



## **Stylistic Analysis of the Short Story “Thank You, Ma'am” by Langston Hughes**

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### **Abstract**

Stylistic analysis is essential for comprehending not just the substance of a literary text but also how its language is employed. This article aims to study the narrative from a stylistic perspective, focusing on the reader response criticism approach and discourse stylistic approach. The form of words and certain sounds created in the text make the readers interpret the text more dynamic. Due to the simplicity of the language used in the text, the reader would have had no difficulty understanding the story's structures, including the narrative, the development, the point of view, and the theme. Additionally, the short story has a significant presence of cohesive grammatical and lexical methods in building the plot, with cohesive grammatical devices dominating the short story. It is recommended to look at other stylistic approaches when interpreting this short story to reveal its intent to the readers.

Keywords: Stylistics, Reader Response, Discourse Stylistics, Cohesive Devices, Short Story

### **Introduction**

Stylistics is a subdiscipline of linguistics concerned with the systematic examination of style in language and how it varies according to criteria such as genre, context, historical time, and author (Leech, 2008). The relationship between stylistics and linguistics is that stylistics employs linguistic models, analytical procedures, and methodologies to enhance the study of style in its broadest meaning. Except for a few notable exceptions, stylistics has typically focused on examining literary works (McIntyre et al., 2004; Jeffries 2007).

According to Simpson (2004) and Baldick (2008), stylistics is also the investigation of literary texts from a linguistics perspective. Additionally, it is the study of language choices in literary situations. Literary stylistics focuses primarily on both linguistics and literary texts. Generally, stylistic analysis is concerned with the language examination of literary writings. It serves as a link between literary and linguistic studies. Stylistics investigates literary works' distinctive patterns and language structure to decipher

their hidden meanings. In this sense, stylistics provides a scientific method for interpreting literary works as an alternative to subjective interpretations (Oztekin, 2013).

As a method, stylistic analysis is essential for comprehending the substance of a literary text and how its language is employed. Therefore, stylistics makes language explicit and explains how information has been structured in a text using numerous stylistic and rhetorical strategies. The analyzer can create an argument based on literary and rhetorical terminology while ignoring the author's intentions through the use of stylistic Analysis (Carter, 2010). In linguistics, stylistic analysis detects usage patterns in speech and writing; in literary studies, stylistic analysis is often conducted to remark on the quality and meaning of a piece. Stylistic analysis aims to investigate language via its constituent parts or interpret it.

The stylistic study of textual form and interpretive impact is predicated on the notion that literary works are heteronomous objects, i.e., things created by the witnessing consciousness of a reader (Stockwell, 2002). This perspective on literary works implies that stylistics has always been and will always be essentially and unavoidably concerned with reader response. The actual identity of this reader might change substantially. The analyst's use of a stylistic framework to study a text's meanings and consequences might be largely implicit regarding reader reaction.

The rapidly expanding field of discourse analysis supports interpretation in conversation through the investigation of meaning to connect the study of language and literature (Naciscione, 2017). Discourse analysts investigate language usage and language learning through considerable empirical research and theoretical work in linguistics, sociology, and psychology. Discourse analysis is a field of study that seeks to find and analyze linguistic regularities and irregularities in utterances that cannot be accounted for at the sentence level, examines language use beyond sentence boundaries, and investigates the structuring of texts. Discourse stylistics has arisen as an independent field of study. It demonstrates how discourse is created and what it expresses intending to advance to stylistic interpretation and assessment of a text since this is fundamental to discourse stylistics as it discloses semantic and stylistic connections.

A text's stylistic analysis can be conducted in several ways. Commenting on the author's choice of grammatical structures or vocabulary can suffice for an analysis. On the other hand, comprehensive analyses may be conducted by evaluating the quality of the author's imagination and inventiveness in writing. Using two techniques (reader response and discourse) for stylistic analysis of literary works, this research attempts to give a comparative interpretation of the textual content found in the short story understudied.

### **Method**

This study included qualitative methodology and textual analysis. In the textual

method, the researcher examines and analyzes the literary work focusing on content analysis. This study also intends to employ stylistic analysis to explore the style of the literary text. The approach of stylistic analysis is used to analyze a specific literary work. This study employs both textual and stylistic analysis concurrently. Specifically, reader response criticism and discourse analysis were the two methods employed to decipher the literary material's meaning.

## **Analysis**

### **Short Story Summary**

"Thank You, Ma'am" by Langston Hughes is a narrative about circumstance, generosity, and innocence published in 1958. Through the narrative, Langston Hughes illustrates how one person may make a difference in the worldwide societal dilemma of children living in poverty.

The plot of "Thank You, Ma'am" centers on Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones and Roger, a little kid. Mrs. Jones goes to her house late at night when a small kid attempts to "steal her pocketbook." Unfortunately, the strap snaps, and the bag's weight makes the youngster tumble to the ground. Mrs. Jones kicks the kid in his blue-jeaned sitter, shocking him. Mrs. Jones asks him several questions about why he stole her pocketbook and why he has such a nasty face. The child is at a loss for words and demonstrates regret as Mrs. Jones reprimands him.

Mrs. Jones, who is still reprimanding the youngster, brings him to her boarding house to wash his face. Mrs. Jones discovers the boy's name to be Roger. She instructs Roger to wash his face before continuing to interrogate him. Mrs. Jones feeds Roger after realizing he has not eaten because no one is home and then asks him again why he attempted to take her pocketbook. Roger states that he desired "blue suede shoes." Mrs. Jones inquires why he did not simply request the shoes from her. Roger is stunned and unable to respond. Roger eats supper while sitting in humbling reflection.

Mrs. Jones informs Roger about her place of employment and gives him 10 dollars to purchase the shoes. Roger would like to thank Mrs. Jones, but he is unable to. As she leads him out the door, she tells him not to steal another person's pocketbook in the future. She says, "Behave yourself, boy!" Roger walks away and thanks her before she re-enters the residence. Roger never sees Mrs. Jones again.

### **Literary Stylistic Approach- Reader Response**

The short story Thank You, Ma'am is analyzed here in a literary stylistic approach following the reader-response criticism through the lens of structuralism. The beliefs that the writer cannot be omitted in the interaction and meaning-making of the text

and the active interplay of the readers they make in the literary text (Tyson, 2006) were the guiding notions in this foregoing analysis. Besides, with the structuralist lens in focus, linguistic conventions such as characterization and plot are vital to developing conclusions and generalizations on the meaning created in this objective literary text.

The story's characterization of the character of Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones is generally direct or explicit. The development of her character was built in a discerning and noticeable way. Beginning from the first paragraph description of the incident and its development towards the end, Mrs. Jones is a character of a fixed, strong, and morally upright woman based on the descriptors and expositions in the text. "She was a large woman with a large purse..." This could mean for the readers that the woman will be tough all throughout the story. However, as the story progresses, the toughness is different from being stoic, the toughness suggests a moving heart toward the other character in the story. Lines like, "If I turn you loose, will you run?" and "Then, I won't turn you loose" were manifestations of the toughness of the character but with a degree of sensitivity. Through the characterization of Mrs. Jones with a good amount of evocative expressions in the story, the readers can make meaning in the text by reading the lines of the text anchored to the story development. With this, Vermeule (2010) wonders how readers are naturally involved in the lives of fictional characters and how the readers' experiences are determined by their emotional attachments to the characters of the story. It may involve or influence their social relationships in real life.

On the one hand, the story's plot development is untypical. It began with an encounter which is believed to be the climax of the story, with a fine cooldown of the conflict brought by the incident in the opening of the story. The readers could be aware of the heightened emotion it opens to them as they begin reading the first paragraph. The cooldown of conflict happened when Mrs. Jones dragged Roger into her apartment. It is symbolic because the apartment became a sanctuary and an interrogation place for the characters to arrive at judgment and understanding of the problem and possibly the resolution of the characters' issue presented in the text.

As pointed out, narratives cannot be singled out from the emotional contents of the plot (Hogan, 2011) which may contain or refer to universal plot structures tied to the development of the story. The plot structure contains the best part for the readers to engage in the situation. It may elevate emotions, subject themselves to the situation or even participate in one of the character's appeals, or the reader's experiences may be at the peak of philosophical thinking when in the character's shoes.

Phrase and word analysis used in the story could also be used to trigger the reader's active meaning-making of the text. Generating character descriptions is an excellent first step in summarizing fictional texts (Zhang et al., 2019). For instance, the thought of guessing the age of the character of Roger, "He looked as if he were fourteen or fifteen, frail, willow-wild, in tennis shoes and blue jeans" is a good strategy of the author

to develop a sense of images pre-built in the text to imagine a direct picture of judging with the text. It is like disallowing readers to be conclusive. With the guess of Roger's age and descriptors, readers could easily assume that the incident of latching the purse of Mrs. Jones was a case of theft because of juvenile delinquency and poverty. However, Roger is silent all throughout the story, but admission and simple turn-taking responses, evidently: "No'm", "Yes,m" and "M'am". Although the silence is not completely silent because he has significant responses to Mrs. Jones to develop Roger's situation truly.

The shape words and some sounds produced in the text make the readers more interactive in the meaning-making of the text. The situation, repetition, and picturing are essential tools for how readers process a story in the course of reading narratives (Toolan, 2016). Such repetitions inculcate possibility, for instance: "He could run, run, run, run, run!" With the door wide open and Mrs. Jones busy doing food preparation for them, the repetition of the word "run" may affect the readers and entering to the portal of readers' emotions and mind, whether Roger will do it to take the chance or not, or even at the readers' shoes if they will grab the chance of the situation. Likely, the writer's diction in the story is simple, easy, and smooth when readers build their experiences and emotions toward the text and the text structures. Of its simplicity of the language, the reader would have been very relaxed in determining the structures, such as the plot, the development, the point of view it was told, and the story theme.

As a matter of fact, making personal responses is challenging because the readers are also ensuring that you have to build your experiences, knowledge, and yourself with the structures of the text. Meaning-making is not dependent on one's perceptions. It needs text structures and underlying linguistic conventions to draw out conclusions. Although readers are given the value of time in the text's meaning-making, tying this license to objectivity in the text would also be challenging. Developing meaning and understanding the text at hand are no easy tasks in landing needed realities from the text, the world, and the reader.

### **Discourse Stylistic Analysis Approach**

In this type of short story analysis, the text cohesion is tested here following the discursal stylistic approach. Investigating the use of grammatical and lexical cohesive devices is core to this analysis. Then, providing possible extensions and comprehensions of the analysis are given thereafter. The work of Halliday and Hasan (1976) was the basis for categorizing and identifying cohesive marks in the short story.

The short story is full of reference cohesive devices (exophoric, endophoric). For instance, the endophoric reference is remarkable as it opens the story with, "She was a large woman with a large purse". The readers' knowledge of the "she" must come up and form outside the text. They may think the writer is describing the incident and introducing a

character in the story. "That will be fine", also exhibits exophoric reference. "That" is understood in the context of the text totality.

On the other hand, endophoric reference (anaphoric and cataphoric) is prevalent in the whole short story as in the case of the anaphoric reference: "When she got to her door..." "She" refers to the previously used name in the preceding sentence, "Mrs. Jones stopped, jerked..." As for the case of cataphoric reference, "I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes". "I" cannot be decoded unless there is the following reference, which was constituted by, "said the boy". There are several references used in the whole short story. Akin to the study of Maspufah and Afifah (2019), 152 anaphora and three cataphoras were found in an analysis of short stories. This only means that anaphora is a universal and widely used form of cohesive reference device in any text.

Likely, substitution is also evident in the whole story and is quite intriguing. For instance, the writer kept using "the woman" as a substitute for the name "Mrs. Jones" even if the name was already revealed in the story. The author also utilized the mark "the boy" in the story even in the revelation of the boy's name, "Roger". The writer is not fond of using names (although there are a few instances of naming the characters), but not enough to leave the readers with the imprint and sound of the story's character names.

On the other reference type, ellipsis, mostly clausal and verbal are notable in the text, especially in the dialogues used by the writer. The boy only replied, "Yes'm" or "No'm" at the early parts of the story. Roger omits some of his clausal answers to the questions of Mrs. Jones; probably, the purpose of this is to develop the picture of the character who becomes submissive, shy, meek, and ashamed of his deed to the old woman.

Conjunctive marks are also seen throughout the whole short story. For instance, "but you put yourself in contact with me" is an adversative one used to reject the situation or reason of the boy to Mrs. Jones. Temporal marker is also used in the story as in, "After he had dried his face" and "Now, here, take this..." Additive marker is also used as in, "And he did not want..." Causal marker is also observed in, "So you set down..." As to Moini and Kheirkhah (2016) findings, conjunctive, primarily temporal and additive, contribute to the thematic development of the narrative prose.

Some lexical devices also emerged in the text. Collocations like: "thank you", "turned around", "good night", "get some" and others are present in the text. Repetition is also marked in, "He could run, run, run, run, run!". Synonymy is also present in the case, "I won't turn you loose" and "She did not release him". As in this, lexical devices are not a handful in the text. Lexical cohesion devices are used in fictional prose to develop the reader's vocabulary and cognitive structure (Moini & Kheirkhah, 2016).

The analysis above focused only on the author's grammatical and lexical cohesive devices in crafting the story. Grammatical cohesive devices prevailed in the short story as gleaned from the discussion above. The use of substitution, ellipsis, and reference in this story is also marked in the Analysis of Jabeen et al. (2013) where they concluded that

allowing these types of cohesive devices in short stories or fiction is purposive—it may create humor, reality, or even strangeness. However, the text is not adjudged to be weak for not using lexical devices. The use of excessive lexical devices may not be needed especially if the text is programmed to its function of readability and easiness to follow. Problems with repetition and naming were the only major facet to be considered here in the analysis. Nevertheless, the writer used an equally fair number of cohesive devices that readers can create meaning out of it, where the text is understood, and confusion does not arise from the readers.

### Conclusion

When readers develop their experiences and feelings concerning the text and text structures, the diction of the story's author is straightforward, easy, and fluid. Due to the simplicity of the language, the reader would have had no difficulty recognizing story structures such as plot, development, point of view, and theme. Grammatical coherent devices also dominated the short story. The author employed a sufficient number of cohesive devices to ensure that the material is comprehended and that the reader does not experience confusion.

The study's objective is to enhance comprehension of the short story and grasp the author's intent. Stylistic analysis is a vast subject to investigate. The researcher was only interested in two stylistic approaches—reader response and discourse. There are several points in the analysis that require elaboration. By examining it, researchers can discover other aspects of analysis, such as critical evaluation.

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