

A Linguistic-stylistic Analysis of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*

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Abstract—This article attempts at conducting a stylistic analytical study of a renowned poem by Lewis Carroll, *Jabberwocky*. It tries to unveil the variations and schemes of linguistic stylistics that can be found in the poem. Carroll's famed poem captivates with its linguistic deviations and imaginative storytelling. This scholarly investigation embarks on a comprehensive stylistic analysis of the iconic poem, delving into its distinctive linguistic features. By exploring Carroll's masterful manipulation of language, especially in the realm of linguistics and stylistics, this research aims at unraveling the poetic brilliance and esthetic allure of *Jabberwocky*. The inquiry commences with a meticulous examination of Carroll's artful utilization of linguistic play, boldly challenging conventional language norms and stretching the reader's comprehension. The poem's unique blend of real and invented words creates boundless creativity. His language exhibits distinctiveness and versatility, employing a diverse array of grammatical and poetic devices to manifest his unique style, thereby adding depth and intrigue to the poem. The methodology entails a comprehensive stylistic analysis based on Geoffrey Leech's eight models of deviations and schemes. Overall, this article will show how linguistic-stylistic bridges the gap between language and literature studies, enriching researchers' understanding of poetry within applied linguistics by scrutinizing the poet's linguistic devices, structures, and effects. The article will encompass a theoretical explanation within the domains of literary analysis, poetic language analysis, and cognitive poetry in the realm of linguistic analysis.

Keywords—Leech's models, Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, Linguistic devices, Linguistic variations and schemes, Stylistic analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to connect language and literature using the linguistic-stylistic analytical technique on Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*. For ages, researchers wrote about the connection between language and literature and how each can merge so tight and inseparable. To many scholars and linguists as can be seen in the underpinning section, especially McIntyre (2014), literary works can be understood using language tools. Stylistics can be one of the tools that can elaborate literary work, especially in the field of poetry. Moreover, the researchers explain how each variation and scheme can work in the production of the poem.

Although many works have been done on stylistics and they applied different variations of different poems, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, none has been conducted on *Jabberwocky* and this would be the reason why the researchers chose this specific work. Moreover, linguistic-stylistics will be explained in the poem by linking the linguistic form and the literary effect; this will elaborate

on the quality of a particular piece of writing by Lewis Carroll. The article will work on the linguistic variation to achieve the aim. Furthermore, the poem will be interpreted linguistically. In later sections, the deviations and schemes will be explained in detail and how each will work on the production of the text.

Leech and Short (1981) explained style as vocabulary that will be used for a specific aim. They explained style and stylistics as the dress of thoughts which can change words and ideas into messages. In addition, the same scholars (1996) illustrated style as a way to use language in a specific context for a specific purpose. Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics which interprets a text based on its linguistic deviations; in contrast, style is the variety of language use among different individuals. Leech (1985) defined stylistics as the study of style to understand any piece of work whether it is literary or non-literary. Furthermore, Widdowson (1986) described stylistics as the study of understanding literature from a linguistic alignment.

Before the 20th century, stylistic studies dealt only with literary works but nowadays, it deals with every type of text from different fields. Stylistics, a division of applied linguistics, examines how literary texts are studied. In addition, Aslam et al. (2014) noted that while in the late 19th century, stylistics was confined to literary texts, the 20th century expanded its scope to analyze non-literary texts such as religious, legal, newspaper, and advertising materials. Different scholars offer diverse definitions of stylistics. Leech and Short (2007) illustrated it as the linguistic exploration of style, not for its own sake but as a means of describing various language uses. In addition, Crystal (2008) viewed stylistics as a linguistic branch that examines the situational language features used by authors in different contexts, establishing principles for exploring individual language choices.

II. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Stylistics will take a close look at any type of text and then examine the text from language and linguistic perspective for the sake of interpretation and comprehension. Linguistic-stylistics has a great role in almost every field of criticism and critical approach. Each linguist, scholar, or researcher defined stylistics from a different perspective; however, from the dictionary definition of stylistic, it can hold the meaning of the science of literary style, or the art of writing formation. Specifically, and vividly, Leech and Short (1981:13) defined the term as “the linguistic study of style.” In addition, Widdowson (1975:4) stated that: by “stylistics” I mean the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation and I shall take the view that what distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other is that it is essentially a means of linking the two. Stylistics, however, involves both literary criticism and linguistics, as its morphological make-up suggests: the style component relating it to the former and the “istics” component to the latter.

Bosan and Paul (2022) mentioned that stylistics involves analyzing literary texts through language study. The primary focus is on understanding how linguistic patterns affect the meaning of texts. By scrutinizing unique language elements, patterns, structures, or levels, the stylistic analysis explores their importance and influence on readers’ understanding. The focus is on identifying repeated patterns and structures that stand out in a text. This assumes that every linguistic aspect in the text holds potential significance. Linguistic tools are employed to sift through these features. The objective is to find linguistic evidence to support a critical assessment, basing intuitions on a thorough, methodical, and explicit textual foundation. The goal is to produce an analysis that is precise, systematic, and detailed, allowing for verification. According to Ayodabo and Butari (2015), the main objective of most stylistic studies is not merely to describe the formal elements of texts in isolation, but rather to demonstrate their functional importance in shaping interpretations.

Nørgaard et al. (2010) suggested that stylistics employs theories, models, and frameworks to elucidate how and why the

text on the page functions. The analysis explores various text features, including semantic, grammatical, lexical, phonological, discursual, and pragmatic aspects. Some stylisticians prioritize the author’s viewpoint, analyzing the text from the author’s perspective, whereas others emphasize the text itself, focusing solely on the text for analysis. Alternatively, certain approaches center on readers’ involvement in constructing meaning during text analysis, acknowledging the role of readers. Watts (1981) emphasized that in stylistic analysis, the stylistician’s task is not to interpret the text but to identify linguistic structures, particularly in literary texts. Some stylistic analysis also aims to validate the methods and principles of the model, not merely interpreting the text.

In her initial version of the Dictionary of Stylistics, Wales (2001) presented various perspectives to perceive style. Numerous stylistic methods in the analysis of literary texts are primarily influenced by both linguistics and literary criticism. While literary materials will be explored, the primary focus remains on the text itself. The stylistic analysis goes beyond simply examining the formal attributes of the text; instead, it aims to reveal the functional importance of the literary text within its specific context.

According to Burke (2014), stylistics is currently a domain of study that adeptly straddles the realms of language studies and literary studies. It serves as a bridge connecting linguistics with literature, enabling stylisticians to employ linguistic data when analyzing literary texts.

As aforementioned, linguistic-stylistic analysis can analyze any literary or non-literary works. Many previous researchers worked on the variations and literary works just as Aslam et al. (2014) and Khan et al. (2014) that they worked on Frost’s *The Onset*. Moreover, Aslam et al. (2014) worked on the stylistic analysis of Frost’s *Bereft* from grammatical, graphological, phonological, and lexical aspects.

Stylistics offers valuable contributions beyond linguistic perspectives and contemporary critical tools, including its impartial approach to analysis. Language-centered theories endeavor to establish an unbiased methodology for analyzing and interpreting literary works, irrespective of the author’s intentions (Kumar, 1987). Moreover, Verdonk (2002) elucidated stylistics as the examination of unique language usage and the explanation of its intended meaning and impact. Before Verdonk, Bradford (1997) highlighted that stylistics is a challenging and intricate subject, and every addition to the extensive and varied field of literary studies will necessitate an exploration of style. Stylistics, with its objectivity, insights from linguistics, and useful terminology, validates readers’ interpretations and enhances their enjoyment of the literature. In contemporary criticism, stylistics has become an integral component, making it imperative for serious students not to disregard it. Literary critics often integrate stylistic analysis into a broader theory of literature, recognizing that the writer’s purpose, involving the fabrication of situations and moral evaluation, is inseparable from the style, which serves as both the means and the delicate texture of that purpose. The fusion of linguistic and literary patterns in a text can be likened to the blending of colors and compositions in a painting (Carter and Stockwell, 2008).

In her analysis (Aitchison, 1999), the author employed a simile to portray the act of crafting a literary language. Writers resemble knitters, seeking to create innovative patterns. They steer clear of clichéd sequences, such as “black despair” or “blue sky,” instead opting for fresh, original combinations that captivate their audience. They aim to construct extraordinary phrases, exemplified by Dylan Thomas’s “a grief ago,” which leaves readers astonished. Similarly, a decade before, Wales (1989) found defining the term “style” challenging due to its subjective interpretation by readers. This complexity impacts the features related to stylistics, a subset of linguistics. She identified several key aspects of style as follows:

1. Style encompasses how individuals express themselves in writing and speaking. Each person exhibits a distinctive style in various activities, such as playing games or problem-solving. Speaking styles can range from humorous to serious, and styles can be characterized as either good or bad.
2. Individuals possess their unique way of approaching actions, writing about themes, or describing artwork. Style can vary depending on the context’s formality, termed “style shifting.” Different literary genres, such as fiction or poetry, also exhibit distinct styles, and styles can evolve, as seen in the contrasting styles of modern and metaphysical poetry.
3. Another essential point highlighted in Wales’ dictionary is that style is discerned by the use of various linguistic features. Writers’ personalities are reflected in their choice and combination of words, resulting in distinct styles. For instance, Jane Austen’s novels such as *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice* reveal her signature style, recognizable to astute readers (Wales, 1989).

Carter and Stockwell (2008: 44) discussed various author styles, such as racy, formal, and colloquial. They defined style and stylistics as “selecting specific structures from available language options. This choice may not always be conscious, as making all linguistic choices consciously would be time-consuming. The best way to convey something can be intuitive or conscious, but the reader’s experience remains unaffected.” Linguistics, a broader field, includes stylistics, aiding readers in uncovering hidden language clues. Stylistics dissects texts into manageable parts, facilitating interpretation. According to Carter and Stockwell (2008), linguistics offers a perspective for consistent analysis, encouraging readers to question the language within the text.

Before analyzing the chosen poem, the foregrounding of the poem should be focused on a crucial term in stylistics. It holds immense significance in poetry analysis, involving the emphasis on a specific element within a text over others. Literary works distinguish themselves by foregrounding their linguistic status, directing attention to how they express ideas rather than the ideas themselves. Poetry deviates from everyday speech and prose, employing meter, metaphors, alliteration, and other devices to highlight its language (Leech, 1969).

According to Leech (1969: 42-52), his study of various poems from a specific time frame revealed distinct types of deviation present in poetry. These deviations can be summarized as follows:

1. Lexical Deviation: Poets employ words in unconventional ways, granting them deeper meaning and esthetic value within the poem.
2. Grammatical Deviation: Poets intentionally disregard sentence structure rules, forgoing full stops and misusing tenses.
3. Phonological Deviation: Purposefully crafted sounds create musicality, taking into account rhyme.
4. Graphological Deviation: Rules related to punctuation, capitalization, spacing, and rhyming are disregarded, showcasing graphological deviations.
5. Semantic Deviation: Ordinary words acquire astonishing meanings, sometimes influenced by the poet’s life and culture.
6. Dialectal Deviation: Poets often borrow certain features from their native language’s dialect to better convey their emotions in their poems. They use “refined dialects,” referred to as “Dialectism” by Leech, to express their feelings through writing.
7. Deviation of Register: Register, also known as “professional dialect,” involves the use of specialized vocabulary, grammar, etc., in specific situations and events. Not all people use register; it is limited to certain groups. Sometimes, writers use “register mixing,” which involves using different registers.
8. Deviation of Historical Period: Archaic words no longer used in daily language are incorporated to enhance the poem’s esthetic value.

Leech’s comprehensive list highlights various deviations that poetry may possess, although not every poem will exhibit all of these deviations; one or two types may be present in a single poem (1969). Furthermore, he illustrated that there are eight deviations in linguistic-stylistics; however, in Lewis Carroll’s poem, only five of those deviations can be found which will be explained in the next section.

III. METHODS

Extensive stylistic analysis is followed for Lewis Carroll’s *Jabberwocky*. The analysis aims chiefly at highlighting the most common areas of deviation from the norms of English in the poem. The central approach adopted in this research is the one proposed by Leech (1969). Leech views linguistic variance as a tool for making poetry since he thinks that it is the linguistic deviation the poet employs in his poetry. However, there are some limitations on deviations. According to Leech, not every type of language variation serves as a vehicle for artistic beauty. He introduces eight types of linguistic deviations: lexical, grammatical, phonological, graphological, semantic, dialectal, deviation of register, and deviation of the historical period. However, the study conducts a stylistic analysis of only five linguistic levels: namely, phonological, grammatical, lexical, graphological, and historical period.

The study finds the different features of the poem by employing different linguistic-stylistics in the poem. Later, it will provide a numerical account of the particular words

that are used and their relation to the stylistic deviation. This would be done by applying the use of five types of stylistic deviations and the data will be collected manually by picking up each word, phrase, or chunk and finding out the correct deviation or scheme for it which is proposed by the model of Leech.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Jabberwocky is possibly one of the best-known poems. It is a whimsical and iconic poem written by Lewis Carroll, the pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, in 1871. It is part of his famous work "Through the Looking-Glass" and "What Alice Found There" the sequel to his equally renowned novel "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland." The poem is praised for its witty linguistic use and inventive depiction of a fantastic monster. Most of the poem is made up of invented words and portmanteaus, which are skillfully put together by fusing different words and sounds. The whole context and images of the poem, even though some of the lines may not have literal meanings, give the protagonist a sense of menace and adventure (Thomason, 2001).

The poem tells the story of a young hero who, armed with a vorpal sword, sets out on a mission to track down and fight the terrifying Jabberwock. Readers are exposed to a detailed and engrossing description of this odd and inventive environment as the protagonist goes into the enigmatic and surreal world. Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* is praised for its creative language as well as for its capacity to transport readers into a world of unadulterated wonder and imagination. It has been a classic work of literature that has enthralled readers of all ages for many years. Its influence may be observed in a variety of artistic mediums, such as music, literature, and visual arts, making it a cherished classic in the field of fantasy and non-sense literature as well as an integral component of the literary canon. *Jabberwocky* contains various linguistic and syntactic deviations from standard English. Here are the main deviations in the poem:

A. Phonological Deviations

Lewis Carroll employs several phonological variations in *Jabberwocky* to create a fanciful and musical quality in the poem. These variations involve the manipulation of sounds, such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, and aphasis.

Rhyme

Jabberwocky consists of quatrains, and each quatrain follows an ABAB rhyme scheme. This indicates each stanza's second- and fourth-line rhyme with one another. This manipulation adds beauty to the poem. For example, the following words in the text rhyme: (Toves/borogoves, wabe/outgrabe, son/shun, catch/Bandersnatch, sought/thought, stood/wood, flame/came, snack/back, boy/joy).

Rhythm

The poem has a distinguishing rhythm created using anapestic meter, which consists of two short syllables followed by a stressed syllable. This rhythm contributes to the poem's

playful and sing-song quality. This is how the poem begins:

"'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe; all mimsy were the borogoves, and the mome raths outgrabe."

Alliteration

Lewis Carroll employs alliteration throughout the poem by repeating the first consonant of words that are close to one another. This technique adds to the poem's musicality and enhances the nonsensical nature of the language. The followings are examples of alliteration in *Jabberwocky*:

Gyre and gimble/g/.

Claws that catch/k/.

Tumtum tree/t/.

Through and through/θ/.

Snicker-snack/s/.

Beamish boy/b/.

Callooh! Callay/k/.

Assonance

The recurrence of vowel sounds in close-proximity words is known as assonance. Carroll utilizes assonance to give the poem rhythm and a beautiful effect. For instance:

"Toves" and "borogoves" in the first stanza.

"Jaws" and "claws" in the second stanza.

"Tulgey" and "wood" in the fourth stanza.

"Two" and "through" in the fifth stanza.

"Left," "dead," and "head" in the fifth stanza.

"My" and "my" in the sixth stanza.

Onomatopoeia

Words that mimic the sounds they represent are referred to as onomatopoeic. Even though they are not precisely onomatopoeic, some of the words in *Jabberwocky* have phonetic characteristics that make them sound a certain way. Onomatopoeia occurs with these words:

"Snicker-snack" in line 18 describes the sound of the "Vorpal Blade."

"Whiffling" has a sense of action and movement.

"Galumphing" has a rhythmic and resonant quality.

Aphasis

It is a type of phonological deviation in poetry that is represented by the omission of certain sounds (graphologically indicated by letters). For example, the poet in the first and the last stanza uses ('twas) instead of (it was).

These phonological variations in *Jabberwocky* contribute to its singsong and enchanting nature. The rhythmic and melodic qualities, combined with the use of playful language, make the poem a delightful and memorable piece of literary non-sense.

B. Grammatical Deviations

The poem employs playful syntax and word order, which adds to its non-sensical nature.

Inverted word order

Carroll often uses inverted word order, placing words or phrases in positions that deviate from standard English syntax. This inversion adds to the poem's peculiar and dreamlike quality. For example:

“‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves” (Instead of “It was brillig, and the toves were slithy”).

“Did gyre and gimble in the wabe” (Instead of “Gyre and gimble did in the wabe”).

“All mimsy were the borogoves” (Instead of “The borogoves were mimsy” or “The borogoves are mimsy”).

Non-standard verb forms

As can be seen in “Beware the Jabberwock” (Instead of “Beware of the Jabberwock”).

Lack of pronouns

Carroll sometimes omits pronouns or uses them in unconventional ways. For instance:

“The jaws that bite, the claws that catch” (Without “they” before bite” and “catch”).

By breaking free from the constraints of conventional grammar, Carroll creates a unique and imaginative linguistic landscape that challenges readers to interpret the poem through its inventive wordplay and unexpected structures.

C. Lexical Deviations

In *Jabberwocky*, the words frequently depart from their normal standard, and words are invented to create deeper meaning, and esthetic value, and to achieve a certain stylistic effect. Carroll creates new words or combines existing words in unusual ways, resulting in non-sensical vocabulary. The following techniques are used in *Jabberwocky*:

Neologism

As in “Jabberwocky,” “brillig,” “slithy,” “toyes,” “gyre,” “gimble,” “borogoves,” “mimsy,” “frabjous,” “Chortled.” These words have no established meanings but contribute to the uniqueness of the poem.

Portmanteau words

Carroll uses portmanteau words to create novel and playful expressions. For example:

Chortled: From “chuckle” and “snort.”

Galumphing: Perhaps a blend of “gallop” and “triumph.”

Uffish: Possibly a combination of “gruff” and “rubbish.”

The poem includes imaginative compound words, combining two or more existing words to form new concepts. Besides, Carroll modifies existing words to fit the rhythm and rhyme of the poem or to create a more playful effect:

Tulgey-wood: A dark and dense forest, combining “tulip” and “burly.”

Beamish: Perhaps a blend of “gleaming” and “beaming.”

Whiffling: Derived from “whiff” or “whistle.”

Snicker-snack: An intensified form of “snicker” or “snack.”

Vorpal: An intensified form of “vortex” or “corpusele.”

Creative adjective formation

Lewis Carroll invents adjectives by modifying existing words or combining them in unusual ways:

Slithy: A blend of “slimy” and “lithe.”

Mimsy: Possibly a combination of “miserable” and “flimsy.”

Anaphora

Lexical deviation in poetry is realized in the form of repetition which is called anaphora. It is a literary term that

is defined as a “deliberate repetition of a word or a phrase at the beginning of a sequence of sentences, paragraphs, lines of verse, or stanzas” (Abrams and Harpham, 2009: 313). For example:

“One, two! One, two!”

D. Graphological Deviation

Unique use of punctuation

In *Jabberwocky*, Lewis Carroll punctuates the poem peculiarly. The poem’s punctuation also contributes to its distinctive syntax: The frequent use of semicolons and colons adds to the feeling of connected but disjointed phrases. The exclamation mark at the end of the poem (“‘Callooh! Callay!’”) emphasizes the sense of joy and triumph.

E. Historical Deviation

Archaic language

In *Jabberwocky*, the poet incorporates historical deviations using archaic words, as well as elements that evoke the medieval and fantastical past. Carroll employs words that were more common in Middle English or Old English but had fallen out of common usage by the time the poem was written. The blending of archaic language, medieval imagery, and ballad-like qualities adds to the poem’s enduring appeal and contributes to its status as a classic work of literary non-sense. For example:

“‘Twas” is an archaic contraction of “it was.”

“Brillig” appears to be inspired by Old English words such as “bryten” (to brighten) or “brytnian” (to become brighter).

“Thou hast” (you have).

Jabberwocky serves as a testament to the power of words and the boundless possibilities of language, reminding us of the magic that lies within the realm of imagination.

V. CONCLUSION

Lewis Carroll’s *Jabberwocky* remains a perplexing and whimsical poem that continues to captivate readers with its inventive language and vivid imagery. Its non-sensical words and unique rhythm challenge the conventional understanding of language, sparking the imagination and inviting readers into an imaginary world. Carroll’s mastery in crafting a narrative without explicit meaning allows each reader to interpret the poem in their way, making it a timeless and cherished piece of literature that celebrates the beauty of linguistic play and creativity. Carroll employs various literary devices and techniques in *Jabberwocky* to create unique and innovative expressions, which can enhance the emotional impact and esthetic value of the work. The poem stands as a timeless exemplar of the power of poetry to transcend linguistic conventions and unlock the boundless potential of the written word. In a nutshell, the article successfully connects language and literature through a linguistic-stylistic analysis of Lewis Carroll’s *Jabberwocky*. It demonstrates how linguistic variations and schemes enhance the poem’s literary effects, providing valuable insights into the broader fields of linguistics and literary studies. The analysis highlights the inseparable

relationship between language tools and the understanding of literary works, deepening our appreciation and comprehension of Carroll's unique writing in *Jabberwocky*.

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