# Lesley Jeffries' CRITICAL STYLISTICS: The Power of English

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We tend to think that politicians, copywriters and journalists can affect us by their use of language, but how does this happen, exactly? Critical Discourse Analysis provides us with general theories for explaining the impact texts can have, considering the social and political contexts in which texts are produced and read. Stylistics provides detailed tools of analysis for understanding how texts work. Critical Stylistics combines the strengths of these two approaches to uncover the deep-seated ideologies of everyday texts.
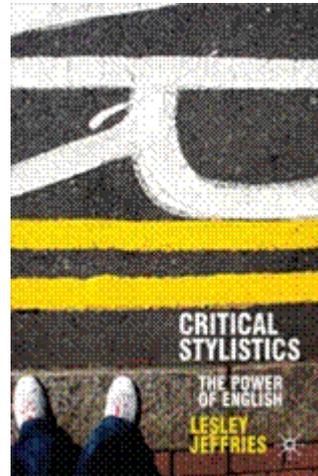
The back-cover summary signals the author's intent to draw together two established linguistic methodologies in order to forge a new approach, *Critical Stylistics*. In doing so, Jeffries strives to provide undergraduate students of English with the tools required to delve below surface level syntactical forms into the textual fabric of meaning and meaning creation.

Part of the Palgrave Macmillan series *Perspectives on the English Language*, this 202-page textbook provides eleven self-edifying chapters—a caveat to the usage of 'textbook' in the previous sentence would establish the stylistic pedagogy of student centered research and discovery to be the underlying principle supporting both this particular usage and Jeffries' pedagogical approach to language study emphasized in *Critical Stylistics*. A short introduction rationalizes Critical Stylistics as providing a comprehensive toolset enabling students of English language or linguistics with a framework for studying and exemplifying the processes by which texts are ideologically crafted and textual choices made. Chapter 1 sets the background by substantiating ideological and rhetorical practices through a social-linguistic lens focusing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as practiced by such flag bearers as Fowler and Fairclough, questioning the rigor and lack of comprehensive coverage afforded by CDA at the micro-linguistic level—the forte of Critical Stylistics.

The next ten chapters each introduce one Critical Stylistic tool and are structured to methodically scaffold student endeavor by: 1) *introduction* of the tool; 2) outlining a *linguistic method* for using the tool; 3) considering *form and function*; 4) discussing *ideological effects*; 5) offering practice *exercises*; 6) providing links to *further reading*. This approach sensibly enables students a foothold into *Critical Stylistics* well before a full understanding of the methods and practices are developed—vital for EFL students. So, in chapter 2:

Naming and Describing, the *linguistic model* develops the notions of noun phrases, prominence of subject position noun phrase, noun choices ('a cup' or 'a gorgeous Ming dynasty teacup'), noun modification and nominalization. The last of which is particularly powerful as seen by recent government controlled broadsheets in Thailand where the nominalization 'red shirt terrorists' (instead of the typical SVO formation: 'the red shirts are terrorists') was consistently used as an ideologically manipulative resource to name the anti-government protesters. As Jeffries states in form and function (P25): *'when we turn a process into a nominal, just as when we use the passive voice, we are syntactically able to discard the actor',* as such the truth or process isn't available for analysis; the act of naming becomes a baptism of 'truth', regardless of the facts—as further exemplified in the *ideological effects* section where detailed analysis breaks down sentences to their constituent parts and considers the ideological effect of the textual feature described. Chapter 2 is completed by five student *exercises* to reinforce the chapter knowledge and encourage *further reading* (books by Fairclough, Fowler, Jeffries and Chapman are proposed, as well as further reading in the Guardian newspaper and Discourse and Society journal).

Jeffries states, several times, that she is *'in favor of eclecticism'*, as can be observed from the list of tools, which also act as chapter headings through two to eleven: *Naming and Describing, Representing Actions/Events/States, Equating and Contrasting, Exemplifying and Enumerating, Prioritizing, Implying and Assuming, Negating, Hypothesizing,*

Presenting Others' Speech and Thoughts and Representing Time, Space & Society. Despite the unfamiliar names, the chapters cover areas common to English language, English literature and linguistics students, such as: phrase and clause structure, synonyms and antonyms, modals, tense, voice and aspect, point of view, deictic projection and pragmatics. Of course, the text itself and textual meaning bind the tools in a functional approach that affords significant benefits for students who have, for far too long, been restricted by formal grammars, adherence to hierarchal pressures, unconsidered repetition of rules (transitional learning techniques) and generally been dissuaded from critical approaches to discourse—often ideologically coerced at the institutional level.

    Critical Stylistics is part of a growing paradigm that aims to empower students with critical linguistic, critical discourse and critical thinking skills, and Jeffries ably demonstrates the worth of enabling students to delve beyond the grammatically superficial to *'uncover the deep-seated ideologies of everyday texts'*. Other offerings in the series, for instance *English Literary Stylistics* by Christina Gregoriou, further compliment *Critical Stylistics*, and it can only be hoped that language teachers and education facilitators take advantage of these excellent new textbooks to provide students a path towards developing vital critical thinking skills.

Bibiography

Jeffries. L (2010) **Critical Stylistics**. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.