



RESEARCH PAPER

Hybridity, Code-Switching and Imagery: A Stylistic Analysis of the Poem *If They Come for Us* by Fatimah Asghar

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ABSTRACT

The current research explores the use of hybridity, code switching and imagery as stylistic and ideological devices by Asghar in expressing cultural belonging, resistance and postcolonial identity. Language within the diasporic literature can be defined as a place of identity negotiation and defiance. The poem of Fatimah Asghar, *If They Come for Us*, is a good example of how the concepts of hybridity, code-switching and imagery are created to build a diasporic identity in the context of Muslim-Americans. The proposed study employs a stylistic and postcolonial approach to using the qualitative descriptive method, with the textual and interpretive analysis of diction, syntax and imagery in theories of hybridity and language decolonization (Bhabha, 1994; Ashcroft et al., 2002). The analysis shows that the mixture of Urdu and English languages, family-related image and the use of the free verse structure by Asghar represents the hybridized self and group identity. Code-switching serves as a form of using emotional authenticity as well as a linguistic defiance against monolingualism. The poem by Asghar uses hybridity as a form of empowerment and reorganizes linguistic diversity to decolonial and unifying manifestation of the diasporic identity in the modern literature. The study recommends to use a larger data to dig the topic evolution and narrative shifting of the Pakistani writers over the period of time. It also endorses to use such poems in academic settings to teach the use of stylistic devices for expressing trauma, identity and conflict as post partition ordeals.

Keywords: Hybridity, Code-Switching, Imagery, Stylistic Analysis

Introduction

In literature, language is not just a means of communication but a very potent place of identity construction, cultural negotiation and opposition. Linguistic experimentation and hybridity are frequently employed by authors of postcolonial and diasporic texts to express their sense of displacement, belonging and self-identification. Particularly, poetry is a confined volume wherein linguistic and cultural hybridity is most prolifically displayed. The poem *If They Come for Us* (2018) by Fatimah Asghar is the most perfect example of such an intersection, where English is presented in combination with cultural and religious imageries, South Asian colloquialisms, and markers of a hybrid identity that are the result of the diasporic state of Muslim-American experience. The poem is a vivid representation of the theme of cultural survival, solidarity and opposition to marginalization, which is achieved with the help of the unique stylistic elements.

The idea of the third space as put forward by Bhabha (1994) implies that it is through the process of negotiating otherness in language and culture that hybrid identity would be created rather than in its isolation. In a similar assertion, Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin (2002) believe that linguistic hybridity is an aspect that is exploited by postcolonial writers to overturn the colonial power and take back the agency. Defined by Myers-Scotton (1993), code-switching is the alternation of languages or language varieties in a text or discourse that as the author says, can serve as a sign of authenticity and language as a weapon of

cultural resistance. Such stylistic changes in poetry do not only demonstrate linguistic competence but also have more symbolic connotations, i.e., as the embodiment of fragmented identities, cultural nostalgia or the opposition to linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah, 2013; Alaiyed, 2022).

The Pakistani-Kashmiri-American poet Fatimah Asghar uses the diaspora and postcolonial identity discourse. The intersections of race, religion and gender are reflected in her poetry and the stylistic devices are echoing the larger trends of linguistic hybridity within the South Asian English literature (Butt et al., 2022). The collective voice of diasporic belonging of the life of *They Come for Us* is one that glorifies multiplicity (and opposes exclusion). The language use in the poem including the use of Urdu kinship words, culturalism and rhythmic free verse, definitely makes the poem a good location in the study of style.

Although, the literature has expanded on the work of Asghar, there is a lack of literature that has adopted a stylistic approach that links the concepts of hybridity, code-switching and imagery as identity co-constructors. The features in question have been previously viewed in isolation as they are thematically represented but not stylistically functional. Hence, there is a gap in the current research to understand how these stylistic strategies merge to create cultural and colonial identity in the poems of Asghar. This gap is also an issue of the subfield of stylistics and postcolonial discourse analysis, in the sense that linguistic creativity reflects a sociocultural struggle and hybridity of Australian diasporic environments.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations: Hybridity, Third Space and Identity

One of the most significant theoretical foundations of hybridity research is the works of Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994), where hybridity is imagined as an active, ambivalent area (so-called third space) between the colonist and the colonized where identity is negotiated and not determined. The concept has since been applied by academics to interpret the destabilization of binary categories of cultural identity (colonial vs. indigenous, tradition vs. modernity) by writers. Indicatively, Butt, Rahman and Jahan (2022) discuss the way authors like Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie and Nadeem Aslam discuss the negotiation of ambivalence and subalternity through cultural hybridity in works on Pakistani literature. These theoretical frames provide grounds on which one can distinguish the manner in which hybridity is working in style (language, form, imagery) in addition to theme only.

Influence of the Language in Literary Texts Code-Switching and Linguistic Hybridity

Several researchers have researched the code-switching (or code-mixing) in the literary work as a stylistic methodology of identity affirmation, protests or authenticity. Barnes (2012) investigates the role of bilingual code-switching in a work by Sepamla, Cronin, Gwala, etc. and finds that non-English headings, use of foreign words and changes in idiom are dramatic, lyrical, ironic or socio-political. Alaiyed (2022) researches poetry, employing both English and vernacular Arabic, indicating inter-sentential and intra-sentential switches which have a role such as quoting, humor or innovation and tend to be syntactically and rhyme constrained. South Asian studies also play a role: an example is the analysis of Urdu words used in English novels that are set in Hyderabad which asserts that inscenic Urdu words tend to refer to culture specific realities in food, ritual and religion. and are used to place the narrative within the local culture. Furthermore, in *Exploring Socio-cultural Issues through Code-Switching in the Poetry of Hamid Khan* (2020), the authors demonstrate that code-switched lexical elements can be used to foreground a socio-political

problem. In these literary pieces, code-switching is no longer considered decorative, it is a part of identity, agency and negotiation of colonial heritage.

Diasporic/Postcolonial Poetry Imagery, Aesthetic Features and Style

Although, scholarly interest in code-switching is commonplace, imagery and stylistic means (metaphor, symbolism, syntax, etc.) are also at the heart of how poets are depicting hybridity and identity. In the study, *Transcultural Hybridity and Dialogism in Poetry* by Khaled Mattawa Megheirbi (Postcolonial Text), it is possible to observe that Mattawa combines the local, regional and global images to achieve the multi-layered viewpoint, constructing a hybrid dialogic discourse that does not promote the dominance of one culture over another. In *Code switching in contemporary isiZulu performance poetry*, Myeni and Sibiyi (2021) discover that, besides code-switching, imagery in performance (spoken word) is useful in creating a sense of cultural memory, effect and local everyday aesthetic. In Arab-American poetry, into the concept of code mixing, research has been done, including that of Ahmed and Mohammed in the study titled *Code Mixing in Contemporary Arab-American Poetry*, to determine how imagery associated with both homeland and host-land (landscapes, rituals, family, exile) interact with code-mixing to form a hybrid identity. In addition, The role and meaning of code-switching in South African poetry (Barnes, 2012) states that images and choice of words (used foreign language) are salvaged to provide a local colour and socio-political impact. These studies demonstrate that imagery is not incidental but embedded in the use of language to enhance the meaning.

Emerging Trends

Although, a lot has been done, there still exists research gaps. To begin with, there are numerous studies about prose (novels) or spoken / performance poetry; fewer research on written lyric poems with a combination of hybridity, code-switching and vivid imagery. Second, this has a tendency to separate code-switching and hybridity, but less frequently rather than looking at how the three aspects interact, they are examined together in relation to imagery and stylistic cohesion. Third, most research is focused on South Asia, Arab diaspora or African settings; there less has been done on identifying the issues of a transnational diasporic identity tied in multiple directions (e.g. third generation immigrants, intersecting religious / racial identities) to examine the weight of the colonial legacy mixed with the new experiences of the generation. Moreover, most of the studies consider foreign words that have not been translated as a code-switching but do not investigate the impact of non-translation on the readers and poetic rhythm. The scholarly literature is already starting to fill in these gaps: recent studies of popular culture and code-switching (e.g. "Issues and Functions of Code-switching in Studies on Popular Culture: A Systematic Literature Review", 2023) are interested in the wider context of discourse. The linguistic hybridity of novels and its cultural identity based implications (e.g. Pakistani literature) are also becoming increasingly studied.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The research study is qualitative descriptive study with a stylistic and postcolonial theoretical framework. The qualitative methodology is suitable in that it involves looking at the meaning-making and interpretations and understanding the context instead of statistical generalization (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this manner, the study explores the way in which the linguistic and stylistic decisions in the poem *If They Come for Us* by Fatimah Asghar (2018) articulate cultural hybridity, identity and resistance. Stylistic analysis is a systematic way in which the linguistic patterns including diction, syntax and imagery are used to add some thematic and ideological significance (Simpson, 2004).

Sample

The poem under consideration is the main source of this study which is the poem *If They Come for Us* included in the collection of poems of the same title by Asghar. The sample is purposive since the poem summarises various themes of diaspora, identity and belongingness to the cultures, frequently explored by the poet. Secondary data entails academic publications on the topic of stylistics, code-switching, hybridity as well as postcolonial theory. These sources help to support the analysis and provide a theoretical background (Hall, 1990; Canagararaj, 2013).

Analytical Framework

The current research combines the linguistic stylistics with the postcolonial literary theory. The stylistic model is grounded on the works of Leech and Short (2007) and Jeffries and McIntyre (2010), which dwell upon lexical, syntactic and figurative elements. The postcolonial aspect is based on Bhabha (1994) idea of hybridity and the third space, Ashcroft et al. (2002) theory of language appropriation and the theory of linguistic decolonization offered by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. This composite structure allows seeing the functioning of language as an instrument of creative art and political statement.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was done in three key steps:

1. **Textual Observation:** To recognize the recurrent language elements in the poem, this was read closely on numerous occasions to determine things like code-switching, imagery and hybridity.
2. **Categorization:** The identified features were classified into the category of hybridity, code-switching and imagery to investigate its use as a stylistic or semantic means.
3. **Interpretation:** The postcolonial theory was applied to interpretation of the categorized data to expose how the stylistic devices reflect the identity construction, diasporic identity and opposition to colonial linguistic dominance (Spivak, 1999; Young, 2001).

As Wales (2014) explains, stylistics offers the means with the help of which one will be able to unveil how the textual attributes mirror ideological standpoints. The combination of stylistic and postcolonial strategies contributes to more rich interpretation in the sense that one can analyze the words at a micro-level and the culture at a macro-level. This approach proves how the hybridity, code-switching and imagery used by Asghar turn English poetry into the decolonial and multicultural discourse that interferes with the traditions of the dominant languages.

Results and Discussion

In her poem *If They Come for Us* (2018), Fatimah Asghar creates a compelling expression of the diasporic identity, hybridity and cultural multiplicity in its manifestation, addressing the postcolonial issue of displacement and belonging. The linguistic approach that may be used to analyze the poem is its structure, diction and imagery which indicate how the poetess manages her hybridity as a Pakistani-American Muslim woman. The stylistic critique illuminates the fusion of hybridity, code-switching and imagery as a means of restoring identity and fighting the cultural erasement.

Structural and Lexical Features

The form of the poem as free verse does not abide by the rules and this is the symbolic movement of idol blend (Bhabha, 1994). The rhyme scheme is not determined and the symmetry of stanzas is not fixed which is also an indication of the non-linear experience of migration and belonging. The stylistic device of enjambment which Asghar uses purposefully, as in the line of we are each other countries, disrupts constraints of syntactic patterns in order to deconstruct the lines between the self and the other. The fluidity refers to the idea of third space mentioned by Bhabha (1994). Such an idea refers to the merged idea of identities. Considering the analysis on lexical level, the poem uses the words like *Ammi* and *Abbu* from Urdu language to express cultural orientations and intimacy as mentioned by (Canagarajeh, 2013). The inclusion of these words into an English poem disrupts the monolingual standard of Western poetic language, making the non-Western expression of the global literature legit. Therefore, the diction that Asghar uses stands as a place of resisting and self-identification what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002) refer to as the appropriation of language in postcolonial situations.

Construction of Identity and Hybridity

Hybridity in *If They Come for Us* does not just work as a fusion of cultures but as a means of survival. To give an example, the poem appeals to Islamic and kinship imagery (*Ammi, Abbu, Allah*) as well as to clearly American socio-political anxieties (*If they come for us*). Such juxtaposition of cultural allusions expresses the conflict of belonging to the world of both and neither (Young, 2001). Bhabha (1994) is theorizing hybridity as the in-betweenness which undermines colonial dichotomies of colonizer/colonized, self/other. This space is conveyed through the poetic vocal of Asghar which is vulnerable as well as defiant.

The Cultural Assertion of Code-Switching

One of the most overwhelming stylistic elements of the poem is code-switching or the use of two or more languages or dialects. The fact that Asghar uses Urdu words in an English frame (*Ammi, Abbu, Khala*) is indicative of not only her bilingual truth, but also a rebellion against language assimilations (Kachru, 1986). The Urdu words have not been translated, leaving the reader to deduce the meaning. This language decision is an indication of power reversal; unlike accommodate the English dominating audience, Asghar requires cultural curiosity and empathy.

Stylistically, this code-switching adds textural diversity to the poem, due to the introduction of rhythmical and phonetic diversification (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010). It strengthens intimacy and cultural particularity as well. The aspect of linguistic hybridity of Asghar conveys the meaning of affectiveness that could not be expressed through monolingual English. The emotional quality of endearments such as *Ammi* is absent in the English counterpart, mother, and is thus an example of how code-switching cipher's affective identity (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Besides, this stylistic element is consistent with postcolonial theories of language ownership. Incorporating Urdu into the English poetic language, Asghar performs what Ngugi wa Thiong (1986) refers to as the process of decolonizing the mind. Her code-switching challenges the hierarchies of language and gives the minority voices a place in the world literature.

Imagery and Symbolism

The work of imagery in *If They Come for Us* is a carrier of cultural memory and group identity. The poem is saturated with images, visual and sensory, making it nostalgic of homeland and at the same time, anxious. The words such as the *sky swallowing us whole, we are each other country* are contrasts between powerlessness and solidarity, making trauma

a source of strength. The visuals are a combination of both personal and political, as they attract the focus on the diasporic fear in the context of the increasing Islamophobia (Ahmad, 2017).

Familial imagery including *Ammi*, *Abbu*, sister, brother and others is not limited to a biological perspective but the transnational relation of marginalized groups. This all-inclusive visualization makes the poem more of a solidarity manifesto. The communal and the mutual protection when using the repeated collective pronoun, *we*, is confirmed and echoes the standpoint of Spivak (1999) that the subaltern collective solidarity is a resistance to the dominant story. The poem *If they come for us*, refrains of symbolically and is reminiscent of history persecution, i.e. Partition violence, post-9/11 Islamophobia and is hinting at cyclical trauma in the memory of the diaspora. However, the tone used by Asghar is defiant and it turns the fear into empowerment. The imminent violence is turned into solidarity through the imagery of togetherness (*we will get hands*) and once again, hybridity is posed as a source of strength and not a divisive force.

Stylistic Cohesion and Tone

The poem is cohesive stylistically by way of repetition and parallelism. Anaphoric form of the sentence, *if they come for us*, enhances rhythm and urgency, which is cyclical in character of oppression (Leech and Short, 2007). The repetition serves as a reminder and a assertion of togetherness. The tone changes in the first and second lines as it starts with vulnerability and ends with defiance in the last line which depicts emotional evolution of fear to empowerment. This tonal development reflects the shift in the hybrid identity with feelings of anxiety over being part of self-certain multiplicity. The strategic application of punctuation elements by the poet, especially the lack of commas and periods, lends a sense of endless motion and lack of breath and creates an impression of the ambiguity of the diasporic life. This formal minimalism puts some fluidity over closure and it also follows postmodern opposition to predetermined meaning (Barry, 2017).

Stylistic Choices, Cultural and Colonial Identity

The blending of the linguistic and stylistic aspects is aimed at defying colonial remnants of language and culture. Through amalgamation of English and Urdu, Asghar does what Ashcroft et al. (2002) term as writing back to the empire. Her visuals make victimhood into agency, and hybridity, fragmentation is re-defined as the cultural richness.

In such a way, the stylistic direction of Asghar does not simply represent hybridity, it is hybridity. The poem itself is an artifact of language as well as a statement of culture that identity is a dynamic and inclusive and constantly negotiated in postcolonial diaspora.

Conclusion

In the stylistic analysis of the poem *If They Come for Us* by Fatimah Asghar, language as an aesthetic and ideological tool becomes apparent in the way the poem is built and negotiated to establish and assert the hybrid identity. It has examined three main stylistic features including hybridity, code-switching, and imagery and how they were used to depict the intersection of the postcolonial identity, cultural belonging, and lingo-resistance. By applying the stylistic and postcolonial theory, it is clear that poetic voice of Asghar is the voice of linguistic hybridity that breaks the language hierarchies of colonialism and glorified multicultural self.

As it is shown in the analysis, hybridity in the poem by Asghar is not the instinctive fusion of cultural symbols but a deliberate statement of in-betweenness. Her mixture of English and South Asian cultural expressions, family dynamics and even her religious images is what Bhabha (1994) calls as the third space of identity formation the area where

different cultural influences can interact with one another but without hierarchy. The form of the poem which is a free verse and irregular syntax, reflects the fluidity of the identity of the diaspora. By means of this hybrid linguistic space, Asghar turns the disjointed into strength and demonstrates that the multiplicity of cultures can be a strength and not a disorder.

Code-switching is a very important stylistic and ideological approach. The use of Urdu terms like *Ammi*, *Abbu* and *Khala* in a poem of an English language can be viewed as a sign of linguistic validity as well as resistance. Asghar does not want to translationate these words, forcing the readers to enter her linguistic environment according to her. According to Canagarajah (2013) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), this is decolonization of the language, which states that the undervalued languages are equally capable at expressing things. Therefore, in this poem, code-switching, serves two purposes: it is the manifestation of a bilingual nature of the diasporic existence, at the same time, it criticizes the supremacy of English in the international literary discourse.

The analysis also establishes that the imagery in the poem Asghar used serves as a connection between the individual and the group. Her application of the family and community metaphors, we are all the country of each other, makes individual weakness a communal strength. The poem builds vision of unity which cuts across ethnic, religious and national borders and is what Hall (1990) calls a collective identity-in-difference. The inclusion and the bright imagery turns the trauma into solidarity which is the healing power of hybrid identity in the postcolonial settings.

The themes of fluidity and resistance are supported in the poem stylistically through its tone, repetition, and punctuation. The repetition of the words *Should they come to us* creates a sense of rhythm and urgency since the marginalized community is constantly at risk of exclusion. However, the refrain turns into the statement of unity and resistance and fear becomes power. This stylistic movement of weakness to agency resembles the metamorphosis of postcolonial identity of displacement into agency.

Altogether, the study comes to the conclusion that *If They Come for Us* by Asghar is not merely a personal examination of the identity and a deep cultural and political message. Incorporating hybridity, code-switching and imagery, Asghar creates a new definition of belonging to the globalized world that is characterized by the language and cultural diversity. Her poetic decisions interfere with the traditional poetic norms and remake English as a malleable, open-minded language that can represent the multicultural realities. The poem is an example of how stylistic hybridity may be turned into a resistance, healing and assertion of self. The poem by Asghar is turned into the place of decolonial discussion where the plurality is opposed to the singularity and inclusion is opposed to exclusion. It confirms the fact that identity is not fixed but a fluid, it is in a continuous state of evolution and this depends on the process of interaction, adaptation and cultural negotiation.

Recommendations

The findings of this study can be a valuable contribution to the general area of postcolonial stylistics as it helps to understand how literary language is capable of reflecting politics of belonging and how the hybridity of language and culture can be valued as a tool of rediscovering identity in a postcolonial world. The study recommends to use a larger data to dig the topic evolution and narrative shifting of the Pakistani writers over the period of time. It also endorses to study such poems, novels in academic settings to teach the use of stylistic devices for expressing trauma, identity and conflict as post partition ordeals with special reference to colonized settings in South Asia and rest of the world. A comparative diachronic thematic analysis of previous and recent writers is another recommendation of the study in Pakistani settings to undergo the process of topic and theme progression.

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