

A Feast of Senses

Rhetorical Devices in the Prose of Salman Rushdie With Special Reference to Metaphors and Adverbs

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The present paper will examine Salman Rushdie's prose from a rhetorical point of view, looking especially at metaphors and adverbs. The two categories may indeed overlap, as will be shown. It should also be noted that the present analysis is not a literary analysis, but focuses entirely on Rushdie's language; in other words it is a study of form, not content. It is of course hoped that it nevertheless might provide insights also for the literary student of Rushdie. Section 1 discusses rhetorical devices in Salman Rushdie's work, generally and with particular emphasis on metaphor usage. Section 2 outlines basic adverb types and their functions, while section 3 provides a more thorough analysis of the adverbs used by Rushdie. Finally, section 4 contains a summary and conclusion.¹

¹ A note should be added on the background of the present paper. As a linguist, I am normally interested in the cognitive non-literary aspects of metaphors (a theoretical perspective which is particularly associated with George Lakoff, e.g. Lakoff 1987), and adverbs have been my special field for many years. The paper is therefore necessarily a *linguistic* analysis of a literary text, or set of texts, though an attempt has been made to keep the linguistics as non-technical as possible.

1. Metaphors and other rhetorical devices in Salman Rushdie's prose

1.1 General introduction

Salman Rushdie's books (and I will here be concerned mainly with *Shame*, *Midnight's children*, and the *Moor's last sigh*; in examples, these works will hereafter be referred to as S, MC, and MLS respectively) function as extended and complex fairytales in which convoluted systems of interlocking stories are presented in an oral narrative tradition. This is an interactive style in which the narrator, often the main protagonist, interacts with the audience – asking questions, inserting his commentary, etc. The rhetoric is that of fairytales, as are the vocabulary and plots. Rushdie's novels have been compared to the colourful vulgarity of the Bombay cinema, but his vulgarities – and vulgarities they often are – are transformed into a bejewelled fabric.

Especially notable in Rushdie is his focus on the physical senses – in particular vision, for instance colour. Thus he brings the world, several worlds, *ante oculos*; his entire literary *oeuvre* might indeed be classified as a hypotyposis or *evidentia/demonstratio*. Other senses, however, are important as well; in particular this is true of smell, but also taste. The senses are often treated synaesthetically, as when scents are classified by colours, (MC p. 318). Rushdie is an artist using language not just to observe nature, but to recreate it, cf. Vickers (1988:333), and indeed his frequent linguistic innovations are perfectly in line with this, cf. (1) where the noun *angel* becomes an expressive, highly physical verb.

- (1) The *angeling of Babar* must have been just about complete by the time of his death...(S 132)

It is, then, the senses we will concentrate on here – the metaphors and adverbs which convey a feast of senses.

As is well known (cf. for instance Merivale 1995:83), Rushdie's narratives may be characterized as magical realism.

It should also be mentioned that Rushdie makes use of the narrative traditions of India as well as the traditions of classical and western rhetoric. His novels, at any rate, abound with strong rhetorical and metaphorical strategies, whether we assign them to Indian or western traditions. Some random examples of frequently occurring classical rhetorical figures will provide a brief introduction, cf. (2).

(2) (Anaphora/repetitio) There were rubies and diamonds. There was the ice of the future, waiting between the water's skin. There was an oath: not to bow down before god or man.. .. The oath created a hole... (MC. 107)

(Isocolon/compar) Precise duty of units? – To obey unquestioningly; to seek unflaggingly; to arrest remorselessly. (MC 348)

(Aposiopesis/praeclusio) Well, then: at night. No, it's important to be more... On the strike of midnight as a matter of fact. (MC 9)

(Asyndeton/dissolutio) Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicians ratified my authenticity. (MC 9)

In short, Rushdie makes frequent and effective use of affective rhetoric and the expressive functionality of figures (*figurae sententiarum*)(Vickers 1988:322).

1.2 Metaphors

Rushdie's metaphor usage is innovative and coherent. There are several examples of superordinate, controlling metaphors, sustained throughout the novels, such as the children born at midnight in the novel *Midnight's children* (who are said to be handcuffed to the history of India), and cf. Dissanayake (1985:239), the pickle jars also in *Midnight's children*, and the

spices of the *Moor's last sigh*. Other metaphors are part of sustained image sets, in which metaphors are mixed with the concrete and literal in semantic sets, cf. for instance (3) where the relevant words are marked in italics.

- (3) ... my mother Aurora was *snow-white* at twenty, and what fairytale glamour, what *icy* gravitas was added to her beauty by the soft *glaciers* cascading from her head... (MLS 12)
... the huge stilt-root of the mangrove trees could be seen snaking about *thirstily* in the dusk, *sucking* in the rain... (MC 361)
The embarrassment of her daughter's deed, the *ice* of this latest shame lent a *frozen rigidity* to her bearing. (S 139)

While every good metaphor, according to Quintilian, has direct appeal to the senses – Rushdie's are particularly sensuous – often down-to-earth, even brutally and nastily so. Terms denoting food, flavour, tasting and eating, etc. occur frequently, and in *Midnight's children* the narrator says of himself that he has been "a swallower of life (MC 9)". The examples in (4) illustrate this:

- (4) ... and those *blazing* days of their *hot-pepper* love (MLS 113)
... never one for a quiet life, she *sucked in* the city's hot stench, *lapped up its burning sauces*, she *gobbled its dishes up whole*. (MLS 128)

Fragrances as well as stench are recurrent metaphors in Rushdie. Thus noses and smells play a particularly important role in *Midnight's children*; the narrator/hero is possessed of a special nose, which even smells emotions, cf. (5).

- (5) ... and smelled the scent of danger blaring like trumpets in my nose. (MC 428)

... The perfume of her sad hopefulness permeates her most innocently solicitously remarks....(MC 385)

Finally, (6)-(7) show other examples of metaphorical language; note particularly the seductive alliteration in (6)

- (6) I became aware of being surrounded by soft, amorous susurrations, like the couplings of velvet mice... (MC 454)
 (7) Despair, lapping at the edges of the boat. (MC 359)

2. An outline of adverbial functions

We turn now to my main concern – the adverbs. First, a brief overview of normal types – cf. (8)-(10), which contain only canonical, normal, everyday adverbs, and (11), which shows some of the less obviously scoped cases.

- (8) MANNER
 a. Kristin talked *loudly*.
 b. Mateuzs played *beautifully*.
 (9) SUBJECT-MODIFIER ADVERB
 a. He *thankfully* accepted her help.
 b. Kevin apologized *willingly*.
 c. *Pinkly* he confirmed this.
 d. WPC Alexander bustled *plumply* around her.
 (10) SENTENCE ADVERB
 a. *Fortunately*, Peter now accepts those stative adverbs.
 b. She will *probably* win the Nobel Peace Prize this year.
 (11) A HANDFUL OF MORE OR LESS DIFFICULT CASES
 a. They were *famously* painted by Bacon.
 b. She *deservedly* won that Oscar.
 c. She *painfully* made her way upstairs.

The examples in (8) are generally typical of pure manner adverbs. Their function is to modify a verb, or specify a type of the action in question, and they usually follow the verb directly. The examples in (9) exemplify subject-modifying adverbs. Normally these refer to states of mind (agents' states of mind), i.e. those subjects are normally considered to be involved in

some activity while they are in this state of mind (9a-b); the examples in (9c-d), however, are of a new type, physical subject modifiers, and ascribe physical properties to subjects.

(10) shows sentence adverbs. They have the entire sentence in their scope, and are subjective in the sense of being speaker comments, evaluating the truth of the proposition, as in (10b), or the fact itself, as in (10a). Finally, (11) contains a motley group of more-or-less odd examples with various indeterminate functions.

It has been shown in various works (notably Swan 1988, 1997) that in English, there is an ongoing linguistic change, called adverbialization, which means (in rather unlinguistic terms) that new types of adverbs are evolving (starting in Old English, but especially from the beginning of the early Modern English period) from manner to sentence adverb, cf. (12)-(13). Manner adverbs, i.e. *-ly* suffixed verb modifiers, are prototypical adverbs (cf. Swan 1997).

(12) The dog *hopefully* stared at the bone>*Hopefully* the weather will be nice.

(13) She *thankfully* accepted her help>*Thankfully*, the weather was nice.

Lately, the process of adverbialization includes an expansion in the subject-modifying use of an adverb – i.e. an *-ly* form, where formerly a predicative adjective would have been used to modify a noun (cf. especially Killie 1993, forthcoming, and Swan 1990, 1997). In all these cases, adverbialization involves an increase of subjectivity (i.e. subjectivity defined as increased grounding in speaker's attitude and perspective on what is said, cf. Traugott 1996b) from concrete (*She walks quickly*) to assumptive (*She sadly wandered home*) and finally wholly subjective, as sentence adverbs situating the event in mental space (*Fortunately Sheila left*).

I would suggest that mental subject-modifier adverbs (such as *thoughtfully*, *happily*, *patiently*, etc.) are assumptive;

they represent the speaker's subjective *interpretation* of the subject's state of mind, since the subject's state of mind is not accessible to the speaker. This is called "other-perspective" by Iwasaki (1993:18ff.); the adverb does not merely describe an event, but orients the hearer by means of interpreting the subject (cf. also Verhagen 1995:115-116). Thus these adverbs denote the speaker's assumptions about the subject based on evidence in real life, and in literary discourse they provide insights into the characters.

3. Adverbs in Rushdie's work

Rushdie makes use of *-ly* adverbs in many contexts, and brilliantly so. As we shall see, they occur repeatedly in unexpected contexts, and thus bring an innovative quality into the text which is wholly consonant with rhetoric and narrative functions (cf. also Faris 1995:170). Here I will mostly be concerned with those adverbs which modify (in some sense) subjects. Rushdie, of course, makes use of traditional adverbs, but notably he uses a great many of a more recent type, namely physical subject modifiers such as *pinkly*, *saltily*, etc. – such adverbs indeed function as rhetorical devices, as will be shown below, to a much higher extent than the less novel types – even though even traditional adverbs in English function as rhetorical devices.

3.1 Rushdie's adverbs as rhetorical devices

So what precisely is the rhetorical function of his adverbs – and how do they fit into the other rhetorical devices and figures used by Rushdie? I take as a starting point that Rushdie makes use of the process of adverbialization, indeed, that this process is used by Rushdie as a poetic, rhetorical device; incidentally Rushdie thus is a part of and possibly may further a historical process of linguistic change. Attempting to answer the question posed, we now turn to some examples (the adverbs under discussion are italicized).

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Firstly, some of the adverbs are rhetorical in the classical sense simply because they are clearly metaphorical, or part of a metaphor, though in some cases they are ambiguous as to whether they are metaphors or used concretely, cf. (14).

- (14) a. She lay *dustily* on her bed; we waited and feared. (MC 273)
- b. The last bachelors and spinsters sun themselves *toothlessly* in the childless Mattancheori lanes. (MLS 119)
- c. ... her secrets are leaking *saltily* out of her eyes... (MC 105)
- d. ... he stressed, flashing *goldly* at Ahmed Sinai... (MC 312)
- e. *Formlessly*, before I began to shape them, the fragrances poured into me... (MC 316)

Toothlessly in (14b) might be a metaphor for the weakness of old age, or simply mean literally without teeth; equally the adverb may represent a syllepsis or pun, and convey both meanings. (In 15a, on the other hand, *toothlessly* is wholly literal.)

Secondly, others are clearly literal (in most senses of the word), but nevertheless function as rhetorical ornaments, figures designed to vividly stop our eyes, providing a focus, pleasing to the senses, as any rhetorical figure does, cf. (15).

- (15) a. Resham said *toothlessly* and fled; (MC 387)
- b. when she had become so *sheetly*-white (MC 59)
- c. At Methwold's Estate goldfish hang *stilly* in ponds while... (MC 115)
- d. 'I am afraid,' Uncle Puffs said *gummily*... (MC 340)
- e. - a new swelling had pushed *lumpily* out of the lower left ventricle. (MC 296)
- f. ... lower lip protruding *fleshily*... (MC 82)
- g. ... *greenly-blackly*, she sails into my cell... (MC 437)
- h. He had long hair, poetically long, hanging *lankly* over his ears; (MC 216)

The examples in (15), then, refer to concrete, literal situations – but the impact of the adverbs is quite striking. Normally, it is objects or entities which are lumpy or fleshy, green, black, etc. – we don't do things in a gummy (or toothless) way. Provided with an adverbial form, however, verb and subject are again linked together unusually and with rhetorical effect.

While normal adverbs are dynamic, verb modifiers, the adverbs in (14)-(15) are formed from stative adjectives, *dusty* in (14a), *toothless* in (14b), *fleshy* in (15f), etc. (cf. *a dusty woman*, *toothless old people*, *fleshy lips*), but combine here with the verb as well as the subject. The reason why these rhetorical ornaments are so vivid is precisely because they draw together – in one image – the proposition of the verb (dynamic action) and that of the subject modifier (stative description). Normally, and prototypically, adverb and verb form one dynamic unit. Here, the adverb provides a focus on both subject and verb. Nevertheless, due to the *-ly* suffix and the meaning of the adjective, the dynamics of the verb is linked to the meaning of the subject. Thus our eyes are drawn to a new and very different combination – a network of interconnected ideas – enriching the syntax with new connotations via rhetoric.

The examples provided in (16) are less determinate as to focus than those described above, but probably includes the subject's eyes in (16a-b), and the object (*bodies*) in (16b). The entire image created is an inclusive one, like that in (14)-(15):

- (16) a. Farooq and Shaheed stared *glassily* at the field... (MC 371)
 b. that it was possible to see through their bodies, not clearly yet, but *cloudily*, like staring through mango juice. (MC 367)
 c. he stood still, gazing *milkily* down and around... (MC 376)

Finally, the adverbs are also to be considered as one-word abbreviations of entire propositions, and thus, as is particularly

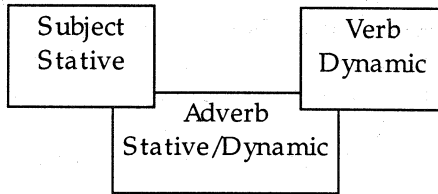
possible in English, are an elegant, abbreviatory rhetorical device. In the sentences in (17), more ordinary subject-modifier adverbs exemplify this. They are used as "setting of the scene" via the initial position, i.e. the topics are the particular states of mind of the subjects or their external appearance. Finally, (18) shows an example with a non-initial state of mind adverb.

- (17) a. Inwardly, *unsmilingly*, Shaheed observed various CUTIA units... (MC 352)
- b. *Blindly*, he impugned my state of mind... (MC 65)
- c. *Patiently*, dry-eyed, I imbibed Nehru-letter and Winkie's prophecy; (MC 130)
- (18) a. ...sat *sullenly* in corners... (MC 274)
- b. ...with my whole family trooping *amazedly* behind us... (MC 280)
- c. Uncle Hanif broke a pencil, *absentmindedly*, into two halves. (MC 249)

In principle, the adverbs in (17) could have been replaced with an initial adjectival clause: *Patient, I imbibed...* (cf. 17c), but again the adverb form serves as a rhetorical device to link subject and verb, and thus comparing and contrasting in a way the adjective would not. The meaning of the adverb encompasses an entire clause: *I was patient*. In (18a-b), the postverbal position is less prominent than initial, and links the adverb more closely to the activity, the dynamic verb. Note especially (18c), where the state of mind adverb *absentmindedly* neatly mirrors the state of affairs (the absentmindedness of Uncle Hanif) by breaking up the syntax of the sentence.

While the above-mentioned adverbs differ with respect to how they focus on subject and verb respectively, all of them clearly have a linking function and simultaneously focus on or specify aspects of the subject or the verb, as shown in (19).

(19)



In cognitive linguistics, perspective and focus are important, as indeed they are in rhetoric: what the writer focuses on implies a perspective. To select adverbs of the type discussed here is to make use of them as conceptual tools to form particular images according to a particular perspective. It should also be mentioned that textual reference is selective. According to Hawkins (1997:26):

In most cases, and especially in iconographic reference, it is clear that the information selected for a presentation in a particular textual reference is chosen for a strategic rhetorical purpose ... the particular conceptual tools accessed depend on the nature of the information needed to construct the image that the speaker/writer intends to convey.

In short, then, Rushdie's adverbs are used rhetorically, and each adverb contributes to the rhetorical imagery of the texts.

4. Conclusion

The present paper has attempted to show that Rushdie's language is highly rhetorical. Partly his rhetoric is metaphorical, partly it is structural and can be traced in the syntax of the texts. The main purpose of the paper is, however, to show that Rushdie's use of novel as well as more traditional adverbs is particularly noteworthy from a rhetorical point of

view, and is effective precisely because it makes use of an ongoing linguistic change.

The adverbs in question function rhetorically in three, partly overlapping ways. They are frequently metaphorical, and even if strictly literal (i.e. concrete), convey images and sense forms. Secondly, the linking and focusing function of the adverbs is an effective rhetorical device, as prototypical adverb use – focus on or specification of verbal actions and activities – is transformed into a focus on or specification of the subject, while the adverb form (the *-ly* suffix) ensures a simultaneous link to the verbal action. Thus the sentence presents a tightly-knit event, a coherent image. Finally, Rushdie's adverbs function rhetorically as abbreviated propositions. This use of adverbs is in particular a property of English, and Rushdie exploits it elegantly.

Rhetoric is, in a sense, the sculpting of language for purposes of effective persuasion or information mediation. In his narratives, Rushdie indeed sculpts the English language into sensual, visual entities or patterns, observing as well as recreating nature. His use of adverbialization is, in this sense, superbly rhetorical: a feast of senses.

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