

A Stylistic Analysis of “I Have a Dream”

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ABSTRACT: “All the fun is in how you say a thing.” Robert Frost’s words give us a perfect explanation about why style is important in a research. According to Alan Warner, style is a way of writing, a manner of expressing one’s thoughts and feelings in words. A same meaning can have different effects on its readers by being put in different ways. This paper is to take the famous speech of Martin Luther King as an example to analyze and discuss its stylistic characteristics. It is not only the spirit of equality and liberty advocated in the speech but also its impressive style that contribute to its great success.

In fact, the present study is divided into three sections: the first section deals with introduction to stylistics; Stylistics and other linguistic principles. The second section concerns itself with style—author; and clean English: the arrangement; the figure of speech; contrast & metaphor; and parallelism. Whereas the third section deals with conclusion. This researcher is going to pay an attention to notions developed by linguists like Leech (1969), (1970) and Jakobson (1960), (1966), (1967), and (1968) since their notions are relevant to the aim of the present study.

Keywords- Introduction, Style—Author, Clean English: The Arrangement, The Figure of Speech, Contrast & Metaphor, and Parallelism

SECTION ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Language is the distinctive quality unique to man. It is what enables man to express him/herself and communicate with his/her fellow man, and it is acquired naturally. According to Fromkin et al (2007) “...language is the source of human life and power” (p.3). They also state that “we use language to convey information to others..., ask questions..., give command..., and express wishes” (p.173). There are two specific media of using language: oral – which is by words of mouth; and written – which is a graphic representation of words on paper.

It is in the use of language that style comes in. Style shows the difference between one piece of writing and the other. According to Adejare (1992) “style is an ambiguous term...”

(p.1). He further states that the term style means different things to different professions. Some examples are: to a psychologist, style is a form of behaviour, to the critic, style is individuality and to the linguist, it is the formal structures in function (p.1).

Stylistics is the study of oral and written texts. It is the description of the linguistic characteristics (which means features of linguistics) of all situationally restricted uses of language. Linguistics is the scientific study of language or of a particular language. Linguistics is scientific because it applies the method of objective observation, collection, classification and application of facts to the study of language.

Stylistics focuses on texts and gives much attention to the devices, parts of speech and figures of speech. It goes further to look into the effects of the use of the devices on the reader.

Talking about the scope of stylistics, Onwukwe Ekwutosi gave four distinctive types of stylistics and they are:

1. General stylistics
2. Literary stylistics
3. Stylo-stylistics
4. Phono-stylistics

General stylistics deals with the non-dialectal varieties found within a language. In other words, it deals with situational or contextual use of language, that is, variation according to use. It also includes variation of language according to field of discourse, variation according to mode of discourse and finally, variation according to style of discourse.

Literary stylistics deals with language use in literature, that is, variations, characteristics of individual writer that made mark in literature. Often, we hear people talk about the style of Shakespeare, Milton, Achebe or Soyinka.

And also, stylo-stylistics deals with the qualification of stylistic pattern. It studies the statistical structure of literary texts often using computers. Finally, phono-stylistics is the study of expression of aesthetic function of sound.

Stylistic features can be described as features that produce style. They include linguistic features such as diction(writer's choice of words, such as clichés, archaism, polysyllabic, monosyllabic), sentence structure such as loose and period sentences, parallelism, parenthetical expressions and passive expressions. Other features are cohesion, coherence, use of punctuation marks and figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, metonymy and personification, slang, colloquialism and connotation.

Diction: By diction, the reader looks at the simplicity or the difficulty of words chosen by the writer to express himself.

Sentence: It is made up of words that express a complete thought. It is the basic unit of thought in any communication. Both oral and written languages are made up of sentences. There are two main kind of sentences; loose and periodic sentences.

Loose sentence: It is the kind of sentence that states the main point at the beginning. Even when the statement is grammatically complete, one or more explanatory clauses or phrases come after it.

Periodic sentence: This kind of sentence keeps the main point for the end. The sentence is not grammatically complete until the end of the sentence.

Parallelism: It is the use of pattern repetition in a literary text for a particular stylistic effect.

Parenthetical expression: It is used to give more information and also as an after thought in a statement.

Passive expression: This is the use of words in the past tense to show the time of action.

Cohesion: It is a linguistic phenomenon which explains the way discourse is structured or organized with regard to message. It is a binding force that ties together stretches of utterances.

Coherence: This is the arrangement of sentence in a logical order.

Punctuation marks: Are signs in writing to divide sentences and phrases and to make meanings clear.

Figure of speech: A figure of speech is an expression used figuratively rather than literary. It gives a deeper meaning to word. Some examples are:

Metaphor: Is a comparison between two dissimilar things which have something in common.

Simile: It is a clear comparison between two dissimilar things. These two unlike items however share something in common. It is this common characteristic that is emphasized by the use of like or as ...as.

Hyperbole: It is an overstatement where the speaker exaggerates what he is saying out of proportion.

Metonymy: This is using a word for something to refer to another with which it has become closely associated.

Personification: It is giving human quality to an inanimate object.

Slang: Very informal words and expressions that are more common in spoken language, especially used by a particular group of people.

Colloquialism: A word or phrase that is used in conversation but not in formal speech in writing.

Connotation: It is the additional meaning the word gains because of the different environment in which a word has been used in the past.

Archaism: This is the use of old and middle English words which are no longer in general usage today. Some examples are, “thereto”, “thou”.

Clichés: They are phrases or ideas that have been used so often that it no longer has much meaning and is not interesting.

A way of stylistic analysis is taking a text and analyzing it at the various levels of linguistic organization – phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels. It is the identification of patterns of usage in speech and writing. It is usually made for the purpose of commenting on quality and meaning in a text.

SECTION TWO

2.1 STYLE—AUTHOR

Brooks and Warren (1952) in an excellent book, *Fundamental of Good Writing*, have compared style to the grain in wood. “The style of a work is not a sort of veneer glued over the outside. On the contrary, it is like the pattern of the grain in a piece of wood.” It is a pattern that goes all the way through: a manifestation of the growth and development of the structure of the tree itself. As a man thinks and feels, so will he write. If his thoughts are muddled, his style will be muddled. If his thoughts are clear and sharp, his writing will be clear and sharp. “A man’s style,” wrote Emerson, “is his mind’s voice.” And he added: “Wooden minds, wooden voices.” Since style is something ingrained in writing and not stuck on top like a veneer, it follows that a man’s way of writing will be an expression of his personality and his way of looking at life.

Martin Luther King, the follower of the nonviolent principles of Mahatma Gandhi, conveyed his belief to the audience through the whole speech. All he said about the poor living conditions of Negro and the discrimination against the black people was nothing but fact. That is, he didn’t say anything exaggerative or sensational to turn the listeners into riot. On the contrary, he stated clearly that they should “struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline” instead of “degenerating into physical violence.” In addition, the author was also a supporter of eliminating the racial discrimination in society. In the speech, he formed a beautiful blue print of white and black people living equally and happily together.

I 'd like to use the sentence given by Buffon, a French writer and naturalist of 18th century to sum up my idea: “ Le style, c'est l'homme meme.” (Style, it is the man himself.)

2.2 CLEAN ENGLISH

In another sense, the word “style” is often used to mean good, clean English. Raymond Chapman (1998) , the author of *A Short Way to Better English*, states: “ Bad writing is caused not so much by mistakes in grammar as by weakness in style.” Weakness in style here means clumsiness of expression, lack of precision and accuracy, obscurity and ambiguity, and anything that hinders the writer from conveying his meaning clearly and vividly to the reader. In my opinion, the best way of describing English that is clear and vigorous, free from verbiage and affectations, and doing its job of conveying meaning cleanly to the readers. The following paragraphs will discuss the point of “clean English” from 4 aspects.

2.2.1 THE ARRANGEMENT

This speech aims to call the attention of the whole society to the poor condition the blacks and the Negro were still in and highlight the urgent need to change it. The author didn't state it immediately at the beginning of his speech. Instead, he started by mentioning the history. In this way, the author convinced his listeners that they had the right and obligation to make equality come true in the society because it was handed down from their ancestors. The author then brought out the discrimination and segregation black people were suffering in reality and further demonstrated the black people's firm determination to overthrow the present world. If the author had kept on in this direction, the audience, especially those who had been long oppressed, would have raised a riot since the speech was emotion-stirring and to-the-bottom-of –the-heart. At this very moment, the author shifted from “ sensitivity” to “sense”. He made it very clear that nonviolent resistance was the best and only means for them to achieve their aim. They should “forever conduct the struggle on the high plan of dignity and discipline.” In the last part, he formed the blueprint of a peaceful happy world in which life and opportunity are equal to every person. He then again called for the audience to fight for the wonderful bright future life.

The arrangement of the whole speech is full of logical thinking. The author led the audience into his mind step by step. He finally succeeded in persuading them to be on his side and march ahead with him hand in hand.

2.2.2 THE FIGURE OF SPEECH

One of the main rhetoric means in the speech is metaphor. It is the author's appropriate use of metaphor that makes abstract things concrete and sharps the audience's mind. In short, it just hits the nail on the head.

Example 1: the black people: creditor : the government: debtor

The author compared the relationship between black people and the government to that of a creditor and a debtor. In this way, the author dramatized the fact that the black people had contributed a lot to the construction and prosperity of the society and it was time for them to be paid and get what they deserved because the black people had provided their service in advance. What's more, the government had promised to improve the living conditions and eliminate discrimination in the society where colored people were concerned. It was their obligation to bring out equality in the true sense of the word.

Example 2: the urgent need for freedom: thirst for water

As is known to all that any being will surely die without water. In the author's mind, freedom and justice was as important as water to him. Life would be meaningless and also impossible without them. The black people's act of fighting for a better life and freedom was driven by their instincts. Freedom and justice are fundamental to a person's life.

Except for the above, the author also described the persecution and police brutality as storms and winds, implying that though they seemed powerful, they would surely pass by and be replaced by a sunny day; the injustice which the Negro slaves were treated with as flames, reminding the audience of the unimaginable, horrible sufferings the Negro slaves went through; segregation and discrimination as manacles and chains, highlighting the fact that the black were crippled both physically and mentally.

2.2.3 CONTRAST & METAPHOR

Example 1: The rest of the American society is "a vast ocean of material prosperity" while "the Negro live on a lonely island." I like this sentence very much because it gives us the sense that the Negro, the blacks were completely isolated. Island and ocean are two quite different things. The space of the ocean is much larger than that of the island. People on the oceans can "swim" freely and enjoy abundant resources while the island's inhabitants are restricted within it, a solid earth. It can be inferred from here that the whites lived a much better life than the blacks and they all enjoyed the social welfare while the blacks were totally neglected.

Example 2: the quicksand of racial injustice V.S the solid rock of brotherhood

This use of contrast and metaphor conveys the meaning that racial injustice was just like quicksand---it was weak and bound to vanish. The brotherhood was like the solid rock---it would stand firmly and last forever.

2.2.4 PARALLELISM

It's a common practice to use the method of parallelism in speeches on the grounds that it can easily catch the attention of the listeners, arouse their awareness, and make them join hand in hand with the speech. This speech is no exception.

Example: “Now is the time to make real the promises of Democracy.

Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God’s children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.”

The four sentences together start with the same phrase “Now is the time...” to make the listeners realize the urgent need to change the reality. The listeners have the sense of being driven to the edge by a kind of growing power---they must take action at once!

SECTION THREE

3.1 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the stylistic characteristics of an research can reveal to readers some information about the author. What’s more, a research can impress its readers by its good, clean English. Since “style” is the way of using language to express one’s thoughts and feelings, the most suitable pre-modifier to it is “appropriate” or “inappropriate” rather than “good”, “bad”, “strong” or “weak”.

In some sense, style is a person, or everyone has his style. There is no person who has no style in the world. That is why our study of one’s style starts with the choice of words, namely lexical level, and then turns to the choice of sentence structure, namely syntactic level, before discussing the use of figure of speech, namely semantic level. Besides, what is most likely to be neglected is the use of sound patterns, namely phonological level.

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