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A Stylistic Analysis of *The Good-Morrow* by John Donne

Abstract:

The present paper aims to analyze John Donne's poem "The Good-Morrow" stylistically. Being a branch of applied linguistics, Stylistics scrutinizes the literary and non-literary texts in terms of their tonal and linguistic style. Donne's poem, being rich in hyperboles and conceits, depicts the universal theme of undying love where Donne welcomes new dawn and is optimistic for upcoming years of adoration and is exuberant over the magical union of two soulmates. The paper in hand adopts the stylistic analysis as a research methodology to unveil the basic theme of the poem and analyses the poem on the grammatical, phonological and graphological levels. The theoretical framework incorporates the main tenets of Geoffrey N. Leech (1969) from his well-known work "A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry", and also this work focuses on the notions of Mick Short (1996). Stylistic analysis of the chosen poem portrays how the poet, via the use of striking stylistic devices, communicates the central concept of the poem and how the poet has adorned the poem with various elements of style on the levels of grammar phon and graphology.

Key Words:

Linguistic Style, Hyperboles, Conceits, Grammar, Phonology, Graphology

Introduction

The work in hand targets conducting the stylistic analysis of one of the most renowned poems of John Donne, "The Good-Morrow". [Leech \(1969\)](#) claims that how something is performed, written or spoken is termed as style. Style is a derivative of the word "stilus" which is Latin in origin and pertains to the act of writing. It is something that is connected with the meditations, artistic expressions, notions and reflections of a poet, author or writer. As far as the sociolinguistic definition of style is concerned, it is a stock of linguistic variants that owns specific social meanings. Social meanings is an umbrella term that constitutes multifarious concepts, for example, the group membership, personal attributes, beliefs, values and so on.

Stylistics, or the study of style, basically lies at the crossroads of literature and linguistics, but now it is considered as the branch of applied linguistics. Stylistics is concerned with the varieties, characteristics and properties of the language, which aids us to understand literature in a more comprehensive way since it explores the principles and rules concealed behind the linguistic choices made by people. The multiplicity of definitions exist for Stylistics. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines stylistics as "the study of style and the methods used in written language". Similarly, Leech and Short (1981) claim that the linguistic study of style is termed as stylistics. Stylistics, as a branch of applied linguistics, has a stipulated rationale. Short and Candlin (1989) state, "Stylistics is a linguistic approach to the study of a literary text. It has incorporated one basic part of the general course - philosophy; that of joining literary study and language" (p. 3).

Spitzer was the one who commenced analyzing literary works from the point of view of stylistics, so Spitzer is considered as the father/pioneer of literary stylistics. The main dichotomy between style and stylistics is that style pertains to what kind of language a writer uses, while

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Stylistics (in addition to being a branch of applied linguistics) refers to the study of the linguistic devices used in the English language that affect a person's interpretation of a text. Stylistics is the study of the diversities of a language. For instance: the language of advertising, politics, religion, poets, authors, etc. or the language of a particular point in time. All are used differently and belong in a specific situation. The goals of stylistics are to establish discourse particularities, endorse appreciation of text and discourses, focus linguistic habits, and make critical judgments.

As far as stylistic analysis is concerned, so stylistic analysis constructs rules and regulations methodologically, scientifically and logically for the poet's linguistic choices to ease the reader in better perception of the textual meaning. Stylistics has many branches, including computational stylistics, stylistic syntax, phonostylistics, grammatical stylistics, comparative stylistics etc. According to [Wynne \(2005\)](#), the most common way of applying stylistics is to consider the theories of phonology, syntax, graphology and techniques from other areas such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics and semantics for the scrutiny of prosaic and poetic stuff.

John Donne (1572-1631) was a contemporary of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare and is the most distinguished member of the Metaphysical School of Poetry. John Donne is considered the master of satires, the writer of twenty allergies, producer of three epithalamions and the greatest laureate in the history of English literature. Versatility and complexity abound in the works of John Donne.

Donne's flights from the material realm to the spiritual domain have been characterized as a "metaphysical poet" by various critics like Dryden and Johnson. His poetry is loaded with conceits, hyperboles, wit, oxymorons, extended metaphors, similes and enchanting imagery that compels the reader to extol this exceptional talent. The school of thought about the "being and knowing" philosophy is called metaphysics. John Donne has been characterized as a metaphysical poet by Grierson because his poetry is philosophical and reflective apart from being witty and wise.

The Chosen poem "The Good-Morrow" was published in 1633 in Donne's songs and sonnets. The poem orbits around the idea of timeless love that the love that has just burgeoned between the two lovers is sufficient for them to get triumphant. Lovers are wholeheartedly singing a welcoming song for their newly awakened souls and are condemning those childish pleasures they have depended upon because they have recently tested the delicious taste of love which is enough for them to provide a complete world.

Since the poem possesses stylistic devices in ample amount, this paper tries to make the common reader aware of the choices of words a poet makes to establish meanings of the text. Exploring the ways in which language choices have been integrated into the selected poem is the ultimate intention of this work. It pertains to the recurrent traits of stylistics used by the poet.

The fundamental purpose of stylistics as a field of study is to establish a connection between linguistic analysis and literary criticism. The focus of a linguist will be on how a literary text depicts the language system. However, the critics will also highlight the concealed significance of the text. The rationale of stylistics is to endorse the tools required to interpret a text and to establish noteworthy critical judgments. Stylistics encapsulates a closed study of linguistic features (devices) of a text in order to portray that how meanings in a literary or non-literary text are generated.

Research Questions

In order to accomplish this study, the following research questions are devised:

1. How can the stylistic manifestation of the selected poem "The Good-Morrow" be analyzed on the grammatical, phonological and graphological levels?
2. Which stylistic devices are at work in the selected poem "The Good-Morrow"?

Literature Review

This section pertains to the literature review regarding various levels of style, metaphysical themes, and works in stylistic analysis. O'Leary (2004) comments on the purpose of a good literature review in these words, "Literature review establishes your credibility as knowledgeable and capable researcher" (p. 79). The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language states that style is the choice of various linguistic features from all the possibilities found in a language. Poets and writers often use different stylistic devices and stylistic manifestations at multiple levels.

Robert Frost, in his poem *Bereft* (1893), makes use of various stylistic devices. The poem is fairly lyrical. At the graphological level, there is no division of stanzas, and we observe standard capitalization. At the grammatical level, the use of various punctuations like question marks portrays the bewildered mindset of the poet that a conflict dwells within the poet's mind. Moreover, colon marks are used where the poet talks about his state of solitude and the uses of full stops depict the completion of one aspect. At the level of phonology, the poem has a rhyming scheme of the order AAAAABBACDDDEDE, and the poem is loaded with various rhyming words like tone; known, before; roar. Choice of words by the writer plays a central part for the reader in the perception and interpretation of the text or the message the bard is trying to convey.

Metaphysical poetry is quite distinct. The poems categorized in this group share common grounds: they are all immensely intellectualized, they use ambiguous imagery, they frequently use paradoxes and possess extremely complicated thought. [Peirce \(2012\)](#) divided metaphysics into: (1) general metaphysics (ontology), (2) religious metaphysics (3) physical metaphysics.

In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," Donne writes, "If they are two, they are two so/ As if stiff twin compasses are two" (lines 25-26), which is reminiscent of the fact that metaphysical poetry is loaded with hyperboles and conceits. The poet contrasts the two lovers who are head over heels in love with each other, with a compass which is an extended metaphor that, like a compass has one central joining point, no matter how far apart the two feet are, their point of unity remains the same. The same is the case with these two lovers that no matter how far they would be from each other, their hearts will always continue to throb with each other's love. So through various stylistic devices like hyperboles and conceits, the readers interpret the message the poet is trying to convey about the eternity of soulful love.

In "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre", Donne remarks, "Get with child a mandrake roote" (Line 2). A mandrake root is endowed with such magical powers that it can perform anything except childbearing. Through this extended metaphor, which is a stylistic device, Donne portrays bitter cynicism and malevolence in the poem reader interprets the misogynist approach of the poet. [Leech \(1969\)](#) states, "The poet, enjoys a unique freedom, among the users of the language, to range all over its communicative resources, without respect to the social or historical contexts to which they belong" (p. 5). So in poetry, we observe such manipulation of language, which is not observed in day to day language because every poet has their own distinctive style.

In The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language, [Crystal \(1995\)](#) observes that stylistic analysis has dealt with the complex and valued language, in practice, within the literature, especially Literary Stylistics. Crystal continues to debate that the scope is narrowed down to focus on enchanting features of language during such explorations. For example, the deviant features that abound in it regardless of the wider structures that are found in discourses as a whole. [Crystal \(1987\)](#) states that the condensed language of poetry unmasks the secrets of its construction to the stylistics far more than the language of plays and novels.

Stylistic devices, also known as rhetoric devices or figures of speech, refer to distinctive techniques that impart additional meaning and a striking flavour to the text—for instance, hyperbole, personification, litotes, oxymoron, onomatopoeia, irony etc.

[Leech \(1969\)](#) enlists multifarious levels of style, some of which are negotiated below:

- (i) level of graphology which deals with scrutinizing someone's character by his handwriting such as comma contracted forms, punctuations, hyphens etc.
- (ii) The level of phonology deals with the systematic study of sounds, formal rules of pronunciation, utterances, end rhyme, assonance etc.
- (iii) Level of lexis deals with the totality of vocabulary items in a language and systematic study of lexemes. In terms of poetry, this level deals with coinage, unfamiliar expressions and compounding.
- (iv) The level of semantics deals with the social, associative, contextual and denotative meanings of language.
- (v) Level of pragmatics deals with underlying meanings created by the poet that is yet to be figured out by the reader. Examples of this level include deixis, anaphora, cataphora and presupposition.
- (vi) Level of syntax deals with the positioning of words in a sentence, arrangement of individual words, phrases, clauses and how do these structures combine to form larger sentences.
- (vii) The level of morphology deals with the science of morphemes, the structure of the word itself, how a word is bifurcated into morphemes and also morphological conditioning. The difference between morphology and syntax is that morphology deals with science within a word, while syntax establishes a relationship between and among words.

Stylistics is that offshoot of applied linguistics that discerns the creativity in language. It aids in multiplying the ways we think about language, and we play with the language. Stylistic analysis is a productive way of deciphering literature, but Wetherill in *Literary Text: An Examination of Critical Methods* (1974) notes two issues with the stylistic analysis of poetry:

1. There may be an over-preoccupation with a specific trait that might minimize the significance of others that could be equally significant.
2. It will ignore other ways whereby meaning is produced if one intends to see a text as simply a collection of stylistic elements.

Research Methodology

This paper analyses the poem "The Good-Morrow" as per the perspective of stylistic analysis. Three levels are considered for the stylistic analysis, which are phonology, grammar and graphology. Stylistic devices dealt with in this paper are hyperboles, metaphors, allusions and parallelism. The instrument here is the researcher himself, who has analyzed the poem and highlighted the various stylistic devices at work in the text. The stylistic analysis uses commentary, mostly scientific and objective, on the technical terminology derived from linguistics and is quite distinct from literary criticism. This analysis leads to various linguistic clues that the poet employs to project his private sphere of thoughts regarding the subject of eternal love between two soul mates who are rejoicing in their newfound realm of endearment. The study's overall design is qualitative because stylistic analysis recognizes patterns of usage in literary and non-literary texts.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework consists of the notions of Geoffrey N. Leech (1969) and [Mick Short \(1996\)](#). As per [short \(1996\)](#), there are many levels of style such as syntactic level, semantic level, grammatical level, phonological level, morphological level, graphological level, pragmatic level etc. But the study in hand is delimited to three levels. The three levels of stylistic analysis that are under consideration are described below.

1. Phonology deals with spoken language's sound patterns and sound systems. It is also concerned with the systematic organization of speech sounds. Rhyme elements, alliteration, consonance and assonance are basic phonological devices.
2. As per [Leech \(1969\)](#), graphology overpowers orthography. Paragraphing, spellings, punctuation, capitalization, spacing and the whole writing system falls under the term "graphology".

3. The grammatical level encompasses both the syntactic (arrangement of words in a sentence) and morphological (formation of words) levels. It identifies various parts of speech used such as nouns, pronouns, verbs, plus phrases and clauses.

[Leech \(1969\)](#) provides a checklist of various stylistic devices out of which I have chosen hyperbole (over-statements that are not intended to be taken literally), metaphor (analogy between two unlikely things), parallelism (similar constructions between or within sentences) and allusion (a suggestive or implied reference to something historical or from other texts).

Discussion and Findings

This particular segment of this research paper deals with the analysis and recapitulation of data. The aid is taken from the ideas of Leech and Short to conduct this stylistic analysis. Three levels of style are discussed: firstly, phonological analysis, graphological level and finally, grammatical level of style in this work. Plus, the rhetorical devices that are in the spotlight in the chosen poem are also mentioned.

Phonological Level

The Good-Morrow is cleaved into three stanzas only. Each stanza is a septet, i.e. consists of seven lines. The poem follows the rhyming scheme of ABABCCC, and we observe rhythmic variety in the poem because each septet is split into two types of metres, with the first six lines being iambic pentameter and the last line is following iambic hexameter. A meter, according to [Short \(1996\)](#), is the rhythmic patterning's additional layer. While [Leech \(1969\)](#) advocates the dependence of meter on the change and transformation of the stressed and unstressed syllables. The same sequence is discerned in all three stanzas. [Short \(1996\)](#) comments that the final syllabus of every line of poetry refers to the rhyme if the last word has identical consonants or vowels. Moreover, [Short \(1996\)](#) talks about assonance that this particular term refers to the process when in one line of a poem, a similar pattern of repetition of vowel sounds exist. Here are some terms that depicts the presence of assonance in the selected poem;

- a. wonder, troth (Line 1)
- b. did, till (Line 2)
- c. countrey, childishly (Line 3)
- d. we, sleepers (Line 4)
- e. fancies, bee (Line 5)
- f. any, beauty (Line 6)
- g. dreame, thee (Line 7)

Moreover, another rhythmic technique here is of alliteration where we find repetition of various consonants. Following are the instances.

- Were **w**e not **w**ean'd till then? (Line 2)
- Or **s**no**r**ted we in the **S**even **S**leepers' den? (Line 4)

Graphological Level

As [Leech \(1969\)](#) has debated about the superiority of graphology to orthography, he opines that a work of art has a particular mode of communication because the language employed within the domain of art is extremely distinguished from the language people practice in their daily routines. The line of demarcation between the occurrence of a specific term in the textual domain and the frequency of the same feature in daily life is termed deviation. Leech claims that a poet is the possessor of poetic licence, due to which he can depart from the usual rules of the language to make it more sparking. Unusual and odd contractions are at work in the text that is not acceptable in standard English forms. For instance:

- Lov'd
- Wean'd
- Suck'd
- Desir'd
- T'was

The use of punctuations such as full stop, comma, colon, the apostrophe is evident in the poem. As the poem initiates with the question, so this particular punctuation mark stirs the imagination of the reader and compels him to meditate over it. So the bards make use of such graphological devices to make their work catchy. Moreover, since the poem was written in 1633, which dates back to the Neoclassical period, so we find many of the old English spellings and obsolete terms in the poem. Below are some examples.

- Countrey (country)
- Thee (archaic for "you")
- Soules (souls)
- Feare (fear)
- Controules (controls)
- Showne (shown)
- Possesse (possess)
- Appeares (appear)
- Sharpe (sharp)
- Finde (find)
- Thou (archaic for "you")
- Doe (do)

Grammatical Level

This poem consist of well-formed grammatical structures where we find various lexical choices made by the poet consisting of nouns, pronouns, abstract nouns, prepositions, verbs, and adjectives. The grammatical structure of this particular poem, including the use of punctuations, capitalizations and various parts of speech, has assisted in transferring the central idea of the poem i.e emotional and physical love. A play of multifarious lexical choices is present in the poem belonging to different parts of speech.

- **Abstract Nouns:** troth, pleasure, beauty, dreame.
- **Nouns:** country, seven sleepers den, roome, soules, sea, maps, face, heart, hemisphere, North, West.
- **Adverbs:** childishly, then, ever, now, none.
- **Pronouns:** I, thou, we, this, our, one, others, us, mine, thine, what.
- **Prepositions:** by, in, on, of, to.
- **Conjunctions:** and, but, so, if.
- **Verbs:** did, love, wean'd, suck'd, snorted, was, got, desir'd, see, be, waking, feare, controul, have, showne, doe, mixt, slacken.

Stylistic Devices

[Leech \(1969\)](#) comments upon the significance of stylistic devices. He is of the view that rhetorical devices impart spark

to a particular work. This is because a plurality of meanings is conveyed via a single utterance, and within the context of a single poem, diverse themes, concepts and meanings are established.

Hyperbole, in the opinion of [Leech \(1969\)](#), is an over-exaggeration in the speech, mainly colloquial speech. Within the poem's context, the first hyperbole occurs in the first stanza when the poet designates all his former life as futile and wasteful and is regarding his post-love life as fruitful and pleasing. The next hyperbole occurs when he regards all the navigators, sailors and cartographers as half-baked and idiotic people who are wasting their time in exploring the world because, according to Donne, he is the sole possessor of the whole world because he has the whole world with him in the shape of his beloved. One more hyperbole is present when the poet comments upon the nature of their love that it can never fall a victim to deterioration, and he compares their loves with hemispheres that his love is superior to the two hemispheres because the North Pole is slanting and the west Pole is declining, but their love is flawless and unblemished.

Parallelism is also found in the poem because few sentences are structured in such a way that they look surprisingly identical.

- Without sharp north, without declining west (Line 18). We can vividly detect the repetition of the word "without".
- My face in thine eye, thine in mine (Line 15). This parallel construction is reminiscent of the fact that the two lovers are a unified soul.

When a poet or writer refers to, or a text shows glimpses of any historical, cultural or religious event or a peculiar figure, the phenomena is termed as allusion. The poem possesses a Biblical allusion of "seven sleepers den" which refers to seven Christian young men belonging to Ephesus who took shelter in a cave because of the fear and anxiety of getting killed by Emperor Decius they slept for many years. So here, John Donne is contrasting his pre-love life with the numbness of seven sleepers den, and he is welcoming their freshly awakened souls and greeting good-morrow to each other.

[Leech \(1969\)](#) talks about metaphor as such a rhetorical device that it forms the crux of the poetic convention. It is a phenomenon in itself and pertains to contrasting two unlike things but are said to possess some identical traits. The poem teems with extended metaphors.

"If ever any beauty I did see/ Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dream of thee" (Lines 6-7) show that the poet has a staunch belief that all the beauties of the world reside in his beloved and her magical personality is the standard of beauty for everyone.

Conclusion

There is a cogent dichotomy between poetic language and normal language. This work conforms to the framework set by Leech and Short, and since a poet is the owner of a poetic licence, he may violate certain conventional rules of the language. Apparently, poetic language involves incorporating various stylistic devices, like the current work constitutes a debate upon hyperboles, metaphors, allusion and parallelism that John Donne has employed in his poem to add colours in his work. This work also discusses stylistic manifestations at the levels of grammar, graphology and phonology. The main significance of stylistic manifestation in a literary work is that it aids the reader in the interpretation, perception and comprehension of themes and meanings that dwells within the text and assists the reader in being aware of what is going on in the text. The stylistic analysis of the poem *The Good-Morrow* depicts the main essence of the poem that the nascent experience of love has proved to be extraordinarily cherishable and refreshing for the poet. This new endearment is so much fertile and richer than the prior experiences of the poet that love has transformed the poet's ordinary monotonous life into something magnificent.

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Appendix

"The Good-Morrow" by John Donne

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? Were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
T'was so; but this, all pleasures fancies bee;
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, T'was but a dream of thee.
And now good-morrow to our waking soules,
Which watch not one another out of feare;
For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome, an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone;
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.
My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plaine hearts do in the faces rest,
Where can we finde two better hemispheares
Without sharpe North, without declining West?
What ever dyes, was not mix'd equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.