An Investigation into Stylistic Devices in Emily Dickinson's and Sylvia Plath's Poetry

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the use of stylistic devices in Emily Dickinson's and Sylvia Plath's poetry. It differentiates between the phonological stylistic devices as alliteration, consonance and semantic stylistic devices as simile and personification. The study is carried out on five randomly selected poems from each poetess using the mixed modal research with the tool of tabulation to quantify the findings. Qualitative approach is used for analysis. The analysis provides a clear picture of the use of stylistic devices in Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath's poetry.

Keywords: stylistics, stylistic devices, classification, phonological, semantics, alliteration, consonance, simile, personification, mixed research

1. Introduction

Literature is a multidimensional phenomenon. The complex and complicated nature of literature has given birth to divergent and varied approaches about literature. Similarly there are certain varied conventional and unconventional ways and approaches to interpret a piece of literature. We can say that literature is the expression of life through the medium of language. Language is an essential material source in literature because any piece of literature is a work of language first e.g., poetry. Literature is the reflection of society. It allows us to enjoy, observe and learn the style and languages of people from past centuries, verses of the poems shows really sincere emotions and arouse sentiments among readers and helps them to learn the realities of life enlighten their minds and broaden the vision of readers.

The very process of composing literature invokes a desire among the readers to be more appreciative of the true spirit and real meanings of that piece of literature that they read. But the job is not easy since the readers are supposed to be aware of literary conventions and historical background of any piece of literature. But they must possess the sensibility of language in which it is written and the grammatical and stylistic technicalities involved in its composition.

In the past centuries a movement was initiated that has gained momentum especially in the modern days that stresses the claim that one can get real meanings of the text by analyzing critically its stylistic and linguistic technicalities. This effort or this movement is called stylistics.

There have been a lot of studies so far, on stylistics and the investigation of stylistic devices in literature. Plenty of the books and articles about this study have been published especially in the past few decades respectively presenting insightful notions and methodologies.

Regarding the importance of stylistic devices in poetry I intended to carry out a comparative study of investigation of stylistic devices in Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath poetry, in order to obtain more insight and to draw out a comparison in stylistic devices used in Dickinson and Plath's poetry.

2. Literature Review

According to Leech (1969) style is the mode in which something is spoken, written or performed. Leech & Short (1981, p. 10) consider that the word "style" has a fairly uncontradictory meaning: it refers to the manner in which language is used in a given framework, by a given person, for a given reason, and so on. Birch (1989, p. 10) says that language and style never moves away from a meditation on the preeminence of words; he believes resolutely that these words somehow "contain" meanings and is efficiently language manipulated in ways that

signal it as diverse from "ordinary" language.

Such avowedly introducing books as Turner (1973), Chapman & Clark (2014), Cluysenaar (1976), Wright & Hope (1996) are considered as the first detailed dictionaries of stylistics presenting stylistic theories and are one of the major contributors to the development of this field of study. But the drawback of these works is that these dealt only with some specific aspects and dimensions of stylistics and do not narrate much about the whole context of this discipline.

From 1950 onwards stylistics began to realize the need to ascertain their field up till the emergence of practical and pedagogical stylistics in 80s. Hough (1969) gives the first historical review of stylistics including all the major stylistics and critics as Bally, Spitzer, Holloway, and Richard Barthes.

So stylistics can be defined as an analytical science which covers all the expressive aspects of language i.e., phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicology.

2.1 Stylistic Devices

Many of the researchers have tried to find out stylistic devices in English poetry as well as in poetry of other languages also. Though there have been a lot of investigation on Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath's poetic style individually but the aim of this study is to investigate some of the stylistic devices that fall into the category of semantic and phonological stylistic devices and make a comparative study of the use of stylistic devices in both American poetesses which is a new attempt on my part.

Cuddon (2013), Katie Wales (2014), Leech Geoffrey (1969) had worked a lot on stylistic devices and presented their sound, authentic and comprehensible dictionaries on stylistic devices.

Phonological stylistic devices that will be the focus of this study are:

2.1.1 Consonance

Consonance refers to the reoccurring of indistinguishable or similar consonant sounds before and after different vowels. Cuddon defines it: "The close repetition of identical consonant sounds before and after different vowels. For example: slip-slop; creak-croak; black-block" (p. 153).

2.1.2 Alliteration

Alliteration is one of the phonological stylistic devices. It is the repetition of same sound either consonant or vowel in a verse or a sentence. It can be immediate or non-immediate. These are the sounds especially repeated at the beginning of the words or stressed syllables. According to Cuddon: "A figure of speech in which consonants, especially at the beginning of words or stressed syllables, are repeated. It is a very old device indeed in English verse (older than rhyme) and is common in verse generally. It is used occasionally in prose" (p. 22).

And in semantic stylistic devices the focus of the study will be following.

2.2 Personification

Personification is a device that means impersonation or embodiment of some quality or abstraction. According to Cuddon, "The impersonation or embodiment of some quality or abstraction; the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects" (p. 529). In other words giving attributes of humans or human qualities to some inanimate being or objects is called personification.

2.2.1 Simile

Simile is one of the stylistic devices that is used to make comparison between two things. It came under the category of semantic stylistic devices as it affects the meaning of verse and somehow enhances it. It is a direct comparison between two or more than two entities. According to Cuddon, "A figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, in such a way as to clarify and enhance an image. It is an explicit comparison (as opposed to the metaphor, *q.v.*, where the comparison is implicit) recognizable by the use of the words "like" or "as". It is equally common in prose and verse and is a figurative device of great antiquity" (657).

3. Methodology of the Study

In this study a random sample of five poems from Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath each will be quantitatively analyzed in terms of phonology and semantics devices. After that the data will be analyzed qualitatively with the tool of tabulation in order to assess the quantity of stylistic devices used in Emily and Sylvia's poetry and to conduct a comparative study or to compare the poetry of both writers. Guba & Lincoln (1994) noted that "Both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm" (p. 105). Similarly, Guba & Lincoln (2005) reiterated that "within each paradigm, mixed methodologies (strategies) may make

perfectly good sense" (p. 200)

3.1 Technique for Analysis of Data Analysis

Tabulation for the analysis of data and for findings.

To conduct this study I have selected five well-known poems of Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath each. All these collected poems have been composed in nineteenth and twentieth century.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Poetic Analysis of Emily Dickenson

There is a Certain Slant of Light Phonological stylistic devices: Alliteration, Consonance

There is a certain slant of light	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	3	3

Interpretation:

In this poem alliteration is used 3 times and consonance also 3 times.

Examples of alliteration:

1). There is a certain slant of light

2). That oppresses like the weight.

3). Heavenly hurt it gives us.

Examples of Consonance:

1). Winter afternoons.

Of cathedral tunes.

2). We can find no scar.

Where the meanings are.

3). Shadows hold their breath

On the look of death

Semantic Stylistic Devices: Simile, Personification.

There is a certain slant of light	Simile	Personification
	+	+
Quantity	1	3

Interpretation:

In this poem 1 time simile and 3 times personification is used.

Examples of Simile:

1) That oppresses **like** the weight.

Examples of personification:

1) There is a certain slant of light that **oppresses**.

2) When it comes the landscape **listens**.

3) Shadows **hold their breath**.

Safe in Their Alabaster Chambers

Phonological Stylistic Devices: Alliteration, Consonance

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	5	2

Interpretation:

In this poem 5 times alliteration and 2 times consonance is used.

Examples of Alliteration:

1) Sleep the **m**eek **m**embers of resurrection.

2) **L**ight **l**aughs the breeze.

3) **B**abbles the **b**ee in Solid ear.

4) **D**iadems **d**rop and **D**oges Surrender.

5) **S**oundless as **D**ots and **d**isk of **S**now.

Examples of Consonance:

1) **S**leep the **m**eek **m**embers of re**s**urrectio**n**

Rafter of **S**ati**n**

2). U**n**touched by mor**n**ing and u**n**touched by **noo**n

Rafter of Sati**n**, and roof of **stone**

Semantic Stylistic Devices: Simile, Personification

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers	Simile	Personification
	+	+
Quantity	1	6

Interpretation:

In this poem 1 time simile and 6 times personification is used.

Examples of simile:

1) Soundless **as** dots on disk of snow

Examples of personification:

1) Light laughs the breeze in her castle above them.

2) Babbles the bee in the solid ear.

3) Pipe the sweet bird in ignorant cadence.

4) Worlds scoop their arcs

5) and firmaments row

6) dogs surrender

A Bird Came Down the Walk

Phonological Stylistic Devices: Alliteration and Consonance

A bird Came down the Walk	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	6	2

Interpretation:

In this poem 6 times alliteration and 2 times consonance is used.

Examples of alliteration:

1) **He** stirred **h**is velvet **h**ead.

2) **Th**an **O**ars divide **the O**cean.

3) And **h**e unrolled **h**is feathers

4) And rode **h**im softer **H**ome

5) Too **s**ilver for **s**eam

6) **O**r **b**utterflies, **o**ff **B**anks **o**f noon.

Examples of Consonance:

1) From the convenient gra**ss**

Let the beetle pa**ss**

2). Too **s**ilver for a **s**ea**m**

Leap, plashle**ss** as they **s**wi**m**

Semantic Stylistic Devices: Simile, Personification

A bird Came down the Walk	Simile	Personification:
	+	+
Quantity	2	3

Interpretation:

In this poem 2 similes and 3 times personification is used.

Examples of simile:

1) They look **like** frightened beads.

2) **Like** one in danger cautious.

Example of personification:

1) They look like **frightened beads.**

2) rapid eyes **that hurried all abroad**

3) than oars **divide** the ocean

The Soul Selects Her own Society

Phonological stylistic devices: Alliteration and consonance.

This is my letter to the world	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	3	4

Interpretation:

In this poem 3 times alliteration and 4 times consonance is used.

Examples of Alliteration:

1) The **s**oul **s**elects her own **s**ociety.

2) **Th**en shut **th**e door

3) **Th**en close **the** valves of her attention.

Examples of consonance:

1) Then shut the doo**r**

Present no mo**re**

2) U**n**moved she **n**otes the chariots pausi**ng**

3) Un**m**oved a**n** e**mp**eror be k**n**eeling

U**pon** her mat

4) I have know**n** her from a**n** ample **n**atio**n**

The**n** close the valves of her atte**n**tio**n**

Semantic Stylistic devices: simile, personification

The soul selects her own society	Simile	personification
	+	+
Quantity	1	4

Interpretation:

In this poem 1 time simile and 4 times personification is used.

Examples of simile:

1) The valves of her attention **like** stone.

Examples of personification:

1) The soul **selects her** own society.

2) Then **shuts** the door

3) Unmoved—**She notes** the chariots—pausing.

4) I have known **her** from ample nation.

The Wind Tapped like a Tired Man

Phonological Stylistic Devices: Alliteration and Consonance

The wind tapped like a tired man	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	2	3

Interpretation:

1) In this poem 2 times alliteration and 3 times consonance is used.

Examples of alliteration:

No bone **h**ad **h**e to bind **h**im

2) **H**is fingers if **h**e passed.

Examples of consonance:

3) and like a host come i**n**

My reside**n**ce withi**n**

4) to offer whom a chai**r**

a sofa to the ai**r**

5) his **s**peech was like a pu**sh**

from a **s**uperior bu**sh**

Semantic Stylistic devices: Simile and personification

The wind tapped like a tired man	Simile	personification
	+	+
Quantity	6	8

Interpretation:

In this poem 6 times simile and 8 times personification is used.

Examples of simile:

1) The wind tapped **like** a tired man

2) and **like** a host come in

3) were **as** impossible **as** hand

4) his speech was **like** the push

5) let go a music **as** of tunes

6) Then **like** a timid man.

Example of personification:

1). The wind **tapped** like a tired man.

2). **entered** then my residence within

3). A rapid footless **guest**

4). No bone had **he** to bind **him**

5). **His speech** was like the push

6). **His countenance**, a billow

7). **His fingers**, if he pass, let go a music

8). He **visited** still flitting

Poetic analysis of Sylvia Plath

Elm

Phonological Stylistic Devices: Alliteration, Consonance

Elm	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	5	1

Interpretation:

In this poem Sylvia has used 5 times alliteration and 1 time consonance.

Examples of alliteration:

1) **I kn**ow the bottom she says **I kn**ow it.

2) Or **th**e voices of nothing **th**at was you madness.

3) Are **th**ose **th**e faces of love, **th**ose pale irretrievable.

4) **Echoing, echoing**

5) **That kill, that kill, that kill.**

Example of consonance:

1) It is what you fe**ar**

I don't fear it. I have been th**ere**

Semantic stylistic devices: Simile, Personification.

Elm	Simile	Personification
	+	+
Quantity	3	6

Interpretation:

In this poem from the semantic stylistic devices Sylvia has used 3 times simile and 6 times personification.

Examples of simile:

1). It's gone of**f like** a horse.

2). This is a fruit tin white **like** arsenic.

3). That fly about **like** clubs.

Examples of personification:

1) The **moon is so merciless she** would **drag** me cruelly.

2) Or I shall bring you the **sound of poison.**

3) Listen, these are **its hooves it has gone off**

4) A wind of violence will **tolerate** no by standing.

5) I am **inhabited by a cry**. Nightly it **flaps out.** This dark thing **that sleeps** in me. All day, I feel its **soft feathery turnings, its malignity.**

Lady Lazarus

Phonological Stylistic Devices: Alliteration, Consonance

Lady Lazarus	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	5	5

Interpretation:

In this poem Sylvia has used 5 times alliteration and 5 times consonance.

Examples of alliteration:

1) My **f**eatureless **f**ace **f**ine.

The nose **th**e eye **th**e full set of teeth.

2) Is an art like **e**verything **e**lse?

3) To **th**e same place **th**e same face **th**e same brute.

4) **Soon soon** the flesh.

Examples of consonance:

1) Ge**n**tleme**n** ladie**s**

These are my ha**n**d**s** and k**n**ee**s**

2) **N**evertheless I a**m** the sa**m**e ide**n**tical wo**m**e**n**

First it happened I was te**n**

3) I do it exceptiona**ll**y we**ll**

I do it so it fee**l**s **l**ike he**ll**

4) I tur**n** and bur**n**

I u**n**derestimate your great co**n**cer**n**.

5) The full set of tee**th**

The sour brea**th**

Semantic stylistic devices: Simile, Personification.

Lady Lazarus	Simile	Personification
	+	+
Quantity	6	2

Interpretation:

In this poem Sylvia has used 6 times simile and 2 times personification.

Examples of simile:

1) Bright **as** Nazi lampshade.

2) And **like** a cat I have nine times to die.

3) **As** a sea shell, they pick the worms off me.

4) **Like** sticky pearls.

5) Dying is an art **like** everything else.

6) I will eat the men **like** air.

Examples of Personification:

1). The big strips **tease.**

2). That same **amused shout.**

The Bee Meeting

Phonological Stylistic Devices: Alliteration, Consonance

The bee meeting	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	-
Quantity	4	2

Interpretation:

There are 4 times alliteration and 2 times consonance in this poem.

Examples of alliteration:

1). Who are **th**ese people at **th**e bridge to **m**eet **m**e? **Th**ey are **th**e villagers?

2). In my **s**leeveless **s**ummary dress.

3). Is **s**he **h**iding is **s**he eating **h**oney **s**he is very clever.

4). Whose is that long **wh**ite box in the grove **wh**at **h**ave they accomplished, **wh**y I am so cold?

Examples of consonance:

1). In my **s**leeveless **s**ummary dre**ss**.

2). And they are all glo**v**ed **a**nd co**v**ered.

Semantic stylistics device: Simile, Personification

The bee meeting	Simile	Personification
	+	+
Quantity	4	6

Interpretation

There are 4 times simile and 6 times personification in this poem.

Examples of simile:

1) I am nude **as** children neck.

2) Strips of tinfoil winking **like** people.

3) And leaves **like** bored hearts.

4) The white hive is snug **as** a virgin.

Examples of Personification:

1) Creamy bean flower **with black eyes**.

2) The tendrils are **dragging** up that string.

3) Strips of tinfoil **winking** like people.

4) The white hive snug as a virgin, **sealing off** her brood cells, her honey, and quietly **humming.**

5) The barren body of hawthorn, **etherizing its children.**

6) **The mind of the hive thinks** this is the end of everything**.**

"You're"

Phonological Stylistic Devices: Alliteration, Consonance

You are	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	4	3

Interpretation:

In this poem, there are 4 times alliterations and 3 times consonance.

Examples of alliteration:

1) Clown like, **h**appiest on your **h**and**s**

2) Thumbs **d**own on **d**odo's mode.

3) Mute as a turnip **f**rom the **F**ourth

Of July to All **F**ools' Day,

4) **B**ent **b**acked Atlas.

Example of consonance:

1). A commo**n** se**ns**e thumbs dow**n** o**n the dodo's mode**

2). Snu**g** as a bud and at home

Like a sprat in a pickle ju**g.**

3). A cree**l** of ee**l**s, a**ll** ropp**l**es.

Semantic stylistic devices: Simile, Personification.

You are	Simile	Personification
	+	+
Quantity	14	1

Interpretation:

In this poem 14 times simile and 1 time personification is used.

Examples of Simile:

1) Clown **like** happiest on your hand.

2) Gilled **like** a fish.

3) Wrapped up in you **like** a spool.

4) Trawling your dark **as** owls.

5) Jumpy **as** a Mexican bean.

6) Mute **as** turnip

7) Vague **as** fog

8) Looked for **like** a mail

9) bent backed Atlas

10) Snug **as** a bud

11) **Like** a sprat in a pickle jar

12) A creel of eels, all ripples

13) Right **like** a well done sum

14) A clean slate with your own face on.

Examples of personification:

1) **Bent backed Atlas**

Colossus

Phonological stylistic: Alliteration, Consonance

Colossus	Alliteration	Consonance
	+	+
Quantity	5	2

Interpretation:

In this poem 5 times alliteration and 2 times consonance is used.

Examples of Alliteration:

1) **P**ieced, glued and **p**roperly jointed.

2) Perhaps **y**ou consider **y**ourself oracle

3) Scaling **l**ittle **l**adders with glue **p**ots and **p**ails of **L**ysol

4) A blue sky **o**ut **o**f **O**resteia

5) **O**f your left ear, **o**ut **o**f the wind.

Examples of consonance:

1) I shall never get you **p**ut together entirely

Pieced, glued and **p**roperly jointed

Mule bray pi**g-g**runt and baw**d**y cackles

Procee**d** from your great li**p**s

2) Counting the **r**ed sta**r**s and those of plum colo**r**

The sun **r**ises unde**r** the pilla**r** of you**r** tongue

Semantic stylistic devices: simile, personification

Colossus	Simile	Personification
	+	+
Quantity	2	2

Interpretation:

In this poem 2 times simile and 2 times personification is used.

Examples of simile:

1) I crawl **like** an ant in the morning.

1) You are pithy and historical **as** a Roman forum.

Examples of personification:

1) The sun **rises** under the pillar of your tongue.

2) My **hours are married** to a shadow

5. Findings and Conclusions

The focus of the study is to make a comparative study of the use of phonological devices as Alliteration and

consonance and semantic stylistic devices as simile and personification in the poems of Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath. The purpose is to find the quantity of these stylistic devices used in their poetry and to make analysis in order to find out the similarities and difference in their use.

Phonological devices in Emily Dickinson

Number of poems	Stylistic devices	Quantity
5	Alliteration	19
5	Consonance	14

In the random sample of 5 poems of Emily Dickinson from the phonological stylistic devices 19 times alliteration and 14 times Consonance is used.

Semantic stylistic devices in Emily Dickinson

Number of poems	Stylistic devices	Quantity
5	Simile	11
5	Personification	24

In the random sample of 5 poems of Emily Dickinson from the semantic stylistic devices 11 times simile and 24 times personification is used.

Phonological stylistic devices in Sylvia Plath

Number of poems	Stylistic devices	Quantity
5	Alliteration	23
5	Consonance	13

In the random sample of 5 poems of Emily Dickinson from the phonological stylistic devices 23 times alliteration and 13 times consonance is used.

Semantic stylistic devices in Sylvia Plath

Number of poems	Stylistic devices	Quantity
5	Simile	29
5	Personification	17

In the random sample of 5 poems of Emily Dickinson from the semantic stylistic devices 29 times simile and 17 times personification is used.

From the findings above it is clearly evident that

1). Sylvia has used more alliteration as compared to Emily.

2). Emily has made more use of consonance as compared to Sylvia.

3). Sylvia has made use of more similes as compared to Emily.

4). Emily has used more personification as compared to Sylvia.

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