

The Intertwined Relationship between Sound and Sense in Arabic Poetry

Dr. Hasan Mohammed Saleh Jaashan

Assistant Professor (Applied Linguistics)

King Khalid university

Saudi Arabia

Sanaa University

Yemen Republic

E-mail: jssam2004@gmail.com

Abstract:

The language of poetry has the characteristics of being distinct from the other forms of literature. A poet, in order to make his poem impressive, selects words which besides determining the semantic structure of a poem show a special and grand unity of sound structure. i.e., the appreciation of a poem meaning comes from the choice of special phonemes through the choice of special words. The objectives of this paper are to: 1- Study the relationship between sound and sense in lyric or narrative poetry. A poem by Alkhansaa (the most famous Arabic poetess) will be selected for studying. 2- Apply the approach of Dell Hymes to prove the phenomena.

Key words: High Ranking Phoneme- Summative Word- Onomatopoeia

ملخص:

إن اللغة الشعرية تتميز بخصائص لغوية معينة تجعلها تختلف عن أي أعمال أدبية أخرى، حيث إن الشاعر على سبيل المثال لكي يجعل قصيدته ذات أثر جمالي يفكر كثيراً، ويتتقي الكلمات والألفاظ التي توصل المعنى وفي نفس الوقت، فإن الطبيعة الصوتية للقصيدة تتطلب منه احتواء تلك الكلمات على أصوات تساعد أيضاً على توصيل الفكرة، و دعم المعنى الذي يقصده الشاعر. وبمعنى آخر، فإن إدراك القيمة الجمالية للقصيدة يتكون من عنصرين مهمين هما اختيار الكلمات، واختيار الأصوات، حيث إن اختيار الأصوات التي تدعم معنى القصيدة يأتي عبر اختيار الكلمات، وهذا الارتباط بين الصوت والكلمة هو سر الجمال الشعري للقصيدة، وأيضاً، يساعد إلى حد كبير على فهم المعنى وإدراك المجال الحسي للقصيدة، ومن هنا، فإن أهداف هذه الورقة هي: 1- دراسة العلاقة المترابطة بين الصوت والمعنى في الشعر الغنائي أو الروائي لأحد قصائد ابرز شاعرات الأدب العربي (الخنساء)؛ 2- تطبيق نظرية ديل هايمز الإحصائية اللغوية لإثبات علاقة الترابط بين الصوت والمعنى في نموذج من الشعر العربي.

Theoretical Background

Besides the main stylistic parameters (structure and sense) of the utterance, there is another important thing that should be taken into consideration. That is the way a word, phrase, or a sentence sounds. This thing in certain type of communication, *vis literature*, has a very crucial role to play. The sounds of most words acquire aesthetic effect, if they are in combination with other words. It is agreed that each phoneme expresses a definite feeling or state of mind. Galperin (1977: 123) quotes Verier a French scientist and a specialist in English versification as follows: “we should try to pronounce the vowels {a:, i:, u:} in a strong articulated manner and with closed eyes. If we do so, we are sure to come to the conclusion that each of these sounds expresses a definite feeling or state of mind”.

The literary writers especially poets make creative use of language by exploiting all the phonological possibilities of a language. They also try to create a kind of relationship between phoneme and meaning. Traugott and Pratt (1980) and Widdowson (1975) in this regard are of the view that although sounds in

language are arbitrary and conventional, they are, in one way or another, used to complement meaning. These ways are exploited particularly in poetic language (lyric poetry). Fonagy, assures the link between sound and content. He states:

The great semantic entropy⁽¹⁾ of poetic language stands in contrast to the predictability of its sounds. Of course, not even in the case of poetry can we determine the sound of a word on the basis of its meaning. Nevertheless in the larger units of line and stanza, a certain relationship can be found between sound and content.

Fonagy (1961: 212)

Bloomfield (1961:27) also has contribution in this concern. He writes “...in human speech, different sounds have different meanings. To study the coordination of certain sounds with certain meaning is to study language”.

Galperin (1977:124) elucidates that “the theory of sound symbolism is based on the assumption that separate sounds due

(1) Entropy is a term in the theory of communication and information developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) denoting the measure of predictability in a message.

to their articulatory and acoustic properties may awake certain ideas, perception and feeling, vague though they might be". Wellek (1960) recognizes and emphasizes the role of sound symbolism in poetry. Hymes praises the work of those critics. He comments "their results show that it is rash to deny the existence of universal or widespread types of sound symbolism in poetry" (Hymes 1960: 112). Beg (2003) mentions that Wellek distinguishes three degrees of sound symbolism. The first degree is named onomatopoeia. The second degree is the suggestion of natural sound through speech sound in a context. For example: "*And murmuring of innumerable bees*" (Tennyson), where the word 'innumerable' strengthens the pattern in its context. The third degree is the relation between sound and sense. Stageberg and Anderson (1970:227) mention that Alexander Pope (the 18th century poet) states a principle that in language of poetry by saying "the sound must be an echo to the sense"). Even psychologists support the opinion that there is a concordance between sound and sense.

Similarly Arabic language is full of examples that prove the relation between phoneme and sense. And the Arab linguists contributed a lot in this concern. Alnagar (1952) quotes Ibn Jinni by saying that sound in literature

supports and not reduces the meaning. Ashmawi(1967:39) writes "sound and meaning are intertwined and inseparable". That means there should be congruence between them to an extent that the word when is uttered, it gives a sense to its mood. Ibn Jinni confirms that in Arabic language the strong sound is used to refer to the strong action and the reverse (the weak sound is for weak action). Arabs also derived the names of some animals from their sound for examples; they called crow /*yaq*/ and duck /*batta*/. At the verb level, they glean the pronunciation of some verbs from their natural sounds such as, when we cut something lengthily we say /*qatta asei*/ and when we cut something from its width we say /*qadda asei*/ because here the sound /*t*/ is longer than the sound /*d*/. The selective combination of sounds to form words in poetry makes a poem aesthetic/impressive. For this reason the Arab linguist Hilal (1980) says that the sounds absolutely attract the hearing as the colours attract the vision.

Lyric poetry has its own features that distinguish it from the other forms of literature. It shows the utmost exploitation of language sound, rhythm and rhyme that prove the congruence of sound and sense in lyric poetry. In this regard Lynch (1953) analysed the phoneme occurrences of some poems of Wordsworth, Keats, Arnold, Spencer, Calians, Marlowe, Raleigh and Donne in order to discover the total effect of the poem's euphony and to

relate its findings to the meaning. In each poem he found that there is a word that sums up the dominant sound structure of a sonnet as well. Hymes (1960) with some modifications adopted the method of Lynch. He studied the sound symbolism in sonnets of Wordsworth and Keats for the same purpose. With the help of statistical method, Hymes (1960) came with the conclusion that a sonnet in general gives emphasis to specific phonemes which are then combined in strategically placed word which is central to the poem. He calls that word "a *summative word*".

In his approach Hymes proposed the following procedures that are prerequisite for the phonological analysis of a lyric poem. These procedures lead to finding out the summative word:

- 1- lyric or narrative poem consisting of 10 to 20 lines should be selected for the analysis.
- 2- The entire poem should be rendered into phonetic transcription.
- 3- Make a separate list of consonants, and arrange them up to the manner of articulation. Then make another list of vowels.
- 4- Find out the high ranking phoneme among the list of consonants and vowels.
- 5- Out of high ranking phonemes, construct a word. This word is called a "summative word". It should meet the following criteria:

- A: It should consist of high ranking phonemes in the poem.
- B- It should appear in the poem itself.
- C- It should sum up, at the semantic level, the theme of the poem.

Practical study

On the basis of these step by step procedures by Hymes, any poem from any language can be analysed to observe the interdependence between sense and meaning. In this paper, I intend to apply the Hymes's statistical approach on a lyric poem from Arabic language said by the famous Arab poetess Alkhanaa (the era before Islam) in order to know to what extent sound structures help to understand the theme and the mood of the poem. Alkhansaa had two brothers (Moaweiah and Sakhr). She extremely used to love them both. However, they were killed in some revengeful battles which were spread amongst Arab tribes the time before Islam. Alkhansaa was psychologically collapsed after that incident. From that time onwards, she started lamenting her brothers especially the younger one (Sakhr). She is considered as the leader of lamentable poetry in Arabic literature. So many poems which have been said by her carry lamentable atmosphere. The poem under analysis is one of them. It depicts the deep sorrow and grief of the poetess over her brother (Sakhr). She starts her poem by addressing her eyes to weep for the death of him who had the features of being generous, hospitable and brave. The poem

runs as follows:

yæ ζəini mæləki læ təkki:nə təkæbæ
 ?ið ræbæ dəhrun wə kænæ dəhru riæbæ
 fəbki ?əxæki li?tæmin wə?ərmələtin
 wəbki ?əxæki ?iðæ jæwərti ?jnæbæ
 wəbki ?əxæki lixəilin kəlgætæ ζusəbən
 fəgədne læmmæ θəwæ səibən
 wə?nhjbæ
 yæçdu bihi sæbihun nəhdun
 mərəkiluhu
 mujəlbəbun bisəwædi læili jilbæbæ
 hətta yusəbihə ?əgwæmən
 yuhæribuhum
 ?əu: yusləbu du:n səfi lqəumi æslæbæ
 huə lfətə lkæmilu lhæmi həqi:gətuhu
 mə?wə dəriki ?iðæ mæjæ?ə muntæbæ
 yəhdi: rəç:i:li ?ið dəgə səbilu bihim
 nəhdə təlili liçbil ?əmri rəkæbæ
 ?əlməjdu hūlətuhu wə lju:du çilətuhu
 wəssidqu həuzətuhu?in qirnuhu hæbæ
 xəttæbu məhfilətin fərræju mædlimətin
 ?in hæbə muçdilətin sənnæ ləhæ bæbæ
 hæmmælu ?əlwiətin gəttæçu ?udiətin
 səhhædu ?ənjjətin lilwitri təllæbæ
 summu lçudəti wə fəkkæku çunəti
 ?iðæ
 lægə lwæγæ læm yəkun lilməuti
 həyyæbæ

The high ranking phonemes of the whole poem, according to their ranks, are:

Vowels	Occurrences
ə (short)	99
i (short)	72
æ (long)	67
u (short)	50
i: (long)	5

Consonants	Occurrences
b	32
n	30
t	18
k	18
h	17
d	13

After investigating the dominant sounds in the poem above, we find that it is the word /nəbki/ ‘we cry’ which is constructed out of high ranking phonemes on the level of sound and sums up the theme of the poem on the level of meaning as well. This word is also repeated many times in the poem. That means since this word gathers the three required criteria, it is called “*summative word*”.

n	ə	b	k	i
30	99	32	18	72

The word /nəbki/ 'we cry' consists of five high ranking phonemes. Three are consonants /n/, /b/, /k/. They occur 30, 32, 18 times respectively. And the two are vowels /ə/, /i/. They occur 99, 72 times. The poem has the atmosphere of sadness. It is regarded as a psychological outlet for the poetess. She, to the utmost, uses the sounds that create the effect of sadness, grief and bereavement. The summative word /nəbki/ (we cry) contains the plosive sound /b/, /k/. These sounds occur 32, 18. So they are the high ranking consonant phonemes in the poem. Alkhansaa selects these phonemes particularly because the nature of their production gave her a kind of relief from the arrested sadness she suffers from. They are used in the poem like the way they are articulated. When we produce plosive sounds, the air is stopped by articulators when it comes out of the lungs and then it is released. There are two other plosive phonemes /t/, /d/. They occur 18, 13 times in the poem. They are not included in the summative word. However their frequent occurrences support their counterparts in the summative word. The nasal sound /n/ has the most frequent use in the poem after /b/. It occurs 29 times. In Arabic language the /n/ sound is a pre-fix added to the verb to refer to the

first person plural (we) as an agent. The poetess wants to say that not only she who was affected by the death of her brother (Sakhr) but the bereavement extended to all people who used to get help and support from him. She starts her poem by asking her eyes to cry with her because the tears are the physical gestures of the grieved heart. Alkhansaa uses the nasal sound /n/ because through this poem she calls all her senses and all people who love Sakhr to share her the crying. /n/ also expresses the deep emotion and suggests the mood of sorrow and dejection that run throughout the whole poem. The fricative sound /h/ occurs 17 times. It is suited to express the feeling of despair and dejected mind of the poetess.

The summative word /nəbki/ (we cry) contains two short vowels /ə/, and /i/. They have the highest occurrences in the poem. The /ə/ phoneme occurs 99 times and the /i/ phonemes happens 72 times. They are backed up by the frequent occurrences of the other vowels /æ/, /i:/ and /u/ which occur 67, 5 and 50 respectively. The poetess largely uses the vowel sounds because, in Arabic poetry, they denote the sense of grief and depth of emotion.

The word /nəbki/ 'we cry' with its inflectional forms is repeated many times in the poem. That has concordance with the third criterion of the summative word. Consider the following lines:

yə ζəini mələki læ təbki:nə təskəbæ

?ið ræbæ dæhrun wæ kænæ dæhru riæbæ

fæbki ?æxæki li?tæmin wæ?ærmælætín

wæbki ?æxæki ?iðæ jæwærti ?jnæbæ

wæbki ?æxæki lixæilin kælqætæ ζusæbæn

fæqædnæ læmmæ θæwæ sæibæn
wæ?nhjbæ

Here after this analysis of the poem, I came up with the idea that the sound in Arabic poetry contributes a lot to comprehend the meaning. Of course, there are some other factors involved in that concern. However, it is noteworthy to say that the dominance and high occurrences of some phonemes has good contribution and help to understand the theme of the lyric poetry. That is to say, the appreciation of a poem meaning comes from the choice of special phonemes through the choice of special words.

Below is the free English translation of the poem which is analysed in this paper:

*yæ ζæini mælæki læ tæbki:næ
tæskæbæ

Oh my eyes why should not you pour down the tears.

*?ið ræbæ dæhrun wæ kænæ dæhru
rææbæ

As the time has become unreliable and the time has always been suspected.

*fæbki ?æxæki li?tæmin
wæ?ærmælætín

Lament your brother to a poor widow and orphans.

***wæbki ?æxæki ?iðæ jæwærti ?jnæbæ**

And the same you do when you are with others.

***wæbki ?æxæki lixæilin kælqætæ ζusæbæ**

Lament your brother to the horses organized like a flock of birds.

***fæqædnæ læmmæ θæwæ sæibæn
wæ?nhæbæ**

Who lost, after his demise, spoil and booties.

***yæζdu bihi sæbihun næhdun mæækiluhu**

A well built floating horse to run carrying him on his back.

***mujælbæbun bisæwædi læili jilbæbæ**

Putting on a black robe of the dark light.

***hættæ yusæbihæ ?æqæwæmæn
yuhæribuhum**

To raid the enemies at down fighting them.

***?æu: yuslæbu du:n sæfi lqæumi æslæbæ**

Or taking their spoil out even before the battle starts.

***huæ lfætæ lkæmilu lhæmi hæqi:qætuhu**

He is the perfect and ideal hero who used to protect his properties.

***mæ?wæ dæriki ?iðæ mæjæ?æ
muntæbæ**

The shelter of the needy people though he comes for help once and again.

***yæhdi: ræç:i:li ?ið dæqæ sæbilu bihim**

Used to guide his people when there is no way out left for help.

***nəhdə təlili liʃʒbi lʔəmri rəkæbæ**

With an elevated neck challenging any difficulty.

***ʔəlməjdu h

u
lətuhu wə lju:du ʒilətuhu**

The exalt is his adornment and generosity is his attribute.

***wəssidqu hæuzətuhuʔin ɡirnuhu hæbæ**

Truthfulness is his property when his fellows used to feel frightened.

***xəttæbu məhfilətin fərræju mədlimətin**

The orator of gathering the reliever of a complain.

***ʔin hæbə muʒdilətin sənnæ ləhæ bæbæ**

If he is afraid of some deadlock, he used to find way out for that.

***həmməlu ʔəlwiətin ɡəttæʒu ʔudiətin**

The wing commander holding the flags crossing valleys after valleys.

***səhhædu ʔənjətin lilwitri təlæbæ**

The who use to grace the conventions and the one who used to take revenge over the enemies.

***summu lʒudəti wə fəkkæku ʒunəti ʔiðæ**

A poison for his enemies and the

releaser for captives.

***ləgæ lwæγæ ləm yəkun lilməuti hæyybæ**

When he used to enter the fierce battle, he was never and at all a afraid of the death.

Conclusion

It is commonly known that the language of poetry is characterized by being distinct. The most common prominent features which are considered in writing poems is selecting and combining sounds in a way that gives special and aesthetic meaning for the whole poem. Without rhythm, rhyme ,metre and etc.. in poetry, the interest and aestheticism will not reach the top. The statistical approach of Hymes which are used to analyse the lyric/ narrative poems to discover the summative word adds a new trend of connection between sound and sense. The combination of high ranking phonemes is a good way to consider the leading role of sounds in understanding the meaning of the whole poem. The application of this approach on Arabic poetry is acceptable to some extent. The statistical analysis of the poem under study proves that selecting special sounds contributes to understand the general sense of the poem.

Symbols

<u>Symbols</u>	<u>place of articulation</u>	<u>manner of articulation</u>
ɣ = غ	uvular	fricative
ʕ = ع	pharyngeal	fricative
q = ق	uvular	plosive
d̥ = ظ ض	dental	plosive+ fricative
t̥ = ط	dental	plosive
s̥ = ص	dental	fricative
ʃ = ش	Plata alveolar	fricative
h = ح	pharyngeal	fricative

References

- Ashmawi. M. Z. (1967) *Qadaya al-naqd aladabi walbalaghah*. Alexandria: Alwadi press.
- Beg, M.K.A. (2003a) *Applied Linguistics: Journal of the Department of Linguistics*, A. M. U. Aligarh, Aligarh, Muslim University Press.
- _____ (2003b) Towards an Understanding of Stylistics. In M. K. A. Beg (ed) 2003: 11-23.
- Bloomfield, L. (1961) *Language*. Henry Holt:New york,.
- Brown, et al. (1955) Phonetic Symbolism in Natural Language. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59.57.
- Fonagy, I. (1961) Communication in Poetry. In *Word*, 17.2, 212-22.
- Galperin. I. R. (1977) *Stylistics*. High School: Moscow.
- Hilal, M.M. (1980) *Jaras Alalfaz Wa Dalalatih fi Albahth Albalaghi Wa Alnaqadi in Alarab*. Dar Alrashid: Iraq.
- Hyme, D. H. (1960) Phonological aspects of style: Some of English Sonnets. In Thomas. A. Sebeok (ed) 1960:109- 131. Longman.
- Jaashan, H. M. S. (2005) The Style of Hemingway: A Stylistic Study of Language Devices Used by Earnest Hemingway in his Major Literary Works. PhD.Diss. India, Aligarh Muslim University.
- Jespersen, O. (1922) *Language, its Nature, Development, and Origin*. George Allen and Unwin: London,
- Lych, J.J.(1952) The Totality of Lyric Poetry: An Experiment Method. In *Word* 9. 102-125.
- Najar, M. A. (1952) *Alkhasa's for Inb Jinni*. Dar Alkutub Almisriah Press: Cairo,

- Sebeok, T.A. (ed) (1960) *Style in language*. Mass MIT Press: Cambridge.
- Shannon, C. E. & Weaver, W. (1949) *The Mathematic theory of communication*. University of Illinois: Illinois.
- Traugott, E. C. & Pratt. M. L. (1980) *Linguistics for the Students of literature*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York,
- Wales, K. (1989) *A Dictionary of stylistics*. London & New York.
- Wellek, R. (1960) Closing Statement; From the View Point of Literary Criticism. In Thomas, A. Sebeok (ed) 1960: 408- 20.
- Widdowson, H.G. (1975) *Stylistics and teaching of literature*. Oxford University press: London.