

From Impression to Stylistic Analysis



Subjective & Objective Aspects

Overview

- Definition of style
- Distinctive features of Style
- Subjectivity & Objectivity
- Higher frequencies & Lower Frequencies
- Style is to be measured in terms of deviation
- Difficulty in Describing All Features
- Objectivity is Unachievable
- Intuition & Objectivity
- Quantification & Intuition



Style is a complicated
phenomenon

Why is style a complicated phenomenon ?

- 1. because it involves psychological aspects of reader and writer
- 2. because it is very difficult to quantify features of a style
- 3. Language is dynamic and so is style of an author
- In order to understand style we need to understand psychology of reader and author and language as a whole

From impression to analysis

Everyone who can speak and read can say something interesting and analytical about any piece of language. Every text in the world that you come across is the product of choices made by someone: which words to select, which order to put them in, where and when to say or write them; who is implicitly addressed, what effect or purpose seems to be intended, and so on.

From impression to analysis

- For most people, such observations tend to be highly intuitive and impressionistic. People observe things about texts and utterances like, that sounded rude ; That makes me laugh; The language there sounds flowery and fancy . Sometimes, such impressions can also be a little more technical: That instruction was too direct; there was no 'please' or 'thanks' ; That joke sends you in one direction, and then fools you with a double-meaning ; There are too many flowery and overly-poetic adjectives . These impressions can begin to be considered as being analytical, though we might say they are examples of sensitive language-awareness, or close-reading.

Relativity & Need for Objective data

- Leech and Short explain that aesthetic terms like urbane, curt, exuberant, florid, lucid, plain, vigorous, etc, are not directly referable to any observable linguistic features of texts and one of the long-term aims of stylistics must be to see how far such description can be justified in terms of descriptions of a more linguistic kind. Therefore, Leech and Short, then, go to explain the role of quantitative stylistics in explaining stylistics.

-



How do we analyze a style ?

How do we analyze a style ?

Subjective
analysis

Objective
analysis

Bernard Bloch's definition of style (1953)

- 'The message carried by the frequency distributions and transitional probabilities of its linguistic features, especially as they differ from those of the same features in the language as a whole'

Frequency distributions & Traditional Probabilities

Got Style?



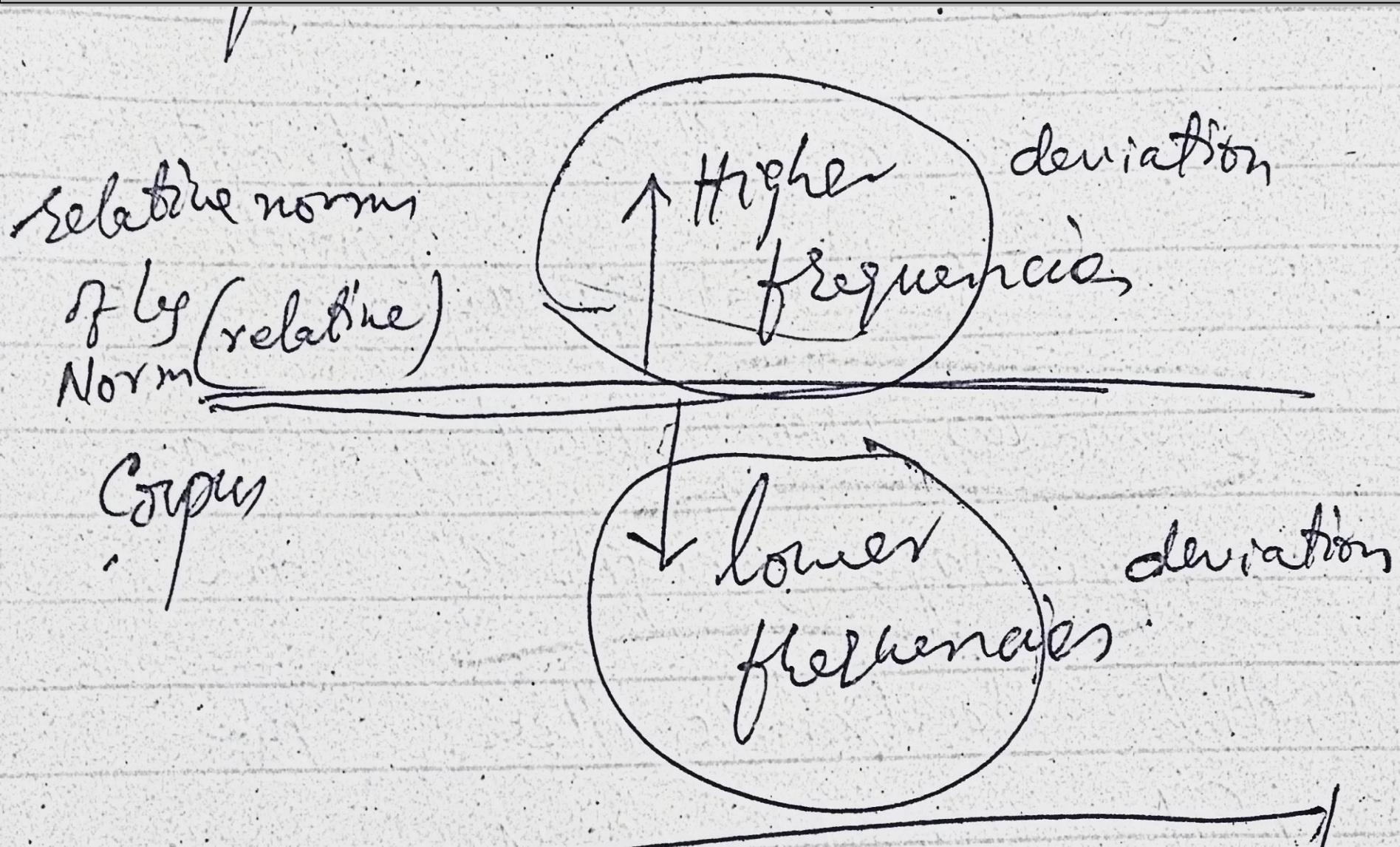
Comparing frequency figures

- In order to objectively measure frequency of particular food item you cook at home, we need to compare this frequency figure with the frequency of food items cooked in your neighborhood .

Distinctive features of Style

- Bloch means that to find out what is **distinctive** about the style of a certain text or corpus we work out the frequencies of the features it contains and measure these figures against equivalent figures which are normal for the language in question. In short, the style is then to be measured in terms of deviations, either higher frequencies or lower frequencies from the norm.

Higher frequencies and Lower Frequencies



a joke

your hair

a good job

your homework

What are transitional probabilities ?

a mistake

your best

make

a cup of tea

friends

an excuse

Transitional probabilities

- In addition to the frequencies, Bloch talks about “transitional probabilities” which means that in addition to the separate frequencies of the words silver and moon, we should determine the frequencies of their combination (silver moon) ----- co-occurrences and or collocations .

- Measuring frequencies against the Whole language



Is Bloch's concept of language as
a whole an objective reality ?

Style is to be measured in terms of deviation.

- For example writer 'x' favors, or is fond of or tends to use language feature 'y', for example that Hemingway tends to use short sentences or that Johnson favors abstract vocabulary. But if we say so it is a guess unless supported by frequency data. If we judge "Hemingway uses short sentences" on Bloch's definition, it means Hemingway's novel's average sentences are shorter than the average length of an English sentence. Then, the problem is "how does one determine the average length of an English sentence?".

Bloch's concept of language as a Whole

Language as
a Whole

Corpus

Corpus of language at a given period

- To arrive at the average length of an English sentence, one should ideally amass a complete corpus of the language at a given period to get what Bloch calls “the language as a whole”. If we resort to sampling, it is bound to involve subjective decisions. So, Bloch’s concept of language as a whole is not the objective reality.

Difficulty in Describing All Features

- Moreover, it is impossible to list exhaustively all linguistic features that may be found in a text; to do so, we require a completely exhaustive description of the language its lexicon, its syntax, its semantics and other characteristics, which is impossible.

Bloch's concept of language as a whole is not the objective reality.

Objectivity is Unachievable

- But the problem is that study of combinatory frequencies is open-ended, when we extend this from syntactical perspective, ie combination frequencies occurring in the syntactical units. Therefore, Leech and Short conclude that the quest for a completely objective measurement of style must be abandoned .



Overemphasizing Objectivity is not realistic

- Therefore, Leech and Short conclude that the quest for a completely objective measurement of style with quantitative method as well as stylistic intuition about a style are important.

In Stylistic Analysis Two things are Important



Stylistic
Intuition

Objectivity

Role of quantitative stylistics

- Quantitative stylistics provides confirmation for our hunches and guesses, insights or intuitions about a certain style.



Role of quantitative stylistics 2

In other words, statistical stylistic study not only compliments the traditional scholarship of literary experts but also provides an alternative method for investigating the works of doubtful provenance (Holmes, 1998). These studies provide authentic results if they work within the same genre and also work within as close a time period as possible. Stylistic markers which occur most frequently in a given passage are also identified by these methods (Mealand, 1997).

Early Quantitative Studies

Mathematicians pioneered in laying a foundation for more vigorous and objective stylistic analysis through their attempts to quantify stylistic features. Mosteller and Wallace's study (1964) is considered as the first authentic stylometric study soundly based on modern statistical procedure using computer as its major research tool. John Burrows (1987) through his series of seminal papers introduced stylometry studies as a viable tool for authorship attribution problem. The availability of modern computing facility has provided a unique opportunity for many stylometricians to introduce many multivariate methods like factor analysis, cluster analysis and correspondence analysis for conducting experiments with high dimensional data and also to widen the frontiers of stylometry (Peng, 2001).

Evidence in measuring a Style

- We need linguistic evidence from texts to support our judgment of a style and linguistic evidence must be couched in terms of numerical frequency.



Importance of Numerical data

- If one critic says Jane Austen frequently uses certain abstract nouns and the other says no she does not, then quantitative evidence is required.



Using Statistics to Study a Style

- Style of an author can be quantified by counting his\her choice of words for expressing his\ her ideas under the assumption that the writer favouring a stock of words for the expression of ideas is regarded, to some extent, subject to chance. Hence given a certain personality and thus a certain style, as its expression, the characteristic properties of style can be described in terms of statistical law. Bailey (1979) says that the stylistic features of a matured writer will be salient, structural, frequent and easily quantifiable. Thus style reflects personality of a writer and this unconscious process is consistent in the case of matured writers.

Using Statistics to Study a Style

- Statistical stylistic study not only compliments the traditional scholarship of literary experts but also provides an alternative method for investigating the works of doubtful provenance (Holmes, 1998). These studies provide authentic results if they work within the same genre and also work within as close a time period as possible. Stylistic markers which occur most frequently in a given passage are also identified by these methods (Mealand, 1997).

Analysis in Stylistics necessitates
identification of variables

Variables in Stylistics

- In Stylistics, variables represent the measurable traits of authors' styles that can vary from author to author

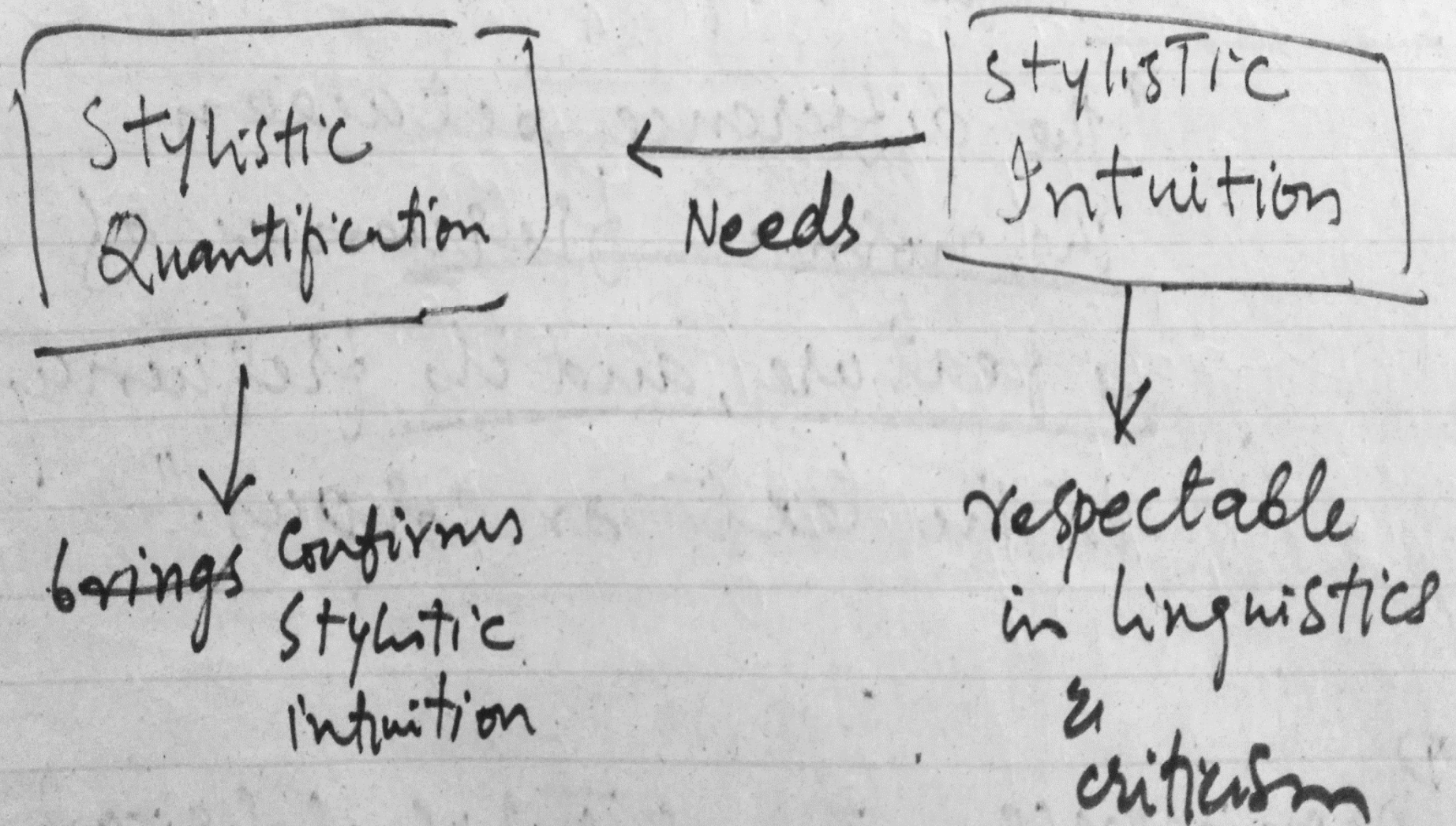
Challenges of Quantitative Studies

Quantitative stylistic studies inhabit two types of problems, the first being the selection of suitable set of stylistic variables and the second being the selection of appropriate techniques. There is no general agreement on the stylistic variable that should be used in stylistic studies. In general, when choosing the stylistic variables, one must use something that has large variation across authors and relatively little variation among an author's own work. Initially, lexical variables have predominated in the stylometry studies, yet this decade has seen the application of syntactic and semantic variables (Holmes, 1998).

Limitations of Quantitative Data

- It also brings to light significant features of style which would otherwise have been overlooked and so lead to further insights. Intuition has a respectable place within linguistics and criticism and the role of quantification depends on how necessary it is to prove one's point because style is such a complicated phenomenon that it would be impractical to demand hard evidence for every observation made. It may be sufficient for many purposes just to enumerate textual examples of the feature under discussion.

Quantification & Intuition



Conclusion

- To conclude , one may agree with Halliday that a rough indication of frequencies is often just what is needed: the essential point is that the use of numerical data should be adopted to the need.