



The Application of Stylistics to College English Learning

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Abstract

It is known that learning English from the perspective of stylistics is a popular trend in the present research in China. It's a pity that Chinese students don't have much knowledge of stylistics. As a result, they can't have a better and deeper understanding of what they have read both in and after class. Moreover, they can not use correct English and pragmatic errors are often made in their communication. In order to improve their competence to use English appropriately, it is necessary to acquire knowledge of stylistics in English learning. This paper not only demonstrates the significance of applying stylistics to college English learning but also presents some stylistic and linguistic analysis in the passages in terms of the characteristics of titles, the tones of the passages in the passages. The passages that have been analyzed as data are from New Standard English (Book 2) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in Beijing, China. New Standard English (Books 1-4) is a set of newly-published and popularly-used textbook in China. It exposes students to the variety of language and encourages students to look beyond the passages and consider the broad implications they have read. Data have been collected and analyzed from the thirty passages in the textbook. Both the quantitative and the qualitative research methods have been utilized in order to make a detailed analysis. By enriching the students' knowledge of stylistics, the traditional way has been changed with the only purpose of memorizing some words and phrases and understanding the literal meaning. More importantly, students will have a good command of both how to use, analyze and differentiate English and appreciate the beauty of the language.

Key words: stylistics, college English learning, techniques

1. Introduction

Stylistics is an area of study that is growing and developing fast. It is concerned with literary studies, linguistics and discourse studies as well. It is universally acknowledged that when language is used, stylistics is always used in a certain context. Generally speaking, the contents and the ways of expressing are often confined to different situations. That is to say, the same words will definitely result in the opposite meanings in different circumstances. So it is difficult for foreign learners to learning English. Through the analysis of stylistics, it is of great help for learning English. The main aim of stylistic analysis is to explicate how the linguistic features in the passages are achieved and how to find out techniques and communication skills employed by writers to attract readers' attention. It is known that learning English from the perspective of stylistics is a popular trend in the present research in China. It's a pity that Chinese students don't have much knowledge of stylistics. As a result, they can't have a better and deeper understanding of what they have read both in and after class. Moreover, they can not use correct English and pragmatic errors are often made in their communication. In order to improve their competence to use English appropriately, it is necessary to acquire knowledge of stylistics in English learning in order to improve the students' communicative competence which is the main purpose for college students to learn English.

2. Stylistics plays an important role in English learning.

1. To develop the ability to use English appropriately and effectively

In China, the English learners are not in the real environment of English communication. As a result, they don't know how to communicate in English properly in a certain situation. Stylistics is just such a discipline which focuses on variation in the use of language, reveals the rich complexity of language and points out that a good mastery of a language means a mastery of its full richness. But it is a difficult job for foreign learners. They do not grow up in the relevant linguistic climate, and they are not familiar with the western culture and the way of life. They often use one type of English for all occasions and situations. Thus they can not always use English appropriately. Stylistics can help to develop the capability of appropriateness and effectiveness in language use to avoid pragmatic errors and cultural shocks.

2. To have a better understanding and appreciation of reading passages

It is common for people to argue over the linguistic interpretation of reading passages, especially such literary works as a poem, a story or a fiction novel, as to whether a particular effect or meaning has been expressed. The discussion usually moves from general statements to particulars. In the process of discussion a new understanding of the reading passage is generated. Moreover, readers can understand and appreciate the reading passage far better and much deeper by stylistic analysis.

3. Stylistic features of the headlines

The term headline means the sentences that will be read first or that are positioned to draw the most attention in a reading passage. Research has shown that, on average, there are three to five times as many people reading the headlines as those reading the body copy. Good headlines will only take a few seconds to capture the reader's attention. Therefore, the headline is the most important part in a reading passage. The following part will focus on the stylistic characteristics of the headlines of the thirty passages in the book at the levels of lexicon and syntax.

1. Data collection and analysis

The data employed in the paper are from the book *New Standard English* (Book 2) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in Beijing, China. *New Standard English* (Books 1-4) is a set of newly-published and popularly-used textbook in colleges and universities in China. It exposes students to the variety of language and encourages students to enjoy using English and to develop a sense of achievement in their learning. There are ten units and each unit contains three passages, totally thirty passages covering different topics, starting out at college, learning to think, communication, feelings and emotions, popular science and travel etc. The contents collected in the book are good data for stylistic analysis. The data are going to be analyzed in terms of the characteristics of headlines, the tones of the passages employed by the writers in the passages.

2. at the lexical level

In order to attract the reader's attention and make the information accessible to readers effectively, the choice of words is very cautious and skillful in writing the headlines. Impressive and expressive words are often used in order to encourage the readers to read the passages. The following table demonstrates the amount of verbs, nouns and adjectives etc. used in the headlines.

Table 1 The amount of verbs nouns and adjectives etc. in the headlines

Items Parts of speech	Number	Total	Rate	Total
Total words	122	122	100%	100%
verb	13	79	10.7%	64.7%
noun	47		38.5%	
adjective	9		7.3%	
pronoun	5		4.1%	
gerund	5		4.1%	

The total words in the thirty headlines are 122 words. As shown in table 1, content words, especially nouns and verbs, are mostly used in the headlines. Nouns, including both simple nouns and proper nouns are 47, and verbs, covering both link-verbs and phrasal verbs are 12 in the total number. Since content words demonstrate the notions of objects, actions, phenomena, state, degree and quantity etc., they play an important role in headlines. It is clear that content words enable readers to understand the headlines more easily and give them a vivid and impressive impression.

3. at the syntactic level

In order to convey colorful, legible and memorable information, the sentence patterns of the headlines are of various types.

Table 2 Sentence patterns in the headlines

Type		Number	Total	Rate	Total
Complete sentences	declarative sentence	4	9	13.3%	29.9%
	negative sentence	1		3.3%	
	interrogative sentence	4		13.3%	
Phrases	noun phrase/noun	16	21	53.3%	69.9%
	verb phrase	1		3.3%	
	prepositional phrase	1		3.3%	
	gerund phrase	3		10%	

All the headlines are concise and simple not only in words but in structure and the length as well. As shown in table 2, nearly 70% of the headlines are expressed by phrases, either noun, verb or gerund phrases. And 29.9% of the headlines are in sentences which are interrogative or declarative to draw the reader's attention.

4. Learning implications

Stylistic analysis of the headlines can help raise students' awareness of how headlines are written, what words are usually used and how headlines may affect readers.

4. Tone of a passage

The "tone" refers to the feelings or emotions expressed by the author towards an issue. It could also encompass his style of writing. The tone of a passage tells writer's goals, values, intentions, emotions and personalities. Identifying the tone of a reading passage is good for better understanding the context and the flow which the writer has set in a particular passage. It is necessary for students to determine the writer's flow of thinking and main points he is trying to convey to the readers. More importantly, tones are closely related to the topic, the theme and the contents of a reading passage. Some commonly expressed tones in the book are demonstrated as follows:

1. Descriptive or informative tone

One of the author's purpose to compose a passage is to convey information to readers or increase the reader's knowledge of a certain issue. As a result, a lot of details, such as figures, facts or data are given in the passage. Descriptive or informative tone is often employed when the author deals with events in history and technology.

Example: Student power (the headline of Unit 1, Passage 3)

This passage is a historical account of students' life at the oldest European university. It presents some facts and shows some reasons for the importance and roles of students in the 13th century.

2. Judgemental tone

The characteristic of such a tone is to present the author's opinions on a person, thing or issue. Is this person or issue right or wrong? Is this good or bad? Is someone intelligent or dumb?

Example: The post-everything generation. (the headline of Unit 1, Passage 2)

This passage is an opinion piece of writing which discusses what the post-everything generation feel and do through reminiscence.

3. Analytical tone

The characteristic of an analytical tone is to present the reasons or justifications to support something. In such passages, the author tries to analyze an issue, presenting the pros and cons, or compares two or more things and tells you why he feels something is better. An author can state that he feels something could happen in the future and providing reasons to justify why he feels in that manner. An author can make a comparison between two or more things and justifying why he feels something is better.

Example: College just isn't special any more. (the headline of Unit 1, Passage 1)

This passage is an opinion piece of writing which discusses college life in the 1960's and now. A number of historical events are referred to in the passage. A comparative way of writing is used to show the differences between the college life in the 1960s and that at the present.

4. Sarcastic/ Satirical tone

Such passages could be on any topic, such as politics, economics, sports, social issues etc. What matters most is how the author writes about it and makes fun of a person or an event not openly but in a sarcastic way.

Example: Leisure inactivities – or how to relax and do nothing (the headline of Unit 8, Passage 2)



This passage is in strong contrast, being a witty ironic piece about being lazy. It amuses readers as they consider people whose hobby is sitting round doing nothing.

Example: Blowing the whistle on the soccer (the headline of Unit 6, Passage 2)

The passage is a newspaper article about the writer's negative and humorous views on football matches.

5. Prescriptive/ Sermonizing tone

This tone is appropriately presented when the author gives advice, recommendations or suggestions to the readers or tells them to believe in something, live their lives in a particular way or follow some practices etc.

Example: Aesop's fables (the headline of Unit 7, Passage 3)

The fables offer familiar but powerful ways for readers to understand and remember morals. Some rewarding advice is presented for readers to follow.

6. Learning implication

Asking students to make clear what certain tones are expressed is an important learning process in class. It is helpful for students to get a deeper understanding of a sentence and a passage and how language is used to convey a certain type of emotion.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, stylistics and learning English connect each other very tightly. Style cannot do without language and English learning without stylistics will be more difficult for learners. On one hand, learning English language well can help to improve the knowledge of stylistics. On the other hand, stylistics highlights the road of English learning. It is clear that stylistics can improve English learning.

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