

BOOK REVIEW

How to Study Literature

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Title:	<i>How to Study Literature: Stylistic and Pragmatic Approaches</i>
Authors:	Nozar Niazi and Rama Gautam
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This book, authored by two experts in the subject, is a comprehensive study of stylistic and pragmatic approaches to literature. One can say that the authors have been successful in their endeavour to help students of literature interpret texts from the stylistic and pragmatic perspectives as the book defines, presents, analyses, and applies the principles of stylistics and pragmatics with such finesse that even novices in the subject can follow and apply the principles with ease. The book is one of its kind that enables students of literature to acquire a holistic perspective of literature and greater insights as regards the nuances of language a writer employs in enriching the beauty or meaningfulness of his or her text.

This book comprises two parts that focus on stylistics and pragmatics respectively. Both parts begin with an introduction to the subject, followed by the theoretical framework on which the authors base their discussion. A brief survey of the history of the theories leads to a detailed analysis of the same, which is followed by practical lessons on how to employ these theories and principles in works of literature. A major part of the book has been devoted to the analyses of

various literary texts using stylistic and pragmatic principles. Part I, “A Stylistic Approach to Literature” consists of seven chapters, while Part II, “A Pragmatic Approach to Literature” comprises six chapters.

The book is very comprehensive and at the same time analytical as one argument leads to the other. For instance, before discussing the principles of stylistics in detail, the authors provide a brief historical view of the subject, drawing from various sources and quoting several luminaries like Widdowson, Charles Bally, and Leo Spitzer. The book also differentiates between practical criticism, linguistic criticism, and stylistic analysis. Dispelling the belief that linguistic and stylistic analysis is the same, the authors quote Widdowson in support of their view that stylistics spans the space between linguistics and literary criticism; while the former is microscopic the latter is holistic. The authors very convincingly argue that without a stylistic analysis one cannot appreciate the beauty of a literary text in its entirety.

Written in a lucid style, the book also throws light on such aspects as foregrounding, deviation, imagery, tone, and lexis. Stylistics is the scientific

approach to a literary text, the approach of the authors to the subject in question is one of scientific precision; they elucidate the concepts objectively and accurately and at the same time they pay attention to detail. For example, the authors first introduce concepts, define them, trace their history, describe them in detail and finally apply them to a literary work.

The chapter entitled "Theoretical Framework" in Part I, for instance, provides guidelines on how to approach a literary work using the concepts of stylistics: from how to take random samples from a writer's work, through quantification, to the various characteristics to be quantified. An example of the diligence of the authors is the section "Phonological Deviations" where they elucidate the various types of sound patterning by quoting lines from various works of literature for every aspect.

Part I provides a threadbare (stylistic) analysis of novels such as D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* followed by an in-depth analysis of Wordsworth's *The Solitary Reaper*, Philip Larkin's *Wants*, and E.E Cummings *Listen*. This is followed by stylistic analysis of short stories such as O' Henry's *The Last Leaf* and *The Gift of the Magi*, and Liam O'Flaherty's *The Sniper*. The stylistic principles applied to vary from genre to genre.

The "Conclusion" of Part I is a peroration of the chapters that go before it. Here, the authors also state how linguistic analysis of literature "becomes an integral aspect of the process of understanding literature" (185). The discussion of the pedagogic principles that stem out of the kind of stylistic analysis elucidated in the book bears ample proof of the enthusiasm of the authors, who are primarily teachers, of this book to help students gain a holistic perspective of a literary work. They rightly opine that a stylistic approach to literature in

classrooms will lead to highly interactive sessions in which students learn to enjoy and appreciate literature.

Defining pragmatics as "the study of speech acts" the theory of which was first propounded by John L. Austin, Part II of the book focuses exclusively on pragmatics. Focusing on the meaning underlying utterances, the authors elaborate on the Speech Act theory and how it encourages reading between lines, meaning to say that every utterance is an act that has a communicative purpose behind it and a greater meaning than what it conveys. The authors summarise their aim in a very eloquent and cryptic manner when they state that "the present study aims at sensitizing students of English Literature to language itself as language itself, as literature is the art form realized entirely through language." (194)

The chapter "Theoretical Framework" in Part II introduces the concept of speech act, elucidates the concept by citing the linguistic acts of blessing and greeting as examples, and differentiates between a sentence and an utterance, the latter carrying more force by it being uttered. The chapter also elaborates on the speech act theory of Austin and Searle, direct and indirect speech acts, which are governed by the three structural forms viz. declarative, interrogative, and imperative, and the important principles of a speech act such as the Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle, and Irony Principle. The significant role that time and place play in an utterance is discussed under the section *Deixis*, which sheds some light on 'person deixis' characterized by the grammatical distinctions first, second, and third person and spatial deixis by adverbs 'here' and 'there' and demonstrative pronouns 'this' and 'that.' Discussions on 'presupposition' and 'turn-taking and adjacency pair' also find a place in this part of the text. The speech acts and theories are enunciated using novels such

as Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *To Have and Have Not*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *The Old Man and the Sea* and William Faulkner's *Sound and Fury*. The five major speech acts viz. assertive, commissive, directive, and declarative have been discussed citing examples from the aforementioned novels. The book also includes a discussion on the role of 'indirect speech acts' in select novels. Other important speech acts such as verbal irony and rhetorical questions also receive an elaborate treatment in the book.

The "Conclusion" of Part II draws together the threads that weave the second part of the text into an elegant but useful fabric and also throws light on the pedagogical implications of the study. Here the authors rightly emphasize the need for teachers to initiate students into making a stylistic and pragmatic analysis of the literary work they read. Moreover, such an analysis would encourage the participation of students in the class, thereby satisfying the needs of the modern learner-centred classrooms. The section on the scope for further study provides pointers to other types of speech acts, an analysis of which is a literary work will render the work much more interesting to read. This will also help students of literature to make an objective and precise analysis of works of literature.

The in-depth analysis of Hemingway's novels using both stylistic and pragmatics principles can be considered a hallmark of the text.

However, the authors have been realistic enough to state that a pragmatic

and stylistic approach will not give scope for a complete analysis of the text and that they cannot "solve all the problems of a literary analysis" (46) The book is a must-read for scholars, students, and teachers and the text will serve its purpose, that is, to bring the learner "to the point where he is capable of teasing out meanings for himself" (18) from the literary work.

Unlike recent works on stylistics and pragmatics, this book does not have exercises for immediate classroom practice; instead, it functions more like a seminal survey in contrasting and tying together historical strands of thought, examining explanations for how meaning interpretation works. The tone of the book is serious and the diligent scholarly research that goes behind the text is evident throughout. The familiarity assumed with the various aspects of linguistic criticism and theories would make this a tricky first book for many undergraduates studying pragmatics; it does, however, present an excellent choice for readers who want both, a historical survey as well as a step-by-step guide to the application of the stylistic and pragmatic concepts to literature. An in-depth reading of the text reveals the minds of two teachers working behind the text. What emerges from the text is not only a thorough analysis of the subject but also the passion of the two teachers striving to bridge the gap between the teaching of language and literature. This book, therefore, serves as an ideal guide for teachers of literature.