

Aspects of Stylistics

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Abstract

This paper discusses the definition and scope of stylistics. Stylistics is approached as the study of language used by authors. Some dictionary definitions are listed and discussed. It is shown that stylistics is a combination of linguistics and literary studies. Stylistics is seen as a part of the interacting zone between language and creativity. Manner of linguistic expressions, literary criticism, relationship between stylistics and social functions, and use of nonverbal communication as a part of stylistics are suggested in this paper.

Key words: Stylistics, literary expressions, linguistic expressions, social functions, nonverbal communication.

Study of Language Used by Authors

Stylistics is a branch of Linguistics that scrutinizes the intrinsic beauty of language used by the authors. It persuades us to investigate the various language features systematically. It determines the role of linguistics in literary interpretation. According to Halliday, “We can define linguistic stylistics as the description of literary texts, by methods derived from general linguistic theory, using the categories of the description of the language as a whole; and the comparison of each text with others, by the same and by different authors in the same and in different genres.” Hence there is a strong link between the textual context and the linguistic frame. Dr. Radhey. L. Varshney says, “The relationship between linguistics and literature is like that of the hammer and the anvil” (1977).

Dictionary Definitions

In viewing style in general terms, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2005) defines stylistics in the seventh edition as the study of style and the methods used in written language. *Macmillan English Dictionary for advanced learners* (2002) defines stylistics as the study of style especially in language and literature. *The Chambers Dictionary* (2001)

defines stylistics as the science of the variations in language, including the effective values of different words, forms and sounds that constitute style in the literary and also the wider sense. It defines 'Style' as the manner of writing, mode of expressing thought in language or of expression, execution, action or bearing generally; a literary composition; the distinctive manner peculiar to an author or other. Hence style is 'manner of writing speaking or doing; collective characteristics of the writing or diction or artistic expression... proper to a person or school or period or subject; and noticeably superior quality or manner' (*Oxford Dictionary*). Subsequently the notion of style depends on the perspective of the observer of the author's individual choice and talent.

Combination of Linguistics and Literary Studies

Stylistics as a branch of study intermingles and interpenetrates linguistics and literary studies and makes deep inroads into both fields. It brings to light the linguistic characteristics of the literary analysis through minute observations of language features. So stylistics can be referred to as the interdisciplinary branch between linguistics and literature.

The linguistic components include phonetic, phonemic, morphemic, syntactic, lexical and graphological contexts. The literary or the textual components include the period in which the text is written, type of speech of the characters with regard to their culture, age, gender, social strata, qualification, experience and other such factors.

Hence stylistic analysis interprets any literary form with regard to the function of the language, with reference to various social contexts, with regard to the mental status and experience of the author; it also includes other norms such as the choice of a word. It is not only with reference to the suitability in the sentence, but also the suitability according to the social context. This means the character of a literary work speaks the type of language/dialect and acts according to a particular socio-cultural context. Hence, Style as described by Dr. Radhey. L. Varshney in *An Introduction to textbook of Linguistics and Phonetics*, which was published in 1977, is: "an individual and creative utilization of the resources of language which his period, his chosen dialect, his genre and his purpose within it offer him. It further involves all choices, organization, categorization, contrast, frequencies of the linguistic features of a passage, a threadbare and objective study of the phonetic features, graphology,

phonology, lexis, morphology, syntax, semantics, social-psychic background of a literary text... ”

Intersecting Zone – Focus on Verbal Art

The concept of the relationship between linguistics and literary analysis is that the field of stylistics acts as an intersecting zone of both fields. The components such as literature, linguistics and stylistics are superimposed in the totality of language. Hence stylistics as a discipline or as a study should be seen in the totality with reference to the components mentioned above.

Language is a word art. It is a verbal art and in turn it is verbal beauty. Words embellish the language and are illuminated in the form of style. Style, though a facet of language, depends on the individual characters that have strong relationship with the sociological, cultural, educational, and economical factors. The concept of style also depends on the period. The language of the discourse of the characters in association with the above said factors takes different shapes in the hands of the author. The characters of the literary work are mere puppets in the hands of the writer and the language used in their discourse, though they are influenced by several sociological aspects, are subject to the choice of the author. In this regard, Arthur Schopenhauer says: “Style is the physiognomy of the mind” (1952). Hence the study of the language features is the study of the literary style of the author.

Enkvist in his essay, ‘On Defining Style’ in *Linguistics and Style*, (1964) mentions six approaches to style:

- (i) As an embellishment, ‘a shell surrounding a pre-existing core of thought or expression’;
- (ii) As the choice between alternate expressions;
- (iii) As a set of individual characteristics;
- (iv) As deviations from the norm;
- (v) As a set of collective characteristics; and
- (vi) As a set of relationships among linguistic entities that are storable in terms of wider spans of text than the sentence.

Manner of Linguistic Expression

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams claims, Style has traditionally been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse - as to how speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say. The style specific to a particular work or writer, or else distinctive of a type of writings, has been analyzed in such terms as the rhetorical situation and aim, characteristic *diction*, or choice of words, type of sentence structure and *syntax* and the density and kinds of *figurative language*.

Literary Criticism

Stylistics is also a part of literary criticism as there is a strong link between literature and linguistics. Louis H. Gray, in his *Foundations of Language*, Macmillan, New York, 1939, says: 'between true literature and linguistics there is no conflict; the real linguist is at least half a *littérateur* and the real *litterateur* at least half a linguist.' (143)

Social Functions and Stylistics

Although technically speaking, stylistics is the study of the linguistic features such as phonological, lexical, syntactical features of a literary text, how such features affect and are affected by the socio-cultural norms and deviations is an integral part of stylistics. In Widdowson's (1974:173) view, 'stylistics is the study of the social function of the language and is a branch of what has come to be called socio-linguistics.'

Creativity and Stylistics

Even though 'stylistics' deals with the systematic portrayal of the language features by the authors, it is strongly influenced and associated with the societal or the sociological aspects and the context. In the web of a particular period which serves as the society's conventional norms, the author skilfully depicts his talent by framing a network. In this regard Chomsky (1968) comments on the notion of the creativity in language as: 'the distinctively human ability to express new terms and to understand entirely new expressions of thought, within the frame work of an instituted language, a language that in a cultural product subject to laws and principles partially unique to it and partially reflections of general properties of mind.'

In view of the various definitions given by different scholars, it has been observed that each scholar has his/her own notion of style and expressive skills differ in each person.

On the basis of the above argument it can be noted that an author's stylistic features can be identified in view of his inimitable approach towards the language and its use. The author in terms of his context creates a world and makes his characters behave in that framework and presents the culture and traditions in vogue during the prevailing period. Hence with regard to the societal trends and by their interaction the characters are made to reveal their emotions in the form of discourse and non-verbal communicative gestures. The outburst of emotions through verbal language is exposed in the language structure and language use of the author with the help of metaphors, similes idiomatic expressions, special expressions etc.

Since all the activities of the characters are based on the context there is a formidable link between 'Stylistics' and 'Socio linguistics'. Kumar (1988) says that style can be viewed from two perspectives. The broader view of style is in consonance with sociolinguistic principles, and the narrower view of style is restricted to the literary corpus. Spilner (1974) asserts that 'stylistics and sociolinguistics are indeed concerned with the same problem of utterances conveying the same information and having the same semantic value, but differing either in some additional aesthetics information... or in some information qualifying the speaker as to his membership in some social group...' Widdowson (1975) states that stylistics is the study of the social function of language. Therefore society, language and individual contribute in the analysis of style.

Nonverbal Communication and Stylistics

Aspects of nonverbal communication also must be considered as part of stylistics. Characters differ from one another as to how they employ nonverbal features. Events also demand a variety of fixed and flexible nonverbal use. Emotions bring out a variety of nonverbal features and characters and contexts could impose conditions on the expression of nonverbal features (Thirumalai, 1987 and 2009).

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