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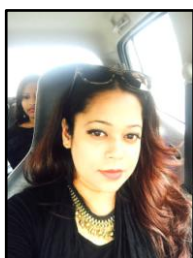
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

STYLISTICS OF TECHNICAL WRITING AND CREATIVE WRITING: A COMPARATIVE AND CONTRASTIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Our growth as civilized beings depends on our ability to comprehend the use of a language. Writing is a skill which is characteristic of evolution. There are several kinds of writing and different styles associated with each form of writing. The researcher of this thesis proposes to analyse the stylistics of technical writing and creative writing, thereby investigating the rhetorical variations between them. Writing is not itself a variety of language, it is a visible medium as opposed to speech which is audible. Though many linguists advocate that speech is primary and written form is secondary, it is important to understand that writing is a reflection of speech.

It is important to understand the difference between the stylistics of the two forms of writing to eliminate any possible misconception. In view of the fact that the thesis is a comparative and contrastive study of technical writing and creative writing, the similarities and dissimilarities will be highlighted. The personal experience of the researcher as a technical writer in Cognizant Technology Solutions and as a creative writer, who had the opportunity to meet eminent Indian writers (an initiative of SCILET – Study Center for Indian Literature in English and Translation – The American College, Madurai, India) and publish writings in different genres, has been advantageous in implementing a ‘*correlation analysis*’ between the subjects taken up for study.

Keywords: Technical Writing, Creative Writing, Stylistics, Writing, Style, Meaning, Difference, Compare and Contrast.

In this third millennium, the world is rapidly growing with the advancement of science and technology. Arts and Humanities have also witnessed transition in the modern era. Our growth as civilized beings depends on our ability to comprehend the use of a language. Writing is a skill which is characteristic of evolution. There are several kinds of writing and different styles associated with each form of writing. The researcher of this thesis proposes to analyse the stylistics of technical writing and creative writing, thereby

investigating the rhetorical variations between them.

Linguistics is a scientific study of language and its use; stylistics is a part of applied linguistics which analyses the various elements of style determining the connections between the form and effects within a particular variety of language. G. W. Turner defines stylistics as “the study of style, with a suggestion, from the form of a word, of a scientific or at least a methodical study.” In this thesis, the researcher intends to highlight the similarities and

differences that pertain to the form, content, diction and presentation of ideas in the two types of writing taken up for scrutiny.

Thomas S. Kane in his book, *The New Oxford Guide to Writing*, classifies writing under two broad assumptions:

- i. Writing is a rational activity
- ii. Writing as a valuable activity

Writing is a rational activity because it is an exercise of mind requiring the mastery of techniques and it is a valuable activity because we create ourselves by words. The rational and valuable properties propounded by Kane can be used to explain technical writing and creative writing respectively. Writing is not itself a variety of language, it is a visible medium as opposed to speech which is audible. Though many linguists advocate that speech is primary and written form is secondary, it is important to understand that writing is a reflection of speech. Moreover, it is challenging to convey what is intended because the tonal qualities of speech can be more effective than a written script in which there is a possibility of misinterpretation. This aspect is evident when G.M. Turner in his book, *Stylistics*, says that, "It is difficult to describe the distinguishing characteristics of written language because the less important ones are obvious and the more important ones subtle." He adds on to say that, "Writing brings together people who would otherwise have no contact, making a reality of large cohesive political units and giving them a historical dimension longer and more exact than an oral tradition can maintain." It is for these reasons that the researcher aims to consider the two variants of the visible (written) medium.

It is important to understand the difference between the stylistics of the two forms of writing to eliminate any possible misconception. In view of the fact that the thesis is a comparative and contrastive study of technical writing and creative writing, the similarities and dissimilarities will be highlighted.

According to Somerset Maugham "if you can tell stories, create characters, devise incidents, have sincerity and passion, it doesn't matter a damn how you write." In view with his quote, creative writing can be defined as a means to present ideas and thoughts in an imaginative way, expressing

feelings and emotions rather than putting across mere facts. This can be related to freewriting as "just sitting down and writing whatever comes into your mind about a topic." However, one has to bear in mind that there are subtle variations between creative writing and freewriting. On the other hand, Your Dictionary (online) defines technical writing as "a type of writing where the author is writing about a particular subject that requires direction, instruction, or explanation. This style of writing has a very different purpose and different characteristics than other writing styles such as creative writing, academic writing or business writing."

Creative writing can be best defined by giving examples of the genres of writing which involve imagination: novels, poems, epics, short stories, screen plays, songs, television scripts, etc. Whereas, technical writing is about formulating instruction manuals, policy manuals, process manuals, user manuals or guides, reports of analysis (limitations or bug fixes in a particular version if any), instructions for assembling a product or a summary that condenses a long report. The subject of creative writing can be anything that triggers the spontaneity of the writer. In Wordsworth's words, 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' not just for poetry, but any creative work. In contrast, the subject of technical writing can either be tangible or abstract. For instance, tangible as a computer or software program, or information on how to use a home appliance; and abstract as the steps required to complete an office process.

There are two factors that constitute the style of technical writing and creative writing: 'factual' and 'emotive', respectively. Since technical writing is about providing accurate details or facts, it has no scope for emotions or variable meaning of words. It is like 'calling a spade a spade'. Conversely, the term 'emotive' originated by A. Marty in Germany in 1908, became popular in English speaking countries after the appearance of C.K Ogden and I.A. Richards', *The Meaning of Meaning*, in 1923. In this book, the authors tried to dispel a simplified idea that meaning is merely the attachment of a particular 'word' to a particular 'thing'. The expressiveness or emotions kindled by the use of symbolic representations is what matters

in creative writing. It pertains to T.S Eliot's theory of 'Objective Correlative' which can be applied to explicate the artistic and literary technique of representing or evoking a particular emotion.

As stylistics emphasizes the analysis of various elements of style, it is mandatory to discuss it in relation to the two types of writing. It is necessary to evaluate and assess the style of a particular work in relation to the purpose of that work. The purpose of creative writing is to 'entertain' while that of technical writing is to 'inform'. Therefore, creative writers adopt an informal style as opposed to technical writers who use a formal and impersonal style.

Both these forms of writing have certain elements that are common: clarity, unity, coherence, emphasis and interest. Lavoisier Lamar in his book, *Pattern and Purpose in Writing*, groups these elements as five cardinal principals of good rhetoric. To achieve these, one has to understand the purpose of the written material. Lamar came up with three considerations that combine in formulating purpose: "the *ideas* the writer wishes to convey, the *audience* he wishes to impress, and the specific *effect* he wishes to have on the audience." He added on that, "A writer, therefore, must as soon as possible answer the following questions. *What* do I want to say? To *whom* do I want to say it? What *effect* do I want to have on my readers? Or more briefly: *What?* To *whom?* With what *effect?*" Most often, a creative writer decides on what to say by selecting a topic that has affected him emotionally, while a technical writer does not get to choose a topic of his choice. A topic or a project is assigned to him as a task. When it comes to the '*whom*' aspect, creative writers may keep in mind the age group of the audience, social background, comprehension ability and other related aspects.

A technical writer does a deeper study in the form of an audience analysis because sometimes while attempting to explain a mechanism, there is a tendency to assume that his readers are at least partially acquainted with the mechanism in question, and, therefore that he does not have to go into minute detail. Henry W. Sams in his book, *Constructive Theme Writing*, suggests ways to avoid such assumptions by following a few steps. The first

is "to assume that the reader is completely, colossally ignorant of the mechanism we are about to describe or explain", the second "is to begin at the very beginning", after which, one has to "proceed step by step in the explanation", and finally "choose the simplest and the clearest style together with the simplest and the clearest diction possible." The last component that Lamar talks about is the '*effect*'. The creative writer focuses on leaving an impression in the minds of the reader while a technical writer focuses on imparting information effectively. These are some of the common elements of style that shall be dealt in detail by the researcher.

The form, structure, diction and content presentation will be studied under the contrasting features of the two variants of writing. It will be paradoxical to say that creative writing is not most often original, but the fact substantiated by Miles C. Olson et al. in *The Writing Process* suggests the following:

"Painters often belong to a 'school' in which artists share similar techniques. Novelists often use relatively similar plot structures. Poets, especially of a century and longer ago, usually used what contemporary readers would consider copied structures – the sonnet, the ballad stanza, and iambic pentameter, to name a few. But they were still creative within the forms they shared."

These forms in creative writing also constitute the structure based on each genre. For instance, a novel is different in form and structure when compared to a sonnet. 'Novels' and 'Plays' follow plot structures with five elements namely: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution, which cannot be applied to other kinds of creative writing. Sonnets are of six types and the structure is different for each type. Rhyme scheme, 'volta' or change of subject matter and stanzaic patterns decipher each kind of sonnet. Technical writers, alternatively, write in accordance with a recognized stylebook or software following the accepted forms and structures. The length of a sentence, font size, alignment, use of bullets and numbers for lists, use of figures and tables, screen shots, etc., are all predefined in technical writing. The choice of words

or diction usually plays a vital role in creating a unique style for every writer and it is invariably different in creative writing, whereas, in technical writing, the aim is to use simple and concise words which are comprehensible for a common man. 'User friendliness' is the keynote for technical writing. A creative writer presents his ideas as content in accordance with the genre of writing involved, sometimes in a grandiloquent style using several literary devices. Since technical writing is a professional form of writing it circumvents the use of slang, clichés, pretentious words and wordiness to communicate more effectively. These variations and differences shall be researched upon elaborately in the thesis. Other aspects such as proof reading, reader-writer gap, technology and processes involved (software), audience analysis, purpose of communication, response or outcome, feedback and impact shall also be focused.

The personal experience of the researcher as a technical writer in Cognizant Technology Solutions and as a creative writer, who had the opportunity to meet eminent Indian writers (an initiative of SCILET – Study Center for Indian Literature in English and Translation – The American College, Madurai, India) and publish writings in different genres, has been advantageous in implementing a 'correlation analysis' between the subjects taken up for study.

The chosen research topic is a challenging and less investigated one compared to many others in the field of language and literature. Therefore, it can prove to be an exceptional source for other scholars who intend to explore related subject matters. Moreover, with the advent of newer technology and upgradation of existing ones, the scope of technical writing is vast. With the altering attitude towards life and artistic ability, creative writing may also experience a radical change. Thus, potential researchers can delve deeper and explore either of the two variants of writing discussed in this thesis.

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