

## Vagueness and Withholding Information in Christie's (1926) Detective Fiction *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*: A Pragma-Stylistic Study

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### Abstract

This study is intended to examine the deceptive strategies utilized in the well-renown Agatha Christie's (1926/2002) detective fiction *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* to fill a gap in the literature by conducting a pragma-stylistic analysis of the novel. To do so, the researchers have set two objectives which are phrased as follows: firstly, examining the pragma-stylistic choices that are used to surface the deceptive strategies on the character-character level in the pre-dénouement stage and secondly, investigating the pragma-stylistic choices that are used to surface the deceptive strategies on the narrator-reader level in the pre-dénouement stage. The stylistic idiosyncrasies of Christie's Dr. Sheppard are carried out through an eclectic pragma-stylistic approach to expose his deceptive strategies for the fulfillment of his selfish ends. Therefore, the study at issue follows an eclectic conceptual framework which comprises Merzah and Abbas's deceptive principle (2020) and Chen's (2001) self-politeness, along with the stylistic effects achieved via the manipulation of such linguistic tools, to explore the two levels of discourse, namely, character-character level and narrator-reader level proposed by Black (2006). The qualitative analysis of the novel has exhibited that Dr. Sheppard is an expert deceiver who principally relies on indirect strategies, as he is cognizant of the power of what is insinuated but left unsaid.

**Keywords:** Agatha Christie, deception, pragma-stylistics, vagueness, withholding information, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

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## Introduction

Although the literature on deception is immense, it is only recently that the concept of verbal deception has become more visible (McCornack, 1992). Many different fields of study, such as social psychology (Weber, 2017), forensics (Picornell, 2013), and politics (Al-Hindawi & Al-Aadili, 2017) among others have been of long-standing interest in the field of deception. Knapp, Hart, and Dennis (1974) undertook a psychological study to determine that verbal and nonverbal behaviors are characteristic of intentionally deceptive communication. They collected seventy-six videotaped interviews to provide a database for the analysis of 32 dependent measures. To achieve their aim, they provided a conceptual framework through which they have concluded that deceivers show more reticence, vagueness, uncertainty, nervousness, dependence, and unpleasantness than non-deceivers.

Moreover, Buller and Burgoon (2006) conducted over two dozen psychological experiments in which they asked participants to deceive one another. Following the lead of previous research studies, Buller and Burgoon suggested a theory which is entitled "interpersonal deception theory" whereby they argued that deception is an interpersonal act. They do not advocate the typical one-way communication experiment as a valid method to detect deception. Instead, they asserted that interactive communication is most necessary for the sake of detecting verbal and non-verbal deception. Similar to Knap et al.'s (1974) study, Buller and Burgoon concluded that there are four message characteristics that reflect the strategic intent: uncertainty and vagueness; nonimmediacy, reticence, and withdrawal; dissociation; and image-and-relationship protecting behaviour.

Nevertheless, one domain hitherto that seems to be under-researched is literary discourse. The literature also shows many studies on stylistics: for example, critical stylistics (Ahmed & Abbas, 2019), discourse stylistics (Abbas, 2020), cognitive stylistics (Jaafar, 2020), etc. However, such stylistic analyses gave no attention to the act of deception. Merzah and Abbas (2020), however, conducted a pragma-stylistic analysis by drawing on synthesizing an eclectic model to explore the deceptive strategies exploited in Flynn's (2012) psychological thriller *Gone Girl*. The main objective of the study was to compare the pragma-stylistic and socio-pragmatic differences between the antagonists Amy as a psychopathic character and her husband Nick as a non-psychopathic character. It was found that the style via which Amy and Nick deceive manifests linguistic gender differences. Both characters revealed different linguistic behaviors when deceiving the target: on the one hand, the psychopathic character showed directness and assertiveness. On the other hand, the non-psychopathic character showed uncertainty and reticence.

Unlike the pre-mentioned previous studies, namely, Knap et al. (1974) and Buller and Burgoon (2006), the present study focuses on literary discourse to manifest the deceptive verbal strategies of the antagonist Dr. Sheppard. Moreover, the difference between Merzah and Abbas's (2020) study and this one is that the former selected whodunnit/psychological thriller, one of the hybrid sub-genres of crime fiction, as data for the analysis. It also has a different model than the one in question. The latter study, however, focuses on a different sub-genre of crime fiction, that is, Golden Age classic detective fiction. This study, furthermore, adopts a different eclectic model than that of Merzah and Abbas. Except for their study, no other research to date examined verbal deception from a pragma-stylistic standpoint in the genre of detective fiction.

Be that as it may, this study aims at bridging the gap in the literature by manifesting certain deceptive strategies of withholding information and vagueness in Christie's (1926/2002) most successful novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. This can be achieved by drawing on a stylistic analysis. The analysis under consideration is particularly interested in surfacing the deceptive strategies in the genre of crime fiction because it is regarded as a fertile ground for deception. The genre itself carries deceptive connotations. More specifically, the present study is set for two objectives as a means of exposing the unorthodox manner via which Dr. Sheppard issues deceptive strategies: firstly, investigating the pragma-stylistic tools that manifest Dr. Sheppard's deceptive utterances on the narrator-reader level (N-RL) in the pre-dénouement stage. Secondly, examining the pragma-stylistic tools that reveal Dr. Sheppard's deceptive utterances on the character-character level (C-CL) in the pre-dénouement stage.

The study under discussion can yield significance to linguistics in general and pragma-stylistics in particular. It offers a linguistic examination of the deceptive utterances in the prototype detective novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. As a result, it is of value not only to the area of linguistics but also to that of literature; it can demonstrate how detective fiction writers deploy deceptive strategies successfully and creatively to challenge the abductive skills of readers, and hence increase the readership of this genre.

## Literature Review

### *Pragma-Stylistics*

Stylistics can be conceptualized as the scientific study of literary discourse and that it is the only linguistic sphere which allows the analysis of literary texts and their literary meaning by employing objective analytical linguistic-oriented tools (Fischer-Starcke, 2010). Based upon this view, stylistics, therefore, fills a gap in the literature of linguistics. In addition to the preceding conceptualization of stylistics, the modern view suggests that stylistics is a method that aims at explaining how meaning in literary or non-literary varieties is formed through the writer's or speaker's linguistic choices (Hickey, 1993). Pragmatics, however, is concerned with context-embedded aspects of language (Levinson, 1983). It can be alternatively demonstrated as in the following equation: [Pragmatics = Semantics + Context]. Hickey (1993) coined the term "pragma-stylistics", which, since then, has come to be an important approach to text analysis. Pragma-stylistics, in consonance with Black (2006), is concerned with showing the extent to which pragmatics contributes to the study of literature; it looks at the usefulness of pragmatic theories to the interpretation of literary texts. Busse, Montoro, and Nørgaard (2010) assert that "next to the classic stylistic tool kit of investigating graphological information, sound structure, grammatical structure of lexical patterning, pragmatic models like speech act theory, Grice's (1975) 'cooperative principle', politeness, implicatures, turn-taking management" (p. 43) are few of the pragma-stylistic approaches frequently applied to the language employed in literary discourses.

Following Busse et al. (2010), underlying a pragma-stylistic investigation of dialogue are some central questions of stylistic analysis:

Why and how does a play text/dialogue mean what it does? What is the specific style of a conventional exchange? How can it be analyzed? What are the effects of the linguistic choices made? (5) What do these choices say about the characters'/speakers' interpersonal

relations and their inherent power structures? How is humor generated? Why do we perceive interactional exchange as, for example, impolite? (p. 40)  
 Finally, the question "how deception is created and detected?" might as well be added to the afore-listed questions. By hybridizing pragmatics and stylistics, more comprehensive explanations can be presented for many unexplained phenomena (Hickey, 1993).

### ***Definitions of Deception***

According to Zuckerman, DePaulo, and Rosenthal (1981), deception is "an act that is intended to foster in another person a belief or understanding that the deceiver considers false" (p. 2). In a similar vein, Buller and Burgoon (2006) argued that deception is defined as "a message knowingly transmitted by a sender to foster a false belief or conclusion by the receiver" (p. 205). Based on this definition, there are two features that need to be fulfilled to perform the act of deception successfully: firstly, it is necessary for the sender to have a conscious intent to deform reality; secondly, the sender must expect the receiver to be unaware that they are ill-informed. Mahon (2007), on the other hand, conceptualized deception as follows:

[t]o intentionally cause another person to have or continue to have a false belief that is known or truly believed to be false by bringing about evidence on the basis of which the person has or continues to have a false belief (pp. 189-190).

The problem, however, is that Mahon specified the target as necessarily singular, not plural. Intuitively speaking, A can, via a gesture or a statement, deceive B, C, etc. simultaneously. For this reason, Mahon's definition is also rejected. Carson (2010) agrees with Mahon (2007) in that the process of deception should necessarily involve inserting false data in another person, where the information itself is false. He, nonetheless, disagreed with Mahon because the information can be truly or "partly" believed to be false by the sender. The aforementioned definitions can be summarised in one definition, which is endorsed in the study undertaken, as follows: A person S deceives another person (+) S<sub>2</sub> iff S<sub>1</sub> intentionally causes (+) S<sub>2</sub> to believe X (or persist in believing X), where X is false and S<sub>1</sub> necessarily believes that X is false. It is worth mentioning that the symbol "+" refers to the notion of pluralism/multiplicity, that is, one or more than one person being deceived.

### ***Withholding Information***

Ekman (1992) argued that concealment occurs when "the liar [technically, a deceiver, not a liar] withholds some information without actually saying anything untrue" (p. 28). The problem with this definition is that it treats "deception" and "lying" as two terms that denote the same semantic meaning. This is evident when Ekman (1992) began his definition of lying by saying, "[i]n my definition of a lie or deceit [emphasis added], then, one person intends to mislead another..." (p. 28). This conceptualization can be considered for the study under discussion provided that the researchers substitute the noun "liar" with "deceiver." Castelfranchi and Poggi (1994), along similar lines, conceptualized concealment as a deceptive behavior that occurs when the speaker "hides some information by giving H [the hearer] some other information that is true but is not the relevant one for H's goals" (p. 284). In light of this definition, concealment differs from lying in that the latter strategy puts forth "untrue" information. Also, Castelfranchi and Poggi advanced an argument, concluding that concealment is a strategy of omission, which makes the former a subordinate notion.

Galasiński (2000) and Marrelli (2004), however, seem to use the concepts omission and withholding information synonymously. Following this train of thought, Dynel (2018) differentiated between withholding information and deceptively withholding information, maintaining that “deception necessitates withholding information” (p. 299). Withholding information is of paramount importance for all deceptive forms. The phenomenon of lying, for instance, necessitates keeping true information, and the very act of deceiving for that matter, covert since the speaker aims at sustaining a false belief in the targeted hearer. This is a requisite of all forms of deception (Carson, 2010). Deceptively withholding information (which will be called “withholding information” hereafter), however, can be employed strategically to invite a false belief in the target, that is, as a form or a source of deception per se. For completeness, Dynel (2018) avered that it is the relevance of the concealed information, compulsorily coupled with the intention to invite a false belief in the targeted hearer that can architect the jointly sufficient criteria for withholding information.

Concerning the micro-strategies of withholding information, they can be systemized into two strategies: (i) half-truths which can be conceptualized as providing relevant “true” information, yet intentionally failing to deliver the entire truth (Marrelli & Castelfranchi, 1981), (ii) silence which is defined as the absence of talk. It is a non-verbal communication that transmits a plethora of meanings. Dynel (2018) maintained that withholding information can be performed by a “dint of silence”. Silence can be viewed as a strategy of deception only if the withheld information is of relevance to the situation under interaction, and, through which, the sender aims at fostering a false belief in the receiver(s) or to continue having it. Phrased differently, the deceivers may intentionally not participate in an exchange, while they are aware that they should because they have some crucial and relevant information to share with the target.

### ***Vagueness***

Égré and Icard (2018) put forth an argument in which they conclude that vagueness can be utilized as a deceptive mechanism. Vagueness might be described as a non-committal mechanism to impede the deceived from discovering the (entire) truth. This can happen in cases in which the speaker is “perfectly informed” and being purposefully imprecise to withhold information, hence misdirecting the hearer. Following this strategy, the speaker can certainly mislead but need not lie in the strict sense of the word. An exception, however, is made when the provided “partial” information triggers false implicature. Égré and Icard further argue that it is the context and the intention which determines the deceptiveness of this phenomenon. It can be deduced, so far, that vagueness can be deceptive in three ways: (1) when it is used to refrain from violating the maxim of quality at the expense of exploiting the maxims of manner and quantity (for not giving sufficient information); trigger false implicatures, thus violating the maxim of quality; (3) and when it is disguised in hedging expressions and/or presupposition.

### ***Unreliable Narration***

Even though fiction writers designed an unconventional literary device known as “unreliable narration,” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the term was first coined by Booth (1960) in his famous *Rhetoric in Fiction* which shaped and prospered the notion of narratology into a discipline. Booth (1961) phrased the notion of unreliable narration as in the subsequent lines: “I have called a narrator unreliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (that is to say, the

implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (pp. 158-159). Heyd (2006) summarised the concept of unreliable narration in few but efficient words: "A narrator is unreliable if he violates the CP without intending an implicature" (p. 225). It can be said, in simple terms, that one of the salient techniques of unreliable narration is the deviation from pragmatic theories. However, the researchers in this study will propose an argument that a new principle should be designed and followed when deceiving.

### ***The Deceptive Principle***

Merzah and Abbas (2020) composed a new principle which is modeled on Grice's (1991) cooperative principle. The four maxims of Grice (1991) can be demonstrated as follows: (1) The maxim of quality: (a) Do not say what you believe to be false. (b) Do not make your contribution more informative than as required. (2) The maxim of quantity: (a) Make your contribution as informative as is required. (b) Do not make your contribution more informative than as required. (3) The maxim of relevance: Be relevant. (4) The maxim of manner: (a) Avoid obscurity of expression. (a) Avoid obscurity of expression. (b) Avoid ambiguity. (c) Be brief. (d). Be orderly. In their model, Merzah and Abbas (2020) argued that interlocutors adhere to the following principle when intending to practice deception:

Make your conversational contribution not as is required, at the stage as you make it occur, by the purpose of direction of the talk exchange in which you evade, ambiguat, and/or are vague, while withholding your real intentions so as not to be honest or accountable for what you say. One might label this the Deceptive Principle. (p. 92)

As demonstrated below, Merzah and Abbas (2020) proposed four maxims that compose the deceptive principle (henceforth, DP):

(1) **The Maxim of Quantity:** (a) Do make your contribution as (un)informative (i.e., more or less than is required) as you need to achieve the fostering of a false belief in the target. Withhold relevant information if needed. (b) Do make your contribution more/less informative than is required. Distort (hyperbolise or downsize) reality if need be. (2) **The Maxim of Quality:** (a) Do not hesitate to falsify/fabricate/lie if it serves your argument better. (b) Do not hesitate to plant seeds of doubt, or spread rumours you have no evidence to be true. (3) **The Maxim of Relevance:** Be irrelevant. Do not hesitate to plant red herrings for the purpose of irrelevancy. To achieve this: (a) Evade addressing the heart of the matter or answering questions. (b) Practice self-/other face-threatening acts to distract the target's attention. (4) **The Maxim of Manner:** (a) Be unclear, indirect, and unorderedly to enable incoherence, hence deception. (b) Be ambiguous/vague if you need to mislead or hide information of truth/relevance. (p. 93)

The deceptive maxims stated above reveals that the nature of the deceptive principle is parasitic on the cooperative principle. On the surface, they must appear cooperative for the act of deceiving cannot be effective without the parameter of covertness. This is precisely what McCornack's (1992) IMT has concluded: The speaker pretends to adhere to the cooperative principle —they are careful not to make their violation apparent to the target for the deception lies in the target thinking.

### ***Chen's (2001) Self-Politeness***

Chen (2001) provided the notion of self-face, which means politeness directed to the self. He argued that self-politeness or self-face refers to cases in communication where the need to shield and enhance one's face influences the style and the content of what one says. By drawing on Brown

and Levinson's theory, Chen (2001) proposed similar strategies for his model. However, only two strategies are applicable to the selected data of this study:

- 1) Withhold the self-face threatening act (henceforth, W-SFTA) – which can be boiled down to being silent altogether. It should be mentioned that this strategy is not discussed in the model that is designed for other-face. The strategy in dispute is realized by the maxim of quantity of the DP.
- 2) Off record: This strategy is manipulated when much is at stake. It is realized by the three maxims, namely, quality, relevance, and manner, of the DP. The study in question, nevertheless, is limited to the maxims of quantity and manner.

It seems that Chen (2001) has separated two related concepts into two super strategies: off record: the maxim of quantity and the super strategy withhold self-face threatening act (i.e., silence). Because the DP includes silence as the first sub maxim of quantity, it has been decided that W-SFTA should be included within off record: the maxim of quantity to avoid redundancy. The model of Chen is employed in the study in question to surface all the macro-strategies of deception, depending on the intention and the style via which Dr. Sheppard deceives.

### ***Detective Fiction***

The tradition of classic detective fiction has been given multi-labels: the clue-puzzle story, whodunnit, the mystery story, and the analytic detective fiction, all of which refer to the basic structure of the genre, that is, to its characteristic of intriguing and challenging the reader to analyze the murder-detection-explanation stages successfully (Horsley, 2005). During the interwar period (1918-1939), the enclosed British community was the provenance of betrayal, deception, tension, and death (Çelikel & Taniyan, 2015). The period of the 1920s and 1930s, as Çelikel and Taniyan (2015) argued, is known as the "Golden Age" of (classic) detective fiction in England. The term under consideration can refer to either the period itself (interwar), or the type/genre of crime fiction produced. Todorov (1977) averred that detective fiction was at its peak during the interwar period (1918-1939). It is during this age that murder became an indispensable part of crime fiction after focusing on robbery and fraud crimes as in Sherlock Holmes' stories (Rowland, 2010).

It was also the age where crime writers employed more intricate plots which can be particularized by a gathered group of vastly possible suspects. As Roland (2010) demonstrated, the Golden Age presented crime fiction typically in a secluded country house or any locked room. The Golden Age fiction is characterized by the marginalizing of sex, vulgarity, and violence, which lead to forming the subgenre of cozy mystery (Bertens & D'haen, 2001). It has consistent features introduced in seriatim fashion such as discovering a body, facing a series of red herrings, finding clues to solve the puzzle, and the dénouement of "whodunit" (Rowland, 2010). It is worth noting that the dénouement stage, also known as the solution or the revelation stage, in crime fiction is the segment of the story in which the protagonist or any other character unravels all the mysteries of the murder. It sets the finale of the story for readers and other characters. Simply put, it is "as much a 'tying up' of the action as an untying" (Wales, 2011, p. 107).

Scaggs (2005) has used the term "whodunnit" synonymously with "detective fiction." Readers must be provided with linguistic clues from which the identity of the perpetrator of the crime should be induced before the detective or any other intelligent character solves the mystery in the dénouement stage in the final pages of the story. For this reason, crime fiction challenges the

abductive skills of the reader. Detective fiction has several genres as briefly afore-demonstrated. The Detective fiction *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is a mixed-breed of the three most common detective fiction subgenres, namely, whodunnit, locked room mystery, and cozy mystery (Ashley, 2002; Bertens & D'haen, 2001; Todorov, 1977).

### ***Christie's (1926/2002) The Murder of Roger Ackroyd***

Like many mystery novels, and particularly Christie's works, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is set in a claustrophobic environment that seems isolated from the rest of the world—as a result, the novel does not allude to historical events. Following Todorov (1977), Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is one of the top novels that best exemplifies the subgenre of whodunnit. A novel that falls under this category presents not one, but two stories: the story of the murder and the story of the investigation. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Dr. Sheppard, the narrator, is presented from the beginning as a sincere, sympathetic, and peaceful person, only to discover in the last part of the book that he is the mysterious murderer, leaving readers to question whom to trust. Presenting the narrator as a physician and a polite man is a red herring in itself, distracting readers and misdirecting suspicion. Contemporary readers, especially those in the 1920s, would be predisposed to trust him on account of the long-standing tradition, stretching back to the *Sherlock Holmes* stories (narrated by the reliable Dr. Watson) in which the narrator of the detective story is the most trustworthy character. In this novel, Christie challenges readers' assumptions about narration and the conventions of the mystery novel when it is revealed in the final chapter of the novel, entitled *Apologia*, that the novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is a manuscript written by Dr. Sheppard who appears to be the mysterious murderer. Priestman (2003) asserted that Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is “full of impostures” (p. 82).

Dr. Sheppard is not a cold-blooded psychopathic person who likes to harm or slaughter people for his pleasure. Instead, he is an ordinary man who grew weak at some point in his life. Because of his critical financial problems, he blackmails Ms. Ferrars, one of the characters who quickly commits suicide at the beginning of the novel. When Mr. Ackroyd is informed about this, he is soon also murdered by the physician. As Poirot remarks, the mysterious murderer is not a criminal nor a sociopath; he is only a desperate person with a “strain of weakness” as Dr. Sheppard indirectly describes himself. Almost all the characters avoid the truth in different scenes in the novel.

### **Methodology**

The framework of the study undertaken comprises two models:

- 1) Chen's (2001) self-politeness
- 2) Merzah and Abbas's (2020) DP.

They have been selected because of their efficient utility to surface the strategies of deception, namely, withholding information and vagueness. This section is finalized by a synopsis of the techniques of data analysis:

- 1) Each utterance or related utterances, according to the researchers' interpretation, will be given numbers in a superscript format to refer to them as representations of the utterances in question instead of re-writing pieces of the extract whenever needed, hence save space.
- 2) Each extract will be contextualized before providing the analysis.



- 3) Square brackets are used to enclose material such as symbols, explanation, or addition that the researchers have inserted in a quotation.
- 4) Tables which demonstrate the frequencies of the deceptive strategies, their realizations, and the pragma-stylistic tools used for analyzing each utterance will be provided, for the sake of precision and characterization. Beck (2003) has suggested that descriptive statistics would be of great value if incorporated within the procedures of the analysis in qualitative research method. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), moreover, the process of tabulation of the frequencies of each characteristic and providing descriptive statistics is an essential method of data analysis in qualitative content analysis.

### Data Analysis

The section in dispute shows the analysis of the selected extracts by drawing on the eclectic framework which is demonstrated in the two previous sections.

#### Extract -1-: N-RL + C-CL

'In all probability this is the last case I shall ever mean to *know*.<sup>[N.1]</sup> And I shall know—in spite of you all.'<sup>[N.2]</sup> He brought out the last words provocatively, hurling them in our faces as it were.<sup>[N.3]</sup> I think we all flinched back a little, excepting Geoffrey Raymond, who remained good-humoured and imperturbable as usual.<sup>[N.4]</sup> 'How do you mean—in spite of us all?<sup>[N.5]</sup> he asked, with slightly raised eyebrows<sup>[N.6]</sup>. 'But—just that, monsieur.<sup>[N.7]</sup> Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me.'<sup>[N.8]</sup> He raised his hand as a faint murmur of protest arose.<sup>[N.9]</sup> 'Yes, yes, I know what I am saying.<sup>[N.10]</sup> [...] *Each one of you has something to hide*.<sup>[N.11]</sup> Come now, am I right?'<sup>[N.12]</sup> His glance, challenging and accusing, swept around the table.<sup>[N.13]</sup> And every pair of eyes dropped before his.<sup>[N.14]</sup> Yes, mine as well.<sup>[N.15]</sup> 'I am answered,'<sup>[N.16]</sup> said Poirot, with a curious laugh.<sup>[N.17]</sup> He got up from his seat.<sup>[N.18]</sup> 'I appeal to you all. Tell me the truth—the whole truth.'<sup>[N.19]</sup> There was a silence.<sup>[N.20]</sup> 'Will no one speak?'<sup>[N.21]</sup> He gave the same short laugh again.<sup>[N.22]</sup> '*C'est dommage* [unfortunately],'<sup>[N.23]</sup> he said, and went out<sup>[N.24]</sup> (Christie, 1926/2002, p. 146)

#### Contextualization of Extract -1-

Poirot proposes to Dr. Sheppard that they should have a meeting with Ackroyd's family. After gathering in Ackroyd's house, Poirot first asks Flora to disclose Ralph's location if she knows his whereabouts since this act will declare his (Ralph's) name. Flora solemnly insists that has not the slightest idea where Ralph is. Next, Poirot employs the same plea to the others—including Dr. Sheppard, yet he receives no answer.

#### Analysis of Extract -1-

The above-cited extract is restricted to repeatedly revealing two deceptive micro-strategies: half-truths and silence—both of which are realizations of the deceptive macro-strategy withholding information. After each utterance detective Poirot has produced [N.1; N.2; N.8; N.10; N.11; N.12; N.16; N.19; N.21; N.23] particularly the ones where he asked direct questions that demand eliciting answers [N.12; N.19], issued an order to speak [N.21], along with Raymond's question [N.4], Dr. Sheppard has practiced deception on the C-CL via silence, as he has had eleven opportunities to confess or reveal the truth, yet chose to be silent.

He is purposefully not engaging in the exchange nor answering questions directed to him while he knows he should, because he has the most relevant and crucial information to share with the target (i.e., Detective Poirot and Roger's family). Dr. Sheppard relies on their default assumptions that he is cooperative, innocent, and a family friend. These default assumptions are the false beliefs that he has allowed them to nurture by appealing to the first maxim of quantity and the self-politeness strategy of being off record by the submaxim in dispute, that is, "[d]o not make your contribution as (un)informative (i.e., more or less than is required) as you need to achieve fostering a false belief in the target. Withhold relevant information if needed", after each of the utterances [N.1; N.2: N.4; N.8; N.10. N.11; N.12; N.16; N.19; N.21; N.23]. On a final note, deception on the C-CL in respect to the aforementioned extract is in the form of withholding full utterances (i.e., silence) to keep the deceived parties in a state of complete ignorance and, consequently, make them nurture false beliefs. This is pragma-stylistically realized by withholding the SFTA which, in turn, is triggered by virtue of the deceptive maxim of quantity and the strategy of being off record in terms of self-politeness. It also seems that Dr. Sheppard is practicing deception for protecting and self-serving purposes since he refuses to appear as a murderer in the eyes of his sister, Caroline.

Eventually, detective Poirot gives him the will to commit suicide instead of deforming Caroline's high expectations of her elder brother (i.e., Dr. Sheppard). In his letter of Apologia (the final chapter of the novel in which Dr. Sheppard puts forth a detailed confession and a suicide note to readers on the narrator-narratee level, namely, N-RL + C-CL), he writes to readers the following lines:

My greatest fear all through has been Caroline. I have fancied she might guess. Curious the way she spoke that day of my 'strain of weakness.' Well, she will never know the truth. There is, as Poirot said, one way out... I can trust him. He and Inspector Raglan will manage it between them. I should not like Caroline to know. She is fond of me, and then, too, she is proud... (Christie, 1926/2002, p. 285)

Pragma-stylistically, this is realized by the deceptive maxim of quantity and withhold the SFTA since, based upon Chen's (2001) notions, the term "self" does not only refer to Dr. Sheppard himself, but also those aligned with him, such as his sister. Following this line of argument, triggered by the intention to save self-face, Dr. Sheppard plans to deceive the targeted hearer/reader every time he keeps silent.

A narrator is reliable only when he demonstrates objectivity, a wide range of knowledge, and leaves nothing of relevance unexposed. In all the utterances [N.3; N4; N.6. N.9; N.13; N.14; N.15; N.17; N.18; N.20; N.22: N.24], Dr. Sheppard is being truthful in his narration, but not completely. The only reason that prompts Detective Poirot to gather Ackroyd's family and Dr. Sheppard in one room is to appeal to them to reveal the whereabouts of Ralph and to confess of murdering Ackroyd because he suspects that one of them is the culprit. Since Dr. Sheppard has hidden Ralph and murdered Ackroyd, he is classified as an unreliable narrator for he has withheld the most two relevant and crucial items of information to readers. As such, Dr. Sheppard is practicing deception on the N-RL via employing the micro-deceptive strategy of half-truth 12 times. This is manifested by the third super strategy, that is, off record, of self-politeness which is

triggered by the deceptive maxim of quantity and the strategy of being off record in regard to self-politeness.

### **Extract -2-: N-RL + C-CL**

'You think it's burglary?' <sup>[N.1a]</sup> I said slowly. <sup>[N.1b]</sup> 'What else could it be?' <sup>[N.2]</sup> There's no question of suicide, I suppose?' <sup>[N.3]</sup> [...] 'It's murder right enough. <sup>[N.4]</sup> But with what motive?' <sup>[N.5]</sup> 'Roger hadn't an enemy in the world,' said Blunt quietly. <sup>[N.6]</sup> 'Must have been burglars. <sup>[N.7]</sup> But what was the thief after?' <sup>[N.8a]</sup> Nothing seems to be disarranged?' <sup>[N.8b]</sup> He looked round the room. <sup>[N.9]</sup> Raymond was still sorting the papers on the desk. <sup>[N.10]</sup> "There seems nothing missing, and none of the drawers show signs of having been tampered with,' the secretary observed at last. <sup>[N.11]</sup> 'It's very mysterious.' <sup>[N.12]</sup> Blunt made a slight motion with his head. <sup>[N.13]</sup> "There are some letters on the floor here,' he said. <sup>[N.14]</sup> I looked down. <sup>[N.15]</sup> Three or four letters still lay where Ackroyd had dropped them earlier in the evening. <sup>[N.16]</sup> But the blue envelope containing Mrs. Farrar's letter had disappeared <sup>[N.17]</sup> (Christie, 1926/2002, p. 51)

### **Contextualization of Extract -2-**

Raymond, Ackroyd's secretary, suggests that the criminal act probably began as a robbery since, as he naïvely claims, Ackroyd has no enemies. On the face of it, nothing seems to be stolen. The absence of Ferrar's letter, however, suggests that the blackmailer is somehow involved.

### **Analysis of Extract -2-**

Since the verb "say" in utterance [N.1b] is defined and treated synonymously with the verb "utter" (Meriam-Webster, 2020), and the verbs "say" and "utter" can refer to any of the following verbs or illocutionary acts, for example, "asking," "confirming," "demanding," "lying," "pretending," etc., this shows that the verb "say" is not precise, as it implies a one-to-many relationship [N.1b]. That is to say, the dialogue tag "said" implies a relationship of one word versus many meanings. It should be mentioned that Dialogue tags are expressions used after a character has spoken, as in "(s)he said/thought/yelled/lie," to show which character is communicating at the given time. They are also essential to add further details to the dialogue (Evans, 2015). For the sake of comparison and clarification, the following are examples of faithful narration which are extracted from *Gone Girl* (Flynn, 2012). Nick, Amy's husband, punctiliously exhibits to readers the exact degree of his sincerity in the first two utterances infra:

- i. "So what's that one [the note] mean? he [the policeman] asked. "I have no idea, "I *lied* [emphasis added] (Flynn, 2012, p. 67).
- ii. "I don't have it with me," I lied [Nick deceives his mother in-law] (Flynn, 2012, p. 80).

Likewise, the following examples demonstrate the manner through which Amy meticulously expressed her sincerity:

- i. "I can just barely," I lie [Amy is referring to her swimming skills] (Flynn, 2012, p. 262).
- ii. "Reading," I lie [Amy is lying about her occupation] (Flynn, 2012, p. 283).

Following this train of thought, Dr. Sheppard has deliberately chosen the verb "said" to report his speech instead of, for instance, choosing the verb "pretended" to be vague, hence deceptive. Accordingly, Dr. Sheppard is communicating deception on the N-RL by employing an imprecise

verb, that is, "said" which, in turn, appeals to the maxim of manner and the strategy of being off record by the maxim under consideration in terms of self-politeness [N.1b].

Utterance [N.2], furthermore, is presented by Dr. Sheppard to be true, yet not sufficiently since the fact that Dr. Sheppard is the murderer has been withheld. Because the importance of this fact is vital, it can be concluded that Dr. Sheppard has exploited the micro-deceptive strategy of half-truth which is centered on the deceptive maxim of quantity and the strategy of being off record in respect to off record.

On the C-CL, Dr. Sheppard does not respond to Raymond who has produced an affirmative illocutionary act: "I hereby affirm that the murderer must have been a burglar," [N.7] and asked two questions concerning the motive of the thief and the scene of the crime [N.8a; N.8b]. Raymond is under the false impression that Dr. Sheppard's silence is a sign of a lack of knowledge. However, the act of silence here is a sign of deception that is driven by a two-layered intention:

- i. An egoistic or self-serving intention to escape punishment from the police and Ackroyd's family.
- ii. W-SFTA, as he is fond of his sister and does not want her to know that he has committed a murder. Therefore, he feels self-ashamed. In his Apologia, Dr. Sheppard shows that he prefers committing suicide over letting Caroline, his sister, know about the blackmail and the murder.

Therefore, Dr. Sheppard allows Raymond's false belief to be nurtured by the default assumption that it is centered on the micro-deceptive strategy of silence which, in turn, appeals to the maxim of quantity and the self-politeness strategy of being off record by the maxim in question. On the N-RL, however, Dr. Sheppard is communicating true utterances [N.9; N.10; N.11; N.12], yet he is not being informative enough to share the crucial fact that he is the murderer. As such, there is an employment of the deceptive micro-strategy of half-truth which is based on the deceptive maxim of quantity and the strategy of being off record in regard to self-politeness.

Along similar lines, on the N-RL, Dr. Sheppard is issuing a true utterance; however, he has manipulated the utterance by morphing its structure from the active to the passive voice to hide the subject or the doer of the action [N.17]. He has also exploited a verb that cannot collocate with the preposition "by," that is, "disappeared" to further ascertain that he has not the slightest clue concerning the identity of the person who took the letter. Following this thread of thought, the use of the passive voice triggers the deceptive maxim of quantity and the self-politeness strategy of being off record by the maxim of quantity in respect to self-politeness which, in turn, manifests the micro-deceptive strategy of half-truth [N.17].

### Discussion of the Findings

This section advances the findings of the analysis and tabulates them for the sake of maximizing illustration. Further, it offers interpretations which psychologize the character of Dr. Sheppard.

Table 1. *Frequencies and percentages of the pragma-stylistic tools of the selected extracts*

Pragma-Stylistic Tools		Dr. Sheppard			
		Pre-dénouement Stage			
Self-Politeness	DP	N-RL		C-CL	
		no.	%	no.	%
Off record: W-SFTA:	Maxim of quantity: 1 <sup>st</sup> sub-maxim	17	94%	11	100%
Off record: W-SFTA	Maxim of quantity: 2 <sup>nd</sup> sub-maxim	0	0%	0	0%
Off record:	Maxim of manner: 1 <sup>st</sup> sub-maxim	0	0%	0	0%
Off record:	Maxim of manner: 2 <sup>nd</sup> sub-maxim	1	6%	0	0%
Total		18	100%	11	100%

It is exhibited in Table one that the first sub-maxim of quantity was the most exploited sub-maxim vis-à-vis the other sub-maxims of the DP. The frequencies further show that the sub-maxim under consideration was employed on the N-RL more than it was employed on the C-CL. The second sub-maxim of manner was used only once on the N-RL. The rest of the (sub-)maxims showed no appearance in the selected extracts.

Table 2. *Frequencies and percentages of the macro- and micro- deceptive strategies in the selected extracts*

Micro- and Macro- Deceptive Strategies	Dr. Sheppard			
	Pre-dénouement Stage			
	N-RL		C-CL	
	no.	%	no.	%
Vagueness	1	6%	0	0%
Withholding information: Half-truth	17	94%	2	18%
Withholding information: Silence	0	0%	9	82%
Total	18	100%	11	100%

The findings in Table two show that Dr. Sheppard employed the macro-strategy of withholding information significantly more than the strategy of vagueness. On the C-CL, it was found that the micro-strategy of silence was used with the frequency of (9) whereas no employment was found on the N-RL. The micro-strategy of half-truth, moreover, was used (17) times on the N-RL versus two on the C-CL. The strategy of vagueness was used only once in the selected extracts, particularly on the N-RL.

The selected extracts show that Dr. Sheppard is interested in practicing deception via exploiting indirect deceptive strategies (viz., withholding information and vagueness). It is also shown in Table two that the deception is boiled down to silence nine times on the C-CL. Both of the strategies, namely, vagueness and withholding information imply discreetness. It is perhaps difficult for Dr. Sheppard to be silent altogether on the N-RL since he is the narrator, and, therefore, responsible for commenting on the occurring events and offering dialogue tags at the very least. The most workable and reticent alternative deceptive strategy on the C-CL, as a result,

is the micro-deceptive strategy of half-truth, followed by the deceptive strategy of vagueness. Dr. Sheppard’s preference to deploy indirect deceptive strategies can be justified as follows: The following lines are excerpted from *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* to support/confirm the argument under discussion: “My greatest fear all through has been Caroline. I have fancied she might guess [...] And then what shall it be? Veronal? There should be a kind of poetic justice [...] I have no pity for myself either” (Christie, 1926/2002, p. 286). It is quite clear that Dr. Sheppard, burdened with remorse, believes that he deserves punishment.

This finding seems to lend support to a recent study in the literature on deception: Merzah and Abbas (2020) examined Nick’s (Amy’s husband) utterances in terms of deception and reached to the finding that he deceives mainly by withholding information. The researchers justified the finding in question by affirming that Nick, in contrast to Amy, is not a psychopathic character. Rather, the reason for his tendency to withhold information is attributed to his feeling of embarrassment and guilt as it is confirmed by the character himself on the N-RL: “I felt a burst of intense guilt, self-loathing. I thought for a second I might cry, finally” (Flynn, 2012, p.79). It is also worth noting that the author Flynn and the character Nick are both Americans, whereas the author Christie and the character Dr. Sheppard are both British. By drawing a parallel between an American and a British non-psychopathic male character, it seems that they both share the same style of deceiving (i.e., withholding information by utilizing the maxim of quantity) the target. Accordingly, though it is out of the scope of the study undertaken, it can be concluded that the findings under argument have the potential to be extrapolated cross-culturally.

By this token, it can be affirmed that the findings of the study under construction along with Merzah and Abbas’s (2020) article replicate the findings of previous classic studies (e.g., Buller & Burgoon, 2006; Knapp et al., 1974) in the field of psychology in terms of the following:

- a. It has been traditionally argued that untrained/ordinary deceivers are reticent in comparison to truth-tellers.
- b. They also seem more uncertain/hesitant than truth-tellers.

The available findings can be better illustrated in the figure infra:

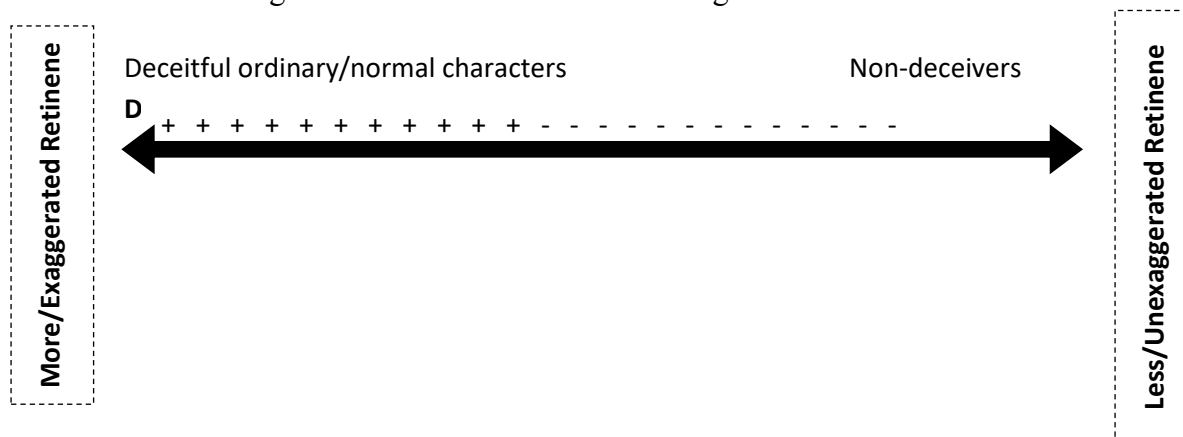


Figure 2. Visual representation of the degree of retinene in relation to the pragma-stylistic preferences between ordinary deceitful characters and non-deceivers

## Conclusion

It has been manifested that Dr. Sheppard slyly deceives by drawing predominately on indirectness and passiveness, both of which coalesce into forming his style of deceit. Detective fiction writers need to write a story that shows deception and challenges readers' analytical skills to solve the mystery. However, to unravel the mystery, readers need the narrator to be (semi-) truthful; giving false facts on both levels of the discourse will make the task of solving crimes impossible. Therefore, the study in dispute approached the text pragma-stylistically to unpack the choices of the deceptive strategies that are successfully utilized by the writer. As such, the study contributed to the knowledge of pragma-stylistics, deception, and literature. The rigorous and systematic pragma-stylistic tools helped to achieve the two pre-established objectives for this article:

The first deceptive maxim of quantity as a strategy of being off record to save self-face scored the highest frequency in comparison to the other sub-maxims with a percentage of 94% on the N-RL and 100% on the C-CL. This finding exhibits that the macro-deceptive strategy of withholding information was the highest in frequency in comparison to vagueness. Moreover, the micro-deceptive strategy of half-truth scored a higher percentage 94% on the N-RL than it did on the C-CL with a percentage of 18%. The micro-strategy of silence, furthermore, showed a higher frequency on the C-CL with a percentage of 82% than it did on the N-RL with a percentage of 0%. Whereas half-truth scored higher on the N-RL, Table two showed that silence scored a higher percentage on the C-CL. The latter finding was justified by the fact that Dr. Sheppard, as a narrator, is obliged to report the events to readers. Therefore, he could not resort to the micro-strategy of silence. Nevertheless, he chose utilizing the micro-strategy of withholding information instead because he still needed to hide crucial facts from readers. This choice of strategy enabled him to narrate certain aspects of the truth and conceal the most significant ones simultaneously. He also utilized the verb "said" as a dialogue tag to further mislead readers. Although he did not lie in this instance, his employment of the verb "said" is vague and it lacks exactness. As shown in Table two, this surfaced the strategy of being off record to save self-face, which led to the manifestation of the second deceptive maxim of manner. It scored a higher frequency on the N-RL with a percentage of 1% in relation to the C-CL in which the maxim in question scored a percentage of 0%. As such, the first and second objectives have been achieved.

The study in question offers certain implications for novelists/writers in general and crime writers in particular as it helps them to understand the strategies of deception and how they are employed by a first-person narrator/character. It is also helpful for them to know the linguistic characteristic of the sub-genres of detective fiction, namely, locked room mystery, whodunnit, and cozy mystery. On that note, the article under construction can be regarded as a useful source for crime fiction writers specifically; the process of writing a crime novel can be significantly less effortful and more methodical.

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