STRUCTURAL AND POST-STRUCTURAL MODELS IN STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study traces the origin and development of structuralism and its extension, post structuralism as theories in linguistic studies, exploring their theoretical bases, and finally establishing their relationships with stylistics as a discipline in the linguistic domain. Because the paper is stylistics domain, it extensively treats, in its first part, stylistics as a distinct discipline within linguistics, tracing its historical development and theoretical conception.

Introduction

The analysis of literary style, of course goes back to classical rhetoric, (during the time of Plato, Aristotle, Horace etc.), but modern stylistics takes its origins in the Russian Formalism and the interrelated Prague School in the early years of twentieth century, following the traditions of fostering the mother tongue, from rhetoric and from the interpretation of literary text (Lesley and McIntyre 1).

In 1909 Charles Bally's *Trait de Stylistique Française* had proposed stylistics as a distinct academic discipline to complement Saussurean linguistics. For Bally, as observed by Taylor, Saussure's linguistics by itself could not fully describe the language of personal expression (Mutual, 91). Bally's programme actually fitted well with the ideas of the Prague School (Ulrich 518). Building on the ideas of the Russian formalists, the Prague School

developed the concept of foregrounding, where by poetic language stands out from the background of non-literary language by means of deviation (from the norms of everyday language), or as parallelism (pioneered by Roman Jacobson in his 1987 secular studies of poetic linguistic tradition around the world, including his own Russian tradition) (Wales 315).

Based on the Prague School's account, the background language is not so fixed, and the relationship between poetic and everyday language is always shifting (Rob 88). This informs the definition and conceptual explication of stylistics offered as the study and interpretation of texts from a linguistic perspective. As a discipline, stylistics links literary criticism and linguistics but has no autonomous domain of its own. The preferred objects of stylistic study is however, literature, but not exclusively 'high' literature; that is, other forms of written texts such as texts from the domains of advertising, pop culture, politics, religion, legal document etc. are also potentially subjected to stylistic analysis (Paul 2). However, literary stylistics deals with exclusively high literature. Crystal observes that in practice, most stylistic analysis has attempted to deal with the complex and valued language within literature, i.e. literary stylistics. He goes on to say that in such examination, the scope is sometimes narrowed to concentrate on the more striking features of literary language, for instance, its deviant and abnormal features, rather than the broader structures that are found in whole texts or discourses. For example, the compact language of poetry is more likely to reveal the secrets of its construction to the stylisticians than is the language of plays and novels (The Cambridge 71).

Correspondingly, the discipline is quite broad. As noted in their 2009 description of peculiarities of stylistics as a distinct discipline, Taylor and Francis observe the following: {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.

This relatively new discipline forms the foundation for scientific analysis of style as well as for practical stylistics, the standardisation of style and the mother tongue. The results of functional stylistics are particularly important for research into the connection between style and the function of a text (or type of text). Since functionally explicable properties of style are also fundamental for rhetorical text, stylistics overlaps here with the modern neighbouring discipline of rhetoric.

Meanwhile, it is practically important to note that style has a broader scope than stylistics. It is in this connection that Crystal and Davy criticise the other angle of stylistic conceptual definition offered by some scholars as the study of style, as being insufficient and inimical. In their words:

> Some scholars have called the object of study [of stylistics] 'style', without further qualification. 'Style' is certainly a familiar word to most of us; but unfortunately to say simply that stylistics studies style does not clarify matters greatly, because of the multiplicity of definitions that the word 'style' has (9).

Earlier we mentioned that stylistics has to do with both linguistics and literature; it follows therefore that this study has acknowledged the fact that stylistics is a bridge between language and literature, but would focus much on stylistic linguistics. In this connection, stylistics attempts, in its theoretical conception, to establish principles capable of explaining the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language, such as in digesting the perceptive attitudes as regards socialisation, the production and reception of meaning, critical discourse analysis and even literary criticism. Other features of stylistics include the use of dialogue, including people's dialects and regional accents, descriptive language, the use of grammar such as active or passive voice, the distribution of sentence length, the use of particular language registers etc. Again, stylistics is a distinctive area that may be

explored to determine the connection between the form and effects within a particular variety of language. Stylistics therefore looks at what is going on within the language, what linguistic associations are the style of the language in use reveals.

This kind of theoretical approach went on and on in the early 20th century, and when in the late 20th century Roman Jakobson (an active member of the Russian formalism and the Prague School) emigrated to America, he brought together Russian formalism and American New Criticism in his Closing Statement at a conference on stylistics at Indiana University in 1958 (Richard, A Linguistic 8). Published as *Linguistics and Poetics* in 1960, Jakobson's lecture is often credited with being the first coherent formulation of stylistics, and his argument was that the study of poetic language should be a sub-branch of linguistics (Nikolas 10). The poetic function was one of six general functions of language he described in the lecture.

Moreover, M. A. K. Halliday, the popular systemic grammar pioneer, is an important figure in the development of British stylistics (Raman 83). His 1971 study, *Linguistic Function and Literary Style: An Inquiry into the Language of William Golding's 'The Inheritors',* is a key essay (Paul 75). One of Halliday's contributions has been the use of the term register to explain the connections between language and its context (Helen 6). For Halliday, register is distinct from dialect; while dialect refers to the habitual language of a particular user in a specific geographical or social context, register describes the choices made by the user (Nikolas 12), choices which depend on three variables: *field* i.e. subject matter (what the participants are actually engaged in doing, for instance, discussing a specific subject or topic); *tenor* i.e. participants/interlocutors (who is/are taking part in the exchange); *mode* i.e. context (the use to which the language is being put) (Christopher 373).

While advancing into the major criticisms and arguments among the stylisticians themselves concerning Halliday's proposition, Fowler, in his 1992 comments, observes that

different fields produce different languages, most obviously at the level of vocabulary. Crystal points out that Halliday's 'tenor' stands as a roughly equivalent term for 'style' which is a more specific alternative used by linguists to avoid ambiguity. Again, Halliday's third category, mode, is what he refers to as the symbolic organisation of the situation (Language 292). Downes recognises two distinct aspects within the category of mode and suggests that not only does it describe the relation to the medium: written, spoken and so on, but also describes the genre of the text (316). Halliday, however, refers to the genre as 'precoded' language, language that has not simply been used before, but that predetermines the selection of textual meanings. Downes again, makes the point that bothers on register. To him, the principal characteristics of register, no matter how peculiar or diverse, is that it is obvious and immediately recognisable (309).

Structural Linguistics

Structural linguistics started with the posthumous publication of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* in 1916, which was compiled from lectures by his students. The book proved to be highly influential, providing the foundations for both modern linguistics and semiotics. After Saussure, the history of structural linguistics branches off in two directions: first, in America, linguist Leonard Bloomfield's reading of Saussure's course proved influential, bringing about the Bloomfieldean phase in American linguistics that lasted from the mid 1930s to the mid 1950s. Bloomfield 'bracketed' all questions of semantics and meaning as largely unanswerable, and encouraged a mechanistic approach to linguistics. However, the paradigm of Bloomfieldean linguistics was later replaced by the paradigm of generative grammar with the publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* in 1957. Second, in Europe, Saussure influenced the Prague School of Roman Jokobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy, (whose work would prove hugely influential, particularly concerning phonology) and the school of Louis Hjelmslev. Structural linguistics also had influence on other

disciplines in Europe, including anthropology, psychoanalysis and marxism, bringing about the movement known as structuralism.

The theoretical framework or conceptual approach of structural linguistics had actually taken its ground in the said Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics,* which stressed the examining language as a static system of interconnected units. He is thus known as the father of modern linguistics for bringing about the shift from diachronic to synchronic analysis of language. Hicks describes structuralism as an outgrowth of European Kantianism which must be considered in relation to phenomenology:

> Neo-Kantianism evolved during the nineteenth century, and by the twentieth century two main forms had emerged. One form was structuralism, of which Ferdinand de Saussure was a prominent exponent, representing the broadly rationalist wing of Kantianism. The other was phenomenology, of which Edmund Husseri, was a prominent representative, representing the broadly empiricist wing of Kantianism. Structuralism was a self-contained, non-referential system, and that the philosophical task was to seek out language's necessary and universal structural features, those features taken to underlie and be prior to the empirical, contingent features of language. Phenomenology's focus was upon careful examination of the contingent flow of the experiential given, avoiding any existential inferences or assumptions about what one experiences, and seeking simply to describe experience as neutrally and as clearly as possible. In effect, the structuralists were seeking subjective nominal categories, and the phenomenologists were content with describing the phenomena without asking what connection to an external reality those experiences might have (43-44).

Structural linguistics thus involves collecting a corpus of utterances and then attempting to classify all of the elements of the corpus at their different linguistic levels: the phonemes, morphemes, lexical categories, noun phrases, verb phrases and sentence types. One of Saussure's key methods was syntagmatic and paradigmatic analyses that respectively define units syntactically and lexically according to their contrast with other units in the system (Searle, online review).

The foundation of structural linguistics is a *sign*, which in turn has two components: a *signified* is an idea or concept (i.e. the referent), while the *signifier* is a means of expressing the signified (i.e. the symbol or referring expression/linguistic form). The *sign* is thus the combined association of signifier and signified (i.e. reference). Signs can be defined only in a state of contrast with other signs in a manner that is either syntagmatic (i.e. syntactic) or paradigmatic (i.e. as part of a related group). This idea contrasts drastically with the idea that signs can be examined in isolation from a language, and stresses Saussure's point that linguistics must treat language synchronically.

Paradigmatic relations are sets of related-contrastive units that exist in the mind, such as the phonological set: cat, bat, hat, mat, rat, fat (popularly called minimal pairs) or the morphological set: run, runs, ran, running/write, writes, wrote, written, writing etc. The unit of a set must have something in common with one another, but they must contrast too, otherwise they could not be distinguished from each other and would collapse into a single unit, which could not constitute a set on its own, since a set always consists of more than one unit. Syntagmatic relations, on the other hand, are temporal and consist of a row of units that contrast with one another, like "the girl slapped Amina" (active voice), or "Amina was slapped by the girl" (passive voice). What unit can be used in each part of the row is determined by the units that surround them. There is thus palpable evidence to prove that language habit does not just flow

haphazardly; part of syntagmatic rules ensures that a set of language elements (syntactic elements) does not just get arranged anyhow to communicate ideas or meanings. We cannot, for instance, form an English sentence this way: "The man house his going is to". It has to be syntactically well-formed (i.e. following syntagmatic rule), like this: "The man is going to his house". There is also an interweaving effect between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. It is this interweaving effect that does not allow, for example, the aforementioned sentence to become "The man are going to his house". It is also important to note that whereas paradigms are always part of the *langue* (French for "language"; or an abstract Platonic *ideal*), *Syntagma* can belong to *parole* ("everyday speech").

Structuralist theory can broadly be defined as an approach to human activity that sees language as analysable in terms of networks of relationships. Structural analysis thus attempts to equalise all texts (and forms of texts) by reducing them to the same underlying universal system. *Semiology*, as a conceptual framework organised through Saussure's tradition of *binarism* in the *Science of Signs*, has been influential throughout the later part of the 20th century. In the 1960s, the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss applied Saussure's principles on his study of mythology and kinship systems. In this regard, he discovered, based on his studies, that myths derive their significance not from their individual elements, but rather from 'bundles of relations'. Since Saussure's *binarism* proves that language derives meaning from difference: the word apple is, for instance, insignificant and arbitrary as an individual unit; only because it is unique vis-à-vis the word pair, and thus every other word is significantly conceivable via this binary method of differentiation, Levi-Strauss demonstrates how myths function like Saussure's theory of language. No individual part of a myth has meaning in isolation; it acquires significance only in its relationship to the other elements in the myth's structure. This way, a single myth, according to him, is only meaningful when it is situated among other myths, social

practice and kinship system, just as a single word is only significantly meaningful through its relation to its pairs in Saussure's linguistics.

Most of the major criticisms tailored towards structuralism came from Chomskyan tradition. Chomsky maintained that structural linguistics was efficient for phonology and morphology, because both have a finite number of units that the linguist can collect. However, he did not believe structural linguistics was sufficient for syntax, reasoning that an infinite number of sentences could be uttered, rendering a complete collection impossible. Instead, he proposed that the job of a linguist is to create a small set of rules that could generate all the sentences of a language, and nothing but those sentences. Chomsky's critique led him to found generative grammar. It should therefore be noted seriously that one of Chomsky's key objections to structural linguistics was its inadequacy in explaining complex and/or ambiguous sentences. This is observed in Searle's review of *Chomky's Revolution in Linguistics* as follows:

> "John is easy to please" and "John is eager to please" look as if they had exactly the same grammatical structure. Each is a sequence of noun – copula – adjective – infinitive verb. But in spite of this surface similarity, the grammar of the two is quite different. In the first sentence, though it is not apparent from the surface word order, "John" functions as the direct object of the verb "to please"; the sentence means: it is easy for someone to please john. Whereas in the second "John" functions as the subject of the verb "to please"; the sentence means: John is eager that he please someone. That this is a difference in the syntax of the sentence comes out clearly in the fact that English allows us to form the noun phrase "John's eagerness to please" out of the second, but not "John's easiness to please" out of the first. There is no easy or natural way to account for these facts within structuralist assumptions (web).

In fact, Chomsky further describes structural linguistics as an "impoverished and thoroughly inadequate conception of language" (20). In the same vein, Marcus declares that structural linguistics were "fundamentally inadequate to process the full range of natural language (and further were) held by no current researchers, to my Knowledge" (77). These and other claims are evidence that by the latter half of the 20th century, many of Saussure's ideas were under heavy criticism. His linguistic ideas are now generally considered important in their time, but outdated and superseded by developments such as cognitive linguistics. It is not surprising when Holland writes that it was widely accepted that Chomsky had "decisively" refuted Saussure "[…] much of Chomsky's work is not accepted by other linguists [and] I am not claiming that Chomsky is right, only that Chomsky has proven that Saussure was wrong" (9). His stress here is the fact that linguists who reject Chomsky, claim to be going beyond Chomsky, or they cling to phrase-structure grammar – they are not turning back to Saussure.

Post-Structural Linguistics

As an extension or outgrowth of structural linguistics which posed so many challenges to structuralism, the post-structuralist moment was a particularly fertile one, as renown theorists such as Roland Barthes, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault and younger theorists like Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Paul Vrilio and others came into the field. The post-structuralist productive period became noticeable in the famous 1966 conference on "Critical Language and the Science of Man" at Johns Hopkins University, which featured an important intervention by Derrida's *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.* Rejecting structuralist theories of language, Derrida stressed the instability and excess of meaning in language, as well as the ways in which heterogeneity and difference were generated. Derrida also questioned binary opposition between nature and culture upon which Levi-Strauss had erected his system, thus undermining a certain glorification of the human science in the

humanities, and opening the discipline for a greater appreciation of philosophy, literature and less-scientific modes of discourse.

Post-structuralism stressed the openness and heterogeneity of the text, how it is embedded in history and desire, its political and ideological dimensions, and its excess of meaning. Whereas structuralism had ambition of attaining the status of a super science, which could arbitrate among competing truth claims and provide a foundational discipline, post-structural challenged any single discipline's claim to primary status and promoted more interdisciplinary modes of theory. Post-structuralism thus turned to history, politics, and an active and creative human subject, away from the more scientific and objectivist modes of thought in structuralism.

It is not surprising that French post-structuralist critical theory is extremely hard to categorise, due to its combination of social theory, stylistics, and many social as well as human sciences in its conceptual framework. It therefore crosses boundaries between academic disciplines and fields. This interdisciplinary focus links it to Frankfurt school of critical theory that practices "border crossing" (that is, they cross the border between disciplines and the traditional division of topics and academic labour).

When it first emerged in France during the 1960s as an antinomian movement critiquing structuralism, the period was marked by political anxiety, as students and workers alike rebelled against the state in May 1968, nearly causing the downfall of the French government. At the same time, the support of the French communist party (FCP) for the oppressive policies of the USSR contributed to popular disillusionment with orthodox marxism. As a result, there was increased interest in alternative radical philosophies, including feminism, western marxism, anarchism, phenomenology and nihilism. These disparate perspectives, which Michel Foucault later labelled "subjugated knowledge" were all linked by being critical of dominant western

philosophy and culture. Post-structuralism offered a means of justifying these criticisms, by exposing the underlying assumptions of many western norms. In a 1976 lecture series, Foucault summarised the general impetus of the post-structuralist movement thus:

> … for the last ten years, the immense and proliferating criticizability of things, institutions, practices, and discourse; a sort of general feeling that the ground was crumbling beneath our feet, especially in places where it seemed most familiar, most solid, and closest to us, to our bodies, to our everyday gestures … we have seen what might be called the insurrection of knowledge (6-7).

Again, when Barthes (a structuralist-turned-post-structuralist) published *The Death of the Author* in 1968, in which he announced a metaphorical event: the "death" of the author as an authentic source of meaning for a given text, he argued that any literary text has multiple meanings, and that the author was not the prime source of the work's semantic content. He was though, actually concerned with post-structural literary criticism. Here, the "Death of the Author", Barthes maintained, was the "Birth of the Reader", as the source of the proliferation of meanings of the text.

It is also important to note that while structuralism was busy using analytical concepts from linguistics, psychology and anthropology to interpret those structures in cultural prods such as texts, and relying solely on logical and scientific methods to advocate its results, post-structuralism came on board with a stringent critique of the aforesaid structural premises and offered a study of how knowledge is produced. It argues therefore that because history and culture condition the study of underlying structures, it is subject to biases and misinterpretations. To understand an object (e.g. one of the many meanings of a text), a post-structuralist approach argues, it is necessary to study both the object itself and the systems of knowledge that produced the object.

In the same vein, it would be recalled that we have established earlier that a major theoretical concept associated with structuralism was binary opposition. This theory proposed that there are certain theoretical and conceptual opposites, often arranged in a hierarchy, which human logic has given to text. Such binary pairs could include enlightenment/romantic, male/female, speech/writing, rational/emotional, signifier/signified, symbolic/imaginary etc. Post-structural linguistics rejects the notion of the essential quality of the dominant relation in the hierarchy, choosing rather to expose these relations and the dependency of the dominant term on its apparently subservient counterpart. The only way to properly understand these meanings, as proposed by Derrida, is to **deconstruct** the assumptions and knowledge systems which produce the illusion of singular meaning. This act of deconstruction (which later became another theory on its own) illuminates how male can become female, how speech can become writing, and how rational can become emotional. It is these and other criticisms geared towards attacking the structural views that led Barthes to further advocate, in his 1967 *Elements of Semiology*, the concept of meta-language. According to him, a meta-language is a systematised way of talking about concepts like meaning and grammar beyond the constraints of a traditional (first order) language.

However, post-structuralism too is not without its criticisms. Some observers from outside the post-structuralist camp have questioned the rigour and legitimacy of the field in academia. The American philosopher John Searle argues in the New York Times Review (6th Dec. 1990) that “The spread of ‘post-structuralist’ literary theory is perhaps the best known example of a silly but non-catastrophic phenomenon” (12). Similarly, in 1997, Sokal criticised “the postmodernist/poststructuralist gibberish that is now hegemonic in some sectors of the American academy” (web). Again, Holland argues that post-structuralism was flawed due to reliance on

Saussure's linguistic model which was seriously challenged in the 1950s and was soon abandoned by linguists:

> Saussure's views are not held, so far as I know, by modern linguistics, only by literary critics and the occasional philosopher. Strict adherence to Saussure has elicited wrong film and literary theory on a grand scale. One can find dozens of books of literary theory bogged down in signifiers and signified, but only a handful that refer to Chomsky (140).

When Holland says this, we understand that he is directly attacking the post-structural concepts of self (which takes its root from Saussurean structuralist notion of signifier and signified in *The Science of Signs*) which was viewed as separate, singular and coherent entity, and as a fictional construct; and that plays an important role for individual perception and interpretation of meaning, based on how the work/text relates to his own personal concept of self as well as independence of the author's intended meaning.

Structural/Post-structural Stylistics

Professionally speaking, there are no overt theories within stylistics; what we have are a number of approaches and models to the stylistic analysis within the development of stylistics as a discipline. Among the enormous number of approaches or models of stylistic analysis include the classical formulation of Roman Jakobson's formal and structural stylistics, functionalist, pragmatic, textual, contextual, sociolinguistic stylistics etc.

The structuralist model attempts to structure a given piece (text) into different components and applying the analysis of structural linguistics on the current issue. First, the constants, underlying all the approaches in stylistics represented is a view of literary stylistics (LIS) as a discipline or sub-discipline engaged in the study of language in use and actions as

manifested in written texts. In such texts certain small-scale, surface elements, from phonological to *logicosemantic,* are singled out and their features, patterns, and mechanisms described in terms of some theoretical linguistics.

The units or elements are singled out initially on the basis of one of the following: their saliency (prominence, predominance, foregrounding) in the text in question; significant accumulation of them in the text; the fact that they represent a consistent singular choice from among all the options available in some underlying system (linguistic, textual, discursive); or the fact that they constitute a marked deviation from the norms of such an underlying system (Margolin 1).

This development built upon Saussure's structural model of analysing linguistic features of texts, has, in many aspects, incorporated the transformational-generative or processing-strategy stylistics, the systematic, the case grammar model, and a few others in its theoretical explications. The generative model under the structural stylistics gathers much momentum than the others within the theoretical unit.

This study, however, features structuralist-cum-poststructuralist stylistics. In that, it looks closely into the development of structural/post-structural approaches to stylistic study. This model of stylistics developed from the attempt to apply the Transformational-Generative Grammar Model to the analysis of text and to stylistic analysis in particular. The model rests squarely on the principle that two surface strings can be *transformationally* derived from the same deep structure unit (Adekunle 30). The analysis based on this model now assumes that the surface strings derived from the same underlying source give the writer two different ways (or styles) of saying the same thing.

Unlike other stylistic analysis models, this kind of structural stylistic model is termed the post-structural stylistic model, and it offers an adequate criteria for distinguishing the linguistic forms responsible for the stylistic features of the expression plane to form. It also provides distinctions between different styles, by using the criteria in the grammar itself.

In his *Linguistic Theory and Structural Stylistics*, Taylor notes that the style of a sentence would be described by the transformational rules which have been applied in deriving its surface structure from the deep structure. This Chomskyan notion has helped in transforming the structural model of stylistic analysis into what we may call today as post-structural stylistic model. Adekunle further observes that since one of the major issues in stylistics has been how to explain the means by which content other than meaning is communicated, the model such as the one described above seems however, to have achieved limited success, for it could merely provide the formal characterisation of only the features of the expressed components of discourse. Other structural stylistic models such as the aforementioned systemic-functional, the case grammar have therefore evolved to cover some of the lapses inherent in the earlier recorded principles or models.

Conclusion

Critically examining the above structural-cum-post-structural stylistic analysis, it would suffice us to draw our conclusion that structural/post-structural stylistics is inadequate for stylistic study. This is because it lays emphasis on quasi-scientific methods following a strictly conservative structural approach to examine the formal features of language structures. This follows the realisation that any stylistic analysis such as the one in question would somewhat appear awkward and irregular in many aspects. The glaring point here is the fact that it (structural/post-structural stylistics) may be appropriate in examining some sentences, which, of course, are purely linguistically based; but any attempt to apply it on sentences or texts which are

literary-oriented may present a seemingly awkward situation. A further justification of this proposition is evident in the fact that a literary text is marked by a special kind of deviation from the norms of linguistic standards.

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