



INCORPORATING STYLISTICS APPROACH FOR TEACHING ENGLISH POETRY AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

Amna Shahid ^{1*}

¹Department of Applied Linguistics, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore.

Article Info

*Corresponding Author

Tel:+9203454063854

Email Id: amnaww@yahoo.com;

amna.shahid@kinnaird.edu.pk

Abstract

The aim of this study was to gain insight into the effectiveness of incorporating stylistic approach to teach English poetry to undergraduates. It was also significant to examine and explore how stylistic approach can be effective not only to teach poetry but also to encourage students to interact with structure of poem to infer meanings and to explore distinctive features of poetic language, to interpret poems systematically by focusing on the linguistic features. The present study attempted to apply a practical teaching methodology based on Stylistic Approach for the teaching of poetry on Undergraduates of Home Economics College Gulberg, Lahore. This research adopted the method used by Leech and Short in their book *Style in Fiction* to analyze and teach poetry with stylistic approach. The findings of this study proved stylistic approach as an effective practical teaching methodology for poetry. The findings of this study also clearly showed that Experimental group was able to understand and interpret poetic language in a better way when stylistic approach was applied on them. Stylistic approach was also found as effective tool for teachers and students to explore distinctive features of poetic language and interpret poems systematically. The findings of this study also provided suggestions for further research.

Keywords

Stylistics Approach, Distinctive features of poetic language, English Poetry Teaching.



1. Introduction

To Widdowson (1992), poetry is useful language because it represents language use. Poets use ordinary language in extraordinary ways. They do experiments with language. They do this by creating outstanding new metaphors, transforming the syntax in unconventional ways and dramatically extending the semantic range of common words by creating collocations” (Maley, 1996). Teaching poetry is really a difficult task. The main problem with teaching poetry to undergrads in Pakistan is the traditional method, in which a poem is introduced with a paraphrase and inessential details. This method is fashioned with many disadvantages, such as the learning is artificial because the paraphrasing and other details are provided by the teacher and secondly, if the poet and the context of the poem is introduced before the poem the students’ concepts become limited for their personal interpretation and analysis of poem. The term stylistics is central to this study. Stylistics involves the analysis of language structures. Stylistic approach also encourages writer to exploit and understand the ambiguity of language (Buckledee, 2002).

1.1 The Gap

The current study builds upon the previous study in Pakistan that suggests teaching of stylistics as a subject at post-graduate level in Pakistani universities can encourage students to investigate both literary and non-literary style (Kamran, R., 2001). Bhatti,S. (2003), highlights the problems encountered by students and teachers of stylistics in the various universities in Pakistan. The current

study now aims to apply stylistic approach on teaching poetry to undergrads in Pakistan. Several researchers have explored stylistic approach from different perspectives i.e., descriptive, contrastive and experimental. Akyel (1995) claimed the positive impact of applying stylistic approach on literary text in TEFL classroom. Hammad (2000) explored the facilitating effect of stylistic approach on 11th grade students to evaluate their learning achievement and positive attitude towards poetry. Damova (2007), applied the stylistic approach to analyze the language of law by focusing on lexical expressions. Shaitan taught poetry to Japanese Adult with task-based approach. Zhanghai (2008) preferred stylistic approach to analyze literary discourse in detail. Timucin (2010) explored poetic language with the tool of stylistics. Liu (2010) investigated the stylistic features in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* from the lexical and grammatical categories. Yi-cheng (2010) talked about the relevance of stylistic approach to examine distinctive features in English poetry. These existing studies provided consistent support for the favorable effect of applying stylistic approach on teaching poetry and exploring literary text. Moreover, stylistics is a very vast subject as it is the outcome of both literature and language. Stylistics has strong links with both literature and language it can serve these two different disciplines effectively. It is necessary to highlight the importance of stylistics as an academic subject. Stylistics must be taught as major subject at undergraduate and post-graduate levels in Pakistan.

However, the significance of applying stylistic approach on teaching English poetry has not been fully explored in Pakistan and there is a lack of experimental work on this topic as well. In order to fill the gap in research, this study investigated the impact of applying stylistic approach on teaching of English poetry in Pakistan at undergraduate level.

1.2 Significance Of The Study

The current study observed the facilitating effect of stylistic approach as modern pedagogy to teach poetry to undergrads in Pakistan. It also investigated how the effective use of stylistic approach on teaching poetry can develop better analytical skills and critical thinking in undergrads and how stylistic approach can help students to infer meanings of poems and interpret poems critically by exploring distinctive features of poetic language.

1.3 Objectives Of The Study

The present study focused on the teaching of poetry through stylistic approach and it also emphasized how stylistic approach could be fruitful for a better interpretation, understanding and appreciation of linguistic and stylistic features of poetic language.

The significant objectives of this study were:

- To investigate the positive impact of applying stylistic approach on teaching poetry
- To explore the effectiveness of applying stylistic approach to analysis poems
- To make students aware of the style and linguistic structure of a poem

- To enable students interpret any poem with the framework of stylistic approach.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Does applying the stylistic approach on the teaching of English poetry at undergraduate level enable students to explore and understand distinctive features of poetic language?
2. Does applying the stylistic approach on the teaching of English poetry at undergraduate level develop confidence in students to work systematically towards interpretations of the poems?
3. Does applying the stylistic approach on the teaching of English poetry at undergraduate level enhance students' ability to analyze English poetry stylistically?

1.5 Hypothesis

Applying stylistic approach on the teaching of English poetry will enable undergrads to explore distinctive features of poetic language and to develop linguistic skills to work systematically towards interpretations and stylistic analysis of the poems.

1.6 Null Hypothesis

Applying stylistic approach on the teaching of English poetry will not enable undergrads to explore distinctive features of poetic language and to develop linguistic skills to work systematically towards interpretations and stylistic analysis of the poems.

2. Review Of Literature

The word poetry is derived from the Greek poiesis, meaning "making" or "creating". Poetry was

defined in Webster's (1966) as: "writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience of language cohesion and arranged to create a specific emotional response through its meaning, sound and rhythm". Poetry often uses particular forms and conventions to expand the literal meaning of the words, or to evoke emotional or sensual responses (Preminger, 1965). Poets do experiments with language by using the ordinary language in extraordinary ways. They do this by creating striking new metaphors, changing the syntax in unconventional ways and by extending the semantic range of common words dramatically. (Maley, 1996).

Widdowson (1992) argues that Poetry is a useful language because it represents language use. All poets not only use striking language but they play with language by creating new collocations, coining new words, , experimenting with sound, using old words in new ways, and so on. Poetry is a paint-spattered canvas, but the poets use words instead of paint, and the canvas is reader. Poetry offers a rich resource for language learning. A poem offers the natural ability to absorb language unconsciously that enables the learners to retrieve grammatical and lexical information they had. Moreover, poetry deals with important experiences that increase the learners' perception not only of for such experiences, but also for other experiences. The ambiguity of a poem evokes individual interpretations and opens up opportunity for discussion. The vivid and strong imagery of poetry enable the learners to experience the power of language beyond the standard and fixed syntactic and lexical structures. Poems often

explore universal themes which are concern with life experiences and thus initiate strong response from the learners (Collie and Slater, 1987). The term stylistics is central to this study. Stylistics means the study of style, the study of the form of the wordstemas and a systematic and a scientific study. Chapman's (1973) definition of stylistic says, "The linguistic study of different styles is called stylistics". Leech (1969) defines stylistics as "the study of the use of language in literature". H.G.Widdowson (1975) says, stylistics is the study of literary discourse from a linguistics perspective and it is an essential mean of linking linguistics and literary criticism simultaneously. Wales (1991) defines stylistics as "the study of style". Style is the dress of thought, the mystery of having been moved by words. "Language expresses and style stresses" (Riffattere, 1967). Teaching of literature and stylistics have their roots in the works of Widdowson (1975), Carter (1983), Carter and Long (1987), Short (1989) and Lazar (1993). However, stylistics in the early twenty-first century is very much alive and well, it is noted by Simpson (1992). Carter (1996) discusses the importance of stylistics for literature teaching by asserting that stylistic analysis helps teachers to foster interpretative skills in learners and to encourage reading between the lines. Kellem (2009) states that stylistic approach can help a teacher to teach systematic analysis of poem because an individual poet or a single poem involves different problems and different perspectives so teaching poetry needs to combine a range of different interpretations, techniques and approaches. Applying stylistic approach on literary

texts does not only involve linguistic textual analysis but also encourage learner/ readers to interact with textual structure to infer meanings (Tutaş, 2006). Stylistics approach is very significant for the analysis of poems, it helps ESL/EFL learners to develop an awareness of poetic language by exploring and interpreting distinctive features of poem systematically and stylistic approach is a useful tool to interact with poetic language to infer particular meanings (Timucin, 2010). Stylistics approach is a systematic approach to poetry. It has potential to understand and explore the linguistics and stylistic features of a poem. Stylistic features of the poems contribute to the meaning making. Basically, the goal of stylistic approach is to explore the formal features and functional significance of poems for better interpretation (Wales, 1991).

3. Research Methodology

The present research was experimental and quantitative in nature. To conduct the study 50 undergrads (female students) were selected as respondents of the research study from College of Home Economics Gulberg, Lahore. The reason for selecting students from this academic discipline was to ensure a certain level of language proficiency which was required for teaching and practice of English poetry stylistically and to notice the facilitating impact of stylistic approach on teaching poetry to explore the distinctive features of poetic language for better understanding and interpretation of the poem.

3.1 Sampling Procedure

The respondents were randomly divided into two groups, Experimental group (25 students) and Control group (25 students). These groups were made to evaluate the facilitating effect of stylistic approach on teaching of English poetry in relation to research questions and hypothesis. Experimental group was focused group, students of this group were taught English poetry through stylistic approach.

3.2 Research Design

Experimental group was taught English poems for two weeks with stylistic approach while students of control group were taught English poems with the same traditional method of paraphrasing.

3.3. Research Instrument

To conduct the study two instruments were used i.e.

- 1) A checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories proposed by Leech and Short (1981: 75-80) (Appendix I)
- 2) Pre-test and Post-Test (Appendix II, Appendix III)

3.4 Reliability Of Checklist

Reliability of checklist was verified with previous researches in which researchers had used this linguistic/stylistic checklist as a useful tool for stylistic analysis. Xiangqi Liu (2010) used this checklist to explore the Lexical and Grammatical Category of *The Great Gatsby* for the stylistic analysis.

3.5 TEST VALIDITY

To ensure the test validity, the tests were handed to one expert in Language from The Punjab University, English Department of Language &

Literature. Consequently, the tests underwent some changes. According to language expert's suggestions some activities were added in category D: Schemes and Tropes and category E: Context and Cohesion.

3.6 Material Selection

The material used in this research study was consisted on five poems selected from the syllabus book "A new Anthology of English Verse" for B.A Classes. Due to time constraint only five poems were selected. The reason of poems' selection was basically the style and lexical choice of poets.

1. Tartary by *Walter De La Mare*
2. Woman Work by *Maya Angelou*
3. The Rebel by *D.J. Enright*
4. After Apple-Picking by *Robert Frost*
5. Hawk's Monologue by *Ted Hughes*

3.7 Procedure

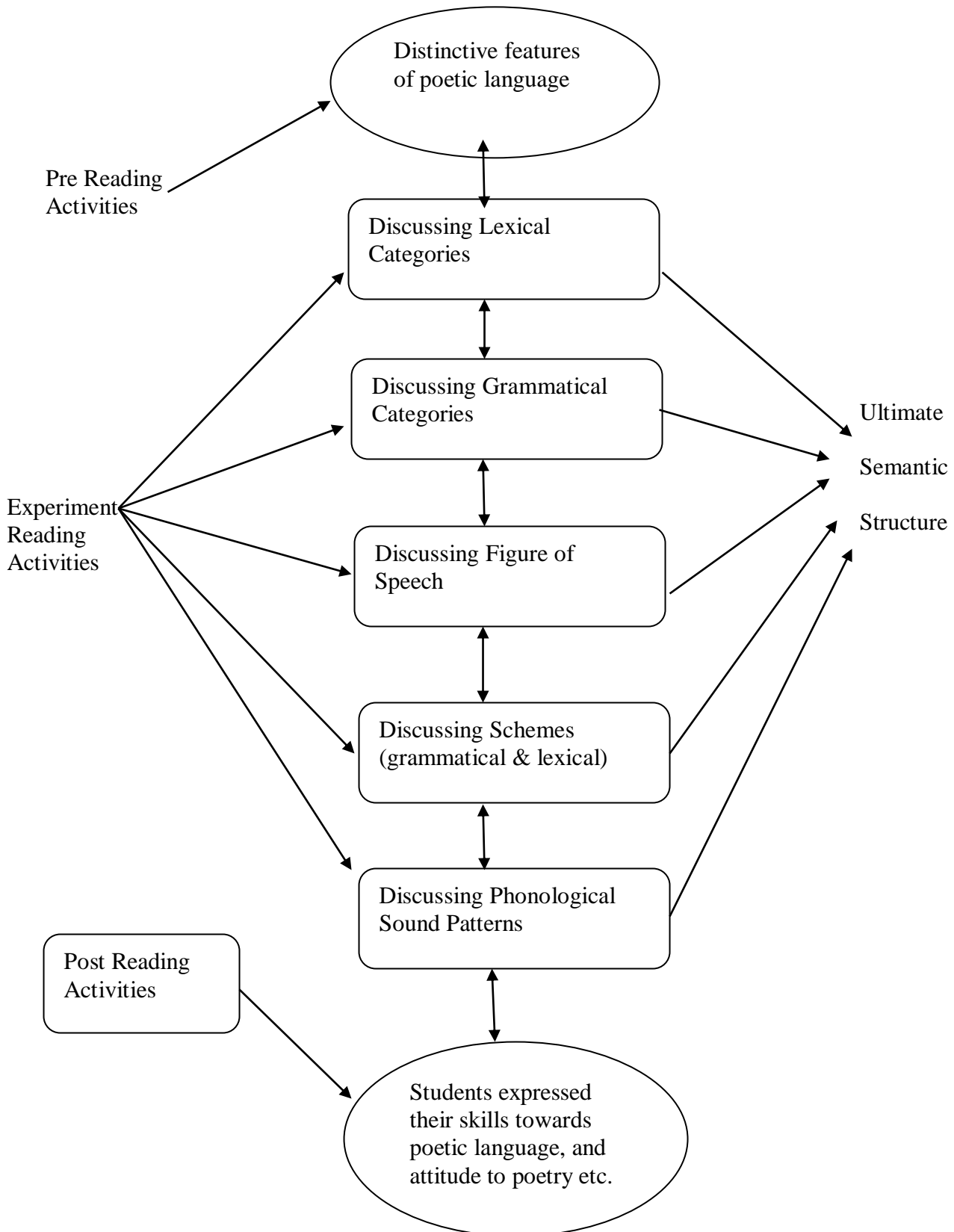
First of all the students were given the checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories proposed by Leech & Short (1981) as a reading assignment. Secondly, the students were taught how to explore the linguistic and stylistic features of a poem in order to interpret and analyze the poetic language systematically with stylistic approach. For better understanding of different linguistics features of poetic language, meaning making, interpretation and appreciation of the poem, three poems (Tartary, Woman Work & Hawk's Monologue) were taught in two weeks stylistically by exploring five different categories: A: Lexical Categories, B: Grammatical Categories, C: Figures of speech, D: Schemes and Tropes and E: Context and Cohesion.

4. RESULTS

Teaching poetry with stylistic approach made student to explore more linguistic categories and meaning-focused linguistic features for interpreting what the poem represents. Students were givens various tasks to understand poem and infer meanings with the help of lexical, grammatical, figurative and phonological categories. By the end of the lesson, effective teaching of poetry applying stylistic approach with task-based approach, students were able to explore and understand the distinctive features of poetic language, such as figure of speech, lexical and syntactical repetition and impressive sound effects widely displayed in English poems, and they were able to produce reasonable interpretations supported by the different linguistic and stylistic categories found in the poem.

The following diagram sum up the procedure:

Diagram
The Stylistic procedure followed in teaching of poetry to the Experimental Group



After the effective teaching of English poems with stylistic approach the results of Pre-Tests and Post-Tests of Control and Experimental groups were compared. It was found that there was a significant difference between the marks obtained by two groups and a crystal clear improvement was observed in students of Experimental group. To evaluate the performance of Experiment Group Paired Sample T- test was applied. The overall result of the Experimental group in Post-Test was 100% while the result of the Control group in Post-test was 36%. In Pre-Test the result of Experimental group was 24% that was less than Control group that obtained 28%. (tables are presented in Appendix IV). These findings evidently showed that stylistic approach played a vital role in teaching poetry at undergraduate level and the use of effective stylistic approach in English poetry teaching can develop linguistic ability in students.

In this research study following findings were obtained:

- Overall result of Control group in Pre-Test was 28%, while result of experimental group was 24%
- In lexical categories (A) result of Control group in Pre-Test was 88%, while result of Experimental group was 92%
- In grammatical category (B) result of Control group in Pre-Test was 16%, while result of Experimental group was 20%
- In category (C) figure of speech result of Control group in Pre-Test was 04%, while result of Experimental group was 04%
- In category (D) phonetic sound patterns result of Control group in Pre-Test was 44%, while result of Experimental group was 40%
- In category (E) context & cohesive result of Control group in Pre-Test was 0%, while result of Experimental group was 08%
- Overall result of Control group in Post-Test was 36%, while result of experimental group was 100%, 64% improvement was found in Experimental group in comparison of control group
- In lexical categories (A) result of Control group in Post-Test was 92%, while result of Experimental group was 100%, 08% improvement was found in Experimental group in comparison of control group
- In grammatical category (B) result of Control group in Post-Test was 60%, while result of Experimental group was 92%, 32% improvement was found in Experimental group in comparison of control group
- In category (C) figure of speech result of Control group in Post-Test was 16%, while result of Experimental group was 92%, 76% improvement was found in Experimental group in comparison of control group
- In category (D) phonetic sound patterns result of Control group in Post-Test was 0%, while result of Experimental group was 92%, 92% improvement was found in Experimental group in comparison of control group
- In category (E) context & cohesive result of Control group in Post-Test was 36%, while result of Experimental group was 88%, 52%

improvement was found in Experimental group in comparison of control group.

- Overall result of Experimental group in Pre-Test was 24%, while in Post Test the result of Experimental group was 100%, 76% improvement was found.
- In Pre-Test the result of Experimental group in lexical categories (A) was 92%, while in Post-Test it was 100%, 08% improvement was found
- In Pre-Test the result of Experimental group in grammatical category (B) was 20%, while in Post- Test it was 92 %, 72% improvement was found
- In Pre-Test the result of Experimental group in category (C) figure of speech was 04%, while in Post- Test it was 92%, 88% improvement was found
- In Pre-Test the result of Experimental group in category (D) phonetic sound patterns was 40%, while in Post- Test it was 92%, 52% improvement was found
- In Pre-Test the result of Experimental group in category (E) context & cohesive was 08%, while in Post- Test it was 88%, 80% improvement was found.

Teaching poetry with stylistic approach demonstrates how linguistic and stylistic categories of poem can serve to integrate focus on form with focus on meaning, in a stylistic approach on a poem. The language used in the poem lends itself directly to the integration of form-focus and meaning-focus through systematic stylistic analysis.

5. DISCUSSION

In this research study it was found that stylistic approach is the best methodology in teaching poetry at undergraduate level in Pakistan. It can help students to interpret and understand poem in a better way by analyzing distinctive features of poetic language at different levels i.e. lexical, grammatical, phonological, figurative and contextual. It was also observed that applying stylistic approach on the teaching of English poetry can help students to improve their language skills by exploring different lexical category as choice of vocabulary, use of poetic language, language variations (dialect, slang, jargon, and register etc.), and the use of semantic field and influence of morphological structures on meaning of a poem. Analysis of grammatical categories such as syntax, sentence structure, types of clauses and phrases, word classes, punctuation etc. with stylistic approach can also help students to comprehend and interpret layers of meanings in a poem at great extent. The use of figurative language in poetry is always noteworthy. Stylistic approach can help students to learn how figurative language is used for achieving different meanings and poetic impressions in the poems and how figurative language can be used to convey meanings effectively and efficiently at four different levels: by creating resemblance/similarity (through simile, metaphor, personification, allegory, fable and parable), by drawing Contrast (through oxymoron, irony, sarcasm, innuendo, hyperbole, litotes, euphemism, pun, antithesis and epigram), by creating Association (through Metonymy and

synecdoche) and by construction/ arrangement of the words and expressions (through interrogation, apostrophe, repetition, pleonasm, bathos and climax). Grammatical Schemes, Lexical Schemes and Tropes are also very prominent features of poetic language. Stylistic approach to poetry teaching can help students to comprehend and explore grammatical and lexical schemes like anaphora, chiasmus, antithesis and parallelism, as well as tropes like foregrounding and deviation in poems. Stylistic analysis of phonological sound patterns helps students to appreciate and understand the impressive sound effects widely displayed in English poems. Students can enjoy the music of words and theme with better understanding of Phonological sound patterns, they can develop skills for to infer meanings of the poem through the dominating and prominent sounds patterns like Alliteration, Assonance , Consonance , Reverse Rhyme, Pararhyme and Rhyme. Stylistic approach to the teaching of English poetry can also help students to understand contextual coherence which exists between lines, sentences and stanzas. Students can learn the effectiveness of using cohesive devices by poets in poems and they can get insight how such devices are linked together to create logical sequence and coherence. Leech and Short (1981) argue that cohesion deals with the logical links between sentences, such logical links can be accomplished through the use of reference such as pronouns and articles, substitution, ellipsis, repetition and elegant variation. It was also observed even the awareness of using punctuation marks can facilitate students to comprehend the logical coherence between

thoughts and hidden meanings of poem. Students can understand the layers of meaning, the shift of moods and thoughts with in a stanza by focusing on the use of punctuation mark. The findings and the practical implication of this research study suggest that stylistic approach is an effective, innovative and productive methodology for teaching English Poetry at undergraduate level. Linguistic and stylistic features of poetic language must not be ignored especially in teaching poetry as many of teachers do in Pakistan.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, teaching of English poetry with stylistic approach at undereducated level in Pakistan is a very useful method of providing opportunity to the students to learn how to interact directly with poetic language and how to come up with better understanding, interpretation and exploration of the distinctive features of poetic language systematically. Certainly such systematic approach to poetry can discourage rote learning practice, spoon-feeding and students' dependence on the teacher's lesson. Definitely it can enhance students' creative and their analytical skills.

Stylistic analysis is very useful for classroom teaching poetry for several reasons. First, it allows the teachers to plan ahead and focus on specific linguistic features when he or she is introducing the poem in the class. Second, a familiarity with stylistic analysis provides a teacher with an explicit vocabulary for discussing the interpretation and failings of texts. Literary interpretation seems to be an opaque process for many people, they think it is the province of

intuition and inspiration, not something that can be learned or taught: you just have to be an “English person” to get it. Stylistic analysis is a fully explicit framework of literary interpretation that can be taught clearly to students who are not “English people” in their opinion. Third, stylistic analysis can form a bridge to other domains of linguistics. Many students can use stylistic analysis as a sense of accomplishment and they enjoy systematic analysis of poems. Overall, stylistics can do a great deal of good in demystifying literature for students of all ages and social backgrounds (Shaitan, n.d). A checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories proposed by Leech and Short (1987), is a useful instrument for the stylistic analysis of poems, but for better and profound analysis of poetic language researchers, teacher and trainers must use some other tools because all texts have their individual qualities and the linguistic and stylistic features in one text can not necessarily be important in another text by the same or a different author.

References

- Akyel, A. (1995). Stylistic Analysis of Poetry: A perspective from an initial training course in TEFL. *TESL Canada Journal*, 13(1), 63-73.
- Bhatti, S. (2003). *The Teaching of Stylistic at the Post-Graduate Level in Pakistani Universities*. Islamabad, Pakistan: The National University of Languages.
- Buckledee, S. (2002). *Language and Literature in Tertiary Education: The case for stylistics*. English Teaching Forum, 40 (2), 8-12.
- Carter, R. (1983). What is stylistics and the teaching of English? M. Short (Ed.). In *Reading, analyzing and teaching Literature*. (pp. 161-177). London: Longman.
- Carter, R., & Long, M. (1987). *The web of words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, R. (1996). Look both ways before crossing: developments in the language and literature classroom. R. Carter and J. McRae (Eds.). In *Language, Literature & the Learner: Creative classroom practice* (pp. 1-15). London: Longman.
- Chapman, R. (1973). *Linguistics and Literature: An Introduction to Literary Stylistics*. London: Edward Arnold Pub. Ltd.
- Collie, J. and Slater, S. (1987). *Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Damova, P. (2007). *The Language of Law A Stylistic Analysis with a Focus on Lexical (Binomial) Expressions*. M.A. Thesis. Brno: Masaryk University.
- Hammad, I.A. (2000). *The Effect of Applying Stylistic Approach on the 11th grade Students' Achievement and Attitudes*. Nablus: Thesis.
- Kellem, H. (2009). *Enhlish Teaching Forum*. Retrieved 3, 12. (2011).
- Kamran,R.(2001). *The Teaching of Stylistic at the Post-Graduate Level in Pakistani*

- Universities. Islamabad, Pakistan: The National University of Languages.
- Leech, G.N., & Short, M. H. (1981). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose*. New York: Longman.
- Lazar, G. N. (1993). *Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leach, G. N. (1969). *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. Longman London & New York.
- Leech, Geoffrey, and Mick Short. (2007) *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. 2nd ed. London: Longman. Print.
- Liu, X. (2010). Stylistic Analysis of *The Great Gatsby* from Lexical and Grammatical Category. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1 (13), 662-667.
- Maley, A. (1996). That's for Your Poetry Book! In R Carter & J.McRae (eds.). *Language, Literature and the Learner*. (PP. 100-114). London: Longman.
- Preminger, A. (1965). *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rifartherre, M. (1967). Criteria for Style Analysis. S. Chatman & S.R. Levin (eds.). In *Essays on the Language of Literature*. (pp. 412 – 430). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Shaitan, A. (n.d.). The Deployment of Task and Stylistic Approach in Teaching Poetry to Japanese Adult Learners. *Chuo University*, 92-97.
- Short, M. (1989). *Reading, Analysing and Teaching Literature*. London & New York: Longman.
- Simpson, P. (1992). Teaching Stylistics: Analysing Cohesions and Narrative Structure in a Short Story by Ernest Hemingway. M.Short (ed.). *Journal of poetics and Linguistics*. 1- 67.
- Tutaş, N. (2006). Theory into Practice: Teaching and Responding to Literature Aesthetically. In A. Paran (Ed.) *Literature in Language Teaching and Learning* (pp.140-156). Virginia: TESOL.
- Timucin, M. (2010). Exploring the Language of Poems: A Stylistic Study. *Novitas-Royal (Research on Youth and Language)*, 4 (2), 129-140.
- Wales, K. (1991). *A Dictionary of Stylistics*. London Longman.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1975) . *Stylistics and the teaching of literature*. London: Longman.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1992). *Practical Stylistics: an approach to poetry*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Yi-cheng, Y. (2010). Stylistic Analysis by Example of Distinctive Features in English poetry. *US-China Foreign Language*, 8 (3), 12-13.
- Zhanghai, Z. (2008). Stylistic Analysis of King Luther's Speech: I have A Dream. *ELT Journal*, 77,19-25.