

## *Lexical items as facets of identity in discourse*

### *Wyrażenia leksykalne jako nośniki tożsamości w analizie dyskursu*

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#### **Słowa kluczowe**

leksykon, komunikacja, dyskurs, referencyjność, Tabucchi

#### **Abstract**

Lexical items are used in discourse not to provide objective direct reference, nor to reflect a language's system of categorization, nor in accordance with cognitive categories, but rather to communicate different perspectives. Lexical items function as facets of identity, chosen by an author to convey a subjective message. The point is illustrated through an analysis of lexical co-reference in Antonio Tabucchi's *Donna di Porto Pim e altre storie*.

#### **Abstrakt**

Wyrażenia leksykalne nie pełnią w dyskursie funkcji bezpośredniej i obiektywnej referencyjności, nie odzwierciedlają językowego czy kognitywnego systemu kategoryzacji ale stosowane są raczej do zakomunikowania różnych perspektyw opisu. Wyrażenia leksykalne funkcjonują jako nośniki tożsamości dobierane przez autora w taki sposób aby konstytuowały przekaz treści subiektywnych. Teza ta zilustrowana została w niniejszym artykule analizą leksykalnej koreferencyjności w opowiadaniach *Donna di Porto Pim e altre storie* autorstwa Antonio Tabucchiego.

## Lexical items as facets of identity in discourse

### 1. Introduction

In discourse, lexical items serve the communicative function of directing attention by referring in a particular way; that is, by assigning an *identity*. A given lexical item can be thought of as a *facet* chosen by a writer to direct a reader's attention onto a thing through a particular perspective. Consider the assigning of an identity to a physical thing. The thing itself does not change, but the angles through which it is viewed, as it were, can serve a writer's narrative purpose, each in its own way. As one researcher has expressed the point in regards to co-reference by "near-synonyms":

[...] even if near-synonyms do name one and the same thing, they name it in different ways: they present different perspectives on a situation. Near-synonyms are neither in free variation, nor in complementary distribution. (Divjak 2010: 1)

That communicative function – co-reference through different perspectives – is not limited, however, to near-synonyms. This paper will illustrate the point through an analysis of the use of lexicon in Antonio Tabucchi's *Donna di Porto Pim e altre storie* 'Woman of Porto Pim, and Other Stories' (Tabucchi 1983), particularly its use of different lexical items in instances of co-reference. The book is a collection of short pieces of evidently various genres but united by place.

Superficially, it can sometimes appear that a writer uses various synonyms (or near-synonyms) unscrupulously, merely for the sake of avoiding the repetition of a word, for the sake of introducing a frivolous variety. Such might appear to be the case in the prologue to Tabucchi's book, where the author uses no fewer than five different words that refer to the book. See Examples (1i-1v) below:

- (1i) una elementare lealtà mi impone di mettere in guardia chi si aspettasse da questo piccolo *libro* un diario di viaggio (p. 9)

[a fundamental sincerity compels me to warn anyone who might expect from this little *book (libro)* a travel journal]

- (1i) sarebbe però disonesto spacciare queste *pagine* per pura finzione (p. 9)  
 [it would be, however, dishonest to pass these *pages* (*pagine*) off as pure fiction]
- (1ii) ho messo piede a terra e questo *libretto* trae origine [...] da un periodo di tempo passato nelle isole Azzorre. (pp. 9-10)  
 [I set foot on land, and this *little book* (*libretto*) originated ... from a stretch of time spent on the islands of the Azores.]
- (1iii) In questo *volumetto* ci sono tuttavia due storie che non sarebbe del tutto improprio definire finzione. (p. 10)  
 [In this *little volume* (*volumetto*), there are, however, two stories which it would not be entirely inappropriate to define as fiction].
- (1iv) Alle confidenze di un uomo che suppongo di aver incontrato in una taverna di Porto Pim devo invece la storia che conclude il *volume*. (p. 10)  
 [To the confidences of a man I suppose I met in a tavern in Porto Pim I owe, on the other hand, the story that concludes the *volume* (*volume*).]

In the space of two pages, the author refers variously to the book at hand as *libro*, *pagine*, *libretto*, *volumetto*, and *volume*. There might appear to be no rationale. The burden of this paper, however, is to make the case that there is indeed an account to be given of the author's choice of lexical item.

Tabucchi's *Donna di Porto Pim e altre storie* is a particularly fruitful corpus to use for this undertaking because one of its themes has to do with multiple perspectives. In the author's words, *Le cose non sono sempre come ci sembrano* 'Things are not always as they appear to one' (p. 22). The prologue itself warns the reader against any effort to decide whether the book is fact or fiction. The denial of that distinction can be seen in the five short passages in Example (1), above, to which we shall return.

## 2. The direct reference view of lexicon

The old idea that a lexical item furnishes direct reference to a thing "is essentially a labeling theory according to which words are names for things" (Ellis 1993: 42). Though at odds with the aim of this paper, the idea has been influential and can be easily illustrated. See Example (2), below, where Tabucchi refers to a *tempio* in a dream about the Azores:

- (2) Il dio del Rimpianto e della Nostalgia è un bambino dal volto di vecchio. Il suo *tempio* sorge nell'isola più lontana (p. 14)

[The god of Regret and Nostalgia is a little boy with the face of an old man. His *temple* (*tempio*) rises on the farthest island]

The lexical item *tempio* allows the author to direct the reader's attention to that structure as opposed to others in the Azores, such as, say, to a *taverna*, in Example (3), a repeat of (1v):

- (3) Alle confidenze di un uomo che suppongo di aver incontrato in una *taverna* di Porto Pim devo invece la storia che conclude il volume. (p. 10)

[To the confidences of a man I suppose I met in a *tavern* (*taverna*) in Porto Pim I owe, on the other hand, the story that concludes the volume.]

The lexical item *taverna* directs attention to that structure, not, say, to a *tempio*.

A lexical item, however, does not “refer” in any really objective sense, even to a physical object such as an architectural construction. Rather, a lexical item *identifies* that thing from a perspective chosen by a language-user. A particular lexical item is one of the options made available to the language-user by that person's lexicon. With the lexical item chosen, the language-user communicates a subjective perspective on a thing, a decision to categorize that thing along with other, distinct things – physical buildings, in this case – that, in the language-user's view, share some identifying characteristic. So one *tempio*, for example, shares with certain other buildings the characteristic of being used by people for the worship of a god. There might be a different *tempio* for a different god (4):

- (4) Del loro dio più importante [...] ho avuto racconti molto diversi [...]. Nella sua isola sorge un *tempio* che gli abitanti di questi luoghi denominano in un modo che potrei tradurre « Le Mirabili Dimore » (p. 16)

[Concerning their most important god ... I have had quite dissimilar accounts... . On his island there rises a *temple* (*tempio*) which the inhabitants of these lands refer to in a way that I might translate “The Wonderful Residences”]

Both the *tempio* in (2) and the *tempio* in (4) are buildings that share the characteristic of being used by people for the worship of gods; they share that *identity*. That cannot be said of the *taverna* of (3) which is used by people for consuming alcoholic beverages.

### 3. Lexicon for identification: Entities both physical and nonphysical

That the particular lexical item chosen reflects a subjective *identification* of a thing – not an objective direct reference to it – can be especially appreciated when a language-user explicitly adjusts perspective and chooses an alternative identification for the same thing. Compare Example (5), below, with Example (2), above; both are references to the selfsame architectural construction.

- (5) Ho chiamato *tempio* una *costruzione* che dovrei piuttosto chiamare *tugurio*: perché il dio del Rimpianto e della Nostalgia non può abitare in un palazzo o in una casa sfarzosa, ma in una *dimora* povera (p. 15)

[I have called *temple* (*tempio*) a *building* (*costruzione*) that I should rather have called *hovel* (*tugurio*), because the god of Regret and Nostalgia cannot live in a mansion or in a sumptuous house but in a poor *dwelling* (*dimora*)]

This particular *costruzione* ‘building’ may indeed serve for the worship of a god, but, according to Tabucchi, it does not compare well architecturally to other temples, to, say, the *tempio* of Example (4). Instead, it strikes Tabucchi as architecturally akin to the sort of humble dwelling (*dimora*) that might be inhabited by a pauper (*tugurio*).

This use of lexical items to communicate a language-user’s perspective on a thing is not at all limited to architectural constructions but instead is a general function of lexical items in discourse. In (6), below, a man and a woman, probably long-time lovers, are having a conversation aboard a ferry between islands in the Azores. The conversation is interrupted when the man suddenly turns from his interlocutor to face instead the *mare* ‘sea’ because there he has spotted land above the *acqua* ‘water’, a sign that the ferry can be expected to arrive soon to its destination.

- (6) [...] disse [...] . Si girò verso il *mare* [...] e uscì una piccola esclamazione: guarda!, e indicò col dito verso il mezzogiorno. La donna si voltò e guardò anche lei. All’orizzonte si vedeva il cono verde dell’isola che emergeva netto dall’*acqua*. (p. 22)

[..., he said, ... . He turned towards the *sea* (*mare*) ... and let out a little gasp – “Look!” – and he pointed with his finger towards the south. The woman too turned and looked. On the horizon there could be seen the green cone of the island, emerging clearly from the *water* (*acqua*).]

Between things to look at, the man turns from his interlocutor on the boat to the *mare*. The lexical item *mare* communicates its half of that contrast,

between the thing on the boat, the ‘woman’ (*donna*) and the thing off the boat (the ‘sea’), or between the solid thing and the liquid thing, or the human thing and a natural feature of the landscape. Then, as the man and woman focus in that direction, they spy the contrast between the green-brown and the blue, the solid and the liquid, the *isola* ‘island’ and the *acqua*. *Mare* and *acqua* are two labels that Tabucchi uses to identify the same physical entity. They allow him to communicate two different perspectives on that entity, one having to do with *vista* (sea vs. ferry) and one having to do with color and texture due to chemical composition (water vs. island).

Nor is it only physical objects whose various facets get communicated through different lexical items. Example (7) below contains two terms for a sickness.

- (7) Nel novembre del 1838 il medico londinese Joseph Bullar, che aveva tentato con scarso successo sul fratello Henry le terapie allora conosciute contro la *tisi*, all’aggravarsi del *male* di Henry decise di intraprendere un viaggio con lui fino all’isola di São Miguel. [...] [...] È da supporre che la salute di mister Henry fosse alquanto migliorata se ... i due fratelli decisero di imbarcarsi su piccoli velieri di pescatori e di visitare le Azzorre centrale e occidentali. (pp. 30-31)

[In November 1838, the London doctor Joseph Bullar, who had tried with scant success upon his brother Henry the treatments then known against *consumption* (*tisi*), at the worsening of Henry’s *illness* (*male*), decided to undertake a trip with him to the island of São Miguel... .  
... It can be supposed that Mr. Henry’s health had somewhat improved if ... the two brothers decided to board little fishing boats and visit the central and western Azores.]

In 1838, certain medical ‘treatments’ (*terapie*) were known for ‘consumption’ (*tisi*), and those treatments were in general different from treatments for other diseases. By contrast, the affliction of Henry with an ‘illness’ (*male*) prompted the trip south, while the improvement of his ‘health’ (*salute*), regardless of which particular illness he had, occasioned the stop in the Azores. *Tisi* identifies a particular illness; *male* is more general. This relationship between words, in which the sense of one includes the sense of the other, is known as hyponymy.

If indeed all lexical items name facets for establishing identity, then, actually, there can be no “direct reference” onto a “thing”. Whatever word one proposes for direct reference onto a thing will in fact provide only a perspective onto that thing; no word will provide a direct reference. Thingness, if it exists, is a property of physics; the *identification* of things – not direct reference to things – is a property of language.

Example (8) can be used to illustrate that point. Caution: The English gloss obliterates the distinction made in the original Italian.

- (8) Attraversò la piazza e si sedette su una panchina sotto il fresco *muro* del convento della Esperança dove c'era un'ancora azzurra dipinta sulla calce della *parete*. (p. 47)

[He crossed the square and sat down on a bench below the cool *wall* (*muro*) of the Convent of Hope, where there was a blue anchor painted in the lime of the *wall* (*parete*).]

*Muro* is a way to identify the construction built to enclose the convent, and *parete* is a way to identify the vertical side, here made of lime, of that construction, on which a blue anchor is painted. Enclosure – *muro* – requires, necessarily, a construction of a certain height, depth, and thickness, depending on the material of which it is made. A ‘bench’ (*panchina*), for instance, would not be adequate to that purpose. By contrast, decoration requires, necessarily, a suitable substance (such as lime) and an orientation (vertical, near the ground) that permits viewing by passersby – *parete*. It would be pointless to paint the decoration on top of the wall or inside the wall. That the words *muro* and *parete* here refer to the same “thing” misses the point; the words present different *perspectives* onto that thing, one having to do with the convent vis-à-vis its surroundings, the other having to do with the properties of the barrier separating them. Yes, here the vertical side is a part of the whole construction, not the whole construction itself. Yet the lexical items *parete* and *muro* do not stand in a logical relation of hyponymy; though here this *parete* may be part of this *muro*, not every *parete* is part of a *muro*: a *parete di una vena* ‘wall of a vein’, for instance, is not a part of a *muro*. As in (8), so in general, lexical items function in communication as *facets of identity*.

#### 4. Variation in identification, both striking and subtle

The semantic differences between words can be so stark, by intuition, that a language-user is aware of the difference. For instance, a physical object can be identified by different functions, one former and one current, as in Example (9) (with two different formats, for two different sets of words illustrating this property):

- (9) Con tutta probabilità si chiamava semplicemente *Aldeia*, che vuol dire «villaggio», ed essendo l'unico luogo abitato nel raggio di molti chilometri gli bastava, quale nome proprio, un nome d'antonomasia. Da lontano esso parve loro [due uomini britannici] grazioso e di ordinata geometria, come sono sovente i piccoli paesi dei pescatori. Le *abitazioni*, tuttavia,

sembravano di forma bizzarra. Quando entrarono in paese capirono il perché. Quasi tutte le *case* avevano per facciata la prua di un vascello: erano *case* a pianta triangolare, alcune di un legno pregiato, la cui unica parete in pietra era quella che chiudeva i due lati del triangolo. Alcune erano *case* bellissime, raccontano gli attoniti inglesi, il cui interno poco aveva di *casa* perché le suppellettili – lanterne, sedili, tavoli e perfino letti – quasi tutto era stato preso dal mare. Molte avevano *oblò* che fungevano da *finestre* e poiché guardavano lo strapiombo e il mare sottostante pareva di stare in un *vascello* approdato in cima a una montagna. Quelle *case* erano costruite coi resti dei naufragi che le scogliere di Flores e di Corvo hanno offerto per secoli alle navi di passaggio. (pp. 29–30)

[Most likely, it was called simply *Aldeia*, which means “village”, and, since it was the only inhabited place within miles, that sufficed as proper noun, an Antonomastic name. From afar, it appeared to them (two British men) graceful and geometrically ordered, as small fishing towns often are. The *residences* (*abitazioni*), however, seemed to be of a weird shape. When they went into the town, they understood why. Almost all the *houses* (*case*) had a ship’s prow as façade. They were *houses* (*case*) of a triangular layout, some made of a precious wood, whose only stone wall was the one that enclosed the two sides of the triangle. Some were very beautiful *houses* (*case*), said the astonished Englishmen, the interiors of which had little to do with *house* (*casa*), because the furnishings – lanterns, seats, tables, and even beds – almost everything had been taken from the sea. Many had *portholes* (*oblò*) serving as *windows* (*finestre*), and because they looked out upon the overhang and the sea below, it was like being in a berthed *vessel* (*vascello*) on top of a mountain. Those *houses* (*case*) had been built with the remains of shipwrecks which the cliffs of Flores and Corvo had presented for centuries to passing ships.]

The *abitazioni* ‘residences’ of the inhabitants of this village in the Azores were *case* ‘houses’ constructed from scavenged parts of shipwrecks, including their *oblò* ‘portholes’. Thus to look through the *finestre* ‘windows’ of a *casa* was to appear to stand inside a seafaring *vascello* ‘vessel’ looking out over the sea.

As the next two passages will illustrate, the semantic differences between words can be subtle. That fact is not surprising if human intelligence is a factor in the structure of language and that structure functions in “a peculiarly human method of communication” (Diver 1995 [2012]: 519 *et passim*). Human beings are capable of creating and of interpreting subtlety.

Example (10) below is a repeat of Example 3 = 1v above, with more context. The passage comes from Tabucchi’s prologue. In much of the prologue, Tabucchi gives us the origin of the book’s contents, inspired by his stay in the Azores. As is generally true of the prologue, Tabucchi here is being self-dep-



recating and quite coy about the veracity of much of what he relates in the book. Here he blames that untrustworthiness on literary imagination and on alcohol.

- (10) Alle confidenze di un uomo che suppongo di aver incontrato in una *taverna* di Porto Pim devo invece la storia che conclude il volume. Non escludo di averla modificata con le aggiunte e le ragioni proprie della presunzione di chi crede di trarre dalla storia di una vita il senso di una vita. Forse costituirà un'attenuante confessare che in quel *locale* si consumavano bevande alcoliche in abbondanza e che mi parve indelicato sottrarmi alla consuetudine vigente. (pp. 10-11)

[To the confidences of a man I suppose I met in a *tavern* (*taverna*) in Porto Pim I owe, on the other hand, the story that concludes the volume. I do not deny having modified it with additions and with the reasons peculiar to the presumptions of one who believes himself to be drawing out of the story of a life the meaning of a life. Perhaps it will count as an extenuating circumstance to confess that in that *bar* (*locale*) alcoholic beverages were consumed in abundance, and that it seemed to me tactless to exempt myself from the prevailing custom.]

One dictionary defines *taverna* as *osteria di infimo ordine* 'public-house of the basest kind', a lowly place for drink and simple meals. The same dictionary defines *locale* as *luogo di pubblico ritrovo* 'public meeting-place'. By implication, the alcohol is partly to blame for the unreliability of the tale, and the sociability of the place gives expatriate Tabucchi an (ironic) excuse for drinking so much.

Example (11) below contains three different terms (one of them used five times) for a given activity. Understanding the subtle choice of lexical item here requires some context. (Again the English gloss is misleading.) A grown man reminisces about his ritual of singing when he, as a young boy, would go out at night fishing with his family. Later in the story (second quoted paragraph), the man recounts a rendezvous with a lover when he was an adult, in particular, how his singing gained him entry into her house. (This is the titular *Donna di Porto Pim*.)

- (11) Ora non si usa più così, ma quando io ero bambino si usava un rito che faceva parte della pesca. Le murene si pescano la sera, quando cresce la luna, e per chiamarle si usava una *canzone* che non aveva parole: era un *canto*, una *melodia* prima bassa e languida e poi acuta, non ho più sentito un *canto* con tanta pena, sembrava che venisse dal fondo del mare o da anime perdute nella notte, era un *canto* antico come le nostre isole, ora non lo conosce più nessuno, si è perduto, e forse è meglio così perché aveva con sé una maledizione o un destino, come una magia. Mio pa-

dre usciva con la barca, era notte, muoveva i remi piano, a perpendicolo, per non fare rumore, e noi altri, i miei fratelli e mia madre, ci sedevamo sulla falesia e cominciamo il *canto*. C'erano volte che gli altri tacevano e volevano che chiamassi io, perché dicevano che la mia voce era melodiosa come nessun'altra e che le murene non resistevano. Non credo che la mia voce fosse migliore di quella degli altri: volevano che cantassi io solo perché ero il più giovane e si diceva che le murene amano le voci chiare. (p. 80)

[...]

Lasciami entrare, la supplicai. Lei chiuse la persiana e spense la luce. La luna stava sorgendo, con un velo rosso di luna d'estate. Sentivo uno strugimento, l'acqua sciabordava attorno a me, tutto era così irraggiungibile, e mi ricordai di quando ero bambino e la notte chiamavo le murene dalla falesia: e allora mi dette una fantasia, non seppi trattenermi, e cominciai a cantare quel *canto*. Lo cantai piano piano, come un lamento o una supplica, con una mano all'orecchio per guidare la voce. Poco dopo la porta si aprì. (p. 84)

[Nowadays it isn't done anymore, but when I was a boy there was a ritual that was a part of fishing. Moray are caught at night, when the moon is waxing, and to call them one used a *song* (*canzone*) that had no words: it was a *song* (*canto*), a *melody* (*melodia*) first low and faint and then piercing – I have never again heard a *song* (*canto*) with so much pain – it seemed to come from the depth of the sea or from souls lost in the night. It was an old *song* (*canto*), like our islands, and now no one knows it anymore, it's lost. And maybe it's better that way, because it held a curse or a fate, like a charm. My father would go out with the boat – it was night – he worked the oars slowly, held straight out, so as not to make noise. And the rest of us, my brothers and my mother, would sit on the cliff and begin the *song* (*canto*). There were times when the others would be quiet and want me to sing, because they said that my voice was sweet like no other and that the moray could not resist. I don't believe that my voice was better than the others'; they wanted me to sing by myself because I was the youngest, and it was said that moray like bright voices.

...

"Let me come in", I begged. She closed the shutter and put out the light. The moon was rising, with a summer moon's red haze. I felt a yearning. The water lapped around me. Everything was so unattainable. And I remembered when I was a boy and at night I would call the moray from the cliff. And then, on a whim, I couldn't help myself, and I began singing that *song* (*canto*). I sang it very softly, like a moan or a plea, with one hand at my ear to guide the voice. Soon the door opened.]

Part of the family's ritual for fishing moray at night was for the boy to sing a particular *canzone* 'song' that was supposed to attract the fish. Here is how that same dictionary defines *canzone*:

componimento lirico formato da un certo numero di *stanze* o *strofe* che si ripetono nella medesima disposizione di versi e rime, tranne l'ultima [...] . breve componimento poetico musicato con una melodia orecchiabile.

[lyrical composition made up of a certain number of *stanzas* or *strophes* that are repeated in the same arrangement of verses and rhymes, except for the last... . a short poetic, musical composition with a catchy tune.]

Quintessentially, a *canzone* involves words, but this was an unusual *canzone*, one, as the writer chose to specify, without words (*che non aveva parole*). This was actually a *canto* 'song'. Here is how the same dictionary defines *canto*:

emissione modulata della voce con successione armoniosa di suoni [...]. componimento musicale per una o più voci

[modulated emission of the voice with a harmonic succession of sounds... . a musical composition for one or more voices]

Both *canzone* and *canto* are musical compositions for the voice, but the senses of the two words differ in emphasis. *Canzone* emphasizes the words of a song, while *canto* emphasizes its modulation of pitch, its melody. This crucial element is made explicit in (11) with the word *melodia* 'melody'. Naturally, fish would not understand human words, and so there was no need for words; rather, supposedly, the fish – and later, similarly, the woman behind a closed door – responded favorably to the melodious voice.

At the other extreme, the various identities that get assigned to one thing can be quite different. What one person at one time might identify in one way – as a certain “thing” – another person at another time – or the same person at another time – might identify in a different way, as a different thing. For instance, consider the truism about Venus: “The evening star is the morning star (Hesperus is Phosphorus)”. What one person – perhaps an ancient poet – identifies as a *star* might, at a different time, or by a different person – perhaps a modern astronomer – be recognized as a *planet*.

Occasionally, the identities that a thing is given by a language-user are so strikingly different that even that person realizes that ‘things are not always as they appear to one’. The realization may be occasioned by interaction with another person. Such a realization comes to the Italian man on the ferry of

Example (6). In (12), that man continues looking out to sea, and he tells the woman what he (thinks he) sees there. The woman, who is bilingual, learns from a local that what the man sees is not what he thinks he sees.

- (12) Poi strizzò gli occhi e si appoggiò al parapetto. Ci sono anche degli *scogli*, aggiunse. Mosse il braccio verso sinistra e indicò due escrescenze turchine, come due cappelli posati sull'acqua. Che brutti *scogli*, disse, sembrano dei cuscini. [...]

[Il bigliettaio] Forse intuì il significato della conversazione, perché si avvicinò sorridendo e parlò alla donna con aria divertita. Lei ascoltò con attenzione a poi esclamò: nooo!, e si portò una mano alla bocca con aria birichina e infantile, come per reprimere una risata. Cosa dice?, chiese l'uomo con l'aria leggermente stolida di chi non segue una conversazione. La donna rivolse al bigliettaio uno sguardo di complicità. Le ridevano gli occhi e era molto bella. Dice che non sono *scogli*, disse tenendo in sospeso di proposito quello che aveva saputo. L'uomo la guardò con aria interrogativa e forse un po' seccata. Sono piccole *balene* azzurre che passeggiano alle Azzorre, esclamò lei, ha detto proprio così. E finalmente liberò la risata trattenuta. (pp. 22-23)

[Then he squinted and leaned against the railing. "There are *cliffs* (*scogli*) too", he added. He moved an arm to the left and indicated two deep blue excrescences, like two hats placed on top of the water. "What ugly *cliffs* (*scogli*)", he said. "They look like pillows". ...

[The ticket agent] perhaps sensed the meaning of the conversation, because he came over smiling and spoke with an amused look to the woman. She listened attentively and then exclaimed: "Nooo!" And she put a hand to her mouth in a mischievous and childish way, as if to stifle a laugh. "What is he saying?" asked the man, with the slightly stupid look of someone who is not following a conversation. The woman turned back to the ticket agent with an air of complicity. Her eyes were laughing, and she was very beautiful. "He says that they aren't *cliffs* (*scogli*)", she said, holding in abeyance, one supposes, what she had learned. The man looked at her with a questioning and perhaps slightly annoyed expression. "They are little blue *whales* (*balene*) that swim around the Azores", she exclaimed. "That's just what he said". And at last she let out a smothered burst of laughter.]

Such instances of misidentification – a planet mistaken for a star, or whales mistaken for cliffs – are but extreme cases of variation in the identification of a thing. The label of identification bestowed by one person might be different from the label bestowed by another person; thus *star* by a casual observer of the night sky, versus *planet* by an astronomer. Even one person at different times – the man on the ferry in (6) and (12) – may come to view

something differently – as ‘cliffs’ or ‘whales’ – as his relevant knowledge develops.

Moreover, the identifications performed by one person may be more valued by society than the identifications performed by another person. That is, a certain facet may be more highly valued than another, depending on the prestige of who uses it. Nowadays, the identifications made by scientists tend to be highly valued. An astronomer might identify a certain celestial object as a *planet*. A biologist might identify a certain aquatic animal as a *mammal*. And so, in either case, one label might be widely deemed to be “correct”.

## 5. Variation in identification of animates, including humans

Different perspectives, different *identities*, can be applied to animates as well as inanimates. Example (13) below, concerns an animal:

- (13) *Capodoglio*. Questa *balena* [...] . È senza dubbio il più grande *abitante* del globo, la più terribile a incontrarsi di tutte le balene, la più maestosa d'aspetto, e finalmente di gran lunga la più preziosa in commercio, essendo la sola *creatura* dalla quale si possa ricavare quella preziosa sostanza che è lo spermaceti. (p. 58, translating Melville)

[*Sperm whale (Capodoglio)*. This *whale (balena)* ... is undoubtedly the biggest *inhabitant (abitante)* on the planet, the most terrible to encounter among all the whales, the most majestic of aspect, and, finally, by far the most commercially valuable, being the only *creature (creatura)* from which one can extract that valuable substance called spermaceti.] (Author translating AT translating Melville)

Melville, writing in the nineteenth century, communicates a certain point of view on the sperm whale. The planet holds inanimate and animate beings created by God. The animate of these beings inhabit the planet. Among these inhabitants are the whales (several species of which are mentioned by Tabucchi in this book). Among those types of whales is the *capodoglio*, the ‘sperm whale’. That single type of *balena* ‘whale’ is the biggest *abitante* ‘inhabitant’ of the planet and the only *creatura* ‘creature’ endowed by God with a certain substance, spermaceti, prized in the life of another creature, the human being, who, through commerce, has dominion over the planet. The lexical items *capodoglio*, *balena*, *abitante*, and *creatura* provide four different perspectives onto the one animal.

A writer expresses a point of view regarding a human being just as he does with a whale. Example (14), below, narrates events that transpire one night about a year after those of the second paragraph of Example (11), when

the young male narrator sang to gain admission to the woman's house. Here, a third human being – not the narrator and not the woman – is first referred to as a *persona* 'person' who was expected by the woman, then as a *figura* 'figure' seen at a distance by the narrator, and finally as a *uomo* 'man', a romantic rival to the narrator for the woman's attentions.

- (14) Poi bussai di nuovo, con più forza, perché la luce era accesa. Lei mi aprì e restò sulla porta, ma io la scostai con un braccio. Parto domani, disse, la *persona* che aspettavo è tornata. Sorrideva come se mi ringraziasse, e chissà perché pensai che pensava al mio canto. In fondo alla stanza una *figura* si mosse. Era un *uomo* anziano e si stava vestendo. (p. 85)

[Then I knocked again, louder, because the light was on. She opened for me and stood at the door, but I pushed her aside with an arm. "I'm leaving tomorrow", she said. "The *person* (*persona*) I was waiting for has returned". She smiled as if she was thanking me, and – who knows why – I thought she was thinking about my song. At the back of the room, a *figure* (*figura*) moved. It was an old *man* (*uomo*) getting dressed.]

The woman's excuse for not admitting the narrator this time is that the *persona* she was waiting for all along during her stay in the town has returned, and so she is leaving town and breaking off her relationship with the narrator. The narrator then sees evidence of this *persona* with his own eyes, an actual anthropomorphic *figura* moving at the back of the lighted room. Upon closer inspection, that *figura* turns out, devastatingly, to be a *uomo* getting dressed.

## 6. Identification by lexicon as enhancement of communicative effect

A sensitivity to a good writer's choices among linguistic elements can heighten a reader's appreciation of a text (cf. Davis 2019). Return now to Tabucchi's chosen words to identify, in his prologue, the book that furnishes the examples for this paper. As seen in Example (1), above, Tabucchi uses five different lexical items in that regard. The choice is evidently not random; the words achieve more than just variety in the text. (If complete synonyms existed, they would be fully interchangeable, with no diminution of variety.) Rather, Tabucchi's choices allow him to communicate meaningful nuance. In (15), below, the relevant passages of the prologue are repeated, but with more context:

- (15) Ho molto affetto per gli onesti libri di viaggio [...] . Ma una elementare lealtà mi impone di mettere in guardia chi si aspettasse da questo piccolo *libro* un diario di viaggio, genere che presuppone tempestività di scrittura o una memoria inattaccabile dall'immaginazione che la memoria pro-

duce – qualità che per un paradossale senso di realismo ho desistito dal perseguire. [...]

Premesso questo sarebbe però disonesto spacciare queste *pagine* per pura finzione: [...] . Effettivamente io ho messo piede a terra e questo *libretto* trae origine, oltre che dalla mia disponibilità alla menzogna, da un periodo di tempo passato nelle isole Azzorre. [...] Il rispetto che sento per le immaginazioni che concepirono Giona e il capitano Achab mi preservava per fortuna dalla pretesa di insinuarmi, con la letteratura, fra i miti e i fantasmi che popolano il nostro immaginario. [...]

In questo *volumetto* ci sono tuttavia due storie che non sarebbe del tutto improprio definire finzione. La prima storia è [...] . Alle confidenze di un uomo che suppongo di aver incontrato in una taverna di Porto Pim devo invece la storia che conclude il *volume*. Non escludo di averla modificata [...] . Forse costituirà un'attenuante confessare che in quel locale si consumavano bevande alcoliche in abbondanza e che mi parve indelicato sottrarmi alla consuetudine vigente.

Il frammento di storia intitolato [...] lo si può invece considerare una finzione guidata [...].

Il pezzo intitolato [...] è dovuto in parte a [...] e in parte al [...]. Al contrario le pagine intitolate [...] non aspirano a essere più che una cronaca [...]. Similmente molte altre pagine, e mi sembra superfluo dire quali, sono mere trascrizioni del reale o di ciò che altri scrissero. Infine lo scritto intitolato [...], al di là di un mio vecchio vizio di spiare le cose dall'altra parte, si ispira senza dissimulazione a una poesia di [...] . (pp. 9-11)

[I have much affection for honest travel books... . But a fundamental sincerity compels me to warn anyone who might expect from this little *book* (*libro*) a travel journal, a genre that presupposes timely writing or a memory that is unassailable by the imagination that the memory produces – a quality which, through a paraxodical sense of realism, I have desisted from following... .

Having said that, it would be, however, dishonest to pass these *pages* (*pagine*) off as pure fiction: ... . In effect, I set foot on land, and this *little book* (*libretto*) originated – besides from my willingness to lie – from a stretch of time spent on the islands of the Azores... . The respect I feel for the imaginations that conceived of Jonah or Captain Ahab saved me, fortunately, from the pretension of inserting myself, through literature, among the myths and fantasies that populate our imaginary world... .

In this *little volume* (*volumetto*), there are, however, two stories which it would not be entirely inappropriate to define as fiction. The first story is ... . To the confidences of a man I suppose I met in a tavern in Porto Pim I owe, on the other hand, the story that concludes the *volume* (*volume*). I do not deny having modified it ... . Perhaps it will count as an extenuating circumstance to confess that in that bar alcoholic beverages were consumed in abundance, and that it seemed to me tactless to exempt myself from the prevailing custom.

The fragment of story titled ... can instead be considered a guided fiction... .

The piece titled ... is due in part to ... and in part to ... . By contrast, the pages titled ... do not aspire to be more than a chronicle... . Likewise many other pages – and it seems to me unnecessary to say which – are mere transcriptions of the real or of what others wrote. Finally, the work titled ... – beyond an old vice of mine to see things from the other side – is inspired without dissimulation by a poem by ... .]

Tabucchi first refers to his *piccolo libro* ‘little book’. (Indeed, the book is small, measuring 12 cm x 16.6 cm and having 96 numbered pages.) Tabucchi distinguishes this *piccolo libro* from *gli onesti libri di viaggio* ‘honest travel books’; both are *libri*, but those are not necessarily little, and his is not necessarily honest.

Subsequently, Tabucchi uses the term *libretto* ‘little book’, which is morphologically the root *libr-* plus the suffix *-ett* (plus the masc. sg. suffix *-o*). *-Ett* is one of the many “evaluative suffixes” of Italian, which may, in addition to physical attributes such as size, express “the emotive involvement of the speaker” (Lepschy – Lepschy 1988: 176–177). In particular, the “diminutive suffix” *-ett* has not merely a physical denotation but also perhaps an affectionate connotation (cf., e.g., *zietta* ‘auntie’); this book is Tabucchi’s brain-child. It is relevant that Tabucchi here is being self-deprecating. He professes not to dare to put himself, a mere writer of literature, in the company of the exalted myth-makers of holy scripture or of Melville. He confesses to: caution, a predilection towards falsehood, a fondness for sociable drink, contrariness, a tendency to embellish what others have told him, and – in contradictory fashion – a limitation merely to provide lowly transcription of what others have written.

The morpheme *-ett* recurs on *volumetto* ‘little volume’, this time added to the root *volum-* ‘volume’. So the affect continues even though something else has changed. The continuation of the affect has to do, evidently, with Tabucchi’s proclivity towards *menzogna* ‘lying’ and *finzione* ‘fiction’. The change from *libr-* to *volum-* coincides with a movement in the prologue from an external to an internal focus: from contrasting this book with others such as travel books, *Jonah*, and *Moby Dick*, to detailing this particular book’s contents, its constituent parts. *Volum-*, as opposed to *libr-*, brings out the aspect of measure, of space. Tabucchi is now going to take us through that space. Finally, with the affect well established and in no need of belaboring, Tabucchi identifies the concluding part of the *volume* ‘volume’, the final segment in its full extent.

There remains in (15) Tabucchi’s phrase *queste pagine* ‘these pages’. The physical book, of course, has physical, down-to-earth pages; it is not just



a whole but a bound whole comprised of parts. In this case, the parts appear quite different from one another: Some are fantasy, some are memoir, some biography, law, and so forth. The word *pagine* occurs twice more, in relation to certain of those parts: a *cronaca* ‘chronicle’ and *mere trascrizioni* ‘mere transcriptions’, the most pedestrian parts of an overall imaginative publication.

Basic communication, of course, would not need such nuance. Aspiring writers in college may need to be advised to “Select the word that expresses your idea exactly” and to “Choose the word with the connotation, as well as the denotation, appropriate to the idea you wish to express” (Hodges and Whitten 1986: 222-223). But *Donna di Porto Pim e altre storie* is no work of basic communication by an aspiring writer. Antonio Tabucchi was awarded several literary prizes.

## 7. Linguistic theory

The understanding that lexical items function in communication as *facets of identity* is incompatible not only with the idea that words provide direct reference but also with the idea that words categorize things, that categorization is “the most basic aspect of language”, its “heart” (Ellis 1993: 27). Categorization is an idea that is itself akin to the old Saussurean idea of a lexicon (within a *langue* ‘language system’) as a *principe de classification* ‘principle of classification’. For categorization of things to take place, there must first be “things” to categorize. The division of the world into “things” must – at least in a conceptual sense – happen before individuals come along to communicate. Communication would have to operate within a relatively stable, straightforward world.

Moreover, the idea in this paper of lexical items functioning for the communication of *facets of identity* is incompatible with the view in cognitive linguistics that categories in language are determined by categories of human cognition. In the words of Tyler and Evans:

The representation of meaning is fundamentally conceptual in nature. Language does not refer directly to the ‘real world’. Rather, language refers to what is represented in the human conceptual system. The conceptual system contains conceptual structure [...] which indirectly reflects and interprets the world as mediated by human experience and perception. (Tyler – Evans 2003: 3)

In that view, cognition mediates between communication and some sort of objective “real world”.

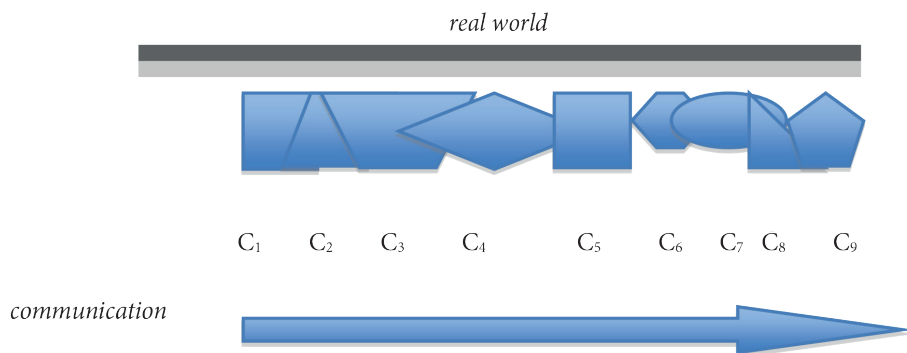
That real world is what Diver (1995 [2012]: 480 *et passim*) dismisses as the nonlinguistic *scene* about which one can communicate a *message* using the *meanings* provided by one's linguistic elements. So, for instance, one can communicate that a cloud is *over* the ground or that the same cloud is *under* an airplane. A cognitive linguist sees that the perception of the location of the cloud differs, while the cloud's objective position remains nevertheless what it is. But such mediation is superfluous. In linguistics, the interpolation of cognitive categories is a distraction. Instead, *over* communicates one perspective (say, that of someone on the ground), and *under* communicates a different perspective (someone – the same or a different person – in the plane). The lexical items serve as two different *facets* for talking about, in this case, the location of the cloud: “Look at the cloud from this perspective” versus “Look at the cloud from that perspective”.

The *meanings* provided by one's linguistic elements (e.g., *over*, *under*) allow the communication of different *messages* even about one and the same *scene*. A language-user communicates that message through the meanings he chooses. “The morphological units are ... signals of meanings; that is, semantic elements that can be used to suggest the message that is to be communicated” (Diver 1995 [2012]: 517). The linguist must be careful not to confuse the *meanings* with the *messages* with the *scene*. Granted, conceptual structure may “affect the structure of language” (There may be conceptual structures corresponding to *over* and *under*), but the analyst need not limit linguistic meanings to that restriction *a priori*; for instance, meanings may involve instruction for how to process a message, such as that one should “Pay attention!” (Diver 1995 [2012]: 436).

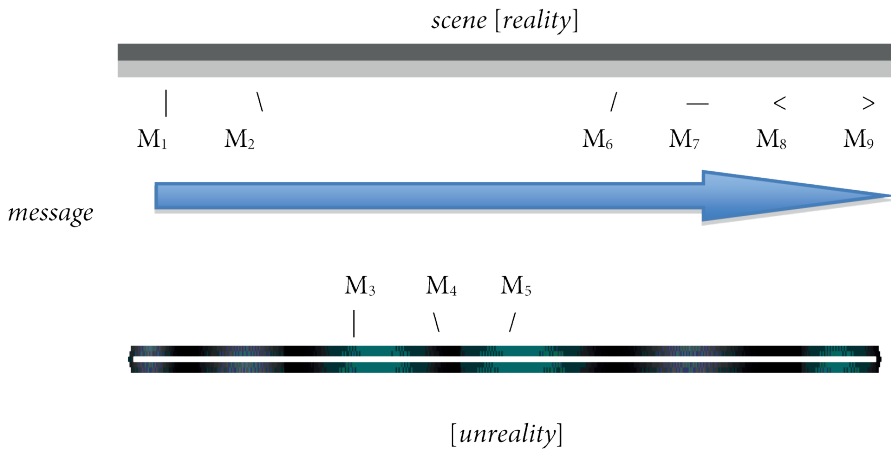
Fig. 1 below illustrates two different views of the relation between reality and communication, one that of cognitive linguistics, and the other that advocated in this paper and influenced by Diver.

**Figure 1: Two views of the relation between reality and communication**

1. Cognitive linguistics: Mediation by conceptual structures (C1-C9)



2. The view here, influenced by Diver: Meanings (M1-M9) suggesting a message



Whereas in cognitive linguistics, conceptual structure mediates between communication and the (supposed) real world, with Diver, encoded linguistic meanings suggest what is being communicated. To the extent that those meanings relate to the real world, they might be said to mediate between communication and that world, but of course, as seen in this paper, language-users communicate about more than just the real world: also about unreality – as witnessed particularly in such genres as fiction and fantasy.

The linguist must not be distracted by direct reference, by categorization or classification, or by conceptual structure. A linguist aiming to account for the observation of linguistic elements in discourse will do best to consider how those elements function in *communication* through the signaling of meaning.

Working within the view that lexical items function as *facets of identity* in communication, an analyst will not want to ignore “the subtlety and ingenuity with which authors discriminate between [...] options” (Diver 1995 [2012]: 509). Language-users discriminate among the options of the lexical items available to them in the process of communicating the message they choose to communicate. What message is to be communicated? Will you call the sounds coming out of your mouth *canzone* or *canto*? Will you refer to your publication as *libro*, *libretto*, *volume*, *volumetto*, or *pagine*? Which best suits your intended message at this point in your discourse?

## 8. Conclusion

The lexicon makes available to a language-user (such as an author) a store of items that serve as windows, or *facets*, through which a concept can be portrayed. In the process of communication, the language-user selects those items whose senses – presumably shared by convention with another language-user (a reader) – will allow him to direct attention as he wishes and thus to construct a text, which may conform as much or as little as he wishes to someone's reality.

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