

DIMINUTION AND OVERSTATEMENT IN STYLISTIC DEVICES

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Abstract: In the article diminution and increase of sense, size and various qualities in some stylistic devices are explored. In the article it is noted that meiosis, litotes, euphemism, anticlimax have the functions of reduction but hyperbole, vulgarism, sarcasm, climax have the functions of increase. Besides, examples have been taken for fusions of some stylistic devices.

Keywords: euphemism, meiosis, stylistic device, hyperbole, litotes, diminish..

This article will deal with the stylistic devices which express diminution and overstatement of different notions. The most noticeable aspect in this part of research work is that several stylistic devices may have the quality of reduction. This analogical order may also belong to exaggeration. In this case an interesting question may arise: Diminution or exaggeration of what?

To find a more detailed answer to the above-mentioned question it is essential to investigate the topic a bit more logically and philosophically. It is possible to mean the size, quality, and the meaning of the object or action respectively. Not to mix afore-said notions up, it is inevitable to differentiate them.

Moreover, some of them are often identified and regarded as synonyms. Meiosis and litotes are claimed to be synonymous stylistic devices by many linguists in different sources however the samples and examples belonging to them don't confirm the same idea. Meiosis is not known in Azerbaijani as a linguistic term but it is quite famous and frequently-used as a medical term. In medicine it means the division of cells. The language is constantly progressing and nothing remains the same. The goal of this article is not criticism in any language. The aim is just to research and clarify obscure facts of local language. In spite of all these facts meiosis has similar approaches and definitions with litotes. In the book of Renaissance Figures of Speech written by Adamson, Sylvia meiosis is defined as "Meiosis typically works to diminish the importance of something or someone in order to simultaneously heighten something else in its place. Such a comparative approach is necessary for the effectiveness of the device" However examples yet show diminution in size in most cases.¹

Shoes for Italy

Tiger for Scandinavia

Big apple for New-York

¹ Adamson, Sylvia. Renaissance Figures of Speech. Cambridge University Press. 2007. P 149.

In above-mentioned example several stylistic devices ally. Apart from meiosis simile is also observed in the example. The shoes like shape of Italy on the map gives us reason to resemble a big country to small human shoes. Analogical resemblance may also refer to Scandinavia and New-York.

In rhetoric, meiosis is a euphemistic figure of speech that intentionally understates something or implies that it is lesser in significance or size than it really is. The term is derived from the Greek (“to make smaller”, “to diminish”) (3) E.g.

The Tasman Sea located between New Zealand and Australia is sometimes called Ditch which means a deep trench. This is called so because of too much depth of this sea. As we see the meaning of the word is deliberately understated.

Meiosis is sometimes used to form ironical mockery understating the significance of the object. This is sometimes used in speech to mock someone making his profession the target of laugh. In this case both the size of the object and the significance of the objects are diminished deliberately mainly creating ironical disrespect. From this point of view it is possible to claim that irony conjoins with meiosis in the example below

E.g. *Treehugger for environmentalist*

Dogs for traffic-police

Meiosis is the stylistic device diminishing the size of object however litotes weakens the meaning or significance of expression. In litotes the affirmative idea is formed by means of negation or vice-versa.

E.g. “*It is not bad*” instead of “*it is good*”

So the quality of goodness declines by means of negation in above-mentioned example. In fact the negative sentence bears the function of positiveness. It is a denial of negative sentence. But the sense is affirmative. This denial may not be only in affirmations but also in negations. If the words ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are shifted there will be denial of negation in the sentence. In the mean the quality of badness weakens. Such kind of examples are usually used to make euphemisms by avoiding harshness. E.g. “*It is not good*” instead of “*It is bad*”.

According to Hollander, Lee.M litotes are just denials in negations or affirmations. He wrote in his book by name “*Litotes in Old Norse*”; “*In Old Norse, there were several types of litotes that got the same point across. These points are denied negatives, denied positives (this is probably the most used method), creating litotes without negating anything, and creating litotes using a negative adjective*”.²

Anticlimax is the next stylistic means which describes an abrupt reduction of meaning in a comic or humorous way. The most distinctive feature of this syntactical stylistic device is that, anticlimax has sudden unexpected fall of meaning or quality.

² Hollander, Lee M. “Litotes in Old Norse” PMLA.1938. p 33

Unlike meiosis anticlimax is a syntactical stylistic device. Because the meaning seems to be analogical in two or more sentences but in the last sentence the meaning unexpectedly opposes to previous ones. Anticlimax may be regarded a type of antithesis. The main difference between them is process. There is a process in anticlimax while antithesis doesn't have such a quality.

E.g. *Thank you! I knew my friends and foes well thanks to you. If you didn't turn my life to hell, I wouldn't have known all these.*

Euphemism is a stylistic device which reduces the quality of any expression, namely, diminishing the harshness of an action or object substituting the harsh words with more gentle ones. A euphemism is a generally innocuous word or expression used in place of one that may be found offensive or suggest something unpleasant.

E.g.. Instead of 'to die' to *pass away, to join the great majority, to go to the last home, to be no more, to breathe one's last, to go west, to give up the ghost, to depart* and many other expressions could be used.

A number of stylistic devices express diminution however some of them bear the quality of opposed meaning. It means that some have the quality of exaggeration or overstatement. Increase can be slight, gradual, considerable, abrupt and too much or overstated. Increase is too much in hyperbole.

Hyperbole is a stylistic device which deliberately exaggerates or overstates the quality of the object or action. Hyperbole is also known as auxesis. But this term is rarely employed by linguists. These two words are regarded synonymous. E.g. Bag weighed a ton.

Climax is a syntactical stylistic device which the significance, emotional tension of expressions increase gradually. Gradual increase is gained in 3 ways; logical, emotional and quantitative. Climax is repetition of the scheme anadiplosis at least three times, with the elements arranged in an order of increasing importance.

e. g. *He was a good man, sincere, hospitable and most respected man in town.*

The gradual overstatement of the quality is observed along the sentence in climax. The meaning of words become more powerful reaching climax. This syntactical stylistic device finds itself in two or more words depending on how many adjectives have followed the object along the sentence.

Vulgarism and sarcasm also possess the increase. Vulgarism increases the harshness obviously while euphemism decreases harshness. Sarcasm increases the strength of criticism with special pathos whipping the deformities and shortages of society. Sarcasm is a sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark; a bitter gibe or taunt. Only people can be sarcastic, whereas situations are ironic (7). This is why this is sometimes claimed to be the strengthened form of satire. Satire exposes deformities confidentially while sarcasm whips all drawbacks obviously.

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