Of Relating the Linguistic Description to an Interpretation of a Literary Work (Poetry)

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Abstract

This article attempts to see, through the structural significances of poetic language, the nature of the split between linguistic description and literary interpretation. Rhythm is the most prominent means of relating form to content in poetic language. The first account of this prominence is seen through identifying its position in the two prosodic forms of metrical and non-metrical poetry. Foregrounding has been seen as a significant feature in literary creation. Following Bradford (1997) the analysis undertakes three stages of analysis as 'discovery procedures', 'naturalization', and 'judgment' (renamed in our work as 'remarks'). The first level examines the degree of the tension between the two patterns. In the second level, i.e. naturalization, the analysis goes on turning the peculiar language of the poem into that of the ordinary, which means making sense of a text. This translation of the poetic language has been shown to be considerably rooted in elements of form in the classical verse, and of content in modern free verse. The intervening type has thus been judged to exist somewhere between the two. The third level, namely 'remarks' evaluates the degree of the poet's success in managing the tension between the two patterns.

Introduction

The appearance of stylistics as a semiautonomous discipline is a modern phenomenon (Fowler 1966, Crombie 1987, Fabb 2002), an ongoing

development in linguistic description that is closely tied to the similar rise of literary criticism and linguistics as academic subjects and departments. Modern stylistics, in general, draws much of its analytical power from the analytical methods and descriptive intentions of linguistics, while modern literary stylistics, in particular, draws upon that area and adds to it the interpretive goals of modern literary criticism. In both cases, the use of linguistic methodology has allowed stylistics to move beyond earlier normative and prescriptive descriptions of 'correct' styles to a fuller analysis of language itself and the purposes to which language regularly is put.

Whatever the limits of previous approaches to style, or the difficulties that have arisen from the practical application of linguistic methods to stylistic analysis, the desire to begin with a set of well-defined terms and procedures lies at the core of the initial formation of stylistics as a discipline. The use of linguistic procedures thus offered stylistics both an affinity with an established discipline and the possibility of founding the description and interpretation of style upon the bedrock of science. The crux of the problem, however, lies not so much in linking the stylistic description to some literary interpretation, but of 'motivating' that linkage. Given the fact that a literary work can have more than one plausible interpretation and that no algorithm exists which automatically assigns a stylistic description to a particular interpretation, how can the analyst 'motivate' a claimed link between linguistic 'form' and literary 'meaning', or stated in slightly different terms, how does an analyst go about showing that a particular stylistic description actually does support a particular interpretation of a work.

Poetry is a movement from 'text' to 'context', and that such a movement or transfer happens in a poem not once, but many times, once from text to context, once from context to its various contextual layers / levels, from the structure to its various structural levels, and finally from meaning to its various semantic levels. (Abercrombie 1932, Attridge 1995). This ever-repeating internal movement is the real cause of the creation of a sense of centrality in poem. This

perhaps results from our general agreement that poetry happens to exist unexpectedly from the depth of silence. And that, it again loses it trace in depth of silence, and on this rising and setting silence-orientation it stands different from prose, where we neither start from, nor end in silence. What one says in prose could be said by another, or even well extended. This conception, of course, does not rule out the principle of regularity in the structure of a poem, but signifies the way this regulation appears to be different from that of a piece of prose.

The analysis suggested here is that of Bradford's (1997) double pattern with its three explanatory levels, namely the discovery procedures, naturalization and judgment (renamed here as remarks). The empirical data on which all these may apply would be divided, as they really exist, into two classes of Persian metrical and non-metrical poetry. The former would further be divided into (1) poetry following strictly the classical prosodic rules, and (2) poetry following the metrical feet but considerably violating the strict classical prosodic line boundaries. To avoid any confusion, one must note that the violation here should not be seen as instances of variation as are well conceivable in any armory of prosodic framework, but as something which turned out, in the evolutionary scope of Persian prosody, to be a new class by itself. The second class, i.e. the free verse captures basically the unmetered poetic compositions of the modern style.

Building upon the notion of foregrounding and its two powerful devices, i.e. deviation and extraregularity (Safavi 2001), and also that (a) the essence of the metrical poetry is basically that of the surface form of the language, being achieved by means of extraregularity, (b) in every pattern of parallelism, there must be a proportion of similarity and difference, and (c) almost no uniformity exists among the techniques resulted from parallelism, so its various types must be sought in phonological, morphological and syntactic levels of analysis, we assume as true the following definition for metrical poetry (verse): 'Metrical verse is a literary genre which appears on the outer shell of language by means

of parallelism resulted from repetition through extraregularity.' This will further lead us towards concluding - as the core idea in our hypothesis here - that extraregularity, in its limited scope to the phonological repetitions, in general, depends on the surface form of the language, and deviation on its content. It could, therefore, be possible to think of the following as a seemingly reasonable definition for non-metrical poetry (free verse): 'Non-metrical poetry is a literary genre which appears on the inner shell of language by means of deviation from the norms of automated language'.

1. Metrical poetry evaluation

a. Discovery procedures

Rhythm acts as a coordinator of the language devices, namely phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic, yet in a scene which is all functional with higher degrees of figurative language. The metaphoric state of rhythm caused by stress is in fact a single, individual effect which always presents itself in a coherent manner. Words here are individual characters, and rhythm their director. Words are not part of a scene, but its creator.

To have a better sense of the figurative state of the poetic language and the degree of the agreement between rhythm and the poem's subject matter, we present here some lines of both classical and modern metrical poetry. The modern poetry, as is conceived here, shares with the classical the usage of the classical metrical units, but it sets itself free from the limitations of verse line, and brings to fore the notion of verse paragraph. This is the first, and the most significant point of separation of modern poetry from the huge body of the classical, thanks to Nimā Yushij, the rhythms employed by the modern poets are stylistically referred to as Nimāyi rhythms.

Obviously in his scope, rhythm is not static and individual, but something which is independent of music but related to it, and related to the necessary form that the nature of the dialouge (between the poet and reader) creates:

1) /ʔey gol ke mowj-e xandeʔat ʔaz sar gozašte ʔast/

    oh flower that wave of your laughter from head it has passed

(oh flower who are all gone in laughter)

/ʔa:ma:de ba:š gerye-ye talx-e gola:b-ra:/

    ready   (you) be cry of   sore of rosewater-acc.

(be ready for the time of cry when your water is being extracted)

                                  (Sāʔeb Tabrizi 1954)

The meter : [- - v -] [v - v -] [- - v -] [v -]

2) /ʔahl-e ka:ša:nam/

    native-of Kashan I am

(I am a native of Kashan)

/ru:zega:ram bad ni:st/

    days-my   bad   isn't

(I have enough to survive)

/tekke na:ni: da:ram, xorde hu:ši:, sar-e su:zan zowqi:/

    piece   bread-one I.have small intelligence-one head-of needle talent-one

(I have a little money, some little intelligence, and a very small amount of talent)

/ma:dari: da:ram, behtar ʔaz barg-e deraxt/

    mother-one   I. have   better   than leaf-of   tree

(I have a mother better than the leaves of trees)

/du:sta:ni: behtar ʔaz ʔa:b-e rava:n/

    friends   better   than water-of flowing

(I have friends better than flowing water)

                                  (Sepehri 1978)

In the first poetic lines, we have the meter "mostafʔalon mafāʔelon mostafʔalon faʔal" imposed on a line that could take, in the first, non-literary pattern, the form of /ʔey gol ke mowje xandeʔat ʔaz sar gozašte ʔast, gerye-ye

talx-e gola:b ra: ?a:ma:de ba:š/. Thus, syntactic deviation would be our first observation in the second, literary pattern. The phonological repetitions could be seen at the two sides of the double pattern, non-literary and literary, with the difference being that these instances practically add to the musicality of the rhythm in the second – pattern scene. The metaphoric uses of /xande-ye gol/ and /gerye-ye gola:b/ point to the second pattern's difference from that of the first. The fourth point is the mood of the meter chosen, that is heavy in tempo and serious, and sad. The poet's symbolic use of /gol/ for all youth, liveliness and beauty and its laughter which refers us to a reckless instances of living, continues, in the next hemistich, to the time when death reaches, when the 'gol' has to give its nectar and fade away. The fifth point is the poetic line division, into two equal hemistiches, which completely follows the formulation of the classical forms. The sixth point of consideration is that of stress markers which do not show any serious tension between the two patterns.

The next example is a poem based on the metrical unit "fā?elāton" with the line scansion as follows:

1) - v - - / -

2) - v - - / - -

3) - v - -/ - -, / - v - -, / v v - - / - -

4) - v - - / - , / - v - - / v v -
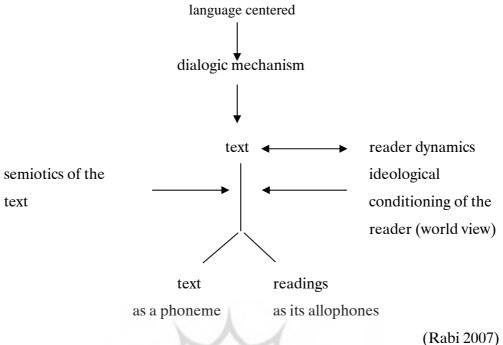
5) - v - - / - v - - / v v –

….

As can be observed, again the lines do not exceed the four feet except for line 3. Interestingly, we observe also the way the phrasal junctures work in conformity with the metrical pattern, as it repeats the metrical foot wherever it appears: twice in line 3, and once in line 4. The metrical foot "fā?elāton" also repeatedly changes into "fa?alāton" – in line 3. The repetition of the metrical foot after the juncture clearly shows a structural fact, that the line could have

been stopped at the juncture and led to another new line. This fact can be proved as per the metrical rule, in that the line – endings show two patterns: (1) "v v-", and (2) "-". In case of the former, we see the replacement of two short syllables by one long syllable. Thus in line three we could have had a line ending in "- -" and another line after the complete foot "- v - -". The same analogy goes well with line 4. This poem shows a very tight link between the rhythmic structure and the poetic line division. The narrative, tell-tale language of the poem is enriched semantically by such similes as /ma:dari: behtar ʔaz barg-e deraxt/, /du:sta:ni: behtar ʔaz ʔa:b-e rava:n/. The poet uses the elements of nature – /barg/, /deraxt/, /ʔa:b/ – which is in fact the major feature of his poetry. This is however meant to express the maximum extent of purity, and Godliness which can be sought in nature. The phonological repetition shows itself primarily in the form of external and internal rhyme the frequency of which is not particularly in the poem. Yet the poem is almost captured by syntactic deviations – lines 3, 4 and 5.

b. Naturalization

Here our concern would basically be on the reader's side and the way he responds to a piece of verse composition, to what the poet preplans, and artistically presents. The reader's responsibility is to unfold, or in Bradford's terms, to naturalize the codes, to neutralize the poetic features and simply to destylize the text so as to make it similar to or even the very same, structure of the ordinary language:

language centered

↓

dialogic mechanism

↓

text ←——→ reader dynamics

semiotics of the → ← ideological

text conditioning of the

reader (world view)

text readings

as a phoneme as its allophones

(Rabi 2007)

This methodology accepts as true that it is only in literary works that aspects of the material and the medium can both be foregrounded. It is in this scene that reader's creativity becomes meaningful, for as we shall see in our discussion for the modern metrical poetry, the level above the sentence symbol (Gargesh 1990), what we have already done in our discovery procedures, would reach us to viewing rhythm as an "extended metaphor" which stands in relation to our compliance with the other aspects of the text, namely phonological, morphological, syntactic, figurative, semantic and pragmatic. That is the point to evaluate the aesthetic realization of the text by the reader, which necessarily has a share of all the above aspects, either in a positive or a negative outlook. This aesthetic realization is also multilayered. The pleasure that the reader receives through feeling the musicality of a verse line is the first-level pleasure, and can well be enhanced through his actual involvement in an attempt to realize the coordination of all aspects of the language for creating a higher level of aesthetic appreciation. In this way he can well add to, or extract from the text what that may possibly be not even the experience of the poet himself.

We should make sense of the text by translating it into the terms and conditions of the non-literary language; to monitor its use of literary devices to

disrupt and refocus familiar registers of the text. All this is what the reader is expected to do in his attempt to realize the language of poetry. The reader of poetry should have a sense of poetic realization. This is the point at which we hear common sense calls poetry as difficult to understand. Because not only should the reader have a realization of the rhythm, but he is also supposed to appreciate the interaction of the rhythm, form, with the subject matter, content. Thus, the reader should elevate his level of art appreciation. More probably at this level, various readings, or the possibility of such readings, would lead him to more, or deeper, realization of this interaction. The reader is then creative, i.e. he plays a significant role to play on the stage created by the poet. Three major steps must be taken in any serious attempt to destylize a piece of poem here:

1) The rhythm must vanish. That necessarily requires the collapse of the foot which further necessitates the loss of unity between syllables. Also the specific time-bound pronunciation of the syllables must be turned into the normal state of the ordinary speech (This factor is of course more of a pragmatic value).

2) The division of the lines should be as per the rule of the grammar of the ordinary language, so no poetic line can exist, and

3) The vocabulary and poetic language must be degraded to the level of the ordinary language.

What may still remain is some instance of phonological repetition that simply exists at any level of language. To break the structure of a metrical rhythm, the first step would be to recognize the major, counting metrical foot/feet in any structure.

c. Remarks

Here we should examine how best the double pattern is used. Doing this means to see the degree of the technical accomplishment in the management of literary and non-literary registers. We decided "rhythm" to be the product of

the phonological component with all its techniques (rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, etc.) and that of conceptualization to be the product of the semantic component with all its techniques (simile, metaphor, etc.). Yet the difference between the two types of poetry under question would be that rhythm, in the former, plays more on the phonological side, and in the latter, it becomes more an element of conceptualization.

2. Free poetry evaluation

In this type of poetry, rhythm begins, projects itself toward, peters out, changes or stops but it does not fall into regular patterns made up of groups of rhythmic pulses. Here rhythm is achieved by the interaction between the rhythms of the language itself, and the line divisions marked on the page. The lack of normative organization may indeed be the one defining the characteristic of this complex and somewhat perplexing form. Following Frye (Koelb 1985) we call this rhythm 'associational' or 'oracular' with its peculiar relation to ordinary speech. A unit of this rhythm is neither the prose sentence, nor the metrical line, but a kind of thought-breath or phrase. It is a somewhat personal style tending to use asymmetric and often long lines, repetition of words or phrases, or even projection of a single word in a separate line and mixture of idiom. The following piece serves as an example:

3) /qasd-am ʔa:za:r-e šoma:st/!
      intention-my   hurt-of   you it is

(my intention is to hurt you)

/ʔagar ʔi:ngu:ne be rendi:/
   if   so   with candour

(if with so much candour)

/ba: šoma:/
with   you

(with you)

/soxan ʔaz ka:mya:ri-ye xi:š dar miya:n mi:goza:ram/,

  speech from happiness-of   mine in   middle   I. put

 (I speak of my happiness)

-/masti-yo   ra:sti:/-

 drunkenness-and candour

 (I'm drunk and candid)

/bejoz ʔa:za:r-e šoma:/

 except   hurt-of   you

(except hurting you)

/hava:y-i:/

 air-one

 (any intention)

/dar sar/

 in   head

(in mind)

/na-da:ram/.

 not-I. have

(I don't have)

(Shamlu 1971)

a. Discovery procedures

Before attempting a careful examination of the poem at this level of analysis, it might be noticed that the degree of the tension between the two patterns is comparatively less than what existed before (in the previous class). The reason could be sought in the structure of the rhythm, as it does not follow that strict regulation of metrical pattern and depends more heavily on the speech rhythm. Also, the instances of the highly regulated phonological repetitions, rhyme, do

not seem to exist as such. This of course does not mean to totally ignore all such instances, but to believe that they are not as effective as they used to be in the previous poetic compositions. In the example above we can observe, as its most obvious features, the graphological deviation in lines 4, 7, 8, and 9. This is the most powerful instance of tension between the two patterns. The whole poem consists of only two complete statements, or better to say, sentences which are cut into pieces: one statement covers line 1, 2, 3, and 4 and another 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. This literary, i.e. poetic ordering, deviates from the rules of ordinary language. The foregrounded poetic pieces are lined so to turn the ordinary rhythm of those statements in the ordinary language into the poetic rhythm. The poem contains no bold metaphoric compounding, and its language is simple and ordinary, even somehow colloquial, as in line 5. Suprasegmentals, namely stress and intonation, play significant role here, as lines 3, 7, 8, and 9 are single-worded lines (in line 8 we have a prepositional phrase) and strongly emphatic. This emphatic sense is achieved through abnormal ordering in written form, and should be sustained through stress, and tone markers in spoken form.

Interestingly enough, the poem does not contain any syntactic deviation, and phonological repetitions are more or less present to the same effect as that of the ordinary language. It is generally hard to try to expect any considerable pattern, in such repetitions, of external or even internal music of the rhythm. Thus the structure of the rhythm depends more on deviation than extraregularity.

b. Naturalization

In our discussion for the tension between the two patterns, three major elements of tension can be counted:

1) That rhythm structure builds heavily on the music of speech, or even the music of words, and it depends on deviation of either graphological, semantic, or stylistic nature.

2) That the division of the poem into its poetic lines depend heavily on the rhythm texture which creates, or highlights the scenes of metaphoric sense, and

3) That the rhythm texture works on tone element (stress and intonation). The effect of the juncture between the lines should not be overlooked.

These elements together with some minor ones (phonological repetitions) show how free poetry, makes use of language components to distinguish itself from the ordinary language. Out of those three steps we decided in our analysis of the metrical poetry, it is possible to apply the last two steps here, namely the removal of the poetic lines, and the translation of the metaphoric language or the poetry into that of the ordinary.

Our reader, in this type of poetry, faces some more complexities than he had in the previous type. Here he should be able to see, through the words, the working of the rhythm. The words are most often those of the ordinary language, but they are elevated to a higher semantic level foregrounded by a metaphoric rhythm. Rhythm as metaphor gives more sense of individuality to the scenes created in each poetic line. Finally it is the rhythm itself, which brings all the scenes together and makes a unity whole. Thus, the removal of the poetic line here means the collapse of the rhythmic structure, what we did not find in the other type. The reason simply lies in the fact that this will change the foregrounded music of the words in the structures, and as a result ruins the individuality of the poetic scenes. In free poetry we have the highest level of the metaphoric language of the rhythm. Here we see rhythm as a product of harmony, harmony between words, lines, and in the whole poem. To ruin this harmony is to ruin the whole poem. Previously we judged rhythm as leaning more towards phonological selection in the classical poetry, and, to its reverse, it moves more toward the semantic selection in the modern style, and is thus present both in "form" and "content" accomplishment. Here we say rhythm is the creator of "content", which finds its language through deviation at different levels.

c. Remarks

The direction of analysis is to see how well the two patterns could make the poems as literary compositions would bring before us the question of how well the reader could realize them. The reader seems to be totally free in his judgment for he is given the maximum space to move. The content is so made that the reader does not feel bound to one interpretation and no other. The question is whether or not both the reader and the poet could share one single point as their target; in other words, whether the reader's interpretation matches the intention of the poet. And this matching can only be partly systematized, the more he realizes the working of the poetic elements, the better he translates the poem. But what if the realization of the poem stands away, if not far, from what the poet has really in mind? There seems to be no confident answer to this question, except for leaving as open, as we do here, the possibility of a complete mismatching.

Finally, to conclude from all analyses we have so far made for the two classes, it might be said that in the first class, "form" plays the most part, and separates itself from the "content". In the second type of the same class the share is almost equally divided between "form" and "content" as two interdependent components and in the second class, the most part is played by "content" and it chooses various, relevant "forms" to express itself, the forms that are achieved by graphological, semantic, stylistic, chronological, and other instances of deviation from the language of the ordinary.

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