DOING IT WITH STYLE:
The Role of Stylistics in ESL

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OUTLINE

I. Identifying stylistics as linguistic study of style in language

- how texts (and utterances) **project** meaning,
- how interlocutors **construct** meaning,
- why they **respond** to utterances in the way they do
- linguistic **interfaces** and their effects on reading texts and understanding utterances.

II. Providing necessary theoretical context

- the scope, aims and traditions of stylistics study,
- conceptions of stylistics
- principles of stylistics

III. Recent developments as applicable in ESL

IV. Conclusions and further directions

I. STYLISTICS AS LINGUISTIC STUDY OF STYLE IN LANGUAGE

Stylistics as Sub-department of Linguistics

„Stylistics has always caused controversy: there are those who deny its usefulness, and those for whom it is an essential branch of applied linguistics. This is partly because it has proved notoriously difficult to define, since it functions as an umbrella term, covering a range of different stylistic approaches to the study of text."

(Clark - McRae 2004: 328-346)

- ❖ The range of texts from an initial preoccupation with "literary" texts to include **any kind, written or spoken**

- ❖ The range of disciplines from which stylistic theory and practice draws no longer limited to **linguistics**, but also includes **literary theory**, **psychology**, and **social theory**.

- ❖ What draws all these different aspects of stylistics together is **the centrality of the language of the text** – be it poem, advert or E-text – to the consideration of its possible interpretation(s).

The Study of Style in ESL:
Text and Style

Everyday notion of style → distinctive manner of expression → language style: distinctive linguistic expression:

What makes an expression distinctive?

Why it has been devised?

What effect it has?

Stylistics defined as

➢ the analysis of <u>distinctive expression</u> in language and

➢ the description of its <u>purpose and effect</u>

What is Style?

Style as motivated choice

- writer´s/speaker´s choice
- in SA not so much focused on every form and structure in a text, as on those which stand out in it
- foregrounding
- intertextuality
- potential style markers (e.g. repetitions, deviations from the rules)
- expected forms & rules/conventions in particular text type or context

→ **concept of style crucially involves choice**

→ **style in context**

→ **style and persuasive effect**

The message written on one of the blackboards the Underground's staff uses to communicate their thoughts to passengers:

YOU ARE PROBABLY WONDERING WHY THE ESCALATORS SO OFTEN AREN'T WORKING? WE SHALL TELL YOU! IT IS BECAUSE THEY ARE OLD AND OFTEN GO OUT OF ORDER. SORRY! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

Stylistics as a branch of applied linguistics

- Descriptive linguistics (grammar = models and „tools" of analysis)

- Literary theory (reception theory = including the reader to SA)

- Cognitive linguistics (psychological theories of processing)

Stylistics and pedagogy

➢ teaching of representational language*, how it works

within a text

➢ both native and non-native speaker context

Stylistic analysis to explicate **how our understanding of a text is achieved**, by examining in detail the linguistic organization of a text and **how a reader needs to interact** with that linguistic organization to make sense of it. But the main purpose of stylistics is to show how interpretation is achieved, and hence provide support for a particular view of the work under discussion.

(Short 1995: 53)

Referential vs. Representational Language

☐ Referential – purely transactional with no requirement for processing and interpretation (in most textbooks for teaching & learning ESL or EFL)

☐ Representational – any use of language which makes an appeal to imagination & affective side of interlocutors (idioms, advertisements, modality, text worlds are all textual elements crucial to the processing of this linguistic material)
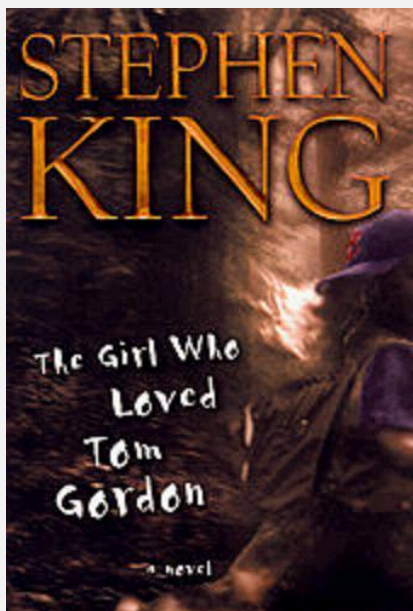
(McRay 1997)

Stylistics and pedagogy

➢ Checklists

➢ Literature in a foreign language

➢ Approaching the text (formal analysis)

➢ Approaching the text (re-writing exercise)

„a plethora of checklists"

❖ covering the linguistic features of texts and tools used by an author

❖ a fingerprint to any text – clues as to *how* it means rather than simply *what* it means

❖ an intention to elucidate the *processes* in writing and reading,

❖ empowering the reader to develop **language awareness**, **text awareness**, and **cultural awareness** in the reading of all texts, whether "literary" or not

(Textbooks: Clark, 1996; McRae, 1997; Simpson, 1997; Thornborrow & Wareing, 1998; Toolan, 1998).

'She took a moment to steel herself and then stepped into the stagnant water, startling up a cloud of waterbugs and releasing a stench of peaty decay. The water was not quite up to her knees. The stuff her feet were sinking into felt like cold, lumpy jelly. Yellowish bubbles rose in the disturbed water; swirling in them were black fragments of who knew what.
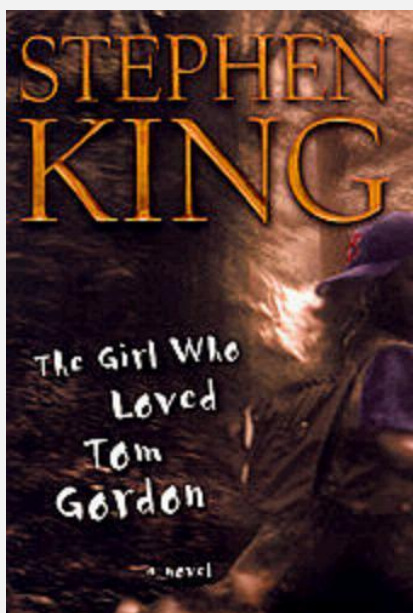
'Gross,' she moaned, moving forward toward the nearest hummock. 'Oh, gross.

Gross-gross. Gag a maggot.'

She walked in lurching forward strides, each ending in a hard yank as she pulled her foot free. She tried not to think of what would happen if she couldn't do that, if she got stuck in the bottom of ooze and started to sink.

'Gross-gross-gross.' It had become a chant. Sweat ran down her face in warm droplets and stung in her eyes. The crickets seemed stuck on one high endless note: *reeeeeeeee*. Ahead of her, on the hummock which was her next stop, three frogs jumped out of the grass and into the water, *plip-plip-plop*.

'Bud-Why-Zer,' Trisha said, and smiled wanly. There were tadpoles by the thousands swimming in the yellow black murk around her.'

'She took a moment <u>to steel herself</u> and then stepped into the <u>stagnant water</u>, startling up a cloud of waterbugs and releasing a <u>stench of peaty decay</u>. The water was not quite up to her knees. <u>The stuff</u> her feet were <u>sinking into</u> felt like <u>cold, lumpy jelly</u>. <u>Yellowish</u> bubbles rose in the <u>disturbed</u> water; swirling in them were black fragments of <u>who knew what.</u>

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<u>*Lexical,</u> phonetic, intertextuality

Checklists featured in EFL textbooks using stylistics
commonly include some or all of the following:

- lexis,
- syntax,
- cohesion,
- semantics,
- phonology,
- graphology,
- dialect/variety,
- register,
- period/intertextuality,
- function,
- etc.

Stylistics in Learning and learning

- S in academic study = Learning

- S in learning = S for students of English language and literature (S in textual understanding)

The web-based course by Mick Short (Ling 131, *Language and Style*, 2001) http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/stylistics/index.htm

STYLISTICS AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION
Assets of Modern Stylistics

➢ *heuristic value of stylistics (learning and discovery)*

➢ its *critical potential* (critical reading and interpretation by highlighting and explaining linguistic patterns)

➢ *linguistic function* (testing base for linguistic theories)

➢ *intersubjective role* (systematic and principled methods = different readers reach certain *interpretative consensus about a text*")

➢ *generic application* of stylistics (*emphasis placed on the relationship of literature to other types of discourse)*

(Simpson 1997)

Assets of Modern Stylistics Reconsidered

- Pragmatic and sociolinguistic approaches
- Techniques for the analysis of
  - ✓ discursive interaction
  - ✓ conversation structure
  - ✓ dialogue of both fiction and non-fiction texts
- Cognitive stylistics
- Schema theory
- Textualist vs. Contextualist stylistics
  - ✓ Text-as-product view vs. discourse-as-process view

The Nuances of Meaning Encoded in the Network of Lexical and Contextual Meanings:

"Butterfly saris, workaday cardigans that make the statement, if you chose to live in a cold northern country, then this is the penalty. Never has there been a sadder sartorial marriage than saris with cardigans."

(Lessing 1993: 84)

- A vivid picture of multicultural London, an impressive depiction of a clash of different cultures, the uneasy adaptation of immigrants in a new setting and many other messages are palpable between the lines.

- However their full understanding is considerably determined by the reader's social and cultural background, his/her knowledge and personal experiences.

- An enhanced pragmatic approach in SA reveals a variety of sentence and text relations, pointing out the interaction between the writer and the reader. Such analysis illustrates the mutual effort on the author's and the recipient's part to contribute towards the process of efficient communication.

II. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The scope, aims and principles of stylistics

The scope

- ✓ Range of texts
- ✓ Range of theories
- ✓ Range of methods

Aims of SA

- ✓ Data
- ✓ Theories
- ✓ Literary and non-literary texts
- ✓ Defining the data
- ✓ Authorial versus genre style
- ✓ Matching data

Principles of stylistics

- ✓ Text-based
- ✓ Objectivity and empiricism
- ✓ Eclectic and open
- ✓ Choice, analysis, interpretation

Text - context – interpretation

Literary critics & stylisticians – an „objective" approach:

„Stylistics is only ´objective´ in the sense of being methodical, systematic, empirical, analytical, coherent, accessible, retrievable and consensual" (Wales 2001: 373)

It is not the purpose of SA to come up with „definitive" reading or interpretation of a text, but that undertaking an „objective" linguistic analysis of a text is one way of limiting the scope of possible interpretations, including misinterpretation. (Short 1988: 232)

III. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AS APPLICABLE IN ESL

Modern Stylistics

From formalist and structuralist beginning => three distinct but interrelated strands of stylistics:

1) Properties of a *text existing as an isolated item* in the world allows for considerations of the cultural and social contexts implicit in the language of the text, reading btw the lines)

2) Points of *contact between a text*, other texts, and their readers/listeners (as an interactive communicative act = cognitive stylistics)

3) Text and the consideration of its formal and psychological elements positioned *in sociocultural context* (CDA, from a static and monologic view toward more dynamic, cognitive, intertextual and interpersonal)

- Pragmatics (the structures of language actually in use),
- Critical discourse analysis (text – context: social relations, socio-political structures, e.g. the ideology underlying the text, etc.)

New directions

The spread of stylistic approaches is now moving more and more into the area of **cognitive stylistics**.

This is the most positive development in the field, both for native and non-native speakers, since it expands into keen awareness of the **sociopolitical background**, which inevitably affects the production and reception of texts (Stockwell 2002, 6–7).

This approach = *deixis and modality* attracting more and more attention within stylistics

Cognitive Stylistics

- Cognitive stylistics

- Schema theory

  ➢ Schemas, scripts and frames

- Conventional aspects of a situation

Conventional aspects of a situation

He had been so happy, moving to a small town not far from London. London was not what it was, it was full of people he didn't think were Londoners at all. And they talked in a funny way…

(DL: 128)

Trends and perspectives:

A variety of **branches of stylistics**:

- ✓ Historical stylistics
- ✓ Cognitive stylistics
- ✓ Pragmatic stylistics
    - ➤ Feminist stylistics
    - ➤ Discourse stylistics
- ✓ Corpus stylistics
- ✓ Pedagogical stylistics
- ✓ Computational stylistics
- ✓ Others…

Stylistics and pragmatics

Early works in stylistics

- focused primarily on the **formal linguistic elements of texts,** SA relatively straightforward (stylistic effects at just **one discourse level),** Stylistics in its infancy – the **lack of appropriate tools** for analysing **discursive interaction**

Modern works in stylistics

- Trying to identify the **stylistic effects in a text with multiple discourse levels,** identifying and isolating stylistic effects **at each of the text´s constituent discourse levels,** *Corpus stylistics* alleviated this problem to a certain extent, *Pragmatic and sociolinguistic approaches* added to the analytical toolkit of stylistics

Interaction in discourse

During the 1970s and 1980s, advances in pragmatics increased the scope of what stylistics was able to achieve.

Pragmatics is the study of:

> ➢ language is use,
>
> ➢ speaker meaning,
>
> ➢ how context effects meaning,
>
> ➢ how more gets communicated than said, etc.

Previously grammatical analysis enabled to uncover aspects of text structure (viewpoint), no means of revealing **the source of interpretative effects deriving from dialogue (drama, prose, casual conversations)**

> ➢ Techniques for the analysis of **conversation structure**
>
> ➢ Pragmatic **aspects of dialogue**

'The After Eight Collection'

Guarantee: Every care is taken to ensure that this product reaches you in good condition. If it does not, please return the pack and its contents to the Consumer Services Manager at the York address shown for purchases in the U.K., stating when and where it was purchased. We shall be pleased to reimburse your purchase and postage costs. Your statutory rights are not affected.

'The After Eight Collection'

Linguistic characteristics

- The language is formal and can be perceived as polite and/or traditional; focused on particular social groups of customers, also syntactic and lexical means serve this purpose, an intentional use of complex and periodic sentence structures, specific use of passive constructions, expressions of modality and „if" clauses.
- **Lexical means** enhance perception of a serious, professional and "caring" attitude of the company towards the customer.
- Verbal **expressions of politeness** and the use of deictic "you" and "your" outline formal/distant proximity.
- Generally speaking, the text has clear **intentionality**, **informativity**, exhibits clear **cohesive links**, and **coherence** is also satisfactory.

The message

can be briefly expressed by the saying

"The customer must be satisfied"

- A variety of interesting meanings can be encoded between the lines of this text,

- Specific background knowledge and context are needed
  - social,
  - cultural,
  - and historical aspects

- Culture specific context
  - the product can be viewed as a specific cultural phenomenon

Contrastive approaches to SA & ESL

Textualist stylistics

   basic unit of analysis = text

Contextualist stylistics

   basic unit of analysis = discourse

Considerable overlap between these two approaches

❖ **Text-as-product view**

  • Static analysis

  • Style markers

❖ **Discourse-as-process view**

  • Interactive analysis (dialogism)

  • Making meaning as a dynamic process

RAZORLIGHT PREPARE TO ROCK CITY

WHETHER you whisper about your greatness in protestations of humility before marrying a Hollywood actress and calling your children Apple, or you shout it from the rooftops while you're still filling support slots in toilets, a sell-out is still a sell-out.

But not to worry. Because even though your hardened supporters from back-in-the-day might not want to go with your career progression from singable indie ditties to bloated rock ballads, there's still enough ears out there to fill an arena.

So it is for Razorlight (we hope we didn't make that too difficult for you; subtlety is our middle name), whose irrepressible frontman, Johnny Borrell, couldn't even be thrown off track by the recent departure of his second drummer – Andy Burrows, who jumped ship in March.

And when you've got two multi-platinum records and three Top 4 albums to boast about, whose ego wouldn't need an arena to contain it?

Razorlight play the M.E.N. Arena on Saturday, May 9. £27.50. The Airborne Toxic Event and Howling Bells support. Call 0844 847 8000.

Published: Fri, 08 May, 2009

Inferential approach to text analysis

- inferences in everyday situations
- we don't really notice
- some examples draw our attention to inferential processes:

  - ✓ jokes
  - ✓ misunderstanding
  - ✓ 'contested meanings'
  - ✓ certain kinds of witty or playful language, including 'literary' or creative language

Headlines

STADIUM AIR CONDITIONING FAILS – FANS PROTEST

MARCH PLANNED FOR NEXT AUGUST

Humour and irony
The Late Show with David Letterman

LETTERMAN: People say New Yorkers can't get along. Not true. I saw two New Yorkers, complete strangers, sharing a cab. One guy took the tires and the radio; the other guy took the engine.

PALA DOES IT WITH STYLE

The Poetics And Linguistics Association

'I'm glad I'm not me.'

(Bob Dylan after reading in a newspaper that he smokes 80 cigarettes a day - *Don't Look Back*, 1965. dir. D.A. Penne baker)

'Well, I always thought it was a hard rain.'

(Bob Dylan after being asked what kind of rain he had in mind when writing his song '*A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall*'. The questioner suggested acid rain or some kind of post-nuclear rain)

'We´re running of time.'

'Time is infinite we cannot run out of time.'

(Russell Brand talks to Parliament about drug addiction)
http://thelaughbutton.com/video/video-russell-brand-talks-parliament-drug-addiction/

Activities which involve inference

o Reading and interpretation

o Writing

o Translation

o Editing

o Formal and informal evaluation

o Literary criticism

o Nonverbal communication

o Producing and understanding multimodal texts

IV. Conclusions and further directions

1) Stylistics as a coherent and methodologically sound discipline

Its central concern
- ✓ the way *cognitive and communicative effects* are achieved by means of *linguistic choices*

It therefore includes
- ✓ literary studies
- ✓ linguistics
- ✓ discourse studies

It mainly takes place within the boundaries of
- ✓ literary analysis,
- ✓ rhetoric,
- ✓ (critical) discourse analysis,
- ✓ applied linguistics, etc.

IV. Conclusions and further directions

Stylistics in ESL – outcomes

➢ *Theoretical* (formalist, descriptive > discoursal, analytical; single level > multilevel texts,; closed vs. open LS)

➢ *Methodological* (SA, CDA, CA, etc.)

➢ *Practical* (glossaries, check sheets, etc.)

Stylistics for ESL students

- ✓ **how** our *understanding of a text* is achieved,
- ✓ **how** readers *interact* with linguistic organization of a text to make sense of it,
- ✓ **awareness** of the *sociopolitical background*, which inevitably affects the **production and reception** of texts,
- ✓ familiarity with the *processes* of writing and reading,
- ✓ empowering the reader´s *language awareness*, *text awareness*, and *cultural awareness* in the reading of all texts
- ✓ *approaches*: conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, politeness theory, critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology, etc.

THANK YOU!

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