

A Cognitive Stylistic Approach to the Notion of “I(me)” of Online Poems by Ethnic Minorities

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Abstract

This article is intended to explore the notion of “I(me)” in the online poems by ethnic minorities in China from the perspective of cognitive Stylistics. Based on initial investigations into several poems created by poets (as well as amateurs), this article aims to unveil certain stylistic characteristics of “I(or me)” in such poems which have not been adequately addressed by previous studies and which, more importantly, shed a light on a possible novel paradigm for the interpretation and criticism of online poems by ethnic minorities. This article reveals that 1) the notion of “I”, although occurring in poems soaked up with the sense of modernity, is closely associated with the primordial and localized ideas as to how man ought to be related to nature and supernatural beings; and that 2) the notion of “I” is in most cases a congruous concept with a strong implication of stipulation or prescription, indicating a poetic projection of moral and aesthetic norms onto life in the cyberspace.

Keywords

The notion of “I(me)”; online poems; ethnic minorities; cognitive stylistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The wide use of the Internet has changed the way poems are created, read and spread, a tendency that is especially significant for ethnic minorities who, for the first time ever, are empowered to write and read poems without having to rely on traditional means of communication and/or on the mainstream waves of poetic skills and tastes. Among many a innovative move that has been effected, the notion of “I(me)”, however, remains inadequately interpreted and illustrated, resulting from an overwhelmingly prevalent paradigm of linking what is literarily/poetically put to what is historically/socially represented[1]. Despite its popularity, this paradigm cannot explain how the understanding of a literary piece necessitates the motley perceptions from historical and social perspectives, nor can it explain why the comprehension of a literary work has to be conducted within the domains that stand aloof to literature itself. In other words, when “I(me)” is approached under this paradigmatic framework, “I(me)” is another “I(me)” which exclusively fits in the history- and society-oriented context satisfying the critics, rather than the original “I(me)” which fits in the status quo as well as the mind-set of the writers themselves. Therefore, what has been discussed about “I(me)” does not really touch upon the genuine “I(me)” that resides in the mind of the writer although the writer has resorted to the Internet in an attempt to depict “I(me)” as it is. Thus, the questions that have to be answered are: 1)What is the the essence of the notion of “I(me)”? 2) How to acquire it?

2. COGNITIVE STYLISTICS AS AN INSTRUMENT

To answer the questions proposed above, we reckon that cognitive stylistics is of desirable values. First, stylistics as a mature discipline which has been established to account for language-related facts in literary works means that, “I(me)”, as a unit of language before it bears

many other labels, can be studied as it is literally is by drawing on resources of linguistics which specifies word-level categories.[2] Second, cognitive stylistics, as the name suggests, goes farther so as to focus on how cognitive sciences (cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology in particular) provides refreshed insights into literary works by observing, describing and explaining certain cognitive operations pertinent to the construal of them.[3] Therefore, if stylistics bridges the gap between literature and linguistics with an assured prospect that literary works can be well understood on the basis of linguistic analyses, cognitive stylistics offers a more encouraging promise that language, literature and human cognition can be incorporated into a well-coordinated consideration that makes possible a new paradigm in which the genuineness of what happens to the writer as well as reader in dealing with a literary piece can be accessed and observed regardless of what a broader social and historical context is like. [4] Accordingly, the notion of “I(me)” in the online poems by the ethnic minorities can be addressed in a way that has been very seldom thought of before.

3. PRIMORDIAL VS MODERN: AN AGITATED “I(ME)”

“I(me)” as a pronoun in Mandarin as well as in many minorities languages in China is often used as subject, object and modifier in sentences. In online poems which are more often than not written in Mandarin(in many cases with the purpose of attracting more readers), “I(me)” is used this way as is expected. However, apart from such a similarity in terms of how “I” is used, what is worth noticing is what follows and/or precedes “I” , or, in other words, the collocation in which “I(me)” is frequently put. According to our survey, there are three types of collocations used with a remarkable frequency:[5]

1)“I”+words that suggest superstitious/ legendary beliefs or doctrines:

e.g. I was caught by a divine glimpse; I ran out of all the heavenly bless; Shamans never trouble me...

2)“I”+words that suggest close associations with animals and plants

e.g. I was brought up by a giant eagle; Crops are the destiny and I am the fate; Wine, goats and many people unlike me...

3)“I”+words that suggest thoughts of the relations between ethnic minorities and the modern metropolitan areas.

e.g. Skyscrapers feed on me; I, with the roaring traffic; Neon lights see no me...

It is intriguing to find out the pervasiveness of such collocations in the online poems written by ethnic minorities, a piece of tangible evidence that substantiates at least two speculations: 1) Spirituality (drawing on traditional beliefs), memory of life experience (characterized by an intimacy with animals and plants which are specific to hometowns and ancestral villages) and sentiments of the real circumstances of modern dwelling places (highlighted by depictions of details of cities where poets are living) are among the most dominant images such online poems reveal and reproduce. This, from a cognitive perspective, indicates that the notion of “I(me)” is neither cut off from the traditions of the very minorities the poets belong to nor is isolated from the ongoing daily life confined to cities as well as various events the poets are engaged in, willingly or not, here in cities. 2)What functions to link these two strands of writing is nothing but the cognition of the poets, teeming with both nostalgia of what has been typical of the schematized patterns of life of their hometowns and atonement of what has been missed out in the re-schematized patterns of life of the cities. If the schematization of the previous way of life is a logical outcome of the homogeneity of every-day rhythm of being together with people with the same origin and the same perception of life (customs, beliefs, mores and so forth that contribute to the sameness as an indiscreet group of people demand), the re-schematization, if it has happened on a considerable scale for minorities who are now living in cities, is an agonizing cognitive process which marks a formal detachment from the past, as well as signifies

a commencement for an iconoclastic awareness of what has been and is being fundamentally altered.

Simply put, starting from a spontaneous schematization that has defined his previous and familiar way of life, a poet of a certain minority group has found himself deprived of almost everything that had been schematized and stored as assured and orderly entries in his mind; instead, what he has to be confronted is a new spectrum of possibilities/alternatives of life, alien, aloof and astounding, which are voicing a pressing call in his mind that asks for reconciliation and readjustment at the expense of the shattering of the existing entries of schematized experience. This poses an unavoidable challenge for the poet in terms of how he seeks an appropriate place in the between without lurching himself into a vicious extremist impulse, which, naturally leads him to a state of agitation.

4. PRESCRIPTIVE VS DEVIANT: A REGULATED “I(ME)”

Apart from agitation which may be regarded as an initial state of cognition of the minorities poets who write online, there is another important concern with what happens in such poems. Basically, this concern is by nature question-oriented, that is, it deals with the question: now that agitation is inevitable, how to righteously cope with it? Our analysis begins with the observation of examples:[6]

- 1)The God of Mountain summons me in the dreams...
- 2)I need a guide, a genuine guide, a guide from the ancient shrine...
- 3)I have to kneel down, ridding me of a corrupt me...
- 4)Where is the fairy; will she be here in the smog of the hazy sky?

The examples above have introduced a clearly-defined participant in the lines, differentiated in exact images or representation but indistinguishable in the nature or the essence, that is, godly or worshiped beings. Not like the Christian beliefs in many western literary works which usually bring about comfort and salvation, the very participant here in the online poems does not necessarily relate to awakening nor enlightenment arising from systematic teachings and doctrines, but for sure entails wisdom for relief, refinement and refreshments arising from conventionalized rituals and celebrations. More specifically, what is crystal in the function of the very participant is a prescriptive force, a force that dictates a path to take, a suggestion to follow and an ideal to ponder over. A wide range of words in various categories help to underpin such a discovery. For instance, in example 1), the verb “summon” is calling for an obligation to become obedient; in example 2), the nouns “guide” and “shrine” are also of an implication of asking people to fulfil their duties as have been mandated; and in example 4), “fairy” is not only an imaged beauty but a divine being who is here to effect irresistible and desirable changes.

Therefore, under the circumstances with a prescriptive force at present, the notion of “I(me)” is given a role of the “regulator”. In the first place, a regulator is the one who has completely comprehended the prescriptive force. By this we mean, the comprehension on the part of “I(me)” is more profound and accurate than that of people other than “I (me)”. In other words, with the best possible degree of understanding how reverent and pervasive the force is, “I” am the best possible spokesperson of such a force, consciously drawing on and depending on this force even though in a place geographically isolated from my origin. Secondly, the connotation of a regulator involves a self-aware responsibility to act on the instruction of such a force. This is particularly true if we take the scenario of the life patterns of those minorities poets in modern cities into consideration. When perplexed, from example, those poets are turning to such a force in a bid to avoid any possible deviance both in thought and in behavior, as they are convinced that this force is inherently trustworthy in directing them in the right way. In some other cases, this force functions not merely as a guide, but also as a means to punish or forgive. As example 3) indicates, my sins (although we do not have a clear clue as to what the “sin” is

about, it is presumed that the sin is related to poets' awkward interaction with the modern way of life in cities) should be dealt with in front of such a prescriptive force; it is such a force that determines my destiny.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis we have conducted in this article is of two points of importance. First, we have presented an unsatisfactorily addressed research question (the notion of "I") in the studies of online poems by ethnic minorities. Second, we have had a close look at the notion of "I(me)" from the perspective of cognitive stylistics, coming up with two preliminary findings: 1) the notion of "I" in such poems is characterized by agitation in terms of how to deal with the gap between the primordial and the modern; 2) the notion of "I(me)" serves as a regulator in order to make sure "I" am on the right track stipulated by the prescriptive force of traditions. However, we must admit that this current article lacks in-depth analysis as, for the time being, we have not constructed a considerably large corpus of samples of such online poems nor have we had sufficient numbers of poets of minority groups to track and interview. These problems are supposed to be solved as our research proceeds.

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