A Critical Stylistic Analysis of Sherko Bekas's Snow

Mahmood Ibrahim

HD1 5PB Mahmood.Ibrahim@hud.ac.uk

PhD Candidate

1.1. Introduction

In this work, I analyse Bekas's *Snow*. In the analysis, I use a number of Jeffries's (2010) critical stylistics tools and Kovecses's (2010) version of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor approach. Conceptual metaphors are metaphors which work on a cognitive level, where one concept is understood in terms of another (Gibbs, 1994:6). Conceptual metaphors allow us to understand abstract ideas in terms of "more familiar" terms (Gibbs, 1994: 6).

 I only used critical stylistic tools to which there are textual evidences. I will use critical stylistic textual conceptual functions (transitivity, equating and contrasting, assuming and implying, naming and describing) to test their roles in the construction of ideational meanings and their roles in the constructions of metaphors. These different functions interact with one another; the construction of ideational meanings and perhaps ideologies, in this poem, seems to depend on a combination of a number of different Critical Stylistic textual conceptual functions. Therefore, I have decided to discuss these tools in combination in each stanza rather than discussing each tool in turn to retain a sense of a 'general view' and to avoid repetition. For example, a particular piece of text might be captured in the analysis of transitivity naming and describing at the same time. Therefore, discussing these

tools in isolation results in that some textual structures being analyzed under more than one tool, and this causes repetition. My research question in the work are (1) how is the situation constructed in this poem? And (2) what are the effects of such constructions?

The aim of this work is to test the applicability of critical stylistics in the analysis of poetry. The work also aims to show what part each textual conceptual function can play in the production of conceptual metaphors.

I argue that all textual conceptual functions, that are used in my data, of critical stylistics construct the speaker, the people and situation in the same way and they also concstruct metaphors. I also argue that critical stylistics can be applied to the anlysis of this poem.

1.2. Critical Stylistics

Critical stylistics (called CS here) has come to refer to a branch of applied linguistics associated with the researcher Lesley Jeffries. CS provides the missing links between stylistics (textual choices) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (namely ideology) (Coffey, 2013: 30). Critical stylistics emerged at the University of Huddersfield and inaugurated with the publication of Critical Stylistics: The Power of English (Jeffries, 2010a).

Critical stylistics attempts to 'assemble the main general functions that a text has in representing realities' (Jeffries, 2010a: 14). It offers a developed theory and a more rigorous methodology for CDA, which CDA has not yet developed. CS 'introduces a set of tools, which, whilst not complete, are nevertheless more comprehensive than

any provided in the literature on CDA' (Jeffries, 2010a: 1). These tools attempt to uncover ideologies implied by the linguistic choices that text producers make.

Critical stylistics provides a more developed and rigourous set of analytical tools which CDA hasn not yet developed (Tabbert, 2013:77). Olaluwoye (2015: 88) states that 'Critical Stylistics is not linked to any political outlook. It argues that all texts are ideologically based whether these ideologies are part of a conscious or unconscious process. It is interested in uncovering and revealing hidden ideologies in texts and discourse'. The tools (according to Jeffries, 2007: 17) which critical styliscs uses to uncover ideologies are the following: (1) Naming and Describing, (2) Representing Actions/Events/States, (3) Equating and Contrasting, (4) Exemplifying and Enumerating, (5) Prioritizing, (6) Implying and Assuming, (7) Negating, (8) Hypothesizing, (9) Presenting the Speech and Thoughts of other Participants, and (10) Representing Time, Space and Society.

1.3. The poem: xem/Concern

This poem has the title **xem**/concern which can be translated into *concern*. The poem is written in Kurdish and the analysis is done on the Kurdish text not the translation. This poem is about the chemical bombardment of a city in Nothern Iraq called Halabja. This bombardment killed 5000 people and happened at eleven pm in 16-03-1988. In Kurdish, March is called Newroz month. In this poem, the poet depicts the bombardment. This poem is from Bekas's (2008: 688) collection **the small mirrors** and the poet explains what the bombardment left for him, and one might conclude that this is an articulation of the poet's ideology.

xem

mangî newruz skî pr bû beagrê

ke agr bû "ba" rayi jendu

ke gewre bû çiya xwastiyu

şewyan lêbû

wxtî şewîş ballayi krdû

bû be şanze

griyan xwastiyu her ew roje

se'at yanze

yanze yanze

xemîkiyan bû

qj rreş çaw reş

gewre..gewre

ewndeyi şarî hellbice!

Concern

The month of Newroz became pregnant with a fire

When fire was born, the ''wind'' rocked it.

When it grew, the mountain engaged to it and

It became night

When night flew and

It became the 16th,

Crying engaged to it

At eleven O'clock

Eleven… eleven

a sadness was born to them

Black hair , black eye

Big.. big

As big as the city of Halabja!

1.4. Analysis

Stanza (1)

The month of Newroz became pregnant with a fire

When fire was born, the ''wind'' rocked it.

When it grew, the mountain engaged to it

mangî newruz skî pr bû beagrê

ke agr bû "ba" rayi jendu

ke gewre bû çiya xwastiyu

The verb **skî pr bû**/ *became pregnant* here evokes the source domains of two metaphors. First, it evokes MONTH OF NEWROZ IS A MOTHER OF BABY and the mappings MONTH OF NEWROZ IS A MOTHER and FIRE IS A BABY.

In this poem, the clause **mangî newruz skî pr bû beagrê**/ *The month of Newroz became pregnant with a fire* uses two metaphors to tell us that the "month of Newroz" generated concern via the causation of deaths. In the first metaphor, **mangî newruz skî pr bû**/*The month of Newroz became pregnant* , there is a personification metaphor involved in the verb (the month of Newroz cannot literally *become pregnant*). However, the predicate *became pregnant* evokes a structure with a role for an animate Actor. Personification metaphor allows *month of Newroz* to fill this slot and this role. Therefore *became pregnant* evokes the domain of MOTHER, whereas *Month of Newroz* evokes March, together evoking the primary metaphor MARCH IS A MOTHER. In this sentence, the Actor **mangî newruz**/*the Month of Newroz* is the target domain; the source domain is MOTHER evoked by the verb phrase *became pregnant*. These two domains evoke the metaphor MONTH OF NEWROZ AS MOTHER. Also,

fire is personified, it is conceptualised as a baby, and it is the target domain; MOTHER is the source domain evoked by the verb phrase *became pregnant*. Because the verb evokes the source domain and the actor evokes the target domain, we can say that the textual conceptual function of representing actions, states and events constucts metaphors. We can see from *the Month of Newroz became pregnant with a fire* that a single item *became pregnant* can fill autonomous slots in two metaphoric constructions, and can therefore evoke the target domain of two different metaphors. The MONTH AS A MOTHER metaphor has certain ideological implications for politics. A month can be construed as weak, since strength is linked with men and weakness with women. This interpretation provided moral justification to bring an appeal from people to save the MOTHER from this BABY. Also, FIRE AS A BABY metaphor has a number of ideological inferences. Most clearly, the metaphor invites the reader to infer that the baby has some characteristics of fire, which is that the fire will keep growing unless abated.

 In this sentence, the source domain verb phrase became pregnant expresses Material Action Intention because becoming pregnant involves having sex on purpose and not preventing the ejaculation of sperm into the vagina or having any drugs that prevent becoming a pregnant. Because the source domain is part of the two personification metaphors, there should be one longer metaphor which is MONTH OF NEWROZ IS THE MOTHER OF FIRE.

The poet then chooses to describe what happened to the *fire* in the following way:

ke agr bû "ba" rayi jendu
When fire was born, the ''wind'' shook it.

Women as fire

Baby as wind

Linguistically, the choices of the system of transitivity are exploited to a great extent. The connector **Ke**/*when* conjoins two clauses expressing material processes. The first process is of the supervention type, and the second of the intention type. **agr**/*fire* is the Actor of the supervention process, and **ba**/*wind* is the Actor of the intention process the affected participant *the wind* is of the intention process. The decision to construct the *fire* as the actor of a material action process, rather than the recepient of a material process as in *the mother gave birth to a fire*, gives *fire* an active role in the process and the mother none.

The predicate **rayi jend**/*rocked* evokes a structure with a role for an animate subject. Because the verb evokes the source domain and the actor evokes the target domain, we can say that the textual conceptual function of representing actions, states and events constucts metaphors. Personification metaphor allows *wind* to fill this slot and this role, in which a mother taking care of her children maps to an inanimate referent *wind* which is presented in a certain way, and this usage thus gives the wind a will of its own and the fire none. Also, the presentation of *the wind* as the active participant rather than *the fire* further subordinates *the fire* role here. The fire is foregrounded by being placed in the object position constructs fire as being acted upon, as the passive recipient of the action.

In the above sentence, *the motherhood's care* connotations of the verb **rayi jend/** *rocked* contribute to the texts construction of the ideology that everything, even the **ba/wind was** against the Kurds because it took care of the fire.

Stanza (2)

The poet chooses to continue with his description of the fire in the following way:

ke gewre bû çiya xwastiyu

şewyan lêbû

When it grew, the mountain engaged to it and

It became night

Again, the choices of the transitivity system are manipulated to a great extent. The first two clauses express material processes are conjoined by the connector *when*. The first process **gewre bû**/*grew* is of the supervention type, and the second ***xwastiy***/*engaged* of the Intention type: we can say that in the first clause, *fire* is the Actor of the Material Action Supervention process, and is the affected participant in in the second clause which expresses Material Action Intention, with **çiya**/*mountain* as the Main Actor. The *mountain* is constructed as active and *fire* as passive because in Kurdish engagement is a process where the male participant is the doer of the action and the female is the recipient of that action Here, *mountain* is personified because the verb *engage* requires a human subject. However, personification metaphor allows *mountain* to fill this role. The subject evokes the target domain of the METAPHOR MEN AS MOUNTAIN whose source domain is evoked by one or the other of the verb phrase *engaged*. Also, the object *fire* evokes the target domain of the metaphor FIRE AS WOMEN metaphor whose source domain is evoked by the verb phrase *engaged*. Here, a woman being engaged to a man maps to an inanimate referent *fire*. This means that the textual conceptual function of representing actions, states and events construct metaphors.

Here, a man engaging to a woman maps to an inanimate referent *mountain* engaging a fire.

Also mountain and fire are constructed as opposites because the verb engage requires a male human actor and a female affected participant. This opposition shows the women in Kurdish are seen as weak, but men cannot continue life without women and men as strong. The third clause **şewyan lêbû**/ *it became night*, the actor *it* has no representational function in the transitivity system; we cannot ask (What/who became night). Also, this *it* is no clear linguistic form in Kurdish. This Process type is relational' Process type and the verb is **bû**/*became*. This clause contains a distinct Circumstantial element **şew**/*night*.

Stanza (3)

wxtî şewîş ballayi krdû

bû be şanze

griyan xwastiyu her ew roje

When the night flew and

It became the 16th,

Crying engaged to it

In the above extract, the poet shows what happened after the engagement of *fire* to the *mountain*. The poet uses Material Action Intention **ballayi krd**/*flew* whose Actor **şew**/*night* is personified because the verb *flew* requires an animate subject. However, personification metaphor allows *night* to fill the subject position. Because the verb evokes the source domain and the actor evokes the target domain, we can say that the textual conceptual function of representing actions, states and events constucts metaphors. Though airlines also fly, but flying indicates a movement

through space and the night is not seen as existing tangible through space. This usage thus gives the *night* a will of its own and the woman none. In saying **bû be şanze**/*It became the 16th*, the poet uses the verb **bû**/*became* to express a circumstantial process, but here *it* does not have a representational function in the transitivity process. It is not the Actor, we cannot ask *who/what became the 16th?* Also, the pronoun *it* is not expressed in Kurdish. This clause contains a distinct Circumstantial element **şanze**/ *16th*. The poet continues with the transitivity process of Material Action Intention *engage* but this time with **griyan**/*crying* as the Actor and fire which is refered to here with the pronoun *it*. Again both the actor and the affected participant are personified because they occupied positions that should be filled by humans. The verb **xwastiy**/*engage* should have a human actor and a human affected participant. Because the verb evokes the source domain and the actor evokes the target domain, we can say that the textual conceptual function of representing actions, states and events constucts metaphors.

Stanza (4)

se'at yanze

yanze yanze

xemîkiyan bû

qj rreş çaw reş

gewre..gewre

ewndeyi şarî hellbice!

At eleven O'clock

Eleven… eleven

a concern was born to them

Black hair, black eye

Big.. big

As big as the city of Halabja!

In the above extract, the poet states what happened at **se'at yanze**/*eleven O'clock*.

Then, he repeated the word **yanze**/*elven* twice to draw the attention of the reader/hearer to it. It is the time when the chemical bombardment occurred.

In the above extract, **xem**/*sadness* is an inanimate Actor of an Meterail Action Supervention process; **iyan** *to them* , which is suffixed to the noun directly **xemîkiyan** is the Goal of the process; the affected participant. The infix between the noun and the suffix **îk** is the indifenite article in Kurdish. Here, *sadness* is personified because only animate entities are born i.e., the verb phrase *was born* should be preceded by animate actor. The verb phrase evokes the source domain BABY and the subject evokes the target domain SADNESS. The poet demonstrates how the parents are assigned a passive role, where **xemîk**/*a sadness* is as a main actor, indicating their subordinate role in the text, where he could have said ***mnalykean hena***/*they gave a birth*.

Then, the poet describes the appearance of the *baby*. He describes the baby's hair and eyes as black where black in Kurdish indicates sadness and a symbol for mourning. Then, the poet repeats the word *black* twice to imply that everything is black. Here the poet exploits the negative connotative meanings of the word black in order to imply that the baby is mournful. The reader is to infer that such being black is mournful. Also, the poet describes the size of the baby ***gewre..gewre big..big***. These negative evaluations of lexis denoting big size here ultimately

recapitulates the notion that *bigger means worse*, because, presumably, *big saddness* would necessitate suffering and horrific experiences. Note that there is a tendency to comapre the sadness's size with that of **şarî hellbice**/the city of Halabja, as an attempt to explain the size of *suffering* of the city of Halabja. The presuppositions – that the sadness and the city of Halabja were big and that the sadness having black hair and black eye– are not in question here. These two presuppositions are not open to question because they had not been expressed in clausal forms e.g. the city of Halabja is big or the baby's eyes are black.

1.5. Conclusions

In this work, although the anlaysis of one poem cannot give any generalised concluions, the followings have been noticed in this work:

1. The textual conceptual functions of representing actions, states and events of critical stylistcs can construct metaphors

2. Critical stylistcs can be applied in the analysis of poetry, although in places there is a need for cultural explanantion because critical stylistics has been developed from, and primarily applied to, English language, and my poem is written in Kurdish language.

References

Bekas, S, (2008). dewane sherk bekas: barge dwam (The Divan of Sherko Bekas: The Second Volume): Kurdistan

Coffey, L. (2013). *"Innocent Until Proven Filthy": A Corpus-Based Critical Stylistic Analysis Of Representations Of Men In Women's Magazines* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Huddersfield).

Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language and Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jeffries, L. (2007). *Textual Construction of the Female Body a Critical Discourse Approach*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Jeffries, L. (2010a) Critical Stylistics. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*, The University Press of Chicago Press: Chicago

Olaluwoye, L. (2015). A Critical Stylistic Analysis of the Identity of Minority groups in the Nigerian print media. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, *16*, 87-97.

Tabbert, U. (2013). *Crime Through a Corpus: The linguistic Construction of Offenders, Victims and Crimes in the German and UK press* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Huddersfield). http://sociology.about.com/od/S_Index/g/Social-Structure.htm