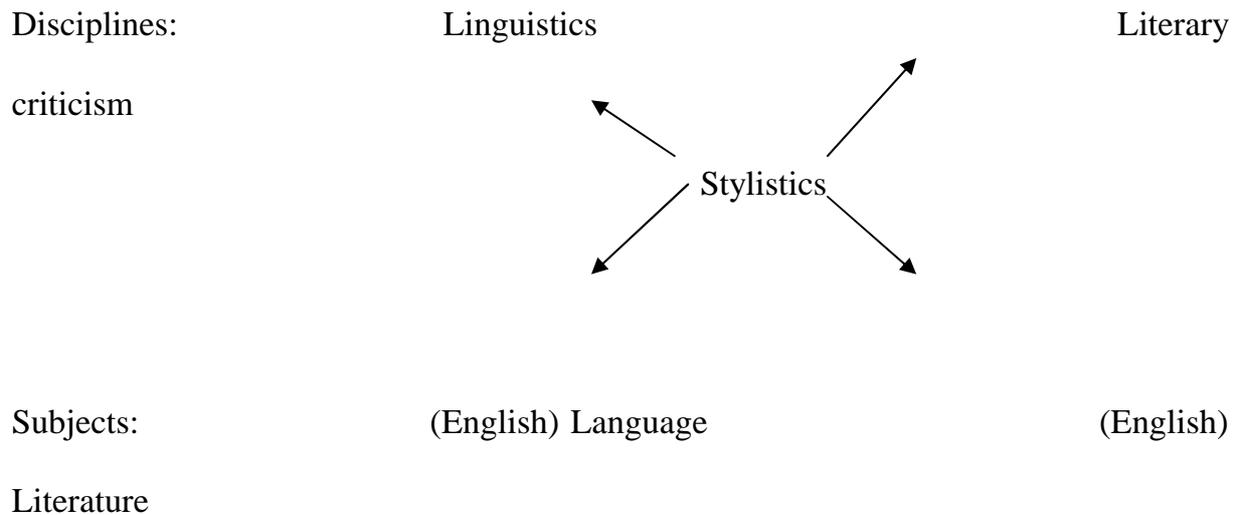


## **1. Aims and definition of the field of stylistics**

We started by quoting H.G Widdowson (1975) who states in his book *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* that *linguistics has something to contribute to literary criticism and vice versa (p.1)*. This can be used to provide a methodology and see how it can be relevant to the teaching of literature as a subject. What can be inferred from this quotation is that the stylistician finds it impossible to analyse a literary text without referring to a study of the linguistic patterns contained within a text and which influences meaning. There are, of course, all kinds of ways of talking about language and the linguist's way is only one. 'Stylistics' combines both literary criticism and linguistics as its morphological make-up suggests: the 'style' component refers to the former whereas the "istics" component to the latter.

In addition, we can add that linguistics and literary criticism draw from other disciplines such as psychology, but that doesn't prevent them from being autonomous. For the time being, we can define stylistics as an area of mediation between two disciplines. Stylistics focusses on a mediation between two subjects: English language and literature.

The relationship we have been discussing can be summed up as follows:



(Widdowson, 1975, p.4)

Therefore, stylistics is neither a discipline nor a subject in its own right, but a means of combining disciplines and subjects. As the diagram shows, this relationship is not only between discipline and discipline, subject and subject, but also between subject and discipline and the reverse.

Our traditional idea of what a literature course should be derives from our knowledge of literature as a discipline. Today, teachers are involved in working out what the aims and procedures of literary teaching should be. What is needed is an explicit and pedagogically oriented definition of the nature of literary study as a subject, one which specifies aims in terms of educational objectives, and actual teaching procedures in terms of these aims. These objectives will vary according to different levels of education: the higher the level, the closer will the subject come to resemble the discipline.

Some pupils will become students and some students will become scholars, and we can say that this process is one of gradual approximation of literature as subject to literature as discipline. These objectives will also vary, of course, according to whether the literature being taught is that of the first or a second or foreign language.

To unveil the difference between literature as a discipline and literature as subject, Widdowson (1975) refers to F.R. Leavis (1943) in *Ideas in Education and the University* (p 34-5) who expresses his philosophy of literary study as a discipline: for him, literature can have very elevated aims such as to train intelligence and sensibility, to cultivate sensitiveness and precision of response, to provide an initiation into the nature and significance of tradition. To this, Widdowson replies that other disciplines can fulfill these functions. He answers to F.R. Leavis that a study of literature requires sensitivity, intelligence, precision of response, and so on because the reader may follow meandering paths where signs are cryptic and sometimes profound, but these signs are mainly linguistic, and therefore the sensitivity must initially be a sensitivity to language, and the intelligence and precision of response can only be developed as general qualities through literature if they are first shaped by practice in interpreting the unique language use of literary discourse. In brief, for Widdowson, no mention is made of language in Leavis' definition and whatever these benefits, they must relate in some measure to an awareness of the subtleties of language use. In other words, he suggests that the concepts of literature are in essence indistinguishable from

their verbal expression.

Besides, teachers often complain that students do not respond to a literary work in a personal way; they tend to repeat criticisms they have read about an author. They should be encouraged to seek out messages for themselves. The full purport of the work can only be recognized by the individual's direct experience of it. What stylisticians are interested in is to develop literature as a subject which has as its main aim to foster the students' capacity for individual response to language use.

How does H.G. Widdowson (1975) interpret "English Literature" for foreign students? He asserts that beside fostering qualities of mind, it acquaints students with ways of looking at the world which characterize the cultures of the English-speaking peoples. As a cultural subject, English literature is associated with history, sociology and social anthropology.

Another way of interpreting 'English Literature' is to look at it as 'literature' written in the English language. On this interpretation the reason for teaching it is essentially a linguistic one: its basic purpose is to acquaint students with the manner in which literary works in English use the language to convey special meanings. By 'linguistic', H.G. Widdowson means both 'discourse' and 'text', terms we shall be referring to later. To teach English literature, in this sense, as a linguistic subject is to adopt a stylistic perspective. For Widdowson, the teaching of literature as a cultural subject overseas is to be integrated with a linguistic approach. He points out that literature used to be taught as a source of historical and sociological heritage,

and that the cultural approach leads to a treatment of literature as a source of facts. Literature has also been studied as a chronological sequence ranging from Beowulf, Chaucer and Shakespeare towards the present, covering every major period.

Students learn of the English-speaking worlds' past culture and of their cultural heritage. H.G. Widdowson's assumption is that we are misrepresenting its essential nature, and that a definition of literature as a subject cannot be based only on cultural criteria, and that we do not appeal to the character of literature itself. He argues that it is better to define literary studies as a linguistic subject and study literary works as kinds of discourses and this is the main reason for teaching it overseas. Since pupils and students are in the process of learning the English language, namely they are involved in learning the language system – the structures and vocabulary of English – but it must also involve the learning of how this system is used in actual acts of communication. We also believe that the student can compare the fashioning of unique literary messages with other uses of the language, making clear the contrast with how the system is used in conventional forms of communication.

Literary teachers tend to teach literary classics (presumably for either moral or cultural reasons or both) to learners whose knowledge of the system and use of English is so limited as to make the work being presented to them almost totally incomprehensible. Therefore it is better to give literature a stylistic basis especially in second language situations because the texts or

works under study will be controlled by the learner's capacity to understand the language which is used especially if literature is presented as discourse, the student must relate the textual features to what he knows of English grammar and vocabulary and compare literary language to conventional language. As a consequence, the student extends his learning of not only the language system, but also the learning of language use.

Progressively, the student may progressively turn to either the study of literary criticism or linguistics as he wishes. As H.G Widdowson recommends it, we shall start with a stylistic analysis of texts and then go on to recognize its cultural, historical and moral implications. It is important to do so for the students to link their own experience of language with the cultural and historical concepts which gave birth to the writer's verbal expression and unique experience. In other words, we should acknowledge that stylistics is interested in language as a function of texts in context and that utterances (literary or otherwise) are produced in a time, a place, and in a cultural and cognitive context. These "extra-linguistic" parameters are very important as they refer to the historical, civilizational and cultural backgrounds in which a text was created and which all contribute to the meaning and purport of a text, namely, not merely the linguistic description of a text, but also the context of a text which must also be taken into account in stylistics. This is the reason why after having studied our first text *Of Plimmoth Plantation* stylistically, we shall refer to its historical and civilisational context by focussing on *The Literature of Colonial America*, a handout which explains the origin of the

Puritans in Europe and their settlement and expansion in America. Therefore, the student will not only grasp the linguistic description of the text but will understand how such a unique experience came into being. Our procedure is that the student will first immerse himself in the writer's experience as expressed through his language and from then on relate that experience to the historic and cultural background which gave it birth. If we start introducing the historical and literary background first as we generally do, it might look arcane and mysterious to the students, but if we start by examining the nature of the experience expressed in the literary work and relate it to the cultural and historical background the student will better make the link between the two. The student must feel that what they are learning is relevant and to the point, that they are not given knowledge which is far-fetched and irrelevant.