



A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Verses from the Poems of Safia El Hillo

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducts stylistic examination of lines from Safia Elhillo's poems "Yasmeen" and "How to Say." I unpack Elhillo's specific choices in language, image, and structure in this study because these all contribute to Elhillo's complex explorations of identity, language, and displacement. The present study utilizes principles of style to perform a neutral analysis of language within literary texts in an effort to shed light on the complex interplay between form and content in Elhillo's work. This analysis demonstrates her effective use of poetry in depicting struggles of bicultural identity and struggles of language negotiation. The findings of this study show Elhillo's important role in contemporary poetry and her distinctive contribution to the field of literature.

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تحليل أسلوبى لأبيات مختاره من قصائد صافية الحلو

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المستخلص

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً أسلوبياً لأبيات مختارة من قصيدتي صافية الحلو "ياسمين" و"كيف أقول". تحلل هذه الدراسة مختارات صافية الحلو اللغوية الفريدة، وصورها الشعرية، ومنهجياتها البنوية، مؤكدة أهميتها في بحثها الدقيق عن الهوية واللغة والنزوح. وتوظف هذه الدراسة المبادئ الأسلوبية لإجراء تحليل محايد للغة في النصوص الأدبية، سعياً إلى توضيح العلاقة المعقدة بين الشكل والمضمون في أعمالها. ويظهر التحليل براعتها في استخدام الشعر لإظهار صعوبة الهوية ثنائية الثقافة وصعوبة التعامل مع اللغة. كما تُلقى هذه الدراسة الضوء على مكانة صافية الحلو المهمة في الشعر الحديث وإسهاماتها الفريدة في المجال الأدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: صافية الحلو، تحليل أسلوبى، شعر، هوية، لغة، نزوح، "ياسمين"، "كيف أقول"

1.Introduction

Safia Elhillo is a celebrated Sudanese-American poet whose work engages in a profound manner with themes of language, identity and displacement. Elhillo, who is from Rockville, Maryland, and raised in a bicultural household, frequently writes about the discomfort of being situated within two cultures, and the ways in which colonialism and migration have shaped both. The poems show significant emotional frankness, linguistic cleverness, and a blending of more traditional poetry with contemporary slang. Stylistics is derived from style. In other words, it is a field of linguistics that defines different styles and variations in language (Hammadi,2022). Leech and Short characterize stylistics as "the linguistic study of style" (Leech and Short,1981, p.89). Widdowson elucidates that stylistics is "the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation" (Widdowson, 1975, p.45), and serves as a bridge between literary criticism and linguistics

There are numerous perspectives on the concept of 'style'; style denotes the particular manner in which language is employed, whether in written or spoken form. It includes the decisions made by a person or a group concerning their language use. Wales underscores the challenges in precisely defining style, particularly concerning readers' understanding and interpretation of language (Wales, 1989, p.66). She delineates various prevalent characteristics of style, encompassing personal expression, contextual variation, and the assessment of style via linguistic elements. Carter and Stockwell characterize style as "the selection of specific structures over alternative options present in the language" (Carter and Stockwell, 2008.p.8). This indicates that authors intentionally or unintentionally choose specific linguistic elements to attain intended results. Examining these choices and their ramifications is crucial for stylistic evaluation.

2. The aims of the study

This study aims to examine the designated research subject and enhance the current body of knowledge in the discipline. This study examines the stylistic features of selected verses from the poetry of Safia El Hillo. This study does an in-depth stylistic analysis to ascertain how the highlighted characteristics enhance the overall message, emotional resonance, and artistic value of the poetry.

The goal is to go beyond a quick look at her work and look into the language tools El Hillo uses to make meaning and get certain reactions from her viewers.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the main stylistic elements (phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and figurative) in the selected verses from Safia El Hillo's poetry?
2. How do these stylistic elements improve the tone and message of the poems as a whole?

4. The objective of the Study

This study meticulously analyses Elhillo's linguistic selections, imagery, and structural methodologies to elucidate the construction of meaning and the expression of thematic issues, especially in relation to identity, memory, and the politics of language. This analysis will delineate essential stylistic elements, such as metaphor, paradox, enjambment, and personification, and evaluate their contributions to the overall effect and meaning of the poetry. This study seeks to examine Elhillo's poetic artistry to deepen comprehension of her unique contribution to literature and the discourse on diasporic experiences.

5. Methodology

The research design of a study outlines the primary methodology utilized by researchers to tackle the research issues. In this setting, researchers utilize comparison design within qualitative research to achieve the study's aims. This study seeks to explore and assess a phenomena or facts to discern parallels or differences (Coccia & Benati, 2018). Stylistic analysis investigates diverse issues employing stylistic elements and language to increase the comprehension of poems. This approach focuses on two levels of language features: phonology and semantics.

6. Theoretical Background: Stylistics and Style

Stylistics meticulously examines the text and evaluates its notable linguistic structures for interpretative purposes, closely aligning with practical criticism. Stylistics plays a significant part in reader response theory, critique, and reception theory. It significantly influences nearly every form of critical methodology. The term "stylistics" is defined by multiple dictionaries as "the science of literary style" or "the art of cultivating effective writing style." Leech and Short define it as "the linguistic examination of style" (Leech & Short, 1981, p.13). Widdowson delineates stylistics as follows:

"By 'stylistics' I mean the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation and I shall take the view that what distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other is that it is essentially a means of linking the two.... stylistics, however, involves both literary criticism and linguistics, as its morphological make-up suggests: the style component relating it to the former and the 'istics' component to the later" (Widdowson 1975, p.4).

One contribution of stylistics, in addition to its language insights and instruments for modern critique, is its objective analytical approach. "Language-oriented theories aim to establish an

objective methodology for analysis and interpretation by concentrating on the literary entity, independent of the author's intentions" (Kumar, 1987, p.40). According to Verdonk, stylistics is defined as "the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect" (Verdonk, 2002, p.4). Stylistics has become an integral component of modern critique; no diligent student can afford to overlook it. This is one reason literary critics often do not distinguish stylistic analysis from a broader literary philosophy. The creation of scenarios and subsequent moral assessment constitute the writer's objective, which is inextricably linked to the style that serves as both its medium and its composition.

The linguistic and literary patterns amalgamate akin to color and composition in a picture (Carter & Stockwell, 2008). Stylistics is the linguistic analysis of literary language. The term 'style' is rather deceptive, as it was historically used to refer to several forms of language, including that of religious texts and legal papers. Both variants are now referred to as registers. Meanwhile, the terms style and stylistics have attained a relatively limited and restricted application within the realm of linguistics as it pertains to literature. Literary language frequently exhibits deviation. Certain qualities are typically emphasized or foregrounded, frequently by rendering them unusual. Aitchison employs a simile to illustrate the process of developing a literary language (Aitchison, 1999). Writers like Knitter's endeavor to create novel patterns. They eschew conventional phrases like "black despair" and "blue sky," instead devising novel, creative combinations that captivate readers and listeners. They attempt to formulate unconventional expressions, such as Dylan Thomas's phrase "a grief ago," which astounds readers (Aitchison, 1999). Wales asserts that the term style is challenging to define (Wales, 1989). The trouble arises from how readers comprehend it. This may impact the stylistic traits, a component of linguistics. Additionally, she has enumerated the predominant characteristics of the term style, which are presented below:

1. Style refers to the manner of self-expression in both writing and speaking. Each individual possesses a unique style in various activities, including gaming and problem-solving. Additionally, styles of communication can vary; some may employ humor while others adopt a more serious tone. Furthermore, style can be evaluated as either positive or negative.

2. Wales noted that every individual possesses a unique method of executing an action, articulating a concept, or depicting a painting (Wales, 1989, p.435). She asserts that style may vary in different contexts and according to the level of formality, a phenomenon she refers to as "style shifting" (Wales, 1989, p.435). Another significant element noted in Wiles' dictionary is the quantity of linguistic features that assess that style. The individuality of any author can be manifested in their works. His selection and arrangement of words is truly exceptional. "A discerning reader of Jane Austen's novels, such as *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice*, may observe the stylistic similarities between the two works" (Wales, 1989, p.435).

3. Carter and Stockwell assert that various styles exist, contingent upon the author's approach, such as racy, formal, and colloquial. Additionally, they characterized Style as: "A selection of specific structures over alternative options present in the language" (Carter and Stockwell, 2008, p.44). Asserting that style is a choice that does not imply it is invariably a deliberate decision. Certainly, if one were required to actively deliberate all phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic options, it would require an extensive duration to articulate anything.

7. Foregrounding

Before commencing the analysis of the chosen poems, it is essential to highlight a significant phrase in stylistics: foregrounding. Upon the mention of this term, we promptly associate it with stylistics. The most crucial aspect of stylistic study in poetry. Foregrounding involves assigning extraordinary prominence to a specific element or property of a text in comparison to other, less conspicuous aspects. Literary works are distinctive as they emphasize their linguistic nature, highlighting the manner of expression over the content: poetry diverges from ordinary speech and prose through the use of meter, unexpected metaphors, alliteration, and other techniques that make its language self-referential (Leech, 1969). Foregrounding is achieved by linguistic divergence and linguistic parallelism.

8.Types of Deviation

Leech asserts that, based on his analysis of many poems from a specific period, there exist different types of deviation in poetry (Leech, 1969). They are enumerated as follows:

8.1. Lexical Deviation: This deviation is produced by poets who employ words in a manner that diverges from their conventional usage, so imbuing them with profound significance to convey meaning and enhance the aesthetic quality of the poem.

8.2, **Semantic Deviation** refers to the phenomenon where a commonplace term acquires an extraordinary meaning. The poet's personal experiences and cultural background can influence the interpretation of a certain term.

8.3. Phonological Deviation pertains to the sounds produced, with the objective of crafting music that incorporates rhyme.

8.4. Morphological Deviation: This type of deviation is about how words can be formed.

8.5. **Grammatical Deviation** refers to the intentional disregard of sentence structure standards by poets. They intentionally disregard the use of the period within sentences. Furthermore, they employ the tenses of the sentences incorrectly, among other issues.

8.6. **The Utilization of Dialect:** The standard dialect fails to meet poets' expressive needs; consequently, they incorporate elements from their native dialects, which effectively convey their emotions in poetry. This practice, referred to as "Dialectism" by Leech, involves the use of "refined dialects."

8.7. The Utilization of Register: Register, usually referred to as "professional dialect," is characterized by the employment of specialized vocabulary, grammar, and other linguistic features. These are utilized by individuals under specific circumstances and occurrences. The register is utilized exclusively by a select set of individuals. Writers occasionally employ register mixing," referring to the employment of various registers" (Leech, 1969, p.42-52).

8.8. Historical Divergence: In this type of departure, poets employ antique vocabulary that is no longer prevalent in contemporary English. They do this to augment the aesthetic value of the poetry.

Poets may incorporate terms from Latin or Greek languages in their poetry, such as "thou," "ere," and "hither."

8.9. Graphological Deviation: Graphological deviance is illustrated by the disregard for punctuation standards, such as omitting capital letters, spaces, or rhymes. Leech enumerated the aforementioned types of deviation present in poetry. It is important to note that not every poem exhibits all these variances; one or two types may be present in a single poem (Leech,1969).

9. Stylistic Analysis of Selected Verses

Safia El Hillo's work, particularly her spoken word poetry, is suitable for postcolonial analysis, which examines the lasting impacts of colonialism on identity, language, and culture. Riya Sohini contends that spoken word poetry functions as a potent tool for decolonization, enabling oppressed populations to express their experiences and challenge dominant narratives (Sohini, 2022). El Hillo writes poems in both Arabic and English. She talks about the postcolonial setting and the difficulties of having a bicultural and bilingual identity that is shaped by historical power dynamics. Her work often looks at hate crimes against minorities and uses language to fight against and tear down oppressive ideas. The stage is a "liminal space" for spoken word artists like El Hillo, which helps different cultures grow and thrive. It makes language, attire, and voice—things that mainstream cultures often use to oppress people—normal again, which makes traditions and morality normal again. This viewpoint stresses that El Hillo's artistic choices are more than just looks; they also have a political purpose that helps to create a counter-narrative that questions established power systems and encourages decolonization. The following lines from "yasmeen" have been selected for stylistic examination:

i was born
 at the rupture the root where
 i split from my parallel selfi split from
 the girl i also could have been
 & her name / easy / i know the story
 all her life / my mother wanted
 a girl named for a flower
 whose oil scents all (El Hilo, 2017, p.41)

The opening lines establish a tone of significant transformation and an exploration of identity. The phrase "I was born, land became ocean became, land anew" utilizes a significant metaphor of cosmic rebirth. This event represents not only a personal birth but also a transformation of the landscape, indicating a significant change in existence. The recurrence of "became" highlights the ongoing,

nearly fluid aspect of this transformation. The use of such images conveys a sense of floating, unstable being in which, one's life is an ongoing transformation rather than a stable place to be. Their following lines, "at the rupture of the root where I split and my parallel self, I split from its shape refusing root in my following mouth" provide an elaboration of this sense of dislocation and splintered identity. Indeed, "rupture" implies a more violent break than just a separation. The "root refusing root" is an evocative image that hints at the conflict within the speaker's sense of self that rejects that which it desperately wants to be. The phrase "fallow mouth" further highlights this barrenness, a silence in the ability to voice, to give words to this fractured self. The repetition of "split from" reinforces the idea of a split self, which is an important trope in postcolonial and diaspora literature. Here, Elhillo uses enjambment within these lines to create a breathless, urgent sound that mirrors the speaker's turmoil and the ongoing nature of the identity crisis being addressed. The lack of capitalization and punctuation in these lines lends a stream-of-consciousness quality to the poem, placing the reader directly "inside" the speaker's unsanitized thoughts and feelings. This stylized decision intensifies the intimacy and vulnerability of the poem which makes the individual struggle feel collective.

El Hillo, in "How to Say," exemplifies El Hillo's play with the phonological aspects of linguistic identity. The reoccurring long "I" sound in "divorce," "piles," "English" "Arabic" in the lines in line one and two produces complicated internal rhyme and assonance that binds these disparate ideas together in a way that reflects the speaker's inner conflict. The contrast between "English" and "Arabic" in the poem, frequently conveyed through their phonetics, underscores the linguistic duality and the speaker's navigation of these two aspects of her identity. The expression "gauzy swathes of Arabic" suggests a gentle, fluid auditory experience, highlighting the ethereal nature of a seamless relationship with her heritage language. The sonic quality enhances the poem's emotional depth, enabling the reader to experience the speaker's longing and the fragile nature of her linguistic connections.

"in the divorce, i separate to two piles books: english love songs: arabic my angers my schooling my long repeating name english english arabic i am someone's daughter but i am american born it shows in my short memory my ahistoric glamour my clumsy tongue when i forget the word for in Arabic "(El Hilo, 2017, p.45).

The rhymes directly address the topic of cultural and linguistic identity, which is a central focus in Safia Elhillo's poetry. The separation into "two piles: English love songs and Arabic" shows the struggle between two cultural and linguistic identities. The word "divorce" makes this separation sound like a big, painful event. The poet talks about her "short memory" and "clumsy tongue" when she has trouble remembering Arabic words. This shows how being cut off from her language and culture has affected her connection to her native tongue. The lines have important meanings that need to be looked at from both a linguistic and a psychological point of view.

In "how to say," Elhillo talks about the complicated nature of cultural and linguistic identity. The opening line, "in the divorce I separate to two piles books: English love songs: Arabic," uses the strong metaphor of divorce to show the main problem. This is a painful and important split of identity into two separate cultural groups, as shown by the languages. The juxtaposition of "English love songs" and "Arabic" highlights the emotional and cultural importance embedded in each language, suggesting that love and heritage are intrinsically connected to linguistic expression. The phrase

"English English Arabic" in the line "my anger, my schooling, my long repeating name English English Arabic" shows how this linguistic duality affects many parts of the speaker's life, such as their feelings, education, and identity. Elhillo talks on the idea of linguistic estrangement in the words;

"I am someone's daughter but I was born in America; it shows in my short memory, my ahistoric glamour. My tongue gets stuck when I forget the Arabic term for." (Elhillo, 201, p. 45)

The speaker is aware of their American birthright, but they also have a "short memory" and "ahistoric glamour." This implies a detachment from their ancestral background and a superficiality that contrasts with the depth of their legacy. The image of a "clumsy tongue" trying to say an Arabic word is a good way to show how the speaker struggles with fluency and, by extension, their cultural identity. The blank area in brackets for the missing word clearly shows the absence that this language problem creates. This shows the internal struggle that a person in the diaspora goes through when they have to deal with two cultures. Not being able to fully speak one language means they lose part of their identity. The unpunctuated manner of "yasmeen" makes it sound like the speaker is confessing something, and it draws the reader into the speaker's personal experience of being displaced from their culture and how language affects their identity.

10. Conclusion

In her poems "Yasmeen" and "How to Say," Safia Elhillo's work demonstrates a particular engagement with issues of identity, language, and displacement through style. Metaphor, contradiction, enjambment, personification, and other devices help make her work beautiful, complex. This study shows how Elhillo constructs a poetic space in which the speaker's personal experience and the larger cultural and linguistic concerns are braided together.

The "Yasmeen" image of cosmic rebirth and shredded persona, articulated via the tropes of "rupture" and "root refusing root," is an effective metaphor for the diasporic life – one of instability and a continual search for identity. The lack of conventional punctuation and capitalization serves to heighten the reader's engagement with the speaker's unfiltered emotional state and creates a sense of sympathy for the character's inner turmoil. This particular stylistic choice illustrates the malleable and fragile nature of identity within a bicultural context.

Similarly, "how to say" employs the metaphor of "divorce" to poignantly depict the troubling division between English and Arabic linguistic identities. Elhillo's description of a "clumsy tongue" and a "short memory" shows how linguistic alienation may have a big impact on a person's relationship with their history. The deliberate use of an empty bracket to indicate a missing Arabic term is an important stylistic choice that shows the absence caused by this language gap and makes it clear how hard it is to engage with either cultural setting completely.

Elhillo's decisions here are not for effect; they matter to her subject. Her word play captures the struggle inherent in bicultural identity, the struggle inherent in the politics of language, and the struggle inherent in seeking belonging in a world in which people move through and cultures collide. Through her poetry, we see language's capability to resonate with and recreate the human experience

and Anderson provides a distinctively new and powerful voice in our literature. Elhillo's spoken word history and the performative dimensions of her poetry are aspects of her work that future scholarship might address, considering the implications of her stylistic decisions when they are performed orally.

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