

Which One is More Literary—A Speech or a Visitor's Guide?

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Abstract

The use of texts as a source of data to test ideas or hypotheses is not widespread, but neither is it rare. The objective of this paper is to analyse two different types of texts and to determine which one is more literary than the other. Carter's (2004) model of literariness is used for the analysis. The findings reveal that the speech (text a) is dependent on itself and contains examples of stylistic and lexical features, words of contrast at text and sound level, parallelism, evocative descriptive language and cross-sentential repetition. The Greece tourist guide (text b) is medium independent and carries examples of archaic and syntactic features, emotive action verbs, evocative descriptive language, polysemy and displaced interaction. To conclude, it is quite difficult to measure which text is more literary unless the two texts are of identical genre.

Key Words: cline and models of literariness, stylistic analysis

1. Introduction

1.1 Definition of literary language / literariness

'Literary language' refers to a particular language or language variety used in literature. It also refers to a type of language—a style or mode of expression associated with literary genres such as poetry, narrative fiction or drama. 'Literariness' refers to the quality of literature/literary language. When used in referring to language in more everyday contexts these terms tend to focus on continuity with literature, for instance, Carter's (2004) argument about a cline of literariness. The term 'cline' has a similar meaning to 'continuum'. It refers to relations along a particular dimension that are a matter of degree rather than having discrete cut-off points. The notion of a literary cline, therefore, suggests that literariness is a matter of degree.

The notion of clines in itself, yet, does seem to be problematic in suggesting that there are gradations, or degrees, of literariness in texts; a difficulty here lies in how to measure this. In terms of linguistic forms, it would seem unreasonable, for example, simply to total the number of creative features used in a particular text. Whether a text is considered to be literary is unlikely to derive simply from the presence of more or fewer literary features. The concept of a cline, or sets of clines, may suggest a level of precision in the identification of literariness that cannot be attained in practice.

1.2 Ronald Carter's models of literariness

Discussing the relationship between everyday linguistic creativity and literary language begs the question of what literary language actually is. Carter (1999) identifies three models of literariness: two established models which he refers to as an *inherency model* and a *sociocultural model*; and a more recent *cognitive model*.

The inherency model sees literariness as embedding in certain formal properties of language: literary language is regarded as distinct from more 'practical' uses of language in that language itself is highlighted. Jakobson (1960:356) perceives this as the poetic function of language, where there is a 'focus on the message for its own sake'. This property of language may also be termed as self-referential—where language is referring to partly to itself and not simply to entities in the external world that are the object of discussion. While the poetic function is evident in many examples of language use, the researcher of this paper would argue that it is the dominant, determining function of verbal art.

A sociocultural model sees literariness as socially and culturally determined: for example, drawing attention to the fact that conceptions of literature vary historically and culturally. Eagleton (1996) argues that there is nothing distinctive about literary language; any text can be seen as literature if it is defined as such by institutions or if people read it as such. Anthropological studies of literary performances in various cultural contexts also tend to take a sociocultural view on literariness. Many studies focus on performance in its traditional literary or theatrical sense, to include public displays of artistic activity that are responded to aesthetically by an audience, such as story-telling, song, dance or drama. Yet, the notion is frequently extended to more everyday activity in recognition of the fact that there are parallels between 'everyday' and 'literary' performance:

'...this notion of performance can also describe what is often found in the most ordinary of encounters, when social actors exhibit a particular attention to and skills in the delivery of a message. To subscribe to and focus on this other notion of performance is more than the recognition of the fact that in speaking there is always an aesthetic dimension, understood as an attention to the form of what is being said. It also means to stress the fact that speaking itself always implies an exposure to the judgment, reaction and collaboration of an audience, which interprets, assesses, approves, sanctions, expands upon what is being said.' (Duranti, 1997:16)

The cognitive model relates literary language to mental processes. Tannen's (1989) suggestion that linguistic repetition derives from a basic human drive to repeat is a kind of cognitive argument. Cook (1994:4) argues that literary texts have an effect on the mind, helping us think in new ways and 'refreshing and changing our mental representations of the world'. Such benefits are not, however, confined to established literature: Cook (2000) has similar things to say about everyday creativity or play with language. Similarly, Gibbs (1994) claims that human language and human understanding are often metaphorical, and that literary metaphor carries on and extends everyday metaphorical notions.

Carter (1999) sees some value in both 'inherency' and 'sociocultural' models: in the case of his own examples verbal art is identified formally, and in this sense is close to an inherency model. Nevertheless, one way to find examples of verbal art in his corpus is to search for instances of laughter. This focus on what people respond to as artful is consistent with a sociocultural model. In his view, cognitive model is beneficial in that it can help explain the prevalence of creativity in everyday language. His main argument is that literariness is best seen as a cline, or a series of clines: it is appropriate to see texts as more, or less, literary rather than in terms of an opposition between literary and non-literary language.

2. Purpose of the study

Two literary texts (Appendix) were chosen for analysis. One is Martin Luther King's speech; the other is a visitor's guide to Greece. They both exhibit elements of stylistic features and their tone is persuasive and convincing. Martin's speech is widely regarded as one of the most powerful speeches ever delivered in the United States. It is an example of formal English with a convincing style. A lot of stylistic devices (which may be considered traditionally as rhetorical devices) are used to inspire and persuade the reader. The city guide, on the other hand, is also persuasive. Evocative descriptive language, which creates a lot of beautiful images, is found in this written discourse. The reader, on reading the text, may be attracted to visit Greece one day. The two analysed texts appear to be quite different but they both contain some elements of literariness. The objective of the present study is, therefore, to identify, compare and analyse the stylistic features in these texts and determine which one is more 'literary' than the other.

3. Hypothesis

The speech would seem more 'literary' than the Greece visitor's guide because it meets most of Carter's (2004) criteria for a 'literary' text. His criteria include a) medium dependence, b) genre-mixing, c) semantic density, d) polysemy, e) displaced interaction and f) text patterning.

4. Limitations

The limitations are twofold. First, excerpts are used for analysis; hence, a complete analysis of stylistic elements is impossible. Second, the two excerpts are of different genres and they both display some features of 'literariness' to different degrees.

5. Methodology

Two excerpts, taken from a speech and the Greece visitor's guide, were selected for analysis. They are analysed in terms of Carter's (2004) criteria. Reference to the criteria can enable us to decide what is prototypical in conventional literary language use. These criteria can help us determine the degree of literariness and provide a systematic ground for saying one text is more 'literary' than the other.

6. Result

6.1 Medium dependence

The concept of medium dependence means that the more literary a text, the less it will be dependent for its reading on another medium or media, for instance, abbreviations, illustrations and pictorial supplements. In this respect, the speech is dependent only on itself for its 'reading' whereby it generates a world of internal references and relies only on its own capacity to project. Yet, this is not to suggest that it cannot be determined by external political or social or biographical influences. No text can be so completely autonomous that it refers only to itself nor so rich that a reader's own experience of human rights it refers to.

To a lesser extent, the visitor's guide could be said to be medium dependent because it is highly likely to be accompanied by some means of pictorial supplements.

6.2 Genre-mixing

Genres such as legal language or the language of instructions are recognized by the neat fit between language form and specific function; but any language can be used to literary effect by the process of genre-mixing, that is, no single word or stylistic feature or genre is prohibited from admission to a literary context. For instance, broad use of journalistic and historical styles is made in Rushdie's novels *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983). It is not suggesting that certain stylistic or lexical features are not appreciably more 'literary' than others; but words like 'twain', 'eftsoons', 'azure', 'steed', 'verdure', together with archaic, syntactic forms belong to a past literary domain. They are associated with what was considered to be suitably elevated and decorous in poetic language and were automatically used as such, losing in the process any contact with a living, current idiom and becoming fossilized and restrictedly 'literary'. Genre-mixing recognizes that the full, unrestricted resources of the language are open to exploitation for literary ends. In the speech, examples of stylistic and lexical features, archaic and syntactic forms are 'creed', 'sweltering' and 'oasis'. Five examples are found in the visitor's guide: 'caldera', 'banded silhouette', 'soul-stirring', 'sky-clinging' and 'renaissance'.

6.3 Semantic density

This is one of the most important defining criteria. The idea is that a text that is perceived as resulting from the additive interaction of several linguistic levels is recognized as more literary than a text where there are fewer levels at work or where they are present but do not interact as densely. There are different linguistic levels at work in these two texts. They can be compared from an interactive patterning at the levels of syntax, lexis, phonology and text. The most outstanding of these patterns is contrast. There are contrasts on the level of lexis. Examples in the speech are 'slums and ghettos' and 'today and tomorrow'. No example is found in the visitor's guide. Grammar, lexis and semantics are complemented by effects at the level of phonology. Examples of alliteration in the speech are 'dream deeply', 'state sweltering' and 'content...character'. There is only one instance of alliteration in the visitor's guide: 'soul-stirring'. For emotive action verbs, three instances are found in the speech--'go back', 'rise up' and 'live out', with seven instances found in the visitor's guide—'laughing', 'dance', 'marvel', 'share', 'lying', 'enjoying' and 'nibble'. For the use of contrast, two examples are found in the speech: '...a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice' and '...where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character', with no example in the visitor's guide.

Parallelism is another syntactic over-regularity. It means exact repetition in equivalent positions. It differs from simple repetition that the identity does not extend to absolute duplication; it 'requires some variable feature of the pattern—some contrasting elements which are 'parallel' with respect to their position in the pattern' (Leech, 1969:66). To put it simply, parallelism means the balancing of sentence elements that are grammatically equal. To make them parallel, balance nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, clauses with clauses, and so forth. In Martin's speech, he uses parallelism to create a strong rhythm to help the audience line up his ideas. Here are some examples: 'go back to'(6 times), 'I have a dream' (6 times), 'that one day' (3 times), and 'sweltering with the heat of' (2 times). No instance is found in the visitor's guide.

Seven instances of conversational elements (the use of the second person) are found in the visitor's guide: 'at your feet', 'your vacation', 'Once you', 'If you're', 'not yourself', 'Are you' and 'your special', but no instance is found in the speech. For repetition, there are two examples in the speech: 'dream' (9 times) and 'I' (7 times). Finally, for evocative descriptive language, eight instances are found in the visitor's guide: 'view of the volcanic caldera', 'clear Greek sky', 'dance the syrtaki', 'sky-clinging monasteries', 'Samaria Gorge', 'deserted beach', 'Dream Islands' and 'athletic journey', with one instance in the speech: 'Greece' (4 times).

6.4 Polysemy

Polysemy is a regular feature of advertisements which is perhaps best referred to as plurisignifying rather than polysemic in that it shares the capacity of many advertisements to be memorable and to provide a verbal pleasure which can result in frequent citation. No instance is found in the speech, with two examples in the visitor's guide: 'period' and 'drink'.

6.5 Displaced interaction

A displaced interaction in a text allows meanings to emerge indirectly and obliquely. What we traditionally regard as 'literary' is likely to be a text in which the context-bound interaction between author and reader is displaced.

The idea of displaced interaction helps differentiate the suggestions for activity in the visitor's guide, in which readers, if they visit Greece, may well perform: '...trying to dance the syrtaki', '...lying on a deserted beach' and '...just nibble a cheese pie breakfast'.

6.6 Text patterning

Criteria for literariness discussed so far have centred mostly on effects at sentence level. At the level of text, effects can be located which can help us further differentiate degrees of literariness. In the speech, patterning at the level of text appears by virtue of repetition of the particulars of the avenue is shown below:

Go back to Mississippi,
go back to Alabama,
go back to South Carolina,
go back to Georgia.

The above is also an example of parallel structure which is found commonly in literary texts. The main effect of cross-sentential repetition here, reinforced by repeated syntactic patterns of clauses and tenses, is to represent the lingering presence and progress of the movement as if the readers were actually engaged in a journey. Example of text patterning is not found in the visitor's guide.

7 Conclusion and Recommendation

As analysed above, stylistic devices (or rhetorical devices) are frequently used in the discourse of literary works especially in speech and the visitor's guide, to achieve certain effects or specific purposes, thus making the style of these two genres somewhat particular to others. Generally speaking, a speech contains the following stylistic characteristics. To begin with, it must be very persuasive. Thus the sentence patterns are very well-organized, with repetitions, parallelism and contrasts frequently used. Second, it should be emotional so as to be convincing, because the speaker should face the audience directly and his/her words should not only be orderly and informative but also be expressive and inspiring. Finally, in many cases, written-conversational style is usually used with not very formal diction and not very complicated sentence structure.

The visitor's guide, on the other hand, includes the following rhetorical features. First, it must be very persuasive and tempting. Thus the sentence patterns are very simple but clear and straightforward, with a lot of elliptical sentences. Second, emotive action verbs are used to create a vivid and enjoyable atmosphere. Finally, evocative descriptive language is used to create substantial superb beautiful images of the avenue to attract the potential visitors. To conclude, the speech a) is dependent only on itself for its 'reading'; b) exhibits a few examples of stylistic, lexical, archaic features and syntactic forms; c) shows substantial examples of 'semantic density' which can be contrasted at lexical and phonological level; has some examples of 'emotive action verbs' and 'parallel structure'; d) has no example of 'polysemy'; e) displays no example of 'displaced interaction'; and f) indicates a number of cross-sentential repetition at textual level.

The visitor's guide, on the other hand, a) could be said to be medium dependent because it is likely accompanied by pictorial supplements; b) has some examples of archaic words; c) displays one example of phonological effect; some examples of 'emotive action verbs'; substantial examples of 'conversational elements' (the use of the second person) and 'evocative descriptive language'; d) has two instances of 'polysemy'; and e) is displaced between the author and the reader.

If we examine Ronald Carter's notion of literariness, we can spot that this perspective is problematic since he suggests that there are gradations, or degrees, of literariness in texts; a difficulty here lies in how to measure this. In terms of linguistic forms, it would seem unreasonable, therefore, simply to total the number of stylistic features used in a particular text. Whether a text is considered to be literary is unlikely to derive simply from the presence of more or fewer literary features. Both the speech and the visitor's guide contain attributes of literariness and consequently it is quite difficult to determine which text is more 'literary' than the other. The recommendation, therefore, is to use two identical genres, for instance, two speeches (complete versions, not excerpts), and compare them thoroughly at lexical, phonological, semantic, syntactic and stylistic level. This is the avenue for future research.

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Appendix

Text a

I Have a Dream

By Martin Luther King, Jr.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair. I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal'. I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Text b

Choose Greece for Your Vacation

Here's why

The world is at your feet – so why choose Greece for your vacation destination? Once you visit Greece, that question is answered. Period, over and out. If you're just considering your first trip, here are some highlights. The view of the volcanic caldera from the banded cliffs of one of the [Cycladic Isles](#)--Santorini. In [Athens](#), the potently moving silhouette of the Parthenon against the clear Greek sky.

The delightful, soul-stirring [music](#) and laughing at yourself trying to dance the syrtaki. Marvel at the sky-clinging monasteries of Meteora, or share the deep silence of the Samaria Gorge on [Crete](#). Want a quiet vacation, lying on a deserted beach? Try a few [Dream Islands](#). Are you an [ecotourist](#), or want a challenging athletic journey? If wine and food are your special pleasures, Greece is full of new discoveries as both cuisine and drink are enjoying a renaissance. Or just nibble a [cheese pie breakfast](#) in the village of Adami.