A Question of Style: individual voices and corporate identity in the *Edinburgh Review*, 1814-1820

Conference or Workshop Item

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A Question of Style: individual voices and corporate identity in the *Edinburgh Review*, 1814-1820

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Research question

Did the *Edinburgh Review* create a “transauthorial discourse” (Klancher 1987) that hid the voices of individual contributors behind a corporate style?

Funded by The Research Society for Victorian Periodicals Field Development Grant (January-October 2017)
The *Edinburgh Review*

Most influential periodical in early 19th C.

Edited by Francis Jeffrey, who could make alterations to any article

All articles published anonymously
The Quarterly Review

*Edinburgh* staunchly Whig (liberal)

Tory rival, *Quarterly Review* started 1809 to counter it

Often reviewed same texts

Some authors wrote for both
Corpus at project end

**Edinburgh Review:**
- 325,000 ‘words’
- 60 articles

**Quarterly Review:**
- 175,000 ‘words’
- 20 articles

Chosen from reviews of literature, travel writing, history, politics and economics
Corpus preparation

- Corpus selection
- OCR correction
- TEI encoding
- Analysis with computational tools
- Interpretation of results
Corpus selection
Corpus selection

with the subjects which were to be discussed, she made it necessary
difficult to follow the speakers, or rather the readers.—L. H.

Notwithstanding this several times she could not utter, that is
understand, what was said, though she was previously ignorant of
the subject of the discussions. She scarcely gives an account of the
several speeches, and finally concludes by condemning the whole
instance in a lump.

"Something wore me by the discourse; and dictating words I let
so long listened to, and not particularly noted or entangled in the
subjects or compositions of the various discourses. I left with my ear
and spirits seduced by the dressing up of the instance, which from
the whole gave me an impression not in accordance to incorporating
means or learning, or consequences of taste.—ib. p. 265.

And this condemnation of academies in general she supports by
the absurd observation, that 'member Homer nor Ossian teaches
so an academy.—ib. 160.
Corpus selection

We wanted pages 172–208 in a complete, consecutive sequence…

We got…

172
173
178
179
182
183
180
181
186
187
207
208
OCR correction

Most scans are good.
Most OCR is good.

Building a library of before and after texts from which we can prepare an alignment, from which we can identify error patterns.
OCR correction

Typical incorrect recognition of individual characters:
\[ w \rightarrow vv, vi, iv \]
\[ h \rightarrow li \]

Some run in two directions:
\[ rn \leftrightarrow m \]
\[ u \leftrightarrow n \]
\[ s \leftrightarrow a \]
We want stylistic quirks:
public or publick to day or to-day

We do not want words normalised:
surprized to surprised Shak[e]spear[e]
BUT

Croker reviewing Scott's *Guy Mannering* writes 'gipsys' in his analysis, whereas Scott writes 'gipsies' in the story itself.
OCR correction

Some good tools already exist for issues such as:
• normalisation
• long S
• hyphenation

No point trying to reinvent them.

Instead:
• building a set of post-processing scripts to aid manual review, eg, to highlight all occurrences of *die* and its possible confusion with *the* in a text, helped by n-grams to assess confidence.
• porting TEI header, footer and paragraph insertion scripts from previous work to speed up mark-up.
Analysis – Stylometry

The study of how hidden stylistic traits can be measured through statistical methods to trace an author's voice

Made better known by John Burrows in his 2001 Busa Award lectures and beyond

Perception of authorial “voice” is quite subjective
  - e.g. Duncan Wu (Introduction, New Writings of William Hazlitt, 2007)
Two interpretations of *style*

**Style as fingerprint**

- **Unconscious** elements in the way we write
  - (e.g. Van Halteren et al. "Existence of a human stylome." (2005))
- Reflected by use of **Most Frequent Words**

**Style as signature**

- **Conscious** choice of words, sentences, tone
  - (e.g. Van Dalen-Oskam *Riddle of Literary Quality* project)
- Still **unsure** how to identify with stylometry

* as defined by Sarah Allison at DH2016, Stylistics workshop, 12 July 2016
Fingerprint - Delta method

“Delta is the mean of the absolute differences between the z-scores for a set of word-variables in a given text-group and the z-scores for the same set of word-variables in a target text.”

Delta – continued

Delta works on the Most Frequent Words present in a given set of texts

All authors use Most Frequent Words differently

Underpinned by solid mathematical and linguistic foundations
## Delta – example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Moore</th>
<th>Coleridge</th>
<th>Godwin</th>
<th>Southey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>7.71%</td>
<td>6.40%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of</td>
<td>5.85%</td>
<td>5.06%</td>
<td>4.49%</td>
<td>3.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>2.83%</td>
<td>3.95%</td>
<td>3.52%</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>2.97%</td>
<td>3.04%</td>
<td>3.01%</td>
<td>3.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Signature – possible routes

Van Dalen-Oskam
• vocabulary richness?
• word length?
• sentence length?

Allison
• medium-frequency words?
• words used vs. words avoided?

Mahlberg
• Corpus stylistics
Analysis – false clusters

**Female pronouns**

- Moore_French_Novels_34_1820_corr: 36%
- Jeffrey_Edgeworth_28_1817: 33%
- anon_christabel_edinburgh_review_27_1816: 32%
- Jeffrey_Lalla_Rookh_29_1817: 23%
- Brougham_melanges_30_1818: 21%

...and 10 texts contained no female pronouns at all
# Fingerprint vs Signature

Both attempt to remove the influence of content over style in the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fingerprint – MFW</th>
<th>Signature – TF:IDF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequent words</td>
<td>Significant words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose what to <em>include</em> in the analysis</td>
<td>Choose what to <em>exclude</em> from the analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconscious style?</td>
<td>Conscious style?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ongoing work

Enhance scripts
Include more texts
Expand reference corpora
Share scripts and TEI texts
Evaluate and critique
A Question of Style Project

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Project blog:
http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/styleproject/
Project outputs (in 2018):
https://ou.figshare.com/