

# The quantitative aspect of foregrounding in the classical and contemporary short stories

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**ABSTRACT:** The article considers the language means of realizing the quantitative aspect of foregrounding in the short stories by Chopin and contemporary flash fiction. The major technique of the quantitative aspect of foregrounding in Chopin's stories is stylistic convergence. Stylistic convergences in her stories normally include extended metaphors and phonetic repetitions. They are usually located in such a strong position as the beginning (in 8 out of the 10 analyzed stories) where the writer describes the personality and appearance of the main character. The use of alliterations makes the stories very poetical. Stylistic convergences in contemporary flash fiction stories are also used in the most foregrounded fragments in the texts, similar to Chopin's stories. The difference lies in the place of convergences: in the analyzed stories they are placed in another strong position, in the ending. Thus, the writers give or suggest their own conclusions about the importance of such values as family, tolerance, and sympathy to other people. The convergences in flash fiction contain two major components—metaphors and syntactic repetitions. Also, the convergences in the analyzed flash fiction stories are smaller in size than in Chopin's texts and include such stylistic devices as play for words, oxymorons.

**KEYWORDS:** quantitative aspect of foregrounding; stylistic convergence; extended metaphor; syntactical repetitions; pragmatic effect; strong position

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## 1. Introduction

In the monograph devoted to the outstanding contemporary linguist and stylistician Short, there is an interesting observation by Leech. Leech comments on the title of Short's classical book on Stylistics "*Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*" (Short, 1996). The title contains an example of alliteration in the words denoting three genres of literature—poems, plays, and prose. First of all, this alliteration is significant because the words belong to the same semantic field; secondly, because they are homogeneous nouns. Besides creating semantic unity and semantic parallelism (Leech, 2008), the initial alliteration can be used to attract the reader's attention. More so, the alliteration occurs in the title, one of the strong positions, according to Arnold (2004).

Therefore, Short applies the stylistic devices of foregrounding in the very title of his book. The theory

of foregrounding is one of the fundamental theories of Stylistics. Traditionally, it is associated with literary texts. However, different types and markers of foregrounding are applied in non-fiction, in particular, in advertising texts, newspaper and Internet articles, in public speeches. But in non-literary discourse, the use of foregrounding markers at the lexical, syntactic or morphological levels is constrained by the text norms (Shen, 2008). While in literary discourse foregrounding devices can be more varied and numerous, and their use can “enhance the meaning potential of the text, while also providing the reader with the possibility of aesthetic experience” (Van Peer and Hakemulder, 2006).

The theory of foregrounding is considered to be one of the foundations of Stylistics. As it is well known, the term “foregrounding” was borrowed from the art of painting, where the foreground is the part of the painting which is the most prominent in the work of art. The theory developed by Jakobson, Shklovskyi and the Prague School of Linguistics, was intended to explain and reveal the difference between poetic and everyday language. As Leech justly states, “in studying and analyzing the language of literature, we are studying *extraordinary* uses of language” (Leech, 2010), with the artistry in literary language. However, the device of foregrounding is applied in other genres, besides fiction, including political speeches and articles, advertising texts, etc.

There are different definitions of foregrounding. Douthwaite gives a rather detailed and lengthy definition: “Foregrounding is the general linguistic technique by which a marked linguistic expression is produced in order to make that expression convey a different meaning than its synonymous equivalent unmarked construction would have conveyed” (Douthwaite, 2000). This definition emphasizes the creation of a new meaning in the foregrounded part of the text. Arnold stresses the effect of this device on the addressee, the feedback of the reader or a listener: “Foregrounding is the ways of the text organization which focus the reader’s attention on certain elements of the message” (Arnold, 2004). In our opinion, the word “certain” in this definition should be substituted by the word combination “semantically and pragmatically important”. Therefore, the following definition can be suggested: “Foregrounding is the principle of a literary text organization which is aimed at concentrating the reader’s (the listener’s) attention on the most semantically and pragmatically important elements of the utterance” (Yemets, 2013). In this definition, we use the word “principle” (not “ways” or “technique”) to imply that foregrounding is a conscious, deliberate stylistic rule. Also, we consider it more appropriate to regard foregrounding as a device, not technique. The term “technique” will denote different linguistic means of realization of this device in speech.

The purpose of this paper is to determine the stylistic devices which realize one aspect of foregrounding, i.e., the quantitative aspect, in the classical short fiction (Chopin, 1997) and in the contemporary flash fiction stories.

## 2. Data and method

The major principles of the foregrounding theory were developed in the works of such contemporary linguists as Short, Leech, Arnold, Douthwaite, and Van Peer. They formulated the aspects and types of foregrounding, and defined the notion of foregrounding and some devices of its realization. In our research, we will apply the methodology of analyzing foregrounding in the text suggested by Douthwaite (2000). He divided the process of analysis into three stages: 1) recognizing a foregrounded element; 2) identifying the linguistic nature of the foregrounding technique employed; and 3) interpreting the type of foregrounding in context (Douthwaite, 2000).

While investigating foregrounding, in particular its quantitative aspect, several methods of analysis

were employed in this paper. First, the method of contextual analysis was used for determining the meanings of the foregrounded lexical units. Second, the method of stylistic analysis of the foregrounded text fragments was employed which is aimed at defining the types of stylistic techniques, their semantic features and pragmatic effect. Thirdly, the elements of conceptual analysis were applied because the foregrounded text parts contain lexical and stylistic devices which verbalize conceptual metaphors. And fourthly, the elements of quantitative analysis were appropriate when describing the frequency of phonetic, lexical and syntactical repetitions.

It is necessary to note that the genre of a short story, especially of a flash fiction story of 2–3 pages, enables the writers to realize and foreground their ideas, their pragmatic intentions and aesthetic effect. However, only some text fragments contain foregrounded elements, usually in certain parts of the texts. Therefore, we will analyze how different authors come to foreground these fragments, by what linguistic means and stylistic techniques.

### 3. Definitions and previous research

Our research included the investigation of the quantitative aspect of foregrounding in the short stories by the outstanding American writer Chopin and the contemporary flash fiction stories published in the “*Flash Fiction Magazine*” and in the collections “*Flash Fiction Forward*” and “*Flash Fiction International*”. All in all, 20 short stories were analyzed—10 stories by Chopin and 10 flash fiction stories. This genre of short stories is very popular in the USA and other English-speaking countries, the stories are short, emotional and psychological.

The classification of foregrounding types involves different approaches. Leech and Short (2007) suggested characterizing two aspects of foregrounding: qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative aspect is the deviation from the language code itself, a breach of some linguistic norm, whereas the quantitative aspect includes the deviation of some expected frequency (Leech and Short, 2007). In our opinion, this classification goes back to the well-known principle of communication formulated by Grice (1989) in his maxims of communication. Grice (1989) singles out the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and manner. The violation of these maxims results in the creation of a stylistic device. In particular, he mentions metaphor, irony, and paradox as examples of violating the quality maxims (Grice, 1989). At the same time, the violation (or flouting) of the maxim can involve the redundancy of information or, vice versa, omission of some information in communication. However, Grice (1989) did not specify the stylistic techniques by means of which the violation (or flouting) of the quantity maxim is achieved.

Most stylisticians single out two basic types of foregrounding: deviation and parallelism. Deviation can be phonetic, lexical, grammatical, graphological and semantic (Short, 1996). Van Peer and Hakemulder (2006) determine such stylistic techniques related to deviation as live metaphors, oxymorons, paradoxes, neologisms, archaisms, and ungrammatical sentences. The second type of foregrounding, parallelism, involves the repetition of the sentence structure. Alongside syntactic anaphora, parallelism creates cohesion between the text fragments, and emphasizes important ideas as in the famous poem “*If*” by Kipling or in the speech “*I Have a Dream*” by King. A short story of the flash fiction genre “*To Reduce the Likelihood of Your Murder*” by Monson begins with many sentences having a parallel structure: *Do not go outside. Do not go outside, on dates, or to the store. Do not go on dates. Do not go on dates with men* (Shapard and Thomas, 2006). The repetition of negative imperative sentences (all in all 27 sentences in a short story) is a manifestation of parallelism combined with syntactic anaphora which helps to create a strong emotional and pragmatic effect. Thus, it is possible to say that syntactic parallelism is one of the

major types of actualizing the quantitative aspect of foregrounding. The quantitative aspect can also involve the use of lexical and phonetic repetitions in a text fragment or in the whole story. But the most explicit manifestation of quantitative foregrounding is *stylistic convergence*.

Arnold unites the most typical stylistic techniques into a system and singles out three other types of foregrounding: 1) the effect of defeated expectancy; 2) coupling; and 3) stylistic convergence (Arnold, 2004). In this classification, coupling is similar to parallelism or the combination of parallelism with syntactic anaphora or epiphora. Stylistic convergence as a technique was formulated by Riffaterre who defined it as the accumulation of different stylistic devices which add expressiveness to each other (Riffaterre, 1959). Convergence includes phonetic, syntactic and semasiological expressive means in different combinations. Such type of foregrounding is based on a high concentration of expressive means, normally in some text fragments, if we deal with prose fiction. Therefore, stylistic convergence can be considered the type of foregrounding which actualizes its quantitative aspect to the greatest extent. If we analyze the initial paragraph of Chopin's story "*The Night Came Slowly*", we can see the interaction of semasiological expressive means with lexical-syntactic techniques:

*I am losing my interest in human beings; in the significance of their lives and actions. Someone has said it is better to study one man than ten books. I want neither books nor men: they make me suffer. Can one of them talk to me like the night—the summer night? Like the stars or the caressing wind?* (Chopin, 1997)

The convergence includes similes, metaphors, the metaphoric epithet *the caressing wind*? (Chopin, 1997), syntactical repetitions and antithesis. The antithesis plays a significant part in the contrast between nature and people; the author explicitly expresses her preference for nature. Our previous investigation of some short stories by Chopin and Thomas from the point of view of prose poeticalness confirmed this function of convergence (Yemets, 2013).

An important criterion for investigating foregrounding was suggested by Short. He considers that a good starting point for the text analysis is the examination of the foregrounded features: "Foregrounded features are the parts of the text which the author, consciously or unconsciously, is signaling as crucial to our understanding" (Short, 1996). Leech defined this strategy of connecting the foregrounded features as "cohesion of foregrounding" (Leech, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to determine what parts of the text are foregrounded and how the cohesion of these parts occurs. The position of the foregrounded parts in short stories plays a significant role, especially when these parts (fragments) are in the so-called strong positions. Arnold defined such parts of literary texts as the title, the beginning, the epigraph and the ending as strong positions because the language units in such positions acquire special semantic and pragmatic importance (Arnold, 2004). That is why stylistic convergences, parallel constructions or repetitions are used in strong positions when the author aims not only to attract the reader's attention but also to give special emphasis to their fragments.

Investigating the stylistic techniques of creating the quantitative aspect of foregrounding, we focused on the use of stylistic convergences and their places in the texts as well as on syntactic parallelism. Stylistic convergence represents the principle of redundancy, which involves a system of repetitions intended to ensure the maximal perception of information. In literary prose, redundancy can include the use of numerous stylistic techniques and their interaction. Such interaction often manifests itself in the combination of tropes and phonetic stylistic devices, or tropes and syntactic repetitions.

## 4. Results and discussion

The short stories by Chopin even today, 100 years after her death, are considered the masterpieces

of American literature. We analyzed 10 short stories such as “*The Night Came Slowly*”, “*An Idle Fellow*”, “*A Respectable Woman*”, “*The Recovery*”, “*A Harbinger*”, “*The Story of an Hour*”, “*Two Portraits*”, “*Two Summers and Two Souls*”, “*The White Eagle*”, and “*The Unexpected*”. Our choice can be explained by continuing interest of contemporary linguists in the works by Chopin as an example of emotional prose, its poetical and paradoxical character. These features are explicitly revealed in the abovementioned stories. Besides, some of Chopin’s images have conceptual characters, like “young women are part of nature”. All these stories are 2–3 pages long, so it would be expedient to compare them with contemporary flash fiction stories of the same size. In these texts, Chopin gives a very poetical description of the relations between men and women in love, in family life and in difficult moments of their lives.

Following the abovementioned methodology of research suggested by Douthwaite, we identified the foregrounded parts of the stories containing stylistic convergences. Most stories, more exactly eight out of ten, have convergences in such a strong position as the beginning. Convergences are not usually big in size (2–3 paragraphs) and can be divided into two groups. The first group includes poetical descriptions of women, as in the story “*Two Summers and Two Souls*”: *He was a fine, honest-looking fellow; young, impetuous; and he was bidding her good-bye.*

It was in the country, where she lived, and where her soul and senses were slowly unfolding, like the languid petals of some white and fragrant blossom (Chopin, 1997).

The description of the young man is based on the use of epithets and the syntactic technique of enumeration. The girl is depicted more poetically with the help of the extended biomorphic metaphor soul and senses are petals, comparing the spiritual life of the young woman to the fragrant flower. The metaphor is combined with the simile and numerous alliterations. The sound [l] is repeated in eight words, and the sound [s] in three words which are the nucleus of the convergence and the main components of the metaphor and the simile. Two other features of the convergence at the beginning of the story should be emphasized. Firstly, the interaction of tropes and alliterations not only attracts the reader’s attention but also helps to create semantic unity between the trope components: sense-blossom. This interaction helps to produce a poetical and aesthetic effect of the utterance. Secondly, the contrast, the antithesis between the two characters is expressed by the antonymic lexical units impetuous (energetic, impulsive) and slowly (unfolding). This description foreshadows the ending of the story; in which the young man makes up his mind to give up his future life with the girl who was so indecisive and slow in her reflections. Even the rhythm of the narration in these paragraphs is contrasting: a sharp, energetic description of the young man with the help of evaluative adjectives and epithets as distinct from an unhurried depiction of the young man with the redundancy of phonetic repetitions and original metaphors.

The story “*Two Portraits*” also begins with stylistic convergence where the main role is played by extended metaphors. Chopin describes the spiritual development of a young woman, and her perception of the surrounding world: *Her eyes were deep brown wells drinking, drinking impressions and treasuring them in her soul: They were mysterious eyes, and love looked out of them* (Chopin, 1997). The metaphoric verb *drink* which can be interpreted as *enjoy* is repeated in some other stories by Chopin: *drinking in the tones of his voice* (“*A Respectable Woman*”); *drinking in the elixir of life* (“*The Story of an Hour*”). Thus, the cohesion of foregrounding involves the intertextual connection of several stories and reveals the features of the author’s individual style.

The stylistic convergence in the story “*A Harbinger*” is bigger than in other stories. It embraces three paragraphs that contain the description of Diantha, the model who posed for the young painter Bruno. This convergence contains metaphors, similes and epithets which depict Diantha as a beautiful flower, as

well as lexical repetitions and alliterations. The name of the main character Diantha is symbolic. In translation from the Greek language, it means “*divine flower*”.

The symbolic name of the main character creates the cohesion of foregrounding at the beginning of the story where Diantha and other girls painted by Bruno are compared with mountain flowers: *She was as beautiful as a flower, crisp with morning dew. The women he painted were all like mountain flowers* (Chopin, 1997). One of the characteristic features of the stylistic convergence in the story “*A Harbinger*” consists in the repetition of the names of different colors: *Bruno did very nice work in black and white; sometimes in green and yellow and red [...]. And then there was gentle Diantha, with hair the color of ripe wheat [...]. Her eyes were baby eyes* (Chopin, 1997). All in all, the names of color are mentioned 12 times in the first three paragraphs. Such redundancy of lexical repetitions as well as metaphoric similes in the depiction of the young women foregrounds the artistic vision of Bruno who was a painter, his poetical thinking of a young professional. The convergence in the story is based on tropes and lexical repetitions while alliteration plays an auxiliary role: *the whirr of the summer breeze through delicate-leafed maples*.

Another type of stylistic convergence is a two-component convergence containing mainly syntactic repetitions (anaphora, enumeration) and tropes. This type of convergence occurs at the beginning of the stories “*The Recovery*”, “*The Night Came Slowly*”, “*A Respectable Woman*”, and “*An Idle Fellow*”. One of the foregrounded stylistic techniques in these stories is antithesis, traditionally referred to as a lexical-syntactical device. The narration of “*The Recovery*” begins with the description of the face of the woman whose eyesight was restored. The main stylistic technique is the repetition of the homogeneous parts of the sentence, such as evaluative adjectives and epithets. The antithesis reflects the changes in the woman’s appearance with years: *She was a woman of thirty-five, possessing something of youthfulness. It was not the bloom, the softness, nor the delicacy of coloring which had once been hers. It lurked rather in the expression of her sensitive face, which was once appealing, pathetic, and confiding* (Chopin, 1997). In our interpretation, this chain of epithets is used to show the woman’s excitement, her emotional climax as she is getting ready to move from darkness to light: *Glad almost to ecstasy, she was not yet afraid. It is also interesting to note that the notion of “darkness” is verbalized in the second and third paragraphs of the convergence only once, while the contrasting notion of “light” is expressed by 5 words: brightness, light, to look, and to gaze. Thus, the antithesis as one of the foregrounding techniques in this story, reflects both internal and external changes in the woman’s emotions and appearance.*

A more significant role in foregrounding is played by the antithesis in one of the best Chopin’s stories, “*A Respectable Woman*”. Though the whole text is based on the description of Mrs. Baroda, the main character, this stylistic technique is applied to show the contrast between Mrs. Baroda’s anticipation of the appearance and behavior of Gouvernail, her husband’s friend, and his actual looks. The quantitative aspect of foregrounding is realized in the text beginning by means of using the antithesis 8 times, both in depicting Gouvernail’s appearance and his style of behavior: *This was a man she had heard much of but never seen. [...] She had unconsciously formed an image of him in her mind. She pictured him tall, slim, cynical; with eye-glasses, and with his hands in his pockets; and she did not like him. Gouvernail was slim enough, but he wasn’t very tall nor very cynical; neither did he wear eye-glasses nor carry his hands in his pockets. And she rather liked him when he first presented himself* (Chopin, 1997). This contrast foreshadows the woman’s contradictory feelings to Gouvernail in the near future: she liked him physically, but being a respectable woman, she remained faithful to her husband. Thus, one of the features of convergences in Chopin’s stories realizing foregrounding is the emotional aspect in the description of her characters, mainly women.

Flash fiction is a genre or a variety of short stories. For the recent 20 years, several collections of these stories have been published in the USA, Australia and other countries. In the United States,

anthologies have sold a million copies. Professional actors have read them on the radio, to live audiences. Due to their small size, the foregrounded features become more explicit.

Mark Strand says: “It can do in a page what a novel does in two hundred” (Thomas et al., 2015. p. 228). Another important feature of these texts is the aesthetic, poetical character. Grace Paley, a well-known American writer and one of the authors of flash fiction, considers: “A short story is closer to the poem than to the novel, and when it is very short—1, 2 pages—should be read like a poem. That is slowly.” (Thomas et al., 2015. p. 230). Such slow reading and rereading can help appreciate the conceptual idea of the text and the techniques of foregrounding this idea.

The quantitative types of foregrounding are realized in flash fiction stories by means of two techniques: stylistic convergence and repetition, mainly lexical and syntactical repetitions, including parallelism. Convergences are smaller in size than in Chopin’s stories, usually one or two paragraphs. However, the place of convergences in the texts differs from convergences in Chopin’s works. They are usually located in another strong position—the ending. Such structure can be observed in eight out of the analyzed texts.

Normally, convergences in flash fiction involve two basic components—tropes (metaphors or similes) and parallelism. Some kind of exception is the story by a well-known American writer Paley “*Justice: A Beginning*” which contains the metaphoric-phonetic type of stylistic convergence. Such concepts as FAMILY and LOVE are verbalized in the fragments of the stories containing convergences.

The example can be a convergence in the story of the great American writer Updike “*Oliver’s Evolution*”. The author describes how a young man feels responsibility for his family, for his children: *Oliver has grown, broad and holds the two of them at once. He is a tree a sheltering boulder. They are birds in a nest. He is a protector of the weak* (Shapard and Thomas, 2006). The convergence includes an extended biomorphic metaphor man-tree which has conceptual character, another biomorphic metaphor children-birds, syntactic repetitions—enumeration, and parallelism. The whole story is based on gradation. Updike describes a physically weak boy, Oliver, who, as a child, was vulnerable to injuries and diseases. However, having become an adult and a husband, a father of two children, he grew stronger—both physically and spiritually. Therefore, the presence of stylistic convergence in such a strong position makes this fragment a conclusion, an illustration of the importance of family life and the father’s role.

The story “*Justice: A Beginning*” by Paley contains a stylistic convergence of the metaphoric—phonetic type. This technique is used to describe the woman’s feelings to her son who is accused of some serious crime. The narrator who is a woman, a member of the jury, watches the mother of the defendant and can’t help feeling sympathy for her. The mother is tired and exhausted, she is compared to a dying flower: *She leaned on the witness bar, her face like a dying flower in the late season, lank leafage of the yellow hair, turning one way, then the other in the breeze and blast of justice. Like a sunflower maybe in mid-autumn, having given up on the sun, Faith thought, letting wind and weather move her heavy head* (Shapard and Thomas, 2006). The convergence in the initial paragraph contains two extended metaphoric similes of biomorphic type, ascribing the woman the features of natural object, and alliterations of the sounds [I], [b], and [w]. The sound [I] is the dominant sound of the two sentences which emphasizes the main trope components. The convergence is used in the strong position of the story. We consider that the major purpose of the metaphors as parts of the convergence is to arouse the feeling of compassion for the mother of the defendant.

Similar to the story “*Oliver’s Evolution*”, this text advocates family values, the significance of parents, and their support, in spite of different situations.

The concept of LOVE is verbalized in three analyzed stories “*Bullhead*”, “*Bigfoot Love*”, and “*My Date with Neanderthal Woman*”. A very short text “*Bullhead*” by Wilson tells a touching story of a married woman who still remembers her first love, “the love of her life”. For 50 years, she goes to the lake which formed when the dam was built and which drowned her native town. Every year she takes a boat and goes to the middle of the lake, just above the place where she made love with the boy, her first love. She drops a coin as a symbol of memory. The story by Wilson has frame repetition—the first and the last paragraphs, so two strong positions, are connected by the repetition of the same paradoxical sentence: *Every story is true and a lie*. However, the last paragraph develops the idea and invites the readers to give their own attitude toward the woman. The contradictory idea is foregrounded by a short stylistic convergence which includes two metaphors, oxymoron, parallel construction and antithesis: *Every story is true and a lie. The true part of this one is: Love and the memory of love can't be drowned. The lie part is that this is a good thing* (Shapard and Thomas, 2006). The title word “*Bullhead*” (the name of a small fish) is symbolic and metonymic in its character. We can interpret this metonymic word as a symbol of memory of love because this group of fish is disturbed by the woman when she drops the coin in the lake. The convergence is metaphoric-syntactical, and antithesis plays an important role in it, similar to some of Chopin's stories.

While the story by Wilson is quite realistic, two other stories—“*My Date with the Neanderthal Woman*” by Galef and “*Bigfoot Love*” by Every have a fantastic plot. Besides, the story by Every is the newest, published in the “*Flash Fiction Magazine*” at the end of 2022. The stories have various devices of foregrounding, both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The titles of the stories are paradoxical and produce the effect of defeated expectation, i.e., realize semantic deviation. The reader cannot believe in the possibility of meeting a Neanderthal woman, it looks like some kind of anachronism. Therefore, such plots create the effect of irony.

The short story “*My Date with Neanderthal Woman*” is actually ironic as the author describes the funny behavior of the Neanderthal woman, her clothes and her manner of eating. At the same time, the convergence in the last paragraph which is a strong position foregrounds the idea of sympathy, friendship and tolerance between people from different cultural (and historical) backgrounds: *Yes, I know all the objections. Some couples are separated by decades, but we are separated by millennia. I like rock music and she likes the music of rocks. I'm modern Homo Sapiens and she's a Neanderthal woman, but I think we can work out our differences if we try* (Shapard and Thomas, 2006). This small fragment contains an original metaphor (music of rocks), parallelism. The antithesis and the play of words make the ending of the story paradoxical, expressive and emotional, thus producing a strong pragmatic effect. We can say that the combination of quantitative and qualitative types of foregrounding is realized in this paragraph.

Another story with quite a fantastic plot is “*Bigfoot Love*” by Every. Here, the quantitative aspect of foregrounding is realized by two techniques: stylistic convergence in the initial paragraphs and numerous lexical as well phonetic repetitions throughout the text. The core lexical unit love and its synonyms (romance, adoration) are used in the text more than 10 times: *They fell deeply in love; No female of any species had even looked at Bert Snerdley with such love and adoration; the lovemaking had begun.*

The stylistic convergence functions at the beginning of the text, similar to the story by Paley. The components of this convergence are syntactic repetitions (enumeration, anaphora, and parallel constructions) and alliterations: *Bert Snerdley had been hunting for Sasquatch for decades. He hunted during the heat of summer winter snows, summer showers and autumn chill. Despite never finding any fur, bone, or even a stinky pile of poop, despite the complete and total lack of evidence, Bert Snerdley continued to be certain of the existence of Sasquatch. [...] From deep in the dark web, the heart of the black-market internet, Bert Snerdley purchased a*



satisfaction-guaranteed Sasquatch siren bigfoot mating call. When Bert put it to his lips and groaned, the sound echoed from tree to tree and stone to stone. It was an eerie, otherworld wail, that rode the wind in waves, twisting serpentine between canyon walls (Castle, 2022). On the one hand, the use of syntactical repetitions emphasized the duration of the search for Bigfoot and Bert's belief in its existence. On the other hand, alliterations combined with onomatopoeia produce the effect of a loud sound call (siren). The irony consists in his buying a siren for attracting the Bigfoot, which would guarantee satisfaction. The situational irony in the story ending consists in the fact that the Bigfoot did exist, it was a big female ape. And when she came, Bert was shocked at first, but later they loved each other: *They fell so deeply in love that it was only a matter of time before the babies arrived. You can find Bert Snerdley atop the tallest tree in the forest every other day, sitting outside the biggest nest you have ever seen, his butt warming a clutch of bigfoot eggs* (Castle, 2022).

The final sentence contains a paradox (the man is sitting on the tree, the bigfoot eggs) which realizes the qualitative aspect of foregrounding. We can also interpret the text from the intertextual point of view, as an allusion and parody of the famous "King Kong" movie. Also, there are numerous examples of sound repetitions which are not typical for the contemporary flash fiction: *When your heart is so big like Bertha's, and then it breaks from loneliness, it is painful beyond belief; Bertha rushed forward to embrace Bert in a great big bear hug*. These and other cases of repetition of the words with the sound [b] which may be used to foreground the strength and force of Bertha's emotions.

In our interpretation, despite all the irony, the author describes the hyperbolic manifestation of emotions, the exaggerated feelings of a female.

If we single out the common features and differences in the techniques of foregrounding realized in the short stories by Chopin and in the texts of flash fiction writers, we can state the following.

The common features of foregrounding in the short stories by Chopin and the contemporary flash fiction stories of the American writers are that the quantitative aspect of foregrounding is realized in stylistic convergences. While in Chopin's texts, this stylistic technique is located mainly in such a strong position as the beginning, the authors of flash fiction prefer to use convergences in the final position. Chopin tries to produce a pragmatic effect on the reader in the initial part by describing the main character's appearance, emotions, and behavior ("*Two Summers and Two Souls*", "*A Respectable Woman*", and "*The Night Came Slowly*"). However, such writers of flash fiction as Updike, Galef, and Don Shea make the emphasis or suggest the conclusion at the end of the stories. We can see convergences in the initial parts of the stories by such authors as Paley and Every.

Though the convergences are not big (maximum 2–3 paragraphs), they are significant for the text understanding and interpretation because in most stories by Chopin and flash fiction writers, such concepts as LOVE, FAMILY, and NATURE are verbalized.

## 5. Conclusions

From a semantic point of view, the authors of flash fiction use similar techniques as Chopin which can testify to our conclusions about the influence, direct or indirect, of Chopin's style on the contemporary short prose.

The stylistic convergences in flash fiction include two main components—tropes (metaphor, simile), often extended tropes and syntactical repetitions, except in the texts by Paley and Every, where alliterations are important components of extended metaphors. The convergences in Chopin's stories usually contain extended anthropomorphic and biomorphic metaphors which interact with phonetic repetitions. Due to the concentration of stylistic devices in small fragments in strong positions such

convergences acquire the features of poeticalness and produce a considerable emotional effect.

The syntactical and lexical repetitions as a feature of parallelism are more typical for flash fiction stories (Wilson, Every). As the analyzed stories by Chopin and the text of flash fiction are rather short, the quantitative aspect of foregrounding often dominates the story. We may conclude that the shorter is the text, the more foregrounded and semantically as well as pragmatically important are the fragments with convergences for the author and the reader.

The prospects of further research lie in the analysis of the qualitative aspect of foregrounding in modern fiction and the problems of rendering it in translation. In our research, we suggested the principles of investigating one but a very significant aspect of foregrounding in short stories. This approach can be useful in both linguistic and literary analysis of other prose writings. The methodology and algorithm suggested by Douthwaite and realized in our practical investigation can be fruitful for revealing stylistic as well as pragmatic techniques of foregrounding and can be applied in university courses of Stylistics and Text Analysis.

## Author contributions

Conceptualization, IB and OY; methodology, YB; software, IB; validation, IB, YB and OY; formal analysis, OY; investigation, YB; resources, OY; data curation, YB; writing—original draft preparation, IB; writing—review and editing, IB; visualization, YB; supervision, OY; project administration, OY; funding acquisition, YB. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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