Introducing Stylistics

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Course Description

This course centres on the stylistic analysis of non-literary texts, such as the language of religion, law, bureaucracy, advertising, journalism, technical and scientific writing, taking situations and the peculiarities of specialised groups and speech communities into account.

The aim of the course is to expose students to the variability of texts and how to employ linguistic theory(ies) in analysing such texts.
What is stylistics?

- The simplest definition takes stylistics as the study of style in a text. It will invariably lead to the question of what style is.

- Stylistics is also the study of the forms and functions of the distinctive uses of language in a text.

- Stylistics ...as a sub-discipline of linguistics is concerned with the systematic analysis of style in language and how this can vary according to such factors as, for example, genre, context, historical period and author (Jeffries & McIntyre 2010, p. 1).
What is stylistics?

O Stylistics is the study of the ways in which meaning is created through language in literature as well as in other types of text (Nørgaard, Montoro, & Busse, 2010, p.1).

O Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, (2010, p.1) explained further that “stylisticians use linguistic models, theories and frameworks as their analytical tools in order to describe and explain how and why a text works as it does, and how we come from the words on the page to its meaning. The analysis typically focuses qualitatively or quantitatively on the phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, pragmatic or discoursal features of texts, on the cognitive aspects involved in the processing of those features by the reader as well as on various combinations of these.
What is stylistics?

Wales (2011, p. 400) submits that:
the goal of most stylistic studies is to show how a text ‘works’: but not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects or themes to linguistic ‘triggers’ where these are felt to be relevant.
What is stylistics?

- Thus, stylistics helps us to see how and why a text is unique.
- Stylistics helps us see the workings of a text by using our knowledge of language to explore the significant choices made in a text as the style of that text.
- In order words, stylistics is concerned with the analysis of style in a text using linguistics. It is at this point that one sees how stylistics differs from literary analysis/criticism.
Scope of stylistics

- **Range of texts** – stylistics analyses and interprets both literary and non-literary texts.

- **Range of theories** – stylistics engages both linguistic and non-linguistic theories for the explication of the text.

- **Range of methods** – stylistics is eclectic in its use of methodologies. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed for the evaluation and interpretation of texts.
Types of stylistics

- There are different types of stylistics as there are different definitions of stylistics. The different types of stylistics generate from the influences of different branches of linguistics.
  - **Literary stylistics**: studies style in literary texts.
  - **Non-literary stylistics**: concerned with analysis of non-literary texts.
  - **Linguistic stylistics**: attempts a refinement of linguistic models which has potential for further linguistic or stylistic analysis.
Types of stylistics

O **Sociostylistics**: studies the language of writers considered as social groups.

O **Cognitive stylistics**: studies the cognitive (emotive) effects of style. It is especially concerned with metaphor.

O Consider others such as formalist, functionalist, pragmatic, feminist, critical, corpus, etc.
Principles of stylistics

○ **Stylistics as text-based:** In principle, every stylistic investigation centres on the explanation and interpretation of a text; whether literary or non-literate text, written or spoken. Having a text to analyse is the starting point of a stylistic research.

○ **Stylistics as eclectic and open:** By its operating principle, stylistics is open to eclectic methods, methodologies and theories for the explanation and interpretation of the text.
Principles of stylistics

- **Stylistics as objective and empirical**
  - This reveals the scientific nature of stylistic inquiries and outlines the major point of departure between stylistics and literary criticism. By using linguistic models, theories, frameworks and metalanguage, stylistics makes the study/analysis of literary texts a scientific one.
  - That a stylistic investigation is empirical means that the research is not subjective since all claims are based on observation or experience.
Principles of stylistics

O That the research is objective indicates that the analysis is falsifiable.

O Every claim is clear enough that it can be challenged by other researchers either through replication of the research process on the same text or the application of the research process to other texts.

O Wales (2001, p.373) who holds that ‘[s]tylistics is only ‘objective’ ...in the sense of being methodical, systematic, empirical, analytical, coherent, accessible, retrievable and consensual’ (p. 373). That a stylistic research is objective and empirical thus means it has **Rigour, Retrievability**, and **Replicability** (These are described as the **3R’s of stylistics**).
**Rigour**

- A principled stylistic research is rigorous when it is transparent such that what has been done and what methods have been used and why are all very clear.
- Rigour makes a stylistic work objective
  - how the tools of analysis are applied; the process of analysis and the results of the analysis are as clear as possible.
- This principle underscores the scientific nature of stylistic research
  - with the way the research is carried out and written up, other scholars can easily see the consistency and clarity in the work done (in terms of clearly stated sampling method, analytical tools, and the process of analysis) and follow the process to investigate the same or different text to get similar conclusions.

- In conclusion, rigour emphasises that stylistics is explicit in with its framework.
Replicability

O This principle indicates that the methods of the stylistic research are sufficiently transparent to allow other stylisticians to verify them, either by testing them on the same text or by applying them to other texts. Replication and application are crucial here.

O It is necessary to state, however, that replicability does not mean that scholars copy one another. Rather, to replicate means that how the research reached its conclusions are accessible to the extent that an analyst can conduct an analysis in exactly the same way.

O This means that in a replicable stylistic research, conclusions are reached through an accessible and principled pathway.
Retrievability

This implies that the analysis is an organised one that employs explicit terms and criteria the meanings of which are agreed upon by other practitioners of stylistics.

This consensus enables other stylisticians to follow the pathway adopted in an analysis, test the categories used, and see how the analysis reached its conclusion.

It is a basic principle of stylistic analysis that others need to be able to see how an interpretive account has been reached.

This means the account is retrievable and recoverable, allowing others to agree or disagree, and making it possible for different interpretations to be compared transparently and objectively.
Why stylistics?

- Stylistics provides an angle on language study which places the text at the centre of its concern (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010, p. 4)
- Stylistics helps with the explanation of language effects in text. This relates to rhetoric and the power of language (form v. function).
- Stylistics helps with the explanation of literary effects in a text.
Why stylistics?

- Reasoning alongside Montgomery et al, (2007, pp. 1-2), I will conclude by saying that stylistics enables a critical and analytic engagement with the text by attending to details of form and structure in pursuit of understanding. In attending to the text’s details, focus will be on the rhetorical organization of texts, that is, how texts work to create meanings and produce recognizable effects by means of identifiable techniques, each of which can be described, analysed and studied.
Why stylistics?

In essence, stylistics provides the technique of analysing and interpreting texts, whether they are literary or non-literary, verbal or visual (cf. Montgomery et al, 2000, p. 2).