

A Stylistic Analysis of Lexicon in Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*

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Abstract

Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* is a futuristic, science fiction novel that chronicles the colonization of Mars by humans, projecting the United States' colonial and immigrant past on to a symbolic future. Bradbury's use of language is mostly picturesque and sensory. The present paper applies a text-oriented analysis of stylistic elements that construct meaning in the text and evoke the novel's themes, using the analytic model developed by Leech and Short (2007). The study's focus is on the lexical category—general lexicon, nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs—of chapters that are stylistically representative of Bradbury's descriptive and metaphorically-rich style.

Keywords: stylistics, lexical category, metaphor, semantics, science fiction.

1. Introduction

Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* is a futuristic, science fiction novel that chronicles the colonization of Mars by humans and is analogous to the United States' colonial and immigrant. Bradbury's use of language is mostly picturesque and sensory, setting a mood for each episode. Bradbury is known as much for his style as for his novels. Bradbury states: "Over the years such people as Aldous Huxley have come to me and said, 'You're a poet. It's right there in *The Martian Chronicles* stories'" (qtd. in Aggelis 67). His lyrical prose contains an abundance of sensual and sentimental verbal effects that evoke emotional responses. In a 2010 interview with *The Paris Review*, when asked where the lyricism of his works came from, Bradbury replies: "From reading so much poetry every day of my life." Although poetic language is not usually associated with science fiction writing, Bradbury employs evocative, metaphorical and sensuous language to draw out a set of associations in an unexpected setting. Therefore, Bradbury is not a typical science fiction writer. Where a Martian goes running over the sands, there is a description as running like "wild calipers" to evoke the picture of a long-legged Martian running clumsily (Bradbury "The Earth Men" 75). Ray Bradbury's use of lexis is intended to create certain aesthetic effects that will be analyzed on the lexical level.

1.1 Lexical Analysis

One of the features of a writer's individual style is his tendency towards certain words or types of words. Word-choice or diction is central to the distinctiveness of the style of a particular author. "Therefore style consists in choices made from the repertoire of the Language" (Leech and Short 31). Leech and Short

assert that all literary works have different degrees of ‘Transparent’ and ‘Opaque’ qualities. Bradbury’s novel is ‘opaque’ “in the sense that the medium attracts attention in its own right” (Leech and Short 24). “The novelist’s medium is language: what he does, qua novelist, he does in and through language” (Lodge ix). A text-oriented, linguistic understanding can help in reaching a more accurate interpretation of the novel. Stylistics or ‘literary linguistics,’ “persists in the attempt to understand technique, or the craft of writing” by examining linguistic particularities of a text (Toolan ix). Leech and Short propose a checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories. Each category is placed under four general headings: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. Lexical categories are used to find out how choice of words involves various types of meaning by providing a description of vocabulary choice, and examinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, etc. (Leech and Short 61). This analysis is based on the model presented by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in their book *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. According to Leech and Short every analysis of style, in our terms, is an attempt to find the artistic principles underlying a writer’s choice of language (60).

2. Method

All writers and texts have their individual qualities and features which recommend attention to a specific aspect. Therefore, what is significant in one text will not necessarily be important in another. This study’s focus is on the lexical category—general lexicon, nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs—of chapters that are stylistically representative of Bradbury’s descriptive and metaphorically-rich style. Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short purpose four general linguistic and stylistic categories: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. A lexical category is “a syntactic category for elements that are part of the lexicon of a language. These elements are at the word level” (Gelbukh 14). The present study will focus on the lexical categories of three episodes of *The Martian Chronicles* which are stylistically representative of Bradbury’s descriptive and metaphorically-rich style: “February 1999: Ylla,” “June 2001: And the Moon Be Still as Bright”—the novel’s “philosophical core”—and “October 2026: The Million-Year Picnic” (Cokinios 140). Each episode is selected from the three phases of the novel narrating man’s endeavors on Mars—pre-colonization Mars, colonized Mars, and human settlement as critical turning points. The analysis involves the examination of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

3. Results

While the narrative is full of details and imagery, the choice of vocabulary is simple. Although the novel is considered to be a work of science fiction, specialized vocabulary is rarely witnessed. In general, the vocabulary used in the novel is simple yet formal with a natural usage of language. There are instances of

colloquial words in character dialogues. High lexical density—the ratio of content words to grammatical words—not only makes it ornate and animated but also gives it depth at the same time, forcing the reader to slow down and reflect (Nofal 83). More content words result in semantic richness, whereas avoiding them results in the text being plain and flat. The majority of the words in the short story are descriptive and emotive, describing the setting of the story, appearance of the characters, and others describe characters' state of mind. For instance, as a Martian is standing behind Sam Parkhill, “He felt something in the seat behind him, something as frail as your breath on a cold morning, something as blue as hickory-wood smoke at twilight, something like old white lace, something like a snowfall, something like the icy rime of winter on the brittle sedge” (Bradbury 81).

3.1 Nouns

Nouns have the highest number in the major word classes in all three stories, explaining that Bradbury's emphasis is mostly on describing and showing the readers using nouns. Concrete nouns outnumber abstract nouns of attributes, qualities, and manner in addition to showing the state of mind and emotional circumstances. Proper nouns are used for characters and places from Earth and Mars. The predominance of nouns creates a mental picture in the reader's mind. For example: “They had a house of crystal pillars on the planet Mars by the edge of an empty sea, and every morning you could see Mrs. K eating the golden fruits that grew from the crystal walls” (Bradbury 5).

3.2 Adjectives

Figurative language, which is full of images, requires concrete pictures appealing to the senses by the employment of adjectives. Bradbury employs a great deal of adjectives to create sensation and conjure up an image. Enhancing the effect of nouns in description, adjectives are used to modify the nouns and specify the properties and attributes of the noun referent. Adjectives are the third dominant major word class in this case. Most adjectives are pertaining to the senses, especially physical, visual, color-related, and emotive in order to reflect the setting conditions as well as the emotional and physical state of the characters. For example: “Mother was slender and soft, with a woven plait of spungold hair over her head in a tiara, and eyes the color of the deep cool canal water where it ran in shadow, almost purple, with flecks of amber caught in it. You could see her thoughts swimming around in her eyes, like fish—some bright, some dark, some fast, quick, some slow and easy” (Bradbury 158).

3.3 Verbs

Verbs are next in word class frequency. As conveyers of action and states both dynamic and stative verbs are used to further explain and describe such as verbs referring to movement, physical acts, speech acts, and psychological states or activities. Such verbs create an observable quality for various events and

circumstances in each story. For example: “The wind kept coming in off the dead sea. It moved around the men and it moved around the captain and Jeff Spender as they returned to the group. The wind pulled at the dust and the shining rocket and pulled at the accordion, and the dust got into the vamped harmonica. The dust got in their eyes and the wind made a high singing sound in the air. As suddenly as it had come the wind died” (Bradbury 51).

3.4 Adverbs

Adverbs are the least dominant in the major word classes. The adverbs have been used as modifiers for extra clarity further magnifying the imagery. The most frequent adverbs are: adverbs of manner, adverbs of place, adverbs of time, and adverbs of degree. For example: “He entered the room and looked at her for only a moment. Then he snapped the weapon bellows open, cracked out two dead bees, heard them spat on the floor as they fell, stepped on them, and placed the empty bellows gun in the corner of the room as Ylla bent down and tried, over and over, with no success, to pick up the pieces of the shattered glass” (Bradbury 17).

4. Discussion

Ray Bradbury’s pictorial style slows down the action in the text in order to slow down the reader as well by concentrating the reader’s attention on the details. Bradbury’s signature style, eliminates the traditional technical accuracy of most science fiction and embracing the power of metaphor. He introduces wonder into trivial everyday events by using fanciful, unrealistic elements so often stories consist less of declarative and simply constructed sentences, distanced from the subject it describes and a more ornate poetic writing style. Bradbury arranges words in such a manner to help the reader see, smell, or hear with a list of comparisons, or similes, to produce a similar mental experience on the part of the reader. His stories are visually written like a film and create an emotive atmosphere by using subjective description. Bradbury seeks to create powerful impressions through the selection of evocative details and the use of connotations rather than focusing on factual detail as a science fiction writer is expected to. In order to do so, he takes maximum advantage of vocabulary for the reader to experience both physical and psychological conditions through the course of the narrative. For Bradbury, profound themes of colonization, immigration, and alienation require rich prose style. One that has the capacity to channel the magnitude and depth of such matters.

5. Conclusion

The present paper’s analysis of Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles* was based on the model presented by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in their book *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. The aim of the study was to examine the stylistic value of lexical choices and how the effective use of language and specifically choice of vocabulary, determined by the purpose of a text, leads the process of writing in *The Martian Chronicles*. The author carefully

chooses words from the range of options at his disposal, to effectively and appropriately encode the desired meaning. Bradbury's elaborate language throughout the novel enriches the narrative. Such rich use of language brings animation to the novel in addition to building levels of meaning to its surface plot. Interestingly, as the novel progresses, the language of the narrative appropriates its plot. A picturesque, dreamy Mars described in fanciful vocabulary at the beginning subtly diminishes at the end as it becomes ruined and depopulated.

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