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COGNITIVE STYLISTICS: FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS OF AN EMERGENT FIELD

Abstract: This article seeks to add to the current body of knowledge regarding Cognitive Stylistics an approach that has witnessed an increase in popularity in recent years due to the emergence of Cognitive Linguistics as a valuable tool for studying language in general. Stylistics and its evolved form, Cognitive Stylistics, have proved influential in understanding the process involved both in the creation as well as in the reception of literature. The study demonstrates that Cognitive Stylistics is a reliable framework for explaining how textual features such as deviation, metaphor or foregrounding trigger specific cognitive models and mental processes in readers. It argues that incorporating cognitive theories and tools, like conceptual metaphor theory, schema theory, text-to-world theory and foregrounding, can enhance literary interpretation and reveal both universal and text-specific aspects of reading comprehension.

Keywords: stylistics, cognitive stylistics, theory, foregrounding, metaphor

Stylistics—the study of style in various texts—has long been concerned with how linguistic choices shape both the production and interpretation of those texts. Traditionally, its emphasis has been on the observable characteristics of a text, analysing lexical patterns, sentence structures, or rhetorical devices to determine the author’s unique style or the traits of a specific genre.

Cognitive stylistics—a crucial and constant development within the broader field of Stylistics—has heralded a shift in paradigm. It has moved beyond simple textual analysis to explore the intricate relationship between language, cognition and the reader’s mental

processing. By integrating insights from cognitive science, linguistics and psychology, Cognitive Stylistics focuses on understanding how meaning is created and understood in literary and non-literary texts. It emerged in the late twentieth century in an attempt to answer the question “How do readers understand, decipher and experience different types of texts, given the way the human mind works?” This “cognitive turn” has enhanced stylistic analysis by offering methodological tools and theoretical frameworks to explore the mental processes that underlie language production and reception.

The term “cognitive stylistics” (and its close relative, “cognitive poetics”) is largely credited to Reuven Tsur. Dating back to the early 1980s, the critic’s cognitive project preceded the formal emergence of cognitive linguistics as a distinct field. His work, *Towards a Theory of Cognitive Poetics* (2008), investigates the connection between linguistic patterns and human cognition, using an interdisciplinary approach that combines insights from stylistics, literary theory and neuropsychology to explain literary meaning and effects. Cognitive poetics seeks to investigate the contribution of cognitive science to the field of Poetics, aiming to determine the extent to which poetic language and form, and literary interpretations are constrained and shaped by the mechanisms of human information processing.¹

A key concept of Tsur’s theory is that poetry employs cognitive processes, originally developed for non-aesthetic functions, for the pursuit of aesthetic ends. This phenomenon is similar to how language ability developed, where pre-existing cognitive and physiological mechanisms were similarly repurposed for new uses. As such, the reception of poetry involves the readjustment of cognitive processes and their consequent adaptation for purposes for which they were not originally formulated.² He claims that a key function of cognitive poetics is to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable gap between human values, stylistics and poetic devices that otherwise might be dismissed as trivial from a purely human perspective.³

Peter Stockwell’s *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* can be considered the foundational work that initiates the theoretical framework of the core principles of cognitive poetics. The book argues that “Cognitive poetics is all about reading literature,”⁴ and as such, its author makes a clear distinction between what one means by “reading” (the mental

1. Reuven Tsur, *Towards a Theory of Cognitive Poetics*, 2nd edition (Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 1.

2. Tsur, *Cognitive Poetics*, 4.

3. Tsur, *Cognitive Poetics*, 19.

4. Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2002), 1.

process involved in understanding a text) and “literature” (the craft of using language to achieve an aesthetic or emotional effect). Stockwell put cognitive poetics at the intersection of these two concepts.⁵

The critic argues that to truly understand literature, one must first understand the reader, specifically, their mind and body. The central premise that literary reading is an active, cognitive process is the foundational argument of the book. The critic defines cognitive poetics as a way of understanding how the mind and body engage with literature. He posits that our minds are not separate from our bodies since the way we think about abstract concepts is often grounded in our physical experiences.⁶ The concept of embodiment is a cornerstone of his work, highlighting that literary understanding is inextricably linked to other physical experiences: “The notion of embodiment affects every part of language. It means that all our experiences, knowledge, beliefs and wishes are involved in and expressible only through patterns of language that have their roots in our material existence.”⁷ Stockwell describes cognitive poetics as a way of understanding how our minds process literary texts by applying the principles of cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology.⁸ Cognitive poetics is concerned with how we read literature. It uses both psychology and linguistics to analyse how we interpret texts and how those interpretations are reflected in the text. This approach is more than just another perspective; it is a fundamental rethinking of how the entire literary process works.⁹

A few years later, addressing the issue of Cognitive Stylistics, Peter Stockwell begins from the premise that creativity has not been adequately addressed by literary criticism which has primarily focused on the history of writing and specific examples of literary works. He asserts that the social science of reading, aiming for a general psychological theory of reading, has failed to incorporate creativity within its scope. Additionally, he claims that stylistics has underemphasized authorial and readerly creativity.¹⁰

Premising his research on the idea that cognitive stylistics (or cognitive poetics) is essentially a discipline that explores the multifaceted nature of literary creativity, Stockwell summarises some fundamental principles that can easily be applied to literary reading:

5. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 1.

6. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 4.

7. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 5.

8. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 4.

9. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 5.

10. Peter Stockwell, “Cognitive Stylistics,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Creativity*, ed. Jones Rodney (Routledge, 2015), 233.

- Language is essential to human experience and not a separate entity. Therefore, language ought to be regarded as having a natural origin rather than being artificial, technological or merely a component of culture.
- Language is embodied in the sense that it is based on the idea that people share a similar human form, condition and experiences. Subsequently, it is only natural to find common metaphors or other linguistic structures across different languages of the world.
- Language is based on and adapts to our senses—sound, touch, taste, sight, smell and our physical space and movement. Since there is no distinct “language mode” in the brain, patterns in language are continuous with these other aspects of experience.
- Since language incorporates memory, speculative modelling, cognition, perception, emotions, anticipation, social relationship, a disciplined account of it ought to include these matters as well.
- A comprehensive linguistic description necessitates an examination not only of the inherent constraints and recurrent patterns that characterize a system, but also of the creative flexibility and imaginative innovation that are fundamental to its practical application.¹¹

For Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper (2002), cognitive stylistics “combines the kind of explicit, rigorous and detailed linguistic analysis of literary texts that is typical of the stylistics tradition with a systematic and theoretically informed consideration of the cognitive structures and processes that underlie the production and perception of language.”¹² Thus, cognitive stylistics is both traditional and innovative. It is traditional because stylistics has always focused on the relationship between a text’s linguistic choices and how they affect a reader’s interpretation. Cognitive stylistics is innovative because its linguistic analysis systematically draws on theories connecting language features to cognitive structures and processes. This approach comes with a more methodical and clear account of the relationship between texts and the responses and readings they generate.¹³

11. Stockwell, “Cognitive Stylistics,” 235.

12. Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper, “Foreword,” *Cognitive Stylistics: Language Cognition in Text Analysis*, ed. Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), ix.

13. Semino and Culpeper, *Cognitive Stylistics*, ix.

Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen (2003) hold that the emergence of cognitive poetics was contingent upon another significant development of the last several decades: the rise of cognitive science. Advances in psychology, cognitive anthropology, linguistics and artificial intelligence have generated a new body of concepts, theories and insights. These are nowadays accessible to literary students seeking to describe and explain how literary texts affect the reader's mind.¹⁴ According to them, an important outcome of the rise of cognitive poetics has been a keen awareness within the social science of the unique cognitive and communicative character of literature. Concurrently, the critics notice that this distinctiveness is rooted in the fundamental structures and processes of human experience and thought which enable these unique artistic interactions.¹⁵

Geert Brône and Jeroen Vandaele's book *Cognitive Poetics: Goals, Gains and Gaps* (2009) is another key publication in Cognitive Stylistics. The critics posit that cognitive stylistics has turned the mind into "its primary object of investigation."¹⁶ They see cognitive linguistics and poetics as natural allies since early cognitive linguistics research can be considered the first step towards a collaborative cognitive poetic project.¹⁷ Along the same line, they consider that to stay relevant, cognitive poetics should incorporate discoveries from cognitive linguistics to adjust its theoretical models to current knowledge of cognitive processes. They believe that the main goal of cognitive poetics is to offer a more rigorous, cognitively informed analysis of how readers derive meaning from literary texts. However, they also highlight the existing "gaps" in the field, calling for a more rigorous and systematic methodology, accepting that this field is still in the process of establishing itself as a mature discipline.

Margaret Freeman finds it challenging to define cognitive poetics as it has different meanings for different people.¹⁸ Her research aims to clarify the unconscious cognitive processes that enable us to grasp the meaning of a poem through language, poetic imagery or rhythm. These processes are not solely intellectual but are rooted in the aesthetic elements of sensation and emotion. These feelings enable us to perceive poetry as a symbolic representation of genuine

14. Joanna Gavin and Gerard Steen, *Cognitive Poetics in Practice* (Routledge, 2003), 2.

15. Gavin and Steen, *Cognitive Poetics*, 2.

16. Geert Brône and Jeroen Vandaele, *Cognitive Poetics: Goals, Gains and Gaps* (Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 1.

17. Brône and Vandaele, *Cognitive Poetics*, 2.

18. Margaret Freeman, "Cognitive Poetics," in *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*, ed. Michael Burke (Routledge, 2014), 313.

human experience.¹⁹ She describes cognitive poetics as “Janus-faced: looking both towards the text and toward the mind.”²⁰

A central concept in her work is “poetic iconicity.” Her theory brings together concepts from semiotics, aesthetics and phenomenology. This approach helps identify the poetic forms that grant a poem its iconic status, making the experience of reality feel immediate. According to this theory, poetic iconicity is not just a matter of personal opinion—it is not enough for a reader to simply believe a poem is iconic. Instead, the poem’s form must incorporate the creative impulse that drives the poet to write in a particular manner.²¹ She argues that what distinguishes cognitive poetics from other stylistic approaches is “its focus on exploring the way in which human cognitive processes constrain aesthetic creativity in all forms and the way in which aesthetic creativity can illuminate the workings of human cognition.”²²

Freeman concludes—answering the question she has addressed at the beginning of her article—that cognitive poetics is an approach that views poetry as “the product of an artistic process” engaging all of the subconscious areas of the brain, incorporating those for thought, emotions and sensation. By concentrating on every element of a poem, readers can grasp its origins in the brain’s most fundamental, preconceptual way of connecting with reality and its own identity within the world.²³

Haileleul Woldemariam shares Stockwell’s opinion, stating that formalist and functionalist stylistic models are not the same as cognitive stylistics.²⁴ For him,

cognitive stylistics places cognition and contextual effects at the heart of its analytical space. Both formalist and functionalist stylistic models place the sentence and the text respectively at the centre of their analysis. They are chief text-immanent models. The cognitive stylistic model, however, is a departure from textualist to contextualist stylistic interpretation of a text.²⁵

19. Freeman, “Cognitive Poetics,” 314.

20. Freeman, “Cognitive Poetics,” 314.

21. Freeman, “Cognitive Poetics,” 314.

22. Freeman, “Cognitive Poetics,” 314.

23. Freeman, “Cognitive Poetics,” 325.

24. Haileleul Woldemariam, *The Teaching and Learning of Poetry at Postgraduate Level: A Cognitive Stylistic Approach* (Polytechnic of Namibia, Department of Communication, Windhoek, Namibia, 2015), 18.

25. Woldemariam, *Teaching*, 18.

He argues that cognitive stylistics examines both textual features and the cognitive processes involved in reading. Specifically, it investigates how the interpretation of symbolic imagery relies on the knowledge, beliefs and inferences of the reader.²⁶ Cognitive stylistics enhances the linguistic analysis of literary texts by applying different theories, such as: schema theory, conceptual metaphor theory, text-to-world theory and foregrounding theory. Integrating these theories helps stylisticians reach a better understanding of literary texts.

Schema Theory

The concept of “schema” was originally coined by the British psychologist, Sir Frederic Bartlett, in 1932 in his work *Remembering*. It was later expanded and applied to various fields by other scholars, such as Richard Anderson in the 1970s. Bartlett was the first to extensively explore this concept to illustrate that the act of “remembering” relies on the narrator’s schematic general experiences.²⁷ His influential research shows that long-term memories are not static or unchanging, as schemata develop through experiences.

Yule defines schema as “a conventional knowledge structure that exists in our memory.”²⁸ For example, when talking about any school, it is unnecessary to specify elements such as desks, chairs, teachers, pupils, or classes, as these are generally assumed to be part of common background knowledge. This theory posits that schemas constitute knowledge structures related to concepts such as objects, situations, events and actions, and are universally present among individuals. Schemas facilitate both the interpretation of information and the anticipation of events in the environment. When information does not correspond to an individual’s existing schema, comprehension may be hindered, which accounts for the difficulty readers experience when engaging with unfamiliar topics.²⁹

Schema theory hypothesises that all knowledge is kept in our memory, which the mind then accesses and uses to understand new experiences or data. According to Culpeper, “a schema is a structured

26. Woldemariam, *Teaching*, 18.

27. Catherine, Emmott, Marc Alexander and Agnes Marszalek, “Schema Theory,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*, 2nd edition, ed. Michael Burke (Routledge, 2023).

28. George Yule, *The Study of Language*, 4th edition (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 150.

29. Eman Jaafar, “Schema Theory and Text-worlds: A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Selected Literary Texts,” *Journal of the College of Education for Women* 31, no. 2 (June 2020): 54.

cluster of concepts containing relatively generic information, and is stored in long-term memory.”³⁰

Based on schema theory, understanding arises from the relationship between the text and the reader’s prior knowledge. This theory offers a framework for literature by examining how the interaction between the text and the reader’s existing schemas shapes the reader’s interpretation. Schema refreshment, which results in a schema change, may entail the elimination of a prior schema or the formulation of a totally new one. Schema reinforcement consolidates existing schemas by validating suppositions about individuals and the world, whereas schema addition generates new schemas. We talk about schema disruption when literary features introduce deviations at the linguistic and textual levels, thereby challenging the reader’s schema.³¹ Semino states that according to schema theory, “meanings are not ‘contained’ within a text but are constructed in the interaction between a text and the interpreter’s background knowledge.”³² If a comprehender does not possess or fails to engage appropriate schemata for specific input, they might struggle to derive meaningful understanding from a text, resulting in impaired comprehension.³³

Another scholar to address the issue of cognitive stylistics is Guy Cook. He defines schemata as “mental representations of typical instances.”³⁴ From his perspective, schemata function in discourse processing to anticipate and understand the specific situation that the discourse illustrates. The concept is that the brain, prompted either by significant linguistic elements in the text (commonly called “triggers”) or by the surrounding context, activates a schema and employs it to interpret the discourse.³⁵ He goes on to propose a theory of literariness “as a dynamic interaction between linguistic and text-structural form on the one hand and schematic representations of the world on the other.”³⁶ His goal is to apply schema theory to account for the differences among readers and their non-linguistic knowledge,

30. Jonathan Culpeper, “A Cognitive Approach to Characterization,” in *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis*, ed. Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), 258.

31. Elena Semino, “Schema Theory and the Analysis of Text Worlds in Poetry,” *Language and Literature* 4, no. 2 (1995): 85–6.

32. Semino, “Schema Theory,” 81.

33. Semino, “Schema Theory,” 81.

34. Guy Cook, “A Theory of Discourse Deviation: The Application of Schema Theory to the Analysis of Literary Discourse” (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1990), 7.

35. Cook, “Theory of Discourse Deviation,” 7.

36. Cook, “Theory of Discourse Deviation,” 212.

while still incorporating the insights and descriptive tools offered by discourse analysis, formalism, structuralism (that focuses on text structure) and Jakobsonian stylistics (that focuses on language).³⁷

Cook's theory offers captivating insights for the examination and representation of text worlds. He emphasizes this by acknowledging the presence of three types of schemata: world schemata, text schemata and language schemata, which one can assume are all contained within the reader's mind:

A reader's feeling that the text structure or linguistic choices of a given discourse are normal or deviant derives from a comparison of its text structure (T) and its language (L) with the reader's pre-existing text schemata S(T) and language schemata S(L). The interaction of these interactions creates the illusion of a 'world' in the discourse (V), which can then be compared with the world schemata of the reader, yielding a judgement as to the normality or deviance of that illusory world.³⁸

Text World Theory

Text world theory serves as another resource for stylisticians to help comprehend how and why readers form mental representations. This theory, initially proposed by Paul Werth during the 1980s and 1990s, facilitates the connection of various fields such as stylistics, cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology. Werth argues that linguistic analysis should start with discourse, not the sentence or text. Even though a text is part of discourse, understanding discourse requires looking at the context of its creation and reception. The critic acknowledges that this context is complex and difficult to analyse. Nevertheless, the critic argues that one cannot overlook context if one wishes to pursue a "more human" linguistics, one that considers language as an integral part of human experience rather than an independent element.³⁹

In recent years, text world theory has undergone significant testing, enhancement, and extension by an increasing number of researchers. Professor Joanna Gavins has played a leading role in this development. After years of revising and refining the text world approach, she published an extensive overview of the framework titled *Text World Theory: An Introduction* (2007). The basic premise of this theory is that every person processes and comprehends discourse

37. Cook, "Theory of Discourse Deviation," 213.

38. Cook, "Theory of Discourse Deviation," 235.

39. Paul Werth, *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse* (Longman, 1999), 3–7, 19.

by creating mental representations or “text worlds” in their minds. In cognitive stylistics, this involves examining how particular linguistic selections in a text activate and influence these mental representations, allowing readers to connect with, interpret and even creatively react to the text’s conceptual environment.

Gavins bases her research on the concept that language comprehension involves a process of mental representations. The mental representations enabling our understanding of each other are influenced not only by the language we employ but also by our broader context, personal knowledge, and past experiences. They are uniquely individual while also being socially and historically linked to one another. These assumptions regarding cognition and experience serve as the primary foundations of text world theory.⁴⁰ According to the scholar, the text world theory primarily functions as a conceptual model. It addresses both the construction of a text and the influence of contextual factors on its creation and interpretation.⁴¹

Similar to Werth, Gavins admits that managing context can be quite challenging and takes it a step further by suggesting that the essential aspect of a thorough analysis of discourse is to acknowledge its complexity from the outset and develop a suitable analytical framework that can make this complexity more manageable.⁴² The scholar suggests that text world theory achieves this by dividing each discourse into several distinct conceptual levels. The first concept, the discourse-world, concerns the immediate context in which people communicate. The active involvement of at least one speaker or writer and one or more listeners or readers is crucial for its existence because the discourse-world contains not only the participants, the entities and objects around them, but also all the personal and cultural knowledge they bring to the language situation. As such, this first level provides a tool to explore how an array of contextual factors has the potential to impact both the creation and comprehension of a given discourse.⁴³

The second level of text world theory addresses conceptual activity and offers a framework for analysing the structure and cognitive effects of individual mental representations.⁴⁴ A core tenet of text world theory is the recognition that the text-worlds created to

40. Joanna Gavins, *Text World Theory: An Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 6

41. Gavins, *Text World Theory*, 8

42. Gavins, *Text World Theory*, 9.

43. Gavins, *Text World Theory*, 10.

44. Gavins, *Text World Theory*, 10.

understand discourse are frequently as vividly detailed as the discourse-world from which they emerge.

Addressing the issue of text world theory, Ernestine Lahey describes it as “conceptualization of the story of discourse” or what the discourse is all about.⁴⁵ According to her, two types of linguistic cues contribute to the construction of text-worlds. The first type, world-builders, includes time, place, objects and characters. These elements establish the foundational structure of the situation in which the discourse events occur. The second type of linguistic cue that shapes the progression of the text world is known as “function-advancing propositions” (narrative, discourse). These assertions make up the foreground of the text world and help to drive forward the progression of the story.⁴⁶

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Another theory that has broadened our understanding of how readers mentally create and comprehend literature is called conceptual metaphor theory. According to this theory, metaphor is a basic mechanism of human cognition that structures our reasoning and perceptions and interacts with the world, and not just a simple poetic device. Introduced by the linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson (1980), the conceptual metaphor theory asserts that intangible concepts are understood through more concrete and familiar concepts. They premise their work on the belief that metaphor is ubiquitous in everyday life, not only in language but also in cognition and behaviour, and that our common theoretical framework, which guides our thoughts and actions, is essentially metaphorical: “Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.”⁴⁷ The authors assert that metaphor extends beyond language and words. They maintain that human cognitive processes are fundamentally metaphorical. Linguistic metaphors are possible because metaphors exist within the conceptual system.

Lakoff and Johnson identify three types of metaphors—structural, orientational and ontological—as distinct ways we understand and

45. Ernestine Lahey. “Stylistics and Text World Theory,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*, ed. Michael Burke (Routledge, 2014), 286.

46. Lahey, “Stylistics,” 289.

47. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

experience concepts (an abstract or target domain in terms of another concrete or source domain). Structural metaphors refer to instances where one concept is thoroughly organized and comprehended through the framework of a more concrete concept, for example, ARGUMENT IS WAR.⁴⁸ A system of concepts is organized in relation to each other through orientational metaphor. Because most of these metaphors involve special orientation, they are referred to as orientational metaphors, for example HAPPY IS UP.⁴⁹ The third category, ontological metaphor, conceptualizes abstract concepts, activities or events as discrete, bounded entities, substances or containers. This approach facilitates reference, qualification, and identification of specific aspects—THE MIND IS A CONTAINER.⁵⁰

Peter Stockwell (2002) demonstrates that conceptual metaphor theory is a crucial analytical tool for cognitive stylistics. He views metaphor as a core pattern in the functioning of the human mind, a basic process of thought and conceptualization, rather than merely an ornamental figure of speech.⁵¹ Building on this perspective, he distinguishes between language representations of metaphors and their conceptual content.⁵² As a result, conceptual metaphor theory extends the study beyond simply identifying tropes to investigate the underlying cognitive mappings that structure the meaning of a text.⁵³ It posits that our abstract thought is structured by concrete, bodily-based metaphors, such as TIME IS MONEY.⁵⁴

Critical to conceptual metaphor theory is the concept of source and target domains, which serve as the cornerstone of metaphorical thinking. The former refers to a familiar, tangible idea that is rooted in day-to-day life or physical experiences. The latter involves abstract concepts such as time, morality, emotions, or complex systems that are often more difficult to grasp. Certain traits, connections, or structures from the source domain are conveyed to the target domain by means of systematic mapping between these domains. Such mappings help readers derive meaning from abstract phenomena in the target domain by using their intuitive knowledge of the source domain.

48. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 5.

49. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 14.

50. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 25.

51. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 105.

52. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 105.

53. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 106.

54. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 110.

Foregrounding

Another theory that has received significant scholarly attention since its introduction is foregrounding. The concept was first introduced by the Prague structuralist Jan Mukařovský in the 1930s and has recently started to be used in different senses, becoming the fundamental basis for the twentieth-century stylistics. Mukařovský maintains that figurative language is a deliberate breaking of standard language norms and this very violation is what enables the unique nature of poetic expression. Such language's meaning is considered to be its maximal deployment of foregrounding, functioning as a specific statement or declaration.⁵⁵ He views foregrounding as “the opposite of automatization that is the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become.”⁵⁶

Paul Simpson (2004) considers that foregrounding refers “to a form of textual patterning which is motivated specifically for literary-aesthetic purpose.”⁵⁷ This stylistic device entails a distinct stylistic distortion, either through a textual element that deviates from a certain linguistic norm or, conversely, through parallelism or repetition that highlights a textual element.⁵⁸ Foregrounding—as a literary stylistic technique—aims “to acquire salience in the act of drawing attention to itself” and this salience “is motivated purely by literary considerations.”⁵⁹ The critic mentions two types of foregrounding: as “deviation from the norm” and “as more of the same.”⁶⁰

Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short (2007) address the foregrounding issue by referring to it as “artistically motivated deviation.”⁶¹ This means expressing something in a novel and imaginative way. As a result, the reader is surprised by the aesthetic investigation of language. This investigation brings a new sensitivity and awareness to the linguistic medium, which is typically assumed to be the ‘automatized’ background of communication.⁶² According to them, foregrounding

55. Jan Mukařovský, “Standard Language and Poetic Language,” in *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Givin (Routledge, 2000), 226.

56. Mukařovský, “Standard Language,” 226.

57. Paul Simpson, *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students* (Routledge, 2004), 50.

58. Simpson, *Stylistics*, 50.

59. Simpson, *Stylistics*, 50.

60. Simpson, *Stylistics*, 50.

61. Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short, *Style in Fiction* (Pearson Educational, 2007), 111.

62. Leech and Short, *Style*, 23–4.

is not limited to metaphors and alliteration—more obvious devices—but it may take the form of rejecting the usually predictable clues of context coherence.⁶³ They classify foregrounding as qualitative (deviation from the language code itself) and quantitative (deviation from some expected frequency and consistency).⁶⁴

Lesley Jeffries and Daniel McIntyre (2010) consider that foregrounding refers to “features of the text which in some sense ‘stand out’ from their surroundings.”⁶⁵ They posit that “in any text some sounds, words, phrases and/or clauses may be so different from what surrounds them, or form some perceived ‘norm’ in the language generally, that they are set into relief by the difference and made more prominent as a result.”⁶⁶ For them, foregrounding can be achieved either by deviation (unexpected irregularity in language) or parallelism (unexpected regularity).⁶⁷

Katie Wales (2011) views foregrounding as “the throwing into relief of the linguistic SIGN against the BACKGROUND of the NORMS of ordinary language” with the purpose of attracting attention by making familiar language unfamiliar—defamiliarization.⁶⁸ She outlines two types of foregrounding based on the Prague School tradition: paradigmatic foregrounding (deviation)—making an element prominent by breaking a linguistic norm; and syntagmatic foregrounding (parallelism/repetition)—making an element prominent by an unexpected regularity or repetition of words, syntactic patterns or sounds.⁶⁹

The linguist John Douthwaite (2014) offers a detailed definition of foregrounding, emphasizing the creation of new meaning: “the general linguistic technique by which a marked linguistic expression is produced in order to make that expression convey a different meaning than its synonymic equivalent unmarked construction would have conveyed.”⁷⁰ Just like his contemporaries, Jeffries and McIntyre (2010), Leech (1969) or Wales (2011), Douthwaite clearly establishes deviation (deliberately committing a mistake) and parallelism (repetition in

63. Leech and Short, *Style*, 23–4.

64. Leech and Short, *Style*, 111.

65. Lesley Jeffries and Daniel McIntyre, *Stylistics* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 31.

66. Jeffries and McIntyre, *Stylistics*, 31.

67. Jeffries and McIntyre, *Stylistics*, 31.

68. Katie Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (Routledge, 2011), 166–7.

69. Wales, *Dictionary*, 166–7.

70. John Douthwaite, “The Power of Parallelism,” *Quaderni di Palazzo Serra*, no. 26 (2014): 93.

two or more parts of the text) as the two main categories of stylistic effect.⁷¹ For him, foregrounding consists of three stages:

- Recognizing that a text contains some sort of deviation
- Identifying the specific rhetorical form of the technique used to achieve foregrounding
- Interpreting how foregrounding is realized in the text and context.⁷²

Cognitive stylistics represents a major development in the analysis of literature and language. Grounding stylistic analysis in human mental processes provides a robust framework for understanding both the content of a text and the ways in which it is perceived, interpreted and experienced. A necessary paradigm shift has occurred with the introduction of cognitive stylistics, which changes the focus from the textual artifact to the reader's engagement process, which is dynamic and experiential. It demonstrates that literary meaning is actively created through a complex interaction of cognitive models, schema theory, conceptual metaphor theory, or foregrounding rather than being merely contained within the language. The above-mentioned theories have provided concrete, testable models used to understand how readers navigate intricate literary texts and how they infer emotional states, areas where traditional formalist stylistics often fell short.

The primary advantage of this approach is its capacity to move beyond descriptive or structural frameworks by placing the reader's cognitive processes at the centre of interpretive inquiry. Cognitive stylistics—through clarifying the systematic relationship between mental processes and linguistic structures—provides an empirical and verifiable source for understanding phenomena that were once regarded as matters of subjective aesthetic intuition. The combination of cognitive science and linguistic analysis establishes cognitive stylistics as an emerging interdisciplinary field. Its capacity to integrate insights from neuroscience, psychology and linguistics ensures its continued relevance in a dynamic and rapidly evolving academic field. Consequently, cognitive stylistics is well fit to address the complex relationship between language structure and artistic effect, offering a coherent and empirically based theory of meaning creation.

71. Douthwaite, "Power," 95–6.

72. Douthwaite, "Power," 97.

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