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HOW TECHNICAL STUDENTS LEARN STYLISTIC: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE NEED AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This article presents experiential learning outcomes and some data from a pilot study which focuses Student Development in Learning Stylistics'. The pilot was designed to assess how information and hard data could be created such that empirical study of technical Students development would be possible, and to gather a small amount of such data for analysis. The article discusses the structuring of the pilot study, the delivery of it and the resulting outcomes. Technical Students groups participating were asked to undertake analysis of a selected text and to complete a questionnaire about their process of learning to analyze

KEYWORDS: Corpus linguistics; empirical study of language; pedagogy of stylistics.

INTRODUCTION

This article reports on how a group of students at engineering college in the entry and final year of their graduate study learn stylistics .The stylistics is really a need of technical and management students because they interact at global level both at personal and professional level .They are more universal than students of humanities and basic sciences. The present study focuses on the pilot study made on a group of students to find out how they learn stylistics and in order to trace the changes growth and improvement in their communication and interpersonal skills. The students who were trained only t translate and transform a language into other when given this study were found to be more efficient in communication then earlier.

Twenty three years ago, Carter (1989:1b), was able to claim that 'questions of language and learning are more widely addressed in the domain of foreign language learning than in the no less important area of mother-tongue language development', and certainly,effectively teaching foreign languages necessitates an understanding of how both the source and the target languages work and how language learning in general works, combined with a continuing awareness of developments in 'connected areas'.[1] It has long been the norm within (foreign-) language teaching circles that the process of teaching should also continually be under examination. Some aspects of 'good practice' can be found on the website of the English and Foreign Language University Hydrabad (EFLU).

It is notable however that another area closely connected for historical reasons with the practice of stylistics is less well placed. 'English' has been allocated a separate Subject Centre site, and so it would seem that Carter's 23-year-old comment about the lack of relation between English language and other languages still holds, and that in some sense 'English' as a discipline in the India is still seen as being primarily language –based.

The students coming from both English and Vernacular medium are trained to translate rather transcribe Indian expressions into English.So they fail to catch the spirit of this foreign language in order to do justice with required expressions and stresses on a given situation. In my own experience of teaching English (both language and literature) at higher levels, despite a continued need for development of grammatical and lexical knowledge, the major need is for a strong focus on the development of a good written style, and a knowledge of stylistics is a major source of that development. Indian Engineering and management students with wider opportunities are spread over the world facing and interacting with global citizens at social professional and personal aims.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in what has been termed 'pedagogical stylistics', that is, in the use of stylistic methods as a teaching tool. However, perhaps surprisingly, and with a few notable exceptions, little attention has been given to the teaching of stylistics itself.

Research questions

The primary research question to technical and management students was 'whether, how and when do technical Students of stylistics acquire an approach to textual analysis that approximates that typically produced by professionals in the stylistics discourse community?' As well as the overtly stated question about learner development, this question of course implies others:

- Is there such a thing as a 'typical' approach to textual analysis amongst technical Students in the stylistics discourse community?
- Is there such a thing as a 'stylistics discourse community', and if so how is it constituted?

The aim of the overall study is to produce clearly-defined data for teachers of stylistics on:

- The process of stylistic analysis skills acquisition
- Any noticeable and identifiable changes in the way that learners approach the task of stylistic analysis at different stages of learning
- The nature of any such changes, if they exist
- an indication of the stage (of study) at which learners begin to approximate the discoursal style of professional practitioners of stylistics.

This therefore also involves making an attempt to provide a first data-based characterization of what professional practitioners of stylisticians typically do when they analyse.

The question also entails a consideration of what it is that learners of stylistics are expected to learn in order to become functioning stylistic analysts. The complexity of this task is considerable, and to my knowledge there are no data available, so from experience alone I compiled the following list, which I believe to be broadly representative of some of the kinds of areas that may be covered, variously, under the heading of 'stylistics':

- Aspects of phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, discourse analysis, pragmatics, areas of linguistic theory and so on
- How to analyse on each 'language level'
- How to select appropriate analytical techniques for analysing a given text or extract
- How to amalgamate findings to describe a text linguistically, stylistically and (sometimes) aesthetically

Fabb (2007) provides an alternative list:

1. Narrative structure
2. Point of view and focalization
3. Sound patterning
4. Syntactic and lexical parallelism and repetition
5. Metre and rhythm
6. Genre
7. Mimetic, representational, realist effects
8. Metarepresentation, representation of speech and thought, irony
9. Metaphor and other ways of indirect meaning
10. Utilization and representation of variation in dialect, accent, and historically specific usages
11. Group-specific ways of speaking (real or imagined), as in gendered stylistics
12. Examination of inferential processes which readers engage in to determine communicated meanings.

Some of these can of course be mapped and are required to be found as skill in technical students but as others are only for students of stylistics can not not be expexted to be found in technical students. Because the present study targets the stylistics to be tought to the the technical students at application level with its practical approach not at the professional level.

Structuring the study

The study is constrained by the available methodologies for obtaining hard data. As already mentioned, it is difficult if not impossible to obtain direct data about learning processes. There is a limited range of techniques common to investigations in the social sciences: questionnaires, introspective read-aloud protocols,6 focus groups, case studies and interviews are the main ones. None of these allows of a fail-safe mechanism of data collection. Another source of information might be the live observation of stylistics teaching, though the experience of peer observation and assessing live English –language oral presentations indicates that the complexity of such observation is considerable, and in any case, because of constraints of time, could involve only a limited number of instances. Further, the data obtained would relate only to the teacher(s) involved, and may not be generalizable. This methodology was therefore not used.

A secondary though less complex constraint appeared in the accessibility of groups of stylistics learners who could take part in the pilot study. The only groups clearly suitable and available were a first-year undergraduate group taking a 24-week module called 'Introduction to Stylistics'; and for comparison, a final-year group taking a 12-week module in 'Language and Power'.

THE PILOT STUDY

The questionnaire, including a case study on human relations for analysis, was presented on Institute website at department humanities which provides not only online workspace for participating students, but facilities for grading and calculating averages and so on, which are useful to staff. It includes a 'survey' category, which enables responses to be extracted as anonymous data into either Excel or Notepad, making them available for further processing. Indian technical Students are accustomed to the Internet interface, and were therefore not likely to experience any difficulties other than those raised by providing the responses themselves. The aims of the pilot study questionnaire were:

- To test the clarity of the questions in the questionnaire
- To assess how effective the questions were in eliciting useful information, and
- To obtain from technical students an attempt at a summary analysis of the case study on human relations

The questionnaire itself was divided into sections covering the following headings:

Q1	Text 'analysis'
Q2–Q4	Background training and studies
Q5–Q18	(i) Felt change in ability
	(ii) Time of any noticeable felt change
Q19–Q22	Felt effects on study/learning skills in non-stylistics modules
Q23	Motives for taking stylistics module(s)
Q24–Q25	What was easiest/most difficult to learn?
Q26	Further comments, any suggestions on module structure, content and so on.

Here follow the questions themselves, each with a summary rationale.

'Core' questions
The 'core' questions, numbers 5–22, addressed the learning experience related to aspects of stylistics that participants may have studied, opinions about when any changes in skills levels may have occurred, and opinions about the transferability of stylistic-analytical skills. Questions 5–18 were paired, each question about felt change in stylistics skills (a 'C' question) being related to a question on the felt time of such change (a 'T' question), so that questions 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 17 were C questions and questions 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 and 18 were T questions. The C questions all took a similar format, centring on the learner's ability to identify, analyse or explain (as appropriate) a particular aspect or feature of language: 'How do you think your ability to identify/analyse/explain [*feature*] has changed since you started studying stylistics at entry level of your graduation?' The seven aspects inserted were: *language, foregrounding, interactions or conversations, instances of narrative structure, grammatical structures and processes, word class,* and *your interpretation(s).* The choice range for responses was: Very much improved, Improved, Only slightly improved, Slightly worse, Worse, Very much worse, No noticeable change either way, Not applicable. (This provided an even number of boxes, to avoid the general tendency to select a centre box when doubtful.)

The T questions were also similarly phrased, with the same seven aspects of stylistics inserted: 'Looking back on what you have learned so far about [*aspect*], can you identify any specific time or period when, in your view, your ability to identify/analyse/explain [*aspect*] changed, if it did?' The response choice was: 'Over a year ago', '9–12 months ago', '6–8 months ago', ' 3–5 months ago', '1–2 months ago', 'Within the past month', 'I cannot identify a time when anything changed', 'There has not been a change'. The time periods were extended as they became further away from 'now', since it was felt that the ability of learners to specify a time of felt change was likely to operate more finely in periods that were relatively recent than in periods that were further in the past. Responses to the T questions were to be correlated with the record of pre Institute and Institute learning experience to see if any effects of stylistics learning could be identified.

Questions19–22 aimed to find out whether or not students had any sense that their stylistics skills had transferred to other areas of work. (This is a claim that some students make in their course feedback, though how accurate it is, is unknown.) It was hoped that the impression of generalizability might be statistically significant, and therefore warrant further investigation. If there were evidence of any correlation, it might be possible to examine what transferable skills are acquired. These three questions took the same basic form as the C questions, but related to learning skills in modules other than the stylistics modules that students were taking or had taken: 'Please indicate how you think learning stylistics may have affected your ability to for other *non-stylistics* modules that you take'. The study skills inserted in the matrix sentence were: *read, analyse,*

understand *material,* and *explain your ideas*. These were intentionally less specific than those in the C-questions relating to stylistics modules, simply because it was the case that the range of 'non-stylistics modules' might be comparatively large, and so the specific skills required would tend to be more variable. The range of response options was as for the C-questions.

Administering the survey
In March 2009 the survey questionnaire was issued to 46 final-year technical Students, following a very brief introductory explanation during a seminar hour. A final year group was useful for the pilot, because those students would not be included in the main study, which would take place during the following academic year. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire in their own time. At the closure of the accessibility period for this questionnaire in March 2008, only five full responses had been received, with a further nine partially completed. It was noticeable that the missing element in the incomplete responses was the summary analysis of a case study on human relations, which in this initial run had appeared as question 26. In view of this, and because some students had commented on a lack of time which may have been a major reason for the missing analyses, it was decided that the analysis question should be placed first in subsequent tests, so that what had been questions 1–25 would become questions 2–26.

There was a difficulty in the low number of responses to the analysis: not only were such responses few, but they were extremely short, indeed one contributor provided only 'bullet points', with no explanation at all of the significance of the features identified. In all, only 90 words were obtained, and this was clearly too little to allow of corpuslinguistic analysis.

METHODOLOGIES AND OUTCOMES
The responses to the questionnaire of course fell into two areas, concomitant with the 'background opinions' and 'core' sections of the questionnaire, and a third area consisted of the learners' attempts at analysis. For the learner analyses, corpus linguistic processing was to be used, whereas the information on background and opinions would lend itself to statistical analysis. Responses to the multiple-choice questions were allocated values as shown in Tables 1and 2. Each of these categories of response relates also to the seven aspects of stylistics learning that were cited in the questionnaire (*language analysis, foregrounding, interactions or conversations, narrative structure, grammatical structures and processes, word class,*and *interpretation*).

Table 1. Scale of values for degree of felt change

Value	Time of felt change
8	Over a year ago
7	9–12 months ago
6	6–8 months ago
5	3–5 months ago
4	1–2 months ago
3	Within the past month
2	There has not been a change
1	I cannot identify a time when anything changed
0	No response

Table 2. Scale of values for time of felt change

Value	Degree of felt change
8	Very much improved
7	Improved
6	Only slightly improved
5	Slightly worse
4	Worse
3	Very much worse
2	No noticeable change either way
1	Not applicable
0	No response

ANALYSING THE RESPONSES

In the following section, the relevant responses will be analysed together with the presentation and discussion of usage.

The learner analyses

The response analyses were aggregated into a single file for corpus analysis, The analyses were problematic. All were very short, many showed signs of the considerable time pressure that the participants had been under, especially in regard to spellingand typing, and in all only some 1078 words (tokens) were provided. However, there were some observable differences which can be highlighted and which seem to support the impression that there are observable changes between firstyear and final-year work.

Background and learner opinions.

The responses to the sections of the questionnaire relating to learning background and opinions were analysed using the numerical values given in Tables 1 and 2 above. However, again the results were not very informative. In almost all cases, responses only occurred in the areas of the survey that indicated improvement. A typical example is the pair of questions, given in Table 3, relating to general ability to analyse language.

Table 3. Survey Extract

Question 5 Multiple Choice

How do you think your ability to analyse language has changed since you started studying stylistics at university?

Answers	Percent Answered
Very much improved	8.333%
Improved	58.333%
Only slightly improved	33.333%
Slightly worse	0%
Worse	0%
Very much worse	0%
No noticeable change either way	0%
Not applicable	0%
Unanswered	0%

Question 6 Multiple Choice

Looking back on what you have learned so far about how language works, can you identify any specific time or period when, in your view, your ability to analyse language changed, if it did?

Answers	Percent Answered
Over a year ago	16.667%
9–12 months ago	0%
6–8 months ago	25.00%
3–5 months ago	50.00%
1–2 months ago	0%
Within the past month	0%
I cannot identify a time when anything changed	8.333%
There has not been a change	0%
Unanswered	0%

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CONCLUSION

Learning and teaching stylistics

Whatever examination of the data may reveal, the outcome of the full study should provide a first instance of data-based information on what some learners of stylistics and some professional practitioners of stylistics actually produce when they analyse. It is my hope that some interesting conclusions will be possible as to how the learning of stylistics actually happens. It may also be possible to make some consequential if tentative suggestions about what the essential elements of stylistics teaching need to be. It has been assumed that most learning is cumulative, indeed it is hard to see it as anything else, since we all 'know' as both practitioners and teachers of stylistics that stylistic analysis only happens successfully after learners have at least taken on board what Short (1989: 1) calls 'a descriptive analytical vocabulary'. There is still a dearth of materials examining the actual learning processes that students undergo, and for good reason. Although there are notionally a number of useful empirical methods of accessing information about learning, there is of course no means of accessing the process while it is happening.

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