

THE FIGURE-GROUND RELATION AND STYLE

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Abstract

With reference to meaning construction, functional-cognitive linguistics often brings into focus the investigation of the figure-ground relation. The present paper approaches the figure-ground relation from the point of view of stylistics. That is, it asks and seeks answers to the question of how the figure-ground relation appears in style, and how we can describe this phenomenon of language. The questions of figure-ground relation are discussed first (1) theoretically, in general, and thereafter the (2) stylistic significance of this relationship will be treated. In the third part of the paper, (3) an analysis and interpretation of a (linguistic-)stylistic investigation with 60 informants is given. The informants highlighted in three texts the elements which, according to them, are in the foreground, that is, are salient (prominent), from the point of view of style, and then gave the grounds for their responses. This novel investigation in this field will not only serve to draw certain theoretical conclusions in this area, but also aims to be a starting point for further similar investigations. As a conclusion, it can be stated that the figure-ground relation has significant stylistic relevance, but the issues discussed here require further explanation and more extensive testing.

Keywords: figure-ground relation, salience, style attribution, stylistic potential of language, socio-cultural factors of style, the stylistic structure of texts

1. The figure-ground relation

This paper treats stylistic issues related to the figure-ground relation, and is looking for answers to such questions. While formulating these answers — especially concerning the new point of view of the questions — it is highly important to keep a balance between theory and practice. Therefore, and in this sense, this is a paper of mixed genres: along with the theoretical foundations, it will rely on empirical components as being equally important: on style analyses¹ (here only partially explained) and on empirical material — in a narrower sense, a simple stylistic investigation.

Several cognitive linguists stress the relevance of the figure-ground relation in language and, consequently, the relevance of this relation in language description (see for example: Langacker 1987: 120-122 and passim, Talmy 2000: 311—344, Talmy 2007; Tolcsvai Nagy 2001a: 48—50, 96, Kocsány 2005: 48—49, Hámori 2010: 42). “The figure/ground organiza-

¹ Style analysis is definitely separable from style attributions connecting the primary, i.e., first readings (see e.g., Jauss 1982), or rather from simple style classifications which here generally appear in the answers of the questionnaires presented and analysed here. Because style analysis is a systematic explanation of spontaneous style attributions and style effects in a clear conceptual framework, conceptual explanations based on the second, or, rather, numerous repeated readings, belong to its essence (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 1996: 255—258).

tion is a valid and fundamental feature of cognitive functioning. By the assumptions of cognitive grammar, the prevalence of figure/ground organization in conceptual structure entails its importance for semantic and grammatical structure as well” (Langacker 1987: 120).

However, research on this relation has been discussed in a detailed way only in a few, but undoubtedly significant areas of language description, namely in semantics and in text linguistics, and it is in these areas that this relation appears in analyses (for the most recent Hungarian examples, see Tolcsvai Nagy 2001a, 2010). In search of the new paths of style description, with the utilisation of the results of the most recent stylistic theories, and with the results of the two above-mentioned related disciplines, semantics and text linguistics, it is worth asking the question: how can stylistics benefit from taking this figure/ground relation into consideration?

As a starting point for the foundation of stylistic issues discussed below it is required at least briefly to sum up how functional-cognitive linguistics describes the role of the figure-ground relation. In the brief schematic presentation of the issue, I rely first on the overview of Tolcsvai Nagy (2001a: 48–49) that summarises the relevant notions of Chafe (1976) and Wallace (1982) also. According to that in the texts, **from both syntactic and semantic points of view, important, salient, and less important, less salient, units can be distinguished**. The distinction is based on ‘foregrounding’, that is, foregrounding in the operations of text production and text reception. Foregrounding is characteristic of the structure and the production of a text, which considers some elements of the text more important, prominent than the others and thus in text processing promotes these. The more salient linguistic categories are figure-like, the less salient ones are ground-like.

From the prominent and the less prominent linguistic categories, Tolcsvai Nagy (2001a: 48–49) lists the following on the basis of Wallace’s (1982: 212) summarising table:

<i>salient</i>	<i>less salient</i>
A	
human	non-human
animate	inanimate
proper noun	common noun
singular	plural
concrete	abstract
definite	indefinite
referential	non-referential
1 st , 2 nd person	3 rd person
countable	uncountable
B	
perfective	not perfective
present, immediate	not immediate, remote
event-like	not event-like
C	
transitive	intransitive
active voice	stative
intentional action	occasional action

D

main clause
foregroundsubordinate clause
background

The importance of figure-ground relation in language can be chiefly approached from the aspect of its role in the construal of meaning. Construal is the procedural (analytical) understanding and the conceptualisation of an event or a scene in some way of the several possible modes (Tolcsvai Nagy 2010: 31, cf. Langacker 2008). According to the tenets of functional-cognitive linguistics, the factors and operations of construal can be described in several ways (Langacker 2008: 55—89, Tolcsvai Nagy 2010: 30—48 and passim, Hámori 2010: 47—48). However, it is necessary here to treat at least two factors and operations to be considered: **perspectivisation** (the direction of attention) and **salience**.

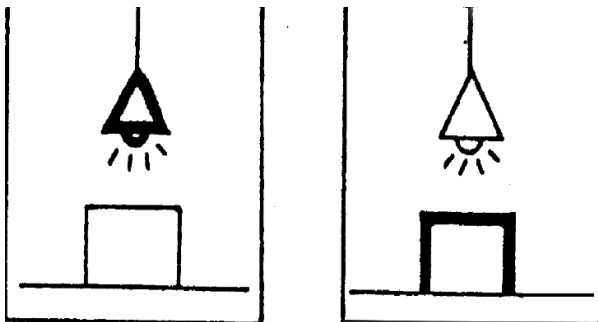
According to studies in cognitive linguistics, especially Langacker (1987, 2008), Talmy (1999), Tolcsvai Nagy (2010) and Hámori (2010), the following main factors may be highlighted briefly in the treatment of **perspectivisation** and **salience**: during the processing of a conceptual content, a framework of attention is always created in the dynamics of speech, including the focus of attention. Entities in the focus of attention are in the foreground and the rest of the attentional framework is in the background. Depending upon which component is in the foreground of attention, the same scene can be construed in several ways. As a simple example of this, let us recall Langacker's (1988: 60—61) "lamp-example", very often cited in the literature on perspectivisation. The following phrases differ from the point of view of the figure-ground relation (foregrounding): the point is that in the first sentence, the lamp as the primary figure is in foreground, while in the second sentence it is the table. The figure is to be understood within this scene as "a substructure perceived as 'standing' out" from the remainder (the ground) and which is attributed special prominence as the pivotal entity around which the scene is organised and for which it provides a setting" (Langacker 1987: 120, cited by Tolcsvai Nagy 1999: 161).

(1a) *The lamp is above the table.*

(1b) *The table is below the lamp.*

The same with Wildgen's (2008: 122) figure (cf. Langacker 1988: 60—61, Langacker 2008: 71):

Figure 1



With reference to **salience**, it is necessary to record the following by way of summary: salience means the attention that a linguistic unit draws on itself in discourse (in language use). That is, salience expresses how much a linguistic unit becomes prominent, outstanding. It should be noted, however, that — as Schmid (2007) and Hámori (2010: 49, 56-60) observe — in cognitive linguistics the concept of salience is used in different meanings.

First, one approach claims that we can talk about “**cognitive salience**”. In this case, salience means **easy accessibility**. According to this, the main feature of salient linguistic units is that minimal energy is required to process them in the construction of meaning (cf. e.g. Langacker 2008: 97, Schmid 2007: 119, Hámori 2010: 57—58). This approach considers as “salient” concepts which have already been activated, which could be more quickly available in the construction of meaning in the speech process, or are directly accessible. Non-activated concepts are, therefore, non-salient. Accordingly, those meanings are considered salient which are first activated, independently of the contextual circumstances. These meanings are stored in the mental lexicon, and precede other meanings as far as conventionality, frequency, routine and prototypicality, in brief, entrenchment, are concerned.

In other approaches — and in this paper I follow these — salience has no relation to the temporal activation of concepts (meanings), but have a clear relation to **prominence (conspicuousness)**. Langacker identifies salience and prominence in this sense (2008: 66) and treats them as interchangeable notions. Schmid (2007: 120) mentions **ontological salience** in this meaning, which comes from the characteristics of an entity. Schmid’s (2007: 120) example from the area of visual perception illustrates clearly how closely connected this approach to salience is with the figure-ground relation and attention. The example is the following: a dog that we see running across a meadow has much greater attention-attracting potential, that is, salience (arising from its attributes) than the meadow, across which it is running. Consequently, the observer of the scene will pay more attention to the dog than to the meadow.

Following Langacker (1987: 307—310), Hámori (2010: 57—58) stresses the important difference between **ontological** or **intrinsic salience** and **salience arising from construal and arrangement**. For instance, an intrinsic property that creates salience is “humanness”, “being human”, while the figure/ground or the foreground/background arrangement is the result of construal (cf. Langacker 2008: 66—73).

From a stylistic point of view, **relative salience** also deserves special attention. It highlights, or rather, expresses the extent to which a linguistic unit is conspicuous; that is, how prominent it is because of its position or the violation of a norm, expectation, or unexpectedness in the context, etc. (cf. Schmid 2007, Talmy 2007, Verschueren 1999: 183, Hámori 2010: 58).

It is a fundamental issue from a stylistic point of view how the figure-ground alignment and the relationships between salience and style may be uncovered. That is, to answer the question of when the difference generated through foregrounding is **of stylistic character**. Between sentences (1a) and (1b) there is no such stylistic difference. At first sight, it does not seem simple to attach stylistic differences to Talmy’s figure-ground system (2000: 315—316) which is more elaborated than Wallace’s aforementioned model. Talmy contrasts figure and ground as follows:

Figure	Base
Has unknown spatial (or temporal) properties to be determined	Acts as a reference entity, having known properties that can characterize the Figure's unknowns
more movable	more permanently located
smaller	larger
geometrically simpler (often point-like) in its treatment	geometrically more complex in its treatment
more recently on the scene/in awareness	more familiar/expected
of greater concern/relevance	of lesser concern/relevance
less immediately perceivable	more immediately perceivable
more salient, once perceived	more backgrounded, once Figure is perceived
more dependent	more independent

It is verifiable, too, that these opposites — more specifically, differences from schematic neutral constructions to be derived from those opposites — may have stylistic aspects. For example, a specific style may result from the inversion of usual figure-ground relation (cf. ironic-metaphorical meaning: ‘*gombhoz varrja a kabátot*’ [a Hungarian phrase meaning ‘he sews the jacket to the button’, i.e., ‘something is made after having a negligible part of it only’]). Likewise, a specific style may result from the change of the ratio of figure and ground (there are more figure-like elements), etc.

As the example of Bańczerowski (2000: 43) shows, the difference between active and passive structures is also based on the difference in formation (Gestaltung, Formierung) similar to the figure-ground relation: “the difference between *activum* and *passivum* can be explained in this way: *John beats Peter* and *Peter is beaten by John*. When the *activum* is changed into *passivum*, a decision is made concerning the primary figure as well.” The contrast between *activum* and *passivum* has only a relatively small stylistic relevance in Hungarian. However, the German active and passive (Vorgangspassiv) structure relation makes an important stylistic difference:

(2a) *Er übersetzt das Buch. (He translates the book.)*

(2b) *Das Buch wird von ihm übersetzt. (The book is translated by him.)*

(3a) *Der Lehrer lobt den Schüler. (The teacher praises the student.)*

(3b) *Der Schüler wird vom Lehrer gelobt. (The student is praised by the teacher.)*

The grammatical possibilities of perspective changes and active and passive structures produce a clear stylistic difference. According to the statistics of Eroms (2009: 1605), for example, only in 1.5% of German literary style, more precisely, within poems, do passive structures occur, while in everyday conversation (in colloquial/conversational style) this ratio is 10.5%. In the scientific registers this is 25%, and 26% in formal style. In analysing the role

of passive in style, Eroms (2009) also points out that such structures in the scientific style have neutral stylistic effects, but if they appear in contexts where their presence is unexpected, this increases the value of their stylistic effect, and they come into the foreground. This, however, leads us to the next point, to the issue of the importance of the figure-ground relation in style.

2. The importance of figure-ground relation in style

Speaking in a general way, concerning the importance of figure-ground relation, let it be made clear that stylistic foregrounding cannot be identified easily with the striking or surprising elements in a text that demand more attention. On the other hand, style can only be seen and is only “activated” when certain linguistic units come into the foreground, that is, when they come into the centre of attention as figures² (Tolcsvai Nagy 2005: 33—37). Notable examples of this fact are those figures of addition (*adiectio*) which place an element that is not prototypically foregrounded in the primary figure position with repetition. Following an example and analysis by Tolcsvai Nagy (2006: 640), we will look at the way this appears in the use of language:

(4a) *It will take a very, very long time to achieve our goals.*

(4b) *It will take a very long time to achieve our goals.*

With respect to the figure-ground relation and to attention directing (cf. e.g. Talmy 2007), the expression *very, very long* in (4a) is worth being analysed compared to *very long* in (4b). While in (4b), the adverbial complement of *long* is not in the foreground, is not the primary figure, in (4a) the special activation (which is special because it is repeated after the preceding activation) places the prototypically not foregrounded adverbial complement, and consequently the repeating operation itself, into the foreground. So the structure *very, very long* becomes relevant from a stylistic point of view. The most general meaning of repetition in (4a) is the increase of quantity, with the effect of emphasis. The figure-status of repetition “can be grasped in its character of differing from conventionalised and expected [structures] and in differing from a necessary measure of accessibility, which is likewise expected and conventionalised, though less routinized” (Tolcsvai Nagy 2006: 640).

Investigation with goals to describe the different types and procedures of “stylistic focusing” related to the figure-ground relation have significant, but different traditions in linguistics that can be linked to diverse linguistic and stylistic theories and thus to different methodologies (cf. Hoffmann 2009). Some authors, for example, discuss expressivity, prominent identities (congruence) or striking antitheses of texts, the degree of prominence, and the so-called “information profile” (von Stufen der Auffälligkeit und einem stilistischen Informationsprofil) in this sense. The latter terms express that certain elements of the text remain in the background and do not show up in the horizon of text processing, while others come into focus and will be prominent in terms of style. As an example, it is worth briefly mentioning Hoffmann’s (2009: 1536—1540) relevant summary which presents the following types and procedures of figure position and prominence creating “stylistic focusing”:

² “Style appears in the case when the formations of certain expressions are foregrounded, i.e. drawn in the focus of attention as a figure” (Tolcsvai Nagy 2005: 33).

- Isomorphism: different types of repetition, for example epizeuxis, figura etymologica, anaphor, epistrophe (epiphora), paronomasia, alliteration, parallelism, etc.
- Contrast: for example, chiasmus, antithesis, question and answer alternation, style-shifting (style-switching): shifting along linguistic variables and between stylistic layers of a language.
- Deviation: while isomorphism and contrast have reference to relations within a text, the phenomenon of deviation, in this sense, is directed outside the text. Because the recognition, detection of the difference is based on linguistic knowledge resulting from operations with previously recognised, processed texts, deviation means difference from generalised rules, norms, conventions abstracted from these texts. In this sense, deviation subsumes, for example, enallage, hyperbole, hysteron proteron, synesthesia, paradox, zeugma, and the violation of suitability (aptum).

Hoffman's (2009) above-mentioned system treats only one subset of elements getting into a figure-position from the point of view of stylistics, concentrating mainly on rhetorical figures and devices. The methodology of the systematisation raises questions, too. For example, the classified figures of isomorphism and contrast enumerated here can be considered as "deviations" in a certain sense. Also, non-homologous elements have been listed within one category; for example, question-and-answer alternation among the figures of contrast, etc. Nevertheless, "stylistic focusing" may be considered as one of the options for the further investigation of the relationship between the figure-ground relation and style.

Summarising the above mentioned issues (including the issues mentioned under point 1) as relevant questions in connection with the figure-ground relation and style as such, the following can be asked:

A) In direct concern with the oppositions of Wallace (1982: 212), Tolcsvai Nagy (2001a: 48—49) and Talmy (2000: 315—316) cited above, characterising the figure-ground relation in general:

1. What kind of relationship exists between these opposition systems, primarily Talmy's model, and the notions, methods and procedures of stylistic description?
2. Is it necessary to supplement the items listed with opposites traditionally regarded stylistic, and if so, how is that possible? (For example: figurative — non-figurative [language], metaphorical — not metaphorical, etc.).

B) Further important questions, related to the above, include the following:

1. What are the stylistically relevant prominent — less prominent pairs?
2. How can the prototype principle and scalarity be applied in the stylistic description of the figure-ground relation?
3. How are different types of texts to be treated with respect to the figure-ground relation, especially literary texts?

3. Style and salience — the results of a stylistic investigation

3.1. Research methodology

The main goal of the investigation described below was to obtain data which can be used in an empirical approach to stylistic issues related to the figure-ground relation. For this I had the informants choose the salient (prominent) linguistic units from the point of view of style, and I asked about their reasons, too.

There are several methods for collecting and processing linguistic data, as generally known. Each of them has its own limitations, so a (relatively) complete picture is obtained only with the simultaneous use of different methods (cf. e.g. Kiss 1998: 257). With regard to the qualitative/quantitative dichotomy, the method used here is closer to the first one. The use of this method otherwise follows from the principles of scientific methodology, because qualitative methods are more commonly used in relatively unexplored areas of research. In this paper, the following main features of qualitative research appear: although the issues to be discussed were predefined, in the course of research I handled these flexibly; from the statistical procedures only the simple types were used; my preliminary assumptions were also open and less specific; an important role had been assigned to the new questions and aspects which were arising in processing the questionnaires, and I tried to analyze the phenomena contextually.

The questionnaire study, briefly, was aimed at bringing to light what kind of linguistic units the informants qualified as being in the foreground, that is in the focus of attention, in the given texts and why. In addition, the questionnaire gave an opportunity for informants to formulate what meanings the recipients ascribe to linguistic units which come into the foreground as figures in style (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 2001b).

As a result of the lack of existing good practices (at least, for myself, I know of no such questionnaire or such investigations), the methodology could be outlined in general terms and not necessarily in the most apt way.³ However, the study of Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy (2001b), titled “A comparative analysis of style values in two daily news items, based on recipient answers” may be regarded as an antecedent of this paper. In the present paper, I have considered several methodological lessons of this study. Some of the issues raised by Tolcsvai Nagy, or issues relevant to them concern my questionnaire also, and although they are not placed in the focus of the analysis of the questionnaires, I find it necessary to mention them here:

1. Is it (roughly) the same or (significantly) different linguistic units that come into the foreground in the informants’ text processing and style attribution?
2. Do the informants attribute the same or different stylistic values to the same texts or parts of texts?
3. What is the cause of the same or different responses, and to what extent do socio-cultural factors influence this?
4. Is there any essential difference between everyday and literary texts as regards style attribution?
5. With what kind of method is it possible to establish and treat the received data in a conceptual framework?

³ This concerns the selection of informants, to the methods of data processing, etc.

3.2. About the informants

The questionnaires were filled out by 60 people. I did not randomly choose the participants, because a certain age and education level was necessary to fill in the questionnaire to yield understandable and appropriate answers. Some knowledge of stylistics was felt to be necessary, too, to receive justifications for the answers, which, in harmony with the purposes of this research, can be analyzed. Consequently, the youngest informants were aged 17—18 (23 persons), most of the others (32 persons) belonged to the 19 to 40 years age group. As regards the level of education of the informants, the following major groups are found: a) the youngest informants were secondary school students in grade 11 (23 persons), b) students of different higher education courses (higher vocational students, BA students, MA students — 30 persons) formed a second, bigger group, c) the third group included intellectuals and graduates, with a relatively broad spectrum of qualifications (graphic artist, information specialist, teacher, etc. — 7 persons).

3.3. The questionnaire texts

Three texts⁴ were selected for an introductory survey of the issues which can be discussed here:

Text (1)

Greece

(Sometimes: New Greece, officially Hellas), a kingdom in south-eastern Europe. The country increased with the Ionian Islands on 14 November 1863, which had constituted a till then separate state under English protectorate. The Berlin Conference (June 1880) complemented it with Thessaly and a part of Epirus, and thus it enlarged the country considerably, so that now (including the islands) it comprises the area between 35° 50' and 39° 54' degrees of North Latitude, and 19° 20' and 26° 10' degrees of East Longitude. It is connected only on the north side with Turkey (through Albania and Macedonia), whereas in the direction of the other three cardinal points it is bounded by sea everywhere (on the east by the Archipelagus, on the south by the Mediterranean Sea, on the west by the Ionian Sea). The country has three main parts: northern Greece, the Morea peninsula and the islands.

Text (2)

North Greece

The Greek mainland is bordered on the north by Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria, on the east by Turkey and the Aegean Sea, and on the south and west by the Mediterranean and the Ionian Seas. Although 20% of the country's territory is composed by 2000 islands, the ancient towns (Athos, Sparta, Delphi) located on the mainland are the cradles of European civilization. The favourable geographical conditions and climate, the variety of the Mediterranean scenery, its wild romantic mountains towering above 1500 metres, the long, sandy and rocky

⁴ In fact I used three excerpts from different passages in questionnaire, but these served in the survey as texts.

beaches, the Greek people's hospitality, the delicious cuisine and the holiday resorts of North Greece provide the visiting guests with a possibility of enjoyable and varied recreation. The Chalkidiki peninsula is popular for its lush flora, its hidden, romantic coves, excellent diver places, and the Olympic Riviera for its wide, fine grained, gently sloping beach.

Text (3)

Mihály Babits: Far... far away⁵ ...

Spain, with fancy hues embroider'd meadow.
 The castle throws a broken shadow.
 Upon the balcony a downcast donna sits
 Her musing o'er the purple sunset flits.
 Italy, rippling cloudlets in the high.
 Balmy zephyrs 'neath the azure sky
 Splashing fountains, crystal waters flow,
 Shattered marbles, myrtle crowns of long ago.

Greece. Barren cliffs, ruins of ancient age,
 Bleak cliffs where mist and fog constantly rage.
 Sterile the earth and heavy is the air.
 Pine tree, flock and shepherd everywhere.

(Translated by William N. Loew)

The source of text (1) is the "Pallas Nagy Lexikona" (Pallas Great Encyclopaedia), published between 1893 and 1897 in sixteen volumes by Pallas Literature and Printing Co. This was a comprehensive synthesis of science being the first independent, i.e. not translated, Hungarian encyclopaedia. The text used here is a part of the longer encyclopaedia entry on Greece. There are two main reasons of choice to be mentioned. Firstly: the style of the text as an encyclopaedia entry shows specific features. They include figure-like, prominent ele-

⁵ Babits Mihály: Messze... messze...

Spanyolhon. Tarka hímű rét.
 Tört árnyat nyujt a minarét.
 Bus donna barna balkonon
 mereng a bibor alkonyon.

Olaszhon. Göndör fellegek.
 Sötét ég lanyhul fülfeteg.
 Szökökut véze fölbuzog.
 Tört márvány, fáradt mirtuszok.

Göröghon. Szirtek, régi rom,
 ködöt pipáló bús orom.
 A lég sűrű, a föld kopár.
 Nyáj, pásztorok, fenyő, gyopár.

ments coming into the foreground, for example style characteristics of wording and sentence structure, conciseness being attached to the objective expertise, etc. On the other hand, the entry shows foregrounded linguistic units, which, in view of the text being more than a hundred years old (issued in 1894), are archaic according to the historical (temporal) components of socio-cultural factors. So I thought that these two particular aspects would figure in the majority of the style attributions, that is, the majority of replies to the questionnaire.

The source of text (2) is a brochure of OTP Travel Agency. The primary reason of my choice of this text was the contact in theme with the first one, the difference from which can afford good (better) possibilities for the perception of the differences in style. From among these, according to my preliminary hypotheses, I expected mainly the mention of style characteristics, which, compared to the conciseness and objectivity of the encyclopaedia entry, are prominent, and are in harmony with the persuasive function (“advertisement flavour”) of the passage. For example, as regards the socio-cultural factors of style in the domain of value I had expected the highlighting of elements with value saturation (*cradle of European civilization, favourable geographical conditions and climate, variety of Mediterranean scenery, towering 1500 m above, wild romantic mountains*), as well as on highlighting of ornate-literary elements, which are associated with the primary function of the persuasive text type (genre), for example the frequency and typicality of meaning specification with attributes (*lush flora, hidden, romantic coves, excellent diver places, wide, fine grained, gently sloping beach*).

Since this is a contemporary text (from 2011), likewise — mainly in contrast with the previous text — I had expected the informants to highlight, according to socio-cultural factors of style in the domain of time, the fact that it is a relatively modern (novel) text. For example, the following linguistic constructions — according to my own style attribution — are relatively novel, because they have only appeared in similar prospectuses in the last two decades: *provide the visiting guests with a possibility of enjoyable and varied recreation, popular for its wide, fine grained, gently sloping beach*).

The third text (an excerpt actually) is taken from a well-known poem of Mihály Babits, which is linked thematically to the previous two texts by its third stanza. The style of this text has in itself, and in particular in relation to the previous two texts, elements prominently widespread in lyric texts, specifically in a literary-historical period and in the individual style characteristic of Babits. The main features to be mentioned here are: increased musicality and nominal structures (nominal style) in the stanza concerning Greece. To demonstrate how these features of style are striking, I quote from a study in which, compared with the type of analysis usual in similar studies, the presentation of the characteristics of style are foregrounded. Of course, this analysis is interesting also from the viewpoint of what the analyst highlights in the poem’s style. According to my preliminary assumptions, these are the elements that I also had expected the informants to emphasise: “Of the nine stanzas of ‘Far ... far away ...’ eight are the characterisations of different countries of a similar number with postcard-brevity and, in accordance with this, with **grammatical conciseness**. The “externalization” of words and images [their applications as symbols — P.J.] is excellently suitable for the anzix-like presentation of a country. The overture, that is, the postcard of Spain is the most famous, and a little ill-famed on account of its alliterations. [...] The alliterations of Babits are interpreted as ‘ornaments’ even by the excellent literary historian and linguist Katalin J. Soltész. This stanza proves exactly the opposite. [...] in the **rhyme harmony at the end of lines** the opening lines already symbolize

the mirage of a fabulously coloured country in a concrete form. [...] The unique character of the lyricism of the poem is defined not by the alliterations, but by its **nominal sentences** with a function of intensifying meaning. [...] The nominal sentences of ‘Far... far away...’, in a style that precedes ‘word-poems’, revive the situation of the medieval storyteller who told stories in the marketplaces with the use of pictures. The poem is a borderline case of the thirst for the infinite, an unparalleled work of art, but every word represses a feeling of tension; personality bleeds through its plastic, sometimes **picturesque collocations**” (Rába 1981: 169—170).

The questionnaire formulated the following questions and tasks for the informants:

Please underline those parts (or the whole text) in the following texts, whose style is interesting, **prominent, particularly striking, perhaps unusual** for you. Please attach a short description: why do you regard the parts marked as such?

3.4. The foregrounded (salient) linguistic units from the point of view of style in the analysed texts

I am going to analyse the linguistic units marked in the questionnaires from three main aspects: what, how often and for what reasons did the informants mark it?

3.4.1. The analysis of the answers of informants in each text

In the following charts, which summarise the responses of informants, only those units are represented which are marked by at least 10% of the informants, that is, at least 6 people.

Table 1.

In text (1) the informants marked the following linguistic units as prominent from the point of view of style:

	Marked linguistic units	Number of markers
1.1.	<i>increased with</i>	16
1.2.	<i>complemented</i>	15
1.3.	<i>enlarged (considerably)</i>	14
1.4	<i>comprises the area [...] between 19° 20' and 26° 10' degrees of East Longitude</i>	7
1.5.	<i>protectorate</i>	6

Table 2.

Units marked as prominent in text (2) by the informants from the point of view of style:

	Marked language units	Number of markers
2.1.	<i>the favourable geographical conditions and climate, variety of Mediterranean scenery; towering above 1500 metres; wild romantic mountains; long, sandy and rocky beaches; the Greek people's hospitality; delicious cuisine and the holiday resorts of North Greece provide the visiting guests with a possibility of enjoyable and varied recreation.</i>	20 ⁶
2.2.	<i>The Chalkidiki peninsula is popular for its lush flora, its hidden, romantic coves, excellent diver places, and the Olympic Riviera for its wide, fine grained, gently sloping beach.</i>	6

Only some informants marked smaller language units, words, word-groups: *romantic coves* (3), *lush* (2), *the cradle of European civilization* (2) etc.

Table 3.

In text (3), the informants marked the following language units as prominent from the point of view of style:

	Marked linguistic units	Number of markers
3.1.	Some (4 or more) parts or lines, which are far from each other, mostly these units: <i>Spanyolhon</i> (archaic form of <i>Spain</i>); <i>hímü rét</i> (in the translation of poem: <i>with fancy hues embroider'd meadow</i>); <i>minarét</i> (archaic form of minaret, in the translation of poem: <i>castle</i>); <i>Bus donna barna balkonon</i> (in the translation of poem: <i>Upon the balcony a downcast donna sits</i>); <i>Olaszhon</i> (archaic form of <i>Italy</i>); <i>Göröghon</i> (archaic form of <i>Greece</i>).	11
3.2.	The whole text	8

It is important to stress that there were not any informants who did not find prominent elements in any of the texts.

⁶ Of the 20 informants, 9 people marked the whole sentence, 11 informants marked from it 1500 metres or from the romantic the sentence throughout. These highlights I treat here together.

3.4.2. Analysis of the informants' answers in the light of hypotheses

My most important preliminary hypotheses (besides the above, mentioned in the presentation of the texts) were the following:

- The informants will highlight **several individual and a lot of collectively prominent style elements** (because supposedly they will mark different language units to a relevant degree).
- A **considerable difference** will occur between the reception of the three texts' style as to how many prominent style elements the informants mark. I expected a larger number of highlighting in the last text.
- I definitely expected the highlighting of (rhetorical-stylistic) figures in the poem by Babits (alliteration, enumeration, parallelism, rhyme; e.g. *Tört márvány, fáradt mirtuszok* [Shattered marbles, myrtle crowns of long ago], *A lég sűrű, a föld kopár* [Sterile the earth and heavy is the air], etc).
- I assumed that the prominent linguistic units would receive **positive assessments** in most cases.
- These assumptions were confirmed only in a relatively small part.
- The informants highlighted individually just a relatively small number of linguistic units, one to two units per text. However, looking at the answers or rather the highlights in their totality, we get another picture. Even if we consider the highlighted units marked at least by 10% of the informants, we can see that in the first text there are five of these units. In text (2), although only two units were highlighted, these two sentences make up more than half of the text. A specific situation occurs in the last text which more informants marked as a whole or highlighted a lot of (4 or more) units as stylistically prominent ones. All in all, **a relatively large number of elements** were marked from a stylistic point of view by a significant number of informants.
- Comparing the three texts to one another from the aspect of how many stylistically prominent linguistic units were marked by the informants, there were **relevant differences** between the reactions. Although this can be seen not as a general phenomenon, only as a tendency, yet the results outlined a clear gradual difference: in text (1) only a few words, in text (2) the last two sentences, and text (3) as a whole were prominent for the informants.
- My assumptions concerning the figures of text (3) and concerning the stylistics of implication were only partially confirmed, as these style elements were highlighted only in a small part of the responses. At least they were not directly marked: that is, the **figures** (alliteration, enumeration, parallelism, rhyme) were not specifically highlighted, but it can be assumed that the figures played a role in the style attribution of those informants who described the style of the whole poem as prominent.
- With respect to stylistic effect, in contrast with my hypothesis referring to (stylistic) suitability and efficiency (cf. e.g. Sandig 2006: 34–36), **positive evaluations were not clearly in the majority**. In many cases, there was no such evaluation, or the informants gave negative evaluations. For example, neutral evaluation about the highlighted words of text (1): “unusual usage”, negative evaluation: “it often uses foreign terms, which makes understanding difficult”; “in such a text the use of such words is im-

proper.” One of the informants, who marked the parts of text (2) included in Table 2 (2.1. and 2.2.), writes the following about the enumeration: “(in the text) there are an awful lot of enumerations, and when one finishes and interprets the long sentence, he or she forgets the beginning.” Also another condemning opinion: “very loose, there is too much information in one sentence.” However, opposite evaluations of this part also appear, such as: “The long enumeration presents [northern Greece] briefly but effectively.” “Attracts attention extremely well. The enumeration makes you feel you want to go there.” “Accurate description... so you can easily imagine the landscape.” There is an evaluation in which the positive and negative ratings are mixed: “tourist-luring text, nicely worded. But it is PRETENTIOUS! (sic)”.

3.4.3. The stylistic potential of language, the socio-cultural factors and the structural possibilities of style

It is worth surveying the answers and highlights of informants from the three main aspects of complex linguistic style description (cf. e.g. Tolcsvai Nagy 2005, 2006). These are the aspect of the stylistic potential of language, the socio-cultural factors, and possibilities pertaining to the stylistic structure of texts.

3.4.3.1. The style options resulting from the stylistic potential of language

The style options resulting from the linguistic potential are almost endless (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 2006: 632), so in the three analysed texts a relatively broad spectrum of the relevant phenomena can be found. From among these I treat some which can be considered typical.

The role of phonological access: the style options of the sounds and rhythms — As the informants encountered only written texts in the investigation, the domain of sounds and rhythms have a limited role. However, it can be assumed that the reading process is always complemented by a phonological decoding, “the sound association exists too in the graphic visualization of sounds, and the reader creates a grapho-phonemic environment in the reading process [...] and internally updates the sounding of the unique sound” (Spillner 1984: 77). Despite their limited role, there were some style attributions, although in a small number, which were focused on phonological characteristics of the texts. For example: “I enjoy the poem, because the whole verse is melodic.” Several informants highlighted the line containing alliteration in the Babits poem: *Bús donna barna balkonon (Upon the balcony a downcast donna sits)*.

Word, lexicon — The informants often highlighted (see Tables 2 and 3) larger linguistic units: syntactic units or greater parts of the texts, or the whole text. In this respect only the first text differs, because there mostly words came into the focus of attention. The stylistics of word and lexicon generally is easily accessible in the system of socio-cultural variables (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 1996, 2005). Since in questionnaires words are highlighted, as shown in the explanations, based mainly on socio-cultural components, I am discussing those issues focusing on socio-cultural factors (see below).

Sentence — According to Tolcsvai Nagy, the most important general variables of sentence stylistics are the following: short — medium — long, simple — average — complex (not from a grammatical point of view, but as a degree of the complexity of sentence structure

perceived by the text producer or by recipient), constructed — non-constructed, left-to-right construction — right-to-left construction (1996: 207). According to the explications in the questionnaires among these variables the most prominent was the ‘simple — average — complex’ domain. For example, about part 2.1. (see Table 2) the informants wrote the following: “the underlined part is very loose, there is too much information in one sentence.” Another informant: “It’s strange because it huddles a lot of information together. I would have written several sentences.” This style attribution in another context I have already quoted above: “(in the text) there are an awful lot of enumerations, and when one finishes and interprets the long sentence, he or she forgets the beginning.”

Meaning — According to the data from the questionnaires, none of the texts pushes style phenomena in the domain of meaning characteristically into foreground. Texts (1) and (2), from point of view of semantic stylistics, are neutral. By contrast, in the case of the Babits poem, the mentioning of implication and (less importantly) figurativity (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 1996: 238—243) had been expected. But they only very rarely appear in the responses: for example, in the explication of the reason of highlighting „*ködöt pipáló bus orom*” (in the above mentioned translation: *Bleak cliffs where mist and fog constantly rage; literally: fog smoking sad cliffs*), the informant said: “landscape elements endowed with human characteristics”. And one more example, in the justification for the prominence of the whole poem’s style: “the adjective structures of the poem are unusual, they are images saturated with emotion”.

3.4.3.2. The socio-cultural factors of style

Analyzing the survey from this perspective, we find the style attributions in the domain of time to be the most important from the five variables: attitude, situation, value, time, and language varieties (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 1996: 133-166, 2006: 642-646). In the case of texts (1) and (3) those linguistic units, mostly words, often came into foreground and became prominent that were assessed as archaic. Some examples from assessments of the words *megnövesztette* (*enlarged*) and *megszaporodott* (*increased*) (text (1)): “the two words next to each other remind me of old times”, “It seems so archaic. Today they are not used often.” About the Babits poem: “the poet uses archaic words”, “it is archaically formulated”, „archaic style, but then the whole poem is”, “the whole poem is so strange and archaic.”

Within the socio-cultural factors, the domain of language varieties appears in the following assessment: the first text is “too professional, there are too many geographical terms in it.” The word *vadregényes* (*wildromantic*; text (2)) “is used rather in fairy tales, and not in scientific texts”, another opinion about the same text: “a little poetic, so it does not fit in the text.” This aspect clearly dominated in the case of the Babits poem: 11 informants highlighted 4 or more separate parts of the text, and 8 informants highlighted the whole text as prominent from the point of view of style. This is a total of 19 people, that is, almost one-third of the informants. However, the informants did not highlight „scattered”, i.e. distant text-units in the case of the first two texts to such a degree, and only one informant highlighted the whole of text (2).

From all this it is clear — as I had assumed, although not anticipating such a large divergence — that the features of literary style came into the foreground of attention in this case. It must be added that these are perceptions of literary style relevant to a specific period. In this context it is interesting that the informant who highlighted the whole text (2), stressed precisely those style

features which are associated with literature: “the wording is poetic, expressive.” Some related examples from among the style-assessments of the informants who highlighted the whole text (3): “elegant, not common wording”, “it is rich in expressions, ‘appealing’”, “the wording is poetic, expressive”, “in the poem the poet uses words that do not occur in everyday language.”

By way of summary, from the aspect of socio-cultural factors we can establish the following facts: on the one hand, the informants highlighted style elements that were looked upon as archaic or unfamiliar, i.e. these style elements did not meet their expectations relating to this text type. In the case of text (3), on the other hand, although the style of Babits’s poem conformed to their expectations regarding the text type of lyrical poems, they highlighted a number of prominent (salient) elements or the whole text.

3.4.3.3. The structural options of style

Discussing the structural options of style, we are to treat two major, partly related aspects: style structure and the system of figures (see Tolcsvai Nagy 1996: 245—254). The style structure of the text includes the following relationships: those between foregrounded text elements with respect to style; those between the foregrounded elements and the coherence-creating constituents, and those between the foregrounded elements and text type (Tolcsvai Nagy 2005: 112). Regarding the structural possibilities of style, one illustrative explication goes like this: one of the informants who highlighted a passage from text (2) (see Table 2, point 2) designates the reason of foregrounding with this structural feature: “the highlighted part differs in style from the preceding part of the text, because it is rather a more factual description.” A similar example characterizing the whole of text (2): “the part starts with scientific fullness of details, but the rest of the text is more like an offer for tourists.” From figures, only enumerations came to the fore: mainly with markings, to a lesser extent in the explications; an example: part 2.2. is a “continuous enumeration.”

4. Conclusions and open questions

A questionnaire similar to the one outlined above, i.e. one whose tasks are simple and uses short texts and works with relatively few informants obviously does not give a ground sufficient for broad generalizations. My aim was only to raise and indicate certain issues relating to style and the figure-ground relation. This means that the results can be a basis or can be rejected as a model for further surveys with similar intentions. That is, the results outlined above, together with the results of further analyses and developments in this theme may provide an opportunity for thinking over certain methods and questions. In this way we may also receive an opportunity to elaborate more efficient procedures with the aim to clarify the relation between the figure-base relation and style, and to clarify essential theoretical and practical issues.

Some conclusions, however, based on the above considerations can be formulated:

- a) From informant responses, we can only partially detect why certain linguistic units came into the foreground from the point of view of style. But some factors are clear. First of all, a linguistic unit is prominent when it is unusual, that is, when there is a tension between the type-specific expectations of the recipients and the instantiated text

style (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 2001b). In connection with the stylistic relevance of unusualness of the expressions in the explanation, it should be noted that it is a fundamental principle in usage-based linguistics that frequency plays a determining role in language. “Frequency from the point of view of the individual is a routine (skill) that is the scale of an individual’s language competence”, and from the point of view of the community, it is “conventionality that gives the degree of acceptance of linguistic expressions and linguistic structures” (Tolcsvai Nagy 2010: 13). In the explanations of informants, there are often references to the lack of routinization/conventionality in the case of all three texts: “it is unusual”, “it is not much used”, “unusual usage of a word”, etc.

- b) The fact that the scope of stylistically prominent linguistic units is the same with the majority of informants indicates in itself that foregrounding, or salience from the point of view of style, is relevant (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 2001b).
- c) The classifications, comments and explanations of informants in the case of texts 2 and 3 confirmed the assumption that style attribution is done primarily holistically. The style of a text appears primarily as a whole (Gesamtgestalt) in the text’s reception (cf. e.g. Sandig 2006: passim, Sandig 2008: 1108).

It can be determined as part of the general frame for further research that a smaller or larger linguistic unit has a stylistically relevant role when it comes into the foreground of the attention of the text producer or text recipient. The characteristics of style have a role in meaning construction as well. The stylistic value of a linguistic expression depends on the opportunities given by the text, and notably on the recipient’s interpretation, by his or her linguistic horizon (cf. Tolcsvai Nagy 1996, 2005). The further investigation of these factors is one of the important tasks and possibilities of functional cognitive stylistics.

Sources of Texts

Text (1): Latkóczy, Mihály: Görögország. In: [A] *Pallas Nagy Lexikona. VIII. kötet*. Budapest: Pallas Irodalmi és Nyomdai Rt. 1894. 175.

Text (2): Külföldi utak. *Az OTP Travel katalógusa*. 2011. nyár. 38.

Text (3): Babits, Mihály: Messze... messze... In: B. M.: *Összegyűjtött versei*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó. 1982. 13.

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