86. Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station*

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Abstract

Stylistics can be defined as analysing literary texts by employing some linguistic tools. Thus, there is a powerful relationship between stylistics and literary criticism and combining them while doing literary analysis helps literary critics to be more aware of the process of the interpretating literary texts. In this context, this study sets out to examine two significant works in 20th-century English literature within the framework of concepts and theories introduced in the studies of stylistics. The study first analyses *Ambulances* (1961) by Philip Larkin, a prominent author in post-war England and a nationally favourite poet. While doing so, it focuses on Larkin's repeating themes and subjects, involving pessimism, death, and fatalism. Then, the present study examines Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* (1982). An English playwright and eminent British dramatist who has won many awards, Pinter has written a lot of plays and dramatic sketches. In his plays, one can mostly see complex ambiguities, elegiac mysteries, and comic uncertainties. Therefore, this study is centred on Pinter's authorial and textual styles in *Victoria Station* by often referring to his explicitly political critiques. In both cases, the study employs Mick Short's stylistics toolkit, a methodology provided as an online course at Lancaster University (2005).

Keywords: Stylistics, Philip Larkin, *Ambulances*, Harold Pinter, *Victoria Station*

Philip Larkin'in *Ambulances* ve Harold Pinter'in *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi

Öz

Biçembilim edebi eserleri bazı dilbilimsel araçlar kullanarak analiz etme olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu nedenle, biçembilim ile edebi eleştiri arasında güçlü bir ilişki vardır ve bu ikisini bir araya getirmek edebiyat eleştirmenlerine edebi eserlerin yorumlanması sürecinde daha bilinçli olma imkanı tanır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma 20. yüzyıl İngiliz Edebiyatında iki önemli eseri biçembilim çalışmalarında atıfta bulunulan kavram ve kuramlar ışığında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma ilk olarak, savaş sonrası İngiltere'de önemli bir yazar olan ve ulusal olarak da oldukça tutulan bir şair olan Philip Larkin tarafından kaleme alınan *Ambulances* (1961) adlı şiiri ele almaktadır. Şiiri incelerken, çalışmanın ana odak noktası Larkin'in eserlerinde tekrar eden karamsarlık, yazgıcılık ve ölüm gibi tema ve konular olacaktır. Mevcut çalışma, daha sonra Harold Pinter'in *Victoria Station* (1982) adlı oyununu inceleyecektir. Ödüllü bir İngiliz oyun yazarı ve senarist olan ve modern zamanların önemli bir İngiliz tiyatrocusu olarak kabul edilen Pinter pek çok oyun ve skeç kaleme almıştır. Eserlerinde çoğunlukla karmaşık ikircimler, matemli gizemler ve komik belirsizlikler yer almaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada da Pinter'in *Victoria Station*'daki üslup ve metin içi biçemi açık siyasi eleştirilerine

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1402 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

odaklanılarak incelenecektir. Her iki analizde de, çalışmanın yöntemi Mick Short tarafından Lancaster Üniversitesinde (2005) çevrimiçi bir ders olarak da okutulan biçembilim araçlarını kullanmak üzere inşa edilecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Biçembilim, Philip Larkin, *Ambulances*, Harold Pinter, *Victoria Station*

1. Introduction

In his *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*, Mick Short defines stylistics to be "a new approach to the analysis of literary texts using linguistic description" (1996, p. 18). He further states that "there is a strong relationship between literary criticism and stylistics" (1996, p. 63). Therefore, bringing them together enables literary critics to become more conscious about the process of the interpretation of literary texts. There are various studies examining authorial styles. Many of these studies are built on stylistics and its tools. In a similar way, this study sets out to examine *Ambulances* (1961) by Philip Larkin and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* (1982) by employing concepts and theories put forth by Short and his school.

Philip Larkin, a prominent author in post-war England, was a nationally favourite poet that was mostly defined as 'England's other Poet Laureate' till his death in 1985. His poetic style has been identified by Eugene V. Moran as "combining an ordinary, colloquial style with clarity, a quiet, reflective tone, ironic understatement, and a direct engagement with commonplace experiences" (2002, p. 130). However, the 'mature' Larkin's style is tied with his repeating themes and subjects, involving pessimism, death, and fatalism. Similarly, Jean Hartley (2008) defines his style as a "piquant mixture of lyricism and discontent". He further argues that Larkin's poetry is "that of the detached, sometimes lugubrious, sometimes tender observer". As will be illustrated below, these features can also be seen in one of his last popular poems, "*Ambulances*".

Similarly, Harold Pinter is an award-winner English playwright and screenwriter. Being a prominent modern British dramatist, Pinter has authored 29 plays and 15 dramatic sketches and co-authored two works for stage and radio. His works involve complicated ambiguities, elegiac secrecies, and comic uncertainties. Pinter accepts the impact of Samuel Beckett on his works and his style. Similar to that of Beckett, the absurdism of Pinter is best represented in his early plays. However, in his later career, Pinter's works tend to be shorter and more explicitly political, offering critiques of suppression, persecution, and other abuses of human rights, associated with the obvious invulnerability of strength. In this respect, although not one of Pinter's best-known plays, *Victoria Station* (1982) still becomes a significant short play for the reasons that will be discussed below.

2. A stylistic analysis of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances*

For ease of reference, below is presented the whole transcript of the poem with line numbers before a general overview of the poem's textual interpretation is provided.

(1)   Closed like confessionals, they thread

          Loud noons of cities, giving back

          None of the glances they absorb.

          Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque,

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(5)   They come to rest at any kerb:

All streets in time are visited.

Then children strewn on steps or road,

Or women coming from the shops

Past smells of different dinners, see

(10)   A wild white face that overtops

Red stretcher-blankets momently

As it is carried in and stowed,

And sense the solving emptiness

That lies just under all we do,

(15)   And for a second get it whole,

So permanent and blank and true.

The fastened doors recede. Poor soul,

They whisper at their own distress;

For borne away in deadened air

(20)   May go the sudden shut of loss

Round something nearly at an end,

And what cohered in it across

The years, the unique random blend

Of families and fashions, there

(25)   At last begin to loosen. Far

From the exchange of love to lie

Unreachable inside a room

The traffic parts to let go by

1404 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

Brings closer what is left to come,

(30)   And dulls to distance all we are.

2.1. General remarks

As Philip Larkin grows old, he becomes more and more worried about the theme of death. In his poem *Ambulances*, he makes use of an ambulance to reflect the state of being lonely when someone gets aged and/or is on the verge of death. He also reminds the reader of the fact that death arrives at everybody, sooner or later. Here, the ambulance is actually similar to the Grim Reaper, who is assigned to claim souls and take them into heaven or hell. Larkin uses many similes in the poem so as to strengthen this effect. Therefore, *Ambulances* totally celebrates the values of consciousness. It humbly but strongly obtains proof of common life to represent a reality that is globally accepted. In this respect, the poem makes one feel unhappy and without hope for the future. The title itself refers to a depressing theme as ambulances drive through a region and stop solely for a very ill man to take him to a hospital.

Everybody stares at an ambulance as it patrols through the roads although the ambulance does not look back at anybody. The diseased man is carried to a hospital and the feeling of loss that the onlookers may have experienced suddenly fades away. The man, who is taken to the hospital in the ambulance, leads a significant life that mixes family relationships and involves observing the fashions of the time. However, that life now finishes and actually loses all its meaning.

In brief, this poem symbolises the inevitability of death and the common fear that it is always just around the corner for us all. Larkin manages to evoke a sense of foreboding in the poem although he is just analysing the visit of an ambulance to a street. The poem makes us all stop for a second and reflect upon a loved one who is no longer with us or perhaps our own death. It creates an uneasy tension between the reader and the poem. We can all sympathise with Larkin when he reminds us of the fact that human reacts to have sympathy with and pity for the poor anonymous person in the ambulance. However, he also highlights that we often stop to look at ambulances and be thankful that it is not us, or indeed a loved one. Therefore, *Ambulances* is a profound poem and, similar to many of Larkin's poems, it deals with death in a manageable manner so that we can identify ourselves with it.

2.2. Lexical features

To do a stylistic analysis, the present study first starts with open-class words in the poem. Open-class words are words that mostly have meaning in a language, contrary to closed-class (grammatical) words like determiners (e.g. this, that, the) and prepositions (e.g. in, at, on). Table 1, below, demonstrates how the open class words are scattered in the poem and what functions they have such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.

Table 1: Open Class Words found in "*Ambulances*"

NOUNS	MAIN VERBS	ADJECTIVES	ADVERBS
Confessional	Listen	closed	momently

Noons	Thread	loud	just
Cities	giving	glossy	nearly
Glances	Absorb	grey	**3**
Arms	come (x2)	wild	
Plaque	Rest	white	
Kerb	are visited	red	
Time	(are) strewn	solving	
Children	See	permanent	
Steps	Overtops	blank	
Women	is carried	true	
Shops	(is) stowed	fastened	
Smells	sense	poor	
Dinners	Lies	deadened	
Face	Do	sudden	
stretcher-blankets	Get	unique	
Emptiness	Recede	random	
Second	whisper	unreachable	

1406 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

Doors	(is) borne	shut	
Soul	Go	**19**	
Distress	cohered		
Air	begin		
Loss	Loosen		
End	let go		
Years	brings		
Blend	is left		
Families	Are		
Fashions	Past		
Exchange	**28**		
Love			
Room			
Traffic			
Parts			
Distance			
34			

As the table above illustrates, the poem consists mainly of nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Out of 34 nouns, 15 - nearly half - are abstract, which represents the elusive nature of the poem's subject - death. On the other hand, the other half of the nouns in the work are concrete, and this mixture of nouns from two distinct semantic categories can be claimed to illustrate the allegorical analogy of the ambulance with death. Therefore, it represents both intangible and observable processes of death in the same way and shows this duality through similitude.

When the verbs in the poem are examined, it might be said that they make a sense of immediacy and generality due to the prevalence of present simple verbs. Only in the fourth stanza, line 22, the verb 'cohere' is in the past form. Apart from that exception, all the verbs in the poem are in present simple or present progressive forms. This clearly illustrates the idea that we, as human beings, are so close to death. Even, we are *in medias res* of the things that could result in our death. It is also strengthened by the three adverbs of manner, which have a sense of suddenness (*momently, just*) and proximity (*nearly*).

Moreover, the use of relatively large numbers of adjectives is also worth examining in terms of stylistic analysis. Out of 84 open-class words included in the poem, 19 (nearly 23%) are adjectives. This figure is three times as many as Ellegard's norm (1962) for written English (7.4%), which has been based on the Brown corpus of American English. It can be argued that this unusual density of an open-class word category has an effect on style and meaning. Actually, it basically contributes to the allegorical effect that Larkin wishes to create in the poem. Since an analogy is established between an ambulance and death in the poem, this must be strengthened through the use of descriptive adjectives in order to have an effect of parallelism. For instance, the first line starts with 'closed-like confessionals'. Confessionals are closed stalls in a Roman Catholic Church where parsons listen to confessions, and the enclosed door of the confessional is akin to the limited area of an ambulance after its doors are closed.

In addition, the colour of the ambulance is a 'light glossy grey' in the poem and it has a plate with the emergency services' coat of arms on the side. It suits the idea that an ambulance is coloured grey as they often refer to the grey area between life and death. Some people who get into the ambulance alive might die in it. Moreover, the phrase 'Light glossy grey' may also allude to the various stages in life. While the Light represents the infant stage, the Glossy reminds the reader of the prime of youth and the grey is, of course, the elderly people. It reiterates how individuals from all walks of life are vulnerable to the universal phenomenon of death. Also, the man carried in the ambulance is denied any identity. Thus, he is basically identified with a 'wild white face'. It can be inferred that the person in the ambulance becomes aged and that the whole blood has been taken away from his/her face on account of fear or sickness. Wild may mean that the patient is frightened or has some psychosis, seizure, or other sicknesses that require hospitalization. The contrast between the 'wild white face' and the 'Red stretcher-blankets' also adds to the impact Larkin is attempting to create. A similar contrast is observed in the first line of stanza four. The word 'borne' is a good example of Larkin's way of playing with words. He employs a pun on the patient being taken by simply highlighting the contrast between being born and dying.

2.3. Graphological and phonological features

As stated above, Larkin's poetic style is ordinary and colloquial. It has a clear, quiet, and reflective tone. Therefore, it represents a direct engagement with commonplace experiences. In *Ambulances*, Larkin's graphology mostly conforms to traditional poetry norms. In each line, the first word starts with a capital letter. The transition between stanzas is through conjunctions such as 'then, for, and, at last'. This parallelism demonstrates a linear effect that represents the respective process of human life from cradle

1408 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

to grave. Even the last stanza starts with a time adverbial 'at last', which contributes to the climactic effect, meaning that life is over and now we are close to death. 'And' is used four times in the third stanza, this stresses the continuous process of the realisation that death is unavoidable and comes to us all. Enjambment is then used by Larkin between stanzas four and five to show the loosening hold on the life of the patient as the ambulance transports him/her away from all that is familiar.

However, the proper use of punctuation and regular formation of the poem diverges the domain of language from the colloquial to the religious field. This is an internal deviation for Larkin since it is different from the ordinary and daily tone in many Larkin poems. It is be considered by Keith Tuma that this creates an effect of solemnity and dignity in the poem and is intended to build up a sombre tone, which is parallel with the similar nature of the poem's subject, death (2001, p. 18). Larkin implies the reader that this is a religious sermon about death rather than a simplistic description of a daily routine. The poetic form of the text also reminds us of the Holy Scripture and the inclusion of ecclesiastical terms such as 'confession' and 'soul' represents Biblical doctrines, as well.

The phonology of the poem is also significant regarding stylistic features. Larkin's regular rhyme scheme and rhythm reflect the regularity of the scene he is describing. Death can be happening anywhere at any time. Unique rhyme type (ABCBCA), iambic tetrameter, and other poetic features such as alliteration, assonance, and consonance make up a musicality effect and therefore create a resemblance to hymns that are chanted by church choirs. Such examples of alliteration and assonance can be found in line 4 'glossy grey', line 10 'wild white', line 17 'poor soul', and line 24 'families and fashions'. On the other hand, the sound of the ambulance is described in the second line. 'Loud noons of cities' represent both the uneasiness and disturbance when death comes near. The 'silence' of death is juxtaposed against the 'loud noons of the cities.' Therefore, it emphasizes the cacophony within the city as the ambulance urges to its emergency. In the third stanza, a snippet of conversation – 'Poor soul' is used to emphasise a realisation that we will be touched by death, too. This idea is strengthened by the final line of the stanza: 'They whisper at their own distress', an onomatopoeia being used to help create a clear picture of the reaction of the onlookers.

2.4. Grammatical features

Another important stylistic effect foregrounded in the poem is the difference between active and passive uses of predicates. Although most of the verbs are in active form, the phrase in line 12 'As it is carried in and stowed' is a significant grammatical deviation. Larkin uses these passive words to emphasize that the body in the ambulance is no longer human and could be carried as an item. Moreover, syntactic inversions and enjambments between lines are also significant deviations in the poem. These deviations strengthen the musical effect that Larkin tries to create. Therefore, they contribute to the objective of transforming the poem into a hymn. The syntactic parallelism of the sentences makes a major contribution to the musicality of the poem, as well. For instance, the first three lines of stanza 1 have the same syntactic order: "Closed like confessionals, they thread / Loud noons of cities, giving back / None of the glances they absorb". The Object + Subject + Verb order of the lines are similar and so create a parallelism effect. As a result, they provide an ease of composing and chanting the poem in a sombre way.

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2.5. Semantic features

In these lines: "Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque / They come to rest at any kerb / All streets in time are visited" the coming of the ambulance resembles the motion of a man. Normally, ambulances do not have 'arms'. Therefore it is semantically a deviant concept. Also, 'resting' is an action that demonstrates relaxation that may never be linked to an ambulance, which is also an indicator of disturbance.

Moreover, in stanza 3, "And sense the solving emptiness / That lies just under all we do," there is an effect of deviation, too. In written English, solving does not come together with the abstract noun emptiness, nor does 'emptiness' need any adjective. However, in the quote above, solving interestingly collocates with emptiness to signify the cognitive theme that we understand the fact of death as it estranges our beloveds. 'Solving' is a verb that has favourable meanings. However, it is linked with 'emptiness', having a negative one. Thus, contrasting aspects are included in the same line in order to emphasize the firm fact that death is inescapable and no one can abstain from it.

In the fourth stanza, "For borne away in deadened air / May go the sudden shut of loss / Round something nearly at an end" there are some other semantic deviations, as well. In the collocation of 'deadened air', the gloomy ambiance is emphasized and it is narrated through a uniquely created adjective 'deadened'. The action verb 'go' essentially points to a hollow emotion which is felt when any beloved one is taken away by death. This means an end to everything about life, relations, wishes, etc. 'Shut' is also a non-traditional adjective collocated with loss as we have a 'sense of loss'. However, 'shut' is chosen here to refer to the portrayal of stopped life. Therefore, this untypical collocation also becomes a significant aspect of cognitive metaphors.

3. A stylistic analysis of Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station*

Although not one of Pinter's best-known plays, *Victoria Station* (1982) is still a significant short play for various reasons. In this respect, this part sets out to examine Pinter's authorial and textual styles in *Victoria Station* by mostly referring to Mick Short's stylistics toolkit, a methodology provided as an online course at Lancaster University (2005).

3.1. General remarks

Victoria Station comprises of a radio dialogue between a minicab controller (or dispatcher) and a driver (called #274) who waits by the side of a gloomy park in Crystal Palace, supposedly listening to further orders. After the stage directions "Lights up on office. CONTROLLER sitting at microphone and Lights up on DRIVER in car" (Pinter, 1993, p. 98), the play alternates between these settings. The controller tries to tell the driver to take a customer from Victoria Station. However, the driver refuses to go, being obsessed with his current customer who is seemingly not moving, maybe even dead, in the rear seat. The Controller's spirit changes through different phases of mystification towards irritation and later probably compassion, concealing some worse intents of what to do with the Driver.

Lasting less than ten minutes, the play's style is often comic as the Controller gets more and more irritated at the Driver's disobedience. But, when the play gets on, the Controller's instructions get gradually perturbative threats. Still, the Driver discloses that this customer is a young woman with whom he has fallen in love and that he does not want to depart from her. He dreams that he will even get married to her and that they will die together in the car. However, he previously admits that he is already married to a wife with a little daughter. The play gets more sombre in style as the Controller

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1410 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

attempts to ensure the frightened and mistrustful Driver that things are going to be fine, eventually persuading him to remain exactly where he is when the Controller gets prepared to abandon his gloomy, cold office.

3.2. Gricean analysis

Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle theory suggests that we cooperate to achieve mutual conversational ends through the use of certain conversational maxims that include quantity, quality, relation, and manner (1989, p. 188). By violating or floating these maxims in a foregrounded way, we intend to put some extra meaning (implicature in Grice's terms) into our speech. In *Victoria Station*, these maxims are frequently floated in order to create an effect of oddness within the play. For instance, at the very beginning of the play, the two characters cannot communicate in a healthy way due to the driver's consistent floating of conversational maxims. The extract below clearly demonstrates this ambiguity:

Lights up on office. CONTROLLER sitting at microphone.

CONTROLLER (1)

274? Where are you?

Lights up on DRIVER in car.

CONTROLLER (2)

274? Where are you?

Pause.

DRIVER (3)

Hullo?

CONTROLLER (4)

274?

DRIVER (5)

Hullo?

CONTROLLER (6)

Is that 274?

DRIVER (7)

That's me.

CONTROLLER (8)

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Where are you?

DRIVER (9)

What?

Pause.

CONTROLLER (10)

I'm talking to 274? Right?

DRIVER (11)

Yes. That's me. I'm 274. Who are you?

Pause.

CONTROLLER (12)

Who am I?

DRIVER (13)

Yes.

CONTROLLER (14)

Who do you think I am? I'm your office.

DRIVER (15)

Oh yes.

CONTROLLER (16)

Where are you?

DRIVER (17)

I'm cruising.

As illustrated above, both characters employ a vague speech tone rather than being brief, clear, and orderly. Therefore, they float Grice's maxim of manner. Moreover, they are not relevant while answering each other's questions and thus float the maxim of relation. For example, in turns 16-17, the controller asks the driver where he is but he simply does not answer the controller's question and instead says what he is doing. As seen above, the speeches are quite short, and there is silence on more than one occasions. Considering the fact that this is the first time they have met, the sentence length is also a float of Grice's quantity maxim. In addition, in turns 58-59, when the driver is asked to "go to Victoria Station", he

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1412 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

simply says that "I don't know it" (Pinter, 1993, p. 99). The driver lies because he does not want to leave the woman in the rear of the car, with whom he has just fallen in love. This is also a significant float of quality which creates a foregrounded implicature within the play. This conversational maxim analysis clearly shows that Pinter violates these maxims deliberately and so establishes a foregrounding effect by the use of these maxim floats. He also deviates from our schematic knowledge, which consists only of an appropriate relation between a cab driver and controller. Therefore, he adds ambiguity and weirdness into the play, which are important requirements for the absurd drama.

3.3. Power relations

In order to examine power relations between the two characters, a short extract from the play is presented below, which will be analysed in accordance with turn-taking mechanisms suggested by Culpeper, Short, and Verdonk (1998, p. 2).

> CONTROLLER (18)
>
> What do you mean?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Listen son. I've got a job for you. If you're in the area I think you're in. Where are you?
>
> DRIVER (19)
>
> I'm just cruising about.
>
> CONTROLLER (20)
>
> Don't cruise. Stop cruising. Nobody's asking you to cruise about. What the fuck are you cruising about for?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> 274?
>
> DRIVER (21)
>
> Hullo. Yes. That's me.
>
> CONTROLLER (22)
>
> I want you to go to Victoria Station. I want you to pick up a customer coming from Boulogne. That is what I want you to do. Do you follow me? Now the question I want to ask you is this. Where are you? And don't say you're just cruising about. Just tell me if you're anywhere near Victoria Station.
>
> DRIVER (23)
>
> Victoria what?

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Pause.

CONTROLLER (24)

Station.

Pause.

Can you help me on this?

DRIVER (25)

Sorry?

CONTROLLER (26)

Can you help me on this? Can you come to my aid on this?

Pause.

You see, 274, I've got no one else in the area, you see. I've only got you in the area. I think. Do you follow me?

DRIVER (27)

I follow you, yes.

CONTROLLER (28)

And this is a good job, 274. He wants you to take him to Cuckfield.

DRIVER (29)

Eh?

CONTROLLER (30)

He wants you to take him to Cuckfield. You're meeting the 10.22 from Boulogne. The European Special. His name's MacRooney. He's a little bloke with a limp. I've known him for years. You pick him up under the clock. You'll know him by his hat. He'll have a hat on with a feather in it. He'll be carrying fishing tackle. 274?

DRIVER (31)

Hullo?

CONTROLLER (32)

Are you hearing me?

1414 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

DRIVER (33)

Yes.

Pause.

CONTROLLER (34)

What are you doing?

DRIVER (35)

I'm not doing anything.

When the number of turns in the quote above is analysed, it is seen that both characters have the same turns: the Driver (9), and the Controller (9). However, as seen in the table below, there is a great difference regarding the length of the turns.

Table 2. Turn-length by character

The Driver	9 turns	22 words	Average: 2.4 per turn
The Controller	9 turns	234 words	Average: 26.0 per turn

It can be expected that the controller, as the most powerful participant socially, has more words per turn than the driver. So, he actually speaks ten times as many words per turn as the driver. This turn-taking pattern which suits schematic assumptions helps us understand how the force of the controller's personality is affecting the turn-taking mechanism in the play. However, no interruptions are observed during the speech between the Controller and the Driver.

On the other hand, there are seven non-fluency markers. These are the non-lexical word 'Eh?' and pauses as a stage direction. They mostly occur in the driver's speech. He uses 'Eh?' once and the pause marker occurs 6 times. These both suggest hesitancy in the driver's speech. Similarly, as his name suggests, the controller effectively controls the topic of the conversation, which contributes to the portrayal of his powerful personality and discourse style. Therefore, the controller quickly becomes the initiator of most of the conversational exchanges although the driver does not seem to be concerned about the conversation.

Likewise, the controller addresses the driver with his licence number. This is not unusual when we consider the social discourse between a cab driver and the controller on a radio conversation. It signifies the power relations and dominant position of the controller. The controller then asks some intimate questions to help establish a different social relationship. There are various speech acts used by the Controller in the play. These are questions (11), imperatives (5), and an offer (1). In brief, the controller uses a rich array of speech acts, suggesting that he is more at ease than the driver.

This detailed analysis of the turn-taking mechanism clearly demonstrates the powerful and dominant position of the controller and so adds up to the effect of superiority authorized by him. However, this power relation fades away towards the end of the play when the characters develop a more intimate relationship. This dramatic shift deviates from our schematic knowledge and therefore creates an effect of weirdness, typical for the genre of absurd drama

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3.4. Politeness

Politeness is a concept that the linguists utilize to mean various linguistic and non-linguistic strategies. It displays to the hearer that "the speaker (i) has a positive opinion of the hearer and (ii) does not want to impose on him/her" (Short, 1996, p. 5). So as to carry out a discourse analysis in terms of politeness theory, a short extract from the play is presented below for further examination.

CONTROLLER (106)

Drop your passenger. Drop your passenger at his chosen destination and proceed to Victoria Station. Otherwise I'll destroy you bone by bone. I'll suck you in and blow you out in little bubbles. I'll chew your stomach out with my own teeth. I'll eat all the hair off your body. You'll end up looking like a pipe cleaner. Get me?

Pause.

274?

Pause.

You're beginning to obsess me. I think I'm going to die. I'm alone in this miserable freezing fucking office and nobody loves me. Listen, pukeface –

DRIVER (107)

Yes?

Pause.

CONTROLLER (108)

135? 135? Where are you?

DRIVER (109)

Don't have anything to do with 135. They're all bloodsuckers. I'm the only one you can trust.

Pause.

In the quote above, the Controller loses his temper after the driver's continuous irrelevant speech style. The Driver becomes irritating since he threatens the controller's negative face by impeding his attempt to achieve his goal, which is making the Driver take a customer from Victoria station. Therefore, the Controller gets obsessed and begins threatening the Driver's positive face by uttering unpleasant things. In response, however, the Driver enhances the Controller's positive face by simply saying that "I'm the only one you can trust". Thus, a more intimate relationship is established between the two characters from now on.

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1416 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

CONTROLLER (112)

Put your passenger on to me. Let me have a word with him.

DRIVER (113)

I can't. She's asleep on the back seat.

CONTROLLER (114)

She?

DRIVER (115)

Can I tell you a secret?

CONTROLLER (116)

Please do.

DRIVER (117)

I think I've fallen in love. For the first time in my life.

CONTROLLER (118)

Who have you fallen in love with?

DRIVER (119)

With this girl on the back seat. I think I'm going to keep her for the rest of my life. I'm going to stay in this car with her for the rest of my life. I'm going to marry her in this car. We'll die together in this car.

Pause.

CONTROLLER (120)

So you've found true love at last, eh, 274?

DRIVER (121)

Yes. I've found true love at last.

CONTROLLER (122)

So you're a happy man now then, are you?

DRIVER (123)

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I'm very happy. I've never known such happiness.

CONTROLLER (124)

Well, I'd like to be the first to congratulate you, 274. I'd like to extend my sincere felicitations to you.

DRIVER (125)

Thank you very much.

CONTROLLER (126)

Don't mention it. I'll have to make a note in my diary not to forget your Golden Wedding, won't I? I'll bring along some of the boys to drink your health. Yes, I'll bring along some of the boys. We'll all have a few jars and a bit of a sing-song.

Pause.

274?

Pause.

DRIVER (127)

Hullo. Yes. It's me.

CONTROLLER (128)

Listen. I've been thinking. I've decided that what I'd like to do now is to come down there and shake you by the hand straightaway. I'm going to shut this little office and I'm going to jump into my old car and I'm going to pop down to see you, to shake you by the hand. All right?

DRIVER (129)

Fine. But what about this man coming off the train at Victoria Station – the 10.22 from Boulogne?

After the Driver discloses his secret to the Controller, a more polite conversation takes place between the two. Rather than threatening each other's faces, they both start to enhance their positive and negative faces. The Controller uses linguistic mitigation and indirectness as a strategy to repair the damage that he does to the Driver's positive face in his previous utterances. Therefore, he wants to be the first to congratulate the driver on his first love and come to him to shake hands. The Driver, in response, enhances the Controller's negative face by reminding him of the goal that he would like to accomplish.

It is this large and systematic transformation, involving so many aspects of conversational behaviour that makes the dialogues at the end of *Victoria Station* both striking and amusing. We feel sympathetic towards the characters on their plight and laugh at the way they turn each other's conversational maxims

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1418 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2022.31 (December)

Stylistic analyses of Philip Larkin's *Ambulances* and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

upside down. Therefore, as the quote examined illustrates, *Victoria Station* seems to strengthen its absurd and ambiguous tone by deviating from politeness theory, as well.

4. Conclusion

Philip Larkin's famous poem *Ambulances* mainly reflects common, inevitable and dreadful features of death. Apart from lexical choices and poetic form, Larkin uses stylistic tools to emphasize these meanings and various effects in his poem. Proportional usage of abstract and concrete nouns, the present form of verbs, and abundant uses of adjectives make up an analogy effect that represents fateful, factual and similar characteristics of death. While graphological parallelism illustrates the linear process of human life, phonological order portrays the regularity of death. However, they also build up a sombre tone that can be found in religious sermons or church hymns. This is mainly because of the link that Larkin seeks to establish between death and religion although he is known to be an atheist.

Grammatical deviations along with syntactic inversions and enjambments also add up to the effect that Larkin aims to create. Appropriate use of passives when the human body becomes a corpse stresses the parallelism effect. Similarly, syntactic inversions and enjambments contribute to the musicality of the poem. On the other hand, semantic deviations in the poem demonstrate the effect of contrast that Larkin sets up while playing with the words. Unusual word combinations and morphological deviations add up to the uniqueness of the poem's subject matter, death. In brief, as illustrated above, Larkin employs many stylistic devices to make his poem sound relevant to the theme that he foregrounds in his work.

Similarly, Harold Pinter is known for his absurd style that involves ambiguity and weirdness. As can be clearly seen above, in *Victoria Station*, this style is retained through the use of certain stylistic devices, too. First, Pinter cleverly employs Grice's maxim floats, which contribute to the absurdity within the play. The conversational obscurity is established by using floats of quality, quantity, relation, and manner maxims. Pinter uses power relations between the two characters in an appropriate way. However, the Controller's dominancy over the Driver yields no efficient result and so creates an effect of weirdness, as well. The discourse between the two characters is mostly impolite in a stylistic context. Both characters threaten each other's positive and negative faces by uttering unpleasant things and hindering their goals. But, this unappealing conversation changes dramatically when the Driver starts to establish intimate contact with the Controller. This sudden change of style makes the audience feel sympathetic towards the characters, which also contributes to the overall absurdity of the play.

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Philip Larkin'in *Ambulances* ve Harold Pinter'in *Victoria Station* adlı eserlerinin biçembilim açısından değerlendirilmesi / İşçi, V.

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