

Orientations in Modern Stylistics

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Abstract

The paper aims at presenting the main orientations and trends in the field of stylistics, without the claim of having exhausted the topic. It also focuses on the concept of style and on how it is perceived by the different stylistics schools and by their representatives.

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I. Introduction. Brief History of Stylistics

Stylistics, a relatively new discipline, whose birth certificate is signed by the Swiss linguist Charles Bally, at the beginning of the 20th century, develops initially in two directions: linguistic stylistics, represented and theorized by Bally himself and literary stylistics, represented by Karl Vossler. However, interest in style and in expressivity can be dated back to the ancient period, the ancients were the first to define style, to classify style and to analyse it as norms which guide speech and help to the achievement of aims followed in speech. Many concepts of contemporary stylistics were also taken over from the ancients. After the ancient period, there was a slight discontinuity in the interest for style and expressivity, there weren't steady preoccupations in theorizing on style. After search and oscillations, after steady and less steady preoccupations in the research of style and expressivity, at the beginning of the 20th century, stylistics theoretically becomes a discipline and it sets its coordinates and methodology. Charles Bally, author of **Précis de stylistique** and **Traité de stylistique française**, defines stylistics, establishes its object and the main features of linguistic stylistics: the expressive value of language, especially of the spoken language: „La stylistique étudie donc les faits d'expression du langage au point de vue de leur contenu affectif, c'est-à-dire l'expression des faits de la sensibilité par le langage et l'action des faits de langage sur la sensibilité.”¹ Bally prefers to focus on language in use, because, in his opinion, in speech one usually resorts to many means of expressivity, in comparison with the written language. Spontaneity is also fuller and more pronounced in speech as compared with the written text where spontaneity and expressivity are the result of a premeditation and reflection process. By dividing between written language and spoken language, linguistic stylistics establishes an artificial separation between oral and written and it excludes written language from the research area of stylistics. Bally promotes the research of language from the point of view of its inner composition, literary texts being excluded from stylistics' area of interest. Giving utmost priority to the spoken aspect of language, Bally emphasizes the description and the analysis of the stylistic features of language and he distinguishes between internal stylistics-which studies the relationship intellectual-affective within the same language and external stylistics. Becoming a linguist under the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure, Bally also bears influences from the former. He thus integrates language into a new vision which is functional, synchronic and descriptive, in that it projects a stylistic point of view over language, this acquires an affective value which is responsible for generating all innovations in language. The direction emphasized by Bally is followed by Charles Bruneau and Jean Marouzeau, who enrich and enlarge Bally's theory by adding the language of literature to the research field of stylistics.

¹ Charles Bally, *Traité de la stylistique française*, p. 16, apud Georgeta Corniță, *Manual de stilistică*, Editura Umbria, Baia Mare, p.9

However, Bally does not start from a scratch, he does not invent a totally new terminology or totally new concepts. If we take a journey back to the outset of stylistics, we will arrive to the ancient period where we find the roots of this discipline, the foundations of stylistics being laid with rhetoric, what differed was the name, the vision and the way of theorizing. Most treatises of stylistics indicate ancient rhetoric as being the starting point of stylistics, along the time the majority of researchers linked stylistics with rhetoric.

2. Orientations in Modern Stylistics

An important feature of stylistics is its openness, especially to related disciplines such as theory of literature, aesthetics, poetics, disciplines which influenced stylistics during its development. Each orientation or direction of stylistics shows preference for one or the other of the disciplines above-mentioned, for example Bally establishes the link stylistics-linguistics, while Spitzer believes stylistics is close to philology. At the beginning of the 20th century the second great orientation in stylistics is closely linked with the name of Karl Vossler. He sets out the idea according to which innovation represents the manifestation of the writer's will and language is the expression of the spirit and of freedom, according to Vossler the psychological factor plays a very important part in stylistics. Both Bally and Vossler give a new start in the stylistic research and they represent a new direction in the research of language. Leo Spitzer, who introduces style both in the field of stylistics and in the field of linguistics, represents the link between the two directions already mentioned.

Along the 20th century the orientations and the research in stylistics begin to increase, new ones begin to emerge besides the two basic orientations which dominated the beginning of the 20th century. Literary stylistics and linguistic stylistics evolve and exfoliate, linguistic stylistics turns into functional stylistics. Functional stylistics starts from Karl Buhler's and Roman Jakobson's theories regarding the functions of language and its role is to describe and explain functional styles as well as individual and collective modalities of using the language according to different contexts. Another important moment in the history of modern stylistics was that represented by The Prague School, which was mainly focused on studying the poetic function of language. Its members (Bohumil Trnka, Vilem Mathesius, Jean Mukarovsky) remained in the history of stylistics mainly for their preoccupations for language and poetic language.

There also appear tendencies and directions for and against linguistic and literary stylistics. There have been reactions against the limitations imposed by Bally and one of the reactions is that of Damaso Alonso's. He does not agree with the fact that stylistics deals with studying the affective element of language. He does not consider stylistics to be a science, in his opinion it rather refers to experimenting techniques and methods. Bally's stylistics represents for Alonso an affective grammar. In Alonso's point of view stylistics is rather related with literature, it has less in common with linguistics and more in common with literature, a totally different point of view from Bally's one. Alonso also refers to the differences existing between linguistic stylistics, Bally's stylistics as he calls it and literary stylistics. He recognizes Bally as being the initiator of stylistics and the creator of a totally new discipline, yet he finds many differences in methods and techniques between the two stylistics, literary stylistics deals with style and linguistic stylistics deals with affective elements from spoken language. Forecasting the future of stylistics Alonso shows that it should examine two perspectives to the same extent: the external form (the relation signifier-significant from signifier to significant) and the internal form (the relationship significant-signifier from significant to signifier). Alonso draws up the portrait of the stylistician, in his opinion the stylistician has to follow several stages, at first he should be a passionate reader, then he should turn into a critic. Being a critic requires three types of approaching the linguistic text: the scientific approach, the critical approach and the reader's approach. Alonso ends his article announcing the difficulties which the stylistician has to overpass in analyzing literary works stylistically, and the sole weapon of the stylistician which helps the latter in overpassing this difficulty is intuition.

In our attempt of presenting the orientations in stylistics, we should not leave out Stephen Ullmann. In his practical and didactical paper “Reconstruction of Stylistic Values” Ullmann warns the stylistician against the dangers the latter can encounter in the attempt of stylistically analyzing a writer’s work. Ullmann’s starting point is Paul Valery’s definition of style- *écart*, definition also borrowed by other stylisticians: „După P. Valery stilul este esențialmente deviație de la normă, idee împărtășită și de alți critici: P. Guiraud- La Stylistique.”² Starting from this definition Ullmann considers that a good knowledge of the norm represents an advantage in reconstructing and discovering the stylistic value, this knowledge enables the stylistician to compare the norm, the intentions and the artistic achievements of the writer. Ullmann also adds the evaluation of the vocabulary, style and elements of grammar as ways of evaluating the originality of a writer. He also tells us that the task of the stylistician is more difficult when the latter evaluates the originality of a writer who, temporally and geographically, belongs to a different time than that of the stylistician. The stylistician should have a good knowledge of the period in which the writer lives and this knowledge should cover all aspects: lexical, morphological, syntactic and phonetic. Lack of knowledge of these aspects can cause difficulties in the stylistician’s attempt of reconstructing stylistic values: errors of addition and errors of omission. Ullmann analyzes the two types of errors and he refers to the identification of the levels of language which are the most liable to these types of errors. As regards vocabulary innovation and the changes which occur within vocabulary can bring about errors of omission: „Cuvintele se deplasează în sus și în jos pe scara socială și se întâmplă adesea ca un termen care astăzi face parte din vocabularul obișnuit să fi fost considerat nu cu mult timp în urmă, drept argotic ori vulgar”³. Archaic terms can harden translators’ and literary critics’ task and they should know very well the period in which the text was written and the type of context in order to be able to identify them. Ullmann does not theorize on style and stylistics, he does not make divisions or impose classifications, his research is rather practical in character, it is a guide from which stylisticians to be find out what they should undertake and what they should beware of in order to avoid these errors.

We shall glance a brief look at the research books in stylistics published elsewhere and we will stop short at G.W. Turner’s book- *Stylistics*. The book is divided into eight chapters: Language, Style and Situation; The Sounds of Language; Syntax; Vocabulary, Context, Register, Functions of Language, Use of Stylistics and it deals exhaustively with every level of language: phonetic, lexical, morphological, syntactical as well as stylistic and expressive particularities which characterize these levels. At the beginning of the book we find the definition of the term stylistics, and with this definition the author includes stylistics in the field of linguistics: “stylistics is that part of linguistics which concentrates on variation in the use of language.”⁴

The expressivity of spoken and written language is also the result of the choice which the writer or speaker makes within language. At the syntactical level word order and especially inverted word order is the source which generates expressivity, the factors taken into account in order to obtain this expressivity are the aim of communication, register, the writer’s/speaker’s level of culture. Thus, the English journalistic style, especially headlines prefer the concise style, the lack of connectors and prevalence of certain verbal tenses, while poetic language is mainly characterized by the Subject-Predicate inversion. The lexical level is characterized by the use of compounds, which can be an important source of expressivity especially in poetic language. The author illustrates this statement by giving examples of nonce words, which are not encountered in daily speech: purple-stained, leaden-eyed (Keats-Ode to a Nightingale). Concise terms are often preferred in scientific language, thus, by means of a short lexical unit, we can convey an idea. Problems which arise in this situation are linked with the translation of these terms, it can sometimes be very difficult to translate them especially when we cannot establish an

² Stephen Ullmann –Reconstituirea valorilor stilistice, *Poetică și stilistică. Orientări moderne*, București, Editura Univers, 1972p.103

³ Stephen Ullmann-op.cit. p.110

⁴ Turner, G.W.- *Stylistics*, Penguin Books, Great Britain, 1973, p.7

equivalence between the two languages and we have to replace a term with a construction which renders the meaning or with an entire sentence. The lexical level is also subject to the most various innovations. The phonetic level is characterized by the dominance of vocalic sounds (preferred by the 18th century writers) and of consonantic sounds. The context dictates the expressive values of terms, metaphorical terms are strongly linked with the context, without which they lose their expressive value. As regards the analysis of style and language, the author analyzes the occurrence and the structure of styles, a characteristic of scientific style being the use of passive constructions. We are warned against the stylistician's ability or inability to detect old terms and archaisms, and more than that an overall stylistic analysis requires a knowledge of the reasons why the writer made this choice in the substance of language.

Michael Toolan's research in stylistics- "On the Centrality of Stylistics" attempts to locate stylistics within the area of language sciences and the author relates stylistics with literary linguistics, text linguistics, discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. Drawing a comparison between the stylistician's work and the linguist's work Toolan shows that the linguist is interested in finding resemblances while the stylistician is looking for uniqueness.

3. Style and Stylistics

The concept of style has known many oscillations, being at turns considered the object of stylistics and being excluded from stylistics. Style represents a complex notion, which cannot be included within the patterns of a definition or of a discipline, although, along time there have been attempts to define style and to include it within one discipline of language or another. Representing a component exploited by a series of disciplines such as aesthetics, linguistics, stylistics, poetics, literary semiotics, or non-language related disciplines such as music, architecture, arts- style offers new perspectives for pluri-and inter-disciplinary research. This openness of the concept explains the complexity of the term. G. Lukacs studies style from the perspective of the history of literature and he defines it as being a sociological category, because it implies the existence of interhuman relationships established within a society determined in time and space and it is also an aesthetical category. Theories about style and attempts to define style can be encountered starting with the ancients. Among those who defined style and from whom we inherit the first considerations about style and the first classifications of style we may quote: Teophrast, Aristotle, Demetrios, Quintilian. As stated before, there had not been steady preoccupations for style, the ancients having provided the first pattern for analysis, up to the beginning of the 20th century when style re-entered the attention of researchers, being conceived this time as an element of language. However, not all the stylisticians agree with Bally, and one of his opponents is Damaso Alonso. The latter does not agree with Bally, especially with Bally's excluding style from stylistics because he believed that with the exclusion of style Bally also excluded the stylistician from stylistics: „Stilul este tocmai ceea ce individualizează o vorbire particulară. Elementul din vorbirea cuiva nu poate fi redus la limba comună, iată ce ne semnaleză diferențierea ultimă a personalității- iată deci care ar fi obiectul stilisticii...Bally însă a fost de altă părere: după ce definește „stilul” într-un sens apropiat de al nostru, mai apoi print-o curioasă incongruență idiomatică el înlătură din stilistica lui ...tocmai „stilul”! O dată cu stilul Bally înlătură și pe scriitor”⁵

Linguistic stylistics sets out the idea according to which the speaker or the utterer represents an important factor in determining and dictating a style, and from a linguistic point of view, style is the expression of the speaker, it reflects and individualizes speech. We shall illustrate the idea with a quotation from Jean Marouzeau: „a defini stilul înseamnă a cunoaște atitudinea persoanei care vorbește sau scrie față de

⁵ D. Alonso, Garcilaso și limitele esteticii, *Poetică și stilistică. Orientări moderne*, București, Editura Univers, 972 p. 86

resursele limbii utilizate”.⁶ Leo Spitzer is a linker between the two conceptions of style and stylistics with dominated the first half of the 20th century, showing that style represents an area where language and literature meet, the linking point between linguistics and literary study.

As regards the criteria for determining style, they differ according to the stylistic orientation. Thus, in linguistic stylistics, the main sources which generate style are choice and deviation. The criteria of choice is also borrowed from the ancients and it had many supporters in stylistics: M. Cressot, J. Marouzeau, Pierre Guiraud, Stephen Ullmann-style represents choice, choice is conditioned by the expressive resources of language and content. For Bally, style represents an affective content which is spontaneously added to the logical content of communication.

In his paper "On Defining Style" N.E. Enkvist analyzes the criteria in defining style: writers' individual styles, style as the object of literature, style as choice, style as deviation from the norm. Style as choice needs to distinguish between three types of selection: grammar selection, stylistic and non-stylistic selection. Selection involves the choice of one alternative out of several existing at a certain moment within one language. Analyzing style as deviation from the norm, stylisticians started to explain the role of frequencies and of stylistic analyses. One of the definitions which best illustrates the individual aspect of style is Buffon's: „Le style c'est l'homme même”. (Discours sur le style, 1753). The difficulties in identifying style arise when the critic who studies literary works written in a different language than the former's. The individual ways of expressing represent a special category which can provide the foundations of an ideal definition of style. The author signals the difficulties which we can encounter when we try to identify individual style: "Still, the identification of style with individual expression leads to two difficulties. First, some features generally labelled as stylistic are not individual at all. They are shared by groups of varying size. Indeed the lack of individual features may serve as hallmark of some style categories.....Secondly, how are we to separate the unique and inimitable features of a given style from among all the other features necessarily present in our text?"⁷. The identification of style with the individual element of language requires the emergence of some norms of comparison. First, we have to define the norm which we take into account when measuring the individuality of a text. After we define the norm, the definition of style as deviation from norm provides us the first element in our stylistic comparison. The American linguist Michael Riffaterre does not agree with defining style as deviating from norm and with analyzing style in relation with the norm, stating that deviations cannot be taken as criterion and starting points to discover the consistency of a stylistic procedure.

4. Conclusions

At the end of these considerations, it is natural to summarize certain conclusions regarding the emergence and the importance of stylistics within the area of language-related sciences and not only. A first conclusion will be that stylistics has two main features, namely its being open to other sciences, hence derives its interdisciplinary and pluridisciplinary character and its flexibility. From a linguistic point of view, stylistics studies linguistic procedures which generate expressive values and its aim is to identify those features of a text which offer it an individual stamp and to identify the linguistic features of a text which create aesthetic emotions and states, during the process of reading. Before the 20th century, the preoccupations with style belonged to rhetoric and grammar and they were included in the general studies of literature and language. During the 20th half of the 19th century linguistics oscillated between the wish to define language through efficient analytic methods and the wish to define language as a social and cultural phenomenon. 19th century linguistics prepares the grounds for the emergence of stylistics, the concepts are borrowed from the ancients and at the beginning of the 20th century the first papers in

⁶ Jean Marouzeau, *Traite de stylistique* apud Ion Coteanu, *Stilistica funcțională a limbii române*, București, Editura Academiei, 1973, vol 1- Stil, stilistică, limbaj, p.55

⁷ Enkvist, Nils Erik; Spencer, John; Gregory, Michael- *Linguistics and Style*, Oxford University Press, Great Britain, London, 1964, p.22

stylistics begin to emerge. Using the methodology of linguistics in the study of stylistics enables the latter to overpass previous research in style and to focus on the analysis and aims of language. Bally's studies as well as his followers' studies (Jean Marouzeau and Marcel Cressot) provided a precise methodology in describing the components and the features of a text. Whatever the limits of previous approach of styles might have been and whichever might have been the difficulties arising from the practical application of linguistic methods in the stylistic analysis, the desire to start with totally new terms and procedures lies at the grounds of the emergence of stylistics as a discipline. At present it is conceived as a discipline comprising two sub-divisions: individual stylistics and stylistics of language which are not opposed as Bally conceived them, they are rather complementary.

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