

A Stylistic Analysis of Passivization and Modality in Oscar Wilde's The Devoted Friend and The Remarkable Rocket

Lecturer: Isa Atallah Salman

Department of English / Al-Imam Al-Kadhum University College / Thi-Qar

عيسى عطاالله سلمان

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية / كلية الإمام الكاظم الجامعية / ذي قار

الملخص:

تعد هذه الدراسة محاولة لمعرفة البعد الجمالي و ما تضمنه تركيبية و صياغة المبني للمجهول و المعلوم و الافعال المساعدة من وظيفة جمالية ابداعية و لعل ذلك كان مائزا رئيسا في أسلوب أوسكار وايلد التصميمي من خلال قصتيه القصيرتين: The Devoted Friend و The Remarkable Rocket . و كان المنهج المعتمد في هذه الدراسة هو المنهج الوصفي التحليلي عن طريق جمع البيانات و احصائها. و بعد استقراء الافعال المبني للمجهول و للمعلوم و الافعال المساعدة في قصتيه ثم تحليلها وفقا ل Quirk et al. (1985) و Dunworth (2008) تبين محاولة وايلد اضعاف حنكته و خبرته و ايصالها للقارئ عن طريق الفعل المبني للمعلوم والفعل المساعد would، وهو الأكثر استعمالا. و لعله كان يريد من وراء استعمال الفعل المبني للمعلوم تعريف الشخصية القصصية وعدم غموضها و جلائها للقارئ، اما الفعل المساعد would فقد فتح افاق الخيال و فضاءاته المتخيلة امام المتلقي من خلال السرد الروائي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصوت النشط، الصوت السلبي، المساعدین الشرطيین، الوظيفة الجمالية، الجهاز الأسلوبي، أوسكار وايلد

Abstract

The present study is an attempt to stylistically investigate the aesthetic function of passivization and modality as significant stylistic devices that mark Oscar Wilde's style in his two short stories: The Devoted Friend and The Remarkable Rocket. The data is identified and extracted by a rigorous numeration of the frequencies of occurrence of passive voice, active voice and modal auxiliaries in the two short stories and then analysed in terms of Quirk et. al.(1985) and Dunworth(2008). The current study adopts a descriptive analytical approach. Then, the findings unveil Wilde's artistic vision in the way he cogently beautifies, in the eye of the reader, his ideas and overtones by making them carried by active voice constructions and the modal auxiliary verb would, which is the most frequently used one, as well as the other modal auxiliaries. In the two short stories, the active voice constructions represent the cement that holds the expressivity power for the characters to be known from the very beginning of the stories, while the modal auxiliary verb would grants the novelist to flatten out in his aesthetic horizons to provide the readers with fictional images throughout the two stories and provokes a torrent of anticipations.

Key Words: active voice, passive voice, modal auxiliaries, aesthetic function, stylistic device, Oscar Wilde

1. Introduction

Passivization and modality are multifunctional stylistic devices and serve to convey various purposeful messages. Some literary readers tend to misinterpret the purpose for which passivization and modal auxiliaries are employed in fictional texts. The present study aims to show the aesthetic function behind the use of active voice, passive voice and modal auxiliaries in Oscar Wilde's two short stories: The Devoted Friend and The Remarkable Rocket from his collection The Happy Prince and Other Tales(2008). Also, it stylistically examines the way active voice, passive voice and modal auxiliaries contribute in making the two fictional texts most effective as well as comparing the cases of passive voice and active voice in the data to come out with illustrative interpretations. The data is analysed on the syntactic level only to concentrate on active voice, passive voice and modality, from one hand, and the differentiation and comparison between passive voice and active voice, from another hand, and any linguistic level is excluded from the analysis.

Oscar Wilde is selected as his literary works are among the most shining and moving masterpieces all over the world. Also, because Wilde is a brilliant poet, his short stories, especially *The Devoted Friend* and *The Remarkable Rocket*, are expected to be affected by his poetic sense and abound with active voice, passive voice and modal auxiliaries. In spite of the fact that many studies are carried out to explore passivization and modality in literary texts, no study to explore them in Oscar Wilde's literary works has been investigated yet - to the best of the researcher's knowledge. As a work carried out in the field of stylistics, the present study endeavors to pave the way for further researches in passivization and modality in short fiction, linguistics and literary criticism.

2. Literature Review

This section represents the theoretical part of the study. It is devoted to highlight the conceptions of active voice, passive voice and modal auxiliaries:

2.1. Passivization

Passivization is turning of a sentence from an active form into a passive one and vice versa. Also, it is defined as the form of a verb in which the action of the verb affects the subject. However, this implies the verb form in which the subject of the sentence has an action done to it by someone or something else (Joshi, 2014: 23).

There are certain cases in which passive voice is needed to be used. Since a passive sentence the subject receives the actions rather than initiating it, the passive construction is preferable for indicating passivity, helplessness or victimization:

1. He was thrown from the car by the force of the crash.

Passivization, however, is also necessary wherever the initiator of the action is not known or unimportant. In addition, passivization is used when the speaker or writer wishes to highlight that information by putting it first in a sentence (Vitto, 2006: 212). In brief, passivization should be used when the action of the verb is more important than the doer, when the doer is unknown or when you wish to emphasize the receiver of the action rather than the doer (Ibid).

2.2. Modality

Modality is an essential grammatical feature explaining a language user's attitude towards a given person or situation (Gavins, 2007:91). Modality is defined by Kroger (2005: 166) as divided into two types: epistemic modality and deontic modality. As for epistemic modality, it is concerned with people's state of knowledge and belief (certainty, probability, possibility...etc.); while the deontic modality is concerned with the meaning of obligation, volition or obligation. However, epistemic modality standardizes the space between affirmation and negation; while deontic modality standardizes the meaning between 'Do it! and Do not do it' (See Hallisdday 1985 cited in Cruse 2000: 287). Radden and Driven (2007: 236) add that deontic modality implies the individual to be direct in a given situation towards a certain event. They (ibid) also add that the expressions of deontic modality provide the same meanings of directive speech acts as in orders, prohibitions, warnings...ect.

Modal verbs are auxiliaries. Their function is to add specific meanings to the main verb. They are can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, must, have to, ought to and need. As for their forms, they do not accept affixes at all, for example:

2. He can speak French. (Not cans...)

Further, they do not accept to-infinitive and -ing, as in:

3. He must succeed. (Not ... to must... or ... musting...)

3. Oscar Wilde's Literary Style

Oscar Wilde is a creative novelist. His works are still considered to have an influential impact on people even at the present time and have a topical relevance as well. Oscar Wilde, was a master of fairy tale, was also famous for his scathing and urbane nonfictional works, while some of his special irony remain, Wilde wrote wonderful tales revolved around princes and nightingales' mermaids, giants, and kings. In fact, all of his fairy tales are written in a well-educated, aesthetic voice (Holland, 1994, 3). In terms of style, Wilde's imaginary short fiction is regarded as an

aesthetic marker. As for Oscar Wilde's style in short fiction, complex structure is excessively employed and Wilde spares no effort to make use of irony and paradox (Daniel, 2004). Wilde exhibits the remarkable tact of fictional language to his audience so as to make it more attractive and amiable. One of his stylistic means is to exploit eloquence and figurative language as well as irony to deliver his themes (Mugair & Abbas, 2016).

4. The Two Short Stories: Themes and Characterization

Surveying the themes, language style and the major characters represents a general background for understanding Wilde's *The Devoted Friend* and *The Remarkable Rocket*:

4.1. The Devoted Friend

The Devoted Friend is remarkable to have the themes of greed, innocence and selfishness and having contradictory temperaments. He is prolific and elegant enough to make his story simple and profound in its dealing with the ironic friendship between Hans and Miller. It depicts the selfish friendship to be comically harmonious. There is a conflict between innocent and simplicity (Hans) and selfishness and greed (Miller).

Little Hans

Little Hans is one of the major characters of the story. He is an honest, tender-hearted, generous and devoted friend to his so-called best friend ever in his life, the Miller. His consistent assistance without suspecting if his friend is only taking an advantage on him is very touching in the story, and his tenderness and devotion to friendship have contrasted extremely with the selfishness and bad intentions of the Miller. Hans is faithful and friendly enough to the Miller but without avail. Poor Hans used to undergo much from cold and hunger in winter because his garden lacks of fruit or flowers in his garden (Wilde, 2001).

The Miller

The Miller exploited and took an advantage of Little Hans' innocence to do some interests for himself. Little Hans was overworked and he was drowned to die because of the Miller, but the Miller didn't show any feeling of regret. The Miller promise to grant his old wheelbarrow to little Hans. He sent him off on long errands and got him to help at the mill, but never fulfilled his promise. However, the Miller's egotism was extremely revealed when he sent Hans to call the doctor for his son but severely refused to lend him his new lantern. The Miller said that it would be a huge loss if something happened to it, but he never acknowledges that the dark, stormy night and the dangerous moor with a lot of deep holes might claim Hans's life. Though the Miller expresses fine words but in fact, they are actually self-serving. Miller is so proud of himself that he considers himself as the most important person in his own life (Wilde, 2001).

4.2. The Remarkable Rocket

The Remarkable Rocket is about the themes of self-importance (the rocket), loneliness and failure. The ego of the rocket is parentally obvious as he considers himself the only one and no opinion is important than his.

It is a **Firework** who has an extremely inflated opinion of himself. He considers all the other characters with whom he encounters the other fireworks a frog, a dragonfly, and a duck, to be his inferiors and citizens from them for not paying well attention to him. The Rocket considers himself to be an unrewarding genius and firmly believes that he is destined to be great. However, he fails to achieve his only functions, that of amusing people by going up into the air and exploding in front of the audience (Wilde, 1994).

5. Research Questions

The present study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the aesthetic functions and intentions behind the employment of passivization and modality in *The Devoted Friend* and *The Remarkable Rocket*?
2. How do passivization and modality in *The Devoted Friend* and *The Remarkable Rocket* characterize Oscar Wilde's literary style?

6. The Model Adopted

The present study adopts an eclectic model composed of Quirk et. al.(1985) and Dunworth(2008) as they highly match the analysis of the data in question. These two models are adopted as they tackle passivization and modality in a clear and rather detailed way. Quirk et. al.(1985:219) state that modality indicates"the manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified so as to reflect the speaker's judgment of the likelihood of proposition." That is, modal verbs enable people to express their attitudes and feelings in a given situation during communication. Semantically speaking, modality is used in short fiction to describe necessity, obligation, permission, ability, etc. They are grouped into intrinsic, which expresses volition, permission, ability and obligation, and extrinsic, which expresses possibility, necessity and prediction. Dunworth(2008:1) indicates that passive voice could be used for several purposes such as describing actions performed by unknown doers, the performed actions are more important than the doers themselves and for generalizing actions that are not limited to a given doer. However, active voice could be used for the reverse of the purposes used for the passive voice.

7. Procedure

The analytical procedure carried out in this study begins with the process of identifying and obtaining data from the original text by a rigorous comprehensive observation of the frequencies of occurrence of active voice, passive voice and modal auxiliaries. That is, active voice, passive voice and modal auxiliaries frequency is precisely searched for and obtained and its occurrence is numerated. Then, the collected data is stylistically analysed in terms of Quirk et. al.(1985) and Dunworth(2008) to achieve the aim of the study. Consequently, the results of the analysis are presented and discussed to reveal the aesthetic and artistic functions of the employment of active voice, passive voice and modal auxiliaries in *The Devoted Friend* and *The Remarkable Rocket* to mark Oscar Wilde's style.

8. Data Analysis and Discussion

In this section, the two perspectives passivization and modality in Oscar Wilde's two short stories; namely: *The Devoted Friend* and *The Remarkable Rocket* are exhibited and analyzed according to the adopted model Quirk et. al.(1985)and Dunworth(2008).

8.1. Analysis of Passivization and Modality in *The Devoted Friend*

The term passivization refers to the use of the "passive mode" which is used in contrast to the active voice. The term modality as widely known refers to the use of the various modal auxiliaries to express certainty, possibility, willingness, obligation,...etc.

8.1.1. Analysis of Passivization in *The Devoted Friend*

The analysis of *The Devoted Friend* reveals(424) occurrences of active voice and passive voice. They are divided into:(402) represent active voice constituting 95% and(22) represent passive voice constituting 5%, as shown in the table hereunder:

Table(1): Frequency and Percentage of Passivization in *The Devoted Friend*

From table(1) above, it is quite clear that the active mode is the dominant. Such dominance stems from that the text does not need to use too much

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Active	402	95%
Passive	22	5%
Total	424	100

passive verbs because the latter are usually used if the writer wants to hide the identity of the doer of the action; in other words, when it is intended that the doer of the action to be unknown or vague for one of the following reasons: economy of expression, anonymity, redundancy or irrelevancy of the agent and deliberate concealment of the identity of the agent to avoid assigning of responsibility. The deletion of the agent has a depersonalizing effect in that the agent is downplayed while the process is focused on, as illustrated in the following example:

4."I don't understand you," answered the Water-rat.

By the means of active voice, Wilde expresses his characters and achieves their themes and tactfully employs his fictional images to make all the human and non-human characters well-known. This is an indication of his direct language style.

8.1.2. Analysis of Modality in The Devoted Friend

There are(69) modal auxiliaries in The Devoted Friend. They are divided into would which is used 18 times, followed by will used 15 times, should used 9 times, can used 7 times, shall used 6 times, could used 6 times, must used 4 times and might used 4 times, as illustrated in the table below:

Table(2): Frequency and Percentage of Modality in The Devoted Friend

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Would	18	26%
Will	15	21%
Should	9	13%
Can	7	10%
Shall	6	9%
Could	6	9%
Must	4	6%
Might	4	6%
Total	69	100

As illustrated in table(2) above, would is the most frequent. The modal auxiliary verb would is a closet approximation to a colorless neutral future. From the events in The Devoted Friend, which is full of morals and narrated in the third person style, the researcher can assure that the near future presented frequently throughout the short story needs a modal verb that matches this style of writing, which is would, as the following example illustrates:

5."Do you think it would be unfriendly of me..." Miller inquired.

This example shows Wilde's artistic vision in the way he harmonizes hypothetical events to his imaginary characters so as to achieve their themes and show their style.

8.2. Analysis of Passivization and Modality in The Remarkable Rocket

This subsection is devoted to analyzing The Remarkable Rocket in terms of active voice and passive voice and modal auxiliaries it contains.

8.2.1. Analysis of Passivization in The Remarkable Rocket

There are(551) occurrences of active voice and passive voice in The Remarkable Rocket. They are divided into(516) are active representing 94% and(35) are passive representing 6%.

Table(3): Frequency and Percentage of Passivization in The Remarkable Rocket

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Active	516	94%
Passive	35	6%
Total	551	100

As illustrated in table(3) above, the frequent use of the active voice throughout the story indicates that the doer of the action is intended to be known. The Remarkable Rocket is a simple fairy tale and its heroes are known and needed to be known and they play their roles directly in a simple form of a dialogue in addition to some comments and questions said by the narrator which is very common in such kinds of stories, as shown in the following example:

6. He had waited a whole year for his bride, and at last she had arrived. She was a Russian Princess, and had driven all the way from Finland in a sledge drawn by six reindeer.

By the means of the active voice, in this example, Wilde elucidates his characters at the very beginning of the story to be well-known to be more expressive and direct.

8.2.2. Analysis of Modality in The Remarkable Rocket

There are(65) modal auxiliaries in The Remarkable Rocket. They are divided into would which is used 14 times, followed by will used 11 times, could used 9 times, should used 7 times, may used 7 times, shall used 6 times, can used 5 times and must used 4 times, as shown in the table hereunder:

Table(4): Frequency and Percentage of Modality in The Remarkable Rocket

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Would	14	21%
Will	11	17%
Could	9	14%
Should	7	11%
May	7	11%
Shall	6	9%
Can	5	8%
Must	4	6%
Might	2	3%
Total	65	100

It is noticeable here that there are(65) occurrences of the modal auxiliaries and the most frequently used one is would which has many uses like willingness and insistence, but here, since it is a fairy tale, would is used to refer to a characteristic activity in the past with somehow an imaginary flavor and tendency. The reason is that the text, as mentioned earlier, is a fairy tale and full of fictional and imaginary images which, for sure, presupposes and needs the modal auxiliary verb would that fits such images, as illustrated in the following example:

7."The world is an enormous place, and it would take you three days to see it thoroughly." said a big Roman Candle.

As shown in the above example, by means of the modal auxiliary verb would, Wilde succeeds to be tactful in describing his characters as imaginary and achieving his themes as fictional.

8.3. Passivization in the Two Short Stories

In the two short stories,(975) passivization occurrences are numerated. They are divided into(918) are active constituting 94% and(57) constituting 6%, as the following table illustrates:

Table(5): Frequency and Percentage of Passivization in the Two Short Stories

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Active	918	94%
Passive	57	6%
Total	975	100

Such excessive use of active voice is employed by the novelist to give prominence to his characters and thoughts by emphasizing their speeches to be more known from the very beginning of the stories.

8.4. Modality in the Two Short Stories

There are(134) modal auxiliaries in the two short stories. They are divided as follows:(32) represent would, will is used(26), followed by should which is used(16) times, could used(15), shall used(12) times, can used(12) times, must is used(8) times, may is used(7) times and might is used(6) times:

Table(6): Frequency and Percentage of Modality in the Two Short Stories

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Would	32	24 %
Will	26	19.5 %
Should	16	12 %
Could	15	11 %
Shall	12	9 %
Can	12	9 %
Must	8	6 %
May	7	5 %
Might	6	4.5 %
Total	134	100

The novelist emphasizes the use of the modal auxiliary verb would to make the fictional texts robust as it captures the readers' minds. Further, it is rather fascinating in delivering a sort of hypothetical and imaginary thoughts and this goes in line with the theme of the two short stories.

To sum it up, as two imaginary fairy tales, the stories have their own unique style in telling the events which, in turn, presupposes some syntactic or grammatical modal auxiliaries that match their style; the modal auxiliaries would and will in particular are the most matching ones.

9. Conclusion

The present study concludes that The Devoted Friend and The Remarkable Rocket are replete and laced with a density of active voice constructions and modal auxiliaries which mark Oscar Wilde's style. The denotative effectiveness of active voice and modal auxiliaries in the data is stylistically pregnant with copious purposes and intentions. Concerning passivization, the active voice constructions, which are used 918 times and constitute 96 %, are highly denominated because the heroes of the two short stories are known from the very beginning of the stories; hence, the doers of the actions are intended to be known and they play their roles directly in a simple form of dialogues, so there is no need to hide their identity with the exceptions of very few cases of passive voice constructions which are used 4 %. As for modality, the most frequently used one in the two short stories is would which is used 32 times constituting 24 %, followed by will 19.5 %, should 12 %, could 11 %, shall 9 %, can 9 %, must 6 %, may 5 % and might 4.5 %. Since The Devoted Friend and The Remarkable Rocket are fairy tales, the modal auxiliary verb would is used to refer to a characteristic activity in the past with somehow an imaginary flavor and tendency to fulfill the desire of the audience. The reason is that fairy tale texts are full of fictional and imaginary images which, for sure, presuppose and need the modal auxiliary verb would to fit such images.

References

- Crystal, D. and Davy, D.(1969), Investigation English Style. London: Macmillan Press.
- Daniel Anne Margaret."Wilde the writer". In: RODEN, Frederick S.(org.). Palgrave advances in Oscar Wilde studies. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Dunworth, K.(2008). Using the Passive in Writing. London: Curtan University in Technology.
- Ellmann, Richard. Introduction to Wilde, Oscar. The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Groenewold, N.(2015). Wilde's Aestheticism, The Picture of Dorian Gray and Salome.
- Gavins, J.(2007). Text World Theory: An Introduction. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Guillen, C.(1987). On the uses of monistic theories: Parallelism in poetry. New Literary History, 18(3), 497-516. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/469055>.
- Halliday, M. K.(1985). An Introduction to Functional Grammar. London: Arnold.

- Harris, Frank, Oscar Wilde His Life and Confessions, edited and published by the author, 29 Waverley place Vol.I, New York City 1916.
- Holland, M.(1994). Complete Works of Oscar Wilde. London: Harper Collins Publisher.
- Joshi, M.(2014). Interchange of Active and Passive Voice. Cambridge: CUP.
- Kroger, P.(2005). Analyzing Grammar: An Introduction. Cambridge: CUP.
- Mugair, S. K., & Abbas, A. J.(2016). A Stylistic Analysis of Oscar Wilde's the Nightingale and the Rose. International Journal of Social Sciences & Education, 6(4), 389-395.
- Radden, G. and Driven, R.(2007). Cognitive English Grammar. Oxford: OUP.
- Siméus, J.(2004). A Study of Art and Aestheticism in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray. Harris, Frank. Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions. New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1930.
- Vitto, C. L.(2006). Grammar by Diagram. Newyork: Broadview.
- Wilde, Oscar, Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde: The Young King – The Remarkable Rocket, NBM, New York City USA 1994.
- Wilde, Oscar, The Devoted Friend, Electric Book Company, Cape Town South Africa, 2001.
- <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/DevFri.shtml#3>
- Dunworth, Kate(2008) Using the passive in writing
Curtan University of Technology
- Dunworth, Kate(2008) Using the passive in writing
Curtan University of Technology
- Dunworth, Kate(2008) Using the passive in writing
Curtan University of Technology