Aesthetic Response of Language Learners to Stylistic Devices

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ABSTRACT

Graded readers, termed Language Learner Literature (LLL), are used mainly for extensive reading. To engage language learners, they rely upon strong plots and readable language. Rosenblatt's transactional reader response and Miall and Kuiken's foregrounding theories support the notion that stylistic devices have the capacity to create evocation, which could heighten the reading experience. The use of literary language in graded readers has been a contentious issue, due to its potential of affecting readability. Nevertheless, studies have shown that readers are capable of responding to stylistic devices regardless of their language characteristics. This study, therefore, investigated language learners' aesthetic response to stylistic devices. Employing an adapted 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire, a survey was carried out on 54 language learners at a tertiary institution to obtain their response towards two versions of a story: one with figures of speech, the other, without. Eight expressions with figures, and their corresponding expressions without them, were also tested on the respondents. The percentages and mean scores generated from the data indicated that stylistic devices do heighten learners' aesthetic reading experience. About three-quarters of the respondents favoured the version with stylistic devices. The results suggest educators should consider the use of literary language in graded readers.

Keywords: Extensive reading, foregrounding theory, graded readers, Language Learner Literature (LLL), transactional reader-response theory

INTRODUCTION

Language Learner Literature (LLL) is the body of reading materials specially written in a reduced language code for language learners with the aim of providing them with suitable texts for extensive reading (ER). As such, it is pertinent that LLL should appeal to language learners. Coined by Day and Bamford (1998), the term signifies the emergence of the genre of learner literature. LLL encompasses fiction and non-fiction, and the texts could be in original or simplified versions. LLL is commonly referred to as graded readers (GRs) (Bassett, 2015) as GRs form the mainstream of materials under LLL. GRs are called graded to reflect the laddered language difficulty of books within a series. Readers thus progress through the levels until they attain the desired level. In other words, GRs aim to prepare language learners for language mastery of native materials. It is, therefore, necessary for GRs to hold the attention of language learners to encourage them to continue reading, failing which, the purpose of increasing their proficiency would not materialise.

To support ER, language practitioners Richard Day and Julian Bamford set up the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF) in 2004. The foundation gives out awards to the best GRs every year and helps to set up Extensive Reading Programmes (ERPs) in educational institutions.

In Malaysia, residential schools were the first to participate in ER in the 1970s and over the years, ERPs such as the Class Reader Programme (CRP) and Nadi Amalan Membaca (NILAM) were introduced to cater for the needs of language learners in non-residential schools (Kanmani, 2013). However, ER is not popular at the tertiary level (Ruhil et al., 2014; Tan, 2016).

To ensure the success of ER, GRs have to be enjoyable to the language learner (Bassett, 2015). This raises the question of what makes a good GR. There is no discord among the key players in the LLL publishing industry that the story is the core factor of good reading material (Bassett, 2015; Claridge, 2011; Waring, n.d.). Good GRs must also provide an easy reading experience, that is an experience that is not linguistically challenging to the language learner. To cater for this, each level of GR is bound by linguistic constraints. This elicits a compromise on the use of language, resulting in concerns over the use of literary language.

Day and Bamford (1998) believed that the success of GRs was determined by their ability to communicate with the audience, that is, the audience must be able to experience affect and impact. Rosenblatt (1978) in her transactional reader-response theory stated that it was the transaction between the text and the reader that transpired in evocation, enabling successful communication between text and reader. The evocation allows for an aesthetic reading experience that fuels and propels the reading journey.

Day and Bamford (1998) implied that the use of literary language contributed to communication with effect and impact when they described editors who allowed the use

of poetic and figurative expressions in GRs as sensible. Rosenblatt (1978) recognised the role of stylistic devices in helping to position the reader on the aesthetic stance. Similarly, the foregrounding theory states that stylistic artefacts will be able to generate reading pleasure when the readers engage with them (Miall & Kuiken, 2002).

In the same vein, GR writers and series editors Bowler and Parminter (2015) supported GRs that use language in a more liberal manner, that is, where the style of writing was revitalising and not pedagogic. They viewed them as possibly the new type of GR.

Waring (n.d.), however, cautioned against the use of figures of speech, expressing concern for readability. Simensen (1987) in listing 11 aspects of language to be avoided in GRs with the aim of controlling the language, identified figurative uses that were not explained as being one of them. While agreeing somewhat with the use of figurative language, she insisted that such use must be explained within the text. She supported the premise of publishers that language should be explicit and require little interpretation. As put forth by Maley (2008), common sense dictates that a linguistically challenging text will discourage reading, and this is a view many cannot disagree with.

Nevertheless, a language that is impoverished may not achieve its aim of effective communication. McRae (1991) opined that unfamiliarity and unexpectedness were necessary for evoking effect and creating impact. However, this does not mean that what is unfamiliar to the learner will be problematic for her. The linguistic world of the learner is modest; hence, the language does not need to be difficult to be unfamiliar to the learner as what are considered common expressions to native speakers may be surprising or delightful to the learner (Day & Bamford, 1998).

Furthermore, readability is a problem that may not be resolved even without the use of stylistic devices if the reading level is not correct. As proposed by Day and Bamford (1998), the reading level should be $i-1$, whereby i is the language learner's reading level, and 1 signifies a level below the reader's level. The level can also be $i-2$, that is two levels below the reader's level, as the aim is to enable effortless reading to promote ER.

It is without a doubt that a good story written in linguistically appropriate language makes for a good GR. However, the issue of whether the use of literary language will contribute to more enjoyable reading experience for language learners needs to be explored due to the paucity of research done on the aesthetic response of language learners from the angle of artefact response (Chiang et al., 2018).

Purpose of the Study

This paper investigates if the use of literary language elevates the reading experience of language learners and explores language learners' aesthetic response towards stylistic devices or foregrounding, which are the artefacts of literary language. Based on the purpose of the study, the following research questions were posed:

1 (a): How do language learners respond aesthetically to a story void of selected stylistic devices?

1 (b): How do language learners respond aesthetically to the same story with selected stylistic devices?

2 (a): How do language learners respond to expressions void of selected stylistic devices?

2 (b): How do language learners respond to expressions with selected stylistic devices?

Literature Review

Aesthetic Reading Theories. A key player in the transactional reader-response theory, Rosenblatt (1978) introduced the concept of aesthetic and efferent reading stances. A reader who adopts the aesthetic stance reads primarily for pleasure as opposed to reading for information, which is the purpose of the reader in taking the efferent stance. In aesthetic reading, both the story elements and the words play a role in the text-reader transaction. Although content or a good story is important in creating an aesthetic reading experience, by itself it cannot guarantee a transaction, which is a two-way interaction between reader and text, whereby the reader plays the active role. The transactional theory states that when a transaction occurs, evocation is generated, helping to place the reader on the aesthetic stance. This means that the felt experience of reading pleasure occurs when the text and the reader transact.

A story is read efferently if the purpose is only to attain the plot. This means the text is not enjoyed. The reader has no interest in savouring the words and is personally detached from the text. However, in aesthetic reading, it is the reading journey that the

reader is concerned with. It is what the reader "is living through during his relationship with the particular text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.25). When the reading activity involves savouring the sounds of words, an evocation of feelings and enjoyment of the reading journey, transaction transpires. This signifies an aesthetic appreciation of the words and evocation of emotions. The use of stylistic or formal devices, therefore, is one way to rouse the reader to assume the aesthetic stance. Words incite the reader to connect his sensations and feelings and imagination to his ideas (Rosenblatt, 1988, 1982, 1978). Rosenblatt (1982) substantiated her notion by highlighting how children were drawn to the sound and rhythm of words despite their limited cognitive strategies.

It has to be noted that Rosenblatt's (1978) aesthetic stance refers to both the reader's experience with the words of the text as well as the reader's private response which results from the reader's personal experiences. Soter et al. (2010) delineated both types of response by describing the aesthetic response as a response to the artefacts of the text and expressive response as response evoked by the reader's personal connection with the text. To be able to respond aesthetically, the reader must have engagement with the text. The text must be relied upon, and this is what Rosenblatt (1978) expounded, opined Soter et al. (2010). In the present study, it is the aesthetic response or the evocation created by the hardware of the text that is the focus.

Rosenblatt (1978) developed her transactional theory based on the first language (L1) readers. She explained that

she developed her theory from observing how her graduate students responded to literary texts. Her reader-response theory has been employed by Iskhak (2015) and Khairul (2016) in their studies on language learners. Claridge (2011) advocated that evocation of texts took place in readers, whether language learners or not, in the same manner in the context of reading for pleasure. Hence, she viewed the transactional reader-response theory as being applicable to language learners as well. No doubt, linguistic proficiency may affect learners' reading experience, as is the concern of Waring (n.d.) and many GR publishers, but it is irrelevant if the difficulty level (*i-1*) of the text matches the readers', as in the context of ER.

Another theory that supports the doctrine that aesthetic experience can be achieved via the use of stylistic devices is the foregrounding theory. The theory proposes that unusual forms of language, or foregrounding, afford the reader unexpected visions or perceptions and sensations (Van Peer & Hakemulder, 2006). This theory is also known as the theory of deviation, which relies on the concept of linguistic elements that are not common such as rhyme, word order and parallelism, which usually fall under the umbrella of figures of speech. In view of this, literary artefacts fall under the scope of foregrounding (Khairul et al., 2012a).

Figures of speech, which are foregrounding devices, have been recognised to be capable of elevating emotions (Chapman, 1982; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). The present investigation employs Miall and Kuiken's (2002, 1994) foregrounding theory, which echoes the general concept of the foregrounding theory that states foregrounding interrupts the reading experience to bring about evocation and sensations. In their foregrounding theory, Miall and Kuiken (2002) explained that devices used in foregrounding capacitate the evocation of feelings as a result of defamiliarisation. These feelings, which embody bodily emotions, moods and attitudes, direct the cognitive work during reading (Kuiken et al., 2004; Miall & Kuiken, 1994). This means interpretations of meanings are a result of feelings. Miall and Kuiken (2002) further advocated that readers were able to enjoy the aesthetic feelings derived from engagement with the formal features of a literary text. In other words, formal features of texts evoke aesthetic feelings, inducing the reader to have a transaction with the text. As such, Miall and Kuiken's (2002, 1994) foregrounding theory resonates with Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional reader-response theory.

Studies have been carried out based on the foregrounding theory to assess responses to literary style, particularly to see how foregrounding evokes feelings. Russian formalist Shklovsky (1998, p.18) asserted that stylistic devices help "to make one feel things, to make the stone stony"; hence, expressions that are aided by devices will be able to achieve the greater emotional effect (Miall & Kuiken, 1994).

Empirical tests have shown that the processes of foregrounding are independent of the reader's background or training (Van Peer & Hakemulder, 2006). As such, the foregrounding theory is relevant to language learners and GRs.

It is quite evident from a review of the two theories that the transactional reader-response theory and the foregrounding theory are intertwined, with the foregrounding theory acting as a support to the transactional theory (Khairul, 2016). Khairul et al. (2012a) captured the essence of the two theories when they deduced that "the primary focus grounded in the studies of foregrounding and reader response is that reader response can be evoked by … the elements of the story world … and … the text itself ", with one of the responses being the aesthetic emotion.

Studies on Language Learners' Aesthetic Response

No known direct studies have been conducted on language learners' aesthetic response to foregrounding or stylistic devices. However, some related studies have indicated that language learners are capable of engaging with stylistic devices. In Khairul's (2016) investigation in which she constructed a pedagogy to help learners appreciate foregrounding, she observed from her survey that her 17-year-old second-language (L2) learner Malaysian respondents were able to respond aesthetically to the foregrounding elements in literary texts.

In another study, Chesnokova and Van Peer (2016) conducted a study that investigated English as Foreign Language (EFL) readers' responses towards stylistic devices to gather the manner in which the respondents interpreted the devices. Their study suggested that the respondents appreciated deviations. However,

interestingly, they did not favour excessive deviations. More interestingly, the findings revealed that deviations that were overly extensive were also not favoured by trained readers.

Wan-a-rom's (2011) study of 80 teenage Thai participants showed that the learners had the capacity to be engaged with texts utilising stylistic devices. A participant who read the GR version of *Jane Eyre* expressed her enjoyment of the detailed emotions and scenes depicted (imagery) and expressed her motivation to read the original version for a more realistic experience. Another participant who read *Gulliver's Travel* at Level 2 of Penguin Readers conveyed his enjoyment of his reading experience due to the vividness of the imagery presented.

The implications of these studies are not surprising as studies by Miall and Kuiken (1994), Miall (2006), and Van Peer et al. (2007) had demonstrated that there was no correlation between readers' response to foregrounding and the readers' literary background. This proposes that readers, regardless of their experience with literary language (Miall, 2006; Miall & Kuiken, 1994; Van Peer et al. 2007; Van Peer & Hakemulder 2006), are capable of experiencing elevated emotions when they encounter stylistic devices. Soter et al. (2010) construed that readers were capable of experiencing the text without being aware of what contributed to the experience. Based on this, it cannot be assumed that language learners lack the capacity to react emotionally to stylistic devices. In addition, there is also evidence that language skills

from the first language can be transferred in performing language tasks involving other languages (Barnett, 1989).

On the other hand, there are studies that suggest that the use of stylistic devices in texts does not evoke an aesthetic reading experience. In fact, one of the studies found that it may even bring negative effects to language learners. Gillis-Furutaka (2015) discovered that the use of figurative expressions caused confusion among learners even though the lexical items used in the figurative expressions were within the designated headword list for each level of GR. Her findings suggest that stylistic devices do not contribute to an aesthetic reading experience; however, her methods of measuring the respondents' reading level in ensuring the correct reading level of her respondents were questionable. She measured their language levels by determining their reading fluency by asking her respondents, who were university students, to read aloud to her and by administering a reading comprehension exercise consisting of five questions based on the first few pages of GR texts (about 700 words). She used the publishers' guidelines of levels and number of headwords stated in determining the level of texts for her respondents. Lastly, she used a retrospective think-aloud protocol to understand her respondents' reading strategies and difficulties in understanding. Gillis-Furutaka (2015) did not indicate that arriving at the suitable reading level of her respondents was of primary concern, which is crucial for ER. In fact, she admitted that her methods

of arriving at suitable levels of GRs for the purpose of her research, which was to explore factors that impede comprehension, were unsuitable for investigating ER experience that focusses on fast and easy reading.

In another study, Khairul et al. (2012b) opined that language learners might not be receptive to stylistic devices, especially low proficient readers. In their study, they observed that when presented with a short story, both low and high proficient readers, as language learners, were primarily evoked by the narrative dimension rather than by the aesthetic aspects or literary devices of the story.

Drawing from the literature review, it is not wrong to deduce that language learners are not foregrounding impaired. However, for an aesthetic response to take place, it is paramount that the reading level is at Day and Bamford's (1998) recommended *i-1*, whereby *i* is the learner's language level. This means *i-1* is the learner's comfort zone in which the material can be read easily and with confidence. When the reading level is not within the learner's comfort zone, the aesthetic experience may not take place, as evidenced in Gillis-Furutaka's (2015) study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

To investigate language learners' aesthetic response to stylistic devices, the quantitative approach was employed. A survey that used purposive sampling was carried out by administering an adapted 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire to generate the data in

the form of percentages and mean scores for descriptive analysis. The data were then compared for statistical significance. The questionnaire was accompanied by two versions of the same story, which were tested out on the respondents, with Version A (VA) void of figures of speech and Version B (VB) containing them. Figures of speech are known to be foregrounding or stylistic devices that have aesthetic value (Chapman, 1982; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014), and are considered to be devices that are capable of contributing to communication with impact and effect (Day & Bamford, 1998). They were, therefore, selected as the stylistic devices to be tested.

Respondents

The respondents were 54 first-year university college diploma undergraduates taking a compulsory English course. Twenty-three of them were male and 31 were female. They had studied English as a second language for 11 years and had obtained low distinction to credit in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) English language examination. The SPM examination is an O-level-equivalent national examination. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 20. The respondents whose English examination results did not fall within the stated range were not included in the investigation as the level of texts to be used in the study would not have matched the recommended *i-1* or even *i-2* range for them.

Instruments

The Questionnaire. There were two parts to the questionnaire. The first part consisted of one question, which aimed to compare the aesthetic reading experience between the two versions of the story tested on the respondents. The item reflected Rosenblatt's (1978) aesthetic notion and Miall and Kuiken's (2002) concept of evaluative response, which takes into account the overall pleasure.

The second part of the questionnaire aimed to measure the respondents' aesthetic response to expressions without and with figures of speech. It consisted of four items that were generated from three sources: questions posed by Miall and Kuiken (1994) in a study that investigated strikingness and affect towards foregrounding; the LRQ (Literary Response Questionnaire) (Miall & Kuiken, 1995); and Van Peer et al.'s (2007) questionnaire, which assesses foregrounding effects. The statements were selected and adapted based on the aesthetic theory of Rosenblatt (1978) and the foregrounding theory of Miall and Kuiken (2002), which reflected two dimensions of the aesthetic reading experience: aesthetic appreciation and evocation. The four items in the questionnaire, which were subdivided into the two categories of aesthetic response are:

Aesthetic appreciation

(i) Statement 1: This expression is striking (it captures my attention/ it is different/ it stands out).
(ii) Statement 2: This expression is beautiful.

Evocation

(iii) Statement 3: This expression lets me feel the description (e.g. see/ feel/ smell/ hear).

(iv) Statement 4: This expression arouses feelings in me (e.g. feel sad, touched, moved).

The questionnaire was tested for reliability utilising the internal-consistency procedure. The Cronbach's alpha generated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the four items that measure aesthetic response was .971, while for the constructs 'Appreciation' and 'Evocation', the values were .938 and .943, respectively. These reliability indices are considered high (Hinton, et al., 2014).

The Texts. The story tested out on the respondents, "Dora's Turn" (Bassett, 2008), was selected based on its suitability of language level, its story or content and expressions (figures of speech) used. It was retold by Jennifer Basset, whom Tabata-Sandom (2013) described as one of the very best GR writers available. A level A2 story, which consists of 700 headwords, it was at the respondents' reading level at *i-1*, a reading level recommended for ER that fulfils the criteria of materials that can be read quickly, easily and with few unknown words (Day & Bamford, 1998).

To determine the accuracy of the recommended level of GRs for the respondents, two methods were employed: relying on the researcher's empirical assessment and conducting a survey to validate the empirical assessment. Using the researcher's empirical assessment, when the researcher is the respondents' language instructor, is a common practice as language teachers are usually responsible for selecting GRs for their students' ERPs (Claridge, 2011). The questionnaire survey utilised the judgement of readability by the learners themselves; this measure has been shown to be accurate in prior research (Klare, 2002). Having gauged the respondents' levels at the Elementary and Intermediate levels of GR texts, the researcher sought the help of her colleagues to carry out the questionnaire survey to avoid researcher bias. The first few pages of two texts (about 700 words) at the two levels (Elementary and Intermediate) and a questionnaire that sought to assess comprehensibility and reading speeds were distributed to the respondents.

For the purpose of the present study, the story selected for the survey of aesthetic response was shortened to almost half its original length to deter fatigue and disinterest. This move was taken as the respondents had shown disinterest and fatigue during the readability survey. More than 300 words long, the story was then manipulated to produce two versions of texts, with one void of figures of speech (Version A) and the other containing figures of speech (Version B). Both reflected the original text of the selected GR story. The figures of speech in the original text were retained and some figures were further added. The two texts were then proofread by a native speaker who was an editor to ensure the correctness of manipulation.

Procedure

The 54 respondents were asked to read the two versions of the story before answering the Likert-scale questionnaire. To neutralise order effects, half of the respondents were asked to read Version A (VA) of the story first and the other half were asked to read Version B (VB) first. The respondents were asked to respond to eight expressions without figures of speech taken from VA and eight corresponding expressions with figures of speech taken from VB. The following is an example of the two versions of expressions:

(i). VA: We are soldiers. No one must escape.

(ii). VB: We are soldiers - no escaping, no running away.

For each expression, they were asked to respond to the four items by circling the appropriate response ranging from "Strongly agree" (1) to "Strongly disagree" (5). The data collected were then computed for percentages and mean scores.

RESULTS

The present study was conducted to explore the effects of stylistic or foregrounding devices on language learners' aesthetic reading experience. The data obtained from the questionnaire were segregated into three groups, by combining "Strongly agree" and "Agree" into one group and "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree" into another to form two polarised groups for distinctive and perceivable results. The response "Not sure" remained a category of its own. The research findings provided answers to (i) language learners' aesthetic response to a text without figures of speech and another version of the text with figures and (ii) the learners' aesthetic response to language expressions without and with figures of speech.

Respondents' Enjoyment Level in Response to Texts Without and with Figures of Speech

Table 1 shows the respondents' preference for the same story without and with figures of speech. A total of 66.7% of the respondents agreed that VA was enjoyable to read compared to 72.2% who found VB to be enjoyable to read, signifying a slightly higher percentage of respondents favouring a text that employed stylistic devices. The mean score of 2.28 for VA versus 2.20 for VB reflects that the respondents were more drawn towards a story that carried less stilted expressions.

Table 1

Language learners' enjoyment response to texts without and with figures of speech: Percentages and mean scores

	Story without figures of speech (VA)		Story with figures of speech (VB)	
	Enjoyment		Enjoyment	
	%	Mean	%	Mean
Agree	66.7		72.2	
Not sure	18.5	2.28	13.0	2.20
Disagree	14.8		14.8	

Respondents' Aesthetic Response to Expressions Without and with Figures of Speech

Table 2 shows the respondents' aesthetic response towards expressions without and expressions with figures of speech and Table 3 gives a breakdown of the respondents' aesthetic response, which consists of the two aesthetic dimensions, aesthetic appreciation and evocation of senses and feelings.

The results displayed in Table 2 show that the respondents responded more positively to expressions that used figures of speech, with average mean scores of 2.60 and 2.37 for expressions without figures of speech and expressions with figures of speech, respectively. Out of the eight expressions tested on the respondents, only one expression, Expression 7 ("Then they must kill us both" versus "Then kill us both they must"), which involved the use of inverted word order or the figure 'anastrophe', was less well-received by the respondents. The results show that the respondents reacted more positively to the expression without the device. Expression 2, which employed 'personification' and 'onomatopoeia', and Expression 6, which employed 'metaphor', attained the highest differences in mean scores (0.54 and 0.55, respectively).

Table 3, which shows the breakdown of the two aesthetic constructs, appreciation and evocation, projected consistent and similar results, with the average mean score of 2.30. The average mean scores for a response to expressions without figures of speech demonstrated that the respondents experienced less 'evocation' (2.59) and 'appreciation' (2.68).

Table 2

Language learners' aesthetic response to expressions without and with figures of speech: Percentages and mean scores

	Expressions without figures of speech (VA)		Expressions with figures of speech (VB)	
	Overall aesthetic response		Overall aesthetic response	
	%	Mean	%	Mean
Expression 1				
Agree	47.2		62.1	
Not sure	26.4	2.73	19.9	2.31
Disagree	26.4		18.0	
Expression 2				
Agree	44.0		67.2	
Not sure	30.5	2.77	20.3	2.23
Disagree	25.5		12.5	

Table 2 *(Continued)*

	Expressions without figures of speech (VA)		Expressions with figures of speech (VB)	
	Overall aesthetic response		Overall aesthetic response	
	%	Mean	%	Mean
Expression 3				
Agree	46.8		70.8	
Not sure	23.6	2.80	17.1	2.64
Disagree	29.6		12.1	
Expression 4				
Agree	51.4		57.4	
Not sure	27.3	2.56	23.6	2.49
Disagree	21.3		19.0	
Expression 5				
Agree	62.1		68.1	
Not sure	15.7	2.53	15.6	2.16
Disagree	22.2		16.3	
Expression 6				
Agree	47.2		72.2	
Not sure	31.0	2.68	12.0	2.13
Disagree	21.8		15.8	
Expression 7				
Agree	67.2		42.1	
Not sure	18.0	2.23	22.2	2.95
Disagree	14.8		35.7	
Expression 8				
Agree	56.1		68.0	
Not sure	26.8	2.51	17.6	2.11
Disagree	17.1		14.4	
Average mean score		2.60		2.37

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results show that a higher percentage of the respondents found a text containing stylistic devices to be more enjoyable to read than a text without stylistic devices. This indicates that a text that is adorned with devices has the capacity to draw language learners towards the aesthetic reading stance.

Table 3

Language learners' aesthetic appreciation and the evocation to expressions without and with figures of speech: Percentages and mean scores

	Expressions without figures of speech (VA)		Expressions with figures of speech (VB)		Expressions without figures of speech (VA)		Expressions with figures of speech (VB)	
	Appreciation		Appreciation		Evocation		Evocation	
	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean
Expression 1								
Agree	43.5		60.2		50.9		63.9	
Not sure	26.9	2.81	23.1	2.28	25.9	2.65	16.6	2.34
Disagree	29.6		16.7		23.2		19.5	
Expression 2								
Agree	38.0		74.1		50.0		60.2	
Not sure	35.1	2.86	13.9	2.17	25.9	2.68	26.8	2.30
Disagree	26.9		12.0		24.1		13.0	
Expression 3								
Agree	41.7		72.2		51.9		69.4	
Not sure	26.8	2.89	13.9	2.12	20.3	2.70	20.4	2.10
Disagree	31.5		13.9		27.8		10.2	
Expression 4								
Agree	45.4		55.6		57.4		59.3	
Not sure	35.1	2.65	23.1	2.54	19.4	2.47	24.0	2.44
Disagree	19.5		21.3		23.2		16.7	
Expression 5								
Agree	63.9		69.4		60.2		66.6	
Not sure	16.7	2.57	14.8	2.13	14.8	2.59	16.7	2.19
Disagree	19.4		15.8		25.0		16.7	
Expression 6								
Agree	43.5		74.1		50.9		70.4	
Not sure	32.4	2.78	10.2	2.11	29.6	2.59	13.9	2.14
Disagree	24.1		15.7		19.5		15.7	
Expression 7								
Agree	64.9		41.7		69.5		42.6	
Not sure	20.4	2.25	22.2	2.99	15.7	2.22	22.2	2.90
Disagree	14.7		36.1		14.8		35.2	

Table 3 *(Continued)*

	Expressions without figures of speech (VA)		Expressions with figures of speech (VB)		Expressions without figures of speech (VA)		Expressions with figures of speech (VB)	
	Appreciation		Appreciation		Evocation		Evocation	
	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean
Expression 8								
Agree	54.7		65.8		57.4		70.4	
Not sure	24.0	2.60	19.4	2.13	29.6	2.41	15.7	2.10
Disagree	21.3		14.8		13.0		13.9	
Average mean score		2.68		2.30		2.59		2.30

The findings also suggest that the language learners were largely capable of adopting an aesthetic reading stance with a text void of stylistic devices, implying that good content alone has the capacity to beget a transaction. Rosenblatt (1988) opined that content alone did not guarantee a transaction; however, this investigation suggests that while there is no guarantee that a transaction will take place by relying on content alone, language learners are very capable of being able to savour undecked content. Nevertheless, as observed by Khairul et al. (2012b) in their investigation, even though both aesthetic and narrative responses play a role in reader engagement, what gives rise to a more enjoyable reading journey is the aesthetic response.

With regard to the language learners' overall aesthetic response to expressions that use stylistic devices and expressions sans devices, the survey results suggest that a majority of these language learners did possess the faculty for appreciating the beauty of language, and had the capacity to be evoked by stylistic artefacts. However, interestingly, the respondents did not respond in the same manner to different types of stylistic device. The respondents did not react positively towards the anastrophe but showed their ability to be evoked by more common types of devices, mainly personification, onomatopoeia and metaphor, and to appreciate them. However, Gillis-Furutaka (2015) discovered in her study that all her respondents found onomatopoeia ("The stick made a THWACK sound when it hit the walls", taken from a Level-A2 text) to be confusing. She provided no explanation for her respondents' confusion despite having interviewed them to try to comprehend their difficulty in understanding the figure of speech. The researcher is of the opinion that onomatopoeia is a device that should be the easiest to understand, as it is a mimic of sound and requires no high levels of cognitive maturity to grasp its meaning and effect. In fact, it is a device very commonly used in children's books.

However, in the present study, it is quite understandable why many of the respondents were not able to respond

aesthetically to the anastrophe. It can be perceived that the anastrophe might seem awkward or unnatural to the respondents; hence it probably impeded their ability to appreciate the expression. The results resonate the findings by Chesnokova and Van Peer (2016) which showed that readers, be they trained or untrained, did not favour extensive and excessive deviations despite their ability to appreciate deviations.

The breakdown of the aesthetic dimensions 'appreciation' and 'evocation' shows both elements were similar in their mean scores. The average mean scores suggest that the respondents were equally capable of showing appreciation for and being evoked by figures of speech. Similarly, the average mean scores for a response to expressions without figures of speech demonstrate that the respondents experienced less appreciation and evocation compared to their response to expressions utilising figures.

The results of the survey support the proposition by Day and Bamford (1998) that the use of literary language contributed to communication with effect and impact. They echoed the findings by Khairul (2016) that language learners were in fact equipped to respond positively to foregrounding devices. The results also reflect the findings of Miall and Kuiken's (1994), which evidenced that the use of foregrounding devices had the ability to strike readers and produce emotional effects. They postulated that the evocation of feelings as a result of foregrounding bears no link with the readers' literary competence. In other words,

the premise that readers' aesthetic reading experience can be elevated by stylistic devices is applicable not only to L1 readers but language learners as well. However, the results reveal that the language learners did not respond in the same manner to different stylistic devices. There was an indication that the respondents did not react positively to language phenomena that seemed strange to them.

While acknowledging the concern raised by Waring (n.d.) that using stylistic devices might affect readability, it has to be borne in mind that if the concept of selecting materials at the *i-1* level is abided by, the matter would no longer be of concern. The study by Gillis-Furutaka (2015) found that the use of figurative expressions caused confusion among her learners was probably a result of her failure to ensure the right level of reading texts.

It is quite evident from the present study that it cannot be assumed that language learners are incapable of experiencing an aesthetic reading experience when the text is embellished with stylistic artefacts. As such, this study implies that the use of literary language in GRs will contribute to a more enjoyable reading experience. For ERPs to succeed, it is pertinent that the instrument is correctly crafted.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the role of stylistic devices in heightening language learners' aesthetic reading experience with the aim of providing language learners with more appealing reading materials. This will help

to make the ER experience enjoyable, and in turn, contribute to the success of ERPs. While it has been acknowledged that content plays a vital role in creating an enjoyable reading experience, there has been discord in opinion on the role of stylistic devices in creating an aesthetic reading experience in language learners, with readability being a concern. As such, an investigation examining how learners respond to the artistic tools of writing was deemed necessary.

By selecting figures of speech as the stylistic devices and eliciting language learners' response to them, the results of the investigation suggest that, in the context of reading for pleasure, learners of language do have the capacity to experience an elevated aesthetic response when they engage with stylistic devices if the reading material is at a suitable level. In fact, a higher number of learners experienced a more enjoyable reading journey with a text that used stylistic devices compared to a lower number of learners who enjoyed reading a text void of devices.

Nevertheless, language learners do not necessarily react aesthetically to all types of stylistic device. This is an area that can be further probed, by ascertaining the suitability of types of stylistic device for language learners. However, the present study also revealed that not all language learners may respond positively to the use of stylistic devices in their reading experience. The results of this research suggest to producers of GRs to consider exploring the use of suitable figurative expressions in GRs, and to English as Second Language (ESL) educators, to consider taking into account the use of literary language in GRs when selecting materials for ERPs.

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