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DICKENSIAN STYLE IN *CHRISTMAS BOOKS*

Abstract

Charles Dickens, the author of novels, novellas, stories and essays, was highly concerned with the social issues of 19th century Victorian period. His writing style is marked with linguistic and artistic creativity, which provided him a label: Dickensian style. The striking common traits of Dickens's works are repetitions and parallelism in lexical level; deviations and variations in narration; a combination of imagination with reality; fragmentations united within the flow of the action; detailed depiction of setting and characters; the repeated concrete nouns to subordinate abstract meaning; variation in characterization and experimentation with varied themes related to the deficiencies of his time. Many of these common traits of 'Dickensian' style are vividly observed in the five short Christmas stories in *Christmas Books*. Stylistic and linguistic variants of the stories lead to conclude that Dickens preferred certain stylistic markers and linguistic codes for his artistic goal: to attract the readers' attention for social issues of Industrial Age of Victorian period via the use of certain lexis and syntactical patterns. The combination of his world-view and his artistic literary style manifest Dickens's style, which can vividly be observed by his readers in *Christmas Books*. The scope of this analysis contains the application of a linguistic study for a literary purpose and the study involves the analysis of lexical categories determined by G. Leech and M. Short in *Style in Fiction* (1981).

Key words: Dickensian style, Christmas Books, stylistic and linguistic variants, lexical categories, G. Leech and M. Short

Based on the results and linguistic data gained from the stories, it can be claimed that in *Christmas Books*, Charles Dickens intentionally preferred common lexical items to provide a

'light' for his readers. Charles Dickens's Christmas stories in *Christmas Books* are based on the critique of society and people, who have lost their compassion and beliefs in the dark Victorian period. In all the stories, Dickens criticizes hypocrisy, vanity, greed and lack of charity, love, compassion and mercy in society. Reading the five stories in *Christmas Books*, I focused on the lexical similarities, which draws a parallelism between the stories. The similarities indicate Dickens's main theme: although people are suffering from the deficiencies caused in Victorian era, compassion, charity, unity and love may lead people to happiness and light. By repeating certain common nouns, adjectives and phrases in all stories, Charles Dickens aimed at attracting the readers' attention to the drawbacks in the unity of society. He deeply felt the necessity of a reforming change for a suffering Victorian society. For this purpose, in his Christmas stories, Dickens applied certain linguistic codes and stylistic devices in order to present his messages for his readers.

In this study, common traits and lexical categories of the stories in *Christmas Books* are analysed within the framework of 'lexical categories' defined in *Style in Fiction* by G. Leech and M. Short (1981). The result of lexical analysis for each story proved that in all stories, Dickens used the parallel structures to emphasize his time: in the dark Victorian era, charity, love and compassion would bring people to light and warmth of unity, particularly at Christmas time. Under the social, political and individual issues, Dickens believed in the efficiency of Christmas spirit, which could revive the good old past and bring hope, charity and joy for the desperate Victorian people, with the revival of the spirits and good old past.

To begin with, it would be proper to define the study of 'lexical categories'. Lexical category is a syntactic category for elements that are part of the lexicon of a language. The analysis of 'lexical categories', refers to the study of words (nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs) and their lexical functions. Also, lexical study focuses on how certain frequently repeated words contribute to the meaning of a literary work.

By focusing on the first common thematic marker in the stories in *Christmas Books*, it is realized that all the stories take place at Christmas time. Dickens uses the syntactic repetition of words related to changes of weather or atmosphere of the setting in all the stories. Some words such as 'cold', 'warm', 'dark' and 'light' are repeated and explicitly indicate a meaning in the flow of all the stories in the book. These repetitions in the stories indicate that all the stories have the similar topography of Dickensian style. Adjectives such as 'cold' and 'dark' are repeated many times in order to indicate the social sufferings, poor conditions of working class and dark mood of society at the very beginning of the stories. However, after the epiphany moments of protagonists, the negative adjectives or nouns related to weather and atmosphere

are replaced by positive words such as ‘warm’ or ‘light’.

When we observe Scrooge’s house in ‘A Christmas Carol’, we can understand that he lives in a cold, dark and empty house. Before the recognition scene of Scrooge, Dickens uses the adjectives ‘cold’ (27 times) and ‘dark’ (30 times). After the recognition scene, the sun shines although it is Christmas time and there is a warm weather. Dickens replaces the negative definition of the weather and the mood of the protagonist with the positive items: ‘light’, ‘bright’ and ‘warm’. As is seen in the below table, after Scrooge experiences a recognition and transforms into a considerate, loving and compassionate person, the words ‘cold’ and ‘dark’ are reduced by Dickens. Through this shift of lexis, there is a change in society, implied as the significant message of Dickens: if rich can recognize the deficiencies of society, they can show compassion and charity towards the poor, which is the only cure for people. As is shown in the below table, Dickens uses ‘cold’ and ‘dark’ frequently at the beginning while he prefers to reduce them after the epiphany of Scrooge:

	cold	dark
Before recognition	27	30
After recognition	2	0

When Dickens describes Trotty’s place and the weather before the recognition part in the second story of Christmas Books, ‘The Chimes’, he prefers adjectives of ‘cold’ (14 times) and ‘dark’ (31 times); however, it gets ‘warmer’ and ‘lighter’ at the party in the end. As is shown below, Trotty realizes that poor should have hope for future and they can change the society, which is indicated by the reduction of repeated words ‘cold’ and ‘dark’:

	cold	dark
Before recognition	14	31
After recognition	0	0

In the third story, ‘The Cricket on the Hearth’, Dickens uses the adjectives ‘cold’ (11 times) and ‘dark’ (18 times) before Caleb (Carrier) realizes the truth about his loyal and innocent wife. After the recognition scene, Caleb’s house and world become ‘warmer’ and ‘brighter’, indicating that love brings happiness and light in the dark Victorian period, as shown below:

	cold	Dark
Before recognition	11	18
After recognition	1	0

In the next story, 'The Battle of Life', the repeated adjectives before the recognition scene are 'cold' (5 times) and 'dark' (11 times); however, after the resolution scene, the weather becomes 'sunnier' and 'brighter'. The repeated negative words at the beginning of the story imply a pessimistic mood, a common belief in the Victorian era. However, after the recognition scene of Grace and Dr. Jiddler, the weather changes and life is depicted with positive lexical items as 'light', 'bright' and 'warm':

	cold	dark
Before recognition	5	11
After recognition	0	0

Dickens in the last Christmas story, 'The Haunted Man', depicts the house of Mr. Redlaw and the weather in a dark mood. He prefers to use 'cold' (21 times) and 'dark' (33 times) before the recognition scene. As Redlaw realizes his mistake and tries to regain his memories, his house gets 'lighter' and the weather 'warmer'. These sudden changes in the choice of words indicate a shift from sorrow to happiness; blindness to recognition; ignorance to awareness; and loneliness to gatherings. The desperate loneliness of Redlaw, which is described with repeated words 'cold' and 'dark', is replaced as the protagonist realizes the significance of memories in human life and feels the emotional necessity for human warmth:

	cold	dark
Before recognition	21	33
After recognition	0	1

All the protagonists in *Christmas Books* are depicted as weak, desperate, pessimistic and inconsiderate characters that experience a recognition scene throughout the end. Before the recognition, the protagonists, the weather and the surroundings are described with negative words; however, after the epiphanies of main characters, Dickens intentionally reduces the

negative words and replaces them with positive ones in order to present his social message: there is hope for a better future if only people can realize the significance of love, compassion, charity and unity in society.

Another common marker within lexical analysis of Christmas stories is Dickens's use of deviations, which attract the reader in the course of thematic analysis. The physical appearance of Trotty in 'The Chimes' is described as "weak Hercules". Dickens ironically associates the small and weak Trotty with a strong god, Hercules: "A weak, small, spare old man, he was a very Hercules, this Toby, in his good intentions" (p.87). Although this semantic deviation is attractive, the reader can realize Dickens's message vividly: even the weakest person in society has the power to overcome the deficiencies with love and compassion.

Another frequently repeated word in all the stories is 'fire', whose symbolic meaning varies depending upon the context. Fire is both supportive and destructive for mankind. It has eased the lives of mankind while causing disasters. In literature, fire often symbolizes hell, inspiration, spiritual release, enlightenment, wisdom or superiority. When the contexts in Dickens's stories are considered, fire is the symbol of heat in hearts, warmth in lives and power of mind. As the characters gather around fire throughout the end, the reader can realize another significant message of the writer: the unification in the society may lead to warmth and peace. Dickens desired to replace the "cold outer world" of Victorian society after the Industrial Age, which caused many sufferings and wrongs with the "warmth of a domestic life". Dickens frequently uses the word 'fire' to emphasize his desire for the hope for a change, which will lead to a better society.

It is not wrong to conclude that Dickens's each Christmas story in Dickens's *Christmas Books* functions as topography for the other story. Dickens felt the need to keep Romantic belief and 'imagination' alive because for him, imagination and childish joy of Romanticism are the significant traits, leading to happiness and peace in modern industrial society (Glancy, 1999: 25). The common stylistic markers and linguistic codes help the reader to distinguish the traits of Dickensian style, which also constitutes his artistic aim as a writer. Dickens preferred to use certain lexical items as a literary tool for an individual artistic purpose by intentionally repeating certain lexis (cold, dark, light, fire, warm) in five Christmas stories in *Christmas Books*. All in all, it would not be wrong to conclude that moving from the words 'cold', 'dark', to 'light' and 'warm', Dickens presents his message: although life in Victorian period seems dark, cold and desperate, with love, compassion and charity, people may have a brighter and warmer lives. Therefore, Charles Dickens through his unique style sets a 'fire' in literature to 'warm' the hearts and awake the minds of readers of his age.

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