

Analysis Of Stylistic And Syntactic Patterns Of A Poem

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Abstract.

This article is devoted to the stylistic and syntactic analysis of the poem "The Rainy Day" by the English American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The article investigates the content of the poem and how the poem was written, the literary techniques and specific details of the language are focused on.

Key words: *stylistic, syntactic, pattern, simile, metaphor, alliteration, impersonation, allegory, stanza, meter of the poem.*

“Too often, in higher education systems all over the world, literature study is not related to language learning; one is considered something of a better discipline, the other a poor exercise (often committed to lower-level personnel). Language

learning and literary study are dependent on each other and in a specialist context, they should be seen as complementary at all stages in the educational process”¹

The main peculiarity of stylistic and syntactic analysis of a literary work (a poem) is that it investigates how the poem is written rather than the content of the poem. In stylistic and syntactic analysis the literary techniques and specific details of the language are focused on.

In stylistic analysis usually the meter of the poem is determined, then the genre is discussed and finally, the use of figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, impersonation, allegory, etc is searched.

In this article we focused on some lexical difficulties while grammatically, syntactically or stylistically analyzing the poems of English and American poets who wrote many celebrated poems. Poetry doesn't always have to be organized into iambic pentameter or rhyme and scan perfectly. By nature poetry is highly patterned language, and it is sometimes useful to analyze the grammatical forms and syntactic structures employed. Some poems have difficult vocabulary, unusual word order, and use various stylistic devices that may make accurate translation difficult. For instance, in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's² poem “The Rainy Day”, one of his finest poems written about rain, the second stanza³ represents the syntactic patterns of the first: so it deserves a few words of analysis. The poem tells us about the depressing day of the author’s life that is just a severe stage in his life and hopes that will soon pass and be over. Here “the day” is metaphor for “life”. In the first stanza he describes that he is feeling gloomy because every day

¹ McRae, J. 1997. *Literature with a small T*. Hemel Hempstead, U.K.: Prentice Hall.

² Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), American poet, one of the most popular and celebrated poets of his time.

³ A stanza is one of the parts into which a poem is divided. A group of lines forming the basic recurring metrical unit in a poem

is dark and dreary for him. He understands that everyone has bad times in their life, not only him.

The day is cold, and dark, and dreary;

It rains, and the wind is never weary;

The vine still clings to the mouldering wall,

But at every gust the dead leaves fall,

And the day is dark and dreary.

In the second stanza the author tells that his whole life is gloomy. He still thinks of what he did in the past but has given up his dreams that he had in his youth.

My life is cold, and dark, and dreary;

It rains, and the wind is never weary;

My thoughts still cling to the mouldering Past,

But the hopes of youth fall thick in the blast,

And the days are dark and dreary.

The final third stanza shifts from the indicative mood to the imperative one, as the author commands his heart to be calm and stop complaining. Although it is raining now, there is the sun shining behind the clouds that we cannot see. When we are miserable and gloomy or depressed, it can be very difficult to remember happiness. He feels hope and realizes that everybody goes through the difficulty and heartache in their lives but must wait for it to be over.

Be still, sad heart! and cease repining;

Behind the clouds is the sun still shining;

Thy fate is the common fate of all,

Into each life some rain must fall,

Some days must be dark and dreary.

The poem includes a number of examples of poetic terms. For instance, the poet used imagery in the second line of the third stanza “Behind the clouds is the sun still shining”. It puts into our minds an image of the sun risen high above the dark clouds.

The poet masterly used rhyme too with the words “dreary/weary”, “wall/fall”, “Past/blast”, “all/fall”.

Also, satire is used in the first and third lines of the third stanza.

There are, of course, several lexical difficulties in this poem; the words *dreary*, *weary*, *cling*, *mouldering*, *gust*, *repining* and *fate* are likely to be new to many students and some will not know the archaic form *thy*. Rather than have the students address to their dictionaries immediately, it would be better to see what they can infer from context. Because *dreary* follows the adjectives *cold* and *dark*, it is natural to suppose that it describes something unpleasant. The word *clings* between *vine* and *wall* gives a powerful clue to its meaning. If the students are told that *gust* usually occurs in the expression *gust of wind*, they should be able to work out what it means. Not all vocabulary can be understood from context, however, and some dictionary work or explicit explanation provided by the teacher will be necessary.

As regards syntactic patterns, it is advisable to consider the first two stanzas together. The first task for the students is to identify the verbs used and the tenses

in which they appear. It will be clearly seen that the same verbs and tenses occur in these two stanzas:

Line 1: to be/present simple

Line 2: to rain/present simple,

to be/present simple

Line 3: to cling/present simple

Line 4: to fall/present simple

Line 5: to be/present simple

It takes a minute to note the adjectives that appear in both stanzas. The next step is to compare the subjects of the verbs in lines 1, 3, 4 and 5 (line 2 is identical in the two stanzas).

Lines	First stanza	Second stanza
Line 1	My day is ...	My life is ...
Line 2	It rains ... the wind is ...	It rains ... the wind is ...
Line 3	The vine clings ...	My thoughts ... cling ...
Line 4	... dead leaves fall hopes of youth fall ...
Line 5	... the day is the days are ...

The next stage is to give the learners some direct questions to answer:

1. Are there any possessive adjectives in the first stanza?
2. Are there any in the second paragraph?
3. Can we substitute *my* for the article *the* in lines 4 and 5 of the second stanza?
4. Why do we have *day* singular in the first stanza but *days* plural in the second?
5. The title is *The Rainy Day*. Is the first stanza about a rainy day?

6. Is the second stanza about a rainy day? If not, what it is about?

At this point the learners should be able to say that the first stanza is indeed about a rainy day while the second employs the same verbs, verb tenses, and adjectives to describe someone's state of mind or feelings. The double use of the possessive adjective *my* could suggest that the poet is concerned with his own mood, although other students might interpret the second stanza as a more general description of a human tendency towards a feeling of pensive sadness. Both views can be supported by the text.

Now let's look at the analysis of the verbs and tenses/moods in the third stanza.

Line 1: to be/imperative, to cease/imperative

Line 2: to shine/present continuous

Line 3: to be/present simple

Line 4: must/modal verb,
to fall/infinitive without *to*

Line 5: must/modal verb,
to be/infinitive without *to*

Follow-up questions might be:

1. Who are the imperatives in line 1 addressed to?
2. What possessive adjective can you find? Who does it refer to?
3. The modal verb *must* can refer to a specific obligation (I must get up early tomorrow morning.) or to a logical deduction (He completed the New York marathon. He must be very fit.). How is it used in lines 4 and 5?

Analysis of the verbs and tenses/moods leaves little opportunity for personal interpretation, at least two of the questions above do not necessarily have a single correct answer. It could be argued that the poet addresses his own sad heart, or that of the reader, or both. There is similar ambiguity regarding the possessive pronoun *thy*. At this final stage, some disagreement among the students is to be encouraged.

Most learners hesitate to express strong personal views on such literary heavyweights as Longfellow. As we can see from these examples of stylistic analysis, learners can enjoy considerable success in applying their linguistic

knowledge to gain insight into how a literary text works, an experience that builds confidence and makes the transition to literary interpretation less difficult to deal with.

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