



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Language & Communication

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/langcom

Limits to styling: The case of adjustments in commemorative names

Peter K.W. Tan

National University of Singapore, Singapore

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Commemorative names
Style
Indexicality
University buildings

ABSTRACT

The notion of style has received extensive attention under the rubric of stylistics. There, the focus has been strongly, though not exclusively, on literary texts. Particular stylistic choices or patterns of stylistic choices have been deemed to be significant or foregrounded and this is said to allow the reader to reach grounded interpretations of the texts.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Style has now garnered further attention in the context of non-literary texts and there has been increased interest in the notion of sociolinguistic styling (e.g. Eckert, 2008). In traditional sociolinguistics, the notion of style involving meaningful choices has also been strongly developed within the Labovian tradition of variationist studies (say Labov, 2006). The extensive use of a statistical methodology resulted in the extensive use of linear scales, meaning that variation is examined as two-dimensional. This has led to this conception of style to be open to the charge of being reductive (Coupland, 2007). In reaction, there is a movement towards a more complex sociolinguistic conception of style where speakers are social actors harnessing linguistic and non-linguistic resources to make social meaning, which itself is 'a complex phenomenon, not merely referring to simple indexical relationships between language forms and membership of social groups' (Coupland, 2007: 177). The emphasis has now moved to local indexical work anchored on human activity.

In this paper, which focuses on commemorative naming, I consider the way in which the act of naming itself as constituting stylistic choice in the sense of a foregrounded and deliberate selection among various options available. I also consider it part of sociolinguistic styling which lends itself to complex indexical relationships.

The notion of commemorative naming itself is well established and the term appears in documents produced by local government authorities and geographical societies. For example, the Vancouver city council provides this definition: 'Commemorative Naming refers to the naming of a property in honour of outstanding achievement, distinctive service, or significant community contribution' (City of Vancouver, 2006) – though we might broaden this definition in relation to the entity being named and the rationale of naming. The specificity of that definition is of interest because it indexes some of the community's expectations with respect to commemorative names.

In this paper, I will consider community expectations in relation to name adjustments because that puts the expectations and indexical relationships into focus. The first example is of New College becoming Murray Edwards College in Cambridge University: this has not been controversial. The second example is of the change from Simkins Residence Hall to Creekside Hall in the University of Texas. This has been much more fraught with difficulties because of Simkins's links with the Ku-Klux-

E-mail address: PeterTan@nus.edu.sg.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2016.12.007>

0271-5309/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article in press as: Tan, P.K.W., Limits to styling: The case of adjustments in commemorative names, *Language & Communication* (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2016.12.007>

Klan (Brophy 2011). Finally I consider the low-key change of Angsana College to the College of Alice & Peter Tan in Singapore, which while not controversial, has raised some eyebrows.

1. The notion of style

In 1985, I applied to the Department of English Studies in Edinburgh to do an MSc degree. However, come the autumn of that year, I found myself in the Department of Applied Linguistics because English Studies had merged with Applied Linguistics. It was as a result of this university reorganisation that I found myself in the department that Alan Davies had long been associated with and was then its head. So it was in this department that I finally completed my thesis on stylistics. Since then though, I have moved on to other research areas, but now I come full circle as I consider style again – albeit extending its scope and relating it to naming.

This paper considers the notion of style as applied to names, specifically commemorative names. (I will define the term below.) In the process, I consider how styling is constrained and how these constraints are negotiated in three cases of name adjustments involving commemorative names.

The linguistic investigation of style is by no means a new enterprise. Since the 1960s, there has been a strong strand of development in the stylistic analysis of literary texts so that literary stylistics is an established area of study. Non-literary texts have also been subjected to analysis from the perspective of style. A key work is Crystal and Davy's *Investigating English Style* in 1969. For them,

the aim of stylistics is to analyse language habits with the main purpose of identifying from the general mass of linguistic features common to English as used on every conceivable occasion, those features that are restricted to certain kinds of social context: to explain, where possible, why such features have been used, as opposed to other alternatives; to classify these features into categories based upon a view of their function in the social context. (p 10)

This has been developed most fully within the tradition of systemic functional grammar: see, for instance, Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), where the notion of 'alternatives' is conceived as choices which operate as systems. The social context is manifested as different situation types, often discussed in terms of 'registers', which give rise to different genres or text types. Finally, these choices are seen as meaningful and are seen as semiotic in nature.

Within sociolinguistics, the notion of style involving meaningful choices has also been strongly developed within the Labovian tradition of variationist studies (for example, Labov, 2006). With the incorporation of a statistical methodology, linguistic choices are correlated to, and are indexical of, affiliations of class, gender, age, ethnicity and so on. Often, particular pronunciation choices are recorded on a large scale, such as the use of rhotic pronunciations or glottal stops.

Sociolinguistic styling has often been seen in the context of change, even as individuals within communities re-evaluate their social circumstances and their affiliations.

Changes operate because communities are heterogeneous, and because speaker and listeners evaluate competing linguistic forms. They recognise that variants have indexical meanings and thus that their use may be more or less attractive, appropriate or valuable in particular social circumstances. (Foulkes et al., 2010: 734)

One criticism of this tradition has been the use of linear scales (in other words, variation is examined as two-dimensional). This conception of style has therefore laid itself open to the charge of being reductive (Coupland, 2007) and ignoring large aspects of the context.

Giles's (1973) development of the recently articulated Labovian paradigm into his communication accommodation theory – in terms of convergence or divergence – made for a more dynamic model of style with its emphasis on the relational processes of the interlocutors and the motivations of the speakers. This paved the way for a more complex sociolinguistic conception of style where speakers are social actors harnessing linguistic and non-linguistic resources to make social meaning, which itself is 'a complex phenomenon, not merely referring to simple indexical relationships between language forms and membership of social groups' (Coupland, 2007: 177). The emphasis has now moved to local indexical work anchored on human activity.

The notion of what is indexed (signalled or pointed at) is now also broadening; Eckert has developed a perspective which incorporates Silverstein's (2003) notion of indexical order, so that 'the meanings of the variables are not precise or fixed but rather constitute a field of potential meanings – an *indexical field*, or constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable' (Eckert, 2008: 454).

The choices made by a particular speaker might presuppose a particular socio-demographic identity. The choices could also be related to ideological positions taken, and speakers might even consciously talk about these choices and employ metadiscourse. Particular behavioural choices are seen to have indexical value. For example, Hall-Lew (2009) focused on pronunciation choices in California. It was possible to hear different pronunciations of the vowel in *goat* – a traditional back vowel, or a fronted vowel. There are different frequencies of occurrence between Asian Americans and European Americans, between younger and older speakers, and between males and females. The low occurrence of fronting in *goat* among older Asian American women might therefore lead us to see the non-fronted *goat* vowel to have indexical value, and cause us to associate it with older Asian American women. As mentioned above, the association need not be with socio-demographic identity. In California, there are character types established within the community, such as the Valley Girl which has largely negative ideological associations, and the Mission Twang associated with upper-working class Irish Catholic civil

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7298299>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7298299>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)