

Meaning and Scope of Stylistics

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Abstract

The present paper presents the meaning and scope of stylistics. Stylistics is an analytical mode of analysis that combines linguistics and literary criticism and includes different levels of phonology, prosody, morphology, syntax, etc. Stylistics analyzes literary discourse through linguistic perspective. The present paper examines how 'stylistics' becomes significant as it tries to link the two approaches. Some theoreticians consider it a branch of linguistics and a domain of mediation between linguistics and literary criticism and some consider it an independent branch that investigates the same phenomenon from its own perspective. The paper also discusses conflicting approaches to stylistics.

Keywords- *Style, Linguistics, Literary Criticism, Content, Form*

Introduction

Stylistics is an outcome of a creative contact between linguistics and literary criticism. In recent years, stylistics has become an analytical mode of analysis and as such has brought into its fold all expressional means of language relating to different levels of phonology, prosody, morphology, syntax, lexicology and the discourse analysis. The shortcomings of literary studies are overcome with the tools and methodology of linguistics by giving it a scientific accuracy.

The term 'stylistics' has been defined differently by different scholars. Morton. W. Bloomfield in his paper, "Stylistics and the Theory of Literary" elaborates on the place of stylistics in over-all theory of literary study and the nature of stylistics and its contribution to various aspects of literary theory and practice. He defines stylistics as follows:

Stylistics is the study or interpretation of the linguistic element or distinctive linguistic element in a writing, group of writings, or a text (that is a structure

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capable of being interpreted by a code, including intentional structures like a culture or a whole language). (271)

By linguistic in this context, Bloomfield means “the phonetic, syntactic and simple lexical aspects of language” (272). However, Bloomfield is of the view that the word ‘stylistics’ is used in many senses and that leads to the slipperiness of meaning, and the main reason behind the difficulty of defining the word. Thus, he attempts to define the term ‘stylistics’ by classifying it into major categories based on its usage. These are *Aesthetic Stylistics* (use of style in metaphysical sense interiors of beauty by aestheticians), *Theoretical Stylistics* (caters to questions regarding the meaning of literature in linguistic terms), *Descriptive Stylistics* (phrase applied to efforts to describe the linguistic element in texts but without evaluating them), *Rhetorical Stylistics* (the part of rhetoric that caters to language and style), *Historical Stylistics* (diachronic and synchronic study of style), *Cultural and Group Stylistics* (examining the typical styles of whole culture, society, school or group of writers), *Topographical or visual Stylistics* (studies the visual side to language and writing as it forms a part of total impact and message), and *Psychological Linguistics* (gaining insight into the mind of a man or writer through the study of language and style) (273-76).

Paul Simpson in his book, *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*, defines stylistics as a “method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language” (2). The reason he gives for the language’s imperativeness to stylistics is that “the various forms, patterns and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text” (2). He gives a list of major levels of language and their connecting technical terms in language study, along with a succinct account of what is covered at each level:

Level of language	Branch of language study
The <i>sound</i> of spoken language; The way sounds are pronounced.	phonology; phonetics
The patterns of <i>written</i> language; The shape of language on the page.	graphology
The way words are constructed; Words and their constituent structures.	morphology
The way words combine with other Words to forms phrases and sentences.	syntax; grammar
The words we use; the vocabulary of a language.	lexical analysis; lexicology
The <i>meaning</i> of words and sentences The way words and sentences are used in everyday situations; the meaning of language in context	semantics pragmatics; discourse analysis.(5)

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Geoffery Leech and Mick Short in their work, *Style in Fiction*, refer to 'style' "as the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given person . . ." (9) and 'stylistics as the "linguistic study of style . . ." (11). Leech and Short are of the view that literary stylistics has the inevitable and specific objective of describing the connection between language and artistic function: "The motivating questions are not so much *what* and *why* and *how*. From the linguist's angle, it is 'Why does the author here choose this form of expression?' From literary critic's viewpoint, it is 'How is such-and-such an aesthetic effect achieved through language?'" (11).

H. G. Widdowson in his work, *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*, defines stylistics as the study of literary discourse from a linguistic position. He emphasizes that stylistics includes both literary criticism and linguistics, as suggested by its morphological makeup: "the 'style' component relating it to the former and 'istics' component to the latter" (3-4). The methodology and approaches of literary criticism and linguistics are connected together by stylistics. Stylistics, in Widdowson's opinion, has no independent domain of its own though he hopes it might be attained in the near future. It can be only understood as an area of mediation between the two disciplines. Widdowson states in this regard:

Stylistics can provide a way of mediating between two subjects: English language and literature. . . . stylistics can serve as a means whereby literature and language as subjects can by a process of gradual approximation move towards both linguistics and literary criticism, and also a means whereby these disciplines can be pedagogically treated to yield different subjects. Thus stylistics can . . . provide for the progression of a pupil from either language or literature towards either literary criticism or linguistics. (4)

G. W. Turner in his work, *Stylistics*, also thinks that stylistics does not enjoy an autonomous domain of its own. He considers it a part of linguistics, that is, the general science of the description of the language. He links stylistics with linguistic variations as he states that linguistics "is a science describing language and showing how it works, stylistics is that part of linguistics which concentrates on the variation in the use of language" (7). Thus, stylistics bears a close relationship with linguistics. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature* assert that it is impossible to simply identify stylistics with poetics or the general theory of literature. But, as the most crucial question in the study of poetic style is the question of the significance and meaning of the poetic word, therefore both linguistics and literary criticism meet in stylistics. Poetics may be regarded as an essential part of stylistics as it caters to the problems of verbal structure: the analysis of painting is concerned with the pictorial structure.

David Crystal in his essay, "Objective and Subjective in Stylistic Analysis" defines stylistics as "the linguistic study of systematic, situationally distinctive intra-language variations"(103). By 'situation', he is referring to a sub-set of non-linguistic variables like

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occupation, purpose, status, regional or class background, etc, that a native speaker through intuition can recognize as accounting for a specific selection of linguistic characteristics in a given text (spoken or written). According to Crystal, stylistics cannot be limited to literary texts as the linguistic explanation of such tests is theoretically reliant on the earlier description of non-literary variation.

Stephen Ullmann in *Meaning and Style* considers stylistics “as not a mere branch of linguistics but a parallel discipline which investigates the same phenomenon from its own point of view” (41). Ullmann identifies three crucial factors in terms of their pertinence to stylistics and thus, inevitably, to the stylistic analysis: “the ‘motivation’ of the name, the vagueness of the sense, and the overtones which may arise around either the name or the sense or both” (42). The first factor is related to the phonetic, morphological and semantic motivation of a word. The second factor relates to vagueness as a significant linguistic tool employed by a writer to deliberately create a state of confusion through ambiguous use of language. The third factor, Ullmann notes, is associated with connotations of a word. Overtones perform a critical role in creating the stylistic scope of a particular discourse by exposing the emotional preoccupation of the speaker or by simply fulfilling the expressive function.

M.A.K. Halliday in his article, “Descriptive Linguistics in Literary Studies” maintains that “Linguistics is not and will never be the whole of literary analysis and only literary analyst - not the linguist, can determine the place of linguistics in the literary study” (70). Stylistics in his opinion is expected to fill the gap of linguistic approach and make the whole of literary study. Because of this reason, Halliday observes, stylistics is generally thought of as the 'only science of literature.'

From these different ideas given by different linguists, it can be deduced that stylistics is a mediation between literary criticism and linguistics. The aims of both a linguist and a literary critic are completely different from each other. While the goal of the literary critic is to decode the message of a literary text without bothering about the linguistic nature of the code, the main concern of a linguist is the analysis of the unique features of the medium of the codes and not the message. A linguist is concerned with the medium through which the message is decoded and not the message. Here ‘stylistics’ becomes significant as it tries to link the two approaches “by extending the linguist’s literary intuition and the literary critic’s linguistic observation and thus makes their relationship explicit” (Widdowson 5-6).

Thus the stylistic analysis, that is, the amalgam of approaches of linguistics and literary criticism becomes an excellent device in the hands of the modern critic as well as the reader in bringing about a scientific and an expansive approach to the study and analysis of literature. Linguistics without literary interpretation is a more verbal analysis which cannot open out the dark nooks and corners of the extra-linguistic contacts. Literary criticism alone is more initiative evaluation tinged with impressionistic colour without having the scientific

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precision of the verbal analysis based on the linguistic description. Thus stylistics creates a new independent discipline of evaluation of the realms of literature by mediating between the literary criticism which is mostly subjective in character and the linguistic analysis which is rigorously objective. In order to enjoy a rich and deep sense of aesthetic taste, a critic should have mastery of linguistics. For this, a combined approach of literary criticism and literary stylistics is required.

The field of stylistics is quite vast, comprising of different approaches and tools which can be helpful in analyzing a literary discourse. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, 'language' whose main aim or function is to communicate, is understood as the most efficient means of expressing the subject. Language is the collective inventory, the sum total of the structures available to the writer, while 'style' concerns the characteristic choices in the given context, "what one wants to write about." Thus, in writing a 'grammar' of a text, the main concern will probably be with 'style,' than with the language in general, for it is not so much that every possible structure available is interesting. This stylistic choice is usually regarded as a matter of 'form' or 'expression' that is, as the choice among different ways of expressing a predetermined text. Jonathan Swift locates 'style' in the effective expressiveness of literary texts: "Proper words in proper places, make the true definition of style" (*Letter to a Young Gentleman in Holy Orders*).

Leech and Short indicate some contradictory views or theories of style. They note that a powerful tradition of thought limits style to "those choices which are choices of MANNER rather than MATTER, of EXPRESSION rather than CONTENT" (13). They call this approach 'dualist' as it is based on an assumed dualism that exists between form and meaning in language. However, an equally powerful and contradictory view is that form and content are not separate but one. Leech and Short cite Flaubert's remark: "It is like body and soul: form and content to me are one" (qtd. in Leech and Short 13). This approach is called 'Monist'. Another approach called 'stylistic pluralism' holds that "language performs a number of different functions, and any piece is likely to be the result of choices made on different functional levels" (Leech and Short 24). A pluralist, observe Leech and Short, is not satisfied with the division between 'expression' and 'content,' and "tries to distinguish between various strands of meaning according to the various functions" (24). Halliday is one of the proponents of this approach of Pluralism.

However, Leech and Short state that "Monism, dualism, pluralism, although apparently in conflict with one another, all have something to contribute to a comprehensive view of style" (31). The fact remains that any approach to 'style' will be in terms of both 'expression' and 'content.' 'Style' gives equal importance to the study of form as well as content, the formal surface structure at the manifest level and the deep structure of the semantic component at the deeper level, that is, expression level and the level of signification.

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