

## Pedagogical Implication of New Criticism and Stylistics

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**Abstract:** Classroom teaching has drastically changed in the post-pandemic world. Moreover, the recent trends in analyzing English literature have radically changed how we approach and analyze a literary text. The present paper turns from such extrinsic to intrinsic approaches to literature, justifying the value of such analysis while teaching in the classroom. Literature and teaching literary texts, especially poetry, can be a total abstract experience in the school. Still, because stylistics as a discipline takes the knowledge of phonology, grammar, lexis, semantics, and discourse analysis, it will make literature a scientific discourse. The philosophical or abstract ideas can be easily explained using a toolkit approach of stylistics. After making a subtle distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to literature, the first half of the paper will discuss New Criticism as an antecedent of Stylistics. At the same time, the latter will trace the contribution of stylistics in classroom teaching.

The recent trends in analyzing English literature have radically changed how we approach and analyze a literary text. Whether it is new materialism, post-humanism, plasticity, disable theories, animal studies, or trauma studies, they all have opened up new ways of reading literature extrinsically. Moreover, they emphasize more on contexts than the text itself. The present paper turns from extrinsic to intrinsic approaches to literature, justifying the value of such analysis while teaching in the classroom. The first half of the form will discuss New Criticism as an antecedent of Stylistics, while the second will trace the contribution of stylistics in classroom teaching.

### **The Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Approaches to Literature**

Extrinsic approaches to literature would advocate reading literature in/with its broader contexts, which include the understanding of social, cultural, political, economic, auto/biographical, historical, etc. They deny the autonomy of text and promote a better experience when a literary text is read within its external context. One thing which the extrinsic approach aims to do is to give equal scope to the non-literary domain and makes literature

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interdisciplinary and intertextual (Graham 2021).

No text gets its birth in a vacuum; every text and understanding is contextualized in a particular situation. These critical approaches give more importance to such external factors than being limited to textual analysis alone. The Marxist approach argues that the text has its roots in the base, formed by economic concerns. A reader is produced and consumed within dialectics about class and money. The postcolonial approach gives due importance to the colonial violence, history, and the burden on the postcolonial writers to answer back to the empire. Their texts are highly influenced by the politics of the English language and identity politics. Feminism foregrounds the history of suppression of women and advocates the need to form literature of their own<sup>1</sup>. Psychoanalysis, like Marxism, emphasizes the unconscious/hidden mode of text.

On the other hand, any approach or method of reading literature that imparts importance to the 'text' rather than 'context' can be called an intrinsic approach in the simplest terms. The inherent approach is also known as the 'formalistic approach' because it gives more importance to the formal aspects of literary language. It talks about the autonomy of the text; hence, oriented toward the language of literary texts.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Showalter, Elaine. *A literature of their own: British women novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton University Press, 1999.

### **New Criticism versus Stylistics**

New Criticism<sup>2</sup> And Stylistics, as an approach to reading literature, analyzes literary text according to specific formal tools. In other words, we can say that both of these approaches were academic and intended to promote what we now call Practical Criticism (Richards; Leavis). Both of these approaches brought the element of objectivity to literature and made it scientific vis-à-vis giving literature a 'close reading.'<sup>3</sup>. Both methods tried to analyze literature in such a fashion that the element of indeterminacy of meaning in the text got highlighted, which was later on championed by the poststructuralists.

One of the most important differences between the schools was the final objective. New Critics used linguistic tools to interpret the text; they were more interested in the analytical meaning of the text, whereas stylistics thrived as a metalinguistic tool to describe the language without being bothered about reaching the final purpose. New- Critics were limited in their literature and literary language approach. In contrast, stylistics embraced and thrived along with new linguistic, psychoanalytical, and postmodern theories of Saussure, Lacan, Barthes, and Derrida.

### **New Criticism as Antecedent of Stylistics**

With the advent of Romantic sensibility, English Literature was replete with a strong sense of subjectivity and

<sup>2</sup>Brooks, Cleanth. "The new criticism." *The Sewanee Review* 87.4 (1979): 592-607.

<sup>3</sup>The term became very popular in the school of New Criticism.

impressionistic tendency. Both I. A. Richards<sup>4</sup> and F. R. Leavis<sup>5</sup> It can be accredited for bringing a shift from Romantic subjectivity to textual objectivity, consequently laying the path for New Criticism. Stylistics, being driven by scientific rules of linguistics, is also objective and scientific in its approach. Both the schools of analysis focused on analyzing literature with a sense of detachment. It is noteworthy that the birth of new criticism is/with formalism, whereas the delivery of stylistics is with the advancement of linguistic theories. Richard Bradford makes an instrumental distinction between textualized and contextualized approaches to stylistics. According to him, formalist and new critics are textualized as the contemporary critics did not consider literary style entirely separate from literature. At the same time, contextualism relies more on the interconnection between text and its context.

A textualist will be concerned principally with how the patently literary structure of the text appropriates and refracts its references to the world. A contextualist will be more concerned with the text as a

constituent feature of a broader range of discourses and stylistic networks: syntactic, lexical, political, historical, gendered, and cultural. The textualist and the contextualist will acknowledge the pressure of the double pattern within the text, but they will differ on the effects and function of literary style. (95)

Both the school of thought are significantly textual in their approach. In other words, both- New Criticism as well as Stylistics give priority to the textual aspect. Consequently, both the schools attempt a close reading but, of course, with different tools in mind. Though both the schools were interpretation-oriented, stylistics broadened the interpretive framework by including the Postcolonial, Feministic, and Marxist aspects. One branch of applied stylistics is mainly concerned with the distinctive varieties of languages, marking a difference between literary and non-literary styles.

However, where the new critics privileged literature above all the other discourses, stylistics was more concerned about the language of the address or any form of literature. Stylistics also analyzed the political, personal cultural, and social textual realities. Because of the specific techniques of new critics, the approach was only suitable for studying concise works like poems. In contrast, stylistics could explore even the larger pieces of literature like short stories, novellas, plays, and even complete novels.

<sup>4</sup>See his Richards, Ivor Armstrong. *Principles of literary criticism*. Routledge, 2017.

<sup>5</sup>See Brooks, Peter, Arthur Walton, and Christa Knellwolf. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 7, Modernism and the New Criticism*. No. 7. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Though stylistics is a recent branch of literary criticism, various academic critical schools, before stylistics, had laid down the foundation for stylistics in some way or other. The earliest antecedent of stylistics was rhetoric. It was a discipline of study in ancient Europe which taught men to use language as a tool of persuasion. In comparison, the other various schools of literary criticism attempt to analyze a text from multiple subjective or contextual perspectives like feminist, psychological, historical, postcolonial, cultural, etc., the aim of stylistics is mainly focused on a linguistic analysis of language. Since stylistics borrows its framework of research from linguistics, it also claims to be comparatively as scientific, systematic, and database-centric as linguistics is.

During the medieval period, the style came to be known as the dressing of thought. But by the beginning of the 20th century, literary criticism moved away from the subjective approach of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary critics. Critics like I A Richards advocated objectivity in criticism. Saussure and Jakobson formulated some theories of analyzing the linguistic features of a literary text; however, they did not do full justice to academic work as their contribution tended to become a surface analysis of linguistic features.

New criticism stands very close to stylistics among all the formalist or textual schools of criticism. The contemporary critics believed in a literary work's inseparability of form and content. The unity of form and content, language and

experience, medium and message is very particular to literature. Based on these aspects, a literary work differs from other non-literary discourses like science, history, or economics.

While analyzing a literary text, new critics denied the focus on both authors, calling it an "intentional fallacy."<sup>6</sup> or even the reader calling it an "affective fallacy"<sup>7</sup>. So finally, it is neither the author nor the reader but the text which should be the focus of analysis for a literary critic, and they should achieve the study by reading it closely on the page. Stylistics also uses specific methods to lessen the value of the authors or readers or their emotions. Yet, the main aim of stylistics is to enable us to understand the intent of the author in the manner the author or writer has passed across the information. Therefore, stylistics is concerned with examining grammar, lexis, semantics, phonological properties, and discursive devices. Stylistics is more interested in the significance of function that the chosen style fulfills.

Both the schools observe the autonomy and universality of a literary text. So it can easily be observed that new criticism came very close to stylistics in its emphasis on the textual analysis of academic work. Still,

<sup>6</sup>Beardsley, Monroe, and W. K. Wimsatt. "The intentional fallacy." *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (1946): 30-35.

<sup>7</sup>Wimsatt, William Kurtz. *The verbal icon: Studies in the meaning of poetry*. University Press of Kentucky, 1954.

contemporary critics didn't imply the linguistic tools to do that simultaneously. Stylistics even differs from the structuralist analysis because it views the text as constituting a multiplicity of discourses. Unlike Structuralism which holds a signifier-signified relationship as a fixed system of signification, Stylistics does not subscribe to a fixed semantic structure in a text. Stylistics points out the different linguistic devices used by the writers, which explain their peculiar style of writing, the deviations, the tools of foregrounding, etc. In a nutshell, stylistics does not replace the other kinds of literary criticism; instead, it asserts that by going to the root of literary creation is analyzing its language and linguistic structures, we can understand and value the works of literature better.

Because of a rigid outlook of new critics, one pronounced effect of new critical practice was the narrowing of the canon. Unlike contemporary criticism, stylistics and its methods can also be applied to other disciplines. The main concern of stylistics is the language's use/abuse/misuse; it becomes a comprehensive approach and can apply to media studies, teaching pedagogy, forensic science, the fashion industry, advertisements, digital humanities, and many more.

In its later phase, Stylistics deviated from the rules identical to New Criticism. With the developments of linguistics and alternative discourse analysis, stylistics embraced the other emergent areas in

literary theory, which New Criticism failed to do. The best example of this break of stylistics is Sara Mill's seminal work *Feminist Stylistics* (1995). Whereas New Criticism failed to successfully analyze the lengthy works of literature like novels and dramas, Stylistics embraced and broadened its horizon and started to study the language of advertising, politics, religion, individual authors, etc. Stylistics brought down the job of literary critics from the pulpit in the arena of politics. The language was not a sacred element for the statisticians, and they enjoyed analyzing it scientifically, whereas New Critics considered literary language a highly selective and holy entity.

Stylistics, as we understand them today, came into existence because of various linguistic developments in the twentieth century. The first and foremost influence is that of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.<sup>8</sup> And semiotics. Saussure distinguished between the corpus of language (*langue*) and an individual's use of language (*parole*), providing a framework for the statisticians to emphasize individual styles. He envisaged language as a series of subdivisions marked off on the indefinite planes of ideas and sounds. A word (*sign*) was a fusion of concept (*signified*) and sound-image (*signifier*), the two being somehow linked as meaning in the mind. He gave more importance to the synchronic study of language rather than diachronic. In my opinion, the most crucial

<sup>8</sup>De Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in general linguistics*. Columbia University Press, 2011.



contribution of Saussure was the formation of syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes theory, which Jakobson developed. We select the words on the vertical axis before they form a meaningful sentence on the horizontal axis by combining them with grammatical rules.

Saussure's ideas spread first to Russia, being brought there and developed by Roman Jakobson.<sup>9</sup> (1896-1982) and other Russian Formalists. Strictly speaking, the product was not Structuralism, which dates from Jakobson's acquaintance with Lévi-Strauss.<sup>10</sup> In the 1960s, formalism is the study of the devices by which literary language makes itself distinctive. Poetry was the great love of the Russian formalists, and they looked intently and dispassionately at the structures and devices that literature employs. Their most significant contribution was to distinguish between the literary and non-literary languages. Russian Formalists explained the formulations of the foregrounding technique by defamiliarization so even the banal or hidden expressions appear new to our eyes. Even today, statisticians use a lot of terms that are contributed by Russian Formalists. Like the Russian Formalists, members of the Prague School were keenly concerned with literature. Still, they were

not hermetic in their approach, i.e., they did not see literature as a self-enclosed, stand-alone entity but as something reflecting social and cultural usage.

The writings of the Russian linguist philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>11</sup> provided a refreshing boost in the 1980s to study the style and structure of prose fiction in a socio-stylistic context. They introduced the notion of intertextuality, texts, and their voices in a creative dialogue with others. Prose fiction inevitably lent itself to discursive approaches, such as focalization or point of view and speech and thought presentation. Later on, various poststructuralist and archetypal critics picked up some of the ideas.

The subsequent and most significant influence was Noam Chomsky<sup>12</sup> (1928- ) and his followers, who transformed linguistics. Indeed, despite many difficulties and large claims later retracted, the school of deep or generative grammar still holds center stage in the field of stylistics. Chomsky came to prominence in a 1972 criticism of the behaviorist's B.F. Skinner's book *Verbal Behaviour*. Chomsky was concerned with explaining two striking features of language -The syntax was universal and straightforward. He aimed to

<sup>9</sup>Jacobson, Roman. "Preliminaries to speech analysis: The distinctive features and their correlates." *MIT Acoust. Lab. Tech. Rep.* 13 (1952).

<sup>10</sup>See De George, Richard T. "The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss." (1972).

<sup>11</sup>Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich. "The Bakhtin reader: selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov." (1994).

<sup>12</sup>See Burke, Michael, and Kristy Evers. "Formalist stylistics." *The Routledge handbook of stylistics*. Routledge, 2017. 31-44.

provide the quintessential framework for learning the English language for the whole world. Though there are many important books, these four are the product of the intersection between linguistics and stylistics and remain, even today, the best books in the field.

1. Fowler, Roger (ed.) *Essays on Style in Language*. London: Routledge and Kegan Pau, 1966.
2. Freeman, Donald C. (ed.) *Linguistics and Literary Style*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971.
3. Leech, Geoffrey N. *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. London: Longman, 1969.
4. Sebeok, Thomas A. *Style in Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960.

Using Stylistics while teaching at the intermediate or undergraduate level will bring almost a scientific inquiry into the classroom. Literature and teaching literary texts, especially poetry, can be a total abstract experience in the school. Still, because stylistics as a discipline takes the knowledge of phonology, grammar, lexis, semantics, and discourse analysis, it will make literature a scientific discourse. The philosophical or abstract ideas can be easily explained using a toolkit approach of stylistics. Since attention is predominantly text-centered, stylistics could arguably be a branch of text linguistics. Since it uses a linguistic framework, it could also be seen as a tool for studying literature in applied linguistics. Moreover, a stylistic approach

to literary texts will train students' minds to be critical and capable of seeing even hidden discourses of language and its relation with reality.

One better thing achieved while using stylistics in classroom teaching is that, unlike New Criticism, stylistics even promotes analysis of the language used in gender, postcolonial, and political arena. It is interdisciplinary; hence the class, which compromises students of different interests, can find it fascinating to use linguistic and psychoanalytical approaches. It enables the teachers to train the students in genre analysis as well. I have used stylistics in my language classes and found it a better way of teaching literature via language and vice versa. The stylistic analysis of literature, let's say poems, sometimes reveal the themes which otherwise would have been neglected or buried without such analytical research.

If using stylistics in classroom teaching has its advantages, no doubt, the other side of the coin is equally loaded with its problems. Stylistics is a complicated subject to teach, and the approach is full of jargon and clichés, which sometimes kill the pleasure of teaching literature in the classroom. The method is very laborious and lengthy; sometimes, students don't find it interesting. The almost scientific approach of stylistics robs literature of its aesthetics and brings, in return, a very uninterested student community that is customary to studying literature for pleasure's sake.

Applying stylistics to short pieces is feasible, but the same approach cannot be given to long genres like novels, plays, and epics. Most of the literature classes of such nature that teaching is mainly limited to thematic or imagery-based analysis. It is challenging for the students to switch to almost a mathematical analysis of linguistics, pragmatics, etc. Teaching stylistics in the classroom sometimes takes the discussion of the class away from the aesthetic-cum-philosophical nature of literature.

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