

Discussion on the Linguistic Devices of “Church Going”: A Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the poem “Church Going” by Philip Larkin from the perspective of Stylistic Analysis. This analysis is made under the aspects of Graphological, Grammatical, Syntactical, Lexical and Phonological patterns. We have also traced Foregrounding and Cohesive Devices that are present in the poem. The research is helpful to analyse the structure, style and theme of the poem, and the poet’s attitude towards the Church. It is also believed that this work will serve as a division of labour between a stylistic analyst and a literary critic.

Keywords: *Stylistics; Church Going; Foregrounding; Deviation; Lexis.*

Introduction

The rapid growth of Linguistics into an independent discipline and its application to the study of literature opened new horizons in the field of literary criticism in the 20th Century. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the tools of Stylistics and their practical application in poetry to the students and readers of English Language and Literature. In fact, Stylistics work as a linking bridge between two important fields that are Linguistics and Literature. Here, one thing must be noted that critics often mistake Stylistic analysis for Literary Criticism. While Stylistics tries to give proof and evidence of their propositions, literary criticism suggests a closer look at a literary piece and it allows for the critic’s personal views, feelings and attitude. Widdowson again states that “Stylistics can provide a way of mediating between two subjects, English Language and Literature.” (1975).

Leech and Short (1981) illustrate the task of Stylistic analysis as “an attempt to find the artistic principles underlying a writer’s choice of language. All writers, and for that matter, all texts, have their individual qualities.” In order to grasp these individual qualities of the texts, one needs to use a number of tools which are called the tools of Stylistics. The following are the basic tools of Stylistics—Sounds, Lexis, Semantics, Discourse, Context, Syntax. Based on these tools the Stylistic analysis of a text is made under the aspects of Graphological, Grammatical, Lexical and Phonological patterns.

Levels of Stylistics Analysis

Phonological Level

It is the study of the sound system in a given language. Here, we study the characteristics and phonetical utility of sound.

Graphological Level

It is analogous study of a language’s written system. Here, we study the overall surface structure and pattern of the written language.

Grammatical Level

In this level, both syntactic and morphological levels are discussed. The aim is to analyse the internal structure of sentences in a language and the way they function in sequences.

Lexical Level

It is the study of the way in which individual words and idioms tend to pattern in different linguistic context.

Semantic Level

In this level, the study is made on the way in which individual words and idioms tend to bear meaning in different linguistic context.

Within these levels there is another important field of Stylistic analysis that is Foregrounding. The concept of Foregrounding as the major characteristics of Stylistics is particularly useful in analysing poetry. Foregrounding is achieved by either linguistic deviation or linguistic parallelism. This deviation is of many kinds—lexical, grammatical, phonological, historical, graphological, semantic and others.

Introduction to the poem “Church Going”

“Church Going” is a famous poem by English poet Philip Larkin. Larkin’s first draft of the poem was dated 24th April 1954, though the final version was emerged in July, 1954. It was published in the poem collection *The Less Deceived* in 1955 (1966). Larkin’s fondness of English ecclesiastical architecture, the seriousness of mood he felt in such places, are apparent in his poem, standing in contrast to his cynicism about Christianity. The theme of the poem is the poet’s contemplation over the future of a Church. The poem consists of seven stanzas with nine lines in each stanza. Throughout the poem the attitude of the poet towards the Church swings.

Stylistic Analysis of the Poem

Stylistic analysis of the poem is made under several levels. They are as follow:

Lexical Features

Lexis takes the centre position in the construction of a text. Lexical features play a vital role in the formation of meaning. Lexical analysis in the poem will be within the domain of content words. Content words are that hold the meaning and they are the major parts of speech besides grammatical words standing for minor parts of speech. Content words include Noun, Verb, Adjective and Adverb. For the purpose of analysis and comparison, the distribution of each content word is investigated separately. The following four different tables show the distribution of the content words in the poem.

Table 1: Lists of nouns in the poem

Stanza No	Nouns	Remarks
Stanza-1	‘thud’, ‘Church’, ‘matting’, ‘seats’, ‘stone’, ‘books’, ‘sprawlings’, ‘flowers’, ‘Sunday’, ‘brass’, ‘stuff’, ‘end’, ‘organ’, ‘silence’, ‘God’, ‘cycle-clips’, ‘reverence’	Material nouns are more in number and they predominate throughout the poem. A moderate number of Abstract nouns are also present in the text and the Proper noun and Common nouns are very few in number. On the other hand, no collective noun is used. There are a number of Pronouns which play a vital role in the construction of meaning. Those Pronouns which take the place of content words are: ‘nothing’, ‘someone’, ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘which’, ‘whose’.
Stanza-2	‘hand’, ‘font’, ‘roof’, ‘lectern’, ‘few’, ‘verses’, ‘echoes’, ‘door’, ‘book’, ‘six-pence’, ‘place’, ‘worth’	
Stanza-3	‘loss’, ‘Churches’, ‘cathedrals’, ‘show’, ‘parchment’, ‘plate’, ‘pyx’, ‘cases’, ‘rest’, ‘rain’, ‘sheep’, ‘places’	
Stanza-4	‘women’, ‘children’, ‘stone’, ‘simples’, ‘cancer’, ‘night’, ‘one’, ‘power’, ‘some sort’, ‘games’, ‘riddles’, ‘superstition’, ‘belief’, ‘what’, ‘disbelief’, ‘grass’, ‘pavement’, ‘brambles’, ‘buttruss’, ‘sky’	
Stanza-5	‘shape’, ‘week’, ‘purpose’, ‘place’, ‘one’, ‘crew’, ‘rood-lofts’, ‘whiff’, ‘gown’, ‘bands’, ‘organ-pipes’, ‘myrrh’, ‘representative’	
Stanza-6	‘silt’, ‘cross of ground’, ‘suburb’, ‘scrub’, ‘separation’, ‘marriage’, ‘birth’, ‘death’,	

	'thought', 'shell', 'idea', 'barn', 'worth', 'silence'	
Stanza-7	'house', 'earth', 'air', 'compulsions', 'destinies', 'hunger', 'ground', 'many', 'dead'	

Table 2: Lists of verbs in the poem

Stanza No	Verbs	Remarks
Stanza-1	'am', 'going on', 'step', 'letting', 'shut', 'cut' 'knows', 'takes off'	Throughout the poem main verbs predominates. The be-verbs and modal verbs used here are less in number. There are some cases of present participle form of those main verbs but past participle is used only once.
Stanza-2	'move', 'run', 'stand', 'looks', 'know', 'don't', 'mounting', 'peruse', 'pronounced', 'endth', 'meant', 'snigger', 'sign', 'donate', 'reflect', 'was', 'stopping'	
Stanza-3	'stop', 'did', 'do', 'end', 'wondering', 'look', 'wondering', 'will fall', 'shall turn', 'shall keep', 'shall avoid'	
Stanza-4	'will come', 'make', 'touch', 'pick', 'advised', 'see', 'walking', 'will go on', 'die', 'remains', 'has gone'	
Stanza-5	'wonder', 'will be', 'seek', 'was', 'tap, 'jot', 'know', 'were', 'counting', 'will be'	
Stanza-6	'knowing', 'tending', 'held', 'found', 'was built', 'pleases', 'stand'	
Stanza-7	'is', 'meet', 'are', 'recognised', 'robed', 'can be', 'will be', 'surprising', 'gravitating', 'heard', 'grow', 'lie'	

Table 3: Lists of adjectives in the poem

Stanza No	Adjectives	Remarks
Stanza-1	'sure', 'another', 'little', 'brownish', 'holy', 'small', 'neat', 'tense', 'musty', 'unignorable', 'brewed', 'hatless', 'awkward'	The adjectives used here are mostly qualitative. Only one of them is Proper adjective that is 'Irish'. A few numbers of quantitative adjectives are used in the poem such as: 'little', 'few', 'less'.
Stanza-2	'new', 'cleaned', 'restored', 'hectoring', 'large- scale', 'back', 'Irish'	
Stanza-3	'out of use', 'few', 'locked', 'free', 'unlucky'	
Stanza-4	'dark', 'particular', 'dead', 'seemingly', 'weedy'	
Stanza-5	'less', 'recognisable', 'obscure', 'last', 'last', 'ruin-bibber', 'randy', 'antique', 'Christmas- addict'	
Stanza-6	'bored', 'uninformed', 'ghostly', 'dispersed', 'unspilt', 'equably', 'special', 'accoutred', 'frowsty'	

Stanza-7	‘serious’, ‘serious’, ‘blent’, ‘obsolete’, ‘serious’, ‘proper’, ‘wise’	
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Table 4: Lists of adverbs in the poem

Stanza No	Adverbs	Remarks
Stanza-1	‘once’, ‘inside’, ‘now’, ‘how long’	In the poem, the Adverb of Time are more in number. There is also frequent use of Adverb of Place. And the rest are the Simple or Independent Adverb.
Stanza-2	‘forward’, ‘where’, ‘here’, ‘loudly’, ‘briefly’	
Stanza-3	‘often’, ‘always’, ‘much’, ‘when’, ‘completely’, ‘chronically’	
Stanza-4	‘random’, ‘when’,	
Stanza-5	‘very’	
Stanza-6	‘here’, ‘so long’	
Stanza-7	‘forever’, ‘round’	

Semantic features

Semantic features deal with the meaning of a text. Semantic analysis is concerned with objective or general meaning, and avoids trying to account for subjective or local meaning (cite Yule). In Semantic analysis, Cohesion is an umbrella term for the various ways in which meaning relations in a text are combined intersententially. (2009).

Cohesive Devices

Cohesion works through a number of tools which are termed as cohesive devices. The poem taken for analysis has a large number of cohesive devices. They are as following:

References

The cohesive device is called Reference when “a grammatical word in one sentence in association with a word or a phrase is used in another sentence”. When an element refers back to another element, it is called Anaphoric references. In this poem, there are a large number of anaphoric references which refers back to “Another church” in the third line. They are— “the place”, “them”, “the rest”, “unlucky places”, “a shape”, “this place”, “this cross of ground”, “it”, “this special shell”, “accoutred frowsty barn”, “a serious house”, “this ground”.

When an element refers forward to another element, it is called Cataphoric reference. In this poem the element “there” in the first line refers forward to “another church” in the third line.

Cohesive Conjunction

In this poem, the first line of the fourth stanza starts in continuation with the third stanza, using the cohesive conjunction “Or”. Again, the last line in the fifth stanza starts with “Or” keeping the continuation with the previous sentence. Similarly, the fourth line of the last stanza starts with the cohesive conjunction “And” in continuation with the previous sentence.

Lexical Cohesion

When repeated uses of the same content words or their synonyms convey a sense of integratedness of a text it is called lexical cohesion (2009). Lexical cohesion is found a number of times in the poem. They are as follow:

“...the place was not worth *stopping* for.

Yet *stop* I did...”—in second and third stanzas.

“*Wondering* what to look for; *wondering*, too, ...”—in the third stanza.

“Will be the *last*, the very *last*”—in the fifth stanza.

“A *serious* house on *serious* earth it is,”—in the last stanza.

Deictic Terms

The spatio-temporal perspective of the speaker or the writer is normally anchored with the help of Deictic (2009). The use of deictic terms serves the purpose of orientation by establishing a shared universe with the readers. Deictic terms like ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘here’, ‘there’ are spatial while the terms like ‘now’, ‘then’, ‘today’, ‘tomorrow’ are temporal. In this poem a number of deictic items are used recurrently: “there”, “here”, “this”, “that”, “now” etc.

Phonological Features

There are a great number of phonological features in the poem which bears the lyrical tone of the poem. Throughout the poem there is predominance of “s” sound which brings harshness in the poem’s tone. There are many other phonological features such as followings:

Alliteration

It is the repetition of the same sound in successive or nearly successive words. Alliteration is recurrent throughout the poem. Good examples of alliteration in this poem can be traced in the use of sound ‘s’ in line no. 3, 32, 36, 48, 52, 55 and 59. Again, the repetitive use of the sound ‘l’ can be found in line no. 20. The use of alliteration can also be traced in the use of the sound ‘c’ in line no. 9 and 24; the sound ‘p’ in line no. 25; the sound ‘b’ in line no. 36; the sound ‘r’ in line no. 42, 57; and the sound ‘h’ in line no. 60. This recurrent use of alliteration gives the poem a rhythm.

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds to create internal rhyming within the poetic line. In this poem, assonance is found in the repetition of the vowel sound in these following pairs of words: “thud-shut”, “nothing-going”, “knows-how”, “roof-looks”, “and-bands-and”, and “let-the-rest-rent”.

Consonance

Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds to create internal rhyming within the poetic line. A number of instances of Consonance can also be traced in the poem as the consonant sounds repeat in the pair of words that follow: “sure-there”, “Irish-Sixpence”, “wondering-what”, “will-fall”, “riddles-seemingly”, “bored-uninformed”.

Graphological features

Every stanza in the poem starts as a continuation of the previous stanza. Even in almost every stanza, there is a little use of full stop (.), rather a large number of commas (,) have been used to create a sense of continuation as if all the sentences are interlinked with each other.

Grammatical Features

The first two stanzas are written in Present tense expressing the present activities and attitude of the poet in association with the Church. The next three stanzas are written in Future tense as the poet contemplates the future of the Church in these stanzas. Again, the last two stanzas are in Present tense as the poet comes back to the present significance and existence of the Church.

Foregrounding

Writers who intend to make their language creative or inventive, use a language different from the so called ordinary, usual or everyday language. Foregrounding is such a tool by which a writer can produce uniqueness in a literary work. It is realized by linguistic deviation and linguistic parallelism.

Parallelism

In Parallelism, same idea is repeated or illustrated in different sentences and they are generally made similar in form that is the principal subject and the principal predicate occupy the same position in each of them. The following two lines repeat the same ideas in the poem: "A shape less recognisable each week.

A Purpose more obscure."

Both the elements "A shape" and "A purpose" refer back to the Church and the words "less recognisable" and "obscure" are almost similar in sense.

Deviation

Deviation is a Stylistic notion, that is, one of the ways in which foregrounding is produced. Short (1996) argues that "deviation, which is a linguistic phenomenon, has an important psychological effect on the readers (and hearers). If a part of poem is deviant, it becomes especially noticeable, or perceptually prominent." Deviation can be produced in the following levels:

Phonological Deviation

Phonological deviation consists the deviation in the sound system used in the poem. In this poem, the deviation can be traced in the rhyme scheme. All the seven stanzas of the poem is written with the rhyme scheme "ababcadcd". The first line rhymes with the third line, second line with the fourth line, seventh line with the ninth line. But the rhyme deviates in the sixth line as it rhymes with the first line.

Semantic Deviation

Deviation in the semantic level can be of following types:

Imagery

It is an author's use of vivid and descriptive language to add depth to their work. It appeals to human senses to deepen the reader's understanding of the work. In this poem for the sake of reader's understanding the poet presents a number of imageries. Image of a silt, image of destinies being robbed, image of taking hat off showing of reverence, image of walking dead one, image of a Christian addict, image of a ruin-bibber.

Symbol

A Symbol is a literary device that contains several layers of meaning. It is the using of an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning. Symbolism can give a literary work more richness and colour and make the meaning of the work deeper. In this poem, the poet uses Symbolism as an important tool. In the first stanza the "brownish" flowers symbolize lifelessness. Again, the symbol of "Hectoring verses" stands for hoarseness of the artificial recitation of religious verses without any emotions. Irish Sixpence symbolizes how charity becomes a practice of little value. The symbol of "Dubious women" stands for the people's cynicism towards the spiritual significance of the Church. The phrase "ghostly silt dispersed" symbolizes the lack of emotional connection between people.

Personification

Personification consists in investing abstract ideas or inanimate objects with the attributes of a living being. (1960). This figure is generally used in imaginative writing and is suited more to poetry than to ordinary prose. In this poem, the poet uses personification as a mean to bring in the intended effect. In the 1st stanza, the abstract idea "silence" is attributed with a state of human mind that is "tense". In stanza no. 2, again abstract idea "echoes" is attributed with human activity as "sniggers". Another abstract idea "superstition" is attributed with the human quality of mortality as the poet

associates the verb “die” with “superstition” in the 2nd stanza. In the last stanza, again another abstract idea “compulsion” is attributed with human activity such as “robed”.

Irony

Irony consists in the use of words the natural meaning of which is the opposite to what is intended to be expressed. By this figure we say one thing when we mean another; we pretend to approve something which we really want to ridicule. In the poem, the poet ends the first stanza with the word “reverence”. But his activities associated with showing “reverence” is something ironic. Generally, people take off their hats when showing reverence. But the poet here, in place of hat, takes his “cycle-clip” off. This move of the poet expresses his ironical response toward the ritual of showing reverence to the religious matter.

Lexical Deviation

In this poem, to put emphasis on the particular word, uses it with a different meaning. In the penultimate line of the fourth stanza, the poet uses the word “disbelief” to mean superstition. Generally, disbelief stands in opposition to belief connoting lack of any belief. But here, the poet uses it with a new meaning.

Grammatical Deviation

Grammatical deviation is associated with the grammatical components used in a text. It includes deviation in word order, syntactical feature and also the morphological structure. Followings are some of the instances in the grammatical level:

Transferred Epithet

By this figure an adjective is transferred or shifted from the object to which it properly belongs, to another with which it is associated in the mind of the writer or the speaker. In this poem, the figure is used two times—one is in “musty silence” in the 1st stanza, and another one is in the “serious house” in the last stanza. In the 1st stanza, the silence is not musty, rather the atmosphere is musty. And in the last stanza, the seriousness is not of the house that is the Church but actually of the activities associated with the Church.

Inversion

This figure consists in inverting the grammatical order of words in a sentence to secure emphasis. In this poem, the poet starts the 3rd stanza with the inversion of the word order for the sake of emphasis: “Yet stop I did...”.

Neologism

It consists in the coining of new words, or the use of words recently coined by others. In stanza no. 5 of the poem the poet coins a new word through compounding. He takes two different word ruin and bibber and compounding them together creates a new word, “ruin-bibber”.

Graphological Deviation

Graphological deviation consists deviation in overall surface structure of a text. Polysyndeton and Asyndeton are included in it.

Polysyndeton

This figure consists in the excessive use of conjunctive particles. It serves to impart emphasis to the particulars which are enumerated. Polysyndeton is a significant tool in the poem. It occurs in the following lines:

“...seats, and stone, and little books...” in line no. 3.

“That tap and jot and know...” in line no. 41.

“Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?” in line no. 44.

“...marriage, and birth, and death, and thoughts of these...” in line no. 50.

Asyndeton

Another recurrent vital tool used in the poem is asyndeton. This figure consists in the omission of connecting conjunctions, and is conducive to energy and vividness. All the stanzas of the poem are presented through a continuation with each other, having less of full stop (.) at the ending. The prominent cases of asyndeton are found in the following lines:

"...sprawlings of flowers, cut for Sunday, brownish now..." in line no. 4-5.

"...a tense, musty, unignorable silence, brewed God knows how long." in line no. 7-8.

"In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;

But superstition, like belief, must die, ..." in line no. 33-34.

"Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky..." in line no. 36.

"Will be the last, the very last, to seek..." in line no. 39.

"...my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt

Dispersed, yet tending to the..." in line no. 45-47.

Chronological Deviation

The poet, in line no. 50, deviates in the chronological order of events in human life. The event of "marriage" always comes after "birth". But here the poet missed the chronological order and places marriage before birth: "...marriage, and birth, and death..."

Deviation in Tense

The first two stanzas of the poem are written in present tense and the last five stanzas are in future tense. But the deviation is found in the following lines which are written in past tense.

In the second stanza, "Reflect the place was not worth stopping for. / Yet stop I did."

In the 6th stanza, "...because it held unspilt so long..."

"...for which was built / This special shell?"

In the last stanza, "Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in."

Interestingly, all the three lines are the mostly emphasized part of the poem which are deliberately produced by the poet to bring out the effect of the poem.

Conclusions

In carrying out a stylistic analysis of a literary work, one must pay attention to its contents, forms, and language. Objectivity posits that such observations and analyses should always be backed with tangible linguistic evidence away from intuitive responses. Again, thorough, and effective reading with sensibility to linguistic choices is essential to a productive stylistic analysis of any literary work. Philip Larkin's "Church Going" deploys rich poetic devices to several purposes such as explaining, clarifying, illustrating, and revealing. However, the analysis has provided a division of labour between a stylistic analyst and a literary critic.

The researcher concludes that through stylistic tools of foregrounding and its types, one can reach to the right interpretation of the poem even if there is no prior knowledge about the literary work. In this way, stylistic analysis, in one way, give us the opportunity to enjoy the creativity of English literature, especially English poetry. And at the same time, Stylistics uses the scientific and objective look of linguistic analysis.

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