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A Stylistic Exploration of War Register in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Mantel's *Bring up the Bodies*

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the similarities of authorial style in the depiction of war in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Hilary Mantel's *Bring up the Bodies*. Using the Systemic Functional Grammar as theoretical model, it investigates the deployment of the register of war in the achievement of linguistic style by both Adichie and Mantel. The theory sees language from a social semiotic perspective, using linguistic choices a language user makes as a measure of deliberate and conscious decisions in the ultimate fulfilment of functions. Going by Halliday (1985: 38) definition of register as a functional variety of language, that is language variability according to use, the authorial deployment of same in the overall attainment of style in the selected texts is investigated. The findings reveal that not only do both authors show similar thematic interests in both novels, but that they also exhibit stylistic patterns that suggest perceived affinities to almost the same literary and linguistic influences.

Keywords: English, stylistics, register, style, war, function, choice

1. INTRODUCTION

The language of literature has been a curious phenomenon to scholars for a long time. Indeed the developments recorded in such areas of language use in the arts for the purposes of communication, exhortation, rebuke, condemnation and satiric endeavours have contributed largely to the emergence of and continued relevance of many disciplines and sub-disciplines in the language oriented scholarship. Two of such sub-disciplines are stylistics and literary criticism. Although some have famously described the two as having a relationship like the two sides of a coin, a lot of disagreements endure between their practitioners. This has however not stopped the inevitable symbiotism of the two disciplines as far as language evaluation in texts is concerned.

There is a historical connectedness between stylistics and literary criticism. Scholars have long speculated and even postulated along that line of argument. Some lay their arguments on the relics of classical literature as found in early Roman and Greek works. This is not so far-fetched because the two disciplines have language and especially its artistic use as their central subject matter. Again, the cord that binds the two disciplines (language) was as important and controversial as it is now. In ancient times, there were three basic schools of thought responsible for the academic use of language. The first was Rhetoric, from the Greek 'techne rhetorike' (Bradford 1997: 2), the art of speech; or the art of creating and analysing speech; and this was taught as a subject to inculcate into students the habits of giving often long and beautiful speeches in public.

The second area of language scholarship was called Poetics. This, ordinarily suggests training for would be artists (poets) to instil in them the necessary ingredients and values which were attached to a piece of art. However, unlike Rhetoric, poetics was taught so that the prospective artist would be exposed to the problems of expressing the ideas his talent had given him before it was made public. According to Missikova (2003:9), 'the work of Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C.) entitled *Poetics* is considered to be a pioneer publication in this field. His distinction of epics, drama and lyrics within artistic works is still applicable'. The third scholarly discipline before the modern era of linguistics and literary criticism was known as Dialectics. Its aim and purpose was to teach communicators the art of guiding and mastering a dialogue, talk or persuasive endeavour in such a way that the flow of thought is delicately but strongly articulated in the period of mutual suspicions and rivalries among powerful kingdoms, (Attridge 2000). According to Meyer (2008), people naturally value rhetoric when it helps them to defend their own interests in both political and legal affairs, and scholars who are familiar with rhetorical politics logically ascribe value to it.

All these historical reviews are for the scholarly purpose of establishing a direct past and continued symbiotic relationship between linguistic and literary evaluation of texts. Stylistics, being the study of texts from a linguistic perspective and literary criticism, the reading of texts from a critical and literary orientation. The fact that they emanated from almost the same disciplinary origins in a way puts paid to the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the practitioners of the two subjects.

Language and literature have a metaphorical mother and child relationship. Indeed, they are no doubt intertwined. However, one precedes the other. Literature is created through the existence of language and literature is sustained through the dynamic nature of language as an ever-growing linguistic cum social phenomenon. It also would not be trite to affirm that without language there would be no literature.

In order to have a prosper grasp of literature, perhaps it would be necessary to study the language that actually brings about its existence. According to Simpson (2004: 3):

> the techniques of stylistic analysis are as much
> about deriving insights about linguistic structure
> and function as they are about understanding
> literary texts. Thus, the question 'What can stylistics
> tell us about literature?' is always paralleled by an
> equally important question 'What can stylistics tell
> us about language?'.

In the excerpts above, it is argued that a symbiotic relationship occurs between language and literature and tone is better appreciated and studied through the understanding and complementary influence of the other. In a nutshell, it is circumspect that to fully understand any form of literature, a detailed analysis of its linguistic components in all the levels of grammatical realisation ought to be studied. In the reasoning of Halliday (1985: 15):

> … the linguistic analyses enables one to say why the
> text is or is not an effective text for its own purposes,
> in what respects it succeeds and in what respect it fails,
> or is less successful.

In explaining the thought above, we can state that the stylistician's goal of a purely linguistic interpretation of literary texts is achievable, provided it is done with an objective (scientific) mind and not a pre-conceived notion of aligning or measuring up with an already provided standard of sort.

2. AIM OF STUDY

The aim of the study is to bring out the similarities in the register deployed to portray/depict the themes of war and political attrition in the two novels. This will hopefully be achieved by a systematic analysis of the collated data while subjecting same to stylistic scrutiny in the most objective fashion. At the end of the study, we hope to lay a claim to a linguistic affinity to similar or same artistic interest as exhibited in the two works.

3. THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REGISTER AND STYLE

Any language is realisable in varieties. According to Biber and Conrad (2009: 2), 'we use the terms *register*, *genre*, and *style* to refer to three different perspectives on text varieties'. They opined further that the register perspective combines an analysis of linguistic characteristics that are common in a text variety with analysis of the situation of use of the variety. They also assert that 'any text sample of any type can be analysed from a register perspective'. In general linguistics study, the varieties of language are classified into two major groupings, which are the ones according to users (dialect) and the varieties according to

use (registers, genre and style). Halliday (1988: 162) defines register as 'a cluster of associated features having a greater-than-random… tendency to co-occur'. Also, Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia says 'a *register* (sometimes called a *style*) is a variety of language used in a particular social setting'. It is a variety of language that has to do with the purposes and situational context of a particular text. A language user makes use of same for different purposes and functions and in different contexts. Importantly too, he/she is naturally made aware of the language variability according to contexts and functions. A successful writer is one who learns and displays artistic dexterity in the particular language patterns that are expected for particular situations and communicative purposes. Texts can be described according to their contexts, considering the characteristics of the people who produce the texts, and the characteristics of the situations and communicative purposes associated with the texts.

Registers can be identified on different levels of specificity. To Ochs and Schieffelin (2012), the importance of the acquisition of register could be compared to the order by which particular sounds or syntactic constructions are acquired or learned by the average language user. According to them, while adopting a cross-cultural and ethnographic perspective, language socialisation scholars went to different societies around the world to document how, in the course of acquiring language, children become particular types of speakers and members of communities. The results show that whether in first language or second language situations, there are similarities in the way they assimilate the various properties of the particular language as far as the contextual use is concerned. Consequently, personal styles and registers that reflect areas of interest are cultivated overtime. Paugh (2012: 151) submits that theories of childhood and child rearing have described in details 'the types and order of acquisition (or not) of grammatical forms, speech acts, registers, styles, languages, and so on over developmental time in children and across the lifespan' of language users.

Register reflects an author's vocabulary and the residual capacity of such. It shows what matters to the writer and his preferences or choices when it comes to artistic thematic concerns. It reflects the deepest thoughts of an author and the topics he holds dearest in his heart. Also, the target audience determines the type of register to use. For example, a writer may use sophisticated registers which may reflect a resolve to communicate with highly educated segment of his readership only. According to Bloor and Bloor (2004), register is a specific socially recognized language form, which results from the context in which language is frequently used. The situation of language use can have a constraining effect on such a language that the society in which it is used often develops clear conventions for same. Examples of such situational contexts are the courts of law, business companies, research laboratories, and so on.

There are different types of registers, as there are different types of styles. For instance, Baby Talk is a speech register, which is a way of speaking that is employed in a particular social situation, (Biber and Finegan 1994). Such a register definitely will be replete with one-word expressions and light semantic choices that aid simple interpretation. This shows that register reflects different occasions for language use and the social contexts of communicative events determine the choices. Writers choose their language based on the field of discourse or topic of interest as well as the textual relationship between them and their readers, (Ferguson 1994).

As a register category becomes more specific, it is possible to identify its situational and linguistic characteristics more precisely. This is where the definition of style as statistics comes into play. According to McMenanin (2002):

> The more objective study of descriptive stylistics reflects the analytical methods of linguistics and rejects casual observantion of linguistic variation. This means that the structural and functional characteristics of writings are identified, catalogued, and analyzed for underlying regularities. In addition, the frequency of occurrence of linguistic features, which are qualitative, can often be quantified, providing a basis for statistical measurement of style. (127)

Using insights from computational linguistics, this view of style tries to describe the phenomenon of style in terms of the frequency of the distribution of particular linguistic properties or features in a particular text. It is predicated on the assertion that a high frequency of occurrence of certain words, collocations, figure of speech, sentence type, paragraph size etc.; all point to a writer's conscious effort at establishing a pattern of style from them all. Although Leech and Short (2007:41) caution that 'nothing can be adduced from, or proved by, statistics alone', and Simpson (2004:3) submits that 'it is the full gamut of the system of language that makes all aspects of a writer's craft relevant in stylistic analysis'; the argument still stands on a solid foundation of authorial consciousness, that writers do not just emphasise patterns of lexis or narrative in any piece of writing, without seeking to create a sort of awareness and that there is still ample evidence to suggest that patterns of occurrences are not to be taken for granted, in the analysis of data, as far as stylistics is concerned.

To further boost our understanding of the interconnected of the two subjects, the mutually beneficial relationship between style and register is graphically demonstrated in the diagram below:

The Situational Context   Linguistic Analysis of the
of use (including communicative   words and structures that
purposes)   commonly occur

← ------- **Function** --------- →

{Components in a Register Analysis (Culled from Biber and Conrad (2009: 6)}

Reading from the diagram above, one can infer a register to mean a variety of language associated with a particular situation of use (including the particular purpose(s) of that communicative episode). The description of a register thus covers three major components: the situational context, the linguistic features (style), and the functional relationships between the first two components.

Biber and Conrad expatiate further by asserting that 'registers are described for their typical lexical and grammatical characteristics: their linguistic features'. These linguistic features constitute the totality of authorial style as it concerns the choices made by the writer in the realisation of his literary ambitions. However, registers are also described for their situational contexts, as stated earlier. For instance, the parameters of whether they are

produced in speech or writing, whether they are interactive, and what their primary communicative purposes are all come into focus. Biber and Conrad (2009) claim that the central argument of their book titled *Register, Genre and Style* is that 'linguistic features are always **functional**, when considered from a register perspective. That is, linguistic features tend to occur in a register because they are particularly well suited to the purposes and situational context of the register' (6). Thus, the third component of any register description is actually its functional analysis. This owes to the practice that the linguistic component of a register analysis requires identification of the 'pervasive' linguistic features in the variety: linguistic characteristics that might occur in any variety but are much more common in the target register under scrutiny in a text. Halliday's (1988: 162) definition of register as "a cluster of associated features having a greater-than-random . . . tendency to co-occur' suffices here.

In conclusion, it is these pervasive linguistic features that are clearly functional and constitute our data for the analysis of stylistic similarities in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Mantel's *Bring up the Bodies*. A majority of the characters' thoughts, words and active predilections in the two novels are tailored towards the prevailing theme of wars and the pervasive linguistic features in their lexical and grammatical choices belie/betray this.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Otherwise called Scale and Category Grammar, Systemic Functional Grammar is a linguistic theory that focuses on the hierarchical system of units in grammatical analysis, basing its foundation and theoretical efficacy on the pivots of choice on the path of the language user and meaning on the path of the society in which a particular language is used. In the words of Halliday (1973):

> A functional approach to language means, first of all, investigating how language is used: trying to find out what are the purposes that language serves for us, and how we are able to achieve these purposes through speaking and listening, reading and writing. But it also means more than this. It means seeking to explain the nature of language in functional terms: seeing whether language itself has been shaped by use, and if so, in what ways? How the form of language has been determined by the function it has evolved to serve. (7)

The functional aspect of the theory is further broken down into the ideational, interpersonal and textual meta-functions, Halliday and Hasan (1989). To further elaborate these functions, Halliday (2013: 30) says the 'ideational meta-function of language is to convey an idea'; while the interpersonal meta-function is 'concerned with the interaction between speaker and addressee−the grammatical resources for enacting social roles in general, and speech in particular, in dialogic interaction: for establishing, changing and maintaining interpersonal relations; and the textual meta-function is concerned with the creation of text− with the presentation of ideational and interpersonal meanings as information that can be shared by speaker and listener in text unfolding in context', Matthiesen and Halliday (2009: 12-13). The Systemic Functional Grammar is very valuable

in the comparison of different registers of English and in making learners aware of the variability. According to Halliday (1985: 38) register is a functional variety of language, that is language variability according to use. The three variables of context of situation (field, tenor and mode) identified in SFL affect our language choices (Manfredi, 2008). Indeed from an SFG perspective, lexical and grammatical (syntactic) choices are made according to the purpose(s) a particular text is serving in a particular context. Halliday refers to a certain Register Code (a concept of text variety) that allows readers to make sensible predictions about the kind of language which will most likely occur in a given situation, that is, associated with a particular field, tenor, and mode.

Since SFL views meaning as the function of a linguistic item in its context of use, then theme, one of the basic tenets of systemic grammar and which Halliday (1973) defines as 'the element of the message with which the clause is concerned', it logically becomes convenient to associate meaning in a work of art to the prevailing register or variety of language according to use in the particular context surrounding the work. In other words, sense could be made of what an author aspires to convey in the text by paying particular attention to the frequency of linguistic choices that are associated with the theme (s) of the text. According to systemicists, meaning is created as a result of the linguistic choices users make in particular speech situations (Bloor and Bloor (1995), Thompson (2004). These meta-functions of language are tailored towards meaning as far as linguistic choice is concerned. In other words, it means that meaning is influenced by the many writer/speaker motives. Systemic grammarians reason that SFL seeks to provide an account of the grammar of a language by reference to the social purposes and context of language use. The social perspective from which it views language as a tool for the execution of human/social needs and purposes is a major aspect of the theory. Van Dijk (2008) captures this assertion in his view that:

> SFL explicitly emphasises the social nature of language and language use. Language is seen as an inherent part of the lived experience of the members of a society and culture; linguistic structures should therefore also be accounted for, and possibly explained, in terms of their "natural" environment and of the social activities constituted by them. It is within this very general aim that the notion of context was introduced in Firthian linguistics, namely as the "context of situation. (30)

According to Halliday (2013: 17), the set of all possible elements in any given syntagmatic environment constitutes a system, from which 'choices' are made to 'mean', that is to convey a particular thought with corresponding feedback from the recipient of such. Henrici (1981) corroborates this argument by calling a system in linguistic study a set of things of which one must be chosen. An example of how to mean different thoughts with particular choice of words and in particular linguistic contexts could be inferred below: 'The man walked in', 'The man strutted in', 'The man sauntered in', 'The man came in'. Each of these expressions convey a different idea of the manner 'the man' got in as a result of the choice of words used.

Systemic Functional Grammar has its roots in the structuralist school of linguistics which developed in the early 20th century. It is functional and semantic rather than formal and syntactic in orientation. Also, it takes the text rather than the sentence as its object; and defines its scope by reference to usage rather than grammaticality.

Halliday (1994: 38) states that 'it is a functional grammar because the conceptual framework on which it is based is a functional one rather that a formal one'. He goes further to state that it is functional in three distinct but closely related senses. This is evident in its interpretation of texts, of the system of a language and of the elements of linguistic structures (phrases, clauses etc.).

SFG is designed to account for how language is used. Every text (that is, everything that is said or written), according to Halliday, unfolds in some context of use. In other words, the intended meaning of a writer may not be comprehensively achieved if it is interpreted in isolation. He goes further to say that:

> language has evolved to satisfy human needs;
> and the way it is organised is functional to these
> needs− it is not arbitrary. A functional grammar
> is essentially a natural grammar, in the sense that
> everything in it can be explained , ultimately , by
> reference to how language is used (1994: 39)

Halliday (2013: 30) says the 'ideational meta-function of language is to convey an idea'; while the interpersonal meta-function is 'concerned with the interaction between speaker and addressee−the grammatical resources for enacting social roles in general, and speech in particular, in dialogic interaction: for establishing, changing and maintaining interpersonal relations; and the textual meta-function is concerned with the creation of text− with the presentation of ideational and interpersonal meanings as information that can be shared by speaker and listener in text unfolding in context', Matthiesen and Halliday (2009: 12-13). The significant aspect of these explanations lies in the 'doing' part of the role or function of language than in the 'knowing' part. This is the crux of systemic grammar. Moreover, the theory helps its exponents marshal the argument that meaning is not achieved by mere focus on linguistic properties alone, but by aligning it with certain variables. Halliday (2013: 17) opines that the set of all possible elements in any given syntagmatic environment constitutes a system, from which 'choices' are made to 'mean', that is to convey a particular thought with corresponding feedback from the recipient of such.

5. ANALYSIS

Overtly influenced by Systemic Functional Grammar, the three steps in the analysis of register in texts provided by Bieber and Ransom (2009: 7) are:

1) The importance of noting the situational characteristics of conversation that distinguish it from other registers.
2) The description of the typical (pervasive) linguistic features of most conversations in the text.
3) The interpretation of the relationship between situational characteristics and pervasive linguistic features in functional terms.

Going by the steps above, we shall limit this study to just two excerpts from each novel. These are picked randomly and without any prejudice at all to the other excerpts. Hopefully, it will do justice to the aim of the paper.

5. 1. Data 1

'What's funny?' Olanna asked.
'That is Rex Lawson's song,' Aunty Ifeka said.
'What is funny about it?'
'Our people say that the chorus sounds like mmee-mmee-mmee, the bleating of a goat.' Aunty Ifeka chuckled. 'They say the Sardauna sounded like that when he was begging them not to kill him. When the soldiers fired a mortal into his house, he crouched behind his wives and bleated, "Mmee-mmee-mmee, please don't kill me, mmee-mmee-mmee!"
Aunty Ifeka laughed again, and so did Baby, as if she understood.
'Oh.' Olanna thought about Chief Okonji and wondered if he too was said to have bleated like a goat before he died. (HYS, pg. 163)

Several important situational characteristics that distinguish textual conversation as a register are apparent even in this short extract. The first is that it involves at least two participants. In terms of the setting, these participants share the same temporal context (the beginning of the Nigerian Civil War) and the same physical space. The predominant linguistic features are words like 'killed', 'mortal', 'begged', etc. Finally, the connection between these lexical items and the context in which they are uttered reflect the disregard with which Nigerians treated human lives before, during and after the civil war.

5. 2. Data 2

The smoke was thickening around her so that she was not sure if the crowd of men drifting into the yard were real or just plumes of smoke, until she saw the shiny metal blades of their axes and machetes, the blood-stained kaftans that flapped around their legs.
Muhammed pushed her into the car and then went around and got in. 'Keep your face down,' he said.
'We finished the whole family. It was Allah's will!' one of the men called out in Hausa. The man was familiar. It was Abdulmalik. He nudged a body on the ground with his foot and Olanna noticed, then, how many bodies were lying there, like dolls made of cloth. (HYS pg. 184)

The situational context of this excerpt lies in the heat of the Nigerian Civil War. It describes the scene of a massacre involving murderous members of a Hausa militia meting out violence on their Igbo neigh- ours. The pervasive linguistic features suggest violence. These include 'smoke', 'blades', 'axes', 'bloodstained', 'finished' etc. the textual connection between these war registers and the particular context they are used evoke a strong authorial depiction of the senseless violence that befell Nigerians during the civil war. No doubt, the carefully selected lexicals which depict war dominate the excerpt above.

5. 3. Data 3

As Henry comes in behind him, he pushes back his chair to rise. Henry waves a hand: carry on. 'Majesty, the Muscovites have taken three hundred miles of Polish territory. They say fifty thousand men are dead.'
'Oh,' Henry says.
'I hope they spare the libraries. The scholars. There are very fine scholars in Poland.'
'Mm? I hope so too.'
He returns to his dispatches… Letters from foreign rulers, wishing to know if it is true that Henry is planning to cut off the heads of all his bishops. (*BTB* pg. 28)

We can deduce a situational context of a state of war from the excerpt above. It involves two participants, Henry III and his master Secretary, Sir Thomas Cromwell, in the king's chambers strategizing on the ongoing war and ruminating on England's political alliances. The connection between war registers present in the text and the context suggests a siege situation which is not strange in times of war. Mantel deliberately cultivates the use of such register to depict the political tension that endured during that time.

5. 4. Data 4

Sometimes antique weapons are unearthed: axes that, wielded with double fist, could cut down horse and rider. Think of the great limbs of those dead men, stirring under the soil. War was their nature, and war is always keen to come again. It's not just the past that you think of, as you ride these fields. It's what's latent in the soil, what's breeding; it's the days to come, the wars unfought, the injuries and deaths that, like seeds, the soil of England is keeping warm. He says, 'Cromwell, Cromwell, what shall I do?' Cromwell, save me from the Emperor. Cromwell, save me from the Pope. (*BTB* pg. 8)
The contextual background to this text dates back to fourteenth century England. The 'pervasive' linguistic features suggest a situation of war. Examples of such lexical items are 'dead men', 'axes', 'cut down', 'injuries', 'wars'. The relationship between these register and the social and political context reflects England in the fourteenth century, where valour and military conquests were celebrated and used as yardsticks to judge men.

5. 5. Data 5

'There's a rumour that Britain supplied five warships to Nigeria, so youths have been burning British shops and houses all over Port Harcourt today. I wanted to be sure you hadn't been bothered. I can send one or two of my boys down.'
First, Richard was irritated at the thought that he still was a foreigner who could be attacked, and then he felt grateful for Madu's concern. (HYS pg. 382)

In this conversation between Richard and an Igbo friend named Madu, takes place against the background of a popular uprising against British interest in the war-torn Eastern region of Nigeria. The excerpt is littered with vocabulary of war and violence such as 'warships', 'burning', 'attacked', and 'bothered', as euphemistically used in this context. Also, the use of these war registers intensify the sense of siege and apprehension that pervaded Nigeria during the Civil War.

5. 6. Data 6

Rochford was killed first and needed three blows of the axe; after which, the others said not much. All proclaimed themselves sinners, all said they deserved to die, but once again they did not say for what; Mark, left till last and slipping in the blood, called for God's mercy and the prayers of the people. The executioner must have steadied himself, since after his first blunder all died instantly. (*BUTB* pg. 387-388)

The excerpt above witnesses the execution of Henry III betrayers and traitors of England who aligned with Rome and allegedly had affairs with the Queen Anne Boleyn. Words like 'killed', 'blows', 'axe', 'blood', 'executioner', and 'died' all belong to the register of war and legitimate violence a state can wield against any individual. The stylistic deployment of these linguistic variables adds to the understanding and appreciation of the prevailing sense of war and religious conflict evident in the novel.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From our discussions so far, we have been able to demonstrate the fruitful working relationship between style and register, as far as the linguistic elucidation and interpretation of texts is concerned. We have also demonstrated, to a certain extent, a shared similarity of thematic interests and literary purpose between Adichie and Mantel. This was done by applying the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions to the three steps of analysing registers as prescribed by Bieber and Ransom (2009). In the analysis, it was demonstrated that the use of war registers in both Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Mantel's *Bring up the Bodies* perform the ideational function of providing the peculiar situational information underlying the texts; the interpersonal function of maintaining relations between interlocutors on the same or ranging subject matters; and the textual function of creating text− with the presentation of ideational and interpersonal meanings as information that can be shared and processed by both writer and reader as the plot and narrative unfold. These three protocols were faithfully followed and the results indicate a certain pattern of writing that suggests a commonality of interest in authorial outputs and reader-expectations.

The authors' preferences for both thematic and mutually shared linguistic characteristics reinforce the perception of glimpses of shared similarities in their writing styles. The lexical choices employed in the prosaic relays of the Nigerian Civil War and England's fourteenth century internecine warfare, with particular focus on Henry III's violent persecution of his political and religious enemies, in both historical novels, portray the authors as sharing a similar literary style. Findings reveal a convergence of mutually applied stylistic concepts in terms of statistics, genre, and content.

Finally, a claim could be made that the place of register in the determination of authorial style and textual understanding, as far as the school of stylistics is concerned, has been reinforced.

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