

The Analysis of Grammatical Voice in the Short Story "The Setar"¹

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Abstract

In the history of grammar, the study of voice dates at least to the Sanskrit grammar of Panini. Voice analysis is thus one of the most ancient topics in the tradition of descriptive grammar.

There is undoubtedly a systematic relation between the literary style and an author's thought and perception (syntax is a means of forming such a perception) and grammatical voice is showing part of this relation.

The short story "The setar" is the reflection of Jalal Al-e-Ahmand own life, which has a tragic procedure and comes from an active hope to a passive hopeless. And from transitive verbs with active voice (which includes 71% of the whole story) to the intransitive verbs with passive voice (which appears in 23% of the whole sentences). There are also reflexive and middle voices in a few sentences.

Keywords: Style, Stylistics, Grammatical voice, Active voice, Passive voice

¹ - The setar, is an Iranian string musical instrument.

1. Introduction

This paper represents the analysis of grammatical voice on the short story “The setar” (by Jalal Al-e-Ahmad). The purpose is to determine the literary style of the author. Before analyzing the story and its dominant voice, it is necessary to define the “style” and “stylistics” as mentioned below.

“style in literature is the literary element that describes the ways that the author uses words—the author’s word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentence arrangement all work together to establish mood, images, and meaning in the text. Style describes how the author describes events, objects, and ideas”: (Mirsadeghi, 1376).

“Stylistics is the study of the language of literature. Which makes use of various tools of linguistic analysis. Stylistics is a field of empirical inquiry in which the insights and techniques of linguistic theory are used to analyze literary texts”: (wynne, 2005).

It seems necessary to mention that studies on grammatical voice are very few in Persian. Fotoohi (1387) is one who worked on grammatical voice. In his article he recognizes three voices and styles in the works of contemporary Persian poet, Qeysar Amin pour’s (2007). Voices are active, passive and reflexive. This classification has based on language (lexical and syntax), imagination and idea. Three different periods of the poet’s life have been presented in three colors.

This article concludes that Aminpour is a true poet because he represents his real feelings of the world and the society and his poems show obviously the sprite of time and his true relations with the ideological changes in Iran.

In this paper the grammatical voice of “The setar”, literary, grammatical and conceptual criticism of it will be studied.

2. Research Framework

Significantly related ideas about grammatical voice and its different types should first be mentioned. Fotoohi (1387) proposes that the voice of a verb describes the relationship between the action that the verb expresses and the participants identified by its arguments.

When the subject is the agent or doer of the action, the verb is in the active voice, when the subject is the patient or target of the action, it is in the passive voice. Tufte (1971) believes that if we accept the systematic relation between style and thought, and syntax as the agent of creating idea, then there is a stable connection between the grammatical structures of the sentences and the style of the author. He also mentions that the grammatical voice shows a part of relation between style and thought.

Klaiman (1991) argues that categories of the verb in natural languages include tense, aspect, modality and voice. Voice expresses relations between a predicate and a set of nominal positions in a clause or other structure. Grammatical voice introduces a threefold classification of voice types, in the first place distinguishing passivization phenomena

(derived voice) from active-middle systems (basic voice): and further, distinguishing each of these from pragmatically grounded voice behaviors, such as focus and inverse systems.

Classification of grammatical voice in various languages can be different, but the most dominant voices in nearly all languages are active, middle and passive ones. Active voice is the most commonly used in many languages (especially in Persian) and represents the normal case in which the subject of the verb is agent. In other words, active voice is the standard form for verbs whether transitive or intransitive and the grammatical subject of these verbs performing the act. But in a passive-voice clause, the grammatical subject is the experiment or recipient of the action or process indicated by the verb (Fotoohi, 1387: 13). Some languages have a middle voice.

Kaufman (2007: 1678) claims that the existence of middle marking is conceptually motivated. And that middle encoding languages provide two strategies of constructing the argument structure of semantically two-place, agentive verbs. One type of argument structure is instantiated by active stems and the other by middle stems. The middle reading can be reflexive, anti causative, or even involve causativeness.

In Persian the most frequent grammatical voices are active, passive and reflexive, but sometimes, causative, reciprocal or middle voices can be appeared too. By the way, some languages have even more grammatical voice.

3. Biography of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad

As it is mentioned before, the purpose of this research is to analyze the grammatical voice of the short story "The setar" in order to gain the author's style. So in this part it is imperative to present a short biography of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad to introduce him and his life, thoughts, ideas and literary works to the readers.

3.1 Personal Life

Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, son of a Shiite clergyman, was born in 1923 in Tehran. His early education consisted of the normal Iranian curriculum in the 1930s as well as study of French and English. In 1946 he earned an M.A. in Persian literature and became a teacher, at the same time making a sharp break with his religious family. In 1950, he married Simin Daneshvar, a well-known Persian novelist. In 1969 He died in Asalem, a rural region in the north of Iran. He was buried in Firouzabadi mosque in Ray.

3.2 Literary Life

From 1945 to 1968 Jalal wrote novels (like: "By the pen"), critical essays (like: "seven essays"), travelogues (like: "A Journey to Russia"), short stories (like: "of our suffering"), translations, (like: "The Gambler"), and ethnographic monographs (like: "Owrazan"). In his works he paid attention to the superstitious beliefs of the common people and their exploitation by Shiite clergy.

Al-e-Ahmad used a Colloquial style in prose. In this sense, he is a follower of avant-garde Persian novelists like Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh. Since the subjects of his works are usually

cultural, social and political issues, symbolic representations and sarcastic expressions are regular patterns of his book. A distinct characteristic of his writings is his honest examination of subjects, regardless of possible reactions from political, social or religious powers.

Al-e-Ahmad rigorously supported Nima Yushij (father of modern Persian poetry) and had an important role in acceptance of Nima's revolutionary style.

3.3 Political Life

Al-e-Ahmad joined the Tudeh Party along with his mentor Khalil Maleki shortly after World War II. They "were too independent for the party" and resigned in protest over the lack of democracy and the "nakedly pro-Soviet" support for Soviet demands for oil concession and occupation of Iranian Azerbaijan. They formed an alternative party the Socialist of the Iranian Masses in January 1948 but disbanded it a few days later when Radio Moscow attacked it, unwilling to publicly oppose "what they considered the world's most progressive nations. "Nonetheless, the dissent of Al-e-Ahmad and Maleki marked "the end of the near hegemony of the party over intellectual life."

He later helped found the pro-Mossadegh Toilers Party, one of the component parties of the National Front, and then in 1952 a new party called the Third Force. Following the 1953 Iranian coup d'état Al-e-Ahmad was imprisoned for several years and "so completely lost faith in party politics" that he signed a letter of repentance published in an Iranian newspaper declaring that he had "resigned from the Third Force, and ... completely abandoned politics."

4. Summary of the short story "The setar"

The setar is a story of a poor and weak player who loved to sing and play setar to share his hidden emotions and inner feelings with others, but because of financial problems he could never play the way he wanted. He had played only for others, for the people who looked for their "gone-with-the-wind and lost joys in his tar and his sad songs. In none of the feasts and festivities he had managed to cry to the sound of his instrument. He had left the school for singing and after a while he gave some order to his work and became famous, but it was still a very painstaking job for him who was only interested to have his own instrument, and be able to play the way he wished. After a long time with the money he received as a gift from a wedding party of rich people, he managed to save some money to buy a new setar for him. The day he owned the instrument, felt the passion and the fervor warmed him up, and the only thing he had in mind was to get to some quiet place and to carefully test his setar. With such thoughts in his mind, he reached the Shah's Mosque and he was about to pass through its gate when a boy selling perfume next to the mosque's gate suddenly jumped up and grabbed his wrist. "He the setar player as an unbeliever entering a holy place with such a sacrilegious instrument", the lad said. The fight had started. Many people intervened. The perfume-selling lad was swearing and cursing the heathens. He was infuriated because of the sin committed against the house of God and beseeched all the Moslems to help him.

Nobody knew how it really happened. He did not know it either. It was only when his setar with its wooden bowl fell on the ground and was broken into three parts with a short resonating sound.

Like the strings of his setar, his thoughts were all tangled and knotted, and the cold that had returned to his heart gradually invaded his mind. Feeling cold and frozen he had fallen in a corner. The cup of his hope was broken like the bowl of his setar as though its broken fragments were tearing his heart.

5. Discussion

In order to determine the grammatical voice of "The setar", conceptual, literary and grammatical Criticism of this story will be analyzed in this part.

5.1 Conceptual Criticism

First of all the conceptual criticism of the concerned story will be studied.

This story and 8 other short stories are all published as a collection of short stories in a book named "The Setar" in 1327, the year Jalal Al-e-Ahmad left the Tudeh party and didn't join any other political party as well. Being in the Tudeh party and his Manifest studies helped him to percept the problems of his society and have a different and deeper perception of his society culture drowned in an unconscious and inherited religion. His family was part of this society and he deeply experienced of growing up in a religious, strict and traditional environment which conflicted strongly with modern thoughts.

All stories shaped and stimulated upon good and evil characters in them.

Good and evil agents in Al-e-Ahmad story are in one side (the good side) the weak, pale and poor setar player who left the school for money and never managed to play what he wished and in the way he wished.

And in the other side (the evil side) is the perfume-selling lad with his rosary in hand, who thought he should carry out his religious duty perfectly and defend the magnificence of his religion, formalities, and the holy place of God (the mosque). Al-e-Ahmad indicates the lad as a symbol of a backward nation of his age. But the author of this research believes that the lad's reaction is the effect of the cultural and political causes of his age, and he is not himself the causative agent. In the other side, what motivates the setar player and fills all his soul is reaching the pinnacle of holiness and humanity and is disposing toward reliving and humanoid living. He is sick to death of his plant life and in order to go beyond his repetitious Career, he is seeking a life-giving motivation, and maybe he finds this motivation in playing the setar. Playing his own instrument to "derive his share out of the tar' and create such an ecstatic atmosphere that even himself would not be able to bear it and involuntarily cry". In fact for him the setar is a means of indicating his love and inner feeling with boundless music language.²

But the perfume-selling lad is an ordinary person who is brought up in the current situation of the conveyed society, in which the government has control over the people's thoughts and social values so the lad is trying unintelligently to defend his holy values, the situation defined for him, without knowing in what perdition and by whom he is involved. However,

².Tar: is another string instrument, although it is different from the setar, the author uses them interchangeably. (Literary, tar means "dark").

Al-e-Ahmad is not referring what is the source of these confusions which descended on the society cogitation. In the other words, he is not denoting the causes but instead the effects.

As he shows in the story, at that time, literacy doesn't exist and religion is an instruction governed the society. Jalal himself was in a manner involved to the religious situation of his family. His father prevented him of continuing his study in a way that he was studying furtively in Dar-al-Fonun institution.

Undoubtedly each author indicates consciously or unconsciously a part of his life, experiences, thoughts, imaginations, dreams or findings in his writing. So we can nearly presume that the perfume-selling lad next to the Shah mosque in the story is the symbol of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad religious father, who is strongly trying to defend his religion and traditions. And the setar player, a pale, poor and talented young man, who is eager of art, is Jalal himself who is separated from his past generation, and with novel ideas start a different living style in the history of his society and presents himself as an intellectual person.

Jalal is really a unique intellectual thinker in the literary and artistic history of Iran. He was a commencer of a novel, attacking, active, critique, emotive and effective style in writing.

He was a serious protector of new contents and modern literature, like Nima Yushij poems. He was also a translator who indicated new political views to the backward society of Iran through his translations, to be a preliminary step to an extensive revolution in people thoughts.

In "the setar", Jalal is not explicitly declaring that "religion is opium of the governments", but instead humiliates the lad (who is with his rosary in hand the representative of religious people of Iran) in a way that all readers disgust him.

He is not explicitly stating that illiteracy spreads widely but instead contemns it in an indirect and sad way through the story that all readers see the ugliness of illiteracy in a beautiful way.

He is not explicitly mentioning that poverty surrounds the society but instead describes the weak, pale and poor setar player in a way to shame rich people and to persuade the readers, to think deeply

Where these unfairness come from.

It should be mentioned that Jalal Al-e-Ahmad is not against the religion, he is against the backwardness and religious prejudice. And His respect to "ka'be" (Moslems holy place in Mecca) and his scientific view to Islam are apparently showed in one of his travelogues "A straw in Mecca".

5.2 Literary Criticism

It is said that Al-e-Ahmad's style of writing is telegraphic flabelliform, nervous, quarrelsome, sensitive, accurate, pointed, precise, sincere, stimulating, provocative, brief, short and eloquent. He is extrovert and is not trying to analyze the minds and the interiors of the characters of his stories.

The Persian old prose and the French pioneer authors' prose have had a strong influence on Al-e-Ahmad's forming literary style.

Jalal is trying to omit verbs, prepositions, nouns in the genitive, sequel of the proverbs, and in brief all parts of his writings which seem redundant. Omission of most parts of a sentence in writing makes his prose to have a quick and hurried setting.

He had an unusual audacity to break some of the literary traditions and some Persian grammatical rules.

5.3 Grammatical Criticism

As mentioned before, the main aim of this research is analyzing the grammatical voice of the short story "The setar" in order to find a meaningful relation between grammatical voice and the style of the author. Fotoohi (1387) believes that grammatical voice comes from the inner layers of the lexical relations in a sentence. The author's position and his outlook and perception towards a subject treated or discussed is recognizable through the grammatical voice of his writing, because it is the reflexive of one's intellectual state in encountering different situations. Different syntactic forms like, revolutionary syntax, ideological syntax, conservative and passive syntax, neutral syntax and fanciful syntax are all showing a special situation which the author encounters with.

In order to find out the style of an author (throughout one of his stories) the frequency of grammatical voice of that story should be determined to find the most frequent one.

Knowing the dominant grammatical voice, will show the position of the author towards the subject, because the author would impose his own ideology on grammatical relations of the words and would choose a special type of grammar to write his story.

Grammatical analysis of the considered story (the study of various grammatical voices and the verbs used in the sentences) shows that there are 112 sentences with active, transitive verbs and 75 sentences with active, intransitive verbs (with agents) in them.

It means that 71% of the grammatical voice of the whole story is active type. Such as:

a) s âle âxar digar kasi zemzeme-y-e ou r â az tah-e klâs nemišenid.

Year the last any longer nobody murmuring he from behind the class not hear.

"The last year nobody hears his murmuring from behind of the class any longer."

b) Az xošhâli midavid.

From happiness he runs.

"He runs happily."

As it is seen, in the first sentence, the verb "hears" is a transitive, active verb with the agent (:nobody) and in the second sentence, the verb "runs" is an intransitive, active verb with the agent (:He).

So both sentences have active voice.

Entirely, in all sentences with active voice, activeness, Motion and hope felt strongly, and the subjects are the agents and the doers of the verbs' actions.

This analysis also shows that there are 61 sentences with passive voice. In other words, 23% of the story has this voice. Such as:

a) *vahšat kardeh bud.*

Fear he did was

"He was feared."

b) *raft o âmad ziy âl nabud.*

Going & Coming a lot was not.

"Coming and going was not a lot."

The reflexive voice, voice of indifference and disillusionment, in Al-e-Ahmad's story includes 14 sentences, or 5% of the whole. Such as:

a) *bar âg-e xodaš zemzemeh Mikard.*

For himself murmuring he was.

"He was murmuring for himself."

b) *hâlâ Mitavânest çenân Tar bezana ke xodaš ra be gerye biandâzad.*

Now could in a way tar play that himself to tears come to.

"Now he could play the Tar in a way that makes himself to come to tears."

And the last and least frequent grammatical voice is middle voice which is appeared in 3 sentences of the story and includes 1% of the whole.

Such as:

Set âr b âyek sed ây-e kut âh va tannin-dâr šekast.

The setar with a sound short and tinkling broke.

"The setar broke with a short and tinkling sound."

6. Conclusion

Jalal Al-e-Ahmad is an author who honestly declares his thoughts, experiences and perceptions in encounter with the world and the social situations of the real life. So the readers of his writings can clearly feel and experience the realities of his age through his fantastic descriptions.

The short story "The setar" is a true and obvious report of Jalal's own life and the relation he had with the society of his age and the ideological changes and revolutions he experienced. His story has a tragic procedure, from hope comes to hopeless and resigning to the fate.

This tragic procedure is shown through the dominant grammatical voices used in the sentences. As it is mentioned, there are four types of grammatical voices as: active voice (includes 71%), passive voice (includes 23%), and reflexive and middle voices include 5% and 1% of the whole.

In short, the story "The setar" is a tragic story, and maybe it is the character of all tragedies to start with hopes (active voice) and end to a dark hopeless (passive voice).

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