A Stylistic Study of Steinbeck’s “The Pearl”

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Abstract

Beside his interest in dealing with minorities, the well-known American writer John Ernst Steinbeck who is one of the outstanding figures in the field of American literature, succeeds in combining his realistic and imaginative writings with social perception. He has been called a “giant of American letters” as many of his works including his novella “The Pearl” are regarded as classics of western literature. His short novella “The Pearl” explores a variety of themes like family relations which cannot be fully elaborated without having an idea about the figures of speech employed by the novelist. The present paper is a stylistic study of some stylistic devices Steinbeck has utilized in his novella “The Pearl” to make his novel rich in language in addition to its vivid thematic issues. It aims to show how these devices are linked in a magnificent technique to create an active power and influence in reader’s mind. Additionally, it attests how the writer’s view towards minorities are reflected through these devices. The study is limited to investigate metaphor, simile, repetition, images and alliteration which are explained with reference to some quotations from the text. The researchers conclude that Steinbeck’s language denoted by his use of symbols and such irritating devices makes the audience gain a precise and deep intuitive understanding of the characters. In doing so, the readers are provided with a good opportunity to have a pure insight of Steinbeck’s
believes towards minorities and aids a lot in making the events continue smoothly and finally to develop the plot. Hence, powerful devices such as metaphor, simile, and other energetic ones have their own dynamic and vital part in shaping the characters and exhibiting the themes of the prominent novella in the western literature “The Pearl”.

Key Words: Stylistics, Stylistic devices, The Pearl, Steinbeck

1- Introduction

John Ernst Steinbeck is an American author who won the 1962 Nobel prize in literature for his realistic and imaginative writings. In addition to his concern of minorities’ life, he is successful in combining these two features (imagination and reality) that do sympathetic humor and keen social perception. He has been called a giant of American letters and many of his works are regarded as classics of western literature. Like other American writers, Steinbeck also plays with language which is one of the fundamental interests of West Literature. A better understanding of his works can be accomplished by throwing light on some figures employed in his novella The Pearl.

This story traces Kino’s life, and explores man’s nature in the light of greed. Early in the story, Kino is presented as a very poor pearl diver living with his wife, Juana and their little baby. In spite of their poverty, they live peacefully as a family; the father, Kino is doing his job and tries to support the family. The wife as well perfects her role both as a mother and wife. After finding the pearl, Kino seemed to have new thoughts and even new dreams which are associated with the pearl. It, in fact, brought a noticeable
change in Kino’s character, and even the relation between Kino’s family and other people in the area was under the impact of the pearl. For instance, before finding the pearl, the doctor refused to treat their baby. Soon after the appearance of the pearl, the doctor himself came to the house to look after the baby.

The present paper is a stylistic study of the narrative work *The Pearl*. It seeks answers to the following questions:

1- How linguistic devices are dedicated to transmit massive messages about the characters in the novella as well as the writer’s attitude towards minorities?

2- What is the role played by the figures of speech in the implementation of interaction among characters in the novella?

Along with the questions above, the study aims to achieve the following aims:

1- Showing how the figures of speech are utilized in the novella to reveal a lot about the nature of the characters and the writer’s view towards minorities who actually reveal a key section of people in the American society.

2- Illustrating the significance of the figures of speech in accomplishing a successful communication among the characters, exhibiting the themes of the novella and finally developing the plot.
The novelty of this paper lies not in dealing with stylistic devices but in showing how the writer’s concepts towards minorities are revealed via such linguistic devices. Thus, the importance of this study is represented in reflecting the views of the American society symbolized in Steinbeck’s character towards minorities who are key section in that society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stylistics

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics concerned with the study of style in texts, especially, but not exclusively, in literary works. It is sometimes termed literary linguistics; stylistics focuses on the figures and other rhetorical devices recycled to offer variability and vividness to someone’s writing. It is linguistic analysis plus literary criticism. Leech and Short (1981:13) define it as the linguistic study of style. Widdowson (1975:4) defines stylistics as "the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation and 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". He adds (ibid) that stylistics, however, comprises 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.
2.2 Stylistic Devices

To create a captivating and a remarkable influence or make the meaning of a sentence easier to remember, writers tend to employ figures of speech through which words or phrases go beyond their lexical meaning. Such figures succeed to turn any piece of literary work to be more attractive or interesting (Stefoff, 2018: 5)

2.2.1 Repetition

Tannen (2007:2) points out that repetition is the “recurrence of words and collocations of words in the same discourse”. It is one of the rhetorical devices that is used as a persuasive tool. To Gray (1984: 172), repetition accomplishes “a vital part of the language of literature both in verse and prose”. On the other hand, Hawthorn (2000: 297) illustrates the fact that although language is appreciated for its practicality for conveying information or meanings, repetition may carry no new information. Yet, it has an aesthetic power and a great function, as Leech and Short (2007: 199) reveal, it is used to emphasize or give rich enhancement to the repeated meaning. The fruitful usage of repetition embraces utilities such as, setting emphasis on a point, approving a fact or an idea, cohesion, persuasion, shift, exhibiting objectivity, and unfolding a concept. Cuddon (1998) confirms the constructive aspect of this technique and argues that repetition refers not only to repeat words but also to sounds and ideas for the purpose of provoking rhythm, and fashioning emphasis. According to Power’s view (1998), the aura that is fashioned by the use of repetition cannot be fulfilled by any other device. In other words, using repetition leads to make a simple sentence be a dramatic one; it enriches the beauty of the sentence and adds tensions to the point of core connotation. Word associations are
sometimes used to replicate the notions and passions in a subsidiary manner; readers may enjoy reading a piece that comprises repetition as they have to interpret such connotations and appreciate the crucial meanings.

2.2.2 Metaphor

Metaphor is a form of figurative language which refers to words, phrases or expressions that mean something different from their literal definition. Thus, in this traditional view metaphor is seen as merely a matter of an implicit comparison where one concept is compared to another (Saeed, 1997: 302). The transition in the view of metaphor appears specifically after the publication of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) book *Metaphors We live By* where metaphor is seen as a significant mode of thinking and talking about the world. Metaphor shows up not only in literature, poetry and writing, but also in speech. Through metaphor, words come to life, the subject will be more relatable to the reader, and finally the complex concept will be easier to understand. Generally, metaphors can be a remarkable help when we want to enhance our writing with imagery. As a mutual figure of speech, metaphors turn up everywhere from novels and plays to political speeches and even common songs.

2.2.3 Simile

The term “Simile” traces its origin to the Latin root word *similes* that denotes ‘like’. It is a literary device that is used to compare two things. Unlike metaphors, similes draw direct comparisons by using the words "like" or "as". Consequently, it is a direct comparison. Such means makes the major object plainer and becomes more influential on the mind. We can find simile instances in our daily speech. We often hear comments like,
“John is as slow as a snail.” Snails are notorious for their slow pace, and here the slowness of John is compared to that of a snail. The use of “as” in the example helps to draw the similarity. Simile adds vividness to our speech. Authors and poets utilize simile to transport their sentimentalities and beliefs via colorful word pictures.

3- Methodology

3.1 The Tool

The only tool used in this paper is the text of John Ernst Steinbeck’s novella *The Pearl*. The researchers intend to investigate merely the following stylistic devices in *The Pearl*: repetition, simile, metaphor, alliteration.

3.2 The Procedure

The novella is examined carefully to identify the figures of speech employed by Steinbeck. Then, the selected linguistic devices are explained with reference to specific quotations of the novella that highly echo the psychology, the emotions and thoughts of the characters available in the novella.

4- An Analysis of Some Linguistic Devices in *The Pearl*

Steinbeck uses the multi leveled meanings of metaphors to capture the basics of his characters in new thoughts and feelings. He has accomplished a significant success in utilizing techniques such as simile, metaphor, images, repetition, and alliteration that are all devoted to criticize the minorities and reflect his inner beliefs towards that section of people. The figures of speech
that he employs convey not only novelty but also they unquestionably express the culture of the characters shaped in the novella *The Pearl*.

**Repetition and Alliteration**

Repetition is a lexical device used by Steinbeck in his novella to lay emphasis on details and to highlight the intensity to this substantiation. Repetition, being one of the stylistic strategies that can occur at three altitudes of language, has its own vital role in implementing more than one task in any discourse and narrative one is no exception.

Kemertelidze and Manjavidze (2013) mention thematic sort of repetition which is clearly expressed in *The Pearl*. One of the noteworthy repeated themes in the novella is that of singing and the vocal release of emotion. Steinbeck writes that Kino's people had sung of everything that happened or existed. In Chapter I Kino hears "the Song of the Family" from behind him as he squats outside the door to his home. Later, a new song comes to him; it is "the Song of Evil" joined with music of the enemy. It is called "the Song of the Enemy." In Chapter III, the music of the pearl that Kino notices "rises like a chorus of trumpets in his ear" (Steinbeck, 1957: 24). The music of the pearl is unified with the music of the family so that one enhances the other. Yet, as Kino imagines what the discovery of this Pearl of the World can do for his son, the "melody of the morning, the music of evil, of the enemy" enters his head and as a result Kino becomes doubtful of his neighbors. The concept of music occurs again when Kino takes his pearl to the dealers in order to sell it. He still hears "in his ears the evil music." (ibid: 6). As he becomes angry at the pearl dealers, he takes the pearl home and buries it. Kino begins to talk with his brother,
Juan Thomas, and he once more hears "the dark music of the enemy" (ibid:53) after the exit of his brother.

Other repeated point is Juana’s shawl. The shawl is used to cover the baby and protect him after he is bitten in Chapter I; then, in Chapter II, after the neighbors learn of Kino’s finding of the great pearl, she covers her face so that her delight could not be noticed. Later, she "loops her shawl under the baby" so that he can swing from her hip. When the doctor appears, Juana "covered the baby's face with the fringe of her shawl" and clenches him firmly as the doctor embraces his hands. Further, Juana holds Coyotito "under her shawl, staring at it with anxiety and fear" (ibid:31) after the doctor’s affirmation that Coyotito will become ill from the scorpion bite. After the doctor leaves, she cradles the baby in her shawl rather than putting him in her bed. Later on, when an intruder comes to steal the pearl and Kino is injured on the forehead, she hollows her shawl in water, as she "swabbed the blood from his forehead." (ibid:37). It is obvious then that the shawl image denotes Juana’s character and reveals her protectiveness and simplicity expressed in her repeated simple gestures.

Along with the repeated themes, The Pearl comprises some repeated hints for the social discrepancies among Kino and his family on one hand and people like peasants, the doctor and the pearl buyers on the other hand. Those People belong to another race that for nearly four hundred years has despised, robbed and frightened Kino’s race. Such differences are reflected in chapter I when Kino is locked out by the doctor's gate. With the pearl in his possession, in Chapter III, he imagines Coyotito in a "white color and a silk tie" who "will make us free because he will know--he will know and through him we will know". (ibid:25). Here, Steinbeck uses epiphora
repetition expressed in repeating the verb “will know”. Epiphora category of repetition refers to the repetition of a word or a phrase at the end of sentence to achieve tasks such as emphasis, making a point memorable and illuminating some deeds. Through such repetition, Kino wants to show how the ownership of the pearl will offer a chance to his family to rise socially. However, Kino is again reminded of his social class when the pearl buyers conspire against him and try to cheat him. Such attempt indicates their bad intention and nature as the pearl signifies also their greed. Nevertheless, in Chapter IV, Kino refuses to be oppressed, saying, "No one shall take our good fortune from us".(ibid:55).

Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound in one line. It is mainly associated with the repetition of consonants. In “The Pearl”, we have a number of examples. In chapter five, we have a scene in which both Kino and Juana are about to fight each other because of the pearl as Juana wants to get rid of it, and Kino wants to keep it to bring him wealth. In that scene, the husband follows the wife and we read the following line [underlining added to indicate alliteration] “…he could hear her quick footsteps going toward the shore. Quietly he tracked her…” (ibid:56) in the above line, the sound /k/ is repeated and such repetition adds emphasis to the words. Another example is when the writer talks about Juana; “Juana, in her woman’s soul, knew that the mountain would stand while the man broke himself; that the sea would surge while the man drowned in it”. (ibid:57). If we consider the two examples, we notice that the repetition occurs in the very significant words and listening to the repetition of the sounds will attract the hearer’s / reader’s attention and it will make the message the writer tries to convey clear.
Simile

There is a large number of similes in *The Pearl* that reflect the creative potentiality of Steinbeck. We can find many innovative similes in *The Pearl*. In Chapter 2 of the novella, Kino discovers the great pearl. Steinbeck employs a simile by writing that the pearl was as "perfect as the moon." Later on in the novella, a shadowy person challenges to steal the pearl from Kino in the middle of the night. The man attacks Kino, wounding him in the head. As Juana is dressing Kino's wounds, she employs a simile by saying, "This pearl is like a sin!" (Steinbeck, 1957:20). Juana recognizes that the pearl is evil; it is the object of greed throughout the community. She appeals Kino to get rid of the pearl, but he rejects and pays no attention to her. Another instance of simile is when Kino attempts to sell the pearl in town; one of the dealers uses a simile to describe the pearl by saying, "This pearl is like fool's gold" (ibid: 25). The dealer compares the valuable pearl to fool's gold in hopes of cheating Kino out of his prized possession.

Steinbeck's use of simile survives till the end of the novella when Kino looks down to see Coyotito lying dead in the cave. Kino realizes that the pearl has been an evil curse on his family. Steinbeck uses a simile to describe the pearl's appearance by writing, "it was gray, like a malignant growth" (ibid:47). These and so many similes have their own energetic power on the readers’ minds and they succeed not only in appealing their emotions but also inviting them to re-read.
Metaphor

The novella is plentiful with sufficient metaphors that are created to influx new energy into the novel. Metaphor, as mentioned earlier, is the imaginative use of the words or phrases to describe something else and to show that the two have the same potentials. Kino, on page (38), compares the pearl to an evil, “it will destroy us”, who will bring no more than misery and depression to his family; the pearl has the same wicked spirit that will finally lead to their mutilation and destruction. Another one is reflected in the writer’s attempt to show the development in Kino’s character after the appearance of the pearl by comparing him to an animal “He was an animal now” (Steinbeck, 1957:59). Clearly such description indicates the undesirable development in the character. Hence, the examples mentioned above of metaphors and good number of others provide an unending fascination to the progress of the novella.

How Minorities are echoed in The Pearl?

The minorities are available in different societies and the American society is no exception as those minorities are mixed with the society; they belong to the American society; however, they are from an altered soil or from a different cultural background. The minorities, represented in the novella by Kino and Juana, have gone through terrible life and they underwent miserable situations. Their suffering is presented as part of what we have in the American society. Steinbeck argues that sometimes it is not easy to differentiate between the minorities and other Americans. This is true for those outside America “there is an American look”.

The writer mentioned the minorities in some of his books and in *America and Americans*, he stated that “from the first, we have treated our minorities abominably, the way the old boys do the new kids in school”. It is clear that Steinbeck tried to show the gap between the Americans and their minorities. This is clear in the novella in terms of the description given to some characters like Juana and Kino. As for Juana, her description as “a strong man” (*Steinbeck*, 1957:4) refers to the unusual attributes we can find in her character. The fact that the writer is describing her by saying “she was like a strong man” does not mean that her strength is physical. In fact, she is strong in terms of her personality as she is asking for something men were not able to ask for. For instance, she wants to go to the doctor—something the minor people were not permitted to do.

Not only Juana, but also the canoe is described by using simile. In the novella, “canoes preserved for generations by a hard shell-like water proof plaster” (*ibid*, :8). Such a sentence takes the reader to Kino’s family and to the fact that the canoe is quite precious for them because they keep it for generations, and their life is centered on the canoe which seemed to have a great value in the past, and will definitely have the same value for the coming generations. Their life, their tools and their simplicity are all interwoven within the texture of sentences depicting their life. Even the weather is described to shed light on the minorities as they represent the backbone in the novella. In describing the morning, the writer said “it was a morning like other mornings and yet perfect among mornings”(*ibid*: 2). The simile is indicated in terms of the word ‘like’ used in the sentence, and in spite of the monotonous tone the sentence carries, hope and the feeling of
new beginning is felt in the second part of the sentence as the ‘perfect morning’ stands for the new life or new future those people are trying to achieve.

The town to which Kino and his wife are heading is described as “a thing like a colonial animal”. This description carries the colonial tone, and such a tone has a lot of implications. From this sentence we can notice the difference between the minorities and those living in the town as it seemed to represent those rich and powerful people who try to dominate the life of the poor ones like Kino and his wife. Describing the town as a ‘colonial animal’ sheds light on the fact that Kino and his people are weak and easily controlled by the people in the town. In the powerful people, we notice ‘oppression’ and ‘sadism’; in Kino’s group, we find ‘weakness’ and ‘being unprotected’, and this explains why Kino and his wife are delineated by Steinbeck as weak and poor. Looking also at the town makes the readers be aware of the fact that the minorities are characterized by “self-imposed ghettos and segregation”.

The writer managed in making us quite close to those minor people as in the text he was eager to repeat some of the social activities done by them to represent the positive and the negative aspects of their life. For instance, they have songs of evil to denote sadness or danger, and songs of the family which reflect love, kindness and harmony in life. Those songs were wonderful tool employed by them to show how they feel. If they have a positive situation, their songs will be jovial; if not, a song of sadness and pain will be heard, and this was obviously noticed in the novella. It is quite obvious then that the writer has utilized figures of speech such as simile,
and repetition of sounds (alliteration) in this novella to show his readers who are the minorities and what type of the relation exists between them and other people in the American society.

**Conclusion**

We believe that *The Pearl* would have not been an interesting novella lest the writer employed fruitful linguistic devices such as repetition, alliteration, simile, and others. The story of the novella is very moving and unforgettable because of that witty mixture of figures of speech involved through the lines of the novella. This harmony among the used devices contributes a lot in revealing the psychological state, the deep emotional conflicts, and the characters’ points of view which actually echo the writer’s thoughts and attitudes. Steinbeck’s language represented by his use of symbols and such rich devices makes the audience gain an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of the characters. This, in turn, gives a chance for the readers to have a pure insight of Steinbeck’s beliefs towards minorities and helps a lot in making the events continue smoothly and finally to develop the plot. Thus, powerful devices like metaphor, simile, and other energetic ones have their own dynamic role in shaping the characters and exhibiting the themes of the prominent novella *The Pearl*.
References


