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‘Stylistics will never become boring’: an interview with Paul Simpson

Interviewed by Sandrine Sorlin, Paul-Valéry University – Montpellier 3, France

Abstract

Paul Simpson got his PhD from the University of Ulster in 1984 and took up a post at the University of Nottingham the same year. He has since worked at Queen’s University Belfast and Liverpool University, and is currently at the latter institution. He was editor of the journal from 2004 to 2009 after having been assistant editor. In this interview he recalls the influences that got him into stylistics and how he came to find a place for himself in the field. He explains why the international association of stylistics (PALA) is an essential outlet for like-minded individuals who may be in different ‘pockets’ around the world. He talks about his early interest in sociolinguistics and language variation and comes back to what fascinates him in language – the things that are usually dismissed by mainstream linguistics as too messy, problematic or slippery. The creativity of language and the pragmatic ways in which ‘language routines’ are subverted are at the heart of what interests him as a stylistician. This brings him to come back to the absurdity of speaking of ‘literary language’ as a separate genre. He comments on his time as editor of *Language and Literature*, the satisfactions and challenges of the work, the place of the journal in the editorial market and ventures a definition of the broad church of stylistics. Lastly he mentions how stylistics is picking up on new things all the time, going with the tide of new media and approaches, while keeping its momentum at all times and even ‘decolonializing’ itself in the process.

Keywords pragmatics, sociolinguistics, creativity, subversion, language variation

[Sandrine Sorlin] My first question to you Paul would be your relation to stylistics during your studies. How did you come to get interested in stylistics? What were your influences in that matter? How did you become the stylistician you are today?

[Paul Simpson] I did a combination of linguistics and literature as my first degree and I realized very quickly that these disciplines were highly compatible. I started a PhD in stylistics¹ where nobody else in the department did stylistics and that’s a very common phenomenon. In fact, at your conference in Aix-en-Provence², I talked to two postgrads who worked in departments where nobody else did stylistics. So an organization like PALA is a perfect outlet for somebody in that position – that’s not being critical of departments or supervisors. It’s just that stylistics seems to happen in pockets in many parts of the world. So I was in one of those pockets. My supervisor (Lesley Milroy, the eminent sociolinguist), sent me on visits to English universities like Birmingham, Sheffield and Nottingham where I met a lot of people who did stylistics and that pretty much changed everything. My primary supervisor was well-known for her work on Belfast vernacular and I’ve always been interested in sociolinguistics in stylistics but she was adamant that I meet people like Bill Nash³ and Ronald Carter⁴ and others. I was working in Belfast and just after I got my PhD, I got my first job in Nottingham. I covered for the great man himself – Ronald Carter – who was on one of his many world tours that year! Thereafter I got a job in Liverpool before spending a long time at Queen University in Belfast and then (laugh) ended up back in good old Liverpool again! So I seem to be going in reverse at this stage in my career (laugh) in so many ways. But the stimulus really was the fact that I worked literally between two departments who didn’t really talk to each other about their respective academic interests. The linguists were sociolinguists, discourse analysts and psycholinguists. And the literary critics ranged from Renaissance specialists to American literature specialists, but to me and perhaps only to me, it seemed that the best way was to assimilate both disciplines. That’s how it happened and that’s why PALA is important because it brings together like-minded people from all corners of the earth.

You've very early published with Ronald Carter⁵, was he a second supervisor for your PhD work?

No, Ron was officially – how can I put it – a 'critical friend'. Ron was always generous with his time, and in my case he kind of took me under his wing. And of course we collaborated on projects from the very early days as well. He was interested in the sociolinguistic and pragmatic work I was doing, which was of course very flattering. That's how our relationship started.

What kind of linguistics did you learn? What was on at the time?

One tends to follow the specialisms of the people who teach the modules. It was a bit of a random mixture, a bit of pragmatics, some historical linguistics, a course in psycholinguistics, of course sociolinguistics with a particular emphasis on language variation and that's something that I've always kept an interest in. I have published articles like the one on accents in pop singing – they had no stylistic input, that was entirely my experience and work as a sociolinguist. I also did a module on generative linguistics because that was what was on offer, and how can I put it, that was terrible stuff but interestingly it would make you want to study the language of literature because all of those aspects of creativity in art were completely missing from the Chomskian model. There was a moment where we did the famous 'colorless green ideas sleep furiously'⁶ example which I remember as being classified as 'semantically anomalous', with the question mark placed in front of the sentence. So it wasn't ungrammatical, it was simply semantically anomalous but I remember I had just been reading TS Eliot that day. There was a line in the poem 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night': 'whispering lunar incantations / Dissolve the floors of memory'⁷; and I thought to myself: is that really semantically anomalous, is that all it is? It just struck me that the transformational model was so insular and never considered the messy world of literary discourse so, in a way, it made you even keener to explore that kind of creativity simply because certain models of language seemed ignorant of it. You get the same with social theorists. I have been reading a lot of Habermas lately and Habermas just ignores or dismisses figurative or humorous language. In other words the stuff that's really interesting is just dismissed because it's too 'unbearably slippery' to use Linda Hutcheon's term⁸ when she speaks about irony. So that was my language background. Once you work with other people in stylistics through PALA conferences, you begin to realize that the world is a bit bigger and there are more of us out there, and that was my experience all the way through as editor of *Language and Literature* as well. It was clear that lots of people around the world were working in these little pockets. It has to be an international connection because the other people in the same institutions – and I'm not being remotely critical – all work on different things. You must experience that as well in France.

I do. I like the idea of little pockets all over the world that PALA sort of brings together. Am I right in saying that you've always been concerned with the impact of stylistics on society, what we could call critical stylistics maybe. I'm thinking of your work on language and power or on ideology and point of view of course⁹. You've always connected sociolinguistics and stylistics, and that makes you special among stylisticians I think.

Ya in a way if you read – we mentioned Nash and Carter – in *Seeing Through Language* (1990) for example, if you think about Roger Fowler's work ... Fowler¹⁰ wrote very lucidly as a stylistician but also was instrumental with his team in developing critical linguistics. If you notice in that work the same models apply both in critical linguistics and stylistics. It depends on what you want to do with the model; transitivity was one of the first used back then in critical linguistics *and* stylistics. If you look at the way people studied metaphor in literature and outside literature, that's the same methodology also. I'm currently working on irony and its social consequences with some reference to literature, yes, but most of it is much wider in a societal

way. It's the fact that the models can be pressed into service for the analysis of any kind of discourse. And that relates to the other big issue in stylistics and again Ron articulated this very clearly in the early days when he argued that there's no such thing as literary language. In other words there is no particular register that separates literature from other genres of discourse. To think otherwise is actually to be reactionary because what you're doing then is you're cutting off the creative potential of language outside literature. Working on Ionesco and Pinter, Deirdre Burton said that often we only recognize norms once they are broken. You needed to have an understanding of what's normal out there to be able to get the oddity or absurdity or surrealism in some dramatic pieces. It's impossible to cut literature adrift from other forms of language. And I think one of the problems of literary criticism is that it sometimes thinks of literature as a special thing with which you shouldn't mess (and stylisticians just love messing around with texts of all sorts). I have issues with publishers being precious about me trying out an exercise with a poem, one even arguing that the late poet himself 'would not have approved'. How do you know that? Most poets that I speak to love having attention paid to their use of language. They might not often like to read analyses about it but they certainly like talking about it. That is because it's their raw material. It's interesting to see how a text might otherwise have been written. That's why work on rewriting and revision is so interesting, like Siobhan Chapman's work¹¹.

To go back to your question on sociolinguistics, to me it's all interconnected, sociolinguistics and stylistics I mean. Again that's not unusual because when you look at Fowler's influential book *Linguistic Criticism* (1986), a very influential and lucidly written book – yes, it's an uneven book, it's dated obviously in some ways – but that kind of book is about linguistic criticism and that may well be of literature but may well also be of anything from swimming-pool regulations to the language of tabloid newspapers.

Yes absolutely. Literary discourse cannot be seen as a secluded register. There's a freedom in seeing it as part of the same continuum. That's also a way not to choose between being a linguist and being a literary critic. Speaking about freedom were you free to offer stylistics modules in the jobs you had? I guess at one point in their career, the stylistician experiences what Mick Short famously describes (see quote below), that is the need to justify oneself vis à vis more established disciplines – or maybe that was never a problem for you?

Some of my literary critical colleagues sometimes accuse me of being an unfeeling linguist, saying that my analyses of poems, say, are too analytical, being too full of linguistic jargon and leaving insufficient room for personal preference on the part of the reader. My linguist colleagues, on the other hand, sometimes say that I am no linguist at all, but a critic in disguise, who cannot make his descriptions of language precise enough to count as real linguistics. They think that I leave too much to intuition and that I am not analytical enough. I think I've got the mix just right, of course! (Short, 1996 : 1)

I was very lucky. I have worked at very good UK universities. I acknowledge I kind of landed on my feet as far as that was concerned. I also worked in English departments where the senior people were aware of stylistics, aware of the momentum gathering in coalescing the study of language and literature. In those days there was always a need for those who could marry the two. So there was an acceptance at one level, but you're right, at times you were never insightful enough to be a literary critic and you were never rigorous enough to be a linguist – but you kind of got tolerated. Where it gets difficult is when you work on stylistics in a department that may be called an English department but is really an English literature department. The difficulty

there is that you are often the person who ‘does language’ while everybody else gets on with the ‘real business’ of studying literature. What I have struggled with in the past, *not* I should point out at my current job, is when you have to persuade students of the value of what you do. Because of the students’ prior specialisms on entry, you have to present an argument for studying language and I don’t think in a department of literature there’s the same pressure on people to justify why you do literature. I find that’s an absolute absurdity – to have students who love studying literature but who profess not to be ‘interested’ in language. An absolute contradiction – it’s theoretically and even emotionally untenable to hold that position. But mercifully in my current job in Liverpool, we have a big cohort of stylistics staff and real ‘buy in’ across the department to the compatibility of literature and language study. We also have a lot of PhD students coming through the system. But coming back to your question, I still think it’s true that linguists and literary critics don’t talk to each other enough. As I said earlier, the two areas are mutually enriching. It does not mean that one side is wrong or holds the absolute truth. To me there is a common sense meeting place between two disciplines like linguistics and literary studies and that is always going to be in the discipline of stylistics.

In your 1997 book, *Language Through Literature* you were not trying to see through the language of literature but, quite the opposite, seeing language through literature, am I right?

Yes I was trying to invert a very common theoretical formula of the time which was that the study of language could enrich literature study. But what I was trying to do was talk about using literature to illuminate our understanding of language precisely because those norms of language are being broken. That’s why that book is full of these ‘subverting’ exercises, with examples studying a particular genre of discourse, let’s say a doctor-patient interaction, but then you show students an extract from one of Edward Albee’s plays where none of those generic rules of discourse apply. And there’s actually a book – now going into a 2nd edition I think – that I wished I’d written (laughter): *Understanding Language Through Humor* by Dubinsky and Holcomb. It is entirely about using humour to illuminate the study of language. It’s a very clever and perceptive book because the authors use a whole range of examples of humorous language (from advertising, politics, ordinary conversation) from many different contexts and genres, but so rich are these jokes and puns that they illuminate all levels of language (syntax, pragmatics, semantics, phonology, switches in register, intertextual echoes, and so on). The book’s not about explaining humour *per se* but about explaining the categories and levels of language using humorous examples. That must be a great book to use in a classroom.

To put it bluntly, what matters for you is language first and foremost in whatever genres. In the second edition of *Stylistics* (2014: 3), you say: ‘To do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use.’ We’ve mentioned creativity before. Maybe Walter Nash was one of your inspirations? The book you dedicated to him mentions creativity as well¹².

I knew of Nash’s work from the earliest days. He had written that ground-breaking book, *The Language of Humour* (1985) for Longman which is still probably the best single authored treatment of the language of humour. Part of his many talents was to improvise parodies and skits in the classroom, on the spot. It was mesmerizing, during the short time I spent at Nottingham, to work with somebody who had that ear for creativity, somebody who could do an off-the-cuff pastiche of DH Lawrence followed by one of Joyce. Having a strong academic background in the history of both English language and English literature, as well as a solid grounding in the study of modern English language, and add to that a prodigious creative ability – that made Bill the perfect stylistician because he could move into these different spaces with ease. And again, I can’t imagine a stylistics that isn’t interested in creativity – Ron Carter wrote

a lot on creativity in everyday social interactions, on metaphor, irony, sarcasm, teasing. All of these tropes at some level show a creativity, a figurative use of language that goes beyond the literal.

Mentioning satire, irony, you've always had an interest in pragmatics. How do you think pragmatics and stylistics cross over? Are they complementary somehow?

First of all stylistics is based on language study and language study embraces many theoretical models and language itself has many levels of organisation. So pragmatics is only one approach that you may or may not choose to employ. What I have been trying to work on recently is what I call 'plurimodal stylistics' which is a way of bringing into play several models to come at the same text and see what happens. Because often I find that the application of one model invites a certain reading but the same text analysed with a different model in stylistics can take you in a very different direction. But as far as pragmatics goes, from my PhD onwards, one of the great influential works I read was Brown and Levinson's *Politeness* (the monograph-length chapter from 1978 and later, the full CUP book in 1986). But what I was trying to do with that was not study politeness in everyday social interaction but use politeness phenomena as a way of understanding humour particularly in the work of the Irish writer Flann O'Brien¹³. I can't imagine how you would explicate that humour without recourse to models in pragmatics. Semantics was not going to cut it, phonetics was not going to cut it, and lexicology was not going to help very much. It had to be a model of pragmatics. And you would say the same in the kind of humour you find in *Father Ted*, the famous Irish sit-com, and even in *The Big Bang Theory*, another famous sit-com – it's really about social interactions in pragmatics or rather the subversion of pragmatic routines. People researching pragmatics uncover, explicate, demonstrate and you take that package of knowledge and then you look at something that's funny and trust me I can reassure you that very often it is some subversion or violation of the 'standard routines' if you like. That's where I came to using pragmatics.

And you were the first, if I'm correct, to apply politeness theories to literature, as early as 1989¹⁴, in a very inspirational way. Was also Geoff Leech also an influence?

Yes, that politeness chapter was a stand-alone (if very basic) study of a chunk from one of Ionesco's plays – but yes, I suppose it was the first application of Brown and Levinson's model in stylistics. Leech's *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983) sits very nicely besides Brown and Levinson's work as well as Levinson's own 1983 book on pragmatics for Cambridge University Press. Significantly Leech is a very good example of somebody who worked on the language of poetry but who also applied other models, including corpus models, to literary discourse. So it's not unusual for somebody to develop a study (eg in pragmatics) that may not be stylistically-focused in the first instance, but then to apply these and other theoretical concepts to literature – as I say, literature is that rich creative locus where you can test your models and refine them.

Absolutely. Maybe we could talk now about the circumstances that led you to become editor of *Language and Literature*.

Well, if you're doing a PhD in stylistics, your supervisors will tell you, as I tell my students, you must embrace PALA! (laughs). You must go to the conference if you can and meet like-minded people who are doing similar kinds of work because that's where you'll get the feedback and make the contacts. So that's really how it started – I attended and presented talks at PALA. Later, I was very honoured to have an article in the first issue of *Language and Literature*¹⁵, so my connection with the journal was always close from that point onwards in 1992. What happens is that the editor of the journal (back then Mick, and then Katie) will develop their team, inviting people to be an assistant editor or onto the editorial board. I became assistant editor when Katie moved onto the position of editor – it was a kind of apprenticeship

that seems to be the standard pattern. You become more involved with the journal, you're progressively given a more senior role and then, if you're asked to be editor, you take it – who wouldn't accept? But you also do so with some trepidation because you know a journal is not something you take holidays from. It 'happens' four times a year and that means that you have to be 'on it' well in advance of those four publications, no matter what else is going on at the time. So it's not a sinecure, it's certainly a demanding job.

And the fact that the title of journal was *Language and Literature* was no problem for you who as we mentioned have always also been looking beyond literature?

We did occasionally publish articles that were not focused on literature but the theoretical underpinning of the articles would be entirely suitable for a stylistic application. In the twenty-year 2012 follow-up¹⁶, I did a break-down of the kinds of papers that were coming out of the journal and what was interesting was the plurality of the stylistic methods. There was stuff on narrative, there was stuff on metrics, there was stuff that was 'non-literary' in scope, there were metaphor analyses (and cognitive stylistics more generally) and corpus applications, there were articles using sociolinguistic models, especially looking at dialect variation in fiction, other studies would use narratorial concepts that were sort of situated outside stylistics. So it's called *Language and Literature*, and we know it's stylistics – while the new-ish subtitle (*International Journal of Stylistics*) captures it even if we're not sure (laughs). But it's a broad church and there's nothing controversial about that.

As editor, what were your greatest satisfactions but also what were the challenges you had to face?

The greatest challenge is one of time because of the non-negotiable timing of the journal. You could expect to work as an editor during holiday times (e.g. the Christmas break) because you know there's an issue coming out in the new year and you have to make sure that all was ok. That's the biggest challenge.

Another challenge was dealing with people and I don't mean that negatively. Sometimes you have to write to people to say that this or that article is not going to be published in the journal. The interesting thing is that a strong rejection rate gives a journal a strong reputation and a strong 'impact factor'. But we were doing that anyway before all the electronic measurements started. Even when you have to break bad news about a submission, you do so knowing that you have a great team of associate editors and reviewers behind you. This team often gives the best feedback on a piece of work that the author of that piece of work will ever get in their entire life. Often, the author would write to the editor and say that, adding that they appreciate all the work that was put into the reviewing process. As editor, even if you say 'no', the author will often say, 'look I work in a department (this is the solitude of the stylistician again (laughs)) where everybody in my department is a literary critic or does theoretical linguistics or something, so I'm a lone voice. This is the first time that somebody has commented in detail on my academic work and I'd like to thank you'. So bizarrely you would get letters of gratitude from people whose work has been rejected from the journal. And very often – and I know that other editors and assistant editors did it too – we would actually send spare copies of work that we had sitting around the office, especially if the author came from a less economically privileged part of the world. You could tell from some submissions that the authors simply did not have access to the contemporary stuff. And if people get published in the journal, that's an advantage because you know it's a strong journal and you know that it will do their career some good as well. The PALA prize¹⁷ has been a very important development also.

Another challenge is that I was overseeing the transition into the 'electronic stage' of journal production and assessment. The 'Year's Work in Stylistics'¹⁸ (the idea coming from a book published by John Murray called *The Year's Work in English Studies* which lots of people had

used) had become a very important research resource. Geoff (Hall) and I uncovered an issue in the way we did this where in the review we (obviously) include reference to works in stylistics that have appeared in *Language and Literature* as well as to other material. But in terms of the metrics this counted as 'self-citation' (very bad!). The more self-citation you do, the lower your impact factor, to the extent that we got kind of relegated, temporarily. We found a way around it of course. In all it was a fantastic experience, you grew up a lot. You really had to manage your time though – I had a young family at the time, my youngest was only 4. But you know all about this!

How do you perceive the place of the journal in the editorial market? I'm thinking of possible contenders like the US journal *Style*. How do you think the two differ and why has there never really been an American stylistics (or has there?) as compared to a British one?

Well, there could be a long answer to that, so I'll keep it short. Just like the theory of enunciation in France is a typically French thing, there are people who work in the States on 'composition', it's not the same thing as stylistics. But you're right, it is unusual that in a country of that size that there are fewer individual stylisticians than you would expect. When you think of our colleagues in China for example where there is the fully-fledged Chinese Stylistics Association (huge) – yet we have only individual points of contact in the States. The interesting thing is that the journal *Style* pre-dated *Language and Literature* and that's where stylistics people published. It was the only journal in town where you knew you were gonna get stylistic-related pieces. Interestingly, people who later published in *Language and Literature* when it started had published in *Style* before that. Don Hardy, a very well-known American stylistician, with whom I have collaborated, was the editor of *Style*. *Style* has always been the cousin of *Language and Literature*. A good article in *Language and Literature* could and should be a good article in *Style* and vice versa. The other journals are *The Journal of Literary Semantics* whose editors over the years have been well-known stylisticians¹⁹ and *Poetics Today*. So I think there are more journals that address stylistics that we account for but there is that conundrum that although *Style* is to all extents and purposes a stylistics journal, it doesn't seem fashionable for scholars in America to call themselves 'stylisticians'.

This is a question that has been asked to the two previous editors of *Language and Literature*: Which works of stylistics would you like to see referred to more often? What books, articles or book chapters you think should be revisited or have been unduly forgotten?

There is one by Vernon Lee²⁰ also known as Violet Paget (1856-1935). She adopted the pseudonym Vernon Lee because she was a woman writing in the early 1900s and obviously, she was not going to get published under her real name. I think she was the first real stylistician, given the way stylistics has naturally progressed, through various phases over the intervening decades. That is, we first got good at analysing texts, then we got good at thinking about what happens in your head when reading those texts, then we got good at exploring literature through corpora, and more recently, we are thinking less about us, the analysts, but more about other 'real' readers. Now if you look at Lee's book, *The Handling of Words*, she was interested in all of this. She would give out questionnaires to readers. She was a friend of Henry James, the writer, and William James, the philosopher. She hung out in Paris with the 'set', you know. To be honest with you, she's been 'appropriated' by some who I think don't really get her contribution. So what we need is a proper reevaluation of the contribution of Vernon Lee. The orthodox conception of when stylistics started was in Leo Spitzer's 'philological circle'²¹. Spitzer wrote that book in the late 40s but Vernon Lee is 50 years before that. She asks all the questions that we are asking today. I mean *The Handling of Words* is all about literary

psychology, style, the aesthetics of the novel; it deals with construction, syntax, rhetoric, all the things we're interested in today. She also tried to understand how literature 'communicates', way before her time. I think she is an important figure and I think I myself will come back to this.

In your reflection article for the 20th anniversary of the journal ten years ago, you were saying in a language familiar to me 'plus ça change...' meaning that stylistics remain the same through the different changes it undergoes. Here are your own words: 'Looking back over the decades, it has indeed been a curious feature of stylistics that it has the capacity at once to remain interested in the same things while moving steadily forwards as new developments come on stream across the platform of influences, models and constructs that are available to its practitioners' (Simpson, 2012: 16). Would you say the same thing a decade later? What are the major developments you've noticed since the end of your work as editor?

In a way I have answered this question inadvertently in my previous comments. We got interested in language because we had to be: for somebody to talk about having an 'insight' into a literary text, but to know nothing about the text's composition in language, by imputation you can never explain where the insight came from. So we got to know a lot about form and function, about the mechanisms and levels of language. But it's true that early on there wasn't enough on figurative language and there's wasn't enough on what was going on in our minds when we did that linguistic processing as a reader. And then the corpus movement came along: how can you talk about the structure of one clause in a writer's work if, in every other occasion, he or she does something completely different? The corpus approach is a natural progression because we could at last say something about big movements in literature – something we were not able to do before. Then we moved into thinking about groups of readers and there is a lot of exciting new work on that also.

You can see the different turns in stylistics. It still has that natural progression. Every time new models come on stream, we have new analytic resources. We obviously have new writing all of the time, and we will have new (kinds of) readers all of the time. So stylistics will never become boring!

Would you really see the different turns you mention in terms of progression? And at the same time you say 'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'

What I mean is that stylistics always moves forward under its own momentum. Aspects can be revisited and be brought to all new levels in ways that have never been done before. When I say 'plus ça change...', that doesn't mean that stylistics can't be new and can't do new things, what I'm saying is that we import new models, new writings come on stream, new media come on stream, new forms of Englishes, new readers. That's the way it's always been. It's in the nature of stylistics to say new things under its own momentum.

Would it be the right moment to venture a definition of stylistics?

The bringing of models in language and discourse to the study of [literary] texts. The bracket allowing for the paradox that there is no such thing as literary language. It means that stylistics always has to look beyond the literary text(s) it focuses on.

What would you like stylistics to keep on exploring? Any worries for the future?

I think there should be more on non-standard or international varieties of English. I know that the focus of stylistics has been on more canonical texts in English. And I am trying currently to work on more Irish and Caribbean writing. Certainly there is useful work in stylistics in native languages other than English. As for potential worries ... if you have a healthy supply of

submissions to *Language and Literature* and other journals in stylistics, that is the sort of 'indicator species' as you would say in biology that all is fine. If submissions dry up it means that fewer people are doing it. Sometimes you've got a break in submissions because of the research excellence framework cycle, for instance, for folk in UK universities. The international associations' numbers are also a good way to measure the health of stylistics and the amount of work that is being done, and of course the number of PhD students as well. I don't see any worries there compared to what stylistics was back four decades ago. The first PALA conference I attended was in East Anglia way back in 1981 – there were about 25 people there, so it was more of a symposium. Now there are five parallel sessions at a typical PALA conference! And with new forms of language, new writings and new ways of reading, stylistics is also 'decolonialising' itself through this process.

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Notes

¹ Paul Simpson's PhD (main) title was 'The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Literary Dialogue'.

² PALA 2022 took place in Aix-Marseille University on 'Styles and Sense(s)' from July 6 to July 10. It was co-organised by Linda Pillière (Aix-Marseille University) and Sandrine Sorlin (University of Montpellier 3).

³ Walter (Bill) Nash (1926-2015) was Professor of English language at the University of Nottingham from where he retired in 1991.

⁴ Ron Carter (1947-2018) was Emeritus Professor of Modern English Language at the University of Nottingham. He started his career there in 1979 and stayed till retirement.

⁵ One of Paul Simpson's first articles is one co-written with Ronald Carter linking sociolinguistics and narrative (Simpson and Carter 1982). He edited a book with the same Ronald Carter published the year after on *Language, Discourse and Literature. An Introductory Reader in Discourse Stylistics* (1989).

⁶ From Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957: 15)

⁷ 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' was published in *Prufrock and Other Observations* in 1917.

⁸ Linda Hutcheon speaks about the 'unbearable slipperiness of irony' in *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1994).

⁹ See Simpson on *Language, Ideology and Point of View* (1993) or on *Language and Power* (first edition with Andrea Mayr in 2009, new edition 2018 with Andrea Mayr and Simon Statham).

¹⁰ Roger Fowler (1938-1999) was Professor of English and Linguistics at the University of East Anglia. He organised the first PALA conference in East Anglia in 1981 where Paul Simpson met him for the first time. Paul

found his writing very compelling and was taken by its accessibility. Fowler was an influence for him for Fowler's work matched what he wanted to do.

¹¹ See for instance Chapman (2020). Siobhan Chapman is Professor at the university of Liverpool. She is interested in the interfaces between pragmatics, philosophy of language and literary stylistics.

¹² The commemorative volume celebrating the work of Bill Nash is entitled *Style, Rhetoric and Creativity in Language. In memory of Walter (Bill) Nash (1926-2015)* and it was published in 2019. Here is an extract from the back cover: 'Bill Nash was an extraordinary scholar – a classicist, parodist, critic, musician, linguist, poet, polyglot, humourist and novelist. He was as adroit in his reading of the Old Norse sagas as he was in his analyses of the rhetorical composition of everyday English usage, and his published outputs embrace the stylistic, rhetorical, compositional and creative topographies of both language and literature'.

¹³ See 'Phatic Communication and Fictional Dialogue' (1986) on Flann O'Brien's novel, *The Third Policeman* (1967).

¹⁴ In 'Politeness phenomena in Ionesco's *The Lesson*' (1989), Simpson applies Brown and Levinson's 1987 politeness model to dramatic criticism, focusing on the power shift between pupil and teacher in Ionesco's *The Lesson*.

¹⁵ 'Teaching Stylistics' in Volume 1 Issue 1 of *Language and Literature*, February 1992.

¹⁶ This article was written by Paul Simpson for the 20th anniversary of the journal and is entitled 'Twenty years of *Language and Literature*: A reflection' (2012).

¹⁷ Since 1996, the Poetics and Linguistics Association has awarded a prize for the best article published in the journal *Language and Literature* by a newcomer to the field. The prize currently consists of a subscription to the journal, membership of PALA for one year, and a £250 cash prize from Sage.

¹⁸ The year's book in stylistics is published once a year in the fourth issue of *Language and Literature*. The reviews editors (in chronological order, Geoff Hall (1999-2004), Joanna Gavins (2004-2009), Peter Stockwell (2008), Dan McIntyre (2010-2014), Rocio Montoro (2015, 2019), Jane Lugea (2016-2018) and Simon Statham (2019-)) have made an amazing job over the years to celebrate and give credit to all the works published in stylistics during the elapsed year.

¹⁹ The journal was founded in 1972 by Trevor Eaton who edited it thirty years before passing over the torch to world-leading stylisticians, Michael Toolan (now Emeritus Professor at the University of Birmingham) and more recently Marina Lambrou (Kingston University, London).

²⁰ Violet Paget was born in France on 14 October 1856, at Château St Leonard in Boulogne, to British expatriate parents, but spent most of her time in Italy (Florence). She was a pioneer in her interest in an audience's personal response and the relationships between writers and their audience. She was also an engaged feminist.

²¹ See *Linguistic and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics* (1948). Spitzer (1887-1960) was an Austrian Romanist and Hispanist, and a literary critic who became known for his focus on stylistics.