Reporting Verbs as a Stylistic Device in the Creation of Fictional Personalities in Literary Texts

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This article presents an analysis of how reporting verbs can contribute to the creation of fictional personalities in literary texts. The examination of verbs was carried out using Caldas-Coulthard's (1987) taxonomy, in which verbs are classified in self-contained categories according to the reporter's level of mediation on the words glossed. The examples under analysis were all taken from Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839). For the sake of consistency, I focused on one character, Ralph Nickleby, whose words are reported using twenty-six verbs a total of 501 times throughout the story. As will be shown, Dickens's choice of verbs projects a specific way of speaking that triggers information about the villain's personality, thereby contributing to shaping his well-known evil character. The analysis will also illustrate how reporting verbs can influence the way in which readers form an impression of characters on the basis of their ways of speaking during the course of a story.

Keywords: reporting verbs; fictional personalities; characterisation; Charles Dickens; *Nicholas Nickleby*; Ralph Nickleby

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Los verbos de habla como recurso estilístico en la caracterización de personajes en textos literarios

En este artículo se analiza el modo cómo los verbos de habla contribuyen a la caracterización de los personajes en textos literarios. Para ello se ha utilizado la clasificación de Caldas-Coulthard (1987), en la que los verbos se organizan en diferentes categorías según su nivel de interferencia sobre el discurso referido. Los ejemplos analizados pertenecen a la novela *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), de Charles Dickens. Por razones de consistencia, el estudio se ha centrado en un solo personaje: Ralph Nickleby, con quien Dickens emplea veintiséis verbos un total de 501 veces a lo largo de la historia. Como se podrá comprobar, la elección que

Dickens hace de los verbos contribuye a proyectar el rol de villano de este personaje a través de un habla muy específica. El análisis servirá, asimismo, para ilustrar cómo los verbos de habla influyen en la impresión que el lector se forma de los personajes en el transcurso de la historia a través de sus formas de hablar.

Palabras clave: verbos de habla; personajes literarios; caracterización; Charles Dickens; *Nicholas Nickleby*; Ralph Nickleby

1. Introduction

In this article, I analyse how reporting verbs can contribute to the creation of fictional personalities in literary texts. It is commonly stated that reporting verbs, both in and beyond fiction, not only have a linguistic function, but also evaluate the discourse being reported (Zwicky 1971; Verschueren 1980; Rudzka-Ostyn 1988; Levin 1993; Caldas-Coulthard 1994; Klamer 2000; Kissine 2010; Urban and Ruppenhofer 2001, among others).[1] In the case of fictional narratives, reporting verbs can be, therefore, a powerful device for characterisation. Unfortunately, the interpretative value of reporting verbs tends to be discussed only with regard to those specific verbs that reveal information related to the "affective meaning" (Leech 1974, 14) of the utterance—the meaning contributed by features that reveal the feelings of the speaker. This article analyses a variety of types of verb, from those that encode attitudinal stances to those that appear merely to refer to the process of interaction. As will be shown, the cumulative effect created by the use of all these verbs can contribute to the portrayal of fictional characters.

The examination of verbs was carried out using Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard's taxonomy (1987), which classifies verbs into five self-contained categories according to the reporter's level of mediation on the words glossed. The examples under analysis were all taken from Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* ([1839] 2008). For the sake of consistency, I concentrated on one character: Ralph Nickleby, whose words are reported by Dickens through the use of twenty-six different verbs a total of 501 times throughout the story.[2] Ralph Nickleby is the uncle of young Nicholas. He is the novel's main villain and principal antagonist. He is a cold, manipulative usurer who finds work for both Nicholas and his sister and then attempts to use them. He hangs himself after Smike is revealed to be his son, whom he had supposed dead.[3] As will be shown, Dickens's use of reporting verbs helps to shape his malevolent character during the course of the story. Although the principal aim of the analysis is to illustrate the characterising potential of reporting verbs, it will also contribute to a better understanding of Dickens's craftsmanship from a stylistic perspective, as his use of reporting verbs remains an underexplored aspect of his well-known techniques of characterisation.[4]

The article begins with a brief discussion on the studies of Charles Dickens's use of reporting verbs (section two). This is followed by a brief overview of reporting verbs and their characterising potential, focusing on Caldas-Coulthard's (1987) taxonomy (section three). In addition, the methodological procedure used to retrieve

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[1] Evaluation should be understood, following Hunston and Thompson, as "the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about" (2000, 5).

[2] The 501 occurrences analysed are all from stretches of direct speech presentation, the most widely used strategy among nineteenth-century English novelists (Busse 2010).

[3] For a more detailed account of the character, see the entry "Ralph Nickleby" in Hawes (2002, 165).

[4] Two remarkable exceptions are the analyses carried out by Mahlberg, Smith and Preston (2013) and Ruano San Segundo (2016), both discussed in section 2.

the examples is explained (section four) and the catalogue of verbs used to report Ralph Nickleby's words in *Nicholas Nickleby* is shown in section five. These verbs are analysed in section six, which is divided into five sub-sections in accordance with the categories proposed by Caldas-Coulthard (1987). The article concludes with some remarks about the potential of reporting verbs and suggests further possible areas of research on reporting verbs.

2. SCOPE

There are two reasons for choosing Dickens for the purpose of this analysis. First and foremost, one of the most widely discussed aspects of his well-known techniques of characterisation is the individualisation of his characters' speeches. Indeed, he provides the reader with "fairly frequent descriptions of the way in which characters speak" (Brook 1970, 39), thereby making speech "an integral part of the personality of each character and a part which we recognize each time he or she appears" (Quirk 1961, 21). Therefore, Dickensian characters seem fertile ground for the analysis of the potential of reporting verbs in the creation of fictional personalities in literary texts. Secondly, and despite the numerous detailed analyses of his characters' ways of speaking, the projection of his characters' voices through reporting verbs is still underexplored. With the exception of a few isolated studies that mention Dickens's use of reporting verbs in passing (Fido 1968; Page 1973; Lambert 1981; Nishio 2005), traditional literary criticism has, in fact, never focused on this aspect. In his analysis of *Great Expectations* (1861), for instance, Martin Fido notes how "Pip's immature lack of control over his emotions is presented through his diction, his actions, and the fact that he 'cries,' 'exclaims' and speaks severely or moodily, while Biddy 'says,' and moves, as a rule, slowly and quietly" (1968, 84). In this sense, Norman Page states that, like many other writers, Dickens seeks "to relieve the monotony of constant 'he-saids' by resorting to elegant variation" (1973, 26). Page concentrates on the opening chapter of *David Copperfield* (1859), which "has *returned* eight times, *asked* and *cried* five times each, *exclaimed, faltered* and *resumed* twice each, and *repeated, replied, sobbed, mused* and *ejaculating* once each" (1973, 26; empahsis in the original). However, Page does not delve any deeper into the stylistic function of these choices. As for Mark Lambert, he realises that the variety of reporting verbs in Dickens's novels is "far larger than would be needed simply to avoid monotony" (1981, 8). Although he acknowledges that it would be interesting to compare the proportions of different types of verbs in different novels as well as to analyse them in a particular work (16), he unfortunately goes no further than that. Finally, Miyuki Nishio (2005) analyses reporting clauses in *Oliver Twist* (1838). She examines the verbs that Dickens uses to report the words of Fagin and Sikes throughout the story. However, she focuses mainly on the relationship between these verbs and the reporting adjuncts with which they appear, ignoring the characterising role that reporting verbs play in the novel.

Although traditional literary criticism has paid little attention to Dickens's use of reporting verbs, it is only fair, however, to state that the use of innovative corpus-linguistic approaches has resulted in several recent studies on this subject, such as those conducted by Michael Mahlberg, Catherine Smith and Simon Preston (2013), Miyuki Nishio (2013) and Pablo Ruano San Segundo (2016). Mahlberg, Smith and Preston identify and analyse the patterns of seventeen different verbs in suspended reporting clauses, demonstrating that "a typology of reporting verbs can overemphasize the meaning of the verb in isolation" (2013, 52), thereby revealing significant character information. With regard to Nishio (2013), she compares Dickens's use of certain speech verbs against the backdrop of two corpora based on novels, one from the eighteenth century and one from the nineteenth century. She concludes that Dickens's use of these verbs is exceptionally rich and varied, even though her analysis is limited to only three different verbs (*fawn*, *frown* and *sneer*). Finally, Ruano San Segundo (2016) also uses a corpus methodology to retrieve 17,021 occurrences of 130 verbs from Dickens's novels. Focusing on his use of specific descriptive verbs, he explores the characterising value of reporting verbs, looking into how they contribute to the individualisation of characters' speeches. The present analysis of reporting verbs associated with Ralph Nickleby will build and expand on these studies, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the way in which Charles Dickens constructed his characters' speeches. As will be shown, the well-known turns of speech and habitual gestures of Dickens's characters are not isolated characterising features, but rather part of a wide range of textual functions "presented more subtly and integrated into the wider picture of the fictional world" (Mahlberg 2013, 165).

3. REPORTING VERBS IN FICTIONAL NARRATIVES

Speech presentation is one of the pillars of fictional narratives (Bray 2014, 222). One of the many functions fulfilled by the reporting of characters' words is, of course, that of characterisation: speech may become both "a badge of identity and a means of enriching the reader's awareness of a given character's individuality" (Page 1973, 15). Such individuality, however, is the result not only of what characters say but also of how they say it. As Jonathan Culpeper states in his model of characterisation in literary texts, "the way one speaks can trigger information about […] personality," thereby contributing decisively to the portrayal of characters (2001, 215). Representing fictional characters' ways of speaking, however, is not easy, as the written medium limits the representation of "such things as tone of voice, voice pitch, nasality, speech defects, singing, etc." (Brüngel-Dittrich 2005, 30). These aspects, which may significantly influence the shaping of a character's speech, and therefore his or her characterisation, are frequently compensated for by the use of reporting verbs. As noted in the introduction, however, the interpretative value of reporting verbs tends to be discussed only with regard to those specific verbs that encode attitudinal stances.

Naturally, the potential of those verbs (*growl*, *thunder*, *whimper*, etc.) is not in dispute, as they refer to "aspects of speech that contribute to the meaning over and above what the verbal element of the message means" (Brown 1990, 112). However, seemingly more neutral choices can also be meaningful for the purposes of shaping the identities of fictional characters. For example, a character may systematically *answer* in a particular way (see section 6.2), or he or she may constantly *interrupt* (see section 6.4). This article will illustrate that different types of reporting verbs can potentially be meaningful in terms of characterisation, from those that describe characters' feelings to those that appear merely to refer to the process of interaction.

    In order to briefly contextualise the potential significance of every verb, two interdependent aspects must be emphasised: the finite nature of the text and the lack of neutrality in fictional narratives. The finite nature of the text with which the potential of reporting verbs is connected is best reflected in Page's assertion that "detail in a work of fiction, whether of action, description or speech, and however apparently fortuitous or excessive, can hardly be dismissed as irrelevant, since it belongs to the strictly finite amount of material laid at our disposal by the writer, as distinct from the unselective and virtually unlimited offering made by 'reality'" (1973, 2). Since we form mental impressions of characters on the basis of limited information (Mahlberg 2013, 119), any description of how they speak is likely to carry a "certain weight of significance" (Page 1973, 2), if only because it is a choice deliberately made by the author. The significance of these descriptions is closely connected to the aforementioned lack of neutrality of fictional narratives, even when this is the impression that the author wants to convey. Thus, a lack of narratorial intervention when reporting characters' words—for instance, through the use of neutral verbs or by using strategies such as free direct speech, in which the reporting clause is omitted (Semino and Short 2004, 10)—is but an illusion, since narrators are "in charge of selecting, ordering and organizing the sequence in which events will be recounted. There is always a choice and a construction" (Caldas-Coulthard 1988, 23). Needless to say, descriptive verbs are more significant than neutral verbs, especially considering that authors frequently exaggerate features of real interaction through the use of specific verbs in order to amplify speech features (62). Thus, readers' assignment of a speech act introduced by *beg* or *implore* will be completely different from one introduced by *bellow* or *vociferate*, for example. That said, seemingly more neutral choices can be equally meaningful, even if the effect is less conspicuous. A systematic use of *reply* may reflect a character's passive role, *suggest* might indicate politeness and *hesitate* can be an effective means of projecting insecurity, to name just a few examples.

    In order to analyse the characterising potential of reporting verbs in this work, Caldas-Coulthard's (1987) taxonomy was used. Unlike other well-known classifications of reporting verbs (Wierzbicka 1987; Levin 1993; Brüngel-Dittrich 2005), Caldas-Coulthard's taxonomy classifies verbs according to the reporter's level of interference on the words being reported; this is very convenient for the purposes of this paper,

as it enables us to measure the meaningfulness of different verbs in the creation of the fictional personalities discussed here. She classifies verbs into five self-contained categories: neutral, structuring, illocutionary, discourse signalling and descriptive verbs. These categories are discussed below. [5]

3.1. Neutral verbs

Neutral verbs (*say* and *tell* in English) are interpretatively empty, as they "simply signal the illocutionary act—the saying; the intended meaning (illocutionary force) has to be derived from the dialogue itself" (Caldas-Coulthard 1987, 153). As will be discussed in section 6.1, though, they are frequently used with glossing phrases that qualify the words reported, thereby conveying a stylistic function in terms of characterisation.

3.2. Structuring verbs

Structuring verbs "describe the way in which a given speech act [...] fits into a sequence of speech acts" (Caldas-Coulthard 1987, 155). They signal prospection (*ask*, *question*) and retrospection (*reply*, *return*). In direct speech "they are often redundant, since the representation of the exchange should be self-evident" (Caldas-Coulthard 1988, 145). As is the case for neutral verbs, author intervention is minimal. Authors also use these verbs with glossing phrases in order to provide readers with further details about how the words are uttered. This is shown in section 6.2.

3.3. Illocutionary reporting verbs

Illocutionary reporting verbs "strongly convey the presence of the author in the text, since outside the dialogue, the reader is presented with a verb that elucidates the author's intended illocutionary force" (Caldas-Coulthard 1987, 156). They are divided into metalinguistic and metapropositional verbs. Metalinguistic verbs simply signal a linguistic act (*quote*, *narrate*), while metapropositional verbs are those which, in addition to signalling a linguistic act, also reveal "what kind of illocutionary act we are confronted with" (158). These verbs can be assertive (*agree*, *assent*), expressive (*complain*, *lament*), directive (*urge*, *order*) or commissive (*offer*, *promise*), and their use eliminates "misinterpretation on the part of the reader" (157). As will be seen in section 6.3, this kind of reporting verbs can have a strong characterising potential by making the illocutionary force of the speech act explicit.

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[5] Out of necessity, the description that follows is very brief, and primarily focuses on the saliency of reporting verbs from the point of view of characterisation. For a more detailed account of each category, see Caldas-Coulthard (1987; 1988; 1994).

3.4. Discourse signalling verbs

Discourse signalling verbs mainly "guide the reader through the simulated process" (Caldas-Coulthard 1987, 163). They may be used to refer to other parts of the discourse (*add*, *repeat*), or to indicate the development of the discourse (*pause*, *pursue*). Authors resort to discourse signalling verbs "to convey 'liveliness' in the pseudo-interaction" (164). Such liveliness may be strategically used to project character traits, since hesitation, pauses, silences or interruptions can all encode attitudinal stances, as will be demonstrated in section 6.4.

3.5. Descriptive verbs

Finally, descriptive verbs "are not reporting but descriptive in relation to the pseudo-talk, since their meaning has to do with the manner of utterances rather than matter" (Caldas-Coulthard 1987, 162). They are divided into the subcategories of prosodic and paralinguistic verbs. Prosodic verbs (*cry*, *shout*) refer to "vocal effects constituted by variation of pitch, loudness and duration" (162). Paralinguistic verbs are further divided into voice qualifier verbs and voice qualification verbs. Voice qualifier verbs (*murmur*, *mutter*) "are frequently used by authors to mark manner" (162), whereas voice qualification verbs (*growl*, *thunder*) "mark *attitude* of speaker in relation to what is being said" (163). Descriptive verbs are undoubtedly the most significant category in terms of characterisation, as will be discussed in section 6.5.

Verbs from each of these five categories convey different levels of mediation on the words reported, from an apparent lack of interference (neutral or structuring verbs) to a high degree of direct intervention (descriptive verbs). Nevertheless, any verb, however neutral it may seem, can contribute to the creation of fictional personalities. This is discussed in section six through the example of Ralph Nickleby. Before analysing the projection of this villain's speech, however, let us briefly explain the methodological procedure used to search for the verbs.

4. Methodology

As far as the search for reporting verbs is concerned, a computer-assisted methodology was used, similar to the one implemented by Pablo Ruano San Segundo (2016) on Dickens's fourteen complete novels.[6] Specifically, the software *WordSmith Tools* (version 7) (Scott 2016) was used to make specific concordance searches in a digitised version of *Nicholas Nickleby*, as the more or less stable structural pattern that Dickens uses to report his characters' words allows a systematic location of reporting verbs. With very few exceptions, Dickens always follows the same two patterns when glossing his characters'

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[6] Due to space constraints, the description of the methodology that follows is very brief. For a more detailed account of the procedure, including caveats and cautionary notes, see Ruano San Segundo (2016, 117-119).

words using direct speech: he either places the words of the character after those of the narrator, with an inversion of the structure subject-verb in the latter—example (1)—or inserts the words of the narrator in the middle of the character's speech, with this same inversion—example (2):

(1) "He might have been burnt to death, if it hadn't been for you, sir," *simpered* Miss Petowker. (Chapter 15)[7]

(2) "I—I—am not impatient," *stammered* Arthur. "I wouldn't be hard with her for the world." (Chapter 54)

These arrangements share two features that prove crucial in searching for these verbs: Dickens places no element between the inverted comma closing the character's words and the speech verb, and speech verbs are in the past simple tense. If we bear in mind that most ways of saying are regular (Wierzbicka 1987; Levin 1993), their past simple occurrences share a common characteristic: the suffix *-ed*. Hence, a search for those tokens with an *-ed* ending which appear after an inverted comma (' *ed* in the concordance tool in *WordSmith Tools*) returns the reporting verbs effectively, as displayed in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Screenshot of concordance search *' *ed* in *WordSmith Tools*
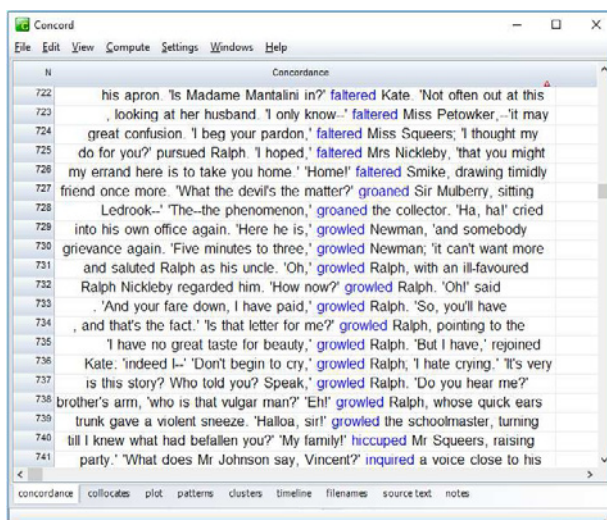
Of course, when Dickens uses a personal pronoun instead of the name of the character, the aforementioned pattern is altered since there is no inversion of the subject-verb structure in the narrator's words, as shown in examples (3) and (4):

(3) "Are you willing to work, sir?" he *inquired*, frowning on his nephew. (Chapter 3)
(4) "Let me go, sir," she *cried*, her heart swelling with anger. (Chapter 18)

To account for this alternative pattern, a different concordance suffices (for example, *' he *ed*). Thus, apart from the search *' *ed*, two further searches were carried out in order to locate verbs after the third-person singular masculine pronoun (concordance *' he *ed*) and the third-person singular feminine pronoun (concordance *' she *ed*). Clearly, no occurrences of irregular verbs are retrieved with such searches. Therefore, specific concordance searches (*' said*, *' he said* and *' she said*) were also carried out in order to locate the occurrences of *say*, the reporting verb par excellence.

5. Reporting Verbs in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*

The concordance searches detailed in section 4 retrieved a total of 4,781 occurrences relating fifty-eight different speech verbs in *Nicholas Nickleby*, as shown in table 1.[8]

Table 1. Reporting verbs used in *Nicholas Nickleby*

Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.
add	58	*groan*	2	*remonstrate*	10	*sneer*	9
answer	46	*growl*	11	*repeat*	59	*sob*	12
ask	136	*hiccup*	1	*reply*	629	*soliloquise*	1
assent	1	*inquire*	79	*respond*	1	*squeak*	1
bawl	7	*interpose*	42	*resume*	23	*stammer*	3
chuckle	2	*interrupt*	32	*retort*	74	*submit*	1
continue	31	*laugh*	5	*return*	226	*suggest*	13
cry	358	*murmur*	11	*roar*	4	*thunder*	2
croak	1	*mutter*	33	*said*	2,302	*titter*	7
demand	39	*observe*	68	*scream*	8	*urge*	21
drawl	1	*plead*	1	*shout*	3	*whimper*	1
echo	6	*pursue*	19	*shriek*	6	*whine*	2
exclaim	73	*reason*	12	*sigh*	7	*whisper*	21
expostulate	1	*rejoin*	222	*simper*	1		
falter	7	*remark*	24	*snarl*	5		
TOTAL							4,781

8 Data could have been normalised to a basis per 1000 words of text (Biber, Conrad and Reppen 1998, 263-264), for example. However, since this is a qualitative rather than a quantitative analysis, raw frequencies were preferred.

Of these 4,781 occurrences, 501 are used to report the words of Ralph Nickleby, and, as can be seen in table 2, they are divided between twenty-six verbs.

TABLE 2. Reporting verbs used to gloss Ralph Nickleby's words

Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.	Verb	Freq.
add	5	*growl*	8	*reason*	2	*return*	22
answer	6	*inquire*	7	*rejoin*	18	*said*	275
ask	14	*interpose*	4	*remark*	1	*snarl*	2
continue	5	*interrupt*	7	*repeat*	5	*sneer*	2
cry	16	*mutter*	16	*reply*	48	*suggest*	1
demand	12	*observe*	4	*resume*	3		
echo	1	*pursue*	3	*retort*	14		
TOTAL							501

These twenty-six verbs include neutral verbs (*say*), structuring verbs (*answer*, *ask*, *inquire*, *rejoin*, *reply* and *return*), illocutionary reporting verbs (*demand*, *observe*, *reason*, *remark* and *suggest*), discourse signalling verbs (*add*, *continue*, *echo*, *interpose*, *interrupt*, *pursue*, *repeat* and *resume*) and descriptive verbs (*cry*, *growl*, *mutter*, *retort*, *snarl* and *sneer*). The specific characterisation function of this catalogue of verbs is analysed in section six.

6. ANALYSIS

The analysis is divided into five sections, each of which corresponds to one of the categories discussed in section three, namely neutral verbs (section 6.1), structuring verbs (section 6.2), illocutionary reporting verbs (section 6.3), discourse signalling verbs (section 6.4) and descriptive verbs (section 6.5).

6.1. Neutral verbs

As has already been mentioned, neutral verbs—*say* in the case of the verbs used to report Ralph Nickleby's words—simply introduce reported discourse, without explicitly evaluating it. However, since neutrality in fiction is only apparent, choices that are seemingly unbiased may have significant stylistic functions. As Caldas-Coulthard asserts, an "author can gloss utterances with the reporting verb 'say' plus either an adverb, an adjective, or a prepositional clause which will mark either manner or attitude" (1987, 165). This is particularly true of Dickens, who makes use of what is perhaps the most varied grammatical realisation of *say* (Oncins-Martínez 2011, n.p.). Not only is *say* the verb that is most frequently used to report Ralph's words, with more occurrences than all the other verbs put together (see section five), it is often also used

with such glossing phrases as mentioned by Caldas-Coulthard. Thus, *say* is sometimes accompanied by adverbs, as in (5) and (6), by prepositional phrases, as in (7) and (8), and by -*ing* clauses, as in (9) and (10):

(5) "Call it what you like" *said Ralph, irritably*, "but attend to me." (Chapter 56)

(6) "Come down, I say. Will you come down?" *said Ralph fiercely*. (Chapter 59)

(7) "He has a tolerable share of everything that you lay claim to, my lord," *said Ralph with a sneer*. (Chapter 19)

(8) "You had better refresh your memory, sir," *said Ralph, with a threatening look*. (Chapter 51)

(9) "There is something missing, you say," *said Ralph, shaking him furiously by the collar*. "What is it?" (Chapter 56)

(10) "There is some of that boy's blood in you, I see," *said Ralph, speaking in his harshest tones, as something in the flashing eye reminded him of Nicholas at their last meeting*. (Chapter 28)

These examples show how the adverbs, prepositional phrases and -*ing* clauses with which *say* is frequently accompanied help to project Ralph Nickleby's evil character. Sometimes, these glossing phrases add information about the tone in which the words are uttered, as in (10), thereby encoding the character's attitudinal stance. The information is also frequently related to body language, which may also emphasise Ralph's state of mind, as can be seen in (8) and (9). However, the most frequent examples are those in which Dickens straightforwardly refers to Ralph's attitude. This is the case of (5), (6) and (7). Of the 275 occurrences of *say*, 145 (that is, 52.72%) contain glossing phrases. As can be seen in the examples above, many of these glossing phrases project meaningful information that contributes to the portrayal of Ralph Nickleby; other glossing phrases found with *say* are *carelessly*, *drily*, *in his harshest accents*, *irascibly*, *looking sharply at them by turns*, *looking fearfully round*, *menacing him*, *roughly enough*, *scowling round*, *tartly*, *testily* or *with great testiness*, among others. This provides plentiful support for the notion mentioned previously that theoretically unbiased choices like *say* can contribute to projecting significant character traits, especially when they are used strategically with interpretative glossing phrases.

6.2. Structuring verbs

Structuring verbs are slightly more specific than neutral verbs. Although they do not evaluate the words explicitly, they do indicate prospection (*ask*) and retrospection (*answer*), which may reinforce the portrayal of a character in a story. For instance, the active role of an inquiring character may be enhanced by the frequent use of verbs indicating prospection (*ask*, *question*, *inquire*), whereas a passive role may be illustrated through the repeated use of verbs indicating retrospection (*answer*, *respond*, *reply*). However, the significance of these verbs for the creation of personalities is best reflected when, like *say*, they are used with interpretative glossing phrases. Let us take *reply*, *return* and *rejoin* as examples. After *say*,

these are the verbs that are most frequently used to report Ralph Nickleby's discourse, with forty-seven, twenty-two and eighteen occurrences respectively (see table 2). Of the eighty-seven occurrences of these three verbs, forty (45.97%) are also accompanied by glossing phrases. As is the case with *say*, some of these phrases are adverbs that reveal Ralph's attitude, as shown in examples (11) and (12):

(11)   "We are alone," *returned Ralph, tartly*. "What do you want with me?" (Chapter 34)

(12)   "I think you had better," *rejoined Ralph, drily*. (Chapter 47)

Interpretative prepositional phrases are also common, as can be seen in (13) and (14):

(13)   "I see," *rejoined Ralph, with the same steady gaze*. "Bad, indeed! I should not have known you, Sir Mulberry. Dear, dear! This IS bad." (Chapter 38)

(14)   "No," *replied Ralph, with equal abruptness*. (Chapter 34)

There are also several occurrences of *-ing* clauses, as shown in (15) and (16):

(15)   "Ay," *replied Ralph, turning upon him with an angry look*. "Help me on with this spencer, and don't repeat after me, like a croaking parrot." (Chapter 44)

(16)   "No," *returned Ralph, bending a severe look upon him*. "Though there is something in that, that I remember now." (Chapter 44)

As these examples show, structuring verbs are used in a very similar manner to *say* to report Ralph Nickleby's words, and as such they help to shape his malevolent character; other glossing phrases found with structuring verbs are *abruptly*, *carelessly*, *exasperated*, *fiercely*, *hoarsely*, *looking bitterly round*, *sarcastically* or *sharply*, among others. In light of these examples, it can be safely concluded that structuring verbs may be strategically used beyond the relief of monotony suggested by Page (1973, 26), as was mentioned in section two, since they can also contribute to the creation of fictional personalities.

6.3. Illocutionary reporting verbs

Illocutionary reporting verbs are, unlike neutral and structuring verbs, "highly interpretative in terms of text mediation" (Caldas-Coulthard 1987, 161). They can therefore fulfil a meaningful characterising role without the need for a glossing phrase. Because their main function is to make explicit the illocutionary force of the speech being reported, illocutionary reporting verbs can reveal specific stances of a character in a story. Thus, if a character is constantly giving orders (directive speech act), readers may get a different impression of him or her than if he or she constantly begs (expressive speech act), for instance. In the case of Ralph Nickleby, there is a verb which best

reflects the characterising potential of this type of verbs: *demand*. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, twelve of the thirty-nine occurrences of this verb (see table 1) are associated with Ralph Nickleby (see table 2), more than with any other character.[9] The repeated use of this verb to gloss his words highlights his inquisitive character, as can be seen in examples (17) and (18):

(17) "What more do you know about him?" *demanded* Ralph. (Chapter 34)

(18) "Which of your firm was it who called on me this morning?" *demanded* Ralph. (Chapter 59)

It should be noted that Dickens also resorts to stylistically marked glossing phrases when using illocutionary reporting verbs. With regard to *demand*, four of its twelve occurrences associated with Ralph are accompanied by further information that enhances his bad temper, as can be seen in examples (19) to (22):

(19) "Is Mrs Nickleby at home, girl?" *demanded Ralph sharply*. (Chapter 3)

(20) "What insults, girl?" *demanded Ralph, sharply*. (Chapter 28)

(21) "What DO you want, man?" *demanded Ralph, sternly*. (Chapter 31)

(22) "What says he?" *demanded Ralph, turning angrily upon her*. "I told you I would see nobody." (Chapter 59)

As is the case with the examples of neutral and structuring verbs that were discussed above, the use of interpretative glossing phrases with illocutionary reporting verbs contributes to the portrayal of Ralph Nickleby's evil character. However, Dickens's use of glossing phrases with interpretative reporting verbs should not be considered especially striking, since, as Caldas-Coulthard points out, "some authors qualify verbs that are already signalling manner or attitude" (1987, 165). Nonetheless, both the glossing phrases that accompany *demand* and the systematicity with which Dickens uses the verb to report Ralph's discourse illustrate the characterising potential of illocutionary reporting verbs, which can amplify the attitudinal traits of a character by making the illocutionary force of the reported speech act explicit.[10]

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[9] Wackford Squeers is the character with which *demand* is used more frequently after Ralph Nickleby (five times).

[10] The repeated use of certain reporting verbs with the same character fits in with Dickens's collocational style, analysed by Masahiro Hori (2004). Specifically, Hori scrutinises Dickens's "predilections, structures, uniqueness, and idiosyncrasies of collocations" throughout his novels (18). The association of reporting verbs—and reporting formulae, for that matter—with the same character adds a layer of depth to collocational patterns peculiar to characters in their speech (175-179).

6.4. Discourse signalling verbs

Unlike illocutionary reporting verbs, discourse signalling verbs are "interpretatively empty" (Caldas-Coulthard 1987, 164). However, they can still make a decisive contribution to characterisation in fictional narratives. As mentioned in section three, they are used to convey liveliness in the process of interaction, indicating pauses, silences, interruptions, etc. It is well known that fictional dialogues are "tidied-up versions of talk" (83). So, if aspects such as pauses, silences or interruptions are reported, then it is because they are extraordinarily meaningful (164). They may be used to reflect characters' traits through their ways of speaking. Let us take the example of *interrupt*. Of the thirty-two occurrences of this reporting verb in *Nicholas Nickleby*, seven are associated with Ralph Nickleby (see table 2), more than with any other character.[11] The repeated use of *interrupt* clearly serves to illustrate his impoliteness, as can be seen in (23), which highlights his well-known rudeness when he does not let Charles Cheeryble finish his sentence:

(23) "Plainly, sir—" began brother Charles.
        "Plainly, sir," *interrupted* Ralph, "I wish this conference to be a short one, and to end where it begins." (Chapter 59)

Moreover, as discussed above in relation to neutral, structuring and illocutionary reporting verbs, discourse signalling verbs are also frequently accompanied by interpretative glossing phrases that further reinforce Ralph Nickleby's characterisation, as can be seen in (24) to (26):

(24) "No they wouldn't, ma'am," *interrupted Ralph, hastily*. "Don't think it." (Chapter 3)
(25) "Yes, we know all about that, sir," *interrupted Ralph, testily*. "It's in the advertisement." (Chapter 4)
(26) "Pray," *interrupted Ralph, motioning her to be silent*. "I spoke to my niece." (Chapter 19)

Both the repeated use of the verb and the stylistically marked phrases accompanying it demonstrate that the use of *interrupt* in connection with Ralph Nickleby goes well beyond the aforementioned illusion of liveliness conveyed by discourse signalling verbs. Thus, although these verbs are not interpretative *per se*, the systematic choice of certain verbs can help to reinforce some characters' personalities by subtly enhancing features integrated into the wider picture of their characterisation.

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[11] Mrs Nickleby and Nicholas are the characters who *interrupt* most frequently, after Ralph (three times each).

6.5. Descriptive verbs

Descriptive verbs are the most meaningful reporting verbs with regard to the creation of fictional personalities, since they refer to phonological and paralinguistic features that contribute to the expression of attitudes by the speaker rather than to the content of speech itself (Brown 1990, 112). In the case of Ralph Nickleby, the following four verbs play a clear characterising function: *mutter*, *growl*, *snarl* and *sneer*. With sixteen occurrences, *mutter* is the fifth most frequently used verb to report Ralph's words.[12] The systematic use of this verb to project his discourse helps to convey Ralph's complaining nature, one of his best-known features. Although the verb tends to be used without any glossing phrases, as shown in (27), Dickens does also occasionally select adverbs—as in (28)—or prepositional phrases—as in (29)—to amplify Ralph's grumpiness:

(27) "Saw I was anxious!" *muttered* Ralph; "they all watch me, now. Where is this person? You did not say I was not down yet, I hope?" (Chapter 59)

(28) "I am not a man to be moved by a pretty face," *muttered Ralph sternly*. "There is a grinning skull beneath it, and men like me who look and work below the surface see that, and not its delicate covering." (Chapter 31)

(29) "Has he turned girl or baby?" *muttered Ralph, with a fretful gesture*. (Chapter 44)

With regard to *growl*, eight of the eleven occurrences of this verb are associated with Ralph. This verb clearly illustrates the habitual peevishness that contributes to shaping his malevolent portrayal. This verb is only accompanied by a glossing phrase once, which is shown in (30). This is probably due to its specificity. In the remaining seven cases, the verb is used without any further glossing elements. However, it is interesting to note that the words projected by *growl* often tend to be orders, as shown in (31) and (32) which further reinforces Ralph's previously mentioned demanding character:

(30) "Oh," *growled Ralph, with an ill-favoured frown*, "you are Nicholas, I suppose?" (Chapter 3)

(31) "Don't begin to cry," *growled* Ralph; "I hate crying." (Chapter 10)

(32) "Tell me what you mean. What is this story? Who told you? Speak," *growled* Ralph. "Do you hear me?" (Chapter 34)

Finally, *snarl* and *sneer* also have a meaningful function with regard to characterisation, although they are only used twice with Ralph Nickleby. The use of *snarl* shown in (33) and (34) reinforces Ralph's peevishness. One occurrence is accompanied by an *-ing* clause, which emphasises Ralph's irascible character, as shown in (34):

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[12] *Cry*, another descriptive verb, is also used sixteen times to report Ralph Nickleby's words (see table 1).

(33) "Who, indeed!" *snarled* Ralph. (Chapter 3)
(34) "What!" *snarled Ralph, clenching his fists and turning a livid white*. (Chapter 34)

The use of *sneer*, however, serves to illustrate Ralph's slyness, as shown in (35) and (36). Although neither of these two occurrences is accompanied by a glossing phrase, the characterising function behind this choice also seems clear, especially considering that Ralph Nickleby's sneering is referred to elsewhere in the novel several times, as we have already seen in (7):

(35) "Ah, to be sure!" *sneered* Ralph. (Chapter 3)
(36) "You do not?" *sneered* Ralph. (Chapter 20)

In sum, it can hardly be denied that Dickens's use of reporting verbs to gloss Ralph Nickleby's words is far from serendipitous. On the contrary, his selection of verbs seems to be deliberate, arising from his desire to design a manner of speech which matches the villain's grumpiness. The use of descriptive verbs such as *mutter*, *growl*, *snarl* and *sneer* are the clearest examples, as they all openly encode attitudinal stances that contribute to the depiction of Ralph's character. However, any verb, from neutral or structuring verbs accompanied by glossing phrases to illocutionary or discourse signalling verbs, which point to Ralph's demanding character or his habit of interrupting, may also be stylistically significant. Taken all together, they help to shape Ralph's identity by means of an idiosyncratic way of speaking that has a direct impact on his portrayal. In short, the example of Ralph Nickleby clearly illustrates the characterising potential of reporting verbs in literary texts.

Finally, the potential of reporting verbs in the creation of fictional personalities is better understood within the framework of characterisation as a process—how we, as readers, form impressions of characters in our minds during the course of a story (see Culpeper 2001). This is best reflected in the fact that the thirty-two examples discussed in this section are taken from fourteen different chapters of the novel, namely chapters three, four, ten, nineteen, twenty , twenty eight, thirty one, thirty four, thirty eight, forty four, forty seven, fifty one, fifty six and fifty nine. The use of stylistically significant reporting verbs throughout the novel—and the interpretative glossing phrases that accompany seemingly unbiased choices—help to create a cumulative effect that results in a powerful device for shaping the characters' identities. In this respect, the case of Ralph Nickleby is particularly interesting, as Dickens published his novels serially and this greatly influenced his well-known techniques of characterisation (Patten 2006, 15). However, the potential of reporting verbs in the creation of fictional personalities in the course of a novel goes well beyond their use by a stylistically excessive author such as Dickens. It is also worth analysing the work of other Victorian authors who published serially, as time lapses between

instalments made characterisation "a distinct element with its own problems" in nineteenth-century fiction (Sucksmith 1970, 250). In fact, any fictional narrative is actually worthy of analysis, since characterisation in literary works relies heavily on the well-established relationship between voice stereotypes and personality types (Culpeper 2001, 215). As has been shown here, reporting verbs play a role of paramount importance in bringing this relationship closer together.

7. Conclusion

Reporting verbs can play an important function in the creation of fictional personalities in literary texts. Normally, both in and beyond fiction, this function is usually only acknowledged in the case of those verbs that describe phonological or paralinguistic features that reveal meaningful attitudes about the person(a) whose words are being reported. However, as the example of Ralph Nickleby has illustrated, any verb may potentially contribute to characterisation. Of course, there exist remarkable differences between neutral and non-neutral verbs, and a cline of interference may even be drawn, from the most neutral verbs—*say* and *tell*, but also structuring examples such as *ask* or *reply*—to the most interpretative choices, i.e., descriptive verbs, with illocutionary and discourse signalling verbs in a middle position. As far as more neutral verbs are concerned, authors frequently qualify them with glossing phrases in order to match the specificity of more descriptive cases—for instance, *said with a sneer*, which conveys the same effect as *sneer*, to use two examples discussed here. These glossing phrases are in fact not exclusive to less interpretative types of verbs, such as neutral and structuring verbs, but are also used to reinforce the value of more specific choices, such as illocutionary reporting verbs—*demanded Ralph, turning angrily upon her*—and discourse signalling verbs —*interrupted Ralph, testily*. However, illocutionary and discourse signalling verbs can also have a meaningful characterising role by themselves. Thus, the fact that Ralph Nickleby systematically *demands* or *interrupts* contributes to his portrayal as an impolite character. Finally, descriptive reporting verbs provide the clearest examples, as they openly encode the attitudinal stance of the character. Thus, the impression that readers form in their minds of a character who pouts, mourns, whines and whimpers will be diametrically opposed to that of a character like Ralph, who regularly growls, mutters, snarls and sneers. In sum, any verb has the potential to contribute to the creation of fictional personalities. In fact, as the example of Ralph Nickleby has shown, both more and less specific choices—the latter with the help of interpretative glossing phrases—create a cumulative effect over the course of the story that enables him to be characterised through his specific way of speaking. The stylistic significance of reporting verbs, therefore, should not be underestimated, as they are a powerful device for the creation of fictional personalities in literary texts.

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