Study of Forensic Stylistics and Information Capture

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Abstract-- Stylistics is a subject that can be looked into from a scientific perspective to establish suspects in this modern age where everything is communicated digitally. Forensic stylistics is not a well known field but there is ample scope in it. In this age where people barely write on paper and every message is sent through digital media, the focus has to shift from handwriting analysis to forensic stylistics for advantage of the law. Every human has a tendency to use a few special words during writing and has a unique writing pattern to. The research aims to see whether it is based on genders of people when are narrated some information without any biasness towards any type of consideration or benefit, the gender bias. The research was conducted among 50 subjects equally distributed in both genders to establish a tendency of stylistics based on gender if any. The experiment showed that females had a tendency to follow the norms of standard writing whereas males noted the information provided as long it was readable and made sense without any need for proper attention to grammar or other accuracy.

Keywords-- *Forensic stylistics, research aim, gender bias*

I. INTRODUCTION

Forensic science is branch of science that deals with civil and criminal laws enforced by the police and the criminal justice system. Forensic science defines document as any object on which a message is recorded in any form that is understandable to anyone. This document can be computer, mobile, paper, wall, cloth, leaf, metal, plastic, wood, glass or any material possible. The scribing on the material can be in handwritten, printed, painted or even embossed.

II. QUESTIONED DOCUMENT

A document when scrutinized for its authenticity is known as a Questioned Document. Questioned document are also known as Contested Documents. The examination of Questioned documents is known as FDE (Forensic Document Examination) and it involves analysis of instruments, office machine products, writing mediums, etc. This field of forensic science is mostly used for examination in case of paper analysis, forgery, alterations, disputes, origin and things related to that.

The American Society for Testing and Materials International (ASTM) publishes standards for the methods and procedures utilized by forensic document examiners. The field of document examiners is a niche of forensic science that takes years of practice to get a hold on.

Stylistics and Forensic Stylistics:

The word stylistics comes from the work "style." The Germans refer to it as stylistic and the French refer to it as stylisque. This concept of stylistic is born in the twentieth century but the seeds belong to that of the late 18th century. The concept was gained momentum and was established in United Kingdom and United States of America by the end of 1960. Some scientists and scholars say that stylistics is a facade whereas others agree to the matter that "Stylistics is an area of mediation between two disciplines. That Stylistics can provide a way of mediating between two subjects: English Language and literature." (Widdoson (1990:4)).

Tzvetan Todorov said "It has language as both its point of departure and its destination. Language furnishes literature its abstract configuration as well as perceptible material- It is both mediator and mediatised. Hence literature turns out to be not only the first field whose study takes language as its point of departure, but also the first field of which knowledge can shed new light on properties of language itself."

III. CLASSIFICATION OF STYLISTICS

Stylistics can be classified into three categories that is

1. Linguistic stylistics: This class is also known as the Sociolinguistic stylistics and this style depends on the occasion and the way the speaker speaks. In other words this is based on the situation of communication.

2. Pedagogical stylistics: Pedagogy means the practice and study of teaching. This stylistics comes to play when English is a foreign language and the student is being taught in English or about English as second language.

3. Practical stylistics: Practical stylistics is involved with literature and texts. Carter about practical stylistics says "A process of literary text analysis which primary interpretative procedures, used in the reading of a literary text are linguistic procedures." (Carter, 1982:4)

4. Structural stylistics: Structural stylistics started around early 1960s in Paris and was spearheaded by Roland Barthes. This form of stylistics is more intuitive based and considers the fact the reader already has the maturity to understand what is being said even if something is skipped or not directly portrayed.

IV. FORENSIC STYLISTICS

Forensic stylistics is used to analyze the language for the purpose of resolving questions mainly in relation to authorship. Forensic stylistics has been used on

numerous occasions to find out the identity of the author of the document. McMenamin (1933)

Forensic stylistics focus on the linguistic pattern of the author which are always unique to the writer and the patterns can be empirically described for identification of the author. Why writer chooses a specific form and another writer opts for another form to express the same thing is based on various factors such as linguistic capability. It is also considered that a writer's choice is determined by their external environment and it becomes a subconscious habit as a result of which the stylistics can be helpful in identification of a writer.

At a high level for Forensic Document Examination, the spelling patterns such the homophones (their/there, than/then, write/right), punctuation patterns (use of brackets, comma, apostrophe- when not required), grammar patterns (subject-verb agreements) and discourse features such as (Hi !! X, Hi..X, Hi X!) are looked for in the document under question.

As per Mc Menamin (1993) the writing style of can be classified into following categories:

1. How an author starts the sentence.
2. Predominant use of punctuations: Comma [,] Semi colon [;] Exclamation mark [!], Question Mark [?] Quotations ["..."] et cetera.
3. Mistakes and Errors: Any spoken or written text may tend to display tendency to break the rules of the Standard English language.
4. Profanity: Profanity in anonymous letters is an easy way to determine the author though not conclusive.
5. Expression of time and date: Some people write time as 2:10, 2/10, 2-10. People also tend to use various ways of writing the dates such as 05/12/1999 may imply 5th December 1999 or 12th May 1999. People may also write dates as 5/12/1999, 05/12/99, 05/12/1999, 5th December, 1999, or even December 5th, 1999 or simply December 5, 1999. There are many variations to it.
6. Expression of cleanliness and grooming: Use of words like neat, tidy, clean, etc is helpful in establishing the suspicion.
7. Characteristic word and phrases: It is not easy to judge if particular words or phrases could occur in two separate documents by chance or whether the document is produced by the same hand. One has to look for words like "couple of, great deal, all along, whole lot, praise the lord, in fact, "ecetera.

V. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this paper a total of 50 samples were obtained from twenty five males and twenty five females. The subjects were all in the age range of 17-21 and full time students in various colleges around Anand district, in Gujarat, India. The subjects were made to write a selected portion on Microsoft Word 2007. All the subjects had rare chance of discussing the subject matter with each other before the experiment was over. The subjects were measured on the criteria of spellings,

punctuation and sense of paragraph when being dictated.

The paragraph verbatim is follows:

Last month, Brittany Nicole Miller celebrated her 29th birthday. Her age makes her the target of much of the corporate affection, a fact that she says she has experienced "ad nauseam."

Ms. Miller, who is also known as Piper, is divorced and works as a massage therapist and a model. She lives with two male roommates (who are not a couple) in a rented town home in Danville, Calif., in the East Bay. She used Twitter to complain to Sprint when she had a problem with her phone (it worked), and she likes to buy vintage clothes and accessories.

The paragraph was dictated to each subject individually. Then they were made to write the paragraph in their own words with oral reference, that is they could ask if they forgot something about the paragraph. The subjects were not restricted to any theme, size or format of the fonts. The subjects were recorded for the type of font, font size, format (bold/italic/normal), paragraph indentation, line spacing. Grammar and spelling error detection was deliberately turned off for more accurate data capture.

For further studies the subjects were asked to format their work in Microsoft word using any formatting to highlight what they deemed could be considered as an useful information any reader of the paragraph.

VI. OBSERVATION

1. People have severe variations for punctuation marks. Even if they are narrated with utmost care and tonal influence, almost 90% of the subjects missed out comma.
2. 78% of the subjects did form a paragraph while writing the dictation.
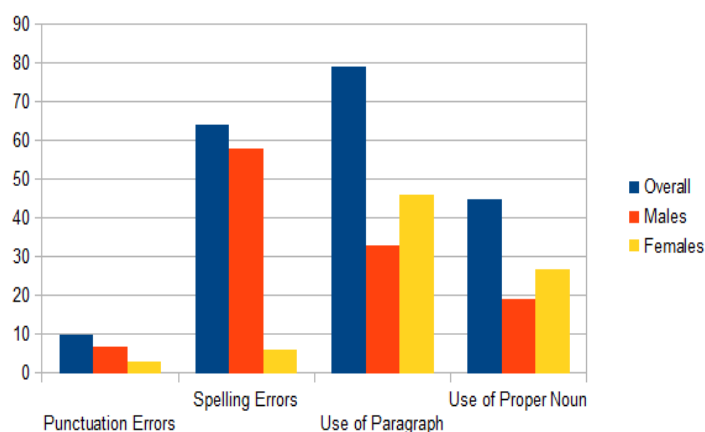3. Subject from the same family had variation in writing.

Figure 1: Graph denoting the results.

The graph based on non extrapolated data indicates that females had a tendency towards less punctuation errors, spelling errors and more use of proper noun as well paragraph when depending on narration to type free from any biasness.
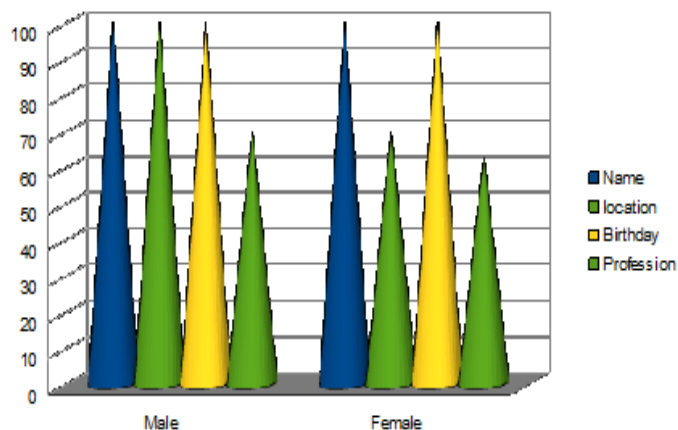
Figure 2: Data considered as useful based on gender

When asked to highlight the information an average person would find interesting or useful from the piece of information provided, 100% the males tended to highlight the Name, location and detail of birth day.

100 percent of the females highlighted the name, detail of birthday. 63% of females highlighted the profession mentioned.

CONCLUSION

The research shows that on an average the females tend to be better at taking dictation of an average quality and do pay attention to proper grammar and form. Males on the other hand tend to ignore formats and stylistics as long it makes sense for the reader. The detection of useful information based on gender has a wide scope of research.

It can be duly concluded that stylistics is a personal factor that can be influenced from various external factors such as habits, ambience, mood. It can also be influenced for certain by subliminal factors. No human can unknowingly copy stylistics of another person.

The scope of stylistics is ample especially in suicidal cases and cases pertaining to authorship of documents. The way a person writes a document subconsciously can be helpful in determining suspects in cases of online threats, kidnap messages and suicide notes provided through digital type settings.

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