

Original Paper

A Brief Linguistic-stylistic Analysis of MY LIFE and SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF

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Abstract

Linguistic devices in poetry have always been a research hotspot in the field of literature. Combined with important linguistic devices, the researcher made an attempt to compare and discuss the systematic stylistic functions between the poem MY LIFE and the poem SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF. More specifically, two research questions are addressed: which linguistic features are used to achieve the foregrounding in the poem to support the theme? And what is the functional significance of these linguistic devices from the stylistic point of view? This paper first identified and classified the linguistic devices employed by these two poems for theme foregrounding. Then this paper analyzed and discussed the functions and the meaning implications produced through those linguistic features. The analysis of these two poems finds that metaphor, repetition, parallelism, simile, and personification are more prominent linguistic devices that are used to allow the poets to create literary plays, reiterate visual images, convey emotional tension, enhance emotive cohesion, stimulate emotional resonance and add literary color. The research finds that these different functional effects can be reflected by the same linguistic devices, also by using different linguistic devices, which mainly depends on the poet's flexible use of these linguistic techniques.

Keywords

linguistic techniques, linguistic devices, stylistic analysis

1. Introduction

Rohingya poet Pacifist Farooq's MY LIFE is a poem written in succinct and straightforward language. It has six stanzas and sixteen lines. Pacifist Farooq is a young multilingual Rohingya poet, educator, teacher, translator, humanitarian activist, peacebuilder, and footballer. He was born in Buthidaung, Northern Rakhine State, Myanmar. The poet described his terrible and horrible life as a refugee in Cox's Bazaar refugee camp after he narrowly escaped from the Myanmar Tatmadaw. The whole poem

is filled with a melancholy atmosphere, and the words describe his life in the refugee camp, like that of a prisoner, without freedom or hope.

Zaki Ovais is a new Rohingya poet who fled Myanmar. Zaki Ovais's *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF* is a rhyming poem in eight stanzas and fifteen lines of similar length. In the first sentence of each stanza, it begins with "I'm." The alliteration used in it makes the poem full of rhyme and easy to follow. It is a poem that presents itself in a monologue, and addresses the author's fear of refugee camps, flashing his poems of agony and caution from the refugee camp. The last line, which is composed in response to a writing activity that asked students to think about the lyric "I," could be viewed as his poetic debut. Zaki's "I" is interestingly imprisoned, denied, and restricted in the poem, representing the recent history of the Rohingya, one of the world's most oppressed ethnic minorities.

According to Toolan et al. (1983), in poetry, the creative manipulation of the verbal code and the aesthetic result are inextricably linked. Both of the two poets experienced as a refugee and expressed their fear feelings in the poem. However, based on the foregrounding theory, they employ different linguistic and stylistic features to display their themes and feelings and attract the reader's attention towards the subject matter of their poems. It is important to conduct a contrastive analysis to explore deviations at the different levels of linguistic organization the two poets use and figure out what effects they create and how those effects can be understood.

2. Methodology

A linguistic-stylistic analysis is utilized to give exhaustive insights into the understanding of the two poems. Metaphor, found in both poems, is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another without any signals such as "like" or "as" (Kovecses, 2010). Parallelism and repetition are put together to compare the similarities and differences between the two poems because they have very similar structures to some extent. Miller (1993) demonstrated that metaphor is an elliptical simile, and according to Glucksberg and Keysar (1990), the simile is the explicit expression of metaphor. From that, a conclusion can be drawn that simile is a counterpart of metaphor and is frequently discussed together. However, in this assignment, simile and personification are analyzed side by side. Because in the poem *MY LIFE* always compares a human to non-human creatures or inanimate objects, while *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF* attaches human traits to them, forming a unique relation in a way.

As for systematic stylistic analysis, the theory put forward by Leech and Short is applied. The first part analyzes the grammatical categories, mainly including sentence types and sentence arrangement. Moreover, the second section is related to cohesion, manifesting that sentences of *MY LIFE* are connected through grammatical cohesion while *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF* through lexical cohesion.

3. Linguistic Devices

3.1 Metaphor and Metaphor

3.1.1 Analysis

MY LIFE written by Rohingya poet Pacifist Farooq, and *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF* by Zaki Ovais both share the theme of fear in different expressions. It was obvious that both of the poems began with metaphor deviation as a linguistic feature to attract the readers' attention. Leech (2014) states that "metaphor is so central to our notion of poetic creation that it is often treated as a phenomenon in its own right, without reference to other kinds of transferred meaning". In *MY LIFE*, the author Pacifist Farooq applied metaphor to describe that he was a frog, and his life was like a well in the second line, which specifically indicated his depression in life. A well is like a prisoner's cage, and he lived like a frog trapped in the well, feeling hopeless and scary. When readers linked the well with the prisoner's cage, the following sentence, "a prisoner in the jail of fresh air" could naturally resonate with the reader, which leads to a better effect of enhancement.

When it comes to *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF* by Zaki Ovais, there are many metaphorical deviations throughout the poem. From the beginning, "I'm a hungry star in the sky", "I'm a goldfish plant in the garden", "I'm a fly in the kitchen, buzzing", "I'm a dove on the street of Yangon" to "I'm the water flowing in Mayu river", the author compared himself with different things, such as a star, a goldfish plant, a fly, and a dove. All of these things have one thing in common: their living conditions are so deplorable that the author experiences a strong, frightening feeling. From those analogies, the author could pass on his fear to his readers, and the fear was enhanced step by step because he used six successive metaphors to express his fear of the perilous environment at the time. Based on the background, the author tried to tell about the horrific scenes he had experienced: the burning down of villages in Arakan, their home in Myanmar; genocide, rape, and torture.

3.1.2 Discussion

To summarize the similarity of the two poems in metaphor, *MY LIFE* by Rohingya poet Pacifist Farooq used metaphor in the beginning to tell the readers what his life was and continues to show his miserable life. *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF* by Zaki Ovais applied continuous metaphorical technique to highlight his fear one by one and impressed the readers more deeply. And although the allusion in the second poem is positive, it is meant to contrast with the negative situation in the subsequent subordinate lines, which highlights the negative influence better.

3.2 Repetition and Parallelism

3.2.1 Analysis

In the poem *MY LIFE*, in line 4 "In the dark, dark cosmos," and line 5 "No days, just nights, nights." The words 'dark' and 'nights' are repeated at the same time. Here the foregrounding in the poem is manifested by the fundamental poetic technique-repetition. Pope (1992) said the repetition of words is often the central element in the poem, and can reiterate the original images and ideas depicted in the poem, or link the stanzas together. What's more, repetition of words is necessary not only to grab the

reader's attention but also to provide emphasis and clarity (Kemertelidze & Manjavidze, 2013). Just like in these two lines, the poet uses the repetition of the two words 'dark' and 'nights', echoing the previous text, to reiterate and build the dark image of the deep 'well' and the 'jail' in the first two lines. The repetitions stimulate readers' visual imagination to build a dark and gloomy image in readers' minds, and make the image clearer and more realistic, arousing the emotional resonance of readers' inner fear. In addition, the repetition here serves as an emphasis, emphasizing how bad the situation 'I' am in, and laying a strong emotional tone for the following description of the suffering and struggle in this situation. Then it is more powerful to convey the emotion of fear and helplessness in the existing life.

In the poem *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF*, in stanza 1 to 7, the word order and sentence structure of each line are similar, which constitutes (Pronoun + Linking Verb + Noun Phrase + Prepositional Phrase, + Reduced Relative Clause). The foregrounding in this poem is well manifested by the similar syntactical structure or construction-parallelism. Firstly, the parallelism of the syntactic structure in this poem not only makes the whole poem neater and well-organized, but also makes the language of the poem change from loose to condensed, thus showing a unique charm. At the same time, it can also make the poem endowed with a certain literary grace when expressing strong emotions, making it easy to read and remember. In addition, Guillén (1987) found parallelism develops a meaningful tension between the design of the poem and its various components, creating syntactic, prosodic, semantic, phonological and morphological interactivity between order and process, and contributing to the different levels' mutual reinforcement and intensification. In the parallel syntactic structure, all of the Reduced Relative Clauses are composed of the negative action in the pessimistic situation, trying to struggle out, but in vain, which reveals the poet's negative emotion of being unable to resist or break free, as well as the intensification for his fear of his own existing situation. Furthermore, combined with the negative elements in the parallelism, the same lexical repetition of "I'm..." also gives emotive intensification and helps to reinforce the process of cohesion in the poem, echoing with the last line "I'm someone I'm afraid of." to push the fear of the whole poem to its climax.

3.2.2 Discussion

All in all, both of the repetitions in these two poems produce the emphatic effect, but just a different focus. The repetition in *MY LIFE* gives a visual imagination, highlighting the dark and gloomy image in readers' minds to relate to them with the emotion of fear. However, in *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF*, the parallelism combined with the repetition to make a meaningful tension and emotive intensification to stimulate or echo the readers' inner fear. They also play an important role in helping to enhance emotive cohesion and maintain an aesthetic principle in the poetic organization.

3.3 Simile and Personification

3.3.1 Analysis

MY LIFE uses a figure of speech called a simile. First, in the sentence "just like an action movie in which you are a gangster," the author compares life to an action movie, "gangster" in this context means a gangster in a movie. In the face of the gangster, we are weak and powerless, which reflects the

author's helplessness towards life, just like a man kidnapped by a gangster, who cannot be free and has no power in his hands. This simile reflects the author's sad attitude towards life. Second, in "just like an actor who cannot discover his lines," the author compares himself to an actor who cannot find his lines. Actors have to read their lines, and actors who can't find their lines are helpless. This metaphor once again depicts the author's helplessness and sadness towards life. The above two metaphors vividly reflect the author's sadness and fear and resistance to life.

SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF uses a rhetorical device called anthropomorphism. First, in "I am a fly in a kitchen, buzzing on the boundary of a blind wall", the lifeless thing wall is endowed with the characteristic of human beings, namely "blind". The wall is described in this way, highlighting a dead picture. Through the description of flies flying near the blind wall, the author can well understand the fear and suffocation of life. Second, in "I'm the water flowing in Mayu river, missing my partner -- air", the inanimate object is compared to a "partner" with living characteristics. This shows the close relationship between "water" and "air" in the sentence. And water and air are not the same thing, that their friendship is destined to have a sad ending. By describing this sad picture, the author alludes to his sadness and despair.

3.3.2 Discussion

Simile and personification are both rhetorical devices, and there are similarities and differences in their application in the two poems. In terms of similarities, both rhetorical devices vividly embody the author's emotion. Using concrete things, such as "actor" and "blind wall", to describe the author's sad mood. In terms of difference, simile makes a comparison of two unlike things, such as "life" and "action movie", using the word "like". Personification assigns human qualities to something that isn't human or that isn't alive, such as making the "wall" blind.

4. Stylistic Analysis

According to Ryder and Zaerr (2008), linguistic analysis reveals systematic patterns in literary devices, while systematic stylistic analysis uncovers the connection between language and artistic function through stylistic categories, including lexical categories, grammatical categories, cohesion and so forth, put forward by Leech and Short (Song, 2009).

In these two poems, stylistic analysis demonstrates how poets convey the same emotion: the fear of the genocidal scourge, the curtailment of civil liberties, and the fear of living in pain and darkness perpetually.

4.1 Structure

As can be seen from the poem *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF*, it employs numerous images, such as a star, a goldfish, a chicken, a dove, the water, and a human, which are embedded into a similar short sentence structure pattern—a main sentence with a subordinate clause, especially a reduced relative clause. Readers can readily change the images in their minds in the blink of an eye, which means that images flood the mind almost continuously, and stay there for a very short time. The advantage of how

the author arranges their text structure is that there is no time for rest and pauses. Therefore, readers feel the urgency of the atmosphere and sensation of asphyxia, thus making readers feel the author's burning desire for justice and freedom, bringing deep fear of becoming a bird confined to a cage and abused at will. What's more, the orderly structure lends a sense of solemnity to the whole poem. The order of the verse and the disorder of reality form a strong contrast. The author tries to soothe the inner uncalm through the regularization of structure and find a kind of peace in the poem.

On the other hand, the poem *MY LIFE*, first of all, does not adopt a lot of imagery. Compared to *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF*, this poem only uses four images, while the other one uses seven. The former puts more emphasis on the detailed description of images rather than the accumulation of images. Hence, on the whole, *MY LIFE* has a slower and less anxious atmosphere, a sad mood flowing slowly in the heart of the reader. With the author's depiction, the sense of powerlessness is progressively growing. Moreover, the poet's use of sentence types is more freewheeling. There are simple sentences, reduced relative clauses, sentential clauses, and so on, and the writer is not in the mood for neat structure, proving that they fall into a flutter. All the emotions, such as grief and agitation, merge into an intense fear of being a refugee, as the poet writes: "In the dark, dark cosmos. No days, just nights, nights." They are afraid that they will no longer be treated as normal people with the rights of humanity, enslaved and massacred.

4.2 Cohesion

A close examination of cohesion in a poem is also a way to conduct a systematic stylistic analysis. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the notion of cohesion refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text. It can be classified into four types: lexical cohesion, grammatical cohesion, phonological cohesion and graphological cohesion.

In the poem *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF*, as is analyzed earlier, the poem is written directly in seven parallel sentences and ends with "I'm someone I'm afraid of." The nouns and verbs share the same semantic contents in this poem, so the cohesion between sentences is realized by lexical cohesion. The nouns: star, goldfish, fly, chicken, dove, and water all share the similar property that they are things or lives seen ubiquitously in life. They are weak, and it is difficult for them to fight against fate and bondage. Just like the stars mentioned in the poem, once clouds cover them, it is not possible to act against those clouds and make people see their brightness. In addition, the poet employs verbs such as "covered, shaded, confined, jailed, missing, denied" to form a connection indicating that the author is trapped in a tragedy of slaughter and cruel war.

On the contrary, the poem *MY LIFE* establishes a relation between sentences through grammatical cohesion. In the first place, the writer uses the sentence "Here's my life in brief" to naturally introduce the main content, showing his lost freedom, equity, personal security, human rights, and the miserable story of heartbreaking genocide. Then, the poet summarizes the above and continues the following through the sentence, "Storm of racism, of hate—This is my life." Therefore, in the next stanza, the author further portrays reality overwhelmed with sorrow. Finally, the poet summarizes the main

idea—"They will kill and bury you under the treasure of human rights." As a result, the whole poem is connected by these three sentences. These three sentences also serve a special purpose. As mentioned above, this poem's rhythm is slow. The use of grammatical cohesion reinforces this sense of pause, giving readers time to fully understand the writer's fear.

5. Conclusion

To explore which linguistic features are used to achieve the foregrounding in the poem to support the theme and what are the functional significance of these linguistic devices from the stylistic point of view? The researcher made an attempt to compare and discuss the systematic stylistic functions between the poem *MY LIFE* and the poem *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF*. The emotion of the two poems is related to the poet's separate experiences. *MY LIFE* is a poem written by Rohingya poet Pacifist Farooq who escaped from the Burmese armed forces and experienced the horrifying life there. Therefore, the poem he wrote is sad. Zaki is a refugee. *SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF* expresses the author's pain at the refugee camp experience, showing his pain and warning at Cox's Bazar.

This paper makes a detailed analysis of the two poems by means of a linguistic-stylistic analysis. In the aspect of systematic stylistic analysis, the theory of Leech and Short is used. The first part analyzes the grammatical category, including sentence pattern and sentence structure. Comparisons between metaphors in the two poems, repetitions and parallelisms, and similes and personifications were made. The second part is about structure and cohesion, which is about images, lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion. Through the analysis of these two poems, it can be found that metaphor, repetition, parallelism, simile, personification are more prominent language means in poetry. The poet uses these methods to convey emotional tension, inspire emotional resonance, depict vivid pictures and add literary color.

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Appendix

1. Two poems selected

MY LIFE

By Pacifist Farooq

Here's my life in brief...

I was a frog in a well,
A prisoner in the jail of fresh air.
In the dark, dark cosmos,
No days, just nights and nights.

A small cormorant survives
the genocidal waves
by being flung, crashing
into the world's strangeness.

Storms of racism, of hate—
This is my life.

Just like an action movie
In which you are the gangster.
Just like an actor who cannot discover his lines.

In Arakan, they kill and bury you
under the treasure of human rights.

SOMEONE I'M AFRAID OF

By Zaki Ovais

I'm a hungry star in the sky,
Covered by jealous clouds.

I'm a goldfish plant in the garden,
Shaded from daylight.

I'm a fly in the kitchen, buzzing
On the boundary of a blind wall.

I'm a chicken under mother's wing,
Confined to the narrows of a wattle.

I'm a dove on the street of Yangon,
Jailed in the cage of inhumanity.

I'm the water flowing in Mayu river,
Missing my partner—Air.

I'm a human in the universe,
Denied the most basic rights.

I'm someone I'm afraid of.