

## **Application of Stylistics in Teaching Literature: A Glance**

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**Abstract:** This paper look at the extent (though at a glance) at which stylistics can be applied in teaching literature. The (viable) nature of Stylistics as researchable area makes it possible for its application in teaching literary texts. The root of stylistics, its definition and place in teaching both Literature and Language are highlighted. The paper concludes that, Stylistics can be used and applied in teaching of literature especially with application of Widdowson's method.

**Keywords:** Stylistics, Literature and Language, Widdowson's method

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### **INTRODUCTION**

There are many discussions in recent years about the application of stylistics to the teaching of literature and even language to native-speaking students (and others) of English. Textbooks have been written with more of an orientation towards the needs of the learner, and studies in both literary and linguistic stylistics, as well as the work in 'modern rhetoric' which contains accompanying exercises designed for further student investigation Mick S [12]. This eases the whole processes and or stages to be followed in the teaching.

### **Stylistics (Its Root and Definition)**

The term 'stylistics' is derived from the word style, In German, it is known as *stylistik* and to the French, they call it *stylistique*. Stylistics is a recent development in an attempt to study style; though it, like human shadow, seems to be with man for centuries. This implies that man has always been conscious both about how he wears dress and how he makes use of different occasions. Although Stylistics is a twentieth century phenomenon, its studies started since the 18<sup>th</sup> C during which period classical works were the models. It came after the study of elocution in classical rhetoric [1]. It gained prominence and became established in the 1960s in Britain (UK) and America (US) [2].

It had also expanded in continental Europe particularly France due to contribution of Charles Bally and Leo Spitzer. Charles Bally, a student of Ferdinand de Saussure, wrote a monumental piece of work (1909) on French Stylistics which brought about wide spread knowledge to the continent on the viable nature of Stylistics as a researchable area of linguistics; where

linguistic 'eyes' can be used to view literary texts. On the other hand, Leo Spitzer's approach to style (which was a decade after Bally's) was known as *Expressive Stylistics* and was concerned with the positive relationship between the stylistic features of a text and the author's psychological mood [2]. In his later works, Spitzer's emphasis was put on the stylistic devices of an author's work instead of the author himself.

From the above, it is however, clearly shown that the side of each of the pioneer developers of the field of stylistics- Bally and Spitzer. Bally on the side of linguistic Stylistics while Spitzer on the side of literary Stylistics [1].

### **Stylistics Defined Definition**

The term 'Stylistics' is a contested one, Different individuals and groups of linguistics, literary critics, anthropologists, psychologists argue on the definition of the term [3]. Stylistics is simply defined as the study of styles. This implies that style is central to the study of Stylistics. In his definition of Stylistic, Tom Mc Arthur (ibid) sees as the 'the branch of linguistics that studies style, especially in works of literature'. According to Leech and Short [4], stylistic study is the application of linguistic knowledge to the study style. However, Widdowson [5] argues that, Stylistics is an area of mediation between two disciplines English Language and Literature.

### **Style Defined**

Style has been defined differently by different scholars. This is because it exists in almost everything that people do such as writing, dressing, walking etc.

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According to Osgood [6], style is an individual deviation from norms for the situations in which he is encoding. Style is different from grammar since it cannot be qualified and it has no fixed rules. Style is concerned with the way a writer/speaker uses it to play on the feeling of the reader [7].

Style is generally used to mean, mainly, a way of doing things appropriately, well or badly or even doing them in a distinctive way or otherwise. Style is the way of presenting a subject which differs more or less from the average which is motivated by the character of the subject, the purpose of presenting, the reader's qualification and the writer's personality [8].

In fact, there are no two people, whose style is the same whether in writing, speaking, playing or walking. The style can only be similar in nature but certainly not the same.

### **Stylistic Analysis and Literary Appreciation**

The two approaches here explain how analysis and appreciation of a literary work can help a learner in the understanding of literature.

The value of stylistic analysis is that it can provide the means whereby the learner can relate a piece of literary writing with his own experience of language and so extends that experience. The establishment of such a relationship can then serve as a base from which literary criticism; or rather a teaching approach can conduct its operations [5].

There must be a point, therefore, when a consideration of the linguistic features or pieces of literary discourse shade off into an intuitive sense of significance. It would seem reasonable to suggest that there is also a point in the learner's progress when allowance should be made for the exercise of intuition and for the appreciation of the artistic value of the message which the literary work conveys. It is in the stimulation of such perception and judgment that literary criticism at its best excels. Thus, the literary critic as teacher can with justification point out that it would be undesirable to suppress the imaginative response of learners in the interest of painstaking linguistic exactitude for its own sake. A central problem in the teaching of anything is to know how to exert control without stifling initiative. The problem in the teaching of literature is to know when and to what extent the learner can be allowed to proceed to the appreciation and evaluation of the broader aesthetic significance of literary works without running the risk of involvement in confusion or the traffic of ready-made judgment.

As earlier mentioned, stylistics occupies the middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism and its function is to mediate between the two. In this

role, its concerns necessarily overlap with those of the two disciplines. It is for this reason that stylistic analysis shades imperceptibly into literary appreciation: if it did not it would not fulfill the pedagogic purpose [5].

### **Pedagogical Stylistics and Teaching**

Pedagogy is the practice of teaching or the study of teaching. When pedagogy is used as a tool in explaining English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL), then it is known as Pedagogical Stylistics [13]. Pedagogy can also be applied or used in the teaching of literature. Pedagogical stylistics, as a category of Stylistics can be a good tool for the exercise. Thus, there are a number of issues which emerge in the context of debates concerning the pedagogical relevance of stylistics. Some are perennial issues deriving from deep-rooted division between linguistics and literary critics but which still require to be considered; others derive from recent advances in literary theory. It is impossible to do justice here to the intricate character of such debates and any highlighting of particular issues will be an inevitably subjective one. But the fact that some issues are probably irresolvable without fundamental changes in assumptions concerning the nature of literature should not be taken to mean that these issues should best be buried.

One of the main issues is the fundamentally descriptive nature of stylistics as a discipline. The greater the literary work the less amenable it will be to systematic description and that only those works or 'texts' (as stylisticians are held-disparagingly to refer to them) which are not 'worth' much will be reducible to the descriptive procedures of stylistics. A related objection is that teaching of stylistics which treats all texts as discourses and juxtaposes them in terms of description to dislocate the 'literary' reducing it to the common denominator of a descriptive framework, relegating to the periphery the essentially non-linguistic but distinctive characteristics of literature such as symbolism, allusion and intertextuality. These results in teaching which singularly fails to promote discrimination of the relative value of the materials and which therefore denies the place of the individual, imaginative response to the text [9].

However, it is untrue that stylisticians do not interpret, Many do, though few would see that primary role as an evaluative one of ranking texts in division of excellence interpretation is the subject of much literary theoretical analysis and here, too, stylisticians need to answer the kind of charges made against the general nature of literary interpretation, particularly when, as with stylistics, the models tend to be that of New or practical criticism. In particular questions concerning the objective nature of all descriptions, the ideology of the interpreter, the isolation of the text as a language artefact from broader historical, socio-cultural and

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political determinants, the inevitably arbitrary and invariably subjective nature of the 'iconic' fit between linguistic forms and literary meanings, all feed into the nature of the interpretative procedures taught and the kind of literary competence which is acquired, particularly in the case of more advanced students Fish [10].

A general result of such debate has been to engender less grandiose claims for the explanatory potential of stylistics in the teaching and study of literature. There is now a greater eclecticism linguistically (reflecting advances across all linguistics levels, specially discourse and pragmatics) and a more modest awareness that any approach to literary texts presupposes theory of literature. Interpretations of texts will thus be more provisional, relative to the analytical model or level of language analysis which is predominant and will not assume any automatic, one-for-one correlations between linguistic structure and literary effect. Within this framework students will be brought to a fuller understanding of the working of language and thus to a firm and clearly principled basis for interpretation as well as to an awareness that language, though only one component in a literary semiotics, is a central feature which it is important to respond to without impressionism or adhocery.

### **Stylistics, Literature Teaching and the Foreign Language Learners**

Here, questions of language learning are perhaps more widely addressed in the domain of foreign language learning than in the no less important area of mother-tongue language development, issues of pedagogy in relation to stylistics, literature and language study can be more easily surveyed. What is however, clear, is that there is growing recognition that integration of language and literature can be of mutual benefit in the context of foreign or second language education and that a situation of literary education, conducted by exposure canon of texts in English literature mainly through a method of lecture, may be in need of modification on a number of counts. In terms of assessment, too, perennial questions such as: in "daffodils" words-worth give a very limited account of nature. Discuss; or write an essay on Jane Austen's innovations in plot structure' require re-examination in the light of students' inevitable reliance on criticism and second-hand sources [11].

- Debate here concerns the extent to which literary texts may be used in the classroom (a) to teach language (b) to teach about language. The case for the former has been advanced but has few adherents. However, literary texts can be used to pose seminal questions about the nature of language, the differentiability of 'literary' from 'non literary' English and to explore the organisation of literature as a communicative discourse.

- One of the boldest claims for uses of literature in foreign language teaching has been made by Widdowson in an interview in *ELT Journal* [5]. There Widdowson develops ideas first put forward to the effect that reading literary discourses can assist students in the development of sense making procedures of the kind required for the interpretation of or sensitisation to language use in any discursal context.

### **CONCLUSION**

The place of stylistics in literature studies and in teaching of literature is now being articulated with sharper theoretical awareness, increasingly numerous and explicit examples of analytical practice and rapidly growing illustrations of classroom stylistics in operation in different teaching contexts. That stylistics by its nature is a reliable tool which can be used in teaching not only literature, but language as well.

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