

Discourse Stylistics: An Appraisal of Fictional Oeuvre

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Abstract

Human experiences and literary compendium go hand in hand and establish a dynamic relationship between mode and motive in a text. A literary work is rendered in a context followed by genre related conventions, cast in a language alongside that discourse. The Discourse Stylistics seeks to investigate any literary text within these parameters. It is presumed that perusing a text on these poles will yield fruitful and comprehensive results.

Key Words: Discourse; Stylistics; Oeuvre; Mode; Motive; Parsing; lexical; Literary conventions; Inherent; Phonology; Graphology; Postulate.

There is always an inherent motive in literary oeuvre which a writer seeks to obtain by employing the complex of linguistic and literary features. Let it be initially admitted that to understand prose fiction or the novel, it is necessary to study technique because the novel is an artefact, a man-made object. Language is the medium of the novelist, and hence the technique of the novelist relates to his skill in handling language. Since a language system is a set of conventions of a whole community or culture, the study of the language of a novelist enables the linguist “to interpret a writer’s linguistic structures in relation to the values and preoccupations of the community for which he writes.”

The framework within which the present paper is conceived derives its principles from modern stylistics, particularly ‘Discourse Stylistics’ of Ronald Carter. Although there have been various models advocated and espoused by reputed linguistic critics

like Roger Fowler, Henry Widdowson, Ronald Carter, Seymour Chatman, Thomas Sebeok, Leo Spitzer and others, all have emphasized the importance of style in language in literary works. They focus their attention on the study of linguistic features that actually contain the motif that the literary texts seek to express. Henry Widdowson and Ronald Carter, however, take the theory further and envisage a dynamic interaction between mode and motive and postulate an integrative approach to the literary texts.

Ronald Carter, in particular, proposed a comprehensive model of literary analysis which seeks to approach a literary text not from one or two angles but from four poles in relation to which the meaning of a text can be determined. Carter's premise is based on the holistic belief that a literary work is an integral whole and should be studied as such. He, therefore, proposed that since each text has a context, follows a convention and is rendered in language, it should be approached from all these poles so as to obtain the writer's real motive in the text. A text, according to Carter, is a complex of patterns which actually constitute the writer's mode, and these patterns carry meaning. In fact, these patterns already exist in the language at a more abstract level than phonology or graphology. This abstract level is called *form*, which has two components, namely grammar and lexis. Grammatical patterns include such categories as word, clause, sentence, and all parts of speech like noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, etc. The way the language is patterned in a text in terms of grammar has a significant contribution to the meaning and style of that text.

Although Carter stressed the importance of the pole of grammar in the analysis of literary texts, he also concurred with Riffaterre (1966) in his view that "no grammatical analysis of a text can give more than the grammar of the text." He therefore, proposed to include the consideration of other linguistic elements such as lexis which also contribute to the determination of meaning. Grammar can tell us about the systems in the language of a text but it also stops short of telling us what is really going on in a sentence. It is lexis which performs this function. It is true that lexical items also have their grammatical function. Grammatical meaning and lexical meaning are thus quite different. Both kinds of meanings are necessary in order to constitute language. In the case of literary texts, the aspect of lexis which is most noticeable is connotation as it emerges in a particular context – real or fictional. Carter (1979) observed that lexis is a "level as significant as grammar" and that "lexical organisation is a vital coordinate in the establishment of textual meaning." Furthermore, no item of language in a text operates without a context. Therefore, a description of lexis in the analysis of literary texts also requires a consideration of the association of particular lexical items with particular contexts. Ronald Carter asserted that "each text creates a context of its own within which fresh associative meanings of words emerge." Fixed meanings in a language are liable to become unfixed and put on

fresh meaning in different contexts. As such most often, different meanings of language can be disambiguated by the context. In the literary discourse as in all other discourses, “readers interact with texts in the contexts those texts supply.” Further still, this context may be related to the surroundings of a language event, which may be the real-life surroundings of a whole text i.e., the situational contexts as that of Dickens’s or Gaskell’s novels. Or it may be the inner environment of that text. The inner context, in turn may be created by the language of the text or by the literary conventions. Both these kinds of context are to be considered for determining the meaning of a literary text.

Ronald Carter postulated that in describing the style of a discourse, recognition should be given to context-specific conventions of a discourse, “instead of being regarded as differentiable by exclusive reference to linguistic factors, I argue that style should be defined by reference to the interaction of text convention and linguistic form and function.”

Elaborating on this, he remarked that these conventions include both the conventions that characterize the genre (primary conventions) and those that characterize the textual form (secondary conventions). A significant implication of this is that a literary writer follows or breaks with certain literary conventions and expects a reader to receive the text in the light of those conventions. This is an important factor in the construing of a text on the basis of some shared awareness. Since the aesthetic code cannot always be predetermined, it “could be said to be deciphered, and if necessary, to be reformulated in the process of reading...in the light of what he knows of the aesthetic system.” Ronald Carter proposed consideration of situational context and text convention as relevant as grammar or lexis “to the determination of effects in a literary text.” Like Carter, other linguistic critics like Geoffrey Leech too have been alive to the fact that a dynamic connection between language and the world view or between mode and motive has important consequences for the serious readers of fiction.

In traditional anthropocentric approaches to the study of literary texts, the value of historical context had always been accepted as absolute till the more linguistically oriented approaches began to consider text as an entity *per se* and tended to discard context as something extrinsic to it. Such a belief was earlier espoused by New Critics like I.A. Richards and Alan Tate in 1920s

Later, the stylisticians whose thoughts were inspired by the principles of linguistics emphasized that meaning of the text was inherent in the language that contained it and, therefore, a critic ought to concentrate upon the linguistic structures to decode that meaning. Defining the aim of literary analysis that concerns itself only with linguistic analysis, Eric Nils Enkvist stated that

The task of the linguistic stylistics is to set up inventories and descriptions of stylistic stimuli with the aid of linguistic concepts.

Now one tends to look askance at such a study of literary works and question if a critical effort is constricted only to such simple parsing of texts. A literary text is a creation and not merely a composition in language. Language happens to be one of the several elements that go into the making of a literary text. Nonetheless, by such observations, stylisticians indeed highlighted the importance of mode that consisted in the linguistic features of the texts. But overemphasis on the linguistic aspect of the literary texts tended to take away the aesthetic delight that the text or its creator embedded into it. At the same time, however, the insights that linguistic analysis obtains can also not be underestimated. Some stylisticians like Henry Widdowson and Ronald Carter proposed an integrative approach to the study of literature in order to enjoy it more fully. They put over the thesis that a more informed reader or critic in his study of literature is simultaneously engaged in a complex of elements that the text is composed of. Therefore, an integrative approach that takes cognizance of all these factors is a more viable approach than any biased one. Ronald Carter in 1979 proposed the need for enlargement of limited stylistic theories by including the poles of context and convention as also of equal importance in any critical examination of a literary text. The 'Discourse Stylistics' approach that he proposed starts from the

presupposition that "the meaning of texts is not wholly intrinsic or immanent to that text but that texts create contexts within which distinct and analysable interaction and the creation of distinct extra-textual "association" takes place. Consequently, the contextual association of words and its contribution to the meaning of text are as important as the grammar or lexis. So, Discourse Stylistics views text as a communicative exchange in a context and this is what provides main focus of analysis."

Carter thus underscores the value of context as indispensable to the study of literary discourse in order to comprehend it as a whole. More recently, the feature of context has been extensively examined by Rick Rylance and Ludy Simons in their latest book *Literature in Context*. They state that "contextual factors shape our perception of how literary texts are made, and how they are read." The various scholarly essays collected in the book pay keen attention to the contextual understanding of works of literature from Chaucer to the present day.

It may indeed be true of all creative writers that they seek primary inspiration from their personal life and their life's conditions. However, the ability and skill to transmute the life's material into literature not only differs from writer to writer, but also depends upon each writer's real motives and his literary beliefs. That is one reason why some writers appeal as more objective than subjective or vice-versa. As

far as Indo-Anglian writings are concerned, it is a well-accepted postulate that most writers write from their own life's conditions.

Stylistics is considered to be the most distinguished branch of the 20th century academic discipline which deals with the study of style, and the *rhetoric* i.e. the art of an effective speech meant for persuasion is generally thought-out as its genesis or antecedent as it has the capacity to utilize best linguistic choices to perform various functions to influence the masses for a particular purpose by persuasion. Thus, in rhetoric, the determination of the linguistic choices for a particular effect is given due consideration which was also recognized and approved by the Greek scholars such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. As language is the medium to share all kinds of experiences, it serves as an arena of battle for making known the unknown part by challenging the existing ideological experiences.

The textual aspects of a literary style focus on the cohesive properties as well as the linguistic patterns of a text and talk about its effect whereas the contextual aspects of literary style focus on the imperative role of the context in the generation and comprehension of meaning. Social and cultural aspects also influence the use of language. Role of a textual structure in the presentation of the outer world of the text is the key concern of the textual aspect of a literary style whereas the contextual aspect focuses on the role of socio-cultural and the historical conventions in understanding the various nuances of a literary text. The role of double pattern is significant here as the language depends upon its historical conventions of using established patterns and at the same time it allows the authors/ writers to experiment with the new parameters in the form of deviations and foregrounding techniques. Thus, the contextual aspects of a literary style see the relationship of the use of words, phrases and sentence structures with the social, historical, cultural and ideological forces of a particular society at a particular time. Chomsky's notion of surface-deep structure is also applicable here as the interplay of a text and context prompts the reader to go for the deep structure to unearth the appropriate meaning of the text. The emphasis here is laid on finding out the relationship of a word with its perceived image in the light of its context.

Thus, the linguistic and non-linguistic behavior of speakers and writers is governed by their roles, statuses and positions in the society and this controls their choices or styles of language patterns. Similar to this, the concept of double pattern in which one-part deals with the conventional use of language structure and the other one deals with the experiment with the language form. Since language preexists the speakers or writers, they are bound to express only by the given linguistics sources/means. Thus, language indirectly controls their perceptions. So, a text is a production of its socio-historic context and presents the relationship between the socio-economic position of the writer/ speaker and available linguistic structures. The social forces control and direct

the choices of a language available to the speaker or writer and this in turn influences society also. Explaining the nature of Stylistics, Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short in *Style in Fiction* state:

Literary stylistics has, implicitly or explicitly, the goal of explaining the relation between language and artistic function. The motivating questions are not so much *what* as *why* and *how*. From the linguist angle, it is ‘*why* does the author here choose to express himself in this particular way?’ From the critic’s view point it is ‘*how* is such-and-such an aesthetic effect achieved through language?’ (13)

So here the specific linguistic choices of phonemes, lexes, syntax and semantics over others made by the author in her/ his works are taken into account conducive to the motives as well as the socio-economic and historic contexts to bring about holistic significance of the text.

I.A. Richards identifies four kinds of meaning: sense, feeling, tone, and intention. Sense refers to the message which is conveyed by the speaker to guide, direct, or excite others. Feeling refers to the emotions, feelings, interest, attitude etc. towards the message being conveyed by a speaker. Tone refers to the speaker’s attitude towards the listener. It conveys the speaker’s social or personal relationship with the listener. And the intention which is directed towards the goal, effect, or the purpose of the speaker. With a particular goal or purpose, the speaker uses particular sets of grammatical categories to arouse a specific effect. So, it presents the conscious or unconscious aim which a writer wants to produce in a text. Intention can also be called the motive which governs the various modes of the text.

Geoffrey N. Leech mentions five functions of language: Informational, Expressive, Directive, Aesthetic, and Phatic. The informational function of language focuses on the message. It denotes imparting information of facts. It is based on truth and value. It includes describing things/people, giving messages etc. The second function of language is the expressive function which is directed towards the expression of feelings and attitudes of the speaker towards objects, incidents, people, and actions. It also shows the speaker’s emotional attitude towards the listeners. The emotional tone is marked by the exclamation marks in the text. The next function is the directive function which is oriented towards giving directions, commands, and requests. It also presents the social roles and status of the speakers-listeners. It aims at influencing the behavior of the listeners/ readers. The fourth function is the aesthetic function which is oriented towards the message itself. It is similar to the poetic function of language propounded by Roman Jakobson. It focuses on the selection as well as the roles of words and sentences in a text which are considered a means of poetic art. The last function of language is the phatic function which is directed towards initiating the conversation or keeping the conversation alive. It is also mentioned by Roman

Jakobson in his function of language. It includes asking for health, wishes, discussing sports, weather etc. It functions as a powerful medium in establishing a contact between speaker and listener. It does not give any information as it only focuses on making and maintaining a conversational link among the participants.

According to Halliday, all linguistic categories are valuable and linguistic choices are interrelated which are influenced by the functional aspect of the language. Use of a particular linguistic category based on its function and context specific to the individual is called mind style. Thus, style is defined as use of linguistic choices from a list of available choices suited to the context and particularly concerned with the literary language where it shows the interrelation of selected linguistic properties and their aesthetic/ poetic functions. Sometimes style is easily discerned by working on the paraphrasing capability of a text and sometimes paraphrasing of a text doesn't function and the reader is required to make use of his/her imaginative power to look for the other possible ways to talk about the subject matter of a text in the different ways. As Harold Whitehall states, "no science can go beyond mathematics, no criticism can go beyond its linguistics" (quoted in Fowler 1). Roman Jakobson considers poetics an integral part of language, there is a deep relation between criticism and linguistics. Fowler also states, "criticism is accepted as an independently defined field of endeavor or knowledge, and linguistics an indispensable aid to that discipline" (*Style and Structure in Literature* 2). Structural approach to literature focuses more on the deeper or abstract levels as compared to the surface structure. In this way, "Stylistics emphasizes particularity, individuality, concreteness; 'structuralism' is more given to generalization and abstraction. Stylistics makes the individual work more recognizable, more discrete, its physiognomy more salient" (Fowler 11).

A work of fiction implies the inventive construction of an imaginary world and, most commonly, its fictionality is publicly acknowledged, so its audience typically expects it to deviate in some ways from the real world rather than presenting only characters who are actual people or portrayals that are factually true. Discourse Stylistics as an appraisal of fictional oeuvre takes into account the role of conventions, context, lexis, syntax or grammar and discourse semantics which help the reader understand the various nuances of all these elements to bring about the hidden layers of the socio-cultural and political ideologies.

Thus, discourse stylistics presents a toolkit to understand the interrelationship among various socio-cultural and political ideologies, discursive practices and text to mark various nuances of meanings in a canon. It further helps in understanding the underlying intricacies which an author has dexterously embedded into the text. In this way, discourse stylistics attempts to mark the form-content / text-context / mode-motive relationship in a text and widen the horizon of resonance and comprehension.

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