

STYLISTICS IN TRANSITION: FROM CLASSICAL RHETORIC TO CRITICAL DIGITAL SEMIOTICS

AHMAD, H.¹ – GHAFAR, N. A.*

¹ *Fakulti Pengajian Bahasa Utama, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.*

**Corresponding author
e-mail: norfarhana[at]usim.edu.my*

(Received 10th May 2025; revised 15th August 2025; accepted 24th August 2025)

Abstract. This paper traces the disciplinary evolution of stylistics from its classical rhetorical foundations to its contemporary engagement with AI-driven digital semiotics. Rooted in Greco-Roman and Arabic traditions, early stylistics emphasized eloquence, ethical persuasion, and structural harmony. The rise of linguistic stylistics in the twentieth century introduced systematic models such as foregrounding, deviation, and systemic-functional grammar, which reoriented the field toward the empirical analysis of form–function relations. Subsequent developments in reader-response theory and critical discourse analysis expanded the field’s ideological and social dimensions. The digital turn brought computational methods: natural language processing, stylometry, and machine learning. These enabled large-scale stylistic analysis across genres and languages-yet also introduced risks of interpretive flattening and methodological reductionism. In response, this study proposes an integrative stylistic model encompassing rhetorical-hermeneutic, linguistic-structural, critical-ideological, and computational–semiotic dimensions. Guided by reflexivity, modularity, and epistemic humility, the model facilitates culturally and ethically sensitive analysis, particularly for spiritually significant texts. The study concludes that while AI extends the scope of stylistic inquiry, interpretive agency remains irreducibly human. Thus, stylistics must navigate technological innovation without relinquishing its humanistic and interdisciplinary core.

Keywords: *digital stylistics, Arabic rhetoric (Balaghah), computational semiotics, critical discourse analysis, AI in literary studies*

Introduction

Stylistics may be broadly defined as the study of linguistic choices and their effect on meaning in textual communication. Historically, it has functioned as a bridge between language form and communicative function, mediating between grammatical structure and literary artistry. Originating in classical traditions, most notably Greco-Roman rhetoric and Arabic *balāghah*, stylistics initially centred on the formal strategies of persuasion, with emphasis on clarity, elegance, and audience appeal. Concepts such as *fasāḥah* (eloquence) and *bayān* (expressiveness) exemplified this early orientation toward stylistic virtue. As stylistics developed over time, particularly during the 20th century, its focus shifted from rhetorical performance to patterned linguistic analysis. This transition was marked by the rise of linguistic frameworks such as Systemic Functional Grammar, deviation theory, and foregrounding (Leech and Short, 2007), all of which emphasized the structured deployment of language in literary texts. Classical Arabic constructs such as *naẓm* (syntactic cohesion), *taqdīm wa-ta’khīr* (word order variation), and *mujānasa* (paronomasia) similarly illustrate how meaning is encoded not only semantically but also structurally (Abubkr et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2014). However, stylistics has never remained a purely formal enterprise. Since the 1990s, the emergence of critical stylistics has drawn attention to the ideological functions of textual choices. Language is now examined for its role in constructing representations

of gender, power, and identity. Alongside this, the digital turn has introduced computational methods such as corpus-based stylistics, topic modelling, and stylometry, which allow for the analysis of large-scale linguistic patterns (Scrivner and Davis, 2017). These methods have redefined the scope of stylistics by enabling both micro-and macro-level investigations.

The beginning of artificial intelligence, particularly in the form of deep learning and natural language processing, has further extended stylistic inquiry. New possibilities now include affect detection, probabilistic modelling, and algorithmic classification of literary form (Gryaznova et al., 2024; Suissa et al., 2022). While these developments expand the field's analytical capacity, they also raise critical questions about the status of interpretation, especially in relation to stylistic ambiguity, tone, and authorial voice (Zhang, 2025; Carceller, 2024). This paper identifies five major phases in the evolution of stylistics: rhetorical, linguistic, critical, digital, and AI-enhanced and explores the interplay between them. Rather than treating these as isolated paradigms, we propose an integrative model that combines rhetorical tradition, literary theory, and computational semiotics. In doing so, stylistics is redefined as an interdisciplinary practice that spans textual analysis, critical theory, and digital methodology, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding how language constructs meaning in both literary and algorithmic contexts.

Classical foundations of stylistics

The origins of stylistics are deeply rooted in classical rhetoric, where language was regarded not merely as a communicative tool but as a vehicle for persuasion, ethical instruction, and aesthetic expression. In both Greco-Roman and Arabic traditions, rhetorical analysis offered systematic methods for understanding the effectiveness, elegance, and moral force of discourse. These classical frameworks, particularly those of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and, within the Islamic tradition, al-Jurjānī and al-Sakkākī, constitute the epistemological bedrock upon which modern stylistic theories have been constructed.

Greco-Roman stylistics: Ethos, logos and lexis

In the Aristotelian tradition, rhetoric was defined as the art of discovering the available means of persuasion, articulated through the triad of ethos (credibility), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logical reasoning). Style (lexis) was a critical dimension of this art, encompassing clarity (saphēneia), appropriateness (prepon), and ornamentation (kosmos). Roman theorists such as Cicero and Quintilian extended this foundation by formalizing rhetorical education through the progymnasmata, thereby elevating stylistic training to a civic and moral discipline. Quintilian's notion of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* "the good man skilled in speaking" encapsulated the moral imperative behind eloquence, linking stylistic excellence to personal virtue and social responsibility. These Greco-Roman systems emphasized rhetorical decorum, syntactic harmony, and mnemonic artistry, features that would later inform structuralist and functionalist models of modern stylistics (Hess and Davisson, 2017; Emanuel et al., 2015).

Arabic rhetoric (Balaghah) and the Qu'ranic paradigm

In the Islamic tradition, ‘ilm al-balaghah, the science of eloquence, evolved into a nuanced system integrating semantics, logic, aesthetics, and theology. Rooted in the study of the Qur’an as an inimitable text (i‘jāz al-Qur’ān), Arabic rhetoric developed through three interrelated branches: ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī (sentence structure and pragmatic intent), ‘ilm al-bayān (figurative language and imagery), and ‘ilm al-badī‘ (aesthetic embellishments). Al-Jurjānī’s theory of naẓm foregrounded the syntagmatic arrangement of words as the foundation of meaning, offering an early theory of textual cohesion and coherence. His insights positioned syntax not merely as structure, but as a site of theological and rhetorical depth (Abubkr et al., 2024). Figures of speech such as metaphor, metonymy, and simile served not only decorative purposes but also cognitive and epistemological functions, encoding subtle shades of meaning and emotional resonance (Ibrahim et al., 2014). ‘Ilm al-ma‘ānī further highlighted rhetorical shifts between brevity and elaboration as semantically driven, contextually anchored decisions. This grammatical–rhetorical interface enabled the strategic transformation of sentence structures to suit specific communicative goals, exemplifying the adaptive power of Arabic style (Salakhova and Nabiullina, 2022). Such principles remain highly relevant not only in classical exegesis but also in contemporary stylistic analysis, including digital rhetoric, where AI-mediated language is being assessed for coherence, subtlety, and style (Pascoal, 2024). Recent scholarship underscores the pedagogical and translational potential of classical rhetoric in the digital age. Salem et al. (2020) show how Arabic rhetorical instruction, when combined with AI-driven language support tools, can enhance accessibility for non-native learners. In this light, balāghah becomes not only a literary tool but also a computationally translatable model of stylistic cognition. Recent research further highlights how Qur’anic stylistic variation functions across rhetorical, phonetic, and translational dimensions, reinforcing both theological resonance and communicative precision (Ahmad and Ghafar, 2025a).

From rhetorical eloquence to functional style: Continuities and shifts

Despite their geographical and philosophical differences, Greco-Roman and Arabic rhetorical systems share key stylistic preoccupations: clarity, persuasion, aesthetic effect, and contextual responsiveness. Where Greek rhetoric privileged civic deliberation and rational appeal, Arabic balaghah fused linguistic beauty with ethical formation and divine intent (Ibrahim et al., 2014). Terms central to modern stylistics, metaphor, ellipsis, parallelism, ambiguity, can trace their lineage to these traditions (Emanuel et al., 2015). However, as stylistics enters the digital age, these classical principles are being re-evaluated in light of computational stylistics, where machine learning tools prioritize pattern recognition, frequency analysis, and predictive modelling. This shift invites both methodological innovation and critical scrutiny, especially regarding the depth and nuance classical rhetoric offers compared to algorithmic generalization (Pascoal, 2025). As we shall explore in the next section, the classical frameworks of style laid the foundation for modern stylistics, but it was through the rise of linguistics, literary theory, and later, critical discourse analysis, that stylistics would become a disciplinary bridge between language, literature, and ideology. These three branches of Arabic rhetoric, ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī, ‘ilm al-bayān, and ‘ilm al-badī‘, form a comprehensive stylistic system that encompasses semantic function, aesthetic expression, and pragmatic intent. As summarized in *Table 1*, each branch contributes distinct stylistic tools that serve both communicative and interpretive functions, especially in Qur’anic discourse.

Table 1. Core branches of Arabic rhetoric (*Balaghah*) and their stylistic functions.

| Discipline | Focus | Stylistic features | Function |
|----------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| ‘Ilm al-ma‘ānī | Sentence structure, contextual fit | Word order, ellipsis, foregrounding | Clarity, appropriateness |
| ‘Ilm al-bayān | Figurative language and imagery | Simile, metaphor (isti‘ārah), metonymy (kināyah) | Conceptual depth, emotional impact |
| ‘Ilm al-badī‘ | Aesthetic embellishment | Rhyme, repetition, paronomasia (mujānasa) | Beauty, resonance, stylistic innovation |

Stylistics in modern literary criticism

The emergence of modern stylistics represents a significant reorientation in the study of language and literature. What began as a rhetorical art concerned with persuasion and eloquence has evolved into a discipline defined by analytical precision and methodological pluralism. Central to this transformation is the view that style is not merely decorative but integral to textual meaning. In tracing this development, the present section surveys three key trajectories: the consolidation of linguistic stylistics, the growth of reader-centred and pragmatic approaches, and the turn toward ideological critique.

Linguistic stylistics and the foundations of modern analysis

The foundations of modern stylistics were laid by scholars such as Roman Jakobson, M.A.K. Halliday, and Geoffrey Leech, who emphasized the interplay between linguistic form and literary function. Jakobson’s concept of the poetic function foregrounded the self-referential aspect of language, positing that literary effect arises from the manipulation of linguistic norms. Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar (SFG), in turn, provided a means to describe language across three meta functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Leech and Short (2007) developed a typology of stylistic features that facilitated empirical engagement with literary texts. Their approach combined a linguistically grounded method of description with sensitivity to aesthetic and contextual variation. Concepts such as deviation, foregrounding, and parallelism became key tools for identifying stylistic salience. Despite its strengths, this model has faced criticism for privileging textual surface over the social and ideological dimensions of discourse.

Reader-oriented approaches and stylistic pragmatics

From the late 20th century onward, stylistics expanded its analytical horizon to encompass the reader’s role in the construction of meaning. Influenced by reader-response theory and stylistic pragmatics, this strand of research conceptualized style as a mediating interface between text and cognition. Constructs such as mind style, deixis, and schema theory allowed scholars to explore how stylistic choices shape reader interpretation and emotional engagement. Arabic stylistics similarly began to adopt this perspective. Abubkr et al. (2024), for example, demonstrate how shifts in pronoun use, narrative stance, and temporal framing in Arabic discourse reflect subtle shifts in epistemic authority. Such features, while rooted in traditional rhetorical practices, are increasingly interpreted through the lens of cognitive and pragmatic linguistics. This shift also facilitated the inclusion of multilingual texts and translated discourse in stylistic research. Salem et al. (2020) show that when rhetorical training is combined

with AI-driven language tools, it enhances learners' interpretive skills across linguistic boundaries.

The rise of critical stylistics and discourse awareness

The 1990s witnessed the rise of critical stylistics, a paradigm that redefined the discipline's scope and ethical responsibility. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), scholars such as Lesley Jeffries and Paul Simpson shifted attention from description to explanation, arguing that language is never ideologically neutral. Analytical tools such as transitivity, modality, and naming were repurposed to expose the ideological underpinnings of seemingly neutral texts. This critical orientation has gained traction in Arabic stylistics as well. Abubkr et al. (2024) and Ibrahim et al. (2014) illustrate how rhetorical constructions, such as ellipsis, metaphor, or syntactic variation, encode hierarchies of power and religious authority. In this way, critical stylistics provides a means to interrogate the social consequences of stylistic form.

Shifting methodologies and disciplinary boundaries

Contemporary stylistics is a hybrid field. It draws from linguistics, literary theory, discourse studies, and, increasingly, computational methods. Its data sources range from canonical literature to political or religious discourse; its techniques span from close reading to corpus-based analysis. Yet this disciplinary expansion introduces epistemological risks. Eysers (2013) has cautioned against a new form of digital positivism, in which quantification displaces interpretive depth. While data-driven methods provide valuable insights, they must be tempered by theoretical reflection and contextual sensitivity. Stylistics, therefore, stands at a methodological crossroads. Its future lies in maintaining analytical rigor while embracing interpretive plurality. The next section turns to this emerging terrain, where AI, computational modelling, and semiotic theory increasingly shape the stylistic landscape.

The semiotic and digital turn

The beginning of digital humanities (DH), artificial intelligence (AI), and computational semiotics has initiated a profound transformation in stylistic inquiry. Where traditional stylistics emphasised close textual analysis and human interpretation, the digital turn introduces a new epistemological landscape: one in which the processes of stylistic detection, modelling, and even partial interpretation are increasingly mediated by algorithmic systems. This shift expands the field's analytical range yet simultaneously raises fundamental questions concerning the nature of meaning, interpretation, and critical authority.

From signs to systems: Computational semiotics

Computational semiotics seeks to adapt the conceptual frameworks of classical semiotics, particularly those of Peirce and Saussure, into machine-readable models capable of simulating meaning-making processes. Central to this endeavour is the translation of semiotic functions into symbolic, logical, or statistical representations that underpin AI-based text analysis (Leone, 2023; Gudwin and Queiroz, 2006; 2005). Where traditional stylistics operates through ambiguity, polysemy, and interpretive flexibility, computational approaches aim to formalise such features within

programmable environments. In practical terms, this enables the modelling of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, antithesis, or irony not merely as isolated figures of speech but as nodes within broader semantic and relational networks. The resultant systems can thus detect stylistic motifs and structural patterns at scale. However, whether such systems can interpret meaning, rather than merely recognise it, remains a matter of ongoing debate.

AI and literary text analysis

Advancements in natural language processing (NLP), stylometry, and neural text generation have significantly expanded the methodological repertoire of stylistics. Tools such as topic modelling, semantic clustering, entity recognition, and collocation analysis now permit the investigation of stylistic phenomena across large, multilingual corpora (Arnold et al., 2019; Alex et al., 2017). These techniques have proven particularly useful in comparative stylistics, translation studies, and genre evolution. For instance, Suissa et al. (2022) demonstrate that deep learning models can identify stylistic trends across historical periods and literary movements. However, interpretive reliability remains an issue: Akazawa and Gius (2025) caution that while large language models (LLMs) may simulate surface coherence and rhetorical consistency, they frequently lack access to diachronic nuance, intertextual resonance, or culturally embedded semiotic values, especially when dealing with sacred or ideologically marked texts.

From distant reading to blended reading

The concept of “distant reading” (Moretti, 2000) initially promised a paradigm shift in literary analysis, privileging computational scale over individualised interpretation. However, more recent developments advocate for “blended reading” a methodological convergence wherein computational analysis complements, rather than replaces, human interpretive judgment (De Boer and Stork, 2024; Boyles, 2018). In this hybrid model, algorithmic tools facilitate the identification of macro-patterns (e.g., lexical variation, narratological shifts, stylistic deviation), which are then interpreted through close reading and contextual critique. Such approaches are particularly suited to analysing large or diachronically diverse corpora, as well as to examining underrepresented or translated texts. Crucially, however, interpretive authority remains with the human analyst, whose task is to assess not only what the system identifies but why it matters.

Critical concerns and methodological realignment

Despite the promise of AI-enhanced stylistics, several scholars have raised principled objections. Eysers (2013) warns that the uncritical adoption of quantitative tools may precipitate a “new positivism,” wherein the richness of interpretive nuance is subordinated to the superficial elegance of statistical output. Similarly, Glukhova (2025) draws upon the framework of 4E cognition, embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended, to argue that meaning is irreducibly situated within experiential and cultural contexts that are not readily computable. These concerns are particularly pressing in the analysis of religious or heritage texts, where language is not only a vehicle for communication but a medium of revelation, tradition, and ethical authority. Here, stylistic analysis must attend not merely to structural or aesthetic features but to the ontological and epistemological dimensions of textual form. In such contexts, computational assistance must be deployed with methodological care and epistemic

humility. As the digital turn continues to reshape the landscape of stylistic research, it is incumbent upon scholars to maintain a critical balance between innovation and reflexivity. Machines may assist in the work of analysis, but the task of interpretation, context-sensitive, ethically grounded, and culturally responsive, remains a fundamentally human enterprise.

Theoretical and methodological implications

The evolution of stylistics—from its classical anchoring in rhetoric and *balaghah* to its current engagement with algorithmic semiotics—entails a set of complex theoretical and methodological consequences. As the field broadens to accommodate new technologies and epistemologies, three interrelated concerns emerge: the preservation of interpretive depth, the calibration of methodological hybridity, and the articulation of epistemological accountability. This section explores each of these dimensions, offering a reflexive account of what it means to practise stylistics in the age of digital humanities and artificial intelligence.

Continuities and disruptions in theoretical orientation

Despite considerable methodological evolution, stylistics continues to orbit two central questions: how does language construct meaning, and through what mechanisms do texts produce stylistic effect? While classical rhetoric, modern linguistics, and AI-informed models may approach these inquiries from different epistemological angles, the foundational concerns remain consistent. What has shifted, however, is the mode of inquiry and the tools available for analysis. This shift gives rise to a key theoretical dilemma: do machine-generated texts conform to traditional stylistic norms, or do they instantiate an entirely new semiotic logic? Recent research suggests a complex answer. Stylometric studies (Eder et al., 2016) demonstrate that LLMs can approximate established authorial signatures. Crucially, it is within these very tensions that stylistic innovation emerges. The stylistician is no longer a passive diagnostician of genre forms, but a reflexive agent, attuned to the evolving dynamics of authorship, form, and interpretive authority.

Methodological hybridity and blended practices

Contemporary stylistics is increasingly defined by methodological hybridity. Scholars no longer frame close reading and corpus analysis as oppositional modes. Instead, there is a growing tendency to blend qualitative insight with computational precision, creating a richer analytic repertoire. This blended approach is particularly fruitful in multilingual and religious stylistics. For instance, classical Arabic rhetorical devices such as *isti'ārah* (metaphor) and *kināyah* (metonymy) can be identified manually via traditional *tafsīr*, and algorithmically through semantic clustering or syntactic parsing. Similarly, features from systemic-functional grammar, such as transitivity structures or thematic progression, can be validated computationally through frequency analysis or collocational mapping. Such cross-method triangulation does not dilute interpretive nuance; it deepens it. The result is a model of stylistics that is both theoretically grounded and empirically extensible.

Epistemological accountability in the digital age

One of the most urgent implications of AI-assisted stylistics concerns the question of epistemological legitimacy: who-or what-is entitled to interpret a text? While large language models (LLMs) can generate annotations, stylistic classifications, or even literary simulations, such outputs often lack the cultural, ethical, and historical depth necessary for responsible interpretation (Akazawa and Gius, 2025). This limitation becomes especially pronounced when dealing with sacred or ideologically embedded texts. In these contexts, interpretive authority is not merely technical but ethical. As noted in the Summary document, analysis of Qur’anic texts, for example, must be conducted in accordance with principles of *adab* (reverent conduct), theological literacy, and historical awareness. Here, stylistic form is inseparable from divine intentionality, moral guidance, and linguistic inimitability. Computational tools, however sophisticated, must therefore be deployed with epistemic humility. They can assist, but not substitute, the interpretive frameworks rooted in religious tradition and cultural embeddedness. This calls for a reflexive methodology, one that recognises the limitations of algorithmic reading. Algorithms should be critically audited for their biases, oversights, and latent assumptions. As Eysers (2013) cautions, the risk of “digital positivism” lies in the replacement of hermeneutic richness with statistical generality. Glukhova (2025) offers an alternative via the framework of 4E cognition: embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended. She emphasises that meaning arises from lived, situated human experience rather than from abstracted data points. In sum, while AI tools can enhance stylistic research, they must not obscure the irreplaceable role of human judgment, empathy, and contextual reasoning. The future of stylistics depends less on technological innovation per se than on the cultivation of epistemological responsibility: a willingness to interrogate not only what we can quantify, but what we ultimately mean.

Towards an integrative model

The development of stylistics from rhetorical origins to digital implementation does not constitute a mere chronological succession of schools. Rather, it reflects an evolving intellectual dialogue between tradition and innovation, between interpretive depth and technological scale. This section proposes a reflexive, integrative model that synthesises rhetorical-historical insight with linguistic analysis, critical theory, and computational semiotics. Its objective is not to unify stylistics under a singular paradigm, but to offer a modular and ethically aware framework adaptable to diverse texts, genres, and research aims.

Reconciling tradition and innovation

Any integrative model of stylistics must begin by reaffirming the value of classical rhetorical systems. Far from being mere historical curiosities, frameworks such as Greco-Roman rhetoric and Arabic *balaghah* function as reservoirs of interpretive and ethical insight. Concepts like *naẓm* (syntactic arrangement), *bayān* (figurative clarity), and *fasāḥah* (eloquence) foreground not only linguistic precision but also moral intent and aesthetic judgement, qualities essential to the analysis of both literary and sacred texts (Abubkr et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2014). Crucially, this model does not cast classical rhetoric and computational approaches as oppositional. Instead, it advocates their strategic convergence. For example, al-Jurjānī’s theory of textual cohesion can be reinterpreted through the lens of Hallidayan transitivity and visualised via stylometric

mapping (Scrivner and Davis, 2017). Figurative features in Qur’anic discourse, such as metaphors, analogies, and ellipses, can be algorithmically identified using semantic clustering or neural embeddings, while remaining interpreted within hermeneutic traditions like tafsīr. Such integration serves both analytical precision and cultural sensitivity. It resists the twin dangers of nostalgia (a return to purely traditional models) and techno-centrism (an uncritical embrace of digital tools). Rather than privileging either the past or the future, the model draws reflexively from both, allowing scholars to align methods with text-specific demands and research aims.

Modular four-dimensional framework

The integrative stylistic model proposed in this study comprises four interdependent yet analytically separable dimensions. Each dimension reflects a major path in the historical and theoretical development of stylistics and enables scholars to approach a wide range of texts with calibrated methodological precision. The four dimensions, rhetorical–hermeneutic, linguistic–structural, critical–ideological, and computational–semiotic, provide complementary perspectives on how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and interpreted across literary, religious, and machine-generated discourse. Their features are summarised in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Four complementary dimensions in stylistic inquiry.

| Dimension | Primary focus | Representative theories/tools |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Rhetorical–Hermeneutic | Purpose, genre, moral-aesthetic persuasion | Balaghah, Aristotelian rhetoric, genre theory |
| Linguistic–Structural | Lexical and syntactic patterning, textual cohesion | Systemic Functional Grammar, foregrounding, deviation theory |
| Critical–Ideological | Power, ideology, discourse construction | Critical Discourse Analysis, critical stylistics, transitivity, modality |
| Computational–Semiotic | Algorithmic patterning, large-scale modelling | NLP, stylometry, hybrid intelligence, transformer-based language models (LLMs) |

This model is conceptualised spatially as a modular quadrant, in which each dimension constitutes a discrete yet interoperable mode of stylistic analysis. *Figure 1* visualises this configuration. Each quadrant represents one domain of stylistic inquiry: rhetorical–hermeneutic (top-left), linguistic–structural (top-right), critical–ideological (bottom-left), and computational–semiotic (bottom-right). The structure permits both modular and integrative application across textual types and interpretive contexts. While each dimension may be applied independently, their intersection allows for layered, multidimensional analysis, particularly in cases where literary form intersects with ethical, ideological, or technological meaning. The framework is extensible: it may be scaled to accommodate large corpora or adjusted for the close reading of sacred, poetic, or algorithmically generated texts.

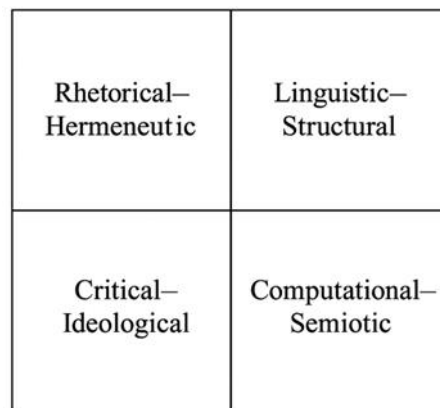


Figure 1. *Four-dimensional stylistic model.*

Epistemological commitments of the model

In addition to its analytic structure, the model is grounded in three interlocking epistemological commitments: reflexivity, modularity, and epistemic humility. These are not secondary attributes but essential principles that shape how the framework should be applied and interpreted. Reflexivity foregrounds the analyst’s interpretive agency. Rather than positioning the scholar as a neutral observer, the model acknowledges that all analysis is situated, shaped by disciplinary assumptions, cultural frameworks, and ethical responsibilities. This is especially pertinent in the study of religious, ideological, or politically sensitive texts, where interpretive authority must be exercised with transparency and moral care. Modularity refers to the model’s adaptability across genres, text types, and research scales. Each of the four dimensions can be deployed independently or in combination, depending on analytic goals. For instance, a sacred poetic text may require rhetorical–hermeneutic emphasis, whereas an AI-generated corpus may demand a computational–semiotic approach augmented by ideological critique. The model accommodates both micro-level close reading and macro-level pattern analysis. Finally, epistemic humility acts as a safeguard against overextension. It reminds the stylistic scholar that interpretation is always provisional, that tools, especially algorithmic ones, are partial, and that stylistic insight depends as much on context and judgment as on formal patterning. The framework thus supports methodological innovation without sacrificing ethical or hermeneutic responsibility. To demonstrate the model’s operational value, the following section presents an applied comparative illustration.

Applied illustration: Classical and machine-generated texts

Table 3 applies the four-dimensional model to two contrasting texts: a canonical Qur’anic verse and a stylistically plausible AI-generated sentence. Each dimension is used to isolate specific stylistic features while maintaining interpretive coherence across analytic domains. While this study applies the model across divergent textual types, Ahmad and Ghafar (2025b) application to the Qur’anic corpus confirms that stylistic coherence and theological function remain mutually reinforcing at all linguistic levels, a conclusion that aligns with the findings of this illustration. This comparative application illustrates both the modularity and flexibility of the model. The Qur’anic text demonstrates how minimal linguistic form can bear maximal theological weight, whereas the AI-generated sentence, though superficially fluent, lacks intertextual

anchoring and epistemic integrity. The juxtaposition reinforces a critical insight for digital stylistics: while AI systems may mimic stylistic features, they remain limited in hermeneutic function.

Table 3. *Application of the four-dimensional stylistic model: Classical and machine-generated discourse.*

| Dimension | Analytic focus | Qur’anic Text “Qul huwa Allāhu Aḥad” “Say: He is Allah, the One | AI-Generated Text “The divine essence radiates through all languages, connecting spirit and algorithm alike.” |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| Rhetorical–Hermeneutic | Genre, function, and communicative intent | The imperative qul signals divine authorship and prophetic mediation. The predicate Aḥad conveys the doctrine of divine oneness (tawḥīd), underscoring theological finality through linguistic minimalism. | The sentence constructs a generalized spiritual register by combining metaphysical diction with technical terminology. However, the absence of genre anchoring results in interpretive diffuseness. |
| Linguistic–Structural | Lexical selection, syntactic patterning, cohesion | The clause follows a simple subject–predicate structure, producing maximal semantic density with minimal form. Repetition of divine reference terms enhances cohesion and rhetorical economy. | While syntactically balanced, the lexical field (essence, algorithm, spirit) blends disparate domains without semantic coordination. Ambiguity stems from metaphoric overload rather than deliberate stylistic design. |
| Critical–Ideological | Representation, identity construction, discursive power | The utterance affirms divine unity and ontological singularity in contrast to polytheistic cosmologies. It constructs religious authority through declarative precision and theological exclusivity. | The sentence evokes a form of techno-spiritual universalism. It implicitly equates algorithmic systems with divine agency—reflecting an uncritical, syncretic ideology masked as inclusivity. |
| Computational–Semiotic | Stylometric detectability, algorithmic patterning, system limits | Stylometric tools may register lexical frequency and brevity across Qur’anic corpora. However, computational systems fail to capture theological salience or intertextual resonance. | The lexical and structural pattern aligns with outputs typical of large language models. While stylistically coherent, the semantic content lacks cultural embeddedness and interpretive depth. |

Core principles: Reflexivity, modularity and epistemic humility

To preserve coherence across these diverse domains, the model is governed by three metatheoretical principles: Reflexivity: Analysts must maintain awareness of their own interpretive assumptions, tool-based limitations, and disciplinary positioning (Boyles, 2018; Eysers, 2013). Transparency about methodological choices strengthens scholarly accountability; Modularity: The model does not require all four dimensions to be applied simultaneously. Researchers may privilege rhetorical analysis when studying theological prose, or computational methods when investigating genre frequency across corpora; Epistemic Humility: No model can fully capture the layered meanings embedded in literary or sacred texts. Interpretive acts, especially within religious, ethical, or affective domains, require methodological restraint and cultural sensitivity (Akazawa and Gius, 2025; Glukhova, 2025). These principles are particularly salient in contexts such as Qur’anic stylistics, where the analytical process must align with adab, a reverent mode of engagement, and integrate both theological and linguistic literacies (Strashko et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2014).

Applications and pedagogical value

In addition to its analytical robustness, the model has clear pedagogical and curricular applications. It provides a flexible structure for teaching stylistics across

traditions and media, serving as a scaffold for comparative rhetoric, genre-specific interpretation, and digital textuality. Each of the model's dimensions can serve as a stand-alone teaching module or be integrated into larger curricular design. For instance, a unit on figurative language might begin with classical theories of metaphor and *isti'ārah*, transition into modern stylistic theories such as foregrounding and defamiliarization, and conclude with a stylometric comparison of metaphor density in human-authored versus AI-generated narratives. Likewise, a graduate workshop on Qur'anic stylistics might combine rhetorical devices (e.g., *'atf*, *iltifāt*) with computational methods, such as semantic field mapping or stylometric analysis of rare collocates and structural parallels. The model thus supports interdisciplinary pedagogy that is historically informed, methodologically plural, and technologically current.

Conclusion

The historical path of stylistics, from its classical origins in rhetorical eloquence to its contemporary intersections with computational modelling, reflects more than a disciplinary expansion; it marks a profound epistemological shift. What began as an art of persuasion grounded in *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, whether in Aristotle's *rhetorikē* or al-Jurjānī's *naẓm*, has matured into a multi-layered field straddling linguistic form, interpretive function, and technological mediation. Each stage in this evolution, rhetorical, linguistic, critical, digital, and AI-enhanced, has introduced distinct theoretical frameworks and methodological tools. Classical rhetoric emphasized moral clarity and aesthetic intent; structuralist stylistics prioritized grammatical patterning and foregrounding; critical stylistics foregrounded ideology and discourse power; and computational stylistics has extended the scope of analysis through algorithmic modelling and pattern recognition. These paradigms, rather than displacing one another, have increasingly converged in a field defined by both methodological hybridity and reflexive adaptation. This study has sought to synthesize these traditions by proposing an integrative stylistic model composed of four interdependent dimensions: rhetorical-hermeneutic, linguistic-structural, critical-ideological, and computational-semiotic. The model is governed by three principles: reflexivity in methodological choice, modularity in application, and epistemic humility in interpretive scope. It invites scholars to draw selectively and critically from each tradition, depending on the nature of their text, disciplinary lens, and research aim. Such a framework is particularly crucial for the stylistic analysis of culturally or spiritually significant texts, where form is not merely decorative but encodes layers of theological, ethical, and historical meaning. Here, digital annotation must be balanced by hermeneutic sensitivity; algorithmic tools must serve, not replace, interpretive judgment. In an era increasingly shaped by generative AI and hybrid intelligence, the future of stylistics lies in its capacity to mediate between humanistic depth and computational scale. Machines may trace stylistic patterns, but it is the human critic who elucidates rhetorical purpose, discursive context, and affective resonance. Stylistics, therefore, remains a vital site of interdisciplinary convergence—where philological precision, rhetorical theory, cultural critique, and digital innovation collaborate to illuminate how language signifies, persuades, and transforms across time, genre, and medium.

Acknowledgement

This research is self-funded.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abubkr, L.O., Al Kaabi, M.H., Almaamari, H., Haidara, N.B. (2024): Stylistic transformation signals in Arabic grammatical discourse: A grammatical-rhetorical approach. – *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3(8): 6341-6356.
- [2] Ahmad, H., Ghafar, N.A. (2025a): Stylistic variation and linguistic strategies in Qur’anic discourse: A rhetorical, phonetic, and translational analysis. – *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)* 9(4): 5957-5964.
- [3] Ahmad, H., Ghafar, N.A. (2025b): Stylistic and linguistic variation in the Qur’an: Toward an integrative framework. – *Quantum Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 6(3): 424-433.
- [4] Akazawa, M., Gius, E. (2025): Literary studies with large language models? Two experimental series on text generation with artificial intelligence. – *Zeitschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft Und Linguistik* 55(2): 449-474.
- [5] Alex, B., Grover, C., Oberlander, J., Zhou, K. (2017): Palimpsest: Improving assisted curation of loco-specific literature. – *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 32(2): 377-392.
- [6] Arnold, T., Ballier, N., Lissón, P., Tilton, L. (2019): Beyond lexical frequencies: Using R for text analysis in the digital humanities. – *Language Resources and Evaluation* 53(4): 645-661.
- [7] Boyles, C. (2018): Making and breaking: Teaching information ethics through curatorial practice. – *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 12(4): 10p.
- [8] Carceller, A.T. (2024): The ARTificial Revolution: Challenges for redefining art education in the paradigm of generative artificial intelligence. – *Digital Education Review* 45: 84-90.
- [9] De Boer, V., Stork, L. (2024): Hybrid intelligence for digital humanities. – *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence and Applications* 386: 94-104
- [10] Eder, M., Rybicki, J., Kestemont, M. (2016): Stylometry with R: A package for computational text analysis. – *R Journal* 8(1): 107-121.
- [11] Emanuel, B., Rodrigues, C., Martins, M. (2015): Rhetoric of interaction: Analysis of pathos. – In *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* 10p.
- [12] Eyers, T. (2013): The perils of the "digital humanities": New positivisms and the fate of literary theory. – *Postmodern Culture* 23(2): 25p.
- [13] Glukhova, O.V. (2025): Semiotics of culture in the context of 4E cognition. – *Voprosy Kognitivnoy Lingvistiki* 2: 15-30.
- [14] Gryaznova, E., Kirina, M., Mikhailova, P., Moskvina, A. (2024): Machine learning and philology: An overview of methods and applications. – In *Springer Geography* 15p.
- [15] Gudwin, R., Queiroz, J. (2006): Semiotics and intelligent systems development: An Introduction. – *Semiotics and Intelligent Systems Development* 368p.
- [16] Gudwin, R., Queiroz, J. (2005): Towards an introduction to computational semiotics. – *Proceedings of KIMAS'05* 2005 6p.
- [17] Hess, A., Davisson, A. (2017): *Theorizing digital rhetoric*. – Routledge 264p.

- [18] Ibrahim, M., Usman, A.H., Muhamed Ali, M.A. (2014): Qur'anic brevity and verbosity: What and how? – *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5(20): 1939-1945.
- [19] Leech, G.N., Short, M.H. (2007): *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). – Pearson Longman 404p.
- [20] Leone, M. (2023): The main tasks of a semiotics of artificial intelligence. – *Language and Semiotic Studies* 9(1): 1-13.
- [21] Moretti, F. (2000): Conjectures on world literature. – *New Left Review* 1: 54-68.
- [22] Pascoal, S. (2024): Uncreative writing: Teaching rhetoric in the age of AI. – *Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems* 858: 301-310.
- [23] Salakhova, I.I., Nabiullina, V.R. (2022): Some stylistic devices in the novel of Jokha Al-Harithi *Bodies Celestial*. – *Res Militaris* 12(3): 869-881.
- [24] Salem, E.M., Alhamad, H.A.M., Ewida, S.A.M., Baker El-Ebiary, Y.A. (2020): The difficulties of the rhetorical lesson of non-Arabic speakers and its technological solution (Translation from Arabic to Malay as a model). – *International Journal of Engineering Trends and Technology* 7p.
- [25] Scrivner, O., Davis, J. (2017): Interactive text mining suite: Data visualization for literary studies. – *CEUR Workshop Proceedings* 10p.
- [26] Strashko, I., Melnyk, I., Kozak, V., Dyiak, O. (2024): Linguistic analysis of texts in philological research: The use of Salesforce Einstein artificial intelligence. – *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 6(3): 246-259.
- [27] Suissa, O., Elmalech, A., Zhitomirsky-Geffet, M. (2022): Text analysis using deep neural networks in digital humanities and information science. – *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 73(2): 268-287.
- [28] Zhang, H. (2025): Literary writing and ethical issues in the era of artificial intelligence. – *Journal of Computational Methods in Sciences and Engineering* 25(5): 4539-4550.