

Relationship as seen through letter-writing style in Van Gogh's letters to Gauguin

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RÉSUMÉ. Van Gogh a tenté de former une communauté avec Gauguin. Cet article parle de leur relation dans des lettres de VG. Le choix des mots, le style de langue, la structure des lettres et les fonctions syntaxiques utilisées dans les phrases de ses lettres ont été extraits des six lettres de VG et analysés à l'aide d'une méthode qualitative, l'approche de l'ACD et de la théorie des fonctions syntaxiques françaises de Le Querler. L'amitié respectueuse est construite par la politesse mais pas complètement formelle. Cette relation asymétrique se reflète à travers la diction contrastée, le choix des pronoms et des salutations, l'utilisation d'un langage implicite et aussi par l'expansion de la structure de la phrase pour être plus poli. Grâce au style d'écriture de lettres de VG, leur relation évolue d'une transaction à quelque chose de plus personnel. Les différences d'ancienneté et de réputation sont souvent devenues un facteur influençant les relations et la communication.

Mots-clés : *analyse critique du discours, Gauguin, style de langage, fonction syntaxique, van Gogh*

ABSTRACT. Van Gogh, the Dutch post-impressionist painter, tried to form a community with Gauguin, the French post-impressionist painter, printmaker and sculptor. This article studied VG's relationship with Gauguin in letters written by VG. The words choice, language style, letter structure, and syntactic functions used in the sentences of his letters were extracted from VG's six surviving letters and analyzed using a qualitative method, CDA approach and Le Querler's French syntactic functions theory. We discover that VG tried to build a respectful friendship through politeness but not completely in a formal language style. This asymmetrical relationship reflects through the contrasting diction, choice of pronouns and greetings, the use of implicit language and also by expansion in the sentence structure to be more polite. Through VG's letter-writing style, their relationship evolves from being transactional into something more personal. Seniority and reputational differences often became a factor influencing relationships and communication.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis, Gauguin, language style, syntactic function, van Gogh*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Van Gogh only began his career as a painter in 1880, before he moved to Paris in 1889 and then to Arles in the same year, where he attempted to form a community of artists with Paul Gauguin, which ended with a confrontation between the two of them and in the infamous severing of Van Gogh's ear (Murray, 2020). Van Gogh's public reputation only lasted about ten years and he only held one exhibition of his paintings despite him being a prolific painter over the course of his entire life (Naifeh and Smith, 2011). Many aspects of Van Gogh's life have been subjected to scientific research, among them his fluctuating religiosity (Krall, 2021), his bilingualism and biculturalism stemming from his immersion in Dutch and French culture (Gardner-Chloros, 2017), his unidentified illness that he suffered over the course of his life (Nolen et al., 2013; Dasgupta et al., 2022), the infamous severing of his ear in Arles (Kaufmann & Wildegans, 2008), and his relationships with other people in his life and how his creativity shows itself through them (Apostolopoulou & Issari, 2022). Among all of the relationships that Van Gogh maintained in his life however, his relationship with a fellow painter, Paul Gauguin, strikes one as being one of his most interesting.

Five years older than Van Gogh (hereafter referred to as VG), Gauguin started painting between 1871 and 1873, and unlike VG, Gauguin started his career earlier in life and was already well-known when VG started painting. In 1876 Gauguin exhibited his paintings at the Salon's official exhibition and his paintings were included in four impressionist exhibitions, in 1880, 1881, 1882, and 1886 (Gauguin, 2010).

Gauguin met VG in Paris in 1887, when VG held his first and only exhibition and he decided to accept VG's invitation to stay and work together with him in Arles in October 1888. Despite VG intending that their collaboration was permanent, Gauguin left Arles in December 1888 due to a fight that occurred between the two painters, and concurrent with Gauguin's departure, VG severed his own ear (Naifeh & Smith, 2011).

The relationship between Gauguin and VG becomes interesting when reviewing two things: firstly, both painters have very different personalities—Gauguin was described as narcissistic and arrogant (Maleuvre, 2018), while VG had a more sensitive and awkward personality, as well as a tendency to lack confidence and be unsure of himself (Naifeh & Smith, 2011); secondly, Gauguin was directly involved in VG's period of mental instability and even witnessed VG severing his ear. These factors have rendered the relationship between the two painters very interesting as a subject of scientific research, yet until now there has been no known research that examines their relationship through linguistically analyzing their correspondence.

This is a promising topic because VG, in particular, was an enthusiastic letter-writer with a unique writing style (Van der Veen, 2002; Jansen et al., 2009). He often gave different appellations for each piece of correspondence, used different closing salutations in different letters to different people, employed metaphors in his writing, gave descriptions of paintings or even drew pictures in the middle of his letters (Jansen et al., 2009; Krall, 2021), as well as having a very unique style of writing in French due to the influence of his native language, Dutch (Van der Veen, 2002; Gardner-Chloros, 2017). Research on Van Gogh's use of pronouns has also been done, noting the increase of the use of first-person singular pronouns and the decrease of first-person plural pronouns in Van Gogh's letters towards the end of his life, as well as showing how existing methods (i.e., quantitative linguistic analysis and change-point analysis) can be combined to study specific research questions in innovative ways (van Emmerik & Hamaker, 2017)

All of this has given a very rich database for research in to the correspondence between VG and Gauguin from a linguistic perspective, that not only examines VG's writing but also deciphers the linguistic choices in his writing-style and the emotions he displays that indicates his assessment of the relationship between them. By analyzing the factors mentioned above, this research

seeks to decipher the attitude adopted by VG towards Gauguin, identify the relationship between them, and to observe how the relationship between them developed over the period of their correspondence, based on surviving letters.

Letters are an important part of the 19th century Europe, as it was the most common way of communicating between members of the society (Vasquez, 2016), not excluding VG and Gauguin, as two figures who lived in 19th century Europe. One of the many methods used in the field of linguistics to dissect a corpus in the form of a letter or a series of correspondences is the method of critical discourse analysis (hereafter referred to as CDA). From the perspective of CDA, Fairclough (1992 in Sari, Putri, Herdi, Hamuddin, 2018) stated in his theory that discourse is a social practice that simultaneously forms and is formed by one's surrounding social structure, building social identity and the relationships that form between various participants and social classes in society. Social practice contributes to the beliefs and the knowledge held by a society due to its relations with other language functions that determine identity, relationship between participants, and what is considered ideal in a society. In this case, a letter, which is communication between two or more participants in the form of writing, is also discourse and is also a social practice. Therefore, a letter can be analyzed through the lens of CDA such as in studies by Khalaf (2020) analyzing grammatical cohesion in business letters in the context of the building of the Fallu-ja Bridge and by Pranoto & Yuwono (2018), who analyzed the Malaysian Prime Minister's diplomatic letters, Mahathir Mohammad, to determine his stance. To provide a substantial basis for CDA however, the text inside the corpus must be dissected grammatically, which can be done by using the theory of syntactic functions in French by Le Querler (1994). Tamba and Laksman-Huntley (2020), discussed the syntax of sentences used in the May 1968 uprising using Le Querler, while Safitri and Laksman-Huntley (2017) examined the structure of *Vogue* magazine headlines, and Dwiputri and

Laksman-Huntley (2020) with their analysis of media framing in the coverage of the *Gilets Jaunes* protests using the same syntactic theory approach of CDA.

Despite there being a significant amount of research using letters as corpus while employing CDA and the theory of syntactic functions in French, there is no known research using the two theories on the subject of the painters' correspondence, in this case particularly between VG and Gauguin. This research seeks to answer the question "What is the attitude that VG takes in interacting with Gauguin, and how is the relationship between the two portrayed through the letters written by VG, if seen through the perspective of critical discourse analysis?"

2. METHOD

The research was conducted using qualitative methods using data in the form of language (words), and draw conclusions from patterns found in a phenomenon (Levitt et al., 2018), and this method was chosen because of its compatibility with the corpus studied. The research is also limited to the choice of words used by VG and his style of language, which will be drawn from the corpus as a whole. The syntactic function in VG's sentences is also discussed, but is limited to sentences containing requests or suggestions from VG to Gauguin.

2.1. Data Source

Six letters written by VG to Gauguin taken from the Van Gogh Museum and Huygens ING study, uploaded to the vangoghletters.org website (<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters>). This study only looks at six surviving letters sent by VG to Gauguin collected over one period (September/October 1888-June 1890), from which it was easier to follow developments. Four of the letters were completed and sent to Paul Gauguin, while the other two letters are incomplete and were not sent, but are nonetheless clearly addressed to Gauguin. The first letter, still in draft form, was written in September or October 1888, in Arles. The second letter (sent) was written on October 3, 1888 in Arles, the third letter (sent) on October

17, 1888 in Arles, the fourth letter (sent) on January 4, 1890 in Arles, the fifth letter (sent) on January 21, 1889 in Arles, and the sixth and final letter (draft) was written on 17 June 1890, at Auvers-sur-Oise.

According to VG's biography, Van Gogh: The Life, compiled by Naifeh and Smith (2011), VG met Gauguin for the first time in Paris in 1875, but Gauguin only arrived and joined VG in Arles on 23 October 1888. The two painters lived together in Arles for two years, until 23 December 1889, when the two quarreled, resulting in VG cutting off his ear and Gauguin departing Arles and returning to Paris. VG moved to Auvers-sur-Oise in May 1890 and remained there until his death on 27 July 1890 (Naifeh and Smith, 2011).

These letters were written in the late 19th century, when the artistic climate in France was beginning to change. Prior to 1880, artists could only gain recognition and financial stability by submitting paintings to the state-run Salon exhibitions, which would guarantee high-selling prices from art brokers, an introduction and academic recognition in the art world and to the public (Etro et al., 2020, p. 6; Morowitz and Vaughan, 2018, p. 157). However, to qualify for the Salon exhibition at that time was very difficult, and the art culture in France only began to change when in 1881, Edmond Turquet, Secretary of State for Fine Arts in the Jules Ferry government decided that the state would relinquish management of the Salon, and hand over the judging-authority of Salon art works to the artists themselves, who formed a new panel of judges with a more diverse style and vision of art (Etro et al., 2020, p. 8).

The absence of state-run salons as the highest authority in the art world led to the emergence of many new salons. Art brokers were also increasingly open to investing in the work of artists with different styles, and after 1880 there was a growing trend for groups and individuals to exhibit their works even though they were not joined to a particular salon (Etro et al., 2020, p. 10). The French art market at that time had become freer, and an artist's legitimacy and financial stability no longer depended solely on the recognition of the Salon, but on the efforts of each artist and

the way in which they made personal connections, whether by joining an art group, building relationships with art brokers, or by holding individual exhibitions.

2.2. Data Collection & Analysis

The data collection technique was carried out using a literature study research method (Purwoko & Puspitasari, 2018). In this case, the corpus is dissected to analyze sentences, word choice, and their relationship to other texts using critical discourse analysis theory (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016), using a letter-writing guide entitled *Le secrétaire universel* (Dunois, 1894) as a reference because it was a common source of how to write letters at that time. The text of the corpus is also associated with the context of the relationship and life situation of VG and Gauguin, as well as the historical context at that time.

Additionally, the data include selected sentences where there is either a request or suggestion, which are then analyzed through syntactic function analysis using Le syntactic theory (Le Querler, 1994). This is due to the request and/or the suggestion of something or of doing something being a consistently recurrent theme in their correspondence, finding ten sentences of request in five out of six surviving letters that VG sent to Gauguin, with the third letter as the only one without any sentence of request. The emotional distance between two people might become the reason for varying levels of politeness in their language style (Holmes, 1995, in Mahmud, 2019), and the act of requesting something from someone else or of asking them to do something can portray the distance between the two participants (Saeli, 2016).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Syntactic Analysis of Request and Suggestion Sentences

Out of a total of 10 request sentences, 6 were declarative sentences (b, c, e, g, i, j) and 4 were imperative (a, d, f, h). The sentences of request and/or suggestion found in VG's letters to Gauguin are as follows.

(a) *Écrivez donc plutôt à mon frère de garder vos tableaux à prix au lieu de les offrir à bas prix.* (draft, unsent)

'Write to my brother to maintain the price of your paintings instead of offering them at a low price.'

(b) *Mais si vous voulez la garder pour nous, mon frère la vous prendra, ce que je lui ai immédiatement demandé, si vous voulez à la première occasion et espérons que cela sera sous bien peu.*

'But if you want to keep it (the painting) for us, my brother will take it, which I had immediately asked him to do, if you want first and foremost, and let us wish that this will be in the near future.'

(c) *Or je désirerais vous faire une part fort large de cette croyance que nous allons relativement réussir à fonder une chose de durée.*

'However, I wish that you share the confidence that we will relatively succeed in founding something that lasts.'

(d) *Ayons bon courage pour la réussite de notre entreprise et continuez à vous sentir bien chez vous ici.*

'Have courage for the success of our effort and do continue to feel well at home here.'

After the fight:

(e) *Alors je désire que vous disiez bien des choses de ma part au bon Schoeffenecker – que vous vous absteniez jusqu'à plus mure réflexion faite de part et d'autre de dire du mal de notre pauvre petite maison jaune – que vous saluez de ma part les peintres que j'ai vu à Paris.*

'Then I hope that you say good things on my behalf to good Schoeffenecker—and abstain, until both sides come to a more refined reflection, from saying bad things about our poor little yellow house—and send my regards to other painters that I have visited in Paris.'

(f) *Répondez moi s.v.p.*

'Reply to me please.'

(g) *Je crois que je commencerai par retourner ce qui est à vous en vous faisant observer que c'est mon intention, après ce qui s'est passé, de contester catégoriquement votre droit sur la toile en*

question. Mais comme j'approuve votre intelligence dans le choix de cette toile je ferai un effort pour en peindre deux exactement pareils. Dans lequel cas il pourrait en définitive se faire et s'arranger ainsi à l'amiable que vous eussiez la vôtre quand-même.

'I believe that I will begin by returning what is yours as I bring to your attention that it is my intention, after what had happened, to firmly contest your right of the painting in question. But as I approve your intelligence in choosing this painting, I will make the effort to produce two exact copies of it. In which case it can be amicably settled that you will have yours anyway.'

(h) *Ne vous servez que le moins possible d'engins de guerre moins enfantins.*

'Only use the less childish engines of war as little as possible.'

(i) *Cela me fera bien plaisir si vous m'écrirai de nouveau sous peu.*

'It will make me very happy if you write to me again soon.'

(j) *Il est fort probable que – si vous me le permettez – je viendrai pour un mois vous y rejoindre pour y faire une marine ou deux mais surtout pour vous revoir et faire la connaissance de de Haan.* (not sent)

'It is very possible—if you allow me—that I come join you for a month to do a seascape or two but especially to see you again and get to know de Haan.'

This indicated that 6 of the requests were indirect requests and four were direct requests, and if seen only from the form of the request, VG utilized more of an indirect request form, which generally communicates requests with a smaller risk of offending the other party compared to direct requests (Ruytenbeek, 2019). VG also only used simple sentences twice to communicate requests (a, h), while compound sentences are used 8 times throughout the correspondence (b, c, d, e, f, g, i, j). The use of a longer sentence can indicate an effort from the writer to adjust the atmosphere to render the message easier to receive by the recipient, and it is also one of the characteristics of requests posed in an asymmetrical relationship by the party of

lower status to the one of higher status (Saeli, 2016, p. 327).

VG used compound sentences 8 times to deliver his request and/or suggestion. 7 (b, c, e, f, g, i, j) among them were complex sentences with subordinate clauses (*subordonnée*) and 1 (d) was one with a coordinate clause (*coordonnée*). In complex sentences with subordinate clauses, the primary message that VG wanted to deliver is always placed in the subordinate clause (*proposition subordonnée*), be it in the *pivot* as in (i), or in the *complément circonstanciel*, as in (g). The independent clause, in most cases, is used by VG only as a preface to the message that he is trying to deliver, despite the independent clause being the most important part of the sentence that cannot, therefore, be omitted structurally. This shows VG's politeness in expressing his wish—placing his request in the omittable part of the sentence is one of the strategies of negative politeness (Meiratnasari et al., 2019). To expand his sentences, VG also

used *expansion du nom* dan *expansion d'adjectif*, which intensifies nouns and adjectives, such as in (c) “*fort large*” and (e) “*notre pauvre petite maison jaune*”. This also amounts to a form of positive-politeness strategy (Meiratnasari et al., 2019; Torres, 2020).

Simple sentences in the corpus are only used on two occasions, in sentences (a) and (h). However, sentence (a) was never sent and the direct request in it was reformulated into sentence (b), in the form of a compound sentence that was more polite when addressed to Gauguin, which makes sentence (h) the only simple sentence that VG sent to Gauguin. This sentence was written after the fight between them, showing that the dynamics of their relationship had changed enough to allow VG to deliver a clear and direct request to Gauguin. An example of the syntactic analysis done to the sentences of requests and/or suggestions based on Le Querler's (1994) theory of French syntax is as follows.

Table 1. Function Analysis on Sentence (h)

SÉQUENCE	FONCTIONS PRIMAIRES : PREMIER NIVEAU	FONCTIONS SECONDAIRES (bolded)
<i>Ne servez</i>	<i>verbe/pivot</i>	
<i>Vous</i>	<i>Sujet</i>	
<i>(ne)... que le moins possible</i>	<i>CC de manière</i>	<i>expansion d'adverbe</i>
<i>d'engins de guerre moins enfantins</i>	<i>COI</i>	<i>expansion du nom</i>

However, sentence (h) is not entirely concise and straightforward. Sentence (h), which is a request for Gauguin to use his fencing equipment as little as possible, includes two of VG's handwriting signatures, which used enlarged font and quotation marks, this time in the phrase “*engins de guerre*”. VG used these features in his handwriting to give emphasis on things that he considered implicitly important, but it also shows that VG still chose to be polite by implying the meaning to get his message understood rather than directly and lexically communicating his message. Furthermore, the *expansion du nom* “*moins enfantins*” used in (h) also exhibits understatement as a politeness strategy, which further shows that

there is still distance between VG and Gauguin that is rooted in VG's respect for Gauguin. This indicates their unequal relationship in VG's eyes, which prompted VG to opt for a more polite language style in communicating his requests to Gauguin.

3.1.2. Diction and language style showing distanced informal relationship between Van Gogh and Gauguin

Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin had a rather informal relationship and were quite close. This can be seen particularly by looking at the appellations “*Mon cher Gauguin*” and “*Mon cher ami Gauguin*” at the beginning of VG's letters to Gauguin instead of “*Monsieur*” (to Charles Angrand, October 25th, 1886) or

“Cher Monsieur” (to Albert Aurier, February 9th/10th, 1890) which were VG’s choice of more formal salutations. He also did not separate the opening greeting from the content of the letter by providing any space and only highlighted the difference between the greeting and the content by writing the greeting with considerably bigger letters. VG also signed his letters to Gauguin with “Vincent” and not “Vincent van Gogh”, as he did in his formal letters. The majority of VG’s letters to Gauguin were also written on A4 paper folded into two A5-sized pages, and he also ended his letters with the greeting “tout à vous (t.a.v.)”, sometimes preceded by “poignée de main”, or “allons, au revoir”. These,

according to *Le secrétaire universel* (1894), a guide to letter-writing in late 19th century France, were closing statements suitable for an informal letter, and it is observable that from VG’s point of view, he felt sufficiently close to Gauguin to not feel the need to write formally in his letters.

This can also be seen from his handwriting. VG often modified his handwriting to give emphasis or to imply another meaning, but fortunately critical discourse analysis involves a multimodal quality, which can also encompass colours, size, and other visual variations such as those conveyed in handwriting (Wodak and Meyer, 2016, p. 2; Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 89).

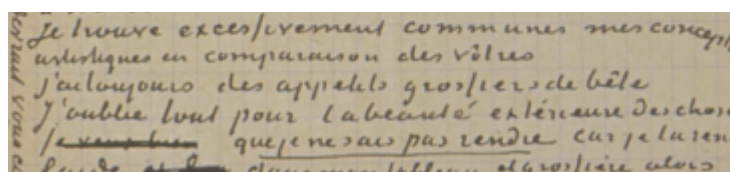


Image 1. Example of the use of underlines

VG had a habit of underlining words or phrases in his letters to give emphasis, like the phrase ‘*je ne sais pas rendre*’ depicted above (Letter 2). Emphasis was also given by differing the sizes of his handwriting, which

becomes very visible because of his consistency in keeping the same size of handwriting and the same spaces between the lines in the majority of his letter.

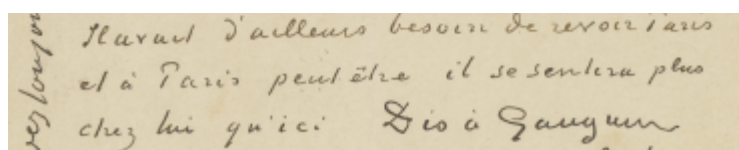


Image 2. Example of a bigger handwriting to give emphasis

The words ‘*Dis à Gauguin (de m’écrire)*’ (to Theo van Gogh, January 2nd, 1889) were written in a bigger size than the rest to emphasize urgency. Despite the various forms, underlining, different sizes of handwriting, and quotation marks, they all had one thing in common: they were only used by VG in his letters to people he was close with, and not in formal letters, such as the one addressed to Charles Angrand (October 25th, 1886). The use of these features in his letter to Gauguin indicated that the relationship between the two of them was quite close; VG did not write formally when he was writing to Paul Gauguin.

Nevertheless, it can be observed that there is still distance between the two. VG called Gauguin by his surname (Gauguin) and not by his given name, as he did with his brother Theo and his sister-in-law, Jo. The pronoun used by VG to refer to Gauguin was also ‘*vous*’, the formal French second person pronoun, and not ‘*toi*’, which is used with people who are closer and are on more familiar terms (Dunois, 1894).

The distance between VG and Gauguin can be understood when reviewing their biographies, as the contents of their discourse can be tied into the larger historical context at the time (Wodak and Meyer, 2016, p. 32;

Amoussou and Allagbe, 2018), which consists of the painters' personal biographies and the situation in the art scene in France as a whole. There is an age difference between the two of them—Gauguin was older by five years, and by the time they met each other, VG had only begun his career in the art scene, while Gauguin had already held four exhibitions of his own art, had had his artwork admitted into the Salon's official exhibition, and had participated with several artist colonies in and outside of France. These were all proofs of Gauguin's already established reputation and a more extensive network of acquaintances compared to VG, as before 1880, artists could only obtain critical acclaim and financial stability by entering their artwork into the official Salon exhibition, which was organized and managed by the French government that guaranteed three things: a high price in the hands of art dealers, critical acclaim in the art world, and the familiarization of the artist to the general public (Etro et al., 2020, p. 6; Morowitz and Vaughan, 2018, p.157). It can be concluded that VG and Gauguin did not stand equally in the art world then, and this asymmetrical relationship created distance between them.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Hierarchy in Van Gogh and Gauguin's relationship

The significant difference in age, experience, and reputation placed Gauguin in a higher status in the hierarchy of their relationship, which incited respect on VG's part. His respect towards Gauguin was demonstrated several times implicitly through his diction that enforced Gauguin's position as the one with more authority; for example, by calling Gauguin "*le chef de cet atelier*", and based on Gauguin's testimony in his biography, VG also called Gauguin '*maître*' (Gauguin & Dallet, 2017). VG also compared Gauguin to numerous great artists and poets of the past, like Petrarque, Giotto, Botticelli, and Dante, further emphasizing that Gauguin would become 'the Arles version of them' (Letter 2).

Gauguin's actions and ideas were also associated by VG with positive words in the

form of a noun, like '*intelligence*' in "*Mais comme j'approuve votre intelligence dans le choix de cette toile,*" (Letter 5), or an adjective, like the word '*excellente*' in "*ce matin j'ai reçu votre excellente lettre...*" (Letter 2), '*saisissante*' in "*votre conception de l'impressionniste en général, dont votre portrait est un symbole, est saisissante.*" (Letter 2), and '*beau*' in "*votre portrait qui serait trop beau.*" (Letter 2).

This makes a very stark contrast to VG's self-deprecating behaviour. The words that VG used to describe himself tend to be negative in nature. He associated himself with words related to animals or possessing a bestial quality, such as in the sentence "*J'ai toujours des appetits grossiers de bête...*" (Letter 2), and "*Maintenant pourtant l'elan de ma carcasse osseuse est tel qu'il va droit au but,...*" (Letter 2). The words '*bête*' and '*carcasse*' are both related to animals—the word '*bête*' means 'animal' (*Bête*, LeRobert), while the word '*carcasse*' means 'the remains of a dead animal' (*Carcasse*, LeRobert).

VG also described his works using words with a negative quality, such as '*laide*' in "*J'oublie tout pour la beauté extérieure des choses que je ne sais pas rendre car je la rends laide...*" (Letter 2), the words '*brutale*' and '*inhabile*' in "*...mon execution brutale et inhabile.*" (Letter 2), and the word '*maladroit*' in "*Quelque maladroit que soit cet essai...*" (Letter 2); as well as words that demean and underestimate himself, such as '*simple*' in "*j'avais cherché plutôt le caractère d'un bonze, simple adorateur du Bouddha éternel*" (Letter 2), and the word '*enfantillage*' in "*Comme j'ai guetté "si cela était déjà du Japon"! Enfantillage quoi.*" (Letter 3). In Letter 2, VG stated that his artistic ideas were very ordinary in comparison to Gauguin's ("*je trouve excessivement communes mes conceptions artistiques en comparaison des vôtres*").

Their hierarchical status is also observable through the language style that Van Gogh utilized in his interactions with Gauguin. To Gauguin, VG did not directly suggest or ask for anything—he used phrases to soften the request such as '*si vous voulez*' when elaborating on his plan (his request of Gauguin's painting), or giving hopes and promises as a strategy so that his request or suggestion might be approved (when he

convinced Gauguin to come to Arles by way of describing the beauty of Arles and promising a comfortable dwelling, for example). This is also enhanced by VG's diction in expressing his wishes—he never used the word *vouloir* and chose to use the word *désirer*, which is a softer synonym of *vouloir* (*Désirer*, LeRobert). On the other hand, the word *vouloir* is used to talk about Gauguin's wishes, especially in the phrase "*si vous voulez*". The word '*permettre*' is also only used to refer to Gauguin, as in the phrase "*si vous me le permettez*" (Letter 6), which conveys Gauguin's higher status compared to VG by its meaning of 'giving permission' or 'giving opportunity' (*Permettre*, LeRobert). We can thus observe that in his relationship with Gauguin, VG positioned himself as the inferior party, who had to soften his language while expressing his wishes, and he considered Gauguin as having a higher status than himself.

3.2.2. *Van Gogh's Language Style towards Gauguin*

VG also delivered meanings by way of implying them indirectly through allusions to literary works and the use of rhetorical questions to imply a certain meaning. To Gauguin, VG recommended two books—Alphonse Daudet's *Tartarin de Tarascon* and the Goncourt brothers' *Germinie Lacertueux* (Letter 5). VG's recommendation of *Tartarin* is accompanied by the comment "*l'imagination du midi rend copains, allez, et entre nous nous avons amitié toujours.*" *Tartarin* is a story about two friends who embark on a journey in the south of France and the following betrayal of one by the other (Daudet, 2016). This allusion to a literary work about betrayal was also elaborated in VG's letter to his brother, Theo, as VG compared Gauguin to Bompard, a character in the book who is characterized as a liar and a traitor to his friend in the south of France, who was Tartarin (Jansen et al., 2009), by saying "...*Et toi qui désire savoir comment étaient les choses, as tu déjà lu le Tartarin tout entier.— Cela t'apprendrait passablement à reconnaître Gauguin.*" (to Theo van Gogh, January 17th, 1889). This shows the disappointment that VG felt towards Gauguin

after their brief stay in Arles. However, this feeling is not directly expressed in his letter—VG chose to express his feelings by recommending a book and giving hints to lead Gauguin's attention to the parts about friendship and imagination in the south of France ("*l'imagination du midi rend copains,*").

This was also done by VG through the novel *Germinie Lacertueux* by the De Goncourt brothers. In the same letter, VG recommended *Germinie Lacertueux*, a novel about a servant-girl who relocated to Paris and lived a double life, as a servant-girl and a criminal (De Goncourt, 2009; Jansen et al., 2009). At first glance, this may pass as an ordinary book recommendation, but according to a letter sent by VG to Theo, dated January 17th, 1889, VG had another understanding of the story, which he related to Gauguin's life that he considered contradictory. In the letter, VG described how Gauguin's life as father to his family in Denmark contradicted his wish to leave and pursue his art career in the Martinique. Though VG still believed that it was better for Gauguin to remain with him in Arles and earn money instead of returning to Paris and performing his two roles as father to his family in Denmark and as a painter, whether in Paris or in Martinique.

Other than allusions to literary works, indirect language is also used by VG in the form of rhetorical questions, as in the questions "*le voyage de mon frère était-il bien nécessaire?*" (Letter 4) and "*à moins pourtant que ce départ fusse prémédité auparavant?*" (Letter 5). Rhetorical questions, which do not require an answer, becomes a way to imply another meaning. The first rhetorical question in his letters, which is "*le voyage de mon frère était-il bien nécessaire?*" (Letter 4), was VG's way of chastising Gauguin, who had sent a telegram to Theo, imploring him to come to Arles after Gauguin's departure, without VG knowing (to Theo van Gogh, January 17th, 1889). VG did not agree with Theo coming to Arles, and decided to address the matter through a rhetorical question. Another example of VG using a rhetorical question is "*à moins pourtant que ce départ fusse prémédité auparavant?*" (Letter 5), which is an assumption made by VG about Gauguin's departure from Arles,

implying a possibility that Gauguin had already considered leaving Arles long before their fight on December 23rd, 1888. VG thus avoided directly addressing this issue by delivering it through a rhetorical question.

From this review of VG's language style, it is found that in his attempt to express disappointment, disagreement, or other negative emotions, VG opted to be diplomatic by delivering it through allusions to literary works or by rhetorical questions. This can be perceived as an attempt to preserve his relationship with Gauguin but nonetheless express his opinion, without risking their relationship.

3.2.3. Change in Van Gogh and Gauguin's relationship after the fight

In terms of pronouns, the use of the plural first person pronoun, possessive pronoun, and the plural first person conjugated form of 'nous' indicates VG and Gauguin had receded in their relationship after the fight. Before the fight, VG used the pronoun 'nous' and the plural first person conjugated form twelve times, but after the fight occurred, the pronoun and the conjugated form are only used nine times. Instead, VG began using 'vous et moi' in place of 'nous' as an object, which happened three times. This shows a shift in VG's perspective, in which he began seeing himself and Gauguin as two different parties, while his perception of them as one party had significantly receded.

In letters sent before the fight, VG used more of the plural first person conjugation in the future tense (*temps futur*) than in the present tense. Before the fight, seven uses of the future tense first person plural conjugation are recorded, while three are found to be in the present tense. After their fight, however, there is only one use of the first-person plural in the future tense while there are three in the present tense. From this shift, it can be inferred that before the fight, VG had more vision of him and Gauguin as being one party in the future. The increase in the use of the first-person plural conjugation in the present tense after the fight between the two of them, however, indicates that VG no

longer focused on his hopes of them becoming one entity in the future, and instead concentrated more on the current state of their relationship. Furthermore, after the fight, the only occurrence of the use of reciprocal pronominal verb of the pronoun 'nous' is recorded in the corpus, which is *s'aimer* (*nous nous aimons*) in the phrase "*Quoi qu'il en soit nous nous aimons assez*" (Letter 5), which further signifies their standing as two equal agents, who are equally capable of affecting each other.

After the fight between them, VG's description of himself and his works also became more positive, with the use of words such as 'vivant' in "*Là-dessus, sur un fond bien vivant...*" (Letter 6). VG also commented "*je n'ai jamais inventé mieux*" about his own work ("*Comme arrangement de couleurs impressioniste je n'ai jamais inventé mieux.*", Letter 5). The inferiority seen in VG's previous writing decreased and his way of complimenting himself indicates an attempt to give credibility to his own ability as an artist

In terms of letter salutations, there is a shift from "*Mon cher Gauguin*" into "*Mon cher ami Gauguin*", which is more formal according to VG's writing style. VG also addressed Gauguin several times with the appellation 'mon ami'. Despite 'mon ami' and 'mon cher ami' being considered informal in *Le secrétaire universel* (Dunois, 1894), the appellation 'mon cher ami (name)' was only used by VG with people he wasn't very close to, such as Eugène Boch (to Eugène Boch, October 2nd, 1888). With people who were closer to him, the formula 'mon cher ami (name)' is only used in letters that contain conflicts, as with Bernard (to Émile Bernard, November 26th 1889), or in writing to a new correspondent or line of correspondence, as he did when he first started writing to his brother in French (to Theo van Gogh, July 19th, 1887). It can be concluded from these examples then, that VG used the formula 'mon cher ami' in more formal situations or to create or maintain distance between the correspondents.

This is further enhanced by the use of the appellation 'mon ami' in the body of the letter twice after the fight, in letters 4 and 5, which shows that the use of the greeting 'mon

cher ami' is VG's attempt to establish a certain distance between them, not one out of respect, but one based on his wish to position himself as a friend (*ami*) who was equal to Gauguin. Gauguin was no longer a leader (*chef*), but a friend. The focus of the correspondence has shifted from luring Gauguin to Arles with the promises of making him the leader of an artist's colony, a transactional relationship, into something more personal, built out of the relation between one person and another of equal standing. VG no longer tried to approach Gauguin with the strategy of promising benefits, but rather by positioning himself and Gauguin as fellow artists.

This change of approach can be understood by reviewing the historical context of the correspondence (Wodak and Meyer, 2016, p. 32; Amoussou and Allagbe, 2018), relating to the art scene in France at the time. At the beginning of their correspondence, joining art communities that held their own *salon* was a more preferred choice for holding art exhibitions, yet at the end of their correspondence, nearing the turn of the century, artists tended to work individually and relied on the connections that they had as an individual with fellow artists or art dealers (Etro et al., 2020). This then explains the change of VG's attitude in his letters; beside their own personal argument, VG no longer had an urgent need of an artist community to help build his career. He was now able to build his career and reputation as an individual, independent, artist. Yet to realize this vision, he still had to build and maintain his connections in the art world, which he did by keeping his contact with Gauguin through correspondence, which was the most common means of long-distance communication at the time (Vazquez, 2016, p. 17). For this reason, after the fight between them, VG began to try building an equal relationship and invoking his individuality in his letters, despite his inability to stand as an entirely equal party due to their inherently asymmetrical relationship at the beginning of their relationship.

4. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of VG's diction, language style, and the syntactic analysis of his letters to Paul Gauguin seen through the lens of critical discourse analysis, it has been found that the relationship that VG built in his earlier correspondence with Gauguin was with the aim of friendship in which he also exhibited his respect towards Gauguin, illustrated by the politeness-strategies in his correspondence, and recognized too, a difference in status between them, despite not using a very formal language style. He also utilized implicit language to address an issue through allusion to literary works and rhetorical questions in a diplomatic effort to communicate his opinions without risking the collapse of the relationship. It was also found, through the analysis of syntactic functions, that VG's respect towards Gauguin was conveyed through his effort to soften the language he used in his requests and suggestions.

VG's feeling of respect is rooted in their asymmetrical relationship, with the hierarchy between them evident through VG's way of describing Gauguin as a figure of authority illustrated by using words with positive meanings or meanings related to authority, while describing himself as more inferior by using words possessing negative or deprecatory meanings. Nevertheless, VG tries to reinforce the closeness between them through the general structure of the letters and the choice of the opening and closing salutations, which were not entirely formal.

VG's language style in his later letters, however, underwent a shift after the fight between them in Arles. The respect that VG had for Gauguin and the different hierarchical status between them remained, yet the relationship that was previously transactional turned into being rather personal due to VG's efforts to evoke his individuality and effort to build a relationship based on equality with Gauguin.

This research has found that the language style used by a letter-writer in his/her letters may indicate the relationship between the correspondents, and one's letter-writing style can sometimes indicate one's

position in a relationship, and concurrently determine the nature of the relationship, maintain a relationship, by paying close attention to the opening and closing salutations, language style in communicating a request or an opinion, and diction.

This research has also found that in the relations and cooperation among artists in late 19th century in France, seniority and the difference in reputation factored into an

artist's relationships and communicating styles, particularly styles of letter-writing. In the age where connections among artists and art dealers were the most important thing for the advancement of an artist's career, seniority and reputation were great assets and were to be considered when one artist communicated with another through letters, which is evident in the letters sent by VG to Gauguin.

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