

## الإسلوبية واكتساب اللغة من خلال الأدب

**Stylistics and Language Acquisition through Literature****Assistant Lecturer**

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Since 2005, the researcher has been teaching English literature in the English Department of the College of Languages at the University of Sulaimani. The researcher has always faced problems with the students especially in the exams because their style of writing is very poor and they make lots of grammatical mistakes. The students, at the department of English Language, study English literature for four years but they cannot get benefit from it to increase their knowledge in English language because they do not know that one of the purposes behind studying literature is to help them improve their language skills and they do not know how to use literature to achieve this aim. The purpose of the paper is to teach students how to acquire language through a systematic study of the linguistic elements in the literary texts and how language can be employed to achieve various goals. To accomplish the aims of the study, students are introduced to stylistic analysis since stylistics is the study of the language of literature.

The research is based on a questionnaire carried out in the English Department of the School of Languages at the University of Sulaimani and the fourth year students participated in it. The students were asked only two questions related to the aims of the research. They were asked whether they got benefit from literature to improve their language skills or not and whether language learners should study literature or not.

The paper is apparently divided into two parts. In the first part, the answers of the students are examined to find out the students' views regarding acquiring language through literature and the necessity of spending a long time reading and studying literary texts for foreign learners of English. The second segment is devoted to teaching students how to acquire language through studying literature and how to use language more effectively and how to make certain meanings. To achieve these goals, students are introduced to the stylistic analysis and some examples are investigated from a stylistic point of view to teach students how to acquire language through literature and how to use the same information in their daily activities.

## **0- Introduction**

Many scholars and linguists focus on the importance of studying and teaching literature from a language-based perspective. They believe that literature can be used as a crucial source for acquiring the foreign language one wants to learn, but this chance is rarely exploited by foreign learners. In the forward written to a book edited by Watson and Zyngier, 2007, Ronald Carter sheds some light on this issue.

Carter (Forward: x) writes:

The place of literature in the foreign language classroom as custodian of style and culture, as a guide to moral good conduct, as a warrant of authenticity, or as a mirror to history is universally being questioned; but more research, and more empirical classroom research, is needed to examine the more intricate issues of its relationship to language acquisition, especially reading development.

According to Carter, literature is studied in the classrooms all over the world to introduce students to culture, society and history, but unfortunately its role in helping students to acquire language is not activated. What Carter highlights is also true for the universities in Iraq. In all the government universities of the Iraqi Kurdistan, English language and literature are studied together in the English Departments at the schools or colleges of language studies. The main purposes behind studying literature side by side with linguistics are:- 1- to introduce students to English literature, and 2- to give them insight about how language is used in different contexts and how complicated ideas can be expressed through composing long sentences or complex structures.

When students read and study the literary texts, they spontaneously notice the differences between the literary genres and they can perceive the changes happened to literature in the eras. Thus, this paper focuses on the latter purpose which concerns the linguistic aspects of the literary texts. To know whether this purpose is achieved or not, a questionnaire was carried out in the English Department of the School of Languages at the University of Sulaimani in which 45 students

from the fourth year participated. The form which contained only two questions was submitted to the students on April 20, 2012, after studying English literature for four years and only about two months before 1- Q1- As a foreign learner; did you get benefit from studying English literature to improve your language skills?

- If Yes, how?
- If No, why?

Q2- Do you think language learners should study literary texts? Explain.

Through these questions, the researcher tries to know whether the students have really got benefit from literature to improve their linguistic skills or not. The paper does not judge the process of teaching literature in the English departments, but it aims at introducing students to stylistics so that they can get benefit from it to explore the language of the literary texts they read or study. The paper tries to teach students how to increase their knowledge in linguistics by dealing with the literature and how they penetrate into the texts to analyze their themes and aims even without the help of the teachers.

### **1- Do students get benefit from studying literature to improve linguistic skills?**

In the form, the students were required to explain how they used literature to broaden their knowledge in language as foreign learners. Of course, this question is compatible with the aim of studying literature with linguistics and the students' answers can be taken into account to decide whether the goal of learning language through literature is achieved or not. For this purpose, the students will be divided into three groups: those

who got benefit from literature; those who got little benefit and those who did not get benefit from it.

Among the 45 participants, only 7 students state that literature helped them to enhance and improve their linguistic skills. In their answers, they indicate that they learnt how to produce long sentences and complex structures to write in a good style. They also emphasize that they memorized lots of vocabularies which they use in daily conversations and in different contexts. For this group, the goal of studying literature to learn language is successfully achieved.

Most of the participants, 27 students, expound that they benefitted from some of the literary texts only to learn vocabularies. The students believe that the texts which are written in old English are not useful because the vocabularies are old and very difficult to understand. This group of students focuses on learning vocabularies alone and they prefer texts written in modern English because they can reuse the words from which they learn or memorize. The students do not mention anything about the linguistic aspects of the texts such as grammatical structures and they do not pay attention to the style of writing in the different texts they study.

The third group of the students which includes 11 participants demonstrates that studying literary texts for them was just wasting of time and literature did not assist them to increase their linguistic capacities. They believe that they can improve their language skills through linguistic sources and even 3 of them do not find any relationship between language learning and studying literature. This opinion is quite contrary to the aim behind studying language and literature in the English departments in the school or college of languages. Among the 45 students only 7 of them used literature to learn language.

This result shows that even if the students do not study literature at all, it will not negatively affect their language skills.

## **2- Should the students study literature?**

In the submitted form, the students were asked to express their opinion about if studying literary texts by language learners is necessary or not. The purpose behind this question is to know whether the students really comprehend that they study literature not only for the sake of literature but also to learn language through literature. Unfortunately, after spending 4 years in the English Department, most of the students do not realize that they can use English literature to learn English language. Among the 5 participants of the questionnaire 42 of them believe that language learners should study literature. But only 7 of them find it necessary for learning language; the rest see it as a way to be familiar with the social, political, religious and cultural issues of the nations the texts belong to. The remaining students, 3 participants, state that language learners do not need to study literature at all.

## **3- Findings**

Generally, the students point to the benefit of studying literature to the foreign learners but not for learning a language. They learn different vocabularies but very few of them manipulate the words in different contexts and only 5 students talk about improving their reading skills through literature. The results and the students' remarks manifest that they did not study the language of the literary texts and they never tried to grasp the meaning of a text by exploring its linguistic aspects. They only focused on the themes, the ideas and the issues but not through language. They did not try to find out what the language of the text tells them about social status of the characters or the social

and political issues. They were just passive listeners and mostly memorized what the lecturers said.

It is obvious that some students even did not read the assigned texts because their language is difficult and they do not understand them, as they say. This lack of understanding of the significance of literature for language learners has made students find literature boring and unnecessary. It can be concluded that the aim of learning language through literature was not achieved because the literary texts were not taught for the sake of language acquisition and also the students did not know how to benefit from literature to improve language skills; therefore, students must be introduced to stylistic analysis as a practical method which can help them use literary texts to improve their linguistic capacities.

#### **4- Stylistics helps Students to acquire Language through Literature**

In the questionnaire, 42 students believe that studying literature is important for language learners, but some of them suggest that the way of teaching literature in the classrooms should be changed so that students will be able to get benefit from it to acquire language through literature. The questions submitted in the form made the participants makes such suggestions because language acquisition through literature is something they have not thought of it before. The students are eager to find a theory or a method which assists them to improve their language skills through the texts they study and to understand the meanings and analyze the themes which are all expressed in words. As a researcher, I believe that stylistic study can help students to achieve their aims because it is a bridge between language and literature. In this paper, some samples from different literary texts will be analyzed stylistically to show to the students how they can use stylistics to acquire language through literature.

## 5- Stylistics and some grammatical issues

There are some grammatical cases which can be regarded as wrong or bad forms from a stylistic point of view. Thornborrow and Wareing (1998: 43) put forward some of the common points which are not stylistically very much acceptable in writing. These include:-

- don't start a sentence with 'and'
- don't split infinitives
- don't end a sentence with a preposition
- don't use third person plural pronoun they to refer to a non-specific singular third person (e.g. someone)

While writing, people try to arrange the words and organize the ideas in an attractive way to draw the attention of the reader whether that writing is a literary piece or it is a letter from a friend to a friend. The aforementioned points can be taken into consideration to beautify the text and produce sentences grammatically acceptable. There are many examples in a single literary text which are well-organized syntactically and semantically. In this excerpt taken from *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence, the sentences carry different ideas are well-arranged and the aforementioned points are avoided.

**As soon as the skies brightened and plum-blossom was out, Paul drove off in the milkman's heavy float up to Willey Farm. Mr. Leivers shouted in a kindly fashion at the boy, then clicked to the horse as they climbed the hill slowly, in the freshness of the morning. White clouds went on their way, crowding to the back of the hills that were rousing in the springtime. The water of Nethermere lay below, very blue against the seared meadows and the thorn-trees.**

*Sons and Lovers*, pp. 137

The paragraph starts with a subordinating conjunction (**as soon as**) joining two sentences together to make a complex sentence. This conjunction can be used between the two sentences, but the writer puts it in the front to draw the reader's attention to the weather and the nature. In the second sentence, the author again describes the weather (**freshness of the morning**). Although the description comes late, it is important in two ways. First, three acts occur in this sentence (shouted, clicked, climbed). The actions occur directly one after another. The first act (shouted) is followed by the second act (clicked) and the temporal location adverb (**then**) is used to show the closeness of the two actions and then (as) is used as a conjunction to combine the third act (climbed) with the previous ones. These acts happen simultaneously and require physical effort and this mood (**freshness**) makes the characters more active and prepares them for the journey. Secondly, the rest of the paragraph is devoted to describe both the weather and the nature (**White clouds, hills that were rousing, springtime, water of Nethermere, very blue, seared meadows, thorn-trees**) and it is linked to the beginning of the paragraph (**skies brightened and plum-blossom was out**) through (**freshness of the morning**).

The above paraphrase manifests how the ideas are interwoven and how the journey steps forward. The actions occur subsequently and the description of the different scenes tells readers that Paul and Mr. Leivers have started their journey and the sceneries will shift as they continue. These grammatical features enable readers to see the motion of the characters and the time as if they were watching a movie.

People use language in various ways to produce different effects, and this is also a good way for writers to send certain messages through the grammatical structures constitute the body of the text. In the previous excerpt, Lawrence manipulates language skillfully to decorate his writing. In these sentences, he avoids repeating subjects and makes some grammatical changes in the class of the words. In the sentence (**White clouds went on their way, crowding to....**) there are two verbs (**went on, crowding**) but one subject (**white clouds**). Although he could manipulate past forms for both of the verbs, the author uses present participle (**crowding**). He uses this technique so that the readers will not pay attention to the clouds only but also to the hills. In this case, the phrasal verb serves the clouds, but the –ing form serves the hills because readers wonder where the clouds (crowded). In the second sentence (**The water of Nethermere lay below, very blue against the seared meadows and the thorn-trees**), a similar technique is used, but this time an adjective is put into service. The writer could have structured the sentence “**The water of Nethermere, very blue against the seared meadows and the thorn-trees, lay below**”, but he did not because the additional information is not only to tell readers about the water, but it is also to describe some other natural phenomena in the area and also to compare between the natural elements (**water= blue, meadow=seared**).

Another example which manifests how grammatical structures can be used to achieve different aims is taken from *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett changes the normal structure of a sentence to show how Pozzo exerts power over Lucky.

**Pozzo: Good. Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me?** (*He looks at Lucky, jerks the rope. Lucky raises his head.*)  
**Will you look at me, Pig!** (*Lucky looks at him.*)

*Waiting for Godot, pp.29*

Pozzo takes the turn to address Estragon, Vladimir and Lucky. In the first two sentences, he uses regular question forms to draw the attention of the listeners, but he deviates from this norm when he addresses Lucky. In the first two questions, Pozzo asks to know whether the other characters are listening to him or not and he uses direct question forms. It seems that Lucky does not pay attention to his speeches because Lucky is a slave and being asked a question does not suit his social status. He is accustomed to being ordered not asked to do something; therefore, Pozzo in the third sentence (**Will you look at me, Pig!**), Pozzo changes the mood of the dialogue and produces a rhetorical question. Pozzo uses this form as an order to oblige Lucky to look at him and he achieves his aim because Lucky looks at him without saying a word. Pozzo puts forward this form to constrain Lucky to listen to him and he does not give him a choice to say 'yes' or 'no'.

Sometimes writers feel that they need to violate the grammatical rules and they also use the structures which are regarded as bad forms, as mentioned earlier. It is not strange to find the less acceptable forms shown by Thornborrow and Wareing in literary pieces, not because the literary writers do not care about good forms or bad forms, but they use such situations to make certain effects on the readers. In this example taken from *Ashes to Ashes*, a play written by Harold Pinter, Rebecca speaks at the end of the play and narrates to Devlin what happened to her and her baby. From page 66 to 69, she takes 19 turns of which 13 of them start with 'and'.

Here are some examples:

- **And I made it into a bundle**
- **And I held it under my left arm**
- **And I went through with my baby**
- **And the man called me back**
- **And he said what do you have there**
- **And I gave him the bundle**
- **And that's the last time I held the bundle**
- **And we got on the train**
- **And we arrived at this place**

Rebecca describes a sorrowful situation and narrates a sad story. The play is about Holocaust. Rebecca explains that the Nazis took away the babies from them before they were transported and she describes how she tried to take her baby with her but she failed. All the utterances can be one continuous paragraph because the topic is one and there is only one speaker, Rebecca. Devlin stands still and he listens to her story, but she speaks in fragments since she is affected by emotion. The loss of her baby is so painful that she does not want to pass over it quickly or lose a bit of the moment she handed the bundle to the man in which the baby was wrapped. She does not only want to tell a sad story, but she also shows the cruelty and mercilessness of the Nazis. With using each 'and', Pinter presents a shocking image and a heartbreaking moment. From the above examples, students can learn how to produce grammatically correct sentences and how to use different structures for different purposes. Of course, different structures may convey different meanings, but only the structure of the sentence is not enough to detect the meaning of the sentence because meaning will change according to the context of use. How meaning is built is also the concern of stylistics and this issue will be discussed hereafter so that students will learn how to use language to convey different meanings.

## 6- Stylistics and meaning derivation

Birch (1989:20) argues, "Analyzing text is an activity which is concerned with understanding how a text means, not with what a text means". According to Birch, analysts do not need a great effort to find the meanings or themes of a text, but they should discover how the constituent parts of the text especially the language are used to make that meaning or to convey the intended message. For instance, by a reading a poem, students will know it is about a failed love or any other issues, but this idea is not enough for analyzing the poem because it is too general. What the students should do is that they need to scrutinize the vocabularies in order to understand the mood of the poem and they also have to explore the sentence structures since fragmented speeches reveal the feelings, emotions and psychological condition of the character in the poem.

To analyze a literary work, knowing the meaning of single words which is the scope of semantics is not enough because the meaning of words will vary according to the context of use. For example, the literal meaning of 'tree' is 'plant', but the word the same word in 'family tree' does not have the same literal meaning. The image which the students see in 'tree' as a single lexis is quite different from the image which they get from 'family tree' because the meaning of the word 'tree' is different in the two tokens.

As teachers, most of the time, we face a particular problem when we ask our students to analyze a poem. The problem is that most of the students paraphrase the poem instead of analyzing it. In other words, they give the literal meaning of the poem which is repeating the poem in prose form using simple words. This is actually not analysis because analysis means

decoding what the writers have encoded. By decoding, I mean exploring the themes of the poem through understanding both the literary features such as the speaker, the spoken to, the situation and the tone and the linguistic features including syntax (long or short sentences, usual or unusual sentences) and the types of words which are used (diction). Knowing such things will not only help students to analyze the poem, but it also teaches them how to use language to make certain effects and convey certain aims. If the students can find a way to decode the meanings of a piece of literature, they can use similar techniques to encode meanings in their daily conversations.

Students should be careful about the meaning of words as it will change in the context of use. Sometimes readers cannot get the exact meaning of a word only by looking it up in a dictionary; therefore, the situation in which the word is used should be considered. For example, we consider the meaning of 'terrible' in these two sentences.

- 1- It was raining terribly.
- 2- I terribly need this book.

In the first sentence, the word terrible means severely, but in the second sentence it means very much or strongly. While studying literature, students should be more careful because the meaning of a word used at the beginning of a poem may be revealed at the end of it. In this poem, Alexander Pope reverses an insult, but the meaning cannot be detected if the whole poem is not explored together as a single entity. The poem is borrowed from (Beard: 2003) which is dealt with for a different purpose.

## Epigram from the French

Sir, I admit your gen'ral rule  
That every poet is a fool:  
But you yourself may serve to show it,  
That every fool is not a poet.

The poem is obviously a satire. It seems that Pope replays someone in a high rank who deems poets as fools. Pope cannot endure this insult, but he does not directly oppose the person and he uses language to reverse the insult. Pope defends the poets but not all of them. He uses the word 'general' to show that the person regards all poets as fools without exception which is not true. Pope is against this generalization. The whole stanza is one sentence. The last two lines explain the first two lines. Pope exploits the punctuation mark colon (:) to achieve his purpose. The first two lines work as a subordinate clause to a main clause which is in the last two lines. If the first two lines end in a full stop, it means that Pope agrees with the man who insulted poets and in this case the word 'admit' supports this assumption, but Pope does not agree with this opinion and the lines do not end in a full stop.

The lines come after the colon are the main clause and complete the meaning of the stanza. To make it more clear, we can simplify the stanza in this way: your general rule that every poet is a fool is the subject, the word show in the third line is the verb and that every fool is not a poet is the complement. The whole stanza can be summarized in a single sentence which is (I admit your general rule that every poet is a fool shows that every fool is not a poet). Here Pope plays with the word 'admit'. He does not acknowledge what that person says is true, but he declares that his opinion makes himself a fool and 'every fool is not poet' clearly shows that Pope tells the man that he is a fool, but he is not a poet.

This explanation manifests that not only poets, but other people can use language to convey different meanings. It is true that this example is not a sentence from everyday conversation, but people also use language and similar vocabularies in their daily talks. Thus it is not impossible to hear people speak satirically in everyday conversations. While students are asked to analyze a literary piece, they should think about how and why it is written. Students cannot answer such questions if they cannot find what choices the writers have made to convey their messages. The choices will include both the literary and linguistic elements.

## 7- Conclusions

Students in the English Department of the School of Languages at the University of Sulaimani study English literature for four years spending a long time reading and studying literary texts, but they do not know how to acquire language from the texts which are full of examples worth attention syntactically, semantically, pragmatically and so on. When the students are asked to analyze a piece of poem or a dialogue in a drama or a paragraph in a novel, they do not know how to do it and their answers are not supported by any critical approach and there is no evidence in their answers. But if the students pay attention to linguistic elements in the texts, they can find examples to support their answers and they will be somewhat objective in their analysis and at the same time they can acquire the language through exploring the syntactic and semantic cases.

The students thought of literature as a source for learning about social and political issues in the other countries and also for memorizing vocabularies, but the other linguistic aspects of the texts such as syntax, semantics and pragmatics were ignored; therefore, the literary texts were not studied to acquire language and even the linguistic elements which are used to convey

various messages and to show different situations were not used in the analyses.

The students paid attention to the literary elements such characters, plot, themes, symbols and so on, but they did not try to find out how these elements were expressed through language. In modern literature, especially modern drama, the identity of the characters is revealed through the language they use and language is exploited in various ways to envisage what may happen later and to connect past, present and future. In other words, the students failed a great part of the texts they study which is the language. They could not make a connection between the literary elements and the tool, language, used to embody these elements. This is simply because they did not know how to build the connection and thus they did not get benefit from the texts to improve their language skills.

In order to know how language works in literary texts and how to reuse the linguistic forms used by the authors, students should be familiar with stylistics since it is a bridge between language and literature. If the students get familiar with stylistic analysis, they will discover how language is used to make special meaning. Consequently they will learn how to use language to make certain effects since stylistics deals with how language is manipulated and should be manipulated to make meaning and to convey the desired aim. Stylistics helps students to write and speak in a high manner and teaches them how to avoid directness in critical situations without changing their goals in the conversations or without being rude by hurting other people's feelings. All these examples exist in literature; thus students can acquire them and practice them in their daily lives because, as Simpson (1997: 7) says, "There is no such thing as a 'literary language'. That is to say, there are no items of modern English vocabulary or grammar that are *inherently* and *exclusively* literary".

## الأسلوبية واكتساب اللغة من خلال الأدب

الخلاصة

منذ عام ٢٠٠٥، قد قام الباحث بتدريس الأدب الإنجليزي في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية اللغات في جامعة السليمانية. فقد واجهت الباحثة دوماً مشاكلات مع الطلاب وخاصة في الامتحانات لأن أسلوبهم في الكتابة ضعيف جداً ويقترفون أخطاءاً نحوية كثيرة. إن الطلاب في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية يدرسون الادب الإنجليزي لمدة أربع سنوات ولكن لا يمكنهم الاستفادة منه لزيادة معلوماتهم في اللغة الإنجليزية لأنهم لا يعرفون أن أحد المقاصد وراء دراسة الأدب هو مساعدتهم على تحسين مهاراتهم اللغوية، وهم لا يعرفون كيف يستخدمون الأدب للوصول إلى هذا الهدف. الغرض من هذا البحث هو تعليم الطلاب كيفية اكتساب اللغة من خلال دراسة منهجية لعناصر لغوية في النصوص الأدبية، وكيف يمكن توظيف اللغة لتحقيق أهداف مختلفة. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، يتم تعريف الطلاب على التحليل الأسلوبي لأن الأسلوبية هي دراسة لغة الأدب.

ويستند البحث على الاستبيان الذي نفذ في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية اللغات في جامعة السليمانية وشارك فيها طلاب المرحلة الرابعة. طلب من الطلاب سؤالان فقط يتعلقان بأهداف البحث. ان الطلاب سئلوا، هل آستفادوا من الأدب لتطوير مهاراتهم اللغوية أم لا ؟ وفيما إذا كان طلاب اللغة يتوجب عليهم دراسة الادب أم لا ؟.

إن البحث هي مقسمٌ ظاهرياً إلى جزئين . في الجزء الأول، فإن أجوبة الطلاب قد تم تفحصها لمعرفة آرائهم فيما يتعلق باكتساب اللغة من خلال الأدب وعلى ضرورة قضاء وقت طويل لقراءة ودراسة النصوص الأدبية للدارسين الأجانب في اللغة الإنجليزية. أما الجزء الآخر فهو مكرس لتعليم الطلبة كيفية حياة اللغة من خلال دراسة الادب وكيفية استخدام اللغة بصورة أكثر كفاءة وكيفية صياغة معانٍ محددة. لتحقيق هذه الأهداف، يتم تعريف الطلاب على التحليل الأسلوبي ويتم التحقيق في بعض الأمثلة من وجهة نظر الأسلوبية من أجل تعليم الطلاب كيفية اكتساب اللغة من خلال الأدب وكيفية استخدام نفس المعلومات في أنشطتهم اليومية.

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