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PHONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF BROWNING'S MY LAST DUCHESS

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ABSTRACT

The chief objective of the study is to analyze the stylistic features of the poem My Last Duchess by Robert Browning. The poem has multilayered meaning which is investigated through different stylistic tools of analysis. The poem is interpreted through parallelism to find out the themes. Moreover, the study focuses on the male supremacy in the Victorian age in Robert Browning My Last Duchess by using the theory of foregrounding to highlight the prominent and foregrounded element in the text. Phonological and is being applied to the poem to find out the effect of foregrounding in the poem. Besides, the thesis attempts to explore the ways the poet uses repetition of sounds and punctuations and how these repetitions of sounds and punctuations portray the male supremacy as well as informal behavior of Victorian women towards every common man apart from their spouses. The study investigated the effect of parallelism through repetition of sounds.. Furthermore, this research explored the suggestivity through alliterations, assonance, consonance. The thesis portrayed the main controversy of the Victorian age that is male supremacy and found that sound patterns of the poem corresponded to the social problems of the Victorian era. The current study is reasonable and helpful because it attempts a novel field. The model of the stylistic element of the same sounds and form of the words, as well as other markings of the selected poetry, are described in detail in this study.

INTRODUCTION

The poem My Last Duchess has been interpreted by a number of critics and scholars from different perspectives, though it still awaits an objective analysis. For this purpose, a stylistics analysis will be followed in the present study by exploring phonological in My Last Duchess (1993). The poem My Last Duchess

by Robert Browning portrays the patriarchal society in the Victorian age where Women were maltreated and male were considered superior to women. Moreover, this male supremacy is still observed in the whole world through which injustice is to be done with every women of the male dominating society. Besides, Women are still considered inferior to men, so for the tortured women, this study will give courage and strength to female. Furthermore, such male dominating society still exists in many parts of the world where women are still badly treated. This study aims to determine the cause of patriarchal society in the Victorian age and identify the factors or reasons of Male supremacy. Through literature the society can be indirectly formed, especially through objective analysis so that it could appeal to many. The present research is also a small contribution to the reformation of the society. Hence, it is precisely in this context that the researcher aim to examine the male dominance over women, and stylistic is the only platform that provides tools to explore such implicit meanings in a literary piece of work.

In this regard, stylistics can provide better tools for analysis. According to Geoffrey N. Leech (2014), stylistic defines the relation between language and art. It is a linguistic approach to literature. On the other hand, Leech (1968, 57) also claimed that foregrounding is basically to leave a normal way of use of language or break the socially accepted rules or norms.

Every literary work has a distinct style. To achieve a certain impact, authors have their own style of using words to describe their point of view or their surroundings, which they adhere to (Simpson, 2004). Stylistics is the study of various styles as expressed in the text. Stylistics is concerned with the constant shape of specific compositions, content, and fundamentals in a speech or writing. It is focused with the study of literary language or the study of certain writers' language habits and writing patterns. (ibid, 2004) Stylistic effects occur in literature through foregrounding at the phonological, semantic, levels. This study examines the effects that happen at the phonological level. Foregrounding can be realized in two forms either through parallelism or through deviation. Parallelism refers to some sorts of linguistic repetition. While deviation refers to encounter with something different what is expected. This study is more focused on the parallelism; in particular, the phonological of parallelism are examined in the selected poem.

Parallelism may be defined as the resemblance of characteristics in successive lines of poetry. It is important to note, however, that parallelism applies not only to poetic writings, but to any works in which language resources are deliberately used to generate beauty and transmit meaning (Leech & Short 2007)). Thus, parallelism may be seen in everyday communication, advertising, public speaking, such as political speeches, nursery songs, oral storytelling, and so on. Because parallel parts have a high pattern of recurrence, they capture people's attention and generate a valued impact. Thus, parallelism happens at several language levels, and one item may appear at multiple levels at the same moment. Because this work focuses on sound devices, greater emphasis is placed on parallelisms caused by phonological structure. The recurrence of sounds is referred to as phonological parallelism. Alliteration happens when the repeating

of a sound pattern occurs at the beginning of a word. Alliteration, assonance, and rhyme are common features in phonological parallelism.

Phonological Level

According to Khan and Jabeen (2015), this level of stylistic analysis is concerned with the study of a particular language's sound system, i.e. the formal norms of pronunciation. This level is concerned with how sound devices operate in texts to achieve stylistic significance. Alliteration, assonance, consonance, and phonaesthesia are examples of phonological devices. According to Alabi (2020), this level is the level of sounds and sound combinations. As a result, if one claims that several sounds are similar or dissimilar, one must show textual or linguistic proof.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Stylistics is a developing field of research and a subfield of applied linguistics that studies style in texts by focusing on linguistic features. Thus, studying a text's language through stylistics and parallelism is an important point for literary interpretation and meaning production through stylistic levels such as phonological and graphological features. Furthermore, a literary work is written in a language, and in order to fully comprehend the work, there must be a remedy for language in all of its aspects of phonology, that characterise the writer's idiolect. Thus, the current study investigates the linguistic phonological and graphological features of parallelism as a sound device used by English the English poet in his poems. As a result, the purpose of this paper is to provide a brief overview of parallelism as sound and its effects on the selected poem which describe what and how these sound devices communicate different meanings.

Robert Browning and My Last Duchess (1993)

Robert Browning was a major English poet, playwright of the Victorian age. Besides, Browning is also considered a romantic poet like a love poetry in a poem "Love among the Ruins" while Robert Browning was being motivated to be a poet because he aimed to be a poet in childhood and he never took other things seriously as a profession (Browning, 2007). My Last Duchess is the famous dramatic monologue of Robert Browning. In the poem, Alfonso, the duke also explains that his duchess cheek was joyful not only because of him but also the presence of Fra Pandolf. Furthermore, the duke is only one who can unveil the curtain of the painting and answer the question as no one else is allowed to go near the painting. (Dupras, 1996)

LITERATURE REVIEW

My Last Duchess (1993) by Robert Browning is a classic poem which has been a center of interest for many literary and linguistic scholars. The poem, according to Aboud (2020), contradicts Grice's maxims. He analyzed the material using textual analysis and saw it through the lens of Grice's dictum. Most of the time, the maxims of quantity and quality have been broken. Furthermore, Aboud claims that Robert Browning employed implicature to disclose a character's actual personality through speech act, as evidenced in the

poem *My Last Duchess*, where the Duke reveals himself through speech. In this poetry, the maxim of manner has also been broken. Aboud (2020) explored the use of implicature in the interpretation of a literary text with theatrical monologue, and they also drew our attention to inferences in literary text analysis. It has been concluded that Grice's maxims and violations of these maxims are extremely useful in Analyzing and interpreting dramatic monologues in literary works. On the other hand, Farajallah et al (2015) claim that women were treated as slaves in the Victorian era, as evidenced by the poem *My Last Duchess* s. Robert Browning wrote this poem. In this poem, they demonstrated the supremacy of Victorian males over women. Furthermore, this research focused on the superiority of Victorian males over Victorian women. Men and women had a master-slave relationship throughout the Victorian era. Except for hideous materialism and prestige, the Victorian era is devoid of feelings and love. In addition, the Duke's persona was depicted as a God in this poetry. He did not even lower himself to address his wife's shortcomings with her, which were not necessarily her mistakes but rather a simple innocence that she would smile at everyone and treat them gently, thus his wife's behaviour frustrated him and he violently killed her. Furthermore, this research demonstrates men's colonization of women and parental maltreatment of Victorian women. Finally, the Victorian era shows women as a powerful force. Salunke (2014) identifies a few forms of violence in the poem and draws our focus on the brutality because the duke has viciously slain his innocent wife. Furthermore, he perceives Marxist traces in the poem. A guiltless duchess was assassinated by her husband just to keep higher his class in society. He does not even talk over her mistakes with her because does not compromise that his class, prestige or status may be down. He also investigates the different forms of violence. Excessive attitude, infidelity, deceit, greediness, low desires are traced in *Last Duchess*. It shows various dimensions of violence, He also exposes the life of a duke in the renaissance period. As a result, multiple researchers examined this poem from various angles during their investigation. The foregrounding theory is thus applied to this poem. From this vantage point, it has received little attention previously. As a result, the primary goal of this research is to investigate phonological and graphological features in order to determine how they communicate various ideas to readers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is theoretical and analytical in nature, and it draws on library resources. As a result, a stylistic approach is used as a technique of analysis in this study to further examine the selected poem *The linguistic technique*, i.e. phonological, was employed in this study, and it was primarily centred on a stylistic analysis of sound devices employing parallelism structure as a tool for data analysis and discussion.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the study presents data analysis arising from phonological elements of foregrounding. Parallelism is the rhetorical structural pattern or technique that deals with the phonetic union that exists between two or more lexical elements in a text that have a paradigmatic or syntagmatic link, as explored in the review of relevant literature. It is employed frequently in the sense that the author uses phonological modes of expression to demonstrate

parallelism in the poetry. The following analysis clearly demonstrates the parallelism in the following lines of *My Last Duchess* (Browning, 1993). Phonology is the repetition of sounds, words, phrases and sentences in a text. Similarly, it mainly concentrates on the similar, repetitive and parallel phonemes.

Alliteration

The repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of a word is called Alliteration. The /P/ sound in the 3rd line of the poem is repeated twice in a words “piece” and “Pandolf’s” so it has caught my mind towards the word “power” because the men in the Victorian age considered themselves as “God figure” who was extremely powerful. They could do anything to their women likewise in this poem the duke of Ferrara brutally killed his wife because she was only friendly to everyone. It was also a very painful era for Victorian women. Furthermore, the /P/ sound also gives birth to another word “possessive” which senses that Victorian men were very possessive about their women likewise in the poem *My Last Duchess* (Browning, 1993), the duke was very possessive and sensitive about his Duchess because he even didn’t want his wife to be informal with anybody or to treat anyone kind otherwise she would have seen bad consequence of her behavior such as in this poem, the duchess was murdered by the duke.

The /S/ sound

The /S/ sound in the 5th line is repeated twice in the words “sit and said,” so it gives rise to the anagram “Sinful” which describes that the Victorian era can also be called a sinful era because injustice is to be done to every woman of this sinful era. In this connection, these words “summer”, “sike” and “sickness” have also been originated from the sound /S/. Therefore, Summer can also be compared with the Victorian era because the temperature is high in summer and everyone is feeling tired mentally as well as physically, however women are also feeling tired mentally and physically because of the rude and arrogant behavior of their husbands in the Victorian era. In summer, people want to get rid of the warmth due to the cruel temperature. Similarly, the women in the Victorian era also wish to fly from such a narrow-minded society which is completely a pessimistic era. The word “sike” means a small stream which gets dried in the summer due to the high temperature. Likewise in this era, the women get dried like a sike as a result of the savage attitude of the men. The word “psyche” also connects the two aforementioned ideas being originated from the sound/S/ in the way that this inhumane behavior of the males towards females is all because of their dominating psyche. It also gives birth to another word “sick” which means vomiting occurred due to the anxiety. Moreover, women were oppressed and suppressed in the Victorian era which caused anxiety among them so they wanted to flee far away from this world.

The sound/f/

The sound/f/ in the 6th line occurs twice in the words “fra” and “for” produces a word “forest” where there are no rules and regulations as such. Similarly,

everyone is trying to save their life from the big wild animal because they considered themselves as powerful as well as dominant over other weak ones. Same is the case in the Victorian era, where women were considered a weak gender that is why if they had committed unintentionally a little mistake, they would have been sentenced to death or punished very harshly. Moreover, the word “feather” has also been originated from the /f/sound which can be related to the Victorian era because women in this era might have wished that if they had feathers, they would have flown from such a suppressed era. /ð/ sound has been repeated nine times in the lines 1st, 11th, 12th, 26th, 28th, 39th, 45th, 46th and 48th. So this repeated occurrence of the /ð/ sound in this poem can be anagrammatized as “they” which is a pronoun. In this connection, the possessive case of they is “their” which shows possession or owning something so it can be related to the Victorian era because the men in this era were very possessive about their women. Moreover, 9 times repetition shows that the men of this era were more possessive as compared to other ages. It also produces a word “then” which denotes time and it is also repeated nine times in the poem so meaning can be inferred that the time of Victorian era was not a normal age for women because they were deprived of their rights as well as they were not given freedom of expression. They had been limited to their home so this inequality was detrimental to women growth. Furthermore, women were being mentally tortured so this era would always be remembered bad era for them. The /ð/ Sound can also suggest the word “than” which is used for the comparison between two different things so this era can also be compared with the modern era because there is a vast difference between both of the eras. After all, the Victorian age was famous for male dominant society while in modern times men have started to give rights to both males and females.

The repetition of the/t/

The repetition of the/t/ sound in the word “to” and “turn” in line 13th of this poem suggests the word “territory” means an area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler. So it was an age under the jurisdiction of Victorian men rule over the weakest gender “women”. In this connection, Victorian men had not been punished for their brutal crimes against their women, so they had no fear of being arrested in their hearts. Moreover, the word “tolerance” can also emerge from the “t” sound which can be related to this era displaying the tolerated women of the Victorian era. Similarly, it can also lead to the word “teach” means that the poet “Robert Browning” is trying to teach you not to treat the women badly in the modern age likewise they treated their women in the Victorian age. The word “too” can also be taken from the sound /t/ which shows the relationship between the incidents that happened in the previous ages is also happening in the present ages. So, we can also interpret the word “too” in a way that the poet portrayed the image of ages before the Victorian era that it also existed before the 18th century. Similarly, it too exists in the Victorian age. Thus, it will also exist in the modern age. So, the poet pointed out the three ages that are before the Victorian era, the Victorian era and the modern era. Moreover, the /t/ sound also leads to the phrase “turning point” which can be taken in the sense that this era may be the turning point for women emancipation.

The /h/ sound

The /h/ sound in the words “her” and “husband” is revised twice in line 14th of this poem which suggests the word “healless” conveying the idea about the heal-less wounds of women in the Victorian age given by the brutal men. Furthermore, such wound which cannot be healed is still given to women of present ages because such thought has been embedded in our mind to suppress the women for their entire life. In this connection, the pronoun “he” is also risen from the sound/h/ revealing the gender inequality in the Victorian era because that era was famous for male dominancy and “he” stands for male so here it is proven that this era was not for “she” (women). Similarly, the /h/ sound can also be opened to the word “horse” which is a symbol of power so it can be compared with the women of the Victorian era. After all, they were treated like a horse in the sense that they put a lot of burden on their women likewise the horse carrying something on their back because they were unaware of their strength as well as power. So, the women of this era were misused by their men. The word “herd” can also be resonated from the sound/h/ that means the large group of animals moving in a group receiving orders from a person. However, it can be compared to women of this era because they were also taking commands from the men and obeying them without any question like a herd. It also leads to another word “hurt”. So, the women of this era were hurt mentally, physically as well as psychologically.

The /k/sound

The /k/sound in a words “courtesy” and “cause” is observed twice in a line 20th of this poem giving rise to a words “crime” and “killed” can be taken in a way that the dreams of the women in the Victorian era were killed and would not be considered as a dreams but as a crime of dreaming in that society. Moreover, the female gender was even criticized if they gave birth to a female child. It is normally believed that a female would get killed at the time of her birth because she was not a male but a female. So, this illiteracy is still going in our modern era as well. In the present age, when a female gets pregnant, the people of the society pray for the birth of male, if somehow she gives a birth to a female then it is considered one of the biggest crime of her life and being criticized a lot. In this connection, the word “killing” attracts me towards the another most discussed topic called as “honour killing” can be correlated to the killing of not guilty women in the Victorian era in a sense that women are also killed in the present age but the reasons are not same such as an honour killing. So, Victorian men were looking for a reason to hurt their women but now in the present age, they are mostly killed in the name of an honour. Moreover, it is locally known as “karo Kari “in the Pakistan that means to be killed due to the extramarital relationship. However, it is about 1/5th of the world’s honour killing are committed in Pakistan. Similarly, it has been a Basic practice for thousands of years and still remains in practice in Pakistan today. A poem named Honour killing by Imtiaz Dharker was inspired by a murder in Lahore in 1999, when a woman was shot by her family. Furthermore a Pakistani show named “Baghi” was presented by an actress Saba kamar on the case of Qandil Baloch who was shot by her brother.

The /l/ sound

The two times detection of /l/ sound in words “looked” and “looks” of this poem portrayed the image of miserable life of women in the Victorian era because their life partners were not sincere to them. Similarly, they were not real to them too and had worn a mask of good husband which was treacherous for the society in 18th century. However, they had spent a restricted life, but in contrast to the above discussion, not all women but few of the present ages are living their life better than that of Victorian women and it has become possible only because of education. The sound/l/ also gives on to a words “Lover” and “locked” means that being a sincere lover to your beloved ,you must blindly believe on your beloved likewise in this poem My Last Duchess the duke of Ferrara was very possessive about his wife and he can't even see his wife with anybody else or treating anyone informally so in order to save your relationship, one must maintain the balance between the relationships because the men in the Victorian era were very arrogant as well as egoistic ,they even didn't discuss het mistakes with their beloved because it could hurt their status or class. Similarly, they treated their wives as slaves not as a wife because they were not living their life in their houses but being locked there like a criminals. In addition to this, there is another word “lavish” can be taken in a way that the men of 18th century was famous for their lavish life style like the Duke of Ferrara in this poem who gave his wife a lavish style but couldn't give her a mental piece or nurse her well so this was a great drawback in the Victorian era that still exists nowadays. So, don't give her a wealth or lavish life style but at least treat them as a special person of your life. Besides this, they should be respected in the society and keep them peaceful mentally as well as physically.

The sound/d/

The sound/d/ is mentioned twice in a words “dropping” and “daylight” in a line 26th of this poem revealing the Victorian age as a dark age for the women in the history of literature that shows the pessimistic face of this era. In addition to this, they were deprived of their brightness in their life because they didn't see anything in darkness wherever they went, they didn't get anything although they were not blind but they were being confined to show themselves as blind and deaf women. Thus, not to discern the world from different interest. That's why they play the roles of wives only. Besides, there are some women in the society who are still not allowed to see the world from different perspective. They are being limited to their home. The /d/ can also suggests another words “deaf” and “dumb” declaring the women of the Victorian era who were deaf and dumb mentally along with physically. However, According to Aristotle, the great philosopher pronounced us “deaf and dumb” because he felt that deaf and dumb people were incapable of being taught, of learning and of reasoned thinking so it can be a metaphor for the women in the Victorian age.

The /r/ sound

The /r/ sound in words “rode” and “round” occurs twice in a line 29th proclaiming the word “red” while red is a color that stands for revolution. So, the poet is trying to attract your mind towards the protest against male

dominancy in society because he has argued about this issue in his poetry likewise in this poem” My Last Duchess”. On one hand in his poetry “Robert Browning” has portrayed the Victorian era while on the other hand, he has suggested the ways as to how to finish the issue in society. Basically, he is of the opinion that such a suffered society had needed a strong revolution. The word “red” also stands for blood because the color of the blood is red. So, it is likely to say that in the Victorian era, a beloved was brutally murdered and their behavior became the big reason of their death so it could also be taken in a sense of bloodshed that the beloved could also become the cause of bloodshed. In addition to this, if we closely observe our society currently, then the bloodshed is very common due to the selfishness, rudeness and greed. Moreover, both fratricide and patricide are observed in our society.

The /r/ sound

The /r/ sound also guides the scholar towards the violence which is mostly based on racism. So, it also results in a harsh violence in our society. Similarly, it can be compared to the violence in Victorian era which was based on male arrogance and dominancy. It also leads the scholar to the word “reality” which shows that the men in the Victorian era were double faced. Moreover, their real face were not being known by the people of the Victorian era likewise in the poem, My Last Duchess, the duke of Ferrara is presented calm and sound but actually he is a devil in real life .The /b/ sound in words “blush” and “but” occurs twice in the line 31st of this poem through which the poet also “blamed” the women of the Victorian era in his poetry because the women of the Victorian era passed their smile to everyone and would treat everybody friendly. Moreover, they did not feel any difference among their husbands and ordinary man because they would give the same response to their husbands and a common man after receiving a gift from them. Thus, the poet also criticized the women in his poetry for their indifferent attitude towards their husbands that is why they got killed very brutally. Similarly, it can also be said that the behavior of the Victorian women is also against the then societal norms. Besides, such women too exist in our society because they want to be a friend of all and there is a proverb that “A friend of all is a friend of none “so they become dangerous for our society as such women may affect a marital relationship between others which can impact their children psychologically. As a result, their children are mentally tortured in their childhood which became a big reason of selecting something that is not right for them as well as for society.

The /n/ sound

The /n/ sound in words “know, not, nine and name” has been mentioned four times in a line 32nd and 33rd diverts my our attention to word “Nightingale” that is famous for its beautiful song singing only at night. So, it leads us towards another idea that the poet is trying to tell us about the situation of Victorian era that need an optimistic voice like a nightingale. Similarly, it has vivid representation and can also symbolize darkness because nightingale sings only at night and there is everywhere darkness at night. So, it can also be related to the darkness in Victorian era. Moreover, to have dreams of nightingale also symbolizes hope, beauty, melody, or joy. In addition, it can be said that the poet

presents both the positive and negative aspects of the Victorian era through nightingale. Beside, the women in the present age also face a lot of problems in their life but the reasons are different. Some women are childless while other single girls suffer from inferiority complex because of their color, race or ethnicity. So they are also in need of a lady like Florence Nightingale who can give them a light of hope or heal their wounds given to them by a society.

The /m/ sound

The /m/ sound in words "me" and "miss" occurs twice in a line 38th of this poem which suggests "Madness" targeting the character of the duke in My Last Duchess of the Victorian era. In addition, the duke was proven completely mad when he was caught very happy whenever he saw his Duchess painting because he could control the duchess painted on the wall. On the other hand, such psychotic or mad characters are also observed in our society of the present age.

The /d/ sound

The /d/ sound in a words "dowry" and "disallowed" has been seen in line 51 of the poem which Suggests "Do" thereby giving the meaning that men of the present age still do the discrimination between women and men as well as white and black. So, the /d/ sound repeated by the poet to foreground the masculinity or to capture the reader attention towards the still ongoing controversy of paternalism that this too happens and done by men.

CONCLUSION

The linguistic phonological devices give rise to different ideas when combined together. The /P/ sound gives rise to another word, "possessive," implying that Victorian men were extremely possessive of their women. The /S/ sound in "Sinful" and additional s in "summer," "sike," and "sickness" describe the men's savage attitude. The /k/ sound in the words "courtesy" and "cause," can be interpreted to mean that the dreams of Victorian-era women were killed. In line 14th, the /h/ sound suggests the word "healless," conveying the idea of women's heal-less wounds. The sound/l/ also gives rise to the words "Lover" and "locked," which imply that in order to be a true lover to one's beloved, one must blindly believe in one's beloved, as in this poem. The Duke's previous duke, the Duke of Ferrara, was very possessive of his wife and had little regard for her affections. The /r/ sound in the words "rode" and "round" proclaims the word "red," and red is a colour associated with revolution. Conditionality is suggested by the /b/ sounds in 'blush' and 'but'. The /n/ sound leads the reader to the nightingale's optimistic voice. The /m/ sound in the words "me" and "miss" suggests "Madness," a Victorian-era character in My Last Duchess suggests that modern men still discriminate against women and men, as well as white and black people. The /d/ sound is found in the word "dowry" and 'disallowed'. Furthermore, the study examined that men were always looking for power, prestige, or status, whereas women were always looking for wealthy and valuable things. So, after examining each sentence with an exclamation mark, it has been concluded that by emphasizing and expressing strong feelings about the big issue of materialism of the era, the poem only suggests unmasking the materialistic approach of Victorian men and women, which is why it has only

been repeated three times in the poem. Inverted commas underscore the male persona, such as Duke. Furthermore, the study reveals that the poem can be studied from the perspective of critical discourse analysis because it contains a lot of information about how patriarchy gripped the society at the time.

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