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| Is Concept of ‘Style’ Used or Abused in Psychology? | |  | Psychology |
| | | | Keywords: style, content, text, discourse analysis, cognitive style, scientific generalization, individuality. |
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| Abstract | | | |
| <p>The concept of style is very common in Psychology. Tracking that stylistic approach, we were interested, is this approach just on the level of use, or probably, it is overused, or even its abused. In order to obtain basic information that can lead us further, we conduct analysis of the Encyclopedia Dictionary (content, text and discourse analysis), following strict methodological procedure. We figured out that there is a stylistic intention, and that although the style is not explained as a key concept in the dictionary, it was used for explanation of different concepts, both alone or as a part of complex concept. Although, its most prominent usage was as cognitive style, as a word "style" it was mentioned 691 times, or one word "style" on every sixth page. We suppose that stylistic approach in psychology is offering possibility for generalization (scientific aspect) as well appreciation of individuality. Probably the "Style "concept is overused, and still it is not abused. We can support the thesis that style is still in style.</p> | | | |

Introduction

It seems that “Style” is in fashion. Still “Style” was in fashion in the mid of the XX century, and even earlier, probably from the beginning of the human understanding of the variety of differences that distinguished us as individuals.

As a trend it is obviously noted in psychology too, used both as a distinctive characterization connected with specific behavior, way of processing information or speed of processing information; or as a personality feature; Sternberg and Grigorenko point in their article: “Is style still in style? (Sternberg and Grigorenko,1997). Also, it is present in almost all other disciplines and spheres closely related to psychology, like communication, design, art , architecture, literature and so on.

The question that arises is what is the meaning of the "Style" concept? The answer on this question that promptly appear is “ it depends on the context where the concept is used”. This answer is true, hence if we want to be more specific , than this answer is only a partial truth. However, the science is seeking for the truth that is valid, reliable and replicable.

That provokes us to search for clarity and more precise definition of the concept of “Style” in psychology, that bring us to the research question that relates to the frequency of usage of the concept in psychology, and even one step more, the question about its use or even abuse.

The concept “Style” origin and literature review

According to the Lexicon of foreign words and phrases (Vujaklija, 1954) the concept of "Style" could be defined as: “Style (coming from Hellenic word “στυλος” and Latin word “stilus”) which means iron bar like today’s pen, tapered on the end which was used from writing on the wax boards. (Vujaklija, 1954: 909)”. The concept covers way of writing and thinking, habit, custom, as well artistic presentation.

That “Style” covers a large range of connotations that is presented in the Oxford online dictionary, where we figured out that it is defined with more than one definition as: “one’s usual way of behaving or approaching situations” ; “characteristic of a particular period, place, person, or movement” ; “a particular procedure by which something is done; a manner or way” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/style?q=style>).

It is obvious that the transformation of the concept: from a writing instrument, the pen in the period of the antique until the Middle Ages to the written discourse today, the manner of the mode of expression, the way of life, the manner, behavior. It is important to mention that even when it was a representation of the pen, it was connected with the "trace" we are leaving, the personal stamp that is coded by us personally.

However in Psychological Dictionaries the word "style" is not explained as a specific psychological concept, moreover it is used in the process of explanation of the other psychological concepts, very often to explain other psychological concepts or to create certain complex concepts like cognitive styles for example (Harré, Rom, and Roger Lamb, 1983, Kazdin, 2000).

Coming to the cognitive process, it is necessary to keep in mind how philosophy merges with psychology (Sternberg, 1999) and how the concept developed a dialectical flow through different psychological schools (see: Sternberg, 1999: 51-79). For the purposes of this article we will point a bit more on Gestalt Psychology. According to the Gestalt psychology thesis, "we best understand psychological phenomena when we view them as organized, structured wholes, not when we break them down into pieces" (Sternberg, 1999:74), and as such they criticize the automatic response to stimuli as a problem solving approach, explaining that the new insights that emerged flourish completely new approach to the problem of perception and understanding as well. The most of the psychologists today, believe that the best way for understanding the complex psychological phenomena is to synthesize analytic and holistic strategies, just the way the Cognitivists are practicing.

As it was mentioned, the most of the Psychological Dictionaries (Harré, Rom, and Roger Lamb, 1983, Kazdin, 2000), nowadays point on the cognitive styles, although the theoreticians of personality emphasize the style with its own characteristics that describes personality. Connected with that, it is worth to mention that today, it is very often connected to Jung's understanding of psychological types (Jung, C.G. 1971) where he postulated three facets. Namely, all facets are on the continuum where attitude is in range extroversion-introversion; perception spreads from intuitive to sensory; and decision making is from thinking to feeling. According to Jung, "Style refers to unique aspects of our humanity" (Jung, 1971: 3). Following that line we came to Allport recognition that there is not better mirror for the human soul than style (Allport, 1984), while Gardner (1985) reflected on its genetic heritage as well social and widely environmental influence on it. As one of the most famous theoreticians in the field Messick succinctly puts that all human activities contains both substance and style (Messick, 1994), it is more than obvious that style is all around us.

Methodology

The methodological approach to this particular research is based on the book content analysis, text analysis and discourse analysis (Gee, 2010).

Briefly explaining the methods, we will use Neuendorf definition of content analysis where she stated that it is: "...a summarising, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method including attention to objectivity, intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalisability, replicability, and hypothesis testing .. (Neuendorf, K, 2002:10)". The text analysis refers to systemic analysis of the content of the chosen text, and discourse analysis concerns: "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of the world. (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:1)"

For book analysis, we chose the Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology (Kazdin, 2000). The Dictionary was consisted of eight Volumes and total 4128, of which 3859 pages will be analyzed because they are forming the integral part of the Dictionary, while the others pages refer to content, list of concepts, abbreviations, acknowledgments and so on. The Dictionary covers 1464 topics from psychological concept to those from closely related disciplines, as well professional bodies and associations, key figures, scientific areas within psychology and so on.

In order to avoid mistakes, and biases, the book analysis and the text analysis was conducted by three researchers – psychologist and one blind researcher. They performed the same analysis procedure. Namely, first they checked if the concept "Style" is present in the Dictionary, than how many phrases which contain "Style" appeared in the content of the Dictionary and as such are defined and explained in the dictionary, and third how many times the

style is found as a part of the phrase in the text or as a single word is used in order to define or explain another concept.

After each of the independent researchers finished the task, the obtained results were checked, compared and re-checked, so the final results are presented. The discourse analysis that was conducted is in order to invite us to think more widely and to be more aware about the necessity to expand our horizons without fears from mistakes or criticism, and as such we are using it to emphasize the relation of the concept of style in the phrases as well its use as an explanation for other concepts. The research was conducted during 2013. The obtained results are presented in tables, and discussed further.

Research Results

Below are the obtained results, regarding the descriptive statistics, concerning the text that was analyzed, its division, number of appearances of the "Style" in total and in each volume, its appearance in phrases again in total and in each volume, and its connectedness with other concepts on the explanatory level.

Table no1 Book length and division

| | Volume 1 | Volume 2 | Volume 3 | Volume 4 | Volume 5 | Volume 6 | Volume 7 | Volume 8 | total |
|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| No pages | 488 | 503 | 507 | 508 | 508 | 508 | 537 | 300 | 3859 |

As it is shown in the Table no1, Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology (Kazdin,2000) is consisted of eight Volumes and total 3859 pages, where the Volume 1 covers 495 pages; the Volume 2 covers 503; the Volume 3 covers 507; the Volume 4 covers 508; the Volume 5 covers 508; the Volume 6 covers 508; the Volume the Volume 7 covers 537, and the Volume 8 covers 300 pages.

Table nr.2. Times of appearance of concept style as an explained concept and concepts where concept style is a constitutive part included in the Dictionary

| | Volume 1 | Volume 2 | Volume 3 | Volume 4 | Volume 5 | Volume 6 | Volume 7 | Volume 8 | total |
|--------------------------------------|----------|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---|----------------------|
| complex concepts | / | Cognitive Styles: Intelligence 163 -166 Cognitive Styles: Personality 166 -169 | / | / | / | / | / | / | 1 / Cognitive Styles |
| style as an explained concept | / | / | / | / | / | / | / | Style in part Sociolinguistics Pg387 (half page) | 1 |
| Pages total | 0 | 6.5 pages | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |

The Table nr.2 displays that "Style" as a key concept is not included in the Dictionary. However it is in the Dictionary, as a specific concept that is used for explanation of the boarder topic of Sociolinguistics. The concept "Style" as a part of the complex concept "cognitive styles" appear twice times, first time connected with cognitive processes and in the second case it is connected with the personality disposition, and as such cover 7 pages.

Table nr.3. Times of appearance of concept style - explanatory use and concept style as a constitutive part of complex concept that is not separately defined in the Dictionary

| | Volume 1 | Volume 2 | Volume 3 | Volume 4 | Volume 5 | Volume 6 | Volume 7 | Volume 8 | total |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Style | 4 | 68 | 7 | 26 | 14 | 17 | 15 | 8 | 159 |
| complex concepts | 44 | 149 | 52 | 48 | 61 | 70 | 73 | 35 | 532 |
| total | 48 | 217 | 59 | 74 | 75 | 87 | 88 | 43 | 691 |
| No pages | 488 | 503 | 507 | 508 | 508 | 508 | 537 | 300 | 3859 |

The Table no3 shows the distribution of the concept style used as an explanation and as a constitutive part of a complex concept that is not separately defined in the Dictionary, through the Volumes of the Dictionary. It is presented that the style was mentioned 4 times in the first Volume (the minimum) and 68 in the second (the maximum), while as a complex concept it was mentioned 43 times in the eighth Volume (the minimum) and 217 in the second Volume (the maximum). The total number of appearances in the first case is 159, while in the second it is 532, or 591 in total, which means that it appears on each sixth page.

Discussion

The obtained results suggested that “Style is still in style” in psychology of the beginning of XXI century, as it was suggested by Stenberg and Grigorenko at the end of the last century (Stenberg and Grigorenko,1997). It is clear that the stylistic approach is common for the most of the psychologists and in the variety of psychological disciplines. Based on the preformed analysis (book content analysis, text analysis and discourse analysis), we will lead discussion in order to cover proposed lines and as such it is important to state that the Dictionary that was chosen for analysis is the biggest and is pure Psychological Dictionary, different than the available others (W. Edward Craighead and Charles B. Nemeroff, 2004; Rom, Rom Harré and Lamb Roger,1983, Rom Harré and Lamb Roger,1986).

The Encyclopedic Dictionary covers 3859 pages and 1464 topics that vary from psychological concepts to definitions of closely related disciplines, as well as professional bodies and associations, key figures, scientific areas within psychology and further on. The concept of style is not the key concept that was explained, although as such appeared as a sub concept in the VIII Volume under the Concept of Sociolinguistics. We didn't expect that it will appear as a clearly distinctive concept, because until now in the Dictionaries we have checked from the American/English publishers it is not the case, although the Psychology Dictionary in Serbian language (Krstik,1988) points on style as a distinctive concept. Also, as a “Style” it is found in Philosophical Dictionary within esthetics and philosophy of art (Lainde, 1988:1032-33)

Hence, its appearance in the Dictionary was on every sixth page and, it reflects that it is one of the most commonly used. It is very interesting to mention from the discourse perspective the way it is used to explain the other concepts. Its clearest use is when the cognitive styles are mentioned, and there "Style" was explained by: “...some personality psychologists continue to emphasize the importance of such stylistic variables and see them as a useful interface between personality and cognition. other personality psychologists question the cross-situational generality suggested by the style concept and focus instead on the implications of specific ways of processing information for other aspects of personality functioning. (Kazdin,2000; VoVI:102)”.

Namely, most of the time "Style" is used in order to point on variety of possibilities that can be observed for example on the level of learning styles, parenting styles, or lifestyle. We chose to analyze Volume VI more in depth and to point on the discourse that was present there. Therefore, we recognize that style was constitutive part of the 32 different stylistic concepts that appear in that chapter. Just to mention the most common: lifestyle, parenting, defensive, interpersonal, care giving, paranoid, explanatory, leadership, communication, ... Also, “Style” was used as a explanation of the individual aspect of the subordinated concept used in the process of explanation of the key concepts like style of supervision, style of dress, It is worth to be mentioned that all of the above mentioned stylistic concepts, as well other 23 was used point on variety and diversity of other concepts, that appeared as generalization. Pointing just on the "lifestyle", we realize that it can represent general concept with general meaning, as well it shows individual stamp that is embedded in it. Than, the "style of living" (style in front) points on the differences that appear depending on the context like in the example ”village style of life and beliefs“ (Kazdin, 2000: 2550). Definitely, the stylistic way in psychology culminated in the field of cognitive styles and learning possibilities, that is the most contemporary approach to it (Samms, Chevanese L.; Friedel, Curtis R., 2012).

The question that provokes further attention is: “How are structure and style related in psychology?” as a continuation of “substance and style” or even more “process and content”.

Conclusion

Psychology was defined as a “science” at its very first appearance from Wund’s laboratory. Being proud of that scientific foundation, we all tried very hard to create and confirm generalizations like all other natural sciences used to do. Hence, we are focusing on the variety of individual differences that are spoiling somehow our previous assumption. Trying to overcome that obstacle, we “invented” the concept “style” which possess its own heritage as a completely and unique concept that is individually colored even under the circumstances that are creating any kind of generalization. Going along with that idea we point that "Style" serves the individual approach in psychology, although Psychology is keeping its scientific foundation. Completely aware that further research is needed, we hope that scientific interest for this topic will continue. Completely aware that further research is needed, we hope that scientific interest for this topic will continue.

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