

## On the Interactivity of Stylistic Analysis

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**Abstract:** Stylistics can be viewed as an area of study which straddles literary criticism and linguistics. Even though different linguistic schools result in different approaches to stylistics, every stylistic approach will incorporate in its paradigm some key factors such as the reader and the author. This thesis is a tentative study of how these factors interact with one another and ultimately form a basis for interactivity in stylistics.

**Key words:** Stylistics; Interactivity; Analysis

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### INTRODUCTION

The study of stylistics can be traced back to the rhetoric studies in ancient Rome and Greece. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus of stylistics is mainly on the subjective comment, and thus did not win its position as an independent discipline (Shen, 2000). Due to the various developments of linguistic branches and after the Saussurean structuralism, stylistics gradually emerges as a prosperous academic object. With the development of stylistics, several questions concerning this discipline naturally occur: what is stylistics? And what does stylistics incorporate in its actual operation? In this thesis, the author will first have a brief review of the history of stylistics, and following this, a tentative study will be made on the problems which torture the stylisticians. In the final part in this thesis, a stylistic analytical model will be proposed which tries to testify that interaction will be a key point in doing stylistics.

### 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of modern stylistics<sup>2</sup> can be arranged into four stages. The first stage is initiated by Bally, one of F. de Saussure's students, with the publication *Traite de Stylistique Francaise* (1909). In this book, Bally, one of students of Saussure, tries to initiate stylistics an independent branch of linguistics. He holds that in our daily conversation, two important factors are encoded: one is the objective thought, and the other is the emotional factor; and a stylistician's task is just to find out the linguistic features that realize the emotion and feelings. Another important scholar in this stage, Spitzer, attempts to define stylistics as a bridge connecting language and literature, and the method he has employed is called "philological circle". According to Spitzer, stylistic analysis is a dynamic process, which incorporates three stages of explanation: hypothesis posing, linguistic analysis and critical explanation, and aims to find "inward life center". (Hu & Liu, 2004, pp.241-242).

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The second stage of stylistics is closely related to the Russian formalist, Jakobson, which holds that stylistics is the language itself, though in his words, poetics is the term he used. In order to make a clear illustration of poetic function in language, he first proposed that language can be viewed from six relatively independent factors and these factors are closely related to six functions. Among them poetic function is an important one, which Jakobson defines as "...what makes a verbal message a work of art" and "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination".(see Weber, 1996, p.11) Jakobson's analysis on the phonemic structure of poetry pioneered and propelled the structural stylistics. However, his analysis is mainly set on the formal characters of the poetry, and that is why the later coming scholars consider his analysis a formal one. Another contribution made by Jakobson is his effort in trying to establish stylistics as an inter-disciplinary subject and this can be clearly indicated in the following words given by him in 1960:

If there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I believe that the poetic incompetence of some bigoted linguists has been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistic science itself. All of us here, however, definitely realize that 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. (Jakobson, 1960, p.377)

In the following 10 years, stylistics, just as explained by Jakobson in his closing statement, borrowed a lot from linguistics, which were represented mainly by generative syntax and functional grammar wherein the former is led by Chomsky and the latter, by Halliday. Ohmann (1969) tries to apply the transformational apparatus to do stylistics. A typical example is his comparative analysis of the prose of Hemingway and Faulkner. Ohmann first transforms the sentences in Hemingway's prose into kernel sentences and finds that the style of Hemingway's works still exists, while this technique testifies that Faulkner's style has disappeared if this kind of transformation is applied into his works. Another typical example is Halliday's thorough and careful analysis of William Golding's *The Inheritors*. In this seminal work, Halliday does his analytical work by using transitivity system in his functional grammar and tries to find the reasons why the "people" is supplanted by the "new" one. But these two approaches are critically reviewed by Fish (1980). Fish holds that the meaning or interpretation given by the analysts is arbitrary. It is not the grammatical form that gives the interpretation; on the other hand it is the reader who finds the meaning of the text. Thus, in Fish's view, reader's factors have to be considered and he then proposes the affective stylistics which puts the reader as a key factor in doing stylistics. While in systemic functional grammar, the relationship between the meaning and the grammar is "natural" (Halliday, 1994), which means the grammar will have a non-arbitrary manifestation of its meaning potential.

The 1980s saw the great development of discourse analysis<sup>3</sup> and in turn, this great move gives much impetus to stylistics. Conversation analysis, Gricean pragmatics, and text-oriented grammar all have made much contribution to the stylistics proper. Following this research trend, literary texts were considered as a kind of discourse, though this kind of discourse has its own features (Feng, 2002). However, theories in discourse studies have propelled the development of stylistics.

In the latest 10 years, social history and cultural stylistics, coexisting with the quick development in discourse studies, have emerged as important approaches to stylistics. They hold that language is not a neutral carrier, any more than a conduit filled with linguistics elements, but a product of ideology and social structure. And the text and culture can both reflect and constrain each other (Gee, 1999). Texts are social phenomena; "a clause, a text or a culture are not 'things', but social processes that unfold at different time scales". (Martin and Rose, 2003, p.1)

The above discussion on the history of stylistics echoes the definition given by Widdowson:

"By stylistics, I mean the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation and I shall take the view that what distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other is that it is essentially a means of linking the two." (Wang, 2000, p.1)

From Jakobson's formal stylistics to the recent social history and cultural stylistics, it is shown that stylistics sways now and then. At the formal stage, they rely much on the linguistic techniques, but with

the development of language theories, it tries to incorporate in its field more factors such as the ideology and cultural factors beyond reader and writer. This direction in stylistics indicates its interdisciplinary characteristics yet also unsteady position in the academic field. As far as the elements are concerned in stylistics, there are different opinions on this topic. Jakobson holds style as the language itself, thus ignoring the writer, reader and other contextual factors. In discourse stylistics, they try to analyze text either from a formal or functional perspective (Schiffrin, 1994). Formalists always pay much attention on the formal aspects of language, thus ignoring the social context. Though functional approach tries to include more in its model, it is yet hard to define the functions, and thus perplexes the analysts. In the latest 20 years, contextualism became popular, and in this paradigm, they weight much on the relationship between stylistic significance and the social political and cultural factors, and thus goes too far as stylistics can do. This approach is also criticized by scholars such as Toolan (1990, 1997) and Widdowson (1998) for its amplification of social history context. In conclusion, the above approaches either rely much on the linguistics or magnify the contextual factors to such an extent that stylistics is a little stuffed.

## **2. INTERACTIONAL MODEL OF STYLISTICS**

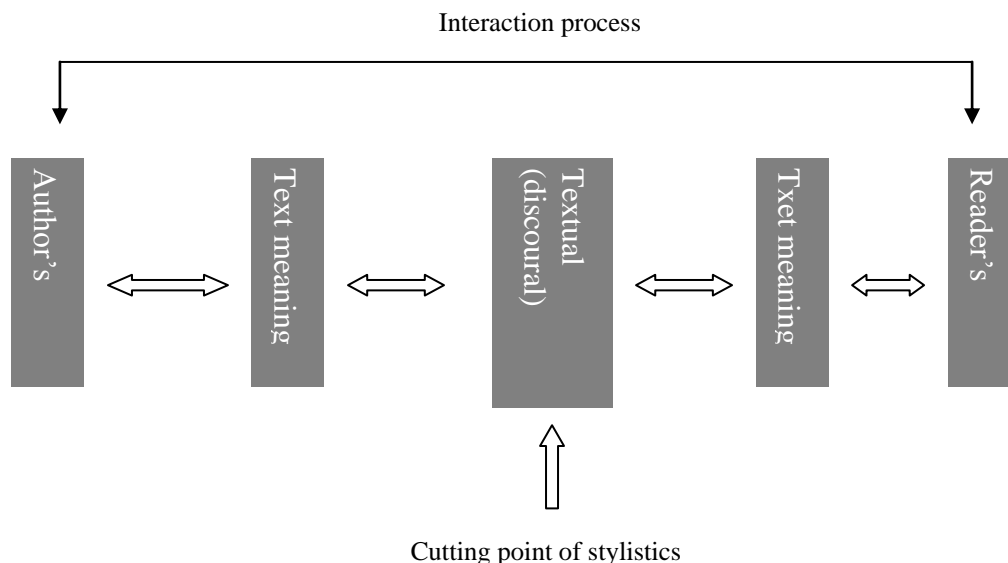
Literature discourse, like any other kind of discourse, is the product co-generated by the author and reader in a certain context. Thus defined, literature discourse will be a semantic site on which the meaning is generated through an interactional process between the writer and reader. Following this assumption, a question will naturally come: where does the meaning come from? It seems that it is the language in the discourse that has meaning for the discourse. But, if we consider this question a little further, it will be easily found that it is the author, rather than the language itself that controls the meaning production in the discourse. Furthermore, the meaning of the discourse will ultimately be recognized by the reader; and no guarantee was provided to ensure that the meaning in the author's mind is quite correctly decoded in the readers' mind. A common phenomenon is that the meaning will be diverged, even strayed from the original meaning. Thus it is naturally held that the discourse meaning is a dynamic process of the interaction between the author and the reader. In this sense, meaning is negotiated through the interaction (Thompson, 1996). The author's task in writing a discourse is just to meet the readers' expectations. This expectation-meeting character constitutes the interactional feature in text-forming (Hoey, 2001). If we accept that the discourse meaning is generated both by the author and the reader, interaction will become an important factor in doing discourse analysis.

Another important element in considering this interaction model in discourse is that both the author and reader are not isolated human beings. On the contrary, they are living in a certain context or quite different contexts, in which numerous and complicated ingredients are included such as the social structure, the author's ideology, etc. In this thesis, we just use a coverage term "context" to refer to the reader's and the author's situations since this is not the key point we are discussing here.

Next question which puzzles the analysts much is how the meaning goes into the lexico-grammar in the discourse. Is the relationship between them, just as pointed out by Fish (1980), arbitrary, or is it a kind of natural relationship that exists between them? This question involves the debate of the autonomous and evolutionary point view of language wherein the former holds language is innate in the human mind and cannot be influenced by the environment, while the latter argues that language, like any species in the world, has the evolutionary character and thus it is greatly shaped by the context; and as a result, the grammar of the language is formed by the function in the history of language development. It will be a hasty mistake to mark any of the two approaches to language as wrong or right. Actually, these two approaches are different perspectives to probe language; one is from the inside of the language and the other, from the outside. In doing stylistics, we are facing concrete discourse materials and very often the author is in another period of time or in another place. How can we then make a full analysis of the author's mind? So, it is convenient to adopt a functional perspective which argues that the grammar naturally realizes the meaning. Thus we have four factors in our model: author's context, reader's context, discoursal lexico-grammar and discourse meaning. Following this assumption, we will consider the last factor in our model: how the meaning of the text is generated in the reader's mind.

So far as the text is created by the author, its meaning will be apt to replicated by the reader. But this process of replication is a dynamic one; the meaning has become an indispensable part in the reader's understanding of this text. Thus, a "new" text will also be created in the reader's mind. Luo (2004)<sup>4</sup> call this kind of text "generated text"; and here we use the word "TXET" to refer to this kind of text. A concrete example will illustrate this clearly. Nowadays, the parents in China like to ask their little child to recite Tang (dynasty) poems or Song (dynasty) proses. Even though the child can recite the poems very fluently, they really do not know the meaning of the poem, or to put it in an exact way, the poem cannot produce a clear "txet" in their minds. The reason is simple: they are in different stations and in different times.

Up to now we have discussed the five factors which are included in the following chart.



Just as the above figure indicates, the cutting point of stylistics is the textual features, which include the lexio-grammar, structure of the discourse, and other visible features related to the discourse. The features will establish a kind of relationship both to the text and the txet, and thus any motivated prominence in these features will show the stylistic significance. Considered from another perspective, the stylistic significance is closely associated with the author's and the reader's contexts, since they constitute the meaning potential for the text and txet respectively.

In conclusion, the consideration of the reader's and the author's contextual factors, must be assumed first, since they form the basis of our analysis. With these assumptions in the minds, the discoursal features will be the cutting point. Any features related to the topic or theme of the text will be the focus of the analysis.

## CONCLUSION

This discussion is based on the assumption that meaning and form are in a natural rather than an arbitrary relation. The assumption on this topic will result in the debate on our argumentation here. Another point which makes our stance not so safe is that even the meaning can be represented in certain linguistic forms, this representation is always unclear and unsteady. For instance, in Hallidayan linguistics, on which we rely much in this thesis, interpersonal meaning is always realized by mood, modality systems, or by appraisal system in Martin's terms. But we must notice that the theme element, which is used in systemic linguistics to define the textual functions can also contain interpersonal elements. This kind of vagueness between the grammatical elements makes the analysis more difficult and complicated.

## NOTES

1. In this thesis, stylistics is assumed to refer to an area of study which straddles two disciplines: literary criticism and linguistics.
2. The study of stylistics has as a long history as can be traced back to ancient Rome and Greece. Modern stylistics refers to the stylistic study since the Saussure structuralism.
3. Discourse is a term usually favored by American scholars and usually refers to the oral form while text is often used by European linguists and connected with the written form. Here this difference is deliberately ignored.
4. Pro. Luo Xuanmin, in his lectures on *Intertextuality and Translation*, makes a clear distinction of text and txet. If a text cannot be reproduced, it is a text, otherwise, it is a txet, and in Chinese, 增殖文本, 或本文.

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