

STYLISTICS AND STYLE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND RECENT TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

The branching off of stylistics in language science was indirectly the result of a long-established tendency of grammarians to confine their investigations to sentences, clauses and word-combinations which are "well-formed", to use a dubious term, neglecting anything that did not fall under the recognized and received standards. This tendency became particularly strong in what is called descriptive linguistics.

Keywords: long-established tendency, investigations, sentences, clauses, word-combinations, literary (standard) language, manner of expression

INTRODUCTION

Stylistics, sometimes called lingvo-stylistics, is a branch of general linguistics. It has now been more or less definitely outlined. It deals mainly with two interdependent tasks: a) the investigation of the inventory of special language media which by their ontological features secure the desirable effect of the utterance and b) certain types of texts (discourse) which due to the choice and arrangement of language means are distinguished by the pragmatic aspect of the communication. The two objectives of stylistics are clearly discernible as two separate fields of investigation. The inventory of special language media can be analyzed and their ontological features revealed if presented in a system in which the co-relation between the media becomes evident.¹

The types of texts can be analyzed if their linguistic components are presented in their interaction, thus revealing the unbreakable unity and transparency of constructions of a given type. The types of texts that are distinguished by the pragmatic aspect of the communication are called functional styles of language (FS); the special media of language which secure the desirable effect of the utterance are called stylistic devices (SD) and expressive means (EM).

The first field of investigation, i.e. SDs and EMs, necessarily touches upon such general language problems as the aesthetic function of language, synonymous ways of rendering one and the same idea, emotional colouring in language, the interrelation between language and thought, the individual manner of an author in making use of language and a number of other issues.

The second field, i.e. functional styles, cannot avoid discussion of such most general linguistic issues as oral and written varieties of language, the notion of the literary (standard) language, the constituents of texts larger than the sentence, the generative aspect of literary texts, and some others².

In dealing with the objectives of stylistics, certain pronouncements of adjacent disciplines such as theory of information, literature, psychology, logic and to some extent statistics must be touched upon. This is indispensable; for nowadays no science is entirely isolated from other

¹I.R. Galperin. Stylistics. M. "Higher school" 1977, page-6

²I.R. Galperin. Stylistics. M. "Higher school" 1977, page-7

domains of human knowledge; and linguistics, particularly its branch stylistics, cannot avoid references to the above mentioned disciplines because it is confronted with certain overlapping issues. The generative grammars, which appeared as a reaction against descriptive linguistics, have confirmed that the task of any grammar is to limit the scope of investigation of language data to sentences which are considered well-formed. Everything that fails to meet this requirement should be excluded from linguistics.

But language studies cannot avoid subjecting to observation any language data whatever, so where grammar refuses to tread stylistics steps in. Stylistics has acquired its own status with its own inventory of tools (SDs and EMs), with its own object of investigation and with its own methods of research.

Definition of style and stylistics. The subject of stylistics has so far not been definitely outlined. This is due to a number of reasons. First of all there is a confusion between the terms style and stylistics. The first concept is so broad that it is hardly possible to regard it as a term. We speak of style in architecture, literature, behaviour, linguistics, dress and other fields of human activity.

Even in linguistics the word style is used so widely that it needs interpretation. The majority of linguists who deal with the subject of style agree that the term applies to the following fields of investigation³:

- 1) the aesthetic function of language;
- 2) expressive means in language;
- 3) synonymous ways of rendering one and the same idea;
- 4) emotional colouring of language;
- 5) a system of special devices called stylistic devices;
- 6) the splitting of the literary language into separate subsystems called stylistic devices;
- 7) the interrelation between language and thought;
- 8) the individual manner of an author in making use of language.

The word style is derived from the Latin word `stylos` which meant a short stick sharp at one end and flat at the other used by the Romans for writing on wax tablets. Now the word `style` is used in so many senses that it has become a breeding ground for ambiguity⁴. The word is applied to the teaching of how to write a composition; it is also used to reveal the correspondence between thought and expression; it frequently denotes an individual manner of making use of language; it sometimes refers to more general, abstract notions thus inevitably becoming vague and obscure, as, for example, "Style is the man himself" (Buffon), "Style is depth" (Derbyshire); "Style is deviations" (Enkvist); "Style is choice" and the like.

Some linguists consider that the word `style` and the subject of linguistic stylistics is confined to the study of the effects of the message, i.e. its impact on the reader. Thus Michael Riffaterre writes that "Stylistics will be linguistics of the effects of the message, of the output of the act of communication, of its attention –compelling function". This point of view has clearly been reached under the influence of recent developments in the general theory of information. Language being one of the means of communication or, to be exact, the most important means of communication, is regarded in the above quotation from a pragmatic point of view. Stylistics

³V.A. Kukharencok. A Book of Practice in Stylistics. M."Высшая школа"1987, page-154

⁴<http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/hes/translation>

in that case is regarded as a language science which deals with the results of the act of communication. The understanding of the term style influences the characteristics given to Stylistics as one of several linguistic disciplines. The following are the most common characteristics of style as listed by K. Wales in her respected work *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (1990):

Although the term style is used very frequently in Literary Criticism and especially Stylistics, it is very difficult to define. There are several broad areas in which it is used⁵:

- At its simplest, style refers to the **manner of expression** in writing and speaking, just as there is a manner of doing things, like playing squash or painting. We might talk of someone writing in an ornate style, or speaking in a comic style. For some people style has evaluative connotations: style can be good or bad.

- One obvious implication of (1) is that there are different styles in different situations (e.g. comic vs. turgid); also that the same activity can produce stylistic variation (no two people will have the same style in playing squash or writing an essay).

- So style can be seen as variation in language use, whether literary or nonliterary. The term register is commonly used for those systemic variations in linguistic features common to particular non-literary situations, e.g. advertising, legal language, sports commentary. Style may vary not only from situation to situation but according to medium and degree of formality: what is sometimes termed style-shifting. On a larger scale it may vary, in literary language, from one genre to another, or from one period to another (e.g. we may talk of the style of Augustan poetry, etc.) we speak of classical style or the style of classicism; realistic style; the style of romanticism and so on. On the other hand, the term is widely used in literature, being applied to the various kinds of literary work, the fable, novel, ballad, story etc.

- Thus we speak of a story being written in the style of a fable or we speak of the characteristic features of the epistolary style or the essay and so on. Style is thus seen against a background of larger or smaller domains or contexts⁶.

- In each case, style is seen as distinctive: in essence, the set or sum of linguistic features that seem to be characteristic: whether of register, genre or period, etc. Style is very commonly defined in this way, especially at the level of text: e.g. the style of Jane Austen's *Emma*. Stylistic features are basically features of language, so style is in one sense synonymous with language (i.e. we can speak equally of the language of Jane Austen's *Emma*). What is implied, however, is that the language is in some way distinctive, significant for the design of a theme, for example. When applied to the domain of an author, style is the set of features peculiar to, or characteristic of an author: his or her language habits or idiolect. So we speak of Miltonic style, or Johnsonese⁷.

- Clearly each author draws upon the general stock of the language in any given period; what makes style distinctive is the choice of items, and their distribution and patterning. A definition of style in terms of choice is very popular, the selection of features

⁵Chatman, Seymour. *Stylistics; Quantitative and Qualitative*, 1967, V. 1, p.30

⁶Riffaterre, M. *The Stylistic Function*. Proceedings of the 9-th International Congress of Linguists, The Hague, 1964, p.p. 316-317.

⁷Hill, Archibald A. *Poetry and Stylistics*.—in: "Essays in Literary Linguistics", p.54

partly determined by the demands of genre, form, theme, etc. All utterances have a style, even when they might seem relatively plain or unmarked: a plain style is itself a style.

- Another differential approach to style is to compare one set of features with another in terms of a deviation from a norm, a common approach in the 1960's. It would be wrong to imply that style itself is deviant in the sense of abnormal, even though there are marked poetic idiolects. Rather, we match any text or piece of language against the linguistic norms of its genre, or its period, and the common core of the language as a whole. Different texts will reveal different patterns of dominant or foregrounded features.

Stylistics is the study of style. Just as style can be viewed in several ways, so there are several different stylistic approaches. This variety in stylistics is due to the main influences of Linguistics and Literary Criticism.

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