

Style, Meaning and Pedagogy

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Series in Education



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To my beloved mother
with Love.

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Abbreviations

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
IFG	Introduction to Functional Grammar
MDA	Multimodal Discourse Approach
NYT	New York Times
Op-Eds	Opposite Editorials
SF	Systemic Functional
SFG	Systemic Functional Grammar
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics

General Introduction

Among the definitions given to Stylistics is that it is concerned with the study and examination of style in human language. This definition, however, remains problematic because style per se yields different meanings to different people at different times and places. Style can be anything that human beings do or say in order to gain appreciation and recognition from their counterparts in the vast world.

Style can be the clothes one is wearing right now; the way a person would comb his/her hair to get prepared for a wedding party; rituals at a funeral or in a graduation ceremony; how orators and TV speakers present themselves in front of their large or small public. It designates the table manners we have, knowingly or unknowingly, developed in our homes while eating with our families and friends; the smart expressions and benign emotions fluctuating in a poem; a well-crafted academic essay; the vibrant colours of a spectacular painting; a crystal trimmed chandelier; the typeface of a headline in a newspaper or the blurb shimmering on the jacket of a book.

Very simply and more uprightly, style is a gem; it encapsulates a number of skills such as reading and writing as well as thinking. In the words of the American literary scholar Michael Meyer:

Style is everywhere around us. The world is saturated with styles in cars, clothing, buildings, teaching, dancing, music, politics – in anything that reflects a distinctive manner of expression or design. Consider, for example, how a tune sung by the Beatles differs from the same tune performed by a string orchestra. There's no mistaking the two styles. (Meyer, 1996, p. 244)

There is all the time a certain purpose, declared or undeclared, that forces people to choose one style of behaviour and bypass another. As a student, think of the manner in which you had presented your exam sheet in the exam hall at school or at your university institution. For sure, you wanted to outshine your peers and rank the top of the list in your class. You wanted to earn good grades; hence, you might be worried about which words to include and which to exclude. I bet you had scaffolded your thoughts and squeezed them into elegant ideas. In certain situations, you might be resorting to the corrector pen and colours. In others, you might embellish the content of your paper with powerful imagery and tropes so as to receive a positive feedback from your tutors and examiners. This feedback is what style is all about.

Writers and speakers cannot do without feedback. They are always inclined to choose and select from the language repertoire to impress upon others. When there is no feedback, there is certainly something wrong with style. This is the reason why some people would break up with conventions and periodically deviate from the norm. The bad news is that people would decline some styles that do not appeal to them. But the good news is that style is acquired and accessible to everyone. It does not demand a special genius; it demands diligence and regular practice. As the old adage goes: "Practice makes perfect."

The book in your hands, *Style, Meaning and Pedagogy: A Handbook for Students*, seeks to achieve two major goals: to help you grasp the intricate and slippery notion of style in English language and to show you how to critically read and approach English texts -- literary and non-literary. This dialectic relationship between style and meaning within the classroom sphere is the principal subject of this book. While it brings, on the one hand, Literary Criticism and Stylistics closer to each other, this book advocates for a strong collaboration between Discourse Studies and Pedagogy, on the other, striving hard to fill any methodological lacuna left in the literature. (van Dijk, 1981; Janks & Locke, 2008; Warriner & Anderson, 2017; Bonyadi, 2019) It emanated from the classroom debates and rich discussions I had with my undergraduate students in the Stylistics course and postgraduate students of the Applied Linguistics & ELT Master Program at Ibn Zohr University. These students frequently encounter a plethora of challenges whenever they search for meanings. They are sometimes daunted by the kind of theoretical approach or methodological procedure they have to follow in order to understand and analyze texts effectively.

The book, which shares a similar vision with other books such as Dominic Rainsford's *Studying English Literature* (Routledge, 2014) and Robert Eaglestone's *Doing English* (4th Edition, Routledge, 2018), and fits quite well in courses such as Humane Education, Creative Writing, Genre Analysis, Rhetorical Studies, to mention but a handful, can be advantageous to students pursuing their English Studies in Higher Education of either stream: Literature and Applied Linguistics. It juggles literary and non-literary texts, critical stylistics and discourse analysis, the teacher and students' reflections, to encourage the search for meaning, which obviously plays a central role in human life and human communication as a whole. Since Plato, philosophers of language have viewed this quest as the activity which brings value to our existence. (Karlsson et al., 2004)

Whether you are an undergraduate student or a classroom practitioner, and whether you are passionate about poetry criticism or media discourse, the carefully selected chapters can take you on a voyage to explore writers'

standpoints on a wide range of topics such as love, manners, home, dreams and other subsidiary themes like motivation, memory and migration. Thanks to their social relevance and significance, these particular themes are useful to university students' lives as long as they can enrich their academic and personal experiences. They are intended to prompt exploration of some human values, authors and their characters as well as opinions and reactions to them. Indubitably, the exploration of such themes will pave the ground for students to develop analogical reasoning and allow them, as Granath (2009) posits, to encounter real language rather than 'made-up examples.'

In Part I, the focus exposes the reader to literary texts, namely the enchanting power of poetry -- from Leigh Hunt to Langston Hughes, moving through Elisabeth Barrett Browning and Yeats to contemporary poets such as Kitty O'Meara, and from creative writing to painting. Again, the objective is to make the students conscious of the evolving nature of poetry across different eras and historical contexts so as to be more informed of its themes, genres and trends. Some popular texts have been proposed to enable them to comprehend the poetic style and unleash their academic imagination when dealing with its nuts and bolts.

With respect to Chapter One, the concept of style and the poetic expression are disambiguated to allow for the explication of the subsequent poems of the book. Definitions of poetry and its major trends, notably Romanticism and Neo-classicism, have been included with the view to rendering this genre quite lucid and intelligible to the prospective reader. Because meaning is fundamental to poetry writing, and since it is all the time eclipsed in its verse and rhythmical text, it is more adequate that I address the semantic and pragmatic features of "Abou Ben Adhem" in Chapter Two. The choice of this poem is ascribed to the fact that it endorses the idea of love and dwells on a narrative tone that sparks interest and appeals to the human ear.

Chapter Three is not different from its antecedent as it uncovers conceptual metaphors and rhetoric in "How Do I Love Thee? Let me Count the Ways." The chapter in question revolves around the types of metaphors that are closely bound up with ardent love; it discusses indexicality and again touches upon the mystery of meaning from a female perspective. Moreover, communicativeness and the sense of friendliness between human beings and other species are expounded in Chapter Four. Here, my focus is fully centred on the analysis of transitivity and process clauses of "Manners." Both the cooperative principle and the confusion surrounding the dichotomy of objectivity and subjectivity are developed as they relate to the problematic of meaning.

Chapter Five attempts to decipher "Memory" using aberrant reading, a concept which was very popular in fields such as semiotics, communication studies and journalism. Besides offering reflections on the notion of beauty and

face, the chapter advances some insights about denotation and connotation as two principal methods which can be deployed to describe the meaning of words. Following the same line of thought, Chapter Six appropriates the constructivist approach in the exploration of “Dreams” and aspirations of Afro-American writers such as Langston Hughes and Martin Luther King, Jr. In my examination of this theme, I account for the phenomenon of dialogism and intertextuality, which have been integrated to transmit writers’ yearnings for and desires for a brighter future.

Chapter Seven grapples with reader-response theory and students’ creativity that is triggered by motivational poetry. Unlike other chapters, this one, availing itself of a bottom-up approach, reflects upon students’ responsive readings of “Thinking” and investigates the metaphors they have carefully selected to promote positivity and optimism in their lives. In Chapter Eight, I explore the same issues in another genre of poetry that flourished during the global lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic. My analytical reading of the lockdown poem, “And the People Stayed Home”, aimed at providing another definition of home and explaining how the private space satisfied people’s lower and higher needs. Along with register and contextual factors, a mixed stylistic approach has been employed to dismantle the home of the pandemic and elucidate the ancient relationship between poetry and healing.

Chapter Nine deals with lecture-based instruction and learning styles in a medieval painting. The significance of the chapter resides in the fact that it introduces the reader to other facets of style, whose contours appear in the two processes of teaching and learning. My objective is to show the pedagogical functions of art and to equip the readers with a toolkit so that they can understand and analyze visual texts in a systematic way.

Part II is devoted exclusively to non-literary texts such as headlines, blurbs and news stories since these texts have been neglected and marginalized in the EFL and Stylistics classroom, which developed a long predilection and proclivity towards literature. In Chapter Ten, I bring to the fore students’ voices about the language of “headlines” and “blurbs.” Whereas the headlines address the topic of human migration and refugees, the blurb discusses the pleasures of poetry. After describing the stylistic features of either discourse, some practical tips and signposts have been suggested to assist readers in their critical analyses of texts having a commercial tinge.

Chapter Eleven is approximately an extension of the previous chapter because it engages a rhetorical analysis of the persuasive devices and stylistic tropes that are privileged by the writers of the New York Times in their representation of certain minorities and social groups. On returning to the functions of language, I emphasize that the journalistic discourse, whether it appertains to tabloids or broadsheets, cannot do without selections. This

chapter is of paramount importance, for it tends to raise the readers' awareness about the rhetorical dimensions of language, its eloquent features, and the possible ways they can draw upon to detect bias and subjectivity in human discourse.

What is at stake is that such amalgamation of texts and a variety of chapters are more likely to enhance the readers' comprehension and analytical skills and convince them to draw analogies concerning creativity in terms of language use or style in general. This variety, I argue, will help the students learn to apply multiple approaches and methods when analyzing or interpreting increasingly difficult texts, written or visual. Observes Nunan (2017, p. 148), "Variety is the spice of life, and a variety of different text types will serve to maintain interest and motivation." The Highlights' sections, alongside Further Readings and the Questions suggested for discussion, endeavour to enlarge their scope of thinking about the topics of the texts and to get them to compensate for any flaws or weaknesses as far as comprehension or explication are concerned.

In connection with the genres of the texts, the following points should be noted: the majority of works explicated relate to narrative and lyric as well as pandemic and motivational poetry, each of which varies in length and difficulty; a few, for the sake of variety, though standing seemingly short and concise, they doubtlessly stimulate one's mind.

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