

Using Stylistics to teach literature to non-native speakers

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This chapter discusses the benefits of using Stylistics to teach literature and language to non-native speakers of English. It argues that the analytical precision offered by Stylistics is useful for learners of English who often have a better grasp of structural elements of language than native English speakers. Consequently, Stylistics can be a useful methodology to use in the interpretation of otherwise difficult literary texts.

Key words: non-native speakers, EFL, language awareness, Literary Awareness, optional courses, sensitivity.

Introduction

Teaching English Stylistics to learners in Ukraine has always been part of a language / foreign language course. Surprisingly, even now teaching literature in the country is formally separated from teaching linguistics, so to study Stylistics students need to enrol for a full four-year language study B.A. programme. In the course, students have no freedom in choosing which subjects to take up, as the pre-defined curriculum remains the same for all students with the same major. Thus a course of Stylistics is a compulsory element of a B.A. university programme in foreign linguistics. In virtually all language schools (in the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, Nizhyn, Sumy, Chernihiv to name just a few), by lecturers (and fairly often by the students as well), Stylistics is regarded as the most important subject among all linguistic courses taught. It is twice as long as others, is based on prerequisite competence in Grammar and Lexicology and incorporates knowledge of English together with vast reading experience.

Even outside Stylistics classes, students are expected to demonstrate their literary competence as they are exposed to excerpts from literary works while mastering the English language. Their books normally include pieces from English textual sources serving as models of authentic language use. This methodology provides non-native learners with historical and cultural knowledge alongside with development of language skills. Besides, universities in Ukraine rely upon the

students' literary competence acquired on the basis of their secondary school courses of home and foreign literature.

Methodological background

Both authors of this chapter are affiliated to Kyiv National Linguistic University (henceforth KNLU), which is one of the oldest Ukrainian schools specializing in foreign language instruction. Studying Stylistics here starts at undergraduate level and is usually based on local manuals (Galperin 1977; Мороховский et al. 1991; Кухаренко 2003; Арнольд 2004; Єфімов 2004) with rare exceptions (Simpson, 2004).

Other schools (e.g., Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University) alternatively offer a course in Comparative Stylistics of English and Ukrainian (Дубенко 2005), which has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, students are well trained in contrastive skills; on the other hand, learning *English* Stylistics often suffers as excessive focus is put on mastering *Ukrainian* Stylistics. The course books are written in any of three languages – Ukrainian, Russian, or English – with no real preference. The background of local textbook authors is mostly Ukrainian or Russian. The reason for this dates back to the Soviet school of Stylistics, which, before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, made no national distinction, and Ukraine at the time was part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR).

The methods of contemporary Stylistics in Ukraine originate from a particular field of academic inquiry, from the early twentieth century, that has had a direct and long-lasting impact. This field straddles two interrelated movements in linguistics: Russian Formalism (Viktor Shklovsky and Boris Tomashevsky) and the Prague School of Structuralism (Jan Mukařovský and Vilém Mathesius). The scholar literally linking both movements, Roman Jakobson, moved from the Moscow circle to the Prague group in 1920. Many of the central ideas of these two schools, including the concept of foregrounding and the notion of the poetic function of language, are incorporated in contemporary Ukrainian Stylistics.

Both the Formalist and Prague School movements have had a significant bearing on the way Stylistics has developed in ex-Soviet countries. As a result, in Ukraine nowadays there are four main approaches to teaching Stylistics, exemplified by the following groups: the French school (typified by the work of Dolinin, Bally and Riffaterre); the British school (Turner, Crystal, Leech, Short, Simpson); the

Russian school (Arnold, Galperin, Screbnev), and the Ukrainian local school (Morokhovsky, Kukharenko and Vorobyova).

Speculating on the importance of teaching the subject to non-native speakers of the English language, the main author of the most authoritative Ukrainian *Stylistics* (Мороховский et al. 1991) as well as the founder of the national school Professor Oleksander Morokhovsky argues that:

learning Stylistics as a theoretical subject should, in the first place, follow practical aims. First, learning Stylistics should serve a means to cultivate in students skills to help them to deeply penetrate into the text's meaning, to "extract" from it not only the external plot, but also the deep conceptual and aesthetic meaning that the text contains. Second, learning Stylistics should stimulate students to consciously select stylistic resources of Modern English so that they can be later used in speech and teaching other students (Мороховский et al. 1991: 5).

Professor Irina Arnold (born 1908) is the author of the highly respected *Stylistics* of the Moscow school (Арнольд 2004), which is widely used to teach the subject in many linguistic universities of the ex-Soviet republics, including Ukraine. In her turn, Arnold claims that Stylistics "not only develops skills of close reading, but also creates the foundation for the development of artistic taste; it encourages language normalization and helps students to speak and write clearly and expressively" (Арнольд 2004: 8), which is crucial for non-native speakers of the language.

The above mentioned scholars, as well as others who contributed to the development of English Stylistics, to a great extent depended upon Vladimir Vinogradov's (Виноградов 1963) approach to text studies, with his "text as a monologue" doctrine. It was the most widely spread approach and the only one officially approved of in the USSR. Vinogradov's basic focus was on the author and his message to the reader as well as on the choice of appropriate language means to convey the message and on the mechanic writing and editing. Consequently, text interpretation was seen by Vinogradov as the reader's ability to follow the process of creation backwards step by step.

Vinogradov's opponent, Mikhail Bakhtin, claimed that "a text is a polylogue" with the potential reader incorporated into its texture. Bakhtin holds that it is important to focus on the reader's but not on the creator's work while interpreting a text (Бахтин 1979). The latter approach was unfamiliar to the Soviet reader until late 1980s.

All approaches to teaching Stylistics in Ukraine tend to emphasise the unity of the systemic and pragmatic scope of studies, the interrelations of different language levels and the power of analysis to explicate messages, the authors' meanings and implications. So in modern Ukrainian academia Stylistics is regarded as a branch of linguistics which studies the principles and effects of choice and the combination of different language elements in rendering thought and emotion under different conditions of communication. Consequently, it is based on the following principal notions: language, speech and speech behaviour, the spoken and written varieties of language, variant/invariant, expressive means and stylistic devices.

Due to the abundance of theoretical approaches and substantial contributions of Ukrainian, Russian and European scholars that affected the development of Stylistics, the subject is mainly taught in a descriptive way; consequently, the classical approach to teaching Stylistics is based on assumptions and personal interpretations rather than empirical data. The main notions of Stylistics are defined in different ways, and textbooks normally include a historical description of how ideas developed, opposed each other, merged or became estranged. Thus, students learn about the different research projects of many scholars and are rarely taught to do their own.

Course structure

At KNLU, students of the fourth year (usually at the age of twenty) attend a class of two academic hours (eighty minutes) of Stylistics per week. The course structural parts are theoretical foundations of Stylistics, stylistic phonology and graphics, stylistic morphology, stylistic lexicology, stylistic syntax, stylistic semasiology (i.e. semantics), and text stylistics. The course lasts for two semesters, seventeen weeks each, which gives the total of fifty-four in-class hours. The classes are organized either as lectures for a group of about 100 students (the so-called "stream") or as seminars where small groups of not more than fifteen students come to discuss practical issues. The choice of attending either a lecture or a seminar is never made by students themselves as the structure, including lecture/seminar alteration, is fixed.

The lectures are rarely interactive, and the lecturer only presents certain issues, narrating them to the students with the latter either taking notes or just following information of the PowerPoint presentation. Normally, with such a large audience, the lecturer only occasionally asks a question or addresses a student at random. In their turn, if students come up with a query, it is answered briefly to be addressed in detail at seminars. This form of in-class work permits all students to become familiar with basic theoretical issues. This is very important for EFL practice: it prepares the students for reading similar information from original linguistic pieces in textbooks, which often abound in complex syntax, terminology and details.

The biggest drawback of such a mode of teaching is the monotonous speaking-listening procedure with few challenging tasks or active involvement for the students. Much depends upon the personality of a lecturer, who is free, within the limits of the course structure, to use his/her own examples, illustrations and text samples during the lecture, and interactive teaching techniques. The task is quite a challenge for the lecturer. On the whole, the practical value of lectures is to introduce students to the functional style and terminology of Stylistics alongside with clear, precise and simple explanations of the issues under discussion.

However, the practical classes of Stylistics, the seminars, differ dramatically from lectures. As the assignments are known to the students well in advance, learners can prepare their questions and feedback upon the issue. The assignment usually comprises theoretical issues for the students to speak upon and a set of exercises to practice recognizing and differentiating language items in their stylistic functions. The exercises may include short or long extracts from original pieces and sometimes even full texts. The activities are mainly focused on picking out specific devices and sorting out different stylistic means in given texts.

Very often such classes do not provide enough context for practice in defining or recognising certain stylistic phenomena, and this is where general knowledge and literary competence (Виноградов 1963; Culler 1977) play an important role. The issue of personal experience of reading original texts then becomes crucial. It is taken for granted that students are familiar with most well-known works of British and American literature and are capable of recognizing them in the exercises. Consequently, teaching Stylistics in Ukraine (as well as in most post-Soviet countries) depends upon a profound high-school education and vast personal reading experience

– something the Soviet school was very proud of, boasting of being the home of “the most reading nation.”

The texts on which the course of Stylistics is based are usually of two types: fiction and media articles. The range of authors representing the former is vast: it is traditional in Ukrainian universities to discuss tropes against the examples of renowned writers, ranging from W. S. Maugham to J. D. Salinger. The authors usually represent the U.K., the U.S.A. and rarely Canada or Australia, while colonial literature has never been included in the curricula. Drama and poetry are equally rare, and verses are only quoted to exemplify how individual authors use tropes in creative ways.

The course of Stylistics *per se* is usually supported by a course of Analytical Reading, which is run simultaneously and gives learners two more academic hours of small-group work per week. Being part of the EFL course, it helps students to practice their language skills, interpreting literary texts by way of linguo-stylistic analysis (henceforth LSA). The focus is both on the vocabulary and grammar of the texts as well as on stylistic devices and expressive means used by the authors, which is helpful in improving language and cultivating close-reading skills.

The choice of writers whose texts are analysed is usually fairly diverse though the list remains stable for all the students of the course and rarely changes over the years. As an example, for decades the students of the English department at KNLU have worked on six texts during the academic year. The passages were quite short (usually not longer than a couple of pages), but stylistically rich pieces from Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Edgar Lawrence Doctorow’s *Ragtime*, Richard Gordon’s *Doctor in the House*, Hector Hugh Munro’s *Lumber Room*, P. G. Aldrich’s “Growing Up with the Media” and Christopher Morley’s *Thursday Evening*.

Both the course of Analytical Reading and Stylistics are followed by an oral one-to-one examination by the lecturer. In the interview, a student takes a card at random and is then required to talk on two theoretical issues and to practically support his or her arguments by analysing a piece of text – usually fiction, and only rarely a media article or a poem.

The course exam in Stylistics is not the last time students revise this subject in their academic experience. The examination procedure of their B.A. state exam, which directly follows the course of Stylistics, is largely based on the subject: fifty percent of the exam questions are from the Stylistics curriculum, and LSA is an

integral part of the examination card. The M.A. course includes Text Interpretation, which some time ago used to be a sub-part of the Stylistics course, later evolving into a separate subject. At the M.A. oral exam, text interpretation is one of the main skills checked, as it is considered to be a key component not only of language teachers' training, but also that of translators and interpreters.

Teaching Stylistics through research

Teaching Stylistics in Ukraine is, in its ideal form, tightly linked to independent research done by students. All of them have to hand in their course papers once a year, and while the choice of topics is quite varied, many of them prefer to work on stylistic rather than grammatical, phonological or historical issues. Such topics as metaphor (conceptual metaphor in particular) in various texts or stylistic peculiarities of an author's language are preferred by learners because they are very familiar with the issues due to regular training at Stylistics lectures and seminars as well as Analytical Reading classes.

Lately in their course papers KNLU students have combined traditional hermeneutic literary interpretation with empirical approaches to research, and this has also helped them to acquire additional skills in Stylistics and to check the effects produced by language patterns on readers. This fortunate tendency gives birth to a number of projects not only submitted to supervisors for grades as course works, but also presented at international conferences (Viana et al. 2007; Paliichuk 2007; Chesnokova and Sergeeva 2008).

To stimulate research activity amongst students, apart from the compulsory subjects, including Stylistics, universities offer optional (elective) courses. Undergraduates are free to choose one such course per semester and later carry on their independent project. The list includes a variety of possibilities: Text Interpretation, Cognitive Stylistics and Poetics, Discourse and Grammar, Non-Fiction Writing, Situation-Bound Lexicon, Language and Gender, Emotiveness in Communication, Phonostylistics and many more.

Literary Awareness (Zyngier 1994) is one such option. Teaching Stylistics is successful only if students possess extensive knowledge of literature and are experienced readers of native, foreign classical and modern authors. Evidently, reading experience has to be taken into consideration at the early stages of language

learning and must be regarded as an important requirement for linguists' professional training. Commendably, many non-native speakers of English demonstrate deep knowledge of English literature and profound penetration in the texts they study. For them, language learning and reading literature are the two facets of one process that brings useful results for developing both communication skills and linguistic background. At the same time, the content of linguistic subjects, including Stylistics, has to be carefully selected by instructors to fit the needs of professional training and to achieve academic aims as well as to allow students to enjoy the process of linguistic inquiry and literary criticism.

In this perspective, Literary Awareness (henceforth LitAw) as a theoretically-grounded methodology (Zyngier 1994, 2002) which aims at sensitizing students to verbal art by having them respond to a number of stylistic patterns in different text types is a highly productive means of teaching Stylistics to non-native speakers. The linguistic perspective of the method sees language in context and the way it works to produce effects on readers. When the context in consideration is the classroom, it is understood that the strategies developed should be learner focused and that the teacher is only a mediator of the process of learning.

LitAw focuses on such key notions of modern Stylistics as transitivity and personification, suspension by subordination, vagueness by modality, iconicity, register mismatch, time/tense contrast, point of view, the function of the mediator, etc. (Zyngier 2002), which are usually not included in the scope of Stylistics courses taught in Ukraine. The LitAw course is scheduled a year before the students start leaning Stylistics. As a result, it helps them to achieve the goals of the subject as the teacher introduces terminology and theoretical background in manageable amounts in each class, giving detailed explanations and demonstrating the practical value of basic notions of Stylistics to be pursued the following year.

The basic principle of the LitAw methodology is the creative work of students. This means that learners do not just practice identifying stylistic techniques and devices, but analyse the way that particular stylistic tools produce a certain impact and try to achieve the same effect in their own pieces of writing.

The results of a combination of the traditional approaches to teaching Stylistics and the latest innovations in the academic process exhibit many advantages to EFL learners; they master the foreign language while at the same time learning *about* it. Preliminary elective courses introduce the basic notions, terms and

phenomena, which are immediately illustrated, identified and practiced with the teacher's careful monitoring. Such supervision serves as a clear guideline for individual research and provides the basics of theoretical analysis and its practical implementations. The traditional course of Stylistics gives a substantial background in approaches and methods of research, giving a chance to follow the line of stylistic analysis of well-known texts. Finally, performing their independent study, students benefit from the access to the author's message, implications and ambiguity that arise from the use of different linguistic techniques, which they recognize and adequately interpret.

Teaching Stylistics empirically

Apart from more traditional research, independent empirical projects by students, which eventually enhance their language awareness and skills in interpreting texts, are now becoming popular. A lot of similar activities are carried out within the framework of the International REDES project (Viana et al. 2007; Viana et al. 2009) that helps students in the Humanities, especially in their early academic stages, to actively participate in intercultural cooperative research activities. This, apart from other obvious benefits, develops the language and stylistic awareness that is crucial to EFL learners. Below we describe a case of teaching students Stylistics by way of empirically testing their sensitivity to one of the LitAw components – lexical repetition.

The project was conducted in 2007 at the Translators' Department of Kyiv National Linguistic University. In it, undergraduate learners were asked to read Poem 809 by Emily Dickinson:

Unable are the Loved to die
For Love is Immortality,
Nay, it is Deity –

Unable they that Love – to die
For Love reforms Vitality
Into Divinity (Johnson 1961: 394).

The verse is clearly rich in reiteration at different levels. Lexical repetition is most conspicuous in the poem: the lemma “love” is used by Dickinson six times in just six lines of the verse, which is noteworthy even for a romantic author. Additionally, the author anaphorically reiterates “Unable” and “For Love” and epiphorically, “to die.” Syntactically, the parallel structures “Unable ... to die” and “For Love + verb in Present Simple” create the clear rhythm of the poem and enhance the author’s belief in immortality produced by love. Dickinson’s broken asymmetrical punctuation at first sight violates the rhythm of the poem as the first dash finishes the first stanza while the second one suggests an emphatic pause before the final element in the first line of the second stanza. Yet even this punctuation pattern seems not to lessen the impact of the otherwise clear repetitive structure of the verse where hidden semantic (“Deity” and “Divinity”) and phonetic (dominance of [l] and [n]) repetitions only add soft lyrical sound to the poem.

The experiment was aimed at checking non-native readers’ awareness of the repetitive patterns in the poem and testing the possible influence of these structures on the poem’s perception. To this end, randomly chosen students were asked to read the poem and anonymously fill in the specially designed one-page questionnaire. First, the respondents had to describe the emotions they felt while reading the poem and contribute five adjectives they would associate with the reading. Second, the students were asked to state if the verse evoked any feelings in them (a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’) and to justify their answer in an open way. Finally, they were asked to underline what in their opinion were the most striking elements in the text and to number them from the most to the least striking.

The setting of the experiment was a regular class in the Text Interpretation optional course, so the academic atmosphere stimulated students to actively cooperate with the teacher and thus helped to get valid results. The context of the experiment (Fowler 1981: 2) was taken into account as it assisted in building logical and reasonable interpretation when the readers “felt” the text and then justified their impressions from a linguistic perspective. In our case, the context included the setting (a traditional university room), the experiment duration (about twenty minutes) and comprehension intensity (cursory or close reading).

The results of the experiment lent support to the idea that repetitive structures indeed influence learners’ perceptions of poetry. From the practical point of view, both the teacher and the students later acknowledged that the experimental way of

dealing with stylistic issues largely contributed to acquisition of patterns by non-native speakers and stimulated them to further deepen their knowledge and enhance their skills of text interpretation.

Ninety-two percent of the experiment's participants mentioned that the poem evoked feelings in them. The adjectives that best described their reactions were the following (listed from the most to the least popular): "optimistic", "inspiring" "lovely", "romantic", "cheerful", "eternal", "happy", "interesting", "lofty", "sad", and "thought-provoking". Interestingly, only one adjective in the list ("sad") has a negative connotation, so obviously the poem got positive feedback from most readers.

Answering the question about the most striking elements in the verse, the respondents focused both on lexical elements ("love", "deity", "vitality", "immortality", and "to die") and on patterns. Fifty-four percent of the participants underlined the full pattern "Unable are the Loved to die / Unable they that Love – to die"; forty-six percent chose "Love is Immortality"; sixty-nine percent marked "Vitality" while "Divinity" and "Nay, it is Deity" was the choice of forty-six and fifteen percent of respondents respectively. These results clearly demonstrate that non-native speakers of the language are equally sensitive to its form and the meaning.

Additionally, in the answers to the open question about justifying their reaction to the poem, students mentioned that "the rhythm and stress can change our comprehension of poetry", that "'for' is tricky, that's why some phrases cross" and that "the text is parallel".

On the whole, the experiment is an example of how Stylistics can be empirically taught to non-native speakers who, without having an innate natural feeling for the language, are nevertheless able to increase their sensitivity to the verbal artistry of an author by way of carefully organized classes when an experiment can serve a useful tool.

Outcomes and current challenges

Teaching Stylistics to non-native speakers of the English language leads both to benefits and problems to be solved. On the one hand, learners from non-English speaking cultures might have natural troubles acquiring not only stylistic skills, but also, and prior to this, language awareness. On the other hand, they are sometimes more motivated to do so than English students as they understand the incredible practical advantages that learning Stylistics brings: from simply being more educated

in their country to getting a better-paid job as a result of being a more qualified applicant.

The obvious fact about teaching Stylistics to EFL learners is that the course has a two-faceted aim, serving both as an important component of professional training and at the same time contributing to the language competence of the students. Due to this, instruction in Stylistics permits the development of the critical appreciation of literary works and improves the language perception skills of learners. Original texts, especially if familiar from previous reading experience, provide an authentic cultural background, thus allowing the students to penetrate into the layers of implications and hidden messages of the author.

Learning a foreign language, students not only develop their lexical competence and grammar skills, but also evaluate and rethink various phenomena of life and civilization, as they are reflected in different language items. Being foreign to the English-speaking cultures, the students need to find out about many stereotypes and practices thus giving them a fresh look upon the reality of the two worlds (the native and that of the text) they are inevitably comparing. The potential of language tools to express different ideas varies in their own and foreign languages, thus the explication of the obvious may lead to findings of deeper historical backgrounds of many everyday matters. For example, reading Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* the reader has to know about Ku Klux Klan, consequently a foreign (in our case, Ukrainian) reader will have to refer to American history to understand what threats the protagonist and his family encountered and why. Evidently, language competence of English learners expands and develops due to extensive reading of literary works.

However, in addition to the benefits, teaching Stylistics to non-native speakers, especially in the ex-Soviet world, also has noticeable drawbacks. The financial and technical challenges of the Ukrainian educational system in general result in slow or even lack of access to modern literature in universities. Consequently, teaching Stylistics to students of English often suffers from inability of teachers, students and even universities in general to handle information. Despite so many current tendencies and new approaches in linguistics, academic programmes and curricula remain traditional and outdated. Adding innovative elements takes so long in administrative terms that they become old sooner than they are introduced into the system of Ukrainian education. Due to that reason, Stylistics has transformed into an accumulative subject, which compiles different historical information about

approaches and trends, but gives few instruments for analysis and develops few professional skills of potential linguists.

Nowadays Ukraine is striving to mend old lapses in education. The country is speedily, though not always successfully, harmonizing its university system with general global standards. To be competitive in the international market of higher education, the curricula of linguistic subjects are updated according to the rapidly evolving modern trends. The content of the curriculum is adapted, and the issue of quality becomes more and more important as the aims and tasks of modern Stylistics change. We in Ukraine fully realize that academic subjects with the old formats do not catch up with the new methods of calculating data or handling on-line resources.

No matter how uncertain the picture might seem, teaching Stylistics remains crucial in EFL instruction. Reading for the sake of learning becomes a new challenge for students with linguistic majors because, apart from checking their level of language acquisition, reading literary works provides a good opportunity for students to improve their cultural competence and aesthetic perception. While dealing with a text in a foreign language and interpreting it, students shift their priority from entertainment to educational reading. Insight and precision become students' main instruments while working on the text, which permits them to develop a sharper perception of the author's ideas and messages and a quicker grasp of implications, layers of meanings, and semantic differentiation of lexical items. Thus teaching Stylistics as part of EFL curricula definitely has its future though needs to address problematic issues.

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- **Appendix 1: Chronology** – a Stylistics-related ‘timeline’ of key publications and events in Stylistics (social, political, historical, cultural)

1984 – *Stylistics of the English Language* by a group of authors guided by Professor O. M. Morokhovsky is published.

2006 – S. Zyngier holds a LitAw workshop at KNLU.

- **Appendix 2: List of key works in Stylistics**

Мороховский, А. Н., Лихошерст, Н. И., Воробьёва, О. П., Тимошенко, З. В. (1991 [1984]). *Стилистика английского языка*. Киев: Высшая школа.

- **Appendix 3: List of key stylisticians and their contributions to the discipline**

Morokhovsky, O.M.

- **Appendix 4: An annotated bibliography of further reading and resources in Stylistics**

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