

Language of the Muse: Stylistics



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Ezra Pound has rightly observed - 'Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree'. A linguist deaf" to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unacquainted with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms. Now, what makes a verbal message a work of art, a thing of beauty, a text with its own literary texture? It is truism to say that nothing but the special use of language that contributes to the literariness of text or discourse.

Language is the medium through which a writer expresses his ideas and communicates his message. Scholars of the idealistic school were concerned with the relationship between the writer's language and the writer's ideas between the expression and the author of the expression. But no one can say anything precisely on this. Once Browning was asked to explain the meaning of a poem that he wrote and he replied only God and Browning knew the meaning when Browning wrote the poem and Browning had forgotten the meaning after he had written it. So critics tried to explore what the poet had in his mind. When he wrote something and they tried to take into consideration his other writings in an attempt to establish the connection between the expression and the ideas of the author. But we must also think of the consumer of the literature – the reader. A writer creates a piece of literature and no one knows what happened to the writer's mind. But the writer as a human being learnt the language and he constructed the grammar of the language in his mind like any other individual. Using that knowledge about the language he selected (consciously or sub-consciously) his own patterns, transformations and derivations and gives shape to his ideas. The reader's mind comes into contact with the piece that was created and using his own experiences, background and his grammar, the reader interprets the piece of literature. In fact, the reader's impressions about the subject-matter (content) and the language are more important than the mysterious thing that happened in the writer's mind. Taking the reader's reaction to the literary piece as the basis; perhaps, it may correspond to the experience of the writer; if it corresponds to that, it is well and good, but one need not and should not expect it.

The reader experiences the subject matter only through the language. So the style is the primary thing so far as the reader is concerned and an attempt is made to reach the subject matter only through the style.

Stylistics, more commonly, is the scientific study of 'Style'. But the term 'style' here has to do with those components or features of a literary composition which give to it individuals stamp, making it as the work of a particular author and producing a certain effect upon the reader. Stylistics is not something opposed to literary criticism: for 'between true literature and linguistic there is no conflict; the real linguist is at least half a literature and the real literature is half a linguist'. Stylistics is an attempt to make literary criticism much more scientific, methodical, objective and precise. It stresses the need to form a literary grammar of language, a literary transformation and satisfactory definitions of various literary terms, such as 'style', 'poem', 'image', etc. More technically stylistics is the study of the linguistic features of literary text phonological, lexical, syntactical- which directly affect the meaning of an utterance. It is thus the study of expressiveness, emotive overtones, emphasis, rhythm, symmetry, euphony and also the so-called "associative elements which place style in a particular register such as literary, colloquial, slangy, or associate it with a particular milieu such as historical, foreign, proverbial, professional, etc. and choices the possibility of choosing between two or more alternatives – 'stylistic variants' which mean the same thing, but are different in their language structure: He came too soon and He arrived prematurely.

Since the early nineteenth century the term; stylistic' has been in current German-usage, in English the noun stylistic is found as early as 1864. Recently, the term stylistic has come to mean the linguistic study of a literary text, the scientific study of 'style', of language or a function, of the mode and manner and variety of literature written or oral. As an independent discipline it has only a history of about five years with a great deal of controversies, and with a boiling pot which is still on the oven. The problem of defining and classifying style is very much as like 'personality' and other abstract terms. As it is difficult to define 'personality and many other abstract terms, so it is difficult to define 'style'. Personality in man is the ultimate mystery; the ultimate justification so is style in a writer. It is the essence of aesthetic pleasure. Style is maze. It is very difficult to tell what constitutes style and how one cultivates style, is style a man or his work, his body, his heart or soul, or the word he uses an embellishment, choice, personality, psyche, derivation from norms, set of individual or collective feature, or the words he uses, or the way in which he uses them. The style of work is not a sort of veneer glued over the outside. On the contrary it is like the pattern of the grain in a piece of wood. It is a pattern that goes all the way; a manifestation of growth and development of the structure of the tree itself. One can and must study the ways in which languages is stretched and exploited by the creative writer. Unless we study every feature of the language that is employed as a tool, we won't get a full insight into the subject matter. So, in literature and literary criticism, the study of style must be considered as important as the study of aesthetic judgement. Only by combining these two, stylistics and aesthetic judgement, can we hope to get the optimal interpretation of literature. Aesthetic judgement is something personal. The appreciation of the personal enjoyment of a literary piece written in a foreign language could be faithfully done only in the reader's mother tongue. If we, Indian, are to express our enjoyment of the subject matter of a poem by Shelley or Shakespeare, the best medium of this is our own mother tongue. If we maintain a distinction between stylistics and appreciation, stylistics will deepen the student's insight into the working of English and the appreciation could be in his own mother tongue. It may be difficult to draw a clear line between linguistic and critical study of a text but one can make a distinction between the two and recognise areas where they overlap.

The act of the reading has become the primary focus of literary theory. Let us go from theory to practical and visualise how Geoffrey Leech has stylistically analysed Dylan Thomas – ‘**This Bread I Break**’

This bread I break was once the oat,
This wine upon a foreign tree
Plunged in its fruit;
Man in the day or night at
Laid the crops row, broke the grape's joy. Once in this wind the
summer blood knocked in the flesh that decked the vine, Once in the
bread
The oat was merry in the wind;
Man, broke the sun, pulled the wind down.

This flesh you break, this blood you let
Make desolation in the vein,
Were oat and grape
Born of the sensual root and sap
My wine you drink, my bread you snap.

- Dylan Thomas

Leech's approach to stylistic analysis differs essentially from that of Holliday and Sinclair in that it aims at relating linguistic description to literature interpretation, Leech shows how the former has to be linked up with the latter. He highlights three dimensions of meaning' - cohesion, foregrounding and cohesion of foregrounding- as important features of literary expression and suggests that for this reason descriptive linguistic cannot simply be applied indifferently to literary text as to other texts.

a. Cohesion - is a dimension of linguistic description which is particularly important in the study of literary texts. By this is meant the way in which independent choices in different points of a text correspond with or presuppose one another, forming a network of sequential relations. The intra-textual relations of grammatical and lexical kind which knit the parts of a text together into a complete unit of discourse and which therefore convey the meaning of the text as a whole are termed 'cohesive devices'. In the poem under discussion, there is cohesion in terms of similar ranges of occurrence in collocation as seen in lexical sets like bread-oats-crops, wine-tree-fruit-grape-vine-drink, day-night-summer-sun, etc.

b. Foregrounding or motivated deviation from linguistic or other socially accepted norms, has been claimed to be at basic principal of aesthetic communication. The deviations in a text can form intra-textual patterns

when they are related among themselves, to produce cohesion for foregrounding. Thus, for example, the deviant expression *broke the sun* is foregrounded against normal usage but takes on a normality in the context of the poem as a whole, because it is related to deviations of a similar kind like *'broke the grapes joy'*, *'pulled the wind down,'* etc. Similarly, intra-textual patterns are formed by the cohesion of the foregrounded expressions, *'the oat was merry'*, *'desolation of the wine'* and *'sensual root'*. The setting up of intra-textual syntactic equivalence is also a feature of foregrounding in that it introduces patterns of language which are not expected in normal use.

c. Cohesion of foregrounding - Cohesion of foregrounding constitutes a separate dimension of descriptive statement, whereby the foregrounded features identified in isolation are related to one another and to the text in its entirety. Thus for example, the deviant expression *'broke the sun'* is foregrounded against normal usage but taken on a normality in the context of the poem as a whole, because it is related to the derivations of a similar kind like *'broke the grapes joy'*, *'pulled the wind down'*, etc. Similarly, intra-textual patterns are formed by the cohesion of the foreground expressions *'the oat was merry'*, *'desolation in the vine'* and *'sensual root...'*

There is certainly no doubt that linguistics today offers to the students of style tools of considerable precision for certain purposes. Linguistics does not simply provide theories and techniques, as its best it leads to the development and critical maintenance of a sensitive attitude to language. The problems of stylistic reconstruction involves all aspects of language: sounds, vocabulary, morphology, syntax and semantics. Hence, stylistics will have the same subdivisions as linguistics graphology can be of help because stylistic studies are primarily concerned with the examination of written language. Writing has its own means, however, inadequate they may be of indicating some of the patterned contrasts discernable in spoken language. In other words 'phonology and graphology not only connect substances to forms, they are themselves aspects of

Forms, patterns which on occasions directly make substance meaningful in a situation."

It is however, grammar (morphology and syntax) which dominated the description of form. Grammar can indicate why *'sit* differ from *"be seated"* *The snake killed the man*; from *"The man was killed by the snake"*, *"A rich man helped a poor man"*, from *A poor man was helped by a rich man'*. Theoretically categories are required for the formal description of lexis in a literary text and two fundamental categories of lexis (collection and set) have been proposed by linguistics.

Stylistics of the word' or lexical stylistics will explore the expressive resources available in the vocabulary of language; it will investigate the stylistic applications of such phenomena as word-formation, synonymy, ambiguity, or the contrast between vague and precise, abstract and concrete, rare and common terms, use of foreign words, etc.

'Stylistics of the sentences' or syntactic stylistics will examine the expressive values of syntax at three superimposed planes: components of the sentence, sentence structure and the higher units into which single sentence combine. "The most effective use of syntactic resource is made by those authors who say within the boundaries of everyday speech, But combining independent and dependent, major and minor clauses and expanding or contracting the attributive elements so as either to coincide with the reader's expectations or where it will produce a striking effect to differ from them. The choice which an author makes among the possibilities available to him, is the way of the syntactic frame of the work and lexical elements, is the subject-matter of stylistics.

Unless we want to mystify literature, we must make use of the findings and linguistics, and try to get the best out of the them. Dylan Thomas says, "you can tear a poem apart to see what makes it technically tick, and say to yourself, when the works are laid/out before you, the vowels, the consonants, the rhymes and rhythms, 'Yes, this is it: This is why the poem moves me so. It is because of the craftsmanship'.

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