

RESEARCH TITLE

Point of View in Simon Stephens' *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*: A Cognitive Stylistic StudyAsst. Lect. Zainab Al Musawi¹

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Abstract

The English playwright, Simon Stephens has written *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2012), a play based on a novel written by Mark Haddon (2003) which is considered as the first adapted play from a novel. The play is about a boy named Christopher who sees the dog of his neighbour dead. So, he makes an investigation to know who the killer is. During the investigation, he discovers that his father is the killer, and his mother is still alive after he has told him that she is dead. Some studies have already been done on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, as novel, by focusing on psychological aspects and relating it to linguistic elements; however, no critic has ever presented a more comprehensive analysis of this work as a play by examining the ASD as a central situation and presenting the worlds that the play consists of, through cognitive stylistic studies. This study clarifies the way that the point of view, DST, and Possible Worlds help in understanding the structure of the play. It shows the way(s) the symptoms of ASD can be related to the way the playwright's point of view is structured and unfolded. The study depends on certain theories and approaches such as McIntyre's (1975-) concept of viewpoint, and how it can be applied on a dramatic text. Deictic shift theory is also used, in addition to possible worlds and Ryan's (1946-) perspective of this theory in order to clarify the structure of the play, and to show the worlds that the play has been structured upon. Furthermore, it analyses the play by drawing on certain linguistic elements like vocabulary, grammar, and deixis. They are applied to the language of the central character, Christopher. Consequently, through the mentioned approaches, the point of view of the playwright will be examined to show how autism is represented in the main character of the play.

Key Words: autism, Christopher, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Stephens, McIntyre, Ryan, point of view, deictic shift, possible worlds.

1. Introduction:

Simon William Stephens is an English playwright, born in Stockport, Cheshire, a suburb to the south of Manchester in 1971. During the 1990s, Stephens appeared as a playwright with his play, *Bluebird* (1998), at the Royal Court Theatre in London (Haydon, 2015). Most of Stephens' plays are based on concrete situations, realistic characters and/or externalizing the inner monologue, which means dealing with time and place in a mysterious way (Stephens, 2005, P. 167). *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2012) is a play based on a novel by Mark Haddon under the same name. It is considered as the first adapted work for Stephens from a novel. The play has been adapted in order to show the understanding and realization of Christopher, the protagonist, who has autism spectrum disorder (Ue., 2014, pp.113-114). The play in brief is about a boy named Christopher, who sees the dog of their neighbour dead. He decides to make an investigation to discover who is the killer. During his investigation, Christopher discovers not only the killer, but also his mother is still alive, as his father has told him that she is dead. Later, he decides to go and live with his mother because he thinks that his father is going to kill him after killing the dog and lying to him about his mother.

Many critics dealt with *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) as a novel by focusing on psychological aspects and relating it to linguistic tools. Semino (2014), for example, proved the existence of autism spectrum disorder in Christopher's character, the protagonist, through the use of mind theory in linguistics by discussing the figurative language, grammar, speech presentation, and character behavior and applying some stylistic tools like Grice's maxims and im/politeness theory. In another article, Semino (2007) studied Short and Leech's development of the concept of mind style and its relation with metaphor, corpus linguistic method, and Grice's maxims, and she applied them on Haddon's novel. Furthermore, Ciocia (2009) examined the genre of detective fiction and aimed in her article to clarify the relationship between the crossover success of Haddon's novel and the postmodern revisitation of this detective formula. Greenwell (2004) focused on the autism spectrum disorder in two novels including Haddon's. Wooden (2012) discussed the ethical aspects of the novel, and examined it as a medical narrative by focusing on the illness and disability of Christopher's character in the novel.

None of the critics who are mentioned above has talked about *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* as a play by examining the autism spectrum disorder as a central situation and examining the worlds and the structure of the play through cognitive stylistic studies including point of view and deictic shift theory, as well as certain linguistic elements like grammar, vocabulary, and deixis. So, this research is going to use McIntyre's idea of point of view to examine the writer's viewpoint, and apply the theory of deictic shift, and possible worlds to examine the structure of the play, then link it with a medical study which is autism spectrum disorder. It focuses on a cognitive stylistic model of McIntyre (2006) and his approach of applying point of view to plays as its framework. This approach includes using deictic shift, and possible worlds theories as a way of exploring the viewpoint in dramatic texts.

In addition to the cognitive stylistic approaches, the present study is going to use also linguistic approaches like grammar, deixis and vocabulary. They are going to be applied to the main character of the play in order to figure out the ASD through his language. Consequently, with the help of cognitive stylistic theories, linguistic elements, and comparing the symptoms of ASD, especially those which are concerned with the language, the point of view of the playwright will be revealed.

This research is going to fill the gaps found in other studies; it links medicine to cognitive stylistic studies by examining the ASD in the central character of Stephens' *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and examining the structure of the play, through cognitive stylistic studies, including point of view, deictic shift, and possible worlds theories, in addition to some linguistic approaches such as vocabulary, grammar, and deixis, so as to show the writer's point of view. The purpose of the present study is to show the point of view of the writer, Simon Stephens, and how he depicts the existence of autism in the main character of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, through using two different ways of analysis which are a cognitive stylistic analysis, which is concerned with the structure of the play, and linguistic analysis, which is concerned with the language of the main character.

2. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has been defined by Happé (1994) as a biological disorder and a severe disease of imagination, socialization, and communication. It is usually characterized by difficulties in learning. Ochs and Solomon (2004) have defined autism in their article "Discourse and Autism" as a neurological disease that prevents or curbs the social, cognitive, and emotional functioning of affected individuals (p.139). It can be studied in terms of three levels; biological, cognitive, and behavioral. Each level of these has a different job in understanding autism. The present study is going to concentrate more on the latter two levels.

Concerning the onset of the disease or the early phases of its appearance, they are originated before birth, in which a problem occurs in the genetic pro-gram. This fault results in a complex central nervous system of a human being. Then, the fault moves on smoothly so that the baby seems healthy until the second year in which this fault starts to emerge with some devastating effects. These effects appear in the brain and its development. They are different from one person to another so that they result in a different range of behaviors (Frith, 2008, p.4).

Regarding whether autism is part of the normal continuum social behavior, one may ask 'are we all a little bit autistic?' The answer will be 'Yes' in terms of the behavioral level because the autistic person behaves somehow like the normal one who is very shy in certain situations. But, in terms of biological and cognitive levels, the situation is different and the answer will be 'No' because, in the former level, the autistic individual has some problems in his brain that keep him in a handicapped situation; while in the latter level, the autistic individual has some social difficulties that have a different cause from the normal shy individual's (Happé, 1994, pp.1-3).

Kanner (1943) and Asperger (1944) have contributed in clarifying the features of autism as we have it today, suggesting the features of autism as excellent rote memory,

repetitious movements, grammatical mistakes, problems in language and communication, emotions and social reactions, joint attention, pronoun reversal, and insistence and stubbornness (Happé,1994, pp.8-9). As such, by applying those features on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, it has been discovered that the central character, Christopher, is suffering from autism. First, Christopher, is able to remember exact words, dates and situations. Second, he is having a repeated body actions like, sudden scream, an unexpected groaning, and rolling himself on the ground. Third, Christopher has grammatical mistakes such as bringing the singular and plural together. Four, he has problem in his communication and the way he uses the language such as when he talks about things in unsuitable situations. Five, he has been described as having no emotions towards other people, and he considers them as strangers; for example, the death of his mother, he has not shown any reaction because he considers his mother as stranger who has left him. Six, Christopher, does not have the desire and the ability to join others; he always wants to be alone, and in his own world. Finally, Christopher has been described as stubborn and insists on getting the things that he wants even if it needs to repeat the word or sentence twice or three times.

3. Cognitive Stylistic Analysis:

In this part, this present study is going to examine the point of view theory in dramatic texts, depending on McIntyre's *Point of View in Plays* (2006) as this book shows how point of view can be applied on the dramatic texts and how it affects them linguistically. This will be done by using deictic shift and possible worlds theories. However, to show how the DST is occurring in the play text, this thesis will depend on Ducham, Bruder and Hewitt's *Deixis in Narrative* (1995) and Ryan's *Possible Worlds* (1991) to discover the different worlds and how to shift between them in the play text. Furthermore, certain linguistic approaches are going to be used also and they are going to be applied to the language of the central character of the play, so as to reveal with the writer's point of view in the relationship between content (i.e. autism), and the form (i.e. the textual and cognitive aspects).

4. Theoretical Framework of Point of View

As it is known, point of view refers to the psychological perspectives through which the story is being told. It covers the narrative framework that is employed by the writers, whether it is first or third person, restricted or omniscient perspectives, and it accounts for the basic viewing position that is adapted in the story (Simpson, 1993, pp. 4-10). It is also defined as the angle of telling a story, or the person's perspective on actions or events (Neary,2014, p.175). Point of view is varied in its classification. Firstly, it is classified according to different planes such as spatial, temporal, psychological, and ideological (Neary,2014, p.176). Secondly, it is classified according to the mode of narration, which is either a first-person and/or third-person type of narration (Neary,2014, p.176).

As it has been neglected in the stylistic analysis of drama because it has been considered as a narratological issue, it is noted that McIntyre (2006) has mentioned that drama and prose fiction are two different genres, and they are characterized by the presence of the narrator in prose and his absence in drama. However, this distinction is made between the prototypical members of each category, and the difference between

the two is somewhat more complex than this. Despite of the present of the narrator in traditional drama, nowadays dramatic texts that contain narrators are considered to be as non-prototypical members of the category (p.3).

Certain reasons for the importance of studying point of view in drama have been mentioned by McIntyre such as giving another perspective on how the viewpoint is conveyed in the literary texts (McIntyre, 2004, p.140). It is also used to show that human experiences can be communicated on stage. The playwrights attempt to examine the minds of characters and to establish a viewpoint within the consciousness of one character or more, and to keep the dramatic story in the mouth of the narrator who may not be engaged in the events of the play (McIntyre, 2006, p.270).

Regarding the analysis of point of view in drama, there are a set of elements used such as the characters' position on stage, lighting effects and so on. In drama also, when analyzing point of view, there is a difference between performance and text. For instance, in films and theatre, point of view is experienced directly, whereas, in the dramatic texts, point of view is experienced indirectly through analyzing the language of the text. Therefore, language is considered as the major element that is used to examine point of view in both drama and prose. Stage directions have been considered also as an important way of analyzing point of view. They have two forms, intra, and extra- dialogic stage directions. Intra- dialogic stage directions occur within the speech of certain characters; whereas, extra-dialogic ones are explicit stage directions which are separated from characters' speech in some ways and they can be marked through the use of parentheses and italicization. They also refer to the author's notes when he points out that these comprise a narrative element in the dramatic texts (McIntyre, 2006, pp.77-79).

4.1 Deictic Shift Theory DST

Another way to examine point of view through language is by using deixis or the Deictic Shift Theory (DST). This theory is defined as a cognitive theory that helps in explaining how the reader can move around within the text itself and experience different viewpoints. So, as DST helps the reader to move around the text, he will experience the different worlds of the texts. Thus, in this way, possible worlds theory is going to be used (McIntyre, 2006, pp.12-15). However, DST is defined as the theory that enables the reader to place himself mentally at the deictic center of the text when he has no direct experience of the situation being referred to. Segal has mentioned that since DST is a cognitive theory, so, it has been noticed that readers take a cognitive attitude within the narrative text that they are and they interpret this text according to that perspective. Thus, text interpretation depends on the cognitive attitude of the reader (Duchan et al., 1995, pp.15-16).

DST has certain elements such as deictic center DC. Stockwell (2002) has mentioned that it is one of the main elements of DST; it helps the reader to understand the words that reflect a deictic meaning in the context. For example, 'come and go', 'this and that', and the determined locatives like 'left and right', 'above and below', 'in front and behind', and so forth (p. 43). Deictic center is created by the author in the text. It can be identified through a cognitive understanding of the textual patterning, and it is used dynamically and is shifted as a part of the reading process. Segal says

that the reader and author in the narrative fiction shift from their deictic center of the real world to an imagined location within the story world. This location is considered as a cognitive structure that contains the elements of a certain time and place in the fictional world or in the subjective space of the fictional character (Duchan et al., 1995, p.15).

Deictic field is another important element of DST and in the world of a literary text. Within a text, one can find more than one deictic field, in which they are composed of a range of expressions that can be categorized as spatial, temporal, relational, perceptual, and textual deixis. These expressions are usually arranged around the characters, narrator, and narratee. They are considered as categories of deixis as they are adapted to the literary text (Stockwell, 2002, pp.43-47).

The last important element of deictic shift theory is the deictic projection. It is considered as an element in which people's point of view can be appreciated (Stockwell, 2002, p.43). Deictic projection is varied from being simple into more sophisticated. When reading a text and being able to project the deictic center, this will help to take into account the viewpoints of others (McIntyre, 2006, pp.93-94). As thus, the more elements of deictic shift theory, the different possible worlds of the text can be discovered.

4.2 Possible Worlds Theory

Possible worlds approach is defined by Wales (2014) as any state of affairs that can be conceived. In this approach, there is a debate about the relation between the real world, possible worlds, and the fictional worlds, and the difference between the last two, if there is any (p.330). Lewis (1986), however, has argued that the possible worlds all exist and the actual world is just one among the many other worlds. He has also said that the fictional world is just a particular subtype of the possible worlds (p.97). Wales has mentioned what Ryan (1991) has said about the fictional world in which it is an alternative possible world that has the function of the actual world of a universe projected by the text (Wales, 2014, p.331).

This theory has certain classifications, for instance, Ryan (1991) has stated that when reading a text, there are different worlds can be named as, actual world (AW) which is the center of the system of reality; textual reference world (TRW) which is the world in which the text claims facts for. It is the center of the system of reality which includes textual actual world (TAW) which is the image of the textual reference world. It is defined by McIntyre (2006) as the textual realization of the textual reference world (p.126), and alternative possible world (APW) which is defined as the model system of reality (p.vii). This world is also defined by McIntyre as the mental constructions of the fictional characters (McIntyre, 2006, p.126).

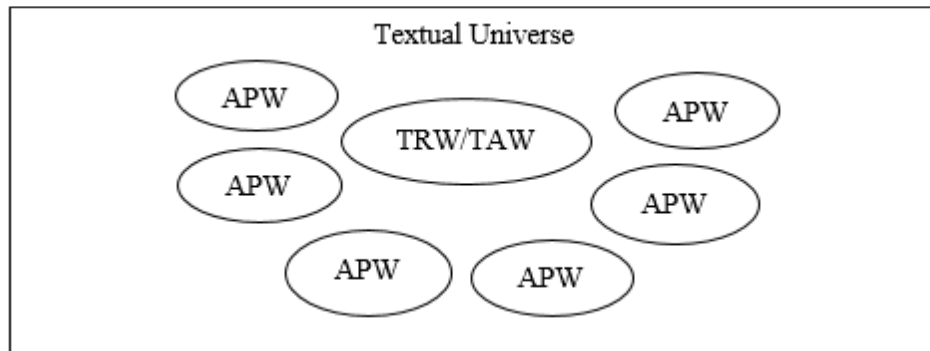


Figure 1. Ryan's typology of Possible Worlds' classification (McIntyre, 2006, p.126)

However, the alternative possible worlds (APWs) has certain subtypes, for instance, knowledge world, obligation world, wish world, and intention world. (McIntyre, 2006, pp.127-131). This type of classification is mentally constructed as a result of being the possible worlds or the APWs are constructed in the mind (Ryan, 1991, pp.19-20). Both Jeffries (2010, p.154) and Semino (2006, pp.778-779) have mentioned that there are tools used in the analysis of the subcategories of the APWs. These tools are the epistemic modality which constructs the belief or hypothetical world in relation to the text producer. The second tool is the deontic modality which constructs the obligation world, and the boulomaic modality which causes a shift to the wish world. Generally, these two theories help to understand and clarify the structure of the play that will enable to discover the playwright's point of view and to prove that the protagonist has autism.

In addition to the cognitive approaches, certain linguistic elements are also going to be used in this research. Through them, the language of the protagonist, Christopher, both in the narrative text world and the dramatic text world is going to be examined in order to see to what extent they can be linked with the autism spectrum disorder. As such, vocabulary is one of the elements that is going to be used to see what kind of words Christopher is using, i.e. the words which are overused and the words that Christopher lacks. Deixis also is going to be used to examine the extent he uses them and what the most used elements are. Furthermore, grammar is going to be applied to discuss the grammatical structure of Christopher's sentences, whether they are short, long, complex, or simple.

4. Concluding Remarks:

Generally speaking, according to what has been mentioned above, and also, according to the dramatic discourse structure and the levels of the dramatic texts that has been presented by Short (1996), this play has more than two levels, and its dramatic discourse structure is as follows:

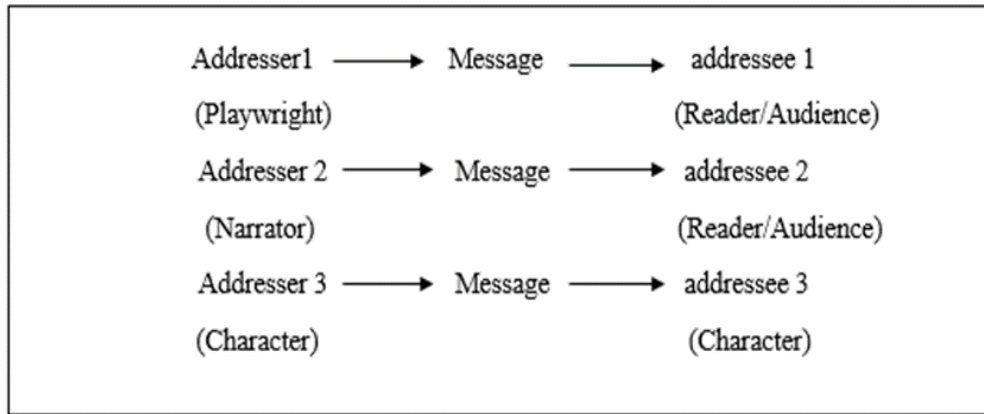


Figure2. The discourse structure of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

It is noted that Siobhan, the teacher, steps out of the framing fictional world to the textual actual world so that to address the readers/ audiences, and with that she becomes a narrator. Then, she returns to the frame story in which she addresses the characters like Christopher, Judy, and so on. Furthermore, the structure of the play according the Possible worlds' classification will be as follows: The AW is the original text, i.e. when the teacher stands on the stage and holds Christopher's notebook preparing to read his story. Then, we move to the TAW, which begins when Siobhan starts reading the story. The APW starts when she narrates what Christopher thinks and feels, i.e. when we move to the conscious-ness of Christopher.

Throughout this research certain cognitive stylistic theories and linguistic elements have been applied in Stephens' *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, in order to examine the playwright's point of view in this play, and to show the link between these two different ways of analysis and the autism spectrum disorder. The cognitive theories that have been used here are the deictic shift and possible worlds theories, which are used to examine the structure of the play. Furthermore, some linguistic approaches like vocabulary, grammar, and deixis have been used also to examine the language of the central character of the play, Christopher. Through such analysis, the viewpoint of the playwright that links those approaches with the ASD is discovered. It has been noted the abnormality of using point of view throughout the play, as we have seen that there is no consistent viewpoint in the text, but, there is a blend of the point of views which is obvious through the narrative and the dramatic text worlds. For instance, when the teacher narrates what Christopher has written, a third-person type of narration is used; although there are certain extracts said by her, the pronoun that has frequently been used is 'I', here an internal type of viewpoint is noted. While Christopher narrates himself, a first-person type of narration is used. It has been noted also when Christopher himself narrates and speaks, he is not consistent in using the pronouns, he sometimes uses the pronoun 'You' instead of 'I' when talking about himself. As for the playwright, he has presented an ideological point of view. Since it is defined as "the way in which a text mediates a set of particular beliefs through either characters, narrator or author" (Simpson, 2004, p.78). We see how the text is structured to show Stephens' point of view to reveal the existence of autism in the main character of the play through the theories mentioned above.

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