

Transcript of Michael Toolan discussing postgraduate supervision

Title: [Michael Toolan discusses postgraduate supervision \(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1d6nfkf1uU\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1d6nfkf1uU)

Duration: 3:35

My name is Michael Toolan and I'm Professor of English Language, here at the University of Birmingham and my special interests are in stylistics, narrative analysis, the texture and structure of language in texts.

I'm particularly interested in literary narratives and one of the things I'm especially interested in at the moment is narrative progression and how a reader makes sense of a narrative as it progresses.

The guidance they get from the language structures in the text and how this sets up certain expectations which might then get manipulated or exploited by the writer, generating things like suspense and surprise, mystery, a sense of gaps, enigmas, secrets.

On the way hand, narrative coherence creates a pressure for there to be full information as a text unfolds. But on the other hand, writers often want to give the reader less than full information to draw them in more.

All the different resources of the language are used in creating those kinds of effects. So I look at traditional grammatical categories like tense and phrase but also newer areas like collocation and fractal patterning and kinds of repetition.

I'm very keen to have people come to work with me, students, researchers, both looking at every aspect of literary narratives, but, in addition, narratives in everyday life.

One of my interests is the narratives or the stories that teenagers tell about themselves or, when pushed, tell about themselves as to where they will be.

What will they be doing when they're 20? What will they be doing when they're 25?

The different kinds of stories that different youngsters tell, reflecting their ambitions, their aspirations and reflecting the narratives that they've heard around themselves and I relate that to the University's mission to reach out to talented youngsters of whatever class and background, some of who we fail to capture at the moment because the potential students themselves don't have a strong enough story about how they will go through university and enter the professions, have high ambitions.

There are other kinds of narratives that I find very interesting to, to do with activity and ageing. The stories that a lot of older people tell themselves along the lines of 'I would do this, except that I'm old and I need to rest'.

So they do less activity, less exercise, they're less ambitious than they might be. Narratives surrounding ageing which is I think a huge area I'm very interested in people working with me on looking at those.