An Analysis on Foregrounding in *Miss Brill* from the Perspective of Functional Stylistics

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Abstract—*Miss Brill* is the masterpiece of modern short story writer Katherine Mansfield, telling the story of an old English lady wandering in France who is hurt by a pair of young lovers. Most of the previous studies on the novel focused on its narrative angle and theatricality. This paper adopts the foregrounding analysis framework of functional stylistics to quantitatively and qualitatively analyze the parallelism and deflection features of foregrounding in *Miss Brill* at the phonological level, the graphological level, the lexical-grammatical level, and the semantic level. This paper finds that: in *Miss Brill*, the foregrounding features at the phonological level are the use of alliteration and coda; the foregrounding features at the graphological level are the parallelism of punctuation; the foregrounding features at the lexical-grammatical level are manifested in the widespread use of material and mental processes, the emergence of high-value, median-value, and low-value modalities, and the extensive use of marked themes; the foregrounding features at the semantic level are parallel means of connection. These foregrounding methods can better reflect the ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function of the text, and at the same time, they can also highlight Miss Brill's tragic living state and her escapist psychological state to readers. By analyzing the foregrounding features of *Miss Brill* at various language levels and their stylistic effects, this paper vividly displays the story, helps readers understand the language features of the novel, and enhances their comprehension of the topic of the story. Thereby, the readers' ability to appreciate such novels can be improved, and a new research perspective is provided for the analysis of foregrounding in novels.

Index Terms—Functional stylistics, foregrounding, *Miss Brill*

I. INTRODUCTION

Katherine Mansfield is an outstanding short story writer, known as the founder of contemporary Western short fiction, who holds an important seat in the literary world. For this reason, Katherine Mansfield and her short stories have long been the subject of literary study. Among them, *Miss Brill*, written in 1921, fully reflects its original language style and narrative skills and established Mansfield's status as an outstanding modern literary master [1]. The protagonist of the story, Miss Brill, is an old English lady wandering in France who makes her living by tutoring and reading newspapers. Every week, she goes to the park to sit alone, observe the surrounding scenery and listen to the words of passers-by to soothe her lonely heart. And a sharp conversation between a young couple brings her back from the joyous world of imagination to the harsh reality.

II. PREVIOUS STUDY AND APPLICATION

A. Previous Study and Application of Miss Brill

The analysis and research of *Miss Brill* by Chinese and foreign scholars mainly include: Kobler (1990) analyzed the modern writing techniques used by Mansfield in *Miss Brill*, and proved that Mansfield's *Miss Brill* is part of modernist literature [2]; Robinson (1994) affirmed the artistic value of *Miss Brill* in his collection of essays, calling Mansfield 'a very valuable and important figure' in the twentieth century and acknowledging Mansfield's Modern English short stories have outstanding contributions [3].

Fu [4] expounded on the uniqueness of Mansfield from the aspects of the novel's subject, structure, narrative method, and viewpoint, as well as female emotions, and revealed the modernity of *Miss Brill*; Lan [5] borrowed the practical methods of New Criticism to interpret *Miss Brill* in a more in-depth and detailed way, and excavated its internal dialectical composition, thinking that it reflects the unity of content and form Lan [5]; Xu [6] Starting from the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, explored how Mansfield chooses and uses the transitivity system in her short story *Miss Brill* to reveal the lonely living state of Miss Brill as a marginal person and the reasons for this state.

In short, the research on *Miss Brill* by Chinese and foreign scholars is relatively abundant, but most of them focus on literature, and few people analyze it in combination with Systemic Functional Linguistics.

B. Previous Study and Application of Functional Stylistics

Halliday is the founder of functional stylistics. He proposed that the theory of language function is a better tool for stylistic research [7]. Foregrounding is an artistic technique of stylistic analysis, which has attracted the research of many scholars. The research on foregrounding by Chinese and foreign scholars mainly includes: Shklovsky (1965) first applied foregrounding to the field of linguistics, thereby proposing the concept of "ostranenie" [8]; Mukarovsky [9] of the Prague School first applied the concept of "foregrounding" to the study of literary language, and he believed that the function of poetic language was to maximize foregrounding; Jakobson (1996) believed that the function of poetry comes not only from the selection of the correct form but also from the selection of the same language item. The parallelism of this combination will also lead to the effect of foregrounding [10]; Leech [11] adopted Jakobson's idea and summarized two kinds of foregrounding: "syntagmatic foregrounding" and "paradigmatic foregrounding".

Halliday [12] combined foregrounding with systemic functional linguistics and distinguished the concepts of

"prominence" and "foregrounding"; Wang and Ding [13] introduced the concept of foregrounding, and differentiated the concepts of "norm"and "deviation"; Shen [7] conducted an in-depth study on Halliday's relevancy criteria for determining true prospects. She believed that the relevancy criteria are still based on thematic meaning; Hu [14] put forward the definition of foregrounding as 'what is unusual, unconventional, and attractive'. In addition to theoretical research, Guan, Fu, Liu [15-17], etc., as well as some master's and doctoral theses in recent years, have combined textual analysis of foregrounding to applications. Therefore, domestic and foreign researches on foregrounding are relatively abundant.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

A. Foregrounding in Functional Stylistics

Functional stylistics is a genre of stylistics, which can be divided into broad and narrow senses. In a broad sense, functional stylistics is put forward relative to formal stylistics and refers to the school of stylistic analysis based on the functionalist view of language, generally including the functional stylistic theory of the Prague School, the systematic functional stylistics of Halliday, Bakhtin's theory of speech genre and style; while functional stylistics in a narrow sense is the abbreviation of "systematic functional stylistics", specifically referring to stylistic studies from the theoretical perspective of systemic functional linguistics [18]. Functional stylistics in this article refers to the narrow usage.

Form and deviation are stylistic concepts closely related to foregrounding and are the cornerstone of foregrounding. People are accustomed to the basic, normative grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure that constitutes the norm of language behavior, and the violation of this commonly used language rule is deviation. The means of foregrounding in functional stylistics include deviation and parallelism: parallelism refers to the quantitative excessive use of a language rule; deflection refers to the violation of language use rules. Both parallelism and deviation can be considered as prominence. Zhang [19] proposed that there are two types of prominence, prominence with motivation, which contributes to the overall meaning of the expression of the author; and prominence without motivation, which is not related to the overall meaning or thematic meaning of the work. Foregrounding refers to the prominence of motivation. In addition, the situational context restricts the generation, evolution, and transmission of language, determines the choice of language vocabulary and the change of language style, recognizes and judges the language features that are foregrounded, and composes the whole text. The analysis is inseparable from the situational context [20]. For stylistic analysis, Halliday proposes an analysis procedure: the first step is to excavate potential salient features of motivation at different language levels; the second step is to check whether these salient features are related to the overall meaning of the story [21]. Zhang Delu revised it into four steps: encoding, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Regardless of the analytical procedure employed, the core steps of them are similar. Scholars need to first explore the salience of different language levels, then explore their motivations to find

valuable features, and finally summarize the overall style of the work through the selected features.

Under the influence of Halliday, Zhang Delu constructed a framework to analyze foreground characteristics from a functional stylistic perspective. The framework is as follows Fig. 1:
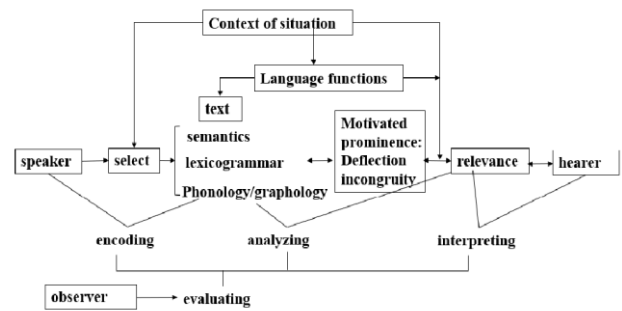

Fig. 1. Zhang Delu's framework of foregrounding.

Based on Halliday's System Functional Linguistics, the framework provides clear and relatively complete analysis steps, analytical language levels, and correlation criteria for determining true prospects. Based on this framework, this paper will analyze the foregrounding features of *Miss Brill* at different linguistic levels, and explore their motivations, to gain a deeper understanding of the theme and connotation of the story.

B. Research Methods

This paper takes Zhang Delu's framework of foregrounding as the basic analysis framework, uses UAM Corpus Tool and AntConc 3.5.8 Corpus software, and takes the original text of Katherine Mansfield's *Miss Brill* as the corpus. By generating the thesaurus, constructing the theoretical framework of the transitory system, etc., the processed corpus is manually annotated. Through the combination of qualitative and quantitative research, the foregrounding at four levels is analyzed. First, at different language levels, extract the prominences that are closely related to the context, further divide these prominences into deviation and parallelism and combine them with different functions. Finally, motivated deviation and parallelism are chosen to illustrate the role these foregrounding features play in the realization of the novel's style and the presentation of thematic meaning.

IV. ANALYSIS OF FOREGROUNDING IN MISS BRILL

A. Foregrounding at the Phonological Level

1) Parallelism at the phonological level

The parallelism at the phonological level is mainly reflected in the repeated use of phonemes, such as alliteration and coda, which can enhance the sense of rhythm and highlight the key points of expression.

EX1: "...the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques."

EX2: "The old people sat on the bench, still as statues."

EX3: "Little children ran among them, swooping and laughing."

In Example 1, words starting with "g", "li" and "w" appear repeatedly, which is phonetic parallelism, the use of

this alliteration makes the scenery more beautiful and brings good weather to the reader's eyes; in example 2, the word starting with "s" appears repeatedly, which also constitutes parallelism, vividly depicts the old man sitting motionless on the beach; in Example 3, the "ing" at the end of words is repeated, reinforcing the tone and depicting the hilarious scene of children chasing and fighting. This repetition embodies the parallelism means of foregrounding, which is musical, can make the article more logically coherent and attract the reader's attention, thus emphasizing the role of information, thus embodying the ideational function and textual function in functional stylistics.

2) Deviation at the phonological level

The deviation at the phonological level mainly includes means such as phonetic omission. Omission refers to omitting certain phonemes at the predicted position. The omission of sounds can seem a little odd compared to standard pronunciation. In fiction, this omission may be due to accent problems.

EX4: "An actress, are ye?"

In Example 4, "ye" is the omission of the "you", and the old man in bed makes such a sound. It fully embodies the characteristics of the character, thereby conveying the ideational meaning of the novel, helping readers to grasp the feature of the characters and better understand the meaning conveyed by the novel. This omission of pronunciation is a means of deviation from foregrounding, which is conducive to the realization of ideational meaning in systematic functional stylistics.

B. Foregrounding at the Graphological Level

The foregrounding method at the graphological level is mainly reflected in the parallelism, which is mainly reflected in the excessive use of punctuation marks in certain novels. As a supplement to writing, punctuation can not only help readers clarify the main sentence structure, but also enhance the expressive effect of the article. The frequency and proportion of the distribution of punctuation marks in this novel are as follows:

TABLE I: DISTRIBUTION OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

	Frequency	Portion
Comma	138	48.8%
Full stop	90	31.8%
Quotation mark	19	6.7%
Exclamatory mark	15	5.3%
Question mark	11	3.9%
Semicolon	10	3.5%
Total	283	100%

As shown in Table I, commas and full stops are used most frequently in this novel, and they are usually used in the narrative. In addition, quotation marks and exclamation marks are frequently used, which are worth studying. The high frequency of quotation marks can indicate that the novel is full of dialogue and enhance the story of the novel; while exclamation marks can express strong emotions such as shock and excitement.

EX5: "What has been happening to me?" said the sad little eyes.

EX6: "Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it!

How she loved sitting here, watching it all!"

Quotation marks are used in Example 5, here is to personify Miss Brill's fox fur scarf and give it human words, which fully reflects Miss Brill's love for this fox fur scarf; Example 6 uses consecutively three exclamation marks to express Miss Brill's love for the scene in the park and her immersion in her imaginary world, which also forms a strong contrast to Miss Brill's return to the real world afterward. From this, we can see that it is necessary to repeat some punctuation marks in the novel, and this parallelism is beneficial to convey the ideational and interpersonal functions of the novel.

C. Foregrounding at the Lexical-Grammatical Level

1) Parallelism at the lexical-grammatical level

The parallelism at the lexical-grammatical level is mainly reflected in the repeated use of partial transitive processes, tone, and modality.

Halliday [12] proposed that there are six kinds of transitive processes: material processes can be seen as the process of doing something; mental processes are the process of thinking; verbal processes are the process of speaking; relational processes can reflect the relationship between things; behavioral process refers to the process of human physiological behavior; existential process means the process of existence. The corpus statistics are established through the UAM Corpus Tool. The distribution and proportion of transitive processes in *Miss Brill* are as follows:

TABLE II: DISTRIBUTION OF TRANSITIVE PROCESSES

	Frequency	Portion
Material process	73	38.6%
Behavioral process	48	25.4%
Mental process	28	14.8%
Relational process	18	9.5%
Verbal process	15	7.9%
Existential process	7	3.7%
Total	189	100%

It can be seen from the Table II that the material process in the novel has the highest frequency, accounting for 38.6%; the behavioral process is second, accounting for 25.4%; the mental process is also more prominent, accounting for 14.8%.

EX7: "Miss Brill put up her hand and touched her fur."

EX8: "... and they laughed and paired and went off arm-in-arm."

EX9: "Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought-though what they understood she didn't know."

Example 7 mainly shows the material process and describes the preparations for Miss Brill before going to the park, which reflects her longing and expectation for going to the park, as well as her love and value for her fox fur scarf; Example 8 mainly shows the behavior process, depicting the behavior of all kinds of people on the street, and reflects Miss Brill's careful observation of pedestrians; Example 9 reflects the psychological process, describing Miss Brill's thoughts when she hears the band playing in the distance. The excitement and joy show her rich mental activities.

Through the usage of various transitive processes, the author presents the image of Miss Brill in front of the reader's eyes: a marginal person who likes to observe others and is

rich in inner activities. The parallelism of these transitive processes makes it easier for readers to grasp the characters and understand the storyline, so it also reflects the ideational function well.

The mood system is a grammatical system that can reflect the function of interpersonal communication. Halliday *et al.* (2014) proposed four speech functions: statement, question, proposal, and order. Statement and proposal are mainly realized through the declarative mood; the question is realized through the interrogative mood, and order is realized through the imperative mood [22]. There are three types of mood: declarative, interrogative, and imperative. After statistics, the distribution and proportion of the mood in this novel are as follows:

TABLE III: DISTRIBUTION OF THE MOOD

	Frequency	Portion
Declarative mood	11	10.7%
Interrogative mood	11	10.7%
Imperative mood	2	1.9%
Total	103	100%

As shown in Table III, the declarative tone in this novel is the most, accounting for about 87.4%, followed by the interrogative tone, and the imperative tone is the least.

EX10: "What would she do? What was going to happen now? But as Miss Brill wondered,..."

Example10 describes Miss Brill's thoughts as she observes a young couple, and she is eager to join the world of others, not just as a spectator, but as a participant. Although the proportion of interrogative tone in the novel is not very high, it is very ingenious, which promotes the development of the story, and also shows the relationship between characters, as well as reflects the interpersonal function.

According to Halliday *et al.* [23], modality is a system that describes a series of uncertain states between positive and negative. Since verbal communication involves the exchange of information and goods or services, the judgmental meaning of modality is also different. The value can be high, medium, and low. Different values of modality can show different interpersonal meanings and can show different degrees of politeness. The systematic view of language as meaning potential is embodied in a unified way, which provides choices for human beings to realize interpersonal functions. The distribution of high, medium, and low modalities in *Miss Brill* are as follows:

TABLE IV: DISTRIBUTION OF THE MODALITIES

	Frequency	Portion
High	1	4.2%
Median	20	83.3%
Low	3	12.5%
Total	24	100%

High-value words include strong words such as must, need, have to; median-value words include will, should, shall, etc.; low-value modal words include can, might, wish, and other milder emotional words. It can be seen from Table IV that in this novel, the proportion of median-value words is the highest, about 83.3%; while the proportion of high-value and low-value words is very low. The abundance of median-value

modality means that the speaker is not dominant, but leaves a comfortable space for the readers.

EX11: "If he'd been dead she mightn't have noticed for weeks; she wouldn't have minded."

EX12: "No doubt somebody would have noticed if she hadn't been there; she was part of the performance after all."

Example 11 is a psychological activity of Miss Brill. She feels that even if the sick old man who often listens to her newspapers died, she might not notice or care, which shows her contempt and indifference to the elderly; Example 12 is Miss Brill immerses in the hustle and bustle of the world, she fantasizes that she is also a member of the drama actor, she is very important, reflecting her happiness and joy at that timer. She also wants to connect with people around her and be accepted by the social environment. These modalities are closely related to the character's status, which can reflect interpersonal meaning, and thus contribute to the expression of the theme of the story.

2) Deviation at the lexical-grammatical level

The deviation at the lexical-grammatical level of *Miss Brill* is mainly reflected in the grammatical metaphors and marked themes of intransitivity.

From the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, when the same meaning is represented by different grammatical structures, one of the grammatical structures may be a grammatical metaphor. When a lexical-grammatical structure is not used to express the meaning it usually expresses, the expression is a grammatical metaphor [23]. In some discourses, metaphors can play a role in highlighting some specific information and making the expression more vivid, which can be regarded as deviation.

EX13: "Although it was so brilliantly fine, the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques."

EX14: "And the band sounded louder and gayer."

In Example 13, "the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed" means "the blue sky is gold and spots of light are great", and the novel uses "powered with" and "like white wine splashed", transforming the structure of the process of existence, vividly depicting the golden scene of the sky, and also implying the happy mood of Miss Brill; Example 14 can be more thought-provoking, it may have two possibilities, one is "the band sounded louder and gayer" in the novel, and the second is "the band played louder and gayer". The former is a mental process, while the latter is a material process. Was the band playing more cheerfully or was it the psychological effect of Miss Brill? In either case, the use of this grammatical metaphor enhances the expression, embodying the deviated ideational function.

Theme-rheme structure is a grammatical device in lexical grammar, which includes theme and rheme: theme is the starting point of information and is what a sentence to talk about, which can be divided into unmarked and marked themes. In general, the information contained in the theme is often known; the information contained in the rheme is new. At a glance, the new information takes a back seat in the linear arrangement, and the appearance of the marked theme is a variation on this regular arrangement of sentences. Thus marked theme can be seen as a deviation.

EX15: "Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought - though what they understood she didn't know."

EX16: "And still soundlessly singing, still with that trembling smile, Miss Brill prepared to listen."

Both Examples 15 and 16 show Miss Brill's state of mind, movements and modalities, emphasizing her state while listening to a band and observing a young couple, highlighting her emotions, reaching the effect of emphasis. The use of this marked theme is a means of deviation, which can attract readers' attention, enhance the expression effect, and at the same time make the article more coherent, and logical, as well as reflect the textual function.

D. Foregrounding at the Semantic Level

The means of foregrounding at the semantic level of Miss Brill are mainly reflected in deviations, including grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Halliday and Hasan [24] first established the English cohesion theory, arguing that sentences form a cohesive semantic unit through cohesive means, that is, discourse. Zhang [19] regarded cohesion as a semantic concept that focuses on the semantic relationship between different language items. Halliday further divided cohesion into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion is the means of connecting sentences into chapters, which includes reference, substitution, omission, and connection. According to statistics, the distribution of grammatical cohesion in Miss Brill is as follows:

TABLE V: DISTRIBUTION OF GRAMMATICAL COHESION

	Frequency	Portion
Reference	115	51.6%
Ellipsis	9	4.0%
Substitution	31	13.9%
Conjunction	68	30.5%
Total	223	100%

As shown in the Table V, various grammatical cohesion means are distributed in this novel, among which reference is the most commonly used, approximately 51.6%; conjunction is second, approximately 30.5%; substitution and omission are the least.

EX17: "And she'd gone on the whole time about how she ought to wear spectacles; she knew she needed them; but that it was no good getting any; they'd be sure to break and they'd never keep on. And he'd been so patient."

In Example 17, the novel uses multiple references "she" and conjunctions "and" "but" in succession to make the whole text coherent. The frequent use of the personal pronoun "she" to refer to Miss Brill in the novel reflects the characteristics of Miss Brill's marginalization; the frequent use of connectives makes the relationship between sentences clearer and helps readers grasp the overall rhythm of the novel.

Lexical cohesion is another way to achieve coherence, including repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, and collocation. According to statistics, different types of lexical cohesion appear in novels. Among them, repetition is the most frequently used, which not only plays an important role in highlighting information but also forms a corresponding relationship with other language items in the text.

EX18: "And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches - they would come in with a kind of accompaniment, something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful moving."

EX19: "She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside."

It can be seen from Example 18 and Example 19 that there are both word repetition and sentence repetition in this novel. In Example 18, "she too" embodies both repetition and omission, expressing Miss Brill's eagerness to join young people's activities and her yearning for a happy stage; the repetition of "quickly" in Example 19 vividly shows Miss Brill's loneliness and helplessness after being ridiculed by young lovers. She quickly put away the scarf abnormally, highlighting the loneliness of the characters. The fantasy world of joy forms a strong contrast and shocks the reader. Therefore, as a means of foregrounding at the semantic level, lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion are both parallel expressions, which can enhance the expressive force of the novel and achieve a fascinating effect.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the theory of systemic functional linguistics, this paper uses qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze and explore the foregrounding in *Miss Brill*. The study found that the two foregrounding means — parallelism and deviation are distributed at the phonological level, the graphological level, the lexical-grammatical level, and the semantic level. The foregrounding features at the phonological level are the use of alliteration and coda; the foregrounding features at the graphological level are the parallelism of punctuation; the foregrounding features at the lexical-grammatical level are manifested in the widespread use of material and mental processes, the emergence of high-value, median-value, and low-value modalities, and the extensive use of marked themes; foregrounding feature at the semantic level is parallel means of connection. These foregrounding methods can better reflect the ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function in the novel, showing Miss Brill's tragic living state of being marginalized and her mental state that she is eager to integrate into the society. It further reflects the theme of the novel, thus once again proving the application value of foregrounding features in stylistic analysis from the perspective of functional stylistics.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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