

AESTHETIC FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE IN THE LITERARY GENRE CHICK-LIT

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Abstract

The word 'aesthetic' is often used in everyday life situations. People tend to use this term when they comment on an art or music piece when it comes to interior or exterior designing or even in the fashion or beauty sphere; there is a separate field in medicine named 'aesthetic medicine'. However, using this word daily is not very complicated and there is a possibility that the users rarely consider the origins and theory that support this concept. The idea of aesthetics is present in many fields, but in this article, it will be analyzed in terms of literature, precisely the language and its aesthetic function that is used in modern women's fiction, in a literary genre called Chick-lit.

Keywords: *aesthetic, language, chick lit, language function, beauty of language*

1. INTRODUCTION

The aesthetic is the field of philosophy that studies the nature, idea and meaning of beauty and the aesthetic experience. Aesthetic research questions related to what makes something considered beautiful, how people react and interpret art and other forms of aesthetic expression and what is the relationship between art and morality, politics, and society. The history of aesthetics dates to ancient times, however as a field of philosophy it has gained a real interest in the modern age, especially together with the development of modern art and new art concepts. In Medieval times aesthetics was strongly connected to theology and scholasticism; Saint Augustin and Saint Thomas Aquinas were considering if there was any relation between God and beauty.

The Renaissance times opened a real boost of interest in aesthetics; art and literature were key factors in shaping culture. Philosophers of that time, like Leon Battista Alberti or Giorgio Vasari, focused their interest on researching beauty and proportions. In the eighteenth Century, a German philosopher, Immanuel Kant played a crucial role in the revolution of the theory of aesthetics. Kant claimed that 'beauty' and the experiencing of it is first the matter of the personal pleasure of the receiver; however, the features of the object are somehow versatile and universally induce this pleasure, without referring to any concepts or argumentation to rationalize it. Friedrich Schelling and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, nineteenth-century philosophers, were developing a romantic approach to art and nature. They claimed that the creator has the absolute freedom of an artistic expression, the art begins with an inspiration. The romantic concept of aesthetics rejected rules, boundaries, or schemes; what matters is to elicit emotions.

The aesthetic trend of the twentieth Century became more differential and experimental. The great thinkers of that time, Martin Heidegger, Theodor Adorno and Maurice Merleau-Ponty disputed past and traditional approaches to beauty and aesthetics. Contemporary aesthetic theories like postmodernism and critical theory examine the bonds between art, society, and politics. And finally, together with the aesthetic we have this controversial, yet very popular literary genre named chick-lit. Very often criticized, by both the authors and the readers, however, the aim of this paper is not to judge the quality of the genre, but a trial to analyze the language.

2. THE THEORY OF AESTHETICS AND THE FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Before the analytical part of the article, the essence of the aesthetic theories will be given.

The term itself comes from the ancient Greek *aisthētikós* which means perceptive, sensitive, about sensory perception, however, in its main meaning it was used for the first time in the series of articles *The Pleasures of the Imagination* for the magazine *The Spectator* (1712) by the journalist Joseph

Addison. Notwithstanding the father of the first acknowledged definition of modern aesthetic is considered Alexander Baumgarten, a German philosopher whose definition reflected the experience of art and the link between good taste and beauty. With the years the term and the concept itself developed and became more complex; further research proved that aesthetics is a very interdisciplinary field, and its basics come from philosophy. However, while analyzing something, not only in terms of the philosophical approach should be taken, but also in other fields, like linguistics or literary studies, or psychology and anthropology. Why is it important? According to continued research of scientists across the world, it is already known that after the Polish professor Maria Gołaszewska, aesthetics is a scientific field that researches the so-called aesthetic situation. The aesthetic situation consists of the artist (creator), the creation process, the piece of art, the recipient, the process of art reception and the aesthetic value. The philosophy of aesthetics aims to describe the relationships between the elements of aesthetic situation.

Aesthetic and the perception of beauty does not only reflect on the pieces that the recipient can see or hear but also on the written creations. The reader can decide, whether the piece of writing, a poem, or a novel, may be considered in terms of aesthetics and the beauty concept.

There are many linguists, and their theories related to language and its functions, but they may vary when it comes to the number of the mentioned functions. The first name that is worth mentioning is German psychologist and linguist Karl Ludwig Buhler, who defined the organon model, which consists of the first three functions of communication, which are the expressive function, the representation function, and the conative function. That was in 1934 and undoubtedly inspired another great linguist, Roman Jakobson, to develop the research, and as a following resulted in a well-known model of six functions of language in 1960.

The first function is a referential function which corresponds to a simple transfer of the message, or description of the situation or object. In this function, language is used to express the facts, depictions or referring to the reality. It is mainly needed for everyday communication when the purpose of language is to pass the specific information.

The second is an emotive function, which focuses on the emotional expression of the speaker. Its main goal is to communicate feelings, emotions, mental states, or attitude to the subject. Language serves to present the subjective impression, for instance, happiness, sadness, astonishment, or anger.

The next one is the phatic function the language is needed to maintain or create a social relationship. This functionality is about building atmosphere, supporting the relationship between interlocutors and is a linguistic instrument to hold a conversation.

The fourth function is a metalinguistic function, which refers to the language, as an object of communication. Often it is present when it comes to grammar or linguistic aspects or during the process of learning the language when there is a necessity to describe, analyze or discuss the language itself.

Number five stands for the conative function, which focuses on the impact on the recipient's behaviour. This function aims to influence, persuade, convince, or instruct the recipient to a specified action; the language task here is to change the behaviour or attitude of the receiver.

The last, but crucial for this article is the poetic function also called aesthetic. Language is the aim itself; the form is more important than the content of the message. Frequently, this function is visible in literature, poetics, or artistic texts, when aesthetic, rhythm, sound, or language expressiveness matter. This function is aimed at valuing the way of organization of the text and producing an aesthetic experience that is characteristic of a particular literature genre. The poetic function of the language is visible at any time when the text differs from the neutral tone of a text and its type. A piece of literature with an aesthetic function may abound with stylistic figures, for instance, metaphors, inversions, or neologisms. It may also contain a specific rhythmical pattern. The described language function is not limited only to poetry, yet it is utilized in speeches, novels, jokes, proverbs etc. Frequently it is noticeable in everyday conversations, spoken and written, in any situation where it is needed to update the language and reframe the cliché.

There are methods how to recognize this language function in literature. The first one is the literary style; authors artistically use a language, by experimenting with form, style, or sentence structure, to create an exceptional aesthetic effect. Abundant metaphors, unexpected parallels or the poetic structure of a sentence are the keys to the exceptional atmosphere and the aesthetic impression. The following is the narration and setting, precisely the description of it. Literary language is essential to make mental and visual pictures, which stimulate the readers' imagination and cause strong emotions. It is a common practice to utilize rhythm, rhyme, or alliteration to create the melody of the language; the rhythm and the sound of the poem or novel can strengthen the mood and emphasize the feelings, both involved in the text and those the reader has; all that has led to the third method of recognition the aesthetic function in a literature.

Before the last, there is one more worth mentioning, which is symbolism and metaphors. A literary piece is rich in symbols and metaphors, whose role is to develop the meaning of the text and to invigorate the reader's reflection. Through abstract pictures and symbols, authors can express the deepest truths and share more universal values.

The final method is related to language experiments; in some cases, authors may use bold structures with neologisms, archaisms or grammatical changes to baffle and interest the recipient, by making the text unique and original. The aesthetic function in literature is utilized not only to share the content but to build developed and multilayered reading experience too. This element is enormously important, it enriches the literary piece and engages emotionally and intellectually the readers.

3. A NEW WOMEN'S FICTION – CHICK-LIT

Chick-lit is a name that describes a very popular literary genre, which was considered typical woman literature since the majority of authors were women as well as readers. The term is a combination of two words; the first is 'chick', which after the Cambridge Dictionary means a young woman, and the second element 'lit' is a shortcut of the word literature. The term and the genre became popular in the nineties of the twentieth Century; books gained more and more interest, and quickly occupied the lists of bestsellers around the whole world. Authors become famous overnight, names like Helen Fielding or Candance Bushnell no longer were anonymous. There was a real madness about this novelty, the books were translated into various languages, from Polish to Japanese; the film adaptations broke the records in the cinemas, and the TV series collected millions of fans in front of the television each episode. Many people wonder what was and still is the key to the success of this modern, and in terms of the history of literature, new genre; the answer is simple, it is the girl from the neighborhood, whom the reader is herself or at least knows the woman like that.

The main character struggles with everyday life problems, which every woman identifies with and deals with at minimum once in her life. The protagonist often is a woman in her thirties who lives in a big city, usually rents a flat, goes to work, which is not her dream job, and runs a typical single life. Most of the time she is in between what she wants and what the world's actual trends are; not only in fashion or beauty sphere, but also when it comes to the love life. What is more, she also must deal with her parents' expectations or what is even worse, society. She often hears comments or questions like: 'You are in your thirties, it's high time to have a husband, don't be so picky!', or 'What are you doing with your life, unmarried, no kids, small flat and job you don't even like?' Sounds familiar, huh?

The second key point is the first-person narration, often the novel is written in the form of a diary, letters, or from the perception of the protagonist. It gives the recipient the impression that she is there, in this big city, accompanying the main character at work, at the meeting with friends or at a family dinner, but what is more important the reader knows the fears and thoughts of the protagonist, that she does not share with her friends. Apart from these problems the main character never loses the sense of humour, she laughs at her own choices and loves life and the job she has, these bring the reader laughter and joy; books are precepted as more optimistic.

Next to the incredible success of the genre and its authors, criticism appeared; critics in their numerous reviews wrote that the novels are simple, far from reality and there is no deep meaning in it. Surprisingly, it did not ruin the position of the genre and the readers can enjoy the books until these days.

4. BRIDGET JONES AND HER DIARY

The novel that will be analyzed in this article is 'Bridget Jones's Diary' by Helen Fielding; published in 1996 for the first time and is considered as the first novel of the literary genre Chick-lit. As the title of the book says, it is written in the form of a diary, and the reader meets Bridget on the first of January, with a massive hangover, with a long list of New Year's resolutions and opposite, things she will not do in a brand-new year. She lives in London, is in her thirties and is single, visits her parents occasionally, and has a stronger bond with her group of friends.

By using the first-person narration, the reader accompanies her when she is happy or sad when she laughs or cries when she thinks she found the real love, but it turns out, her true love is just outside the corner.

The organization of the book is easy and encouraged to read, there is no division into traditional chapters. As was mentioned it is a diary, so each part (chapter) is a separate day, and subsections here are parts of the day, every day's entry contains information about the number of calories, number of cigarettes smoked, and units of alcohol drank. Some days the entries are very short, for example,

'7.30 p.m. *Oh, Bloody Hell*' (Bridget Jones's Diary, H. Fielding, p. 145),

and sometimes it lasts for several pages. Analyzing the text in terms of mentioned in the previous section aesthetic function of language it starts with the most visible method, narration, and description.

Narration is a first-person as it is written in the form of a diary. The reader has the impression of actually reading Bridget's thoughts, it gives the exclusive access to such a private thing, as a diary is. Referring to a definition given by the Cambridge Dictionary, a diary is a book in which someone records a person's thoughts or feelings or what has happened each day. By interpreting every definition of a diary, it says that it is something very personal and private, it contains emotions and reflections, which is why it may give the reader an exceptional impression of closeness to the main character. The reader experiences the life of the protagonist by detailed descriptions of numerous situations that happen in her life as well as depictions of places, people, and particularly everything that the author decided to be important, to receive the complete picture of the presented world.

The next aspect of analysis is literary style, and here is the place to have a look at the history of the literary genre, chick-lit. As it was mentioned before, the genre started in the nineties of the twentieth century, and a novel Bridget Jones's Diary is considered as the very first novel of this style. After releasing the book, there were many voices that it was undoubtedly a copy of the great novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen; Fielding admitted that she was inspired and somehow reused the plot and adjusted it to modern times.

After years of studies, it is known that this literary phenomenon is named intertextuality. Following Julia Kristeva's results of research intertextuality is a process of creating an original text by someone else's text, it might be done instantly, as a quotation, allusion or calque, plagiarism, translation or parody and pastiche; or as a sort of an interconnection between the similar or related previous texts. As a first impression intertextual phenomena are not very sophisticated, however, if the reader takes a moment to read a bio of an author, Helen Fielding, he or she will discover, that her very first book was a pastiche novel, also with numerous refers to a current situation on the world. What is more the author herself explains, that she used the pattern of *Pride and Prejudice* intentionally. Fielding reused the name of the male hero, Mr Darcy, as well as the plot in the story, there are similarities between the heroines and her parents in both novels.

Having in mind the prior novel of Helen Fielding it gives the recipient an introduction and somewhat a more meaningful explanation for this book. It is not only a simple novel treating about everyday life and not serious problems, like boyfriends or fashion and weight, when the reader while reading considers the time a novel was written, the social situation and general mood around the world it could be a great glimpse of what life looked like at the beginning of the new Century.

5. AN AESTHETIC ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE IN NEW WOMAN'S FICTION BASED ON BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY

The first aspect that is considered in terms of language aesthetics is the organization of the novel and narration. As the title says the book is written in the form of a diary, which was a novelty at the time of forming this literary style. Using the diary form and the first-person narration gives the reader a completely different perspective and after the success of the *Bridget's Diary* authors began using this type of structure and narration in their books, which over the years became a new preferable form utilized by other writers. The diary form leads to another aspect of aesthetic which is language, both grammatical and vocabulary level.

The analysed literary style and aforementioned form of a book may create an impression, that there are no complicated grammar structures, what is more, there are deviations from the standard rules made. The author made it on purpose because it gives the recipient a chance to recognize the personality of a protagonist, as well as it gives an insight into her thoughts.

The first example is the fragmentation of a sentence, not only complete sentences appear in the novel, but also numerous samples of fragments of them. It is an excellent grammar structure deviation for this literary form, it represents the stream of many different thoughts and gives the impression that the diary is written spontaneously and sometimes immediately, as something happened, or the protagonist has an opinion that she does not want to share with anybody. The fragmentation instead of a complete sentence reflects how usually people think and communicate in everyday life and it creates a dynamism of a story and relatability for the novel characters. Here is the example from *Bridget Jones's Diary* presented:

"Oooh, goody. Valentine's Day. Wonder if the post has come yet. Maybe there will be a card from Daniel. Or a secret admirer. Or some flowers or heart-shaped chocolates. Quite excited, actually."

(*Bridget Jones's Diary*, H. Fielding, p. 49)

Another example of grammatical aberrancy is the omission of subject pronouns which is a very interesting idea used in a novel. Creating a sentence structure without a subject in this type of literature is a clever idea because it makes an impression for the reader that the diary is written sometimes in a rush, casually when something happens or simply to release somewhere the character's emotions. What is more, this slight grammatical variation creates the feeling that the author shares something very private, as the thoughts come and go, it mirrors the process of diary writing.

"8 a.m. Ugh. Wish was dead. Am never, ever going to drink again for the rest of life."

8.30 a.m. Oooh. Could really fancy some chips." (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, H. Fielding, p. 68)

In the described novel the author produces a real variation of different language styles, from formal to slang; it depends on the scenes and moments described. While formal and typical informal versions of using language are not shocking in a book, however slang and multiple colloquialisms, especially in the nineties, were not something a reader could expect in a soft woman's lit. Undoubtedly, it presents *Bridget's* authenticity and relatability; grounds her in a particular cultural and social context, and last but not least, using colloquial or slang words adds some humour and character to a text.

"Come on, you silly sod. Let us in." (Bridget Jones's Diary, H. Fielding, p. 264)

While examining the grammatical side of the novel, it is not very complicated to discover many examples of changes applied to standardized grammar. What is more, modifications in grammar are not only related to a sentence structure but also to punctuation or implementing parentheses or capitalized letters as well as abbreviations. All the listed alternatives play a significant role in the text and the author utilizes them to bold the intensity and urgency that usually accompany the author of a diary, it reflects the realism of a situation. The recipient of a book can feel the spontaneous atmosphere and strong emotions that the protagonist has; adding parentheses allows mimicking the path people think, or as in the case of Bridget, overthink and comment their thoughts and views. Additionally, in a way all the changes applied to a grammatical structure present modern communication habit, which strengthen with time, for instance, using abbreviations and shorthand these days is even more common than it was in the nineties; back then mainly it was used for notetaking and currently people use it even while mailing, texting or talking.

There is no doubt, that a detailed examination and analysis will provide more examples of grammatical aspects in terms of the aesthetic function of language, however, to keep the reader of this article intrigued it is necessary to continue with the next linguistic area, specifically neologisms. For not only fans, but the obvious one also firstly comes to mind is the word 'singleton' it describes a single person, unmarried or not staying in an official, long-term relationship, however, the most important part in the meaning of this term is that it relates to a person that is independent and self-sufficient. The perception of this word is rather positive than negative, in comparison to the old-fashioned 'spinster'; the attitude that the author builds with this word is powerful and presents a modern social norm about relations and their perception of them.

In contrast to singleton, there is another popular term 'smug marrieds', which is also invented by Bridget and refers to married couples who enormously underline how extremely happy they are in this marriage. Very often or even always, on any occasion they emphasize and undermine every single person in their friend's group with rude and direct questions 'How is the single life?' or comments about the time passing by and more and more advanced age. This neologism is used by Bridget and her single friends towards married people negatively to mirror their attitude to singletons.

The first version of today's 'city break' was in the nineties novel a 'minibreak' used by the protagonist to talk about a short vacation, lasting for a few days to go somewhere near the city and unwind from everyday problems. Also, for Bridget that is an area to fantasize about romantic minibreaks with her actual boyfriend.

The next term that is commonly reused in modern times is 'urban family' which refers to a close-knit group of friends who always support and share important moments, this name was invented to emphasize the importance of people who are not related by blood, by very often are the first one who give advice or help when necessary, a significant substitute of a family in a place when someone lives.

Finding neologisms in a text might be quite entertaining, for the professionals as well as for the recipients with no scientific background and there are more examples in the book than only a few above mentioned. Newly invented words evidence the well-skilled author, but more importantly help to define the protagonist; how unique she is, her complex personality, great sense of humour and what is crucial, the ability to distance herself and life. Neo words present the reality of the changing times, and attitudes towards different social aspects, for instance, marriage or career or redefinition and non-traditional usage for the word family. Creative expressions and neologisms assure about competencies of the author and contribute to the overall perception of the book.

Lastly, but only in terms of this paper, a significant aspect taken into consideration while thinking about language aesthetics is symbolism. The novel is rich with different symbols and all of them are the key to recognizing the plot, the protagonist and the times it happens in.

The central symbol is a diary itself, however at this point not as a literary form, but as the representation of Bridget's journey to self-discovery and personal growth. The diary is her very own space to share fears, happiness, struggles as well as resolutions; it symbolizes her desire to improve herself in different life areas and her ongoing fight for harmony between societal expectations and what a person aspires to.

The second symbol is weight and diet; Bridget is enormously focused on those and starts every day with a note of how much is her weight, she counts consumed calories after or before she eats or drinks something and constantly looking for a perfect diet. This is connected to the social pressure about the so-called 'perfect body' and what the women see on the covers; very often it results in a lack of self-acceptance and deepens someone's insecurities.

The final symbols analyzed in this paper are two of the mentioned neologisms, singleton and smug marrieds. These expressions depict societal norms and expectations to follow the traditional life path which is marriage and family. While 'singletons' represent the ongoing change in the new generation's life and way of thinking, the 'smug marrieds' mirror the conservative approach of what a woman's life should look like and the perfect age for each step. Both words also uncover the attitudes of both groups towards each other, single people who do not criticize someone's life choices and couples opposite, always have some advice for unmarried, how to live better lives.

Surely, there are more symbols in the analyzed novel, but these are just to point out and encourage us to find the rest of them. Using symbolism in 'Bridget Jones' Diary' underlines the main issues of the book which are self-discovery, social pressure and personal growth; the author gives the reader a picture of a complex, modern woman.

6. CONCLUSION

The field of aesthetics is very wide and complicated to define, especially in the scientific area; as the world is placed in constant change researchers find it difficult to specify and propose an explanation for something, because what was analyzed for instance a year ago, now it does not even exist.

Luckily, the literature world does not change so fast, however, some aspects of language do, and it may cause several difficulties while analyzing some patterns for grammar or semantics in a particular book. Modern literature often is viewed as an easy piece to work on as it is about the time we live in and all the literary styles have been already invented, so it should not be a challenge to describe the linguistic characteristics or to decide which genre it suits best.

Nothing could be further from the reality, to be honest, language is a living area that tries to follow its users and the times they live in; to give an example, grammatical structures are updated not only with the following generations but with regions too. Lexical field is facing the same, the 'old' word is replaced by the new one, becomes extremely popular and is added to a dictionary, and in consequence the 'old' word starts to be an archaism. These are just two of many problems for a language researcher, no difference in difficulty is on the aesthetic field, which is very interdisciplinary and the perception of something in terms of it delivers more questions than answers to the scientist.

Whether someone is a fan of a chick-lit genre or not, according to the definition of the aesthetic function of language, the analyzed novel 'Bridget Jones' Diary' written by Helen Fielding presents several features of this function. Applied in the book deviations to grammatical structures, neologisms or symbolisms create the unique style of the author as well as the style of the genre; full of humour, emotional bond with characters of the book or the ability to relate with feelings, people or situations described in the text. In conclusion, it is crucial to remember that an aesthetic situation is not just the judgment based on some rules, but more importantly, it is the perception of the reader and his or her attitude to the literary piece.

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