



## Traversing the speech and thought presentation features of Merlinda Bobis's "The Sadness Collector"

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This study aims to describe the effects of stylistic features in extrapolating the meaning and sociocultural realm of Merlinda Bobis's short story, "The Sadness Collector." The story's theme, the breakdown of a family brought about by migration, is effectively and creatively achieved through the author's stylistic speech and thought presentation techniques. The sociocultural actuality reflected in the story points out the miserable plight of the Philippines, having developed a "culture of migration" as a leading labor exporter, and the turmoil of Filipino families experiencing the downside of migration.

**Keywords:** Stylistics, narrative, speech and thought presentation, free indirect discourse

### 1. Introduction

Widdowson (1975 as cited in Carter, 1982) presents the incorporating tool of stylistics between language and literature:

By stylistics I mean the study of literary discourse from a linguistics orientation and I shall take the view that what distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism on one hand and linguistics on the other is that it is a means of linking the two. (p. 7)

Identified as a linguistic approach to literature, stylistics regards language a primordial degree of importance since the forms, patterns, and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an index or manifestation of the text's purpose, which, in turn, acts as a gateway to interpretation. While linguistic features do not themselves constitute a text's meaning, an account of linguistic features, nonetheless, serves to ground a stylistic interpretation and helps explain why, for the analyst, certain types of meaning are possible.

Stylistic analysis initially involves identifying features of language and determining patterns of occurrences of these language attributes. Using these parallelisms, analysts arrive at stylistic interpretation by extending their own literary encounters through relating their

own experiences of language. Simpson (2004) recognizes that stylistics concerns itself in language as a “function of texts in context” (p. 3); language here is perceived as an active element of the real world. Thus, what a text signifies or means is linked to the language or utterances used that operate within sociocultural underpinnings. He further discusses that a full and effective stylistic analysis happens when a text employs a more comprehensive and context-situated language use. Consequently, stylistic analysis comprises the entirety of the language system in a writer’s work.

By examining what happens in a text and what occurs outside, stylistic analysis calls for the convergence of a variety of disciplines such as gender studies, sociolinguistics, semiotics, structuralism, and the like. This is to ensure that all ranges of the system of language that comprise aspects of a writer’s craft being subject to stylistic analysis are dealt with. The analysis is seen as contextual and pragmatic in the sense that the potential effect of the message is examined beyond words in the selection.

Accordingly, a sound literary judgment can be established by making use of the basic element of any text–language–as it serves as the basis in which to work out the full significance of a literary text. A basic presupposition pointed out by Carter (1982) is that literary texts are composed of language arranged in engaging manner, and because of that, they serve as an interesting subject for the study of language. Hence, doing stylistics means traversing creativity in language use. Language serves as an enabling device, allowing analysts to look into a writer’s style–his sequence of choices, responses, acts, and consequences that make up his work.

### *Literature and Social Reality*

Lucien Goldmann (1968 as cited in Laurenson & Swingewood, 1972) says that great literature deals with major social problems as the writer relates with the social leanings of his time and addresses social conditions having awareness about the human tendencies.

A great deal of literary classics around the world like “Beowulf,” “Ramayana,” “Mahabharata,” and “The Odyssey”; the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe; and the novels of Chekov and Maupassant are reflections of their own times and peoples of the countries where they were written.

Fowler (1977 as cited in Bradford, 1997) upholds a sociolinguistic program in analyzing literary style:

Basically, it is theory of varieties, of correlations between distinctive linguistic choices and particular socio-cultural circumstances. The individual text can be described and interpreted in relation to the stylistic conventions which generate it and the historical and sociological situation which brought it into existence. (pp. 82-83)

In other words, the literary text, realized in language, informs and forms actuality in the same way as it replicates it. Fowler’s (1996 as cited in Bradford, 1997) idea further

contends that “the linguistic conventions and habits of the world—involving ideological and social registers—influence and permeate the stylistic character of the text” (p. 84).

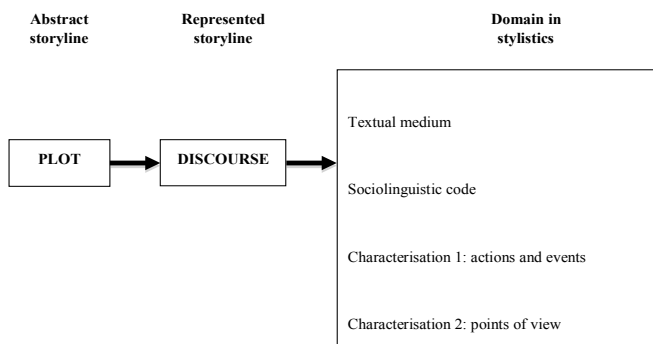
Correspondingly, Widdowson (1996) underscores the connection of language, social reality, and stylistics:

Messages are produced in accordance with systems of social convention; otherwise, they would not be understood. The units of the message are not simply tokens but types in their own right—definable in terms of social communication. Stylistics is concerned with such message types; its purpose is to discover what linguistic units count as in communication and how the effects of different conventions reveal themselves in the way messages are organized in texts. Stylistics then is the social function of language (p.140).

### *Narrative*

A narrative displays all aspects of human experience. Being everywhere, a narrative can be major and minor, oral or written, formal or informal, and literary or not. Distinguishing a narrative from all the other types of writing, Toolan (1996, p. 137) notes the movement, i.e., the sense of “before and an after” condition that something has happened. He further asserts that “something that has happened needs to be interesting to the audience, and interestingly told” in a narrative (p. 137).

Examining a narrative requires that certain elemental features be present for it to be considered successful and effective. Simpson (2004) argues the need of a narrative to progress, build on, beautify, as well as the requisite to achieve a level of “stylistic flourish” that would leave a mark of the author’s distinctiveness or personal touch; without which would result in a flat or dry work (p. 19).



**Figure 1. Simpson's model of narrative structure (2004)**

Moreover, Simpson (2004) has come up with a narrative framework model (See Figure 1) that presents how a narrative may be analyzed. A narrative can be seen from the narrative plot and the narrative discourse paradigms. A narrative plot or the abstract text points out detailed, orderly events that refer to the narrative's inner core or the narrative's conceptual or abstract storyline. On the other hand, a narrative discourse is the realized storyline, depicting the manner by which a plot is told or narrated. Simpson (2004) further emphasizes that certain stylistic tools such as flashback, prevision, and repetition operate to break off the "elemental chronology" of the narrative's plot (p. 20).

Simpson (2004) enumerates the following stylistic elements that realize the narrative discourse:

- a. Textual medium that serves as the physical means by which a story is narrated;
- b. Sociolinguistic code that articulates the story's sociocultural context by exploring the text and context connection;
- c. Characterization on elements, actions, and events that presents how the progression of character relates with the actions and events of the narrative;
- d. Characterization on points of view that deals with the connection between the manner of narration and the character's or narrator's vantage point. Speech and thought presentation in a narrative is also a beneficial factor as it attributes to both the actions and events of the story;
- e. Textual structure that calls for the arrangement and structure of the different elemental units in the narrative; and
- f. Intertextuality that refers to the "allusion" technique as narrative fictions reflect other texts and other representations.

## 1.1 Objectives

This paper attempts to explore how the theme of Merlinda Bobis's narrative, "The Sadness Collector" is effectively achieved through the author's "stylistic flourish" by examining the third element in Simpson's six-fold stylistic domains: the intersection of the narrative mode and the use of points of view in the selection's narrative discourse. The study aims to identify the unique voice created in the story by finding answers to the following questions:

1. What speech and thought presentation techniques are employed to establish the narrative voice in the story?
2. How is the story's theme revealed through the story's narrative voice?

## 1.2 Theoretical Framework

Of the six stylistic domains used in analyzing a narrative discourse identified by Simpson (2004), this study attempts to explore the story's narrative mode and characterization in terms of point of view, and subsequently, establish the relationship between the stylistic character reflected in the features of the literary text under study and the sociocultural context in which it is mirrored.

### 1.2.1 Speech and Thought Presentation

An important aspect of narrative characterization on point of view is the way speech and thought processes are presented. Toolan (1996, p. 106) stresses that the speech and thought presentation techniques in a narrative promote a level of "dramatization" and distinguish a story from a flat narrative "telling." Thus, analyzing a narrative's shifts from telling to internal-character reflection commences with identifying speech and presentation techniques used. Since an array of categories by which speech and thought are reported abound, this study makes use of the speech and thought presentation model developed by Leech and Short (1981).

**Table 1**  
*Speech and thought presentation categories and sample sentences*

Category type	Example
DS-Direct Speech	She said, "I won't now, regardless of what you say."
DT-Direct Thought	She thought, "I won't now, regardless of what you say."
FDS-Free Direct Speech	I won't now, regardless of what you say.
FDT-Free Direct Thought	I won't now, regardless of what you say.
IS-Indirect Speech	She said (that) she wouldn't then, regardless of what they said.
IT- Indirect Thought	She thought (that) she wouldn't then, regardless of what they said.
FIS- Free Indirect Speech	She wouldn't now, regardless of what they said.
FIT-Free Indirect Thought	She wouldn't now, regardless of what they said.
NRSA-Narrative Report of Speech Act	She expressed refusal on the matter, whatever the circumstances.
NRTA-Narrative Report of Thought Act	She resolved not to, whatever the circumstances.

Table 1 presents the different speech and thought categories and their respective examples.

DS (Direct Speech) and DT (Direct Thought) are composed of two elements: first, they are introduced by a matrix clause, also called the framing clause, which presents who is doing the telling and thinking (She said and She thought); and second, the dependent clause, which shows the exact and direct copy of what the speaker told or thought. FDS (Free Direct Speech) and FDT (Free Direct Thought) have some similarities with the DS and the DT, one distinguishing feature of which is the absence of a framing clause.

Meanwhile, the framing clause is dropped in the IS (Indirect Speech) and IT (Indirect Thought), and the reporting mode (said and thought) is marked. A grammatical shift of the following deictic features is also observed from Direct to Indirect: first to third person (I to she), present to past (won't to wouldn't and now to then) and second to third person (you to they). FIS (Free Indirect Speech) and FIT (Free Indirect Thought) resemble IS and IT, except that they are free of the reporting element "She said."

NRSA (Narrative Report of Speech Act) and NRTA (Narrative Report of Thought Act) present speech or thought acts from a narrator's viewpoint. In the example, the difference lies in the terms "expressed refusal" and "resolved not to" which would delineate a speech and a thought act.

In an effort to describe "the grammar of effect and affect," Toolan (1996) emphasizes that FID (Free Indirect Discourse – FIS/FIT) is used by a narrator to transform a character into an incongruous or absurd individual and emphasize his or her articulated thoughts.

Similarly, knowing who is speaking to the readers, especially in a situation when "one speaker, a reporter is merely a channel for some other individual's words" (Toolan, 1996, p.117), is also essential. A narrative, seen as a vivid experience of real people, is reflected in the use of direct and free indirect discourse. Toolan (1996) further notes that a text loaded in these modes is one in which

...we sense that real people are speaking out, in their own words and disclosing their thoughts in their own words. Instead of a detached and summarized telling of what happened, we witness an involved and elaborated showing of what happened—and in fact that phrase of what happened ceases to be entirely fitting as the result; when the showing is sufficiently direct and displayed, through the pages of the text, we feel we are witnessing "what is happening" rather than merely "what happened." (p. 118)

Figure 2 illustrates the different categories of speech and thought presentation in a cline.

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				norm	
speech presentation	NRSA	IS	FIS	DS	FDS
thought presentation	NRTA	IT	FIS	DT	FDT
		norm			

(Source: Leech & Short, 2007 as cited in Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010)

**Figure 2. *Speech and thought presentation***

The narrator mediation is seen most on the left side while utmost freedom is afforded to the character on the right end. Concerning the categories of speech presentation, the standard is the DS; as regards thought presentation, IT. Leech and Short (2007 as cited in Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010) explain the significance of the different norms in the following:

Thoughts in general are not verbally formulated, and so cannot be reported verbatim. Given that the norms for speech and thought presentation are at different points on the continuum, the different values of FIS is a movement leftwards from the norm in the figure and is therefore interpreted as a movement towards authorial intervention, whereas FIT is seen as a move to the right and hence away from the author's most directly interpretive control and into the active mind of the character. Because the direct perception of someone else's thought is not possible, DT is perceived as more artificial than more indirect forms. (p. 91)

According to Nestvold and Lake (2006), voice, which is determined by point of view and style evident in the use of language, is the "the writer's diction, choice of words, kind of dialogue and the sentence structure" (para. 2). The element of tone, influenced by word choices as well as the narrator's outlook, can deliver "intense and serious interest in its (story) characters and events" (para. 3), further pointing out the attitude the narrative seems to take toward its subject matter.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Study Corpus

The study utilized Merlinda Bobis's "The Sadness Collector," one of the 23 stories included in *White Turtle*, a collection of short stories published in 1999. Situating the Philippines' sociocultural context as a leading human labor exporter because of the lack of local employment opportunities, the story tells about the crumbling down of a typical Filipino family whose one member (the mother) is an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW).

One pressing sociocultural actuality presented in the story is the destabilizing impact of migration on families. “The Sadness Collector” relates the problems of a six-year-old troubled girl named Rica left to live with her father as her mother went to Paris three years ago to work as a domestic helper. To encourage Rica not to be sad, her father creates the tale of a Big Lady who goes from house to house to collect people’s sadness. If the Big lady becomes full, she will explode.

Such social concern mirrored in the story upholds the result of a 2003 study titled “Hearts Apart: Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children” by the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People-CBCP (ECMI)/Apostleship of the Sea-Manila and the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC). The results of this study showed that children in mother-absent families were more likely to describe their parents’ relationship as “problematic.” The children of migrant mothers reported feeling lonely, angry, unloved, unfeeling, afraid, different from the other children, and worried compared with all other groups of children, including non-OFW children.

The author, Merlinda Bobis, a Filipino based in Australia teaching Creative Writing at the University of Wollongong, is a well-established writer having published numerous works of poetry, prose fiction, and drama. Also, having performed her own works in numerous countries, she has earned literary accolades and fellowships in the Philippines, Australia, Italy, and the United States.

## **2.2 Research Procedure**

This study undertook a textual analysis of a literary piece (i.e., the lexicogrammatical, syntactic, and sentential components of the corpus) and related how the text occurs within the context of situation through the speech and thought presentation techniques that, in turn, realize the text’s meaning in the sociocultural realm.

In identifying the speech and thought presentation techniques, this study examined the discourse presentation of the entire corpus. The classification of each speech and thought made by the characters was based on Leech and Short’s (1981) categories of speech and thought presentation.

The assistance of an intercoder was sought to guarantee the reliability of the results of the analysis. Both the researcher and the intercoder methodically conferred on the individual codings made and reached agreement in cases when markings differed.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Speech and thought presentation**

The absence or lack of signals distinguishing transitions of Rica’s thoughts, her central consciousness, Father’s admonitions to Rica, and even the gossips of her aunties all integrated with the philosophical narration and description of a heterodiegetic narrator, may pose difficulty for reading the selection. But taking cues from the meanings revealed through



the selection's experiential, interpersonal, and textual aspects, correspondingly, with regard to characterization on point of view, the narrative, as seen from Rica's vantage point and her thoughts and opinions, is deemed plausible.

Bobis presents the main characters using all available speech and presentation techniques. The apparent unmediated presentation of thoughts and the use of FIT, FDT, and even NRTA are ways in which the author lets the readers feel that they are directly accessing the characters' thoughts.

On initial reading, there seems to be either a plain narrative or an FIT. This puzzlement seems to uphold what stylisticians observe about FID that includes the FIS and the FIT variants—this mode shows both a character and a narrator speaking simultaneously through a kind of dual voice. The story's progression would point though that the sentence is FIT as the readers are directed to Rica's thoughts:

*And she will not stop eating, another pot, another plate, another mouthful of sadness, and she will grow bigger and bigger, and she will burst.*

The next sentence (see Appendix A, para 2) is an NRTA serving to orient the readers about a six-year-old Rica awaiting for a "dreaded explosion." It would also be interesting to note that instead of using a period to end the sentence, a dash is used. The choice of a dash may relate with what Kirsznr and Mandell (2002) point out; that is, a dash serves as a stylistic device to create a dramatic pause and a writer's distinguishing voice. Not only does the narrator pungently stress what is happening to the main character but also strategically draw attention to the succeeding paragraph that describes the thoughts in the mind of Rica, which are FIT expressions.

Two distinguishable elements noted in the third paragraph are the presence of the conditionals "maybe" and "they must have scraped off." It would be illogical for the omniscient narrator, being a know-it-all, to use such expressions in describing Rica's neighbors. It is then logical to label the paragraph as another FIT, specifying Rica's mental disturbance and all the speculations she has about the Big Lady.

The next sentence (see Appendix A, para 4) presented in another paragraph is labeled NRTA, showing Rica's mental process of listening and anticipating the fearful explosion.

Right after the paragraph that describes the physical setting where Rica is in (see Appendix A, para 5), the next sentence paragraph states:

*Are you there?*

This is clearly an FDT. It can be surmised at this point of the story that Rica's anxiety level is peaking, believing that the Big Lady is true, anticipating of her impending bursting.

The subsequent paragraph (see Appendix A, para 7) starts with an IS about Rica's father telling her that the Big Lady is invisible. The second sentence is an FDS of her father:

*Big Lady only comes when you're asleep to eat your sadness.*

Being on the extreme portion of the speech presentation cline, FDS is the most narrator-unmediated, the freedom and characterization solely attributed to the character. With zero narrator intervention, this father's FDS to Rica purports to highlight the authority and truthfulness accorded to the father's stature based on Rica's perspective. This statement supports the interpersonal meaning emphasized in the earlier section of the study. The last part of the paragraph shifts back to FIT, to Rica's mental consciousness, as it connects to her thoughts about the Big Lady and the neighborhood. This statement, being an FIT, upholds her mental perceptions emphasized in the earlier part of the selection.

What comes next is another FDT, with Rica imagining how this father-formulated daughter-imagined creature looks like:

*Are you really that big? How do you wear your hair?*

This unfortunate perplexity Rica is experiencing, as shown by these FDTs, may explain what Trevathan and Goff (2007) discuss in their book *Raising Girls*. They identify that six-eleven-year-old girls accept truth presented to them in black and white, having no doubts and believing that what are told to them are plain facts. Moreover, they present that girls in this age bracket easily contend with fear because of their concrete thinking.

The ninth paragraph is a combination of FDS and NRTA:

*Dios ko, if she eats all our mess, Rica, she might grow too fat and burst, so be a good girl and save her by not being sad – hoy, stop whimpering, I said, and go to bed. Her father is not always patient with his storytelling.*

What is remarkable in the initial utterance by the father is the use of the local language, “*Dios ko*” and “*hoy*.” These expressions of local color serve not only to reflect the truthful characterization of the father in relating with Rica, being stern and seemingly irritable toward his daughter, but also to effect an integral voice and create an integral intention to the theme of the whole story, that is, the psychological trouble this Big Lady myth brings to Rica.

*All quiet now. She's gone.*

The above concept is another case of an FIT; Rica is pacified that, somehow, the Big Lady has left.

The next three paragraphs are all labeled PNs (see Appendix A, para 11-13). The readers are introduced about Rica's mom leaving for Paris three years ago, how her father has told Rica about the Big Lady tale three years back, how Rica has been trying to suppress her sadness so as not to disappoint her father and the Big lady, and how Rica and her father has taken the nurturing role Rica's mother is supposed to take on.

The subsequent two paragraphs are predominantly FITs. (see Appendix A, para 14-15)

*She never forgets, talaga naman, the aunties whisper among themselves these days. A remarkable child. She was only a little thing then, but she noticed all, didn't she, never missed anything, committed even details to memory. A very smart kid, but too serious, a sad kid.- FIT*

The extract above shows Rica recalling in her memory what her aunts would think of her distressing condition, that she is a “remarkable... but a sad child.” Worth mentioning is the presence of another local expression, “*talaga naman*,” as this expression infuses another kind of effective voice that cannot be rightly and effectively done so in the English language. It seems to indicate a kind of annoyance Rica is starting to feel with all the comments she is receiving.

The 15<sup>th</sup> paragraph is a continuation of Rica’s FIT, dealing with her father and aunts as signaled by the conditional expression “*they must have...*” (referring to the aunts). In this part, Rica’s mental state dwells on a variety of concerns: cheating on her promise to behave well and save the Big Lady, making efforts not to show too much sadness, and hoping that her father would fulfill his promise.

From FIT, a shift to PN is made using the name Rica as a lexical clue. All throughout the paragraph, Rica is referred to as “she,” but in this sentence, she is identified as “*Rica*”: *Earlier, Rica watched TV to forget, to make sure the tears won't amount to a mouthful.* Right after, the sentence goes back to FIT again, relating how she abhors waiting and so does the Big Lady.

The next paragraph (see Appendix A, para 16) is a blend of FDS, FIT, and NRTA from Rica and her father as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2**  
***Speech and thought presentation types in a single paragraph***

<b>Extract</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Character involved</b>
<i>Why Paris? Why three years-and even more? Aba this is getting too much now.</i>	FDT	Rica
<i>The aunties never agree with her mother's decision to work there, on a fake visa, as a domestic helper – ay naku, taking care of other people's children, while, across the ocean, her own baby cries herself to sleep? Talaga naman!</i>	FIT	Rica
<i>She wants to earn good money and build us a house. Remember, I only work in a factory...</i>	FDS	Rica's father
<i>Her father had always defended his wife, until recently, when all talk about her return was shelved. It seems she must extend her stay, because her employer might help her to become "legal." Then she can come home for a visit and go back there to work some more –</i>	NRTA	Rica

Table 2 shows the different types of speech and thought presentations made in a single paragraph. The first extract expresses Rica raising concerns about her mother not being with her for more than three years now. It shows an unmediated narrator intervention into the thought of Rica. The second sentence resembles her aunts' disagreements over her mother's decision to work abroad. In mother-migration studies, aunts are left with the fathers serving as caregivers to the children left behind. In a way, their opinions matter as it is accepted in a Filipino culture. The next statement presents the father explaining to Rica her mother's decision to leave them behind. It is also made known through a report of Rica's thoughts how her father has stopped defending his wife since the wife extended her stay.

The subsequent paragraphs have FDTs and FITs interfaced in predominantly plain narrative or PN expressions (see Appendix A, para 17-23). The 18<sup>th</sup> paragraph starts with Cutlery noise - the image of a hearing sensation is presented to the readers.

The FDTs include:

*Does she also check them? This has never happened before, her coming back after a lean meal. Perhaps, she's licking a spoon for any trace of saltiness, searching between prongs of a fork.*

Then the narrator cleverly links the Big Lady's hunger to Rica's longing for her mother's calls (it is known here that her mother has lessened her frequency of communicating with Rica) and explains, through a philosophical elucidation about hunger and grief (see Appendix A, para, the alarming situation of Rica that even her stick drawings show 19) the "*Big Lady's increasing girth.*"

It is at this point of the story that Rica describes the features and actions of the Big Lady by way of FDTs. Noticeable are the marked themes, particularly the presence of "No" at the beginning sentences in these lines to contradict the previous statements given:

*Mouth curved downward, she's sad like her meals. No, she wears a smile, she's happy because she's always full.*

*She can hardly walk, because her belly's so heavy, she's pregnant with leftovers. No, she doesn't walk, she flies like a giant cloud and she's not heavy at all, she only looks heavy.*

These expressions reflect how Rica is so affected by the Big Lady. The next paragraph (see Appendix A, para 24) presents how real the Big Lady is to Rica.

The time element "*nowadays*" indicates the current period in the story. The readers are led into concluding that the mother entered into a suspicious relationship as signaled by the presence of a photograph. At this point, the father has totally relinquished his duties to his daughter through a PN, narrating how he comes home late each night so as not to answer Rica's queries and to "*improvise further on his three-year-old tale.*"

Approaching the climax of the story is another noise in the kitchen, with Rica expressing through FDT and NRSA these words:

*There it is again, the cutlery clunking against a plate – or scraping the bottom of a cup? She’s searching for the hidden mouthfuls and platefuls and potfuls. Cupboards are opened. No, nothing there, big one, nothing – Rica’s eyes are glued shut.*

Rica is again drawn to the noise, surmising that it is the Big Lady. The first sentence is a run-on, expressing a series of mental run-down: “*There it is again,*” can qualify for a sentence, but a comma is used to indicate a continuous presentation of ideas. “*The cutlery clunking against a plate*” may not be the Big Lady’s own doing, so Rica, at one point, is thinking whether this act is caused by another person. A dash separates this thought to the next one, indicating a strong force. “*Or scraping the bottom of a cup?*” – In Rica’s mind, she is wondering about the Big Lady making the noise again. “*No, nothing, big one, nothing*” – Rica here is confronted with confusing thoughts.

The turning point of the story is well-emphasized, with each statement separated from each other – each ending with a dash – emphasizing force and incessant happening. A first glance may render the following as all PNs, but a closer look at them indicates that the expressions are an amalgamation of FDTs and NRSA. This is hinted by the use of the deictic, “*That’s,*” indicating that Rica is the focalizer; that is, her thoughts and her perceptions of space and time are the subject of this particular discourse.

*That’s the rice pot being overturned – (FDT)*

*Her breaths make and unmake a hillock on the streets – (NRSA)*

*A plate shatters on the floor – (FDT)*

*Back to a foetal curl, knees almost brushing chin – (NRSA)*

*Another plate crushes – (FDT)*

*She screams – (NRSA)*

*The pot is hurled against the wall – (FDT)*

*She keeps screaming as she ruins out of the room, down to the kitchen – (NRSA)*

*And the cutlery, glasses, cups, more plates – (FDT)*

*Big Lady’s angry, Big Lady’s hungry, Big Lady’s turning the house upside down – (FDT)*

*Breaking it everywhere – (FDT)*

*Her throat is weaving sound, as if it were all that it never knew – (NRSA)*

Each sentence above shows the much-awaited “*explosion*” of the Big Lady as seen from Rica’s perspective and how Rica, in the same way, shows the same outburst as reported in her screams and continuous screaming as she “*ruins out of the room, down to the kitchen.*”

It must be noted that in the paragraph 38 of the story, the words are all in capitals to indicate increase in volume and pitch variation as compared with the rest of the speech:

*SHUT UP!*

The next paragraph (Appendix A, para 39) seems to be another commentary of the omniscient narrator. Expressions, like “*heart of the matter*,” “*vein of a plate*,” “*within the aluminum bottom of a pot*,” “*copper fold of a spoon*,” and “*deep in the curve of a cup’s handle*,” show a foreshadowing of something to be revealed; the expressions bear resemblance—to get to the core of the matter—a truth to be unveiled.

*Ropes and ropes of scream – (NRSA)*

*“I SAID, SHUT UP!” (DS)*

*Her cheek stings. She collapses on the floor before his feet. (NRSA)*

*“I didn’t mean to, Dios ko po, I never meant to” –(DS)*

*Her dazed eyes make out the broken plates, the dented pot, the shards of cups, glasses, the cutlery everywhere – (NRSA)*

*He’s hiccupping drunkenly all over her –(NRSA)*

The first in the above extracts reports a continuous explosion. Right after it is the father’s DS stating “*I SAID, SHUT UP!*” in all capitals, signaling the utmost emotion released by him. It can be entailed that the father slapped Rica right after uttering the statement with full force and emotions. “*Dios ko po...*” - indicates a deep remorse, a humbling down expressed after hurting Rica and seeing her lose consciousness. It is at this point that truth comes out: the noises in the kitchen thought of to be the Big Lady’s doing are made by the father being a drunkard, especially after suspecting about his wife’s affair.

*“I didn’t mean to, Rica, I love you, baby, I’ll never let you go –“ His voice is hoarse with anger and remorse. (DS) (NRSA)*

*“She came back, Papa” –(DS)*

*“She can’t take you away from me” –(DS)*

*“She’s here again” –(DS)*

*“Just because she’s ‘legal’ now” –(DS)*

*“She might burst, Papa” –(DS)*

*“That whore–!” His hands curl into fists on her back. (DS) (NRSA)*

In the above excerpts, dashes, which signify a dramatic pause, close each line and indicate that the lines are spoken in a more dramatic or forceful way. The last seven exchanges between Rica and father mostly in DS divulge the father’s fury toward his wife, wary of the possibility of Rica being taken away from him. It is also significant to note how the two main characters’ exchanges come from two different perspectives and not jive: Rica explains that the Big Lady has come back, being in their midst and about to burst again, while the father talks about the mother’s move to get Rica away from him and labeling his wife as a whore.

A description and commentary from an omniscient narrator, the last sentence of the story signals that sadness will continue.

*Big Lady knows, has always known. This feast will last her a lifetime, if she does not burst tonight.*

This may be the author's subtle way of critiquing that as long as there are families like that of Rica's, sadness will persist and families will continue to experience turmoil and explosion.

Table 3 shows that out of the 155 sentences in the narrative, 54 or 35% are PNs while the NRSAs totaled to 11 or 7.1%. Emphasis must be given to how Bobis involves the main character's thoughts in the narrative with FDTs totaling to 31 or 20%, FITs having 28 or 18.1%, and NRTAs numbering to 12 or 8%. When combined, these three categories totaled 71 sentences or almost half of the whole narrative (46.1%). This figure underscores the focus of the story to the distressed Rica, being the most affected in this mother-migrant family setup. Meanwhile, the unrestricted-narrator account, expressed through FDS, totaled to eight or 5.2%; DS numbered to ten or 6.5%; and one or 0.1% for IS.

**Table 3**  
*Use of speech and presentation techniques*

Speech and thought presentation techniques used	Frequency of use	Percentage
PN	54	35%
FDT	31	20%
FIT	28	18.1%
NRTA	12	8 %
NRSA	11	7.1%
DS	10	6.5 %
FDS	8	5.2 %
IS	1	0.1 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>100%</b>

In her own book *A Novel-in-Waiting. Creative Research: Towards Writing Fiction*, Bobis (2004) reveals that from her own experience of reading and writing, she has found out that the primordial elements that make a fiction (novel) include voice (closely bound with style), image, story, and theme. She stresses voice "as the timbre of the text, the psychological and emotional register of the characters, focuses narrative and establishes the relationship between the next and the narrator with the reader" (p. 37).

"The Sadness Collector," unfolding in a conglomeration of the different speech and thought presentation types, most of which present the thoughts of the character, very well establishes the voice pointed out by Bobis. In the same way that the human thoughts are random, disassembled and continuous, the story's voice is veined in such respect that readers must stay focused and conscientious to take hold of what is going on in the story.

In summary, examining the story's speech and presentation techniques reveals the story centering on the main character, Rica, the focalizer; her thoughts; and the way the story is narrated from her own thoughts, perceptions, opinions, and vantage point. The different techniques used to reveal Rica's thoughts (FITs, FDTs, NRTAs, and FDAs), perfectly being random and disturbed, jive with the distressed and unstable personality of Rica and the domineering and evasive actuations of the father in the experiential processes, the distant or aloof father-daughter relationship, and the textual meaning filled with sadness, desperation, and negativity expressions and devices. The use of different speech and thought presentation techniques created a "striking voice" on the part of the narrator, validating what Nestvold and Lake (2006) emphasize: "All the choices the writer makes, consciously, unconsciously or subconsciously concerning point of view, perspective, language, tone and style create the story telling voice" (para. 5).

Nestvold and Lake (2006) further explain that word choice affects the impact and theme of the text, both in support of the voice and the development of tone, which is inextricably linked with that voice. The story is a coalescence of kitchen, eating, and saltiness—all related to sadness. In fact, a total of 93 out of the 2005 words in the story or 4.6% comprise lexicons about kitchen and eating. Among the words frequently used are *plate/plates/plateful* numbering to 11, *pot/pots* to eight, and *eat/eats* and *cup/cups* to seven. The following part of the story presents the heterodiegetic narrator's take about the interweaving of hunger and sadness:

*Unknown to Rica, Big Lady is wise, an old hand in this business. She senses that there's more to a mouthful of sadness than meets the tongue. A whisper of salt, even the smallest nudge to the palate, can betray a century of hidden grief. Perhaps, she understands that, for all its practice, humanity can never conceal the daily act of futility at the dinner table. As we feed continually, we also acknowledge the perennial nature of our hunger. Each time we bring food to our mouths, the gut – emptiness that we attempt to fill inevitably contaminates our cutlery, plates, cups, glasses, our whole table. It is this residual contamination, our individual portions of grief, that she eats, so we do not die from them – but what if we don't eat? Then we can claim self – sufficiency, a fullness from birth, perhaps. Then we won't betray our hunger.*

This narrator's remark underpins what Genette (1980 as cited in Bradford, 1997) asserts; that is, while there are different kinds of narrator depending on their degree of control in the narrative, every kind of narrator is "to some degree intradiegetic, that is to say involved in the story; the opinion, the knowledge and the style of the narrator will always have some effect upon the various elements of the narrative..." (p. 59).



#### 4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates a substantial stylistic analysis to describe the effects of stylistic features in extrapolating the meaning and sociocultural realm of the literary text “The Sadness Collector.”

The story’s theme, the breakdown of a family brought about by migration, is creatively achieved through the author’s prolific utilization of a narrative style as revealed in the speech and presentation techniques analyzed.

This study applied Widdowson’s (1996) premise regarding the contribution of stylistics: “By investigating the way language is used in a text, it can make apparent those linguistic patterns upon which an intuitive awareness of artistic values ultimately depend. It provides a basis for aesthetic appreciation by bringing to the level of conscious awareness features of the text otherwise only accessible to trained intuition” (p.139).

Some pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study. A teacher’s indispensable duty is to provide a meaningful learning experience and prepare students for life. Meredith (2002 as cited in Meredith & Steele, 2011) asserts that true learning happens when “knowledge level is sufficient to foster critical thought and informed actions” (p. ix). Doing a stylistic analysis of a text, like “The Sadness Collector,” can very well help students exhibit their critical thinking skills as stylistic analysis unearths meanings by actively engaging with the content, carefully analyzing the language and context in which language is used. It requires students’ careful analytical thoughts in determining how language works for a text to achieve its purpose.

Moreover, concerns have been raised that social networking, like Facebook, is creating a youth culture of self-centeredness or egotism and that the Youtube generation are more interested in self-expression than in learning about the insider world—oblivious of what is happening in the society. Exposing students to literary texts, like “The Sadness Collector,” allows them to engage in social reality. Studying texts that have themes, such as the corpus utilized, can help the young people be more responsible citizens, who are aware of the social issues besetting the nation and are not ignorant and insensible of the country’s basic concerns.

Dalisay (2012) in his article “The Literary Lopez” presents his observation about how he sees the generation of today and admonishes this generation to follow Salvador P. Lopez’s mantra on engaging with social reality:

The “precocious cynicism” that Lopez bemoaned is all over the Internet, the beguiling anonymity of which has encouraged slash-and-burn ranting, a kind of generalized complaint about the state of everything without the slightest acknowledgment of complicity, culpability, or responsibility. Instead of engagement, we find a sense of entitlement, a puerile demand to be bathed and fed without any personal investment in the messy processes of growth and change.

This, of course, goes beyond literature. But speaking of literature, I have more than once expressed my concern over what I perceive to be the denial or erasure of a sense of nation in the work of some of our writers enamored of what they may imagine to be supranational fantasy, but which on closer inspection is merely another import from elsewhere, particularly the West. We dream of a borderless world and delude ourselves into thinking that the Internet has created precisely that, forgetting that the terms of discourse on the Internet, literary or otherwise, are still largely established in and by the West...

Salvador P. Lopez's urgings for writers to be grounded in the society that provides them their material and their sustenance cannot be lost on us teachers of literature and writing, who are in a position to remind our students that, aside from artistic expression, writers serve a goal "none more worthy than the improvement of the condition of man and the defense of his freedom." (para. 11-13).

For a richer and a more detailed stylistic study of the narrative, other stylistics domains may be included in the analysis of the selection such as intertextuality, characterization on action and events, and transitivity. Moreover, other research can explore more recent literary works that mirror social reality.

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## Appendix A

### The Sadness Collector (Merlinda Bobis)

- 1 And she will not stop eating, another pot, another plate, another mouthful of sadness, and she will grow bigger and bigger, and she will burst.
- 2 On the bed, six-year-old Rica braces herself, waiting for the dreaded explosion –
- 3 Nothing. No big bang. Because she's been a good girl. Her tears are not even a mouthful tonight. And maybe their neighbours in the run-down apartment have been careful, too. From every pot and plate, they must have scraped off their leftover sighs and hidden them somewhere unreachable. So Big Lady can't get to them. So she can be saved from bursting.
- 4 Every night, no big bang really, but Rica listens anyway.
- 5 The house is quiet again. She breathes easier, lifting the sheets slowly from her face – a brow just unfurrowing, but eyes still wary and a mouth forming the old silent question – are you really there? She turns on the lamp. It's girly kitsch like the rest of the decor, from the dancing lady wallpaper to the row of Barbie dolls on a roseate plastic table. The tiny room is all pink bravado, hoping to compensate for the warped ceiling and stained floor. Even the unhinged window flaunts a family of pink paper rabbits.
- 6 Are you there?
- 7 Her father says she never shows herself to anyone. Big Lady only comes when you're asleep to eat your sadness. She goes from house to house and eats the sadness of everyone, so she gets too fat. But there's a lot of sadness in many houses, it just keeps on growing each day, so she can't stop eating, and she can't stop growing too.
- 8 Are you really that big? How do you wear your hair?
- 9 Dios ko, if she eats all our mess, Rica, she might grow too fat and burst, so be a good girl and save her by not being sad – hoy, stop whimpering, I said, and go to bed. Her father is not always patient with his storytelling.
- 10 All quiet now. She's gone.
- 11 Since Rica was three, when her father told her about Big Lady just after her mother left for Paris, she was always listening intently to all the night – noises from the kitchen. No, that sound is not the scurrying of mice – she's actually checking the plates now, lifting the lid off the rice pot, peeking into cups for sadness, both overt and unspoken. To Rica, it always tastes salty, like tears, even her father's funny look each time she asks him to read her again the letters from Paris.

- 12 She has three boxes of them, one for each year, though the third box is not even half-full. All of them tied with Paris ribbons. The first year, her mother sent all colours of the rainbow for her long, unruly hair, maybe because her father did not know how to make it more graceful. He must have written her long letters, asking about how to pull the mass of curls away from the face and tie them neatly the way he gathered, into some semblance of order, his own nightly longings.
- 13 It took some time for him to perfect the art of making a pony-tail. Then he discovered a trick unknown to even the best hairdressers. Instead of twisting the bunch of hair to make sure it does not come undone before it's tied, one can rotate the whole body. Rica simply had to turn around in place, while her father held the gathered hair above her head. Just like dancing, really.
- 14 She never forgets, talaga naman, the aunties whisper among themselves these days. A remarkable child. She was only a little thing then, but she noticed all, didn't she, never missed anything, committed even details to memory. A very smart kid, but too serious, a sad kid.
- 15 They must have guessed that, recently, she has cheated on her promise to behave and save Big Lady. But only on nights when her father comes home late and drunk, and refuses to read the old letters from Paris – indeed, she has been a very good girl. She's six and grown up now, so, even if his refusal has multiplied beyond her ten fingers, she always makes sure that her nightly tears remained small and few. Like tonight, when she hoped her father would come home early, as he promised again. Earlier, Rica watched TV to forget, to make sure the tears won't amount to a mouthful. She hates waiting. Big Lady hates that, too, because then she'll have to clean up till the early hours of the morning.
- 16 Why Paris? Why three years – and even more? Aba, this is getting too much now. The aunties never agree with her mother's decision to work there, on a fake visa, as a domestic helper – ay naku, taking care of other people's children, while, across the ocean, her own baby cries herself to sleep? Talaga naman! She wants to earn good money and build us a house. Remember, I only work in a factory... Her father had always defended his wife, until recently, when all talk about her return was shelved. It seems she must extend her stay, because her employer might help her to become "legal." Then she can come home for a visit and go back there to work some more –
- 17 The lid clatters off the pot. Beneath her room, the kitchen is stirring again. Rica sits up on the bed – the big one has returned? But she made sure the pot and plates were clean, even the cups, before she went to bed. She turns off the lamp to listen in the dark. Expectant ears, hungry for the phone's overseas beep. Her mother used to call each month and write her postcards, also long love letters, even if she couldn't read yet. With happy snaps, of course. Earlier this year, she sent one of herself and the new baby of her employer.

- 18 Cutlery noise. Does she also check them? This has never happened before, her coming back after a lean meal. Perhaps, she's licking a spoon for any trace of saltiness, searching between the prongs of a fork. Unknown to Rica, Big Lady is wise, an old hand in this business. She senses that there's more to a mouthful of sadness than meets the tongue. A whisper of salt, even the smallest nudge to the palate, can betray a century of hidden grief. Perhaps, she understands that, for all its practice, humanity can never conceal the daily act of futility at the dinner table. As we feed continually, we also acknowledge the perennial nature of our hunger. Each time we bring food to our mouths, the gut – emptiness that we attempt to fill inevitably contaminates our cutlery, plates, cups, glasses, our whole table. It is this residual contamination, our individual portions of grief, that she eats, so we do not die from them – but what if we don't eat? Then we can claim self – sufficiency, a fullness from birth, perhaps. Then we won't betray our hunger.
- 19 But Rica was not philosophical at four years old, when she had to be cajoled, tricked, ordered, then scolded severely before she finished her meal, if she touched it at all. Rica understood her occasional hunger strikes quite simply. She knew that these dinner quarrels with her father, and sometimes her aunts, ensured dire consequences. Each following day, she always made stick drawings of Big Lady with an ever-increasing girth, as she was sure the lady had had a big meal the night before.
- 20 Mouth curved downward, she's sad like her meals. No, she wears a smile, she's happy because she's always full. Sharp eyes, they can see in the dark, light-bulb eyes, and big teeth for chewing forever. She can hardly walk, because her belly's so heavy, she's pregnant with leftovers. No, she doesn't walk, she flies like a giant cloud and she's not heavy at all, she only looks heavy. And she doesn't want us to be sad, so she eats all our tears and sighs. But she can't starve, can she? Of course, she likes sadness, it's food.
- 21 Fascination, fear and a kinship drawn from trying to save each other. Big Lady saves Rica from sadness; Rica saves Big Lady from bursting by not being sad. An ambivalent relationship, confusing, but certainly a source of comfort. And always Big Lady as object of attention. Those days when Rica drew stick – drawings of her, she made sure the big one was always adorned with pretty baubles and makeup. She even drew her with a Paris ribbon to tighten her belly. Then she added a chic hat to complete the picture.
- 22 Crimson velvet with a black satin bow. Quite a change from all the girlie kitsch – that her mother had dredged from Paris' unfashionable side of town? The day it arrived in the mail, Rica was about to turn six. A perfect Parisienne winter hat for a tiny head in the tropics. It came with a bank – draft for her party.
- 23 She did not try it on, it looked strange, so different from the Barbies and pink paper rabbits. This latest gift was unlike her mother, something was missing. Rica turned it inside out, searching – on TV, Magic Man can easily pull a rabbit or a dove out of his hat, just like that, always. But this tale was not part of her father's repertoire. He told her not to be silly when she asked him to be Magic Man and pull out Paris – but can she eat as far as Paris? Can she fly from here to there overnight? Are their rice pots also full of sad leftovers? How salty?

- 24 Nowadays, her father makes sure he comes home late each night, so he won't have to answer the questions, especially about the baby in the photograph. So he need not to improvise further on his three-year-old tale.
- 25 There it is again, the cutlery clunking against a plate – or scraping the bottom of a cup? She's searching for the hidden mouthfuls and platefuls and potfuls. Cupboards are opened. No, nothing there, big one, nothing – Rica's eyes are glued shut. The sheets rise and fall with her breathing. She wants to leave the bed, sneak into the kitchen and check out this most unusual return and thoroughness.
- 26 That's the rice pot being overturned –
- 27 Her breaths make and unmake a hillock on the streets –
- 28 A plate shatters on the floor –
- 29 Back to a foetal curl, knees almost brushing chin –
- 30 Another plate crushes –
- 31 She screams –
- 32 The pot is hurled against the wall –
- 33 She keeps screaming as she ruins out of the room, down to the kitchen –
- 34 And the cutlery, glasses, cups, more plates –
- 35 Big Lady's angry, Big Lady's hungry, Big Lady's turning the house upside down –
- 36 Breaking it everywhere –
- 37 Her throat is weaving sound, as if it were all that it never knew –
- 38 "SHUT UP – !"
- 39 Big Lady wants to break all to get to the heart of the matter, where it's the saltiest. In the vein of a plate, within the aluminum bottom of a pot, in the copper fold of a spoon, deep in the curve of a cup's handle –
- 40 Ropes and ropes of scream –
- 41 "I SAID, SHUT UP!"

- 42 Her cheek stings. She collapses on the floor before his feet.
- 43 “I didn’t mean to, Dios ko po, I never meant to -”
- 44 Her dazed eyes make out the broken plates, the dented pot, the shards of cups, glasses, the cutlery everywhere –
- 45 He’s hiccupping drunkenly all over her –
- 46 “I didn’t mean to, Rica, I love you, baby, I’ll never let you go –” His voice is hoarse with anger and remorse.
- 47 “She came back, Papa –”
- 48 “She can’t take you away from me –”
- 49 “She’s here again –”
- 50 “Just because she’s ‘legal’ now –”
- 51 “She might burst, Papa –”
- 52 “That whore - !” His hands curl into fists on her back.
- 53 Big Lady knows, has always known. This feast will last her a lifetime, if she does not burst tonight.