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Lexical, Syntactic and Phonological Analysis of Omer Tarin's "A Love Story"



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Abstract

This article presents a systematic stylistic analysis of the short story “*A Love Story*” written by Pakistani English writer Omer Salim Khan (pen name, Omer Tarin) from his 2011 collection *From Hill and Plain: Short Stories*. By employing Leech and Short's (2007) framework as its primary theoretical lens, this paper examines the story's stylistic elements across three levels: lexical, grammatical, and phonological. The analysis indicated that at lexical level, Tarin's use of colloquialism, idiomatic expression, and figures of speech i.e., tautology, zeugma, pleonasm, simile, and epithet demonstrate demographic orientation of its characters. At the grammatical level, patterns of parallelism, anaphora, framing, chain repetition, and inversion highlight significant rhetorical and ideological functions in the creation of unreliable first-person narrator. At the phonological level, this study scrutinizes alliteration, assonance and consonance as significant elements contributing to the story's conversational register. The context and cohesion of the story is also an inclusive feature of Leech and Short's (2007) framework. Hence, the findings reveal that Tarin's stylistic preferences are deliberate, as they mirror the narrator's moral compass, societal hypocrisy and the socio-cultural landscape of Punjab. This study contributes to the limited body of stylistic scholarship on Pakistani English prose fiction by highlighting analytical productivity of the Leech and Short framework when applied to postcolonial short stories in the South Asian context.

Keywords: Stylistics, Omer Tarin, Pakistani English Fiction, Leech And Short, Postcolonial Prose

Introduction

“A Love Story” is written by a Pakistani writer Omer Salim Khan, also known as Omer Tarin with four volumes of poetry, several research articles, book of short story and shorter essays to his credit. His short story collection *From Hill and Plain: Short Stories* (2011) focuses on rural Punjab, its social order, moral contradictions and postcolonial linguistic insights. Tarin is also an elected member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and his writings have been recognised for its contribution to Pakistani English literature (“Alchetron”, n.d.). Despite his literary achievements, his short stories have attracted limited research attention. This prominent gap is striking, given that Tarin's prose largely centers on stylistic devices, colloquial vocabulary drawn from both Urdu and Punjabi, complex grammatical structures, and a cultural preference for a first-person narrative voice of considerable significance.

Literature Review

The article aims at investigating how particular lexical (related to words), syntactic (related to structure) and phonological (related to speech sounds) choices made by Omer Tarin in his short story “*A Love Story*” contribute towards story's stylistic register. According to Peter Verdonk (2002), stylistics is concerned with “the study of style in language” and it also examines how linguistic choices at every level from the phonological to the discursive generate meaning, create aesthetic impact and frame

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ideological positions within literary texts (p. 3). Stylistics enables researchers to identify the features of literary texts by examining how a particular linguistic expression is employed “to create facsimiles, models or distortions of the real world (Bradford, 2013)” across three levels: lexical, grammatical, and phonological.

The story under consideration for the purpose of present stylistics analysis is taken from *Hill and Plain: Short Stories* (2011). It seeks its primary analytical lens across lexical, grammatical, phonological categories from Leech and Short’s framework *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (1981) and later revised and expanded in 2007. Over years, this theoretical framework has emerged as a standard point of reference in understanding stylistics aspects in the context of prose fiction.

Pakistani English literature has gained global attention since the late twentieth century. Prominent literary contributions by the novelists such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, Hanif Kureishi, and Nadeem Aslam have attracted enormous scholarly attention to postcolonial narratives, identity crises, and problematic linguistic experiences. However, the stylistic choices of Pakistani English prose in the genre of short stories remained underexplored within the discipline of stylistics. Pakistani novels have claimed reasonable scholarly criticism, but, a larger research gap is observed in the Pakistani short story writing tradition represented by the writers such as Omer Tarin, Bina Shah, Daniyal Mueenuddin and Aamer Hussein. This story is narrated in the first person by a male protagonist residing in a rural Punjab whose life and romantic attachment, both are riddled with contradictory moral choices, patriarchal supremacy, caste prejudices and distinctive linguistic expressions drawn largely from Urdu and Punjabi languages. Tarin’s employment of stylistic devices i.e., simile, zeugma, tautology, pleonasm, epithet establishes room for further examination of contextualized colloquial vocabulary from Urdu and Punjabi within the broader canvas of Pakistani short story genre, an essentially undertheorized dimension of Leech and Short’s framework.

Research Questions

The following questions are framed for research analysis:

Q1. What lexical, grammatical, and phonological stylistic devices does Omer Tarin deploy in “A Love Story,” and how do they occur in the narrative?

Q1. How do these stylistic devices function collectively to construct the narrator’s postcolonial voice and experiences through the story’s first-person narration?

Q3. In what ways does Tarin’s colloquial register reflect the sociolinguistic specificity of the Pakistani English short story tradition?

The structure of the analysis focuses upon three categories i.e., at the lexical level, it examines colloquialism, idiomatic expression, and figures of speech, at the grammatical level, it addresses parallelism, repetition in its multiple forms, epithets, and inversion, at phonological level, it includes alliteration, assonance, consonance, and the use of punctuation as a stylistic device. This article concludes with the key stylistic findings along with its implications in Pakistani English prose fiction.

Stylistic Analysis at Lexical Level

Stylistic variation can be created through different ways of addition, deletion, substitution and even permutation at word level by different writers which makes their style and writing as distinct as they are. It is “the way of the writer to convey message

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to the reader” (Leech & Short, 2007, p 10). Tarin seems to be unconventional by applying different variations in his short stories especially in “A Love Story”. Some of them are discussed here.

Colloquial Expressions

Colloquialism, a word of Latin origin means “Conversation”. It is used as a literary device by the writers as informal expressions in the form of words and phrases, with the specific aim to express more realistically not only the demographics of the characters (their age, education, socio-cultural background etc.) but their true voice also (Kidder, 2022). According to Boyce (2018) colloquial expressions are the expressions used in “everyday spoken language of the educated upper classes of society (p 2)”. In writing this term is used to reflect the “educated spoken idiom” which is used to give true essence to the meaning. It is different from “vulgar” or popular language which reflects the language of the lower classes while “General colloquial” is the term used to express those expressions which exhibit both urban and popular language. In “A Love Story” as the narrator is the part of the story and the whole story revolves around his soliloquies so mostly the words used as general colloquialism are found.e.g.

love-shuv, Munshi Karam, Neem tree, Thanedar, Police-chowki, Police-wallahs, Nai's shop,

Kiaun jee, ajj kithay jaa rahay au ussi?" chambeli oil, Maulvi Sarwar, *Khutbah, Amreeka,*

laat-sahibs Lunndun, Chaudhry-sahib, dhoom-dhaam, Hain jee? Munshi jee's Neem, haveli, Oe,Jangle, daughter's mang, Kalashnikov, Sultana Dakoo, Jihad, Houris in Jannat al Firdos....

Colloquial Phrases

Along with colloquial expression at word level Tarin very beautifully used the colloquial phrases like:

the sum of 20,000 rupees doesn't grow on trees (It is hard to earn).

break his legs (Injure him).

! 8-classes pass (Secondary school pass).

This is all advice from the Devil (Devil's advocate).

Idiomatic Expressions

Idioms are the collection of words used by the speakers of almost all languages for figurative, implied purpose in literary work. They can be used for maintaining the readers' interest, conveying difficult thoughts in simple expression, creating humor, indicating demographical information and establishing a specific tone (“Literary Devices” 2022). The idiomatic expressions in this short story are used for almost all the above mentioned purposes e.g.

I couldn't lose face before Cheema, (humor)

He shouted in glee in between his insane bouts of laughter (demographic information).

They are all under evil influence (specific tone).

Figures of Speech

The following figures of speech from “A Love Story” are elaborated in detail.

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Tautology

Tautology defines as “verbal repetition” (Erlich, 2012). The difference between repetition and tautology is of the aim i.e. repetition is used for emphasizing some elements in the text while tautology is used for creating humor in tensed situations (“Literary devices, terms and elements”). Here tautology is used just for the sake of pretending to be daring for example when the protagonist says Honour is honour.

Zeugma

A rhetorical device used as “an ambiguous word or phrase is placed in construction with a coordinate structure in such a way that it must be interpreted differently with respect to the different conjuncts...”) more or less equivalent to the modern term *Conjunction Reduction* (Lasersohn, 2013)”. In “A Love Story,” the hero uses zeugma when he says:

his friends introduced me to gambling and Cheema.

Pleonasm

Pleonasm “a superabundance of words which strengthen what is expressed (Dupriez, 1991) or “A juxtaposition of synonyms, with or without asyndeton (Brock, 1911) can also be observed in

he is my daughter's mang, her affianced?

I was shocked beyond any words.

Simile

A rhetorical device to compare two relatable things mostly nouns with connector “like” or verbs with connector “as” in order to create a detailed, strong imagery in the minds of the readers. Sometimes simile can be used to indicate some dissimilarity or difference or as stylistic device by the writers in all types of writings either formal or informal (McGuigan, 2011). Tarin very beautifully uses simile in this short story at many places such as

Cheema looked exactly **like a mouse**. Small, brown and frightened.

He fell down, blood streaming down his face, screeching **like an old woman in labor**.

If you tried to talk to her she would gasp and run off, **like a rabbit running for its life** from the greyhounds.

Laloo stopped glaring at me now and started laughing **like a madman**.

And I will become a hero, hiding in the forest and looting all the bad people in the name of Allah and doing good deeds **like Sultana Dakoo**.

Stylistic Analysis at Grammatical Level

This section addresses stylistics analysis in the following analysis.

Parallelism and Anaphora

If I hadn't seen her, I wouldn't have fallen in love. If I hadn't fallen in love I wouldn't have gambled wildly and bet more money than I had ever seen, what to do, then?

Repetition

Repetition when used by a writer as a figure of speech in any text, its main objectives is to attract the attention of the audience through “logical emphasis” (Kemetelidze & Manjavidze, 2013). Different types of repetitions are used by different writers ranging

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from sound, words, phrases, clauses to sentences. Anaphora, epiphora, anadiplosis, framing, root repetition, chain repetition, synonymous repetition, scattered repetition and thematic repetition are some of the repetitions Kemetelidze & Manjavidze, 2013). Tarin has also used some of these types such as **Anaphoric repetition** where the initial words or phrases repeated like:

I thought, I'd tell him I'd pay him the remainder later, and I'd ask him for Cheema's hand in marriage

We are Jats, and we can't have these low caste bastards getting too free with us.

Look at that! And look at all those shameless girls today

Women are only for indoors. To look after our needs. To bear our children in their Wombs.

You, who even your parents' curse? You, who are the bane of the whole village and all decent folk.

Do you know that you stole that buffalo from Nazeer-do you know that he is my daughter's mang, her affianced?

Framing

The repetition of initial words at the end of sentences like:

You animal! You donkey! You thing, you!

This is all advice from the Devil. They are all under evil influence.

Chain repetition

Chain repetition is used for logical reasoning (Kemetelidze & Manjavidze, 2013).

I must get some more money and get away from here.

I won't buy a video shop in Hafizabad, now. I will buy a Kalashnikov. And I will become a hero.

Synonymous Repetition

After I have settled down in Hafizabad and set up my video shop.

Epithets

Semantically epithet is an adjective or noun phrase used to identify the someone with the help of “evaluated nouns or “collocation” but grammatically it is used to fill the “modifying slot” in noun phrase (Wales, 2014) where adjective is used to modify a noun for enhancing the aesthetic sensibility of the readers through expressive, emotive, evaluative connotation (Romanyshyn, 2022). Tarin uses epithets in both ways like as adjective phrase e.g.

Lurking timidly

Gambled widely

And as noun phrase like:

Delightful timidity

Dastardly deed

Bloody relation

Al thorough bad lot

Blood-shot eyes.

Inversion:

Inversion is considered to be an independent syntactic stylistic device found in the following phrases:

Life's too short for this love-shuv business, I tell you.

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Pay close attention to my story and you might understand why.

I could always return Nazeer the money.

Stylistic Analysis at Phonographical Level

This section focuses upon phonographical level in detail.

Alliteration

Alliteration is another stylistic device which enhances not only the cohesiveness to the text but can be used for “mnemonic effects” and as fore grounding in poetry. It can be used as assonance i.e., is the repetition of vowel sound in stressed syllables and consonance that is the repetition of consonant sound in words (Norgaar, Busse & Montoro, 2010).

Assonance

Door or

I was shocked beyond any words.

Anone any more.

Consonance

I could easily make that much muney in a month with my shop

Combed it carefully.

Where would the world be otherwise?

People should all know their proper places

I saluted him and stood there.

You animal! You donkey! You thing, you!

I think that this

Deeds like Sultana Dakoo

I must get some more money

Look at that! And look at all

She was a good girl

like a rabbit running for its life from

I can come

your dastardly deed

on the way and whistled in

stealing, gambling and disturbing

his house and he

smiling and smiring

beating us and making us lend his goat.

Graphological Devices

McIntosh (1961) in *Graphology and Meaning* coined this term by explaining its importance in written medium the way phonology has in spoken medium. Many linguists broadened the concept of graphology later on. According to Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964):

Graphology, however, is an essential part of the description of any written language. The use of the word may be unfamiliar. It has been chosen to parallel ‘phonology’, and the term includes orthography, punctuation, and anything else that is concerned with showing how a language uses its graphic resources to carry its grammatical and lexical patterns. (p 50)

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For Leech and Short (2007) graphology is related with overall writing system like punctuations, spacing, paraphrasing like capitalization, hyphen, comma, full stop etc. while for Crystal and Davy (1969) it means orthography (rules of hand writing patterns, typography) although these types of deviations are considered to be “minor and superficial part of style” but they become effective, valuable and noticeable when the writers deliberately use them in their writings (Leach & Short 2007).

Use of punctuations:

According to MacCaskill (2012) punctuation is used in written communication with a specific purpose “to make meaning clear and to make reading easier” (p 44) with the help of punctuation marks of different sorts. They perform different functions like to “separate” (period), to “enclose” (parenthesis) to “connect” (hyphen) and “to impart meaning”. But think that these symbols perform the semantic and syntactic, psychological and controlling function in a text that’s why it should not be taken as ornamental or decorative devices only (Nunberg 1990); Dale 1991; Truss 2004; Buchholz 1979).

Dashes:

The dash as a stylistic device is used for different purposes like some times to summarize, to explain or to show an abrupt change in thought. In short stories it is used to make it more “conversational” (Dean, 2015). Same found here:

police- chauki
love- shuv
police- wallah

Period and Capitalizations

They say its very hard getting over your first love and I know, because I've been there. To my misfortune.

Women are only for indoors. To look after our needs. To bear our children in their Wombs.

All women have become deceivers. Like Sahiban, who threw away Mirza's arrows when her bloody relatives approached.

Context and Cohesion

Tarin very beautifully and artistically creates the situation where all incidents are logically interconnected.

Narration

Narrative type plays a very crucial role in the understanding of the text. Different types of narratives have different purposes in the text. In 1st person narrative which is presented in 1st person pronoun like I, we etc. the objective of the author is two folded. He either wants to present the narrator as a character in the story or unfolds the story through his eyes by probing into his mind, it is a kind of personal account of the protagonists or he presents it as a “secondary character” also a part of the story, an observer who objectively analyzes the events in the story and comments (Alami, 2019, Shen, 2010). In the story under discussion 1st person narrative is used where the narrator himself is the protagonist of the story who is unfolding the story through his

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choice and lens.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to probe into Tarin's short story to find out the stylistic devices used by him. For that purpose lexical, grammatical, phonographical, contextual and cohesive elements were observed. The analysis indicated that Tarin used all these features so exquisitely and attractively. Through his evocative prose, Tarin breathes life into his characters, endowing them with authenticity and depth. The protagonists come alive, their hopes, fears, and vulnerabilities laid bare before the reader's eyes. With keen insight and empathy, he explores the complexities of their relationships, delving into the depths of their souls and unmasking the intricacies that bind them together.

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