**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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# A STYLISTIC APPROACH TO TEACH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

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**Abstract**

The aim of the present study is to demonstrate the role of stylistics in the teaching of English language and literature to undergraduate students especially who reside in the hinterland of Punjab and find the underlying language a hard nut to crack. The researcher has acquired a considerable teaching experience in the countryside for four years in various degree colleges. During that period, the researcher strictly adheres to varied stylistic tools and devices to make students attain language competency in the target language. The study will establish that the language learners from rural background can enhance their literary competency to appreciate diverse and aesthetic literary features in a text with the applications of stylistics. It will definitely assist them to read, grasp and evaluate encoded message of a text and may develop their proficiency in lingua franca up to the mark that is a foremost requisite to secure employment in diverse domains of the contemporary competitive world. The study will also set and define the numerous parameters to the language learners who would be in a position to make a mark on the world map by pursuing careers in diverse fields such as journalism (print media as well as electronic media), academics, research, creative writing, translation and so on.

**Keywords:** Stylistics, Literary Criticism, Linguistics, Language, Pedagogy

## 1. Introduction

In the domain of stylistics, the term 'style' attributes to language use in text by the author with having a particular purpose to achieve a rhetorical effect on the reader. In general, a text may be written or spoken but here primarily the researcher restricts his study to the written language of literary text which indubitably enriches literariness to it. For that, certain distinctive linguistic elements, expressions of the English language are exploited by an author to disseminate an intended message to an intended reader because a text whether literary or non-literary always incorporates message and stylistics assists the implied reader to decode the underlying message in a systematic manner. During message encoding, a penman has an access at the level of lexis, grammar, figures of speech and thought presentation according to the situation of context—situational as well as cultural. In other words, the style does not restrict itself only to writer but on the other hand may be associated with the use of language in diverse situation and context. To clarify this, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de

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Saussure's concepts of 'langue' and 'parole' are taken into consideration. According to him, *langue* means certain systematic conventions or codes of language which are shared by the same language speakers within a community while *parole* determines the actual manifestation of these codes in speaking or writing by the individuals of the same community. So, in view of the aforesaid, it can be argued that style pertains to parole because of the selection of linguistic expressions from the repertoire of a language. Sometimes it can be sensed as the particular linguistic choices of a particular author, but the present study primarily focuses on the linguistic features of an individual text where the primary emphasis would be on the concept of how varied linguistic arrays acquire position semantically in the discourse.

As far as the stylistics is concerned, it determines the way how varied linguistic choices are exploited by the implied author to convey an intended message to an intended reader. It is an amalgamation of literary criticism and linguistics because the word 'style' is drawn from literary criticism and '-istics' from linguistics, making an interface between two domains which primarily establish a semantic relation between both. To define this, Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short have described and illustrated the 'philological circle' by Leo Spitzer as "a cyclic motion whereby linguistic observations stimulates or modifies literary insight, and whereby literary insight in its turn stimulates further linguistic observation" (*Style in Fiction* 12).

A stylistician establishes the fact that a writer has an access to the varied expressions of language during composition, but s/he exploits these according to the requisite of situation. To do so, s/he deviates from the conventional use of language to foreground the contextual aspects of cohesion by infusing literariness which turns text into literary one. The origin of stylistics is traced back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* but its original source of flourishing may be referred to the United States in 1960s, where the chief proponents of Russian formalism, Roman Jakobson and Viktor Shklovsky, were primarily inquisitive in literariness of text. For that, they incorporated linguistic features to demonstrate scientific features of text through its external features such as lexical, grammatical, phonological choices, parallelism and deviation which confer literariness to above. One important point to remember is that the stylistic features of formalists were chiefly restricted to the analysis of poetry only.

## 2. Research Objective

The present study adheres to the varied devices and tools of pedagogical stylistics which are quite functional in communicating complex world views by numerous authors of the English literature—an imagined and observed world that is narrated and observed through the English language. Given that a certain advancement in English in the contemporary world demonstrates its position in providing career options to young generation in multi-dimensional streams like call center employees, editors in leading English newspapers, English trainers in coaching institutes, academics and research. It can be achieved only through command over the communicative competence in the target language because the underlying language is the official language in India where the learners in rural area are not still in a dominant position, and are struggling hard to enrich their fluency in spoken English; and as a result, throng in leading institutes of hinterland is witnessed in last two, three decades who pay a high amount of tuition fees (a financial burden on economic weaker section) for their academic services. One important point to remember is that the current study does not explicitly endorse the idea that the above enroll themselves in varied coaching institutes in terms of the academicians' incapability and insensibility towards the communication skills; they are expert in their respective domain but the teaching environment of educational institutes requires the teaching discourse in regional language, exhibiting less command over communication skills of learners. Hence, a strict adherence to teaching English language and literature through above becomes an impediment for the teacher and the taught because the intended message that has to be deduced by a receiver in the target language is perceived by one in regional language, making a serious impediment in the way of acquiring command over communication skills for both. This practice must be abolished

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primarily to achieve their cognitive compatibility with the foreign language.

It is observed that the devices of stylistics are quite functional in the English language classroom teaching and primarily to undergraduate students of hinterland as well where the communication occurs in the regional language which seems the serious impediment in acquiring fluency in English. But if they are made accustomed to the devices and tools of stylistics by the respective academic fraternity in classroom teaching then the underlying methodology can indubitably generate interest among the language learners towards the target language and literature and a thorough practice of the same unfolds numerous ways towards countless professions where they secure economic stability. It is also learnt that the practice of the following devices and tools in the classroom teaching draws a good bond between the teacher and the taught because the latter puts forward her own viewpoint, leading to aesthetic appreciation of a literary text. Traditionally, a teacher teaches varied western originated literary concepts in the target language in causing difficulties for learners to grasp the overall idea and widening the gap between pedagogue and student as well as text and reader. As a consequence, most of the students lose their confidence in the target language and hesitate to speak English, making the teacher an active participant in classroom discourse and putting too much burden on teacher's shoulders for teaching. This one-way communication makes the teaching practice monotonous and uninteresting because the flow of information from sender to receiver does not receive constructive feedback in return and a feeling of alienation can be sensed among the learners for the foreign literature. Hence, this imagined fear towards the English language compels them to purchase readymade material from various institutes and online sites to just pass the examination. The memorization of respective answers to certain questions causes the deterioration in rational and logical thinking and observation of the learners. Therefore, the obtained marks in English examination through rote learning results in few opportunities to secure sublime career in numerous multinational companies, academics

(school as well as higher education), journalism where the primary requisite for the applicant to have proficiency in communication skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) to secure job.

### 3.  Methodology

This study refers to the various devices and tools of stylistics that are quite functional in enriching literary sensibility and communication skills of the rural students who have artistic capabilities, skills, etc., that can be honed by the exploitation of following methods and procedures the researcher too adheres to. It extracts the principles and methods in the given checklist from the text *Style in Fiction* by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short—a significant work in the domain of stylistics that helps language learner to deduce the basics of literature work and has two-dimensional benefits: improving the language competency and literary sensibility of the second language learners. The checklist that has four sub-headings such as Lexical categories, Grammatical categories, Figures of Speech, and Context and Cohesion is further divided into sub-categories.

### 4.  Analysis

The first category pertains to *Lexis* (lexis means vocabulary) that primarily focuses on the various types of vocabulary items which can be identified in literary text, and a strict adherence to these stylistic devices will undoubtedly benefit the second language learner to comprehend the intended meaning by wordsmith. The said category incorporates the basic four parts of speech like nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. A comprehensive analysis of these stylistic devices is carried out by the above-mentioned writers consistently that appears beneficial in the domain of stylistics for the teachers as well as the taught who have an utmost devotion for the under-consideration topic. Generally, a basic sentence pattern in the English language incorporates Subject + Verb + Object (Subject + Predicate). Nouns (also called nominals) are used subject and object in a sentence as reference to the name of person, place or thing. The analysis makes the learners understand various types of nouns whether they are proper, concrete or abstract (referring to events,

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perception, moral or social qualities) nouns. Verb draws an interdependence between subject and object of a sentence in terms of demonstrating what subject does to object. Verbs, generally, are further subdivided into two categories: stative (referring to states) or dynamic (referring to movement, action, etc.). Next, the language learners and readers are introduced to adjectives and adverbs, respectively, where their role in implicit and explicit meaning making within and across sentence has been demonstrated. It also incorporates the lexicon-based collocation, the role of preposition in meaning making, the denotative and connotative references of the lexis and denotes whether the used deixis is simple or complex, attributive or predicative.

It can be argued that the above lexical devices and tools of stylistics are applicable and functional in the language classroom especially at the undergraduate level that seeks most intervention on a teacher's part to impart the underlying notions and methodology to a taught who seems in dire need to acquire comprehensive knowledge in English, for instance, fluency in communication skills that unfolds numerous possibilities of advanced careers in diverse streams which were earlier inaccessible for rural students due to not an up to mark language competency and proficiency. The use of lexical analysis enables them to describe and demonstrate how a literary or non-literary text can be decoded only through a sound knowledge of used vocabulary, in simple words, a written text manifests its original intended meaning through its lexis. The pedagogue cites certain instances from a piece of literature in classroom teaching to helps them understand how noun primarily undertakes the role of a subject and an object that is preceded and followed, respectively, by a verb in the simple sentence. The students are introduced to the semantic values of proper nouns that are exploited by the author to emphasize a particular character whilst perceptions are emphasized through the use of abstract nominals. The concrete nouns pertain to materialistic things and objects. Next, verbs pertain to action that has been performed in the sentence structure by agentive participant as subject (performer of action) and affected participant (animate or inanimate who does not cause the

happening) as a direct object. It is mandatory part of a sentence formation and without the presence of the above any language remains in limbo. A stative (referring to states) and dynamic (movement or action verbs) verb draws cohesion between subject and object that portrays the intended meaning in embedded sense. It also incorporates the use of transitive verbs (which take a direct object) and intransitive verbs (do not require objects). Adjectives that can be observed in attributive and predicative form play an important role in determining the extended form of nouns and construction of varied noun phrases where the main idea of sentence is encoded by the implied author. The semantic use of adverbs in the form of conjuncts and subjuncts refers to manner, time, place, direction and degree. Further, a language teacher defines various varieties of lexis and differentiates their separate meaning according to context. It is followed by training in pronunciation of given words that at first is performed by a teacher and subsequently by a learner, determining the language acquisition through listening. Either a teacher may apply fill in the gaps technique to demonstrate learners to the ways words contextually secure position in sentence structure to complete meaning or some matching columns to teach synonyms, near synonyms and antonyms. The incorporation of technological gadgets is an important step in the direction of listening improvement—a right step in improving communication skills that removes psychological, social and cultural barriers, and learning process occurs in the same way as pupil acquires the mother tongue through certain codes or conventions of language that are inherently acquired by people of certain sections of society (*langue)*. The researcher is of the view that the entire communication that takes place inside and outside of classroom must be occurred in the target language because it will develop learner's thinking in English. The bilingual dictionary as well as teaching in local language must be restricted because these construct cognitive barriers in acquiring the target language because the human mind is receptive to simple notions rather than complex ones. So, through the exploitation of above pattern, the

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language learner is introduced to the varied characteristics of lexis.

The second stylistic category provided in the checklist is the Grammatical category which incorporates the role of various types of clause structure, sentence structure and phrases, parataxis (juxtaposition of subordinate clauses) and so on. It primarily focuses on that what types of sentence structure like simple, compound or complex is exploited by the author to pen a text that determines the rhetoric and prosodic characteristics of wordsmith to convey intended meaning to reader. As a matter of fact, the complex ideas require a complex sentence structure and instead of the preceding one, the use of simple sentence pattern could have lost its aesthetic sense that can not be ignored at any cost. The checklist denotes the role of various types of clauses such as independent, subordinate and superordinate in meaning making of text. Positioning of two independent clauses in sentence and connected by various connectors or conjunctions turn it in a compound sentence where the two clauses have its whole meaning and the removal of either clause before or after conjunction does not affect the meaning of each clause. It is important to remember that a compound sentence contains only two clauses which are independent or main clauses whilst a complex sentence incorporates one independent clause which is followed by one, two or more than two subordinate clauses as dependent constituents—a group of words appear as clauses or phrases. The incorporation of varied phrases, i.e., noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase, prepositional phrase and their semantic value in sentence formation enriches the communication skills of a language learner.

To do so, the language teacher in the target language classroom can teach the above-mentioned grammatical patterns and choices through a piece of literature to enable the students understand how an author constructs varied sentences as per knowledge of grammatical features in English particularly. Here, one can extract a couple of sentences from a text and teach learners the difference between a simple, compound and complex sentence. Furthermore, a reconstruction of the derived sentences in their own words can be sought on the students' part as feedback. The underlying teaching technique of sentence formation will certainly enable the learners to understand the sentence patterns of English language as well as improve their speaking skill. It will make them deduce the author's use of periodic sentence structure, loose sentence structure, the role of dependent constituents as adverbials, phrases and subordinate clauses. The teacher will apply one's knowledge of grammar to make them aware how numerous sentences are constructed in the narrative, for instance, if a writer uses a periodic sentence structure, then the dependent constituents as subordinate clauses are positioned against the main clause in the beginning of sentence where it compels a reader to withhold information in mind till the end of independent clause to deduce meaning. The juxtaposition of dependent constituents in the beginning of sentence is termed the anticipatory dependent constituents while the medial or the parenthetical dependent constituents are positioned in the middle of a sentence. Due to this, the readers will able to understand the main idea which is embedded into various subordinate clauses and phrases and the underlying parataxis is the invention of a mature mind that primarily intends to create an aesthetic effect on the readers across disciplines. Compared to the periodic sentence structure, the loose sentence structure incorporates dependent constituents not in the beginning but in the end of sentence where the reader without withholding information in mind can deduce the intended meaning because these are primarily functional in adding information and their removal from the sentence structure does not impact the primary meaning. So, it can be argued that the target language learner will be able to rewrite sentences which are primarily extracted from under-consideration text and the underlying constructed sentences can be used in their routine communication with fellow students, teachers and parents. So, through an adherence to above features and devices, the language learner proceeds from word to utterance.

Next, the third category in checklist refers to numerous figurative expressions of language which

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demonstrate the denotative and connotative references within text and helps the language learner to understand how foregrounding has been achieved through deviation where an author moves from the conventional or orthodox use of language to foreground the contextual aspects of cohesion. It includes lexical and grammatical repetition in terms of anaphora, parallelism and so on. The preceding stylistic devices may appear in the beginning, middle or end of a sentence to create rhythm, rhyme and music in poetry as well as in prose where the structural repetition of underlying schemes represents textual meaning, in simple words, reel of the text narrates real incidents of the text, creating aesthetic effect in the mind of reader who feels enthralled by the used symphony. The use of lexical and grammatical repetition creates echoic sense of meaning. The use of various metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche, irony and paradox introduces reader to varied connotative references of meaning in the form of juxtaposition where all things are settled at the level of structure but at the contextual level it may vary from person to person. A sound knowledge of the abovesaid figurative expressions of language will indubitably enhance the communicative competence and enable a reader how to read between lines of a text which may be from diverse literary domains.

Proceeding further, a close stylistic analysis of contextual aspects of cohesion that determines internal and external coherence, for instance, the role of substitution, ellipsis (a kind of zero substitution), anaphoric and cataphoric references, lexical cohesion (synonyms, near-synonyms, elegant variation) in meaning making across text. In classroom teaching, a language pedagogue teaches a language learner how an author substitutes pronouns in place of nouns to avoid unwarranted repetition which may lead to certain confusion on part of a reader such as lack of interest in reading, less appeal to aesthetic sense and restriction in learning of exact syntax pattern of the English language. The knowledge of ellipsis will enable the language learner to deduce meaning from the surrounding environment of text. In addition, a study of elegant variation will aware the reader about how an author uses certain appositive

nominal phrases to draw coherence within sentence and adds additional information to subject (also nominal). Citing a few examples from text, a teacher makes the language learner aware about forward and backward movement within and across sentences where pronouns are exploited against proper nouns to avoid reiteration in text, and in this way, the reader has to comply with the underlying practice to understand an intended meaning by the author. Above all, a sound understanding of speech and thought process is mandatory to apprehend whether the wordsmith communicates to an intended reader by speech or thought process.

5.     Findings

So, the above-mentioned cohesive devices and tools of stylistics help a reader to comprehend the overall meaning of text. The present piece of study establishes that the underlying methodology can be used by the language teacher in classroom teaching where literary texts sound quite functional source to gain competence in English particularly by those who are from hinterland and have not an access to required exposure in this language. It is manifested by the research article that the above-mentioned tools and devices of stylistics are quite useful in language learning and appreciation of literary works where the learner is introduced to varied socio-political, economic, geographic and historic factors which play an important role in exerting influence on an author's writing style. A close stylistic analysis of lexical devices enhances the reader's command over deixis which can be exploited to deduce the overall meaning of a piece of literature. It introduces a range of spectrum to reader that how numerous synonyms, near-synonyms and antonyms are employed semantically to weave a web of words which indubitably seek attention on his/her part. Grammatical devices motivate a learner to grasp the structure of a clause and its role in constructing a simple, compound and complex sentence where the learner can be introduced to diverse phrases which provide additional information about the subject of a sentence in a compliment form. It is also witnessed that how diverse figurative expressions of language can be used by an author to amuse reader and a thorough stylistic analysis of these enables her to

determine denotative or connotative meaning. An analysis of contextual aspects of cohesion demonstrates how an author deviates from the orthodox use of language to foreground the contextual aspects of cohesion, for instance, substitution, ellipsis, elegant variation, anaphoric and cataphoric references, speech and thought presentation. It enables a learner to grasp the implied coherence which is used by the implied author in meaning making during composition.

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be argued that stylistics draws an interface between literary criticism and linguistics and demonstrates that the stylistics is not just counting of nouns and verbs. It appears beneficial for the teacher and the taught—both acquire fluency in communication skills through the use of it. The former exploits the fundamentals of stylistics to teach language through literature and in return also hones her perfection in the target language while the latter fulfills dreams by acquiring many job opportunities in the contemporary world that is full of challenges and opportunities because only the perfection leads to success. It also makes teaching interesting where the taught receives equal opportunities to draw her viewpoint, giving proper feedback through decoding message and turning herself as a sender of message.

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