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STYLISTICS AND LITERARY ANALYSIS

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STILISTIK ER EN LINGVISTISK DISCIPLIN, DER MED
UDGANGSPUNKT I EN DETALJERET SPROGLIG ANALYSE
UNDERSØGER TEKSTERS STILMÆSSIGE VIRKEMIDLER SÅSOM
ORDVALG, BRUGEN AF METAFORER, GRAMMATISKE
STRUKTURER, RIM OG RYTME, BRUGEN AF IKKE-STANDARD
SPROG MV. OPLÆGGET INTRODUCERER GRUNDLÆGGENDE
ASPEKTER AF STILISTIKKEN SÅSOM FOREGROUNDING OG
DEVIATION OG KOMMER MED EKSEMPLER PÅ, HVORDAN
STILISTISKE ANALYSER KAN BRUGES TIL AT STYRKE BÅDE
VIDEN OM SPROG SAMT LITTERÆR FORTOLKNING.

OVERVIEW

- Stylistics
 - Foregrounding
- Ecstylistics
- Ideas for exploration
- Example analysis: The Revenant (novel)
 - Group work
 - Suggestions for incorporating AI

I have included a lot of text extracts and analysis – more than we can cover today, but perhaps this can act as inspiration and material for your own teaching.

STYLISTICS

- Stylistics: Linguistic analysis of texts through close reading and detailed description.
 - Focuses on language structure, textual construction, and interpretation.
 - Analyses should be replicable by other scholars (Simpson 2014).
- Investigates **language, texts, readers, and contexts**.
- Challenges **ideologies and belief systems** embedded in texts.
- Draws from diverse fields:
 - Pragmatics
 - Cognitive linguistics
 - Gender studies
 - Corpus & historical linguistics
 - Multimodality & neuroscience

STYLISTICS

- Focus on grammar mainly (but can include sound level):
 - Morphology (word formation)
 - Syntax (sentence structure)
 - Lexis & Semantics (word meaning & relations)
- Stylistic analysis = grammatical commentary (Toolan 2014)
- Uses close reading to identify significant patterns and choices (although stylistics can also be quantitative!).
- Interested in **foregrounding**, point of view, and metaphor.
 - Create link between linguistic form and textual meaning.
- Goal: to explain how language choices shape interpretation and ensure analysis is organized, retrievable, and replicable.

FOREGROUNDING

- Foregrounding: Use of non-standard language to draw attention and provoke interpretation.
 - Prominence and salience arouse curiosity and deepen interpretation.
- Foregrounding = meaning-making through aesthetic deviation achieved through unusual vocabulary, grammar, similes, metaphors, layout, and narrative structure.
- Related to defamiliarisation (Šklovsky, 1917):
 - Makes the familiar seem strange
 - Enhances perception and engagement
 - Marks aesthetic and cultural value
- Term from Prague School (Mukařovský, 1964), metaphorically linked to visual prominence in art.
- Contrasts foreground (noticeable) with background (standard/unmarked language).
- Foregrounding created either via (internal/external) deviation or parallelism

ECOSTYLISTICS

- Ecology: relationships between different forms of life
- So, if stylistics “challenges **ideologies and belief systems** embedded in texts” – then ecostylistics takes a particular interest in the ideologies expressed with regard to the relationship between humans and the rest of the biosphere
- In other words: “Its main concern is to investigate connections between style and the natural environment in discourse. Broadly conceived as the air, water, and land inhabited by people, animals, and plants.” (Mohamed & Jaafar 2023)
- **Ecostylistics:** traditional and innovative analytical techniques and frameworks to texts concerned with ecological issues. (Fiction)
- **Ecolinguistics:** “explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment” (The International Ecolinguistics Association 2024) (Non-fiction)

IDEAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- Postcolonial literature typically emerges from countries that were once colonies of European powers (India, Nigeria, Jamaica, Kenya, South Africa, etc.), and often reflects the historical, cultural, and political aftermath of colonial rule.
- Postcolonial literature is a site where environmental and ecological issues are effectively problematised in relation to historical, socio-political and economic pressures and, as such, an ideal area of investigation not only for postcolonial ecocriticism but also for ecostylistics.
- See Adami 2025 for more on postcolonial stylistics
- See Viridis (2022) for more on ecological stylistics (stylistic interpretations of non-fiction texts from environmental organizations)

EXAMPLE: THE REVENANT, MICHAEL PUNKE, 2002

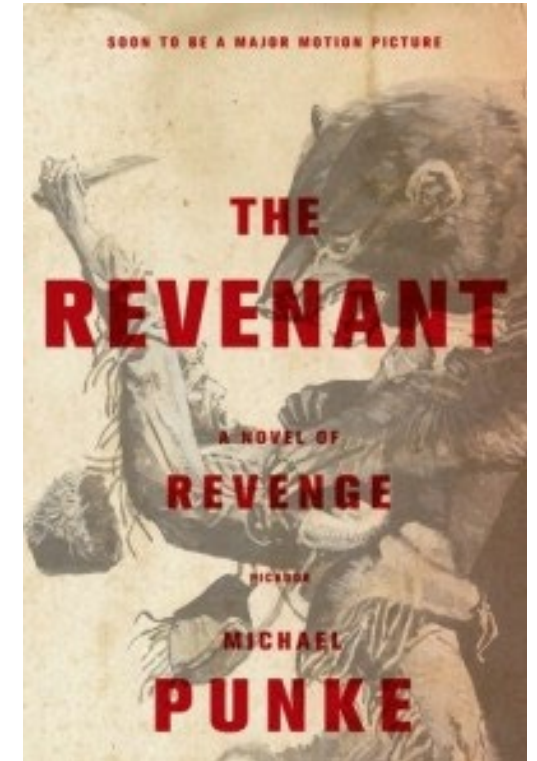
- “Hugh Glass isn’t afraid to die. He’s done it once already.

Rocky Mountains, 1823. The trappers of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company live a brutal frontier life. Hugh Glass is one of the most respected men in the company, an experienced frontiersman and an expert tracker. But when a scouting mission puts Glass face-to-face with a grizzly bear, he is viciously mauled and not expected to survive. Two men from the company are ordered to remain with him until his inevitable death. But, fearing an imminent attack, they abandon Glass, stripping him of his prized rifle and hatchet.

As Glass watches the men flee, he is driven to survive by one all-consuming desire: revenge. With shocking grit and determination, he sets out on a three-thousand-mile journey across the harsh American frontier, to seek revenge on the men who betrayed him.

The Revenant is a remarkable tale of obsession and the lengths that one man will go to for retribution.

The novel that inspired the epic new movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hardy.”



AREAS OF INTEREST

- Historical fiction, the frontier, nature, survival, indigenous population, “cowboys and Indians”, Western (genre) = could fit into a range of themes within a teaching setting
- Based on a true story – parts of the book read like a documentary, other parts more ‘like fiction’ = could be interesting to look for linguistic clues of what gives this impression
- Also a film (2015) = could compare scenes from the film and in the book (what visual effects are used to replicate the linguistic effects?)
- In this session: (Eco)stylistic analysis: transitivity, agency, dynamic vs stative, semantic categories
- Focus on the character Glass (trapper vs nature)

Transitive verbs take a direct object (something or someone that receives the action).

Intransitive verbs do not take a direct object.

Dynamic verbs describe actions or processes that can change over time (e.g., run, step, tumble).

Stative verbs describe states, conditions, or mental states (e.g., know, be, have).

EXCERPT 1

- Glass is tracking a deer when he happens upon two playful bear cubs.
- (1) Glass stepped from the willows into a clearing, scanning for the deer (2) he knew must be just ahead (3) He saw the cubs before he saw the sow. (4) There was a pair, and (5) they tumbled toward him, bawling like playful dogs. (6) The cubs had been dropped in the spring, [...]. (7) They nipped at each other as (8) they bore down on Glass [...]. (9) Glass had not raised his glance to the far end of the clearing, fifty yards away. (10) Nor had he yet to calculate the certain implication of their presence (Punke 2002: 17).

Eco-words (semantic category): deer, sow, dogs, cubs, the spring, willows, a clearing = context

EXCERPT 1 - TRANSITIVITY

- **Line 1**
- **stepped** → *intransitive* (no direct object; “from the willows” is a prepositional phrase)
- **scanning** → *transitive* (object: “for the deer”)
- **Line 2**
- **knew** → *transitive* (object: “must be just ahead” as a clause)
- **must be** → *intransitive* (linking verb; no direct object)
- **Line 3**
- **saw** → *transitive* (object: “the cubs”)
- **saw** → *transitive* (object: “the sow”)
- **Line 4**
- **was** → *intransitive* (linking verb; subject complement “a pair”)
- **Line 5**
- **tumbled** → *intransitive* (movement, no direct object)
- **bawling** → *intransitive* (crying, no direct object)
- **Line 6**
- **had been dropped** → *transitive* (object implied: “the cubs”)
- **Line 7**
- **nipped** → *transitive* (object: “at each other”)
- **Line 8**
- **bore down** → *intransitive* (phrasal verb meaning “approached aggressively,” no direct object)
- **Line 9**
- **had not raised** → *transitive* (object: “his glance”)
- **Line 10**
- **had** → *transitive* (object: “he yet to calculate...” as a clause)
- **calculate** → *transitive* (object: “the certain implication of their presence”)

Line	Verb	Transitivity	Dynamic/Stative	Agent (Doer)
1	stepped	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass
1	scanning	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
2	knew	Transitive	Stative	Glass
2	must be	Intransitive	Stative	the deer
3	saw	Transitive	Dynamic	He (Glass)
3	saw	Transitive	Dynamic	He (Glass)
4	was	Intransitive	Stative	There (existential)
5	tumbled	Intransitive	Dynamic	they (the cubs)
5	bawling	Intransitive	Dynamic	they (the cubs)
6	had been dropped	Transitive	Dynamic	(implied)
7	nipped	Transitive	Dynamic	they (the cubs)
8	bore down	Intransitive	Dynamic	they (the cubs)
9	had not raised	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
10	had	Transitive	Stative	He (Glass)
10	calculate	Transitive	Dynamic	He (Glass)

EXCERPT 1

- Most action verbs (stepped, tumbled, bore down) are dynamic and intransitive.
- Mental or relational verbs (knew, was, had) are stative and often transitive or linking.
- Participles like scanning and bawling are dynamic because they describe ongoing actions.
- For existential “There was”, the agent is not a true doer; it signals existence.
- For passive “had been dropped”, the agent is implied (likely the mama bear – the sow)
- Most agents are **Glass** or **the cubs**, reflecting the narrative focus.

EXCERPT 2

- Let's read on in the text...
- (1) He heard her size before he saw it. (2) Not just the crack of the thick underbrush that the sow moved aside like short grass, but the growl itself, a sound deep like thunder or a falling tree, a bass that could emanate only through connection with some great mass (Punke, 2022: 17).
- Eco-words: underbrush, the sow, grass, thunder, and tree
- Foregrounding (defamiliarization through semantic deviation): *He heard her size before he saw it*
- “The sound of the bear’s gait has been exaggerated and highlighted to introduce the grizzly bear deliberately because it represents a turning point or an active participant in changing Glass’s life and destination.” (Mohamed & Jaafar 2023: 7)

EXCERPT 2 – TRANSITIVITY AND DYNAMIC/STATIVE

- **heard** → transitive (object: “her size”)
- **saw** → transitive (object: “it”)
- **moved** → transitive (object: “aside” + “underbrush”)
- **could emanate** → intransitive (emanate = no direct object; “through connection” is a prepositional phrase)
- **heard** → dynamic (perception as an active process)
- **saw** → dynamic
- **moved** → dynamic
- **could emanate** → dynamic (process of sound emerging)

Line	Verb	Transitivity	Dynamic/Stative	Agent (Doer)
1	heard	Transitive	Dynamic	He (Glass)
1	saw	Transitive	Dynamic	He (Glass)
2	moved	Transitive	Dynamic	the sow
2	could emanate	Intransitive	Dynamic	the bass (sound)

EXCERPT 3:

- (1) The growl crescendoed as she stepped into the clearing, black eyes staring at Glass, head low to the ground as she processed the foreign scent, a scent now mingling with that of her cubs. (2) She faced him head-on, her body coiled and taut like the heavy spring on a buckboard. (3) Glass marveled at the animal's utter muscularity, the thick stumps of her forelegs folding into massive shoulders, and above all the silvery hump that identified her as a grizzly (Punke 2002: 18).
- Eco-words: clearing, spring, grizzly, and cubs.
- All verbs here are **dynamic** (actions or processes), none are stative.
- Size and strength of bear in focus

EXCERPT 3 - TRANSITIVITY

A higher number of intransitive verbs here
= text more descriptive (no actions)

- **crescendoed** → intransitive
- **stepped** → intransitive
- **staring** → transitive (object: Glass)
- **processed** → transitive (object: the foreign scent)
- **mingling** → intransitive (with phrase “with that of her cubs”)
- **faced** → transitive (object: him)
- **coiled** → intransitive
- **marveled** → transitive (object: at the animal’s muscularity)
- **folding** → intransitive (into massive shoulders)
- **identified** → transitive (object: her as a grizzly)

Agent is bear (personal pronoun) or parts of the bear

Line	Verb	Transitivity	Dynamic/Stative	Agent (Doer)
1	crescendoed	Intransitive	Dynamic	the growl
1	stepped	Intransitive	Dynamic	she (the sow)
1	staring	Transitive	Dynamic	black eyes (sow)
1	processed	Transitive	Dynamic	she (the sow)
1	mingling	Intransitive	Dynamic	scent
2	faced	Transitive	Dynamic	she (the sow)
2	coiled	Intransitive	Dynamic	her body
3	marveled	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
3	folding	Intransitive	Dynamic	forelegs
3	identified	Transitive	Dynamic	the hump

EXCERPT 4

- After being attacked by the bear, Glass is severely injured and his friends abandoned him. Glass falls in and out of consciousness and unconsciousness and is hallucinating.
- Chapter 7 (1) Glass wanted to roll away, (2) but there was something inevitable about the way the snake moved. (3) Some part of Glass remembered an admonishment to hold still in the presence of a snake. (4) He froze, as much from hypnosis as from choice. (5) The snake moved within a few feet of his face and stopped. (6) Glass stared, trying to mimic the serpent's unblinking stare. (7) He was no match. (8) The snake's black eyes were as unforgiving as the plague. (9) He watched, (10) mesmerized, [...] (11) He stared down in horror (12) as the rattler's head shot forward, (13) jaws distended to reveal fangs dripping with poison. (14) The fangs sunk into Glass's forearm. (15) He screamed in pain(16) Finally the snake dropped, its long body perpendicular to Glass's torso. (17) Before Glass could roll away, the snake rewound itself and struck again. (18) Glass couldn't scream this time. (19) The serpent had buried its fangs in his throat (Punke 2002: 53-54) [... .] (20) "Having killed the rattlesnake, Glass's next challenge was to gut it out (2002: 68).

EXCERPT 4 – SEMANTIC DEVIATION

- (2) but there was something inevitable about the way the snake moved. (3) Some part of Glass remembered an admonishment to hold still in the presence of a snake.
- Inevitable as a modified of move (how can one move in an inevitable way?)
- Some part of Glass remembered – why not ‘Glass remembered’? (=weakness)

Line	Verb	Transitivity	Dynamic/Stative	Agent (Doer)	
1	wanted	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass	The snake approaches. Glass is passive.
1	roll	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass	
2	was	Intransitive	Stative	something inevitable	
2	moved	Intransitive	Dynamic	snake	
3	remembered	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass	
3	hold	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass	
4	froze	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass	
5	moved	Intransitive	Dynamic	snake	
5	stopped	Intransitive	Dynamic	snake	
6	stared	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass	
6	mimic	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass	Snake (or parts of) attacks (active participant), Glass stares, watches and screams
7	was	Intransitive	Stative	He (Glass)	
8	were	Intransitive	Stative	eyes (snake)	
9	watched	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass	
11	stared	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass	
12	shot	Intransitive	Dynamic	rattler's head	
13	distended	Intransitive	Dynamic	jaws	
13	reveal	Transitive	Dynamic	jaws	
13	dripping	Intransitive	Dynamic	fangs	
14	sunk	Transitive	Dynamic	fangs	
15	screamed	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass	Glass has killed the snake
16	dropped	Intransitive	Dynamic	snake	
17	rewound	Transitive	Dynamic	snake	
17	struck	Intransitive	Dynamic	snake	
18	scream	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass	
19	buried	Transitive	Dynamic	serpent	
20	killed	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass	
20	gut	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass	

EXCERPT 5 – GROUP WORK

- Snake goes from being enemy/predator to sustenance/prey
- Chapter 8 (1) Glass crawled cautiously toward the snake, the imagery of his horrific dream still vivid. (2) He moved to within six feet, stopping to pick up a walnut-size rock. (3) With his left hand, he rolled the rock, which skipped toward the snake, bumping its body. (4) The snake didn't move. (5) Glass picked up a fist-size rock and (10) crawled within reach. (6) Too late, the snake made a sluggish move toward cover. (7) Glass smashed the rock on its head, beating the serpent repeatedly until he was certain it was dead (Punke 2002: 68).

Line	Verb	Transitivity	Dynamic/Stative	Agent (Doer)
1	crawled	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass
2	moved	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass
2	stopping	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass
2	pick up	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
3	rolled	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
3	skipped	Intransitive	Dynamic	rock
3	bumping	Transitive	Dynamic	rock
4	didn't move	Intransitive	Dynamic	snake
5	picked up	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
5	crawled	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass
6	made	Transitive	Dynamic	snake
6	move	Intransitive	Dynamic	snake
7	smashed	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
7	beating	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
7	was	Intransitive	Stative	serpent

EXCERPT 6

- Glass has reached a large river where a wolf is eating a recent kill. Glass is desperate for food, so challenges the wolf.
- Chapter 10 (1) He thrust the torch toward the wolf with one ear. (2) Flames singed the animal's face and it jumped backward with a yelp. (3) The white wolf leapt at Glass's flank, sinking its teeth into his shoulder. (4) Glass pivoted, craning his neck to keep the wolf off his throat. (5) Only a few inches separated Glass's face from the wolf's, and he could smell the animal's bloody breath. (6) Glass struggled again to keep his balance. (7) He swung his arms around to bring the flames in contact with the wolf, burning the animal's belly and groin. (8) The wolf released its grip on his shoulder, retreating a step (Punke 2002: 88).

EXCERPT 6 – TRANSITIVITY AND AGENCY

- thrust → transitive (Agent: He (Glass) + object: torch)
- singed → transitive (Agent: flames + object: face)
- jumped → intransitive (Agent: wolf)
- leapt → intransitive (Agent: wolf)
- sinking → transitive (Agent: wolf + object: teeth into shoulder)
- pivoted → intransitive (Agent: Glass)
- craning → transitive (Agent: Glass + object: neck)
- separated → transitive (Metaphorical agent: inches + object: Glass's face from wolf's)
- smell → transitive (Agent: He (Glass) + object: breath)
- struggled → intransitive (Agent: Glass)
- swung → transitive (Agent: He (Glass) + object: arms)
- bring → transitive (Agent: He (Glass) + object: flames)
- burning → transitive (Agent: He (Glass) + object: belly and groin)
- released → transitive (Agent: wolf + object: grip)
- retreating → intransitive (Agent: wolf)

NOTE: tendency for agents/actors to act on body parts

Line	Verb	Transitivity	Dynamic/Stative	Agent (Doer)
1	thrust	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
2	singed	Transitive	Dynamic	flames
2	jumped	Intransitive	Dynamic	wolf
3	leapt	Intransitive	Dynamic	wolf
3	sinking	Transitive	Dynamic	wolf
4	pivoted	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass
4	craning	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
5	separated	Transitive	Dynamic	inches
5	smell	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
6	struggled	Intransitive	Dynamic	Glass
7	swung	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
7	bring	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
7	burning	Transitive	Dynamic	Glass
8	released	Transitive	Dynamic	wolf
8	retreating	Intransitive	Dynamic	wolf

A QUANTITATIVE SLANT

Rocks, flames, growl, inches, jaws, fangs, etc. = approx. **12 times** across all excerpts.

- **Occurrences of Glass as agent**

- **Excerpt 1 (deer & cubs):** Glass = 8 times
- **Excerpt 2 (bear growl):** Glass = 2 times
- **Excerpt 3 (bear attack):** Glass = 2 times
- **Excerpt 4 (snake attack):** Glass = 13 times
- **Excerpt 5 (snake kill):** Glass = 9 times
- **Excerpt 6 (wolf fight):** Glass = 9 times
- Total: 43

- **Occurrences of animals as agent**

- **Excerpt 1:** cubs = 6 times
- **Excerpt 2:** sow = 2 times
- **Excerpt 3:** sow/body parts = 6 times
- **Excerpt 4:** snake/serpent = 10 times
- **Excerpt 5:** snake = 4 times
- **Excerpt 6:** wolf = 7 times
- Total: 35

QUANTITATIVE INTERPRETATION

- Glass is the agent slightly more often than animals, but animals still account for a large share of actions. Other entities (inanimate or abstract) play a smaller but notable role in agency.
- Applying an **ecostylistic approach** means interpreting these findings through the lens of **language, style, and ecological ethics**, focusing on how agency distribution reflects human–nature relationships.
- **Glass as agent (43 times)** dominates slightly over **animals (35 times)** → near parity, signaling a **dialogic struggle** rather than domination.
- **Other entities (rocks, flames, sounds)** appear as minor agents (12 times), but they still act in meaningful ways.
- The narrative alternates between **human control** and **animal resistance**, creating tension in agency.

ANTHROPOCENTRIC BIAS VS. ECOLOGICAL AGENCY

- Glass's frequent agency suggests a human-centered perspective: survival, control, and dominance.
- However, animals also act significantly (wolves attack, snakes strike, bears charge), resisting human dominance.
- This duality reflects an ecostylistic tension: nature is not passive but an active force.
- The text enacts an **ecostylistic narrative of entanglement**, where survival depends on negotiating with nonhuman forces.

STYLISTIC CHOICES AND POWER DYNAMICS

- Verbs for Glass: *thrust, smashed, swung, killed* → **violent, forceful actions**, reinforcing human mastery.
- Verbs for animals: *leapt, struck, sunk, rewound* → **predatory, instinctive actions**, emphasizing autonomy.
- Verb choices create **semantic fields of violence and vitality**, shaping ecological ethics.
- The style foregrounds **conflict and reciprocity**, not unilateral control.
- This aligns with ecostylistic principles: ecosystems involve **interconnected forces**, not just human vs. animal.
- The narrative dramatizes survival but also **acknowledges animal vitality**.
- By giving animals frequent agency, the text resists total anthropocentrism, hinting at **ecological equality**.

SUGGESTIONS FOR AI

- Genre transposition (if working with parts of the book which are written in a more ‘documentary’ style)
 - Explain linguistics aspects of particular styles/genres
- Find main verbs (and other word classes, of course!), categorize them, count them, provide overviews/tables
- Identify metaphors, meronymy etc.
- Identify semantic categories, list words within categories

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