

A Study of Tabish Khair's Poetic Work through Stylistics

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Abstract

Stylistics as a scientific discipline helps to interpret literary text logically based on linguistic evidence. This study aims at exploring the stylistic features of Tabish Khair's poem, Immigrant. The poem has been analyzed on different levels of stylistics: graphological, phonological, morphological, syntactical, pragmatics, and discourse. The connotative and denotative meanings of the poem have been explored to get a complete understanding of the poem. The stylistic analysis of the poem reflects the main idea of the poem that is the quest of the poet for his homeland and his lost identity. The choice of the words by the poet has played a very important role in underlying major or minor themes of the poem. It is interesting to mention that he has not used the word Immigrant even once, yet the use of words is quite apt to convey the central idea. The poem is not monotonous or tedious. The poem is relatable to anyone experiencing the same phase of life or state of mind. The theme has been conveyed artistically by using different stylistic devices. This study is also the manifestation of the unique style and structure of Khair's poetry.

Keywords: Stylistic Analysis, Immigrant, Stylistic Devices, Alienation and Sense of Loss

Introduction

Stylistics plays a significant role in interpreting and understanding literary texts not just to explore the linguistic features of the texts, but exclusively with the purpose to signify functional impact and implications of literary texts so their validity and impression in relevant contexts may be reflective and intact (Verdonk, 2002). There has been bare criticism on Stylistics mainly from theoretical linguists that it is more to do with literature than linguistics as Lecerle (1993) came forward with the stance that nobody knows what Stylistics it and it has become the part of the dark alley with no glow like structuralism. He besides categorizing stylistics as 'ailing' ascertained that the scholars attached to research in Stylistics are the true sufferer (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). However, Stylistics is pleasantly thriving and being applied in the disciplines of Language, Literature, and Linguistics as a vital source for meaning-making and interpretations (Stephens, 2007). There is no doubt in the interdisciplinarity status of Stylistics both in its methods and in its theories as it incorporates methods and approaches of multiple domains of social sciences (Sorlin, 2014).

The long-standing claim of Stylistics as an empirical approach to examine literary texts is widely acknowledged as it simultaneously explores textual features of the text and its impacts on the readers too (Peplow & Carter, 2014). Stylistics was an established domain of academia that got prominence in the 20th century and was quite influenced by movements like New Criticism, Formalism, and Structuralism (Hashim, 2017). The central focus of analysis in early Stylistics was poetry, specifically the phonological and grammatical patterns in poetic texts. It has been widely practiced and praised as an objective approach to reach the texts in comparison with the literary criticism or analysis that is often criticized for being subjective and biased (Starcke, 2006). Stylistics has aimed to explore the creativity in literary texts that enhances a thorough understanding of Literature besides language use and structures (Gibbons & Whiteley, 2018). Stylistics relies on linguistic techniques to investigate and probe into literary texts to establish connections and bridge the gaps between literary criticism and linguistic analysis that as a result signify the impression and expression of literary texts in all aspects (Widdowson, 2014). Paramount impact and influence of Stylistics in current practices and emerging trends of exploring functions of language has given validity and diversity to the interpretations of literary texts that we have sub branches of stylistics

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mainly: feminist stylistics, discourse stylistics, Corpus stylistics, cognitive stylistics and the focus of them is to bring forth the peculiar patterns of language of a text that will correspond to the style, impression, implication, and significance of the target text (Simpson, 2004).

The current study aims to signify the practical application of Stylistics in the analysis of the literary text by analyzing Khair's *Immigrant* in particular. This study is an endeavor to reveal and elucidate the unique style as well as themes of Tabish Khair's poetic work that differentiate him from his contemporaries. The stylistic investigation of Khair's Poetic work is of paramount significance as he claims to be part of an obscure, multifaceted, and stretched history. This research aims to explore the stylistic features of the poem 'Immigrant' by Khair. Khair, an Indian Diaspora writer, has a secure niche among the poets of exile. A clear and nostalgic sense of exile pervades through his works. Continually engaged in an exhaustive, yet desperate, effort to find an environment familiar to the senses and a place to belong to, Khair deals with exile in his peculiar way at different levels. This research is focused on the efforts made by Khair to voice the sense of loss which emerges as a consequence of the critical yet unprofitable choices made. Khair was born in 1966 in Ranchi and grew up in his hometown, Gaya. He is the author of several books that include his poetic work and fiction. Khair is a critic, poet, and novelist (Lau & Mendes, 2012). He left India and chose to reside in Denmark. A clear and nostalgic sense of exile pervades through his works. Khair is continually engaged in an exhaustive, yet desperate effort to find an environment familiar to the senses; a place to belong to, Khair peculiarly deals with immigration at different levels. The themes of isolation, class discrimination, bigotry, individuality, recognition of identity, pursuit for cultural roots, distancing from home-grown soil, adaptation to the adopted nation, colonization, etc. are obvious in his work being a Diaspora writer (Singh, 2015). Most of his lofty works can be found in form of translated versions in about seven languages. He has earned global recognition and fame through the countless National and International honors and Awards he receives time and again. This study offers a depth understanding of major and minor themes of Khair's poetic work through linguistic and literary stylistic analysis.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are

- To bring forth the stylistic features of the poem *Immigrant* by Tabish Khair
- To investigate how stylistic analysis leads to the exploration of major and minor themes
- To signify the role of Stylistics in understanding literary texts

Research Questions

This stylistic analysis attempts to answer the following key questions.

1. What are the stylistic features of the poem *Immigrant* by Tabish Khair?
2. How does stylistic analysis help in revealing implicit meanings of the poem?
3. What are the major and minor themes of Khair's poetic work?

Literature Review

Stylistics got eminence as a sole coherent discipline to understand and interpret literary texts that strong advocacy is going on for its recognition as a central domain of study within linguistics (Stockwell, 2020). The acknowledged definition of stylistics is often recognized in terms of understanding the language of literature (Spitzer, 2015). Widdowson (1975, p: 3) defines stylistics as—the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation. Stylistics for him is empirical and scientific that approves and investigates the content based on linguistic evidence. Stylistics is the thorough study of textual analysis in which the foremost consideration is given to language (Simpson, 2004). It gives various interpretations of the text along with a better insight into the style of the author. According to Abdulmughni (2019), the approach of Stylistics as a method demands objectivity rather than involving personal perceptions and subjective interpretations, and aims in stylistics can only be achieved when one has basic comprehensions of all peculiarities of general linguistics. The analysis in Stylistics is rigorous and replicable simultaneously as it is highly objective and impartial based on linguistic evidence it provides that can be verified at any level and in any context (Abdulmughni, 2019). According to Widdowson (2014), Stylistics is a medium to relate other subjects and disciplines and in itself, it is not autonomous. Likewise, it links language with Literature. The objective of Stylistics is to provide a deeper insight into the literary text to support or explore the linguistic examination of the critic connect two approaches. This stand of Widdowson is reaffirmed by (Leech, 2014) when he says that any piece of literature is completely understood when one has

appropriate comprehension of the structure of the language used. . Style has different meanings for different people. According to Carter (1989) style generally depends on linguistic levels. Adejare (1992) makes this clear when he said that style is an ambiguous term. Lawal (1997) however, describes the style as an aspect of language that deals with choices of diction, phrases, sentences, and linguistic materials that are consistent and harmonious with the subject matter. Stylistics thus helps not only in the understanding or interpretation of literature but also in language learning (Ronald Carter, 2015). There are certain activities in EFL classrooms where students are engaged with such activities that involve stylistic analysis with the distinct goal of making them well-versed in structure as well as in the function of language (Gonzales & Flores, 2016). There are applications of stylistics in pedagogy exceptionally in L1 and L2 learning (Paran, 2006). Besides, Stylistics as a methodology has evolved itself greatly as it is incorporating other perspectives and methodologies to see how language is being approached as a tool to shape society and how it is shaped by society (Ronald Carter, 2010). Stylistics proposes a treasure of assistance to English language teachers who desire to integrate features of language and literature collectively and to involve their students in critical, creative, text-driven, reader-response knowledgeable grammar pedagogy (Cushing, 2018). Especially, Stylistics is embedded with the frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore underlying ideologies and implicit meanings in Socio-political contexts based on textual features of the texts that provide linguistic evidence for qualitative interpretations minimizing the risks of subjectivity and biasness (Widdowson, 2008). Likewise, Corpus Stylistics is another influential methodology that rendered a great significance and reliability specifically to the interpretations of a literary text (Sinclair, 2004). The semantic fields are formed based on high-frequency words that are further explored with the help of concordance lines that involve colligation, collocation, and semantic prosody for generating themes and interpretations (Hardy, 2007). The corpus stylistic analysis leads to the findings and conclusion in a systematic way. Corpus stylistic studies concentrate minutely on the individual characteristics of the target text, as Stubbs (2005) and Starcke (2006) elucidate by investigating lexical clusters respectively in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. Mahlberg (2007) analysed novels of Dickens applying methodology of Corpus Stylistics on the basis of high frequency lexical items in the corpus of Dickens' novels. Corpus Stylistic Analysis no doubt is a quantitative approach that relies on statistically figured out data. Thus, it provides objective and biased free set up for the interpretations (Semino & Short, 2004). The present study is also an endeavour to explore linguistic features of the selected poem on the basis of literary and linguistic stylistic analysis and to relate it with pervasive recurring themes of alienation, identity crisis, and migration in diaspora literature.

Methodology

The present study is qualitative. This study aims at exploring the stylistic features of Khair's poetic work. The sample for this study is the poem *Immigrant*. The poem has been analyzed on different levels of stylistics: Graphological, phonological, Morphological, Syntactical, pragmatics, and Discourse level. The connotative and denotative meanings of the poem have been explored to get a complete understanding and to explain how such stylistic features add to the meaning, impact, and style. The phonological properties, syntactic patterns, lexical choices, and use of literary devices in the poem are the basis of analysis. Major or minor themes are interpreted based on linguistic evidence that is derived by analyzing poems at multiple levels of stylistics and stylistic devices. The stylistic features of the poem have been investigated based on the following levels and devices of stylistics.

Levels of Stylistic Analysis

Graphological Level	This level examines the structure and pattern of investigating text, the use of punctuation and systematic structure of sentences, etc.
Phonological Level	This level examines the sound patterns of the given language, pronunciation, rhyming patterns, etc. The phonological devices that normally get attention are rhyming scheme, alliteration, assonance, and consonance.
Grammatical Level	This level examines the structure of sentences and clauses in the piece of work. The diction used, the patterns of used vocabulary, the use of verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, foregrounding, and deviations are also investigated.
Lexico-Syntax Level	This level keeps the sentence structure, use of words, omission of certain parts in a sentence, and unusual use of words.
Pragmatic and Discourse Level	This level involves the context in which particular language is used. The investigation of how linguistic choices and particular style of the poet contributes towards the pragmatic and discourse-level is discussed at this level. The style of

Stylistic Devices	the poet becomes major assistance in getting the connotative meanings of the work. It helps in making the meanings explicit. The stylistic devices discussed in the poem are Imagery, Irony, Symbolism, rhetoric expressions, and Allusion.
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Data Presentation

Immigrant

(Based on H. C. Anderson's 'The Little Mermaid')

It hurts to walk on new legs:

The curse of consonants, the wobble of vowels.

And you for whom I gave up a kingdom

Can never love that thing I was.

When you look into my past

You see

Only

Weeds and scales.

Once I had a voice.

Now I have legs.

Sometimes I wonder

Was it fair trade?

Analysis and Interpretation

Title of the Poem

The title of the poem "Immigrant" has all the gloomy connotations. This one-word title is significant enough to highlight the subject matter of the poem; however, the parallels that have been drawn cannot be understood without sparing a thought for the intertextual relations. It is interesting to mention that the poet has not used the word 'Immigrant' other than the title in the poem even for a single time yet the use of the word is so apt to convey the central idea. All of the poem's constituent clauses are connected grammatically to the very title of the poem, 'Immigrant'. The poem has literary allusions to H.C. Anderson's fairytale The Little Mermaid. This intertextual relation is the soul of this poem. The desire to be in another world at the cost of one's identity is foregrounded. The people move away from their roots to better their standards of living or for so many other reasons but this choice is invariably as unprofitable as the one made by Anderson's Mermaid. The Mermaid fell in love with a human being but her love could not be consummated since she was not a human. She was so desperate to have her love that she sacrificed her ability to speak for the sake of acquiring legs; a humanistic possession. However, the exchange of voice for legs was not a fair trade as she could never tell her love that how much she loved her. Likewise, an immigrant is almost always at loss; losing roots, home, relations, and identity too.

The Tone and Major Themes of the Poem

"Immigrant" by Khair is a short 12 lines poem divided into four couplets and one Quatrain but replete with many stylistic features. The lexical choices by the poet have played a very important role in enhancing underlying major or minor themes of the poem. The Poet uses intertextuality as a framework for this poem. The poem has a direct start. It is a first-person narration and is more like a monologue. The direct opening arrests the attention of the reader at once. The opening line of the poem is:

It hurts to walk on new legs:

The very opening line of the poem reflects the tormented soul of the poet and his deep sense of loss. This 12 lines poem has a depth of meaning in it. The lexical choices aptly disclose the restlessness of the poet and his ever-growing quest for his true identity. The poem highlights the state of the poet's mind quite artistically. As the poet belongs to Diasporas', the themes of sense of loss, the enigma of identity, the nostalgia of home, assimilation of new ideas, adjustment between the home of origin and home of adoption are obvious in this short 12 lines poem. The problem of language and disillusionment are obvious in this little poem. The poem though is personal and subjective treatment yet all the themes are relatable to the very condition of a common man who leaves for his or her native country. The themes are having universality in their nature.

The tone of the poem is nostalgic and full of a sense of loss. This loss is paramount. It depicts the distressed soul of the poet who conflicts with his decision of leaving his native land for an alien land.

The poet is in a pessimistic mood and seems like having lost every hope about an accomplished life. He is preoccupied with remorseful thoughts.

Graphological Level

The graphological analysis of the poem shows that the poet has used minimum punctuation marks that emphasize the strong flow of emotions. It seems as the poet is overflowed by his nostalgic feelings and remorseful emotions. Though the poem has run on lines all the lines begin with capital letters. For example

And you for whom I gave up a kingdom

Can never love that thing I was.

This capital initialization undoubtedly impresses upon the readers the intensity of passion that lies in this poem. The deviation at the Graphological level gives more depth to the meanings of the poem. It is examined that after the second couplet where the structure is at once compromised restricting the whole line to one single word only. Quite interestingly this only word is "Only" itself. This graphological deviation foregrounds the whole package that comes with this one word; only. Stylistic deviations, famous as foregrounding, putatively stimulate defamiliarization, arouse feelings, and elongate reading time. The same purpose is obvious in the following lines:

When you look into my past

you see

Only

Weeds and scales

The foregrounding heightens the restlessness of the poet's soul and his prevalent sense of loss that he is unable to behave like a normal person. His heart and soul are hurt and remorseful expressions are vivid in the choices of vocabulary he makes to express his feelings.

Phonological Level

The analysis of the poem at the phonological level shows how beautifully the poet has used alliteration in the very first couplet of the poem. Alliteration is a stylistic device that uses repetition of consonant sounds. This alliteration in the first couplet besides adding musicality to the poetic diction and it also gives out strong pessimistic connotations. The curse of consonants and wobble of vowels is an example of alliteration. The poet is lamenting over the so-called barriers that are meaningless. Consonant and vowels are representing a language but on an alien land, one's language is to be disowned due to the difference of codes. The poet is so hopeless that he finds no way to come out of this pathetic situation.

It hurts to walk on new legs:

The curse of consonants, the wobble of vowels.

The poem is written in free verse. The regular rhyme scheme is missing in the poem through the repetition of 'z's sound at the end of certain lines creates rhythm. For example:

When you look into my past

you see

Only

Weeds and scales.

Once I had a voice.

Now I have legs.

Lexical Level

The lexical level gives an insight into the word choices made by the poet. The use of vocabulary or the diction used in the poem is simple and direct. The major themes of the poem are the enigma of identity, alienation, detachment, disillusionment and the used vocabulary is equating with the major themes as hurt, curse, past, gave up, etc. the used vocabulary is vivid and concrete. The verbs used are mostly Stative Verbs like hurts, love, wonder, look, etc.

*When you **look** into my past*

*You **see***

The use of these verbs beautifully exposes the state of the Poet's mind. He is suffering through constant pain and a sense of loss. His mind and soul are tormented by the conflict of past and present and he is unable to overcome this agitation.

Like verbs, the use of adjectives also adds to the themes of the poem. Adjectives portray qualities to entities, objects, and concepts and the use of adjectives in negative connotation is a

marked feature to expose the Poet's state of mind. The use of personal pronouns has thematic universality as the situation from which the poet is passing through is relatable to every Immigrant. This makes the tone of the poem pessimistic. Likewise, the use of adverbs is very cautious. The adverbs used in the twelve lines poem are of a specific category as they are indicating towards a certain duration and timeframe that is depicting the wretched condition of the poet. He is not happy in present circumstances and questions his existence. The adverbs used in the poem provide circumstantial information. Khair employs adverbs of time relationships like 'never', 'Now', 'Then', 'When', and 'Sometimes'. Such adverbs function to communicate negative time relationships as he is in conflict and a sense of loss is prevailing throughout the poem. The adverbs are portraying his circumstances

Grammatical Level

The poem has a simple sentence structure. There is no complexity at the sentence level but the simple sentence structure is quite complex semantically as there are jumbled thoughts. The poet feels it hurts to live in a community where every other is ignorant towards his native language and culture. The parallels like the curse of consonants and wobble of vowels have also been used, which provide the musicality and also create an alliteration. The other parallel is built in the second last couplet:

I had a voice

I have legs

This thematic parallel foregrounds the object lost and gained. The poem is written with the backdrop of Anderson's fairy tale. The mermaid sacrificed her voice for the sake of legs so that she could look what she was not. This desire to adopt a fake identity for a worldly cause made her feel so devastated that she started thinking about what was gained and what was lost. The voice that she had in the past and the legs that she has at present are the real tragedy of her life.

The structural deviation also grabs the attention towards the breakdown of the poet. The structure at once breaks in the middle of the poem with the insertion of a quatrain which comes after two couplets and precedes two couplets. This is intentional on the part of the poet to show the breakdown of an immigrant's faith in the happiness that lies abroad and like the mermaid; he believes that distance lends enchantment to the view. The mermaid looked up to the land of human beings as a world full of happiness and she lived under this illusion only until she joined that world physically. Only then she came to know about the reality of things. The things that look so beautiful from a distance are pretty ugly when looked upon closely.

Semantic and Pragmatic Level

The poem is rich semantically and pragmatically. The poem has different layers of meanings that are apt in context and giving multiple interpretations. The poet just uses the word 'Immigrant' once as the title of the poem but he succeeds in having the impact of this title throughout his poem. The feelings of the poet are relatable to every other person who is facing the same aloofness and detachment living in a foreign land.

Stylistics Devices used in the Poem

The thorough analysis of the poem also helps in exploring the other stylistic features. The poem has stylistic devices as the use of symbols, imagery, rhetorical devices, and allusion.

Symbolism

Symbolization is a tool to imply the meaning and the readers perceive the connotative meanings that involve a certain context and situation. Weeds and Scales are symbolizing a familiar and happy past for the mermaid, but for a human being, these symbols manifest ugliness only. It seems as if the roots and past of a man uncannily follow him and a pricking of conscience carry on jerking him. These weeds and scales are the sorrows and grieve of his life that is pervasive everywhere. The expression 'Trade' symbolizes the commercialization of relationships. He lost touch with his motherland to find a substantial lifestyle and this proved a failed business. It ascertains how a man has to pay a heavy price for his pursuit of materialistic desires. 'Vowels' and 'Consonant' symbolize verbal communication. But at one stage this verbal communication becomes meaningless as in an alien land; one's choice of words and language cannot render totality to one's feelings and sensations. 'Kingdom' symbolizes the native home which is always so precious even if it is a hut. The home in the native land of the poet is like the kingdom of the emperor.

Allusion

The poem has literary allusions to H.C. Anderson's fairytale 'The Little Mermaid'. She fell in love with a human being. They, however, could not enjoy this feeling only because she was not human but a mermaid. The decision had to be made between her prospects of love and identity as a mermaid. She made the critical choice and decided to take up the fake identity of a human being by foregoing her true identity. This choice turned out to be drastic as she had to lose her voice for acquiring legs. Consequently, she could never express her love to her beloved. This allusion builds an intertextual relationship of the text with other texts to elucidate that texts are not isolated islands. They become more reliable and sustainable when are read in diverse contexts. Besides, this allusion discloses the cognitive paradigm of the poet's mind. He is repenting and that repentance is of no use at that stage.

Imagery

The imagery used in the poem is remarkable as the use of words like vowels, consonant; legs, voice, etc. give a clear picture of the poet's present condition. The vivid usage of imagery helps in understanding the in-depth meanings of the poem appealing at once to the senses of the readers.

Rhetorical Question

The poem also makes use of rhetorical questions in the last couplet and his feeling of repentance and sadness overwhelmed the whole poem. The device of rhetorical question is again to involve the readers in the discourse. From the micro to the macro level, the interpretations change. Khair is not personalizing wider implications here. He renders universality to the suffering of immigrants that they are in flux and the fuzziness of their identity and existence deprives them of the solace and comfort they have been in the quest for.

Sometimes I wonder

Was it fair trade?

Irony

The use of Irony of the Situation in the poem is as apt as the poem shows the contrast between the expectations of the poet and reality. The reflection of his mind that we witness in the poem portrays the sense of loss and bewilderment on the part of the immigrant. Likewise, the irony of choice is obvious as it was the disillusionment of his choice and fate.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study is a stylistic analysis of the poem 'Immigrant' by Khair. The short poem of 12 lines is replete with stylistic features and their exploration artistically gives a microcosm of the style and themes of Khair's poetry. The stylistic analysis of the poem has demonstrated the unique style and structure of Khair's poetry. Khair's style is simple but rich in symbolic and ironic expressions. He perceives literature as an art of telling stories and transferring thoughts from the writer's prism. This poem is replete with such expressions. He is presenting his state of sad affairs of life quite artistically. No doubt Khair is residing in Denmark and has obtained the citizenship of the Nation still he is closely attached with his root nation which he intends to revive through this poem. The poem is not monotonous or tedious. It shows universality in its theme despite having the tinge of personal experience and emotions. This study strengthens the belief that the study of stylistics is beneficial for a thorough understanding of literature. Moreover, the exploration of the language of literary texts through stylistic analysis brings clarity in understanding structures of language and the functional value of utterances and words. Therefore, there is a great inclination in pedagogy to incorporate stylistics in certain language activities as grammatical, lexical, semantic, or pragmatic features of literary texts enhance the level of interest of the students besides thorough understanding. This research will help the students to understand the peculiar relation between language features and literature. This study will be helpful for future researches related to stylistic analysis.

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