



Juan M. Hernández-Campoy



Sociolinguistic Styles



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*To my parents,
Manuel Hernández-Carrillo
and
Juana Campoy-González,
with eternal gratitude
for having defined my personal style*

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Series Editor's Preface

In his famous 1961 book, *The Five Clocks*, Martin Joos suggested that it was possible to isolate, in spoken English, five styles. These he labeled frozen or static, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. His work was innovating and very influential; and from the early 1960s onwards there grew up a tradition in sociolinguistics of conceiving of styles as representing varieties of language which are associated with social context, and which differ from other styles in terms of their formality. This means that styles can be ranged on a continuum from very formal (including “static”, in Joos’s terms) to highly informal or colloquial (casual, intimate). It has been common, for example, to point out that, in English, stylistic differentiation is for the most part indicated by lexis; and that lexical items can be ranged on a very long cline of formality, but that there are no such things as discrete stylistic varieties.

In his insightful and highly important treatment of this topic, the distinguished sociolinguist Juan Manuel Hernández-Campoy confirms the importance of the Joosian approach, but he also shows very clearly that things are a good deal more complicated than this. We have to ask questions not just about formality, but also about, for example, what speakers are trying to do when they shift up or down along the stylistic continuum. What is the social meaning of operating at one point along the continuum than another? What role does social interaction play in all this?

Professor Hernández-Campoy’s book is a magnificent, comprehensive, and critical overview of all the major work that has been completed in this field over the half century since Joos. *Sociolinguistic Styles* has been produced by a scholar who has acquired a profound and thorough knowledge and understanding of everything of importance which has been written on this complex subject; who has thoughtfully considered it all; and who is able to evaluate and compare all the different approaches to the issue which have emerged from sociolinguistic research, including his own. This book really does have everything you need to know about sociolinguistic style.

Peter Trudgill

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At the academic level, as always, on principled conviction I owe eternal gratitude to José María Jiménez Cano for having been the first scholar to trust me and for being a constant encouragement in my university life. I have received valuable and privileged feedback on stylistics and style-shifting from Rafael Monroy, David Britain, Juan Antonio Cutillas-Espinosa, and our departed Francisco Gutiérrez; their rich theoretical and methodological suggestions made my ideas much clearer. I am also very grateful for the anonymous reviewers of the initial proposal as well as those of the final manuscript for their meticulous, constructive, and thought-provoking criticism. I owe a special debt to Peter Trudgill, whose work, lectures, and advice have been an endless and invaluable source of inspiration and motivation, encouraging me to undertake this fascinating project.

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Introduction

The word “style” comes etymologically from the Latin “stylos”/stylus” (also spelled “stilos”/stilus”), which referred to a sharp-pointed instrument made of metal, wood, or bone employed for writing letters on waxed tablets (and with a blunt end for erasing them) – indeed, in obsolete English it was a “style” (Verdonk 2006: 196). But “stylus” began to be used metonymically to denote a manner of writing or speaking with effective persuasion, and it was this that was developed as its main characteristic by *rheto*rs and *orato*rs in classical Graeco-Roman times (see 1.1).

A precise definition of style is controversial given the several broad areas in which it appears (see Chapter 1) and the concepts to which it has traditionally been related (see Chapter 2):

I hardly need to note that ‘style’ has meant many things in the rhetorical tradition. Some see style as a matter of clarity. In this view, good style is easy for readers to process. Others see style as a matter of appropriateness. In this view, good style is what readers expect. Style is sometimes described as expressive of self, sometimes as responsive to audience; sometimes as constitutive of truth and sometimes as simply ornamental. And so on. Pedagogies of style sometimes borrow from multiple models. (Johnstone 2010b: 1)

The metonymic notion of “style” developed into how we use language reactively or proactively under specific circumstances and for specific purposes. It requires from the user knowledge of the available as well as the sociolinguistically and pragmatically acceptable linguistic resources in the system for the creation and interpretation of texts and conversational interaction. Style is thus the result of choice from the appropriate range of linguistic means to deliver a particular message effectively (Znamenskaya 2004: 124): “The concepts of ‘style’ and ‘stylistic variation’ in language rest on the general assumption that within the language system, the same content can be encoded in more than one linguistic form” (Mukherjee 2005: 1043). Style is obviously a dimension that belongs more to the plane of expression than to that of content (Galperin 1977/1981: 13). It must therefore, in Galperin’s view (1977/1981: 22), be understood as a technique of expression, where style-shifting constitutes what speakers are doing when they vary their speech from situation to situation depending on the effect they intend to have on addressees (Johnstone 2010b: 1). But given its ability to transmit conceptual, affective, and social meanings, style is a multi-level phenomenon: a coordinated configuration of linguistic features, designed and interpreted holistically as a multidimensional phenomenon (Coupland 2011: 140).

Style in writing refers to the variable ways in which language is used in genres, periods, situations, and by individuals, as traditionally practiced by stylistics (see 1.2) when studying literary and non-literary texts. In this practice, choice within a norm (grammatical, acceptable, or “correct” forms) or deviations from that norm (ungrammatical, unacceptable, or “incorrect” forms) are crucial and consubstantial ingredients. On the other hand, style in spoken language alludes to choice within the available linguistic variation resulting from the social context of conversation – usually defined by the topic and purpose of the interaction as well as the speakers’ socio-demographic, cultural and geographic characteristics – or the intended effect in performative speech, as studied by sociolinguistics. Three main correlates condition linguistic variation: i) the linguistic environment of the variable (its phonological and/or morphological constraints, phonotactics, and so on), ii) the social characteristics of the speaker (such as their age, sex, race, ethnicity, education, income, occupation, links to social networks, group affiliations, or place of residence), and iii) the situation of use (addressee, topic, opportunity for careful production, degree of shared context, and formality) (Finegan and Biber 2001: 235). In fact, Mukherjee (2005: 1043) distinguishes user-bound and situation-bound factors conditioning choice:

Considering style as choice, there are a multitude of stylistic factors that lead the language user to prefer certain linguistic forms to others. These factors can be grouped into two categories: user-bound factors and factors referring to the situation where the language is being used. User-bound factors include, among others, the speaker’s or writer’s age; gender; idiosyncratic preferences; and regional and social background. Situation-bound stylistic factors depend on the given communication situation, such as medium (spoken vs. written); participation in discourse (monologue vs. dialogue); attitude (level of formality); and field of discourse (e.g. technical vs. nontechnical fields).

In sociolinguistics, the study of the relationship between language and society by correlating extralinguistic factors with intralinguistic elements led to an appreciation of the complexities of variability in language systems. Given its ubiquity in language production, style enjoys a pivotal position in this correlation, where *stylistic* variation constitutes a principal component together with *linguistic* and *social* variation (Rickford and Eckert 2001: 1). But, as stressed by Macaulay (1999), despite this centrality in sociolinguistic variation, the study of style within the variationist tradition has been ancillary until very recently: it has been used merely as an independent variable (formality/context/situation parameters) in the correlation of linguistic and extralinguistic variables – mostly linguistic in intent – rather than as a sociolinguistic resource for the investigation of speakers’ style management, its effective use, and how style reflects and transmits social meaning – both social and linguistic (Gadet 2005; Coupland 2007; Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2012b).

This book aims to explore the complex phenomenon of style-shifting in sociolinguistic variation by focusing on its controversial nature, the motivations and mechanisms for its use and effect in the transmission of social meaning, and also presenting an up-to-date and in-depth overview of the different theoretical approaches developed. The critical description of the range of historically different perceptions and theoretical assumptions accounting for its nature and behavior inevitably leads to the consideration not only of sociolinguistics, stylistics, and semiotics but also of ancient arts of verbal discourse such as rhetoric and oratory.

The book is divided into two parts – THE CONCEPT AND NATURE OF STYLE AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC MODELS OF STYLE-SHIFTING – and seven chapters, trying to differentiate the conceptual and definitional treatment of style as a linguistic phenomenon and the sociolinguistic approaches developed to account for its nature. These different approaches

are critically presented (including their limitations and also the work that has been most influential on them) and illustrated with examples, with special emphasis on the methodologies used. Some approaches follow a unidimensional framework in that they are either derivative of attention to speech or reactive to audience-related concerns. Others draw on a multidimensional model, focusing on the speaker's agency and viewing stylistic variation as a resource in the performing (active creation, presentation, and even re-creation) of speakers' personal and interpersonal social identity.

Chapter 1 deals with the perception and treatment of style-shifting in rhetoric, stylistics, semiotics, and, more recently, in sociolinguistics, and will help us understand some contemporary theoretical models developed to explain this phenomenon. The importance of style was explicitly addressed in the work of Greek and Roman thinkers in ancient rhetoric and oratory, with the role of rhetors, sophists, and, later, orators. Stylistics and semiotics focused on the study of style in literary and non-literary texts in association with genre, as well as with choice, norm-deviation, and recurrence. Currently, in sociolinguistics, the different approaches have allowed a distinction between *interspeaker* (social) and *intraspeaker* (stylistic) variation and, recently, with reactive (responsive) or proactive (initiative) motivations for style-shifting through speakers' agency in society.

Chapter 2 differentiates between the linguistic and the social meaning of stylistic variation. The phenomenon of style-shifting and its controversial essence are examined here, shedding light on the motivations for the use of stylistic variation and its effect on the construction and transmission of social meaning not just linguistically and conceptually, but mostly – and crucially – at sociolinguistic and pragmatic levels. Style is contrasted with concepts such as dialect, accent, repertoire, genre, register, slang, cant, and argot, with which, due to its inherent extralinguistic connotations, it is often confused. The connections between styling in language and the projection of social meaning in the form of identity and ideology are also scrutinized.

In Chapter 3 William Labov's model accounting for style is presented after reviewing the philosophical foundations of Variation Theory and the main assumptions and principles leading to the formality continuum construct. Known as the "universal factor", style-shifting is understood as a social reaction (response) to a situation, which makes speakers self-monitor their speech more or less consciously. The Attention to Speech Model alludes to a reflection of the speaker's awareness and attention to their own speech depending on external factors (topic, addressee, audience, and situation), which determine the linguistic variety to be employed. Style was thus understood in a narrow sense, focusing on context and topic mainly – but very cursorily – on speaker and listener. Consequently, it has been restricted to different varieties of language produced by different degrees of formality in particular situations and with particular interlocutors.

Chapter 4 analyses the model developed by Allan Bell, emphasizing the theoretical foundations that inspire it, such as social psychology and accommodation, on the one hand, and Bakhtin and dialogism, on the other. The Style Axiom states that people normally engage in style-shifting in response to audience members, rather than situations and shifts in amount of attention paid to speech, stylistic variation thus derives from social variation. The Audience Design theory (AD) therefore saw stylistic variation as the result of adaptation to the characteristics of an audience, whether present or absent.

Chapter 5 describes the communicative functional model for style-shifting developed by Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan with the Register Axiom and its theoretical foundations – mostly Firthian and neo-Firthian linguistics of the context of situation and

Hallidayan register theory. Here, style is basically context-dependent and social class differentiation is just an echo of the different registers that are most commonly used in one's professional and personal life.

Chapter 6 deals with the recent social constructionist approaches that, underlining speaker's agency, view stylistic variation as a resource for creating as well as projecting one's persona, self-monitoring the performing of the speaker's personal and interpersonal social identity through speech. Style-shifting is now understood as a proactive (initiative) rather than responsive (reactive) phenomenon.

In conclusion, Chapter 7 is concerned with theoretical and methodological prospects for the study of style-shifting. Special emphasis is given to the fact that style is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that cannot be modeled on a single unidimensional theoretical framework, as in the past. Style studies are now coming to understand that the boundaries between the three main components of sociolinguistic variation – *stylistic*, *linguistic*, and *social* – are permeable. Recent trends are focusing on the socially constructive potential of style-shifting in order to find out how sociolinguistic variation interfaces with other dimensions of meaning-making in discourse. These approaches focus on the proactive facet of style-shifting and the individuality of speakers, where self-identity requires creativity and agency, and where the individual voice is seen as an active – rather than passive – agent for the transmission of sociolinguistic meaning (identificational, ideological, and interactional).

Styles represent our ability to take up different social positions, because styling is a powerful device for linguistic performance, rhetorical stance-taking, and identity projection. Accordingly, as claimed previously (Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2010, 2012b), there is a need to develop permeable and flexible multidimensional, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary approaches to speaker agency that assume not only reactive but also proactive motivations for stylistic variation, and where individuals – rather than groups – and their strategies are the main concern for style-shifting in social interaction.

Molina de Segura and Bullas (Murcia), November 2014

Part I

The Concept and Nature of Style

