

Language Variation and Style: What Makes People More Careful about their Style of Speech and Why?

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Abstract: *People always position themselves in relation to others by the way they talk in different kinds of interaction. A person doesn't always talk exactly the same way all the time. For example, he/she alters his/her pitch, tone, intonation and stress accordingly. A football commentator uses different styles if he/she is commenting on a local, unimportant game or, say, the final game of the world cup. He/ she might use different functional and grammatical forms. Therefore, speakers take into their consideration who their addressees are, and therefore use the appropriate changeable speech style. Different definitions of style will be discussed and more elaborations about style within the sociolinguistics field will be highlighted. Then, style shifting and its effectiveness will be elaborated. In brief, we will thrash out the audience design and how it affects speech style. This review will focus on different topics and style attunement such as salience, emotionality, technicality, narration, abstraction and humorousness. These topics will be supported by simple dialogue experiments and field observations. Topics from the other Languages in relation to style and variation will be entertained. Finally, we will answer the question why styles of speech are attuned to other people commenting on the purposes of style shifting.*

Keywords: *speech variation, style-shifting, salience, emotionality, technicality, narration, abstraction and humorousness*

Introduction

According to sociolinguistics, style is often used to signify a variation in speech (or writing) from formal to more casual (Platt, 1975; Labov, 1966; Meyerhoff, 2006). A lot of sociolinguists among them Labov, have stressed on the continuum aspect of stylistic variation. For example, one can notice that certain linguistic variables change as the speech gets more or less formal. More formal styles contain more complex syntactic structures, a more elaborate range of lexicon, and a more careful attention to phonetics than those of casual styles. Abu Baha (2013) maintained that:

An American student was interviewed to give a sentence that has more than one style (According to the State she lives in). She graded the following utterances from:

More formal: what are you doing?

Less formal: whaddya doin?

More casual: whach doon?

According to the speech situation, gender, social class, education, and identity, style might vary. Therefore, one can notice formal styles in ceremonies, public functions and formal discussions. However, when one communicates with friends and family, he/she uses more casual styles. It's possible for a speaker to shift his/her style according to the social context. A teacher might use five styles in just one day. He/She might use intimate, casual, consultative, formal, or even frozen styles accordingly.

Language markers are highly considered in the definition of style. Platt & Platt (1975) have identified the markers of formal and casual styles in some English varieties. He noticed the absence of an article at the beginning of a sentence such as: Coffee's cold. And as well, the absence of the subject at the beginning of a sentence such as: Bought it yesterday. And the absence of an auxiliary such as: Leaving? Seen John lately? However, in formal styles, they noticed that some English varieties use 'may' instead of 'might, can'. In addition, they noticed that the utterance: For whom did you get it? is more common than: Who'd you get it for?

Stockwell (2002) pointed that 'within sociolinguistic studies, style refers to the variation within registers that can represent individual choices along social dimension.' One stylistic dimension within a register would be the scale from formality- casualness with many relative gradations in between. Stockwell added that other stylistic scales include impersonal-intimate, monologic-dialogic, formulaic-creative styles, and so on.

Abu Baha (2013) has studied variation within registers. He interviewed an Egyptian teacher who does three jobs every day. In the morning until midday, he works as a very successful teacher teaching biology in a formal style. Between midday and sunset, he works in a catering kitchen as a dish-washer. However, he uses another style of speech to attune himself with non-academic people. Finally, he has night-shifts in a café and is considered the best emotional story-teller who performs in a style that keeps his audience highly interested until midnight.. Accommodating the addressees and the audience of speech are the main reasons of changeable styles. Another reason is the social context and the social class which play a major role in style shifting.

The style variation becomes more marked when the idea of identity is over highlighted. Heller (1982) studied a French clerk working in an English hospital. The clerk used his French accent to call for a French sick called 'Robert Saint Pierre' in French style. The English employer

corrected the clerk angrily by pronouncing the name in an English style claiming the identity of working for an English Hospital. In brief, the relationship between language style and identity involve a complicated mixture of intrapersonal, interpersonal, social, and political issues which associated to see people as belonging to a social group or excluding them from it.

Stylistics has in its account by which contexts might be characterized externally, that is in relation to one another. The question is what makes this style, this event, this context not others. As a result, styles seem to be deviations (Enkvist, 1973 as cited in Coupland, 1988). This deviation is a well-known formulation and in early accounts was conceived as a relation between two or more distributions across contexts of formal linguistic elements. Here, one could note that the style of any token should consider the phonological, grammatical, lexical frequencies associated with contextual relations.

Three Factors

Style variation considers three factors which are the medium, the domain, and the tenor. The medium is the language used (spoken or written); the domain is the subject matter (literary, scientific, ironic..) or the function of language such as teaching, law, advertising..; and the tenor is the relationship between the participants in the event (Stockwell, 2002).

The domains of language style include friendships, family, religion, employment and education. A family style, homebound language is characterized by a casual, conversational speech style, used with familiar interlocutors to a restricted set of topics focused on everyday life (Dressler, 1991 as cited in Chevalier, 2006). Thus the speaker's style is influenced by many factors such as the addressee, the goals of the speaker, the topic, the relationship between interlocutors, the domain which represents topic, situation, and the speaker's communicative goals (Fishman, 1964, 1968, 1972, 1991).

The tenor of a child may differ if her mother is a lecturer in a university and this child is one of her students. The mother and her child will absolutely have two different styles depending on the social situation they find themselves in.

Audience Design

Bell (1984) as cited in Thornborrow (1999) provides a theoretical account of the reasons why speakers change the way they talk depending on the situation and context they are talking about. This Idea was also mentioned by Giles and Powesland, 1975; and Giles & Sinclair, 1979). Bell invented the concept 'audience design' within two meanings called convergence and divergence. Through convergence, the speakers try to fit more closely to their hearers. However, in

divergence the speakers try to emphasize the difference between themselves and their addressees.

Edwards (1998) studied a group of children who diverge from expected norms by using their variety of (Black) English in the classroom. He noticed two reasons for this divergence. One is that children tend to show solidarity with black group. The other is to show the distance from and exclusion of the out-group.

The person whom the speaker is addressing is of great influence on the style performed. Bell (1984) as cited in Meyerhoff (2006) has distinguished between addressees, auditors, overhearers, and eavesdroppers. He claimed that speakers will attune their style of speech less to auditors, overhearers, and eavesdroppers. The reason for this is that the speakers' relationship with them is more attuned and speakers have less clear relational goals. Moreover, the speaker might be more ignorant of what kind of people is listening.

Bell proposed that style shifting happens primarily in response to the speakers' audience rather than to the amount of attention or other factors. He conducted a study on New Zealander news presenters. He found that the same News Presenter who is working for two different radio station, say high class and middle class, shifts his/her style by producing intervocalic /t/ in two different styles attuned to high or middle class audience. However, Labov (1966) as cited in Meyerhoff (2006) has considered the natural and the spontaneous difference in attention to speech. In his theory, he found that everyone used pronunciation with an /r/ more when they were reading the narrative aloud than they did in casual conversation. They used even more /r/ when they were reading the word lists and they were more likely to use /r/ variants when they were reading minimal pairs.

The major fact of audience design is that style is oriented to people rather than to mechanisms such as attentions. 'Style is social and marks interpersonal and intergroup relations' according to Bell (1984) as cited in Coupland & Adam (1997). A particular style is normally associated with a particular group or situation and so carries with it the flavour of those associations. Response is the primary mode of style shifting and style is the responsive phenomenon. Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that style may shift according to politeness strategies. Hence not all audience members are equally important, the speaker can rank their roles according whether or not they are known, ratified, or directly addressed by him. That means that the distance of the hearer plays a major role in any style.

In the next section, we will see how style shifts according to the topic associated with audience design. We talk about education in a style that echoes how we talk to a teacher, or about work in a style that echoes how we talk to a boss. Coupland (1984), in a study about travel agents, found that the travel agent shifted her style significantly between work-related topics and other topics.

On the other hand, Coupland (2001) added another factor which affects the style called 'Speaker Design'. Here, what kind of motives or goals is ascribed to the speakers which are assumed to drive variation is the main difference between speaker and audience style-shifting. In addition, the audience may attune their style styles in interviews. Trudgil (1986) as cited in Meyerhoff (2006) has conducted a study in Norwich. He found that, through the interviews, the Norwich interviewees tend to use less regional Norwich variants even though they use more of these variants in daily communications.

Style Shifting

A lot of people have a mixture of codes available to them. Even in monolingual speakers, a person can switch from casual to formal styles. Stockwell (2002) argued that a person can switch within different accents (as in telling a story or a joke) within different dialects (as moving from writing a message on a fridge door to writing a message to the bank). Therefore, one could note that a person can code switch according to the different situation and according to the domain in which the speakers perceive themselves to be in.

The Labovian view of style shifting is that formality- informality can be considered as linear continuum reflecting the amount of attention that speakers give to their speech. As formality increases, the frequency of occurrence of some non-linguistic features decreases. Labov (1972, Chapter three). However, Wolfson (1976) as cited in Romaine (1982) has pointed out that speakers in some situations might control their speech carefully to insure that they use more non-standard features in order to produce an appropriately informal speech styles.

According to Meyerhoff (2006) style-shifting is '*variation in an individual speech correlating with differences in addresses, social context, personal goals or extremely imposed tasks*'. She added that people takes more or less attention to their speech when they are engaged in different kinds of verbal tasks. Moreover, speakers might have an audience in mind and so they design their styles to suit them. Even different linguistic styles represent different personas that the speaker identifies them.

In brief, one could argue that style shifting aims to highlight important information and ensure main themes or minor themes. However, one shouldn't ignore the accompanied changes that happen while style shifting. These changes in style involve paralinguistic cues, prosody, pauses, intonation, gesture and facial expressions in order to convey and monitor information change.

Topics and style attunement

The topic of any conversation has a great impact in the social interaction through style attunement and modifications. Giles and Powesland (1975) have argued that salience,

emotionality, technicality, abstraction and humorousness are topics that could be attributed to style shifting.

1. Saliency

Saliency is the style in which speakers talk about topics that are more crucial to them in a special context than those which are less important to them. To elaborate more, the researcher had the following two observations,

Abu Baha (2013) conducted a small study while having dinner with three English speakers in his English department to check the saliency effect. He found that 10 out of 15 minutes of the talk time was consumed to talk about university assignments and university evaluation scheme as well. Even though he tried to shift the topic to family or friendships affairs, still the major concentration was on university. What characterizes the talk is being more formal with little pauses, hardly hearing Geordie-Newcastle accent, lower-pitch, and lower intonation as well.

2. Emotionality

When the topic is too emotional and sensitive for the speakers, the style is attuned in terms of speech rate and accent. In terms of speech rate, previous studies such as Cook (1969) as cited in Giles and Powesland (1975) found that discussing topics which seem to worry or embarrass the speaker such as sex and family had little effect on their speech rate. However, in general, one could argue that speakers tend to talk more slowly about their emotions (It depends on what I call these painful memories or fertile memories). Therefore, when the emotions are positive and fertile speakers tend to attune the style by lower-pitch, lower-intonation, and more casual.

Abu Baha (2013) did a small observation to examine some of the informal and formal styles used by friends talking about their emotions. He tried to isolate at least one phonological variable and a group of lexical variables and another syntactic variable accompanying the style of emotionality. Therefore, two sincere friends are used to visit the accommodation. They usually talk about emotions accompanied with family absence since all are married and have wives and kids abroad. In this style of speech, he found that the /h/ sound in the Arabic language is much more aspirated than usual. He also found that some lexical items have also changed in this context. For example, a word such as /sadeeq/ is changed to / sahib/ (friend becomes mate; and children becomes kids.). He also noticed that some syntactic features are changed such as more inversion is found. For instance, sentences such as: 'Never have I spoken to them' were more used than 'I have never spoken to them.'

3. Technicality

Speakers tend to attune their style according to how much technical their addressee is. To clarify more, a university linguist will absolutely use more linguistic and technical words when talking to colleagues than talking to non-technical friends. That means speakers attune their style of how

well they think the audience comprehends them. I still remember my first lecture on sociolinguistics and the numerous repetitions of technical terms and how the style of the lecturer was attuned in repeating terms such as variation, varieties, variants, dialects, inter-speakers, intra-speakers, and others in order to ensure that all students are in harmony of comprehending these technical terms.

4. Abstraction

Speakers tend to attune their styles of speech when moving from concrete to abstract subjects. It seems that language style would be more structural and complex when approaching abstractness in contrast to casual or descriptive dialogues. However, this depends of how formal or casual the speaker talk. According to the Scottish or Geordie accents informal descriptive styles are much more complicated than formal abstract topic.

In a short observation to support this idea, Abu Baha (2013) observed a British girl speaking Geordie and London accents. He found that while speaking about lectures, she tends to use the London accent with all its features. The result is that the style is well-structured, few- segment omissions, less casual and more understandable style. On the other hand, while talking about shopping, invitations, and family, she uses the Geordie accent with all its features. The result is ill-structured sentences, more omissions, more casual and less understandable style.

In contrast to Arabic language, whenever the topic is more abstract, the style would be more difficult to understand. Ancient Arab poets composed their poetry in an abstract style that one can hardly comprehend. Paoli (2001) talks about style of ancient Arabic poetry. He argued that

'There are different verse-patterns, by means of slight modifications such as the adjunction, deletion or substitution of conjunctions, prepositions, interrogative pronouns or aspectual markers, which partly behave like "stop-gaps", keeping the meaning unchanged while modifying the metrical pattern of the formula. The analysis is then extended to "rhythmical formulas", i.e. to combined metrical and word-stress patterns which serve as models for a great number of "formulaic expressions". Word boundaries may be specified, as well as some morphological and syntactical information, so that expressions derived from a same rhythmical formula can be classified into a number of more or less abstract subcategories'

5. Humorousness

Speakers tend to change their styles appreciably when telling a humorous story in contrast to a serious story. The humorous style tend to be more non-standard, less precise in enunciation and to 'have more tempo and pitch than serious speech 'as Giles and Powesland (1975) claimed. They added that even without a live receiver, the humorousness of a topic can influence the individual's speech/style to some extend.

In brief, speakers might change their styles according to different topics. Salience refers to the importance of the topic to the speaker. Emotionality refers to how much the topic is sensitive to the speaker. Technicality refers to how much technical the addressee to the speaker. On the other hand, abstraction refers to how abstract the topic is to the addressee. Finally, humorousness refers to how much humorous or serious the topic is to the addressees. In all cases, sociolinguistic studies showed that speakers tend to attune their styles according to certain topics.

In addition to the mentioned topics above, people are used to sermonizing in other speech styles such as introducing, welcome, farewell, retirement, presentation, nomination, acceptance and installation. Introducing style is used to introduce and present new speakers; welcome to greet a visitor; farewell to appreciate someone leaving something; retirement to give credits for someone after joining an institution for a certain period of time; nomination to nominate and announce a person or a committee; presentation to present special awards such as a prize or a certificate; acceptance to thank for being nominated or given a gift; and installation style is used when people accept a new challenge in their lives.

The genre of the speech discourse has also an impact on the style of speech. In conversation, speakers tend to use different genres. They can use descriptions to describe things and people; narration to recounts events in time and place; evaluation to express opinions; explanation to feature cause and effect relationships; and argumentation to persuade people. One topic which is narration has been chosen to comment on style and variation.

6. Narration and variation

Giles (1991) as cited in Meyerhoff (2006) argued that all stylistic variation was actually caused by speakers attuning or accommodating to the norms associated with different addressees by the means of attuning the way they talk according to the situation they find themselves in. Giles studied a speaker of Bislama (English-based Creole spoken in Vanuatu). (He) listened to him telling a story to his family and to the researcher as well. He found that the speaker used more subject-omissions when speaking to his family than when speaking to the researcher.

One could conclude that narration is one of the topics that involve style attunement. A person accommodates his style in narration regarding in-group or out-group activation. The reason of using less subject omissions for out-group hearers is to provide them with as much information about the subject matter (story). However, the reason of using more subject omissions for in-group addressees is to make the narration clearer, easier to follow, more sequential, less-detailed, and more enjoyable and thrilling to the children in the family.

Topics from the Arabic language

1. Childhood memories

When an Arabic speaker talks about his/her childhood, he/she might use different styles. These styles seem to be neither formal nor casual. Abu Baha (2013) noticed an Egyptian who was asked to talk about his childhood memories in order to track his style and variation. The story was so long to be translated. However, it starts like this:

'Once upon the time, there was a little boy who was born during heavy rain. His mother passed away three days after his birth. His father was working in the Arab Gulf. Therefore, his uncle adopted him and

The Arabic version shows many stylistic variations. One could conclude that childhood memories are characterized by lower-pitch, lower speed, more pauses, natural intonation (not exaggerated).

In another study by Jahangiri and Hudson (1982) as cited in Romaine (1982), it seems that patterns of variation in Tehran Persians have similar conclusions. They studied the variable (man) = (I) in Persian language which has two forms either Singular /man/ or Plural /ma/. They studied a speaker talking about his memories. Here is the translation:

...I (p) had a wife who took my (p) possessions; whatever I (p) had, she took, and left me (p) homeless and penniless in the streets. I (p) slept in the streets in the night – six months, yes six months I (s) was in terrible condition, in this Tehran I (s) was hungry for days, I (s) could work, but I (s) was driven crazy because of anxiety...

They concluded that this speaker started to feel sorry for himself at a point indicated by the gap (-) and at that point his style shifted and stopped using the relatively personal form to refer to himself rather than the distancing and impersonal plural. Why the speaker did so, is mainly explained by the fact that the plural form is used to express humility. However, the two researchers warned from generalizing too far in this study.

2. Rural and Urban styles

In an interview to tackle in the rural and the urban Palestinian Styles, Abu Baha (2013) noticed another female speaker who used two different styles every day. She is a Palestinian teacher living in a rural area (Agricultural Gathering Community). She performs agricultural work such as ploughing, planting, harvesting, collecting wood, and even hunting in the nearby mountains. She says that her job as a teacher in an urban area, requires a different style. She gave me one dominant feature of her styles. This feature is attuning the rural /š/ sound to the urban /k/ sound. So she tend to be neither formal neither informal in her style while teaching. So, she greets her students by *Keef Halkum*

(How are you?) However, at home she says to her kids: *Šeef HalŠu* . Alternatively, when she writes formal Arabic language, she uses a third style: *Kaifa Halakum* .

We could notice many features associated with these different styles. One is that the urban style is within a step approaching the formal style to some extent. Second is that the rural style is much more complicated; and the speaker can't use this style in urban schools for one main reason. Many students will laugh at this style of speech and will not understand it, either. Finally, the third style isn't used in spoken languages and widely used in written forms.

Why are different styles attuned to different people within different topics?

A person may attune his style of speech when talking to his/her addressees for many reasons. First, the speaker should sense the needs, the feelings, the aspirations, and the fears of his addressees. Second, he/she might attune his/her style to enable people-centered communication in terms of participation and involvement in the subject matter (the topic).

Abu Baha (2013) conducted another observation in Palestine. In an interview with a Palestinian head teacher, he was asked why he has to conduct three styles at the same time. These styles are firmness (formal language), neutrality (neither formal nor casual) and casualness. He argued that he performed these styles depending to the situation he finds himself in. Is he giving instructions to students? Then, firmness is more dominant. Is he following them up in break time? Then, friendliness and neutrality would be the best style. Is he watching students in an after-school activity? Then, casualness should be performed regardless of being a head-teacher. He added that he did so in order to show empathetic feelings and well-understanding to their needs and desires; otherwise he would be a stranger in a strange land. He has to be decisive and friendly simultaneously. Moreover, in after-school activities, he tends to activate the energetic time in a more casual style. He tends to attune his speech and attune his feelings so that the students will carefully consider the importance of each time in the learning process. Finally, in this case, one could conclude that style is attuned to influence or control the thoughts or actions of others; or to control one's emotions and feelings when relating to others.

Conclusion

The 1950s has witnessed a significant growth in the study of language variation, and it has now become a highly dynamic subfield of research in sociolinguistics. The sociolinguistic studies are farther complicated by the fact that the speakers can adopt different styles of speaking. One might talk very formally or very informally, and his choice to do so is governed by different conditions or circumstances. Ceremonial occasions almost invariably require very formal speech, public lectures to some extent require less formal style, casual conversations between people requires a quite informal style, and conversations between intimates such as lovers, friends, members of the family might be extremely informal or casual.

This paper has focused on style and variation according to their varied career. The essay started by defining style and variation and how speakers attune their speech accordingly. Then, style

shifting and audience design were discussed proposing that style shift happens primarily in response to the speakers' audience rather than to the amount of attention or other factors. The medium, the domain and the tenor are factors that affect style and topic attunement.

Moreover, we have already discussed how topics such as salience, emotionality, technicality, abstraction, narration, and humorousness have an impact in the social interaction and style modifications. Some other topics from the Arab language such as childhood memories and rural/urban styles have been elaborated. More importantly, we have made an attempt to answer the question why styles are attuned to other people. The essay ends up with more topics regarding formal, less-formal, and casual styles supported by some examples. Walker (2003) has studied dialogues within interaction. He claimed that dialogues can be expressed using different kinds of forms and styles. Utterances can be differentiated by choices in prosodic style such as sad, happy, excited voice, highly enunciated or inaudible

Wardhaugh (2006) tried to relate the level of formality chosen to a variety of factors such as the kind of occasion; the various social gender, age, and other differences between the addressees; the particular task that is involved such as writing, speaking, the emotional involvement in the conversation; and so on. He added that the stylistic appropriateness and inappropriateness is considered in such distinctions in a sentence addressed to a king: What do you intend to do, your majesty? Or addressed to you kid: Waddy intend doin', Rex? He concluded that while it may be difficult to characterize discrete levels of formality, it nevertheless possible to show that native speakers of all languages control a range of stylistic variations.

Stylistic characteristics differ according to the topic the speaker finds himself in. There is no doubt that our style will be attuned when talking to young kids; writing an essay to a lecturer; playing chess with an intimate-close friend; approaching a foreigner in a capital to ask for directions; attending a funeral; indicating seriousness, mockery, humor, respect, disdain; talking to one's self; being stopped of crossing a red traffic light; or burning you tongue by a hot drink.

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