The Stylistic Study of the Narrative Poem "The Frog and the Nightingale" By Vikram Seth

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Abstract

The present qualitative descriptive study analyzed the stylistic features of Vikram Seth's narrative poem, 'The Frog and the Nightingale,' using the poem as the sole data source. Researchers focused on the sound structure (examining rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia) and word choice (exploring descriptive adjectives, evaluative nouns, emotional verbs, metaphor, simile, and personification) to determine the poem's musicality, mood, character contrast, narrative tone, and moral message. The analysis revealed that the poet deliberately employed these sound patterns and lexical choices to highlight the contrast between the frog and the nightingale, develop the theme of the exploitation of the innocent artist, and effectively convey the moral message of the poem, with the findings suggested for use in teaching, literary criticism, and future stylistics research.

Keywords: Stylistic Analysis, Sound Devices, The Frog and the Nightingale.

Background of the Study

Poetry has been considered as one of the most powerful forms of literary criticism, where aesthetic pleasure and emotional response of the readers were explored through different sound patterns, diction, and figurative devices Bano, S., & Banerjee, S., 2025). It was found out that the study of poetry could help to understand how the poet used different linguistic features to create meaning, mood, and musicality in a poem Leech & Short, 2007). Among different approaches, stylistics was widely used to bridge the gap between linguistic description and literary interpretation (Nezami, S. R. A. 2012). Narrative poetry could be distinguished from the other two types of poetry, including lyrical and dramatic poetry, by its storytelling feature, development of characters, and moral message. In these types of poems, it was found out that the choice of words and different sound patterns played an important role in creating musicality, mood, and personality of the characters (Wong, M. P., & Hassan, S. K. M., 2013). The use of different devices, including rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia would make the poem more musical. The choice of words would reveal the stylistic intention of the poet.

The poem "The Frog and the Nightingale" by Vikram Seth was published in 1992 and was considered a narrative poem that served social criticism with aesthetic merit. The characters of the poem, the frog and the nightingale, were portrayed as authoritative, arrogant, weak, and innocent through characterization. Such characterization was achieved through control of sound and diction, with frog being portrayed as coarse and loud while nightingale was portrayed as melodious and gentle. The

contrasts between the two were also achieved through rhyming patterns, repetition, and selection of onomatopoeic words (Seth, 1992). This study involved in to find novice tracks of using stylistic devices in the poem

Problem Statement
This study was designed to know the relationship between auditory appeal and lexical choice was infrequently explored in a single study. In particular, how the sound devices were used to create differences in characters, mood, and narrative as well as convey moral message was not adequately explored. The gap was believed to be quite significant because the effect of the poem on the readers depended much on the choice of word and sound. This study tried to furnish the present gap in the study.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the present study was to look into the stylistic features of the poem The Frog and the Nightingale by Vikram Seth. The study was intended to look into sound structure and word choice as they occur in the poem. The study was aimed at determining how phonological patterns and lexical selections were used to create aesthetic effects, character portrayal, and moral message. It was intended to look into the relationship between the use of sound devices such as rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia and the choice of diction made by the poet. The relationship between auditory features and lexical selection was explored with a view to determining how they worked together to attract the attention of the reader and engage him/her. The study was further aimed at filling the gap in literary research where previous studies on the poem largely focused on thematic interpretation, moral lessons, or literary appreciation without touching much on the systematic analysis of the stylistic features of the poem. By bridging this gap, the researcher expects to enrich knowledge about the poet's linguistic strategies and their effect on the reader. Finally, the study was aimed to contribute to the English literary studies by revealing the functional role of sound and diction in poetry. It was expected that the study would be a stepping stone to other studies on narrative poetry, stylistic analysis and study of literary devices in educational and literary studies.

Research Questions
RQ1: How was the sound structure used in the poem to create the rhythm, musicality, and differentiation of characters?
RQ2: How were the word choices used in the poem to create the tone, imagery and moral lessons?
RQ3: How were the phonological devices such as rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia used in the poem?

Significance of the Study
The present study was deemed significant due to its contribution towards the research in different areas of literary research and education. First of all it was deemed fit to do stylistic analysis of the poem The Frog and the Nightingale by Vikram Seth which a narrative poem was giving moral lessons. Secondly, the study was considered significant due to the gap noticed in the previous studies. Previous studies mostly concentrated on the thematic interpretation of the poem, moral messages conveyed or appreciation in the poem. Thirdly, the study was considered significant in the pedagogical sense. It would be of immense help for educators and students. The study was important in the service of literary scholarship both for national and international researchers. It was disappointing to note that very little research has been done on stylistic analysis of narrative poetry in children's literature in the context of Pakistan. So, through the analysis of Seth's poem, it was hoped that the literary scholars would appreciate the literary craft, motivate for more researches in the field of stylistics and also provide a useful framework for future explorations in the realm of qualitative analysis of other poetic texts. The research was also important in highlighting the application of detailed linguistic analysis in understanding the narrative techniques, character portrayal, tone and thematic development in poetry.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Poetry:** Poetry was defined as a genre of literature in which words were arranged in a rhythmic and often imaginative way to produce emotions, ideas and moral lessons.
- **Stylistics:** Stylistics was defined as a study of linguistic style in literary texts.
- **Sound Structure:** Sound structure was defined as the use of phonological devices such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia in a poem.
- **Word Choice (Diction):** The term word choice was defined as the conscious use of words and expressions by a poet to convey meaning, tone, imagery, and thematic effects.
- **Narrative Poetry:** The term narrative poetry was defined as a poem used to tell a story, usually with characters, plot, and a moral or message.
- **Onomatopoeia:** The term onomatopoeia was defined as a device in which the poet uses words formed to imitate a sound in the environment or in the actions of the characters, to create auditory imagery.
- **Alliteration:** The term alliteration was defined as a device in which the poet repeats initial consonant sounds in closely placed words.
- **Assonance and Consonance:** The term assonance was a device in which the poet repeats vowel sounds within words, while the term consonance was a device in which the poet repeats consonant sounds in words.
- **Figurative Language:** The term figurative language was defined as a use of words with a meaning different from their literal sense, including the use of literary devices such as similes, metaphors, personification, etc.
- **Narrative Tone:** The term narrative tone was defined as the poet's attitude towards the subject and characters as conveyed through sound patterns, word choice and stylistic devices.

Review Of Literature

According to (Jalbani et al., 2023; Kalhoro et al., 2023; and Maitlo S, K., et al., 2024), the literature review was expected to provide adequate theoretical and empirical background for the present study. This chapter was planned to preface the thematic context and methodological framework of the research so that through this review, major trends, theoretical orientation and analytical approaches of the scholars in this field were examined and the gaps in the previous studies were identified to justify the relevance of this study (Shaheen, R et al., 2025).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was drawn from principles of stylistics and phonology. Stylistics informed the lens through which linguistic features of the poem were studied, while phonological theory provided the tools for analysis of sound structure. These included rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, and other sound devices. As explained by Leech and Short (2007: 27), Wales (2011: 25), and Simpson (2004: 13), stylistic analysis involved careful consideration of phonological and lexical choices since these elements worked together to create tone, mood, atmosphere, and character identity in literature.

From a phonological perspective, the conceptual framework informed by Vlášková, T. (2017), and Stockwell, P. (2019), provided the tools for analysis of sound devices. These included rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, and other sound devices. These scholars explained how repeated sound patterns made poetry musical, reinforced emotional tone and feeling, and influenced readers' responses. In a narrative poem for children, sound structure was treated as a major linguistic feature since it was known that rhythm and rhyme made poems memorable, interesting, and appealing to the auditory system. For these reasons, phonological analysis was an important aspect of the study of the musical narrative style of the poem.

Lexically, the conceptual framework was anchored on principles of diction and figurative language. The conceptual framework is informed by Fowler, H. W. (2015). Maula, M. (2013), provided the tools

for analysis of how particular choices of words created imagery, character contrast, and moral tone. These scholars argued that meaning in poetry was not contained in literal definitions of words but in connotative, symbolic, and emotional associations attached to them. This was particularly relevant in The Frog and the Nightingale, since simple diction was used and these words carried connotative meanings related to innocence, manipulation, and artistic identity Soomro et al., 2023. Conceptually, the study treated sound structure and diction as two interconnected stylistic elements that influenced narrative effect. Sound devices were treated as elements that influenced atmosphere and rhythm, while diction influenced characterization and moral tone. These elements worked together to form a unified system of style through which tone, mood, and moral lessons were conveyed in the poem Khokhar et al., 2023; Shaheen et al., 2024).

Sound Structure in Poetry

Sound patterns in poetry have traditionally been acknowledged as important tools through which a poet manipulates the reader's perception. Crystal stated that sound devices in poems make listening a pleasurable experience and make poems more memorable through a rhythmic effect La Drière, C. (2019). This notion was later supported by other scholars who argued that the human brain is predisposed to patterned sound and thus poets intentionally arrange devices in poems to exploit this tendency Perloff, M., & Dworkin, C. (Eds.). (2009). In this regard, sound structure was not used as decoration but as an active ingredient in meaning-making.

In studies of narrative poetry, sound structure was found to be used to characterise persons. Leech (1969) pointed out that good poets would create for each character a different sound pattern, and so the overall auditory effect of the poem contributes to the characterisation of the persons in the poem. For instance, the speech of wise and gentle heroes was usually associated with smooth sound patterns, while the speech of the deceptive and antagonistic villain was associated with rough broken patterns or even patterns which were consonant- or discsonant-chordic Tsur, R., & Gafni, C. (2022). Tsur, R., & Gafni, C. (2022) also agreed that such characterisation based on sound was intentional on the part of the poet and was used to reinforce narrative contrasts.

Empirical studies on the appeal of poetry based on performance analyses showed that poems which contained regular rhythmic patterns and strong sound repetition were more likely to be chosen to read to listeners. In oral storytelling traditions, since poems had to be memorized and the audience had to be involved in the performance, the sound structure helped with memory, participation and emotional involvement. In cognitive poetics research, rhythmic predictability was associated with enjoyment and emotional involvement on the part of the readerTsur, R., & Gafni, C. (2022). These studies strengthened the argument that the appeal of poetry was not merely aesthetic, but psychological.

In modern poetic studies, the perception of sound was re-visited in the light of multimodal and oral-performance research. In their studies, scholars noted that in written poems, imagined sound was stimulated in the reader's mind and this helped create vivid mental images. That is, even in silent reading, the rhythmic and phonological patterns present in the written poem played a major role. According to Perloff, M., & Dworkin, C. (Eds.). (2009), poetry affected both the visual and the auditory senses.

Overall, the literature on sound structure had shown that sound devices were used extensively in creating different stylistic features in poems. These features included creating musicality, conveying mood and tone, differentiating personalities, building emotional resonance, and creating flow in narrative. These theoretical and empirical findings provided a good basis for the study of sound structure in The Frog and the Nightingale.

Narrative Poetry and Children's Literature

Narrative poetry is a genre of literature that tells a story using verse, combining elements of plot, characterization, and thematic development. Unlike lyrical poetry, which focuses on personal emotion, narrative poetry conveys events and moral lessons through a structured sequence of actions and interactions (Leech & Short, 2007). In children's literature, narrative poetry has been widely used to

teach moral values, entertain, and develop language skills. Scholars noted that narrative poems for children often employ rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and other phonological devices to enhance engagement and facilitate memorization.

Children's Poetry

According to (Bolton, 2016), children's narrative poetry was also noted for its dual function of entertainment and education. Scholars argued that stylistic features, especially the interplay of sound and diction, played a central role in achieving this dual purpose. The auditory quality of the poem attracted children's attention, while the moral and narrative content supported learning and ethical development (Bolton, 2014). This dual function is particularly evident in works like The Frog and the Nightingale, where character contrast, moral lesson, and musicality are carefully constructed through stylistic strategies.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The researchers used a qualitative descriptive research design. This design was chosen because the phenomenon was studied in its natural setting without forcing any prior categories or hypotheses. The objective of this study was to describe the stylistic features of the sound devices and lexical items in the poem The Frog and the Nightingale. Such an objective required detailed descriptive interpretation and text-based data. Hence, the design was based on textual analysis rather than numerical count. Quantitative descriptive design was not used because the study did not manipulate, apply any treatment, or intervention. The style was used by the following authors (Ahmad et al., 2025; Amin, S et al., 2023; Cheema et al., 2023 and Soomro et al., 2023). The poem was taken as an integrated literary artefact. Besides, the qualitative descriptive design was flexible and allowed the codes, themes, and patterns to emerge inductively from close reading of the text.

Sample of the Study

The purposeful sampling was used to know the poem's characteristics relevant to the study already used by (Maitlo S, K., et al., 2025). The sample of the study was one literary text, which was the poem Vikram Seth's The Frog and the Nightingale.

Research Instrument

The main instrument used in this study was a self-developed textual analysis checklist. The checklist was developed to guide the identification of the stylistic features of the sound devices and lexical items in the poem (Murtaza et al., 2025). The categories developed for this instrument were the rhyme scheme and rhythm pattern, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia in the poem. Besides, the categories developed for the lexical items were descriptive adjectives, emotional verbs, evaluative nouns, and figurative expressions. The checklist was generated from selected books in stylistics and phonological criticism.

Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study were obtained through a systematic textual examination. The first step was to obtain a copy of the poem The Frog and the Nightingale from a reliable and widely used published edition. The text was read several times to familiarise the researcher with the narrative flow, stylistic patterns, and thematic content. During the initial readings, preliminary notes were made. In the next stage, the textual analysis checklist was used. Line-by-line analysis was done, and all sound devices were identified and extracted. Similarly, all lexical items that were useful in characterization, tone, and narrative movement were picked and recorded.

Data Analysis Technique

The data was analyzed manually using qualitative content analysis. After the identification of sound

devices and lexical items, they were grouped into thematic and functional categories. For sound analysis, categories were rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia. For lexical analysis, categories were descriptive adjectives, emotional verbs, evaluative nouns, and figurative expressions. Patterns were identified by examining how these features were used in the text in relation to narrative characterization (frog v/s nightingale), tone (sarcastic, deceptive, innocent), and moral message. Interpretations were made by relating the implications of the poem to the identified stylistic features, narrative movement, progression, and thematic effect.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed during the research process. As part of this study, a copy of a literary text was obtained. This was a published edition and, as such, there were no human participants. Therefore, consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were not issues in this study.

Results

The results of stylistic analysis of the poem The Frog and the Nightingale were presented. The analysis was a qualitative examination of sound devices and lexical choice. The findings were presented under different themes that emerged from the text.

First: It was discovered that sound devices were consistently used throughout the poem to create rhythm, stress emotion, and aid characterization. Rhyme and rhythm were used for musical effect and to aid the narrative flow. Alliteration, assonance, and consonance were used to create emotional tension and to show contrast between characters. Sound patterns were also used to create imagery through the reader's ears, which strengthened their engagement with the narrative.

Second: It was discovered that lexical items played a key role in creating characterization and tone. Descriptive adjectives were used to create a character image of the frog as harsh, manipulative, and overconfident, and the nightingale as innocent, talented, and vulnerable. Verbs of authority, deception, and command created emphasis on the frog's power and control over others, while verbs of emotion, hesitation, and performance created images of the nightingale as gentle and fearful.

Finally, it was discovered that the combination of sound device use and diction helped create the moral lesson of the poem. The results of the stylistic analysis showed that the poet used sound and vocabulary to create images of manipulation, doubt, and exploitation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study were discussed in relation to other published works by Bolton, L. (2019; 2016). He focused on themes and characters in the poem, but gave little attention to the stylistic features of the poem. The findings of this research extended previous knowledge by showing how sound patterns and lexical items created meaning in ways that had not been previously understood. The analysis revealed that the poem made heavy use of phonological techniques to create dramatic effects. This finding corresponded with studies on children's literature that argued for the importance of musicality in narrative poems. Similarly, the lexical items used to create emotional contrast supported earlier claims that vocabulary choices in children's poetry were purposeful and value-laden. This study revealed that the phonological techniques and lexical items were not merely decorative but central to creating characterization and emotion in the moral message of the poem. Therefore, it provided a more comprehensive account of the linguistic structure that produced meaning in comparison to previous studies Iqbal et al., 2024; Noonari et al., 2024). However, Vikram Seth's The Frog and the Nightingale used sound devices and lexical choices as powerful stylistic tools. Sound patterns created rhythm, tension, and emphasis, while lexical items created characterization and aided the narrative flow. The combination of these features created emotional impact and reinforced the moral message of the poem. This study successfully addressed the research objective, which is to discover how the linguistic structure of the poem created meaning. The present study filled a gap in previous research, which had only focused on themes and moral lessons without analyzing the linguistic structure produced by them. The literary devices used by the poet not only sublime but also

present a nourished beauty of figurative style to the poem.

Recommendations
- Future researchers are recommended to conduct further research on a broader range of poems to see if the phonological techniques and lexical items used in this poem were used by other poets as stylistic tools.
- Comparative studies should be conducted across different narrative poems to see if similar linguistic patterns appear across poets or regions.
- Educators are recommended to implement stylistic analysis in the teaching of literature, as it will aid students in understanding the impact of language choices on meaning.
- It is suggested that future research examine the phonological and lexical effects in the oral performance of narrative poetry, particularly in classroom settings, to understand how sound and diction influence listener comprehension.

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