THE LANGUAGE OF DISTANCE

IN GRAMMAR AND DISCOURSE

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IMAGE ◊ GONZALO LEBRIJA | THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME (15)

The language of distance
in grammar and discourse

Distance in grammatical constructions
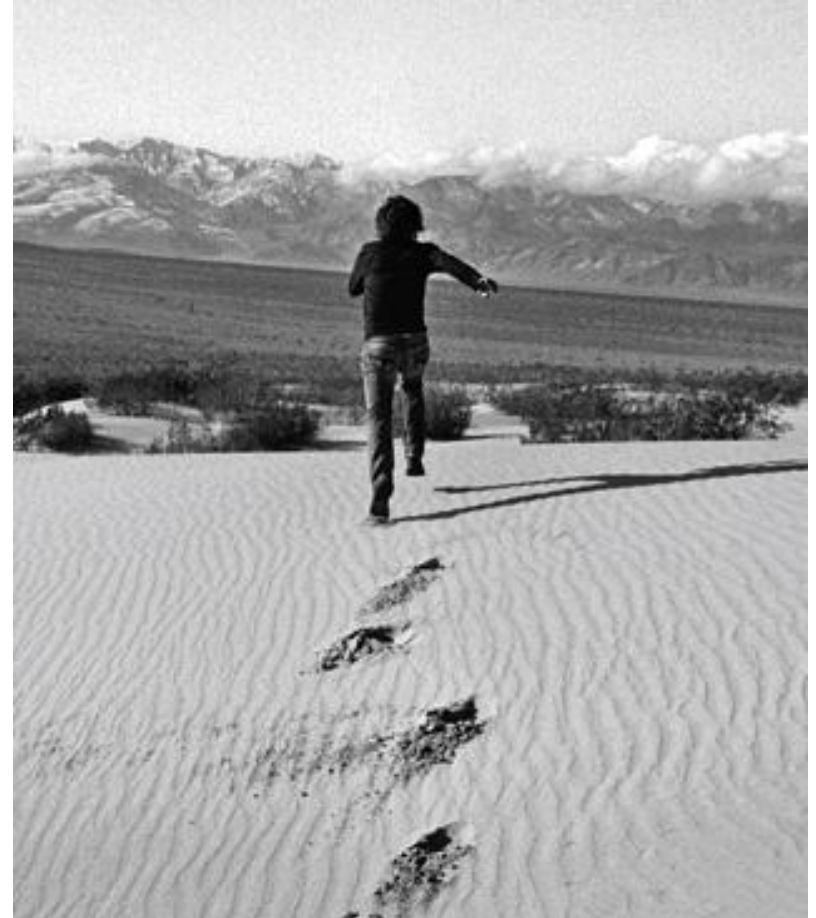
Distance in poetic discourse

Distance in fiction

Distance in news discourse

Concluding thoughts

Distance in grammatical constructions

IMAGE ◊ GONZALO LEBRIJA │ THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME (16)

'Distance' in linguistics

- spatial sense invites inferences, e.g.
  - (-) distant places are more difficult to reach (e.g. *My wife is so distant*)
  - (+) one is less likely to be affected by what occurs in a remote place (e.g. *I heard a roll of distant thunder*)

- from space to time: temporal distance, e.g.
  - I am approaching the deadline / The deadline is approaching
  - cf. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) , Evans (2004, 2013) on time metaphors

- from time (cf. Fleischman 1989/1990) or space to social relations: social distance, e.g.
  - I was wondering if you could help
  - The country house, at the end of its rhododendron-guarded drive, lay at an immense remove, in language and manners, from the village that provided its postal address. (Jonathan Raban, *Passage to Juneau*)

- from time to knowledge: epistemic distance (cf. Fillmore 1990, Dancygier & Sweetser 2005), e.g.
  - If you came/had come, we would talk/would have talked about it
  - further examples expressing epistemic distance: *wish, I think, may, seem, appear, if I remember correctly*

'Distanced' discourses

- Some grammatical constructions that can be labelled as 'distanced discourse' (Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2009) – incorporating another's discourse without shifting to another deictic centre – including some types of conditionals and negation, echo questions, and a specific type of speech/thought representation
  - Hearsay conditionals and 'cited' predictions
  - Metalinguistic conditionals
  - Metalinguistic negation
  - Intersubjective negation in stance refutation
  - Echo questions
  - Distancing indirect speech or thought

Distanced discourse constructions in grammar

- 'Hearsay' conditionals and 'cited predictions' (Dancygier 1993, 1998, & Sweetser 2005) as evidential constructions
  - 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)
  - If he'll get better by tomorrow, I won't cancel our theater tickets

- Metalinguistic conditionals (Dancygier 1998, Dancygier & Sweetser 2005)
  - Republicans believed they had hit a rhetorical mother lode with this line of argument in 2008, but their efforts to make hay of Obama's putative socialism proved unedifying, if not outright comic. (COCA corpus, Academic, Commentary 2010)
  - 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, Spoken, CNN_King 1997)

- Metalinguistic negation (Horn 1985, 1989)
  - Meg: No, it's okay.
    Jennifer: No, no, Meg. It's *not* just okay, it's huge. (SOAP corpus, *As the World Turns*, 2005)

Distanced discourse constructions in grammar

- Intersubjective negation in stance refutation (Dancygier 2012) in which negated stance verbs are used to reject assumed/attributed stances evoked in the broader context, e.g.
  - Speaker A: What do you hope the mainstream audiences will learn about this artistic/bohemian culture...
    Speaker B: I don't hope they learn anything... I don't know who goes to see films and why. (Internet example qtd. Dancygier 2012: 85)
  - I had an abortion when I was 20 years old. I don't regret it at all. Sometimes I think about how my life would have been different had I not aborted, but never in the sense that I wish my life were different than it is now. I don't wish I had ended up on welfare, I don't wish I'd created an emotional and financial strain for my family and I don't wish not to have the wonderful partner I have now. (Internet example qtd. Dancygier 2012: 85)

More distanced discourse constructions in grammar

- Echo questions (e.g. Blakemore 1994, Noh 1998, Iwata 2003, Vandelanotte 2010a)

  - Speaker A: I'm leaving on Tuesday.
    Speaker B: You're leaving on Tuesday? (Noh 1998: 603)

- Cf. partial, sarcastic echoes perhaps modelled on conversational usage:

  - 'Well, maybe you could talk Shamus out of it.'
    'Maybe I could talk a bird out of the sky.'
    (Jim Dodge, *Stone Junction*)

  - She even questioned him about the books as if they were homework. Finding he hadn't read them she smiled tolerantly.
    'My experience of prime ministers, Prime Minister, is that, with Mr Macmillan the exception, they prefer to have their reading done for them.'
    'One is busy, ma'am,' said the prime minister.
    'One is busy,' she agreed and reached for her book. 'We will see you next week.'
    (Alan Bennett, *The Uncommon Reader*)

Distancing indirect S/T

- A 'narrator'-oriented counterpart to 'character'-oriented free indirect speech/thought (Vandelanotte 2002a, 2004a/b, 2009, 2012), recognizable by the fact that nothing is 'shifted' to the character's deictic viewpoint (as with the celebrated 'now in the past' of the free indirect form, e.g. *How her heart was beating now!* or *Tomorrow was Monday, Monday, the beginning of another school week!*)

- The way in which this is achieved is in essence simple: everything is construed from the deictic viewpoint of the current speaker, and yet a thought or utterance of another, represented speaker is being borrowed ('appropriated')
  - A kind of 'deictic singularity' as opposed to the duality of FIST
  - Compare it to a lazy Susan: 'drawing someone else's discourse into your own perspective' is like turning a plate towards you and eating from it
from where you're sitting

- The main grammatical indices, exemplified over the next slides:
  - The use of first and second person pronouns referring to the 'current' speaker/addressee (rather than to the 'represented' speaker/addressee)
  - The use of full NPs (proper names, descriptive NPs) rather than pronouns to refer to represented speaker/addressee
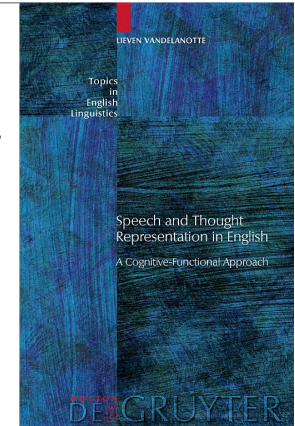
First and second person pronouns in DIST

- *She said um::n e::m did I know if you were teaching […] She said did I know if you were teaching*
I said (.) well I know she has been […] (data qtd. Holt 1996)
[compare *Do you know if she is teaching*]

- [the speaker is offered a job] this was a Wednesday ((was it right)) so *would I start the next day – and perhaps put in for that Friday as well –* m and that that would be my first week's pay
(data SEU qtd. Fludernik 1993)
[compare *will you start tomorrow*]

- *I'm going to third. Where's he going?* "Basement,"
he says. *He'll wait while I go up, then he'll go down.*
(M.D. Browne, "Philip Larkin")
[compare *Where are you going? I'll wait while you go up, then I'll go down*]

- I was a fool for marryin' you. …I wish I had it to do over again, I hope to tell you. *You was goin' to do wonders, you was! You wasn't goin' to be a bookkeeper long – oh no, not you. Wait till you got started – you was goin' to show 'em. There wasn't a job in the store that was too big for you.* (Elmer Rice, *The Adding Machine*)
[compare *I'm going to do wonders, I am! I'm not going to be a bookkeeper long…*]

The full NP option in DIST

- A conversation then ensued, not on unfamiliar lines. *Miss Bartlett was, after all, a wee bit tired, and thought they had better spend the morning settling in; unless Lucy would rather like to go out? Lucy would rather like to go out, as it was her first day in Florence, but, of course, she could go alone. Miss Bartlett could not allow this. Of course she would accompany Lucy everywhere. Oh, certainly not; Lucy would stop with her cousin. Oh no! that would never do! Oh yes!* (E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*)
  [compare *I am, after all… unless you would rather like to go out? I would rather like… I cannot allow…Of course I will accompany you everywhere. Oh… I will stop with my cousin…*]
  [compare free indirect *She was… unless she would…*]

- The draft will be abolished then? *Well, that far the minister wouldn't go. Clarity will only come in the priorities memorandum, in a few months.* (data qtd./transl. from Dutch newspaper in Redeker 1996)
  [compare *that far I won't go*]
  [compare free indirect *that far he wouldn't go*]

The full NP option in DIST

- Shortly and kindly Sir William explained to her the state of the case. *He had threatened to kill himself. There was no alternative. It was a question of law. He would lie in bed in a beautiful house in the country. The nurses were admirable.* Sir William *would visit him once a week. 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*)
[compare *I will visit him once a week. If you are quite sure you have no more questions…*]
[compare free indirect *He would visit him once a week. If she was quite sure she had no more questions…*]

- Underlying principle at work: cognitive accessibility of referents (e.g. Ariel 1990)
  - Viewpoint in FIST is with represented speaker ('character'), from whose viewpoint speaker and hearer (= represented speaker and represented addressee) are inherently highly 'activated' or 'accessible', so high accessibility marking NPs (like pronouns) are in order
  - Viewpoint in DIST is with current speaker ('narrator'), who may choose to use low accessibility marking NPs such as proper names or descriptive NPs

From grammar to discourse
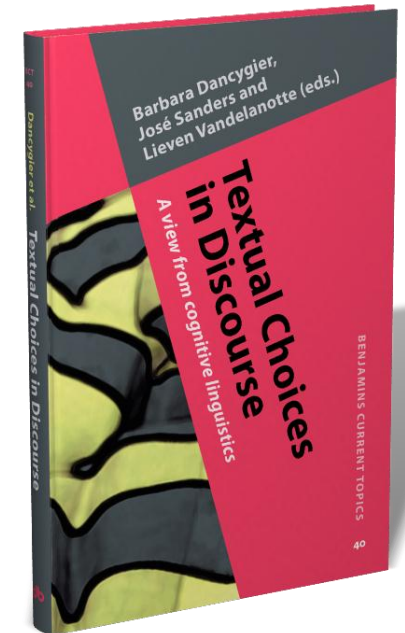
Distance in poetic discourse

IMAGE ◊ GONZALO LEBRIJA | THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME (18)

Judging distances

"Not only how far away, but the way you say it
Is very important. Perhaps you may never get
The knack of judging a distance, but at least you know
How to report on a landscape (…)
There are three kinds of tree, three only, the fir and the poplar,
And those which have bushy tops to; and lastly
        That things only seem to be things (…)
You must say, when reporting:
At five o'clock in the central sector is a dozen
Of what appear to be animals; whatever you do,
        Don't call the bleeders sheep."

Example discussed in Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2009

- The metalinguistic distance creates emotional distance

- Military instruction to mark epistemic distance ('seem/appear to be') throughout a report rather than in 'genuine' cases of uncertainty only

Judging distances

4th stanza: soldier asked to report what he sees as a way of practising the lesson: scene in which 'a pair of what appear to be humans appear to be loving'

- There to the west,
  Of the fields of summer the sun and the shadows bestow
  Vestments of purple and gold

- unlikely to be the sleeping soldier in the classroom, more likely to be the poet's persona's inner response (distanced, imaginary dialogue)

final stanza: pretense is dropped:

- I will only venture
  A guess that perhaps between me and the apparent lovers (…) is roughly a distance
  Of about one year and a half

- recollection of a pre-war scene of tender loving (all along since 4th stanza?)

- we cannot detach ourselves from our emotional selves

Metalinguistic distancing in two poems

Talent

This is the word *tightrope*. Now imagine
a man, inching across it in the space
between our thought. He holds our breath.

There is no word *net*.

You want him to fall, don't you?
I guessed as much; he teeters but succeeds.
The word *applause* is written all over him.

Syntax

I want to call you thou, the sound
of the shape of the start
of a kiss – like this, thou –
and to say, after, I love,
thou, I love, thou I love, not
I love you.

　　　　　Because I so do –
as we say now – I want to say
thee, I adore, I adore thee,
and to know in my lips
the syntax of love resides,
and to gaze in thine eyes.

Love's language starts, stops, starts;
the right words flowing or clotting in the heart.

Distanced discourse in Larkin

- Metalinguistic echoing of a preceding utterance to question the appropriateness of making the echoed utterance at all

  - *Now, dear child,*
    What's wrong (…)
    What's wrong! Moustached in flowered frocks they shake:
    By now, all's wrong (…)
    ("Faith Healing")

  - What's he like?
    Christ, I just told you. Oh, you know the thing, (…)
    ("Posterity")

Distanced discourse in Larkin

- Evoking an anonymous ('public') opinion to which the poem's persona reacts dismissively

  - Why be out here?
    But then, why be in there? Sex, yes, but
    what is sex? Surely, to think the lion's share
    Of happiness is found by couples – sheer

    Inaccuracy, as far as I'm concerned (…)
    ("Reasons for Attendance")

  - Much better stay in company!
    To love you must have someone else,
    Giving requires a legatee,
    Good neighbours need whole parishfuls
    Of folk to do it on – in short,
    Our virtues are all social
    ("Best Society")

  - Next year we are to bring the soldiers home
    For lack of money, and it is all right (…)

    We want to keep the money for ourselves at home
    Instead of working. And this is all right
    ("Homage to a government")

Direct speech used to evoke discourse

Poetry of departures

Sometimes you hear, fifth-hand,
As epitaph:
He chucked up everything
And just cleared off
And always the voice will sound
Certain you approve
This audacious, purifying,
Elemental move.

And they are right, I think.
We all hate home
And having to be there:
I detest my room,
Its specially-chosen junk,
The good books, the good bed,
And my life, in perfect order:
So to hear it said

He walked out on the whole crowd
Leaves me flushed and stirred,
Like *then she undid her dress*
Or *Take that you bastard*;
Surely I can, if he did?
And that helps me to stay
Sober and industrious.
But I'd go today,

Yes, swagger the nut-strewn roads,
Crouch in the fo'c'sle
Stubbly with goodness, if
It weren't so artificial,
Such a deliberate step backwards
To create an object:
Books; china; a life
Reprehensibly perfect.

Manipulating direct speech

First stanza from Vers de société

My wife and I have asked a crowd of craps
To come and waste their time and ours: perhaps
You'd care to join us? In a pig's arse, friend.
Day comes to an end.
The gas fire breathes, the trees are darkly swayed.
And so *Dear Warlock-Williams: I'm afraid –*
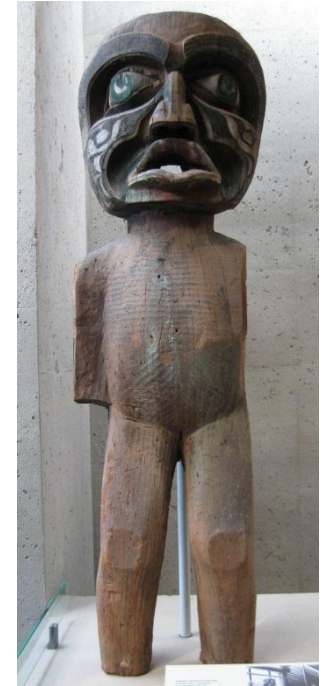
Grammatically, the italicized parts involve direct speech, since the first person *I* clearly refers to the character Warlock-Williams and not to the poem's persona – the latter one might say has put his own words into the mouth of the former

Epistemic distancing

Mr Bleaney

'This was Mr Bleaney's room. He stayed
The whole time he was at the Bodies, till
They moved him.' Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,
Fall to within five inches of the sill,

Whose window shows a strip of building land,
Tussocky, littered. 'Mr Bleaney took
My bit of garden properly in hand.'
Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook

Behind the door, no room for books or bags –
'I'll take it.' So it happens that I lie
Where Mr Bleaney lay, and stub my fags
On the same saucer-souvenir, and try

Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool, to drown
The jabbering set he egged her on to buy.
I know his habits – what time he came down,
His preference for sauce to gravy, why

He kept on plugging at the four aways –
Likewise their yearly frame: the Frinton folk
Who put him up for summer holidays,
And Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke.

But if he stood and watched the frigid wind
Tousling the clouds, lay on the fusty bed
Telling himself that this was home, and grinned,
And shivered, without shaking off the dread

That how we live measures our own nature,
And at his age having no more to show
Than one hired box should make him pretty sure
He warranted no better, I don't know.

Epistemic distancing

Church Going

… Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new –
Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
…
…   I wonder who
Will be the last, the very last, to seek
This place for what it was; one of the crew
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, …

Ignorance

Strange to know nothing, never to be sure
Of what is true or right or real,
But forced to qualify *or so I feel*,
Or *Well, it does seem so:*
Someone must know.

Strange to be ignorant of the way things work:
Their skill at finding what they need,
Their sense of shape, and punctual spread of seed,
And willingness to change;
Yes, it is strange,

Even to wear such knowledge – for our flesh
Surrounds us with its own decisions –
And yet spend all our life on imprecisions,
That when we start to die
Have no idea why.

Nothing but evocation: "Funeral"

- 'evocative', 'imagined', 'disembodied' snippets of direct discourse used to construe attitudinal rather than representational meanings, e.g.

Funeral
"so suddenly, who could have seen it coming"
"stress and smoking, I kept telling him"
"not bad, thanks, and you"
"these flowers need to be unwrapped"
"his brother's heart gave out, too, it runs in the family"
[…]
"two egg yolks and a tablespoon of sugar"
"none of his business, what was in it for him"
"only in blue and just small sizes"
[…]
"give me a call"
"which bus goes downtown"
"I'm going this way"
"we're not"

- distancing effect of evoked discourses achieved by
  - the 'anonymity' of speakers (disregard of individual identities)
  - contrast between solemn occasion (title: funeral) and informal chitchat

Example discussed in Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2009

Rehearsing a response but reverting to default

Vocabulary

"*La Pologne? La Pologne?* Isn't it terribly cold there?" she asked, and then sighed with relief. So many countries have been turning up lately that the safest thing to talk about is climate.

"Madame," I want to reply, "my people's poets do all their writing in mittens. I don't mean to imply that they never remove them; they do, indeed, if the moon is warm enough. In stanzas composed of raucous whooping, for only such can drown the windstorms' constant roar, they glorify the simple lives of our walrus herders. Our Classicists engrave their odes with inky icicles on trampled snowdrifts. The rest, our Decadents, bewail their fate with snowflakes instead of tears. He who wishes to drown himself must have an ax at hand to cut the ice. Oh, madame, dearest madame."

That's what I mean to say. But I've forgotten the word for walrus in French. And I'm not sure of icicle and ax.

"*La Pologne? La Pologne?* Isn't it terribly cold there?"

"*Pas du tout,*" I answer icily.

Evoking disparate discourses

The Famine Road

"Idle as trout in light Colonel Jones
these Irish, give them no coins at all; their bones
need toil, their characters no less." Trevelyan's
seal blooded the deal table. The Relief
Committee deliberated: "Might it be safe,
Colonel, to give them roads, roads to force
From nowhere, going nowhere of course?"

one out of every ten and then
another third of those again
women – in a case like yours.

Sick, directionless they worked. Fork, stick
were iron years away; after all could
they not blood their knuckles on rock, suck
April hailstones for water and for food?
Why for that, cunning as housewives, each eyed –
as if at a corner butcher – the other's buttock.

anything may have caused it, spores
a childhood accident; one sees
day after day these mysteries.

Dusk: they will work tomorrow without him.
They know it and walk clear. He has become
a typhoid pariah, his blood tainted, although
he shares it with some there. No more than snow
attends its own flakes where they settle
and melt, will they pray by his death rattle.

You never will, never you know
but take it well woman, grow
your garden, keep house, good-bye.

"It has gone better than we expected, Lord
Trevelyan, sedition, idleness, cured
in one. From parish to parish, field to field;
the wretches work till they are quite worn,
then fester by their work. We march the corn
to the ships in peace. This Tuesday I saw bones
out of my carriage window. Your servant Jones."

Reader links infertility 'land/woman' and is prompted to consider further/deeper consequences of this link

Irish famine

Discourse
Trevelyan
Jones

Description

Gynaecologist

Discourse
Doctor
Patient

Distance and evocation in poetry vs. prose

- The functioning of various kinds of distancing in poetry is probably different in degree, and to some extent in kind, from that in prose
  - The higher economy of expression in poetry can make distancing 'stand out' more strongly if its forms are particularly pervasive across poems relying almost entirely on various kinds of distancing (e.g. "Judging distances", "Talent", "Syntax", "Funeral", "Vocabulary", etc.)
  - Evocation of distanced discourses, recognized as not representing the poem's persona's viewpoint, is probably on the whole more characteristic of poetry (e.g. "Poetry of Departures", "Vers de société", "Funeral", "The Famine Road"), which needs to be able to quickly suggest stances, attitudes, etc. where typical narratives can more easily devote more attention to detailed description of speakers and their backgrounds and contexts
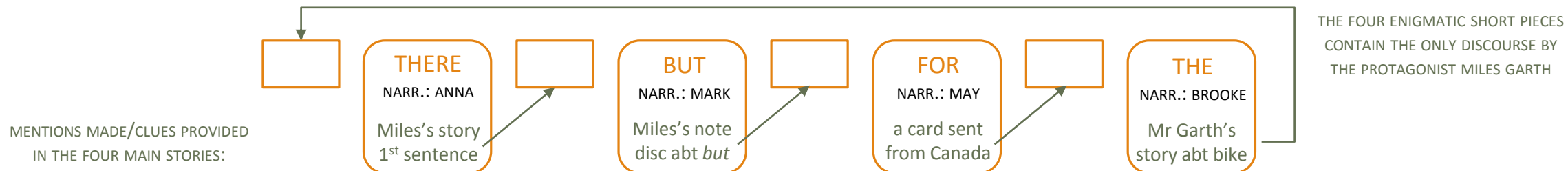
Distance and evocation in poetry vs. prose
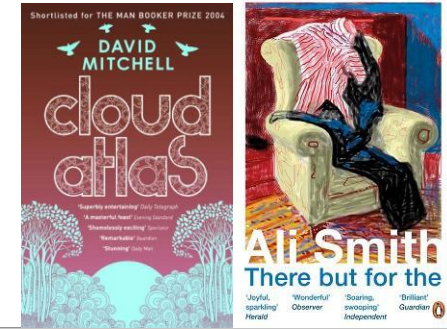
- Nevertheless, some contemporary novels like to leave much of this to be sorted out by readers in ways similar to (though still more complex than in) the example of "Famine Road" (cf. Vandelanotte 2013), e.g.

  - David Mitchell's (2004) *Cloud Atlas*, where stories are cut off midway (and even mid-sentence) for reasons which only gradually become clear
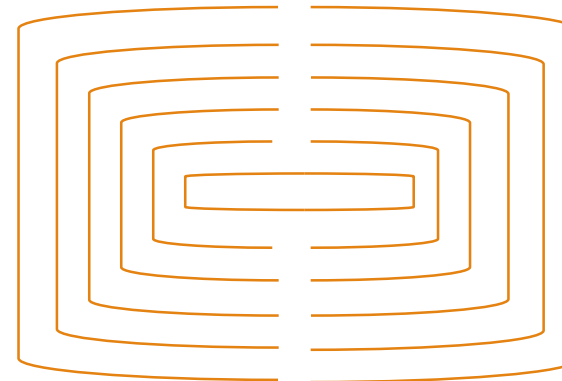
  - Ali Smith's (2011) *There But For The*, where the four main parts (each with their own narrator) are preceded by short, apparently unconnected stories or notes whose source and role is to be gleaned from fleeting hints in the main narrative sections

THE FOUR ENIGMATIC SHORT PIECES CONTAIN THE ONLY DISCOURSE BY THE PROTAGONIST MILES GARTH

MENTIONS MADE/CLUES PROVIDED IN THE FOUR MAIN STORIES:

THERE	BUT	FOR	THE
NARR.: ANNA	NARR.: MARK	NARR.: MAY	NARR.: BROOKE
Miles's story 1st sentence	Miles's note disc abt *but*	a card sent from Canada	Mr Garth's story abt bike

Distance in fiction

IMAGE ◊ GONZALO LEBRIJA │ THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME (12)

Distance in fiction:
# The case of Banville

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- John Banville as an example of a contemporary writer consistently marking distance at different levels thereby suggesting a fundamental sense of disconnectedness

- Some examples from a larger case study of *The Book of Evidence* (1989) and *The Sea* (2005) in Vandelanotte 2010b/repr. 2012 in Dancygier et al. (eds.) 2012

- **Metalinguistic distance** turning attention to different registers, e.g.
  - Vital days – how easily one slips into the lingo! – vital days were to pass before they even began to know who it was they were after. (BoE 129)
  - .. the big curved window of what used to be the living room but which Miss Vavasour prefers to call, in landladyese, the lounge. (Sea 4)

- ... or to the (in)appropriateness of idioms, e.g.
  - 'Take off your coat, at least,' I said.
    But why at least? What a business it is, the human discourse. (Sea 21)
  - I gave as good, or as bad, as I got, reminding her, merely as a corrective, that for the best part, I mean the worst part – how imprecise language is, how inadequate to its occasions – of the year... (Sea 66)

Distance in Banville
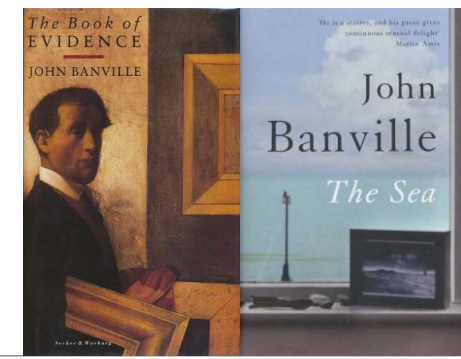
- Striking penchant of BoE's narrator Freddie Montgomery for linguistic playfulness, e.g.
  - I swiped at her, the swipe became a blow, which became the prelude to a second blow – its apogee, so to speak, or perhaps I mean perigee – and so on. (BoE 151)

- This involves **ironic distancing** both *within* the story – a dictionary is what Freddie most wanted to obtain when he arrived in prison – and *without*, since some of Banville's critics are frustrated by his predilection for obscure vocabulary, e.g.
  - I must see if I can get a catamite, or do I mean a neophyte? … I must see if I can get a dictionary, too. (BoE 4)
  - From those days, those nights, only a faint, bittersweet savour remains, and a trace, the barest afterglow, of that state of floating ease, of, how shall I say, of balanic, ataraxic bliss – yes, yes, I have got hold of a dictionary – (BoE 19-20)

- Some 'metalinguistic' examples shade into the '**metafictional**' realm (i.e. from epistemic difficulties in successfully capturing the story world in language, into ontological difficulties), e.g.
  - The water in the barrel, being rain water, was soft, or hard, one or the other, and therefore was considered good for the hair, or the scalp, or something, I do not know. (Sea 221)

Distance in Banville
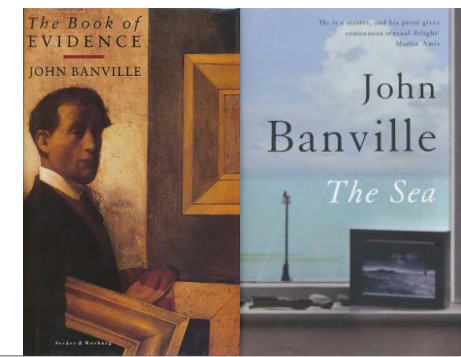
- **Metafictional distance** – signalling the narrator's exasperation over the tedious process of writing
  - [closing sentence before a section break marked by an asterisk] The café. In the café. In the café we. (Sea 145)
  - Speaking of typewriters – I did, I mentioned a typewriter a minute ago – last night in a dream, it has just come back to me, I was trying to write my will on a machine that was lacking the word I. (Sea 71)
  - 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? (BoE 92)
  - Oh, by the way, the plot: it almost slipped my mind. (BoE 219)
  - [at the very end, in answer to the Inspector's question how much of his confession is true]
    True, Inspector? I said. All of it. None of it. Only the shame. (BoE 220)
  - What was her name? What was it. No, it will not come – so much for Memory's prodigious memory. Mrs Strand, I shall call her Mrs Strand, if she has to be called anything. (Sea 161)
  - The one with the machine-gun–Sergeant Hogg, let's call him –
    His name will be – Barker. ...
    Then he went off, and Hogg came back, and he and the elderly guard – oh, call him something, for God's sake – he and Cunningham, old Cunningham the desk sergeant, took me down to the cells.
    Next to appear was an elderly chap in cavalry twill and a natty little hat... Then Detective Twill advanced ...
    (BoE 190; 198; 201; 207 respectively)

Distance in Banville
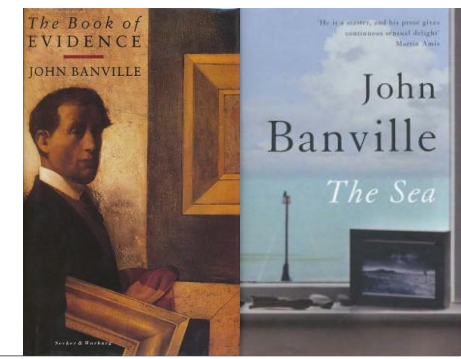
- **Distancing indirect speech/thought** used at crucial points to represent dialogue, suggesting how the narrator 'egocentrically' draws everything into his own perspective:

  - *Did we imagine*, Fr Foamfleck scoffingly enquired, pacing impetuously from door to window, from window to door, his cassock swishing and a star of light gleaming on his narrow, balding brow …, *did we imagine that sin must always involve the performance of an action*? (Sea)
    [compare *Do you imagine* (DS), *Did they imagine* (FIS), *Fr Foamfleck enquired whether we imagined* (IS)]

  - That did it. I shouted, I waved my fists, I stamped about stiff-legged, beside myself. *Where were they, the pictures, I cried, what had she done with them? I demanded to know. They were mine, my inheritance, my future and my son's future.* And so on. … She let me go on like this for a while, ... Then, when I paused to take a breath, she started. *Demand, did I? – I, who had gone off and abandoned my widowed mother, who had skipped off to America and married without even informing her, who had never once brought my child, her grandson, to see her* … (BoE)
    [compare e.g. *Demand, do you* (DS), *Demand, did he* (FIS)]

Distance in Banville
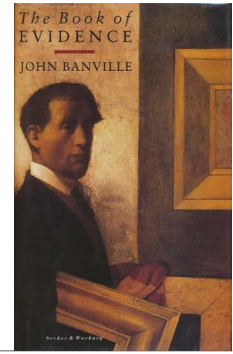
- *The Book of Evidence* is presented as a written testimony, e.g.
  - when I write it down I had to pause (33)
  - when I look up from the page (75)
  - I thought of trying to publish this, my testimony. But no. I have asked Inspector Haslet to put it into my file, along with the other, official fictions (219-220)

- But at the same time it features fictive address of story-internal 'narratees' (Prince 1973) putting the reader at one further remove from connecting with the narrative (**distanced situation of discourse**), e.g.
  - Don't worry, your lordship, no need to summon the tipstaff or the sergeant-at-arms or whatever he's called – they are just headaches. I shall not suddenly go berserk, clutching my temples and bawling for my – but speak of the devil, here she is, Ma Jarrett herself. Come, step into the witness box, mother. (39)
  - Ibiza? Ischia? Mykonos perhaps? Always an island, please note that, clerk, it may mean something … She [Freddie's wife Daphne] is a big woman, not fat, not heavy, even, but yet weighty, and beautifully balanced: always when I saw her naked I wanted to caress her … Clerk, strike that last sentence, it will seem to mean too much. (BoE 8)

Distance in Banville
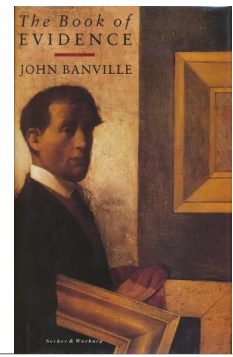
- **Distance vis-à-vis the self** – personality splits and widely divergent eyewitness reports in *The Book of Evidence*, e.g.

  - I felt that I was utterly unlike myself. That is to say, I was perfectly familiar with this large, somewhat overweight, fair-haired man in a wrinkled suit sitting here fretfully twiddling his thumbs, yet at the same time it was as if I – the real, thinking, sentient I – had somehow got myself trapped inside a body not my own. But no, that's not it, exactly. For the person that was inside was also strange to me, stranger by far, indeed, than the familiar, physical creature. This is not clear, I know. I say the one within was strange to *me*, but which version of *me* do I mean? No, not clear at all. (BoE 95)

  - … they gave a description of me: an elderly man with black hair and a bushy beard. The woman at the traffic lights was sure I was in my early twenties, well-dressed, with a moustache and piercing eyes. Then there were the tourists at Whitewater who saw me make off with the painting, and Reck and his ma, of course, and the idiot boy and the woman at the garage where I hired the car: from each of their accounts another and more fantastic version of me emerged, until I became multiplied into a band of moustachioed cut-throats, rushing about glaring and making threatening noises, like a chorus of brigands in an Italian opera. (BoE 161)

Distance in Banville
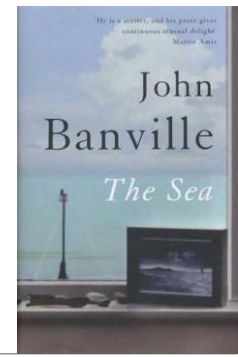
- **Distance vis-à-vis the I-narrator's own perspective** (especially) in *The Sea*
  - Where am I, lurking in what place of vantage? I cannot see myself (Sea 10)
  - Odd, how often I see myself like this these days, at a distance, being someone else and doing things that only someone else would do (Sea 43)
  - I see us turn and walk away toward the gap in the dunes that led to Station Road. A corner of Chloe's towel trails in the sand. I go along with my towel draped over one shoulder and my wet hair slicked down, a Roman senator in miniature. Myles runs ahead. 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? (Sea 137)

Marking distance in fiction

- In Banville, we find pervasive use of techniques to consistently mark distance from an epistemological difficulty to capture experience truthfully to the ontological, suggesting that the story world and the identity and perspective of the narrator cannot reliably be known
  - Reflecting a world view to which a sense of disconnectedness is fundamentally integral

- The process of writing itself seems one of distancing:
  - what happens in writing involves "something that [is] in a curious way NOT [his] own" (Banville qtd. in Friberg 2006: 200); his books are "written in some other state than the state [he] walk[s] around in the world in" (Banville qtd. in Friberg 2006: 208)

- In addition to phenomena seen in grammar and poetry (metalinguistic distance and DIST for instance), some techniques seem more typical of fiction, e.g. distanced situation of discourse (with story-internal narratees) and distanced perspective

- Banville obviously isn't the only author whose pervasive use of distancing techniques at different levels makes his fiction stand out; in particular, the work of 'postmodern' writers with a preference for self-conscious narrators is likely to show similar features, e.g. David Foster Wallace, W. G. Sebald

Marking distance in fiction

obliv ion stories
David Foster Wallace
author of Infinite Jest
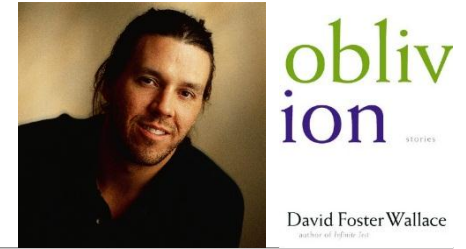
- David Foster Wallace: e.g. "Good Old Neon" from *Oblivion: Stories*
  - A lot of metafictional distance on the part of a self-conscious narrator speaking from beyond the grave, e.g.
    - I know this part is boring and probably boring you, by the way, but it gets a lot more interesting when I get to the part where I kill myself and discover what happens immediately after a person dies. (143)
    - I'm putting all this in such a long, rushing, clumsy way to try to convey the way I remember it suddenly hit me (148)
    - All this was presented in a context of a very long pseudo-argument about fraudulence with Dr Gustafson that would take way too much time to relate to you in detail, so I'm just telling you about some of the more garish examples (158)
    - Although to you I imagine it probably doesn't seem all that compressed at all, you're thinking here's this guy going on and on and why doesn't he get to the part where he kills himself and explain or account for the fact that he's sitting here next to me in a piece of high-powered machinery telling me all this if he died in 1991 (169)
  - A split self and distanced perspective at the point where the narrator's suicide is described, e.g.
    - Even as I wrote my note to Fern, for instance, expressing sentiments and regrets that were real, a part of me was noticing what a fine and sincere note it was, and anticipating the effect on Fern of this or that heartfelt phrase, while yet another part was observing the whole scene of a man in a dress shirt and no tie sitting at his breakfast nook writing a heartfelt note on his last afternoon alive, the blondwood table's surface trembling with sunlight and the man's hand steady and face both haunted by regret and ennobled by resolve, this part of me sort of hovering above and just to the left of myself, evaluating the scene,… (175-176)

Marking distance in fiction
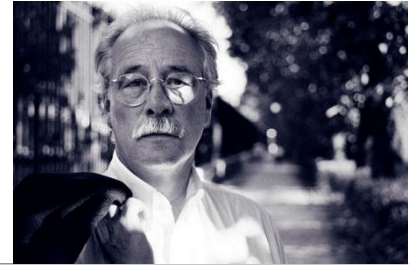
- W. G. Sebald: discussion of proximity and distance in terms of Sebald's 'empathic narrative persona' in Ward (2012), e.g.

  - In *Austerlitz* (2001), "the narrator insists on his distance from the victims" (Ward 2012: 2), i.e. a kind of distanced perspective:

    - I could not imagine how the prisoners, very few of whom had probably ever done hard physical labour before their arrest and internment, could have pushed these barrows full of heavy detritus over the sun-baked clay of the ground, furrowed by ruts as hard as stone, or through the mire that was churned up after a single day's rain; it was impossible to picture them bracing themselves against the weight until their hearts nearly burst, or think of the overseer beating them about the head with the handle of a shovel when they could not move forward. (28-29)

    - In contrast, when glancing through the mess of the SS guards, "I could well imagine the sight of the good fathers and dutiful sons from Vilsbiburg and Fuhlsbüttel, from the Black Forest and the Bavarian Alps, sitting here when they came off duty to play cards or write letters to their loved ones at home. After all, I had lived among them until my twentieth year." (29)

  - In "Paul Bereyter" from *The Emigrants*, the story of the narrator's schoolteacher who committed suicide, we see a distanced situation of discourse that calls up questions of evidentiality:

    - Sebald relates these events through several layers of narration. Paul remembers his childhood during convalescence from an eye operation, and describes it to Lucy; Lucy remembers this conversation decades later, and tells it to the narrator; the narrator, finally, relates Lucy's account to us. (…) Sebald, through an act of writing, creates a narrative persona who, through acts of listening and of imagination, relates to, and relates the story of, "Paul Bereyter." Thus the story is told at one remove. (Ward 2012: 12-13)

Distance in news discourse

IMAGE ◊ GONZALO LEBRIJA │ THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME (11)

'Framing' adjectives in news discourse

- Shared use of many viewpoint devices, including different forms of speech and thought representation, among which DIST (cf. Vandelanotte 2004b), and also 'implicit' viewpoint (Sanders 2010); an example of the latter from a news report about a bike theft:
  - Thanks to a witness to whom the situation seemed suspicious the police could catch the pair of thieves (qtd. Sanders 2010: 227)

- Some linguistic forms are more typical of news discourse (though not of course exclusive to it), e.g. what have been called **'framing' adjectives** (Vandelanotte 2002b, 2007), i.e. adjectives such as *so-called*, *putative*, *purported*, *alleged* which set something apart as belonging to a 'distant' reality, viz. the reality of another's discourse

- These adjectives do not fit in neatly in most discussions of adjective types:
  - Semantically, they do not ascribe permanent or temporary qualities to a head noun (like ordinary adjectives do), but put the referent in a certain perspective
  - Structurally, they involve 'non-compositional' or 'interpersonal' combinatorics (different from constituency or dependency; see e.g. Halliday 1994, McGregor 1997); consider e.g. the different 'size' of units they frame:
    - They can get between $ 400 and $ 1000 for selling a stolen vehicle to a so-called expert (CB, oznews; framed unit *an expert*)
    - the very emotional and understandable response to seeing pictures of Romanian so-called 'orphans' (CB, bbc; framed unit *orphans*)
    - this is reflected by the feeble response of the so-called United Nations which is dominated by the western powers. (CB, ukmags; framed unit *United*)

CB = Cobuild Bank of English corpus (subcorpora: Australian newspapers; transcribed BBC radio broadcasts; UK magazines)

'Framing' adjectives in news discourse

- Shared general meaning of framing adjectives: 'stated by some, but not the speaker, to be X' (a source other than the speaker is held responsible for a given designation)

- Frequent framing adjectives: *alleged* (strongly associated with news discourse) and *so-called* (more versatile)

- Framing adjectives can be used neutrally, to indicate technical terms or jargon (*the so-called Oder-Neisse line*)*,* or particularly in news discourse to avoid an assumption of guilt (*the alleged rapist*)*,* or they can be used 'critically', i.e. with additional ironic distancing (*this so-called President of ours*)

Neutral vs. dissociative uses

- Neutral uses:
  - If his Vive La France rhetoric is any guide, Chirac also would avoid transferring further powers to the European bureaucrats in Brussels. This gives hope to the anti-European Union people in Britain – the so-called sceptics – but Chirac is not thinking of Britain. (CB, oznews)
  - The British government, and Mrs Thatcher in particular, have always been hostile to the creation of a single currency throughout Europe, and the setting-up of one central bank to direct monetary policy in all the countries of the European Community – as foreseen by the so-called Delors Plan. (CB, bbc)

- Dissociative uses:
  - My book was an angry response to the papers being published in so-called scientific journals saying Aids had started in Africa. When they say Africans they mean Black people wherever they are. (CB, ukmags)
  - The recent hijacking of the passenger jet in Algeria may reinforce our belief that violence is peculiar to the Muslim faith. However, the pre-Christmas mock shooting of Santa Claus in Lismore, the very real shooting in the US of an abortionist by so-called men of God, the mindless brutality of the civil wars in Bosnia and Northern Ireland, and the obscene major conflicts down the centuries from the Crusades to the Vietnam War should show us that Christians of all denominations have been among the most prolific and the most inhumane willing killers in history. (CB, oznews)

So-called vs. *alleged*

- Especially *so-called* has many uses with dissociative overtones for various reasons:
  - high frequency compared to e.g. *purported* or *self-styled* (infrequent words usu. have a more fixed meaning, Sinclair 1991)
  - used in a wide variety of registers (as opposed to *alleged* used mainly in news discourse)
  - weaker and fewer collocates than *alleged* (which has 'investigation' words as strong collocates, e.g. *victim, involvement, rape, offences, police, plot, corruption, investigation, victims, assault, attack, fraud, abuse, drug, affair*)
  - hence, *so-called* is less specialized or more versatile than *alleged*, and can therefore more easily develop new general meanings
  - additional factor: different 'source': often the designated person in the case of *so-called* vs. an external, often 'judicial' source in the case of *alleged*

Table 1. The distribution of *so-called* and *alleged* across different registers

Subcorpus	Number of occurrences per million words for *so-called* (N=1517)	Number of occurrences per million words for *alleged* (N=1366)
oznews	33.91	51.90
times	29.49	30.54
today	21.53	40.97
sunnow	18.54	25.75
bbc	74.72	96.94
npr	60.72	30.36
ukbooks	28.95	10.09
usbooks	28.44	8.89
ukspok	8.84	0.54
ukmags	25.09	16.73
ukephem	8.96	2.88
usephem	9.80	0.00

- Derived patterns involving a blend of *Mr X* and *so-called X*: *Mr so-called X* with various shades of dissociative and invective meanings, used even with proper names (e.g. Mugabe blaming Zimbabwe's misfortunes on the machinations of *Mr so-called Tony Blair and his gay cabinet*)

Variations across genres

- Some distancing techniques discussed earlier in poetic discourse or fiction resurface in news discourse and related genres, but with a twist

- Various kinds of evocation of a separate, distant discourse space, which, however, unlike in the poetic examples, cannot remain 'disembodied' but are (at least eventually) tied to identifiable news sources:
  - Sometimes 'provocative', sometimes more purely 'conventional' (as in the third example) opening quotes with following indication of source, e.g.
    - They cannot be appointed because they have been named in fraud cases (quote from TV news broadcast with subsequent indication that this is not the journalist's claim or opinion but that of one of the members of the opposition)
    - *NHS better loved than GP*
      Our country and its rules take better care of the NHS than of the GPs. They value more highly the administration which the former keep than the basic health care the latter provide.
         This appears according to the weekly *The GP* from the national health insurance budget. (opening of a newspaper article)
    - JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) – Indonesia has arrested the alleged operations chief of an al-Qaeda-linked terror group blamed for bombings on the resort island of Bali, the nation's police chief said Wednesday. The arrest of Mukhlas, alias Ali Gufron, was a major blow to Jemaah Islamiyah, which has been implicated in a string of terror plots against Western targets in Southeast Asia, officials said. Mukhlas was taken into custody Tuesday near the central Javanese town of Solo, along with eight other people, including his wife, police chief Gen. Erwin Mapaseng told reporters. (online news report, usatoday.com)

Variations across genres

- Various kinds of evocation of a separate, distant discourse space, which, however, unlike in the poetic examples, cannot remain 'disembodied' but are (at least eventually) tied to identifiable news sources:
  - Sometimes 'provocative', sometimes more purely 'conventional' (as in the third example) opening quotes with following indication of source
  - Obliquely rendered dialogue (as opposed to a question/answer type interview) in feature articles and human interest reportage, showing a mix of direct speech and DIST, e.g.
    - Mouse on Mars recently issued 'Glam', the soundtrack to the film of the same name. Stuff that already dates back a few years. Werner: "We're still making music weekly in Andi's studio in Düsseldorf, so you can rest assured that a new record will be out soon." That much doesn't go for Microstoria for the time being. Werner does not want to seem arrogant or conceited, but with the last few Microstoria records a limit has been reached. Not that no nice new electronic music is being released, far from it. But innovate? Not really. As far as innovation is concerned, Microstoria is still well ahead of the competition, Werner thinks. "A lot of music is plain stupid, it seems as if no one is willing to take any risks anymore, as if no one wants to go their own way." (from music magazine *Gonzo Circus*)
    - She has soft white hair, a clear voice and perfect teeth. "Gnashers in good order," she said. She is 90 and lives in St Andrew's. […] Her father worked for the Great Western Railway in Berkshire; she and her younger sister played in the garden, shared a governess with the vicar's children and did as they were told – until Betty was almost 18. (from *Intelligent Life*)

Variations across genres
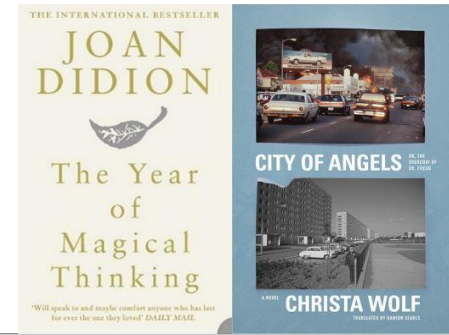
- Varieties of split/distanced selves in hybrid genres mixing memoir, testimony, autobiography, journalism, fiction – but essentially non-fiction in subject matter, e.g.

  - Joan Didion (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking*, describing the 'magical thinking' that allows her to expect her dead husband to return despite realizing he is dead and having publicly acknowledged this at his funeral

    - In my rational mind I knew how it happened. In my rational mind I had spoken to many doctors who told me how it happened. (…) I was not however operating from my rational mind. Had I been operating from my rational mind I would not have been entertaining fantasies that would not have been out of place at an Irish wake. (204-205)

  - Christa Wolf (2010 / 2013) *City of Angels: Or, the Overcoat of Dr Freud* (which features a section called 'To look into my own otherness'), shifting from I-narration to a seemingly more distant (pseudo-generic/generalized) *you* while still clearly continuing the story of looking up Stasi files relating to her

    - Now I was getting to what I really had to tell him – the whole long story so far had just been the necessary background. The last day in the agency's building, finally. You had more or less thoroughly read through the forty-two volumes of files, learned the informers' real names and forgotten them again, you thought it was over, thought it was behind you, and then the woman helping you (…) cleared her throat: There was something else. A feeling of looming disaster instantly came over you (…) These were what made this folder a "Perpetrator File" and what hurled you, without warning, into another category of human being. (…) As for me, I said to Francesco, I heard myself say for the first time: I had forgotten all about that. And I noticed myself how implausible it sounded. The woman sighed: We hear that here a lot! And she rushed to take the file back out of the room. (translation Damion Searls)

Concluding thoughts

IMAGE ◊ GONZALO LEBRIJA | THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME (7)

Concluding thoughts

- Some forms are ubiquitous in everyday language and across discourse types, e.g.
  - Spatial distance expressions used to talk about temporal distance
  - Past tense used to express social or epistemic distance
  - Echo questions
  - Metalinguistic distance (negation, conditionals)
  - DIST

- Some forms are typically (though not exclusively) associated with certain discourse types, e.g.
  - Poetry: the 'disembodied' evocation of 'distanced' (non-speaker) discourse spaces
  - Fiction: distanced situation of discourse and distanced perspective
  - News discourse: framing adjectives
  - Blogs or similar forms of 'confessional writing', interviews, etc.: intersubjective negation in stance refutation

- In appreciating literary discourse in particular, differences in *degree* ('foregrounding') and not just in *kind* matter, e.g.
  - Pervasive distancing/evocation in "Judging distances" or "Funeral"
  - Pervasive distancing of various types in Banville

Concluding thoughts

- Earlier linguistic applications of 'distance' were able to adopt an analysis in terms of metaphor (e.g. using spatial language to metaphorically describe time; using temporal pastness to metaphorically describe social or epistemic distance)

- Broadening the range of data to the various grammatical constructions of 'discourse distance' (DIST, cited predictions, etc.) and many of the discourse phenomena discussed requires a more complex set-up in which different discourses are blended in the sense of Conceptual Integration or Blending Theory (e.g. Fauconnier and Turner 1996, 1998, 2002)
  - E.g. it doesn't make much sense to describe DIST, or Larkin's "mouthpiece telling" in "Vers de société" as 'metaphorically' using another's discourse; rather such cases are best understood as involving a blend of two discourse 'spaces' with the viewpoint being aligned with that the speaker who 'views' the blend from a higher ('decompressed') space (cf. Tobin & Israel 2012)

Thank you for listening

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