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Stylistic Characterisation in Gerard Reve's The Evenings/De Avonden: A Corpus-based and Transitivity Analysis

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Table of contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: *De Avonden* and its English translation, Gerard Reve and criticism

1.1 Gerard (Kornelis van het) Reve

1.2 *De Avonden: een winterverhaal (a winter's tale)* and the boredom of youth

1.2.1 *De Avonden* and its English translation

1.2.2 Plot and themes

1.3 The reception by Dutch literary criticism

1.3.1 First period

1.3.2 Second period

Chapter 2: Systemic Functional Linguistics, Stylistics and Corpus linguistics

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics, a functional approach to language

2.1.1 The meaning potential of language and the three metafunctions

2.1.2 The experiential metafunction: transitivity and processes

2.2 Linguistic stylistics and foregrounding

2.2.1 Prominence and foregrounding, deviation and parallelism

2.3 Corpus linguistics, a brief overview

2.3.1 Corpora usage and results

2.3.2 Advantages and limitations of corpus linguistics

- 2.3.3 Quantitative and qualitative, two sides of research
- 2.3.4 A purpose, a corpus: types of corpora and other areas of interest
- 2.3.5 AntConc, a software for text analysis

2.4 Corpus linguistics for the study of stylistics

- 2.4.1 From stylistics to corpus linguistics
- 2.4.2 Advantages of corpus stylistics
- 2.4.3 A tool, not an end: further considerations on corpus stylistics

Chapter 3: A Corpus-based approach to the analysis of *The Evenings*

3.1 Wordlist

- 3.1.1 Personal pronouns
- 3.1.2 Verbs and processes
- 3.1.3 Nouns

3.2 Keyword list

- 3.2.1 Nouns
- 3.2.2 Adverbs
- 3.2.3 Verbs and processes

3.3 Discussion and conclusion

Chapter 4: SFL analysis of *The Evenings*

4.1 A systemic functional perspective on the text: qualitative analysis of *The Evenings*

- 4.1.1 Context and analysis of self-reflection extracts
 - 4.1.1.1 Extract A

- 4.1.1.2 Extract B
- 4.1.1.3 Extract C
- 4.1.1.4 Extract D
- 4.1.1.5 Extract E
- 4.1.1.6 Extract F
- 4.1.1.7 Extract G
- 4.1.1.8 Extract H
- 4.1.2 Discussion of transitivity choices in self-reflections
- 4.1.3 Context and analysis of dialogue extracts
 - 4.1.3.1 Extract I
 - 4.1.3.2 Extract J
 - 4.1.3.3 Extract K
 - 4.1.3.4 Extract L
 - 4.1.3.5 Extract M
- 4.1.4 Discussion of transitivity choices in dialogues
- 4.1.5 Interpretation of results and conclusions: from transitivity to characterisation
 - 4.1.5.1 From transitivity processes to themes
 - 4.1.5.2 From transitivity processes and themes to characterisation
- 4.2 Stylistics foregrounding in themes and language of *The Evenings*
 - 4.2.1 Repetition in *The Evenings*, an almost misunderstood tool
 - 4.2.2 Foregrounding as thematic parallelism
 - 4.2.3 To conclude

Chapter 5: Processes in *De Avonden* and *The Evenings*, transitivity in comparison

5.1 Transitivity processes in the Dutch text

5.1.1 Self-reflections in *De Avonden*

5.1.2 Dialogues in *De Avonden*

5.2 From transitivity processes to characterization

Conclusions

References

Appendix

Riassunto

Introduction

The present dissertation is proposed as a multi-faceted linguistic analysis of *The Evenings*, the English translation of *De Avonden*, the debut novel of the Dutch author Gerard Reve. The multiplicity of linguistic perspectives from which the novel will be considered and analysed will hopefully help shed light on the aspects analysed in this dissertation. The general objective of the investigation is twofold. On the one hand, it aims to deepen the description and understanding of Reve's novel with particular attention to its themes and to how they are constructed and conveyed. Secondly, it aims to provide a stylistic characterisation of the protagonist showing how specific elements and features of the text can intrinsically contribute to its shaping and definition. The analysis is carried out by applying various linguistic theories and methodologies. The different parts in which the investigation is divided show how each theoretical framework individually contributes to achieving the aim of the work.

The very centre of this work is Gerard Reve's novel in both the original version, *De Avonden*, and in the translated English version, *The Evenings*. As a matter of fact, however, particular attention is paid to the translated text as the analysis will regard, for the most part, the English version. The original text, on its part, is taken into account to a lesser extent, but equally fundamentally, only in the final part of the analysis.

This work falls in-between two different disciplines. On the one hand, it is to be included in the framework of linguistics, as the majority of the topics and theories that are applied to the analysis belongs to different fields of this wider branch. The other discipline on which a fundamental part of the investigation is based is translation studies, as the final part of the analysis is composed of a linguistic comparison of texts considered in a contrastive perspective.

The theoretical framework of the present work is linguistics-oriented. In general, the analysis of the novel shown here adopts theories that belong to different linguistic branches

and each is applied to the investigation of *The Evenings* for different purposes. The first method applied to the text is the one of corpus linguistics: a corpus-based approach is used to investigate quantitative features of the text with the aid of AntConc, a piece of software for automatic text and corpus analysis.

Nonetheless, the fundamental theory on which the entire work is based is Systemic Functional Linguistics. Particular relevance in the analysis is given to experiential meanings, which are conveyed by language through the experiential metafunction by means of the transitivity system and the related processes. The notions of transitivity and processes will be applied to the novel with regard to the representation of themes and the construction of the protagonist's characterisation. The reason behind the centrality of this theory in the present work lies in the fact that "any interpretation of a literary text needs to be firmly based on an understanding of what is happening at the lexico-grammatical level: all the effects of literature are created by the language used" (Thompson 2004: 250). Since the ultimate aim of this work is the interpretation of *The Evenings* with regard to the representation of its theme and to the definition of the protagonist's characterisation and since these two aspects intended as effects of literature result from a precise language use, a systemic functional analysis becomes essential to the understanding of the functioning of such language use.

In addition, stylistics and the concept of foregrounding complete the analysis of the English translation by highlighting further revealing elements of the text and how these contribute to the characterisation of the protagonist. In the final chapter, translation studies provide a conclusive and essential contribution to the analysis through a contrastive perspective applied to the comparison between the original Dutch text and the English translated one.

The present work also aims to test the extent to which a linguistic analysis of a literary text can be useful and revealing when it comes to understanding the text and its consequent appreciation. In particular, we expect that a corpus-based analysis will give a precious first insight into the features of the text from a quantitative perspective. Then, the analysis of the text made within the systemic functional perspective should provide a central contribution to the description of the experiential meanings contained in the text, intended both in thematic

terms and as elements that primarily construct the protagonist's characterisation. Moreover, the application of a careful stylistic approach is considered important in exploring the functioning of those elements that have a relevant role in the characterisation. To follow, the comparison in contrastive terms of the original text with the translated version will hopefully show if, and to what extent, the representation and conveyance of themes and of the protagonist's characterisation may differ in the two texts.

With regard to the methodologies used to carry out the analysis, it can reasonably be stated that the approach most generally used is the qualitative one. In fact, apart from the corpus-based analysis, which belongs to the quantitative dimension of linguistic investigation, it can be said that the entire work is characterised by a scrupulous reading of the text and results. Indeed, instances of language considered relevant to the different purposes have always been attentively considered in all of their aspects and results closely interpreted at any level of the analysis.

This work is composed of five chapters. Each chapter deals with a different aspect of the analysis of *The Evenings*. The first two chapters are meant to introduce the reader to the framework on which the investigation is based, to locate the work in the context and within the theories that have been used to carry out the analysis. The following three chapters describe the actual analyses, with each one covering a specific dimension of the investigation.

Chapter 1 focuses on different aspects of *De Avonden* and on the author. In particular, it provides a brief introduction to the novel followed by a section containing bibliographical information on Gerard Reve. To follow, a summary of the plot is provided in which the central points and events of the story are described. In a different section, the most important themes of the novel are presented and discussed for both their centrality in the narration and for the fundamental role they have in the analysis. After that, an essential dimension of the novel is addressed with specific attention: the representation of reality. Reality is expressed in the text in the form of self-reflections and dialogues as resembling the inner and outer reality. In the following section, the novel is taken into account from the perspective of its reception by the critics. *De Avonden* has received and collected contrasting opinions and comments. The main ones are reported with regard to both its first appearance and to the

rediscovery of the novel after a period of low attention by part of the public. Finally, a specific section is dedicated to the English translation of the novel, published long after the original has appeared.

Chapter 2 presents the theories and methods that have been used in the investigation of the novel. The first topic to be covered is the one of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Halliday's theory is generally presented with a discussion of the main notions and concepts that compose it, by paying particular attention to the three metafunctions of language. Specifically addressed is the experiential metafunction which, with the transitivity system and process types it provides, is central to the analysis of transitivity carried out of the text. To follow, Stylistics and the qualitative approach it puts forward to the study of literary texts are specifically discussed. In addition, the concept of foregrounding is presented for both its centrality in stylistic analysis and because it will also be applied to the case of *The Evenings*. Finally, Corpus linguistics is presented and corpus methods are discussed with regard to different respects: how they work, the kind of results they provide, their advantages and limitations, the use of software for concordance analysis of texts, but also the different purposes of applying quantitative or qualitative methods and the different types of corpora. The last section regards the field of Corpus stylistics and discusses the use of corpus-methods applied to the study of style in literary texts.

Chapter 3 provides the first part of analysis of *The Evenings* and is meant to offer a first insight into the text from a quantitative perspective. In particular, this chapter presents the results of the corpus-based analysis of the text obtained with AntConc. A wordlist and a keyword list are explored and an attentive reading of the results emerged about the text are discussed. To note is the fact that the application of this quantitative method has made it possible to spot features that would have otherwise been difficult to detect.

Chapter 4 represents the very centre of the linguistic analysis here performed. This part of the investigation shows an approach which is deeply qualitative as extracts from the text have been closely read and analysed. In particular, in this chapter the text is divided in self-reflections and dialogues, analysing 8 extracts for self-reflections and 5 for dialogues. A distinction will be made in this sense because the two main components of the novel are the

protagonist's self-reflections and the dialogues he takes part in. The analysis is intended to verify whether the two types of extracts show differences with respect to the analysed elements. The selected passages have been chosen for their high representativeness of the main features and themes of the novel. Practically, every extract is considered with regard to two aspects: the transitivity processes and the role of the subject. The types of process in every clause are annotated and the role of the subject attentively considered. At the end, the results emerged from the analysis of the two categories of extracts are compared and deeply discussed. Critical references are also provided to support the findings. The specific aim of the systemic functional analysis is to understand how the transitivity system and processes in particular contribute to the depiction of the reality given in the text, intended as themes, and to the characterisation of the protagonist. In the second part of the chapter, the text is considered in stylistic terms. In particular, the representation of themes and the use of language are discussed within the notion of foregrounding, providing further elements that complete the protagonist's characterisation.

Chapter 5 takes into account the novel in both its original and translated version in a comparative perspective. Here, the extracts analysed in Chapter 4 are compared to the same extracts in the original Dutch text, divided again in self-reflections and dialogues. In particular, the processes and the role of the subject are analysed also in the original text and the results here observed are compared to those retrieved from the previous transitivity analysis of the English version. The differences highlighted by the comparison are discussed from a translation perspective by considering their language-specific character.

In general, the present dissertation is the result of the main interests I have developed during my university career. On the one hand, the English language has long been one of my main passions, especially with regard to the field of linguistics and its applications. On the other hand, the study of Dutch language and literature started at university gave me the opportunity to engage with a rich cultural dimension that I find deeply fascinating and that I would like to keep exploring. During the bachelor degree but especially in the two years of the master programme, I have attended language and literature classes that have contributed

to improving my knowledge and increasing my interest for these subjects, leading me to the decision to include them both in this dissertation.

Chapter 1: *De Avonden* and its English translation, Gerard Reve and criticism

In this first chapter, Gerard Reve will be presented together with *De Avonden*, of which a summary will be provided and a discussion of its main themes and central features. To follow, the reception of the novel by the critics will be also considered.

1.1 Gerard (Kornelis van het) Reve

This brief section will introduce the author and provide information about his life and career. Gerard Kornelis van het Reve was born in Amsterdam in 1923, where he grew up with his parents and the older brother Karel. Gerard did not complete his high school career at the gymnasium and later attended the graphic school. As an introvert adolescent, he was in therapy for suffering from psychological problems which also led him to a suicidal attempt. The author spent a period in England during which he started writing in English. In his life, religion played an important role as he was deeply catholic. Considered one of *De Grote Drie* (lit. the Great Three) of the post-war Dutch literature with Willem Frederik Hermans and Harry Mulish, Gerard Reve had a long writing career which produced many other relevant works. Apart from *De avonden*, among the most famous are *Op weg naar het einde* (1963), *Nader tot U* (1966), *De taal der liefde* (1972), *Moeder en zoon* (1980), *Het boek van violet en dood* (1996). He started suffering from the Alzheimer's disease and died in Belgium in 2006.

1.2 *De Avonden: een winterverhaal (a winter's tale)* and the boredom of youth

De Avonden tells the story of the 23-year-old Frits van Egters, a peculiar young man who lives with his parents in Amsterdam. The novel takes place in the last ten days of December 1946 and is divided into ten chapters. Every chapter represents one of the ten days in question. The reader is told very little about Frit's days, which run fast and without particular events between a barely mentioned office job and few other activities. On the contrary, as the title itself suggests, the centre of the narration are the evenings, during the course of which the

reader learns how to deal with Frits' oddities and obsessions. Frits' life is given as a continuous repetition, made of compulsive thoughts, nightmares and debatable theories.

It should be noted the irony and the paradox behind the second part of the title, which describes the novel as *een winterverhaal* (lit. a winter's tale). Such a specification creates an expectation of domestic and family warmth inside the house as opposed to the cold outside. However, readers quickly realize that "there is no trace of traditional story with an intrigue, let alone a winter's tale which, after all, suggests not only cold but also domestic security and warmth"¹ (Hubregtse 1989: 4). In fact, the only common point in this sense is the fact that events almost entirely take place inside. Apart from this, warmth is nowhere to be seen and is instead replaced by a meticulous report of repetitive actions, disturbed thoughts and few social situations in the life of the young protagonist, in which solitude, fear, boredom, disillusionment and cynicism are constantly present, representing some of the main themes of the narration.

De Avonden is the debut novel of Gerard Reve. It was published in November 1947 by the publishing house De Bezige Bij under the pseudonym of Simon van het Reve. The novel won the first edition of the Reina Prinsen Geerligsprijs, an annual price intended for young writers. This award already highlighted the talent of the young author who, despite his age, proved to be worth of attention and brilliant, as much as his novel showed to be (cf. Paardekooper 1986).

1.2.1 *De Avonden* and its English translation

Before more specifically addressing the novel and its themes, *De Avonden* will be taken into account from the point of view of its English translation.

Despite it was first published in 1947 and many reprints have been released since then, an English translation arrived many years later. In fact, the novel was translated and *The Evenings* first published in 2016. The translation has been reviewed by many with articles published in famous newspapers like The Times, The Guardian, The Irish Times, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, to cite some. In general, it has received very positive

¹ [...] van een traditioneel *verhaal* met een intrige is geen sprake, laat staan van een *winterverhaal*, welke term immers behalve kou ook huiselijke geborgenheid en warmte suggereert.

comments. As reported in review within the first pages of *The Evenings* itself, the novel has been described as a masterwork, funny and profound at the same time, peculiar and fascinating. In addition, the importance of the novel being finally translated into English and made therefore available to an Anglophone public is also highlighted.

In particular, in his article on The Guardian (2016), Tim Parks defines it as “cornerstone manqué of modern European literature”. With regard to the late appearance of *De Avonden* in English translation, Parks also considers how the politics can also influence decisions on which works will be published. In fact, he claims that “in a period when publishers tended to the liberal left, he was ferociously anti-communist; he converted to Catholicism but at the same time came out as gay, long before such openness was commonplace”. Parks generally highlights the extent to which these aspects did not favourably contributed to *De Avonden* being translated into English, also adding the role played in this sense by the fact that the novel was not written in one of Europe’s major languages.

Over the course of the following chapters, the original Dutch novel *De Avonden* will be also referred to by means of the abbreviation *DE*. The same goes for its English translation *The Evenings* and the acronym *TE*.

1.2.1 Plot and themes

In this section, a brief summary of the plot will be provided with a discussion of the most important themes. The evident feature of the plot is almost certainly its repetitive nature. In fact, the ten chapters narrated are very similar to one another and the events they present are repeated with minimal variations. In fact, Frits’ days and evenings are almost identical and are presented with a cyclical pattern. The main elements that compose the chapter are simple and repeated: he wakes up and either goes to work or stays at home doing nothing in particular or listlessly listening to the radio. He sometimes goes visit a friend, with whom he tells weird stories. He shares a meal with his parents and has brief and repetitive dialogues with them. He sometimes goes to a mundane night out, be it to the cinema or to a party. Repetition is extremely present in the narration in many disguises: as repetition of actions, thoughts, dialogues. To connect the pattern of repetitions of Frits’ days and evenings are the series of frightening nightmares that the protagonist has during the night.

The novel opens in the morning of December 22, 1946 with Frits that has just woken up from a nightmare. Already in this first chapter, he observes himself in the mirror, inspecting and commenting on his body state. Here we have the first demonstration of his almost pathological concern with body decay and body related aspects, intended both as distasteful features and as physical flaws or problems. As if he was looking for signs of decay, Frits pays incredible attention to his and other people's bodies. In particular, he often looks at his reflection in the mirror and comments on it, he also observes other people's body and very often, directly and regardless of the matter he openly gives his opinion about it, often suggesting possible remedies. One of his biggest concerns is baldness, which is presented in the first chapter as well. In fact, when he sees his older brother Joop, Frits comments on his hair state. Another example with regard to Frits' obsession for body decay is given when he comments on his friend's child crying saying that there must be something wrong with his nerves and that he will not live long. Frits often tells gloomy stories with his friends Jaap, Louis and Viktor. For example, about how they used to torture animals or death in general.

His attention for physical flaws is just an aspect connected to a bigger theme of the novel, which will also show to be central in the following analysis: the definition of reality. Frits is obsessively concerned with the description of the reality around him, intended as weather, time, his and other people's actions, and of the reality inside himself represented by his thoughts. Whatever the object of his attention, Frits observes it accurately and defines it with equal attention and precision. Among this, time is certainly one of the main objects of his attention and an important theme as well. Frits is deeply concerned with the passing of time as he often looks at the clock and reflects about it. Time is considered by the protagonist as both in the form of present and as past and memories that sometimes come to his mind.

Frits is presented as a religious character that often appeals to God. In particular, during the narration there are points in which he thinks about God and remembers his goodness and omnipresence, asking him to see upon him and his parents in particular. An example of this is given when Frits gets home drunk after a night out and, while his parents put him to bed, he acknowledges their goodness and asks God to take care of them, showing a very rare moment of affection. Another episode connected to both Frits' affection for his parents and to religion, is to be seen in the last narrated chapter, taking place on New Year's Eve. This

episode will be partly analysed in Chapter 4, where its centrality in the narration will be specifically discussed. Frits has dinner with his parents and the entire evening is characterised by an anxious state of the protagonist, who counts the hours to midnight in a climax of emotions. Nonetheless, once midnight strikes, all his fears seem to disappear and, before going to bed, Frits provides a long interior monologue in which he asks God to look upon his parents and in which he shows his confidence in the omnipresence of God.

Despite the simple and flat plot, the events narrated evoke a wide range of themes. In general, boredom is probably the most evident feature. It has been shown how Frits is never really occupied doing anything nor does he ever really have something to do. He easily loses interest for any activity and never engages into anything, he just looks for every possible way to make time pass faster. In general, Frits appears as a bored young man without passions or interests for anybody or anything, far from having any aspiration or objective. On the contrary, he is much more deeply interested in deciding what he should be doing and how, which becomes paradoxical if we consider that he ends up accomplishing little or nothing during the day. His little group of friends, his parents and his brother are the only people he interacts with and with whom he shares relationships that, nonetheless, appear quite superficial. Frits can be defined as a static and deeply disillusioned character whose nature is fundamentally stagnating and cynic.

A further theme, which is central to both the narration and the following analysis, is the sense of fear. Frits' obsessive definition of reality and concern for body decay are some of the factors that suggest the intrinsic fear he experiences. It is never really mentioned but is equally retrievable from both his actions and thoughts. He never talks about his fears but these are nonetheless present in his subconsciousness, that presents them to Frits at night as nightmares.

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the novel offers some funny moments, making irony a fundamental part of the narration. Irony is present above all in the form of sarcasm and is deeply connected to the use of language, especially to that of the protagonist. In fact, Frits' frequent use of refined language or formal expressions connected to trivial situations can make the narrated scene very ironic and also tragicomic.

Finally, a central aspect in narration which can also be seen as a further theme, is the distinction between inner and outer reality. In fact, the narration is mostly made of the protagonist's interior thoughts, feelings and perceptions on the one hand, and of dialogues between him and other characters on the other. This distinction between Frits' inner self and the external reality that he observes around him is sharply given and perceivable during the reading. Since the two different realities have their own peculiarities and features, the extracts in the following chapters are analysed taking into account this narrative characteristic and divided accordingly to their belonging to self-reflections or dialogues.

1.4 The reception by Dutch literary criticism

After the publication, the book immediately caused conflicting opinions and the critics divided in those who could not find anything good in the book and those who were firmly convinced Reve's work was truly worth reading and innovative. As explained by Raat (1988: 32), after a period of minor attention due to the fact that in the 1950's Reve did not publish any work in Dutch, the novel enjoyed a revival in the 1960's. This was also due to the publishing of the novel *Op weg naar het einde* in 1963, which awakened the interest for the author and his first work. Over the years, *De Avonden* has been reprinted in several editions and is now considered a Dutch masterpiece.

In addition to the positive and negative comments about it, numerous were also the interpretations given to the novel. To follow, the most important of these interpretations are given, divided between the first and the second period, which respectively refer to the moment after the publication and the one of renewed attention for the novel from the 1960's.

1.4.1 First period

In 1947, the novel was considered and interpreted from a sociological-historical perspective especially because such point of view is the one supported by the jury of the Reina Prinsen Geerligsprijs. This interpretation sees the novel as deeply related to a precise historical period, the one of the World War II just concluded, and as representative of an equally precise generation. The themes and the novel in general are seen as the result of what war has left to young people of that time: the sense of powerlessness and disillusion. In particular, the novel

is seen as representing “the spiritual distress of the post-war time, especially of those who became adult during the war”² (Hubregtse 1989: 4). Also, it is not considered as “a random soul story, but the book, that depicts what time, which killed all the illusions, has done to youth”³ (Hubregtse 1989: 4).

Another interpretation given in this first period is the psychological one. In particular, Hubregtse (1989) discusses the position of the writer Vestdijk, who sees Frits as torn between the love for his parents and his inability to show it to them. Those who see it from a more general perspective and reconduct the novel to puberty and to its related problems consider it as a representation of that specific age.

1.4.2 Second period

The second period is characterised by different perspectives on the novel. First of all, “the question of whether or not *De Avonden* articulates the feelings of the post-war generation is rarely asked in the second period. The issue of the time-bound nature of this novel therefore almost disappears from the view”⁴ (Raaijmakers 1988: 33). In fact, the author himself stated that the novel has nothing to do with the war-period youth but “it simply revolves around the great emancipation problem against an older generation”⁵ (Raaijmakers 1988: 33).

In general, the psychological interpretation acquires more relevance. For example, the psychiatrist De Levita sees Frits as embodying the psychological downside of the emancipation of the working class (Hubregtse 1989: 5) and Gomperts supports the idea of puberty as main theme, which would make Frits an isolated young man. Very important is the interpretation given by Paardekooper, who expands such ideas and concludes that fear is the main theme of the novel, “fear of the emancipation process of puberty, and, by extension:

² “[...] de geestelijke nood tonen van de naoorlogse tijd, in het bijzonder van hen, die in de oorlog volwassen werden.”

³ “Dit is niet een willekeurige zielsgeschiedenis, maar het boek, dat uitbeeldt wat de tijd, die alle illusies vermoordde, de jeugd heeft aangedaan.”

⁴ “De vraag of *De Avonden* al dan niet de gevoelens van de naoorlogse generatie articuleert, wordt in de tweede periode zelden meer gesteld. De kwestie van de tijdgebondenheid van deze roman verdwijnt daarmee vrijwel uit het zicht.”

⁵ “Het draait eenvoudig om het grote ontvoeringsprobleem tegenover een oudere generatie.”

fear of life”⁶ (Hubregtse 1989: 6). This vision in particular will show a fundamental importance in the analysis in Chapter 4.

Finally, as discussed in Raat (1988), during the second period further features of the novel are also taken into account. It is the case of the ironic component of *De Avonden* which comes to the attention of a few critics. In fact, humour is considered by both Vestdijk and Gomperts, and all its sides are more deeply interpreted by van den Bergh, who defines it as ‘a leap for safety’ (*noodsprong*).

⁶ “[...] angst voor het ontvoogdingsproces van de puberteit, en, bij uitbreiding: angst voor het leven”

Chapter 2: Systemic Functional Linguistics, Stylistics and Corpus linguistics

This chapter provides the theoretical framework on which the present investigation of *The Evenings* is based. First, it will cover the topics of corpus linguistics and corpus stylistics. To follow, Halliday's systemic functional linguistic theory will be presented with particular attention to transitivity analysis and process types. Finally, literary stylistics will be addressed in the final section, specifically focusing on the concept of foregrounding.

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics: a functional approach to language

A central linguistic framework which the present work refers to is Systemic Functional Linguistics. The theory was developed in the 1960's by Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday (1925-20018) starting from the intuition of his teacher, the linguist J.R. Firth on Systemic Theory. Firth's theory considers the functions of language as its primary and most important trait, in opposition to the description of language given by Structuralism, in which elements are accounted for their being part of a structure. Halliday's work, in which he furtherly developed Firth's theory with his fundamental contribution, has become overly valued and represents one of the most influential theories in modern linguistics.

In systemic functional linguistics, the two essential concepts are the one of system and function. The notion and importance of system as intended by Halliday is very well given in the following lines:

a text is the product of ongoing selection in a very large network of systems – a system network. Systemic theory gets its name from the fact that the grammar of a language is represented in the form of system networks, not as an inventory of structures [...] structure is the outward form taken by systemic choices, not the defining characteristic of language [...] a language is a resource for making meaning and meaning resides in systemic patterns of choice (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 23).

Here, three are the points to be considered. First, a text is the result of a system network of choices that are made at different levels of language and that depend on the context in which they occur. Secondly, language must be considered from the point of view of its system networks and not structures, for structure is the form given to language by systemic choices. Finally, the aim of language is to make meaning, which is enabled by systemic choices.

2.1.1 The meaning potential of language and the three metafunctions

Apart from the central concept of system in language, SFL focuses on the notion of function. To Halliday, the function of language is to be recognised in its meaning potential: language, both written and spoken, is used to create and share meanings in real life social contexts. In SFL, strictly connected to the relationship between language function and meaning potential is the assumption that “if language is, as it were, programmed to serve a variety of needs, then this should show up in some way in an investigation of linguistic structure” (Halliday 1971: 90). In this perspective, the meanings conveyed and contained in language should be retrievable from the structure of language itself. Since choices can be made at different levels of language, analysing those levels enables to retrieve the meanings language is conveying. In this sense, the notion of stratification acquires a central value: it sees language as made of four strata, which are the levels of context, semantics, lexico-grammar and phonology-graphology. These represent the levels on which language is organized and through which meaning is created.

In general, the function of language is to be seen as the making sense of our experience and acting out of social relationships (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 29). Specifically, the meaning making potential of language is shaped around three main functions, better called metafunctions: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual metafunction. The metafunctions serve the purpose of realizing in language the three fundamental meanings contained in every linguistic act.

The ideational metafunction is generally concerned with the representation of meaning as experience. It divides in experiential and logical function. The experiential function is used to make sense of the world around us, intended both as external world of actions and happenings and as internal world of thoughts and perceptions. The logical function focuses on the organization of logical-semantic relations of units and does not relate to the domain of experience. In the following section, the experiential function will be looked at in more detail for its importance in the present work.

The interpersonal metafunction is connected to the idea of language as means for the establishment and maintenance of social relationships. In this perspective, language is not

only considered for its accounting of experience but also for the use one makes of it when interacting.

The textual metafunction is internal to language and intrinsically concerned with the organization of the meaning and with language itself, which is intended as a message. It provides the links within language, enabling the relationship between the experiential and the interpersonal metafunction.

To conclude, it should be added that the unit of analysis at which SFL operates is the one of the text. Nonetheless, the meaning potential of language can also be investigated in relation to specific and more restricted aspects of a text. What must be bore in mind is that “these smaller units must be viewed from the perspective of their contribution to the meanings expressed by the total text in context” (Chapelle, 1998).

2.1.2 The experiential metafunction: transitivity and processes

In this section, the experiential metafunction will be more deeply considered, especially in relation to the notion of transitivity and processes. In the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, the experiential metafunction is the one that constructs the experiential component of reality, a reality which is made of actions, happenings and events. To do so, the experiential metafunction provides the grammatical system of transitivity, which accounts for the representation of reality by means of process types. The three components of the transitivity system are the process, the participants and the circumstances. The process represents *what* the happening or event is, the participants are those *who* participate or are involved in the process, the circumstances represent the information connected to *how* the process takes place. From a grammatical point of view, the process is realised by verbal groups, the participants by nominal groups and the circumstances by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases. The experiential structure of the clause can be represented in the graph below:

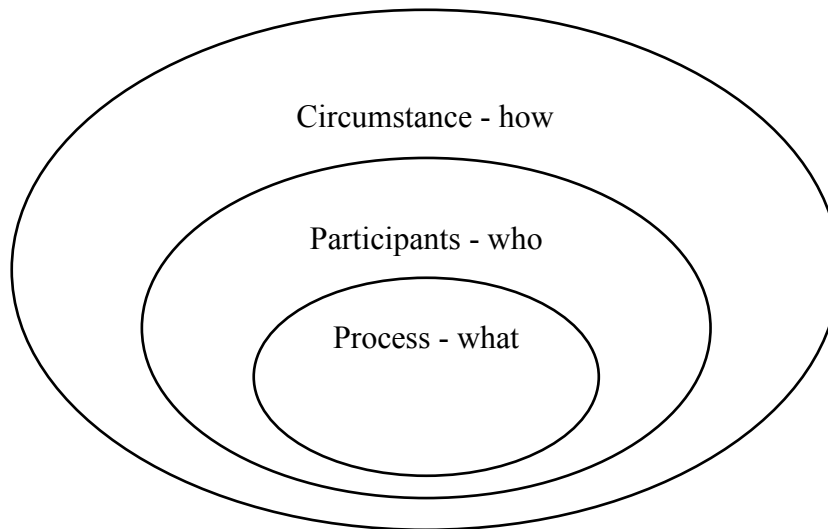


Fig. 1: Experiential structure of the clause

Therefore, by means of a transitivity analysis, one can investigate how language represents reality. Being the process the absolute centre of experience as Fig. 1 graphically shows, the transitivity analysis performed on *The Evenings*, shown in Chapter 4, will address processes specifically, with the aim of analysing how the reality expressed in the text is conveyed.

To carry out a transitivity analysis, it is important to recognize process types. Below is the definition of the six categories of processes of the transitivity system. An example is provided for each category, where the verb representing the process in question is underlined.

- Material processes are also called processes of ‘doings’ or ‘happenings’ because they describe an action performed by someone or something. They are connected to the material sphere of reality.
Ex. Yesterday she bought a new book.
- Mental processes, involve the inner dimension of reality and include all those verbs of sensing, cognition and perception.
Ex. He often thinks to his career

- Behavioural processes are considered of physiological and psychological behaviour, they are represented by those verbs which are “semantically a mix of material and mental” (Eggins 2004: 233).

Ex. The child cries a lot.

- Verbal processes relate to verbs of speaking and saying.

Ex. Anna told her sister a lot about her trip.

- Existential processes are concerned with the existence or happenings of things.

Ex. There is no place like that!

- Relational processes define two entities in a relationship of identification or attribution. In both cases, it can be either a case of intensive, possessive or circumstantial relational process.

Ex. That new shirt of him was a good purchase

2.2 Linguistic stylistics and style

Linguistic stylistics, or just stylistics, studies the use of style in texts. In particular, the stylistics we are interested into is the one that focuses on literary texts, also called literary stylistics. As said above, stylistics focuses on specific uses of language, intended as language choices and patterns or particular configurations of forms that the author uses as devices to convey meanings and that all together can contribute to the creation of style.

The central tenet of stylistic research is the qualitative method. The intuition of the reader is fundamental and features that appear relevant are attentively analysed, taken into account singularly and in relation to other features. In the previous section, it has been discussed the extent to which this methodological approach is central in the study of style but can be integrated with the quantitative one offered by corpus methods and corpus linguistics. Nonetheless, either the investigation also adopts quantitative methods or not, what remains central is the close reading of instances of language.

2.2.1 Prominence and foregrounding, deviation and parallelism

In this section, specifically addressed is the concept of foregrounding for both its centrality in stylistics and because it will be applied to the investigation of *The Evenings* in Section 4.2.

In the study of style of literary texts, the concepts of prominence, foregrounding and deviation play a central role. As has been said, style is provided by means of linguistic devices used to convey meanings. These specific uses of language that directly contribute to style are often perceived by the reader as their presence and use may show some kind of prominence, drawing attention on them. As Leech points out, “literature is distinguished from other varieties of linguistic activity above all by the number and importance of the deviant features it contains” (2008: 15) and it is exactly by means of such deviant features that the style of a text comes into being. The fact is that the prominence that certain elements seem to show is,

many times, intentionally pursued by the author who, in his or her creative use of language, employs the related prominence to construct style and meaning.

Central in stylistics and inherently connected to prominence is the concept of foregrounding, which can be defined as the employment of stylistic devices to draw the attention on specific elements and features of the text. It can work in two directions and take two forms: deviation and parallelism. Deviation occurs when the selected item disrupts the expectancies of what would have normally occurred in a given context, making it prominent to the eyes of the reader. On the other hand, foregrounding as parallelism involves the repetition of specific features in the text. In general, foregrounding can be applied by the author at any level of language, from orthographical to lexical, from syntactic to morphological. A note to be made is that the reader's intuition about prominence in a text can be misleading. In fact, not all cases of prominence are cases of foregrounding, for an element can be perceived as prominent without it making it an actual case of foregrounding.

A fundamental consideration to be made with regard to foregrounding is that prominence must be motivated, that is it must have a purpose within the meaning of the text and be relevant to the conveying of that meaning. This refers to what Mukalovskm calls the 'consistency and systematic character of foregrounding', which is better described by Leech and Short when they claim that

prominence, which is the basis for our sense of the particularity of a style, also provides the condition for recognition that a style is being used for a particular literary end: that it has a 'value in the game'. But there is an additional condition: we should be able to see a prominent feature of style as forming a significant relationship with other features of style, in an artistically coherent pattern of choice (Leech and Short 2007: 40).

To conclude, what should be remarked about foregrounding is that a text may show instances of both deviation and parallelism or just one or the other. In whatever forms it occurs, the aim of foregrounding is to draw attention on itself through the motivated prominence of language features. In these cases, language will be specifically used to establish and break norms, by showing patterns and configurations that are deeply related to the meaning of the work in which they are included. According to Leech and Short (2007: 46), the study of style should have a dynamic character, since "pervasive and local features of style are equally parts of the pattern". For this reason, foregrounded elements should be

taken into account both when they appear as single and individual cases and when they are a constant feature of the text at issue, for they contribution to the general meaning of the work will be equally central.

2.3 Corpus linguistics: a brief overview

The first of the linguistic frameworks to be considered here is corpus linguistics. Corpus linguistics is a methodology within the field of linguistics that uses data provided by corpora to study language and linguistic phenomena. As it is clear, its fundamental tool is the corpus, which can be defined as a collection of naturally occurring texts stored in a digital medium.

The beginning of corpus linguistics dates back to the 1960's, when written and spoken texts started to be collected to perform linguistic research. Since then, the discipline has deeply evolved and has been chosen by scholars of different linguistic fields for the most diverse purposes. In general, this methodology is used to support linguistic analyses and can be applied to language investigation by means of three different approaches. The corpus-based approach uses corpora to test hypothesis based on already existing linguistic theories. On the other hand, in the corpus-driven approach the investigation is carried out with as few preconceived ideas as possible, by studying what is considered relevant in a corpus. Finally, the corpus-aided/supported approach is used to find illustrative examples. In this dissertation, the corpus linguistics analysis of *The Evenings* that will be shown in Chapter 3 is conducted by adopting a corpus-based approach.

An aspect important considering is that corpus linguistics focuses on a central feature of language, its use. The fact is that language is an evolving and dynamic entity made to be used: its rules are based on the use that is made of it and it is subject to variation, which occurs through its usage in communication. In fact, instead of focusing on structural aspects of language, corpus linguistics works with collections of authentic texts, which allows one to study the actual use of natural occurring language. As a matter of fact, the aspects of language that can be investigated with the aid of corpora are plenty but, regardless of the main focus of the investigation, it is very common to find two central research goals:

assessing the extent to which a pattern is found and analysing the contextual factors that influence variability (Biber et al. 1998: 3). For example, one may want to study the context in which an adjective is most likely to be found, paying attention to the other words that co-occur with it and focusing on its collocations. The same adjective may also be investigated from the point of view of the frequency of its usage, and so on.

2.3.1 Corpora usage and results

An easy way to explore corpora is by using a concordance software which allows to investigate various aspects of the texts contained in a corpus by means of different tools. One of the most famous is AntConc, the concordance software that has been used to carry out the corpus analysis of *TE* shown in Chapter 3. AntConc will be more specifically addressed in following Section 2.1.1.

The results that a corpus analysis provides can appear as a concordance or as frequency figures. The concordance is a list of all the instances of occurrence of a word in a corpus given with its context. The word in question can be referred to as a keyword and it will usually be presented centred in a line which, on both sides of the word, provides the context. This is defined as a keyword-in-context concordance, or KWIC. Frequency figures, on the other hand, give numerical information about the search word. It can be the number of instances a keyword shows or lists ranking words according to their frequency in the corpus, called wordlist or keyword list.

2.3.2 Advantages and limitations of corpus linguistics

The advantages of the use of corpora for the study of language are many. The most evident of these will now be reported also taking into account those enumerated by Lindquist (2009). In general, corpora provide objective data that comes from language in use and, as such, represent an authentic sample. Data can easily be verified and shared among researchers, as well as accessed by users all over the world. Corpora can be an evidence base for research, provide illustrative examples, or to find the frequency of occurrence of any item one may want to investigate, also representing a theoretical resource. Moreover, since texts are in electronic format, corpora allow to do quantitative linguistic research. Not of less importance is the usefulness of corpora for non-native speakers of a language.

Despite its many advantages, corpus linguistics has its limitations as any other methodology. According to the list given by Lindquist (2009), limitations of corpus linguistics can be summarized in the following points. First, findings may sometimes turn out to be trivial and also present mistakes. Secondly, a speaker's knowledge of a language will always be greater than the material corpora can contain, as well as the intuition of a native speaker will become useful to understand what is grammatical or not. Finally, the use of corpora cannot be separated from a theory of language, which will be needed to define what to look for and to explain the results obtained.

2.3.3 Quantitative and qualitative, two sides of research

An important remark to be made is that also corpus linguistics draws a distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods. From the one hand, one may apply a quantitative method to the investigation, thus focusing on counting and frequency related aspects of the item at issue. On the other, a qualitative method can be applied when the interest lies on single aspects, be it a text or a grammatical construction, in that case you will carry out a close analysis on that specific point.

The use of computers and digital storage of texts allow one to deal with enormous quantities of data enabling quantitative research which would, if manually made, be very time consuming and generally limited. Nonetheless, the qualitative dimension remains central at different moments of the investigation. It is important at the beginning, as you may need it to define your research question and the item you will be analysing, and it is equally central when it comes to the observation of the results, as a close look is essential to the understanding of data emerged. In fact, "to make the best use of the figures, it is vital to go back to individual examples from the corpus to look at the reality behind figures. (Lindquist, 2009: 26).

2.3.4 A purpose, a corpus: types of corpora and other areas of interest

The compilation of corpora has started to be used in the field linguistic research. Since then, this area of language study has developed enormously on many fronts and nowadays the types of corpora existing and the purposes of their use are a multitude. The result is that for

an aspect one may want to investigate, there almost certainly is a suitable corpus. In order that the results are as meaningful as possible, it is important to choose a corpus that suits the aim of the research. To follow, is a list of the main types of corpora with examples for any category:

- Spoken corpora, which contain spoken language text: The London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC) and the Corpus of London Teenage Speech (COLT)
- General corpora are the ones which contain both spoken and written language: the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the Bank of English (BoE), the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA)
- Specialised corpora for the study of specific purposes: the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE)
- Historical diachronic corpora for the study of language over time periods: COHA and the Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern English Tracts
- Text archives can be used as corpora: Corpus of English Novels (CEN), the Oxford Text Archives (OTA) and the Project Gutenberg
- The web can be used as a corpus as well, a development of the last two decades

As we can see, corpus linguistics offers many possibilities and resources for the study of language. For this reason, corpus linguistics as a set of methodologies is not only used by “core” corpus linguists but also by researchers from other fields, who may find this methodology revealing to investigate language for specific purposes. In fact, corpus linguistics can provide useful insight also to those interested in systemic functional linguistics, in stylistics, in semantics, in cognitive linguistics, in language acquisition, in sociolinguistics and in many other fields.

2.3.5 AntConc: software for text analysis

As said above, corpora are usually investigated by means of concordance software. In this section, the software AntConc will be introduced with a presentation of its main features and tools.

AntConc is a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordancing and text analysis. It was designed by Laurence Anthony and specifically created as a resource to be used in the classroom. It is available for Windows, Mac and Linux and can be easily downloaded for computer usage from Anthony's website. User friendly and graphically intuitive, AntConc is one of the main concordance software used both among researchers and students, as the tools it provides allow to investigate different aspects of your text or corpus. Examples of the tools below will be given in Chapter 3 with the corpus analysis of *The Evenings*.

Concordancer tool

After having uploaded your text or corpus in AntConc, you can search for a linguistic item in the concordancer tool. It will show you all the hits in which the item you typed is to be found in the corpus. You can type a single word but also phrases and the number of hits for that item will be given. In particular, the concordancer tool shows the results in enumerated KWIC lines, (Key Word In Context), which means that, for every hit, the search item will be given in the centre of the line surrounded by the context in which it appears. Very useful is the option to assign colours to words around the item, both to its left and right, up to three levels. In addition, results obtained can also be saved, for example in a text file.

Plot tool

This tool provides a simple yet very useful function, giving the user information on where the search item is to be found in a file. In particular, boxes will appear showing lines within them: each box represents a file and the lines are the hits of the search item in that file, which will be positioned in the box according to the item position in the file.

View files tool

This tool makes it easy for the user to see all the hits of the search item in a file. Hits will be given coloured and their total number provided as well. The view files tool is accessible also

through the concordancer tool: if you press a hit in the KWIC line, it will show you that specific hit in the File view tool.

Word list and Keyword list tools

These two tools allow the creation of lists of words which can be very useful for text and corpus investigation. The Word list tool generates a list of all the words contained in the corpus, which can be ranked both alphabetically and according to their frequency. To note is that, to avoid functional or specific words to appear in the list, a stoplist can also be included. This tool can provide initial information for your investigation, highlighting possibly interesting features.

Nonetheless, more useful may be the Keyword list tool. As a wordlist is often not that revealing in terms of central words in a corpus, a keyword list is generated for this purpose. Specifically, to create a keyword list, you first need to upload a reference corpus. The tool will then generate a list which will show words occurring with unusual frequency in your corpus when compared to the reference corpus. The list ranks the words according to their level of 'keyness', which is calculated by means of a statistical measure, either the chi-squared or the log likelihood. As a matter of fact, keyword lists can provide much more revealing information about your corpus, as the unusual frequency of the words ranked is usually useful indicator of important features that may need further investigation.

Word cluster tool

This tool is particularly addressed to the investigation of strings of words and multi-word units in general. It will show the search item surrounded by clusters of words co-occurring with it. The number of words to be displayed to the left or right of the item can be specified. This tool can be useful to study multi-word units of any kind, for example when looking at collocations, or to focus on fixed expressions like idioms.

2.4 Corpus linguistics for the study of stylistics

Now that corpus linguistics and its main features have been generally considered, we can draw the attention to one of the many fields to which corpus linguistics has proved its utility. Stylistics will be addressed more in detail in the following section but it is important to first define it to understand how it can interact with the methods of corpus linguistics.

2.4.1 From stylistics to corpus linguistics

When talking about stylistics, we refer to the branch of linguistics that focuses on the study of creative use of language in texts and on the way in which language devices can contribute to the creation of style. Stylistics is particularly devoted to the analysis of literary texts and of configurations of choices and patterns for the effect these produce on the reader. Such choices and patterns represent the devices authors can employ to convey meanings in their work. Stylistic research can regard the style of a single author as well as specific features in the work of different authors. Because of its aims and purposes, it requires a close analysis of texts, usually adopting a qualitative approach. As such, analyses within the stylistic field need great attention to specific pieces of text which can be a high time-consuming activity.

The creation and development of electronic corpora and of corpus linguistics soon crossed the path of stylistic studies leading the two linguistics fields to a further one, recognised as corpus stylistics. The central point of corpus stylistics is that it applies the methods of corpus linguistics to the study of literary texts. Their hybrid combination results in a theoretical framework that very well suits specific needs within stylistics, also managing to go beyond some of its limitations.

2.4.2 Advantages of corpus stylistics

As previously discussed, the uses of corpora for linguistic analysis are many and result fruitful to stylistic research as well, which finds different advantages with it. An example is the fact that, by using corpora, the data becomes accessible to any user in the world, which makes analyses replicable and potentially available and verifiable in their entire process.

Apart from this, the most evident advantage of using corpus method for stylistic analysis is arguably the fact that, being texts in electronic format, it is possible to study a much bigger quantity of data and texts than a manually performed research could possibly do. This, as a matter of fact, allows to apply a quantitative approach to the field enabling quantitative linguistic research. The importance of such a contribution is immediately obvious if we consider that corpus methods make it possible to investigate choices and patterns of language on a much wider scale by means of corpus tools, that can provide essential information and figures to the study of style, like the frequency of occurrence of a given linguistic item. Direct consequence of the possibility to study much more data is that the range of research topics that can be pursued becomes wider as many are those aspects that can take advantage of a quantitative approach, making it possible to address issues related to style that could not or hardly covered manually. This is arguably a contribution that corpus linguistics gives to what can be considered a limit of the stylistic method.

In relation to what has just been said, we can consider the extent to which corpus stylistics can be more insightful in the analyses of texts with respect to a standard stylistic method. In general, “software tools such as concordances can classify and arrange data, and thus changes what is empirically observable” (Ho 2011: 7), which once again stresses the importance of dealing with a broader quantity of data. Tools provided by software such as

AntConc make it possible to focus on different points of the aspect at issue as repetitions and patterns of language become more easily observable. For example, a word or a linguistic item can be investigated in the concordance lines, by means of a keyword list, in the plot tool, as part of a cluster, and so on. It can be argued that, by means of corpus methods, patterns of language can be potentially investigated at different grammatical levels, be it syntactic, semantic, lexical etc. The fact is that both corpus linguistics and stylistics make use of linguistic evidence, which makes the utility of the complementary use of their methods even clearer.

A further advantage of applying the use of corpora for the study of style lies in a methodological reason: stylistic analysis often requires to specifically focus on the comparison of elements and corpora perfectly answer to such need.

2.4.3 A tool, not an end: further considerations on corpus stylistics

To conclude, it is important to stress the fact that the use of corpus methods in the study of style represents a tool, a methodology, an aid that can contribute to research in the field. As Ho points out, “the use of computers for analysing electronic versions of texts is to generate and display linguistic evidence in support of our interpretation and stylistic analysis” (2011: 11). Consequently, it should be clear that corpus stylistics does not limit to the retrieving of quantitative data as the attentive qualitative component remains central. In general, corpus methods represent a tool for research, not an end, which means that they can support evidence and hypothesis but are of no utility if we demand them to provide answers on their own, just by collecting quantitative information and lacking a qualitative insight.

Another point to be considered is that corpus methods are not always and irrespectively suitable to the study of a stylistic issue since, as a matter of fact, there are aspects which cannot be quantified. In general, “if and how corpus methods are applicable to the analysis of a literary text depends on the text under analysis” (Mahlberg 2014: 387).

Corpus stylistics finds the enthusiasm of many linguists but, as it is normal, there are also those who disregard the application of corpus methods to the study of style. One of their main reasons is that they see it as possibly affecting and compromising literary features as

such. In fact, they believe that applying a quantitative approach would make literary features lose their centrality and meaning within the work, reducing them to a matter of counting and numbers.

Chapter 3: A Corpus-based approach to the analysis of *The Evenings*

The aim of the corpus-based investigation presented in this Section was to obtain quantitative information to start to gain an insight into the features of the text and single out the ones

which stand out the most or seem to show particular saliency for some reason. To this end, the plain text of *The Evenings* was downloaded and saved in .txt format. Subsequently, the tagged text divided into the ten chapters that make up the book was uploaded into AntConc. The POS-tag of the text was provided by using TagAnt.

3.1 Wordlist

To generate the wordlist, first a stoplist was uploaded into AntConc to remove common words that would have appeared among the first results but which would not have been relevant to our purpose. In particular, all the proper names of characters were included in the stoplist because, being them Dutch names, they would have shown a very high but at the same time not meaningful frequency, as the reference corpus used to calculate the keyword list was an English one. Secondly, a lemma list taken from Laurence Anthony's website and based on the BNC was uploaded. Here are the results of the wordlist:

| <i>Rank</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Lemma</i> |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1 | 4534 | he |
| 2 | 2781 | be |
| 3 | 2373 | i |
| 4 | 2054 | say |
| 5 | 1957 | you |
| 6 | 1045 | have |
| 7 | 728 | go |
| 8 | 726 | they |
| 9 | 680 | think |
| 10 | 675 | with |
| 11 | 576 | she |
| 12 | 574 | ask |
| 13 | 510 | one |
| 14 | 427 | we |
| 15 | 380 | ares |
| 16 | 370 | as |
| 17 | 363 | come |
| 18 | 359 | from |
| 19 | 340 | all |
| 20 | 320 | back |
| 21 | 320 | father |
| 22 | 297 | see |
| 23 | 290 | look |
| 24 | 284 | this |
| 25 | 279 | into |
| 26 | 254 | do |
| 27 | 254 | take |
| 28 | 253 | mother |
| 29 | 252 | can |
| 30 | 247 | man |

Table 1: Wordlist of *The Evenings*

3.1.1 Personal pronouns

The very first word appearing on the list is the personal pronoun *he*. Since the text is partly narrated in the third person and the protagonist is a boy, this finding was predictable. What stands out the most from it is something else. During the reading of the book one can notice that the person speaking is often a man or a male character in general and that very little space is given to women, who tend to speak infrequently. Women contribute little discourse, and when they do so most of the time they comment on what male characters said before. Their discourse, therefore, consists of superfluous and brief utterances. Frits' mother is the only female character who is given the same space as other male characters, both in the developing of the text and in the direct speech that each person produces. From this result of the personal pronoun *he* appearing at the top position, we can start to make sense of the tendency of the text to give more space and attention to male characters, both as subjects in the narration and in direct speech. A confirmation that Frits' mother is the only female character that is given space is the fact that the personal pronoun *she* occurs in the results. Also, analysis of the concordance lines suggests that it mostly refers to this woman in particular.

The same goes for the first-person pronoun *I*. This is a logic result because, as we know, the reflections of the protagonist are very often reported and the first personal pronoun is used because Frits is "talking" to himself. Of course, he is not the only one using this pronoun, but by analysing the concordance results, we can see that most of the times it is Frits speaking to himself or thinking. From this quantitative observation, we can see how much space self-reflection is given in the narration.

Another personal pronoun occupies the first positions: *you*. The high frequency of *you* can be a hint of the fact that characters are often addressing or referring to each other when talking, and they do so using direct speech.

3.1.2 Verbs and processes

As regards the presence of verbs in the list, we can see that the second occurring is *say*. This is not an outstanding result as this verb is often used to introduce direct speech, but

it might be a confirmation of the presence of dialogues or self-discourse in the novel. The fourth verb is *go*, which represents a material process. By looking more carefully at the concordance, we notice that this lemma is very often used to describe physical movement of the subject in a clause as it often occurs together with an adverb of place or a noun phrase referring to a place. Given the high frequency and the use of the lemma *go* in the text as shown by the concordance, it can be said that great attention is paid to the description of the physical actions and movements of the characters.

| Concordance Hits 213 | |
|----------------------|--|
| Hit | KWIC |
| 6 | realize that , said Frits , I'll go and get it . You hold on! |
| 7 | into the hall , his head bowed . " Go and see whether the key is |
| 8 | stairs . " Quick , " he thought . " I'll go and talk to whoever it is . |
| 9 | is actually quite sultry . " " Let's go anyway , " his father said . " Then I' |
| 10 | need to leave , without having to go anywhere . Those are the cases in |
| 11 | things I tell you . Do you go around blabbing about that to everyone ? " " |
| 12 | things I tell you . Do you go around blabbing about that to everyone ? " " |
| 13 | to the dentist ? Father needs to go as well . His teeth are always |
| 14 | dying , " the girl said . " I'll go ask how she is , then I' |
| 15 | I know that , it will all go automatically . I have had just a |
| 16 | the cases in which one must go away from somewhere . " " Stay and have |
| 17 | , I'm afraid . " " To turn and go away would be awfully rude , " Frits |
| 18 | about it , because then things can go awry . Listen to the counsel of |
| 19 | twenty-two thousand that way , or go back and correct the first ones . |
| 20 | in a tizzy . I wanted to go back , but I couldn't . I |
| 21 | let the tap run and suddenly go back into the room . But I |
| 22 | silent . " So do you have to go back to the chapel then ? " Frits |
| 23 | , but it is Wednesday . When we go back to work again it will |

Figure 1: occurrences of *go* in the concordance

The fifth verb occurring in order of frequency is *think*. *Think* describes a mental process. The fact that it ranks in this position is quite revealing as it seems to be opposed to the material process described by *go*. These findings mirror the structure of the book: as previously discussed, a particular feature of the novel is that the text seems to be split in two. On the one hand, the interior monologues and the self-reflections of the protagonist, and on the other, it reports informal conversations, represented by the direct speeches of characters throughout the book. There is no in-between, except for the descriptions of what is going on in the surroundings which, however, very often make part of Frits' thoughts.

Ask is an example of a verb representing a verbal process. It may be said to contribute to describing the tendency of the text to illustrate many instances of direct speeches, which demonstrates the fact, once again, that dialogical parts play an important role in the narration.

At the bottom of the list we find two verbs, *see* and *look*, which belong to the sphere of mental and behavioural processes respectively. They contribute to showing that much attention is paid to what characters do, as even more subtle actions like looking or seeing, verbs belonging to the perception subgroup in Halliday's terms, are reported and described. If we observe the verb *look* in the concordance, we notice that it is also used with the aim of describing the appearance of things in the sense of what something looks like and that it is often followed by an attribute. It indicates that also the appearance and description of what and how things look like is given great relevance, and this is representative of the extremely reflective motif of the narration.

| Concordance Hits 89 | |
|---------------------|---|
| Hit | KWIC |
| 55 | ? " They laughed . " What does that studio look like , anyway ? " Frits asked . " We must |
| 56 | then , " Maurits said , " what I should look like , how I should dress — " " And |
| 57 | woman in a green velvet dress . " Look , look , Dirk , " Jaap called out , " over |
| 58 | his fork to dish up more . Look , look . " Gritting his teeth , he watched |
| 59 | wrote " Frits " , mirrorwise , on the windowpane . " Look , Louis , " he said , " how quickly I |
| 60 | really think about the way I look ? " Maurits asked . " You've had your |
| 61 | . So that you get pastries that look nice too . " " I would , if I |
| 62 | I look ? " " Oh , " said Frits , " you look normal ; base as the next man . |
| 63 | I look ? " " Oh , " said Frits , " you look normal ; base as the next man . |
| 64 | 't dare to go for a look , not when you're alone in |
| 65 | said : " But honestly , how do I look ? " " Oh , " said Frits , " you look normal ; |
| 66 | said : " But honestly , how do I look ? " " Oh , " said Frits , " you look normal ; |
| 67 | and listened . " It makes the head look old , shiny and distasteful , " he thought , |
| 68 | and listened . " It makes the head look old , shiny and distasteful , " he thought , |
| 69 | a roof or precipice and saying : look out ! And the third is , while |
| 70 | then , at the last moment , yelling : look out ! So they could jump aside |
| 71 | across the steamy glass . " You definitely look quite peaky , Louis , " he said . Louis |

Figure 2: occurrences of *look* in the concordance

3.1.3 Nouns

With regard to the nouns on the list, the first ones appearing are *father* and *mother*. Their high frequency tells much about who the other characters are that more often take the scene in the book apart from the main character. We know that Frits' parents are included in many moments during the narration and are also the ones he speaks to more frequently. Indeed, they represent his first contact with the external world, outside of his mind.

3.2 Keyword list

The keyword list was generated after uploading the wordlist of the written component of the BNC used as the reference corpus. Table 2 summarises the results:

| <i>Rank</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Keyness</i> | <i>Effect</i> | <i>Keyword</i> |
|-------------|------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1 | 1852 | +5221.2 | 0.0158 | said |
| 2 | 2886 | +4337.39 | 0.0092 | he |
| 3 | 1681 | +1994.66 | 0.0072 | you |
| 4 | 529 | +1958.15 | 0.0107 | asked |
| 5 | 1648 | +1944.35 | 0.0072 | his |
| 6 | 527 | +1523.91 | 0.0092 | thought |
| 7 | 1816 | +1462.69 | 0.0057 | i |
| 8 | 320 | +1057.79 | 0.007 | father |
| 9 | 253 | +696.72 | 0.0055 | mother |
| 10 | 129 | +561.86 | 0.0035 | replied |
| 11 | 266 | +550.25 | 0.0051 | went |
| 12 | 174 | +426.04 | 0.0039 | yes |
| 13 | 88 | +405.32 | 0.0024 | stairs |
| 14 | 165 | +354.82 | 0.0036 | door |
| 15 | 191 | +354.53 | 0.0039 | room |
| 16 | 35 | +328.6 | 0.001 | divan |
| 17 | 75 | +324.07 | 0.0021 | coat |
| 18 | 316 | +322.94 | 0.0041 | back |
| 19 | 177 | +321.39 | 0.0036 | himself |
| 20 | 145 | +318.98 | 0.0033 | table |
| 21 | 46 | +300.25 | 0.0013 | stove |
| 22 | 189 | +295.4 | 0.0036 | head |
| 23 | 65 | +278.47 | 0.0018 | shouted |
| 24 | 235 | +274.06 | 0.0038 | man |
| 25 | 48 | +269.88 | 0.0014 | loudly |
| 26 | 109 | +264.17 | 0.0027 | evening |
| 27 | 99 | +249.18 | 0.0025 | sat |

| | | | | |
|----|-----|---------|--------|---------|
| 28 | 85 | +246.55 | 0.0022 | slowly |
| 29 | 137 | +243.83 | 0.003 | turned |
| 30 | 36 | +240.08 | 0.001 | mumbled |

Table 2: Keyword list of *The Evenings*

The keyword list shares many similarities with the wordlist we have seen above, especially with regard to the very first entries. In particular, the three main personal pronouns *he*, *you* and *I* found in the wordlist appear here as well. Moreover, two nouns the lists have in common are *father* and *mother*. As regards verbs, here we find once again the lemmas of *ask*, *say*, *think* and *go*.

Nevertheless, substantial differences are spotted soon. One of these is the fact that the verbs *see* and *look* are not found among the first thirty entries of the keyword list, while they had shown a significant frequency in the wordlist.

3.2.1 Nouns

It can be noticed that many items on the keyword list are nouns. This tells the keyword list apart from the wordlist, as in the wordlist few of the results belonged to this class. A striking fact is that these nouns share a common semantic area, if we may call it so, as all of them are parts of a house or are somehow related to a house or to the personal sphere. In the specific, these nouns are: *stairs*, *door*, *room*, *divan*, *coat*, *table* and *stove*. This is very representative of the book since much of the narration takes place at Frits' home, especially in the kitchen or in his room. There are also many references in the dialogues to daily and common objects or parts of the house.

Alternatively, the events unfold outdoor on the streets of the city, among the canals or sometimes also at another character's house, even if this happens only for brief pieces of narration. In either case, however, apart from Frits' house, the surroundings are never specifically described and many details about it are absent in this sense. This is reflected also by the fact that the keyword list does not show any noun pertaining to semantic areas which are not the ones related to the house or domestic sphere as mentioned above.

Other two nouns, the high frequency of which is motivated by their role in the narration, are *head* and *evening*. As is known, Frits' almost obsessive attention for the physical

aspect of other people makes him draw his attention on different details that may denote aging or decay. Baldness is one of the first features he focuses on, in fact the protagonist often comments on other people's heads and hair state.

The other noun to be observed in the keyword list is *evening*. Its presence does not need further justification or explanation. It just serves the purpose of confirming, within the context of the linguistic analysis carried out here, the common thread on which the narration is based.

3.2.2 Adverbs

Moving on with the analysis, a striking aspect is related to the adverbs on the list. Specifically, the only two adverbs we find are *loudly* and *slowly*, which rank similarly on the list. What appears to be outstanding in this case is not some intrinsic aspect of theirs as single words, but it becomes clearer if they are considered in relation to each other. In fact, what can be noticed is that they are the only two adverbs on the list and, at the same time, they seem somehow opposite to each other. This does not mean that the one is the exact antonym of the other, yet it cannot be denied that the shade of meanings they respectively convey are opposite to a certain extent. With *loudly* what is being described is a sound that can easily be heard, *slowly* instead regards the speed at which something moves or happens. They are clearly not antonyms but still we perceive that something in their meanings puts them far from each other.

A first tool to take a deeper look at the use and presence of these adverbs in the book is the “concordance plot” available in AntConc. It shows graphically, hence very clearly, exactly where the word you are investigating on is located within the text(s) you are analysing. Figures 4 and 5 show the case of *loudly* and *slowly*. As for *loudly*, we can see that there are few instances of this word in every chapter, ranging from 1 to 5 specifically. However, the number is surprisingly and significantly higher in Chapter 10.

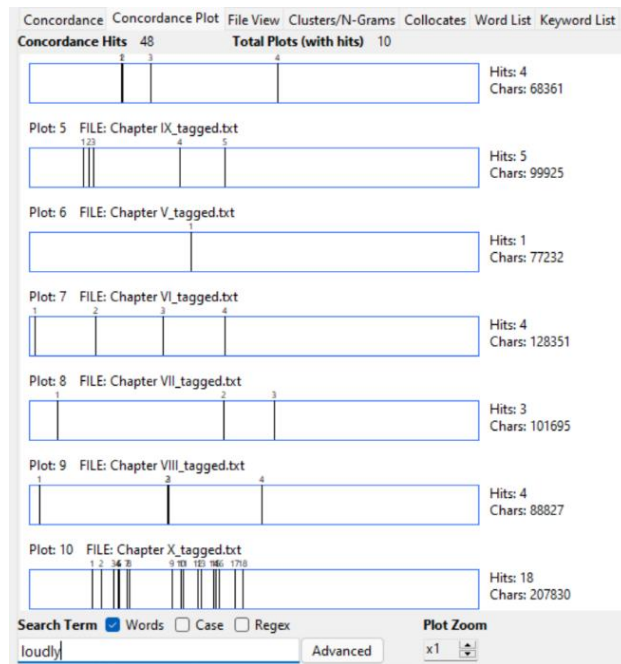


Figure 4: *loudly* in the concordance plot tool

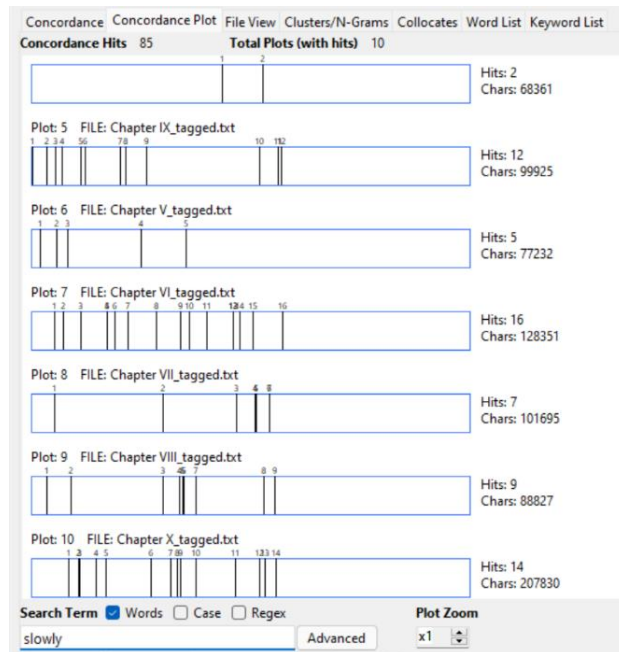


Figure 5: *slowly* in the concordance plot tool

Figure 6 represents the concordance lines for the instances of *loudly* in Chapter 10. It can be noticed that this adverb is largely used in clauses in which Frits is the subject. In particular, the adverb describes the manner in which Frits says something and in only very few examples it is related to his actions.

| Concordance Hits 18 | |
|---------------------|--|
| Hit | KWIC |
| 1 | berries and apples , " Frits replied loudly , " a fresh , slightly tart beverage . |
| 2 | , he slammed the front door loudly behind him and remained standing |
| 3 | going to listen , play it loudly enough . The way you would |
| 4 | at all . " " Father , " he said loudly , " Father . " The man looked up . " |
| 5 | too late . " " Father , " he said loudly , " Father . " " Yes , my boy , " his |
| 6 | could hear his parents talking loudly . " Frits ! " his mother shouted after |
| 7 | humming sound . " Soh , " he sang loudly . He repeated it twice and |
| 8 | his chin . " Absolutely , " Frits said loudly , " I am a small-time |
| 9 | 's not that , " Frits said loudly , " I would be more than |
| 10 | to his ear and sang loudly , in a low voice : " Soh ! " " |
| 11 | your own plate , " Frits said loudly , " it's more convenient . Otherwise |
| 12 | really terrible , Mother ? " he asked loudly . " It's something Louis told |
| 13 | off the light and shouted loudly : " Just a minute . I'm |
| 14 | isn't wine , " he said loudly . " Not wine ? " his father asked . " |
| 15 | leafed through it , closed it loudly , opened it again , examined the |
| 16 | feeder and slammed the lid loudly . " Ow , " Frits said in a |
| 17 | . " I was saying , " Frits said loudly , " that the two of you , |
| 18 | one is calling , " Frits said loudly . " Two times , " he thought , " that |

Figure 6: occurrences of *loudly* in the concordance of Chapter 10

On the other hand, *slowly* shows a different distribution. There are chapters with a few instances and others with many more. Figure 7 shows the concordance lines for *slowly*. It can be noticed that also in this case Chapter 10 features a large number of cases, being the second chapter with more examples of this adverb. Looking at the context of the clauses in which it appears in the last chapter, we can see that it is used in combination with verbs describing movements, for example *to walk*. With regard to the subjects of the clauses with *slowly*, Frits is again the most frequent subject but not the only one as in other clauses we find his friend Louis, his father, an inanimate object or an unspecified subject.

| Concordance Hits 14 | |
|---------------------|---|
| Hit | KWIC |
| 1 | behind him , climbed the stairs slowly and crossed the landing . Right |
| 2 | go . " Louis raised his hand slowly and felt at his forehead |
| 3 | towards the ceiling , he walked slowly back and forth , then took |
| 4 | binding and slid the volume slowly back into place . " Frits ! " his |
| 5 | a goner . " Moving his head slowly from side to side , he |
| 6 | programme for tomorrow . It is slowly growing dark , and I am |
| 7 | crumbs . " " What ? " his father asked slowly . He smiled . " You're better |
| 8 | , hopped down the stairs and slowly headed back the way he |
| 9 | stairs and crossed the landing slowly . In the living room his |
| 10 | bed , scratched at his temples , slowly sank back and fell asleep |
| 11 | , flickered and then died out slowly . The sirens and whistles stopped , |
| 12 | up the fallen newspapers , searched slowly through the pile , and went |
| 13 | a moment . Then he walked slowly up the stairs and into |
| 14 | , " a calm , mellow voice said slowly , " we would like to once |

Figure 7: occurrences of *slowly* in the concordance of Chapter 10

3.2.3 Verbs and processes

This last section is devoted to the most frequent verbs. As previously said, the keyword list contains verbs which were also included in the wordlist. However, it also features a few new entries. In particular, we notice the verb forms *replied*, *shouted*, *sat*, *turned* and *mumbled*. The first one, which describes a verbal process, does not need particular attention since it is commonly used in direct speech. *Shouted* is a specific verb that regards the way in which characters speak. The instances of use of this verb are represented in Figure 8. However, it is not that easy to define it from the point of view of the category it belongs to, in fact we may include it between verbal and behavioural processes.

| Concordance Hits 65 | |
|---------------------|---|
| Hit | KWIC |
| 12 | the speaking tube . " Frits , " he shouted back , " is Viktor home ? " " I |
| 13 | them off on someone , " he shouted back , pulling the door closed . " |
| 14 | them off on someone , " he shouted back , pulling the door closed . " |
| 15 | , " the voice answered . " Fine , " Frits shouted back , " tell him Frits van |
| 16 | , we'll talk soon , " he shouted back . The rain began . He |
| 17 | wait and see , " the man shouted back . They heard a rumbling |
| 18 | we here ? " " Quiet , quiet ! " he shouted . But the voice went on |
| 19 | best wishes accompany you , " Frits shouted , climbing aboard the tram . Smiling , |
| 20 | curtains . " Watch out ! " his mother shouted . " Don't go wiping your |
| 21 | right away , but when he shouted " Down ! Knock it off ! " the |
| 22 | first , " a fat little man shouted down to them . With the |
| 23 | Frits ? " " Frits van Egters , " he shouted , " friend of Louis , of Frans |
| 24 | geranium any day . " " Catch ! " Joop shouted . Frits caught a ring of |
| 25 | . " Come over here , " a gardener shouted . Frits pushed open the heavy |
| 26 | him . " Wait a minute ! " Frits shouted , " hand me that stick , would |
| 27 | him . " Wait a minute ! " Frits shouted , " hand me that stick , would |
| 28 | . " We'll go together , " Frits shouted . He followed him and passed |
| 29 | off right away . " Whoa ! " Frits shouted . " Hev ! " Lidia cried loudly and |

Figure 8: occurrences of *shouted* in the concordance

Sat, for its part, describes a material process and, among the results, it is motivated by the fact that, as we know, much attention is paid to movements and physical actions of characters, so its high frequency contributes to confirming this feature of narration. In addition, according to the context provided by the concordance, Figure 9, *sat* is used almost exclusively in moments which take place inside the house and in clauses with nouns related to the domestic sphere. This shows how the results emerging from the analysis connect to each other and represent what is typical of the text.

The same goes for *turned*, another verb referring to a material process which focuses on the actions of the characters. As Figure 10 shows, it is often referred to physical movements in space but especially to specific actions connected to the use of an object, for example the light, the gas or the radio. This recalls, once again, the domestic sphere in which most part of the narration takes place.

The last verb which ranks high on the list is *mumbled*. This verb is not easily definable in terms of process either. It may be seen to be between the two groups of verbal and behavioural. In addition, it is a peculiar one in the specific case of this text and its narrative context as it is mainly used in clauses in which Frits is the subject and thus it is strictly connected to him, see Figure 11. This connection becomes clearer in the light of the narrative value this verb takes on. Specifically, it can be seen as further evidence of the reflectiveness that distinguishes Frits. He is always busy thinking about something, often in a way that makes him mumble his thoughts. This gives his thoughts a vague shape in which they become an in-between of reflections and words.

| Concordance Hits 99 | |
|---------------------|---|
| Hit | KWIC |
| 27 | boy , " his father replied . They sat down at the table . " I |
| 28 | them on , " Frits said . They sat down at the table . " It' |
| 29 | lit the gas fire and sat down at the writing table . |
| 30 | the newspaper from Frits . She sat down at the table , got |
| 31 | the newspaper from Frits . She sat down at the table , got |
| 32 | out , " over here . " The two sat down at the table . " It' |
| 33 | mother brought their dinner . They sat down at the table . The |
| 34 | , rising to his feet . He sat down at the table . Frits |
| 35 | it beside the mirror and sat down at the desk . " Listen , |
| 36 | two days , " Louis said . He sat down between Jaap and Frits |
| 37 | made room for Frits , who sat down between them on a |
| 38 | hard , " she said as they sat down , " but I can't |
| 39 | newspaper from the rack and sat down by the window . Outside |
| 40 | coal to the stove and sat down by the window . He |
| 41 | and loved by millions . " He sat down by the radio , put |
| 42 | and loved by millions . " He sat down by the radio , put |
| 43 | slowly into the living room , sat down by the fire and |
| 44 | not calling any more . " He sat down by the radio . " Let' |

Figure 9: occurrences of *sat* in the concordance

| Concordance Hits 137 | |
|----------------------|---|
| Hit | KWIC |
| 33 | chair beside the bed , and turned it off . " Don't stay |
| 34 | side of the set and turned it off . He combed his |
| 35 | jumped at the set and turned it off . Then he sat |
| 36 | in on a waltz . Frits turned it off , tiptoed out of |
| 37 | went to the radio and turned it on . An organ was |
| 38 | over to the radio and turned it on . " — decision to be |
| 39 | a coating of chrome . " He turned it over , the price was |
| 40 | out her right leg and turned it so he could see |
| 41 | knob between his fingers and turned it up slowly again , bit |
| 42 | . He took the big armchair , turned it with the seat towards |
| 43 | had taken the night before , turned left after five minutes and |
| 44 | firmament . At the river he turned left and followed the granite |
| 45 | the quay to the river , turned left and walked quickly , leaping |
| 46 | end of the canal they turned left , down a broad street . " |
| 47 | returned to the foyer and turned left into a bar area , |
| 48 | opening and the lamp being turned off . He went to the |
| 49 | went to the kitchen and turned off the burner . When he |
| 50 | a red linen shade and turned off the ceiling light . " Do |

Figure 10: occurrences of *turned* in the concordance

| Concordance Hits 36 | |
|---------------------|--|
| Hit | KWIC |
| 3 | , the two of them , " he mumbled , adjusting the set . A cowboy |
| 4 | rang . " God help us , " he mumbled and went to open it . " |
| 5 | countless points of infection , " he mumbled . At the end of the |
| 6 | beneath . " A healthy scalp , " he mumbled , " but I must start massaging |
| 7 | to a roaring start , " he mumbled . " But today's Sunday , " he |
| 8 | don't think so , " he mumbled , going to his bedroom and |
| 9 | to take a piss , " he mumbled . He stepped up to the |
| 10 | window . " Evening has come , " he mumbled . He walked back into the |
| 11 | beneficence , beast of atonement , " he mumbled , holding it up to his |
| 12 | my courage until midnight , " he mumbled . " I must persevere till then . |
| 13 | , his anus . " Very distasteful , " he mumbled . " If you saw a photograph |
| 14 | . " A quarter to six , " he mumbled , " it's still night . " He |
| 15 | remedy for dried cod , " he mumbled . It was a quarter past |
| 16 | that folding and hanging , " he mumbled . Once in bed , he thought : " |
| 17 | read out loud , but she mumbled . Or actually , it wasn't |
| 18 | anxious . " Ten to seven , " he mumbled , peering at the watch . " I |
| 19 | body is gravely damaged , " he mumbled , peering into the round shaving |
| 20 | the room he heard a mumbled reply . He descended the stairs |

Figure 11: occurrences of *mumbled* in the concordance

3.3 Discussion and conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning, this part of analysis looked at quantitative data mainly, with the aim of exploring the text from the quantitative perspective by means and use of software for linguistic analysis. The concordancing software program AntConc was used to identify the running words that stand out quantitatively in comparison to a reference corpus of written texts. The findings have revealed some word forms. Their high frequency, as well as their keyness, has suggested further analysing their meaning in context.

By observing the wordlist, attention has first been paid to the word-class of the words on the lists and specifically to two personal pronouns which score high: *he* and *she*. The higher position of *he* on the list, of which the protagonist is the main referent, confirmed the tendency that can be observed during the reading, that is the general male focus of the narration. In fact, it emerges quite clearly that boys or men take the scene much more often than women do or are more likely to be the speakers in dialogues. By contrast, the feminine personal pronoun *she* is less frequently used and the referent, as shown by the concordance, is almost always Frits' mother. She is, in fact, the only female character to be given prominence, yet still to a lower extent when compared to the male characters.

Then attention has then switched to verbs, especially from a systemic and functional point of view. They have been considered with regard to the kind of process they convey. Specifically, the lemmas of *go* and *think* scored both high in the list. As the former belongs to the category of material processes and the latter to mental processes, they can be seen as a clear representation of the distinction that the narration itself offers, between the inner reality of Frits' thoughts and the outer one of dialogues and other people.

Moreover, the lemmas of *see* and *look* are part of the list and belong to mental and behavioural processes, which seems to reinforce once again the importance of the role played by processes which are more connected to reflectiveness and thoughts.

Finally, nouns have been considered as well. Only three nouns are shown in the list but two of them, specifically *father* and *mother*, are very representative of the book, as Frits' parents are the first and the few ones with whom he interacts.

In the second part, a keyword list was created by comparing the text to the written component of the BNC used as reference corpus. The results of the comparison match in some respects those revealed by the wordlist but we notice also differences. What is

certain is that the keyword list is more varied and revealing of the text and seems to show a higher degree of specificity with respect to the book. Specifically, we find the same personal pronouns that have been discussed before. On the other hand, differences regard nouns, as many entries on the list belong to this category and to a very specific semantic domain: the one of daily and domestic activities. This aspect deeply reflects and describes the main setting of the plot, Frits' house. Another two nouns, *head* and *evening*, are included in this list and the reason of their relevance has been briefly reminded as well. The category of adverbs has also some representatives in the list: *slowly* and *loudly*. Attention was drawn to them not for their meaning as single words but for the kind of opposition they create if considered in relation to each other. Thanks to the concordance plot tool, it has been possible to look at the distribution of such adverbs: *loudly* is highly and almost exclusively used in Chapter 10, *slowly* as well occurs often in this chapter but it shows a rather equal distribution throughout the book.

With regard to verbs and processes, here we find again the verbs mentioned in the wordlist but also a few more: *turned* and *sat*, describing material processes. They support the fact that much attention is paid to the physical actions of characters. Another two verbs are *shouted* and *mumbled* which fall between the categories of mental and behavioural processes. The second one is particularly relevant for its being connected to the protagonist and for the evidence it supports of the importance given to reflection and thoughts.

To conclude, it can reasonably be stated that this first part of the analysis characterised by a corpus-driven method has proved to be a suitable and useful tool to acquire a first insight into the text. It has allowed relevant features to gain visibility, most of which would probably not have been noticed otherwise and therefore investigated. It is certain that many of the aspects discussed above enclose a high level of representativeness of the text and have helped to confirm some tendencies that could be noticed during the reading. Most importantly, some of these can be considered as interesting elements for a further investigation. For example, the presence of verbs representing material and mental and behavioural processes on the list and the fact that the protagonist was often the subject of the considered clauses are certainly aspects to look at in more detail.

In Section 4.1 of the following Chapter, extracts from the text will be taken into account by means of a qualitative method of analysis that will pursue a deeper investigation of the

novel. Section 4.1 will aim to check whether the general quantitative tendencies observed here are somehow paralleled by the results of the more fine-grained qualitative analyses performed.

4.1 A systemic functional perspective on the text: qualitative analysis of *The Evenings*

This chapter will report on the qualitative analysis of the text. This analysis will be characterised by a different approach from the ones in the previous chapter and will be centred on the specific linguistic choices the author (and to some extent the translator) made at the level of single clauses. This kind of work requires great attention to single instances of language and the manual analysis of single extracts.

Not only does this qualitative analysis differ from the previous one in terms of the approach adopted, which shifts from a general and numerical quantitative perspective to a specific, low instances focused qualitative one but, most importantly, it differs in the theoretical framework in which it is situated. In other words, the perspective from which the text will be approached and analysed is a systemic functional one.

As seen in 2.1, the system of transitivity is the means through which language conveys experiential meanings concerned with the representation of experience intended as reality, made of events and happenings. This means that by concentrating on transitivity processes we can extrapolate this kind of meaning from *The Evenings*. The meaningfulness of such an intention can be better understood if we take into account that “the experiential function is an important marker of style, especially so of the style of narrative discourse, because it emphasises the concept of style as choice. [...] Choices in style are motivated, even if unconsciously, and these choices have a profound impact on the way texts are structured and interpreted” (Simpson 2004: 22). In other words, deepening the understanding of the choices that construct a text means to capture the representativeness of the text itself.

Considering what has just been said, the very aim of applying this type of investigation to *The Evenings* can be described as a twofold one, in which the two sides are constantly interacting with each other. On the one hand, what I hope will be achieved is a deeper understanding and a consequent greater appreciation of the text, in particular with regard to the themes developed in the book. On the other hand, the object is to obtain a more complete description of the work and of the function of the specific features that play a role in the characterisation of the protagonist, which refers to the way in which characters are created and represented in literature. The reason for choosing the transitivity system and its resources to pursue such an investigation of the text comes

from the fact that “a principal mode of narrative characterisation is the transmission of ‘actions and events’. This mode refers to the way character is developed through and by the semantic processes and participant roles embodied in narrative discourse” (Simpson 2004: 74). In other words, characterisation is achieved with the transmission of reality, which is encoded in processes and roles given and described by means of the transitivity system.

In the chapter, extracts from *The Evenings* will be analysed with particular attention to the processes provided by the verbs contained in the passages. As previously discussed, in Reve’s work two simultaneous realities unfold during the narration: one can be called inner reality and is realised through the self-reflections of the protagonist and his thoughts. The other is the outer reality, in opposition to the considerations in Frits’ mind, as it is represented by the dialogues between Frits and other characters.

A reason to consider *TE* from the point of view of the transitivity processes is to analyse the two different kinds of realities just mentioned. It must be said that a difference in self-reflection and in dialogue extracts becomes tangible during the reading experience. As a reader, in fact, one can feel that there are specific features characterising one or the other type of passage, yet the reason for this distinction remains unclear and it is not so obvious how it should be described. For this reason, the following analysis of transitivity processes will try to shed light on the nature of the difference between extracts and on the way in which self-reflections and dialogues depict the inner and the outer reality, respectively.

From a practical point of view, what will be performed here is a close reading of different extracts of the book which will be divided in self-reflections and dialogues. Every passage is first contextualized in relation to the plot in which a first part of analysis will be provided by means of narrative remarks. To follow, we will find the analysis of transitivity processes. The systemic-functional analysis of transitivity will start with the identification of the type of process of the verbs in the extracts which will be indicated with an abbreviation in brackets following the verb of reference. One should note that the verbs considered will be only the ones within quotation marks, that is the ones contained in thoughts of self-reflections and in the actual direct speech of dialogical extracts. Therefore, introductory and descriptive external sentences will not be considered. This is mainly because the verbs of the sentences surrounding self-reflections and direct speech

serve the purpose of contextualizing and giving narrative information on what characters are doing or saying. As a consequence, the verbs in question represent material or verbal processes, like *go*, *do* or *say*, *reply*, which are not particularly relevant for the purposes of the analysis, as they are expected to be there for the strictly practical purpose they can serve, for example introducing direct speech. At the end, observations and quantitative results are compared and commented.

With regard to the choice of these specific extracts for the investigation of transitivity processes, the reason lies in their representativeness: each extract contributes to showing in practice the main features and themes of the book that have already been previously introduced and discussed. Self-reflections extracts, on the one hand, have been chosen because they are really exemplificative of the way Frits thinks, perceives the environment around him, his obsessions, worries, desires and ideas. On the other hand, dialogues extracts show how Frits and other characters interact with each other, what topics they discuss and how interaction generally takes place.

To sum up, the qualitative analysis that follows is intended as an investigation tool to explore the selected extracts and aims to describe the two typologies of passages from a systemic-functional perspective strictly connected to transitivity processes to see what differences emerge in this sense and how this kind of work can contribute to extending the understanding we have of the text itself.

4.1.1 Context and analysis of self-reflection extracts

4.1.1.1 Extract A

He awakened for the fourth time, and sat up in bed. It was seven thirty-five. The bedroom was cold. He sat there for five minutes, then stood up and, turning on the light, saw the windowpanes covered in flowers of frost. He shivered as he made his way to the toilet.

“I should start(M) going out(M) for a little walk in the evening, before bed,” he thought while washing himself at the kitchen sink. “It would make me sleep(M) more soundly.” The soap slipped through his fingers, and he spent quite some time feeling around for it in the shadowy space beneath the counter. “We’re off(M) to a roaring start,” he mumbled.

“But today’s Sunday(R),” he realized suddenly, “what a piece of luck.” Then he added to himself: “I’m up(R) far too early, how stupid of me. But no, for once my day won’t be ruined(R) by lying around(M) till eleven.” While drying his face he started to hum, then went into his room, dressed, and combed his hair in the little mirror that hung beside the door, above one corner of the bed. “It’s ridiculously early(R),” he thought. “I can’t go in(M) yet. The sliding doors are still open(R).”

He sat down at his little desk, picked up a white marble rabbit about the size of a matchbox and tapped it softly against the arm of the chair. Then he put it on top of the pile of papers from whence it came. Standing up with a shiver, he returned to the kitchen, opened the bread bin and took out two soft white rolls, the first of which he stuffed into his mouth in a few bites. The second he held clenched in his teeth as he went into the hallway for his coat. [...]

Church bells rang once. “An early start, this will be(R) a day well spent,” he thought, turning right along the riverbank. “It’s cold(R) and early and no one’s out(R) yet, but I am(R).”

Crossing the big bridge, he skirted the southern railway station and walked back beneath the viaduct. “It’s wonderful(R), taking a walk(M) so early in the morning,” he said to himself. “You’ve been outside(R), you feel chipper(B) and your spirits are high(R). This will be(R) no wasted and profitless Sunday.” (pp. 9-11)

Context and narrative remarks

Extract A belongs to the first of the ten days during which the story unfolds. To be precise, it is taken from the first pages of the first chapter and represents the very beginning of the story and thus the first contact between the reader and Frits’ inner reality of his thoughts and self-reflections. Once again, what we must bear in mind is that the point of view we are given is exclusively and always the one of the protagonist’s and, consequently,

everything is totally filtered by his eyes and presented according to his interpretation of the events.

The context of the passage is very simple and ordinary: it is the morning of the first day, Frits wakes up after one of his strange dreams and decides to go out for a walk in the morning. Extract A well resembles the kind of thoughts Frits is used to having, we find general considerations about the reality and we often then receive a comment on such events which provides his elaboration and hence his inner reality.

What stands out from this passage is, as it is often the case in the entire book, that a mixture of feelings and perceptions arises that the protagonist formulates and then thinks out loud. Specifically, there are three different kinds of thoughts that can be recognized here: in the first place, we observe that there are a few thought-sentences which may be described as motivational. In this case, he addresses himself and, it can be argued, also the audience he often seems to be speaking to. Specifically, he formulates these sentences in the form of statements in which he claims how things are or are going to be. He also seems very much proactive and positive in his attitude, which can mainly be seen from the use of positively connoted words or structures, such as for example: *“An early start, this will be a day well spent”* or *“This will be no wasted and profitless Sunday”*.

The peculiar irony contained in the novel is one of its fundamental features. With regard to monologues, their (tragi-)comic character has been highlighted given by the solemn use of language and the cheap and so redundant wisdom (Hubregtse, 1989: 9). Irony does not miss in this moment either as there are clauses which seem to belong to this first kind of thoughts but that instead turn out to be sarcastic as pointed out by the context. *“We’re off to a roaring start”* in this case is a perfect example.

At the same time, though, we find sentences that convey a completely different mood, such as: *“I should start going out for a little walk in the evening, before bed”*, *“It’s ridiculously early”* and *“I can’t go in yet. [...]”*. Here we have another proof of the extent to which Frits is used to dwell upon, first consciously, as he makes considerations about what would be better for him to do, as in the first example. In the other instances, on the other hand, his thoughts run more freely and give the impression that there is an implicit rule the reader is not aware of, according to which there are things he should be doing and others which should not be done at that moment. These instances communicate that

he is feeling out of place or the impression that his actions are inappropriate for that specific context.

These two different moods mix up in the extract and create a deeply contradictory effect, in fact there seems to be a constant internal fight that keeps Frits occupied and which is best represented in *“I’m up far too early, how stupid of me. But no, for once my day won’t be ruined by lying around till eleven”*.

A third tendency that can be noticed in the passage is stating the obvious. There are clauses in which he literally gives definition of things according to very precise parameters, especially in relation to weather and time. These sentences seem to serve no purpose in the story but the one of claiming state of things as a sort of reminder to himself or perhaps also to the reader. The most representative is the following: *“It’s cold and early and no one’s out yet, but I am”*. This kind of clauses can be seen as a way in which Frits tries to keep things and time under control. This constant inclination of him to define material and abstract things around him certainly contributes to the depiction of the concern he often shows with the possibility of wasting time.

4.1.1.2 Extract B

His eyes traced the outlines of the frost flowers and he poked his index finger against the ice again and again, leaving a little round hole each time where it melted. “That’s been(R) a while,” he thought, looking over his shoulder at Louis, who was bent over his book. On his wrist he wore a large, flat watch with a broad grey strap. A pencil dangled from his lips.

“I must have been(R) twelve or thirteen,” Frits thought. “We were on(R) the balcony. Who else was there(E)? Louis, Frans, Jaap, Bep and a couple of the others, I can’t remember(Me) their names.” He closed his eyes. “I can still see(Me) it,” he thought. “They were walking(M) back and forth, on the fourth floor, balancing(M) on the rail. It wasn’t much broader(R) than my hand. And the others just laughed(B) and laughed(B). How could they laugh(B)?” He opened his eyes, looked at Louis, and closed them again. “To have(R) such courage,” he thought, “what a blessing. Or did they simply fail(M) to see(Me) how dangerous it was(R)? Perhaps that was it(R). I felt nauseous(R), and there was(E) this pain behind my eyes; that was me(R). And a sort of tickling at the base of my spine. Afraid I was(R), afraid I have remained(R). So is(R) it.” He sighed. “If only I were Louis(R), or Frans, that’s what(R) I used to think(Me),” he said to himself. “And merely watching(B), and being discontented(R).” (pp. 25-26)

Context and narrative remarks

Extract B shows one of those moments in which Frits feels victim of boredom and decides to go out to visit a friend. In particular, here Frits is at his lifelong friend Louis' place, who lives in an apartment with another person and a few cats. From their conversation we understand that he should be a photographer and is currently busy working at home. The two friends make some small talk in one of the rooms of the house and do not do anything in particular. At one point, as Louis needs to go back to his work for a while, Frits starts looking around and his mind wonders.

This is one of those moments in which Frits recalls an event of the past. Most of Frits' self-reflections are focused on the present moment but it happens that he pushes his thoughts back to past events. By looking at Louis he recalls a moment when as a young boy he was on the balcony of a building with some friends and together they were pulling a stunt.

Frits' eyes and their movement play a particular role here as they encircle the wandering of his mind while also paying attention to what happens around him. Moreover, their opening and closing can be seen as marking a distinction between what he 'sees' and remembers inside and what he sees outside.

The reflection starts by guessing his age at that time and by describing the scene that he can clearly see in front of him again: on the one hand, there are a few of his friends who are walking on the trail of the balcony while other kids are laughing at the show. On the other, there is Frits who, with a mixture of admiration and fear, looks at his bold friends and feels resigned and miserable because he is not that brave.

Frits' digging into his memories makes him feel again the same feelings and emotions of those moments. The consequence of this is a sort of matching and overlapping of past and present due to the coincidence of feelings. In fact, he clearly recognizes his static position in this sense when he concludes: "*Afraid I was, afraid I have remained*", he knows that, to this extent, nothing has changed and this self-awareness allows the matching of past and present. It is also interesting to notice the word order that has been chosen: the presence of the attribute *afraid* in theme position in both clauses gives it particular relevance creating a pattern of repetition that contributes to the connection between past and present.

4.1.1.3 Extract C

He sat down on the divan, pushed the curtains aside, nibbled on his fingertips and looked outside.

“Why did that sudden darkness and rain provide(M) such a sense of exhilaration?” he thought. “I need to figure that out(Me).” “In fourth class, at the start of the summer holidays,” he told himself, “we went(M) home and I was given(M) an empty, wooden box that had been used(M) to hold(M) chalk. I was standing(M) in the hall, waiting(M) for the rain to stop(M), because I had(R) no coat with me. And I kept sniffing(B) at that box. It was(R) the smell of wood, fresh wood, of resin and of chalk. That much is clear(R), those are(R) the facts. But how does it fit together(M)?”

“I know(Me),” he thought suddenly, “it’s simple(R). The final hours of school had to be sombre(R), in order to make(R) the transition to days of freedom that much sharper.” (p. 137)

Context and narrative remarks

This passage is taken from one of the many moments of everyday life that Frits spends with his parents at home. They are in the kitchen where they are used to spend much time doing most of the daily activities. This kind of passages in the book provide a very realistic picture of what life looked like in those years, when most people were much arm as a consequence of WWII which had just ended. Life was not back to normal yet, and people were used to spend most of the time at home especially during the winter. In this season, it was normal to stay in the kitchen or in the main room of the house for many hours a day, where those who could afford it also had a stove which kept them warm.

As on many other occasions in the book, the author is representing a domestic scene: Frits is in the kitchen with his parents and has just collected the newspaper from the front door. His mother starts reading it and Frits observes her but, as usual, he gets bored and distracted so he sits on the sofa, looks outside the window and starts thinking. In this passage, he reflects about a specific moment of the past which is triggered by the observation of the weather outside: he was a young boy, school had just finished and he was waiting for the rain to stop before leaving while smelling a chunk box he was given.

All these aspects mix up in Frits’ reflection and create what we could call a sensory pattern, as both eyesight and smell are involved cyclically. In fact, this aspect contributes to the fragmented nature of the reflection as it begins from a visual input given by the weather and suddenly skips to the sensory sphere of smell brought about by the chunk box. Fragmentation and indistinction derive also from the difficulty in grasping the real

connection between the two parts of the reflection, one about the weather and the other about the box. We understand that he is assuming that there is a relation between the facts he describes. He wonders: “*That much is clear, those are the facts. But how does it fit together?*”. To the reader, however, it is not clear what it is that fits together, much less how it actually does so.

Then, he got the revelation he was looking for and “*it’s simple. The final hours of school had to be sombre, in order to make the transition to days of freedom that much sharper*”. Everything becomes immediately logic to him but the reasoning behind is kept untold, the answer is just formed in his mind without being spoken out loud. In other words, the connection between the two sensory spheres of the reflection becomes tangible to him but the key to the comprehension of such working is not given. In addition, Frits’ answer seems to take into account only the weather of that day, as smell is not mentioned and he gives the impression to have forgotten about the chunk box. In this sense, the feeling is that the chunk box and its smell do not contribute to the final answer, yet they must do so because everything finally makes sense and falls into place, as Frits shows he knows.

4.1.1.4 Extract D

When the piece was over, he turned off the radio. After sitting still for ten minutes, he got up. “If I don’t want(Me) to be drowsy(R) this evening,” he thought, “I should take a little nap(B) right now.” He went to his room and lay down on the bed, sat back up halfway to remove his jacket, and listened to the blood pounding in his head. “I should get up(M),” he thought, “and fetch(M) a blanket from the cupboard. But I cannot force(M) myself to sit up(M) straight. I don’t have(R) the strength.” From outside, the sound of children at play reached his ears. “When I was seven(R),” he thought, “I cut(M) grass on the lawn with a normal pair of scissors and saved(M) it in a paper cornet. I’m lying(M) here like a sick man.” Gradually he dozed off. (p. 157)

Context and narrative remarks

Extract D is taken from the beginning of Chapter 7 and the context is a common one in the novel. Frits arrives home in the afternoon and his parents are not there. His mother left a note telling she does not know where his father is and that she would be home later that evening. Frits takes the fact as good news, it means he will be home alone and that really sounds as “*sweet restfulness*” (p. 155). However, the night is still several hours

away and this implies he needs to find a way to get to night-time. After laying around for a while, he thinks it is better to take a nap.

In the first part of the passage, we find again an aspect which recalls something observed also in Extract A. Specifically, he is worried that he could feel tired that evening so it is better to have some rest. This reminds of his constant concern with how and when things should be done so that the outcome can be acceptable to his eyes or suitable to the situation. This seems to be an ordinary thought, and it certainly is, but it also very much connected with his being controlling and constantly concerned with how he should manage time and his activities, which paradoxically contrasts with the lazy, inconclusive and aimless way in which he actually spends his days.

Once in bed, Frits becomes immediately exhausted, as he himself says, and every movement seems to cost him a lot of strain. Sounds from outside then enter his ears and suggest to him a piece of some old memory when he was a child but he immediately comes back to the present and sees his inactivity as the one of someone who is sick.

The three different brief sections in which this passage can be divided interchange rapidly and suddenly, in a disconnected way, according to what happens around the character and show, especially in the final part when Frits is probably already half asleep, a pattern of concatenation of the way reflections appear which makes it very close to the unfolding of thoughts in the stream of consciousness.

4.1.1.5 Extract E

“The end of the year is approaching(M),” he thought. “I am(R) here, walking(M) through town, through the mist, on my way home, as darkness falls(M). These are the final days(R) of the year.” He followed the pavements, lifting the front wheel carefully at each kerb. “Still, this the right weather to do(M) some thinking,” he mused on. “At this atmosphere, one discovers(M) one’s true worth.” He began singing to himself softly, half humming. Arriving at the front door he thought: “There is(E) no single, valid reason why this evening should be a failure(R). I have a suspicion(R) that it will succeed(M). An evening, the course of which is fixed(R) beforehand, cannot possibly be a failure(R). The point is(R) to imagine(Me) nothing more of it than can reasonably be expected(Me), that’s all(R).” (pp. 218-219)

Context and narrative remarks

Extract E can be found towards the end of the book and at the beginning of Chapter 9. Frits goes to take his bike from the rack outside the office but notices soon that a tyre is

flat, so he has to take the bike home by foot. The fact does not annoy Frits at all, he just takes the handlebar, starts walking and, as soon as his feet move, begins the work of his mind. He first pays attention to the weather and observes that it is particularly wet and misty. Completed his weather forecasting habit, his mind starts wandering and here we are confronted with the real reflection of the extract.

As already said, the events narrated in the book unfold in the last ten days of December and every day occupies a different chapter which logically means that the ninth chapter corresponds to 30th December. This fact motivates the first part of Frits' reflection: "*The end of the year is approaching*" and "*These are the final days of the year*". A common thread in the whole book and especially throughout Chapter ten is that the year is finishing and that those are the last days of it. This is something that really draws Frits' attention and that is often in his thoughts, as for some reason it was something important to him or there was an intrinsic relevance in it.

He then goes on with his reflection and stops for a while on weather. It is now obvious that the weather plays a part in the way Frits' thoughts flow, as it was a character on its own who accomplishes the tacit task Frits has entrusted it with. In this case, the weather seems to perfectly fit his mood and provides the right context in which to unveil thoughts and even understand "*one's true worth*".

Finally, the last sentences of the reflection appear less abstract and general and more involved with the present moment. Frits is now busy analysing the upcoming event which is not told in this moment. It will be disclosed only further in the chapter, when we will understand that he is going to the cinema with his bunch of friends that night. Being initially unaware of it, from his words, however, we see that what he has to do that night seems to worry him in a considerable way. In fact, according to his thoughts, one would expect that the character has something important going on that night, which most probably is not spending a couple of hours at the movie theatre.

Here we can observe the repetition of a pattern that has been encountered previously. Frits is concerned with something tangible and near in terms of time, the evening that is to come, he is obviously worried about it and tries to ensure himself that everything will be smooth as silk. What can be seen here is the motivational mood he uses to encourage himself about the outcome of the evening. He manages to be quite persuasive even to the reader who trusts his intuition that "*it will succeed*". However, we

discover soon how the pattern concludes, that is with a kind of self-sabotage: in fact, the confidence in the result does not depend on the fact that he really expects the evening to succeed but from his just not expecting anything from it at all. It is here that we understand we are in front of the mix of contradictory feelings that has been observed in other extracts: Frits sometimes shows a positive attitude towards events but it almost certainly ends up mixing with or being just the disguise of something different, from which you can only get the deep sense of disillusion that lies at its core.

4.1.1.6 Extract F

AT TWO O’CLOCK on Tuesday afternoon, he left the office. A fine drizzle had just ceased. “Until I am very much mistaken(R), some real fog is on its way(M),” he said to himself as he stepped out of the door. “The wind will keep up(M) for a bit first, but as soon as it dies down(M), we are in(R) for it.” He walked towards the bicycle shed, but stopped suddenly when he came close to the entrance. “The bicycle is(R) still at the house,” he thought. “Man’s frailty.” He turned and began walking home. Head bowed, hands in his pockets, he moved at a modest pace. “We’re early(R) today,” he thought, “the hours are like those(R) on a Saturday. In reality, though, it is Tuesday(R). Tomorrow is a Sunday(R), but it is Wednesday(R). When we go back(M) to work again it will therefore be a Monday(R), but at the same time it will be Thursday(R). So therefore we can rightly say: the day after tomorrow is Saturday(R). This illustrates(M) how, with only limited means, one can render(R) simple things complicated. It is not a bad week(R).” He took a deep breath and sighed. “Is it raining(M), or isn’t(M) it?” he said to himself. “There is(E) a situation in which it is raining(M) and one in which it is dry(R). Between the two there is(E) nothing. Still, minutes go by(M) when you don’t know(Me), when you hold out(M) your hand and are not sure(R). In the face of uncertainty let us say(V): it is still raining(M), but imperceptibly so. Yes, that is a good way(R) to put(Me) it.” (p. 251)

Context and narrative remarks

Extract F is the very beginning of the last chapter. Frits has finished his work earlier than usual precisely because it is New Year’s Eve.

As already seen, Frits often comments on the weather in his mind. It is known that The Netherlands are one of those countries with particularly bad weather, with thousand facets and different conditions, so it becomes quite normal for people living there to pay particular attention to it as their day will, to some extent, be influenced by the weather. It is exactly what Frits does. He has the habit of paying attention to and to forecast it. By showing a trait that is intrinsic and proper of Dutch culture, the book contextualizes this feature and makes it acquire a specific value that becomes culturally connotated.

After checking the weather, Frits goes to the rack to take his bike but it is not there. As seen in Extract E, he had found the tire flat the day before and that morning he went to work on foot but forgot about it and mechanically went to the rack. At this point, he solves the trick he himself had created and with the irony veiled by a layer of resignation that distinguishes him, he concludes that it is all due to "*Man's frailty*".

Walking home, Frits starts one of his tangled considerations. This one regards the days from the perspective of that particular week. The assumption around which his reflection revolves is the fact that on that day, even if it is Tuesday, he finishes work at the time he usually finishes on Saturdays because it is New Year's Eve. As a consequence he feels like it is actually a Saturday even if it is not, making tomorrow a Sunday even if it is a Wednesday and so on. This way of counting will therefore also affect the days of the following week, which would be messed up in turn. At the end of his almost nerve-racking but meticulous readaptation of the days, he concludes that it is a perfect example of how to complicate very simple things if someone is willing to. This can be an example of irony being initially delivered by the character as a proof of self-awareness but that inevitably turns into humour just for the fact of being outsourced.

The last lines of the extract come back to weather, and here the same considerations can be applied made at the beginning. Still, another point can be made. If we pay attention to it and move away for a moment from the immediate literal meaning of these lines, it becomes clear that the description of the rain encloses and conveys a deep sense of in-betweenness. The situation Frits is depicting is uncertain and undefined, he recognizes there are two distinct moments during which one can undoubtedly say whether it is raining or not, yet a third circumstance can come into place and it is the one he is referring to. It cannot be qualified at all, the only thing he understands is that "*Between the two there is nothing*". He then finds an answer that seems to suit the situation, the reality of facts is that "*it is still raining, but imperceptibly so*".

The sense of in-betweenness conveyed by the description of rain may also be seen as a metaphor that Frits uses to describe his condition: the third circumstance would be the one he feels to be in, in which "*you don't know*" and "*are not sure*", a condition of undefinition and vagueness.

4.1.1.7 Extract G

“If I say(V) nothing,” Frits thought, “perhaps nothing special will happen(M). I’ll keep my mouth shut(B). See(Me) how that goes(M).” In the silence he could hear the ticking of the clock. His mother’s knitting needles rattled. “In books and nursery rhymes they always tell(V) you that a clock says(V) tick-tock,” he thought, “but that’s not true(R). Not tick-tock, in any case, because those are two(R) distinct sounds.” He listened closely. “Tocka tocka tocka is more like it(R),” he said to himself, “but I can’t hear(Me) it very well right now. I must be patient(R), wait(M) until she has finished(M) another row, until the rattling stops(M).”

The moment his mother switched needles, he opened his mouth, lowered his eyelids and listened breathlessly. “It’s not(R) really a word at all,” he said to himself. “Heard(Me) correctly, it’s(R) teppa teppa teppa, but very quiet. That’s not(R) quite it, not exactly, but it’s close(R).” “Ten o’clock is the first milestone(R),” he thought, “then it’s on(R) to eleven. Once we’re past(M) that, the worst is over(R).” (p. 301)

Context and narrative remarks

Extract G is from the middle of Chapter 10, which is very rich in happenings and relevant occurrences from the thematic point of view. In the moment described in the passage here, Frits is in the kitchen with his parents, it is New Year’s Eve evening and they have just finished eating their dinner, including the typical Dutch pastries *oliebollen*. They also drank some berry-juice that Frits’ mother mistook for wine when she went to the grocery.

They are spending the night at home waiting for midnight while doing the usual things. The night is being quite boring which, according to the first line, seems to be what Frits wants. For the entire length of the chapter there is a sort of climax for the waiting of the arrival of midnight, which causes to Frits a mix of excitement, fear, worry, relief and agitation, as if midnight was something he wants or has to reach but is also afraid of. This odd situation finds an explanation if we take into account that the novel is set during the last ten days of the year. This increases the symbolism and the drama of the narration as the year coming to an end and the special emotions this period brings about provide an ideal scenario for examining physical decay. Indeed, the inevitable turn of the year almost leads to a crisis (Hubregtse, 1989: 8). It is exactly what we are witnessing here: this uncomfortable feeling and its externalization occupy the character’s mind and time during the evening and combine with the total wandering of his thoughts, only interrupted by any sort of trivial facts that comes to his attention.

The alternation of deeper reflections and more trivial thoughts is well exemplified in the passage above. Frits starts his reflection as if he were trying to anticipate, or even avoid, what could be going to happen, hoping that his saying nothing will keep the situation quiet. The impression we have is that something worries him and that he wants to reach midnight in the most linear way possible. Then, his attention is captured by a specific element, probably not for being of special interest but just because it is one of the only two things happening in that moment, including his mother knitting.

Frits spends almost the entire passage reflecting on the clock to understand what it actually sounds like and what is the best way to describe it with a word. He thinks that it has always been taught the wrong way to children as *tick-tock* is not the real sound. He needs to listen closely and with all his effort to catch it and this can be done only when his mother's knitting stops for a moment. At the end, he arrives to a solution that seems quite convincing and his mind can be set free.

After that, Frits comes back to a different level of reality and his attention is still on the clock, now not to identify the sound of the pointer but to see what time it is. The sense of worry surrounding the attentive countdown to midnight becomes even more tangible thanks to the last two lines of the passage: here the character sees that a first milestone represented by ten o'clock is achieved so he gathers strength to arrive at eleven, past which the worst part would be over.

4.1.1.8 Extract H

“Rabbit,” he said, cradling the rabbit on his arm, “your punishment has been revoked(M), in view of your resounding accomplishments for the cause.” He placed the animal on the desk, closed the curtains and began to undress. When he was finished, he drummed his fists against his chest and ran his hands over his body. He pinched the scruff of his neck, his stomach, his calves and thighs. “Everything is finished(M),” he whispered, “it has passed(M). The year is no more(R). Rabbit, I am alive(R). I breathe(B), and I move(M), so I live(B). Is that clear(R)? Whatever ordeals are yet to come(M), I am alive(R).”

Drawing his lungs full of air, he climbed into bed. “It has been seen(Me),” he murmured, “it has not gone unnoticed(B).” He stretched himself out and fell into a deep sleep. (p. 317)

Context and narrative remarks

Extract H has a particular relevance as it contains the very closing lines of the *The Evenings*. The narrative context preceding the passage is the following: it is midnight,

Frits has a toast with his parents and then leaves to have a walk in the surroundings of the neighbourhood. Initially, he just wanders around and looks at the fireworks but then thinks to go visit his friends and wish them a happy New Year. However, Jaap, Louis and Viktor are not at home, so he decides to just go back home. At home, he has a word with his parents who are already in bed, they wish each other goodnight and Frits goes to his room and takes the stuffed rabbit he borrowed from his friend.

The passage is quite intense from the point of view of content and of the themes it shows. In particular, the pages preceding this extract contain a long monologue in which Frits addresses God in an attempt of reconciliation with the surrounding reality and life through the forgiveness he offers to his parents who are evoked, for the first time, with explicit affection. God is asked by Frits to lower the gaze on the miseries of man and invoked as a witness both of the sins against good taste and intelligence committed by his parents but also of his love for them (Di Canio, 2012: 585-586).

In the extract, it can immediately be noticed that Frits is talking to the stuffed rabbit, an object which makes a few appearances throughout the book and with which the character interacts in a peculiar way. In fact, he alternatively speaks to it punitively, hugs it and puts it in his pants (Beekman and Meijer, 1973: 20). Its role is undoubtedly an ambiguous one and has drawn the attention of critics. In particular, according to Rodenko, from a symbolical point of view the sexuality represented by the toy fades into an emotional value which is so broad to also envelop the religious (Beekman and Meijer, 1973: 20). The rabbit can therefore reasonably be considered as a sort of catalyst of Frits' emotions, also of the evidently repressed and unspoken ones. This time, fortunately, the boy decides that the rabbit has successfully completed the job it was assigned so just revokes the punishment.

What is very central in the passage and becomes immediately visible is the switch in mood that characterises Frits. The countdown to midnight was experienced by him as particularly stressing and source of agitation, as something he was obliged to go through. However, then it all changes and it is what Extract H is showing here. First, it must be said that this complete change in the mood of the protagonist is not presented immediately after the stroke of midnight but at the very end of the chapter, when he is finally in his room alone with the rabbit.

The feeling which becomes immediately tangible is the one of relief and it is given by the statements that Frits makes, strongly charged in meaning and, above all, in awareness. In fact, everything is different now, it is like a completely separate moment from an hour before and even Frits himself does not even seem to be the same person, his attitude has totally changed: midnight has come and he sees it as a winning, after all he is alive, he has managed to go through it and it is all he can focus on, nothing else matters now. He passes his hands on his body as it was the first time he realizes to be alive and, more importantly, as if he understood what it means to be alive, finally being able to feel all the sensations this may bring with it. This entire process can be described with the image of a bubble, whereby Frits was keeping himself prisoner but from which he has finally managed to escape, acquiring a new consciousness as a reward for his self-liberation.

Generally speaking, the entire process of Frits' acquiring a new deep awareness could be given a connection to the historical moment in which the story and the work itself are set. If we put it another way, the waiting for the new year and the emotional charge accompanying it may be seen as a metaphor connected to the experience of war. The idea is that there would be a correspondence between the fear of the outbreaking war and the stroke of midnight. In this sense, the waiting for the new year to come would, for some reason, cause Frits to live again the same feeling of fear and anguish that he had already experienced, caused by the beginning of the conflict. The character is really sucked into a whirlwind of emotions he tries to deal with for the entire evening, but then the only fact of midnight to arrive is enough to take it all away, everything passes and, when finally alone, he becomes suddenly aware that he has managed to go through that moment. For Frits, realizing that he could survive the coming of midnight he was fearing so much means that he had survived war as well. In this sense, it is as if he had transposed all the fears already experienced into the arrival of that exact moment and, now that it has come and passed, Frits has the confirmation that he has managed to get through them both. Now he can really feel he is breathing and this means he is alive. Even if, as discussed in Chapter 1.2.1, the author himself did not embrace the idea that the novel can be defined as the voice just of a specific generation, the one grown up during the war, there are critics who have suggested the existence of references to it within the book. To paraphrase the writer Simon Vestdijk, although in the book there are no clear references

to the post-war anguish, war becomes a dangerous ghost the presence of which can still be felt, without making the book a sociological piece of writing (Di Canio, 2012: 576-577). It is in this sense that the correspondence between the stroke of midnight and the outbreaking of war can be suggested, as a proof of the ghost that sometimes still seems to be fluttering above Frits' everyday life.

After this, Frits' reflection concludes with two clauses which are among the most important and cited by Reve's entire work. These last two lines represent the closing part of Frits' long monologue in which he shows to know that what has happened has been seen, that it has not got lost but noticed.

4.1.2 Discussion of transitivity choices in self-reflections

In the previous paragraph, self-reflection extracts from *TE* have been provided followed by an explanation of the narrative context in which they appear and a comment that has highlighted their most important and peculiar aspects, thus allowing me to show the way in which the main themes are actually presented in the text. In each extract, the processes contained in the clauses have been marked with an abbreviation following the verbs in question without, however, giving any specific commentary of the possible implications from the point of view of the characterisation. The analysis of transitivity processes is the very centre of the investigation and aim of the present paragraph. Specifically, self-reflection extracts will now be taken into account with regard to the choices of transitivity processes and an attentive discussion of their distribution will be given in the perspective of a more complete description of the feature that contribute to the characterisation of the protagonist.

Table 1 offers an overall quantitative picture of the transitivity choices made by the author in the selected passages regarding self-reflections. Data are given, divided per extract and type of process. The data are given in raw terms because the parts in the self-reflection passages are of similar length.

| | <i>Material</i> | <i>Mental</i> | <i>Behavioural</i> | <i>Verbal</i> | <i>Existential</i> | <i>Relational</i> |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Extr. A</i> | 7 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| <i>Extr. B</i> | 3 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 15 |
| <i>Extr. C</i> | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| <i>Extr. D</i> | 7 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| <i>Extr. E</i> | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| <i>Extr. F</i> | 11 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 16 |
| <i>Extr. G</i> | 6 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 11 |
| <i>Extr. H</i> | 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Total | 54 | 15 | 11 | 5 | 5 | 79 |

Table. 1 Summary of processes in self-reflection extracts

By looking at Table 1, it can be observed that, in general, the two types of process showing the highest number of cases in self-reflection extracts are material and relational ones. Nonetheless, the two categories differ from one another as the latter counts a total of 79 instances, much more of the 54 of material processes, making relational processes the most used type of process in self-reflections. With regard to other categories, we see that verbal and existential processes both score few instances, 5 to be precise, which means they do not even appear at least once in each extract. Mental and behavioural processes, on their part, show slightly higher totals, suggesting that the two categories have a more consistent presence in the extracts. From this, it can immediately be understood that relational processes are clearly the category on which self-reflection extracts base the conveying of the experiential meaning they carry. Secondly, the total amount of material processes suggests the centrality of this category as well. Finally, it may be supposed that the remaining process types play just a minor role in depicting the specific reality given by the extracts.

Nonetheless, a limited comment of figures and findings is far from being our objective and can only be a point of departure for a qualitative analysis of extracts that

aims to reach a deeper and more specific discussion and interpretation of the transitivity choices made in the text, which is the main concern of the present chapter.

Transitivity processes beyond figures

The close analysis of all self-reflection extracts has highlighted the higher presence of material and relational processes with respect to other categories. In fact, all extracts appear as absolutely dominated by these two types of processes. Nonetheless, it must be said that relational processes show a significant predominance also on material ones, which makes such category the very protagonist of the text from the point of view of transitivity processes.

With regard to the way processes are used to convey the experiential meaning and the subject matter, we observe that they are either used in combination throughout the passage or a sort of polarization can be recognized in this sense. In the first case, the analysis has shown that both relational and material processes generally work together on the building of the same meaning and theme(s). On the other hand, polarization is to be found when a specific type of processes singularly works on the building of a precise meaning and theme independently from the other category of process which in turn can be focused on a different meaning and theme.

When relational and material processes are used in combination, they can both play a central role in the developing of the narrative content or it can be observed how one of the two processes has a preponderant role with respect to the other. In this second case, a process fundamentally contributes to the conveying of the experiential meaning described, while the other, even if consistently present, is not equally central and either supports and completes the meaning given by the first one or just remains in the background. The first possibility is exemplified by Extract F. Here, relational and material processes work, mean and together contribute to the understanding of the extract. They do not regard separate aspects but build together the one they share. The reflection starts from the observation of weather in the current reality and culminates in an observation of weather which is mental and metaphorical, where the two distinct conditions of raining and wet are the only ones to be a certainty, while they envelop a third one which lies in-between, where it is *still raining* but in a way which is just *imperceptible*. It is the cooperation of material and relational processes that depicts the dual essence of the

passage, as they together signal the identification and description of the reality the passage is concerned with, a reality which is both effective and real, on the one hand, and mental and metaphorical, on the other. This duality makes the conflict and difference evident also in Frits' perception of reality and consequently of time. A discrepancy comes into being between the time intended as the protagonist's personal or interior time and the real one. The former runs fast, while the real and external one flows much more slowly (Hubregtse, 1989: 7). The narration very often shows that the protagonist's perception of reality and time is not linear as his own interior time appears not to coincide with the real and external flow of time.

The second condition can be seen in Extract C, a passage that results as particularly engaging from the sensory point of view. This becomes clear if we consider that even if the scene is static and nothing is happening in terms of actions, the material processes used create a picture that is highly communicative thanks to the sensorially connotated scene that comes into being. Relational process, in turn, show many instances but do not seem revealing or in need of decoding. This is only partly true because it is not an interpretation of such processes that is needed but the simple recognition of their role in the extract. In fact, relational processes here serve the purpose of confirming the experience that has been described in sentences containing material processes. For this reason, their role can be called subordinated but necessary to the one of material processes and the experiential meaning they convey, as they confirm what has been understood by the character and his intuition.

With regard to polarization, an example is Extract A: here, material processes are mainly represented by very common verbs, such as *to go*, used in basic forms in relation to movement in physical space and are generally concerned with the description of trivial actions. On the other hand, relational processes are mainly used to relate to the present moment, to describe the state of things and Frits' expectations about the day, thus becoming a tool used to report general and impersonal thoughts and statements behind which the character seems to hide himself. The two different meanings are therefore conveyed by one or the other specific type of process respectively.

The same happens in Extract E. In this case, material processes fulfil practical and descriptive purposes by relating to abstract and general thoughts. Specifically, Frits uses almost exclusively this category to describe what happens around him, to state obvious

facts and to describe the working and the nature of what is known to him. Relational processes are instead deeply connected to the sentences regarding the upcoming evening which causes him some worries and a contradictory mixture of attitudes, starting from pseudo motivation but ending in resignation and zero expectations. This process serves the purpose of classifying and of defining things and events. Also, to Frits this category becomes a tool that helps him control what worries him: the feeling of being able to define and understand things by stating what they actually are gives him a sense of control. Indeed, because if he can define what concerns him then it appears more manageable. This is confirmed in what critics have described as a compulsive observation that the character uses to defend himself from the world around him, he describes what happens around him as a way to exorcise his fears (Di Canio, 2012: 585). This fact represents one of the most meaningful and intrinsic aspects of the novel that the analysis of transitivity processes has clearly and remarkably shown.

As said above, other processes are much less employed in self-reflection extracts. Of these, mental and behavioural ones appear with a slightly higher frequency. Interesting to consider is the use of mental processes in Extract E. Here, they acquire importance in terms of significance as the verbs connected to them give meaning to the sentences which summarize the whole idea underlying the reflection, that is imaging nothing more of what can be expected. In this way, they contribute to completing the deep disenchantment that characterizes the extract.

The use of behavioural processes is interesting in Extract B where, out of four instances, three are the repetition of the same verb *laughed* related to the kids attending the reckless scene. This verb differs quite remarkably from the one in the fourth instance, *watching*. In fact, we observe a powerful dichotomy that can be read both semantically and grammatically: on the one hand, the two verbs convey a different effect and meaning as *laughed* denotes the amusement of the witnesses while *watching* misses any kind of connotation giving instead a feeling on inability and helplessness strictly related to the protagonist. Secondly, the difference in tense contributes to enriching the contrast: *laughed* is used in the simple past tense which completely fulfils the task of placing the action firmly in the past. Differently, the gerund form *watching* does not permit to assign it to a specific moment. It does not belong either to the past or to the present but is suspended, it conveys the feeling that Frits, then and now, is incapable of action and the

only thing he manages to do is watching what happens around him. The result is that such feeling extends in time to reach the present moment, which contributes to creating a sense of suspension and inactivity which is intrinsically Frits'. This finding and the consequent meaning that is conveyed thanks to the specific use and choice of transitivity processes seems to be totally attributable to the idea that "Frits is prisoner of the present between the poles of past and future, speed and inertia, and that is the cause of his passivity"⁷ (Hubregtse, 1989: 6).

Finally, the use of verbal processes results very significant from a thematic and experiential point of view in Extract G. The first occurrence of this category is relevant because the verb in question is charged with some responsibility: in this case, to say something would correspond, to Frits' eyes, to do something because his parents would answer back and he does not know what would happen next. As it is what he wants to avoid, he prefers to just follow the flow of events but not to contribute to it, thus also refraining from speaking.

As is known, the transitivity system is not just made of processes but also of roles and what can be particularly interesting for our purposes here is the role of the subject. In general, the analysis shows that Frits is almost never the subject of the sentences he formulates as thoughts and, when he does, he is not characterised by particular agency. We see that he is rarely the initiator, the responsible or the one leading an action, being it physical, mental or of other kind. On the contrary, he often limits himself to a description of what things look like, how they work, how they would be in a certain condition, how they used to be, and so on, as he just had the mere task of reporting facts. In the clauses where Frits is the subject, he often does not carry out any effective action nor does he cause any change in the situation. More likely, he is representing his feelings, he is defined by and corresponds to the adjectives employed within relational processes. He thus turns out to be a suffering subject performing meaningless and motionless actions conveyed by means of material processes who tries to impose his ineffective agency on things.

An exception to all this must be recognized and is related to Extract H, a very central passage from the narrative point of view in which we observe a sort of change of

⁷ "Frits wordt in het heden gevangen gehouden tussen de polen verleden en toekomst, snelheid en traagheid, en dat is de oorzaak van zijn passiviteit"

perspective. This change can be retrieved for example from the clause “*Everything is finished*” thanks to which we understand that a specific boundary has been crossed causing a shift in condition and pointing out the separation of the previous from the following moment. In particular, Frits experiences his realization like a sort of epiphany, he acquires a new understanding of himself which is made clear in “*Rabbit, I am alive. I breathe, and I move, so I live. Is that clear? [...], I am alive*”. The description of the vital and basic actions Frits realizes to perform are given great emphasis in simple and direct clauses. The element that reinforces the evidence of his new awareness is the fact that, in this extract, Frits is much often the subject and the central participant of the actions and sentences that represent his thoughts.

4.1.3 Context and analysis of dialogue extracts

In this second section of the analysis, the attention will be on extracts presenting dialogues and interaction among characters. As with self-reflection extracts, the passages included here have been chosen for their representativeness of the most important themes and main features of *TE*.

It must be specified that in the following extracts possible self-reflections will be left out as the focus of the analysis is exclusively aimed to explore direct speech. Like the self-reflection extracts in the previous section, transitivity processes are indicated with an abbreviation after the verb of reference. However, no specific comment is given here. They will be provided in Paragraph 4.1.4, where the dialogue extracts below are followed by an explanation of their narrative context and by a comment that points out the most important and peculiar features and highlights the themes contained in the passage.

4.1.3.1 Extract I

He headed down a long, narrow street and reached the cinema post-haste. The doorman was just setting a large sign, reading “Sold Out”, on the pavement outside. Frits entered the foyer, and saw that it was full of people waiting. He pulled out his tickets and was looking around when someone tapped him on the shoulder. “He moves in mysterious ways,” he thought, “it is Maurits.” “I run into(M) you at the least opportune moments,” he said. “I’m trying(M) to get(M) a ticket,” Maurits said, “do you know(Me) where I can get(M) one?” “I have(R) one left,” said Frits, “I would rather have sat(M) next to something else, but it could be(R) worse. One fifty-five.” “May God protect(M) me,” Maurits said, “you have(R) money to burn, I believe(Me).” He paid and accepted the ticket with the reservation stub. “You’re getting(M) your money back, and first-rate company to boot,” he said, “what more could one hope(Me) for?”

“Didn’t your girl feel(Me) like coming(M) along, Frits?” he asked after the usher had shown them to their seats. “She can’t stand(Me) films like this,” Frits said. “Well, I’ll be(R),” Maurits said, “so you actually have(R) one?” “You’re better off(R) having(R) one who doesn’t want(Me) to go(M) to the cinema than not having(R) one at all,” Frits replied. “You have none(R); and I don’t believe(Me) you ever will. But then you are(R) truly repellent. How terrible that must be(R). What a fate.”

“Goddam it,” said Maurits, “what about my looks? What do you think(Me) of my appearance?” “It is not(R) what one might call particularly conducive(R) to relations with the fairer sex,” Frits said, “but I know(Me) some who are(R) in an even worse way.” Coloured blocks of advertising appeared on the screen. “I’ve never seen(Me) this woman of yours,” said Maurits.

“The whole point is(R) that you are incapable(R) of consorting(M) with the other sex,” Frits said. “It seems(R) to me less than wise after intercourse to kick(M) the girl out of bed so forcefully that she becomes lame(R), or at least limps(M) about, for two days afterwards.” Maurits laughed.

“You talk(V) just like that doctor,” he said, “in that French film, in... I can’t remember(Me) what it was called(R). But you have(R) far too good a memory for the things I tell(V) you. Do you go(M) around blabbing(V) about that to everyone?” “That depends(M),” Frits said.

The newsreel began. When the lights went up again for a moment, Maurits said: “But honestly, how do I look(R)?” “Oh,” said Frits, “you look(R) normal; base as the next man. In any case, women don’t care(Me) about looks.” (pp. 144-145)

Context and narrative remarks

The extract above is set at the cinema during the evening described in chapter 6. Frits has bought two tickets for the movie but none of his friends could join him, so he decides to go on his own. There he meets an acquaintance, Maurits, who wants to buy a ticket. However, the movie is sold out so Frits offers the boy to sell him his extra ticket and Maurits accepts. During the negotiation, we observe an exchange of words characterised by a certain degree of jokes and mockery, in which the two tease each other. The mockery continues during the conversation and shifts to a different topic as Maurits tries to investigate about Frits’ girlfriend, questions to which Frits ends up answering in quite an offensive way. This part of the conversation is an example of the very direct and rude way in which Frits sometimes speaks to other people.

As a matter of fact, Frits neither mentions the existence of a girl nor does he ever manifest interest for someone in general. This is an aspect that tends to go unnoticed but acquires its relevance if we consider that the protagonist is a 23-year-old boy that narrates his every-day life. An explanation to this may be found if we take into account that, as it is evident, in Frits’ life eroticism plays no role, certainly not in his deeds or conscious longing, it is therefore the lovelessness that surrounds him to deprive him of any illusion in this sense (Beekman and Meijer, 1973: 20). This fact reinforces the extent to which *TE* can represent the absolute boredom and stagnation experienced on different sides of life.

Maurits thinks that Frits’ comment is related to the way he looks, so he asks him about it. This time, Frits manages to be less rude, in appearance, and gives his opinion in a way that is very typical of him by delivering an answer which is direct but neutrally and impersonally formulated, see “*It is not what one might call particularly conducive to*

relations [...]”. This allows him to say what he wants to, which is often not very kind, but the fact of giving such comments as a matter of fact and as they were something universally recognized has the result that the awkwardness of the content is not his fault, he is just reporting the obvious truth.

In the second part of the conversation, Frits comments on Maurits’ relationships and (mis)behaviour with women. The boy dismisses Frits’ words simultaneously leaving leaked a slight concern about the possibility that Frits talks about this kind of episodes with someone else. In the last part of the conversation, Maurits goes back to talk about his appearance, evidently touched by the matter. Frits keeps his tone neutral and does not expose his thoughts too much, but manages, with few words and his peculiar style, to reassure the boy.

4.1.3.2 Extract J

“We have made(M) a mess,” said Frits, pointing at the tabletop. “We are very uncouth(R).” “Let’s go(M) watch(B) them dance(B),” Jaap said, “we might learn(Me) something.”

They got up and elbowed their way through. Viktor was in front; Jaap, Joosje and Frits followed in single file. They forced their way to a corner of the dance floor and sat down on a long bench along the wall.

“We are too old(R) to take part(M) in this,” said Frits. “The decline of Western civilization. Still, it is wonderful(R), being young(R).”

“Shall we have(M) another?” Jaap asked. “No, better not,” said Frits, “wait(M) a bit.” “A cigarette then,” said Jaap, offering his around. (p.178)

Context and narrative remarks

Extract J comes from Chapter 7, which narrates the evening that Frits spends out to a party with his group of friends. The scene depicted is the one of a crowded place with people dancing and drinking and even if Frits and his friends don’t dance during the night, for sure they take part to the second activity as Frits and Jaap in particular get quite drunk. In general, the passage provides a timeless picture of youth leisure. In fact, coherently with the style of the book, the scene manages to perfectly convey the feeling of light-heartedness characterizing the moment.

Frits and Jaap are drunk so their conversations become more and more fragmented, and spontaneous. Due to this is the irony and the humour arising from situations. An example can be seen in the first lines where, realizing the state of the table where they are sitting, Frits describes Jaap and himself as *uncouth*, a comment which provides a comic effect due to the contrast between the situation of sloppiness in which they are and the use of such a refined adjective to describe it. This is an example of how “language and humour are closely related”⁸, (Hubregtse 1973: 9).

Throughout the night and especially towards the ends, Frits has become very talkative and often says things out loud which are totally unrelated to any conversation and are most likely comments he addresses to nobody. To this kind of comments belong the two sentences in the central part of the extract. In a mixture of feelings typical of him, Frits sets his mind free providing a concatenation of thoughts and words which seem like a brief stream of consciousness that, considering he is not sober, sounds even more sincere. With a tone between resignation and frustration, he starts exposing the feeling that they are too old to take part in it, probably referring to the party but leaving the doubt of a possible alternative reference. Following, as a definition of what he has said or just a separate idea, we understand there is something that he considers as the decadence of Western society. Finally, switching in mood and suddenly seeing it another way, he abandons himself to the moment and, in a manner which does not even seem his, he feels that “*still, it is wonderful, being young*”.

This is one of the unique moments in which Frits leaves aside his cynical eye on things and just enjoys the situation for what it is, recognizing and appreciating the moment he is living. It, however, lasts shortly as Jaap takes him back to reality and they continue the flow of the night and its vices.

⁸ “hangen taalgebruik en humor hier wel heel nauw samen”

4.1.3.3 Extract K

His father looked at him with a smile of amazement. “How much did you drink(M), for God’s sake?” his mother asked, “where have you been(M)?” She stood up. “Look(B) and make sure(R) he hasn’t lost(M) his money,” she said.

“I know(Me),” Frits said. “I have had(M) too much. God sees(Me) everything. His eye is(R) not only on me, his eye is (R)on each and every one of us. The end of days is near(R). I couldn’t have had(M) more than seven or eight.” His father came over to him, withdrew his wallet from his inside pocket and looked in it. “No,” he said, “there’s(E) still thirty-two guilders in it.” He placed it on the bookshelf.

“Would you like(Me) some bread and cheese?” his mother asked. “No,” he said, “I shall partake(M) of nothing more. Purify(M) the body. Christ, behold(B) thy soldiers. And so it happened(M). It is bad(R). I have done(M) you, my parents, a great injustice. Great sorrow and injustice. It is loathsome(R). But God sees(Me) us all. I am going(M) to bed. To sleep(B).” But he remained seated. His voice descended to a murmur and his chin fell to his breast.

His mother began removing his shoes. With the help of his father, she undressed him and led him to bed. There he remained sitting upright. “Few there be(E) who appreciate(Me) your goodness. I see(Me) it. Should I behave(B) as though I do not, that is(R) mere appearance. But should you think(Me), Mother...” “Yes, mouse,” she said. “Should you think(Me) that I do not see(Me) it,” he continued, “realize(B) then, that God’s eye rests(M) upon the two of you. He sees(Me) you. He sees(Me) your righteousness.” “Hold(M) your arms back for a moment,” she said. “Why should I do(M) that?” he asked. “You need to put on(M) your pyjama top,” she replied. “Of course, you know(Me) what’s best(R), what is right(R),” he said, sticking his arms in the sleeves. (pp. 187-188)

Context and narrative remarks:

Extract K is the direct consequence of what Extract J narrates. Frits is back home late at night and meets his parents who immediately understand the situation. Frits is obviously very drunk and combines reasonable utterances with ranting and apparently disconnected discourse. His parents, after asking him two questions they know he will not answer, make sure he has not lost his wallet and then try to make him more comfortable by taking out his clothes and putting him to bed. During this operation, Frits keeps being talkative towards his parents and his mother in particular.

Since the beginning of his monologue, Frits shows an evident feeling of guilt because he knows what he has done is regrettable and that God has seen it all and he cannot escape the guilt for his sins. Especially in this first part, many obvious references to religion and God can be seen, made evident by the use of a different language. In

particular, throughout the passage, Frits often repeats the words “*God sees everything*” or variations of it. The clause clearly recalls one of the fundamental beliefs of Christianity regarding the idea of God as the almighty creator of universe that can see everything happening on Earth. Such repetition becomes like a formula in the passage, which can clearly be seen as a reference to the repetition of formulas during religious Christian rituals. Another fact that unequivocally recalls such tradition is the use of strongly connotated and more archaic language. This is all primarily exemplified in “*Christ, behold thy soldiers*”, where the choice of the possessive adjective is immediately striking.

Another theme present in the extract is Frits’ relationship with his parents. It is known that he spends quite a lot of time with them at home, and for part of it he is busy enumerating their flaws and weaknesses or mentally anticipating their actions. In general, he very rarely shows affection and just limits to a pacific and flat cohabitation with them. However, Extract K constitutes a breaking point in the narration characterised by a pattern that will be repeated in the long monologue of the last chapter, in which Frits shows a completely different self with them: it is actually the first moment in which he manifests total affection towards his parents and sincerely takes out what he feels for them. There is no room here for jokes and irony but just for a strong sense of gratitude that he is evidently unable to normally speak out. As if he was coming to terms with his conscience, Frits recognizes his mistakes and faults towards them and tells his parents but to his mother in particular how much he appreciates them and what they do, even if it might seem he does not, as Frits himself admits. In this sort of confession, the character also refers to God adding that even if he fails to wholly understand and appreciate them, he knows that God sees them and their goodness. An explanation of this substantial change in the perspective that the protagonist lets us see is given by Gomperts (1976: 318), who suggests that this God, suddenly appearing in this atheistic family, is born from the observer function taken on by Frits to self-preserve himself, adding that “he (Frits) in his drunkenness can say what he cannot say otherwise, that his parents are good and righteous. And if his perception should fail, codifying this truth amidst all that is fleeting, then God is there, the enlarged projection of Frits who does not fail, who does not sleep, who sees the justice of his parents [...]”⁹.

⁹ “Hij kan in zijn dronkenschap zeggen wat hij anders niet kan zeggen, nl. dat zijn ouders goed zijn, rechtvaardig. En mocht zijn waarneming die temidden van al het vergankelijke deze waarheid codificeert,

To conclude, it can be stated that Extract K represents a turning point in the narration to deepen and complete Frits as a character, since his believing and thankful nature openly shows up to other characters and to readers as well.

4.1.3.4 Extract L

“So,” his mother said, “did the young man have a good time(M) last night?” Frits did not answer. “I suppose(Me) you were out(R) with Jaap?” she asked. “Was he drunk(R) as well?” “Drunk,” he replied. “Stop nattering(V), would you? Drunk. Backward provincials is(R) what the two of you are(R). What do you know(Me) of drunk, for God’s sake?”

“Oh no,” she said, “don’t try(M) to tell(V) me you weren’t drunk(R). Your father and I had to carry(M) you to bed.” Frits closed his eyes for a moment. “What difference does it make(R)?” he said. “It makes(R) all the difference,” said his father with emphasis. “It means(R) that you can’t control yourself.”

“I’m a bit cold(R),” said Frits, coughing. “What stinks so terribly?” he thought, and sniffed at his hands, his pullover, his coat sleeves and tie. It all seemed to give off the same sour, disgusting odour. “Am I imagining things?” he thought, then stood up and sniffed at the curtains.

“Watch out!” his mother shouted. “Don’t go(M) wiping(M) your nose on the curtains! Have you gone completely mad(R)? That’s(R) what hankies are for(R)!”

“It still seems(R) a good deal easier to me,” he said, “to blow my nose in my handkerchief. As long as I have(R) a handkerchief, there is(E) no need to fear(Me) for your curtains.” “Oh yes,” she said, “I can tell(V) that from the chairs.”

“That is(R) another matter,” said Frits. “That which is solid(R) must be removed(M) by hand. It can’t be done(M) with a handkerchief. And the bottom of a chair is the best place(R) for it. Besides, wherever you go(M), if you feel around(M) under the chair the pieces of dried snot fall(M) to the floor.” “Stop(M) it, would you?” she asked. (pp. 192-193)

Context and narrative remarks:

In the first pages of Chapter 8, we find Extract L. It is the morning after the night out with his friends and Frits is understandably not in a very good mood. Entering the kitchen, he meets his parents. His mother in particular does not miss the chance to both make some ironical jokes to her son and investigate on the circumstances of the night before.

falen, dan is God er, de vergrote projectie van Frits die niet faalt, die niet slaapt, die de rechtvaardigheid van zijn ouders ziet [...]”

Far from the demonstration of affection and gratitude we have seen in the previous extract, Frits comes back to his usual manners and, probably feeling embarrassed for his behaviour, answers back to her in a rude way trying to minimize his conditions. The woman does not allow her son to make a fool of her and his father firmly enters the conversation without leaving him the possibility to counter.

In the second part, a comic scene comes into being because of a misunderstanding. Seeing Frits sniffing at the curtains, his mother gets hungry because she thinks he is wiping it with them. His answer seems totally reasonable, but what his mother says makes us understand it is not the first time she catches Frits doing something like that. Frits' following justification of his actions and attached explanation is the perfect representation of the protagonist's taste for corporal disgusting features. As it is known, this interest of him for what is disgusting, macabre and decadent is a recurrent theme in the whole book and touches different aspects. In general, Frits often observes people's physical flaws or unpleasant features and provides a detailed description of what catches his attention. This peculiar feature appears both in self-reflections and in conversations with other people, as it is the case here.

4.1.3.5 Extract M

His father had taken a chair by the fire and was warming his hands. Joop and Ina were sitting beside each other on the divan.

“Joop,” Frits said, “there's no(E) need to tell(V) you, of course, that you will be bald(R) in no time. But have you ever stopped(M) to think(Me) about what you will do(M) once things get(M) to that point? There is(E) a very real chance that it will start(M) falling(M) out in the middle too. That you will develop(M) an actual bald spot. That is a true defacement(R). Then you look just like an old man(R). As long as it only grows thinner(R) at the front, it is not(R) such a problem. But when the real baldness comes(M), have you thought(Me) about what you will do(M) then?”

“No,” Joop said smiling. “Various methodologies have been advanced(M) for combating(M) it,” Frits said, “but that is all quackery(R); science, in such cases, is virtually powerless(R). But there are(E) means to disguise(M) the void. That is not something(R) I have learned(Me) from any book; you could have known(Me) it yourself, but you refuse to look(B) around you.”

“I see(Me) nothing, go(M) on,” said Joop. “Listen(B),” Frits went on, “when the bald opening becomes awfully large(R), you can take(M) the hair on the sides, which you first allow(M) to grow quite

long(R), and comb(M) it across. Comb(M) it up, over the top and towards the middle.” “Shouldn’t I put(M) pins in it?” Joop asked. “Bah,” Ina said. “No, you must plaster(M) it down well with some sort of pomade,” Frits continued. “I admit(V) that a coiffure like that runs counter(R) to the Western European fashion of our age, but it does hide(M) the baldness completely.” (pp. 202-203)

Context and narrative remarks:

The scene narrated in Extract M is taken from Chapter 8, like the previous one, and is placed a short time after it in the narration. Frits is at home with his parents, they are staying inside spending time near the fireplace when somebody rings at the door. It is Joop, Frits’ brother, and Ina, his sister-in-law. The guests are welcomed inside. They sit all together in the main room where they chat for a while before Frits’ mother serves dinner. The extract shows the moment after the meal, when Frits starts talking to his brother. Joop, who is a few years older than Frits, is starting to lose his hair, a fact which Frits invariably and directly points out to him every time they meet. It has already been discussed that Frits is concerned, if not obsessed, with everything that relates to physical decline and flaws. Here, out of the blue, Frits highlights to Joop the matter of the fact, which he sees as the approaching of baldness on his brother’s head. In this passage, the protagonist’ obsession with signs of body decay is very clearly exemplified and is just one of the many instances in which Frits thinks of or talks about baldness in particular, a thematic repetition that lies between obsession and comedy.

What is quite striking is the fact that, even though he is talking to his brother and the level of closeness between them is presumably high, with carelessness and frankness he says just what goes through his mind in a way which stands at the edge of rudeness and impoliteness. Far from being requested to do so, Frits starts describing his brother’s hair situation and the possible developments, also he would like to know whether Joop has decided what to do with it. After admitting his scarce confidence in hypothetical remedies, he refers to alternative ways to disguise the problem and blames Joop for his lack of attention to the world around him. Even if it does not convince him in terms of fashion, Frits goes on exposing to his brother the hack he could adopt and describes all steps in detail.

Although Frits’ shamelessness can be questionable from a human point of view, it certainly contributes to creating ironic moments that sometimes reach absurdity. The conversation in this extract is an example of it. Here, irony is given by the extent to which

Frits takes the topic seriously but especially by the contrast between Frits' long and detailed utterances about the matter and Joop's brief and unconcerned answers filled with sarcasm, by means of which he is actually mocking his younger brother and his theories. This is best seen in: "*That is not something I have learned from any book; you could have known it yourself, but you refuse to look around you.*" "*I see nothing, go on,*" said Joop.

In general, the passage here fits the purpose of showing three important topics and features of *TE*: on the one hand, we can see Frits' obsession for physical decline and hair loss in particular, which regards everybody universally, not just himself. On the other, it is a perfect example of the directness and little touch that often mark the character's manners and, finally, of the irony that subtly characterizes Reve's work.

4.1.4 Discussion of transitivity choices in dialogues

Table 2 below provides summative information about processes in dialogues divided per extract.

| | <i>Material</i> | <i>Mental</i> | <i>Behavioural</i> | <i>Verbal</i> | <i>Existential</i> | <i>Relational</i> |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Extr. I</i> | 14 | 12 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 24 |
| <i>Extr. J</i> | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| <i>Extr. K</i> | 14 | 12 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| <i>Extr. L</i> | 12 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 18 |
| <i>Extr. M</i> | 19 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 12 |
| Total | 64 | 33 | 11 | 8 | 6 | 67 |

Table 2 - Summary of processes in dialogue extracts

Similar to self-reflections, it can immediately be noticed that material and relational processes are the most frequent ones, with total amounts that largely differ from those of other categories. However, a difference is just as easy to notice. In fact, while in the selected self-reflections analysed above the two categories show the highest number of instances but a significant gap still divides them, here the two types of processes have a total amount of cases which is almost identical, namely 64 and 67. This bears an immediate significance from the interpretative point of view because it suggests that in dialogues there is not a specific process which is chosen to convey experiential meanings, but rather a more equal distribution takes place in this respect.

The other types of processes show low figures that score around ten. An exception is given by mental processes that show a considerable amount of instances, 33. This fact suggests that this category may have quite a central role in the extracts as its employment in dialogues is much more consistent than it is in self-reflections.

Figures can certainly give some hints and indications about which may be the most revealing aspects in the text and what deserves particular attention. Nonetheless, it is only

through the transitivity analysis that we can acquire more specific and especially meaningful information.

Transitivity processes beyond figures

In general, the analysis of the dialogue extracts above has shown that material and relational processes are the most recurrently used transitivity categories in each passage with other processes being widely less chosen. It has also pointed out a more intense use of mental processes with respect to self-reflections which, as will be discussed later on, provides to highlighting a feature proper of dialogues.

With regard to the distribution of material and relational processes in the extracts, it has been observed once again what previously described, that is a combined and polarized use of them. The first possibility is exemplified in Extract L where the conversation is built by means of both material and relational processes. Relational processes contribute to the depiction of contrast among characters by defining states of being. For example, *“was he drunk as well?”* or the much more direct and stronger one constituted by Frits’ answer: *“Backward provincials is what the two of you are”*. In the insult the definition is reinforced by the double use of relational processes and the marked construction has undoubtedly an intensifying effect. In the whole interaction, then, specific verbs denoting material processes are used to give a clear image of the actions described. A greater degree of description is reached in the last part of the extract, where the details of Frits’ disgusting theory about how to deal with mucus are assured by the specificity of actions conveyed by material processes.

Polarization can instead be seen in Extract M as the processes are used to convey different aspects of the central idea of the passage. Specifically, the depiction of the possibility of Joop becoming bald is achieved in two different ways: on the one hand, there is the description of the process of losing hair; on the other, the definition of the new condition that this possibility implies. The description is achieved by means of material processes, category which is charged in meaning by the speaker, see for example: *“when real baldness comes”* and *“what you will do once things get to that point?”*. The use of material processes here creates a strong image of the matter where baldness is given considerable relevance and almost undergoes a process of personification. With the same category, Frits suggests that practical actions are possible as solutions to the problem.

Relational processes are used for the description of the result of the process of losing hair and its consequences, which are given in specific clauses, that is: “*That is a true defacement*” and “*Then you look just like an old man*”. The choice of the word *defacement* is quite strong because of its very negative connotation. It is seen as something that ruins the look of the person and which, in addition, gives the impression of looking older. *Defacement* is also used to convey the sense of no possible solution, as even science is seen as *powerless* and just *quackery* in this case. The use of relational processes in this extract shows the responsibility that this category is given from a thematic point of view. As pointed out above, relational processes highlight the idea of *defacement* and *old* that the protagonist connects to baldness in an obsessive way for the entire length of the book. As the author himself explains, baldness is a kind of leitmotiv and the frequent occurrence of incipient or progressing baldness in the secondary characters that come in contact with Frits is something that has been purposely included. Also, he explains how baldness is thinkable as symbol of physical decay, loss of charm and masculinity (Beekman and Meijer, 1973: 20). In addition, this explanation also proves the extent to which the theme of sexuality is not totally absent as it seems to but, as it happens with the stuffed rabbit, is instead indirectly deeply present.

Drawing the attention on a different process, a category that should be considered is the one of mental processes which, with a quite high total number of instances, shows to be much more central and relevant in dialogues than in self-reflections. Although this fact seems to be contradictory at a first glance, the reason behind it can be seen in several cases. In Extract I, for example, in clauses containing mental processes it can be noticed characters are often more inclined to say what they think and believe and, in general, the greater space given to the expression of their feelings and impressions. This fact would suggest that interactions tend to create an environment that encourages characters to externalize opinions and ideas more than it was for self-reflections, where clauses containing this degree of exposure of characters’ emotions were more rarely provided.

Another instance is the one of Extract K. Here, all the clauses that enclose Frits’ demonstration of gratitude towards his parents are connected to the verb *see*, with the goal representing almost exclusively the positive qualities that Frits attributes to his parents: *goodness* and *righteousness*. In this case, mental processes support and develop the fundamental themes of the passage, which are Frits’ religious component and the

unspoken gratitude towards his parents. In general, it can be argued that this type of process results as a primary one in showing central themes, as well as in conveying the experiential meaning of the extracts in which they serve as tools that characters employ to bring out their opinions and feelings.

Finally, the role of the subject needs to be considered in these extracts from dialogues as well. Here, we find again a tendency already observed: Frits is rarely the subject of his utterances and is rather most often busy describing how things are, should or could be. These features are undoubtedly shared with self-reflection extracts. To reinforce the evidence that Frits often keeps himself in the background is the fact that, in Extract M, in the utterances he pronounces he covers the role of the subject only twice in the entire passage, while baldness and its synonyms like *opening* or *bald spot* are very often the active subjects. This fact highlights two aspects: once again, the agency that this condition is given by the speaker and the extent to which Frits, as the active subject, keeps himself in the background of his thoughts but also of his utterances.

It is also interesting to note that the tendency to avoid being the active and direct subject is not shown only by Frits but it can be observed also in other speakers, for example, when he and Jaap talk to each other in Extract J. In this case, none of the speakers ever puts himself singularly as subject of his utterances but either uses the plural pronoun *we* by including them both or the more general *it* to refer to a third entity. Among the different critical considerations made about the characters in *TE*, the following are interesting to report with regard to what has been said above. In particular, the characters are described as having no meat on their bones and none of them, excepting Frits who still does so unilaterally, have come into their own. At best, some of them can be an unimpressive ‘type’ like Maurits, but others are difficult to distinguish from one another (Beekman and Meijer, 1973: 16). On the same trend, another critical comment refers that only Frits and his parents have become observable people while all others are just talking phenomena (Beekman and Meijer, 1973: 17). This similarity of Frits’ friends to him or, in other words, the minimal characterization many have claimed to see in them, seems to be also confirmed by the fact that these characters often are not given an active role in the clauses they themselves utter. This tendency, as we have seen, is common also for Frits, and can be noticed in both monologues and dialogues.

4.1.5 Interpretation of results and conclusions: from transitivity to characterisation

The systemic-functional analysis of Gerard Reve's work *The Evenings* has now been completed, with specific attention to transitivity choices and processes. Extracts from the text have been divided according to typology in self-reflections and dialogues, discussed first from a narratological point of view, highlighting the most important aspects especially in terms of themes. Consequently, some passages have been specifically analysed for transitivity features, an analysis in which processes and the role of subject have been the absolute focus. The preliminary results and findings of the transitivity analysis have been discussed above. At this point, general conclusions can be drawn regarding the way in which the investigation carried out here has helped explore the text from a thematic the point of view. It will also explore the extent to which the way experiential meaning is conveyed in the text can be an indicator of the characterisation of a character, the protagonist in this case. Table 3 below summarises all the instances of transitivity processes recorded in self-reflection and dialogue extracts.

| <i>Process</i> | <i>Self-reflections</i> | <i>Dialogues</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| <i>Material</i> | 54 | 64 | 118 |
| <i>Mental</i> | 15 | 33 | 48 |
| <i>Behavioural</i> | 11 | 11 | 22 |
| <i>Verbal</i> | 5 | 8 | 13 |
| <i>Existential</i> | 5 | 6 | 11 |
| <i>Relational</i> | 79 | 67 | 146 |
| <i>Total</i> | 169 | 189 | 358 |

Table 3 - General summary of transitivity processes in the extracts

The first column categorises the processes per category, the second and the third ones display the number of cases of a specific process in the two types of extracts, the fourth column finally shows the total number of instances for each process.

By looking more closely at the table, it can immediately be noticed that the total number of processes in the extracts is 358 and that the single amounts for self-reflections and dialogues are very close to one another. This fact makes the features of processes distribution in the analysed text easier to grasp.

As previously said, a numerical discussion of the data is not the ultimate aim of the chapter, much less so of this conclusive section. Since a quantitative analysis acquires much of its meaning from a following close-up qualitative observation, the comment of the summative table above will highlight only the numerical information useful to the discussion that will follow and that is meaningful to the purposes of the transitivity processes analysis carried out up to now.

As was already evident during the analysis of the extracts, material and relational processes show the highest number of cases, scoring a total of 118 and 146 respectively and representing almost the total amount of processes in each type of extract. On the other hand, behavioural, mental, verbal and existential processes show very low numbers and are divided more equally between self-reflections and dialogues.

In general, the most important piece of data to be noticed is the difference in the distribution of material and relational processes. According to Table 3, dialogue extracts are characterised by a very similar number of cases of both types of processes: material ones show 64 cases and relational ones just few instances more, scoring 67. In other words, dialogue extracts show a very similar number of instances with regard to the two categories, with just a slight preponderance of relational processes. On the other hand, self-reflection extracts appear to be more interesting in this sense. Monologues, in fact, show more varied amounts of these two processes, as the total number of material processes is 54 while relational ones reach 79 instances. The larger gap between the two amounts in self-reflections firmly confirms, therefore, how this type of extract is deeply characterised by relational processes.

Another category scoring high is the one of mental processes with 48 instances. This process, as the first and second columns show, is not equally present in the two types of extracts. Self-reflections reach a low total of 15 instances while dialogues largely

double this number, reaching 33 cases. This data numerically confirms what was observed during the analysis of extracts that is the quite unexpected inclination of characters to the use of this process in dialogues instead of self-reflections.

With regard to the remaining categories, behavioural, existential and verbal processes, we see that they are evenly distributed in extracts and that their total amounts count very few instances, especially if compared to the ones of material and relational processes, which go well beyond a hundred.

Beyond figures

Now that the most relevant information in numerical terms has been discussed, we can take stock of the information that the analysis has provided and start to convey it to a possible answer to the questions and purposes set at the beginning of the chapter.

The analysis of transitivity processes just concluded has brought out from the text many features and aspects through which it has hopefully been possible to acquire some relevant and meaningful knowledge of the text that could help deepen the understanding and therefore the appreciation of *The Evenings* as a piece of literature. The information that has been provided is varied and broad but proved to be revealing and significant in many respects. As said at the beginning of the chapter, the analysis had a twofold aim: on the one hand, it aimed to deepen the general comprehension of the book with a specific focus on the presence and representation of themes in the narration; on the other, it was a tool for the description of the text and of the characterisation of Frits. Since “the relationship between transitivity and characterisation is a close one” (Simpson 2004: 120), an analysis as the one just carried out represents the most suitable device for pursuing the interpretation of this kind of information and the related meaning.

With regard to the first objective set, in general it can undoubtedly be stated that the themes clearly emerged thanks to the attentive reading of the text and those suggested by the transitivity analysis are different. In self-reflections, the themes that have appeared more frequently and commonly are the sense of inappropriateness felt by Frits on many occasions, often accompanied by contradiction arising from a sort of internal fight. We also find a wide tendency to state the obvious and to define things which suggest an attempt to look for control. The definition of reality and its pursuing show an important connection also with the notion of time, which is intended as both internal and external.

The protagonist shows attention to the concepts of handling and wasting of time, which is present as current time and past time, so in the shape of memories. Above all, one theme which is very central in the novel is the one resulting from the mixture of different aspects that could be observed in the extracts. These are the general sense of stagnation and inactiveness but also fragmentation and indistinction that can be perceived, to which disillusion, indeterminacy and uncertainty must be added to form the intricate group of feelings and sensations that contributes to highlighting Frits' inconclusive nature. On the other hand, much irony could also be observed. Although subtle and very peculiar, it helps balance the general cynicism adding to the story a (tragi-)comic trait that is certainly one of the distinctive points of the novel. Then, some of the many references to God and religion contained in the book could be seen in some of the selected extracts. Finally, the veiled theme of sexuality could be suggested as well in the ambiguous relationship of Frits with the stuffed rabbit.

In general, it can be claimed that all the themes above can be found in dialogue extracts as well, with the addition of a few more. In dialogues, we often find mockery among characters and it can be seen as a shade of the more general irony which proves to be frequent in interactions as well and manages to increase the evidence of the close relationship connecting humour and language. The feeling of contradiction that seems to come from an internal fight as described above can clearly be felt again, with the already cited permanently perceivable senses of disillusionment and stagnation. Here, religion is present and evident in the shape of an emotionally charged liberating exposure of guilt that the protagonist shares with his parents. In addition, a very central theme that could more consistently come out is the one of Frits' obsession for his and especially others' physical appearance, made clear on different respects. The most evident is certainly baldness and hair state in general, which Frits repetitively observes and comments on. We see how the attention to the physical sphere is shown also with the inclusion of distasteful body matters and references to body ugliness, which the protagonist notices on other characters. It has been discussed how baldness is intrinsically connected to the silent theme of sexuality, a theme which is only indirectly addressed in a conversation involving the possibility of Frits having a girlfriend.

A last feature has been observed with great persistence in self-reflections and largely in dialogues: the speakers' systemic reluctance to take on the role of subject in

thoughts and utterances, preferring instead a third object or an inanimate entity to play this part. This characteristic may not be a theme as it would be conventionally intended, but its relevance within the analysis makes it acquire a thematic dimension.

All these themes and features of *TE* are undoubtedly evident and perceivable during the reading but the analysis has allowed to extrapolate them better and more completely from the text. The fact is that an intrinsic connection exists between themes, intended as the experiential meanings contained in the text, and the choices and use of transitivity processes made within the text to convey such meanings. To better understand and appreciate how this is achieved we need to go more in detail into the description of the specific employment of processes and show how they manage to reflect the themes.

4.1.5.1 From transitivity processes to themes

It can generally be stated that self-reflections and dialogues present some differences from the point of view of transitivity but, at the same time, it becomes more obvious the extent to which such differences are instead surpassed by the common points shared by the two typologies of extracts. These similarities can be summarized in the recognition of the absolute predominance of relational and material processes within the text, the choice and use of which construct and allow one to convey the exact experiential meaning contained in the novel and therefore its themes.

The descriptive nature of the extracts, achieved by means of both material and relational processes, has already been largely emphasised. With regard to material processes, we have observed their wide use in all extracts independently from their typology, how they are chosen by all characters indiscriminately and also the fact that they do not show any peculiarities in the grammatical structure in which appear. Therefore, it could be generally and easily claimed that material processes have shown no evident specificities in their use within the analysed text. However, their centrality for our interests lies in another aspect, which becomes obvious by paying attention to the effective experiential meaning that this process conveys.

In both self-reflections and dialogues, it has been shown that the instances of material processes generally accomplish a very functional task by describing practical actions, physical movements in space, events, things in general and their functioning. This is probably the most common use one would expect from this type of process and,

in fact, it is not in this sense that we can see their real importance and centrality in the analysis. It, instead, is to be seen in what may be called the unconventional result that this process continuously creates. If we carefully pay attention to the instances of material processes throughout the analysis, the pattern of meaning that this process strongly tends to enclose will soon become evident. Specifically, material processes are very often represented by verbs describing actions which are simple and trivial, an end in themselves and which do not convey a particularly revealing meaning from a narrative point of view. On the contrary, they have minimal or no direct consequence on people and things, they result as totally aimless and depict deeply static scenes. This use seems somehow to be in contrast with what is considered the nature of this process and the verbs by which it is represented, normally considered 'verbs of doing', because here this intrinsic feature is fundamentally overturned. In *TE*, it is not unusual that material processes are employed to describe totally motionless actions, as they are insistently represented by verbs that neither designate movement nor intrinsically include an idea of change, development or alteration but give instead a feeling of suspension, inactivity and stagnation. The result of these actions from a narratological point of view is absent and the entire description frequently leads nowhere, as such verbs do not contribute any development to the scene. This can be especially perceived if we consider that the extracts often start and end in the same condition, with little or no advancement and where everything seems not just to be subject to time or to any change, with a perspective that remains fundamentally static and unchanged. Therefore, quite a paradoxical inversion in the use of material processes takes place as we recognize how it purposely contributes to the construction and conveying of the sense of general inactivity, immobility and stagnation that pervades the narration.

On their part, relational processes have proved to be very revealing as well in demonstrating the connection between transitivity processes and themes. As is well known, in a relational process two elements appear in a relationship of identification or attribution which has a defining function. In both self-reflection and dialogue extracts, the likely most evident feature is that Frits is almost constantly busy defining things and stating how these are and, as a direct consequence, we have observed an extensive use of relational processes on his part. In particular, the main purpose for which this process is employed by the protagonist is to give a very clear and sometimes even obvious definition of things and events around him which can be both related to the present or also connected

to a memory of the past. He also largely chooses this process to depict abstract and hypothetical conditions and their result, to describe feelings and the state of things, to express a deep feeling of doubt.

The result is that a continuous and extensive application of relational processes can be observed which inevitably highlights the extremely reflective nature of Frits as a character. The fact that this is the most employed transitivity process shows the urgent and constant need and tendency of the protagonist to define things around and inside himself. This peculiarity of his denotes, at the same time, a pressive need for control: he has the necessity to determine the nature and details of things and situations to better handle them, both if those are known or not. Consequently, this feature contributes to building and showing the contradictory nature of Frits: he very often wonders or shows to be uncertain and this is reflected in his urge to define, as if it were to help him make a decision. Similarly, it has been discussed that Frits is characterized by a constant feeling of inappropriateness, perceivable both when he expresses his thoughts and when he interacts with other people. In these cases, the protagonist seems to be trying, consciously or not, to disguise such sensation but gets instead the opposite result and makes these feelings of inappropriateness and uncertainty even more evident by formulating clauses containing relational processes which are contradictory in meaning. As a result, we are told about the feelings he experiences, made clear by the constant indecision he shows about what to say and how to see and define things.

Another point to consider is that, despite the presence of some mental processes in the extracts, their use has proved not to be as central and important as the material and relational ones. This can be claimed if we observe how mental processes do not really seem to support any of the main themes discussed, at least not with the obvious directness of material and relational ones. As reported above, mental processes are much more frequent in dialogues than in self-reflections. This, apart from remarking how dialogues seem to create situations more likely for characters to share emotions and ideas, is relevant for two reasons. On the one hand, it shows how self-reflections are not largely composed of mental processes as the nature of the extracts may suggest. On the other, on the same trend it more importantly confirms and reinforces the dominant role that relational processes have especially in self-reflections, characterised by the constant tendency to the definition and determination of things, events and emotions.

At this point, it is obvious how the choices made with regard to transitivity processes reflect the contents of the narration and its more fundamental themes and how it is exactly thanks to this very specific employment of processes that we retrieve the main meanings contained in the book. In this way, the fascinating and complex relation circularly connecting the choice and use made in the transitivity system and the representation of the experiential meaning contained in a text, here intended from a thematic point of view, has been made more evident and clearer in the specific case of *The Evenings*.

To conclude this section, it is important to make a few further considerations. It has been shown that the analysed extracts share different features from the point of view of transitivity. Among these, the most relevant and interesting for our purposes is the specific use of material and relational processes and the meaning that they express. Summarizing what has already been more widely discussed, we can say that the employment of material processes has proved to be an unconventional one to some extent. In fact, material processes are either limited to the description of trivial actions and physical movements or, much more frequently, used to convey ideas of stagnation, immobility and suspension. On the other hand, the defining nature of relational processes is continuously and largely used to determine and describe state of things and situations, people and feelings. This extensive and meticulous definition shows the constant aim of the protagonist of looking for control and having the situation in hand, a need that consequently ends up suggesting a sense of uncertainty, contradiction, fragmentation, indistinction and inappropriateness. The relationship between the meanings supported by the two categories of processes becomes evident from a thematic perspective as we can see how they are all coherently connected to one another, as single and minor themes of a larger and more complex one because, as a matter of fact, we can see all these themes as indicators of a more general feeling, which can be described as a sense of fear. The construction and the implications of such a vision, however, can be more adequately described and understood only if we take into account some further specificities that regard the main character.

4.1.5.2 From transitivity processes and themes to characterisation

To all what has just been said about material, relational and mental processes, a few considerations must be added with regard to another element of the transitivity system for its primary contribution to the total depiction and expression of the experiential meaning that is being discussed: the role of the subject. During the analysis of self-reflections, it has been generally demonstrated the extent to which Frits is very infrequently the subject of the clauses representing his own thoughts. Also, not only does he rarely take up this role but, when he does, the actions expressed are often aimless and inconclusive. Most likely, he is the one who somehow undergoes the action described, often carried out by an external and abstract element. Following the same logic, the actual result and consequences of the actions having Frits as subject are basically insignificant. The only substantial difference in this sense can be seen in Extract H, where he acquires a new awareness. It must be said, however, that this change in condition does not imply a greater level of agency as it is not connected to action. Frits is not doing anything new from a practical point of view, nor are his actions producing any effective consequence. The change regards the presence of himself in his thoughts, where he finally achieves the role of real and active subject and is no longer limited to a position of observer and reporter of facts.

Similarly, in the interactions narrated in the extracts, the protagonist rarely plays the role of subject and, when he does, his actions are generally trivial and pointless, limited in their outcomes or without a result. It can be stated that, with his actions, Frits never contributes to a change in the current condition or situation. Actually, in addition to the choices and employment of transitivity processes discussed above, it is also the features regarding the role of the subject that convey Frits' inconclusive, inactive and undecided nature, which is peculiar of his own way of experiencing reality. This aspect supports the senses of suspension, inappropriateness, fragmentation and stagnation that so much constitute the themes of the narration and that, equally as much, we understand characterize Frits.

If we take into account and add these elements to what has been discussed in the previous section, we can start to grasp the very centre of the experiential meaning of the text. In fact, the tendency of the protagonist, reflected from a syntactic point of view, to avoid putting himself as subject of both his thoughts and utterances can clearly be seen as his way to avoid being in the foreground and somehow feeling exposed, which, in other

words, can also be intended as a general fear to act. This possibility relates to and completes what has been shown above as intrinsically retrievable and reflected in the transitivity choices, with the result that this sense of fear is mirrored from a linguistic perspective by both the transitivity processes and the role of the subject.

However, within the narration, fear never shows an obvious centrality as the considerations just made would suggest. As a matter of fact, Frits never mentions fear directly nor does he clearly reveal that he is afraid of something. The only instance of this emotion that the reader is given is represented by his dreams. It is just during these weird nightmares, which appear as totally disconnected from his awake life and from the general narration, that we can perceive this emotional component. However, apart from this, Frits never gives any further hint in this sense. The fact is that, as the transitivity analysis has suggested, Frits' feeling of fear is generally present in the narration, in the experiential meaning conveyed and for the way in which it is expressed, it is just silent. This is what the analysis above has allowed to retrieve from a linguistic perspective and finds a confirmation in an aspect that critics had already highlighted. In particular, as explained in Hubregtse (1989: 6), according to Paardekoopers "the theme of *The Evenings* is *fear*: fear of the emancipation process of puberty and, by extension, fear of life"¹⁰. In addition, it is claimed that "this approach provides insight into how much theme, form and content are related to one another and to the different motifs: Frits' fear (1) for erudition and science, (2) for disorder and carelessness, (3) for the mirror, (4) for emptiness and silence, (5) for physical decay and (6) Frits' nightmares"¹¹.

In summary, the way the experiential meaning is represented and what it itself represents and conveys directly and clearly lead us as readers to a specific vision: the intrinsic fear of Frits is to be intended both as the fear of an individual, so from a personal perspective, and as the fear of a boy as a testimony of his own generation, thus acquiring

¹⁰ "[...] dat *angst* het thema van *De avonden* is: angst voor het ontvoogdingsproces van de puberteit, en, bij uitbreiding: angst voor het leven."

¹¹ "Deze aanpak maakt inzichtelijk hoezeer thema, vorm en inhoud samenhangen met elkaar en met de diverse motieven: Frits' angst (1) voor geleerdheid en wetenschap, (2) voor wanorde en slordigheid, (3) voor de spiegel, (4) voor leegte en stilte, (5) voor lichamelijk verval en (6) Frits' angstdromen."

a collective dimension. As a matter of fact, this can be claimed to be the fundamental level of meaning contained in the text.

Finally, conclusions can be drawn about the correlation between the representation of the experiential meaning and the characterisation of characters in fiction, in this case with regard to the protagonist. It can be seen now how all the aspects just discussed, which have taken into account the transitivity processes and the role of the subject, contribute to creating “a regular pattern of transitivity choices, a transitivity profile in other words” (Simpson 2004: 119) that widely offers linguistics material for the characterisation of Frits. The transitivity profile that has been possible to recognise in the case of *TE* regarding the main character can be summarised as follows: the use of transitivity processes demonstrates that Frits is a very reflective, uncertain and inconclusive character who accomplishes little throughout the narration and whose agency is substantially limited to movements in space and trivial actions. It has been discussed how these aspects of his personality are supported by and reflected in the specific employment of relational and material processes above all.

In addition, it has been shown how these features may also reflect something more central from a thematic point of view, which is the general sense of fear that, without ever really being spoken out by Frits, can be seen pervading and influencing his life. This leads him to be constantly looking for control and therefore obsessively recurring to definition of things outside and inside himself. As described in Gomperts, “he wraps himself in a ritual of words, with which he tries to replace the missing emotional bonds and to defuse the dangers he perceives around him. His defence consists of closing observing everything, including the tiniest and the most banal, and then verbalize it”¹² (1976: 316). This fear, at the same time, makes Frits unable of effective agency, forcing him to trivial actions and general inactiveness. In addition, thanks to the observation of the role of the subject, the fulfilment of his image has been provided and his insecure, disillusioned, powerless, static and inconclusive nature as a character confirmed.

As suggested by Simpson (2004: 119), it can be claimed that also in the specific case of *The Evenings* “the transitivity profile embodied by a text is a generally useful

¹² “Hij hult zich in een ritueel van woorden, waarmee hij de ontbrekende emotionele banden probeert te vervangen en de gevaren waardoor hij zich omringd voelt te bezweren. Zijn defensie bestaat uit het scherp observeren van alles, het allergeeringste en het allerbanaalste inbegrepen, om het dan te verbaliseren.”

indicator of character in prose fiction”. It has been achieved by means of the analysis of transitivity carried out in this chapter which, through the investigation of self-reflection and dialogue extracts, has proved useful and revealing for the purposes set at the beginning. Specifically, it has helped to gain a more complete understanding of the novel from a thematic point of view and also to describe the working and functioning of the specific elements that contribute linguistic material to the characterisation of the protagonist.

4.2 Stylistics foregrounding in themes and language of *The Evenings*

The previous section has provided the discussion of the results of the transitivity analysis carried out on the self-reflection and dialogue extracts of *The Evenings*. It has shown the extent to which, from an analysis of transitivity processes, it has been possible to retrieve important information about the conveyance of the themes of the novel. It has also shown how the transitivity pattern recognized is essential in building the characterisation of the protagonist.

This second section of Chapter 4 aims to provide further elements that can deepen the discourse around Frits' characterisation and expand the description of the thematic aspect. This will be achieved by means of a stylistic approach applied to the text. In particular, the representation of central themes and the use of language on part of the main character will be considered in terms of foregrounding. Specifically, what is wanted to be demonstrated here is the extent to which elements which are perceived as prominent in the narration can be deeply connected to the style of a novel and to the characters' characterisation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5, stylistics recognizes foregrounding as those cases in which a (set of) feature(s) showing particular prominence in the text becomes an important and distinctive marker of style in a literary work. In such cases, specific elements stand out from the text for some reasons, coming to the attention of the reader. It is important to note that such prominence must be literary motivated, its being foregrounded must enclose a meaning within the literary work. Foregrounding can take a double form, coming to the fore in two different ways: it can be repeated throughout the text and create a pattern of parallelism or it can depart from an expected linguistic norm acquiring the form of a deviation.

Practically, the notion of foregrounding will be applied to examples from the text. The aim is to discuss the functioning of this phenomenon in the case of *The Evenings* and, more importantly, the effect it creates, as a stylistic device, during the reading experience. The fact is that "salience [...] constitutes an important textual strategy for the development of images, themes and characters, and for stimulating both effect and affect in a text's interpretation." (Simpson 2004: 50).

With respect to *The Evenings*, it can reasonably be argued that different aspects come to the attention of the reader, resulting quite prominent, in Reve's first novel. As a

matter of fact, we can also recognize and appreciate the extent to which such prominence has an enormous impact and effect on the whole development of the novel. An awareness of this as readers can be defined in terms of what Leech and Short (2007: 39) refer to as our ‘stylistic competence’, intended as our ability to react to what is ‘noticeable’ in style.

4.2.1 Repetition in *The Evenings*, an almost misunderstood tool

Before going further into the matter, a central aspect needs to be considered. As discussed in Section 1.2, *The Evenings* received both positive and negative reviews by the critics. On a few of the negative ones, interesting points are given by Paardekooper (1989: Ch 3). In particular, he reports Frederik Hermans’ opinion on the novel, according to which *TE* can be considered neither a novel nor a story because it misses any kind of development. Yet, as highlighted by Paardekooper, although *TE* may not contain the type of climax as other novels and works do, this does not mean that development is not present in Reve’s novel but it just follows another way because, as a matter of fact “the development mostly takes place *by means of* the repetition”¹³ (Paardekooper, 1986: 14). Therefore, repetition represents the alternative way, the means by which *The Evenings* ensures and creates its own development. The alternative way, however, has not satisfied that taste of other critics who have complained about the presence of repetition in Reve’s work, defining it as exaggerated and unnecessary (Paardekooper 1989: Ch 3). As readers, we can certainly confirm the many repetitions as strongly present in *TE*. This, nonetheless, should not be seen as a negative feature, on the contrary, it could even be argued that repetition acquires the status of theme itself because “after all, much of the book’s effect rests on its repetitions, rather than its developments”¹⁴ (Paardekooper, 1986: 13).

This consideration solves two of the problems mentioned above: development is present in *TE* and is provided by the repetitive nature of the novel itself; not only, it is by means of repetition that the book is able to convey its effect thanks to the stylistic value it assumes.

¹³ “De ontwikkeling grotendeels plaatsvindt *door middel van* de herhaling.”

¹⁴ “Per slot van rekening berust het effect van het boek voor een groot deel op de herhalingen, meer dan op de ontwikkelingen.”

4.2.2 Foregrounding as thematic parallelism

As said above, one of the forms in which foregrounding can be recognized is the one of parallelism which, as such, must imply some sort of repetition. Considering the points just discussed about repetition in *The Evenings* and the fact that foregrounding is “capable of working at any level of language” (Simpson 2004: 50), we can arguably apply the notion of foregrounding as parallelism to the novel from a thematic point of view, referring to it as thematic foregrounding.

The reason for talking about thematic foregrounding in *TE* comes from the parallelism recognisable in the way specific features that construct themes are recurrently presented in the narration: their cyclical and repetitive appearance in the novel makes them draw the attention of the reader i.e., acquire prominence. The fact is that “over the course of a narrative, [...] certain elements are experientially foregrounded” (Simpson 2004: 120) and it is exactly what happens in the novel: specific elements, which primarily contribute to the construction and depiction of themes, show a certain level of prominence due to their recurrent presence in the narration and to the experiential meaning they provide.

It should be noted that the type of prominence we are referring to here is not to be solely reconducted to the recurrent presence of themes during the narration, but largely to the unexpectedness and directness with which they are presented. A reader would not expect the character to meticulously observe and describe what he sees when standing naked in front of the mirror, for example. Neither would we expect him to directly ask a friend about his baldness emphasising his own negative considerations or telling another friend that he hopes to find his parents hanged at home one day. Themes such as body decay, death and exasperating definition of reality, and the way in which they are presented, are the distinctive sign of Reve’s first novel, without which the *TE* would not be the work it is.

As said above, prominence must be motivated to be meaningful. It will now be shown how the repetition of themes and the way they are experientially presented throughout narration is not only prominent but, above all, relates to the general meaning of the text.

The main themes of the novel have been presented in Section 1.1.3 and then deepened in 4.1. The examples from the text that will now be presented regard the themes

which have been more persistently retrieved from the previous transitivity analysis and will regard the topics of body and physical decay, stagnation, definition of reality and irony.

Body and physical decay

As is well known, one of Frits' main obsessions is the one related to body ugliness and imperfections and general physical decay. Among the signs of such conditions, baldness is certainly one he is very concerned about. As it has been discussed in Section 4.1, baldness also acquires a sexual connotation as it is, to the protagonist's eyes, a sign of the end of the sexual life of a man as he is no longer considered attractive. The theme of baldness widely covers the entire narration from the beginning to the end. An example has already been provided in the transitivity analysis: Extract M reports Frits' dialogue with his brother about Joop's impending baldness, according to Frits, and the possible action he should put into practice to deal with it. It has already been highlighted the direct, and shameless way in which Frits asks or talks to his interlocutors about such a personal issue. The reader can even feel the awkwardness of those narrated moments, as one would not expect such a rudeness, not even if the addressee of the observation is his brother.

A further example of Frits' directness when it comes to baldness can be seen in the example to follow, Extract N1:

"Oh, but you are becoming quite bald," Frits said. Joop did not reply. "Listen, Joop," he started in again, "without meaning to be nasty, your scalp is really almost bare. It will not be long before you can count your hairs on the fingers of one hand." Joop smiled, keeping his lips pursed. "I'm not going bald all that quickly," he said. "But it seems as though you can barely wait." [...] "I'm afraid you are," Frits said. "Do you count the hairs in your comb each morning? If you did you would see that there are more of them each day. Slowly but surely. I would be horrified to know that I was going bald. I would lose all desire to live. But please don't misunderstand me, I don't mean to discourage you." "Is he at it again?" Ina asked. (pp. 41-42) (extract N1)

Frits' directness and his disregard for possibly being rude does not even touch him, or if it does, his worry can certainly be interpreted as sarcastic. It can almost certainly be stated that no one would expect such a conversation but, according to what Ina says, it is much more a norm than an exception.

Frits exposes the problem not only to his family members but also to very close friends, as Jaap in Extract N2 below, without, nonetheless worrying for his directness about it. See:

“You’ve become even balder,” Frits said, “you’re getting extremely bald. Are you still massaging it? You told me recently, as I recall, that you massaged your scalp.” [...] “It goes faster all the time, doesn’t it?” Frits went on. “There is no stopping it, is there?” [...] “In the long run though you go bald anyway, just like everyone else,” Frits said. (pp. 75-76) (extract N2)

Finally, a self-reflection illustrates the issue of baldness in Extract N3:

He went into the hall, turned on the light and looked in the mirror. “Deliver me from baldness,” he said, pushing back his hair and examining the airline. “It is a gruesome infliction.” He stopped and listened. “It makes the head look old, shiny and distasteful,” he thought, “that is the truth. But even worse is when the bare skin is cracked or covered with little bumps.” (p. 140) (extract N3)

As Frits’ reflection clearly shows, he is deeply concerned with the possibility of losing hair, as much as he regularly examines his scalp in the mirror, as he does with many other parts of his body. Baldness is a total catastrophe to him and becomes even worse when other unpleasant perspectives are contemplated. Here we can also perceive that Frits is obsessed not only with features connected to physical decay but also with body distastefulness. Another clear example of this was provided in Extract L, where Frits spontaneously illustrates his mother how one should deal with nose mucus.

Stagnation and inactiveness

The transitivity pattern that the analysis of processes has allowed to retrieve from the text has highlighted different features that have richly contribute to the characterisation of the protagonist. Among these, one of the most important and central is the sense of stagnation and inactiveness that generally describes Frits. This aspect acquires a thematic dimension in the novel because, as we have seen in 4.1, it characterises the protagonist at a fundamental level, being even retrievable from the experiential meanings that encircle him and his actions. To show the extent to which such theme repetitively occurs in the novel, examples from the text will be given below.

One of these previously been presented and it is the case of Extract D. This self-reflection very well represents the inactiveness of which Frits is often victim. The boy goes to bed to take a nap and, once he is laying down, he is not able to move anymore and even a simple action becomes impossible. Frits becomes subject of his inability to move and cannot doing anything else but listening to the blood pounding in his head and recalling to the mind an old childhood memory.

In a similar direction goes the resignation shown in the two following brief but powerful extracts O2 below:

[...] and looking in the mirror. "Not an appealing face," he thought, "I have a sick soul." (p. 219) (extract O2)

And extract O3:

"The soul is covered in countless points of infection," he mumbled. (p. 241) (extract O3)

These two statements of the protagonist can almost be seen as an acknowledgment of the young man, an externalization of what he considers to be his own condition. The fact that he refers to his soul in these terms is very revealing because he is referring to his own essential fundament. From his words, we understand that it cannot be changed, it is something immutable on which action is not contemplated. As a matter of fact, Frits undergoes his own powerlessness about it: he in no way tries to change it, he can only recognize it, stick with it and keep stagnating in his condition.

Definition of reality

Another aspect that almost certainly gets the attention of the reader is the detailed description given by the protagonist about almost everything around him. These descriptions can often be perceived as obvious, as they regard also the most trivial of facts, even appearing, it may be argued, very superfluous and thus narratively useless. If critics' complaint of 'unnecessary repetition' is to be applied to descriptions as well, then their judgment in this sense would again prove inaccurate. It has been shown in Section 4.1 the extent to which Frits constant practice to claim state of things, to define reality and give obvious and superfluous details is not something he can avoid, nor a narrative filler. Frits' search for definition is not a choice but a need: he needs to constantly describe and try to understand things because that is his antidote against his fears, description corresponds to control.

In the transitivity analysis, it has been shown the extent to which Frits' descriptive need can be retrieved from the text in terms of processes as well. In fact, the high presence of relational process, indeed the most present transitivity category in the extracts, clearly highlights this distinctive sign of the protagonist, deeply contributing to its characterisation. To furtherly show the presence of this feature in the text, examples will now be provided.

Extract G from Section 4.1 provides a very clear example of Frits' obsession for the definition of reality and details in general. Here, he focuses on the sound of the clock pointers, trying to figure out how it is. The entire self-reflection shows his attempts to meticulously recognize the sound in between his mother knitting. Another example is given by Extract F from Section 4.1: the reduced work hour of that day ruins Frits' perception of the week so he needs to make things go back into place by rearranging the sequence of days, not failing to see the useless complexity of his thought. The same passage ends with a further evidence of his need for definition, as also the exact weather condition needs to be established.

Other two interesting examples in this sense can be seen in Extract P1:

Frits went to the lavatory and, when he returned, began pacing back and forth. "I know already that it will all be a failure," he thought, "but there is no going back. Home at two, consumed with disappointment, broken with misery, dull with fatigue. Sleep tight." (p. 244) (extract P1)

In this case, we see how Frits' urge to define reality does not only regard the present moment but also the future in a way as he, at the beginning of a night out, is already worried describing how it will go and how he will feel once home.

And Extract P2:

An hour and fifteen minutes later, he awoke. "Why am I lying here, as though I were exhausted?" he thought. "I need to come up with some plans. I need to establish a programme for tomorrow. It is slowly growing dark, and I am just lying here." He got up, went to the window and looked outside. "This is the final day of the year," he thought, "until midnight it is still December of this year. Immediately after that it is the 1st of January. Between the two there is nothing. It's cold in here." (p. 263) (extract P2)

This passage is totally representative of the different dimensions that Frits includes in his necessity of definition. Just awake from a nap, Frits is already worried to have plans for the day after, he must know what he will be doing the next day, he ‘needs to establish a programme’. Here the character is evidently externalizing what he himself calls a need, to define and to establish, an urge that, once again, shows to regard also future actions. After that, he comes back to the present moment and starts digressing in one of his typical reflections on time and current reality: the definition he gives of calendar time is so sharp that in between the two moments nothing else can exist.

These were just a few examples of the need for definition of the protagonist but the reader knows that it can persistently and recurrently be found all throughout the book.

Irony

The last theme considered in this section is irony. As it has already been highlighted in 4.1, Hubregtse (1989) emphasises the extent to which humour and use of language are closely related in the novel, a language which is often solemn and filled with cheap wisdom. Another fact to consider is that Frits’ irony is very peculiar, generally sarcastic and sometimes also macabre. He shows his humour in different situations, with his parents and friends but also when mumbling to himself. Examples of it will now be provided, see Extract Q1:

[...] “What time will you come home then, for God’s sake?” she asked. “It will probably be around two o’clock,” he replied, “be sure not to bolt the door.” “One of these days you’ll go completely mad,” she said. “True,” Frits said, “I am already moving in that direction, by leaps and bound. But don’t tell anyone.” (p. 224) (extract Q1)

Here we see a dialogue between Frits and his mother. The woman, probably not very enthusiast of the late time his son will be back home, comments on his upcoming madness. The boy is not offended or annoyed at all by her comment and does not miss the chance to agree with her by proudly confessing he is making very good progress in that sense, making sure she will not spread that information.

Another example is Extract Q2:

“Well Mother,” he said, “it’s not here on the table. If you think that I am incapable of searching, why don’t you try?” “It’s as though the two of you were morons, as though no one in this house has any sense,” she said. “Don’t you two have eyes in your head?” “What’s all this screaming?” his father asked. “Nothing,” Frits said, “there is no conflict whatsoever. It is a friendly debate. Later on there will be an opportunity for you to pose a few questions.” (p. 269) (extract Q2)

The scene shows a regular mother-son spat over an object Frits is looking for. The woman reproaches the son and his father and the high tone of their voices discussing draws the attention of the man, who asks what is going on. Frits delivers to his father one of his typical sarcastic answers and tells him that no one is arguing, it is instead a calm debate in which, if he wishes to, he can later participate with questions.

A last example of irony can be seen in Extract Q3:

“No, seriously,” Frits went on, “I’m firmly convinced of that. Old people cause a lot of the world’s misery. They contaminate our lives. They spread a sour smell in the tram. Like a pot of fruit preserves that has been opened and then forgotten. Everything over sixty should be done away with.” “Why not everything over forty?” Louis asked. “You wouldn’t hear me complain,” Frits said, “but we have to stay humane. Between forty and sixty there are still signs of life.” (p. 284) (extract Q3)

This part of conversation between Frits and his friend Louis very well shows the kind of talk he and his friends often have when they are together. In both self-reflections and dialogues, it is not unusual for Frits to make macabre and very strong comments. What strikes the most, apart from the content of his thoughts and statements, is the carelessness with which he delivers such ideas, which Frits always provides with evidence to support them. After his comments, he often adds a sarcastic or ironic closing. In this case, after proposing a kind of genocide, he has to decline his friend’s further idea because, after all, one should be emphatic when there are still signs of life.

This kind of black humour is to be seen in the entire book and in many different situations. The reader in the end gets used to Frits’ cruel comments but gets always more astonished by the extent of cruelty or disgust these can reach.

To conclude

This section has shown how specific features that construct a few of the most central themes, contributing therefore to the conveyance of experiential meaning of the book itself, are recurrently and repetitively presented in the narration. This repetition, together

with the directness and unexpectedness with which such features are given, acquires, to the eyes of the reader, a certain prominence. Examples from the text have been shown and it can reasonably be stated that these elements are experientially foregrounded and this happens repetitively in the narration, in a pattern of parallelism. As such prominence is deeply connected to the elements that directly contribute to the construction of themes, it has been defined as thematic parallelism.

It should be noted that the fundamental condition for prominence to be defined as foregrounding is that it must be motivated, in the sense that it must somehow contribute to the general meaning of the text. With respect to this, it should be noted that:

a feature that is brought into prominence will be “foregrounded” only if it relates to the meaning of the text as a whole. This relationship is a functional one: if a particular feature of the language contributes, by its prominence, to the total meaning of the work, it does so by virtue of and through the medium of its own value in the language – through the linguistic function from which its meaning is derived. Where that function is relevant to our interpretation of the work, the prominence will appear as motivated. (Halliday, 1971: 98)

As a matter of fact, it can be stated that the thematic elements that appear in the novel in a pattern of parallelism are foregrounded for they fundamentally relate to the meaning of the text as a whole. All the elements discussed above are all connected to what can be considered the major theme of *The Evenings*, to its essential meaning, which Paardekooper clearly presents when claiming that:

[...] De Avonden deals with the emancipation process of puberty, and the theme is: the fear, first of all for that emancipation process. Frits' fears are those of the adolescent who is about to leave his youth behind, and who realizes that he is alone in his leap into adulthood. [...] Becoming adults eventually leads to death; that is the only certainty that life offers. Not growing up means: being left alone; that's almost certain. These two perspectives and the knowledge that there is not a third possibility fill Frits with great fear, which he tries to combat more or less homeopathically: by talking about it constantly (and usually joking). [...] In doing so, he projects his feelings of fear onto others, partly to put them off, partly to convince himself that he is not alone in those feelings.¹⁵ (Paardekooper 1986: 22).

¹⁵ “In feite behandelt *De Avonden* het ontvoogdingsproces van de puberteit, en is het thema: de angst, allereerst voor dat ontvoogdingsproces. Frits' angsten zijn die van de adolescent die op het punt staat zijn jeugd achter zich te laten, en die beseft dat hij alléén staat in zijn sprong naar de volwassenheid. [...] Volwassenen worden leidt uiteindelijk tot de dood; dat is de enige zekerheid die het leven biedt. Niet volwassen worden betekent: alléén achterblijven; dat is zo goed als zeker. Deze twee vooruitzichten en de wetenschap dat er geen derde mogelijkheid is, vervullen Frits met grote angst, die hij min of meer homeopathisch probeert te bestrijden: door er voortdurend (en meestal schertsend) over te praten. [...] Daarbij projecteert hij zijn angstgevoelens op anderen, deels om ze daarmee van zich af te zetten, deels om zichzelf aan te praten dat hij in die gevoelens niet alleen staat.”

As already noticed from the transitivity analysis in 4.1, the fundamental meaning of Reve's work is the sense of fear of the protagonist and all the elements discussed above contribute to the construction of this theme. They do so through their motivated prominence and through the linguistic function to which their meaning is derived, in this case, the experiential (meta-)function. We know that the function in question needs to be relevant to the interpretation of the work: hopefully, this section has managed to show that the function here is relevant to our interpretation of the work and makes the prominence of the analysed elements entirely motivated.

5.1 Transitivity processes in the Dutch text

In this final Chapter, we will take into account *The Evenings* from a further perspective. In Chapter 3, the text has been analysed quantitatively by means of a corpus-based approach that has provided a first insight into the novel and proved to be useful by revealing a few central features. In Chapter 4, a systemic-functional approach has been applied to selected self-reflection and dialogue extracts. The choice and use of transitivity processes and the role of the subject have been closely analysed to describe their contribution to the representation of themes and to the characterisation of the protagonist.

In this chapter, the self-reflections and dialogues that have been analysed in Chapter 4 will be compared to the Dutch original text. From now on, the English and the Dutch texts will be also referred to as target text or TT and source text or ST, respectively. Specifically, such a source-target text comparison aims to explore the types of differences between them with regard to transitivity processes and the role of the subject between the ST and the TT and, if so, how and to what extent. If differences are found, we want to describe whether they may have influenced the way the experiential meanings of the novel are conveyed, with an effect on the representation of the themes and the characterisation of the protagonist. Practically, the Dutch original extracts were closely read by identifying the transitivity processes. After that, the single instances of processes in each clause were compared to the ones of the English translation discussed in Chapter 4.1. In addition, the use and implications related to the role of the subject were considered.

It must be noticed that this section will not comparatively show all the extracts in their entire length because the demonstration of the whole comparison would not be of particular interest and quite long to be reported. What will instead be shown is an analysis of the most salient features and points that have emerged from the comparison of which examples from the texts will be reported. Nonetheless, the Dutch extracts have been entirely included in the Appendices section.

As is well known, English and Dutch are both West Germanic languages, a fact which may lead one to think that they must, therefore, function similarly on many respects. Undoubtedly, belonging to the same linguistic branch is the reason why languages may share common points from a general grammatical point of view. For example, Dutch and English differ from Italian or other Romance languages in their rules for the omission of the subject. Common points may also regard the lexical level in a

relationship of mutual impact. For example, the influence of English on Dutch is noticeable if we consider all the traces that the former has left and keeps leaving in the latter (Thelen, 2005: 245), an influence that, nonetheless, can be seen also the other way around, as common words like *waffle*, *beer*, *dumbhead*, *coleslaw* and *cookie* all descend from Dutch (Jansen et al. 2017: Ch. 1).

For the purposes of the current investigation, it is worth knowing that “a comparison of two languages at the syntactic level is likely to show that they have rules in common, but also that there are rules which apply in one language but not in the other. English and Dutch share a large number of syntactic rules, but they both have rules that are language-specific” (Aarts and Wekker, 1987:6). In view of these considerations, the comparison was expected to highlight that the selected extracts in the two languages show more similarities than differences in the choice and use of transitivity processes and the role of the subject. Nonetheless, the possibility that general variations and language-specific rules would have emerged was certainly not excluded.

What this section aims to achieve is a description of the general trends found in the comparison, with specific discussions of the most relevant aspects. An objection that could be added is that being the extracts limited in nature, the results emerged from their comparison may be partial and not sufficiently exemplificative of the whole text. However, the extracts analysed have been chosen for their high level of representativity of the novel from different perspectives. For this reason, it is reasonable to believe that the results they have provided are reliable and representative of the main differences and similarities existing between the two entire texts. A consideration to be made before going into the details of the comparison is that the language of the novel, which deeply characterises both the narration and the protagonist, is spoken and informal, a fact which was very peculiar and not obvious for the time the book was published. With respect to this, it should also be noted that many years divide the Dutch text, appeared in 1947, and the English translation of 2016, a time gap that has certainly an influence on the features of the two texts.

As expected, the ST and the TT are very similar, the differences found are few and have a low impact. Nonetheless, here we want to reflect also on subtler differences, for they can provide equally interesting insights. In fact, the aim of analysing also minor

differences is to see whether they may play a role in providing a different effect to the reading experience.

The fundamental tendency observed is that the transitivity processes as detected in English extracts match those in the Dutch text. This correspondence is actually very important because it suggests a closeness of the texts at the lexico-grammatical level. However, despite this main and central common point, some differences have emerged. One of the most relevant ones is that English translated clauses sometimes count a higher number of verbs and therefore of processes than their Dutch correspondents and the reasons for this difference will be discussed below. In general, differences observed between ST e TT are primarily related to transitivity processes but also to other syntactic and lexical related features considered important for the purposes of the comparison. Note that each feature discussed has been encountered several times but none has shown preponderance on the others. This means that there is not an aspect that has turned out to be more frequent. For this reason the discussion will be divided according to the aspect observed and should not be intended as a ranking of any kind.

The extracts taken from the original Dutch novel *De Avonden* will be indicated with the acronym *DA*, while those from the English translation *The Evenings* with the equivalent *TE*. Also, in those cases where it is considered useful, a literal English translation will be provided to facilitate the understanding of the comparison.

5.1.1 Self-reflections *De Avonden*

Verb phrase implication

As anticipated above, a general feature observed regarding verbs is that in the English translation clauses are often found with more verbs and processes than the original ones in the Dutch text. This difference appears to be caused by the fact that verbs are sometimes left implied in the original text while they are instead expressed or added in the English one. It will now be shown how this could supposedly be due either to a syntactic reason, as the application of a grammatical rule, or to a stylistic one, intended as result of a preference and choice of the translator. The first of the two cases just mentioned can be seen in the following example from Extract A:

*DA: “Het is koud(R) en vroeg en niemand is nog buiten(R), maar ik **wel (-)**.”*

*TE: “It’s cold(R) and early and no one’s out(R) yet, but I **am(R)**.”*

In this case, the English clause counts three verbs and the Dutch clause just two (which are underlined). In fact, the third English verb does not translate a verb in Dutch but transposes the phrase containing the particle *wel*, an adverb which can acquire different meanings according to the context. In this case, *wel* is used to reinforce the sense of contrast given by *maar* (lit. but) in the Dutch sentence. Specifically, what we observe in Dutch is a case of stripping, a case of verbal ellipsis in which all other nonverbal material in the second conjunct is deleted and there is only a single remnant, often immediately followed by the (focus) particles like *wel/ook* ('also', 'too') or polarity items like *niet* ('not') (Corver and van Koppen, 2017: 13). In this case, the single remnant is *ik* (lit. I), followed by the particle *wel*. In English, in a contrastive perspective, there would arguably not be other possible options but the one adopted by the translator to convey the original meaning, a solution that inevitably requires to addition of the implied verb.

As said above, this difference between ST and TT could supposedly be due to two reasons. The second one can be reconducted to a stylistic preference of the translator and is very well represented by the following example from Extract E:

DA: “Ik loop(M) hier in de stad, door de mist, naar huis, terwijl het donker wordt(R).”

TE: “I am(R) here, walking(M) through town, through the mist, on my way home, as darkness falls(M).”

The Dutch clause *ik loop* (lit. I walk/I am walking) shows one verb while its correspondent translation formally counts two verbs. In this case, it is clear that the difference does not depend on a possible or required Dutch grammatical option that forces the translation to add a verb to compensate it but is instead due to a stylistic preference arguably exclusively depending on a choice of the translator in the construction of the sentence.

As said above, the fact that the TT generally counts more verbs and processes than the ST is a tendency and, as such, may have exceptions. See, for example, Extract G:

DA: “Het is(R) in ieder geval niet tik tak, want dat zijn twee verschillende klanken(R).”

TE: “(-) Not tick-tock, in any case, because those are two distinct sounds(R).”

Here we see the opposite, as the Dutch sentence shows two verbs while the English translation chooses to keep just the second one and to leave implied the initial *it is*, the direct translation of *het is*. This arguably is, once again, just a stylistic preference of the translator.

Verbs replacing a noun (phrase)

Another reason that causes the English translation to count more verbs than the original text is apparently the use of verbs in the TT to translate a noun or a noun phrase in the ST. See the following example from Extract B:

DA: “Of zou het gebrek aan inzicht van het gevaar zijn geweest?(R)”

TE: “Or did they simply fail(M) to see(Me) how dangerous it was(R)?”

In this case, we see that the English construction has three verbs. The Dutch clause, on the other hand, counts just one verb related to the entire noun phrase that precedes it. The meaning of the noun phrase, which can be literally translated as *the lack of insight of the danger*, has been conveyed by adding verbs that replace each one of the original nouns.

A point that should be made here regards the effect of the two versions. In the Dutch original construction, the subject is represented by the entire noun phrase and a human or non-abstract agent is totally missing. These two aspects in particular give the entire clause a strong impersonal and passive trait: no human agent is present, whom an action can be attributed to but rather the entire action is very static and inevitable at the same time. These aspects confirm and enrich the features that have emerged in the transitivity analysis and previously discussed in Chapter 4. In the English translation, the effect is quite different: the concreteness of the human referent implied by the subject *they* could arguably diminish the ‘fatality’ of the scene as much as its sense of passivity. On the other hand, a literal English translation of the noun phrase in question might result as formal and even forced, missing therefore the spontaneity and immediacy that the representation of a thought should provide.

Another instance can persistently be seen in Extract C:

DA: “In de vierde klas, bij het begin van de grote vakantie,” zei hij bij zichzelf, “we gingen naar huis en ik had een leeg krijtjeskistje(noun) gekregen. Ik stond in de gang, te wachten op het eind(noun) van de regen, want ik had geen jas bij me. En

elke keer snoof ik in het kistje. Het was een lucht van hout, nieuw hout, van hars en krijt. Tot zover is het duidelijk, dat zijn de feiten. Maar de samenhang(noun)?”

TE: “In fourth class, at the start of the summer holidays,” he told himself, “we went(M) home and I was given(M) an empty, wooden box that had been used(M) to hold(M) chalk. I was standing(M) in the hall, waiting(M) for the rain to stop(M), because I had(R) no coat with me. And I kept sniffing(B) at that box. It was(R) the smell of wood, fresh wood, of resin and of chalk. That much is clear(R), those are(R) the facts. But how does it fit together(M)?”

This section of passage C perfectly shows what is described above: in three instances, we see the English translation using a verb where the original text shows a noun phrase. The first underlined noun in Dutch is *krijtjeskistje* (lit. *small box for chalk*). To solve the problem given by the likely inexistence of a direct translation in such a compact form, the translator has decided to translate the noun using an entire explanatory sentence.

By looking at the second noun phrase in Dutch, *het eind* (lit. *the end*), we see that it is replaced by a verb in English not because of a missing correspondent noun but, most probably, again due to a stylistic choice by the translator. Finally, the third instance regards the noun phrase *de samenhang* (lit. *the cohesion*) and seems to be an in-between case of the two above. In fact, the reason for choosing a verb in the translation does not come from the impossibility to find an alternative noun, as words like *connection*, *correlation* or other synonyms could have been an option here. Most likely, the fact of choosing an entire clause over a noun is due to the more pleasant effect provided by the clause in question, which manages to convey the original sense more spontaneously and clearly than a synonym could have possibly done.

However, exceptions have been observed also in regard to the use of verbs in the TT to translate noun or noun phrases. In Extract B, for example, the English text opts for a noun (*their names*) to translate a verbal phrase in Dutch (lit. *how they were called*):

DA: “Ik weet niet(Me) hoe die hetten(R).”

TE: “I can’t remember(Me) their names.”

In this case as well, the reason for a different choice seems to be strictly connected to the greater spontaneity and readability ensured by the adopted solution with respect to the maintenance of the verb in the literal translation.

The verb *krijgen*

To conclude the comparison of self-reflections, it is interesting to discuss the use of the verb *krijgen*. Throughout the extracts, this verb has been seen frequently in the original text and it is interesting to note the solutions adopted by the translator. In fact, *krijgen* is a very frequently used verb in Dutch characterised by a visible versatility, as we can observe the extent to which it acquires different shades of meaning and, therefore of translations, depending on the context in which it is used.

According to the Van Dale dictionary of Dutch language, the verb in question has different meanings and can appear in idiomatic expressions, specifically *to take, to grab, to acquire by means of one's efforts, to reach an objective, to bring something into a state or action, to receive, to be affected by something, to be sentenced to a punishment*. In the extracts, we find it for example in Extract A:

DA: “Men is buiten geweest(R), voelt zich fris(B) en krijgt(R) een goed humeur.”

TE: “You've been outside(R), you feel chipper(B) and your spirits are high(R).”

The comparison of the original sentence to its translation provides two aspects worth noting. First, we see that the Dutch sentence is built on the impersonal construction *men + verb* which counts three (underlined) verbs including *krijgen*. In general, the entire Dutch sentence is built to provide a strong sense of impersonality and passivity, given by the *men + verb* form and emphasised by the use of *krijgen*. Differently, the English sentence translates the impersonal construction and the connected meaning by using the construction *you + verb*. This example reconnects to the matter of language specific rules discussed at the beginning, showing how Dutch and English may function differently despite their belonging to the same linguistic family and sharing several similarities at the syntactic level. In fact, while Dutch can use the particle *men* to build an impersonal construction, other solutions are available in English, that is *one* and *you*, for example. In the analysed case, it should be noticed that it is not the indefinite *one* to have been chosen but *you* which, even if impersonally used, creates a different effect, resulting less detached and impersonal than the *men + verb* form.

On its part, *krijgen* has been translated in English with the form *to be + adjective*. This solution results as clear and suitable from the point of view of the conveyance of the meaning but lacks the sense of passivity that the Dutch verb so intrinsically encloses.

The second fact to note is that the versatility in context of *krijgen* and the idiomatic uses it can support make it not always easy to determine which transitivity process it is representing in a specific case and considering it literally can be misleading. A solution that can be adopted is to paraphrase the sentence in question. In the case above, the verb must not be intended from a literal point of view, so as *receiving something*, we need instead to take into account the real meaning of that part of sentence, which can be paraphrased as *getting in a good mood, becoming in a good mood*. In this way, it becomes easier to recognize the process and to classify it as a relational one.

Another interesting example of the use of *krijgen* is to be seen in Extract B:

DA: “*Ik werd misselijk(R) en kreeg(Me) pijn achter mijn ogen.*”

TE: “*I felt nauseous(R), and there was(E) this pain behind my eyes.*”

In this case, the sentence has a human referent, as *ik* (lit. I) is referred to Frits. Despite the explicit presence of a human subject, the use of *krijgen*, this time in its past form, gives the sentence a sense of inevitability and passivity as Frits is victim of his physical sensations. In English, such sense is given by *there was*, which gives the right level of objectivity to the sensation felt by the boy and of passivity with respect to his agency on it.

From a transitivity perspective, here *krijgen* is used with a further different connotation and the process it represents appears more complicated to establish. Nonetheless, by paraphrasing the part of the sentence in question, we understand it means *getting pain, to be affected by pain*, the sense is that the subject *has* that pain, he *is feeling* it. Taking this into account, we may arguably define this specific use of *krijgen* as an instance of mental process, definition which, however, has liable edges as the verb is not immediately and undoubtedly classifiable as such but seems to fall in-between this category and the one of relational processes. This example makes it evident the extent to which the classification of processes can sometimes be not so straightforward.

In general, it is clear the level of passivity and impersonality that characterizes the Dutch sentences and which is conveyed by the complex and subtle spectre of meanings

of *krijgen*. Furthermore, the examples show the different ways in which the common and widely used Dutch verb *krijgen* can be translated into English according to the different connotations and meanings that characterise it. Beside this, its level of interchangeability in transitivity terms has been also shown, as the process it represents is not intrinsically connected to the verb itself but may change and depend on contextual changes.

The subject in the self-reflections of *De Avonden*

As the present work aims to investigate how the representation of themes and the role of the subject in Reve's novel contribute to the characterisation of the protagonist, in the comparison between texts the subject could not be left behind. In general, ST and TT appear as very close from this perspective as well, as the comparison has highlighted significant similarities in the way the Dutch and the English texts use and deal with the role of the subject. In fact, it can reasonably be said that the considerations made with respect to this topic in the analysis of transitivity of Chapter 4 are fully applicable and relatable to translated self-reflections as well. Nonetheless, as already observed above, a large similarity does not correspond to a total equivalence and differences are to be seen also in this case. See the following instances from Extract A:

DA: “[...] dan wordt de slaap dieper(R).”

TE: “It would make me sleep(M) more soundly.”

And:

DA: “Het begint(M) goed,” mompelde hij.

TE: “We’re off(M) to a roaring start,” he mumbled.

In both cases, we see that the subjects of the Dutch clauses, which are underlined, differ from the ones of the English translation. In the first example, in Dutch Frits is totally absent from the clause, much less as subject, represented by *de slaap* (lit. the sleep). On the other hand, in the English clause Frits is present, even if as a sort of passive subject undergoing the effect of an abstract entity, a previously mentioned *evening walk* represented by *it*.

In the second example, the subject in English is the plural pronoun *we* which has a general referent while in Dutch it is an impersonal third person subject represented by *het* (lit. it). In general, a significant tendency to impersonality can be observed in both

languages. In English, for example, the use of *we* in the second clause has a highly impersonal and general effect. Nonetheless, such effect is objectively more prominent in the Dutch text. In fact, even if in English the subjects are either an abstract entity (*it*) or a personal pronoun with an unspecified referent (*we*), in both cases Frits is always somehow present in the clause, even if in a passive condition or implied in an undefined plural. In the Dutch clauses, on the other hand, the subjects are an abstract concept (*de slaap*) and a third personal pronoun with an unspecified referent (*het*) and, more importantly, Frits is nowhere to be seen or contemplated, he is forced to take and maintain a back seat, which makes the already evident degree of impersonality even greater. What can be retrieved from this is that, in the ST, Frits appears still less present as subject because he not only undergoes the narrated actions and shows minimal agency, as already observed, but he is just generally less chosen for this role, as subjects with third impersonal referents are preferred.

To conclude this first section, it should be noticed that, while the differences considered in the previous sections have a more conceptual character, here the contrast between ST and TT in the way the subject is represented appears as more evident and concrete.

5.1.2 Dialogues in *De Avonden*

The comparison of dialogue extracts between the two texts has highlighted many common points shared with what has been discussed for self-reflections. The first aspect that has been observed is that, exactly as in the previous typology of extracts, the transitivity processes in the ST and TT generally correspond, which confirms again the closeness shared by the texts in this sense. Nonetheless, some of the interesting differences discussed above could be observed here as well.

Verb phrase implication

As explained above, the translated English clauses show the tendency to count more verbs than the Dutch original. As discussed above, this can be due to a language specific rule or to a stylistic preference of the translator, who may choose to imply the verb and to opt for a different construction. Such tendency finds a general confirmation also in the comparison of the dialogue extracts, which present instances of them.

See the following instance in Extract M:

DA: “**Moeten** er geen spelden in (-)?” vroeg Joop.

TE: “**Shouldn’t I put(M)** pins in it?” Joop asked.

In this case, we see that in the Dutch clause the only verb to be seen is the modal *moeten* (lit. must) which is explicit while the main verb is left implied. On the contrary, in the English translation we find both the modal *shouldn’t* and the lexical verb *put*. The difference between the two clauses is due to the first of the two reasons mentioned above: this is a case of ellipsis due to a language specific rule. In fact, it is an example of the possibility, in Dutch, to leave verbs implied while they are still retrievable from the clause itself. In addition, we should bear in mind that the language of the novel is one of its most characterising elements and tends to resemble the spoken language both in self-reflections and dialogues, therefore exceptions or differences in the choice and use of specific elements must be considered as generally motivated by this aspect as well.

The following instance from Extract I exemplifies, on the other hand, the second reason mentioned:

DA: “Ik **moet** een plaats **hebben(R)**,” zei Maurits.

TE: “I’m **trying(M)** to **get(M)** a ticket,” Maurits said.

This instance is worth considering for several reasons. First, we see that in the original clause, excluding the modal verb *moet* (lit. must), there is just one verb, while the English sentence counts two verbs. Secondly, we observe a difference also from a transitivity point of view: in Dutch the verb represents a relational process and in English both verbs enclose a material process. Finally, a difference can be observed also in the directness of the content of the clause. In fact, the literal translation of the Dutch clause is *I must have a seat*, we can see that it has a very different effect with respect to its English version, resulting very direct because of the use of the modal *moeten* (lit. must). Consequently, the English translation has arguably a less direct effect due to the absence of a strong modal verb like *must* and to the softer semantic meaning of the combination of verbs chosen, *trying* and *to get*.

In general, the two clauses differ in the number of verbs included not because of an ellipsis that could be applied in Dutch and not in English, forcing the translator to choose

an alternative solution, but it is apparently due to a stylistic choice to opt for a different construction which result in a more natural way of expressing the message in the TT.

To conclude, the following piece of text from Extract I exemplifies both reasons:

DA: “**Wou(Me)** je meisje niet **mee (-)**, Frits?” [...]

“Je kan er beter een hebben(R), die **niet mee wil(Me)** naar de bioscoop(-), dan helemaal geen(-),” antwoordde Frits.

TE: “Didn’t your girl **feel(Me) like coming(M) along**, Frits?” [...]

“You’re better off(R) having(R) one who **doesn’t want(Me) to go(M)** to the cinema than not having(R) one at all,” Frits replied.

In this part of the dialogue between Frits and his friend, we see that different verbs are implied in the original text but not in the translation, with the result that in English we count more verbs. Two are cases of a language specific rule that allows an elided use. Specifically, this happens in the first Dutch clause which leaves implied what is translated with *coming along*, and in the following sentence with what in English is replaced by *to go*. In both cases, in Dutch we recognize the form *meewillen*, which is the elided form for *willen meegaan*. According to the Algemeen Nederlands Woordenboek, it means *to want to go somewhere with someone*. When using *meewillen*, the following part represented by the verb *gaan* (to go) can be left implied and its meaning is always recognizable and retrievable.

In the third instance, underlined at the end of the sentence, in English we see a verb and in Dutch an adverb. This difference does not seem to have particular grammatical reasons at the basis but shows a stylistic preference. In fact, also the TT could have followed the ST by concluding the sentence with an adverb as it was done in Dutch with *helemaal geen* (lit. none at all), a combination which provides a strong sense of negation. Instead, the translator has opted for the repetition of the verb used at the beginning, a choice which conveys the same sense of negation of the original text.

However, dialogues as well have shown exceptions to the tendency of the TT to count more verbs than the ST. See Extract I:

DA: “Hoe vind je(Me) nou eerlijk, dat ik er uitzie(R)?”

TE: “But honestly(-), how do I look(R)?”

Here, the Dutch sentence counts two verbs and the English clause just one. The literal translation of the Dutch sentence would be *But how do you honestly think that I look?* We can see how the difference in the number of verbs is due to the decision of the translator to cut out the verbal phrase at the beginning, leaving just the adversative conjunction *but* and the adverb *honestly*, which are rendered by the interjection *nou*, here used with the meaning of *but* in the translation, and the adverb *eerlijk* (lit. honestly). The result of such a choice is an idiomatic translation which does not affect the spontaneity of the message.

The verb krijgen

Another aspect observed also in dialogue extracts regards the use of the verb *krijgen*. Two interesting instances are in Extract I:

DA: “*Jij zit zonder(R); ik geloof ook niet(Me), dat jij ooit iets krijgt(R).*”

TE: “*You have none(R); and I don’t believe(Me) you ever will.*”

And Extract M:

DA: “*Dat je een echte kale plek krijgt(M).*”

TE: “*That you will develop(M) an actual bald spot.*”

The versatility of *krijgen*, more widely discussed above, is confirmed again by these two examples which contribute to showing its interchangeability from a transitivity point of view. In fact, we see that the process connected to it very much depends on the way it is used in context. Specifically, in Extract I *krijgen* is related to the meaning of *having a girlfriend* and represents, therefore, a relational process. On the contrary, in Extract M its meaning results less figurative because the action it describes, *getting a bald spot*, is objectively visible. In this case, we can consider it as representing a material process.

The verb zien and mental processes

In dialogues in particular, a feature that has been observed with a certain repetition is the use of the verb *zien*, meaning *to see*, especially in Extract K. See below:

DA: “[...] *God ziet alles(Me). Hij ziet(Me) niet allen op mij, hij ziet(Me) op ons allen.*” [...] “*Christus, zie(Me) uw soldaten.*”

TE: “[...] *God sees(Me) everything. His eye is(R) not only on me, his eye is(R) on each and every one of us.*” [...] “*Christ, behold(B) thy soldiers.*”

It can objectively be said that such repetition within the extract in the original version provides a cohesive effect. A direct consequence of this repetition is that, in Dutch, all instances are mental processes and it should also be noticed that the subject of the clauses containing *zien* is always *God*. The English translation, on the other hand, is much more varied both in the choice of verbs and in the subject. In fact, the verb *to see* is used only once while different verbs have been chosen in the other parts of the extract. As a consequence, we observe a greater diversity with regard to processes, which vary from mental, to relational to behavioural. Also the subject varies from *God* to *his eye*.

Other instances show what seems to be a more frequent employment of mental processes in the original version. In fact, it happens that where the English text shows different verbs and processes with respect to the original, the verbs in Dutch represent a mental process. See Extract I:

DA: “*Maar je onthoudt(Me) veel te goed, wat ik je vertel(V).*”

TE: “*But you have(R) far too good a memory for the things I tell(V) you.*”

In the original text, the verb *onthouden* means *remember, memorize*, clearly representing a mental process, while in English the use of *have* puts the focus on a different aspect of the meaning of the clause and represents a relational process. See also Extract L:

DA: “*Weet(Me) je anders niets?*” vroeg ze.

TE: “*“Stop(M) it, would you?” she asked.*”

In this other example, we see again that, while in the original the verb *weten* (lit. to know) represents a mental process, the translation shows a verb related to a material process. A fact to note here is that not only the verbs and processes are different, but that this also causes a change in the effect of the utterance. In fact, while the mother in the English version asks Frits to stop, in the Dutch one she sarcastically asks him whether he has anything else to say about it, which amplifies the comic trait of the passage itself.

The observations made in this section have highlighted a kind of pattern in the frequent employment of verbs representing a mental process in the original version. This may be seen as suggesting the possibility that the Dutch text contains much more mental

processes with respect to the translated one. Such possibility, however, can only be hypothetically considered as a confirmation could only be provided by a comparison of the entire text.

5.2 From transitivity processes to characterization

In this conclusive Chapter, the Dutch original extracts and the English translated ones have been compared from the point of view of the transitivity processes. The comparison has highlighted different aspects of interest and the most relevant have been more widely discussed by means of examples.

In general, it must be said that the expectations presented at the beginning have found a confirmation in this comparison, as the English extracts have proved to be very close to the Dutch text in many respects. Also, the results that emerged have been generally found in both self-reflections and dialogues. First, transitivity processes have been considered in Dutch self-reflections and it has been observed the extent to which the processes in the two texts very frequently correspond. A second interesting remark on verbs and processes is that, according to the extracts considered, it appears that the translated version counts more verbs than the original and shows, therefore, a higher number of processes. It has been discussed that this may be due to two different reasons: from the one hand, it can be the result of a language specific rule, on the other it is connected to a stylistic preference of the translator for a different construction.

A further interesting aspect regards the verb *krijgen*. The examples considered seem to highlight the semantic versatility this verb can have in context and its consequently interchangeability from a transitivity perspective. In fact, as the different solutions used to render it in English would suggest, its meaning is not fixed. This causes it to vary in its transitivity categorization, as the process connected is not fixed but changes with the context.

A further aspect has more consistently emerged comparing dialogues: there seems to be a more frequent use and preference, in the Dutch text, for verbs representing mental processes over other categories, *zien* in particular. The English text has proved to be more varied in these instances, with verbs belonging to different transitivity processes.

The last aspect discussed regards the role of the subject. The evidence obtained in the comparison would suggest that the points discussed in Section 4.1 about the subject

are reasonably applicable to the translated version as well. Moreover, the comparison has allowed what seems to be an interesting aspect of the original text to emerge. A few examples have shown that, in *De Avonden*, the protagonist appears as still less chosen and present as subject than he does in the English text, fact which might suggest Frits' lower centrality and agency in this role in the original. In fact, it has been recognized that the ST shows a higher level of impersonality and passivity with respect to the TT. Such a sense is largely provided by the use of abstract or undetermined elements over human agents for the role of the subject.

Finally, it is important to consider the limits as well as the implications of the present comparison. The observations provided in this chapter come from selected extracts and not from the two entire texts, consequently a comparison of the whole ST and TT may provide further elements. Nonetheless, the findings have shown great consistency between the two typologies of extracts. All in all, it can be stated that the few differences between the Dutch and English text can almost entirely arguably be reconducted to choices of the translator. In fact, it should be considered that the extracts represent spoken language, which requires flexibility, and that variations like the ones shown here are inevitable in translation. It could be undoubtedly interesting and revealing to clarify these aspects with the translator by asking him about the possible reasons behind specific choices. Another issue that arises is whether the differences observed between texts may, in the long run, cause a different effect on the reader. For this purpose, a reception analysis involving target readers would be very interesting to be carried out.

In general, this comparison should not be intended as aimed to just point out differences between texts but instead as an enrichment of the description of their common conveyance of the experiential meanings contained in the novel, both as representation of themes and as characterisation of the protagonist.

Conclusion

This work was meant as a multi-perspective linguistic analysis of *The Evenings*, the English translation of the debut novel of the Dutch writer Gerard Reve *De Avonden*, published for the first time in 1947. The novel represents a Dutch classic and is considered a masterpiece in the literature of the country, with its author counted among the greatest Dutch writers.

As stated in the introduction, the aim of the present work is to explore the “fabric” of the novel with regard to two matters: the representation of the themes developed in the novel and the characterisation of the protagonist. The investigation of these two aspects was carried out from an interpretative point of view and as a contribution to the appreciation of the novel as a whole. In particular, the themes were specifically addressed from the point of view of their construction and expression in the narration. Connected to this is the representation of the protagonist intended as his characterisation in stylistic terms, which regards the way in which the impression of the character is created in narration through a specific use of linguistic elements.

These two aims have been pursued by means of different levels of linguistic analysis included within specific theoretical frameworks, namely: systemic functional linguistics, stylistics and corpus linguistics. Each level of analysis and each of the theories and methods applied had a precise purpose in the investigation of the text and were meant to each contribute to drawing a general picture of the text. The analysis has been characterised by a qualitative approach, as the close and attentive reading of instances of text and results obtained has remained central during the whole investigation. The results provided by each level of analysis will now be summarised by highlighting their main apport.

The first framework in which the novel has been included is the one of corpus linguistics. In particular, in Chapter 3 the text has been analysed with the aid of the concordancing software AntConc. The wordlist and the keyword list of the text have been determined and their results closely considered. The keyword list has proved to be more revealing. In fact, the keyword list has ranked nouns that are particularly representative of the novel as they are connected to its setting or themes. An example are the house-related objects and the nouns *head* and *evening*. With regard to verb and processes, the

list has highlighted the presence of many material processes representing physical movements, like *went* and *sat*, and also of mental and behavioural ones like *thought* and *mumbled*. In the dissertation a discussion has been conducted of the extent to which the verbs and related processes standing out from the list deeply reflect some of the main features of the narration, such as its mainly domestic setting and the distinction between inner and outer reality that seems to be reflected in the use and choice of verbs and processes. The application of corpus-based methods was meant to provide a first insight into the text by means of quantitative information that could reveal features and elements worth considering in the further steps of the analysis.

The most relevant contribution to the investigation is the one given by the systemic functional analysis. This analysis has focused on the investigation of transitivity processes and the role of the subject in selected extracts, chosen for their high representativeness of the text. Self-reflection and dialogue extracts have been analysed separately and the respective results finally compared. Despite the existence of minor differences, the two categories of extracts have shown similar features: they turned out to be characterised by the extensive use of material and relational processes, with the latter being nonetheless substantially preponderant. It has been discussed how the choice and use of these processes construct and allow to convey the experiential meaning contained in the novel and therefore its themes. It has been shown how the specific employment of processes constructs the obsessive, reluctant, inactive and stagnating nature of Frits that can be perceived during the reading. The most important traits of such employment of processes are the use of material processes to describe motionless and aimless actions but especially that of relational ones, constantly used by the protagonist in his pursue for the definition of reality around and inside himself. The analysis has made it possible to recognise a transitivity pattern connected to the protagonist, which has proved to be a useful indicator for the character's characterisation. In fact, it has been demonstrated how Frits' perceivable need of controlling things is resembled in his constant use of relational processes. This category is chosen to define the reality and represents his answer to the sense of fear he experiences which, has already discussed, can be recognised as the main theme of the novel. Fear is also what makes Frits unable of effective agency. In fact, the analysis of the role of the subject has highlighted the extent to which Frits rarely takes on

such role in both thoughts and utterances and to which his actions are generally trivial, static and providing little or no consequence.

The considerations about the transitivity pattern and the role of the subject have allowed to learn more both about the representation of themes, given by specific transitivity choices, and the recognition of elements that contribute to the shaping of the protagonist's characterisation. In general, the intrinsic connection between themes as the experiential meanings of the text and the choices and use of transitivity processes to convey such meanings have been discussed.

Further elements have completed the discourse around Frits' characterisation, provided by the stylistic analysis. It has been discussed that foregrounding is the motivated prominence given to specific linguistic elements within a text, which are employed as devices and markers of style to create meanings. The concept of foregrounding, which can be intended in the form of deviation or parallelism, has been applied to the text in this latter form. In particular, it has been shown how the repetition of the themes of body and physical decay, stagnation, definition of reality and irony, together with the way they are experientially presented throughout narration, makes them prominent. More importantly, such prominence is motivated by the way in which it intrinsically relates to the general meaning of the text and contributes to the representation of its themes. In fact, these thematic elements are all connected to the meaning of the text as a whole and to its major theme, the sense of fear. By investigating the notion of foregrounding in the text and recognizing what has been defined as thematic parallelism, this stylistic analysis has provided further revealing elements that have enriched and completed the investigation of both the representation of themes and especially the characterisation of the protagonist.

Finally, a translation comparative perspective has been applied to the novel. The English translated extracts considered in the transitivity analysis have been compared to the same extracts from the Dutch original text. The aim of the comparison was to determine whether the Dutch source text and the English target text exhibit any difference with regard to use and choice of transitivity processes and the role of the subject. Different interesting aspects emerged which have been explored through the analysis of textual samples. In general, the comparison has highlighted the closeness of the two texts but

also a few differences. One of these is that the English extracts count more verbs and processes than the original Dutch ones. It has consequently been discussed that differences in this sense may be the result of a language specific rule or be connected to the translator's stylistic preference. A further point of interest is the fact that, in a few original extracts, the protagonist appears even more present as subject than he does in the English text. This would suggest a lower centrality and agency of Frits in the original with respect to the English text. It has been discussed that this is connected to the higher level of impersonality and passivity shown by the Dutch text, provided by the use of abstract or undetermined elements over human agents for the role of the subject.

To conclude, it can be said that the multi-faceted analysis of the novel carried out with the application of different linguistic theories and methods has achieved the aims initially set. On the one hand, it has provided a more complete understanding and description of the functioning of the elements that contribute to the conveyance of the experiential meanings of the text and therefore to the representation of themes. On the other, a stylistic characterisation of the protagonist has been retrieved from precise features of the text and from the way in which such experiential meanings are specifically conveyed.

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Appendix: extracts from *De Avonden*

Extract A

Hij werd voor de vierde maal wakker en richtte zich op in bed. Het was vijf minuten over half acht. In de slaapkamer was het zeer koud. Ijsbloemen bleken, toen hij, na vijf minuten te zijn blijven zitten, was opgestaan en het licht had aangestoken, de onderste helft van de ruiten te bedekken. Hij liep huiverend naar het closet. 'Ik moet 's avonds voor het naar bed gaan even een eindje wandelen', dacht hij, toen hij zich in de keuken stond te wassen, 'dan wordt de slaap dieper.' De zeep glipte hem uit de vingers en hij moest geruime tijd in de schemerige ruimte onder de gootsteen er naar rondtasten. 'Het begint goed', mompelde hij. 'Het is zondag', dacht hij opeens, 'dat is een meevaller.' 'Ik ben veel te vroeg op, stom', zei hij daarop bij zichzelf. 'Nee', dacht hij, 'op deze manier wordt het geen bedorven dag; dit keer eens niet om elf uur opgestaan.' Hij begon bij het afdrogen van zijn gezicht te neuriën, ging zijn slaapkamer binnen, kleepte zich aan en kamde zijn haar voor de kleine spiegel, die vlak naast de deur half boven het bed hing. 'Het is nog krankzinnig vroeg', dacht hij, 'ik kan nog niet naar binnen. De schuifdeuren staan open.' Hij ging aan een kleine schrijftafel zitten, nam een konijntje van wit marmer, ter grootte van een lucifersdoosje, in de hand en klopte er zacht mee op de stoelleuning. Daarna zette hij het weer terug op het stapeltje papier, waarvan hij het had opgenomen. Hij rilde, stond op, liep weer de keuken in en nam uit de broodtrommel twee kadetjes, waarvan hij het eerste in een paar happen in de mond propte en het tweede tussen de tanden zette, terwijl hij de gang inliep om zijn overjas aan te trekken. 'Een heerlijke, verkwikkende ochtendwandeling', mompelde hij. Bij het afdalen van de trap kefte een hond bij de benedenburen, toen hij hun deur passeerde. Hij trok de straatdeur zacht dicht en volgde de met ijs bedekte gracht tot de rivier, die, uitgezonderd in het midden, met een donkere ijslaag was toe gevoren. Er was weinig wind. Het was nog niet goed licht, maar de straatlantaarns waren al uit. Op de dakgoten zaten rijen meeuwen. Hij wierp het laatste stuk van het kadetje, dat hij tot een balletje had gekneed, op het ijs en tientallen van de vogels daalden neer. De eerste, die het wilde oppikken, miste. Het stuk brood kwam in beweging, rolde in een klein wak en zonk, nog voor een volgende meeuw er naar had gepikt. Een kerktoren gaf één slag. 'Een vroege dag, een welbestede dag wordt het', dacht

hij, rechts afslaand en de rivieroever volgend. ‘Het is koud en vroeg en niemand is nog buiten, maar ik wel.’ Hij liep de grote brug over, om het zuidelijk station heen en wandelde onder het viaduct door terug. ‘Het is uitstekend ‘s morgens heel vroeg te wandelen’, zei hij bij zichzelf. ‘Men is buiten geweest, voelt zich fris en krijgt een goed humeur. Dit wordt geen bedorven en verprutste zondag.’ (pp. 8-10)

Extract B

Zijn ogen volgden de gestalten van de ijsbloemen en hij plantte telkens zijn wijsvinger in de figuren, waarbij door de smelting een rond gaatje ontstond. ‘Dat is lang geleden’, dacht hij, draaide zich half om en bekeek Louis, die over het boek gebogen zat. Hij had een groot, plat horloge met een breed, grijs bandje aan de pols. Tussen zijn lippen bengelde een potlood. ‘Twaalf, of dertien was ik toen’, dacht Frits. ‘We waren op het balkon. Wie waren er allemaal? Louis, Frans, Jaap, Bep en nog een paar, ik weet niet hoe die heetten.’ Hij sloot de ogen. ‘Ik weet het nog’, dacht hij. ‘Ze liepen vier hoog, op de rand van het balkon heen en weer, Louis en Frans. Die rand was niet veel breder dan mijn hand. En de anderen lachten maar. Hoe konden ze lachen?’ Hij opende de ogen, keek naar Louis en sloot ze weer. ‘Zoveel moed te hebben’, dacht hij, ‘wat een rijkdom. Of zou het gebrek aan inzicht van het gevaar zijn geweest? Misschien. Ik werd misselijk en kreeg pijn achter mijn ogen; dat was ik. En een soort kieteling onder aan mijn stuitbeen. Bang was ik, bang ben ik gebleven. Zo is het.’ Hij zuchtte. ‘Louis te zijn, of Frans, dat dacht ik’, zei hij bij zichzelf. ‘En naar ze kijken, en ontevreden zijn.’ (p. 20)

Extract C

Hij ging op de divan zitten, duwde de overgordijnen opzij, beet op zijn vingers en keek naar buiten. ‘Waarom hadden die duisternis en die regen een verblijdende betekenis?’ dacht hij. ‘Daar moet ik achter komen.’ ‘In de vierde klas, bij het begin van de grote vakantie’, zei hij bij zichzelf, ‘we gingen naar huis en ik had een leeg krijtjeskistje gekregen. Ik stond in de gang, te wachten op het eind van de regen, want ik had geen jas bij me. En elke keer snoof ik in het kistje. Het was een lucht van hout, nieuw hout, van hars en krijt. Tot zover is het duidelijk, dat zijn de feiten. Maar de samenhang?’ ‘Ik weet

het', dacht hij plotseling, 'het is eenvoudig. De laatste uren van de schooltijd moesten somber zijn, om de overgang naar de vrije dagen des te scherper te laten uitkomen.' (p. 98)

Extract D

Toen het stuk uit was, zette hij de radio af. Na tien minuten stil te hebben gezeten, stond hij op. 'Als ik vanavond niet slaperig wil zijn', dacht hij, 'moet ik nu een beetje gaan dutten.' Hij ging in zijn slaapkamer op bed liggen, trok, half overeind komend, zijn jasje uit en luisterde naar het kloppen van het bloed in zijn hoofd. 'Ik moet opstaan', dacht hij, 'een deken uit de kast halen. Maar ik kom er niet toe om me op te richten. Daartoe mis ik de kracht.' Van buiten drongen de stemmen van spelende kinderen tot hem door. 'Toen ik zeven was', dacht hij, 'knipte ik met een gewone schaar gras af in het plantsoen en ik bewaarde het in een papieren puntzakje. Ik lig hier als een zieke.' Geleidelijk zakte hij in een sluimering. (p. 111)

Extract E

Het einde van het jaar nadert', dacht hij. 'Ik loop hier in de stad, door de mist, naar huis, terwijl het donker wordt. Het zijn de laatste dagen van het jaar.' Het voorwiel bij de zijstraten behoedzaam optillend, liep hij voort over de trottoirs. 'Toch is dit het goede weer om te kunnen nadenken', mijmerde hij verder. 'Bij deze atmosfeer beseft men zijn werkelijke waarde.' Hij begon zacht, half neuriënd, te zingen. Toen hij voor de huisdeur stond, dacht hij: 'Er is geen enkele geldige reden, waarom deze avond zou moeten mislukken. Ik heb een vermoeden, dat hij slaagt. Een avond, waarvan het verloop van te voren vaststaat, kan onmogelijk een mislukking worden. Men dient zich niets meer voor te stellen, dan verwacht kan worden, dat is alles.' (p. 154)

Extract F

Dinsdagmiddag verliet hij om twee uur het kantoor. Een fijne motregen had juist opgehouden. ‘Ik zou me erg moeten vergissen, als er niet een stevige mist op komst was’, zei hij bij zichzelf, toen hij buitenkwam. ‘We houden eerst nog even wind, maar zodra die gaat liggen, is het zo ver.’ Hij liep op de fietsenstalling toe, maar bleef vlak bij de ingang plotseling staan. ‘De fiets is nog thuis’, dacht hij, ‘menselijke onmacht.’ Hij draaide zich om en begon naar huis te lopen. Met gebogen hoofd, de handen in de zakken, stapte hij in matige pas voort. ‘We zijn vroeg vrij vandaag’, dacht hij, ‘de dienst is als op zaterdag. In werkelijkheid is het echter een dinsdag. Morgen is het een zondag, maar het is een woensdag. Wanneer we weer aan het werk gaan, is het dus een maandag, maar tegelijk donderdag. Dan zullen we dus kunnen zeggen: overmorgen is het zaterdag. We zien hieruit, hoe men eenvoudige dingen met geringe middelen ingewikkeld kan maken. Het is geen slechte week.’ Hij haalde diep adem en zuchtte. ‘Valt er nu regen of niet?’ zei hij bij zichzelf. ‘Er is een toestand, dat het regent en een, waarbij het droog is. Daartussen is niets. Toch zijn er minuten, dat je het niet nauwkeurig weet, je hand uitsteekt en niet zeker ervan bent. Laten we bij onzekerheid zeggen: het regent nog, maar onmerkbaar. Ja, dat is een goede vorm.’ (p. 177)

Extract G

‘Als ik niets zeg’, dacht Frits, ‘gebeurt er misschien niets bijzonders. Ik zeg niets. Kijken, hoe het gaat.’ In de stilte hoorde hij de klok tikken. De breipennen van zijn moeder ratelden. ‘In de boeken en in kinderversjes zeggen ze altijd, dat een klok tik tak zegt’, dacht hij, ‘maar dat is niet zo. Het is in ieder geval niet tik tak, want dat zijn twee verschillende klanken.’ Hij luisterde scherp. ‘Tukke tukke tukke tukke is beter’, zei hij bij zichzelf, ‘maar ik kan het nog niet goed horen. Ik moet geduldig wachten, tot er weer een pen is afgebreed, dat ze even niet zo ratelt.’ Op het ogenblik, dat zijn moeder de pennen omwisselde, deed hij de mond open, sloot de ogen half en luisterde met ingehouden adem. ‘Het is eigenlijk geen woord’, zei hij bij zichzelf. ‘Goed gehoord, is het teppe teppe teppe teppe, en dat heel zacht. Dat is het wel niet, maar daar lijkt het het meest op.’ ‘Tien uur is de eerste mijlpaal’, dacht hij, ‘dan op weg naar elf uur. Als we daar voorbij zijn, is het eigenlijke leed geleden. (p. 211)

Extract H

‘Konijn’, zei hij, het konijn op de arm nemend, ‘je straf is ingetrokken, gezien je grote verdiensten voor de zaak.’ Hij zette het dier op de schrijftafel, sloot de gordijnen en begon zich uit te kleden. Toen hij gereed was, trommelde hij zich met de vuisten op de borst en betastte zijn lichaam. Hij kneep in het vel van de nek, in de buik, de kuiten en de dijen. ‘Alles is voorbij’, fluisterde hij, ‘het is overgegaan. Het jaar is er niet meer. Konijn, ik ben levend. Ik adem, en ik beweeg, dus ik leef. Is dat duidelijk? Welke beproevingen ook komen, ik leef.’ Hij zoog de borst vol adem en stapte in bed. ‘Het is gezien’, mompelde hij, ‘het is niet onopgemerkt gebleven.’ Hij strekte zich uit en viel in een diepe slaap. (p. 222)

Extract I

Frits, volgde een lange, smalle straat en bereikte in looppas de bioscoop. De portier zette juist een groot bord met ‘uitverkocht’ buiten. Frits ging de hal binnen, waar het vol was van wachtenden. Hij haalde zijn biljetten te voorschijn en keek om zich heen, toen hij op de schouder werd geklopt. ‘Onbegrijpelijk zijn zijn wegen’, dacht hij, ‘het is Maurits.’ ‘Ik kom je op de minst gelegen ogenblikken tegen’, zei hij. ‘Ik moet een plaats hebben’, zei Maurits, ‘weet jij er nog ergens een te krijgen?’ ‘Ik heb er één’, zei Frits, ‘ik had liever iets anders naast me, maar het kon erger. Eén vijf en vijftig.’ ‘God zal me bewaren’, zei Maurits, ‘je houdt te veel geld over, geloof ik.’ Hij betaalde en nam de kaart met het bespreekbiljet in ontvangst. ‘Je krijgt je geld terug en eerste klas gezelschap naast je’, zei hij, ‘beter kan je het niet treffen.’ ‘Wou je meisje niet mee, Frits?’ vroeg hij, toen ze naar hun plaatsen waren gebracht. ‘Ze kan niet tegen dit soort films’, zei Frits. ‘Verrek’, vroeg Maurits, ‘heb jij er dan een?’ ‘Je kan er beter een hebben, die niet mee wil naar de bioscoop, dan helemaal geen’, antwoordde Frits. ‘Jij zit zonder; ik geloof ook niet, dat jij ooit iets krijgt. Je bent wel erg afstotend. Verschrikkelijk moet dat zijn. Wat een lot.’ ‘Godverdomme’, zei Maurits, ‘hoe zie ik er uit? Hoe vind je mijn uiterlijk?’ ‘Bepaald uitnodigend tot geslachtelijk verkeer kan het niet genoemd worden’, zei Frits, ‘maar ik ken lui, die er slechter aan toe zijn.’ Op het doek verschenen gekleurde reclames. ‘Ik heb die vrouw van jou nog nooit gezien’, zei Maurits. ‘De hele kwestie is, dat je niet met het andere geslacht kunt omgaan’, zei Frits. ‘Het lijkt mij niet verstandig om het meisje na

de gemeenschap zo krachtig uit het bed te trappen, dat ze er twee dagen mank, althans gebrekkig van loopt.’ Maurits lachte. ‘Je praat net zoals die dokter’, zei hij, ‘uit een Franse film, uit..., ik weet niet meer, hoe die heet. Maar je onthoudt veel te goed wat ik je vertel. Klets je dat aan iedereen uit?’ ‘Dat ligt eraan’, zei Frits. Het journaal begon. Toen het licht weer opging, zei Maurits: ‘Hoe vind je nou eerlijk dat ik er uitzie?’ ‘Ach’, zei Frits, ‘je ziet er gewoon uit, net zo plat als ieder ander. Bovendien, vrouwen letten helemaal niet op het uiterlijk.’ (pp. 102-103)

Extract J

‘We hebben gemorst’, zei Frits, op het tafelblad wijzend. ‘Wij zijn bijzonder lompe.’ ‘Laten we eens naar het dansen gaan kijken’, zei Jaap, ‘daar kunnen we van leren.’ Ze stonden op en baanden zich een weg. Victor liep voorop; op een rij volgden Jaap, Joosje en Frits. Ze drongen zich naar een hoek van de zaal en gingen op een lange bank aan de muur zitten. ‘We zijn te oud om hieraan mee te doen’, zei Frits. ‘De ondergang van het avondland. Toch is het heerlijk, jong te zijn.’ ‘Zullen we er nog een nemen?’ vroeg Jaap. ‘Nee, liever niet’, zei Frits, ‘even wachten.’ ‘Dan een sigaret’, zei Jaap en presenteerde. (p. 126)

Extract K

Zijn vader keek met een verbaasde glimlach toe. ‘Hoeveel heb je in godsnaam gedronken?’ vroeg zijn moeder, ‘waar ben je geweest?’ Ze stond op. ‘Kijk eens of hij zijn geld kwijt is’, zei ze ‘Ik weet het’, zei Frits. ‘Ik heb te veel gebruikt. God ziet alles. Hij ziet niet alleen op mij, hij ziet op ons allen. Het einde der dagen nadert. Meer dan zeven of acht heb ik zeker niet gebruikt.’ Zijn vader kwam op hem toe, nam zijn portefeuille uit de binnenzak en keek er in. ‘Nee’, zei hij, ‘er zit nog tweeëndertig gulden in.’ Hij legde hem op de boekenkast. ‘Moet je nog brood met kaas?’ vroeg zijn moeder. ‘Nee’, zei hij, ‘niets meer gebruiken. Het lichaam reinigen. Christus, zie uw soldaten. Aldus is geschied. Het is slecht. Ik doe u, mijn ouders, veel onrecht. Veel verdriet en onrecht. Het is walgelijk. Maar God ziet ons allen. Ik ga naar bed. Slapen.’ Hij bleef echter zitten. Zijn stem ging tot een gemurmel over en zijn hoofd zakte voorover. Zijn moeder begon zijn

schoenen uit te trekken. Samen met zijn vader kleepte ze hem uit en leidde hem naar bed. Hij bleef rechtop zitten en zei: ‘Weinigen waarden jullie goedheid. Ik zie het. Mocht ik doen, alsof ik het niet zie, dan is het maar schijn. Maar mocht je denken, moeder...’ ‘Ja, mis’, zei ze. ‘Mocht je denken, dat ik het niet zie’, ging hij door, ‘bedenk dan, dat God jullie ziet. Hij ziet jullie. Hij ziet jullie rechtvaardigheid.’ ‘Steek je armen eens naar achteren’, zei ze. ‘Waar is dat goed voor?’ vroeg hij. ‘Je moet een pyjamajas aan’, antwoordde ze. ‘Natuurlijk, jij weet het beste, wat goed is’, zei hij en stak zijn armen in de mouwsgaten. (p. 132)

Extract L

‘Zo’, zei zijn moeder, ‘heeft het jongetje gisteren plezier gehad?’ Frits antwoordde niet. ‘Je was zeker met Jaap mee?’ vroeg ze. ‘Was die ook dronken?’ ‘Dronken’, antwoordde hij, ‘oudehoer toch niet. Dronken. Jullie zijn achterlijk volk uit de provincie. Wat heb je toch in godsnaam voor een voorstelling van wat dronken is?’ ‘Nee’, zei ze, ‘vertel me, dat je niet dronken was. Je vader en ik hebben je in bed moeten dragen.’ Frits sloot even de ogen. ‘Wat komt het er op aan’, zei hij. ‘Het komt er alles op aan’, zei zijn vader nadrukkelijk. ‘Het betekent, dat je je niet beheersen kunt.’ ‘Ik heb het een beetje koud’, zei Frits en kuchte. ‘Wat stinkt er toch zo?’ dacht hij en berook zijn handen, slipover, jasmouw en das. Aan alles nam hij een zure, walgelijke lucht waar. ‘Ligt het aan mij of niet?’ dacht hij, stond op en rook aan de overgordijnen. ‘Pas op’, riep zijn moeder, ‘niet je neus in de gordijnen afvegen! Ben je helemaal gek? Daar heb je een zakdoek voor.’ ‘Het lijkt me nog altijd een stuk eenvoudiger’, zei hij, ‘om mijn neus in mijn zakdoek te snuiten. Zo lang ik een zakdoek heb, hoef je voor je gordijnen niet bang te zijn.’ ‘Ja, ja’ zei ze, ‘dat zie ik wel aan de stoelen.’ ‘Dat is iets anders’, zei Frits. ‘Wat hard is, moet er met de vingers worden uitgehaald. Dat gaat niet met een zakdoek. En onder aan een stoel is de beste plaats. Trouwens, waar je ook komt: als je onder de zittingen voelt, vallen de stukken gedroogd snot op de grond.’ ‘Weet je anders niets?’ vroeg ze. (p. 136)

Extract M

Zijn vader was bij de kachel gaan zitten en warmde zijn handen. Joop en Ina hadden naast elkaar plaats genomen op de divan. ‘Joop’, zei Frits, ‘ik hoef je natuurlijk niet te vertellen, dat je gauw kaal wordt. Maar heb je je al voorgesteld, wat je zult doen, als het zover gekomen is? De kans is groot, dat het ook in het midden gaat uitvallen. dat je een echte kale plek krijgt. Dat ontsiert bijzonder. Dan lijkt je net een oude kerel. Zolang het alleen van voren dunner wordt, is er nog niet veel aan de hand. Maar als die kaalte komt, weet je dan wel, wat je moet doen?’ ‘Nee’, zei Joop glimlachend. ‘Er worden verschillende werkwijzen aanbevolen om kaalheid te bestrijden’, zei Frits, ‘maar dat is oplichterij en de wetenschap staat hier vrijwel machteloos. Maar er zijn middelen om de leegte te verbergen. Dat haal ik niet uit een boek: jij had het ook kunnen weten, maar je kijkt niet om je heen.’ Ik zie niets, vooruit’, zei Joop. ‘Kijk’, vervolgde Frits, ‘als de kale opening erg groot wordt, kun je haar van de kanten, dat je goed lang laat worden, er overheen kammen. Omhoog kammen, naar het midden toe.’ ‘Moeten er geen spelden in?’ vroeg Joop. ‘Bah’, zei Ina. ‘Nee, goed plakken met een of andere haarcrème’, ging Frits door. ‘Ik geef toe, dat die dracht in strijd is met de west-europese mode van deze eeuw, maar van de kaalte zie je niets.’ (p. 143)

Riassunto

Questa tesi si propone come analisi linguistica di *The Evenings*, la traduzione inglese del romanzo olandese *De Avonden*, scritto da Gerard Reve. L'analisi linguistica cui il testo viene sottoposto prevede un approccio plurimo, il quale è riconducibile a più teorie, tutte appartenenti al più ampio campo della linguistica. Le teorie utilizzate sono quelle della Systemic-Functional Linguistics, della stilistica e della *corpus linguistics*. Ognuna di esse è stata applicata in diversi momenti dell'analisi testuale per il fondamentale apporto che poteva offrire al raggiungimento degli obiettivi della stessa. Non meno importante è la prospettiva traduttiva comparativa applicata nella parte finale dell'analisi, la quale si inserisce quindi nel campo degli studi traduttivi.

L'obiettivo di quest'analisi multi-prospettica riguarda due aspetti fondamentali del romanzo: la componente tematica e la caratterizzazione del protagonista. Nello specifico, da un lato l'analisi vuole approfondire la descrizione e la comprensione del romanzo di Reve, con particolare attenzione alle tematiche contenute e al modo in cui queste vengono costruite ed espresse nella narrazione. Dall'altro lato, si propone di fornire la caratterizzazione stilistica del protagonista, mostrando come specifici elementi e peculiarità del testo possano intrinsecamente contribuire alla sua composizione e definizione. In generale, l'analisi intende verificare la misura in cui un'analisi linguistica di un testo letterario possa risultare utile e rivelatoria nella comprensione del testo e nel suo conseguente apprezzamento.

Il metodo di lavoro utilizzato si può certamente definire di tipo qualitativo. Il motivo è duplice: da una parte, tale approccio riveste un'importanza fondamentale all'interno delle teorie utilizzate, dall'altra perché il metodo qualitativo si adatta perfettamente al tipo di analisi condotta e al raggiungimento degli obiettivi sopra citati.

Il primo capitolo fornisce una descrizione del romanzo prendendo in considerazione diversi aspetti centrali legati ad esso. *De Avonden* rappresenta l'esordio del giovane autore ventitreenne Gerard Reve e viene pubblicato nel 1947. Nello stesso anno vince un importante riconoscimento letterario rivolto ai giovani autori e riceve immediatamente l'attenzione della critica, divisa tra coloro che lo vedono un romanzo troppo cupo e per certi versi illeggibile e quelli che lo apprezzano profondamente. Gerard Reve, nato ad Amsterdam nel 1923, inizia così una carriera letteraria caratterizzata da una lunga e ricca

produzione. Annoverato tra i più grandi autori della letteratura nederlandese, è considerato uno dei *Grote Drie*, i tre più grandi della letteratura post-bellica dei Paesi Bassi, assieme a Frederik Willem Hermans e Harry Mulisch.

Il romanzo si articola in dieci capitoli, ognuno dedicato agli ultimi dieci giorni di dicembre del 1946, durante i quali la storia è ambientata. Il protagonista è il ventitreenne Frits van Egters, un giovane disilluso e cinico che vive ad Amsterdam con i genitori. Le giornate di Frits passano inosservate facendo un lavoro d'ufficio di cui viene menzionato quasi nulla, le sue serate invece sono il vero centro della narrazione che, nonostante ciò, passano all'insegna della noia, della ripetizione e dell'ossessione morbosa per diversi aspetti della realtà. Frits ha qualche amico, nessuna relazione sentimentale e ancora meno sono i suoi interessi. Il giovane infatti passa il suo tempo facendo visita a Jaap, Louis o Viktor, con i quali ogni tanto prende parte a delle uscite serali, camminando per i canali della città oppure a casa, dormendo o ascoltando svogliatamente la radio.

Significativa nel romanzo è la suddivisione tra monologhi interiori e dialoghi in cui la narrazione viene presentata, attraverso i quali al lettore vengono presentate la realtà interiore del protagonista e quella del mondo intorno a lui. Assolutamente centrali sono i temi che ricorrono costantemente, incarnati in ogni pagina del romanzo: disillusione, cinismo, paura, noia, ossessione, stasi e passività ma anche un'ironia profondamente sarcastica e tragicomica. Le interpretazioni date al romanzo nel corso degli anni sono state diverse e possono essere suddivise in due periodi, il primo immediatamente dopo la pubblicazione e il secondo a partire dagli anni '60, durante i quali l'opera ha vissuto una riscoperta da parte del pubblico. Al primo periodo risalgono fondamentalmente due interpretazioni: quella che lo lega indissolubilmente al periodo post-bellico e alla generazione dei giovani cresciuti durante il conflitto, e quella che lo vede come romanzo psicologico che incarna i problemi e i conflitti interiori tipici della pubertà. Nel secondo periodo la visione psicologica prende particolarmente piede e l'autore stesso spiega come il libro sia legato al problema dell'emancipazione rispetto alla generazione precedente. In collegamento a questo, un'interpretazione che risulterà assolutamente centrale anche nell'analisi dei prossimi capitoli è quella del romanzo come rappresentazione della paura per il processo di pubertà e crescita, e quindi della vita. In questo periodo anche la componente ironica del romanzo viene finalmente considerata.

Nel primo capitolo, *De Avonden* viene considerato rispetto alla sua traduzione inglese, che esce solo nel 2016. In generale, il romanzo raccoglie giudizi molto positivi dal pubblico anglofono. Tim Parks, ad esempio, lo definisce una pietra miliare mancante nella letteratura moderna europea e sottolinea come i motivi di una mancata traduzione precedente possano essere stati legati agli orientamenti politici, e non solo, dell'autore nel corso degli anni.

Nel secondo capitolo, le teorie utilizzate durante l'analisi sono state presentate e discusse. Come menzionato inizialmente, gli approcci teorici applicati al testo appartengono a tre branche della linguistica. Quella il cui apporto è stato maggiore è la *systemic-functional linguistics* o SFL. La teoria sistemico funzionale viene sviluppata da Michael Kirkwood Halliday negli anni '60 espandendo la teoria del linguista Firth, suo mentore. Questa teoria rappresenta uno dei maggiori contributi dati alla linguistica moderna. Fondamentale in essa sono i concetti di sistema e funzione della lingua. In particolare, la lingua è il risultato di una continua selezione all'interno di sistemi di significato ed è vista come risorsa volta alla creazione e scambio di significati all'interno di un contesto reale di utilizzo. Secondo Halliday, il potenziale del linguaggio come risorsa per la creazione di significati si svolge grazie a tre metafunzioni: ideazionale, la quale si occupa di trasmettere l'aspetto esperienziale della realtà, quella interpersonale, coinvolta con la creazione e mantenimento delle relazioni sociali, e quella testuale, rivolta all'organizzazione interna della lingua. L'analisi qui presentata si concentra sulla metafunzione esperienziale, parte di quella ideazionale, e sul conseguente *experiential meaning*. Quest'ultimo è inteso come il significato esperienziale contenuto nel testo, il quale viene trasmesso attraverso il *transitivity system* e i processi ad esso legati. I concetti di *transitivity* e processo vengono applicati al romanzo per analizzare la rappresentazione tematica e la costruzione della caratterizzazione del protagonista.

The Evenings viene analizzato anche in prospettiva stilistica. Questo campo della linguistica studia l'uso creativo della lingua nei testi letterari, sottoforma di *pattern* e configurazioni linguistiche, che l'autore utilizza per trasmettere significati all'interno del testo che possono contribuire alla creazione dello stile all'interno dello stesso. Centrale al suo interno e nell'analisi svolta sul romanzo, è il concetto di *foregrounding*. Esso si riferisce al particolare utilizzo della lingua per dare prominenza a elementi specifici del testo. Affinché si possa parlare di *foregrounding*, tale prominenza deve essere motivata,

deve dare un contributo al significato del testo ed essere rilevante alla sua trasmissione. Si può parlare di *foregrounding* sia come devianza rispetto ad una norma, sia come ripetizione di elementi, definita parallelismo. Questo concetto viene applicato al testo per mostrare come la ripetizione tematica e di determinati elementi relativi all'uso del linguaggio nel testo abbia un ruolo centrale nella rappresentazione dei temi e nella costruzione della caratterizzazione del protagonista.

Infine, all'analisi del testo viene applicato anche un approccio che, a differenza dei due appena visti, ha un carattere più quantitativo. La *corpus linguistics* viene definita come una metodologia per l'analisi linguistica che si serve dell'utilizzo di corpora, raccolte di testi in formato elettronico. I corpora differiscono per tipo di testi raccolti e si suddividono in varie categorie, come corpora di linguaggio scritto, parlato, per usi specifici ecc. Tra i maggiori vantaggi del *corpus method*, vi è sicuramente il fatto che permette l'analisi di quantità di dati molto maggiori di quelli che possono essere presi in considerazione manualmente, e il fatto che la ricerca linguistica diventa sia replicabile che fruibile da chiunque. Nonostante l'approccio quantitativo sia centrale, l'attenta osservazione dei dati raccolti rimane centrale. Un'applicazione della *corpus linguistics* avviene proprio all'analisi dei testi letterari che, unendosi alla stilistica, ha dato vita ad una fruttuosa combinazione di loro approcci che viene utilizzata nella *corpus stylistics*.

Il terzo capitolo rappresenta l'inizio dell'analisi vera e propria di *The Evenings*, a cui viene applicato per primo l'approccio della *corpus linguistics*, inteso a fornire una prima panoramica del testo e delle sue caratteristiche da un punto di vista quantitativo. Nello specifico, vengono mostrati i risultati dell'analisi condotta sul testo tramite il software per l'analisi linguistica AntConc. Una *wordlist* e la *keyword list* del testo sono state calcolate, fornendo preziose informazioni che una semplice analisi manuale difficilmente avrebbe prodotto. Osservando specialmente la *keyword list*, che fornisce una classifica delle parole in base alla loro salienza nel testo, notiamo come sostantivi rappresentativi sia dell'ambientazione che dei temi del romanzo risultino al suo interno. Più importanti sono, tuttavia, i risultati rispetto ai verbi e ai relativi processi. In particolare, la *keyword list* mostra la presenza di molti verbi legati a movimenti fisici e rappresentanti *material processes*, ma anche *mental* e *behavioural processes*. In generale, i verbi e i risultati mostrati riflettono profondamente le caratteristiche centrali del

romanzo, come l'ambientazione ma soprattutto la distinzione tra realtà interna ed esterna, la quale è rispecchiata nell'uso e nella scelta di verbi e relativi processi.

Il quarto capitolo mostra l'applicazione della teoria sistemico funzionale al caso di *The Evenings*, analizzato ponendo specifica attenzione ai processi del *transitivity system* e al ruolo del soggetto. Il testo non viene analizzato nella sua interezza ma attraverso estratti specificamente selezionati per la loro rappresentatività del testo e delle sue peculiarità. Gli estratti sono stati divisi in due categorie, riflessioni interiori e dialoghi, per via della centralità che tale distinzione mostra all'interno della narrazione. Gli estratti sono stati analizzati per categoria e poi i rispettivi risultati comparati e discussi. Nonostante minori differenze, riflessioni interiori e dialoghi hanno mostrato enormi similarità. Il risultato più importante che questa analisi sistemico funzionale ha mostrato è che entrambe le categorie di estratti sono caratterizzate da un uso estensivo di *material* e *relational processes*, e questi ultimi in particolare si mostrano preponderanti. L'aspetto più importante di tale risultato riguarda la misura in cui l'uso e la scelta di queste due precise categorie sia ciò che costruisce e permette la trasmissione dell'*experiential meaning* del testo e conseguentemente dei suoi temi. In particolare, l'uso specifico di questi processi è ciò che fornisce e dipinge la natura ossessiva, riluttante e stagnante di Frits: i *material processes* descrivono infatti azioni generalmente statiche, senza scopo e inconcludenti, ma soprattutto il continuo utilizzo di *relational processes* da parte del protagonista nel perpetuare la sua ricerca di definizione della realtà. È stato discusso come l'estensivo uso di quest'ultima categoria rappresenti la risposta del protagonista al senso di paura generale che prova, poiché una costante definizione della realtà rende le sue paure più gestibili. Tale paura è anche il motivo per cui, come mostrato dall'analisi, Frits sia così infrequentemente il soggetto delle sue riflessioni e affermazioni, e che, quando assume tale ruolo, le sue azioni siano pressoché irrilevanti, statiche e prive di un conseguente risultato. In generale, l'analisi ha quindi permesso di riconoscere e tracciare un *transitivity pattern* relativo al protagonista fornendo così un contributo essenziale alla sua caratterizzazione. Inoltre, ha mostrato come l'uso e le scelte specifici all'interno del *transitivity system* e il ruolo del soggetto siano intrinsecamente collegati alla rappresentazione dei temi all'interno del testo.

Nella seconda parte del quarto capitolo, il testo è stato preso in considerazione in una prospettiva stilistica che ha fornito un importante contributo alla definizione della

caratterizzazione del protagonista. Nello specifico, il concetto di *foregrounding* come parallelismo è stato applicato a *The Evenings* da un punto di vista tematico. È stato dimostrato come la continua ripetizione di temi centrali durante la narrazione, quali il decadimento fisico, la stagnazione, la definizione della realtà e l'ironia, insieme al modo in cui vengono presentati e trasmessi dal punto di vista esperienziale, li rendano fondamentalmente prominenti. L'aspetto più importante però è che tale rilevanza risulta motivata per il modo in cui è intrinsecamente collegata al significato generale del testo e in cui contribuisce alla rappresentazione dei temi. Infatti, i temi sopra menzionati sono tutti collegati al senso di paura già discusso, e pertanto si è potuto riconoscere un parallelismo tematico.

Nel quinto capitolo, il romanzo è preso in considerazione da una prospettiva traduttiva comparativa. Nello specifico, gli estratti in lingua inglese utilizzati nell'analisi del quarto capitolo sono stati comparati ai rispettivi estratti in lingua originale. Tale confronto è quello di determinare se il testo originale e quello tradotto differiscano in qualche modo nell'uso e nella scelta dei processi e riguardo al ruolo del soggetto. Gli aspetti di interesse emersi sono stati mostrati anche con esempi tratti dai testi stessi. La tendenza generale evidenziata dal confronto è che i testi di *De Avonden* e *The Evenings* sono generalmente molto simili ma mostrano anche alcune differenze. Tra queste, vi è il fatto che gli estratti in lingua inglese contano più verbi, e quindi processi, rispetto a quelli in lingua originale. È stato quindi discusso come differenze di questo tipo possano essere dovute a regole specifiche in una delle due lingue o riconducibili a preferenze stilistiche del traduttore. Un altro aspetto interessante è che, in alcuni estratti in lingua originale, il protagonista appare ancora meno presente come soggetto rispetto a quanto non lo sia nel testo tradotto. Ciò suggerirebbe che in *De Avonden* la centralità di Frits e la sua *agency* siano minori rispetto a *The Evenings*. È stato quindi discusso come questo aspetto sia collegato al maggiore livello di impersonalità e passività che caratterizzano il testo originale, dovuto alla scelta di elementi astratti o indeterminati rispetto ad agenti umani per il ruolo di soggetto.

In conclusione, si può affermare che l'analisi multi-prospettica del romanzo eseguita applicando diverse teorie e metodi linguistici al testo ha raggiunto gli obiettivi posti all'inizio della stessa. Da un lato, ha fornito una più completa comprensione e descrizione del funzionamento di quegli elementi che contribuiscono alla trasmissione

dell'*experiential meaning* contenuto nel testo e quindi alla rappresentazione dei temi. Dall'altro, attraverso precise caratteristiche testuali e narrative e dal modo in cui tali significati esperienziali vengono specificamente trasmessi, è stato possibile ricavare una caratterizzazione stilistica propria del protagonista.