TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

“POINT OF VIEW AND NARRATOR’S CONTROL IN AGATHA CHRISTIE’S THE CHOCOLATE BOX: A STYLISTICS APPROACH”

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GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Curso Académico 2016-2017
Fecha de presentación: Convocatoria de septiembre de 2017

FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
Index

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 3
Resumen .......................................................................................................................... 3
1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 4
2. Stylistics ....................................................................................................................... 6
   2.1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 6
   2.2. Novels and Point of View .................................................................................. 8
   2.3. Discourse Presentation and Categories .............................................................. 10
3. Agatha Christie ........................................................................................................... 14
   3.1. Short Biography .................................................................................................. 14
   3.2. Detective Novels ................................................................................................. 15
   3.3. Writing Style ....................................................................................................... 17
4. Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 20
   4.1. The Chocolate Box ............................................................................................. 20
   4.2. Corpus Annotation .............................................................................................. 22
       4.2.1. Data and Overall Interpretation .................................................................... 22
   4.3. Corpus Analysis .................................................................................................. 24
       4.3.1. Data Discussion ........................................................................................... 24
       4.3.2. Hercules Poirot ........................................................................................... 29
       4.3.3. Uncovered “Clues” .................................................................................... 31
5. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 33
6. Bibliography ............................................................................................................... 36
7. Appendix ..................................................................................................................... 39
   7.1. Appendix I: Color label system for each category .............................................. 39
   7.2. Appendix II: ‘The Chocolate Box’ – Annotated Corpus .................................... 40
Abstract

Stylistics deals with the analysis of style in language and how the study of linguistic choices in a text contributes to its interpretation (Short 1996, Toolan 1998, Simpson 2004, Jeffries & McIntyre 2010). This project includes a stylistics analysis of the short story *The Chocolate Box* (Christie, 1974) which depicts Agatha Christie’s most famous detective Hercules Poirot. The corpus was selected on the grounds that it has not previously been analyzed from a stylistics viewpoint and that it is the only story in which Poirot fails to uncover the culprit. The project aims at achieving a better understanding of the role of each character in the detective story and how the reader is deceived so as not to uncover the murderer until the end of the story. The analysis will be based on the speech and thought presentation framework (Short 1996, Simpson 2004) and applied to each of the characters in the story, bearing in mind the narrator’s control over them. The differences of point of view in the corpus will be the key to discover the way in which the narrator presents his relationship with the characters as well as the level of control in their interactions.

Key words: Stylistics, Speech and thought presentation, Agatha Christie, Short story, The chocolate box.

Resumen

La estilística se encarga de analizar el estilo en el lenguaje y de cómo el estudio de las elecciones lingüísticas en un texto contribuye a su interpretación (Short 1996, Toolan 1998, Simpson 2004, Jeffries & McIntyre 2010). Este proyecto incluye un análisis estilístico de la historia corta *La caja de bombones* (Christie, 1974), que representa al detective más famoso de Agatha Christie, Hercules Poirot. El corpus se seleccionó sobre la base de que no ha sido previamente analizado desde un punto de vista estilístico y que es la única historia en la que Poirot no logra descubrir al culpable. El proyecto tiene como objetivo lograr una mejor comprensión del papel de cada personaje en la historia de detectives y cómo se engaña al lector para no descubrir al asesino hasta el final de la historia. El análisis se basará en el marco de la presentación del habla y el pensamiento (Short 1996, Simpson 2004) y se aplicará a cada uno de los personajes de la historia, teniendo en cuenta el control del narrador sobre ellos. Las diferencias de punto de vista en el corpus serán la clave para encontrar de qué manera el narrador presenta su relación con los personajes, así como el nivel de control en sus interacciones.

Palabras Clave: Estilística, Categorías de representación del discurso y pensamiento, Agatha Christie, Historia corta, La caja de bombones.
1. Introduction

This project is entitled “Point of view and narrator’s control in Agatha Christie’s “The Chocolate Box”: A stylistics approach”. Framed in the area of stylistics, the project includes an analysis of the characters in Agatha Christie’s short story The Chocolate Box. In particular, it explores the narrator’s control and the representation of the characters’ speech and thought (Short 1996, Simpson 2004, Jeffries & McIntyre 2010) as to uncover how the detective story is developed.

Style in language reveals how every author has his or her own individual characteristics that distinguish him or her from other writers and stylistics is in charge of analyzing these changes of style. This sub-discipline of linguistics begins in the formalist school of literary criticism that emerged in Russia in the early years of the twentieth century. The aim of the movement was to explain that the purpose of all art was to defamiliarise the familiar (‘defamiliarisation’) in order to change the perspective a reader has of a piece of work, including literature. Russian formalism’s impact in the development of stylistics was of an immense importance and its influence can be particularly seen in the concept of ‘foregrounding’ which stylisticians use (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010).

Writers have their own way of presenting the speeches and/or thoughts of their characters so readers are subject of their manipulation. They do it, for example, by using different types of narrators that can reveal different points of view depending on the story. So the analysis aims at uncovering how choosing a specific speech and thought presentation category can determine the reader’s interpretation of the story and the narrator’s control on it as well.

This project studies Agatha Christie’s work since the detective novels she wrote are rich on characterization with a wide variety of discourse interactions. The corpus object of study is called “The Chocolate Box” which was included in her short stories collection Poirot’s Early Cases (1974) and its selection results from the fact that this is the only story in which the protagonist, Hercules Poirot, has failed to find the culprit in a murder case. This corpus will be tagged according to the categories of speech and thought presentation as it has never been analyzed from a stylistics viewpoint.
The theoretical framework is ‘speech and though presentation’ (Mick Short 1996, Michael Toolan 1998, Paul Simpson 2004 or Jeffries and McIntyre 2010), and also, we have likewise considered the evolution of detective fiction and the author’s style as included in Peter Hühn (1987), Charles Osborne (1999) or M.G. Alexander (2006).

The project starts with an introduction to the area of stylistics where we will discuss its definition and key concepts like the term ‘foregrounding’ and how it is a field related to linguistics; the different viewpoints a literary text has depending on the type of narrator and the categories of speech and thought presentation we could find in the corpus.

After that, Agatha Christie’s life is presented in a short biography pointing at milestones in her life and some of her recognitions, her narration style and its relation and its relation with middle-class, the origin of Hercules Poirot and the writing style that represents her from her lexical choices to her love for dialogues.

Then, we will analyze Agatha Christie’s short story The Chocolate Box in detail: there is a summary of the story first so we know its development and also the data which reveals the categories of speech and/or thought presentation. These categories will be explained in relation to the narrator’s control and characters and we will discuss the main characters’ discourse interactions and their role as narrator as well as the relevance of the clues located in the story.

And finally, the conclusion of the project includes what we learnt about the characters and their roles in the story, the results obtained in relation to the narrator’s control with the categories of discourse presentation in the analysis, and the future studies it could have.

The main research questions thus are how the narrator’s control and the representation of speech and thought determine characterization in The Chocolate Box and the resulting manipulation the reader is exposed.
2. **Stylistics**

2.1. **Introduction**

This section is devoted to define the area of study, stylistics, as well as the theoretical framework we will use in the final analysis, speech and thought presentation (Short 1996, Toolan 1998, Simpson 2004, Jeffries & McIntyre 2010).

Stylistics is a sub-discipline of linguistics which it is concerned with the analysis of the style in language and how it can vary according to the individual style that distinguishes one writer to another, the style associated with particular genres or the characteristics of what could correspond to ‘literary style’ (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010).

To be precise, when we are given an example such as “he had a heart of gold”, obviously we know there is more than it seems because a heart cannot be made of gold and that is why, after deducting that what the line says is not literally true, we can formulate a non-literal interpretation. So stylistics is thus “concerned with relating linguistics facts (linguistic description) to meaning (interpretation) in as explicit a way as possible” (Short, 1996, p.5). Their relationship should be discussed as systematically and in as detailed way as possible because it is not only concerned with discovering what a text means but also how that text comes to represent that exact meaning.

This field runs parallel to linguistics due to its use of models of language, analytical techniques and methodologies from linguistics that facilitates the study of style. It also applies linguistic description to the interpretation of literary and non-literary texts. The relationship of both the writer and these texts, and then the text and its readers, stress the idea of taking the text as its main concern so its interpretation depends on, for instance, the lexical choices the writer does (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010).

There is a characteristic phenomenon in stylistics analysis called *linguistic deviation* that has an important psychological effect on readers. If a part of a short text is deviant, it becomes especially noticeable so this effect is known as foregrounding. The term is borrowed from art criticism so let us examine it in this illustration below:
The foregrounding area is the part of a painting situated at the centre and towards the bottom. It is regarded as the most important because, in relation to the rest of objects of the painting, that part constitutes the subject matter of it. Without a doubt, the background of the picture also contributes to the whole but the foreground possesses the real significance. If we export this to a text then it could be presented as follows:

In language the background is what is linguistically normal – the rules, norms and expectations which we associate with a particular kind of speaking or writing; the foreground is, in large part, the portions of text which do not conform to these expectations. Foregrounding is thus produced as a result of deviation from linguistic norms of various kinds.

Short, 1996, p. 12

Some methods that writers can use in their texts of foregrounding can be repetition such as “O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon” in John Milton’s ‘Samson Agonistes’ (Paradise Regain’d, 1671) or parallelism in “love is more thicker than forget/ more thinner than recall” in E.E. Cummings’ “love is more thicker than forget]’ (Complete Poems, 1904-1962).

The author is the one who chooses what is actually relevant in his work, as Short (1996) says, “foregrounded features are the parts of the texts which the author, consciously or unconsciously, is signaling as crucial to our understanding of what he has written” (p.36). For example, in relation to the author object of study in this project, Agatha Christie, it is likely that foregrounded devices were used to present the moment in which the detective finds the final clue to resolve the case.
2.2. Novels and Point of View

Now we will discuss the different viewpoints a literary text could have and how this affects the story depending on the narrator found. There are texts (fictional and non-fictional) that are particularly rich to analyze from a stylistic point of view due to its variety of perspectives and events. A novel might be one of the most complex texts to analyze from a stylistic point of view as they are long and have a lot of characters so in their discourse structure we will find more interconnections and different discourse representation.

The fictional world of novels lead us to contemplate from which perspective the same event is described as it is not the same to have a tennis match described by a player or by a spectator. This helps consider an important distinction between non-fictional and fictional writing:

With non-fiction, we can perceive things for ourselves and then compare with the descriptions of others. In fiction, the events and conditions of the fictional world are always construed by the reader from the description itself and cannot be independently verified.

Short, 1996, p.256

The distinction designates the reader as the one who interprets the message of the narrator although the description of events changes in both writings. However, it will be useful to understand how viewpoint works in novels. In terms of discourse structure, a novel has at least three levels, which are represented in this graph below:

Graph II: Discourse Structure of Fictional Prose

```
Addresser 1  Message  Addressee 1
    (Novelist)         (Reader)
     |                |
     |                |
Addresser 2  Message  Addressee 2
    (Narrator)         (Narratee)
     |                |
     |                |
Addresser 3  Message  Addressee 3
    (Character A)       (Character B)
```

Source: Short, 1996, p.257
The representation of this discourse structure only refers to a novel in general because “any particular novel may neutralize some of the distinctions, multiply others, or do both at the same time” (Short, 1996, p.257). For example, in Charlotte Brontë’s novel Jane Eyre there is an overlap between levels 2 and 3 because she is narrator but at the same time character (Short, 1996, p. 260). To have six participants in its basic discourse structure involves that there are more viewpoints to take into account than in any other genre so we observe all the interconnections it has.

Between levels 1 and 3 there is a level that involves a narrator and depending on whether the person who tells the story may also be a character itself or not, we will distinguish between a first-person narrator and a third-person narrator. According to Short (1996) the first type, also called I-narrator since it uses the first-person pronoun ‘I’, alludes to those cases in which he or she refers to himself or herself, and represents all the events as if they were happening for the first time although they are looking back on them. This makes the I-narrator to be limited or unreliable. In this regard, we should point out that this situation often happens in murder stories so we will later relate to this in our analysis. In fact, as an example, Short (1996, p. 258) selects the author object of study in this project Agatha Christie’s novel *The murder of Roger Ackroyd* because the murderer is a vicar but also because he is narrating the story. When this happens, it can be seen how the narrator level could clash with the character level as the narration is in first-person.

Also for Short (1996), the second type of narrator is the dominant one as most narrations are in third-person. In the fictional world he or she is not a character so the other characters will be addressed with the third-person pronouns ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘it’ or ‘they’. A type of narration in which readers might assume third-person narrators could be the author, although there is no necessary reason for that to be the case, so they are much more omniscient. Therefore, “when a third-person narrator is limited or unreliable the effect is very heavily foregrounded” (Short, 1996, p.259) due to its capacity of highlighting the different parts of a text we could understand being more relevant, such as asking questions to create mystery and suspense, could be interpreted as knowledge limitation of the story.

Another division in the narrators scale establishes that the third-person narrator is situated outside of the story and for this reason the narration is ‘heterodiegetic’. And in the
case of the first-person narrator, the events are narrated internally so it is ‘homodiegetic’ (Simpson, 2004).

The viewpoint in a novel is related to all the general discourse relations in it and can be manipulated by “small-scale linguistic choices on the part of the author” (Short, 1996, p.263). There are different means such as schema-oriented language (when a doctor explains the illness using the specific vocabulary), value-laden expressions (when in the phrase “She went to the sordid, crowded market to buy some vegetables”, the description of the market is from her viewpoint), given and new information (between the sentences “I took a train yesterday” and “I took the train yesterday”, the speaker refers to something you do not know (“a”) or that you already know (“the”)), deixis (the use of here or there depending on the speaker’s viewpoint), ideological viewpoint (a general mind-set on the world)… etc

All the discourse relations we find in a novel are related to the categories we will analyze of speech and thought presentation as their use will explain how a narrator introduces the discourse of different characters in the narration.

2.3. Discourse Presentation and Categories

This section embraces one aspect of narratives that have received a lot of attention from stylisticians and it will be later applied to the analysis of the characters in the short story object of study: “the presentation by a narrator of others’ words or of their thoughts” (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010, p.87).

The study of speech and thought presentation started with the fully analytical approach made by Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short in their book *Style in Fiction* (1981). They separated two parallel scales of discourse presentation: speech and thought but, since their revision of the model in 2007, other academics have contributed to this framework such as Semino & Short (2004) or Jeffries & McIntyre (2010), for example, as writing was presented in the scale, although we will not include it in the analysis later on. Now it has become simpler to label it as ‘discourse presentation’ which “covers both written and spoken language and also the thoughts that are sometimes presented by narrators as though they were witnessed directly” (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010, p.87). Therefore, characters have their
thoughts and words (written and spoken) introduced by a narrator (homodiegetic/heterodiegetic) that the author creates.

In a novel, the author is the only one who has access to a character’s words which implies that veracity cannot be checked. This situation helps to explain why linguists looking at fictional discourse tend to talk of speech ‘presentation’ as, for instance, Short (1996) and Jeffries & McIntyre (2010), while those looking at non-fictional discourse tend to talk of speech ‘representation’ such as Simpson (2004) and Toolan (1998), for example.

Speech presentation in a literary text can represent a variety of categories that have a correspondence with thought presentation although the meanings and effects are different. We observe that these categories could be collocated in a scale due to their features reveal how close or far they are from the narrator’s control in the narration. This is important because if the author chooses to select a category instead of another, it will determine the relevance of that piece of speech in relation to its interpretation in the corpus. Therefore, we will present which are the categories in the next graph:

Graph III: Categories of Speech and Thought Presentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>+ Narrator’s control</th>
<th>- Narrator’s control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>NRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NRSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought</td>
<td>NRT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This list of categories is located with its partner, that is, the first line of speech categories have its counterpart in the next line but this time of thought categories; and it shows where the narrator’s control is stronger and where is not: “the narrator’s degree of control or influence over the representation of the utterance or thought is greatest for those categories at the left-hand side of the table, and gradually diminishes with each step to the right” (Bray 2014, p. 223). And also we have to take into account that characters are influenced by this scale as the narrator’s degree of control will be proportional to the control’s degree a character has in the narration.
One of the purposes of narratives is “to represent actions, perceptions, events and states which occur in the world of the fiction” (Short, 1996, p. 292) so there is no speech presented at all. That category is not located in the scale because of that but it possesses importance as a non-speech phenomena. It is called Narrator’s Representation of Action (NRA) and an example could be: “Carla took the train to Manchester”.

Now we will discuss each category in detail starting from the categories of speech presentation with own examples that illustrate the change from one to another. The first category is called Narrator’s Representation of Speech (NRS):

(1) He shouted at him.

We can observe that the discourse merely tells us that speech has occurred but it really does not specify what was said. In the next category the speech act is performed but now there are some indications of the topic of the talk as it can be seen in the example:

(2) He rejected his proposal.

This category is called Narrator’s Representation of Speech Acts (NRSA). Both categories possess a strong narrator’s control as it can be seen in graph III because we know characters have talked thanks to what the narrator wants to reveal. In addition to those first categories situated at the beginning of the speech presentation line, we have a category “where characters speak directly for themselves, without being filtered through the narrator” (Short, 1996, p.299). It is called Direct Speech (DS) and it could be seen as the ‘baseline’ form because often categories are measured by it:

(3) “I do not enjoy playing tennis with you now!” he exclaimed.

We can observe that in this speech category there is a reported clause, which explains what was said with exactly the words of the character between quotation marks, and a reporting clause which just tells us who did the reporting (Simpson, 2004). In the case of Toolan (1998), he named the reported clause as ‘dependent clause’ and the reporting clause as ‘matrix clause’. In this category, the character’s control is quite high as it is located at the right-hand of the scale but if we take its example (3) and change its markers of time, place and social relations, we will then encounter the coming category, Indirect Speech (IS):

(4) He exclaimed that he did not enjoy playing tennis with us then.
It can be seen that from DS, we have removed the quotation marks, the reported and reporting clause are now become one and their order is the opposite. Also inside the reported clause there have been some deictic shifts such as “I/he”, “you/us” and “now/then”. This category has a higher narrator control than DS as well. Between these two, there is another category that includes different DS and IS features, making often complicated to attribute which words are from the character and which belongs to the narrator, called Free Indirect Speech (FIS):

(5) He did not enjoy playing tennis with them now!.

We can observe it is “a category that indicates a move towards narrator control and narrator viewpoint (Short, 1996, pp. 306-307) and in contrast, there is a category called Free Direct Speech (FDS), located at the right-hand of the scale, which is even freer than DS when it comes to let the characters say their words directly so their control is total in the narration:

(6) “I don’t enjoy playing tennis with you now!”

Now it is the turn for the categories used by an author to represent the thoughts of their characters. They are presented in the second line of graph III and their order is the same as the speech categories just with some changes in their meanings. These are some examples that illustrate them:

(7) He was thinking all day (Narrator’s Representation of Thought [NRT]).

(8) He wondered about her absent (Narrator’s Representation of Thought Acts [NRTA]).

(9) “Why is Lauren not coming today?” (Free Direct Thought [FDT]).

(10) “Why is Lauren not coming today?”, he asked (Direct Thought [DT]).

(11) Why was not Lauren coming yesterday? (Free Indirect Thought [FIT]).

(12) He asked why Lauren was not coming yesterday (Indirect Thought [IT]).

We can observe the evolution in the last four categories as they have deictic shifts and changes in the use of quotation marks and reporting clauses just like in speech presentation but this time related to the thoughts exposed in the narration. The degree of narrator and character’s control is presented as in the scale too.
All those categories of speech and thought presentation helped stylisticians to investigate properly the effects when changing the viewpoint in the narration as well as how the words and thoughts of a character/narrator were maintaining their original purpose when having shifts in the development of a story (Bray, 2014, p. 222).

3. Agatha Christie

3.1. Short Biography

What can I say at seventy-five? Thank God for my good life, and for all the love that has been given to me. – Christie, 1977, p. 342.

Born in 1890, Agatha Christie was the youngest child of Frederick and Clara Miller and was educated mostly by private tutors. In 1914 she married Archie Christie and, as the First World War was started, she served like a voluntary nurse and later an apothecary. This job acknowledged her expertise with poisons, which she would use in some of her novels as a method to commit murder. That’s the case of her first novel The Mysterious Affair at Styles, published in 1921, where her well described murderer’s use of poison was remarkable. In this novel, we observe the first appearance of one of her most acclaimed characters and the one we are going to study in the analysis of this project: Hercules Poirot (Kastan, 2006, p. 466). Christie did not based the creation of this character on any particular person but, during the First World War, she saw a lot of Belgian refugees which led her to think that one of them, a former Belgian policeman, could be an exceptional detective. So Poirot was born.

Her instant success and the happiness that brought the birth of her only daughter Rosalind were shattered after her mother’s death and the struggle of being often alone at home trying to continue writing. This affected the relationship with her husband and they divorced in 1928. Later, she married an archaeologist, Max Mallowan, in 1930 who she met in one of her travels to an archaeological site in Baghdad (Kastan, 2006).

During the Second World War, she again volunteered into the auxiliary nursing corps as an apothecary in London and Max stayed in Cairo helping with his language skills. Even during this period of time she continued to publish new books. After the war, her career rose
from its lethargy, with Christie publishing successfully almost until her death (Bunson, 2000). In 1955, the Mystery Writers of America gave her the most prestigious award in the field of crime writing, the Grand Master Award, being the first author to receive it.

She died in 1976 at the age of eighty-five. During her long and prolific literary life she wrote sixty-six detective novels, fourteen short story collections, over twenty plays and other fiction (Bunson, 2000, p. 5). Also she has the record for the world’s longest-running play *The Mousetrap*. According to the UNESCO\(^1\) statistics, Christie is the most translated author in the world being placed first among the top fifty writers. Her works have been translated into approximately fifty-six languages. Thanks to this, it is normal to say how she maintains her nickname as the ‘Queen of Crime’.

### 3.2. Detective Novels

This seems to have taken me a long way from detective stories, but explains, perhaps, why I have got more interest in my victims than my criminals. The more passionately alive the victim, the more glorious indignation I have on his behalf, and I am full of a delighted triumph when I have delivered a near-victim out of the valley of the shadow of death. Returning – Christie, 1977, p. 247.

The literary genre that made Agatha Christie the famous author everyone knows nowadays is crime fiction, and as a subgenre, we discover her specialty, detective fiction. It was during the First World War that she turned to writing detective stories and it was partly in response to a bet from her sister that she could not write a good detective story and to relieve the monotony of her life at that moment as well. The most every day events and casual observations could trigger the idea for a new plot so Christie made endless notes in dozens of notebooks, writing down unfinished ideas and potential plots and characters. She spent the majority of time revising all the plot details and clues in her head on those notebooks before actually starting writing.

Her work is constantly associated with the English middle class; in fact, Christie is considered to be a middle class author writing for a middle class audience as she selected to employ a lot of different characters and situations that were closely related to her audience. This gave her plenty of readers that enjoyed her stories for pleasure. We can observe these ties in the characters of her two most famous detectives: Hercules Poirot (Murder on the Orient Express (1934), The A.B.C Murders (1936), Appointment with death (1938) or Five Little Pigs (1942) among others) and Miss Jane Marple (The Body in the Library (1942), A Murder is Announced (1950), 4.50 from Paddington (1957) or Nemesis (1971) among others).

During the Golden age of detective stories, a period between the two world wars (1920s and 1930s) detective fiction saw its peak, “she became a famous writer mainly thanks to Hercules Poirot” (Bargainnier, 1980, p.4). As we said before, he appeared in her first novel, The Mysterious Affair at Styles, and stayed with her for the rest of her literary career.

Poirot was not the typical representative of the upper class; unlike Sherlock Holmes, one of the first well-know detectives in Britain, he appeared as a hero from the British middle class that had arisen after the First World War. The rise of this new class made the old upper class of Sherlock obsolete so the middle class wanted a brand new detective who would suit it better. Then “by ridiculing Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie gave the British audience its own middle class detective” (Stix, 2010, p.11).

Although she created other detectives during her career such as Mr Quinn, Tommy and Tuppence… among others, Miss Marple, and especially Poirot, occupied the majority of Christie’s work as it can be seen in the amount of novels: she wrote forty-five books, including short story collections, about him.

Detective fiction was full of allusions to different social and cultural dimensions that allowed seeing the real economic structures people from the middle class had. Not only these dimensions but also the characteristics of the criminal justice system influenced them and revealed to be shown thanks to different facets of stylistics:

As a genre of popular fiction, detective fiction lends itself to the teaching of many aspects of stylistics; for example, genre, narrative structure, point of view and characterization. Through the use of these various stylistic features, provides insight into the social, cultural and psychological dimensions of public institutions, most notably, the law and the criminal justice system and the underlying social class and economic structures which support it.
The process of narration in Agatha Christie’s novels is characterized by two features (Hühn, 1987): a classical detective novel typically consists in reconstructing a hidden or past story (normally, the crime) and the process of reconstruction (that is, the investigation) which is usually hidden as well so the reader solves the mystery step by step, and also, the different social effects the concealment or announcement of this story would have so the novels are marked by growing doubts of telling the story.

Therefore, the development of these novels reflects a certain plot which, as we have said, comprises two stories -the crime and the investigation- and both are intertwined. We observe how this happens as Hühn (1987) states that “the story of the crime is mediated in the discourse of the detective’s investigation and the story of that investigation, in its turn, is mediated in the narrator’s discourse” (p. 452). For instance, when in Christie’s novels Hastings informs us about how Poirot’s investigation is progressing. In both cases, the story is hidden so the reader is doubly puzzled and we perceive Christie’s high significance of plots as we will appreciate in her writing style.

3.3. Writing Style

Plots come to me at such odd moments, when I am walking along the street, or examining a hat shop suddenly a splendid idea come into my head – Christie, 1977, p. 129.

Being one of the most acclaimed authors in this field requires that your abilities have to be extremely effective at the development of a plot so the story can impress the most demanding reader. In this section, we will pay attention to Christie’s writing style starting from her use of narrators, the significant plots, her lexical choices and, finally, how dialogues are especially noticeable in her works, according to Alexander (2006) and Stix (2010) among others. These methods she uses are what make her such a great writer:

[…] the evaporating ice-darts or any of the other paraphernalia used by some of the earlier crime writers are of no great interest to Agatha Christie. Her tricks are sometimes verbal, sometimes visual. If you listen carefully and watch her all the time, you may catch Mrs Christie, but it is highly unlikely that you will. The solution which she has somehow persuaded you quite early in the narrative is not the correct one very frequently is […].
First and foremost, her style remained nearly the same throughout her literary career but there were only some slight changes in the narrator’s voice. The evolution in the middle class stratum helped maintaining a good development in this area so the narrator chosen was ultimately the third-person that gives the reader an insight only as much as the detective was able to. Christie cannot be considered the narrator of her novels although “where it might appear she is the narrator, what it is actually the case is that the levels of author and narrator on Short’s (1996) discourse structure diagram collapse” (McIntyre, 2006, p.32) but actually this does not happen because there is a minor character (Hastings) almost always narrating a main character’s story (Poirot).

Christie’s trademark of plot style involved a murder case where it is supposedly impossible for anyone to have entered or left the scene. It takes place often in some sort of sealed area and the list of suspects is considerably short. However the real skill was that she provided a situation where there is no obvious way in which the murder was committed so the readers are manipulated through the information presented of who is the killer and how it was done. These pieces of information or clues are made to maintain the reader in the dark until the detective obtains the essential one that is why readers enjoy the pleasure of finally knowing the truth (Alexander, 2006).

It is clear that these novels deceive the reader by the way the clues are exposed, sometimes misleading and with a precise intent in others, and they are expressed, according to Alexander (2006, p. 12), by linguistic and psycholinguistic means which happen to be necessary elements because deceiving a reader solely through bare events is quite difficult.

There were rigid structures during the 1920s and 1930s regarding the conventions of the genre that created rules with particular views of it, highly valid at that time. S.S. Van Dine, a mystery writer, created a list called Twenty rules for writing detective stories published in the American Magazine of September 1928 where he presented the methods of manipulation allowed by this genre itself. Although these rules are made to be broken, Christie followed them in general but not exactly Van Dine’s exposition of them. For example, the rule sixteen\(^2\) is certainly used by her as it supports that “in Christie’s fiction prose, characterization and

events are fully subjugated towards the requirements of a complex, unfolding plot” (Alexander, 2006, p.8).

Her novels and short stories reflect her change in lexical choice, closely interconnected with the settings. Christie situated them in the British upper-middle class after she became an established author, a fact which affected the vocabulary she used. In the case of his character Hercules Poirot, his wide range of interactions allowed him to learn and understand better without losing his French essence. Even her narrators tend to use words associated with that strata as it represents the general educated Englishman who employs lots of long words and a broad vocabulary list. Another factor that influenced Christie’s lexical choice was the age of those narrators. The main characters of her novels are usually young people because she was really obsessed with youth in general. This situation made her include the language used by her young contemporaries so her dialogues could be plausible. Old people appeared but only as detectives, doctors or various experts (Stix, 2010).

Moreover, Christie was very fond of dialogues. Her novels do not have uninterrupted descriptive passages instead they are full of dialogues and at the end, there is usually a monologue in which the detective resolves the case and catches the killer. She selects and places the clues so the reader is in the dark until the detective starts leading the way. Then, her writing style contains a lot of proofs of her manipulated skills so it is assumed that in detective fiction: “an author must provide a path to the eventual solution while simultaneously concealing it” (Alexander, 2006, p. 12).

Some examples of studies related to Agatha Christie’s style could be an analysis of her use of the English –ing form compared with other British authors like J.K. Rowling to establish their stylistics typological distances: “certain frequencies of the –ing forms show certain concrete manifestations of the tendencies of thinking of an author” (Tambovtsev, 2003, p. 248). And also the analysis of gender roles in the characterization style of Christie’s characters, Hercules Poirot and Miss Marple, using five novels of each one as the corpora:

The initial hypothesis is that these two characters would reflect the traditional characteristics usually associated to being a man and to being a woman. That is to say, the expected result of an examination of these characters’ characterization would be that the two detectives’ success in solving mysteries is closely connected to capacities usually associated to gender roles.

Porto, 2015, p. 2.
After all this discussion, we will start with the analysis of Christie’s short story “The Chocolate Box” (1974), discussing all the data and explaining how the interpretation of the corpus is related to the narrator’s control and characters as well as the manipulation events we can find on it.

4. Analysis

4.1. The Chocolate Box

*The Chocolate Box* is a short story written by Agatha Christie in 1974 that was included in her book *Poirot's Early Cases*. This will be the corpus for our analysis because, as we said before, it has not been analyzed from a stylistics approach in relation to speech and thought presentation. This section summarises the short story.

The short story starts with a conversation between Hercules Poirot and his good friend Captain Hastings in their flat one night in which the latter believes that Poirot has never known failure in his professional career. But, to his surprise, he tells him this is not the case and starts relating Hastings that strange one occasion when his “grey cells” did not help him to solve a murder.

The case was related to the death of Paul Déroulard, a French deputy who was living in Brussels at the time Poirot was part of the Belgian detective force. Monsieur Déroulard was a key player in the conflict over the separation of the church and state as an anti-catholic and a potential minister. Then he died suddenly in his house from a reported heart failure just exactly on the eve of his promotion to minister.

Poirot started the investigation due to the visit of Mademoiselle Virginie Mesnard who was a cousin of Monsieur Déroulard’s dead wife and she was convinced that his death was not natural. She explained to Poirot that the household consisted of four servants: the domestics Jeanette and Félicie, Denise, the cook, and François, an old servant of the house; his aged mother Mademoiselle Déroulard, and on the night of the death, two guests stayed in the house, M. de Saint Alard, a neighbor of Monsieur Déroulard’s in France, and Mr John Wilson, an English friend.
Mademoiselle Mesnard created a false pretext and Poirot was introduced into the household to start his inspection. Exploring the study where the death actually occurred, Poirot spotted an open but untouched box of chocolates and found out Monsieur Déroulard loved eating them after dinner and did so the night of his death, finishing the previous box. However, what really captured his attention was that the box had its lid of a different color, one blue and one pink, exposing that someone could have switched them with the previous one.

As poison was one of the most suitable ways to have murdered Monsieur Déroulard, Poirot asked about what types could have been introduced into the chocolates and induced the type of death suffered. Thanks to Monsieur Déroulard’s doctor advices, Poirot interviewed some local chemists where he discovered that a prescription was done for Mr John Wilson of ‘trinitrine’, a little tiny tablet made of chocolate that lowers the blood-pressure. A large dose of this medication would be fatal and maybe it was hidden in one of the chocolates.

This discovery caused a problem for Poirot as Mr John Wilson had the opportunity but not the motive. He wondered why he had not come from England with enough of his medication so he asked Félicie, who told him a bottle of the tablets have been lost, although the English gentleman had thought she had broken it. After that, he decided to pay a visit to M. de Saint Alard’s house and, using the disguise of a plumber, he found in the bathroom cupboard the empty bottle of medication.

As soon he thought the case was close, he returned to Brussels and it was then when Madame Déroulard send him a note asking to see him. She had discovered that Poirot was a police officer and, considering he was going to accuse some innocent person, she confessed having murdered her son. Two years before she had seen him pushing his wife down the stairs and had realized the sort of man she had brought into the world. Afraid of all the problems his new role would cause, she resolved to kill him. She took Mr John Wilson’s tablets, changed the chocolate boxes and put the empty bottle into M. de Saint Alard’s pocket thinking his butler would throw it away, not that he would place it in the cupboard where he found it.

Madame Déroulard died a week later of her infirmities after Poirot admitted his mistakes. He laments the failure of his “grey cells” on that occasion as he could not put all the clues in their correct path but, as Hastings explains, this is not enough to prevent him from boasting of the other times when he was right.
4.2. Corpus Annotation

This section includes an analysis of narrator and characters, and their role in the story, according to the presentation of speech and thought. First, the corpus will be analyzed and annotated with labels that correspond with the respective categories of speech and thought presentation explained before, and then, the list of characters will be classified according to those categories. The tagged corpus is included in the appendix with a color system that distinguishes the different labels (Appendix II) as well as a list with the color label associated to each category (Appendix I).

4.2.1 Data and Overview

The annotated corpus will be divided into the different categories of speech and thought presentation. We need to consider whether the characters of the short story have had any interactions with others (speech) and/or their thoughts presented. This will show which category represents them, that is, how the narrator’s control affects their development in the story. Here table I includes a list of the characters and the different ways in which their speech and/or thought is either presented or omitted:

Table I – Discourse Representation of Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERS</th>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hercules Poirot</td>
<td>DS/ IS/ FDS/ IT/ FDT/FIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Hastings</td>
<td>DS/ FDS/ IT/ FIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Déroulard</td>
<td>X^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgine Mesnard</td>
<td>FDS/ DS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanette</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^3 The characters marked with an X are not represented in the corpus with a category.
Félicie | FIS
---|---
Denise | X
François | FDS
Madame Déroulard | FDS/ FIT
M. de Saint Alard | X
Mr. John Wilson | X
Monsieur Déloulard’s Doctor | DS/ FDS

First of all, the list of characters gives us twelve in total but only the speech and/or thought of seven of them is presented in the short story so the categories found in the corpus to represent them are only: DS (Direct Speech), IS (Indirect Speech), FDS (Free Indirect Speech), FIS (Free Indirect Speech), IT (Indirect Thought), FDT (Free Direct Thought) and FIT (Free Indirect Thought).

The characters that are not represented by a category of speech and thought presentation have their relevance in the story and what we know about them is delimited by the narrator’s control during their appearance and the only category not presented in the corpus is DT (Direct Thought) which means there is no exchange of what someone thinks using reporting clauses.

Also there are four categories of speech and thought presentation that are exclusively associated to the narrator reporting that some sort of speech or thought has taken place but without really explaining the actual words used. In *table II*, we will include the characters that employ those categories:

**Table II – Discourse Representation of Narrators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERS</th>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hercules Poirot</td>
<td>NRA/ NRS/ NRSA/ NRT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23
The categories are NRA (Narrative Report of Action), NRS (Narrative Report of Speech), NRSA (Narrative Report of Speech Act) and NRT (Narrative Report of Thought) and they are located on the narrator’s control side of the scale. Therefore, they are associated to the narrator and we can distinguish two in the story: Captain Hastings, who appears at the beginning and at the end of the short story only, and Hercules Poirot which is the narrator in the whole part about the murder case. If we compare the tables, both take part as narrator and character in the story.

Despite this change of narrators, Poirot’s narration includes cases of NRS, NRSA and NRT, which are the most significant as Hastings only uses NRA where speech is not presented at all. This implies a distinction between them because Poirot is the only one who exposes that some speech act has taken place, which explains his control over some characters interactions and the development of the story. However, Hastings just presents the events as they are without interacting with other characters apart from his friend Poirot.

### 4.3. Corpus Analysis

#### 4.3.1 Data Discussion

In this section, we will discuss all the data collected in 5.2 that will help us analyze the role that narrators play as well as how it is related to the discourse interactions in the story. It can be seen that the data shown in *table I* (Discourse Representation of Characters) and *table II* (Discourse Representation of Narrators) reveals the use in the corpus of different categories of speech and thought presentation in different characters of the short story.

One key aspect in the development of the story is a strong degree in narrator’s control that is presented by the two narrators we can find, that is, the two viewpoints the corpus has and how this affects the interpretation of the story. Both narrators expose their thoughts in the narration so we are influenced by what they think about a character or an event. This implies we will find different opinions which affect how we interpret the development of the story.
As pointed out in 5.2.1, there is a change of narrator in the story which causes differences in its development: it is Hastings who starts the narration in NRA (“Poirot and I sat facing the hearth [...]” (p.40, line 2)\(^4\)) following with some dialogue as we observe when he uses DS and FDS and also in the reporting clauses. Some examples are “I agreed” (p. 40, line 10) or “protested Poirot” (p.40, line 12), among others. And also it is him who finishes it because, when we realize Poirot’s story of the crime is done, the narration changes again to be told from his point of view:

He was silent for a moment then said quietly: “She died just a week later. Mademoiselle Virgine passed through her novitiate, and duly took the veil. That, my friend, is the story. I must admit that I do not make a fine figure in it”.

Christie, 1974, p. 50

Here Hastings takes control again of the narration with a DS which includes a reporting clause that signs the change of narrator. These features present Hastings as an I-narrator or ‘homodiegetic’ who explains the story from his perspective but it can be seen he has no interaction with other characters other than Poirot so his viewpoint is limited only to the parts where Poirot is not the narrator.

The transition from narrator to character is seen as a change from NRA to FDS that shows the free access in the narration that the narrator who was telling the story has so he can change his role to a character. Then, when Poirot takes the role of narrator, there are two occasions when that role is intertwined with his role as a character in the story. We find at the beginning of the corpus a sentence: “That of which I tell you (said M. Poirot) took place in Belgium many years ago” (p. 40, line 41) which is a FDS but with the peculiarity of containing between brackets an allusion to Poirot that suggests Hastings is passing him the role of narrator as he was just a character before. And also there is a second sentence that acts like a bridge between being a narrator and a character who speaks: “I wonder my friend (continued Poirot), whether you can possibly figure to yourself the difficulties of my task?” (p. 42, lines 35-36) which marks how Poirot is a character again and Hastings is still listening.

Both have more interactions throughout the short story such as “You comprehend, Hastings, c’était des femmes-toujours des femmes!” (p.40, line 47) where we can see his use

\(^4\) All the examples are presented with the page and line from which they are taken. See Appendix II.
of French that emphasizes his identity and the fact that those are his actual words that are presented in the story while he is addressing Hastings. And we observe as well that they are the ones that contain more categories of thought presentation. For instance, when Poirot says “I could not but believe that it was a delusion on her part” (p. 43, lines 14) being a clear example of IT or “I now knew that John Wilson held the means for the crime but what about the motive?” (pp. 45-46, lines 48-1) which is FIT. This represents their importance in the story as all those thoughts could derivate in ideas of who the culprit could be and also their effect in the narration, giving the reader an inside of their minds.

These two different points of view reveal how the reader is positioned in the story, and consequently the reader’s capacity to trace the crime hints. In order to trace those clues, we have to analyze now the characters of the story, their interactions and relevance with their different categories of speech and thought presentation.

Poirot’s role as a first-person narrator makes us observe the relevance some characters play in the short story. When he is telling the story of M. Déroulard’s crime, we know about a specific character from his viewpoint because he is the one who presents him or her through statements about who he/she was and his/her past. For example, there are two NRA where the narrator, Poirot, explains something relevant about the character of Paul Déroulard: “He was in many ways a peculiar man. Though he neither drank nor smoked, he was nevertheless not so scrupulous in other ways” (p. 40, lines 45-46) or “His death, which had taken place quite suddenly in the evening after dinner, was attributed to heart-failure” (p.41, lines 9-10). As he wants to solve his crime, he needs to know information about him to do so.

Although we observe that not only we receive information of the characters form him but also from Virgine Mesnard which is the one with whom Poirot has his first interaction in his story as narrator. Using FDS, she expressed her suspicions about M. Déroulard’s death and, then, she is the responsible of making him start his investigation: “Monsieur, I have something to go upon –nothing but my woman’s instinct, but I am convinced, convinced I tell you –that M. Déroulard did not die a natural death!” (p. 41, lines 41-42). So Mademoiselle Mesnard presents the other characters of the story that were in the house the night of the murder and that she thinks they could be implicated in the case:

There are the domestics, of course, Jeanette, Félicie, and Denise the cook. She has been there many years; the others are simple country girls. Also there is Francois, but he too is an old servant. Then there
is Monsieur Déroulard's mother who lived with him, and myself. My name is Virginie Mesnard. I am a poor cousin of the late Madame Déroulard, M. Paul's wife, and I have been a member of their ménage for over three years. I have now described to you the household. There were also two guests staying in the house.

Christie, 1974, p. 42.

Thanks to her, the reader can start thinking of possible motivations or scenarios where the death of M. Déroulard could have happened as there is no other explanation of the events before.

As this is only a first contact with the characters, we need more knowledge about them throughout the story and, as we can see in table I, Jeanette and Denise do not have any category of speech and thought presentation so they are named when Poirot is trying to find a clue of the murder case. Nevertheless, Félicie, who is one of the domestics, is more important since her appearance gives some help with a clue Poirot was investigating:

It was quite true. She, Félicie, had been blamed for it. The English gentleman had evidently thought that she had broken it, and did not like to say so. Without a doubt it was Jeanette – always nosing around where she had no business to be.

Christie, 1974, p. 46.

This is the only case of FIS in the corpus where the key phrases that reveal that she is expressing and telling what happened to Poirot and it is not him who says it are “without a doubt” and “nosing around”. Both expressions derivate from her opinion of Jeanette, something Poirot could not know, and so she exposes it to him just to make sure he understands how her personality is.

In relation to the two guests, M. de Saint Alard and Mr. John Wilson, which were also in the house the night of the murder, they are only represented by the narrator’s explanation of their actions, for instance, when Poirot finds out what they did exactly the night of the murder or how they were related to M. Déroulard. Their presentation through those statements reveals that, as we observe the scene and understand the same as Poirot while following the story, the reader is being manipulated by the author to believe one of them could be the murderer and not paying attention to the real clues. An example could be seen when M. Déroulard’s Doctor helps Poirot with his first inquiries about the murder but it is not until he goes to see the local chemists that his suspicion about the use of some kind of medicine to kill M. Déroulard
begins to make sense: “It lowers the blood-pressure. It is given for some forms of heart trouble – angina pectoris for instance. It relieves the arterial tension in arteriosclerosis –“(p. 45, lines 34-35). Here, the chemists’ lexical choices imply the profession he has using specific terminology in the medical field such as “blood-pressure”, “angina pectoris” or “arteriosclerosis”.

As we said before, there is a strong degree of narrator’s control in the corpus but, as Christie was very fond of dialogues, at the end of the murder’s story when Madame Déroulard invites Poirot to her house, we observe the whole scene is developed through a dialogue:

-Wherefore, monsieur, I would beg of you most urgently to tell me exactly what progress you have made in your investigation.

-Madame, my investigation is finished.

-My son?

-Was killed deliberately.

-You know by whom?

-Yes, madame.

-Who, then?

-M. de Saint Alard.

-You are wrong. M. de Saint Alard is incapable of such a crime.

-The proofs are in my hands.

-I beg of you once more to tell me all.

Christie, 1974, p. 48

This indicates that, as the category of speech presentation used is FDS, the characters are less attached to the narrator which derivates in an almost inexistence narrator’s control. Their dialogue marks the climax of the story because, after Poirot accused M. de Saint Alard, Madame Déroulard reveals that she was the murderer of her son and she explains it by herself.

The reader is led to this ending where Poirot failed because as he did not follow the hints properly neither did we. We were manipulated until the end by the way the narrator, in
this case Poirot, understood the clues and gave more or less importance to what was in front of him. However, this is how a detective novel is supposed to be. We have to be in the dark so at the end of the story the surprise of who is the killer is real which means the author has achieved his goal.

4.3.2. Hercules Poirot

The main character of this short story is the detective Hercules Poirot who made Agatha Christie the famous author she is to date. We will discuss then his importance in the story, his relationship with Hastings and how he interacts with the other characters on it.

This short story has a peculiarity and it is that Christie’s novels are normally written in third-person narrator, for example, her novel *Murder in the Orient Express* (1934), but, in this case, we find a first-person narrator. This could be seen as her short stories have this characteristic but, essentially, she just switches the narrator focalization when it is needed. This first-person narrator, which is Poirot, tells the story from his point of view so we will be influenced by what he thinks about one character, his or her description or simply the order of the story. These factors make us see the narration from his perspective so if, for example, we find an important hint we should be paying attention to but he is not aware of its relevance and just continues, we will definitely miss what is really happening underneath the events or conversations we are reading.

Here, we can observe the manipulation Agatha Christie makes in her novels or short stories so that the reader will remain in the dark until she wants. For instance, Poirot in this passage explains he has found the chocolate box but he did not understand exactly its importance: “I did not as yet see that this little incident was of any use to me, yet I determined myself to investigate it as being out of the ordinary” (p. 43, lines 33-34), just reporting it with NRA which maintained the reader from considering it relevant as well. But later he reveals to Hastings how he just did not use properly that clue until it was too late:

The chocolate box! Do you not see? Would anyone in possession of their full eyesight make such a mistake? I knew Madame Déroulard had cataract -the atropine drops told me that. There was only one person in the household whose eyesight was such that she could not see which lid to replace. It was the
chocolate box that started me on the track, and yet up to the end I failed consistently to perceive its real significance! […]

Christie, 1974, p. 50

He explains it to him using FDS which does not have any narrator’s control in his speech so it gives more freedom to his explanation and let the readers understand why he did not uncover the real culprit before.

Not only he has narrated the story as an I-narrator but also he is a character in the story because Hastings is who starts and finishes the short story, signaling that there is a change of narrators, as we said before. Poirot will be a character when Hastings is in charge of controlling the flow of the dialogue, for instance, when the story of M. Déroulard is starting Hastings says “he leaned back and commenced his story” (p. 40, line 38) so since then, Poirot took the lead. They have some interactions throughout the story of M. Déroulard’s murder that reflect Poirot is telling the story to someone, creating a bridge between both characters and the story. Some examples could be when he uses FDS to address Hastings: “Remember, he was a fanatic, and there is no fanatic like a religious fanatic” (p. 46, line 13) or “Figure to yourself, my friend” (p. 47, line 33) which includes Hastings in the narration as a listener.

His relationship with Hastings is noticeable in all the examples we have mentioned before because through their interactions we can appreciate they are friends who are comfortable to tease each other as, for example, at the end of the short story when Hastings says using FIT “I had suffered often at his hands, but I, too, though not possessing the finest brain in Europe, could afford to be magnanimous!” (p. 50, lines 43-44) or when we observe Poirot uses “mon ami” or “my friend” when he addresses him.

The use of French in the story has two important functions: to observe how he only uses it while he refers to Hastings indicating their close relationship and to reflect his personality and identity through the text so we know more about him. For instance, when he says “Ça ne se voit jamais” (p. 43, line 31), “C’est evident!” (p. 44, line 33) or “Bon!” (p. 44, line 9) we understand it significance because it is his mother tongue.

In addition, Poirot’s interaction with other characters determines how we will interpret their importance in the story. He leads us to observe that just depending on how he explains an event, we will interpret the character’s primary or secondary role in the story in relation to the resolution of the case or just give us a hint we should understand together with Poirot.
Moreover, as we see in the example “he made a wry face” (p. 44, line 49), he tells us a gesture that encodes the doctor’s opinion and it is only noticed by him and evaluated as ‘wry’. Then the expression could be linked to his perspective that makes us understand how it is completely different to see it through his eyes than from our own point of view.

Poirot could use some characters to help him discover hints to resolve the murder such as François who gave him the chocolate box that, as we discover near the end of the story, was the most important clue but he could not understand its real significance, or when Mademoiselle Mesnard gave him the address of M. de Saint Alard which led him to his conclusion that he was the murderer.

4.3.3 Uncovered “Clues”

After discussing the relevance of the main character, Hercules Poirot, we need to explain the clues that seemed to solve the murder and finally the resolution and reasons of the killer, Madame Déroulard.

Poirot, since Virgine Mesnard came to see him to solve the murder of M. Déroulard, was finding clues that led him to commit a mistake at the end. It is precisely a category of thought presentation, FIT, the one that we observe takes the lead to show how Poirot began his inquiries about it.

He exposed his thoughts about the case saying: “Here was a man whose death had taken place three days previously. If there had been foul play, only one possibility was admissible –poison!” (p. 42, lines 36-37) using FIT as we observe deictic shifts (here/there or was/is) on it. And later, he asked himself some important questions such as “Had the man been poisoned? Had he died of natural death?” (p. 42, line 40) which gave the impression he was starting to wonder some aspect of the murder scene using again FIT that we can recognize by a characteristic of free style –the interrogative question. Not only those examples but also his theories, which began with the hypothesis of a fatal injection, are presented in FIT so we know his exact thought about it without the intervention of a narrator:
It was just possible that a hypodermic needle might have been introduced into the dead man’s chair in such a way as to allow of a fatal injection. The minute puncture it would cause was likely to remain unnoticed. But I could discover no sign to support that theory.

Christie, 1974, p. 43

But, just when he was thinking about that possible cause of death, he found a large box of chocolates that had caught his eye. The box itself had a completely different color in comparison to its lid so Poirot was determined to investigate it. In this passage he comes out of the story to explain the color difference to Hastings and how it would be later the key to solve the case:

For, see you, Hastings, while the box itself was pink, the lid was blue. Now, one often sees a blue ribbon on a pink box, and vice versa, but a box of one color, and a lid of another—no; decidedly—ça ne se voit jamais!.

Christie, 1974, p. 43

We observe the characteristics of FDS as the narrator is giving all the control to him as Hastings is listening, but also of FIT in its use of deictics (now/then or is/was). This clue was used in the wrong way as Poirot thought he had found the killer, M. de Saint Alard, but he was not.

Then, after all the investigation is done, Madame Déroulard calls Poirot to hear his progresses and finally confesses the crime: “It was not M. de Saint Alard who killed my son. It was I, his mother”(p. 48, lines 45-46) which derivates in an extent dialogue, almost a monologue, about how and why she did it. His remorse when she heard Poirot was going to accuse someone innocent changed her mind.

There were some clues of her culpability which Poirot did not notice clearly as, for example, when Mademoiselle Mesnard said that Madame Déroulard does not pay attention to details, something that could start leading the reader to think about how she acted the night of the crime or when Poirot said he knew about her eyesight problem—cataracts—due to the atropine drops she had a prescription for, and ignored the most important detail of all, the mixed colors of the chocolate box:

[…] I had learned already from Mademoiselle Virgine that she was absent-minded. Altogether it was a miserable affair that I have recounted to you there! Only to you have I told the story. You comprehend,
I do not figure well in it! An old lady commits a crime in such a simple and clever fashion that I, Hercules Poirot, am completely deceived. [...] 

Christie, 1974, p. 50

This was crucial because she was the only one at the house that could have commit that mistake yet he failed to see it, as he explains it to Hastings at the end of the story in FDS and his words are presented without any intervention from the narrator.

Her terrible pain about what his son did to her wife and all the problems he was going to bring after being elected as a minister convinced her to use John Wilson’s tablets and place them in the chocolate box to kill him. Madame Déroulard’s plan was a success but Poirot’s investigation was not.

5. Conclusion

This project has offered an analysis of the characters in The Chocolate Box (Christie, 1974) and the development of the narration in this detective story, according to the narrator’s control and the way the characters’ speech and thought is presented (Short 1996, Toolan 1998, Simpson 2004, Jeffries & McIntyre 2010), foregrounded or hidden, filterer or unfiltered.

Discourse interactions are a crucial part in the analysis of this story since the relationship between the characters and the narrators reflects how the story explores different points of view. In this short story, we have two main narrators, Poirot and Hastings, so the narration develops a duality where both narrators are seen interconnecting their appearances, for instance, when Poirot is talking and makes an allusion to Hastings such as “Figure to yourself, my friend”, we keep in mind he is a listener all the way through Poirot’s narration. And also, the characters involved in the story change how we perceive someone else’s personality or characteristics as, for example, when Félicie explains in FIS how she was blamed instead of Jeannette which reflects her opinion about her.

In the discourse structure of the corpus, there is an overlap between levels 2 and 3 according to Short (1996) because Poirot is represented as a character-narrator. When
Hastings gives its narration role to him, he starts telling the story and interacting with other characters but suddenly when we find “continued Poirot”, it reveals Hastings is still in the narration and this sentence acts like a bridge between being a narrator and a character who speaks. Although this is the case, Poirot’s narration is more important because he uses NRS, NRSA and NRT which exposes that some speech act has taken place but instead Hastings only uses NRA where speech is not presented at all so he does not interact with other characters apart from Poirot.

Depending on the narrator’s control, we have found that characters are presented with different categories of speech and/or thought presentation. This influences its interpretation because the narration will be based on the relevance a character has in the story (primary or secondary role) with the corresponding category. For instance, at the end of the story Madame Déroulard confesses to be the killer and her revelation is presented by means of a dialogue with Poirot in FDS. This category represents the ‘freedom’ of speech for this character so she can tell everything without being supported by a narrator, that is, his character’s control is total. If we compare that example with Monsieur Déroulard, it can be seen that he is only presented when Poirot or another character talks about him, which implies that the narrator’s control on him is extremely high. Then, we can observe how characters are presented in the narration and their relevance within the narration.

The characters presented by a category of speech and/or thought presentation are Poirot, Hastings, Mademoiselle Mesnard, Félicie, François, Madame Déroulard and Monsieur Déroulard’s Doctor. All of them, except Félicie, use FDS in the narration which expose there is no narrator at some point in their appearance so their character’s control is important. We obtain information about other characters and events before Monsieur Déroulard’s death during the story thanks to them so we can see their contribution to the investigation. The rest of the characters, Monsieur Déroulard, Denise, Jeanette, M. de Saint Alard and Mr. John Wilson have no category in the narration. This implicates that what we know about them is delimitated by the narrator’s control during their appearance only so they do not have ‘freedom’ of speech or thought.

The first time we read this short story, in a first intuitive reading, the narration just seems to develop as a normal detective story where the plot narrates the investigation of a crime. We do not pay special attention to all the characters and only try to find the culprit
following the clues found. But this is exactly what the author is expecting us to do. We continue the detective’s investigation so at the end we are puzzled and without any idea of who is the real murderer.

Christie explores the idea of manipulation with an extraordinary ability. Although it is quite difficult to do so, she used the way in which the hints were presented and how we interpreted their importance along with the detective to deceive us. Her style reveals how we could not discover the real hints because Poirot, who guide us during the narration of the investigation, did not follow them properly which was the author’s intention to mislead the reader using linguistic means. Therefore, what the author is doing is ‘foregrounding’ some parts of the story so we cannot associate them properly with the regular development of detective stories.

Those moments during the narration are when Poirot finds the chocolate box, see the colour’s difference between the lid and the box but he does not understand properly its meaning which derivates in finding the wrong culprit at the end, as well as when in the narration we are told Madame Déroulard’s vision is poor and that she even takes pills for it, he did not take it into account. Also Poirot overlook that if M. de Saint Alard would have been the criminal, he would had never kept the bottle of ‘trinitrine’ because it could incriminate him.

In a future research project, the representation of the characters in The Chocolate Box will be compared with the characters from the TV series Agatha Christie’s Poirot. That TV adaptation was broadcasted in 1993 with some differences from the short story. Hastings was replaced by Chief Inspector Japp (another character from Christie’s novels) and other characters were added which probably changed the plot, as well as viewpoint.
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## 7. Appendix

### 7.1. Appendix I: Color label system for each category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NRA</td>
<td>NARRATIVE REPORT OF ACTION</td>
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<td>NRS</td>
<td>NARRATIVE REPORT OF SPEECH</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRSA</td>
<td>NARRATIVE REPORT OF SPEECH ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRT</td>
<td>NARRATIVE REPORT OF THOUGHT</td>
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<td>DIRECT SPEECH</td>
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<td>FREE DIRECT SPEECH</td>
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<td>IS</td>
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<td>FIT</td>
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7.2. Appendix II: ‘The Chocolate Box’ – Annotated Corpus

It was a wild night. Outside, the wind howled malevolently, and the rain beat against the windows in great gusts. Poirot and I sat facing the hearth, our legs stretched out to the cheerful blaze. Between us was a small table. On my side of it stood some carefully brewed hot toddy; on Poirot's was a cup of thick, rich chocolate which I would not have drunk for a hundred pounds! Poirot sipped the thick brown mess in the pink china cup, and sighed with contentment. (NRA)

“Quelle belle vie!” he murmured. (DS)

“Yes, it's a good old world” I agreed. (DS) “Here am I with a job, and a good job too! And here are you, famous.”(FDS)

“Oh, mon ami!” protested Poirot. (DS)

“But you are. And rightly so! When I think back on your long line of successes, I am positively amazed. I don't believe you know what failure is.” (FDS)

“He would be a droll kind of original who could say that!” (FDS)

“No, but seriously, have you ever failed?” (FDS)

“Innumerable times, my friend. What would you? La bonne chance, it cannot always be on your side. I have been called in too late. Very often another, working towards the same goal, has arrived there first. Twice have I been stricken down with illness just as I was on the point of success. One must take the downs with the ups, my friend.” (FDS)

“I didn't quite mean that” I said. (DS) “I meant, had you ever been completely down and out over a case through your own fault?” (FDS)

“Ah, I comprehend! You ask if I have ever made the complete prize ass of myself, as you say over here? Once, my friend” (FDS) A slow, reflective smile hovered over his face. (NRA) “Yes, once I made a fool of myself.” (FDS) He sat up suddenly in his chair. (NRA)

“See here, my friend, you have, I know, kept a record of my little successes. You shall add one more story to the collection, the story of a failure!” (FDS)

He leaned forward and placed a log on the fire. Then, after carefully wiping his hands on a little duster that hung on a nail by the fireplace, he leaned back and commenced his story. (NRA)

That of which I tell you (said M. Poirot) took place in Belgium many years ago. (FDS) It was at the time of the terrible struggle in France between church and state. M. Paul Déroulard was a French deputy of note. It was an open secret that the portfolio of a Minister awaited him. He was among the bitterest of the anti-Catholic party, and it was certain that on his accession to power, he would have to face violent enmity. He was in many ways a peculiar man. Though he neither drank nor smoked, he was nevertheless not so scrupulous in other ways. (NRA) You comprehend, Hastings, c'était des femmes-toujours des femmes!
He had married some years earlier a young lady from Brussels who had brought him a substantial dot. Undoubtedly the money was useful to him in his career, as his family was not rich, though on the other hand he was entitled to call himself M. le Baron if he chose. (NRA)

There were no children of the marriage, and his wife died after two years - the result of a fall downstairs. Among the property which she bequeathed to him was a house on the Avenue Louise in Brussels. It was in this house that his sudden death took place, the event coinciding with the resignation of the Minister whose portfolio he was to inherit. All the papers printed long notices of his career. His death, which had taken place quite suddenly in the evening after dinner, was attributed to heart-failure. (NRA)

At that time, mon ami, I was, as you know, a member of the Belgian detective force. (FDS) The death of M. Paul Déroulard was not particularly interesting to me. I am, as you also know, bon catholique, and his demise seemed to me fortunate. (FDS) It was some three days afterwards, when my vacation had just begun, that I received a visitor at my own apartments - a lady, heavily veiled, but evidently quite young; (NRA) and I perceived at once that she was a jeune fille tout à fait comme il faut. (IT)

“You are Monsieur Hercule Poirot?” she asked in a low sweet voice. (DS) I bowed. (NRA) “Of the detective service?” (FDS)

Again I bowed. (NRA) “Be seated, I pray of you, mademoiselle” I said. (DS) She accepted a chair and drew aside her veil. Her face was charming, though marred with tears, and haunted as though with some poignant anxiety. (NRA)

“Monsieur” she said, (DS) “I understand that you are now taking a vacation. Therefore you will be free to take up a private case. You understand that I do not wish to call in the police.” (FDS)

I shook my head. (NRA) “I fear what you ask is impossible, mademoiselle. Even though on vacation, I am still of the police.” (FDS)

She leaned forward. (NRA) “Écoutez, monsieur. All that I ask of you is to investigate. The result of your investigations you are at perfect liberty to report to the police. If what I believe to be true is true, we shall need all the machinery of the law.” (FDS)

That placed a somewhat different complexion on the matter, and I placed myself at her service without more ado. A slight colour rose in her cheeks. (NRA) “I thank you, monsieur. It is the death of M. Paul Déroulard that I ask you to investigate.” (FDS)

“Comment?” I exclaimed, surprised. (DS) “Monsieur, I have nothing to go upon - nothing but my woman's instinct, but I am convinced, convinced I tell you -that M. Déroulard did not die a natural death!” (FDS)

“But surely the doctors -“(FDS)

“Doctors may be mistaken. He was so robust, so strong. Ah, Monsieur Poirot, I beseech of you to help me -“(FDS)
The poor child was almost beside herself. She would have knelt to me. I soothed her as best I could. (NRA) “I will help you, mademoiselle. I feel almost sure that your fears are unfounded, but we will see. First, I will ask you to describe to me the inmates of the house.” (FDS)

“There are the domestics, of course, Jeanette, Félicie, and Denise the cook. She has been there many years; the others are simple country girls. Also there is Francois, but he too is an old servant. Then there is Monsieur Déroulard’s mother who lived with him, and myself. My name is Virginie Mesnard. I am a poor cousin of the late Madame Déroulard, M. Paul’s wife, and I have been a member of their ménage for over three years. I have now described to you the household. There were also two guests staying in the house.” (FDS)

“And they were?” (FDS)

“M. de Saint Alard, a neighbour of M. Déroulard’s in France. Also an English friend, Mr John Wilson.” (FDS)

“Are they still with you?” (FDS)

“Mr Wilson, yes, but M. de Saint Alard departed yesterday.” (FDS)

“And what is your plan, Mademoiselle Mesnard?” (FDS)

“If you will present yourself at the house in half an hour’s time, I will have arranged some story to account for your presence. I had better represent you to be connected with journalism in some way. I shall say you have come from Paris, and that you have brought a card of introduction from M. de Saint Alard. Madame Déroulard is very feeble in health, and will pay little attention to details.” (FDS)

On mademoiselle’s ingenious pretext I was admitted to the house, (NRA) and after a brief interview with the dead deputy’s mother, who was a wonderfully imposing and aristocratic figure though obviously in failing health, (NRS) I was made free of the premises. (NRA)

I wonder, my friend (continued Poirot), whether you can possibly figure to yourself the difficulties of my task? (FDS) Here was a man whose death had taken place three days previously. If there had been foul play, only one possibility was admissible – poison! (FIT) And I had had no chance of seeing the body, and there was no possibility of examining, or analyzing, any medium in which the poison could have been administered. There were no clues, false or otherwise, to consider. (NRA) Had the man been poisoned? Had he died a natural death? (FIT) I, Hercule Poirot, with nothing to help me, had to decide. (NRT)

First, I interviewed the domestics, (NRS) and with their aid, I recapitulated the evening. I paid especial notice to the food at dinner, and the method of serving it. The soup had been served by M. Déroulard himself from a tureen. Next a dish of cutlets, then a chicken. Finally a compote of fruits. And all placed on the table, and served by Monsieur himself. The coffee was brought in a big pot to the dinner-table. (NRA) Nothing there, mon ami (FIT) -impossible to poison one without poisoning all! (FDS)
After dinner Madame Déroulard had retired to her own apartments and Mademoiselle Virginie had accompanied her. The three men had adjourned to M. Déroulard's study. (NRA) Her they had chatted amicably for some time, (NRS) when suddenly, without any warning, the deputy had fallen heavily to the ground. M. de Saint Alard had rushed out (NRA) and told François to fetch a doctor immediately. (NRSA) He said it was without doubt an apoplexy, explained the man. (IS) But when the doctor arrived, the patient was past help. Mr John Wilson, to whom I was presented by Mademoiselle Virginie, was what was known in those days as a regular John Bull Englishman, middle-aged and burly. (NRA) His account, delivered in very British French, was substantially the same. (NRS)

"Déroulard went very red in the face, and down he fell.” (FDS) There was nothing further to be found out there. Next I went to the scene of the tragedy, the study, and was left alone there at my own request. So far there was nothing to support Mademoiselle Mesnard's theory. (NRA) I could not but believe that it was a delusion on her part. (IT) Evidently she had entertained a romantic passion for the dead man which had not permitted her to take a normal view of the case. Nevertheless, I searched the study with meticulous care. (NRA) It was just possible that a hypodermic needle might have been introduced into the dead man's chair in such a way as to allow of a fatal injection. The minute puncture it would cause was likely to remain unnoticed. But I could discover no sign to support that theory. (FIT) I flung myself down in the chair with a gesture of despair. (NRA)

"Enfin, I abandon it!” I said aloud. (DS) “There is not a clue anywhere! Everything is perfectly normal.” (FDS)

As I said the words, (NRS) my eyes fell on a large box of chocolates standing on a table nearby, and my heart gave a leap. It might not be a clue to M. Déroulard's death, but here at least was something that was not normal. (FIT) I lifted the lid. The box was full, untouched; not a chocolate was missing - but that only made the peculiarity that had caught my eye more striking. (NRA) For, see you, Hastings, while the box itself was pink, the lid was blue. (FDS) Now, one often sees a blue ribbon on a pink box, and vice versa, but a box of one colour, and a lid of another - no; decidedly - ça ne se voit jamais! (FIT)

I did not as yet see that this little incident was of any use to me, yet I determined to investigate it as being out of the ordinary. I rang the bell for François, (NRA) and asked him if his late master had been fond of sweets. (IS) A faint melancholy smile came to his lips. (NRA)

“Passionately fond of them, monsieur. He would always have a box of chocolates in the house. He did not drink wine of any kind, you see.” (FDS)

“Yet this box has not been touched?” (FDS) I lifted the lid to show him. (NRA)

“Pardon, monsieur, but that was a new box purchased on the day of his death, the other being nearly finished.” (FDS)

“Then the other box was finished on the day of his death,” I said slowly. (DS)

“Yes, monsieur, I found it empty in the morning and threw it away.” (FDS)
“Did M. Déroulard eat sweets at all hours of the day?” (FDS)

“Usually after dinner, monsieur.” (FDS)

I began to see light. (NRA) “François” I said, “you can be discreet?” (DS)

“If there is need, monsieur.” (FDS)

“Bon! Know, then, that I am of the police. Can you find me that other box?” (FDS)

“Without doubt, monsieur. It will be in the dustbin.” (FDS)

He departed, and returned in a few minutes with a dust-covered object. It was the duplicate of the box I held, save for the fact that this time the box was blue and the lid was pink. (NRA) I thanked François, recommended him once more to be discreet, (NRSA) and left the house in the Avenue Louise without more ado. Next day I called upon the doctor who had attended M. Déroulard. With him I had a difficult task. He entrenched himself prettily, behind a wall of learned phraseology, (NRA) but I fancied that he was quite as sure about the case as he would like to be. (IS)

“There have been many curious occurrences of the kind” he observed, when I had managed to disarm him somewhat. (DS) “A sudden fit of anger, a violent emotion -after a heavy dinner, c'est entendu -then, with an access of rage, the blood flies to the head, and pssst! -there you are!” (FDS)

“But M. Droulard had had no violent emotion.” (FDS)

“No? I made sure that he had been having a stormy altercation with M. de Saint Alard.” (FDS)

“Why should he?” (FDS)

“C'est évident!” (FDS) The doctor shrugged his shoulders. (NRA) “Was not M. de Saint Alard a Catholic of the most fanatical? Their friendship was being ruined by this question of church and state. Not a day passed without discussions. To M. de Saint Alard, Déroulard appeared almost as Antichrist.” (FDS)

This was unexpected, (FIT) and gave me food for thought. (NRA)

“One more question, Doctor: would it be possible to introduce a fatal dose of poison into a chocolate?” (FDS)

“It would be possible, I suppose” said the doctor slowly. (DS)

“Pure prussic acid would meet the case if there were no chance of evaporation, and a tiny globule of anything might be swallowed unnoticed -but it does not seem a very likely supposition. A chocolate full of morphine or strychnine -“ (FDS)

He made a wry face. (NRA)
“You comprehend, M. Poirot - one bite would be enough! The unwary one would not stand upon ceremony.” (FDS)

“Thank you, M. le Docteur.” (FDS)

I withdrew. (NRT) Next I made inquiries of the chemists, especially those in the neighbourhood of the Avenue Louise. (NRS) It is good to be of the police. (FDT) I got the information I wanted without any trouble. Only in one case could I hear of any poison having been supplied to the house in question. This was some eye drops atropine sulphate for Madame Déroulard. Atropine is a potent poison, and for the moment I was elated, but the symptoms of atropine poisoning are closely allied to those of ptomaine, and bear no resemblance to those I was studying. Besides, the prescription was an old one. Madame Déroulard had suffered from cataract in both eyes for many years. I was turning away discouraged (NRA) when the chemist's voice called me back. (NRS)

“One moment, M. Poirot. I remember, the girl who brought that prescription, she said something about having to go on to the English chemist. You might try there.” (FDS)

“I did.” (FDS)

Once more enforcing my official status, I got the information I wanted. On the day before M. Déroulard’s death they had made up a prescription for Mr John Wilson. Not that there was any making up about it. They were simply little tablets of trinitrine. (NRA) I asked if I might see some. (IS) He showed me them, and my heart beat faster - for the tiny tablets were of chocolate. (NRA)

“It is a poison?” I asked. (DS)

“No, monsieur.” (FDS)

“Can you describe to me its effect?” (FDS)

“It lowers the blood-pressure. It is given for some forms of heart trouble - angina pectoris for instance. It relieves the arterial tension. In arteriosclerosis -“ (FDS)

I interrupted him. (NRS) “Ma foi! This rigmarole says nothing to me. Does it cause the face to flush?” (FDS)

“Certainly it does.” (FDS)

“And supposing I ate ten - twenty of your little tablets, what then?” (FDS)

“I should not advise you to attempt it” he replied drily. (DS)

“And yet you say it is not poison?” (FDS)

“There are many things not called poison which can kill a man” he replied as before. (DS) I left the shop elated. At last, things had begun to march! (NRA) I now knew that John
Wilson held the means for the crime but what about the motive? (FIT) He had come to Belgium on business, (NRA) and had asked M. Déroulard, whom he knew slightly, to put him up. (NRS) There was apparently no way in which Déroulard's death could benefit him. (NRA) Moreover, I discovered by inquiries in England that he had suffered for some years from that painful form of heart disease known as angina. (NRS) Therefore he had a genuine right to have those tablets in his possession. Nevertheless, I was convinced that someone had gone to the chocolate box, opening the full one first by mistake, and had abstracted the contents of the last chocolate, cramming in instead as many little trinitrin tablets as it would hold. The chocolates were large ones. Between twenty or thirty tablets, I felt sure, could have been inserted. (NRA) But who had done this?. (FIT)

There were two guests in the house. John Wilson had the means. Saint Alard had the motive. (NRA) Remember, he was a fanatic, and there is no fanatic like a religious fanatic. (FDS) Could he, by any means, have got hold of John Wilson's trinitrine? (FIT) Another little idea came to me. (NRT) Ah! You smile at my little ideas! (FDS) Why had Wilson run out of trinitrine? Surely he would bring an adequate supply from England. (FIT) I called once more at the house in the Avenue Louise. Wilson was out, but I saw the girl who did his room, Félicie. (NRS)

I demanded of her immediately whether it was not true that M. Wilson had lost a bottle from his washstand some little time ago. (IS) The girl responded eagerly. (NRS) It was quite true. She, Félicie, had been blamed for it. The English gentleman had evidently thought that she had broken it, and did not like to say so. Whereas she had never even touched it. Without doubt it was Jeannette -always nosing round where she had no business to be- (FIS) I calmed the flow of words, (NRS) and took my leave. I knew now all that I wanted to know. It remained for me to prove my case. (NRA) That, I felt, would not be easy. I might be sure that Saint Alard had removed the bottle of trinitrine from John Wilson's washstand, but to convince others, I would have to produce evidence. And I had none to produce! Never mind. (FIT) I knew -that was the great thing. (FDT) You remember our difficulty in the Styles case, Hastings? (FDS) There again, I knew but it took me a long time to find the last link which made my chain of evidence against the murderer complete. (NRA)

I asked for an interview with Mademoiselle Mesnard. (NRS) She came at once. (NRA) I demanded of her the address of M. de Saint Alard. (NRS) A look of trouble came over her face. (NRA)

“Why do you want it, monsieur?” (FDS)

“Mademoiselle, it is necessary.” (FDS)

She seemed doubtful – troubled. (NRA) “He can tell you nothing. He is a man whose thoughts are not in this world. He hardly notices what goes on around him.”(FDS)

“Possibly, mademoiselle. Nevertheless, he was an old friend of M. Déroulard's. There may be things he can tell me - things of the past - old grudges - old love-affairs.” (FDS)

The girl flushed and bit her lip. (NRA) “As you please -but -but -I feel sure now that I have been mistaken. It was good of you to accede to my demand, but I was upset -almost
distracted at the time. I see now that there is no mystery to solve. Leave it, I beg of you, monsieur.” (FDS) I eyed her closely. (NRA)

“Mademoiselle” I said, (DS) “it is sometimes difficult for a dog to find a scent, but once he has found it, nothing on earth will make him leave it! That is if he is a good dog! And I, mademoiselle, I, Hercule Poirot, am a very good dog.” (FDS) Without a word she turned away. A few minutes later she returned with the address written on a sheet of paper. I left the house. Francois was waiting for me outside. He looked at me anxiously. (NRA)

“There is no news, monsieur?” (FDS)

“None as yet, my friend.”(FDS)

“Oh! Monsieur Déroulard!” he sighed. (DS)

“I too was of his way of thinking. I do not care for priests. Not that I would say so in the house. The women are all devout -a good thing perhaps. Madame est très pieuse -et Mademoiselle Virginie aussi.” (FDS)

“Mademoiselle Virginie? Was she “très pieuse?” (FDS) Thinking of the tear-stained passionate face I had seen that first day, I wondered. (FDT)

Having obtained the address of M. de Saint Alard, I wasted no time. I arrived in the neighbourhood of his château in the Ardennes but it was some days before I could find a pretext for gaining admission to the house. (NRA) In the end I did - how do you think - as a plumber, mon ami! (FDS) It was the affair of a moment to arrange a neat little gas leak in his bedroom. I departed for my tools, and took care to return with them at an hour when I knew I should have the field pretty well to myself. What I was searching for, I hardly knew. (NRA) The one thing needful, I could not believe there was any chance of finding. (IT) He would never have run the risk of keeping it. Still when I found a little cupboard above the washstand locked, I could not resist the temptation of seeing what was inside it. The lock was quite a simple one to pick. The door swung open. It was full of old bottles. I took them up one by one with a trembling hand. (NRA) Suddenly, I uttered a cry. (NRS) Figure to yourself, my friend, (FDS) I held in my hand a little phial with an English chemist's label. On it were the words: `Trinitrine Tablets. One to be taken when required. Mr John Wilson.' (NRA)

I controlled my emotion, closed the little cupboard, slipped the bottle into my pocket, and continued to repair the gas leak! One must be methodical. Then I left the château, and took train for my own country as soon as possible. I arrived in Brussels late that night. I was writing out a report for the préfet in the morning, when a note was brought to me. It was from old Madame Déroulard, and it summoned me to the house in the Avenue Louise without delay. (NRA)

Francois opened the door to me. (NRA) “Madame la Baronne is awaiting you.” (FDS)

He conducted me to her apartments. She sat in state in a large armchair. There was no sign of Mademoiselle Virginie. (NRA)
“M. Poirot” said the old lady. (DS) “I have just learned that you are not what you pretend to be. You are a police officer.” (FDS)

“That is so, madame.” (FDS)

“You came here to inquire into the circumstances of my son's death?” (FDS)

Again I replied: “That is so, madame.” (DS)

“I should be glad if you would tell me what progress you have made.” (FDS)

I hesitated. (NRT) “First I would like to know how you have learned all this, madame.” (FDS)

“From one who is no longer of this world.” (FDS)

Her words, and the brooding way she uttered them, sent a chill to my heart. (NRS) I was incapable of speech. (NRA)

“Wherefore, monsieur, I would beg of you most urgently to tell me exactly what progress you have made in your investigation.”(FDS)

“Madame, my investigation is finished.”(FDS)

“My son?” (FDS)

“Was killed deliberately.” (FDS)

“You know by whom?” (FDS)

“Yes, madame.” (FDS)

“Who, then?” (FDS)

“M. de Saint Alard.” (FDS)

The old lady shook her head. (NRA) “You are wrong. M. de Saint Alard is incapable of such a crime.” (FDS)

“The proofs are in my hands.” (FDS)

“I beg of you once more to tell me all.” (FDS)

This time I obeyed, going over each step that had led me to the discovery of the truth. She listened attentively. At the end she nodded her head. (NRA)“Yes, yes, it is all as you say, all but one thing. It was not M. de Saint Alard who killed my son. It was I, his mother.” (FDS)

I stared at her. She continued to nod her head gently. (NRA)
“It is well that I sent for you. It is the providence of the good God that Virginie told me before she departed for the convent, what she had done. Listen, M. Poirot! My son was an evil man. He persecuted the church. He led a life of mortal sin. He dragged down other souls beside his own. But there was worse than that. As I came out of my room in this house one morning, I saw my daughter-in-law standing at the head of the stairs. She was reading a letter. I saw my son steal up behind her. One swift push, and she fell, striking her head on the marble steps. When they picked her up she was dead. My son was a murderer, and only I, his mother, knew it.” (FDS)

She closed her eyes for a moment. (NRA) “You cannot conceive, monsieur, of my agony, my despair. What was I to do? Denounce him to the police? I could not bring myself to do it. It was my duty, but my flesh was weak. Besides, would they believe me? (FIT) My eyesight had been failing for some time - they would say I was mistaken. I kept silence. But my conscience gave me no peace. By keeping silence I too was a murderer. My son inherited his wife’s money. He flourished as the green bay tree. And now he was to have a Minister’s portfolio. His persecution of the church would be redoubled. And there was Virginie. She, poor child, beautiful, naturally pious, was fascinated by him. He had a strange and terrible power over women. I saw it coming. I was powerless to prevent it. He had no intention of marrying her. The time came when she was ready to yield everything to him.” (FDS)

“Then I saw my path clear. He was my son. I had given him life. I was responsible for him. He had killed one woman’s body, now he would kill another’s soul! I went to Mr Wilson’s room, and took the bottle of tablets. He had once said laughingly that there were enough in it to kill a man! I went into the study and opened the big box of chocolates that always stood on the table. I opened a new box by mistake. The other was on the table also. There was just one chocolate left in it. That simplified things, No one ate chocolates except my son and Virginie. I would keep her with me that night. All went as I had planned.” (FDS)

She paused, closing her eyes a minute then opened them again. (NRA) “M. Poirot, I am in your hands. They tell me I have not many days to live. I am willing to answer for my action before the good God. Must I answer for it on earth also?” (FDS)

I hesitated. (NRT) “But the empty bottle, madame” I said to gain time. “How came that into M. de Saint Alard’s possession?”(FDS)

“When he came to say goodbye to me, monsieur, I slipped it into his pocket. I did not know how to get rid of it. I am so infirm that I cannot move about much without help, and finding it empty in my rooms might have caused suspicion. You understand, monsieur -” (FDS) she drew herself up to her full height (NRA) -“it was with no idea of casting suspicion on M. de Saint Alard! I never dreamed of such a thing. I thought his valet would find an empty bottle and throw it away without question.” (FDS)

I bowed my head. (NRA) “I comprehend, madame” I said. (DS)

“And your decision, monsieur?” (FDS) Her voice was firm and unflurtering, her head held as high as ever. I rose to my feet. (NRA)

“Madame” I said, (DS) “I have the honor to wish you good day. I have made my investigations -and failed! The matter is closed.” (FDS)
He was silent for a moment, then said quietly: “She died just a week later. Mademoiselle Virginie passed through her novitiate, and duly took the veil. That, my friend, is the story. I must admit that I do not make a fine figure in it.” (DS)

“But that was hardly a failure” I expostulated. (DS) “What else could you have thought under the circumstances?” (FDS)

“Ah, sacré, mon ami” cried Poirot, becoming suddenly animated. (DS) “Is it that you do not see? But I was thirty-six times an idiot! My grey cells, they functioned not at all. The whole time I had the true clue in my hands.” (FDS)

“What clue?” (FDS)

“The chocolate box! Do you not see? Would anyone in possession of their full eyesight make such a mistake? I knew Madame Déroulard had cataract -the atropine drops told me that. There was only one person in the household whose eyesight was such that she could not see which lid to replace. It was the chocolate box that started me on the track, and yet up to the end I failed consistently to perceive its real significance! Also my psychology was at fault. Had M. de Saint Alard been the criminal, he would never have kept an incriminating bottle. Finding it was a proof of his innocence. I had learned already from Mademoiselle Virginie that he was absent-minded. Altogether it was a miserable affair that I have recounted to you there! Only to you have I told the story. You comprehend, I do not figure well in it! An old lady commits a crime in such a simple and clever fashion that I, Hercule Poirot, am completely deceived. Sapristi! It does not bear thinking of! Forget it. Or no - remember it, and if you think at any time that I am growing conceited -it is not likely, but it might arise.” (FDS)

I concealed a smile. (NRA)

“Eh bien, my friend, you shall say to me, ‘Chocolate box’. Is it agreed?” (FDS)

“It's a bargain!” (FDS)

“After all” said Poirot reflectively, “it was an experience! I, who have undoubtedly the finest brain in Europe at present, can afford to be magnanimous!” (FDS)

“Chocolate box,” I murmured gently. (DS)

“Pardon, mon ami?” (FDS)

I looked at Poirot's innocent face, as he bent forward inquiringly, and my heart smote me. I had suffered often at his hands, (NRA) but I, too, though not possessing the finest brain in Europe, could afford to be magnanimous! (FIT)

“Nothing,” I lied, (DS) and lit another pipe, smiling to myself. (NRA)