The language of distance in grammar and discourse

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Distance, with its literal sense of being apart in space, has naturally extended metaphorically into such domains as time (*the conference is fast approaching*) and social relations (*why are you so distant?*) (see e.g. Lakoff & Johnson 1980). The notion has also taken root in linguistic description (e.g. Fleischman 1989, Fillmore 1990, Dancygier 1993, Dancygier & Sweetser 2005), for instance in discussing temporal distance used for social distance (*I was wondering if you could help me set up my presentation*, with past tense marking politeness), or again temporal distance used for epistemic distance (*if you registered on time, you would pay the early bird fee*, with past tense marking negative epistemic stance). The aim of this talk is twofold: first, to propose the further notion of "discourse distance" (Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2009), and second, to assess and illustrate the extent to which various types of distance can be applied fruitfully to the study of text (e.g. Vandelanotte 2010a, 2012; Dancygier 2012).

The notion of discourse distance covers a range of constructions in which material is inconspicuously 'borrowed' by the speaker from another speaker to construct his or her own discourse, without this being accompanied by a deictic shift to a distinct, represented speaker as in direct quotation. Examples include (i) metalinguistic negation (see e.g. Horn 1985), (ii) metalinguistic conditionals (Dancygier 1998), (iii) 'cited' predictions (Dancygier 1993, 1998), (iv) echo questions (see e.g. Blakemore 1994, Iwata 2003, Vandelanotte 2010b), and (v) a specific mode of speech or thought representation labelled 'distancing indirect speech or thought' (Vandelanotte 2002, 2004, 2009), each illustrated in turn below:

(i) Meg: No, it's okay.
     Jennifer: No, no, Meg. It's *not* just okay, it's huge. (SOAP corpus, *As the World Turns*, 2005)

(ii) King: Joe, I think it's 97 percent of civil cases settle. Is this settleable, *if that's a word*? Cammarata: That is a word. I don't know if it is. (COCA corpus, CNN_King 1997)

(iii) *If, as you say, his daughter married the High Commissioner to Malta*, then once again we have a whole new set of leads to follow to get a modern day descendant. (Cobuild corpus)

(iv) Speaker A: Talk to a fortune-teller.
      Speaker B: *Talk to a fortune-teller?* (Noh 1998: 604)

(v) If Mrs. Warren Smith was quite sure she had no more questions to ask—he never hurried his patients—they would return to her husband. She had nothing more to ask—not of Sir William. (Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*)

Turning from grammar to discourse, I hope to show ways in which the range of phenomena discussed can contribute to local meaning effects as well as establishing a more global viewpoint in poetic and narrative discourse. In the process, specifically 'literary' distancing techniques will also be uncovered, as for example when the metalinguistic strays into the metafictional (as in vi), or when a narrator becomes distanced from their own perspective (as in vii):

(vi) Mrs Reck was tall and thin. No, she was short and fat. I do not remember her clearly. I do not wish to remember her clearly. For God's sake, how many more of these grotesques am I expected to invent? (John Banville, *The Book of Evidence*)

(vii) I see us [= the narrator back when he was a child, plus his then friends Chloe and Myles] turn and walk away toward the gap in the dunes that led to Station Road. … But who is it that lingers there on the strand in the half-light, by the darkening sea that seems to arch its back like a beast as the night fast advances from the fogged horizon? What phantom version of me is it that watches us – them – those three children – as they grow indistinct in that cinereal air and then are gone through the gap that will bring them out at the foot of Station Road? (John Banville, *The Sea*)

The various means of distancing seem to jointly structure a broad area of language use, thus attesting to the pervasive effects the language of distance has across grammar and discourse.

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