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 indeed sometimes
found it difficult to follow the speakers, or rather the readers. — ii. 261.

Notwithstanding this, she could not altogether be understood. What was said, though she was previously unacquainted with the subject of the discourses, she carefully gives an account of the several speeches, and finally concludes by condemning the whole instance in a lump.

"Something worn out by the discourses and declamatory tone. I have
done listened to, and not particularly cured [or entertained] by the
subjects or compositions of the various discourses. I left with my ear
and spirit shrivelled by the dressing up of the discourses, which, as a
whole, gave me an impression quite inappropriate to incorporate notions
of learning, or connubialities of taste. — ii. p. 265.

And this condemnation of academies in general, she supports by
the absurd observation, that 'neither Homer nor Osiris resided
in an academy.' — ii. 169.
Corpus selection

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

We got…

172
173
... 178
179
182
183
180
181
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.

Farewt'u! a
won! ijiat
must be,
and lialll
been —
A sound nliicb makes us linger;

Farewell! a
word that
must be,
and hath been —
A sound which makes us linger;
OCR correction

Typical incorrect recognition of individual characters:
- w → vv, vi, iv
- h → li

Some run in two directions:
- rn ↔ m
- u ↔ n
- s ↔ a
OCR correction

BUT

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

Fingerprint – MFW
- Frequent words
- Choose what to include in the analysis
- Unconscious style?

Signature – TF:IDF
- Significant words
- Choose what to exclude from the analysis
- Conscious style?
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/