

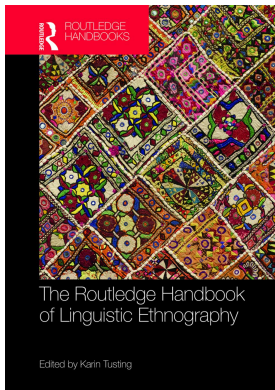
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Style and stylisation

Jürgen Jaspers and Sarah Van Hoof

Introduction

Throughout their lives, language users acquire, cultivate, identify and act upon different ways of speaking and writing that scholars customarily call ‘styles’ or, less regularly, ‘registers’. Conventional labels that people use for such styles are ‘slang’, ‘posh’, ‘polite speech’, ‘announcing’, ‘informal talk’, ‘lecturing’, ‘dialect’, ‘hip hop language’ and many others. Such labels draw attention to verbal behaviour, but styles are probably best described as cultural models of interaction (cf. Agha, 2007, p. 4): apart from deploying specific linguistic features, ‘lecturing’, to give one example, often involves a higher voice volume and a slower rhythm of speech, gestures to underline explanations, and until not so long ago, wearing a costume or gown. Those who follow the lecture adopt a range of matching signs: they are mostly silent, nod their heads (or feign they are listening), take notes and raise their hand to ask a question. ‘Lecturing’ equally hints at particular types of interlocutors and the social relations between them (students and their lecturer rather than, say, lovers), at a specific location (a lecture hall), and at different speaking rights (lecturers talk much more than their students).

‘Lecturing’, in other words, is a short-cut name, or more precisely, a ‘metasign’ (Agha 2007: 22), for the complex choreography of semiotic resources that interactants set up to make clear to each other what it is that they are doing. In this sense, a style offers a template for social activity, or a recipe that tells us which semiotic ingredients to combine and how, and which ones to leave out to avoid giving the wrong impression. Of course, like all recipes, styles are amenable to change, half-hearted enactment, partial learning, rejection or extinction – many lecturers today dress relatively informally and prefer a conversational over a declamatory style. In most societies too, some styles are held up as exemplary (for example, as ‘the standard’), while others are discouraged. Exemplary styles and those related to specific professions and pastimes are often only acquired by a subset of the population, though they may be observable by millions (for example, on television). As a result we all learn to use a number of styles that circulate in a particular society, and we learn to recognise many more than we can produce ourselves (Agha, 2004; Auer, 2007).

Sociolinguists have in the last 50 years attended to when and why groups of speakers shift between styles, and adopt (features of) styles, in order to study how such adoptions impact on

the dynamics of a language as a whole. Rather than on lecturing or slang, this work initially concentrated on the varying uses speakers make of ‘vernacular’ and ‘prestigious’ linguistic features, on how their relative usage corresponds with speaker characteristics, their self-presentation and situational changes (from informal to formal, for example). Many scholars have traced style shifts through frequency counts in large corpora that subdivide speakers according to a limited set of broad social categories like class, age and gender. Others have later applied ethnographic methods to identify how linguistic features, types of demeanour or dress, and contexts of use are associated with local social categories. Today, scholars tend to see styles as multimodal complexes of linguistic and other semiotic practices produced in situated interaction, and they demonstrate speakers’ regular use of these combined resources through quantitative or qualitative methods. In all of these cases, speakers are seen to commit to the style selection, and the selection is seen as relatively inconspicuous: it is not unexpected, or not surprising given the situation.

Linguistic ethnographers have observed, however, that speakers can also ‘stylise’, i.e. suddenly, momentarily, and in an exaggerated manner produce particular styles that lie beyond their regular linguistic repertoires, or beyond what is conventional in the situation at hand – think of a student who briefly shifts into a lecturing style to address a friend in the pub. Speakers in so doing interrupt the routine and turn others into spectators of a brief performance. Such eye-catching style choices, so-called ‘stylisations’, have been investigated to reveal how stylisers interpret the on-going situation, and how they position themselves in that situation and in the social world beyond it. Rather than focussing attention on the changes the language as a whole may incur, it is directed here towards the micro-level of individual speaker moves and their often critical stance towards established social and linguistic trends. Analyses of stylisations are thus mostly qualitative, case-study-based, and in principle open to an infinite set of local and non-local speaker characteristics.

This suggests that the study of style and stylisation moves in orthogonal directions (demonstrating regular language behaviour vs. explaining irregular, if not ‘fake’, activity). We argue in this chapter, however, that routine and markedly self-conscious speech are two manifestations of the same process in which speakers demonstrate their interpretation of the social world and the uses of language within it. Scholars of style and stylisation may thus have more to say to each other than is obvious at first sight, their combined insights offering a complex perspective on the meaning of language variation.

Historical perspectives

The sociolinguistic interest in style was a reaction against dominant trends in 20th-century linguistics (associated with Chomskyan generative grammar) that ignored language variation, considering it a chaotic surface feature of the underlying linguistic system. William Labov’s pioneering work in New York in the 1960s demonstrated that instead of being a matter of ‘free variation’, linguistic heterogeneity was remarkably regular. Labov introduced the notion of the linguistic variable to refer to any aspect of language that appears in different variants – e.g. in his New York study (2006), the presence ([r]) or absence (∅) of final and pre-consonantal /r/ in words such as *car* or *card* constituted variants of the phonological variable (r). He revealed that speakers’ differential use of [r] or ∅ varied systematically with their socio-economic background and, thus, that linguistic variation was socially stratified. In addition, Labov found that speakers’ use of these variants depended on the formality of the situation, so that intra-speaker stylistic variation could be seen to mirror variation across socio-economic groups. In some cases this synchronic variation led

to diachronic change, when style features associated with one social group were gradually taken over by others.

In the ‘variationist’ strand of research that Labov so inspired, style was seen as depending on the attention speakers paid to their speech: the more formal the situation, the more speakers would be inclined to use ‘prestige’ variants, associated with high-placed social groups, instead of ‘vernacular’ variants. Scholars therefore made sure that the sociolinguistic interview, the classic method by which they revealed the structured nature of linguistic variation, consisted of activities that would make informants style shift as they increased attention to their speech: an interview elicited ‘careful speech’; having informants read a text produced a ‘reading style’ with more prestige variants; the ‘maximum attention’ paid to speech while reading minimal pairs (e.g. *guard* and *god*) produced the highest frequency of prestige variants. A particular challenge though was to

somehow become witnesses to the everyday speech which informants will use as soon as the door is closed behind us: the style in which they argue with their nearest and dearest, scold their children, or pass the time of day with their friends.

(Labov, 2006, p. 64)

Such everyday, vernacular, speech was seen as people’s linguistic baseline, their most ‘natural’ type of speech since they presumably paid “no attention [...] to language” (Labov, 2006, p. 64), and it was assumed that demonstrating language change depended on proving innovation in this baseline. But being observed by a linguist made informants self-conscious rather than spontaneous, and variationists tried to circumvent this so-called observer’s paradox (Labov, 1972) by, for example, asking informants to talk about life-threatening situations that would briefly make them forget where they were.

Later strands in variationist sociolinguistics were less rejecting of people’s self-consciousness, or ‘reflexivity’. Thus, rather than seeing vernacular usage as a natural baseline, the so-called ‘second wave’ of variationist studies (Eckert, 2012) deployed ethnographic methods to demonstrate that such usage was motivated by speakers’ participation in tight-knit local networks of working-class adolescents (Cheshire, 1982) and adults (Milroy, 1980), or by their belonging to class-based school categories like ‘jocks’ and ‘burnouts’ (Eckert, 1989). Others argued that style had to be approached as a strategic response to audience characteristics. Bell (1984) described how radio announcers adapted their speech style to cater to different audiences. Giles and Powesland (1975) similarly proposed in their ‘communication accommodation theory’ that speakers actively modified their speech style, converging with that of their addressees in order to look more attractive or to facilitate communication, or diverging from it to reduce intimacy and enlarge social difference (Coupland, 2007, pp. 54–81). What first was a heuristic problem – speakers’ reflexivity – here emerges as a commonplace but important aspect of the ‘communicative competence’ (Hymes, 1972) with which speakers partake in social life. In creole studies, Le Page (1978; also see Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) proposed that stylistic choices are not so much related to people’s relatively automatic response to broad social categories (such as social class) or to the attention they pay to their speech, but need to be seen as ‘acts of identity’, engendered by speakers’ active identification with particular social groups, that is, by their wish to model their language on the groups that they so hope to be identified with. Sociolinguistic variables are thus “reanalysed [...] from symptoms into symbols” (Auer, 2007, p. 4).

These and other studies gradually moved the study of style into what Eckert calls a ‘third’ wave of variationist studies. Scholars in this strand approach language as “performance rather

than behaviour” (Coupland, 2001, p. 348), that is, as a social practice in which speakers actively and creatively draw on available linguistic and other semiotic resources to produce social meaning (Bucholtz, 2003; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Schilling-Estes, 2006; Androutsopoulos, 2007; Eckert, 2012). Scholars in this wave moved from a single variable approach to a more holistic notion of style as a conglomerate of verbal and non-verbal resources (cf. Auer, 2007, pp. 11–12), including, besides linguistic features, intonation, gesturing, body positioning, use of space, clothing, hairdo, make-up and so on (Schilling-Estes, 2006). The basic idea is that speakers recycle, reconfigure and combine several semiotic resources, and that the repetition of this bricolage activity culminates into a particular style, a conventional model for interacting with others, which can itself again be only partially adopted or reconfigured in interaction. The meanings of specific variables are seen in this context as ‘underspecified’ (Eckert, 2012, p. 87), that is, as becoming more specific when they are interpreted in relation to the other resources that are used.

Taken together, the focus in research on style gradually came to lie on speakers’ active ‘styling’, rather than on how they shift styles in response to the formality of the situation; and on a much broader range of social meanings than on a limited set of standard demographic categories. This changing focus has to be situated in a wider, ‘post-structuralist’, turn in the humanities that essentially sought to move away from seeing behaviour as natural and from the tendency to see its meaning as related to its place in a social system, to a focus on how social actors autonomously create meaning by deploying the semiotic resources they have access to. Inspired by this turn, more and more scholars questioned the predominant approach of language variation as a group phenomenon – the idea that group members share a variety that each of them has been socialised in at home to speak competently with other members, and of which they are the authentic, ‘native’, representatives. In contrast to this ‘linguistics of community’, scholars called for a ‘linguistics of contact’ (cf. Pratt, 1987). They insisted, first, that the study of language variation needed to include across-group interaction, imperfect, unusual and quasi-use, next to language use stamped by speakers’ dealings with contexts outside of the home (the media, popular culture and so on). Second, they argued that communication is not an event where speakers merely act out pre-given identities nor freely assemble new ones, but that it must be seen as a site of “imposition, collusion and struggle in which people invoke, avoid or reconfigure” their relationships, social identities and the semiotic resources these entail, with a potentially serious impact on “people’s minds, lives and material conditions” (Rampton, 2006, p. 24). In this context, it also becomes natural to investigate occasions when speakers style, that is, experiment with language.

Although they are probably “as old as speech itself” (Rampton & Charalambous, 2010, p. 4), stylisations only came into focus in the mid-1990s. The interest in them was triggered by the work of Bakhtin, a literary critic who posited that our speech is always ‘heteroglossic’, that is, constantly resonates with others’ words and voices, so that what is ‘(in)authentic’ in someone’s speech can often be hard to decide (see Blackledge and Creese, this volume). Bakhtin coined the term ‘stylisation’ to refer to the specific practice in which speakers produce “an artistic image of another’s language” (1981, p. 361), a type of ‘double-voicing’, either to mock or comment on the represented voice (‘vari-directional double-voicing’), or to align oneself with the qualities that are associated with the original owners of the voice (‘uni-directional double-voicing’).

A pioneering study in this context was Rampton’s (1995) work on ‘crossing’ among multi-ethnic adolescents in the UK Midlands. He analysed how youngsters from Anglo, Asian and Caribbean descent experimented with varieties that were not usually seen as their own: those with Anglo and Asian descent tried out English-based Creole, Anglos and

Caribbeans occasionally switched to Panjabi, and all three ventured into a ‘Stylised Asian English’. While this often occurred during jokes and games, Rampton showed that beyond this playfulness, many of these verbal experiments were recurrent events in youngsters’ management of cross-ethnic friendship and local peer-group affairs, and that stylisations could also be addressed to authority figures. Youngsters, for example, switched to Creole – a variety they associated with verbal agility and a lack of deference – to take up an assertive stance that they credited their Creole-speaking friends with. Or they briefly adopted Stylised Asian English to project a deferential and uncomprehending persona, as a way of publicly criticising other adolescents in a style that imputed diminished competence to them, or, in interaction with adults, to evoke problematic race relations that these adults were then invited to somehow pacify – leading to more, or less, enjoyable relations, depending on adults’ response. The availability of different styles was not a safe-conduct for their stylisation, however: at the wrong moment or in the wrong company, youngsters could seriously question the other’s right to use what was not seen as ‘theirs’.

In a different context, that of light entertainment on radio, Coupland (2001) found that radio presenters playfully selected Welsh dialect forms of English to stage ‘Welsh’ cultural styles (‘gossiping over the garden fence’) and stances (anti-heroism, pragmatism). Rather than mocking Welsh dialect and its speakers, however, Coupland argued that these presenters through their stylised performance both ironically evoked and self-identified with Welsh ways of being, inviting the audience to “find it confirmatory, credentializing, and solidary – as well as humorous” (2001, p. 371). The performance could thus be seen to bolster regional identification with Wales by culturally reassessing, and valorising, the dialect.

What stylisations mean, then, is a much more complex issue than simply ‘faking it’ or ‘having linguistic fun’. Indeed, stylisations can be meant as “mocking, admiring, an end-in-itself or the first step in a longer journey, and [they] may strengthen boundaries, undermine them, or assert their irrelevance” (Rampton & Charalambous, 2010, p. 5). Whichever of these meanings applies needs to be argued on the basis of ethnographic insights. A crucial element in their interpretation, as we shall now explain, is the notion of indexicality, which plays an increasing role in current research on style.

Current contributions and research areas

A central notion in current work on style and stylisation, drawn from linguistic anthropology, is (social) indexicality. The term refers to the fact that speakers see linguistic sign forms as indicative of a social context within which their use makes sense. It is related to the linguistic notion of ‘deixis’, according to which speakers need to identify the specific, contextual, meaning of each ‘I’, ‘this’ or ‘soon’ that these words point to when they are used. Linguistic anthropologists argue that all linguistic features, however, not just the deictic words, are indexical, that is, are taken by language users as signs that point to a specific context that determines their meaning: what ‘nice’ or ‘chair’ means (their ‘referential indexicality’) must be decided on the basis of a specific context of use (Silverstein, 1976).

Social (also: ‘nonreferential’) indexicality refers to the fact that linguistic features, ranging from one sound over sets of lexemes to a whole style, can evoke stereotypic social characteristics, relationships and contexts of use. This means that we can deliberately deploy them to “formulate a sketch of the social occasion constituted by the act of speaking” (Agha, 2007, p. 14), but also to give an indication of our orientation to a social occasion. Using a formal voice, for instance, can suggest that the speaker regards the occasion as formal or takes an ironic stance; using a vernacular voice in a formal context may flag a non-deferential,

assertive stance vis-à-vis a particular authority, or, alternatively, indicate that the speaker strikes up a convivial tone (cf. Jaffe, 2009).

Whether the audience is sensitive to the social sketch or stance a speaker evokes in this way depends on their ability to recognise the stereotypic connotation of the linguistic features deployed. This ability depends on socialisation processes (at home, at school, in the workplace) where linguistic and other signs are associated with particular values. Because socialisation trajectories differ, linguistic features have multiple, even competing, social meanings: dialect usage is often regarded as convivial by one group but as ugly by another, while standard language can be found elegant as well as arrogant. These meanings may moreover evolve, as was the case with the many standard languages that used to be associated with a specific region before they were re-typified as neutral and modern. The social indexicality of a linguistic variable or a style can thus be multidimensional, changing and contradictory, i.e. they have what Eckert calls ‘an indexical field’: “a field of potential meanings [...], any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable” (cf. Ochs, 1996; Eckert, 2008, p. 453). As a result, interactants and analysts have to determine which potential meaning is actually targeted when a variable is used, and need to be attentive to how linguistic resources may be given additional meanings.

Such reworkings can be incidental, and of no consequence for particular variables’ wider reputation, but in some cases the effects can be much more enduring. Labov (1963) already showed that a local diphthong /ay/ in Martha’s Vineyard was reconfigured from a variable that indicated the speaker was a Vineyarder to one that indicated that the speaker was a ‘real’ Vineyarder rather than a tourist or immigrated mainland pensioner. More recently, Johnstone (2013) described how variables that originally indexed the working class in Pittsburgh came to index place and local Pittsburgh identity. Several Danish sociolinguists have argued that linguistic resources that used to be mainly associated with ‘learner Danish’ – the Danish of immigrants – are being reconfigured as standing for a ‘street’ and thus, a cool urban speech style (see, among others, Quist, 2005; Madsen, 2013), although this new reputation still competes with the older, less flattering fame of these resources. Agha (2007) reports on a similar, long-term process for the style we now call ‘Received Pronunciation’ in Britain. While in the 16th century this was a relatively unknown speech style, associated with a small elite in southeastern England, it was gradually reworked in the 18th and 19th centuries into a ‘neutral’, ideal speech style for the whole of British society and later again transformed into a symbol of eliteness.

All of these processes depend on what Agha (2007) calls ‘enregisterment’. The term refers to all the evaluative activities through which sets of linguistic resources are associated with social value (like ‘elegant’, ‘from Pittsburgh’, ‘urban’, ‘deficient’) and come to gain cultural recognition as distinctive ‘registers’ or styles. Such activities can comprise

linguistic utterances which explicitly describe a register’s forms and associated values; or, utterances which implicitly evaluate the indexical effects of co-occurring forms (as ‘next turn’ responses to them, for example) without describing what they evaluate; such behavior may include non-linguistic semiotic activity as well.

(Agha, 2004, p. 26)

Calling a type of speaking ‘slang’ or ‘standard’ and explaining it as a sign of speakers’ (lack of) civilisation constitute an example of the first; laughing with somebody’s accent illustrates the third activity; the second type comprises stylisations. One crucial point is that evaluative behaviour is inescapable: all usage of linguistic resources involves and entails assumptions

about their adequacy in the context at hand. This is why using the vernacular can never be a ‘natural’ type of behaviour. A second point is that this evaluative behaviour is ideological, i.e. it is inspired by views of ‘good’, ‘civilised’ or ‘attractive’ behaviour that serve to distinguish social groups and legitimise their unequal ranking. A third point is that this evaluative behaviour needs to be regular for it to have any enduring effect, that is, to enable us to recognise a particular constellation of linguistic and non-linguistic features as a ‘register’ or ‘style’. Much current research into styling therefore not just looks at the forms that are being used, but includes an analysis of how these forms are simultaneously evaluated.

Research into stylisation has in recent years sought to demonstrate that stylisers’ behaviour is related to their conventional language use, and that they are not merely concerned with the here-and-now but are engaging with bigger issues, like social class. Rampton (2006) revealed that the everyday speech of London-based youngsters was characterised by the same stratification patterns that Labov found in the 1960s; that these youngsters frequently stylised the standard (‘posh’) and vernacular (‘Cockney’) styles that their everyday speech shifted between; and that these stylisations foregrounded institutional and class-based hierarchies, sometimes contesting these hierarchies while on other occasions reinforcing them (also see Snell, 2010; Madsen, 2013). Charalambous (2012) describes how young Greek Cypriots during Turkish class, faced with a teacher intent on banning all of the political overtones that an engagement in Turkish could evoke in this context, found in stylised language a way to critically address Cypriot politics and to reshape the meaning of learning Turkish from betrayal into a revolutionary move. In this view, stylising becomes a way of symbolically engaging with larger social issues that speakers do not know anymore how to talk about explicitly (as in Rampton’s case), or find too dangerous to discuss above board (in Charalambous’s study).

In a perspective that views all language use as reflexively produced, there is no exclusive preference anymore for ‘real’, spontaneous, face-to-face language use. Also scripted, set-piece performances now fall squarely within the remit of sociolinguistics. There has been ample research of style and stylisation on radio and television, in music, in film, in advertising and in new media. All of these spaces are treated as “site[s] of social action in [their] own right” (Androutsopoulos, 2012, p. 142) where ‘real life’ linguistic styles can be creatively reworked and made “particularly metalinguistically and metaculturally salient” (Mortensen et al., 2016, p. 8) by putting them on display and increasing their occurrence on the public scene. Mediated social action can in this way reproduce traditional sociolinguistic hierarchies, but also (re)contextualise individual features or entire speech styles and imbue them with new meanings (*ibid.*).

Thus, Van Hoof and Jaspers (2016) show that Flemish 1970s TV fiction typifies dialect as a folkloric, inarticulate working-class style, and Standard Dutch as an educated prestige style, which chimes in perfectly with the widespread pro-Standard Dutch propaganda that Flemings were at that time confronted with. At the same time, some of these TV shows ambiguated and contested this propaganda. Comedy shows portrayed Standard Dutch speakers as unworldly and patronising language zealots, while other characters’ stylisations of Standard Dutch evaluated this type of speech as pretentious and effeminate. The styling and stylisation of vernacular and standard speech in this case thus testified to both the reproduction and the “fracturing of traditional indexical relations” (Coupland, 2014, p. 90).

Bucholtz and Lopez (2011) likewise show how white actors’ metaparodic stylised performances of black language in Hollywood films have complex outcomes. They observe that white middle-class characters draw on deliberately disfluent uses of a restricted set of stereotypical features of African American English (AAE) to lay claim to positively valued stereotypes of young working-class black men – coolness, toughness, sexual self-confidence – that

they themselves lack. Bucholtz and Lopez argue that although these mock AAE performances “valorize[d] African American language and culture as superior in some ways to hegemonic linguistic and cultural forms” (2011, p. 683) and portrayed the use of black language by whites as inauthentic, they nevertheless reinforced essentialised divisions between black and white culture and language, and ultimately re- rather than destabilised hierarchies of race, class and gender.

Online environments have also come into focus of research on style and stylisation. Androutsopoulos (2007), for example, found that German youngsters on hip-hop-related websites fused ‘global’ hip-hop style markers (lexical items like *diss* or *dope*, and hip-hop slang spelling variants like <z> as plural marker in *beatz*) with ‘local’ German vernacular features such as colloquial spellings, and used these as “resources for constructing non-mainstream and ‘down to earth’ attitudes” (2007, p. 309) and for displaying membership of the hip-hop community. Contrary to assumptions of the web as a free space where concerns about proper language are extraneous, scholars have shown that online environments often respond to traditional sociolinguistic hierarchies – with non-standard writing especially found on discussion boards while professionally authored texts on hip-hop websites usually deploy a more standard style (Androutsopolous, 2007). Web users themselves may moreover police each other’s language according to standard norms (Stæhr, 2015). Focussing on style in music, Stæhr and Madsen (2015) describe how in their rap videos on YouTube young Danish rappers from minority descent gradually embrace standard, monolingual practices as they wish to move from ‘gangster’ to ‘serious’ rappers – an evolution inspired by their concern with wider comprehensibility and aspirations for commercial success. These studies show that “[g]lobal cultures, codes and flows”, such as hip hop styles, “are not swallowed without chewing” (Varis & Wang, 2011, p. 75, cited in Stæhr & Madsen, 2015, p. 79) and that local contexts must be ethnographically explored to understand what linguistic resources mean to the participants involved.

Critical issues and debates

One issue for debate is whether it is best to characterise stylisations as a matter of artful performance (Bauman, 1975), stimulated by an era that revels in irony, identity and mass-mediated entertainment, as Coupland (2007) suggests, or whether their occurrence may, at least in part, be more timeless, everyday, and may also construe other, less spectacular, social effects than ‘look at me!’ (Rampton, 2009). Stylisations clearly have a performative quality, given their often intense delivery. When they target a particular audience by effect-seeking producers (actors, presenters, comedians) in the mass media, or when they occur during mundane activities such as joke or storytelling and games, it makes sense to understand them as designed for the “enhancement of [the] experience” of their audience (Bauman, 1975, p. 178). Rampton (2009) argues though that a performance lens downplays the fact that many stylisations constitute a type of interaction management – what Goffman (1981) calls ‘interaction ritual’. As Goffman suggests, speakers use a range of formulaic utterances to approach or leave others, avoid or remedy offense, say thanks, offer sympathy and so on. These utterances

often serve a bracketing function, celebratively marking a perceived change in the physical and social accessibility of two individuals to each other [...] as well as beginnings and endings – of a day’s activity, a social occasion, a speech, an encounter, an interchange.

(Goffman, 1981, pp. 20–21)

Many of the stylisations Rampton found appear to do exactly this: they are used in greetings, remedies, apologies, expressions of annoyance, their occurrence responding to a temporary interactional hiccup or to looming institutional authority and the social stratification that this authority presupposes. Stylisations in such cases are “auxiliary rather than focal, valued more for their contribution to [...] maintaining or restoring normal social relations than for qualities of their own” (Rampton, 2009, p. 169), and since interaction ritual presumably is fundamental to communication, their occurrence goes beyond a representation of them as a typical sign of post-modern pastiche.

A second issue is whether stylisations can be taken as critical of local or larger-scale routines, representations and social hierarchies. This is certainly the way in which a great many of them have been interpreted (Talmy, 2009; Jaspers, 2011a; Charalambous, 2012; Madsen, 2013). Yet, as already mentioned above, Coupland (2001) indicated that stylisations can not just denaturalise but also re-authenticate linguistic practices and so contribute to their cultural reproduction. Bakhtin’s discussion of uni-directional double-voicing moreover suggests that in a number of cases, stylisers do not wish to criticise nor mock but intend to adopt (features of) a voice – English-based creole, AAE, the local dialect – that they find attractive or useful. In this way, stylisers reproduce the associations between a voice and certain speaker characteristics, and, for example, simply accept the symbolically ‘low’ position of a (dialect) voice because it is that position that makes it attractive. It is important to see, in addition, that vari-directional double-voicing equally reproduces certain aspects of the contexts that it shakes up: in producing a ‘Stylised Asian English’ to call down other adolescents or challenge local authorities, the youngsters in Rampton’s work were at the same time building on, and thus reproducing, the stereotype of Asian English as an index of deference and ineptitude. And when speakers ridicule ways of speaking they perceive as disfluent, e.g. through producing ‘Mock Ebonics’ or ‘Mock Spanish’, these stylisations feed into the negative representations of particular speakers (Chicanos, Latinos, Blacks) that audiences need to be familiar with to make sense of such mock practices (Hill, 1998; Ronkin & Karn, 1999; Bennett, 2012). Jaspers (2015) argues that the interactional locations where a teacher inserted his playful renditions of pupils’ home languages, in between the more important curriculum-oriented moments, implicitly suggested to pupils what the relative value was of the resources he stylised, compared to the school language, and so reproduced the wider-scale symbolic positions of the languages involved.

That said, the effects of stylisations may not be always so easy to pin down. In discussing an Asian American stand-up comedian’s revoicing of ‘Mock Asian (English)’, Chun (2009) admits that such renderings reproduce racial stereotypes about Asians and their competence in English. She argues, however, that the comedian’s own Asian background and her successful framing of Mock Asian as jocular, as well as her known criticism of Asian marginalisation in the United States, all worked to unhinge a simple reproduction of racial stereotypes and helped reframe the use of Mock Asian as a critique of these. Also Coupland (2007, pp. 175–176) contends that an interpretation of mock varieties as racialising *per se* may overlook the possibility of metaparody (mocking the parodist) and that contextualising and framing are paramount. Indeed, while stylisation

may exploit stereotypical symbolic evaluations [...] the discursive effects are likely to be more subtle than this, depending on how sympathetic the relevant personas have been constructed to be, whether audiences are positioned to ‘laugh with’ rather than ‘laugh at’ specific performers, how characters and relationships have been developed in particular narratives, and a host of other local-contextual considerations.

(Coupland et al., 2016, p. 35; cf. Auer, 2007, p. 6)

Chun (2013) further shows that these discursive effects can be mediated by the ways in which stereotyped linguistic signs travel across transnational spaces such as YouTube. While the ironic adoption of ‘black’ linguistic signs by a Chinese American YouTube star left intact the stereotype that associates blackness with hypermasculinity and Asianness with deficient masculinity, a unitary reading of this YouTube star’s stylising was challenged by the range of other meanings that emerged in comments from his transnational viewership.

So although linguistic forms may quite naturally evoke stereotypes, they never have an intrinsically racialising, or critical, meaning, because this meaning always depends on their (trans)local contextualisation. Clearly though, local transformations of stereotyped linguistic forms always run up against their wider-spread meaning, by which they may again be overruled, that is, reframed as exemplary of that stereotyping practice (an exquisitely critical joke with stereotyped language may be taken as a simple example of the stereotype).

A third, and not least, issue is whether stylisations have any relation to style, that is, whether stylisations can play a part in the explanation of larger-scale linguistic trends. Indeed, self-conscious speech was long seen to obfuscate “systematic speech, where the fundamental relations which determine the course of linguistic evolution can be seen most clearly” (Labov, 1972, p. 208). As a result, variationist sociolinguists have tended to focus on (systematic) styles, while interactional ones have concerned themselves with (unsystematic) stylisations, with little interaction between them. Recent research suggests however that these groups of scholars may be focussing on two sides of the same coin, and that an analysis of style is necessary for understanding stylisation, and vice versa. This is argued on the basis of Agha’s claim that “overt (publicly perceivable) metapragmatic activity [i.e. evaluative behaviour towards linguistic sign forms] ... is a *necessary condition on the social existence of registers*” (2004, p. 27; emphasis in original). If so, this means that “reflexivity is built into the very definition of a register/style/variety” (Rampton, 2011, p. 290), and that explaining these registers/styles/varieties comprehensively requires a focus on recurrent sets of linguistic forms *and* the evaluative practices that are responsible for our ability to recognise and deploy them in social life. Stylisations are equally ‘real’ and necessary, in that sense, as style is for the explanation of variation in language (see Rampton, 2006 and Snell, 2010 for examples of a combined analysis).

A second way in which stylisations matter to students of more enduring styles is that some stylisations can gradually become part of regular language use. Such a process is based on stylisers’ uni-directional double-voicing (see Blackledge and Creese, this volume), that is, when they adopt linguistic features with which they seek to demonstrate their alignment with the habitual users of these features or with the qualities that are attributed to them. When such adoptions conventionalise in a styliser’s daily language use, the two voices (the styliser’s original one and the stylised voice) can fuse, temporarily and possibly permanently. Thus, Cutler (1999) describes a middle-class white youth’s use of features of AAE as a way of taking part in an urban, black and male youth culture, and how in the process, some of these uses appeared to leave long-term traces on the youngster’s repertoire. Rampton (1995) likewise demonstrates how using Creole resources by adolescents of Anglo and Asian descent “was [...] close to the point where uni-directional double-voicing shifted over into direct unmediated discourse” (1995, p. 223) and seemed to become part of their own intended social identification. Jaspers (2011b) similarly shows how features of a local, white, urban dialect appear to be appropriated by ethnic minority youth as part of their regular, assertive stance.

Main research methods, including approaches to analysis

In practical terms, the variationist approach to style involves identifying linguistic variables and quantifying how frequently speakers use each variant in particular situations (see Dray and Drummond, this volume). These situations are carefully selected or designed on the basis of differences in formality – e.g. casual conversations are less formal than interviews, which are, in turn, less formal than reading tests. The speakers are grouped according to their demographic characteristics: socio-economic class, gender, age, regional provenance, etc. Subsequently these studies compare how often these groups use a particular feature in comparison to others, and whether the differences between them are statistically significant – for example, whether the relative proportion of vernacular variants that working-class women produce differs significantly from the relative frequency of those same variants produced by working-class men, middle-class women and middle-class men. In doing so, such studies reveal correlations between linguistic and macro-social variables.

The importance of replicability and wide coverage in this type of analysis implies that the social world can only have a skeleton presence in the analysis: it incorporates standard sociological variables such as class, gender or age but abstracts away from locally relevant (and thus less comparable) categories, not to mention from pragmatic meanings which cannot be easily quantified. What Eckert (2012) called the ‘second’ and ‘third’ waves in variationist studies, as well as the study of stylisation, can be seen as an attempt to go beyond this, and this has required a linguistic ethnographic approach in which scholars submerge themselves extensively in local networks, audio-record the targeted group, interview its members and explore what speakers themselves find to be meaningful linguistic differences and how they deploy these differences in interaction. Online ethnographers can do this by collecting Facebook interactions of a particular group, the YouTube videos they post, their contributions to particular fora and by combining online with offline data (cf. Stæhr, 2015). Such an approach does not mean that analyses can only be qualitative in nature: Eckert consistently quantifies the use of particular variables that the ethnography has revealed to be locally distinctive with other locally relevant categories. Similarly, Snell’s (2010) linguistic ethnographic study of primary school children’s linguistic practices combines a quantitative analysis of one linguistic variable, the first person possessive singular, with an interactional analysis of the way one particular variant, *me*, features in the children’s stylisations (see Snell, this volume).

Contextualisation is key, however: without it, all claims about the meaning of styles and stylisations risk being speculative. Indeed, as we indicated above, linguistic features can have a variety of indexical meanings. A careful analysis therefore distinguishes the meanings that a feature “*potentially indexes from [...] [those that a feature] actually indexes in a particular instance of use*” (Ochs, 1996, p. 418, cited in Rampton, 2006, p. 303). This requires a thorough knowledge of which indexical meanings a particular feature can evoke in the context at issue, next to a keen awareness of participants’ conventional and less conventional ways of speaking. A possible approach is to retrace the interpretation made by other interlocutors – who may identify what the speaker does, or produce other behaviour that provides a clue. Asking participants to comment on language in feedback interviews may be a way of obtaining such clues if these are not in the original recording. Mostly though, analysts will have to run the full gamut of options that ethnographic and interaction analysis has in store, that is, rereading the fragment for its pragmatic meaning, conversation analytic characteristics, participant framework and politeness issues, among others, and comparing each of the relevant cases with others in order to find a pattern across the data.

It is important as well to avoid interpreting the use of particular features as straightforward identity projection, and to investigate the interactional relevance of a feature in terms of how speakers evaluate the interaction and their relation with co-participants. This is the line taken by scholars interested in stance (Ochs, 1996; Jaffe, 2009), who investigate how speakers, in selecting a certain style, position themselves with respect to the form or content of their utterance, and how in so doing they align themselves with other interlocutors and the events at hand. Using a vernacular style to address an authority may, for example, intimate the speaker's non-deferential, assertive stance rather than being intended to suggest 'I'm local' – certainly if the authority already knows this. In this perspective, linguistic (together with non-linguistic) features contribute to a range of fleeting interactional effects and demeanours (sophistication, hesitancy, decisiveness, etc.). If stances are taken up repeatedly or become routinised, the features that signal them may become indexes of more durable (individual or group) identities. Ochs (1992) points out, however, that such a process is always constrained by more established, ideologised categories of class, gender and the like. Analysts would be wise therefore not to see cumulative stance-taking by means of certain features too quickly as proof of a distinct style, but to explore how these features are linked to the social types believed to conventionally take such stances: depending on the time and occasion, men's use of standard language to create a sophisticated stance may be taken as feminine, classy or arrogant, leading to different identifications of the stance producer that, in their turn, impact on the opportunities for conventionalising the stance. Ideologies of masculinity thus limit male speakers' style spectrum.

No analysis of style and stylisation, moreover, can allow itself to ignore that styling and stylising only make sense in relation to other styles. Styles, as Irvine points out, are "part of a system of distinction, in which a style contrasts with other possible styles, and the social meaning signified by the style contrasts with other social meanings" (Irvine, 2001, p. 22). Studying style and stylisation, then, depends on exploring the universe of styles that speakers are aware of and their knowledge of how local styles differ from each other and how local styles interact with non-local ones that are institutionalised through schooling or mainstream media. Understanding a system of distinction equally requires a focus on practices of differentiation, or the way in which styles are actively distinguished from each other, labelled, talked about, promoted, stylised or otherwise evaluated. Such social evaluations are inevitably ideological because they interact with ideologised representations of 'good', 'civilised', 'polite', 'beautiful', 'cool' language, and these representations are not universal: the same style (features) may be found, for example, 'mainstream', 'slang' or 'fake slang', depending on speakers' background, age, education or interest (cf. Agha, 2004). Local uses of style and stylisation must thus be analysed for how speakers understand their social world, the perspectives about language that exist within it and in terms of the linguistic (and other) features they have access to (cf. Irvine, 2001, p. 22).

A particular challenge for scholars interested in stylisations is knowing when something can be taken as a stylisation, and when it may be more appropriate to categorise a particular utterance as sound play. In general, stylisations involve a marked deviation from speakers' conventional behaviour, and consist of an emphatic, exaggerated or (over) acted rendering of linguistic features that fall outside speakers' habitual speech range. These features are often markers of an out-group variety (e.g. AAE stylised by white speakers), but they may just as well belong to one's 'own' variety – as with the Welsh dialect features stylised by the radio presenters in Coupland's (2001) data, or the northern English possessive *me* in Snell's (2010) data, which had fallen out of habitual use in the age group she studied. Typically stylisations are marked by a conglomerate of semiotic

resources. They can be recognised by “an increased density of marked linguistic features” (Rampton, 2006, p. 262), e.g. stereotypical lexis, or a phonetic rendering characterised by overshoot (Bell & Gibson, 2011, p. 568). In addition they are often set off from their surroundings by paraverbal means such as sudden shifts in pitch level, voice quality, volume or pace (Rampton, 2006, p. 262), as well as by facial expressions and gestures. Another clue to their identification are the metalinguistic responses produced by the audience or participants to the interaction, who may react to stylisations by “laughing, repeating the utterance, by commenting on [them], or by switching into a different kind of non-normal dialect or voice” (Rampton, 2006, p. 262).

In staged performances, such as the mass-mediated, scripted performances delivered by Coupland’s (2001) radio presenters, stylisations often comprise long stretches of talk and project widely known cultural styles, stereotypical personae or even named persons, as a result of which they may be quite straightforwardly interpretable to anyone knowledgeable of that culture (Gibson, 2011; Van Hoof, 2016). In spontaneous, non-scripted interactions, stylisations are often fleeting, their indexicalities more local, more ambiguous or even opaque. Opacity is a fundamental aspect of communication, though, and the challenge is then to distinguish clearer from less clear stylisations, and to see how these can be interpreted in a single framework (Rampton, 2006, p. 305). It is often useful to distinguish jocular from less- or non-jocular stylisations, and vari- from uni-directional ones, and to determine in response to what specific kind of business they occur (including local and less local affairs), in order to interpret how and why speakers deploy them.

Future directions

‘Change’ is a theme we have so far only marginally touched upon. It is a central endeavour in variationist sociolinguistics, however, to demonstrate language change, conceptualised as the change of vernacular norms in a given speech community. Recently, so-called ‘post-variationist’ students of style have been casting the net wider in arguing for a study of ‘sociolinguistic change’, that is, of changing relations between language and society (Androutsopoulos, 2014, Coupland, 2014; Mortensen et al., 2016), focussing on how language users “may reallocate values and meanings to existing styles and valorise new ones” (Coupland, 2010, p. 145). This is argued, in particular, in relation to varieties conventionally referred to as ‘standards’ and ‘dialects’: we often overlook that these terms are actually *evaluative* because the ideological perspective that makes this type of juxtaposition has become so entrenched that an alternative, competing, representation is difficult to imagine. Yet there is no reason why these styles cannot be re-evaluated up to the extent that it may become pointless to label them ‘standard’ or ‘dialect’. Agha (2015), in fact, claims that a number of former ‘slang’ varieties – Bahasa Gaul in Indonesia, Nouchi in Côte d’Ivoire, among others – are losing that reputation and are instead acquiring middle-class respectability or are becoming a sign of national identity, and that mainstream and new media play an important role in this process. Coupland and his collaborators similarly suggest that these media may be particularly apt for tracing how styles we call ‘standard’ and ‘dialect’ are “coming to hold different, generally less determinate and more complex, values in a late-modern social order” (Coupland, 2010, p. 145). The practical advantage of media data is that they allow for a real-time diachronic analysis, given that ‘old’ as well as ‘newer’ media are relatively easily accessible in broadcasters’ archives, on YouTube, etc.

Moving outside the realm of variation within what we call a ‘language’, Rampton (2011) has, in line with a reflexive understanding of styles (see above), proposed the notion

of ‘contemporary urban vernacular’ as a style that consists of linguistic forms that occur in mixed urban neighbourhoods (a core of working-class English, elements of migrant languages and ‘standard’ English) as well as a range of reflexive practices (including stylisations) that simultaneously set this style off from others. One ‘style’ can in this view thus unite elements from different ‘languages’, and come to be juxtaposed with styles that are seen to be less ‘urban’. Rampton furthermore argues that such an approach is apposite too for understanding what a ‘standard’ variety is, or can become, in our current societies. This is an invitation, in other words, to broaden our horizon beyond the borders of a singular language, and to see how students of style and stylisation could contribute to detailing the emergence and consolidation of (hybrid, multilingual or pure) styles that we consider to be urban, cosmopolitan or contemporary, and to explore how these are set off from others.

Further reading

- Agha, A. (2007). *Language and social relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (How people come to distinguish different social styles of speaking – or ‘registers’ – is the central topic of this book. Agha argues that social relations crucially depend on people’s reflexive capacity to recognise that communicative signs have social effects. He builds on this insight to argue how reflexivity leads to speakers’ recognition of stereotypic ways of behaving, and shows, among other things, how one speech style – ‘Received Pronunciation’ – was transformed from a local speech style spoken by a privileged few into a widely known, established standard for British society.)
- Coupland, N. (2007). *Style. Language variation and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (This book offers a highly readable analysis of style, styling and stylisation. Drawing on classic sociolinguistic, social-psychological as well as anthropological approaches, Coupland argues insistently, using ample examples, that variation in language is more usefully explained as a form of social practice rather than as behaviour that is responsive to external conditions.)
- Eckert, P. (2012). Three waves of variation study. The emergence of meaning in the study of variation. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41, 87–100. (Eckert discusses in this article how the study of social meaning has evolved in sociolinguistics, suggesting that it has been characterised by three waves: the first wave was mainly interested in finding correlations between single variables and broad social categories; the second adopted ethnographic methods to show how local categories drive the production of particular variables; scholars in the third wave determine the meaning of variables in relation to the other resources used, speakers’ use of semiotic resources going far beyond marking local or less local categories.)
- Rampton, B. (2006). *Language in late modernity. Interaction in an urban school*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (In this book Rampton situates adolescent linguistic practice in a London school in relation to popular culture and changing communicative trends, before demonstrating, on the basis of fine-grained analysis of audio-recordings, that these youngsters’ stylisation of a school foreign language (German) inverted the authoritative way in which German was taught, and that their playful and less playful stylisations of Cockney and ‘posh’ English revealed their on-going negotiation and construction of social class.)
- Snell, J. (2010). From sociolinguistic variation to socially strategic stylisation. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 14(5), 630–655. (This article shows how quantitative and interactional analyses can be usefully combined to explore the indexicality of the individual features that conventionally make up ‘vernacular’ speech styles. Focussing on stylised instances of the first person possessive singular *me* in ethnographically collected interactions amongst primary school pupils, the analysis lays bare a complex indexical field that goes considerably beyond the conventional association of vernaculars with informality and working-classness.)

Related topics

Interactional sociolinguistics; Mixing methods? Linguistic ethnography and language variation; Heteroglossia; Social class.

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