A Socio-Stylistic Analysis of Death in Dickinson's and Harper's Selected Poem

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Abstract

This study attempts a socio-stylistic analysis of four well-known American poems, focusing on their presentation of death as a prominent issue. The poems are "Because I Could not Stop for Death," "There's Been a Death in the Opposite House" by Emily Dickinson, and "***The Death of the Old Sea King", and "The Drunkard's Child"*** **by Frances Harper.**

The poems are analysed for their use of semantic-level of stylistic devices. The strength of the paper lies in its integration of the aforementioned stylistic devices in a way that is consistent with the linguistic variable of ethnicity. Therefore, two female poets were selected to compare and contrast the two poets' styles and perspectives. Both poets employ a great deal of stylistic devices in their poems and share several similarities in their writing styles. At the same time, Dickinson employs more word formation, euphemism, and symbolism in her poems, while Harper heavily employs metaphor, irony and allusion. Examining the poems in this way lends credence to the paper's argument that language and ethnicity are intricately intertwined in the presentation of such a massive topic as death which led each poet to express death from their own perspective as well as their surrounding society.

Key word: Dickinson, death, devices, Ethnicity, Harper, socio-stylistics.

1. Introduction

Poets use language to express their inner thoughts and conflicts by selecting various uncommon word combinations, syntactic patterns, and figurative language. Because language profoundly affects people's actions and thoughts, these techniques assist poets in establishing emotional connections with their readers (Crawley, 1970). Moreover, since language is not static but flexible (Yule, 2014), it paved the way for the emergence of Poetic forms like allegory, narrative poetry, odes, sonnets, and monologues (Rosenthal,1987), which are used for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to the establishment of interpersonal communication and the forging of emotional bonds between individuals.

The aspects of life and death are well-known for their profound impacts on human existence. Therefore, Humans spend their entire lives pondering these two major abstract aspects that can be identified and interpreted scientifically (Parnia & Young, 2013) and philosophically (Kamath, 1993) but cannot be empirically demonstrated. On the other hand, this paper focuses on the aspect of death, specifically the presentation of death in American poetry and how American poets present it differently. Death is a source of inspiration for poets, allowing them to ponder

their own demise freely and, in some cases, the afterlife. Carrard (2021) confirms this notion when he asserts that authors tend to describe death based on their own life experiences; they even prefer to imagine themselves as omniscient deceased observers who observe the actions of their living companions. They create a new reality and react to it as if it were tangible.

According to Chavis (2011). Poetry encourages people to engage with their own and other people's creative expression, allowing them to communicate their inner selves, recognise their abilities, and discover new ways to overcome challenges. They use a variety of stylistic elements that may bolster their messages and maintain their status. Still, occasionally there is a gap in understanding some poems that are exclusive to one ethnicity. Consequently, this study is designed to examine the various poetic styles of each poet in light of their ethnicity. Therefore, the current study aims to bridge this gap by finding answers to the following questions:

1. What are the semantical stylistic devices that dominate the style of each ethnicity when describing death?
2. What are the semantical deviations employed by each poet?
3. What are the similarities and differences in each poet's style in relation to death?

1. 1. Socio-stylistics

The analysis of the current study is based on two interdisciplinary fields; stylistics which is interwoven with linguistics, psychology, cultural theory, sociology, literary critics, history, and philosophy (Leech,2013:2), and Sociolinguistics which is an interdisciplinary science between sociology, anthropology, and linguistics (Mallinson & Kendal, 2013). According to Crystal (1992:371), stylistics is " the study of any situationally distinctive use of language and of choices made by individuals and social groups in their usage of language in all linguistic domains, while sociolinguistics is" a branch of linguistics that studies how language is integrated with human society with reference to such race, ethnicity, class, sex, and social institution."

In light of the late definitions, socio-stylistics might be defined as a subfield of linguistics that investigates the characteristics of different language varieties in relation to their specific applications in various contexts. It makes an effort to establish principles that are able to account for the particular linguistic decisions that individuals and social groups make in their communication. Speaking about variables, the study concerns ethnicity, a significant variable that exists in all societies and within the same group that distinguishes a group of people from another by the use of language, tradition, and beliefs. Ethnicity or An ethnic group is a collection of people that identify with one another based on perceived shared characteristics that set them apart from other groups. These characteristics can include shared sets of customs, ancestry, language, history, civilisation, nation, religion, or social treatment in their community. The terms ethnicity and nation are frequently used interchangeably, particularly in circumstances of ethnic nationalism (People & Garrick, 2012:389).

1. 2. Stylistic Devices

Stylistic devices are language techniques employed by poets and authors to achieve innovation and distinctiveness in their work. The employment of these strategies distinguish a writer's language from that of another writer (Watson, 2008). There are several distinct categories of stylistic devices in use today, and they all share a lot of the similar components that only differ in nomenclature and categorization standards.

According to Simpson's (2004), theory of language levels, also proposes a four-levels framework for analysing language styles. The four levels are phonological, grammatical, graphologic,, and semantic levels. The first two catigories are explained in the previous paragraph. So, the graphologic level is the study of writing styles, while the semantic level deals with how words and phrases are understood. The current study deals with the semantic level.

The Semantic Level

According to Leech and Short (1981:75), semantic devices in stylistics deal with the style of word choices. The author's choice of vocabularies, such as simple or complicated words, broad or technical terminology, words associated with other emotions or idioms, or the choice of word class, can be used to analyse lexical structure in stylistics (noun, verb, adverb, or adjective). However, meaning is not always conveyed literally, but by using figures of speech which manipulate words to give different and deeper meanings and images. Figurative language should not be judged solely by its denotative meaning because it has more to convey than surface meaning.

Among the many stylistic devices, the following is the most common one that represents the semantic devices that are used in the current study:

1. Imagery

The term "imagery" describes language that arouses the reader's senses. The writer conveys a greater grasp of the human experience by evoking those senses through touch, taste, sound, smell, and sight, establishing a shared sensory experience with the reader. (Enos, 1996). Imagery is achieved by the use of several devices as follows:

a. Symbolism

The practice of employing physical imagery in order to communicate abstract concepts is referred to as symbolism (Wales,2011).

b. Simile

According to Frost (2016), simile is a metaphorical language used to convey the resemblance of two items (in shape, colour, features, etc.) directly using connectors such as like, as, than, similar to, resembles, or seems.

c. Metaphor

A metaphor is a metaphorical language used to establish an indirect comparison between two or more objects. Metaphoric language is utilised to create a new and different meaning (Goatly, 1997).

d. Personification

According to Kennedy (1979), personification is a figure of speech in which nonhuman objects are given human features and attributes in order to achieve dramatic consequences.

2. Anthropomorphism

According to Wales (2011) anthropomorphism is the practice of ascribing human qualities to nonhuman entities, such as inanimate objects, natural phenomena, material states, and abstract ideas.

3. Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the impression created when the words employed mimic the sounds they describe (Cuddon, 1999).

4. Paradox

Paradox is a statement that appears to be self-contradictory yet, upon closer study, reveals a truth that is ordinarily hidden. It is a rhetorical phrase for a circumstance or remark that is or appears self-contradictory, even absurd, but may contain an insight into life (Kennedy, 1979).

5. Polyptoton

Polyptoton is a type of hyperbole as "an absurd exaggeration of an object attribute intended to exaggerate a truth or emotion in order to emphasise its importance (Frost, 2016).

6. Merism

A merism is a literary device that is formed by combining two contrasting parts or images of one subject to refer to it as a whole (Longman & Enns, 2008).

7. Asterismos

Asterismos refers to an initial or middle word or phrase like "behold," whose primary purpose is to draw attention to what comes after it in a piece of rhetoric (Dupriez,1999).

8. Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a part that is employed to designate the whole or the entire is used to designate a part (Wren & Martin, 1990).

9. Euphemism

A non-offensive term is substituted for one that is deemed offensive or humiliating (Abrams & Harpham, 2009).

10. Pun

A play on words that are either identical in sound (homonyms) or very similar in sound, but are sharply diverse in meaning (Abrams & Harpham, 2009).

11. Diction

Diction refers to the words, phrases, and sentence patterns, as well as occasionally metaphorical language, that comprise any literary work (Abrams & Harpham, 2009).

12. Apostrophe

An apostrophe is a direct and clear address to a person who is absent or to a nonhuman or abstract entity (Abrams & Harpham, 2009).

13. Meronymy

A meronym is a term used in semantics to represent a component portion or a member of something (Jendrzejewski, 2011).

14. Allusion

Allusion is a fleeting allusion to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or section, without specific identification (Fahnestock,2011).

15. Irony

Irony is a trope and a remark in which the implied meaning of the speaker varies significantly from the proclaimed meaning (Abrams & Harpham, 2009)

2. Methodology

2. 1. Data Collection

This study focuses on analysing the concept of death in four poems by two American poets. The main focus of the current study is how each poet presents death according to her ethnicity. Thus, the study is based on the nineteenth-century poetry of Emily Dickinson and Frances Harper, who are known for their frequent employment of the death theme. The poems will be analysed according to their semantic stylistic devices.

2.2. The model of analysis

To achieve the aims of this study, an eclectic model (Fig. 1) made up of two theories. The first theory is Ferguson's (1996) model which is used to analyse the socio-stylistics context, and Leech (1969) of the levels of the stylistic devices.

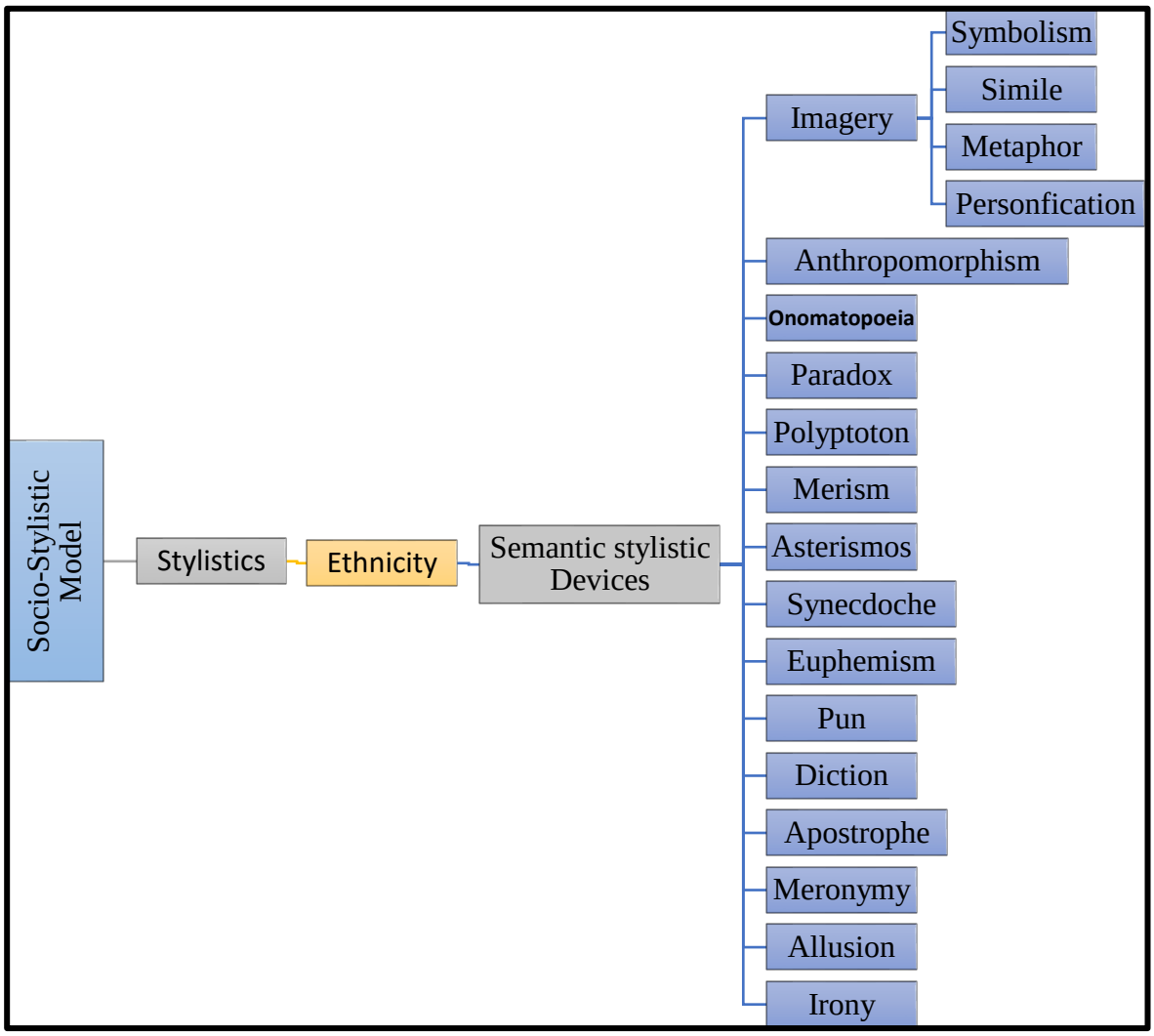

FIGURE 1 THE MODEL OF ANALYSIS

2. 3. Data Analysis

In the following sections, an extraction of each poem and its analysis will be presented according to each poet. According to the date of publication, Emily Dickinson's poems will be analysed first, then Frances Harper's.

2. 3. 1. Emily Dickinson's

2.3.1.1 " Because I Could not Stop for Death."

"Because I could not stop for death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality".

1. **The Stylistic Devices**
   - **1- The Imagery**
   - a. Symbolism

The first symbol is the carriage, which is connected in the readers' minds with moving wheels and passages. Together, they signify the timeline from life to death. A sped-up picture of life is then depicted as the carriage drives the speaker through the countryside life as

a metaphorical journey is now a literal ride in the carriage. The carriage may also presents the speaker's body, which could be compared to the "carriage" of the speaker's soul" The Carriage held but just Ourselves". The symbol of the carriage also connected with the road which presented the life and the horses presented the people's thoughts that lead them to make several decisions effects the destination of their lives.

b. **Personification**

The current poem relies heavily on the personification of death. As early as the second line, the concept of "Death" is personified as an uninvited gentleman who arrives to take the speaker. "Death" appears to be a guide or escort, leading the speaker to either the afterlife or to unending nothingness, depending on their perspective.

This character of "Death" can be described in surprisingly few words by the poet. He is "*gentle*" and "*civil*," and he treats his female companion with deference and consideration. The only other aspect of death disclosed is how he does his business. He is utterly unhurried because he understands the meaning of the time on his journey. For someone who has been existing since the beginning of time, time is not that critical, and thus he does not need to hurry.

An essential element in the poem's impact is death's unspoken silence throughout the text. It creates a sense of isolation around the speaker, even when she is traveling in a group. When it comes to death itself, no one can ever truly know what it is like until it actually occurs.

2. Paradox

The use of paradox as a stylistic device is essential in this poem because the poem juxtaposes death with its polar opposite, Immortality

"The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality."

This paradoxical approach of reconciling death with eternity captures the fundamental topic of the poem. While it is true that many religions believe that death serves as a gateway to endless life, it is also true that this idea is universal. In order to understand Dickinson's originality, it is necessary to understand the solipsistic way in which it is thought out and depicted.

3. **Euphemism**

Euphemism of death is found in the second line of the current" ***He kindly*** *stopped for me."* Death is kindly stopped to the speaker and helps him to get in the carriage.

2.3.1.2 There's been a Death, in the Opposite House"

"The Neighbors rustle in and out —
The Doctor — drives away —
A Window opens like a Pod —
Abrupt — mechanically —"

1. The Stylistic Devices

1- Imagery

a. Symbolism

The first symbol in the current poem is presented by the doctor. Usually, the readers' first impression about" *doctors"* is derived from their experience that the doctor image is either associated with the healing process or life's end. Therefore, the doctor's image in the current context reflects the confirmation of death.

b. Simile

A vivid simile is found in the third line, when the speaker describes the opening of the window which is another normal thing in daily life, but it reflects a sign of death because the

window opens like a "*Pod*" and" *mechanically*." which means the "*window*" opens differently than usual. Readers may consider the fact that both grief and death are unwilled, unchosen, involuntary, and even "mechanical" aspects of existence that cannot be avoided.

2.Pun

A pun is found in the poem in the first line:

*"The Neighbors **rustle** in and out —"*

The word *"rustle"* has two meanings. It either describes the rush movement of people who get "*in and out"* or it mimics the sound that their movements cause in that case it would be called onomatopoeia. In both cases, it refers to a lexical word belongs to the meaning rather than the sound device. But in the case of the first meaning "pun" is considered to be a foregrounding lexical ambiguity.

3. Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is also found in the first line:

*"The Neighbors **rustle** in and out —"*

It mimics the sound made by the movements of rushing people who work in the opposite house. Despite that, onomatopoeia is considered a sound sense in literature, but it belongs to lexical meaning in the stylistic analysis.

2. 3. 2. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's **poems**

2. 3. 2.1 "*The Death of the Old Sea King"*

"But they heard no cry of anguish
Break through that fiery wall,
With rigid brow and silent lips
He was seeking Odin's hall."

1. **The stylistic Devices**
1. **Irony**

Irony plays a significant role in the current poem. It unites all life's fragments to connect reality with imagination in human life.

The irony which is found in the fourth line in the current extraction combines two other ironies in the same poem. It leads the readers to combine the images of spiritual and physical worlds with the life and death of the warrior's body. It portrays the spirit of the warrior who is seeking its place in "Odin's hall."

2. **Allusion**

The poet draws the reader's attention to the glory of the dying warrior by bringing an allusion of an old war god "Odin", whose hall, "Odin's hall," is the ultimate quest of any warrior.

2. 3. 2.2 "*The Drunkard's Child"*

"*My father!" said the dying child,*
(His voice was faint and low,)
"Oh! clasp me closely to your heart,
And kiss me ere I go.
Bright angels beckon me away,
To the holy city fair –
Oh! tell me, Father, ere I go,
Say, will you meet me there?"

1.The stylistic Devices

1. **Euphemism**

Euphemism in the current extraction is found in the sixth line when death is presented as a peaceful end for the child. It pulled him from a miserable life to a "*holy city fair."*

2. Asterismos

Asterismos in the current poem is used to reflect the little child's pain and help the readers feel the child's emotions. Asterismos is found in the third and seventh lines of the current extraction: "***Oh****! clasp me closely to your heart"* and the second one is found in the thirty-seventh line: "***Oh!*** *tell me, Father, ere I go."*

2. 4. Results and Discussion

2.4.1 Overall analysis

The overall analysis of the socio-stylistic study of the presentation of death in the four selected American poems shows that imagery is the most frequent semantic device used by both Dickinson and Harper. It is recorded (68.75%) by Dickinson and (44.68%) by Harper, among other devices, as shown in Table (1). In addition to imagery, euphemism is found to be the second most frequently used device for Dickinson, with a percentage of (9.37%), while Harper records only (4.25%), as shown in Table (1). On the other hand, Harper tends to use a great deal of irony, with a percentage of (23.40%) and allusion, with a percentage of (14.89%). In comparison to Harper, Dickinson shows no attention to neither irony nor allusion.

Regarding the types of imagery, symbolism is considered the most frequent semantic device used by both Dickinson, with a percentage of (50%) and Harper, with a percentage of (57.14%). In addition to symbolism, personification is the second most frequently employed device for Dickinson, with a percentage of (22.72%), while Harper tends to use metaphor as the second employed semantic device with a percentage of (19.04%) as shown in Table (2).

Despite the differences in both styles, there are several similarities between Dickinson's and Harper's writing styles such as the use of anthropomorphism which scored (6.25%) by Dickinson and (6.38%) by Harper. It indicates that both poets deal with inanimate objects as living creatures to add extra effect on their poems. At the same time, each poet employed several semantic devices that do not utilise by the other. For example, Harper uses irony, allusion, and asterismos. At the same time, Dickinson tends to use paradox, synecdoche, pun, onomatopoeia, merism, and synecdoche. At the same time, they both share the same interest in symbolism, simile, and anthropomorphism.

2.4.2 The Stylistics Devices

1. Imagery

Imagery is the most used device by both Dickinson and Harper. It is a unique device that may be divided into several types. It helps to deliver both poets' wit and rich imagination to the readers as well as their masterful choice of effective words. The current poems consist of four branches of imagery: symbolism, personification, metaphor, and simile, as shown in Table (2). Dickinson, for example, used imagery with a percentage of (68.75%), while Harper used imagery with a percentage of (44.68%). Both Dickinson and Harper employ all four branches of imagery but in different percentages. Both poets have a great interest in symbolism, with a percentage of (50%) for Dickinson and (57.14%) for Harper. At the same time, Dickinson tends to use personification more than Harper, with a percentage of (22.72%), while it is scored (9.52%) by Harper. At the same time, Harper employed metaphor more than Dickinson, with a percentage of (19.04%), while Dickinson scored (9.09%). In addition to the previous devices, simile has the same importance as symbolism to indicate the similarities between Dickinson and Harper because it is the third most frequently used device for both poets, with a percentage of (18.18%) for Dickinson and (14.28%) for Harper.

2. Euphemism

The results in (Table 1) show that euphemism is the second most frequently employed device by Dickinson, with a percentage of (9.37%). On the other hand, Harper pays little attention to euphemisms, with a percentage of (4.25%). Euphemism is employed to gain readers' attention to

the importance of death to life and how it should be treated as a friend or a normal phenomenon because it is the only fact in their levies.

3. Irony

Irony is heavily used by Harper, with a percentage of (23.40%). She employed it to create a sort of suspense that assists the readers in engaging with the emotional confusion of the characters toward death. Dickinson, on the other hand, does not employ any irony in her poems and prefers to be direct and simple when dealing with death.

4. Asterismos

The results in (Table 1) show that asterismos is employed by Harper with a percentage of (6.38%). She utilised it to draw the readers' attention to the importance of the lines that follow it to the character and their inner conflict. At the same time, Dickinson prefers not to use asterismos in her poetry and keeps her poem simple and direct.

5. Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is a semantic device that is used by both poets, with a percentage of (6.25%) for Dickinson and (6.38%) for Harper. They employ anthropomorphism to reflect the deep sorrow that even inanimate objects feel toward death.

TABLE 1 THE SEMANTIC LEVEL OF STYLISTIC DEVICES

	Devices	Poets			
		Emily Dickinson		**Frances Harper**	
		F	%	F	%
Semantic Level of Devices	Imagery	22	68.75	21	44.68
	Euphemism	3	9.37	2	4.25
	Anthropomorphism	2	6.25	3	6.38
	Paradox	1	3.12	0	0
	Synecdoche	1	3.12	0	0
	Pun	1	3.12	0	0
	Onomatopia	1	3.12	0	0
	Merism	0	0	0	0
	Allusion	0	0	7	14.89
	Synecdoche	1	3.12	0	0
	Apostrophe	0	0	0	0
	Irony	0	0	11	23.40
	Adynaton	0	0	0	0
	Meronymy	0	0	0	0
	Asterismos	0	0	3	6.38
	Diction	0	0	0	0
	Total	32	100	47	100

TABLE 2 TYPES OF IMAGINARY

Devices	Poets			
	Emily Dickinson		Frances Harper	
	F	%	F	%
symbolism	11	50	12	57.14
Personification	5	22.72	2	9.52
Simile	4	18.18	3	14.28
Metaphor	2	9.09	4	19.04
Total	22	100	21	100

Conclusion

By skillfully blending of sociolinguistic variables and stylistic devices, American poets managed to reveal their perspective of death and presented it according to how they saw and felt it. Regarding the semantic level of stylistic devices. Dickinson tends to use imagery and euphemism to tie her readers with the concept of death she deals with in her poem to reshape its realistic existence with the spiritual pain of the departure of loved ones. Therefore she employs symbols from real life that have connotations from the readers' daily life. Harper also tends to use imagery, but she combines it with irony for the same reason. She employs metaphoric images with irony to create a sense of reality for whom believe in life after death. Thus, she utilises irony to complicate life and simplify death. Both poets use their unique techniques to put the reader in the characters' position because death is a common phenomenon, so both poets want the reader to sense it by using simple devices more heavily than others. On the other hand, the reader will recall an old memory about the death of a relative or a friend, which is the ultimate goal of the poets.

From the study findings, it can be concluded that imagery is the most utilised device that dominates the semantic level of Dickinson's and Harper's styles. However, in addition to imagery, each poet employs several devices that reflect their status in their community.

Each poet wrote her poems depending on the language of each ethnicity at their time. Commonly, Caucasian women tend to talk differently than African-American women depending on their environment and the community around them as well as their ethnic companions. It could be a method to prove their power and origin to be understood by their readers. On the other hand, Dickinson, as shown in figure (1), like the typical style of women how, tends to use many word formations that show her mastery in using the language in targeting specific groups of readers. Harper, on the other hand, also uses devices that are not used by Dickinson for the same reason. Therefore, She tends to use allusion to simplify her thoughts to her readers and keep her english language simple. Furthermore, the main reasons that make women chose such devices and words is their caring nature and their role in society as women who are the guardian of their children and housekeeping that requires to use a simple direct language that suits each person in according to their education, thoughts and personality. Generally - under tremendous pressure- women tend to simplify their sentences to express more thoughts and ideas simultaneously.

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دراسة اسلوبية اجتماعية لتحليل الموت في قصائد ديكنسون و هاربر

الملخص

تحاول هذه الدراسة إجراء تحليل اجتماعي أسلوبي لأربع قصائد أمريكية معروفة ، مع التركيز على تقديمها للموت كقضية بارزة. القصائد هي "لأنني لم أستطع التوقف من أجل الموت" ، و "كان هناك موت في البيت المقابل" لإميلي ديكنسون ، و "موت ملك البحر القديم" ، و "طفل السكران" لفرانسيس هاربر.

يتم تحليل القصائد لاستخدامها على المستوى الدلالي للأدوات الأسلوبية. تكمن قوة الورقة في تكاملها بين الأدوات الأسلوبية المذكورة أعلاه بطريقة تتفق مع المتغير اللغوي للعرق. لذلك تم اختيار شاعرتين للمقارنة بين أساليب الشاعرتين ووجهات نظرهما. يستخدم كلا الشاعرين قدرًا كبيرًا من الأساليب الأسلوبية في قصائدهما ويشتركان في العديد من أوجه التشابه في أساليب كتابتهما. في الوقت نفسه ، تستخدم ديكنسون الى الاكثار تشكيل الكلمات والتعبير الملطف والرمزية في قصائدها ، بينما تميل هاربر الى استخدام الاستعارة والسخرية والتلميح. إن فحص القصائد بهذه الطريقة يضفي مصداقية على حجة الدراسة القائلة بأن اللغة والعرق متشابكان بشكل معقد في عرض مثل هذا الموضوع الضخم مثل الموت الذي دفع كل شاعر للتعبير عن الموت من منظورهم الخاص وكذلك المجتمع المحيط بهم.