

Style and Stylistics: An Overview

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Abstract

This article studies the concepts of Style and Stylistics. It also studies origin of the term Style, the beginning of modern Style Study, the Traditional approach to Style, Linguistics and Stylistics. The purpose is to have a look at the inadequacy of the Traditional approach though it definitely provides a basis for the later development of objective approach towards Style known as Stylistics. Henry Fielding, David Lodge and Michael Riffaterre represent the subjectivity of the Traditional approach towards Style. Geoffrey N. Leech, Widdowson, Halliday, Berry and Bradford among others represent Linguistic approach to Style. The Traditional approach to style without a clear model gives way to Linguistics to tackle the subject objectively. Linguistics had offered unlimited ways of looking at a text Stylistically. Linguistics itself being an eclectic subject, Criticism and Literature reflects multidisciplinary approach towards Style.

Keywords: Style, Stylistics, Linguistics, Criticism, Multidisciplinary

Introduction:

In the territory of literature language is used as a medium of communication between the writer and reader. The study of language of literature is the study of Style. Traditionally it dwells within the territory of Literary Criticism. Literature owes a good deal of power to the way of language is used in the text. Most of the writers including Plato, Aristotle, Wordsworth, Cardinal Newman, and T.S. Eliot have taken great efforts to acquire Style. It is recorded of Plato that in one of his drafts of Dialogues, found after his death, the first paragraph was written in seventy different forms. The writers try to write well and the critics try to understand well. Without a sense of Style, literature cannot be fully enjoyed. A work of literature is an artifact. Its beauty lies within its language. Let us take an example of Onion. On the surface we do not sense much of its beauty. But if its petals are opened one-by-one its internal as well as external structure is studied that becomes the source of joy. Similarly, the study of Style yields a peculiar joy in it. Style is the key to the meaning and structure of the literary text. The critic dwells intently upon each part, each line and each word and each context. Literary language is a language in a context, words in relation to other words. Each word gives its quality to the work as a whole and each detail of the literary work takes its quality from the whole work. *Put out the light* is an undistinguished sentence in isolation, but not in *Othello*. It has exceptional seriousness in the play. *To be or not to be* is also has an undistinguished sentence in isolation, but not in *Hamlet*. One can understand and enjoy the beauty of literature through the study of Style.

Origin of the term: The word 'Style' is derived from the Latin 'Stylus' meaning 'stimulus' 'instigate', 'stick'. The word 'Style', naturally, originally meant a 'writing-implement' appointed object of bone or metal, for inscribing wax. But in the days of classical Latin the word 'stylus' was extended to mean, first, a man's 'way of writing'; and then, more generally, his 'way of expressing himself' in speech as well as in writing.

The beginning of Style-study:

The concept of style is an old one. Etymologically it goes back to the very beginnings of literary thought in Europe. It appears in connection with Rhetoric rather than poetic. It was regarded as part of the technique of persuasion, and therefore, discussed largely under the head of Oratory. Plato, who lived in an age of Oratory, studied and laid down a few principles of good speech in his *Phaedrus*. Aristotle too deals with it in his *Rhetoric*. Quintilian wrote a treatise in twelve books dealing with the art of Oratory. In his *Institutio Oratorio* he formulates a theory of style which applies to the written and the spoken speech.

Various Approaches to Style:

‘Style’ is a very common word used in day-to-day life. We talk of walking style, hair style, acting style etc. We think of it as the manner of doing something. Similarly, Style in literature refers to the way in which language is used in a given text. In this kind of general interpretation, the word ‘Style’ has a fairly uncontroversial meaning.

1. Style as Dress of Thought Approach:

This is one of the earliest approaches to style and there are a host of definitions which subscribe to the traditional view that style is ‘dress of thought’. Thought is imagined as existing in some pre-verbal form, and it is then ‘clothed’ in language. Traditional Rhetoric and Criticism made a separation between Matter and Manner, Content and Form, what is said and the way of saying it. Dryden observes in his preface to *Anus Mirabilis*:

“So then the first happiness of the poet’s imagination is properly invention, or finding of the thought; the second is fancy, of the variation, deriving or molding of that thought, as the judgment represents it proper to the subject; the third is elocution, or the art of clothing or adorning that thought so found and varied in apt, significant and sounding words.”

On this theory it is easy to see what Style is. Language is the dress of thought, and Style is the particular cut and fashion of the dress. This ‘Ornamental’ theory of Style has its justification. Even in Aristotle’s definition of tragedy “..... in language *embellished* with each kind of artistic ornament;..... The chief aim of the literary writer was to achieve the heart of the reader, and therefore, artistry of the writer was very much valued. Even ornamentation of style was considered as an art by itself and a good writer was advised to use Similes, Emphasis, Metaphor and other figures of speech to this end in view.

2. Style as Choice:

This is a view frequently held by a large number of scholars who think that Style is a matter of choice. They believe that every writer necessarily makes choices of expression, and that it is in these choices, in his way of putting things, that Style resides. They do not believe in the doctrine: one thought, one form. They premise different forms, for an utterance which create particular effects. Language offers expensive choices by way of vocabulary, syntax, sound systematic. The writer makes voluntary choices from among the repository of varied resources of a language. For instance a writer can use one among a number of expressions to mean ‘died’. After few days after John Smith’s death his son Mark Smith wrote four different letters in order to convey the incident. *My beloved parent has joined the heavenly choir*, he wrote to his aunt. He wrote to an elderly acquaintance, *my dear father has passed away*. He sent a letter to his officer stating *my father has died*. He informed one of his friends, *my old man has kicked the bucket*. Each of the statements communicates the same fact that John Smith has died. The words, which express the fact, are different in each case. The matter is the same but the manner has changed. In other words each sentence is written in a different style.

3. Style is The Man Approach:

It is based on the assumption that style reflects the writer’s personality. A Latin statement ‘*stilusvirumarguit*’ states that: ‘Style proclaims the man is’. Style is personality clothed in words, character embodied in speech. If hand-writing reveals character, style reveals much more. Longinus insisted, ‘Height of style is the echo of a great personality’. All this may seem strangely remote from modern ideas. But Buffon’s definition of style in his Academy address in 1753 contributed to its vogue.

He said. "Style is the expression of the individual quality characteristic of the writer". This emphasis on the individual element of style is very important as everybody knows that many writers, including a host of great ones, have arrived at the kind of individuality that makes it possible for an experienced reader to identify their writings. Hence we talk of Shakespeare's style, Milton's style, Dr. Johnson's style, Dickens's style, Eliot's style, Hemingway's style, to name a few who have their own stylistic peculiarities.

4. **Style as Deviation from Norms:**

It is our common experience that a literary work deviates in some way from norms which we have learnt to expect in the medium used. The literary writer's skill lies not in mechanically reproducing established patterns of language in his work. A work of art must please and achieve the heart of the reader. The writer deliberately departs from accepted norms and creates unique effects.

Stylistics:

With the advent of linguistics, in the early decades of twentieth century, the problem of studying 'Style' with a degree of objectivity seems to be solved. Linguistics is described as the scientific study of language. The linguist, as his study is to be scientific, has developed objective techniques for analyzing and describing categories of language. He studied the organization of language at various levels-phonemic, lexical, syntactic, semantic and has arrived at a theory of model of language of his own. Halliday's functional model of language or Chomsky's transformational generative model is a case in point.

Structuralism:

Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* has proved to be of seminal influence on the study of language as well as literature. *Langue* is thought of as an abstract pattern or scheme of language and *parole* is the individual use of language on particular occasions. The difference between 'no' and 'never' is a difference within the 'language', but if King Lear utters 'never' five times in a particular context in the play *King Lear* in a particular way on a particular occasion, we say it is *parole*. Style is a particular use of language by a particular author for a particular purpose. The term 'Stylistics' was first attested in 1882-83 in Oxford English Dictionary, but the word 'Stylistic' was found as early as 1846. Stylistics as 'the art of forming good style in writing' and as 'the science of literary style' are a few of the meanings given in dictionaries. Stylistics means the study of Style, with a suggestion, from the form of the word, of a scientific or at least a methodical study. A stylistician is one who makes a methodical study of the principles of style.

Definition of Stylistics:

H.G. Widdowson defines the term as "By Stylistics' I mean the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation and I shall take the view that what distinguishes Stylistics from Literary Criticism on the one hand and Linguistics on the other is essentially a means of linking the two and has (as yet at least) no autonomous domain of its own. Stylistics, however, involves both Literary Criticism and Linguistics, as its morphological make-up suggests: the 'Style' component relating it to the former and the 'istics' component to the latter". Widdowson believes that stylistics is an area where the two disciplines-Linguistics and Literary Criticism-meet. It also provides a way of meditation between two subjects-(English) Language and Literature. The purpose of stylistics is to link the two approaches by extending the linguist's literary institutions and the critic's linguistic observations and making their relationship explicit.

Linguistic Stylistics and Literary Stylistics:

From the beginning, Stylistics as a discipline has been polarized between two tendencies which are most clearly formulated in French 'Stylistique' and German 'Stilforschung'. 'Stylistique' is closely linked to linguistics and 'Stilforschung' is linked to literary criticism whose primary point of reference was the total being of a work of literary art. Linguistic Stylistics, based on linguistics, attempts to make literary criticism as objective as possible. Like Noam Chomsky's linguistic competence, and Hymens 'Communicative competence' scholars and critics such as Terence Hawks and Jonathan Culler have argued out a case for literary competence' and its explicit and formal description. Literary stylistics, as advocated by Leo Spitzer and his followers in the 1940s. aims to relate the critic's concern of aesthetic appreciation with the linguist's concern of linguistic description. From the linguist's angle, it is 'why does the author here choose to express himself in a particular way?' From the critic's viewpoint. It is 'How is such and such aesthetic effect achieved through language?'

Literary Stylistics:

This kind of Style study which is known as Literary Stylistics, involves a close and intimate examination of verbal texture. Beginning with its language, say of a poem, it arrives at a comprehension of its form and meaning, at the appreciation of the poet's artistic achievement. Knowledge of linguistics is part of the mechanism of his study. His methods are not rigorous and restricted methods of theoretical Linguisticians but relatively expansive procedures of those who were more concerned with literature as an art form. Linguists were concerned with the establishment of a general system of language and thereby, Stylistic possibilities. The keystone of their system was the setting up of a norm against which stylistic deviations could be measured. Literary stylistic inquiry is essentially directed towards discovering the aesthetic principle lying behind a stylistic peculiarity.

Conclusion:

Linguistics has provided valuable modes and methods for the study of literary style with objectivity and precision. Linguistic study of style is not a prosaic activity of converting literature into mathematics; it factualizes fancy and imagination. It supplements the traditional treatment of literature and literary Style. Stylistics functions as a bridge between to Literature, Criticism and Linguistics. It is possible to arrange these in a logically compelling order, and it is possible to bind these together into an argument that can reach, if not certainly, at least a very high degree of persuasiveness.

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