

**Linguistic Inquiry: Textual Analysis of the Labyrinths of  
Language and Meaning in Frank Stockton's**

**«The Lady, or the Tiger?»**

الاستقصاء اللغوي: تحليل نصي لمتاهات اللغة والمعنى في قصة فرانك ستوكتون  
«السيدة، أم النمر؟»



**By: Dr. Diana Hadi**

Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics – Phoenicia University–Faculty  
of Arts and Sciences – English Department, P.O Box: 11-7790, Zahrani  
District, Lebanon.

الدكتورة ديانا هادي

أستاذ مشارك في اللغويات التطبيقية – جامعة فينيسيا، كلية الآداب والعلوم – قسم اللغة الإنجليزية،

ص.ب: 11-7790، قضاء الزهراني، لبنان

Diana.Hadi@pu.edu.lb

Date of receipt: 14/04/2025 Date of acceptance: 06/05/2025 Date of publication: 25/06/2025

## **Abstract**

This article attempts to investigate the complicated relationship of form of language, narrative vagueness, and cultural interpretation within Frank Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" Applying text linguistic methods to the analysis of this classic short story, the researcher tackles two research questions, specifically, how does the linguistic structure of the narrative reinforce the uncertain ending of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" What are the effects of cultural and language influences on how the reader interprets the important characters and themes of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" Grounded in theoretical frameworks from Halliday and Hasan's cohesion and coherence, and more recent cognitive linguistics, the paper addresses how the deployment of ambigui-

ty within language functions as a reader engagement and theme exploration strategy. The research concludes that the narrative's linguistic construction—defined by its deliberate plot of unresolvable conflict, indirect characterization, and sophisticated temporalities—is a significant factor in the development of the legendary vagueness of the story. The research further contends that cultural contexts and linguistic norms governing the reader's interpretation heavily influence the apparently moral, motivational, and destined lives of characters and thus the broader themes of justice, choice, and human nature. Finally, the paper concludes that "The Lady, or the Tiger?" illustrates the outstanding power of language in creating narrative doubt and highlights the importance of

cultural spectacles in the reception and interpretation of literature. In this sense, the story illustrates the general implications of text linguistics in the understanding of narrative ambiguity and cultural .impact

**Keywords:** text linguistics – standards of textuality – language influences – cultural influences – ambiguity

### الملخص

تحاول هذه المقالة استقصاء العلاقة المعقدة بين شكل اللغة، وغموض السرد، والتفسير الثقافي في قصة فرانك ستوكتون «السيدة أم النمر؟». ومن خلال تطبيق أساليب اللسانيات النصية لتحليل هذه القصة القصيرة الكلاسيكية، يتناول الباحث سؤالين بحثيين، وهما: كيف تعزز البنية اللغوية للسرد النهاية غير المؤكدة في قصة «السيدة أم النمر؟»، وما هي تأثيرات العوامل الثقافية واللغوية على كيفية تفسير القارئ للشخصيات الرئيسية ومواضيع القصة؟

وانطلاقاً من الأطر النظرية لهاليداي وحسن فيما يتعلق بالتماسك والتناسق، بالإضافة إلى النظريات الأحدث في اللسانيات الإدراكية، يتناول البحث كيف تعمل الغموضات اللغوية كاستراتيجية لجذب القارئ واستكشاف الموضوعات

ويخلص البحث إلى أن البناء اللغوي للسرد - الذي يتحدد من خلال حبكة مدروسة قائمة على صراع لا يمكن حله، وتوصيف غير مباشر، وزمنيات معقدة - يشكّل عاملاً مهماً في تطوير الغموض الأسطوري للقصة. كما يرى أن السياقات الثقافية والمعايير اللغوية التي تحكم تفسير القارئ تؤثر بشكل كبير على الفهم الأخلاقي والتحفيزي والمصيري للشخصيات، وبالتالي على الموضوعات الأوسع مثل العدالة والاختيار والطبيعة البشرية.

وفي النهاية، يؤكد البحث أن قصة «السيدة أم النمر؟» تُظهر القوة الهائلة للغة في خلق الشك السردية، وتبرز أهمية المنظور الثقافي في تلقي الأدب وتفسيره. ومن هذا المنطلق، توضح القصة الآثار العامة للسانيات النصية في فهم الغموض السردية والتأثير الثقافي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اللسانيات النصية  
- معايير النصية - التأثيرات اللغوية -  
التأثيرات الثقافية - الغموض

## **Background Information About Text Linguistics**

Text linguistics explores how texts, both spoken and written, make meaning surpass sentences, and structure, coherence, and cohesion in larger discourse. Cohesion, for Halliday and Hasan (1976), represents the lexical and grammatical links between sentences which bind them together, while coherence is the rational order through which a text can be read as a whole work of cohesion. But more recent text linguistics has taken these notions further to involve cognitive and social aspects. Kaal et al. (2021), for instance, believe that coherence and cohesion in text also need

to be examined cognitively with an understanding of the role played by readers' mental models of a text to its meaning.

Also, Bergs (2022) mentions that, in digital communication, texts depend on multimodal signals and intertextual allusions, in addition to traditional cohesive devices, to become coherent. This is a challenge to the conventional definitions and makes a case for a more refined understanding of what constitutes text structure, especially in the modern digital era when textual boundaries are normally blurred.

## **1. Theoretical Fundamentals of Text Linguistics**

Textual theory in linguistics emphasizes the structure of the text and the manner in which coherence and cohesion

work to achieve meaning.

### **A. Coherence and Cohesion**

Coherence and cohesion are two dominant concepts in the field of text linguistics. Halliday and Hasan (1976) proposed the cohesion theory, which gave the theoretical grounding for explaining how grammatical and lexical relationships (such as conjunction, reference, and substitution) form the textual cohesion and that coherence represents the logical progressiveness of the ideas that carry meaning in a text. Present studies still borrow from these early assumptions, as studies investigate the usage of cohesion by social media and digital texts in innovative forms (Liu & Zhang, 2020).

For instance, Liu and Zhang (2020) explain how social media messages like

tweets employ few cohesive devices but attain some level of coherence through interaction and shared cultural knowledge. They believe that cohesion in the digital era is no longer just linguistic but can also be attained through joint intertextuality and multimodality.

### **B. Text Types and Genre**

Text linguistics also studies the structuring of various kinds of texts or genres. Researchers such as Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) have been instrumental in advancing genre theory, noting that communicative functions shape texts. In the last decade, Perkins and Smith (2021) have researched how genre evolves in academic settings specifically in the wake of online publication platforms and emerging

collaborative writing spaces. They emphasize how genre conventions are more and more shaped by internet-based resources like citation managers and collaborative tools like Google Docs.

## **2. Central Methods in Text Linguistics**

Text linguistics also intersects with other fields like discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and pragmatics. All of these models account for texts in different ways.

### **A. Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is also closely related to text linguistics, emphasizing the employment of language at levels beyond the sentence in building meaning. Discourse analysts, for instance, Gee (1999), have investigated how texts are employed to build social identity and power

relations. Further research has included sociocultural and political contexts to text analysis, taking into account how texts reinforce or oppose social norms (Van Dijk, 2022).

For example, Van Dijk (2022) discusses the application of discourse in social identity construction focusing on the language and power intersection in political discourse. Political discourse to him incorporates implicit cohesive relations in the manner of endorsing ideologies and outlines how cohesion and coherence constitute persuasiveness of the texts.

### **B. Cognitive Text Linguistics**

Cognitive linguistics has greatly influenced text linguistics by bringing together text comprehension and cognitive operations. Scholars

such as Lakoff (1987) and Langacker (1987) put a foundation of the way cognitive structures shape language use. Cognitive models over the last three years, such as mental spaces, frame theory, and conceptual metaphors, have been used to describe how readers make sense of complicated texts.

Current studies, for instance, Gibbs and Colston (2021), concentrate on how cognition influences meaning construction in argumentative discourse, specifically political rhetoric. They contend that cognitive biases, including confirmation bias, influence the way people read texts, something which is potentially to blame for the persistence of polarized readings of the same material.

### **3. Text Linguistics Applications**

Text linguistics has extensive applications across various disciplines such as language pedagogy, translation studies, and legal language.

#### **A. Language Teaching**

Text linguistics also has an important contribution to make to language pedagogy, especially reading pedagogy and writing pedagogy. It has been argued by Carrell (1984) and Carson et al. (2021) that if language learners are to improve their interpretative ability, they must know about the structure of the text. Carson et al. (2021) mention how teaching cohesion and coherence directly serves as a method of enhancing the learners' interpretation and production of complex text.

Current research also indicates the necessity of incorporating digital literacy in language learning. Lee (2022) indicates that the study of web texts and digital multimodal texts in language class can assist learners in building more robust strategies for interpreting new genres like blogs, online reviews, and tweets.

### **B. Translation Studies**

Text linguistics has also assisted a lot in translation studies, that is, how cohesion and coherence are ensured between languages. Klaudy (2009) paved the way to monitor how the cohesive devices operate in the context of translation. Current research continues to investigate this field, and Zhang and Li (2023) researched how coherence in law translations can be

ensured while accommodating various legal systems and cultures.

### **C. Legal and Professional Texts**

Legal language is yet another field to which text linguistics has made a substantial contribution. Gotti (2005) explained how legal writing adopts certain genres and conventions in the interest of clarity. The past decades have witnessed electronic forms, e-contracts, and web-based schemes for resolving disputes having an ever-growing impact on legal texts as researched by Chang et al. (2024). Their research traces how digitalization has changed the structure of texts in legal documents while ensuring cohesion and coherence wherever required.

#### 4. Criticisms and Limitations

Although text linguistics has been useful, the criticisms have been in the form of being overly structuralist to the detriment of other social, cultural, and political interests. Van Dijk (2022) has maintained that conventional text linguistics has been ignoring the construction of meaning in context, which has been attempted to be filled by critical discourse analysis in its emphasis on power, ideology, and inequality.

In the same vein, Mendelsohn and Barlow (2023) contend that greater use of artificial intelligence in text generation (e.g., GPT-based models) threatens classical models of text coherence and authorship, revealing new research agendas for how texts are written and read in

the age of AI.

Text linguistics is a dynamic and developing area of research that generates perceptive information regarding the structural and cognitive processes of text processing and interpretation. In its investigation of cohesion, coherence, and genre analysis, text linguistics offers a complete model for the comprehension of how texts operate within personal and wider communicative contexts. Emerging trends in cognitive linguistics, new media, and translation theory also continue to test the limits of the discipline and theorizing that text linguistics will continue to be central to the comprehension of textual practices today.

#### Methodology

This study attempted to

analyze Frank Stockton's short story "The Lady, or the Tiger?" by applying the seven standards of textuality. They served as lenses to analyze how meaning was constructed and delivered. Moreover, they helped in triangulating the analysis of the complicated relationship of form of language, narrative vagueness, and cultural interpretation in the text by addressing the two research questions below.

### **Research Questions**

The present study attempts to answer the following two research questions by applying various criteria of textuality like linguistic analysis, cultural context, and literary theory.

1. How does the linguistic structure of the narrative reinforce the uncertain ending of "The Lady, or the Tiger?"

2. What are the effects of cultural and language influences on how the reader interprets the important characters and themes of "The Lady, or the Tiger?"

The above research questions are answered as follows through text linguistic exploration of the standards of textuality of Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger"?

### **Linguistic Construction and**

**Ambiguity:** The linguistic construction of the narrative uses devices like ambiguous pronoun reference, modal verbs of doubt, and lexical ambiguity to construct several possible readings of the ending of the story. By syntactic construction and lexical selection, Stockton intentionally constructs a narrative that causes readers to make inferences regarding

the ending without giving certain closure.

### **Cultural and Historical Linguistic Aspects:**

Linguistic aspects within the novel reflect larger cultural and historical aspects such as social assumptions, gender norms, and systems of morality found at Stockton's time. Analyzing linguistic indicators such as variation in dialects, antique words, and meaning changes permits an increased understanding of how separate cultural groups define characters' conduct and intentions. In addition, the use of literary theories like feminist or psychoanalytic criticism reveals the underlying power dynamics and psychological tensions in the linguistic fabric of the narrative.

The Lady or the Tiger, a short story by Frank Stockton, is a

novel of duty love and loyalty that borders on issues of morals and justice. The novel has a paradox that compels the hero, a young man accused of being in love with the king's daughter, to select between two doors one of which shall determine his destiny either a tiger or a lovely lady. Thus, it is imperative to analyze how the various standards of textuality function in the tale and how they influence the reader's understanding.

Cohesion and coherence are two basic properties of text structure and they are concerned with the interconnectedness and coherence of ideas in a text. Cohesion is the employment of linguistic devices like reference substitution and conjunction to establish relations among sentences

and render them coherent and cohesive. Coherence is the coherent and logical organization of ideas in a text. In "The Lady, or the Tiger?", Stockton weaves the pieces of the text together under personal pronouns like "he" and special names like "the accused" for naming the hero. For example, the text begins with the statement "in the very olden time there lived a semi-barbaric king...". Through the usage of the pronoun there, the reader can sense as though he or she is within the context and put across the context for the subject matter of the story. In later parts of the story, the writer uses the pronoun "he" when referring to the king, hence to link all the events together and provide continuity. For instance, the author writes, "The king was

a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts." The employment of the pronoun "he" here makes characteristics of the personality of the king linked to action and also develops a feeling of coherence in the story.

He also employs coordinating conjunctions like "and" and subordinating conjunctions like "if" to join the sentences and establish logical connections among them. For example, the narrator states: "It was the accused's responsibility to approach these doors and open one of them." He could not know which door he opened. If he opens the one, there came out of it a hungry tiger, the fiercest and cruelest that could be obtained, which

at once leaped upon him and tore him to pieces as a punishment for his guilt.” The conjunction “if” in the second sentence is employed to establish a feeling of condition or causality between the task assigned to the accused and his subsequent punishment if he opens the wrong door. This cause–effect relationship generates tension and suspense in the narrative and keeps the reader interested in the outcome. In addition, the uniformity of the narrative is preserved by the accurate and pertinent descriptions of the setting, characters and events that form a clearly vivid picture of the world of the narrative in the mind of the reader.

Intentionality is the meaning or purpose intended by the author expressed through the structure and style of the

language used in the text. The purpose of “The Lady, or the Tiger?” is to pose a moral dilemma so that the reader asks the question to himself of what justice is and what price the man has to pay in pursuing love and duty. Stockton accomplishes his intentionality through the use of suspenseful mood that leaves the reader in suspense throughout the narrative. He also employs irony like the king’s partial justice and the princess’s jealous love to communicate a better understanding and stimulate different thoughts and generate different interpretations about the themes of the narrative.

The author’s intentionality is found in the way he frames the narrative around this larger enigmatic question of whether the princess will choose the

lady or the tiger. This question creates tension and suspense that hooks the reader in terms of what will happen to the story. The author's intentionality is also evident in the way he uses the emotions and thoughts of the princess in an attempt to address the problems of jealousy and love. For example, the narrator explains "How her soul had burned in agony when she had seen him hurry to meet that woman, with her flushing cheek and sparkling eye of triumph; when she had seen him guide her forth, his whole form alight with the joy of regained life; when she had heard the rapturous cries from the throng, and the wild clang of the blithe bells; when she had seen the priest, with his glad attendants, come forth to the couple, and join them one together and forever

and forever." The words and descriptions that the writer has employed here assist in giving expression to the intensity of feelings of the princess and the matchless passion for her beloved.

One other instance of the purposefulness of the author in "The Lady or the Tiger?" is how he employs the end of the story to raise the issue of justice. The author goes on to say, "And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door-- the lady, or the tiger?" This ending makes the reader make their speculations and guesses, which leaves them wondering what justice is. The intentionality of the author in this case is to compel the reader to critically reflect on the themes in the narrative and question their assumptions

regarding justice and morality.

Two features of the text that are interrelated and of interest to the reader are Informativity and acceptability, which pertain to the reader's knowledge regarding the topic and the words used in the text. Acceptability means that the reader should be able to comprehend the language and the cultural references used in the text and Informativity means that the text is able to inform the reader about the topic. In "The Lady or the Tiger" the vocabulary isn't complex and the cultural references are few and hence the story becomes easily acceptable to a mass base of readers. Apart from that, the story is also didactic as it presents a moral argument for the price of human love and different definitions of justice.

However, it must be noted that the author is not able to achieve "acceptability" in the classical sense of the word.

The tale is concluded in a cliffhanger, and the reader is left to decide for himself or herself whether the princess directs her lover to the lady or the tiger. This perplexing question has been the issue of some controversy and argument between readers for over a hundred years, and no one really has an idea of what the right answer is.

On the contrary, the writer is successful in achieving ambiguity and moral complexity in the novel. By failing to provide a concrete ending, Stockton compels the reader to reflect on the hard and puzzling decisions and outcomes the characters must face. The tale asks

questions regarding justice, love, and human nature and makes the reader consider the matters on a level of critical thinking that might be greater than his or hers. Comprehensively, though “The Lady, or the Tiger?” contains no conclusion as such, its deliberate indeterminacy and philosophical content have contributed to making it a work of American classic literature.

Situationality is the context in which the text is written and read and includes the time, place, and audience of the text. “The Lady, or the Tiger?” was written in the late 19th century and for a general population. The story illustrates the culture of the time such as the patriarchal society and the focus on honor and duty that dictated the moves of the protagonist and

the conclusion of the story.

Secondly, the narrative involves a fictional kingdom described as “semi-barbaric” and governed by a king who is famous for his unorthodox system of justice. The kingdom is marked by extravagance and luxury, with description of elaborate clothes, lovely structures, and ritual rites. This atmosphere gives a sense of fantasy and otherworldliness, so that the reader can set aside their cynicism and fully become involved in the action. The people in the story also contribute to the situationality. The king is introduced as a power-seeking tyrant, and the princess as a shrewd and assertive young lady who is not afraid to defy the norms and be unconventional. The lover represents the attempt of the individual to overcome

the forces of tradition and fate.

All these characters are creations of their worlds, determined by the world they inhabit and what they have to do. Thus, the Situationality in “The Lady, or the Tiger?” is a result of the combination of setting and character description, making a rich and engaging world that engulfs the reader and keeps them interested until the very end.

Finally, intertextuality explains the connections, references, and allusions the text has to other texts cultures and histories. “The Lady, or the Tiger?” alludes to the ancient Roman tradition of Gladiator combat and the medieval tradition of Trial by ordeal where divine intervention decided one’s guilt or innocence. References to these traditions provide a

historical and cultural richness to the story and make it more contemporary and timeless.

One example of intertextuality here is the allusion to the “Spartan fable” of the fox and the grapes. The fable is presented as one of the possibilities of the princess’s dilemma of sending her lover or the lady to the tiger. The reference to the fable serves to underscore the theme of the story, that convention and fate direct our choices even when we think that we are making choices of our own free will or volition. The other example of intertextuality in the story is the allusion to “the old story of the Crusaders” in the last paragraph. This allusion is used to create ambiguity and uncertainty so that the reader is left questioning what became of the lover. The

allusion to the Crusades also acts to situate the story within a broader cultural heritage, complicating and enriching the narrative. Briefly, the intertextuality of “The Lady, or the Tiger?” makes the unfolding of the plot possible through referencing other novels and ancient societies. They enhance the narrative and infuse it with meaning and richness, and contribute to the rendering of the story universal and reader-friendly regardless of location and era. It stands at the junction of discovery and uncertainty in determining whether it’s the lady or the tiger.

“The Lady, or the Tiger?” represents a tour-de-force document about the capability of narrative technique and linguistic flair. By relying upon cohesion and coherence,

Stockton carefully entwines a tale in which every detail, ostensibly trivial, nonetheless contributes toward intensifying the background tension and unease inherent to the story. The coherence of the text, from syntax to lexis, maintains the reader’s complicity in the narrative, while the coherence within the narrative constituents guarantees that even the inconclusive closure, so vague as to be almost unspecified, is believable and interesting. The purpose of the story is obvious: it resists a clear-cut resolution, challenging the reader to supply the gaps and participate in meaning-construction. This intentional design is a significant factor in creating the story’s famous ambiguity.

The acceptability of this uncertainty is informed by

the cultural and social worlds of the reader, revealing how Situationality affects knowledge of what the characters are doing and why. The moral problem at the center of the story is not only one of individual taste but also one which reflects wider cultural understandings of justice, choice, and fate. The informativeness of the story is its implication rather than statement; the deepest meaning is in what is not said, challenging readers to consider the implications of their own decisions. Furthermore, intertextuality is at work as readers reference other cultural stories, myths, and tropes of fate and justice that resonate throughout the narrative, enriching their understanding of the stakes involved.

In the end, “The Lady, or the Tiger?” is not merely a narrative about what will happen to its characters, but it is a narrative that exhorts readers to work against the boundaries of language and interpretation. Through its textual options and its manipulation of the layout of the story, the tale offers a space for intertextual dialogue between the reader and the text, where meaning is not only obtained through what is stated but also through what is left to the reader. Consequently, Stockton’s story illustrates the intersection of doubt and insight, where the play of language, with all its subtlety, saves a plain story as a lasting treatise upon man and decision.

## References

1. Bhatia, V. (1993). **Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings**. Longman.
2. Carrell, P. (1984). The effects of rhetorical organization on ESL readers. **TESOL Quarterly**, **18**(3), 441–469.
3. Carson, J., Lee, M., & Zhang, W. (2021). Teaching cohesion and coherence in second language writing. **TESOL Journal**, **12**(2), 240–259.
4. Chang, H., Wang, T., & Zhang, Y. (2024). Digital transformation in legal texts: An analysis of e-contracts and legal dispute resolutions. **Legal Studies Journal**, **32**(4), 310–328.
5. Gibbs, R., & Colston, H. (2021). Cognitive biases and the interpretation of political texts: Insights from cognitive linguistics. **Discourse & Society**, **33**(3), 301–318.
6. Gotti, M. (2005). **Legal discourse: Theory and practice**. John Benjamins.
7. Halliday, M., & Hasan, R. (1976). **Cohesion in English**. Longman.
8. Jones, S. (1975). "The Lady, or the Tiger?": A reinterpretation." **Studies in Short Fiction**, **12**(2), 171–177. doi:10.1300/J120v12n02\_08.
9. Klaudy, K. (2009). **The role of text linguistics in translation studies**. In J. Kohn & M. Smith (Eds.), **Translation and Meaning**. Benjamins.
10. Lee, J. (2022). Integrating digital texts into language pedagogy. **Language Teaching Research**, **26**(1), 45–62.
11. Liu, X., & Zhang, S. (2020). Cohesion in digital discourse: The case of social media. **Discourse & Communication**, **14**(3), 305–320.
12. Mendelsohn, E., & Barlow, A. (2023). AI and text construction: Rethinking text coherence in the age of automation. **Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Linguistics**, **4**(2), 25–38.
13. Perkins, M., & Smith, L. (2021). **The evolution of academic genres in the digital age**. **Journal of Applied Linguistics**, **43**(2), 150–168.
14. Swales, J. (1990). **Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings**. Cambridge University Press.
15. Van Dijk, T. (2022). **Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive**

**Approach.** Cambridge University Press.

16. Zhang, Z., & Li, J. (2023). **Translating Legal Texts: Maintaining Coherence Across Languages.** Translation Studies, 19(1), 45-58.