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Study of Stylistic Deviation in Two Selected Poems from I am a Rohingya

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Abstract: This study presents a detailed analysis of poems from I Am a Rohingya. Two poems with the same theme hopeless are selected: one is ABOUT THOSE BORN INTO THIS PLACE from YAR TIN, and the other one is BEING ROHINGYA from RO ANAMUL HASAN. In linguistic stylistics, language features are presented through kinds of deviations to achieve the foregrounding effect. The degree of language use in stylistics varies greatly, especially in poetry. Poets use their unique styles to distinguish themselves from others. In this study, the researchers attempt to analyze and compare these two poems based on stylistic methods. The following two research questions are posed: What linguistic features can be categorized in the two selected poems? Besides, how do these features function in these poems with the use of language? To answer the above questions, the researchers focus on the selected two poems and stylistically analyze them. Findings reveal four linguistic features appearing in both poems: parallelism, semantic deviation, lexical deviation and syntactic deviation. By adopting the same stylistic deviations, the effects of the selected poems are present differently due to the two poets' unique language uses and writing styles. In a word, the choices of words and expressions are important because they will affect readers' understanding of a poem.

Keywords: Rohingya Poem; Stylistic Analysis; Parallelism; Deviation; Hopeless.

1. Introduction

I Am a Rohingya is the first English collection created by Rohingya poets, which provides evidence of the suffering endured by the Rohingya and places a vital emphasis on their voices. These poems reveal the atrocities taking place in Myanmar, including ethnic cleansing and genocide, the severing of families, and statelessness. Students, professors, journalists, folk singers, editors, and translators who are refugees have contributed to this outstanding collection of poetry (Byrne & Doja, 2019).

In the collection, two poems related to "hopeless" are selected as the main targets of analysis and contrast. Poem A is ABOUT THOSE BORN INTO THIS PLACE from YAR TIN, and Poem B is BEING ROHINGYA from RO ANAMUL HASAN. A poet and short story writer from Rakhine State in Myanmar named YAR TIN is a Rohingya. He instructs Rohingya students in the Burmese language. RO ANAMUL HASAN is a humanitarian worker, a documentalist, an interpreter and a translator. On August 25, 2017, the military killed seven members of his family in his Burmese village. He almost escaped death by dodging bullets and vividly recounts that experience.

Based on the stylistic methods, this study aims to analyze and compare the linguistic features in the two selected poems. The following two research questions will be solved in this research:

1. What linguistic features can be categorized in the two selected poems?
2. How do these features function in these poems with the use of language?

This study is divided into five parts: introduction, methodology, analysis, discussion, and conclusion. Firstly, the introduction provides some information about poets and poems. Secondly, the methodology describes the foregrounding methods in two poems. Additionally, the analysis identifies prominent literary devices in poems. Next is the discussion that examines how literary devices are employed to achieve specific effects. The final part concludes findings and contributions.

2. Methodology

This part provides a brief introduction about parallelism and repetition, metaphor in semantic deviation, lexical deviation and syntactic deviation including discontinuity, pleonasm and ellipsis.

Parallelism refers to the use of various expressions held at the same level within the structure of a poem, and repetition involves the usage of the same word or words within the same line or within subsequent lines and more than one repeated word in the unit (Hubbard, 1905). In fact, repetition is classified under parallelism.

Semantic deviation belongs to figurative language, which happens when a word's meaning deviates from the expectations set forth by the words around it. They frequently break the regulations of selectional limits, which are the semantic limitations that a word imposes on the context in which it occurs (Niazi & Gautam, 2010). Metaphor is considered under semantic deviation in which two things are compared fundamentally different, but without drawing attention to a comparison by using terms like "as", "like" or "than". Leech (2014) indicated that "Metaphor is so essential to how we think about poetry that it is frequently regarded as a phenomenon in and of itself, without reference to other forms of transferred meaning."

Lexical deviation is one of the most important aspects of poetry. Poets may create strange and new words by breaking rules of word formation. It occurs when words depart from their norms in the language (Hameed, 2015). "Neologism" refers to a poet inventing a word that didn't previously exist, which is the most obvious instance of lexical deviation (Short, 2018). There are other types of lexical deviation in poetry, such as functional conversion, nonce formation, archaism,

and compounding (Hameed, 2015). Compounding is the joining of two or more words into a single one (Yule, 2020).

Syntactic deviation is an extensively used linguistic deviation in poetry. According to Plett (2010, p.183), it refers to the addition, deletion, rearrangement and replacement of components in a sentence. It violates the rules of grammar or mismatch among sentence elements through discontinuity, pleonasm, ellipsis, etc. By applying this deviation, the language in poetry presents differently from other literary genres. It is more modifiable and freer to meet poets' needs in expressing their thoughts (Nofal, 2011). In this study, three types of syntactic deviation appear which are discontinuity, pleonasm and ellipsis. In a clause or sentence, a discontinuity happens if the closely related words or phrases are separated into several parts. Pleonasm is redundancy of words or phrases in a sentence, which might be against grammatical rules. Ellipsis is an omission of words or elements in a sentence. It is extensively used in poems but the absence does not affect readers' understanding of the expression.

3. Analysis

3.1. Parallelism

In both poems, the poets use parallelism, which systematically repeats words or phrases to highlight the poem's foregrounding. In Poem A, the poet begins with the ironic line "Though the land is fertile and the soil rich", repeated five times in succession. Although each stanza is followed by a similar central idea, which is a negative statement about the social and existential situation of the Rohingya people, each repetition line deepens the poet's inner thoughts and touches the reader's heart significantly. RO ANAMUL HASAN, on the other hand, uses syntactic parallelism, repeating only the sentence structure and specific words to attract the reader's attention, as shown in lines 15-29, and line 34-36 from Poem B. In all five stanzas of the second part of his poem, he uses the same structure "I am..., By those I..., Let the…", and the words replaced afterwards are mostly the verb-ed form. Through the cohesiveness between these words, the poet attempts to convey the desperation of Rohingya people living in an unjust society and contributes to the poem's overall pessimistic mood. Also, he uses the same syntactic structure, anaphora, in the poem's third part, "I was born" plus a preposition plus a noun. The central theme of these three juxtaposed lines is the same. The poet uses three different nouns, "hell", "bloodstream", and "battleground", all of which are linked in some way, hinting and emphasizing the suffering of the poet as a Rohingya, thus further affirming the ideas expressed by him in the poem's first two sections.

Poem A

Though the land is fertile and the soil rich (line 1, 17, 32, 44 and 58)

Poem B

15 ***I am*** baited for the hook
16 ***By those I*** trusted ***the most.***
17 ***Let the*** sharks swallow ***me.***
34 ***I was born*** in hell.
35 ***I was born*** in the bloodstream.
36 ***I was born*** on the battleground.

3.2. Semantic Deviation

In the two selected poems, one type of semantic deviations that is used in both of them is metaphor. In the following example of line 24 and 25, the word "kingdom" is a metaphor in the third stanza from Poem A. Here, "kingdom" refers to the poet's hometown which was peaceful before. The poet uses the word with the modifier "once-pleasant" to indirectly compare with his hometown which is full of war now. Metaphor is also used in Poem B. From line 34 to 36, three negative words "hell", "bloodstream" and "battleground" are used by the poet to describe his birthplace which is scar-covered because of wars. In both two examples, the four highlighted words are vehicles in the poems and the tenors are not mentioned directly, but with the understandings of the contexts, it is obvious that the two poets use metaphors, with the tenors are hometowns, etc., to have foregrounding in poems.

Poem A

24 My once-pleasant ***kingdom***,
25 Too wilted to show its face.

Poem B

34 I was born in ***hell***.
35 I was born in the ***bloodstream***.
36 I was born on the ***battleground***.

3.3. Lexical Deviation

In both poems, the poets use a compound of simple words to express the lexical deviation of the stylistic, thus showing their uniqueness. Compounding is a poet who combines two words into a new word which does not exist in the language. In Poem A, YAR TIN uses four compound words in different stanzas, linking words of different lexical categories to detail the poem's plot. In "blood-scented", "thorn-strewn", "death-riddled", the first word "blood", "thorn", and "death" are all negatively colored nouns, while the latter words "scented", "strewn", "riddled" are all verbs that convey how a noun characterizes the state of something. The other compound, "once-pleasant", is an adverb plus adjective construction. What these four compounds have in common is that the poet uses them all as adjectives to describe the central nouns in the verses, "oxygen", "kingdom", "path", which truly depicts the poet's miserable life as a Rohingya. In contrast, in Poem B line 18, RO ANAMUL HASAN uses only one compound word, "rifle-shoot", in the poem's second stanza, using a noun plus verb structure. The purpose is to create a connection between "rifle" and "shoot", expressing the poet's psychological feelings of despair as a Rohingya.

Poem A

4 The ***blood-scented*** oxygen inhaled
24 My ***once-pleasant*** kingdom,
74 We walk across a ***thorn-strewn, death-riddled*** path,

Poem B

18 I am a target for the ***rifle-shoot***

3.4. Syntactic Deviation

3.4.1. Discontinuity

As a type of syntactic deviation, discontinuity can be found in two selected poems. From line 12 to line 16 in Poem A, two kinds of discontinuities can be found. The first one is the broken order of adverbs between line 12 and 13. In line 12, "the sound" is the subject in this complete sentence, and "Under a depraved mind's bullying" is the adverbial to modify it. The second one is the broken order of subjects. It is a complete sentence from line 12 to 16 with a compound subject of "sound", "whispers" and "sobs" which link to the same verb "keep". In this situation, three subjects are

separated into three lines to achieve a foregrounding effect in this stanza.

Poem A

12 Only the sound of hearts cracking
13 Under a depraved mind's bullying
14 Bitter whispers
15 And uncertain sobs
16 Keep rubbing against my ears.

Discontinuity also can be found in Poem B. Five stanzas from part 2 share the same stanzaic pattern and type of discontinuity. Being separated into two lines, line 15 and 16 form a complete sentence with a full stop at the end. It is the broken order of adverbs. In line 15, "baited" is the verb in the sentence, while "By those I trusted the most" in line 16 is the adverbial modifying the verb. These two parts, which should be closely related, are separated now to achieve a visually prominent effect in the poem.

Poem B

15 I am baited for the hook
16 By those I trusted the most.
17 Let the sharks swallow me.

3.4.2. Pleonasm

Pleonasm can be found in Poem A. In the following example, lines 72 to 74 form a complete sentence and the pleonasm can be found in the repetition of the subject. "My Rohingya people and I" is the subject of the sentence, but in line 74, the personal pronoun "we" appears. It violates grammar rules by containing two repeated subjects in a sentence. The personal pronoun "we" should be deleted to correct the structure.

72 My Rohingya people and I,
73 With scarred hearts,
74 We walk across a thorn-strewn, death-riddled path,

3.4.3. Ellipsis

Ellipsis appears in Poem A. The following four lines are two sentences lacking the copula "be". In the two sentences, "motherland" and "kingdom" are the subjects. The subject should be followed by a main verb or copula "be" and the object in the grammar rules to form a complete sentence. Hence, in the above four lines, the copula "be" should be added after "motherland" and "kingdom". Due to the two subjects being singular forms, the copula should be "is" in both sentences.

22 My lush green motherland,
23 Scorched by fire,
24 My once-pleasant kingdom,
25 Too wilted to show its face.

4. Discussion

4.1. Parallelism

The use of parallelism not only adds balance and rhythmic effect to the sentences but also persuasiveness to the poet's statement. In both poems, the creative use of parallelism demonstrates the pessimism and despair of the poet's life as a Rohingya.

In Poem A, YAR TIN uses the line "Though the land is fertile and the soil rich" as the opening, repeated five times, with the same structure and semantics, to strongly contrast with the content described in each stanza, thus satirize the situation of the Rohingya people. In these stanzas, the poet tells of the bloodshed, bullying and discrimination surrounding the Rohingya in this land of plenty. The poet also uses "harsh, torturous seasons" as a metaphor for the painful atrocities of the oppressors who destroy their hopes, thus giving the reader a thought-provoking statement of the poet's desperation for life.

In Poem B, the poet first repeats the same sentence structure in the second part, "I am + verb-ed/noun, By those I + verb-ed + the most, Let the + noun + verb + me", in which the substituted parts are mostly verbs related to the poet's situation. "I am" in verse is in the passive voice, telling of the poet's torment and persecution by those he thought he could trust. At the same time, "Let" is an imperative verb, a strong expression of the poet's inability to endure such torment and shame through its commanding and forceful tone. The nouns "sharks", etc., are closely related to each stanza's first line, attracting the reader's attention and highlighting the climax of the poet's despair at life. Secondly, he uses another type of parallelism, anaphora, in lines 34-36, repeating "I was born" three times. Parallelism, as exemplified by two or three lines of verse, often provides a central theme and delivers "list effect" (Okunowo, 2012). "I was born" is followed by three different nouns, used as a vivid depiction of the current state of Rohingya, strongly echoing the poem's theme of hopelessness.

Overall, this full repetition or sentence structure repetition in the two poems allows for a more compact and layered structure, enhancing the poet's emotional expression and resonating with the reader.

4.2. Semantic Deviation

When metaphor appears in the poem, it not only has a stronger effect on the readers but also becomes stronger than a simple remark in expressing a notion. Sometimes, metaphors are regarded as exaggerations, but they are only exaggerated to create a striking image or to convey a meaningful message.

In these two contexts, metaphor from lexical aspect is used to express authors' dependence and attachment to their homeland as well as the discontent and sadness of losing their homeland. In Poem A, line 24 and 25, "kingdom" is thought to be their motherland, although there is no "like" or "as". Actually, "kingdom" should be solemn, should be grand, should be beautiful, should be displayed to the world with pride and people under the "kingdom" should be happy and joyful. However, it becomes "To wilted to show its face", which causes a huge contrast in our eyes and underlined yearning for the former home and hopelessness for the current situation from the author.

In Poem B, line 34, 35 and 36, "hell", "bloodstream" and "battleground" were also deemed as their motherland, however, which are negative words and depicts a sorrowful and miserable picture for readers to show the present status of his home. At the same time, the former parts of each sentence are the same structure as "I was born" that stress the author's sense of belonging. These lines deliver some emotions like sadness, anger but powerlessness from the author about the persecuted home.

In short, these words are utilized to make readers think thoughtfully through these similar expressions but have differences in nature. Besides, the difference between two poems under metaphor is, positive words and negative words are supposed to express their "hopeless" feeling.

4.3. Lexical Deviation

Lexical deviation is employed for several reasons, including creating deeper meaning, achieving a certain effect,

and meeting a lexical need for a particular use. Compounding is one of the types of lexical deviation. Particularly, the use of hyphenation is an effective way of attracting readers' attention and reducing the chance that the words will be perceived as separate units.

In Poem A, there are four compound words. The first word "blood-scented" means "bloody smell". Additionally, the two words "thorn-strewn" and "death-riddled" describe the path strewn with thorns and death. By using the last word "once-pleasant", the author conveys that life in the past was happy, which contrasts sharply with the miserable life of today. In Pome B, only a compound word, "rifle-shoot" expresses the author's frustration over being hurt by those he loved most.

In conclusion, compound words and hyphenations are used by the authors to produce a profound impression on the readers and to emphasize the theme of hopelessness.

4.4. Syntactic Deviation

In this study, the two selected poems have several types of syntactic deviation. Firstly, discontinuity could be found in both poems. In the example from Poem A, the poet separates a compound subject into three lines and capitalizes their first letters. The poet uses this form to express his life of suffering from "the sound of hearts cracking", "bitter whispers" and "uncertain sobs". Three kinds of voices have negative modifiers, such as "heart cracking" and "bitter". These invisible pains and depressive atmosphere hang over him and other Rohingya people. Although they are not physically hurt, the horrible voice in their hearts is more lethal. Owing to endless persecution, the people there are too tired to fight against. The sun rises as usual every day, but not a beam of sunlight can shine into their hopeless lives. Poem B has the same discontinuity of broken order of adverbs throughout its five stanzas. "I am baited for the hook" and "By those I trusted the most" are separated into two lines. Through this separation, the poet wants to emphasize that he, and other Rohingya people, are persecuted by those they revere and obey. Home loss is sad enough, but being hurt by familiar ones is a grievous loss. Using discontinuous forms has a foregrounding effect in the poem, and the hopeless emotion can express profound emotions in readers' hearts.

Besides, two types of syntactic deviations, pleonasm and ellipsis are used in Poem A. There is a pleonasm in line 72 and 74, with the repeated subjects of "My Rohingya people and I" and "We". Although the pleonasm violates grammar rules, the poet uses this form to highlight the fact that the people "with scarred hearts" are them, the Rohingyas. Despite their many persecutions and injustices, the Rohingyas still want to be treated fairly and given hope. In terms of ellipsis, the poet ignores the copula "be" in the above examples. One function of this ellipsis is to show the eternity of something in a poem. In the above examples, "My lush green motherland" and "My once-pleasant kingdom" do not have the copula after them. In this situation, the time has stopped at this moment, and the poet's hometown will be prosperous and peaceful forever. It reflects the poet's desire to return to the past instead of staying in the present with endless wars and hopelessness.

The two poems both apply discontinuity to highlight a specific word or phrase in order to express their hopeless feelings. Besides, Poem A applies pleonasm and ellipsis which do not appear in Poem B. In a word, syntactic deviations can make a specific part eye-catching by violating grammar rules to achieve a foregrounding effect in a poem.

5. Conclusion

The linguistic and stylistic comparative analysis of "ABOUT THOSE BORN INTO THIS PLACE" and "BEING ROHINGYA" has been covered in this work. Through these analysis methods, the way of feelings and thoughts expressed by poets has been discovered. Parallelism and repetition, metaphor in semantic deviation, lexical deviation as well as syntactic deviation are found to be the main features in these two poems although their usages have some similarities or distinctions at times. For research question 2, the researchers find that the four linguistic features contribute to revealing the theme of both poems "hopeless". In both poems, the poets effectively use sentence structure parallelism and syntactic deviation to highlight the contrast between the former home and its current oppressive situation. In addition, the two poets use negative compounding words and metaphors to allude to the miserable social conditions of the Rohingya people, thus expressing to the reader their inner despair and helplessness at the existing state of society and their lives. Through their poem, they hope to enlighten their readers, awaken their souls, expose the atrocities of the Burmese government, make them understand the Rohingya people's actual situation, and save the declining Rohingya people.

In conclusion, it can be found that the appropriate use of linguistic features can express the poet's distinctive style, enhance the expressive power and effect of language, render the poem's atmosphere, underline the theme, and fulfill the poet's purpose of expressing his feelings through the landscape.

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