

Language of Religious and Secular Text: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study aims to find out the differences existing in the language structure of the religious and secular texts. Religious text serves a different purpose than that of secular one and due to this reason the differences in language and style become predominant. The language structure, rhetorical aspect and the scope for the audience are the basic factors to be analyzed during this study. For this purpose the tragic history of Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlow is focused as it carries not only the religious text, being the morality play of Renaissance period, but also secular text is a part of this play. The methodology adopted for this study is qualitative exploratory which determines that there is no involvement of statistical analysis and exploratory focuses on exploring the new dimensions in this study which are still unexplored. The relevant text is taken for subjective analysis which determines that how these differences in the language structure of religious and secular texts are working and are making the difference prominent. The study determines that these differences are not only present but are also prominent in both the religious and secular texts as they serve different purposes. It is suggested that religious text should be considered as a different genre than that of the secular one due to these linguistic variations. The amalgamation of both texts in certain writings is actually presenting a contrast to each other to highlight certain distinctive linguistic features which makes the meanings clearer to the audience.

Keywords: religious, secular, text, rhetoric, language structure, genre.

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Introduction

This study focuses on the comparative analysis of the religious and secular literary text to explore the differences and similarities present in the communicative style of both the texts. The differences present in both the religious and secular literary texts aid the texts to serve different purposes required by them. The specific features assigned to both texts make them prominent and serve different purposes.

Religion is a private and sacred activity, ordained by God and governed by certain rules and regulations for moral improvement. This study focuses on the analysis of linguistic differences between a religious statement and non-religious or secular statement. For this purpose Dr. Faustus of Christopher Marlowe has been studied as a primary source of research and analytical study. The rationale for the selection of this play is that it is a representative of medieval and renaissance period. On one hand it carries the religious aspect of the morality plays in which there is a constant struggle between good and evil. While on the other hand the renaissance features, culture and secular instinct to achieve greater worldly success, is present. The methodology adopted for this study is qualitative exploratory. Qualitative nature of the study determines that there is no involvement of statistical analysis and exploratory focuses on exploring the new dimensions in this study which are still unexplored. The relevant text is taken for subjective analysis which determines that how these differences in the language structure of religious and secular texts are working and are making the differences prominent. Parts of speech and arguments in the religious text are analyzed in comparison with the everyday speech to make the differences prominent in religious and secular texts. For this purpose the speech of good angel from Dr. Faustus is taken as the religious text while other conversation is evident of the secular text. This study aims to explore the use of those powerful devices which also impart power to words while used in a specific religious context and empower the receivers and satisfy them without justifying the claims presented in the religious literary text.

When we talk about language, it is claimed to be a language game in which each language is distinct from each other as well as interdependent. There are certain rules to use each language as well as understand it (Kimble, 2010). The term religious language is used to refer to the claims made about God or gods (internet encyclopedia of philosophy). For the secular text we are having the characteristic as described by Holmes that it is “unique to author” (Holmes, 1994) but it is further amended as it is a “set of measurable pattern which may be unique in a particular period of time” (Sanja Stajneer, 2011). The religious text is considered sacred and it carries with it a complete doctrine of a system which is based upon religious beliefs. Religious language is significant to analyze as it is about certain things which are not described in the other different types of texts (Ricoeur, 1974). According to Encyclopedia of Britannica the sacred words are different from the secular, ordinary language as they are used to impart certain spiritual powers and through them the sacred reality is also revealed with its complete power and truth. The meanings described in one type of language game are certainly different from the meanings of the other one (Kimble, 2010). There are arguments in the favor of sacred text, due to its characteristics, to be considered as a different genre (Clarke, 2011). The language used to describe God involves the words from everyday experiences and the ‘world-transcendent God’ is not within our reach (Harrison, 2007). Sacred text is actually meant for all generations and it is not having time limits while contrary to this the secular text is limited to a certain time period

(Clarke, 2011) and then according to the changing demands it also changes. While discussing sacred text another factor of historicity becomes prominent as the sacred text has its roots in centuries ago. So it may not be easily comprehensible for the people of modern age to understand the culture and metaphysical concepts (Clarke, 2011). While discussing about the sacred text the “sources of words, as well as the identity, agency, authority” become prominent (Keane, 1997). All these things combine in the religious text and bestow powers to it and that’s why it draws the attention of the audience. In attaching powers to the sacred text as compared to the secular text repetition and assonance also play a vital role (Keane, 1997). Language used to describe religion evokes ‘an experience of the divine’ (Harrison, 2007). The special use of language imparts vitality and life to the words of the religious figures (Owolabi, 2012). The religious and sacred text is beyond the boundaries of humans and they feel to be at a distance. This theory was termed as “meta-pragmatics” which means that it actually refers to the actions that it undertakes (Silverstein, 1976). In religious context spells and prayers are meta-pragmatics by nature. They carry the exact words and can’t be changed as their effect will also change at that time. When someone repeats the words the effect is same and linguistic form also remains the same but they are performing a different function which is the ‘re-contextualizing’ of text (Keane, 1997). These sacred words when used by people customarily, also transform them into sacred characters (Bourdieu, 1991). They carry the same meanings for all generations and hence their usage is also not changed. This factor is termed as ‘semantic poverty’ (Keane, 1997). According to Keane the linguistic resources are used for religion with self-consciousness. Religious text is also a type of discourse which considers being true (Ricoeur, 1974). Religious language is different than the secular one as it is also used to describe the religious claims that are ‘non-cognitive and non-verifiable or assessable for correctness by means of evidence’ (Kimble, 2010). Everyday conversation requires participants in which communication and sharing is present from both sides (Hanks, 1996). With the presence of participants, context also becomes a prominent feature of secular, everyday speech while in religious speech the need for context and participants is not present (Howell, 1994). Derrida speaks about this characteristic of language in a different way and calls it as ‘iterability of language’ that as anything is given in the religious text it will be described in the same way because religion does not allow any kind of interactive work (Derrida, 1982). These are not the actual words of religious language but the purpose and overt context in which religious language is used. (Harrison, 2007) Another feature of religious text is that the people have to recite it as a whole and they cannot isolate it in parts (Bois, 1986). According to Du Bois the speaker of the religious text is only bodily present and he has to talk to an agent who is having no physical presence and is quite distant.

Rhetoric is another prominent feature of religious speech. It is a device of ‘verbal means of persuasion’ (Amossy, 2009). It is used for persuasive speech so appropriate to convey religious message (Spina, 2008). The use of rhetoric helps to check the ‘intended impact on the speaker’ (Amossy, 2009). These persuasive words impart subjectivity to the speaker to an inanimate listener of the religious text while performing rituals and offerings (Keane, 1997). Spina also mentions another factor that whenever we have to talk about religion we take it in plural and if any religious phenomena is under discussion then it is mentioned in singular (Spina, 2008).

Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe is studied for its struggle of good and evil. The main character of the play, Dr. Faustus suffers from the influence of good and evil forces and their

attraction which leads him towards his tragic downfall (Neurowired, 2005). Then the importance of religious books and knowledge gained through them as well as the authority, the power associated with the text has also been a matter of discussion (Doctor Faustus). This play mirrors the religious beliefs in England of that time. The issues of salvation, values, secular knowledge and ambiguity of the last moments of Dr. Faustus also become prominent during the study of the play (Kemp, 2009).

Discussion

For this research work the text of Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe is studied for the observance of differences in religious and secular language. In the start of the play the protagonist Dr. Faustus reads from Jerome's Bible:

“Stipendium peccati more est

The reward of sin is death: that's hard. (Marlowe, 1588-92)

The above mentioned proclamation gives us the final words after which there is no need of any sort of liberty. Such commandments are not specific to a certain period of time. There is no margin given to the interpreter to bring any sort of change in the given words. The sentence is precise, clear and to the point. There is no need to establish a context for this sort of proclamation. This sentence also carries the device of rhetorical speech. When we read it we feel the echo of words insisting us to follow and this is the use of persuasive words after which there is no margin left for any sort of alteration or deviation. The above given lines from the religious text are evident of certain linguistic characteristics which are not a part of secular text.

This proclamation also does not require any justification to be given and is considered to be true. It insists the follower or the receiver to believe blindly in whatever is said and the nature of the selection of words does not allow a second question to be raised.

St peccasse negamus, fallimur, et nulla est in nobis veritas;

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.”

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

This very next commandment again limits the scope of the receiver or of audience. These two commandments not only restrict our actions but we also feel that our thoughts are also abandoned. The complete personality of the audience shatters down and only remains the echo of the religious text reminding again and again of the limited liberty of taking actions. This is the use of rhetoric and persuasive words which is necessary to preach, to persuade towards something which is unseen and only promised. Another factor that we notice is that there is no specific audience mentioned in the above given sentences and the general rules are applied on all the receivers, possible audience and above all on all humanity.

On the other hand if we compare this religious text with the non-religious one then a visible and sharp contrast is present:

“These metaphysics of magicians,

And necromantic books are heavenly;

Lines, circles, scenes, letters, and characters;

Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

Here the justification is presented by mentioning the desire of the person which influences the person to obey and follow. In the secular text the details are given with reference to the worldly life and convincing techniques are adopted by presenting the details which is missing in the religious text.

O, what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,
Is promis'd to the studious artizan!
All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command: emperors and kings
Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
Nor can they raise the wind, or rend the clouds;
But his dominion that exceeds in this,
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man;
A sound magician is a mighty god:
Here, Faustus, tire thy brains to gain a deity.”
(Marlowe, 1588-92)

In these above given lines the receiver of the speech is clear contrary to the religious text. It starts getting message from lines, circles and scenes, then it moves to letters and characters. Then it moves to the ‘world of power and delight’. This is the power of imagination which moves from the text to the world of all pleasures and then, ‘all things that move between the white poles shall be at my command’, from this world to the worlds beyond it. Then from emperors and kings it moves to winds and clouds. There is no limit to capture the things and the wish to rule and dominate.

The sentence “these are those that Faustus most desires” makes it clear that Faustus is the audience of the text and it is only meant for him. While contrary to this religious discourse is not restricted to one person only rather that is meant and designed for the whole humanity. Here in these sentences the reasons are also presented to convince the audience while in the religious text no arguments are present but only the final authoritative commandments are present. Again the sentence, “Faustus, tire thy brains to gain a deity” shows that only Faustus is addressed. Another linguistic feature of powerful imagery is prominent in the above given lines. The source of imagery welcomes the imagination of audience and bestows them the power to have a vast canvas to think, act and interact. There are no margins and limitations present for the receiver. This secular text is also not precise and to the point so it also involves the receiver to flow with it. English language is also fluent in these lines which reflects the flow of thought. Again the speech of good angel in the play shows some other qualities of the religious text:

“O, Faustus, lay that damned book aside,
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head!
Read, read the Scriptures:--that is blasphemy.”
(Marlowe, 1588-92)

In the start, the audience is evident because the personal acts of Faustus are mentioned here. But the words of “read, read the scriptures:--that is blasphemy”, are again rhetorical. Subject is also missing in this commandment which is generalizing the statement. Again these words of the

religious text limit the action and in a straight forward way focus the attention towards the command. Fear is also raised through the given words, “lest it tempt thy soul”. Religious text is, in this way, more demanding by nature and forces to subdue personal desires and attraction to an unseen, invisible but mighty force. With the use of selected words the power of that invisible force becomes evident. So these words also bestow powers to those who are conveying them. For example, here in these sentences good angel is the delivering force so some power also gets attached with his presence as he is the representative of the divine force. The words, “gaze not on it” reflect that the receiver is not even allowed to see to anything evil or to think about that as there is the fear of temptation. But on the other hand as we have seen the secular text, it imparts a broad scope to its audience with the power of imagination which takes the receiver with it to discover the new horizons which have attraction for him. Now the response of the evil angel presents an entire different situation:

E. Angel: Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art

Wherein all Nature's treasure is contain'd:

Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,

Lord and commander of these elements.

The above given lines are a part of the non-religious text and rather they are presenting an entire different situation than the religious text. It also tries to influence Faustus by telling about the importance of worldly art instead of the religious one. All the power, majesty and grandeur is associated with the worldly pleasures instead of the heavenly ones which are distant and beyond human imagination.

Again the under given secular text gives us the powerful imagery:

“VALDES: Faustus.....Like lions shall they guard us when we please;

Like Almain rutters with their horsemen's staves,

Or Lapland giants, trotting by our sides;

Sometimes like women, or unwedded maids,

Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows

Than have the white breasts of the queen of love:

From Venice shall they drag huge argosies,

And from America the golden fleece

That yearly stuffs old Philip's treasury;

If learned Faustus will be resolute.”

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

The words, “learned Faustus” make clear to him that all these achievements are a result of knowledge and learning so are specific for those only who are having this specific knowledge. Everything that a person may wish is available in its best form, without any restriction or condition while the religious text also has conditions for reward. The use of figures of speech such as similes is also prominent here, such as: ‘like lions’, ‘like Almain rutters’, ‘like women’. The use of similes intensifies the effect of the images presented. Then references are also given to instigate Faustus as: Lapland giants, Venice, America and Philip's treasury. Due to them the text does not remain precise rather the expression of wordiness is present. And what is the condition present that ‘if learned Faustus will be resolute’, that if Faustus will remain firm in enjoying all these pleasures that he wishes. Another extract from the text of ‘Dr. Faustus’, makes

the picture more clear:

“GOOD ANGEL: Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.

FAUSTUS: Contrition, prayer, repentance--what of them?

GOOD ANGEL: O, they are means to bring thee unto heaven!

EVIL ANGEL: Rather illusions, fruits of lunacy,

That make men foolish that do trust them most.

GOOD ANGEL: Sweet Faustus, think of heaven and heavenly things.

EVIL ANGEL: No, Faustus; think of honour and of wealth.”

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

Here in the above given lines the conditions are present to get heaven or reward at the end while secular text only attracts without conditions. The religious text also raises the goodness of personality to flourish it in the character of Faustus while secular text only provides attraction for unlimited worldly pleasures. Religious text only provides attraction of the unseen which is having spatial and temporal distances. On the other hand secular text attracts for that which is at hand within our reach, “honor and wealth”, which everyone desires to have. That’s why the words used by evil angel are, ‘rather illusions, fruit of lunacy,’ because nobody can see or feel the pleasures of the world hereafter. Here in the religious text proofs are neither provided nor demanded rather they are believed to be the fact. The listener does not require validity or testing of all the promised things.

“GOOD ANGEL: Faustus, repent; yet God will pity thee.

EVIL ANGEL: Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity thee.

FAUSTUS: Who buzzeth in mine ears I am a spirit?

Be I a devil, yet God may pity me;

Ay, God will pity me, if I repent.

EVIL ANGEL: Ay, but Faustus never shall repent.”

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

The rhetorical devices and the persuasive words also bestow powers to the good angel as he is conveying the religious text. These straight forward words again give a hope for the future which is unseen and which one feels is unattainable. The words, “Faustus, repent” are again a sort of command with the description of his miserable plight, “God will pity thee”. Again it is felt that Faustus is enclosed in unseen boundaries where he is helpless.

“EVIL ANGEL: Too late.

GOOD ANGEL: Never too late, if Faustus can repent.

EVIL ANGEL: If thou repent, devils shall tear thee in pieces.

GOOD ANGEL: Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin.”

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

The commandment comes, “repent” which is again the order with the use of persuasive words:

“If Faustus can repent”, the use of conditional sentence again provides a chance to be persuaded.

The repetition of adverbs, ‘Never too late’, intensifies the effect to attract the attention of the receiver to the religious command.

“CURSED BE HE THAT STOLE AWAY HIS HOLINESS' MEAT FROM THE
TABLE! maledicat Dominus!

CURSED BE HE THAT STRUCK HIS HOLINESS A BLOW ON THE FACE!

maledicat Dominus!

CURSED BE HE THAT TOOK FRIAR SANDELO A BLOW ON THE PATE!

maledicat Dominus!

CURSED BE HE THAT DISTURBETH OUR HOLY DIRGE! maledicat

Dominus!

CURSED BE HE THAT TOOK AWAY HIS HOLINESS' WINE! maledicat

Dominus? sic

Et omnes Sancti! Amen!"

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

In this above given speech of Friar the subject is missing in the start to intensify the effect of the prayer. The normal word order of English language, subject, verb and object, is not present rather the sentences are starting with verb and the repetition of one same verb is present in all of the sentences to intensify the effect on the audience. Again in these lines Friar appears as the agent of the divine power as he is having the authority to curse the one who deserves it by committing the evil deeds. All the above given sentences are also ending up on the sign of exclamation which expresses sudden feelings and emotions of the speaker. Exclamatory sentences are also used as a rhetorical device to attract the attention of the audience through arousing their emotions.

The speeches of the scholars are also indicative of the religious text:

"Sec. Scholar: yet, Faustus, look up to heaven; remember God's mercies are infinite."

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

This sentence again uses persuasive words to attract the attention of Faustus towards something that he has forgotten. The words 'look up to heaven' again persuade him and give him a ray of hope in share despair. Then the use of the word, 'remember' is again rhetorical device used to persuade. This is not only the rhetorical device but also a sort of command given to Faustus which he is supposed to obey without any margins.

"Third Scholar: Yet, Faustus, call on God."

(Marlowe, 1588-92)

Again the precise commandment is present, "call on God". Only three words are there but they contain everything in them. It is a command and call to change the whole life and world.

All these examples from Dr. Faustus reveal the differences which are present in the religious and secular texts.

This research work makes the fact clear that religious speech is rhetorical and provides lesser margins to its receiver. They are bound to perform certain acts which are having certain conditions. Rhetoric is the basic device used to attract the audience because it carries persuasive words. The religious text also appears precise, to the point and without imagery and if it provides attraction for the unseen then it has certain conditions. On the other hand the secular text is full of imageries and provides a vast scope to its audience where they are free to perform whatever they want to without any restriction. It is not precise rather it is more detailed with the minute descriptions of the worldly pleasures to attract the attention of its audience. It is not something unseen or unapproachable which is mentioned through secular text rather it is something easily available showing its glimpse to the audience to create more attraction. In the secular text the

authority is also bestowed to the receiver while in the religious text it remains restricted to the divine powers and their representatives who preach the religious commandments.

Conclusion

It is concluded that religious text serves a sharp contrast with the secular text. Both are having differences due to certain linguistic features. Other studies also define religious text different than the secular text but they are unable to define the linguistic features and the role of the receiver for both of the texts. This study also determines the need for the use of certain specific devices to achieve the required purposes. The use of different devices impart distinctiveness to religious text from that of the secular one. It also enables the religious text to convey the message that is always considered to be true although that belongs to an abstract world that is out of reach but is unconsciously a vital part of every aspect of life. The phonological features are not studied in this research work. So in future to study the phonological features can also open new domains for research. The present study determines that religious text is different than the secular one and it should remain different as both of the texts serve different purposes. According to written obligations the religious text should use rhetorical devices to persuade the people. In the religious text lesser scope is provided to the receiver because it does not demand changes rather it demands share obedience. The written structure is also different which marks a prominent difference and alerts the reader or the receiver for something extraordinary.

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