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STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF W.B. YEATS' *THE SECOND COMING*

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**Abstract:**

*Every language has its own literature and every literature deals with different genres but poetry enjoys the highest position among all the genres. But poetry is a difficult genre to understand for non-native speakers of that language and English is a language that is widely spoken in the whole world. But it is not easy for non-native speakers to understand English language especially poetry. To solve this problem, linguistics especially stylistics can be used. Linguistics and literature are closely interrelated. This research paper is going to show how stylistics can help in understanding the poetry and for this purpose; the poem *The Second Coming* penned by W.B. Yeats will be taken.*

**Keywords:** *W.B. Yeats, Poet, Victorian Period, Modern Period, The Second Coming, Stylistic, etc.*

**1. Introduction:**

Linguistics and literature complements each other. Linguistics is the scientific study of the language and every language has its own literature. Linguistics has different tools to understand the literature and stylistics that is going to be used in this research paper, is one of the linguistic tools to interpret and understand the literature.

To understand this relationship, it is necessary to define what literature is and the different genres of literature. Then why poetry is above all the genres and what poetry is. Literature is any piece of work that can be found either in written or oral form that has an aesthetic value and that has traces either hidden or direct evolution of a language, its history, the culture of the people who have adopted that language. Krystal defines literature as “means not only what is written but what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented, in whatever form.” These forms are known as the different genres that are found in almost every language. The different genres of literature are poetry, drama, novels, short stories, essays, non-fiction, etc. Among all the genres, poetry occupies the highest place in literature. It acquires the top-most position because it deals with the emotions of a person, opens his/her heart employing imagination.

Poetry is a composition having meter, rhyme and figures of speech. It inspires imagination, helps in learning vocabulary and language learning and acquisition. Flangan says:

Poetry is an imaginative awareness of experience expressed through meaning, sound and rhythmic language choices so as to evoke an emotional response. Poetry has been known to employ meter and rhyme, but this is by no means necessary. Poetry is an ancient form that has gone through numerous and drastic reinvention



over time. The very nature of poetry as an authentic and individual mode of expression makes it nearly impossible to define.

The linguistic study of poetry makes a clear and obvious textual description. It is not a new branch of linguistics but the application of existing theories and methods. Being the scientific study of language, linguistic necessarily covers all aspects and uses of language and all styles. Lyons means by linguistics as a scientific tool of “language investigation by means of controlled and empirically verifiable observation and with reference to some general theory of language-structure.” (1) The creativity of language is fully realized in literature because in literature, language is not a means but an end in itself and the aesthetic use of language pushes into the foreground the language itself. The function of poetic language consists in the maximum foregrounding of utterances. It is used to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself.

The objective of this research is to tell how stylistics can help in understanding poetry to non-natives of English language by analysing W. B. Yeats’ *The Second Coming*. The definition of stylistic analysis and how stylistics is related to poetry will be discussed in this paper. For this purpose, W. B. Yeats’ *The Second Coming* will be analysed. The reason for choosing W.B. Yeats and this poem is that he is a modern poet renowned for his symbolism. His poetry is full of private and public symbols and in this poem; he has used both public and private symbols.

Stylistic analysis is a method of textual interpretation in which language acquires the primary place. As a linguistic tool, it is used to study literature and poetry is used to observe, classify and characterize verbal style or verbal devices in literature. Abrams defines stylistics as “the study of the use of language in literature involving the entire range of the general characteristics of language...as a medium of literary expression (307).” Foregrounding and deviation are the important tools of stylistics.

In this research paper, W.B. Yeats’ *The Second Coming* will be analysed using pragmatic stylistics, formalist and functionalist stylistics.

### **1.1. Pragmatic Stylistics:**

According to Leech, “Pragmatics is ‘the study of meaning in speech situations’ and it is assumed as an individual utterance, that is, while studying pragmatics, one does not have to consider more than one contribution to a conversation or discourse (88).” It is based on the “Cooperative Principle” of Grice and “Politeness Principle” of Leech. According to Grice’s Cooperative Principle, when the two people are talking to each other, unintentionally they cooperate with each other to reach to the meaning of the conversation. It is based on four maxims known as Maxim of Quality, Maxim of Quantity, Maxim of Relation and Maxim of Manner.

- In Maxim of Quality, the speaker ought to speak the truth having adequate evidences.
- In Maxim of Quantity, the speaker has to provide the only required information, not more or less.
- In Maxim of Relation, the response of the listener to the topic should be relevant.
- In Maxim of Manner, ambiguity and obscurity should be avoided.

Awin Wijaya has explained the Politeness Principle of Leech in the following words:

Politeness concerns a relationship between self and other. In conversation, self is identified as the speaker and other is the hearer. Besides that, the speaker also shows politeness to the third parties who may be present or not. The politeness





principle (PP) is introduced by Geoffrey Leech. PP is Minimizing (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs, and there is a corresponding positive version (maximizing (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs) which is somewhat less important. PP proposes how to produce and understand language based on politeness. The purpose of PP is to establish feeling of community and social relationship. Thus, PP focuses on process of interpretation that the center of the study is on the effect of the hearer rather than the speaker.

Pragmatics is concerned with the meaning of utterances rather than of sentences or propositions and meaning that comes from the contextual and interpersonal situation involving speaker and listener. Pragmatic stylistics studies the functions, intentions, goals and effects of utterances of speaker on the listener.

#### **1.1.1. Context:**

The interpretation of what meanings the speaker wanted to convey using particular words is often influenced by factors such as the listeners' assumptions or the context. Verbal context is the set of words that surround the lexical item in question in the same phrase, or sentence. The physical context is the location of a given word, the situation in which it is used, as well as timing, all of which aid proper understanding of the words.

For example, in W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*, context plays an important role. In the poem, persona presents the horrifying picture of the world to the addressee, the reader. It is foregrounded in the poem how anarchy spreading its wings in the world,

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosened upon the world;  
The blood- dimmed timed is loosed

To understand the context in pragmatic stylistics, knowledge of deixis is compulsory for the students.

#### **1.1.2. Speech Act:**

Searle has defined speech into locutionary, illocutionary and prelocutionary acts. Locutionary act is the performance of an act of saying something, illocutionary act is the performance of an act in saying something and prelocutionary act is an act by saying something. In the poem, "troubles" and "know" are locutionary speech act verbs. These verbs serve the ideational function and the verbs "fall", "hear", "hold", "loosed", "drowned", "drops" are illocutionary verbs serving the interpersonal function of language. "Turning", "vexed" and "slouches" are prelocutionary verbs.

#### **1.2. Formalist Stylistics:**

The formalist model of stylistic analysis draws on the works of Jakobson and Mukarovsky. It is adopted in order to develop linguistic competence. It discusses the fundamental concepts of the formalist stylistic model of analysis- the functions of language, the relevance of poetic tropes, formal design of a poem and defamiliarization and foregrounding. Non-natives can gain experience here at the sentence level. Jakobson identified six functions of language (in bracket) and corresponding factors:



CONTEXT  
(INFORMATIVE)

ADRESSER  
(EMOTIVE)

UTTERANCES OR TEXTS  
(POETIC)

ADDRESSEE  
(DIRECTIVE)

LANGUAGE/CODE  
(METALINGUAL)  
CONTACT  
(PHATIC)

(350-377)

These six functions can be converted into six questions and responses to these questions will help the learners to regard the poetry as a means of communicating messages. For example, in W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*, there is a person who uses for himself words like "my sight" and "I know", the first person pronoun. He is addressing to the indirect addressee, the reader in the poem. He is warning the reader for the things he is visualizing going to happen in the future.

### 1.3. Functionalist Stylistics:

The functionalist model of stylistic analysis pays attention to the text. The difference between the formalist and the functionalist model of stylistic analysis will help in understanding the basic components of functionalist stylistic model. The basic components of this model identified by Halliday are the ideational function, the interpersonal function and the textual function – will be analyzed (122).

#### 1.3.1. The Ideational Function:

To express the ideational function, the persona has used the symbols. These symbols describe the internal and the external world of the persona. The symbols that have been used are, "The Second Coming", "gyre", "falcon", "falconer", "blood-dimmed tide", " Spiritus Mundi", "A shape with lion body and the head of the man" and "Bethlehem". The use of both animate and inanimate objects in the poem enforces deviation. The persona feels that slowly and slowly inanimate objects are engulfing animate objects. There is only anarchy, violence and blood- shed has been left in the world and the intellect, virtues and innocence have become the things of old days. All these things are troubling him.

Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;  
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
 Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.

#### 1.3.2. The Interpersonal Function:

In the poem, persona is the first person narrative and is expressed through use of "my" and "I" pronouns. But it is not him that is expressed in the poem but it is his vision that has been expressed in the poem. The addressor, persona tells the addressee, the reader that he is horrified to see



Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world;  
The blood- dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

He is troubled to see

Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.

The persona believes that this “rough beast” will take birth in “Bethlehem”, the birth place of Jesus Christ. Thus, the tone of the poem is a warning to the reader.

### 1.3.3. The Textual Function:

The textual function is concerned with text formation and instrumental in materializing the ideational and the interpersonal functions in a text. The repetition of words “Turning”, “loosed”, “surely”, “hand”, “Second Coming” and “desert” enforces that anarchy rules the world and the second coming will surely come but it will not bring any hope for the future. It will be barren of intellect, emotions, innocence, values, etc. like a desert. The collocation of following lexical items has been used to understand the poem. The lexical item “turning”, is repeated in the same line seems to be associated with the lexical items (widening, gyre). The poet uses such a lexical set to certify his belief in the cyclical theory of history. The falcon goes beyond the retrieving whistle of the falconer. In Yeats’ poem, the falcon represents the people, the culture and the society of the age of the falconer.

### 1.4. Conclusion:

Using stylistic analysis, one can easily understand the symbolic poetry of different poets and this poem *The Second Coming* of Yeats is a great example to teach how to understand the poetry using stylistics and then no one will find poetry a difficult genre. It will not make anyone afraid of reading the literature of English; especially those people will start understanding English like a native whose mother-tongue is not English language.

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