■ *Norma Mendoza-Denton*
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Style

Style, long shunned by postmoderns and identified in critical theoretic circles with an author-centered approach to literature known as stylistics, now enjoys a resurgence driven by an explosion and rearticulation of its definition. Structuralist concepts of style as the deviation of a message from its coded (habitual) norm now lie in tatters, as do the sociolinguistic all-or-nothing dichotomies: formal/casual, read/spontaneous. In the aftermath of the turmoil, linguistic style is defined not as still product but as relentless epiphenomenal process, a context-sensitive interaction between speakers' balance of innovative and conventional elements in their repertoire and hearers' expectations, together with the resultant attributions and interpretations that may or may not be intended by or known to the speaker. Linguistic style is the implementation, at any given time, of a combination of features from the many varieties (such as California Chicano English, or Standardized British English), registers (such as baby talk), and performance genres (e.g., sermon, advice, proverb) at that speaker's disposal. But style does not emerge unmediated from the speaker: it is continuously modulated as it is accomplished, co-produced by audience, addressees, and referees, sensitive to characteristics of these as well as to delicate contextual factors such as presence of an overhearer. Style can be extremely self-conscious, laying claim to identity even in the most "informal" circumstance (as any walk through a high-school cafeteria will make evident); at the same time it can be habitual and routinized, so well worn a groove that it resists attempts at change.

Early sociolinguistic studies found linguistic differences at all levels of the grammar between carefully elicited formal and informal speech in interview settings. These studies viewed style as a metric for attention paid to speech, a meta-awareness of the linguistic correlates of social hierarchy that would motivate a speaker to attempt to use the most prestigious, standard code in the formal section of the interview. An overshoot of this prestigious target became known as hypercorrection. Hypercorrection was taken

Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 9(1–2):238–240.

as a powerful piece of evidence that the entire speech community oriented toward—but not all parts of it had access to—the same standard code. Sociolinguists (usually strangers to the interviewees) attempted to manipulate the level of formality as the interview progressed, trying to make it more informal; the aim was both to simulate the conditions of an ordinary conversation and to reduce the effects of observation. Interviewers tried to elicit the vernacular by identifying particular topics of common experience (such as the danger of death) where interviewees were thought to become more attentive to content and less to the form of their own speech. The result over the course of thirty years has been the establishment of a paradigm: impressive, replicable graphs show linguistic patterns in diverse sites correlating with speakers' elicited style and cross-correlating with other factors similarly predefined by the researcher (such as age group or socioeconomic status). These cross-correlations have ossified into associations between two rigidly polarized definitions of styles, with one end of the continuum associating informal-vernacular-stigmatized-innovative-working-class-young and the other formal-standard-prestigious-conservative-middle-class-old. One of the problems that we have inherited from this line of research is the difficulty of disentangling these sets of opposites and of considering that linguistic features do not have a one-to-one correspondence with either social identity or functional meaning. An inevitable observer's paradox also remains, as interviewers concede that even casual asides by interviewees to their relatives differ tremendously from the most informal speech that a strange interviewer can elicit. From the sociolinguistic springboard of controlled interview data have emerged studies of style that focus on naturally occurring and naturalistic speech settings, where research turned to the question of style-shifting in the course of speech events or as a function of variable factors in the speech situation. Audio recordings of workplace settings, especially broadcast media, have provided researchers with extensive data sets and led to various theories on the correlation between style-shifting and contextual factors such as topic, participants, familiarity, channel, audience, addressee, and attitudes, among others. In many cases speakers' responses to contextual factors were measured by the quantified presence of local dialect features (versus broader, implicitly style-less standard features), and found to mirror characteristics of the listening audience, specific addressees, and persons to whom the speakers referred (referees). Studies under this framework commonly hold that rather than paying attention to their own speech, speakers actively design and target their speech for an audience based on implicit assessments of its characteristics. Without a specific audience, speakers associated topics with an imaginary audience. Work-related topics, for instance, would trigger the use of speech like that of people in a speaker's workplace. Feature co-occurrence and alternation are important for establishing the patterning of features that constitutes a given style. Another strand in style research is that of style as poetics and performance, where features of utterances are organized in such a way that the organization calls attention to itself, and style is put on display for enjoyment, evaluation, and scrutiny by an audience.

The emphasis on performance connects to the question of how different styles emerge. Studies of repetition and ritualization in language suggest that item frequency, markedness, and social evaluation are all important factors in the crystallization of styles. Additional components of style that are currently being brought into focus are extralinguistic, embodied, and material components which contribute to a new understanding of the articulation of linguistic styles with larger frames of symbolic behavior. In my own research with adolescent Latinas in the Bay Area of Northern California, fine distinctions in social networks and gang membership were associated with differences in the use of makeup and clothing, and correlated with the variable use of morphophonologically salient, high-frequency discourse markers. Like any other social actors, these adolescent girls simultaneously draw from the linguistic and extralinguistic realms for bricolage, fashioning styles that are not only linguistically identifiable and socially named, but also embodied, symbolically coherent and aesthetically unified.

(See also *codes, genre, heteroglossia, inference, participation, performativity, register, switching, variation, voice*)

Bibliography

Bell, Alan
1984 Language Style as Audience Design. Language in Society 13:145—204.

Biber, Douglas, and Edward Finegan, eds.
1994 Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register. New York: Oxford University Press.

Coupland, Nikolas
1980 Style-shifting in a Cardiff Work Setting. Language in Society 9:1–12.

Eckert, Penelope
1988 Adolescent Social Structure and the Spread of Linguistic Change. Language in Society 17:183–207.

Ervin-Tripp, Susan M.
1972 On Sociolinguistic Rules: Alternation and Co-occurrence. *In* Directions in Sociolinguistics. John J. Gumpertz and Dell Hymes, eds. Pp. 213–250. New York: Hold.

Labov, William
1972 Sociolinguistic Patterns. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Mendoza-Denton, Norma
1997 Chicana/Mexicana Identity and Linguistic Variation: An Ethnographic and Sociolinguistic Study of Gang Affiliation in an Urban High School. Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Stanford University.

Department of Anthropology
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ 85721-0030
nmd@u.arizona.edu