

LINGUISTIC FEATURES FOR MORE UNDERSTANDING LITERARY WORK

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Abstract

The development of literary approaches to appreciate texts offers distinctive ways and purposes. The various approaches offered so far are about post-structuralism, postmodernism, feminist, gender, post colonialism, and some others. Those are practiced by scholars who are interested in studying literature. Studying literature means studying text, so language enthusiasts attempt to appreciate it by applying a different approach, stylistics. Stylistics is the study of style in language use including literary works. What makes this method different from other literary criticism is the employment of the linguistic features in the texts: graphology, phonology, lexis, and syntax (Verdonk, 2002). The researches done by some researchers reviewed in this article prove that stylistic analysis is an applicable and effective way to appreciate literary work. The existence of certain linguistic features in literary work is able to prove how linguistic features constitute meanings and effects. The grammatical sentences in the work compose the meanings and effects of it. Consequently, more understanding literary work can be reached.

Keywords: approach, language, linguistics, literary, text

Language and Literary Works

Literary work has been appreciated in numerous ways. People have been applying various approaches to appreciate literary work, such as post-structuralism, postmodernism, feminist, lesbian/gay, new historicism, Marxist, and post colonialism. The development of those approaches triggers scholars to improve the approaches year by year. The popularity of post colonial studies is one of the examples. Many scholars reject the claims to universalism and believe in the need of examining the representation of other cultures in their respective literature (Barry, 1995). That bid is to appreciate texts in a distinct way so that the readers can see the unseen parts of the texts.

Language is a core in the text consumption. The various types of text create different types of style. The job for language enthusiasts is of course to observe the language used in texts. Consequently, we need a suitable method to appreciate them. In linguistic studies, stylistics is often used by scholars to study texts. Stylistics can be defined as “the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect” (Verdonk, 2002: 4). Barry (1995) adds that this approach uses the methods and findings of the science of linguistics in the analysis of literary texts. Therefore, stylistics is not only used to observe newspaper headlines, but also speeches, articles, even literary works.

Verdonk (2002) states that even though language use in literary works is different from non-literary texts, stylistics is trying to figure out how specific features of style could create particular effects. The careful analysis of word choice, for instance, is attempted to figure out the motivation and purpose of the writer to do so. In a stylistic study, we do not only guess and interpret literary works based on “impression” (Barry, 2002: 210), but we provide evidences from the linguistic data.

Motivated by the situation described above, this article is about to present how and what linguistic features are used in stylistic literary analyses and how they help us gain more understanding literary works. Some books and journals are reviewed in this article in order that we can see how stylistics works in literary study.

Linguistic Features to Observe

Rhodes (2010) states that stylistics applies the amplification of linguistics to approach literary texts: to identify the choices and ways a writer uses in weaving a text (www.literaryworks.net). To do so, stylisticians might observe its context. It means that they see the surrounding features of language inside a text. In conducting a stylistic study, we pay attention to the context of situation which refers

to, among others, linguistic features in a text. Verdonk (2002) proposes the structures of language to observe: graphology, phonology, lexis, and syntax.

Graphology

In graphology, stylisticians notice the typographical features of a text such as punctuation, fonts, grapheme size, and grapheme layout. Norgaard (2009) suggests that typographical features can help us to discover and explore the meaning-potential of the visual aspects of printed verbal language in literature. Leech (1969) states that graphology refers to the whole writing system: punctuation, paragraphing, and spacing. Bilal and Cheema (2012) summarizes that graphology deals with systematic formation, structure, and punctuation in a sentence.

An example of graphology in stylistic study is found below, the three lines of the poem entitled *Clearances* by Seamus Heaney:

Fear of affectation made her affect
Inadequacy whenever it came to
Pronouncing words 'beyond her'. *Bertold Brek*.
(Cited in Verdonk, 2002: 57)

Verdonk (2002) analyzes that the inverted commas round the phrase 'beyond her' appear to confirm the son's suspicion that his mother's mispronunciation of words do not come naturally to her. It is whereas the italics and misspelling of 'Bertold Brek' are strongly suggestive of her "inadequacy"

Another example of a graphostylistic study is shown by Ayeomoni (2012: 103) in Remi Raji's *Bound to Remember*.

no water runs where the Niger flows
no fish swims where the Benue berths
my spirit is grieved, my grief is long like the rivers
i will not forgive I will not forget
i will be like God vengeance of truth
i will be thunder in the kidney of liars...

In parts of the poem above, there are neither capital letters in the beginning of each line nor punctuation. Ayemoni (2012) figures out that the absence of capitalization and punctuation in the poem is aimed by the poet to reduce the image of the political leaders who perpetuate socio-political anomalies. Here, the poet sees that the political leaders do not deserve honor, meaning that the poet uses this style to reduce the personalities and to show that they do not deserve respect (Ayemoni).

Phonology

Phonology can also be used to study literary work. Phonology is known as the study of how sound patterning. Bilal *et al.* defines that phonological analysis of a text means to analyze sound pattern in it, formation of words and utterances by systematic use of sound in a language. In *The Voice*, they find that the phonological devices used in the story are repetition, alliteration, consonance, and assonance. Below are the examples.

Men have been striking their lives working and digging for hours.
The Tick-lock of the word went on.
I locked up at eight o'clock last night.
Not that I've got anything against.

(Cited in Bilal *et al.*, 2012: 437)

In the lines above, consonance is found, meaning the repetition of consonant sounds along the lines in the stanza.

Another phonological device is alliteration. It is the repetition of the first consonant sound in two or more words in a line as seen below.

For vestry curtain or carpet at the communion rail.

They're having a ruddy row.
He found himself handling by both hands over the pit.
The rescue workers were digging again.
(Cited in Bilal *et al.*, 2012: 437)

In the above examples, the sounds [k], [r], [h], [w] are repeated in each sentence.

Assonance is another phonological device to observe in stylistics. It refers to the repetition of vowel sound two or more than two words in a line as seen below.

Who were near strained to hear?
The voice had not stopped singing.
I'm an old man! Lewis, and I can't stand it; I've been down here every since the raids go bad.
(Cited in Bilal *et al.*, 2012: 438)

The phonological devices above prove that the writer's choice to clarify the subjects and themes of the story through his beautiful writing (Bilal, 2012). It also reveals the harmony between language and the theme of the literary work.

Aboh (2008), as quoted in Ogunsiji *et al.*, states that sound patterning functions linguistically in poetry to project a poet's purpose or concern in a work. Below is an example in Dasylva's *Songs of Odamolugbe*.

Their *stanzas* of stifling *scandals*
Causes the masses to *curse*
(Cited in Ogunsiji *et al.*, 2012: 26)

The words *stanzas* and *scandals* are intentionally chosen by the poet show that sound effect created by such selection gives the reader a deeper sense of understanding the enormity of corruption and insincerity in the Nigerian society. It is the insincerity of the rulers that 'cause' the masses to 'curse' (Ogunsiji, 2012: 26).

Lexis

Lexis refers to vocabulary, collocation, connotation, metaphor, and other figures of speech. Leuween (2005) defines that connotation involves the discursive import of typographic signs into a context where they do not previously belong. The symbols used in the literary work should be enquired where they are from and how they constitute meanings. Unlike connotation, metaphor attempts to seek the similarity of the symbols used in the work, or the signifier, with their signified. "You are my rose" can be interpreted that "rose" refers to the person I love. The symbol or signifier "rose" here constitutes the similar quality of "you."

Yeasmin *et al.* (2013) argue that the choice of words in a literary work can reflect its underlying meanings and ideas. The text *Shooting Elephants* contains words such as *riot*, *target*, *imperialism*, *oppressors*, *prisoners*, *convicts*, *tyranny*, and many others. Those words reveal that the political situation of the story. Those words give the associated feeling and make the text produce meanings (Yasmin *et al.*, 2013).

Bilal and Cheema (2012) conduct a lexical analysis in Wordsworth's *Early Spring*. In his work, Wordsworth likes to use personification. Below is the example.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoy the air it breathes.
(Cited in Bilal and Cheema, 2012: 30)

In the lines above, Wordsworth represents the full blossom of spring by giving the flowers the human ability to breathe and enjoy. In addition to attracting the readers' attention, here, the poet also attempts to describe the beauty of nature.

Syntax

The other linguistic feature in doing stylistic analysis is syntax. Syntax refers to grammatical structures including sentence, clause, and phrase elements. Hillier (2004) observes three variables in doing stylistics which are related to syntax. She pays attention to the mode, field, and tenor of texts. Mode refers to the text as a product, meaning that what the readers perceive is only the texts regardless the background of the writers. Field refers to the consumption of text by the reader of literary work. The readers pay attention to the basic content of the work. Tenor refers to the writers and readers of the particular texts.

Transitivity analysis proposed by Halliday is commonly used by stylisticians nowadays. This kind of analysis observes the processes in the texts: material, verbal, mental, relational, behavioral, and existential. To recognize each process, a verb is the tool to determine the type of each process. Material verbs mark the material process, verbal verbs mark the verbal process, mental verbs mark the mental process, linking verbs mark the relational process, behavioral verbs mark the behavioral process, and *there* and non referent *it* mark the existential process.

Each process is also composed by its participants. The material process has Actor, Goal, and Affected participants. The verbal process has Sayer, Receiver, and Verbiage participants. The mental process has Sensor and Phenomenon participants. The relational process has Carrier-Attribute, Identifier-Identified, and Possessor-Possessed participants. The behavioral process has Behavior participant. The existential process has Existent participant.

Nguyen (2012) conducts transitivity analysis to uncover the personality of the character in Hoa Pham's *Heroic Mother*. The different representation of the processes in Pham's *Heroic Mother* to describe the character can be seen below.

Material : I **do** my exercise *near Hoan Kiem lake*
Relational : I **am** a kindly grandmother
(Cited in Nguyen, 2012: 88)

The use of *I* as the Agent in the work reveals that the character appears as a sole participant. The material verb *do* shows that as a mother, she devotes her energy in her hard times. The main character portrays herself as being "*a kindly grandmother*". That is the way she defends herself against her relatives' misjudgment and their inappropriate attitudes towards her. What is more, by stating her quality of being "*kindly*" she may believe that it is more important to be herself than to mind the words of others (Nguyen, 2012).

Brooks (2010) conducts a transitivity analysis in Van Wyk's *In Detention*. The four lines below are taken from the poem.

He fell from the ninth floor
He hanged himself
He slipped on a piece of soap while washing
He hanged himself...
(Cited in Brooks, 2012: 28)

In the above lines, we can focus on the processes done by the agent *he*. The second and fourth lines have the same participants, agent-goal. The clause is included as a material process, marked by the verb *hanged*. Brooks concludes that *he* as the agent shows that *he* is to hold the blame for the action *hanged*. The goal *himself* refers to the agent *he*. It implies the awkward logic that the voluntary process *hanged* is self-inflicted (Brooks).

How Stylistics Works

Barry (1995: 2007) argues, "Stylistics attempts to provide a commentary which is objective and scientific, based on concrete quantifiable data, and applied in a systematic way." To conduct a stylistic study, a researcher should be prepared with his linguistic competence so that his analysis can be comprehensive. As a consequence, a stylistic study may focus on the phonological devices only, for instance. The knowledge of sound patterning is important so that the types of phonological devices and their effects can be uncovered.

To do so, Barry suggests some characteristics how stylistics works to analyze literary texts. Firstly, Stylistics emphasizes connections between literary language and everyday language (Barry, 1995:207). The plainer the language use in literary works, the easier it is to understand. Poetic language of a literary work sometimes becomes barrier for people to appreciate and analyze it. People tend to choose non-literary works to analyze. However, the complexity language use in literary works should become a challenge for stylisticians. We can pay attention to its complexity as the data to interpret what happen in a particular literary work, and why the writer chooses such a style.

Secondly, stylistics uses specialized technical terms and concepts which derive from the science of linguistics (Barry, 1995:208). It makes how stylistics is different from other approaches. The linguistics terms used in stylistics are not used in daily life. To call a terminology, we need to find its examples and proofs in the work. How certain terms, such as allegory and transitivity are found must be equipped with their existence in the work. Consequently, we can figure out the meanings and contexts of the work.

Lastly, stylistics makes greater claims to scientific objectivity than does close reading, meaning that its methods and procedures can be learned and applied by all (Barry, 1995: 208). It does not mean that stylistics is the best approach among others, but this approach does not depend on the intuition of the readers only, but also the empirical data found in the work. The massive studies on stylistics can be easily learned by the readers. What to prepare is the readers' linguistic competence on particular linguistic features. For example, one can focus only on personification to gain more understanding literary work.

To sum up what has been discussed in previous paragraphs, I would like to emphasis that stylistics is applicable for various text analyses. The massive use of language becomes delicate sources for stylisticians. The use of literary works in all levels of studies proves that the existence and power of literature are believed to be able to improve people's sensitivity. That goal can be reached whenever people have good understanding of the work. One of the so many ways to reach it is by conducting stylistic analysis.

Conclusion

Linguistic features in literary work can serve as strong evidences to interpret the work. The existence of certain construction, punctuation and paragraphing for example, can represent the human character in the work or the writer's style. The choice of sounds found in the words has its own purpose. The writer may show his or her intelligence to make sounds in beautiful constraints. It can also be used to attract the readers. The choice of certain lexical features also reveals the reason why the writer uses personification, for instance. The verbs used in literary work become other tools to observe what happen with the agent in a clause. Those previous examples show that the study of text, either with literary criticism or stylistics, is a delicate research to do. Stylistics is an effective approach to study the style of language in literary works. The readers or researchers can gain more understanding of the works by means of the features found in them.

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