

REVIEWS

Marcello Giovanelli and Chloe Harrison 2018:
Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics: A Practical Guide.
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As evidenced by the plethora of publications, the cognitive turn has gained ground in contemporary academic discourse within the humanities. However, this is not necessarily the case with materials for undergraduate students and beginners in the field; although several cognitive linguistics and Cognitive Grammar introductions have been on the market for some time (e.g. Taylor 2002; Evans and Green 2006; Ungerer and Schmid 2006; Radden and Dirven 2007; Langacker 2013), there is still a need for cognitive-stylistic and cognitive-poetic textbooks which would not scare off the novice reader with technical vocabulary and high expectations of linguistic and literary erudition.¹ Particularly expected is a course book introducing cognitive methods/analytical tools to the interested practitioners of literary studies, who usually lack the necessary linguistic background; the absence of such a book is, arguably, one of the major factors preventing literary cognitivism from becoming truly an *applied* methodology.

¹ See Danaher's (2007) and Tsur's (2008) criticism of Peter Stockwell's *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (2002), a ground-breaking textbook on cognitive poetics in the stylistic tradition. Also see Marecki's (2013) discussion of Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen's *Cognitive Poetics in Practice* (2003), the book intended as a practical supplement to Stockwell's more theoretical introduction.

In this light, Marcello Giovanelli and Chloe Harrison's *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics: A Practical Guide*, addressed "mainly [to] undergraduates taking courses in English language, linguistics, stylistics or literary studies"² (p. 1, emphasis added), raises hopes for a practicable, student-friendly resource to be used by teachers of literature in the university classroom.³ An enthusiastic passage from Alison Gibbons's review included in the blurb could make a cognitively-inspired literary scholar choose the book for the sake of her/his academic courses: "the first choice for all students, teachers and scholars wanting to explore the various construals and force dynamics of poetry, drama and fiction." Accordingly, the subsequent considerations will be conducted from the perspective of a practicing literary cognitivist, with a view to the textbook's usefulness to teachers and students of literature departments. Since these readers do not constitute the primary target of Giovanelli and Harrison's book,⁴ my remarks could be regarded as a version of "minority report," to evoke the title of the Hollywood blockbuster.

To begin with, *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics* is characterized by lucid structure, approachable language, and accurate focus on exemplification, which must appeal to any university teacher. In each chapter there are well-distinguished subsections which offer concise descriptions of particular issues, accompanied by non-textual material in the form of visuals (figures, tables, drawings, photographs, etc.), thereby making the intricacies of Cognitive Grammar (CG) easier to understand. Conveniently, each chapter begins with Key Objectives, or bullet points indicating the major issues to be explored. Furthermore, the key terms/phrases discussed in each chapter are marked with a bold font and listed – together with brief explanations – in the Glossary section at the end of the book. This can be useful for the sake of quick reference and/or revision, just as References and Index of Crucial Terms.

Giovanelli and Harrison's introductory considerations are rightly placed in Chapter 1 (rather than in a stand-alone introduction), which underlines their significance. The authors clearly state their general assumption that CG is "a powerful alternative to more traditional grammatical models" (p. 1). They also promise that in the course of their book, the reader, familiarly addressed as "you," will be prepared to utilize the tools offered by CG to be able to encounter various text types critically.

In the section devoted to stylistics, Giovanelli and Harrison begin with the discipline's focus on texts, simultaneously emphasizing the role of individual and social contexts of reading, as well as the role of particular in-

2 As the umbrella term "literary studies" applies to subjects deriving from different methodological traditions in different (European) countries, my remarks concern literary studies in Poland.

3 On the other hand, the book's blurb mentions only "students [...] taking modules in stylistics, English language and cognitive linguistics."

4 See e.g. Xiaqing 2019 for a review of the book from a linguist's perspective.

terpretation. Perhaps, for the sake of a student of literature, the *cognitive* character of such an understanding of stylistics could have been stressed more explicitly, as it is done, for instance, in Christiana Gregoriou's *English Literary Stylistics* (2008). In the subsection "Avoiding impressionism," Giovanelli and Harrison refer to a passage from popular media criticism and persuasively juxtapose it with Paul Simpson's requirements ("the three R's") concerning the practice of a stylistic analysis of a text. Such an analysis is to be "rigorous," "retrievable," and "replicable" (p. 2). The authors – much to a literary scholar's satisfaction – also invoke two sentences from the classic work of Stanley Fish (1980), where he proposes to "slow down the reading process so that events one does not notice in normal time but which do occur, are brought before our analytical attention" (p. 4). However, Giovanelli and Harrison's commentary that "[i]n this way stylistics can be fully considered a discipline that integrates linguistic and literary study" (p. 4) seems ungrounded. Neither do they explain Fish's significance for literary theory.

Likewise, Giovanelli and Harrison do not comment on *cognitive poetics*, proposed and developed by Peter Stockwell (2002, 2020), only mentioning the term as alternative or subsidiary to *cognitive stylistics*.⁵ This is even more surprising in light of the fact that the most recent, revised second edition of Stockwell's *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (2019)⁶ is included in the References. In the section "Key sources and further reading," the authors may admit that Gavins and Steen's (2003) and Stockwell's (2020) books "are essential reading for [...] an introduction to and wide-ranging coverage of cognitive poetics" (p. 9), but the reader would expect them to remark on the difference between it and their understanding of cognitive stylistics.

In turn, the subsections of Chapter 1 devoted to grammars in general and CG in particular are comprehensible and exhaustive; of particular value are examples, owing to which the reader can easily be familiarized with such notions as the linguistic rank scale, construction, the principle of iconicity in language, etc.

Chapter 1 also contains information about the textbook's structure and the authors' choice of examples. Significantly, apart from using a variety of texts, ranging from "nineteenth-century poetry [...] [to] television scripts and experimental contemporary literature" (p. 8), Giovanelli and Harrison have decided to provide a sample analysis at the end of each chapter. These analyses are to serve "as a springboard [...] to develop [the reader's] expertise in working with cognitive grammar" (p. 8) in her/his own analyses. Indeed,

5 I am fully aware of the fact that terminological debates associated with different treatment of cognitive poetics/ stylistics/ rhetoric are academic and as such may be of little interest to the course book's target reader. However, the question concerning the domains of cognitive poetics vs. cognitive stylistics is too important, I believe, to be put aside.

6 In fact, the second edition of Stockwell's course book was published in 2020.

to a literary scholar interested in cognitive readings of literary texts this sounds promising.

Another essential subsection underscores the importance of diagrams in Cognitive Grammar. Here, following Ronald R. Langacker, the authors not only explain but also *show* how diagrams represent linguistic conceptualizations, thus introducing the reader to the CG metalanguage.

Chapter 2 deals with conceptual semantics and conveniently begins with a revision of what has been delineated in the previous chapter, which is a general and useful feature of the book. In Chapter 2, the authors introduce such concepts as image schemas, exemplified with the CONTAINMENT and SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schemas, categories and prototypes (“sports”), frames (“the *Frankenstein* frame”) and domains (“body”), to move on to metaphor (LIFE IS A JOURNEY) and metonymy. While the explanations are generally lucid, the sample responses thematically connected with this chapter may disappoint a literary scholar’s (and student’s) expectations.

Thus, after offering a relatively detailed analysis of an excerpt from Ian McEwan’s *Nutshell* in terms of CONTAINMENT and SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schemas (Text 2B), in the key (Chapter 8) Giovanelli and Harrison jump to conclusions, based on the novel’s intertextual bonds with William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The authors also explain the irony underlying the novel by the fact that “all of the narration is taking place in the womb, thus presenting a literary representation of how image schemas emerge from (pre)birth” (p. 150). The statement, though remarkable on a meta-level, does not relate to the novel’s “traditional,” or, in cognitive terms, more prototypical reading.⁷ Nor is such a statement a convincing answer to the question “What do you think is the *effect* of such image schemas?” (p. 16, emphasis added). This sample reading might be fine as an illustration of Giovanelli and Harrison’s stylistic methodology, but it cannot satisfy a scholar/student focused on interpretation of a literary text.⁸

The violation of the basic prerequisite of literary studies, namely that a literary text constitutes a meaningful *whole*, is striking also in other sample responses offered in *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics*. True, it is impossible to thoroughly analyse a novel in a textbook like this one, but it is really hard to understand why even such short forms as (modern) poems have been cut out. In Activity 2.2., there are only two initial lines from the poem “Valentine” by Carol Ann Duffy: “Not a red rose or a satin heart / I give you an onion” (p. 20). Here, on stating that “an ‘onion’ would typically be a very bad example

7 Needless to say, an undergraduate student should first be provided with a generally accepted “message” of a literary work, i.e. with the most prototypical reading(s).

8 As I argue elsewhere (Kowalczyk 2017: 16-17), a *literary* cognitivist could aim at integrating what Culler (2009) understands as *poetics* with *hermeneutics*. While the former concept “asks how attested meanings and effects [in literary texts] are achieved,” the latter “starts with texts and asks *what they mean*” (Culler qtd. in Kowalczyk 2017: 16-17, emphasis added).

of a Valentine's gift" (p. 20), the authors leave the reader with the question of "how this initial deviation works to *set up the remainder* of the poem" unanswered (p. 20, emphasis added). Unfortunately, Giovanelli and Harrison seem to ignore the significance of the poem's last line: "Its scent will cling to your fingers, / cling to your knife" in their super-brief introduction. For a student interested in literature, this may be counter-productive.

Chapter 3 of the textbook is devoted to construal – arguably one of the most complex aspects of CG. The theory in this chapter is generally well elucidated (specificity, scope, profiling, windowing and figure-ground), perhaps with the exception of Figure 3.1 (p. 34), where the meaning of the construal relationship is taken for granted. A uninitiated student may wonder why the two conceptualizers shown are "speaker/writer and hearer/reader"; the relationship between them is not commented on, either. Also, the "literary" part of the chapter raises concerns. In Text 3B, for instance, the authors do not use the term "defamiliarization," which suggests itself in their discussion of a passage from Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (p. 39). In turn, specificity in construal is exemplified with a passage from a ghost story by John Conolly (pp. 36-37). While the excerpt is useful for observing how construal may work, the second study question ("how might you relate this to the genre of this short story") *does* require prior literary knowledge. The corresponding commentary in Chapter 8 is fine within the limits of the passage, but it fails to grasp the effect(s) produced by the story in question, let alone the impact of "the genre," that is the ghost story.

The chapter also contains Giovanelli and Harrison's remarks on the visuals (a Christmas card, a political poster), illustrating such notions as figure/ground and perspective. In the case of the latter, though, the authors merely *mention* "a number of parody posters" (p. 50) which question the political message intended by their sample image. The extended example analysis in this chapter, an excerpt from Emma Donoghue's *Room*, provides ample food for thought in terms of subjective/objective construal and can serve as a good starting point for the novel's cognitive-literary analysis – a teacher/student of literature could only wish other literary passages in the textbook were treated in such a manner.

In Chapter 4, Giovanelli and Harrison discuss nouns and verbs, as well as relationships between them. The authors aptly underscore the fact that in CG grammatical class is also a part of the speaker's construal (p. 62). Unfortunately, soon after the introductory section, they again fall into the trap of overgeneralizing. In Text 4B, for instance, intended as an illustration of "profiling in poetry" (p. 63), the reader is familiarized with four lines from Shakespeare's "famous Sonnet 116" and asked to "[c]omment on the stylistic effects of [the] profiles in context" (p. 63). How can this be done with regard to (roughly) one third of the poem? And what about Shakespeare's "punch-

line” in the final couplet? For linguistic/stylistic reasons, what Giovanelli and Harrison offer here might be sufficient – though I doubt it, given that the context far exceeds the four lines cited.

In contrast, the discussion of an excerpt from James Dashner’s *The Maze Runner*, focused on explaining the role(s) of definite and indefinite determiners (pp. 64-65), is more convincing. Whether this is owing to its familiar dystopian scheme or to the popularity of the novel’s film adaptation (2014, dir. Wes Ball) is less important; it does its job as a self-contained scene. It could serve as a springboard for a class discussion, to be enhanced with an analysis of the corresponding section of the film. Another well thought-out part of Chapter 4 is devoted to scanning; here, both the theoretical and practical part help the reader to grasp this aspect of CG. Similarly, the subsection devoted to reference points not only conveys the knowledge in a student-friendly manner but also refers to pages from the children’s book *Funnybones: The Pet Shop* to make the reader ponder on the text-image relationship (p. 71).

Chapter 4 closes with an extended sample analysis of Sylvia Plath’s poem “Words.” The poem is listed in full and treated as an organic whole, which makes Giovanelli and Harrison’s discussion stimulating for both linguistics and literature students.

In the next chapter (Chapter 5), the authors deal with clauses, bringing the discussion of meaning construction on another level. Of particular interest here is the subsection devoted to fictive simulation (pp. 81-82); other aspects include prototypicality, intransitive vs. transitive clauses, voice, as well as action chains and archetypal roles. Significantly, Giovanelli and Harrison draw attention to the fact that in CG “the relationship between verbs and nouns in clauses is premised on the idea of motion and energy” (p. 88). One would wish these notions had been treated in greater detail, as they look promising for cognitive-oriented text analysis. As far as examples discussed in Chapter 5 are concerned, again, it can be generalized that Giovanelli and Harrison’s treatment of non-literary texts is more cogent than that of excerpts from novels, for the reasons mentioned above. And although the choice of novels must be appreciated (e.g. such bestsellers as Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*), the headlines of subsections tend to be too broad with reference to their content (e.g. “Action in *dystopian fiction*” for a three-paragraph excerpt from one novel). It is also difficult to understand why certain key literary concepts, for instance *focalizer* (p. 84), have been taken for granted and left with no explanation.

On a positive note, the activities associated with textual cohesion (Text 5H; pp. 97-98) and the extended example in this chapter (Text 5G; pp. 99-103) offer an inspiring perspective for analysis of a literary narrative text. Also, the exercise in the Further Activities section can be useful for students of literature and/or creative writing, since it proposes rewriting a passage from

Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* to indicate how meaning creation depends on the discussed features of clauses, such as modality, voice, profiling, etc.

The concept of grounding in CG constitutes the theoretical base of Chapter 6 and is discussed in greater detail with reference to nominal (pp. 112-118) and clausal grounding (pp. 118-127). The former encompasses definite and indefinite reference, fittingly exemplified with a passage from Shakespeare's *Richard II* (Text 6D) and a poem by Browning (Text 6E). In this case, the proposed analyses are self-contained to the degree of being acceptable without the necessity of knowing the entire texts. Clausal grounding, in turn, includes sections devoted to the concepts of reality, tense, modality, and gradience, all elucidated in a student-friendly manner, accompanied with figures, and appropriately illustrated with diverse texts (a passage from a novel, an Internet text on tax and insurance rules).

The extended analysis in Chapter 6 "draws together all the ideas and concepts covered in this chapter" (p. 127). It is based on an excerpt from Paula Hawkins's chart-topping novel *The Girl on the Train*. In their discussion of the passage, Giovanelli and Harrison sketch the novel's general context, which grounds their detailed remarks in the overall situation of the characters. Equally welcomed is the allusion to "potentially significant plot and thematic concerns of the novel" (p. 130), which at least suggests a literary-oriented perspective.

Nevertheless, in the Further Activities section of Chapter 6 the problem I have been complaining about is reiterated: not only is the passage (the first stanza) from the poem "Canonization" by John Donne introduced with no context, but also the suggested question is too general to make sense to a student of literature ("What do you notice about the types of nominal and clausal grounding in this extract?", p. 130). What *should* I notice, one may ask. On the other hand, the fundamental issue concerning the *role* that nominal and clausal grounding can play in constructing the poem's *general meaning* is not addressed. Because of its specific historical-literary context (seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry), let alone its challenging language, Donne's "Canonization" – especially in such a "truncated" form – is hardly a text to be dealt with by an unprofessional reader on her/his own.

The textbook's concluding theoretical chapter, Chapter 7, is devoted to discourse. In this manner, the careful design of *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics* manifests itself, again: from the level of individual words, to what Giovanelli and Harrison accurately call "macro-levels [...] of language" (p. 134). In the chapter, the authors encourage the reader to "think critically about the ideas presented here" (p. 134), rightly drawing attention to CG's scalability, which, in a sense, still constitutes a *terra incognita*. Apparently, this is an area of major interest to students and scholars of literature.

Giovanelli and Harrison's discussion of the Current Discourse Space (CDS), exemplified by a passage from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, familiarizes the student with Langacker's fundamental concept. CDS-related questions are explored based on a passage from a sit-com script (Activity 7.1). The authors rightly observe that "the CDS structure gets complicated [...] when we try to apply these ideas to reading" (p. 137), and the following subsection ("The Role of the Reader") opens room for discussion. It seems to me, though, that the treatment of this issue is too sketchy to provide the reader with enough knowledge for her/his own analyses. Likewise, I find the subsequent activity, intended to put together the ideas explored in the chapter, insufficient for the purposes of literary class discussions. Rather than quoting at least a passage from *Elisabeth is Missing* by Emma Healey, "a pseudo-detective story narrated by the protagonist Maud, who has dementia" (p. 139), the authors propose to consider only three examples of expressions (not even sentences) from the protagonist's narration. In their sample discussion of this "text" in Chapter 8, Giovanelli and Harrison jump to conclusions, drawing on what is impossible to deduce without reading Healey's novel. For instance, they talk about "Maud's unreliability throughout the novel," "setting [Maud] as a very unlikely protagonist for a detective quest," etc. (p. 169).

The Further Activities subsection in this chapter seems equally problematic, though for yet another reason. In Activity 7E, the authors consider an extract from Myla Goldberg's experimental story "Comprehension Test" (pp. 143-145). But in the instructions Giovanelli and Harrison fail to explain that the story involves a multiple-choice reading comprehension test intended to "measure" the reader's empathy. They may draw the student's attention to the story's title as affecting "[its] content, structure or style" but then direct her/him towards "consider[ing] the further questions that follow" (pp. 143). Nevertheless, in terms of layout, there is absolutely no difference between Goldberg's questions (a part of the text to be analysed) and the authors' questions, which is confusing to anyone not familiar with the story's peculiar design. Also, in their post-reading suggestions, Giovanelli and Harrison continually refer to "this story" and "this text," asking the student to think about such aspects of "Comprehension Test" as cohesion (p. 145). Is this really possible, a literary scholar would ask, based on one-and-a-half-page excerpt only? And what about the story's interpretation? From the viewpoint of a literary cognivist, the key issue is *why* all these stylistic intricacies may have been introduced by Goldberg.

The second part of Activity 8A, devoted to a film narrative of the (student) reader's choice, throws her/him in at the deep end. The authors' questions are intended to underscore a logical link between the film's introductory scene and the entire narrative (pp. 145-146). On the one hand, this strategy is

justified, for Giovanelli and Harrison have accompanied the reader “step by step” (p. 1) to this final moment of producing her/his independent analysis. On the other hand, however, the proposed tasks appear to be too abstract and too general for an undergraduate non-specialist (Cf. “If you have identified problems, how might these be overcome?” [p. 146]).

Finally, Chapter 8 not only elaborates on some of the exercises proposed in Chapters 1-7 (“Sample responses”) but also offers extra activities with ideas to be further explored in class. The chapter ends with far more demanding “Further discussion questions” (pp. 182-183), clearly targeted at an advanced reader. Significantly, the chapter includes a survey of most important books on CG and cognitive linguistics in general, conveniently summarized by the authors – another asset of *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics*.

Summing up, it needs to be recalled that the present “minority report” is offered from a perspective which implies the reader who does not constitute the *primary* target of Giovanelli and Harrison’s *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics*. By all means, the textbook is a valuable source for any student of linguistics who begins her/his journey into the domain of Cognitive Grammar as used for the purposes of stylistic analysis. As such, it does fulfil its pedagogical function well. In addition to reader-friendly, coherent presentation of the theory, the book may provide the teacher with convenient, ready-made tasks, based on popular texts which represent a selection of discourses, including (contemporary) literature. In this manner, Langacker’s CG proves to be a valuable tool for dealing with text at various levels of linguistic organization.

This said, *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics* is less likely to be of interest to a representative of the “literary minority,” for the authors’ treatment of artistic texts is, with few exceptions, insufficient. As a matter of fact, one frequently has the impression that the literary excerpts analysed may have been replaced with *any* other type of discourse without much difference. In Giovanelli and Harrison’s textbook, the fundamental category of literary *interpretation* has practically been overlooked. As a literary scholar, I deem to question the authors’ prerequisites: contrary to what Giovanelli and Harrison claim, stylistics *cannot* be “fully considered a discipline that integrates linguistic and literary study” (p. 4). It could be argued that literary texts, though made of grammar and based on grammar, are governed by different laws and therefore require some “special” treatment, some different type of “action” (cf. Danaher 2007). As Jonathan Culler observes, even though “literary and non-literary works can be studied together and in similar ways,” it does not follow that “all texts are somehow equal: some texts are taken to be richer, more powerful, more exemplary, more contestatory, more central, for one reason or another” (Culler 2009: 18). Nevertheless, regardless of these problems, the inspirational role of *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics* must be appreciated.

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