

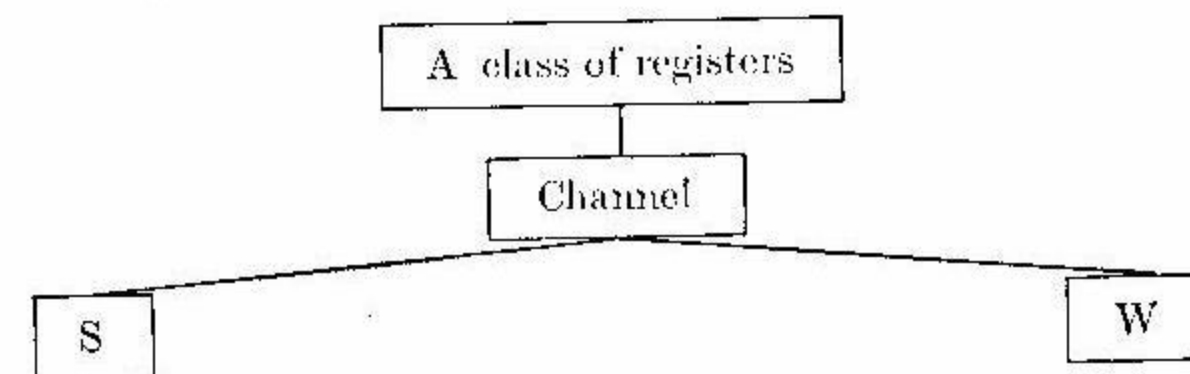
TOWARD CONTRASTING STYLES

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The idea underlying the present considerations is to do away with the arbitrariness of style categories like those isolated by Joos (1959). We want to argue that achieving that goal has to be preceded by research of a more sociological nature. Also, we wish to point out in this paper that accounting for stylistic variation within a contrastive framework bears a lot of relevance to and fruit for teaching purposes.

The terms *register* and *style* have sometimes been used in the literature synonymously, and quite often -- meaning two entirely different things. We basically adopt Halliday et al's definition of register, namely "a variety of a language distinguished according to use" (1964 : 87). Unlike dialect characteristics (a variety of a language distinguished according to user) which will not change with a situation shift, register shifts will occur upon any change of extralinguistic factors functional from the point of view of the given dialect. Those factors include 1. setting 2. participants (personnel) 3. channel, and 4. topic. Any change in any of those factors is a potential mechanism for triggering off alternations and adaptations in the linguistic system. The interdependence among the four mentioned factors might be graphically illustrated in the following form:



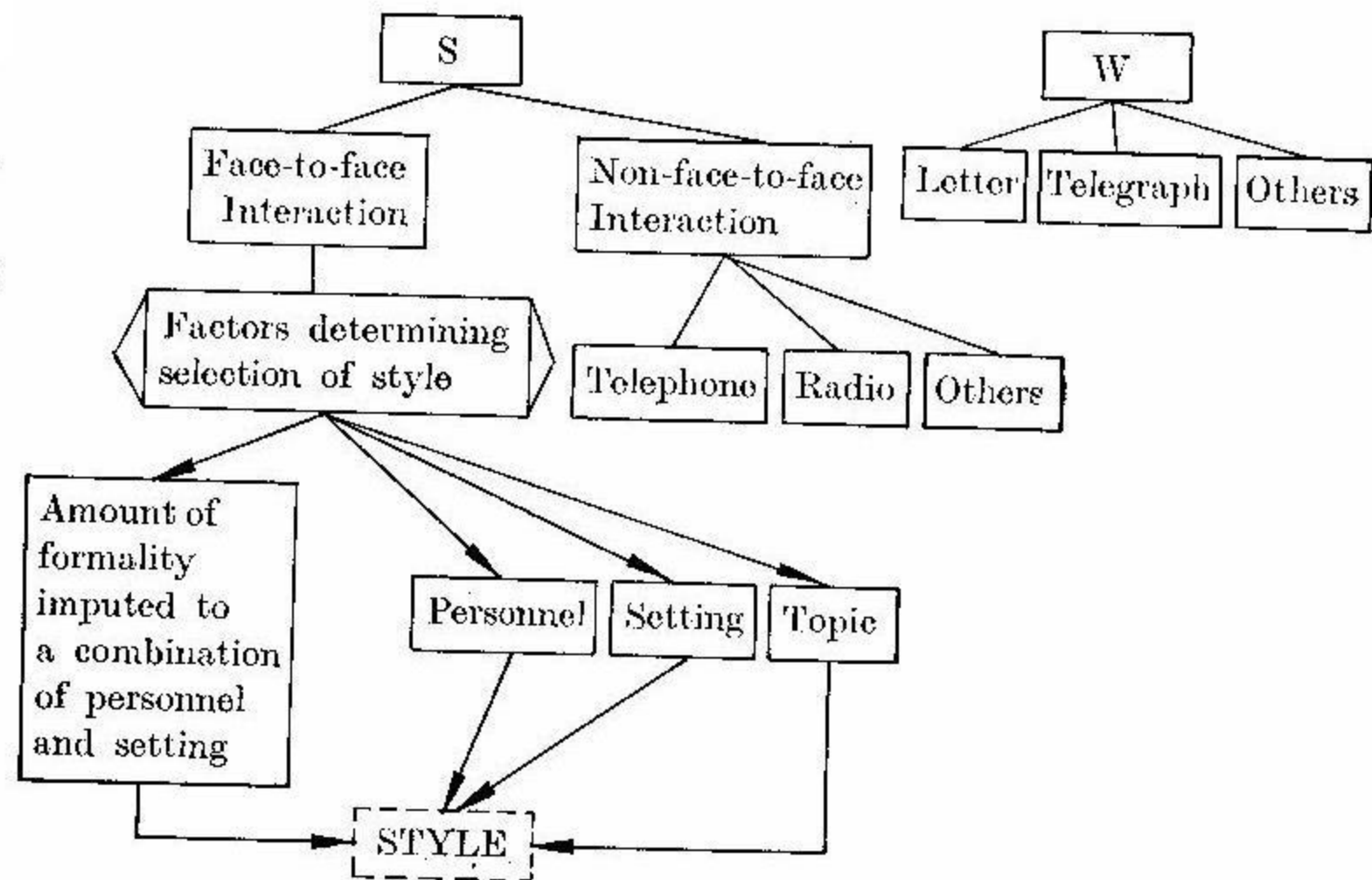


Table 1

The chart should be interpreted in the following manner: Register ought to be analyzed under two headings: 1. spoken language (S), and 2. written language (W). The spoken language will exhibit significant differences depending on whether the verbal interaction is conducted in person or not. In the latter case (e.g., telephone, radio, etc.) further significant divergencies can be detected. In face-to-face encounters the two main non-linguistic factors correlating with linguistic forms are *setting* and *personnel*. The ontological status of *topic* is not the same as those of setting and participants. Topic shifts generally result in changes in the lexicon while other components of language will remain unaltered. A switch in phonology or syntax (upon a change of topic) will be largely dependent on the arrangement of the setting and personnel units, allowing for syntactic or phonological forms of varying degrees of formality.

Referring to the diagram presented above one can define *style* as a language variety (or a kind of register) distinguished according to *setting*, *participants* (in face-to-face interaction), *topic*, and the *amount of formality* culturally associated with a particular setting (a set of settings), particular participants (or sets of participants), and a particular combination of the two. We follow this conception of style throughout this article.

In order to understand better the interrelationships among all the components included in table 1, and in particular the relationship of style to other

kinds of register, it seems useful to reformulate table 1 and present the interrelationships in question in terms of a filtering mechanism:

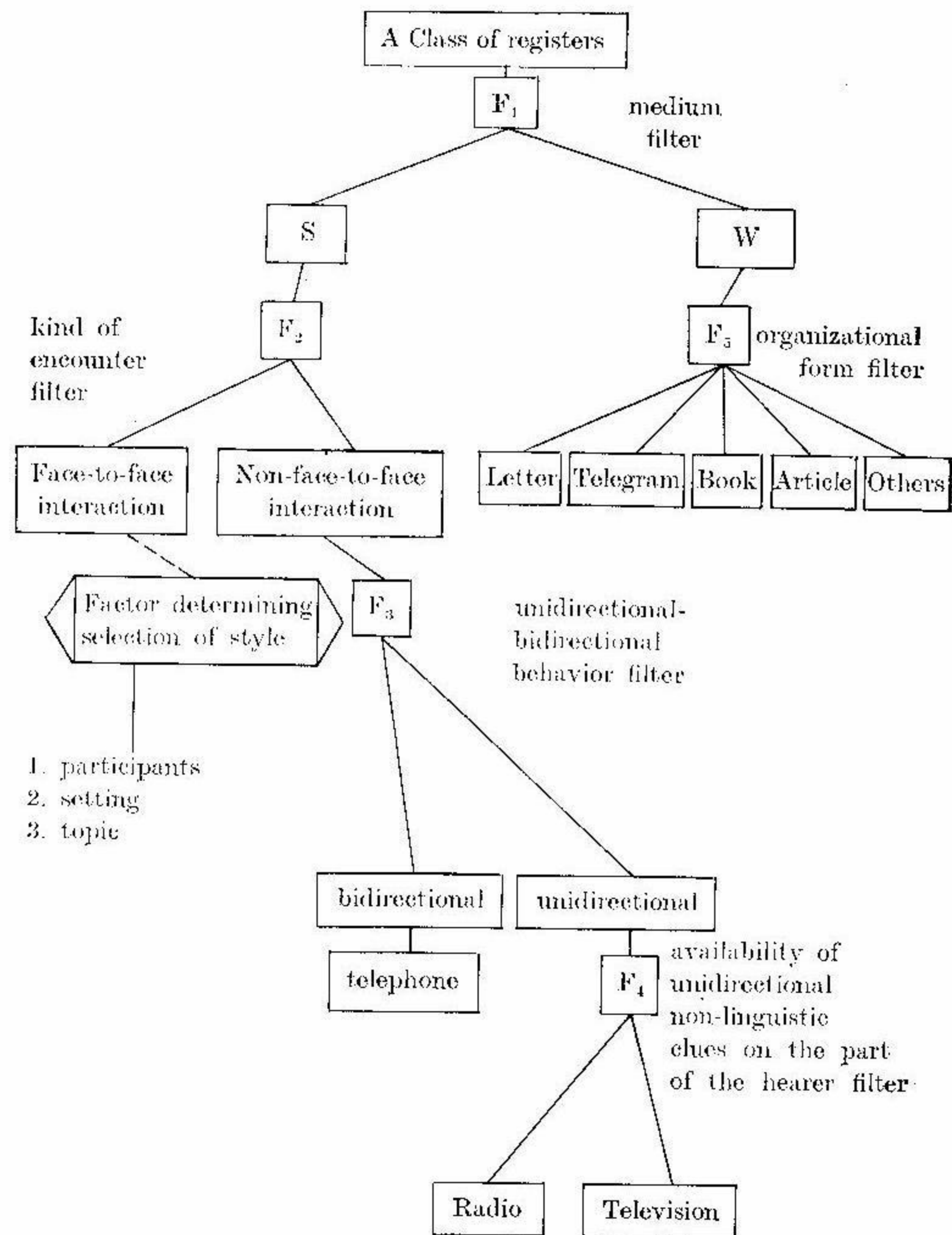


Table 2

Filter₁ (F₁) in the case of the choice of *S*, for example, filters out all the linguistic features (except the common core) that would be ascribed to a given language variety in the case of selecting *W*. F₂ has two slots — face-to-face interaction and non-face-to-face interaction. In the case of face-to-face interaction the factors determining the language variety called style are participants (*P*), setting (*S*), amount of formality (*F*) assigned to a combination of *P* and *S*, and topic (*T*). The non-face-to-face interaction slot is filtered through F₃ — the unidirectional-bidirectional behavior filter. Bidirectional linguistic behavior in non-face-to-face interaction (where the two different settings are irrelevant to the linguistic selection) is maintained only in case of telephone conversation where the factors determining selection of formal linguistic features are participants and topic. The unidirectional slot is filtered through F₄ — the filter which isolates situations in which there either does or does not exist the availability of unidirectional non-linguistic behavioral clues on the part of the hearer. In this way the two main mass media — television and radio — get separated. In the case of television there exists the above-mentioned availability of nonlinguistic clues. In both cases, the language variety remains more or less the same since the participant component is averaged out and therefore regarded as relatively constant.

The set of decisions required due to the filtering out of *S*, i.e., the selection of *W*, is filtered again through F₅ — the organizational form filter. The operation of the organizational form filter (F₅) should be understood in the following way: On deciding to write a letter or a newspaper article, for example, the writer is first exposed to restrictions imposed on him by the form of the writing attempted. These are usually realized by means of inherent instructions like: "omit articles" (telegram), "start your writing with a salutation" (letter), etc. Only after the organizational restrictions of the piece of writing attempted have been taken into account can the second determining factor — recipient — come into play. Topic will also play a role in the selection of the linguistic subcode appropriate for the rendition of a given piece of writing, but, as in the cases of styles and varieties pertaining to the telephone, radio, and television, its ontological status will be different.

If radio language varieties, for example, were to be differentiated and investigated, then recourse to the styles distinguished for face-to-face interaction would have to be taken into consideration. Also, in the case of written language, the equivalents of some face-to-face encounters could be found. Therefore it seems reasonable to first focus on personal encounter styles which will enable us to lay the foundations for further research and possible extrapolations. The reasoning presented above thus allows us to call the varieties pertaining to face-to-face interaction primary.

Depending on the channel characteristics, a sociolinguistic study will focus on different components of language. In an analysis of the language of

letters for example, phonological considerations would obviously be entirely irrelevant, whereas in face-to-face interaction style analyses phonology will certainly be of central interest.

We now wish to expound the relevance of the formality—informality continuum to the notion of style. Members of a particular culture or social group have historically come to perceive social situations¹ as formal, less formal, informal, very formal, etc. In other words, situations are classified on the informal—formal continuum. In our understanding, any sample of language (style) associated with a situation labelled formal is also called formal. If in a formal situation for example, an informal linguistic form occurs, then either 1. the use of language in that particular situation is intended to be marked, or 2. the situation has been redefined by one or some of the participants.

It must be born in mind that any classification of styles proposed for any language is, at the present state of research, arbitrary (cf. for example Joos' categories — frozen, formal, colloquial, casual, and intimate). That state of affairs results from the lack of formal criteria by which situations could be classified. It is not known yet what makes a situation formal or informal in a given culture. As S. Ervin-Tripp indicates "the mere cataloging of cultural units is not likely to bear much fruit unless the features of the situations which effect sociolinguistic rules can be identified" (1971 : 53). It is our contention that such features of situations, i.e., features of personnel and setting, can be identified and made use of in the classifying of situations along the formality—informality dimension.

One of the basic concepts pertaining to personnel, and having sociolinguistic relevance, is that of *status*, which is most often defined as "the worth of a person as estimated by a group or class of persons" (Secord et al. 1976 : 365). Status includes such categories as sex, age, occupation, income, social origin, education, race, clothing, etc. Depending on the culture, it may include other categories, irrelevant to European culture, for example, like the number of wives (Arabic), or bulkiness in figure (Hindu).

In a social encounter involving use of language the participants usually identify more features of status than they take into account when selecting a particular style. Therefore, in an analysis of a particular culture we have to engage in a two-step procedure involving:

1. identification of all the categories making up status in that culture, and
2. identification of all the categories of that set which are functional sociolinguistically.

Thus, the categories interesting to the sociolinguist will constitute a subset of the set of categories relevant to the definition of status. For example, in culture X the following status characteristics may be distinguished: occupa-

¹ *Situation* should be understood here to include setting and personnel.

tion, education, age, income, race, social origin. Out of those six only occupation, education, age and race may turn out to be sociolinguistically functional.

For both theoretical and applied pedagogical reasons the isolation of all the sociolinguistically functional status characteristics is crucial. With respect to the latter — the foreign language learner has to know clearly which are the sociological indices that he should take into account while labelling social situations along the formality continuum.

Once some status characteristics have been found out to be sociolinguistically functional, the next procedural step is to determine which of the isolated categories are primary and which are secondary factors. The distinction between those two kinds of factors will be extremely important again for pedagogical reasons since the foreign language learner, in a foreign language situation, will of necessity direct his attention first to the identification of primary factors whose proper classification will preclude dramatic social consequences, and thus enable a relatively smooth functioning in the foreign community. In the case of Polish culture for example, occupation and education are primary components of status whereas social origin may be considered to be a secondary one.

Attempts have already been made at describing linguistic forms in typical situations. This kind of approach, however, would hardly allow for significant generalizations. The linguistic data so collected would be associated with individual social situations. We would thus arrive at long lists of situations and typically used linguistic forms associated with them. This is the kind of procedure that yields teaching units like "at the railway station" and the enumeration of vocabulary items like "round-trip ticket", "check the baggage", etc. The usefulness of this unsystematic description of languages in typical situations, which has been in progress for quite some time now, cannot be denied in the foreign language teaching process. Many language programs have incorporated the fragmentary information that exists, and used it with some success.

The number of potential situations is infinite, and they may be assumed to be created according to a finite set of rules. Although new situations occur every day, all the situations which have occurred in the past, do occur in the present, and will occur in the future share some relationship to a finite set of rules the knowledge of which should enable us to predict what the potential situations are.

In this way, the reasoning leads us to state that there must exist some identifiable features which make a situation formal, informal, intimate, etc., that is, some as yet not clearly isolated features of personnel and setting should enable us to classify situations along the formality dimension. Finding out what those features are is the first step involving analyses of style.

In the following paragraphs we want to suggest that it is possible to con-

struct a diagnostic model of the social situation. We wish to focus our attention on only one dimension of the situation — the degree of formality. In other words, what we maintain is that it is plausible to produce a predictive system which would assign a certain amount of formality to a potential situation. This would be possible because within the system relevant features of the various degrees of formality would be known.

It is our contention that any fieldwork with respect to style as viewed in this article has to be preceded by an analysis of the situation itself. As S. E. Tripp says it is not clear what makes a situation formal (1971). Only after we have identified the relevant features of situations as distinguished with respect to degrees of formality should we commence systematic linguistic investigations. How do we find out what makes a situation formal in a given culture? There follows an outline of the procedure we propose to follow in this endeavor.

A large population representing culture (speech community) A should be presented an extensive list of clearly defined situations occurring in that culture. The situations described would be mainly typical congruent situations (e.g., a bank teller talking to a customer in a bank, a teacher talking to one of his pupils at school), but they would not necessarily have to be such very typical situations.

A large population representing culture (speech community) B should be presented an equivalent list of situations occurring in culture B. The two lists should include the largest possible number of situations which are sociologically the same or very similar, if possible. It is estimated that the lists in question should include at least 300 (?) examples. Then the informants should be instructed to mark on an 8 (10?) point formality scale the amount of formality they ascribe to a given situation. The results of such a study might take on the following form:

| | | |
|---|---|---------------|
| 1 | — | 20 situations |
| 2 | — | 30 |
| 3 | — | 60 |
| 4 | — | 70 |
| 5 | — | 40 |
| 6 | — | 30 |
| 7 | — | 30 |
| 8 | — | 20 |

The results should be interpreted as: 20 of the 300 situations have been indexed 1, i.e., most formal, 20 have been marked 8, i.e., least formal. Other numbers represent the placement of the remaining situations along the continuum. Some disagreement among the informants may be expected. Ways of solving

that problem can be worked out, however. One possible solution would be to take into account only those ratings that overlap. It is suggested that the scale presented to the informants be relatively large because in this way a mistake of underdifferentiation will not be committed. If, however, two points of the scale turn out not to be functional, they will merge thus yielding one functional entity.

Having grouped the isolated situations with respect to the amount of formality imputed to them by the informants consulted, the researcher's first task will be to identify the features of the situations as grouped in the distinguished categories. For example, it will become indispensable to find out what features the 20 situations (marked 1 on the scale) share that the 30 situations marked 2 on the scale, do not share. In turn, it should be ascertained what features the 30 situations share, that the 60 situations, marked 3 on the scale, do not share, etc.

When we have identified the features which make a situation formal (one of the 20 in our hypothetical study), less formal (one of the 30), etc., then we will be able to generalize and assume that any situation having the same features will be classified by members of the given culture as formal (level 1), less formal (level 2), etc. It is hoped that such a procedure will enable us to construct a diagnostic model of the speech situation,² i.e., provided a given situation is defined as having a specific set of features (extracted from the situations grouped together) it will automatically be attributed a defined amount of formality (*f*), and thus classified in one of the functional situation categories previously differentiated. The following is a rule defining the relationships in question:

$$SS^x_{y \in Z(t)} \equiv SSX_y \text{ has } ABCD\dots \text{ of } Z$$

The rule should be interpreted as: any speech situation *X* in culture *y* is a member of the speech situation category *Z* differentiated with respect to *f* if and only if it has the features *ABCD*... of category *Z*.

The features *ABCD*... will be inherent features of personnel and setting like occupation, education, age, etc. (of personnel), historical significance, artistic value, etc. (of setting).

In this way we will achieve the isolation of *situation types* (not typical situations) correlating with styles appropriate for, or, used in those situations. Each situation type in a given culture should be marked by the presence of a set of features, or the absence of another set the presence of which would mark another situation type.

² Any social situation is a potential speech situation, i.e., a situation in which language is used. Although the concept of *formality* is applicable not only to speech situations but also social situations, sociolinguistic analyses of style would obviously not go beyond the limits of the speech situation.

Having differentiated a specific number of speech situation types in a given culture, the researcher should start doing linguistic fieldwork. The sociolinguist would then not care about typical situations (what is a typical situation for some people may not necessarily be so for others). He would be doing fieldwork in various situations which, if our reasoning is correct, should be classifiable in one of the situation types listed for the culture in which the investigation would be carried out. A situation type is an abstract unit. It gets realized in the many concrete situations from which differentiating features are extractable. As opposed to our framework, analyzing language in typical situations (e.g., at the railway station) is not interesting because no overall generalizations can be captured.

When cultures (speech communities) *A* and *B* are compared, the researcher's fundamental concern will be to state whether the features of personnel and setting (possibly others) making up situation types in culture *A*, are the same as or different from the features making up situation types in culture *B*. This kind of contrastive analysis offers insights of tremendous significance to foreign language teaching. Where cultures *A* and *B* coincide with respect to the features of personnel and setting which make a situation formal, informal, etc., there is no sociological interference and no mistakes of "formality identification" should be expected. In the case of different structures, interference is very likely to start at the sociological level, and enhance the moment language will come into play. Therefore, it seems that the sooner the student (a member of *A*) knows what features make situations in *B* formal, informal, etc., the sooner a large number of sociolinguistic mistakes will be eradicated. It is a task within contrastive sociolinguistics (Janicki 1977) to juxtapose the features in question as pertaining to cultures *A* and *B*. Pedagogical Contrastive Sociolinguistics (Janicki 1977) will, in turn work out ways of implementing this knowledge in the learning-teaching process.

When fieldwork done within our framework commences, linguistic data will be collected in the various situations, which are subsumable under the isolated abstract situation types. By extension, the linguistic forms encountered in these situations can be subsumed under style categories, the number of which will equal the number of situation types. Such a procedure will allow for the attribution of some value of *f* to each identified linguistic form, depending on the situation or situations in which a given form is found. Obviously most linguistic forms, which constitute the common core of a given language, will not be marked with respect to *f*. This is because words like *book*, *chair*, *lamp*, etc. are used under any situational circumstances. It is only the marginal part of any language that gets marked by some value *f*.

One must be cognizant of the fact that irrespective of the number of styles distinguished in a language, those styles will be described largely in terms of variable rules. Style *A* may differ from style *B* (matched with situ-

ation types A and B, respectively) only in the frequency of occurrence of some linguistic variables. Categorical statements can be expected particularly when language varieties which are non-adjacent in the stylistic dimension are juxtaposed.

If our reasoning is correct, then it may be expected that answers will become available to questions like the following: In Polish, two friends will exchange the greeting *cześć*, likewise, two American friends will exchange the greeting *hi*. In an American store *hi* is the most frequently used greeting between the clerk and the customer. In Poland, however, using *cześć* in a store would be deviant. The question we want to put is: Is it that the two different cultures assign to the situation — store + clerk(s) + customer(s) — a different value of *f*, thus not allowing *cześć* to be used in a store?,³ or is it that the value of *f* assigned to the situation in question is the same in the two cultures, except that in American English *hi* is used in two styles but the Polish *cześć* only in one? Graphically the first alternative might be presented in the following way:

| Polish | American |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 — | 1 — |
| 2 — store | 2 — |
| cześć 3 — friends | hi 3 — store, friends |
| 4 — | 4 — |
| 5 — | 5 — |

The second alternative would yield:

| Polish | American |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 — | 1 — |
| 2 — store | hi 2 — store |
| cześć 3 — friends | hi 3 — friends |
| 4 — | 4 — |
| 5 — | 5 — |

We believe that answers to questions like the one posed above will have a considerable effect not only on the development of sociolinguistic theory but also on that of language teaching.

³ In this case the American culture would be said to assign to the *store + clerk(s) + customer(s) situation* less formality than the Polish one.

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