

Literary Relevance , Deviance , Prominence & Stylistic Analysis



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Overview

- Literary Relevance
- Deviance
- Prominence
- Prominence is relative
- Links between relevance, deviance and prominence
- Role of Stylistic Competence & Responsiveness of Reader
- Complete Objectivity is Myth, Work out Relative Norm
- Search for Contextually related norm

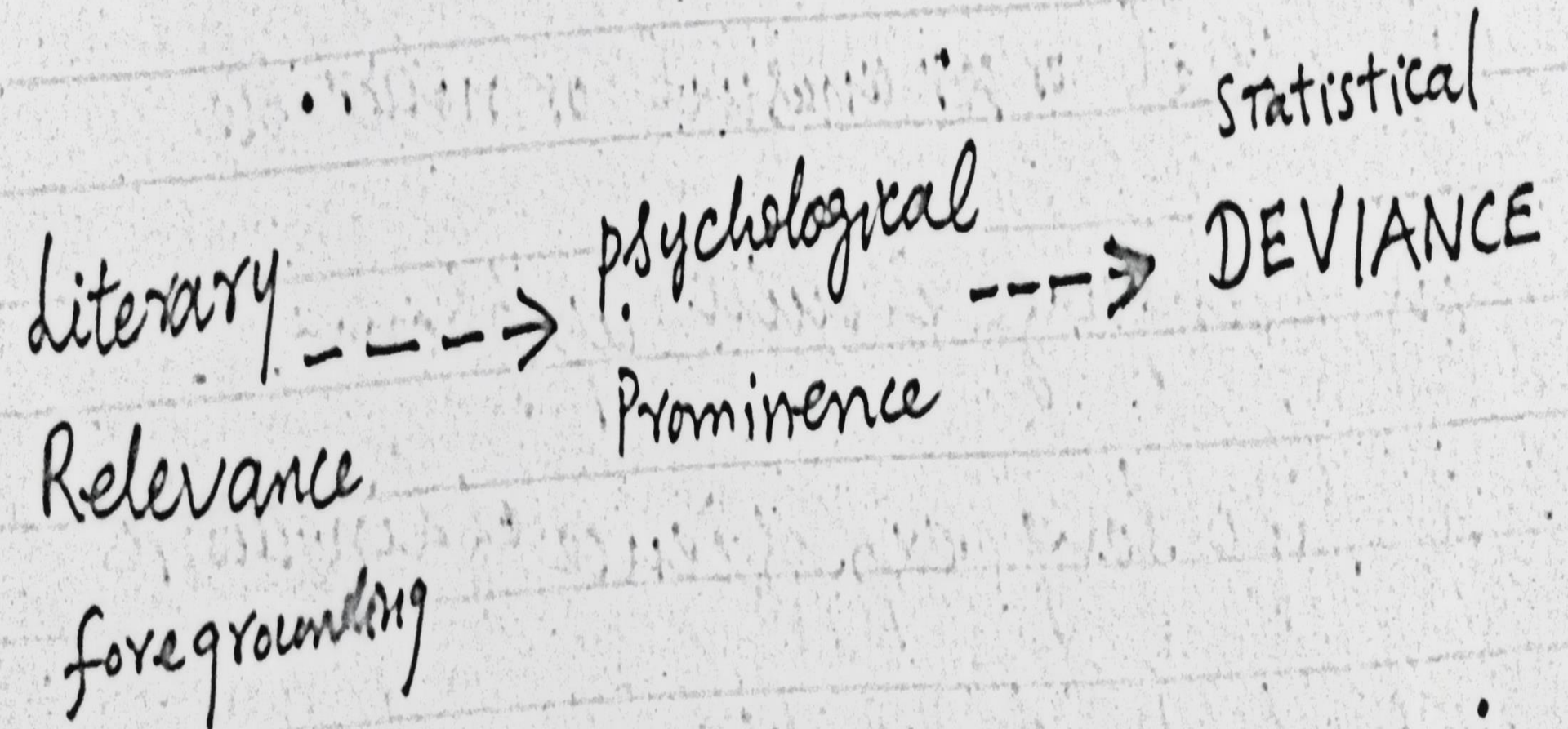
Deviance, Prominence & Literary Relevance

- Deviance: defined as a purely statistical notion, “the difference between the normal frequency of a feature and its frequency in text or corpus.”
- Prominence: the related psychological notion, “the general name for the phenomenon of linguistic highlighting, whereby some linguistic feature stands out in some way”.
- Halliday’s Literary Relevance: “value in the game”. Halliday , Leech and Short associate literary relevance with Prague school notion of FOREGROUNDING or artistically motivated deviation. Foregrounding may be qualitative and quantitative

What matters in Stylistics

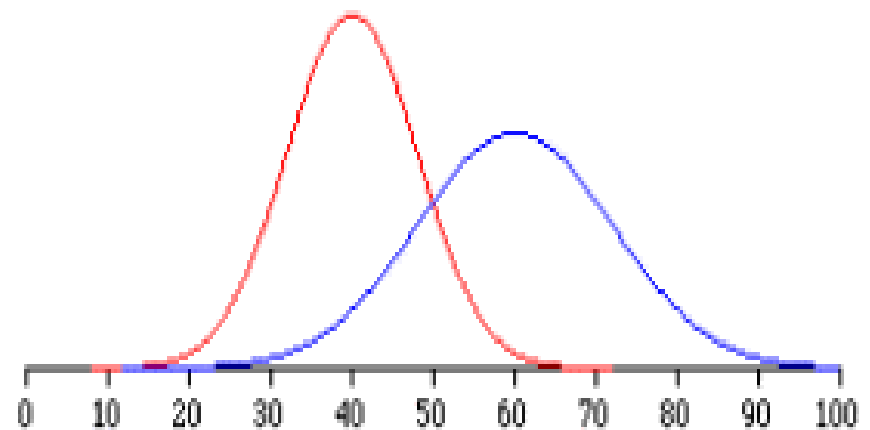
- The interrelation and interplay of the concepts of deviance, prominence and relevance is what matters in stylistics (Leech and Short 48).
- How are these three concepts of deviance, prominence, and foregrounding interrelated? Discovering the interrelations is actually knowing about the true nature of these aspects.

Interplay of The Three Aspects



Deviance

- In dictionary , 'deviance' means 'the fact or state of diverging from usual or accepted standards'. In stylistics, deviance means diverging from usual frequency of a feature in corpus.
- To work out deviance, we compare frequency of a feature in text of an author / poet with frequency of the same feature in the corpus. For instance, if the frequency of a given feature in the text is 30% and the frequency of the same feature in the corpus is 15%, it means , there is deviance.



Prominence

- In dictionary, prominence means 'the state of being noticeable or projecting from something'. In stylistics, it refers to linguistic highlighting, whereby some linguistic feature stands out in some way. Prominence is psychological saliency and depends on reader's stylistic competence.

Two Types of Foregrounding

- Qualitative Foregrounding: deviation from the language code itself---- a breach of some rule or convention of English.
- Quantitative Foregrounding: deviation from some expected frequency. Then, Leech and Short express the intentions of considering the interrelation between deviance, prominence and foregrounding. First, the relation between prominence and deviance.

Role of Stylistic Competence

- Prominence & Deviance: To discuss this we need to define two terms. Linguistics competence & stylistics competence:
- _Each of them in a capacity which we possess and exercise unconsciously and intuitively: only with special training can it be turned into explicit knowledge.

Linguistic Competence & Stylistic Competence

- But unlike linguistic competence, stylistic competence is an ability which different people possess in different measure, so that although there may be a great deal in common between different English speakers responsiveness to style, allowance must be made for difference of degree and kind.
- So, there seems to be a fairly direct relation between prominence (psychological saliency) and deviance (a function of textual frequency)

Relativity of Stylistic Competence

- How do we know what is notable in style and what is not? Is there any universal rule? Stylistic competence unlike linguistic competence is not a capacity shared by all speakers of a language. Leech and Short stress that stylistic competence is “an ability which different people possess in different measures” (Leech and Short 49). Though people may have a similar sense of style, there should be allowance for differences of kind and degree.
- The responsiveness to what is notable or common or uncommon in language is related to life experience of language use. Leech and
- Short also cite Mukařovský who thinks that the distinguishing sign of someone’s literary language is not only the isolated frequency of a specific feature but also the systematic pattern and consistency of foregrounding (Leech and Short 49-50).

- We interpret the arrows in “ $x \longrightarrow y$ ” “all instances of x are instances of Y ”. But in the opposite direction, the relation does not hold.
- According to this formulation , all cases of foregrounding should be cases of statistical deviation , but not all cases of statistical deviation are cases of foregrounding .
- In other words, deviance can be used to suggest and support hypotheses about style; but nothing can be deduced from or proved by statistics alone.

A Computer program has limitations

- **Let us suppose , then, that a computer program will tell us which are the significantly deviant features of a text and how deviant they are . It will not tell us which features are foregrounded , but it could well be a very useful guide.**

Saliency is Relative

- So, saliency in prominence is relative because of a number of factors such as his attentiveness, sensitivity to style and previous reading experience ----- stylistic competence. Our sense of what is usual or unusual or noticeable in language is built up from a life long experience of linguistic use, so that we are able to affirm with reasonable confidence and without resort to a pocket calculator that Hemingway favors short sentence. But, though our sense of saliency varies from person to person, it would be hazardous to assume that prominence and deviance are simply subjective & objective aspects of the same phenomenon. It is because of the individual differences in stylistic competence and it is likely that certain deviances do not reach the threshold of response, even for the most experienced alert, and sensitive reader.

Statistical
pattern

Positive Side
High frequency

features
occurring more
often than
usual

Prominence & Deviance

Usual →

Negative
Side

rarity

features
occurring
more
rarely

Statistical
pattern

Prominence and deviance

- Both prominence and deviance have a negative, as well as a positive side: feature which occurs more surely than usual is just as much a part of the statistical pattern as one which occurs more often than usual; and it may also be a significant aspect of our sense of style. For example the rarity of certain categories (eg transitive verbs) was just as important, as the high frequency of others: the most striking features of Lok's language were its limitations . so, sometimes if something that is required is missing, gives birth to prominence or deviance.

Value in the Game

- Foregrounding depends on coherent interpretation of style. It involves an artistically coherent pattern of choice. Its effect is to push the relevant part of the text into the reader attention, to place it as if in the foreground of the picture. Halliday's definition of foregrounding as "value in the game" is in accordance with the opinion of some theorists that foregrounding is the essential element that distinguishes literature from non—literary text. Moreover, these concepts of prominence deviance are best understood in terms of relative norm.

Relative Norms & Necessity of Quantitative Evidence

- Completely objective description of style is a myth. So, we are left with relative norms. It means that some kind of comparison outside the text or corpus is necessary. So, establishing relative norms means comparing 'A' & 'B' to discover deviance in text. For example, if we say Gibbon uses x percent concrete nouns, we need to compare Gibbon's style with other coeval writers so that we can conclude about his use of concrete nouns. The greater the range of comparison and corpus which acts as a relative norm, the more valid is the statement of relative frequency. But a small sample for is better than nothing at all Relative validity is all we can aim at.

Search for contextually related norm

- In establishing a relative norm, some contextually related norm should be worked out. The principle of “the same category of writing” should be kept in mind.

Narrowing Down Range of Comparison

- The books of Jane Austen could be compared with
- Other prose writings of the period.
- With other novels of the period.
- With other novels with similar subject matter, and so forth.

The narrower the range of comparison, the surer we shall be that the stylistic features we are attributing to Jane Austen are peculiar to her style. Leech and Short continue this discussion by extending it to the discussion of primary and secondary norms.

Primary Norms

Primary norms determine our more general expectations of language and secondary norm is established by deviance from the primary (relative) norms. For example, we feel that there is something 'odd' about Lok's language. This we do by reference to primary norms. But when we consider what might be deviant in terms of Lok's own 'dialect', we refer to the secondary norm.

- Similarly, the adaption of a style borrowed from some foreign norm or style borrowing or attainment of a norm, when writer creates his own special kind of language, is an instance of secondary norm. This secondary norm is also attained by stylistic consistency. In secondary norms, the particular pattern of frequencies sets up its own expectations. This adopted norm may of course become a literary norm or a convention in itself. The child language at the beginning of “Joyce’s Portrait” is an example of secondary norm.

Internal Deviation

- The recognition that a text may set up its own secondary norms leads to a further conclusion, that features of language within that text may depart from the norms of the text itself, that is they may 'stand out' against the background of what the text has led us to expect. This is the phenomenon of internal deviation. For example, at the beginning of Jane Austen's "Emma" the three word sentence "Miss Taylor married" stands out momentarily against the background of longer sentences.

Local characteristics of Style

- Internal deviation draws attention to local characteristics of style. There is no reason why stylistics should not cover local or individual features. The concepts of deviation , prominence and foregrounding may be given an individual as well as a frequential interpretation. At the same time pervasive features are as essential background, against which is local features become contrastive.

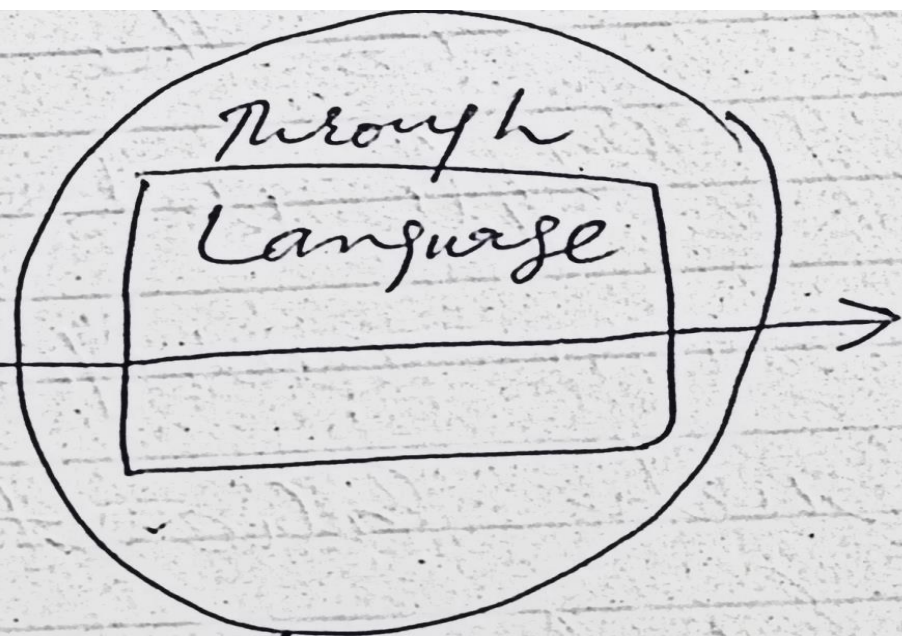
- Moreover, there may a multiplicity of styles within the same work. In Faulkner's "The Sound and The Fury" four narrators take in turns to present their vision of events to the reader.

Selecting features for analysis

- In stylistic analysis, we select some features for analysis and ignore others. So, stylistic analysis must be very selective indeed.
- How are the features for analysis to be selected ?
- To know this, let us look at the business of stylistics. Stylistics investigates the relation between writer's artistic achievement and how it is achieved through language. In other words significances of the text and the linguistic characteristics in which they are manifest.

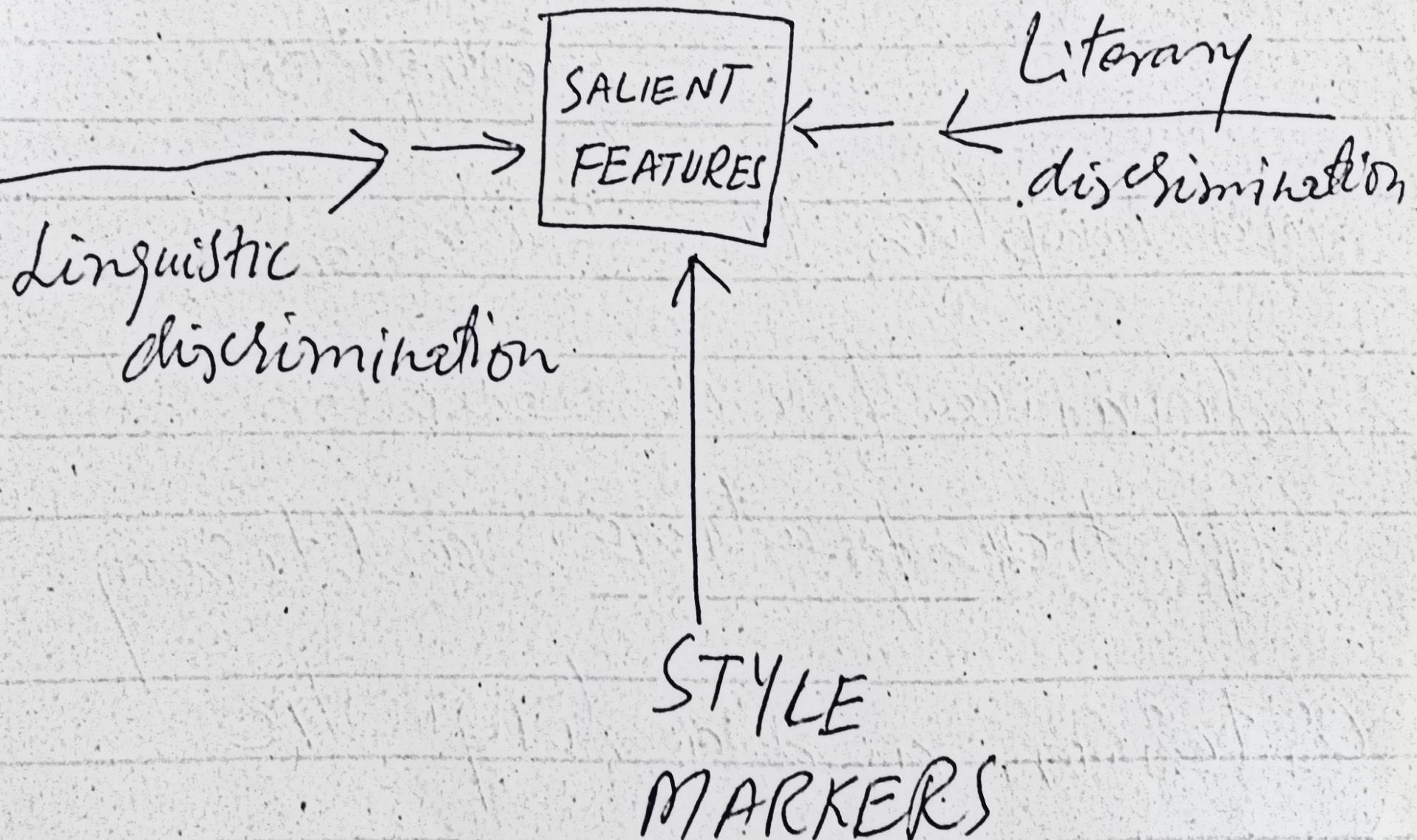
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Artistic achievement



The sphere of
Stylistic
investigation

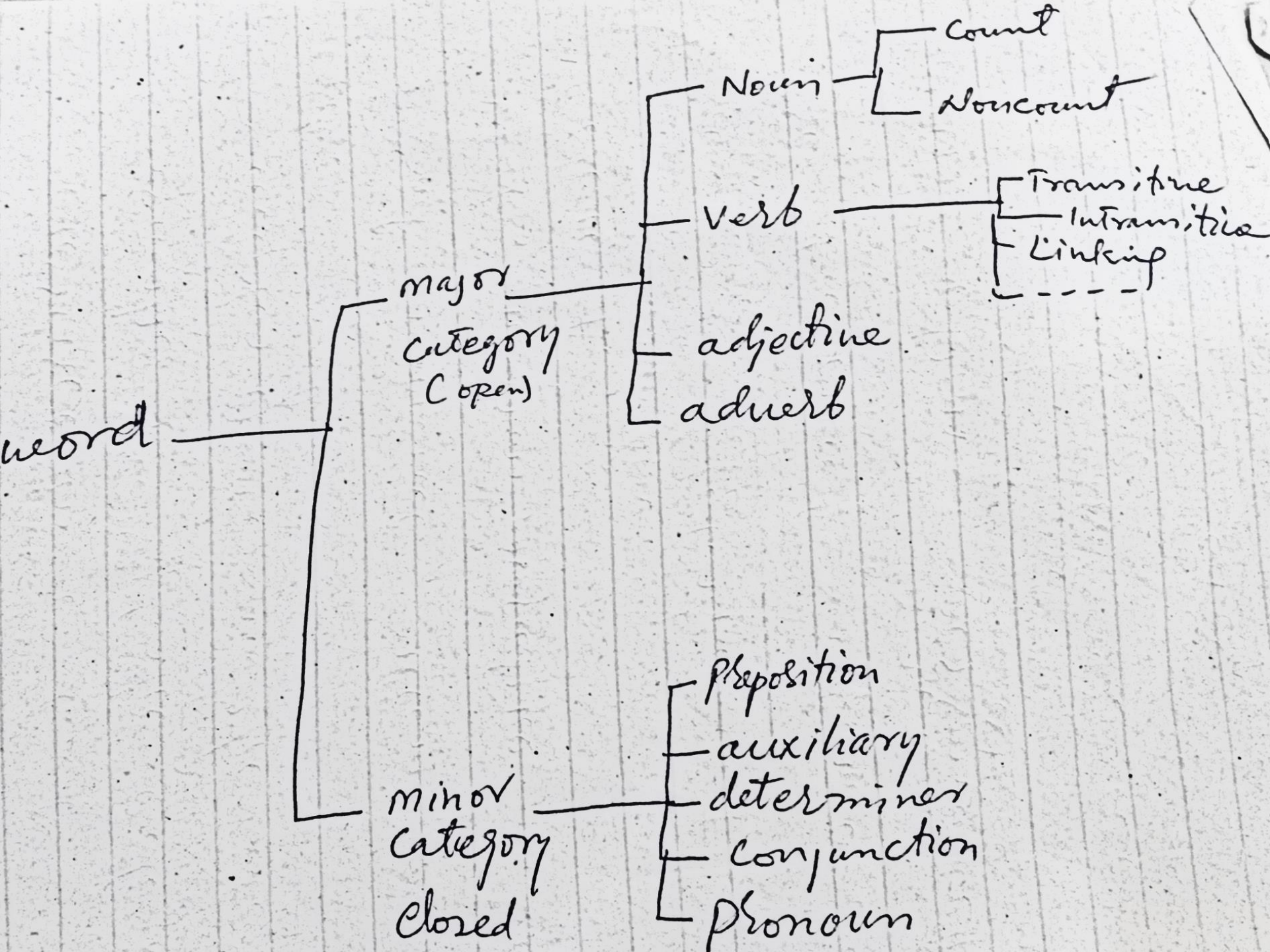
- This implies two criteria of relevance for the selection of stylistic features; a literary criterion and a linguistic criterion.
- By combining literary discrimination and linguistic discrimination in this way, he should become alert to the particular features of style which call for more careful investigation. Such salient features of style may be called style markers.



- “We may not define style markers as those linguistic items that only appear or are most or least frequent in one group of context”.

ENKVIST

- Features of Style: Linguistic categories and stylistic categories.
- The term “feature” is defined, by Leech and Short, as the occurrence in a text of linguistic or stylistic category. Examples of linguistic categories are: nasal consonant, nouns, transitive verb, question, negative, future and colour term.
- Examples of stylistic categories are: balanced sentence, alliteration, personification. Leech and Short further illustrate the concept of categories in the form of the following tree diagram of the classification of words.



Conclusion

- There is data generated by computer and there is human factor involved in the appreciation and analysis of literature. Leech argues that quantitative data has its limitations and evaluation and analysis of literature must include human perceptions and judgments . So, stylistic analysis of literature cannot solely depend on quantitative data. Computers cannot replace humans. The world of foregrounding , deviation and prominence is too complex to be dealt by computers alone because every foregrounding or artistic deviation may not form statistical deviance and every statistical deviance may not form foregrounding or artistic deviation .