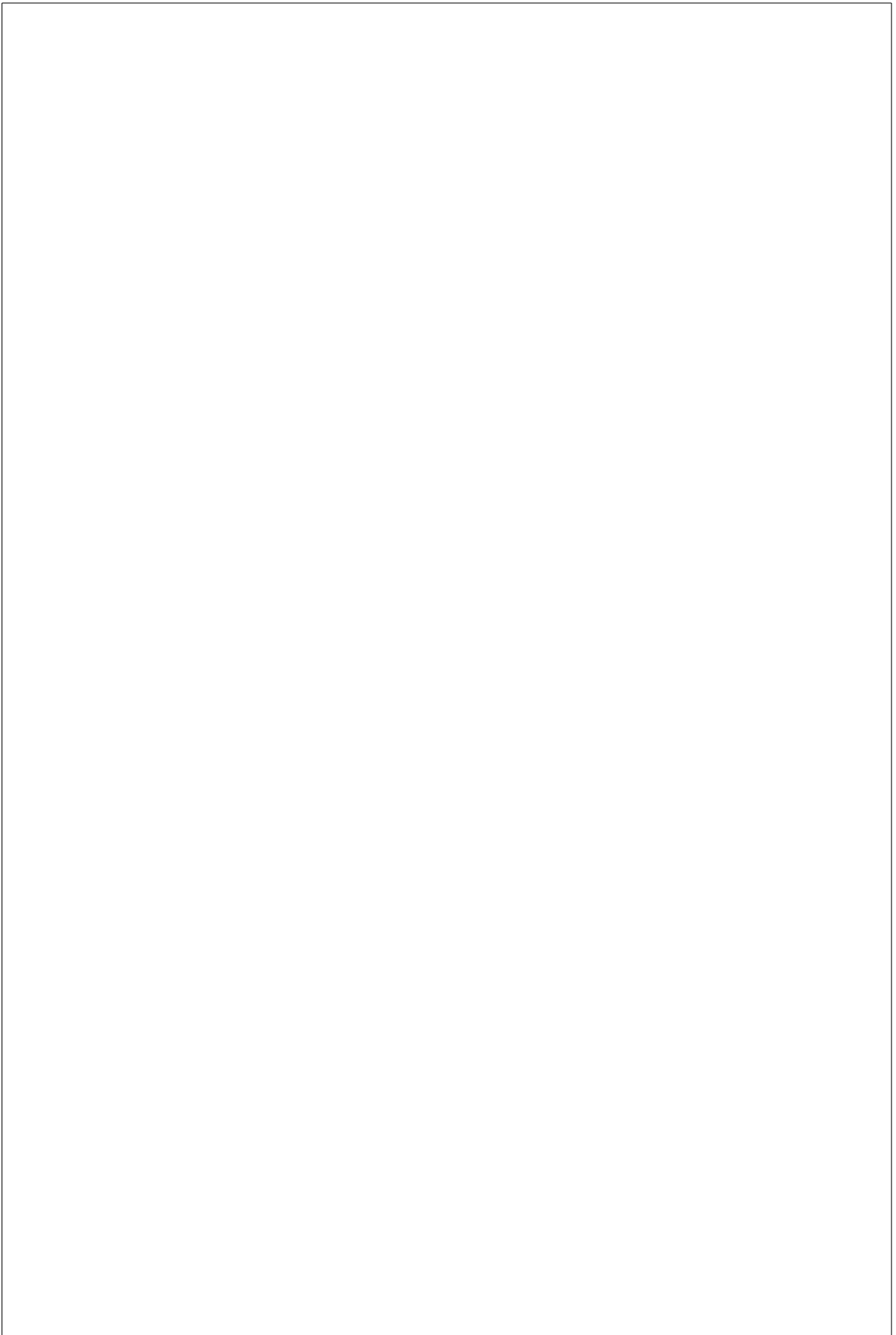


# **Unit One**

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## **A Framework of Analysis of Style**

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# 1 PROCEDURE OF ANALYSIS

There is no foolproof technique for analysing style, and each analysis may be compared to “an adventure of discovery”. Linguists suggest that we need a flexible method. The following points may prove to be useful in our practice.

## 1.1 THE CONCEPT OF TEXT

The first term we need to define is “text”, because it is the natural starting place for the study of style.

A TEXT is any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that forms a unified whole. It may be the product of a single speaker/writer (e.g. a sign, a letter, a news report, a statute, a novel), or that of several speakers (e.g. a piece of conversation, a debate).

A text is realized by a sequence of language units, whether they are sentences or not. The connection among parts of a text is achieved by various cohesive devices, and by semantic and pragmatic implication. Let us construct a text from the following disconnected sentences.

- (1) a. Two boys stood near a jeweller's shop.
  - b. Two boys saw a man break a window of a jeweller's shop and steal all the watches.
  - c. Two boys took a man with several watches in his hand for a thief.
  - d. Two boys ran after a man with several watches in his hand.

To connect the sentences into a text, we need to make several modifications so that the sentences become cohesive with one another.

(2) Two boys stood near a jeweller's shop. They saw a man break the shop window and steal all the watches. They ran after him, because they took him for a thief.

In the text you may notice the following modifications, which serve as grammatical cohesive devices:

(a) the use of the definite article on second mention, e.g.

a shop → the shop

a man → the man

(b) the substitution of pronouns for nouns, e.g.

two boys → they

(c) the use of conjunction, e.g.

They ran after him, because...

The lexical cohesion in the text is realized by the collocation of the words that are in some way or other typically associated with one another, e.g. *steal* with *thief*; *jeweller's shop* with *watches*.

Let us examine another example, in which linguistic units are not overtly cohesive.

(3) A: See who that is.

B: I'm in pyjamas.

A: OK.

In example (3) the relevance of B's remark to A's first remark is conveyed by pragmatic implication. "I'm in pyjamas" implies an excuse for not complying with A's command (= "No, I can't, because I'm in pyjamas."). A's second remark implies that he accepts B's excuse and undertakes to do himself what he originally asked B to do (= "OK. I'll go myself and see.").

Texts are therefore recognized as appropriately coherent in actual use. A full understanding of a text is often impossible without reference to the context in which it occurs.

(4) Pollution is a menace to us all.

(a sign on a beach)

Functioning as a sign on a beach, example (4) is not simply a generalized statement, but a request for not polluting the particular beach.

The content of each text is organized and presented according to various relational structures (e.g. cause and effect, general and particular; matching or contrast), and genre schemes (i.e. the distinctive and characteristic forms of different types of texts, such as the form of a letter, a recipe, a legal document, a poem, or a play).

## NOTE

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It is arguable, however, most of our everyday conversation is not as coherent or well-formed as we have generalized in this section.

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## 1.2 THE CONCEPT OF CONTEXT

The discussion of “text” naturally leads to the discussion of “context”, because an understanding of the meaning of a linguistic unit or a text depends upon a knowledge of the context in which the unit or text occurs.

“Context” has been understood in various ways. It may be linguistic or extra-linguistic. Linguistic context is alternatively termed as CO-TEXT, which refers to the linguistic units preceding and/or following a particular linguistic unit in a text. Extra-linguistic context (interchangeable with CONTEXT OF SITUATION) refers to the relevant features of the situation in which a text has meaning. Taking on a broader sense, the term CONTEXT may include not only the co-text (if there is any), but also the extra-linguistic context of a text.

Contextual factors that are socially, regionally or situationally relevant to the production and interpretation of texts fall into the two following categories:

- (i) Characteristics of the USER of language
  - a. Age
  - b. Sex
  - c. Socio-regional or ethnic background<sup>1</sup>
  - d. Education
- (ii) Characteristics of the USE of language in situation
  - a. Medium of communication: speech or writing
  - b. Setting: private or public
  - c. Role-relationship between addresser and addressee: the degree

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1. In the United States, someone from Brooklyn may joke about the Southerner's definition of sex by telling you that sex is fo' less than tin.... Some regional dialects clearly have stereotyped pronunciations associated with them.

- of intimacy; the degree of social distance
- d. Purpose for which language is used: e.g. to inform; to command; to express feelings; to establish social relations, etc.
- e. Subject matter (of limited stylistic significance)

Linguists have emphasized the role of contexts of situation as determinants of style. There is an observable match (CORRELATION) between linguistic features and contextual factors. Let us compare some examples conveying more or less the same idea of asking somebody to close a door.

- ( 5 ) I'm sorry to trouble you, but could I ask you to close the door for me, please.
- ( 6 ) Would you mind closing the door (please)?
- ( 7 ) I could do without the draught from that door.
- ( 8 ) Shut the doör, won't you.
- ( 9 ) Shut the doër, will you!<sup>1</sup>
- (10) Door!
- (11) Were you born (AmE: raised) in a barn?
- (12) I know a little boy who never leaves the door open.

These sentences differ from each other in linguistic form:

- (8) and (9) differ in the choice of a question tag and in intonation pattern;
- (6), (7) and (10) in syntactic structure;
- (5), (7) and (11) in the choice of words or expressions.

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1. cf. Pinter's *Trouble in the Works*  
 Fibbs: Ah, Wills. Good. Come in.  
 Sit down will you?

Fig.1.2

CONTEXT OF SITUATION	SPEAKER'S POSSIBLE CHOICE
i. Setting	
Public	(5) – (10)
Private	(8) – (12)
ii. Speaker-Hearer relationship	
Distant	(5) – (8)
Intimate	(9) – (12)
iii. Speaker's intention	
To request	(5), (6), (8)
To hint	(7)
To persuade	(12)
To command	(9), (10)
To rebuke	(11)

To ask somebody to close the door, a speaker may choose one from the above examples in accordance with the context of situation. (see Fig. 1. 2)

When any of the contextual factors changes, the entire style complex (linguistic form) will most probably have to be re-arranged: a different word or phrase, a different grammatical structure, with a different intonation pattern or accent, will be used, thereby changing the nuance of meaning of the message. Moreover, with the change of contextual factors, the same linguistic form may communicate a different meaning. Take sentence (5) for example. It indicates courtesy if said to a stranger; but the polite form manifests irritation and displeasure if the speaker and the hearer are usually on familiar terms.

Nevertheless, two points should be noted. First, linguistic features do not usually correlate with contextual factors in a neat one-for-one way. There is often a range of linguistic appropriateness and acceptability to a given context of situation: linguistic features  $L_1$ ,  $L_2$ , and  $L_3$  may all be acceptable to the context  $C_1$ , with  $L_1$  being



the most appropriate. Similarly, the choice of  $L_1$  does not necessarily presuppose the context  $C_1$ ;  $L_1$  may also be identified with context  $C_2$  or  $C_3$ . These can be illustrated by the following two figures:



Second, the manipulation of language in turn may sometimes influence the context. For example,

(13) (Jenny comes to Alan's house. She is conducting a survey for the Government.)

Alan: Won't you come in, Miss-er-.

Jenny: Cartwright, Jenny Cartwright.

Alan: I'm Alan Marlow.

(Alan shows Jenny into the living room.)

Alan: Oh won't you make yourself comfortable, Jenny?

(After some minutes of talk, which is omitted here)

Jenny: Mr Marlow...

Alan: Call me Alan.

(*The Marlows*, Episode 11)

The context shows clearly that Alan and Jenny are total strangers. The conventional address form between strangers is Title + Surname (Mr/Miss So-and-so). But Alan addresses the girl by her first name and later asks her to do the same. His adoption of first-naming is an example of the manipulation of language. It is a move towards a friendlier relationship, indicating that Alan does not want their encounter to be formal and distant, as it is customary between strangers. In contrast, Jenny chooses to remain formal and distant by addressing Alan as "Mr Marlow".

### 1.3 LEVELS OF LINGUISTIC DESCRIPTION

In order to capture the stylistic characteristics of a text, we have to describe the text's verbal properties in a rigorous way. Any piece of spoken or written language (i.e. a text) can be described or analysed in terms of two distinct, though interacting, levels:

- (i) The phonological/graphological level;
- (ii) The lexicogrammatical level.

PHONOLOGY is defined as the system of speech sounds in a language (phonemes, stress, rhythm, intonation). GRAPHOLOGY refers to the writing system of a language (spelling, punctuation marks, capitalization, type style, etc.); it forms an alternative system of realization to phonology, since an utterance must make either a spoken or a written form. The lexicogrammatical system consists of vocabulary and syntactic structures. For example,

(14) A: /tɪm feɪld (h) ɪz tɛst /

B: /tɪm feɪld (h) ɪz tɛst /

(15) A: Tim failed his test.

B: Tim failed his test?

Example (14) is the phonological representation of an exchange between two speakers. It is rendered as (15) in written form. If we compare A's and B's utterances at the phonological level, we notice that they differ in intonation: A's falling tone asserts a fact of which he is certain; B's rising tone expresses some uncertainty about what he has heard. This difference in intonation is realized at the graphological level by the use of punctuation marks: a full stop for A's statement; a question mark for B's question. At the lexicogrammatical level the two utterances are almost identical in that (i) the

same words are chosen, and (ii) the same syntactic structure is adopted. In B's question, the order of a declarative is retained instead of the usual order of a yes-no question ("Did he fail his test?"). This is an echo question which repeats the whole of what has been said by A. It functions as a request for confirmation (= "Did you say he failed his test?"), because, probably, B has not quite caught A's words, or B cannot believe his ears.

Such analysis is a means to make students examine language features systematically, so that items of potential significance may not be overlooked.

#### 1.4 CONSISTENCY AND RELATIVE FREQUENCY

Generally, we recognize a style only when certain choices of language features recur or prevail in a text. To substantiate our observation, frequencies of certain language features should be computed. In order to verify the observation that the style of a certain text is written/spoken and formal/informal, we need to know the percentage of content words, the percentage of Latinate/Anglo-Saxon words, the ratio of dependent to independent clauses, and other linguistic data. But style is such a complicated phenomenon that it cannot be defined by a mere computation of frequencies. What is more, local features, set against pervasive features may become contrastively salient and therefore stylistically significant (e.g. Some polite forms appearing in a familiar style may indicate humour or sarcasm.). Obviously, the use of statistical data should be adapted to the need of a given case.

#### 1.5 THE PLACING OF A TEXT

Since a text necessarily implies a context, the analysis of the style of a text should not be isolated from the examination of the relevant

contextual factors. The matching of a text with its context is termed the PLACING OF A TEXT (or: CONTEXTUALIZATION). The placing of a text is carried out in several dimensions.

In the first place, linguistic features of a given text should be compared with a set of relative norms of language in use (e.g. relative norms for spoken/written varieties, for formal/informal style, etc.). By “relative norms” we mean the ranges of linguistic appropriateness to various contexts of situation. They are considered “norms”, because conventionally people observe them in their verbal communication. They are “relative”, because (i) there is often a range of possible language choices for a given situation, and (ii) any norm is subject to violation when the user deems it to be necessary. Let us turn to an example which we have analysed in section 0.4 already.

(16) Policeman: What’s your name, boy?

Black psychiatrist: Dr Poussaint. I’m a physician.

Policeman: What’s your first name, boy?

Black psychiatrist: Alvin.

The first use of “boy” by the policeman should be compared with (i) the norm for addressing an unknown adult formally and politely (e.g. “sir”); (ii) the norm for using “boy” as an address form. His second use of “boy” can be compared with the norm in the United States for addressing a physician (e.g. “Dr So-and-so”).

Clearly, some knowledge of various relative norms in language use is the basis for the placing of a text. Without such knowledge we are unable to recognize the style of a text which may be a deviation from one norm or an approximation to another norm.

A text should further be contextualized in terms of its genre, its historical period or cultural background. In fact, the greater our knowledge of the language and the world, the better are we

equipped in the “adventure of discovery”. The achievement of this objective would be beyond the scope of stylistics, to say nothing of the present elementary coursebook.

## NOTE

The study of style is the study of distinctions: looking at what was said against what might have been said.

### 1.6 PRINCIPLE OF COMPARISON

The distinction of a style cannot be perceived without comparison. The selection of language features for an analysis is based on comparison: we define a regional style by matching it against Standard English. We analyse an individual's style by matching it against that of a group of people. We study literary language through comparisons with various relative norms of non-literary language.

Sometimes, we have to suggest variants to a given language unit or text for comparison's sake. Take the degree of politeness in making requests for example. According to the convention, the more indirect the wording, the more polite. But this is a general statement, and does not specify any language forms that constitute the norm. A comparison of example (17) and its variants may help us to locate the degree of indirectness in example (17).

(17) Students are asked to remind themselves of the rules of the library.

(17a) a comparison with variants (set A)

Direct	<u>You should</u>	} remind yourselves of...
↑ ↓	<u>You are asked to</u>	
Indirect	<u>Students are asked to</u>	remind themselves of...

(17b) a comparison with variants (set B)

<b>Direct</b>	Students are asked <u>to obey</u> the rules...
	<u>not to violate</u> the rules...
	<u>to bear in mind</u> the rules...
	<u>to remind themselves</u> of the rules...
<b>Indirect</b>	

### NOTE

In order to keep to the point of indirect expression of politeness, a discussion of the difference in word meaning has been left out. We have not compared the different degrees of politeness expressed by the choice of different words such as *request*, *ask*, *tell*, *instruct*, *forbid*, etc.

## 1.7 SUMMARY: A PROCEDURE OF ANALYSIS

The procedure of stylistic analysis sketched so far can be summarized as follows:

- (i) Analysis of the language features of a text into two levels;
- (ii) Computation of relevant frequencies of language features according to needs (see section 1.4);
- (iii) Contextualization in terms of the social factors influencing a language event (see section 1.5).

But the procedure is not yet complete; we need to synthesize the available linguistic data. The synthesis may involve the examination of the following aspects.

- (a) the prevailing tendency of the language features at one level;
- (b) the arrangement or pattern of the language features at the same level (e.g. the juxtaposition or contrast of two different types of features);

- (c) the inter-level relationship of various features (Features at one level may explain or reinforce features at the other level. See 2.1.2 for examples.);
- (d) the cohesion of a text;
- (e) the relational structure of a text;
- (f) the relation between language and genre scheme;
- (g) linguistic appropriateness/inappropriateness to the subject matter (e.g. a very formal and pompous tone adopted in dealing with a trivial, mundane matter).

The suggested procedure may serve as a guide to the analysis of style. But, as mentioned earlier, there must be some flexibility in following the procedure. We may adhere to the procedure closely, we may shift the order of analysis, or we may omit some of the procedural work if allowable. In a word, we should adapt the procedure to our needs in a particular case of investigating style.

For the remainder of Unit One we shall discuss a selection of potential style markers. Such knowledge is essential for carrying out linguistic analysis.