

She is Intelligent, She is Headstrong, and She has Two Navels: Mind Style in Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*

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Abstract. This study explores the mind style of Connie Vidal, the enigmatic protagonist of "The Woman Who Had Two Navels" by Nick Joaquin. It investigates its alignment with the three interpretations of the titular two navels, as delineated by Tope (1998). By focusing on word choice and sentence structure concerning agency and animacy (Fowler, 1977; Leech & Short, 2007) of Connie's dialogue, the research aims to account for the ways the two navels shape Connie Vidal and the ways she realizes, embodies, and reacts towards the main themes of the novel. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the novel's thematic richness through stylistics, offering insights into the interplay between individual consciousness, societal norms, and existential dilemmas in Joaquin's seminal work.

Keywords. *mind style, cognitive stylistics, mental idiolect, Philippine fiction, cognitive poetics*

Introduction

As early as reading the first few pages of Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961), the reader is inevitably met with eccentricity akin to that of reading magical realism. Picture this: a girl who claims to have two navels comes to a horse doctor for a cure, and the doctor unquestionably agrees with a conviction as queer as having two navels. The novel commits to this eccentricity as it chronicles Connie Escobar's self-exile in Hong Kong through a style of narration that plays with the temporality of switching between the present and the past events in her life and that of the characters important to her.

Connie's self-exile is due to her moral and existential dissonance after knowing the truth about her parents, Manolo and Concha Vidal, and her husband, Macho. Her inner turmoil manifests in the form of the two navels that she claims to have, which in her self-exile disrupts the lives of the Hong Kong-born immigrant community of Filipinos, Pepe and Tony Monson, Rita Lopez, and Paco and Mary Texeira. Towards the end of the novel, through an intensely poetic spiritual transformation presented as dream sequences of her deaths, Connie ultimately rejects her monstrous two navels and embraces her humanity and runs away with the married Paco Texeira.

In her analysis, Garcia (1967) claimed that the characters and situations are rendered so realistically in most parts of the novel that Connie's obsession with her two navels leads the readers to demand a literal explanation about that part of her anatomy. Garcia called Connie's obsession with her two navels a *neurosis*, and insists that Connie's claim is acceptable "only when considered in the light of the novel's obvious attempts at symbolism." In relation, in her trenchant analysis of the novel, Tope (1998) wrote that "the ambiguity and strangeness of the pivotal metaphor has unlocked a multilayered signification which have generated various readings of the two navels: they are a symbol of our binary universe – illusion a fact, good and evil."

Tope (1998) observed three different but related readings of Connie's two navels. The first reading suggests "the dichotomizing effects of the navels, a binary splitting of both the psychological and philosophical universe" (p. 119). The characters and even the readers may sense of displacement in relation to the unusual nature of Connie's "ailment." The second reading suggests "the destruction

of the certainty of origin—an existential or spiritual unhinging of the individual from the security of birth and genesis” (p. 119). Disoriented by both confusion and betrayal caused by bearing the truths about her parents, Connie questions her sense of self and origin. The third reading focuses on the two navels as “a signifier for [Connie’s] brokenness in the form of a lie” (p. 119). This allows Connie to escape pain by retreating to a delusion. While the first reading is interpersonal, such that it recognizes the effect of the navels on the other characters aside from Connie and even the novel’s readers, the second and third reading is inherently focused on Connie and how the navels are the ‘tangible’ manifestation of her inner turmoil.

This study, in its entirety, is compelled by Tope’s analysis and is keen to (dis)prove her readings of the two navels through linguistic analysis. This study also aims to extend her reading should the linguistic analysis allow additional interpretation. It is interested in how the two navels shape Connie Vidal and how she realizes, embodies, and reacts to the novel’s central themes.

Cognitive stylistics provides a way to account for Connie’s cognitive structures and processes as the bearer of the navels. It provides an analytical approach that explicitly relates her linguistic choices to the cognitive phenomena constituting her two navels and the effects they perpetuate. By accounting for Connie’s mental schemas, the analysis aims to reveal her mental idiolect—her cognitive habits, abilities, and limitations. In cognitive stylistics, this is equivalent to *mind style*. According to Fowler (1977), mind style refers to “any distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual mental self” (p. 103).

The notion of mind style, one of the prominent concepts in cognitive stylistics introduced by Roger Fowler (1977) and developed by Elena Semino (2002), is used in this study to trace the mental idiosyncrasies of Connie with the assumption that these idiosyncrasies are constitutive of the mental phenomenon that is her two navels. Semino (2002, as cited in Nuttal, 2019) claimed that a good account of mind style “[has] the potential to invite understanding and sympathy for characters and their alternative experiences of the world” (p. 155). This is crucial to Connie, who is a mystery and is often misunderstood by both the other characters and the novel’s readers.

Mind Style

According to Fowler (1977), “A mind-style may analyze a character’s mental life more or less radically [...]” (p. 103). Leech and Short (2007) added that “the term ‘mind style’ is particularly appropriate where the choices made are consistent through a text or part of a text. Such a consistent choice of a particular stylistic variable might be on the part of a novelist, a narrator, or a character” (p. 153).

In 2002, Semino developed mind style by differentiating the terms “world view,” “ideological point of view,” and “mind style.” Scholars before her used these terms either loosely or interchangeably. Though similar in the most general sense, the nuances among these terms can lead to insights into Connie’s unique mental structures and processes.

World view, to Semino, refers to the overall view of “reality” or the text’s actual world. *On the other hand, the ideological point of view and mind style* “captures the different aspects of the world views projected by the texts” (p. 97). This conceptualization fits the study as Connie’s *mind style* is the topic of interest, and it must be differentiated from the general *worldview* of the text. The notion of mind style

“is most apt to capture those aspects of world views that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin, and which are either peculiar to a particular individual, or common to people who have the same cognitive characteristics (for example as a result of a similar mental illness or of a shared stage of cognitive development, as in the case of young children)” (p. 97).

These aspects include cognitive habits, abilities and limitations, and any beliefs and values that may arise from them. This study will then distinguish Connie’s *ideological point of view*, the aspect of her worldview that is shared and culture-dependent, from her *mind style*, the aspect of her worldview that is dependent on individual experience and cognition.

The concept of “mind style,” central to modern stylistics, is employed by various researchers to analyze and understand characters through their distinctive linguistic patterns. In his study, Boas (2022) argued that Lysias crafted unique speaking styles for his characters in “Lysias 1” to reflect their personalities. He did it by focusing on linguistic features like sentence length, particle usage, and pronoun usage alongside cognitive concepts such as mind blindness and cognitive metaphor. This study concluded that Euphiletus is depicted as a simple, naive man, more of a passive experienter than an active participant. On the other hand, Demjen and Semino (2021) used the concept of mind style to investigate schizophrenia and auditory verbal hallucinations in a published autobiographical by analyzing pronoun use, narrative style, visual focus, and the representation of mental states. They demonstrated how these stylistic features can enhance and challenge current descriptions and diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia. Stockwell and Mahlberg (2015) conceptualized mind style as exploring cognitive poetics through corpus linguistic methods. They focused on how readers engage in mind-modeling during characterization. Analyzing Mr. Dick from “David Copperfield,” they identify textual patterns that cue character information, revealing his thematic and authorial significance and advancing understanding of readers' modeling of authorial intention.

The previous studies on mind style provide a robust foundation for analyzing the mind style of Connie Vidal. Boas (2022), Demjen and Semino (2021), and Stockwell and Mahlberg (2015) all utilized the concept of mind style to uncover how linguistic patterns reflect the cognitive states and personalities of characters. Similarly, the current study applies this approach to Connie Vidal; by focusing on the linguistic features of her dialogue, the study seeks to reveal how Connie's unique mind style encapsulates her psychological complexity and fragmented identity, much like how previous analyses have elucidated the nuanced portrayals of characters in classical and modern literature. This connection highlights the enduring relevance and versatility of mind style as a tool for deepening our understanding of literary characters across diverse narratives.

Research Methodology

While my conception of mind style is heavily influenced by Semino (2002), I will use Fowler (1977) and Leech and Short (2007) to operationalize the linguistic analysis of Connie's mind style through her dialogue. In addition, shades of critical stylistics will be employed as participant relations (Halliday's notion of actor and agency) will be considered in her mind style.

Connie's mind style will be analyzed by focusing on word choice and sentence structure concerning agency and animacy (Fowler, 1977; Leech & Short, 2007). The focus is on three particular scenes: Connie's first meeting with Pepe (pp. 2-9, ch. 1), Connie's conversation with Pepe and Tony (pp. 197-208, ch. 3), and Connie's meeting with Macho in a dream sequence (pp. 217-224, ch. 4). These scenes were chosen because they contain a rich amount of Connie's dialogue. It must be noted that Connie does not have a dialogue in Chapter 5, the last chapter of the book, in which she had already eloped with Paco by then.

The study aims to answer the following questions: What is Connie Vidal's mind style (the woman with two navels), and does this mind style align with any of the three interpretations of the two navels that Tope (1998) identified?

Results and Discussion

After discovering the truth about her parents and her husband, Connie is plagued with a moral and existential crisis. This crisis manifests as the two navels she claims to have. A conflict of this kind requires some considerable level of intellect at the very least, for it takes some mental prowess and labor to question one's standing in the world on the social and philosophical level.

This intellect is evident in the sentence structure of Connie's dialogue. Though there is nothing hifalutin with Connie's semantic choices, her utterances are varied in terms of structure. There is an adequate presence of simple (one independent clause), compound (two or more independent clauses), and complex (one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses) sentences. (see Table 1)

Table 1
Some Examples of Simple, Compound, and Complex Sentences Uttered by Connie

Scene	Simple	Compound	Complex
pp. 2-9, ch. 1	I can see that. (p. 2, ch. 1)	I knew that they knew that I knew, but we all pretended that I didn't and that they didn't. (p. 4, ch. 1)	If you could beget a monster of a child it could prove you were rather monstrous yourself. (p. 4, ch. 1)
pp. 197-208, ch. 3	I don't think so, Father. I know. (p. 198, ch. 3)	Yes, I know, you did at first, but afterwards you were just like everybody else [...]. (p. 199, ch. 3)	If you were right, I'll be stripped of all my defenses. (p. 205, ch. 3)
pp. 217-224, ch. 4	I didn't know, Macho! I didn't know! I was only a child! (p. 219, ch. 4)	Maybe you're right and I'm a crook. (p. 223, ch. 4)	Our life was made for us even before we married. (p. 217, ch. 4)

The varied sentence structures show that Connie is far from a simpleton. She can deliver ideas in piecemeal, and she can compound and subordinate ideas. The length of her sentences also varies. By using a lot of complex sentences, Connie shows that she can distinguish and manipulate major and minor ideas (Leech & Short, 2007). She also has a strong sense of coordination. This is evident by the prominence of sentences that start with coordinating conjunctions (see Table 2). This accounts for her ability to identify the connection among ideas and connect them linguistically.

Table 2
Examples of Sentences that Start With Coordinating Conjunctions Uttered by Connie

pp. 2-9, ch. 1	And then I became thoughtful. (p. 3, ch. 1) And I remember the little girl crying by the pond and Minnie naked and all the world suddenly dark... (p. 6, ch. 1)
pp. 197-208, ch. 3	But how am I to know? (p. 204, ch. 3) And he's not afraid to have me back? He's not afraid of what I am? (p. 198, ch. 3)
pp. 217-224, ch. 4	But do you know what you're tied to, Macho? (p. 220, ch. 4) But I see now I must have been looking for them—" (p. 223, ch. 4)

Notable as well is the writer's repeated use of the em dash, which accounts for Connie's auxiliary thoughts (see Table 3). The writer used the em dash in two ways: to inject Connie's parenthetical thoughts in the middle of a sentence and to append her afterthoughts. This shows her dynamic thought process – that Connie is metacognitive such that she can assess her own ideas as she utters them and add as she seems fit.

Table 3
Examples of Sentences With an Em Dash Uttered by Connie

2-9, ch. 1	You were a nice boy—weren't you, Doctor?—and lovingly sheltered. (2, ch. 1) He might be horrified—I could never have stood that—or he might say I had cheated. (4, ch. 1)
197-208, ch. 3	I told you but I haven't told him—and he wants to know. (198, ch. 3) I have resigned—I mean, I am resigned. (199, ch. 3)
217-224, ch. 4	So you see, Macho, you were my childhood—or what I thought was my childhood until I found those letters. (223, ch. 4)

Aside from considerable intellect, a moral and existential conflict necessitates self-awareness and constant reflection from Connie's end. For her, this reaches a certain extent of self-centeredness. This is evident in the glaring repetition of the subject pronoun *I*. In the three selected scenes, *I* was repeated a total of 198 times: 56 in Chapter 1, 103 in Chapter 3, and 39 in Chapter 4. The high frequency of Connie's self-reference signifies that she is naturally concerned with herself and her circumstances.

Relatedly, she uttered a lot of transitive clauses, and as a subject pronoun, the *I* also signifies that Connie is the leading actor in the actions that she's involved in. Consider the selected scene in Chapter 1 (pp. 2-9). Here, Connie shares her experience growing up with two navels with Pepe; she is the

focalizer of this storytelling. It can be speculated that she aims to gain sympathy from Pepe, the horse doctor, so that he will be compassionate and help her. By using *I* consistently, Connie is projecting strong agency over her will and actions. She is the *doer*, *behave*r, *senser*, and *carrier* of the transitive actions. It is not an inanimate object (See Halliday), or not just a part of her body (See Fowler) that claims agency. Instead, as the focaliser and therefore as part of her mind style, Connie claims agency.

Moreover, the subject pronoun *I* syntactically “forces” the verbs not to be nominalized: “I was silly” versus “My silliness,” “I felt” versus “My feelings,” “I was desperate” versus “My desperation.” According to Fowler (1977), using action verbs rather than nouns has apparent connotations of activity, agency function, and the reinforcement of will to the character, Connie, with whom this style is applied.

So far, the linguistic analysis shows Connie’s mind style to be composed of complex thought and abundant activity and agency. Again, I claim that the dynamics of her thinking process brought about her moral and existential crisis, which ultimately manifested as the two navels. In the same manner, perhaps her strong claim of agency gives off ambivalence, a kind of pseudo-existential crisis, among the people she had a profound encounter with. Connie is intelligent, headstrong, and has two navels.

To me, Connie’s mind style thus far typifies Tope’s first reading of the two navels: “the dichotomizing effects of the navels, a binary splitting of both the psychological and philosophical universe” (p. 119). The contrast between her pragmatic disposition and her claim of having two navels causes cognitive dissonance in the people around her. They are taken by her capriciousness and mystery whenever they are with her. But after their encounter, feelings akin to being swindled by a trickster wrench their guts. Because of this, she is deemed a force to be reckoned with. In introspecting about her two navels, Paco insists that Connie claims to have the said bodily anomaly “to shock, of course, and to corrupt. She’s not after one’s body, she wants to ruin your soul” (p. 62). His friend Pepe responded in a more leveled manner by saying that Connie was “just a scared girl, desperately trying to save herself.” Later in that conversation, however, Paco admits to running when Connie calls for him despite knowing she’s vile and evil (p. 64).

When Connie Vidal speaks, her words reflect the intricate workings of her mind – creating an ambiguous and often puzzling impact on those around her. This connection between her speech and her thought process reveals the complexity of her mind style and leaves others grappling with her enigmatic presence. Her speech generates a blend of clarity and uncertainty, which challenges those she encounters to dive deeper into their understanding of her, and, perhaps, of themselves.

Conclusion

The linguistic analysis reveals that her mind style highlights the complex nature of her thought processes and her assertive personality. Her complex thinking, as evident in the varied sentence structures and the use of em dash, led her to deeply explore and question her own identity, manifesting her existential and moral dilemmas. Her strong agency, on the other hand, as evident in her repetitive use of the pronoun *I*, means that she actively engages with and asserts her unique perspective, even if it creates ambiguity or confusion among those she interacts with. Essentially, her intellectual depth and assertiveness culminated in this extraordinary claim of having two navels, and this reflected her inner conflicts and the profound impact she had on others.

With regards to Tope’s second and third reading – the navel as a symbol of an unhinged sense of origin and as a signifier of brokenness, respectively – perhaps it can be assumed that Connie’s headstrong mind style is a defense mechanism that she (un)consciously developed. Like Tope, one can argue for these interpretations extensively using intricate theorizing. However, these readings, I believe, are observable beyond the linguistic investigation conducted in this study, which is limited to Connie’s dialogue. It is quite ironic, considering that Tope’s first reading is interpersonal. In contrast, the latter two are intrapersonal, and Connie’s mind style lends itself to the interpersonal function of the two navels. Perhaps this attests to the idea that Connie’s disposition – her seemingly intelligent, active mind style – is an adaptive strategy to the displacement she feels.

I believe that Tope’s second and third interpretations are apparent in the investigation of the novel on a more holistic level - it is the product not only of Connie and her mind style but also of the

De Castro's *She is Intelligent, She is Headstrong, and She has Two Navels: Mind Style in Nick Joaquin's The Woman Who Had Two Navels*

temporality and narrative structure of the novel. Relatedly, a noteworthy feature of the novel is its third-person narrator, who, at times, as a focalizer, dominates the unfolding of the novel. An excellent example of this is the select scene in the first chapter. The scene started with a substantial number of direct speeches from Connie and Pepe, but halfway through, the narrator interjected and finally took over as the scene ended. Given the predominance of the narrator in the novel, perhaps this study could be complemented or extended by investigating the mind style of the narrator.

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