

# *Stylistics Today*

## **1. New Stylistics**

*It is generally admitted that stylistics, regarded as a discipline of linguistics and literatures, was formed in the beginning of the 20th century. I don't deny, the significance of this turning point however, the first signs of stylistic reflection are doubtless as old as a human reflection on language in general. The key notions „style” and „stylistics” originated from the ancient rhetoric when it gained a certain maturity. Thus the stylistic traditions are very old.*

*The term style, related to the linguistic expressions, appears in the Roman times as a result of metonymization of the Latin word stilus, which means cyclostyle pen. Gradually, in rhetoric and in poetics, and then in linguistics and in the theory of literature, it acquires various meanings becoming a very polymorphic term. This ambiguity increased because of art critics who used the term style metaphorically in their discussions about the Renaissance. In the 19th century this term relates to the whole culture. In the 20th century it is used every now and again in new disciplines, compare: cognitive style, life's style in sociology of culture as well as, freely enough, in colloquial language.*

*In this way the notion „style” has become one of the basic notions of the sciences of man and culture. „Style is, first of all, a system of forms possessing qualities and meaningful expression, which reveal an artist's individuality and a comprehensive outlook on life of a group. It is also a means of expression within the group, a means transmitting and fixing some values of religious, social and moral life through the emotional suggestiveness of the forms. (...). For a historian of culture or for a philosopher of history who tend*

towards a synthesis, style is a manifestation of culture as a whole, an outward sign of its unity"<sup>1</sup>.

Such an interpretation of style, rejecting dualism of the contents and form, differs entirely from a rhetorical comprehension of style as an ability to select the proper means for expressing a given essence, an ability that can be learned and whose rules are universal independent of time, language, territory, etc. The calling in question of the 19th-century rhetorical conception of style resulted in the appearance of many notions of style which had various historical genealogy. Being the creation of researchers they contain as much essence as their creators have put in them. Each notion contains only a part of complicated reality to which it is related. Many of them gradually assume a character of hypostases and become a subject of study, as though the scientific notions were reality („Renaissance style”, „scientific style”, „Mickiewicz's style”, „Pan Tadeusz's style”) and not only the phenomena of reality itself, as they are conventionally called.

However, the boom for the paradigm of style didn't last long. It became evident that it was difficult to extend a primarily morphological (formal) category of style so that it could contain completely the questions of contents and context, as well as make of it a competent notion. The notions of style, being the extensive generalizations and simplifications, began to lose their cognitive capacity. Because of their „fatigue” (ambiguity, mutual incommensurability) it was only natural that there began a searching for new ways of the interpretation of reality.

In this situation the young stylistics (the term stylistics appeared in many European languages in the 19th century) has been ousted by the new popular theories and disciplines, among others by socio- and psycholinguistics, neorhetoric, theory of text, pragmatics. It is a paradox that in the second half of the 20th century, when predominant paradigm of cultivation of the humanities seems to be conducive to stylistics, when a formal-immanent treatment of language is neglected in favour of a wide psychosocial and cultural context, the terms style and stylistics vanish from the scientific communication,

1 M.Schapiro, *Style*. – *Anthropology Today*, ed. A. L. Kroeber, Chicago 1953, p. 287.

and stylistics itself is often conceived as a dead discipline or a very limited one (that deals generally with the superficial, narrow linguistic aspects of a literary text).

The time of the initial impetus – when the new theories and disciplines existed mostly as though „in themselves” and „for themselves”, and their researchers didn't try to get to know the previous traditions and suggestions of their confreres from the other fields — is passing. The cognitive pluralism assuming a form of anarchical chaos is an alarming phenomenon. There is an increasing conviction that we cannot be content with the registration of new facts and the creation of small theories. We need a more comprehensive formulation which could integrate the past and new results of the old and young disciplines. According to the claims from many fields of social life, such a synthetic formulation is univocally necessary both for theory and practice.

It appears that style is not a notion that can be simply rejected. If we reject it while explaining the definite phenomenon, we will have to replace it by another notion devoid of style's features (i.e. we will have to deal with all or selected levels of a text related to time, space, social spheres, person, etc.). Such a notion is unknown. Perhaps we could find a solution in the reconsideration of the hitherto existing stylistic knowledge and in the use of the new cognitive results. It is necessary to define precisely a relation between the various notions of style and the general notion of style. We should make a thorough theoretical study of the methodology of stylistics and the related disciplines, as well as its connections with some general scientific and general linguistic processes. We need a new stylistics.

## 2. Stylistics as a Transdiscipline

In contemporary stylistics we can distinguish the three basic trends of research: 1) the traditional trend that deals with style's means; 2) the trend dealing with the functional languages, especially popularized by the Prague school; 3) the very active contemporary trend that can be defined as a textual one. Each of these trends is typified by a considerable internal differentiation and often in particular research they exist simultaneously, although in various proportions.

The traditional stylistics of means treats style as a store of characteristic elements from the various levels of language (from the phonetic to the syntactic one) as well as a theory of literature and linguistics. Stylistics understood in this way — stylistics langue — could be completely linguistic. In the background there were the questions of style's systemicity, its integrating categories and the role of various factors influencing the usage of particular means of style. The means were classified according to the comparative method by expressing the identical (similar) meaning. However, the dependence of the usage of form upon the contents has not been taken sufficiently into consideration. Style has been considered as a form, and the use of styles as an art of conscious expression of the same contents by various means.

Therefore, style is strongly connected with a choice and synonymy, it is also treated as a departure from the norm.

The functional stylistics brought into prominence a category of functional style (macrostyles: colloquial, artistic, scientific, publicistic, religious, administrative). This category is formulated according to the system and is treated initially as a structural expression of a function of language (communicative, aesthetic, expressive, cognitive etc.) and then as a language's variant conditioned by the specificity of a particular social sphere of activity and communication (daily life, art, scientific cognition, socio-political life, etc.). Each of these spheres has a different quality, they are typified by specific contents, they have various degrees of awareness of the usage of linguistic means (compare: the colloquial style and the artistic one). The differences between particular styles make it difficult to compare them on the same plane. At the same time they are not hermetic, mutually separated systems. They create together a multiaspect system of function and style. (Under the influence of an idea of functional stylistics a theory of registers was formed basing upon the conception of the situational contexts of the linguistic activity, which conform to the typical linguistic means, cf: Enkvist Halliday).

Therefore, style is, as a matter of fact, a set of norms which determine a choice and usage of the linguistic means in particular circumstances of linguistic communication. Functional stylistics

*deals mainly with the varieties of style and their arrangement, as well as with the factors which determine these varieties.*

*Stylistics has been dealing with a text for a long time. Already the ancient rhetoric treated style as an aspect of text and looked for the integrating categories in the analytic standards („the features of style”) of a text – although insufficiently determined and separated – such as clarity, conciseness, etc. The textual orientation is distinct in the romantic (or expressionistic) conception of style that stems from G.Vico, J.W.Goethe, B.Croce, then occurs in the German neoidealism of K.Vossler and L.Spitzer and finally in hermeneutics. This trend also exists in the Russian formalism and Prague school which are closer to the rhetorical conception of style. It appeared mainly – under the significant influence of the history of art – in the stylistics of the theory of literature that deals with artistic text. However, as linguistics was ripening to treat text as a linguistic unit – together with the formation of the theory of text – this trend became fixed also in the linguistic stylistics.*

*Style begins to be treated as a complex, basic fact of communication, as an attribute of the textual activity, compare: style competence, style structure of a text. The notion „style” contains: 1) the contents (values) of various kind (among others, objective, ideological, emotional, aesthetic) which are arranged in the multi-level structure consistent with the subject's preferences (from the phonetic to the textual ones); 2) the means of expression which realize these values and also form a textual structure; 3) the functional aspect – style is not only a morphology of text, but also the relations linking the text with various contexts.*

*Stylistics is then a discipline that deals with the human textual activity and it must include all the aspects of this activity, which are considered in various disciplines by many conceptions. There emerges sharply a question of interpretation of the results achieved and of a possibly homogeneous parametrization of the discoveries. In such cognitive situations we used to talk about transdisciplinarity.*

*How to interpret the transdisciplinarity of stylistics? First of all, as a respect for a cognitive independence of the particular disciplines dealing with various aspects of the linguistic activity (and not only). Stylistics exists with them in a close symbiosis. It uses their*

*theoretical and practical achievements in order to integrate them employing, among others, its basic but complex notion „style”. At the same time, as a specific macrodiscipline, it provides these disciplines with the general conceptions, as well as notions, methode, etc.*

### *3. Stylistic Synthesis — Possibilities and Limitations*

*In the cognitive situation that is typical of contemporary stylistics and the related disciplines, the researchers behave variously. Some are antitheoretical, avoiding all kinds of theories. Others – monotheoretical – choose one theory rejecting the rest or trying to translate them into language of a chosen theory. The third group of researchers – eclectic – use the fragments of various theories neglecting their adjustment and unity. At last, the integrating researchers try to combine many conceptions.*

*The last attitude especially needs „a language of a higher order” that would enable us to describe particular theories and to build a metatheory. The comparative analysis of the existing theories makes a basis for the creation of such a language.*

*The study of the progress of human knowledge assumes that every theory has three layers:*

*– descriptive (D), i.e. more or less abstractive descriptions of phenomena, facts (data and rules);*  
*– hypothetical (H) containing the explanations and interpretations;*

*– metalayer (M) that consist of the methodological statements (about the empirical methods), metatheoretical ones (about hypotheses) and the statements dealing with the essential philosophical issues (especially the epistemological and ontological ones). The relations between them can be described in the following terms:*

$$D \Leftrightarrow H \Leftrightarrow M$$

*In practice the theories have different degrees of regularity and formal organization. They are often described in freely organized texts, without stratification into three levels of abstraction and without explicit, formalized statements and suppositions. Therefore,*

*the reconstruction of theories is not easy and only when we fulfil that task, we can compare them in order to create the metatheories. The model of metatheory, theory-synthesis, in comparison with the described model of theory, is richer by one more layer – the cognitive context (CC) that includes such factors as the historical tradition, present cognitive situation and researcher's individuality:*

$$CC \rightarrow M \rightleftharpoons H \rightleftharpoons D$$

*I don't aim here at a thorough characteristic of various conceptions, or their comparative analysis or an introduction of metatheory-synthesis, I only emphasize the methodological issues. For I feel sure that stylistics would derive great advantage, if the researchers studied thoroughly the character and function of theoretical formulations. Very important seems to be the understanding of the role of theory, such as the generating or initiating the research.*

*In the last period the researchers-theorists used to progress rather slowly, while one comprehensive theory containing various aspects of man's linguistic behaviour would be more advantageous. The fragmentary or one-sided mini-theories should be finally taken into consideration by more comprehensive theories. However, despite the request for synthesis, despite the concentration of the conceptions round some modal, theoretical positions, the progress of integration is not great and even the way of this progress is questionable.*

*First of all, many conceptions are formulated so inexactly that integration seems to be a little risky process, since the involved elements are only vaguely outlined. The theoretical differences often refer to the empirical issues of a very elusive character. In these circumstances, when there doesn't exist even one predominant theoretical standpoint, wouldn't it be better if we let various theories progress freely till they are more formalized, empirically reasonable? Then, we could achieve integration by natural means and on a solid empirical basis, not as a result of an artificially concocted process based upon the individual liking and individual convictions. Is it the right time then, and favourable circumstances to deal with the stylistic synthesis?*

*Does not the programming of stylistic integration intensify the chaos? Nowadays in the field, which I call here the field of comprehen-*

sive stylistics, the empirical research, connected with the existing theories, is underestimated, while the new formulations or theoretical speculations are overestimated. The circumstances have been formed which are more conducive to the creation of new, even trivial theories, than to the verification of the existing theories.

The study of style needs both more radicalism and more conservatism. We could say that it needs more creative imagination and more critical opinion. A theorist should be ready to violate the generally accepted assumptions and opinions but, at the same time, after the formation of a new set of opinions, he should study thoroughly and consistently their implications. The verification of theories wants for some time a conservative keeping to the accepted standpoint. It can be changed only under the influence of a verified evidence, not because of a fancy or fleeting observation. The only effective criticism of the existing theory is the alternative theory that functions best of all.

Out of accord with rationality of the research procedure is also uncritical acceptance of some theories under the influence of scientific fashion, as well as theoretical imperialism, i.e. the imposition of a particular standpoint as the only right one. The „imperialists“ convictions may not wrong, but it seems that the creation of theory is an example of „free play“. No theorist has the right to order the other researchers what they ought to do. He should present his theory in the most convincing way with the rational argumentation but should respect the fact that theoretical conviction is relative.

Beside the issues connected with the contexts of discovery and motivation – as they are called in the study of the progress of human knowledge – it is proper to emphasize a context that can be conventionally called rhetorical. In the humanities the existence of many theories depends upon a textual way of their introduction. Meanwhile, a necessity to master methodology better is connected with a necessity to differentiate an attractive literary style from useful theorizing. A smart and brisk style, convincing presentation arouse the interest in theory, however, it should be estimated according to its investigative usefulness, not according to an author's literary mastery.

Despite the above and other doubts, reservations, difficulties and limits, it seems that the aspiration for a stylistic synthesis is reasonable. This doesn't contest the right to free theoretical creation. Nevertheless,



it is necessary to warn against the immoderate metatheorizing that is typical enough of the contemporary theoretical thought. The animation of this thought and the variety of theoretical orientations not always go together with a change of investigation practice which would reveal the use of these suggestions by the researchers-empiricists. There arises then a dissonance between the theories and the investigation practice, and a division into „theorists' theory” and „researchers' theory”.

I would rather resolve the dilemma relating to the status of stylistics by accepting a very comprehensive – transdisciplinary – understanding of its subject. As a result of this standpoint there arises a necessity to integrate the stylistic knowledge.

#### 4. The Current Tasks of Stylistics

From the above considerations there result for stylistics various cognitive, practical and organizing tasks.

In the cognitive sphere, the theoretical–methodological thought ought to be not exactly an exuberant theoretical fantasy but – stemming from the achievements of empirical research on the one hand and adducing the contemporary cognitive context and metatheoretical statements on the other – it should formulate theoretical generalizations as well as research programmes. One of its tasks would be also the explication of „immanent poetics” which controls the earlier and present methods of the cultivation of stylistics and the related disciplines. The studies in this field should result in the dictionaries of terms, the publications dealing with the history of stylistic thought and the theory of style and stylistics, etc.

Stylistics has also important descriptive-explicative tasks. They refer to the functional languages, the registers, of genre styles, etc. Their past and contemporary condition needs a description. Historical stylistics, as well as comparative one (in many plans), is still a weak link in the stylistic research.

As for the application of stylistic knowledge (for example, in translations, in teaching native and foreign languages) there is also from much to be done. Stylistics doesn't meet all the requirements

*from various fields of social life. Too great a gap has been formed between theoretical and practical stylistics.*

*The above mentioned and other tasks of stylistics exact intensive efforts from the researchers. These tasks could be facilitated by a properly formed organizational and communicative structure in particular countries, likewise on an international scale, which could create a community of stylists.*

*Above all, the informal structure represented by the invisible colleges is poor. It can be strengthened by a development of the formal and informal communicative ties between the researchers.*

*I hope that „Stylistyka” will be helpful in realizing all these tasks.*

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