



Analysis of Lexico-Semantic Devices in the Short Story The Optimist by Bina Shah

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Citation: Madad Ali Sabri, Dr Muhammad Asif, & Arif Khan Masood. (2024). Analysis of Lexico-Semantic Devices in the Short Story : The Optimist by Bina Shah. *Al-Qirtas*, 3(3). Retrieved from <https://al-qirtas.com/index.php/Al-Qirtas/article/view/332>

Abstract:

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the lexico-semantic devices employed in Bina Shah's short story, The Optimist. The current study utilizes a qualitative research method and applies Leech and Short's model to analyze the lexico-semantic devices present in the text. The findings of the study indicate the abundant use of lexico-semantic devices in the story, including metaphor, personification, hyperbole, oxymoron, paradox, and imagery. The use of lexico-semantic devices provides insight into how Bina Shah creates her prose to evoke emotions and craft themes, enrich the story's language, deepen characterization, and convey complex ideas more effectively. Through adept use of lexico-semantic devices, Shah effectively explores major themes such as optimism, gender inequality, and the dominance of male-centric societal norms, while developing robust characters like Adnan and Rahila to weave a compelling narrative.

Key Terms: *Lexico-semantic Devices, Short Story, The Optimist*

Introduction

Bina Shah is a Pakistani English writer and journalist. She has written five novels and many short stories. Her articles are published in international newspapers like the New York Times and Pakistani English newspapers like Dawn. Her fiction and nonfiction work has been published in international and national literacy journals and newspapers. *The Optimist* by Bina Shah was published in 2007 in a collection of short stories book written by Pakistani women writers. *The*



Optimist (2007) is based on the arranged marriage issue in Pakistan. Two cousins named Adnan and Raheela got married and ended relation with divorce. However, the protagonist Raheela was born in England, but her parents forced and emotionally blackmailed her to get married to a Pakistani boy. She, after the marriage, performed a rebellious act and proved herself an independent feminist woman who has the right to live her own life. Bina Shah's short story, *The Optimist*, delves into the intricacies of human relationships and the enduring struggle between hope and despair.

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to analyze the lexico-semantic devices employed in the short story *The Optimist* by Bina Shah. Specifically, it seeks to identify and examine how lexical choices and semantic strategies contribute to the narrative's themes, character development, and overall literary impact. By focusing on these devices, the research aims to uncover the underlying linguistic mechanisms that shape the reader's interpretation and understanding of the story.

Research Objectives

The overall purpose of the present study is:

- To identify lexico-semantic devices used in *The Optimist* by Bina Shah.
- Investigate how these devices contribute to the development of themes, characters, and the overall narrative structure in the story *The Optimist*

Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

Q1: What are the key lexico-semantic devices used in "The Optimist" by Bina Shah,

Q2: How do the identified lexico-semantic devices contribute to the development of themes, characters, and overall narrative structure in *The Optimist* by Bina Shah?

Literature Review

Bina Shah's short story "The Optimist" presents a rich tapestry of lexico-semantic devices that contribute significantly to its thematic depth and narrative impact. In scholarly literature, the analysis of lexico-semantic devices in literary texts serves to illuminate how language choices shape meaning and enhance the reader's experience. This literature review synthesizes existing research and critical perspectives on similar analyses in short stories and literary texts, providing a framework for understanding the unique contributions of Shah's work.

The study by Mellouki and Berriha (2016) provides a focused analysis of the lexico-semantic features employed by Ernest Hemingway in his classic novella *The Old Man and the Sea*. Their research contributes to a broader understanding of how linguistic choices contribute to the narrative impact. Their analysis highlights specific examples of linguistic innovation or stylistic devices that enhance the reader's understanding of Santiago's journey and his philosophical reflections on life, struggle, and human dignity. Their research underscores the enduring relevance of stylistic analysis in understanding the artistry of literary texts and their impact on readers.

Almahameed (2020) researched the short story *The Little Match Girl* written by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen. The study aims to explore four stylistic features in the



story namely semantic, syntactic, phonological, and graphological. It was found that the author has followed deviation from the standard use of sentence structure and he used various functions in the writing. Further, the story is also full of alliteration, assonance, metaphors, and symbolism. Each figure of speech gives meaning on different levels. On the semantic level of analysis metaphors, personification, and similes provide meaning in depth.

Bouguelmouna (2022) conducted Ph.D. research on James Joye's two novels *Ulysses* and *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* to find out lexicosemantic devices in the text. The study concluded that James Joyce has made use of numerous literary devices like simile, metaphor, personification, and paradox. The main purpose beyond the use of those devices seems to highlight major themes like alienation, betrayal and lack of trust, love fate, and free will. All the literary devises make both novels a worth reading piece of literature.

Ladapo & Akinsola (2023) conducted a study *Subjugation of Widowhood: A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Bayo Adebowale's Lonely Days*. The findings section presents insights into how Adebowale's lexico-semantic choices illuminate the experiences of widows in Nigerian society. It explores the portrayal of resilience, agency, and social subjugation through linguistic analysis. The study underscores the importance of linguistic analysis in revealing deeper meanings and cultural critiques within literature. It emphasizes the significance of Adebowale's narrative technique in portraying the complexities of widowhood and advocating for social change. The study contributes to broader discussions in African literature, gender studies, and the representation of marginalized voices.

Research Methodology

This present study adopts the qualitative research method. Qualitative research focuses on the comprehension of social phenomena within a natural setting (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). It relies on the direct experience of humans as meaning-making agents. Further, it is a textual analysis and the primary data is the short story *The Optimist* by Bina Shah.

Research Model

To carry out a lexico-semantic analysis of the story *The Optimist* by Bina Shah, Leech, and Short's model (1981) is used. According to this model of analysis of literary text focus on the relationship between artistic function and use of language. It focuses on four levels of analysis namely lexical, grammatical, figures of speech, and context and cohesion in the text (Short & Leech, 1981). Additionally, at the lexicosemantic level, the use of literacy devices like metaphors, simile, and personification are focused.

Leech & Short Check List

Lexical
Category

Grammatical
Category

Phonological
Category

Context &
Cohesion



sis

A. Personification:

Personification is a literary device where human qualities or traits are attributed to inanimate objects or non-human entities, such as animals, objects, or abstract concepts.

1. **“Her eyes stayed perfectly blank, but the lips still moved, whispering words that stung”** Here the *lips* are given humanistic characteristics of moving and whispering words on their own. Certain separation of lips from the human body itself. sentence enhances the description by giving human-like qualities to body parts (eyes and lips), thereby creating a vivid and evocative image of someone experiencing a disconnect between their outward appearance (blank eyes) and their spoken words (stinging lips). It adds depth to the emotional and psychological state being described.
2. **“The wind whipped around my ears and stung them.”**
The wind cannot whip (slap/push) something on its own like humans but it is property of air pressure is attributed to the human-like ability of whipping. This personification makes the wind more alive and active capable of causing physical discomfort and pain.
3. **“The chocolate fell from my fingers into her hands”**
Could merely be considered the effect of voice, indicating that *chocolate* fell all on its own like an animate object. If the sentence had been rather, *I dropped the chocolate*, it wouldn't have given chocolate the autonomy to fall on its own.
4. **“I could feel my heart leaving my body and going away with it, back to England.”**
The *heart* is given the human-like ability to leave one's body and walk away like a being or entity with mobility.
5. **“Guilt, guilt, guilt, day in and day out. Nagging by day, sobbing by night.”**
Although *guilt*, *nagging* and *sobbing* are suspected to have been performed by a character of the story, they are structured in the sentence as if autonomous and independent.

B. Oxymoron:

An oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines contradictory terms or ideas to create a paradoxical effect.

1. **“Creative curses in three different languages.”** Curses are typically seen as negative and vulgar, while the term “creative” suggests ingenuity or innovation, creating an oxymoron in the description of the curses.
2. **The blood dripped from my hand as I went up the stairs, leaving a trail of red protest across the hall.** The phrase “red protest” juxtaposes the color red (associated with blood) with the concept of protest, creating an oxymoron to convey Raheela's defiant reaction to the situation.
3. **“She seemed strangely happy.”** This phrase juxtaposes the unexpected happiness exhibited by Raheela with the tension and sadness surrounding her family's departure, creating an oxymoron that underscores the complexity of her emotions.



C. Paradox:

A paradox is a statement or situation that appears self-contradictory or logically absurd but may reveal a deeper truth upon closer examination.

1. "I've loved Raheela from the day I saw her photograph."
This statement presents a Paradox because love typically requires deeper personal connection and interaction, but Adnan claims to have loved her merely from seeing her photograph.
2. "A marriage takes compromise, you see, and I'm nothing if not a reasonable man."
This statement presents a paradox as it implies that being a reasonable man necessitates compromise, yet Adnan's infatuation with Raheela is portrayed as uncompromising and based solely on his emotional attachment.
3. "It's a bit complicated," said Mum. "It's not," Dad put in from the doorway.
This exchange presents a paradox as Mum suggests that the situation is complicated while Dad insists that it's not, highlighting differing perspectives on the matter.
4. "We argued back and forth for what seemed like hours, Mum crying, Dad shouting, and my voice becoming more and more shrill as I tried to explain to them that I didn't want to get married."
This situation presents a paradox as Raheela tries to assert her independence and desires while being subjected to parental pressure and emotional manipulation. Thus, the paradox highlights the difficulty of maintaining rational discourse in the face of strong emotions, particularly within familial relationships where personal decisions can lead to intense reactions. Amidst the emotional chaos, the speaker is attempting to communicate a rational and clear stance—they do not want to get married.

D. Rhetorical question

A rhetorical question is indeed asked to create a dramatic effect, provoke thought, or emphasize a point, rather than to elicit an actual response. It's a literary device used for stylistic or persuasive purposes.

1- Why on God's earth did Dad decide to settle here, Instead of some decent place like the Bahamas Of Morocco?"

This rhetorical question expresses Adnan's frustration or dissatisfaction with their current living situation. He is questioning his father's decision to settle in their current location rather than a more desirable place like the Bahamas or Morocco. The question is rhetorical because Adnan doesn't expect a direct answer; instead, it serves to convey his feelings about the environment. The speaker contrasts their current situation with what they perceive as more desirable or exotic locations. This highlights a sense of longing or aspiration for a better place to live.

2- "What did you say?" Adnan asks this question in response to Raheela's muttering, indicating their confusion and disbelief at her words. It's a rhetorical question because the narrator Adnan expects a genuine answer; rather, they're expressing their surprise and seeking clarification from Raheela.



3) *"Are we moving to the Caribbean, then?"* This question is rhetorical because Raheela doesn't expect a direct answer; rather, she is expressing her surprise and confusion at the situation being discussed. The question also serves to convey Raheela's attempt to make sense of the unexpected news being shared with her parents

4) *"How could you do this to me?"* This question is rhetorical because the Raheela doesn't expect a direct answer but uses it to express their shock and disbelief at the situation. Similarly, *"What do you mean, you've accepted!"* is another rhetorical question expressing the Raheela's frustration and confusion about their parents' decision to accept the proposal without consulting them. These questions serve to convey the Raheela's emotional turmoil and resistance to the marriage arrangement.

5) *"Why should you work?"* This question is rhetorical because it is used to challenge the Raheela's resistance to the proposed marriage by highlighting the perceived benefits of the arrangement. It implies that the Raheela's potential future husband, Adnan, is successful and can provide for them, questioning the need for the Raheela to work.

6) *"Had I done something wrong and they'd found out about it?"* Raheela is questioning whether their parents' serious demeanor is due to them discovering some wrongdoing on the Raheela's part. This question is rhetorical because the Raheela does not expect an immediate answer but rather poses it to themselves as a way of reflecting on the situation.

7) *"April Fool's is months away. Can I go now?"* Here, Rahila is making a statement rather than asking a literal question. She is pointing out that her dad's joke is out of season since April Fool's Day is months away. This is a rhetorical statement because it implies that jokes related to April Fool's Day are only appropriate around that time. Rahila is not seeking permission to leave; rather, she's using the question to emphasize her desire to end the current situation or conversation. The implied answer is that she wants to leave, possibly because she finds her dad's joke or comment amusing but is ready to move on.

E- Imagery:

Imagery refers to the use of vivid and descriptive language that appeals to the senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell) to create a mental image or evoke certain feelings or sensations in the reader or listener.

1. **"Blisteringly hot day, the kind of day that burns your face and turns your skin into a living, crawling mess of sweat and dirt."** This vivid imagery creates a sensory experience for the reader, evoking the intense heat and discomfort of the day, reinforcing the narrator's emotional turmoil. Overall, this imagery paints a picture of a brutally hot day where the environment is not just uncomfortable but actively hostile to the human body, affecting both physical sensations and emotional well-being. It effectively conveys the experience of enduring extreme heat and its impact on a person's perception and physical condition.
2. **Sunset on the Karachi Beach:** Shah paints a picture of the Karachi beach at sunset, describing the sky ablaze with colors like "blood-orange" and "ruby-red," while the sea reflects the hues like "a mirror." This imagery not only sets the scene but also conveys a sense of beauty and



tranquility.

3. **Rusty Ferris Wheel:** The image of the rusty ferris wheel looming over the Karachi skyline is powerful. It symbolizes both the passage of time and the decay of dreams, contrasting with the vibrant colors of the sunset. This imagery reflects the theme of hope amidst decay.
4. **The Optimist's Shack:** The shack where the protagonist, the Optimist, lives is described as a place "festooned with broken toys and scraps of material." This imagery suggests a sense of whimsy and creativity amidst adversity. It also highlights the Optimist's resilience and ability to find joy in simplicity.
5. **"It was freezing outside, the wind whipped around my ears and stung them as I stood at the bus stop for ages."** This description creates a vivid image of the cold weather and the discomfort experienced while waiting for the bus. "It was freezing outside" immediately sets the scene with a strong sense of cold. This suggests that the temperature is very low, likely below freezing, making the environment extremely uncomfortable. The word "whipped" implies that the wind is strong and forceful, which adds to the biting cold already described. The word "stung" suggests that the wind is not only cold but also causes a sharp, painful sensation, emphasizing the unpleasantness of the experience. Together, these elements create a powerful imagery of a bitterly cold and windy day, where the protagonist is enduring discomfort while waiting for transportation. The imagery not only describes the physical environment but also evokes the emotions associated with enduring such harsh conditions.

F. Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action by referring to something else, suggesting a likeness or analogy between them.

1. **"My cheeks flushed crimson."** This is a metaphorical way of saying his cheeks turned red, likening the color to the deep red of a flushed face. "My cheeks flushed crimson" compares the reddening of the cheeks to the color crimson, implying a vivid and intense shade of red. Here's how the metaphor works and what it conveys: when someone's cheeks flush, it means they become red due to embarrassment, anger, excitement, or some other emotional reaction that causes increased blood flow to the face. This physiological reaction is compared figuratively to the color crimson. The use of "crimson" emphasizes the intensity of the blush. Crimson is a deep, rich shade of red, often associated with strong emotions such as embarrassment or passion. It suggests that the speaker's cheeks are deeply and noticeably flushed, indicating a heightened emotional state.
2. **"My mother rhapsodized about Raheela's beauty and good character, residence permits and British passports."** This metaphor compares the enthusiastic praise and excitement expressed by Adnan's mother to a rhapsody, emphasizing the intensity of her emotions. The metaphor juxtaposes the mother's admiration for Raheela's personal qualities (beauty and character) with practical, material concerns (residence permits and British passports). This contrast highlights a blend of idealistic admiration and practical considerations in how Raheela is perceived or valued. It suggests that while the mother appreciates Raheela's inner and outer qualities, she also



recognizes the importance of legal status and national affiliation in today's world, perhaps hinting at aspirations or concerns related to immigration, citizenship, or social status.

3. "They were my eyes, thirty years on, and I dreaded the day that I'd look into my own daughter's eyes and recognize them in her face, but not in mine anymore." This metaphor compares the tiredness in Raheela's mother's eyes to Raheela's own eyes, suggesting a sense of weariness and the passage of time.
4. "But the power of Pakistani parental persuasion is far stronger than any drug they could come up with in a lab." This metaphor compares the persuasive influence of Raheela's parents to a potent drug, highlighting the intensity of their emotional manipulation.
5. "She was soft and tender and so brave." This metaphor compares Raheela's demeanor and behavior during their intimate moments to qualities like softness, tenderness, and bravery, highlighting her strength and vulnerability.
6. "The Emirates plane squatted on the runway in the distance, ready to take off." This metaphor compares the appearance of the airplane on the runway to that of a squatting creature, enhancing the imagery and emphasizing the imminent departure. The Emirates plane squatted on the runway in the distance, ready to take off" is a metaphorical expression that uses personification and imagery to vividly depict the scene of an airplane poised for departure, enhancing the reader's visual and sensory experience of the moment.

G. Irony:

Irony is a literary device that involves expressing a meaning by using language that signifies the opposite, typically for humorous, dramatic, or emphatic effect.

1. There is irony in Adnan's aspirations against reality because of Raheela's hatred and lack of affection for him, which contrast dramatically with Adnan's positivity and desire for a future with her.
2. Raheela's mother is overjoyed to hear of Adnan's plan to marry her, despite her concerns about him finding an appropriate spouse. This is hilarious because Adnan's obsession with Raheela's photo is the only factor that determines her suitability—no realistic elements at all.
3. The narrator's hope is mixed with irony, even if he believes that Raheela can be treated better. The uncertainty of relationships and their results is highlighted by the difference between his ambitions to travel to England and win her back and the fact that she left him without giving any reason.

H. Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a literary technique where an author hints at future events or outcomes in a story. Foreshadowing in "Optimist" by Bina Shah subtly hints at future events or themes in the story. Here are a couple of instances:

Here are some instances of foreshadowing from the provided story, along with their explanations:



1. Raheela's Initial Disdain for Adnan :

- **Foreshadowing:** Raheela's initial contempt and dislike for Adnan are evident when she expresses her disdain for him at their wedding.

- **Example:** "She chose to tell me this on the day of our wedding in Karachi. The moment our nikah was signed she said that she hated me."

Explanation: Raheela's outright rejection of Adnan hints at the strained nature of their relationship and suggests future conflicts between them.

2. Raheela's Reluctance to Marry Adnan

Foreshadowing: Raheela's resistance to the marriage arrangement is hinted at through her reluctance and defiance towards her parents' decision.

- **Example:** "I don't care what you think. I'm not doing this."

- **Explanation:** Raheela's defiance indicates her unwillingness to conform to societal expectations, foreshadowing potential struggles in her marriage with Adnan.

3. Adnan's Misguided Optimism:

- **Foreshadowing:** Adnan's unwavering optimism and belief that his love for Raheela will eventually win her over foreshadow his eventual disappointment and heartbreak.

- **Example:** "But the power of Pakistani parental persuasion is far stronger than any drug they could come up with in a lab."

- **Explanation:** Adnan's naive optimism blinds him to the harsh realities of Raheela's feelings, setting the stage for his eventual disillusionment and realization.

4. Raheela's Departure from Adnan:

- **Foreshadowing:** Raheela's disappearance at the airport hints at her unwillingness to fully commit to her marriage with Adnan.

- **Example:** "When thirty minutes passed, I knew what she had done."

- **Explanation :** Raheela's sudden disappearance foreshadows the ultimate breakdown of their relationship and her inability to reconcile with her cultural expectations.

Overall, these instances of foreshadowing build tension and anticipation, providing subtle hints of the conflicts and resolutions to come in the story.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is found that Bina Shah in her story *The Optimist* has made abundant use of lexico-semantic devices. In *Optimist* by Bina Shah, lexical semantic devices are employed to enrich the narrative and convey the themes and emotions of the story effectively. In the story, several key lexico-semantic devices contribute to the richness of the narrative, character development, and thematic exploration. Metaphors and symbolism are used to convey deeper meanings and evoke emotions. Imagery appeals to the senses and creates a visual and emotional. Foreshadowing hints at future events or outcomes, building suspense and anticipation while contributing to the narrative's structure and thematic development. Thus, lexico-semantic devices play a crucial role in shaping themes, developing characters, and structuring the narrative effectively. **Metaphor and Symbolism** Shah uses metaphors and symbols to deepen the exploration of themes such as



optimism, gender inequality, and societal norms. For example, the metaphorical use of light or darkness may symbolize hope or despair, reflecting the characters' journeys and the broader social context they navigate. Vivid imagery enhances thematic exploration by evoking sensory experiences that resonate with the themes. Shah may use imagery to depict scenes of empowerment or oppression, thereby reinforcing the themes of resilience or societal constraints.

The language and tone in the characters' dialogue reveal their personalities, motivations, and relationships. Through dialogue, Shah highlights characters' optimism in the face of adversity within this framework, Shah crafts compelling characters such as Adnan and Rahila, enriching the narrative with their depth and complexity. Shah's creation of characters like Adnan and Rahila is notable for its depth and complexity. In short, by adeptly employing lexico-semantic devices such as metaphor, symbolism, imagery, narrative voice, foreshadowing, irony, and personification, Bina Shah crafts a narrative in *The Optimist* that not only explores themes in depth but also breathes life into complex characters. These devices collectively contribute to a cohesive and compelling story that resonates with readers, offering profound insights into the human experience within a nuanced socio-cultural context.

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