



Script design in the media: Radio talk norms behind a professional voice

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Abstract

The study of style within the variationist tradition in sociolinguistics has received little attention in general terms. Some of the main introductory textbooks dealing with this discipline hardly mention style as a variable, and, when they do, they usually understand style as a reflection of the speaker's attention to his/her own speech. Contrary to this tradition, two main approaches have been proposed. First, in the *Audience Design* model [Bell, A., 1984. *Language style as audience design*. *Language in Society* 13, 145–204] stylistic variation is seen as the result of an adaptation to the features of a present or absent audience. Second, in the so-called *Speaker Design* model, stylistic variation is seen as a process of identity building. In our study, we analyse the speech of a radio presenter in a local station in Murcia and compare it to the audience's linguistic behaviour as shown in the phone calls received during the programme. We also analyse the data obtained in an interview with the radio presenter. Our results, which show a radical divergence between the presenter's speech and that of his audience, are contrasted with both Audience Design and Speaker Design theoretical tenets, using the explicit knowledge of the presenter's attitudes and opinions to contrast theory and fact. We conclude that neither model offers a completely satisfactory explanation of the patterns found. Finally, we reflect on the need to consider not only *performance*, but also the *script* (in the form of a professional voice used following a particular linguistic policy based on sociolinguistic norms and attitudes to language) that condition the individual linguistic behaviour, thus suggesting the need to consider community-specific factors in the explanation of stylistic variation.

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1. Introduction

Despite its centrality in sociolinguistic variation, the study of style within the variationist tradition has received little attention in general terms (Macaulay, 1999). Style enjoys a pivotal position in sociolinguistic variation, with *stylistic* (or intra-speaker) variation constituting a principal component together with *linguistic* variation and *social* (or inter-speaker) variation (see Eckert and Rickford, 2001, p. 1). Additionally, the observation of stylistic variability, for example, as Labov (1966) showed, has been crucial to detect and understand phenomena such as linguistic change in progress.

The traditional delimitation of style in variationist studies is based on the speech styles continuum established by the pioneering studies by Labov (1966) and Trudgill (1972, 1974) for the sociolinguistic interview, focussing largely on the co-variation of linguistic variables and external factors such as topic, audience, situation and addressee; i.e., to simplify somewhat, style as a reflection of the speaker's attention to his or her own speech (AS) and using the interlocutor and/or the topic and/or the context of conversation as factors in determining the linguistic variety to be employed in a given situation. But the notion of attention paid to speech with the formal-informal distinction with a stylistic continuum employed by Labov (1966) and Trudgill (1974) has been questioned for the methodological and theoretical difficulties this approach entails (see Mahl, 1972; Macaulay and Treveyland, 1973; Macaulay, 1976, 1977, 1997; Rickford, 1979; Gal, 1979; Milroy, 1980; Romaine, 1980, 1982; Wolfram, 1981; Bell, 1977, 1982a,b, 1984, 1991, 1999, 2001; Levinson, 1988; Coup-land, 1988; Figueroa, 1994; Rickford and McNair-Knox, 1994; Johnstone, 1996; Johnstone and Bean, 1997; Schilling-Estes, 1998, 2002; or Cutillas-Espinosa, 2001a, amongst others).

Contrary to this tradition, together with Giles' socio psychological model known as speech accommodation theory (SAT) (see Giles and Powesland, 1975; Giles and Smith, 1979, or Giles and Coupland, 1991), Bell's *Audience Design* theory (see Bell, 1984) is probably the most complete study carried out so far dealing with style as a sociolinguistic variable and pioneeringly questioning the traditional attention to speech model. Inspired by the SAT in the consideration of the effects of addressees as audience members in terms of accent convergence versus. divergence, though in a more subtle form (Macaulay, 1999, p. 14), the Audience Design model (AD) states that people engage in style shifting normally in response to audience members rather than to shifts in amount of attention paid to speech (see also Youssef, 1993). In this way, as Schilling-Estes (2002, 384) points out, AD provides a fuller account of stylistic variation than AS because (i) it goes beyond speech styles in the sociolinguistic interview by trying to be applicable to natural conversational interaction; (ii) it aims at explaining the interrelation of intra-speaker and inter-speaker variation and its quantitative patterning; and (iii) it introduces an element of speaker agency into stylistic variation, i.e., it includes responsive as well as initiative dimensions to account for the fact that (a) speakers respond to audience members in shaping their speech and (b) they sometimes engage in style shifts that do not correspond with the sociolinguistic characteristics of their present audience.

A completely different conception of style is represented by Biber and Finegan (1994). They argue that stylistic variation should not be considered as a mirror image of inter-speaker variation. Rather, they assume that "the patterns of register variation are basic and the patterns of social dialect variation result from differential access among social groups to the communicative situations and activities that promote register variation" (Biber and Finegan, 1994, p. 337). From this viewpoint, style is basically context-depen-

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