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# Do English learners from different countries approach (“compose”) topics differently? A study report

**Abstract.** The paper reports on a study with over 600 respondents (EFL students) from 18 countries, concerning their personal approach to mastering two selected topics (*Clothes* and *Sport*). The hypotheses and the major conclusions relate to four facets – structure, lexis, correctness, fluency – which are presented in the paper as components to which L2 students need to be positively oriented to fully master any given topic. The study reveals structural orientation (within and across topics) to be approached least positively and, contrary to initial expectations – correct use of language being as much desired as the mastery of lexis and attainment of fluency. Most crucial empirical observations concern intercultural differences detected on the topical level, discrepancies between declared practices and indecisiveness in learning, and resignation from learning habits boosting control over the language learnt. The study is grounded in the concept of ‘composing one’s own English’ as a personalised approach conducive to what is referred in the paper as formal control over it.

**Keywords:** Composing Your Own English, attitude to L2, personalised learning, language mastery/masterpiece, intercultural differences.

## Introduction

The ‘imprisoning’ and “liberating” power of language (cf. McCullen & Saffran 2004) implies – among many other things – that our categorisation and comprehension of any given issues will proceed as allowed by our sets of mental lexical tools. This implication of what has long been known as “the linguistic turn”, prompted by Ludwig Wittgenstein’s statement “the limits of *my* language means the limits of *my* world”, quite naturally applies to both native and foreign languages. In the latter case, if we operationalise this issue and consider it through the prism of “traditional” (meaning those frequently found in English textbooks for EFL students) lexical topics, such as *Sport*, *Weather*, *Education*, or *Health*, the above means that our understanding and handling them will rely on how we categorise them, break them down into subcategories into which we (consciously or not) assign expressions and words, hierarchize all the topical items learnt, which will result in certain elements being “closer at hand”, more (subjectively) important and more easily employed.

This being the case, the learning of a second language as well as mastering any lexical topic is a highly personalised process. No wonder then that there has recently been much attention put

to the dimension of affect, which has been treated as more significant and extensively researched over the last decades (cf. Barcelos 2015:306), with students' belief that they have control over the subject matter learnt substantially aiding cognition (Arnold 2001:13). In the case of lexical topics, this control appears to be more readily attainable by students in that sub-categories can easily be recognised, named and systematically acquired (filled), so that learners' "affective tank" (cf. Dewaele 2015: 13) can be kept full.

Hence, the learning of a topic in a second language can be considered to be a process of individual construction, the character of which learners themselves can be either less or more aware of and, consequently, have greater or lesser control over it. At the same time this process involves, on the one hand, acquisition of items which, when put together, form (fixed) conventional combinations which can be viewed to serve necessary communicative acts reconstituting society (cf. Duranti 1997: 338), and, on the other hand, formation of novel arrangements of words and phrases which, distinguishing a language user from all other speakers, is an equally indispensable part of mastering a foreign language.

This two sidedness of the process leads to the major premise underlying this paper that there is a far- and deep-reaching similarity between the learning of a foreign language and the composing of music. The likeness does *not* pertain here to the two most common traditions of seeing the language-music link, that is developmental interdependence (as in e.g. McCullen & Saffran 2004) or technical aspects of mastering the two disciplines (the need for regularity and persistence, improved sound quality, etc.), but it relates strictly to the (conscious) formation of one's personal construction, complex in nature and never entirely complete. The similarity lies in that in language learning, on the one hand, there are – from the perspective of an individual – “must-learn” topics (such as *Family, Weather, Food & Drink*) without which language learners cannot pass as proficient language users – just as in music one simply has to recognise and be familiar with best-known pieces, and, on the other hand, “can-learn” topics (be it *Geology, Binomials, or Fuels*), which are less common and thus not expected to lie within every user's command of their second language. Furthermore, when arriving at the own highly personalised combinations of topics (in other words, when “composing their own English” (Daszkiewicz 2017)), they master topical vocabulary in accordance with analogous rationale: on the one hand, they need to become familiar with a set of most frequently used, most relevant and most often taught vocabulary (e.g. in the area of *Weather* it will cover words such as ‘rain’, ‘snow’, ‘cloudy’ or ‘windy’) – just as in music no musician will remain unfamiliar with the basic repertoire of notes – and, on the other hand, they will be free to expand their topical competence and add to it less frequent or obvious items or expressions such as ‘drizzle’, ‘rain cats and dogs’, ‘clear up’ or ‘hail’. Technically speaking, as a result of the said two-sidedness within and across topics, language learners develop their own intralanguages. In such a composition-based approach to language learning, the putting of language elements together becomes “highly explicit and completely open to conscious analysis” (Lantolf 2011:36), which constitutes learners' important (largely theoretical) know-how and which

renders the entire approach strongly sociocultural and heavily dependent on what and how topics are viewed and discussed.

## Materials and methods

The aim of the study presented here was to answer a question arising from the above, as to whether students from different countries approach this heavily personalized process of topic composition in a similar manner. The question appears particularly relevant to English, which, being a global language, is, as Brutt-Griffler notes, characterised by sufficient adaptability and changeability for its users from different continents to express their (personal) experience (Cf. Brutt-Griffler 2002:ix). It can be observed that while the making of comparisons between individual arrangements (“compositions”) across and within topics is too far-fetched a challenge (and far from being needed if the personal approach to language is to be cherished), there are criteria that can be used for a comparison, namely (the students’ attitude to) structure, lexis, correctness and fluency (see e.g. MacGowan-Gilhooly 1991:73). It was assumed in the study that the choice of the four facets may be considered well-suited for at least two reasons: first, attention to all the four facets can be argued to be a prerequisite for full mastery of a language, to characterise the ideal approach to language studies, and to enable learners to construct their own cohesive whole (“masterpiece”); second, the four facets, when considered on two spectrums, largely conform to personal differences classically recognised by psychologists, i.e. global vs. fragmentary styles of learning conforming to structure- vs. lexis- orientation (or the other way round), and correctness- vs. fluency- orientation complying with reflexive vs. impulsive personalities. It must also be added here that the facet referred to here as “structure” has been understood more broadly than its traditional equation with “grammar”, that is it relates to a learner’s overall awareness of what structural issues the learning of a particular topic consists of, and so their knowledge of what sub-issues occur to be acquired on the path to developing one’s own cohesive whole (intralanguage) (hence in the study such statements have been used as “I look for order..”, “I classify expressions..”, “I recognise a hierarchy..” etc.). Yet, (the traditionally understood “grammar” remains an integral component here, which, accordingly, is viewed in the study as complementary to the facet of lexis. The two dimensions can, for the sake of clarity, be presented graphically, with learners either striking a balance between the two extremes of the two spectrums (favourable attitude) or being inclined to favour one of the two extremes (undesirable attitude):



Figure 1. Two key dimensions of personal approach to learning topics

Hence, the said key **problem** addressed in the study can now be operationalised as reading: to what extent do language learners from different countries show distinct attitudes to (topical) structure,

lexis, correctness and fluency during their topic composition? With English serving as today's omnipresent lingua franca and "a taken-for-granted" component of world curriculum models (Cf. Cha & Ham 2008:325), and with communicative competence being commonly prioritised over linguistic competence, it was **hypothesised** prior to the study that in different countries language learners would value (the right-most ends of the spectrums, i.e.) lexis and fluency over (the left-most) structural orientation and correctness. In other words, it was anticipated that EFL learners would prove to treat the former as if they were more conducive to their complete mastery of a topic and to take a more "relaxed" (detrimental) attitude to the latter, which can be presented as follows:

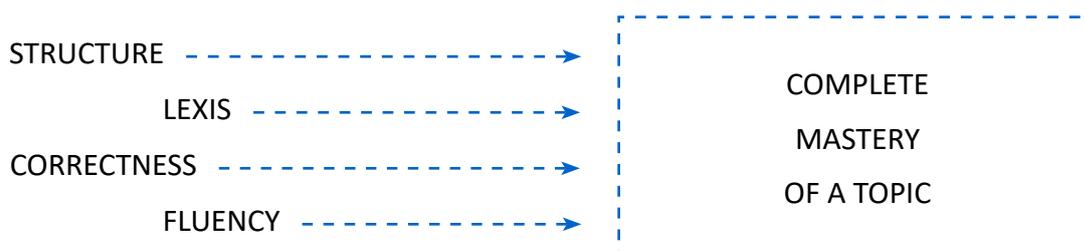


Figure 2. (Anticipated) perception of the relationship between four facets and language mastery

Therefore, as presented in Figure 2, it was assumed prior to the study (in such an implicit degree that the author himself did not actually realise the assumption till this very text has been reviewed) that students would demonstrate comparable preferences in their attitudes to the four facets, which may be presented as the study's null hypothesis reading "there are no differences in the way learners from different countries compose topics" (a reviewer's insightful suggestion).

With the respondents' overall approach assumed to show no significant differences, the four-faceted model gave rise to four major premises leading on to four respective complementary hypotheses pertaining to language learners' attitudes and beliefs only (not behaviours, the study of which would require a different methodology and which lies beyond the scope of this paper), namely:

- on the basis of Premise 1 that, on the whole, learners from different countries will regard language practices improving their lexis and fluency of speech as more significant and needed than those focused on the build-up of topics and correct uses of language (regardless of how the latter may support the former and render learners genuinely advanced), it was hypothesised that foreign language learners value language practices enhancing their lexis and fluency higher than those improving their structural orientation as defined earlier and the correctness of the language they use (Hypothesis 1);
- on the basis of Premise 2 that the right extremes of the spectrums in Figure 1 are altogether subject to more systematic reflection on the part of learners than the left extremes (with correct production of speech being multifoldedly demanding (cf. Cameron 2001: 36) and engaging learners "in [more intense] fire of psycholinguistic mechanisms (Mota 2010: 226)),

which implies that language learners can be expected, for instance, to reflect on preferred ways of memorising vocabulary more than on, say, divisions within particular topics, it was hypothesised that foreign language learners, when learning any given topic, show more attention to lexis and fluency than structure (as defined above) and language correctness (Hypothesis 2);

- on the basis of Premise 3 that reflection on language-learning practices retains a universal character, meaning that, generally speaking, it does not pertain to separate topics but rather to language as a whole, which means that language learners will have more to say about general behaviours appearing commonsensical to them (e.g. checking words before using them, selection of sources, speaking fast without inhibitions etc.) rather than about topic-oriented ones, it was hypothesised that foreign language learners demonstrate more certainty with regards to universal language behaviours than those pertaining to particular topics (i.e. when surveyed, they would find items of a universal appeal less problematic to decide about than those of a narrower appeal) (Hypothesis 3);
- on the basis of Premise 4 that respondents can be expected to be most positive about those language-learning practices which help them develop lexis or (the rate of) speech “across the lexical board” and most sceptical or hesitant about those behaviours through which they become familiar with the structure or correct use of language elements pertaining to (only) separate topics, it was hypothesised that foreign language learners favour such practices that universally apply to lexis and fluency over those enhancing topical orientation in structure and correctness (i.e. when surveyed, they would evaluate the former more positively than the latter) (Hypothesis 4). (A comment needs to be added here that the last two hypotheses both address the universal-topical spectrum, with the difference between them being that Hypothesis 3 relates to the degree of certainty (awareness, reflection), whilst Hypothesis 4 to the degree of desirability of particular language learning behaviours.)

The study was carried out with 606 **participants** from 18 countries (14 European states (342 respondents) and 4 Asian and African countries (264 respondents)), namely Bulgaria (10), the Czech Republic (3), Denmark (16), Germany (70), Greece (39), Hungary (20), Lithuania (19), Poland (34), Portugal (14), Romania (38), (the European part of) Russia (2), Serbia (53), Slovakia (18), Spain (6), and Iraq (44), Japan (46), the Republic of South Africa (10), Turkey (164). They were all university students whose common denominator was that English was not their major, but a foreign language which they studied throughout (secondary in terms of importance) classes as one considered potentially significant for their future professional life. They were between 19 and 24 years of age, and their level of English was estimated by their teachers as not lower than B1+. The respondents constitute a convenience sample, with no direct comparisons being intended across countries (in compliance with the said null hypothesis), but rather a relatively (geographically) spread sample being required to verify the relationships between the four facets in question.

In order to operationalise the respondents' approach to the four facets in question, a questionnaire was applied with a Likert-type scale reading 'Definitely NOT-Rather NOT-Hard to say-Rather YES-Definitely YES'. The **procedure** was that the respondents marked their position with regard to concepts associated with the four facets, namely:

- divisions, hierarchies, classifications, order, or combinations – associated with structure-orientation; the learners' approach was verified here with the following statements (the numbers in parentheses show the position of items in the research tool applied):  
*I consider in detail how vocabulary related to clothes can be divided (e.g. articles, patterns, sizes, etc.). (1)*  
*I recognize a hierarchy in clothes-related vocabulary. (5)*  
*I classify the expressions I learn into subcategories. (9)*  
*To support my learning, I look for order in clothes-related vocabulary. (13)*  
*I try to learn clothes-related vocabulary by constructing sentences combining it with other topics. (17)*
- memorisation, numbers of words, word isolation, short replies, counting words – marking lexis-orientation; the learners' approach was verified with the following statements:  
*When learning language related to clothes, I try to memorize as many words as possible. (2)*  
*My success in communication related to clothes depends mostly on the number of words I have learnt. (6)*  
*My ability to use words in isolation (e.g. about different shirts) is more important than forming full sentences. (10)*  
*For me, a good command of clothes language mostly means knowing a lot of words (e.g. types, material, etc.) (14)*  
*Counting the words you know is a good idea. (18)*
- certainty, checking words, grammaticality, taking risk, character of language sources – important in correctness-orientation; the learners' approach was verified here with the following statements:  
*To speak, I need to be sure that my sentence is correct. (3)*  
*Before using words, I check how to use them properly. (7)*  
*I believe that by articulating incorrect sentences about clothes you promote a harmful approach to language. (11)*  
*I think taking risk in building sentences is a bad idea. (15)*  
*I carefully try to choose sources which present only correct use of language. (19)*
- speech anxiety, rate of speech, mistakes, contexts, social circumstances – indicative of fluency-orientation; the learners' approach was verified here with the following statements:  
*When talking about fashion and dressing styles, I stop worrying about making mistakes. (4)*  
*I'd rather be able to speak fast with mistakes rather than slowly but fully correct. (8)*  
*I believe you can consider yourself an advanced user of English even if you make lots of mistakes. (12)*  
*I may ignore single words unknown to me if I understand the general meaning in context. (16)*  
*I admire people who are not bothered by what others think when they speak and make language mistakes. (20)*

## Notes on methodology:

- two parallel versions of the tool have been used, one referring to the topic of *Clothes* (completed by 367 respondents: from Europe (217) and Asia & Africa (150), and the other one – *Sport* (completed by 239 respondents: from Europe (125) and Asia & Africa (114)); the choice of the two topics was based on the assumption that they are likely to fall within the interests of most of the respondents. In the administration of the questionnaire, they were free to decide which of the versions they use;
- as the numbers above indicate, the items pertaining to the four facets (all cited above) were put in an alternating order so that none of the four would be given priority over the other three facets; in order to account for “the fallibility of single items” (Dörnyei & Csizér 2012:76), the respondents’ approach to each facet was verified with a set of (five) items, none of which was prioritised over the remaining (four);
- one half of the items have included topical references (i.e. focused on *Clothes* or *Sport*, depending on the version) and the other half – general (e.g. Item 1 is topical in that it names very specific sub-issues, i.e. ‘articles, patterns, sizes’, and ‘disciplines, equipment, situations’, respectively; other topical items bear explicit topical markers, such as ‘dressing styles’ or ‘games’, respectively; the general items are based on wording which can be applied to any given topic such as ‘subcategories’, ‘context’, ‘sources’, or ‘mistakes’). The general items are shared by the two parallel versions;
- all the items are consistently viewed to be indicative of the respondents’ thoughts on language learning (expressed both in terms of their beliefs, preferences, etc. as well as statements describing their actions); none of these items are construed as information on what the respondents’ actual language learning behaviours are;
- the procedure resulted in that when converted into quantitative values, the respondents’ choices could theoretically reach 100 “points” (20x5) at the most and 20 “points” (20x1) at the least. It must be emphasised, however, that the conversion into numerical values has served purely a supportive function so that overall tendencies could be recognised across the participating nations and they are by no means meant to be interpreted as indicators of cut-and-dried language-learning behaviours. Instead, these values can simply be seen as indicative of the learners’ degree of determination to study the second language (here: English) by becoming familiar with language “belonging” to topics;
- for the sake of the two versions’ validity, each of the twenty items used contained a label binding it with one of the four facets;
- for the sake of the two versions’ reliability, nearly all items retained the same subjective orientation (“I”, “my”) so as to evade sources of irrelevant variance (Niemierko 1999:195).

## Results

The most general observation that can be made on the basis of the results obtained is that, on the whole, they put themselves at a disadvantage by taking an approach in which they resign from practices likely to boost their language learning. In both versions of the questionnaire the respondents showed marked ambivalence regarding as many as nearly a half of the aforementioned twenty (language-beneficial) stances, which in numerical terms was manifested by overall scores of 64.7 and 64.4 “points” (out of 100) calculated for the *Clothes*- and *Sport*-oriented tools respectively, with the mean, most interestingly, equalling 3.2 in both the versions (with the standard deviation of the mean in the former version (0.48) exceeding that of the latter (0.36)); with the size of the two sub-samples differing, this indicator remains a better index of variability of the scores than the standard deviation of the total scores). The variance observed in the two versions of the questionnaires has been below 0.25, with the former version (0.23) exceeding that of the latter (0.13); the highest variance was observed in the sub-sample of 217 European respondents using the questionnaire relating to *Clothes*, i.e. 0.29 (which, considering the fact that this group was the largest of all the four sub-samples, is far from being surprising).

Quite naturally, the said ambivalence and the resulting scores pertain to various (combinations of) twenty language-learning practices, yielding distinctive ‘masterpieces’ as defined above. This point will be discussed at greater length later in the text.

On a very general level, too, a note needs to be made on a cross-continental outcome that became most apparent at a very early stage of the analysis of results: (with both versions of the questionnaire) the biggest difference observed between European vs. Asian and African language learners (362 and 264 respondents respectively) pertained to the idea of counting familiar words as a separate item of the questionnaire and to practices supporting the learning of lexis as a block of items considered together. Specifically, these two outcomes – noticeably outstanding within the entire data set from 606 learners – suggest that the Asian and African language learners value their familiarity with decontextualized vocabulary and their awareness of its volume more than their European peers.

Statistically speaking, what has proved to be of paramount importance in the analysis is marked comparability of results obtained from the two versions of the questionnaire. This quality, that is consistence between the two versions (with the correlation index exceeding 0,7), served as the major determinant of the credibility of outcomes. It is the consistence between results obtained with the two versions (the juxtaposition of four sub-sums pertaining to the four facets) that substantiates the observations below concerning all the facets of mastering different topics. It has thus been presumed and confirmed by the results obtained that personal language learning practices do not substantially vary from topic to topic, but rather remain sufficiently constant and thus can serve as an indicator of tool credibility.

Considering practices pertaining to STRUCTURE, the least appreciated ones prove those that are aimed at classification of subcategories within topics or – what can be viewed as synonymous

and so indicative of the reliability of outcomes – recognition of hierarchies across topical vocabulary. Any mention of relationships (even in the first item used, which also concerns topical subdivisions) shows a more positive attitude on the part of the respondents, who seem to have most positive connotations regarding the idea of context and, as a result, find connecting words and expressions a highly commonsensical thing to do. It appears, however, that – as follows from observations across the questionnaire components – positive associations to do with relationships between language elements pertain more to *intra*-topical than to *inter*-topical blends. Putting together the two major observations concerning structure, it can be inferred that the respondents value building up larger wholes out of separate components, but they are significantly less concerned about what classes the words or expressions joined belong to. This being the case, their awareness of the character and range of possible (especially *inter*-topical) blends is likely to remain limited if they are not instructed on the beneficial edge of realising the very existence of unfamiliar blends.

Responses concerning LEXIS, apart from the already mentioned intercultural difference in the overall approach to lexis, show motivation of learners to enlarge their repertoire of words, on the one hand, but significantly lower determination to monitor this process by, for instance, counting the words, on the other hand. This general tendency is accompanied by a markedly more positive attitude of the Asian and African respondents to such quantitative measures, which is borne out also by their appreciation of familiarity with isolated words. The European respondents prove to be decidedly more sceptical about the ability to use words devoid of context, with the approach of the Asian and African respondents being on the verge between positive and negative (i.e. the average score falling in the two versions slightly above 3.0 denoting indecision in this respect).

The (declarative) approach to CORRECTNESS has proved essentially positive. Most interestingly, with both versions of the questionnaire the respondents generally maintain that they need to be sure about sentences being correct and check how to use words properly before they actually speak and that they try to choose sources which present only correct use of language (with all these three habits being more frequently revealed by the Asian and African respondents). Yet, in another item they show that they do not view articulation of incorrect sentences as being harmful to language. Considered jointly, these two results imply that, on the whole, the group of 606 respondents are concerned about their own way of learning and using English, but not so much about how it is done by others. Regardless of whether we refer to such an approach (negatively) as ‘egocentrism’ or (positively) as ‘self-awareness’, it is undoubtedly better than the opposite case (i.e. one’s concern for others’ use of English exceeding that for one’s own) in being conducive to one’s learning achievements.

The responses pertaining to FLUENCY show the following two most important effects: first, fast speaking is not a target that the respondents wish to reach at the cost of correctness, and, second, when it comes to fluent speech, the respondents are inclined to admiration for others who speak fluently, even if they do it with language mistakes. Viewed jointly with the earlier observations, the latter observation reveals greater attention being paid to advanced language performance than

to errors obstructing language perfection. Such a tendency seems natural in that it is but human to expect others to err and thus not be disturbed by errors, on the one hand, and, consequently, to be impressed by those whose mistakes are few and far between, on the other hand (similarly to the domain of, say, sport, in which we all fail, and contrary to the domain of ethics, in which most of us are not thoroughly evil).

The results above obtained from an analysis of the four facets and concerning primarily little concern for classifications, aspirations to enlarge vocabulary repertoire altogether, attention to one's own language mistakes (as opposed to errors committed by others), and, finally, admiration for fast-speaking language users can be better understood and more clearly discussed once the four facets are juxtaposed. Similarly to the observations above pertaining to individual facets, a multi-faceted study leads us to observations which appear to be universally valid across (18) nations as well those of a continental character. These points are addressed below under references made to the four key hypotheses of the research.

Ad. Hypothesis 1. The two versions of the questionnaire consistently show the practices building up the learners' orientation in structural aspects of topics to be the ones least valued as compared to the other three facets. This fact proves one half of the first hypothesis, which has been refuted with respect to lexis as not necessarily being more appreciated than correct uses of the English language. In other words, the group of 606 respondents reflect on divisions and classifications within and across particular topics less frequently than on the construction of correct sentences or acquisition of new words. Considered jointly, the facets of lexis and fluency do in fact yield a higher degree of appreciation by learners, which is a fact additionally confirming the hypothesis; yet, this is mainly to due to the said lower result obtained on the level of structure, which is big enough a difference from the other facets to "mask" the fact that the approach taken to lexis proves as positive as to the facets of correctness and fluency.

Ad. Hypothesis 2. It is with regard to the structural facet, too, that the highest indecisiveness of respondents has been observed: among both the 367 respondents that reflected on the lexis of *Clothes* as well the 239 learners who responded to items concerning *Sport* nearly one third of markings showed their doubt expressed with the 'Hard to say' option, as compared to only one fifth in all the other three facets. The same effect was found with the respondents from Europe and from Asia and Africa, although – especially in the case of *Sport* – the European respondents showed greater hesitation. The second hypothesis thus being proved right, the respondents might be seen as revealing uncertainty about how they should feel about thoughtful organisation of language elements within and across topics. This effect has been scattered equally across the questionnaire items pertaining to the structural facet, with only one item (No. 5 reading "I recognise a hierarchy...") standing out in the case of the European respondents, who in the questionnaire on *Sport* showed substantial uncertainty (as many as 60 out of 125 marked the 'Hard to say' option).

Ad. Hypothesis 3. As the responses were compared on the topical-vs-general spectrum, the following – highly significant – twofold outcome became apparent: on the one hand, the respondents showed only minor differences in their approach to practices applying generally vs. those func-

tional in a given topic, with the latter even slightly exceeding the former; on the other hand, they demonstrated significantly higher uncertainty in the case of statements pertaining to topics than the universally-formulated ones (roughly, every fourth topical and every fifth universal statement caused doubt, with the European respondents showing greater hesitation). The third hypothesis can thus be viewed to have been proved right if ‘consideration of behaviours’ is to be construed as tantamount to theoretical reflection only, but it needs to have been proved wrong if it is accepted that genuine ‘consideration’ can only be shown in practice (or here: through the percentage of the respondents’ actual choices).

Ad. Hypothesis 4. A similar discrepancy between declarative approaches and actual choices has been observed with regard to the last hypothesis: whilst the respondents’ attitude to (six) practices supporting general improvement in lexis and fluency (Items 8, 10, 12, 16, 18, 20) has proved nearly identical (in numerical terms) to other (six) behaviours boosting orientation in the facets of structure and correctness (Items 1, 3, 5, 11, 13, 17) (with no significant intercultural differences), the respondents demonstrated substantially greater scepticism or ambivalence with regard to the topic-oriented statements than those of a general appeal. The discrepancy was observed predominantly with the 342 European respondents, who signalled doubt (by either marking the ‘Hard to say’ option or leaving a given statement unmarked) in nearly 30% of all the six topical items altogether (i.e. in two versions of the questionnaire). This effect was particularly noticeable in the field of *Clothes*, the interpretation of which, as intriguing as it is, falls beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to note here that the observed degree of respondents’ hesitation (falling between 18% in the group of Asian and African learners focused on the issue of *Clothes* and 29% in the two groups of European students focused on one or the other topic) merits careful attention and action for the respondents and their peers not to remain so unaware and indecisive.

## Discussion

Personal as the approach to language learning needs to be seen for students to feel at liberty to study in ways they find most pleasant and/or convenient, the intercultural differences found in the research have proved it to be socially determined, too. Although intercultural or international comparisons have not been the key aim of the analyses conducted, some dissimilarities became too evident to leave them without at least brief remarks. On the whole, the differences in question, most importantly, have implied the Asian and African respondents being more reflective as to their learning of language than their European peers, who, in turn, seem to benefit in some sense from their more spontaneous or even risky attitude to verbal communication. In both cases, though, such continental qualities may be considered a virtue as well as a vice, which, however, is a discussion falling beyond the scope of this paper. As for cross-national differences, the differences revealed by numerical values proved too small to merit an in-depth discussion here.

The primary conclusion following the entire data set aggregated with respondents from 18 countries concerns the facet of intra- and inter-topical STRUCTURE as being subject of lesser reflection than the other three facets, i.e. lexis, fluency, and – somewhat unexpectedly – correct-

ness. Such results imply that generally language learners become complacent about their control over English before they become aware of the range of options (combinations, blends, etc.) and divisions (hierarchies, orders etc.) occurring within and across different topics. Therefore, regardless of whether it is an effect of insufficient training or the learners' personal choice (although the degree of similarity between responses renders the former more likely), the group of 606 respondents demonstrate what we may refer to as **informative control** over the second language but they fail to show the (complementary) **formal control** over it. In other words, they prove more concerned about the content, the message and communication than about the build-up of language, the form or meta-language. The two types of control could also be referred to in, respectively, qualitative and quantitative terms, with the subject matter being "cherished" more than its volume or size; this appears analogous to two types of characteristics of languages themselves, in the case of which the quantitative features of particular structures can pose a varying challenge to language learners caused by how rarely or frequently they are applied for learning and/or real-time use (cf. Bates et al. 2001:317). Natural as it may seem, their disregard for the structural aspects unavoidably poses an obstacle to yet better familiarity with how English works and, as such, it should be a component of language teaching and learning. This applies to two strata on which limited formal control has been observed in the study: on the syntactic level (with learners acquainting themselves what "pieces" can be put together and how, what other combinations are available inside and across topics, etc.) and on the semantic level (with learners developing competence in the conscious blending of topics, deliberate juxtaposing of concepts belonging to different thematic fields, etc.). As follows from the earlier remarks, although under some items the respondents claim to value inter-topical relationships (and when learning thematic vocabulary, they "construct sentences combining it with other topics"), they are in serious doubt when presented with statements concerning practices supporting their formal control over the foreign language.

The second major conclusion concerns the facet of CORRECTNESS, with regard to which Hypothesis 2 was disproved. It was found that the respondents care about grammaticality more than anticipated and value practices supporting it (despite not being strongly bothered by language mistakes made by others). It must be emphasised, however, that the questionnaire is by no means a measure of learning achievement and it rests on the respondents' declarations only. It may still be that the global tendencies mentioned earlier in the text do lead to lower levels of correctness and it is perfectly natural that learners do not signal their potential disregard for grammar and correctness. What merits consideration and further cross-national studies here is how strong a discrepancy occurs between declarations concerning practices supporting correctness and its degree in the actual use of language by second-language learners. Whilst in the case of structural aspects, a marked divergence has been observed between declarations and decisions, in the case of items pertaining to correctness the degree of indecision was lower and comparable to that concerning fluency and lexis, but the discrepancy may occur between declarations and achievements.

To make the results obtained from a large set of data, it appears worthwhile to derive from it a position taken with regard to the learning of topics (at least *Clothes* and *Sport*) by a (hypothetical)

average learner participating in the research (similarly to how it is done with comprehensive statistical studies to make them more easily readable and applicable). That learner’s “voice” expresses a rationale along the following lines: *I learn as many words as I think I need and I make sure that what I learn is correct. But I’m not in the habit of organising these words in any way or finding out what is the exact number of words I know. I do my best to avoid mistakes and often resign from speaking if I’m not sure how to say things properly. On the other hand, I realise that others make a lot of them and it is not the most important thing in communication. Generally speaking, the message is crucial, not the form. I’m not sure why or if I should classify the vocabulary I learn.* It thus follows that in the respondents’ average perception of language success three out of four facets lead one to the mastery of language, with the facet of STRUCTURE remaining largely alien and not recognised as needed. This average perception can be presented with a modified version of the figure from the second section of the paper:

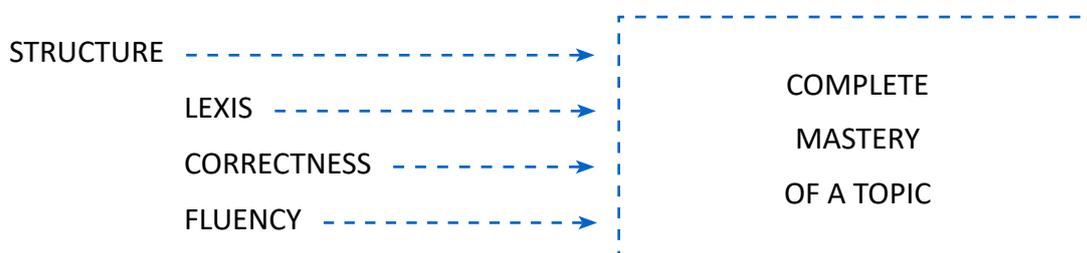


Figure 3. Perception of the relationship between four facets and language mastery – as shown by results

The research outcome reflected by the “voice” cited and the figure above is of paramount importance for the concept of *masterpiece* as defined in the first section: the marked disregard for practices supporting language learners’ awareness of relationships within and, most importantly, across various topics prevents them from arriving (deliberately) at combinations encountered before, which is tantamount to hampering their communicative skills and cognitive potential, and which is likely to cause their language to become fossilised. The tendency to value practices supporting lexis, fluency and correctness more than inter-topical structural orientation proves scattered across respondents from all the participating nations, although more detailed studies are necessary to recognise the exact character and degree of international differences (some of them will be addressed in another text by the author which will rest on topic-based remarks gathered from the same group of 606 respondents). It may be the case that the structural facet of language learning has come to appear as most remote or alien to learners, who view the language learnt as a practical tool for communicative practices rather than the subject for meta-reflection; such a perception of the structural facet as a formal element, imposed on the learner instead of being left for his or her own choice, which creates circumstances in which acquisition of a second language becomes a partial or complete failure (Annoussamy 2006: 86), calls for a radical modification of the approach so that the facet becomes much more “student-friendly”. In the light of the intercultural

differences between the approach of the European respondents and those from Asia and Africa, it must be noted here that similar studies may not only help discover further continental or national characteristics, but in some sense also serve better understanding between continents and nations. Looking at the (underestimated) issue of structural orientation from the teacher's perspective, the results presented above make it clear that the conclusion drawn by e.g. Arnold and Douglas that by adding this aspect to the language teacher's competence will, somewhat paradoxically, not pose an extra burden but serve as facilitation and serve students' holistic language development (cf. Arnold & Brown 1999: 24), is fully justified.

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# The effect of transparency on a three-cycle model of manipulative discourse

**Abstract.** It is assumed that manipulative discourse can carry various types of messages on the continuum of sincerity, such as: truth, persuasion (argumentation), deception and manipulation. These different intended meanings can cause variations within the ‘transparency factor’. The transparency factor is controlled by specific social and pragmatic factors. Generally speaking, manipulative discourse is far away from transparency because it entails the use of implicit strategies and processes to achieve a final goal. The highly transparent type of discourse is the testimony where the speaker’s intention is to present truth that is supported by explicit strategies and processes. Within this continuum, there is the persuasion where the speaker’s intention is to convince the addressee without exerting any power upon the receiver. Other types, such as coercion and deception, may show a lower degree of transparency because they are used to mislead the hearer with or without the use of the social effect such as ‘power’. Accordingly, a theoretical framework which treats manipulation as a three-cycle of the meaning-making process is proposed. It is assumed that this model helps in classifying manipulative texts into different types based on the transparency factors. The aim of this study is to provide a theoretical framework that can be adopted by researchers to analyze types of discourse in terms of transparency taking into consideration the speaker, the text itself and the hearer. All these factors in the three-cycle model help in shaping the degree of transparency that a text may show.

**Keywords:** manipulation, transparency, deception, testimony.

## Introduction

A manipulative piece of discourse is developed through stages. According to Fairclough (2003), a text is produced based on the ‘meaning-making’ process which makes use of both explicit and implicit factors. Fairclough divides the process of meaning-making into different stages starting from the production of discourse, the discourse itself and ending with the reception of discourse. The production stage focuses on the producer (Speaker). The second stage involves the development of the Text itself, and the third stage is the reception of the texts that has a close relation with the receiver who is the (Hearer).

The aim of this study is to build a connection between these stages and the transparency factor. The variations in the degree of transparency are found between the first and the last stages where the interplay of roles among the deceiver and the receiver is evident. In other words, the degree of transparency is highly dependent on both speaker’s and hearer’s intention. When the speak-

er is simply lying, he creates a low degree of transparency which stands in contrast with giving truth. Similarly, the hearer may perceive the speech as a complete truth which has a high degree of transparency or as a lie which has a low degree of transparency. The perception is evaluated regardless of the speaker's intention. The second stage focuses on the real text itself that displays a message with various degrees of transparency as well. The testimony discourse, for example, is highly transparent in contrast with the manipulative discourse which is the least transparent. Other types of discourse may appear in between such as persuasion, coercion and deception. They are characterized by a degree of transparency that may differ from the ones that can be found in testimony and manipulative discourses. A set of factors help in shaping the degree of transparency that these texts may reflect.

The aim of this study is to propose a theoretical framework which focuses on the classification of discourse in terms of transparency by emphasizing the speaker's intention and strategies, the texts features and the hearer's attitude.

## **Towards the theoretical framework**

The analytical framework adopted here relies heavily on Blass's (2005) and de Saussure's (2005) realizations of the manipulation theory. Within this treatment, the main acts of manipulation are mainly related to the truth conditions of the intentional statements. The statements, therefore, are treated as propositions that can be true or false based on proof or reasons. The manipulation theory is an intentional act that has specific goals whether these goals represent a mere fact or a mere lie with or without proof. Accordingly, the manipulative discourse is "a discourse produced in order to persuade the addressee of a set of propositions  $P_1... P_n$  of type T with appropriate strategies S" (de Saussure 2005: 120).

This paper is based on the assumption that manipulative discourse has to go through a three-cycle process which includes the speaker, the text itself and the hearer. This assumption is supported by Fairclough (2003), who states that there are stages in developing discourse starting from the production and ending with perception. The first participant is the speaker or the communicator (S) who has a specific goal (G). This goal can be manifested through propositions which can be true or truth-conditionally (T) or false or truth-functionally defective (F). The speaker needs a variety of strategies (ST) to achieve his final goal. When the proposition is (T), the manipulation discourse under goes the 'testimony type'. Testimony is a kind of text that deals with facts whose truth value is effectively evident with a desirable effect for both the speaker and the hearer. Testimony has a beneficial outcome to both of them (Blass 2005). However, if the proposition is false, it falls within the general headings of 'coercion', 'deception' and 'manipulation'. The relevance of the truth or false value is not relevant when proof is needed. This comes under the title argumentation (A) or persuasion (P) (Blass 2005). According to Blass, manipulation can be manifested in three forms, namely, testimony, deception and argumentation or persuasion. These three forms are different forms of communication that are used to influence people and make them "believe and do what one wants them to do" (Blass 2005: 171).

The present study proposes five types of equations which represent in short the previously stated types of manipulative texts:

- a. Testimony (T) is a proposition (P) about (F) facts. ( $T + P = F$ )
- b. Deception (D) is a proposition about (L) lies. ( $D + P = L$ )
- c. Argumentation (A)/persuasion is a proposition about (F) facts or (L) lies with reasons. ( $A + P = F \text{ or } L / R$ )
- d. Coercion (C) is a proposition about (L) lies with (PW) power.
- e. Manipulation (M) is a proposition of (L) lies with cognitive effect.(CE)

The second participant is the hearer (H) or the receiver of the proposition who acts according to his set of beliefs or the so-called cognitive environment (CE) (de Saussure 2005).The cognitive

environment carries its own truth value regardless of whether the proposition is true or false. The propositions need to go through two types of intentions, that is, the communicative 'CI' and the informative 'II' to be processed by the hearer. These two intentions fall within the 'Relevance Theory'. It indicates that the speaker's intentions must be acknowledged by the hearer in order to start the interpretive process. The first one triggers "expectations of relevance" which implies that the hearer knows that there is a message from the speaker and the second is pragmatically enriched by the use of different strategies and it creates "relevant consequences". This implies that the hearer needs to improve his knowledge of reality. In other words, the hearer suspects the speaker's propositions and that the speaker has hidden intentions (ibid:134). The figure below shows the three main cycles in the process of building a manipulative piece of discourse.

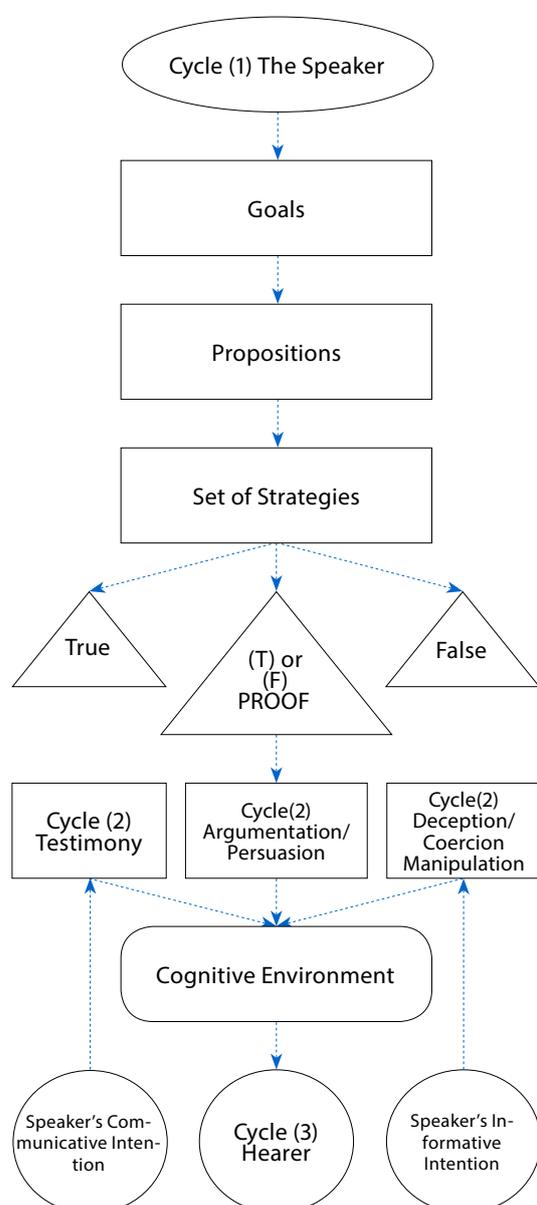


Figure 1. The suggested model of the three-cycle process of building manipulative discourse

### Cycle one: The speaker

The role of the participants in manipulative discourse can be accounted for semantically and pragmatically. Based on the proposed Ilia's (2005) conception, the semantic approach to the role of the participants can be exemplified in terms of three core roles which are Agent, Co-Agent and Patient. These roles are associated with a particular discourse and they control the type of relationship the speaker may have with other participants.

Agent generally acts on the patient in specific settings. However, it is not always the case as there are situations in which the roles can be unidirectional. It is exemplified in a specific speech act exchange between the interviewee and the interviewer especially when the interviewee has prior social status as a president. The two roles, namely the agent and the patient, can be applied in such a case. The patient's role is clearly evident as he has to answer the questions which are directed by the agent or the interviewer. Similarly, the agent role is evident when he performs the speech acts as he responds to or comments on the questions (Ilie 2005). The co-agent appears in a situation in which the agent cannot fulfill his own goal, thus, the co-agent has to carry on a joint action to pursue the agent goal. In such a case, two possibilities are evident. The first one is when both agents have the same goal and the second possibility is when the two agents have different goals, that is, the two inter-agents should rely on each other to achieve their goals. This is called the cooperation in communication (Rigotti 2005).

From the view point of transparency, it can be assumed in this study that the speakers are semantically the agents in all these types of manipulative texts. They perfectly employ the actions but they differ in the way they implement their strategies. In testimony, the agent is quite sure of the truthfulness of his message and he/she tends to be as clear as possible. The degree of the transparency of the agent is highly dependent upon his intention. Thus, the higher degree of transparency will be evident when he personalizes himself as an active agent only without affecting others or minimizing the opponents. The lower degree of transparency is evident when the speaker has the two contrastive intentions of maximizing his role as an active agent and minimizing the opponents as a passive agent.

In this respect Vadia (2016) states that the speaker personalizes himself as an active, competent character whereas the opponent is given the submissive position. The following figure shows the degree of transparency from the semantic perspective.

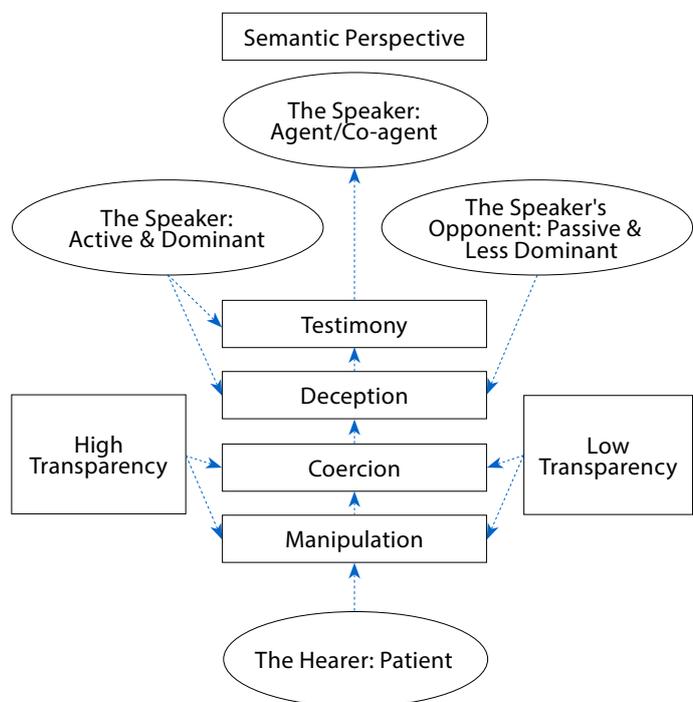


Figure 2. The transparency of the speaker from the semantic perspective

Pragmatically speaking, speech acts have a close relation with the participant roles as they tend to contextualize the participants roles. In this respect Ilie (2005: 197) states that: “At the utterance level, the roles of Speaker and Hearer can be constructed as interaction macro-roles acting as pragmatic counterparts of the semantic role of Agent and Co-Agent”. According to Ilie (2005), the directive and commissive speech acts assign different roles to the speaker and the hearer. In commissive acts the speaker is the agent whereas in directive the hearer is urged to do something. Therefore, the speaker has a leading position which gives him or her enough power. Commissive acts commit the speaker to perform an action whereas the directives are primarily targeted to a group of people or the patient to comply with the agents’ actions. Similarly, Vadai (2016) states that the speaker can make use of different types of speech acts based on his intention. These speech acts include a set of expressives, representatives and commissives. The speaker’s intended use of these speech acts has a close relation with the truth value of the intended message. Generally, a speaker uses assertion acts to carry truth claims, but it may be used differently by a manipulator who intends to behave as the knower of the information and the seer of the future.

It is proposed here that the difference in usage creates different degrees of transparency, that is, whenever the speaker uses assertion acts such as expressive, representative and commissive in a direct way, he is building a testimony type of discourse. Similarly, in persuasion discourse the speaker can make use of different speech acts to convince the hearer. The persuasion in this case seems to have a mid degree of transparency because it is highly connected with the hearer’s belief or disbelief. The logical reasoning is a key factor in convincing the hearer. On the other hand, when the speaker uses these acts to promote inequality and discursive ideologies, he is building less transparent discourse. In this respect Vadia (2016) states that the manipulator may use expressives in terms of polarization to emphasize the positive self-presentation and negative presentation of others or opponents, depending on lying, blurring and defocusing.

The final assumption that has to be raised is that commissives are used to represent vague promises and threats where the truth value of these promises and threats are questionable. The same is applicable to coercion texts. Directives that have the forms of begs and request are used to indicate power-dependence. Similarly, declaratives in form of announcements may occur because they indicate power. The representatives with truth claims and expressives with positive self and negative others are also used. This type implies a mid degree of transparency because the speaker has a kind of power that he can impose through the use of both declaratives (the announcement) and the representative with a truth claim. The mid transparency is also evident because the speaker may use half-truth based on his power. Portis et al. (2000) state the half-truth is a strategy used to persuade people. It is implemented by being cognizant rather than being consistent or having a ‘characterological’ sense.

Manipulative discourse appears as the last option on the continuum of sincerity with the least degree of transparency because speakers tend to violate most of the pragmatically based rules. In this respect, Maillat & Oswald (2009) state that in a manipulative text, speakers tend to violate the felicity condition particularly the sincerity condition. In manipulative discourse, the speaker makes use

of two important aspects where he maximizes himself and minimizes the others. Therefore he may use expressive polarization, representative dissimulation and vague promises or threats. The figure below shows the degrees of transparency from pragmatic perspectives in manipulative discourse.

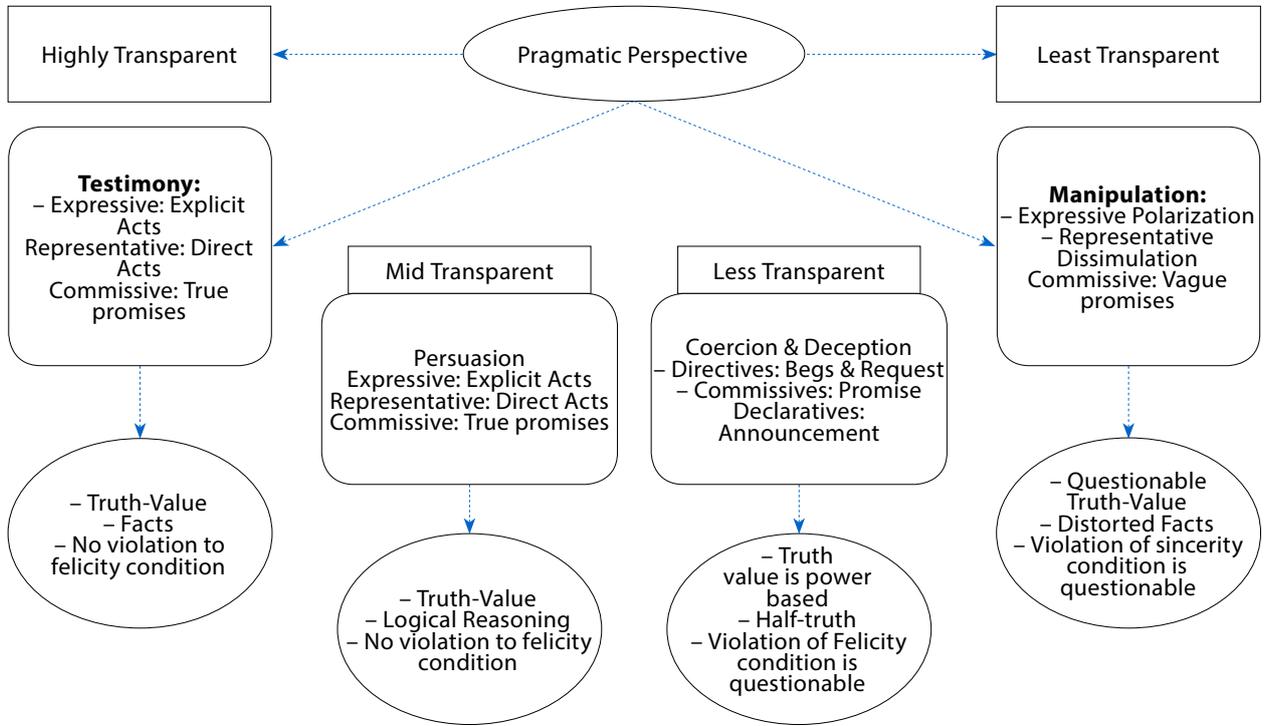


Figure 3. The transparency of the speaker from the pragmatic perspective

According to de Saussure, manipulation theory can come to practice when it is associated with strategies. The strategies are of two main types: the local strategies and the global strategies. The local strategies include the “rhetorical devices or questions”, “misuse of concepts” and “the totalitarian manipulation”. The rhetorical questions carry a strong presupposition, like the question “what else can we think?” and the question presupposes the answer “Nothing”. The misuse of concepts includes the misuse of words such as “hero” or “heroism” for a person who is a dictator and describing the killing actions as heroic. The last one is the totalitarian manipulation which implies that the speaker wants a “God-like being” because he asks for “faith instead of rational agreement” (de Saussure 2005: 127-128).

The global strategies include the use of linguistic devices, such as repetition, numbers and acronyms or non-linguistic devices, such as group pressure and the creation of an image. The group pressure is reflected when the “individual tends to comply with the most salient opinion” and the images creation is the achievement of a “super-competent” image in the hearer’s mind (de Saussure 2005: 130).

Other types of strategies are pragmatically based, such as the use of omission or vagueness and polarization. Omission or vagueness is defined as lacking of complements which can in turn be

definite and indefinite. Definite omissions are found in the discourse whereas indefinite omissions have to be deduced from the context. Polarization, on the other hand, refers to the white and black colors or to the good and evil image that the participants may form based on the way a specific character or discourse is being identified. The transparency of polarization falls under three degrees, which are: obvious, less obvious and low obviousness. When the speaker's speech is obvious, the speaker is using specific words to show that something is part of the good or evil image. However, when the speaker is less obvious, the hearer has to make use of his knowledge of the context. The same is applicable if the degree of obviousness is low as it requires specific analyses of the lexeme or verbs used by the speaker (Danler 2005).

### **Cycle two: The discourse itself and transparency**

Sorlin (2016) distinguishes three types of discourse: manipulation, deception and persuasion. The manipulation type exploits the resource of the normal language and the pragmatic acts. It can be measured on a continuum of power that imposes upon the addressee and it is less covert. The other type of discourse is deception. It is a type of discourse that is similar to manipulation with slight differences. It is a deliberate attempt to manipulate factual and emotional information. It has to do with the true/false dichotomy or half-truths. Manipulators rely heavily on the half-truth because lies are easily discovered and it demands immediate re-thinking on the part of the hearer. Lying is the most common way of deception. The persuasion, on the other hand, is different from manipulation because it is the act of convincing the addressee who has a degree of liberty.

Blass (2005) classifies discourse into three types: testimony, deception and argumentation. Testimony is a way of stating facts in a way that the speaker or hearer adheres to the mutual trust between them. On the other hand, deception is based on the falsehood of the proposition to convince people that it is true. Argumentation is only different from the other two terms as it may be true or false. Regardless of it being true or false, it should be supported by a proof or a reason. In argumentation the speaker should deal with reasons so that the hearer can accept his proposition even when the hearer has no confidence in the speaker's speech (Blass 2005:171-172).

This study argues that the effect of transparency or opaqueness is evident in these types of discourse. For instance, manipulative discourse is supposed to be far away from transparency and reflects a high degree of opaqueness because it may refer to a setting in which communication is needed to change or manipulate the behavior of others. Accordingly, a proposition is manipulative if it helps in changing "the vision of the world" in the hearer's mind and the speaker would be able to achieve his or her final goal and interest (Rigotti 2005:68). This view is also discussed by de Saussure (2005: 119) who suggests that: "A communication is manipulative when the speaker retains some relevant information, or provides the correct information but in order for the hearer to conclude that he should behave in a way which favours the speaker's interests, without being aware of it."

Manipulative discourse should always be covert. It is covert because the act of manipulating requires the people concerned to be expert at hiding their true intentions which are usually unidenti-

fied (Morler 2006). The covert nature of manipulation makes it an act of intentionally changing other people’s minds and it does not happen accidentally. If the speaker does it unintentionally, then he is making a mistake and it is not part of manipulation (Blass 2005). All the manipulation strategies should pass unnoticed and speaker’s intention should remain concealed because it is not to the benefit of the hearer (Maillat & Oswald 2009). Coercion represents a situation where a severe threat of harm is evident. Thus the hearer is unable to avoid it because it hurts the hearer physically without relying on the act of convincing. That is why it is different from persuasion (Kamil & Fareed 2017).

This paper builds on the assumption that these types of texts can reflect different degrees of transparency. Testimony, for example, is highly transparent based on its truthfulness. It is shaped on a kind of trust between the speaker and the hearer without exerting any power or imposing any kind of lies and, most importantly, without changing the hearer’s mind by manipulation. The high degree of transparency is supported by Blass’s conception of testimony who states that testimony has a beneficial outcome with a desirable effect based on its truthfulness. Similarly, the argumentation has a high degree of transparency in comparison with deception because it involves a convincing process that is based on truth or falsehood of the statement.

According to Blass, a testimony may turn into argumentation when there is no trust between the speaker and the hearer. Argumentation or persuasion occurs in order to gain trust among participants. Therefore it is the study of giving reason to justify the people’s statements or propositions. The speaker in this type of text can use both overt and covert strategies to get the required trust (Blass 2005). A different view is represented by de Saussure (2005:122) who states that the speaker may be involved in the process of persuasion when he is not “aware of reality”, which means that “there is no possible discrepancy between his own interests and the freely evaluated interests of the audience”.

Other text-types such as deception and coercion are supposed to have less degree of transparency. They have a low degree of transparency and a higher degree of opaqueness because they represent a deliberate attempt to manipulate factual or emotional information with the true-false dichotomy or half-truths. They are less transparent because they are misleading, indirect and make covert attempts to deceive others. The figure below presents the continuum of manipulative discourse types in terms of transparency.

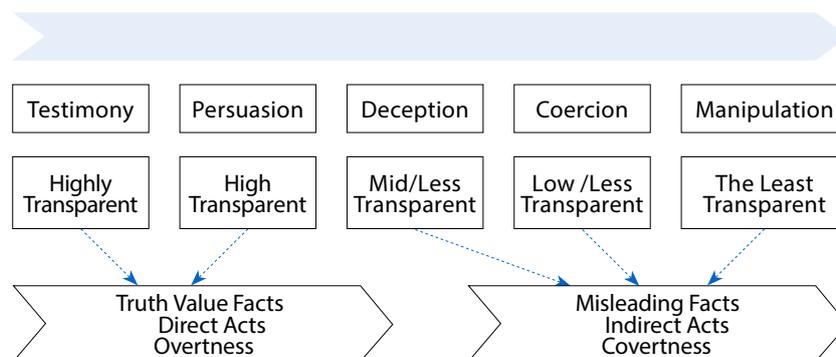


Figure 4. The suggested model of manipulative discourse and transparency

### Stage three: The hearer

The relation between the two participants in a manipulative discourse may take different forms based on: first the relation that is intended, and secondly on the goal which is planned for. These forms are proposed by Danler (2005) when he tries to explain the main strategies that a participant may use in manipulating others as follows:

**Y has relation to X by:**

- a. X saying untrue things about Y to Z.
- b. X saying untrue things to Y.
- c. X making Y look ugly.
- d. X making Y greater in degree.
- e. X saying things to Y that cause pain to Y's feelings.

The speaker (X) is trying to build a relationship with the hearer in different ways, such as telling lies, distortion and hurting procedures. The speaker in (a) misleads the hearer by giving him wrong information about others. Similarly, the speaker in (b) is lying by giving untrue propositions. The situation is different in (c) and (d) because the speaker is changing the mind of the hearer by presenting ugly things about a proposition or by emphasizing untrue or half-true propositions.

In line with this, Maillat & Oswald (2009) state that the manipulator can mislead the manipulee by urging him to give up a legitimate belief, reinforcing a problematic belief or hiding the legitimate belief. All these are different from (a) and (b) which involve deception or lying.

The hearer in persuasion discourse, however, has the liberty to disagree with the arguments. However, it should be noted that the general hearer's rational capacity is underestimated in manipulative discourse (Sorlin 2016). A rather different view is given by Maillat Oswald (2009) who states that the hearer's attitude in manipulation is considered to be cooperative because he assumes that the speaker is direct and straight forward. It is a belief that the hearer possesses a mutual trust between himself and the speaker. That is why hearer may rely on his cognitive environment to form his own attitude.

De Saussure (2005) proposes two types of intentions that a hearer may use, namely, the informative or the communicate intentions within the relevance theory to assess the speaker's speech (mentioned previously in the suggested model). The classification of these two intentions within the framework of transparency is not in terms of the speaker's statements' truth value but on the hearer's choice. The use of communicative intention implies a high degree of transparency because the hearer believes that what is being said is true. However, the use of informative intention entails a low degree of transparency because the hearer has his own suspicion towards what is being said. The following figure shows the hearer's use of the two intentions.

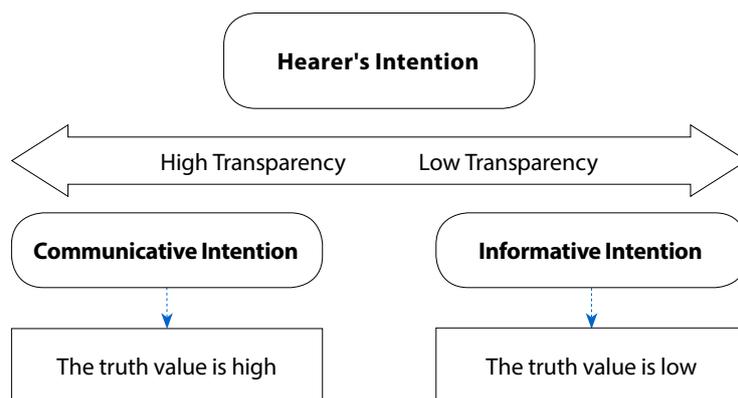


Figure 5. The hearer's intention and transparency

The hearer can create 'the relevant consequence' based on his current relation with the speaker. When he is not quite sure of the other's utterance or he has certain suspicions, he will use the informative intention. It leads to the hearer questioning the truth value of the speaker's proposition, which creates a low degree of transparency. However, the hearer may use the communicative intention when his relation with the speaker is based on mutual trust. This in turn paves the way to a higher degree of transparency.

This conclusion is supported by de Saussure (2005) who proposes that the hearer can rely on the cognitive environment whose truth is not matched with the falsehood or truthfulness of the proposition but it is matched with the hearer's intention.

### The application of the descriptive framework

In this section two examples are given to represent the two extremes of manipulative texts which are the testimony and the manipulation. The first example is taken from Graham (2006) who presents a testimony text as a sample. The testimony sample is given by a schoolteacher to a group of students. In the previously introduced descriptive framework, it is proposed that the testimony text has a high degree of transparency because the speaker has no intention to manipulate the hearer but rather he is explaining a scientific text that has a high truth value. The schoolteacher gives his explanation as follows:

"In requiring that the source [the recipient's interlocutor] have knowledge if the recipient is to have knowledge based on interlocution, I oversimplify. Some chains with more than two links seem to violate this condition. But there must be knowledge in the chain if the recipient is to have knowledge based on interlocution."

The schoolteacher states facts as an agent whereas the students are the patients. Stating facts entails a highly transparent type of text where the agent has no intention to deceive his patients (students). The patients have to use the informative intention that reflects a high truth value because the text is a testimony that states facts. The text itself is highly transparent because a) the speaker uses direct and over strategies, b) he uses an expressive, representative and commissive and in a direct way, and c) the use of the linguistic device of repetition to make the text understandable.

The second example is taken from an analysis of a political text. It is given by Emeka and Ngozi (2016). They describe a speech given by Obasanjo when he becomes the president of Nigeria. In his speech he makes a connection between himself and God:

“FELLOW Nigerians, we give praise and honour to God Almighty for this day specially appointed by God Himself. Everything created by God has its destiny and it is the destiny of all of us to see this day.”

According to Emeka and Ngozi (2016), Obasanjo uses the manipulative strategy to paint the picture of a messenger who was sent to save Nigeria from corruption. He makes use of the fact that people of Nigeria are religious to manipulate their minds by implicitly stating that he has been chosen by God to save them.

Based on the earlier description, it seems that these types of texts have a low degree of transparency because the speaker acts as an agent that has a superior status. In fact he is chosen by God, whereas the hearers are the patients who are passive recipients of the president's speech. His religious hearers will be affected by this speech and choose to employ the communicative intention that has a high truth value and the speech is evaluated by the hearers or the patients as highly transparent. However, other patients who have sufficient political knowledge may use the informative intention when they have a suspicious attitude towards the speech.

The manipulative speech accordingly has a low degree of transparency. This result is achieved because the hearers are being manipulated as they cannot realize the speaker's covered intentions behind what is being said. The given speech is covert and indirect. Thus, the types of the texts that are analyzed may have various degree of transparency. The degree of transparency is controlled by the speaker's intentions. Stating facts is highly transparent, which stands in contrast with manipulative texts, which are the least transparent.

## Conclusion

Based on the proposed three-cycle theoretical framework it seems that manipulation discourse may fall under different categorizations that show various degrees of transparency. Thus manipulation does not necessarily mean ‘to change somebody's mind by telling lies’. Rather it has many other implications, such as stating facts in testimony or arguing with a proof in persuasion. Each type of manipulative discourse has its implications. The deepest effect on the type of manipulation discourse is carried out by the participants. The roles of the speaker and the hearer vary according to their belief. The speaker is either stating the truth or he is unaware of the falsehood of his statement. In both cases, the testimony type of manipulative discourse is formed. However, he can deliberately intend to manipulate the hearer. This forms the other extreme, which is the manipulative text. The manipulator's strategies are highly dependent on the type of manipulation discourse they are involved in. This paves the way to other types of manipulative discourse, such as coercion and deception. The hearer, in turn, is free to accept or reject that based on his or her communicative or informative intention.

Finally, manipulative discourse has various degrees of transparency. It is proposed that the factors of overtness, direct speech and truth value have an effect in creating a high degree of transparency and these factors are evident in the testimony types of manipulative discourse. On the other hand, the use of covertness, indirect speech and falsehood can lead to a lower degree of transparency and a higher degree of opaqueness.

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# Against Old English 'short' diphthongs

**Abstract:** Since the earliest grammars, Old English has been analysed as having a length contrast in diphthongs, containing both regular, bimoraic ones, side by side with cross-linguistically unique monomoraic ones. The supposedly monomoraic diphthongs [io eo æɑ] arose through back umlaut and breaking. Unsurprisingly, they have become the source of possibly the greatest controversy in OE phonology, which still remains unresolved. The present paper refutes the main arguments for a length contrast in OE diphthongs. Instead, it argues for a generative phonological analysis, where the diphthongs constitute monomoraic monophthongs in the underlying representation, and bimoraic diphthongs in the surface representation.

**Keywords:** Old English, short diphthongs, syllable weight, back umlaut, breaking.

Since the earliest grammars, Old English has been analysed as having a length contrast in diphthongs, containing both regular, bimoraic ones, side by side with cross-linguistically unique monomoraic ones. The supposedly monomoraic diphthongs [io eo æɑ] arose through processes known as back umlaut and breaking, cf. the data in (1) and (2). Unsurprisingly, they have become the source of possibly the greatest controversy in Old English phonology (systematically summarised in Lass & Anderson 1975: 75-79), which still remains unresolved. It ought to be noted, however, that the problem of 'short diphthongs' in Old English is so complex that it cannot be solved comprehensively in a journal article. Instead, the present paper attempts at suggesting a solution within generative phonology. Namely, the diphthongs are suggested to constitute monomoraic monophthongs in the underlying representation, and bimoraic diphthongs in the surface representation.

(1) Old English back umlaut<sup>1</sup>

	before /u/	before /a/
/i/	* <i>sifun</i> > * <i>siofun</i> > <i>siofon</i> ‘seven’; <i>writ</i> ‘a writing’ ~ <i>gewriotu</i> ‘writings’	* <i>niða-</i> > * <i>nioða-</i> > <i>nioðemest</i> ‘lowest’; <i>lifian</i> ‘to live’ ~ <i>lifað</i> ‘he lives’
/e/	* <i>hefun</i> > * <i>heofun</i> > <i>heofon</i> ‘heaven’; <i>ete</i> ‘eat (pres. subj. sg.)’ ~ <i>eotu</i> ‘I eat’	<i>fela</i> ~ <i>feola</i> ‘many (indecl.)’; <i>etan</i> ~ <i>eotan</i> ‘to eat’
/æ/	<i>fæt</i> ‘vessel’ ~ <i>fatu</i> (nom. pl.); <i>hwæt</i> ‘active’ (nom. sg.) ~ <i>hwatum</i> (dat. sg./pl.)	<i>hwæle</i> ‘whale’ (dat. sg.) ~ <i>hwalas</i> (nom. pl.); <i>fære</i> ‘go’ (imp. sg.) ~ <i>faran</i> (inf.)

## (2) Old English breaking

(a) before /r/:	Pre-OE * <i>hærd</i> > OE <i>heard</i> ‘hard’, Pre-OE * <i>sterra</i> > OE <i>steorra</i> ‘star’, OE <i>birhtu</i> ~ <i>beorhtu</i> (< * <i>biorhtu</i> ) ‘brightness’;
(b) before /l/:	Pre-OE * <i>æll</i> > OE <i>eall</i> ‘all’, OE <i>self</i> ~ <i>seolf</i> ‘self’, Pre-OE * <i>silfr</i> > OE <i>siolfor</i> ‘silver’;
(c) before /w/:	Pre-OE * <i>þæw</i> > OE <i>þēaw</i> ‘custom’, Pre-OE * <i>mēwle</i> > OE <i>mēowle</i> ‘maiden’, OE <i>hiw</i> ~ <i>hiow</i> ‘shape’;
(d) before /x/:	Pre-OE * <i>sæh</i> > OE <i>seah</i> ‘he saw’, Pre-OE * <i>næh</i> > OE <i>nēah</i> ‘near’, Pre-OE * <i>fehthan</i> > OE <i>feohtan</i> ‘fight’, OE <i>wiht</i> ~ <i>wioht</i> ‘creature’ (Kentish), OE <i>liht</i> ~ <i>liohht</i> ‘light, n.’ (Kentish).

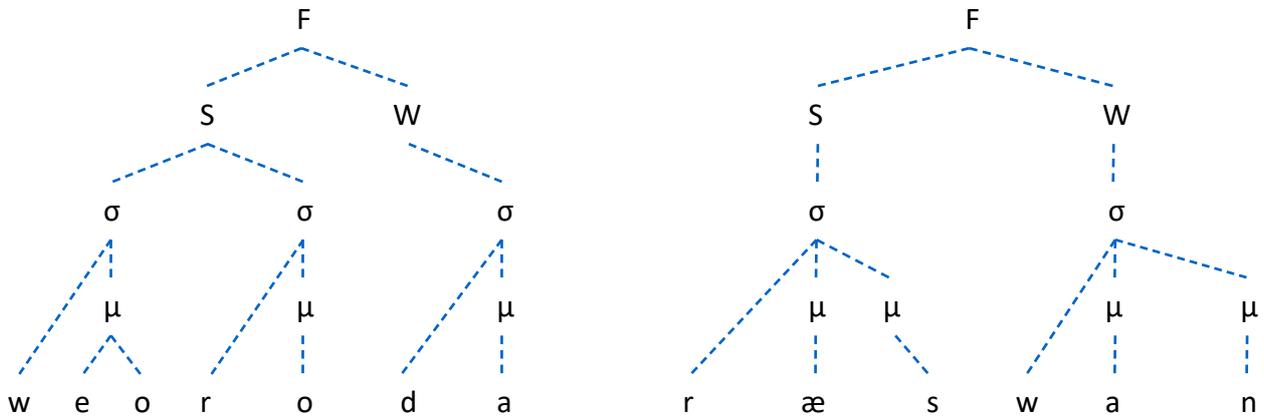
The source of the controversy lies in that those diphthongs seemingly function in the language like short vowels. For instance, the assumption of ‘short’ diphthongs allows for a fully regular scansion of lines such as *Beowulf* l. 60b: *weoroda ræswan* ‘the counsellors of troops’.<sup>2</sup> The half-line scans as a perfect Sieversian (1893) A-type verse, with the first lift resolved over the initial two syllables (ḶX X | Ḥ X) if and only if the initial syllable of *weoroda* remains monomoraic.<sup>3</sup> The relevant foot structure in the ‘Germanic foot’ system of Drescher & Lahiri (1991) is shown in (2) below.

1 Standard descriptions of back umlaut and breaking include Luick (1921: §§ 133-153, 220, 224-234), Campbell (1959: §§ 139-163, 205-221), Lass & Anderson (1975: 74-112), and Hogg (1992: §§ 5.16-5.27, 5.103-5.107).

2 Quotations from *Beowulf* follow Dobbie’s (1953) edition. Macrons have been added above long monophthongs and indisputably bimoraic diphthongs.

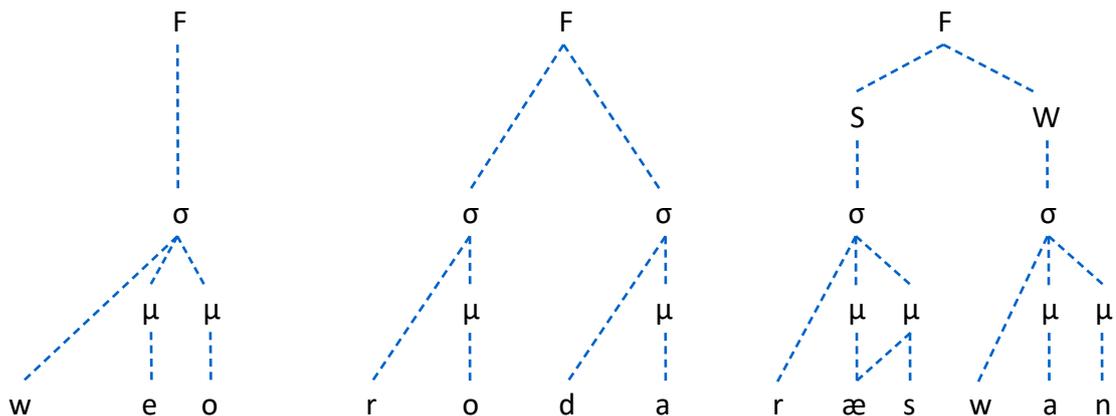
3 The notation uses the following symbols: H – heavy syllable, L – light syllable, X – syllable of unspecified weight, ‘ – accented syllable, | – foot boundary.

(2) Prosodic structure of *Beowulf* l. 60b *weoroda rǣswan* ‘the counsellors of troops’, according to the ‘Germanic foot’ theory of Drescher & Lahiri (1991)



The majority of Old English poetical half-lines belong to this type, which may be described as two consecutive trochees. Any aberration from the basic pattern would be linguistically marked, and especially so in the b-verse, which always adheres to the metrical types far more strictly than the a-verse. However, the basic pattern of two consecutive trochees would founder in the quoted line if the diphthong received two moras, as in (3).

(3) Prosodic structure of *Beowulf* l. 60b *weoroda rǣswan* ‘the counsellors of troops’, without ‘short’ diphthongs



The prosodic structure of (3) is (H́ | L̘ | H́ X), which cannot be easily accommodated within any of the types defined by Sievers.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, such half-lines have constituted primary evidence for positing short diphthongs as the surface representation of the results of back umlaut and breaking

<sup>4</sup> The grave accent over L̘ signifies secondary stress, as opposed to primary stress marked with the acute accent.

on short vowels. However, not all instances of the relevant digraphs in poetry yield more regular scansion if interpreted as monomoraic nuclei. Sievers (1893: § 77) already pointed out that at times these must be analysed as phonetically long, though without examples of poetic half-lines where that is the case. Nonetheless, examples can be easily found; for instance *Beowulf* l. 489 *Site nū tō symle / ond onsǣl meoto* ‘Now sit down to the feast and unseal the food (i.e. start eating)’. If *meoto* ‘food’ is analysed to have a monomoraic diphthong, the verse scans as (X X H́ | Ĺ X). In Sieversian classification, such verses belong to the C-type, whose canonical form is (X H́ | H́ X). In this case, the verse has the first dip expanded by a single syllable, which is allowed in the off-verse, and suspends resolution in the second lift. Such a half-line structure occurs frequently enough to have gained recognition as one of the possible subtypes (see for instance Fulk 2001). However, if the initial syllable of *meoto* is bimoraic, then the verse would scan as (X X H́ | H́ X), without the need for suspended resolution in the second foot. What is more, Sievers (1893: § 77) also notes that some diphthongs resulting from back umlaut or breaking of short vowels were long in all contexts, e.g. PrGmc \**faw-* > OE *fēawa* ‘few’. Hence, metrical data cannot be taken as unambiguously supportive of the theory of ‘short’ diphthongs.

The other argument commonly adduced in favour of ‘short’ diphthongs in Old English is that their later English reflexes apparently pattern together with etymological short vowels rather than long ones, as shown in (4).

#### (4) Later reflexes of Old English ‘long’ and ‘short’ diphthongs

	long in OE	short in OE
/i i: io/	OE <i>wīf</i> ‘woman’ > PDE <i>wife</i> /'waɪf/; OE <i>fīond</i> ‘enemy’ > PDE <i>fiend</i> /'fi:nd/	OE <i>brim</i> ‘surface of the sea’ > PDE <i>brim</i> /'brɪm/; OE <i>siolfur</i> ‘silver’ > PDE <i>silver</i> /'sɪlvə/
/e e: eo/	OE <i>dēman</i> ‘to judge’ > PDE <i>deem</i> /'di:m/; OE <i>dēop</i> ‘deep’ > PDE <i>deep</i> /'di:p/	OE <i>men</i> ‘men’ > PDE <i>men</i> /'men/; OE <i>heofon</i> ‘heaven’ > PDE <i>heaven</i> /'hevən/
/æ æ: æɑ/	OE <i>rǣdan</i> ‘to counsel; to read’ > PDE <i>read</i> /'ri:d/; OE <i>drēam</i> ‘joy’ > PDE <i>dream</i> /'dri:m/	OE <i>sæt</i> ‘sat’ > PDE <i>sat</i> /'sæt/; OE <i>weallan</i> ‘to well’ > PDE <i>well</i> /'wel/

The examples in (4) have been chosen so that no phonological processes would change vowel length after the Old English period. The data above show that etymologically bimoraic vowels and diphthongs, both those inherited from Proto-Germanic and those newly created through breaking, emerge in Present Day English with either the long vowel /i:/ or its Great Vowel Shift cognate /aɪ/, both uncontroversially bimoraic. The two vowel phonemes /i: aɪ/ constitute the only two possible PDE reflexes of OE etymologically bimoraic front vowels and diphthongs beginning with a

front vowel whenever no process changed the vowel length.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, etymologically monomoraic diphthongs seem to survive in PDE with short vowels, cf. the stressed syllables in *silver*, *heaven*, *well* – just as do the PDE reflexes of etymologically monomoraic vowels, for instance, *brim*, *men*, *sat*.

However, the latter generalisation takes into consideration only part of the data. While OE *heofon* > PDE *heaven* has kept the initial syllable monomoraic, the very similar OE *beofor* ‘beaver’ > PDE *beaver* /‘bi:və/ has lengthened its stressed syllable. No generalisation can account for both PDE reflexes of OE words, because of their mutually contradictory development. Previous research (for instance, Luick 1921: §§ 391-394; Dresher & Lahiri 1991: 281-282) suggests that words such as *beofor* underwent Open Syllable Lengthening, a Late Old English / Early Middle English process of mora insertion into the stressed syllable: ‘(C)V<sup>μ</sup>CV<sup>μ(μ)</sup>- > ‘(C)V<sup>μμ</sup>CV<sup>μ(μ)</sup>-. On the other hand, words such as *heofon* simply failed to undergo the lengthening.

This account may be largely correct, but it glosses over major dialectal discontinuities between Early Old English and Present Day English. In fact, Early Old English is mainly attested in Anglian (i.e. Northumbrian and Mercian) dialects, Late Old English in West Saxon. No standard can be discerned for Early Middle English, while in Late Middle English there emerged the London standard, based mainly on the Midland variety, a direct descendant of OE Anglian, yet with some Kentish features. Crucially, the three OE dialect families – Anglian, West Saxon, and Kentish – differ in their treatment of the diphthongs under consideration. Therefore, the argument from the later standard English reflexes of the OE ‘short’ diphthongs cannot be valid, because the standard dialects do not descend from each other in an unbroken line.

The Present Day English reflexes of the ‘short’ diphthong examples in (4), especially *siolfur* and *heofon*, point to the attrition of the diphthongisation rules, since the modern forms, *silver* and *heaven*, preserve the OE front vowel intact, as if no diphthongisation took place. This has prompted Daunt (1939) to interpret the phenomenon in question not as phonological diphthongisation, but as purely graphical addition of a diacritic in the form of a back vowel letter, whose function was to mark the ‘back’ quality of the following consonant. The logic behind such reasoning is that if breaking and back umlaut left no diachronic trace, then maybe they did not constitute sound changes. Because of the dialectal discontinuities described above, it is difficult to adduce credible data from direct descendants of the dialects with more abundant diphthongisation, i.e. West Saxon and Kentish. Fortunately, the needed evidence can be found in place names preserved in medieval documents from the Southwestern dialectal area of Middle English (the direct descendant of OE West Saxon).

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<sup>5</sup> For description of the relevant shifts in long vowel quality, see the classic grammatical account in Luick (1940: §§ 479-501), as well as the famous discussion in Stockwell & Minkova (1988a; 1988b) and Lass (1988).

(5) Place name evidence for Southwestern ME reflexes of the ‘short’ diphthong spelled <ea>, after Kuhn & Quirk (1953: 150)

WS *-bearu* ‘grove’ > Estharabyar, Trendelbiare, Wydebyer;

WS *healh* ‘place’ > la Hyele, la Hyales;<sup>6</sup>

WS *fearn-* ‘fern’ > Fiernham;

WS *fealw-* ‘fallow’ > Vialepitte;

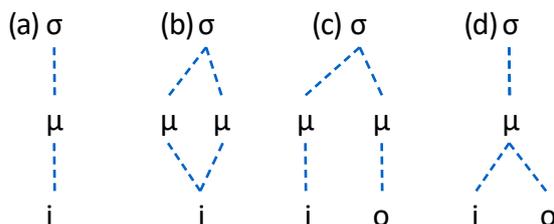
WS *dealla-* ‘proud, eminent’ > Dyalediche;

WS *pearroc-* ‘enclosure’ > Piarrecumbe.

All ME spellings in (5) represent the reflex of the ‘short’ diphthong <ea> [æa] with digraphs consisting of either <i> or <y>, followed by <e> or <a>. The obvious interpretation of these digraphs is that they stand for diphthongs whose first element can only be /i/, while their second element might be any of the ME non-high unrounded vowels /e ε a ə/. The spelling of the ME reflexes of the OE short monophthongs do not point towards any regular diphthongal development. Hence, the OE digraphs must have also represented diphthongs rather than monophthongs followed by a diacritic. They must have been bimoraic, since, to the best of my knowledge, no ‘short’ diphthongs have yet been posited for ME, or any other stage of the historical development of the English language.

Some scholars (for instance, Lass 1983: 53-58, followed by Hogg 1992: § 2.29) have attempted to save the theory of ‘short’ diphthongs by agreeing to the diphthongal quality of these vowels, but denying them the second mora, as in (6).

(6) The hypothetical fourfold contrast of vowel types in OE



<sup>6</sup> The gloss for *healh* gives only approximate meaning for this ambiguous noun, discussed by the dictionary entries in Bosworth & Toller (1898) and Toller (1921).

Figure (6) shows the monomoraic monophthong (6a) /i/, the bimoraic monophthong (6b) /i:/, the bimoraic diphthong (6c) /io/, and the hypothetical monomoraic diphthong (6d) /io/. The latter structure has been traditionally interpreted as a sequence of a monomoraic vowel followed by a ‘glide’ of uncertain quality (Campbell 1959: § 139; Minkova 2014: 179-180). Yet such an understanding of the theory of ‘short’ diphthongs cannot be accommodated into the basic phonological assumptions about Germanic syllables. This is because Germanic languages are highly weight-sensitive, universally preferring the stressed syllable to be heavy. For stress-related issues, as well as other phonological processes, both CVV and CVC syllables must be interpreted as heavy. A CVV syllable is heavy due to its underlying two moras attached to the vowel, while a CVC syllable has one underlying mora attached to the vowel, plus a derived, second mora attached to the coda consonant through Weight-by-Position (Hayes 1989). Consequently, if a diphthong or vowel-glide sequence is not supposed to obtain a second mora, it requires the suspension of Weight-by-Position. Such a suspension has been posited for word-final consonants, so that final, unstressed syllables remain monomoraic; see, for instance, Kiparsky (1998: 6). However, both breaking and back umlaut operate (primarily) on stressed syllables, also in polysyllabic words, the canonical context for Weight-by-Position. Suspending it there would derive incorrect outputs for the whole system of OE phonology.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the OE ‘short’ diphthongs need a representation that would encode both their diphthongal, and hence necessarily bimoraic structure, and their diachronic and synchronic propensity to pattern together with monomoraic vowels. Generative phonology offers a solution for such cases: these vowels ought to be represented as monomoraic monophthongs in the underlying representation and bimoraic diphthongs on the surface.

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<sup>7</sup> For other systematic counterarguments against ‘short’ diphthongs, see White (2004).

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# WORK IN PROGRESS

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# The problem of racism in Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*

**Abstract.** This article analyzes Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (2009) with the main focus on the presentation of the ubiquitous problem of racism experienced by African Americans in the United States. Specifically, it demonstrates shameful, humiliating and unbearable living conditions of black maids in the 1960s in Jackson, Mississippi. It discusses different types of racism, such as overt, institutional, and structural, which occur in this community. Additionally, this paper provides an overview of the history of racism in the USA. The purpose of this article is to examine the history of interracial relationships in the USA, which sheds light on the problem of white supremacy, as well as demonstrates the damaging consequences of racial prejudice. However, the main objective of the paper is to analyse the relationships between white and black characters inhabiting Jackson, Mississippi as depicted in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*.

**Keywords:** Kathryn Stockett, racism, the USA, Mississippi, black maids, discrimination, Jim Crow laws.

## Introduction

The plight of African Americans in the United States is the phenomenon which has been widely studied by scholars and academics from different disciplines. Racism has been experienced by the Blacks since slavery was introduced in the USA as a system after 1619 landing of the first group of 20 Africans in Jamestown. This fact makes us realise that the USA has a long history of gradually changing relationships between black and white Americans. This article, therefore, aims at presenting many considerable changes in problematic interracial relationships as well as accentuating huge differences in standards of living experienced by the Whites and the Blacks. It is worth noting that African Americans bore the brunt of the changes.

The paper puts the main emphasis on describing the everyday struggles of African Americans trying to live with dignity and respect as portrayed in Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*. Set in the segregated South, the book contains detailed depictions of events which took place from the late summer of 1962 through 1964 in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, the article highlights unbearable living conditions of African American maids employed by white Americans with a strong racial prejudice towards the Blacks. Moreover, not only does *The Help* demonstrate fictional events

taking place in the blindly racist community of Jackson, but it also depicts events which actually took place. This adds authenticity to the work.

## **The situation of African Americans in the USA**

Since the introduction of slavery as a system in 1661 in Virginia, American history of a racism has been fraught with series of ups and downs in relationship between white Americans and African Americans. This was a point of history when the conflict between them began. African Americans were treated as if they were inferior. They worked for a long time, sometimes from sunset to sunup. The system of oppression lasted until it was abolished before the end of the American Civil War in 1865. The introduction of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution changed the lives of African Americans completely. From this moment on African Americans, former slaves, were considered human beings and they also were given the right to vote. They started to educate themselves and, what was more important for them, were allowed to possess their own land. Furthermore, a year later, in 1866 the first Civil Rights Act was enacted. It strengthened the position of African Americans by giving them American citizenship and therefore equal treatment before the law. Nonetheless, racial discrimination did not disappear as African Americans still were considered inferior and subservient. In some states, especially in the South, white Americans strived to prevent them from exercising the right to vote by means of literacy tests and high poll taxes. Moreover, the Blacks were paid less than white Americans for the same work. The next example of the Whites resentment toward the Blacks was forming secret organizations like the Ku Klux Klan which promoted white supremacy. Members of this organization terrorized their black neighbours at night wearing masks and costumes to terrify the Blacks. During the Reconstruction era, in 1877 there were also strict Jim Crow laws legislated. This humiliating set of rules and regulations officially segregated the Blacks and the Whites throughout the Southern States of America affecting almost every sphere of their life (Fisher 2006: 48-49).

At the beginning of the twentieth century the situation concerning race relations did not improve. In the USA there was a rise of racist behaviour and shocking increase in the racist attacks. During World War I, African Americans started to migrate in large numbers to western and northern America. They hoped that this would give them a better chance of gaining knowledge and a rewarding, well-paid job. However, many black people became unemployed as they were not educated or skilled enough to take up a job. As a result, it was difficult for them to make their ends meet. Many of them lived in abject poverty inhabiting slums (Greenberg 2009: 15-17).

The next period of great changes in race relationships between the Whites and the Blacks in the USA was World War II. Some of the black Americans started to achieve success in a large number of fields. For instance, Gwendolyn Brooks won a Pulitzer Prize for poetry, Sidney Poitier won an Academy Award for Best Actor, and Hulan Jack became the first black Manhattan borough president. Nevertheless, even if the lives of some African Americans improved considerably, most of them still suffered from acute poverty or unemployment (Greenberg 2009: 29-31). Then, the period of 1960s began with the so-called 'sit-in protests' during which African Americans oc-

cupied a particular place preserved for white people. By means of such protests they showed that they were no longer going to acquiesce to unequal treatment. Nevertheless, apart from taking part in nonviolent protests, some of African Americans were so tired of being mistreated that they did not see other alternatives but to fight for their rights by taking part in riots. Moreover, in order to maintain struggle for justice, peace, and equal treatment for African Americans, during the 1960s the Blacks were represented by a generation of courageous black leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr. who paid for the defence of the Blacks' dignity with his life (Fisher 2006: 106-109).

### **The lives of African Americans in *The Help***

Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*, published in 2009, brings up the issue of racism in the Southern United States by portraying relationships between white and black Americans from late summer of 1962 through 1964 in Jackson, Mississippi. The book is written from the perspective of three different women: Eugenia Phelan (best known for her nickname Skeeter) – a white young college graduate who wants to be a journalist and undertakes a monumental task of writing a book about black maids' struggles from their point of view, Aibileen Clark – a wise black maid who raised seventeen white children, and Minny Jackson – an outspoken black maid who persuades other black maids to help Skeeter to write the book. Each narrator presents her own background, thoughts, and the desire for change. However, not only does the novel depict the white employers' discrimination against black maids, but also it focuses on prejudiced treatment of the Blacks by white Americans of all ages and from all walks of life.

Set in the segregated South of the 1960s, *The Help* provides a detailed description of the events connected with daily lives of Mississippians. Kathryn Stockett demonstrates how strong is the bias of the Whites toward black residents of Jackson by means of numerous examples of racist behaviour. Apart from fictional events, the novel also demonstrates events which actually took place, thus adding authenticity to the work. For instance, the book clearly depicts the fear of death and brutality that African Americans experienced after Medgar Evers' assassination. When the black inhabitants of Mississippi find out that he was killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan they are scared to death and avoid leaving their homes for fear of being shot. The situation is even more dramatic because of the fact that Evers, the black field secretary for NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) who fought against the Blacks' exploitation, was shot in front of his house right before his children's eyes. Therefore, the Blacks realise that their lives are always under threat just because of their skin colour. As one of the main protagonists of *The Help*, the black maid Aibileen, states:

for days and days, Jackson, Mississippi's like a pot of boiling water. On Miss Leefolt's tee-vee, flocks a colored people march up High Street the day after Mister Evers' funeral. Three hundred arrested. Colored people say thousands a people came to the service, but you could count the whites on one hand. The police know who did it, but they ain't telling nobody his name (Stockett 2009:196).

This entire event demonstrates that white Mississippians have no compunctions about taking African Americans into custody even if they do not commit any crime. Moreover, white perpetrators always remain unknown to the general public while the Blacks are severely punished for even slight conflicts with the Whites.

The next historical event which the author includes as a plot point in *The Help* is the long struggle of African Americans against Jim Crow laws. For instance, Stockett incorporates into her narration a description of the sit-in protest at Brown's Drug Store. Minny Jackson, the black maid, states that "a bunch of white teenagers stand behind the five protesters on their stools, jeering and jabbing, pouring ketchup and mustard and salt all over their heads" (Stockett 2009: 219). The event clearly displays the white teenagers' strong prejudicial attitudes, as well as racial hatred and aggression toward the Blacks. Thus, Stockett suggests that white children are taught by their parents and teachers from a very young age to hate the Blacks as the white adults want to prevent from their integration (Sturkey, Hale 2015: 12). Then it is difficult or even impossible for the white teenagers to get rid of racial stereotypes and behaviour.

Another important aspect of Jim Crow laws demonstrated in the novel is the huge division between white Americans and African Americans concerning facilities used by them. The humiliating set of rules and regulations stated that the black inhabitants of Jackson are not allowed to use shops, restaurants, and libraries reserved for the Whites only. The black maids in *The Help*, e.g. Aibileen and Minny, sometimes have to buy something in the shops for the Whites for the white families they work for. However, they can enter the shop provided that they wear white uniforms. What is important to notice is the fact that the schools, libraries, and shops attended by the Blacks are completely different from the ones attended by the Whites. In the Stockett's novel this is illustrated in a description of the shop for the Blacks called Piggly Wiggly "with the potatoes having inch-long eyes and the milk almost sour" (Stockett 2009: 42). In addition, it is essential to mention that when the Blacks refuse to adhere to Jim Crow laws they are severely punished. For instance, Skeeter says that when there was a sit-in protest at the white library a few years ago, "the police department simply stepped back and turned the German shepherds loose" (Stockett 2009: 154).

Stockett also stresses the fact that black inhabitants of Jackson can hardly make ends meet due to racial discrimination in terms of employment. They are given only menial jobs such as maids, charwomen, and fast-food workers which are, of course, low-paid. In addition, their white employers perpetuate racial stereotypes about the Blacks' aggression, laziness, irresponsibility, and lack of intelligence. Thus, the black residents of Jackson often live in abject poverty inhabiting the poorest part of the city, which is clearly exemplified by means of a description of Hotstack, Constantine's (Skeeter's former maid) neighbourhood. When Skeeter recollects one day of walking along the neighbourhood with Constantine she remembers "the colored five-and-dime store, then a grocer with hens laying in back, and all along the way, dozens of shabby-looking roadside houses with tin roofs and slanting porches" (Stockett 2009: 61). Living in such poor conditions causes the black characters of *The Help* want to change their lives fraught with pain, hunger, and suffering. As a result, it leads to taking part in violent demonstrations, like the one in the library described by Skeeter.

ter. Therefore, Stockett, by combining the actual historical events with the fictional ones, offers a true representation of the interracial relationship between inhabitants of Mississippi which at that time was regarded as one of the most racially oppressive states in the USA (Watson 2010: 10).

### **Different types of racism in *The Help***

Stockett's *The Help* offers a multitude of examples of racial discrimination against black inhabitants of Jackson, Mississippi. Almost every white character demonstrated in the novel shows hatred toward the Blacks and treats them with scorn and contempt as if they were second-class citizens without full rights and benefits. Therefore the author of the novel clearly reveals that deeply-rooted racism permeates every aspect of the segregated society of Jackson.

### **Overt racism**

The characters of *The Help* have to deal with different forms of racism on a daily basis. However, most often they are victims of overt racism, which manifests itself in hatred and contempt towards other people due to their belonging to a different race. It is characterised by assumptions of racial superiority made by the white people who consider themselves to be better in terms of intelligence or personality traits. This form of racism is easily observable as overt racism action "takes place only if a harm is inflicted or a benefit withheld either because of the perpetrator's racial bias against the victim or because of that perpetrator's obliging the race prejudice of others" (Ezorsky 1991: 9). This type of racism is omnipresent in the prejudiced community of Jackson, which is clearly pointed out by Hilly Holbrook's negative behaviour toward her black maid Minny Jackson and the black maid, Aibileen Clark, who works for her friend Elizabeth Leefolt. According to Garcia, Hilly is "the self-serving power broker in this female world of white social elites" (Garcia, Young, and Pimentel 2014: 54). Holbrook is the president of the Jackson Junior League which aims at helping PSCAs (The Poor Starving Children of Africa). During one of the meetings, when a member of the league asks her if it would not be better for them to send money to the poor rather than canned food whose transport is very costly, she says that they "cannot give these tribal people money" (Stockett 2009: 175). She also adds that the Blacks "are likely to go to the local voodoo tent and get a satanic tattoo with [their] money" (Stockett 2009: 175). The entire event displays Hilly's patronising attitude toward the Blacks and lack of respect for them. What is more, when Holbrook meets her friends at Elizabeth's house for a weekly bridge game, she says that African Americans disseminate different kinds of diseases and that she wants to maintain separation of black maids from white families by means of separate bathrooms for the maids. She tries to pass a bill which would require all Mississippians to build outdoor bathrooms for their black maids which she calls "a disease-preventive measure" (Stockett 2009: 8). As a result, after a few days Aibileen has to use a separate bathroom outside the Leefolt's house. Moreover, "Hilly raises her voice about three octaves higher when she talks to colored people" (Stockett 2009: 157). Her manner of speaking demonstrates that she treats African Americans as if they were inferior and not as intelligent as the Whites. What is more, when Hilly finds out that Aibileen helped Skeeter to write a book about

the black maids in Jackson employed by white Americans (including Hilly and Elizabeth), Hilly makes Elizabeth dismiss Aibileen accusing the black maid in a completely unjustified way of stealing her three pieces of cutlery. As Mills states in her book, “it is no wonder that Aibileen declares to aggressively racist Miss Hilly [...] ‘You a godless woman’, for only a woman without knowledge of God and His mercy could be so unrelentingly racist” (Mills 2016: XI).

The matter of overt racism is also highlighted by a racist attitude of Elizabeth Leefolt who blindly follows Hilly Holbrook. When her little daughter, Mae Mobley, uses Aibileen’s bathroom, Elizabeth tells her that Aibileen is dirty and diseased. Therefore, Leefolt enforces prevailing racist behaviours and attitudes. This situation reveals that due to adults’ prejudice toward the Blacks, racism is handed down over the ages from generation to generation.

The reader of the novel is presented with overt racism also through the mentioning of several incidents. For instance, the author of *The Help* describes Robert’s case. The grandson of the black maid Louvenia Brown is beaten with a tire iron by the Whites after using the unmarked bathroom reserved for white Americans at Pinchman Lawn and Garden. As a result of the beating, he becomes blind. Stockett also mentions the Whites burnt the house of Aibileen’s cousin, Shinelle, in Cauter Country because of her participation in elections. The next example of overt racism can be seen when white Americans cut off the tongue of Aibileen’s husband’s cousin as she talked with somebody from Washington about the Ku Klux Klan.

### **Institutional racism**

Stockett also presents many situations demonstrating institutional racism. According to Shirley Jean Better, this kind of racism often goes undetected and “moves surreptitiously throughout [...] social institutions, hardly making a ripple unless you are the recipient of its harsh treatment” (Better 2002: 48). Institutional racism expresses itself in unfair treatment of people who do not belong to the white race in institutions such as schools, media systems, and the government. The mistreatment is observable when some people in control of institutional power use it to devoid people belonging to different race of equal opportunities. The book clearly reveals the situations by means of racist treatment of black maids who work for white American families. As pointed out by Garcia, “beyond the overt racial and class divisions present in America today, the assumption that black (and brown) women are innate caretakers has a much longer history than the current domestic employment practices” (Garcia, Young, and Pimentel 2014: 58). Therefore, due to negative stereotypes perpetuated by white Americans, African Americans in *The Help* are given only menial jobs like maids, refuse collectors, and plantation workers.

What is important to note is the fact that the white people in control of institutional power often mistreat their employees, which is shown by the example of relations between Elizabeth Leefolt and Aibileen Clark, the black maid who works for her. The detailed descriptions of Elizabeth’s behaviour clearly reveal that her black maid is discriminated against in her workplace. The best example of racial oppression is building by the Leefolts a separate bathroom in the garage for

Aibileen. What is more, during her working time Aibileen is often offended by Elizabeth's friend, Hilly Holbrook, who says that African Americans should be separated from white Americans as she believes they disseminate different kinds of diseases. It is essential to mention that Aibileen "work[s] for Miss Leefolt eight to four, six days a week except Saturdays" (Stockett 2009: 16). She gets "forty-three dollars [every] Friday, which come[s] to \$172 a month" (Stockett 2009: 16) and she is afraid to even ask Leefolt for minimum wage even if she hardly makes ends meet. She is dismissed "when the babies get too old and stop being color-blind" (Stockett 2009: 128). The author of *The Help* mentions that Aibileen raised seventeen children, which means that she had to change her job many times. Furthermore, according to Mills,

anything that happen[s] during the course of any day a black woman work[s] in a white home [is] almost invariably her fault. [...] If a white child fell, it [is] because the black woman [is] not attentive enough. If the biscuits [are] burned or the chicken slightly undercooked, then, in the absence of slavery-sanctioned corporeal punishment, docked wages—or firing—would be the result (Mills 2016: XII).

The next example portraying institutional racism is the way in which the Whites treat Aibileen's son, Treelore, who dies two years before the novel opens (when he was 24). One rainy night when he works at the Scanlon-Taylor mill "lugging two-by-fours to the truck, splinters slicing all the way through the glove" (Stockett 2009: 2) he slips off the loading dock and falls down the drive. The person who operates a tractor-trailer does not notice Treelore and crushes his lungs. Then "his broken body [is] thrown on the back of a pickup by the white foreman" (Stockett 2009: 153). By the time Aibileen finds out about the accident Treelore is dead. As the maid states, Treelore was "too small for that kind of work, too skinny, but he needed a job" (Stockett 2009: 2). Treelore's case shows that white employers do not consider their black employees' safety as an important issue. African Americans are given the most physically demanding jobs which often are also the most dangerous. This situation clearly indicates that Treelore, like other young black men, had no other possibility to earn money for his family but to take up a low-paid, menial job.

## **Structural racism**

In *The Help* there are also examples of structural racism, which manifests itself in unequal distribution of goods and resources for achieving aims due to different colour of skin, as discrimination against black Americans is deeply-rooted in white inhabitants of Jackson who aim at concealing racism rather than eradicating it (Garcia, Young, and Pimentel 2014: 23). The work of Sam Porter reveals that "individuals will enjoy more or less powerful enabling positions in a society which displays structural racism, depending on how they are categorised in racist terms" (Porter 1993: 597). This unequal distribution existed a long time ago and now people are put within some kind of groups whose members are given more or less powerful positions than others. For instance, the Whites in *The Help* show their supremacy over the Blacks when they do not allow them to expand

into white neighbourhoods. According to Aibileen, “Jackson’s just one white neighbourhood after the next and more springing up down the road. But the colored part a town, we one big anthill, surrounded by state land that ain’t for sale. As our numbers get bigger, we can’t spread out. Our part a town just gets thicker” (Stockett 2009: 12). This passage reveals that African Americans are treated unfairly by the US government whose members strive to avoid integration of white and black Americans. Even if they live in the same town, according to Skeeter, “the colored part of town seems so far away when, evidently, it’s only a few miles from the white part of town.” (Stockett 2009: 143).

Structural racism in *The Help* is also pointed out by deeply-rooted beliefs held by white inhabitants of Jackson that the Blacks are thieves and liars. The novel clearly portrays the negative attitude of the Whites towards African Americans when Minny, the black maid who works for the Holbrooks, is unjustifiably accused by Hilly of stealing her silver. The false accusation ruins Minny’s reputation and creates an enormous problem for her to find a job as the white residents of Jackson consider the Whites to be honest and trustworthy while maintaining that the Blacks do not deserve to be trusted. The white Mississippians completely believe in the rightness of Hilly’s accusation. They do not even assume that it is a part of her plan to get revenge on Minny for using the Holbrooks’ toilet during a brutal storm.

Stockett also illustrates structural racism by the fact that the Blacks have to obey rigid Jim Crow laws which maintain the racial hierarchy stressing white supremacy and control over African Americans. The humiliating set of rules prevents them from living decent lives as the Blacks are deprived of even basic facilities. For example, black inhabitants of Jackson cannot use shops, restaurants, swimming pools, and libraries reserved for whites only. It is worth mentioning that when African Americans refuse to obey these rules, the groups such as the Ku Klux Klan fight against them. Its members often terrorise the Blacks, burn their houses, beat them, and shoot to death for not obeying Jim Crow laws.

Moreover, what is important to mention is that some people of power in the community of Jackson like Hilly Holbrook, the leader of the Junior League, is expected to be devoid of racial discrimination. Holbrook, who is responsible for the organization supporting the Blacks in Africa, should set a good example for Mississippians. Nevertheless, Hilly’s behaviour reveals her strong bias toward African Americans. She is a hypocrite who “send[s] money to colored people overseas, but not across town” (Stockett 2009: 280). Although she helps The Poor Starving Children of Africa, she simultaneously strives to maintain racial segregation in her town, which can be definitely regarded as the example of structural racism.

### **Prejudice and injustice experienced by the black maids**

Stockett’s novel demonstrates racial discrimination which affects all black characters who live in the deeply prejudiced society of Mississippi during the Jim Crow era. She presents unbearable living conditions experienced by the black inhabitants of Jackson, cruel treatment of the Blacks who

take part in protests fighting for equal rights, and humiliating black workers by white Americans. However, the author of *The Help* puts the main emphasis on portraying the suffering of black maids who work for white families looking after their children, cooking and serving food, and cleaning their houses. The Stockett's novel deals with the problem of maid's abuse as she demonstrates in her book numerous examples of prejudiced behaviour towards the black maids. As Yanick St. Jean states in his book, "for an African American it takes great strength and courage to 'do tough' in the face of discrimination and misrepresentations, misconceptions, and distortions of black women at the hands of white Americans" (Yanick 1998: IX).

It is worth mentioning that African American women in *The Help* are treated much more harshly than black men as they are burdened by the stigma of race as well as the stigma of sex. Not only are they mistreated by white Mississippians but also by their husbands and fathers. For instance, Minny Jackson, the black maid working for the Holbrooks, had really difficult childhood due to her "no-good drunk daddy" (Stockett 2009: 38) because of whom she was about to drop out of school in order to support her family. After school she spent much of her time performing household chores such as cooking and cleaning. The situation experienced by the Jacksons clearly reveals that only women were responsible for earning their livelihood while man did nothing but drowned his sorrows in alcohol. What is more, when Minny starts her own family she is constantly beaten by her husband Leroy who often also shouts at her. At the end of the novel Leroy even tries to kill Minny as he finds out that he lost his job because of his wife. He does not hit Minny only when she is pregnant, which is why Minny gets pregnant all the time and they have five children. Minny is continually worried about "[her] husband Leroy coming home drunk [very frequently]. [Leroy] knows that's the one thing [she] can't stand after nursing [her] drunk daddy for ten years, [Minny] and [her] Mama working [...] to death so he had a full bottle" (Stockett 2009: 51) but he does nothing to change his damaging behaviour. In addition, when Minny talks with Aibileen, her best friend, she says that "plenty of black men leave their families behind like trash in a dump, but it's just not something the colored woman do. [They've] got the kids to think about" (Stockett 2009: 310-311).

The next woman who suffers owing to being a woman and her skin colour is Aibileen – the black maid who works for the Leefolts. As a young teenager she had to drop out of school to support her family by working as a maid. She was, therefore, deprived of a normal, happy childhood. Then, when her son Trelore was born, her dark-skinned husband Clyde left her to raise the child alone. Thus, Stockett depicts black males in her book in a negative light, making black maids victims of their husbands' and fathers' brutal and inhumane behaviour.

The black maids portrayed in *The Help* are often mistreated by their fathers and husbands. However, the author of the novel focuses mostly on demonstrating dehumanizing and humiliating working conditions experienced by them. Stockett makes reader realise that in the small community of Jackson, where racism permeates all aspects of life, "no concept of equality [can] govern maid/mistress interactions in the homes of whites just as no concept of equality govern[s] the society in which these women [are] employed" (Mills 2016: XII).

As an example of dealing with humiliation Stockett describes Aibileen Clark raising her eighteenth white child, Mae Mobley, the daughter of the Leefolts. The maid faces racial discrimination and prejudice on a daily basis. Even though she does her best taking care of Elizabeth Leefolt's child, cooking, and cleaning, she is not appreciated by her employer. Conversely, Aibileen is frequently reprimanded by her, for example, when she talks with Elizabeth's friend Skeeter during her working hours. Such a situation shows that she is treated like Leefolt's property. In addition, Aibileen is used to be given worn-out clothes by her white employers. The black maid, who lives in abject poverty, has no choice but to wear clothes which earlier belonged to her white employers as she does not possess enough money to buy new ones. Furthermore, the Leefolts build a separate toilet for her as Elizabeth is persuaded by her friend Hilly that it is the only way to prevent their family from being infected with dangerous diseases which, she states, are disseminated by the Blacks. This is probably the most embarrassing situation that has ever happened to Aibileen. What is important to mention is the fact that Aibileen, who is treated like a second-class human being, never complains of being tired and discriminated. Moreover, Aibileen never talks back to Leefolt as well as to her racially prejudiced friend Hilly who often offends African Americans by creating and perpetuating racial stereotypes showing the Blacks as unintelligent, dirty, and lazy. Nevertheless, Aibileen perseveres in overcoming all the obstacles of her life without feeling sorry for herself.

The next example of prejudiced treatment of black maids is demonstrated by the case of Constantine, who was employed by the Phelans. Skeeter, the Phelans' daughter, "praises Constantine as a nurturer who would bring her home to the black segregated side of town simply due to the love that she had for the white child in her care" (Garcia, Young, and Pimentel 2014: 68). Nevertheless, after working for Phelan family for twenty-nine years Constantine was dismissed by Charlotte Phelan, Skeeter's mother, due to Constantine's illegitimate daughter's rude behaviour. What was even more cruel, Charlotte told Lulabelle that "[her] mama hadn't been sick a day in her life. She [had given Lulabelle] up because [she was] too high yellow" (Stockett 2009: 364). However, what is essential to note is the fact that Constantine gave her daughter for adoption as "being [African American] with white skin [...] in Mississippi it's like you don't belong to nobody" (Stockett 2009: 358). When Constantine was noticed with her white daughter "[w]hite folks would stop her, ask her all suspicious what she doing toting round a white child. [...] Even colored folks... they treat[ed] her differently, distrustful, like she [had] done something wrong." (Stockett 2009: 358). By means of Constantine's case Stockett stresses the fact that "[b]lack women are expected to love their white families unconditionally" (Garcia, Young, and Pimentel 2014: 68) and devote considerable efforts to performing household chores as effectively as possible while white Americans do not pay attention to their emotions, mistreating and humiliating them all the time.

The black maids in *The Help*, therefore, are treated unequally by their white employers even though they are indispensable for their families. For instance, African American maids' salaries do not correspond to the great effort put into their jobs. Minny, after working as a maid for five years, is paid one dollar per hour, which makes her "feeling kind of ashamed" (Stockett 2009: 37) as she is paid below the legal minimum wage. Similarly, Aibileen is paid by the Leefolts 172 dol-

lars a month, working from eight to four o'clock, as a result of which she barely makes ends meet. Stockett demonstrates in her book that because of such appallingly low salaries the black maids and their families live in a deep poverty. For instance, when Minny was fourteen, “[b]irthdays were the only day of the year [she] was allowed to eat as much as [she] wanted” (Stockett 2009: 38). Thus, as a result of poor living conditions together with unfair treatment by the white community the Blacks tend to have a lower self-esteem than the Whites. This phenomenon is illustrated in Aibileen’s case when she sits in her kitchen after supper and observes a big cockroach. She compares this insect to herself noticing that it is blacker than she is. Furthermore, Aibileen feels her inferiority to white Americans not only due to her colour of skin, but also because of her ancestry. When she is asked by Skeeter, who writes a book about the plight of black female domestic workers in the USA, whether she always thought she would be a maid, Aibileen replies in an affirmative manner. The black maid tells her that she knew that she was going to work as a maid as her mother was a maid and her grandmother had been a house slave. Aibileen does not even consider looking for another job as she finds it impossible for her to get a job which would provide her with sufficient income, a sense of accomplishment, and overall satisfaction.

*The Help* is also fraught with references to racist incidents suffered by black maids which are mentioned in the conversations of the main characters of the novel. For instance, when Aibileen talks with her black colleague Ernestine, who works for the Holbrooks, she finds out that Flora Lou, a black maid employed by Miss Hester “who everybody think is real sweet” (Stockett 2009: 433), was given “a special ‘hand wash’ to use ever morning” (Stockett 2009: 433). As Ernestine says, it turned out to be “straight bleach” (Stockett 2009: 433). As a result, Flora Lou had a burn scar which she showed Ernestine. In addition, during Minny’s conversation with Aibileen they recall unpleasant incidents connected with Minny’s former racist white employers. As an example, Aibileen brings up the memory of Mister Charlie who thought it had been funny to humiliate Minny by name-calling and insults and his wife “who [made her] eat lunch outside, even in the middle a January, [...] even when it snowed that time” (Stockett 2009: 227). Then, when Aibileen starts to talk about the incident connected with Miss Roberta she cannot stop laughing as the white employer made Minny “sit at the kitchen table while she [was trying out] her new dye solution on [Minny]” (Stockett 2009: 227). This caused Minny’s hair became blue and, according to her husband Leroy, she “look[ed] like a craker from outer space” (Stockett 2009: 227). The situation was certainly not so funny for Minny as it “took three weeks and twenty-five dollars to get [her] hair black again” (Stockett 2009: 227). Therefore, all the events illustrate that black female domestic workers were frequently abused in numerous ways. They were accustomed to being treated like sub-humans and facing hardships on a daily basis.

## Conclusions

Stockett’s novel “make[s] clear that problematic interactions across racial lines remain an ongoing dynamic that informs and shapes what happens to black women when they go to work as maids and caregivers in white women’s houses” (Mills 2016: XIII). The book clearly demonstrates that

white employers look down on black maids. The maids are offered harsh and humiliating treatment which makes them feel inferior to white Americans. Nevertheless, at the same time this treatment causes their desire to change their poor existence which is the reason for their willingness to share their unpleasant experience with white and black Americans by means of a book written together with Skeeter. What is essential to note is the fact that by taking up this monumental task the black maids put their lives at risk. This illustrates that they are ready to resort to the most desperate measures in order to avoid abuse.

Through analysing shameful living and working conditions faced especially by black maids, whose lives are always under threat due to their colour of skin, *The Help* makes people aware of the problem of white supremacy and the damaging consequences of racist behaviour towards the Blacks. Together with the film of the same title as the book, which was released in 2011, *The Help* contributed a lot to changing white Americans' perception of African Americans. The movie "became one of the most commercially successful films so far in the twenty-first century" (Garcia, Young, and Pimentel 2014: 5) as it earned over 150 million dollars in domestic box office sales. In general, both white and black viewers of the film found it worth watching due to its excellent acting parts, well written script, and effective music. The novel as well as the film of the same title based on Stockett's book serve as an eye-opener to racially prejudiced white Americans helping them discern huge number of problems dealt with by the Blacks which were largely ignored or glossed over by the Whites over the centuries. It does not mean that *The Help* had great influence on all its readers and immediately opened their eyes on the obstacles the Blacks face every day. Nevertheless, such a production as *The Help* is a big step in fighting against racial discrimination towards African Americans which is still present in the USA today.

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