

Significance of Forensic Stylistics in Fixing Authorship of Handwriting



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Abstract

Style is variable element of human behavior. It is simply a habit of a person which never dies. Stylistics has always proved its importance in establishing the identity of an individual whether there is a case of handwriting or vocal conversations. In cases involving ransom notes, anonymous letters or threatening letters, the offender usually modify his/her handwriting to conceal their identity to minimize the chances of being caught. Attempted disguise may sometime leads to a deteriorated piece of handwriting and changes its overall pictorial effect. Also the general and individual characteristics of handwriting lose their competency in pin pointing the perpetrator. In such special cases the style features in a person's handwriting plays a vital role in fixing the authorship of the writer. The main focus of this paper is to list out some writer specific stylistics features from their handwriting which will aid the examiners in framing accurate and reliable opinion on handwriting.

Keywords: Forensic; Stylistics; Linguistics; Authorship; Handwriting; Identification

Introduction

Frauds related to documents have always been a curse to the society. Whether it is case of a simple handwritten application or more heinous crime like blackmailing, kidnapping, extortion etc, the document expert should remain competent enough to handle all such challenges related to the written materials [1]. Sometime, the situation becomes worst when the deterioration in handwriting appears so prominently that identification of writer turn out to be a problem. In these cases the style of writing or a person's writing habit plays a very important role in personal identification [2]. Stylistics is a word derived from style; it is a discipline which studies different styles. It can refer to the study of proper use of words or language in proper places. Stylistics is the study and interpretation of texts from a linguistic perspective [3,4]. As a discipline it links and linguistics, but has no autonomous domain of its own. The preferred object of stylistic studies is literature, but not exclusively "high literature" but also other forms of written texts such as text from the domains of advertising, pop culture, politics or religion [5]. Stylistics also attempts to establish principles capable of explaining the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language, such as socialization, the production and reception of meaning, critical discourse analysis and literary criticism [6,7].

Stylistics is also defined as a study of the different styles that are present in either a given utterance or a written text

or document. The consistent appearance of certain structures, items and elements in a speech, an utterance or in a given text is one of the major concerns of Stylistics [8]. Stylistics requires the use of traditional levels of linguistic description such as sounds, form, structure and meaning [7]. It then follows that the consistent appearance of certain structures, items and elements in speech utterances or in a given text is one of the major concerns of stylistics. Linguistic Stylistic studies are concerned with the varieties of language and the exploration of some of the formal linguistic features which characterize them [9]. The essence and the usefulness of stylistics is that it enables the immediate understanding of utterances and texts, thereby maximizing our enjoyment of the texts.

The concepts of style and stylistic variation in language are based on the general notion that within the language system, the content can be encoded in more than one linguistic form [10]. Thus, it is possible for it to operate at all linguistic levels such as phonological, lexical and syntactic. Therefore, style may be regarded as a choice of linguistic means, as deviation from the norms of language use, as recurrent features of linguistic forms and as comparisons [11]. Stylistics deals with a wide range of language varieties and styles that that are possible in creating different texts, whether spoken or written, monologue or dialogue, formal or informal, scientific or religious etc. Again, stylistics is concerned with the study of the language of literature

or the study of the language habits of particular authors and their writing patterns [3,12]. From the foregoing, stylistics can be said to be the techniques of explication which allows us to define objectively what an author has done, (linguistic or non-linguistic), in his use of language.

The main aim of stylistics is to enable us understand the intent of the author in the manner the information has been passed across by the author or writer. Therefore, stylistics is concerned with the

Examination of grammar, lexis, semantics as well as phonological properties and discursive devices [7,13]. Stylistics is more interested in the significance of function that the chosen style fulfils. Stylistics is adaptive in nature such that its framework, as a veritable linguistic analytical approach, deals with a whole range of human discourses: medical, religious, political, legal, social, interpersonal, group communication, and so on. The practice of stylistics is targeted at achieving certain goals: to establish discourse peculiarities [14-16], induce appreciation of discourses, to ascertain linguistic habits, and to make critical judgments.

Principles for Individuality in Stylistics Features

- a) Each matured writer has a handwriting which is personal and individual to him alone.
- b) Every writer has a unique style of using a particular language either in handwriting or verbal communication.
- c) Every individual have their own distinctive conspicuous characteristics which are unconsciously reflected in their handwriting each time he or she writes.

Common Style Markers in Handwritings

- a) **Marginal spacing:** Every writer starts the process of handwriting after leaving some useful space from all the four margins of the paper (i.e. top, bottom, left and right). The amount of marginal space provided differs from writer to writer thus forming the individuality.
- b) **Formation of paragraph:** Some writers are in the habit of forming proper paragraphs while writing while some of them don't form paragraphs. Also the location and length of paragraphs differs between two writers.
- c) **Page number:** The style of giving a page number and its location creates uniqueness in writer,
- d) **Headings and subheadings:** Presence or absence of headings and subheadings and their location are writer specific.
- e) **Emphasizing of words or phrases:** The style which a writer adopts to highlight or emphasize a particular word or phrase creates individuality in the writer. Such highlighting styles can be categorized as usage of block letters, change of pen or writing instrument, use of italics, thickening of strokes, underlining etc.

f) Underlining style: Single, double or triple underlining, dotted or crossed underline.

g) Bulleting: Design or style of bullets used in handwriting

h) Grammar and vocabulary: Way in which the writer uses a particular language, choice of words and phrases to express their feelings. It also measures the proper use of tenses and prepositions.

i) Misspellings: Spellings of certain words which have fixed in the mind of any writer remain consistent every time the writer uses that word in his or her handwriting. No matter how complicated form of disguise writers practice, the mental impression remains constant throughout.

j) Frequently used words or phrases: Usage of particular word or phrase every time the writer writes. Eg: "name of the writer at the starting"; "Om sai ram"; "Jai shree Krishna" etc.

k) Abbreviations: Use of short forms of words, commonly seen in text messages or what app conversation is. E.g. "use of n or & instead of and"; "Ok or k instead of okay"; "d instead of the"; "u in place of you" etc.

l) Use of profanity: Usage of slang in handwriting. E.g. "Bullshit", "Damn", "Shit" etc.

m) Punctuations: Use of proper punctuation marks. Commonly the English writers in India have a habit of incorporating only full stops, comma and question mark more frequently in their handwriting and compared to other punctuations. The above mentioned stylistic features are most commonly encountered in handwriting of every individual. There can be many more style markers depending upon the content of writings which are to be examined for fixing their authorship.

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