

The Use of Alliteration and Its Effects in Hopkin's Poems

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Abstract

Literary devices play a crucial role in teaching poems. Alliteration has a very great effect on poetry and it also plays an important role in attracting readers' attention on a particular poem. In doing research or term papers on literary devices, it is usually found that alliteration is the most prominent sound device in poetry. Although students can identify alliteration, they do not know its effect. Moreover, in teaching literary devices, when students are asked to investigate alliteration, they cannot analyse it well and they do not recognize that alliteration is in relation to sound units such as plosive, sibilant and fricative. In this paper, the two poems 'Spring and Fall' and 'Pied Beauty' written by Gerard Manley Hopkins have been chosen and different types of alliteration and the effects of alliteration are presented. The aim of this paper is to develop students' understanding of the effect of alliteration in teaching poems. The objectives of this paper are to discover different types of alliteration and to make students know the effects of alliteration with reference to Hopkins's poems.

Key words: literary devices, alliteration, effect of alliteration

Introduction

Poetic devices can assist the writer in developing cogent expressions pleasing to his readers. Among other devices, alliteration is a literary device used widely in poetry. It is the repetition in two or more nearby words of initial consonant sounds usually on the same or adjacent lines and it plays a very important role in poetry. According to the Wikipedia, alliteration comes from the Latin word 'littera', meaning letters of the alphabet, and the first known use of the word to refer to a literary device occurred around 1624.

There are several research studies of students that have been done on literary devices or figurative language (eg. Nilar Win, 2015, Thu Thu Swe, 2015, Thandar Mon, 2016). These studies have attempted to explore the use of poetic devices and to find out literary devices in poetry. They have investigated the prominence of alliteration in poetry. Yet they have not analysed it on each type and not presented the effective use of alliteration. It is important for students to know the effect of alliteration and to analyse it well. The aim of this paper is to make students know the effect of alliteration. The objectives of this paper are to discover different types of alliteration and to make students know the effects of alliteration with reference to Hopkins's poems.

In this paper, the two of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poems 'Spring and Fall and Pied Beauty' have been selected because of his masterful use of four poetic devices, sprung rhythm, exact rhyme, assonance and alliteration. In this paper, alliteration of Hopkins's poems is analysed in terms of different types of alliteration and the effects of alliteration are presented. In this paper, the types and the effects of alliteration are analysed according to Bloom's modern critical interpretations.

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are different types of alliteration used in Hopkins' poems?
2. What are the effects of alliteration?

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Literature Review

In literature review, the importance of alliteration, alliteration and sound units, and types of alliteration are presented.

The Importance of Alliteration

Authors use figurative language and figures of speech to evoke emotion and to imply meanings in writing by using comparisons and allusions to familiar objects and ideas that can help a reader to relate to what the author is trying to say. Alliteration is a rhetorical device that repeats the same consonant sound, not the actual letters at the start of a series of words. Cuddon (1991) stated that alliteration is a figure of speech in which consonants, especially at the beginning of words, or stressed syllables, are repeated.

Alliteration is one of the most important literary devices mainly used in poetry for a number of purposes. In Old English poetry, alliteration was a continual and essential part of the metrical scheme and it was often until the late Middle Ages. However, alliterative verse becomes increasingly rare after the end of the 15th century and alliteration- like assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia- tends more to be reserved for the achievement of the special effect (Cuddon, 1991). Alliteration can be found in both classic and modern poetry. It can have a different impact on the meaning of the text or how the reader experiences it due to how it is used in the text. If the poet's use of alliteration is effective, a reader can imply meaning, even without knowing the definition of words. According to Rubin (1995), "repeating patterns of sound in the form of rhyme and alliteration cue memory more broadly and in less time than either imagery or meaning". Thus, alliteration has mnemonic power and it is a powerful tool that can arouse readers' awareness, evoke sounds in rhythm, and provide insight into an author's words.

The effect of alliteration is to drive the rhythm of the poem, to make poems have a musical quality and to make them more appealing and entertaining. It can add artistic style to a poem or other literary form. It can create a rhythm that is fast and fine flow, carrying the text forward. It can enhance the pleasure of reading a literary piece, creating a musical effect in the text. It gives flow and beauty to a piece of writing, making poems attractive and appealing. Alliteration has the ability to shape the mood of a poem with hard or soft sounds. According to Maria Magher, alliteration with an "s" can create a sound like a snake, which can contribute to a mood of intrigue or danger. Softer sounds like "h" or "l" may create a more introspective or romantic mood or tone. Meanwhile, hard sound like "k" gives a harsh sound and a threatening tone. Due to alliteration, a poem can give a calm, smooth feeling or a loud, harsh feeling. The sound of alliteration can help create the mood or tone of a poem or piece of prose depending on what sounds are used, how many words are included in the alliterative series, and what other rhetorical devices are used.

Types of alliteration

There are several types of alliteration. Among them, sibilance, internal, double, symmetrical, continuous, transverse and extensive types of alliteration are selected. Occurrences of more than two alliterated words seem marked to the modern reader, even over-emphatic. Yet extensive alliteration was regularly used as a means of cohesion in so-called alliterative verse which flourished in England before the Norman Conquest; and again in the north and west of the country in the fourteenth century. The alliterated syllables are also the strongly accented or stressed syllables, and so are related to the RHYTHMIC pattern (Wales, 2001). As well as what can be seen as continuous alliteration (xxxx) there are patterns of transverse alliteration (xyxy), etc. Symmetrical alliteration is alliteration containing parallelism. The example of symmetrical alliteration is 'rust brown blazers rule' (xyyx).

Internal alliteration occurs when words and phrases of which (primary-or secondary-stressed) syllable alliterates with another (stressed) syllable of the same word or phrase. Examples of internal alliteration are past compare/ a mine of information/cut your coat according to your cloth/. Special type of alliteration is called sibilance. Sibilance is the recurrence of a hissing sound with 's' or 'z' or 'sh' and sometimes a soft 'c' which can be effective in prose and poetry. Six types of alliteration mentioned above are chosen because they are associated with the old English poetry.

Alliteration is also related to onomatopoeia in that it involves the sense of sound. According to the wikipedia, onomatopoeia is a word that phonetically imitates, resembles or suggests the source of the sound that it describes. It is used to describe the action or to provide an image in a more efficient way. In poetry, alliteration is characteristically used for onomatopoeic effects, to suggest by the association of sounds what is being described. Onomatopoeic words are used to emphasize a particular point or evoke a certain emotion that the author is trying to evoke. The effect of onomatopoeia is that it can give readers better explanation, provide them a more vivid description and make them understand what the writer is trying to say.

Related Resesarch

There are several research studies of students that have been done on literary devices or figurative language (eg. Nilar Win, 2015, Thu ThuSwe, 2015, Thandar Mon, 2016). These studies have attempted to explore the use of poetic devices and to find out literary devices in poetry. They have investigated the prominence of alliteration in poetry. Yet they have not analysed it on each type and not presented the effective use of alliteration. In this research paper, types of alliteration are classified and the effect of each type of alliteration is analysed with reference to Hopkins' poems "Spring and Fall" and "Pied Beauty"

Method

In this research paper, quantitative research method is used. Different types of alliteration are classified in terms of Bloom's method and the types and the effects of alliteration are classified and expressed in alliteration categories in the table.

Materials

In this paper, the poems "Spring and Fall" and "Pied Beauty" by Gerard Manley Hopkins are selected to be analyzed.

Introduction to the poem 'Spring and Fall' by Gerard Manley Hopkins

The poem 'Spring and Fall' by Gerard Manley Hopkins is a simple, yet elegant poem that has a musical sound with a powerful religious theme. The poem 'Spring and Fall' is about contrasts between youth and age, life and death, spring and fall. In this poem, the poet addresses to a young child named Margaret, who is crying. The poet thinks that she is crying because all the leaves in the forest of Goldengrove have turned into yellow and fallen off the trees. The poet tells the child that she might not notice or care about leaves falling off the trees and she might not cry over the fallen leaves when she grows older. He says that Margaret is young and innocent and has such fresh thoughts so she is able to care about small tragedies in nature like the leaves falling off the trees in the autumn like "the things of man" such as human problems yet knows nothing of man's troubles.

Introduction to the poem "Pied Beauty"

The poem "Pied Beauty" is one of the first poems of Hopkins in the so-called sprung rhythm which is based on the rhythms of Anglo-Saxon and Ancient Welsh poetry. It is also a good example of Hopkins' innovative use of condensed syntax and alliteration. In this poem,

the speaker says that God should be praised for every strange thing he has provided us. He has given us dappled, spotted, freckled, checkered, speckled things such as the skies with two colours like a two-coloured cow, the little reddish dots on the side of trout, the fallen chestnuts like red coals in a fire, the blended colours of the wings of a finch, plotted and pieced landscape, etc. God should also be glorified for all the different jobs that humans do. The speaker sums up the poem circling back to the beginning of the poem and the idea of praise and glory.

Findings and Discussion

Alliteration is used in poetry for several purposes, so it cannot be analysed separately. It is associated with themes, tone, rhythm, rhyme and so on. Therefore, in teaching procedures, alliteration is analyzed after identifying speaker, setting, form, tone, rhyme, rhythm and theme.

Hopkins is masterful in using sprung rhythm, exact rhyme, assonance and alliteration. In this research, Hopkins's poems 'Spring and fall' and 'Pied Beauty' are used for analysis. Types of alliteration and its effects found in the two poems are described as the table.

Table 1. Types of alliteration and its effects found in the two poems

Sr. No	Name Of poem	Sound units	Types						Effect							
			internal	double	symmetrical	continuous	extensive	message	phrase	Tone/mood	onomatopoeic	musicality	cohesion			
1	Spring And Fall	g	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓				✓	
		l		✓			✓		✓						✓	
		k		✓	✓		✓					✓			✓	
		s	✓		✓		✓					✓			✓	
		w		✓			✓					✓			✓	
		n				✓						✓				
		h		✓							✓					
		b		✓						✓						
		m		✓					✓							✓
		g		✓												✓
2	Pied Beauty	k	✓			✓				✓						
		f	✓			✓				✓					✓	
		p	✓		✓											
		t				✓				✓						
		s	✓	✓			✓						✓			
		d		✓						✓						
		h		✓						✓						
											✓					

In the two poems, six types of alliteration are investigated and transverse is not found. Because of extensive alliteration, the two poems have cohesive effect. Alliteration in the two poems draws attention to certain word or phrases, creates the mood and tone and provides unity, rhythm and musicality. Moreover, onomatopoeic effect can be found in both poems.

Analysis of the poem ‘Spring and Fall’

The poem ‘Spring and fall’ brings out the effective use of alliteration. There is a lot of alliteration in this poem. The use of different words that begin with the same sound contributes to the idea of unity-in-diversity.

In the first “Margret, are you grieving”, “g” sound which is plosive, is repeated. Plosive is explosive so this alliteration engages the speaker’s sympathy for the child. Using alliteration in a question form evokes a certain emotion that the author is trying to evoke.

In the second line “Over Goldengroveunleaving”, the repetition of “g” sound in the name of the place makes pretty sweet internal [alliteration](#) and /g/ is a voiced velar plosive that is the hardest and the most obstruent in English phonology. It gives loudness and strength. The sound “g” has occurred two times in the word “Goldengrove”. This internal alliteration is used to draw attention to a word “Goldengrove” and helps the context of the poem to be more idyllic.

“l” sound in the line “Leaves, like the things of man, you” is liquid and nasal and it is the softest and it is also the most sonorous consonant. It suggests the light movement of fallen leaves. It is the double alliteration. The use of alliteration “l” in “Leaves, like” signifies the important message, the transience of human life like fallen leaves.

The alliteration of voiceless alveolar plosive “k” of “care” and “can” in line 4 “With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?” suggests sympathy for fallen leaves. The poet also uses the symmetrical alliterative sound “k” as [k s sk] in line 6 “It will come to such sights colder”. Alliterative “k” in this line is used to express less emotion of a girl when growing older. The use of alliteration of “k” sound in line 4 and in line 6 also highlights the contrast of “care” (with emotion) and “colder” (without emotion). It signifies the message of the girl’s changing mood.

Throughout the poem, the voiceless, fricative “s” alliteration is scattered in different places: “such sights” in line 6, “spare a sigh” in line 7 and “Sorrow’s springs” in line 11. The sibilance “s” sound imitates the sound of the leaves rustling in the wind and it also mimics the sound of one shuffling through the piles of fallen leaves on the ground. Moreover, “by” is an internal rhyme. Such internal rhyme and alliteration of “s” in “spare a sigh” are used to emphasize the “sigh” at the end of the line.

In the middle of the poem, Hopkins uses the approximant and the most sonorous “w” in “world’s of wanwood” in line 8 and “will weep” in line 9 mimics the sound of the blowing wind. Besides, the two kinds of alliteration “w” in “world’s of wanwood” and “l” in “leafmeal lie” in line 8 sound like a tongue twister so it makes the poem more appealing and entertaining. It enhances the musicality of the poem.

Hopkins also uses the “n” alliteration in “Now no matter, child, the name” to create a sense of melancholy. The alliteration of the glottal fricative “h” in “heart heard” in line 13 can create a more introspective mood or tone. The alliteration “g” in “ghost guessed” in line 13 contributes to the emphatic slowing of the rhythm at these earnest and dramatic points in the poem. /g/ and /h/ are double alliteration.

The voiced bilabial plosive “b” alliteration in “blight man was born in line 14 suggests prudence, and the poet reminds the child that all of life leads towards the terrible inevitability

of death. The alliteration “m” in “Margret you mourn” is associated with a sense of melancholy.

In this poem, the first eight lines have regular meter but in line nine, sprung rhythm can be found. In line 9, there are a total of four stressed syllables, but instead of being evenly spaced out, they are clustered together. Alliteration occurs on some of the stressed syllables.

The poem falls roughly into two halves: the first nine lines and the final six lines. The first half raises a question while the second half provides a kind of response to the question. The extensive alliteration spreads throughout the poem. /g/ in lines 1, 2 and 13, /s/ in lines 6, 7 and 11, /w/ in lines 8 and 9 and /m/ in lines 14 and 15 give the poem more of an aural quality. Some of the alliterative patterns in the first half can be found in the second half. This use of extensive alliteration helps to unify the poem.

Analysis of the poem “Pied Beauty”

“Pied Beauty” by Gerard Hopkins is a poem that can be used as an alliteration example. The poem succeeds with both visual and auditory images. The poet’s use of alliteration adds to the auditory experience.

The first line ‘Glory be to God---’ is alliterative with the repetition of the ‘hard’ ‘g’ to speed the line. In the second line ‘For skies of couple-colour as a brindecow’, /k/ sound is repeated. He uses this continuous alliteration to connect the multicoloured skies with the brinded cow. It highlights the visual image of the piedness of the world. Moreover, the repetition /k/ in couple-colour makes pronouncing the word more difficult, but this internal alliteration adds more emphasis on the line. Moreover, it has an impact on the rhythm. The sibilant /s/ repeated in line three suggests the sound of water where the trout swims.

In the line 4, ‘Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;’ the internal alliteration /f/ in Fresh-fire makes a natural pause which also makes pronouncing the word difficult. Moreover the continuous alliteration /f/ reinforces the beauty of pied things such as a freshly fallen chestnut that opens and looks like charcoal ember on fire and the dabbed colours on the finches’ wings. It suggests that although many of God’s creations appear imperfect and flawed on the outside, inside they reveal beauty. /f/ is voiceless fricative and it can create an airy effect. Therefore it signifies the air that makes chestnuts fall and in which finches fly.

In the fifth line, /p/ and /f/ are repeated to highlight the man’s intervention in natural landscape. The first [pl] is alliterated with the last [pl]. The plain [p] is found in the middle. Fold, fallow, and plough is an appositive modifier of landscape (plotted and pieced). Alliterative pattern in line 5 is symmetrical. The alliteration plotted and pieced emphasizes a visual image which shows the delicacy and care with which God crafts the landscape. In line 6, /t/ is repeated to evoke happy images for men who do various jobs. Like line 5, the first [tr] is alliterated with the last [tr]. The plain [t] is used in the middle. ‘their gear and tackle and trim’ stands in apposition to all trades. In line 7, the poet’s reflections on abstract qualities he admires in dappled things are presented with a list of adjectives. /s/ in two adjectives ‘spare’ and ‘strange’ evokes abstract qualities: rarity and oddness.

In line 8, the double alliteration /f/ in ‘fickle’ and ‘freckled’ is used to describe the qualities that are not appreciated in Victorian age. The poet describes the way in which the dappled things are ‘fickle (changeable) and freckled with two opposite qualities. No one knows how it occurs. In line 9, two kinds of alliteration /s/ and /d/ are found in the three pairs of adjectives showing contrasting qualities. /s/ is continuous alliteration. The alliteration /s/ in the first pair helps to highlight the contrast of ‘swift’ and ‘slow’. Moreover, /s/ in the second pair reinforces opposite tastes of sweet and sour. The alliteration /d/ in the last pair highlights the contrast between adazzle and dim. In line 10, two kinds of alliteration /h/ and /f/ can be found.

/f/ in the phrase fathers-forth is internal alliteration that highlights the message that the poet makes a reference to God as a kind father. The poet's message 'the beauty of God will forever remain beautiful' is described by the alliteration /h/.

This poem has no regular meter. Instead, Hopkins invented 'sprung rhythm. He creates strong accents by using alliteration everywhere. Perfect example occurs in line 4 '**Fresh-fire coal chestnut-falls -----**' Therefore, the effect of alliteration in this poem is to drive the sprung rhythm.

The strikingly musical repetition of sounds throughout the poem (the combination of /l/ with /p/, /k/ and /z/) enacts the creative act the poem glorifies: the weaving together of diverse things into a pleasing and coherent whole.

The most common sounds in this poem are /f/, /p/, /s/ and /t/. This poem, a curial sonnet, is divided into two halves: the first six lines and the final five lines. Some sounds such as /f/ and /s/ created in the first half are reused in the second half. /f/ and /s/ are extensive alliteration. By repeating patterns of alliteration, Hopkins more effectively links the two halves of the poem. /p/ and /t/ have the same alliterative pattern. The alliteration of the poem is based on two types of sound units: fricatives and aspirates: /f/ and /s/ and plosive: /g/, /p/, /t/, /k/, and /d/. Fricatives and aspirates are the second softest sound and plosives are the hardest sounds. These two different groups of sound units suggest the dappled things of the poem.

The main functions of alliteration are to bring into focus a particular line or set of words that the poet wants to draw the attention of the reader and also to guide the rhythm of the poem. The poet's use of alliteration is so effective that a reader can apply meaning, even without knowing the definition of words and its alliteration allows rhythm and musicality.

In both poems, Hopkins mainly used double alliteration and it is used to give the readers certain message and to evoke a certain emotion that the author is trying to evoke. Extensive alliteration is also used in his poems to have cohesive effects.

In Spring and Fall, the first 8 lines have lyrical rhythm and lines 9-15 have sprung rhythm. The juxtaposition of two different rhythms contrasts the different ways of thinking. The change also allows the readers to aurally experience the emotion caused by the time-machine effect.

In Pied Beauty, the poet uses sprung rhythm to make his poem sound more genuine. It emphasizes the fact that he truly feels the sense of love towards God because sprung rhythm imitates the rhythm of natural speed.

The use of sprung rhythm creates uneasy sound and interrupts the continuity. It drags the lines, creating a more sombre and serious tone with sound stress of alliterative words. Hopkins creates strong accents by using alliteration everywhere and he achieves his melody mainly through his sound effects.

Conclusion

Sound effects can be the most challenging area in poetry analysis for foreign language learners, who often lack the phonological awareness and sensitivity to identify sound effects correctly. Sometimes, the spelling of words may also be misleading. Students often identify alliteration but fail to analyze it successfully-- they either neglect the effect of the sound by switching to an analysis of the alliterated words, or produce comments which show limited understanding of the poet's craft, such as 'the alliteration draws the reader's attention to the words' or 'the alliteration makes the image more vivid.

This research has been done with the intention of moving students on from making those general statements to interpreting the impact of the sound of alliterative language. In this paper, sample analyses are made with reference to Hopkins's two poems 'Spring and Fall' and 'Pied Beauty'.

The effect of alliteration is to add artistic style to a poem or other literary form. The aim of this research is to make students know the effect of alliteration and to develop their understanding of its effect. Sound units play an important role in analyzing alliteration. Poets deliberately or unconsciously choose words whose sounds reflect the mood they want to create. When the consonant sounds are repeated through alliteration, it can subtly emphasize the atmosphere desired by the poets. In addition, types of alliteration used by poets are also crucial in analyzing alliteration. Extensive alliteration enhances the unity of the poem.

This research also attempts to make students know effective use of alliteration in Hopkins's poems. As the poet uses Welsh and Anglo-Saxon traditions, almost every line of his poems is full of alliteration. Hopkins uses different types of alliteration that affect the mood, tone, musicality, rhythm and signify the message he wants to convey. By teaching alliteration of Hopkins's poems, it is hoped that students will recognize Hopkins's masterful uses of alliteration and analyze the effect of alliteration.

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