

Pragmatics and stylistics

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Abstract

Consideration of linguistic variation is inherent to pragmatics, especially where such variation relates to contextual factors, an area where it frequently converges with work on stylistics. This article reviews certain relevant contributions made from the perspective of style analysis (literary studies, sociolinguistics, and systemic functionalism) and outlines certain approaches to a stylistics of language, centred on Bühler's threefold division into symptom, signal and symbol. Lastly, illustrations of this approach are given, touching too on the ideological dimension, with reference to questions of analysis.

Summary

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1. Preamble

It is certainly not an easy task to define the limits of stylistics with respect to neighbouring disciplines such as rhetoric, microsociolinguistics or pragmatics. The label "stylistics" is related to very specific writers and schools, such as Charles Bally and subsequently, in connection with idealist stylistics, Leo Spitzer, Dámaso Alonso and Amado Alonso. In different order of things, the discipline can also be linked with the work on functional language variation, where the term "style" overlaps with that of "register", and is closer to the latter epistemological area. Recently, certain linguists have put this disciplinary label back in circulation as a branch of the old rhetoric, and currently Bally is looking for the foundations of a *stylistics of language*, beyond individual speech acts, and not limited to the ambit of literary creation (Adam 1997).

What is more, we note the closeness to some of the subdivisions within pragmatic linguistics -such as speech act theory, the study of politeness or metaphor and irony from the point of view of relevance theory- to the interest scholars are now showing in style, within the contribution made by pragmatics. These are all factors that, taken together, have ushered in a new and explicit label for this area of the discipline: "pragmastylistics". So, in view of the topic's complexity and the possible points of connection with pragmatics, it would be worthwhile now revisiting certain epistemological areas where stylistics has taken root, to then go on to examine the different dimensions of style.

2. Literary studies

As is well known, the study of style has its origins in Rhetoric, and in particular in *elocutio* or the study and improvement of expression, which steadily gained ground over the course of time with the weakening of some of the classic components of Rhetoric. Indeed, as interest focused increasingly on written texts, *memoria* and *actio-pronuntiatio* were relegated to second place, and *inventio*, shifted, especially from the 16th century onward, to a large extent from rhetoric (the art of *bene dicere*) to logic (the art of *vere dicere*). The other important component, *dispositio*, was eventually to be given a boost, centuries later, with the advent of narratology and text linguistics. Yet for many years, scarcely any points of

contact were found with a linguistics which took the sentence as the upper limit of its interest. In contrast, stylistics, focusing as it did primarily on the study of microstructures, was able to seek an analytical methodology for the linguistic study of such issues as adjectivisation, the discourse use of verbs and word order at sentence level. (It should be made clear that stylistics does *not* need to limit itself to microstructures, and here we are adopting a broader perspective. Yet there is no doubt that microstructures have traditionally been the favourite area of application). On the other hand, the word "style", has in ordinary every day discourse, a better image than "rhetoric", which is also a factor contributing to the currency of the same term (style) for the discipline. This, to the detriment of rhetoric, with whose content it preserves nevertheless a close relationship (Enkvist 1985).

In any case, style and style considerations preserve a close relationship with *elocutio*, and the contemporary study of style originated the old rhetoric and went on to be increasingly linked to the area of literary studies. And conceptualisation in terms of rhetorical figures (one of the objects of study within the discipline, as aesthetic resource and stylistic elaboration, often seemingly as mere ornament) further favoured this trend to wards the literary. It is clear, too, that these figures, metaphor and irony above all, are often studied in the context of legal argumentation (Perelman, for instance) or in relation to the pragmatics of relevance (Sperber and Wilson), or indeed within the ambit cognitive semantics (G. Lakoff). This is true certainly in the case of Bally, the pioneer of modern stylistics. He emphasises expressivity of ordinary language (López García 2000). Despite that, his main area of application has been in the analysis of literary texts. In this way the study of style *distanced* itself from ordinary speech and style was even seen, at times, as a *transgression*, of the ordinary everyday patterns of speech.

It is important to note that the idea of *choice*, of selection of meaningful options involving a range of variants, is ever present. An author's style in a work can be viewed as determined by a series of options that the text manifests and which are selected from a given range of possibilities which the language offers. And when translating, for example, these can be seen to vary considerably when having to "move house" from one linguistic system to another (Marco 2002). It is for that reason that, between stylistics concerned with individual discourse acts and stylistics of the language, the bridges are many and much frequented. To give just one instance of this: when Spitzer carried out his masterly analysis of Racine's style as a strategy of "muted" expression, he looks at the series of options chosen by the dramatist. In showing the value of each of these choices he gradually and cumulatively sketches out the main outlines of a stylistics of the French language, continually referring as he does to the corresponding repertoire of variants for each of the variables in question.

3. Social and functional variation

Since that the realisation of linguistic units is diverse rather than uniform, choice from among the possibilities offered, in each case, by the language, becomes meaningful in one way or another. It could be the speaker's identification with a social group defined by age, sociocultural level or geographical location (*dialectal* variation), or it could represent the speaker's attempts to suit the utterance to the communicative context such as the precept, interpretation or the construction (*functional* variation). Including more than the world of literature, but without excluding it either, stylistics has to take into account the value of this last type of optionality in all kind of discourse, to the extent that situational variation is both individual and collective (Garrido Medina 1997).

In effect, as with dialectal variation, there is here a correlation between linguistic variation and social variation, between language and society, since the constraints that govern stylistic modulation of texts constitute a socially elaborated construct, by virtue of conventions that have been progressively consolidated and transformed over the course of the history of the language. Thus, for example, the first historic uses of the periphrastic perfective tense (inflected simple past) in Catalan was as an expressive literary usage, an individual choice, in narrative genres such as the medieval chronicles. Effectively, this was a resource to achieve vivid dramatisation, and involved using the historic present of the verb *to go* as auxiliary. Thus *va dir* used in stead of the simple form *digué* (both meaning "he said"). In time, this usage spread beyond the framework of the chronicles and a purely individual choice, to become a structurally integrated grammatical feature of the language.

It became, therefore, an extensively found and structurally conventionalised variant, *gramaticalised*, in short; from a sociolinguistic perspective it is a *marker* in Labov's sense, since the alternating of the two variants influenced by dialectal factors (present-day geographical distribution in the Catalan-speaking territories) and at the same time responding to stylistic factors (not just in Labov's simplified sense as degree of attention accorded to one's own discourse, but as a multidimensional range of factors: oral or written context, informal or solemn, even a certain archaic association in the case of the simple past) (Salvador 2001). But what needs to be noted here is that the effect of creative style, whose historical origins can be pinpointed, later become *stabilised* as a structure of the Catalan linguistic system, the periphrastic perfective. Its use can no longer be creative, since it has taken on the value of an option of grammatical choice more or less *regulated by convention*.

Now, these patterns that are regulated by social convention do not determine linguistic variants in the strong sense, seen as a subcode of the language. They have to be seen dynamically, as a component of the functional concept of *register*, which has become common place in studies on variation theory, especially with respect to oral / written dimension, which today finds methodological support in the technologies of linguistic corpora (Biber *et al.* 1998; Payrató and Alturo eds. 2002).

But the theoretically most potent characterisation of the notion of register surely is to be found in systemic functionalism, where the concept is defined in terms of *meaning potential*, a configuration of semantic resources which members of a linguistic and cultural community associate with a *situation type* (type of context). In the Firthian tradition of British (and Australian) linguistics, language and socio-communicative activity form an indissoluble whole, such that linguistics cannot relinquish the systematic study of contextual parameters which help to modulate the discourse.

Thus, for Halliday and his disciples, the notion of register establishes a model of the context based on the interaction of three factors: the *field*, the *tenor* and the *mode*, which refer respectively to systems of social activity, power relations and solidarity among the participants and, thirdly, the semiotic distance which is formed, based on the medium of communication selected. Each of these three factors, in turn, relate to three types of meaning linking linguistic organisation to social organisation: the ideational meaning that "naturalises" conceptive reality by means of an institutionalised social activity; the interpersonal meaning which gives material shape to social relations; and the textual meaning which gives a semiotic dimension to communication and organises it sequentially. Also, on a more comprehensive level of context modelling, one would need to situate the notion of *genre*, relative to the system of institutionalised, teleological (*goal-oriented*) social processes by means of which social activity is organised in each cultural framework (Martin 1992, 2001).

We can say, therefore, that the theoretical construct "genre" allows us to explain the adoption of postures or roles (both on the part of speakers as listeners) in the communicative interaction and, therefore, also in the way in which registers suitable to each instance are selected. Similarly, at a lower level, the construct "register" corresponds to the mechanisms that guide selection of the aptest or most efficient lexico-grammatical options within the stylistic repertoire of the language.

Of course, this theorising seeks to account for *contextual models* of an interpretive order that could exist as mental representations and determine many of the properties of the production and reception of discourse in a given linguistic-cultural setting. Among these properties of discourse, stylistic choices occupy a particularly important place. From this perspective, style should be considered as a combination of formal properties of discourse which derive from contextual models (Van Dijk 2001).

There are a series of corollaries to this approach, if we avoid an a-historical, individualist and ideologically decaffeinated view of style as a merely "expressive" manifestation of an individual personality. In fact, from the point of view of "critical" discourse analysis, these contextual models guiding stylistic choice of speakers are subjective interpretations of contexts and their typology, and are clearly subjected to ideological control. In this sense, then, style becomes one of the more obvious manifestations of one's ideologies, and a determining factor in its social reproduction (Van Dijk 1998). But let us go on to examine the

functioning of these properties of discourse which make up style from the angle of its meaning as an option among the range of possibilities offered by the language.

4. Symptoms, signs and symbols

Taking the function of language in terms of Bühler's model as a our point of departure, we refer to symptom when the sign relates to its producer or source; we speak of signal where semiotic activity has to do with the effect on the receiver; and we speak of symbol when such relates to the external referent denoted by the sign. It is from this triple perspective that we are able to enhance our understanding of at least some of the oscillation in this area of study.

In fact, a good part of the work done on stylistics has placed emphasis on the first of these functions, that of style as *symptom*, referring back to the origin of the discourse, the subject or originator. The index value of the sign here can refer to the personality (or indeed the unconscious) of a literary author or of any other source. Thus, there has often been a tendency in literary studies to take style markers of reiterated occurrence as evidence in the identification of text authorship. In forensic linguistics too, scholars have searched for recurrent style markers capable of furnishing practical markers of plagiarism ("The plagiarism machine") or of identifying authors of anonymous writings with legal consequences or criminal implications. Behind this approach lies a key notion in stylistics: that of personal *choice*. But it is obvious that choice in context cannot be defined other than by reference to a framework of possible options, and a repertoire of variation that establishes the universe of practicable alternatives.

As regards the second function, that of *signal*, it should be recalled that stylistics inherited its focus on the persuasive dimension from the old discipline of rhetoric, or at least the emphasis on the *effect* achieved (if not sought) on the audience. In more contemporary terms, we should say that style "proposes" a point of view for the receivers of the discourse, or more exactly, this point of view is *imposed* since it acts as an (often imperceptible, certainly unavoidable) filter, since style is an essential component of textual semiosis. Put another way, it is by means of stylistic options chosen in the course of a discourse, that we are *made to see* things from a pre-set point of view. This imposition, previous to its eventual pervasive effect, possesses a cognitive dimension, shaping the perception of the listener-receptor as a necessary condition for subsequent persuasion. This takes us on to the third of the three pragmatic types mentioned above, in that the cognitive bias associated with the adoption of a point of view has to do with the semantic content of the discourse.

In particular, consideration of style as a *symbol* raises the question of semantic relations between equivalents or synonyms. Thus, according to a restrictive view of semantics as the study, exclusively, of the logical-referential component, synonyms involve identity of basic or denotative meaning, as observable across putatively synonymous pairs of words or expressions. From this point of view, the values of elements in synonymous pairs can be relegated to the fringe area of connotative meaning, of subjectivity and context of use. And the latter can be understood as nebulous and nameless, or at least not removed from the epistemological framework of general linguistics.

Stylistics, seen from this standpoint, would seem to be about impressionistic labelling of nuanced distinctions of secondary importance. The arrival of pragmalinguistics on the scene, however, has made it possible to increase systematisation of contextual factors. Furthermore, the development of a wider range (a more *pragmatic* range, if you will) of semantic issues, such as Language Argumentation Theory (LAT) proposed initially by Ducrot, facilitates consideration of many such values (distinctions and nuances) that were originally considered residual. These latter form a part of language as elements which have come to be conventionalised in the structures of the language. Many synonymous pairs thus cease to be such, as linguistic research makes it possible to establish explicitly the semantico-pragmatic differences between apparent synonyms (or, more euphemistically, "almost synonyms"). These become linguistic units differentiated via the inclusion of pragmatic specifications (for example, in relation to requirements of indirect speech acts or politeness), or alternatively through the *emergence* of connotative meaning in terms of structural factors (for example, the suffusing of lexical units with associated axiological points of view).

At other times, progress in differentiating synonymous lexical units stems from the rigorous study of contexts of use and of correlation existing between linguistic variation and social variation. As we have seen, variation sociolinguistics, on the one hand, and studies of systemic functionalism exploring the notion of register, on the other, clearly underpin the functionalisation of stylistics -and the associated narrowing of the concept of synonymy. There is no need to repeat here the well-known anecdote reported years ago by Martin Joos: as soon as there is more than one clock at the same train station, the forces of specialisation begin to operate. Indeed, if the clocks were to show exactly the same time, why have more than one?

Viewed in this way, stylistics that emphasise the symbolic can be seen to push back the barrier of (socio)linguistic entropy. It reclaims certain areas assigned traditionally to *free variation*, converting them into territory governed by patterns of variation and susceptible to systematic description. In the next section, we shall be looking at some of the most promising stylistics issues from this perspective.

5. Some objects for the application of stylistics

Let us go on to consider, by way of illustration, the stylistics of some structures of the language: phraseological combinations, the infusing of socio cognitive bias in the lexis, and the mechanisms of semantic nominalisations.

As regards the first, note that phraseology is today an attractive area for linguists, especially in application to contrastive lexicography and translation (Corpas 1998). After a stage when it was *de rigueur* to evaluate linguistic creativity and free or *open choice*, emphasis came to be placed more on the way speakers used "prefabricated" pieces of discourse. The literary use of fashionable phrases and clichés has received attention from scholars of stylistics, often in the context of originality of manipulation (reorganisation) or breaking with tradition as a resource for "de-familiarisation". However, stylistic analysis is not averse to looking at routines and "routinisation" which facilitate production and interpretation of discourse, in accordance with the patterns of each register or each genre.

There is a phraseology that is characteristic of legal discourse, of administrative documents, of scientific articles, literary criticism, news reports, electioneering, tele evangelism, radio talk shows and even Internet chats. Such phraseological practice (which often involves mere word *collocations* that occur habitually and which today corpus linguistics can help us to study on a more empirical basis) foment a degree of productive and interpretative automatism and facilitate the immediate identification of registers and genres. Its power as a mechanism for reproduction of ideologies is simply remarkable, especially in the way it contributes to "naturalise" discourse, making it more difficult to assume a critical position. There is nothing new in this, the sayer of proverbs has functioned in this way for centuries (often a proverb or saying is simply an *ideologeme* that adopts the seductive form of the trope). The decreased visibility suffered today by such routinised forms actually increases their ideological effectiveness in the discourse of contemporary mass media.

Another instance is the analysis of sociocognitive biases of the lexicon -axiological points of view, as we have said, that have become conventionalised over time within a cultural and linguistic community, which have finally crystallised in the very structures of the language. From the perspective of language argumentation theory, subsequently developed into *topoi* theory, what is relevant is the fact that many lexical units so to speak impose a point of view on speakers, be it euphoric or otherwise (non-euphoric) (Raccah 2000). Thus, to speak of "xafagor" (burning shame, embarrassment) and even more so the Spanish equivalent "bochorno" (ditto) which have a literal meteorological meaning (sultry, hot and close), and a metaphorical projection, "balafiar" (squander, waste), "emigrant" (emigrant) or "terrorisme" (terrorism), *implies* an inseparable axiological content, inherent in these linguistic units. In the same way, "warm", "investment", "tourism" or "struggle for independence" inevitably convey more or less euphoric points of view. Similarly, on a scale of values, "danger" clearly rates as "non-euphoric"), while the near-synonym "risk" is clearly less so, and even in certain contexts (in some Christian theology, for example) may become euphoric. Commercial advertising and political propaganda have taken careful note of all this, obviously enough. What should be underlined here is that the built-in bias is inevitable once the speaker / writer has selected the item in question as a consequence of a stylistic option.

It should not be forgotten that this choice is conditioned by socio-discursive inertia, by an acquired *habitus*. And, reciprocally, the receiver (listener, reader) has to counteract this inertia if he or she wishes to be free to carry out an interpretative criticism of the discourse.

The last illustration that we propose is that of nominal-heavy or nominalised style (Salvador 2000). Here the alternatives set up are between the expression of processes (and qualities) by means of sentence-level constructions which contain verbs (and, often, adjectives) or alternatively by means of nominals where the information is reduced and made compact. As such, the latter makes it possible to perceive processes or qualities as entities or wholes. Thus, speaking of "illegal adoptions", "masculine beauty", "a catastrophic seismic movement" or "health and illness", constitutes alternative stylistic options selected in the place of other (roughly) similar ways of referring to the same content by means of whole sentences. Such sentences are normally very exact, with particular shades of meaning: "children that one adopts/ one has adopted/one will adopt, thus breaking the law"; "The/some/these/ men are/have been/will become/seem beautiful"; and so forth. It should be noted, in any case, that a variety of different sentential expressions can be found to correspond to nominalised expressions.

Quite clearly, the nominals options are more "economical" and facilitate the creation of taxonomies associated with specialist discourse, or at least a formal register with a certain degree of opaqueness, by means of *processes of "terminologisation"* that are very relevant to sociocognitive approaches. In the same way, opting for this synthetic expression makes for more rapid or smooth advance in the thematic progression of a text, thanks to the anaphoric function: "Yesterday a Panam aircraft fell into the ocean.... *The accident had...*").

Now of course, side by side with these advantages in economic expression, nominalisation clearly plays its part in reducing information: information on the weather, place or the participants, as well as factors of modalisation, which, once concisely packed into a nominal expression are not easily recoverable. Also observable is the effect of presenting concrete processes as abstract entities. The ideological importance is considerable, in the manipulation of processed information, particularly noticeable in the case of certain types of anaphor which give a strong interpretative bias to the discourse ("The demonstrators noisily crossed the quadrangle... Their *bursting on the scene/invasion / intrusion* brought about...").

6. Conclusions

In closing this overview of work on stylistics and its function in the ambit of language sciences, we can briefly and succinctly point out certain trends and orientations within the discipline, while not in any way claiming to be exhaustive: *a)* it goes beyond literature, without ignoring such institutionalised discourse patterns; *b)* it is situated in the language framework, where structures allow variation which becomes functionalised and filled out with individual/social meaning; *c)* consequently, the amount of observable free variation is reduced, with the increased systematisation of determining factors, in terms of registers and genres on the one hand and stylistics on the other; *d)* contributions from pragmatolinguistics and discourse analysis are crucial to defining the diversity of expressive styles and the sociolinguistic and ideological relevance of stylistic options.

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