Style in Stylistics and in Text and Discourse Linguistics

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1. Styles in a general semiotic

If we start out by postulating that a style is one of several ways of doing or shaping something, it follows that styles can arise whenever something can be done in more than one way. We can build houses or cars in different styles, we can have styles of handwriting and of driving a car, and I suppose dentists and their less fortunate patients might speak about styles of pulling teeth. Some of these styles correlate with time ("Renaissance style"), others with a group ("Bauhaus style"), others with an area ("Sicilian Baroque"), others with an occupation and its type of product ("cookery-book style"), others with a classic text ("Biblical style"), others with an individual ("Miltonic style", "the style of Caravaggio").

A style, then, consists of a set of characteristics that distinguish one way of doing something or of shaping things from other ways of doing and shaping. Comparison is therefore fundamental to style: comparison is necessary to find differences between one way of doing and shaping and other ways of doing and shaping. To compare, however, we must decide what should be compared with what. Sometimes such decisions are relatively straightforward. So, if we wish to compare John Donne's style with Milton's, we need a sample of what we regard as typical of Donne and another sample of what we regard as typical of Milton (though "what to regard as typical of" is sometimes difficult to operationalize). Sometimes such decisions are difficult. If we want to attribute an anonymous product X to one of the suspected creators A, B, C and D, we must find samples of products created by A, B, C and D which are meaningfully comparable with X with regard to theme and context. There are instances where products of different kinds show charac-

teristics of the same style, as in Art Nouveau building, wallpaper, furniture and tableware, and where, say, decorations of houses and of tableware are worth comparing.

2. Styles in language

In language, styles are one type of variation which should be placed in relation to other types of variation. Diachronic variation results in stages of linguistic development such as Old English and Middle English (which can then be more delicately subdivided when need be). Diatopic variation results in regional dialects (which can also be described with different levels of delicacy). Individual variation results in idiolects, language forms characteristic of a specific person. And stylistic variation is best regarded as correlating with situation and context. The choice of style is determined by situational parameters involving medium (spoken or written, and electronic which allows conversation in real time but in writing), genre (e.g. sermon versus business letter versus newspaper editorial), cultural and rhetorical tradition (a black preacher in Alabama versus the Archbishop of York), and relation between the communication partners (a professor uses one style with his children, another with his wife, yet another with his university president, and so forth).

Each normally functioning individual is thus obliged to recognize and to use a range of different styles. But the inventory and range of relevant styles varies from one individual to the next. However, a mastery of the relevant stylistic range is an essential part of the command of a language. One of the goals of educational systems is to enrich the stylistic experiences of the young. Students should be made capable of choosing expressions appropriate for the range of situations they must be prepared to meet. This does not mean that we should aim for conformity. But to jettison traditions effectively we must first know something about the traditions we refuse to follow.

We can test the principle that styles correlate with context by asking ourselves to what extent we can reconstruct the situation in which a given piece of text was born. Some texts may be general enough to suggest a number of contexts: their style is, relatively speaking, general. Some texts suggest highly specific contexts: the pulpit, the barracks, the laboratory. Note that this is one of the many areas where language and its background culture interact. To identify contexts we must know both the language and its various spheres of application. In another terminology: the identification of styles is not only a syntactic and semantic operation but inevitably comes to involve pragmatics as well.

It is worth noting that there are overlaps between our different types of linguistic variation. Old forms of the language often survive into later periods as special styles, especially in ritually frozen texts such as religious ones, or in texts with claims to permanence such as laws and statutes. Diglossia and polyglossia can be said to involve stylistic variation: if a nobleman speaks to other noblemen in standard language and to peasants in **patois** or dialect, standard language and dialect are used in the function of styles. And there are many speakers who change sociolect with function, for instance speaking a lower-class language when shopping and perhaps within the family, and an upper-class norm on the job and with the boss.

The producer of discourse should, then, be familiar with the style the members of his social and national group traditionally use in the communication situations he has to control. If he is an ex-serviceman turned priest he shold know the difference between a sergeant's language in front of a squad of recruits, and that of a clergyman in front of a congregation. He may of course use the one instead of the other, but he should then be prepared to face the effect. Correspondingly, our response to styles is based on a comparison between the text that develops as we listen or read, and the texts we have experienced people using in comparable situations. When listening to a sermon we expect the language to resemble that of other sermons we have heard; if the clergyman starts using the drill-sergeant's idiom we are surprised and perhaps shocked. The stylstic effect would be strong.

Surprises, information theorists tell us, have high information content. Stylistic novelties are surprises and raise the information content of their message - something well known to modernist and surrealist poets for example. Indeed one of the differences between the classic and the romantic temper is the attitude to expectations. The classicist finds beauty in satisfied expectations: if he sees half of the facade of a building he expects the other half to be symmetrical; if he reads one verse of a poem he expects the other verses to conform to its metre and stylistic level. The romantic, and in extreme cases the surrealist and the experimenting modernist, find beauty in unpredictabilities, surprises and shocks, and thus in a high information density of their text. Note that such responses build on a comparison between past experience which yields present expectations, and what the receptor actually hears or sees. So, a reader used to modernist poetry will be less shocked and surprised than a reader nurtured on neoclassical poetry. This, by the way, helps to explain why some people dislike modernist poetry: they are unable to cope with high information density, that is, with surprises and shocks.

These points bring up a corollary of great importance in language teaching, mother-tongue as well as foreign-language. We cannot respond to styles unless we already possess experiences of text with which we can compare the new texts we hear or see. If we wish our students to acquire a readiness to respond to styles, we must first give them a network of reference texts for background within which they can place new texts. Such experiences of a network of representative texts form a canon (though what such a canon actually contains and to what extent it conforms to old social and educational patterns is another matter). Social and aesthetic changes are apt to bring with them changes in the canon and thus also changes in stylistic response and appreciation.

3. Linguistic methods in the description of styles

So far I have argued that the genesis of stylistic impressions involves a comparison between a text we hear or read, and our past experiences of a corpus of texts which, consciously or unconsciously, we regard as canonical and stylistically normative. To repeat: when we hear or read a text, we compare it, bit by bit, with canonical features we carry with us in our memories of other texts we have heard or read. One of our basic observations has to do with conformity (is this clergyman's sermon style akin to that of sermons we have heard or read before?), another with identification of contexts from which possible nonconformist elements have been borrowed (do the shocking expressions of our clergyman come from the barracks or from somewhere else?).

As always in linguistics, we must rmember that language is both process and product. Discourse production and discourse comprehension are processes. But we can also record discourse and analyse it as if it were a static product. In real life, stylistic responses arise as a continuous process: we hear or see a text emerging item by item, phoneme by phoneme or letter by letter, morpheme by morpheme, word by word, phrase by phrase, and so forth. But studying the processual genesis of stylistic impressions is a cumbersome and difficult business at best. Therefore most linguists have analysed styles from products and thus in terms of completed texts.

To model the genesis of the stylistic response, a linguist must somehow imitate what happens in actual communication. He must describe the text whose style he is studying, and he must compare this description with that of a set of texts which he has defined as relevant, contextually related and canonically significant, for the text under stylistic analysis.

Many linguists used to insist that stylistic relevance exists only in the optional features of language, not in the obligatory ones. Personally I doubt if this is always and categorically true. If for instance a novelist describes a foreigner as saying **I is** and **he am**, such breaches of "obligatory" grammar can be seen as part of his foreigner-style. Motherese is another type of language that uses breaches of adult grammar with a stylistic impact: when we hear motherese, we can reconstruct its situational context. But the optionality of stylistically significant features is especially manifested in the character of style as frequency. I have defined stylistically significant elements as those elements whose density (meaning frequency of occurrence per some suitable measure of text length) in the text is significantly different from, or significantly akin to, the corresponding elements in the relevant canonical corpus. Once we define our text and our relevant canonical corpus, we can, in theory at least, count elements in the text and in the corpus, and use statistical formulae to define the level of significance of the differences and the similarities emerging from our counts. Note, however, that there remain several subjective elements in such a procedure: exact delimitation of text and canonical corpus, possible difficulties in defining and categorizing the linguistic items we wish to count, etc. For a complete description of a text we need, for instance, an apparatus for the definition and analysis of metrical features, assonances, types of metaphor and allusion, intersentential links and coherential features and inferences, and the like, because all such features may be potentially relevant to style. Conversely, the description should not be over-delicate. If we are describing foreigner-talk as a style, we should presumably not set up different categories for every minute shade of error but group them into categories that are meaningful for our particular purpose.

"Style markers" has been my term for those features in the text whose density is significantly related (that is, significantly greater or significantly less or significantly the same) to the density of corresponding features in the contextually relevant canon. The identification of such style markers should thus be an analogue to the process we use when responding to the style of an emerging text. In actual communication we match densities of elements in the emerging text with those in our memory of past experiences of comparable texts. In the linguist's laboratory we must build up a stylistic canon as a consciously constructed artefact, and then, via an adequate linguistic description of canon and text, proceed to a comparison of densities and, finally, a common-sense appreciation of the plausibility of our interpretations of our figures and probabilities.

There is another corollary here that contradicts a common view of style. Some linguists and lexicographers have tried to make a difference between stylistically neutral items capable of occurring in a wide range of texts (such as **and**), and stylistically marked elements occurring in a specific text type only (like nautical, military or scientific terms). To define style markers in terms of densities is, however, better. First, a very high or very low frequency of "stylistically neutral" items such as and may function as striking style markers. And, secondly, the range of occurrence of stylistically marked items can also be stated in terms of densities within a text type (and thus context category): a high density of **adjacency** is likely to mark a text as coming from linguistics, and even from a specific movement within linguistics.

4. Stylistics, text linguistics, discourse analysis

There used to be linguists who defined stylistics as linguistics beyond the sentence. Linguistic proper, they used to say, stopped at sentence borders, and the analysis of stretches of more than one sentence (and presumably of single sentences where they constituted one-sentence utterances and thus minimal discourses) was stylistics.

Such views were put through a tough test with the rise and development of text linguistics and discourse analysis, from the late nineteen-sixties onwards. It was obviously true that some style markers reside, not within individual clauses and sentences but in the ways in which sentences are strung together and cemented into text and discourse. But this is not all.

In various publications, and for reasons both theoretical and pedagogical, I have classified models of text and discourse under four headings. **Sentence-based models** take a text such as it is, and trace links between its sentences. Predication-based models start out from semantic units ("text atoms", predications) and from a text strategy which governs their textualization: with different strategies we can thus build up different texts ("allo-texts") out of the same predicational text base. **Interactional models** start out from communicative needs and from the text-producer's views of the receptor or receptors in terms of pragmatic factors such as previous shared knowledge, politeness, and the like. And, finally, **cognitive models** relate text production and comprehension to cognitive units and factors, such as planning span, the amount of work-space in short-term memory and its relation to textual and syntactic units, and the like. These terms should of course not be strained unduly. Obviously, all linguistic activity is inevitably cognitive. But as a

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rough pedagogic classification of linguistic approaches to discourse, these four categories may be of some use.

How, then, does style relate to these different aspects of text and discourse modelling? Or, rather, what use are these different models of text and discourse in the description of styles?

Sentence-based models permit the analysis of various kinds of intersentential linkage and their interpretation as style markers: a high density of **and** may thus turn out to be a style marker. Predication-based models must include a stylistic component in the text strategy that textualizes the underlying text atoms: textualizing the same set of text atoms with different strategies may result in different styles. Styles thus turn out to be part of text strategy. Interactional models present us with parameters governing text strategies. And cognitive models relate such parameters and strategies to processes of human cognition: to memory stores of canonical texts and their contexts, to the constraints imposed by cognition on discourse production and comprehension, and so on.

5. Conclusion

All this raises the question of the hierarchic position of stylistics within the universe of linguistic subdisciplines. Is stylistics hierarchically superordinate to discourse linguistics? I.e., is the job of discourse linguistics simply to describe discoursal features that have stylistic significance? Or has stylistics been swallowed by text and discourse linguistics, so that it becomes part of, say, the text strategies postulated in the predication-based models of discourse? Some linguists have an interest in protecting their own preserve from trespassers and interlopers, and will hierarchize linguistic subdisciplines so as to give their own specialty a maximal degree of independence. My own view is to see stylistic analysis as a problem-centered rather than as a theory-centered undertaking. When we take a patient into a hospital we expect her to be examined with a number of diagnostic aids such as x-rays, blood tests, heart films, ultrasound and whatnot. Similarly, when we look at the style of a piece of discourse, we may wish to submit the text to examination with a number of different techniques. Our aim is to arrive at a synthesis, a total and all-round view of style. This does not prevent anybody from theorizing about style. In fact much of the present paper might be characterized as such theorizing. But when we are faced with a real text and a purpose why we want to examine it, the problem-centered approach will justify our using an entire set of complementary methods, instead of just one as dictated by a narrow theoretical

stance and stubborn adherence to one single school of thought. In a word: Theoreticians may object to eclecticism. Those analysing styles should not.

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Styl w stylistyce oraz w lingwistyce tekstu i dyskursu

Autor definiuje styl jako zbiór cech odróżniających jeden ze sposobów dokonywania czegoś od innych takich sposobów. U podstaw stylu leży zatem porównanie. O stylu określonego tekstu możemy mówić tylko w oparciu o znajomość innych, podobnych tekstów. Różnice stylu wiążą się z rónicami w sposobie przekazu, gatunku literackim, tradycji kulturalnej i rodzaju relacji społecznej, zachodzącej między uczestnikami dyskursu. Użytkownicy języka powinni być świadomi tych różnic oraz skutków, jakie przynosi naruszenie istniejących w tej mierze konwencji. Łamanie ustalonych norm stylistycznych podnosi informatywność tekstu, lecz niszczy jego harmonię. Autor wyróżnia cztery rodzaje modeli tekstu i dyskursu: modele zdaniowe badają związki między zdaniami badanego tekstu; modele predykatowe analizują możliwości różnorodnego komponowania "atomów tekstowych" w większe całości; modele interakcyjne badają tekst w terminach czynników pragmatycznych, natomiast modele kognitywne uwzględniają czynniki takie, jak np. pojemność pamięci krótkotrwałej uczestników dyskursu. Autor opowiada się za ich łącznym wykorzystaniem w analizie tekstu.