STYLISTIC DEVICES AS TOOLS OF SUBJECTIVITY IN W.S. MAUGHAM'S FICTION

National University of Uzbekistan Jizzakh Brench,

1st year master's student:

Narzullayeva Mohina

Annotation: This article explores how W. Somerset Maugham employs stylistic devices to express subjectivity in his fictional prose. Drawing upon stylistic and pragmatic frameworks, it identifies the linguistic features that convey authorial attitude, emotional coloring, and narrative perspective. The research reveals that Maugham's use of modality, evaluative lexis, parenthetical insertions, and rhetorical structures contributes to a consistent presence of subjectivity, inviting readers into a dialogic relationship with the narrator. These strategies help to frame the narrative voice as simultaneously personal and reflective, positioning Maugham's work as a prime example of stylistic subjectivity in 20th-century British fiction.

Keywords: W.S. Maugham, subjectivity, stylistic analysis, narrative stance, pragmatic markers, modality, rhetorical questions, authorial presence

Subjectivity in literature refers to the presence of personal judgments, emotions, and attitudes within a text. In fiction, such subjectivity often reveals itself through narrative stance, evaluative commentary, and authorial intrusion. W. Somerset Maugham, a British writer acclaimed for his clear, elegant prose and psychological insight, is an author whose narrative style subtly incorporates personal attitudes without compromising structural simplicity.

Although Maugham has often been described as a detached observer, a close stylistic analysis reveals a more nuanced presence of the narrator's subjectivity. This paper aims to examine how stylistic devices in Maugham's fiction function not only to shape aesthetic form but also to encode the author's personal attitudes and narrative involvement.

This study applies a qualitative textual analysis rooted in literary stylistics and pragmatics. The selected texts for analysis include short stories and excerpts from major works such as The Razor's Edge, The Painted Veil, and The Ant and the Grasshopper. The following stylistic and pragmatic features were identified and analyzed:

• Modality: Use of modal verbs and adverbs expressing possibility, necessity, and personal stance.

• Evaluative Lexis: Emotionally or morally charged adjectives and adverbs.

• Parenthetical Expressions: Authorial insertions, interjections, and discourse markers.

• Rhetorical Devices: Questions, irony, understatement, and metaphor.

• Narrative Framing: Shifts in point of view and direct commentary from the narrator.

Each instance of these devices was evaluated based on its contextual role in conveying personal attitude, narrator involvement, and dialogic positioning between narrator and reader. The analysis found consistent patterns in Maugham's prose that illustrate his subjective narrative style:

1. Use of Modality

Maugham frequently employs modal verbs (might, must, should) to reflect uncertainty, speculation, or moral stance. For example, in The Painted Veil, the narrator speculates on characters' motives using modal constructions that blur fact with personal interpretation, such as:

"She might have loved him once, or perhaps she had only imagined she did."

2. Evaluative and Emotive Lexis

Words with emotional or moral weight—such as pathetic, absurd, graceful, mean—reveal the narrator's personal stance. In The Ant and the Grasshopper, Maugham describes

George's prudence as "admirable, though slightly dull," subtly blending praise with critique.

3. Parenthetical Insertions and Narrative Comments

Phrases like I suppose, you see, as I think, and naturally appear throughout his stories, creating an authorial presence. These elements reflect an informal, reflective tone:

"He was, I suppose, a gentleman of sorts, though the word may have meant something different in his case."

4. Rhetorical Devices

Maugham often uses rhetorical questions to involve readers and guide interpretation. For instance,

"Is it possible to know anyone, truly?"

This form suggests uncertainty and subjectivity while inviting reader reflection. Irony and understatement are central tools, particularly in character sketches. He might describe a vain character as "a man of modest achievements but great self-confidence," creating subjective commentary through tone.

The findings support the claim that stylistic devices in Maugham's fiction are deliberately used to convey subjectivity. Rather than relying solely on overt self-expression, Maugham constructs a subjective narrative voice through subtle linguistic choices. His narrator does not impose opinions forcefully but gently guides the reader's perception through evaluative and modal cues.

This stylistic subjectivity aligns with pragmatic approaches to literary discourse, where language is understood as a vehicle of social interaction and speaker positioning. Maugham's use of parenthesis and rhetorical questions, for instance, functions as metadiscourse—language about the discourse itself—framing the narrator as both observer and participant in the events he recounts.

Furthermore, the interplay between irony and modality in his narratives allows for a dual voice: a surface objectivity veiling deeper subjectivity. The narrator often invites the reader to co-construct meaning, blurring the boundaries between authorial stance and reader interpretation. This nuanced style is particularly effective in short stories, where economy of language is critical. The subjectivity embedded in Maugham's prose enhances narrative richness without disrupting structural clarity.

This article has shown that W.S. Maugham skillfully employs stylistic devices—modality, evaluative lexis, rhetorical strategies, and parenthetical insertions—as tools for expressing subjectivity in his fiction. These features create a subtle yet persistent authorial presence, enriching the narrative with evaluative commentary and emotional nuance. By highlighting these stylistic strategies, the article contributes to broader discussions in literary stylistics and pragmatic stylistics, and it reaffirms Maugham's reputation as a technically sophisticated writer whose simplicity of style conceals a complex engagement with personal perspective.

References:

1. Aijmer, K. (2002). English Discourse Particles: Evidence from a Corpus. John Benjamins.

2. Biber, D., Conrad, S., & Leech, G. (2002). Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Pearson Education.

3. Black, E. (2006). Pragmatic Stylistics. Edinburgh University Press.

4. Blakemore, D. (2005). "Hints and Echoes." Journal of Linguistics, 41(3), 559–574.

5. Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. (2014). Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar (4th ed.). Routledge.

6. Leech, G. N., & Short, M. H. (1981). Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose. Longman.

7. McIntyre, D. (2010). "Narrative, Point of View and Perspective in Literary Discourse." In J. J. Weber (Ed.), The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics (pp. 28–43). Routledge.

8. Semino, E., & Short, M. (2004). Corpus Stylistics: Speech, Writing and Thought Presentation in a Corpus of English Writing. Routledge.

9. Simpson, P. (1993). Language, Ideology and Point of View. Routledge.

10. Simpson, P. (2004). Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students. Routledge.

11. Toolan, M. (1998). Language in Literature: An Introduction to Stylistics. Arnold.

12. Wales, K. (2014). A Dictionary of Stylistics (3rd ed.). Routledge.