

# STYLISTICS IN THE EFL WORLD: POINTS TO PONDER

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## Abstract

*This paper seeks to offer a thought-provoking idea on how literary texts can promote English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' communicative competence and enhance their critical thinking skills. With the ultimate aim of emphasizing quality education in mind, the paper adopts the idea that literature plays an essential role in EFL contexts. Generally speaking, there are three main merits for a literary education program; namely, developing learners' scope of literary understanding and critical judgment for aesthetic purposes, presenting a broad spectrum of the ideals as expressed in the world's great works, and improving all aspects of the comprehension process: affective consideration, readiness consideration, and so on (Al Alami, 2009). Providing learners with literature experiences is, therefore, central to effective instruction.*

**Keywords:** *EFL, literary texts, communicative competence, critical thinking*

## 1. Introduction

The current paper aims to offer a thought-provoking idea on how literary texts can augment EFL learners' communicative competence and enhance their critical thinking skills. Emphasizing quality education, the paper adopts the idea that literature plays an important contribution to EFL learning contexts. Adopting this view, the paper seeks some convincing answers to the two questions below:

How can EFL instructors maximize the effectiveness of using literature to enhance students' communicative competence and develop their critical thinking skills?

How can EFL instructors maximize the effectiveness of using literature through employing a stylistics approach?

Part Two of the paper presents a theory and an approach within EFL contexts. Part Three proceeds to highlight the author's criteria for selecting literary texts, and Part Four discusses the author's proposed procedure for dealing with literary texts, through presenting the story *Three Is a Lucky Number* by Margery Allingham alongside the writer's suggested procedure. The paper concludes with some recommendations for EFL instructors and specialists to consider.

## 1.1. Literary texts within EFL Contexts: Theories and Approaches

What theories and approaches can be adopted to ensure quality education in the world of EFL literature? This part of the paper presents a theory and an approach within this field.

To begin with, the role of emotion in education has taken on more and more importance in the field. A number of specialists argue that understanding and managing our emotions has impacted the educational sphere (see for example Dawson, 2007; Brearely 2000). Stressing the significant role emotion plays, Dawson (2007) introduces a reading theory for the teaching of World Englishes literature. The proposed theory emphasizes the universality of human emotion, and is based on affective responses to literary works. Happiness; fear; anger; and sadness, Dawson believes, are what make up the embodiment of a universality of human emotion, and thus, should be viewed as the main vehicle for engagement with a literary text. The theory is referred to as 'emotion tracking pedagogy' and has been initiated for the teaching of World Englishes literature. The role emotion plays in reading is significant; it is the primary resource a reader holds to make text mean. While decoding a text at various levels, a reader strives for the text to mean. Affect plays a primary role in this meaning construction. When discussing the role of affect, attention should be given to the importance of affective responses.

A number of specialists recommend the use of a stylistics approach when dealing with literary texts. Both Leech and Short (2007), for instance, assert that we normally study style because we want to explain something, and in general, literary stylistics has the aim of explaining the relation between language and artistic function. The motivating questions are not so much what, as why and how.

Cook (2003) argues that literary stylistics has proved to be effective in EFL/ESL contexts; it links linguistic choices to their effects upon the reader, raising learners' awareness not only of the importance of exact wording, but also of how there is far more at stake in the use of language than the literal meaning of the words. Stylistic analyses tend to highlight three related aspects of literary language: its patterning of linguistic units to create rhymes; rhythms; and parallel constructions, its frequent deviation from the norms of more everyday language use, and the way in which the form of the words seems to intensify the meaning.

According to Crawshaw (1996), the study of stylistics is an integrated discipline that brings together the complementary domains of linguistics, psychology, and sociology. Any utterance or text, fictional or otherwise, takes place or is created by a speaker/author in a given context, and is articulated in a particular form to represent an intention or view of the world. The form of the message is a product both of context and of intention, just as intention can be understood only as a function of context and form.

Carter and Long (1991), on the other hand, divide stylistics into two types: linguistic and literary. Linguistic stylistics is derived from the study of style and language variation. Literary stylistics, by contrast, provides a basis for a fuller understanding, appreciation, and interpretation of literary texts. Short (1983) explains that sensitivity to literature can be taught by providing the student with a descriptive tool applicable to any literary passage, by means of which he/she can assess the deviance and richness of the text against the norms of everyday language. This is valuable to the foreign learner in particular because it enhances his/her appreciation by reinforcing knowledge of the regularities he/she will meet in non-literary language. Instead of leaping into interpretation and then evaluation, students should be urged to devote more time to explicit description, over which they are more likely to agree. Hence, stylistic analysis should be central to the teaching of literature, since it is only by demonstrating the explicit link between linguistic structures and meaning/effect that we will understand how literature works.

To conclude, stylistics can contribute to effective teaching of EFL due to its capacity for dealing with language in an engaging way. This, therefore, can be seen amongst the main reasons for the success of stylistics in the EFL world (Al Alami, 2014).

#### 111. Proposed Criteria for Selecting Literary Texts within EFL Contexts

Motivation, pleasure reading, and fun are within the main criteria to be emphasized when discussing literary texts in EFL contexts. To meet these criteria, the overriding question in selecting a literary text is how the literary text can improve the learning process.

The author proposes some criteria that can be taken into consideration while choosing a literary text for teaching purposes. These are:

*Cultural appropriateness:* Opening the door for EFL students to the foreign culture, a literary text can be used to enrich cultural awareness (Chen, 2006; Reese, 2002). To maximize the effectiveness of using literary texts, the text has to be appropriate in terms of cultural content; it should not be culturally offensive. Furthermore, 'cultural allusion' where unfamiliar cultural content can be one of the contributing factors which may lead to learners' failure in understanding a literary text has to be avoided (Baba, 2008).

*Language complexity:* A text has to be of the right language complexity level; in other words, it should be neither too difficult nor too easy; otherwise, it will be either too challenging or too simple to deal with. Language complexity can be measured in terms of the vocabulary, grammar, and structure used in a text, considering the extent to which such language elements are frequent/infrequent; standard/colloquial; familiar/unfamiliar; and modern/archaic. Logically speaking, the more frequent, standard, familiar and modern a piece of language is, the easier EFL learners may find to deal with.

*Variety:* Variety in terms of theme, setting, and style exposes learners to different experiences, and therefore, is expected to be of interest to them.

*Age group's interests:* A text has to suit the target group in terms of content. A twenty-year old student, for example, may not be interested in reading a text dealing with childhood issues.

*Length:* A text has to be practical in terms of length. It should not be too long a text, or else, it may be time-consuming in contexts where the time factor is crucial.

*Authenticity:* A text has to be authentic rather than simplified to expose learners to language used for genuine purposes.

*Relative contemporary:* Considering EFL contexts where learners are mainly interested to learn English for communication purposes, language familiarity has a role to play. Part of what makes language familiar is the era during which it is written. Old English in such situations might not be of genuine support to EFL learners whose

study major is not English, but have to learn the English language as a school/university requirement (Al Alami, 2016).

#### VI. Literary Texts in the EFL Classroom: Suggested Procedure

This part of the paper presents a short story by Margery Allingham along with a proposed procedure which the author thinks can be of use when dealing with literary texts, short stories in particular, within EFL contexts.

##### *Three is a Lucky Number by Margery Allingham*

At five o'clock on a September afternoon Ronald Torbay was making preparations for his third murder. He was being very careful. He realized that murdering people becomes more dangerous if you do it often.

He was in the bathroom of the house that he had recently rented. For a moment he paused to look in the mirror. The face that looked back at him was thin, middle-aged and pale. Only the mouth was unusual-narrow and quite straight. Even Ronald Torbay did not like his own mouth.

A sound in the kitchen below worried him. Was Edyth coming up to have her bath before he had prepared it for her? No, it was all right; she was going out of the back door. From the window he saw her disappearing round the side of the house into the small square garden. It was exactly like all the other gardens in the long street. He didn't like her to be alone there. She was a shy person, but now new people had moved into the house next door, and there was a danger of some silly woman making friends with her. He didn't want that just now.

Each of his three marriages had followed the same pattern. Using a false name, he had gone on holiday to a place where no one knew him. There he had found a middle-aged, unattractive woman, with some money of her own and no family. He had talked her into marrying him, and she had then agreed to make a will which left him all her money. Both his other wives had been shy, too. He was very careful to choose the right type of woman; someone who would not make friends quickly in a new place.

Mary, the first of them, had had her deadly "accident" almost unnoticed, in the bathroom of the house he had rented-a house very like this one, but in the north of England instead of the south. The police had not found anything wrong. The only person who was interested was a young reporter on the local newspaper. He had written something about death in the middle of happiness, and had printed photographs of Mary's wedding and her funeral, which took place only three weeks after the wedding.

Dorothy had given him a little more trouble. It was not true that she was completely alone in the world, as she had told him. Her brother had appeared at the funeral, and asked difficult questions about her money. There had been a court case, but Ronald had won it, and the insurance company had paid him the money.

All that was four years ago. Now, with a new name, a newly invented background, and a different area to work in, he felt quite safe.

From the moment he saw Edyth sitting alone at a little table in the restaurant of a seaside hotel, he knew she was his next "subject". He could see from her face that she was not happy. And he could also see that she was wearing a valuable ring.

After dinner he spoke to her. She did not want to talk at first, but in the end he managed to start a conversation. After that, everything went as he expected. His methods were old-fashioned and very romantic, and by the end of a week she was in love with him.

Her background was very suitable for Ronald's purpose. After teaching at a girls' school for ten years, she had gone home to look after her sick father and had stayed with him until he died. Now, aged forty-three, she was alone, with a lot of money, and she didn't know what to do with herself.

Five weeks after they met, Ronald married her, in the town where they were both strangers. The same afternoon they both made a will leaving all their property to each other. Then they moved into the house which he had rented cheaply because the holiday season was at an end. It was the most pleasant of his marriages. He found Edyth a cheerful person, and even quite sensible-except that it was stupid of her to believe that a man would fall in love with her at first sight. Ronald knew he must not make the mistake of feeling sorry for her. He began to make plans for "her future", as he called it.

Two things made him do this earlier than he intended. One was the way she refused to talk about her money. She kept all her business papers locked in a desk drawer, and refused to discuss them. His other worry was her unnecessary interest in his job. Ronald had told Edyth that he was a partner in an engineering company, which was giving him a long period of absence. Edyth accepted the story, but she asked a lot of questions and wanted to visit his office and the factory.

So Ronald had decided that it was time to act.

He turned from the window, and began to run water into the bath. His heart was beating loudly, he noticed. He didn't like that. He needed to keep very calm.

The bathroom was the only room they had painted. He had done it himself soon after they arrived. He had also put up the little shelf over the bath which held their bottles and creams and a small electric heater. It was a cheap one, with two bars, and it was white, like the walls, and not too noticeable. There was no electric point in the bathroom, but he was able to connect the heater to a point just outside the door.

He turned on the heater now, and watched the bars become red and hot. Then he went out of the room. The controls for all the electricity in the house were inside a cupboard at the top of the stairs. Ronald opened the door carefully and pulled up the handle, which turned off the electricity. (He had a cloth over his hand, so that he would not leave fingertips.)

Back in the bathroom the bars of the heater were turning black again. Still using the cloth, he lifted the heater from the shelf and put it into the bath water, at the bottom end of the bath. Of course, you could still see it. It looked as if it had fallen off the shelf by accident.

Edyth was coming back from the garden; he could hear her moving something outside the kitchen door. He pulled a small plastic bottle out of his pocket and began to read again the directions on the back.

A small sound behind him turned suddenly. There was Edyth's head, only two meters away, appearing above the flat roof of the kitchen which was below the bathroom window. She was clearing the dead leaves from the edge of the roof. She must be standing on the ladder which was kept outside the kitchen door.

He stayed calm. "What are you doing there, dear?"

Edyth was so surprised that she nearly fell of the ladder. "Oh, you frightened me! I thought I'd just do this little job before I came to get ready".

"But I'm preparing your beauty bath for you".

"It's kind of you to take all this trouble, Ronald".

"Not at all. I'm taking you out tonight and I want you to look as nice as – possible. Hurry up, dear. The bubbles don't last very long, and like all these beauty treatments, this one's expensive. Go and undress now, and come straight here".

"Very well, dear". She began to climb down the ladder.

Ronald opened the little bottle, and poured the liquid into the bath. He turned on the water again, and in a moment the bath was full of bubbles, smelling strongly of roses. They covered the little heater completely; they even covered the sides of the bath.

Edyth was at the door. "Oh Ronald! It's all over everything – even on the floor!"

"That doesn't matter. You get in quickly, before it loses its strength. I'll go and change now. Get straight in and lie down. It will give your skin a bit of colour".

He went out and paused, listening. She locked the door, as he expected. He walked slowly to the electricity box, and forced himself to wait another minute.

"How is it?" he shouted.

"I don't know yet. I've only just got into the bath. It smells nice".

"One, two...three", he said, and pulled the handle down. A small explosion from the electric point behind him told him that the electricity had gone off. Then everything was silent.

After some time he went and knocked on the bathroom door. "Edyth?"

There was no answer, no sound, nothing.

Now he had to prepare the second stage. As he knew well, this was the difficult bit. The discovery of the body must be made, but not too soon. He had made this mistake with Dorothy's "accident", and the police had asked him why he had got worried so soon. This time he decided to wait half an hour before he began to knock loudly on the bathroom door, then to shout for a neighbour and finally to force the lock.

There was something he wanted to do now. Edyth's leather writing-case, which contained all her private papers, was in the drawer where she kept her blouses. He had discovered it some time ago, but he had not forced the lock open because that would frighten her. Now there was nothing to stop him.

He went softly into the bedroom and opened the drawer. The case was there. The lock was more difficult than he expected, but he finally managed to open the case. Inside there were some financial documents, one or two thick envelopes and, on top of these, her Post Office Savings book.

He opened it with shaking fingers, and began reading the figures. £17,000... £ 18,000...£21,940...He turned over a page, and his heart jumped wildly. On 4<sup>th</sup> September she had taken almost all the money out of her savings account! Perhaps it was here, in these thick envelopes? He opened one of them; papers, letters, documents fell on the floor.

Suddenly he saw an envelope with his own name on it, in Edyth's writing. He pulled it open, and saw in surprise that the date on the letter was only two days ago.

Dear Ronald,

If you ever read this, I am afraid it will be a terrible shock to you. I hoped it would not be necessary to write it, but now your behavior has forced me to face some very unpleasant possibilities.

Did you not realize, Ronald, that any middle-aged woman who has been rushed into marriage to a stranger will ask herself about her husband's reason for marrying her?

At first I thought I was in love with you, but when you asked me to make my will on our wedding day, I began to worry. And then, when you started making changes to the bathroom in this house, I decided to act quickly. So I went to the police.

Have you noticed that the people who have moved into the house next door have never spoken to you? Well, they are not a husband and a wife, but a police inspector and a policewoman. The policewoman showed me two pieces from old newspapers, both about women who had died from accidents in their baths soon after their marriages. Both pieces included a photograph of the husband at the funeral. They were not very clear, but I was able to recognize you. So I realized that it was my duty to agree to do what the Inspector asked me to do. (The police have been looking for the man since the photographs were taken to them by your second wife's brother.) The Inspector said the police needed to be sure that you were guilty: you must be given the opportunity to try the crime again. That's why I am forcing myself to be brave, and to play my part.

I want to tell you something, Ronald. If one day you lose me, out of the bathroom, I mean, you will find that I have gone out over the kitchen roof, and am sitting in the kitchen next door. I was stupid to marry you, but not quite as stupid as you thought.

Yours,

Edith

Ronald's mouth was uglier than ever when he finished reading the letter. The house was still quiet. But in the silence he heard the back door open suddenly, and heavy footsteps rushed up the stairs towards him.

### *Glossary*

murder: a crime of killing unlawfully

funeral: a ceremony of burying a dead person

background: a person's family, experience, & education

valuable: worth a lot of money

property: that which is owned

sensible: having or showing good sense

bubbles: balls of liquid containing air or gas

drawer: a sliding boxlike container with an open top

lock: an apparatus for closing and fastening something by means of a key

realize: understand

duty: what one must do either because of one's job or because one thinks it's right

guilty: having broken a law or disobeyed a moral or social rule

### **WARM UP**

#### **Brainstorming**

Why is it important to be careful about the use of electricity in a bathroom?

#### **Advance Organiser**

Based on the title, what speculations can you make about the content of the story?

### **READING IN ACTION**

#### **As you read find out**

- A. how many times Torbay got married.
- B. why Edyth was a suitable lady for Torbay's purpose.

#### **Keeping track**

Question-Generating Strategy: Think of an "*I wonder*" question. Write it down, and then read the first three paragraphs to answer your question. Write the answer when you have found it. Ask yourself another "*I wonder*"

question, and then read the next three paragraphs to answer your question. Continue to read small segments making sure that you ask yourself a question before starting to read again. When you have finally finished, write the most important ideas.

**Close study – focus on setting**

A. Complete the *setting log* provided below.

Sequence of Events	Time	Place
Beginning:		
Main event:		
Main event:		
End:		

B. How important is the setting to the plot of the story “Three is a Lucky Number”? Justify your answer.

**Reader’s response**

- A. What do you think would happen next?
- B. Do you think Ronald Torbay was a partner in an engineering company? Justify your answer.

**Follow up**

Have you ever read other stories written by Margery Allingham? Search the Internet to find some of the author’s publications.

**LANGUAGE PRACTICE**

**Word finder**

Find the words which are similar in meaning to each of the following:

- A. lately ( paragraph 2 )
- B. an event after a person’s death ( paragraph 5 )
- C. caused to flow a liquid ( paragraph 26 )
- D. connected with money ( paragraph 37 )

**Grammar focus – past perfect**

Read paragraph five and then write the verbs used in the past perfect tense in the paragraph.

**Literary qualities**

“It was the most pleasant of his marriages”.

In what way does the story “Three is a Lucky Number” have a touch of irony? Justify your answer referring to the statement given above.

**ORAL PRODUCTION**

**Act out:**

- A. the conversation between Ronald and Edyth when they first met in the hotel.
- B. Edyth’s conversation with a police officer after escaping from the bathroom.

**WRITER’S WORKSHOP**

**Know your purpose – offering advice**

- A. **Pre-writing.** What advice would you give to a friend of yours about how to succeed in life? Make a list of the points which you think would be of use to him/her.
- B. **Drafting.** You should now be ready to draft your piece.
- C. **Proof-reading.** Check for mistakes in word choice, spelling and punctuation.
- D. **Publishing for your classroom journal.** Use pins to hang your writing piece on a line in your classroom.



**SELF EVALUATION**

Use the PM Chart below to reflect on your progress in English.

Plus	Minus

**BUILDING UP YOUR PORTFOLIO**

Write an account of the main events in the story “Three is a Lucky Number” as they may appear in a newspaper. (Al Alami, 2013)

**V. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The current paper adopts the view that literary texts play an essential role in EFL contexts. Adopting this view, the paper seeks some convincing answers to the following questions:

How can EFL instructors maximize the effectiveness of using literature to enhance students’ communicative competence and develop their critical thinking skills?

How can EFL instructors maximize the effectiveness of using literature through employing a stylistics approach?

As far as the first question is concerned, learners should be offered sufficient exposure to literature as well as given adequate practice in all four language skills whilst at the same time focusing on critical thinking. To sufficiently answer the second question, the writer suggests that it is through involvement that EFL learners can become well-equipped with communicative competence and critical thinking skills. To fulfill this requirement, three types of involvement are needed; namely, affective, cognitive, and interactive. Students need to be involved affectively, cognitively, and interactively with the literary text being discussed (Al Alami, 2009).

Based on the aforementioned answers, the questions to pose and address would be concerned with what and how. What types of literary texts should students be exposed to as well as have practice in? Amongst the criteria, which the author proposes, should be borne in mind when selecting literary texts for teaching purposes are: language complexity, cultural appropriateness, variety, length, authenticity, relative contemporary, and age group’s interests. Concerned with the question how; that is, methodology, it is the author’s belief that the language instructor is the key to effective teaching. The instructor’s success is determined to a large degree by his/her ability to organize material, thus selecting and employing what would suit students the best. The variety of theories and approaches proposed within the field of EFL literature should provide language teachers with an insight into what tool(s) is/are needed for a particular situation and why (a) particular tool(s) is/are needed rather than any others.

On a final note, it would be appropriate to consider literature as an effective input which EFL teaching practitioners can use, to develop not only students’ language skills but also their cultural awareness and critical thinking. Furthermore, being acquainted with stylistics raises EFL students’ awareness of certain features of language, enables them to implement the knowledge in their language production, promotes their language competence, as well as enhances their critical thinking skills (Al Alami, 2009; 2014). To encounter challenges and satisfy demands, the selection of appropriate literary texts, the use of relevant approaches and strategies, and the implementation of purposeful curricula, can yield in quality education for all to learn and gain.

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