The Use of Discourse Stylistics to Improve the Language Skills of Upper-Intermediate ESL Learners

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The use of authentic texts to teach language has been long recognized as an effective and engaging approach to developing language skills in ESL learning contexts. However, relatively little research has been conducted on the use of stylistic analysis to promote L2 learning. This action research study intended to investigate the effectiveness of introducing discourse stylistics, an interdisciplinary field that combines linguistics and literature to explore language within a more nuanced understanding, for English language enhancement. The study involved a group of twenty ESL learners who were enrolled in a higher-diploma advanced reading class, with an upper-intermediate proficiency level, but with no prior exposure to stylistics. The study was implemented in four phases: material design, lesson delivery, identification of challenging areas and the monitoring of task completion, with three cycles of implementation. In the first phase, the lesson material was developed in three parts: Introduction to Discourse Stylistics, Foregrounding, and Faulty Parallelism. After the delivery of the lessons, small group discussions and presentations were carried out in the classroom with a focus on identifying areas where students were encountering difficulties. The final phase involved an analysis of the tasks completed, attempted or left unattempted by the students. The findings indicate that the use of discourse stylistics, particularly foregrounding and faulty parallelism, has benefits in terms of improving language proficiency and critical thinking. Students reported that by learning stylistic features such as 'deviation' and 'parallelism', they became more aware of the language rules they had previously taken for granted. However, the majority of students expressed frustration with the new concept of discourse stylistics, mainly due to the new terminology. The analysis of task completion also highlighted an inability to comprehend language use beyond the individual sentence. The study concludes that with simplifications and suitable adaptations to specific language learning contexts stylistics can be effectively applied to teaching ESL learners.