Abstract

This study is an attempt to deal with literary texts from different angles and perspectives. It is a new approach that assigns to stylistics a very significant role and function different from the traditional aesthetic one. It supports the new trends made in the discipline that stylistics must widen its scope and frees itself from the restrictions and limitations imposed on it since its emergence as a new discipline. The present study attempts to show the importance of this approach in the analysis of literary discourse, and how it is possible to be applied to literary dialogues in particular. Taking into account that this type of stylistics incorporates with other disciplines, namely pragmatics and sociolinguistics, the researcher has taken concepts from these disciplines and used a pragmatic model of meaning in his stylistic analysis.

This type of stylistics shows how current pragmatic theories, notably those of John Searle, Brown and Levinson, and Paul Grice, can be used as tools for interpreting literary texts. It also emphasizes the importance of using literary dialogues as “models for hypothetical discourse situations” (Herman, 1994:24), which help us to rethink and evaluate the linguistic presumptions that operate in our construction of the meaning and cohesion of discourse. Herman points out that “Literary dialogues... stage the
principles and mechanisms of dialogues in general, forcing us to reflect on our canons for conversational coherence” (ibid: 219). Pragmatic theories, as Herman illustrates, seek to explain the abstract sociolinguistic mechanisms that enable us to relate context to sentential meaning and arrive at inferential pragmatic meaning in discourse. This study goes in this direction, emphasizing the importance of using this model of stylistics in the analysis of literary texts in general and literary dialogue, in particular.

Using Forster novels, this study discusses the issue of speech representations in narrative fiction by drawing on sociolinguistic and pragmatic researches on style. Forster’s novels feature abroad range of social styles, with style shifts both indexing and helping to understand conflicts pertaining to class, power, gender and identity. Forster’s speech representations reveal a mutually distinctive relationship between style and power, patterns of usage and context of use, undermining the commonsensical idea that one selects from among various available styles to communicate who and what one is. Rather, his text suggests that it is by communicating, by stylizing, that interlocutors take on a role as selves. Besides, Forster is always thematically concerned with the problem of connectedness in human relations. His characters desire to understand each other
and to connect in true and honest friendship, yet they never feel totally fulfilled or totally successful in their relationships. In Forster’s novels, the powerful social dynamics at work between characters make the novels appealing to examine from sociolinguistic and pragmatic viewpoints. Forster consistently portrays characters interacting with those culturally or socially unequal to them and thus encountering inescapable conflict in their personal relations.

The aim of this study is to examine how this thematically important interpersonal interaction plays itself out linguistically through the concepts of style-shifting and lexical colouring.

Style shifting, the study has shown, is used by E.M. Forster’s characters to negotiate their power in conversational exchanges. Forster characters are able to shift from one style to another according to the communicative situations. Using the concept of face action as a criterion for analyzing style shifting, it has been found that Forster’s characters negotiate their power by not attending to their addressees’ negative or positive face wants. They use certain words and expressions that shift their style totally from polite into impolite style, causing face-threatening acts to the addressees. In conversational exchanges where there is asymmetry in power between conversational participants, those who are more socially powerful use style shifting. But even less
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powerful characters sometimes use style-shifting to empower themselves in the conversation. Style shifting is not only used as a communicative strategy in Forster's novels, but also as a stylistic device to reveal certain aspects of the type of social relationships among the characters.

Then, the study investigates lexical colouring, another concept used by E.M. Forster's characters in their literary dialogues. Using Scotton's (1983) model of markedness, the study tries to throw some lights on the functional aspects of using this strategy. Citing as many examples as possible, the analysis has shown that lexical colouring is used by E.M. Forster's characters to achieve three important communicative goals: first, to control the interactional content of the conversation.; second, to pass evaluation on the communicative content; and third, to pass a negative judgment either on the addressee or on his contribution. Besides, the use of lexical colouring helps the reader and the analyst predict and assess many sociolinguistic dimensions associated with the characters, such as social power, role relation, linguistic behaviour, and the like.

In this analysis of Forster's dialogues, we use our knowledge as speakers and hearers to determine the function of a character's utterance act. More important, however, is that how we interpret a particular act, whether we view it as a FTA or as some other type
of face act (of solidarity, respect, distance, redress, and so forth) - ultimately influences the inferential meaning we construct. In other words, as individual readers, our ultimate understanding of the function of an act may vary and thus the implicit social meaning we construct in our reading must vary as well.

The study concludes that in Forster’s dialogues, the characters “do” with their language rather than they simply “say”. It also concludes that the concept of power manifests itself linguistically through style shifting and lexical colouring. The study supports the claim made by Buck and Austin (1995) that social power in Forster’s novels is not a given; it is something that one needs to negotiate, maintain, protect and defend. At the linguistic level, this can be achieved through the linguistic choices the characters make in their fictional conversational exchanges. Thus, this stylistic study concentrates primarily on the functional aspects of language rather than the structural ones.