

THE EVENTUAL APPEARANCE OF MODERN STYLISTICS

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the study of style from the early period of appearance of stylistics as a science. The limits of previous approaches to style, or the difficulties that have arisen from the practical application of linguistic methods to stylistic analysis are deeply analyzed in this scientific investigation. The work of the neogrammarians, key figures in the formation of linguistics as a modern scientific discipline, is also discussed in this article with a great effort.

Keywords: prose work, stylistics, science, principle, basic.

Treatises devoted to the study of style can be found as early as Demetrius's *On Style*. But most twentieth-century discussions appear as secondary components of rhetorical and grammatical analyses or in general studies of literature and literary language. The appearance of stylistics as a semiautonomous discipline is a modern phenomenon, an ongoing development in linguistic description that is closely tied to the similar rise of literary criticism and linguistics as academic subjects and departments. Modern stylistics, in general, draws much of its analytical power from the analytical methods and descriptive intentions of linguistics, while modern literary stylistics, in particular, draws upon that area and adds to it the interpretive goals of modern literary criticism. In both cases, the use of linguistic methodology has allowed stylistics to move beyond earlier normative and prescriptive descriptions of "correct" styles to a fuller analysis of language itself and the purposes to which language regularly is put [Linda Jorgensen. *Real-World Newsletters* (1999)].

Whatever the limits of previous approaches to style, or the difficulties that have arisen from the practical application of linguistic methods to stylistic analysis, the desire to begin with a set of well-defined terms and procedures lies at the core of the initial formation of stylistics as a discipline. While all versions of literary stylistics have dedicated themselves to the study and interpretation of literary texts, it was the growing importance of European historical linguistics during the mid-nineteenth century that produced the most easily recognized component of early modern stylistics: a deeply rooted concern with formal linguistic description of literary language. The methodological benefits that stylistics gained by uniting literary interpretation and linguistic analysis were matched by institutional gains as well [Allan M. Siegal and William G. Connolly. *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage: The Official Style Guide Used by the Writers and Editors of the World's Most Authoritative Newspaper*, (2002)]. Historical and general linguistics were well-established academic disciplines at the turn of the twentieth century, and stylistics could expect to benefit from that status. The use of linguistic procedures thus offered stylistics both an affinity with an established discipline and the possibility of founding the description and interpretation of style upon the bedrock of science.

While its air of scientific analysis made linguistics

attractive, linguistic science was not itself a monolithic entity. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, linguistic study oscillated between a desire to define language through efficient analytical methods (often requiring a-contextual descriptions) and another, competing desire to define language as a social and cultural phenomenon. The work of the neogrammarians, key figures in the formation of linguistics as a modern scientific discipline, displays the tension well. Although the neogrammarians began their work with the intention of reintroducing behavior into linguistic description, the attractiveness of scientific method dictated the slow elimination of the user as a complex part of the description. The result for some linguists, notably the philologists, was a sacrificing of the real heart of linguistics to a sterile formalism; for many, however, the shift was the logical result of a move into the modern scientific age. It was in terms of these separate views of the proper role of linguistic description that the predominant approaches to modern stylistics developed, and because of the strong Continental influence of Romance Philology on historical linguistics, modern stylistics usually is seen as having begun there.

The roots of modern stylistics can be uncovered in the work of Charles Bally (1865-1947) and Leo Spitzer (1887-1960). Bally's *Précis de stylistique* (1905) stresses the description and analysis of a language's generally available stylistic properties. Literary texts, in Bally's formulation, are particular examples of language use, and the analysis of their style is not a central part of the general stylistics he emphasizes. Nevertheless, Bally's work, and its later realization in the work of Jules Marouzeau (*Précis de stylistique française*, 1946) and Marcel Cressot (*Le Style et ses techniques*, 1947), strongly influenced the formation of literary stylistics. Such analytical work offered literary critics a relatively precise methodology for describing the components and features of a text. In place of an open-ended and evaluative interpretive process, linguistics both underwrote the need for a more precise analytical attitude toward language study and provided specific categories for characterizing sound, rhythm, and eventually syntax, as well as points of comparison and contrast between registers, forms, and functions within genres and literary periods.

In contrast to the *stylistique* of Bally and his proponents, Leo Spitzer insisted upon following the more

philologically based tradition of textual (and often literary-textual) analysis. Such work, while using the analytical techniques of modern linguistics, strives to unite the analytical description with a critical interpretation that relates the style to a larger conceptual or situational frame. Style is seen as an expression of a particular psychological, social, or historical sensibility or moment rather than as a general property of a particular language. In undertaking these wider interpretations, critics such as Spitzer did not, however, assume that they were defining their stylistics as separate from, or even as a subset of, linguistic analysis. In both his etymological studies and his more specifically literary-critical interpretations [Stilstudien, 1928, and Romanische Stil- und Literaturstudien, 1931], Spitzer insisted that he was promulgating a general program of linguistic study, offering his stylistics in opposition to what he saw as the more reductionist analyses of general, scientific linguistics. Spitzer himself emphasized the split until the end of his career, regularly referring to his work as *Stilforschung* (literary, cultural interpretation of style--philology in his eyes) to set it apart from that of *Stilistik*, or Bally's *stylistique* (e.g., "Les Études de style et les différents pays" 23-39). At the same time, he assumed--as did fellow critics of style such as Ernst Robert Curtius, Karl Vossler, and Helmut Hatzfeld--that he was not reducing the scientific aspect of linguistics but only offsetting a false, positivistic tone that was becoming increasingly predominant in the field. The tension in linguistics between general linguistic description and less formal sociocultural interpretation thus was mirrored in this early separation in stylistics between linguistic stylistic description and literary stylistic interpretation. It is a separation, and a tension, that remains at the heart of modern stylistics [www.stylistics.com].

This tension, Spitzer's and Bally's position as Continental rather than Anglo-American linguists, and the popularity of Practical Criticism and New Criticism in England and the United States all lay behind the relative lack of an organized, Anglo-American literary stylistics during the first half of the twentieth century. Literary stylistic analyses were occurring in England and in the United States at this time, but they often did not contain the formal linguistic orientation that characterizes the modern discipline of stylistics. Instead, they drew support and procedures from the basic but less analytically structured orientation of New Criticism and practical criticism. And while the influence of Romance language study grew during the mid-twentieth century (due in no small part to the presence in England and in the United States of many expatriated scholars), the established strength of other, more empirical linguistic methodologies reduced possible exchanges between linguistics and literary criticism.

The eventual appearance of modern stylistics in Anglo-American work repeated the earlier Continental process, appearing most clearly when united with an interest in linguistic analysis at mid-century and with the related interest in literary Structuralism somewhat later. By the late 1950s, the general critical ambience provided by the rise and fall of New Criticism and practical criticism, in combination with a growing interest in

comparative literary studies and a new awareness of the increasing importance of linguistic science, provided the needed impetus for a strong appearance of literary stylistics outside the European continent. The processes behind the formation of American stylistics are exemplified by work done by Michael Riffaterre on Romance languages. Riffaterre's published dissertation, *Le Style des Pléiades de Gobineau* (1957), is a self-described attempt to blend Spitzer's work with that of contemporary structural linguistics, while the later, even more formal stylistic methodology set forth in "Criteria for Style Analysis" (1959) and "Stylistic Context" (1960) shifts away from interpretive description and toward the general linguistic analysis that was beginning to dominate academic study [*Le Style des Pléiades de Gobineau* (1957), "Criteria for Style Analysis" (1959) "Stylistic Context" (1960)]

Such work in stylistics reflected a larger trend occurring within literary criticism as a whole during this period. Riffaterre's particular interest in a systematic, formal description of literary style mirrored a growing awareness among literary critics in general of the possibilities provided to literary study by trends and theories available from formal linguistic study. The discovery of linguistic work [Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson] by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, and structural linguistic theory in general all formed part of the rapid flowering of critical work closely related to, if not directly based upon, particular methods of linguistic analysis. It was not a link between literary stylistics and structural linguistic analysis that marked the real establishment of stylistics as a discipline within the United States, however. It was the transformational-generative grammar of Noam Chomsky [*Noam Chomsky Syntactic Structures*, 1957] that signaled the arrival of stylistics as a discipline with independent, self-defined goals, if not yet a real autonomy from either linguistic or literary-critical approaches to language analysis. The rapidly established importance of Chomsky's linguistics within his own discipline provided a strong argument for the importance of transformational-generative grammar within literary stylistics as well. But beneath that academic, institutional cause lay particular features of the theory that explain further the explosion of stylistic work using transformational-generative grammar. The grammar's focus on syntax, its distinction between deep and surface structures, and the resulting dynamism in its descriptive procedures all contributed to a methodology that allowed for a much wider discussion of the possible forms (and by implication styles) available to the user of language. At the same time, the declared mentalism of Chomsky's grammar was seen by many as providing literary stylistics with a means of uniting a still lingering Romantic sense of creativity with the formal linguistic description needed to provide the analysis with a now-requisite air of scientific study. Many critics found not only an implied linkage between language and mind within Chomsky's grammar but an actual justification for tying intention to structure. Whichever aspect of Chomsky's grammar provided the impetus for a particular study, the general influence was huge, and the numerous studies that appeared during the years 1965-75 testify to the

boost that Chomsky's thinking on language gave to the era, one of the most hectic and dramatic in the formation and growth of stylistics.

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