

Lexical Repetition In Alice Walker's Novel 'The Color Purple'

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Abstract:

The current research looks at the use of lexical repetition in Alice Walker's novel "The Color Purple." It focuses on the recurrence of colours and the expressive connotations they imply. It discusses how the writer might represent the protagonist's situation, viewpoints, and feelings through the use and repetition of specific colours.

التكرار المعجمي في رواية "اللون الأرجواني" للكاتبة اليس ولكر

ملخص البحث:

يبحث البحث الحالي في استعمال التكرار المعجمي في رواية "اللون الأرجواني" للكاتبة اليس ولكر. حيث يركز على تكرار الألوان والدلالات التعبيرية التي تنطوي عليها وكيف يمكن للكاتب أن يمثل موقف بطل الرواية ووجهات نظره ومشاعره من خلال استخدام وتكرار ألوان معينة.

1. Introduction

The repetition of the same words, phrases, or sentences in daily life may be considered negative and boring (Tannen, 2007:63). Repetition, on the other hand, is an important stylistic device in fiction, where it serves a variety of literary goals. Repetition has been extensively researched from the standpoints of linguistics and literary studies.

Lexical repetition, or recurrence, is one type of repetition that serves two major coherent functions: textual and rhetorical. In terms of textual function, the device is used to connect various parts of a text by the unmarked recurrence of particular components at the text's very surface. In terms of rhetorical function, lexical repetition refers to the expressive meaning that a distinct recurring pattern indicates through a foregrounded rhetorical image.

2. Repetition

Short (1996:365) investigates the relevance of repetition in its many forms as a stylistic storytelling technique that serves as "an alternative conceptual link." In other words, it is significant as a method of engaging the reader with the text and prompting him/her to reflect on what is repeated for intellectual appreciation. Repetition is strongly connected to two significant stylistic strategies in the subject of stylistics: "foregrounding" and "parallelism." Foregrounding is the emphasis placed on a certain language phenomenon, such as an action or a trait that is central to the lexical or syntactical qualities of the parts that are foregroundingly repeated (Carter, 1982:239).

Chapman (1973:48) describes the connection between foregrounding and deviation as "prominence that is motivated." While "deviation," the breaking of linguistic norms, is the major means of foregrounding, parallelism is another significant means of foregrounding, despite the fact that parallelism represents the repetition of linguistic regularities rather than irregularities.

Short (1996:11;13-14) discusses the psychological effect of deviant styles which he terms as 'foregrounding'. He states that "[A]nother obvious method of foregrounding is repetition", which he calls a "parallelism rule." It is another way of exerting psychological effects on the reader:" In addition to their perceptual prominence, what is interesting about parallel structures is that they invite the reader to search for the many connections between parallel structures. Consequently, repetition is not necessarily a sign of artistic failure or creative weakness. Rather, it could be a successful stylistic narrative device. Repetition might be of individual words, phrases, or sentences. Nonetheless, repetition could be of larger lexical units and patterns of discourse and, with the aid of parallelism, of syntactical structures. (Chapman, 1973:52).

Repetition, according to Koch (1983:48), is a device of persuasion. It is used to create linguistic cohesion of the texts to increase the rhetorical effect. Writers use synonymous words and phrases, syntactically parallel structures, paraphrase, reverse paraphrase and repetition of morphological roots for persuasive and artistic purposes. Repetition serves intensification, humor, and control in conversation, expression of anger/pleasure/displeasure, cohesion/coherence, emphatic, evaluative and thematic functions (Shepherd, 990:632).

3. Types of Repetition

One of the different types of repetition is the lexical repetition. It is used for intensifying, emphatic, imitation and purposive reasons. It covers repetition of one word only and can be classified under four categories: lexical repetition of addition where the same lexical item is repeated by adding an intensifier or a modifier; lexical repetition of substitution which falls into two subdivisions: word substitute and lexical repetition of a syntactic unit. In some cases, a pronoun which is in anaphoric relationship is used with a lexical item previously used in the sentence context (word-substitute); in others, a lexical item which refers back to a syntactic unit is used (lexical repetition of a syntactic unit) (Persson, 1974:8).

Other types of repetition are the syntactic repetition and the thematic (discoursal) repetition. The former has several types such as the exact repetition of a syntactic unit in the form of a substitute and syntactically parallel constructions. It covers repetition of two or more words or word combinations. Prepositional phrases fall into this type (Persson, 1974:12). The latter is composed of paraphrase, repetition with variation, reverse paraphrase and rewording. It occurs on all levels of discourse and in different forms (Koch, 1983:51). Furthermore, it is a cohesive device which links new utterances to previous ones in oral discourse and in literature (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:106).

4. Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'

Alice Walker publishes her most famous novel, 'The Color Purple', in 1982. For this novel, she wins the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award. The novel shows the struggle of several black women in rural Georgia in the first half of the twentieth century. Upon its publication, it arises a storm of controversy. It initiates debates about black culture representation in that a number of male African critics complain that the novel acknowledges old racist stereotypes about pathology in black communities and of black men in particular. Besides, Walker has been criticised for focusing heavily on sexism at the expense of addressing notions of racism in America. However; the novel has its supporters especially among black women and others who praise the novel as a feminist fable. The intensive disputes surrounding 'The Color Purple' are an indication to the resounding effects the work has on cultural and racial discourse in the United States.

'The Color Purple' is a story told through the eyes of Celie, a black woman in the south. In the course of her story, Celie meets a number of other black women who shape her life: Nettie, Celie's sister, who becomes a missionary teacher in Africa; Shung Avery, the Blues singer whom her husband Mr. _____ is in love with and who becomes Celie's salvation; Sofia, the wrong-willed daughter-in-law whose strength and courage inspire Celie; and Squeak, who goes through awakenings of her own. Throughout the story, Celie is the center of this community of women, the one who knows how to survive.

Celie, as a black woman of her time, is poor and uneducated. She lives in a world of racism, sexism, and abuse. After being raped and abused by the man who is believed to be her father at the age of 14, Celie is forced into marriage. Her children are taken away to 'be with god', her sister escapes from the pain and torment and runs away to the home of a pastor. Celie has no one to turn to; no one except God. Hence, Celie writes letters to God in which she tells about her life; her role as daughter, wife, sister, and mother. Through these letters, she writes her diary confessing and letting out the anger and emotion which she is not allowed to express in normal everyday life. But, Celie is soon fascinated by Shung Avery, who comes to stay with her due to her poor health. Shung is the only person to show any affection to Celie, and stays in their house a little longer to protect her from her violent husband.

After decades of not hearing or receiving letters from her sister who promises her to write her, Celie assumes Nettie is dead. But, with the aid of Shung, they soon discover that Mr. _____ has hidden the letters that Nettie has sent to Celie. The letters explain how Nettie has travelled to Africa with another family as their maid, and she soon finds out that the two children that she takes care of are Celie's children and finds out that the man, who she believes to be her father, is not. Celie, as an independent woman now, starts a sewing business and discovers that Nettie plans to return back to America with the children and her husband. Once reunited at old age, Celie and Nettie are truly happy and live in harmony with the others they love around them.

5. Analysis and Discussion of Results

This part of the paper focuses on first making a statistical analysis of the most frequent colours in the novel under scrutiny. Also, it presents the dispersion of colours along the novel and provide reasonable justifications and interpretations for the frequency of a certain colour in this epistolary novel.

To begin with, it is seen that the colours 'white' and 'black' are the most recurring ones:

As shown in Table (1), the word 'white' comes in the first place; it is used 142 times in the novel. The other colour which also dominates a great deal of the novel is 'black' in that it occurs 62 times. Based on the statistics shown in the previous table, the focus of the analysis will be mainly on the significant repetitions of the two high-frequency colours 'white' and 'black', with a little concentration on the other colours, when necessary.

The two colours, black and white, are the most frequent colours in the novel. This high frequency is not arbitrary. Conversely, the use of these two colours is closely and deeply related to the theme of the novel. If the 62 occurrences of 'black' are traced all over the novel, it is found that the majority of these are used in contexts related to the description of people or skin. More specifically, the word 'black' is used 51 times with reference to people and skin. The other 11 uses of 'black' are associated with different things. The word is used 5 times with 'folks', 4 with 'dress', 1 with 'bible', and 1 with 'chocolate'.

Table (2) Collocates of the Word 'Black' in 'The Color Purple'

Collocates of the Word 'Black'	No. of Occurrences
People and skin	51
Folks	5
Dress	4
Bible	1
Chocolate	1
Total	62

The use of the colour 'black', with such a high frequency with people and skin, is not unusual or unexpected, simply because the novel centres its story on a black female, suffering of black people, rape and racism. In the following extracts, the way black people are looked at is explained:

He be gone for days. Then she start having babies. And she young and pretty. Not so pretty, say Carrie, looking in the looking glass. Just that head of hair. She too black. Well, brother must like black. Shug Avery black as my shoe. Shug Avery, Shug Avery, Carrie say. I'm sick of her. Somebody say she going round trying to sing. Umph, what she got to sing about. (The Color Purple)

He scared. Me and him out in the field all day. Us sweat, chopping and plowing. I'm roasted coffee bean color now. He black as the inside of a chimney. (The Color Purple)

And Celie, there is something magical about it. Because the black is so black the eye is simply dazzled, and then there is the shining that seems to come, really, from moonlight, it is so luminous, but their skin glows even in the sun. (The Color Purple)

They say everybody before Adam was black. Then one day some woman they just right away ill, come out with this colorless baby. They thought at first it was something she ate. But then another one had one and also the women start to have twins. So the people start to put the white babies and the twins to death. (The Color Purple)

As the above extracts indicate, black women, in particular, are under patriarchal domination. The novel also tells that black women's relationships with their men are characterized by the men sexiest viewpoints. Black men share the view that a married woman has to give up her free will because once a woman becomes a wife, she is 'owned'. Thus, black men demand their wives' obedience by inflicting violence and abuse on them.

In addition, it has been found that about 66% of the occurrences of the colour 'black' are within the first half of the novel. This confirms to the events and the picture Alice Walker gives in this half. The black colour is said to express darkness, sorrow, and pessimism. This is natural from the very beginning of the story, 'The Color Purple' intensely explores black women's victimization of black men's violence. Celie is being raped by her stepfather at the age of fourteen. Her stepfather is violent with her mother. For him, sex is the most important part of having a relationship. And when her mother refuses to have sex with him, he turns to her and repeatedly rapes her. Then Celie is given away to a man she does not love. While living with him, she has to take care of his children from another wife and has to endure his beatings. During this time in the South, spousal abuse is common, even tolerated, and thought to be right by some. So, this dark and painful picture is expressed by Walker through an intensive use of 'black'. In western world, black is the colour associated with mourning, violence and evil. And this interprets Walker's intensive use of this colour in the early parts of the novel.

Turning to the discussion of the colour 'white', the analysis, as shown in Table (1), uncovers that this colour is used 142 times. This, on the surface, should be surprising as the novel revolves about the life of a black lady and the suffering of black people in the south. However, a careful analysis would reveal that the white colour is used significantly and symbolically.

The white colour symbolizes, in western culture, purity, marriage, and peace. In African culture from where Walker originally came, white symbolizes goodness. In this sense, it becomes clear why the white colour is more frequent than the black as the events go on.

Through the examination of the 142 occurrences of the white colour in the novel, it is found that the word 'white' is used 109 times with reference to people and skin, 13 to folks, 10 to dress, 2 to bible, 2 to eyes, 3 to building, 1 to hair, and 2 to thing, as shown in Table 3:

Table (3) Collocates of the Word 'White' in 'The Color Purple'

Collocates of the Word 'White'	No. of Occurrences
People and skin	109
Folks	13
Dress	10
Bible	2
Eye	2
Building	3
Hair	1
Thing	2
Total	142

In the following extracts,

She busy looking at a magazine. White women in it laughing, holding they beads out on one finger, dancing on top of motocars. Jumping into fountains. She flip the pages. Look dissatisfied.(The Color Purple)

Tell him you just think justice ought to be done, yourself. But make sure he know you living with Sofia husband, say Shug. Make sure you git in the part bout being happy where she at, worse thing could happen to her is to be some white lady maid.(The Color Purple)

Okay, I say. He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted. Blue eyes? she ast. Sort of bluish-gray. Cool. Big though. White lashes, I say. She laugh. Why you laugh? I ast. I don't think it so funny. What you expect him to look like, Mr. ??? That wouldn't be no improvement, she say. Then she tell me this old white man is the same God she used to see when she prayed. If you wait to find God in church, Celie, she say, that's who is bound to show up, cause that's where he live. (The Color Purple)

Sometime he drive me home in his car. He still live in the same little house. He been there so long, it look just like him. Two straight chairs always on the porch, turned against the wall. Porch railings with flower cans on them. He keep it painted now though. Fresh and white. And guess what he collect just cause he like them? He collect shells. All kinds of shells. Tarrapin, snail and all kinds of shells from the sea. Matter of fact, that's how he got me up to the house again. He was telling Sofia bout some new shell he had that made a loud sea sound when you put it to your ear. (The Color Purple)

The analysis shows that the majority of the occurrences of the white colour are in the second half of the novel. This supports the idea that, as the story progresses, Celie becomes more optimistic, self-confident, and liberated. More clearly, Celie, through the story, meets other black women who help her contribute to her discovery of selfhood. She survives all difficulties through her strong relationship with the other black women in her extended family; Shung Avery, Nettie, Sofia and Squeak. Each of them, in one way or another, gives Celie an inspiration and moral support to be successfully transformed from a frightened young girl to a successful business woman at the end.

In the beginning of the novel, darker colours like brown, maroon and blue are common. They demonstrate Celie's inability to make her own decisions. When shopping for fabric, Celie only has the choices of dull colours, as in:

She go with me in the store. I think what color Shug Avery would wear. She like a queen to me so I say to Kate, Something purple, maybe little red in it too. But us look an look and no purple. Plenty red but she say, Naw, he won't want to pay for red. Too happy lookin. We got choice of brown, maroon or navy blue.(The Color Purple)

The three colours, brown, maroon and blue, are all darker. They represent Celie's feelings of despair because of her lack of freedom. But, near the end, theses colours are far less used since Celie gains her independence and freedom from suppression. This is represented by the use of the bright colours namely red and purple. Celie's new room portrays her new life, as in:

Well, here it is, I say, standing in the door. Everything in my room purple and red cept the floor, that painted bright yellow. She go right to the little purple frog perch on my mantelpiece. (The Color Purple)

Having her own room, Celie proves her independence. Decorated with red and purple, she possesses her own house and gets anything she likes to adorn her room. Celie's state or situation is reflected in the colours. That is, the changing of colors indicates that she becomes optimistic towards life. The two bright colours, red and

purple, surround her now. In the western, 'purple' symbolizes elegance, authority and dignity. At the beginning of the story, Celie does not wear purple clothes, which suggests that she has not had independence and self-identity. With Shug's help, Celie begins to make a living by herself. Additionally, having 'The Color Purple' as the title, Walker aims at establishing the social status of black women and encourages them to gain the dignity for purple symbolizes black women's independence and dignity. On the other hand, the colour 'red' comes in third position after 'white' and 'black' (20 occurrences). Walker's red symbolizes boldness, love and passion. Shug dresses in red, as in:

They soft dark blue jersey with teeny patches of red.(The Color Purple)

*And she dress to kill. She got on a red wool dress and chestful of black beads.
(The Color Purple)*

*....looking at Shug's bright black skin in her tight red dress, her feet in little
sassy red shoes. (The Color Purple)*

6. Conclusions

In Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple', the protagonist, Celie, struggles with feelings of worthlessness and inability to gain independence. Celie's life is portrayed through the use and the repetition of certain colours Waker uses. In the beginning of the novel, Walker overuses colours like white, black, blue, and brown. They symbolize purity, marriage, peace, goodness, rape and racism. Hence, when feeling trapped, Celie is surrounded by these dull colours. In the end, her life is full of colours like purple and red because she has achieved what she struggles to gain, that is, freedom and complete independence of the people who had caused much harm. The colour shifting indicates the progression from having no freedom to gaining complete independence.

Walker highlights the progression of Celie's life from trapped under the pressure of men to a self-ruled life when she was surrounded by dark colours. At the very end of the novel, Celie is completely independent, and bright colours encircle her. In so doing, Walker expresses feelings and emotions in every situation the protagonist passes through.

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