

Who is Elena Ferrante?



Is it Anita Raja or Domenico Starnone (as recent reports have claimed)?

Here's what the Cogito semantic technology discovered when it compared Ferrante's writing style with that of Anita Raja, Domenico Starnone, Marco Santagata and Goffredo Fofi.

The name Elena Ferrante is known worldwide. While her best-selling four-part series known as the Neapolitan Novels has sold millions of copies around the world, the author's true identity is still unconfirmed.

According to [the most recent research](#), Elena Ferrante could be **Anita Raja**, the award-winning translator who also works for Ferrante's Italian publishing house Edizioni e/o. However, with no confirmation from Ferrante, Raja or the publishers, the question "Who is Elena Ferrante?" remains a mystery.

At Expert System, this is just the sort of mystery that we love, because, without delving into matters of privacy, our analysis relies on the only real clues that we have: **the language that Ferrante uses in her published works**. And it is from this perspective that we explore the question:

By analyzing the language and style of writing, who is Elena Ferrante?

About the analysis

The analysis was made using Expert System's Cogito semantic technology to compare the literary style of Elena Ferrante (in Italian) with that of four of the most cited candidates behind the Ferrante pseudonym: Translator **Anita Raja**, Raja's husband and author **Domenico Starnone**, novelist **Marco Santagata** and essayist **Goffredo Fofi**.

(Note: The analysis was performed on the original Italian version of each author's books, the results of which are translated into English for the purposes of this report.)

The analysis is based on text (5,000 - 9,000 words) excerpted from the following books:

- Elena Ferrante: "Troubling Love", "The Days of Abandonment", "The Lost Daughter", "My Brilliant Friend", "The Story of a New Name", "Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay", "The Story of the Lost Child"
- Anita Raja: The introduction and several pages of Raja's translation of German author Christa Wolf's "What Remains", the afterword of "Sotto i tigli" the Italian translation of "Unter den Linden", also by Wolf
- Marco Santagata: "Dante: The Story of His Life", "Come donna innamorata" and "L'amoroso pensiero: Petrarca e il romanzo di Laura"
- Domenico Starnone: "Fuori registro", "Ex cattedra" and "Lacci"
- Goffredo Fofi: "Zone grigie: Conformismo e viltà nell'Italia di oggi", the forward to "La rivolta libertaria" by Albert Camus, the forward to "La città e la scuola" by Lamberto Borghi

100 indexes for language analysis

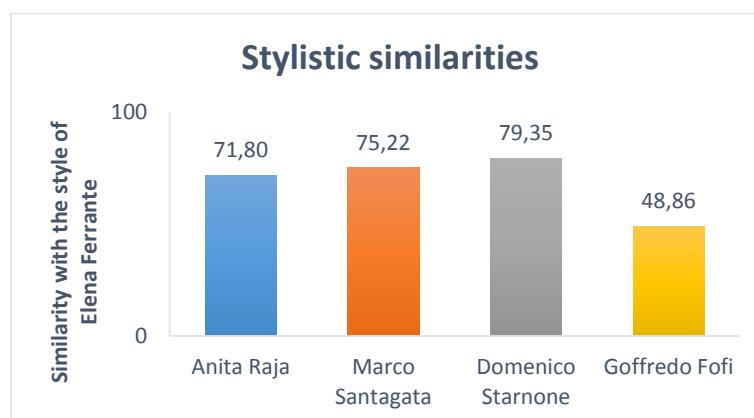
Expert System's semantic analysis has taken into consideration hundreds of different elements that provide accurate data on the language used in the texts cited above, all automatically calculated by the software. These elements, which we will refer to as indexes, were divided into five sub categories:

- 1. Legibility**
- 2. Text structure**
- 3. Lexical richness**
- 4. Grammatical characteristics**
- 5. Register**

Stylistically, Domenico Starnone is most similar; however....

When we consider the comprehensive analysis of all five areas, Domenico Starnone is most similar to Elena Ferrante from a linguistic and stylistic point of view.

The chart below shows the degree to which each author's style is similar to that of Ferrante, where a higher value indicates greater similarity. Here, Domenico Starnone is shown as having the greatest stylistic similarities with Ferrante, followed by Santagata, Raja and Fofi.



However, if we look at the these sub categories individually, the results highlight some major differences between Ferrante and Starnone and show greater similarity between Ferrante and author Marco Santagata. While Santagata has a higher similarity rating in 4 of the 5 categories, we should note that these characteristics (which are calculated based on a number of different indexes of varying degrees of importance) are not valued equally and therefore are not enough to alter the collective result.

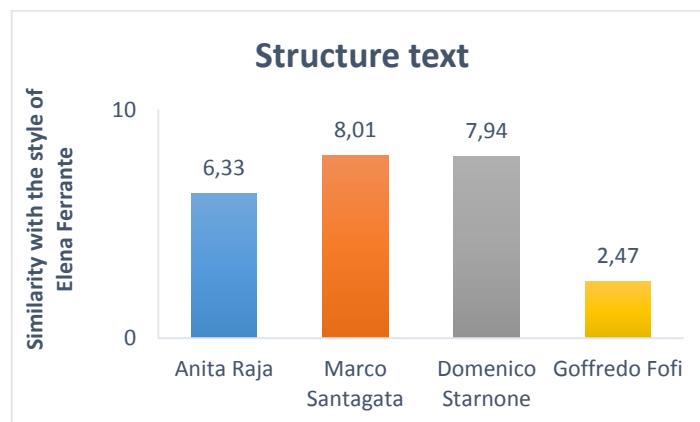
1) Legibility

The legibility index looks at the **length of each phrase, the number of characters and words present and the sum of a variety of semantic factors that determine the level of difficulty required to read and understand a text**. Our analysis revealed that **the legibility of Santagata's style is more similar to that of Ferrante**, followed by Starnone, with Fofi at the opposite end of the spectrum.



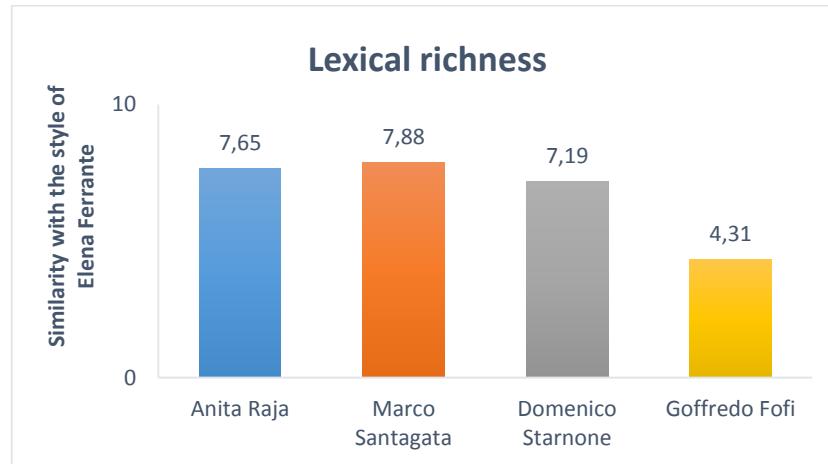
2) Text structure

Another feature that **Ferrante and Santagata have in common is text structure**, which is defined as the **number of phrases and the average number of words and characters per phrase**. In this area, Starnone is a close second, while Raja's, and especially Fofi's style are markedly different in terms of sentence phrasing.



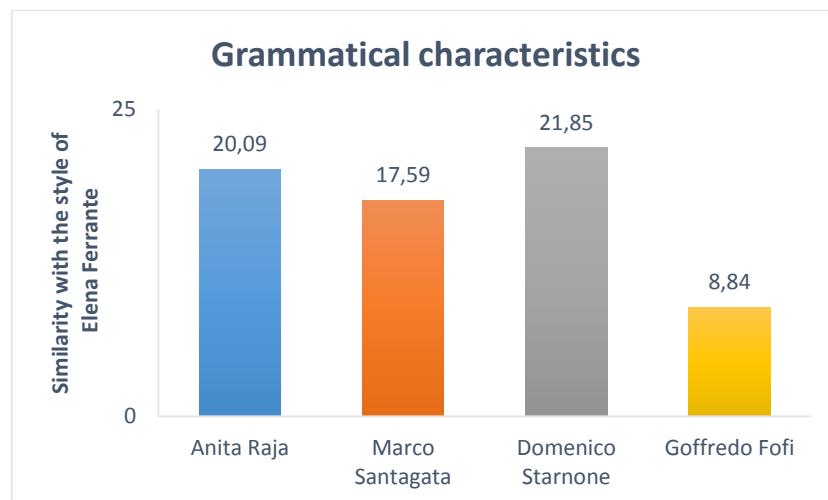
3) Lexical richness

This area looks closely at the type of vocabulary used: **are the words short or long?, how often are they repeated? are they terms that are commonly used or relatively unknown?, is the vocabulary typical in nature or academic or technical?, etc.** In this category, **Santagata** is again most similar to **Ferrante**, followed by Raja. Fofi's score indicates a style of vocabulary that is very different from that of Ferrante.



4) Grammatical characteristics

Starnone showed great similarity with Ferrante when it comes to grammatical characteristics of text, an important element of one's literary style. This category compares the **use of adjectives, verbs, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, etc.** and the author's choice of possessive adjectives vs. normal adjectives, action verbs vs. those of communication, future tense vs. present tense, etc. Here, Raja is a close second, followed by Santagata and Fofi.



5) Register

Comparing the register, which is calculated **according to the use of abbreviations, use of foreign words, literary terms or slang, etc.**, again showed **greater similarity between Ferrante and Santagata**.

