



A Perfect Match of Style and Subject: Remarks on the Style of

World Leaders Pay Tribute to Reagan

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Abstract

Style is very important in writing. When a style matches a subject, the subject can be well expressed. The author of the article “World Leaders Pay Tribute to Reagan” succeeds in using the right style to reflect the unforgettable solemnity of the state funeral for the former president and people’s deep memory of him. This paper intends to do some research on the successful match of the style and the subject of the article.

Keywords: Style, State funeral, Solemnity

1. Introduction

Style, though very hard to define academically, can be understood as a special manner of expression in writing. Text style is a very important type. It represents the writer’s tendency of linguistic choices, through which the style of a discourse may be racy, pompous, formal, journalistic, colloquial, rhetoric, inflammatory, etc..

The article entitled “World Leaders Pay Tribute to Reagan” is found in *The Guardian* on Saturday, June 12 2004. The style of this article, I think, is journalistic, formal, and rhetoric. The author is skilled in weaving them into a highly integrated unit.

2. The journalistic style attracts the reader at once

As for the journalistic style, this article can be interpreted and analyzed in two levels.

2.1 It is a news report in the inverted pyramid

A news report is usually written in an inverted pyramid marked as “▼”. The author usually gives the general elements at the very beginning: who, what, where, why, and how, and then goes into certain specific details.

Adopting this method, the author of this article makes things very clear and attracts the reader’s interest immediately. Only through the title and the lead of this article does the reader get the most important information: **world leaders** came to attend the ceremony of the state funeral for the former president. The reader becomes so seriously excited that he is eager to go on reading for details. The inverted pyramid really functions here!

2.2 It is a feature of a powerful semantic field

This article can be also interpreted as a feature. A feature is a special article in a newspaper about somebody or something to produce some special effect. Soon after giving the general elements at the beginning, the author describes the grand and solemn ceremony, the great respect for and the deep memory of the former president by using a lot of synonymous words and parallel phrases. These words and phrases are so well organized together as if to form a powerful semantic field!

Semantic field theory takes the view that the vocabulary of a language is not simply a listing of independent items, but is organized into fields, within which words interrelate and define each other in various ways. The author of this article, intuitive or conscious, succeeds in forming such a semantic field --- the special state funeral for the former president. To show the greatness and solemnity of the occasion, the author uses “pomp and ceremony” side by side. To express the

high level of the ceremony, the author describes the people who had the right to come as “icons of present and cold war eras, a stellar cast of world leaders and the greatest gathering of foreign dignitaries, the most powerful of the world, the high-powered assembly”. To achieve the solemnity, the author resorts to plenty of expressions like “masterful entrance”, “the hush of the National Cathedral”, “the regular tapping of the bishop’s staff on the marble floor”, “grandeur”, “greatest”, “restrained solemnities”, “final assignation”, “sirens blaring”, “limousine”, “cavalcade”, “hearse”. The feature is well done just by creating such a great and expressive field. Only in this field can the reader “experience” the grand, solemn, high-ranked, and unforgettable ceremony, and only by reading such a feature can the reader share everything with the author.

3. The formal style matches very well with such a serious subject

The subject of this article---world leaders pay tribute to former president Reagan---is a very serious one. Therefore, the author uses the formal style from the very beginning to the end. This matches everything with the subject and the subject is well expressed by the author’s careful and proper choice of formal words.

First, the author chooses a lot of formal words and phrases to show the formalness of the occasion, such as “stellar”, “dignitaries”, “salute”, “eulogy”, “overt”, “vignettes”, “assignation”, “personage”. Take “dignitary” and “vignette” as examples. Dignitary is a very formal word, meaning a person with a high rank or position. In this discourse “dignitaries” refers to “a stellar cast of world leaders, past and present, enemies and friends”. The word “vignette” has French origin meaning a short written description of something. It is well chosen here to refer to the very formal, authoritative, graceful and effective eulogy made by the 41st president George Bush Senior, the vice-president who worked for eight years with Reagan.

Second, the author lists as many high-ranked people as possible to show the importance of the ceremony. Besides the American presidents alive since 1974---Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, there came the very important leaders of some other countries---Britain’s prime minister, Tony Blair, Germany’s chancellor, Gerhard Schroder, and so forth. The greatest gathering of these important people showed that this funeral ceremony was, perhaps, of highest level in the world.

Third, the author skillfully describes the formalness of the procedures of the ceremony by using “the masterful entrance”, “the hush of the National Cathedral”, “the tapping of the bishop’s staff”, “the bringing-in of the Ronald Reagan’s casket at the beginning” and so on and so forth. The religious service “the regular tapping of the bishop’s staff on the marble floor” indicates the commencement of the state funeral; the eulogies made by George Bush Senior and George Bush Junior bring the ceremony to climax; the sirens blare and then become silent; the slow thrum of motorcycle engines in low gear announces the arrival of a cavalcade of black SUVs, limousines, and a hearse and also marks the end of three days of pomp and ceremony.

Fourth, the author makes the reader feel that the formal and solemn ceremony is all the more formal and valuable by giving a rough detailed description of the three leaders’ tributes. To show George Bush Senior’s deeper feeling and respect for Ronald Reagan, the author says Bush Senior “betrayed a more personal grief, choking slightly and saying” and cites the words of his eulogy, “As his vice-president for eight years, I learned more from Ronald Reagan than from anyone I encountered in all my years of public life.” To show the high praise of the present government, the author describes George Bush Junior’s tribute as “lengthy” to praise Ronald Reagan’s great commitment to freedom for which Reagan did his utmost to work for his people and cited, “Ronald Reagan belongs to the ages now, but we preferred it when he belonged to us, ...” which was, perhaps, the most powerful and unforgettable sentence. To tell the reader Reagan’s contemporary, Margaret Thatcher’s great passion and high praise, the author uses the very formal word “extolled”, and quotes her phrases and sentences, such as “eight of the most important years of our lives”, “crediting him with winning the cold war”, “Surely it is hard to deny that Ronald Reagan’s life was providential, when we look at what he achieved in the eight years that followed.” All this shows that the formal style and the serious subject match very well.

4. The rhetoric writing strengthens the expressiveness

To strengthen the solemnity of the state funeral and to show fully the respect of people for the former president, the author resorts to rhetoric writing by using some figures of speech skillfully.

4.1 Transferred Epithet

Transferred epithet is a figure of speech in which the epithet is transferred from the appropriate noun to modify another to which it does not really belong.

The phrase “a masterful entrance” in the first paragraph of the article is a good example. The word masterful is usually used with a person, meaning able to control others. But in the article, it is transferred to modify “entrance” to show that the entrance was so formal and solemn that it reflected the level of the funeral and marked the beginning of the pomp and ceremony, and the formalness and solemnity would go through the whole process.

4.2 Euphemism

Euphemism is the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant.

In order to show people's great respect and deep love for Reagan, the author manages to avoid using harsh and blunt words and expressions. Take the sentence "From the hush of the National Cathedral, ... as Ronald Reagan's casket was borne in ..." as an example. The word casket literarily means a small, usually ornamental box for holding jewels and valuable things. But here it is a much milder expression than "coffin" which would suggest an unpleasant feeling. Only "casket" is proper for such a state funeral held for the revered former president.

4.3 Metaphor

Metaphor is the use of a word or phrase to indicate something different from the literal meaning and achieve a vivid and impressive effect.

The word "vignette" means a drawing or photo of a scene or someone's head and shoulders. Figuratively, it means a short effective written description of a character. In this discourse it refers to George Bush Senior's written description of Ronald Reagan's character and greatness. By using this word, the author let the reader "see" or "experiencing" the life and work of the former president in the White House together with Gorge Bush Senior. It leaves the reader a picturesque impression.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the article of "World Leaders Pay Tribute to Reagan" is a good example of a perfect match of style and subject. It makes the reader share everything with the author. The success lies, perhaps, mainly in the right choice of style. The words and expressions are carefully chosen and organized, and the figures of speech were skillfully applied to match the style very well. Thus, such a subject is well expressed.

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