**Lecture Ten**

**Stylistics**

**Introduction**

Most linguists would never deny that literature is ‘language at full stretch’, and therefore, it is less easy to describe and explain than a daily conversation. They would admit that a purely linguistics analysis will never explain why we show different reactions to different patterns of words. For example, the utterance ‘*I wish that person were still alive’* does not elicit the same attention or reaction as Tennyson’s:

*But O for the touch of a vanished hand*

*And the sound of a voice that is still!*

Yet, all linguists would agree that literature, be it written or oral, is composed of language and so is amenable to linguistic analysis.

1. **Definition and Purposes**

Stylistics is broadly viewed as the analysis of linguistic form and its social effects. Stylistics developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the traditions of fostering the mother tongue, from rhetoric and from the interpretation of literature. Stylistics can be used for a variety of purposes, including the teaching of language and literature. It can also be used as a means of demystifying literary responses, understanding how varied readings are produced from the same text; and it can be used to assist in seeing features that might not otherwise have been noticed. It can shed light on the crafted texture of the literary text, as well as offering a productive form of assistance in completing interpretations, making them more complex and richer. Stylistics can thus be used both as a descriptive tool and as a catalyst for interpretation.

1. **Development of Stylistics**

It began as a distinct approach to literary texts from the 1960s onwards as a result of three direct influences: Anglo-American literary criticism; the emerging field of linguistics; and European structuralism. As far as linguistics is concerned, Saussurean structuralism and later the Prague School linguists developed many of the main concerns of modern poetics including studies of metaphor, the foregrounding and dominance of theme, trope and other linguistic variables, narrative morphology, the effects of literary defamiliarization, and the use of theme and rheme to delineate perspective in sentences. Bloomfieldian structural linguistics offered a precise terminology and framework for detailed analyses of metrical structure in poetry. Chomskyan transformational-generative grammar provided a means of exploring poetic syntactic structure. And Hallidayan functionalism added a socio-cultural dimension that began to explain stylistic choices in literary texts (Stockwell, 2006).

In other words, phonology, for example, has shown us how individual sounds are made and helps explain why plosives like /p/ and /d/ which are sharp sounds are often used to recreate warfare sounds; and why fricatives like /s/ and /z/ are used to emphasize continuous movements. Functional stylistics is particularly important for research into the connection between the style and the function of a text (or type of text).

Henceforth, the discipline is quite broad: (a) methodically, stylistics is a procedure for the analysis of texts; (b) normatively, stylistics is a directive for what is right in the use of language; (c) descriptively, stylistics is a text linguistic discipline, which explains the style of a text and sets it in relation to other features of the text (style). (Bussmann, 2006).

Stylistics is a discipline that has bridged various areas, and stylisticians have found themselves engaged in arguments not only with literary critics, cultural theorists, philosophers, poets, novelists and dramatists, but also with practitioners of linguistics. However, it has been argued that the artistic endeavor of literature cannot be amenable to the sort of rigorous analytical procedures offered by linguistic analysis; and descriptive linguistics cannot be applied to artificial texts and readerly interpretations since the latter cannot be described in a scientifically replicable and transparent manner.

Yet, the investigation of artificial rather than natural language, and the spectre of unstable interpretations all served to make theoretical and applied linguists suspicious of stylistics. At a time when the other branches of linguistics were claiming prestige and institutional funding as social sciences, those who were interested in literary analysis tended to be regarded as operating at the ‘soft’ end of the discipline.

In the 1970s, the field took an explicitly practical approach in the form of ‘pedagogical stylistics.’ Teaching language through literature mirrored stylistics; texts tended to be those of contemporary literature used by teachers to easily illustrate specific points of language usage, grammar and lexical choice were discussed as a motivating means of accessing literary texts, rather than studying them dryly for their own sake. Stylistics thus took itself out of literature departments and found adherents in education and modern language study around the world.

Through the 1990s, stylistics became one of the most dynamic and interdisciplinary fields within applied linguistics gaining insights from different fields including sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology, corpus and computational linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. Modern stylistics denied the separation of interpreted content from textual form, together with the existence of synonyms in language. But, the field is not settled at the theoretical level; it is claimed to be both as a descriptive tool and a critical method for interpretation. Stylisticians, therefore, divided onto ‘linguistic stylistics’and ‘literary stylistics’. On the one hand, linguistic stylisticians tend to be interested in exploring language using literature, they are mainly language teachers. On the other hand, literary stylisticians tend to be interested in exploring literature through analysis of its language.

**References**

Bussmann, H. (2006). *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics (2nd ed.).* Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Stockwell, P (2006). Language and literature: Stylistics. In *The Handbook of English Linguistics.* B. Aarts & A. McMahon. Blackwell Publishing Ltd;