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ABSTRACT

Formality as a style may be defined as language which reflects or "keynotes" the degree of familiarity between participants in a discourse. Working from this assumption, this paper attempts to answer the question, "How is formality best described?" Results of a series of tests indicate that informants' labels (with the exception of the polar "formal" and "informal" categories) are unreliable. As an alternative to labelled categories, the article proposes a scale which would be non-linear (since between the two poles, a discontinuity needs to be specified, where marginally formal English passes "catastrophically" to marginally informal English) and would be weighted toward the informal end. Furthermore, the scale should contain no midpoint, for formality appears to have no "neutral" category, i.e., there is no discourse of any length where formality is not signalled in some degree. (DB)

FORMALITY IN ENGLISH: A NON-LINEAR SCALE AS A DESCRIPTIVE ALTERNATIVE TO LABELLED CATEGORIES*

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1.0. Preliminaries

The conclusions to be made eventually in this paper are of the kind which are based on patterns of response observed in a fairly large number of informants and elicited in the course of a series of experiments. Data-based statements of this kind naturally impose upon the linguist who makes them, the obligation (a) to include *all* data which might be relevant to his discussions and (b) to report in full on the experimental methods employed in collecting these data. In a paper of this size, however, which is aimed at simply illustrating how certain conclusions were drawn, little will be served by repeated references to a larger body of data which can, at best, be only included here in a drastically summarized form which, while possibly retaining some value as statements of a general kind, would be quite inadequate as illustrations of a specific point.

The data included here therefore are highly selective examples taken from a larger body of data and are best interpreted as ad hoc illustrations of the arguments which follow rather than as formally presented experimental evidence. Should further details be required regarding the validity of the results or the testing procedures alluded to below, then these are reported in full in Chan 1974.

1.1. Preliminaries: Working Definitions In what follows, 'Formality' (which subsumes both Formal and Informal style) will be referred to as *a style* in English, using the term 'style' broadly in the sense in which Crystal and Davy (1969) use the term 'variety'. This usage has certain similarities with that intended in Halliday's use of the term 'register' and Gregory's use of 'variety'.

My own working definition of the term 'style' is that

I:1 style is the capacity which a language has for varying according to the constraints of different factors in the non-linguistic situation.

Having said this, it must be emphasised at once that the situation does not, of course, necessarily determine the type of language in use, in any a prioristic or causal sense and it is just as useful, as McIntosh (1962) pointed out, to suppose that the situation is specified by the language event in it.

The duality of 'situation' (sometimes 'context') and 'language event' has been fully commented on in the literature on stylistics in the last decade and there is no need to dwell on it here.[1] It can be seen, however, that the above definition (I:1) is situation-based rather than

language-based. This is necessary in order not to presuppose that the object of our scrutiny, Formality, already has a well-established identity as a linguistically describable phenomenon. While we may *suspect* that Formality has a basis in 'linguistic fact', no systematic study of Formality in English has been carried out before this, so that any statement about what constitutes Formal or Informal English which is not supported by some evidence of the objective correlates of these styles is at best an assumption about such styles.[2] What the linguist *may* presuppose is that there are aspects of the non-linguistic situation (hereinafter, simply 'situation') which can be regarded as constraining language use along a certain dimension. This dimension has not always been defined in the same way in the last twenty years by the different linguists concerned with the subject.[3] For the purposes of the present paper, the central feature of this dimension of the situation is that it is:

I:2 the degree of familiarity between participants in a discourse.

Consequently, the central assumption about Formality as a style is that it is:

I:3 language which reflects or 'keynotes' the degree of familiarity between participants in a discourse.[4]

The main theme of this paper is not the verification of the assumption implied in I:3. It is, instead, a discussion of certain interpretative problems which arose during attempts to verify the primary assumption implied in I:3. In other words, in attempting to answer the question -- 'Is there a linguistic basis for what we intuitively refer to as Formality?' -- it was necessary also to ask: 'How is Formality best described?' While in logical terms, the first question is an a priori to the second, in methodological terms, it is clear that no such priority can be insisted upon. The theme of this paper is the second question.

2.0. *The Data and the Experiments*

The three texts given immediately below are examples of recorded passages used to elicit responses from informants in a series of tests which will be referred to as Battery A. Situational sources and other test information are given at the end of each text. An outline of the test design features follows the texts themselves.

Examples of texts eliciting high agreement (Note: A short dash '-' indicates a pause in the flow of speech; a series of letters in brackets, or empty brackets, represent an incomplete or indistinct word.)

Text 1 ... the judge had no option - what I think must be done - and I think will be done - is to alter - the law - there was a very powerful letter from Gerald Gardner ( ) I think this morning's *Times* - ( ) arguing in favour of the fact that the law should be altered not only in this but in many other respects and I entirely - agree with him - a lot of our laws are completely obsolete - that being said - if I'd been Home Secretary - I would have reprieved her - after a committal ...

Speaker: Lord Boothby
Situational source: *Any Questions*, B.B.C.
Test result: Very Formal (most clearly Formal text in three Tests)
Variance: 0.4

Text 2 (Asterisks indicate an interruption)

Speaker 1: Everybody was shouting and telling them to piss off and sit down ( ) - and nobody seemed too worried about what was happening - you know - enjoying it
Speaker 2: (the -)*
Speaker 1: The whole thing was - I think they are serious -
Speaker 2: *I think they are serious - I think they'd like to get rid of our - rid of J.W. and have a left-wing president
Speaker 1: I think they would - and I think (thi-) everybody knows they would and therefore - nobody can care a damn really you know
Speaker 2: *It seems as though ( ) last year they had somebody else up - some woman got elected - and the next week they're trying to get rid of her as well

Speakers: Two undergraduates
Situation: Discussing Student Union politics in the J.C.R.
Test result: Clearly Informal
Variance: 0.1

Text 3

Speaker 1: ... a survey of hypertension in your middle-aged patients - in ( ) - particular blood pressure of four hundred and eighty middle aged patients - about (ten) a tenth of them had a diastolic - of a hundred and ten - this is a single - casual - sitting blood pressure taken once - and most of them come down to normal levels
Speaker 2: Do you think - that we should - investigate and treat these - ten per cent -
Speaker 1: Well I think if they've got a diastolic of a hundred and ten millimetres on more than one occasion you should look at them with these risk factors I've been talking about very much in mind.

Speakers: Doctor and student
Situation: Doctor lecturing on 'Heart Disease' (B.B.C.TV)
Test result: Clearly Formal
Variance: 0.45

The major test design features of Battery A were as follows:

a In all three tests, informants (all undergraduate students) were asked to listen to recordings taken from various everyday sources: e.g. students in conversation, B.B.C. programmes.
b Earlier testing had suggested that the optimum length of each text -- as a stimulus -- was around 50 seconds, in order to elicit a response, though informants were often able to respond within 20 seconds.
c Various labels (e.g. Casual, Boring, Serious) were read out to informants at the end of each text and they were asked to note down those which appeared to them to be applicable to what they

had heard on the tape.

d One important variation of the procedure (in (c) above) was in Test 1, where informants were given labels on a card and allowed to stop the tape at the point where they wished to make a response. This technique provided additional information -- e.g. regarding the amount of hesitation in the response, correlating the points in the text where the same responses occurred from all informants, and so on.

e Where Tests 1 and 2 used labels, standing for hypothetical stylistic categories, Test 3 used, with each label, a 7-point scale, to allow the informant to indicate graded contrasts.

The assumption implied in (e), that informants might prefer to use scales in response rather than labels for discrete categories, was based on observations arising from the results of Tests 1 and 2. The question, whether informants do prefer to use a graded scale in response, is of course part of the theme of this paper.

2.1. Discussion of Texts The extracts given above (Texts 1 to 3) are roughly 30 second stretches edited from the texts used in the original experiments. Even a stretch of speech lasting 30 seconds however may contain a large number of stylistic variables, each carrying a different weighting in terms of their effect on different informants. Moreover two such texts in juxtaposition could well produce a quite unpredictable response from the informant, owing to the interference of random non-linguistic variables and stereotypes: e.g. an informant might rate one text more highly than another for Formality partly because the first was read by a man with a deep husky voice as opposed to a shrill jerky voice in the second. In order to be reasonably confident of interpreting the test results and scores later on, it is necessary to point out what some of the more immediately recognizable variables in these texts might be. In so doing, the methodological problems involved in attempts to control these variables can also be discussed.

Text 1 differs from Text 2 along the following variables, not all of which are necessarily linguistic:

a (Voice quality) Text 1 is spoken by a well-known parliamentarian, with a deep, resonant voice. The speakers in Text 2 have higher pitched voices.

b (Dialect interference) Text 1 is in R.P. Text 2 is by two students, each with traces of a regional pronunciation.

c (Sentence structure) Text 1 contains fairly complete sentences, of the type one might expect in a written medium (e.g. an essay), while Text 2 contains interruptions, unfinished clauses and so on.

d (Participation features) Text 2 is clearly marked as a conversation. While Text 1 is clearly addressed to some immediate recipient(s), there is no overt participation by another person and the passage is therefore a monologue (possibly within a larger dialogue situation).

e The prosodic features in Text 1 combine to produce a regular rhythm; pauses are infrequent and mostly coincide with tone and syntactic boundaries. Text 2 contains more frequent pauses, not often coinciding with tone or syntactic boundaries.

f Text 3 contains the same sort of features mentioned in (a) - (e)

above which distinguish it from Text 2 and place it closer to Text 1. It varies from Texts 1 and 2 most obviously in its subject-matter or 'Topic'.

Two major methodological points need to be made before proceeding to discuss the informants' responses to these texts.

First, it appears to be methodologically feasible, from the evidence of the tests conducted so far, to treat subject-matter as a non-stylistic variable (at least for Formality). Certain topics tend of course to be strongly associated with certain styles,[5] but this is quite different from saying that subject-matter is a *parameter* of Formality, or that some 'topics' correlate in a mostly predictable way with (say) Informal English and hardly ever with Formal English. The real difficulty here is not in deciding how they correlate, but in the vagueness of the term 'subject-matter'.[6] In comparing the Formality ratings of Texts 2 and 3, there is no reason to suppose that 'student politics' for instance is intrinsically a more frivolous topic than a discussion about 'blood pressure'.

Second, given all these variables between the texts, it is obviously desirable to test the effect of each variable in isolation, to ascertain their relative weightings as stylistic markers. The experience gained from the tests reported here, as well as from several abortive pilot tests not included in the present paper, suggests that the isolation of such variables is difficult to implement. In an earlier test, single sentences were edited from the parent texts and pairs containing minimal contrasts were given to informants. (These were played off a tape, as all tests in Battery A had to do with the spoken medium.) Thus, we had, e.g.

ia and I entirely (-) // agree with him
(read by Lord Boothby)

ib as above in (ia), read by another R.P. speaker.

(Note: ↘ = nucleus, (-) = pause, // = tone boundary)

As examples of minimal lexical contrasts, we had:

iia A lot of our laws are completely obsolete.
iib A lot of our laws are completely out of date.

It was found in a later test that using these pairs in the written medium did produce clear patterns of response. In a spoken medium however, the informant's ability to respond is destroyed when only minimal contrasts of this kind are left and other variables are trimmed away.[7]

Now, it may well be that this is not simply a methodological problem. It may be that this is a comment on how Formality is signalled in the spoken medium: viz. that in speech, we require a higher redundancy of stylistic devices than in a stretch of similar length in writing. Indeed, there is some evidence (in Chan 1974) that utterances which most clearly signal Formality do so through a 'bundle of stylistic features' (Crystal and Davy 1969) or what Riffaterre (1959) called a 'convergence' of 'stylistic devices'. This appears to be true even of written style, but it seems reasonable to expect that if Formality devices work best in 'bundles' or 'convergences', then a spoken utterance (where recall is not aided by the printed word) would require a higher redundancy of stylistic

devices than a written one in order to elicit a clear response in a test situation.

3.0. *How is Formality best described?*

Martin Joos' name is strongly associated with this question about Formality (Joos 1959, 1961). He first suggested in 1959 that Formality had five categories. His somewhat speculative work was developed in different directions in the following decade. Ervin-Tripp (1964) for instance questioned the assumption that such categories could be formed, while Halliday (1964) suggested that this style was best described as a cline or scale. Crystal and Davy (1969) subsumed Formality under their dimension 'Status', and also suggested that this was a matter of gradations rather than discrete categories. In contrast, other writers, noticeably those writing for pedagogical purposes -- for instance, Strevens (1964), Pearce (1969) -- while making the point that Joos' categories might be oversimplified, nevertheless claimed that Joos' divisions were useful for certain purposes. Strevens invented amusing examples to illustrate these five categories and Pearce, rejecting a more sensitive approach by Leech (1966) carefully discussed the way in which these five categories could be distinguished. Another linguist to give serious thought to these five categories (which are: Frozen, Formal, Consultative, Casual, Intimate) was Gleason (1965).

The first assertion which will be made in this paper is that Formality is *not* best described in terms of categories. Nor will it be a question of whether we allow more, or less, than five categories, or whether we allow these to overlap. The essential point about a category (of any kind) is that it must have an identity. The further requirement for a category of style -- if that category is meant to stand for some part of the native speaker's awareness of, or attitudes to, his language -- is that the label we choose for it must have an intuitive basis. The word 'elegant' for instance, must mean something to the informant (if he is expected to use it in responses) whereas it probably does not matter if the phrase 'deep-structure' meant nothing to him. The latter is a linguistic construct, whereas the former is part of the language being tested, and if it is to be employed as a construct, in a quite different sense from that understood by the layman native speaker, the linguist is obliged to explain what the difference is in the two uses.

Running parallel to this point is another distinction: the stylistician is obliged to take account of his informant's judgements about stylistic labels in a way in which a grammarian might not be. If the grammarian's informant, for example, were to insist that he saw no structural differences whatever between *John is easy to please* and *John is eager to please*, we might feel inclined to challenge his judgement (or even teach him a little about Chomsky). If we were dealing with a child of five years, we might even decide that such a response had certain implications for our theory of grammar. But we would never ourselves accept that these two sentences are not, in the terms of at least one grammatical model, structurally different.

However, in stylistics, if an informant were to insist that he found a certain utterance offensive, or inelegant, or very Formal, the linguist (*qua* stylistician) is not at liberty to challenge this sort of judgement, however he might (in his own capacity as native speaker) disagree with the judgement. This sort of disagreement often serves as the basic data for stylistics. Above all, one cannot, in such a situation, challenge the judgement without challenging the informant's ability to act as a native speaker.[8]

Now, if fifty out of one hundred informants said an utterance was offensive, while the rest said it was not, then the most immediate implication (whatever other socio-linguistic or psycho-linguistic implications there might be) is that the objective correlates of the notion 'offensive' are not very clear. Its identity as a distinct stylistic category is now in doubt. At the very least, the text we had provisionally labelled 'offensive' must now be regarded as not signalling 'offensiveness' as clearly as previously supposed. It might even be found eventually that 'offensiveness' had its clearest correlates in non-linguistic domains altogether (e.g. the informant might have been responding to the speaker's voice quality at the time the utterance was made, which reminded him of a dead grandfather, who had been an offensive person).

The experiments to be discussed here will amply illustrate the need to bear these provisos in mind. In what follows, the point to be made is not that Joos' choice of five (as opposed to three, or six, etc.) was over-deterministic, or that the categories overlap too often: the essential point is that no satisfactory *labels* can be found with which to identify these categories.

3.1. Data from Score-sheets for Tests 2 and 3 Table I below is a summary of results from Test 2, showing the frequency with which eight 'target' labels and eight 'masking' labels were used, in response to ten one-minute texts played off a tape. No attempt was made to ensure that each label had another in direct opposition. Some antonyms were of course obvious -- e.g. smooth/jerky. These were used to check on each informant's reliability, as explained in the notes to Table I, below.

Table II is from the same test, and is a selection of the responses actually made by four out of 10 informants to certain texts.

Table I: Labels Used in Test 2

(*) before a label indicates that no informant used it in a self-contradictory way.

Labels suspected of denoting FORMAL categories	Total no. of times used by informants
* Formal	15
Restrained	8
Haughty	8
Prim	7

Labels suspected of denoting INFORMAL categories	Total no. of times used by informants
* Informal	44
Relaxed	34
Casual	28
Chatty	23

Masking Labels

Smooth	Sensible	Interesting	Serious
Jerky	Trivial	Boring	Amusing

Notes:

1 On average, masking labels were used more frequently than target-labels: e.g. *serious* occurred 58 times, *interesting* 55 times; *trivial*, the masking label used least, occurred 16 times.

2 Masking labels were used with great consistency: e.g. no one who used the label *smooth* also used *jerky* for the same text. The only sign of masking categories being conflated was in 3 (out of 100) instances of the use of *trivial* and *interesting* for the same text: such a conflation of labels might well accurately reflect the informant's own tastes.

Table II: Reliability of Labels

Informant no.	Text no.	Labels Used
011	7	Informal, Restrained
012	4	Chatty, Restrained, Casual
	5	Formal, Relaxed
016	4	Relaxed, Restrained, Informal
	5	Haughty, Casual
	8	Informal, Haughty
020	7	Informal, Casual, Restrained

The labels in Test 2 were read out in a different random order at the end of the playing of each text. Every text was screened beforehand by two independent linguists, to ensure they were reasonably homogenous in style.

3.2. Discussion of Results Bearing these features in mind, it can be seen from Table II that the only two labels which were never contradicted are the labels FORMAL and INFORMAL. Informants seemed quite prepared to regard texts as being (for instance) both 'Haughty' and 'Casual'. Since the texts did not appear to the linguists to have been unusually heterogeneous in style, and since, moreover, it is difficult to see how so many passages of

50 seconds' duration could oscillate between stylistic poles so rapidly (if 'Haughty' and 'Casual' are indeed stylistic poles at all) this pattern of response leads us to conclude (tentatively) that these labels are probably unreliable ones as stylistic constructs for categories of Formality.

This pattern of apparently contradictory response was repeated often enough to discourage any suggestion that the *informants* had been unreliable. To check whether this pattern could have been attributable to a fault in test design, or to an unfortunate choice of texts, the results here were compared with those from an earlier test (Test 1), where informants gave their responses as soon as they felt able to and the tape was stopped as they did so. This allowed the response to be pinpointed to the stretch of speech between that response and the next -- usually a stretch of ten to fifteen seconds.

From this test, the following supporting observations can be made:

a There were 22 occurrences of a target label (i.e. either the word FORMAL or INFORMAL). Of these, there were only six instances when the use of a target-label by one informant was not corroborated within the next 15 seconds by another informant. There was only one instance of the label INFORMAL occurring within 20 seconds of the label FORMAL -- and even here, the informant qualified her response to say 'probably INFORMAL'.

b Other labels (Casual, Relaxed, Flippant, Concerned) did not occur in this pattern.

Hence, these are additional grounds for believing that all other labels apart from the labels FORMAL and INFORMAL, are unreliable in some way. Since the design of each test differs in certain fundamental ways, there are fewer grounds for supposing that the contradictory or more random occurrences of labels like Casual, Haughty, etc. are the products of a particular test design.

3.3 Scoring on 7-point Scales In Test 3, informants were asked to respond by scoring on a set of 7-point scales (each scale standing for one label, and running from 'Most...' to 'Least...'). Adoption of scales instead of single labels suggests some prior assumption that the style in question is indeed best described in scalar terms. At the time Test 3 was conducted, such an assumption had not been explicitly stated, and it was only in retrospect, after comparing the results from different tests, that the advantages of a scalar description could be seen.

The more immediate point about Test 3 is that two new labels, 'Vulgar' and 'Polite' were added, and the labels Prim, Haughty, Chatty (the lower-scoring ones in Table I) removed. Table III below gives a selection of the scoring patterns for the scales for Formal, Casual, Polite, Vulgar (more strictly, 'Least to Most Formal' etc.). The format of the test, and the actual instructions given to informants, were closely based on the techniques used by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957).

Table III. Scores on 7-Point Scales for Labels: Vulgar, Polite, Casual, Formal.

(7 = most, 1 = least)

Text 1

Informant no.	Formal	Casual	Polite	Vulgar
101	6	1	6	1
2	5	1	3	6
3	6	4	3	4
4	6	1	1	1
5	7	1	6	1
6	6	7	7	4
7	6	5	5	1
8	7	4	3	4
9	7	2	6	1
10	7	1	7	4

Text 2

Informant no.	Formal	Casual	Polite	Vulgar
101	1	6	4	5
2	1	6	5	4
3	1	6	4	5
4	1	6	6	2
5	1	7	2	5
6	1	7	5	1
7	1	1	4	5
8	1	7	4	5
9	2	6	4	5
10	1	3	4	4

Text 3

Informant no.	Formal	Casual	Polite	Vulgar
101	5	1	6	1
2	5	2	3	5
3	6	4	6	4
4	6	1	7	1
5	7	1	7	1
6	6	4	7	4
7	6	2	4	1
8	6	4	5	4
9	6	2	6	1
10	7	1	6	2

Because the data in Table III pertain to texts which elicited some of the more reliable scores in the parent study, correlation for all labels is better than for the parent body of data as a whole. In spite of this, in all cases, correlation between labels is clearly very poor. Given this lack of cross-label correlation, the most reliable sets of scores will be the sets which show the greatest clustering towards one point on the scale. With the relatively small amount of data here, it can be immediately seen that the scale 'Most to Least Formal' is the most reliable one in this sense. ('Variance' scores for this scale were given earlier for each text, in section 2.0. and it can be seen that these figures are very low.)

4.0. *Implications arising from Test 3*

The term 'Casual' was actually used by Joos and others after him to refer to one of his five categories of Formality and Halliday (1964) suggested that this style might be represented by a scale from 'Colloquial to Polite'. The results from these tests on the other hand suggest that while notions like Vulgarity, Politeness and Casualness might well be associated with Formality, they are distinct from it. For instance, the most FORMAL text (Text 1) is not the least Casual one, nor the least Vulgar, nor the most Polite. What is even more remarkable is that whereas many informants committed themselves to scoring on the extreme ends of the scale for 'Most to Least Formal', they were far more reluctant to do this for the other scales.

The implications so far may be summed up as follows:-

1 Out of 11 different labels tested as possible labels for categories of FORMALITY, the only reliable ones throughout, whether scales were used or not, were the labels FORMAL and INFORMAL.

2 Whatever association all other labels may have with Formality, it is clear that to the native speaker, they have connotations other than those sometimes intended by linguists. Before applying them as constructs therefore, it would seem a prerequisite that the linguist determines the semantic properties of those terms. It may well be that the labels FORMAL/INFORMAL, for instance, appeared reliable only because the negative prefix {in-} clearly discouraged informants from treating these as anything else *but* bi-polar terms. (This does not of course explain why the *scale* 'Most to Least FORMAL' is more reliable than the others.)

3 Changing from a format using a simple choice of labels to one using seven gradations for each label produced clearer, more confident responses. If this is not taken as a genuine reflection of how the informant prefers to describe Formality in the texts concerned, then two other observations would still have to be reconciled with the data:

(a) In psychological testing in general, informants tend to avoid extreme ends of scales. Response should have been more likely to have been blurred rather than sharpened, but the latter took place.

(b) Avoidance of extreme ends *did* occur as a general pattern for other scales than the one for Formality.

Formality seems therefore to be best described as a scale.

4 Because scores on scales for the labels Vulgar, Polite, Casual, correlate poorly, and are above all, equivocal, whereas those for the label FORMAL were not, the implication is that the texts chosen to test a hypothesis about Formality contained clear markers of Formality but not markers of these other hypothetical categories. In short, the linguistic features which indicate Formality are not also the linguistic features which indicate Vulgarity, Politeness, and so on.[9]

5 As has been suggested (by Strevens (*ibid.*) for instance) Vulgarity appears more likely at the Informal end of the scale. (Strevens was however, working within the terms of Joos' five categories at the time.) The figures in Table III do show a correlation in this direction. But it needs to be emphasised that notions like Politeness and Vulgarity are probably quite distinct from Formality and may even cut *across* Formality distinctions. Indeed, from the peculiarities of the scoring pattern, it may well be that while Formality is best described as a scale, the other categories are not.

4.1. Scores on the Mid-point of Scales One other implication arising from these tests requires a lengthier exposition now.

In analysing the scores for the Formality scale, it emerged that scores on the mid-point (a score on no. 4 of a 7 point scale) were very rare indeed.

In accordance with the Osgood technique, informants were not allowed to ignore a scale. If they felt a scale did not apply, they could indicate this with a score on the mid-point. The other interpretation of a mid-point score is that the informant feels it applies, but cannot commit himself -- perhaps because conflicting stylistic features in the text cancel each other out.

The mid-point occurred with a 6% frequency for a sample containing 120 possible distinct scores. This compares with $>17\%$ and 14% for the extreme INFORMAL and FORMAL ends respectively. In view of two observations mentioned above -- (a) that informants generally avoid extremes and (b) that clustering towards the centre *did* occur for scales other than the Formality scale -- the infrequent use of the mid-point is quite striking. Moreover, since this avoidance of the middle is characteristic only of the Formality scale, such a pattern of scoring would seem to be a feature of Formality, not of the test design. Finally, out of 19 different texts tested, only 8 received scores which clearly assigned them to one end or the other of the Formality scale. There were therefore 11 texts about which the informants disagreed to various extents. The implication here is that even when Formality is not very clearly marked, informants avoid saying it does not apply.

From these observations, I would suggest that Formality has no 'neutral' category: i.e. there is no discourse of any length (e.g. more than 20 seconds) where Formality is not signalled in some degree.[10]

4.2. *The Mid-point and 'Consultative Style'* Joos, Gleason and others have suggested that there *is* a neutral category, which Joos called 'consultative style'. The examples in various papers (e.g. Joos 1959, Pearce 1969) by those attempting to demonstrate what is meant by this style are highly interesting for a number of reasons.

To begin with, they usually contain a mixture of linguistic features which turned out to be slightly FORMAL or INFORMAL. Now, it might be thought that with just the right balance, so to speak, of FORMAL and INFORMAL markers in a discourse, one would achieve 'neutral' Formality.

The results just discussed suggest that this does not happen, for a reason which will immediately be made clear.

If one takes Joos' examples of 'consultative style' -- *Oh, I see, I'd like to see, Oh, yes, well...* -- and inserts these in any so-called 'neutral' text, the text will become clearly INFORMAL. For one generalization which can be made now is that it is relatively easy to destroy the effect of FORMAL style with just a few intrusions of INFORMAL features, (e.g. verbal contractions, colloquialisms) but the converse is not true. A basically INFORMAL text cannot be made more FORMAL by the addition of a few FORMAL markers.

One piece of indirect experimental evidence could perhaps be mentioned here in support of this assertion that FORMAL style is sensitive to INFORMAL intrusions -- or, at any rate, to intrusions, of one kind or another, which interfere with the FORMAL effect. Text 1 (given in section 2.0. above), is part of a larger text in the parent body of data, and it originally contained a facetious remark followed by laughter. When tested in this form, Text 1 failed to elicit clear agreement: as many thought it FORMAL as thought it INFORMAL. When the facetious remark and laughter were edited from the text, it elicited the clear response FORMAL, as can be seen in the scores in Table III.

The same point might be made with an ad hoc example:

i Members are asked to refrain from *taking away* the towels provided in the changing rooms.

ii Members are asked to refrain from *pinching* the towels provided in the changing rooms.

The use of *pinching* in (ii) in no way alters what are almost certainly the major features signalling FORMAL English in (i): the passive construction, impersonalization of speaker and the phrase *refrain from*. Nor does it replace a necessarily FORMAL feature -- the phrase *taking away* is not particularly striking either way for Formality. Yet (ii) is clearly more INFORMAL. It is instructive to attempt to achieve the converse of this effect: in general it is more difficult to accomplish.

There are other reasons for suggesting that FORMAL style is sensitive to INFORMAL intrusions. Formal English cannot tolerate much ungrammaticality, dialectal interference, slang, vulgarity. While none of these are necessarily features of INFORMAL style, their use will obviously enhance it.

5.0. *Conclusion*

The final question now is: how do we visualise a scale which is (a) weighted towards the INFORMAL end, (b) contains no midpoint?

Clearly, one now has to deal with a scale that is not linear, because it cannot be specified by just *two* points. Between two poles, a discontinuity needs to be specified, where marginally FORMAL English passes 'catastrophically' to marginally INFORMAL English.[11]

Moreover, such a scale would have to show, perhaps through an algebraic rather than geometric model, that it is heavily weighted on the INFORMAL side and that this INFORMAL side cuts across allied notions like Vulgarity, Casualness, and so on. One thing seems fairly clear: a simple straight line, however finely graded, would be inadequate.

If the mid-point tends to be null, is there a situational counterpart for language use where *no* Formality constraints are in operation? Bearing in mind the central defining characteristic of Formality (statement I:3 in section 1.1) it is difficult to envisage any situation where the participants can speak for any length of time without indicating *some* degree of familiarity or social distance. The closest we come to such a situation is in cases where maximum *uncertainty* about what degree of familiarity to assume exists. In such cases, however, we do not really suspend all assumptions about Formality -- where there is maximal uncertainty, we tend to err on the safe side, so to speak, and use fairly FORMAL English. Hence, any communication to an audience which cannot possibly be defined in terms of inter-personal factors, social distance, and so on -- public notices, circular letters, news bulletins -- tends to be FORMAL. In other words, in the absence of some specific reason for being either FORMAL or INFORMAL, the English speaker does not adopt a 'neutral' or 'wait-and-see' style: he adopts a FORMAL one. In this sense, the lack of a mid-point on the scale has a situational counterpart.

NOTES

* I would like to thank Professor David Crystal of the Department of Linguistic Science, University of Reading, for his helpful comments on the research associated with this paper, and Peter Roach and Wynford Bellin, both also of Reading University, for making available recording and editing apparatus and computing facilities for some of the tests reported here.

1 In adopting this dualism of language and situation, a theoretically crucial question is whether one assumes a directionality from language to situation. McIntosh (1962) and Crystal and Davy (1969) appear to favour such a directionality, the important criterion for them being that a situation remains (for the linguist) undefined without knowledge of the language event in it. Ellis and Ure (1969) on the other hand recognise a register distinction only if distinctions can be found in both the situation and the language. A similar criterion is implied by Gregory (1966) in treating register as on the 'inter-level' of 'context'.

2 In saying this, I have excluded Joos' and Gleason's work on Formality. Neither was meant to be taken as anything more than an exploratory and tentative introduction to the investigation of this style.

3 A crucial question in these characterizations is what sort of relevance to assign to other aspects of the situation which could well influence Formality. Ellis and Ure (1969 fn.1) include 'social role' as being of possible relevance. Crystal and Davy subsume Formality under 'Status'. While there is no question that such things as 'role' and 'status' are relevant, my own interpretation is to treat these as being distinct: e.g. two persons with the same social status are not necessarily more 'familiar' with each other when they first meet, than two persons with a distinct gap in status.

4 The term 'keynote' is taken from McIntosh 1962. It retains the idea that the situation is specified by the language in it. It is also neutral as to whether the language event is in response to a situational demand or is the actual event which created the situation.

5 Hendricks (1971) quotes a remark from Gleason which places the emphasis not so much on the subject-matter, but on the conventions associated with certain professions and the discussion of certain subjects: 'A physicist talks like a physicist when he is talking to another physicist'.

6 Some of the difficulties of including subject-matter as a stylistic dimension may be deduced from Halliday's attempts to set up a 'field' register (Halliday 1964).

7 In any case, a great deal of methodological ingenuity is required to prepare minimal contrasts of this sort in the spoken medium while ensuring the utterances remain natural and convincing. The problems encountered here were reminiscent of those discussed by Kramer (1963) in his critiques of methods employed by researchers to isolate voice quality from other variables.

8 A distinction of a similar kind, applied to the study of semantics, has been made by Leech (1969).

9 I would like to express my gratitude here to Professor Milner, Dr. Killingley and Mr. Geoffrey Sampson for their helpful comments at the conference regarding the scoring pattern in Table III. I hesitate to go as far as they do in suggesting that university undergraduates no longer understand the meaning of the term 'Vulgar'. However I do agree that one or two responses are simply bizarre (e.g. the score of 6 on 'Vulgar' for Lord Boothby). In the parent study, one in every 15 or so informants would at one point or another in the tests produce one such skewed response. I do not feel that these rare deviations warrant a generalization about the meaning of 'Vulgar', and would rather treat these as rare instances of informant unreliability.

10 I have suggested 20 seconds as a rough working interpretation of

'a discourse of any length' on the basis of the work in the field. Informants were told to allow 'a few seconds' before making a response, to discourage over-hasty reaction. Given this restriction, most informants responded within 20 seconds, and a few even within 15 seconds.

11 I have borrowed this term from Herdan (1966) who used it to describe the mathematical transformation from one side of a duality to the other (e.g. from line to point).

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