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The rhythm in the corridors of Virginia Woolf's mind

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf was one of the most distinctive writers of the English Literature using the stream of consciousness technique masterfully. The stream of consciousness technique is one of the most challenging narrative techniques in writing. In both reading and teaching, this technique requires a lot of study. This study focuses on the teaching of the stream of consciousness technique taking Virginia Woolf's technical artistry in her use of sentence structure and vocabulary. Putting special emphasis on Virginia Woolf's technical artistry while dealing with this challenging technique, we hope that it will be easier to understand Woolf's style better. The thematic analysis of her works is not enough. In this study, we dealt with Virginia Woolf's three novels; *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*. These are Virginia Woolf's well-known novels, which are considered to show her mastery in the use of stream of consciousness technique in an effective way. First, it is possible to say that in each of the books mentioned above; a different way of the stream of consciousness technique is used, which makes it peculiar to Virginia Woolf. Despite the fact that she deals with each work differently, there are some specific points common in all three of these books. Although the works are in the form of a prose, they are closer to poetry, especially *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. Her vocabulary choice and the sentence structure causes the reader to feel that he is reading a poem in the form of prose. This is related to Woolf's passion to find a new narration style. She combines poetry and prose so successfully that her works are both tempting and hard to read. This study is an examination of some of the techniques Virginia Woolf used in order to create poetry in the form of prose. The structures of balance and sound as well as the use of parenthesis are analyzed in this study. This work increases our understanding of Woolf's stream of consciousness technique while we are walking along the corridors of her mind.

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1. Introduction

The Rhythm in the Corridors of Virginia Woolf's Mind

Virginia Woolf was one of the most striking figures in the English Literature with her mastery in using the stream of consciousness technique in her works. What makes her so special in this challenging technique is that she could

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reflect her technical artistry in her narrative successfully. The stream of consciousness technique is a difficult technique due to the fact that it does not obey the rules of traditional narratives such as plot, chronology, and characterization. The reader turns out to be writer while he is reading a work written in stream of consciousness technique, therefore it can be claimed that the reader seems to work as a detective so as to gather the parts scattered everywhere in the minds of the character in such time consisting past, present, future at once. For that reason, the narrative gets harder to follow.

With Virginia Woolf's distinctive use of the stream of consciousness technique, the reader can accomplish his task following the characters' flows of thought in time more easily. Not only thematic analysis but also the linguistic analysis is beneficial to make it easy to understand and to teach. In this study, we would like to focus on Woolf's technical artistry, which makes her works poetic and rhythmic. These are significant features of Virginia Woolf's works that cause them to be strong visually and auditory as well. Underlying such features makes the stream of consciousness technique comprehensible, which is significant in teaching of this technique. Making the students focus on the linguistic analysis of the technique as well as the thematic analysis of the stream of consciousness technique enables the students use their creativity. Seeing that the vocabulary, the sentence structure used by Virginia Woolf is not a coincidence, the students will follow each line carefully.

In this study, we are going to deal with Woolf's technical artistry found in her use of sentence structure and vocabulary in her three novels; *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*. We would like to draw your attention to the rhythm and poetry in the form of prose. As well as the structures of balance and sound in these works, the use of parenthesis plays an important role making Woolf's narrative more striking. While walking along the corridors of the characters' minds in the books, we follow the corridors of Woolf's mind at the same time. However, this is not an easy task to achieve. The stream of consciousness technique is one of the most challenging narration techniques in literature as it is different from the traditional narration technique with neat order. With this article, we would like to say that without analyzing the linguistic features of the narrative, teaching this technique will be rather difficult and incomplete.

Woolf supports her artistry using some special structures creating poetic effect as a result of the rhythm and balance in her writing. First of all, the structures of balance in her writing help her create a dramatic effect on the reader. For instance, the omissions of conjunctions on purpose are in order to accelerate movement. While the reader is following those kinds of sentences, he feels that the pace of the story is becoming faster. Here are some of the examples showing asyndeton (deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses).

Indoors among ordinary things, the cupboard, the table, the window-sill with its geraniums, suddenly the outline of the landlady, bending to remove the cloth, becomes soft with light, an adorable emblem which only the recollection of cold human contacts forbids us to embrace. She takes the marmalade; she shuts it in the cupboard.

... it was her manner that annoyed him; timid; hard; arrogant; prudish. The death of the soul. (Woolf, 1925)

For the great plateful of blue water was before her; the hoary Lighthouse, distant, austere, in the midst...

He heard her quick step above; heard her voice cheerful, then low; looked at the mats, tea-caddies, glass shades, waited quite impatiently; looked forward eagerly...(Woolf, 1927)

The waves rise; their crests curl; look at the lights...

We are off; he has forgotten us already; we pass out of his view; we go on; filled with lingering sensations, half bitter, half sweet... (Woolf, 1931)

The use of asyndeton structure in various ways gives a kind of movement to the narrative. The words, the sentences are also in a flow like the minds of the characters in the book. Especially when asyndeton is used in short sentences, it accelerates the pace of the narrative. In addition, when it is used with isolated words, it puts a special emphasis on these words creating a strong effect. For instance, the words in one of the example sentences above, "timid", "hard", "arrogant", "prudish" are stressed in asyndeton structure. In longer sentences, the omission of conjunctions serve to balance the narrative. There are other examples of this, but we cannot present all of them here in order not to lengthen the subject too much.

Virginia Woolf used asyndeton with other special structures in her writing. The use of words having the same or similar ending sounds in a sentence or phrase is also common; this is called homeoteleuton, which is another structure of balance in Woolf's writing. Especially, the repetition of present participles is common in Woolf's

writing. In her diary, Virginia Woolf writes; “It is a disgrace that I write nothing, or if I write, write sloppily, using nothing but present participles.” (Woolf, 1924). Homeoteleuton creates a special kind of sound effect in Woolf’s narrative. This is one of the elements creating a poetic effect as well. Some of the examples here also include asyndeton, which creates a more rhythmic effect while the reader is following the lines. When these two structures are at work together, the musicality in Woolf’s writing becomes inevitable.

... there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponnies, tapping of cricket bats...
 ... mending her dress; playing about; going to parties; running to the House ...
 ... For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it....(Woolf,1925).
 Flashing her needles, glancing round about her, out of the window, into the room, at James himself, she assured him, beyond a shadow of a doubt, by her laugh, her poise...(Woolf, 1927)

As well as omitting conjunctions in her narrative, Woolf uses many conjunctions deliberately, which is called polysyndeton. While asyndeton creates an accelerating effect, polysyndeton slows down the rhythm of the sentence. It is also possible to see the abundant use of conjunctions within the sentence with homeoteleuton. Here are some examples of Woolf’s use of polysyndeton:

On and on she went, across Piccadilly, and up Regent Street, ahead of him, her cloak, her gloves, her shoulders combining with the fringes and the laces and the feather boas in the window to make the spirit of finery and whimsy which dwindled out of the shops onto the pavement, as the light of a lamp goes wavering at night over hedges in the darkness.
 ...That she had herself well was true; and had nice hands and feet; and dressed well...
 ... The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames.
 The aeroplane turned and raced and swooped exactly where it liked, swiftly, freely, like a skater- (Woolf,1925)
 So with the house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round...
 Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom, and among the shrouded jugs and sheeted chairs even the prying of the wind, and the soft nose of the clammy sea airs, rubbing, snuffling, iterating, and reiterating their questions – “Will you fade? Will you perish?” – scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain. (Woolf, 1927)
 They say Yes , they say No; whereas I shift and change and am seen through in a second.
 ... here among these grey arches, and moaning pigeons, and cheerful games and tradition and emulation... (Woolf, 1931)

Another structure of balance used by Virginia Woolf is anaphora. It is the figure of repetition that occurs when the first word/set of words in one sentence/phrase is repeated at or very near the beginning of the successive sentence/phrase”. Anaphora serves to tie multiple sentences or sometimes paragraphs, which causes the continuity in the flow of images and thoughts in the narrative. This also supports the technique stream of consciousness as it is based on the flow of thought in the mind without permitting any interruption. Some of the examples of anaphora are as follows:

Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that...
 She would have been, in the first place, dark like Lady Bexborough, with a skin of crumpled leather and beautiful eyes. She would have been, like Lady Bexborough, slow and....
 Bond Street fascinated her. Bond Street early in the morning.... (Woolf, 1925)
 He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word...
 He said, It must rain. He said, It won’t rain... (Woolf, 1927)
 ‘Shall I free the fly? Shall I let the fly be eaten?’
 I have a short space of freedom. I have picked all the fallen petals and made them swim. I have put raindrops in some. (Woolf, 1931)

The parenthesis is another structure frequently used by Virginia Woolf. It shows isolation in the narrative. The use of parenthesis creates flexibility for the writer. Using parentheses, Woolf can intrude on the descriptions or the

flow of ideas. Virginia Woolf uses parentheses especially to give the external things related to the events or the characters, so that she will not lose the unity in the internal reality. Some of the examples of parentheses in the novel are as follows:

A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her a one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster)...

(June had drawn out every leaf on the streets. The mothers of Pimlico gave suck to their young. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty. Arlington Street and Piccadilly seemed to chafe the very air in the Park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To dance, to ride, she had adored all that.)

... the religious ecstasy made people callous (so did causes); dulled their feelings... (Woolf, 1925)

He could never “return hospitality” (those were his parched stiff words) at college.

...in she came, stood for a moment silent (as if she had been pretending up there, and for a moment let herself be now), stood quite motionless...

If her husband required sacrifices (and indeed he did) she cheerfully offered...(Woolf, 1927)

Now I am getting his beat into my brain (the rhythm is the main thing in writing) (Woolf, 1931)

The last example of parenthesis is different from the other examples, because it reflects Woolf’s own thought about writing. We learn this fact from Virginia Woolf’s own writing in her diary in 1930: “This rhythm (I say I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm not to a plot) is in harmony with the painters.” The use of parenthesis serves to protect the fluidity of the narrative in Woolf’s writing.

Woolf’s three novels analysed in this study are good examples reflecting her poetic style and lyrical composition. That kind of structure is the most suitable style for the stream of consciousness technique she uses. Virginia Woolf believes that a novelist should not be the slave of the words. Writing means more than using the words if the task of the novelist is to express the life itself even in the novel. For Virginia Woolf, the task of a writer is to express life as in the real world. For that purpose, Woolf chose to play on the words. In order to catch the “innumerable atoms”, the language used must be as flexible as possible. “The shower of innumerable atoms” requires freedom and indefiniteness. Virginia Woolf reflected this in her works by using the language in a poetic way. Her works can be considered poems in the form of prose. The poetic use of the language brings flexibility, rhythm, and transparency to her writing. That poetic style in her works is achieved by the use of some rhetorical devices. The structures of sound and balance as well as the use of parenthesis support the stream of consciousness technique. This is also significant in teaching of this narrative style. Not only thematic approach but also a linguistic approach to the technique makes the teaching and learning process easier and beneficial. A range of various classroom activities can be prepared in order to teach especially the advanced learners of literature department Virginia Woolf’s use of the stream of consciousness technique in these three novels suggested here. Nevertheless, teaching of this technique can be another article subject because of its details.

While studying the novels we have given here by Virginia Woolf, students can be presented some parts from the novels which have not been written in the stream of consciousness technique so that the students can have a chance to compare and contrast narratives different from each other. If the students consider the sentence structure, the structures of sound, rhythm, they can see how distinctive the stream of consciousness technique is. We can say that unless we study Woolf’s use of stream of consciousness analysing some of the linguistic features, we cannot deal with it appropriately.

To conclude, we have focused on Virginia Woolf’s treatment of the stream of consciousness technique in her three well-known novels. The most significant thing that we would like to emphasise is that the sentence structure and the other structures of sound, rhythm and balance are a means to understanding this narration technique. The thematic analysis of the novels in the stream of consciousness technique is not enough to understand the meaning in writing. *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* are good works to be used in teaching the stream of consciousness technique due to the fact that they address to the senses as a result of vocabulary choice and sentence structure with poetic elements. We recommend the use of linguistic study accompanied by drama and creative writing in teaching the stream of consciousness technique so as to make it more comprehensible and enjoyable.

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