

Stylistic Analysis of “ROAR”, a Song by Katy Perry

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Abstract

The current research work is an analytical study which deals with the stylistic analysis of Katy Perry’s song “Roar”. The analysis is divided into three major levels. The first one is phonological analysis in which the researchers explore different phonological aspects of the song. The second part deals with figurative devices. Different themes of the song have been discussed in the third and the last part of the analysis.

Keywords:

Stylistics, figurative language, phonological level, feminism

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Introduction

In this modern age of literature and linguistics, most of the critics have agreed upon the fact that literature and linguistics are complementary to each other. If anyone wants to have a comprehensive view of a literary text, he/she should first understand the nature of language used as the medium of literary works. On the other hand, everybody should consider literature as a way of how language is used while examining language. Leech (1990) asserts that literature cannot be analyzed thoroughly excluding language analysis, and vice versa. So, Leech clearly gives verdict in the favor of stylistics which is, according to Widdowson (2014), the field of study in

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which literary discourse is analyzed from linguistic point of view. The current research work is also an attempt to analyze a literary piece “Roar” from the point of view of linguistics. This type of work comes under the area of stylistics which is usually defined as the systematic and scientific study of styles. It is one of major areas of linguistics. Stylistics has become an interdisciplinary field within linguistics because of the rapid progress in this field in the second half of the twentieth century. It includes subfields such as literary stylistics, pragmatic stylistics, cognitive stylistics, corpus stylistics, critical stylistics etc. In the recent years, the literary stylistics has got vital importance in research as compared to other subfields of stylistics. Many of the literary texts have been analyzed and are being analyzed by the literary stylistic researchers in the light of the rules and models provided by the experts of this field. This research also deals with the area of literary stylistics. The researchers intend to analyze the song ‘Roar’ by Katy Perry from stylistic perspective. As stylistics deals with styles, it is better to know what style is.

Longinus, one of the pioneers who talked about style long before the modern English introduced to the world, puts forward definition of style as “style is the man”. Here, he means to say that everybody in the world has got some sort of personal habits (either in writing, speaking, way of living etc.) and these habits can be termed as his/her style. The same idea is maintained by Malic (as cited in Lawal 1997) who argues that “the style of an author has a consistency due to the habitual nature of the writing process and this consistency can be determined, measured and used to determine consanguinity between an unknown and a set of authenticate text”. (p.34). Wales (2001) is of the view that “style refers to the perceived manner of expression in writing or speaking” (p.273). Any piece of work either literary or non-literary is, in fact, not written in a vacuum, there has always been a message in it that a writer has in mind to convey to the reader/s, the pattern that the writer adopts while using language to convey his/her message is referred to as the style of the writer and the field of linguistics that deals with styles is called stylistics.

Stylistics

Short (1996) considers stylistics as the study which deals with the analysis of literary texts by applying linguistic approach. In other words, stylistics analyzes literature by implying linguistic tools of analysis. Short makes stylistics more important by saying that it not merely analyzes the linguistic forms but also deals with semantics by analyzing the plot and overall message of a piece of literature. So, Stylistics can be considered a mediator between language and literature.

Keeping in mind the multidimensional nature of subject and its close connection with linguistics and literature, Enkvist (1973) argues that stylistics can be regarded as a sub branch of linguistics which deals with the peculiar characteristics of literary texts. It can be viewed as a branch of literary studies which use various linguistic methods for the text analysis. It can also be regarded as an independent field of study which eclectically and freely maneuvers various methods from linguistics and literary study.

Keeping in mind the above discussion, stylistics, in its broadest sense, can be defined as the study which describes and interprets the distinctive linguistic choices and patterns in non-literary and literary texts or it can be fairly inferred that stylistics is a branch through which linguistics and literature are dovetail into each other. The present paper also analyzes and interprets the distinctive linguistic choices and patterns in literary texts.

Research Methodology

This is an analytical research work in which the researchers look into different stylistic devices found in a selected song "Roar" by Katy Perry. The methods of stylistic analysis put forwarded by Leech(1969) in '*A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*' and Wales(2001) in '*A Dictionary of Stylistics*', are of vital importance as far as this study is concerned. Both put forward the ways of analyzing a literary text. They propose different devices for analyzing a text. According to them, foregrounding, parallelism, verbal repetition, rhyming and metrical scheme, figurative language, ambiguity and indeterminacy are some of the key concepts which must be analyzed while having stylistic analysis of poetic language. They

Stylistic Analysis of “ROAR”, a Song by Katy Perry also favour that any piece of poetry should be analyzed in different levels- phonological, figurative, thematic etc. The current study also analyzes the Song in different levels. One of the levels is phonological analysis which is discussed in the next section of the paper.

Phonological Analysis

Rhyme

Rhyme has always got considerable attention of the researchers of stylistics during their investigation of styles. It is the correspondence in the last sounds of different lines of a piece of poetry. It is generally created by using the same codas in the last words of the successive lines in poetry. As alliteration deals with onset of the syllables, rhyme deals with coda (one of the parts of syllable). Wales (2001) considers it a phonetic parallelism in verse; comprehensively it can be argued that rhyme is "phonemic matching". Bradley (2009) argues that “the most common rap rhymes are end rhymes which fall on the last beat of the musical measure, signaling the end of the poetic line...” End rhyme is to be found in the second stanza of the song under analysis:

*“You hear my voice, your hear that **sound**
Like thunder, gonna shake the **ground**”*

The last words of the first two lines of second stanza are *sound* and *ground*. These words have same codas or having corresponding sound /d/ at the end of the lines that creates an end rhyme.

There is also the use of internal rhyme at many places in the Song:

1. *“So I sat **quietly**, agreed **politely**”*
2. *“I stood for **nothing**, so I fell for **everything**”*
3. *“I got the eye of the **tiger**, a **fighter**”*
4. *“I went from **zero**, to my own **hero**”*

The words *quietly/politely*, *nothing/everything*, *tiger/fighter* and *zero/hero* within the lines 1, 2,3 and 4 respectively are creating internal rhyme which is adding the sense of musicality to the song. Apart from rhyme, alliteration

is another device which gets attention of the critics. The next section deals with this phonological device.

Alliteration

Alliteration is also known as head rhyme or front rhyme. In Latin, alliteration refers to “**putting letters together**”. Contrary to the above given idea, alliteration depends not on letters but on sounds in the field of stylistics. The repetition of initial consonant sound in a line is called alliteration. Wales (2001) defines the term alliteration concisely as "initial rhyme". Here alliteration is used in the second and fifth lines of the first stanza:

*“Scared to rock the boat and **make a mess**”* (second line of the first stanza)

*“I let you **push me past the breaking point**”* (fifth line of the first stanza)

The words *make/mess and pushed/past/point* within the first and fifth lines are repeating /m/ and /p/ sounds respectively. This delicate use of alliteration enhances the musicality of the song.

Consonance

In Latin, consonance refers to sounds agreement in a line. Wales(2001) defines consonance as a kind of 'end- alliteration' or 'half-rhyme'. Here final consonants are reiterated but with different preceding vowels. Leech (1969) calls it “para rhyme”. The use of /r/ in the chorus part is the best example in the text under analysis.

“I got the eye of the tiger, a fighter,

Dancing through the fire,

‘C I am a champion, and you’re gonna hear me roar,

Louder, louder than a lion”

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Both these phonological elements “alliteration” and “consonance” create the mood of quite admiration.

Assonance

Assonance refers to the repetition of the identical vowel sound in neighboring words in a line of a verse. Bright (2013) calls it ‘a medial rime’. Assonance is to be found in many places in the song under analysis. Examples are fourth line of first stanza and first line of third stanza respectively.

“I guess that I forgot I had a choice”

And

“I got the eye of the tiger, a fighter, dancing through the fire”

The word “I” is giving the sound of a diphthong /aI/ that has been repeated three times in the first stanza. In the third stanza, in words *I, eye, tiger* and *fighter* the diphthong /aI/ is again repeated. This repetition is called assonance.

Aphaeresis

It is a rhetoric device which allows the poet to omit one or more sounds or syllable from the beginning of a word. It is also spelled as apheresis. This rhetoric term is also used by the writer when she uses the word ‘*Cause*’ instead of *because* in the third, sixth and seventh stanzas.

Onomatopoeia

The last but not the least phonological element used here is “onomatopoeia” that refers to the words that create the sound what they mean. The title “*Roar*” itself is the best example of the use of onomatopoeia. It is used to deal with the expression of anger in the first half of the song and then with the expression of amusement in the second half of the song. The use of another word “*oh*” many times in the text enhances this expression of amusement and gives the real description of feelings of the writer. This word relates the text with the real life that when

one feels extreme excitement and when is full of passions, he/she loses the proper words of language and the continuous repetition of this word "oh" gives the element of passion and vigor in the text.

Figurative Devices

Anaphora

In Greek language, it means 'carrying back'(Wales2001). It is the form of parallelism that can be defined as the repetition of a word at the beginning of neighboring clauses, verses or sentences.

You hear my voice, you hear that sound (second stanza)

In the above mentioned example, the word *you* is being repeated in the beginning of respective clauses; this is an anaphoric repetition. It can be described as (x ..., x ...) mathematically. 'x ...' alludes to the reiteration of the same words in the beginning of the neighboring clauses.

"I see it all, I see it now"

The repetition of 'I' is to be found in the beginnings of neighboring clauses of the above given line. This is also an anaphoric repetition. These two lines appeal the auditory and visual senses and their repetition strengthen these auditory and visual images. The images shown by the anaphorical device also explain the theme of realization that someone was being dominated by others and now this realization has given the courage to challenge those who use their power to rule others.

Metaphor

Metaphor refers to the description of one thing as another thing. McArthur (1992) calls it a condensed simile. The difference between metaphor and simile is that unlike simile metaphor does not take 'like' or 'as' with it for comparison.

The first line of chorus part is the best example in this regard.

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‘I got the eye of the tiger, a fighter, dancing through the fire’

Here author’s eye has been described as ‘a fighter’.

Here, author’s visual sense (visual sense of tiger) metaphorically symbolizes power and bravery. So, through this device the theme of empowerment is declared which shows that the author that has got enough power and confidence to compete those who try to bind her in ropes.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration. Leech(1969) argues, hyperbole is used frequently for the expression of personal values and sentiments.

e.g.

“And you’re gonna hear me roar

Louder, louder than a lion”

Though the voice of human being cannot be louder than a lion, the feelings and sentiments of the author are exaggerated by hyperbole and emphasis is obvious by the use of the word ‘louder’ twice. This device is being used here to put a stress on the idea and to enhance the effect of the idea.

Simile

Simile is a figure of speech that compares two or more unlike things by using such words as ‘like’ or ‘as’.

e.g.

“Now I’m floating like a butterfly

Stinging like a bee I earned my stripes”

This use of Simile gives a nice tone to the song. By comparing herself to a “butterfly” the author inserts the aspect of beauty and by comparing herself

to a "bee" a strange aspect is described that although bee is considered to be a minute thing, but it can sting to secure and protect itself.

Themes

There is one major theme and three embedded themes in this song. The major theme deals with the "Feministic Aspect" and the embedded themes are "Empowerment", "Freedom" and "Rebellion".

Feminism

As the author is a female that is why feministic aspect is of vital importance. Now the reality is being analyzed from female perspective. The Song is in the form of an internal monologue with the first person pronoun "I". Therefore, it can be considered that the author talks particularly about herself, about her own life experiences. But when the idea that she is trying to convey comes under the heading of generalization or when the author is taken as '**PERSON AS CLASS METAPHOR**'; it can be interpreted that the idea signifies all the women. Now author's problems can be generalized as the problems of all women. The song, from this subject matter reveals a reality that how women face different problems in the male chauvinistic society where women are inculcated to such extent that they forget that whether they have any choice or they are just 'yes women'. These problems were more dominant in the past when women were considered to be remained in the homes, and were bound in the stripes of rope that are held by the males. First part of the song deals with the theme of colonization of men on women, but after the first stanza the author represents 'a new era': an era of women struggle for their rights. It can be linked to the Feministic Movement in the 18th century.

Empowerment

The third and fourth stanzas illustrate the present and post present era: an era of women empowerment to such extent as lion in the forest. These two stanzas not only represent the present era in the developed countries but also foretell bright future of women living in developing countries. According to the poet, women have now got enough confidence that they

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 can speak even louder than a lion. Here lion is taken as a metaphor for male, that now women are moving forward and crossing those men that held them behind in the past. Now, they can float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, because they have gone through the process of zero to hero.

Freedom

Theme of empowerment further leads towards another universal theme that is “the theme of Freedom”. In this universe where economic and political crisis are at their peaks many people/countries are considered as slaves who are ruled by the powerful people/countries and the author is trying to make those people/countries feel free and realize their own identities, apart from being slaves. Because they are having same physical appearance as of those ruling people as Abraham Lincoln says, “If slavery is not wrong nothing is wrong”.

Rebellion

Theme of empowerment leads towards the theme of rebellion. The author, being the representative of women, represents the other side of reality- the reality from female perspective. The post-colonial concept of ‘empire writes back to the centre’ is obvious from the text.

Tone

The tone of the song changes from one extreme to the other. From negative to positive, from pessimistic to optimistic, from powerless to powerful, and from slave to a ruler. It shows the reality that oppression on women makes their lives miserable and full of pain, but when women work against oppression and get power they become free.

Mood

The song represents the mood of determination, courage and enthusiasm in women because once there was a time when they were considered as:

“They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented”

But when they realized this slavery they got courage to be lions instead of living as passive objects because:

"Things can change in a day; the only thing that one needs is determination"

Conclusion:

The song foretells the future of women in the society. The song on one hand is an open call for the repressed women who are being treated like a chattel to rebel the male chauvinism and on the other hand it is a warning for those who are following stereotypical norms of male dominance in the society. The songwriter anticipates that there will be a time when women will break down the shackles of suppression and exploitation and will roar louder than lions. Feminism is the dominant theme of the song along with other embedded themes such as empowerment, freedom and rebellion. Apart from exploring thematic significance, the study also explores linguistic importance of the song. The song contains powerful sensuous imagery. Rhyme, alliteration, consonance, assonance and aphaeresis are the main phonological devices used in the said song, whereas anaphora, metaphor, simile and hyperbole are figurative devices exploited by the songwriter.

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Official music video for Katy Perry's "Roar" brought to you in Junglescope directed by Grady Hall & Mark Kudsi and produced by Javier Jimenez, Danny Lockwood, Patrick Nugent, Derek Johnson and Oualid Mouaness. Lyrics: I used to bite my tongue and hold my breath Scared to rock the boat and make a mess So I sit quietly Agree politely. I guess that I forgot I had a choice I let you push me past the breaking point I stood for nothing So I fell for everything. (Pre-Chorus) You held me down but I got up Already brushing off the dust You hear my voice, you hear that sound Like thun KATY PERRY Roar (3:42) Producers: Dr. Luke, Max Martin and Cirkut Writers: Katy Perry, Lukasz Gottwald, Max Martin, Bonnie McKee, Henry Walter Publishers: various Capitol Records. Katy Perry kicks off her hotly anticipated "Prism" era with a stylistic return to the arena-sized singer-songwriter formula that made her debut "One Of The Boys" so remarkable. Fans have already had a heyday of comparing the self-empowerment anthem's sound to Sara Bareilles -- specifically the singer-songwriter's current single "Brave" -- but that doesn't discredit the art...Â Plus, the song's staccato-heavy, shout-along chorus sounds custom-made for a live setting -- and a really killer remix. Read More Billboard Reviews Here. FACEBOOK.