Style in Fiction: A Stylistic Analysis of *Overcoat* by Ghulam Abbas

Mumtaz Hussain

PhD Scholar at University of Sindh/Lecturer in English at Govt. College Sama Satta, Bahawalpur

Email: mumtazdepal@gmail.com

Dr. Wasim Hassan Malik

Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language & Literature, University of Sindh

Sabeeha Rehman

M. A English Language & Literature, Govt. Sadiq College Women University, Bahawalpur

Abstract

Stylistics uses methods of science of linguistics for textual interpretation. Language is a very important to stylisticians because diverse forms and levels that construct linguistic structure are vital index regarding textual function. The present study analyses a short story *Overcoat* (2014) written by Ghulam Abbas under the perspective of Leech and Short’s (2007) model of stylistic analysis. This model consists of four extensive categories. These categories are Lexical, Grammatical, Figures of Speech and Cohesion and Context. The basic idea that the selected short story contains is that we should judge people morally not materially as several people pose to be wealthy try to conceal their poverty and deprivation because elite class looks down upon them. The study reaches at the conclusion that the writer has skillfully dealt with the theme with a serene and restraint but effective language or style that is peculiar to him.
1. Introduction

a) Background

Ghulam Abbas (1909-1982) stands with Manto and Rajinder Singh Bedi apropos Urdu short story tradition. Due to the unique characteristics of his short stories, he is considered as one of the most prominent writers of his era (Abbas & al., 2016). Punjab Advisory Board Lahore rewarded him cash prize for his first short story Anandi. His second short story Jaray ki Chandni also made him to get Adam Ji literary award in 1960. Government of Pakistan gave him Sitar e Imtiaz in 1967 due to his wonderful contribution to literature (Fatehpuri, 2000, p.111).

Ghulam Abbas’ short stories have specific value in terms of plot. He leaves no gaps while in the presentation of sequence of events. Moreover, he provides details and realism in his short stories. For example in Overcoat, he reflects the people’s movements and description of details in a forceful manner. In another of his short story Anandi, he makes the plot in the perspective of childhood memories (Khaki, 1987).

Ghulam Abbas belongs to the convention of realistic writing in fiction. He follows this tradition in a beautiful and expert manner. He is keen observer of human nature and human relations with all the secrets they have in them. His interest lies in their ups and downs making them the subject of his short stories. In his writings, there is no intensity in depiction of reality, nor does he raise storms. He explores beauty only in outwardly beautiful aspects of life (Qazalbash, 2000).

Ghulam Abbas does not use dialogues frequently but it should be considered that he lacks in this art. He uses dialogues which are suitable to the demands of his plots. Wherever he uses them, he uses them in a perfect manner (Sultana, 1995). His characters are men of flesh and blood; they never remain strange to the readers. They seem to be the part and parcel of our daily lives. He achieves wonderful performance as a short story writer because of his characters (Baig, 1991).

The present study analyses a short story ‘Overcoat’ (2014) written by Ghulam Abbas under the perspective of Leech and Short’s (2007) model of stylistic analysis. The study seeks to discover how the writer, through lexical and syntactic choices, has skillfully dealt with the theme with a serene and restraint but effective language/style that is peculiar to him.

b) Overcoat: Plot

Overcoat is a heartbreaking story of a young person who tries to hide his outward form and his destitution under the overcoat. The story can be divided into two parts. In the first part, the
young man appears excellent wearing hat and having a cane in his hand. He roams about on the Mall road, exhibiting himself well off. For few moments he stops before a restaurant and listens to an orchestra. Then he moves towards music shop and asks for gramophone records list. He goes to a carpet shop and a book stall. He then strolls on the footpath near high court. A young couple overtakes him making him to follow them. The second part consists of his sad demise. It reveals his true reality that is hidden under the coat he is wearing. When the young man crosses the road, a truck coming behind knocks him down. The driver of the truck escapes and the young man is taken to hospital in a taxi. But severely injured, he takes his last breath at hospital.

c) Statement of the Problem

The analysis of a short story *Overcoat* (2014) written by Ghulam Abbas under the perspective of Leech and Short's (2007) model of stylistic analysis reveals that the writer has skillfully dealt with the theme that we should judge people morally not materially as several people pose to be wealthy try to conceal their poverty and deprivation because elite class looks down upon them. The writer presents this theme using a serene and restraint but effective language or style that is peculiar to him.

d) Research Questions

i) How to analyze the short story *Overcoat* (2014) written by Ghulam Abbas under the perspective of Leech and Short’s (2007) model of stylistic analysis?

ii) How Leech and Short’s (2007) model exhibits the peculiar style of Ghulam Abbas as depicted in his short story *Overcoat*.

iii) How the writer has presented the theme of short story *Overcoat* through his peculiar style?

2. Literature Review

Stylistics uses methods of science of linguistics for textual interpretation. The purpose of Stylistics is to analyze and reveal the linguistic elements of literary works. For example, it shows how the writer of a particular text uses certain words and sentence structures that create meanings and effects (Barry, 2013, p. 196).

Language is a tool to express varied and complex human emotions and thoughts. Grammatical and Lexical choices have a wide range, and the writers have to be selective in this regard to convey varied thoughts, emotions, moods, meanings and effects. Even to express similar thoughts,
meanings or concepts, different writers may have different choices in this manner. According to Oloruntoba-Oju (1999), style means variety; it simply means how the writer expresses his thoughts which “differ according to the various contexts” (p. 127). Leech and Short (2007) state that application of style can be on spoken, written, literary and everyday language varieties; but traditionally it is particular to written texts of literature (pp. 09-10).

Hence, Stylistics concerns itself mainly with analyses of style i.e. the manner of language usage and the effect it produces. Widdowson (1975) describes it as a way of studying literary discourse from the perspective of linguistic orientation (p. 3). Short and Candlin (1989) argue that stylistics uses linguistic approach to examine literary texts (p. 183).

Stylistic analysis either gives validity to already existed interpretation of text or presents a new interpretation which challenges the already existed readings. According to Barry (2013), following can be the goals of stylistic critics.

i. They explain technical features of language of a text and then utilize this data in explanation.

ii. In some cases, linguistic analysis is done to support already existing readings.

iii. In other cases, the aim is to formulate new reading on the basis of linguistic data.

iv. Critics explore the technical account of meaning formulation in literature, which also explains the uniqueness of text.

v. Stylistics goes beyond the grammar of sentence to the grammar of text (discourse) to reveal textual process to achieve its goals (p. 207).

The present study, keeping in view the above list, presents linguistic analysis of the selected short story and then interprets the linguistic data to examine the major theme. It also shows linguistics choices impact on the reader and the purpose such choices serve for the author.

3. Methodology

The present study involves the stylistic analysis of a short story Overcoat by Ghulam Abbas with the purpose of analyzing the choice of language by the writer. The stylistic analysis of the selected short story has been executed using Leech and Short’s (2007) checklist of stylistic categories. These categories are Lexical, Grammatical, Figures of Speech and Cohesion and Context. The checklist forms a ‘systematic basis’ for relevant linguistic data collection from the selected text apropos stylistic evaluation purpose. The study reaches at the conclusion that
the writer has skillfully dealt with the theme with a serene and restraint but effective language/style that is peculiar to him.

4. Stylistic Analysis and Discussion

i. Lexical Features


Leech and Short (2007) exhibit lexical features in questions that a student or a stylistician is should answer while doing stylistic analysis of the text. These questions or features consist of these aspects: general, nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs (pp. 61-62).

a) General Features

A general analysis of lexical features of the text reveals that the writer uses simple vocabulary more frequently as compared to complex vocabulary. According to Jackson and Amvela (2000), simple vocabulary has all free morphemes and such vocabulary is unanalyzable in terms of morphology. Examples of such words are dear, play, think, fact. However, complex words are formed from simple words using affixes. Examples of such words are disappoint, definition, rougher (p. 4). Ghulam Abbas uses simple vocabulary in the form of difficult words. The reader may have to consult dictionary to find out the meaning of such words. Such words taken out from the text are sleek, rakish, twirl, dandy, amble, promenade, profligate, gaiety, throng, ware, connoisseur, adorn, corduroy and precarious. On the other hand, complex vocabulary that the writer uses has been formed from everyday language. It is very easy for the reader to assess its meanings. Such words of vocabulary taken out from the text are jauntily, briskly, enquiringly, loneliness, attractively, suddenly, amiably, approvingly, bulky and floppy. These words used by the author depict and reveal hero’s personality, and hence contribute a lot in the progress of the story.

The writer also uses descriptive and evaluative words in terms of meaning to exhibit reality and his own point of view. A descriptive meaning is the one which shows truth of reality. Such words express objectivity as they are concerned with truth. For example, the words wide, thin and hard are best instances to illustrate the point (Kortmann & Loebner, 2013, p. 22). In the short story
Overcoat, the writer also uses descriptive vocabulary. The words such as *thin, sleek, immune* and *brown* reveal the truth about the young man strolling on the road. On the other hand, according to Wales (2001), the words related to evaluative meaning have an effect on our emotions as such words reveal subjective thoughts or feelings (p. 139). For example, the word ‘practical’ in “Ali thinks that he is practical man” is evaluative one. The words of such kind can also be found in overcoat and they also fulfill the same purpose. The words *sharp, warm, intense, profligate, brilliant, happy, jauntily, shivering* all show writer’s own subjective feelings.

There is also frequent use of emotive vocabulary in the short story to evoke emotions in the reader. Words such as *jauntily, attractively, amused, smoothing, relish, brilliant, happy, scented, precarious, alive, whipped, stains, dirty, dirt, grimed, life less and alas* have been used for the said purpose. These lexical items can also be categorized into two semantic sub fields: *jauntily, attractively, amused, smoothing, relish, brilliant, happy, scented, precarious and alive* belong to the sub field of positive emotions, while *whipped, stains, dirty, dirt, grimed, life less and alas* belong to the semantic field of negative emotions.

Ghulam Abbas also uses specialized vocabulary in Overcoat, which depicts his own knowledge as well as creates awareness about other fields. It also depicts reality to create a sense of seriousness in the theme or the story. Specialized vocabulary also termed as “jargon” is a vocabulary specific to different trades, professions or academic disciplines (Mandell & Kirszner, 2012, p. 195). The words and phrases such as Spanish guitar, hurried glance at the contents, a fine carpet indeed, casualty department all show writer’s knowledge of different fields and professions.

b) Nouns

Abstract nouns denote conditions, qualities or ideas that our senses cannot perceive. Abstract words depict imaginative or mental world, not the physical world. Eschholz and Rosa (2012) in this regard state that disagreement between two people on abstract things does not mean regarding one person as right and other as wrong. For example, for one person forest may be beautiful but for other it may be a frightening place. This is due to the fact that beauty and fear both are ideas (p. 284). However, concrete nouns refer to things that we can see, taste, hear, touch or smell. Such words denote physical world like table, clothes, car etc. Ghulam Abbas uses both concrete and abstract nouns frequently in the short story overcoat. However, abstract nouns are almost half in number as compared to concrete nouns. The abstract nouns used by the writer are *time, loneliness, content, quality, evening, January, Saturday, winter,*
dandy, distance and silence, while taxi, driver, people, streets, restaurants, advertisements, bicycles, material, tray, moustache, overcoat, hat, horses and anna are concrete nouns used by the writer. Both kinds of nouns together with adjectives contribute to the setting and progress of the story by describing surrounding places and the personality, and also thinking of the characters depicted.

c) Adjectives

Occurrence of adjectives is frequent in the text. The text contains many types of attributes of adjectives. The words in the text thin, green, short, small, little, huge, large depict physical adjectives used in the text. Words bitter, intense, profligate, immune are psychological adjectives used in the text. Brown, green, white, shiny are color adjectives. All these adjectives either describe the setting around the incidents or physical appearance of different characters.

d) Nouns and Adjectives

The clusters of noun and adjectives exhibit the appearance and attributes of the main character portrayed in the short story. These clusters can be divided according to the two hypothetical parts of the story. The first part consists of young man’s outward appearance that has hidden his true reality. The writer uses the following adjective-noun clusters in this part: well-groomed young man, hair was sleek and shining, thin moustaches, brown overcoat, green felt hat, rakish angle, white silk scarf, short polished cane, lapels were stiff and the sleeves well creased, buttons were of horn, big and shiny. On the other hand, the second hypothetical part consists of the reality of the young man after accident. The writer uses these adjective-noun clusters: large stains of blood, white marble table, hair was still smooth, strong scented oil, old cotton sweater, dirty vest, grimed with dirt, small black comb, half smoked cigarette, little diary, little cane.

e) Verbs

According to the semantic classification, verbs are of different types (Leech et al., 1982, p. 46). The verbs which express events or actions are called dynamic verbs, while verbs which show conditions or states are called stative verbs. Dynamic words play a key role in the progress of the story and the selected short story contains the major part of these, while stative verbs show conditions in which characters exist. The examples of dynamic verbs from the text are walked, turned, wore, knotted, slipped, polished, struck, looked, whipped, turned,
shivering, rubbed, collected etc. On the other hand, the examples of stative verbs are was, having, ambling, stood, hanging, remembering, watching etc.

f) Adverbs and Verbs

The verbs and adverbs together used in the text indicate the actions as well as the psychological state of the main character. These clusters describing the actions of the main characters are twirled jauntily, walking briskly, ambling along obviously, looked at him enquiringly, attractively displayed, carefully replaced, and hurriedly moved. On the other hand such clusters showing the psychological state of the main character are said amiably, said approvingly, and deeply engrossed.

ii. Grammatical Features

The grammatical structures which the author uses in the selected chapter reveal author’s distinct style. His frequent use of conjunctions and commas makes the sentences long and complex. Let’s examine following sentences in this context.

a) He had put on a brown overcoat with a cream colored half opened rose in his button hole and a green flat hat which he wore at a rakish angle.

Possible Sentences: He had put on a brown overcoat. There was a cream colored half opened rose in his button hole. He was also wearing a green flat hat at a rakish angle.

b) He looked such a dandy that tonga-wallas catching sight of him, even from a distance, whipped up their horses and raced towards him.

Possible Sentences: His dandy looks made tonga-wallas to catch sight of him from a distance. They whipped up their horses and raced towards him.

c) Hardly had he reached half way across the road when a truck full of bricks came from behind like a gust of wind and crushing him down speeded off toward Mcleod Road.

Possible Sentences: When he reached half way across the road, a truck full of bricks came behind. It came like a gist of wind. It crushed him down and speeded off toward Mcleod Road.

d) In the operating theatre, the assistant surgeon and the two nurses with their faces concealed behind masks, were attending the young man, only their eyes were visible.

Possible Sentences: In the operating theatre, an assistant surgeon and two nurses were attending
the young man. The faces of nurses were concealed and only their eyes were visible.

e) A small black comb, a handkerchief, six annas and few pies, a half smoked cigarette, a little diary in which the names and address of a few people were noted, a list of gramophone records and a few handbills which distributors had thrust upon him during his evening promenade.

This is one sentence paragraph put together with commas and conjunctions.

Moreover, the writer uses many sentences which are sentences in graphological terms (starting with capital letter and ending with a full stop). He does not bother to follow traditional sentence structures. These are mere replies, however connected with the text, such words or phrases, make sense easily. Following are few examples in this regard.

a) “Pan Walla”.
b) “Yes, sir”.
c) “With pleasure, sir”.

It is essential to be noted that these sentences don’t have reported speeches with them.

iii. Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are used by the writers to create special effect, to clarify an idea and to make the writing look more forceful and colorful (Abrams & Harpham, 2012, p. 130). The writer has used figures of speech in the selected short story for above mentioned purpose.

The first figure of speech used by the writer is symbolism. The title of the short story itself is symbolic. Overcoat symbolizes that poor people try to conceal their poverty in many ways but other people made fun of them when they are exposed. The story also makes the old saying ‘appearances are always deceptive’ credible.

The writer also uses similes at two times in the short story. The first sentence containing simile is “the sharp icy gusts of wind struck like steel”. Here the word ‘steel’ has been used to describe the gust of wind. Another sentence in which the simile has been used is “when a truck full of bricks came like a gust of wind”. Here again the phrase ‘gust of wind’ has been used, but here it depicts the speed of the truck. Metaphor has been used by the writer two times in the story. In the sentence “the youth was tall”, tall actually is used to for height. Morover, the writer uses the phrase ‘icy gusts’, icy here stands for cold.

Alliteration has been used by the writer at various places in the short story. Following are the
sentences where the writer uses alliteration; He had… overcoat with a **cream colored** half opened rose; the lapels were **stiff** and the **sleeves** well creased; …enjoying the music more than those who sat inside; a hurried glance at the **contents carefully**; a truck full of **brick** came **behind**; the **strong scented** oil.

The writer also uses *hyperbole* in the short story when he states “thin moustaches seemed to have drawn with pencil”.

**iv. Cohesion & Context**

a) Cohesion

The most observable feature of cohesion in the selected short story is that the author use referential links between sentences. The story of the text revolves around one nameless character, therefore there are ample of pronouns used by the writer. There is also lexical repetition in the text. The phrase ‘young man’ has been used seventeen times in the short story. The writer uses different names to for the main character. Those names are ‘young man’, ‘poor fellow’, and ‘a youth’. This technique used by the writer are not unnecessary, rather they help reader understand the different aspects of hero’s personality.

Another feature regarding cohesion is usage of indigenous language words by the writer. The writer uses many words from Urdu language to add local flavor tone and feel. Such words used by the writer are **tonga-walla, pan-walla, anna, and tongas**.

b) Context/ Point of View

The story is narrated by third person. All the actions, thoughts and dialogues of different characters are transported to us by the point of view of third person narrator. The story narrates only the world of one character i.e. the young man. The actions and inner world of young man is the focus of the story. The actions of other characters have also been described in the presence of young man, whether he is alive or dead. What the young man does feels and thinks becomes the knowledge of reader. The use of words or phrases in the narrative such as young man having walked, he had put on, he was… enjoying, the young man seated, young man seemed, he stroked it and many other such phrases reveal the world of young man, making the narrator omniscient limited.

c) Thought Presentation

Thought presentation and point of view are connected to each other. The function of thought
presentation mainly of free indirect speech is to manipulate the point of view of the narrative. The purpose of thought presentation is similar to that of speech presentation, and that is to control the sympathies of the reader. Ghulam Abbas skillfully controls the sympathies of reader for the young man with Free Direct Thought. Throughout this process the reader can peep deep into the consciousness of young man and understands the character deeply without realizing the intervention from the writer. The access provided by the author to reader into the inner world of the young man create in reader many questions and uncertainties. These uncertainties and questions indicate mysteriousness inside the mind of the young man.

d) Speech Presentation

In the selected short story, vivid direct speeches form a major part of the text. These speeches expose characters’ temperament as well as the inside world of individuals. This also help the reader to create a more clear understanding of characters as the words uttered by the characters are exact expressions. It gives the impression of character directly speaking to the readers, and hence the distance between the two is decreased which increases the familiarity.

The direct speeches produced by the young man and the boy selling pan reveal a lot about young man’s personality.

“Pan Walla” (said by the young man)
“Yes, sir”
“Have you change for a ten rupee note?”
“No, sir, but I’ll get it for you.”
“And what if you don’t come back?”
“If you don’t trust me sir, you can come with me…”
“Never mind … Here I have found one anna. Now give me a good cigarette and be off with you” (Abbas, 2014, pp. 87-91)

These expressions reveal that the young man is trying to show off that he has a large amount but in fact he possesses just one anna. This fact it supported by the statement when he shows his fear that the pan walla would run away taking such a large amount. At another place, when the salesman asks for help, the young man replies in air of indifference stating “No thank you”. This expression also reveals about young man that he is actually showing that he belongs to the class that buys such things but as he does not have amount he shows indifference.

Next the young man has a dialogue with shopkeeper of carpet shop. This conversation also
reveals young man’s showy nature.

“I just wanted to see this carpet” the young man said to the carpet dealer.

“With pleasure, sir”

“Oh don’t bother to take it down. I can see it quite well it is… I’ll come again some time.”

The last direct speech uttered by the young man is when he tries to spin his cane around his finger but it drops down. On this happening, he utters, “Oh, sorry,” This expression exposes the fact that it is not his habit to roll the stick around his fingers.

5. Conclusion

The above given stylistic analysis of the short story *Overcoat* using Leech and Short (2007) model of stylistic analysis brings into view the distinctive characteristics of author’s style in all four proposed categories. The usage of nouns and verbs is frequent. The author uses concrete and abstract nouns both kinds in high frequency. However, abstract nouns are almost half in number as compared to concrete nouns. Both kinds of nouns together with adjectives contribute to the setting and progress of the story by describing surrounding places and the personality, and also thinking of the characters depicted.

All the adjectives used by the author either describe the setting around the incidents or physical appearance of different characters. The clusters of nouns and adjectives exhibit the appearance and attributes of the main character portrayed in the short story. Dynamic words play a key role in the progress of the story and the selected short story contains the major part of these, while stative verbs show conditions in which characters exist.

Figures of speech and indigenous words have been used by the writer to create special effect, to clarify an idea and to make the writing look more forceful and colorful. Besides these features author uses co-referential to make the text a cohesive hole. Another distinct quality of author is his deviation from normal patterns of language, by using unnecessary commas and conjunctions.

It can be concluded that appropriate use of lexical items, figures of speech, point of view distinct grammatical features and style of narration play a key role in the development of the story. The writer has skillfully presented the theme that we should judge people morally not materially as several people pose to be wealthy try to conceal their poverty and deprivation because elite class looks down upon them.

References


