Linguistics and Literature: Points of Convergence

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Abstract

The study maps thoroughly how different concepts and theoretical aspects of linguistics are applied in literary criticism. Diverse linguistic features are analyzed in literary criticism to highlight how they are used differently by poets and writers from the way they are commonly used. Since the early 20th century, due to the influence of formalistic critical practice, it has been the common pursuits of the critics to enquire how special uses of linguistic elements contribute to achieve the literariness in a text. Further, it is interesting to note that that from the mid-20th century linguistic codes and conventions have been appropriated as the paradigm in a number of

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areas other than literature that, in its turn, led to the development of theories to account for different genres of literature, its narration and interpretation.

Introduction

According to H. G. Widdowson, the areas that the linguistics comprises are the nature of language, its sound system, design, scope, form, meaning, and its context. In other words, students of linguistics study phonology and phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. The relatively recent areas are psycholinguistics, socio-linguistics, functional linguistics, corpus linguistics. In addition, we have linguistics for descriptive purposes, for contrastive analysis, discourse analysis, error analysis, and for forensic linguistics. Students of linguistics study them to gain expertise in various fields of it and to use them in their professional fields. It is more so in case of students of applied linguistics.

One of the important tasks of linguistics students is to analyze the use of language in the context—i.e. ---various discourse types---they have to analyze social , business, political and many other kinds of discourses in order to look into how language works in the real world. They also have to analysis literary discourse. According to Mick Short, modern linguistics takes huge interest in literature. Now the concern of analyzing literature linguistically or analyzing linguistics in literature has made the latter a shared territory both to the students of linguistics and literatures (Short, 1996).

The critics who investigate linguistic elements in literature should be competent to study those linguistic elements that the writers manipulate or use in literature for special effects in meaning. Such critics use linguistic concepts, theories, models to decode text and discourse.

Text, Discourse and Discourse Types

Now what is text? "When we think of a text, we typically think of a stretch of language complete in itself and of some considerable extent. He also included those small registers like the signals danger, stop, slow, etc., as text" (Verdonk, 2002).

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However, when we talk about meaning of text, it does not come into being until it is actively used in context.

According to Peter Verdonk, "This process of activation of a text by relating it to a context of use is what we call discourse." According to Jeremy Hawthorn, (Hawthorn, 1992), discourse is language in use, not language as an abstract system.

Literary Discourse

Literary discourse is different from other discourses. According to Jeremy Hawthorn (Hawthorn,1992) the general discourse is a context-bound act of communication verbalized in text that waits to be inferred. Now the communication act is mainly an interpersonal act. It involves two parties. They sometimes share contexts of different types—physical and others— like values, ideas and beliefs. So, in discourse in the real world communication has a context that is identifiable and uses language that is referential. However, in literature the contextual world is fictional and communication is not as straight as in discourse of real world.

Real world communication has two parties: the addresser and addressee. But in literature too, communication takes place in two parties: There can be addressor and addressee—but what is more in this case, this communication has another pair of addressors and addressee—that is the narrator and the readers. In those forms where narration is less like drama---or lyric poem which is the authorial monologue, the pair is the writer as the addresser and the reader as the addressee. Now the perspectives or point of view in each case changes sometimes making the literary communication different and difficult.

The criticism of literature has been a n area of studies for thousands of years. There was a time rhetoric that has quite a few common elements with linguistics was studied and evaluated in relation to literary criticism. It is from the early 20th century that the language came to the centre-stage in this field.

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Literary Criticism Before and After 20th Century

Literary Criticism before 20th century is roughly called traditional or humanistic criticism. Their concern was not language. According to Mick Short, "Some specialists concern themselves almost entirely with the socio-cultural background against which particular works were written, and others look at the lives of the authors and how their experiences led them to write in the way that they did." This style of criticism mostly refers to the Anglo-American criticism before 20th century.

Now the central concern about linguistic elements started off with formalistic practice of criticism whose influence is seen in many other critical approaches that are practiced till date. Formalism has to face opposition too. There are critical schools that do not subscribe to formalism. For example—Reader-response criticism, speech-act-theory and new historicism (Abrams, 2000)

The formalist critic Roman Jacobson wrote about literariness. He emphasized the study of literariness of literature. In other words, his main focus was on not what is the meaning of certain poem. His focus was to find out how meaning is created. He wrote, "The object of study in literary science is not literature but literariness, that is, what makes a given work a literary work. Meanwhile, the situation has been that historians of literature act like nothing so much as policeman, who, out to arrest a certain culprit, take into custody (just in case) everything and everyone they find at the scene as well as any passer-by for good measures. The historians of literature have helped themselves to everything –environment, psychology, politics, philosophy, -- instead of a science of literature they have worked up a concoction of homemade disciplines" (Eichenbaum, 1998).

Jan Mukarovosky, a member of the Prague Circle, described literariness as consisting of "maximum foregrounding of the utterance," i.e., foregrounding of the act of expression, the act of speech itself (Mukarovosky, 1964).

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Victor Shklovsky said that the primary aim of foregrounding is to estrange or defamiliarize the language of literature. That is, by disrupting the modes of ordinary linguistic discourse, literature makes strange the world of everyday perception and renews the readers' lost capacity for fresh sensation. In 1817, Samuel Taylor Coleridge described the "prime merit" of a literary genius to be the representation of familiar objects so as to evoke freshness of sensation. But unlike the formalists, Coleridge believed in the ability of the author to express a fresh mode of experiencing eh world, the formalist stresses the function of purely literary devices to produce the effect of freshness in readers' experience.

According to MH Abrams, phonemics is one of the areas of phonology that deals with phonemes—smallest unit of functional speech sounds. This is an area that is largely exploited by the poets. That is to say, poets take huge interest in speech sounds and their function to produce heightened effects and meaning particularly in poetry. Literary students or critics should have strong sense of these sounds system to understand the effect the manipulation of these sounds can achieve.

To have an overview about the sound system of English vocabulary and to see difference in meaning and effect that little change of "smallest sound unit" can bring, we can look at the following examples.

In the word *pin*, if the initial speech sound is changed, we get pin-tin-din and with the change of medial sound we get pin-pen-pun. Again, if final sound is changed, what we get is pin-pit-pill. Phonetic differences are found in dialects.

Saussure proposed in this regard that "the same phoneme " within a language is not determined by the physical features of the speech sound itself, but by its difference from all other phonemes in that that language, i.e., by the differentiability, within a given language, between a particular speech unit and all other functional speech units (Abrams, 2000).

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Morphology is another aspect of linguistics that deals with "the combination of phonemes into morphemes and into words. Morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of speech sounds within a language."

Some morphemes like man, open and run make complete words while others constitute the parts of the words such as grace, dis, ful, etc.

We find another type of "phoneme combinations" that do not make any morpheme but these provide a "loose-boundaried area of meaning". For instance, *fl* in the words *flash, flare, flame, flicker, flimmer* -- all these words suggest a common meaning -- a kind of moving light. In another series with the same initial sound, we get fly-flip, flap, flop, flit, flutter—signifying some kind of movement in air.

The terminal sound, ash, for example, can also be a part of the words **--** bash, crash, clash, dash, flash, gash, mash, slash -- signifying sudden violent movement. Such combinations are called phonetic intensives or sound symbolism or phonaesthemes.

According to MS Abrams, utterance is made by the stream of speech sounds that in its turn made by phonemes, morphemes and words. Moreover, supra-segmental features of language that consist of stress, juncture and intonation are also studied by the literary critics and linguistics.

Another area of linguistics is syntax -- "combination of words into phrases, clauses and sentences." These structures are extensively explored in stylistic approach. Syntax is studied both in case of poetry and fiction. In syntactic structures, regularity of constructions is found and these are explained by the syntactic rules "operative in the linguistic system or langue". Roman Jakobson used a distinction between two types of rules in a fully formed sentence -- syntagmatic (rules of combination) and paradigmatic rules (rules of selection) (Hawthorn 1992).

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Semantics is another filed of linguistics—study of meaning of words, phrases, clauses, sentences and larger linguistic units. In this regard Saussure introduced the idea of sign consisting of inseparable union of signifier and signified.

Manipulation of Linguistic Features for Literary Effects

Poets, fiction writers and playwrights manipulate lexical, the phonetic, morphological and syntactic and other features of linguistics in their arts for special effects in the meaning that foregrounds the literariness of their texts. In their manipulation, we commonly find some kind tampering or deviant use of these elements. Let us read the following examples where deviations are made in various structures to achieve literary effects. The examples are featured in Mick Short's *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose (Learning about Language,*1996.

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-

Dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-drawn-drawn Falcon---

(Gerard Manely Hopkins "The Windhoever")

In the above quote, we find a graphological deviation in the word *kingdom.* By separating *kingdom* into two morphemes we can think hard about the meaning of the two morphemes. Besides, he might also hints at the word dom as meaning doom which is historically the same morpheme. Doom means judgment. So by this special use, the poet has foregrounded the king and judgment parts of the word for special significance. Besides, look at the alliterative words in which the similar consonant sounds has lent a rhythmic resonance to the lines. Though not directly connected to linguistics, alliteration or prosody has some overlaps with phonetics.

"Think you're in

Heaven?

Well-you'll soon be

In H

E

L

L-"

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Michael Horovitz, "Man-to-Man Blues"

In the above example, the graphological deviation is used to suggest "the long descent to hell visually on the page."

"The boys are dreaming wicked or of the bucking ranches of the

Night and the jollyroggered sea.

(Dylan Thomas, Under Milk Wood")

In this example, the poet has makes two words together to make a compound noun-you know jolly ro(d)ger means the pirates flag of skull and bones. The poet has joined the two words together and then added to make it a participial adjective that modifies the sea. The result of this double invention is a sea that is "haunted" by piracy and is associated with "romantic adventures."

In the following example you will see how Hopkins uses a verb achieve and uses it as a noun even though there is a noun form of achieve i.e. achievement. By using this form, the poet has foregrounds the extent of the achievement of the bird in flight and also the physical energy.

"… My heart in hiding

Stirred for a bird,--the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!"

(Gerard Manely Hopkins "The Windhoever")

Let's look at another example—

"Even the aerobatic swift

Has not his flying crooked gift."

(Robert Graves, Flying Crooked."

Instead of more balanced construction, i.e., his gift of flying crooked, the poet has rearranged the word order in the noun phrase for the rhyming scheme of the couplet.

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In another example, we find a deviation of morphological structure. By adding the suffix less to "perhaps" is a deviation. By this deviation the poet is suggesting a contradictory quality of heaven that is a mystery with no uncertainty.

Look at the example:

"Perhapsless mystery of paradise"

(e.e. cummings, "from spiraling ecstatically this")

Let's look at this example –about manipulation of short vowels and stop consonants. You know there are short vowels and long vowels. Also, some consonants are long while some short. Stop consonants and the liquid sounds /l/ and /r/ are shorter than fricatives /f/, /v/, /s/, nasals /n/ and /m/ and the affricates.

Look at the line.

"Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle"

(Wilfred Owen, "Anthem for Doomed Youth")

The density of short vowels and consonants symbolize the subject of matter and heightens the effect.

Stylistics in Literature

Stylistics is a system of literary criticism that heavily draws on linguistics. It came as a result of the influence of the Russian formalist and Czech formalism on American Criticism. Stylistic method of literary criticism derived its impetus from formalistic critical principles that laid emphasis and insisted on studying the textual features of literature. Formalism diverged from the traditional criticism the primary concern of which was to look into the contextual background and affective qualities in a text. In other words the formalists mainly focused on the form, rather than on contents -- the proposed meaning in the text and "freed themselves from the traditional correlation of form-content and from the conception of form as an outer cover or as a vessel into which a liquid (content) is poured" (Eichenbaum, 1998). Likewise, modern stylistic method

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focuses on various textual features and considers form and meaning to be inseparable, (Bolinger, 1981). Similar opinion was also given by Stanley Fish in his *Is There a Text in This Class?*

The range, parameter and the nature of textual features that stylistics encompasses are divergent. Some analysts use concepts from linguistic theories such as paradigmatic and syntagmatic distinction, speech act theory and transformational linguistics while some concentrate on "the study of the use of language in literature" involving the entire range of general characteristics of language." At any rate, after 1960s, stylistics incorporates both traditional criticism and traditional rhetoric. Its difference from these earlier practices is that it insists on being objective by discovering the rules by which linguistic elements and patterns accomplish their meanings and literary effects in a text (Abrams 2000). Then again, some critics include also the literary discourse analysis as the area where they focus on the narrative techniques, perspective and their implication on meanings. (Leech and Short *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. Longman 1981)

Notwithstanding the differences in the approach, there are a few common linguistic features that stylistics investigate and analyze. They are phonological, lexical, syntactic and rhetorical features. Sometimes, discourse analysis is added to the range.

Dialect

Dialect is a social indicator reflecting social connotations and aspects of the speaker's identity. "Dialect is language variety related to the performer's provenance or affiliations in a geographic, temporal or social dimension" (Catford, 1965). In stylistic analysis of literature, dialects are closely studied focusing on the shifts in language styles based on varying circumstances. Dialect represents the raw emotions, feelings and thoughts of the uneducated rural people. In analyzing dialects, mainly the deviations in vocabulary, spelling, different sentence constructions from the standard ones, etc. are scrutinized. Consider the following quote:

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"Dos't mind how you could jerk a trout ashore with a bramble, and not ruffle the stream, Charl?' said the deposed keeper was saying. ''T was at that I caught 'ee once, if you can mind? (Hardy, *The Mayor of Chasterbridge,* Chapter 36)

In the above quotation, the constructions like *dos't mind* (Do you remember), *Twas* (it was), "*ee*" (you) are the markers of dialect.

Lexical Structure

It is a part of stylistic analysis that investigates the word structure as to whether compound words, monosyllabic words, polysyllabic words, archaic words, or blending or clipping are used in the novel or poetry for special reasons**.** The poets or fiction writers sometimes may coin new words too that is called neologism. Besides, vocabulary also plays contributory role in lending the language either sweet tone or harsh tone. Besides, writers create image which is called poetic logic through the lexical chain. For rhythmic resonance too, writers exploit vocabulary in novel. Studying lexical structures is also related to the analysis of formal cohesion. The following excerpt is an example quoted from *The Mayor of Chasterbridge*, where repetition and reiteration are used for a purpose.

*"Casterbridge announced old **Rome** in every **street, alley, and precinct**. It looked Roman, bespoke the art of **Rome**, concealed dead men of **Rome.** It was impossible to dig more than a foot or two deep about the town fields and gardens without coming upon some tall soldier or other of the Empire, who had lain there in his silent unobtrusive rest for a space of fifteen hundred years. He was mostly found lying on his side, in an **oval scoop in the chalk**, like a **chicken in its shell**; his knees drawn up to his chest; sometimes with the remains of his **spear against his arm**, **a fibula or brooch of bronze** on his breast or forehead, an urn at his knees, a **jar at his throat**, **a bottle at his mouth**; and mystified conjecture pouring down upon him from the eyes of Casterbridge street boys and men, who had turned a moment to gaze at the familiar spectacle as they passed by"* (Hardy, *The Mayor of Chasterbridge,* 54).

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In the above quote, the repetition and reiteration of some words are used for textual cohesion. This analysis is a part of discourse analysis.

Syntactic Structure

In this section, the critics analyze the special features about syntactic structures. Critics investigate if sentences are periodic or loose. They also check the clause structures---either anticipatory or trailing, periodic pause, inversions, fronting, cleft sentence, end focus and so on. They find out the significance of using varied structures by writers and focuses on how special use of the syntax affects meaning.

Let's look at the following periodic sentence in which the main theme or message is held up till the end of the sentence

> "*The young man, who could now read the lines and folds of Henchard's strongly-traced face as if they were clear verbal inscriptions, quietly assented; and when people deplored the fact, and asked why it was, he simply replied that Mr. Henchard no longer required his help*" (Hardy, *The Mayor of Chasterbridge).*

Discourse Analysis

Discourses such as conversation in a novel, poetry, narration, dramatic dialogues are all sometimes analyzed in stylistics. Both discourse analysis and pragmatics are studied in linguistics. In analyzing literary speech, speech acts, cooperative principles such as politeness, conversational maxims, terms of address etc. are taken into consideration. Besides, textual cohesion in narration can be also studied. For extra-linguistic context, deictic are analyzed. These are textual cues that point to the listeners' or readers' attention to the temporal and spatial situation.

Structuralism, Linguistics and Literature

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Roman Jacobson and Tzvetan Todorov, a narratologist, influenced French structuralism. After the Russian Formalists Boris Eichenbaum, Victor Shklovsky and Roman Jacobson were suppressed by the Soviets in early 1930s, the centre of formalism moved to Czechoslovakia, where the movement was continued by the Prague Linguistic Circle. It included Roman Jacobson, Jan Mukarovsky and Rene Wellek. Jacobson and Wellek became professors at American Universities.

Structuralist approach is used not only in interpreting literature but also a number of other disciplines, namely, anthropology, social science, etc. This analysis parallels a literary novel or a poem to a parole that needs to be examined to find out the underlying structures, that is, langue that is responsible for the special arrangement or organization of parole.

This concept of langue developed by Ferdinand de Saussure has been taken up by a number of other disciplines. "The aim of classic literary structuralism is not to provide interpretations of an individual text, but to make explicit, in a quasi-scientific way, the tacit grammar (the system of rules and codes) that governs the forms and meanings of all literary productions**.**

It is not mimetic (the view that literature reflects or imitates reality) criticism; neither is it expressive criticism (the view that literature is an expression of the author's feelings and emotions.

The salient features of structuralism are closely linked with various linguistic concepts. MH Abrams (Abrams, 2000) has pointed out the following features of structuralism.

a) A literary work is a text that is written by "a play of component elements according to specifically literary conversions and codes." This kind of text does not have any truth value though it may create an illusion of reality.

b) "The conscious self" is a construct, "a product of the linguistic system".

c) An author's mind is a "space" within which "a system of literary language, conventions, codes and rules of combination gets precipitated into a particular text."

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d) "Reader as a conscious, purposeful, and feeling individual is replaced by the impersonal activity of reading."

e) In structural critical approach in literature," the emphasis is on the impersonal process of reading which brings into play the particular conventions, codes and phrases and sentences that constitute a text."

f) "Barthes abandoned his previous belief in the scientific aspirations of structural concepts that structural codes and conventions create the meaning. In his book *The Pleasure of the Text*, he distinguished between two types of text—the *readerly* text such as realistic novel that tries to close the interpretation by insisting on specific meaning and *writerly* text that aims at the ideal of a galaxy of signifiers, and so encourages the reader to be a producer of his or her own meaning according to not just one code but to a multiplicity of codes."

Structuralism sees close relations between structures underlying literature and structures of human consciousness.   To the structuralists, a particular literary text is not what they are mainly interested in as they think it as a surface phenomenon. The main focus of the structuralists is the universal underlying science of all literary productions**.** The concept has been appropriated from the structuralist linguist Saussure who called the individual utterance "parole" and the underlying system or structures of language "langue." Similarly, the structuralist critics parallel parole to the individual genre of literature and langue to the underlying system of all literary productions.

According to Lois Tyson, structuralist approaches to literature have tended to focus on three areas of literary studies i.e**.** the classification of literary genres, the description of narrative operations, and analysis of literary interpretation.

Literary Genres

Northrop Frye (Frye, 1957) conceives "theory of myth" as the underlying principles of four types of narratives, namely, comedy, romance, tragedy and irony/satire**.** He relates romance with mythos of summer. For example, Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur,* Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene,* John Bunyan's *The Pligrim's Progress*. The romance represents the world

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of adventure in which "brave, virtuous heroes and beautiful maidens overcome villainous threats to the achievement of their goals."

He puts double genre irony/satire under mythos of winter. Irony, according to Frye "is the real world seen through tragic lens. It is a world in which protagonists are defeated by the puzzling complexities of life". Examples are Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* John Stenibeck's *Of Mice and Men.*

He puts tragedy under mythos of autumn**.** In tragedy, "a hero with the potential to be superior, like a romantic hero falls from romantic height into the real world." Examples: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.*

He puts comedy under mythos of Spring**.** In this genre, the hero gets into "threatening, real world difficulties". The hero then successfully overcomes all difficulties and achieves happiness.

Linguistic Paradigm

Narratology is a theory that studies the functions of narrative. A good deal of literary criticism is now done based on narratology that comes under the structuralist approach. A.J. Greimas takes up the binary system that is mainly the concern of linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, and uses it in interpreting common structural patterns in literature.

Tzvetan Todorov finds a similarity between "structural units of narrative" and "the structural units of language: He draws a parallel between structural units of narrative to the structural units of language. In this system, literature is thought as a construct modeled on a sentence.

Characters---proper nouns

Characters' actions----verbs

Characters' attributes ----adjectives

Propositions----sentences

Sequences--------paragraphs

Other categories----negation, comparison and modes

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Linguistic paradigm - the language system with its components have now been appropriated by the narratologists and applied in interpreting literary structures. Gerard Genette "uses tense to designate temporal relations between narrative and story; mood to designate forms and degrees of narrative representation; and voice to designate the narrative situation or its instance" Hawthorn (2003, 191).

Semiotics

Semiotics which is a relatively new field of study owes its origin to Saussure's concepts of signs as used in explaining linguistic system. Though semiotics has gone beyond linguistic signs, it has adhered to a common system i.e. sign that mainly belongs to the territory of linguistics. Semiotics, like in other disciplines is also used in literature. In literary semiotics is interested mainly "in literary conventions: the rules, literary devices, and formal elements that constitute literary structures.

Post-Structuralism/Deconstruction

Going against "the restrictive and limited critical practice" (Nayar,2010) of structuralism, a large number of theorists of Post-structuralism or deconstruction have come up with extra-ordinary views and concepts about language and its functions. Their concepts and arguments have considerably changed the way of literary studies. Such post-structuaralists and deconstructionists as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Paul De Man, J. Hillis Miller, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Jacques Lacan have brought unconventional concepts about the nature of meaning, relation between language and reality, subjectivity, self, identity formation etc that have strong implications in the study and criticism of literature.

Conclusion

The study of literature now is largely associated with wide ranging linguistic theories and practices. Unlike traditional literary criticism where focus was given on the writer's biography to

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interpret and determine meaning of a literary work, literary criticism after 20th century is more concerned with the formal elements i.e. linguistic elements that constitute literature. Critics now mostly engage in finding how those elements are exploited in a special way to achieve literary effects. Besides, meaning associated with language is also at the centre of current critical engagement of literature. Further, the investigation of meaning, its relativity and illusiveness or the permanence in literature, brings it to bear on the philosophical dimension of linguistics. It is seen from the above study that literature and linguistics have many meeting points. It has become quite common now that both students of literature and linguistics are almost obligated to have knowledge and ideas about both the disciplines.

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