

On the Possibility of Film Stylistics

映画文体論の可能性について

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Introduction

In the *Bulletin of the Faculty of Art and Design of University of Toyama* vol. 6, I examine the “narrative style” of the 1930s British “quota quickies.”^{*1} In the article I focus on the style rather than the “narrative structure,” because the distinctive feature of the 1930s British film trend seems to be found in its style while its structure resembles that of Hollywood films.

Because the term “style” is poorly defined in film theory, it is used in various ways. A theoretical definition of film “style” is needed to help film theorists arrive at a common understanding. The definition of what the film style is could provide the foundation for a new area of study: “film stylistics.” Scholars in the fields of film semiotics and film narratology have provided clues for analyzing films in terms of linguistics; however, the possibility of film stylistics has yet to be explored. This is the focus of this paper.

The development of stylistics has been drawing attention in literary studies. One of the most remarkable achievements in Anglo-American linguistics is *Style in Fiction*, published by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in 1981, which has helped to advance the study of literary stylistics. The following discussion addresses its advancement based on the additional chapter that is included in the second edition (2007). In this chapter, titled “Stylistics and fiction 25 years on,” Leech and Short reconfigure the map of the discipline.

After surveying the trend of literary stylistics, I review the field of film narratology, the interests of which overlap with those of stylistics, by referring to the arguments of two major theorists: Seymour Chatman and David Bordwell. After elucidating the difference between their views regarding the components of film, I conclude this paper by identifying important aspects to consider in the exploration of film stylistics.

1. Reconsideration of Literary Stylistics

Style in Fiction by Leech and Short was first published in 1981. While stylistics had been established in its own right in Germany or France, their book was the first influential study on stylistics within the field of Anglo-American linguistics or literature.

They revised the book in 2007, adding two chapters. In one of these chapters, titled “Stylistics and fiction 25 years on,” the authors consider the recent development of stylistics and re-examine their own theory and methods. Reflection on the views presented in this chapter can enhance our understanding of current issues in literary stylistics, laying a foundation for exploring the possibility of film stylistics.

Style in Fiction can be regarded as a companion to Leech’s study on stylistics in poetry, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, which was published in 1969. According to Leech and Short, literary stylistics derives from Russian Formalism and Practical Criticism, as represented by I. A. Richards or William Empson. However, at the time when they published the first edition, most of the analysis focused on poetry. *Style in Fiction* was the first fundamental theoretical approach to the style of prose fiction (Leech and Short 282-283).

At the beginning of *Style in Fiction*, Leech and Short refer to the idea of style as “relational” (10), and they examine the domain to which the term style is applicable and the perspective from which it is viewed. The object of analysis is restricted to the style of “texts” separate from the author’s personality, given that “the more general the domain, the more general, selective and tentative are the statements about its style” (11). On the basis of this analysis, they reflect upon two perspectives that had been observed in stylistic analysis: dualism, in which the text is separated from the theme, and monism, which incorporates both the text and the theme. Leech

and Short reject neither. Instead, they adopt a more pluralistic perspective, drawing on three representative works, that treat language as multifunctional: *Practical Criticism* by I. A. Richards, “Linguistics and Poetics” by Roman Jakobson and *Explorations in the Function of Language* by M. A. Halliday (25). From these three works, Leech and Short pay the most attention to the three functions described by Halliday: Ideational, Textual, and Interpersonal (26-27).

It is interesting to note that their concern for Halliday’s theory includes such seemingly non-linguistic aspects as Ideational or Interpersonal functions. This is because Halliday emphasizes the “cognitive” meaning of language. Leech and Short associate this approach with Roger Fowler’s concept of “mind style,” reflecting the worldview of the addresser (Chapter 6). As I argue later, Leech and Short push this concern further, while the film theory of David Bordwell is affected by cognitive psychology. In any case, Leech and Short see styles of fictional language from a multi-level perspective.

In the first edition, *Style in Fiction* analyzed literary style according to the following aspects: fictional world, discourse, the author / narrator / reader, along with their points of view: and rhetoric, speech and thought. These aspects can be considered the subjects of their study, which they examine according to various functions of language: lexeme, grammar, figures of speech, and context/cohesion. The variety of subjects and functions reflects the authors’ tendency towards a multi-level perspective.

In the second edition, Leech and Short summarize the progress that occurred in the field of stylistics in the 25 years after the publication of the first edition. Stylistics has prospered, extending beyond prose fiction to include even plays as an object of its analysis. In addition, the field of stylistics has been influenced by its neighboring disciplines: pragmatism, narratology, critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, and cognitive linguistics.

In terms of film stylistics, it is interesting to mention narratology and cognitive linguistics for several reasons. First, the subjects of stylistics often overlap with those of narratology. All of the abovementioned items that are included in the book by Leech and Short can be covered in narratology. Second, some film theorists (e.g., Seymour Chatman, David Bordwell, and Mieke Bal) attach importance to the narrative aspects of film. Therefore, narratology could serve as a starting point for

the development of film stylistics.

Third, cognitive linguistics could open the possibility for elucidating the types of extra-textual aspects that drew the interest of Leech and Short through Halliday and Fowler. In the second edition, Leech and Short refer to George Lakoff’s idea of cognitive metaphor and Gilles Fauconnier’s mental space or blending theory. We should also not ignore the fact that the theory of narration constructed by David Bordwell draws upon cognitive psychology, although he is not actually concerned with linguistics.

Considering the progress in stylistics, Leech and Short reorganize their subjects of study as follows: “(i) style, (ii) point of view, (iii) story/plot, (iv) fictional worlds, (v) character, (vi) theme and (vii) evaluation and appreciation” (289). Although the subjects addressed in the first edition were largely related to (i) and (ii) Leech and Short argue that, in the future, stylistics should focus more on (iii) to (vii).

As argued by Leech and Short, advancement has occurred in literary stylistics. In the next section, we relate this new movement of stylistics to narratological trend of film studies in order to reveal the possibility of film stylistics. We focus on two theorists, Seymour Chatman and David Bordwell, each of whom adopts a unique view of film style.

2. Film Narratology

In this section, I review the representative theories on film narrative or narratology, as described in Seymour Chatman’s *Story and Discourse* and *Coming to Terms*, as well as in David Bordwell’s *Narration in the Fiction Film*. To connect their narratological views to literary stylistics, I examine their theories from three viewpoints selected from the list compiled by Leech and Short: (i) style, (ii) point of view, and (iii) story and plot.

2.1 Seymour Chatman

Chatman’s two major works on literary or filmic narrative are *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* and *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. As suggested by the former title, Chatman’s theory tends to treat narrative as a structure. Chatman draws on Jean Piaget to discuss structure as comprising three elements: wholeness, transformation, and self-regulation (*Story and Discourse* 20-21). In the paragraphs below, I discuss his

theorizations of the three elements, style, point of view, and story/plot.

The title of Chatman's work, *Story and Discourse*, also represents his attitude toward the relationship between the story and the plot. According to Chatman, story and discourse (not plot) are two major components of a narrative. He argues that the two should not be conflated. A story is a set of events, characters, setting, and all other items that are related to the narrative, and discourse is a verbal method for expressing these items. In other words, story indicates the content of expression, and discourse is the expression. To Chatman, plot is a story rearranged by discourse, or "story-as-discoursed" (43).

Chatman's view of story and plot originates in two schools of thought: Russian Formalism and Structuralism. The story/plot dichotomy is based on the formalist ideas of *fabula* and *syuzhet*. In their second edition of *Style in Fiction*, Leech and Short describe the relative influence of these two lines of thought on Anglo-American scholars exploring the story/plot structure: "... by the 1960s structural and formalist influences from outside the English-speaking world had brought a new interest in story structure" (290). They count Chatman among the literary theorists or critics adopting the structuralist view, particularly in terms of the story/plot analysis, together with Barthes, Bal, Fludernik, Herman, Rimmon-Kenan, and Toolan (290).

Chatman's view of the relationship between story and plot is obviously not a simple dichotomy. As stated in *Story and Discourse*, story and discourse have their own respective materials and forms (26). However, he adopts a method of organizing terminology and categorizing ideas that allows him to avoid ambiguity in his narrative theory. In this sense, his methodology is primarily structuralist.

If style is "relational," as described by Leech and Short, it seems to be at odds with any form of organization or categorization. Chatman uses the term in a different way. In *Coming to Terms*, he states,

Slant has been found not only at the more abstract levels of narrative but also at that of actualization or "style." (...) At the level of individual style we find idiosyncratic ideological or psychological slants: the typically pessimistic slant of Alfred Hitchcock's narrators, the buoyant slant of Federico

Fellini's, the puritanic and "standing still" slant of John Ford's, the "sexual buddy" slant of Howard Hawks's, the musing, environment-sensitive slant of Michelangelo Antonioni's, the heroic nationalist slant of Leni Riefenstahl's, and so on. (154)

Here, the term style is used to represent the film artists' "ideological or psychological" features as manifest in their expressions. This is the "actualization" of "the more abstract levels of narrative." In other words, style is a means of bringing something that is extra-linguistic or invisible (e.g., the artist's idea or psyche) into the linguistic or visible field. In this sense, Chatman treats style as existing outside the narrative structure, being employed only to complete the narrative.

Interestingly, however, Chatman's idea of style presupposes his own method of organization and categorization, because it is captured according to his understanding of the terms that are alternative to the narrator's "point of view": *slant*, which he distinguishes from the character's "point of view," *filter*. The former lies with the implied author or the narrator's intellectual perspective, which remains *outside* of the story. In contrast, the latter reveals the character's perspective *within* the story that the character actually experiences. Hence, style is considered as mediating between slant and filter (or, in some cases, being wedged between them). This can be categorized as the slant-style-filter structure. Therefore, slant and filter are introduced as new categories in order to avoid such comprehensive and ambiguous ideas as "point of view," "perspective," and "focalization."

In comparing Chatman's views on the three subjects -- style, point of view, and story/plot -- with those expressed by Leech and Short, it is helpful to elucidate the difference between the two disciplines of stylistics and film narratology in order to determine the possibility of film stylistics.

(i) Style: While Leech and Short confine their object of analysis to texts, they are interested in Halliday's idea of ideational function and cognitive linguistics, thus apparently including something that should be called "extra-textual." Furthermore, Chatman refers to style as a means of actualizing the "ideological and psychological" thought of the implied author or narrator. In this sense, their views of style are similar. However, Chatman remains within the

formalist and structuralist tradition, showing no interest in cognitive science as such.

- (ii) Point of view: Both theories include extra-textual standpoints. In the first edition of their book, Leech and Short introduce two conceptions: the fictional point of view and the discursual point of view. The former is “the viewpoint held by one or more characters whose consciousness is represented through the fiction” (298-299) and the latter is “the relationship between the teller (the ‘implied author’ or narrator) and the fiction being represented” (299). These seem to correspond to Chatman’s “filter” and “slant.”² However, the difference might seem larger, if we were to follow the transformation of their theories. In the second edition, Leech and Short redraw their conceptions about the “point of view,” with reference to Paul Simpson’s four categories. They compare one of these categories, “psychological viewpoint,” to Chatman’s old notion of “conceptual point of view,” which had been employed before he invented the new term, “slant.” In other words, they feel it necessary to allow themselves to adopt various levels of “point of view.” As they change their standpoints, they also question the validity of such notions as the “implied author,” “reflector,” or “focalizer.” These notions represent an agent of conveying a message from a certain “point of view” because they tend to enclose plural or multileveled perspectives within the restricted scope of the addresser. This leads Leech and Short to renew their evaluation of “mind style,” in connection with Chatman’s “conceptual viewpoint” (301). Ironically, however, Chatman changes his three categories on “point of view” — perceptual, conceptual, and interest (152), as presented in *Story and Discourse* — into the new ones — “slant” and “filter” — which Leech and Short do not seem to notice. In this terminological renewal, Chatman does not relinquish the role of the agency — the implied author or narrator. Instead, he strengthens it. While Leech and Short are conscious of the plural dimensions of “point of view” including its cognitive aspects, Chatman keeps attempting to place this idea into a strict category.
- (iii) Story/Plot: Leech and Short mention the influence of formalism and structuralism on the study of story

and plot. However, once its influence has weakened, their focus shifts to inference, foregrounding, and other notions derived from pragmatism and cognitive linguistics. In contrast, Chatman’s view falls within the formalist and structuralist tradition, which Leech and Short argue should be overcome by the cognitive approach.

Briefly stated, the difference between the stylistics of Leech and Short and the narratology of Chatman is reflected in their respective attitudes toward the cognitive aspects of linguistics. In terms of film *style*, the cognitive perspective seems to be useful, while the formalist or structuralist appears nearly indispensable in the analysis of film *structure*.

In the next section I examine the two standpoints described above from a different angle. I do this by reviewing David Bordwell’s theory, which employs the cognitive perspective while using the vocabulary of Russian Formalism.

2.2 David Bordwell

David Bordwell’s view of story and plot in film is also based on the Russian Formalist ideas of *fabula* and *syuzhet*, which are the two components of narration. According to Bordwell, the *fabula*, or the story, “embodies the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field” (*Narration in the Fiction Film* 49). In contrast, the *syuzhet*, or the plot, is “the actual arrangement and presentation of the fabula in the film” (50).

Bordwell considers story as something that spectators construct and complete through their “inferences” (30). The story is not given to them; it is a process in which they also participate. This view of story differs from that of Chatman, although it is similar to the recent attitude of Leech and Short. Bordwell draws on Constructivist psychology (30). He is critical of mimetic tradition in Western literary and filmic art, which places its central emphasis on the author or narrator, thus ignoring the faculty of the audience. Bordwell focuses on the spectator’s “schemata,” a set of knowledge that guides their “hypothesis making” (31), which makes them search for a story. Thus, he rejects the term “narrator” or “narrative” which seems to presuppose a given story, and instead applies the term “narration” to represent the dynamics of the story-creation process.

For Bordwell, style is another component of the narration. He argues that it is correlative with plot, which shows us the progression or turning point of events and scenes. In other words, it reveals a “dramaturgical” process of film. For Bordwell, style is a “technical” process (50) through which the dramaturgy is realized. Style interacts with plot to offer hints to help the spectator make inferences regarding the story. Bordwell defines these three components of narration as follows: “In the fiction film, narration is *the process whereby the film’s syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channeling the spectator’s construction of the fabula*” (original emphasis, 53).

In his refusal to position the narrator in a fixed place, Bordwell also denies the existence of a subject who adopts a certain “point of view.” Establishing the narrator’s point of view alienates the spectator which Bordwell values. Chatman and the first edition of Leech and Short adopt such conventional notion as the implied author, the narrator, the character, considering these points of view as a source of the message to the reader or the spectator. In contrast, Bordwell expresses doubts about a one-way flow of information from a fixed subject:

The passivity of the spectator in diegetic theories generally is suggested not only by the extensive borrowing of mimetic concepts of narration but also by the use of terms like the “position” or the “place” of the subject. Such metaphors lead us to conceive of the perceiver as backed into a corner by conventions of perspective, editing, narrative point of view, and psychic unity. A film, I suggest, does not “position” anybody. A film cues the spectator to execute a definable variety of *operations*. (original emphasis, 29)

Thus, Bordwell confines the use of the term, “point of view,” to the “optical or auditory vantage point of a character” (60).

Although Chatman criticizes Bordwell’s views of style, point of view, and story/plot, he values Bordwell’s theory as a whole. First, Chatman calls Bordwell’s rejection of the narrator into question: “My only real criticism is that it goes too far in arguing that film has no agency corresponding to the narrator and that film narrative is best considered as a kind of work wholly performed by

the spectator” (*Coming to Terms* 124). Chatman also sees Bordwell’s definition of the terms, particularly the relationship between plot and style, as somewhat ambiguous. Chatman considers the categorization contained in Bordwell’s statement that the “syuzhet embodies the film as a ‘dramaturgical’ process; style embodies it as a ‘technical’ one” (50) as insufficient: “Applying the word ‘embodies’ to both these levels is a bit problematic, however, unless the embodiment is understood to be layered” (125). He insists that both plot and style have unique, specific modes and roles: “To my mind, it makes sense to say that the syuzhet ‘arranges’ the fabula into a text, but the style *actualizes* that arrangement; that is, it ‘embodies’ the total narrative” (original emphasis, 125-126). If Chatman adheres to the formalist and structuralist tradition as described in the previous section, he would obviously not be satisfied with Bordwell’s vagueness. Thus, concerning the issue of the “point of view” and the agency of narration, the views that Leech and Short express in the second edition of *Style in Fiction* come closer to Bordwell’s theory of narration, even as Chatman maintains such conventional categories as the implied author and narrator.

3. Conclusion and Prospect

This paper opens with a discussion of the second edition of the classical study of stylistics by Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, along with a survey of current issues in literary stylistics. According to Leech and Short, the subjects in stylistics (e.g., point of view or story/plot structure) should be examined in more depth than they had done in their first edition. They also identify the possibility of the developing stylistics in relation to cognitive linguistics. Even in the first edition, they are concerned with the cognitive aspects, drawing on Halliday’s ideational function or Fowler’s mind style. However, in the second edition, they suggest that their analysis is in need of further refinement with reference to pragmatism, cognitive metaphor theory, or other emerging linguistic trends.

In the second section of this paper, I attempt to connect the views of Leech and Short regarding literary stylistics to film studies, and particularly to film narratology, the analytical subjects of which are similar to those of stylistics. Reviewing the two representative and somewhat opposing theories of Seymour Chatman and David Bordwell, I demonstrate two different types of

film analysis: structuralism and cognitivism.

Both Chatman and Bordwell are well known for their own theories, although they obviously cannot cover all of the issues concerning film narrative or film style. Much work remains to be done for the establishment of film stylistics, including the re-examination of the Russian Formalist study of style, structuralist linguistics, the film semiotics of Christian Metz, and the influence of Noam Chomsky's transformational grammar on cognitive linguistics. Nevertheless, I conclude this brief paper by stating fundamental problems.

The first problem concerns the gap between literature/language and film. In other words, it involves the application of literary stylistics — the linguistic study of style — to the analysis of films, which contain an accumulation of both images and words. Leech and Short refer to such linguistic functions as lexeme or grammar to analyze the distinctive feature of literary style. Perhaps similar tools exist for film stylistics. As noted by Robert Stam, the notion of film language has been used since the earliest stages in the history of cinema.^{*3} Film is composed of images, some of which cannot be captured by language. They cannot be anything but metaphors when talking or writing about them. In this sense, the cognitive approach that is used by Leech and Short and by Bordwell might be helpful in addressing the issues beyond language in film stylistics, although its validity in the practice of film *analysis* remains to be seen.

The second problem derives from the first; as noted in Chatman's criticism of Bordwell, such cognitive notions as inference and schemata introduce ambiguity into the act of interpretation. Warren Buckland, who also adopts a cognitive approach, criticizes Bordwell for ruling out the possibility of the linguistic analysis of film and doubts the validity of his theory: "The problem with Bordwell's cognitivism is that he has rejected the communication model of narration, the role of the narrator, and has developed a disembodied theory of schemata" (ch. 2). Buckland attempts to restore the cognitivist approach to linguistics in a broad sense, referring to the continental trend of film studies, which re-evaluates the achievements of semiotics or generative grammar.

Thus, one issue that calls for further examination concerns whether film style should be analyzed from a linguistic perspective, a cognitive perspective, or both.

This paper is intended to locate the notion of "narrative style" within the context of film studies, given its fluid character relative to the idiom of "narrative structure." Although Chatman takes style as one element of the narrative structure, his view is not concerned with cognitive science and it seems to presuppose that every element of film can be explained in language. If film image extends beyond language, his approach might be insufficient. In contrast, Bordwell's cognitive approach favors the audience's faculty of interpretation over the linguistic analysis of film message. In this method, understanding the components of film narrative (e.g., story, plot, and style) is at least partly dependent on their intuition, thus leaving a certain element of ambiguity. This ambiguity might be caused by Bordwell's lack of concern for cognitive "linguistics," in light of his interest in cognitive "psychology." In this sense, when considering the cognitive side of film, the possibility of film stylistics is likely to lie in blending cognitive and linguistic approaches. Nevertheless, it should not simply mediate between Chatman's categories and Bordwell's inference.

Notes

^{*1} Fukaya 124-131.

^{*2} While Chatman's "slant" concerns the narrator's "ideological or psychological" aspect, the fictional point of view adopted by Leech and Short is related to the "consciousness" of the character.

^{*3} "Indeed, the notion of FILM LANGUAGE was already a commonplace in the writings of some of the earliest theorists of cinema, even those untouched by the theoretical movements of schools of which we have spoken" (original emphasis, 28).

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