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Bellard-Thomson, Carol

Joining The Stylistics Discourse Community: an empirical study of student development in learning stylistic analysis

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The stylistics ‘discourse community’ is a group of academics and researchers who may be said to use a shared disciplinary register and a demonstrate a shared mindset which prioritises a rigorous and explicit analytical approach to language.

This PhD project seeks corpus-based empirical evidence of when and how learners begin to approximate the academic discoursal techniques of professional practitioners of stylistics.

Methodology

- Build a mini-corpus of learner discourse from undergraduate coursework assignments produced in stylistics modules during the 2008-9 academic year.
- Build a mini-corpus of professional discourse from published stylistics analyses produced by professional practitioners.
- Use Wmatrix2 to analyse and compare usage in the learner corpus with the practitioners’ corpus.
- Make a cross-comparison of both mini-corpora against the British National Corpus, to identify deviation from non-stylistics usage.
- Extract statistically significant data to characterise learner and professional discourse.
- Extrapolate results to inform pedagogical practice.

What professional stylistics practitioners do

- Produce coherent interpretations from their first impressions of a text or extract.
- Analyse the text in detail, selecting those aspects of theory that are likely to provide interesting linguistic information.
- Relate their interpretations to the data provided by analysis.
- Re-evaluate or refine their interpretations as necessary (‘Literary Stylistics’), or suggest new theory based on their findings (‘Linguistic Stylistics’).