

Varieties of Media Language

Dauglas Biber

- Written registers in English have undergone extensive stylistic change over the past four centuries
- In the 17th century written prose registers were different from conversational registers
- In the 18th century it became more distinct
- In the 19th and 20th centuries popular written registers like letters, fiction and essays, became more similar to spoken registers

- Samuel Johnson and Benjamin Franklin in the eighteenth century argued for elaborated and ornamental writing. Middle class writers like Defoe and Richardson addressed middle class readers.
- In the nineteenth century, there was mass schooling and demand of wider reading public for more accessible written prose and linguistic norms began to shift towards more accessible oral style.

- In contrast, readers of medical research prose, science prose and legal prose became more specialized in their backgrounds and training as well as in their linguistic form.
- Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, newspaper prose was similar to academic prose. However, more oral style began to influence newspaper prose towards the end of the nineteenth century and the change was more marked in the twentieth century.

- Over the past few decades, these changes towards more oral styles in newspaper language have accelerated.
- The informational explosion has resulted in pressure to communicate information as efficiently and economically as possible resulting in compressed style.

