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EXPLORING THE LANGUAGE OF POEM THROUGH STYLISTICS**Das Pradip Ch***Asst. Prof., Dept. of English
Lumding College, Lumding
Nagaon, Assam, India.*

Abstract:

The aim of interpreting a literary text is to understand the meaning of it by studying the text. Stylistics approach to literary texts does not merely involve analysis of linguistic tools of the text but in addition motivate the readers to infer meaning from the textual structure. This paper mainly highlights the relevance of stylistics approach in the present days for the analysis of poems in Teaching English as a Foreign/second Language. There are fruitful ways in which poetry can be subjected to stylistic analysis. To meet the purpose of the study, W.H. Auden's 'O Where Are You Going?' is considered to make a stylistics analysis of this poem through the examination of its constitutive elements-title, mode of narration, phonological patterning, syntax, Lexis and overall structure. The paper does not basically focus on analysing the texts, but also argues in favour of exploiting language-based approaches in literature study in English as a Foreign / second Language context, since stylistics is interested in what writers do with and through language. At the end the stylistics analysis reveals its advantages against the traditional method of interpretation.

Keywords:*Stylistic Analysis, Literature and English Language Teaching.*

Introduction:

Almost fifty years back, Roman Jakobson(1960) made a statement, indicating the relationship between linguistics and literary studies pointing that:

If there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I privately believe that...linguists have been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistic science itself. All of us here, however, definitely realize that a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconvertant with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronism. (Jakobson, 377)

The important objective of stylistics has been to attempt objectively for the meaning of text, which is achieved systematically analysing the language of text. Gower (1986) opposes any literary stylistic analysis of literature as he considers it to be too mechanistic and cerebral in operation. According to him, when a text is put 'under a microscope', the readers' attention is diminished and the readers who 'work under such laboratory conditions' fail to appreciate the emotional appeal of the text.

Gower's criticism of the use of literary stylistics in the study of literature is difficult to accept as the analysis of the different parts of a literary text following a literary stylistic model is never an end in itself. The actual reason of 'putting a text under a microscope' is to formulate the reader's literary

sensitivity in a systematic objective level, and to enhance the appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the text.

Carter, et al (1989) has very clearly pointed out how a stylistic approach enhances the literary experience of the readers. It is doubtlessly very easy to eulogize the ideals of responsive enjoyment and imaginative participation in literature, but it is very difficult to translate them into action in the true sense of the term. Literary stylistics analysis provides the readers with the necessary tools to understand the 'aesthetic qualities' of a text by sensitizing the readers to the intricacies of literature.

II

Stylistics and the teaching of literature have their beginning in the works of some notable linguists. For instance, Widdowson (1975), Collie and Slater (1986), Carter (1983), Carter and Long (1987), Short (1983), Simpson (2004) observed that stylistics in the twenty-first century is very much relevant and it has become a subject of study. He also says, "upon the exploration of texts (may be literary or non-literary) by the utilization of stylistics, the method of inquiry has an important reflexive capacity insofar as it can shed light on the very language system it derives from; it tells us about the 'rules' of language because it often explores texts where rules are bent, distended or stretched to breaking point. Interest in language is always at the fore in contemporary stylistic analysis which is why you should never undertake to do stylistics unless you are interested in language." (Carter, 4)

Regarding the relevance of stylistics, Cater (1996) argues that stylistic analysis helps to foster interpretative skills and encourage reading between the lines. He points out, "the advantages of stylistics is that it provides students with a method of scrutinising text, 'a way in' to a text, opening up starting points for fuller interpretation. From a teaching point of view, students learn to open a text not only osmosis but explicitly and consciously. A pedagogically sensitive stylistics can give students increased confidence in reading and interpretation. He also emphasises how stylistics can be a useful tools in the literature class is of paramount importance since literature study has generally caused a feeling of apprehensiveness in the pedagogy of teaching English as a foreign or second language." (Cater, 5)

Language is transmitted either by audible sound-waves or by visible marks on a surface: that is language substance is either phonic or graphic. For stylistic, a linguistic study needs, in the first place, to take account of this substantial aspect of language; and it needs also to possess the means of enabling us to recognize and deal adequately with the relationship between written and spoken language. Since graphic substance is related to and in part derives from, phonic substance, all written language has phonic potential. This leads, in turn, to the recognition, important, as in stylistics, that much written language, particularly poetry, is written with its phonic potential.

III

In the following paragraphs, since relating linguistic descriptions to the interpretation of poetry is at the core of the current paper, certain linguistic elements--tile, mode of narration, phonological patterning, syntax, lexis, and overall structure, which are stylistically significant, will be taken into consideration in W.H. Auden's 'O Where Are You Going?'. Underlying stylistics features of the poem, an attempt will also be made to explain how these stylistic levels and features contribute to its overall interpretation. While doing the stylistic analysis of the poem, it is not necessarily be illustrated all the techniques and criteria of analysis. In fact, it is the preliminary

reading and the intuition, should be able to decide which of the levels and features are significant, in each case and proceed further on those lines.

Title:

W.H. Auden's 'O Where Are You Going?', holds rich potential for stylistic analysis. This poem can be approached strictly in an intrinsic way, that is, without reference to extrinsic features like biographical or sociological information, and with attention focused on significant linguistic features. Stylistic analysis attempts to examine the title, which is a linguistic structure by itself, first without any reference or looking at the poem once. The title "O Where Are You Going?" is a linguistic structure by itself. The direct address "You" makes for a certain informality of tone. This interrogative mark suggests a question, and since it is a 'wh'-question rather than a yes-no question, it may be taken to be more open. But all interrogative are not necessarily real questions; they may also be rhetorical questions. In the latter, what could be the communicative implication of the interrogative? Or, is it an exclamation (as is indicated in the use of "O"), or is it a warning or threat? ("Don't go, or else...").

Overall structure:

It is the second element of the analysis. The first three stanzas seem to make up one large unit (with three sub-units within it) posing a series of questions. The fourth stanza constitutes another unit containing the reply to each of the questions. The "balance" here deserves consideration. The final stanza contains fewer words than the first three stanzas put together; each of the replies contains fewer words than each of the questions earlier. The rhetorical impact of this fact should be kept in mind arriving at an interpretation later. Besides, the poem is rather heavily punctuated, with a large number of commas being used, as is appropriate to any enumeration or piling up (here, of obstacles, dangers, etc.).

Lexis:

The Lexis (diction), noticed first, is the foregrounding technique employed in using three parallel and contrasting pairs of agential nouns: reader--rider, fearer--farer, horror--hearer. These pairs are having common lexical features. It is noticed that the first of the nouns in the pairs (reader, fearer, horror) can be grouped together since they can be said to represent a passive state as contrasted with the second nouns in each pair (rider, farer, hearer) which represent (at least relatively) a more active life. It is noticed that there is a striking instance of deviation when we look at the word "horror" in this context. The three pairs of agential nouns are formed by the addition of the derivational suffix -er to verbs (e.g. "reader" from "read"). So we have here "rider" from "ride", "fearer" from "fare" and "hearer" from "hear". But the poet has very daringly planted "horror" (which is an abstract uncountable noun) amidst these agential nouns and we accept it for the moment as an agential noun referring to a person (as though there were some verbs like "horr" to which -'or' been added to form an agential noun!). But what is the effect of this? It is perhaps to suggest the way in which abstract and nameless fears can take shape and threaten us when we have been, as it were, primed for such sensations. "Horror", an abstract noun, can suddenly become a concrete noun as a person and frighten us! (In the present global context, "terror" seems to have actually undergone such a change!)

Syntax:

Coming to syntax, and also observing at sentence types, it is noticed how the interrogatives in the first three stanzas are balanced by the matching declaratives in the fourth. What can here be

added when contrasted with interrogatives (asking questions or even issuing warnings), declaratives which make statement, always convey finality (“no more talk”). This type of reading is fixed by different syntactic features. Again, it is seen that in the first three stanzas, the sentences are long which suggest endless waiting and doubt, whereas the sentences in the last stanza are short, coming like telling blows and clinching the issue, so to speak. While the first three stanzas between them employ parallelism (“said reader to rider”, “said fearer to farer” and “said horror to hearer”), the last stanza employs it within itself, and the order is reversed now in quick succession (“said rider to reader”, “said farer to fearer” and “said hearer to horror”). The item repeated is a subordinate clause, but it could well have the force of a main clause: “as he left them there, as he left them there.”(L-16)The repetition has an incremental effect.

Phonology:

Phonology is another surplus area of analysing in this poem. The poem is having the usual features like the **alliteration** (reader-rider, fatal-furnaces, dusk-delay, path-pass, etc.) and the **assonance** (furnaces-burn, path-pass, swiftly-figure). Most significantly, the number of subtle vowel changes is made to create pairs of words: midden-madden, looking-lacking, granite-grass, swiftly-softly. The most crucial of these pairs, which have been noticed already under lexis, are the three pairs of characters: reader-rider, fearer-farer, horror-hearer. All these phonological features give the verse (especially the first three stanzas) a ritual, magical quality. But, now some questions arise in the mind.

Returning to the three pairs of characters, what may be the reason for deploying pairs of names with only a slight vowel change distinguishing the members in each pair? (reader-rider; fearer-farer; horror-hearer). Is the poet rhetorically suggesting that they are but aspect of one and the same person? And that “fearer” has only to take one quick decision to change a vowel as it were, and he can immediately become “farer”!

Cohesive devices:

At the final stage, the cohesive devices of the poem can be analysed. The term 'cohesion' refers to the logical relationships within a sentence and between sentences. Cohesion, in the linguistic sense, is achieved by various devices like **anaphora**, **cataphora** (through the use of articles, possessives, pronouns), co-ordinators, subordinator, and often by **repetition** and also by **ellipsis**.

The poem is having a series of noun phrases with the demonstrative adjective “that” (“that valley”, “that gap” and “that shape”) and another series with the definite article “the” (“the pass”, “the twisted trees” and “the figure”). These devices serve an identifying function and though there are other details provided, these in themselves are powerful in creating their own context. But the final stanza is seen with the most interesting use of cohesive devices, especially parallelism, repetition and ellipsis.

The elliptical response is found in each of the first three lines of the first three stanzas: “Out of this houses” is to be read as “I am going out of this house” (in reply to “where are you going?”). “Yours never will” is a deliberately elliptic form of “Your diligent looking never will discover the lacking, your footsteps never will feel from granite to grass”.(L-8) The “they” in “they’re looking for you” refers to “that bird”, “that shape” and “the figure” all of which were held out as threats in the third stanza. The doubts and misgivings of the first three stanzas are thus dismissed with assurance but with a minimum of language; the focus is now on action.

Interpretation:

Stylistic analysis demands the interpretation of the poem as a whole on the basis of the linguistic features noticed so far.

W.H. Auden's poem, "O Where Are You Going?" is primarily a dramatised form of an inner dialogue. The strategy of the poet, however, is to present a series of apparently discrete pairs of characters in each of the first three stanzas and then fuse them together in the final stanza. Also, the various speakers are aspects of one and the same person which is revealed not only by the pronominal features in the last stanza; it is also seen in the close phonological correspondence between the members of each pair. The positive aspects in the three pairs are united into one person at the end and the negative aspects are left behind forever.

Conclusion and suggestions:

From the result of the analysis, it could be concluded that the study of poetry could be demystified through the use of stylistic approach as it is more effective in the teaching and learning of poetry than the conventional teaching method. Based on the analysis of the poem, the following suggestions are made:

- Teachers need to adopt stylistic approach in the teaching of literature in general and poetry in particular. They should be encouraged to use stylistic strategies to reinforce the conventional approach.
- Parents should be encouraged to be actively involved in their children's education. They should take time to supervise their children's work and make the necessary materials available for them.
- Textbook writers should apply principle of prior knowledge in structuring curriculum.
- Government should encourage teachers to go for in-service training that will expose them to the use of this approach which in turn will boost their confidence in handling poetry lessons and increase students' achievement in literature and poetry in particular.
- Curriculum designers should design literature curriculum in such a way that emphasis is placed on the function of words.

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Appen.:

W. H. Auden

O Where Are You Going?

"O Where Are You Going?" said reader to rider,

"That valley is fatal when furnaces bum,

Yonder's the midden whose odours will madden.

That gap is the grave where the tall return."

"O do you imagine," said fearer to farer,

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"That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,

Your diligent looking discover the lacking

Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?"

"O what was that bird," said horror to hearer,

"Did you see that shape in the twisted tree?"

10

Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,

The spot on your skin is shocking disease."

"Out of this house,"--said rider to reader,

"Yours never will," --said farer to fearer,

"They're looking for you,"--said hearer to horror,

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As he left them there, as he left them there.

[Note: line 3 midden: dunghill]