Discourse Pragmatics vs. Prescriptive Stylistics

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A programmatic claim is made in this paper regarding the relationship between discourse pragmatics and stylistics. I suggest that the notion of prescriptive stylistics is ready to be reexamined in the light of the knowledge about language that has accumulated in recent decades, particularly its discourse-pragmatic, cognitive-psychological, and social aspects. Below I attempt to substantiate this claim empirically.

0. Introduction: Why Prescriptive Stylistics (PS)?

Stylistics is a well-established area of language study, consisting of descriptive and prescriptive stylistics. Lucas (1955:16) seemed to grasp the dual nature of style when he defined it as two things: 1) a way of writing, and 2) a good way of writing. The first, descriptive stylistics, can be found in the functional treatments of the Prague School and of linguists such as Halliday, Crystal and Davy, as well as in literary and sociolinguistic treatments of topics such as register.

The second, prescriptive stylistics, is found primarily in handbooks. As a practical matter, prescriptive stylistics has a great deal of potential significance for and influence on non-linguists. It can be used to introduce students to linguistic concepts and can help with effective communication. Moreover, stylistics handbooks are a gold mine for discourse analysts, as they deal with areas of language that are not controlled by cut-and-dried grammatical rules but rather by elusive and hitherto ill-defined regularities and relations (unless, as is sometimes the case, the treatments are simply completely misguided). Despite its pervasiveness, however, prescriptive stylistics has been virtually ignored by linguists, with a few not very successful exceptions, e.g. Darbyshire (1971).

The recent tendency among stylisticians towards a lesser degree of normativeness nevertheless falls short of taking full advantage of advances in linguistics, and especially in discourse pragmatics. See, for example, Todd and Hancock's (1986:360-361) failure to distinguish between particles and prepositions in "This is the sort of behavior up with which I shall not put"; or Burchfield's (1996:577) mistaken claims about a double passive construction in "members who are found to have taken cocaine." More generally, however, as stated by Rannie (1915:130), a

champion of the study of stylistics in the early part of the 20th century: "Style is concerned not with correct or incorrect, but with good, better, and best." Discourse-pragmatics, as an area with scalar rather than absolute distinctions, is well equipped to provide a *theoretical* foundation to the phenomena that have traditionally been treated in prescriptive stylistics.

1. Dangling modifiers and Voice

I will explore two of several syntactic constructions that are staples of English prescriptive stylistics: dangling participles and passives. In general, the complexities in the acceptability judgments of certain syntactic constructions have increasingly been recognized, hence a trend towards greater acceptance for at least some of them. Among formerly proscribed constructions that have virtually "made it" into the norm are split infinitives, whose rehabilitation seems to have begun with Jespersen and Curme, and which have steadily gained ground through Morris and Morris (1975), Strunk and White (1979), and Quirk et al. (1985:1121-1123), up to the latest edition of the Chicago Manual of Style (1993:76); and Close's well-argued analysis (1987) was perhaps not without effect on their recent redemption. Lately, some authors prefer to allocate the use of some traditionally non-normative variants to colloquial and informal speech, and so refrain from condemning them indiscriminately (as in Todd and Hancock's (1986) or Burchfield's (1996) treatments of stranded prepositions).

1.1. Dangling modifiers (participles)

The treatments of dangling modifiers by stylisticians range from straight proscription (Morris and Morris 1975, Strunk and White 1979, Chicago Manual of Style 1993) to recommendations of avoidance in cases of potential ambiguity (New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage 1994, Todd and Hancock 1986). Interestingly, Burchfield (1996:805) acknowledges the actual rarity of ambiguity, but blames "the centuries-old failure to fault overt examples of unattached participles" in part for the present difficulty in making acceptability judgments. I will argue below that—on the contrary—rather than having anything to do with normativists' permissiveness, dangling participles have managed to continue being (legitimately) generated *despite* the proscriptions of normativists.

Several types of dangling participles have enjoyed acceptance since the early part of the 20th century: a) absolute participles like "Strictly speaking, …", "Taking all things into consideration, …", "Putting it mildly, …"; b) "generalized" participles like "When dining in the restaurant, a jacket and tie are required"; and c) in scientific publications, like "When treating the patient with.., the therapy consists …" (Curme 1947, Quirk et al. 1985). Other types of dangling participles remain proscribed in English, although numerous literary attestations never fail to be listed, e.g. (1), an example from Jespersen (1964:94).

(1) *He* felt himself gently touched on the shoulder, and looking around, *his* father stood before *him*. (Dickens).

Strunk and White (1979:13-14) recommend rewriting (2) as (3), and Quirk et al. (1985:1121-1123) suggest (7)-(9) for (4)-(6) respectively (the acceptability judgments for the latter are those of Quirk et al.).

(2) Without a friend to counsel him, the temptation proved irresistible.
(3) Without a friend to counsel him, he found the temptation irresistible.
(4) ?Driving to Chicago that night, a sudden thought struck me.
(5) ?Since leaving her, life has become pointless.
(6) ?Walking down the boardwalk, a tall building came into view.
(7) Driving to Chicago that night, I was struck by a sudden thought.
(8) Since leaving her, I have felt that life was pointless.
(9) Walking down the boardwalk, I saw a tall building.

It is important to note, however, that (3) and (7)-(9) are not exactly the same as (2) and (4)-(6). The distinction is particularly clear in (2) vs. (3): the main clause in (2) has a certain immediacy that (3) lacks. Narratologically, (2) would be a case of *style indirect libre* (Lips 1926), while (3) is the voice of an omniscient narrator. The same immediacy distinguishes (4)-(6) from (7)-(9), although it is impossible to ascribe it exactly to *style indirect libre*, given the first person narration. What unites (2) and (4)-(6) is the acuity of the psychological and perceptual experiences described in the main clauses: "The temptation is irresistible!", "I know what!", "Life is pointless!", and "Wow! A tall building!". This acuity is lost in (3) and (7)-(9), although these "corrected" versions may gain in normativeness. The difference in acuity, I would argue, amounts to a difference in point of view. In (2), the point of view is the character's, whereas in (3) it is the narrator's. Extending the same distinction to the other examples: in (4)-(6) the point of view is that of the speaker as s/he was at the time the narrated event took place, while (7)-(9) reflect the point of view of the speaker removed from the scene of the narrated event and placed in the speech event.[1] Pragmatically—and, of course, narratologically—the difference is significant.

There is another, not unrelated factor that accounts for the productive and regular generation of sentences with dangling participles, despite repeated proscriptions by stylisticians. Sentences like (2) and (4)-(6) are possible only when the deleted participial subject is topical. In narratives, this usually means being the topic of the preceding context. To that extent, subject deletions in dangling participles can be considered intersentential forward deletions, rather than intrasentential backward deletions. It is notable that Quirk et al. (1985) assume that the deleted participial subjects in (4)-(6) are all first person. Perhaps the relative prominence of "I" on the scale of topicality (cf. Kuno's (1987) "Person Hierarchy") has suggested such a reading of (4)-(6), although deleted 3rd person subjects would also be

[1] The terms "speech event" and "narrated event" are used here in the sense of Jakobson (1956:133 ff).

possible in (4)-(6), provided that the subjects are topical in the preceding context. Cognitively, the referential knowledge of the referent of the deleted subject must be assumable by the speaker to be among the knowledge items activated at the moment preceding the utterance of the preposed participial clauses;[2] the greater the justification for such an assumption, the more acceptable the sentence.

At least one of the conditions just suggested—the topicality of the deleted participial subject and the assumption in the main clause of the point of view of the participant of the narrated event—appears to be satisfied in all "good" sentences with dangling participles in English and in a number of other languages; consider the following examples:[3]

(10) Hearing the floor creak behind me, my heart froze with fear, for I realized that Moriarty was inches away.

(11) Zabole me glava, slušajući tu dreku.
hurt me-acc head-nom hearing that fight-acc
'My head started to hurt, listening to that fight.' (SC)

(12) V takuju noč', proxodja po cepjam, gusto mozgi nalivajutsja dumami.
in such night passing through front-lines heavily brains swell thoughts-instr
'On such a night, while passing through the front lines, one's brains heavily swell with thoughts.' (R)

(13) While driving through the snowstorm, dreading every curve, my car skidded helplessly over the icy road.

(14) En chevauchant à travers la forêt, nos montures prirent peur.
while riding across the forest our mounts became afraid
'Travelling through the forest on horseback, our mounts took fright.' (F)

(15) Bidding each other farewell, Holmes turned on his heels, while Watson proceeded in the direction of the morgue.

(16) Polučiv èto izvestie, mnoju byli nemedlenno prinjaty sootvetstvujuščie mery. (R)
receiving this notice by-me were immediately taken appropriate measures-nom
'Receiving the notice, appropriate measures were taken by me immediately.'

(17) Upon awakening next morning, the somber knell of church bells reached our ears.

(18) Having known Harry for five years, he still reminds me of a baboon.

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[2] To paraphrase this in terms of knowledge sets, as discussed below in section 3: the referential knowledge of the referents of the deleted subjects must be in the set of current concern at the moment preceding the utterance; see Yokoyama (1986) for details.

[3] The following abbreviations are used: Cz = Czech, F = French, LV = Late Vedic Sanskrit, OR = Old Russian, R = Russian, SC = Serbian/Croatian.

(19) Vraćajući se uveče, dočekala me je mlaka crvenkasta svetlost.
returning refl evening welcomed me past warm purple light
'Returning home in the evening, a warm purple glow welcomed me.' (SC)

(20) I ubdistasja ot sna, i poskočivši skoro ot lože svoego,
and awaking from sleep and jumping quickly from bed self's
napade na nix strax velik o videnii tom.
fell on them fear great of vision that
'And the two of them woke from their sleep, and jumping off their bed quickly, a great fear fell upon them about that vision.' (OR)

(21) tám ha enam drstvá bhír viveda
that-one ptcl him seeing fear found
'And seeing him, fear overtook him.' (LV)

(22) Vylezá z domu, takové nám byl mráz.
going-out from house such to-us was frost
'Going outside, it was so cold (on us).' (Cz dial.)

These examples contain cases of synecdochic antecedents in (10)-(12), split antecedents in (15), possessive antecedents in (13), (14), and (17), and oblique antecedents in (16) and in (18)-(21); in (22), the dative *nám* 'to-us', coreferential with the deleted participial subject, is not an argument but rather a so-called Dative of Interest, a strongly topical non-argument element that is frequent in Czech, especially spoken Czech (King 1998). All of these deletions are seriously problematic for a straightforward intrasentential syntactic analysis and must instead be accounted for by resorting to the discourse-pragmatic notions suggested above. Nor can straightforward prescriptive stylistics account for the high acceptability rating of these sentences even in languages in which the normative rule proscribing dangling participles is enforced, such as English, French, or Russian. Note, however, that no proscription exists in Old Russian, Serbian/Croatian, Sanskrit, or in Czech dialects. In modern languages with a strong prescriptive tradition and with a grammatical orientation towards sentential syntax, the formulation of the participial subject deletion rule has been couched in terms of subject identity, in all likelihood because in most cases the subject and topic of a sentence in these languages overlap. This is why Burchfield (1996) was misguided in ascribing the difficulty in judging the acceptability of dangling participles to a long-standing failure to fault these constructions: there was no reason to proscribe dangling participles in the first place, as long as they satisfied the two conditions suggested above. It is likely, rather, that native speakers' ambivalence towards them results from the longstanding but misguided proscription itself.

1.2. Voice

Another example of an English stylistic rule that can benefit from a discourse-pragmatic perspective is the recommendation against the use of the passive voice. This recommendation stems from the claim that the passive voice is weak while the active voice is vigorous and direct. The influential figure Quiller-Couch (1923:120-

121) was quite forceful in his prescription: "Generally use transitive verbs, that strike their objects, and use them in the active voice, eschewing the stationary passive, with its little auxiliary *it's* and *was*'s […] by his use of the straight verb […] you can tell a man's style, if it be masculine or neuter". Eastman (1978) and Strunk and White (1979) follow suit, advocating the "vigorous" and "forcible" active voice. Such judgments, evidently, arose from a cultural attitude that values "vigor" and "directness", combined with a faulty meta-linguistic intuition that the grammatical *active* voice is *vigorous* while the *passive* voice is *weak*.[4]

To be sure, more nuanced considerations have also been voiced by grammarians. Notable among them are Jespersen's claims (1964:120-121), which early on mention the effect of voice in shifting point of view: "the person or thing that is in the centre of interest at the moment is made the subject of the sentence". (This, in fact, is an early formulation of what Kuno and Kaburaki proposed in 1977 as "Empathy".) In (23), Jespersen said, "the greater interest" is "taken in the passive rather than in the active subject":

(23) His son was run over by a car.

Quirk et al. (1985:943) also point to "the importance of the passive voice as the means of reversing the normal order of 'agentive' and 'affected' elements, and thus of adjusting clause structure to end-focus and end-weight"; a similar observation was made by Eastman (1978:153). This point, as well as Quirk et al.'s observation that "[T]he passive is generally more commonly used in informative than in imaginative writing, notably in the objective, non-personal style of scientific articles and news items" (808), are entirely consistent with the "Topic Hierarchy" and "Humanness Hierarchy" proposed in Kuno (1987). The use of passive voice in the form of the "impersonal passive" has in fact been long accepted in PS; cf. Copperud (1964:289), who found "'The issue was discussed for an hour…' hardly objectionable if the discussers of the issue are of no moment." Fowler, for his part, objected to those cases of impersonalization in which deleting the *by*-agentive deprives the hearer of information as to who the responsible party is, thus shirking the responsibility by using constructions like "It is felt that…" (1965:440).

Despite normativists' recommendations to the contrary, the passive voice continues to be produced by speakers of English, and for a good reason. While Gross's (1979) demonstration of the complexity of the passive voice clearly showed that it is premature to assume that its functions and conditions will be exhaustively delineated in the foreseeable future, it is hardly disputable today that the passive voice encodes at least one important pragmatic difference: it is used when the speaker assumes the patient's point of view. Thus, I suggest that point of view is a category operative in both participial subject deletion and in passives. In fact, point of view is manifested in a number of disparate areas of language; cf.

[4] My Microsoft Word grammar check persistently suggests that I change all passive sentences into active ones—another example of prescriptive overgeneralization!

(24), which violates not only a point of view constraint on the subject selection of certain directional verbs like "come/go" (Kuno & Kaburaki 1977: 663-664) but also a point of view constraint on the lexical semantics of certain adverbs, such as "suddenly":

(24) ??I suddenly came up to him.[5]

Point of view can explain the *raison d'être*, as well as the degrees of appropriateness, of these various constructions in their contexts. As such, I propose that it reflects a category of "theoretical stylistics," a field that is yet to be created with the help of discourse pragmatics.

2. Russian word order and intonation

2.1. Word order and pragmatics

In so-called "free word-order languages", word order is another area typified by scalar judgments, and, as is usually the case in such areas, it invites discourse-pragmatic considerations. Consider the following examples, all of which are discourse-initial and assume so-called "neutral" intonation:[6]

(25) Ja rodilas' v Xarbine.
I-nom born in X.
'I was born in Harbin.'

(26) Vam prislali cvety.
you-dat they-sent flowers-acc
'(Someone) has sent you flowers.'

(27) Kolju izbili xuligany.
K.-acc beat-up hooligans-nom
'Kolya was beaten up by hooligans.'

Note that the sentence-initial elements in (25)-(27) are nominative subject, dative indirect object, and accusative direct object, respectively; in (26) there is no subject, although the verb is marked plural, and in (27) the nominative subject *xuligany* 'hooligans' is in sentence-final position. The sentence-initial placement of the first and second person pronouns, as I have argued elsewhere (Yokoyama 1986), is due to the normal presence of the referential knowledge of the interlocutors in their "sets of current concern" (the activated portion of the cognitive sets the interlocutors constitute). Under the conditions of normal interpersonal discourse, {I} and {you} are a given, unless displaced out of the sets of current concern in the course of a subsequent exchange.[7] This explanation, however, cannot account for

[5] The reading of this sentence improves if two selves are implied, as in a retelling of a dream.
[6] See Yokoyama (2001) for a discussion of Russian intonation.
[7] The capacity of a set of current concern is clearly limited, although its actual capacity cannot be determined without empirical data and experimentation. Note in this respect Spencer's insightful remark that the addressee "has at each moment but a limited amount of mental power available."

(27), which can be uttered without the presence of Kolya at the scene. What allows the order in (27) to be generated is the speaker's own concern for Kolya in combination with the assumption that the addressee, too, is concerned with Kolya. The speaker thus—perhaps presumptuously—posits the referential knowledge of {Kolya} into the addressee's set of current concern and proceeds with the ordering. This imposition of {Kolya} onto the addressee may or may not be reasonable, since Kolya may or may not be relevant to the addressee at the exact moment the utterance (27) is produced. It is thus a potential violation of relevance constraints, and as such it is likely to be produced, and accepted without the addressee's protest or confusion, between two very close individuals (like Kolya's parents), where the risk of unreasonable imposition is minimized. Were the same reality to be reported by Kolya's mother to the mother of one of the hooligans, the order would be exactly the same as in the corresponding English version "Your son beat up my son".

Russian PS remains silent on nearly all but the most obvious questions concerning word order. Yet word order is certainly an area where stylistic guidance could be used. The sentence-initial placement of referential items assumed by the speaker to be in the addressee's center of current concern is a matter of communicative competence. Notably, Lucas (1955:16ff.) stressed the importance of communication-based stylistics, actually proposing stylistic rules and recommendations strikingly similar to Gricean maxims more than a decade before Grice— another indication that stylistics and discourse-pragmatics overlap in their jurisdiction. That the word-order effect of the English passive voice, another discourse-pragmatic phenomenon, often corresponds to Russian word order variation (itself unaccompanied by a change of voice) is yet another piece of evidence that ties the word order changes in both languages to speakers' assessment of the cognitive stance of the addressee.

2.2. Word order, intonation, and pragmatics

Consider now the underlined items in (25)-(27). These items can be moved to the left, provided sentential stress is placed on them, and the items that appear after them in these new versions are both deaccented and lose their phrase boundaries. These versions differ from those in (25)-(27) in what is sometimes called tenor or register. I suggest elsewhere (e.g. Yokoyama 2001) that the difference in question concerns the fact that (25)-(27) belong to a distanced planned discourse, while the variations under consideration are spontaneous and are generated when the social/psychological interlocutor distance is short. In (25)-(27) the sentence-final position is reserved for knowledge items the speaker does not assume to be in the addressee's knowledge set, at least not in the propositional relationship of a given utterance. In planned discourse, this cognitive status is encoded linearly through sentence-final position, while in spontaneous discourse the encoding is intonational. Combined with the evidence that linear encoding is learned in the process of

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Note also Miller's (1956) considerations of the human capacity for processing information (1917:3).

normative socialization (Yokoyama 2001), this last point suggests a relationship between Russian spontaneous discourse and Bernstein's "restricted code" (see e.g. Bernstein 1973).

There is a large body of literature on Russian spontaneous discourse as attested among the speakers of Standard Literary Russian (Zemskaja 1973, 1987, *inter alia*). The vernacular of the intelligentsia is distinguished from the formal standard by a cluster of linguistic and communicative features ranging from phonetics, intonation, phonology, morphology, word-formation, syntax, and lexicon to linguistic poetics and play, as well as conversational behavior. It is also in the vernacular that most genderlect features occur in Russian. The clustering of the features suggests a subsystem (which some Russian scholars call "colloquial style" and others "colloquial language"), or in fact two subsystems of educated Russian vernacular—a male and a female one.[8] Regardless of whether it is called a style or a register (or something else), in the case of the speakers of Standard Literary Russian the question of code switching becomes unavoidable.

3. Conclusion

I have suggested above in section 2.1 that the speaker's assessment of the content of the addressee's knowledge set plays a role in the form of the utterance, down to the fine points of word order. The vernacular of the Russian intelligentsia, as outlined in section 2.2, also suggests that the speaker's assessment of his/her relationship with the addressee plays a role in the form of the utterance, including the fine points of sentential stress placement, intonational phrasing, and concurrent word order rules (not to mention a host of other phenomena). These are all linguistic choices the speaker makes, and they depend on extralinguistic, pragmatic factors which involve the speaker's (and the addressee's) cognitive (although not necessarily conscious) stance. Recalling Rannie's (1915) formulation that style is a matter of choice among good, better and best, these pragmatic factors, then, are categories in what has traditionally been called stylistics.

Point of view is another cognitive phenomenon that, as I have suggested in section 1, affects what has traditionally been called stylistic choices. The point of view shifts manifested in various linguistic phenomena testify to the human capacity not only to assume others' points of view (as is the case with the passive voice in section 1.2) but even to view one's own alter ego as a separate entity (as suggested above with respect to the participial constructions (4)-(6) vs. (7)-(9))[9] in section 1.1. The investigation of point of view can hardly be said to have been carried exhaustively in discourse linguistics; but once the relationship between the established field of stylistics and the newer field of discourse-pragmatics is accepted, one hopes that "[a] comprehension […] of the general principles from which the rules […] result will not only bring them home to us with greater force

[8] Cf. Yokoyama (1999b) for a description of the Russian genderlect system.

[9] Cf. also Yokoyama (1999a) for another manifestation of the "doubling" of the first person speaker in Russian possessive reflexives.

but will discover to us other rules of like origin" (Spencer 1917:3).

It was briefly suggested in section 2.2 that code switching is involved in the shift to the vernacular of the Russian intelligentsia. In fact, code switching is at play in any language where there is a choice among alternate systems of expression. The evidence examined here suggests that discourse-pragmatic mechanisms are employed not only in the choice of particular alternatives in each given utterance but also in more global switching between codes and registers.

The greater part of any English stylistics handbook is occupied by lexical choices, and a significant portion of lexical stylistics entries are concerned with historical changes in semantics and usage. These have not been considered in this paper. Many lexical choices that pertain to register, however, fit squarely into the same area as do choices concerning Russian vernacular code switching, for example. Longstanding recommendations to avoid foreign words (Fowler 1965:212, Strunk and White 1979:81), or to prefer "the Saxon words to the Romance" (Quiller-Couch 1923:120, also cf. Gowers 1948:60), are also a matter of assessing the addressee's knowledge and the implications for the linguistic self-image of the speaker; both are discourse-pragmatic decisions.

To conclude, then, I have tried to show that discourse-pragmatics addresses itself largely to the same sort of phenomena as traditional stylistics. I have also suggested that the time may be ripe for discourse-pragmatics to attempt to provide a theoretical basis for traditional stylistics, as part of what may be called "Theoretical Stylistics".

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