



Vague markers in French and Spanish: Evolution of *Style* and Comparison with its Spanish Equivalents

*Marcadores de vaguedad en francés y en español: evolución de style
y comparación con sus equivalentes españoles*

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Abstract

This study proposes an analysis of the French vagueness marker *style*, which is similar to the marker *genre*, but has lost presence in discourse in recent years. First, a distributional and syntactic study of the marker is presented, followed by a semantic examination. It is then argued that there has been a pragmaticalization of the noun *style*, giving rise to a marker that is increasingly desemantised. Lastly, a comparison is made between the marker *style* and its Spanish equivalents, *en plan*, *tipo* or *rollo* is made.

Keywords: intentional vagueness, numerical approximation, taxonomic noun, *genre*, *tipo*

Resumen

En este estudio proponemos el análisis del marcador de vaguedad del francés *style*, similar al marcador *genre*, pero que ha perdido presencia en discurso en los últimos años. En primera instancia, se presenta un estudio distribucional y sintáctico del marcador para seguidamente pasar a un estudio semántico. Se defiende que se ha producido una pragmaticalización del sustantivo *style* para dar lugar a un marcador cada vez más desemantizado. Para finalizar, se compara el marcador *style* con sus equivalentes españoles, *en plan*, *tipo* o *rollo*.

Palabras clave: discourse markers, vagueness, pragmaticalization, diachrony, semantics

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, linguists have been working on attenuation and vague language in the context of the English language. Numerous studies have been published on the widely recognized *vague markers* in English, notably on *like* as well as *sort of* and *kind of*. As Mihatsch (2007) points out:

Loose talk can and often has to be made explicit by special linguistic expressions, so-called hedges (Lakoff, 1973). Well-known approximating hedges in English are *sort of* and *kind of* (...). Many languages have equivalent expressions, such as French *espèce de*, *genre de* et *sorte de* (...) (Mihatsch, 2007, p. 225).

In recent years, several studies have been published on these attenuation markers or vague markers in Romance languages, particularly in French, but also in Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. I will focus here on the contemporary marker *style*, which is comparable to *genre*, but which has been overtaken by *genre*. I will also compare the French marker *style* with other similar markers in Spanish.

My starting point is a written and oral corpus, compiled using several databases and corpora. For this study, we used literary texts from the *Frantext* database and the *theatre-classique.fr* corpus. To analyze both represented and spoken French, we consulted the databases *Sketch Engine*, *Eslo*, *Corpus du français parlé parisien et du français parlé à Bruxelles*, *Les Vocaux*, and the *Yonglish* website.

The *Frantext* database contains 14,134 occurrences of *style*. Within pre-classical French, we identified 172 occurrences, from which we selected 50 for this study. In Classical French, there are 1,936 occurrences, of which we extracted the 100 most relevant to our analysis. For Modern French, focusing exclusively on the nineteenth century, we found 3,887 occurrences and selected 100. Twentieth-century French contains 7,007 occurrences, from which we also retained 100, as we did for the corpus of contemporary French (1980–present), which comprises 2,682 occurrences.

From the *theatre-classique.fr* corpus, we extracted 13 occurrences: one in pre-classical French, ten in Classical French, and two in Modern French. Regarding the databases and oral corpora, *Sketch Engine* presents 34,629 occurrences of *style* with quotation marks (‘ ’) and 31,636 without. For each case, we selected 100 occurrences. *Eslo* and the corpora of Parisian and Brussels spoken French contain 32 occurrences, while *Les Vocaux* includes six. Additionally, the *Yonglish* website provides 6,116 occurrences of *style* without quotation marks. This study analyzes a sample of 801 occurrences, representing the primary functions of *style* from pre-classical to contemporary French.

We adopt the concept of stereotypes as defined by Jean-Claude Anscombe (e.g., Anscombe, 2001), who describes a term's stereotype as an open series of sentences associated with the term and defining its meaning. We also draw on studies on historical pragmatics and pragmaticalization (Dostie 2004).

After reviewing the dictionary definitions, I will begin with a distributional analysis, followed by a semantic study and a brief comparative study with Spanish.

1. Dictionary definitions and distributional study

1.1 Style in dictionaries

The Littré dictionary online lists 8 meanings of the noun *style*, starting with that of the metal, ivory or bone punch used by the ancients for writing. In the fourth meaning, it is claimed that the term has come to designate writing itself through a process of metonymy. In this study, we will focus on entry 7, where *style* is defined as «*Manière d'envisager ou de présenter des choses, façon d'agir*».

Laissons ce style [parlons d'autre chose], [Molière](#), Éc. des f. I, 6.

Ce langage à comprendre est assez difficile, Madame ; et vous parliez tantôt d'un autre style, [Molière](#), Tart. IV, 5.

Il n'y a rien de tel que d'être insolent ... j'ai toujours haï ce style ; mais, s'il réussit, il faut changer d'avis, [Sévigné](#), 22 janvier 1674. (Littré online)

Rey (1995, p. 2029), in his *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, traces the evolution of the meaning of *style*, which I have abbreviated below:

Le mot est emprunté au latin classique stilus, qui désignait tout instrument composé d'une tige pointue, c'était en particulier le nom d'un poinçon de fer ou d'os, la pointe servant à écrire sur des tablettes. De là stilus devient en rhétorique synonyme de scriptura « écriture » (comme plume en français) et s'emploie avec diverses acceptions : exercice écrit, façon d'écrire, puis manière, coutume, usage (..) Le mot style est introduit au XIII^{ème} siècle sous la forme estile pour désigner une manière personnelle d'agir. (...) Style est en usage à partir du XIV^{ème} siècle pour désigner par métonymie du nom de l'instrument le tracé de l'écriture de quelqu'un. Le latin des rhétoriciens est aussi repris avec le sens de « manière

individuelle de s'exprimer, de parler » qui ne se développe qu'à partir de la Renaissance.

(...) La Renaissance donne au mot sa valeur aujourd'hui dominante. Style (1548) désigne alors une manière de composer, d'écrire, de discourir.'

The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* online traces the same evolution. However, the contemporary value—*style mec cool*—is not mentioned at all. In its *Dire, ne pas dire* section, the Académie points out that: *Genre* is often used as an adverb, as was *Style*, which it has now replaced in this informal usage.

To date, dictionaries such as Larousse and Le Robert do not deal with the contemporary value of these approximation markers.

1.2 Distributional study of the marker style

The evolution of *style* at the distributional level is fairly clear, insofar as we go from a use in which the determiner is almost omnipresent between pre-classical French and modern French²—*le style, ce style, un style*—up to and including the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, *style* is increasingly used without a determiner.

Where *style* has a literal meaning, equivalent to *manière de; way of* (writing, expressing oneself, behaving, composing) it is always introduced by a determiner:

(1) Il trace des soupirs, et **d'un style plaintif**. (Corneille. Frantext)

(2) De vos moindres billets, la grâce naturelle

Du style épistolaire est un charmant modèle. (Voltaire. Frantext)

(3) Mérite bien que **le style** soit changé. (Jean Calvin. Frantext)

(4) Dirige la pointe de **son style**. (Du Bellay. Frantext)

Of the 800 occurrences of *style* in the corpus, 36.5% contain a determiner, mainly the indefinite determiner *un*,

(5) Pour bien parler du chaos, il fallait parler **d'un style inintelligible**.

Gueullette, Thomas-Simon, *Arlequin-pluton*, 1719.

at the same level as the definite determiner *le*,

(6) On croit y reconnoître sa froideur dans l'intrigue, sa touche dure et forte dans **le style**.

Bachaumont Louis Petit de, *Mémoires secrets*, 1763.

then the possessive *son*,

- (7) M'en a fait le débit dans **son style** gaillard.

Robinet, Charles, *Panegyrique de l'école des femmes*, 1664.

the possessive *mon* and finally the demonstrative *ce*.

In a search for *style* in Modern French only, from 1800 to 1970, according to Frantext, where the database lists just over 9,000 occurrences, *le* is the most common definite determiner introducing *style* (29% cases) followed by the indefinite *un* (12%), then the possessive *son* (7%), and the demonstrative *ce* (4%); and fewer occurrences introduced by the possessives.

In most cases, literal occurrences of *style* are qualified by an adjective:

- (8) Il trace des soupirs, et d'un **style** plaintif.

Corneille, Pierre, *La mort de Pompée*, 1644

- (9) Que dirai plus ?

Certes les miens esprits

Furent dès lors comme de joie épris :

Bien disposés d'une veine subtile,

De vous écrire **en un souverain style**.

Marot Clément - *L'Adolescence clémentine* (1538)

We also find several occurrences that introduce prepositional phrases - *de style*:

- (10) Va lire donc (pour en être assuré)

Ses beaux écrits **de style mesuré** :

Marot Clément - *L'Adolescence clémentine* (1538)

a proper name,

- (11) (...) il y a surtout deux bracelets !... (*À lui-même*.) Je me suis encore cassé un ongle en arrosant. (*À Thibaudier*.) **Style Renaissance**... bleu sur fond d'or.

Labiche, Eugène, *Les deux timides*, 1860.

a comparative structure,

- (12) Mais pour ce que je n'en avois pas encore assez de connoissance pour en parler **du mesme style que** du reste, c'est a dire, en demonstant les effets par les causes...

Descartes René - *Discours de la méthode* (1637)

When *style* acquires a value more distant from its literal meaning—*manière*, *façon de X* or *catégorie X*—and takes on a value close to *genre* or *comme*, it mainly introduces direct speech,

- (13) Il composa mentalement un télégramme affolé. C'était **du style** : « OTIS, REVIENS ! JE PARDONNE TOUT. SIGNÉ PIFRE. ». Il sourit.

Vautrin, Jean, *Billy-Ze-Kick* (1974).

nouns,

- (14) Pendant ce temps, la police est là, avec ses canons à eau et ses hélicoptères survolant la foule. Liliane Homégan, envoyée spéciale de Vibration, écrit un petit article sur le recueil de sermons de la victime. Elle les trouve conventionnels. «**Style curé**». J'allais vous le dire.

Sollers Philippe - *Le Cœur absolu* (1987)

proper nouns,

- (15) (...) oui lui il me faisait euh ben nous c'est la cascade c'est euh la cascade les arts martiaux euh c'est **style** eux **Jacky Chang**...

CFPP, *Corpus de français parlé parisien des années 2000*

or infinitive clauses,

- (16) Alors à quoi pourrait ressembler une dictature numérique. Déjà, on peut écarter l'idée que ce sera simplement une dictature ayant pour modèle celle du 20^e siècle. C'est à dire **du style à envoyer** les gens dans des camp de concentration.

<https://youtu.be/BTE56jX5ixE> mn.10.25 (date?)

It should be mentioned that the use of «*en style*», of which we found 36 occurrences, including 2 in pre-classical French, 15 in classical French, 14 in 19th - century French, 5 in 20th-century French and none in twenty-first-century French.

- (17) Vous savez combien les froids raisonnements alambiqués, écrits **en style bourgeois**, sont impertinents dans une tragédie que le boursoufflé est encore plus condamnable, que l'impropriété continuelle des expressions est ridicule etc. Voltaire, *Correspondance*, t : 90 (1775)

- (18) C'est alors que s'établissent, de tous les coins de la salle, des conversations, **en style grivois**, que les élèves de Vadé s'empressent de recueillir, au profit de Brunet et de son théâtre.

Jouy Étienne de - *L'Hermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin*... (1813)

Nowadays, the construction *en style* has been replaced by *dans le style de* or in recent years by *en mode*:

- (19) Mais tout de même en rentrant avec Paul dans la chambre que nous partageons, je me sens ridicule et pareil à un personnage de Dos Passos (Richard) et je me raconte l'histoire **en style Dos Passos** : « Et Sartre s'emporta et il dit qu'il fallait vivre dans le dénuement parce qu'on était en guerre. Et il condamna Pieter parce que Pieter s'était fait pistonner.

One of the most prevalent uses is the combination of *style* + *reported speech* (19% of cases), which is attested for the first time in our literary data from Frantext in 1947 by Simone de Beauvoir.

- (20) Incroyables articles sur l'affaire Mac Gee, **du style** : « Bon, l'Amérique assassine quelques Noirs, mais avec honte et remords, ce n'est pas grave, tandis que la Russie s'enorgueillit de ses camps de travail, ça c'est mal. » Qu'en dites-vous ?

Simone de Beauvoir (1947), *Lettres à Nelson Algren*.

There is also the structure of *être du style à* + *infinitif* - *être du style à vous exclamer*.

Around 35% of the occurrences of our corpus show *style* without a determiner. Most of these occurrences (90%) appear in the 20th century. In these cases, *style* mainly introduces nominal groups (34.5%), proper nouns (28%), adjectives (18%) and reported speech (13%). To a lesser extent, it may also introduce prepositional phrases and statements.

- (21) Je suis sûre que ça va être une mortelle connerie. Genre tu vas te souvenir d'un truc tout perrav, **style la fois où t'as manqué ton bus et t'es rentrée à pied**, un pauvre souvenir, quoi. Despentes Virginie, *Baise-moi* (1993)

As previously observed, the distribution of *style* has evolved, particularly in its determination, which tends to be lost in contemporary French, shifting from *un style* + *N* to *style* + *N*. This development aligns with the pragmaticalization of *style*, which will be examined in the following discussion.

2. Semantic Study: Pragmaticalization of Style

Few studies have looked into the marker *style*₂, unlike the case of *genre*. Danon-Boileau and Morel (1997) studied what they call prepositional nouns including *question*, *point de vue*, *genre* and *style*. Mihatsch (2007) analysed expressions in Romance languages equivalent to «*sort of*», such as French *type*, *genre*, *façon*, *style*, Spanish *especie de*, *del género*, *tipo de* or Portuguese *tipo*. In another paper, Mihatsch (2020) studied Spanish markers in the Argentinian variant similar to *genre* or *style*: «*tipo*, *onda*, *corte* and *rollo*». Dostie (1995) looks at Quebec French markers such as *genre* and *style* in postposed use. Finally, Rosier (2002) explored the polysemy of the markers *genre*, *style* and *type*. To date, there is no study devoted exclusively to the marker *style*₂³ Moreover, the studies mentioned tend to suggest that these markers are multifunctional. Conversely, we will try to argue that *style* has only two values. The first, *style*₁, is close to its original meaning—way of acting, writing, behaving and category. The term developed a pragmatic use at the beginning of the 20th century, even if, as we shall see, there were

already traces of this pragmaticalization in the preceding centuries, given that the categorical and semantic changes took place gradually. The new value that we will call *style*₂ is detached from its original meaning and can be schematized as *X being like Y which the members of the speaker's and interlocutor's linguistic community already know*.

2.1. *Style*₁

From the earliest occurrences of *style*, collected from Pre-classical French in 1500 to Contemporary French in 1950, most occurrences of *style* correspond to the literal sense in which we are presented with a noun that can refer to the manner, the way of writing, acting, behaving or to a given category. This value is still present in today's language and coexists with the marker *style*₂.

*Style*₁ refers mainly to the manner, way of acting, writing, behaving...

- (22) Je m'adroisseroy' aussi peu à cause de ceste Divinité d'Invention, qu'ilz ont plus que les autres, de **ceste grandeur de style**, magnificence de motz, gravité de sentences, audace, et variété de figures, et mil' autres lumieres de Poësie.

Du Bellay Joachim - *La Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise* (1549)

- (23) Il trace des soupirs, et d'un **style** plaintif.

Corneille, Pierre, *La mort de Pompée*, 1644. (theatre-classique.fr)

- (24) De vos moindres billets la grâce naturelle

Du style épistolaire est un charmant modèle.

Les femmes, j'en conviens, entendent mieux que nous

Cet art si délicat, si naïf et si doux.

Voltaire, *L'envieux*, 1738.

- (25) (...) on devait expliquer enfin qualifier **le style** de Ronsard ... et on avait encore quelque chose qu'est-ce que c'était ... hum je sais plus je te redirai si tout d'un coup ça me revient ...

Corpus Les Vocaux, 376_02.txt

In this type of usage, *style* is typically preceded by a determiner. *Style*₁ really corresponds to the noun defined by dictionaries as the way or manner of writing—*le style de Ronsard, le style épistolaire*—of behaving—*des soupirs d'un style plaintif*. *Style*₁ categorizes how the sighs are—*plaintifs*; how the writing is—*épistolaire, ceste grandeur*...

*Style*₁ can also refer to a recognized category:

- (26) Thibaudier.

(...) Il a acheté la corbeille !

Garadoux, *tirant son petit instrument et se limant les ongles*.

Vous verrez !... Je crois que ce n'est pas mal !... il y a surtout deux bracelets !... (*À lui-même.*) Je me suis encore cassé un ongle en arrosant. (*À Thibaudier.*)

Style Renaissance... bleu sur fond d'or.

Thibaudier, *à part*.

Bleu sur fond d'or ! (*Haut, faisant un effort.*)

Labiche, Eugène, *Les deux timides*, 1860. (theatre-classique.fr)

Garadoux categorizes the bracelets purchased as 'Renaissance'. We are dealing here with a literal use of *style* and not at all with an attenuator. The bracelets really do belong in the Renaissance jewellery category.

- (27) ouais y a le Batofar y a quelques péniches qui font de la musique exact ouais c'est peut-être un des seuls coins où y avait de la musique enfin où y a de la musique mais pas **le style de musique** que j'écoute donc c'est peut-être pour ça que je que je n'y vais plus là-bas

CFPP, *Corpus de français parlé parisien années 2000* (consulted on 20th September 2024).

In this last instance, the speaker is referring to a category of music, the one he usually listens to. *Style* does not attenuate the term *music*. It places the music in a given category.

As we have said, the contemporary use of *du style* appears in our corpus from 1947 onwards. In these cases, *du style* mainly introduces direct speech, and the term *style* corresponds to *style*₂. Earlier we found instances of *de+le style* (du style) where *style* has its full noun value, *style*₁, as in:

- (28) La volonté ne peut s'exercer que sur le choix des moyens, car l'œuvre d'art n'est qu'un ensemble de moyens et nous arrivons pour l'art à la définition que je donnais **du style** : l'art est la volonté de s'extérioriser par des moyens choisis : les deux définitions coïncident et l'art n'est que le style.

Jacob Max (1923), *Le Cornet à dés*. (Frantext)

2.2 *Style*₂

The transition to a second *style* value, *style*₂, where its semantic bleaching begins, takes place gradually. Although it is mainly from the 20th century onwards that we will come across the contemporary value, there are traces of it in earlier centuries. We have seen that *style* introduces, in many instances, a reported speech, as in (29):

- (29) Le mieux serait, à mon avis, que tu lui dises que tu renonces. **Style** : « Je ne sais pas ce qui m'a pris, je regrette, ce n'était pas bien. »
Monferrand Hélène, *Les amies d'Héloïse* (1990).

According to the study's corpus, the value *style*₂ appears in French and becomes frequent at the beginning of the 20th century:

- (30) 12 décembre. - Vous êtes-vous déjà battu en duel ?
Non, mais j'ai déjà reçu des calottes. **D'un style** : « c'est fin comme la pluie ».
Louis Barthou. Guitry, Capus, Léon Barthou, maître des requêtes, une femme de de préfet, deux jeunes gens dont je ne saurai jamais les noms.
Jules Renard, *Journal* (1887-1910), 1910.

*Style*₂ is well established in the second half of the 20th century. As we have seen, the expression «*du style*» used as an introducer of reported speech appears from 1947 onwards:

- (31) Incroyables articles sur l'affaire Mac Gee, **du style** : « Bon, l'Amérique assassine quelques Noirs, mais avec honte et remords, ce n'est pas grave, tandis que la Russie s'enorgueillit de ses camps de travail, ça c'est mal. » Qu'en dites-vous ?
Simone de Beauvoir (1947), *Lettres à Nelson Algren*.

Style, with or without a determiner, often introduces a direct speech presented as virtual. The speaker presents the segment in inverted commas as direct speech that a *speaker*₂ might have said:

- (32) Alors les témoins de l'affaire se joignirent à lui pour louer Dieu d'avoir épargné la vie de Frère Grégoire. Mais ce dernier, in petto, n'y voyait qu'un signe d'assentiment, et sa prière fut de **ce style** : « Que votre volonté soit faite, Seigneur. Puisque vous ne voulez pas de ma vie, c'est que vous exigez de moi que je me soumette à l'épreuve que vous m'avez envoyée. J'irai »...
Fallet, René. *Le Braconnier de Dieu* (1973).

This *style* indicates that the words reported are not necessarily as they were said. They look like what the *speaker*₂ may have said.

- (33) Le mieux serait, à mon avis, que tu lui dises que tu renonces. **Style** : « Je ne sais pas ce qui m'a pris, je regrette, ce n'était pas bien. » Et là tu prends une attitude de femme de devoir, *invitus invitam*. Je serais étonnée qu'elle résistât à **un style** douloureusement résigné.
Monferrand Hélène, *Les amies d'Héloïse*. (1990)

In (33), the first *style* has lost the determiner and introduces a virtual direct speech. *Speaker*₁ indicates what the *speaker*₂ may say in the future. Furthermore, what *style* introduces corresponds to a stereotyped segment, in this case the «typical» sentences that might be said in this situation. The speaker is presented as knowing these kinds of sentences. Note that in extract (33) there is a second *style* which corresponds to *style*₁—a

way of doing things, of saying things—*je serais étonné qu'elle résistât à une manière de parler douloureusement résigné.*

- (34) Et vous vous croyez peut-être intelligent parce que vous me posez des questions brillantes, **du style** : « Êtes-vous pour la guerre ? » Et moi, j'aurai été un écrivain de génie, universellement admiré, j'aurai reçu le prix Nobel de littérature, tout ça pour qu'un blanc-bec vienne me lancer des questions quasi tautologiques, auxquelles le dernier des imbéciles fournirait une réponse identique à la mienne !

Amélie Nothomb, *Hygiène de l'assassin* (1992).

Du style introduces a virtual direct speech. Speaker₂ is presented as being able to ask questions similar to *Êtes-vous pour la guerre ?* Note that speaker₁ even comments on the stereotypical nature of the direct speech introduced by *style*: these are «almost tautological» questions.

Style can also introduce adjectives, as in:

- (35) J'étais si fière d'être en grève ! Cela l'intéressait, les luttes ouvrières c'était son dada. On est allé au café du coin. Il avait de grands yeux verts en amande sous des boucles brunes. **Style gauchio-romantique propre.** Il m'intimidait un peu. Letessier Dorothée - *Le voyage à Paimpol* (1980)

Style introduces a stereotypical segment. We are dealing with an *X style Y* structure, in this case *Il est comme quelqu'un gauchio-romantique propre dont l'image appartient à la communauté linguistique du locuteur et de l'interlocuteur.* *Gauchio-romantique propre* is presented by the interlocutor as an already known social stereotype; he must know what he is talking about.

- (36) J'entre finalement dans Victor's Café qui me paraît plus gai et, de plus, exposé au soleil. C'est plein de pédés **style intellectuel**, de jeunes filles de bonne famille, de couples bourgeois du quartier. Comme il fallait s'y attendre, c'est un restaurant hispano-cubain.

Sollers Philippe - *Le Cœur absolu* (1987)

Style—in pédé style intellectuel—introduces an adjective that characterizes a type of homosexual, and that the addressee must be able to identify. He needs to know that in his linguistic community there is a stereotype of the type an «*pédé à l'apparence intellectuelle*».

- (37) Mais non, c'est pas tous pareils, ceux-là ont vraiment des sales gueules de vigile ou un truc comme ça. **Le style raciste grincheux agressif et dangereux.** C'est de la tuerie d'utilité publique.

Despentes Virginie - *Baise-moi* (1993)

Less commonly, *style*₂ can also be found in definite noun phrases. In (37), *style* introduces a series of adjectives: *raciste grincheux agressif et dangereux*. This type of enumeration is very common in the corpus. This sequence of adjectives is presented as being inseparable. It is the stereotype of the racist person. If you are a racist, then you are likely to be *raciste grincheux agressif et dangereux*.

In example (38), *style* introduces a nominal group. The segment Y is presented as stereotypical. It is something that the addressee already knows, since the conveyed image belongs to the speaker and the addressee's linguistic community.

- (38) Il était en smoking, très bronzé, le crâne presque rasé. Il s'assit au fond de l'autobus, à côté de deux barbus en jean, bedonnants, crasseux, la trentaine, **style mecs-cool-résidus-de-mai-soixante-huit**. Il entendit l'un d'eux murmurer : « Un extra-terrestre. ». Matzneff Gabriel - *Ivre du vin perdu* (1981)

The semantic schema of X style Y would correspond to: two bearded guys in jeans (segment X) are like the cool guys left over from May '68 that you, addressee, and I, speaker, already know (segment Y). *Style* introduces a comparison with an idea shared by the speaker and the addressee's linguistic community.

We also find several instances where *style* introduces a series of nouns, as in (39):

- (39) Depuis un mois, j'ai un mal de dos à mourir. J'ai beau faire des exercices, des massages, des crèmes, rien n'y fait. J'ai aussi mille anomalies, **style pas d'appétit, eczéma, herpès, qui vont et qui viennent**. Il m'est affreusement difficile de me concentrer.
Grimm Ariane - *La Flambe* (1987)

Pas d'appétit, eczéma, herpès qui vont et qui viennent are physical anomalies that everyone should be aware of.

In the following conversation between Florence Lefevre and Catherine Ménard from the CFPP corpus about writing a doctoral thesis just after giving birth, *style* introduces the nominal group *biblio et autres*:

- (40) euh je sais pas comment il a fait d'ailleurs parce que moi je sais que j'avais la prétention de faire que **des trucs style biblio et autres** quand Laura est née parce que j'étais en plein de f- en train de finir ma thèse et et j'ai pas pu faire quoi que ce soit de de ces petites bricoles que je pensais tu vois...
CFPP, *Corpus de français parlé parisien 2000*, (consulted on 20th September 2024).

Compiling a bibliography and the like (*des trucs stule bibliographie et autres*) is presented as the stereotype of a part of the thesis that doesn't require too much effort (compared, for example, to the research itself).

Style also introduces proper nouns.

(41) Elle se couvre de perles, de colliers, de bracelets, de bagues... « J'aime faire l'amour dans les diamants. » **Style Boucher**. Diane aubain. Je monte directement chez elle après avoir regardé la vitrine. Sollers Philippe - *Le Cœur absolu* (1987).

(42) Des doigts serrés rapidos, quelques banalités échangées et je me dirige vers mon poste où j'arrive sans encombre, c'est-à-dire sans parsemer ma route de repères vineux, **style** Petit Poucet ringard.
Giraud Robert - *Carrefour Buci* (1987)

(43) Cela risquait à tout moment de dévaler la pente et de provoquer une catastrophe **du style d'Hiroshima**.
Chamoiseau Patrick - *Texaco* (1992)

(44) (...) et par contre grande chance un petit magasin d'alimentation euh ++ euh on va dire eurasienne ou asiatique au sens large **style Tang** de de de l'avenue de Choisy enfin du treizième qui a qui s'est installé là dans le quinzisième...
Corpus de français parisien des années 2000.

In all these occurrences, *style* introduces a proper noun into an *X style Y* structure where *style* draws a comparison between a precise X—diamonds; the road; a disaster; a small grocery shop—and a stereotypical Y.

Les diamants style Boucher: these are not really Boucher diamonds, but as Boucher is a stereotype of luxury jewelry, the speaker is comparing the diamonds he is talking about with Boucher diamonds. *Je ne parsème pas ma route de repères vineux style Petit Poucet ringard*: everyone in our linguistic community knows *Petit Poucet* (Little Thumb), hence the stereotypical aspect of the Y segment introduced by *style*.

Une catastrophe du style d'Hiroshima: Hiroshima being one of the greatest disasters of the 20th century, the specific disaster the speaker is talking about (segment X) is compared to one of the best-known disasters in the speaker's linguistic community.

The same applies to the comparison between the small Eurasian shop and the Tang shops⁴, the stereotype of the Eurasian shop.

In all these cases, *style* introduces an attenuating comparison in that X is not exactly Y, X is similar, is closer to Y. Hence the similarity with other comparative conjunctions such as *comme*. In (44), there is a double attenuation effected by *au sens large* + *style*: Eurasian shop like Tang shop.

As we have already mentioned, *style* can appear in infinitive structures: *être du style à* + *infinitive*:

- (45) Je vois, mademoiselle fait partie de cette populace nouveau genre qui aime les noms païens. Vous **seriez du style à appeler** vos enfants Krishna, Élohim, Abdallah, Tchang, Empédocle, Sitting Bull ou Akhénaton, hein? Grotesque. Moi, j'aime les noms chrétiens.

Nothomb Amélie - *Hygiène de l'assassin* (1992)

The speaker's discourse can be paraphrased by «You (X) are a person comparable to those who would name their children with typically foreign first names—a series of typically foreign and non-Christian first names (Y)».

Style, as we can see from these examples, tends to become pragmatic. At the same time as it loses the determiner, its original meaning, *manière de X*, starts to fade. The marker is found in comparative structures where X is compared to a stereotypical Y. In the process of pragmaticalization, *style* becomes increasingly desemantized. In some cases, it co-occurs with *genre*:

- (46) Je suis sûre que ça va être une mortelle connerie. **Genre** tu vas te souvenir d'un truc tout perrav, **style** la fois où t'as manqué ton bus et t'es rentrée à pied, un pauvre souvenir, quoi.

Despentès Virginie - *Baise-moi* (1993)

Here, *style* is linked to *la fois (inoubliable) où tu as manqué ton bus et t'es rentrée à pied*.

- (47) ben je sais pas ce qui s' est passé s' il a mal géré son rendez-vous d' avant je ne sais pas ... il nous a pris mais **genre** avec un truc **style** trois quarts d' heure de retard ... le pire c' est qu' il a même pas dit désolé ...

Corpus Les Vocaux, 188_01.txt

- (48) bah forcément mais euh ... **genre** ... je sais pas comment te bah au pire en vrai mais il y en a trop en fait et j'ai pas encore tout écouté du coup je peux pas te dire genre même **un style genre** c'est grave large et tout...

Corpus Les Vocaux, 367_04.txt

While *genre* and *style* competed in the second half of the 20th century, from the 2000s onwards, *style*₂ gradually gives way to *genre*. From my point of view, this is due in part to the age of the speakers. Another factor (yet to be verified) is the social class of the speakers using *style*. In Youglish, on Youtube, we find 6,116 occurrences of *style*. In an initial sample of the first 100 occurrences, only 8 correspond to *style*₂. The other occurrences have the literal meaning of *style*₁:

- (49) Et pour la petite histoire, je crois que, si je me souviens bien, Eckhart Tolle a été SDF en Allemagne, je crois. Et maintenant, bien sûr il est assez riche avec la vente de ses livres. Et un journaliste, un jour je crois, lui demande "Mais

maintenant que vous êtes riche, c'est facile, finalement. Tout est facile, vous pouvez dire la peine conscience, tout ça, c'est facile". Et je crois qu'il a répondu **un truc du style** "Bah, quand j'étais pauvre et SDF, c'était bien ainsi. Et maintenant que je suis riche, c'est bien ainsi". Ça vous laisse réfléchir. (https://youtu.be/ojHyDEGu_Lo Mn. 1 :22)

(50) François Asselineau ?

- Vous disiez qu'il ne fallait pas de langue de bois, on a été servi par M. Bournazel, parce que là on a eu droit à **tous les poncifs européens, des affirmations comme ça, du style "on a besoin de l'Europe pour..."** Mais moi je voudrais voir le bilan au bout de 60 ans. Où sont les succès de la construction européenne ?
([https://youglish.com/pronounce/Style/french/fr?](https://youglish.com/pronounce/Style/french/fr?mn.58) mn.58 :53)

In (50), *style* introduces a description as a Europe-centric cliché, which supports its stereotypical aspect: «*on a besoin de l'Europe pour*» is a stereotype, one of the possible statements we tend to make.

In the Sketchenginedatabase (fr Ten Ten20), if we take a sample of the first 100 occurrences of *style*, only three correspond to *style*₂, such as:

(51) Cette photo la regardez bien dans le coin droit en bas dans la roche y'a un visage d'homme **style Soviet!**(fr Ten Ten20)

When we search for *genre* in Youglish, we find 25,370 occurrences. In a sample of the first 100 occurrences, 24 correspond to the contemporary marker compared with the 8 occurrences of *style*. Furthermore, in this sample, the speakers who use *genre* are young people aged between 20 and 30.

Style can be understood as the result of a process of pragmaticalization, as defined by Dostie (2004), for the following reasons:

- It has shifted into the pragmatic domain. *Style*₂ is becoming increasingly desemantized, acquiring a primarily pragmatic function that conveys a sense of imprecision or vagueness in language.
- The scope of *style*₂ is not necessarily intraphrastic. It no longer exclusively accompanies a term to categorize it, as in «*sighs in a plaintive style*».
- The process of pragmaticalization occurs gradually.
- The discourse marker *style* has undergone both semantic and syntactic evolution, leading to increased subjectivity. As previously noted, *style*₁ always appears with a definite or indefinite determiner (e.g., *the style*, *a style*, *this style*, *his style*). In contrast, while *style*₂ may still be preceded by a determiner, it is increasingly used without one—particularly from the late twentieth century onward.

3. Comparison with Spanish vague markers

Vague markers belong to a global evolution of the language. We have seen for French the presence of *style* and *genre* (although there are many others, *espèce de*, *sorte de*, *comme...*). English and the other Romance languages have similar markers. This is explained by Mihatsch (2020) when analysing the Spanish attenuators *tipo*, *rollo*, *onda*, *corte*, the latter being present in Latin America. All of them, as the author indicates (Mihatsch 2020, p. 688), express imprecision and approximation, «*es decir, atenuación de lo dicho*». The evolution is similar to that of the marker *style*. Mihatsch (2020, p. 690) explains how to build comparative constructs on the basis of semantics «which in turn arise from *ad hoc* categorisation». According to Mihatsch, the process of these markers is first evident in structures such as «X is of the type of Y», i.e., «X is of the same implicit taxonomic category as Y». The construction is re-analysed as a construction of similarity between two segments. It could be paraphrased by «X belongs to the same category as Y», which leads finally to «X is like Y» (Mihatsch, 2020, p. 691). *Style* works in the same way. It categorises X, to which Y is compared. We go from «X is in the same style, in the same way as Y» to a structure in which there is a desemantisation, to the point that in some 21st century occurrences the comparison disappears completely, as in the example of WhatsApp audios from *Les Vocaux* corpus:

- (52) (...) je peux pas te dire *genre* même **un style** *genre* c'est grave large et tout...
Corpus Les Vocaux, 367_04.txt

We are moving from a comparison to an attenuation or imprecision of what is said.

In addition to desemantisation, vague markers can also undergo syntactic modification. This is shown by Borreguero (2020, p. 77) as she explains how the Spanish marker *en plan* has lost the preposition «*en plan de*», although according to the author it has not yet been fully pragmatised, given that compared to other markers—such as the Italian *tipo*—it still maintains a preposition—«*em*». We saw in the case of *style* that the first occurrences always presented the marker with a determiner. This is gradually being lost and in recent years we find in most cases «*style*» without a determiner.

Style shares most of its functions with the Spanish markers *en plan*, *tipo*, *rollo*, *onda* or *corte*. Thus, it can convey informative vagueness by functioning as an approximant. As Borreguero (2020, p. 73) recalls for *en plan*, this function indicates that the term over which the marker has scope is not clearly defined:

- (53) *Cobraba en plan mil euros*⁵.

- (54) *Il touchait style mille euros*.

Borreguero (2020) also mentions the informative vagueness present when the term Y appears as an exemplary prototype representative of a class—*no es en plan el Mediterráneo*. In this case, we speak of an exemplification marker. In our semantic description of *style*, we argue that this prototypical character—we speak rather in terms of stereotypes—is present in all occurrences of *style*₂. It is a defining feature of the semantic structure of *style*.

The author also mentions, as other authors also do (Méndez Orense, 2016; Mihastch, 2020), the citational character of some occurrences, where the marker introduces a reported speech. In this study of *style*, we call it a virtual referred discourse, given that Y always corresponds to a referred discourse which is presented as what a speaker₂ could enunciate or could have enunciated. Borreguero (2020, p. 73) speaks of markers of relational vagueness alluding to the attenuation of what has been said, where the speaker tries to mitigate what has been said: « (...) *para que no sea interpretado por el interlocutor como una imposición*» (so that it is not interpreted by the interlocutor as an imposition). This function is often related to youthful language, since, as the author reminds, young people and adolescents often lack confidence when speaking. However, as we have seen in the case of *style* compared to *genre*, the speakers who enunciate it are not necessarily young. This could be one of the differences between *style* and *genre* and one of the reasons why *style* seems to be in decline when compared to *genre*.

Finally, Borreguero (2020, p. 75) mentions the function of enunciative vagueness for *en plan*, where the marker indicates to the interlocutor that the speaker has «*dificultades pasajeras para construir su enunciado, pero no tiene intención de ceder el turno*» (temporary difficulties in constructing his statement, but has no intention of giving up his turn). This is especially the case when markers such as *o sea* and *en plan* are combined.

- (55) Bueno, a ver, cuéntanos, en cuanto a tu tiempo libre, ¿qué es lo que no lo que te gusta hacer? Pues, tomo mucho café, quedo o sea, *en plan* con los amigos, también (CREA, conversación entre estudiantes de Filología, s.f.). (Quoted in Borreguero, 2020, p. 75)

We have found fewer occurrences of *style* with this function, although when combined with *genre* it can be compared to these *en plan* uses.

- (56) ben je sais pas ce qui s' est passé s' il a mal géré son rendez-vous d' avant je ne sais pas ... il nous a pris mais **genre** avec un truc **style** trois quarts d' heure de retard ... le pire c' est qu' il a même pas dit désolé ...
Corpus Les Vocaux, 188_01.txt

In this occurrence, the speaker marks the hesitation when indicating the waiting time- *trois quarts d'heure*. The occurrences where we find *style* and *genre* combined belong to the 21st century and reflect the speaker's imprecision in conveying their utterance.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have traced the evolution of the noun *style*, which has become a marker of attenuation introducing a stereotypical «X-as-Y» comparative structure. Nowadays, there are several instances of *style* that are becoming increasingly desemantized. Other vague or approximation markers in English and Romance languages such as Spanish function in a similar way, starting from a noun and acquiring an approximation value. In French, two markers appeared approximatively at the same time, at the beginning of the 20th century: *genre* and *style*. Llopis and Pons (2020) postulate, following Hansen (2018), that an A unit can replace a B unit filling a gap left by the A unit. This is a chain of propulsion where the constructions coexist for a time. The B unit gradually loses weight against the A unit and eventually disappears. This is perhaps the movement that *style* is undergoing. It currently belongs to an older generation than the one that uses *genre*, bearing in mind that this type of vague marker is often attributed to younger generations. Social class also influences the use of markers, and while *tipo* is attributed more to a bourgeois social class—*clase media alta* or «*pijos*» according to Mihatsch (2020, p. 700)—*style* also seems to belong to a wealthy social class. Various factors play a part in the strength and survival of the markers, including the age of the speakers and how they are transmitted. Popular music—whether pop, rap or trap—television series or social networks are all ways of ensuring that vague markers remain in our language.

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NOTES

¹ Translation: The word is borrowed from the Classical Latin *stilus*, which referred to any instrument consisting of a pointed shaft; in particular, it was the name of an iron or bone punch, the point being used to write on tablets. From there, *stilus* became a synonym for *scriptura* (*writing*) in rhetoric, and was used in a variety of ways: written exercise, way of writing, then manner, custom, usage (...) The word *style* was introduced in the thirteenth century in the form *estile* to designate a personal way of acting (...) *Style* came into use from the fourteenth century to designate, by metonymy of the name of the instrument, the tracing of someone's handwriting. The Latin of the rhetoricians was also used, with the meaning of "individual way of expressing oneself, of speaking", which did not develop until the Renaissance. (...) The Renaissance gave the word its current dominant meaning. *Style* (1548) refers to a way of composing, writing or speaking...

² Pre-classical French refers to the period between 1500 and 1650, while Classical French spans the years 1650 to 1789. Modern French is commonly defined as covering the period from 1789 to 1950. This periodization of the French language remains an area of ongoing study among diachronists.

³ There is a stylistic study on style and the word *style* in the 16th century (Kotler, 1997).

⁴ Tang Frères has been a leader in Asian and exotic foods in France since 1976.

⁵ Built example.