

Style & Stylistics

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What's 'Style'?

As we are asked the above question, one or the other of the following answers naturally come to our mind:

- i. the way something is done, built, etc.
- ii. the fashion, shape or design of something.
- iii. elegance or refinement of manners, dress, etc.
- iv. a distinctive, formal, or characteristic manner of expression in words, music, painting, etc.

In linguistics, however, 'style' refers to something similar to register as it also implies choice of vocabulary and grammatical structures, but has distinct traditional and historical connotations. Satiric works of A. Pope and other Augustan poets wrote in elegant, refined and cultivated literary language known as 'poetic diction', which did not find favour with the Romantic writers who wrote in 'language used by the common men'. The style became simpler and less ornate, even though the register of these Romantic poets remained still distinct from everyday colloquial speech.

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics concerned with the study of style in texts, especially, but not exclusively, in literary works. Also called literary linguistics, stylistics focuses on the figures, images, metaphors, rhetorical devices and syntactical patterns which add variety and a distinctness to someone's writing and produce 'expressive' or 'literary' style. It is a kind of linguistic analysis used in literary criticism.

Literary style has been an object of study in ancient times also. Aristotle, Cicero, Demetrius, and Quintilian treated style as a way of decorating or beautifying thought. Such a view prevailed throughout the Renaissance period. The scholars would select and recommend devices of style for their future imitation and reproduction. The writer was expected to present his ideas with the help of model sentences and prescribed kinds of "figures" suitable to his mode of discourse.

Modern stylistics does not suggest normative or prescriptive rules and patterns. Stylistics makes use of the tools of formal linguistic analysis along with the methods of literary criticism; the objective being to identify and describe

characteristic uses and functions of language and rhetoric in creating ‘literary effects’.

Contrary to the traditional idea of style as something that adorns thoughts, ‘style’ in language emerges from the possibility of choices or alternatives of language use available before a writer above and beyond the choices necessary for the ‘simple’ expression of a meaning. For example, the choice of words like ‘see’, ‘look’, ‘watch’, ‘observe’ and ‘behold’ before Wordsworth, in the context of his poem ‘Solitary Reaper’- each of which has a different evocative value- contributes to the ‘style’ of his poetry. Out of a set of possibilities for the production of meaning, the selection and use of certain specific linguistic forms results in linguistic style. Studying a text from the point of view of stylistics helps to discover layers of meaning that run deeper than just the basic theme or plot, which is visible on the surface level.

According to Katie Wales in "A Dictionary of Stylistics, the goal of "most stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic 'causes' where these are felt to be relevant."

Stylistics is an umbrella term which covers a range of different stylistic approaches to the study of texts. Although stylistic analysis originated as a way of applying linguistic models to literary texts, it came to **be applied to the analysis of a large variety of texts, to non-literary registers as well.** Consequently, the range of texts with which stylistics concerns itself has extended from an early preoccupation with “literary” texts to include any form of text, written or spoken.

Again, the range of disciplines from which stylistic theory and practice draws is **no longer limited to linguistics**, but also includes **pragmatics, literary theory, psychology, and social theory.** The common concern that brings together all these different aspects of stylistics is the centrality of the ‘language’ in the production of meaning of the text- be it poem, advertisement or e-content- in the process of its possible interpretations.

Three Key aspects of Stylistics -

1. the use of linguistics (the study of language) to approach literary texts;

2. the interpretation of texts according to **objective** criteria rather than purely subjective and impressionistic values;
3. an emphasis on the aesthetic properties of language; for example, the importance of rhyme in Nursery songs in creating 'pleasure'.

Clearly enough, Linguistics (theoretical) is the study of linguistic forms/ components of language such as sounds, parts of words, and words represented at phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic levels. These together constitute a code by which our expression acquires a specific meaning. Linguistic forms are always available as a set of possibilities for the production of texts, and thereby linguistic forms make possible linguistic style. Thus, the sentence, "James chased the run target and defeated the Kenyan Cricket team", encodes a simple message, involving some past event with two agents playing specific roles relative to a context. The same event could be encoded in other ways such as 'The run target set by Kenyan Cricket team got chased by James and they ended up with a humiliating defeat.'). The choice of words and manner to encode the message is a stylistic choice. Stylistic choices are designed to have effects on the reader or listener, which are generally understood as:

- (a) communicating meaning which go beyond the linguistically determined meaning,
- (b) communicating attitude, as in persuasive effects of style, and
- (c) expressing or communicating emotion.

The famous saying, "Style is the man himself", suggests an important aspect of stylistics in that style finally is a mark of character. A writer's style invariably bears the mark of his personality. An experienced writer is able to rely on the capacity of his habitual choices of sounds, words, and syntactic patterns to suggest the subtle shades or nuances of his thought or worldview.

Jargon- Vocabulary, specifically used by **specialists** to make their discourse more precise. For example, 'windows', 'mouse', 'disc' or 'ram' in the field of computer.

Register- Vocabulary and syntax regarded as **appropriate** for a specific type of discourse. For example, writing in science avoids the use of 'active form' of sentences, metaphors or figurative language and remains as concise as possible while explaining the appropriate principle, finding, description, etc.