 Literary stylistics and creativity

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Introduction

The study of creativity is arguably central to the discipline of stylistics. An important way in which to understand stylistics is as the study of a distinctive style in a work or an author, or a genre or a period. A distinct style is taken to create distinct significance (compare Wales, 2011: ‘Style’; ‘Stylistics’). Creativity, in turn, is generally understood now as valued and unexpected innovation, making new connections (for example Jones, 2012). Stylistics thus fundamentally begins from a textual study of what is new, different, or distinctive about language use in a text. The interest, however, is not purely linguistic, but functional, in the sense that linguistic choices are taken to represent meaningful choices. In more recent times therefore, as I shall show, stylistics has moved from a purely textual search for distinctiveness and innovation to a broader understanding of language use as discourse, with the result that notions such as ‘value’ and the expected or unexpected aspects of language use must necessarily involve study of the production, reception, and dissemination of texts in specific contexts without which, it is now felt, formal features cannot be fully described and understood. Who exactly notices or values these features, and why might that be? Beyond this, though, stylistics now ranges far beyond the study of classic mainstream literature: literary stylistics remains at the centre of much stylistic writing and research, and literature is prototypically understood (even when this is problematised) as ‘valued literature’ – texts valued, especially in modern times, for their innovatory properties. Thus literary stylistics can be claimed to be centrally concerned with the study of linguistic and discursive creativity in literary texts.

Formalist stylistics

The teaching of stylistics usually begins with the fundamental notion still of ‘deviant’ language, which is ‘foregrounded’ for readers’ attention by being unusually formulated, the form drawing attention to itself as in Jakobson’s (1960) celebrated model of ‘poetic’ communication, in which poetry is itself conceived of as prototypical ‘literature’. Jakobson proposes that unusual uses of language are noticed and so perform an important role in a reader’s construction of meaning from a text. An unusual use is, of course, implicitly a comparative notion: ‘unusual’ compared to the usual. The usual can be seen as the norms of standard language use, or even the usual ways in which a writer uses language, and in one view can be looked at statistically, as a question of comparative frequencies of occurrence of
a form from which ‘significance’ can be calculated (sometimes distinguished as ‘deviation’: Wales, 2011).

Corpus stylistics is particularly strong at identifying such relative statistical frequencies and infrequencies. Thus ‘stylometry’ (Hoover, 2007, on the style of Henry James, for example) identifies significant patterns of distinctive language use, preferred words, constructions, and so on, by means of computerised sweeps through complete publications of an author. One issue that such work raises is how successfully statistics and software actually capture what an individual specific reader in a specific reading event or practice may notice. Claims sometimes need to be made for subliminal frequency effects, whereby corpus stylistics seems to reveal deviance that has not actually been consciously noticed by actual readers. (See also Mahlberg, 2013, for an exemplary corpus stylistic study of characterisation in Dickens’s fiction.)

A related concern, central to sociolinguistic debates, is what exactly a ‘norm’, or ‘ordinary’ or ‘standard’ language, might consist of when there is demonstrably so much variation in actual language use. We do feel some uses of language to be unusual, and we do notice them and may (or may not) value such unusual uses of language, but the cognitive mechanisms of how this happens are still not entirely clear. What is clear is that this is not a purely textual activity – that readers bring their own prior experiences of language use to texts newly encountered, and that these experiences vary, so that what is unusual or notable to some may not be entirely so to others in all instances, even though much overlap of experience undoubtedly exists (compare Stockwell, Chapter 13).

The notions of foregrounding and deviance are known to have originated for modern stylistics with Russian formalist writings, and then Prague school research, in the early twentieth century, with Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) a central figure for both movements (see Miall, Chapter 11, for a fuller account). The Russian formalists were identified, as the name suggests, initially by their interest in linguistic and literary form. The object of research for the group was to formulate scientifically and objectively in what ways literary texts differed from non-literary texts, as it was assumed they did at this stage. A modern variation on the investigation into literariness might be the work of Dorst (2015), again based on corpus linguistic methodology, on metaphor in fiction. Metaphor, according to this research, is actually less common in fiction than in journalism or everyday conversation, but certainly where metaphor does occur, it is more often novel, self-conscious, and/or explicitly signalled (‘creative’). Creativity derives from use, rather than being a purely linguistic and textual phenomenon, although interestingly making finer distinctions regarding the kinds of metaphor identified shows that the orientation toward self-conscious use of metaphor seems to be more likely in the literary setting, in some ways confirming the more intuitive proposals of formalists, as well as what our intuition as readers of literature might already suggest to us.

‘Devices’ such as metaphor were shown by the formalists to be important ways in which the felt or perceived ‘literariness’ of a text comes into being. These are the ‘deviant’ uses of language already mentioned – that is, if there is alliteration or metaphor, or any other possible device, occurring at what seems to be more than a chance level of frequency, or in other particularly salient or innovatory ways for a reader, it is assumed that there is a deliberate creative effect being attempted, whereby ‘creative’ means original, unusual, but also deliberate and intended rather than accidental, and thus we are in the presence of a literary text. Repetition and ‘parallelism’ (repeated or near-repeated structures, words, or other devices) are identified as the most important ways in which to effect foregrounding (‘perceptibility’ is another term used by the formalists for this phenomenon). Famously, Shklovsky (1917)
argued for ‘defamiliarisation’ (or ‘deautomatisation’) as the driving force of literary creation: ‘Art exists to [renew perception]…’. Equally dramatically, Roman Jakobson (quoted in Eagleton, 2011: 2) described literature as ‘organized violence committed on ordinary speech’. Paying attention to the language of other forms, a reader is led to think and notice in refreshed and non-habitual ways.

Geoffrey Leech (1969, 2008), who developed and illustrated the deviance tradition very lucidly for later British stylistics, famously noted the unusual lexico-grammar of Dylan Thomas’ ‘A Grief Ago’, both in itself, but also, since the device is used by Thomas elsewhere as well, as a feature of Thomas’ (habitual) style. Schematically, Leech (2008) makes a useful distinction between primary deviation (deviation against the background of general linguistic norms), secondary deviation (deviation against the norms of conventional poetic regularity, as in metrical variation and run-on lines in verse), and tertiary deviation (deviation against norms established within a literary text).

Jakobson (1960) himself instanced as ‘poetic language’ a political slogan of his time, ‘I like Ike’, in which the utterance is clearly patterned to be noticeable and memorable. Perhaps counterintuitively, parallelism and repetitions can also be centrally creative – a point to which I return in discussing genre later in this chapter. On the stylistic significance of repetition in literature, see in particular the work of Toolan (2012; see also Toolan, Chapter 14), who has persuasively traced the emotional effects of repetition in fiction and poetry. The difference between foregrounded form and repetition in promotional discourse such as ‘I like Ike’, or advertising more generally, and in literature lies, for Jakobson, in the differing functions of similar devices in Dylan Thomas or Gerard Manley Hopkins and in political propaganda. In the one case, the function is clearly to sell something or someone to a defined market, while the purpose of literature is less clearly focused, but usually taken to relate to imaginative activity and pleasure in play, including language play, and more highly valued as creative rather than utilitarian. Nevertheless, linguistically and textually the two practices cannot be distinguished out of context, and an individual reader or viewer may take as much pleasure, or more, from a good jingle as from a modernist poem (whereas an overt concern with form and language, from T. S. Eliot to John Ashbery, may be viewed more negatively as ‘elitist’). With this differentiation, then, of ‘literature’ and advertising (for example), the idea that literariness, and hence creativity, can be purely linguistic and textual is again slipping away, as is the idea that literary creativity is a distinct kind of activity. A more modern position in stylistics, as in literary theory, is to recognise that there is a continuum, rather than a dichotomy, between literary and non-literary uses of language, and that literature, or style, is not a purely linguistic category, but rather a socioculturally mediated way of taking meaning from texts in contexts, albeit admittedly particularly from texts that tend to offer more unusual or more stimulating linguistic or formal devices (Carter, 2004; Maybin, Chapter 1). Deviance is hard to identify in many cases and not a sufficient explanation for literary meaning making or valuation, but certainly will often enter into perceptions of literariness and of the valuation of a particular text or utterance. Similarly, repetition can be valued or disvalued in different circumstances and contexts. The form itself has no essential meaning or value.

Thus Toolan (2012) investigates, in a stimulating essay, the paradox that valued literature is typically repetitive, but yet not all repetition in literature is valued. ‘Formula’ or ‘genre’ popular literature (Mills and Boon romances, for example) are not highly valued, while the writings of James Joyce or Beckett are (see also Attridge, 2004). Literature is often characterised, for Toolan (2012: 21), by ‘exceptionally adept uses of repetition’, with an example
given from a Seamus Heaney poem. Jakobson’s parallelism, it is noted, is essentially another way of saying ‘repetition’, and in general the patterning for which stylistic analysts look will be variations on repetition (see also the discussion of cliché, below). Even here, I would emphasise in response to Toolan that the repetition in D. H. Lawrence’s great novels, The Rainbow (1915) or (even more so) Women in Love (1920), is valued by some, but criticised as repetitious, heavy-handed, and obfuscating by others. The repetition is textual, the valuation demonstrably varies, although I would probably put more weight on sociocultural explanations for this than would Toolan in his more textual approach.

Interest in repetition and difference also informs a later development of formalism less studied and reported on in Western literary studies than are deviance and foregrounding. This was the work on literary evolution or literary history, and particularly the history of genre evolution. This work is worth highlighting, however, in a discussion of how stylistics studies creativity, both of itself and for its links to the ongoing and later development of another twentieth-century theoretical school: the Bakhtin circle. By 1928, Jakobson had left Russia for Prague and, visited there from Russia by Juri Tynjanov, they formulated together an important set of hypotheses around what would come to be called ‘literary evolution’. The focus was now not so much on innovation in individual works as it was on innovation in literary forms and schools. Why and how do new modes of writing come into being and become more highly valued, even as the older forms go out of fashion and seem to offer no further space for innovation (at that juncture, at least)? Their insistence now was that ‘evolution is inescapably of a systemic nature’ (Jakobson & Tynjanov, 1981 [1928]: 79) – that is, a new form cannot be understood without looking at all of the forms from which it consciously distinguishes itself: a comparative perspective again. Moreover, this perspective required the integration of what the linguistically trained Jakobson and Tynjanov (1928) called the synchronic and the diachronic – that is, historical social and cultural environments were relevant to literary developments, as well as the literary order itself. A new form develops because it is different from previously existing forms (a Saussurean structuralist principle), but also it develops because there are new speakers with new things to say and new experiences to write about (determinants external to the linguistic or literary system): change is not purely endogenous-internal and is not unmotivated even if it can be seen to take determinable forms. All forms, it was claimed, like all languages, as we recognise now, are continuously undergoing change, but these changes are not random, and can be studied and understood at least retrospectively, as variation from a ‘dominant’ form and style of a previous age. There is a system, but the system is changing all the time: what might now be called an ‘emergent’ system. The idea, developed further in later writings of Tynjanov in particular, is one of ongoing and unceasing ‘struggle’ for dominance between the new and the old – an idea anticipating a key claim of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, who were also beginning to publish around this time, although keen to distinguish their work from so-called scientific ‘formalisms’ (see also Erlich, 1980: ch. 14). The insight in Jakobson and other formalist writings that thought can be driven by language as much as language by thought is valuable for our understanding of creative and innovative thinking.

Elsewhere, Tomashevsky wrote of artistic evolution or innovation as ‘creative deformation’, and insisted that the ‘perceptibility’ of devices, apparent novelty, may actually be a return to an older, but recently unused device or form. For Shklovsky (quoted in Erlich, 1980: xiv), ‘creation means change’, although, of course, not all change will be generally positively evaluated. Thus, for later formalists, Shklovsky’s idea of change as driven by ‘deautomatisation’ in art was not sufficient. Zhirmunskii, for example, in a polemic with
Shklovsky, argued that evolution cannot be accounted for in purely literary terms (quoted in Erlich, 1980: 256): ‘The theory of automatization can explain only the fact of “movement” in literature, the inner necessity for its evolution, but not the nature or the forms of this development.’ Later, in Prague, perhaps not coincidentally at the same time as Nazi forces were occupying Czechoslovakia, Mukařovský (quoted in Erlich, 1980: 256) made a stronger case still:

Each change in artistic structure is induced from the outside, either directly, under the immediate impact of social change, or indirectly, under the influence of a development in one of the parallel cultural domains, such as science, economics, politics, language, etc. The way, however, in which the given external challenge is met and the form to which it gives rise depend on the factors inherent in the artistic structure.

Tynjanov saw parody in particular as a key moment in artistic development, when the old is sufficiently well known to be invoked, but can no longer be taken seriously as adequate expression and is becoming somewhat laughable. Again, we are reminded of Bakhtin on creativity and the importance of style: parody is an inappropriate or ironic, ‘knowing’ performance or imitation of a known pre-existing style, amusing in itself, but also intended to critique the inadequacy of the previous way of using language and of previous ways of thinking. The important factor to stress is again that of function: context, as well as content, make the difference; the parodied form would not be used to express that thought and therefore must be taken as parody. The parody is therefore understood ironically, itself inherently pleasurable to read and recognisable, but beyond that implicitly critiquing a previous ideological position, a way of thinking and using language no longer tenable. Lewis Carroll parodies established nursery rhymes expressing pious Victorian thoughts in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) because he finds such beliefs and such ways of teaching children both banal and wrong-headed. Readers are therefore invited to dismiss them by laughing at them.

A related and final important idea found in formalist writings on literary evolution, congruent with the points already made, is that the most highly valued literature can be understood and valued only against second- and third-rate contemporary writings; high, ‘creative’ literature is organically related to more popular literature. These works will all borrow from each other and use each other’s devices, just as (for example) Shklovsky insisted that the *skaz* (folk tale) informed the development of the Russian novel (see also Propp, 1928) or as Bakhtin (1986) insists on the origin of literary genres in ordinary everyday ‘speech genres’. Such positions are consonant with more modern ideas of the continuum of creativity, as opposed to exceptionalist ideas of literary creation, and creativity as perpetual and deliberate ongoing transformation of materials at hand into more highly valued ‘new’ forms, rather than the genius creating *ex nihilo* (‘out of nothing’) (compare, for example, Pope, 2005, as well as Carter, 2004). D. H. Lawrence’s writings on love and sexual attraction are different, but not completely distinguishable, from mass readership romances of the later twentieth century if considered in purely linguistic terms, but they are valued quite differently (see Nash, 1990).

**Discourse stylistics**

With Bakhtin, many of whose writings revolve around investigations of creativity, we move from structuralism to a poststructuralist conceptualisation of creativity, from text
to discourse (see also Jones, Chapter 3). Bakhtin took strong exception to the idea that creativity can be considered as merely a rearrangement of the same old elements if that is what formalism seems at times to suggest. (I would argue that, at its best, it exceeds such thinking.) To catalogue the elements or devices of a work, or even of a genre, is rather like using grammar rules to explain invented sentences, and it cannot account for pragmatic meanings of utterances in use. Genre, for Bakhtin, is not to be seen as a mere collection of ‘devices’, but as a worldview, a vision of reality, and an intervention, inevitably partial, although it is claimed that the novel has the potential to show its users more than other genres. In this view, people respond to meanings, rather than language to language. The key to understanding genre, for Bakhtin and the Bakhtin circle, is the notion of any utterance being inhabited by, but nevertheless being a new, unique and distinctive, meaningful and evaluative inflection of, the words of others, ‘appropriated’ and ‘accented’ for new purposes in new circumstances. Bakhtin’s most highly valued genre, or super-genre (exceeding the limits of previous genres), is the novel, its very name taken to indicate its potential for new ways of thinking and seeing, precisely because it is so catholic and capacious in the way in which it can borrow words of others – particularly in what Bakhtin called the ‘polyphonic’ novel, best exemplified for him by Dostoevsky’s work. A literary genre like the novel includes ‘secondary’ transformations of multiple ‘primary’ speech genres and everyday genres, such as letters, diaries, and narratives. The novel, Bakhtin insists, relies on ‘extra-artistic’ sources for its new inflections and combinations. Genres, for Bakhtin, are forms of thinking, and are the major contribution of the humanities to Western thought and so to creativity, because they make alternative ways of thinking and seeing (and using language) possible. Crucially, literary genres offer an excess of potential for differential thinking beyond what is apparent in their own age, and to their own authors and first readers. The adaptability of genres is emphasised and the idea of cross-fertilisation.

In valuable Bakhtinian studies of the development of polyphonic free indirect speech by canonical modernist writers of fiction such as Lawrence and Woolf, Sotirova (2011, 2013) shows the workings of creativity as adaptation of an established technique into new ways of thinking and writing about the individual consciousness and interpersonal relationships. The distinct intonations of narrator and character perceived by readers in a work such as Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) are difficult or impossible to distinguish by the time of Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* (1915), or Woolf’s *The Waves* (1931). This is not because the writing is poorer or less self-assured (as some misinterpretations have it), but rather because ideas of truth, reality, and the individual consciousness had changed across the twentieth century and into modern times.

Julia Kristeva is usually credited with popularising Bakhtinian notions of transformations of the words of others into today’s widespread conception across many disciplines of creation as ‘intertextuality’, emphasising Bakhtin’s proto-poststructuralist idea of unfinalisability, the openness and inexhaustibility of semiosis in Kristeva’s own later reformulations. (See Allen, 2011, for an historical and theoretical introduction to literary intertextuality.) Particularly attractive for key theoreticians of intertextuality such as Barthes (as summarised in Allen, 2011) was the idea of *heteroglossia*, the mixing of styles and genres in (for Bakhtin) the most highly valued literature – notably, the ‘polyphonic’ (many-voiced) novels of Dostoevsky. ‘Voices’, as signalled to readers by style shifts, are a central concern of any such analysis of novels and narration more widely, including key narratological issues such as focalisation and free indirect discourse. An evolution of the novel form from the romance of earlier ages is shown by Bakhtin (1981) to make possible new ways of thinking and talking about space and time, consonant with other social and cultural advances of
the modern age. In all of these ideas, the ascertainable derivation of new and creative forms and ideas from those pre-existing is a common theme.

Later, Derrida (1980) wrote in characteristically provocative ways of the simultaneous necessity, but impossibility, of genre for creative literature in particular. Repetition is a necessary, but impossible, condition for the workings of genre in this argument, and indeed Derrida’s implicit argument seems to be that the most worthwhile literature will not quite fit any single genre even while playing with the possibilities offered by various genres. More modestly, Derrida could be read as claiming that all genres are necessarily intrinsically hybrid forms never finally allocatable to one single generic (assumed) tradition. In applied linguistic terms, this is also the position of Kress and Threadgold (1988), for example. Once again, repetition teases the researcher into creativity into or out of thought (as Keats might have had it). Genre is always mixed and processual (coming-into-being), but also constraining and pre-existent, and is therefore arguably both conservative and potentially subversive. The study of genre(s) in such a view can be seen as the entry into studies of creativity in language, ideology, and even of newly creative social identities (see Jones, Chapter 3; Bhatia, Chapter 9).

To consider a concrete example, the sonnet may be thought of by some as among the most fixed of literary genres. In the Victorian age, when there was a fascination with form and experimentation with forms not always recognised today, George Meredith, in his Modern Love sequence (1862), produced sixteen-line narrative sonnet sequences, yet many of us have been taught in school that sonnets, by definition, have only fourteen lines. Meredith’s poems are nevertheless defensible and readable as sonnets – or at least as an orientation towards the classic sonnet – because of their structure, rhyme scheme, and concerns with love, but love for Meredith (‘modern love’) is now treacherous, adulterous, and leads to divorce, rather than Echoes idealised cries to an unattainable Petrarchan or Shakespearean loved one. The sonnet has evolved to express new content and ideas. In the twentieth century, Tony Harrison also used sixteen-line sonnet sequences to write about his relationship with his parents in the From the School of Eloquence sequence (1978). Thus genre – for example, with the sonnet – can be shown to be more flexible than sometimes believed. In an interview, Harrison referred to Milton’s earlier experimentation with the sonnet form to write about politics and religious violence as an important precedent for him in rethinking what he could do with the sonnet and in deliberately appropriating it for new contemporary purposes.

Staying with stylistic creativity as heteroglossia and transformation of supposed genre boundaries, a canonical poet such as Larkin (see examples in Toolan, 2012) deliberately and effectively mixes styles and registers to express his own contemporary thought and feelings. Cliché – supposedly the antithesis of literary creativity as originality and fresh expression – is repeatedly used by Larkin for effect. Hall (2000) writes on the pervasive use of cliché in Harrison: ‘wish you were here’, for example, is reframed from holiday postcard cliché to function as a particularly poignant farewell to his deceased parents. Normally unremarkable language is repeatedly foregrounded and held up for closer contemplation in the context of Harrison’s late modern sonnets. Elsewhere, Samuel Beckett’s pervasive uses of cliché are studied with great subtlety by Barry (2006), as Beckett explores religion, memory, literary, and other forms of authority, and indeed of the human condition as he sees it. Beckett, it goes without saying, consciously working in the ‘wake’ of James Joyce, but also of Flaubert and Proust, was one of the most creative and influential writers of the twentieth century, but this was not despite, but because of, his pervasive and defining use of cliché – that is, supposedly worn-out, meaningless, or uninteresting uses of language.
Again, how the language is used and its contexts of use show creativity in writing, rather than the forms themselves being intrinsically ‘creative’ or not. The language of the Bible, or of wider western European culture, is foregrounded and questioned by Beckett, as Barry reads his writing as a sustained interrogation of ‘authority’ in all of its forms. Beckett’s linguistic strategies to achieve these wider aims are shown by Barry to be typically achieved by means of the modification of clichéd phrases, or through recontextualisation, including deliberately inappropriate or unexpected uses of set, intertextually recognisable phrases, as suggested by Bakhtin and the formalists’ notion of ‘parody’.

Future developments: Wider perspectives on semiotic creativity

The study of stylistics, in more recent incarnations, has extended its interests beyond the literary to the more everyday expressions, and beyond writing to other communicative modalities, in the Internet and other everyday exchanges (see Goddard, Chapter 23; Knobel & Lankshear, Chapter 25). Thus Carter and Fung (2007) study strategies of creativity in social media use – in this case, a sociolinguistic study of code switching, including the creative use of classical Chinese proverbs and idiomatic new coinages as Cantonese-using students explore and develop identities and social relationships and feelings about being away from home. The study is of interest as an example of creativity in practice, showing how pre-existing materials are adapted formally and functionally to new uses for new meanings in new contexts, whether the field is a literary one or more everyday exchanges.

Such sociolinguistic work on creative appropriations of language for new purposes can, in turn, be usefully related to wider important research on stylisation, notably in Coupland (2007) or Eckert (2000), in which stylisation is seen generally as a linguistic means to assert agency and identity for language users in given communities. Identity, in such a perspective, is differential, and register use, variation, and similar strategies are seen as deliberate innovations in pursuit of alternative or resistant values and worldviews. This area of research from sociolinguistics offers much to more obviously literary studies of linguistic creativity if the basic Bakhtinian paradigm of creativity as appropriation of others’ words for new purposes is accepted as a working premise for research.

Elsewhere, O’Halloran (2014, 2015) argues for the stylistic interest of Internet ‘film poems’, in which images and even wider narratives are generated, or at least referred back, to precise linguistic details of the originating poem. Pedagogically, the approach promotes the study of linguistic creativity, but beyond this, students are prompted to work creatively themselves across modalities starting from a linguistic base. In his paper on ‘performance stylistics’, O’Halloran (2012) gives an example of how interpretation of literary texts can bring together Internet use and stylistics in new and creative ways, with inflections from literary and critical theory. The approach will not appeal to, or indeed convince, all, but is unarguably creative and innovative.

Jeremy Scott (2014) has taken broader proposals in Pope (2005) and others to develop a more specific book-length, bottom-up approach to teaching and developing creative writers by using the precise tools that stylistics can offer, with precise examples and exercises. A concern for creativity is increasingly important for pedagogy, and stylistics is seen by many stylists writers as having much to contribute to a more participatory and interventionist teaching of language and literature, as well as to the teaching of creative writing itself (see also Harper, Chapter 31). Short (1996, for example) has similarly consistently claimed that stylistics can offer a secure way into literary reading for less experienced and less confident readers of literature.
Another related area of creativity in language use on which stylistics is beginning to work more systematically is literary writing in the so-called new Englishes, world Englishes, or indeed beyond the ideology of a single self-contained language in our brave new multilingual and multicultural world – what Makoni and Pennycook (2007) and others characterise as ‘translanguaging’, which moves beyond anything that can be captured by classic notions of ‘code switching’ and bilingualism. In the kind of writings instanced in Ahmad (2007) and Chi’en (2004), we see again that value and creativity are typically contested topics and very much to be read in context. In those examples, the very notion of a single language called ‘English’ is effectively called into question more radically than the older ideas of ‘deviance’ or variation can capture. Value and ‘verbal art’ (Bauman, 1975) in such work are contested in Bakhtinian fashion in creative, innovative ways, with group and personal identities at stake. Literary creativity in ‘new/world Englishes’ is understudied or only poorly studied from the point of view of discourse stylistics. Talib (2002), Kachru (1985), or Chi’en (2004) focus too heavily on forms alone, ironically reinforcing hierarchies of value and power by foregrounding ‘non-standard’ uses of language, often from what seems an increasingly dated nationalistic and standard language perspective, whereby a national literature is assumed to be easily identified and the best way in which to consider language use in literary creativity is as variation from an assumed norm. They invoke the concept of ‘speech communities’ in which a more post structuralist take on sociolinguistics and identity prefers to consider more contingent and shifting ‘communities of practice’ in the contemporary world (compare Eckert, 2000). From the more contemporary perspective of ‘translanguaging’, to look at incidental linguistic features of dialect representation is inadequate, if not rather beside the point. Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, but also Ha Jin, Xinran, and other Chinese diasporic writers, are using English in their own ways for their own purposes, and it is not helpful to hunt for tokens of the exotic in their work (see Ahmad, 2007, for examples of texts that would prompt such analyses). Some indicative, more sophisticated, analysis can be found in Pope (2005) or Vethamani and McRae (2005), but there is no extended and systematic stylistic writing on this cutting-edge literary work as discourse rather than as, on the one hand, words and sentences, or on the other, literary criticism. Much more remains to be done in this challenging field to help us to better understand the larger issue of how creativity in language emerges and works, as well as to illuminate individual works and authors, to mediate, in fact, more traditionally linguistic and more literary approaches.

Sanders (2015), in the same way, usefully summarises and extends work on multimodality, adaptation, and appropriation – for example ongoing and ever-more-popular transmutations of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books – but again more precise stylistic work of the transformations needs to be done to extend the reach of stylistics, and also to deepen understandings of how such cross-modal creativity can be seen to work to the benefit of both literary studies and of stylistics. The playfulness and characteristic pastiche and parody of much postmodern writing, largely intertextual in nature, would seem to require more careful stylistic analysis – specific attention to the details of the workings of language – than they are usually given. Beyond this, are reading and writing practices of modern audiences changing with new media and the ever-expanding availability and accessibility of multiple texts and modalities? It seems likely, but is an empirical question that will require further reader research to understand better (compare Swann, Chapter 16, on the study of readerships and literary reading). Jones (2012) includes important suggestive short essays by Thurlow and others on creativity in the new media, which can point us in directions for more future research.
Conclusion

In my opening paragraphs, I cited modern understandings of creativity as deliberate, valued innovation. The challenge for a discourse stylistics of creativity is to show, with any given text or set of texts, how they meet these criteria. Specifically, it needs to be shown how and why a text is, or came to be, valued for these qualities and by whom, and generally the context-bound nature of creative uses of language. Hence my own chapter here touches on relevant research in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. My examples in passing of parody, cliché use, and creativity in world Englishes are intended to give an idea of what such an approach might study and how it might study it. I have also given some indication of the overlapping issue of how this study is being extended to creative, and arguably literary or near-literary, uses of language in the rapidly developing new communicative media. There is an exciting, ever-expanding body of work to be done on the stylistics of literary creativity, which can build on or extend most of the topics discussed in this volume.

Related topics

cognitive stylistics; creativity and discourse analysis; creativity and Internet communication; literariness; literary narrative; literature and multimodality; poetry and poetics

Further reading


This is an anthology of creativity in the so-called new Englishes.


This book contains a useful introduction to intertextuality and its later developments into the study of multimodal creative adaptations and appropriations.


This volume contains some of the best stylistic analyses of literature from a Bakhtinian perspective to date, but much more interesting work remains to be done in this vein.


This is a classic statement of modern textual stylistics – a benchmark for the discipline, even though many now would want to play up the functional aspects more than the textual-linguistic aspects, as argued in this chapter.


This is another classic of stylistics, well worth revisiting for its lucidly argued and illustrated examples of textual and linguistic creativity in mostly canonical valued literary texts. Updated examples of the approach can be found in Leech (2008).

References


