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Original research article

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20544/uklop.2026.636>

Received: 11.01.2026 • Accepted after revision: 12.04.2026 • Published: 10.05.2026



#UKLO  
Annual International  
Scientific Conference

## AI IN LITERATURE TEACHING: EXPLORING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF COMMERCIAL AI MODELS

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Artificial intelligence (AI) has completely transformed our world, fundamentally changing many areas of our daily lives. While natural language processing (NLP) technologies have become part of our day-to-day live, one of the sectors most significantly affected appears to be education. However, one area that remains underexplored is AI in pedagogical stylistics – i.e., the practical use of AI models in teaching literature within the English language classroom.

**Methods:** Recognizing a research gap, this qualitative paper explores how teachers can incorporate AI into pre-, during-, and post-reading activities. Drawing on existing literature and personal experience with AI use, the study proposes practical applications and activity designs, with a focus on instructional integration of AI.

**Results:** The paper proposes a series of practical AI-based activities designed to strengthen students' EFL (English as a Foreign Language) skills while leveraging the immense potential of these technologies in language and literature education.

**Discussion:** By addressing the gap in AI's role in pedagogical stylistics, the paper emphasizes AI's potential to improve engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking in literature-based EFL instruction.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence (AI), ChatGPT, Pedagogical Stylistics, AI in Education

### 1. Introduction

Stylistics has always been seen as problematic to define as it is often found “*sitting uncomfortably on the fence between the linguistic and the literary – a bit uneasy within either domain*” (Watson & Zyngier, 2007). Traditionally, stylistics helps both students and scholars understand how language “works” within literary texts. It does so by detailing the stylistic choices that contribute to meaning, tone, and overall impact on the reader. Pedagogical stylistics, a sort of a subset of this field, focuses on using stylistic analysis within different

educational settings in order to help students better understand both literature, as well as language.

Historically, this approach has relied on human-led methods of analysis and human-led teaching. Yet, with the introduction of mainstream advanced artificial intelligence (AI), and models such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot etc. new opportunities have emerged.

### **1.1. Stylistics, Language, and Literature – Introductory notions**

Stylistics, a field within applied linguistics, studies and interprets various kinds of texts or spoken language by examining their linguistic and tonal characteristics. It focuses on style as a distinct form of language shaped by individual speakers or specific contexts.

In the broadest sense of the word, stylistics is the science of language style (Verdonk, 2002). Its focus is on the way language varies, influenced by certain factors such as context, intent, author and period. Also, stylistics is defined as the linguistics of literature (Freeman, 1981). In other words, stylistics is a science that studies expressive means and possibilities of language, as well as their realization in speech. Although, seemingly, the definition seems simple, stylistics is not easy to define, as, according to Galperin (1977), it is determined by the several concepts associated with style itself – style as deviation, style as a choice, style as a distinct personality etc. – concepts that still serve as the basis of new scientific insights in this field.

As a discipline, stylistics serves as a bridge between literary criticism and linguistics. It does not operate as an independent domain but rather helps us better understand several disciplines: literature, journalism, linguistic phenomena, etc. Stylistics can be divided into two main branches: literary stylistics and linguistic stylistics, the latter of which also includes the study of functional styles (Widdowson, 1975; Simpson, 2004; Betti, 2021). As such, stylistics is extensively studied. One particular area of interest is pedagogical stylistics.

### **1.2. The Basic Tenets of Pedagogical Stylistics**

Pedagogical stylistics functions within the wider framework of literary linguistics, with specific focus on teaching and the educational context, in general. Thus, as a separate entity, pedagogical stylistics aims to help foster better understanding of both literature and linguistic features. “Pedagogical stylistics promotes looking *at* language rather than *through* it” (Zyngier & Watson, 2022). This approach encourages students to engage with language in a much more tangible way and discover how stylistics can help shape it into different literary forms. According to the authors (Zyngier & Watson, 2022), pedagogical stylistics can also be a lens that can, in a way, level the playing field for both native and non-native speakers as both groups can learn important information to do with the way language is used mostly through literature.

This discipline, therefore, is a link between the subjects of English language and English literature, among else, and the disciplines of linguistics and literary criticism (Widdowson, 2013). According to Widdowson (p. 21), while the literary critic is primarily concerned with the meanings codes convey, the linguist solely focuses on the codes themselves. Both hold their merit, yet, it is only the one that studies stylistics, and by extension, pedagogical stylistics, that can fully understand how literature exemplifies the language system and breathes new life into it. In a similar manner, Gheni (2020, p. 62), states that “*pedagogical stylistics has two aspects: the first one covers the pedagogical account of stylistics for teaching the features of the language of literature, and the other includes the role of stylistics in teaching of English language through literature*”.

It is important to note, in this regard, that the term *pedagogical stylistics* is not to be used interchangeably with the term *pedagogy of stylistics*. The latter refers to the study of how to teach stylistics in particular, while the former refers to the application of stylistic

techniques in teaching – both in teaching stylistics but also in teaching other language- or literature-related content (Burke et al., 2012, p.137).

Moreover, pedagogical stylistics seems to prioritize the “foregrounding” effect of the language of literature. Foregrounding, as defined by Leech and Short (2007), is best seen in language patterns that are different from the norms. This can help draw readers’ attention to stylistic elements like sound, rhythm or imagery. “Foregrounding” as a concept is crucial for stylistics, because it helps students recognize how deviations from the established rules in literary texts can have different emotional and cognitive effects. This concept, according to Zyngier (2001) can be particularly useful for non-native speakers.

But all students – non-native and native speakers alike – can benefit from stylistic analysis as it holds great pedagogical value (Burke, 2010). According to the author, pedagogical stylistics can improve literary awareness, and can be adapted to fit a wide range of classroom settings. Burke (2010) argues that by engaging with literary texts through a stylistic lens, students can improve their overall language proficiency, as well as their critical thinking skills, and even cultural awareness. This would help them acquire skills to both appreciate the aesthetics of language, as well as its practical use.

## 2. Review of Related Studies

As mentioned above, pedagogical stylistics relies on stylistic analysis in teaching literature and language. Thus, it aims to enhance students' understanding and language acquisition (Burke et al., 2012). It focuses on interactive classroom activities that raise awareness of language use in texts (Clark, 2007). Worldwide, research has shown that pedagogical stylistics can improve second or foreign language proficiency, build language awareness, and develop academic skills (Fogal, 2015). In the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), pedagogical stylistics has been found to be effective in promoting language skills through literary texts, particularly poetry (Gheni, 2020). Studies have demonstrated that this approach improves students' literary intuition, motivation, and linguistic knowledge through pre-, during, and post-reading activities (Novak & Gowin, 1984; Ren & Wang, 2018; Daniels & Zelman, 2004; Gheni, 2020 etc.). The British Council's Guide to Reading and Writing (2015, recognizing previous findings. also advocates for pre-, while-, and after-reading activities that support learners in reading full texts. Despite these insights, the field of pedagogical stylistics has been criticized for relying too heavily on self-interpretation rather than empirical support (Fogal, 2015).

Though papers that focus on pedagogical stylistics, in particular, in English, are few and far between, stylistics, and by extension, the implementation of literature and stylistics in the language classroom, have been extensively studied. Incorporating literature into language classrooms has historically been acknowledged as a powerful method to improve language proficiency, enrich cultural awareness, and promote critical thinking (Frantzen, 2001; Mart, 2018; Shepin, 2019, etc.). Henning (1993, p. 24), one of the pioneers in the field, advocates for using literature in the language classroom, stating that by doing so, “*students can develop a full range of linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity*”.

Chen (2018), more recently, emphasizes that integrating stylistics-based activities into an extensive reading program can significantly improve language learning, with students themselves reporting progress. According to him, activities that focus on identifying language features and structures, based on Willis's (1996) task-based methodology, helped enhance learners' awareness of the language used in the texts. Similarly, Jones (2019) notes improvements in spoken skills, along with more evident progress in literacy, after implementing tasks centered around literary texts. Additionally, Boers (2000), and Boers and Lindstromberg (2008) emphasize the importance of implementing stylistic features – such as idioms, metaphors, proverbs, and fixed expressions – in foreign language learning and

teaching, claiming that they improve students’ language acquisition and overall language skills.

Despite the challenges of implementing literature into the language classroom – challenges such as too complex texts or students’ lack of cultural understanding – research shows that the benefits of implementing literature in the language classroom far outweigh the disadvantages, and one interesting area that can be explored is the use of AI, in this implementation (Mart, 2017).

### 3. Methodology

The analysis is guided by the general qualitative interpretative-inductive method described by Thomas (2006), Kahlke (2014), and Harding and Whithead (2016). This method doesn’t have a formal methodological framework, but instead emphasizes the inductive reasoning that generates ideas from the collected data. This approach aligns well with the study’s aim of exploring the practical applications of AI in language teaching, in various areas of education.

Drawing on personal experimentation with AI models and existing research on AI in education, the study explores several practical activities for integrating ChatGPT – the most widely used AI model – into literature-focused activities in the pre-, during- and post-reading stages in the foreign language classroom. The proposed activities are designed for the instruction of selected classic literary works – works chosen randomly by the authors.

By doing so, the study aims to answer the research questions: *How can AI models be used in pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading activities in the foreign language classroom?* and *What are the benefits of including AI into the literature-based activities in the foreign language classroom?*

### 4. Results and Discussion

Integrating AI into pedagogical stylistics has the potential to fully transform the way teachers teach literature and language via literature. Recognizing the vast transformative potential of AI – transformative potential supported by research, we propose a framework that outlines how AI can support each stage of a pedagogical-stylistics-focused lesson: pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading activities. Advocates for this “reading stages” approach, such as the British Council (2015), state that this approach is crucial for setting context, and a great way to structure lessons in a way that will help students better comprehend full texts.

#### 4.1. Pre-Reading Activities

ChatGPT, as the focus of this study, can be used in various pre-reading activities that shall take place before the students ever engage with the literary work assigned. Referred to as a way to build anticipation (Crawford et al., 2005), improve engagement (Harmer, 2007), and motivation (Ren & Wang, 2018), the pre-reading stage can help prepare learners for the upcoming reading. This stage aims to activate students’ prior knowledge, experiences, and linguistic resources as well as assess their initial understanding of the work and/or author (Crawford et al., 2005). Some typical pre-reading activities include pre-teaching key vocabulary, exploring the topic and cultural context, predicting content based on visuals, brainstorming, addressing and posing questions, etc. (Gardner, 2005; Lazar, 2009; Lightbrown & Spada, 2013; Watkins, 2017).

##### 4.1.1. Using AI to Conduct Background Research

One activity that can be enhanced by AI is the context-exploration activity, proposed by the British Council (2015), in a traditional, non-AI classroom setting. AI tools can

completely transform such an activity, as they can provide summaries of the historical, cultural, and literary contexts of a given work within clicks. And the best part is, they can tailor these summaries to fit different language proficiency levels. For example, when studying a Shakespearean play, ChatGPT can generate concise explanations of the Elizabethan era, theatrical conventions of the time, or relevant biographical details about Shakespeare himself. And it can do so using varying levels of language complexity. For instance, when prompted to provide brief info about the Elizabethan era, suitable for 12-year-old EFL speakers, ChatGPT generates:

*“The Elizabethan era (1558-1603) was a time when Queen Elizabeth I ruled England. It’s known for a golden age of culture, with famous playwrights like William Shakespeare. People loved the theater, and explorers discovered new lands. Life was different for the rich and poor, and religion played an important role in society.”* (OpenAI, 2024)

Yet, when asked to do the same, but for C1-level proficiency EFL speakers, the model generates a different output:

*“The Elizabethan era (1558-1603), during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, marked a time of cultural flourishing in England. It saw the rise of great literary figures like William Shakespeare, whose plays became central to English theater. The period also featured significant exploration, expanding England’s influence. Religion was a powerful force, and social divisions were evident between the rich and poor.”* (OpenAI, 2024)

The texts obviously differ in complexity, yet both enable students to build a foundational understanding of a chosen work’s broader context, while engaging with the target language in a level appropriate for them.

### **5.1.2. AI quizzes and games that can help with students’ motivation**

One of the main goals of the pre-reading activities, as Ren & Wang (2018) state, is to improve students’ motivation to read the assigned work. And AI can also be put into good use for this aim. ChatGPT can create interactive and engaging quizzes or trivia games about key themes, characters, or an author's life. For instance, before assigning *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, a teacher can create a quick AI-generated quiz on Regency-era social customs, fun facts about the era, or literary tropes often found in Austen’s works. Such quizzes can potentially spark students’ curiosity and set the stage for deeper analysis of the assigned work.

These quizzes and/or games can also be customized to fit students’ language proficiency level and age to ensure they are not discouraged by too-complex vocabulary or too-demanding tasks.

### **5.1.3. Generating Pre-Reading Discussion Prompts**

ChatGPT can also suggest thought-provoking questions tailored to the assigned work and students’ language proficiency level and interests. Q&A sessions are also part of traditional instruction, but can be re-imagined with some creative prompts by the teacher and AI models such as ChatGPT.

For example, prior to reading Orwell’s 1984, ChatGPT could generate questions like:

- *What are the ethical implications of government surveillance?, or*
- *How do you define freedom in a modern society?* (Open AI, 2024)

These prompts can potentially encourage students to draw connections between the text and modern issues that they face daily.

## 5.2. During-Reading Activities

The during-reading strategies, also referred to as while-reading strategies, help students/readers stay actively engaged with the assigned work, as they read. Some typical activities that center around this idea include annotating (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004), two-column logs (Fisher & Frey, 2014), and formulating questions during reading (McLaughlin, 2015). Though all of these activities have been successfully implemented in traditional literature instruction, at least some, such as the one suggested by McLaughlin (2015), that focuses on posing questions as one reads, can be reimaged with the help of AI.

With the correct prompting, AI can act as an interactive assistant during the reading process, by “asking “students interesting and probing questions, like:

- *What impact does the repetition in this line have on the tone?*
- *How does the choice of imagery in this passage affect its meaning?* (OpenAI, 2024)

To answer the model’s questions, students can either enter textual input, or use ChatGPT’s voice-command to simulate a “real conversation”. In turn, the bot can answer their questions and offer alternative perspectives or corrections.

But the role of ChatGPT can extend into vocabulary-acquisition, too. The model can also help students understand unknown words they encounter while reading. The model can define different words with ease, within seconds, and can help students understand how to use them in different contexts. For instance, when prompted to define and provide usage examples for the word “Hiems” (found in Shakespearean works), the model generates the following output:

*“The word “hiems” is a Latin term that means “winter” or “winter season.” It is often used in classical literature, particularly in poetry, to represent cold or harsh conditions associated with winter.*

*Here are five sentences using “hiems”:*

- *The harsh winds of hiems swept across the village, freezing everything in its path.*
- *In ancient texts, hiems is often described as a time of struggle and survival.*
- *The poet wrote about the beauty of hiems, comparing the snow-covered landscape to a peaceful white blanket.*
- *As hiems approached, the farmers worked quickly to harvest the last of their crops before the freeze.*
- *The legend tells of a god who controls hiems, bringing storms and snow to punish the people for their mistakes.*

*In these sentences, hiems refers to the cold, wintry season and is used to evoke the feelings and imagery associated with winter.”* (OpenAI, 2024)

Such an answer will probably help students understand the word and the way it can be used in different contexts. AI-definitions can, again, be customized to fit students’ needs. For instance, when prompted to define the same word but on a 6-year-old-understanding level, ChatGPT provides the following answer:

*“Hiems” is a Latin word that means “winter.” It’s a word used long ago in stories and poems to talk about the cold, snowy time of the year.*

*Here are five simple sentences with “hiems”:*

- *Hiems is when the snow falls and the weather gets very cold.*

- *In hiems, we wear warm clothes like coats and hats.*
  - *The trees are bare and the ground is covered in snow during hiems.*
  - *People like to drink hot chocolate to stay warm in hiems.*
  - *Hiems is the time when we can build snowmen and have snowball fights.*
- In these sentences, hiems means winter, the cold and snowy season!” (OpenAI, 2024)*

The personalization that the model offers is its main asset as its learning output can easily fit the needs of a wide range of students with different abilities, interests, and language proficiency levels.

### 5.3. Post-Reading Activities

To solidify comprehension, teachers also employ different post-reading activities. Traditionally, they can range from summarizing a text in one’s own words (Duke & Pearson, 2009), through creating one’s own visuals (Novak & Gowin, 1984), to engaging in discussions with peers or with the teacher (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). There are several ways ChatGPT can be used to re-imagine the post-reading section, to help students expand their linguistic knowledge and literary understanding of the assigned work.

#### 5.3.1. Rewriting Texts and Stylistic Variations

ChatGPT can help students rewrite selected parts of the text, using different stylistic choices. For example, students can:

- Have the model transform formal into colloquial dialogue,
- Have the model rewrite a modern text in a different genre, literary period, or author style,
- Experiment with varying sentence lengths to alter rhythm and tone etc.

Students can then analyze the effects of the changes the model has made. For instance, when prompted to “rewrite” part of Sylvia Plath’s *Lady Lazarus*, into Shakespearean style, ChatGPT’s output is as follows:

| Lady Lazarus, by Plath                                                             | ChatGPT’s output                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I have done it again.<br>One year in every ten<br>I manage it——                    | I have done it once more, as in each year,<br>One in the ten, I find it comes to me.<br>A walking miracle, with skin so clear,<br>Bright as a lampshade's glow, pale as can be.                              |
| A sort of walking miracle, my skin<br>Bright as a Nazi lampshade,<br>My right foot | My foot, a paperweight, it drags, it falls,<br>My face a blank, like linen, fine and white.<br>Peel off the napkin, O my enemy’s calls,<br>Do I bring terror, or am I your fright?                           |
| A paperweight,<br>My face a featureless, fine<br>Jew linen.                        | The nose, the eyes, the teeth, they all shall gleam,<br>The sour breath will vanish in a day.<br>Soon, soon the flesh that once was death’s dark<br>dream,<br>Shall find its place within me, come what may. |
| Peel off the napkin<br>O my enemy.<br>Do I terrify?——                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?<br>The sour breath                  | The grave shall feast, yet I shall live anew,<br>This flesh, once lost, shall wear its home in view.                                                                                                         |

Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh

The grave cave ate will be

At home on me

(OpenAI, 2024)

As one can note, the model's output follows established notions on Shakespearean writings: it produces a sonnet-like output with iambic pentameter and a rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. The analysis of the output can potentially help students internalize the effects of stylistic decisions, and help them deepen their appreciation of literary craft.

### 5.3.2. Post-Reading Discussions

Post-reading discussions with peers and teachers, as suggested by Palincsar & Brown, (1984) can help students understand alternative interpretations. And some of these discussions can also be “facilitated” by AI. This can be done through generating thought-provoking questions that encourage students to reflect on the assigned work and its stylistic elements. For instance, when asked to generate discussion questions about “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald, ChatGPT's output includes:

- *How does The Great Gatsby portray the pursuit of the American Dream as ultimately unfulfilling? To what extent do the characters' ambitions and failures reflect this critique?*
- *How does Fitzgerald's use of recurring motifs (such as the green light, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, and the valley of ashes) contribute to the novel's themes and emotional impact?*
- *How does The Great Gatsby challenge the idea of achieving success through hard work and ambition? Do you think these challenges still apply to young people pursuing their dreams in today's world?*
- *Just as Gatsby creates an idealized version of himself to win Daisy, people often curate idealized versions of their lives on social media. How does this phenomenon reflect the themes of illusion and identity in The Great Gatsby? (OpenAI, 2024)*

Such questions may help students connect the form of the text—its language, structure, and tone—with the underlying themes of the text, and connect the text itself with their everyday life. And, of course, the questions can be adjusted to fit students' level of language proficiency and age. Moreover, AI can generate follow-up questions during discussions, guiding students to analyze on a deeper level. These kinds of prompts/questions can help students improve their analytical skills and critical thinking.

## Conclusion

Integrating AI into pedagogical stylistics can fundamentally change the way literature and language are taught in today's classrooms. Tools such as ChatGPT offer transformative possibilities, giving educators new ways to enhance and support every phase of reading—before, during, and after the text.

Although this study is limited by its focus on a single model and its qualitative design – both of which produce findings tied to a specific context – we believe it still offers valuable insights. Our results correspond with previous research on AI's transformative potential (Wang et al., 2023; Canosa, 2023; Holmes et al., 2019, etc.) and suggest that ChatGPT can support teachers in rethinking conventional tasks, while providing students with accessible, contextualized information suited to their proficiency level. It can also spark curiosity and motivation through thought-provoking questions, act as a tool for expanding vocabulary, and

encourage students to be creative, explore different stylistic choices, and critically reflect on the generated output.

Future studies could build on these findings by examining how AI might be incorporated into pedagogical stylistics across diverse learning environments and age groups, as well as how other AI models could be implemented in similar classroom practices. While issues surrounding the ethical and responsible use of AI persist, the potential advantages of embedding AI in pedagogical stylistics are substantial. AI is likely to complement existing teaching approaches, though in such a rapidly evolving field, forecasting its future impact remains uncertain.

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