

## A Stylistic Analysis of Bisson's *Bears Discover Fire*

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### Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing Terry Bisson's short story *Bears Discover Fire* stylistically by following both Gerard Genette's theory of narratology (1980), and Short and Leech (1981) methodology for analyzing the language of fictional works. Also trying to examine to what extent these models are applicable in analyzing the selected story.

Stylistic analysis procedures help the readers/researchers to identify specific linguistic features in order to support literary interpretation and appreciation of literary texts. Style in fiction concentrates not on what is written, but on how a text is written. Each writer has his own style and techniques which distinguish him from other writers.

**Keywords:** *Bears Discover Fire*, narration, Short story, stylistics

تحليل اسلوبي لقصة بيسون " دببة تكتشف ناراً "

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### المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث الى تحليل القصة القصيرة ل تيري بيسون " دببة تكتشف ناراً " اسلوبيا و ذلك باتباع نظرية جيرارد جنت لتحويل السرد الروائي (1980) وستراتيجية شورت و ليچ (1981) لتحليل العمل الروائي ومحاولة الكشف الى اي مدى ممكن تطبيق هاتين النظريتين في تحليل القصة المختارة.

تساعد طرق التحليل الاسلوبي القراء والباحثين في التعرف على خصائص لغوية معينة وذلك من اجل دعم التفسير الادبي وتثمين النصوص الادبية. يتركز الاسلوب الروائي ليس على ما هو مكتوب بل كيف هو مكتوب. حيث ان كل كاتب له اسلوبه وتقنياته الخاصة التي تميزه عن غيره من الكتاب الاخرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: " دببة تكتشف ناراً "، سرد، قصة قصيرة، علم الاسلوب

### Introduction

Stylistics is an approach which applies the methods and findings of linguistics. "Its aim is to show how the technical linguistic features of a literary work, such as the grammatical structure of its sentences, contribute to its overall meanings and effects" (Barry, 2002:135).

Barry (ibid: 136) has mentioned that readers while reading a piece of literary work, for example a Hemingway's short story, they give an account that the style of the story is plain. Stylisticians on their part can help readers to know why Hemingway's style is plain. Stylisticians can provide evidence from the text of the story. Hemingway avoids using descriptive words like (adverbs and adjectives). He depends heavily on nouns and verbs, while other writers may do the opposite. In this way stylistics helps the readers to distinguish between the different styles of different writers.

This paper tries to connect two disciplines "Narratology" and "stylistics". Narratology focuses on the relation between story events and the arrangements. While stylistics focuses on the deviations of the ordinary use of language "foregrounding". Several works by different linguists and stylisticians marked by multidisciplinary incorporating various approaches, but these studies still have a distinctive stylistic identity, focusing on the language of literary works and depending on linguistics. Here in this paper, stylistics draws on narratology models or concepts which are used as frameworks for investigating the function of language (Phelan&Rabinowitz, 2005:139,141).

The analysis is based on Genette's theory of narratology (1980) with the help of Leech and Short (1981) strategy for analyzing fictional works. The reason for choosing these two models is that, they help

to find the stylistic patterns within the story. The study also presents conclusions and recommendations for further studies.

The present paper attempts to answer the following research questions:

- 1- Are Genette's theory and Short and Leech methodology applicable in analysing fiction?
- 2- Is there any discrepancy between the narrative and the stylistic model?
- 3- To what extent narrative theory is useful in this study?

### **Definitions of Important Terms**

Before trying to analyze the selected work stylistically, it is crucial to understand the meaning of some terms related to the fictional world such as:

- 1- Narration: (Abrams, 2005:181) defines narrative as a story, whether told in prose or verse. This story requires components such as events, characters, and what the characters say or do and any story is told by a narrator.
- 2- Point of view: this term signifies the way a story gets told. The mode (or modes) used by an author to present the major components of any story like characters, dialogues, actions, setting and events which form the narrative in a work of fiction (ibid:240).

Writers use different methods to present their stories. These are listed as follows (ibid: 241):

- I. Third Person Narrator: the narrator is someone outside the story, and refers to the characters in the story by 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns ( he, she, they).
- II. Second Person Narrator: this mode of story gets told by using 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns (you) which is a less common mode in fiction than the other modes. (You) refers to the reader\readers of the story (Ibid).
- III. First Person Narrator: in this mode of narration, the narrator of the story uses the 1st person pronoun (I). In this case, the narrator expresses his feeling, experiences, and inferences or findings while talking to other characters in the story (ibid: 242).

According to Fowler (1977:72) explains that the term "point of view" has two senses. The first sense is aesthetic\ perceptual. This means something similar to "viewing position". In other words, "the author must orient himself and his readers to the contents of his presented world"(ibid:73).

The second sense has importance in sentence structure. Language is a powerful medium to work in. This is to say, that writers\speakers when trying to say something they are unconsciously conveying an attitude to that something (ibid:76).

- 3- Narratology: it deals with all above-mentioned types of narrators, "the identification of the structural elements and their diverse modes of combination, recurrent narrative devices, and the analysis of the kinds of discourse by which a narrative gets told" (ibid: 181).

### Literature Review

Some of the previous studies that focus on analyzing fictional language include:

Shklovsky, in his two essays of 1917 "art as technique" and "Stern's Tristram Shandy: stylistic commentary" (1921), reduces fictional structures into two important and opposing terms: *sjuzet* and *fabula*. *Fabula* refers to the chronological sequence of events that form the narrative; and *sjuzet* refers to the order, manner and style of the narrative (Bradford, 1997:52). Moreover, Greimas (1966: 1970) regards narrative patterns as a system of consecutive ordering similar to the syntagm. "The syntagmatic chain of a sentence each word and phrase is tied into an accumulative sequence which generates larger units of meaning". In the same way the events of the narrative like marriages, journeys etc. are combined to produce a narrative structure (ibid: 54).

Finally, Chatman (1978:151) provides readers with a diagram which contains the principal constituents of any process of linguistic communication. He sees that discourse is a kind of communication transferred from a speaker (addresser) and a hearer (addressee). The speaker encodes a message and the hearer in return decodes that message.

### The Models

Genette's Theory of Narratology(1980):

In his *Narrative Discourse* (1980) Gerard Genette offers detailed and comprehensive typology of narrators and narrative techniques (Bradford,1980:58). He depends on Plato's terms (diegesis& mimesis) in his book *Republic* when he tries to classify narrators. The first term, according to Plato means (the story constructed by the narrator) and the second term means (speech and dialogue as a mimetic record of someone's thoughts and opinions) (ibid: 59). Genette has developed the use of these two terms into much more comprehensive formula. This paper focuses on selected points of Genette's theory according to their importance and relevance in analyzing the story, these include the following:

#### 1-Narrative Voice

Genette divides narrators of a story into three types:

- Extradiegetic: is the third-person narrator who introduces and describes characters and events by using the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns (he, she, they and it).
- Autodiegetic: is a narrator who uses the first-person pronoun(I) and tells the story as a part of his/her own experience.
- Intradiegetic: according to Genette every kind of narrator is to some degree intradiegetic i.e. the narrator is involved in the story; the views, the knowledge the style of narration etc.

#### 2- Distance

According to Genette(1980: 171-172) the study of narration requires the reader to assess the distance between the narrator of the story and the story itself. Therefore, distance helps the readers to determine the degree of precision in the narrative and the accuracy of the information given in the story. Whether the text is a narrative of events (tells what the character is doing) or a narrative of words (tells what the character is saying or thinking), there are four types of discourse (Guillemette & Lévesque,2006).

1. *Narratized speech*: "The character's words and actions are integrated into the narration, and are treated like any other event (-distant)" (ibid).

Example: "He confided in his friend, telling him about his mother's death."

2. *Transposed speech, indirect style*: "The character's words or actions are reported by the narrator, who presents them with his interpretation (- + distant)".

Example: "He confided to his friend that his mother had passed away."

3. *Transposed speech, free indirect style*: "The character's words or actions are reported by the narrator, but without using a subordinating conjunction (+ - distant)."

Example: "He confided to his friend: his mother had passed away."

4. *Reported speech*: "The character's words are cited verbatim by the narrator (+ distant)."

Example: "He confided to his friend: "My mother passed away." (ibid).

### 3-The Narrator's Functions

Genette (1980:255-256) identifies five types of the narrator's functions:

- **The narrative function:** "it is a fundamental one. Any time we have a narrative, this role (detachment) is assumed by the narrator, whether present in the text or not." (Guillemette & Lévesque, 2006).
- **The directing function:** "The narrator performs a directing function when he interrupts the story to comment on the organization or articulation of his text (involvement)." (Guillemette & Lévesque, 2006).
- **The communication function:** "The narrator addresses the narratee in a direct way (that is, the text's potential reader) in order to communicate with him or her (involvement)" (ibid).
- **The testimonial function:** "The narrator confirms the truth of his story, the degree of precision in his narration, his certainty regarding the events, his sources of information, and the like. This function also comes into play when the narrator expresses his emotions about the story, that is, the affective relation he has with it (involvement)" (ibid).
- **The ideological function:** the story is interrupted by the character who narrates the events, in order to give advice and comments. This requires kind of involvement (ibid).

### 4- Narrative Perspective

Genette (1988: 74) distinguishes three kinds of focalization: "So by focalization I certainly mean a restriction of 'field' – actually, that is, a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience*".

**1. Zero focalization:** "The narrator knows everything about the characters. He may know the facts about all of the protagonists, as well as their thoughts and inner conflicts. This is the traditional omniscient narrator".

**2. Internal focalization:** "The narrator knows as much as the focal character. This character filters the information provided to the reader. He cannot tell about the characters' thoughts and feelings."

**3. External focalization:** "The narrator knows less than the characters. He acts a bit like a camera lens, following the protagonists' actions and gestures from the outside; he is unable to guess their thoughts." (ibid).

### 5- Time of the Narration

According to Genette, there are four types of the time of the narration:

1-Subsequent narration: the narrator tells what happened in past time.

2-Prior narration: here the narrator tells what will happen in future time, it is a kind of dream or prophecy.

3- Simultaneous narration: in this type, the narrator tells the events of the story at the same moment it occurs.

4-Interpolated narration: "this type represents a combination between the subsequent and simultaneous narration. Here the narrator tells what happened in past time and his current feelings about these past events" (Guillemette & Lévesque, 2006).

### 6-Order

Order means "The relation between sequencing of events and their arrangement". The order can be either chronological i.e. presenting the events of the story in the order they occurred, or out of order (e.g. detective stories when the story starts with a crime before the actual narration) (ibid).

### 7- Frequency of Events

In his work Genette (1980: 114) also gives us three kinds of frequency of events

"A system of relationships is established between these capacities for 'repetition' on the part of both the narrated events (of the story) and the narrative statements (of the text) – a system of

relationships that we can a priori reduce to four virtual types, simply from the multiplication of the two possibilities given on both sides: the event repeated or not, the statement repeated or not" (ibid).

1. Singulative narration: narrating any event one time only.
2. Repeating narrative: recounting more than once what happened once.
3. Iterative narrative: relating one time what happened several times.

The researcher has analyzed the story according to the previous steps of the theory which are summarized as follows in Figure 1:

Elements Analyzed	Components				
<b>1-Narrative Voice</b>	Homodiegetic narrator	Heterodiegetic narrator		Autodiegetic narrator	
<b>2- Distance</b>	Narratized speech	Transposed speech indirect style		Transposed speech, free indirect style	Reported speech
<b>3-Functions of the Narrator</b>	Narrative function	Directing function	Communication function	Testimonial function	Ideological function
<b>4-Time of the Narration</b>	Subsequent Narration		Prior Narration	Simultaneous Narration	Interpolated Narration
<b>5-Order</b>	Chronological			Out of order	
<b>6-Narrative perspective</b>	Zero focalization	Internal focalization		External focalization	
<b>7-Frequency of events</b>					

Figure.1 (Guillemette & Lévesque, 2006).

### Leech and Short (1981) Approach

Leech and Short (1981:75) give the readers a stylistic method for analyzing fictional works. This method searches for lexical and grammatical categories, figures of speech, cohesion and coherence. In this paper, the researcher has examined the lexical categories, figures of speech and the grammatical structure.

- 1- Lexical categories: in general refer to the elements of language in the selected text whether the vocabulary is simple or complex, general or colloquial. The researcher will examine the nouns, verbs, adjectives and the adverbs (Ibid).
- 2- Figures of speech: in this, the researcher looks for the features that departed the regular rules (foregrounding). Tropes and schemes are helpful in this research along with traditional figures of speech such as metaphor, metonymy, irony, synecdoche... etc (Ibid:78,79).

The text of the story is included for reference easiness. In the analysis of fiction (novel, stories, prose) the most important thing is the text. The text consists of sentences. Sentences may refer to an element, or unit, or constituent of a text (Fowler, 1977:5). In terms of the investigation on "style" the researcher sheds the light on how the author's stylistic choices are made (Ibid:148).

### The Data

The selected American short story was written in 1990, is a science fiction story by Terry Bisson about bears which discover fire and are camping on highway medians. But this is not only about bears, it is also about family relationships (Fail.n.d). This story won both Hugo and Nebula awards for best short story. This story is also described in The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction as a story that "elegizes the land, the loss of the dream of America; it is also very funny" (Whyte, 2005). The gist of the story is that the narrator one night with his brother and his nephew are fixing their tire while trying to visit his mother. Then they noticed bears in the woods. These bears with torches and they are five feet tall and weigh about (300 hundred pounders) means they are so heavy in weight (ibid).

The narrator mentions that his mother was sick four years ago. She had a dream that a group of doctors were sitting around in a circle discussing her case of illness. This dream actually happens at the end of the story. When the mother runs away from her home and the narrator with his nephew

finds her sitting in the woods in a circle with the bears. So they join this circle and eat newberry which discovered by the bears. They fall asleep and in the morning the narrator and his nephew find that that bears have gone away and the mother died (Whyte, 2005).

**The Analysis**

The researcher follows the steps of Genette’s theory one by one to see to what extent this theory is applicable. The analysis has been presented in a table. This table contains examples from the selected story. Also, there are stylistic explanations about the examples.

**1- Type of the narrator of the story( Narrative voice):**

Examples	Stylistic explanations
I was driving with my brother, the preacher, and my nephew	The narrator of a story is autodiegetic who uses the first-person pronoun (I) and tells the story as a part of his own experience.
I pulled over to the left, onto the median grass.	

**Table 1.**

**2- Distance**

Examples	Stylistic explanations
, and my brother is always telling me to get radials and quit buying old tires.	<i>Narratized speech:</i> The character's words and actions are integrated into the narration, and are treated like any other event (-distant).
the boy would talk like what Mother used to call " <b>a helot from the gorges of the mountains.</b> "	Reported speech: the character’s words are cited verbatim by the narrator.
"Shake that light again," I said.	In this example, the narrator cited his own words by using the technique of the reported speech.

**Table 2.**

### 3-The Narrator's Functions

Genette gives five types of functions related to the narrator. These functions describe the involvement and the remoteness of the writer. The narrative function is a crucial one, which is built into any narrative.

Besides this function there are other functions illustrated below:

Examples	Stylistic explanations
The flat caused what you might call knowing groans since, as the old-fashioned one in my family ( <b>so they tell me</b> )	The directing functions: here the narrator is commenting on what his family has already told him about the flat.
He's old enough to want to help and not old enough ( <b>yet</b> ) to think he knows it all	The ideological function: the narrator has presented his general opinion about his nephew using between brackets ( <b>yet</b> ) his ideological experience.

Table 3.

### 4-Time of the Narration

While reading the story *Bears Discover Fire*, readers can notice that the narrator tells the events of the story in the past time. Using the past tense is clear throughout the narration. So the story is an example of subsequent narration. Different types of past tense within the event of the story have been clarified as follows:

Simple past	It was Sunday night...
Past continuous	I was driving with my brother...
Past perfect	we had been to visit Mother at the Home...
Past perfect continuous	I had been meaning to drop them at the dump.

Table 4.

### 5- Order

Bison uses the chronological order in his story. The events of the story occurred one following the other smoothly without interruption or a flashback or any other interfering event.

### 6-Narrative Perspective

The narrator of the story represents an example of *external focalization*. He knows less than the characters. The narrator cannot guess his mother's behavior when she runs away from home and joins the bears in the forest.

But the narrator also represents a *zero focalization*. This is because he is able to predict the place where he can find his mother, in this way, he knows about his mother thoughts.

### 7-Frequency of Events

This refers to the relation between the number of the times an event happens in the story and the number of times it is mentioned in the narrative. Readers can notice that the events of the story are mentioned once only.

Thus, the story is a good example of the singulative narration i.e. what happened once is told once.

After examining the events of the story, the peculiarities of the uses of language are highlighted. In this way, the researcher has used stylistics tools in doing so.

Considering lexical categories, the language of the story is simple rather colloquial, the story can be understood by readers without any difficulty due to the simple manner of narrating the story.

Though, there are lots of phrasal verbs in the story such as (drive on, hung on, drive off, drive on, spin-off, let off). These verbs can make the semantic meaning rather tricky but this can not affect the simplicity of the writer's language.

## Figures of Speech

There are certain figures of speech in the story which are listed below:

- 1- **Personification:** the title of the story itself is a personification which is the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human. "Bears Discover Fire" in this title, the author gives an attribute of human to non-human.
- 2- It is also an example of semantic deviation, the sentence is semantically odd 'bears' are incapable of discovering fire. Hence the oddness of the title of the story (See, Jaafar, 2014, Yule, 2006:101).
- 3- **A simile** is an analogy that compares two things that are alike in one way. In order to identify a simile, the words "like" or "as" are always used. There are a lot of analogies used in the story, some examples include: Comparing the talk of the narrator's nephew to "a helot from the gorges of the mountains". Also comparing the process of fixing tires by hands to making sorghum. Finally, comparing the traffic to a waterfall.
- 4- **Neologism:** refers to a newly invented or coined word or expression in the story there is an example of this term which is "newberry".
- 5- **Metaphor:** examples from the story include "fixing tires by hand is a dying art". There is an implied comparison with this metaphor opposite the explicit one of the simile.

## Grammatical Features

### Sentence types

The sentence is the highest rank of the grammatical construction. In terms of their communicative functions, sentences may be divided into four categories: statement, commend question, and exclamation (Song, 2009:120, Vol., No.2)

Bisson uses rather long sentences. The use of coordination and subordination is quite clear throughout the text of the story. Coordination involves the ways by which words, phrases and clauses are combined into more complex forms. Usually by using a connector combining two independent clauses. These connectors include (and, or, so, nor, for... etc.). There is also the use of suitable punctuation before the coordinator.

While subordination is clarified by combining two clauses. These are the main (independent) clause and the subordinate (dependent) clause (Spyridakis, 2011). Examples of these types of sentences from the story will be illustrated in figure (2).

The opening sentence of the story shows Bisson's grammatical style of the story.

*"I was driving with my brother, the preacher, and my nephew, the preacher's son, on I-65 just north of Bowling Green when we got a flat"*. The sentence patterns are:

- a- I was driving with my brother and my nephew when we got a flat.(main& subordinate clause).
- b- Appositions: 

{	My brother (the preacher)
	My nephew (the preacher's son)



c- on I-65 just north of Bowling Green ( adverb of place)

It is worth noting that there are many dependent clauses with non-finite verbs including (-ing participle clauses and infinitives). Examples from the first page of the text may include:

Infinitives the use of “to” before the verb

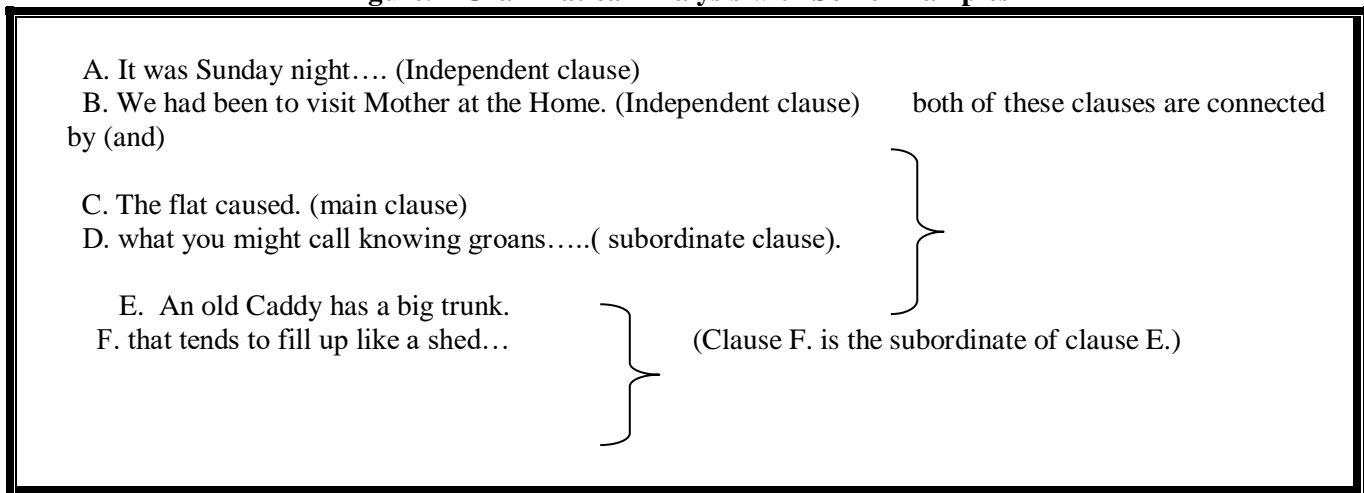
- 1- We had been **to visit**....
- 2- My brother is always telling me **to get**....
- 3- But if you know how **to mount**....
- 4- He’s old enough **to want to help** and not old enough (yet) **to think**...
- 5- he didn’t offer **to help**...

(-ing) participle clauses:

- 1- **fishing** tackle...
- 2- **looking** for my Jack..
- 3- The light was coming ...two bears ...**holding** torches.

Readers can notice from reading the first page of the story the excessive use of infinitives.

**Figure. 2 Grammatical Analysis with Some Examples**



### Conclusions and Recommendations:

While trying to analyze the story by using the theory of narratology by Genette and Leech and Short (1981) Approach; the researcher finds it is not enough to mention only the order, frequency and the moods of the events related to the selected story. In fact, readers need something more tangible. Thus, the analysis is supported by the help of stylistic tools and techniques. In this way, the analysis is well built. Therefore, the researcher has added another approach to support the theory of narratology without any modifications just to make the analysis more comprehensible to the readers. Thus, by combining “style” and “discourse” the results become more reliable and understandable.

The researcher found throughout the language of the story that Bisson’s language style is rather simple. There is a limited usage of descriptive words like adjectives and adverbs. He narrates the events without excessive usage of ornamentation that can make the language rather embellished. Considering the grammatical structure of the story, Bisson used long sentences. He did that by joining the sentences by coordinators and conjunctions. In this way, he made the structure rather complex.

For further studies, according to the results of the research, it is advisable to combine approaches together to reach to the best results.

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