What is Style?

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Abstract—The article attempts to define the term of style in literature. It briefly presents various approaches to style analysis – from monism, dualism and pluralism to most recent interpretations of style. The article tries to show some drawbacks of monism, dualism and pluralism, which are now out-of-date approaches. Most recent theories have introduced two new terms in style analyses; i.e. identity and identification. The article briefly tries to explain the differences between these two terms.

Keywords—dualism, identification, identity, monism, pluralism, style

I. INTRODUCTION

The term of style is impossible to define or describe unambiguously. The term and its use have been changing and developing through the centuries; but its original meaning referred solely to painting. Literary science began using it at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Slovenian literary critique it was first used by Izidor Cankar in 1926.

II. THE TERM OF STYLE

Leech in Short define style as the manner of language use in a certain context by a certain person (1981: 10). They emphasise it can refer to spoken or written language as to literary or non-literary versions of language (1981: 11). It can be deduced that linguistics, i.e. the study of grammatical structures are used to describe style. Long before their descriptive method, in the first part of 20th century, »Leo Spitzer, Karl Vossler, Viktor Vinogradov, Boris Ejhenbaum, Jan Mukarovski and others included style in their thesaurus, with which the attention shifted from browsing through non-literary factors […] to formal and aesthetic qualities of literary works« (Juvan, 2003: 3). The researchers at that time stopped asking themselves »Why?«; more and more often the question asked was »What for?«. The real growth of style research started in the 1950s.

Different researchers used different methods to research style. One of the most widely spread methods was structuralism with its key researcher Ferdinand de Saussure, who even »declined the interest in artificial literary language« (Skubic, 2005: 38). Saussure introduced three terms, later used by Leech and Short: langue, parole in langage. Langue is a language system, which exists only within a certain group of people. Parole is practical speech; langage is a social part of the language, which cannot be neither modified nor created by an individual.

Saussure distinguishes two branches of language research: diachronic and synchronic. Thus, he enables that the focus of research concentrated on the manner of language phenomena description (Skubic, 2005: 38). For structuralists »it was not enough to understand the meaning of the text, but they tried to discover the general 'law', which generated stylistic features in literary genres« (Juvan, 2003: 4).

Saussur's concepts were partly taken from functional structuralism (so called Prague School), although a certain part of its concepts were denied. Prague School glorified standard language and stressed the inseparatability of diachronic and synchronic language research. Important researchers of Prague School were Roman Jakobson, Vilem Mathesius, Bohuslav Havranek etc.

Beaugrande (1992: 22) emphasises the fact that early stylistic research limited itself to the sentence as the finished unit, while later research expanded over the limits of the sentence to the complete text (study of the coherence, intercultural studies etc.). The latter is specifically important in the analysis of literary texts. Russian formalists and Prague structuralists were among the first to distinguish literary from non-literary texts. Their primary interests were:

a. describing processes in progress while creating a text and the results of a certain author/authors in a certain time and place;
b. discovering meanings of texts;
c. assessing texts.

Structuralism influenced some Slovenian literary historians, such as France Bernik, Boris Paternu, Jože Pogačnik, Franc Zadravec, Helga Glušič etc. Andrej E. Skubic saw the reason for that in similar social circumstances (Skubic, 2005: 37–40). Literary science was approached from more linguistic point of view by Breda Pogorelec, Jože Toporišič, Martina Orožen, Ada Vidovič–Muha, Janez Dular, Hermina Jug–Kranjec, Marko Stabej etc. (Skubic, 2005: 40; Juvan, 2003: 4).

Slovenian linguist Jože Toporišič (1992: 311) defines style as the use of linguistic possibilities of a certain language; he claims this refers to any linguistic level, tone, form of communication etc.

Leech and Short likewise approach to defining style from linguistic viewpoint. They claim that the style of certain author, era, or genre can be researched. According to them, style is analysed by listing linguistic characteristics in connection to non-linguistic factors (1981: 11).

Leech and Short talk about three approaches to the understanding of style:

- monism,
- dualism and
- pluralism.

Beside style, the contents is very important in all three approaches; the differences are in the understanding of the relationship between them.

III.   MONISM

From monistic viewpoint, style and contents are indivisible. Monism is more appropriate in poetry (where it has roots), where one meaning can be expressed in only one manner (rhetoric figures, such as metaphors, irony etc.). Every change of form consequences in the change of meaning. According to monistic viewpoint, the following sentences differ in contents: I slept badly. / I suffered from insomnia. / I did not close my eye. The first paragraph under each heading or subheading should be flush left, and subsequent paragraphs should have a five-space indentation. A colon is inserted before an equation is presented, but there is no punctuation following the equation. All equations are numbered and referred to in the text solely by a number enclosed in a round bracket (i.e., (3) reads as "equation 3"). Ensure that any miscellaneous numbering system you use in your paper cannot be confused with a reference [4] or an equation (3) designation.

IV.   DUALISM

Dualism anticipates a gap between style and contents, therefore it is more useful in prose. One branch claims that there is a difference between what the author wishes to say and how the idea is told / presented to the reader. The other branch stresses that style is actually part of a choice of how to write. Style is therefore subordinate to the form, so the same contents can be presented in various different ways. Thus, there are stylistic variations with different stylistic values. Contents and form are subordinate to the reader and the purpose. It can be deduced that contents and form depend on reader and purpose.

Juvan (2003: 6–11) sees the following disadvantages of dualism or binary oppositions:

1. He discards dualism on a simple case of the following sentence: I slept badly.

This sentence should be – according to dualism – completely with no style, while the use of any stylistic figure would create a style. Juvan exemplifies this with a personification (I suffered from insomnia.) and hyperbole (Infinitive hours passed without my closing an eye.). Unlike the first sentence, the latter two should have a style. Such theories are now long outlived since it has been long known and accepted that each section from any text has a certain style or can be assigned with a certain figure.

2. The very opposite to monism seems a statement that the same contents can be told in infinitive number of ways (the only limitations being the language itself and one's linguistic capabilities) since this dualistic concept of style says that »style derives from the choice between options, which are at hand in a certain linguistic system and from variational verbalisation of the same referential contents…« (Juvan, 2003: 8). Juvan discards this theory (2003: 9–10):

a. Stylistic impression does not arouse only from varieties of linguistic expression.

b. stylistic impression while reading two texts […] arouses social, historical, cultural and ideological associations […].

3. It is more difficult to discard the understanding of style as a deviance from generally accepted norm (grammatical, orthographic etc.). Empirical definitions / theories of style are relatively common. Style should be a message, told with a certain frequency of use of linguistic means [i], especially if they differ from norms.

Bach (In Leech and Short, 1981) claims that the style could be »measured« by numbering deviances from accepted norms. If a researcher finds an example of a deviance, he should determine with a thorough reading of the text if it is style-forming. A lone deviance is not yet such. But Juvan, Leech and Short all warn of a very important dilemmas: what is norm and how to determine it. The fact is that »norm and deviance are statistic quantities, i.e. the average distribution of a linguistic phenomena and its quantitative representation in a certain material/text« (Juvan: 2003: 7). Linguistic norms are clearly written in grammars, dictionaries, orthographies, but there is no such stylistic norms since they are impossible to be determined. As an example Short and Leech (1981: 43-4) state the length of the sentence. The fact is that if one would want to credibly proved that one author's sentences are unusually long, one would have to count the number of words in all literary texts in a certain period, calculate the average number and then compare it with the average of a chosen author. Such work is practically impossible and meaningless.

As Leech and Short (1981: 51) warn, norms in stylistics are relative. However, the reader himself is responsible for the relativity of the norm. The norm »depends on a reader's sociolinguistic and literary competences« (Juvan,

2003: 8). A literary proficient author, who (partly) knows the literary canon of an author, the period, author's culture etc. will differently experience deviances than less educated reader. Linguistic competences play an important role.

The relativity of norm is also proven by the fact, that it is »psychologically, socially, culturally, and historically changeable« (Juvan, 2003: 8). The experience of style therefore depends on the reader's psychological condition, sociological environment of the reader's origin, general knowledge of the cultural background of the reader's origin and on the time of the text origin.

V. PLURALISM

Pluralism includes the third category, which is the level of meaning regarding different functions of language. Thus, the pluralist believes that the language has numerous functions and that the choice of linguistic means is the result of a choice on different functional levels. Pluralist wishes to distinguish between different meanings regarding different functions. One of the pluralists, Kitty van Leuven-Zwart (1989), lists the following language functions: interpersonal function, ideational function, and textual function.

The interpersonal function means establishing a connection (relationship) between a writer and a reader (microlevel) – the use of linguistic means for regulating and use of these connections, i.e. formality, hierarchy, distance etc. On the macrolevel it is suited by coding different hierarchies of social relationships into a text: it is a tone of a text (Skubic, 2005: 78).

Ideational function is the way of presenting fictional world. On microlevel it is corresponded by different aspects of the use of linguistic means for expressive objective meanings and their combining into more complex meanings. On the macrolevel it is corresponded by the activities of the language; it is the area of the language (Skubic, 2005: 78).

Textual fiction is the way of structuring text and language; on the microlevel it is connecting linguistic means into meaningful connections; on the macrolevel it is conventional ways of structuring a text. It is a manner of the text.

All three functions are interwoven and influence every verbal expression. Interpersonal is the most important and conditions the other two.

All three functions work on three levels of meaning: the textual level, narrational level and the level of discourse. The textual level or the level of story is the contents or inner form. It is made of events, characters, setting. Narrational level is the outer form: genre, the order of events, focalisation. The level of discourse is the way of presenting narrational level, i.e. verbalisation, theatre show, film etc. The most important concept on this level is the narrator, who is the link between the fictional world and the reader.

It would be naive to claim that any of these aspects is more correct or better. Each contributes to a more complete understanding of what style is. To fully understand one author's style, one must not forget that within a single work style has its variations, which follow different patterns. The most important are:

a. evolutional pattern, where the style evolves together with the character;

b. change, where style changes together with the person in focus.

In 1980s the then known concepts of style were becoming outdated.

Juvan (2003: 5–6) enumerates the following drawbacks of the then known concepts of style:

1. Literary stylistics stresses so called authorial function (i.e. seeing the author as the only authoritative owner and supervisor of the meanings in the text), establishing style as the virtue of the text and persisted in the ideology of estetics.

2. The term of style is too wide. Thus, the literary researchers need to be assisted by functional linguistics and sociolinguistics, mostly with terminology.

3. The analysis of stylistic features separates the text from the wider socio-historical context.

4. Binary opositions are very doubtful. A conclusion section must be included and should indicate clearly the advantages, limitations, and possible applications of the paper. Although a conclusion may review the main points of the paper, do not replicate the abstract as the conclusion. A conclusion might elaborate on the importance of the work or suggest applications and extensions.

VI. RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF STYLE

In recent years two new terms have appeared in connection to style: identity and identification. According to Juvan (2003: 12) identity is a double construction: narrative-interpretative building of selfness, i.e. the way how individuals comprehend and define themselves, while the identification is equating of a person with something else: groups, social role, ethnicity, gender, race, national identity of an individual and a group.

The approach, which stresses the importance of identity, is called »subject in language«. The founders are Jacques Lacan, Emile Benveniste, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler.

There is a very strong connection between literature and identity. As Meta Grosman (1998) stresses, literature has a very strong impact on a reader's identity. While reading belletrists, we read about other people's experience, which enables us the awareness about possible people's experience, their dimensions and consequences.

Style is more and more often understood as inter-textual concept since the style of one text can be created only in relationship to other texts. Thus, the text through style

copies, repeats and reshapes previously used linguistic structures, with which – according to Juvan (2003: 14) – the logic of textual style is homogenous to the logic of identity.

VII. CONCLUSION

The introduction of the terms of identity and identification have made a significant change in style comprehension since they stress the importance of the reader. Although it will most probably always be a dilemma how to define style, it is quite safe to claim that style changes together with a writer and reader and is dependent on the language, genre, linguistic structures etc.

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[i] Halliday (2004) distinguishes two types of linguistic means in a text: those often used (called *prominence*), who are the base for reader's personal experience of the style, and those, who have artistic motivation (called *literary relevance*); they are both therefore used intentionally to achieve a certain goal. They are connected to so called *foregrounding (emphasizing)*, known from Prague School. Foregrounding is divided into qualitative (deviance from linguistic code) and quantitative (deviance from expected frequency of repetitions).