A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Simon's Lyric "THE SOUND OF SILENCE"

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Abstract

Various methods have been used to discover the sublime mysteries of literary texts. Cognitive stylistics is one of the rich and most useful approaches that focuses on the process of reading to infer meaning. Though meaning is located in the formal structure of the literary text, readers can also approach meaning by deploying aspects of their previous background knowledge (schema).

This paper is a cognitive stylistic analysis of Simon's lyric "The Sound of Silence". It attempts to explore the patterns of creativity and novelty in language use. It is more concerned with investigating how figures of speech can be employed as features of creativity and novelty in "The Sound of Silence".

The analysis traces Simon's use of different types of figures of speech and shows how such a use leads to produce new metaphorical mappings and novel image schemata. The analysis also reveals how the coherence among figures of speech, and the use of extended and complex figurative expressions, lead to creating new stylistic frameworks and metaphorical formulas that illustrate the idea of novelty and creativity in this lyric.

Keywords: Cognitive stylistics, figures of speech, schema theory, conceptual   metaphor theory, Conceptual mapping

Introduction

   Paul Simon, born in 1941, is an American musician, singer and songwriter. His fame began as being part of the duo Simon & Garfunkel that was formed in 1964 with the musical partner Art Garfunkel.

        "The Sound of Silence" is one of his most popular songs with a high chart performance played in the 1960s by the famous duo Simon and Garfunkel.

Aim and research question

As it is essential and one of the major perspectives in stylistics is to investigate novelty in language use, this study aims at exploring the patterns of creativity and novelty in "The Sound of Silence". It particularly discusses the following question: How does Simon employ figures of speech as features of creativity and novelty in "The Sound of Silence"?

        Based on its aim, this study is divided into two main sections: the theoretical background section which deals with two main aspects. The first part outlines cognitive stylistics as an academic discipline in the field of linguistics with a special focus on schema theory and conceptual metaphor theory. The second part discusses figures of speech as a strategy for creativity and novelty in language use. After having done this, in section two, the research presents a general overview of Simon's lyric "The Sound of Silence". Then,a detailed cognitive stylistic analysis is offered to cover three patterns of creativity and novelty in "The Sound of Silence": (1) the coherence among figures of speech; (2) new conceptual mapping and new image schemas; and (3) extended and complex figurative images.

        This study concludes that the employment of figures of speech is pervasive and prominent in "The Sound of Silence" which produces a coherent and solid text featured by creativity and novelty.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 **Cognitive stylistics**

 Cognitive stylistics is a sub-discipline in the field of applied linguistics (see e.g. Steen and Gavins, 2003; Stockwell, 2002 and 2005; Semino and Culpeper 2002 and Freeman, 2002). Stockwell (2002:4-6) observes that cognitive stylistics provides a new way of thinking about literature involving the application of cognitive linguistics and psychology. He also notifies that cognitive stylistics is more concerned with presenting a

descriptive and detailed account of linguistic features of a text in a mechanistic and non-evaluative way

In confirming the connection between literature and psychology, Freeman (2000:253) suggests that literary texts are "the products of cognizing minds", and he describes interpretations as "the products of other cognizing minds in the context of the physical and socio-cultural worlds in which they have been created and read" (cited in Glotova, 2014: 2445)

In this respect, Stockwell (2002:15) asserts that cognitive stylistics looks at people as cognitive human beings who rely on their background knowledge and experiences to understand literary texts. That's to say, cognitive stylistics offers important means for the reader to have a clear view of text and context, circumstances and uses, knowledge and beliefs. It can thus be seen as a starting point for readers to understand and approach how a literary context is built.

A similar view of cognitive stylistics is reported by Woldemariam (2015:18):

> Cognitive stylistics places cognition and contextual effects at the heart of its analytical space. Both formalist and functionalist stylistics models place the sentence and the text respectively at the center of their analysis. They are chiefly text-immanent models. The cognitive stylistics model, however, is a departure from textualist to contextualist stylistics interpretation of a text.

He further claims that cognitive stylistics looks not only at the text but also at the mind's contribution to reading. In other terms, cognitive stylistics explores, how certain types of metaphorical images can only be understood by using the reader's knowledge, beliefs and inferences (ibid).

Furthermore, cognitive stylistics, as Jeffries and McIntyre (2010) demonstrate, takes into account the cognitive processes by which readers respond to particular aspects of texts. It attempts to capture how readers employ their real life schematic knowledge in the interpretation of literary texts. These two scholars also confirm that literary texts contain triggers which stimulate aspects of readers' prior knowledge to allow them to construct a mental representation of the world of the text (cited in Patil, 2014:82-83).

One more important point to be added here, Stockwell (2002:15) states that many scholars, who work in the field of cognitive stylistics,

expanded the boundaries of linguistic analysis of literature by using different theories such as schema theory, conceptual metaphor theory, text world theory, blending theory, mental space theories etc. All these theories provide frameworks for the analysis of literature and focus on reading and cognition.

For the purpose of this paper, a special focus will be given to schema theory and conceptual metaphor theory since they are commonly used in cognitive stylistic analysis and they offer some important analytical frameworks to be applied in the analysis section. The following part sheds more light on these two theories.

2.1.1 Schema Theory and Conceptual metaphors theory

Anderson (1984) defines schema as an individual's collection of background knowledge and experience that provide a meaningful interpretation of new information. Schema theory, as Simpson (2004) asserts, appears to be a "significant landmark" in cognitive stylistic study (p.89). It basically focuses on how knowledge is mentally represented in the mind of individuals and used to interpret information. Rumelhart (1980) argues that schema theory studies the process of how people combine their world knowledge to the interpretation of texts through the process of reorganizing the existing schemes to create a new perspective of the world. Schemata, as Stockwell (2002: 87) puts it, offer an important means to be used by readers in understanding information which is both explicit and implicit in texts.

Accordingly, the idea behind the use of schema theory in the study of literature, as notified by Marszalek (2012: 119), is that interpreting any kind of literary text depends, to a great extent, on the reader's background knowledge and prior experiences. That's to say, when reading a text, people interpretation relies on their own knowledge of the surrounding world.

On the other hand, conceptual metaphors theory, (see e.g. Werth,1997; Gavins, 2001; Lakoff and Turner,1989 and Lakoff and Johnson,1980), is considered to be very important in cognitive stylistics. It was conceived in the early works as "a series of asymmetric mappings stored in long-term memory uniting structure from a more concrete source domain to a more abstract target domain" (Evan 2010: 76). Likewise, Ruekijo (2007:35) admits that metaphors extend or alter the

schemata by generating new ways of mapping the real world on the textual world.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980:115) and Turner (1987: 458) broaden the scope of conceptual metaphor; they argue that it is not limited to individual words rather it involves reconceptualisation of a whole idea or experience in term of another. They also demonstrate that metaphors in literature develop new and challenging ways to interpret the world by establishing new schemata. The invention of new conceptual metaphors in a text can produce considerable and significant changes on the way people perceive the world around them.

As for Simpson (2004: 43), writers consciously strive for novelty in literary expression and this undoubtedly requires developing not only new conceptual mappings but also new stylistic frameworks through which these mappings can be presented. He also observes that writers seek to adopt some stylistic strategies that can acquire prominence in the act of drawing attention to the deviation from the normal language. They often try to "[…] awaken the reader, by freeing him from the grooves of cliché expression, to a new perceptivity" (Childs and Fowler 2006: 90). Hence, the employment of figures of speech, which is the concern of the following part, is one of these strategies which seem closely associated with novelty and creativity. Figures of speech and poetic metaphor are the most applied features of this strategy.

2.2 Figures of speech as features of creativity and novelty in language use

Figures of speech are devices commonly used to convey meaning other than the literal meaning of the words by employing different tropes and rhetorical devices. Figurative structures, as Dancygier and Sweetser (2014:1) assure, are far from being just decorative; rather they are essential and pervasive in language. Kartz et al. (1998) notify that figures of speech can be seen as describing something through the use of unusual comparisons. This is often done to present ideas and imaginations in a more entertaining way to make something clearer, or to captivate the readers' interest. Similarly, Philip (2001) argues that figures of speech are used to communicate ideas beyond the literal meanings of the words though they may not be literally true. They appear in poetry and prose as well as in spoken language to generate vivid pictures or concepts in the mind of the reader or listener and stimulate a great appeal to the senses.

By the same token, Gibbs (1994) indicates that figures of speech are basic schemata by which people conceptualize their experience and their external world. A figure of speech is thus a word that cannot be taken literally because it does not make sense; rather it is a twisting of the normal meaning of words to create a new metaphorical formula .

Another concern can be observed here, it seems, according to Alm-Arivius (2003:15), very important to distinguish between literal and figurative meaning. Literal meaning, on the one hand, is basic and has unconditional priority; it is unproblematic and is context-free. That is, the literal meanings of expressions remain unchanged regardless of the context of use. The figurative meaning, on the other hand, is derived from the literal and can be detected by discovering the nature of the substitution of the metaphorical for the literal. To put it another way, figurative meaning, as Dancygier and Sweetser (2014: 14) expose, is a process of mapping between two different domains which are known as the target and source domains. The target domain is the concept that one wants to describe through the metaphor while the source domain refers to the concept that people draw upon in order to create a metaphorical construction.

With this in mind, the use of figures of speech seems important in literary texts since it provides writers with the possibility of investing words to articulate new meanings. More specifically, as Trim (2007:35) stresses, the construction of new metaphorical mapping shows that there is a need to express thoughts and impressions other than the conventional verbal representations.

Accordingly, figures of speech have a special importance in literature, since they are powerful devices to develop the style of any text they occur in. So, in order to develop and create new stylistic frameworks, writers may rely on figures of speech which are the repertoire of creativity and novelty that do not need a special talent for its use.

To sum up, figures of speech and all different types of rhetorical devices are frequently and immensely used in all languages, and in different types of verbal and written texts. What characterizes figures of speech is their richness and their ability to develop the style of any text they occur in by creating new expressions and certainly new meanings. In the narrow sense, figures of speech are easy to use devices that undoubtedly have a special power to generate novelty and creativity,

especially in poetic writings. In addition to their power in portraying great metaphorical images, they participate in increasing the poetic level of any text that uses them in a proper way.

3. Analysis and discussion
3.1 A general overview

Before going on to the analysis part, let us start with an initial interpretation of Simon's lyric "The Sound of Silence" which reads as follows:

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains
Within the sound of silence

In restless dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a streetlamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light
That split the night
And touched the sound of silence

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
No one dares
Disturb the sound of silence

"Fools," said I, "You do not know
Silence like a cancer grow
Hear my words that I might teach you
Take my arms that I might reach you"

But my words like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the wells of silence

And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said "The words of the prophets
Are written on subway walls and tenement halls
And whispered in the sounds of silence"

Though "The Sound of Silence" was written nearly 55 years ago, its pessimistic and dark ideas are very much significant and relevant in today's context.

      Simon's lyric reveals a deep personal feeling and deals primarily with a common human experience. It is told from the perspective of a speaker who feels that he has an important message to deliver to the people entrenched in materialism. A man who dreams of a more moral and conscious world. The lyric presents a disturbing image of a society encircled in the arms of materialism and self-absorption. It is a fair portrayal of modern life as there is a lack of meaningful communication in our modern urban world. Modern life, as Simon describes it, raises the sense of alienation, loneliness and dislocation. Even the future of humanity looks very gloomy. People seem overwhelmingly entrenched in the material life without paying any attention to the value of their life as human beings, and this is exactly what the duos themselves stated in one of their earliest video versions:

> […]ability to communicate with each other, not particularly internationally but especially emotionally so that what you see around you is people who are unable to love each other. This is called the sound of silence. (www.youtube.com, 08/2014)

In "The sound of Silence", Simon employs many varieties of figures of speech; there are the metaphor, simile, personification, paradox, apostrophe, etc. These literary devices become important elements in the process of interpreting and approaching the meaning beyond this lyric. The following part is concerned with giving more details on the use of figures of speech as features of creativity and novelty in this lyric.

3.2 Patterns of creativity and novelty in "The Sound of Silence"

This section focuses on three patterns of language varieties that Simon cohesively implies in his lyric to portray new metaphorical and conceptual image schemas featured by novelty and creativity in language use .

3.2.1. The coherence among figures of speech

A. Apostrophe

Due to the coherence in experience and knowledge, Simon tries to establish coherence among figures of speech to create new stylistic frameworks signified by creativity and novelty.

For instance, in the first stanza, and precisely in the opening line, "*Hello darkness, my old friend*", Simon uses the apostrophe, which is an important figure of speech, especially in the lyric poetry. Apostrophe is "almost synonymous with the lyric voice" (Kennedy and Wershler-Henry 2006: 287). It is generally used to address absent people or personified things. In other words, apostrophe as a figure of speech is associated, in its use, with personification. In "The Sound of Silence", Simon uses apostrophe to address the personified "*darkness*" by using the word "*hello*", which is a greeting word that can be used to greet a person that one sees or meets. "*Darkness*" is thus described here as an intimate person that the narrator used to see and meet. Hence, the metaphorical formula that can be captured here from the linguistic construction "*Hello darkness*" is that **DARKNESS IS A HUMAN BEING**

B. Personification

Personification, on the other hand, is created by giving "*darkness*" some human traits by implying some words related to humans (*hello, friend, talk,* and *you*). Personification, as Lakoff and Turner(1989: 72) point out,

> "[…]permits us to use our knowledge about ourselves to maximal effects, to use insights about ourselves to help us comprehend such things as forces of nature, common events, abstract concepts, and inanimate objects."

Simon actually elevates the notion of darkness to the level of a human personality. This is undoubtedly one of the personification's positive features to make the narrative interesting and vivid, and it maybe more noticeable in the poetic composition where readers understand things as human beings.

Indeed, when a human being takes "*darkness*" as his "*friend*", one may not even imagine to what extent he feels lonely. Therefore,

addressing "*darkness*" as his friend conveys more than one meaning: on the one hand, there is no one to talk with, or rather no one would like to listen to him. It is thus an indication to the gaps among peoples as well as to his personal loneliness too. On the other hand, the expression "*my old friend*" (line 1) indicates that the narrator used to live in "*darkness*" for a long time. Hence, "*darkness*" for him is not something strange; rather it is the only thing that he can share his feeling with.

By applying this figure of speech, i.e. in personifying "*darkness*" as "*friend*", Simon tries to alter the readers' perception of the notion of "*darkness*". He transfers features from the source domain "*friend*" to recontextualise them in the target domain *"darkness"*, as it is one of the functions of metaphor is to alter or transform readers' perception of the target domain.

Likewise, in (line 2) "*I've come to talk with you again*" Simon stresses and reinforces the form of personification because talk is a human trait. In addition, the word "*again*" reveals that the narrator used to talk with his supposed intimate friend the "*darkness*". As a consequence, it is perhaps clear to be understood that the personification of "*darkness*" is derived from the need to talk. The narrator wants to express his feeling and to convey his moral message to anyone or even anything that he sees. Since "*darkness*" is the only thing that he could reach, he unleashes his imagination to portray "*darkness*" as his friend to be able to reveal what he feels. Therefore, "*darkness*" is structured and perceived in terms of an intimate friend.

C. Paradox

Paradox is a figure of speech which is used to combine words or expressions side by side with opposites.

In *"[h]ello darkness, my old friend"* (line 1), Simon maps "*friend*" who is an intimate person in the source domain to "*darkness*" which is an inanimate abstract notion in the target domain. Through this mapping, "*darkness*" turns into an intimate person that can listen and hear what the narrator would like to say. However, according to our cognitive understanding, "*darkness*" is an inanimate and unintimate thing, so how can a unintimate thing be a friend. It is absolutely the power of figures of speech, through which Simon brings two opposite concepts together to create a new metaphorical formula that can be evoked here as **DARKNESS IS A FRIEND**. This portrayal is achieved by using

paradox. Hence, to understand the image-schemas and the relation that Simon establishes between "*darkness"* and *"friend"*, readers need to apply a process of mental representation because metaphorical conceptualization is a process of mapping between two different conceptual domains Glucksberg & McGlone (2001:5).

From novelty and creativity perspective in language use, *"[h]ello darkness, my old friend. I've come to talk with you again"* (line1-2) is a powerful metaphorical image, through which Simon creates new expressions that definitely carry new meanings by using the criterion of coherence among figures of speech. Namely, the personification of "*darkness"* is created and illustrated in three simultaneous and coherent figures of speech to emphasize it as a result of the dominant silence. In addition, the use of apostrophe, personification and paradox in one line and in a coherent sequence makes the meaning clear and precise. This phenomenon, as Lakoff and Turner (1989: 67) put it, is a notable feature of poetic texts, because one of the things that characterize poetic thought is the simultaneous use of two or more such figures in the same passage, or even in the same sentence.

According to Leech (1969: 23), a poet is nothing if not creative, and since language is his medium, he endeavors to create new communicative possibilities which are not already in the language. Simon, as a poet, shows a strong ability of manipulating words and gathering three rhetorical devices together to draw a clear and very interesting metaphorical image featured by novelty.

3.2.2 New conceptual mapping and new stylistic frameworks

It is a common sense that writers always seek to create and develop new conceptual images in their works as they consciously strive for novelty and creativity in literary expressions and this undoubtedly requires developing not only new conceptual mappings but also new stylistic frameworks through which these mappings can be presented.

In stanza four "*Silence like a cancer grows"* (line 2), Simon employs simile to compare "*silence*" to "*cancer*". It is perhaps pertinent here to remind ourselves that the use of tropes is not arbitrary at all since "[t]he choice of the metaphor tells us what features to transfer [and] how to understand the target domain" (Foley 2009: 183). So, to describe "*silence*" as "*cancer*" is to present an exaggerated image of the

consequences as if "*silence*" dominates in a society, as well as to state to what extent silence is dangerous.

This is a new conceptual mapping between the source domain "*cancer*" and the target domain "*silence*" which provides a highly negative evaluation of *"silence"*. It is a hopeless and an incurable disease that grows day by day to control over society driving it ultimately to death as cancer does to a human body. People need thus to resist and uproot silence from a society as their need to treat and uproot cancer from a human body. As a result of this mapping, the new metaphorical formula that can be captured here is that **SILENCE IS DEATH**. People have therefore to rely on their bodily experience and prior knowledge about cancer to conceptualize such a new mapping as well as to understand the message that the poet intends to convey here.

3.2.3 Extended and complex figurative expressions

As creativity is frequently inherent in the structure of the extended and complex figurative expressions, poetry is the best domain to produce such expressions because the poetic techniques use the mechanism of everyday thought, but it extends, elaborates and combines them in ways that go beyond the ordinary.

In stanza four, "*But my words, like silent raindrops fell*" (line 5) Simon creates a new figurative framework where words are compared to raindrops. This metaphorical framework extends in the following lines (6-7): "*[a]nd echoed*", "*[i]n the wells of silence*" to cover other metaphorical expressions. As a result, we get a sequence of metaphorical images which are gathered together to form one extended figurative framework that interprets obviously how the narrator speaks, but his words become a part of the silence. Because, raindrops fell silent when there is nothing to fell on, and voice echoes when a place is empty. It is thus an indication that there is no one there to hear his words.

This can be seen as a repetition or rather a confirmation of the initial image that Simon portrays in the first stanza when the narrator chooses to talk to darkness since there is no one to talk to. The only single difference between the two images, is whilst the first one is a reflection of the narration in the real world, the other image is part of the narrator's dream where he finds people, but they lost their ability of listening and speaking. Both images reflect and emphasize the domination of silence overall and everywhere.

Meanwhile, and based on the notion of novelty by deploying the feature of metaphorical mapping in literary texts, writers of literature always seek to establish new types of connection between target and source domains. They are also keen on extending and elaborating upon existing metaphors in various ways.

For instance, in stanza two, "*When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light*" (line 5) another manifestation of a new extended figurative framework that signifies creativity in *"The Sound of Silence"*. The poet creates a new metaphorical image in which "*neon light*", or "*neon god*" as he calls it in the last stanza, is personified as a powerful and an aggressive person, with its "*flash*", which is portrayed as a strong arm; it stabs, splits and touches. It is a new metaphorical framework created throughout a sequence of actions by evoking the source domain by verbs, and attributing them in a form of actions to the target domain. It is, of course, the power of poetic thinking to create new complex conceptions from simpler conventional ideas.

To put it another way, as Simon positively alters our perception of darkness, he alters it again but negatively this time about the "*neon light*". Whereas "*darkness*" is portrayed as an intimate friend in the first line, "*light*" is portrayed as an aggressive person here. It is perhaps important to state that creativity and novelty are also illustrated by the contradictory manifestation of things in this lyric, through which Simon aimed to present a clear image of the materialism that dominates people's life.

4. Conclusion

Though this cognitive stylistic analysis is short and concise, it does illustrate some of the ways of using figures of speech varieties as features of creativity in language use.

"The Sound of Silence" is rich with different forms of figures of speech that Simon employs, in a professional way, to produce a coherent and solid text characterized by creativity and novelty. Simon successfully employs figures of speech to lead his readers to form a clear image from the fragmentary pictures that he presents in his lyric. He always chooses the appropriate literary device to communicate what he thinks and how he feels about something, to explain what a particular thing is like and to convey a meaning in a more interesting and creative way.

"The Sound of Silence" offers lots of new images schema, new conceptual metaphor and new types of mapping between source and

target domains. Simon has achieved these techniques by (1) employing the strategy of coherence among figures of speech, (2) using new conceptual mapping and new stylistic frameworks, and (3) deploying some extended and complex figurative expressions that lead to create new figurative frameworks which illustrate the idea of novelty and creativity in the language used in this lyric.

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ملخص البحث

"صوت الصمت" قصيدة غنائية كتبت منذ اكثر من ٥٥ عاما من قبل بول سايمون وسجلت بصوت الثنائي الغنائي المشهور سايمون وكارفنكل في الوقت الذي كانت فيه امريكا تعاني الكثير من الاضطرابات والمشاكل الاجتماعية. أن الافكار والمواضيع التي طرحها هذه القصيدة مازالت حاضرة وتعبر بشكل دقيق عن ما نعيشة اليوم وكانها كتبت لتصف حال البشرية اليوم اكثر من اي وقت مضى.

لقد استخدمت الكثير من الطرق لتحليل النصوص الادبية والوصول الى ماتخفية من معاني بين سطورها. التحليل الاسلوبي المعرفي يعتبر احد الطرق المهمة والتي تركز على القراءة للوصول الى المعنى. ففي دراسة تحليلة معرفية يدرس هذا البحث انماط التجديد والابداع في قصيدة بول سايمون الغنائية "صوت الصمت". ويتناول البحث على وجه الخصوص كيفية استخدام التعابير المجازية كملامح للابداع و التجديد في استخدام اللغة.

تحدد الدراسة الحالية ثلاثة انماط اتبعها الشاعر في استخدام التعابير المجازية لتضيف صبغة التجديد والابداع على اسلوبه في "صوت الصمت" حيث:١) استخدم التنسيق و التوليف فيما بين التعابيرالمجازية، ٢) واستخدم روابط خيالية وأطراسلوبية جديدة ،٣) كما استخدم التعابير المجازية المركبة والموسعة.