



A STUDY OF LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC DEVICES OF RAJA RAO'S 'THE CAT AND SHAKESPEARE'

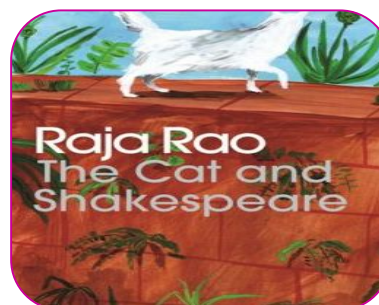
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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to study the lexical and syntactic devices that occur in Raja Rao's novel 'The Cat and Shakespeare'. The paper analyses lexical devices such as native words, collocations, idioms, and syntactical devices like parenthesis, clauses, finite verbs, articles, tense pattern selected from Raja Rao's novel 'The Cat and Shakespeare.' Analytical, descriptive and interpretative method is adopted for the present study.

KEY WORD: Lexical, Syntactic, analysis, idioms, collocations, parenthesis clauses.



INTRODUCTION

The *Cat and Shakespeare* was published in 1965, though an early version of the novel had appeared under the title *The Cat* in *Chelsea Review*, Summer, 1959. Chomskyians in search of kernel sentences would have loved such passages! And the teachers of English would have loved to grade this, on the basis of vocabulary count and all that, as beautiful stuff for the seven-year-olds! Let us take the categories that we have used so far and try to analyze the language from the point of view of lexis and syntax.

Lexis

A. As pointed out earlier, the vocabulary is extremely simple, almost 'basic', with very few Indian words:

Words of food-items like-*dose* (4); *wada* (29); *chapatis* (31); *raspuri* [mangoes] (52); *upma* (61); Others like- *koel* (51); *bilva* [tree] (7); *almirah* (76); Words with foot notes : *mantra* (9); *Vaidyans* (17); *jhatka* (29); *bandi* (29); *namam* (39); *Dussera* (67); *Swayamvara* (11); *Kamadhenu* (76);

The Malayalam word for a cat- 'poocha' (73);

The Sanskrit word for it- *marjaram* (13).

He uses words like 'jeeva' (61) or 'marjaram'(73) because he must :

'jeeva (and in Sanskrit it sounds more real)', says the narrator. 'Poocha' is what a cat is called in Malayalam. But Bhoothalinga Iyer always used the Sanskrit word *marjaram*. It carried its own condemnation. It needed no more explanations. It made you talk less. Abraham understood. John did not.' (73)

Two or three native exclamations- *chee-chee* (1575); *Ayya' yo yo* (5).

The point is, Raja Rao has reduced his 'borrowings' to the minimum-not more than 20 or 25 words in the entire novel of 117 pages.

B. Similarly, translations of native words, collocations, idioms, similes are extremely limited in number:

horse-dung-smelling purge (16)
 '.. Her 'three days'(109)
 .. As one hunts lice in a girl's .hair (14)
 ...listening to myself like a lizard (24)

C. Raja Rao's favourite device of collocation is rarely: seen: horse-dung medicine (23), horse-dung-smelling purge (16) and the *jhatka-and bandi-walas* are the" only compounds that I can lay my finger on.

D. There is one example of a repetitive collocation which has a native phonological basis: malaria orfilaria (41)

Syntax

The sentences are generally very short and simple. In addition to the passages quoted, one might quote the following ones. Birth is instantaneous with time Who is born where ? Time is born in time. And that is Shantha. To be a, wife is not to be wed. To be a wife is to worship your man. Then you are born. (30) Wonderful is man. He needs to be told he *is*. Then he knows he is. Looking alone he sees himself and tries to say: You. He is dumb. He cannot speak. He makes "a bare movement of lips. The mirror says so. There, is no sound. But sound comes and tells him: "You". Who said "You"? She. Thus the world goes moving on its pivot. (32)

A. Raja Rao uses parenthesis to suggest the speaking voice and the various modes of casual, intimate kind of talk: It had other bands on it - almost as on a temple - and I could hear the sea. (p. 4)

.. the Kartkuras' house was two miles inland - but you could hear the sea - and the Dutch took away: - . (4)

This is a common device in *The Cat*, used on an average four times in a page.

B. If fragments can convey what a clause or a sentence does, Raja Rao goes in for them without any hesitation:

So when I woke up and, frightened, said... (16)
 And one cup of milk immediately after. (52)
 Including the yield of the coconut trees etc., etc. (57)
 What trick? A ration office and such tricks. (71)

But the fragments are not many.

C. The clauses are simplified by dropping the subordinators:

She is the cause of Shridhar's fever, is as simple for him as (65) (Here, the subordinator 'that' is dropped.)

People live who live. (65) (This is the shortened form of ' Those people who live live'.)

D. As in *The Serpent and the Rope*, ' to be ' is used as a finite verb for the same purpose of suggesting metaphysical existence and truth:

I tell you, without Mother the world is not. (10)
 To die rightly is to wake and find one has ever been being. (19)
 You are bad because I am. You are good because I am. The sun is because I see. (24)

E. Raja Rao drops articles to suggest the abstract essence or the Universal principle:

Not that I like all sorts of women, I like woman, in fact. (20)
 I don't yet know what it is to mean husband. (3)
 If she became my mistress it was because she felt wife. (21-22)
 I saw nose (not the nose)... (113)

F. As in *The Serpent* he often italicizes words to indicate that a special kind response is demanded:

She *tells* you. If woman were not would you know you were? (32)
 ..But it was /at house for it was mine. (32)
 He needs to be told that he *is*. (32)
 This is what Usha meant when she said she *saw* Shridhar, (114)
 If I say you are and just see you, you are not *there*. (114)

G. There is one significant use of a dash, and Prof. C. D. Narasimhaiah given a very perceptive explanation of it:

In fact he himself is-running. (8)

"And the last sentence is the most deceptive in its simplicity, for the word running after a dash denotes a state of being, not becoming, that is 'he' and 'running' are interchangeable; running itself is he and he, it."

H. Like parenthetical dashes, we have parenthetical brackets as well. :

When I thought of the bad new road (which leads to Kamla Bhavan.... building) (3)

....for sharpening pencil and such other things (including twigs). (79)

"There are quite a number of these brackets which contain a variety of things like an explanation, an important afterthought, a comment or a modification. They all lend a kind of casualness and conversational ease to the narration. There is one particular use of brackets which is extremely meaningful:

There's only one depth and one sensitivity and that's (in) oneself. (60)

The 'in' in the brackets is philosophically important: the depth etc. are in oneself and identical with oneself.

I. One of the most delightful experiments is to be found on pp. 80-82, where Govindan Nair tries to make a speech 'in the manner of Hamlet', that is, using here and there Shakespeare's diction and syntax :

To be or not to be. No, No (*He looks at the cat.*)

A kitten sans cat, kitten being the diminutive for cat-

Vide Prescott of the great grammatical fame.

A kitten sans cat that is the question....

Of course, this is not a regular feature of *The Cat's* language.

On the whole, we notice a tendency towards simplification, towards denudation. But it is the sort of simplicity that only a great master of language can achieve... Dr. Iyengar compares *The Cat and Shakespeare* to the Upanishads from the points of view of both structure and language. 43 The simplicity of the dialogues in *The Cat* are certainly reminiscent of the Upanishads. Dr. Iyengar quotes the famous dialogue on p. 48:

"Where does water come from?"

"From the tap?"

"And the water in. the tap?"

"From the lake?"

"And the water in the lake?"

"From the sky."

This is, of course, Upanishadic. But even ordinary conversation, too, is carried in this monosyllabic, fragmentary way that is in keeping with the utter simplicity of the narrative style:

He said: "Sir, it's done."

I said: "What?"

"I say, Sir; it is done. The thing is done. You have it when you want." I think I understood. But I was not sure. I was afraid to know lest the knowing be false

So I said which?"

He said: that."

I was dumbfounded. "And that is?"

"That is this," he said as if he had said everything. (34)

In *The Cat and Shakespeare* Raja Rao has achieved a language which is remarkably simple, clear and transparent, through which a profound understanding of life is communicated, a unique kind of language which, like poetry, makes us read between the lines and makes us feel, in the words of Prof. Narasimhaiah, 'what remains unsaid seems to be more important'⁴⁴ than what is actually said. Prof. Narasimhaiah is right when he says: 'Here is a major manifestation of the possibilities of a foreign language in the hands of a master.'⁴⁵

Raja Rao's has been a great artistic-linguistic Odyssey—beginning modestly With translations, groping his way through all kinds of difficulties in; the use of an alien- non-alien -language, determining, like a conqueror, to fashion a ' dialect' for the communication of Indian modes of thought and expression, succeeding in forging a unique idiolect capable of expressing his multi-dimensional consciousness, and then stopping the language, with a conqueror's self-assurance and power, of almost everything that he had dressed it with and, finally, achieving a 'prayer-like' language, capable of immense suggestivity and poetry. Let me end by quoting Lawrence Durrell's tribute to Raja Rao: "You not only do India great honour, but you have honoured English literature by writing in our language," and by adding to it a remark about his use of the English language: "You found it brick and left it marble."

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CONCLUSION:

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