

## Linguistic and Stylistic Categories: A Textual Analysis of Anita Desai's Bye-Bye Blackbird



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### Abstract

*The words in all their different forms help in making the beautiful structures of literature. The overall variety, aesthetic beauty and value of any piece of writing depend upon the quality and quantity of words used by the author. Leech and Short say, "Stylistics tries to explore for pattern and system below the surface forms of language, to search for principles of meaning and language use, which activate and control the code." Literary stylistics should describe the relation between language and artistic function. One of the important functions of stylistics is to check and confirm the feelings and intuitions by detailed analysis. In this a careful study of the lexis, grammar, cohesive and contextual devices must be made. "Linguistic analysis does not replace the reader's intuition, what Spitzer calls 'the click in the mind': but it may prompt, direct and shape it into an understanding. 'Bye, Bye Blackbird' by Anita Desai is a psychological analysis of the immigrants who suffer mixed feelings of love and hate towards the country of their adoption. 'Blackbird' used in the title is none other than the immigrant, whom London says goodbye. The book is divided into three parts e.g. Arrival, Discovery and Recognition, and Departure. Desai sets the background of the story in England, the feelings and sufferings of the Indians at that place.*

*The paper will focus on this aspect of Anita Desai making a case study of her novel 'Bye, Bye Blackbird'. This paper will have three divisions: (i) To explore the meaning of Stylistic and Linguistic Analysis. (ii) A depth study of Stylistic and Linguistic Categories. (iii) A Textual analysis of 'Bye, Bye Blackbird'.*

### Introduction

Stylisticians agree to the fact that style is a matter of choice. Every writer with the use of his own peculiar choice of words and structures writes in his own unique style. In order to understand the underlying pattern, the modern stylistics gives attention on these choices of the writer. In his article *Some Aspects of Style*, J. Warburg writes:

"The good use of a language, then, consists in choosing the appropriate symbolization of the experience you wish to convey, from among all possibly words and arrangements of words (by saying, for example, dog rather than cat). 'Good style, it seems to me, consists in choosing the appropriate symbolization of the experience you wish to convey, from among a number of words whose meaning area is roughly, but only roughly, the same (by saying cat, for example, rather than pussy). That is to say, matters of style are necessarily linguistic matters: linguistic matters are not necessarily- it is a common but misleading view- matters of style.'

It has been correctly mentioned that "Stylistics is not a mechanical technique of style analysis. It acknowledges that intuition and personal judgement of the reader cannot be replaced by any method. The mystery of having moved by words as Dylan Thomas says, will always remain." One of the important functions of stylistics is to check and confirm the feelings and intuitions by detailed analysis. In this a careful study of the lexis, grammar, cohesive and contextual devices must be made. "Linguistic analysis does not replace the reader's intuition, what Spitzer calls 'the click in the mind': but it may prompt, direct and shape it into an understanding."

In order to make linguistic and stylistic study of any piece of writing; one must know what the linguistic and stylistic categories are. A brief discussion of these categories has been mentioned following:

### Linguistic and Stylistic Categories

- **General:** One must check here is the vocabulary simple or complex? Is it formal or colloquial? Is it descriptive or evaluative? Is it general or specific?

- Does the text include idiomatic phrases? Does the text contain rare or specialized vocabulary?
- **Nouns:** One must check are the nouns abstract or concrete? What kind of abstract nouns does the text contain, e.g., nouns referring to events, perceptions, moral values, social values, processes etc?
  - **Adjectives:** Does the author make use of frequent adjectives? One must see adjectives refer to what kinds of attributes whether physical, psychological, visual, auditory, colour, referential, emotive or evaluative. One must evaluate adjectives are restrictive or non-restrictive, adjectives are gradable or non-gradable, they are attributive or predicative.
  - **Verbs:** In this category one must check whether the verbs carry an important part of the meaning, the verbs are stative or referring to actions, events etc. One must also see whether the verbs refer to movements, physical acts, speech acts, psychological states, or perceptions. What kind of verbs has been used, transitive, intransitive or linking? One must see whether the verb is factive or non-factive.
  - **Adverbs:** In this category one must analyze the adverbs are frequent or not. One must check whether any significant use of sentence adverbs is there or not (conjuncts such as: so, therefore, however and disjuncts such as: certainly, obviously, frankly)

## Grammatical Categories

- Sentence types: Here one must analyze whether the author makes use of only statements or he also makes use of questions, commands, exclamations or minor sentence types.
- Sentence Complexity: Here one must analyze on the whole whether sentences have simple or complex structure, sentences are long or short.

- Clause types: One must analyze here what types of dependent clauses are favoured, are they relative clauses, adverbial clauses or different types of nominal clauses? One must find out whether reduced or non-finite clauses are commonly used or not, if they are used then what type are they? Are they infinitive clauses, -ing clauses, ed-clauses or verbless clauses.
- Verb Phrases: One must analyze here whether there is any significant departures from the use of simple past tense or not.
- Minor Word Classes: Here comes the use of prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, determiners, auxiliaries and interjections. One can find out whether particular words of these types have been used for particular effect. As, the definite and indefinite article, first person pronouns, I, WE, etc, demonstratives, like this and that, negative words like not, nothing and no.
- General: Here one can check whether any general types of grammatical construction have been used for any special effect. As, comparative or superlative constructions.

## Figures of Speech

- Grammatical and Lexical Schemes: One can check here whether there is found any case of formal and structural repetition in the given text such as, anaphora, parallelism etc.
- Phonological Schemes: One must analyze whether in the text any phonological patterns of rhyme, alliteration, assonance etc have been used, whether any salient rhythmical patterns is used, whether vowel and consonant sounds pattern or cluster in particular ways have been used.

## Context and Cohesion

- Cohesion: One must analyze whether the text contains any logical or other links between sentences, such as, coordinating conjunctions or linking adverbials. One must also find out what kind of use is made of cross-reference by pronouns in the text, such as she, it or they? One can also notice one more important aspect whether meaning connections are reinforced by repetition of words and phrases or by

repeatedly using words from the same semantic field.

- Context: One can analyze whether in any text the writer addresses the readers directly, or through the words or thoughts of some fictional character. One can check of the addresser-addressee relationship what linguistic clues have been used, as first-person pronouns, I, me, my, mine. One can analyze whether the direct or indirect method has been used to show a character's words or thoughts.

### Text from Bye-Bye Blackbird

The morning light slid down the lane-lengths of telephone wires, perched a while on the peaks of television aerials and then rolled down the drain pipes into the new-leafed hedges and through the silver caps of the milk bottles on the steps, rang the brass door knockers and set the birds and bottles clinking and clanking in informal good-morning voices that rose up to Dev's window and politely woke him (1). But when he pulled out his watch from under his pillow he was disgusted to find it was disgusted to find it was barely five o'clock (2). He wondered if it had died in the night of an inability to acclimatize itself, but its steady ticking asserted itself through the bright bead-curtain of bird-and-bottle sounds and he shoved it away with a groan, and then put his head beside it under the pillow (3). But he had mistakenly left the window open at night and now the milky fingers of morning reached through and scrabbled through his emerge, half smothered, from the dark pillow and face the window now swimming with liquid light in which the red roofs and blackened brick walls of Clapham stood steady as the keels and hulls of sound old boats that had weathered the wash and swell of another day's tidal wave (4).

He propped himself up on one elbow, trying to conjure some of yesterday's excitement and buoyancy out of the tiredness of a night's sleep begun too late and ended too early (5). Groping about for the support of a tranquillizing smoke, he found he had left his cigarettes on top of the brass-knobbed dresser at the far end of the room (6). There was nothing for it but to roll out of his disheveled bed, leap up into the air as his feet touched the freezing floor boards race across to the dresser, snatch up cigarettes and matches and take a flying leap back into his feet touched the freezing

floor boards race across to the dresser, snatch up cigarettes and matches and take a flying leap back into his quilt (7). Trying nervously to nurse it back to warmth and keep the ashes from falling on the blue stain, he thought with momentary bitterness of the cup of tea that would have been brought to him if he were at home in India now, by a mother fresh from her morning prayers, or a servant boy scorched and sooty from a newly made fire (8). By no stretch of imagination were his host Adit Sen or his wife Sarah likely to do this for him: there was an eiderdown-smothered silence from their end of the flat (9). Once the cigarette had dwindled to a stub and he had to leap up in order to fling it out of the window into the hedge, he felt he might as well wrap his earthen brown shawl about him and go out to find the kitchen and make himself a cup of tea (10). It was the first lesson his first day in London taught him: he who wants tea must get up and make it (11).

*Analysis:* On the first day in London Dev is awaked by the morning light which is mixed with the voices of birds and sounds of milk-bottle. But Dev does not feel comfortable in the new surroundings. If he wants to have something he will have to take it himself as by mistake he leaves the window open, in order to save himself from cold he will have to get up from the bed and close the window. Then he realizes he has left his cigarette and lighter on the dresser, once again he has to get up from his warm bed, now he wishes to have tea, and he will have to make it himself. Here comes a realization to Dev that in India he lived a comfortable life where his mother or a servant boy used to bring tea for him, but here in England he would have to do all his works himself. So he learns the first lesson about life.

**General Observation:** One can notice that the above passage is written in simple idiomatic English. Complex words have not been used much. There can be seen many compound words used by the novelist such as: *lane-lengths*, *new-leafed*, *bead-curtain*, *bird and bottle*, *milky-fingers*, *giggling-tease*, *half-smothered*, *brass-knobbed*, and *eiderdown-smothered*. The style of writing of the novelist denotes freshness, her keen observation and insight.

**Nouns:** Total 78 nouns have been used in the above quoted passage, out of which 15 are abstract nouns. They are: *voices*, *sounds*, *inability*, *milky*, *fingers*, *giggling-tease*, *excitement*, *buoyancy*, *stretch*, *imagination*,

*elderdown-smothered, silence, tiredness, bitterness, warmth, groan, wash and swell.*

*Proper Nouns* have also been used in the above passage, such as: *Dev, Adit, Sarab*, the locality and the city, such as: *Clapham, London*.

**Collocations:** One can notice that in this passage words which are dealing with marine imagery are of supreme importance, as: *swimming, liquid, tidal wave, keels and hulls, old boats, weathered, wash and swell.*

**Adjectives:** In the above passage one can see that adjectives refer more to the psychological states as compare to the physical objects. They are: *excitement, buoyancy, informal, giggling, tranquilizing, freezing, newly, politely, barely, mistakenly, nervously.* These words describe the feelings and reactions of Dev, these words are with emotive connotations.

**Adverbs:** Adverbs of place and direction have been used in the above passage which add movement and dramatic feature. The transitive as well as intransitive verbs have been used in the passage, and they are equal in number. These adverbs depict the movements, psychological states and perceptions of the protagonist. They are: *mistakenly left, to conjure excitement and buoyancy, groping for support, trying nervously, leap up, pulled out, shoved away, fling out.*  
**Grammatical Categories:**

**Sentence Length:** The first sentence is the longest sentence in the passage. It depicts the complexity of ideas in the mind of Dev. The last sentence in the passage is the shortest sentence, it hints at the clarity of ideas which comes in the mind of Dev as a result of his thinking. The unsettled and disturbed state of Dev is depicted through sentences from 2-10, while the sentence 11 makes the conflict clear.

**Prepositions:** A few prepositions have been used in this passage. In order to relate ideas to physical objects and sounds the role of preposition 'OF' is essential. As, *the bright curtain* (Imaginary), *Of bird and bottle sounds* (Real). *As the keels and hulls* (Imaginary)

OF sound old boats	(Real)
Momentary bitterness	(Thought process)
Of the cup of tea	(Physical)
The wash and swell	(Ideational)
OF another day	(Physical)

**Punctuation:** The specific use of colon (:) can be noticed in the passage as: *'By no stretch of imagination were his host Adit Sen or his wife Sarab likely to do this for him: there was an eiderdown-smothered silence from their end*

*of the flat'. 'It was the first lesson his first day in London taught him: he who wants tea must get up and make it'.*

**Figures of Speech:**

**Metaphors:** In the above passage use of metaphors can be noticed such as:

*New leafed hedges:* It symbolizes trimmed hedges.

*Bright bead curtain of bird and bottle sounds:* It symbolizes sounds produced by birds' chirping and milk bottles.

*Giggling-tease:* It symbolizes an act of friendliness.

*Milky-fingers:* It symbolizes white light in the morning.

*An eiderdown smothered silence:* It symbolizes soft, comfortable living which impels the people to live in alienation.

**Simile:** In the above passage use of simile can also be noticed as, *As the keels and hulls of sound old boats.*

**Antithesis:** Use of antithesis can also be seen in the passage, as: *Began too late, ended too early.*

**Alliteration:** The title of the novel is itself alliterative *Bye- Bye Blackbird, bird and bottle sounds, face the window now swimming with/ liquid light.*

**Assonance:** *Clinking, clanking, giggling.*

**Parallel Constructions:** Pairs can be easily found in the above passage such as:

- *Had died-had weathered.*
- *Excitement and buoyancy-tiredness and bitterness.*
- *Reached through-scrabbled through.*

**Cohesion:** One can notice the use of articles as co-reference in this passage.

**Generic Reference:** In this passage the use of indefinite article which is coupled with abstract ideas can be noticed. This represents familiarity, as: *A groan a giggling tease, a night's sleep, a tranquilizing smoke, a mother, a servant, a newly made fire, a cup of tea etc.*

**Specific Reference:** In this passage specific reference occurs 21 times. With abstract nouns it has been used only three times as *the wash and swell, the tiredness and bitterness, the support.* In order to ensure cohesion Anita Desai makes use of a common device which is Repetition. As the *window* is repeated 4 times, *leap* is repeated 3 times, *milk, milky* is repeated 2 times, *bird and bottle* is repeated 2 times, *steady* is repeated 2 times, and *half smothered, smothered* is repeated 2 times.

**Context:** Use of third person narration can be noticed in the above passage where Dev's action and reactions have been described. The narrator describes the morning light comes and it touches

the telephone wires, television aerials and it awakes Dev from his sleep. Dev will have to accept the change in order to settle himself in England. The difference in life styles and thinking has been depicted in the passage with the fore grounded use of *but*. In the begging of two sentences and once in the middle has been made use of *but*. In the beginning Dev was unable to accept and judge the reality but in the end it can be seen that he has to accept it.

Thus, it can be said that in order to understand the hidden meaning, a unique aspect of life presented in Anita Desai's *Bye- Bye Blackbird* we need to understand the English language first. We must possess a thorough knowledge of grammar so that the broken language used by Anita Desai to depict the mental isolation and torture of her protagonist Dev could be understood.

## References

1. Geoffery N. Leech and Michael H. Short, *Style in Fiction* (London: Longman, 1981) 5.
2. I bid, 5.
3. Randolf Quirk and A.H. Smith, *Some Aspects of Style* (Cambridge University Press, 1959) 47-55.
4. Geoffery N. Leech and Michael H. Short, *Style in Fiction* (London: Longman, 1981) 4.
5. I bid, 5.