

A Semantic Analysis of *An Ode to Death*: A Poem By Daud Kamal

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Abstract:

Poetry is the clear expression of mixed feelings. The purpose of this research was to explore the images, signs, symbols, feelings and the hidden meanings used by Daud Kamal in his poetry. This research has analyzed the poem, 'An Ode to Death' by Daud Kamal. This research used semiotics as a theoretical framework. The types of meaning given by Leech (1967) were used for analysis.

Key words: An Ode to Death, Daud Kamal, semiotics

1. INTRODUCTION

The word semantics has been derived from a Greek verb which means to signify. Babatunde (1995) explains that word “semantics” etymologically came from a Greek verb which means to signify. Semantics is the study of meaning that channel the expressions, codes and experiences via language. The word Semantic was originated by Micheal Breal in 19th century. Semantics is the study of overall logical and conceptual meaning communicated by language. The study of semantics starts with the Chomskian(1995) Transformational generative grammar. The study of deep structure and surface structure of word leads a way to the future study of meanings. Leech (1974) asserts that;

Semantics is foremost to the study of language, and as language becomes more and more a pivotal in society, the need to comprehend it becomes more necessary. It is the study of human mind, cognitive process and conceptualizations. So it study experience of world via language.

For Babatunde (1995), semantics is the study of overall meanings that channel the expressions, codes and experiences via language. Semantics not only conveys meanings but also nature of language. It investigates how language works, how individual communicates, and how it is perceived by receivers (Goddard, 1998, p.1). Speaker of a language has different sorts of linguistic abilities which reflects through his lexical choices, phonological patterns, sentence constructions, linguistic background and culture. So semantics deals with study of meaning in a language by focusing the linguistic choices of a speaker. This statement acknowledges semantics a study of non-linguistic context as culture and background.

This research used semantics to analyze a poem *An Ode to Death* by Daud Kamal by considering the overall meanings and themes implied by the poet. To appreciate a literary work like a poem, it is significant to analyse it linguistically. This research revealed the formal underpinning of the poem which lead to the embedded connotative and thematic meanings. Daud Kamal (1935–1987) considered a gem of Pakistani literature. His poetry presented a blend of cultural, historical and religious imagery. “Poetry for him was of Yeats and Pounds” Claimed by his daughter Fatime. He translated notable Urdu classical poets in his poetry as Ghalib and Faiz. Kamal has won three gold medals and two recognition certificates from 1987 to 1990. Kamal's poetry was marked with imagery, culture, paintings and recurrent themes. Coppla submits that, Kamal's poetry is like a “primordial scripture of a people betrayed not only by kings and priests but by weather, geography, history, foreigners, and most treacherously by each other”. During his life Kamal was not a celebrated poet. He was not in the list of

renowned poets. He remains unrecognized throughout his life time. As he himself claims in *An Ode to Death*:

But let bygones be bygones
Who was the deceiver and who the deceived?
Was I on the floating Island
And were you on the shore?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used in this research was semantics. Leech (1967) has proposed seven sorts of meanings named as Denotative, Connotative, Collocative, Affective, Stylistic, Thematic and Reflective. What is meant by a word, text and concept is known as meaning. Meanings are arbitrary, conventional and explicit. Meaning is derived by the linguistic choices of speaker / writer. Following table will elaborate the classification and types of meaning proposed by Leech:

1. Denotative Meaning	Conceptual, cognitive or logical meaning Ordinary Dictionary everyday meaning Universal Meaning
2. Connotative Meaning	Certain emotional associations attached with a word due to its origin, culture, history, society and context etc. Communicative value Idiosyncratic association
3. Collocative Meaning	Association with words tending to occur in the environment of another word Certain associations
4. Affective Meaning	Reflects personal feelings and attitudes of the writer. Attitudinal meaning
5. Stylistic Meaning	Meaning conveyed by the social circumstances of its use Social relations

	Choices of words: Stiff/relaxed, Formal/informal
6. Thematic Meaning	Subject Matter Linearization Order and emphasis
7. Reflexive Meaning	Meanings due to other meanings Dominancy Unintended meanings

3. ANALYSIS OF AN ODE TO DEATH

An ode to death is a poem by Daud Kamal about the ultimate reality of life and death. The meanings and signs used by poet in this poem can be analysed semantically, under seven types of meanings gave by Leech.

3.1 Denotative meaning: An ode to death is a poem about the ultimate reality of life and death. It is a journey of one's life from the time period of his birth to death. As the name suggests an ode is a kind of lyrical poetry whose purpose is to express inner feeling and thoughts. The poem is written into lyrical form thus it creates a rhymical and musical pattern. This poem is about the poets deep feelings about the phenomenon of death. The narrator has used simple and formal diction to express his thoughts. First person narration has been used to show the actual thoughts and experiences of writer. The words like 'archipelago' and 'anchorage' creates an imagery in the mind of a reader. The whole poem creates an imgerly in reader's mind.

3.2 Connotative meaning: Conotative meaning is the communicative value of a text. It deals with concept and context. The poem is the pessimist approach of Daud Kamal towards the monster of death which is engulfing every human being. The poem starts with Cornord Aiken lines:

Your ode to death is in the lifting of a single
eyebrow. Lift it and see.

These lines showed the timeperiod of a man's life. He resemble life with lifting an eyebrow. The timeperiod of life is as short as lifting of a single eyebrow. It will take only a second to lift an eye or to die. In the following lines

Death is more than certain, says e.e Cummings,
But the clocks go on ticking as before

Daud quoted e.e cummings to show the materialistic nature of human beings. He asserted that death is an obvious thing but our life is going on a same track like ticking of clock. Death is certain but the time of death is not. In the next line he said:

And in every particle of carbon dust
There lives a diamond dream
How many galaxies yet to be explored-
How many seeds in the pomegranate of time?

Here he focused again on the concept of time. Man born with a dream-a diamond dream. He chased that dream without knowing the time left of him. Here the 'clock' also described that there is a certain time. Man does everything in accordance to that timeable which is set by his creator. Diamond is made of carbon particle but it is not in the fate of every carbon molecule to be a diamond. Man lives with a dream but it is not in the fate of every man to get what he desires, due to the time. The line How many seeds in the pomegranate of time? Shows (showed) the time left for life. There are so many things to be done, so many galaxies to be explore. But there is no time for that. In the next lines:

The pine tree blasted by last year's Thunderbolt
And the burn out match stick in my ashtray
Look so terribly alike
I have sat by your bedside and felt
Your sinking pulse.

The poets presented an imagery of a pine tree (a very strong tree) which was rooted out last year with a thunder storm, and of a burnt match-stick in ashtray. According to poet these two things are as same as human body. By these lines and imagery poet presented a process of decline a decay. The largest thing like a pine tree and the smallest like match both have to decay. It show when the time comes every one will die no matter how rich or poor, small or big he is. Poet also showed the process of after-death. He says

Does it take for the eyes
To dissolve in the grave?

The lines, I have seen the “stars plummet to their dark addresses”, Daud has quoted Sylvia Plath. She has seen the falling stars. She has accepted the fact that their fall is their destination. The poet has seen many persons facing the same decline.

3.3 Collocative meaning: These are the associated words which tends to come in same environment. Collocative meaning is found in the following phrases: diamond dream, naked rocks, floating island. These are used to enhance meaning.

3.4 Affective Meaning: These are used to explain the attitude and feelings of the poet. Poet explained his feeling towards the death of his love one. He felt the sinking pulse.

I have sat by your bedside and felt
Your sinking pulse.

He felt the absence of the bygone. He felt the absence of his beloved around him.

I have felt your absence around my neck.

He is uncertain and lost. He put a question

Was I on a floating island?

In the feeling of hopelessness he shares his own past experiences

I, too have wandered in a forest of symbols
And clutched at the hanots of memory

But atleast he accept the ultimate reality of life, death. The loved ones who died cannot return. There is nothing in the world that can change this certain pattern. So he accept the reality of death by saying

But let bygones be bygones.

3.5 Stylistic Meaning: It is concerned with social circumstances of language use. In the overall poem poet presented a picture of the process of death. Poet said that we are too busy in our materialistic life that we even forget a very certain thing which is death. We are deceiving ourself. As he postulates;

Who was the deceiver and who the deceived
Was I on a floating island
And were you on the shore?

3.6 Thematic Meaning: 'Death' is thematicized in this entire poem. This certainty of death is presented by uncertain time, decay and decline. There is also a criticism on materialism and worldly quest.

3.7 Reflective Meaning: The poem reflects the eternity and religious reference.

Two streams mingle in a forgotten river.
Between the eye and the tear.

Two streams here are soul and body who are dissolved into the forgotten river(earth). The contrast of soul and body with eye and tear shows the existence of one thing with other. No one knows when tear can fall from eyes. No one knows when soul

leaves the body. 'Sleep and silence' presents ignorance and death respectively.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research provided a way to analyse a literary piece of work by use of semantics. It discovered the number of meanings Daud Kamal used in this poetic work, *An Ode to Death*. He used dramatic monologue to show his personal feelings and experiences towards death. He created an imagery in the mind of reader regarding death and process after death.

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