An Analysis of Verbal Parallelism in T.S. Eliot's Poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of anaphora, epistrophe, symploce, homoioteleuton, polyptoton and some other stylistic devices that T.S. Eliot employs in the actualisation of his poetic composition *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. These various types of verbal parallelism are the integral part of his artistic skills and poetic disposition. Eliot's aestheticisation processes as a poet depend heavily upon a set of regularities of form. Geoffrey N. Leech's book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* is selected to inform the study with reference to its theoretical framework. This research would prove very helpful to the readers for exploring the size and depth of the poetic emotions and thoughts with the help of different ploys and strategies of linguistic parallelisms experimented in the given poem. What role the artistic parallelism is to play for foregrounding some message is the target of the present study.

Keywords: Anaphora; Verbal Parallelism; T.S.Eliot; Homoioteleuton; Polyptoton
Introduction

Balance is central to art. Different arts adopt different techniques to achieve this aesthetic equilibrium. As far as the genre of poetry is concerned, it uses various literary devices; deviations and parallelism are two main categories in this regard. Verbal parallelism that consists of poetic strategies like anaphora, epistrophe, symploce, homoioleteuton, polyptoton is perhaps the most important feature of the style of a writer. T.S. Eliot besides using deviations is known for his leaning on linguistic parallelism. In his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* we notice an important role of the repetition of grammatical moulds. Anaphora that stands for the repetition of some linguistic material at the start of consecutive phrases, clauses and lines is often observed in the poem under analysis; the purpose of this technique is to stress some idea and facilitate the memorability of the reader regarding the given poem. Homoioteleuton that accounts for the repetition of the derivational and inflectional endings of different words is also a significant ploy of Eliot to weave the form of his poems. Polyptoton which means the "repetition of a word with varying grammatical inflections" (Leech, 1989, p. 82) is another stylistic device used in the poem. All these devices along with some other techniques are used skillfully by Eliot to bring about the

Data Analysis and Discussion

Anaphora is the initial verbal repetition, opposite of epistrophe, which stands for final verbal repetition. It speaks for the repetition of the same word(s) or phrase, at the beginning of the successive phrases, lines, clauses or sentences; it is used commonly in conjunction with climax and parallelism. It is one of the popular stylistic strategies that find an important place in the modern poetry. Line 31 in the *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* offers an example of anaphora:

Time for you and time for me,                                      (31)

This line is a befitting example of isocolon which denotes a succession of phrases of approximately equal length and corresponding structure; both the phrases consist of equal number
of syllables. Verbal parallelism is synchronized with syntactic parallelism. Anaphora contains two parts: invariant and variant part. In this example of anaphora the linguistic items at the beginning of two parallel phrases 'time for' is the invariant part and the rest is the variant part. Anaphora is not a casual and haphazard rhetorical figure. Eliot here uses this figure of rhetoric for some specific purposes. The repetition of the linguistic items of 'time for' "hammers home the content" (Leech, 1989, p.85). Time is slipping out of the hands of the persona and he in a state of severe agitation and excitement that is expressed through this parallelistic structure. He has a wish for action but his will is paralyzed: he cannot assert. He can only create refuge in the possibilities of time.

Lines 42-43 exhibit another example of anaphora:

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,

My necktie rich and modest, but assisted by a single pin- (42-43)

The lexeme 'my' is used at the beginning of three successive phrases. Therefore, they are anaphorically parallel to each other. The verbal parallelism is also accompanied with syntactic parallelism. The repeated use of 'my' is extraordinary; it makes these lines strikingly pronounced. The deliberate and conscious use of 'my' is to create the desired effects in stylistics. First, the persona is a socially alienated soul; he has no sense of belonging to the society. He wants to have harmonies with it but his fear of being rejected makes him rush from image to image. In his agony he runs to various sources for help but in vain; In fact his "suppressed self" (Williamson, 1988, p.65) constantly keeps him in instability. The repetition of 'my' shows that now he is asserting but it is only a sham reality. It emphasizes his use of crutches to do an 'overwhelming' work. Therefore, the repetition of 'my', at the same time, indicates his studious but lamentable efforts and various amusing gestures, to come to the threshold of action.
Epistrophe is the "Final repetition; the opposite of anaphora" (Leech, 1989, p.81). It is the repetition of the same word(s), falling at the end of the successive phrases, clauses, sentences, or lines. It is an extremely emphatic device because of the emphasis laid on the last word or words of the successive linguistic items. To stress heavily depends upon this figure. An example of epistrophe is noticed in the lines 97-98:

Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all'. (97-98)

The words 'at all' are repeated at the end of both the adjacent sentences; it is not a normal use of language; it is an abnormal arrangement of words to make the lines marked and popped out to create the intended aesthetic effects. Here the verbal repetition of 'at all' presses home the relentless quickness in the rejection of the proposal and solid determination of the targeted lady. The persona is a man of hallucinations who hears the harsh and disheartening words of the lady in his imagination. The repetition of 'at all' hammers home this content.

Symploce is an important type of verbal parallelism consisting of the combination of the anaphora and epistrophe. One word, phrase, or expression is repeated at the beginning and another word, phrase or linguistic expression is repeated at the end of successive phrases, clauses sentences or lines. Leech, while discussing the structure of symploce, says: "Initial combined with final repetition; i.e. anaphora and epistrophe together" (Leech, 1989, p.81). This figure of repetition foregrounds the concerned part of a poem, to serve some specific purposes. The lines 15-16 of the poem The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock hold out an occurrence of this scheme:

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes, (15-16)

About these two lines Leech says: "This is an example of a fairy strong verbalism, in which symploce (initial and final repetition) is combined with medial repetition, the pattern is represented by formula (a…b…c) (a...b...c...)" (Leech, 1989, p.83). The lexemes 'the yellow' are
repeated at the beginning of the two successive lines. The linguistic items of 'the window-panes' have the exact verbal repetition at the end of these two clauses. Further, both the lines have similarity in the occurrence of the comma at the end. The verbal parallelism is hand in hand with syntactic parallelism. The repetition of 'the yellow' at the beginning and that of 'the window-panes' at the end is an uncommon use of language which is well contrived to produce the desired stylistic effects. The persona of the poem is 'a patient etherized upon a table'; he is tilted towards inaction and inertia and is allergic to action. His movement to his destination is likened to fog - the Prufrockian cat - which does not walk, rather drags its back upon the window-panes. The repetition of 'the yellow' and that of 'the window-panes' does stress the nature of the persona's move to his goal. 'The yellow' fog is very fluid; it seems in motion but in fact it is not. Its yellow colour and the transparency of the window-panes both deceive our eyes. The fog is destined to make a motion and then retreat into its mass. "If the cat image suggests sex, it also suggests the greater desire of inactivity" (Williamson, 1988, p.60). The repetition of 'the yellow' and that of the 'window-panes' is to heighten this aspect of it. It is also very helpful to stamp this image on the mind of the reader. Further, it makes the lines easy to stick to our memory. Lastly, this repetition is so successful in creating impressions on the mind of the reader that the fog episode turns into an Imagist poem within a poem. It is also so successful in its sensation and effects that the image of the persona always comes to our mind and eyes as a cat.

Homoioteleuton is a strategic use of word(s) to foreground a stretch of language; it stands for similarity of endings in adjacent or parallel words. According to Leech this scheme denotes "The repetition of the same derivational or inflectional ending on different words" (Leech, 1989, p.82). In terms of comparison, this figure is cast as "the morphological counterpart" (Leech, 1989, p.82) of epistrophe - the final verbal repetition; it can be called the end-repeater. An example of this repetition of expression is spotted in lines 4-9 of The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock:
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in the one-night cheap hotels

And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

Streets that follow like a tedious argument

Of insidious intent (4-9)

The occurrence of the plural morpheme '-s' with the lexical items of 'street', 'retreat', 'night', 'hotel', 'restaurant' and 'oyster-shell' is a shrewd use of language; the planned recurrence of this inflectional morpheme is well contrived to create the intended stylistic effects. First, with the help of the inflectional sign the poet is successful in materialising/externalizing a long chain of barriers, obstacles and hindrances, in the psyche of the persona who is on his way to action; the filthy and ill-smelling locations, realized through the plural morpheme, are the "emotional realities" (Drew, 1950, p.54) of the persona. The crowd of hurdles and obstructions is sufficient enough to betray the persona's paralysed will. Second, this inflectional ending is also effective to procure the semantic juxtapositions at the beginning of the poem. Semantically, the above quoted words with the plural inflection, deal with the common theme of modern barrenness. Panic, unease, and helplessness are the common semantic parameters of 'half-deserted streets', 'restless nights', 'sawdust restaurants' and 'muttering retreats'; these vivid images do stress "the ugliness and squalor of the common urban scene" (Drew, 1950, p.54). Third, the attachment of the same inflectional ending to a heap of images with particular nature creates a powerful impression that the persona will never be able to come to the surface for action, from the interiors of his psyche. The persona is a helpless insect that remains entangled in the pitiable "locations" (Scofield, 1988, p.58) of his mind.
Lines 32-33 are foregrounded owing to the similarity of endings in some neighbouring words in them:

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.  (32-34)

The addition of the plural inflection 's' to the parallel nouns 'indecision' , 'vision' , and 'revision' is a conscious and rhetoric use of language to arrest the attention of the reader. This homoioteleuton is finely framed to produce some linguistic effects. First, the use of plural 's' is not only added to all the important nouns of a couple of lines, it is also to be noticed that these nouns are preceded by 'a hundred'. These 'indecisions', 'visions' and 'revisions' are just an activity of hair splitting that has occupied the mind of the speaker to the maximum extent. He is trapped in a circular voyage and diurnal journey of indecisions, visions and revisions which are his studiously sought excuses and pretexts to avoid action. The plural morpheme 's' here stands for strong walls of inaction within which the persona remained imprisoned; "the impossibility of escape from it" (Drew, 1950, p.53) is ensured. Secondly, the use of the plural morpheme 's' is also employed by T.S. Eliot to foreground the mock-heroic character of the persona. The plural morpheme plays its role effectively, to inflate the tension that is bound to "explode into gentle ridicule" (Williamson; 1988:61). The anticlimax is created when 'visions' and 'revisions' are followed by 'before the taking of a toast and tea'. "The same kind of mock-heroic contrast appears in the un-Hesiodic 'works and days of hands' " (Williamson, 1988, p.61); this stylistic effect is created with the help of the plural inflection 's'. In both these examples of homoioteleuton the plural morpheme 's' and the word 'time' are used excessively and consciously by the poet. "the tension mounts as the time shortens" (Williamson, 1988, p.61). At that moment the persona, instead of bracing himself runs after infinite lame excuses to shy away from action. Eliot suggests all this through sensations and impressions created by the plural inflection' s'
Polyptoton is the opposite of homoioteleuton; the former is the root-repeater and the later is the end-repeater. These repetitions are used in the poetry of T.S. Eliot to underline and underscore a particular idea more successfully than elaborating it. They are like the ringing of the bell which at once catches the attention of the listener. There are many other purposes too that are realized through this repetition. The following lines exhibit an example of this type of verbal parallelism:

I am no prophet---and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moments of my greatness flicker, (83-84)

Here the lexemes 'great' and 'greatness' have the same root 'great'; this unusual use of this lexeme makes the lines strikingly marked, to create the desired artistic effects. 'Great' is the lexeme which does suit the heroically grand figures only; but here the word has a ludicrously appropriate use to create ripples of laughter and smiles. A pigmy is put in the grand mould to emphasize the "self mocked-romanticism" (Scofield, 1988, p.62) of the persona. The repetition of 'great' in these two lines enhances the comic effects in the poem.

No doubt, T.S. Eliot makes marvelous use of the important traditional figures of rhetoric. But basically he is an inventive talent who is always prone to the creative use of language; therefore he sometimes introduces innovations in the traditional rhetoric catalogue, to clothe his powerful thoughts and feelings. For example:

(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!' ) (41)
(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!' ) (44)

Both the lines have the same syntactic structures; both the lines start and finish with brackets; both the lines have the same initial verbal repetition of (They will say: 'how his-'); both the parallel structures have the same final verbal repetition of '-thin!'). But it is not the example of symploce because in symploce there is no gap and intervention between parallel structures. It is certainly a creative repetition of its own kind. This queer repetition is audible to the listener and
visible to the reader. It emphasizes the psychological dismemberment of the persona conveyed through his physical fragmentation of thin hair, the legs and the arms; "The mind of Prufrock is unable to cohere into a single train of thought" (Scofield, 1988, p.49).

An important repetition is noticed in the lines 13-14 and 35-36:

In the room the woman come and go

Talking of Michael Angelo. (13-14)

In the room the woman come and go

Talking of Michael Angelo. (35-36)

At first sight this irregular repetition seems to be the example of ploce; but in fact it is not. Because the gap between the repeated constructions is so big as to consist of twenty lines. Therefore, this irregular repetition of its own kind belongs to Eliot's distinguished poetic discourse. It is not a common use of language; this repetition stands out to create the desired stylistic effects. The repetition highlights the sharp contrast between the persona and the society. The women presenting the society are quite smooth in their action of coming and going and also in spelling out their interpretation and judgment on the creative and heroic works of Michelangelo. On the other hand the repetition also works as a foil to the neurotic, paralyzed, inactive and suppressed anti-hero of the poem; this unique repetition "is the first of his (the persona's) heroic juxtapositions" which "both magnify and mock the overwhelming question" (Williamson, 1988, p.68).

Conclusion

The study makes a conclusion that T.S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, a master creation on the part of the author, is a very successful attempt to deal with the dilemma of the modern man and to aestheticise this theme the poet needed and took a lot of support from the regularities of form like verbal parallelism; anaphora, epistrophe, symplecte, homoioteleuton, polyptoton are some of the rhetoric and literary techniques that are used cleverly to encode and
decode the message in the given poetic creation. These artistic strategies work effectively to create rhythm, produce musicality, and facilitate memorability; it also proves instrumental in emphasising the specific ideas and estranging the poetic material. Prufrock is the persona of the poem and his lack of action and courage is conveyed through all these rhetoric techniques. The popularity of the heavily depends upon the shrewd use of the rhetorical figures. Homoioteleuton and polyptoton are especially very much effective in interpreting and stressing the frustrations and psychological fixtures of the speaker of the poem.

References

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