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Stylistics in France Today

The study of stylistics in France is as varied and controversial as in many other countries. Stylisticians are tempted to subdivide it into discourse stylistics, poetics, theoretical stylistics, or even linguistic stylistics (stylistics based on linguistic theories). The same can be said about literary studies, which can easily be divided into even more subcategories than stylistics. Literary theorists know where their object lies (i.e., in literature, be it fiction, poetry, or theater). However, the corpora used in stylistics, as practiced in France, are not restricted to “literature” as expressed through novels, plays, or poems. The corpora include any piece of writing on any subject, from political speeches to the language of advertising (i.e., “literature” in the very broad sense of the word, as in the phrase “sales literature”).

Foreign-language departments in France have been trying progressively to develop the study of “specialized varieties” of English (or other languages). These varieties include, for example, the study of medical, legal, commercial, or financial discourse. These fields of research have to be included in any society whose aim is to study the production of discourse in the English language. The Société de Stylistique Anglaise, which I represent, encourages any attempt at providing a stylistic study of medical, financial, or legal varieties of English, even though the majority of the articles that we publish in our journal, the Bulletin de la Société de Stylistique Anglaise, are devoted to literature.

However, stylistics has to be more than just the study of the production of discourse in any field. What is at stake here is the theoretical background we rely on. This is where linguistics, or more generally the philosophy of language, comes in. Stylistics is sometimes regarded as a form of “applied linguistics”—that is, the application of linguistic theories, methods, and findings to the production of texts, be they literary or not. The most influential school of linguistics in France since the 1960s has involved a theory called Énonciation, which, unlike so many French theories (especially in the field of literary studies) has not found its way beyond the borders of its native land.

Énonciation was heavily influenced by Emile Benveniste, the highly acclaimed French linguist, who was especially active in the 1950s and 1960s. This movement questioned the Chomskyan approach, especially the rejection of subjectivity from linguistic analysis. Énonciation is precisely about the
rehabilitation of all forms of subjectivity in language, including grammar. Thus, some grammatical markers were deemed to be more subjective than others. For instance, the "auxiliary avoir + past participle" construction in French (e.g., il a fait) was considered as pertaining to the subjective plane of discourse, in which every utterance assumes a speaker and a hearer and, "in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way." By contrast, the simple past (e.g., il fit) in a narrative is "the tense of the event outside the person of a narrator" (Benveniste 208).

French grammarians specializing in the English language extended this notion of subjectivity to aspectual forms in English. A lot of research has been done on the relationship between the speaker (or the énonciateur) and his or her utterances. Proponents of Énonciation set great store by the speaker's viewpoint with respect to what he or she is saying and by intersubjective relations (as with pragmatics but unlike generative grammar). That is why many articles have been written about the effects produced by such-and-such a grammatical marker.

The proponents of Énonciation also rely heavily on notions that Chomskyan linguistics had somewhat neglected; that is, the situation of utterance, best symbolized by the three shifters: I, here, and now. An utterance cannot be analyzed outside a specific situation of utterance, and concepts like connection/disconnection with the situation of utterance are central to the theoretical framework of Énonciation. Although the logician Hans Reichenbach (1891-1953) is little known in France, Énonciation can be described as somewhat Reichenbachian in its treatment of tense, in that utterances are to be interpreted relative to three Reichenbachian parameters: speech time, reference time, and event time.

The very concept of the "ideal speaker-listener," as used by Noam Chomsky, is totally foreign to the Énonciation school of thought. For Chomsky, "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors" (3). The object of linguistic study for an Énonciativiste, by contrast, is a specific speaker in the actual context in which he or she communicates with someone else.

Like "cognitive grammar" (as championed by Ronald Langacker, Bernd Heine, or William Croft), Énonciation was partly born of a reaction to generative grammar, which (at least in its early stages) was not interested in the origin of utterances, in the relation between speaker and utterance, or in the specific situation in which a given sentence is produced. Some generativists are partisans of "autonomous linguistics." In other words, they view languages as self-contained mental systems that bear no relation to the lives of their speakers (Cobley 131). As it happens, cognitive grammar and Énonciation have a lot in common, even though they developed independently. They both question the precepts of
transformational grammar and they are both concerned with mental activity. Regarding transformations, both cognitive grammar and Énonciation challenge the idea that a question like *Will the boy leave?* is the surface structure of a deep structure that reads as *the boy (= Det + N) + will (= Infl) + leave (= VP)*, to which an inversion transformation is applied, thus yielding *Will the boy leave* (in which the underscore _ means that something has been *moved* from that place).

Cognitive grammar and Énonciation also question the idea that there might be "empty morphemes," like the auxiliary *do*, which is often considered as an empty graph (the famous dummy *do*). More precisely, Énonciation tends to call grammatical morphemes "operators," not in the usual sense of the word as used by Randolph Quirk et al. (i.e., the first auxiliary in a given Verb Phrase), but as markers of a specific form of mental working or processing (cf. Latin *operari* = work). The determinant *a*, for instance, in *Look, a balloon!* shows, first, that the word *balloon* in an "*a* + Noun" construction is stocked in the mind of the speaker with its physical and cultural properties, which can be aptly applied to an object whose definition corresponds to a balloon and, second, that there is an underlying mental working of *a* (or "of the operator *a*"), which can be summarized as follows: I know that the object I am referring to is one element of a psycholinguistic category called *balloons*, yet *a* provides new information: the element introduced by *a* is supposed to correspond to new information provided in my specific situation of utterance for the listener.

This sketchy presentation of Énonciation clearly shows how much this theoretical framework and cognitive linguistics have in common. Operations, as conceived by Énonciation, clearly fit in with the cognitive agenda. A lot of theoretical preoccupations are shared by both Énonciation and cognitive linguistics. Concepts like *viewing* or *grounding* as used by Langacker have their counterparts in the "enunciative" concepts of *repérage* or *situation d'énonciation*. However, what differentiates cognitive grammar from Énonciation is that the former is explicitly interested in the way the mind works, and in drawing a parallel between the mind and the structure of language. The mind thus becomes the center of theorists' intellectual investigations. Even though Chomsky refers to the "cognitive revolution" introduced by his views about language in the 1950s and 1960s, the phrase "cognitive grammar" applies to a non- (or even anti-) Chomskyan approach to language, whose aim is to link language to other aspects of human experience. In other words, linguistic knowledge is not to be dissociated from other types of knowledge (see Heine 3-17, for instance).

A number of linguists in France, like Jean-Rémi Lapaire (Université de Bordeaux 3) and myself, are trying to bring together the work of Énonciation theorists and cognitive grammarians. That is why a major international conference, "From Gram to Mind, Grammar as Cognition," was held in France at the Université de Bordeaux 3 in May 2005, and also why the conference organizers founded the French Association of Cognitive Linguistics (AFLICO).
So, where does stylistics as practiced in France fit in with these developments in linguistics? Stylistics in France is clearly influenced by the énonciative trend very briefly described here, and also more and more by what could be deemed its theoretical blood-brother, by which I mean cognitive grammar (or its counterpart in syntax, often referred to as “construction grammar”). The December 2004 issue of our journal bears witness to this trend, as can be seen in the articles by Craig Hamilton and Stéphanie Bonnefille. The former explores how the “metaphors we live by”—and more precisely life is a journey—can inform literary works, like Woolf’s The Voyage Out; the latter studies how the conceptualization of a resultative construction (“being emailed to death”) is governed by a cognitive scene that includes the path schema, with a departure point A, an arrival point B, a trajectory and a path connecting A with B. As Hamilton wrote in the preface to this special issue, “where there is language there is cognition, and where there is cognition there are patterns we can study to gain some insight into reading and interpretive processes.” Even in a grammatical construction like resultative sentences, there are cognitive patterns. Of course, this is something many generativists would challenge, but bringing together Énonciation theorists and cognitive grammarians may be one of the more important developments in stylistics in France today.

Works Cited


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was developed on the basis of the analysis of a corpus of written narratives. This model accounts for a larger variety of phenomena than was previously the case, including, for example, the presentation of "hypothetical" words and thoughts, and the "embedding" of SW&TP inside other instances of SW&TP. Both of these phenomena are shown to be particularly central to the extract from Barnes's novel. Finally, the results of the analysis of the passage are consistently compared with the results of the analysis of a larger corpus, in order to make more reliable claims about its peculiar characteristics and potential effects.

Yanna Popova, "'Little is left to tell': Beckett's Theater of Mind, Ohio Impromptu, and the New Cognitive Turn in Analyzing Drama" / 452

This article argues that the emerging field of cognitive poetics, with its emphasis on experientiality and embodiment in meaning construction, is particularly well-suited to articulate the interpretive strategies necessary to make a unified sense of theater. In the past the dramatic text, seen as both written and performed, has been studied most exhaustively by semioticians. The disadvantages of the semiotic enterprise in the study of theater can be shown to stem from the semiotic reduction of all linguistic and nonlinguistic phenomena to systems of signs, thus largely ignoring the experiential content of meaning. In this article converging evidence from cognitive science about the interdependence of perception, action, and cognition is used to substantiate the proposal that theater, uniquely among the arts, is best understood as the site of corporeal experience, a form of cathartic simulation based on empathic projection. An analysis of Beckett's Ohio Impromptu aims to elucidate further some of the theoretical claims that underlie this proposal.

Craig A. Hamilton, "Toward a Cognitive Rhetoric of Imagism" / 468

In this article, I reveal how concepts like fictive motion, image schemas, and analogical reference relate to the cognitive rhetoric of Imagism. I focus especially on the figurative language of Imagist poetry by analyzing similes, metaphors, and analogies in Imagist poems. I discuss the evolution of Imagist style before discussing figures in specific poems. I draw on findings from cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics to suggest what a fully developed cognitive rhetoric of Imagism could entail.

Michael Burke, "Cognitive Stylistics in the Classroom" / 491

This article is a pedagogical enquiry into how the recently emerging field of cognitive stylistics might best be taught in the university classroom in order to facilitate maximum learning and understanding. Based on my teaching experiences, and relying on qualitative research in the form of closed and open classes of written responses to a questionnaire, in this essay I will argue that ideally students should take a short course in literary stylistics before they join a cognitive stylistics program. The main reason for this, as shown in the response data, is that without such a grounding in the basics of stylistics, students are often unable to grasp the intricacies of either stylistics or cognition—conceivably because they are having to learn two new things at once. Hence, an earlier encounter with stylistics in its default form best facilitates an optimal learning environment for cognitive stylistics in the university classroom.

Wilfrid Rutge, "Stylistics in France Today" / 511

The aim of this article is to provide a brief survey of the recent developments in stylistics in France and to show how influential linguistics has been in this field of research. It also shows
how indebted stylistics is to the French linguist Emile Benveniste, who initiated a linguistic trend called *Énonciation*, whose basic principles make it highly compatible with cognitive linguistics as championed by Ronald Langacker. Recent studies in stylistics have shown that there are cognitive patterns at work in language and therefore in literary and nonliterary texts.


Recent advances in conceptual integration or blending theory, as well as new insights of cognitive linguists and psychologists into such experiential aspects as perspectivization, profiling, and the role of idealized cognitive and cultural models, have been of great interest to many stylisticians working in related areas. These developments have given rise to a new paradigm for literary studies—cognitive poetics or stylistics. After an initial and almost exclusive focus on the study of conceptual metaphors (see e.g. the special issue of *Style* [36.3] on *Cognitive Approaches to Figurative Language*), cognitive stylisticians have now considerably broadened their field of investigation, as witnessed by the three books reviewed here: an introductory textbook by Peter Stockwell, and two collections of articles, one edited by Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen, and the other by Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper.