

# ENGLISH STYLISTICS

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## **Optional literature**

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# Lecture 1

*Questions for discussion:*

1. Introduction. General notions. The concepts of style.
2. Linguostylistics and its branches.
3. The stylistics of decoding.
4. Literary stylistics.
5. Discourse stylistics.

I. **Stylistics** is the academic discipline which studies certain aspects of language variation. Being an essential part of general linguistics, stylistics occupies the highest position in the traditional hierarchy of linguistic disciplines with theoretical phonetics at the bottom, theoretical grammar and lexicology in between. The object of study - is ***style***, but the term needs further qualification as far as it is used in numerous senses.

The word *style* was borrowed into European languages from Latin; originally *stylos* meant a short stick, sharp at one end and flat at the other used by the Romans for writing on wax tablets.

Now the word *style* is applied to the teaching of how to write a composition; it is also used to reveal the correspondence between thought and expression. It denotes an individual manner of making use of language. It refers to more general, abstract notions thus inevitably becoming vague and obscure. **Style** is the result of individual choices and patterns of choice among linguistic possibilities. That is, the same thought, idea, belief, opinion, emotion, feeling or attitude can be expressed in more than one way.

The ambiguity of the word gave birth to many definitions of the notion. “Style is a quality of language which communicates precisely emotions or thoughts, or a system of emotions or thoughts, peculiar to the author.” (J. Middleton Murry) “Style is a contextually restricted linguistic variation.” (Enkvist) “Style is a selection of non-distinctive features of language.” (L. Bloomfield) “Style is simply synonymous with form or expression and hence a superfluous term.” (Benedetto Croce) “Style is essentially a citational process, a body of formulae, a memory (almost in the cybernetic sense of the word), a cultural and not an expressive inheritance.” (Ronald Barthes).

The definitions of the term “style” have much in common. All of them point to some integral significance, namely, that style is a set of characteristics by which we distinguish one author from another or members of one subclass from members of other subclasses, all of which are members of the same general class.

Another point is that all the definitions concentrate on the form of the expression. The evaluation is also based on whether the choice of language means conforms with the most general pattern of the given type of text (a novel, a poem, a letter, a document, an article, an essay etc.).

It seems logical to distinguish between *individual style* and *idiolect*. The term *individual style* should be applied to that sphere of linguistic and literary science which deals with the peculiarities of a writer's individual manner of using language means to achieve the effect he desires. It follows that the individual style of a writer is marked by its uniqueness. It can be recognized by the specific combination of language media and stylistic devices which in their interaction present a certain system. This system derives its origin from the creative spirit, and elusive though it may seem, it can nevertheless be ascertained. Naturally, the individual style of a writer will never be entirely independent of the literary norms and canons of the given period.

An *idiolect* is the speech of an individual which is characterized by peculiarities typical of that particular individual, i.e. those qualities of speech which are inherent and which reveal a man's breeding, education, social standing, etc.



The analysis of an author's language seems to be the most important procedure in estimating his individual style. This is obvious not only because language is the only means available to convey the author's ideas to the reader in precisely the way he intends, but also because writers unwillingly contribute greatly to establishing the norms of the literary language of the given period.

In order to compel the language to serve his purpose, the writer draws on its potential resources in a way different from what we see in ordinary speech.

The idea of the individual style brings up the problem of the correspondence between thought and expression. The problem should be looked upon from the assumption that thought and language are inseparable and language is a means of materializing thought. Deliberate choice of language and the ways the chosen elements are treated are the main distinctive features of individual style.

The treatment of the selected elements brings up the problem of the norm. The notion of the norm mainly refers to the literary language and always presupposes a recognized or received standard. One of the most characteristic and essential properties of the norm is its **flexibility**. Both *oral* (colloquial) and *written* (literary) varieties can be integrated into an invariant of the standard (received) language. The norm should be regarded as the invariant of the phonemic, morphological, lexical and syntactic patterns circulating in language-in-action (speech) at a given period of time.

There is a tendency to estimate the value of individual style by the degree it violates the norms of the language.

It is important for the stylistic analysis to bare in mind the two inseparable sides of the language: **oral** (the *language-in-action*) and **written** (the *language-as a system*). All rules and patterns of language which are collected and classified in works on grammar, phonetics, lexicology and stylistics first appear in language-in-action, whence they are generalized and framed as rules and patterns of the language-as-a-system.

Stylistics is divided into *General Stylistics*, *Descriptive Stylistics*, *Comparative (or Analytical) Stylistics*, *Functional Stylistics*, *Practical Stylistics*, *Statistical Stylistics*.

General Stylistics studies the categories that are common to all or most of the natural languages. Descriptive Stylistics is interested in the same categories within one concrete language. Comparative Stylistics investigates these categories in several languages. Functional Stylistics concentrates on the study of the functional styles of the language. Practical Stylistics works out recommendations for correct and adequate use of the language means in accordance with the situation of communication. Statistical Stylistics studies functional and individual styles with the help of mathematical methods which establish objective differences in common and individual use of language means, constructions, and styles.

Stylistics may be described as a means of coding and decoding of utterances (texts). Thus, the stylistic means employed by the author is the Coding Stylistics. It studies the aim of the utterance (text) to be produced, the possible results or influences on the listener (reader). Decoding Stylistics is connected with the listener (reader) who is affected by the information got and consequently reacts in a certain way. Both of them refer to individual types of speech, organization and technique of expression and perception.

The **goal of stylistics** is to investigate the choice of the language means which are described in grammar and lexicology. **Style** is understood as the ability to speak and write grammatically correct and clear so as to make the reader or the listener get interested in the subject matter of communication. Style is looked upon as a means of speech decoration, a technique of expression and a system of teaching the adequate language..

The **main aim of stylistic study** is to estimate, select and adequately employ the means of native or foreign language in oral and written communication. The main category of stylistics is **imagery**, which is created by interrelations of different types of meanings characteristic of *linguistic* signs and *extra-linguistic* environment.

**II.** Depending on the school of thought linguists apply the term ‘stylistics’ to **linguostylistics**, the **stylistics of decoding and literary stylistics**. It is necessary to add to this list **discourse stylistics** which is a comparatively new trend of contemporary stylistic research.

**Linguostylistics.** Language is a means of communication, a means of formation and expression of thoughts, feelings and attitudes, a means of stocking, getting and transference of information. In order to affect mind and feelings of the listeners (readers) the speaker (writer) must possess a perfect command of the language, i.e. the culture of the language use. The adequate expression of thoughts, ideas, intentions, and treatments of the outer and inner world depends on the correct choice of language means.



**Linguostylistics** investigates the system of expressive means, their linguistic and functional characteristics; it describes the system of functional styles of the English language which are recognized as typical embodiments of adequate language means serving the aims of communication. Linguostylistics is aimed at teaching the learners how to choose adequate means of expression, in what way utterances or texts should be compiled to satisfy the norms, the situations and the demands of communication. The *object* of linguostylistics is language, and its functioning in texts; the object of literary stylistics is literature and, to a great extent, how language is used in it.

Linguostylistics is necessarily connected with other linguistic sciences. **Phonetics**, for example, studies the ways of speech sound production and their acoustic properties. Stylistics is interested in expressive abilities of sounds and intonation, in the ways acoustic effect of the utterance is created, how the effect of “hearing” the events described is achieved. **Lexicology** studies the vocabulary of the language in respect to semantic properties. Stylistics investigates the influence of all the combinations of meaning possible on cognitive, intellectual or emotional state of the listener (reader). **Grammar** describes the system of word-forms in different parts of speech and types of sentences.

Stylistics is interested in expressive properties of forms and constructions which are marked by deliberate violations of strict rules but, nevertheless, do not ruin the sense of the utterance. Phonetic stylistics gives priority to expressive impact of speech organization. Lexical stylistics describes the stylistic properties of lexemes, their primary and secondary, direct and derived meanings. Grammatical stylistics studies grammatical categories as a means of emphatic influence. Stylistic semasiology deals with the mechanism of meaning changes in figures of speech.

Today's stylistics is a constituent of linguistics and as such presents an independent sphere of investigation. Inherent of it is its integrative nature which is revealed via a set of terms like *functional stylistics*, *communicative stylistics*, *text stylistics*, *poetry stylistics* and etc.

The above mentioned facts indicate a wide range of problematic and interdisciplinary bonds of modern linguostylistics with other sciences researching human speech activities. Linguostylistics deals with social circumstances of speech situations, speech participants with their varied psychoemotional manifestations, intentional and axiological aspects, speech pragmatics by means of analyzing their stylistic representations. Image-bearing means are in the centre of linguostylistics investigations, as far as they greatly influence actualization of pragmacommunicative component of the utterance.

Linguostylistics is traditionally subdivided into **expressive stylistics** and **functional stylistics**.

### *Expressive stylistics*

According to the theory of language levels, expressive stylistics can be further subdivided into phonostylistics, morphological stylistics, syntactical stylistics, lexical stylistics and text stylistics. Also one should not ignore graphical stylistics. Firstly, though graphic means do not belong to the generally recognized language levels, they serve to convey in written texts those ideas, feelings and emotions which in the oral types of texts are expressed by intonation and stress. Secondly, the layout of the text, its visual design (types, fonts, iconic elements, etc.) play an important role in logical structuring of the content expressed by the author in a particular language form.

- The basic notions of expressive stylistics are expressive means and stylistic devices which convey stylistic information. Stylistic information can be understood as an aggregate of different shades and nuances of stylistic meaning and typical or specific stylistic colouring of the language means employed in the text.
- Expressive means are those phonetic, morphological, syntactical and lexical forms which are used for the purpose of logical and / or emotive intensification of the utterance. Lexical expressive means, for example, are labelled in good dictionaries as “**intensifiers**”; in most cases they have corresponding synonymous forms which are stylistically neutral. Expressive means intensify the thought contained in the utterance by commonly used language means (e.g. *emotionally coloured words, modal verbs and expressions, diminutive suffixes - as in the words auntie, streamlet*).

The stylistic device is a productive model, an abstract pattern into which any content may be inserted. Stylistic devices can be regarded as a special code which has to be well known to the reader / listener for him / her to successfully decipher it. Stylistic devices function as marked units carrying stylistic information. Concrete realizations of an abstract scheme help to achieve desirable communicative effects. Actually, stylistic devices are those expressive means which correspond to certain language patterns included into the system of stylistic devices, each of them having a special name (e.g. metaphor, metonymy, rhetorical question, etc.).

**Expressive means and stylistic devices** perform in context various stylistic functions, which can be defined as a pragmatic usage of certain type of stylistic meaning – expressive, figurative, emotive, evaluative – in a communicative situation/context. Some examples of stylistic functions are as follows: detailing, concreting, evoking feelings, exciting emotions, stirring up imagination, the functions of intensification, accentuation, gradation, laying emphasis, etc.

Text stylistics aims at investigating the most effective ways and means of producing texts belonging to different styles, substyles and genres. Stylistic analysis of a concrete text should lead to a clear and profound understanding of its content and form which are inseparable. In this respect stylistically significant seem to be the problems related to the types of information imparted by the text, the problem of text categories such as informativity, modality, expressiveness, emotiveness, accentuation and the problem of basic textual segments.

## *Functional stylistics*

Within the framework of the communicative-and-functional approach, scholars distinguish among different versions of the given language, the so-called functional styles. Functional style is a system of interrelated language means serving a definite aim in communication; functional styles are products of concrete social tasks set out by the language community (Galperin I.R.). They are the tools which help people to understand one another in different spheres of communication, including art, science, political, social and private life, etc. A particular choice and arrangement of vocabulary, grammar and other linguistic means, called style markers, are typical of texts belonging to a certain functional style. Each functional style is further subdivided into substyles and genres. Substyles and genres, in their turn, have their own language and compositional peculiarities.



According to the existing classifications, one can single out *the style of official documents, the scientific prose style, the newspaper style and the publicist style (the news media style), the belles-lettres style, the colloquial style*. Each functional style is represented by a certain variety of genres that are typical of it.

# III. The stylistics of decoding

In terms of the stylistics of decoding:

- ❖ communication can be defined as an activity in which information is transferred from one system to another by means of some physical embodiment;
- ❖ human language is the most powerful and elaborate of all means of communication.

In a natural language, messages are materialized in two kinds of signals: they are sound waves in the atmosphere (phonic substance), and the signs of writing or printing (graphic substance). In terms of the theory in question, language can be regarded as a very complicated code. In codes like languages no matter what is said, more can always be said about the | same topic, and there is always more than one way of saying it. In language as a code there is always a potential, a stock of signs which could be used to convey the same message, to develop the same idea. This feature may be termed as redundancy; it is the redundancy of the language code that provides the opportunity of choice (Maltzev V.A.).

The primary concern of stylistics of decoding is with language codes and the particular message the reader can draw from the text, deciphering these codes while reading. It is claimed that the stylistics of decoding is based on the theoretical grounds of linguo- and literary stylistics (Arnold I.K). The central interest of this school of stylistic studies is the output of the act of communication, the effect of the message. Needless to say, that only a skillful reader/listener can perceive the information contained in the text objectively.

**IV. Literary stylistics.** The object of literary stylistics is literature and, to a great extent, how language is used in it. The problem of individual style is a common ground for literature and linguistics. The term *individual style* presupposes a deliberate, though often intuitional, choice of language means. It is normally applied to the writer's peculiar manner of using these language means to achieve the effects he / she desires. If the writer does possess an individual style, it is easily recognizable and marked by uniqueness. By the language community, individual styles are linked to concrete proper names. The individual style is based on justifiable deviations from the literary norm; therefore, it presupposes a perfect knowledge of its variants bearing this or that stylistic colouring. The analysis of the author's language preferences seems to be the most important procedure in estimating his / her creative individuality. The observation of how the language code is used by the writer or poet serves only as a means to the main aim, that is interpretation. To interpret and evaluate literary pieces of writing as works of art is the ultimate purpose of literary stylistics.

**V. Discourse stylistics** is a comparatively new interdisciplinary branch of stylistics. The noun *discourse* can designate “conversation”; “lengthy treatment of a subject”; “lecture, speech”. Used as a term, this word is also polysemantic: it means a “cohesive utterance containing more than one sentence”, “a text”, “an unlimited number of texts developing one and the same theme or overall topic”.

Having a wide range of usages, the term in question tends to replace the term *functional style* that is purely a linguistic one. In discourse stylistics a special accent is laid on a wider range of extralinguistic factors — ideological, social, cultural, historical, psychological, etc.

The words text and discourse are also treated by linguists as synonyms. In case they are used in different senses, text is regarded as an abstract unit belonging to language-as-a-system, and discourse is understood as an element of language-in-action / speech. As for discourse analysis, it is similar to stylistic analysis, but its main aim is to unveil (=to reveal) the effects of a social situation/context on language choices and text interpretation. In other words, discourse analysis is context bound. Therefore, it presupposes a careful study of its varied extralinguistic characteristics, the social relationships of the participants of the communicative event, the target audience (e.g. 'ideal', or 'imaginary' reader), the conversations of the text type or genre.