应用语言学研习丛书

Pragmatic Stylistics

语用文体学

Elizabeth Black

上海外语教育出版社
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出版说明

对于中国这样一个英语教学大国，和语言教学相关的话题一直受到语言学界的关注。应用语言学作为一个涵盖范围十分宽广的研究领域，尤其受到我国学者及语言学方向师生的重视。本世纪初，外教社陆续引进出版了“牛津应用语言学丛书”、“剑桥应用语言学丛书”等国际优秀学术成果，因其内容权威、选择精当而受到外语界的好评。

近年来，应用语言学研究取得了很多新的进展，如何引导我国语言学方向的研究生快速便捷地了解这一领域的发展全貌和研究热点，成为我国语言学界老师面临的一个重要问题。有鉴于此，我们又从爱丁堡大学出版社、Multilingual Matters 等国际知名出版社精选了一批图书，组成“应用语言学研习丛书”，以更好地满足广大师生和相关学者的需求。

本丛书的各分册主题均为近年来应用语言学研究领域的热点话题，其中既有对所论述主题的理论回顾和梳理，也有对较新的发展和应用所做的阐释和分析，脉络清晰，语言简洁，共同反映了这一领域过去三四十年间的成果和积淀。

相信本套丛书的出版将为国内应用语言学研究带来新的启示，进一步推动我国语言学研究的发展。

Pragmatic Stylistics

Elizabeth Black

For my Mother, and in memory of my Father and daughter Julia, 'My priuy perle wythouten spotte'.

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I am unable to quote from James Joyce's texts, since permission was refused by his heirs. The books are available in libraries. I regret the inconvenience caused to readers, should any wish to follow up the comments.

Acronyms

CP: the co-operative principle with four associated maxims: of quantity, quality, manner and relation
DD: direct discourse
FDD: free direct discourse
FDS: free direct speech
FDT: free direct thought
FID: free indirect discourse
FIT: free indirect thought
FIS: free indirect speech
FTA: face threatening act. Part of Politeness theory: an FTA can threaten positive face (desire to maintain a positive self-image) or negative face (desire not to be imposed upon)
ID: indirect discourse
IN: implied narrator. A bundle of features (knowledge, attitudes etc.) necessary to account for the text
IR: implied reader. One who has the necessary knowledge and background to understand a text fully
N: narrator. The voice that tells the story
NRSA: narrator's report of speech act
NRTA: narrator's report of thought act

Glossary

Code switching: shifting from one dialect or language to another.

Deictic expressions: pointing words that link the situation and text.

Echoic discourse: any discourse where two voices are heard. It includes irony and FIT. See Chapters 7 and 8.

Heteroglossia: the combination of registers, jargons, sociolects, dialects in a natural language.

Hybrid discourse: the co-presence of two consciousnesses within a single bit of discourse (for example in FID).

Implicature: (conversational implicature). What is implied, but not stated: a hearer accesses an implicature to rescue the CP – when, taken literally, a statement does not satisfy it. Implicatures may be used for reasons of politeness, or to increase interest.

Intertext: the echo or quotation of other texts.

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Introduction

This book tries to show that Applied Linguistics can make a contribution to the study of literature. When I was an undergraduate, I was impressed – and very puzzled – by colleagues who declared that something was 'symbolic'. This was generally approved by the lecturer, but no one said why or how. When I began to teach, I encountered the same problem. My students were avid in the recognition of symbols. Sometimes I saw why, at other times I was baffled. This book is an attempt to debaffle me, and, I hope, others. I believe that there is a linguistic explanation for many tropes in literature, and I hope to show how they work. The ways in which we interpret ordinary language use are relevant to the ways in which we interpret literary discourse – which is only the language of the time, written by people who are more adept at manipulating its nuances than most of us. But I shall try to show that we follow roughly the same procedures whether we are listening to a friend, reading a newspaper, or reading a literary work.

I begin with an account of traditional approaches to literary discourse. This is because pragmatics is the study of language in context, and the ways in which novelists create character and situation are relevant to our interpretation of the discourse. I then move on to introduce the theories of Austin and Grice, who offer basic groundwork in pragmatics. Then I consider the kinds of 'signposting' that help us through our reading. The theories considered here are pragmatic in the sense that they contribute to the contextualisation of the text, and offer hints as to its interpretation – the equivalent of intonation in spoken language. More technically, I move on to consider the complexities of prose fiction in the variety of 'voices' offered the reader, and, in the following chapter, the ways in which direct and indirect discourse are manipulated. The argument then becomes more technical, as I consider the role of politeness theory and relevance theory, and then consider how these theories show us something about how we interpret the books we read. In particular, I show how these theories can explain how we interpret metaphor and symbolism in a coherent manner. It is not an arbitrary decision, but one grounded in an (implicit) understanding of how language works. I have attempted to avoid excessive use of technical terms throughout, which may offend the purists, but I offer no apology.

Chapter 1

Pragmatics and Stylistics

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The first stylisticians seem to have felt that the language of a text perfectly reflected the textual world (see Fasold 1990; Joseph, Love and Taylor 2001). In this they were – perhaps unconsciously – following the ideas of Whorf. The weak interpretation of the Whorfian hypothesis holds that people's world view is at least partially conditioned by their language. A linguistic study would therefore reveal its meaning. Nowadays it is more fashionable (and probably more accurate) to think that meaning is the result of interpretive processes. We do not assume that all readers will come to share the same view of all aspects of a text's meaning (see Weber 1996: 3–5), though a general consensus is of course likely, and a grossly deviant interpretation may signal problems with the production or reception of the text. We will therefore understand a text differently according to what we bring to it: we cannot assume that it has a single, invariant meaning for all readers. Since Pragmatics is the study of language in use (taking into account elements which are not covered by grammar and semantics), it is understandable that stylistics has become increasingly interested in using the insights it can offer. We are in a world of (relatively) unstable meanings; the role of the reader is that of an interpreter, not a mere passive recipient.

I propose to consider here some of the basic elements which are crucial to the interpretation of written, and in particular, literary discourse. Some of the topics will be developed more fully later. I shall consider whether it is possible to identify such a thing as literary discourse; the nature of context; the interpretation of deictic expressions (especially the verb and pronouns); and what these tell us about the relationship implied between text and reader.

1.2 LITERARY AND NON-LITERARY DISCOURSE

It has become conventional wisdom in recent years to say that there is no principled way in which to distinguish between literary and non-literary discourse. The same linguistic resources are used in the spoken and written language; figures of speech such as metaphor and simile are found in speech and all kinds of writing (see Short 1986: 154). One of my aims here will be to suggest ways in which the same devices

may be more effective in literary than in non-literary discourse. I will argue, for example, that the impact of some metaphorical structures is greater in literary texts, because they form part of a 'package' and make a greater contribution to meaning than the random use of (often trite) metaphors and similes in everyday conversation.

It is to be expected that literary discourse will differ from ordinary conversation and some written discourse since any published work is subject to a process of careful composition and much revision. Even in fictional dialogue the slips of the tongue, repetitions, elisions and opaque reference which characterise the spoken language are seldom represented, save occasionally for humorous effect.

Written discourse is addressed to an absent audience: even a shopping list is intended for a future 'I' who does not know what I do now about the gaps in the larder. Private diaries may be meant only for the author, but typically they will be read at some later time, so the author may well be surprised by some attitudes or comments, to say nothing of having forgotten incidents which once seemed important. That is, in almost any written text an element of 'decentreing' enters in: even if we are addressing ourselves, it is a future or other self, who does not necessarily know all that we do; hence the need for shopping lists.

1.3 CONTEXT

Context is usually understood to mean the immediately preceding discourse and the situation of the participants (see Brown and Yule 1983: 35–67). In a written text the beginning provides the necessary orientation into the discourse, since nothing precedes it. But it should be noted that the title, appearance, author, even publisher of a book or magazine provide the reader with many hints as to the kind of text they can expect, and so contextualise it to some extent. Werth (1999) develops an elaborate and very precise view of context. The context in which discourse takes place is identified as the discourse world, while the topic is the text world. It is the text that drives the evocation of knowledge and establishes common ground which is arrived at by negotiation between the participants. To this is added the background knowledge of the participants, enriching and giving meaning to the ongoing discourse. In short, he argues that context is dynamic, the mutual creation of the discourse participants. (This applies equally to written or spoken discourse.) In this view, the search for coherence is text driven. While the prototypical situation of discourse is face-to-face interaction, there is no reason to suppose that written texts operate any differently. This view stresses the incremental nature of discourse: added information clarifies what has gone before, and/or may alter our perception of it.

Another view of context (considered below in Chapter 7) is developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995). They argue that context is the responsibility of the hearer, who accesses whatever information is necessary in order to process an utterance, on the assumption that it has been made as relevant as possible by the speaker. Without discounting the importance of the points discussed above, they stress that encyclopaedic knowledge plays an important role. Thus different people may interpret the

same utterance differently according to the information they possess, what they deem relevant, and their knowledge of social conventions. Consider for example:

> Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.
> For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach. (Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 1925/1964: 5)

We may infer from these initial sentences of *Mrs Dalloway* a number of things. The social relationship between Lucy and Mrs Dalloway is hinted at by the fact that one is referred to by first name only, the other is more fully introduced with title and two names. Mrs Dalloway makes an apparently generous offer in the first sentence – to reduce Lucy's workload – but it sounds more fun to buy flowers than be involved with the removal of doors, and the arrival of Rumpelmayer's men. We do not know who they are, but the purchase of flowers suggests a party rather than removal men or painters. It is in this way that the reader feels her way into a text. The social relationship between these women would have been immediately clear to the first readers of the novel: it might be opaque to a modern reader. Early readers of the novel might also assess the social situation of the family by observing that when Mrs Dalloway returns home, it is Lucy, and not a butler, who opens the door for her. The development of our understanding of discourse is incremental.

1.4 DEICTIC EXPRESSIONS

There are a number of significant differences between most written and spoken discourse. This applies particularly to deictic expressions. Deictics are 'pointing' words. They include tensed verbs (temporal deixis), personal pronouns, demonstratives (*these, this, that*), and time and place expressions such as *now, then, here, yesterday, today*, and so forth. These words relate our linguistic expression to the current situation. They are bridges between language and the world (Lyons 1977: 637ff.; Hurford and Heasley 1983: 62–75; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1,451ff.). They take their basic meaning from the so-called canonical situation of discourse: face-to-face interaction. (This is clearly the basis of human interaction: one notices, even on the telephone, the need to provide a context for some utterances.) In written texts, particularly in fictional discourse (where the 'world' is created by the text), they have a role that is somewhat different to that found in ordinary language use, so some attention will be paid to them here. They play a significant part in establishing the spatio-temporal perspective of a narrative, and may suggest whether the perspective of narrator or character is invoked. I will now consider in some detail how deictic expressions work in written texts.

1.4.1 Pronouns

In one crucial respect fictional discourse differs from other types of discourse. As Widdowson (1975: 50–3) shows, the referents of the pronominal system differ from

that of spoken language. The 'I' of the lyric poet cannot be identified with the author of the text, any more than the reader (save in exceptional circumstances) identifies with the 'you' in a love poem. The same point applies to the whole pronominal system in a text. We cannot identify the sender of the message directly with the author, just as the reader is the ultimate addressee, but not the one addressed directly in the text. Thus, the first person has elements of the third person, and the second person has elements of the third, since it refers to an addressee who is not the receiver of the message. That is particularly clear in the case of lyric poems, where the 'speaker' may be an inanimate object, dead, an animal, or whatever the poet chooses.

1.4.2 Articles

The definite article is normally used to refer to unique entities (*the sun*), or items already known from previous discourse. Therefore when it occurs at the beginning of a text, the reader is informed of what is to be taken as part of the 'given' of the fictional discourse: this may imply the perspective from which events are viewed: *At first Joe thought the job O.K. He was loading hay on the trucks, along with Albert, the corporal* (D. H. Lawrence, 'Monkey Nuts', 1922/1995: 64). The definite articles, and the verb *thought* urge this reading.

An alternative explanation for the occurrence of the definite article at the beginning of a narrative derives from script theory (that is, pre-existing knowledge structures which enable us to process discourse speedily). Tannen (1993), in discussing Schank and Abelson's concept of a script, cites the minimal narrative: *John went into the restaurant. He ordered a hamburger and a coke. He asked the waitress for the check and left* (Tannen 1993: 18). The use of the definite articles, it is suggested, is an argument for the existence of a script, which has 'implicitly introduced them', by virtue of our knowledge of restaurants and the habits of customers. (One might note similarly that no mention is made of John paying for his meal: the reader assumes he has done so; otherwise the story would be far more interesting than it is.) The definite article referring to the waitress here clearly implies 'the one who served John' rather than any passing waitress. The definite article referring to the restaurant is a typical way of introducing entities in a fiction: it simply tells us that this restaurant is to be taken as part of the 'given' elements in this world.

The role of deictics in establishing the spatio-temporal perspective of a narrative is perhaps most obvious at the beginning of a text. In particular, odd combinations of proximal (close) and distal (distant) deictics occur. One case is the first sentence of Ernest Hemingway's 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber': *It was now lunch time, and they were all sitting under the double green fly of the dining tent, pretending that nothing had happened* (1947/1964: 413). In ordinary discourse, the past tense of the verb is normally accompanied by a distal deictic, so we would expect the past tense to be followed by *then* rather than *now*. The use of the proximal deictic seems to shift the perspective to that of the characters in the fiction. Together with *pretending*, it suggests that something unpleasant had happened not long before (see Simpson 1993: 14). A comparable example is: *Evvie arrived again at supper time on*

Saturday. Tonight she wore baggy cotton trousers with a drawstring at the waist and a fairisle pullover . . . (Alice Thomas Ellis, *The Other Side of the Fire*,1983/1985: 30). The *tonight* suggests that the perspective is of a character in the fiction, since the past tense would normally be followed by *that night*. The verb *arrive* also helps to establish that the perspective is that of a member of the host household.

One of the effects of the use of such proximal deictics is to draw the reader into the text, creating a sense of involvement at the beginning of the narrative. A rather curious use of *ago* occurs at the beginning of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913/1948). The first paragraph describes a situation, which is said to have occurred since the reign of Charles II: *Then, some sixty years ago, a sudden change took place.* Here, in the absence of other evidence, the temporal reference appears to be that of the time of writing.

1.4.3 Tense

Tense is normally reckoned to be part of the deictic system, since it locates actions or events in relation to the moment of speaking. However, the situation in fictional discourse differs from the canonical situation. The normal narrative tense in fiction is the simple past: it is best interpreted not as a temporal or deictic marker, but as a generic marker. That this is so is readily seen by the fact that we are not disturbed by the normal combination of past-tense narrative with the present tense in dialogue. (In dialogue, of course, tense has its normal deictic values, as it is mimetic of real world discourse.) It is also appropriate because fictions are often told by a narrator who relates events as though they are past, with genuine or assumed hindsight, whether or not the author has decided how the story will end. That is why even novels set in the future may be narrated in the past tense: it is used for the narration of any imagined world, past, present or future.

Of course, tense functions deictically within narratives, which essentially means that the perfect tenses have a deictic function within the fictional discourse, whereas other tenses do not normally have this function. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961/1965: 54), Muriel Spark writes: *The sewing sisters had not as yet been induced to judge Miss Brodie* . . . Note the complexity of the temporal system here: the perfect tense works in relation to the normal base line of the narrative, while *as yet* is the narrator's hint that the situation will change in the (fictional) future. The reader is juggling with information which will, in the light of other elements in the fiction, have to be organised in a temporal sequence in order to work out the development of the plot. In this respect, as in some others, the language of literary discourse differs interestingly from standard language. Thus the pragmatic interpretation of a perfect tense differs from the interpretation of the simple past.

1.4.4 Present tense

Stanzel (1984: 22–44) draws attention to the widespread use of the present tense in texts such as synopses, chapter headings and author's notes. He considers that this