

# **Fur Coat, No Knickers: Semantic Potentiality in Alternative Identity Negotiation**

**Klára Matuchová**

Masaryk University, Brno

## **Abstract**

My contribution discusses the semantic aspects of the negotiation of personal/social identity as they appear in the language used by the protagonists of three British novels (see *Sources* below). In my use of the term, *identity* is a process that is manifested within an ongoing communicative event. Herein, I argue that *denotational correctness* and *interactional success* are two discrete phenomena whose co-occurrence in any language sample is realised through the dynamism of differing degrees of *accuracy* and *effectiveness*.

I outline a semiotically mediated model of identity negotiation using a quantitative and qualitative analytical approach focusing on (a) two types of dialogue (internal and external), (b) depth of context-embeddedness and (c) the degree of implicitness, as the key linguistic factors correlating with the occurrence of selected social variables. I propose an application of Jakobson's concept of language functions and compare it to more recent theories. My results serve to demonstrate the impact of alter-identity negotiation as opposed to identity negotiation on syntactic structure and semantic complexity.

## 1 Introduction

One of the most established notions of social class and social membership conceives of class as a phenomenon of the distribution of power within a community and further defines it as consisting of a “specific causal component of their life chances” that “a number of people have in common” (Weber, 1995, p. 31). Thus, *shared life chances* are arguably the most opaque aspect of social class membership.

It would seem that the main difficulty in trying to define social class in England is that most of the characteristics are rather “indefinable”, however, very distinctly perceived by most of society.<sup>31</sup> The evasiveness of description can be perceived from two distinct viewpoints. From the individual perspective, genuine group membership is typically rather automatised, thus making it difficult for the member to describe. The extract LB 14 that follows is taken from *The Line of Beauty* (2004), one of the novels that I analyse, and it illustrates the conversational style of one of the upper-class figures (Rachel) that the aspiring protagonist (Nick) *longs* to adopt (emphasis mine):

[LB 14] Nick loved the **upper-class economy** of her [Rachel's] talk, her way of saying nothing except by **hinted shades** of agreement and disagreement; he longed to master it himself.

[...]

It had been **her** [Rachel's] **fortune not to describe** but to **enjoy**. She said, ‘You know of course there’s modern art, as well as the Rembrandts,’ with a brief smile at having retrieved a notable detail. (47)

Here, we also witness Rachel’s inability to describe the château she grew up in, thus indirectly denying Nick the benefit of *sharing* her *life chances*. Hence, the vagueness of the upper-class description aggravates the poignancy of Nick’s unattainable desire for inclusion.

From the societal perspective, another significant factor contributing to the difficulty of description is the fact that identity is not a culturally transmitted heritage, but rather a representation of the nation’s view of and attitudes towards the future (Colls, 2002). Colls (2002) also remarks that since the British imperial project seems to have come to an end, the formerly shared aims that gave the British their sense of identity are now being replaced by multiculturalism and local identities, necessarily fragmenting any unitary concept of identity

---

<sup>31</sup> A MORI poll (Mortimore & Robinson, 2003) states that 65% of the British population do not feel they belong to any particular class, while 76% disagree that Britain is a classless society.

(cf. Fox, 2005, pp. 1-2; Paxman, 1999). Thus the social system in late modernity might be best characterised by self-identification processes whose actual outcomes seem to have gained more relevance than the traditional social indexical values of class and membership (cf. Coupland, 2003, p. 428).

Concerning the material under scrutiny, I am aware that the language of fiction is generally not viewed as equal to the so-called 'authentic' language of every-day use. One of the principal observed differences is in the degree of stylisation (Mathesius, 1982, pp. 45-49). I should, therefore, emphasise that in the framework of the current analysis the concepts of *reality* and *fiction* are understood as a continuum where both the 'authentic' and fictional elements are constantly present either latently or patently.

Moreover, stylisation should be more easily discernible in the samples of the language of fiction than in the language of spoken conversation for two main reasons. First, the occurrence of stylisation in fiction can be *a priori* presupposed, while in the case of spoken conversation we tend to expect, rather illogically, a *designless* discourse (cf. Jakobson, 1960) and consistent observance of *the Cooperative Principle* (Grice, 1975, pp. 45-6). Second, the fact that the written medium is typically more easily accessible to analysis also plays a significant role. However, I agree with Fowler (1996) that literature should not be viewed as a *special* and *autonomous* form of discourse, since "to propose some special essence for literature, not found in "other uses of language", is to erect an obstacle in the way of properly understanding literature as language" (Fowler, 1996, p. 10).

The proposed paper draws on extensive research I have conducted for the purposes of my dissertation that focuses on the role of language functions in identity negotiation. Herein, I present a stylistic analysis of the semantic roles of sample key words (i.e. loci) in identity construction in a selected fiction discourse from the perspective of social class. The applied research method draws on the domains of semantics, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. In terms of the structuralist view of the language system, I focus on the intersection of the lexical and the discourse levels. Principally, this paper aims to determine whether there is a correlation between the negotiation of alter-identity (i.e. consciously constructed, non-authentic identity) as opposed to identity and the particular lexico-syntactic means the protagonists opt to use.

In the present analysis the *functional-textual* approach to language (originated in 1930s by the Prague School, see Mathesius, 1982) is adopted in order "to understand why [...] particular linguistic patterns are found, in terms of the social and communicative needs which the text is called on to serve" (Fowler, 1996, p. 11).

## 2 Material under Investigation

To begin with, the three novels I analyse are *Room at the Top*, *The Stars' Tennis Balls*, and *The Line of Beauty* (henceforward RT, SB and LB, respectively; see *Sources* below). The reason for this choice was firstly my long-term interest in the topic of upward social mobility and its linguistic manifestation and secondly the striking similarity of the storylines concerning the lives of the protagonists, their motivations and the outcomes of their social endeavours.

To introduce the aforementioned protagonists from a standpoint presented in the respective novels, *Joe Lampton* (RT) is originally a working-class civil servant, who later gets married into the upper middle-class family of a factory owner. *Ashley Barson-Garland* (SB) is a lower middle-class college student and a political researcher, who later becomes an MP, and *Nick Guest* (LB), who is also a lower middle-class college student who later becomes a magazine editor and lover of an upper-class partner. As has already been mentioned, the motivation for these characters is their upward social mobility. Thus, their identity is constructed and negotiated in a period when their original identity is being suppressed and their new desired identity assumed. The strategy they all adopt is based on becoming lodgers with the more socially privileged.

Consequently, the *non-aligned status* that best characterises their class membership is inherent in all their self-presentations. As these are motivated by the protagonist's intention to attain a particular *semiotic effect* rather than present identity that is actually felt to be true, most of the self-presentations can be expected to be acts of *alterity* rather than identity. This term is originally used by Hastings and Manning (2004), however, in the context of negotiating mock identities. The difference between the original and my use of this concept is the degree of recipient awareness.

*Alterity* as mock identity is usually perceived by both the producer and the recipient as a form of acting out, whereas an act of alterity in the context of my current analysis should be understood within the dichotomy desired – actual, i.e. alterity as an expression of a desired identity disguised and, more importantly, perceived as an actual identity. Thus the reflexive aspect of these identity construals is brought to the forefront, as the responsibility for meaning is 'delegated' to the recipient and the fulfilment of the original communicative intention is contingent on its recognition and acknowledgement by the interlocutor (see also *negotiability* in Leech, 1983, p. 23).

The original discourse of the novels was first sampled into basic information units that were labelled *messages* and manually copied from the original novels to form an electronic version of the analysed corpus. A message is a particular extract of text related to the topic of identity

negotiation always including the protagonist as a participant of a particular form of a dialogue (see Tab. 2 below). Thus, one of the main criteria for the delimitation of the text unit relevant for the current analysis is the retrievability of the *macroTheme* (Martin & Rose, 2003) of identity based on key words explicitly or, for that matter, implicitly present.

Hence, key words/loci<sup>32</sup> play the role of “items of special interest” (Firbas, 1992, p. 29) determining the adequate level of content specificity that singles out the messages from the surrounding context. The extract RT 25 below demonstrates the method of message selection. Only the central section in bold is delimited as a *message*, i.e. pertaining to ‘identity’ discourse, with the locus underlined. The initial section provides general reference, while the closing section provides situational background:

*[RT 25] Then I rejected it. Not on moral grounds; but because I felt then, and still do, that envy’s a small and squalid vice – the convict sulking because a fellow-prisoner’s been given a bigger helping of skilly. This didn’t abate the fierceness of my longing.*

***I wanted an Aston-Martin, I wanted a three-guinea linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a Riviera suntan – these were my rights, I felt, a signed and sealed legacy.***

*As I watched the tail-end of the Aston-Martin with its shiny new G.B. plate go out of sight I remembered the second-hand Austin Seven which the Efficient Zombie, ..., had just treated himself to. (29)*

Moreover, the *message* can be specifically delimited within the *process model of language* (Leech, 1983, pp. 58-61) as an element of a three-part hierarchy of discourse – message – text. The model draws from Halliday’s (1980, pp. 66-70) *hierarchy of instrumentality* and describes the act of communication ‘as constituting a transaction on three different planes’ (Leech, 1983, p. 59):

- I. an interpersonal transaction (Discourse)
- II. an ideational transaction (Message)
- III. a textual transaction (Text).

---

<sup>32</sup> Locus represents the syntactico-semantic focal point of the information structure of each message and is typically represented by a single key word, i.e. a noun/noun phrase.

The three planes are related hierarchically in such a manner that “the discourse includes the message, and the message includes the text” (*ibid.*).

The following table (see Tab. 1) summarises the quantitative results of the application of the elementary categories which structure the complete identity discourse<sup>33</sup>.

TABLE 1: Overview of quantitative data for RT, SB and LB

	RT	SB	LB
<b>Overall Word Total</b>	84,600	96,800	157,800
<b>'Identity' Word Total</b>	6,996 (8%)	4,658 (5%)	5,024 (3%)
<b>Total No. of Messages</b>	98	66	81
<b>Words per Message</b>	71	71	62

Next, the messages were further classified according to the social variables they specifically refer to into five sets. Based on the presence of pertinent loci the sets are the *Presentation*, *Origin*, *Accent*, *Social System* and the *Setting* set (see Tab. 2 below). Since the latter is statistically the least significant set, it is not included in the table below.

As to the variables, *the Presentation Set* includes those of age, education, occupation and family, *the Origin Set* comprises family and geographical background, *the Accent Set* represents dispreferred and preferred types of pronunciation, *the Social System Set* class membership and relevant attitudes and, lastly, *the Setting Set* refers to all the significant spatial relations in the analysed discourse.

TABLE 2: Representation of Variable Sets in Room at the Top

Variable Set	Internal Dialogue (80%)	External Dialogue (20%)
<b>Presentation</b>	24%	47%
<b>Origin</b>	15%	18%
<b>Accent</b>	15%	23%
<b>Social System</b>	46%	12%

<sup>33</sup> The values presented in this table serve as indicators of the general statistical properties of the analysed texts. The overall word totals above are based on a rough estimate, as the complete original texts were available to me only in the printed form at the time of writing. The other totals are based on computer word counts of the identity discourse in an electronic version. The given percentages for each novel refer to the overall total highlighted in grey that is listed in the left column.

Another significant distinction (*cf.* Tab. 2) is between the occurrence of **internal** dialogue (on average 80% of the analysed discourse), and **external dialogue** (on average 20% of the analysed discourse), which has a considerable impact on the retrieved data. As this is a highly general distinction, it includes all categories of speech and thought presentation. The difference is mainly constituted by the explicit presence or absence of an interlocutor. The internal dialogue (extract RT 24 below) is characterised as an interaction of the protagonist with himself<sup>34</sup>, or directly with the *implied reader* (*cf. receiver vs. addressee* in Leech, 1983, p. 13), while the external dialogue (extract LB 21 below) takes place between the protagonist and another explicitly present interlocutor, i.e. including direct speech.

[RT 24]        *He [Jack Wales] hadn't ever had to work for anything he wanted; it had all been given to him. The salary which I'd been so pleased about, [...], would seem a pittance to him. The suit in which I fancied myself so much – my best suit – would seem cheap and nasty to him. He wouldn't have a best suit; all his clothes would be the best. (28-29)*

[LB 21]        *'You know about furniture,' he [Lord Kessler] said.*

*'A bit,' Nick said. 'My father's in the antiques business.'*

*'Yes, that's right, jolly good,' said Gerald, as if he'd confessed to being the son of a dustman. (51)*

Moreover, the values in Table 2 above illustrate the interdependence of the dialogic structure and the types of conveyed messages (see highlighting in grey). The external dialogue typically displays a dominant occurrence of *the Presentation Set*, while the internal dialogue predominantly deals with the issues of the social system. Most of the internal dialogue messages of *the Social System Set* would be rather detrimental to the protagonist's (in this case Joe's, RT) social rise had they been uttered publically. An example of an internal dialogue message from *the Social System set* follows:

[RT 13] *I knew that they [items of a coffee set] were expensive because of their lack of ornament and the deep glow of enamel. I've an instinct like a water-diviner's where money's concerned; I was certain that I was in the*

---

<sup>34</sup> Certain ambiguities occurred in the internal dialogue distinction. Unlike RT and SB, where we are presented predominantly with Free Direct Thought in the internal dialogue, LB uses mostly the 3<sup>rd</sup> person narration, therefore (Free) Indirect Thought presentation. For the purpose of easier comparison between these three texts, the internal dialogue distinction is applied even when the protagonist is referred to in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person and it is objectively impossible to tell "whether one is reading the thoughts of the character or the views of the narrator/author" (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 338).

*presence of at least a thousand a year. When I noticed the matter-of-fact way in which Mrs Thompson handled the coffee-set, without a trace of that expression of mingled pride and anxiety which most women assume on bringing out good china, I increased the amount by five hundred. (16)*

### **3 Theoretical Framework**

From the broad perspective of semiotic relationships in identity negotiation the proposed discussion is based on three theoretical concepts, namely Jakobson's (1960) theory of the six basic functions of verbal communication, Holmes' (2001) concept of referential and affective function scales and Agha's (2007) discussion of reflexivity in human communication and reported speech.

Jakobson (1960) delimits six constitutive factors that determine six different functions of language: addresser, message, addressee, context, code, and contact<sup>35</sup>. Verbal messages can rarely serve only one of these functions. Therefore there is a discernible hierarchy of functions in each language sample that is governed by the predominant function. Jakobson (1960) calls the "division of labour" between the individual functions participation. Following the logic of hierarchy, a certain function displays *leading* participation in each message, while other functions display *accessory* participation.

Correspondingly, in her discussion of social factors influencing communication, Holmes (2001) describes four different social dimensions that are represented by four scales out of which the last one holds the greatest relevance for the current analysis: solidarity-social distance scale, status scale, formality scale and referential and affective function scale. In accordance with Jakobson's approach, she points out that both these functions occur in communicative language use at the same time; however, one function will be dominant depending on the particular constellation of the above-mentioned four factors.

Agha's (2007) work on language and social relations indirectly exploits the above-mentioned concepts, but takes a considerably broader and more innovative perspective. He emphasises that "the social effects mediated by speech are highly context-bound or indexical in character" (Agha, 2007, p. 14). As a result, the relevance of reflexive activity lies in the fact that it is an activity in which we can typify perceivable signs (extra-linguistic and linguistic) by using communication (ibid.). The communicative process thus grants speakers the

---

<sup>35</sup> To illustrate, the addresser is the focus of the so-called emotive function of language. If the emotive function takes on a leading participation role, its purest expression will be presented by the



potential to re-signify particular social indexical values in a specific context through reflexivity, a notion of crucial descriptive importance when discussing the construction of identity. In Marková's view (1997), reflexivity is an "ability to comprehend the effect of one's own language on others, to interpret the other person's language and the effect of language of both (all) interlocutors on the process of communication" (Marková, 1997: 227). Moreover, there is also the "reflexive relationship between text and its interpreter" (ibid.; cf. Bakhtin, 2008).

Below is a schematic representation of this communicative model, which expounds my application of it in this analysis. The arrows in the graph represent the dynamic orientation of the elements of a communicative event towards a certain goal, in other words it shows how the information potential of the message is realized by dominant and accessory language functions in a given situation. The vertical axis of denotation (y) represents the semiotic relationship between a language sign and the extra-linguistic reality. The horizontal axis of interaction (x) represents the semiotic relationship between the author of a message and the recipient. The third important element is the axis of time (z), which represents communication unfolding in time. It is along this axis that the information structure of our messages oscillates. The overall amount of expressive and factual content will be dependent on our communicative aim and on how effectively we are able to attain it.

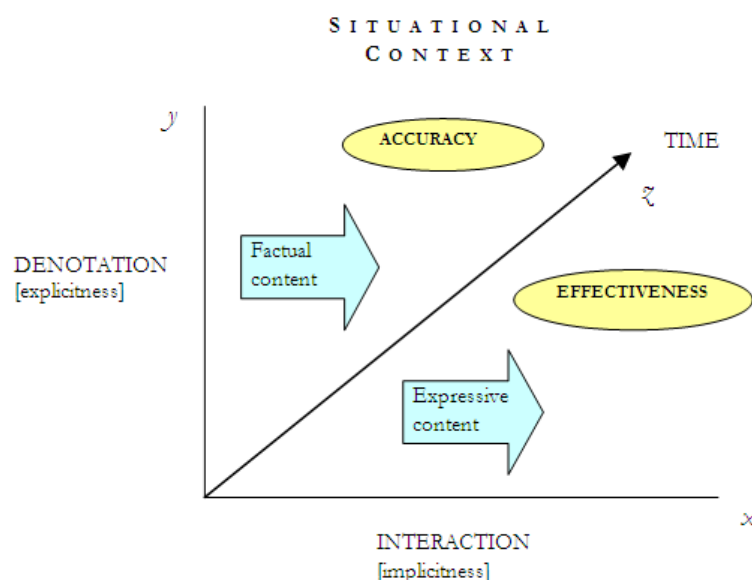


FIGURE 1: Semiotic Relationships in Identity Negotiation (based on Agha, 2007)

---

interjections that "differ from the means of referential language both by their sound pattern [...] and by their syntactic role" (Jakobson, 1960, p. 354).

From a more narrowly delimited perspective of semantic analysis, herein my focus is on the level of specificity that the aforementioned loci display. As Cruse (2004) says, one level of specificity has a special status and it is called “the basic or generic level of specificity” (Cruse, 2004, p. 133). The basic level categories are, then, characterised as being at the “most inclusive level for which a clear visual image can be formed” and they are habitually used for “neutral, everyday reference” (ibid.). For these reasons, the basic level categories are typically processed faster than super- or subordinate level categories. Rosch asserts that “objects may be first seen or recognised as members of their basic categories”, and only then they are “identified as members of their superordinate or subordinate category” (Rosch, 1978, p. 10).

Therefore, I am interested in the potential differences between the levels of loci specificity in relation to a particular level of the language hierarchy (i.e. mainly lexical and syntactic), since they can offer insight into the specific aspects of alterity negotiation, particularly concerning the degree of implicitness and semantic indeterminacy (cf. Lyons, 1996, p. 49).

## 4 Hypothesis

Relating to the above-mentioned concept of the dynamic balance between effective (i.e. communicatively successful) and accurate (i.e. denotationally correct) content in communication, it should be emphasised that the effectiveness discussed herein can be understood as a form of effective interpersonal domination. Thus, the external dialogue effectiveness lies in the fact that it stays unrecognised by the explicit interlocutor. In the case of the internal dialogue, the recipient is either the protagonist himself (in the act of self-persuasion) or the implied reader. As an overt reaction of the recipient is absent, the effectiveness is judged by the employed linguistic means. Typically, these are evaluative utterances using *verba sentiendi* in predication, or their nominalised equivalents in the form of copulative predication that defy a truth test (see the following extract RT 27).

*[RT 27] Suddenly, I had an intuition that I could sleep with Eva. It was a genuine intuition, not simply a rationalization of my desires. I've always found that intuitions are rarely wrong. Mine work very well because I'm not very fond of abstract thinking and I never expect anyone to be morally superior to myself. (33)*

Therefore, principally, I argue that the more accurate, the less effective an act of communication will be (cf. Fig. 1 above, the oscillation of message content). Consequently,

the more effective the content, the more implicit and indirect its expression will be, which should lead to deeper embeddedness of the loci in context.

Specifically, my hypothesis concerns the correspondence between the homo/heterogeneity of grammatical meaning and the homo/heterogeneity of lexical meaning as represented by the different types of information structure in messages:

*The negotiation of identity (occurring in accuracy-oriented messages) should display a prevalence of syntactico-semantically homogenous events, and the negotiation of alterity (occurring in effectiveness-oriented messages) should be represented by the prevalence of heterogenous events.*

An example of the homogenous type of event is represented by the extract RT 1 below, while the extract RT 94 illustrates the heterogenous type of event (emphasis mine). Grammatically, an event is homogeneous “if it is construed as unchanging”, and heterogeneous “if it is construed as changing” (Cruse, 2004, p. 286). Semantically, I view heterogeneity as represented by contrast, while homogeneity as represented by similarity. RT 1 displays an affirmative, i.e. homogenous, sense relation structure via the use of hypero-/hyponymy (*clothes, shoes, coat, hat*), whereas RT 94 displays contrastive, i.e. heterogenous, structure via the use of contextual opposition (*suit vs. skin*).

Grammatically speaking, in the first extract there is a striking prevalence of copulative predication (see emphasis below) that is characterised by expressing static entities, herein made even more prominent by the occurring qualifying type of predication with the nominal part expressed by adjectives that are by definition atemporal (cf. Cruse, 2004).

In the second extract, the predications express mainly dynamic aspects (see emphasis below) construing a changing reality. Consequently, RT 1 is identified as a message predominantly displaying accuracy and negotiating identity, whereas RT 94 is identified as a message predominantly displaying effectiveness and negotiating alterity. It should also be noted that the first extract occurs at the very beginning of the analysed discourse, i.e. *Room at the Top*, while the second extract occurs at the end.

*[RT 1]My **clothes** were my Sunday best: a light grey suit that had cost fourteen guineas, a plain grey tie, plain grey socks, and brown shoes. **The shoes** were the most expensive I'd ever possessed, with a deep, rich, nearly black lustre. My trench-coat and my hat, though, weren't up to the same standard; **the coat**, after only three months, was badly wrinkled and smelled*

of rubber, and **the hat** was faintly discoloured with hair-oil and pinched to a sharp point in front. (7)

[RT 94] 'I expected it,' Joe Lampton said soberly. 'She [Alice] drove like a maniac. It doesn't make it any less tragic, though.' I didn't like Joe Lampton. He was a sensible young accountant with **a neatly-pressed blue suit** and a stiff white collar. He always said and did the correct thing and never embarrassed anyone with an unseemly display of emotion. ... I hated Joe Lampton, but he looked and sounded very sure of himself sitting at my desk in **my skin**; he'd come to stay, this was no flying visit. (219)

## 5 Applied Method

It follows from what has been stated above that the elementary units I focus on are messages in general (for their delimitation see *Material under Investigation*, extract RT 25 above) and the message loci in particular. These are analytically approached via the concept of semantic fields. For the purposes of the current analysis, I find it most useful to adopt the taxonomical distinction of categories at different levels of abstraction and inclusiveness (see Cruse, 2004; Rosch, 1973, 1978). The data are thus organised into tables that classify loci from each separate variable set of each fiction discourse<sup>36</sup> (e.g. Tab. 3 below presents the semantic fields of the *System Set in RT*).

In order to render the Overviews of Semantic Fields informative, I have limited my description to only two levels. The 'shelter terms' I use for the semantic fields represent broad superordinate categories, whereas the loci themselves represent the subordinate members that display shared semantic features outlined by the name of the pertinent semantic field (see Tab. 3 below - *Hierarchy, Membership, Location, Tendency and Status Symbol*).

As this categorisation is heavily contextualised, the membership of some of the loci might appear unfounded when assessed in isolation. Equally, the degree of membership of the individual loci differs based on discourse and dialogue type. The results of the semantic analysis are highlighted in the table below by bold print for the basic level categories and asterisks for external dialogue loci. The colour coding signals the accuracy-effectiveness

---

<sup>36</sup> For reasons of practicality and space limitations I do not present the overviews of semantic fields in the text of the article. All the analysed loci are listed in the Appendices below. Moreover, the relevant data are illustrated by Fig. 2, 3 and 4 below summarising the loci levels of specificity.

ratio, i.e. the loci in red display accuracy orientation, the loci in blue display effectiveness orientation in their respective messages.

TABLE 3: System Set Semantic Fields (RT)

SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview – System Set (A/E ratio 16:17)				
HIERARCHY	MEMBERSHIP	LOCATION	TENDENCY	STATUS SYMBOL
2x CLASS*	CLUB	PLACE	FAULTS	DRESSING GOWN
2x POWER	KINSHIP	POSITION	INSTINCT	SHIRT
3x GRADE	PROTOCOL	WORLD		COFFEE
OWNERSHIP	GAME			PRICE
LABOUR	KEY			2x SUIT
SHOPKEEPER				UNIFORM
2x LEVEL				
2x INCOME GROUP				
ROYALTY				
RIGHT*				

To illustrate the pertinent context, the two extracts below (RT 10 and RT 24) display two basic-level category loci represented in the Status Symbol field (see Tab. 3 above); the accuracy oriented locus DRESSING GOWN (see Tab. 3 above) and the effectiveness oriented locus SUIT (see Tab. 3 above), respectively:

[RT 10] *‘There’ll be some coffee in half an hour, by the way. Or would you prefer tea?’ I said that coffee would suit me splendidly (I would much rather have had tea but I had an instinctive feeling that it wasn’t quite correct at that hour). When she’d left the room I opened my suitcase and unfolded **my dressing-gown**. I’d never had one before [...]. (13)*

[RT 24] *He [Jack Wales] hadn’t ever had to work for anything he wanted; it had all been given to him. The salary which I’d been so pleased about, [...], would seem a pittance to him. **The suit** in which I fancied myself so much – my best suit – would seem cheap and nasty to him. He wouldn’t have a best suit; all his clothes would be the best. (28-29)*

## 6 Results and Discussion

In the following discussion, the results obtained from each fiction discourse (RT, SB, LB) are outlined and compared to demonstrate how the conclusions were arrived at. All the results below refer to the data presented in the Appendices (see Appendix A, B, C below).

As illustrated below, the distribution of accuracy (15%) and effectiveness (9%) within the basic level categories (see Fig. 2 *RT Semantic Fields – Proportion of Levels of Specificity*) represents a significant result, as the loci in the RT variable sets display a higher proportion of effectiveness in 3 out of 5 sets. Therefore, an opposite result was hypothesised. One more distinction (not represented in Fig. 2) is the ratio of internal (83%) and external (17%) dialogue basic level loci. This result positively correlates with the ratio of all the occurring loci and the generally low number of external dialogue messages.

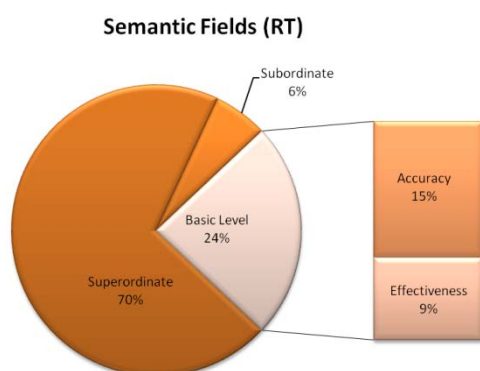


FIGURE 2: *RT Semantic Fields – Proportion of Levels of Specificity*

Here, I find it particularly useful to refer to the basic principles for the formation of categories. In her definition, Rosch (1978) asserts that “the task of category systems is to provide maximum information with the least cognitive effort”, and that “the perceived world comes as structured information rather than as arbitrary or unpredictable attributes”, therefore, “maximum information with least cognitive effort is achieved if categories map the perceived world structure as closely as possible” (Rosch, 1978, p. 2). It follows that the processing of basic level categories should be faster than of the categories with higher or lower level of specificity.

To exemplify, the locus (**bolded**) of the extract RT 20 below is categorised as a basic-level category, while the locus of RT 1 is categorised as an under-specification, i.e. the locus CLOTHES being a hyperonym of a potential basic-level category item in this semantic field such as e.g. shirt.

*[RT 20] **The kitchen** was large and clean and bright with an electric oven which had a control panel like a bomber’s. [...] And yet the room was as gay as Mrs Thompson’s flowered apron, it would, just as it was, have served as a film set for any middle-class comedy. It didn’t make one feel an intruder;*

*there were no squalid little secrets like stopped-up sinks and dirty dishcloths.*  
(23)

[RT 1] *My clothes* were my Sunday best: a light grey suit that had cost fourteen guineas, a plain grey tie, plain grey socks, and brown shoes. The shoes were the most expensive I'd ever possessed, with a deep, rich, nearly black lustre. My trench-coat and my hat, though, weren't up to the same standard; the coat, after only three months, was badly wrinkled and smelled of rubber, and the hat was faintly discoloured with hair-oil and pinched to a sharp point in front. (7)

Thus, the occurrence of basic level category loci in a particular discourse should positively correlate with the level of accuracy therein, as accuracy (denotational correctness) is represented by explicitness of expression. Also the overall results for RT indicate a similar tendency, particularly in the direct proportion of the degree of accuracy in the whole discourse and the sum total of the occurring basic level categories when compared to the other two discourses.

Nevertheless, when the occurring semantic fields are examined more closely, the aforementioned correlations become problematic. As was described above, basic level categories should provide maximum information, while applying minimum cognitive effort. However, if we consider the principal characteristics of alterity negotiation as an expression of a *desired* identity perceived as an *actual* identity, the speaker can be expected to intend to achieve the opposite counterbalance, i.e. limited information with considerable cognitive effort. This strategy should grant the speaker greater control over the ongoing communication.

As remarked above, the sub- or superordinate category loci should require longer processing time and thus might provide an opportunity for the speaker to exert more influence and control over the semantic commitment (cf. Frazier & Rayner, 1990) the recipient makes in the process of interpreting a given message.

To illustrate this notion, below is an example of the above described results in alterity negotiation that are semantically marked by the negative correlation between the message level of accuracy and the occurrence of basic-level category loci. In the SB 33 extract, the speakers opt for a syntactically accurate expression, yet neither of the sentence elements can be considered a member of a basic level category.

'My mother teaches, sir,' I said [...]. (66)

To achieve a higher level of accuracy and specificity, the second speaker (Ashley) could have chosen to formulate identical content using a basic level category (e.g. *My mother is a teacher, Sir...* [therefore she cannot take holiday at free will].), as this is his first mention of his mother. If the profession is referred to by the verb *teach*, the semantic range to be interpreted is potentially broader. Ashley's mother could teach at elementary school but also at college. Had Ashley used the noun *teacher*, the latter interpretation is significantly backgrounded.

Generally speaking, the *Presentation* sets occurring in the three analysed discourses can be perceived as the most relevant sets from the perspective of the content of identity negotiation as they most readily describe the personal identity of the protagonists. Moreover, in all three discourses the *Presentation* set consistently displays the highest degree of accuracy, while containing the lowest (LB) or the second lowest (RT, SB) number of basic level categories.

Therefore, the aforementioned discrepancy caused by the high degree of accuracy and a low number of basic level loci is particularly noticeable in the *Presentation* set (61% of accuracy loci overall). Interestingly, the only other set that displays a higher accuracy loci ratio than the effectiveness ratio is the *Origin* set (54% of accuracy loci overall) that can be considered representing the most relevant aspects of personal identity together with *Presentation*. The other three RT sets loci (*System*, *Setting* and *Accent*) display a lower accuracy ratio and a higher number of basic level loci than the first two sets.

As shown in the following chart (see Fig. 3), the distribution of accuracy (8%) and effectiveness (9%) within the basic level categories in SB represents a less significant result than in RT, however, given that *Presentation* and *Accent* are the only sets that display a higher proportion of *accuracy*, a less balanced result was hypothesised prior to the analysis. Nevertheless, this proportion might be influenced by the average utterance length in internal and external dialogue. Unlike RT and LB, where the internal average values tend to be twice as high as the external values, in SB the average utterance length displays similar values for both the internal and external dialogue.



### Semantic Fields (SB)

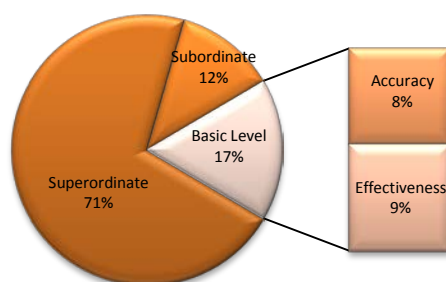


FIGURE 3: SB Semantic Fields – Proportion of Levels of Specificity

The dominance of superordinate categories is again clearly demonstrated, herein only 1% higher than in RT. However, concerning the higher level of specificity, in SB the basic level and subordinate categories display a more balanced ratio than in RT. This difference could be caused not only by the authors' style but also by the predominantly written form of Ashley's identity negotiation. The written channel of communication as compared to the spoken typically grants the language user more time for encoding and decoding and thus might allow for a higher level of specificity.

A diary entry extract follows:

*[SB 22] She [mother] brought some of her deaf kids home for tea this afternoon. After they have gone you said that good God, they even signed in a Mancunian accent. You thought it a good joke. Mum bridled and called you a snob. That was the first time the word was ever said openly. [...] And I came up and started to write this and ... ah. I've gone into **the first person**. I have said 'I'. (31)*

As in RT, the SB *Presentation* set displays the highest degree of accuracy (identically to RT 61% of accuracy loci), while containing the second lowest number of basic level categories, i.e. 11%. Similarly to RT, only one more set (*Accent*) displays a higher ratio of accuracy loci (57%) together with the lowest number of basic level categories (8%).

Concerning the LB results, it should be emphasised that the LB loci display a proportion of basic level categories similar to SB (13 and 11 loci, respectively), which is 50% lower than RT (24 loci). Moreover, in LB the basic level loci are more unevenly distributed than in the previous two discourses, since in three sets out of five only one basic level locus occurs,

which makes comparisons with RT and SB less statistically reliable. Nevertheless, this fact seems to be in accordance with the different styles of the discussed authors, the particular topics of their novels and the type of lexis they frequently employ.

As shown in the chart below (see Fig. 4), the distribution of accuracy (12%) and effectiveness (3%) within the basic level categories represents a highly significant result, given that *Presentation* and *Setting* are the only sets that display a higher proportion of *accuracy* loci and the overall ratio of accuracy vs. effectiveness loci is almost perfectly balanced (54% vs. 46%).

A possible explanation can be found in the uneven distribution of basic level loci within the individual sets. Since 77% of these loci occur in the *System* and *Setting* set that particularly focus on the description of physical objects, the high frequency of basic level categories that are accuracy-oriented is an expected result as is also demonstrated by the extract LB 69 below:

*[LB 69] He seemed to tread there for a moment, [...], in the archway that led from the outside world to the inner garden: Toby who was born to use the gateway, the loggia, the stairs without looking at them or thinking about them. (295)*

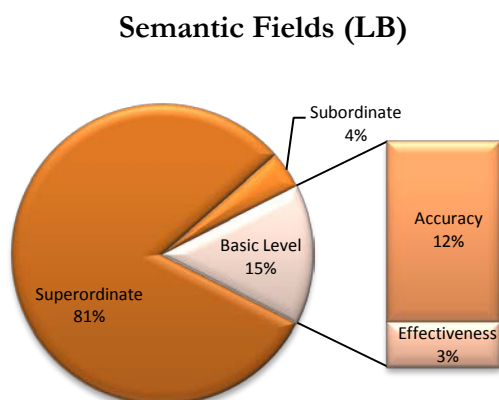


FIGURE 4: LB Semantic Fields – Proportion of Levels of Specificity

The dominance of *superordinate* categories is 10% higher than in RT and SB, resulting in a lower frequency of subordinate and basic level categories. Considering the SB proportion of levels of specificity (see Fig. 3 above), this result confirms the principle manifested in both RT and SB as it positively correlates with the significantly high proportion of external dialogue loci.

As was mentioned above, in SB the basic level and subordinate categories display a more balanced ratio than in RT, with the SB subordinate loci displaying the highest proportion in all three discourses. In the framework of my analysis, this difference might be caused by Ashley's (SB) predominant use of the written channel of communication that allows for higher specificity of expression (see extract SB 22 above).

Concerning the LB *levels of specificity*, we can observe the lowest subordinate and basic level loci proportion in the three analysed discourses. Moreover, the proportion of the external dialogue loci is considerably higher than in RT and SB. As the spoken communication allows the interlocutors a relatively shorter encoding and decoding time when compared to written communication, a higher degree of vagueness can be expected to occur. This is confirmed by the highest frequency of superordinate categories in LB and also by an average utterance length that is the shortest within the analysed discourses.

To continue the comparison of results from the three analysed discourses, in LB the *Presentation* set displays the highest degree of accuracy as in the previous two discourses (77% of accuracy loci as compared to 61% in RT and SB), while containing the lowest number of basic level categories, i.e. 6%. Similarly to RT and SB, only one more set (*Setting*) displays a higher ratio of accuracy loci (69%), however, the number of basic level categories is the second highest (19%).

## 7 Conclusions

In relation to the analysed semantic fields, the principle finding concerns the correlation between the frequency of the basic level category loci and the proportion of message accuracy. I indirectly hypothesised that in a semantically unmarked discourse, i.e. *identity* negotiation in the current framework, the occurrence of basic level category loci should positively correlate with the level of message accuracy (*cf. homo-/heterogeneity* above). Accuracy is represented by explicitness that also characterises the basic level categories.

However, in the light of the overall semantic results, a discrepancy between the degree of accuracy and the frequency of occurrence of basic level categories is manifested. This indirect proportion is caused by the contextual framework of *alterity* negotiation, which is manifested by *patent* accuracy at the sentence level and *latent* under- or over-specification at the lexical level (see Fig. 2, 3 and 4 on *Semantic Fields – Proportion of Levels of Specificity* above).

Thus it can be concluded that a significant proportion of the analysed messages manifests a tendency for *alterity* negotiation to be expressed in accordance with the principle of

*accuracy-effectiveness dynamism*. In terms of Leech's *process model of language* (1983, p. 59), these results indicate that *alterity* negotiation is expressed accurately at the level of discourse and messages, whereas at the textual level, the negotiation tends to be predominantly effective.

As regards the levels of specificity, based on the obtained results it can be concluded that the analysed data demonstrate a tendency to display higher levels of specificity (i.e. basic level and subordinate semantic categories) in the internal dialogue negotiation, whereas the external dialogue negotiation is more typically characterised by lower levels of specificity (i.e. superordinate semantic categories). A similar phenomenon is referred to by Urbanová (2003, p. 75) as the *manifestation of intentional illocutionary opacity in spoken discourse* (cf. Crystal & Davy, 1997, pp. 102-103).

The proposed hypothesis that identity and alterity negotiation is manifested by using different linguistic means is proven only indirectly. My expectations were based on the different psychological and linguistic characteristics of these two concepts. However, my hypothesis failed to incorporate the fact that such difference would be clearly discernible in its linguistic expression only under the condition that the producer considered it desirable to be disclosed to the recipient.

Since the successful (i.e. persuasive) negotiation of *alterity* is fundamentally contingent on its credibility as *identity*, the hypothesis has to be reformulated including this factor. Therefore, the conclusive version asserts that *identity* and *alterity* negotiation is manifested drawing on identical discrete syntactic and semantic means. However, their contextual use and their distributional patterns differ considerably in relation to the contrasting communicative intentions.

To summarise, within the framework of *alterity* negotiation the guiding principle of *accuracy-effectiveness dynamism* indicates semantic potentiality that is manifested dialectically, i.e. in such a manner as to make thorough use of the occurring contrasts. These contrasts are observable at three particular levels:

- at discourse level in the form of identity vs. alterity
- at message level in the form of paradigmatic relationships of affirmative vs. contrastive structure
- at textual level in the form of accuracy vs. effectiveness (syntactically) and in the form of basic level vs. super- or subordinate categories (lexically).

In order to maintain the validity of my analytical claims and to arrive at more universal conclusions, my data would have to be supported by more extensive research, particularly focusing on *identity negotiation* in direct interaction and spoken discourse. As my analysis is based on a single type of discourse, it is essential that the protagonists are not perceived as mere fictional characters but as sets of social personae that reflect the social attitudes, beliefs and projections of the authors and of the audiences for which they were created.

It is plausible to expect that a different analytical approach would have brought different phenomena to the forefront and offered alternative solutions. However, as Taylor asserts, “the making and sustaining of our identity [...] remains dialogical throughout our lives” (Taylor, 1991, p. 35). Thus identity can never be complete without the interpretation of others.

## 8 References

- Agha, A. (2007). *Language and social relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2008). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (17th print.). Holquist, M. (Ed.). Emerson, C. & Holquist, M. (Trans.). Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Braine, J. (1963). *Room at the top* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Colls, R. (2002). *The identity of England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coupland, N. (2003). Sociolinguistic authenticities. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7(3), 417-431.
- Cruse, A. (2004). *Meaning in language: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D., & Davy, D. (1997). *Investigating English style* (16<sup>th</sup> impr.). Harlow: Longman.
- Firbas, J. (1992). *Functional sentence perspective in written and spoken communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fowler, R. (1996). *Linguistic criticism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fox, K. (2005). *Watching the English: The hidden rules of English behaviour* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Frazier, L., & Rayner, K. (1990). Taking on semantic commitments: Processing multiple meanings vs. multiple senses. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 29, 181-200.
- Fry, S. (2001). *The stars' tennis balls*. London: Arrow Books.
- Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole, & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics, Vol. 3: Speech Acts* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academia Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1980). Modes of meaning and modes of expression: types of grammatical structure, and their determination by different semantic functions. In D. J. Allerton, E. Carney, & D. Holdcroft (Eds.), *Function and context in linguistic analysis* (pp. 57-79). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hastings, A. & Manning, P. (2004). Introduction: Acts of alterity. *Language and Communication*, 24(4), 291-311.
- Hollinghurst, A. (2004). *The line of beauty*. London: Picador.
- Holmes, J. (2001.) *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Harlow: Longman.
- Jakobson, R. (1960). Closing statement: Linguistics and poetics. In T. A. Sebeok (Ed.), *Style in language* (pp. 350-377). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press.
- Leech, G. N. & Short, M. H. (1981). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Lyons, J. (1996). *Linguistic semantics: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marková, I. (1997) Language and an epistemology of dialogism. In M. I. Stamenov (Ed.), *Language structure, discourse and the access to consciousness* (pp. 227-250). Amsterdam and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: John Benjamins.
- Martin, J. R. & Rose, D. (2003). *Working with discourse: Meaning beyond the clause*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Mathesius, V. (1982). *Jazyk, kultura a slovesnost*. Praha: Odeon.
- Mortimore, R. & Robinson, J. (2003) Changing social values [online]. <http://www.mori.com/mrr/2003/c030702.shtml>, accessed 12/1/2007.
- Paxman, J. (1999). *The English: A portrait of a people* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Penguin Books.
- Rosch, E. H. (1973). Natural categories. *Cognitive Psychology*, 4, 328-50.
- Rosch, E. H. (1978). Principles of categorisation. In E. H. Rosch, & B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Cognition and categorisation* (pp. 27-48). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Taylor, C. (1991). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.
- Urbanová, L. (2003). *On expressing meaning in English conversation: Semantic indeterminacy*. Brno: Masarykova Univerzita.
- Weber, M. (1995). The distribution of power: Class, status, party. In P. Joyce (Ed.), *Class* (pp. 31-40). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

**APPENDIX A: Overview of Semantic Fields in RT**

<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview – System Set (A/E ratio 16:17)</b>				
<b>HIERARCHY</b>	<b>MEMBERSHIP</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>TENDENCY</b>	<b>STATUS SYMBOL</b>
2x CLASS*	CLUB	PLACE	FAULTS	DRESSING GOWN
2x POWER	KINSHIP	POSITION	INSTINCT	SHIRT
3x GRADE	PROTOCOL	WORLD		COFFEE
OWNERSHIP	GAME			PRICE
LABOUR	KEY			2x SUIT
SHOPKEEPER				UNIFORM
2x LEVEL				
2x INCOME GROUP				
ROYALTY				
RIGHT*				
<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - Presentation Set (A/E ratio 14:9)</b>				
<b>BODY</b>	<b>PERSONALITY</b>	<b>ROLE</b>	<b>POSITION</b>	
HAIR	PART	LODGER	POSITION	
SKIN	TYPE	LOVER*	POWER	
CLOTHES	MENTALITY	OLDER*	TOWN HALL*	
FACE		MINOR*	LEGACY	
FACE		JACK WALES*	HABITS*	
PERSON		NAME*	BARRIER	
MODEL				
GRIMACE*				
<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview – Setting Set (A/E ratio 9:11)</b>				
<b>TOPOGRAPHY</b>	<b>BUILDING</b>	<b>ATTIRE</b>	<b>BORDER</b>	
TOP	2X ROOM	2x SUIT	PASSPORT	
AVENUE	BATHROOM	EVENING-SUIT	TASTE	
LANGDON	DRAWING ROOM			
ROAD*	KITCHEN			
HILL*	3X HOUSE			
WORLD	PIECES			
<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - Origin set (A/E ratio 7:6)</b>				
<b>ABILITY</b>	<b>FAMILY</b>	<b>TOPOGRAPHY</b>	<b>MEMBERSHIP</b>	
CHARM	HOME	2X DUFTON	INTELLIGENT PEOPLE	
INTUITION	BIRTH	WARLEY	CIVILIZED PEOPLE*	
MIND	PLACE			
	FATHER*			
	WORKING-CLASS*			
<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - Accent Set (A/E ratio 5:8)</b>				
<b>PRONUNCIATION</b>		<b>LANGUAGE</b>		
4x ACCENT**		WORDS		
LANGUAGE		LOVE		
2X ACCENT*		TEA		
VOICE				
STANDARD ENGLISH				
'A'				

**APPENDIX B: Overview of Semantic Fields in SB**

<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview – Presentation Set (A/E ratio 17:11)</b>			
<b>BODY</b>	<b>PERSONALITY</b>	<b>ROLE</b>	<b>ATTRIBUTE</b>
FEATURES	SOUL	2X RESEARCHER**	PERSON
HAND*	CONFIDENCE	MAN	IDENTITY
HEART	OPPOSITE*	POWER*	SENILE LABILITY
	INTUITION	SERVANT	VICTORY
	PRUDE	OPRAH	ASHLEY
	ANGER*	PERFORMER	THEM
	TOP DRAWER*		KNIVES
	SERIOUSNESS		ASHLEY
			QUALITY
			NAME
<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - Origin Set (A/E ratio 5:7)</b>			
<b>ATTRIBUTE</b>	<b>FAMILY</b>	<b>TOPOGRAPHY</b>	
OIK	2x MOTHER*	MOVE	
CURRENCY	PARENTS	'SHIRE'*	
PIN STRIPES	2X MISTAKE		
HAT*	CLASS		
<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview – System Set (A/E ratio 4:8)</b>			
<b>HIERARCHY</b>	<b>TENDENCY</b>	<b>STATUS SYMBOL</b>	
STATUS	MANNERS	SUIT*	
SEATS*	TASTE		
'POSH'			
3X NAME			
LOOKS			
WORLD			
MAJORITY			
<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview – Setting Set (A/E ratio 2:7)</b>			
<b>ATTRIBUTE</b>	<b>ATTIRE</b>	<b>BUILDING</b>	
SYMBOLS	HEAD	QUADRANGLE	
NAME	2x UNIFORM*		
HAT	SKIN		
	CLASS		
<b>SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview – Accent Set (A/E ratio 4:3)</b>			
<b>PRONUNCIATION</b>		<b>LANGUAGE</b>	
EMPHASIS		DELIVERY	
'FROTHING'*		PLACE	
INTONATION*		MUD	
		VESPERTINE*	



**APPENDIX C: Overview of Semantic Fields in LB**

SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - System Set (A/E ratio 14:14)				
HIERARCHY	MEMBERSHIP	LOCATION	TENDENCY	STATUS SYMBOL
ARISTOCRACY*	MEMBER*	DISPLACEMENT	EXPECTATIONS*	PRICE
GROCER*	KEYHOLDER	VIEW	INSTINCT*	SUITS
PARASITES*	THEM*	GATEWAY	BENEVOLENCE*	MONEY
	ALIENATION	PARK*	SMILE*	'PRICES'
	FRIENDS	CHAIR*	RELIEF	SUIT
	SORT*	CASTLE*		WEALTH
	ROUTINE	PLACE x		
SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - Setting Set (A/E ratio 11:5)				
TOPOGRAPHY	BUILDING	ATTITUDE		
NAME	2X ROOM	SUBMISSION		
	HABITAT	PRESUMPTION		
	KEYHOLDER	NEGLIGENCE*		
	BUTLER			
	2X HOUSE			
	KEY			
	CHILDREN*			
	CAR			
	FURNITURE			
	STILL LIFE			
SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - Origin Set (A/E ratio 5:8)				
ATTITUDE	FAMILY	ROLE		
CONFIDENCE*	HOME	SON*		
FEELING*	HOUSEHOLD	LODGER*		
BOASTS*	ROOM*	STAIN		
	ANTICLIMAX	TWIT		
	BACKGROUND*	FIGURE		
SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - Presentation Set (A/E ratio 13:4)				
PERSONALITY	ROLE	POSITION		
STANDARDS	LODGER	WORLD x		
THROB	OUTSIDER	COINAGE		
SHOCK	BOY	FRIENDS*		
	PUZZLE	NAME		
	AESTHETE			
	WHATSIT			
	WE *			
	ELEMENT			
	PART*			
	AESTHETE*			
SEMANTIC FIELDS Overview - Accent Set (A/E ratio 2:8)				
PRONUNCIATION	LANGUAGE			
PRONUNCIATION*	IMPLICATION			
BURBLE	STYLE*			
IMITATION*	ECONOMY*			
SOUND*	AGREEMENTS*			
VOWELS				
ASSENTS*				