

ANALIZĂ STILISTICĂ A UNUI FRAGMENT DIN „ZBUCIUMUL INIMII” DE NASTUME SOSEKI

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF A FRAGMENT FROM “KOKORO” BY NATSUME SOSEKI

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Rezumat

Studiul de față urmărește două scopuri: (1) de a întreprinde o analiză stilistică asupra unui text literar și (2) de a demonstra că stilistica este o disciplină care trebuie luată în considerare atunci când încercăm a descoperi sensurile unui text. Fragmentul analizat este extras din romanul „Zbuciumul inimii” („Kokoro”) de autorul japonez Natsume Soseki. Prin analiza întreprinsă voi demonstra, folosind exemple (și explicații), că stilul în care a fost scris acest text literar este unul specific și deosebit complex. Pentru a înțelege „aluziile” autorului, presărate în text, cititorul trebuie să fie echipat cu importante cunoștințe de lingvistică. Concluzionez că stilistica este o disciplină care încurajează gândirea logică și creativă, putând fi aplicată diferitor discipline umaniste.

Key words: *stylistic analysis, literature, novel, Japan*

Cuvinte cheie: *analiză stilistică, literatură, roman, Japonia*

Defining style and stylistics

Style is the author’s careful choice of words and arrangement of words, sentences, and paragraphs to produce a specific effect on the reader.

Style allows the author to shape how the reader experiences the work. For example, one writer may use simple words and straightforward sentences, while another may use difficult vocabulary and elaborate sentence structures. Even if the themes of both works are similar, the differences in the authors’ styles make the experiences of reading the two works distinct.

An author’s style evolves out of the chosen point-of-view technique. The omniscient point of view produces a relatively complex style; the first-person point of view results in a simple style if it is recorded as “spoken,” more complex if written; and third-person point of view generates a style that typically is slightly elevated above the intelligence level of the focal character.

Style can be broken down into three types: simple, complex, and mid-style. Sometimes authors carry a single style throughout an entire work. Other times, the style may vary within a novel. For example, if the novelist tells a story through the eyes of several different characters, the use of different styles may give each character a distinctive voice.

A **simple style** uses common words and simple sentences, even if the situation described is complex. The effect of the simple style can be to present facts to the reader without appealing to the reader’s emotions directly. Instead, the writer relies on the facts themselves to affect the

reader. American author Ernest Hemingway is widely known for a spare, economical style that nevertheless provokes an emotional reaction.

A **complex style** uses long, elaborate sentences that contain many ideas and descriptions. The writer uses lyrical passages to create the desired mood in the reader, whether it is one of joy, sadness, confusion, or any other emotion. American author Henry James uses a complex style to great effect in his novels.

A mid-style is a combination of the simple and complex styles. It can give a neutral tone to the book, or it can provide two different effects by contrast. Thai-American writer S.P. Somtow uses the mid-style in *Jasmine Nights*.

Some authors use more than one style within a novel. This approach allows the author flexibility in choosing which style is appropriate at different points in the work, depending on the situation and on the character or characters being portrayed. Novelists who have mixed styles include the American writer Herman Melville, in such work as *Moby Dick*, and the Irish writer James Joyce, in his *Ulysses*.

Style has been a subject of interest for a very long time, and in recent years has acquired its own field of study called **stylistics**.

Stylistic analysis in literary studies is usually made for the purpose of commenting on quality and meaning in a text. The purpose of a stylistics analysis is to understand and interpret a text. Thus, an extremely careful attention is paid to the text in its every detail. The process of the analysis will reveal the good (and/or bad) qualities of the writing.

Stylistic analysis of a non-literary text involves studying in detail the features of a piece of writing from such genres as: news reports, articles, opinions, editorials, etc. The method of analysis of a non-literary text is not different from the one used to analyze a literary text. The text is being looked at in great detail, observing what the parts are, and identifying the function they perform in the given context.

The method of analysis is fairly scientific. A hypothesis is stated and then proved using examples and explanations.

Aims, text, hypothesis

The aims of the present paper are: (1) to attempt a stylistic analysis of a literary text, and (2) to demonstrate the fact that stylistics is an important discipline when trying to discover meanings in texts. The text analyzed is a fragment from the novel *Kokoro* by the Japanese author Natsume Soseki. In the analysis I will demonstrate using examples and explanations that the style of the text is complex. In order to understand the meanings and the allusions implied in the text, the reader has to be equipped with knowledge of linguistics and possess a special schema.

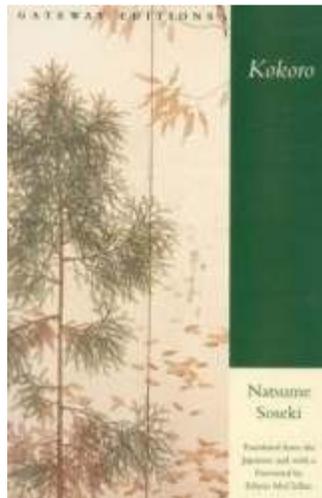
The text

<<I finally got tired of my own inability to decide whether I would speak to K or remain silent. It was, I remember, on a Saturday night that I told myself: "Tomorrow, I will make up my mind one way or the other." But that night, K killed himself. Even now, I cannot recall the scene without horror. I do not know what strange forces were at work that night; for I, who had always slept with my feet pointing towards the west, decided that evening to arrange my bedding so that my feet would point towards the east. Some time in the night, I was awakened by a cold draught on my head. As I opened my eyes, I saw that the door between K's room and mine was ajar. This time, however, I did not see K's shadowy figure standing in the doorway. Like a man who has been suddenly warned of some approaching disaster, I sat up and peered into K's room. In the dim lamplight, I could see his bed. The counterpane had been flung back. K sat with his back

turned towards me. The upper part of his body was bent forward. “Hey!” I called. He did not answer.

“Hey! What’s the matter?” His body did not move. I stood up, and went as far as the doorway. From there, I took a quick glance round the room in the half-light.

I experienced almost the same sensation then as I did when K first told me of his love for Ojosan. I stood still, transfixed by the scene I beheld. My eyes stared unbelievably, as though they were made of glass. But the initial shock was like a sudden gust of wind, and was gone in a moment. My first thought was, “It’s too late!” It was then that the great shadow that would forever darken the course of my life spread before my mind’s eye. And from somewhere in the shadow a voice seemed to be whispering: “It’s too late . . . It’s too late . . .” My whole body began to tremble.>> (Natsume Soseki, *Kokoro*)



The front cover of „Kokoro”



Nastume Soseki (1867-1916)

Stylistic analysis of the text

Although the fragment from the novel *Kokoro* by Natsume Soseki is in English, the original version was written in Japanese because the author is a Japanese national.

I did not choose the text at random. My background information about Japanese literature in general and this author in special made me have certain expectations when I started reading the book. Other novels that I had read by Nasume Soseki dealt with characters that lost their identity, who were alienated from society. This was due to the writer’s own uncertainty about his place in society, having in mind that he was born in 1867, the year before the Meiji Restoration, when the traditional feudal order was dethroned by the Western powers. Thus, before even reading the novel I had a feeling of what the text will be like.

The **title of the novel** has a crucial meaning to the novel. An important factor in analyzing the title is the fact that I have read the book twice in two different languages, i.e. Romanian and English. The two versions had also two different titles, i.e. “Zbuciumul inimi” for the Romanian translation, and ‘Kokoro’, the original Japanese title, for the English translation. If we translate both titles in English we would come up with the following titles: “The fussiness of the heart” for the Romanian version, and “The heart” or “The soul” for the English version. There is obviously a striking connection between the two translations. The message that both titles convey makes us believe that the novel is a story about matters of heart. The words that build up the title are very important in the sense that they prepare the reader for a special kind of

text. But without the background knowledge about the author we could not precisely guess before reading the novel that the story is about complications that arouse from love. We might think that it is a medical book that deals with the biological description of the human heart.

All the **elements** that form the text are **tightly connected**. We cannot take words out of the text without altering the overall meaning. Taken out of the context the literal meaning of individual words is so different than the meaning conveyed in the text as part of a lexical item (e.g. phrase).

For example the examples below have a different meaning if we take them out of the phrases they are found in the text and if we treat them as individual words. In all the following cases, it is not the literary connection of meanings that forms a whole meaning.

- The verb phrase 'to get tired' implies an annoyance due to waiting. One of the dictionary definitions of the verb 'to get' is 'to have something by buying, borrowing, or receiving it from someone else'. The meaning of the word 'tired' is explained in the dictionary as a feeling of physical or mental exhaustion. So, if we would make a sum of all the literary meanings that these words in the verb phrase convey we could interpret the meaning of the phrase 'to get tired' with the action of 'buying, borrowing or receiving physical or mental exhaustion'. It is obvious that it makes no sense.

- The verb phrase 'to remain silent' has the meaning of 'not speaking'. If we dissect the meanings of the words that form this lexical item we can say that 'to remain' means 'not to go anywhere, but stay somewhere' and 'silent' is when 'a person or a thing does not make any sound'. The literal sum of the meanings these words independently convey would be illogical.

- The verb phrase 'to make up' can have many meanings, some of which are 'to put powder on the face', 'to become friends again', 'to decide' etc. As separate words, 'to make' stands for 'putting something together, or creating something, or changing something into something else', while 'up' refers to a place that is in contrast to a low one. This is a good example to demonstrate the fact that the meaning of individual words cannot be taken out of the context. Lexical items can be polysemic, thus making them even more difficult to be separated from the context.

- The verb phrase 'to take a quick glance' stands for 'looking for a short while at something'. As individual words, 'to take' can mean 'to get something using the hands', 'to carry or bring', 'to have', 'to need' etc; 'quick' stands for 'something that happens fast or in a short time'; 'glance' means 'to look at something for a short period of time'. Given all these possibilities it is obvious that the verb phrase could have so many illogical meanings. Taken out of the lexical item that they are part of, the meanings of words can be so different.

All these examples prove the fact that we cannot treat words and lexical items as individual parts when found in a text. The meanings that they express out of the context are not the same with the meanings they express when considered as a unity and part of a text. The words that formed all the above phrases are elements without which the more complex lexical items could not have been built.

The text is composed of long and short sentences. The reader cannot grasp the overall meaning of a sentence just by summing up the dictionary definition of the words present in a sentence. At a sentential level, the meaning conveyed by a sentence does not rely only on the author's ability in making himself clear. Literature does not have to be clear. And depending on the receiver, the message might be obvious for some readers, while for others might be opaque.

To give just one example that better illustrates the above mentioned ideas, the following chain of sentences from the text will be analyzed: 'I do not know what strange forces were at

work that night; for I, who had always slept with my feet pointing towards the west, decided that evening to arrange my bedding so that my feet would point towards the east.’

- The sentence ‘I do not know what strange forces were at work that night; ...’ can have an ambiguous meaning if taken out of the text. First of all we do not know who ‘I’ is, and we do not know what ‘night’ the addresser is taking about. But even in the text, the sentence can give the addressee some difficulties when s/he is faced with the task of identifying the meaning of the ‘strange forces’ that ‘were at work’. The writer probably wanted to make the reader understand that life is governed by a ‘divine presence’ who makes itself present by such notions as ‘destiny’ or ‘karma’. This interpretation comes from my own beliefs and education regarding life in general. Any other reader might come with another, maybe better, view of what the author wanted to express. All these different interpretations that readers come up with are due to the writer’s use of language, and the receivers’ own personal experience and feelings.

- The following sentence asks the reader even more concentration and literary affinity than the one analyzed before: ‘...for I, who had always slept with my feet pointing towards the west, decided that evening to arrange my bedding so that my feet would point towards the east.’ Out of the context the sentence is illogical and not clear. Some ignorant readers not familiarized with the Asian culture in general and the different Japanese religious sects in special, could not make any sense of this sentence. In analyzing the first part of the sentence we have to understand what ‘to sleep with one’s feet pointing towards the west’ means.

During the 12th century, Honen Shonin, a Japanese monk, founded a very popular sect called the ‘Pure Land’ Buddhism or Jodo Buddhism. The followers of this sect believed that west was the direction of the Pure Land where the dead abide. According to the sect’s teachings, to sleep with the feet pointed towards this direction is considered unlucky. So, with this background knowledge, I understand that the author believed in (or maybe just made use of) this religious sect, and thus the main character of *Kokoro* was also, by association, a follower of the same sect.

While Natume Soseki makes proof of deep insights into the teachings of Jodo Buddhism, his character does not, and hence his habit of sleeping with his feet pointing the west. The fact that he unconsciously ‘decided that evening to arrange my [his] bedding so that my [his] feet would point towards the east’ was probably due to his unrest regarding his friend K. He wanted his luck to change, or better say he wanted to get rid of an obstacle, to get rid of K. He wanted the stars to favor him.

This is my personal interpretation of these sentences. If taken out of the text I might have guessed part of the meaning that the sentence conveys. But it is within the text that I could fully use the schema I have about the author and his place of origin.

The text is **cohesive** because there are ties and connections that bind the sentences together. There are connections present in the text in the use of pronouns, which are used to maintain reference via anaphora to the same people and things: *I – I – my*. Almost all the sentences have reverence to the personal pronoun ‘I’, thus making the sentences cohesive. There are lexical connections such as *Saturday night – that night – in the night* or *shadowy figure – a man – his back – his body*. The more general connections are created by a number of terms which share a common element of meaning, like ‘house’: *door – room – doorway – counterpane*, or ‘light’: *shadowy – dim – lamplight – half-light – darken*. There are also connectors which mark the relationship of what follows to what went before: *but, however*.

The verb tenses in the text are mainly in the past, due to fact that it is a story that narrates something that happened in the past, thus creating a connection between those events. There are a few interpolations of verbs in the present tense (e.g. ‘I do not know what...’), the present perfect

tense (e.g. ‘Like a man who has been suddenly...’) and future (e.g. ‘Tomorrow, I will make up my mind...’) caused by general truths, actions that continue their effect in the present, and, respectively, the use of reported speech.

Analyzing all these cohesive links within the text gives us an insight into how the writer structured what he wanted to say. These links are one of the factors that counted most when I decided that **the text is well-written in a complex style**. But we have to remember that the text analyzed is a translation, and the conventions of cohesive structure might differ from one language to another, in our case from Japanese to English.

I consider that the text is also coherent due to the fact that we understand, or at least have our own interpretation of the writer’s message. Coherence is not something that we can find in the text, but depends a lot on our experience and the way we see the world. I found this text coherent due to a number of factors. Firstly, I have read the entire book twice, in two different languages. Secondly, I did some research on the writer’s life and literary activity right after reading the book for the first time in Romanian. Thirdly, I have read and wrote extensively about Japanese culture and civilization, fact that made me have a certain affinity towards anything connected to Japan. And lastly, my experience in reading Japanese literature familiarized me with some of the major topics of Japanese literature, such as the lost of identity. The text requires interpretation from the reader’s part and if s/he does not have the necessary tools to decode the message, the meaning of the text might be different than mine.

We also have to remember that this fragment is taken out from the pages of a whole novel, thus the fragment might not make sense at a first glance. This is due to the fact that we have taken the text out of its context, and thus we deprive the readers from many important elements that gravitate around the full text.

Conclusions

In this paper I have examined multiple motives for the stylistic choices in one text from a novel. Taken all together, these motives produce an effect far more impressive and moving than any description of the same scene or topic in ordinary, careless style. Since the scene in the novel occurs at the most important moment of the novel the impact of the text comes greatly into effect. The author chose a complex style in the hope that the details of the scene would remain in the readers’ minds.

Stylistic analysis is practiced as a part of understanding the possible meanings in a text. It is a useful discipline which encourages logical and creative thought and can be transferred to many other areas of academic study, such as discourse analysis or critical reading. The fact that stylistic analysis can be applied to a large variety of texts, as shown above, makes it a useful and important discipline.

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