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**Characterization through stylistic variation in
First-Person narratives : a stylistic analysis of Sozaboy, a
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Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger, The Curious
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Université Stendhal – Grenoble III
Master 1 LLCE Anglais – Spécialité Recherche (2012 – 2013)

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THROUGH STYLISTIC VARIATION
IN FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVES:**

a stylistic analysis of

***Sozaboy – A Novel in Rotten English* by Ken Saro-Wiwa**

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Mémoire de Master 1 de Marie LEGER

Sous la direction du Dr Victoria BRIAULT-MANUS

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INTRODUCTION

When watching a film, it is easy to have a clear idea of who the character is. The same character, when transferred into words on pages, is a more abstract “thing” to the reader than it was for the spectators. In his handbook of English stylistics,¹ Patrick Rafroidi argues that a written message conveys less information than the same message in an oral context. From all the non-linguistic elements, the addressee builds an image of the speaker. In the context of written texts the character only depends on the writer, through the process of characterization, to exist in the reader’s imagination. Characterization can use physical descriptions (self-description, description by the narrator or by other characters) or use the story and the character’s role in it (courageous, committed or passive for instance). In the case of first-person narratives the image given to the reader is limited for the character is the only one telling the story: the narrator cannot be described by other characters and the story is seen from only one, subjective, point of view. The author can have the homodiegetic narrator describe himself or let the reader construct their own image with the help of clues, apparently objective, spread through the very core of the text. Among these clues are the narrator’s language and the stylistic artifacts used by the author to fashion a characterizing voice.

This study aims to analyze the authorial strategy of characterization through stylistic variation in three first-person narratives. The novels of the corpus are apparently quite different in terms of their dates of publication, authors and topics, but they share a common structure and the unusualness of their narrators.

¹Patrick Rafroidi, *Précis de stylistique anglaise*, (Paris : Ophrys, 1978), pp. 42-43.

In *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951),² Jerome David Salinger gives a voice to Holden Caulfield, an American teenager, suffering from his moodiness and confusing emotions, who questions the world around him. The young narrator seems to represent a whole generation of post-war teenagers as, more broadly, an age group with its pains, doubts and fears.

In *Sozaboy – A Novel in Rotten English* (1986)³, Ken Saro-Wiwa portrays a young boy, the narrator Mene, whose life and experience affect, and show through, his words. Saro-Wiwa writes as the Nigerian child soldier who tells the story of how he enlisted during the Nigerian civil war and how he lost his mother, his fiancé and his innocence in the conflict. The reader uses the “rotten English” referred to in the title to construct their image of Mene.

In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*,⁴ the British novelist Mark Haddon writes as Christopher Boone, a fifteen-year-old boy suffering from Asperger’s Syndrome (a form of autism altering his emotions and his ability to communicate). Although not the apparent central issue of the book, Christopher’s autism is the key to Haddon’s narratorial strategy. The lexis, syntax, grammar and graphic dimension of the text are carefully chosen by the author to illustrate Christopher’s ideological and psychological specificities.

To analyze the authorial strategy in these works, this study will adopt a pluridisciplinary approach blending literary criticism, linguistic analysis and stylistic description. The dissertation will tackle the questions of fictional first-person narratives,

²J.D Salinger, *The Catcher In The Rye*, (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

³Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy – A Novel in Rotten English*, Longman African Writers, (New York: Longman, 2003).

⁴Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, (London: Vintage, 2004).

the construction of the narrative voice and the process of characterization through stylistic variation in three steps. After a presentation of the main notions linked to the topic studied – style, stylistics, narrative voice and homodiegetic narrators—the stylistic strategies present in the three works of the corpus will be analyzed. The different levels of stylistic variation in each novel - lexical and grammatical variation, markers of orality, use of visual dimension, point of view, and so on - and their effect in the creation of the three personas will be explored. Finally the three works will be set in parallel in terms of their narratorial strategy: how does each of the authors portray, through stylistic variation, their narrators and their specificities, and to what purpose?

PART ONE: theoretical background

Style is a central concept in the fields of linguistics and literary criticism. It has been given a multitude of definitions. Every text has a style and can be studied from a stylistic perspective, even a phonebook.¹ Yet, its role is distinct depending on texts. The study of style is often realized in the perspective of its aesthetic purpose and effect while this work aims to consider it as a tool used by authors for characterization in first-person narratives. Style will be studied as a message, a meaning in itself and not only as the form of the message.

Chapter One: about style and stylistics

In this first chapter, the main theories and definitions applied to style will be considered. Then, the various layers composing the text itself and its style will be studied. After this presentation, the discipline – or sub-discipline² - of stylistics and the relationship between linguistics and literature will be analyzed.

¹“Car, tout texte a un style, une façon d’être, même un annuaire du téléphone [...]” in Patrick Rafroidi, *Précis de Stylistique Anglaise*, (Paris: Ophrys, 1994). p.7.

²M. Short and D. Archer, “A brief history of stylistics”, *Ling 131: Language and Style*.

1.1.1. What is 'style'?

In their 1970 work entitled *Stylistics: readings*³, the French linguists Pierre Guiraud and Pierre Kuentz ask this very question, apparently straightforward but opening onto a great variety of answers and definitions: what is style? To begin tackling this issue, style should be defined in its most basic sense as the manner in which something is done; and in the case of literature, the way ideas are expressed in the text. The style is specific to a text and to one writer or speaker. Pierre Guiraud writes: “In the sounds or tone of his voice, the flow of his speech, his more or less clear articulation, the addresser’s feelings, intentions, culture and social origins are reflected.”⁴ He later applies the same idea to written texts in which the lexis, syntax and use of grammar reflect certain aspects of the addresser’s personality, emotions, experience, ideology and social and cultural backgrounds. Style is the personal dimension of the discourse; it is the manifestation, in his or her discourse, of the speaker’s or writer’s individuality and personality.

Among the various definitions and theories, one aspect of the issue was the cause of disagreement between the main theorists. In 1953 Roland Barthes gave a definition of style as “the product of a thrust”, a natural and biological exteriorization of the writer’s “personal and secret mythology”.⁵ In the early twenty-first century, the Dutch linguist Peter Verdonk defined style as a “motivated choice” made by the writer when using

³Pierre Guiraud and Pierre Kuentz, *La stylistique: lectures*, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978).

⁴“Dans les sons où le timbre de la voix, l’intensité du débit, l’articulation plus ou moins nette et soignée reflètent les sentiments, les intentions, la culture, les origines sociales, du locuteur ; dans les mots qui peuvent être vulgaires, familiers, etc. [...]” in Pierre Guiraud, *Essais de stylistique*. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1985), (my translation).

⁵Roland Barthes, ‘What is writing?’ in *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, (New York: The Noonday Press, 1988), pp. 10-11.

language “for some purpose and to some effect”.⁶ There is a clear opposition between the notions of style as a natural and unconscious phenomenon, and style as a deliberate choice. In this second definition which Nikolas Coupland also gave in 2007 – “[style is] an assemblage of design choices”⁷ style can be seen as a tool used by authors to give their work the shape they aim for. It seems common to most theories that the confection of style corresponds to a process of selection among the infinite possibilities the language used has to offer. These choices are either calculated by the author or not conscious, resulting from his or her knowledge and experience of the language. In their work, *Linguistics for students of Literature*, Mary Louise Pratt and Elizabeth Closs Traugott write: “To claim that style is choice is not, of course, to claim that it is always conscious choice.”⁸

Studying style in a piece of literary work implies having one’s own vision of the concept. In this study, we shall position ourselves at the crossroads between the different definitions presented above. Indeed in the specific case of the corpus, style results both from the conscious and strategic choices of the author who aims to portray his narrator, and from the author’s personal experience, culture and linguistic knowledge. Style is both the tool and the result of the author’s narratorial strategy.

⁶Peter Verdonk, *Stylistics*, Oxford introductions to Language study, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 5.

⁷Nikolas Coupland, *Style: Language Variation and Identity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.1.

⁸Elizabeth Traugott Closs and Mary Louise Pratt, *Linguistics for Students of Literature*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. 29.

1.1.2. Stylistics: linguistics and literature

Style is the manner in which the author puts his ideas into words in a text. Studying the text, attention should be paid to both the ideas expressed and the means used to convey them. Stylistics and the association of linguistic and literary analyses appear as a natural perspective for the analysis of the corpus in which language is a message and a theme in itself.

Linguistics and literary criticism

The critic cannot focus exclusively on the ideas leaving aside the linguistic structures; neither can he or she analyze the linguistic construction of the text without paying attention to the ideas.

The “schism”,⁹ as Fowler puts it, between language – the object of linguistic study – and literature – the object of literary criticism – has been under scrutiny since the first half of the twentieth century and the debate reached its climax in the 1960s. Fowler explains how “by the time [he] went to university, in 1956, it was well accepted that commentary on language was normal and essential practice within literary criticism [...]”.¹⁰ While he argues in several of his works in favour of an interdisciplinary approach to texts, other scholars and especially critics – such as F.W. Bateson – remain reluctant to acknowledge the usefulness of linguistics in the process of literary criticism and defend a more compartmentalized study in which linguist and literary critic do not share the same object of analysis, purpose or methodology.

⁹Roger Fowler, *The Languages of Literature: Some Linguistic Contributions to Criticism*, (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 43.

¹⁰Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 2.

In his writings, Fowler denounces the “fear, common among teachers of literature although perhaps less so among the great critics, that linguists may invade and ravage precious literary territory”¹¹ and the frequent allegation that “perhaps because of their ‘scientific’ education, linguists are not equipped to know the difference between linguistic analysis and criticism, nor indeed sensitive enough to be critics.”¹² Indeed, it seems at first sight that a linguist and a critic do not apprehend the text from the same perspective. The first focuses on the more scientific ground of grammar, syntax and lexis, while the latter is often seen as focusing on more artistic ground, experiencing the text through his sensibility to study the meaning conveyed and its emotional effect. Yet, while a literary critic cannot abstract the ideas and values conveyed by a text from its linguistic frame, the linguist can apply his technical knowledge of the language to literature and put it in relation with the extra-linguistic context of the text. Linguistics becomes a method and not an end to the study of the text. Fowler argues that linguistics brings the “objective structures of language” as evidence to help “query and discuss the claims” the critic makes.¹³ This particular form of literary analysis, which combined “the use of linguistic analysis with what we know about the psychological processes involved in reading”¹⁴, was to be called “stylistics” and to develop considerably from the second half of the twentieth century on with the works of scholars such as Roman Jakobson, Roger Fowler and Geoffrey N. Leech.

¹¹Roger Fowler, *The Languages of Literature: Some Linguistic Contributions to Criticism*, (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 43.

¹²Roger Fowler, *The Languages of Literature: Some Linguistic Contributions to Criticism*, (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 45.

¹³Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 2.

¹⁴Short and Archer, “A brief history of stylistics”, *Ling 131: Language and Style*, <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/stylistics/>.

Using the distinction made by Ferdinand de Saussure between *langue*, the system one uses to communicate, and *parole*, the specific use made of *langue* in a given context,¹⁵ stylistics is the study of the *parole* of texts. In his work entitled *Stylistics*, the Australian linguist G.W. Turner wrote about *parole* in the context of literature that it is “a special, careful, elaborated, shuffled, pruned, and tidied form of language, very different from the everyday, spontaneous, precarious adventures of speech which [...] are [...] ‘normal language.’”¹⁶

Stylistic variation and literature

In their account of stylistics and literature,¹⁷ Leech and Short focus on the transcription of verbal English and the representation of dialects in fiction - especially through dialogues - and what it brings to the analysis of the social, cultural, spatio-temporal contexts and of characters. They take the example of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and show how, in a short sentence taken from the novel, they managed through identifying specific linguistic features to figure out elements of the context such as the origins of the character. In the sentence “And how long hev this news about me been knowed, Pa’son Tringham?”¹⁸, they identify what they called the “graphological rendering [...] of West Country and Yorkshire dialect speech” through the use of “hev” instead of “have”.

Discussing the help linguistics brings to the analysis of the narrator’s or character’s image in a text, Fowler writes: “choices of *diction* may individualize the narrator as a

¹⁵Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, (Paris: Payot, 2005), pp. 30-31.

¹⁶G.W Turner, *Stylistics*, (Penguin Books Ltd. 1987), p. 8.

¹⁷Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, (London, New York: Longman, 1990), p. 168.

¹⁸Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, quoted in Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction* (London, New York: Longman, 1990), p. 168.

certain psychological type or a member of a certain social class.”¹⁹ In the same way, linguistics can help determine the position, the point of view, of the characters towards the facts or values conveyed in the narrative. The critic looks for markers of modality in the text: evaluative lexis, deixis, and expressions of certainty or uncertainty such as “I think”, “I know”, “I remember”, “It must have”, “It did”, and others.

Finally, linguistic features can show the impact the writer intended to make on his reader. Repeating words or expressions, or using frequently the same variation throughout the text the author draws the attention of the reader to the fact that his narrator’s language is different. This process of highlighting the artificiality and specificity of the fiction’s language is what Fowler calls “foregrounding”.²⁰

The study of the language, the basis for the literary creation, and its connection to the values and images the text bears, allows theories and interpretation based on what seem scientific, objective arguments. Stylistics deciphers the text in its lowest structures - words, sentences, paragraphs and sounds - to analyze, interpret or justify the highest layers: ideas, values, arguments and symbols.

1.1.3. Features of style

In his handbook of stylistics for French speakers,²¹ Patrick Rafroidi identifies five traits in which stylistic variation can be observed: the graphic dimension of the text, which includes for instance the insertion of pictures or the layout of the page; the

¹⁹Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 135, (italics from the text).

²⁰Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 71.

²¹Patrick Rafroidi, *Précis de stylistique anglaise*, (Paris: Ophrys – Enseignement supérieur, 1994).

phonetic traits which are the play on sounds (assonance, alliteration, transcription of a speech disorder or of a local accent); the lexical traits such as the use of lexemes from a foreign language or a local dialect, or the presence of invented expressions; the grammatical traits which are examined through the analysis of the syntax, word-order, or the tenses used in the text; and finally what he calls the rhetoric or poetic traits which correspond to the figures of speech and other artistic features used by the author. Each of these categories offers a great variety of items and writers can adapt the language they use to match the context they are constructing in their fiction. In the case of first person narratives, the choices have to match the narrator's style.

Chapter Two: style and first person narratives

This chapter will examine style in the specific context of first person narratives, mock autobiographies, such as *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Sozaboy* or *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

1.2.1. Who is 'I'?

When studying a fictional text, the first question that arises is: 'who is telling the story?' The narrative can be told by one or several voices; these voices can be those of characters from the story or be external to the plot. In the case of autofiction, fictional autobiographies, the narrator is the only authority speaking in the story and the narrative

corresponds to the telling of his or her own life (as a whole, or a particular episode of it).

“Real” and “implied” authors

In the novels of the corpus, the authority of the narrator is created by the author for the fiction and the author and the narrator are two distinct entities. The reader sees the name of the author on the cover and the genre of the book they are reading. They dissociate the ‘I’ of the narration from the original author. The latter is the “real author” (for instance Salinger is the real author of *The Catcher in the Rye*). The narrator is the “implied author” of the story (Holden Caulfield in Salinger’s novel).

‘I’ and subject construction

Since the author is not the ‘I’ of the narrative, this ‘I’ is a distinct individual, a mask, a persona in the story. The use of the first-person pronoun enables the author to construct entirely the subject of his or her work since, as Benveniste argues, “the pronoun ‘I’, unlike referential nouns in the system, could refer to no class of objects, for each instance of its use signals a unique referent, the one who has appropriated the pronoun in the act of speech.”²² Every ‘I’ from every mock autobiography is unique and refers to the subject created by the author and imagined by every reader.

The author/narrator relationship

The relationship between the real and implied authors is that of a creator and his creation. One may wonder if, in order to create this mask, the real author needs a real link with the narrator. Interestingly, the three authors of the corpus have a more or less

²²Vimala Herman, “Subject construction as stylistic strategy in Gerard Manley Hopkins” in *Language, Discourse and Literature* ed. by CARTER and SIMPSON (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 213-232.

direct link with their narrators which may explain, justify or legitimate their attempt to represent their voices. Ken Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian author and activist who witnessed the 1967–1970 Civil War in which his narrator, Mene, enrolls himself. J.D. Salinger, of course was once a teenager so understood Holden’s situation. Furthermore he was known for being sociable, secretive, and for living as a recluse until his death in 2010. Finally, Mark Haddon who portrays the young autistic Christopher in his novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, worked as an educator and teacher with children and adults with mental disabilities.

1.2.2. Mock autobiographies and reality imitation

Bakhtin, in his work *Questions of Literature and Aesthetics*, wrote about the “extraordinary peculiarity of the novel as genre” which relies fully on discourse, on the “man who speaks”.²³ He goes on to explain that the novel relies on the use and manipulation of language by the author to construct the voices of his characters. He talks about the ‘literary representation of language’²⁴. The author of any literary work, especially a novel, has to create a discourse which exists solely in his work but echoes the language(s) of his or her and his or her reader’s realities.

Building a mock reality

In their work *Style in Fiction – A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, Leech and Short analyze the “way language is used to convey the ‘mock reality’

²³Mikhail Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 152 (my translation).

²⁴Mikhail Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 156 (my translation)

of fiction”.²⁵ In the works of the corpus, language is used and adapted to represent the mock reality imagined by the authors and to characterize the narrators. Yet, as Leech and Short argue: “language by its very nature is a vehicle for abstraction and differentiation”.²⁶ Therefore, with language as the only channel to convey their message, authors cannot represent the whole of the reality they are creating. The image of the persona, and the context (cultural, temporal, and social) around it, is inevitably limited by its nature as a linguistic creation. Short and Leech write: “whenever a writer uses language, he seizes on some features of ‘reality’ which are crucial for his purpose and disregards others”.²⁷ In the corpus, the authors focused on specific features of their narrator’s personality and ideology: Haddon focused on Christopher’s autism representing his difficulties in communicating and expressing his emotions; Salinger focused on Holden as a representative of a specific age group but also on Holden’s psychological specificities and finally Saro-Wiwa focused on Mene’s cultural identity. The complexity of these three narrators cannot be fully transcribed through the text but the authors can give their reader enough elements to deduce most of it.

Giving voice to the voiceless

Fiction gives authors the opportunity to create a reality, representing and manipulating their own. Writing a first person narrative gives them the chance to create a persona to embody their text and to give voice to their creation. Mock autobiographies may be used to give voice to fictional personas representing real characters, from the author’s reality, would not necessarily have a voice outside the fictional context. Mene

²⁵Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p. 150.

²⁶Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p. 151.

²⁷Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p. 151.

in *Sozaboy* is a barely literate Nigerian teenager who, in the fictional creation of Ken Saro-Wiwa, is able to tell his story in intelligible English.

Christopher Boone, Mark Haddon's narrator, is suffering from a form of autism which results in difficulty in communicating, especially with strangers. Yet the young boy tells his story to an unknown reader. Haddon has him open up to the outside world through the text and gives his reader an insight into autism.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger gives a voice to one individual teenager representing a whole generation and age-group who are rarely heard or taken seriously. Pierre-Yves Pétilion presents Holden Caulfield as the voice of the 1950s "silent generation"²⁸ and Carl F. Strauch notes Holden's frequent complaint that he is not being listened to:

"'People never notice anything,' 'He wasn't even listening,' 'People never believe you' and morons 'never want to discuss anything.' The failure in communication could not be more bleakly confirmed [...]."²⁹

In general terms, style refers to the form of the text and is commonly associated with the individual it represents. In the case of mock autobiographies, it is linked to the fictional addresser and it is the main tool authors have at their disposal to characterize their narrators. In the second part of this study, the styles created by Saro-Wiwa, Salinger and Haddon will be analyzed in terms of the features they are made of and the image they give of the narrators.

²⁸Pierre-Yves Pétilion, *Histoire de la littérature américaine: notre demi-siècle, 1939-1989*, (Paris: Fayard, 1992), pp. 137-142.

²⁹Carl F. Strauch, "Kings in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure. A Reading of Salinger's 'The Catcher in the Rye'", *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 1961), pp. 5-30.

PART TWO:

Narrative voice as persona: a stylistic analysis of the texts

This part of the study will consider successively the three novels of the corpus and their stylistic particularities identifying the aspects of their narrators the authors wished to represent. As Leech and Short write: “[w]e must recognize the importance of inference in the determination of character: in novels, as in real life, a person’s motives and character are inferred from outward behaviour: from actions, from demeanour, and also from speech.”¹ Here, we will focus on and identify the main, and most frequent, stylistic features of each text. As far as Ken Saro Wiwa’s novel is concerned, we will see its lexis, grammar and syntax keeping in mind the author’s strategy to portray the young, barely educated, Nigerian narrator: Mene, and the particular context he evolves in.

Chapter One: *Sozaboy* and Mene’s “rotten English”

In *Sozaboy – A Novel in Rotten English*, Ken Saro-Wiwa takes his reader to the fictive region of Dukana, where the narrator lives. This village in which “everybody [...] was happy at first”², has just undergone a change of government from what Mene

¹Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, (London, New York: Longman, 1990), p. 176.

²Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy – A Novel in Rotten English*, Longman African Writers, (New York: Longman, 2003), p. 1.

calls the “old, bad government” to “the new government of soza and police.”³ Two authorities seem to fight over the region and the story is set in a tense context of what appears as a civil conflict. The narrator tells the story of his life before the changes and their consequences. The novel shows the process through which the naive fifteen-year-old apprentice driver, Mene, enrolled in the army -- became a soza⁴ -- to make his mother and fiancé proud, and for the prestige of wearing the uniform. Although this is never made explicit, the plot is clearly anchored in the context of the Biafran war of secession (1967-1970) which occurred in south-eastern Nigeria, soon after the country obtained its independence, as the result of the self-proclamation of the region as the Republic of Biafra. The specific context of the Biafran war and the Nigerian culture are represented by the activist and author Ken Saro-Wiwa through his character Mene and the latter’s language. Saro-Wiwa does not write in Nigerian English (NE), the official language of Nigeria; he writes neither in Nigerian Pidgin (NP) nor in Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa (the main indigenous Nigerian languages⁵). He creates a language, a “rotten” version of English, in which he mixes English and Nigerian Pidgin grammar, lexis, and culture.

2.1.1. Nigerian and English influences: lexical variation

Mene’s testimony, from the beginning and as suggested by the title, is presented as a discourse at the crossroads between African and English languages. “Sozaboy” derives from the noun “soza” which means “soldier” and corresponds to the

³*Sozaboy*, p. 1.

⁴Soza (or sozaman) means soldier in Nigerian Pidgin.

⁵Munzali Jibril, “Sociolinguistic Variation in Nigerian English” in *English World-Wide, A journal of varieties of English*, Vol. 7, N° 1 (1986).

graphological representation of the way Nigerian speakers of English pronounce the word “soldier”. Following this reference to the African language, there is the subtitle: “a novel in rotten English”, appears as a metalinguistic comment by the author on his work. It indicates to the reader that Nigerian culture will be associated to the English language and that will coexist in the novel. Mene’s “rotten English” is composed of Pidgin lexemes which abound (often emphasized by the use of italics). Incidentally, the edition of Saro-Wiwa’s work used for this essay – like most of the publications encountered in the process of research – is published with a glossary to be found at the end of the book, defining all italicized indigenous words or expressions (nearly two hundred tokens) present in the novel.⁶

Borrowing

Numerous lexical borrowings from Pidgin can be found throughout the narrative such as “*ye-ye*” (“That *ye-ye man*, proper *yafu yafu* man, just moving about in Dukana prouiding because he fight against Hitla and abusing young people like myself that we must go and fight.”⁷), “*kotuma*” (“Nobody want to hear of *kotuma* worst still, police in Dukana.”⁸), “*yanga*” (“And my master was prouiding. Making *yanga* for all the people, all the time.”⁹), and “*sabi*” (“Then you can get your driver licence whether you *sabi* drive or you no *sabi*.”¹⁰). Most of the indigenous words or expressions encountered refer to local and cultural realities such as African food, traditional garments or names and titles of authorities within the society. There are references to food: “*okporoko*”

⁶*Sozaboy*, pp. 182-187.

⁷*Sozaboy*, p. 37 (translated in glossary, p. 187: “doomed.”)

⁸*Sozaboy*, p. 7 (used either in its full form translated in glossary, p. 184: “*kotuma* ashbottom: customary court bailiff”; or simply as “*kotuma*” and refers to legal representatives).

⁹*Sozaboy*, p. 3 (used as a noun or a part of the verbal phrase “to make *yanga*” translated in glossary, p. 187: “pride”).

¹⁰*Sozaboy*, p. 1 (derived from Portuguese verb “saber”, translated in glossary, p. 185: “to know”).

(cod-based dish) “*ngwongwo*” (mutton-based dish) and “*gari*” (“a local food, powdery like rice”¹¹ made out of manioc); and drinks: “*ginkana*” (defined as “locally brewed gin”¹² in the glossary) and “*tombo*” (“palm wine”) regarding drinks. White men are referred to as “*oyibo*”¹³. NP vocabulary and expressions can be found throughout the text such as “*sabi*”, “*wey*”, “*dey*”, “*chop*”, “*don*”, “*picken*” and others. All these lexemes contribute to anchor Mene’s testimony in its geographical and cultural context. Despite the presence of the glossary, the typical Yoruba, Igbo, or NP words and expressions often remain ambivalent and used in great a variety of situations to give them a single meaning. The reader has a sense of Mene’s origins but, although given elements to understand his code, the non-Nigerian English-speaking reader cannot fully cross the linguistic and cultural gap between them and the narrator.

Adapting

Although frequent, the borrowings from the Nigerian lexis are not the main lexical device used to convey Mene’s identity through his language. For instance, phonological interferences can be observed through words such as “**lomber**” which corresponds to ‘number’ as it would be pronounced by a Nigerian speaker, “**porson**” for ‘person’, “**zenttle**” for ‘gentle’, “**awright**” for ‘alright’ or “**sarzent**” for ‘sergeant’.

Grammatical words also undergo such a modification in spelling to represent Nigerian English (NE) pronunciation. For instance, as the sound [h] in initial position is commonly not pronounced in NE as noted by Mfon Brownson Ekpe¹⁴ it is represented

¹¹*Sozaboy*, p. 183.

¹²*Sozaboy*, p. 183.

¹³“And I will say it carefully with my mouth and with style so that if you hear me talking by that time, you will even think that I am oyibo man.”, *Sozaboy – A novel in rotten English*, p. 93.

¹⁴Mfon Brownson Ekpe, “The English Language in Nigeria”, (Lagos: National Open University of Nigeria: 2010).

in *Sozaboy* as 'e for 'he' and 'am for 'him': "E tell Bullet make him give some to him friends wey dey inside 'those cold trenches' as him talk **am**."¹⁵ Moreover, Ekpe notes in his description of NE that the dental fricative [θ], transcribed <th>, is pronounced either [t] or [s] and the reader of *Sozaboy* comes across "tiefman" (**th**iefman) and "tink" (**th**ink). The morpheme [ð], commonly pronounced [d] in Nigerian English, is represented by the letter <d> in *Sozaboy* as in "dis" (**th**is), "de" (**th**e) or "dere" (**th**ere). In the case of such variations, words appear close to their western Standard English (SE) forms and are intelligible for the English-speaking reader with no experience of Nigerian basilectal English. They underwent a process of adaptation, of Africanization, to fit the voice of the young narrator and the context of the plot. Through these variations, Saro-Wiwa creates what could be called an "eye-dialect" for his narrative voice. Yet, the variation does not apply to every word nor to every occurrence of the words. Saro-Wiwa's "rotten English" is a construct and not an authentic language. It is a "stylized" dialect: it represents a specific context and a culture but does not prevent the reader, unfamiliar to them, from understanding the text. It is not rare to find, in the same sentence or paragraph the Africanized and the standard spelling of a same word: "E say the name is very good for the man. And **he** think the man must like the name when we tell **am**."¹⁶ This phenomenon is typical of non-standardized languages.

The lexical devices used by Saro-Wiwa can be assimilated to what Roger Fowler refers to as underlexicalization as much as to a process of africanization and code-switching. In his 1986 work, he writes: "in deliberately formed 'literary' texts [...], underlexicalization is marked by two alternative linguistic devices: either the noticeable suppression of a term or the substitution of a noticeably complex expression for what in

¹⁵*Sozaboy*, p. 94.

¹⁶*Sozaboy*, p. 95.

other registers would be a simple term.”¹⁷ The lexis of the novel is adapted to the narrator and represents Mene’s cultural background and his knowledge and use of NE, SE and NP. The complexity mentioned by Fowler is here that of western SE for Mene who is not familiar to and at ease with this variety and who turns to NE and NP. The narrator uses simple terms (NP and NE words and expressions) which actually represent a difficulty for the non-Nigerian reader. This representation of Mene’s cultural and educational background through his adapting the rules of SE is also noticeable through Saro-Wiwa’s use of grammatical variation in the novel.

2.1.2. Mene and “big big grammar”

In the novel, Mene often refers to the “big big grammar” of other characters: people on the radio, his superior Bullet, and “oyibo” men¹⁸. “Big big grammar” or “big big English” refers to the acrolectal variety of NE: to “tedious, erudite arguments or statements in standard English”¹⁹ as Saro-Wiwa explains in the glossary. Mene is irritated by the use of “big big grammar” and admits it is complex and confusing for him to understand:

“As Bullet was speaking was confusing me again. I don’t like how he used to talk big big grammar sometimes. Either he will be laughing small small and he will not talk plenty or if he wants to talk, he will make big big grammar and he will be confusing me.”²⁰

There is therefore a gap between the narrator’s use of grammar and the grammar of SE that he is uncomfortable with.

¹⁷Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁸See 2.1.1., “oyibo” refers to white men.

¹⁹*Sozaboy*, p. 182.

²⁰*Sozaboy*, pp. 92-93.

Syntax

Mene uses a variety of sentence types in his testimony: statements, questions, exclamations and what Leech and Short called “minor sentence” types with no verb.²¹ The narrative is predominantly made of simple sentences whose length is variable. On the first page of the novel the average number of words in a sentence is fourteen, the minimum is two and the maximum is thirty-five.²² On the same page, while some sentences have no verb and limited information others have juxtaposed elements introduced by basic sequential conjunctions. Mene’s syntax is composed of basic conjunctions and straightforward structures. On the first page, the common structures are: Subject (S) + Verb (V) + and + S + V or S + V + because + S + V. Although some sentences do not have a verb and others are even made of single words (“My heart begin to cut. **Plenty**. Join army? For what? So I am now soza? **No. No.**”²³), on the whole, Mene’s syntax is standard. Yet, some non-standard syntactic structures can be observed throughout the novel. First, the narrator’s negative structures do not follow the standard S + auxiliary + not + V. Mene, following the Pidgin tradition, erases the auxiliary to mark the negation with “no” between the subject and the verb:

“We were still digging when the sun don die finish and porson **no** fit see him brother again.”²⁴

“Oh, sozaman life **no** be small thing.”²⁵

“I **no** like this thing that Pastor Barika is saying, oh.”²⁶

²¹Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, (London, New York: Longman, 1990), p. 76.

²²*Sozaboy*, p.1.

²³*Sozaboy*, p. 47.

²⁴*Sozaboy*, p. 84.

²⁵*Sozaboy*, p. 84.

²⁶*Sozaboy*, p. 154.

(“So I will stay in this Dukana like Bom and Zaza?”), or to ask other characters (to Agnes: “Or you think I don’t like to go to Pitakwa?”).³² Although not systematic, Mene’s interrogative structures are often non-inverted.

Another aspect of the novel’s syntax observed is the use of conjunctions of coordination or subordination (because, and, so, but, etc.) in initial position. The reader often comes upon sentences such as:

“**Because** as young man and apprentice driver, they will not give us too much trouble on the road again.”³³

“**But** as you know, you cannot walk with girl in Dukana without people talking about it.”³⁴

“**So** I begin to think, yes, I can try to make my mother happy.”³⁵

“**And** just that morning we see death.”³⁶

This stylistic variation occurs at the beginning of the narrative: in the first sentence of the novel, Mene uses “although” in initial position. This conjunction expressing opposition works in standard sentences to link two segments. Yet in Mene’s sentence there is only one segment; it is not opposed to a second one: “**Although**, everybody in Dukana was happy at first.”³⁷ This non-standard use of conjoining conjunctions without any conjoining function can be seen as part of the author’s strategy to represent Mene’s culturally marked discourse. Either the narrator uses the conjunction with a non-standard structure eluding the opposite clause or uses it where Standard English would use other conjunctions which work with one-clause sentences. Yet, in the previous example, “although” can also be interpreted as a reference to the rest of the narrative

³²*Sozaboy*, pp. 56-57.

³³*Sozaboy*, p. 1.

³⁴*Sozaboy*, p. 22.

³⁵*Sozaboy*, p. 57.

³⁶*Sozaboy*, p. 112.

³⁷*Sozaboy*, p.1.

which therefore plays the role of the segment opposed to “everybody in Dukana was happy at first”.

Grammatical categories

Beyond syntactic variation, *Sozaboy – A Novel in Rotten English* introduces the reader to grammatically non-standard forms of some words or expressions. Nigerian speakers of English, as noted by Brownson Ekpe in his survey of the English language in Nigeria, tend to show great creativity where verbs are concerned. This creativity appears through the process of enallage or conversion in which the speaker shifts the grammatical category of words he or she uses: nouns, adjectives or adverbs are used as verbs for instance. Mene often uses the adjective “proud” as a verb: “And I was thinking how I was **prouding** before to go to soza and call myself Sozaboy.”³⁸ He also turns adverbs into verbs: “We cannot **byforce** anybody.”³⁹; or adjectives into nouns: “[...] if you ask them whether they have seen your mama and your wife, **angry** and **hungry** will not even allow them to answer you.”⁴⁰ Adjectives can be found in adverbial position: “Because I take my work **serious**.”⁴¹ Verbs can be found in nominal position: “I beg, God make you no **vex** for these people [...]”

Other grammatical variations can be found in the novel such as the frequent elision of articles before nouns, a common feature of Nigerian Pidgin:

“My master say if it continues like this, we can buy **new motor** very soon.”⁴²

“In fact, I am **very clever boy** in school and I like to work hard always.”⁴³

³⁸*Sozaboy*, p. 181.

³⁹*Sozaboy*, p. 6.

⁴⁰*Sozaboy*, p. 149.

⁴¹*Sozaboy*, p. 12.

⁴²*Sozaboy*, p. 3

⁴³*Sozaboy*, p. 11.

“Then he called me **with hand** to come.”⁴⁴

“By this time, they have cut our hair so that my head was shining **like moon**.”⁴⁵

Tenses

Another area of Mene’s non-standard usage of grammar is that of tense and aspect. The narrative alternates between past and present tenses and both tenses are used in non-standard forms. First of all, Mene elides the <-s> ending of the third person in the present:

“Nobody for Dukana **like** to work on the road”⁴⁶

“I want to be soza and my mother **say** I must marry.”⁴⁷

“Even if he **listen**, he cannot understand everything.”⁴⁸

“So now after Manmuswak⁴⁹ **have** gone and we have all smoke the cigar which he give us, all that confusion began in my mind again.”⁵⁰

As illustrated by this last example, Mene also seems to have difficulties with standard agreement of tenses and it is not rare to find in a same sentence verbs conjugated in present and past tenses and with different aspects: “Because I do not like how the Chief and the Pastor **were looking** at themselves **when I say** I do not like to fight useless fight.”⁵¹ Mene has a further tendency to use the progressive aspect in unexpected situations where SE would use a simple aspect as in “[e]verytime **she will**

⁴⁴*Sozaboy*, p. 39.

⁴⁵*Sozaboy*, p. 71.

⁴⁶*Sozaboy*, p. 5.

⁴⁷*Sozaboy*, p. 56.

⁴⁸*Sozaboy*, p. 84.

⁴⁹“Manmuswak” is the ironical name Mene gives to a regular character in the novel. The word comes from the expression “a man must wak” (wak: live/eat) and refers to the character’s constant switching sides in the conflict. Manmuswak prioritizes his individual survival over the principles and ideas which led to the war and therefore adapts and changes side in order to remain safe.

⁵⁰*Sozaboy*, p. 98.

⁵¹*Sozaboy*, p. 155.

be talking careless talk.”⁵² and “I will do anything so that this fine girl can be my wife and **I can be sleeping** with her on one bed every night.”⁵³

Finally, the novel also presents non-standard use of the perfect aspect. Indeed, the narrator often uses the infinitive form of the verb where Standard English uses the past participle to form the present or past perfect (auxiliary “to have” in present or past tense + past participle) as in “[w]here **have I see** him before?”⁵⁴ and “[s]o throughout that night, I was just thinking of the tall man and where **I have meet** him before [...]”⁵⁵. In some other cases, the standard use of the past participle is replaced by Mene’s use of the simple past form of the verb: “When I opened my eyes, day **have broke** well well.”⁵⁶

Saro-Wiwa’s “rotten English” is based on lexical variation representing Mene’s Nigerian origins and grammatical non-standard forms which can also be seen as representative of his origins, and of his difficulty in mastering SE which he learnt as a second language. These variations might be seen as “mistakes” by (non-linguist) native speakers of English. They represent the narrator as a young boy whose education was limited (Mene explains: “[...] I passed my elementary six with distinction. In fact, I am very clever boy in school and I like to work hard always. It was very hard for my mama to pay my school fees [...] I wanted to go to secondary school but my mama told me that she cannot pay the fees.”⁵⁷) but who knows, masters and adapts the rules of SE. The variations do not apply to all occurrences in the book of a same word, expression, or structure. It helps constructing the image of a child, naïve and innocent, bred in a

⁵²*Sozaboy*, p. 37.

⁵³*Sozaboy*, p. 37.

⁵⁴*Sozaboy*, p. 94.

⁵⁵*Sozaboy*, p. 95.

⁵⁶*Sozaboy*, p. 101.

⁵⁷*Sozaboy*, p. 11.

multicultural and multilingual context but also gives the image of a boy deeply attached to his origins and culture.

2.1.3. Representing a culture, a society and a context

Beyond the individual representation of Mene, the narrative voice gives the reader a broader picture. Ken Saro-Wiwa represents, through the plot but also through stylistic devices, the Nigerian culture and tradition, the post independence society and the violence of the civil war.

Language in Nigeria

The first aspect of Mene's language to be discussed is its hybridity. The concomitant uses of SE, NE, NP, and Nigerian languages result in an artistic and experimental surrogate language which Saro-Wiwa called "rotten English". This non-standard variety symbolizes the multilingualism of Nigeria but also evokes the post-colonial reflections on the language African writers should use: Standard English, the language of the Empire; local languages; or an Africanized variety of English. Saro-Wiwa chose to anchor Mene's voice neither solely in one linguistic sphere, nor in the other and the young narrator code-switches between NE, NP and Nigerian languages.

The Oral Tradition

Another element of the language wrought by Saro-Wiwa which echoes Nigerian is its orality. Indeed, the text is influenced by the African tradition of orality and storytelling and Mene's testimony bears numerous characteristics of oral discourse. First, the

narrator frequently addresses his reader through the use of the pronoun “you” as if telling his story to an audience:

“**I am telling you**, this kain talk can make me shame.”⁵⁸

“I think **you** know as I was thinking when I entered army the first time and wear sozaman uniform. **You** remember as I was prouiding [...] Well, **I am telling you** now that something come spoil my mind small.”⁵⁹

Mene also addresses his reader through phatic expressions or questions such as “you know”, “you see”, or “you remember”: “If na before I will not understand what Bullet is saying but, **you know**, sitting in this pit for one month, I am beginning to know one or two things.”⁶⁰ This type of phatic expression accompanies rhetorical or standard questions. Through these, Mene calls for the reader’s sympathy or approval in situations in which he is puzzled, doubtful or shocked as in “[a]nyway, why the trouble? Ehn? Why the trouble? Wetin bring the trouble ? Ehn ? Jesus my lord.”⁶¹ and “[a]t first, I think that what I am seeing is not true. How can handkerchief grow in the bush?”⁶² Marks of orality are also observed in Mene’s syntax such as, for instance, the regular use of interjections punctuates his discourse:

“Why all this trouble now? **Ehn?**”⁶³

“Praps the girl love me **oh. Ha! ha!**”⁶⁴

“**God in Heaven!** This Zaza is not very useless man after all, you know.”⁶⁵

“Because I must return to my Agnes and my mama with plenty rope. **Oh yes.**”⁶⁶

“I was very happy to hear that. **Oh, thank God.**”⁶⁷

⁵⁸Sozaboy, p. 14.

⁵⁹Sozaboy, p. 104.

⁶⁰Sozaboy, p. 93.

⁶¹Sozaboy, p. 9.

⁶²Sozaboy, p. 92.

⁶³Sozaboy, p. 3.

⁶⁴Sozaboy, p. 18.

⁶⁵Sozaboy, p. 33.

⁶⁶Sozaboy, p. 105.

⁶⁷Sozaboy, p. 135.

Nigerian society after Independence

Characteristics of Nigerian traditions are found in the novel and especially characteristics of Nigerian post-independence society. Nigeria is a patchwork of neighbouring communities each with its cultural, linguistic and political identity. Saro-Wiwa uses the context of the civil war and creates a language which illustrates the divided and violent society of Nigeria in the 1960s. For instance, the hybridity and heterogeneity of Mene's language represents the multiculturalism of the country. The French academic Simone Rinzler drew a parallel between the novel's "rotten English" and the "rotten" society the narrator evolves in.⁶⁸

Violence

Violence is also evoked through specific stylistic devices such as the graphological transcription of the sounds of guns and bombs: "Now the sozas do not follow men they begin to shoot their guns: *Tako, tako. Tako – tako – tako.*"⁶⁹ In several scenes, the sounds of weapons are associated with the sound of Mene's heart-pulse like in: "My heart was cutting, beating like drum. *Tam tum. Tam tum tum.*"⁷⁰ and "My heart begin to beat drum more than before. *Tam tum tum. Tam tum tum.*"⁷¹ Both sounds are represented by the alliteration of the plosive consonant [t]. The graphological transcription of the sounds through onomatopoeia once again gives the reader the image of Mene as a naive and innocent child-soldier, trying to describe a reality he does not really understand. This impression is reinforced by the lexical choices made to define war which Mene says is

⁶⁸Simone RINZLER, "Textes, contextes, hors-textes dans *Sozaboy, a novel in rotten English* de Ken Saro-Wiwa: pour une linguistique encyclopédique postcoloniale" in *Bulletin de la Société de Stylistique Anglaise*, 26, (2005).

⁶⁹*Sozaboy*, p. 47(italicized in the text).

⁷⁰*Sozaboy*, p. 47 (italicized in the text).

⁷¹*Sozaboy*, p. 47 (italicized in the text).

“a very bad and stupid game.”⁷² The words, expressions and onomatopoeia might be seen as giving a simplistic image of war but their simplicity highlights the absurdity of the conflict and the innocence of the witness.

To sum up, Ken Saro-Wiwa has elaborated a unique language for his narrator, using elements from different cultures and tongues, and he has managed to depict the context of the Biafran war as much through Mene’s idiolect as through the plot. The experimental dialect observable in the novel is a response to one of the post-colonial dilemmas of African writers: whether to write in English or in their mother tongue. It also reveals the commitment of Saro-Wiwa, showing the lost innocence and naivety of the young Mene caught up in war.

⁷²“If you see how all their eyes have gone inside their head, and all their hair have become palm oil colour and they have dirty dirty rag shirt and all their bones are shaking inside their body, I am telling you if you see these things, and you think them very well, you will know at once that war is a very bad and stupid game.”, *Sozaboy*, p. 151.

Chapter Two: markers of orality and generational discourse in

The Catcher in the Rye

The Catcher in the Rye (published in 1951), beyond its status as a best-seller, has become a reference and a recurrent object of study in the various fields of the humanities. The novel, by J.D. Salinger, is not only studied as a literary work but also, on a linguistic and even sociolinguistic level, as a representation of American teenagers' vernacular dialect in the 1950s. Salinger introduces his reader to the voice of Holden Caulfield, the sixteen-year-old narrator. Holden is educated, witty and presumably from a high social background. He is also a representation of the troubles of his age group, adolescence: he is anxious about death; he is afraid of the future and wishes to remain a child; he craves for new experiences and adventure, and he is particularly curious about sexuality. Holden is also very judgmental, rebellious and defiant towards authority. The narrator's identity with its social, cultural and psychological components is conveyed in the style Salinger creates all through his work to represent the narrative voice.

This section will examine the oral dimension of the text. The focus will then be on the linguistic elements typical of the social and cultural identity of Holden, a typical 1950s American teenager. Finally, this chapter will study how Holden's troubled mind, his doubts, anxieties and fears, are transcribed through his voice and his words.

2.2.1. Orality in *The Catcher in the Rye*

One of the main aspects of the novel is the oral dimension of Holden's testimony. From the very beginning of the novel we, readers, are to believe that Holden is addressing a co-speaker orally. The use of the pronoun 'you' can be observed from the first sentence of the novel and seems to address the reader.¹ By the end the novel it seems more likely that Holden is actually addressing a doctor from the psychiatric institution he is staying in. Therefore all through the novel, although the identity of Holden's addressee is not clear, it seems obvious that he is telling his story in an oral context rather than on a written one. In his account of the language in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Donald P. Costello writes: "The structure of Holden's sentences indicates that Salinger thinks of the book more in terms of spoken speech than written speech."²

Holden's confession

"If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth."³

Early in the book, the reader understands that the novel is the personal story of the narrator. The latter, Holden Caulfield, intends to tell "it" to an addressee represented by the use of the second person pronoun "you" which appears six times in the first paragraph ("If **you** really want to hear about it"; "**you'll** probably want to know"; "if **you** want to know the truth"; "I'm not going to tell **you**"; "I'll just tell **you** about this madman stuff that happened to me"; "in case **you** never heard of him"). Therefore, from

¹"If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born [...]", J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 1.

²Donald P. Costello, "The Language of 'The Catcher in the Rye'", in *American Speech*, Vol. 34, No. 3, (Oct. 1959), pp. 172-181.

³*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 1.

the first lines the situation of utterance is set: “I”, Holden Caulfield, tells his story to “you” who, until later in the novel, seems to be we readers. This situation includes the reader as an addressee and witness of Holden’s confession. Indeed, beyond the notion of autobiography, *The Catcher in the Rye* takes the shape of a confession. Phrases such as “If you really want to hear about it [...]” and “[...] if you want to know the truth.” can be observed.

Throughout the novel, this truthful confession is set by Salinger at the frontier between the written and the spoken. The oral dimension of the book is identifiable, in the beginning of the novel, through the use of the verb ‘to hear’ in the first sentence. Yet, in the same sentence, as pointed out by Isabelle Génin there is a reference to the written literary tradition when mentioning Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield*.⁴ The novel oscillates between the written form of expression and orality.

Features of orality

When analyzing the language in *The Catcher in the Rye*, it appears that Holden’s speech is marked by a certain number of features corresponding to spoken English rather than to written forms of the language. Isabelle Génin talks about the “mode of cohesion specific to orality” that Salinger created in his work⁵ using features of lexis, grammar, and syntax.

At the level of syntax, Holden’s sentences are markedly long and punctuated by the use of basic sequential conjunctions such as “and”, “but” or “so”. The six-line

⁴Isabelle Génin, ‘The Catcher in the Rye et L’attrape cœurs : oralité, cohérence et incohérence’, *Palimpsestes*, 23 (2010), p. 89.

⁵‘Quelques particularités mettent en place un système qui contribue à l’illusion d’oralité, reprenant un mode de cohésion propre à l’oral, légèrement en marge de la norme de l’écrit.’ in Isabelle Génin, ‘*The Catcher in the Rye* et *L’attrape cœurs* : oralité, cohérence et incohérence’, *Palimpsestes*, 23 (2010), p. 90, (my translation).

opening sentence of the novel, for example, is cadenced by the use of six commas, four “and” and one “but”.⁶ Holden frequently juxtaposes several ideas, either complementary or digressing from the original topic, linking them with conjunctions characteristic of oral discourse.

The syntax observed in the novel is simple and typical of informal oral English using juxtaposition and ellipsis. Holden often erases logical operators⁷ in his discourse as speakers of English tend to do in an oral context. He repeatedly erases the conjunction “that” from his sentences, replacing it by a comma as in the following examples:

“The thing was, I couldn’t think of a room or a house or anything to describe the way Stradlater said he had to have.”⁸

“The only trouble was, the cold made my nose hurt [...]”⁹

In other sentences, Holden deletes the logical operators expressing cause or consequence such as, for instance, when he tells the story of his first encounter with Jane Gallagher: “The way I met her, this Doberman pinscher she had used to come over and relieve himself on our lawn, and my mother got very irritated about it.”¹⁰ In this example, the logical link between the first part of the sentence and the Doberman story (for instance: was when) has been replaced by a comma. Commenting on these ellipses, and more generally on Holden’s syntax, Isabelle Génin writes it is “quite simple but never dislocated”¹¹: Indeed, the apparent simplicity of informal and familiar forms is

⁶See quotation, p. 40.

⁷Logical operators are grammatical words or phrases used to connect parts of a same sentence, or several sentences with one another (“if”, “and”, “or”, “neither/nor”, “but”, “so that” are logical operators).

⁸*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 33.

⁹*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 47.

¹⁰*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 69.

¹¹Isabelle Génin, ‘The Catcher in the Rye et L’attrape cœurs : oralité, cohérence et incohérence’, *Palimpsestes*, 23 (2010), p. 90.

associated with oral English but the general aspect of the discourse remains close to structured standard written English.

Another element of Holden's discourse more frequent in informal oral situations than in written literary texts is contraction. Indeed, the narrator often uses the contractions of auxiliaries and verbs such as "don't" and "didn't" instead of do not and did not: "I **don't** feel like going into it[...]" (p. 1), "I **don't** remember how much I had but I was pretty loaded." (p. 46), "He said he **didn't** know." (p. 46), "It **didn't** exactly depress me to think about it but it **didn't** make me feel gay as hell, either." (p. 110). He also uses "he'd" instead of he would: "**He'd** be charming as hell and all." (p. 12); "they're" instead of they are: "**They're** *nice* and all – I'm not saying that – but **they're** also touchy as hell." (p. 1)¹²; "it's" and "that's" instead of it is and that is: "I mean if **it's** Phoebe or somebody." (p. 189), "**That's** the whole trouble." (p. 126); "I'll" instead of "I will": "**I'll** just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me [...]" (p. 1), "**I'll** admit that." (p. 7); or "would've" instead of would have: "It probably **would've** hurt him a lot [...]" (p. 38).

Finally, all through the novel there is recurrent use of italics to emphasize specific words in Holden's speech. This variation in typography represents the prosodic prominence of the words, syllables or expressions in a spoken context. In the following sentences, the italicized words would presumably be emphasized through means of intonation in an oral context: "It's *boring* to do that every two minutes."¹³; "Then I *really* started chucking the old crap around."¹⁴; "You never really know whether they

¹²"*nice*" italicized in the book.

¹³*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 10.

¹⁴*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 50.

really *want* you to stop, or whether they're just scared as hell [...].”¹⁵; “I don't know *how* I knew, but I knew.”¹⁶ Interestingly, the same use of italics can be noted in reported speech in the novel: “Now, *shut up*, Holden, God damn it – I'm *warning* ya,' he said – I really had him going.”¹⁷; “Oh! I'm *so* sorry,' she said.”¹⁸ The use of a different typography (italics, bold letters, underlining) to emphasize parts of the spoken discourse expressing insistence, surprise, anger, or excitement is a frequent technique used since the nineteenth century. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, the technique is applied both to reported speech and to apparently written discourse. The distinction between the oral and spoken contexts is blurred: the language of the text oscillates between written norms and features typical of oral English. While structured as written English, Holden's testimony often uses oral devices. Through the oral dimension of the novel, Salinger gives a representative account of 1950s American teenagers' vernacular.

2.2.2. Holden Caulfield: the voice of teenagers

In 1959, Donald P. Costello wrote: “In coming decades, *The Catcher in the Rye* will be studied, I feel, not only as a literary work, but also as an example of teenage vernacular in the 1950s.”¹⁹ Indeed, as Costello foresaw, as early as the 1960s, the book was studied and criticized from the perspective of its language which was considered a realistic and authentic representation of teenagers' colloquial language.

¹⁵*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 83.

¹⁶*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 90.

¹⁷ *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 38.

¹⁸*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 51.

¹⁹Donald P. Costello, “The Language of ‘The Catcher in the Rye’”, in *American Speech*, Vol. 34, No. 3, (Oct. 1959), pp. 172-181.

The 1950s “silent generation”

Holden is one of the numerous silent teenage witnesses of the post-war societal changes, but in *The Catcher in the Rye* he is finally given a voice by Salinger. Early in the novel, he explains that he is going to tell his addressee the truth, his truth, in reaction to the silence imposed by the phoney society he lives in. There are several occurrences of phrases such as “if you want to know the truth”:

“I ran all the way to the main gate and then I waited a second till I got my breath. I have no wind, **if you want to know the truth.**”

“I’m not too tough. I’m a pacifist **if you want to know the truth.**”

Furthermore, Holden often emphasizes the authenticity of what he tells with the use of the adverb “really” as in:

“It was very ironical. It **really** was.”²⁰

“Only this time I thought I was dying. I **really** did.”²¹

“I don’t think I could stand it if I had to go to war. I **really** couldn’t.”²²

Holden insists on his truthfulness in opposition to the “phoniness” of the surrounding world he keeps denouncing in the novel. He is telling the truth, really, and even writes that he is “the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It’s awful.”²³

Holden is growing older and becoming adult in a society more concerned by post-war economic, political or diplomatic issues than by the feelings and troubles of its youth. This society, in which Carl F. Strauch identifies a “failure in communication”²⁴, indeed fails to listen to and hear its teenage members’ call for authenticity. Holden repeats

²⁰*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 24.

²¹*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 93.

²²*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 126.

²³*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 14.

²⁴Carl F. Strauch, “Kings in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure. A Reading of Salinger’s ‘The Catcher in the Rye’”, *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 1961), pp. 5-30.

several times how “people never notice anything”²⁵ or how “people never believe you”²⁶. Every time, the phrase follows a similar affirmation but which only concerns Holden. He widens his remarks to a broader scale and to the pronoun “you” which might refer to every person likely to hear or read his testimony, or to the rest of his generation and age-group. The pronoun “you” is also used in its impersonal form in such expressions. Instead of implying that Holden includes himself among his generation or addressee, this impersonal use represents Holden’s feeling of being invisible in society: the pronoun does not refer to any particular entity.

Furthermore, the social and psychological aspects of the 1950s teenage population represented in the novel through Holden’s obsession with truthfulness as opposed to “phoniness”, Holden is also shown to represent his generation through the use of specific linguistic features. For instance Holden continuously uses the adjective “old” in front of names (of people from every age-group). He names old Selma Thurmer, old Spencer, old Brossard, old Ackley, old Stradlater, old Horwitz, old Luce, old Phoebe and even old Jesus. This repeated use of the adjective before names of people regardless of the actual age of the characters most of whom are children or teenagers, seems ironical knowing how Holden despises adults. Indeed, “old” refers more naturally to adults than to young people. Thus, when Holden associates names with “old”, expressing familiarity, affection or respect, he seems in contradiction with his fervent rejection of grown-ups.²⁷ Commenting on this feature of Holden’s speech, Carl F. Strauch draws a parallel with Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* “from

²⁵*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 8.

²⁶*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 32.

²⁷Especially when “old” is used with the name of his sister, Phoebe, a symbol of youth and innocence and a character he obviously likes particularly.

which [Holden] has borrowed Gatsby's nonchalant and phony habit of address".²⁸ Published for the first time in 1925 in the United States, the novel was part of the 1950s teenage culture and references. Holden's use of "old" can be seen as a cultural feature, typical of his generation. The remark by Strauch also highlights the paradoxical dimension of Holden Caulfield. Regarding the use of "old" indeed, while he constantly criticizes the phoneyess of the society around him he uses a feature typical of Gatsby who used "old" as a "phony address".

Holden: typical but unique

Hence, Holden is a typical representative of an age-group, teenagers, from a specific time period, the 1950s. Yet, his role as a representative can be extended to most contemporary, and more precisely post-war, teenagers. Louis Menand, in 2001, wrote: "kids respond to *The Catcher in the Rye* because they recognize themselves in the character of Holden Caulfield. Salinger is imagined to have given voice to what every adolescent [...] thinks but is too inhibited to say".²⁹

Beyond the ideas and values which bring together the teenage readership of *The Catcher in the Rye*, the language of Holden composed of typical features of teenage vernacular makes the novel sound familiar to its teenage audience. Among these typical speech mannerisms, there is the constant use of "and all" by Holden to end his sentences and avoid going deeper in his explanation or description. Indeed, Holden often punctuates his narratives with the phrase "and all" as in the following examples:

²⁸Carl F. Strauch, "Kings in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure. A Reading of Salinger's 'The Catcher in the Rye'", *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 1961), p. 8.

²⁹Louis Menand, "Holden at Fifty" in *The New Yorker*, Vol. 77, No. 29 (October 2001).

“I mean that’s all I told D.B. and he’s my *brother and all*.”³⁰

“Anyway, it was December **and all** [...]”³¹

“His door was open, but I sort of knocked on it anyway, just to be polite **and all**.”³²

“She put her hand up to her mouth **and all**.”³³

This lack of precision is also noticeable with the repeated use of phrases such as “or anything” and “and stuff” as in: “Besides, I’m not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography **or anything**.”³⁴; “That’s also how I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these goddam checkups **and stuff**.”³⁵ Holden does not aim to be precise in his discourse and frequently avoids, through the use of such phrases, going too deep into some subjects and to develop issues he presumably feels uncomfortable with.

Other speech mannerisms such as the constant repetition of what Costello called Holden’s “favorite words”³⁶ for instance “ass” used in various contexts (“You give me a royal pain in the **ass** if you want to know the truth”³⁷; “Game, my **ass**.”³⁸) or “goddam” which occur seven times in one page in chapter six, along with “stupid” (“his **goddam** stupid footsteps”, “If he was so **goddam** stupid [...]”, “He didn’t say one **goddam** word about Jane.”³⁹). Moreover, one notes the repeated use throughout the novel of other slang phrases such as: “as hell”, “phony”, “terrific”, “like a madman”, “it kills me”, and so on. In his survey of Salinger’s novel, Costello also identifies Holden’s tendency to coin new lexemes from existing ones by changing their grammatical nature and

³⁰*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 1.

³¹*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 3.

³²*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 6.

³³*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 51.

³⁴*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 1.

³⁵*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 4.

³⁶Donald P. Costello, “The Language of ‘The Catcher in the Rye’”, in *American Speech*, Vol. 34, No. 3, (Oct. 1959), p. 177.

³⁷To Sally in *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 120.

³⁸Commenting on old Spencer’s remark: “Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules.” in *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 7.

³⁹*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 35.

function. For instance he turns nouns into adverbs adding an ending in -y to the latter as in “Christmasy”, “fisty” or “whory-looking”.⁴⁰ These phrases and more generally the repeated use of these “few favorite words” are common in teenage vernacular, as argued by Costello, Génin or Strauch. Although expressing a typical desire to belong, through a shared dialect, and a rebellious temperament frequent among teenagers, Holden’s speech differs from the norm and Salinger portrays a unique young man with a specific and elaborate use of language.

Holden apparently expresses his discontent and disappointment through violent vocabulary. Yet, the repeated use of some words (“phony”, “ass”, “as hell” and so on) in very different contexts, positive and negative, diminishes the rebellious and violent load of these words and phrases. In the novel, “goddam” has no blasphemous value and “crap” is used, as Costello writes, “in seven different ways” so it seems to have lost its vulgarity.⁴¹ The use of slang words and expressions seems to illustrate his desire to dissociate himself from the adult world, to shock the phoney society and to identify with a group (teenagers). Holden’s vulgarity expresses violence and represents non-conformity and, partly through it, the narrator embodies the typical teenage rebelliousness and discontent.

Holden’s language also shows his wit and complexity. Indeed, he wants to belong but appropriates language rather than using it in the common, typical teenage trend. He is rebellious but moderates the violence and vulgarity of his speech.⁴² Holden seems to

⁴⁰Donald P. Costello, “The Language of ‘The Catcher in the Rye’”, in *American Speech*, Vol. 34, No. 3, (Oct. 1959), p. 178.

⁴¹Donald P. Costello, “The Language of ‘The Catcher in the Rye’”, in *American Speech*, Vol. 34, No. 3, (Oct. 1959), p. 176.

⁴²As Costello notes in his work, Holden never uses “fuck” (the word only appears as Holden comments on it being written on walls) and the most vulgar terms “sonuvabitch” and “bastard” are used in situations of extreme anger.

conceal more than he actually tells. He promises a truthful confession but often avoids going too deep in his narrative (with the use of “and all” for instance) and using words whose meanings became unclear over multiple occurrences. To sum up, Holden is a very complex and ambiguous character. He is representative of a generation and of an age-group, notably through his language. Yet, he seems unique through his ability to personalize and manipulate language associating features of conformity and originality.

2.2.3. Psychoanalytical perspective: ‘But I’m crazy.’

In his novel, Salinger also portrays his young narrator through his particular state of mind and psychological situation. Holden is a teenager who, like most teenagers, is suffering from conflicting emotions and desires. Yet the reader is shown very early in the novel that the young man is particularly sensitive and intelligent, and that his contradictions go beyond those common among teenagers. Holden has specific obsessions and worries which appear throughout his testimony, and show through his speech.

Holden: from teenager to adult

Salinger, in portraying a teenage narrator, emphasizes the painful and complex transition his character is going through: from childhood which represents innocence,⁴³ to adulthood associated with “phoniness” and artificiality.⁴⁴ Holden is seventeen at the time he tells his story, and sixteen at the time the reported events took place. At the edge

⁴³Childhood is especially represented in the novel by the characters of Allie and Phoebe, Holden’s (deceased) brother and sister.

⁴⁴Holden deplors being surrounded by “phonies”, who are mostly adults, in the novel: the headmaster of his former school Elkton Hills, his own father, the actor he and Sally meet in Chapter 17, and more.

of adulthood, Holden could appear at first as the typical hero of a bildungsroman. Yet, his age and the classical bildungsroman process of growing older are blurred in the novel. Indeed, Holden is seventeen as we have seen but explains how his actual age does not fit his behaviour, personality or even physical appearance: “I was sixteen then, and I’m seventeen now, and sometimes I act like I’m about thirteen. It’s really ironical, because I’m six foot two and a half and I have gray hair.”⁴⁵ In the same sentence Holden gives his addressee his real age but also a series of contradictory elements which blur his actual mental, psychological and physical age. Salinger’s narrator is caught between two ages.

The “literate” and the “slob” Holden

Not only does Holden fail to belong to an age group, he also seems to fail at belonging to a community. Indeed, early in the novel the reader is told he has been expelled from several prep schools before the time of the reported events and his testimony occurs after his latest eviction, from Pencey Prep. He is in a boarding school away from his parents and his brother D.B and the first anecdote he tells is about a football game his whole school attended except for him. Thus, from the first chapter, the reader senses that Holden is a solitary young boy, an outsider. The reader also understands quite rapidly that Holden is a very smart, witty fellow who analyzes what he is living and witnessing, and who constantly judges the people around him. Yet, paradoxically, he seems to play down his apparent intelligence in his speech. Indeed, Holden is judgmental and undeniably perspicacious but, in order to belong to a community, he uses a language (lexis, references and others) more adapted to his age group than to his actual personality and intelligence. One line especially represents this

⁴⁵*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 8.

duality in Holden's speech: "I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot."⁴⁶ He pretends to be illiterate while he is writing his testimony and explains that he writes his friends' dissertations. Holden is good at English, the only subject he did not fail at Pencey Prep. He has a real knowledge of standard grammar rules, he is educated and from an upper-class family and yet he constantly uses non-standard, lower-class and familiar varieties of English. For instance he spells the verb to lie as "lay": "Then what happened, a couple of days later I saw Jane **laying** on her stomach next to the swimming pool [...]"⁴⁷ The use of the relative pronoun "that" instead of "who" can also be observed as in: "it had this one story about a traffic cop **that** falls in love with this very cute girl **that's** always speeding."⁴⁸ Donald P. Costello also notices the various occurrences of double negation in Holden's discourse (as in: "I **hardly didn't even** know I was doing it"⁴⁹) and the non-standard use of the preterit form instead of the past participle (as in: "He was sore because I'd woke him up."⁵⁰).

These variations seem in complete opposition with Holden's success in English at school, his conversation about literature with Jane or Allie, and his apparent ability to master the English language. Indeed, the narrator switches from the standard English of an educated middle-class schoolboy to the non-standard variety of a non-conformist and rebellious group he wishes he was part of. He also shows a metalinguistic awareness when commenting on his own language: "'Boy!' I said. I also say 'Boy!' quite a lot.

⁴⁶*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 15.

⁴⁷*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 69.

⁴⁸*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 16.

⁴⁹*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 13.

⁵⁰*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 46.

Partly because I have a lousy vocabulary and partly because I act quite young for my age sometimes.”⁵¹

Hence, the code-switching between different varieties of English allow Holden to express his rebellious temperament and give him the image of a typical teenager although the reader is made aware of Holden’s difference and complexity. The multiplicity in varieties represents the fragmented and paradoxical personality of Holden and of most teenagers. Carl F. Strauch identified two contradictory sides of the young man’s personality: the “slob” and the “literate” Holden.⁵²

Holden and death

Another aspect of Holden’s duality is expressed in his discourse through the contradiction between his linguistic, lexical, relation to death and the more psychological and emotional obsession he has about it. Indeed, death is a central issue in the novel both in terms of its lexical presence and in terms of the importance of the two main deaths reported in the book: Holden’s brother Allie’s and the suicide of one of his schoolmates at Elkton Hills. These two traumatic events are told and commented upon by Holden who reflects upon human mortality, cemeteries and burials, the aftermath of death, the consequences of one’s death on people around, and so on. These passages have of course a significant emotional load, especially when Holden is referring to his late brother Allie. Yet, paradoxically, death is also omnipresent in the novel in a more neutral dimension. Indeed, one can notice the frequent use of the phrase “it kills me” to express Holden’s surprise, discontent or satisfaction as in: “[the short

⁵¹*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 8.

⁵²Carl F. Strauch, “Kings in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure. A Reading of Salinger’s ‘The Catcher in the Rye’”, *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 1961), p. 7.

story] was about this little kid that wouldn't let anybody look at his goldfish because he'd bought it with his own money. It **killed** me."⁵³; "He said he talked to Jesus all the time. Even when he was driving in his car. That **killed** me."⁵⁴; "Sensitive. That **killed** me. That guy Morrow was about as sensitive as a toilet seat."⁵⁵ The verb loses its original meaning and death is neutralized by the constant repetition of "kill" in various contexts.

Holden and insanity

The same lexical repetition and concomitant habitualization and neutralization can be observed with reference to insanity. Salinger reveals more or less clearly at the end of his novel that Holden's addressee was in fact a member of the psychiatric institution in which he is staying.⁵⁶ Salinger seems to represent the narrator's progressive fall into insanity through Holden's language and his use of words such as "mad", "insane", and "crazy". Throughout the first half of the novel Holden often concludes his anecdotes, positive or negative, saying "[it] drives [him] crazy" as in the following examples: "I can't stand that stuff. It drives me **crazy**. It makes me so depressed I go **crazy**."⁵⁷; "Girls. Jesus Christ. They can drive you **crazy**."⁵⁸ Furthermore, Holden often describes his actions, feelings or behaviour as those of a madman, as in the following examples: "I apologized **like a madman**, because the band was starting a fast one."⁵⁹; "There were about three inches of snow on the ground, and it

⁵³*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 1.

⁵⁴*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 14.

⁵⁵*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 49.

⁵⁶"A lot of people, especially that one psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I'm going to apply myself when I go back to school next September." in *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 192.

⁵⁷*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 12.

⁵⁸*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 65.

⁵⁹*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 65.

was still coming down **like a madman**.⁶⁰ Yet, in the second half of the novel, as Salinger is gradually making his reader aware of Holden's neurosis, Holden seems to use the lexemes in their real, original meaning of "insanity" when he says in chapter 14: "But I'm crazy. I swear to God I am."⁶¹ Insanity therefore takes on all its significance at the end of the novel after being neutralized and diminished throughout Holden's discourse.⁶² The same evolution can be seen with the theme of suicide, which is used in expressions such as "It was the last game of the year, and you were supposed to commit suicide or something if old Pencey didn't win."⁶³ and when Holden expresses his suicidal thoughts in chapter 14: "What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide. I felt like jumping out the window. I probably would've done it, too, if I'd been sure somebody'd cover me up as soon as I landed."⁶⁴ This last remark by Holden also represents the paradox between the seriousness of the subject and the futility of what he considers being the real issue of suicide: appearances and people seeing his body after his death.

To conclude, in his novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger gives a voice to Holden Caulfield whose language gives the image of a teenager who is at once typical and unique, someone the reader can easily imagine and yet who remains mysterious and paradoxical.

⁶⁰*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 31.

⁶¹*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 93.

⁶²Stephen J. Whitfield comments on the progressive acknowledgement by Holden of his own neurosis and the evolution in meaning of words such as "crazy", "madman" and "insane". See: Stephen J. Whitfield, "Cherished and Cursed: Toward a Social History of *The Catcher in the Rye*", *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 567-600.

⁶³*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 2.

⁶⁴*The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 94.

Chapter Three: mind-style and images

in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

This chapter will consider the third novel of the corpus: Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The novel is the autonarrated fictional story of Christopher Boone, a fifteen-year-old ("15 years and 3 months and 2 days"¹) British boy who suffers from Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism which affects his emotions and his ability to communicate. The young narrator is a fervent reader of mystery novels (especially the Sherlock Holmes stories as the title indicates²) and he undertakes the writing of a detective story based on the death of his neighbours' dog. The narrator's "difference", as a sufferer of Asperger's Syndrome, shows very early in the novel with the numbering of chapters ("I have decided to give my chapters prime numbers 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13 and so on because I like prime numbers."³). Throughout the novel, Mark Haddon elaborates a style for his narrative voice which bears different characteristics of autism. This chapter will examine the stylistic features present in Christopher's discourse and analyze how they reflect his psychological and ideological particularities.

¹*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 7.

²The title is a reference to Conan Doyle's short story "Silver Blaze" (in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, 1892) in which Sherlock Holmes investigates the disappearance of a race-horse and the murder of his trainer. In the story, Holmes talks to Dr. Watson about the "curious incident of the dog in the night-time" (the dog remaining silent on the night of the events). The short story is mentioned several times by Christopher throughout the novel.

³*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 14.

2.3.1. The autistic language: cohesion and coherence, grammar, syntax and lexis

The novel is told by Christopher and the facts are seen from his point of view. Haddon had to adapt his lexical choices, syntax, grammar and the general structure of the novel to the boy's difficulty in expressing emotions, his obsession with structure and order and his lack of ease in communication and interaction with non-autistic people.

Cohesion and coherence

Roger Fowler defined a cohesive text as a work which “stays on its topic or makes clear shifts of topic, develops a subject rationally and indicates what are the prominent and the subordinate parts of an argument or of a story.”⁴ In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, initially the reader has the impression that Christopher's discourse lacks coherence and cohesion on some occasions for it switches frequently from one topic to another. In the first chapter, the novel begins like a standard detective story with the discovery of a corpse (“the dog”). The chapter ends with the narrator wondering what has happened to the animal: “Who had killed him, and why?”⁵ This first section of the novel seems to foreshadow the story of an investigation with the precision of the first paragraph (“It was seven minutes after midnight.”⁶), the questions of the investigators, and an emotional dimension since the detective knew the victim (“The dog was called Wellington. It belonged to Mrs Shears who was our friend.”⁷). This first page seems coherent with the title of the novel. The next chapter no longer focuses on the dog, the crime-scene or the murder, but on the narrator, who

⁴Roger Fowler, *Linguistic criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 69.

⁵*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 1.

⁶*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 1.

⁷*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 1.

introduces himself: “My name is Christopher John Francis Boone.”⁸ Early in the presentation he makes of himself, Christopher gives elements which do not correspond to the situation such as the fact that he knows “all the countries and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,507.”⁹ The reader expects the narrator to introduce himself as a detective: telling about his past experience or his connection to the victim. The narrator goes on to tell the story of how he expresses emotions using pictures of faces.

This type of technical and scientific digression is common in Christopher’s discourse: in chapter 13 he digresses about jokes, in chapter 17 about the Milky Way, in chapter 19 about cardinal and prime numbers, and Conan Doyle’s biography in chapter 139. These explanations seem, at first, unrelated to the main plot of the novel but are in fact linked, in Christopher’s mind at least, to the main story (the reference to the faces is used to explain how he felt when he discovered the dead dog; he refers to jokes to warn that his novel “will not be a funny book”; he talks about prime numbers to explain the numbering of his chapters, and so on.). Christopher needs to explain everything, in precise terms, which leads to these digressions.

The novel’s coherence seems at first to depend on references to “the curious incident of the dog” and the lexis and imagery of murder, mystery and investigation associated with them. However the mystery is quickly unravelled and the narrative then revolves around Christopher’s personal story. The novel’s coherence ultimately relies more on the particularities of the narrator’s voice rather than on the story: the reader

⁸*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 2.

⁹*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 2.

progressively understand the way Christopher's mind works and they make the links between the digressions and the story.

Syntax

Christopher's psychological particularities show through the way he structures his narrative. They also appear through the syntax used to convey his story. Although the complexity of Christopher's sentences varies throughout his discourse, the sentence type he uses is limited to declarative sentences. Indeed, in the narrative (but not including the dialogues) the narrator solely uses statements as scientific affirmations. In terms of sentence complexity, two types can be observed in the novel: simple sentences ("Its eyes were closed." ; "The dog was dead."¹⁰) and complex sentences ("Terry, who is the older brother of Francis, who is at school, said I would only ever get a job collecting supermarket trollies or cleaning out donkey shit at an animal sanctuary and they didn't let spazzers drive rockets that cost billions of pounds."¹¹). This last is the most frequently found structure in which Christopher uses an unusual amount of juxtaposed clauses. His sentences are therefore mostly long.

The average sentence length is, for instance, of fifteen words throughout the first three chapters. Long sentences of more than fifty words, which form a whole paragraph, are frequent in the narrative. Yet short and sometimes non-verbal sentences can be observed too ("I like dogs. You always know what a dog is thinking. It has four moods. Happy, sad, cross and concentrating."¹²). This noticeable variation in sentence complexity corresponds to the variation in the importance given by the narrator to the element he is

¹⁰*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 1.

¹¹*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 33.

¹²*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 4.

describing and whether or not he feels the need to explain it further in, scientific, terms. Christopher appears unable to stop the string of details and consequently the string of clauses he adds to the main idea and main clause of the sentence.

Another stylistic device used by Mark Haddon to represent Christopher's fast mind and his constant need to add information and precision is the use of conjunctions. Indeed, the text frequently takes the shape of a list, a sequential juxtaposition of elements introduced by "and", "or", "because", "but", "so" and "then", as illustrated by the following example:

"I didn't sleep very well **because** of the cold **and because** the ground was lumpy **and** pointy underneath me **and because** Toby was scratching in his cage a lot. [...] **And** I stayed where I was for another 2 hours **and** 32 minutes, **and then** I heard Father come into the garden **and** call out, 'Christopher...? Christopher...?'"¹³

The same conjunction is frequently used in initial position and the subject and verb are also repeated, often highlighted by line-breaks as illustrated in the following examples:

"**And** after morning break she came **and** sat down next to me **and said** she had read the bit about my conversation with Mrs Alexander **and she said**, 'Have you told your father about this?'

And I replied, 'No,'

And she said, 'Are you going to tell your father about this?'

And I replied, 'No,'"¹⁴

"**And I go** out of Father's house **and I** walk down the street, **and it is** very quiet even though it is the middle of the day **and I** can't hear any noise except birds singing **and** wind **and** sometimes buildings falling down in the distance, **and** if I stand very close to traffic lights I can hear a little chick as the colours change.

And I go into other people's house **and** play at being a detective **and I** can break the windows to get in because the people are dead **and** it doesn't matter. **And I go** into shops [...]"¹⁵

¹³*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁴*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 94.

The anaphoric device used in the text shows Christopher's lack of concern for aesthetics as opposed to his obsession with facts and reality. He does not make use of ellipsis, variations, or substitute forms and elegant repetition. The redundancy of Christopher's discourse is part of Haddon's strategy to portray his narrator's limited sense of aesthetics and preference for a clear, straightforward account of the facts. The prevalence of efficacy over aesthetics, of the referential function of language over the poetic function, can also be observed at the level of the lexis.

Lexis

In their linguistic approach to literature, Leech and Short suggest measuring the complexity of words in a given text through their syllabic or morphemic complexity. Since the former was more convenient, they proposed to determine the average number of syllables to establish whether the vocabulary from the text was simple or complex. Regarding *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, words are predominantly simple. For instance, the average syllable-count throughout the first chapter is 1.23 per word.¹⁶ Christopher's lexis is simple and except for occasional technical, Greek or Latin words¹⁷ (for instance: "apocryphal"¹⁸) which are immediately defined, the vocabulary of the text is not particularly specialized. Even when discussing precise scientific topics such as the solar system, prime numbers or his behavioural problems, the narrator uses basic vocabulary. This feature of Christopher's style is linked to his wish to be clear and straightforward. Yet it is often in contradiction with the complexity of the topic he

¹⁵*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 243.

¹⁶A minimum of one syllable and a maximum of three syllables ("Wellington", "opposite", "underneath"): *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 1.

¹⁷"μετα" and "φερειν", *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 20; and "so quod erat demonstradum", *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 33.

¹⁸*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 20.

discusses (Mathematics, Physics or Psychology) and does not correspond to the characteristics established by Laurent Mottron to define Asperger's Syndrome.¹⁹ Indeed Mottron argues that one of the specificities in the way autistic people talk and write is their use of precise, specialized scientific terminology (especially when discussing their behavioural problems). In the case of Christopher, the terminology used is simple and limited. This limited lexis leads to repetitions and redundancy for Christopher does not use periphrasis or synonyms to give variety in the case of cross-references. The reader comes across twelve occurrences of "the dog" on the first page. Other examples can be observed throughout the novel: "He **held up** his right **hand** and **spread** his **fingers out in a fan**. I **held up** my left **hand** and **spread** my **fingers out in a fan** and we made our **fingers** and thumbs touch each other."²⁰ The poverty of the narrator's vocabulary, although not a characteristic of Asperger's Syndrome, gives the narrative a naïve dimension. As far as the repetitions and redundancy are concerned they reflect once more the absence of aesthetic purpose in Christopher's literary project.

Another particularity of the narrator's vocabulary can be observed at the level of adjectives. Throughout the novel Christopher rarely uses affective qualifying terms. For instance, when describing the dead dog he does not indicate whether he found it nice or mean; frightful or friendly but only describes it objectively in terms of its colour, size, and fur. While describing the policeman and policewoman in chapter 11, he notices the "little hole in [the policewoman's] tights" and the "big orange leaf stuck to the bottom of the [policeman's] shoe" but does not give any evaluative comment.²¹ The presence of affective vocabulary is limited throughout the text and restricted to non human and

¹⁹Laurent MOTTRON, "Chapitre 7 - Émotions et traitement de l'information dans l'autisme : vues de l'intérieur" in *L'autisme: une autre intelligence*, (Sprimont, Belgique: Mardaga, 2004), pp. 179 - 196.

²⁰*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 21.

²¹*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 7.

inanimate elements. He likes dogs, the police, murder mystery novels and when “things [are] in a nice order”; he hates France, lies and yellow and brown things. When talking about his mother, father or Siobhan the affective vocabulary the reader might expect is replaced by objective descriptions. For instance, “Siobhan has long blonde hair and wears glasses which are made of green plastic.”²² Christopher’s apparent difficulty in expressing emotions towards people, as opposed to animals and inanimate elements, is typical and representative of his autistic condition.²³

Figures of speech and aesthetics

Another characteristic is the absence of poetic and aesthetic figures of speech. Christopher claims that he does not like, or even understand, metaphors for they are lies according to him. The reader is made aware from the beginning of the novel that they will not come across such figures of style. Only similes, which are not lies, can be observed in the novel. Although figures of speech are used in the narrative such as the frequent anaphoric devices, similes and others, they do not appear as part of Christopher’s strategy to “dress his thoughts”²⁴. Indeed, from the narrative the reader understands that Christopher’s main aim is to reveal the truth, to be clear and objective and that he has no aesthetic pretensions. The apparent absence of poetic figures of speech or their use in a non-poetic and non-aesthetic way (for instance: similes are used in a very practical way to convey the image more clearly) can be seen as a stylistic feature in itself on the part of Mark Haddon. In this manner, he represents Christopher’s practical vision of his story and his lack of imagination, of which he admits: “Other people have pictures in their heads, too. But they are different because the pictures in

²²*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 5.

²³Peter Vermeulen, *Autisme et émotions*, (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2011).

²⁴Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p. 15.

my head are all pictures of things which really happened. But other people have pictures in their heads of things which aren't real and didn't happen.”²⁵

2.3.2. An unusual narrator: point of view, mind-style and narratorial strategy

Christopher is a peculiar narrator who admits he does not have imagination and does not like or understand basic figures of speech. His Asperger's Syndrome affects the points of view expressed in the novel. He also differs from the usual narrators by his being aware of his text as a text and the unusual discourse he introduces his non-autistic reader to.

Points of view and mind-style

When discussing the points of view observable in a text, the distinction should be made between spatial, temporal, psychological and ideological perspectives. These three distinctive points of view indicate the position of the addresser towards the message he or she conveys. They orient the discourse in terms of its content and form. Spatial and temporal points of view are, in Fowler's terms, the “easiest to understand” and to identify: the former examines how places are represented in the narrative while the latter observes the rendering of the story time-line (slow or rapid, continuous or disrupted). The ideological point of view refers to the presence of a specific ideology or belief-system, in the narrative. Finally, the psychological point of view corresponds to the analysis of the narrator as an individual, with his own psychology, vision and assessment of the events. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* the reader is aware, from the first page of the novel, of the narrator's peculiar psychological

²⁵*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 98.

and ideological points of view and of a very detailed and precise spatio-temporal point of view. Indeed, while times and places are described and commented upon with great precision by Christopher (“It was 7 minutes after midnight.”; “She lived on the opposite side of the road, two houses to the left.”²⁶) the lack of personal involvement, emotions and judgments, makes the ideological point of view less clear and identifiable. Commenting on ideological and psychological points of view, Fowler uses the example of William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* in which “Benjy, a 33 year-old man with the mind of a young child” is the character from whose point of view parts of the narrative are told. In this case, language shows “the limitations of Benjy’s grasp of the world around him”²⁷. In Christopher’s case, the text shows his limited capacity to be affected or to take the measure of the emotional load of the events he is telling. Therefore, no emotional or affective dimension is conveyed while he describes the crime-scene in the first chapter; only the precision of places, objects, and time are felt in the extract. Christopher keeps referring to “the dog” while he reveals that he knew him, as he was his friends’ dog, Wellington.

Furthermore, as already mentioned, evaluative vocabulary although rare can be observed when referring to objects (when talking about red cars), animals (when Christopher refers to dogs and to Toby), or general concepts and realities (police, Mathematics, France, being touched) but not to human beings. This reveals Christopher’s ideological point of view and his complicated human interactions. He cannot read other people’s emotions, nor express his own. The distance he puts between himself and the other humans reveals his difficulty in communicating with other individuals, partly due to the fact, he argues, that people tend to lie whereas numbers,

²⁶*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 1.

²⁷Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 133.

the solar system and dogs do not. The scarcity of modals also reveals an aspect of Christopher's psychological point of view: his obsession with truth and scientific precision.

The language of the text helps constructing the image of the narrator and his world-view, ideology and psychological characteristics. What was previously called the "point of view on the ideological plane"²⁸ or simply the ideological point of view merges with the concept of mind-style. Leech and Short named "mind-style" the way the fictional world established in the novel is apprehended by the narrator. Like Fowler in his demonstration of unusual psychological points of view, the two linguists chose to exemplify what they called "very unusual mind-styles" with an extract from Benjy's discourse in *The Sound and the Fury*.²⁹ They postulate that narrators with particular psychological and mental conditions constitute unusual mind-styles. As far as Christopher is concerned, the unusual dimension of his mind-style shows in his emotional detachment and in the contrast between his obvious intelligence and the naïve simplicity of his syntactic and lexical choices. The uniqueness and unusualness of his discourse are also to be found in the way he violates the standards and norms of literature. He is an unusual mind, and does not correspond to the image of the narrator most readers are familiar with.

Narratorial strategy

The novel is introduced and presented to the reader by the narrator himself: "But I do like murder mystery novels. So I am writing a murder mystery novel."³⁰ Yet, the

²⁸Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 150.

²⁹Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction – A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, (London and New York: Longman, 1990), pp. 202 – 207.

³⁰*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 5.

form and content of the narrative seem in contradiction with this assertion. Moreover Christopher announces a detective story while the text quickly focuses on his personal and familial experiences.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time appears more like a project in construction, a draught for Christopher's novel, than like the finished form of his murder mystery story. The narrator tells his reader about the process and context of his literary undertaking more than about the mystery and investigation. Only the first chapter is part of the standard detective story. About this passage, Christopher explains: "Siobhan said that the book should begin with something to grab people's attention. That is why I started with the dog."³¹ Most of the narrative shows the awareness the narrator has of his text as text. Intertextual and metatextual references are rife. Indeed, Christopher explains how and why he undertook to write his text; he gives his models and references such as Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories ("[Siobhan] said that it was usually people who were killed in murder mystery novels. I said that two dogs were killed in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* [...]"³²) and comments on his own style in the core of the text or in footnotes ("This will not be a funny book."³³; "This is not a *metaphor*, it is a *simile* [...]"³⁴; "But this is what is called a digression, and now I am going back to the fact that it was a Good Day."³⁵). Some of his comments are in contradiction with his project: he is writing a novel, but claims that he does not "like proper novels because they are lies about things which didn't happen" while he wants to

³¹*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 5.

³²*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 6, (bold types in the text).

³³ *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 10.

³⁴ *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 22, ("*simile*" and "*metaphor*" italicized in the text).

³⁵*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 33

write only about true events.³⁶ Christopher situates his text on the edge between fiction and reality; between literature and scientific or academic writing through the use of footnotes, appendix, tables and illustrations.

The peculiar narrative voice and narratorial strategy are part of Haddon's authorial strategy to portray Christopher. The latter sees the world in a unique way. He notices and gives importance to elements that non-autistic readers would not necessarily perceive. The issue tackled by the narrative voice is not only that of autism. Haddon, through Christopher's discourse, offers a unique point of view and questions literature, fiction and the usual conventions of novel-writing.

2.3.3. Resorting to visual elements

Among the different particularities of the novel in terms of its form is the constant resorting to visual artifices within the text: lists, different font, bold letters, italics, tables, logos, pictures and others. What Patrick Rafroidi called the material or physical presentation of texts is given considerable space and importance in Christopher's discourse.³⁷ Peter Vermeulen argues in his description of autism in general and Asperger's Syndrome in particular, that autistic patients tend to show what they mean (through images, drawings or gestures) rather than to speak or write about it.³⁸

³⁶*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 25.

³⁷Patrick Rafroidi, *Précis de stylistique anglaise*. (Paris: Ophrys, 1994), pp. 19-33.

³⁸Peter Vermeulen, "Montrer davantage et moins parler" in *Autisme et émotions*, (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2011), pp. 117-119.

Typographical variation

The most recurrent visual feature used in the novel is the variation in typography: italics, bold letters, capital letters, line breaks and justification. To highlight some words or expressions or to represent the effect they have on him, Christopher often resorts to bold type, italics and capital letters as opposed to lower case letters. These variations are used in different contexts, for instance applied to titles of books (“*The House of the Baskervilles*” in chapter 7), sentences to be commented on (chapter 13 and chapter 29), numbers in a list (chapter 13), fossilised expressions or concepts used by the narrator (“**Good Day**”, “**Quite Good Day**” and “**Black Day**” in chapter 47) and words, numbers and expressions from signs or graffiti that he comes across on his journey (“And there were signs saying **There are 53, 963 holiday cottages in Scandinavia and Germany** and **VITABIOTICS** and **3435** and **Penalty £10 if you fail to show a valid ticket for your entire journey** and **Discover Gold, Then Bronze** [...]”³⁹). This typographical variation is used for elements which are important to Christopher, which need to be highlighted in the text or which stand out from the landscape around the narrator, catching his attention.

Special characters are also used, and highlighted in bold type, to express Christopher’s confusion in the train station while facing numerous illuminated signs.⁴⁰ Furthermore, variation in the typography is used to dissociate inserted texts by other authors from Christopher’s narrative. His mother’s letters are in bold type, quotations from Conan Doyle’s works are in italics and presented with narrower margins, texts from magazines or signs are in bold-type, capital letters and with different margins.

³⁹*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 226.

⁴⁰See Appendix, Illustration 1, p. 86

Christopher also uses reproductions of handwritten elements in the novel such as his name and address written by his mother.⁴¹

Finally, another variation in conventional layout can be observed throughout the novel: the frequent use of line breaks to end very short paragraphs, and the opening of each new one by an indent. The text is lightened by the mostly very short paragraphs, composed of one to twenty lines only, and the introduction of each by an indent. The reader understands from the novel that structure and organization are obsessions for the narrator and the layout of his narrative is in harmony with his personality and scientific discourse.

Lists

As part of the scientific dimension of Christopher's narrative the reader comes across several lists. Indeed, the narrator does not include the elements he lists in his text by introducing them with conjunctions or expressions with a view to an aesthetic rendering. On the contrary, he presents items in the form of a list introduced by numbers, letters or dashes as illustrated in the following example:

“These are some of my Behavioural Problems:

- A. Not talking to people for a long time.
- B. Not eating or drinking anything for a long time.
- C. Not liking being touched.”⁴²

The visual effect of the list is accentuated by it being presented with a different justification and reduced margins, in contrast with the rest of the narrative. This variation illustrates Christopher's obsessions with clarity and scientificity.

⁴¹See Appendix, Illustration 2, p. 87

⁴²*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, pp. 59-60 (Christopher lists until point R).

Diagrams, illustrations, pictures

Standards of written literary works are also questioned in the novel by the constant use of pictures, drawings and diagrams which bring the reader into the universe of children's literature, newspapers and magazines or academic papers. Illustrations take the form of drawings which Christopher inserts in the core of the text, as part of his sentence either following columns or directly following the last word (for instance: Siobhan's drawings of faces to help Christopher express his feelings⁴³).

Among the illustrations observed in the novel there are also figures and tables which correspond to scientific concepts developed by Christopher. The reader comes across a schema of "our galaxy"⁴⁴, one of the speed of light⁴⁵ and tables of cardinal and prime numbers⁴⁶. The scientific diagrams, along with the use of footnotes and an appendix, give the text the form of an academic paper or of an article from a scientific journal. Finally, illustrations also show through the insertion of pictures such as the wooden puzzle, the card from his mother with cars on the front, the stamp from his mother's letter, the pictures of aliens he painted in art class, the cow and its particular markings, the map of England, the picture of a cloud over the roofs, logos of brands or of the London Underground, and others.⁴⁷

Christopher struggles to apprehend the world around him and resorts to images and visual representations of it, rather than verbal descriptions. The use of illustrations emphasizes the variable nature of the novel oscillating between literary fiction and scientific realism, and between murder mystery novel and children's literature.

⁴³See Appendix, Illustration 3, p. 88.

⁴⁴See Appendix, Illustration 4, p. 89.

⁴⁵See Appendix, Illustration 5, p. 90.

⁴⁶See Appendix, Illustration 6, p. 91.

⁴⁷See Appendix, Illustration 7, pp. 92-93.

To conclude, Mark Haddon has adapted the form and content of his novel to the psychological and ideological particularities of his fictional narrator. He uses his narrator to provide an insight into autism and offers a unique and uncommon piece of literature. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* falls within the category of major works such as the Sherlock Holmes stories but constantly maltreats the norms and rules of standard fictional literature. Christopher Boone, as Sherlock Holmes in “Silver Blaze”, notices and gives importance to elements and details, which most people, and most readers, would not have paid attention to. He offers his vision of the world and of literature. The novel being often catalogued as a children’s book, its innovative and critical dimensions have taken the back seat. Although it became rapidly a best-seller, was adapted as a play; has been reviewed in numerous magazines and was examined as a representation of autistic language, critical studies of the novel from the academic spheres of language or literature are still rare.

Chapter Four: three different works, the same narratorial strategy

Written by different authors, at different times, in different countries, and dealing with distinct issues, the three novels from the corpus are apparently unrelated. Yet when analyzing and comparing them, some resemblances can be found. The three narrators do not share the same economic, educational or social backgrounds but have in common that they are teenagers. They give their visions of their environments with a perception on the boundary between the innocence of childhood and the more critical perspective of adulthood. Another common point between the three narratives concerns their form: all three are first-person narratives with a single narrator throughout the novel. The use of a sole voice for the whole text limits the possibility the authors have to give a description of the narrator. This explains the importance of a characteristic discourse to help the reader picture the characters of Mene, Holden and Christopher. The three novels share the same authorial strategy: the use of stylistic variation to characterize the narrators.

Defamiliarization

To represent their unconventional narrators, the authors use a process of defamiliarization through stylistic variation. Defamiliarization, also called de-automatization¹, is a concept elaborated during the first half of the twentieth century by the Prague school of poetics and the Russian formalists like Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984). Shklovsky identified in the arts the technique of estrangement which consists of

¹The term “de-automatization” is used by Katie Wales in *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (London, New York: Longman, 1994), pp. 105-106; and in Leech and Short’s *Style in Fiction*, (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p. 28.

using unfamiliar or unconventional forms of expression to “force [the audience] to look, to be critical.”² Leech and Short comment on the technique arguing that “the aesthetic exploitation of language takes the form of surprising a reader into a fresh awareness of, and sensitivity to, the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an ‘automatized’ background of communication.”³ In the three novels of the corpus, the more common language of literature has been replaced by orality, non-standard grammatical forms, syntactic particularities, redundancy, scientificity over aesthetics and poetics, and other variations. The authors based the process of defamiliarization on the employment of a language generally used by a minority, and rarely represented in literature. Most readers are not familiar with Nigerian Pidgin, 1950s American teenagers’ vernacular or texts by autistic authors. The unusualness of the language forces the reader to grow aware of it. Language is given the same importance as the story itself: it is not only a code used to convey a message but a message in itself.

Criticism

Defamiliarization and, more generally, the use of non-standard forms of English allow the authors to give their works a critical dimension. Ken Saro-Wiwa tackles the issue of colonization and the linguistic hegemony of English over local dialects through Mene clinging to his African culture. J.D. Salinger illustrates the ambiguity of adolescence and has his narrator violate the “phoney” adult norms through violating the rules of written Standard English. Finally, Mark Haddon offers a new vision of literature with the unusual sensibility and point of view of his autistic narrator. The three novels have in common that they offer a reflexion about language in general:

²Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 39-52.

³Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p. 28.

cultural influences, authenticity or phoneyess, conveying lies or reality, aesthetics and exactness.

Purposes

The texts disrupt the common knowledge the reader has of literature and offer an unusual perspective through unusual voices.

Ken Saro-Wiwa created a voice to be heard widely whereas Nigerian child-soldiers do not usually have the occasion to testify and to address a large audience.

J.D. Salinger wrote the testimony of a sixteen-year-old boy, Holden, while the latter's generation and more generally his age-group are not often heard. Holden feels, like most teenagers, that he is not heard by the adult world. Through his novel, Salinger gives an opportunity to teenagers to be heard, and to adults to hear them.

In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Mark Haddon offers insight into the mind of an autistic child while the pathology is little known and real testimonies are difficult to read and understand for non-autistic and non-medical people.

Adaptation

In order to convey their messages to a large and varied audience, the authors had to adapt the language used. Indeed, another common point between the novels is that although representing a particular reality (Nigerian child-soldiers during the Biafran war, the 1950s generation of teenagers and the Asperger's Syndrome) the authors adapted the language of their fiction to make their texts intelligible to readers from other times, places, ages and backgrounds.

Mene's English is neither NP, nor NE. It is understandable for readers who do not speak Nigerian dialects or other African languages.

Holden's discourse blends features of generational and local dialects but uses on the whole a standard variety of English, intelligible by speakers of English from different countries and times.

Finally, Christopher's narrative, although representative of the consequences of autism on language, does not present the reader with complex scientific vocabulary and concepts. The recurrent digressions in Christopher's discourse are limited and can always be linked to the main plot. The complex notions are explained or illustrated.

Thus, the discourses represent specific minorities but they have been adapted (lightened, simplified or "stylized") to reach a readership beyond these minorities. Roger Fowler writes: "any activity is creative which is capable, under the right conditions of production and reception, of reanalyzing people's theory of the way the world works."⁴ The process of adaptation of the language observed in the three texts corresponds to the "right conditions of production and reception" under which the authors are able to represent a reality which is rarely dealt with and little known.

To conclude, the three texts and the three narrators do not at first seem to have anything in common. Yet their creators and the purpose behind the creation are what link the works together. The novels represent reality but do not necessarily aim for realism. The language is manipulated to draw the reader's attention to specific details of the context and of the narrator. The artificiality of these discourses is openly discussed in the texts and even highlighted as shown for instance by Saro-Wiwa's subtitle "a

⁴Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 40.

novel in rotten English” or the frequent metatextual comments to be found in *The Catcher in the Rye* or *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The language of the texts “draws the reader’s attention to its own artifice of construction”.⁵

The reader comes away from the three works with knowledge from a specific field rarely dealt with in literary works and with a renewed and de-automatized perspective on language and literature. The authorial strategy is a creative process of defamiliarization and disruption of norms. It also implies a criticism of the world (and more precisely of the reality represented) and of literature.

⁵Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 73.

CONCLUSION

The initial intention of this dissertation was to observe the strategy elaborated by the authors to characterize their auto-narrators through the text, at the linguistic level, rather than at the hermeneutic level of the story. The study of the language in the texts as part of the authorial strategy to portray the narrators is a perspective which, although less common than classic literary criticism, has been used in previous studies to comment on *Sozaboy – A Novel in Rotten English* and *The Catcher in the Rye*. Regarding *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, perhaps because more recent or because often considered a children's book, no previous papers of such type have been found in the course of this research. The selection of three unrelated works enabled different realizations of the same strategy and their effects to be apprehended. It has been observed that in the three texts, different layers (lexis, syntax, grammar or graphology) are more or less subject to variation depending on the image the authors wished to convey of their characters. The language of each novel is anchored in a particular context (geographical, social and temporal) and adapted to a particular individual (his state of mind, point of view, psychological situation and personal history). This characterization through the creation of a unique style of language requires that the authors have knowledge of the reality they aim to represent. Such a strategy also demands creativity to adapt the language and to convey that reality through fiction to the reader, to be capable of establishing the “right conditions of production and reception”¹ for the novels to maximize the impact of their message.

¹Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 40.

The interest of characterization through stylistic variation in first-person narratives is multiple both in the context of research, and for the reader. As far as the academic analysis is concerned, the representation of the narrative voice through linguistic particularities allows an interdisciplinary approach involving both a linguistic analysis and literary criticism of the text. The narrative is considered through the tangible proof it offers to support interpretations based on sensitivity or aesthetic notions. For a reading with no academic or critical purposes, the same multiplicity of interests can be observed. First-person narratives in which the message is predominantly conveyed through the form of the text force the reader to pay a special attention to the language. The reader has to be aware of the stylistic variation used to be able to picture the narrators. The three novels offer a reflection on the reality they present through an innovative and surprising use of language. Norms and standards of English are disrupted and so are the conventions of reading literature and fiction. Through the voices of their narrators, the three authors each make accessible a reality that is rarely represented or heard. They have adapted this reality so that the reader adapts their reading to the unfamiliar language they are presented with.

The use of stylistic variation, and more specifically of an unfamiliar non-standard variety of English, to create the narrative voice of their novels is to some extent an act of commitment. The choice Saro-Wiwa, Salinger and Haddon make to give a voice to minorities through their narrators is clearly the sign of an ideological engagement. The choice they make of using a fictional representation of these minorities' language varieties rather than a standard and more common form of English is also the sign of a deeply committed authorial strategy. In the case of Saro-Wiwa, his novel and the use of an invented variety of English ("rotten English") fall within the

sphere of post-colonial African literature and the questioning of the hegemony of Standard English. As for J.D. Salinger, his use of an American generational vernacular with non-standard forms, blasphemous expressions and slang words in a written piece of literature disrupts the standards of literature, literary language, correctness and appropriateness. Finally, Mark Haddon's choice to represent the discourse of an autistic writer offers an original vision of literature in which the plot and precision matter more than aesthetic and poetic effects. Although it has been adapted and simplified to fit the context of fiction, the discourse imagined by Haddon has the reader enter and try to apprehend the world of autism.

The innovation brought by the strategies of the three authors who use language as a message more than as a channel required innovation in the analytic and critical perspectives applied to the texts. The three novels are stories to be analyzed in terms of the message, the reality, and the ideas they convey from the perspective of a conventional literary criticism. The novels are also discourses, linguistic entities. Through the creation of fictional languages they raise questions about real languages. The authors challenge their readership: the reading of the three works is based on the authors' modeling a language and the reader deciphering this language and adapting their linguistic and literary knowledge. Such works require the adaptability of the authors and their reader, and the active receptiveness and open-mindedness of the latter.

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APPENDIX

This appendix contains examples of illustrations, drawings, diagrams and typographical variations observed in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

ILLUSTRATION 1

be Mother and the policeman in Swindon had phoned her up with the phone number I told him.

But he said, 'A policeman.'

And I said, 'I know.'

And he said, 'Oh. Right.' And then he said, 'You wait here, then, and I'll go and tell them,' and he walked back down the side of the train.

So I carried on walking. And I could still feel the feeling like a balloon inside my chest and it hurt and I covered my ears with my hands and I went and stood against the wall of a little shop which said **Hotel and Theatre Reservations Tel: 0207 402 5164** in the middle of the big room and then I took my hands away from my ears and I groaned to block out the noise and I looked round the big room at all the signs to see if this was London. And the signs said

Sweet Pastries **Heathrow Airport Check-In Here Bagel Factory EAT excellence and taste** **UD!** sushi **Stationlink**
Buses **W H Smith MEZZANINE Heathrow Express**
Clinique First Class Lounge **FULLERS easyCar.com The Mad Bishop and Bear Public House Fuller's London Pride Dixons**
Our Price Paddington Bear at Paddington Station **Tickets**
Taxis **↑↑ Toilets** First Aid **Eastbourne Terrace** **ing-**
ton Way Out Praed Street The Lawn **Q** Here Please
Upper Crust Sainsbury's **Local** **i** **Information** **GREAT**
WESTERN FIRST **®** **Position Closed Closed** **Position**
Closed **Shop Fast Ticket Point** **☒** **Millie's Cookies**

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Coffee **FERGIE TO STAY AT MANCHESTER UNITED Freshly Baked Cookies and Muffins** Cold Drinks **Penalty Fares** Warning **Savoury Pastries** Platforms 9-14 **Burger King Fresh Filled!** the reef^o café bar **business travel special edition** **TOP 75 ALBUMS** Evening Standard

But after a few seconds they looked like this

Sweathr **ow** **Airpheck-lagtory** **EAenceandtaste**
UD! **suUserHeesortCWHSmithEANEINStalnH*ioeadBho**
athrnieFirlassLoULLERnreHeBSeasyCar.comTheMpanard
BebileFuler'sLonPrndoidePaiesstrDzzixonsOur&PPurdEboi
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zd! **the** **resit** **rh** **aspectionTOP&UMSEvedard**

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because there were too many and my brain wasn't working

ILLUSTRATION 2

Christopher
Swinden

I only know 3 people who do little circles instead of dots over the letter *i*. And one of them is Siobhan, and one of them was Mr Loxely who used to teach at the school, and one of them was Mother.

And then I heard Father opening the front door so I took one envelope from under the book and I put the lid back on the shirt box and I put the toolbox back on top of it and I closed the cupboard door really carefully.

Then Father called out, 'Christopher?'

I said nothing because he might be able to hear where I was calling from. I stood up and walked around the bed to the door, holding the envelope, trying to make as little noise as possible.

Father was standing at the bottom of the stairs and I thought he might see me, but he was flicking through the post which had come that morning so his head was pointing downwards. Then he walked away from the foot of the stairs towards the kitchen and I closed the door of his room very quietly and went into my own room.

I wanted to look at the envelope, but I didn't want to make

ILLUSTRATION 3

3

My name is Christopher John Francis Boone. I know all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,507.

Eight years ago, when I first met Siobhan, she showed me this picture



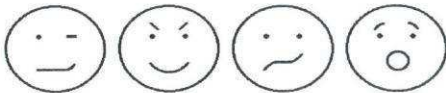
and I knew that it meant 'sad', which is what I felt when I found the dead dog.

Then she showed me this picture



and I knew that it meant 'happy', like when I'm reading about the Apollo space missions, or when I am still awake at three or four in the morning and I can walk up and down the street and pretend that I am the only person in the whole world.

Then she drew some other pictures



but I was unable to say what these meant.

2

I got Siobhan to draw lots of these faces and then write down next to them exactly what they meant. I kept the piece of paper in my pocket and took it out when I didn't understand what someone was saying. But it was very difficult to decide which of the diagrams was most like the face they were making because people's faces move very quickly.

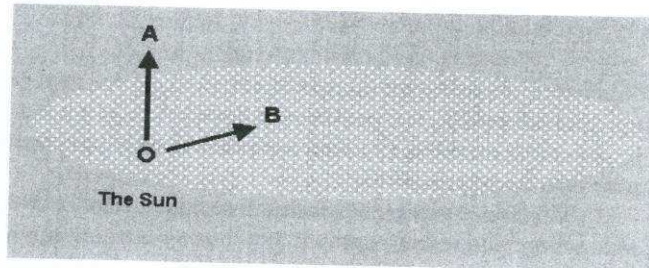
When I told Siobhan that I was doing this, she got out a pencil and another piece of paper and said it probably made people feel very



and then she laughed. So I tore the original piece of paper up and threw it away. And Siobhan apologised. And now if I don't know what someone is saying I ask them what they mean or I walk away.

3

ILLUSTRATION 4



When you look in direction A, at 90° to the disc, you don't see many stars. But when you look in direction B, you see lots more stars because you are looking into the main body of the galaxy, and because the galaxy is a disc you see a stripe of stars.

And then I thought about how, for a long time, scientists were puzzled by the fact that the sky is dark at night, even though there are billions of stars in the universe and there must be stars in every direction you look, so that the sky should be full of starlight because there is very little in the way to stop the light reaching earth.

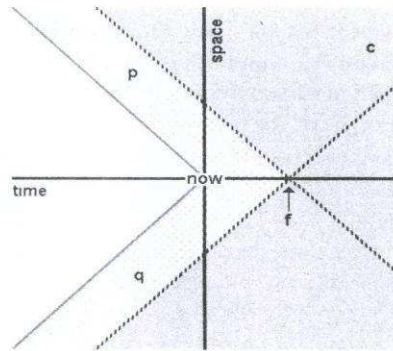
Then they worked out that the universe was expanding, that the stars were all rushing away from one another after the Big Bang, and the further the stars were away from us the faster they were moving, some of them nearly as fast as the speed of light, which was why their light never reached us.

I like this fact. It is something you can work out in your own mind just by looking at the sky above your head at night and thinking without having to ask anyone.

ILLUSTRATION 5

the speed of light, you may come back and find that all your family is dead and you are still young and it will be the future but your clock will say that you have only been away for a few days or months.

And because nothing can travel faster than the speed of light this means that we can only know about a fraction of the things that go on in the universe, like this



And this is a map of everything and everywhere, and the future is on the right and the past is on the left and the gradient of the line **c** is the speed of light, but we can't know about the things which happen in the shaded areas even though some of them have already happened, but when we get to **f** it will be possible to find out about things which happen in the lighter areas **p** and **q**.

ILLUSTRATION 6

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Chapters in books are usually given the cardinal numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and so on. But I have decided to give my chapters prime numbers 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13 and so on because I like prime numbers.

This is how you work out what prime numbers are.

First, you write down all the positive whole numbers in the world.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	etc.

Then you take away all the numbers that are multiples of 2. Then you take away all the numbers that are multiples of 3. Then you take away all the numbers that are multiples of 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 and so on. The numbers that are left are the prime numbers.

	2	3		5		7			
11		13				17		19	
		23						29	
31						37			
41		43				47			etc.

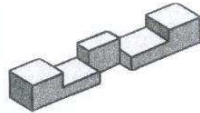
ILLUSTRATION 7

When I got to the police station they made me take the laces out of my shoes and empty my pockets at the front desk in case I had anything in them that I could use to kill myself or escape or attack a policeman with.

The sergeant behind the desk had very hairy hands and he had bitten his nails so much that they had bled.

This is what I had in my pockets

1. A Swiss Army Knife with 13 attachments including a wire-stripper and a saw and a toothpick and tweezers.
2. A piece of string.
3. A piece of a wooden puzzle which looked like this



4. 3 pellets of rat food for Toby, my rat.
5. £1.47 (this was made up of a £1 coin, a 20p coin, two 10p coins, a 5p coin and a 2p coin).
6. A red paperclip.
7. A key for the front door.

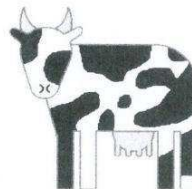
I was also wearing my watch and they wanted me to leave this at the desk as well but I said that I needed to keep my watch

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west corner is lowest (I had a compass because we were going on holiday and I wanted to know where Swindon was when we were in France) and the field is folded downwards slightly along the line between these two corners so that the north-west and south-east corners are slightly lower than they would be if the field was a flat inclined plane.

6. I can see three different types of grass and two colours of flowers in the grass.
7. The cows are mostly facing uphill.

And there were 31 more things in this list of things I noticed but Siobhan said I didn't need to write them all down. And it means that it is very tiring if I am in a new place because I see all these things, and if someone asked me afterwards what the cows looked like, I could ask which one, and I could do a drawing of them at home and say that a particular cow had patterns on it like this



And I realise that I told a lie in **Chapter 13** because I said, 'I cannot tell jokes', because I do know 3 jokes that I can tell and I

Then I was really confused because Mother had never worked as a secretary for a firm that made things out of steel. Mother had worked as a secretary for a big garage in the centre of town. And Mother had never lived in London. Mother had always lived with us. And Mother had never written a letter to me before.

There was no date on the letter so I couldn't work out when Mother had written the letter and I wondered whether someone else had written the letter and pretended to be Mother.

And then I looked at the front of the envelope and I saw that there was a postmark and there was a date on the postmark and it was quite difficult to read, but it said



Which meant that the letter was posted on 16th October 1997, which was 18 months after Mother had died.

And then the door of my bedroom opened and Father said, 'What are you doing?'

I said, 'I'm reading a letter.'

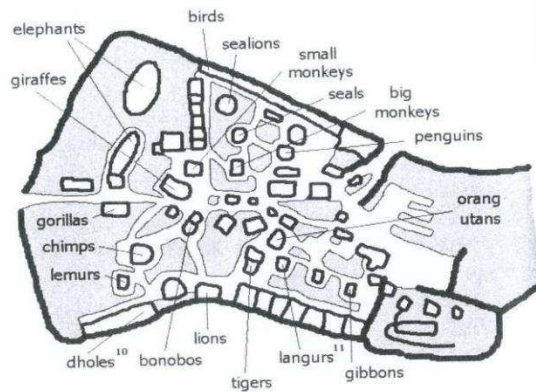
And he said, 'I've finished the drilling. That David Attenborough nature programme's on telly if you're interested.'

I said, 'OK.'

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in a fan, and I held up my left hand and spread my fingers out in a fan and we made our fingers and thumbs touch each other.

Then I got out a piece of paper from my bag and I did a map of the zoo from memory as a test. The map was like this



Then we went and looked at the giraffes. And the smell of their poo was like the smell inside the gerbil cage at school when we had gerbils, and when they ran their legs were so long it looked like they were running in slow motion.

Then Father said we had to get home before the roads got busy.

¹⁰ The Dhole is *The Indian Wild Dog* and it looks like a fox.
¹¹ The Langur is *The Entellus Monkey*.

And she said, 'If you do start to feel sad about this. I want you to know that you can come and talk to me about it. Because I think talking to me will help you feel less sad. And if you don't feel sad but you just want to talk to me about it, that would be OK, too. Do you understand?'

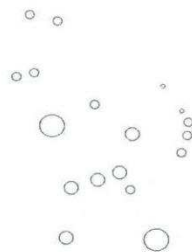
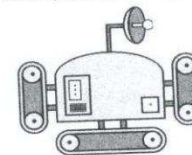
And I said, 'I understand.'

And she said, 'Good.'

And I replied, 'But I don't feel sad about it. Because Mother is dead. And because Mr Shears isn't around any more. So I would be feeling sad about something that isn't real and doesn't exist. And that would be stupid.'

And then I practised maths for the rest of the morning and at lunch I didn't have the quiche because it was yellow, but I did have the carrots and the peas and lots of tomato ketchup. And for afters I had some blackberry and apple crumble, but not the crumble bit because that was yellow too, and I got Mrs Davis to take the crumble bit off before she put it onto my plate because it doesn't matter if different sorts of food are touching before they are actually on your plate.

Then, after lunch, I spent the afternoon doing art with Mrs Peters and I painted some pictures of aliens which looked like this



And there aren't any lines in space, so you could join bits of **Orion** to bits of **Lepus** or **Taurus** or **Gemini** and say that they were a constellation called **The Bunch of Grapes** or **Jesus** or **The Bicycle** (except that they didn't have bicycles in Roman and Greek times which was when they called **Orion** Orion).

And anyway, **Orion** is not a hunter or a coffee maker or a dinosaur. It is just Betelgeuse and Bellatrix and Alnilam and Rigel and 17 other stars I don't know the names of. And they are nuclear explosions billions of miles away.

And that is the truth.

MOTS-CLES: stylistique, variations stylistiques, récit à la première personne, roman autobiographique, voix narrative, caractérisation

RESUME: Ce Mémoire met en relation trois romans apparemment très différents en termes de dates de publication, auteurs, origines géographiques et contenu. Les trois ouvrages ont cependant des points communs quant à leur forme: ils sont tous trois des récits à la première personne ; les trois narrateurs sont de jeunes hommes présentant des particularités psychologiques, médicales ou culturelles (l'un est un adolescent en proie à des angoisses et des émotions caractéristique de son âge ; l'un est un enfant-soldat Nigérian; enfin le dernier est atteint du Syndrome d'Asperger, une forme d'autisme). Cette étude vise à étudier comment, à travers des variations stylistiques et donc à travers le langage de leurs textes, les trois auteurs parviennent à produire une certaine image de leurs narrateurs.

KEY-WORDS: linguistics, stylistics, stylistic variation, first-person narrative, mock-autobiography, narrative voice, characterization

ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze the authorial strategy of characterization through stylistic variation in three first-person narratives. The novels of the corpus are apparently quite different in terms of their dates of publication, authors and topics, but they share a common structure and the unusualness of their narrators. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger gives a voice to Holden, an American teenager, suffering from his moodiness and confusing emotions, who questions the world around him. In *Sozaboy – A Novel in Rotten English*, Saro-Wiwa portrays Mene, whose life and experience affect, and show through, his words. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Haddon writes as Christopher, a fifteen-year-old boy suffering from Asperger's Syndrome (a form of autism altering his emotions and his ability to communicate).