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New Styles, New Meanings, New Identities: Editors' Introduction

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Investigations into style have been the object of interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences since at least the 1960s. *Style in Language* (Sebeok 1960) is one of the earliest and most influential attempts to discuss "the fluid and dissonant notion of style" (1960: 3). The volume is a collection of proceedings from an international conference held in Bloomington, Indiana, which saw the participation of philosophers, cultural anthropologists, linguists, folklorists and critics. Creative writers – those that could be metaphorically defined as the 'artisans' of style – were also central to this debate. Specifically, not only did the conference primarily address the concept of the language of literature but also, with the presence of creative writers, attempt an interdisciplinary understanding of style. As Sebeok wrote in the introduction to the afore-mentioned volume, "[t]he significance of the Conference on Style can perhaps best be expressed by the same evocative metaphor T. S. Eliot once applied to Paul Valéry's meditations on poets and the art of poetry: 'The tower of ivory has been fitted up as a laboratory'" (1960: 4).

As well as providing long-lasting foundation theories, these beginnings set the tone for further ongoing developments of critical approaches to style. These discussions continue to this day to be the object of a highly inclusive interdisciplinary debate that "continually seeks to refine and update its principles in line with new knowledge in relevant fields" (Gibbons & Whiteley 2018: 5). In particular, recent insights from pragmatics, socio-semiotics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, cognitive science and cultural studies have provided invaluable contributions to show how choices of style in literary as well as non-literary texts have the inherent power to shape world-views and

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identities in response to the social, cultural, ideological and political context in which texts are produced, as well as in orienting their interpretations.

Given this general premise, it is not surprising that style should be one of the themes to be investigated as part of the activities of the five-year Departmental Project *Diversity & Inclusion* (2018-2023). The interdisciplinarity that has always characterised critical approaches to style as well as style's pivotal role in all forms of discourse made it a strategic theme to address within the above-mentioned project. Style is a key issue to investigate in order to build an open and inclusive dialogue among the disciplines hosted by our Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures with a view to forging a multidirectional research trajectory focused on multilingual discursive forms.

It was precisely this intent that motivated the organisation of the 2022 Departmental summer school entitled *Questions of Style: Bridging Literature, Linguistics and Translation*, which provided the original inspiration for this issue of *DIVE-IN*. Organised around plenary lectures and practical workshops, this summer school offered a selected group of postgraduate students specialist knowledge on style from the perspective of contemporary creative writers, as well as scholars in translation studies, stylometry and corpus linguistics. Attending students were given the task of 'bridging' this knowledge during a final hands-on laboratory session aimed at the realisation of posters that featured integrated ideas of style.

The main section of this issue contains critical pieces that provide a reflection on stylistic variations in connection with some of the most pressing challenges of our times.

In *La biografia linguistica tra costruzione identitaria e plurilinguismo: un caso studio*, Giulia Lo Voi, Rita Luppi and Eva-Maria Thüne present a close analysis of the linguistic biography of R. Although this biography concerns events that took place during the last century, this article offers an original and enlightening contribution to understanding how phenomena of mobility experienced by present day refugees and emigrants impact on their language and identity.

Antonella Luporini, Claudia Roberta Combei and Ludovica Pannitto's contribution – *Verbal and visual metaphors of an unfolding crisis: Emerging styles of representation in British and Italian front page news at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic* – brings us back to the days when Europe was beginning to face the challenge of an unprecedented (at least in recent history) health crisis. Working on two corpora of front pages from British and Italian broadsheet newspapers published in early 2020, and moving beyond the verbal to

encompass the visual mode, the authors identify several key metaphorical themes that may have shaped subsequent public perceptions of this critical situation, though with potentially relevant socio-cultural differences between the two contexts under investigation.

The language of social media on the platform X is the focus of Elisabetta Zurru's article entitled *An ecostylistic study of the online communicative practices of environmental activism in India*. Combining ecostylistics with ecolinguistics, multimodal critical discourse analysis and multimodal studies, Zurru investigates the digital communicative practices of a grassroots environmental movement. Focusing on their stylistic traits and communicative strategies, she reveals that verbal and non-verbal figurative language and non-conventional oppositions are major stylistic traits in the digital communication of this environmental movement; that engagement, mobilisation and persuasion are their main communicative functions; and that most of the strategies used are beneficial rather than ambivalent or destructive.

Shifting the focus from linguistics to literature, Maira Martini's article – *Un romanzo 'a due cervelli': intelligenza artificiale e ironia in* Non siamo mai stati sulla Terra *di Rocco Tanica* – delves into another key contemporary issue: the relationship between human and artificial intelligence and how these "two brains" can interact to the point of complementing each other in creative writing. Martini's analysis follows Rocco Tanica's pioneering experiment in *Non siamo mai stati sulla Terra* – the first novel ever written through AI-human collaboration, according to the publisher's synopsis.[1] The article reveals how the interaction with Gpt-3 allows the human writer to push the boundaries of language in multiple ways, through a narration that merges resonant intertextual reminders with a skilful use of irony and estrangement effects.

The *Zona Franca* section of this issue features an article by Federica Ferrari and Houda Akalai entitled *How bloody is your vessel? 'Contrastive idiomaticity' among languages and cultures*. Through a comparison of an idiomatic expression in English with similar expressions in French, Italian, and Arabic, their conclusions provide discussion from a cross-cultural persuasion and sustainability perspective.

Following the positive feedback on the summer school, and in the belief that literature has a privileged place in stylistics (cf. Carter & Stockwell 2008; Miller 2021) and plays a key role in reflecting the realities of our time, this issue

[1] https://www.ilsaggiatore.com/libro/non-siamo-mai-stati-sulla-terra [last access on 25/02/2025].

also includes a section entitled *Conversazioni*. Here, Alessandro Berselli, an Italian author of noir fiction and teacher of creative writing, discusses his style with Maurizio Ascari, professor of English literature and author of fictional works, while Indian writer Jeet Thayil is interviewed by Esterino Adami, professor of English language and linguistics and author of a recent key study on postcolonial stylistics.

As Editors, we hope that this issue will offer a broad perspective on the importance of style, which can help us become more critical writers, readers and, ultimately, thinkers – capable of navigating the complexities of meaning, culture and identity in our contemporary society.

We wish to thank all those who, in different ways, contributed to the planning and realisation of the 2022 Annual Summer School. In particular, we would like to express our gratitude to Ana Pano Alamán, Maurizio Ascari and Paola Scrolavezza, who acted as members of its scientific committee; to Marina Manfredi and Chiara Bartolini for playing a key role in the organisation of the translation section; to plenary speakers Javier La Rosa, Kirsten Malmkjær, Michaela Mahlberg, Laura Imai Messina and Chantal Wright, and to Valentina Vetri for coordinating the workshop on translation. We are also grateful to the summer school students who generously offered to showcase their posters during the Alma Mater Fest. Last but not least, we wish to thank all the Reviewers who were involved in the double-blind review process of the articles in this issue.

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