

Problems of stylistic research

Units of language on different levels are studied by traditional branches of linguistics such as phonetics that deals with speech sounds and intonation; lexicology that treats words, their meaning and vocabulary structure, grammar that analyses forms of words and their function in a sentence which is studied by syntax. These areas of linguistic study are rather clearly defined and are a long-term tradition of regarding language phenomena from a level-oriented point of view. Thus the subject matter and the material under study of these linguistic disciplines are more or less clear-cut.

It gets more complicated when we talk, about stylistics. Some scholars claim that this is a comparatively new branch of linguistics, which has only a few decades of intense linguistic interest behind it. The term stylistics really came into existence not too long ago. In point of fact the scope of problems and the object of stylistic study go as far back as ancient schools of rhetoric and poetics.

The problem that makes the definition of stylistics a curious one deals both with the object and the material of studies. When we speak of the stylistic value of a text we cannot proceed from the level-biased approach that is so logically described through the hierarchical system of sounds, words and clauses. Not only may each of these linguistic units be charged with a certain stylistic meaning but the interaction of these elements, as well as the structure and composition of the whole text are stylistically pertinent.

Another problem has to do with a whole set of special linguistic means that create what we call «style». Style may be belles-letters or scientific or neutral or low colloquial or archaic or pompous, or a combination of those. Style may also be typical of a certain writer-Shakespearean style, Dickensian style, etc. There is the style of the j press, the style of official documents, the style of social etiquette and even an individual style of a speaker or writer—his idiolect.

Stylistics deals with styles. Different scholars have defined style differently at different times. Out of this variety we shall quote the most representative ones that scan the period from the 50s to the 90s of the 20th century.

The authors of handbooks on German (E. Riesel, M. P. Brandes), French (Y. S. Stepanov, R. G. Piotrovsky, K. A. Dolinin), English (I. R. Galperin, I. V. Arnold, Y. M. Skrebnev, V. A. Maltsev, V. A. Kukhareenko, A. N. Morokhovsky and others) and Russian (M. N. Kozhina, I. B. Golub) stylistics published in our country over the recent decades propose more or less analogous systems of styles based on a broad subdivision of all styles into two classes: literary and colloquial and their varieties. These generally include from three to five functional styles.

Since functional styles will be further specially discussed in a separate chapter at this stage we shall limit ourselves to only three popular viewpoints in English language style classifications.

Prof. Galperin distinguishes 5 groups of functional styles for the written variety of language while Prof. I.V. Arnold suggests only two major types of styles - colloquial and literary bookish — with their division into substyles (see chapter 4.4).

Prof. Y. M. Skrebnev suggests a most unconventional viewpoint on the number of styles. He maintains that the number of sublanguages and styles is infinite (if we include individual styles, styles mentioned in linguistic literature such as telegraphic, oratorical, reference book, Shakespearean, short story, or the style of literature on electronics, computer language, etc.).

Of course the problem of style definition is not the only one stylistic research deals with.

Stylistics is that branch of linguistics, which studies the principles, and effect of choice and usage of different language elements in rendering thought and emotion under different conditions of communication. Therefore it is concerned with such issues as

- 1) the aesthetic function of language;
- 2) expressive means in language;
- 3) synonymous ways of rendering one and the same idea;
- 4) emotional colouring in language;
- 5) a system of special devices called stylistic devices;
- 6) the splitting of the literary language into separate systems called style;
- 7) the interrelation between language and thought;
- 8) the individual manner of an author in making use of the language (47, p. 5).

These issues cover the overall scope of stylistic research and can only be representative of stylistics as a discipline of linguistic study taken as a whole. So it should be noted that each of them is concerned with only a limited area of research:

1. The aesthetic function of language is an immanent part of works of art—poetry and imaginative prose but it leaves out works of science, diplomatic or commercial correspondence, technical instructions and many other types of texts.

2. Expressive means of language are mostly employed in types of speech that aim to affect the reader or listener: poetry, fiction, oratory, and informal intercourse but rarely in technical texts or business language.

3. It is due to the possibility of choice, the possibility of using synonymous ways of rendering ideas that styles are formed. With the change of wording a change in meaning (however slight it might be) takes place inevitably.

4. The emotional colouring of words and sentences creates a certain stylistic effect and makes a text either a highly lyrical piece of description or a satirical derision with a different stylistic value. However not all texts eligible for stylistic study are necessarily marked by this quality.

5. No work of art, no text or speech consists of a system of stylistic devices but there's no doubt about the fact that the style of anything is formed by the

combination of features peculiar to it, that whatever we say or write, hear or read is not style by itself but has style, it demonstrates stylistic features.

6. Any national language contains a number of sublanguages or microlanguages or varieties of language with their own specific features, their own styles. Besides these functional styles that are noted in the norm of the language there exist the so-called «substandard» types of speech such as slang, barbarisms, vulgarisms, taboo and so on.

7. Interrelation between thought and language can be described in terms of an inseparable whole so when the form is changed a change in content takes place. The author's intent and the forms he uses to render it as well as the reader's interpretation of it is the subject of a special branch of stylistics—decoding stylistics.

8. We can hardly object to the proposition that style is also above | other things the individual manner of expression of an author in his use of the language. At the same time the individual manner can only appear out of a number of elements provided by the common background and employed and combined in a specific manner.

Thus, speaking of stylistics as a science, we have to bear in mind that the object of its research is versatile and multi-dimensional and the study of any of the above-mentioned problems will be a fragmentary description. It's essential that we look at the object of stylistic study in its totality.

Stylistics and other linguistic disciplines

As is obvious from the names of the branches or types of stylistic studies this science is very closely linked to the linguistic disciplines philology students are familiar with: phonetics, lexicology and grammar due to the common study source.

Stylistics interacts with such theoretical discipline as semasiology. This is a branch of linguistics whose area of study is a most complicated and enormous

sphere—that of meaning. The term semantics is also widely used in linguistics in relation to verbal meanings. Semasiology in its turn is often related to the theory of signs in general and deals with visual as well as verbal meanings.

Meaning is not attached to the level of the word only, or for that matter to one level at all but correlates with all of them—morphemes, words, phrases or texts. This is one of the most challenging areas of research since practically all stylistic effects are based on the interplay between different kinds of meaning on different levels. Suffice it to say that there are numerous types of linguistic meanings attached to linguistic units, such as grammatical, lexical, logical, denotative, connotative, emotive, evaluative, expressive and stylistic.

Onomasiology (or onomatology) is the theory of naming dealing with the choice of words when naming or assessing some object or phenomenon. In stylistic analysis we often have to do with a transfer of nominal meaning in a text (antonomasia, metaphor, metonymy, etc.)

The theory of functional styles investigates the structure of the national linguistic space—what constitutes the literary language, the sublanguages and dialects mentioned more than once already.

Literary stylistics will inevitably overlap with areas of literary studies such as the theory of imagery, literary genres, the art of composition, etc.

Decoding stylistics in many ways borders culture studies in the broad sense of that word including the history of art, aesthetic trends and even information theory.