

Review of *Linguistics and English Literature – an introduction*

by H. D. Adamson, Cambridge University Press, 2019.

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This volume forms part of the book series *Cambridge introductions to the English language*, which is a series of textbooks aimed at undergraduate students of English Language. As such, the books in this series function as introductions to their specific areas and assume no prior knowledge of the topics covered. The books in the series aim to be reader-friendly and include chapter summaries, exercises and discussion points. Each book in the series also has an accompanying website with additional materials. The book on linguistics and English literature reviewed here makes up the fifth volume in the series. It consists of nine chapters, which cover a wide range of topics within English language and literature studies with an emphasis on the merger of the two (often non-associated) fields. In other words, what this book is actually about is stylistics, showing how an analysis of language can bring about a deeper understanding of literary texts and vice-versa. In addition to the nine chapters, the book also includes a glossary of terms.

Before jumping into the review of the individual chapters, I should perhaps make clear that I am approaching this book very much as a lecturer teaching in an English programme at a Scandinavian university where the student body consists of non-native English speakers. I foreground this only because (as it will become evident on a few occasions below), the book is written by an American, affiliated with an American university (H. D. Adamson is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Arizona) and most likely aimed at native English-speaking students enrolled in either an American or British university. In addition, the structure of degree programmes in English are also vastly different in e.g. the UK and Denmark (the two places where I have been employed as a lecturer). In the UK, it is possible to do a degree solely in English language, for instance, or in English Language and Literature. In Denmark, however, English degrees cover literature, media, history, society, culture and language across the English-speaking world. Finally, as a researcher, I am a sociolinguist working with variation in British English, including in dialect literature, and I often employ corpus linguistics methods in my work.

In the preface to the book, Adamson briefly introduces the area of linguistics, which he states covers “everything from the analysis of sound waves to theories of political power” (xiii) and states that the “partnership” between linguistics and literature, which nowadays is called stylistics, indeed is very old. He then looks at two different teaching strategies influential in American education: the instructional approach and the progressive approach. He states that while literary history might lend itself well to being taught using an instructional method (centred on a teacher lecturing the students), Dewey’s progressive, student-centred approach to teaching may be more suited to teaching literary analysis. However, when it comes to the teaching of linguistics, Adamson’s own experience suggests that the instructional approach is more appropriate (and this also explains why the exercises included in the book are mainly instructional). Hands-on doing is important in both approaches though, and this is why Adamson stresses that the exercises at the end of each chapter are as important as the expository parts.

Chapter 1 features an introduction, which outlines how stylistics can be related to other approaches to literary analysis and criticism. Adamson introduces nine schools of criticism with examples (including New Criticism, structuralism and reader-response theory). Towards the end of the chapter, he introduces two analytical tools central to stylistics: foregrounding and cohesion. The chapter (like the rest of the chapters) also contains a summary at the end, a few exercises, a list of key terms and suggestions for further reading.

Chapter 2 introduces the sounds of English. One thing to note here is that the chapter focuses on American English. This is evident both in the vowel inventory and vowel qualities described but also in the phonetic alphabet used, as Adamson does not use IPA symbols (the phonetic alphabet created by the International Phonetics Association) but rather a system which is perhaps more common in an American context. For instance, he represents the initial voiceless affricate sound in *chip* as [č] (instead of [tʃ]) and the high, front vowel in the name *Pete* as [iy] (rather than [i] or [i:]). While one system is not intrinsically better than the other (and certainly both would be fine in the context of this introductory textbook), it is worth bearing in mind if selecting this as a textbook for students who are already familiar with the IPA symbols as it adds an unnecessary level of complexity. Adamson also includes allophones in this chapter. He then shows how a phonemic transcription can aid in the analysis of poems and enhance students' awareness and understanding of rhyme, alliteration, etc. Indeed, in all of the chapters in this book, the reader is presented with a vast amount of examples from a range of different types of literature, showing how the specific linguistic feature can be employed in a stylistic analysis.

Chapter 3 surrounds the topics of metaphor and metonymy and Adamson includes both the 'traditional approaches' to metaphor as well as cognitive approaches. Metaphors are interesting because they are very prevalent in everyday language but often go unnoticed (unlike the creative use of metaphors we often find in literature). However, both types of metaphor reflect how we think about the world on a profound level – thus they reflect what is called *conceptual metaphors* (e.g. ARGUMENT IS WAR; *Smith won the debate* and LIFE IS A PLAY; *He is always making a scene*). Indeed, both metaphors and instances of metonymy are ways of investigating the connection between language and the mind.

Syntax is introduced in chapter 4 as "the study of how words can be strung together to form grammatical sentences" (91). The book adopts a generative approach to grammar based on the work of Chomsky. Indeed, the generative framework is introduced as "a more systematic and scientific way of describing syntactic patterns than traditional approaches to grammar" (91). And while the aspects of syntax covered here are fairly basic (phrases and clauses), his approach could prove challenging for undergraduate students not familiar with this framework or who have perhaps only ever been exposed to more functional approaches to language. Certainly, there is learning to be found when trying to wrap one's head around transformational rules (forming passives and interrogatives), but it is perhaps an unnecessary level of complexity in the context of a textbook in stylistics. Two important topics, which are also covered in this chapter (towards the end), are those of markedness (also called foregrounding) and the question of whether we can talk about a literary style. I here wish to highlight that this chapter also contains 20 exercises clearly split into topics corresponding to the sections of the chapter – an invaluable resource for teachers.

In chapter 5, Adamson looks at the rhythms of poetry and speech, in particular the effects of rhythm on meaning. This chapter covers traditional topics such as poetic feet (e.g. iambs and dactyls) and metre (e.g. tetrameter and pentameter). However, Adamson also covers aspects more often associated with linguistics and phonetics, namely word stress, sentence stress and phrase stress. Indeed, knowledge of the stress patterns of English is invaluable when scanning a poem (scansion is the analysis of a poem's rhythm), which is also introduced in the chapter and broken down into a pedagogical three-step procedure.

In chapter 6, the reader is introduced to the notion of language variation and the two main varieties of English: American English and British English. In addition to regional variation, Adamson also brings in social variation when he introduces sociolinguistic work on social class, age, gender, and speech situation. Of course, examples of how authors use variation creatively to bring more dimension to their characters are also given. The chapter also features a section on African American English (AAE) and AAE in literature, an important inclusion. The section on British English focuses on the East Anglian variety, which allows Adamson to consider a text example from

Dickens' *David Copperfield* and to bring in Trudgill's work on Norwich English. As Adamson also states, "English has more accents and varieties than any other language in the world" (174) so indeed, one could always argue that examples of more varieties should be included (e.g. Scottish English, Indian English, etc.). However, in a textbook of this nature, simply highlighting to students that the English language is not a monolith is all one can hope for. A topic which I do miss in this chapter, however, is the consideration of spelling conventions and the impact these have on the use of non-standard language. Any consumption of non-standard texts happens from a place where the standard is assumed and this impacts the reader's experience. Work by Hodson (2016) on the use of dialects in literature and Sebba (2009) on spelling conventions would have been welcome additions.

Chapter 7 introduces the readers to the different organizational levels of language (departing in Levelt's (1989) speech production model) and then focuses on the areas which have not yet been covered: morphology, semantics and pragmatics. The chapter has a slightly different structure as the exercises occur throughout the chapter following each main topic. The section on semantics focuses on the relations between the noun phrases in a sentence specified by the verb, the so-called semantic case roles (or thematic roles). The section on pragmatics, not surprisingly, focuses on speech acts.

The topic of chapter 8 is discourse analysis but corpus stylistics is also introduced towards the end of this chapter. The focus of the chapter is how the building blocks introduced so far (phonemes, morphemes, sentences, etc.) can be combined to form larger, coherent texts and indeed how authors can create entire new, fictional worlds through language, the so-called *text worlds*. Adamson here draws on the cognitive model introduced in chapter 3 and expands this to also cover schema theory. He then goes on to look at examples of how authors build worlds in their readers' minds, e.g. through the use of deixis. This chapter also covers important topics such as point of view and unreliable narrators as well as possible and impossible worlds and how text worlds can change schemas. Adamson also highlights that characters in texts do not always share with the reader the same way of understanding the text world they live in. This is called the *mind style* of the characters. As mentioned, the chapter concludes with a brief section on corpus stylistics focusing on the use of computers in literary analysis. It must not be an easy balancing act, deciding on what to include within the finite number of pages of a textbook such as this, however, a full chapter dedicated to corpus stylistics (rather than two-and-a-half pages) would have been a welcome addition in my book.

Finally, chapter 9 looks at what Adamson describes as *alternative texts*, namely visual images and cartoons. As such, the chapter also functions as a summary of some of the many aspects of language covered in the book as Adamson shows how a range of them (e.g. metaphors) can also be analysed through visual images. Adamson also introduces Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and shows how looking at the different functions (ideational, interpersonal and textual) can be relevant in the stylistic analysis of images. Halliday's method is also briefly compared to those of Fillmore (the father of *Case Grammar* introduced in chapter 7) and Chomsky (the father of generative grammar introduced in chapter 4). Towards the end of the chapter, Adamson also looks at the expression of conceptual metaphors in images.

Overall, I think Adamson's book is a good starting point for any student interested in stylistics. The amount of exercises in the book is certainly also a help for lecturers and the suggestions for further reading are very welcome. I particularly appreciate that Adamson often suggests original literature within each area (e.g. Lakoff & Jonson (1980) in chapter 3 and Melchers & Shaw (2003) in chapter 6). Each chapter also includes a multitude of examples adeptly showing how and why stylistic analysis can be done and should be done. While the intended recipients of this book may not be my students first and foremost, I can certainly envision using selected chapters in my own teaching and supervision and would happily also direct students to this textbook for self-study.

References

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