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Yangon University of Distance Education**

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A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEM “THE ROAD NOT TAKEN” BY ROBERT FROST

Nyo Me Kyaw Swa*

Abstract

The style in a piece of writing gives it unique recognition. Stylistics as a branch of linguistics deals with different styles. It is the study of the effective and appropriate use of language in writing. The purpose of this paper is the analysis of the poem “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost from the perspective of stylistic analysis. The present research focuses on the stylistic analysis of the poem “The Road not Taken” by Robert Frost. The aim of the present research is to make a stylistic analysis of the selected poem. The objectives were to identify and analyse the major word classes and to investigate and indicate the most frequently used lexical features and the least frequently used lexical feature at the lexical level. The poem “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost was analysed using the levels of stylistic analysis proposed by Crystal and Davy (1996). It was found that the frequency percentage of verbs (37.3%) was the greatest one of the major words in the poem.

Introduction

Style is the study of the effective and appropriate use of language in writing. Therefore, it might be termed as the analysis of literary discourse from the lens of linguistic. Thus, the connection between the linguistics and literary criticism is the stylistics. Style as an aspect of language which deals with choices of phrases, diction, sentences as well as linguistic materials should be consistent with the subject matter.

Style can be analysed in terms of linguistic terms such as phonological devices, sentence types, morphological varieties, lexical varieties, and utterances. The aim of the present research is to make a stylistic analysis of the poem “The Road not Taken” by Robert Frost. The objectives of the research are to identify and analyse major word classes at lexical level and to investigate why they were used in the poem and indicate the most frequently used lexical feature and the least frequently used lexical feature.

The style used in “The Road not Taken” has its basis on the search for understanding the hidden meaning of things that are hidden from view. It is simple to select a road, but in this context, the poet does not understand where this selection could lead him in the future. Frost in the poem chose the appropriate words to convey the intended meaning effectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

The present research focuses on a stylistic analysis of the selected poem, “The Road Not Taken” written by Robert Frost. Therefore, the definitions of style, stylistics will be reviewed and the levels of stylistic analysis proposed by Crystal and Davy (1969) were also presented.

Style

According to Crystal and Davy (1969), style may refer to some or all of the language habits of one person-as when we talk of Shakespeare’s style (or styles). More often, it refers in this way to a selection of language habits, the occasional linguistic idiosyncrasies which characterize an individual’s uniqueness. It is usually impracticable to try and discuss all a person’s speech and writing habits, hence the concentration on those features in a person’s expression which are particularly unusual or original. Style may refer to some or all of the language habits shared by a group of people at one time, or over a period of time.

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Style is given a more restricted meaning when it is used in an evaluative sense, referring to the effectiveness of a mode of expression. This is implied by such popular definitions of style as saying the right thing in the most effective way or as good manners.

Finally, style has long been associated primarily or exclusively with literature, as a characteristic of ‘good’, ‘effective’, or ‘beautiful’ writing, for example, and the focus of the literary critic’s attention alone. This sense is partially evaluative, partially descriptive, and stylistics here would not concern itself with uses of language outside that of literature. Another interesting theory of the term ‘style’ is presented by Leech and Short (1981) in “Style in Fiction”. It refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a person, for a given purpose and so on. Different linguists and scholars present their theories and concepts of “style”. This present research will look at the style of language in poem.

Stylistics

Style refers to the way or the manner of expression in the text. It can be viewed as the variation in language use, the set of linguistic features, the author’s choice of items and the way they are distributed and patterned in the text. Understanding style may help us define Stylistics. Style has several ways to define, so there are several different stylistic approaches. Stylistics is the branch of general linguistics that focuses on style (i.e. the manner of a speaker's or writer's linguistic expression), particularly in works of literature.

According to Katie Wales in *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, 2nd ed. (2001), “The goal of most stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects to ‘linguistics causes’ where these are felt to be relevant.”

The variety in stylistics is due to the main influences of different branches of linguistics and literary criticism. Stylistics is sometimes called confusingly literary stylistics or linguistic stylistics: literary because it tends to focus on literary texts; linguistics because its models or tools are drawn from linguistics.

Levels of Stylistic Analysis

Crystal and Davy (1969) categorize the levels of stylistics into five levels. They are –

1. Phonetic/graphetic level
2. Phonological/graphological level
3. Grammatical level
4. Lexical level and
5. Semantic level

The first level which may be isolated relates to the actual substance or raw material of language. This material may be of two kinds: the expression of language involves a primary choice between two media, speech and writing. Phonetics is the characteristics and potential utility of human vocal noise. The study of written or printed shapes has hardly been developed at all compared with this and graphitic is the visual analogue of phonetics in similar terms. But at this level, isolated sounds and shapes may have a definite aesthetic appeal. They may be interpreted as reflecting aspects of reality as in onomatopoeia or conveying a meaning residing wholly in the intrinsic properties of the spoken or written physical event. The choice of type-size and colour in a text are essentially non-linguistic. Phonetics and graphetics study the basic phonic and graphic substance of language, respectively.

Phonological/graphological level studies the organization of the basic phonic and graphic substance of language within the framework of a particular language or language group. Human language is clearly more than isolated sounds and shapes: it displays patterns. The sounds and letters of English have a clearly definable form and function and their systematicness may be formalized in rules. Phonology studies the sound system of a given language. Graphology is the analogous study of a language’s writing system or orthography, as seen in the various kinds of handwriting and typography.

The grammatical level analyses the internal structure of the units called sentences in a language and the way these function in sequences. Many other kinds of unit and category need to be distinguished and words, clauses, nouns; verbs and so on will be reviewed at this level. The traditional division of grammar into morphology which studies the internal structure of words and syntax which studies their external relationships moreover has some relevance of stylistics.

Lexical level studies the way in which individual words or idioms tend to pattern in different linguistic contexts. The attributes of single 'lexical terms' (the terms which cover idiomatic word-sequences as well as single words) will be studied regardless of their grammatical form and function. This level may refer to as the study of vocabulary. Under the heading of vocabulary, the information is given about the choice of specific lexical items in a text, their distribution in relation to one another and their meaning.

And the semantic level is the study of the meaning of stretches longer than the single lexical item. The term "semantics" is thus being used in an idiosyncratic way: semantics studies the linguistic meaning of a text over and above the meaning of the lexical items taken singly. It is also the study of patterns of thematic development, the distribution of concepts in a text as a whole, the use of characteristic figures of speech, semantic ingenuity.

Crystal and Davy (1969) presented five levels of stylistic analysis in "Investigating English Style". However, the present research investigated into lexical levels. The significant features of the lexical level of stylistic analysis were discussed in this present research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The present research focused on the study of poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. The aim of the present research is to study the language used in poem from the stylistic point of view. To complete this, the levels of stylistic analysis presented by Crystal and Davy (1969) in "Investigating English Style" were used. They proposed five levels of stylistic analysis – graphological level, phonological level, grammatical level, lexical level and semantic level. The data for the present research will be analyzed only at the lexical level of stylistic analysis.

Procedures for conducting analysis

In analyzing the selected poem, the data for the present research will be analyzed at the lexical level of stylistic analysis proposed by Crystal & Davy (1969) in *Investigating English Style*. In the lexical level, major word classes such as noun, verb, adjective and adverb in the selected poem were mainly focused and identified. The tables of the detailed analysis of lexical level were shown. The number of each type of lexical level in the selected poem was counted and converted to percentage. The different types of major word classes were analyzed as the most frequently used and the least frequently used. Finally, the reasons for using the most frequently used and the least frequently used were investigated.

Analyzing Data

The poem The Road not Taken by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
 And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveler, long I stood
 And looked down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5
 Then took the other, as just as fair
 And having perhaps the better claim,
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
 Though as for that, the passing there
 Had worn them really about the same, 10

And both that morning equally lay
 In leaves no step had trodden black.
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
 I doubted if I should ever come back. 15
 I shall be telling this with a sigh
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:
 Two roads diverged in a wood and I—
 I took the one less traveled by,
 And that has made all the difference. 20

Analysis of Lexical level in the poem The Road Not Taken

Major word classes, nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs were identified and analyzed. The table 1 indicates the analysis of lexical level of selected poem.

Table 1. Analysis of Lexical level in the poem The Road not Taken by Robert Frost

Words	Nouns	Verbs	Adjective	Adverb
Roads(2)	✓			
Diverged(2)		✓		
could		✓		
yellow			✓	
Wood(2)	✓			
sorry			✓	
not				✓
travel		✓		
be		✓		
traveler	✓			
long				✓
stood		✓		
look		✓		
down				✓
as(5)				✓
far				✓
where				✓
then				✓
just				✓
bent		✓		
undergrowth	✓			
took(2)		✓		
other	✓			
fair			✓	
having		✓		
was		✓		
perhaps				✓
better			✓	
claim	✓			
grassy			✓	
wanted		✓		
wear	✓			
though				✓
passing	✓			

Words	Nouns	Verbs	Adjective	Adverb
there				✓
had(2)		✓	✓	
worn		✓		
really				✓
same	✓			
morning	✓			
equally		✓		✓
lay				
leaves	✓			
step	✓			
trodden		✓		
black			✓	
kept		✓		
first			✓	
another				
day	✓			
knowing		✓		
how			✓	
way(2)	✓			
leads		✓		
doubted		✓		
if				✓
should		✓		
ever				✓
come		✓		
back				✓
shall		✓		
telling		✓		
Sigh(2)	✓			
somewhere				✓
Ages(2)	✓			
hence				✓
less				✓
traveled		✓		
has		✓		
made		✓		
difference	✓			
Total	21	31	7	24

Findings and Discussion

The selected poem, “The Road Not Taken” was analyzed using the lexical level proposed by Crystal and Davy (1969). In this chapter, findings of major word classes were presented.

Findings of lexical level in selected poem “The Road not Taken”

The frequency percentage of the lexical data, major words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs in the selected poem were presented, calculated and converted into percentage. The number of major word classes in the poem will be looked at and analyzed.

Table 2. Frequency percentage of major words in the poem “The Road Not Taken”

Major Words	Frequency	Percentage
Nouns	21	25.3%
Verbs	31	37.3%
Adjectives	7	8.4%
Adverbs	24	29%
Total	83	100%

The table indicates the frequency percentage of major words in the poem “The Road not Taken”. It was found that the highest percentage of the use of major words was that of “verbs” (37.3%). It was observed that the use of adverbs was the second highest (29%). The use of nouns was (25.3%) the use of nouns was (25.3%). It was discovered that the lowest frequency of major words was that of adverbs (8.4%).

It was observed that verbs “travel, come, travelled, stood, took, kept, trodden, and made” were used to convey the kind of activities the way the speaker doing. Verbs such as “knowing, doubted, want” were used to express his feeling and thinking. To show his action, verbs such as “stood, bent, look worn” were used.

It was discovered that the verbs which relate to the two roads are (8) and they are “diverged, bent, was wanted, worn, lay, leads, and travelled”. These verbs indicate that it will be difficult to see what is ahead and chosen one will be a miserable decision in life. It was discovered that the poet used the verbs “diverged, stood, looked bent, was wanted, had, has worn, trodden, made, kept doubted, travelled” to denote the choice or decision that the person made.

It was found that the poet makes lexical choices with great care. He is stacked with indecision and regrets and later on be telling this with a sigh somewhere and ages. It contributes the idea that choice is inevitable but never knows what his choice means until he has lived. The person is indecisive .The poem revolves around the choices human beings must make in life. Frost in the poem is travelling before coming at a point where the road is divided into two. He is forced to decide the path to take for the future go his life. It is difficult to make choices when the presentation is the same. The destination of the two roads is unknown, but the choice must be made since the poet is unable to take both roads at the same time. One of the roads was used and had growth of shrubs while the other had grass with a desire to be used.

At that instance, the two roads had not been used. They are still covered by leaves and yellow in color which is a clear indication that the roads had not been used up that time. The poet makes the decision of taking the second road over the first since it is less trodden. However, the other is saved for another day even though the general observation of the poet is that he might never pass that way again hence any chance of taking the other road again. This is to mean that the decision that people take in life are mostly final. There is no chance to turn back. This is the message from the poet that with a sigh, he does not know what awaits him in the future with his choice. Even though he selected the road that is less travelled, the difference between the first and second road is dismal. In his decision lies an adventurous spirit.

Conclusion

The aim of the present research is to make a stylistic analysis of the poem “The Road not Taken” by Robert Frost. The present research has analysed the poem using the lexical level of stylistic analysis proposed by Crystal and Davy (199).

The “Road not Taken” is a poem that explains the time's people are forced to make the decision which entails alternatives. The theme generally appeals to everyone as the need to make a choice is part of human life. There are two paths leading from a common point each leading to different directions. The person at the junction is in the dilemma of whether to go by the first or the second road. Even though the two roads both appear attractive, the poet must decide. The poem evaluates the past, present, and future of the decision made by Frost. The

repetition of “Two roads diverged” in the first stanza as well as the last one is a clear reminder of the chances we get to decide and make choices. The last stanza the poet looks back on what happened when he was forced to make a choice, but no one knows where the other road could have led.

It is imperative to note that our paths as human beings unfold themselves as we travel in the road of life. We can only realize our destination when we arrive even though all along, we did not drive towards it with an assured mind, and with the purpose that we might reclaim to be our own. The close analysis of the poem indicates that it is not for the courage of an individual that we make choices but through the experience of our self-encounters and self-division. Through the use of lexical choices, it was observed that every decision determine what we will go through for the rest of our lives.

The poem is all about the selection or the choices of the road Frost had to take for his life. The poet is at a junction whereby the road has diverged into two. The sections of deciding become serious when he finds it difficult to decide or choosing between the two roads to take for his future. Through the stylistic devices, Frost easily and clearly describes the point of view. The devices give the deepest meaning to the dilemma facing him. The stylistic analysis done in this context helped to unravel hidden meaning from the poem.

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