

Themes of Birth and Death in Pakistani and British English Fictions: A Corpus based Analysis

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Abstract

This study presents a comparison of the themes associated with the phenomena of birth and death in Pakistani and British English fictions i.e. PEF and BEF in the vast framework of several varieties of Englishes around the world. As culture of Pakistan differs entirely from that of Britain, so are the themes which are associated with birth and death in their fictions. Different words have different associative meaning in different societies (e.g. meaning and usage of 'dear' or 'clever' is quite different in Pakistan and in England. Truly representative corpus of English fiction, comprising various genres from both the varieties of English has been analyzed and processed through AntConc 3.2.2w (windows) 2008. The study has investigated PEF as well as BEF thoroughly on the basis of Dixon's Semantic approach to English grammar (2005) and elaborated that the adjectives used with birth and death in both fictions are entirely different besides the universally common psychological incidents of birth and death in all human beings. The study reveals that the rituals and customs associated with birth and death are entirely different in BEF and PEF. It establishes that Pakistani variety of English uses entirely distinctive linguistic norms as compared to British variety of English.

Keywords: PEF, BEF, themes, birth, death, associative meaning.

Introduction

Theme is defined by Webster's dictionary online as "a unifying idea that is a recurrent element in literary or artistic work" (Webster's, 2011). Like morals or messages, themes often explore historically common or cross-culturally recognizable ideas and are almost always implied rather than stated explicitly. It means that various themes present in every fiction are usually implicit instead of explicit. Along with other ingredients of any literature such as: plot, character, setting, and style, theme is also considered as one of the fundamental components of the fiction. Themes of birth and death are the universal phenomena usually present in every fiction around the globe. Themes can be found in two ways:

Firstly, when you finish reading a book, ask yourself to sum up the book in a single word. For example, a single word for the book "*Little Red Riding Hood*" by Charles Perrault could be deception. Deception is the major subject or theme of the book.

Secondly, stretch that single word into a message: innocence can or may lead to deception. This is a theme for "*The Three Little Pigs*" by Joseph Jacob. Symbols and adjectives along with other allegorical elements used in any piece of fiction could be the clues to several themes depicted in that fiction.

As literature is an art, and the beauty of art is that it can be interpreted differently by everyone. The message or the theme of a fiction book is much like the message and theme of a beautiful painting. It is not something that is stated in a particular sentence and easily located; it is something that is comprehended upon reflection.

It is an obvious fact that themes of birth and death are having universal significance and present in every fiction. The Pakistani English fiction and British English fiction also focus on a variety of themes including the themes of birth and death.

Statement of the Problem

This study will investigate the themes associated with birth and death in Pakistani English fiction and British English fiction i.e. PEF and BEF. Various kinds of symbols and adjectives along with other allegorical elements that highlight the meanings of birth and death in both the fictions will also be analyzed in terms of their frequency of presence (occurring) in PEF and BEF.

Significance of the study

This study will focus on the depiction of the themes of birth and death in PEF and BEF, thus enhancing the level of comprehension among the readers of the relative fictions. As both societies are having different cultures, so are their associations with the themes of birth and death. Major focus of the study is to highlight how writers of PEF and BEF present the scenes of birth and death in the medium of words. It is hypothesized that both PEF and BEF have different ideas and rituals along with customs associated with themes of birth and death, beside the universal element of birth and death among all the human beings.

Literature Review

In contemporary literary studies, a theme is the central topic, subject, or concept the author is trying to point out,

not to be confused with whatever message, moral, or commentary it may send or be interpreted as sending regarding said concept (inferred "thesis"). While the term "theme" was for a period used to reference "message" or "moral", literary critics now rarely employ it in this fashion (Mishra, 2011). It is due to the confusion that it causes regarding the common denotation of theme: "the subject of discourse, discussion, conversation, meditation, or composition; a topic." One historic problem with the previous usage was that readers would frequently conflate "subject" and "theme" as similar concepts, a confusion that the new terminology helps prevent in both scholarship and the classroom. Thus, according to recent scholarship and pedagogy, identifying a story's theme—for example, "death"—does not inherently involve identifying the story's thesis or claims about "death's" definitions, properties, values, or significance. Like morals or messages, themes often explore historically common or cross-culturally (i.e. universal) recognizable ideas and are almost always implied rather than stated explicitly. Along with plot, character, setting, and style, theme is also considered as one of the fundamental components of fiction. In every piece of literary activity several motifs and symbols are used to portray the real situation allegorically. Motifs depicted in fiction are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes. Same is the case with symbols as they are the objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

With the help of corpora we can identify features that a reader may not be fully aware of when he arrives at a particular interpretation of a text. As in corpus linguistics a research approach facilitates empirical descriptions of a language used in any kind of fiction. Usually it is based on analysis of corpora i.e. a large and principled collection of texts stored in computer. A corpus is a sample, designed to represent a textual domain in a language. Thus a research carried on a corpus has the goal of describing the patterns of language used in the target textual domain.

According to Conard & Reppen (1998), a corpus based research is empirical, analyzing the actual patterns of language use in natural texts. It makes extensive use of computers for analysis, using both automatic and interactive techniques. It is based on both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Researches based on corpus linguistics do not discover anything new about the fiction under analysis but they do help us to understand the several linguistics devices and themes used in the text to achieve the new levels of interpretation. The two renowned scholars in this regards are Fischer and Starcke (2009, 2010) who are highly productive in studying the novels of Jane Austen and exploring the text in new dimensions. The current comparative analysis is the analysis of various lexis, syntax and symbols available in text of both the fictions i.e. PEF and BEF. According to Webster's dictionary, symbolism is "the representation of a concept through symbols or underlying meanings of objects or qualities" (Webster's, 2011). Symbols can be clues to the theme of a given text, such as a bridge represents a crossover or a change in the role of a character present in that text. Jonathan Culler (2005) says "Literature has not only made identity a theme; It has played a significant role in the construction of the identity of the readers. Literary work depicts identification of the characters by showing things from their point of view".

The occurring frequency of words 'birth' and 'death' will be analyzed with the help of AntConc 3.2.2w (windows) 2008, an authenticated software to analyze machine readable corpora. Corpus linguistics can provide useful tools to identify textual features that characterize the style of a particular text. Corpora enable comparisons of typical patterns with features foregrounded in particular text or texts by a particular author and corpus linguistics techniques can suggest quantitative as well as the qualitative approaches to the analysis of texts. A corpus stylistic analysis may describe the development of a narrative by looking at distributions of content words (Stubbs 2001), or the analysis may focus on collocations that reflect the way in which characters are portrayed (Hori 2004). Moreover, corpus linguistic methodology can be used to test existing theories and themes for the stylistic analysis of texts (Semino & Short 2004). The present study will focus on various words (such as adjectives both attributive along with predicative usage) used with 'birth' and 'death' thus signaling the themes and customs along with rituals associated with birth and death in both the fictions that will ultimately portray the societal pictures in the mind of the readers.

Besides different inflections of the words birth and death (such as bear, bore, die, dead etc), other allegorical elements and modifiers like adjectives will also be explored so as to reach the exact interpretations and themes. In this way an effort has been made to achieve the meanings present in the mind of the writers of the text. As it is a fact that meaning and form cannot be separated. This is one of the fundamental points of corpus linguistic approaches to the description of language. In corpora we can observe collocations and patterns of words that make visible the meanings shared by the members of a discourse community. However, meanings in texts are not only conventional. The meaning of a particular text is characterized by the interplay of conventional patterns and the texts or creative combinations of words. It is the creative or 'unusual' collocations that literary stylistics is interested in: the relationship between meaning and form is analyzed with regard to the effects that can be achieved by deviating from linguistic norms thus highlighting the themes presented in the text.

Methodology and Research Design

With the help of corpus linguistic methodology the analysis of any literary text is not restricted to those features striking enough to be discovered by a human observer, but what makes the use of corpora such a valuable tool in stylistics is the analysis of the interplay between conventional and defining ways of creating exact meanings as present in the mind of the writers of that text.

The study is a blend of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The framework of the present study is the representative texts of PEF and BEF to be analyzed through AntConc 3.2.2w (windows) 2008. The data consists of one million corpus of Pakistani English Fiction (PEF) and the same quantity of the text truly representative of British English Fiction (BEF) compiled by the researchers both from Government College University Faisalabad, Dr. Rashid Mahmood, Dr. Asim Mahmood and has been approved by ICE-Hk. The one million corpus of PEF has been compared with the one million corpus of British English fiction (BEF) also compiled by the same researchers. The frequencies of 'birth' and 'death' along with their modifiers and adjectives have been explored in different contexts and compared in both corpora and differences have been studied. The findings and occurring frequencies of the required words has been presented in tabulated diagrams.

The present study has taken examples from the fictions i.e. PEF and BEF to illustrate how corpus linguistic methodology can provide useful information for the stylistic analysis of texts for highlighting various themes. What appears to be an unusual instance of collocation may turn out to be part of a textual pattern that is created by a set of semantic prosodies spanning large passages of text. The major focus is on different patterns that illustrate how the writers of texts portray specific features and themes of birth and death. Following is the number of occurring frequencies in PEF and BEF as both the fictions analyzed through AntConc 3.2.2w (windows) 2008, as displayed in Table 1.1 and explained in detail below:

Words	Frequency in BEF	Frequency in PEF
Death	600	586
Dead	812	698
Die	251	248

Table 1.1. Frequency of words in BEF and PEF

It is clear that frequency of occurrence of all the three words 'death', 'dead' and 'die' is greater in BEF as compared to PEF. So it is clear that frequency of the words under subject is less in PEF as contrasted to BEF. It is quite clear that it commonly said that "you are what your words are", it explores the focus of the writers, what they are thinking about through their words.

Next table (1.2) is describing the frequency of occurrence of words such as: 'birth', 'born', and 'bear' both in BEF and PEF.

Words	Frequency in BEF	Frequency in PEF
Birth	57	157
Born	109	278
Bear	79	155

Table 1.2. Frequency of words in BEF and PEF

In both the fictions there is much difference in frequency of the words depicting joy and happiness among the characters. So it evident that symbols and words like 'death', 'dead', and 'die' appear more in BEF as compared to PEF. Contrary to this fact it is also clear that the number of appearances of the words like, 'birth', 'born', and 'bear' are more in PEF as compared to BEF.

Adjectives in BEF and PEF depicting themes of death and birth

Adjectives like fear, starved, bleeding, torturing, ultimately, burning, valley, crash, mutilation, violent, vicious, drooped and fading etc have been used in BEF to create more disappointment among the audience or readers of BEF.

On the other hand adjectives used in PEF with the abovementioned words are such as lingering, quickly, swift, little, game of, bearable, impending, and convincing have been used thus creating less element of discouragement as compared to BEF. Thus making it clear that the scenery of death is viewed differently in both the fictions i.e. societies. Same can be witnessed in the movies of both countries and other genres of literature.

As far as the adjectives depicting the theme birth they are also more vibrantly used in PEF as compared to BEF. Same can be glanced when we have a look on the rituals and other celebrations regarding different occasions about death and birth. The most evident difference between BEF and PEF are the phrases such as: *Liberty* or *death* in PEF, so death has one more status in PEF i.e. the status of martyrdom (to die for liberation of the homeland). Which is not available in BEF.

Conclusion

This paper has considered how death and birth are presented in Pakistani as well as in British English fictions. A

wide range of texts, principally but not exclusively from the English language tradition, is used to illustrate themes. Themes and celebrations of birth in both the fictions are quite different. Broad categories are suggested for the study of death: some authors give personal accounts of their impending death or their sense of bereavement; some use distinctive metaphor to structure and order our thoughts about death; and some treat death as a literary device, using it, for example, as a symbolic representation of the decay of society. It is clear that the themes along with customs and rituals regarding birth and death are entirely different in BEF and PEF. The adjectives (both attributive as well as predicative) and synonymous words define the role of the themes about birth and death present in the respective fictions. It is obvious that both societies (England and Pakistan) have different cultures so the writers are always depicting the surrounding pictures available around the environment in their writings. This study established that Pakistani English fiction has used distinctive linguistic features that prove it as an independent variety of English among other ever increasing and flourishing varieties of English around the globe. So it should be recognized and acknowledged worldwide.

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