Defining Style

The word “style” is derived from the Latin word “stilus” which meant a short, stick, sharp at one end and flat at the other, used by the Romans for writing on wax tablets.
What is Style?

- Style is a means of communicating one’s ideas, thoughts and emotions in an expressive way;
- Style is a way of showing the function of language/implies registering language and requires statistics, analysis of grammar, stylistic devices;
- A way of individualizing an act of speaking or writing;
A way of involvement (how to express something in a neutral or expressive way);

A way of catching attention;

A cultural mark/sign;

An individual choice and arrangement of linguistic units according to the context (specific WHERE/WHEN), in order to convey a message;

An application of words with certain intentionality;

Embellishment of language;
The correspondence between thought and expression

Style is “ticks” (Cmeciu, 2007); A metallic tapping sound

Style is a shell surrounding a pre-existing core of thought or expression (Enkvist, 1965).

“Le style est l’homme même” (Style is the man himself) (Buffon, 1753).
Arthur Schopenhauer:

“Style is the physiognomy* of the mind. It is more infallible* than that of the body. To imitate the style of another is said to be wearing a mask. However beautiful it may be, it is through its lifelessness insipid* and intolerable*, so that even the most ugly living face is more engaging.”

*The human face
*Incapable of failure or error
*Lacking taste or flavour or tan
unbearable
"Essentially style resembles good manners. It comes of endeavoring to understand others, of thinking for them rather than yourself—or thinking, that is, with the heart as well as the head." (Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch)

Style is “a going back to the root of the words” (Cmeciu, 2007).
The concept of style is so broad that it is hardly possible to regard it as a term. We speak of style in architecture, literature, behaviour, linguistics, dress and other fields of human activity.

On the basis of the definitions of style and of most familiar collocations with “style”, we can identify an impressive number of style labels.
latest, modern, new vs. classical, old, old-fashioned, traditional *style of management*;

characteristic, distinctive, individual, inimitable (Defying imitation; matchless), original, personal *style of humour*;

authoritarian or autocratic, participative or democratic, delegative, benevolent (Generous in providing aid to others), coaching, consultative, manipulative, bureaucratic *style of leadership*;

impulsive, irrational, aggressive vs. passive, assertive vs. non-assertive *behavior style*;

elegant, lively, flamboyant Elaborately or excessively ornamented, glossy Superficially attractive and stylish; suggesting wealth or expense, glitzy Tasteless showiness, ostentatious Intended to attract notice and impress others vs. plain, simple, unaffected *style of dress*;
formal vs. informal, simple vs. complex, intricate; plain vs. ornate. Marked by elaborate rhetoric and elaborated with decorative details, sarcastic. Expressing or expressive of ridicule that wounds, sardonic, ironic. Disdainfully or ironically humorous; scornful and mocking, mocking, caustic. Harsh or corrosive in tone, derisive. Abusing vocally; expressing contempt or ridicule, humorous, ambiguous literary/narrative/prose style;
frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate conversational style/style of speech (Joos, 1959);
clear, concise, objective, effective, appropriate vs. inappropriate, ineffective; direct and lean. Lacking excess flesh vs. inflated. Enlarged beyond truth or reasonableness and static writing style etc.
Stylistics: Theoretical Concerns

The science that has style as its object of study, i.e. stylistics, raises many problems when trying to define it and set its field of investigation. One of the possible solutions could be that of constantly considering it against a background of related domains.
There are mainly three perspectives that influence the possible definitions of Stylistics

1. There are some theorists who believe that Stylistics should be included either in the field of literature, or in that of linguistics, with any possible compromise:

The direction based upon the ambiguity of style itself is adopted by Wales (1991) who states that:
“Stylistics is the study of style; yet, there are several different stylistic approaches. This variety in Stylistics is due to main influences of linguistics and literary criticism. [...] The goal of most stylistic studies is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary facts to linguistic 'causes' where these are felt to be relevant.”
Taking the debate to one of its extremes, I. R. Galperin assigns stylistics to the area of linguistics exclusively, and gives it two main directions of research as a science.

“Stylistics, also called linguo-stylistics, is a branch of general linguistics. It deals mainly with two interdependent tasks: a) the investigation of the inventory of special language media which by their ontological features secure the desirable effect of the utterance, and b) certain types of texts (discourse) which due to the choice and arrangement of language means are distinguished by the pragmatic aspect of the communication.”

(computer science) a rigorous and exhaustive organization of some knowledge domain that is usually hierarchical and contains all the relevant entities and their relations
2. From a different perspective, H. G. Widdowson (1997) suggests a definition of stylistics that sends to its interdisciplinary character, somewhere at the border between literary criticism and linguistics:

“By 'stylistics' I mean the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation and I shall take the view that distinguishes stylistics from literary...
criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other is that it is essentially a means of linking the two and has (as yet at least) no autonomous domain of its own. [...] Stylistics, however, involves both literary criticism and linguistics, as its morphological make-up suggests: the 'style' component relating it to the former and the 'istics' component to the latter.
3. Finally, members of the third party grant it autonomous existence among other related sciences. The definition that we favour and adopt is the one proposed by Short (1997:1): “an approach to the analysis of literary texts, using linguistic description”.
To sum up, stylistics can be seen:
1. Primarily as a sub-department of linguistics, when dealing with the peculiarities of literary texts;
2. Secondly, it can be a sub-department of literary study, when it draws only occasionally on linguistic methods;
3. Thirdly, it can be regarded as an autonomous discipline when it draws on methods from both linguistics and literary study.
Each of these three approaches has its own virtues. However, we should keep in mind that to study styles as types of linguistic variations and to describe the style of one particular text for a literary purpose are two different activities.
Stylistic Analysis vs. Levels of Style

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS AND LITERARY INTERPRETATION

In his work on stylistics, J. Mistrík (1985) draws clear boundaries between stylistic analysis and literary interpretation:

a. **Stylistic analysis** aims at exploring the linguistic means and devices of a given text. The method of stylistic analysis can be equally applied to the study of language use in literary as well as non-literary texts.
The stylistic analysis of language (linguistic stylistics) implies the exploration of the main components, or levels of language in order to elucidate the way in which an author uses a unique combination of language units in order to create his/her individual style.

Make clear and (more) comprehensible
As style is a relational concept, the aim of literary stylistics is that of relating the literary reader’s or the critic’s concern of aesthetic appreciation with the linguist’s concern of linguistic description.
Thus, the study of style involves both grammatical correctness (the way in which language works) and rhetoric effectiveness of linguistic means (e.g. the rhetorical construction of sentences).
b. **Literary interpretation** is a process which applies exclusively to literary texts; it aims at understanding and interpreting the topic, content and the message of a literary work, its literary qualities and the so-called *decoding* of the author's signals by the recipient.
Levels of Style and Stylistic Devices

According to Leech and Short (1994), a stylistic approach is concerned with the study and interpretation of all the linguistic features of a writer's work, at five levels of style:

- **phonological** (restricted to the use of sounds, rhyme, rhythm, sound devices such as alliteration and assonance);
- **lexical** (items concerning the vocabulary used: specific choice of words, synonyms and related words, antonyms and other semantic relations between words);
- **morphological** (the way in which the grammatical categories are exploited);
- **syntactic** (the way in which the relations between words and structures are handled);
- **artistic** (shows the personal imprint of every writer’s skill in enriching the language with new meanings through their use of stylistic devices and of figures of speech).
These five levels are connected to the text itself as a signifying system, but analysis does not limit to the textual boundaries; on the contrary, it combines linguistic information with contextual and general world knowledge.
A deeper insight into the **multiple levels** and units of analysis in language that can help organize and shape a stylistic analysis is offered by Mick Short and Dawn Archer. They start from the premises that language is an intricate web of levels, layers and links. Thus, any utterance or piece of text is organized through several distinct *levels of language*. 
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Levels of language</th>
<th>Branch of language study</th>
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<tr>
<td>The <em>sound</em> of spoken language; the way words are pronounced.</td>
<td>phonology; phonetics</td>
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<tr>
<td>The patterns of <em>written</em> language; the shape of language on the page.</td>
<td>graphology</td>
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<tr>
<td>The way words are constructed; words and their constituent structures.</td>
<td>morphology</td>
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<tr>
<td>The way words combine with other words to form phrases and sentences.</td>
<td>syntax; grammar</td>
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<td>The words we use; the vocabulary of a language.</td>
<td>lexical analysis; lexicology</td>
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<tr>
<td>The <em>meaning</em> of words and sentences.</td>
<td>semantics</td>
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<tr>
<td>The way words and sentences are used in everyday situations; the meaning of language in context.</td>
<td>pragmatics; discourse analysis</td>
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These basic levels of language can be identified in the stylistic analysis of text, which in turn makes the analysis itself more organised and principled. Interaction between levels is important: one level may complement, parallel or even collide with another level.