

PHONAESTHETICISM

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses all about aesthetic aspects of phonetics in literary texts. Beautiful meanings and feelings are realized with the use of phonetics in literary texts, both in prose and verse. Use of phonetics is to enhance beauty of a text. This has been illustrated in this paper with the references of Ronald Carter & et al., J. R. Firth, and G. N. Leach.

KEYWORDS: *Phonaesthetics, Phonetics, Aesthetics, Stylistics, Literature*

INTRODUCTION

We are blessed with language and articulators organs that work easily and with flexibility with sonority in language. Imagine, how could people have communicated information and shared feelings without language? We feel delighted when birds chirp and twitter, when a river flows with murmurs, when wind blows with whisper, when trees whistle, and when mountains smile. We feel frightened when thunder crashes, when lightening crashes, when dogs bark, when tigers roar, when waves beat the lands, and when bamboo grove whistles at night. Even parents thunder at children. Children meow. Soldiers cow. This can be possible only in natural, human language. Language is a wonderful tool of communication.

Signs, symbols and other aspects of languages are commonly used during communication. Verbal and non-verbal communication applies semantic aspects of language. Words do not have meaning in isolation. Even dictionary meanings are useless unless we use them in a context. Pragmatic meanings are much more preferable in linguistics. Phonetics adds meanings to pragmatic and semantic aspects of language in a literary text.

David Crystal (1995) examines why people regard some words as inherently more beautiful than others. He says that people ponder about the most beautiful words in English, in terms of sound rather than meaning. He defines the term 'phonaesthetics' as 'the study of the expressive properties of sound'. He quotes some phonaesthetic words from Willard J. Funk (lexicographer): tranquil, murmuring, mist, chimes, dawn, hush, tendril, rosemary, luminous, etc. Another list is from poet John Kitching (poet): velvet, melody, young, gossamer, crystal, autumn, peace, mesmerism, blossom, etc. He also presents a 1980s' newspaper report, about an unnamed novelist who chooses peril, moon, shadow, carnation, heart, silence, forlorn, April, apricot as beautiful words. He says that pleasant-sounding words have positive and desirable meanings.

Alma Denny, an American poet and columnist, writes the following poem with her phonaesthetic opinions,

Some words have such a lovely sound

It's pleasant to roll them round and round

And savour their syllables on the tongue,-

Words like oriole, melody, young.

In the below poem, Denny opines with the same concept of phonaesthetic differences in words. Some words are on our tongue and we like to pronounce them frequently because of their lovely and beautiful sounds. Some words have ungraceful, harsh and abrasive letters but yet they have intrinsic beauty. Justifying Denny's views, Crystal says that the word *peril* can be a beautiful word though it sounds unusual.

Other words, though, of ungraceful letter,

Harsh, abrasive, sound even better!

These are words of intrinsic beauty,-

Service, conscience, kindness, duty. (Crystal, 1995)

Phonology and Literary Texts

Phonetics and Phonology

Phonetics and phonology are the two fields dedicated to the study of human speech sounds and sound structures. The difference between phonetics and phonology is that phonetics deals with the physical production of these sounds while phonology is the study of sound patterns and their meanings both within and across languages.

Phonetics is strictly about audible sounds and the things that happen in your mouth, throat, nasal and sinus cavities, and lungs to make those sounds. It has nothing to do with meaning. It's only a description. For example, in order to produce the word "bed", you start out with your lips together. Then, air from your lungs is forced over your vocal chords, which begin to vibrate and make noise. The air then escapes through your lips as they part suddenly, which results in /b/ sound. Next, keeping your lips open, the middle of your tongue comes up so that the sides meet your back teeth while the tip of your tongue stays down. All the while, air from your lungs is rushing out, and your vocal chords are vibrating. There's your /e/ sound. Finally, the tip of your tongue comes up to the hard palate just behind your teeth. This stops the flow of air and results in /d/ sound as long as those vocal chords are still going. As literate, adult speakers of the English language, we don't need a physical description of everything required to make those three sounds. We simply understand what to do in order to make them. Similarly, phoneticists simply understand that when they see /kæt/, it's a description of how most British and Americans pronounce the word "cat." It's not about meaning. It's strictly physical. (O'Connor, 1992)

Phonology, on the other hand, is both physical and meaningful. It explores the differences between sounds that change the meaning of an utterance. For example, the word "bet" is very similar to the word "bed" in terms of the physical manifestation of sounds. The only difference is that, at the end of "bet," the vocal chords stop vibrating so that sound is a result only of the placement of the tongue behind the teeth and the flow of air. However, the meanings of the two words are not related in the least. What a vast difference a muscle makes! This is the biggest distinction between phonetics and phonology, although phonologists analyze a lot more than just the obvious differences. They also examine variations on single letter pronunciations, words in which multiple variations can exist versus those in which variations are considered incorrect, and the phonological "grammar" of languages. For a native speaker of English, he pronounces the letter /p/ three different ways. He may not realize it, but he does, and if he were to hear the wrong pronunciation, he might not be able to put his finger on the problem, but he would think it sounded really weird. Say the word "pop-up." The first /p/ has more air behind it than the others, the second is very similar to the first, but it doesn't have much air in it, and the last one is barely

pronounced at all. The word ends there when your lips close. Now, say it again, but put a lot of air in the final /p/. That is realized odd. That's because the aspirated /p/ (with air) sound is not "grammatically" correct at the end of an English word. Similarly, Spanish words do not begin with an /s/ sound followed by a consonant, which makes it very difficult for Spanish-speakers who are learning English to say words like "school," "speak" and "strict." Phonologists study these things. (O'Connor, 1992)

Unlike consonants, vowels do not have obstruction of the air stream while it flows through the mouth. Vowels involve shaping of the air stream in its passage. They also involve criteria of manner and position of articulation. For vowels, manner of articulation involves voicing, lip rounding or spreading, length and degree of muscular tension. Place of articulation for vowels involve gross generalizations relative to the front and back of the mouth, as well as tongue and jaw's height. Rising of the tongue is noticed for high, mid, and low vowels. There are twelve monophthongs and eight diphthongs. The monophthongs are classified in terms of

- length / duration of production
- parts / place of the tongue
- height / raising of the tongue
- position of lips
- position of muscles.

Similarly, diphthongs are classified into

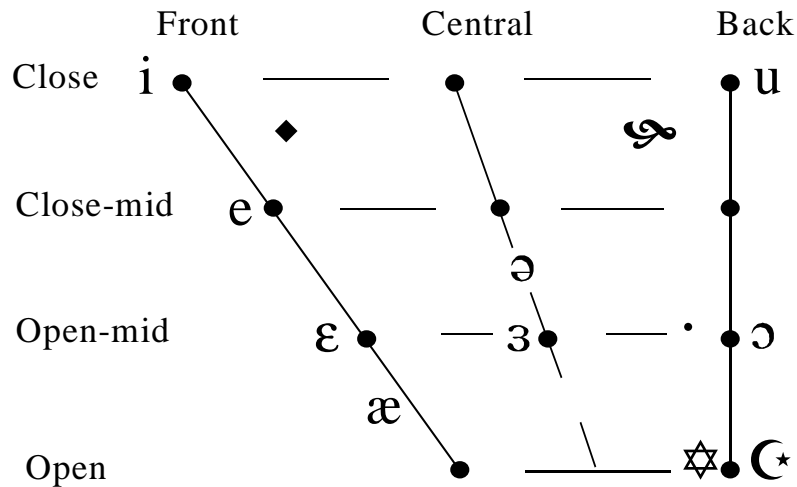
- rising diphthongs and
- Falling diphthongs.

MANNER		VOICE	PLACE						
			Bilabial	Labiodental	Interdental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Obstruent	Stop	Voiceless	p			t		k	▪
		Voiced	b			d		g	
	Fricative	Voiceless		f	θ	s	ʃ		h
		Voiced		v	ð	z	ʒ		
	Affricate	Voiceless					tʃ		
		Voiced					dʒ		
Sonorant	Nasal	Voiced	m			n		ŋ	
	Liquid	Lateral	Voiced			l			
		Rhotic	Voiced				r(ɹ)		
	Glide	Voiced	W				j	(w)	

Source: My English Teacher.eu

Figure 1.

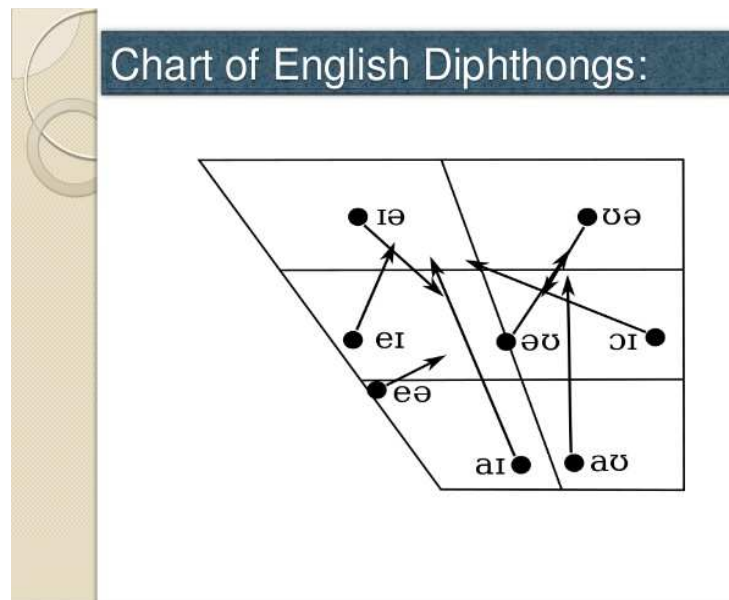
VOWELS



Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.

Source: Uni Bielefeld

Figure 2: Monophthongs.



Source: Slide Share

Figure 3: Diphthongs.

Phonology in Literary Texts

In literary texts, there are stylistic meanings along with the contextual meanings. Even phonology adds stylistic meaning to a literary text. For example, Carter et al. analyses the phonological meanings in the following poem:

'Meeting at Night'

Robert Browning

This poem has two stanzas. In the first stanza, the speaker is rowing his boat at night across the sea towards land. The second stanza describes his journey across land and culminates in the lovers' meeting at night.

The grey sea and long black land;
 And the yellow half-moon large and low;
 And the startled little waves that leap
 In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
 As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
 And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.
 Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
 Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
 A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
 And blue spurt of a lighted match,
 And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
 Than the two hearts beating each to each!

While analyzing the major phonological sounds (consonants) in both stanzas, we can feel a good impact on the senses. Consonants in the first stanza:

- The voiced lateral /l/, sometimes referred to as a 'liquid' and associated with the flowing, refers here to the rippling qualities of water.
- The voiceless plosives /k/ and /p/ show soft percussive sounds.
- The voiceless fricatives /f/ and /s/ show soft hissing sounds.
- The voiceless affricate /tʃ/ shows soft percussive sound, immediately followed by soft hissing sound.

These sounds, in the first stanza, suggest the action and sound of the oars. The plosives erect the vigorous moment of the oars entering and pulling through the water and the fricatives are suggestive of the sound made by the disturbed water after the oars are taken up ready for the next stroke.

In the second stanza, the narrator crosses the beach and fields to arrive at the farm. "A tap at the pane" echoes the rhythm of his action and the voiceless plosives /t/ and /p/ suggest that his tapping is cautious and muted. (Carter et al., 2002)

Firth and other linguists suggest that the meaning of a text "cannot be achieved at one fell swoop by analysis at one level" (Firth, 1968: 192). Firth suggests that the meaning complex should be split up and that at each level the analyses

should try to capture specific types of meaning making mechanisms. "The accumulation of results at various levels adds up to a considerable sum of partial meanings in terms of linguistics" (Firth, 1957/68: 197)

When we make statements of meanings in terms of linguistics, we may accept the language event as a whole and then deal with it at various levels, sometimes in a descending order, beginning with social context and proceeding through syntax and vocabulary or phonology and even phonetics, and at other times in the opposite order. (Firth, 1951/57: 192)

Phonological patterns are one of the ways "to mean" when creating texts. To illustrate the existence of phonological meanings in texts, Firth presents an analysis of Lewis Carroll's famous nonsense poem called "Jabberwocky",

Firth discusses the poem and its phonological meanings in terms of its stanzas, specific rhymes and its phonematic and prosodic processes. He concludes that the poem is certainly "English enough" in its realizations. (Firth, 1951 / 57: 195)

Crystal (1995) finds that continuants (/l, r, w, j/) are phonaesthetic sounds which compose beautiful words. Front (notably labial) consonants are a little more frequent in phonaesthetically pleasing words, and back ones (velar and glottal) a little less frequent in phonaesthetically pleasing words. Impression is that consonant clusters are an important feature of phonaesthetic words but that is not true. They are not an important feature of phonaesthetic words. In Crystal's words, a word apparently sounds prettier if the manner of consonantal articulation changes as the syllables pass by. He argues that people have an impression that long pure vowels are important in phonaesthetically pleasing words but he suggests that four of the long vowels are not even in the top ten of the vowel list during his examination of the sounds. He says diphthongs do better than those long sounds.

"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths ou'gabe.

Components of Literary Texts

For a thorough analysis of phonological meanings in texts, Firth (1951 / 57: 199) and Leach (1969:89-130) suggest many components or elements of literary texts such as: alliteration (feel / fate), assonance (bead / eel), chiming of consonants (foul and fair / mice and men), stress, intonation, reverse rhyme (send / sell), pararhyme (send / end), and onomatopoeia (buzz). Such features can be distributed by a writer as to form part of artistic prosodies in both prose and verse. Firth emphasizes that such phenomena in texts are not just "sound symbolism" or "onomatopoeia", but, rather, they are part of the various means to express phonological meanings in texts, and thus they contribute to the total contextual meaning of the texts. They create the prosodic mode of the text or the phonaesthetic character of the text.

Euphony (consonance) is for producing pleasant, rhythmical and harmonious effects. Cacophony (dissonance) is for harsh, unpleasant, meaningless and discordant sounds.

Alliteration

Repetition of consonant sound in two or more than two words or accented Syllables is known as alliteration. This makes sound of emphasis and interesting style. We can see it in this following piece:

A strong man struggling with the storms of fate.

Thomas Addison (quotation)

What is the 'alliteration' has been defined by Prof. Higgins in George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion (Act II)

Mrs. Pearce: Only this morning, sir, you applied it to your boots, to the butter, and to the brown bread.

Higgins: Oh, that ! Mere alliteration, Mrs. Pearce, natural to a poet.

Assonance

Repetition of vowel sound in two or more than two words or accented (stressed) syllables is known as assonance. It demands that the sound similarity occurs within the vowels, not the consonants, and only in accented syllables: as lake and fate.

Rhyme

In case of rhyme, similar sound is in the accented syllables of two or more words but the preceding consonants are different as: cat and fat, but not meat and meat. Rhymes are classified as end rhymes, internal rhyme and beginning rhyme. Rhyme scheme is determined by end rhymes as in the following (abab rhyme scheme):

There was a sound of revelry by right, a
 And Belgium's Capital had gathered than b
 Her beauty and her chivalry, and bright a
 The lamps shore over fair women and bravemen b

Lord Byron (The Wave of Waterloo)

Stress

Stress is used for greater force, with greater effort, than the other syllables. For example, the sentence 'I could hardly believe my eyes' has the words 'hardly', 'believe' and 'eyes' are stressed. Stress is important for many components in literary texts. (O'Connor, 1992)

Metre is formal rhythm in lines of verse. The verse line is divided into feet which contain different rhythms and stresses. The commonest English metre is the iambic feet. Metric feet are iambic (U-), trochaic (-U), anapestic (UU-) and dactylic (-UU). - is spondee (stressed) and U is pyrrhic (unstressed). The number of feet are monometre (one), dimeter (two), trimeter (three), tetrameter (four), pentameter (five), hexameter (six), heptameter (seven) and octameter (eight), For example:

$\overset{U}{B} \overset{-}{u} \overset{-}{t} \overset{U}{W} \overset{-}{h} \overset{-}{e} \overset{-}{n} \overset{U}{t} \overset{-}{o} \overset{U}{m} \overset{-}{i} \overset{-}{s} \overset{U}{c} \overset{-}{h} \overset{U}{e} \overset{-}{f} \overset{-}{m} \overset{U}{o} \overset{-}{r} \overset{-}{t} \overset{U}{a} \overset{-}{l} \overset{-}{s} \overset{U}{b} \overset{-}{e} \overset{-}{n} \overset{U}{d} \overset{-}{t} \overset{-}{h} \overset{-}{e} \overset{-}{i} \overset{-}{r} \overset{-}{w} \overset{-}{i} \overset{-}{l} \overset{-}{l}.$

$\overset{U}{H} \overset{-}{o} \overset{-}{w} \overset{-}{s} \overset{-}{o} \overset{U}{o} \overset{-}{n} \overset{U}{t} \overset{-}{h} \overset{-}{e} \overset{-}{y} \overset{-}{f} \overset{-}{i} \overset{-}{n} \overset{U}{d} \overset{-}{f} \overset{-}{i} \overset{-}{t} \overset{-}{i} \overset{-}{n} \overset{-}{s} \overset{-}{t} \overset{-}{r} \overset{-}{u} \overset{-}{m} \overset{-}{e} \overset{-}{n} \overset{-}{t} \overset{-}{s} \overset{-}{o} \overset{-}{f} \overset{-}{i} \overset{-}{t} \overset{-}{!}$

Alexander Pope (The Rape of the Lock)

Verse in iambic pentameter without rhyme is blank verse. Each line has ten syllables. The second, fourth, eighth and tenth syllables bear the *accents* (stress) which is known as pentameter. Now this term includes almost any material unrhymed

form. 'U' is unaccented and '-' is accented.

— U — U — U — U —
 good | Old man | how well | in thee appears |
 U — U — U — U — U —
 Thee con | stant ser | vice of | the an|ti que world |

William Shakespeare (As You Like It, Act 2, Scene 3)

Intonation

Intonation is good for rhythm and music. It is also good for rhetoric. Intonation refers to the voice going up and down and the different notes of the voice combine to make tunes. Intonation adds the speaker's feelings and emotions, and also meanings in the speech. Meter is the formal rhythm of verse, but prose also has rhythm. Regular beat, accent (stress) rise and fall etc. in poetry makes rhythm but in prose these are less regular.

Onomatopoeia

It is the use of the sound of words, imitation of the sound of animals, things or someone. The words or sound suggest the object, the scene or the incident. Hiss, buzz, gurgle etc. are onomatopoeic words. From Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Princess*:

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
 And murmuring of innumerable bees

Euphony and Cacophony

Online Encyclopaedia Britannica mentions that Euphony and cacophony refer to the sound patterns used in verse to achieve opposite effects. Euphony is pleasing and harmonious but cacophony is harsh and discordant. In Euphony, vowel sounds in words for serene imagery. Vowel sounds, rather than consonant sounds, are more euphonic; the longer vowels are the most melodious. Liquid and nasal consonants and the semivowel sounds (l, m, n, r, y, w) are also considered to be euphonic. An example may be seen in "The Lotos-Eaters" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson: "The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came." Cacophony is usually produced by combinations of words that require a staccato, explosive delivery. Inadvertent cacophony is a mark of a defective style. Used skillfully for a specific effect, however, it vitalizes the content of the imagery. A line in S. T. Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" illustrates cacophony:

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
 Agape they heard me call.

CONCLUSIONS

Sounds add aesthetic meaning to words in a text. Phonetics and phonology are analytical tools of exploring phonaesthetic aspects of language in a text. The tools and ways of analyzing phonological meanings in texts may differ in linguistic traditions but the various approaches have largely accepted the study of phonological meanings as a fruitful enterprise and consider them as expressions of personal and social attitudes in literary texts. People involved in literature can extend their study to this area of linguistics for exploring stylistic means of pleasures in a text.

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