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Stylistics Analysis of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

Abdul Ali

M.Phil Linguistics
Faisalabad Grammar College,
Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Abstract:

A language practitioner analyzes style on the scientific grounds. His analysis seems relatively mechanical, as the linguist neither looks at other elements outside text nor does he consider the author's mood or attitude for the purpose of investigation. The present study offers stylistics analysis the poem " I know why the caged bird sings " poem written by Maya Angelou. The study explores multiple linguistic structures deployed in the poem by the poet. This stylistics analysis is carried out on the basis of phonological, lexical, graphological , syntactic and morphological patterns. This research is effective for the students of literature and language. It is also inordinately helpful from pedagogical point of view. The study concludes that poetess deploys divergent stylistics levels to highlight her theme.

Keywords: Style , stylistics , phonological pattern , lexicio-syntatic patterns , morphological patterns

Literature Reviewed

Style

The notion of style is viewed and articulated variously by the language practitioners. It has been commonly contented that we use the terms " style " without knowing its meaning .Leech(1969) views " style is the way in which something is spoken ,written , or performed." Leech and Short (1981, P.10) say that " style " "refers to the way in which language is used in given in given context ,by a person , for a given purpose and so on" .Birch (1989, P.10) is of the view that " language and style never moves beyond a concentration on the supremacy of words ; he thinks firmly that these words somehow ' contain ' meanings and is effectively language manipulated in ways that signal it as different from ' ordinary ' language " .

Carter (1989, P.14) argues that" it is generally recognized that the style of a work can depend on linguistic work effects produced at a number of different levels often simultaneously and that fairly crucial factor is our expectations concerning the literary form or genre employed". Olorunfoba –Oju (1999, p. 127) cites that " style is almost synonymous with variety ; it refers in a simple way to the manner of expression , which differs according to the various contexts ."

Stylistics

Scholars have expressed divergent views on " Stylistics " .

Paul Simpson (2004, p.2) argues "stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to *language*". The reason why language is so important to stylistics is because the various forms, patterns, and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text. Freeman (1971) defines "stylistics is sub-disciplined which started in second half of the 20th century. It can be seen as logical extension of moves within literary criticism early in the 20th century to concentrate on studying text, rather than authors. Short and Candlin (1989, p.183) view that "stylistics is a linguistics approach to the study of the literary texts . It thus embodies one essential part of the general course –philosophy ; that of combining language and literary study".

Widdowson (1975, p.3) believes stylistics as "the study of literary discourse from linguistic orientation ". He also propounds that stylistics occupies the middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism. Banjo (1982) holds the view that stylistics is "the exhaustive study of the role of language in literary works ". Enkvist and Gregory (1964) hold the view that " it is difficult to tell what constitutes style and how one cultivates, is style a man ,his body ,his heart, or soul, or the words he uses , an embellishment, choice, personality , psyche ,deviation from norm, set of individual or collective features , or the words he uses ,or the way in which he uses them ."

Levels of Stylistics Analysis

The levels stylistics analysis are identified as :

Graphology

Leech (1969 P.170) says that graphology transcends orthography ." It refers to the whole writing system : punctuation and paragraphing as well as spacing". Alabi (2007, p.170) cited that " a graphological discussion of style among other features entails the foregrounding of quotations marks ,ellipses , periods hyphens, contracted forms special structures , the full stop, the colon , the comma , the semicolon , small print , spacing , italics etc.

Phonology

To Wales (2011) phonology is " the expression or realization of language in its spoken form ". Lodge defines that "phonology is the study of linguistic system specially the way in which sound represents differences of meaning in a language ". Phonological devices are secured through the repetition. For example in rhyme, alliteration, consonance , assonance and phonaesthesia .

Morphology

Mark and Kirsten (2005, p.1) believe that " Morphology to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistic that deal with words , their internal structure , and how they are formed ". Morphological level of analysis deals with word formation processes subjected to specific condition and rules of the processes of affixation –the prefix , suffix , and the roots words ,coining , back formation etc .

Lexcio-Syntax

According to Tallerma(1998, p.1) Syntax means " sentence construction " how words group together or the to make phrases and sentences ". It is also used to mean the study of syntactic properties of languages; in this sense it is used in the same way as we use stylistics to mean the study of literary style.

Introduction to Poetess

Maya Angelou is an unprecedented poetess who is deemed as one of the great voices of the modern times literature . she was born on April, 1928 and is highly respected as a spokesperson for Black men and women she is an author ,poet ,historian, songwriter ,playwright, stage and screen producer director and civil right activist .She inspires and motivates her readers through the dazzling beauty of her words and lyrics . Her poems has been called anthems of African Americans . The major themes of her literary work are family , sexuality , identity ,racism and travel .The main contribution of her work is the defense and fight for Black culture .

Introduction to the poem

Maya Angelou was a great poet America. She writes a good number of great poems. **I know why the caged bird sings** is one of famous poems. The poem reflects pessimistic tone and it also articulates pent up emotions of the poet against racial discrimination and slavery .It reveals the domination of the White in the free bird and subjugation of the in the form of caged bird . The structure of the poem is very simple and austere, as a consequence, can be interpreted more easily as there are no hidden or embedded themes in the poem .The poet expresses her agonies and grievances through caged bird that represents the Black race . The blacks are not dish out legitimate social status on the land of America .They are thought as second rate citizens ,not worthy of social , religious and cultural freedom . The encased bird (the blacks) are cramped for room in the American social milieu.

Theme of the poem

The poem showcases multi-layered themes and ideas. However one of the major themes is racial discrimination and slavery. There are two birds in the poem, one is trapped in the cage while the other is free and flying in the sky .The trapped bird stands for the African American Black race while the free bird represents the White American dominant race. The ensnared bird is struggling madly to carve a peaceful niche in the social fabric of America. The social rights of the Blacks were subdued, pulverized at the hands of White American. Maya Angelou explains the emotions of racial discrimination, segregation, and domination of the white skin. The caged bird reflects the Negroes that were being held and halted from freedom on account of the color of their body, it is not allowed to fly anywhere at his own will and choice .Even though the caged bird's wings are clipped and its feet are tied, it is continue to persist, persevere and unwilling to surrender to the opponents.

How theme is foregrounded

The poem reflects theme of social confinement,and subjugation of the Blacks .The caged bird represents the Black people who are being deprived of their innate and legitimate social

rights . Their voices for comprehensive freedom are subdued from all sides .Theme is foregrounded through the vocabulary items .The poet uses caged bird five times to show its captivity, and suppression ,in other words ,it reflects captivity and suppression of the black people . The hostility and injustice with the Blacks (caged bird) are described through these words : a bird that stalks down, narrow cage , seldom see through , bars of rage , his wings are clipped and feet are tied , the cage bird sings with fearful trill , caged bird stands on the grave of dreams , shadow shouts on a nightmare scream . But the encased bird is fully determined and committed to fight for his innate and equal social rights. The poem ends on very optimistic note: "his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings for freedom.

Phonological analysis

On account of alliterations and assonance, the poem achieves effective and vivid description, apart from aesthetic pleasure they offer. Moreover, they also musical quality that appeal to sense of hearing. The poem is the combination of soft and hard sounds. The soft sounds include fricatives (h, s, f, th,z) and liquids (w,r, ll,m,n) whereas hard sound include (b, t, k, g,d) . The sibilant fricative /s/ reflect pains and agonies and unrealized targets of the poet . Each stanza of the follows the rhyming scheme of AAAB as in the third and the sixth stanza . The rigidity of the first three lines show the captivity of the bird . However, the last phrase of each stanza cuts off from the rhyme with the last word totally different from the original rhyme scheme : trill , still , hill , freedom .

original rhyme: "trill, still, hill, freedom.

End Rhyme (Last stanza)

With fearful trill
But longed for still
On the distant hill
And his tune is heard
For the caged bird

Internal rhyme scheme

The fat worms waiting on dawn bright lawn

And his tune is heard

His shadow shouts on night mare scream

Assonance

Assonance is used normally within a line of poetry in order to achieve unity and rhythmic effect. The close repetition of middle vowel sounds between various consonant sounds. There is an extensive use of long vowels in the text that imply that the voice and passion of the poetess for freedom is not momentary, temporary, and for the time being , rather she will adhere to it forever and ever . At the same time, both vowels sounds show contradiction. Short vowels show mortality, temporariness, and fleeting moments of the free bird, for example the vowels ' his ' 'dip' ' win ' reflect littleness and temporariness.

<u>F</u> ree	le <u>a</u> p	H <u>i</u> s	<u>i</u> s
<u>O</u> pen	Thro <u>a</u> t	<u>D</u> awn	<u>L</u> awn
<u>D</u> ip	W <u>i</u> n	<u>D</u> istant	<u>H</u> ill
<u>F</u> ree	Bre <u>e</u> ze	<u>C</u> aged	<u>G</u> rave

Consonance

Consonance is identified as the repetition of consonant sounds at the end of the words. It is self-evident that the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ occurs ten times in this poem. In the same vein, voiced alveolar plosive /d/ occurs six times and voiceless plosive /t/ one time. In addition, there is one lateral /l/ sound and one nasal /n/ sound. Keeping in view the context, /d/ sound reflects declension, curtailment in free movement of the black community. Whereas /s/ and /t/ sounds show limitedness and confinement. In the same fashion, /l/ and /n/ sounds manifest loudness, noise and high pitched voice for freedom and salvation.

<u>D</u> ips	w <u>i</u> ngs	H <u>i</u> s	w <u>i</u> ngs
<u>S</u> tands	dr <u>e</u> ams	<u>D</u> awn	l <u>a</u> wn
<u>C</u> lipped	and	<u>C</u> lipped	<u>T</u> ied
<u>F</u> earful	tr <u>i</u> ll	<u>C</u> aged	<u>B</u> ird
<u>W</u> inds	tr <u>e</u> es	<u>F</u> at	<u>B</u> right
<u>N</u> ames	h <u>i</u> s	<u>S</u> tands	dr <u>e</u> ams

Alliteration

The poem is also scintillating example of alliteration that lends structure, flow and beauty to any literary text / poetic text. Moreover, it is deployed to show, unity, emphasis and musical effect in the poem. Most of the repeated sounds are fricatives, for example, seldom, see soft, sighing, shadow, which suggest that the poetess gives vent to subdued feelings and emotions of social and political liberty.

<u>S</u> eldom	<u>S</u> ee	<u>S</u> oft	<u>W</u> orms	<u>W</u> aiting
<u>B</u> ird	<u>B</u> reeze	<u>S</u> ighing	<u>S</u> hadow	<u>S</u> hout

Lexico-syntactic analysis

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is identified as an extravagant exaggeration, not intended to be taken literally, but used figuratively to create humor or emphasis. Couple examples are also observed in the poem on hand, for example, the free bird "dares to claim the sky" is a hyperbolic expression that suggests that the free bird has the courage to claim the sky. The free bird with inordinate

pride claims the possession and occupation of the sky .The sky stands for full- fledged freedom .

And dares to claim the sky

And he names the sky his own

Personification

- (i) Bars of rage
- (ii) And trade winds through sighing tress
- (iii) His shadow shouts on nightmare scream
- (iv) The free bird thinks of another breeze

Personification also prevails in the poem in order to give vivid and clear picture to the reader. For example, sighing is human quality attributed to the trees. In the same fashion, shadow however tall and strong may be , cannot shout . In addition, thinking ability out and out belongs to human beings afforded to the free bird. The motive behind using personification is to make her voice heard clearly. In the poem personification involves human senses, in particular, the sense of hearing. In the final analysis, the poetess intends to draw the attention of the people through the personification so that they could give their ear to hear her voice for freedom and emancipation.

Antonyms The caged bird , the free bird

Synonyms Wind , breeze

Hypernyms / hyponyms

Hyponym is considered as a device of meaning. It is a kind of elaborating relationship in which lexical items represent a class of thing. In the poem under study, we find some hyponymous lexemes that highlights the message and theme, for example , bird and its co-hyponyms reflect the theme of freedom , confinement and constrain for the black people . On the other hand , sun and its hyponyms show the freedom , pleasure , optimism of the white people . These hyponymous lexemes amplify and extend theme and thought of the poem.

Hypernym: wind

Hyponyms : wings, cage, sky, clipped ,breeze ,trees, leap.

Hypernym : sun

Hyponyms : rays , orange , shadow , sky ,dawn

Hypernyms : Cage

Hyponyms : bars, freedom, free , bird, wind

Imagery

Types of Images

Visual	Auditory	Olfactory	Gustatory	Tactile	Kinesthetic	Organic
Bird	Trill			Wind	Float	Rage
Downstream	sing			Downstream	Leap	Longed
Wings	Tune			Breeze	Dip	Fearful
Orange	Shout				Clipped	Soft
Sun	Scream				Sing	Nightmare
Sky	Tune					
Cage	Sighing					
Bars						
Feet						
Throat						
Hill						
Trees						
Worms						
Lawn						
Grave						

One of the most elevated objectives of imagery is to "show, not to tell". The poet invests the poem with concrete details for the luxury and convenience of the reader to make graphic picture in the mind. The concrete imagery involves the mechanism that enhances learning and memory. The poetess has employed a fair number of visual imagery to depict the situation graphic, pictorial, and life-like. The author keeps the abstraction level to the minimum by choosing visual images for the poem. The auditory images also play vital role in creating deep auditory effects on the listener, the auditory imagery rings and resound in ear of reader. The writer consumed kinesthetic, organic and tactile imager moderately. Olfactory and gustatory images hardly touched upon by the writer.

Syntactic Analysis

The text is teeming with the present tense. The present tense reflects the poetess current state of mind. It also implies that is she not giving vent to feelings of the remote and distant past. It has also been observed that the text is ridden with active voice and passive voice. But the predominance of the active voice in the poem gives an inkling that the agent is indispensable to the text to vocalize bottled up sentiments. However, the passive voices also point out that the cause of the speaker is stagnant, passive and impeded and not moving forward swiftly, for example :

- (i) His wings are clipped and his feet are tied .
- (ii) His tune is heard on the distant hill.....

In the afore-mention lines passive verbs 'are clipped' 'are tied' 'is heard' show that there is deadlock, and inertia in the situation.

There are five sentences in all in the poem. The length of the sentences indicate that the poet intends to draw uninterrupted attention of the reader. Most of the sentences in the text are simple. It is also interesting to note that the text is inordinately interspersed with the compound sentences. The author consumed Coordination conjunction 'And' in the text predominantly, for example

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees (coordinating conjunction 'And')
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn (Coordination conjunction 'And')
and he names the sky his own. (Coordinating conjunction 'And')

Afore mentioned stanza is also the example of polysyndeton which is identified as the use of conjunction between each word, phrase, clause, as a consequence it is considered the opposite of asyndeton. In addition, polysyndeton is the repetition of conjunction to strengthen the notion of equal logical or emotive importance of connected sentences. In the above stanza, the poet is giving equal and balanced importance to her emotions and feelings.

Lexical Analysis

If we analyze the verbs, we come to know that most of the verbs are in the present tense form. The verb 'sing' has been repeated six times. The verb 'clipped' 'tied' 'open' 'heard' are repeated two times respectively. This shows that the simple and straightforward vocabulary highlights the writer poetic style. The poet employs concrete and tangible words that aid the reader to understand the poem profusely.

The adjectives used in the poems tell us social status of the black and the white in America. Throughout the poem the adjectives 'the free bird' 'the orange sunrays' 'fat worms' display the freedom, gaiety, and exuberance and confidence of the white skin American. On the other hand, the adjectives: 'narrow cage means narrow social space' and the caged bird suggests that her community is put in captivity or they cannot move freely.

whereas 'fearful trill' means their voice for freedom is filled fear and 'distant hill' indicates that the destiny of her nation is far off and 'longed for' means her tell the reader that black skin community is afforded least social

space, they are socially and politically imprisoned and confined, their voice for freedom and social rights is full of fear and awe, the poetess longs desperately full-fledged freedom for her community and race.

The spatial adverbs, which are further divided into: position, direction, and distance adverbs. The poetess has employed spatial adverbs as literary tool to promote and propagate her case. For example 'on the back of wind' 'downstream' in the orange sun rays 'on dawn-bright lawn' prepositional adverbial phrases clearly tell us about

the full-fledged space occupied by the white people , whereas ' with fearful , on the distant hill ' on the grave of dreams' reflect the subjugation, fear and victimization of the black people '

As for nouns, most of the nouns are concrete: bird, wing, sunrays, cage, bar, throat, hill, tree, worm, sky, lawn and stream .The use of concrete nouns imply that the situation is inordinately external at the same time show physical agony of the poet . There are also abstract nouns which show the state of mind .

Morphological analysis

Morphological marker(ing) shows continuity , progression and flow of her message and theme . Similarly " Ful " shows the caged bird overwhelmed with fear .The poetess took considerable care in using complex words .There is no overwhelming consumption of prefixes and suffixes in the poem. The process of affixation is simple and understandable. The poetess has adhered to the ' Root' or ' Core words' to impart her message in clear and tangible terms .Inflection in the nouns and verbs is also predominantly simple , for example , the nouns : wings , rays , bars , things , trees, worms , and dreams involves simple and austere process of regular inflection . In the same fashion , the verb : leaps , floats , dips , dares , stalks , clipped , tied and sings show simple grammatical inflection and mark the present tense and Concordance (subject and verb agreement)

Morphological devices include suffixes and prefixes. There are five suffixes and one prefix in the poem.

Affixation

Fearful	Fear+ful	Waiting	Wait+ing	Unknown
Sighing	Sigh+ ing	Longed	Long+ed	Un+known

Graphological Analysis

The title of the poem is written in the bold print in order to draw the attention of the reader. The poem consists of 42 lines and the total number of sentences is seven, The total number of stanzas are six. Each stanza of the poem starts with capital letters then rest of the stanza starts with small letters. There are seven full stops in all in the poem. The poet has not deployed commas', semi colon, dashes and dots for the continuous progression and flow of her message, there is no break in the sentences. The basic purpose of the contracted forms is the economy of space and time .However, the poetess has not exploited this device. There is only one hyphenated word that is 'dawn bright- lawn'

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Appendix

Caged Bird

BY MAYA ANGELOU

A free bird leaps
 on the back of the wind
 and floats downstream
 till the current ends
 and dips his wing
 in the orange sun rays
 and dares to claim the sky.
 But a bird that stalks

down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown

but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

The free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends and dips his wings in the orange sun rays and dares to claim the sky. But
a bird that stalks down his narrow cage can seldom see through his bars of rage his wings are
clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with fearful trill of the things unknown but longed for still and his tune
is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom. The free bird thinks of
another breeze and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees and the fat worms waiting
on a dawn-bright lawn and he names the sky his own.
But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream his
wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant
hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.