

The World of Lexis in *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract - The present paper is an analysis of the use of words/lexis to tell about a world which mesmerizes readers draws them into it with ease. The author does away with the conventional way of using the lexical items; she innovates. She goes beyond the set of choices available and coins new words. There is coming together as well as splitting of words in unusual ways.

Keywords - Lexis, innovate, coin, new, word, unusual

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It is matters a lot how an author use of the words in his/her writing. All this comes in the category of vocabulary or lexis, which is a more technical term. At the lexical level what is explored is the type of words used, word formations, whether the words used are simple or complicated, subject specific or lexical sets, the deviations from the norms of Standard English is what is investigated. The type of language Arundhati Roy has used, and the words that make that up are under scrutiny. It will be seen how often she has used lexical items that fall into different categories like Standard English – British or American – dialect, substandard English or the Indian English.

There are also a number of cases of linguistic innovations/deviations. It would be studied whether they are just “idiosyncratic linguistic choices” or some rule has been extended beyond its limits. This is especially with word formations, neologisms, splitting of words and words coming together. One thing that is certain is that these linguistic moves have made her description and narration lively, forceful, easy, economical and interesting.

For instance, instead of explaining the divorce of Chacko and his wife, and the relation of their child, the author uses the term *biological father* for Chacko, and *English mother* for Chacko's ex-wife, Margaret Kochamma.

Here are some interesting examples of word-coinage:

1. church-feeling: a feeling experienced inside a church. (54) This has an underlying principle: Locative noun + Verb (ing) = A + B where B has some feature characteristics of A. The formula is one from Valerie Adams' *Introduction to Modern English Word Formation*.

2. getting-outedness: Verb(ing) + Particle(ed) + (ness). (172)

This is used to depict Mammachi's use of the sense of hearing to notice things, as the usual sense of sight was absent. The old lady was blind, which is

implicated by the lexical item. The old lady's innovation of one sense to compensate for the other called for a lexical formation to match the Innovation.

In the novel, it can be seen what are the items that make up the lexical set – nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs etc. This can be further divided into what types of noun phrases are used - whether it is simple or has pre/post modifiers. Then whether the verbs used are dynamic/stative, transitive/intransitive, or copula types. Then she has also verbalized and deverbalized items, and also made new verbs like *Stoppited*. (141)

The frequency of attributive adjectives is more than the predicative ones. The number of premodifiers is more than that of postmodifiers. New adjectives have been formed. Adverbs of manner are conspicuous, as Roy prefers precision while describing an activity/action. All this also covers a lot of the portion of Grammar, but there is another thing about grammar:

... it always stops short of telling us just who did just what to just whom. What is left to describe after Grammar has been described is called lexis ... The same thing can be both a grammatical, with grammatical features, e.g. singular noun, and a lexical item, e.g. *carpenter*. (Cummings and Simmons 171)

In the very first line of the novel Roy indicates that in the months of May/June Ayemenem is a happening place. Things are felt and seen:

May in Ayemenem is a hot brooding month. (1)

A little bit of jargon creeps in while describing the birth of Estha and Rahel. The terms *doctors* and *two-egg twins* have the roles of the performer and the performed.

The adjectives *dizygotic/fertilized* are strictly medical terms. Roy also makes this activity of *separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs* literary by labeling

them as *Siamese twins*, like *Siamese men*, *Cheng and Eng* (1811-74) who despite being joined at the waist led an active life. The only difference was that in that case the twins were physically joint, with separate identities, whereas in this case the *twins* were physically separate with joint identities. This is from the biological angle, but there is a linguistic angle too as the twins *thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We or Us*. (2)

Sir Ernest Gower's in his 1965 revision of **Fowler's Modern English Usage** (1926) introduced the expression ... to characterize certain two-member phrases (connected by *and* or *or*), which always go together. (712) So in the entire novel this pair *We and Us* goes together like *leaps and bounds*, and *lo and behold*.

Appearance is deceptive. This is shown what one wears and what one really is, especially those who represent India. For instance Inspector Thomas' moustaches, an appearance, are contrasted with his eyes, the real him. This has a parallel with the *Air India Maharaja* that is merely a symbol, an appearance, of hospitality, whereas one can expect enough hostility actually. Roy has also made a deft move by going for the eyes of another Symbol, the Police Inspector, which are *sly/greedy* against the **Air India Maharajah** whose eyes are *half-closed/lowered* with courtesy. (7)

Courtesy is what the **C** of the *POLICE* stood for. (8)

There are other lexical items that stand as symbols:

For instance the *red colour*, *red flag*, *Red Agenda* etc. stand for the communists, their party and their principles. The *Plymouth* car is the symbol of Imperialism, and the ability to recite Shakespeare is symbolic of a good command over English language, which in itself is symbolic of status and well educatedness. And whereas the **Air India Maharajah** touches his own **bosom and bows in humility**, the *Inspector tapped Ammu's breasts* ... (8), and forced the other person, mostly helpless, to bow in humiliation. Having faced one man, Ammu faces another man in **Khaki**, the bus conductor, who *slid* towards Ammu and her children. The verb has undertones of a snake. He clicked his ticket puncher, as usual, but at Ammu. The Inspector had stared, at Ammu's breasts. The lexical items *khaki/slid* and the preposition *at* are enough indicators that Ammu was dealing with the same category. The *baton* and the *ticket-puncher* are perfect **khaki** counterparts. So *Khaki* becomes symbolic of hostility.

Slogans like *Inquilab Zindabad* convey layers of messages. This slogan that has been used against the Imperialism, has now become a symbol of protest against any oppressor. Apart from such intelligent, logical and architectural use of lexis, unlike other Indian English writers and most of the native writers, Roy uses many other features that form the traditional tools of the vocabulary, like other writers.

Among these, the first is her use of native lexical items. These are done in four ways:

- Native item that is local - Malayalam.
- Native item that is national - Hindi.
- Native item in combination with an English item – Hybrids₁.
- Native item (Malayalam) in combination with English – Hybrids₂.

While not much Hindi terms are used, Malayalam is used extensively, which was required to capture that socio-linguistic reality, as the setting of the novel is Ayemenem, Kerala. In Hindi, the common nouns are used lesser than the proper nouns that have been used in the stories within the novel. For instance, while narrating the *Kathakali* performance of the *Mahabharata*, the names of the characters are proper nouns in Hindi.

Common nouns like *Kohinoor*, *veshyas*, *dhoti*, *dhobi*, *mehndi* etc. have been used as single items.

Proper nouns, the characters of the *Mahabharata*, like *Draupadi/Kunti/Bhima/Karna*, and Malayalam *filmactor*, *Adoor Basi*, are in contrast to the English film/music stars like *Julie Andrews/Elvis Priestly/Phil Donahue* and *Charlie Chaplin*. *Nehru* and *E.M.S Namboodripad* are juxtaposed with *Bill Clinton*.

Hindi terms in combination with the English ones, forming hybrids, are also used to show the *Hinglish* phenomena. Lexical items like *dhobi's thumb*, *bus bhajan*, *Zamindar mentality*, *Oxford avatar*, *Opposition bandh*, *mehndi hedge*, *henna red* etc.

Chhi chhi-poach ... *shit-wiper* (51), though used for one of the characters in the novel for being an *Anglophile*, was used for the English that the Indians used, *the chhi chhi English*, or *butler English* or *Babu English*, still referred to as, by some native users or non-natives with native-like competence. In this case Roy, like the other Indian writers sticks to the conventional formula:

a formation modifier + head + (qualifier) structure.
(Kachru, *Alchemy* 41)

The title of one of the chapters *Big Man the Laltain*, *Small Man the Mombatti* is a popular Indian saying. (88)

The feature of compounding can be seen throughout the novel; it is used less in conversations and more in imparting/giving information/news because of the tendency of the register to use more varied vocabulary, but she uses this feature to relate several things/events – past, present and future.

Apart from the usually productive combinations like noun + noun, adjective + noun and verb (ing) + noun, Roy uses the less productive ones like the 'particle + verb and verb (ing) + particle'. Roy makes adjectives by adding the suffix "- ity", a state or quality of being A.. She uses terms like *offity*, and

vornity etc. She adds the letter **y** to the noun “to make a diminutive name for N”, like *helmety* hair, in which case the hair is in the shape of a helmet.

And what sets her apart from the lot is that she never uses these terms in limited or defensive manner. Armed with exceptional intelligence and linguistic competence, she can afford to assert whatever she wants. It is as though she has the confidence to defend her work against whole world – not required though. Because for anyone to cast doubts or question her linguistics, s/he has to have similar aids, not necessarily of the same degree, which is rare, but at least some percentage of it.

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