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### For a Sociolinguistics of Literature: The Question of Style

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**For a Sociolinguistics of Literature:  
The Question of Style**

And, especially, I would insist on the concept of the *event*, which is at the juncture of *langue* and *parole*, competence and performance.

--Jacques Derrida, *Some Questions and Responses*

Broadly conceived, indeed, stylistics can be almost indistinguishable from ethnography of speaking...

--Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*

Whatever else is happening in a real world communication, or other normal uses of language, there can be little doubt that it involves resort to the I-language, partially shared by others in the various communities with which people associate themselves in their normal lives.

--Noam Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language*

I. On A Place for Stylistics

It is customary in the field of linguistics at least since Ferdinand de Saussure to make a distinction between linguistic competence and performance. The distinction resurfaces with great theoretical vigor in American linguistic theory through the generative school of Noam Chomsky. He recasts Saussure's *langue* and *parole* as competence and performance, motivating the one set of terms for the other on methodological and theoretical grounds. In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, and elsewhere, Chomsky argues that it is not necessary for all the data of a language to be gathered or completely compiled, in order to start writing increasingly more economical theories of grammar over the available data. The decision to study the available data leads to a fair degree of idealization of the data itself and the environment in which they are studied. The generative paradigm is known for its abstract theories, from the heavy machinery of early transformational grammar to later government and binding accounts, to current minimalist proposals.<sup>1</sup> Currently, modularity plays a major role in the

description and explanation of a vast array of linguistic phenomena. The formal theories of competence produced within the generative paradigm begun by Chomsky are known to be formidable in their form and principles. But such highly formal approaches to the study of competence have not suited well linguists who are of a sociolinguistic and functional bent. For this camp of linguists Chomsky's abstraction from the actual spoken language to 'the ideal-speaker hearer' and 'a homogeneous speech community' idealizes linguistic data entirely too much. Because Chomsky's idealization narrows the phenomenon of language to a narrow internal linguistic state attained by native speakers, language as a social phenomenon threatens to disappear.

The focus on the native speaker's acquired competence has more recently led Chomsky to employ new appellations for competence and performance; competence is now I-language, I to connote internal, while E-language is performance, E to connote external. If the names have changed, Chomsky's ontological commitment to a mentalistic view of grammar has not. It seems that for Chomsky linguistic performance, being on the outside, reduces to a mere surface phenomena, secondary in all respects, as when he states in *Knowledge of Language: Its Origin, Structure, and Use*: "The E-language that was the object of study in most traditional or structuralist grammar or behavioral psychology is now regarded as an epiphenomenon at best" (25). On this view of grammars and grammatical theory, the work of sociolinguistics and functional linguistics is epiphenomenal, that is, merely analyses of phenomena on the surface structure of language. The conditions that give rise to such phenomena and the principles to explain them are left behind, or simply misrecognized. Taken literally, Chomsky's reformulation of the *langue/parole* distinction would be a ruthless application of Occam's razor, rendering all forms and schools of linguistic functionalism at best extensional equivalents, notational variants, of each other. It is thus understandable why a generative view of grammar poses a threat to social and functional grammatical theory. The exclusive focus on internal grammar, on competence as knowledge of grammaticality, of linguistic well-formedness conditions, threatens to reduce to mere triviality any grammatical theory that does not address competence in the Chomskyan sense, an internal state in all human beings, devoted to the production and reproduction of language.



That generative grammar places a heavy premium on an inside-outside dichotomy should come as no surprise, since Chomsky has never ceased making historical links from his conception of the generative enterprise to Kantian idealism, Cartesian rationalism, and a Platonism purged of metempsychosis. From the standpoint of that classical tradition inaugurated by Plato, the internal-external language split is a repetition of the metaphysical premise in Western philosophy that there must be a relation of priority between speech and its outside, its exterior manifestation, writing.<sup>2</sup> In the same way that writing is cast into secondary status because it does not share the privilege of the phonic substance, so the generative enterprise places linguistic performance outside the domain of linguistic competence. Linguistic competence shares the privilege of a universal essence of language that is invariant, active, and guaranteed for all human beings. On the performance side of things, the use of language in concrete situations or sociolinguistic settings is derivative, much like writing, not at all a true reflection of what human beings know when they know a language. Frederick Newmeyer, historian and linguist of the generative school, has succinctly summarized the core of the debate between generative grammarians and linguists of a functional and sociolinguistic bent. The dissatisfactions of the latter with the former, he states, "...begins and ends with the competence/performance distinction" (*Grammatical Theory* 35).

It is neither my intent in this essay to deconstruct the internal-external distinction so central to generative grammar nor to favor one side of the debate over the other, since in fact I want to favor both sides. My objective is to explore Jacques Derrida's insistence that the concept of the event be placed in the gap of the competence/performance distinction (*Linguistics* 53). The event, as Derrida calls it in philosophical language, is the moment of utterance in an exchange between interactants, the content of the illocutions, the illocutionary forces that affect and modify these illocutions, the interactions the contents motivate between the interactants. What do we gain by responding to the philosophical language with which Derrida commissions the event? First and foremost we see that the distinction between competence and performance is a metaphysical one. That is, it is a distinction necessary for a metaphysics requiring a mind-body duality, where competence is put in the mind and performance in the body. The reason or motive for placing the event at the juncture of competence and

mind  
not  
the  
body

performance is to support a sociolinguistic approach to the study of style in literature. That is, I maintain that stylistic choice in the literary text is different from stylistic choice in everyday ritual interactions in degree only, not in kind. All that sociolinguistic theory considers part of its field, from dialect variation to the study of style as Hymes recommends it, the ethnography of speaking, is relevant for the study of literature. A sociolinguistic approach to literature takes each and every stylistic choice made by an author as a speech event or moment of utterance conditioned by sociolinguistic exigencies. The literary speech event is thus a synergy of competence and performance, and as such, a perfect vehicle for the study of style in general. On this view, the literary text, through its poetic and diegetic representations, is a kind of thought experiment, an indirect testing of experience through the fantasy of the literary text, *in potentia*, always able to be performed. If the literary stylistic choice differs only in degree from other types of stylistic choices, everyday life as well as literature is made up of fantasies. This is perhaps why life and literature cannot be kept apart. Whatever part literature plays in life, it is clear what part life plays in literature. It's all about it.

In the hypothesis I pursue, there are not two competences, one linguistic and another communicative. I argue instead for a single competence, one that includes both linguistic and communicative values, and resides in the question of style. I put forth the hypothesis of a single competence in the interests of a sociolinguistics of literature and because I believe literary discourse is a good test case for the deconstruction or neutralization of the competence-performance dichotomy. If my belief holds good, a sociolinguistic approach to literature can contribute to linguistic theory if the study of style in the literary text can shed light on the event in the gap between competence and performance.

## II. On Competence, in Style

I define style as the economic exchange of the pleasure and reality principles. I am guided in this hypothesis by Sigmund Freud's conception of these two principles, principally in his exposition *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. There, Freud posits a priority for the pleasure principle. That is, phylogenesis Jacques Derrida's philosophical



by which I have in mind the complex computations humans make in the process of negotiating the dynamics of sociolinguistic interaction.<sup>3</sup> I invoke Freud's account of mental life because I believe that such complex computations take place in a largely unconscious way and begin from the earliest phases of existence. In a sense, the Freudian account also makes it possible to speak of the body as a kind of stylus, as when a baby can get things done for itself through bodily movements, face gestures, and one syllable utterances.<sup>4</sup> These bodily processes parallel the acquisition of syntax, thus supplement its unconscious working, i.e., its status as a faculty that works in largely unconscious ways. Chomsky and Freud do not disagree on the necessity of the unconscious, even if the one channels the paradigm through Kantian vessels. Freud's unconscious carries within it the specters of the libido while Chomsky's generative paradigm has been sanitized with Kantian *a priori* categories such as time, space, quantity, quality, etc. Sociolinguistic variables come into play *ab initio* precisely because the body is not immaterial to the language acquisition process and still less is it irrelevant to the complex computations humans make in sociolinguistic interaction. The exigencies of sociolinguistic interaction call for complex computations of the order Roman Jakobson ("Closing Statement") established in the six functions of language and Erving Goffman (*Interaction Ritual*) put forth as face-presentation phenomena. This is to say no more than that the body is relevant to the mind in setting up the initial condition for language acquisition.

In the classic essay "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," which outlines the six functions of language, Jakobson never establishes clear boundaries of demarcation for any of the factors correlating with the six functions. His point is rather more complex and practically post-structuralist:

Although we could distinguish six basic aspects of language, we could, however, hardly find verbal messages that would fulfill only one function. The diversity lies not in a monopoly of some one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions (353).

Jakobson's point that the six functions of language are present in any speech act constitutes not only a descriptive statement about linguistic speech acts but also a claim about linguistic competence. Descriptively, it follows that in the phatic function of language, a speaker will produce utterances that will establish contact and prolong the

communication for the time necessary. In the prolongation speakers and hearers may express their respective emotive states, direct their utterances to specific settings and topics, and perhaps engage in talk about the messages in exchange. In the poetic function of language, where the poet focuses on the stylization of the message for its own sake, Jakobson elevates equivalence to the level of principle--his famous projection principle: "The poetic function of language projects equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (358). For Jakobson, equivalence is a matter of similarity and dissimilarity and further, the poetic function of language concerns the poet not only for the selection of linguistic elements but also for the unselected ones. From this it follows that the concatenation of selected elements involves the poet's performance and that of elements left in reserve or suspension, that is, the unselected elements encompass the poet's knowledge of the code. On Jakobson's own account, the poet's delay over the message and suspension over the virtual elements of the code defines the poetic function of language but it is neither unique to that function nor contained by it. That is, the effects of lingering over equivalence from antonymy to synonymy are bound to appear wherever, in everyday conversation not only c As a matter of strategy therefore, I generalize the poetic function of language over the other functions in order to pursue the hypothesis that stylistic choice in the composition of a literary text differs only in degree and not in kind from stylistic choice in everyday sociolinguistic interaction. This strategy further implies that linguistic phenomena such as alliteration, metrics, rhyme, assonance, metaphor, and metonymy define a general stylistic function of language and not just the literary.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, the stylistic function of language projects equivalence from paradigmatic sets of the linguistic code into syntagmatic chains that comprise a message. Compare, for instance, the following stylistic choices. One is excerpted from *Summer Life* by Gary Soto, a contemporary Chicano writer, and the other is taken from William Labov *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*:

- (1a). I listened to a diesel downshifting, the grind of gears hurting<sub>M</sub> the air (4).
- (1b). I hit the girl, powww! I put something on it. I win the fight (359).

In stylistic choice (1a), the adjunct phrase predicates from the paradigmatic axis the metaphoric equivalence between 'hurting' and 'affecting the air with sonic vibrations'. A



strikingly similar effect can be read from the figure of speech *to put something on it* and the sound symbolism attending it in (1b). In construction with the three-place predicate properties of *to put*, the direct object *something* connotes the force of the punch.

On track with Jakobson is Erving Goffman's fined-grained analysis of face-presentation phenomena, which speaks of the interactional complexities that one must compute even in the simplest of ritual exchanges. "The term *face*," asserts Goffman, "may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (5). The term 'line' is particularly intriguing because with it Goffman records two parallel orders of sociolinguistic experience, the verbal and non-verbal. In everyday contacts with others, an interactant simultaneously performs "... a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself" (5). Succinctly, the concern for one's face amounts to a concern that one's discursive desires in an interaction be unimpeded, acknowledged, and respected.

Consequently, face-presentation phenomena are relevant to linguistic competence on at least two counts. On one count, the presentation of one's face in a public setting is not the kind of phenomena that can be reduced to the behaviorist models of stimulus-response. It is to these models of linguistic behavior that Chomsky has opposed his generative conception of grammatical competence from its inception.<sup>6</sup> Chomsky's proof is simple but devastating to hard behaviorism and it revolves around the design feature of language called linguistic creativity. Linguistic creativity for Chomsky means not in the first instance an artistic skill but a human capacity to utter an infinity of sentences, barring time and exhaustion. On this view, linguistic creativity turns linguistic behavior into something essentially unpredictable. Perhaps the steadfast resistance linguistic creativity poses for behaviorism is also what drives Chomsky's extreme abstraction to the ideal speaker-hearer and the focus on the internal representation of grammatical competence: the scales of grammaticality and acceptability. On a second count, face-presentation phenomena appear to be as universal as knowledge of syntax. Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson have extended Goffman's initial insights onto a global scale in *Politeness: Some Universals in Language*



*Usage.* But not just in their universality do face-presentation phenomena and grammatical competence coalesce. The one is also relevant to the other because the exercise of linguistic creativity is not done for itself but invariably to compute complex face considerations. These considerations involve not just a single speaker-hearer but always already involve the face of the other interlocutor in exchange. As Goffman puts it: "One's own face and the face of others are constructs of the same order" (6). Face presentation phenomena are thus recognizable because we share it with others and the desire to maintain one's face, enhance the face of the other, or even threaten it, are indices of the highly specific ways we share it in sociolinguistic interaction. Goffman reminds us:

In any case, while his social face can be his most personal possession and the center of his security and pleasure, it is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it. Approved attributes and their relation to face make of every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell. (10)

Consequently, the phatic function of language makes it virtually impossible to exercise linguistic creativity for its own sake, even if only a single subject is involved. Face-presentation phenomena solicit native speaker subjects at every turn of linguistic interaction, demanding from them (us) the establishment of a ratio between the pleasure and reality principles. This solicitation suggests a second revision of Jakobson's projection principle: the stylistic function of language projects considerations of face between interactants from such sociolinguistic variables as distance, power, and ranking into the moment of utterance.<sup>7</sup> We can see such sociolinguistic variables at work in a stylistic choice made by Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*:

(1c). [Not me sold out<sub>VP</sub> my people but they \_\_\_<sub>VP</sub> me] (21).

In the economy of the stylistic choice, the movement of the predicate from the gapped position performs double duty, yielding a non-canonical syntax. The stylistic choice foregrounds the sociolinguistic variables of power and distance, i.e., the social asymmetry between Chicanas and the traditional Chicano patriarchy.

Because this second revision brings syntax into utterance time, it is also a turn to the scene of writing and the array of gaps, pressures, and exigencies that impinge on the social act of writing. At my own scene of writing for instance I am forced to recognize that the specification of the event Derrida insists upon can only be the work of *bricolage*. Reasons of *bricolage* motivate my definition of style and its turn to Freud, or more specifically, to Jacques Lacan's return to Freud.<sup>8</sup> I turn to Freud not for Lacan's conviction that the unconscious bears the imprint of language but for the processes of condensation and displacement, which the return aligns with metaphor and metonymy respectively. The alignment of the return is indebted to Jakobson's pairing of selection and combination, paradigm and syntagm, with metonymy and metaphor, otherwise the difference between the aphasic disorders of similarity and contiguity. Condensation and displacement thus represent the fundamental processes of syntax. The effects of these processes can be computed not only in terms of aphasic disorders or psychoanalytic symptoms of desire but also in terms of the features [ $\pm$  grammatical] and [ $\pm$  acceptable], which generative grammar takes to be representatives of grammatical competence.<sup>9</sup>

Knowledge of grammaticality is intuitive knowledge of the well-formedness of a linguistic structure and thus by implication its ill-formed status as well. Knowledge of acceptability involves knowing under what conditions an ungrammatical structure may attain acceptable status. The ability to make judgments of grammaticality and acceptability is therefore knowledge of the interaction of these features. Knowledge of the conditions under which an ungrammatical structure can shift from one scale to another makes condensation and displacement representatives of the force of a desire. The reality of this force is at least now and again present in the gap between the features of grammaticality and acceptability precisely because native speakers are known to cross judgments, as when they judge a well-formed string ungrammatical and an ungrammatical string acceptable (Schütze). In the literature on grammaticality and acceptability, it is part of the lore to present the following relative-clause as an example of a crossed judgment:

(2a). [the horse — — raced past the barn] fell]].



Native speakers take this token to be ungrammatical, even though it is perfectly well-formed, and thus hold it to be unacceptable. Other tokens with relative-clauses also loom large for their complexity, as in the following syntactic differential pair where the judgments for grammaticality and acceptability are also crossed:

- (2b). [the university \_\_ the coach \_\_ the team likes \_\_ snubbed<sub>E</sub> \_\_] fired him]]  
 (2c). \*[the university \_\_ the coach \_\_ the team likes \_\_ E] fired him]]

The stacking of one relative clause after another exposes a limit in the native speaker's knowledge of linguistic form. The tendency in native speakers to judge the grammatical token as ungrammatical and unacceptable while the ungrammatical one as grammatical and acceptable, represents linguistic competence as subject to the force of a desire in the form of a symptom, namely, metalinguistic performance expressed in the crossed judgment. What I am seizing upon is the fact that native speakers can get it wrong, so to speak, and this 'getting it wrong' is part of the event's being situated in the gap between competence and performance. In the view I am proposing, the disposition to misrecognize the grammatical or salvage the ungrammatical by making it acceptable in some way is an index of the poetic function of language. Indeed, much of the ungrammatical data studied in the generative paradigm could be read as instances of poetic diction or syntax.

- (3a). \*Mary wants [John to shave herself]  
 (3b). \*John believes [that Mary wants to shave himself]  
 (3c). \*It was defeated Belgium by Caesar  
 (3d). \*It is likely John to go

(3a) and (3b) constitute a violation of Principle A of the Binding Theory, which states that a reflexive pronoun must be bound in reference to a nearby antecedent (Chomsky, *Knowledge*). Apparently, the clause defines the domain of reference. (3c) and (3d) are typical violations of the Case-filter, which requires that every noun in a sentence receive Case in the sense of nominative, accusative, dative, etc. In these tokens, while *Belgium* and *John* are without Case, the insertion of a pragmatic pause after the predicate can render them acceptable expressions under poetic license or some other pragmatic



condition. Because it is the referential properties of the reflexives which are under scrutiny in (3a) and (3b), these tokens are on par with the poetic lines such as the following from e.e. cummings' *anyone lived in a pretty how town*:

- (4a). anyone lived in a pretty how town...
- (4b). Women and men ... cared for anyone not at all...
- (4c). someones married their everyones...
- (4d). one day anyone died i guess...

A sociolinguistic stylistics of literature looks to the way the form and principles of syntax contribute to the poetic function of language. These lines draw much of their poetic power from the referential ambiguity in the quantifier pronouns *anyone*, *someone*, and, *everyone*. These pronouns are both bound and free, that is, they refer to a proper name in the poem, though one never named, at the same time that they refer to a type or open class. These lines derive their poetic effects from the way e.e. cummings suspends reference but also assures it. This play with reference is studied with utmost diligence in generative grammar, coming under the rubric of scope ambiguities. A sentence such as (5a) below is said to be ambiguous between two readings, (5b) and (5c),

- (5a). Everyone loves somebody
- (5b).  $\forall x \exists y$  [love  $x$ ,  $y$ ]
- (5c).  $\exists y \forall x$  [love  $x$ ,  $y$ ]

Reading (5b) states that everyone has someone to love and reading (5c) states that everyone loves some specific person, i.e., the same person is loved by all. This difference in reading is captured by reordering the universal and existential quantifier. Thus in (5b), the universal quantifier has scope over the existential but in (5c), it is the existential quantifier that has scope. This scope property then denotes the proper name of the individual whom all love. Cummings' *anyone lived in a pretty how town* works with exactly the same kind of referential ambiguity. A sociolinguistic stylistics of literature should be apt at finding the means by which the poetic function of language produces aesthetic effects, in particular, how these are produced at the limits of grammaticality and acceptability. Thus, I locate the event at the very limits of language where competence

and performance cannot gauge each other: native speakers misrecognize their own linguistic competence in making metalinguistic judgments about it.

The misrecognition is therefore not a trivial property for a sociolinguistic stylistics of literature since it is not an accident in the native speaker subject. The desire to make an ill-formed token acceptable is filtered through a metalinguistic performance that 'prejudices' any pure view of linguistic competence. And it is this 'prejudice' that links desire with the poetic function of language. Here, the self-reflexive design feature of language makes it impossible for competence to validate itself as a pure Chomskyan phenomenon. Linking grammatical competence to the event through the medium of desire provides the hinge or *brisure* the event occupies when placed in the gap of *langue* and *parole*. The link is also a claim about the line of descent from the traditional figures of metonymy and metaphor to their structuralist versions, paradigm and syntagm, as well their post-structuralist variants, difference and spacing, deferral and trace, in a phrase, the structure of structure as displaced center. More important in this regard is the way the link makes desire indispensable to the cohesion of the event through the medium of desire. Consequently, the cohesive role desire plays in specifying the pragmatic properties of the event is more than an acknowledgment of a psychoanalytic component in a sociolinguistic stylistics of literature. In the gap between competence and performance, desire stands to play a role Derrida calls the dangerous supplement.

### III. The Cognitive Cluster

Kant. The placement of desire in the gap between competence and performance supplies the event with a certain cohesion because it draws together considerations of face-presentation with the syntactic processes of selection and combination at the moment and scene of stylistic choice. But for that same reason the placement also goes against the grain of much current linguistic theory, which is more apt to hand the work of 'interfacing' language structure with language use to the concepts of cognition. Linguistic theory, whether formalist or functionalist, hesitates very little to reify concepts to the genus of The Concept and in this both branches of linguistic theory share an



idealist strain in the Kantian tradition. Ray Jackendoff's *The Architecture of the Language Faculty* is one of the clearest articulations of this filiation with Kantian idealism. A kind of functionalist among formalists, Jackendoff submits exemplary accounts for the necessary role of conceptual structure in linguistic theory. His vision of linguistic structure contravenes what he calls Chomsky's syntactocentric model not so much to displace it *in toto*, but to enrich it with the presence of conceptual structure. Representational modularity is the model he advances and in its general import, the model resonates with the Lacanian conviction that the unconscious always presents us with a language:

The overall idea is that the mind/brain encodes information in some finite number of distinct representational formats or 'languages of the mind.' Each of these 'languages' is a formal system with its own proprietary set of primitives and principles of combination, so that it defines an infinite set of expressions along familiar generative lines. (41)

Whatever empirical validity these languages of the mind may have, I am tempted to say that they are not autonomous but derivative. Jackendoff stipulates the autonomy of these languages of the mind insofar as additional signifiers are needed to express their modular character. That is, the primitives and principles governing the operations of these languages are themselves concepts, or quite simply, already the effects of the stipulation rather than an independent control. In effect, Jackendoff contravenes Chomsky's syntactocentric model by offering more linguistic signifiers, a move that inflates the linguistic sign. The design feature of self-reflexivity in language is not an empirical or theoretical boundary condition that Jackendoff can escape. My mention of Jackendoff's use of conceptual structure under a self-reflexive condition by no stretch of the imagination drives concepts from the domain of cognition. Quite the contrary, it points to a differential logocentrism between Lacan's psychoanalysis and Jackendoff's psycholinguistics. Jackendoff's languages of the mind share a virtual space in the unconscious with Lacan's theory of the signifier over the signified, but there the similarity ends. Where the one's logocentrism forms discrete representational modules, the other's shapes an elusive capital Other, an Omega if you will, whose fundamental character is desire. Where the one generates an infinity of concepts, the other generates



an insatiable desire. Where the one maps autonomous conceptual structures into syntax and phonology, the other elides the signified such that reason and its concepts are nowhere to be found except as signifiers. Be that as it may, it would be a mistake to construe the difference between the two positions as offering a choice for a sociolinguistic stylistics of literature. What the computation of the difference requires is the recognition that desire supplements cognition at the same time that conceptual structure expresses desire through syntax, that is, stylistic choice.

### III. Epilogue

In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues for a vision of beauty as a phenomenon that must be contemplated and appreciated on the possibility that human beings can render a judgment of it that is free and disinterested. Any detour from this possibility falls into judgments of the good and pleasant. Both types of judgments are unfree and interested precisely because they fall under the command of the concept. Whether Kant's thesis succeeds depends on whether we grant him the possibility that the true contemplation of beauty is free and without interest; where such contemplation does not obtain, the concept prejudices the view of the object. If the possibility of free beauty means the departure of the concept, does the same possibility hold for Lacan's Other? I ask because neither one seems particularly available. On the one hand, free beauty is hard to observe and on the other, the Other is hard to pin down and thus both seem to share an elusive ontology. Why should this be so if the one stretches beyond the concept while the Other according to Lacan is "...evoked by the recourse to speech in any relation in which the Other intervenes" (*Ecrits* 285). At some juncture, free beauty and the Other cross paths. Perhaps this explains why free beauty is so elusive and the Other so complicitous with the concept. A sociolinguistics of literature should address this ontological crossing and in that spirit I offer a speculative version of the stylistics function of language: at the scene of writing, the subject projects free beauty from the Omega axis into the omicron axis through nothing but stylistic choice.

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<sup>1</sup> See Newmeyer *Linguistic Theory in America* for analytical expositions of the various stages of generative grammar and for the historical conditions accounting for the success of the paradigm over other formal schools.

<sup>2</sup> See Derrida's *Dissemination* for a critical account of Plato's repression of writing as both instrument and abstract category.

<sup>3</sup> This definition of style owes a great deal to Jacques Derrida's exposition of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *Writing and Difference*. There, Derrida speaks of the relation between pleasure and reality as one that cannot be taken as containing an inside-outside analogue, i.e., it is not the case that reality lies outside the organism and pleasure inside. Instead that relation is what he calls "an original possibility, within life, of the detour, of deferral and the original possibility of the economy of death" (196-231). This point puts the linguistic sign and the category of style on the same plane in the sense that the linguistic sign is a detour to a signification that cannot be the function of full presence since a full presence would render the sign unnecessary. In the same way, style is the kind of sociolinguistic phenomena humans must turn to when (re)presenting themselves to others, given that due to the linguistic sign's detour they present themselves as they really are.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Lacan's "The Mirror Stage," holds forth this possibility of nomenclature though Lacan himself does not make it explicit. Samuel Weber draws out this possibility of thinking of the human subject as a kind of stylus.



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<sup>5</sup> M.L. Pratt makes a similar point in *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* where she gives an excellent review of William Labov's work with what he called 'natural narratives,' that is, narratives of personal experience elicited in the course of an interview from speakers of Black English Vernacular. Not only does Pratt demonstrate the relevance of Labov's work to the field of literary and cultural studies, the major import of her work is still timely today: "What is important about the fact that literary narratives can be analyzed in the same way as the short anecdotes scattered throughout our conversation? To begin with, it casts grave doubt on the Formalist and structuralist claim that the language of literature is formally and functionally distinctive" (67).

<sup>6</sup> See Newmeyer's *Linguistic Theory in America* for a historical account of Chomsky's debate with Skinnerian behaviorism.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Allan develops a theory of semantic around face-presentation phenomena in *Linguistic Meaning, vols I and II*. This theory poses a synchronic view of face-presentation phenomena and can be compared empirically with Penelope and Brown's cross-linguistic and cross-cultural account.

<sup>8</sup> In *Return To Freud*, Samuel Weber provides careful and insightful exegesis of Lacan's return to Freud via the route of Saussurean structuralism. Weber's exegesis motivates my use of the notion of stylus as a metaphoric description of the baby's body as already forming the original basis of style, i.e., what I am referring to as the economic exchange of the pleasure and reality principles. See also note 4.

<sup>9</sup> Carson T. Schütze has done a tremendous favor to the field of linguistics by drawing together under a single cover the various empirical and theoretical questions surrounding the features of grammaticality and acceptability. The study of grammaticality is vexed because it represents a system of knowledge that a native speaker has intuitions about but cannot therefore by dint of that fact access them through intuition itself. In other words, having the knowledge does not guarantee an ability to access it. What a native speaker's intuitions do allow is an ability to judge the acceptability of a certain utterance. This ability is a metalinguistic performance that already relies on not just knowledge of pure grammatical form but knowledge contributed by other cognitive factors. Schütze addresses this vexation of linguistic theory by calling for better data-collection methods.