

**Zeitschrift:** SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Association of University Teachers of English  
**Band:** 3 (1987)  
  
**Artikel:** What happened to stylistics  
**Autor:** Enkvist, Erik Nils  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-99844>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

**Download PDF:** 25.05.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# What Happened to Stylistics?

Nils Erik Enkvist

## 1

I well remember that distant age when ladies still dressed in skirts of a standard length prescribed by fashion. And I remember how people used to theorize about connections between skirt length and the cycles of the economy. In a bull market, as in the years before the Wall Street crash in 1929, skirts were said to go up, but in a recession, as in the early thirties, skirts were supposed to go down.

If these remarks have led you to hope for frivolous reminiscences of a middle-aged skirt-watcher, I fear you will be disappointed. My purpose was only to suggest that, like skirts, stylistics too has had its fashionable ups and downs. As I have invested in stylistics during both bullish and bearish markets, I see myself in the role of an historical market analyst of stylistics. And, as market analysts should, I shall not only cite facts and figures but also give you some personal interpretations and opinions. Some of them will no doubt be controversial; some may even be distasteful to people whose perspective is different from mine.

## 2

But first a terminological caveat against undue reification. I have already spoken about "stylistics" as if such a term had a constant and stable referent. In actual fact no discipline, and least of all stylistics, is immutable in scope. Borders of disciplines move, one subject expands and another one may shrink, and new disciplines start asserting their territorial rights. Such shifts and even feuds in interdisciplinary relations are never arbitrary. They may owe to major international currents in scholarship, or to local conditions in a particular university or department.

But they can always be read as a cultural metatext, as a commentary how a larger or smaller society or group faces a never-ending sequence of intellectual challenges.

I wanted to remind you of such problems because in speaking about "stylistics" I am committed to a label which has covered many different things in many different settings. A definition is therefore in order. An extensional definition would begin by listing what types of activities have been pursued under the label of "stylistics". Such a list leads us back, if not to the birth of the world's first bard or story-teller, at least to the birth of rhetoric. And when looking at the annals of rhetoric we must worry about matters such as the shifts in balance between *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*: *elocutio* was the stage of composition most akin to stylistics proper, and during periods when *elocutio* expanded at the expense of other areas of rhetoric, rhetoric became increasingly similar to, or even identical with, stylistics. As matters of style have been dealt with under different headings, the student of stylistics cannot simply look up the word "style" in texts from various periods. He must really go deep into his texts and see how they deal with problems he himself would include in his stylistics.

But to look for stylistic statements in rhetoric and in other disciplines, one must first have an intensional definition of style. Unless one knows what style is, one does not even know what to look for. As I think the most interesting attempts at defining the linguistic essence of style were made in the 1950's and 1960's, I shall now try to give a bird's-eye view of the territory of research of the linguistic stylistics of that period.

### 3

The conspicuous surge of interest in linguistic stylistics between the late 1950's and the 1970's was, I think, motivated by the confluence of several trends. One was the linguists' interest in finding out whether their methods might help us to objectify as intractable a concept as style. Perhaps they could provide a linguistic complement to the literary critic's traditional impressionistic approach. Another relevant trend was a growing impatience with the structuralists' preoccupation with the smallest units of language: phonemes and morphemes. Describing sentences and discourses as arrangements of such small items was like describing a metropolis as an arrangement of individual bricks, stones and planks. Therefore attempts arose at focussing on larger units such as

sentences and texts. In his *Syntactic Structures* of 1957, Noam Chomsky attempted a syntax-centred description of language; roughly at the same time there appeared systematic efforts at going even beyond the sentence into text and discourse. Two of the milestones in this development of a text-centred but still linguistic stylistics were the Bloomington style conference of 1958 (Sebeok 1960) and the debate about the essence of style in *Voprosy Jazykoznanija*, the leading linguistic journal in the Soviet Union.

Of course there had been scholars such as Vossler, Croce, Bally, Spitzer, Staiger, Roman Jakobson, and – bridging the gap to the present – René Wellek who had ventured into the border zone between language and literature well before the 1950's. But – and here I shall digress for a moment – it has always surprised me how little happy collaboration there has been between linguists and literary scholars, especially in the area of stylistics. The best-known exceptions are Russian formalism, and its sequel, Prague structuralism. In Moscow, Petrograd and Prague, linguists and literary scholars breathed the same air. They spoke to each other and could be impressed by each other's views. Roman Jakobson particularly seemed to cruise happily between literature and linguistics. And in France, and perhaps in Switzerland, the gap between linguistics and stylistics seemed narrower than in many other environments. But notably in the English-speaking world, such a happy harmony for some reason failed to come about. Even to my own youthful mind, when I studied post-Bloomfieldian structural linguistics and the then fashionable new-criticism-dominated literary syllabus in the great days of the University of Michigan in the late 1940's, it was puzzling to see how little contact there was in Ann Arbor between these two tribes of linguists and literary scholars. This was the more surprising as New Criticism was uncovering poetic minutiae that were fairly crying out for rigorous linguistic description. Of the American structuralist linguists, Archibald Hill – another link to the present day – was exceptional in subjecting poems to an analysis based on linguistic considerations (Hill 1965).

But this was a digression. My main purpose was to emphasize that in the late fifties and early sixties, a number of linguists tried to find out to what extent the concept of 'style' was amenable to linguistic analysis and description in rigorous and objective terms (cf. Enkvist 1964, 1973a, 1973b). And to do this, the linguist had to find out what style was: he had to define style.



And what *is* style?

In a wide semiotic sense, we might suggest that style is a way of doing something within a given set of rules. We can, for instance, drive a car with different styles, more smoothly or more jerkily, more politely or more aggressively, within the same highway code. We can build, say, two railway stations that satisfy the same requirements and contain the same facilities but still look different: then the differences qualify as stylistic. If we want to translate such a wide semiotic definition into the more restricted world of natural language, style might turn out to be a certain definite way of saying something.

Such a definition, you will have noted, assumes that there are different ways of saying the same thing. About this, people disagree. Some people, many logicians and some linguists among them, say that the same proposition or predication can be dressed up into different surface forms. Others deny such a dualism between meaning and form. In the manner of the New Critics they assert that every text has a unique meaning of its own, and that all changes of the surface form of a text will also inevitably change its meaning. Their view might be characterized as monistic rather than dualistic. But those impatient to get on with the job of stylistic analysis may wish to bypass such theoretical arguments. Yet to know whether two expressions "mean the same" or not they will need a rigorous, formal semantics which is capable of distinguishing surface variants which mean the same from surface variants which mean different things. And nobody can offer the style analyst such a semantics, ready-made. It follows that the definition of style as a way of saying something is hardly a satisfactory basis for concrete linguistic operations. It relies too heavily on intuitions about identity or difference of meaning, such intuitions being notoriously subjective and open to argument.

Another definition starts out by assuming that style is a decorative halo of stylistic devices and figures surrounding a kernel of basic meaning. If such a definition is to be translated into a heuristic procedure, we must once again learn to distinguish underlying basic meanings from their expressions on the textual surface. And this we cannot do with sufficient stringency.

Yet another of the classic approaches to style regards style as the result of choice. Intuitively, such an approach seems fine. We feel that our own styles arise through choice, sometimes unconsciously, and sometimes consciously through a long and even painful quest for the

best from among a set of possible expressions. Here the difficulty is that nobody has succeeded in charting all the choices that are available to a speaker or writer in a certain situation. Some choices involve semantic substance, others take place between near-synonyms. Even generative-transformational grammar failed to give us a complete charting of the syntactic structures from among which choices take place during text generation. And, finally, when we actually see a text, all the choices have already taken place: they are no longer available for investigation. To the linguist, the operationalization of the view of style as choice poses unsurmountable problems.

A definition more concretely useful to a linguist is based on regarding style as situational variation. In different situations, people express themselves differently, and style is that subvariant of language that is associated with a particular type of situation. We use one type of language in formal situations and another type of language in intimate ones; a general uses one type of language when talking to a private and another type of language when speaking to his wife (at least I hope he does). Here the problem for the linguist is how to learn to describe situations, how to extract those situational features that are stylistically relevant from the welter of all the features that go into any normal speech situation.

We might now merge the definitions of style as choice and of style as language associated with a certain type of situation, and say that style arises from a situationally determined choice of expression. In so saying we are looking at the genesis of style in a speaker or writer. But we can and should also look at matters from the point of view of the receptor, the hearer or reader. A person who knows a language has acquired a great deal of experience of contextualised and situationalised language: he knows how family members chat at each other over breakfast, how professors speak to students, how tax authorities bully citizens, and how the Elizabethans used to address their ladies in a sonnet. He turns such past experiences of contextualized language into present expectations. Whenever he hears or reads a new text he matches it against relevant past experience and forms a set of expectations as to what is to come next. He matches the emerging text against a network of past experiences, forms expectations which are either satisfied or thwarted, and gets his impressions of the style of the text as an incremental result of such processes. This presupposes that the receptor has a network of past experience adequate for stylistic judgments. If different literary critics have different networks of past experiences, their judgments of the style of the same text may become different. And if there is no such network, for instance

if we are learning a foreign language, we cannot possibly judge the style of a text. This, by the way, sets a programme for us as teachers of English as a foreign language: if we want to give our students a sense of style, we must first provide them with a network of experiences of the range of texts they will need for stylistic judgments.

The speaker, then, chooses his expressions to fit the situation he is in. The hearer or reader judges the style by matching the emerging text against a network of past experiences of situationalized and contextualized language.

Starting out from such views of the rise of stylistic judgements, the linguist would like to set up an apparatus capable of modelling them in stringent terms. The obvious way of imitating the rise of stylistic responses is to compare the language of one text with the language of another body of text, and obviously one that has a significant contextual relationship to the text studied. Defining the significance of contextual relationships is not a task for the linguist alone: it is a cultural matter, not one of linguistic structure. In practice, one's problem and one's purpose must determine where one looks for a body of text suitable for comparison with the text at hand. To study the style of Shakespeare's sonnets, for instance, we should hardly consider comparing them with the instructions in the telephone book or with Gray's Manual: Shakespeare's plays, the sonnets of other sonneteers, and other literary texts would give us a more meaningful base of comparison. Note, however, that the choice of norm against which we compare the text will always predetermine our results. In this sense, linguistic stylistics must ultimately rely on extralinguistic criteria. For those looking for concrete examples of such analyses, author-attribution studies are a good field to study.

To carry out such a comparison we shall need two things: first, an apparatus for describing the text and the norms we compare it with, and, secondly, a statistical apparatus for measuring the significance of the similarities and differences we shall find. Our apparatus for linguistic description must be adequate for the job: if we are interested in, say, imagery, simple basic syntax may not be enough. And stylometrics, or stylometrics as it has sometimes been called, is a recognized subfield of stylistics with its own devotees and its own bibliographies (see e.g. Kenny 1982).

The stylistic comparison was essentially a heuristic for the discovery of style markers, the stylistic characteristics that give a text its particular stylistic flavour. (A style marker is definable as a linguistically describable item or structure or process whose density (= number of occurrences per some measure of text length) is significantly different from, or

significantly similar to, the corresponding density in a stylistically relevant norm.) But linguists have not been satisfied with mere descriptions of sets of style markers. Some of them have tried to place stylistic variation into its proper perspective in a system of language varieties: how do styles relate to and interact with historical variants of the language, with regional dialects, sociolects, and idiolects? Further, if styles are a matter not only for occurrence and non-occurrence of specific markers, but also a matter of frequencies, how can we devise syntactic rules that are sensitive to such frequencies? Matters of these kinds were studied in the seventies, for instance, by William Labov, the sociolinguist, and his followers (Labov 1972); by Henrietta Cedergren and David Sankoff, who contributed to the development of so-called variable rules sensitive to frequencies (Cedergren and Sankoff 1974); and by Charles-James Bailey and others who advocated polylectal grammars catering for systematic descriptions of the total variation of a language, including its styles (Bailey 1973). Such studies showed that sociolinguists, students of linguistic variation, and students of style have a great deal in common, at least in their methodology. Sometimes it seems as if the difference between a sociolinguist and a student of style depended more on departmental background than on research methods.

Such, and other, arguments led to an hausse in the status of stylistics in the linguistic establishment. Stylistics acquired all the hallmarks of scholarly respectability: a place in many syllabuses, sections at symposia and congresses, conferences of its own, special journals such as *Style*, *Language and Style*, and *Lingua e stile*, and a bibliography which seemed to grow in geometric rather than arithmetic progression. Soon, however, problems that students of style had regarded as their domain were invaded by a somewhat different tribe of linguists: those calling themselves text linguists or discourse analysts.

## 5

Thus another of the most interesting events in the linguistics of the 1960's and 1970's was to be the realisation that descriptions of languages in terms of single, decontextualized sentences could not reveal all of the true essence of the structure and use of a natural language. A sentence is not a purpose unto itself. On the contrary, sentences normally occur in speech situations, they are embedded in discourse and are surrounded by other sentences which they must link up with. And in some types of



discourse, such as impromptu speech or modern, syntactically deviant poetry, the continuity and connexity of the text are more important than sentence structure: indeed in such texts the sentences need not be syntactically well-formed, though the text still works successfully in communication. This means that the text is all right even if its sentences, in a syntactic sense, are not. (There are, however, syntactic constraints that must be upheld: we cannot say *Jack kicked Jill* if we mean "Jill kicked Jack".) And to understand the reasons why a speaker or writer has chosen a specific form for a certain sentence, we must reckon with the links of that sentence with its situational and discoursal environment.

A few examples. In isolation, a sentence such as *this book I have read many times* looks stranger than *I have read this book many times*. (Note that the equivalence between such sentence pairs can be defined in terms of their having the same truth value, irrespective of whether they "mean" precisely the same or not.) But it would be perfectly natural if uttered by a person who stands in front of a table with several books and points at one of them. Similarly, if I ask, *What happened to the sandwiches?* it would be quite normal to answer, *the sandwiches/they were eaten by Susie*, whereas a dialogue such as, A: "What did Susie do?" B: "The sandwiches were eaten by Susie." would seem distinctly odd. We choose from among cognitive equivalents to find the one that fits our discourse: we choose between *Susie is John's daughter* and *John is Susie's father*, *Peter is taller than Max* and *Max is shorter than Peter*, *put six oysters into a well-greased frying-pan* and *into a well-greased frying-pan put six oysters*, *your spectacles are on top of the telephone book* and *the telephone book is under your spectacles*, depending on what information structure we wish to give to our discourse, and on what we think our receptor already knows and what is to him new information. In fact we can now suggest that the task of syntax and lexis is to make possible the conveyance of information structures in the desired form. The information strategy of discourse and the information structure of the sentence come first; we then choose those words and syntactic structures that best carry out the information strategy. Here too, as in wars, strategy comes before tactics.

As I here used two terms, "strategy" and "tactics", which are not part of the stock terminology of linguistics, a brief digression may again be in order. One of the major trends in recent linguistics has been an increasing interest in describing languages in terms of processes and not only as structures. Indeed the word "process" has become extremely common in titles of linguistic books and articles, and we can justifiably speak of the rise of a new kind of processual or procedural linguistics (see e. g. Allén

1982 and Eikmayer 1983). But once we are committed to describing processes we must also develop a new apparatus for processual description. And for such an apparatus we shall need concepts such as "strategy" (for "goal-determined weighting of different alternatives at points where one must decide between alternative actions") and "tactics" (in language, for "choice of words, sentence patterns and textual macro-structures which best help one to realize and execute the chosen textual strategy"). A place where a decision must be made between different alternatives might be called a "decision point", and the factors or parameters whose values affect the decision might be labelled as "decision parameters". In such processual terms we might now try to redefine style as "a context-determined weighting of decision parameters". In metrically regular poetry for instance, the requirements of the metre may be important enough to override even the requirements of syntactic well-formedness. Metricality then becomes a heavily weighted factor or parameter. And if a cookery-book writer fronts a locative adverbial, even with the verb "to put" where such fronting is rare (as in *Into a champagne glass put two lumps of sugar.*), this fronting apparently owes to the importance of turning the sentence into an icon of events in the concise operational style. Such a sentence is short for "first take a champagne glass and then put into it two lumps of sugar": it mentions the champagne glass and the bits of sugar in the same order as they enter the scene.

And now back to my argument. I myself became involved with these textual and discoursal problems in the sixties because I found that different styles could also differ in the ways in which they linked sentences to each other. Therefore I needed a piece of linguistic machinery capable of describing links between sentences. Among useful studies were the theme-rheme investigations of Prague-school linguists, though at that time the role of themes and rhemes for text strategies and the linking of sentences had not yet been properly understood. Paradoxically, generative-transformational grammar also came to stimulate text linguistics. Transformations had to be described in full explicit detail, including the triggers that started them off. But it soon appeared that many transformation triggers resided, not within the sentence but outside it, in discourse and text and situation. A number of the successive revisions in transformational grammar have actually consisted of devising ways and means of introducing textual parameters, forces from the discourse, into the description of single sentences. In fact there are only two solutions available to the linguist who has grasped how much the sentence owes to its discoursal environment. Either he becomes a text linguist and

acknowledges that the discourse is the father of the sentence, or he must try to bring in textual parameters into the description of single sentences.

Text and discourse linguistics went into a rapid development, and different schools and methods quickly evolved. We might try to classify the theories and models of text linguistics into four major categories, just to bring some order into what at first sight looks like a chaos.

The first category of text models I have called sentence-based. Sentence-based models accept a text such as it is, without tampering with its clauses and sentences, and try to describe what links clauses and sentences to each other. *Cohesion in English* by Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (1976) is an example of a sentence-based study of cohesion. But if we ask ourselves where sentences come from, why they were formed the way they are, and what alternative ways there would have been for textualizing the same or similar contents, a sentence-based model will no longer be enough. We need a model which starts out from some type of primitive text atoms and contains devices for combining them into texts according to definite and explicit strategies. If we symbolize these text atoms with predications we might call such a model predication-based. The same set of predications can then be textualized into different texts with different strategies. Predication-based text models have been devised for instance by Bengt Sigurd (1974) and Gunnel Källgren (1979) in Sweden, and methods for reconstructing underlying predications from texts have been designed by van Dijk and Kintsch (e.g. 1983) and others, who use the term "text base" for such a predication set.

But if we go on to ask where predications come from, we shall need a third type of model, one capable of extracting predications out of a store of knowledge. As such knowledge stores turn into models of human cognition, we might call these text models cognitive. Cognitive text models, then, model information storage in the form of frames, schemata, scripts, and the like, often given in the form of associative networks. Cognitive psychologists and psycholinguists are interested in studying cognitive aspects of text processing in human subjects, whereas students of artificial intelligence are trying to build computer models of cognitive text processing.

A glance at the abstracts in *LLBA* and a survey of journals in psycholinguistics, psychology and cognitive science (including artificial intelligence) will show the strength of such currents. So will a count of those books and articles whose titles proclaim an interest in text, or language, or information processing. Two useful surveys are Flores d'Arcais and Jarvella 1983 and Sanford and Garrod 1981.



There is yet a fourth question: why does a certain person in a certain situation choose to express himself in a certain way? What politeness level does he opt for? Does he surround his text proper with metatext, phatic expressions and the like? How do people organize their behaviour in dialogue? To answer such questions we need a fourth type of text model that we might call interactional. Pragmalinguists such as Stephen Levinson have surveyed this area (Levinson 1983). Ethnomethodologists such as Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have studied turn-taking in dialogue, conversation analysts such as Deborah Tannen have attempted comprehensive analyses of conversational strategies (Tannen 1984), and so forth.

These types of text models do not relate to each other like slices of a pie, but rather like Chinese boxes or Russian dolls. Interactional models show how people behave, and perhaps to some extent why; when people know what they ought to do, they can begin extracting things to say, as modelled by cognitive text models; when they have extracted what they want to say, they go on to textualize it as explicated in a predication-based model, to produce a text with cohesion markers such as those described in a sentence-based text model. All the same we should not press distinctions between these model types too hard: of course interaction presupposes cognition because our knowledge of how to behave, how to interact, is part of our cognitive store. But such a pigeonholing is of some practical use, and it also invites comparison with the processes of invention, disposition and elocution in classical rhetoric.

## 6

Stylistics can never be the same after the rise of discourse linguistics. I could touch upon the effect of discourse linguistics on stylistics under two headings. The first has to do with the status of stylistics as a discipline in relation to discourse linguistics. And the second has to do with the new weapons stylistics can borrow from the arsenal of discourse linguistics. But for reasons of space I find it more convenient to answer these two questions together.

What, then, has discourse linguistics done to change the status of stylistics?

One plausible answer would be: discourse linguistics has swallowed stylistics. Stylistics has become part of discourse linguistics. When we work with sentence-based text models we must concern ourselves with the ways in which different types and patterns of links between sen-

tences correlate with different situational contexts. In other words, we must study how frequent different linking types are in different text types, and in so doing we are in fact analysing styles. In predication-based text models, you will remember, the textualisation of a set of predications was steered and governed by a text strategy. And in fact "text strategy" comes to be largely or even entirely synonymous with "style": it is the text strategy that reckons with contextual principles in shaping the surface form of the text, it is the text strategy that estimates what the receptor already knows and what he is capable of processing. In cognitive models of text production, we get involved with systematizations of cognitive storage, including the storage of stylistic values: word families such as *girl, lass, maiden, young lady, bird* and so on, as well as families of syntactic structures with different stylistic values will have to be stored in memory with relevant labels, so that they can be retrieved and used in their proper stylistic contexts to conform with traditions, or perhaps to shock the receptor by breaking all traditions. And, finally, in interactional models, factors of stylistic context also come to the fore. Principles of politeness, of co-operative behaviour (in terms, for instance, of the Gricean maxims), of turn-taking, of clarifying text structure through special metatextual signals, of softening one's message by softeners and hedges, and so forth – all these principles will be directly relevant to style, as ingredients in the contextual and situational elements and patterns that effect the choice of language.

In such a view, as you have seen, stylistics in a sense disintegrates: stylistic considerations are scattered into the four different models of text. Stylistics cannot be said to exist intact inside text linguistics, like Jonah in the belly of the whale. Rather, the discoursal whale has chewed up the stylistic Jonah, whose bits and pieces now enrich different parts of his host organism.

Those students of style whose happiness depends on the intactness of their stylistic empire may well deplore such a development. Still, even they ought to be happy about the help they get from text and discourse linguistics. There is now an arsenal of new methods describing textual connexity which reveal new types of style markers. And in a wider, more philosophical context one might even suggest that in science, presiding over one's own liquidation can be a fine achievement. A scientific theory that has shown its own redundancy by reducing its statements to terms of another science is, in this sense, a success. In chemistry for instance we no longer need a special theory of phlogiston: we can explain burning as a special case of oxidation which is a special type of ordinary chemical reaction. Perhaps in linguistics we can do without a special

theory of style if we can learn to handle all the relevant problems within a more general and powerful theory of discourse. Chomsky too assumes "that our aim is to assimilate the study of language to the general body of natural science" (Chomsky 1977:4), thus proclaiming his interest in presiding over the liquidation of linguistics. To what extent "the general body of natural science" would be capable of providing an adequate basis for stylistics is a problem he does not discuss.

Of course, the student of style can turn such an argument the other way round. He can say that stylistics is his main business, and text and discourse linguistics are his servants and handmaidens. The job of the text and discourse linguist is simply to provide him, the student of style, with tools and with assistance.

Personally I find it difficult to get upset or excited by such arguments, pro or con. I said at the beginning of my talk that disciplines should not be viewed as static, stable and immutable objects. And to me it matters little under what label we analyse styles, or whether people call me a student of style or of text and discourse.

## 7

If style is definable as that variety of language which correlates with context, including situation; if the impressions we get of style are based on a continuous matching of the emerging text with sets of expectations conditioned by past experience; and if we can study linguistic style markers through a comparison of the densities of linguistic features in our text with the corresponding densities of linguistic features in a contextually related norm – then to what extent are such matters dealt with in today's different literary theories?

To answer such a question I must venture into what to me looks uncomfortably like an uncleared minefield. Those familiar with literary theory – or just "theory", as its devotees often call it – will know how fragmented and full of contradictions and contested views today's literary theory is. For a consensus we should be looking in vain. The subject, however, is interesting, and I shall briefly mention a few current literary theories and give you an opinion of their relevance to stylistics. At this point I have had the benefit of the wisdom of my colleague Professor Roger Sell of Åbo Akademi and the University of Göteborg, whose conversation, face-to-face and by letter, has guided me through some parts of the critical wilderness.

Post-structuralism, particularly in its deconstructionist extremes, has

not been hospitable to systematic comparison of one variety of language with other varieties. The deconstructionist's preoccupation has been with particular complexes of problems, or themes, in terms of certain key words, which are often manipulated and revolved out of context, to reveal contradictions and show the instability of meaning. The term "intertextuality", fashionable with many movements, might at first blush suggest a concern with placing a text into a system of other texts and matching its language with intertextually related norms. In practice, to the best of my knowledge, such stylistic intertextual comparison has not been the main concern of the critics who speak about intertextuality. Rather they have tried to divorce texts from their pragmatic role in an act of communication from writer to reader, emphasizing that the relation between a text and other texts is more important than the relation between writer, text, and receptor.

There is more harmony between my view of style as arising from a matching of a text with past experience and with expectations, and the kind of criticism known as Reader Response. One of the early protagonists of Reader Response criticism was Stanley Fish, whose, what one might call, "middle period" as a critic – roughly, the seventies – began with his famous paper on Affective Stylistics (Fish 1970). There Fish argued that style did not reside in detachable, reified structures in the text, but resulted from a sequence of fulfilled or thwarted expectations. Style in other words grew incrementally, evolving out of an experiential process: it was a dynamic phenomenon rather than a static structure. Presumably Fish too viewed style as a continuous matching of a linear, emerging text with a set of expectations conditioned by past experience. Wolfgang Iser's emphasis on readers as active agents filling in gaps left by the author should also be compatible with a stylistic creed: one of the factors affecting the receptor's inferencing is his past experience of what expressions are common and what expressions are rare in a certain type of situation. Note again how nicely such a view harmonizes with the approach to style as a matching of a text with a network of comparable experiences of other texts.

There is in the Western world today an intense and rising surge of interest in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, another of the Russian theorists resurrected outside the Russian-speaking world. Indeed Bakhtin's work will make students of style ponder its stylistic significance. One point where Bakhtin anticipated text and discourse linguistics is his emphasis on the complex *rappport* that exists between speaker and listener, writer and reader. An act of communication, so Bakhtin realized, does not proceed through the simple behaviorist formula, speaker → text →



hearer. On the contrary, first the speaker estimates what the hearer already knows and how much information he is capable of absorbing. A message is always adapted to the receptor even before it is dressed up in its final linguistic garb. Bakhtin did not, however, show how such receptor adaptation is manifested in terms of the choice of words and syntactic structures and information strategies, themes and rhemes, topics and comments and presuppositions, as modern linguists would like to do. He was satisfied with more general terms:

[The speaker's] orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social "languages" come to interact with one another. The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background. (Bakhtin 1981: 282.)

To Bakhtin, language exists in a state of heteroglossia prompted by the dialogization of discourse, and part of this heteroglossia would no doubt qualify as stylistic. Such heteroglossic tensions exist not only between speaker and listener but also within a literary text. Different passages in different styles evoke different contexts, says Bakhtin:

Style organically contains within itself indices that reach outside itself, a correspondence of its own elements and the elements of an alien context. The internal politics of style (how the elements are put together) is determined by its external politics (its relationship to alien discourse). Discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context. (Bakhtin 1981: 284.)

If my reading of this passage is correct, Bakhtin would subscribe both to the view of style as context-bound language, and to the conviction that impressions of styles arise through a process governed by expectations, which in turn are based on experiences of what is common and what is rare in a particular type of context. Bakhtin's meticulous sense of stylistic tensions and his use of 'style' are not, however, objectives in their own right. Bakhtin uses stylistic contrasts and textual heteroglossia as a taking-off point. What he is really interested in are the wider sociohistorical perspectives, in the novel for instance. I don't think we can say as yet what critics beyond the Marxist persuasion – I am thinking of critics

such as Terry Eagleton and Frederic Jameson – may make of Bakhtin. Perhaps he will spark off a new kind of sociostylistics, a criticism trying once again to link styles to social currents.

But there I am already gazing into my crystal ball. When critics are asked, What is the next fashion in literary theory?, their answers will differ depending on their persuasion. One answer is, a new historicism. Another answer is, literary pragmatics. Roger Fowler, still as sensitive to stylistic arguments as ever, regards literature as social discourse, as a message from a writer to a reader (Fowler 1980). And Roger Sell claims that

literary scholars ... are now overcoming the Deconstructionist scepticism about the ability of authors to encode meanings that are at once their own and communicable to others ...

I should prophecy that the interaction between literary texts and their contexts is from now on likely to be the major growth area in literary research. (Personal communication.)

Texts, so Sell insists, should be seen as functioning within, and contributing to, ongoing contexts of human interaction. If he is right, we are likely to be heading for a new marriage of “lang.” and “lit.”, and another renaissance of stylistics.

## 8

I was beguiled into forming the title of my paper as a question, and I should therefore also try to answer that question. So, what happened to stylistics?

I think the study of style is still very much alive. Some people study style overtly, calling themselves students of style. But many others too are involved in analyses of stylistic variation. Sociolinguists have as one of their major tasks the study of situational variations in language. Text and discourse linguists study those aspects of style that arise from different ways of connecting and organizing sentences into texts, and from different text strategies which are in turn affected by forces in human cognition and social interaction. ‘Text strategy’ could indeed be defined in ways that make it practically synonymous with ‘stylistic principle’ or ‘stylistic organization of discourse’. And some literary theorists are concerned with style, irrespective of whether they use that particular term or not. Some of us call ourselves students of style and are proud of doing so. Others study styles on the sly as crypto-stylisticians, and yet others study styles without knowing that they are doing so. In any case, stylistics

tics is still very much with us, though sometimes in shapes and guises that did not exist twenty or even fifteen years ago.

## REFERENCES

- Allén, S., ed. (1982): *Text Processing*. Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 51. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Bailey, C. J. (1973): *Variation and Linguistic Theory*. Arlington, Virginia: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981): *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Cedergren, H. / Sankoff, D. (1974): "Variable Rules: Performance as a Statistical Reflection of Competence." *Language* 50: 333-355.
- Chomsky, N. (1977): "Conditions on Rules of Grammar." In: Roger W. Cole, ed., *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 3-50.
- Eikmayer, H.-J. (1983): "Procedural Analysis of Discourse." *Text* 3: 11-38.
- Enkvist, N. E. (1964): "On Defining Style." In: N. E. Enkvist / J. Spencer / M. J. Gregory, *Linguistics and Style*. London: Oxford University Press, 3-56.
- Enkvist, N. E. (1973a): *Linguistic Stylistics*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton.
- Enkvist, N. E. (1973b): *Stilforskning och stilteori*. Lund: CWK Gleerup Bokförlag.
- Fish, S. (1970): "Literature and the Reader: Affective Stylistics." *New Literary History* 2: 123-162. Reprinted in Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class?*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, etc.: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Florès d'Arcais, G. B. / R. J. Jarvella, eds. (1983): *The Process of Language Understanding*. Chichester etc.: John Wiley & Sons.
- Fowler, R. (1981): *Literature as Social Discourse*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K. / R. Hasan (1976): *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Hill, A. (1965): *Essays in Literary Analysis*. Austin, Texas. [A collection of fourteen previously published papers.]
- Iser, W. (1976): *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*. München: Wilhelm Fink.
- Källgren, G. (1979): *Innehåll i text*. Stockholm: Studentlitteratur.
- Kenny, A. (1982): *The Computation of Style*. Oxford etc.: Pergamon Press.
- Labov, W. (1972): "The Isolation of Contextual Styles." in Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 70-109.
- Levinson, St. (1983): *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sacks, H. / Schegloff, E. A. / Jefferson, G. (1974): "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation." *Language* 50: 696-735.
- Sanford, A. J. / S. C. Garrod (1981): *Understanding Written Language*. Chichester etc.: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sebeok, T. A., ed. (1960): *Style in Language*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: M. I. T. Press.



- Sigurd, B. (1974): *Experiment med text*. Papers from the Institute of Linguistics, University of Stockholm, 25.
- Tannen, D. (1984): *Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk Among Friends*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
- van Dijk, T. A. / W. Kintsch (1983): *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension*. New York etc.: Academic Press.