

Bridal Confession in “At the Altar Rail”

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Abstract

Stylistics is a linguistic analysis on literary and non-literary texts. This article is concerned with a systemic stylistic analysis of a poem in terms of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Verbal Art Semiotics. The article uses library research, qualitative data, documentary study, descriptive method and intrinsic-objective approach. The semantic analysis results in both automatized and foregrounded meanings. The automatized meaning produces lexical cohesion and in turn, produces subject matter. Meanwhile, the foregrounded meaning produces the literary meaning and in turn, it creates a theme. Finally, the analysis indicates that the subject matter is about the planning of a marriage, the literary meaning is about the confession of an experienced bride, and the theme is about bridal confession.

Keyword: automatized meaning, foregrounded meaning, literary meaning.

Introduction

In fact a text is a semantic unit and a clause is a grammatical unit. Therefore semantics is an interface between the context of a situation and lexicogrammar. In this sense the semantic systems are related upwards to contextual systems but also they are related downwards to lexicogrammatical systems; moreover these semantic systems are sideways related to cohesive systems (Halliday and Hasan 1985, Martin 1992, Eggins 1994 and Matthiessen 1995). The contextual systems are Field (subject matter), Tenor (role relation) and Mode (rhetoric). The semantic systems are logical, experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings. The cohesive systems are structural conjunction, lexical cohesion, conversational structure, cohesive conjunction, reference, substitution and ellipsis. Specifically, lexical cohesion deals with repetition, synonym, antonym, hyponym, cohyponym, meronym, comeronym and collocation. The lexicogrammatical systems are Complexing, Transitivity, Mood and Theme.

Then logogenesis, ontogenesis and phylogenesis constitute semogenesis.

Actually logogenesis is a process of creating meanings through instancial system (shifting system) in the unfolding text. The shifting system is used not only by the writer/speaker as a resource to create a text but also by the reader / listener as a resource to interpret the text; logogenetic pattern reveals coincidence between shifts in grammatical pattern and shifts in textual structure (Halliday and Matthiessen, 1999). In general literariness is defined as the difference between automatization or background and defamiliarization or foreground (Jefferson, 1995: 37). Background is also called ground, familiarization, automatization and the normal, canonical, habitual, common, automatized and familiarizing pattern; whereas foreground(ing) is also called figure, defamiliarization, deautomatization and the foregrounded, dominant, prominent, motivated, deautomatized and defamiliarizing pattern (Mukarovsky, 1977). The opposition of background and foreground in Verbal Art is analogous to the reversal of ground and figure in Gestalt Psychology (Butt, 1996). In other words the opposition of semantic background (subject matter) and semantic foreground (literary meaning) in Verbal Art is analogous to the reversal of ground (two black faces: *dua*

wajah warna hitam) and figure (white chalice: *gelas anggur warna putih*) in Gestalt Psychology. The reversal of ground and figure is diagramed in the following Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Reversal of Ground and Figure

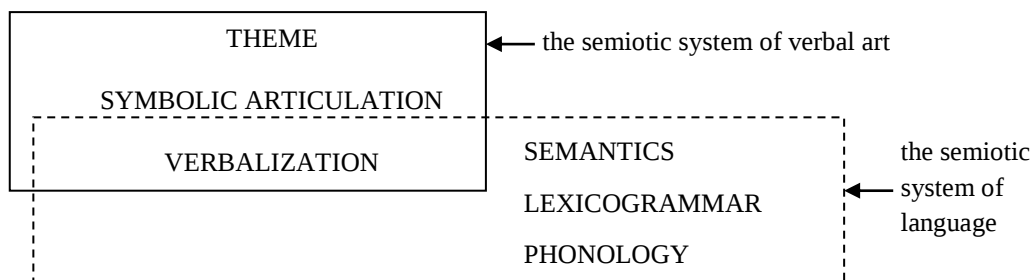


In addition, consistency of foregrounding has two aspects. By stability of semantic direction, consistency of foregrounding means that the various foregrounded

patterns point toward the same general kind of meaning. By stability of textual location, consistency of foregrounding means that the significant patterns of foregrounding have a tendency to occur at a textually important point (Hasan, 1985: 95). In particular the concept of the consistency of foreground(ing) is used by Hasan (1985, 1996) to propose the two semiotic systems of verbal art and of human language. The semiotic system of verbal art is concerned with verbalization (expression), symbolic articulation (content 2) and theme (content 1), whereas the verbalization is the semiotic system of human language concerned with phonology (expression), lexicogrammar (content 2) and semantics (content 1). The two semiotic systems are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Two semiotic systems of verbal art and of language (Hasan, 1985: 99)



First at the stratum of verbalization, the consistency of foregrounding makes the foregrounded patterns produce the first order meaning. The first order meaning is also called the deep level of meaning and consistently foregrounded meaning. Then at the stratum of symbolic articulation, the first order meaning functions as a symbol, sign or metaphor for the second order meaning. The second order meaning is also called the deeper level of meaning and literary meaning. Next at the stratum of Theme, the second order meaning creates the Theme. The Theme is also called the deepest level of meaning and the third order meanings. Thus the first order meaning is the product of linguistic semiotics but both the second order meaning and the deepest level of meaning are the products of artistic semiotics.

This article is concerned with a systemic stylistic analysis of a poem written by Thomas Hardy shown as follows:

At the Altar-Rail

"My bride is not coming, alas!" says the groom,
And the telegram shakes in his hand; "I own
It was hurried; we met at a dancing-room
When I went to the Cattle-Show alone,
And then, next night, where the Fountain
leaps,
And the Street of the Quarter-Circle sweeps.
"Ay, she won me to ask her to be my wife--
"Twas foolish perhaps!--to forsake the ways
Of the flaring town for a farmer's life.
She agreed, and we fixed it. Now she says:
It's sweet of you, dear, to prepare me a nest,
But a swift, short, gay life suits me best.
What I really am you have never gleaned;
I had tasted the apple ere you were weaned."

(Thomas Hardy)

The Semiotic System of Language

1. Logical Meaning, Logical Metafunction or Logical Semantics

Logical meaning is a resource for constructing logical relation (Halliday, 1994: 36) and the logical meaning describes a clause type (clause complex). In other words, logical meaning is concerned with the logical relation of clause complexes in the text, and the logical relation includes taxis (parataxis and hypotaxis), expansion (elaboration, extension and enhancement) and projection (locution and idea). In terms of logical meaning, this poem is composed of three

clause complexes consisting of three main clauses and twenty expanding clauses. Out of twenty expanding clauses, there are seven clauses of paratactic extension, six clauses of hypotactic enhancement, two clauses of paratactic elaboration, two clauses of paratactic projection and three embedded clauses. Thus, extension is the automatized pattern because the poem is frequently realized by extending clauses. Actually, logical meaning is realized by complexing and the complexing analysis is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Complexing Analysis

No.	Notation	Logical Relation	Clause
1.	"1	Projection	"My bride is not coming, alas"
2.	2	Main Clause	Says the groom
3.	+3	Extension	And the telegram shakes in his hand;
4.	+4 α	Elaboration	I own
5.	4 $\times\beta$	Extension	It was hurried;
6.	+5 α	Extension	We met at a dancing room
7.	5 $\times\beta$	Enhancement	When I went to the Cattle-show alone
8.	+6 α	Extension	And then, neat night, [[9.1 9.2]] ah she won me
9.	6 $\times\beta$	Enhancement	To ask her to be my wife
9.1	[[]]	Embedding	Where the fountain leaps
9.2	[[]]	Embedding	And the street of the Quarter Circle sweeps
10.	1 α	Main Clause	It was foolish perhaps
11.	1 $\times\beta$	Enhancement	To forsake the ways of the flaring town for a farmer's life;
12.	+2	Extension	She agreed
13.	+3	Extension	And we fixed it
14.	1	Main Clause	Now she says
15.	"2 α	Projection	It's sweet of you
16.	2 $\times\beta$	Enhancement	To prepare me a nest
17.	+3	Extension	But a swift, short, gay life suits me best:
18.	=4	Elaboration	You have never gleaned [[18.1]]
18.1	[[]]	Embedding	What I really am:
19.	=5 α	Elaboration	I had tasted the apple
20.	5 $\times\beta$	Enhancement	Before you were weaned

2. Experiential Meaning, Experiential Metafunction or Experiential Semantics

Experiential meaning is a resource for construing experience (Halliday, 1994: 36) and the experiential meaning discusses a type of process (processes). In other words, experiential meaning deals with the process

of clauses in the text, and the process includes material process (process of doing), mental process (process of sensing), verbal process (process of saying), behavioral process (process of behaving), existential process (process of existing) relational process (process of being) and causative process (process of causing). In terms of

Experiential Meaning, this poem is expressed by twenty three clauses consisting of eleven clauses of material process, three clauses of mental process, four clauses of verbal process, and five clauses of relational process. In addition, the poem is expressed by nine clauses of past tense, eight clauses of present tense, one clause of present continuous, one clause of present perfect tense and one clause of past perfect. Moreover, the poem is

expressed by twenty clauses of finiteness and three clauses of non-finiteness. Thus, material process, past tense and finite clause are the automatized patterns, because they are frequently used in the poem. Then, experiential meaning is expressed by Transitivity and the analysis of Transitivity as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Transitivity Analysis

No.	Process	Tense	Finiteness	Clause
1.	Material	Present Continuous	-	"My bride is not coming, alas"
2.	Verbal	Present Tense	-	Says the groom
3.	Material	Present Tense	-	And the telegram shakes in his hand;
4.	Relational	Present Tense	-	I own
5.	Relational	Past Tense	-	It was hurried;
6.	Material	Past Tense	-	We met at a dancing room
7.	Material	Past Tense	-	When I went to the Cattle-show alone
8.	Material	Past Tense	-	And then, neat night, [[9.1 9.2]] ah she won me
9.	Verbal	-	Non-finite	To ask her to be my wife
9.1	Material	Present Tense	-	Where the fountain leaps
9.2	Material	Present Tense	-	And the street of the Quarter Circle sweeps
10.	Relational	Past Tense	-	It was foolish perhaps
11.	Material	-	Non-finite	To forsake the ways of the flaring town for a farmer's life;
12.	Verbal	Past Tense	-	She agreed
13.	Material	Past Tense	-	And we fixed it
14.	Verbal	Present Tense	-	Now she says
15.	Relational	Present Tense	-	It's sweet of you
16.	Material	-	Non-finite	To prepare me a nest
17.	Mental	Present Tense	-	But a swift, short, gay life suits me best:
18.	Mental	Perfect Tense	-	You have never gleaned [[18.1]]
18.1	Relational	Present Tense	-	What I really am:
19.	Mental	Past Perfect	-	I had tasted the apple
20.	Mental	Past Tense	-	Before you were weaned

3. Logogenetic Process

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1998: 184-5), logogenesis is a process of constructing meaning through an instantial system (a changing system) when text unfolds (in the unfolding text). The speaker/writer uses the instantial system (the changing system) as a resource to create a text, whereas the listener/reader uses the instantial system (the changing system) as a resource to interpret the text. Moreover, Matthiessen (1995: 40) adds that logogenetic process reveals that lexicogrammatical shift (Cf. Butt, 1988: 83 on “latent patterning”) coincides with episodic shift (Hasan, 1988: 60 on “textual structure”). Textual structure is

also called narrative structure (O’Toole, 1983), schematic structure (Martin, 1985), staging structure (Plum, 1988) and generic structure (Eggins, 1994). In this poem, the shifts are described as follows:

Shift from material process (clause 13) to verbal process (clause 14) coincides with the shift from the Condition of the Bride to the Confession of the Bride.

In this poem, the instantial system of process is used as a resource for constructing meanings. Finally, logogenetic process is provided in table 3.

Table 3: Logogenetic Pattern

Clause Number	Lexicogrammatical Shift Cf. Latent Patterning	Episodic Shift Cf. Generic Structure
1 13	Material process Material process	The Condition of Bride
14 20	Verbal process Mental process	The Confession of Bride

4. Lexical Cohesion

A poem is realized by a series of lexical chains and each chain has a number of lexical items. Actually, this poem is realized by twenty lexical chains consisting of 54 lexical items. The lexical chains include *bride* (six lexical items), *groom* (three lexical items), *we* (two lexical items), material process (ten lexical items), mental process (four lexical items), verbal process (four lexical items),

relational process (five lexical items), repetition (two lexical items), synonym (twelve lexical items), antonym (two lexical items), cohyponym (two lexical items), and collocation (two lexical items). Thus, lexical cohesion is realized by the main lexical chains of *bride*, material process and synonym. Lexical cohesion is realized by lexical chains, and the analysis of lexical chains is drawn in Table 4.

Table 4: Lexical Analysis

No.	Lexical Chain	Lexical Item	Total
1.	Bride	bride, she, she, she, I, I	6
2.	Groom	groom, I, I	3
3.	We	we, we	2
4.	Material Process	is not coming, shakes, met, went, won, to forsake, fixed, leaps, sweeps, to prepare	10
5.	Mental Process	suits, have gleaned, were weaned, had tasted	4
6.	Verbal Process	says, to ask, says, agreed	4
7.	Relational Process	own, was, was, is, am	5
8.	Repetition	life (2x)	2
9.	Synonym	bride = wife, sweet = gay, swift = quick, dancing = flaring, room = nest, show = circle	12
10.	Antonym	foolish >< clear	2
11.	Cohyponym	town – street	2

12.	Collocation	farmer - apple	2
Overall Total			54

5. Subject Matter

Field includes subject matter as one of its special manifestations (Halliday, 1993: 110) and Field is realized through Experiential Meaning (Halliday, 1993: 143). Field is encoded by Experiential Meaning and lexical cohesion (Eggins, 1994: 113). Moreover, subject matter is expressed by lexical chains (Butt, 1988: 177) and specifically subject matter is indicated by the main lexical chains (Butt, 1988: 182). Thus, subject matter is realized by Experiential Meaning and lexical cohesion.

In section 2.2, experiential meaning was frequently realized by material process. In section 2.4, lexical cohesion was frequently realized by material process. This means that subject matter is normally realized by material process. In fact, the frequent use of material processes indicates that the functional elements are Actor (*we*), Process (*fixed*), and Goal (*marriage*). In conclusion, the subject matter is about the planning of a marriage. The analysis of material processes is offered in table 5.

Table 5: The Analysis of Material Process.

No.	Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance
1.	My bride	is not coming		
2.	The telegram	shakes		in his hand
3.	We	met		at dancing room
4.	I	went		to the cattle-show alone
5.	She	won	me	
6.	The fountain	leaps		
7.	The street	sweeps		
8.	We	fixed	it	

The Semiotic System of Verbal Art

1. The Deep Level of Meaning

In section 2.1, extension was automatized, so a combination of extension, elaboration, enhancement and projection is foregrounded. Thus, the foregrounding of logical relation takes place in clauses 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 18.1, 19 and 20. In section 2.2, material process was automatized, so other processes are foregrounded. Therefore, foregrounding of process occurs in clauses 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 18.1, 19 and 20. Moreover, in section 2.2, past tense was automatized, so other tenses are foregrounded. Consequently, the foregrounding of tense occurs in clauses 1, 2, 3, 4, 9.1, 9.2, 14, 15, 17, 18, 18.1 and 19. In section 2.2, finite clause was automatized, so non-finite clause is foregrounded. Accordingly, the foregrounding of non-finiteness exists in clauses 9, 11 and 16.

Finally, the patterns of foregrounding are mapped out in table 6.

Table 6: Patterns of Foregrounding

Note: dotted lines = clause complex boundary

No.	Logical Relation	Process	Tense	Finiteness
1.	-	-	1	-
2.	-	2	2	-
3.	-	-	3	-
4.	-	4	4	-
5.	-	5	-	-
6.	-	-	-	-
7.	-	-	-	-
8.	-	-	-	-
9.	-	9	-	9
9.1	-	-	9.1	-
9.2	-	-	9.2	-
10.	-	10	-	-
11.	-	-	-	11
12.	-	12	-	-
13.	-	-	-	-
14.	14	14	14	-
15.	15	15	15	-

16.	16	-	-	16
17.	17	17	17	-
18.	18	18	18	-
18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	-
19.	19	19	19	-
20.	20	20	-	-

Table 6 shows that the patterning of the various foregrounded pattern points toward clauses 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 18.1, 19 and 20. It means that the consistency of foregrounding converges toward the last clause complex. The consistency of foregrounding refers to the last clause complex due to the foregrounding of logical relation, process, tense and non-finiteness. Therefore, the consistency of foregrounding makes the foregrounded patterns of the last clause complex produce consistency in foregrounded meaning which is also called the first order meaning and the deep level of meaning. In summary, the consistently foregrounded meaning of the last clause complex is the deep level of meaning in this poem: Now she says, it's sweet of you dear to prepare me a nest, but a swift, short, gay life suits me best: you have never gleaned what I really am: I had tasted the apple before you were weaned.

2. Symbolic Articulation: The Deeper Level of Meaning

The deeper level of meaning functions as a symbol, sign or metaphor which is also called the literary meaning and the second order meaning. In section 3.1, the deeper level of meaning refers to the last clause complex because of the foregrounding of logical relation (a combination of extension, elaboration, enhancement and projection), process (mental, verbal and relational), tense (present continuous, present tense, present perfect and past perfect) and finiteness (non-finite clauses). Therefore, the last clause complex reveals that the bride says that the groom is very kind to provide her with a house, but the bride prefers a quick, short, happy marriage because the groom has never heard about her and the bride is much more experienced than the groom. In short, the

deeper level of meaning is about the confession of the experienced bride.

3. Theme: The Deepest Level of Meaning

The deeper level of meaning creates the deepest level of meaning which is also called Theme and the third order meaning. Hasan (1985: 97) states that Theme is the deepest level of meaning in verbal art; it is what a text is about when dissociated from the particularities of that text. In its nature, the Theme of verbal art is very close to generalizations which can be viewed as a hypothesis about some aspect of the social life of man. Moreover, Hasan (1985: 54) adds that the deepest level of meaning is a meaning that arises from saying one thing and meaning another. In this poem, saying one thing (*the confession of the experienced bride*) means another (*bridal confession*). In brief, the deepest level of meaning is about the bridal confession.

Conclusion

The lexicogrammatical analysis produces semantic components and there are two kinds of semantic patterns such as automatized and foregrounded. On the one hand, the automatized pattern produces the automatized meaning, and in turn the automatized meaning produces subject matter. On the other hand, at the stratum of Verbalization, consistency of foregrounding makes some foregrounded patterns produce consistently foregrounded meaning which is also called the deep level of meaning and the first order meaning. At the stratum of symbolic articulation, the deep level of meaning functions as a symbol, sign or metaphor of the deeper level of meaning which is also called the second order meaning and literary meaning. At the stratum of Theme, the deeper level of meaning creates the deepest level of meaning which is also called Theme and the third order meaning. In summary, there is a symbolic relation between lexicogrammar and Theme in verbal art. The meanings in this poem are outlined in the following table.

Table 7: Meanings of Verbal Art Semiotics.

Verbalization	Symbolic Articulation	Theme
Consistently Foregrounded Meaning	Literary Meaning	Theme
The Deep Level of Meaning	The Deeper Level of Meaning	The Deepest Level of Meaning
The First Order Meaning	The Second Order Meaning	The Third Order Meaning

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