



THE MEDIATING ROLE OF STYLISTICS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LITERATURE STUDY.

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Abstract. In this article we highlighted the role of stylistics in teaching or learning different genres of literary works. In addition, we tried to reveal the reasons why students of English language courses at the English language and Literature department of high educational establishments in Uzbekistan have difficulty in literary criticism of a literary work even if it is a poem, prose or a newspaper article. The article also reveals the assumption that language learning and literary study are interdependent, stylistics is important to eliminate the artificial separation of language and literature not as a subject, but as the link between linguistics and literary criticism.

Key words: *literary work, literary criticism, critical opinion, stylistics, stylistic devices, genres, rhetorical devices, writer's artistry, poem, prose, newspaper article.*

In many countries, students at high educational establishments, especially in English language courses are required to read a considerable number of literary works. Generally, the major criterion for selecting texts is not their accessibility for nonnative speakers, but their status as major works in the literary list. As a lecturer of English Literature at the English language and Literature department of a pedagogical institute I had experience how to teach literature to the students and I drawn some conclusions. Thus, Beowulf of Old English, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and many other middle English writers, who are not easy even for native speakers, are obligatory reading for nonnative English speaker undergraduates whose own production of English may occasionally lapse into a confusion, misunderstanding or a comedy of errors.

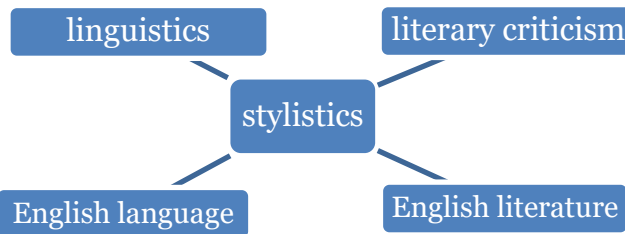
Students may be asked to translate literary works or analyze them from the view point of literary criticism when they obviously lack the analytical methods required to approach a difficult text containing low frequency or archaic lexis, different or not normal grammatical constructions, and difficult literary devices to understand. Since they have neither the confidence nor the skill to attempt a personal interpretation of the work in question, it goes without saying they have to turn to ready (published by someone else) criticism. Of course, students even teachers also do this. Many of them try to achieve a pass grade for a written assignment that is no more than an exercise in paraphrasing the words of some eminent lecturer. It is not unknown for a student to write such an essay without even going to the trouble to read the novel or play on which it is based.

It is hardly surprising if they sometimes repackage others' critical opinions and do not trust their own ability to interpret and evaluate a literary classic. However, in our opinion, the learners of English as a foreign language have to be given appropriate training to develop the necessary skills to find their own way into even quite difficult literary works. So, it is important to know and understand stylistics in order to understand the literary work and the author's expressions and meaning of

feelings, how artificially used the stylistic devices and what is meant in the literary work. To understand stylistics, it is important to eliminate the artificial separation of language and literature. McRae criticizes the practice of treating literary study and language learning as separate subjects: “Too often, in university systems all over the world, literature study is not related to language learning; one is considered something of a superior discipline, the other an inferior exercise (often entrusted to lower-level personnel). Language learning and literary study are interdependent and, in a special context, should be seen as complementary at all stages in the educational process”¹.

Widdowson sees stylistics not as a subject in its own right but as the link between two disciplines: linguistics and literary criticism. He presents the mediating role of stylistics as shown in the diagram below.

DISCIPLINES:



SUBJECTS:

According to Widdowson's model, the student may start from either language or literature and, passing through the intermediate stylistics stage, progress towards either linguistics or literary criticism. Brumfit and Carter also see a certain overlap between stylistics and literary criticism, the essential difference between the two being "the degree of detailed systematic attention given to the analysis of language"². Short and Candlin believe that the attention to language involved in stylistic analysis makes this approach particularly appropriate for nonnative speakers:

“The chief advantage is that, unlike English undergraduates, for example, foreign students have learned how to analyze sentences grammatically and frequently have a considerable awareness of English phonological structure. They are thus often more consciously aware of linguistic structure and better equipped to analyze it and its relationship to meaning than today's native-speaking undergraduate student of English”³.

Although stylistics entails linguistic analysis, it also develops the learner's literary competence. According to Lazar, learners who possess literary competence have an implicit understanding of and familiarity with certain conventions which enable them to take the words on the

¹ McRae, J. 1997. *Literature with a small T*. Hemel Hempstead, U.K.: Prentice Hall.

² Brumfit, C. J. and R. A. Carter. 1986. *Literature and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ Short, M. H. and C. N. Candlin. 1986. *Teaching study skills for English literature*. In *Literature and language teaching* eds.

page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meanings⁴. The relevant conventions include genres and rhetorical devices as well as interpretative skills. In other words, for nonnative speakers who initially lack the intuitive awareness necessary for literary criticism, stylistics provides systematic training (through the analysis of language) in the interpretative methods that can lead to increasing appreciation of a writer's artistry through language⁵. Therefore, stylistics may be seen as an aid to intuition and a preparation for literary appreciation.

In poetry it is not unusual to find the continuing use of lexis from a particular semantic field throughout the work. For instance, let's look at the poem by Emily Dickinson below:

*I taste a liquor never brewed,
From tankards scooped in pearl;
Not all the vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an alcohol!
Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew,
Reeling, through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.
When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the foxglove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more!
Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun!*

⁴ Lazar, G. 1993. Literature and language teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Brumfit, C. J. and R. A. Carter. 1986. Literature and language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In the poem “*I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed*” above, twelve of the sixteen lines contain references to alcohol and drinking, while Thoreau's “*Sic Vita*” develops the lexical field of flowers and plants through seven stanzas.

*I am a parcel of vain strivings tied
By a chance bond together,
Dangling this way and that, their links
Were made so loose and wide,
Methinks,
For milder weather.
A bunch of violets without their roots,
And sorrel intermixed,
Encircled by a wisp of straw
Once coiled about their shoots,
The law
By which I'm fixed.
A nosegay which Time clutched from out
Those fair Elysian fields,
With weeds and broken stems, in haste,
Doth make the rabble rout
That waste
The day he yields.
And here I bloom for a short hour unseen,
Drinking my juices up,
With no root in the land
To keep my branches green,
But stand*



In a bare cup.

Some tender buds were left upon my stem

In mimicry of life,

But ah! the children will not know,

Till time has withered them,

The woe

With which they're rife.

But now I see I was not plucked for naught,

And after in life's vase

Of glass set while I might survive,

But by a kind hand brought

Alive

To a strange place.

That stock thus thinned will soon redeem its hours,

And by another year,

Such as God knows, with freer air,

More fruits and fairer flowers

Will bear,

While I droop here.

We can see in the poems above that stylistics is about more than just vocabulary, however.

An important feature of distinguishing literary texts from other written genres is the creative writer's willingness to break the usual rules and conventions. Even popular writers cheerfully invent a neologism, convert a noun into a verb, treat an intransitive verb as if it were transitive, or link words to flout (intentionally break) the norms of collocation.

In prose works, we often find that the authors opening sentences employ pronouns in an unconventional way. There can be few language teachers who have not tried to make learners aware of textual cohesion by drawing their attention to the use of pronouns and related possessive adjectives



for anaphoric reference. In most non-literary texts the convention is clear: pronouns refer back to previously mentioned people, things, and events.

Let's look at the opening sentence of Hemingway's story "*The Snows of Kilimanjaro*" "*The marvelous thing is that **its** painless, **he** said.*" We do not know who *he is*, nor what *it* refers to. Here the two pronouns are used for cataphoric reference; they indicate a person who will be identified and a fact that will be explained later in the text. Revelation is not immediate because a dialogue follows in which we will not even discover the gender of the man's interlocutor until the eighteenth line. We must read on considerably further to learn that *he* is named Harry and *it* is gangrene, which has eliminated the pain from his leg wound. The trick of teasing the reader by deliberately withholding key information is a technique that skillful authors employ to stimulate our curiosity and persuade us to carry on reading. Newspaper reporters, in contrast, know that their readers want the important facts quickly and briefly.

A useful classroom activity is to have learners read two texts of different genres — one is a newspaper report, the other is the opening to a short story or a novel and to have them analyze the use of pronouns. It is likely that in the newspaper report all the pronouns will refer back to people or events mentioned in the first two paragraphs. Indeed, having got the key facts, we often do not bother to read the entire article. The literary texts often contain pronouns and high-frequency common nouns that are identified later in the text. By doing this activity, learners will become aware of an important feature of literary prose. This activity might direct attention towards the journalist's repeated use of names and words and the creative writer's preference for synonym and metaphor to avoid repetition.

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