STYLISTIC CLASSIFICATION OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

From stylistic point of view, it is important to classify the English vocabulary, as many stylistic devices are based on the interplay of different stylistic aspects of words. According to Galperin, the vocabulary of the English language can be divided into three main layers:

1. the literary layer
2. the neutral layer
3. the colloquial layer

The literary and neutral layers contain a number of sub-groups each of which has a property it shares with all the sub-groups within the layer – this common property is called aspect. The aspect of literary layer is its markedly bookish character. This layer is more or less stable. The aspect of the colloquial layer is its lively spoken character – it makes this layer unstable and fleeting. The aspect of the neutral layer is its universal character - it is unrestricted in its use,
- it can be employed in all styles of language,
- it can be employed in all spheres of human activity,
- it is the most stable layer.

Ad 2) NEUTRAL, COMMON LITERARY AND COMMON COLLOQUIAL VOCABULARY

- are grouped under the term standard English vocabulary.

a) Neutral Words are used in both literary and colloquial language. They are the main source of synonymy and polysemy (prolific in the production of new meanings). The wealth of the neutral words is often overlooked due to their inconspicuous character but their faculty for generating new stylistic variants is amazing.

Unlike all other groups, the neutral words cannot be considered as having a special stylistic colouring, (whereas both literary and colloquial words have a definite stylistic colouring).

b) Common Literary Words are mainly used in writing and in polished speech. It is not difficult to distinguish between a literary word and a colloquial word as the literary units, they stand in opposition to colloquial units. This is especially apparent when pairs of synonyms (literary and colloquial) can be formed which stand in contrasting relation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>colloquial</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>literary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kid</td>
<td>child</td>
<td>infant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chap</td>
<td>fellow</td>
<td>associate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get out</td>
<td>go away</td>
<td>retire</td>
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</table>
As you can see, these synonyms are not absolute as they differ stylistically. Stylistic difference may be of various kinds:
- it may lie in the emotional tension connoted in a word
- it may lie in the sphere of application or in the degree of the quality denoted

Colloquial words are always more emotionally coloured than literary ones. The neutral stratum of words has no degree of emotiveness. Boths literary and colloquial words have their upper and lower ranges. The lower range of literary words approaches the neutral layer and the same can be said of the upper range of the colloquial layer so it can very easily pass into the neutral layer.

The difference in the stylistic aspect of words may colour the whole of an utterance. In the example from the “Fanny’s First Play” (Shaw), the difference between the common literary and common colloquial vocabulary is clearly seen:

**Ex. 1: G.B. Shaw**
DORA: Oh, I’ve let it out. Have I? But he’s the right sort: I can see that.
You won’t let it out downstairs, old man, will you?
JUGGINS: The family can rely on my absolute discretion.

**Commentary:**
The Words in Juggins’s answer are on the borderline between common literary and neutral X words used by Dora are clearly common colloquial, not bordering on neutral.

**Ex 2:** from David Copperfield (Dickens) illustrates the use of literary English words which do not border on neutral:
“My love,” said Mr. Micawber, much affected, “you will forgive, and our old and tired friend Copperfield will, I am sure, forgive the momentary laceration – in other words, with a ribald Turncock attached to the waterworks – and will pity, not condemn, its excesses.

c) **Common Colloquial Vocabulary**
is represented as overlapping into the standard English vocabulary and is therefore considered part of it. It borders both on the neutral vocabulary and on the special colloquial vocabulary. Just as common literary words lack homogeneity, so do common colloquial words and set expressions. Some of the lexical items belonging to this layer are close to the non-standard colloquial groups such as jargonisms, professionsalisms, etc. These are on the borderline between the common colloquial and the special colloquial or non-standard vocabulary. Other words approach the neutral layer of the English
word-stock. E.g. teenager, hippie are colloquial words that have passed into the neutral vocabulary. They have lost their non-standard character and have become widely recognized. However they haven’t lost their colloquial association and therefore still remain in the colloquial stratum of the English vocabulary.

Other examples:

take – in “as I take it” = as I understand
to go for – to be attracted by = You think she still goes for that guy?
guy – young man
to be gone on = to be madly inlove with
pro = professional (boxer)
ad = advertisement

The spoken language abounds in set expressions which are colloquial in character: e.g. all sorts of things, just a bit, so-so, to hob-nob (= to be very friendly, to drink together, to be sick and tired of, etc.)

On the other hand, certain set expressions have been coined with literary English and their use in ordinary speech will inevitably make the utterance sound bookish, e.g.: in accordance with

with regard to
to speak at great length
to lend assistance
by virtue of, etc.

Ad 1) SPECIAL LITERARY VOCABULARY

a) Terms

Terms arose due to the necessity of reflecting in language the cognitive process maintained by scholars in analysing different concepts and phenomena. One of the most characteristic features of a term is its direct relevance to the system or set of terms used in a particular science, discipline or act. Term is directly connected with the concept it denotes – directs our mind to the essential quality of the thing, phenomenon or action. Terms mostly and predominantly belong to scientific and technical style but they may as well appear in other styles – newspapers (publicistic). When using in the style of fiction, a term may acquire a stylistic function and consequently becomes a stylistic device. (e.g. the stylistic effect of the medical terminology used by Cronin in his novel the Citadel)

Moderate use of special terminology in fiction is bordering on common literary vocabulary.

Ex: (T. Dreiser: The Financier)

“There was a long conversation – a long wait. His father came back to say it was doubtful whether they could make the loan. Eight per cent, then being
secured for money, was a small rate of interest, considering its need. For ten per cent Mr Kuzel might make a call-loan. Frank went back to his employer, whose commercial choler rose at the report.”

Commentary:

Such terms as loan, rate of interest, to secure for money are widely known financial terms which need no explanation. The main task of the writer in this passage is not to explain the process of business negotiation, but to create the environment of business atmosphere – the use of terms is stylistic as they serve the purpose of characterizing the commercial spirit of the hero – however they are not a stylistic device.

The following is an example where a term is used as a stylistic device:

**Ex:**

“What a fool Rawdon Crawley has been,” Clum replied, “to go and marry a governess. There was something about the girl too.”

“Green eyes, fair skin, pretty figure, *famous frontal development,*” Squill remarked. (Thackeray)

Commentary:

The combination “frontal development” is terminological in character (used sometimes in anatomy). But being preceded by the word famous used in the sense indicated by the dictionary as a strong expression of approval (chiefly colloquial), excellent, capital the whole expression assumes a specific stylistic functions due to the fact that frontal development is used both in its terminological aspect and in its logical meaning” the breast of a woman” – twofold application of meaning.

Final remark: With the increase of general education, many words that were once terms have gradually lost their quality as terms and have passed into the common literary or even neutral vocabulary = **determinization:** e.g. radio, television, laser, software, etc.

**b) Poetic and Highly Literary Words**

- have a marked tendency to detach themselves from the common literary word-stock and gradually assume the quality of terms denoting certain definite notions and calling for poetic diction. Poetic diction occurs when words are selected and arranged to arise aesthetic imagination.

Being drawn into the system of literary styles the words are selected and arranged in groups of definite images, in phraseological series, which grow standardized and are becoming conventional symbols of definite phenomena or character or of definite ideas of impressions.

From stylistic point of view poetical words in an ordinary environment may have a satirical function.

**Ex:**
But Adeline was not indifferent: for  
(Now for a common-place!) beneath the snow,  
As a volcano holds the lava more  
Within – et cetera. Shall I go on? – No,  
I hate to hunt down a tired metaphor,  
So let the often-used volcano go! (Byron: Don Juan)  

Commentary:  
The satirical function of “tired metaphor”, “the often used volcano” lies in Byron’s estimating of the value of conventional metaphors and stereotyped poetical expressions.  
The striving for the unusual is close to the sensational and can therefore be found in may other styles (not only in fiction). A modern English literary critic has remarked that in journalese a policeman never goes to an appointed spot – he proceeds to it, the picturesque reporter seldom talks of a horses, it is a charger. The sky is the welkin, the valley is the vale, fire is the devouring element. It should be noted here that the overuse of poetisms and their constant repetition gradually make them hackneyed like anything that lacks freshness it fails to evoke a genuinely aesthetic effect and eventually call for protest on the part of those who are sensitive to real beauty.

c) Archaic, Obsolescent and Obsolete Words  
The word-stock of a language is in an increasing state of change. Words change their meaning and sometimes drop out of the language altogether. We distinguish 3 stages in the aging process of words:

1. The beginning of the aging process when the word becomes rarely used.  
   Such words are called obsolescent, i.e. they are in the stage of gradually passing out of general; e.g. a pallet = a straw mattress, a palfrey = small horse, garniture = furniture – mainly French borrowings.

2. The second group of archaic words are those that have already gone completely out of use but are still recognized by the native speakers, e.g. methinks = it seems tome, nay = no. These words are called obsolete.

3. The third group which may be called archaic proper, are words which are no longer recognizable in modern English, words that were in use in old English, e.g. troth = faith, a losel = a worthless, lazy fellow.

There is still another class of words which denote objects, customs, institutions and events of historical period. They are historical words/terms and they name things and phenomena which passed into oblivion and therefore have no synonyms in modern English. X archaic words on the other hand, have been replaced by modern synonyms.
From stylistic point of view, these groups of words can be found in the style of official documents, in legal language, in all kinds of statutes, in diplomatic documents, e.g. aforesaid, hereby, therewith, hereinafternamed etc. in poetry, in historical novels (they maintain “local colour”)

d) Barbarisms and Foreignisms
Barbarisms are words of foreign origin which have not entirely been assimilated into the English language. They bear the appearance of a borrowing and are felt as something alien to the native tongue. E.g. chic = stylist, bon mot = a clever witty saying, en passant = in passing, ad infinitum = to infinity
It is very important for purely stylistic purpose to distinguish between barbarisms and foreign words proper. Barbarisms are words which have already become facts of the English language. They are part and parcel of the English word-stock, though they remain on the outskirts of the literary vocabulary. Foreign words used for some stylistic purposes, do not belong to the English vocabulary and are not registered in dictionaries. In a written language they are often italicized.
Both foreign words and barbarisms are widely used in various styles to supply local colour.

Ex: in press advertising
The French say that wine has “de la robe du bouquet, dela cu ise”.

Ex: The use of foreign word to describe the peculiarities of the German menu. (Thackeray: “Vanity Fair”)
“The little boy, too, we observed, had a famous appetite, and consumed schinken, and braten, and kartoffeln, and cranberry jam… with a gallantry that did honour to his nation.”
Commentary:
By introducing several German words, the author gives and indirect description of the peculiarities of the German menu and the environment on general.