

Soland's Language in her Ten Minutes Plays: A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis

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Stylistic studies act like a bridge between linguistics and literature. They offer an opportunity for researchers to reveal the hidden aspects of spoken language in order to utilize the specific features of the author's style to various fields, a particular aspect of a time era, or a practical characteristic of language use. This study is a literary / linguistic stylistic analysis of Soland's *Red Roses*. The analysis was conducted in three scopes: genre, register, and language. The genre analysis referred to the structure of *Red Roses* in the light of Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistic framework. The register analysis revealed that the 'Finite' form of the clauses is in the past tense. Finally, the language analysis showed that the lexical density in *Red Roses* was moderate which means that the play is written for all people and for all kinds of mentalities. The study helps English instructors and English learners in understanding the way of looking at literary works, how to analyze them, and the way we use such analysis in interpreting literature and choosing texts to be presented in English learning classrooms.

Keywords: stylistic analysis, genre, register, lexical density.

1- دائرة البعثات والعلاقات الثقافية/ وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

Introduction

Harris (1952) suggested the idea of analyzing linguistic elements and their distribution in written texts. His suggestion led to the spread of stylistic and discourse analysis studies. After that movement, many scholars worked on various theories of discourse analysis, one of which was Halliday, who came up with his systematic functional linguistics. Huang (2001) suggested that following Halliday's steps in analyzing texts functionally can be carried out in three phases: genre (the cultural context), register (the situational context), and language. The purpose of this study is to analyze Soland's play *Red Roses* from the three phases of Halliday's functional analysis: genre, register, and language.

Lisa Soland

Lisa Soland has a BA degree in acting from Florida State University. She worked as an apprentice at the Burt Reynolds Jupiter Theatre with playwright William Luce in his world premiere play, *Luce Women*. Her first play, *The Name Game*, received a yearlong writer's grant and was subsequently published by Samuel French, Inc. She received the Artistic Director Achievement award for best original comedy for her play *Happy Birthday, Baby!* Then her drama *The ReBirth* won her the Hawthornden Fellowship in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Her ten-minute plays have received numerous productions and publications. In 2015, Soland launched her own publishing company, Climbing Angel Publishing. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America, SAG, AFTRA and AEA.

Red Roses

Red Roses is one of Soland's '10 minutes plays'. It tells the story of a married couple who faces the crises of a love affair which threatens their marriage. This time the wife is the one who has this love affair. The wife is a writer who travels a lot to sign copies of her book and attend many meetings while the husband takes care of the house and the kids. A bouquet of red roses reveals the mischievous behavior of the wife when it arrives home. Red roses represent a romantic love night that took place. Although the betrayal as not stated literally in the play, but the symbol portrayed it clearly which makes it hard to the reader to believe that it is a real betrayal. By the end of the play, and while the husband collects all his belongings to exit the marriage life, the wife selects her home and promised to end this affair and takes her role as a wife only: not a writer and not a working woman anymore.

Text Analysis

Genre Analysis of *Red Roses*

Genre is the goal oriented social process (Martin & Rose, 2003). It is the enactment of various social contexts. Saying that, written genres would be novels, poems, plays, fairy tales...etc. Each one of these genres can be divided into sub-genres, such as plays that can be divided into comedies, tragedies, historical plays, ... etc. Chang (2005) stated that a genre is realized by the schematic structure of the text. Hasan (1984) found that six elements comprises literary texts. Those elements are: placement, initiating event, sequent event, finale, and moral. Initiating, sequent, and finale events are obligatory elements, unlike the other elements which are optional. Obligatory elements are the ones that determine the genre of the text. On the other hand, optional elements give variety to the structural resources within a genre.

Initiating event is what *Red Roses* starts with Robert receiving a bouquet of red roses and reading the card attached to it.

The sequent event proceeds when his wife returns home from a trip to sign her new book release. The final event in this play is the act of emptying Roberts' suitcase. The 'finale' of the story refers to the end of a summer storm that might occur in the life of a married person.

Register Analysis

Register is the functional variety of language (Halliday, 1964). In other means, it is the use of specific configurations of language resources in a specific context (Thompson, 2004). According to the systematic functional linguistic model, language in social context recognizes three social functions of language use:

- 1- Presenting experience (ideational meta-function).
- 2- Enacting social relationships (interpersonal meta-function).
- 3- Organizing representations as meaningful text (textual meta function) (Bing-yan, 2011).

Register analysis is basically the analysis of those three meta-functions. However, the analysis of each one of them can be done from several perspectives; which is why the researchers of the current study chose one perspective for each to conduct the analysis in question due to the limitation of the study.

Ideational meta-function in terms of transitivity analysis

The transitivity system divides the world of experience into a group of process types. There are six process types: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential. Each one of those process types provides its own model of constructing a particular kind of experience. In English,

each experience forms a specific semantic configuration which consists of a process, participants, and circumstantial elements (optional) (Halliday, 2004). Results of the transitivity of *Red Roses* are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Transitivity Analysis of *Red Roses*

Total number of processes	Material		Mental		Relational		Behavioral		Verbal	
	N	P (%)	N	P (%)	N	P (%)	N	P (%)	N	P (%)
214	12	5%	47	21%	82	38%	56	26%	17	7%

The analysis reveals that the percentage of the relational processes is the highest in *Red Roses*. They constituted (38%) from the total processes of the play. Relational clauses characterize and identify entities. The following is an example of relational processes in *Red Roses*:

“I’m Back.”

“I’m exhausted.”

“... they’re not from you.”

Behavioral process comes next and accounts for (26%) of the total processes in *Red Roses*. Behavioral clauses are those clauses that explain physiological and psychological behavior. In *Red Roses*, Soland used the behavioral process to describe various states of the characters, such as the following

“I dropped them off at the Bergh’s....”

The analysis shows that mental processes in this play comes third with (21%) percentage. Mental clauses are those concerned with the experience of the world of consciousness. Those clauses are related to

sensing. They capture any change in the flow of events that takes place in the consciousness (Halliday, 2004). Most of the mental clauses in *Red Roses* are cognitive, for example:

"I can't believe I did that."

"I don't know."

The percentage of the material process in this play is only (5%). This is because Soland did not aim for *Red Roses* to be a play of doing and happening. This fact is reflected in the lack of material clauses which are used basically to indicate changes in the flow of events as taking place through some course of energy (Halliday, 2004).

Verbal processes constitute (7%). An examples of verbal processes is:

"..... what you tell them to write."

"What's the card say?"

Interpersonal meta-function analysis in terms of mood and modality

The main concern of interpersonal function is discourse as an exchange. And the main purpose of this exchange is demanding a commodity of information. Which is why there are four speech functions: statement, question, offer, and command. Mood and modality reflect the ways participants interact in this discourse. In this interaction, the subject and the 'Finite' constitute the mood of the clause. On the other hand, modality is part of the 'Finite'. It acts as the tool that assists the speaker in sharing his/her attitude about the subject of the interaction. In other means, it is realized by the following:

- 1- A finite modal operator, e.g., must, may.
- 2- A modal adjunct, e.g., probably, usually.
- 3- An expanded predicator, e.g., be supposed to, be anxious to, be determined to (Ding, 2000; Thompson, 2004).

Table 2 explains the results of mood and modality analysis in *Red Roses*.

Table 2

Mood and Modality Analysis of *Red Roses*

Total number of processes	Finite						Modal Operators	
	Past		Present		Future			
	N	P (%)	N	P (%)	N	P (%)		
214	23	10%	175	81%	8	3%	18	8%

Table 2 shows that the Finite in the clauses of *Red Roses* is in the past tense (10%) and the present tense is (81%). Using the present tense indicates that the information is valid for things that is happening in the present, which surely confirms the nature of Soland's piece as a play because plays are describing actions that mostly happen in the present. Modal operators are used as a Finite in this play as well. They are mostly the modal verbs "could" and "can", which indicates the ability of doing things:

".....could still make our six o'clock dinner..."

Language Analysis of *Red Roses*

In this study, the researchers are mainly concerned with the lexical density of the text. By lexical density they mean the ration of lexical words in relation to the total number of words. This density reflects the amount of information contained in the text, and thus refer to its difficulty. Lexical words include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and numerals.

The lexical density in *Red Roses* is 65%. These results indicate that the lexical density of *Red Roses* is high. The proportion of lexical words is higher than that of function words. This high use of lexical words is a touch

of Soland's writing. She tends to make her writings a little bit complex because it is directed to adults and more advanced readers.

Conclusion

In this study, the researchers followed a functional thematic approach in analyzing Soland's *Red Roses*. This analysis was carried out in three phases: genre, register, and language. The following conclusions were drawn out of the results:

- 1- As far as genre is concerned, *Red Roses* develops in the following way: Placement → Initiating event → Sequent event → Finale. It matches the schematic structure of Hasan (1984).
- 2- Concerning register, transitivity and modality analysis were carried out. The transitivity analysis showed that the relational processes were the most dominant ones among all other six processes in *Red Roses*. On the other hand, the modality analysis showed that the present tense is the Finite in the clauses of this play.
- 3- Language analysis of the text revealed that the its lexical density is high.

This study gives English instructors the opportunity to understand all sides of the style of Soland as one of the modern play writers in literature. It helps them write lesson plans about how to teach this piece of writing, and other literary texts as well. The study represents also a resource for English learners because it explains to them the texture of combining sentences in a way that reveals the intended meaning in a well-organized way.

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