# Stylistic Functions of Deictics and Clauses in Charles Dickens' "Little Dorrit"

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## I. Introduction

Writers use words according to their own talent, will and purpose; with the help of words they unveil the hidden "meanings" of their spirit, intellect and imaginative world. It is, therefore, only with the help of words that they let us know their inner feelings, deepest fears or personal conceptions. It is widely accepted that generally, in literature, style constitutes an author's particular way of structuring the products of his creative talent in written form. As a tool for linguistic expression, it is thus obvious that style mirrors an individual's personality, ability, originality in perceiving, analyzing and rendering aspects of his interior world and of the outer world with the help of language.

Stylistics is an approach to the analysis of literary texts, using linguistic description (Short 1997: 1). As a science, Stylistics spans the borders of the two subjects involved, literature and linguistics. Literary stylistics is concerned with explaining the relation between style and literary or aesthetic function (Leech, Short 1981: 39). Being concerned with the literary language, stylistics can sometimes look like either linguistics or literary criticism. But a stylistic approach is concerned with the study and interpretation of all the linguistic features of a writer's work, at five levels of style: phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic and artistic. The study of the phonological level is restricted to the use of sounds, rhyme or rhythm. The lexical level brings items of information concerning the vocabulary used: specific choice of words, synonyms and related words, antonyms or some other semantic relations between words. The morphological level reveals the way in which the grammatical categories – nouns, adjectives, verbs etc. – are exploited.

The syntactic apparatus presents the way in which relations between words and structures are handled. The artistic level best demonstrates the personal, matchless imprint of every writer's skill in enriching the language with new meanings. The stylistic devices (figures of style) and the figures of speech (tropes) reveal an author's imaginative force and his ability to tackle words.

These five levels are connected to the text itself as a signifying system. But a detailed stylistic approach is not confined within purely textual boundaries. In interpreting a literary work stylisticians combine linguistic information with contextual and general world knowledge. Moreover, stylisticians try to discover not just *what* a text means, but also *how* it comes to mean what it does. Some other elements that go beyond the very written form are also important: the period when the literary work was written, the literary genre it belongs to, the cultural impact of the work, the relationship between the writer and his readers, the echo of the literary piece in the contemporary society and in the history of the genre. Therefore, the aim of a stylistic approach is the thorough description and interpretation of all the linguistic levels of the text, the inventory of its psychological genesis, its socio-cultural items, the relationships and connections between them and a statement of their contextual spread.

As style works at the level of syntagms, of discourse items and not at the level of isolated words, Stylistics reveals the spatial and temporal associations among words. A given word in a text acquires stylistic value only by juxtaposition with other words; uncontextualized statistics on single items are of no stylistic significance. One of the most fundamental concepts in stylistic analysis is linguistic deviation (Short 1997: 10, 11). Any stylistic phenomenon such as a trope becomes a deviation from a norm. The unexpected, deviant part becomes especially noticeable or prominent and has an important psychological effect on the readers. On analyzing a text, those portions or elements of the text which deviate from the linguistic norms cause instances of foregrounding, namely factors that represent the most important or prominent features of that specific text.

## II. Tendencies in the literary style of the 19th century

The last years of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century brought forth a new literary attitude, as that of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron. Individualists, rebels, these poets fought against the artificiality of the previous age, struggling against formality, rules and conventions in writing poetry.

The new themes – fantastic journeys, imaginary adventures, dreams, reveries, insomnia – rejected all linguistic boundaries.

There was no radical revolt in prose writing, though. The Johnsonian tradition of elaborate, sober prose continues right on into the Victorian period. Two of the outstanding writers of those days, Jane Austen and Walter Scott, were conservatives in their style, and influences of Dr. Johnson's authority can be observed. Jane Austen's style is often quoted for its delicate precision resulting from control of the chosen tools; she revised her language carefully, and yet without being excessively elaborate. Jane Austen's admiration for the Johnsonian style did not have bad influence upon her creation. But critics state that Scott's bad writing has as a source the same tradition of Dr. Johnson's style. He is a fine story-teller of historical events, but his writing often has literary pretentiousness.

As a conclusion, we have mentioned two contrasting directions in the literature of the late 18$^{th}$ century and the beginning of the 19$^{th}$ century: the Johnsonian imitation had as an effect stiff and pompous literary works, whereas the revolutionary Romantic Spirits argued for poetic freedom of expression and construction.

As far as the literary trends in the style of the Victorian writers are concerned, literary criticism established two basic generations of Victorian novelists. The first generation of novelists is represented by W. M. Thackeray, C. Dickens, E. Gaskell, A. Trollope, the Brontë sisters and George Eliot. S. Butler, G. Meredith and T. Hardy are part of the second generation.

There can be traced certain similarities or differences with the anterior literary age. For example, the Victorian writers share with the Elizabethan ones a sense of entity, the spirit of adventure or the magnitude of achievement. Victorians are opposed to the Romantic indeterminacy; the former were determined to bring forces together and work for the regeneration and rejuvenation of a sick society. Some of the early Victorian novels were loosely plotted, reminding of the picaresque type of novel of the 18$^{th}$ century. The pure innovation of the Victorian novel consists of a thorough debate on social and political topics. The general artistic creed is that of realistic presentation of life. Trollope urges that a writer must please, teach as a lecturer and preach what is just and real; a valuable novelist must make virtue alluring and vice ugly[1]. The narrative voices often criticizing their contemporary world made special use of irony, satire, savage comedy along with melodramatic elements and symbols. What is also relevant is that the novel was generally

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1  The brief typology of the evolution of the English novel in the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century is taken from Walter Allen, 1978, *The English Novel*, Penguin Books, London, pp. 140-143.

open-ended: the task of interpretation belonged to the reader. The sense of balance was still obvious in most Victorian novels, the ending of the story usually restoring balance through installing justice for the disadvantaged characters.

Referring strictly to style, there was no specific moment at which the English novel acquired a cohesive grammar or typology of stylistic conventions, but Victorian fiction is more confidently aware of its own stylistic character than was its 18th century predecessor. The polished, confident mode of Victorian fiction is that of classic realism that strives to correct and to punish through a highly structured fictional demonstration of the existing social reality.

The novel becomes a genre whose developed techniques of refraction and mediation effectively distance it from the discourses and tensions of non-literary discourses and experience. The 18th century novel was an experimental form. Writers like Fielding or Smollett were engaged with the formulae of I and III person narrative but there were few precedents and no properly established conventions governing the deployment of these techniques. 18th century novels were regarded as realistic in that their unfixed conventions allowed them to respond in different ways to linguistic registers that operated in everyday life. But Victorian classic realism is different in that respect that novelists operated within tacitly agreed conventions through which non-literary discourses and reported events would be processed by the structural features of the text (Bradford 1997: 140). But above all, classic realism denotes the development of the novel into a stylistic form with agreed structures and principles comparable with those of "classical" literature, mostly poetry.

The texts themselves show that many Victorian writers used stylistic sophistication, repetitiveness and euphemistic language as an ideological tool. Thus, realistic fiction serves 19th century society by providing it with strategies for containing – and repressing – its disorder within significantly structured stories about itself, aiming to restore order. Language helped the writers express what they saw in the society they lived in; and their writing worked as a larger instrument to denounce evil and contribute to moral rehabilitation.

## III. Stylistic functions of deictics. Deictics and coherence

The use of deictics is generally linked to the creation of the coherence and cohesion of the text. The joining of clauses or of elements of clauses together without certain formal links would produce a blunt, abrupt style, which is not the case with Dickens. The function of deictics is to refer indirectly or directly to elements of the situation (Leech, Short 1981: 291). Therefore, deictics are words or phrases which

refer to items present in the immediate situational context and code those items in terms of distance from the speaker[2]. The analysis of any deictic elements pre-supposes the existence of a deictic centre. Generally, place and time deictics may infer psychological attitudes and even social relationships (that is closeness or re-moteness to people in social terms or in terms of spatial or temporal distance).

These words or expressions referred to as deictic elements or deictic items must always be understood in strict relationship with the specific extra-linguistic con-text (O'Sullivan & others, 2001: 99). Therefore, the meaning and the function of some statements do not totally rely only on the meanings of the words used, but they also depend on the context in which they are employed, on distinct occasions. Peter Verdonk speaks about spatial, temporal and interpersonal deictics, also inc-luding in this class the articles *a, the* (Verdonk 1993: 121-125). The author com-ments that deictics take their meanings in part from the situational context in which they are used because they directly relate an utterance to a speaker's or writer's place and time. What the author underlines is that deictics are egocentric, namely 'speaker-centred' (Verdonk 1993: 125). This is due to the fact that humans are inc-lined to see themselves as the centre of things, therefore speakers locating their di-scourse mainly in relation to their own viewpoint. This assumption is similar to Short's identification of a deictic centre when we refer to deictics.

Having as a starting point and guiding model the example offered by Leech and Short (Leech, Short 1981: 244-250), we shall analyse the function of deixis and the logical and formal connections between words, which defines coherence, in the following passage. We want to make out the way in which the Dickensian text fo-regrounds aspects of semantic and formal linkage so as to clearly convey the message and to show the relationships between the characters:

> After tea there came another knock at the door, announcing Arthur. Mistress Affery went down to let him in, and he said on entering, "Affery, I am glad it's you. I want to ask you a question". Affery immediately replied, "For goodness sake don't ask me nothing, Arthur! I am frightened out of one half of my life, and dreamed out of the other. Don't ask me nothing! I don't know which is which, or what is what!" and immediately started away from him, and came near him no more (p.186).

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2    The etymology of the term (*NODE*: origin early 19th century, from the Greek *deiktikos*, *deiktos* 'capable of proof', from *deiknunai* 'to show') clearly suggests that the main usage of this class of items is to show, to represent, to make visible and even to demonstrate certain particular signifi-cances of the fictional world in terms of space, time, relationships between characters, setting, at-mosphere, plot, events, etc.

We may identify and discuss two major kinds of linear connectivity:
I. Cross reference, that is the various means which language uses to indicate that the same thing is being referred to in different parts of the text. It consists of:
  1. Definite reference:
     (a) personal pronouns: *he, I, you, me;*
         the pronouns: *which* and *what;*
     (b) the definite article: *the (door), the (*co-referring to *half)*
     (c) deictics: – pronouns: *I* vs. *you;*
                    – adverbs: *there;*
                    – social deixis: *Mistress Affery* vs. *Affery;*
                    – time deixis: *after* (co-referring to *tea*);
                    – deictic verbs: *want to ask* vs. *don't ask*
                                     *come near* vs. *started away*
     (d) implied: *other;*
  2. Substitution: *another* – additional determiner;
  3. Ellipsis: *the other (half);*
  4. Formal repetition:
     – *immediately* showing hastiness, impulsiveness, hurry;
     – *don't ask me nothing* showing strong refusal of cooperation;
     – *which, what;*
     – *him* – pointing to the person seen as the deictic centre;
II. Linkage (overt linkage):
  1. Coordinating conjunctions: *and, or;*
  2. Linking adverbials: *after.*

Linguistic cohesion means that texts have structure and consistency beyond that of the clause. The logical sequencing of events moves from things already known by the readers to things they do not know about. On a strictly formal level, the very beginning of the passage may seem new information: *after tea there came another knock.* But in fact tea time stands as a temporal deictic centre which was previously mentioned. The adverb *there* is not an element of place deixis as it is used impersonally here and it stresses mystery or unexpectedness. The *knock* is an additional one, because having in view the context this means that a previous knock took place in the recent past. Besides formal repetitions, cross reference also involves the principle of reduction, that is avoiding repetition of expressions. The form of reduction that occurs in this passage is the use of the third person pronouns *he* or *him*, co-referring to Arthur, or *me, my,* co-referring to Affery. However, the author uses formal lexical repetition even where the principle of reduction or elegant variation

would be possible. But in this case repetition is expressive as it emphasizes the meaning and the relevance of the words and it also gives semantic force to those words and structures. The syntactic repetition strengthens the force of syntactic parallelism: *Don't ask me nothing! Don't ask me nothing!* also carries dramatic effect. The repetition of the adverb *immediately* seems to reduce the actions of the agent to repetitive or redundant gestures; moreover, it enhances the already mentioned fright of the character that comes to act by automatisms. The syntactic parallel structures *which is which* and *what is what,* containing the repetition of the question pronouns, seem semantically ambiguous as they hint at some possible secret in the mind of the character. The shortness and bluntness of the character's retort along with her going away underline her refusal to cooperate with the others, just as the double negation used does not suggest illiteracy but rather stubbornness and insistence to make herself clear.

The passage contains few examples of linkage, and out of these, only *and* and *or* are links between graphological sentences. *And* is the vaguest of connectives and is considered a general purpose link in that it merely says that two ideas have a positive connection[3]. However, the presence of *and* as an element of overt linkage helps the reader decode the spatio-temporal succession of actions. Some other formal links may be considered the full stop and the exclamation marks which apparently cut the text into slices. But simple juxtaposition or inferred linkage can suggest closeness and interconnectedness between words or phrases.

Analyzing the deictic elements of the fragment, we come across deictic pronouns, verbs, adverbs and even elements of social deixis. For example, *I* and *you* foreground the pronoun *I* as the deictic centre, an agent who tries to establish contact with a distant interlocutor, *you.* The viewpoint from which the events are rendered is very important. The term *Mistress Affery* signals authorial viewpoint, but when linguistic contact is established between the two characters, the woman comes to be seen from Arthur's point of view. She is addressed to not by her job but by her first name suggesting familiarity in social terms. *After tea* may be considered a close time deictic as it refers to a recent past moment from speech time. The contrasting deictic verbs *come near* and *started away,* as related to a deictic centre, *him,* obviously mark the woman's physical movements of approaching and then suddenly distancing from the man, gestures consistent with her general behaviour in the fragment. The author leads us to the conclusion of the impossibility of establishing linguistic and emotional contact between the two characters, which is empha-

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3  *NODE,* electronic version.

sized once more by the meaning of the deictic verbs: *want to ask* vs. *don't ask* which irreversibly blocks the communication.

The Dickensian style is a fluent, well-knit, coherent one, being richly supplied with overt and covert links, among which deictics occupy an important part.

## IV. Stylistic functions of clauses

On the whole, it is relevant that Dickens uses all types of clauses in his extensive writing as a dynamic and fruitful variation in style. A wide, varied range of sentences and clauses moulds a complex perspective on life as viewed by the author himself.

The first sentence of the novel is a simple one which opens room for future interpretation: Dickens is very much fond of using parenthetical constructions, anticipatory and trailing constituents:

[Thirty years ago,] Marseilles lay burning in the sun, one day (p. 1).

The main clause is placed in medial position, whereas the focus is on the temporal information, *thirty years ago*, which is in fact an anticipatory constituent. Additionally, the initial temporal information seems to foreground a temporal setting which reminds us of the incipit of fairy tales. All along the novel, Dickens makes intensive use of such anticipatory constituents which add a dramatic quality and bring an element of suspense.

Dickens' fondness of details causes another specific trait of his writing: the ample use of trailing constituents within clauses, as in:

(1) Sometimes, on holidays towards the evening, he will be seen to walk with a slightly increased infirmity, [and his old eyes will glimmer with a moist and marshy light] (p. 363).
(2) Barnacle Junior, however, was announced as a lesser star, [yet visible above the office horizon.] (p. 107).

The constructions between parentheses are trailing constituents, adding more information about a character or a situation; such information is not always vital, but it adds a poetic flavour to the description.

And yet, an outstanding position, from the point of view of its frequency, is occupied by the use of parenthetical constructions, occurring in medial position, graphologically marked by dashes or brackets. These constructions allow the generalizing authorial voice to interrupt the narrative flow and to add more informa-

tion. In other cases, they reveal the author's desire to comprise old and new information in shorter structures:

(1) Her father, a gentleman in misfortune – a gentleman of a fine spirit and courtly manners, who always bore with him – she deeply honoured (p. 214).
(2) In a word, it was represented (Clennam called to mind, alone in the ticking parlour) that many people select their models [...] (p. 149).

Features of non-fluency in speech (1) or grammatically wrong constructions (2) are minutely recorded in written form, and the text gains authenticity, diversity and offers the impression of recording real speech:

(1) Amy, said Mr. Dorrit, I am well persuaded that if the topic were referred to any person of superior social knowledge, [...] and sense – let us say, for, instance, to – ha – Mrs. General – that there would not be two opinions as to the – hum – affectionate character of my sentiments (p. 611).
(2) It ain't many that comes into a poor place, that deems it worth their while to move their hats, said Mrs. Plornish. But people think more of it than people think. (p. 137)

Graphological signs are exploited impressionistically, in a way which suggests what sort of pronunciation a reader should adopt and the importance of the underlined construction in the fabric of the novel. For example, the basis of the science of government lies in the importance of applying the art of *HOW NOT TO DO IT* (p. 104) unto the society. Defining by negation, capitalizing the entire structure, the narrator echoes his utmost dissatisfaction, that referring to the abnormality of the judicial system which encouraged the people and the bureaucrats to do nothing or to hinder any attempt to do anything for the sake of justice.

When trying to summarize a description of a character or the development of an action, the author resorts to intricate, long, somehow agglomerated structures, confusing the reader:

And there, with his noble friend and relative Lord Decimus, was William Barnacle, who had made the ever-famous coalition with Tudor Stiltstalking, and who always kept ready his own particular recipe for How not to do it; sometimes tapping the Speaker, and drawing it fresh out of him, with a "First, I will beg you, sir, to inform the House what Precedent we have for the course into which the honourable gentleman would precipitate us; sometimes asking the honourable gentleman to favour him with his own version of the Precedent; [...] (p. 405).

The use of commas and of semi-colons – as paratextual elements – suggests a change of thought but not an abrupt interruption, the full stop being delayed so that one single complex sentence might render a wide range of items of information.

Besides the creation of a complicated syntax, the author also uses loose sentence structures, complex structures which do not cause difficulties of comprehension. The qualities associated with this type of structure are easiness, relaxation, informality, normal sequence, linear chain of ideas; the links are conjunctions, punctuation marks or explanatory structures which help in the designing of cohesion:

> Several projectors, likewise, availed themselves of the same opportunity to correspond with Mr. Meagles; as, for example, to apprise him that their attention having been called to the advertisement by a friend, they begged to state that if they should ever hear anything of the young person, they would not fail to make it known to him, and that in the meantime if he would oblige them with the funds necessary for bringing to perfection a certain entirely novel description of Pump, the happiest results would ensue to mankind (p. 332).

This way, the author comprises relevant data referring to the near past, to the near temporal context. This example also highlights two functions of 'if', the employment of if clauses being another preponderant syntactic feature, constituting a way of expressing hypothetical meaning along with using putative 'should' or by using the conditional.

Lisa Sternlieb (Sternlieb 2002: 150-153) quotes James Joyce who, in 1919, wrote about Dickens' exaggeration in point of syntax, lexis or character description. The great talker, Flora Finching in *Little Dorrit* is the source for Joyce's portrayal of Molly Bloom in *Ulysses*. Like her literary ancestor, Penelope, Flora endeavours to erase and abolish time. She is only able to tell one story, and she tells it repeatedly, in a rapid, unpunctuated discourse confusing the interlocutor. Therefore, Dickens' character is a very important one in point of speech features, influencing Joyce's modernist breakthrough. Flora points her river-like speech with nothing but commas, and very few of them. Flora breaks all the maxims of conversation and the rules of mutual understanding; in fact, her speech is a sort of monologue as far as all the characters coming in contact with her cannot establish a true dialogue.

And yet, Flora is not simply babbling: there is a pattern to her speech. She is forced – by past circumstances – to cover the same topic over and over again in order to sustain the limited memory she has of her former love, in order to stop time in an obstinate refusal to move forward and dispose of her memories. Her particular verbal idiosyncrasy is her paradoxical remembering and immediately forgetting when she refers to her former lover as Arthur, only to remember that it is far more proper to call him Mr. Clennam or Mr. Doyce & Clennam (familiarity is thus replaced by impersonal, distanced social status):

> You mustn't think of going yet, said Flora [...] you could never be so unkind as to think of going, Arthur – I mean Mr. Arthur – or I suppose Mr. Clennam would be far more proper [...] (p. 151).

From formality she gradually glides to formal, polite, impersonal ways of addressing, in an overflow of repetitive constructions tiring the hearer. What is more important, as her appearances in the novel persist, her speech becomes more frantic and less punctuated. She utters so many words so quickly that Little Dorrit is left *to ponder over the meaning of her scattered words* (p. 283):

> Romance, however, Flora went on, busily arranging Mr. F's Aunt's toast, as I openly said to Mr. F when he proposed to me and you will be surprised to hear that he proposed seven times once in a hackney-coach once in a boat once in a pew once on a donkey at Tunbridge Wells and the rest on his knees, Romance was fled with the early days of Arthur Clennam, our parents tore us asunder we became marble and stern reality usurped the throne, Mr. F said very much to his credit that he was perfectly aware of it and even preferred that state of things accordingly the word was spoken the fiat when forth and such is life you see my dear and yet we do not break but bend, pray make a good breakfast while I go in with the tray (p. 283).

Flora constantly recreates the story of her first courtship, her eventual broken marriage, her actual marriage and widowhood, and her renewed hope for Arthur, only to unravel it again and again. A second or even a third reading puzzle the reader, finding himself lost in Flora's loose speech, passing quickly from one subject to another. Flora announces Molly, and it is significant the fact that a Victorian character created by a Victorian writer is the antecedent and starting point for a modernist character, Molly, Joyce's artistic daughter, the fruit of his spirit. Though of a different typology, the two female characters are alike in their random-like cascade of words; and yet, in Flora's case there is more talking and less private thought, whereas with Molly there is extensive recording of her mental activity which knows no graphic, grammatical, textual boundaries as in the famous monologue beginning and ending with the exclamation 'Yes':

> Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the *City Arms* hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting to that old faggot Mrs. Riordan that he thought he had a great leg of and she never left us a farthing all for masses for herself [...] (p. 659).

The '– ing' forms in some fragments hint at presentness and continuity of an action or state, endowing the chain of words with fluidity and dynamism as in:

> While all this noise and hurry were rife among the living travellers, there too, silently assembled in a grated house, half-a-dozen paces removed, with the same cloud enfolding them, and the same snow flakes drifting in upon them, were the dead travellers found upon the mountain. The mother, storm-belated many winters ago, still standing in the corner with her baby at her breast; the man who had frozen with his arm raised to his mouth in fear of hunger, still pressing it with his dry lips after years and years (p. 433).

In such a short text, the author embedded verbal adjectives – the contrasting pair *living travellers* vs. *dead travellers* and present participles which enhance progressiveness and bridge the past and the present: *standing, pressing.*

Dickens' preference for long, thorough structures and very long sentences called periods does not bring lack of rhythm or order. On the contrary, the elaborate syntax is a proof of exquisite artistic work, amendments and hard toil, giving birth to diversified syntactic features.

## V. Conclusions

*Little Dorrit* is not easy to deal with, particularly from a linguistic point of view. Though a complex one, the plot does not provide understanding difficulties in spite of the sudden changes in the story line. The use of language is characterized by the abundance of words and structures not frequently used in everyday speech; therefore, the modern reader may need more time and concentration to get the full meaning of the words. The language of the text convinces through the employment of rhetorical devices which rely on effects of suspense and surprise. But the impression of suspense did not derive only from amazing overturning of events, but also from an engaging diversity of stylistic devices. Thus, besides the obsessive repetitive patterns out of a desire to convince, to pragmatically influence the readers, the Dickensian style gives birth to a sense of expectation in the reader's mind who gradually encounters more and more varied, complex and ingenious linguistic structures.

Dickens is a masterful manager of suspense and mystery, artfully leading the reader through an elaborate dilatory space that is always full of signs to be read, but always menaced with misreading until the very end.

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## *Stylistic Functions of Deictics and Clauses in Charles Dickens' "Little Dorrit"*

The paper attempts to offer a model of stylistic investigation by focusing only on two functions related to style, namely the role of deictics and the role of clauses within the morphological and syntactic system as displayed by and within the Dickensian text. Thus, our analysis will be particularized onto the study of fragments from one of Dickens' novels, *Little Dorrit*, in an attempt to unfold the stylistic peculiarities and constancies of the Dickensian writing. We will first try to briefly outline the specificity of any stylistic analysis within the domain of Stylistics and then we will contextualize Dickens' writing within the larger frame of the history of English writing. The study of deictics and clauses finds its motivation in the endeavour to record Dickens' fervour to clearly *show* what his fictional universe constitutes (the function of deictics) and to *explain* minutely what it consists of (the function of clauses).