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Stylistics goes Historical.
Current Trends and Practices in Historical Stylistics

Studies in Stylistics in the past few decades have branched out to include the most diverse contexts of language production and have drawn on a vast array of methodologies, leading to what has been acknowledged as its interdisciplinary turn (Douthwaite, Wales 2010; Burke 2014; Montini 2017; Gibbson, Whiteley 2018). It is a fact that contemporary Stylistics is intrinsically eclectic and keeps abreast of theoretical and methodological innovations: once they became emancipated from their initial (and some would argue *supposed*) subjection to literary studies, studies in stylistics expanded to examine the most varied instances of text production and adapted to their own ends a vast range of theoretical models, approaches and procedures, such as Discourse Analysis, Text-world Theory, Relevance Theory, different kinds of Theories of Metaphor, corpus-based methodologies, and also borrowed such notions as *blending* from cognitive science.

The practices adopted in the past decades better qualify Stylistics as a model 'interdiscipline' – one that retains an independent disciplinary identity and at the same time incorporates the perspectives and methods of several other disciplines. It is in virtue of its openness to the advancements and acquisitions of other disciplines that Stylistics continues to evolve, so that one may even affirm that, in fact, "its increasingly interdisciplinary character with

its elastic boundaries encourages exciting innovations." (Taavitsainen, Fitzmaurice 2007:11).[1]

As occurred in other paradigms, the approach shifted from regarding language as a synchronic, static, and homogenous system to a diachronic, social, and dynamic entity (Traugott 2008). It is this interest in the diachronic dimension that eventually gave rise to studies into Historical Stylistics, or rather, a New Historical Stylistics (Busse 2010; 2014), and, as a sister discipline, into Historical Pragmatics (Jucker, Taavitsainen, 2010, 2013; Fitzmaurice, Taavitsainen 2007).

Both fields of study have adapted methods and devices developed in Stylistics and Pragmatics to work on texts from the past (literary and otherwise) and on language use and variation in past contexts, in order to understand how meaning is made and supply new materials and evidence to linguists, historical linguists, and language historians.

The target of Historical Stylistics is to examine the style of a period, genre, or author (whether stable or in a transitional phase) from a diachronic and/or synchronic point of view. The analysis of texts from the past is conducted in keeping with the general principles of Stylistics and tends to counterbalance the kind of somewhat intuitive, sometimes unsystematic and im-

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[1] In a recent interview on the main features of contemporary Stylistics, Elena Semino declared: "I would never want to say that Stylistics is this and only this and it is different from Discourse Analysis, and it is different from Pragmatics, and it is different from this and it is different from that: I don't see things that way. I believe in something that is research: we have questions about things that matter and there are ways of answering those questions that others consider as valid. And then of course, depending on the theories that we have and the methods that we have, we label what we do in different ways, so we can call something Stylistics and something Critical Discourse Analysis. Those labels are always temporary, they are fluid and I don't think they should ever be seen as separate boxes." (Semino, Montini 2017: 118-119).

pressionistic approach to text analysis that is a particular danger in approaches to literary texts. The focus is on the text, investigating how and why a text works as it does and what effects it produces on the reader. The means of the analysis are scientific: the text is framed within a general system and special emphasis is placed on meaning as defined in relation to a precise historical setting, with its specific linguistic, social, and cultural features.

Historical Pragmatics shares the same aims and methods, with a specific focus on authentic language use in the past. As defined by Culpeper and Kyto, the linguistic framework is one of 'speech-related' written genres, brought into focus against their historical context (Culpeper, Kyto 2010: 1-20).[2] The materials for analysis are drawn from written text types in which spoken face-to-face interaction is used, such as trial proceedings, plays, fiction, didactic works and such other works in which speech is represented. The focus of historical pragmatics remains firmly set on the core pragmatic features of conversation maxims, the Co-operative Principle, politeness, and speech acts (Jucker, Taavitsainen 2008; Taavitsainen, Jucker 2002. Underlying the practices of historical pragmatics is the question of the treatment of written texts from the past ages as legitimate data: such texts are frequently marked by inherent ambiguity, and it is inevitable that the researcher should encounter vagueness and elusiveness of language use in the textual products of "distant cultures", when no direct access to the speakers and the contexts of production is viable. Predictably, data problems increase the further back in time we go, leaving the infamous "bad data problem" as an open, key challenge for historical linguists (Labov 1994; Nevalainen 1999). The use of technological resources has opened new avenues to the discipline. Currently, empirical studies that rely on corpora as databases constitute one of the main

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[2] Text-based *historical pragmatics* and *historical discourse analysis* overlap, and another label like *historical dialogue analysis* has also been used.

trends in English historical Stylistics and Pragmatics: in dealing with historical texts and literature, corpus linguistics has made the acquisition and treatment of large amounts of data manageable, and enables the analysis of such peculiar key concept for Stylistics as deviation and foregrounding.[3]

Beatrix Busse has recently proposed a useful checklist of a few methodological precepts which would help the scholar and the student to go about a New Historical Stylistic analysis.[4] As a first tenet she emphasizes the need to comply with the "three Rs" (Simpson 2004): stylistic analysis should be rigorous, retrievable and replicable. As a preliminary step to research, thus, a survey of the state-of-the-art of the literature in the field should always be carried out first; and when contemporary tools and approaches are brought to bear on a linguistic investigation in the diachronic perspective, its outcomes should then be verified or falsified according to the linguistic features of the period under analysis.

Moreover, researchers seek to meet the aims of 'historical stylistics' as set out by Auer et al. (2016:1). Thus, in order to appraise how a historical text might have been processed by its contemporary readers, we need to investigate the literary, cultural, and linguistic contexts of its *production and reception*, paying attention both to historical sources and to the socio-pragmatic conventions of the period under investigation: meanings are not permanent but "different audiences make different meanings: how the original readership understood a text may be very different from the meanings made by contemporary other audiences, later periods or present readers. There is ample evidence of this in literary history, for example, of Chaucer's or Shakespeare's texts" (Fitzmaurice, Taavitsainen 2007:26).

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[3] Historical corpora have been compiled with a focus on a diachronic perspective, as in Jonathan Culpeper and Meria Kyto's *Corpus of English Dialogues* (2010), and are used as the only reliably balanced record of spoken English.

[4] Busse has borrowed the famous checksheets proposed by Michael Short in his 1996 seminal *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*. (Busse 2010: 40-41).

From the methodological angle, Busse suggests that researchers "combine quantitative and qualitative analyses to establish historical linguistic norms and deviations", in an interplay between, for example, corpus stylistics and more qualitatively oriented stylistic investigation or intuition (Busse 2010: 41). Again, a form-to-function and a function-to-form approach should be taken in combination for a complete and reliable analysis (Jacobs and Jucker 1995). Ultimately, the interaction of formal and functional approaches on the one hand, and of linguistics and discourse studies on the other have helped shape new dynamic fields of study (Fitzmaurice, Taavitsainen 2007).

In the wake of such innovations in the approach to stylistic studies, the present issue of *Status Quaestionis* aims to take a closer and updated look to a select group of texts, literary and non-literary. The diversity of approaches that inform the essays is intended to reflect the varied critical scenario that marks contemporary stylistic studies, and the different trends in the approach to reading texts here represented will also bring to light a number of key questions regarding the methods and outcomes of such readings or analysis.

The table of contents features a short, but compact list of contributions which fittingly cover a variety of historical genres and methodologies: from corpus to pragmatic stylistics, and from cognitive stylistics to narratology. Silvia Pireddu draws attention to the use of specialized corpora for Early Modern English. The publication of the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (HTOED) in 2012 has enabled the implementation of diachronic analysis of lexicalization and semantic contexts in order to identify the kind of lexico-grammatical features which help identify authorial or genre style. Pireddu tests the advantages and limitations in using HTOED in a historical stylistic analysis of the term "satire", both as a concept and as a genre. Her case-study focuses on Horatian epistolary satire, used by sixteenth-century English courtly writers to address targeted groups of patrons and friends, and criticize the emerging London cultured milieu.

Historical pragmatics is engaged with the study of forms on the one hand, and with the study of functions on the other: Polina Shvaniukova's investigation relies on this kind of theoretical background in order to analyse an inventory of eighteenth-century closing formulas in Samuel Richardson's *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends* (1741). The 'bad data problem' related to texts of the past is especially complicated when the researcher is faced with a patchy source, as occurs with letters, because of the conditions of preservation or because the reciprocal exchanges are not always available (Montini 2014). As written legitimate data, the article proposes epistolary superscriptions and subscriptions which, for the Late Modern English period, and especially the eighteenth-century, have been presented by recent linguistic studies as elements that "registered hierarchies and acknowledged relations of power [that] can constitute the key to the interpretation of an eighteenth-century letter" (Bannet 2005:65). The analysis of the patterns of usage of these formulaic elements reveals how these can assume multiple pragmatic functions and contribute to the meaning-making process as an integral component of the message encoded in a letter.

Among literary genres, narrative receives by far the most attention from stylisticians, being as a genre "the 'all-rounder', the versatile and multi-faceted format into which a multitude of stories can be shaped." (Montoro 2016: 387). Giuseppina Balossi and John Douthwaite analyse two narrative texts in order to show how narration strategies deal with character presentation. As the characters created by Modernist authors tend to represent both individuals and heroic types and as the 'cognitive turn' shows no sign of abating, Balossi's Cognitive approach leads to a reappraisal of the character of Percival in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* – both everyman and heroic figure of the medieval chivalric romances. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools, the article aims to suggest how the reader's understanding of Percival arises on the one hand from our background knowledge of the classical/medieval hero, and on the other from the information derived from the six Edwardian characters that present him.

John Douthwaite further elaborates on narrative strategies and resorts to the combined tools of Stylistics and Narratology to carry out a meticulous close reading of a short extract from an Edith Wharton story: the 'degree of focalisation' on the character, and the mode of speech and thought presentation employed at each point in the text contribute to the character's presentation of the Self in everyday life and his private musings, ultimately revealing the novelist's methodological tools.

The final essay in the collection tackles T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* from a narratological perspective. Narrations enclosed within poetical texts pervade modernist tendencies and ideologies of the time and Bonaventure Munganga aims to show how narrative theories provide a congenial tool in the analysis of the typically modernist alternation of continuous narrative and quasi-narrative sequences in the poem.

Taken together, the essays included in this issue bring into relief how methodological innovations and tools in contemporary stylistics may contribute to the analysis of style and discourse in textual contexts that are at some remove in the past.

As a scientific community, we have to believe that by raising the level of awareness of methodological problems, both the theoretical profile of the discipline and the practical outcomes of textual analysis may be improved. This is possible by explicitly discussing the advantages and limitations of methods and their outputs, and by producing a variety of practices that can be measured and evaluated on their own terms, avoiding such extremes as the highly subjective, individual close readings, on the one hand, but also the number-crunching investigations that come out of some exquisitely quantitative approaches. This will pave the way for future developments, and the ever-shifting goal of interpretation will be achieved through best practices that are as increasingly rigorous, repeatable, and retrievable as possible.

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