



Style, stylistics and stylistic analysis: A re-evaluation of the modern-day rhetorics of literary discourse

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Abstract

Stylistics is the study of language and the language of literature in all its manifestation and is, one of the moderate approaches to literature. The present paper is a modest attempt to re-evaluate the gradual development in the discipline from old discourse to the modern including the ideas of Michael Halliday, Widdowson and Geoffrey Hartman. A special focus has been laid on the concept of 'Style' tracing back from ancient understanding to the modern conceptions of the term. At the end of the paper, a stylistic analysis has also been made to practically observe the stylisticians' assumptions of discourse analysis.

Keywords: style, stylistics, discourse analysis, syntax, the rainbow, my heart leaps up, the child is the father of the man, literary criticism, linguistic exploration

Introduction

At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, the art of rhetoric almost ended and fell in a state where scholars assumed it in linguistics. But in the beginning of the 20th century it came back in the literary debate as 'Stylistics', though, the term stylistics had been used since the early nineteenth century. In modern times, it is 'an analytical science which covers all the expressive aspects of language as phonology, prosody, morphology, syntax and lexicology' (Cuddon 872). Stylistics in general is an enquiry or a study of language of literature in all its manifestation, a study of literary discourse which tends to study different styles in language use. According to Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, stylistics is 'an aspect of literary study that emphasizes the analysis of various elements of style' and 'the devices in language that produce expressive value'. Stylistics is one of the most moderate approaches to literature.

Stylistics after the 1950^s and 60^s onwards has been applied to critical procedures which seem to replace what is claimed to be the subjectivity and impressionism, the standard analysis with an objective or scientific analysis of the style of literary text. Renowned scholars like Saussure and Jakobson have shaped the course of stylistics— and much of the impetus for the analytical and practical application was also provided by Russian Formalism and as well as European structuralist approach. Michael Halliday, Widdowson and Geoffrey Hartman are mostly linked with stylistic analytical practice. But interestingly all three differ from each other. For example when Halliday in 1966 analyzed "Leda and Swan," his main purpose was to illustrate the application of the categories and methods of his theory to the analysis of literary texts. He tabulated the results of his investigation of verbal groups in the poem and then made an observation on the lexically more effective verbal items. His analysis remains unrelated to the interpretation and understanding of the text. Halliday introduced the term 'Register' in his book, *Linguistic Function*

and *Literary Style* (1971) to explain the connection between dialect and register.

Widdowson on the other hand says that Halliday stops only with the textual analysis, and he does not proceed ahead to the 'discourse analyses. He assigned no importance to meaning, therefore, for justification, experts opine that Geoffrey Hartman analyses "Leda and the Swan" in the poststructuralist frame work. The concept of 'discourse analysis' emerged in 1980s which enabled linguistics to comment on, and analyze the structure of complete piece of writing, rather than just isolated phrases and sentences to which it previously been restricted with. This development came to be called as the 'New Stylistics'.

As mentioned above, while making stylistic analysis, its levels are identified as, Phonology, Graphology, Lexico-Syntax and Morphology. 'Graphology is the analogous study of languages, writing system or orthography as seen in various kinds of handwritings or topography (Albi 170). According to Lodge 'Phonology describes the ways in which speech sounds are organized and generated in language' (Ofuya 14). Morphology in linguistic terms, studies the form words, shapes or structures in particular and lexico syntax which is also known as lexicosemantics.

In the words of Crystal and Davy, Graphology 'refers to the whole writing system: punctuation and paragraphing as well as shaping' (Leech 39). Graphology also includes foregrounding of quotation marks, ellipses, periods, hyphens, contracted form, especial structures, the full stop, the colon, the coma, the semicolon, the question mark, the dash, lowercase letters, capitalization, small print spacing and italics.

Language use is claimed to have specialization and possesses unique characteristics. An individual can appear to be capable of having unknown varieties of language. A person can bring but the needed and expected verities at a time appropriately according to the context, situation and condition. These

unknown numbers of varieties differ person to person, age to age, gender to gender, profession to profession and region to region. In language, the unknown numbers of unique varieties are infinite. The time language comes in use, especially with literary and creative writers, the sustained engagement, creative and authoritative impulse, infinitive nature, and unique artistic ways of expression with a variety of language use become the medium of recognition which shape the identity of a writer. The choice of certain words, phrases, expressions, syntactical structures, periodic and non-periodic sentences and the choice of short and long sentences develop and form a particular style, which keeps an individual apart from the other writers' i. e. aphoristic style of Bacon, known for short and witty sentences, which are full of practical wisdom and the autobiographical style of Charles Lamb, known for sensational style and also the style of antithesis and wit of Lyly.

Stylistics simply results from 'style' which is, in a widely held view, correspondence between thought and expression. The notion of style is based on the assumption that of the two functions of language i.e. means of communication and also a means of shaping one's thought. The first one is communicative and the second one is expressive. Generally it is defined as the ability to write clearly and correctly. Specifically it belongs to the realm of Grammar and sets up a number of rules and general acceptance as how to speak and how to write—it discards all kinds of deviations as being violations of the existing norms.

There are some nomenclatures or devices such as onomatopoeia, a combination of speech sounds which aim at initiating sounds produced or found in nature i.e. sound of wind, sea and thunder etc. Alliteration, again a phonetic stylistic device which aims at imparting a melodic effect to the utterances, the repetition of similar sounds especially the consonant sounds. Rhyme, which is the repetition of identical or similar terminal sounds combined and placed at a regular distance. Rhyme exists in all spheres of human activity.

For Cicero and other classical rhetoricians, styles were usually classified into three main standards i.e. first, high or grand style, second, the middle or mean, third, low or plain style. The Canadian critic, Northrop Frye introduced various kinds of analysis of stylistics' level in literature. He makes primary differentiation between the *denotative style* and *hieratic style*. *Denotative style* is molded on language, rhythm and the association of ordinary speech. *Hieratic style* employs a variety of formal elaboration that separates the literary language from ordinary speech.

There are mainly two types of sentence structures commonly distinguished as 'periodic sentence and non-periodic sentence or loose sentence. A periodic sentence is one in which the component part of units are so composed that the syntactic structure remains suspended or complex until the end of the sentence. The effect tends to be formal or oratorical. The non-periodic or loose sentences are more relaxed and conversational in their effects.

In prose style, two categories of style are also discussed as Parataxis and Hypotaxis. Parataxis is simply composed of 'para' and 'taxis' meaning 'beside' and 'argument', more precisely that is an act of placing words side by side. It is a literary technique in writing or speaking which have short and

simple sentences with the use of coordinating rather than subordinating conjunctions. In parataxis style units or members within a sentence or in a sequence of meaningful complete sentences are set after one another without any expression of their connection or relation as using the word "and" i.e. Ernest Hemingway's style in characteristically parataxis where he uses "and" as: "*It was dim and dark and the pillars went high up and there were people praying and it smelt of incense and there were some wonderful big buildings.*" (*The Sea Also Rises* 1926)

The hypotaxis style is in the temporal, casual, logical and syntactic relations between variant units and the sentences are specified by words such as "when", "then", "because", "therefore" or some times by phrases such as "in order to", "as a result" or by the use of sub-ordinate phrases and clauses for example the language of Abram's in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (2005). Abram has mainly used hypotaxis style which is an unequal arrangement of sentences. Hypo means 'beneath' or unequal sentence structures e. g. lines in John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale": "O, for a draught of vintage! That hath been / Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth, / Tasting of Flora and country green" (Stanza II, 1.11-13). Pure, ornate, florid, gay, sober, simple, elaborate and so on are the kinds of styles used in English. English style is also classified according to the periods or conventions of literary history i. e. "Metaphysical," "Restoration Prose Style," "Biblical Style," "Euphemistic Style," "Miltonic Style," "Shakespearean Style," "Practical Style," "Contemplative Style," "Prophetic Style," "Romantic Style" and "Subjective or Objective Style."

Style is the result of choice making activity in language use, the normal and especial both, whether made in text book or in the real life. In ancient time, for Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, 'style' was considered as "*the ornament of thought.*" Swift thought that style is "proper words in proper places." There are psychological theories of style that are based on the assumptions that it reflects one's personality. This is the only reason that Buffon defined style as "*the style is the man himself.*" The analysis of style often tries to relate distinctive stylistic features to trace the author's psyche, or author's characteristic ways of perceiving the world, phenomenon and organizing—and formulating the experiences.

In his essay "What is Stylistics and Why are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?," the well-known literary theorist, Stanley Fish has given a sharp critique of the scientific presentation of formal stylistics. Being a Reader Response Theorist, he has consideration that since the meaning of the text consists of a reader's total response to it—there is no valid way to make distinction in the process of response between style and context.

Generally there appear two distinguished approaches in stylistics—first, the mode of formal stylistics, where style is identified in a quite traditional way by making the distinction between content and the form of the text. The content is often denoted as 'information', 'meaning' or some 'propositional meaning'. In this mode style is taken as variation in the presentation of the 'message', information or the 'propositional meaning' that serve to distinguish and alter its aesthetic quality or reader's emotional response. Apart from

the other observations, the concepts of modern linguistics are used to identify the stylistic features which are specific and distinctive of a particular work, author, a literary tradition or a literary era. These stylistic features may be diverse— first phonological, the patterns of speech sounds, meter, rhyme and sound, second syntactic, the types of sentence structure, third, lexical, the abstract and concrete affair of words, the relative frequency of part of speeches, fourth, the rhetorical feature, the affective use of figurative language e. g. foregrounding, deviation and metaphorical use of language.

The second mode of stylistics has been prominent since the mid-1960s till present. According to M.H. Abrams, the proponents of Stylistics greatly kept expanding the conception and scope of their analytical enquiry. Here stylistics is taken as, in the words of a theorist, “*the study of the use of language in literature*” which involves the entire range of the “*general characteristics of language..... as a literary expression*” (Leech19).

The first initial instance of Stylistics is traced back in Russian Formalism in 1920, where Roman Jakobson's closing Statement in the famous “*Conference of Style*” held in 1958 and *Style in Language* edited by Thomas Sebeok which became the manifesto of stylistics studies. The other important work is the *Essay on Style and Language: Linguistics and Critical Approaches to Literary Styles* edited by Roger Tower in 1966— since then it has been followed by a number of books and various articles as well. *Linguistic and Literature: An Introduction to Literary Style* (1974) by Raymond Chapman, *Language and Literature: An Introductory Reader in Stylistics* (1982), edited by Roald Carter, *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* (1975) by H.G. Widdowson, and *Language, Text and Context: Essays in Stylistics* (1989), edited by Michael Toolan are the major contributions in the discipline. Amongst the modern prominent scholars of Stylistics studies are Freeman, Leech, Short, Candin and Cartor.

Stylistics, apart from being an integral part of different styles is sub-categorized into five sections by Carter, first, Linguistic Stylistic, second, Literary Stylistics, third, Stylistics and Discourse, fourth, Pedagogical Stylistics, fifth Stylists and the Foreign Language Learner.

In the same fashion, the style is analyzed concisely in five different ways. First, style as personality or individuality, which appears to be a relational term. Second, style as choice from variants, the selection from a total linguistic repertoire— individuals have the right to choose from the available possibilities which is appropriate and fits in to the concerning work. Third, style as deviation from the norms as language in general is behaviorally governed by rules and norms, when something is set or done in an unconventional way or against the traditionally accepted rules, often found in creative writing. It is most common at both lexical and syntactical levels and is mostly used for effective communication. Fourth, style as situation or relationship between message and medium. The medium of a message can be both formal or informal and written or spoken. As we know language is in flux or in constant change, there is variation in language use, i.e. the kind of language used in court room will be different from the one used in class room or in information media. Thus, the concept of medium and message becomes

indispensable in Stylistics. Fifth, style as a temporal phenomenon, here style is referred as being old or new or out of vogue, ancient and modern style. There are features for certain periods attached to the mode of style, therefore, language style changes time to time. Style is recognized by the predominant features of the fashion of the period i.e. Anglo-Saxon time, Chaucerian time, Elizabethan time, Classical time, Victorian time, Romantic time, Old, Middle and Modern ages or times.

Now in sum, the term Stylistics practically makes an analysis using any of the above discussed approaches explained above. It is apparently conducted by means of the levels of analysis. After the discussion of the sub-categories of stylistics, I would explain briefly the levels of stylistic analysis and the element employed under them respectively.

Stylistics uses specialized technical terms and concepts which are derived from the science of linguistics, terms like ‘transitivity’, ‘under lexicalization’, collocation, coherence and cohesion. Stylistics, therefore, attempts to study and analyze the deviation in a literary text, a text which does not subscribe to the norms and models of linguistic description. Though Widdowson has famously opposed Michael Halliday's finding and that of generative grammarians who claim that grammar is the model of the speaker's knowledge of his language as Widdowson argues in the following lines:

It is common to find sentences in literature which are not generated by grammatical rules. It is possible to specify the nature of the deviation of these sentences by referring to the base rules, sub categorization rules and selection restriction rules. (Widdowson 25)

The stylistic study takes a literary piece as a text and points out precisely where in the text deviation has occurred and how it defies the traditional grammatical rules. It displays how a writer achieves the desired effect in his writing by deviating the grammar rules.

Thus according to Widdowson, stylistics would be ‘the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation’. He is trying to take the view that what distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other is that ‘a means of linking the two’ we arguably propose that stylistics occupies the middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism, and no function is to mediate between the two. Stylistics is, therefore, a study or a field that combines both literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other hand as the morphological make up displays: ‘style’ component relating it to literary criticism and the ‘istics’ components to linguistics (Widdowson3). In his book *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry has stated the same point:

Stylistics moves beyond ‘sentence grammar’ to ‘text grammar’ considering how the text works as a whole to achieve (or not) its purpose (for instance, to amuse, to create suspense, or to persuade) and examining the linguistic features which contribute to these ends. (Peter Barry 207)

Now all I had to say about the concept or the theory of Stylistics, ended. It is time to examine stylisticians' claim of

stylistic analysis by doing the practice of stylistic reading of a literary piece. For this stylistic operation I have selected a very simple and short poem of William Wordsworth, a simple nine line poem. The poem is titled “My Heart Leaps up” or: *The Rainbow*:

My heart leaps up when I behold
 A rainbow in the sky:
 So was it when my life began;
 So is it now I am a man;
 So be it when I shall grow old,
 Or let me die!
 The Child is father of the Man;
 I could wish my days to be
 Bound each to each by natural piety.

The poem at first may appear to be of a simple little rhyme, which seems to be a product of emotional upheaval and of remarkable skill— people may think that short works are more difficult than writing a long one. Presenting, therefore, a complex idea is not such an ominous task when one does it in many pages, it is when that the same complex thought is to be distilled until its potent essence remains that true genius is required, that is what “The Rainbow” is all about. In a few simple lines, it encompasses almost all of the themes which are central to the British Romantic Revival Movement. The poem is an embodiment of romanticism by form, content and structure.

First, as I have the liberty, would emphasize on the linguistic aspect of the text. The half of the poem is in present tense and other half in future tense. A single line “*So was it when my life began*” is in the past tense in setting. The lines “*My heart leaps up when I behold / So is it now I am a man / Or let me die*” and “*The Child is the father of the man*” are openly set in present tense grammatically. The second other half lines’ “*So be it when I shall grow old / my days to be/ Bound each to each by natural piety*” are set in future tense. The first half of the poem is about the present condition, evolution and development. The central point of the poem lies in “*The Child is father of the man,*” and the second half of the poem expresses all about hope and natural piety that is one of the major features of romanticism. The line “*So was it when my life began*” tells the element of permanence in the temporary world.

The pronoun ‘I’ occurs four times, “My” three times, in nine lines only. This reflects true nature of the involvement of the “self” and “personality” which is quite prevalent subject in romanticism. The adverbs are quite suggestive psychosocially as – “Up”, “When” and “Now”. The main verbs, leaps, behold, began, grow, wish, and die are representing the phenomenon of “*spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,*” the most celebrated notion of romanticism with the tripartite setting of God or the father indicative of ‘*natural piety*’ man; sky or rainbow, for the world and the inter-relation to each other. The rhyme scheme of the poem follows as abccabdc.

Now, from the aspect of literary criticism, the poem embodies the following romantic themes such as the importance of the emotions, the idea of the importance and holiness of nature, the idea of the transience of joy, the ecstasy of revelation, the springs’ creative power, the concern for the loss of creative

power, the loss and joy of childhood, the sanctity and the theme of the exalted position of a rustic man.

The importance of overwhelming emotion is exposed in the very first line of the poem. The idea is the foundation of a reaction movement, which was a reaction to the inordinate emphasis being put on reason, empirical knowledge and book learning by philosophers of the enlightenment to the down play of emotions, intuitive knowledge and natural learning. The importance of nature is another romantic them, an experience, out of doors, as he gazes at the sky, the idea of transience of joy, the rainbow, an eternal thing, a starry way to the heavens, a bond; that one feels with God in a state of joy. Here in the poem, we have two major themes which are quite hard to deal with separately. In Wordsworth’s view, they are inextricably intertwined. These are the themes of the quasi holiness of children vs. the pitiful recompensed state into which we drift as we age and the concern of the loss of creative power.

The Fifth and Sixth lines: “*So be it when I shall grow old / Or let me die!*” are expressing an yearning for an ongoing union with the Ultimate Reality, a continual sense of harmony with the Universe, a want of natural affinity for nature, as does a child, and wants to find a creative inspiration. There is a noble quest but also- there is something which will not be!

There is a fear that the joy will leave him. The author sees childhood as a time, full of awe of nature, innocence and intuition. The idea of child is a wiser philosopher rather than the bumbling adults. Through the notion of the significance of the common man is not mentioned directly. By choosing classic Ballad Stanza, the poet is telling great deal about his values, the poetic form that is used for folk songs of the time, the poetics of rustic people which rose to an exalted position by British Romantic School.

Wordsworth must have taken the service seriously important in his time when urbanization and industrialization were lulling man into a spiritual atrophy. Wordsworth looks concerned with moving the reader emotionally for prodding him to re-establish his too long dormant relationship with God and so is in our time that is all ‘virtual’ at the verge of total spiritual and intellectual decay. The stylistic analysis of the poem has been made keeping both the aspects in mind i. e. literary criticism or literary stylistics and linguistics stylistics by the fulfillment of the gapes or of bridging them together equally for the actual justification of the poem. Thus not to exaggerate but in real sense, stylistic leaves no corner left in terms of artistic and linguistic exploration, appreciation and interpretation. Stylistics appears to be a useful and quite a valid approach for the textual interpretation for literature in all its manifestation.

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