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	Modern Stylistics and the Effect of Arabic Classical Rhetoric on Its Development	
	Dr.	
Soumia Leghrib	Abderrahmane Mira University of Bejaia, Laboratory: Interpretation and Analysis of Discourse	
	Algeria	
	soumia.leghrib@univ-bejaia.dz	
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Abstract		
<p>Stylistics is a modern discipline that emerged from linguistic thought. It embodies the scientific spirit of the era, free from judgement. The opinions regarding the boundaries of style and perceptions of stylistics are widely recognised as far exceeding what can be quantified or exhaustively listed. For example, the French dictionary defines “style” as having two meanings and two functions: sometimes it refers to the system of means and rules employed or devised in a work, and at other times it indicates its distinctiveness and characteristics. Having a style is an undisputed virtue. This study is guided by the question of the limits of the intersection between modern stylistics in its developmental trajectory, the principles that govern it and the procedures that serve these principles, and rhetorical studies, which many consider to be a suitable precursor to stylistic studies. Here, we will examine the profound role played by ancient Arabic stylistic research in developing contemporary stylistic studies within the Arab sphere. Our focus is on what we consider to be the most significant researcher in this tradition: Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani and the most important contemporary Arabic stylistician: Abdul Salam Al-Masdi.</p>		
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1. From Text to Style to Stylistics:

It is widely accepted that the concept of style is generally associated with the individual effect that we can easily identify. It is necessarily of ‘individual origin and psychological nature’ (Fadl, 1991, p. 123). It could not be included in a framework that only considers language in terms of its material and natural properties, disregarding its relationship with thought and focusing on its abstract truths regardless of its connection to the individuals who produce it. Therefore, reflection on style

involves reflection on the linguistic tool and the individual who works with it – the individual who absorbs, digests and re-presents it. Thus, we fluctuate between the three levels established by human experience and later defined by Saussure in his theoretical framework: language, speech and utterance. In stylistics, we focus on language as an individual performance that aims to leave a mark on linguistic transmission, making it apparent to all. According to linguists, this mark or specificity transforms the language user into a practitioner of communicative material, aiming to demonstrate high linguistic competence that will eventually be validated by history.

Modern Arab scholars have adopted the meanings explored by the ancients in their definitions of style, thus approaching these meanings in their general content. The most prominent of these definitions states that style is ‘the writer’s or poet’s specific way of choosing words and composing speech’. It is a method of writing or composition that involves selecting and orchestrating words to express meaning with clarity and impact. It has also been defined as ‘the distinctive feature of a literary work’. They also stated that style is ‘the essence revealing the mode of thought of the stylist’. Style has also been described as ‘the verbal image used to express meaning’, ‘the organisation and composition of speech for the presentation of ideas and the expression of imagination’, and ‘the coordinated verbal expressions used to convey meanings’. Despite the diversity of definitions, they all converge on the core meaning that style is the method by which writers choose expressive tools in a way that distinguishes them from others, granting them uniqueness in the formulation and expression of their ideas (Al-Mahdawi, 2001, p. 146).

It seems that the linguistic origin is the same, as all researchers agree that the concept of style in Western studies comes from the Latin term ‘stylus’, meaning a metal rod used by the ancients to write on wax tablets. In their terminology, it means ‘the writer’s use of expressive tools for literary purposes, distinguished by the rules that determine the meaning and appropriateness of forms’. Some scholars argue that style ‘lies in the conscious selection of expressive tools’, while others claim that it is ‘an aspect of the utterance resulting from the choice of expressive tools, shaped by the nature and intentions of the speaker or writer’. Valéry states that ‘style is a deviation from the rules. (Al-Mahdawi, 2001, p. 146)’

Roland Barthes is notable for his definitions of linguistic and literary phenomena, which distinguish him from others. He defines style as having two states of linguistic engagement: the first is ordinary expression, which has no inherent value; the second is style, which is characterised by markers that refer to the language user. Therefore, we must establish a contrast between style and writing, emphasising that they differ from language. Barthes states that style is ‘a language that is self-sufficient, delving only into the personal and hidden myth of the writer, as well as into the underlying material of speech where the first pair of words and objects is formed, and where the major oral subjects of existence permanently reside... Style is considered a phenomenon with a hereditary system in every sense of the word, and it also transforms mood (Barada, 1988, p. 12).

From this collection of definitions, we can conclude the following:

- Style is the writer’s conscious choice from a wide array of possibilities.
- Style is an individual characteristic of the text, controlled by the writer.
- Style is the result of criteria and specifications, and their origins.
- Style reflects the characteristics of its creator and the circumstances in which the text was created.

In the Western intellectual tradition, style may have emerged as synonymous with rhetoric, or it may have been given the more specific meaning of ‘level of expression’. Scholars distinguished three levels of expression: simple, moderate and elevated, as represented in the Virgilian Wheel. These levels are associated with social standing, literary arts and rhetorical embellishments respectively. This entire theory is likely inspired by the Greek Aristotle, who viewed tragedy as superior to comedy because tragedy emerged in cities under the gaze of history due to its proximity to power holders, while comedy developed among rural folk, contributing to its obscurity. Aristotle incorporated the element of language into his definition of tragedy, making the grandeur of language and the abundance of rhetorical devices fundamental criteria (Barada, 1988, pp. 147-148).

2. The Limits of Stylistic Studies

We will always operate within the field of linguistics as we discuss stylistics. Summarising stylistic research from the perspective of its connection to linguistic research, Abdul Salam Al-Masdi states that our general aim is to ‘uncover the origins of stylistic science and the characteristics of its structure, not in terms of its landmarks within historical development, but in its current structure as it manifests today in the Arab field’ (Al-Mesedi, 1991, p. 22).

This positioning confronts us with the fact that we are dealing with a specific type of analytical fidelity to Saussure’s approaches to thinking and examining societal communicative phenomena.

Regarding the stylistic analysis of literary texts specifically, given our work in this field, several hypotheses have been established:

- Stylistic analysis is the synthesis of linguistics and literature/aesthetics.
- Stylistic analysis is an integral part of literary analysis.
- Stylistic analysis complements grammatical analysis. However, the stylistic values derived from grammatical values mean that it is a linguistic practice divorced from the literary dimension.
- Stylistic interpretation is an interpretive art and a creative process that aspires to become a form of hermeneutics (Antohi, 2010, p. 46).

Given its fourfold complexity, clarifying this viewpoint requires a survey of the styles and processes that fall within our area of interest, thereby demonstrating the intricacy of stylistic research.

In reality, once stylistics had established its methods, it found a fairly defined approach that is easy to recognise. In our opinion, this is due to the simplicity of applying the stylistic procedure, as well as the ease with which it can be taught and learnt, leading to straightforward application. However, the results of these applications are another matter. This approach aims to study literary discourse in an objective and scientifically rigorous way.

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In modern times, Arab linguists have striven to adapt stylistics to the requirements of Arab thought and the Arab approach to understanding and appreciating texts. These methods and traditions of reception differ from those in the West. Therefore, they immediately turned to researching the ancient rhetorical and critical heritage to find a suitable reference for adapting this study. At first glance, the results seem very promising.

The question we pose here is: Did modern Western stylistic research contribute to establishing a reliable foundation for Arabic stylistics suitable for studying ancient and modern Arabic literary texts? As a result of this cross-fertilisation of theoretical and procedural knowledge, has the scope of modern stylistic study expanded?

Through this study, we aim to demonstrate the initial foundations of what can be termed ‘Arabic stylistic thought’ (drawing on Masdi’s terminology), which ‘manifested in the varied positions of Arab linguists towards this new method’. We seek to answer the following research questions:

What is the position of Arab critics and rhetoricians towards stylistics?

In what ways do Arab stylists contribute to enriching modern stylistic studies in theoretical and practical terms? (Labik, 2017, p. 132)

How were the foundations of Arabic stylistic studies laid through translating terms, clarifying concepts, and defining the relationship between stylistics, rhetoric, and criticism? Due to the wealth of works on this subject in the Arabic literary heritage library, it was necessary – albeit in a limited and cursory manner – to highlight the most significant Arabic works addressing stylistics in both its theoretical and practical dimensions (Labik, 2017, p. 133).

3. An overview of stylistic thought in Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani

Al-Jurjani is a product of rhetorical thought. But first and foremost, can rhetorical awareness be described as stylistic or semi-stylistic awareness of texts? In reality, rhetoric has presented four fundamental principles of style that can be applied to stylistic heritage.

- Appropriateness: The fit between style and its textual context (the writer, the audience and the text).
- Precision: The suitability of the style to the prevalent linguistic usage of a specific era.
- Clarity: The exclusion of multiple textual meanings.
- Embellishment: Adorning natural discourse with stylistic imagery (Muttalib, 1994, p. 31).

These principles essentially underpin the concepts of eloquence and rhetoric in the Arab literary tradition.

When presenting this overview, we must be mindful of the pitfall of erroneously imposing contemporary terminological systems onto ancient terminology. This is something that Al-Masdi handles with great skill. This process is crucial, as it can correct misunderstandings; however, it may also lead to erroneous applications and misconceptions.

‘It is only fair to make scientific linguistic comparisons between the proposals of modern scholars and the results and scientific facts reached by the ancients, in order to clarify the connection between the two and establish elements of a renewed interpretation of the legacy left to us by our ancestors. This proves the continuity, vitality and robustness of the linguistic heritage despite the passage of time. (Rizaiqia, 2021, p. 135)’

If we adopt an unbiased perspective, rejecting the notion of cultural appropriation, we would acknowledge the significant contributions of ancient Arab scholars. The works of figures such as Sibawayh, Ibn Jinnī, Al-Jāhiz, Abdul Qahir Al-Jurjani and others fundamentally established linguistic theories, revealing the potential of the Arabic language and identifying important truths that have since been confirmed by modern linguistics. This demonstrates that these scholars were fully aware of contemporary issues.

Arabic rhetoric has long held a prestigious position among other sciences, with many Arab scholars excelling in areas such as the eloquence and rhetoric of speech and the exploration of the mysteries of the Qur’anic miracle. Each scholar traversed these sciences according to their own understanding and interpreted the words as they pleased. This status persisted into the modern era, despite facing scepticism and reductionism from some. Nevertheless, some have attempted to defend and revive its brilliance by linking ancient rhetoric with the concept of modern style.

Al-Jurjani’s theory of ‘narration’ has received considerable attention in linguistic and stylistic studies, and his work has been acknowledged by numerous contemporary Arab scholars for its contribution to the understanding of the Qur’anic miracle and the advancement of Arabic linguistic studies. They dedicated their studies to this area, successfully delineating the contours of the intersection between Al-Jurjani’s thought and linguistics, and stylistics in particular.

In light of this discourse, it is not incorrect to establish two methodological connections between the two elements. First, we can connect Saussure’s ultimate goal and stylistics, given their kinship with linguistics – referring here to their highly systematic scientific approach – and Al-Jurjani’s approach, which clearly displays a systematic and organised scientific character governed by numerous strong principles (Rizaiqia, 2021, pp. 136-137).

Secondly, we will navigate between Al-Jurjani and modern stylists from a different angle, considering the excessive tendency to create mechanisms that do not negate the vital work of text appreciation. The scientific approach observed today among Saussure's successors is similar to the scientific methodology displayed by ancient Arab scholars.

It is fair to assert here that our scholars preceded modern scientists in their attempts to apply scientific methods to topics typically regarded as the output of the humanities and not amenable to strict scientific methodology. This shifts these topics from the realm of opinion and evaluative judgement to that of descriptive judgement.

The similarity between Al-Jurjani's ideas, as set out in his renowned theory, and contemporary stylistic principles is striking. Contemporary stylistics differs little from the Arabic theory of 'narration' established by Imam Abdul Qaher Al-Jurjani in his renowned book, *دلائل الإعجاز*. When Al-Jurjani expressed his views on narration, he recognised that different word arrangements give rise to different styles, some of which depend on others.

His studies on precedence and postponement, mention and omission, definiteness and indefiniteness, expression and implication, and styles in literal and figurative language, similes, representations and metaphors represented a novel effort in Arabic rhetoric. They provided an extensive exploration of style, coming remarkably close to the concept of stylistics in modern Western theories (al, 1992, p. 35). This text, alongside testimony from a group of Arab scholars, compels us to recognise the similarities between Al-Jurjani's work on narrative theory and that of contemporary stylists.

It is therefore appropriate to ask: what specific features of stylistic research can be identified in Al-Jurjani's theory of narration? Experts respond: 'Abdul Qaher Al-Jurjani made significant contributions to stylistics that should be recognised and examined through his discussions of narration, commentary, degrees of metaphor and poetic structures. He addressed many issues in his *Dalā'il* that distinguish the style of a poet or writer. (al, 1992, p. 136)'

This is, in fact, a new perspective introduced by Al-Jurjani – a viewpoint that bridges two seemingly disparate sciences. These are also the two fields that stylistics will work to reconcile in the modern era. I will approach this from two angles. First, there is the kinship with Saussurean thought, involving attempts to secularise communicative and expressive phenomena, and to purify language from the impurities of cultural history, thought and ideological biases.

Secondly, I will address the inherited closure of grammar as a formalist approach, which is disconnected from meaning and the challenges of semantics. This is something that we find among both ancient Arab rhetoricians and modern stylisticians (Rizaiqia, 2021, p. 135).

There is no need to quote specific statements from modern scholars because most of them have followed a direction clearly delineated by Al-Jurjani. His words do not compel us to rely on interpretation to reconcile the modern with the ancient, nor to apply ancient insights to modern concepts while manipulating texts with interpretive tools.

Modern scholarship consistently reflects the ideas of Al-Jurjani and his rhetorical predecessors. Their work closely aligns with concepts in modern linguistics. By distinguishing between language and speech and focusing on speech, Al-Jurjani also addressed rhetoric, since rhetoric specifically studies language at the level of the individual speaker. It rarely concerns itself with the broader level, except in the context of theorising its outcomes, as seen with this element.

4. Reconfigurations (Abdul Salam Al-Masdi's Perspective).

First: A Renewed Ancient Concept: Complementarity

When we examine the work of modern scholars, as represented by Al-Masdi, one of the most notable aspects is his proposal of the concept of complementarity, which has often been emulated by others.

This term is one of the most important concepts in stylistic studies and is explained by critic Abdul Salam Al-Masdi. He describes it as ‘the arrangement of elements in a specific order that allows for their exploration according to different criteria, ensuring that, whenever the measures of exploration vary, the elements maintain the principle of interconnection’(Thamer, 1994).

Al-Masdi’s concept of complementarity is similar to the concept of ‘narration’ proposed by Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani. It is a complex idea that refers to the procedural elements which provide the stylistic critic with a new tool for deconstructing and reconstructing the structure of a text. This is achieved through a combination of analytical elements beginning with the ideal reader. These reactions provide the stylistic researcher with a critical standard that enables them to identify significant stylistic features before offering insights into additional domains that the reader can access at various levels. This allows them to reveal aspects of textual style that would otherwise remain hidden, as Al-Masdi himself demonstrated in his analyses of the poem ‘The Birth of Guidance’ by Ahmad Shawqi, and in his subsequent study of the poetry of Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi.

Second: an expanded stylistic experience.

In Al-Masdi’s view, the Arabic linguistic and rhetorical heritage should be regarded as ‘a human possession carrying communal wealth and conferring an absolute right’ (Ben Jadid, 2021, p. 71). This is because it embodies a profound human essence through the comprehensive history it encompasses. It has achieved this uniqueness thanks to its success in realising a complex equation. Building upon the assimilation of preceding influences, it draws from all available human heritage resources, representing the fruits of Indian, Persian and Greek legacies in philosophy and logic.

Al-Masdi’s principle of interpreting the linguistic and rhetorical heritage and drawing inspiration from its components is invaluable in establishing a sense of identity for our Arab nation. This inspiration fosters contemporary Arab thought, establishing a future-oriented present that draws upon the rich cultural links ingrained in the Arab heritage. ‘Clinging to heritage and claiming its perfection — that it does not require any modern additions — may express adherence to the bonds of civilisation. However, it is also a form of neglect and a cognitive fallacy that avoids engaging with knowledge and its modernity, exhibiting arrogance without making an effort to explore it. (BenJadid, 2021, p. 71)’

From here, we will overcome the aforementioned pitfall—the substantial gap between the two eras. We will recognise the important role played by foundational scholars and heritage texts in the development of a hybrid Arabic-Western stylistics. This approach is not disconnected from modern Western stylistics and is enriched by splendid methods that achieve the independence sought by Saussure and his followers. This independence is from the burden of evaluative judgements that can easily lead research into the pitfalls of ideology. Such research becomes susceptible to opinion, bias and partiality without compelling scientific justification. However, this is not a stylistics that turns its back on this heritage, rendering it an ancient entity incapable of engaging with the spirit of the age and transitioning towards the future — merely a phenomenon of nostalgia.

Conclusions:

The conclusions of this research are scattered throughout the text; here, we attempt to bring them together to improve their usefulness.

There is agreement on the similarities between the nature of rhetorical work and stylistics, which has recently emerged as a field of knowledge and an approach to text analysis, primarily literary but also non-literary. It took nearly half a century for stylistics to mature into an independent discipline with its own ‘history’ and geography, meaning it developed pathways, figures, books and concepts that define and are recognised through it.

It is important to note that the term ‘rhetoric’ is fundamentally different from the term ‘stylistics’. However, we have clearly demonstrated that ancient Arabs had a profound understanding of the concept of ‘style’ and its nuances. This

understanding facilitates the linking of stylistics with rhetoric, as both fields aim to enhance the context of texts by developing the 'style' markers that distinguish each writer or individual with a unique style. This ensures a stronger aesthetic and semantic impact, guaranteeing the 'reaching' of meaning and its stability in the mind of the audience.

There are strong interconnections and correlations between ancient stylistics, as exemplified by Al-Jurjani, and modern stylistics, as represented by Al-Masdi. These include theoretical aspects that contemplate textual phenomena through concepts such as narration and grammar, elements that were previously emphasised, and corresponding concepts found among Western figures such as Jakobson, Rivière, John Cohen and Roland Barthes. Arab stylists, including Al-Masdi, have drawn on these concepts, resulting in significant terminological devices and deeper pathways for understanding texts.

Ethical Considerations

This study is theoretical and analytical in nature and is based exclusively on the critical examination of published linguistic, rhetorical, and stylistic sources. It does not involve human participants, personal data, interviews, or experimental procedures. Therefore, ethical approval was not required. The author confirms that the research adheres to established academic and ethical standards, including originality, accurate citation, and respect for intellectual property.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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