

THEMATIC STRUCTURE AND RHETORICAL EFFECTS IN S.T. COLERIDGE'S "KUBLA KHAN"

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Abstract

This paper extends the existing research in the field of Functional Stylistics. The aim of the study is to explore the use of various stylistical and rhetorical devices employed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in one of his revered poem 'Kubla Khan'. The theoretical framework adopted for the purpose is M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. The paper makes an interesting reading of how the poem enclothe the aura of mysticism depicted through the imagery and mood created by the poet. It is concerned with the understanding of those linguistic features that are foregrounded to have the desired effect of this imaginative piece of writing on the reader.

Keywords- Stylistical and rhetorical devices, Systemic Functional Linguistics, grammatical choices, foregrounding, ideational, interpersonal, textual metafunction, theme and rheme, marked and unmarked themes, nominalization, ellipses.

Poetic language refers to the language which is made use of in poetry for the sake of novelty or creativity. Since the motive of the poem is to capture the attention of a common reader, it does not necessarily have to follow grammatical rules. Unlike fiction or prose, poetic language is much more compressed thereby pushing the reader to kind of unpack the poem and make out its meaning in the process of reading it. The purpose of a poet is the temporal psychological transportation of the reader from real to imaginary. So, he/she may make use of various stylistical or rhetorical devices like parallelism, repetition, ellipses, nominalization etc. to escape the logical and achieve the desired response from the reader. Stylistics refer to those linguistic strategies that study the feelings and emotions evoked in the mind of a reader on reading the poem. The focus is to shift the reader's attention from 'what is said' to 'how it is said'. Mukarovsky concurs "When used poetically words and groups of words evoke a greater richness of images and feelings than if it were to occur in communicative occurrence" (Mukarovsky 73).

In this paper I intend to examine the statistical devices in S.T. Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" to explore the way in which he depicts the imagery and mood of the poem linguistically or in other words lexico-grammatically through the approach of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). We use SFL because the focus is on the linguistic features of the poem. This linguistic approach aims to study the text beyond the level of the sentence whereby various choices at clause rank level are visible. SFL is the linguistic science to analyze the words and word structure in their contextual set-up. It is concerned with the semantic meaning and not solely based on grammatical rules. By using the methodology of SFL, I will examine the lexico-grammatical choices employed by the poet to find out the where and how if any special linguistic feature is 'foregrounded' or 'diverted'. Linguist M.A.K. Halliday has characterized foregrounding as "motivational prominence in imaginative writing: the phenomenon of linguistic, whereby some features of the language of a text stand out in some way" (Halliday *Explorations in Functions* 102-112).

The theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was pioneered by M.A.K. Halliday and Christian Matthiessen. The basic tenet of this approach is that in every kind of text, there are three strands of meanings that are inter-twined with each other to give it a final semantic shape. Every written or verbal piece of communication ranging from a casual gossip to a formal presentation of an academic lecture or a literary book consist of the fusion of three metafunctions that represent the function of language in the system of language. They are: 1) interpersonal metafunction for enacting personal and social relationship, 2) textual metafunction for the construction of the text and 3) ideational Metafunction for construing experience. Ideational metafunction comprises of two components, that is, experiential and logical components. "In most general terms, the purpose of analyzing a text is to explain the impact that it makes: why it means what it does and why it gives a particular impression that it does" (Halliday *An introduction* 3rd 366).

Poem "Kubla Khan" has been divided into 36 clauses. When we look at the language of poem from the point of view of textual metafunction, we try to see how poet constructs the message organization. The analyses of poem reveals that marked themes are more common than unmarked themes. The total percentage of marked theme is 67% of the total thematic distribution. In marked theme, circumstantial adjuncts constitute the highest number, thus having quite high frequency of 54%. Ghadessy (1995) argues that since marked themes especially circumstantial adjuncts in initial position are frequently new information, considering these to constitute the whole of the theme, obscure the development of the text. But interestingly in this piece of poetry, Coleridge has made ample use of these to add emphasis to his text or bring some point to the foreground. Circumstantial elements have been the launching point of statements rather than the participants in thematic position. They not only create the atmosphere of awe, suspense and distant land along with the musical tone of the poem, but have been employed by the poet for some other reasons too such as rhyme,

rhythm or other rhetorical effects. Circumstance of location which constitutes two-third of circumstantial adjuncts invokes the imagery in the mind of reader for visualization.

The analysis depicts the use of multiple marked themes by poet. Some linguists such as Martin have proposed a more intuitively appealing approach by regarding all marked themes as topical themes (Martin 223-258). For example , cl.36 in the poem :

And	mid these dancing rocks	ones and ever	it flung up momentarily the sacred river
Textual	Circ: location	Circ: Extent	
Theme			Rheme

Also taking another example of cl.17

Five miles meandering with mazy motion	through wood and dale	the sacred river ran
Circ : Distance	Circ : Place	
Theme		Rheme

Such an approach makes sense in terms of broader characterization of the theme as point of departure, since the additional marked themes function to lay the ground and prepare for the message within the clause to properly take off. It must be remembered though, that this exception to the golden rule of having only single topical theme (leaving the rest as rheme) applies only to marked themes.

The analysis further depicts that apart from circumstantial adjuncts, writer has employed a variety of elements such as phenomenon, range, goal, material process as marked themes in thematic position to enhance the exotic effect of poem on the mind of reader. The examples are as follows:

Phenomenon in thematic position as marked theme:

cl.24	A damsel with dulcimer	in vision	once	I	saw
	Phenomenon	Circ: location	Circ: extent	Senser	Pr :Mental
	Topical				
	Marked theme	Rheme			

Range in thematic position as marked theme:

cl. 25	And	on her dulcimer	she	played
		Range	Actor	Pr: material
	Textual	Topical		
	Marked	theme	Rheme	

Goal in thematic position as marked theme:

cl.28	To such a deep delight	't	would win	me
	Goal	Actor	Pr: material	beneficiary
	Marked Topical theme		Rheme	

Material process in thematic position as marked theme:

Cl.31	And	drunk	the milk of paradise	
		Pr: material	Goal	
	Textual	Topical		
	Marked theme		Rheme	

The above examples show that the poet primarily brings important information to the foreground, maintaining the mood of the poem. He aims to bring in new information on the very outset of the clause thus striking the reader's imagination.

cl.6

And	here	were	forests	ancient as hills
		Pr: Existential	Existent	
Textual	Topical			
Theme		Rheme		
(Enfolding sunny spots of greenery)				

It is observed that in cl.6 '-here' has been used, in sense of 'there' and 'there' when used in existential process, has no representational meaning, it does not refer to a location. In this sense, both 'here' and 'there' can be seen as logically connected. It is also observed that the complete meaning of the subsequent phrase "(Enfolding sunny spots of greenery)" can be recovered from the previous clause i.e. cl.6 with its subject being 'forests ancient as hills' lying over there. 'Enfolding' which denotes the material process, seems to be topical but it is not actually representing theme. It will be put in brackets for analysis purpose and not given the status of a separate clause because its meaning lies in the light of previous clause.

cl.7

but	Oh !	that deep romantic chasm which	slanted
	Adj: contin		
Textual	Textual	Topical	
Theme			Rheme

In the above clause 'which' is resaying the phrase 'that deep romantic chasm'

cl.11	And	from this chasm	with ceaseless turmoil	seething
		Circ: Location	Circ: manner	Pr:mental
	Textual	Marked Topical		
	Theme		Rheme	

cl.12	As if	this earth	in fast thick pants	were breathing
		Behavior	Circ:Manner	Pr:Behaviorial
	Theme		Rheme	

cl.11 is separately seen as a clause having circumstance of location in theme position which gives it a status of marked topical theme but if considered in relation to subsequent clause, that is, cl.12, it serves as a dependent clause to it with 'As if' serving as subordinating conjunction of comparison and the latter functioning as an independent clause. It is known that in hypotactic logico-semantic relationship of interdependence, dependent clause cannot stand alone; it makes sense when read with its accompanying dominant clause. In this hypotactic clause structure, the poet consciously tries to emphasize the dependent clause by increasing its status & making it become circumstance for the subsequent independent clause. By placing the hypotactic clause in initial position as a marked theme choice, and creating the sense of comparison between two clauses, the poet elevates its figurative status to impart it an allegorical feel. According to Eggins, "by positioning the dependent clause first the writer gives the text a degree of thematic planning not common in spoken language" (Eggins 320).

Poet also makes use of rhetorical device of nominalization. Nominalization enables the writer in expansion of the meaning potential by creating new patterns of structural realization. Precisely speaking, it is a grammatical means of wording a process or an action with a noun. The participants in transitivity have a role/process but when this process is given the status of the thing, we do nominalization. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (*An Introduction* 2nd ed 636) "wording a process as a noun, i.e. nominalizing it is a more sophisticated realization than a congruent one and is not part of everyday's spontaneous speech." Fowler writes that by means of nominalization "processes and qualities assume the states of things: impersonal, inanimate, and capable of being amassed and counted like capital, paraded like possessions (Fowler 80). Few instances from the poem are given below:

cl.15	Or	chaffy grain	beneath the	thresher's	flail
		Goal	Circ: Location	Actor	Pr :Material
	Theme		Rheme		

In the above clause the poet makes use of prepositional phrase ‘the threshers flail’ for nominalization in which “flail” being the material process has been used as a noun-phrase. Another example is cl.14

Cl.14 (Amid whose half intermitted burst) huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail.

Here prepositional phrase ‘Amid whose half intermitted burst’ which acts as a circumstance of location has been used in a condensed form of a noun group. The language has been deliberately made short which is one of the basic features of nominalization. The above two clauses portray how the poet makes the text more concise by packing a great deal of information into few words. As a consequence of using nominalization the poetic language becomes more abstract and more imaginary. It is a function that helps to create variety in writing.

Cl.17

(Five miles meandering with mazy motion)	through woods and dale	the sacred river	ran
Circ: Time	Circ: Time	Actor	Pr:Material
Theme	Rheme		

In the above clause it is seen that the author has made use of fragmented language to create the parallel sense. The poet through the phrase “five miles meandering with mazy motion” creates duplication of same meaning with the subsequent phrase ‘through woods and dale’. No new meaning is deciphered; he is resaying the same thing. Both the phrases seem to depict the circumstance of time. It is interesting to see that the above clause can also be interpreted in other way, where both the initial phrases are seen as two different activities, former acting as circumstance of distance and latter as circumstance of location, as depicted below :

cl.17 (Five miles meandering with mazy motion)	through woods and dale	the sacred river	ran
Circ: Distance	Circ: Place	Actor	Pr: Material
Theme	Rheme		

The poet has skillfully made use of ellipsed subjects as Unmarked themes. The example is as under:

cl.19

And	(river)	sank	in tumult to a lifeless ocean
Textual	Ellipsed Topical	Pr: Material	
Theme		Rheme	

In Ellipses “the ‘subject’ and often the finite verb are ‘understood’ from the context” (Halliday *An introduction 3rd ed* 63) In the above clause the ellipsed subject ‘river’ can be retrieved from the earlier few lines of poem. This kind of subject ellipses shows the way in which the theme of the second clause sets off from the theme or rheme of previous clause which add cohesion to the text and maintains the uninterrupted free flow of ideas.

Interestingly, the poet has also made use of conceptual metaphors at some places in the text. Metaphors are the heart of poetic function. Poet tries to create new meanings by challenging the fixed expressions. It may be an experience, unless it is transformed in poetic function, it can't be a poem. It is potentially an enlightening tool for identifying underlying meaning. The few examples from the poem are as under:

Cl.27

Could	I revive within me her symphony and song
Theme	Rheme

Cl.36

And	drunk	the milk of paradise
Theme		Rheme

In the above examples the clauses are metaphorical. There is no material sense, but the abstract ideas are being presented. They represent subconscious choices on the part of poet which are shared by other members of community. These help poet as well readers to share difficult, emotionally intense or uncommon experience, thus providing imagination and richness to the poem. Neither one can revive real symphony and song within oneself nor can one drink the milk of paradise as no such thing exists in reality, still these expressions when used metaphorically portrays a mere surface manifestation of a more important phenomena.

Towards the end, the poem undergoes a turning point. The poet makes the poem dialogic, wherein he directly creates a dialogue with the reader through the use of imperative clause in thematic position. The example below clarifies the point :

cl.34

And	close	your eyes with holy dread
Textual	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

In the above example the poet creates direct communication with the reader. The poem does not exist in vacuum but the poet triggers a strong response from the reader who has been transposed to the exotic land of the pleasure dome, the caverns, the ocean, river Alph and much more.

It can be concluded that the analysis of poem has been done at third level Semiotic system i.e. Textual Metafunction of SFL. The study investigates the role played by Thematic structure in the message organization of poem thus highlighting the emergence of various stylistical devices. The analysis of theme choices revealed that most of the topical themes in the Theme position are Marked Themes. These are mostly realized by Circumstantial adjuncts which help the poet to launch each clause with the new information. It not only sustains the atmosphere of the poem but aggravate the growing suspense, terror, awe and suspense in the reader. The marked themes have also been realized by other elements as phenomenon, goal, range, material processes which shows that the degrees of markedness keep on varying. The Thematic construction reveals that poet has made ample use of foregrounding through rhetorical devices of nominalization, ellipses, parallelism and conceptual metaphors. The poet through these tools depicts the dangerous and threatening aspects of nature. Perhaps the most fantastic world is created wherein creative imagination, nature and mysticism go hand in hand. Stopford Brooke characterized the poem having no rival due to its "imagination phrasing". Although short in length the poem acquires "Romantic" aura. It enters into a direct dialogue with the reader, triggers his response and never finishes.

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