

A Cultural-Stylistic Approach to L2 Short Story Writing: A Teaching Report

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A cultural-stylistic approach to teaching creative short story writing can be especially appropriate for those about to study abroad or for returnees. This paper reports on course in which Learners read short stories that illustrated various stages of the foreign sojourn and also introduced various stylistic elements accessible to the learners. Students worked in groups to write cultural adaptations of Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants" earlier in the semester, and then each student wrote their own short story and meta-analysis. A student work by Sagiya (2016) exemplifies potential outcomes and applications this approach can have for advanced English learners with study abroad experience. This paper reports on the application of this approach in designing an advanced extensive reading and creative writing elective course and calls for collaborators interested in developing materials for anthologies of short stories on the theme of study abroad.

Leech and Short (2007) define the field of Stylistics as “the (linguistic) study of style” with literary stylistics including the goal of “explaining the relation between language and artistic function” (p. 11). Simpson (2004) describes the purpose: “To do Stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use” (p. 3). Stylistics can be applied to advertising, song lyrics, and conversation in addition to literature, and draws upon many specific areas of study such as foregrounding, politeness theory, conversation analysis, narratology, corpus study, and text world theory (Burke, 2014). With so much territory to explore, teachers developing literary appreciation courses in L2 contexts can benefit from narrowing the scope of the endeavor, especially for second language students, and thus, this paper focuses on a Cultural Stylistic approach to both reading and writing short stories.

Zyngier (2001) introduces such an approach, illustrating the connections between the disciplines of linguistics, stylistics, literature, and cultural studies. In her “Stylistics as Interface” below, she shows how Stylistics fits in the overlapping zone and can function as an interface in interdisciplinary research.

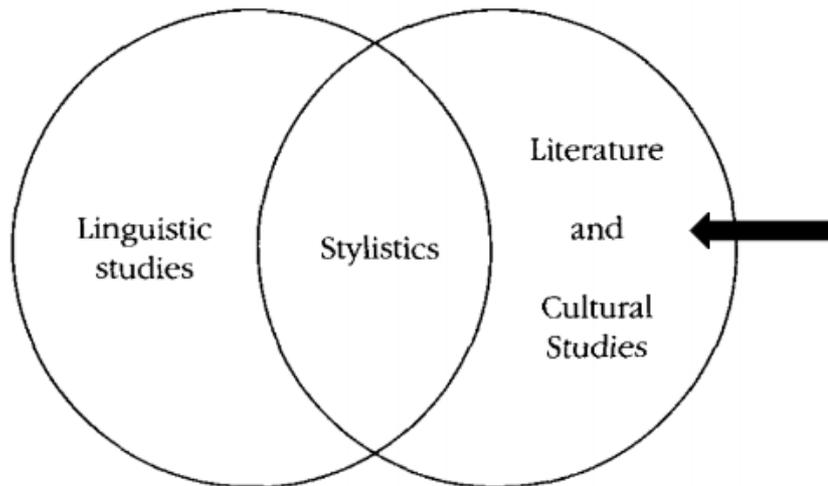


Figure 1. Zyngier's (2001) "Stylistics as Interface"

I have added an arrow to the right side of Zyngier's diagram to show the entry point as a curriculum designer in this model. This model fits very well with a now out-of-print anthology edited by Lewis and Jungman (1986). The anthology, *On being foreign: Culture shock in short fiction*, brings together a variety of literary fiction selected for their fit into the Lewis and Jungman's adapted framework for analyzing phases of culture shock. Their framework, pictured in Figure 2, illustrates the selection process and cultural content that learners would need to learn.

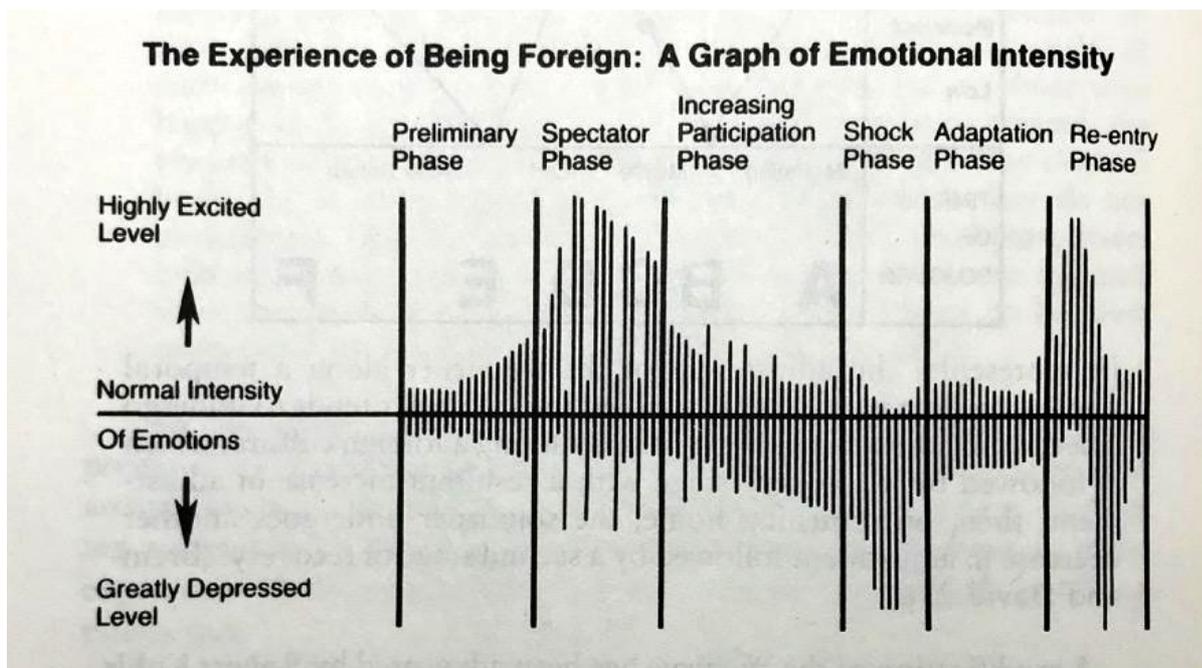


Figure 2. Lewis and Jungman's (1986) Phases of Culture Shock

There are several problems with this collection of short stories, however. These stories are

extremely difficult reads, and almost all of the authors are male. Thus, I set out to use the framework and collected new short stories that would work better with a population of advanced learners at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. About half of the students who take this course are international students from Asian countries and half are domestic Japanese learners. The domestic students tend to have a TOEFL ITP score between 525 and 550, while the international students have closer to 600 or have IELTS scores between 6.5 and 8.0.

Table 1 <i>Sojourn Phase → Short Story → Stylistic Elements</i>	
<p>Pre-Departure Phase –<i>Our Lady of Paris</i> (Mueenuddin, D.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Allusion <p>•Spectator Phase –<i>To Khabarovsk</i> (Tawada, Y.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Foregrounding/Deviation •2nd Person Narration •Landscape Symbolism <p>–<i>Hills Like White Elephants</i> (Hemingway, E.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Landscape Symbolism, <p>Increasing Participation Phase –<i>This Blessed House</i> (Lahiri, J.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Big Five Psychological Traits and Character Development 	<p>Culture Shock Phase –<i>Blue Hotel</i> (Crane, S.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Eye Dialect •Character Development <p>Adaptation Phase –<i>Third and Final Continent</i> (Lahiri, J.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Dialogue •Character Description <p>Re-Entry Shock Phase –<i>Sampaguita</i> (Sagiyama, D.)</p> <p>Implicature and Theme</p>

As a counterpoint to these sojourn stories, I added indigenously authored stories. Some of the authors and stories in this vein include “Super Frog Saves Tokyo” (Murakami, 2012), “Things Fall Apart” (Achebe, 1958), and “Headstrong Historian” (Adichie, 2008). These works are helpful in introducing appropriation and indigenization as an approach to the creative writing process.

During the first several weeks, students read through stories in the first phases of the sojourn phase with mini-lectures interspersed on literary elements important for understanding each work (Table 1). Book discussions helped the learners to process their reading and analysis. One helpful tool for setting these learners’ goal for discussions is Bell’s (2011) arc of interpretation. He emphasizes there are six stages of interpretation: Estrangement, Preview, Proto-Understanding, Analysis, Understanding, and Ownership. The teacher’s ability to point out which stage a group has reached helps the students to realize the importance of preparation for these discussions. At the end of the first six weeks, students worked in groups to write a prequel or sequel to Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” that was indigenized to Japan. The more gifted writers could help the less experienced writers to get an overview of the creative writing process. The disadvantage of collaborative writing, however, is that the less gifted students sense the inequity in their ability to

contribute to the group task.

During the second half of the semester, the students were developing their own short stories. The students were also assigned to write a meta-analysis along with their short story. The meta-analysis was to be in an academic voice and set out the literary and stylistic elements that the student incorporated into his or her story. As a teacher, this helped me to understand the student writers' intentions for the story and the stylistic elements they were attempting to employ in the process. The meta-analysis also helped the students think about their stories' development more objectively. By the end of the semester, I developed a way to study this approach more scientifically. I framed the following research question for others interested in this approach:

Research Question:

Assuming that creative writing is at the top of Bloom's Taxonomy, what cultural and stylistic elements do student writers incorporate when writing their own short stories?

Sagiyama (2016) incorporates a wide variety of cultural and stylistic elements, starting from his personal experience of living abroad and fictionalizing that experience in order to explore these elements and phases of a sojourn. Sagiyama explicitly discusses the following story elements:

- theme
- character analysis
- plot (following Campbell's Hero Cycle)
- setting (following Sagiyama's personal knowledge of locations in Japan and the Philippines)

Implicitly, Sagiyama also references developing open-mindedness resulting from experiences of culture shock and re-entry shock. The references to growing compassion and motivation for this kind of creative writing are also supported by the work of Kidd and Castano (2013) and Hanauer and Liao (2016). He also discusses the motif of long hair as a foregrounding element to identify the secondary character in the story as a "symbol by which the main character (and reader) can recognize him." Some next steps in the development of such a course is a rubric for assessing both the creative writing qualities and the meta-analysis. Another helpful step is to grade or rewrite some stories based upon the phases of the cultural sojourn.

Time permitting, I will work with several authors to create a new anthology of carefully graded short stories that help learners appreciate the stages and complexities of the sojourn experience and provide a more streamlined introduction to stylistic elements accessible to each proficiency level, assigning creative writing during study abroad as the final product. Any reader

interested in supporting this project is encouraged to contact me.

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