The Nexus between Stylistics and Discourse in the Explication of Meaning

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Abstract
There are basically two forms of a text – the spoken form and the written form. The vehicle that carries a text, whether spoken or written, is language. This language does not exist in a vacuum, it must function within an environment or an event. It is the parameters of stylistics and discourse that the linguist uses in the explication of meaning. Both approaches pursue meaning not only in terms of the linguistics element and the sense it makes to the hearer but also seems to see any word in terms of who said it, to whom, where, in whose presence, with what objects around and what effect it has on the hearer (reader). It is against this eclectic approach to linguistic analysis that this paper seeks to examine the relationship between stylistics and discourse. The paper adopts purely narrative and descriptive approach in its discourse, noting of course the points of interconnectedness and the points of departure. It concludes that for now and in the near future, stylistics and discourse are veritable tools in the hands of the language analyst.


Introduction

The ability to communicate to a wider audience is a task before writers. And, every writer’s no matter how humble the task is, is inescapably concerned with style. Therefore, the problem of a writer is to choose the most appropriate way of handling his subject. Hence, whatever the subject may be, the artist must adopt a style that is in consonance with his purpose and not against it.

Literary criticism and literary appreciation are all avenues employed by writers to examine how effective or ineffective writers have been in communicating feelings. There are various schools of literary appreciation or criticism with different views. Some describe how writers have achieved their purpose while others believe that there are certain ways or tradition on how to write a particular genre. A critic may praise a work of art while another may criticize it. For this reason, it is often said that literary criticism is subjective (Mbuba, 1998). It is because of this subjectivity that a great confusion exists in literary criticism.

It is against this background that Fish (1986:53) states:

Stylistics was born of a reaction to the subjectivity and imprecision of literary studies. For the appreciative raptures of the impressionistic critic, stylisticians purport to substitute precise and rigorous linguistic descriptions, and to proceed from those descriptions to interpretations for which they can claim a measure of objectivity. Stylistics in short is an attempt to put criticism on a scientific basis.

Stylistics is thus a part of socio-linguistics, that is language studied in relation to society.

In the same view, discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used. According to Baker (1999) the context in which an utterance occurs determines the range of implicatures that may sensibly be derived from it. Baker further opines that
apart from the actual setting and the participants involved in an exchange, the context also includes the co-text and the linguistic convention of a community in general.

Celiktas (2011) shares the view that maintains that discourse analysis provides an alternative text processing approach to discourse elucidating meaning and stylistics studies with differentiating features in the way that it aims to relate functions of linguistic structure to certain context. It is against the above views that this paper sought to discuss the nexus between stylistics and discourse in the explication of meaning. This paper is divided into three sub-units: the concept of stylistics; the concept of discourse; the interface between stylistics and discourse and their place in meaning determination.

**Style and the Scope of Stylistics**

The concept of style has a wide currency since it is applied to various spheres of human activity characteristics of an individual e.g. personal style, a distinct personality, period of style, individual tone adopted in conversation, mode of tradition etc. Generally speaking, possibilities of selection from inventories of largely synonymous choices enhance particular ways (i.e. styles) of their arrangement. In verbal communication for instance, these inventories are represented not only by the systems of linguistics (viz: phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic) but also by thematic, textual and macro-compositional features, including types of speech act, the type of code, etc. Their relevance of the stylistic enquiry lies in their significance in relation to the function of discourse. Style as a suitability can be seen as part of communicative competence.

The term “style” comes from a Latin word “stillus”, meaning a way of doing things with additional senses, (Chapman, 1974). According to Holman (1976) style is the arrangement of words in a manner which at once best expresses individuality of the author and the idea and intent in his mind. To
Holman therefore, style is a combination of two elements: the idea to be expressed and the individuality of the author. Also, Schor (1980) assesses style as recurrent features of a text that an author habitually uses, in the sense that a writer cannot help writing the way he/she does. She opines that we may take style in its ornamental view to mean deviation from a neutral or even a naked norm. According to this opinion, the writer dresses the same meaning in different suit of clothes for different occasions.

Giving further clarification, Leech and Shorts (1981) maintains:

*langue being the code or system of rules common to speakers of a language...* and *parole being the particular uses of this system or selections from the system, that speakers or writers make on this or that occasion... style then pertains to parole. It is the selection from a total linguistic repertoire that constitutes style (pp.10-11).*

What Leech and Shorts posit above is the fact that style is rarely undertaken for its own sake, simply as an exercise is discussing what use is made of language. To them, we normally study style because we want to explain something, and in general, stylistics has implicitly or explicitly the goal of explaining the relation between language and the writer’s purpose.

For Crystal and Davy (1975) style is the conscious or unconscious selection of a set of linguistic features from all the possibilities of language. This view of Crystal and Davy is significant because it recognizes the role of linguistic features in text-forming process. Akpan (2013) says that these features are selected from a range of possibilities. For instance, in analyzing oral or written text, Mc Arthur (1996) is of the view that, the traditional levels of stylistic description must be used. These levels according to the source are phonology, graphology, syntax, lexis and semantics. He also maintains that style is a way or manner which implies distinctiveness, that there are phonetic, grammatical, and lexical feature which mark out a text, register, genre or
situation. In this area however, a sense of appropriateness is crucial. In other words, this approach of style as choice from a pool of linguistic resources has to do with the way an individual choose his words to suit a particular occasion.

Anyachonkeya (2008) maintains that style is a variety of language which correlates with contexts including situations. The explorations we have done so far on style reveal how difficult and intriguing it is to define the term style satisfactorily. Indeed, no single definition of style can say the final word. All the definitions examined above are different only in terms, and not in substance. This view supports Morgan’s (1965) position that any writer has the right to write as his pen points and it is not our business, not even our advantage to reshape him according to our notions of what really good writing is. From the above, we posit that the operative principle of these definitions is that style involves a careful choice of linguistic items which will inevitably enhance communication.

Adejare (1992) however states that style and stylistics are virtually synonyms. The main different between them is in usage of the terms. “Style” is favoured by the critics while “stylistics” is favoured by the linguists. At this point, certain questions are necessary. What precisely do we mean by style and stylistics? And why is a particular aspect of a linguistic model preferred to others in the stylistic analysis of the chosen texts?

The aim of stylistics then lies in its analytical and descriptive methods. This means that language can be analyzed beyond the prescriptive model of “correctness” to a fuller analysis of language and the purpose to which language is regularly put. Stylistics is thus concerned with interpretations. From this assertion, it is possible for stylistics to proceed from the stage of analysis to that of explanation and interpretation and the reason a writer may have chosen to shape the text in a particular way.
The Concept of Discourse Analysis

The term discourse was first used by Zelling Harris in 1951. But, the growth and development of DA owes much to J. R. Firth in *The Technique of Semantics* (1983). Firth opines that language scholars should explore conversation to assess the key to a better understanding of what language is and how it works. Our source argues that language analysis should not be restricted to the phonological, syntactic and semantic properties.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1985) sees Discourse Analysis goes beyond Chomsky’s “innate speaker’s competence” which focuses on well-formedness of sentences by finding meaning even in the ungrammatical or seemingly unrelated sequences which users produce. Thus, DA is interested in what makes people use language in the way they do within the confines of specific situations/events.

According to Longrace (1976), studies in the analysis of discourse came as a reaction against traditional grammar and indeed the early versions of transformational grammar that emphasized correctness at the expense of functionality of language based on the users and situation of use.

Slembrouck (1998) considers discourse as the inter-relationship between language and society, with the interactive or dialogue properties of everyday communication. He went further to state that, discourse tells us about itself, language, society, culture and thought. This position corroborates Edward Sapir (1929), who explores the relationship of interrelations between language, culture and personality. According to him, “language does not, as a matter of fact stand apart from or run parallel to direct experience but completely inter-penetrates it” (p.32). The source says that it is an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an accidental means of solving specific problems of communication.

Also contributing to the scope of discourse analysis, Schmitt (2002) sees it as analysis in its social context. This discipline is based on the fact that
language needs a context for its existence and it is impossible to understand the linguistic items, used in discourse, without a context. Commenting on context, Baker (1999) opines that the context in which an utterance occurs determines the range of implicatures that may sensibly be derived from it. Baker further opines that apart from the actual setting and the participants involved in an exchange, the context also include the co-text and the linguistic conventions of a community in general.

However, commenting on the weakness of DA in linguistic analysis, Grenoble (2000:67) states that,

_Hans interestingly enough ruled out the kind of study which DA aims to do. He is of the view that linguistic research focuses on the element within an utterance; discourse can be considered as a sequence of utterances... while this held true for 1950s, 1960s saw an emerging body of different approaches including pragmatics, conversational analysis, textual linguistics and relevance theory._

This underscores Bussman (1997) assertion that discourse is a generic term for multiple interpretations of language use. Hence, discourse becomes a cover term for the model of analysis of different ways of using language – whether spoken or written.

**Stylistics and Discourse Analysis: The Nexus**

For effective creation of meaning, a writer constantly makes free choices as he writes. The choices help the writer to put across his message, ideas, direction and his cast of mind. He can carry out his choices in areas of diction, organization, sentence structure, lexis, punctuation. A writer may decide to use single or monosyllabic words or may prefer turgid or difficult words for specific effect. The writer is free to make his choice within the range of his subject, his purpose of writing and his readers. For effectiveness, an important aspect of what a writer says and how he says is determined by two factors: one is the
broad context of his writing, that is his subject, his purpose and his readers. Another factor pivots on the rules of the language which are too important that if they are ignored will lead to an absolute loss of communication.

The linguistic analyst therefore has a duty to unearth the language use by writers. This he does using linguistic parameters – which often overlaps and inter-connect. In this section of the paper, an attempt would be made to explore the interface between stylistic and discourse analysis; particularly where the two meet and where they depart.

Stylistics is more interested in how language is utilized. Paying attention to choice of language, whether it contains curiosities which may be described in grammatical terms. The business of stylistics takes cognizance of meaning contained in a work but this is subsidiary to his aim of analysis. Meaning or interpretation can only be an aid to the linguistic explications.

In the same vein, Discourse Analysis examines the connection between speech and writing and their relationship to the context in which they are used. Fasold (1996) describes DA as the study of how stretches of languages used in communication assume meaning, purpose and unity for their users. Again, this stance by Fasold highlights users of language as an important element in interpreting the communicative intent of a discourse. It also points out the fact that the stretches of language used in discourse are not haphazard, but they have order, connection and meaning. Like stylistics, Discourse Analysis looks into the form and structures of a text to ascertain how they are combined to achieve unity and meaning.

Also, Ullman (1961) sees stylistics as having to do with expressive and evocative values of language. He explains that stylistics is one of the popular methods to investigate the usage of a particular writer in order to determine what is unique and idiosyncratic in his handling of language. Stylistics treats text as discourse. It studies how linguistic elements are systematically organized to create messages, and how literary works serve as a form of communication.
But, according to Hatim (1990), the interest of discourse analysis may not be directly to establish a linguistic unit above the sentence, but it tries to describe how these units depend on each other to make a meaningful unit. It examines the linguistic clues that link words in a sentence, sentences in a paragraph and paragraphs in extended discourse. As Tannen (1996) puts it, Discourse Analysis considers larger discourse context in order to understand how it affects the meaning of sentences. By depicting language in action, discourse analysis concentrates on structural analysis such as lexical and sentence structures as well as how they are used in a context and tries to account for the complexities of poetic discourse and implied meaning. To achieve this, discourse analysis uses linguistic principles to explain these complexities and tries to see if there are some forms of uniformities in the connectivity of utterance and try to describe them.

The aim of stylistics therefore lies in its analytical and descriptive methods. This means that language can be analyzed beyond the prescriptive model of correctness to a fuller analysis of language and the purpose to which language is regularly put. Stylistics is thus concerned with interpretations. From this assertion, it is possible for stylistics to proceed from the stage of analysis, to that of explanation and interpretation and the reason why a writer may have chosen to shape the text in a particular way.

On the other hand, the descriptive approach to stylistic analysis is very objective. It is an approach which offers a scientific description of a set of distinctive characteristics which mark a text out as belonging to a particular person, time, genre or profession. According to Arnold (1974) this approach to stylistic analysis of literary texts is given various names – statistical stylistics, computational stylistics, stylometrics or stylostatistic.

Brown and Tule (1983) opine that discourse studies how words, phrases, clauses and sentences are used to achieve a text. According to them, the strand among these items is cohesion. They state that a unit of discourse is considered
to be cohesive through generally, speaking, the inter-sentence connection device (reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction) that are made use of in it. This made Bussman (1996) to refer to Discourse Analysis as a discourse grammar. According to him, discourse grammar involves the analysis and presentation of grammatical regularities that overlap between sentences in a text. Bussman further asserts that it is within the register of discourse grammar that words such as discourse markers and cohesive ties are employed to study cohesion and coherence in a text. Schmitt (2002) in answering the question “what is discourse analysis” states that the business of the discourse analyst is an attempt to answer the following questions:

The first is who are the participants in the discourse (the writers and readers)? What are their relationship? And secondly, how do we know what writers and speakers mean? What do we need to know about the context?

Both stylistics and discourse analysis aim at achieving meaning in a given text. What the above suggests is that meaning does not lie in the text itself alone but also in the complex interaction between the author’s intent and his performative ability to encode that intent, and the receptor’s intent to decode. Explaining the concept of meaning, Carlford (1965) defines meaning as the total network of relation entered into by any linguistic form – text, item-in-text, structure, element of structure, class, term in system or whatever it may be. Also commenting Lyon (1977) observes that meaning of an utterance includes, but is not exhausted by the meaning of the sentence that is uttered. He maintains that the rest of the meaning is contributed by a variety of factors that may be referred to, loosely, as contextual.

Akpan (2013) sees stylistics and discourse are two terms that are used to study the actual use of language as well as determine their stylistic and discourse peculiarity. To Schmitt (2002:49):

*The central focus of discourse and stylistics is that discourse is made up of units whose structures*
need to be identified and analysed to effectively interpret the essence of the communicative act. Consequently words, phrases and sentences which appear in the textual record are subject to analysis.

What we can infer therefore from the above explications is that discourse analysis and stylistics are broad-based disciplines which deal with the functional aspects of language. In the words of Akpan (2013) posits that while discourse analysis analyzes what is communicated in discourse, stylistics analysis how it is communicated. Hence, one could assert that the two disciplines often interact with each other. We can therefore affirm that discourse and stylistics are concerned with the analysis of communication to reveal its function using various tools of interpretation including textual peculiarities. Discourse and stylistics are also defined as those designated branch of stylistics which draws specifically on the techniques of discourse. It is against the foregoing that discourse and stylistics acknowledge key assumption in modern linguistics namely, that the distinction between literary and non-literary discourse, if tenable at all, is drawn not a purely linguistic basis but in terms of multiple intersections among texts, readers and sociocultural contexts.

In the view of Celiktas (2011), discourse and stylistics provide an alternative text processing approach to linguistic analysis. Both relate to the study of style, as they investigate, describe and specify the linguistic and extra-linguistic structures. Both domains study and interpret texts from linguistic and context perspectives. The understanding here is that both attempt to establish principles capable of explaining the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language. Therefore, stylistics and discourse analysis look at “how and what” is going on within language; what the linguistic associations are that the style of language reveals. In addition, both may be used to determine the connection between the forms and effects within a particular variety of language.
From the foregoing, discourse and stylistic analyses involve studying the language forms and functions of both spoken and written texts. They do not study linguistic forms in isolation but in association with the user and context of use. Although DA is an inter-disciplinary matrix and heterogeneous discipline, it is unified by its interest in describing language above the sentence; it incorporates the context and cultural influences that motivate language and the ties which hold discourse together.

**Conclusion**

It is thus obvious that both discourse analysis and stylistics manifest a lot of features and present certain opportunities for discourse and stylistics to thrive. Bazhenova (2005) posits that the discourse component allows for the identification of extralinguistic factors, while the stylistic component allows for the discovering of the linguistic devices that represent standard content of a text. Opara (2005) is of the opinion that stylistics contributes to discourse in the following: (a) It exposes the various forms of the text and sees the text as pieces of information (b) It controls and validates instruction by detailed analysis (c) it depicts language in action; and (d) generally works on data from a linguistic dimension.

In his view, Oyeleye (1998) notes that discourse and stylistics emphasize structural analysis and the social role of language, and uses the techniques and concepts of modern linguistics to reveal functions and meanings for texts it analyzes. This views is particularly associated with Michael Halliday and others; and it is the foundation of the practice of stylistics.
References


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