Direct Thought Presentation in Charles Dickens's Fifteen Novels: A Corpus-Stylistic Approach

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The investigation of Dickens's style using corpus tools is not new (see, among, others, Hori, 2004; Mahlberg and Smith, 2012; Mahlberg, Smith and Preston, 2013; Mahlberg, 2013; Stockwell and Mahlberg, 2015; Ruano San Segundo, 2016). This presentation follows in their footsteps. Specifically, I look into Charles Dickens's use of direct thought presentation in his fifteen novels (c. 3.8 million words) using a corpus-stylistic approach. The full texts were downloaded from the Project Gutenberg website and were processed using the *WordSmith Tools 7* (Scott, 2016) software. The aim of the analysis is to delve deeper into Dickens's presentation of his characters' thoughts, an aspect so far underexplored maybe due to the 'lack of psychological inwardness and depth in his characters' (McParland, 2011: 209). Despite such dearth of psychological depth, though, Dickens consistently reported his characters' thoughts throughout his fifteen novels. Therefore, a systematic analysis of how he did so seems in order, if only because no comprehensive account of it has been yet attempted. As will be shown, occurrences of direct thought (henceforth, DT) can be effectively retrieved thanks to a corpus methodology, which makes it possible to systematically analyse Dickens's use of this mode of thought presentation. The analysis will focus on those examples that contain the verb *think*, the reporting verb for thought presentation *par excellence*. For example:

> (1) 'John' thought madame, checking off her work as her fingers knitted, and her eyes looked at the stranger. 'Stay long enough, and I shall knit 'BARSAD' before you go.' (*A Tale of Two Cities*, book 2, chapter 16)
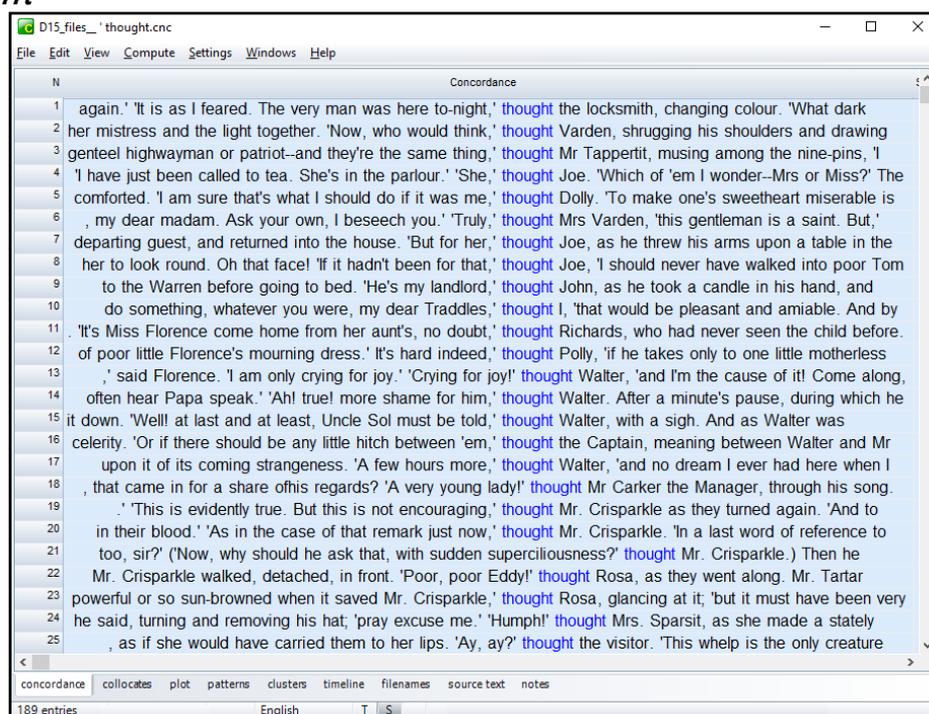
This example contains several characteristic features of Dickens's use of DT, such as the use of a vocative in the reported clause, a suspended reporting clause and the reference to the character's eyes. These and other traits will be investigated in this presentation. As will be shown, they fulfil meaningful functions which relate to significant aspects of Dickens's style, as discussed by other critics. As far as the search for instances of *think* is concerned, several concordance searches were made following the patterns under which the verb is used: *' thought*, *" thought*, *' thinks*, *" thinks*, *' he thought*, *" he thought*, *' he thinks*, *" he thinks*, *' she thought*, *" she thought*, *' she thinks*, *" she thinks*, *' I thought*, *" I thought*, *' I think* and *" I think*.[1] Figure 1, for instance, shows twenty-five examples of the 189 hits retrieved from Dickens's fifteen novels after the concordance search *' thought*.[2]

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[1] As Project Gutenberg texts present irregularities when it comes to the use of inverted commas — texts do not necessarily stick to either simple or double inverted commas consistently —, every concordance had to be made twice.

[2] This concordance search identifies all the occurrences of DT in which, as is the case of the example from *A Tale of Two Cities* shown above, the reporting verb (*thought* in this case) is used immediately after the inverted comma closing the character's thoughts.

Figure 1. Occurrences of *thought* retrieved after concordance search ʼ *thought*

The concordance searches retrieve a total of 244 occurrences of *think* as a DT reporting verb in Dickensʼs fifteen novels, constituting a much wider set of examples than the twenty-one examined by Busse (2010) in the most comprehensive analysis of discourse presentation strategies in nineteenth-century fiction to date.[3]

The analysis of these 244 occurrences will provide solid evidence in support of previous findings on thought presentation in nineteenth-century English narrative fiction, such as the relationship between charactersʼ glances and the presentation of their thoughts or the use of DT in moments of heightened intensity. However, this analysis will also unveil hitherto unremarked patterns in form and function as far as Dickensʼs presentation of his charactersʼ thoughts is concerned: the relationship between body language and the presentation of charactersʼ thoughts (the fact that women are presented in a sitting position, for example), the character information presented in reporting clauses, or the use of suspensions to create an effect of synchronicity between body language and thought presentation, among others. The analysis, in sum, is intended to contribute to a better understanding of Dickensʼs craftsmanship using corpus tools.

The presentation will be divided as follows. I will begin with a brief overview of DT as a strategy for reporting mental discourse and its uses and functions in nineteenth-century English fiction. Next, the methodological procedure used to retrieve the examples will be explained and the results obtained will be presented. The analysis of these results will be divided into four

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[3] It is only fair to note that Busseʼs corpus is composed of excerpts of less than 3,500 words from twenty-two nineteenth-century novels (Busse 2010: 64), being therefore much smaller than the corpus of Dickensʼs novels analysed here.

parts. Firstly, I will discuss the overall distribution of DT across the corpus. Secondly, I will discuss the most striking aspects of Dickens's use of DT from a formal perspective (the use of parentheses enclosing instances of DT, vocatives and exclamations). Thirdly, I will analyse Dickens's use of reporting clauses in DT, focusing on aspects of body language and characterisation. Finally, I will also examine the use of reporting clauses as suspensions; this will allow me to demonstrate that Dickens used these in a very much similar manner to those in direct speech. To do so, the CLiC tool (Corpus Linguistics in Cheshire; see http://clic.bham.ac.uk/) was used, which allows for the systematic retrieval of suspensions from literary texts.

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