



**THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE AND LITERARY DEVICES IN PLOT
CONSTRUCTION IN AGATHA CHRISTIE'S WORKS**

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Abstract. This article examines the role of language and literary devices in constructing plots in Agatha Christie's detective fiction. Particular attention is paid to dialogue, repetition, irony, ambiguity, contrast, ellipsis, and narrative perspective. Through examples from *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, *Murder on the Orient Express*. The study demonstrates how linguistic choices function not merely as stylistic decoration but as mechanisms for concealing clues, directing suspicion, creating suspense, and preparing the final revelation.

Keywords: *Agatha Christie, detective fiction, plot construction, literary devices, dialogue, irony, ambiguity, suspense, narrative perspective, stylistics.*

Introduction. Agatha Christie occupies a distinctive position in twentieth-century English literature. Her novels are usually associated with carefully constructed mysteries, memorable detectives, unexpected revelations, and complex systems of clues. Yet the effectiveness of her plots cannot be explained by plot design alone. The language through which information is presented is equally important. A seemingly ordinary sentence may contain a clue; a brief answer may conceal a motive; a pause may be more significant than an explicit statement; and a narrator may describe an event accurately while encouraging the reader to interpret it incorrectly.

Recent scholarship increasingly approaches Christie's fiction from linguistic, stylistic, narratological, and cognitive perspectives. Marc Alexander, for example, demonstrates that Christie uses rhetorical organization to guide readers toward accepting Poirot's interpretation in *Murder on the Orient Express* [1, pp. 13–27]. Ping Zhang emphasizes the importance of conversation in Christie's fiction and argues that dialogue deserves analysis as an essential component of her detective narrative rather than being treated simply as a means of presenting information [2, pp. 134–154].

Olena Pakhomova and Victoria Yashkina identify irony, epithet, metaphor, and simile among the stylistic resources characteristic of Christie's individual manner of writing and connect them with her thematic, compositional, and linguistic organization [3]. Gill Plain, in her recent study of Christie, also stresses the economy of her prose, her manipulation of readers, the use of recurring verbal patterns, and the gradual movement of her fiction from the classical clue-puzzle toward greater psychological and atmospheric complexity [4].

Main part. Dialogue occupies a central position in Agatha Christie's narrative technique. Her characters frequently reveal themselves not through lengthy authorial descriptions but through



short exchanges. A character's choice of words, hesitation, repetition, correction, or refusal to answer may become more important than the explicit content of the conversation.

Ping Zhang's discourse-stylistic analysis draws particular attention to conversation as a structural element of Christie's detective fiction. In this view, dialogue performs several functions simultaneously: it moves the narrative forward, establishes relationships between characters, provides clues, creates suspicion, and controls the reader's interpretation of an event [2, pp. 134–154].

This can be observed in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. Miss Marple does not normally interrogate people in the manner of a police officer. Instead, she listens to apparently insignificant conversations and notices inconsistencies between what people say and what they actually know.

The plot consequently develops through speech as much as through physical action. A seemingly harmless remark may acquire a completely different meaning after another piece of information is revealed.

Christie's dialogue is particularly effective because characters often do not communicate directly. They evade questions, change subjects, repeat themselves, or give answers that are technically correct but pragmatically misleading. Such conversational behaviour creates a gap between what is said and what the reader understands.

One of the characteristic features of detective fiction is the controlled distribution of information. Christie rarely gives the reader all the relevant facts at the moment when they first appear. Instead, information is fragmented across descriptions, conversations, observations, and retrospective explanations.

Ellipsis is therefore not simply a grammatical phenomenon in Christie's writing. It becomes a narrative technique.

A character may leave a sentence unfinished, avoid naming a person, or omit a detail that appears unimportant at first. Such omissions create an information gap. The reader instinctively attempts to fill that gap, often using assumptions that later prove incorrect.

The technique is particularly effective in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Dr. Sheppard's narration appears straightforward, but his presentation of events is carefully selective. He does not necessarily provide false statements; instead, he controls what is foregrounded and what remains outside immediate attention.

Sara Gesuato's study of the novel demonstrates that Christie employs textual, narratological, and linguistic strategies that mislead the reader without necessarily giving openly false information [5].

This is precisely why the novel's final revelation is structurally convincing. The necessary information has been present, but the language has prevented the reader from assigning the correct significance to it.



The most striking example of the relationship between language and plot construction is Dr. Sheppard in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

Sheppard simultaneously occupies two positions: he is a participant in the events and the narrator who describes them. This double position creates a linguistic problem for the reader. Normally, narrative description is treated as a relatively reliable source of information. Christie exploits that expectation.

Nicola Angeli's narratological study of Dr. Sheppard examines the linguistic and narrative mechanisms through which the narrator constructs his unreliability [6].

The crucial point is that Sheppard's unreliability does not depend on constant factual lies. His strategy is subtler. He selects details, controls emphasis, withholds explanatory connections, and allows the reader to reach conclusions that are not explicitly stated by him.

The narrator's language creates an illusion of transparency while simultaneously restricting interpretation. The reader therefore becomes involved in solving the mystery under conditions that have been linguistically designed to produce error.

Recent research on Christie describes this process as a form of reader manipulation: the form of the narrative itself can direct attention away from the actual culprit and toward alternative suspects [7].

Irony is another important element of Christie's plot construction. It enables a statement to function on two levels: its immediate meaning and its later, retrospective meaning. In a detective novel, this is particularly valuable because the reader frequently understands a statement differently after the solution has been revealed. A simple remark may therefore operate as both ordinary conversation and concealed foreshadowing. Pakhomova and Yashkina identify irony as one of the characteristic stylistic features of Christie's individual style and place it alongside metaphor, epithet, and simile [3].

The importance of irony becomes especially clear in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. The narrator's apparently neutral descriptions acquire a different meaning once his involvement in the murder becomes known. What seemed to be an ordinary narrative detail can retrospectively be recognized as an element of concealment.

Thus, irony does not merely make the prose more expressive. It changes the temporal relationship between the first reading and the second reading. After the final revelation, earlier statements are mentally reconstructed by the reader.

Repetition also contributes to plot development. Christie frequently returns to particular words, expressions, objects, names, or descriptions. At first, these repetitions may appear incidental. Later, they acquire evidential significance.

This technique corresponds to the basic principle of the clue-puzzle: information must be available to the reader but not necessarily recognized as important. Gill Plain notes Christie's skill



in combining economy of language with recurring verbal patterns and techniques of misdirection [4]. In *And Then There Were None*, for instance, recurring verbal references to the nursery rhyme gradually become connected with the sequence of deaths. The rhyme is not merely an ornamental element of the novel. It becomes a structural framework against which the plot unfolds.

The repeated verbal pattern produces expectation. Each new event is interpreted in relation to what has already been established. Language consequently creates a rhythm for the plot.

Contrast is another productive stylistic device in Christie's fiction. The contrast may occur between appearance and reality, speech and action, public reputation and private behaviour, or a character's self-description and the evidence presented elsewhere.

In *And Then There Were None*, the characters arrive on the island carrying different social identities and reputations. Their language initially supports these identities. As the plot progresses, however, their speech begins to conflict with their behaviour and with information about their pasts. The contrast between the respectable surface and the concealed past generates suspicion. Gill Plain emphasizes that themes such as hypocrisy, deceit, duality, and betrayal underpin Christie's narratives [4]. The linguistic realization of these themes is closely connected with plot construction: characters say one thing while the narrative gradually encourages the reader to consider another possibility.

Modal expressions play a particularly important role in detective fiction because they regulate the degree of certainty attached to a statement. Words and expressions such as *perhaps*, *probably*, *might*, *could*, *seemed*, and *apparently* allow Christie to present information without confirming its truth. Such language keeps several interpretations open at the same time.

The result is not linguistic vagueness for its own sake. It is controlled uncertainty. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, different characters provide accounts of the same night. Their statements vary in certainty, emotional intensity, and precision. Poirot's task is not simply to collect statements but to evaluate the linguistic and logical relationships between them.

Marc Alexander's analysis of the novel's rhetorical structure shows how Christie organizes the final explanation so that the detective's interpretation gradually appears as the most coherent account of the available evidence [1, pp. 13–27].

Christie's descriptive language is generally economical. She rarely interrupts the investigation with long descriptive passages unrelated to the central action. Yet short descriptions can have considerable narrative importance. A gesture, facial expression, change in tone, unusual movement, or apparently insignificant object may later become relevant. A recent linguostylistic study of Christie's short stories distinguishes among curiosity, suspense, and bewilderment as different reader responses and connects them with particular narrative structures and emotive signals [8].



This distinction is useful for understanding Christie's technique. A descriptive detail can create curiosity by raising a question; it can produce suspense by delaying the answer; or it can generate bewilderment when the reader's earlier interpretation is suddenly disrupted.

Metaphor, epithet, and simile are less dominant in Christie than in highly figurative literary prose, but their selective use is significant. Pakhomova and Yashkina emphasize that Christie's individual style combines thematic and compositional economy with specific figurative and linguistic-stylistic devices, including irony, metaphor, epithet, and simile [3]. The relative restraint of figurative language is itself meaningful. In a detective novel, excessive description can disclose too much or slow the movement toward the solution. Christie generally uses figurative expression economically, often to establish a character's appearance, mood, social identity, or the emotional atmosphere of a scene.

For example, a brief comparison may influence the reader's first impression of a character. That impression can later prove inaccurate. In this way, figurative language participates in the construction of false expectations.

One of Christie's most important achievements lies in the organization of information before the final revelation. The final explanation in *Murder on the Orient Express* illustrates this particularly clearly. Poirot's reconstruction does not merely announce the solution. It reorganizes previously presented information and establishes connections between details that the reader has already encountered.

Marc Alexander's analysis demonstrates that the final monologue is rhetorically organized to persuade the reader of the validity of Poirot's interpretation [1, pp. 13–27]. This means that the dénouement is not simply an addition to the plot. It is a reinterpretation of the plot. The same principle operates in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Once Sheppard's guilt becomes known, earlier passages are reread mentally. The reader discovers that the language had not necessarily concealed the facts completely; rather, it had encouraged a particular interpretation of them.

The preceding observations make it possible to regard Christie's language as a system of clues.

A clue may be:

- ✓ an unusual word;
- ✓ a repeated expression;
- ✓ an incomplete answer;
- ✓ a change in grammatical emphasis;
- ✓ a suspicious silence;
- ✓ an ambiguous statement;
- ✓ a contradiction between speech and action;
- ✓ a carefully positioned description;



- ✓ or a narrator's selective presentation of events.

In this system, literary form and detective logic become inseparable.

A recent study of Christie's individual style similarly argues that her linguistic and stylistic techniques cannot be separated from her plot and compositional organization [3]. Another recent study of Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle places linguistic-stylistic analysis, plot construction, characterization, and stylistic innovation within the development of English detective fiction [9].

The significance of Christie's achievement therefore lies not simply in the complexity of her plots. It lies in her ability to make the language carrying those plots function simultaneously as information, concealment, characterization, atmosphere, and evidence.

Conclusion. Agatha Christie's detective fiction demonstrates that plot construction is inseparable from linguistic organization. Her narratives do not merely tell the reader what happened; they carefully regulate when, how, and from whose perspective information becomes available.

Dialogue is used to advance action and reveal contradictions between characters' statements and intentions. Ellipsis creates informational gaps that encourage the reader to form hypotheses. Repetition turns apparently ordinary details into potential clues. Irony produces double meanings that become visible only after the final revelation. Modal expressions maintain uncertainty, while contrast exposes the distance between appearance and reality. Narrative perspective, particularly the unreliable narrator, allows Christie to construct plots in which the reader receives truthful fragments but interprets them incorrectly.

The examples from *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *And Then There Were None*, and *The Murder at the Vicarage* demonstrate that these devices are not independent stylistic ornaments. They are structurally connected with the movement of the plot.

Christie's particular achievement lies in the economy of this system. She does not normally explain every psychological or narrative detail in advance. Instead, she places linguistic signals within ordinary conversations, descriptions, pauses, repetitions, and apparently insignificant remarks. Their importance becomes clear only when the larger structure of the plot is revealed.

Consequently, the language of Christie's detective fiction can be understood as a secondary narrative mechanism: the visible plot tells the story of the crime and its investigation, while the linguistic structure simultaneously directs, delays, and sometimes distorts the reader's interpretation of that story.

This dual function explains why Christie's novels invite rereading. After the solution has been discovered, earlier words acquire new meanings, minor details become clues, and seemingly neutral statements reveal their structural role in the narrative. Her language therefore does not merely accompany the plot; it helps create the plot itself.

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