



STYLE AND STYLISTICS: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Stylistics is a systematic way of exploring a literary text especially the language of a text and tries to explain how language creates meaning, style and certain effect. The study of stylistics is considered as one of the significant tools to analyze a literary piece from the point of view of language. There are a number of scholars who are engaged in the interpretation of different genres of literature such as prose, poetry, drama, short story and one-act-play with the help of Stylistics. The interpretation of poetry is possible with the help of some of the important terms in stylistics. The students of literature are to be made aware of the fact that without looking at the individual and collective usages of the lexical items, it is not possible to comprehend the meaning of a poem of any sort. The present article is exclusively devoted to the rudimentary study of Stylistics, an important branch of linguistics. In the beginning, it offers a historical background of Stylistics as a linguistic discipline examines strength and weakness and unfolds its scope and limitations following important definitions.

Key words: *Style, Stylistics, Linguistics, Deviation, Diachronic view, Foregrounding, Figurative use of Language.*

Stylistics: A Diachronic View

Historically speaking, the study of style can be traced back to the literary scholarships of the Greeks and Romans in the fifth century BC. In this period the rhetoric was the dominant art. This discipline was a set of rules and strategies which enable writers and orators 'to speak well'. In other words, they fully decorated the language with all the figures and tropes to bring about changes in the feelings and opinions of the audience.

Stylistics as a sub-discipline came in the limelight in the second half of the twentieth century with the publication of a number of books that included many articles on Stylistics. One of the articles was written by Roman Jakobson in Sebeok's book entitled as "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics". Jakobson is an important figure in the historical development of Stylistics as a promising branch of linguistics.



Another important point in the historical development of Stylistics is that it was an extension of literary criticism in the early twentieth century. The main focus of stylistics was on the literary texts rather than the author. In the nineteenth century, the focus was on the author. In Great Britain two important critics such as I. A. Richards and William Empson came on the scene and changed the direction of literary criticism. They more concentrated on the literary texts. They formed the opinion that readers get affected by the text. This approach is known as practical criticism. It is matched by a similar critical movement in the USA, associated with Cleanth Brooks, René Wellek, Austin Warren and others, called New Criticism. These two movements proved crucial in the historical development of Stylistics because they laid more emphasis on the literary texts especially on the language of the texts. These critics did not analyse the language of texts very much, but, rather, paid very close attention to the language of the texts.

A different, although conceptually similar, tradition of linguistic stylistics was established by British linguists in the 1930s and came to be called British Contextualism. The most important proponents of British Contextualism include John Rupert Firth, M.A.K. Halliday, and John Sinclair.

Another development in Stylistics is attributed to the scholars from Eastern Europe and Russia which is known as Russian Formalism. This group consisted of linguists, literary critics and psychologists. They were instrumental in introducing the textual study in the texts which is known as foregrounding theory. This view suggested that some parts of texts had more effect on readers than others in terms of interpretation. The textual parts were linguistically deviant or specially patterned in some way, thus making them psychologically salient (or 'foregrounded') for readers. The Russian Formalists were, in effect, the first stylisticians. But their work was not understood in the west because of the effects of the Russian Revolution in 1917. After the revolution, formalism fell out of favour and, in any case, academic communication between what became the Soviet Union and Western Europe and North America virtually ceased.

Roman Jakobson became one of the most influential linguists of the twentieth century, and the reason for his considerable influence on Stylistics, in addition to his own academic brilliance, was because he linked various schools of Linguistics together. He left Moscow at the time of the Russian Revolution and moved to Prague, where he became a member of the Prague Structuralist circle, who were also very interested in the linguistic structure of texts and how they affected readers.

What is Stylistics?

At the outset, it must be made clear that there are a number of definitions of stylistics given by many scholars in the field of linguistics. However, the following definitions are vital as



they provide us sufficient knowledge to understand the meaning of the term 'stylistics':

Important Definitions:

1. The general definition of stylistics is that it is the study of style of the writers or the literary artists,
2. According to Lucas (1995) stylistics is the effective use of language in prose to make statements or arouse emotions.
3. Stylistics can be also defined as the study of different styles that are present in the text or the utterance of the character.
4. According to David Crystal stylistics is the study of certain aspects of language variations as a part of linguistics.
5. G. N. Leech one of the renowned linguist opines that stylistics is the linguistic approach to literature explaining the relation between language and its artistic function,
6. H. G. Widdowson says that stylistics involves both literary criticism and linguistics.
7. According to K. T. Khader stylistics an intensive study of literary text on an advanced level.
8. In the opinion of Thomas Kane stylistics is the study of linguistic choices the writer makes to express his/her thought and feeling in an effective way.
9. Stylistics can be also defined as the study of the language deviations or the choice of language outside of the range of normal language.
10. Stylistics may be defined as the study of language use according to the situation or the circumstances.

The above definitions are helpful in understanding the nature of stylistics.

The Nature and Scope of Stylistics

As we know that every individual is known from his or her style. Every person in the world possesses some kind of style suitable for him/her. Similarly, every writer has his or her own style of writing. It is observed that every writer makes use of linguistic choices to describe the situation and to portray his characters. Therefore, it is interesting to study how the writers make use of certain structures in their writings. Stylistics deals with a wide range of language varieties and styles that are possible in creating different texts. There are certain possibilities for the writer to make the selection of the words from a wide range of storehouse of the words such as synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, metonymy etc. The writer also makes use of phonological, morphological and syntactic systems of linguistics depending on the situations. Stylistics is the distinctive way to use language. Any prose writer or a poet or a playwright uses his unique method to create a text. The choice of the linguistic units made by the writer reflects his/her ego and the socio-cultural aspects in which the characters and situations exist.



Paul Simpson (2004) says:

Why should we do stylistics? To do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use. Doing stylistics thereby enriches our ways of thinking about language and, as observed; exploring language offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of (literary) texts. (p.3)

Since stylistics is the borderline discipline between language and literature, it focuses on language use in both literary and non-literary texts. It takes into account many disciplines such as literature, sociology, psychology, philosophy and so on. Stylistics looks at style from the following perspectives:

1. **Style as Choice:** In this, the writer makes certain choices of the words and expressions to describe the situations or the characters. The poets make use of certain words or expressions to highlight his or her intensely felt emotions.
2. **Style as Deviation:** Here, the writer/poet avoids the standard form of writing and makes use of deviations to sound stylistically significant. In other words, the writer does not conform to the standard form of writing. Thus, we can say that the writer has a poetic license to break the rules of grammar.
3. **Style as Situation:** Here, the situation is the context in which the text comes to life. The situation could be social, cultural, political or pragmatic. We come to know the situation in a literary text via the style of the writer.
4. **Style as the Temporal Phenomenon:** Here, the time factor plays an important role. When the writer wants to write a text, he/she has to consider the time factor. For example, Shakespeare wrote the plays and used the language that was relevant to his period. The modern playwrights do not write the same way as Shakespeare did. Therefore, there is a marked difference between Old English and Modern English.
5. **Style as Individual:** It is often said that man is known by his style. Every individual is unique in his style of speech and writing. There are some specific characteristic features associated with particular individuals.

There is a tremendous scope for the study of stylistics. There are many writers in the world who have written about the direct experiences of their lives. The language styles of the writers are worth studying to understand the nature of the linguistic behavior of his/her characters. Individual styles are also worth studying because they give us insight of the circumstances in which the individual moves. The significance of the literary language cannot be avoided. We can appreciate the literary texts and try to understand the nature of

language used in the texts. The literary texts are better understood with the tools used in stylistics such as deviations, figures of speech, foregrounding, discourse etc. Thus, the study of stylistics paves the way to understand the text at the advanced level bringing out the nuances of the language use.

Strengths and Limitations of Stylistics

Stylistics is one of the important tools to examine and analyze a literary text. It is an interesting branch of linguistics which studies the different styles of language. There are, however some advantages and disadvantages of the study of stylistics.

The strengths of stylistics are illustrated as follows:

1. The strength of stylistics lies in the fact that the students at the advanced level are made aware of the social aspect of language and language variation.
2. The study of stylistics helps the students to develop their analytical skills. The stylistic analysis of a literary text helps them to arrive at an understanding from language point of view. For instance, when the students are asked to do the stylistic analysis of the poem 'Daffodils', they are expected to study the diction, the use of figures of speech, imagery and poetic devices related to sound etc. Thus, the students' ability to interpret the text enhanced.
3. This kind of study will help the students to use the this analytical skill in the spoken and written discourse.
4. Stylistics does not only help in analyzing the literary texts but it also helps the students to use language effectively in written and oral communication in various speech situation.
5. We can understand the power and solidarity relations with the help of stylistics. In other words, stylistics would be an understanding of how conversational turn-taking patterns in novels and plays can reflect power relations.
6. One can understand the figurative use of language including deviations and the principles of foregrounding while studying the stylistics
7. The goal of the stylistics is not only to describe the formal features of the text, but it also takes into account the functional significance.
8. The readers of the texts are benefited by the study of stylistics with regard to the rhyme, sound patterns, language variation, dialects and registers.
9. The students of literature will understand the point of view of the writer in writing the texts.
10. The students are also become aware of the structures of language including several kinds of ambiguities used in the text.

Thus, the strengths of stylistics are manifold and the students at the higher level become more

competent in the use of language because they are constantly aware of the style in communication. Thus stylistics can help us enhance our power of understanding of the text. It will also help us to increase our knowledge of the language use.

However, there are certain limitations of stylistics. The following are some of the limitations:

1. Firstly, study of stylistics is limited to the phonological, morphological and syntactic relations of the words and expressions. It cannot go beyond and study the meaning.
2. Secondly, the limitations of stylistics is that it does not take into account the social or cultural meaning of the words and expressions,
3. Thirdly, the contextual or the associative meaning does not form the study of stylistics.
4. Fourthly, pragmatic meaning of the utterances is not considered in stylistics.
5. Finally, this kind of study is limited to the structures of the language

Conclusion

This article is useful for those who would like to pursue the studies in Stylistic as an interesting discipline. The readers are likely to generate interest in the area of Stylistics as language is at the core of understanding and interpreting literature especially poetry. The language of poetry is better understood with the help of useful terms and devices in poetry. The language of a poet is different from the language of a prose writer in the sense that a poet uses unconventional language adopting the ways of deviation and foregrounding whereas a prose writer follows the conventionality of language use. Therefore, one must investigate in the usages of the lexical items and the exceptional sentence constructions in order to derive the aesthetic pleasure as well as complete satisfaction of understanding the nuances of language in the text under consideration.

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