

THE USE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL-GENERATIVE GRAMMAR IN POETRY APPRECIATION: A CASE OF STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper proposes an approach to understanding and appreciation of literature called stylistics. Stylistics is an analysis of verbal texts by way of investigating their language structure, thus, resulting in a more objective interpretation. Specifically, the poem analyzed in this paper was explicated via transformational-generative grammar espoused by Noam Chomsky. Meanings from the poem were unraveled by discovering the deep structure generated by the phrase-structure rules. This paper has shown how the teacher's knowledge on deep structures can be extended to students so as to provide them tools in understanding complex constructions and deviations in poetry; and use this knowledge to unravel meanings in their readings even outside literature classes. A teacher who is linguistically knowledgeable will be in a better position to devise sound pedagogic approaches that help leaning process more fruitful.

Keywords: stylistics, transformational-generative grammar, phrase-structure rules, teaching literature

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1.0 Introduction

Among many others, the major role of English teachers is to promote students' understanding and appreciation of literature. In Philippine setting, where English is used as a second language, teachers are confronted with difficulties performing this role. Most likely, they will be confronted with seemingly basic but daunting problems, such as, the students' lack of ability to comprehend even simple sentence constructions and to determine meanings underlying them. In a classroom discussion of literary pieces, students are often perplexed by the authors' unconventional use of grammar. Poets, for instance, use sentence fragments, inversions, and omissions of words and punctuations. As a result, students often fail to grasp the grammatical relationships of the parts of a poem or a short story. If education means leading the students out of the realms of unarticulated lives, then the job of the teachers is to provide the students tools in attacking these complexities in literary pieces so as not to deprive them the chance to gain insights and experience they can encounter with literature.

This paper hopes to present an approach to teaching literary pieces using transformational-generative grammar—a description of language proposed by Noam Chomsky. Major concepts of language presented by the framework shall support this approach of teaching. The paper, however, does not claim to be suitable for teachers whose students have more or less advanced level in terms of reading comprehension. The method to be presented is believed to be most acceptable to those whose students have yet to tackle some basic problems in identifying the chunks of ideas that make up the whole before proceeding to identifying the relationships of these ideas to one another.

Stylistic analysis can be done in different linguistic

levels: phonetic, phonological, lexical, graphological, lexical, and grammatical (Aslam, et.al 1-2). In this paper, the analysis is on the grammatical level as both the syntactic and morphological structures of the poem were explored. Patterns and sequences of the words, phrases and clauses were investigated guided by the concepts of Transformational-Generative Grammar.

A number of studies have been conducted focusing on the stylistic analysis of poems. There are studies on Robert Frost's "Bereft" (Aslam, et al. 2014) and "Taken" (Batool, et al. 2014), on W.H. Auden's "O Where Are You Going" (Iqbal, et al. 2014), and on Thomas Hardy's "The Ruined Maid" (Costa), to name a few. However, there is a dearth of analysis on Shelley's works, especially on his famous piece, "Ozymandias".

The literary piece subjected to stylistic in this paper is "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley. It is observed that this piece is often included among the most used texts in literature classes in the Philippines. With the national elections and other political issues, the theme of power has become even more relevant in this time and age.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

An American linguist, Noam Chomsky, has proposed an approach to language description known as transformational-generative grammar. The grammar contains three components: phrase-structure rules, transformational rules, and morphophonemic rules. Each of these rules consists of a set of rules operating upon a certain "input" to yield a certain "output." The phrase-structure rules are formulaic expressions that show the possible sequence of grammatical elements into phrasal units. The finite number of formulaic

a	S	->	NP VP
b	VP	->	V(NP) (PP)
c	NP	->	(Det) N
d	PP	->	P NP

a	Meena dances
b	Sophia reads a novel
c	The dog hid in the barn
d	The girl sends letter to her aunt

a	[s [NP[N Meena]] [VP[v dances]]]
b	[s [NP[N Sophia]] [VP[v reads][NP[Det a][N novel]]]]
c	[s [NP[Det the][N dog]] [VP[v hid] [PP[p in [NP[Det the][N barn]]]]]
d	[s [NP[Det the][N girl]] [VP[v sends] [NP[N letter]] [PP[p to][NP[Det her] [N aunt]]]]]

expressions can generate a finite number of sentences. The transformational rules relate sentence types to each other, as active to passive, account for operations like number agreement and tense assignment, and generate complex sentences. The morphophonemic rules prescribe the forms and sounds required for the complete utterance.

These rules are highly abstract. However, the teachers can make use of the insights provided by the rules. They may also be of great interest to students since they can provide deep insights into language structure and provide in greater detail the basic structure of English sentences- the primary unit of understanding.

The outline of the phrase-structure rules which illustrate the internal structure of a phrase and which intend to generate the deep structure of this group of words is presented in the next page.

A transformational grammar is one which incorporates two aspects of syntactic description, a surface structure and a more abstract deep structure. According to Chomsky (1957), in any syntactic description, the observable syntactic structure of sentences, the surface structure should be related to a more abstract deep structure. Deep structure relates to meanings; surface structure relates to the order of elements. The positional level of representation is a representation of surface structure; the semantic level is a representation of the deep structure. The deep structure contains all information necessary to the semantic interpretation (Fowler, 1971) and is realized as the surface structure through transformations. The job transformations do consists of repositioning or permuting elements. They also delete and insert elements.

In this paper, the focus is on finding the deep structure of the sentences via the kernel sentences. A kernel sentence is a sentence produced by the phrase-structure rules and the obligatory (not optional) transformations to a string of words. It may be a declarative sentence in the active voice. Every sentence of the language will either belong to the kernel or will be derived from the strings underlying one or more kernel sentences through a sequence of one or more transformation (Chomsky,

45). Chomsky proposes that a description of a language must have the means to discuss the relation between syntax and semantics and points out that in this respect kernel sentences have a privileged part to play since, if kernel sentences are in some sense 'basic' sentences, an understanding of how they are understood is the key to understanding how sentences in general are understood (Malmkjaer, 1996,488). Take for example the following sentences:

- (1) The black cat which was bumped by the new car died yesterday.
- (2) The black cat which died yesterday was bumped by the new card.
- (3) The new car bumped the black cat which died yesterday.
- (4) It was the new car which bumped the black cat that died yesterday.

All these four strings of words which have different surface structures are derived from the combination of the same kernel sentences below which may represent the deep structure.

- (1) The cat was black.
- (2) The car bumped the cat.
- (3) The car was new.
- (4) The cat died yesterday.

A grouping of sentences with reference to their basic deep structure can provide the students with practice in looking beyond the superficial differences and in focusing on the essential propositional content of a sentence and the way it contributes to the main theme of the passage of which it forms a part. The point about deep structure representation is that they reveal underlying meaning and detach it from any particular surface structure manifestation. They enable readers to find relationships among parts of the sentences (Allen and Widdowson, 1975).

It must also be emphasized to students that although a sentence is a sequence of formatives, these formatives are not joined to another in the sequence like the links of a chain. The sentence is an ordered series of words in which small units are progressively built up

into a large on regular structural principles. The phrase structure or the constituent structure of a sentence is concerned with the units into which the words in a sentence are grouped, which are the constituents, and their hierarchical organization.

The concepts presented above would be very helpful in understanding literary works especially poetry which employs deviations such as transpositions and deletions of units of sentences and unconventional lineation. These styles of language use in literature will surely baffle students who are not equipped to locate missing units and connect scattered ideas to form a whole, and may deprive them of the chance to understand and appreciate literature.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Here is the poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley [Note: the lines have been numbered for reference of discussion.]

Ozymandias

- (1) I met a traveler from an antique land,
- (2) Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs stone
- (3) Stand in the desert ... Near them, on the sand,
- (4) Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
- (5) And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
- (6) Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
- (7) Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
- (8) The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
- (9) And on the pedestal these words appear:
- (10) "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
- (11) Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
- (12) Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
- (13) Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
- (14) The lone and level sands stretch far away.

English teachers have approached this poem in several ways. What this paper proposes to do here is to

I met a traveler.	[T ₀ + N + O + Past + V _t + T + N + O]
The traveler is from a land.	[T _d + N + O + present + be + prep + T _i + N + O]
The land is antique.	[T _d + N + O + present + be + Adj.]
<i>Lines 2-4</i>	
The traveler said it.	[T ₀ + N + O + Past + V _t + pron]
Legs stand in the desert.	[T ₀ + N + S + Present + V _i + prep + T _d + N + O]
The legs are vast.	[T _d + N + S + present + be + Adj.]
The legs are trunkless.	[T _d + N + S + present + be + Adj.]
The legs are two.	[T _d + N + S + present + be + Adj.]
A stone makes up the legs.	[T _i + N + O + present + V _t + part. + T _d + N + S]
A visage lies near the legs.	[T _i + N + O + present + V _i + prep + T _d + N + S]
A visage is on the sand.	[T _i + N + O + present + be + prep + T _d + N + O]
A visage is shattered.	[T _i + N + O + present + be + Adj.]
A visage is sunk.	[T _i + N + O + present + be + Adj.]

present an approach to teach this poem using language as the basis for initial understanding. The aim of this method is to give the students tools to discover meanings in the poem themselves and not be dependent on the teacher. This self-discovery may enhance their appreciation of literature. A teacher may start with reading the poem aloud to the class. The proper intonation and juncture may already give the students the groupings of ideas. He/she may now proceed to asking the students to write down the kernel sentences and group these sentences based on the lines. With the knowledge on phrase-structure rules and kernel sentences, and the teacher's guidance, students may be able to yield the following:

[Note: Samples of the phrase structures are indicated to show where the kernel sentences representing the deep structure are derived and show that they have not undergone optional transformations.]

These kernel sentences based on the surface structure of lines 1-4 can help make clear to students the image of a statue whose trunk and legs are separated and scattered in the desert. The physical description and location of the statue become even more vivid. The persona in the poem introduces in this part the traveler he met who is from an antique land where the visage and the legs also lie.

Lines 4-5

A visage has a frown.

A visage has a lip.

The lip is wrinkled.

A visage has a sneer of command.

The command is cold.

The expressions on the face of the statue are described. These lines start giving an idea to students the feelings portrayed by the face of the statue and may prompt them to find out the reasons why the visage bears those feelings on its expressions. The 'wrinkled lip' suggests old age, and therefore, transience of life. The 'frown' and 'sneer of cold command' on the face of the statue convey arrogance and lack of compassion.

Lines 6-8

They tell it.

The sculptor read well the passions.

The passions survive the hand.

The passions survive the heart.

The passions are stamped on the things.

The things are lifeless.

The hand mocked them.

The heart fed them.

This is most likely the part of the poem where the students, without the aid of kernel sentences, would even have more difficulty identifying which parts of the three lines go together to form ideas. These questions may arise: What is the antecedent of the pronoun they? Looking at the surface structure, they must refer to the frown, the lip, and the sneer. If this is so, what do the

frown, the lip, and the sneer tell? They tell or convey the idea that the sculptor who carved the visage shows well the "passions". These passions as manifested by the frown, the wrinkled lip and the cold command suggest the arrogance and pride of the subject of the visage. Finally, the transitive verb survive take hand and heart as its subjects. The passions stamped on the visage survive or outlive both the hand of the sculptor who mocked the king's arrogance and lack of compassion by depicting them on the statue, and the heart of the king which feeds these passions.

Lines 9-10.

The words appear on the pedestal.

These are the words.

My name is Ozymandias.

I am king of kings.

You look on my works.

You are Mighty.

You are despair.

The words that appear on the pedestal reinforce the possible initial interpretation of the students on the nature of the king – his being arrogant and proud, and lacking compassion to his people whom he calls 'despair'. The word 'Mighty', which starts with a capital letter, calls attention from the readers. Can this possibly refer to the "Almighty" or Higher Being whom he invokes or brags his works to so as calling himself "the king of kings", the one highest above everyone or everything else?

Line 12 - 14

Nothing beside remains.

The wreck is colossal.

The wreck is decaying.

The sands are lone.

The sands are level.

The sands are boundless.

The sands are bare.

The sands stretch far away round the wreck.

The works the king was boasting about are nowhere to be found. They did not survive the sands of time. The poem ends with an image of bare sands stretching far away. The wreck, though colossal, is shattered. Only the kings 'visage' and 'trunkless legs', which are in their ruins, remain amidst nothingness.

After this initial process of unlocking meanings of the surface structures, the teacher can proceed now to elicit the insights or viewpoints of the students and share their significant experiences in relation to the poem. The teacher serves as the facilitator in this approach, the students the active participants

4.0 Conclusion

This paper has tried so far to show an outline of a stylistic description and how a teacher's knowledge on deep structures can be extended to students so as to provide them tools in understanding complex constructions and

deviations in poetry; and use this knowledge to unravel meanings in their readings outside literature. A teacher who is linguistically knowledgeable will be in a better position to devise sound pedagogic approaches that help learning process more fruitful and meaningful.

The analysis above has also shown the viability of a linguistic analysis of literary pieces as an alternative or a complementary method. In uncovering layers of meanings usually elusive in the study of poetry, a stylistic analysis employing transformational-generative grammar can provide a systematic and objective analysis aimed at a better understanding, if not appreciation, of literature.

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