

Stylistic Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's Story

“A Beheading”

Aatika Asad^a, Naima Batool^b

^a Student, Department of English, University of Mianwali, Mianwali

^b Lecturer, Department of English, University of Mianwali, Mianwali

*Corresponding author: aatikaasadniazi786@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper presents a stylistic analysis of Mohsin Hamid's story “A Beheading”. This analysis is fundamentally based on Lexical and Morphological level of Stylistic analysis. This is a short story written in the first-person narrative showing the story of a middle-class man. The study aims to find out morphologically and lexically significant features from this text. Further, this Short Story is analyzed by classifying the lexical categories and mentioning the importance of their presence in this particular text. So this paper provides analysis of selected short story at two levels; morphological and lexical. These levels are explained by Paul Simpson in his book “Stylistics: A Resource book for students” in 2004. According to him, lexical level focuses on the lexeme, figurative language and literary devices, and the morphological level focuses on the morpheme, word origin and word formation. As a result of the application of Stylistic Analysis on this text, some lexical and morphological elements have been brought to foreground. Some literary devices like imagery, personification, metaphors, similes and repetitive phrases have been highlighted. Secondly, while working at morphological level different types of words belonging to diverse origins, languages and parts of speech have been found. This research is helpful to analyze the style of Mohsin Hamid and focuses on his use of diction. Thus this paper applies stylistic analysis on the selected short story and shows how one can better understand writer's use of different literary devices and vocabulary items in a particular text. Through deep analysis of the text some words are found showing abuse of power and brutality, thus the writer has used expressive diction that contributes to the theme of terror.

Keywords: Discourse stylistics, power abuse, story, style, terror.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the text of Mohsin Hamid's story *A Beheading* at Lexical and Morphological levels. A lot of work has been done in the domain of stylistic analysis but very little or almost no comprehensive research has been done on this particular short story. So,

the prime focus of this study is on the features of Pakistani writings. This study focuses on the theme of story, in this way it highlights several words and expressions from the text that contribute to the theme of terror and brutality. It highlights some figurative devices including similes, metaphors, personification, stress and imagery while analyzing it at the lexical level, secondly some morphological elements like word formation, word origin and coinage are brought to foreground while analyzing it at morphological level. This all is included in Stylistic Analysis.

Style is a way in which language is used in a given context, by given people for a given purpose (Leech and Short, 1996). According to Leech and Short (1981), style is the usage of vocabulary in a particular situation for a specific aim.

According to Leech and Short (1981), style is the usage of vocabulary in a particular situation for a specific aim. They further said that style is a dress of thoughts and a medium for transportation of thoughts and messages to the readers or listeners.

Stylistics, a branch of applied linguistics, is the study and interpretation of texts of all types and/or spoken language in regard to their linguistic and tonal style, where style is the particular variety of language used by different individuals and/or in different situations or settings (Wikipedia).

H.G. Widdowson (1986) defines Stylistics as, "The study of literary discourse from a linguistics orientation". According to Leech (1985) "Stylistics is the study of the style which can be applied in both literary and non-literary texts. Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics concerned with the study of style in texts. Before the 20th century stylistics only dealt with literary text, but from 20th century onwards it started to deal with non-literary texts as well. For Example: law, religion, advertisement, newspaper etc.

The story begins with the kidnapping of the narrator. That was a night scene when the kidnappers entered his house. The speaker is in dilemma because he wanted to escape but fails. At that point, he gives expression to his thoughts as he was confused, worried and terrified. Finally, he is caught. The kidnappers make him suffer both physically and mentally. Although, the speaker himself is tortured but at the same time, he is also concerned about his family who might as well be kidnapped. He has

second thoughts about his wife, parents and children. Further on, he goes on mentioning his thoughts, hopes and sufferings throughout the story.

This paper is about the stylistic analysis of the text of Mohsin Hamid's short story, some levels of stylistics are mentioned below:

1. Phonetic level,
2. Graphological level,
3. Morphological level,
4. Syntactical/Grammatical level,
5. Lexical level,
6. Semantic Level,
7. Pragmatic/Discourse level.

This short story is selected because of its expressive diction, so this paper focuses on lexical and morphological aspects of the text and clarifies how meanings are constructed via interplay of different textual features. Thus the paper also provides a discourse stylistic study of the selected short story.

Literature Review

Stylistic Analysis is a way of analyzing any literary or non-literary text on different stylistic levels. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this work is to highlight the lexical and morphological aspects of our selected text. In this case, immense literature can be related. Attempts have been made to look at many reviews. Some of them are related here, see the contributions of Abdul Bari Khan and Ghazala Siddiqui (2014), Saima Aslam(2014), Sobia Kiran(2013) and Isam M Shihada. Similarly, Abdul Bari Khan and Ghazala Siddiqui (2014) worked on Robert Frost's poem "The Onset" and highlighted the use of diction, symbols, imagery and metaphors in it by doing its Stylistic Analysis. Additionally, Saima Aslam (2014) analyzed Robert Frost's poem "Bereft" from Stylistic point of view and highlighted its Grammatical, Graphological, Phonological and Lexical aspects.

As here our concerned story is written by Mohsin Hamid so we can relate some literature related to his other notable works, including the works of Sobia Kiran (2013) and Isam M. Shihada (2015). In Addition to it, Sobia Kiran (2013) states in her article that in the novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid", loss of identity is the major dilemma faced by people caught up between two worlds. So this could be related to

our topic of concern, because the theme of our selected story is also terror and power abuse. Furthermore, Isam M Shihada (2015) in his research article explains that Muslims were harshly treated after the backlash of 9/11 with reference to Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Katherine Fieldgate gives review about this story and says that we are immersed into a chaotic scene of shattered glass and loud voices. In the dark, we read the thoughts of an anonymous man. We've worked hard to catch the short and bloated phrases because that man was unable to speak properly due to terrific situation. He was beaten and thrown in a box. We do not know where he is at that moment, so the absence of context creates more panic. At the same time the stream of consciousness of the narrator heightens our curiosity. Due to impressive diction and technical use of imagery the scene is portrayed in a great way (Silent Frame, 2018).

Research Questions

In order to do the stylistic analysis of the text, the following questions are formulated:

1. How do we come to know the dominant theme of the selected story?
2. What is the quantity of Morphological and Lexical expressions in the text?
3. How the author has successfully knitted the theme of power abuse morphologically and lexically?

Research Methodology

This study is partly qualitative and partly quantitative in nature. It explores the features of text by employing stylistic analysis as main approach. Secondly it provides a statistical account of the number of particular words, phrases and literary devices been used in the text. Here Mohsin Hamid's story "*A Beheading*" is focused for the stylistic analysis on two levels; lexical and morphological level. Lexical level is the study of the use of figurative language and literary devices. Morphological level is concerned with the study of morphemes, word formation and word origin. By analyzing this text on these levels lexical and morphological aspects will be brought to the foreground. This would be done by highlighting the use of similes, metaphors, personification and imagery along with the details of word formation and word origin. Data is collected by manual

way; by picking up morphologically and lexically significant features of text related to the theme of terror and violence. In the table given **below, the elements employed in the text along with examples are explained.**

Table 1: Represents the elements in the paper at lexical and morphological level

Lexical Level	Morphological Level
Simile: “As old as my parents, as young as my son” “I sound like a whispering child” “Blood on the floor like ink”	Compounding: “Copper-colored Corolla”
Imagery: “Shadows are jumping and stretching” “Gatekeeper’s face is so thin. He looks like we have been starving him” “Bigger than me” “Blood on the floor like ink”	Merged Morphemes: “Electricity’s gone”
Repetition of words/phrases: “I wish...” “I hope...” “I don’t.”	Borrowing: “Chechen” “Arabic, Pashto, Urdu, English” are the names of different languages which are mentioned by the speaker
Metaphorical Expressions: “Blackout” “Used to” “Dead eyes”	Abbreviations: “UPS”
Euphemism: “I watch as I end before I am empty”	Slang Words: Fuck

Data Analysis and discussion

This short story is analyzed to highlight the lexical and morphological aspects of the text that evidence terror, abuse of power and brutality. Here are some examples stated below:

Lexically significant expressions

- **“As old as my parents, as young as my son”** is an example of simile which falls in the category of lexical level analysis. As mentioned before that a lexical level is the one which analyzes the figurative language and literary devices, therefore, a simile is a literary device which uses ‘as, like’ to make resemblance between similar ideas, things or people, etc. The narrator finds himself in a troubled state which he cannot escape. So, he thinks of his loved ones who are not present there with him and uses simile to compare himself either with his parents or son in order to calm down his present state of mind. This shows that the narrator is frightened of the situation.
- **“Shadows are jumping and stretching”** is an example of personification and imagery on Lexical level. Personification is a literary device in which inanimate things or abstract ideas are given the qualities of human beings. Imagery is also a literary device, usually used in fiction work, in which the writer uses such a language which creates an image in the mind of the reader. The speaker here uses combination of both imagery and personification to create a vivid image in the mind of the reader. Shadows here personify the shadows of the kidnappers. The jumping and stretching of the shadows imply that the kidnappers have entered the house of the speaker and he could see them jumping and stretching in his house. This creates a horrifying scenario. The narrator feels terror in everything around him because the terror was created in his mind upon seeing the kidnappers entering his house at night.
- **“I sound like a whispering child”** is an example of a simile on lexical level as the speaker uses ‘like’ to resemble his sound to a child’s whisper. This means that the speaker, who is eventually caught by the kidnappers, is unable to speak or shout for help. His voice is as low as a whisper of a terrified child.
- **“I wish...”** is an example of repetition of phrase on Lexical level. This shows stress to emphasize the troubled state of the writer’s mind. He repeats this phrase three times in the story. The use of this phrase repeatedly shows that the writer is helpless and wants to escape somehow. This also adds to the imagination (imagery) in which the writer uses such phrases which makes the reader create a scenario of the speaker. This helps the reader to create such an

image coupled with repetition of phrase which stresses that the speaker is totally helpless and hopeless. He can only wish to escape but cannot to do anything to help himself to escape.

- **“Gatekeeper’s face is so thin. He looks like we have been starving him”** is an example of imagery and irony on Lexical level. The speaker first uses imagery to tell the reader about the appearance of the Gatekeeper who is also a kidnapper. The use of the word ‘thin’ shows that the Gatekeeper is physically thin. Further telling about the condition of the gatekeeper, he uses irony which adds a slight humor to the situation of the speaker as he says that the gatekeeper is so thin that it looks like the someone have been starving him. It is also situational irony in which it is not the gatekeeper who is starving but the speaker himself. Irony is a literary device in which the meaning is opposite to what is said.
- **“I hope...”** is an example of repetition of phrase which shows stress. Again, the reader gets an idea of the troubled state of the narrator who is unable to help himself. Here, the speaker hopes that his family is safe, and is not kidnapped like him. The repetition of this phrase shows the speaker’s concern for his family.
- **“I don’t.”** is another example of repetition that again shows stress. The reader has continuous second thoughts about his family, and he keeps on negating himself which further worsens his mental state.
- **“Black out”** is an example of metaphor which means that the speaker is unconscious. The phrase ‘black out’ does not mean a black color but a metaphor used for the speaker’s lost senses who has fainted due to constant mental and physical torture by the kidnappers. It also creates a black image in the reader’s mind which again implies that the speaker is faint.
- **“Used to”** is a metaphorical phrase which means to become accustomed to something. It does not mean to utilize something constantly but becoming habitual to some idea or activity.
- **“Bigger than me”** is an example of comparison and imagery on lexical level as it is figurative language. The speaker uses a comparison between his size and the size of the kidnappers while at the same time creating imagery of the scenario. The use of comparison is also an indirect way of telling the reader that the

kidnappers are much bigger in physique than the speaker, so they are more powerful than him.

- **“Dead eyes”** is a metaphorical phrase for dull eyes of the kidnapper. It does not mean that the eyes are dead but are cold and devoid of emotions.
- **“I watch as I end before I am empty”** is an example of euphemism. Euphemism is a technique in which a mild or indirect word is substituted for a taboo term. Here, the phrase ‘I am empty’ is used by the writer which indirectly refers to death.
- **“Blood on the floor like ink”** is an example of both imagery and simile. The speaker creates an image of blood spread on the floor by making a resemblance of it with spilt ink. This makes a clear image in the mind of the reader.

Morphologically significant expressions

- **“Copper-colored ’81 Corolla”** is an example of compounding and ’81 Corolla is example of coinage, so this term is analyzed on Morphological level. Compounding is a technique of word formation in which two words are joined in such a way that they give one meaning. There may be a shift in the category as parts of speech of the compounded word. The compounded words if separated still have their individual meaning. Here ‘copper’ and ‘colored’ are combined to make a compounded word which is ‘copper-colored’ which is used as an adjective for describing the color of Corolla car. ’81 Corolla is the model name for the car. ’81 is a year date format which the speaker has written in a compressed form. From ’81 Corolla the speaker infers that the car probably is a 1981 model of Corolla.
- **“Electricity’s gone”** is an example for merged morphemes. The word ‘is’ is compressed into a single morpheme as ‘s. In this way it becomes an inflectional morpheme which is attached to the noun ‘electricity’ which does not result into any change in its grammatical category. Thus, ‘Electricity’s’ is a compressed form of the phrase ‘Electricity is’.
- **“Arabic, Pashto, Urdu, English”** are the names of different languages which are mentioned by the speaker in the text but there are no words used from origin of these languages except for English as the text is written in English language.

- **“Chechen”** is an example of borrowing. Borrowing is a technique of word formation in which the writer borrows a word from another language which differs from the language used in writing the text. Chechen is member of a Muslim tribe who are inhabitants of Chechnya. The speaker calls the kidnappers Chechen.
- **“UPS”** is an example of Abbreviation. An Abbreviation is a shortened form of a written word or phrase to save time or space, to avoid repetition of long words and phrases, or simply to conform to conventional usage. UPS is an abbreviation for uninterruptible power source or uninterruptible power supply. It is also an acronym which is a type of abbreviation formed from the components of the initial letters of larger contents such as words or phrases. It is a technique of word formation.
- **“Fuck”** is a word which is repeatedly used by the speaker. It shows vulgarism and use of abusive or slang language. The speaker uses this word three times in the text. This contrasts with the use of euphemism used previously.

The quantity of Lexical and Morphological elements found in the text:

The selected text has 3 examples of simile, 4 examples of imagery, 3 examples of repetitive phrases, 3 examples of metaphorical expressions and one example of euphemism. So, altogether 14 expressions fall in the category of lexically significant elements.

Secondly, it has one example of compounding, one example of merged morpheme, 2 examples of borrowing, one example of abbreviation and one example of slang. So, altogether 6 expressions fall in the category of morphologically significant elements.

Conclusion

It has been quite clear in the discussion that this text includes imagery, personification, metaphor and simile. In this paper some figurative aspects of language are highlighted while doing stylistic analysis at lexical level. For instance, it highlights different types of words and their origin while focusing on the morphological aspect of text as well. By analyzing the story at discourse level, some stylistically significant

expressions are highlighted that contribute in relating this story to the theme of terror, brutality, violence and misuse of power. So, the study clarifies writer's use of expressive diction to convey his intended meaning to the readers. Hence, it is truly said that Stylistic Analysis plays a vital and notable role in better interpretation and evaluation of a text.

References

- Aslam, S., B., Mukhtar, P., & Sarfaraz, A. (2014). *Stylistics analysis of the poem Bereft* by Robert Frost. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Arts and Humanities*, 2(1), 1–5.
- Crystal. D, and Davy. D (1969, p. vii). *Investigating English Style*, Longman.[http:// en. Wikipedia.org /wiki/ stylistics-linguistics](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/stylistics-linguistics) (Modified on 15 March 2010)
- Khan, A. B., Summara, R., & Saddique, G. (2014). *Stylistic Analysis of the poem “ONSET” by Robert Frost*. *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, 2(4).
- Kiran, S. (2013). *Identity Crisis as Reflected in Selected Works: The Reluctant Fundamentalist By Mohsin Hamid and the Black Album by Hanif Kureishi*. *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication*, Vol. 1 No. 2, December 2013.
- Fieldgate, K. (2018). *Silent Frame*.
- Leech, Geoffrey N (1969). *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. Longman.
- Leech, Geoffrey N (2008). *Language in Literature, Style and Foregrounding*. Longman.
- Leech, G. (1989). *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry (14th ed.)*. London: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Shihada, I. M., (2015) *The Backlash of 9/11 on Muslims in Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND CULTURAL STUDIES*, Vol. 2, Issue 2.
- Simpson, Paul (2006). *Stylistics: A Resource book for students*. Routledge, London.
- Widdowsin, H.G. (1975). *Stylistics and the teaching of Literature*. London: Longman.

Appendix

Text of selected short story

I hear the window shatter. There's no air conditioner on to muffle the sound. I get out of bed. I wish I wasn't my age. I wish I was as old as my parents. Or, as young as my son. I wish it didn't have to be me telling my wife to stay where she is, saying everything will be fine in a voice she doesn't believe and I don't believe either. We both hear the shouting downstairs. 'Put on some clothes,' I'm saying to her. 'It'll be better if you're wearing clothes.'

The electricity's gone so I use my phone to light the way. Already there's the sound of men running up the wooden stairs. I shut the bedroom door and lock it behind me. Shadows are jumping and stretching from multiple torches. I raise both my hands. 'I'm here,' I say to them. I want to say it loudly. I sound like a whispering child. 'Please. Everything is all right.'

I'm on the floor. Someone has hit me. I don't know if it was with a hand or a club. My mouth is full of liquid. I can't get any words out. I'm gagging and I have to let my jaw hang open so I can breathe. Behind my back my wrists are being taped together. It feels like electrical tape, the kind of tape you wrap around a tennis ball for street cricket when you're a kid. I'm lying on my face and there's a grinding pain from that so I make some noise before I black out.

I'm between two men. They're holding me under my armpits and dragging me out the front door. I don't know how much time has passed. It's still night. The electricity has come back so the gate lights are on. The gatekeeper is dead. He's an old man and he's lying folded in on himself. His face is so thin. He looks like we've been starving him. I'm wondering how they killed him. I'm looking at him, looking for blood. But I don't have enough time.

I think there are four of them. They have a copper-coloured '81 Corolla. We used to have a car like that when I was growing up. This one is in bad shape. They open the trunk and dump me inside. I can't see anything. My face is partly on a rough carpet. The other part is on the spare tyre. Its rubber sticks to me. Or maybe I'm sticking to it. The shocks are

shot, and every bump slams through the car. I think of being at the dentist, when it's already hurting and you know it's going to hurt more and you just wait and try to think of mind tricks to make it hurt less.

I feel feverish, a high, malarial fever that makes me shiver and drift in and out of sleep. I hope they didn't kill my son and my wife and my parents. I hope they didn't rape my wife. I hope whatever they do to me they don't use acid on me. I don't want to die but I don't mind dying. I just don't want to be tortured. I don't want anyone to crush my balls with a pair of pliers and put his cigarette out in my eye. I don't want this car ride ever to end. I'm getting used to it now.

They take me out in the sunlight. They're big men. Bigger than me. They take me into a house with paint peeling off the walls and put me in a bathroom with no windows, just a skylight. I've already pissed myself and my legs itch from dried urine. I don't make a sound. I sit there and prepare to cooperate. I wish I could remember how to say my prayers. I'd ask them to let me pray. Show them we're the same. But I can't risk it. I'll make a mistake and if they see that, things will be even worse for me. Maybe I can just mumble to myself and they'll think I'm religious.

They come back when it's dark. They're speaking a language I don't understand. I don't think it's Arabic or Pashto. What is it? Is it fucking Chechen? What is that fucking language? Who the fuck are these people? Tears are coming out of my eyes. That's good. The more pathetic I look, the better. 'Sirs,' I say in the most grovelling Urdu I can manage. 'What have I done? I beg your forgiveness.' My mouth doesn't work properly so I have to speak slowly. Even then I sound like I'm drunk. Or like someone has cut off half my tongue.

They ignore me. One is setting up a video camera on a tripod. The other is plugging a light into a portable UPS unit the size of a car battery. I know this. I don't want this. I don't want to be that goat. The one we bought for Big Eid. I used to feed it after school. We kept it for a week. I would break shoots off the hedge, green shoots that stained my hands, and feed them to that goat. it was a nice goat, but with dead eyes. I didn't like its eyes. I liked the way it chewed sideways. It was like a pet. I never petted it, but it was like a pet. It had small feet. It could stand on a brick to

reach the leaves. My parents let me watch a man come and wrestle it to the ground and say a prayer and sacrifice it to God.

‘Look, don’t do this.’ I’m speaking English now, slurring, making no sense. The words are just dribbling out of my mouth. I can’t stop them. They’re like tears. ‘I’ve always censored myself. I’ve never written about religion. I’ve always tried to be respectful. If I’ve made a mistake just tell me. Tell me what to write. I’ll never write again. I’ll never write again if you don’t want me to. It doesn’t matter to me. It’s not important. We’re the same. All of us. I swear it.’

They tape my mouth shut and pin me flat on my stomach. One of them gets behind me and pulls my head up by the hair. It feels sexual the way he does it. I wonder if my wife is still alive and if she’s going to sleep with another man after I’m gone. How many men is she going to sleep with? I hope she doesn’t. I hope she’s still alive. I can see the long knife in his hand. He’s speaking into the camera. I don’t want to watch. I shut my eyes. I want to do something to make my heart explode so I can be gone now. I don’t want to stay.

Then I hear it. I hear the sound of my blood rushing out and I open my eyes to see it on the floor like ink and I watch as I end before I am empty.

Key sentence of story: ‘The words are just dribbling out of my mouth. I can’t stop them. They’re like tears.’

Published by: Granta Magazine.