

Lieven Vandelanotte (University of Namur & University of Leuven)

### **Imagined English: The language of the future sections in David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas***

The question of “literariness” (Jakobson 1921) and of the relation between “ordinary” and “literary” language continues to hold a strong appeal for any linguist interested in literary creativity. In cognitive linguistics and poetics, the question is framed in terms of the relationship between general cognitive processes, believed to be fundamentally embodied, and their applications in literary texts or other modes of artistic expression (see e.g. Brône & Vandaele 2009, Dancygier & Sanders 2010, Dancygier & Sweetser 2012). As a test-case for emerging cognitive-linguistic explorations of this domain, this paper investigates fictive future dialects of English in David Mitchell's highly acclaimed novel *Cloud Atlas*.

*Cloud Atlas* consists of six interlocking stories, spanning several centuries from the 19th century to a post-apocalyptic future. The future setting of two of these six stories is reflected among other things in their language, which was “doctored” by Mitchell to create a distinctly different feel and yet maintain coherence and intelligibility for speakers of present-day English.

The linguistic means deployed to arrive at this imagined “futurespeak” (Mitchell 2010) include, in the fifth tale (“An Orison of Sonmi ~451”), some modest orthographic changes reminiscent of texting (“xecution”), ample use of metonymy (“fords” for cars, “nikons” for cameras, “kodaks” for pictures, “starbuck” for coffee, “celsius” for temperature, etc.) and neologism based on productive derivational processes (“facescaping” for plastic surgery). The sixth story, “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After”, is characterized by excessive use of *yay*, which has acquired particle status, and especially of contraction (as suggested in the story’s title), which along with some other orthographic adaptations (“cudn’t”, “din’t”) suggests phonological attrition. Striking morphological operations used include compounding (“gone-lives”/“now-lives” for the living/the dead), conversion (as with *to sorry* in “she sorried losin’ the chance” or *to dark* in “Duophysite darked”), the “recycling” of once productive affixes to produce new lexemes (as with *-some* in “winsome”, “friendsome”, “bleaksome”, etc.) and the regularization of fossilized irregular forms (as with “telled” for *told* or “badder” for *worse*). Slang terms and Hawaiian or Afro-Caribbean borrowings are also thrown into the mix or used as the basis for neologism (e.g. “heartbuggahin” [‘heart bugging’] for “heartbreaking”), resulting in a mutated language inspired by that used in Russel Hoban’s (1980) novel *Riddley Walker* (cf. Mitchell 2010, Stephenson 2011).

In the final part of the paper, the “imagined” Englishes of the two future stories are confronted with Mitchell’s evocation of 19th century language in the earliest story, “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”. The various virtual Englishes used prompt readers to integrate the disparate linguistic features into overarching, coherent themes (cf. Dancygier 2007, 2011: 42-50): first, in general, that of language drift, and second, more specifically, the degeneration of civilization, which seems to be reflected by the direction of language drift (e.g. phonological attrition and relapse into morphological derivations no longer productive in present-day English). However common or “ordinary” the individual processes Mitchell puts to work in constructing his imagined Englishes, their deliberate and inventive combination is, in the final analysis, fundamentally novel and “literary”.

## Literary works cited

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