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The Effect of Communicative Anxiety on Intended Meaning: A Study of Shaharyar's Barish

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Abstract

Language is not a mere tool of conveying information; more so when it comes to its use for literary purposes, especially in poetry. Poets are known to maneuver the resources of language to suit their purpose. In doing so they quite often are seen to convey more than the literal meaning. The present paper tries to find out how the famous Urdu poet Shaharyar has used the resources of language dexterously to convey the intended meanings.

Key Words: Speech Act, Sense of Futility, Generic Expectation, Isotopy, Politeness

Meaning is a Kind of Intending

Language is as much, if not more, a mode of action as it is a means of conveying information (see J. L. Austin's How to Do Things with Words, second edition, 1975). As John Searle puts it, "All linguistic communication involves linguistic acts. The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word, or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word, or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of a speech act."

Meaning, then, should be regarded as a species within the genus intending-to-communicate, since language itself is highly complex, rule-governed intentional behaviour. A theory of language is part of a theory of action.

The basic emphasis of speech act theory is on what an utterer (U) means by his utterance (x) rather than what x means in a language (L).

As H.P. Grice notes, "meaning is a kind of intending," and the hearer's or reader's recognition that the speaker or writer means something by x is part of the meaning of x.

Shaharyar

One of the clearest examples of this "Meaning is a kind of intending" can be found in Shaharyar's poem Barish (Rain). Shaharyar is a leading figure of "Contemporary Urdu Poetry". Contemporary Urdu poets address everyday Indian life in a simple, straightforward language with very little, if any, experimentation with form. His poems are fairly short lyrical compositions conveying and even sharing the deep thoughts, feelings and state of mind of a single speaker in a clear, informal language.

Born in Bulandshahar city of Uttar Pradesh, Kunwar Ikhlaq Muhammad Khan, became famous by his pen name Shaharyar. Shaharyar started his career as a Urdu journalist. He did his Masters in Urdu in 1961. He joined as Lecturer in the Department of Urdu, Aligarh Muslim University in 1966 wherefrom he retired as chairman and head of the Department.

Shaharyar's poem **Ba'rish** proclaims:

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Be Daira nuqtoN ko gine jaeNge kab tak
(How long these meaningless dots will be counted)
SannaToN ki a'wa'z suneN ja'eNge kab tak
(How long the echo of silence will be heard)
SaRkoN pe pataNgoN ke swa' kuch bhi nahin hai
(There is no one other than moth on roads)
Barish ke sabab se
(Due to rain)
Ik a'Nkh meN ham aur zamin chand sitare
(In this eye I find stars moon and the earth)
Is sihar se us qahar se
(From this spell of agony)
Bachne ki koi rah nikaleN
(Let's find some escape route)
Ta ham ko koi ajnabi sarhad se pukare
(Till the time a stranger gives me a call from the frontier)
Tarik-e-shab se
(From the darkness of this night)
Uktae hue ham bhi bahut hain
(I am bored to death)
Ghabrae hue ham bhi bahut hain
(I am scared and terrified)
Chumen kisi parchaiN ki peshani ka suraj
(I should also kiss the forehead of a shadow)
DekheN kisi khushbu ka badan ham bhi barahna
(I should also see the naked body of some kind of fragrance)
Naghma sunen ham bhi kisi diwar ki lab se
(I should also listen the music from the lips of the wall)
SarkoN pe pataNgoN ki siwa kuch bhi nahin hai
(There is no one on the road other than moth) barish ki sabab se
(Due to rain)

The Overt Structure

Although no question mark is present in any of the lines, the poem appears to be an answer in retaliation to the brisk statement," Be Daira nuqtoN ko gine jaeNge kab tak" (How long these meaningless dots will be counted).

Tightly bound into sixteen lines of unequal size, the shape of the composition contributes to the fast delivery of his indignant repudiation of the state of solitude loneliness and isolation. This effect is conveyed through the repetition of exclamation marks and the strongly suggestive rhyme and assonantal "slant" on the end word of the first two lines in the poem, "Gine jaeNge kab tak" and "Sune jaeNge kab tak".

The Upbeat Pace of the Poem

Sharyar's use of metric pattern in this poem contributes to the upbeat pace of reading and the readers' belief that the feelings expressed are real and true. Moreover, his use of alliteration and metaphors of pain like "tariki-e-shab," heightens the tale of a painful and melodramatic passion.

This technique helps to convey a sense of serious thought and contemplation, "ukta'e hue ham bhi bahut haiN," "ghabrae hue ham bhi bahut haiN". These regular, but brief expressions, are followed by his wishful thinking, " dekheN kisi khushbu ka badan hm bhi barahna" , which highlight a stylistic devise that loosens the stiff formality of punctuation and effects a breathlessness throughout the verse.

The Speaker

Written in the first person, "ham", the poet and the speaker in the poem become one and the same. One important consideration at the level of the communicative situation here is the genre to which the text belongs. "Barish" is a subjective and reflective type of discourse in which a speaker presents or describes an emotion, or discusses a philosophical problem. The sentences of a lyrical poem are usually given in the present tense.

Fulfilling the Generic Expectation

"Barish" fulfills most of these generic expectations. The central tense therein is the present, although there are references to the past and the timelessness, as already explained. Subjective emotions of isolation and alienation, on the other hand, dominate the text. The emotions are not groundless; they have their socio-philosophical causes in the gap between appearance and reality and the absence of true love and intimacy. This is where the author and the speaker of the poem - the poet and the speaker-in-the-text - seem to coincide. Even though the speakers and authors should be treated as "distinct textual roles", they may, of course, "share certain characteristics; indeed, biographical and other text-external evidence may add considerable substance and meaning to a poem."

The focus is more on the meta-textual and inter-textual aspects of the poem than on the details of the poet's life. This section is, not unjustifiably, quotation-heavy. It is based on different accounts of Shaharyar's life and works and on different critical responses to his poetry in general.

The Movement From Within

In Barish, there is evidence for the main characteristics of the "Movement." Simple, accessible and only minimally ambiguous, the poem departs from the canons that characterize, perhaps stigmatize, many modern and post-modern poems. In this respect, the poem challenges its own author's sense of isolation and alienation - both text-internal and text-external. A large portion of the alienation of modern poets derives from the deterioration of literary competence among a continually decreasing readership, on the one hand, and the association of most modern (ist) poetry with extreme symbolism, ambiguity and sometimes unintelligibility, on the other.

What Makes It Readable?

What makes Shaharyar's poem readable despite its sad tone is probably what made Shaharyar himself popular: "With Shaharyar and his readers, the silliness which helped to make him popular was his genuine, uncultivated, sincere philistinism. One more distinctive feature about Shaharyar is his "resistance to biographical curiosity". However, his resistance to biographical curiosity, whatever it meant for him, does not make possible a decontextualized reading of his poetry. The thematic preoccupations, the general tone and the stylistic features of 'Barish', as discussed above, not only reflect historical conditions and personal propensities, but also cohere with the bulk of his work, in general. Shaharyar devoted the vast majority of his poetry, 'Barish" included, to what is generally taken to be negative aspects of life, such as loneliness and dejection, disappointments, and the terrifying prospect of loss, and has come to be identified with a downhearted, pessimistic temper and tone of voice."

Sense of Futility

Those feelings stemmed from, at least partly, his sense of futility, the feeling that his lifetime passes unused, and his inability to cope with people The last clause in "Barish" clearly indicates the speaker's mistrust, his frustration and the gap between expectations and reality. Throughout the poem, "the theme is dark (shab-e-ta'rik), the tone bleak with disappointment at the discovery

that the passage of time [which 'passes silently'] does not bring with it those fulfillments that expectation seemed latent with."
The characteristic Shaharyar tone of disillusionment is strong in this poem. This is all true; yet we cannot make generalizations on Shaharyar's attitude towards life based on the poem. Assuming that the speaker in the poem is a male, (ChumeN kisi parchaiN ki peshani ka suraj dekheN kisi khush bu ka badan hm bhi barahna) as we already did, the other person is apparently less powerful and less articulate.

The Advantage of the "Speaker"
The speaker has the advantage of talking, has the access to discourse. He can make statements about moral obligations, narrate past events and states, describe nature and evaluate its attitude to humans and finally diagnose some of the maladies which humanity suffers from. This is all on a narrow scale.
Moreover, the shaky conclusion that the male participant is more powerful (ChumeN kisi parchaiN ki peshani ka suraj dekheN kisi khush bu kabadan hm bhi barahna) should be understood within the context of an overall sense of isolation and deprivation, irrespective of gender.

The Irony in Shaharayar's Poems
Larkins once famously said that "deprivation was for him what daffodils were for Wordsworth." Deprivation in a situation of pleasure and fulfillment is the heart of the irony of the Shaharryar's poetry.
Irony, one dominant feature in modern poetry, the mismatch between the ideal and the real, is encoded in the thematic development, transitivity choices and deictic sub-worlds of the poem. And in the mismatch between what is and what ought to be, Barish is intertextually related to many other works by Shaharyar such as 'Gumshuda, apni yad meN and Wapsi.
Barish echoes its historical and intertextual context in many other ways too.
The speaker's awareness of the indifference and malice in nature - sarkoN pe kuch bhi nahin hai ---- barish ki saqbab se - reflects one aspect of the poet's personality as far as perception of nature and environment is concerned: Nature, especially the least comforting aspects of nature: the blank moon (shab-e-tarik), the empty air (sannatoN ki awaz) were for Shaharyar signs that it would be wrong to look for presence anywhere out there.

The Feeling as the Basis
Moreover, the poem confirms one of Shaharyar's pronouncements on his own poetry: "I think a poem usually starts off from the feeling. In fact, 'Barish' starts from the feeling of frustration and ends with the double feeling of hope and disappointment." Both feelings end in disappointment, as already indicated. Yet, in its attempt to establish order and unity, to provide glimpses of coherence in a world falling apart, the poem makes itself seem true - true to its author, to its age, to the personae therein and to us as human beings.

Barren Lust and Futile Communication
The poem is about the same barren lust and futile communication that are found in " KhaboN se dastbardar hone walon ki Nam". It is as clipped and anti-romantic, too. It is also about the disillusionments and discontents of urbanization.
The eternal cities are now "dark towns" that heap up on the horizon. Nature is now an enemy, not a Wordsworth's paradise.
Barish is as true to the modern world as ***The Waste Land*** is, although in a totally different way and on an apparently smaller scale. For it is also about the agony of alienation, the loss of faith

in communion. One strategy for the analysis of thematic coherence in a text is the use of the concept of "isotopies".

Isotopies in Barish

An isotopy refers to "a level of meaning which is established by the recurrence in a text of semes belonging to the same semantic field, and which contributes to our interpretation of the theme" (Wales, 1989, p. 265).

"Barish" is in many ways a poem about talking. It is, in a sense, a metalinguitic poem, a poem about the use, misuse and abuse of language, about the contribution of human language, not to communication and understanding, but to the alienation and isolation of humankind, of "two people" who used to be "honest", who "ought to" talk easily, but they are now "lying" together, watching time passing "silently".

What remains is only an "emblem". An emblem is a (semio)linguistic signifier, or set of signifiers. It substitutes reality. In the present situation it substitutes a past reality, for it "goes back so far." The epigrammatic ending of the poem bears further witness to the centrality of the language isotopy.

An essential part of the predicament is the difficulty of "finding words" that are either "true and kind" or "not untrue and not unkind": the difficulty of telling the truth and being nice at one and the same time, or at least not lying and not being cruel.

Situationally Defined Use of Language

"Barish" is a situationally defined use of language. The unmarked features of this use include the highest degree of informality and intimacy. The intimate style is our closest, friendliest, most trusting variety. … The second most prominent isotopy in the poem is that of a malicious, indifferent, if not hostile, nature/environment.

"Time"(Be Daira nuqton ko gine jaeNge kab tak) passes silently; the "wind" (sannatoN ki Awaz) haphazardly "builds" and "disperses" "clouds" in the "sky"; "towns" are "dark" (tarik-e shab); they heap up on the "horizon" as well as on the vision and feelings of the human experiencer/s, none of them "cares" for or provides answers to the questions of the human/s at the unique distance from isolation.

Shaharyar's Nature Isotopy - Hostile and Indifferent

The hostile, indifferent nature isotopy challenges both the romantic fallacy of a friendly nature and the pathetic fallacy of nature as endowed with human capabilities, sensations and emotions Rejection of the two fallacies should not necessarily result in a rejection of the possible analogies between the human and the natural worlds. The poem's apparent denial of nature's sympathy for humankind - "None of this cares for us" (SarkoN pe patangoN ke siwa kuch bhi nahin hai) - does not preclude the use of nature as a background and a mirror for human emotions and mental states, or as a parallel world onto which one may project his/her emotions and states.

On the other hand, most of the images in the poem occur within the nature/environment isotopy. Two more metaphors connect nature to the human participants in the poem: the animation of those natural objects and phenomenon into things that could, but do not "care" for "us" and the rather far-fetched metaphor of "communication-as-showing" (SarkoN pe patangoN ke siwa kuch bhi nahin hai).

The Isotopy of Love

The third isotopy has to do with love. Absence of one condition/consequence of love, "care', characterizes nature-human relationship. The "two people" who used to be "honest" are now, isolated. Most of the lexical items constituting the love isotopy have sexual over- and undertones. (khushbu ka badan, barahna, diwar ki lab)

In this semantic environment, "Barish" can be very easily interpreted as the verbal part of love and emotion. One marginal isotopy that crosscuts the nature and the love isotopies is that of night. Thus, "Barish", "sannatoN ki Awaz", "dark towns(Shab-e-tarik)" and "isolation" find their ideal environment in the night. Obviously, they are not restricted to this semantic domain. Yet, the circumstances surrounding them merit their grouping under a night isotopy, so to speak. Night, love and sex are closely related, and they, in fact, constitute one major isotopic center. One salient metaphor in this center is that of "emotional -intimacy- as- physical closeness." However, the metaphor is aborted by the paradox of closeness and remoteness in thought and emotion. The three isotopies - language, nature and love - not only constitute some of the major thematic preoccupations of the poem, but also function as important cohesive ties. Other unifying devices used in the poem include parallelism and repetition.

The Import of Verbs

On the other hand, "suneN" and "dekheN" are parallel optative constructions indicating non-factuality. Taken together, the factual and the non-factual verbs represent the three referential axes of the poem - the past, the present and the tenseless. These are the three "deictic sub-worlds" in the poem:

Be daera nuqtoN ko gine jaeN ge kab tak -- Factual past
uktae hue ham bhi bahur hain -- Factual present
DekheN kisi khushbu ka badan ham bhi -- Non Factual

Building the World

The "world-building elements" that make up these sub-worlds are as follows:

Present Continuous gine Jaenge kab tak, Sune jaeNge kab tak
Present Status - uktae hue ham bhi bahut hain;
Tenseless: (ought to be)- DekheN kisi khushbu ka badan ham bhi barahna.

"Bachne ki koi rah nikaleN" combines to intensify the distance between the past and the present. The gap between the past and the present is also indicated by the adversative "is sahar se us qahar tak", which joins the first two stanzas.

The conjunction is not merely a cohesive device; it signals a departure from one sub-world to another.

Other instances of repetition and parallelism in the poem include the repetition of " ham bhi", also has isotopic and unifying effects: "Barish" is implicitly set against other forms and varieties of language use.

Indefinite pronoun kisi not only functions as cohesive devices, but also help the reader identify the conceptual space, the different "sub-worlds", of the text. It signals a spatial movement resulting in a shift from the world of "two people" to the world of an indifferent nature outside.

As demonstrated below, the two worlds are not separable.

The demonstrative "is" and "us" occurs once (Line 6) (Is sahar se us qahar se.) The first "is" refers to the indifferent environment surrounding, at least, the "people" in the text. In this sense, the demonstrative pronoun becomes apparently ironic, for it categorically refers to someone or something near or close in space and/or time to the speaker/s.

The lexical expectations raised by the use of "this" are frustrated by the anomaly and the negation of the entire clause, thus rendering the otherwise realis process of "caring" counterfactual.

The singularity of the demonstrative has other implications: elements of the surrounding environment unite in their indifference and there is no need for distinguishing them one from another. The second occurrence of demonstrative pronoun "us" refers to the "unique distance from isolation." Here, it suggests that the isolation has to do with someone, or some people, in the immediate context of the poem.. These two references deserve an elaboration.

The referential scope of "two people" (koi ajnabi) is marked for non-specificity. The identity of the participants is 'suppressed'. This is a "distancing device" which may be called "defocalization". Its goal is to minimize the speaker's involvement and to avoid any direct confrontation with the hearer/s.

In fact, there appears to be a boundary between the speaker-in-the-poem and the two people, of whom he is presumably one, resulting in a sense of detachment that is spatio-temporally consistent with displacement into the past and ideologically consistent with the sense of disillusionment and isolation.

A more traditional stylistic effect of non-specificity is "to expand the speaker coordinate of the deictic center to the extent that its boundaries become indeterminate. The two people in the poem could be any couple in a similar situation.

Informal and Intimate Register of Barish

As already suggested, "Barish" is conventionally an instance of informal, intimate register. Linguistically, the intimate style is filled with deletion, ellipsis, rapid and slurred pronunciation, nonverbal communication and private code characteristics, "often unintelligible outside the smallest social units". It is 'talking', not writing; mode: (genre): it must be "pillow-talk" - informal conversations, demonstrating the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the intimate style identified above; channel (face-to-face, telephone, etc.): very proximate, face-to-face, supposedly manipulating body language as well; tenor (interpersonal relationship): the "two people" "lying together" must be lovers or husband and wife, and context (situation - social and cultural factors): this must be a bedroom, most probably at night, for time "passes silently" and towns are "dark."

Thus, the speaker in "Barish" is a "he", addressing both his communicational partner and the reader. This speaker is a "communicator", where he is also part of the significance of the "emblem". His relationship with his partner is one of frustration and disillusionment. The gap between expectation ("ought") and memories ("two people being honest"), on the one hand, and reality (patangoN ke siwa kuch bhi nahin hai), on the other, is so obvious and so neatly presented in the first stanza.

Hard To Make Sense?

The functional analysis so far given suggests that all the movement and action in the poem are the sole property of the natural objects and entities. Much of this movement and this action does not really make sense. For instance, the actions performed by the wind are absurd and non-consequential. The action performed by the dark towns, on the other hand, seems to lack volitionality.

The human participants are not really "doing" anything. Much of their existence is invested in recollecting a wonderful past, sleeping silently, or, watching meaningless action outside, being denied guidance as well as care, struggling in vain for salvation from isolation through language. Yet, it seems that it is more difficult to find successful human communication than to receive sympathy and care from nature.

Communication Breakdowns

At the heart of alienation and isolation lie communication breakdowns and pragmatic failures. Silence, dishonesty, lack of care and absence of candid and kind words are indications of those breakdowns and failures.

The text-internal, as well as text-external, concern of the poem with language as crucial to human well-being may be approached from a pragmatic vantage-point. The requirement that "dekheN kisi khushbu ka badan ham bhi" should be 'easiest', to begin with, is based on the assumption that between intimates and lovers there must exist the highest level of cooperation - in its Gricean sense.

This assumption, which used to be valid when the "two people" were "honest", is now flouted because of their mutual mistrust. In this context, the maxims of conversational cooperation are broken in at least two ways: quietly violated through deception and telling lies and opted out of through silence - "time passes silently". Honesty, a mere memory now, largely consists in abiding by the Maxim of Quality in Grice's Cooperative Principle - "Do not say what you believe to be false; do not say that for which you lack evidence" (Finch, 2000, p. 160).

The Principles for Cooperation and Politeness

At a text-external level, the environment/nature isotopy is an apparent, rather than real, violation of the Maxim of Relation - "Be relevant" (pp. 160-161). The violation is only apparent because the description of a malicious, indifferent environment is indirectly relevant to the concern with the personal dilemma of the "Speaker" in the poem. Lack of ease in bed are only intensified by a global sense of isolation. Nothing can instruct the speaker on how to abide by the Cooperative Principle (Maxim of Quality) and the Politeness Principle (generosity, sympathy, minimization of cost to others, agreement, and so on; see Leech, 1983) at one and the same time - "Words at once true and kind." It is even difficult to achieve a minimum of cooperation and politeness.

That is, it is difficult to avoid direct violations of the Maxim of Quality and direct violations of the Politeness Principle. The following diagram shows the different options resulting from the interplay of the Cooperative Principle (quality) and the Politeness Principles: Nothing is said in the poem about the "true but unkind" option, which is (+ quality) but (- politeness), or the "kind but untrue" option, which is (- quality) but (+ politeness).

The implication is that these two options are not in demand. They seem to be available everywhere. The difficult-to-attain ideal is a combination of truth (+ quality) and kindness (+ politeness). This seems to be the heart of the sententiae that "lay down the law" of the poem. It is analogous to Mahatma Gandhi's "Whenever you have truth, it must be given with love, or the message and the messenger will be rejected." However, it remains an ideal that the speaker in the poem seeks.

Midway Between Truth and Falsehood?!

An alternative that he can accept is to find a midway between truth and falsehood, between kindness and cruelty - "not untrue" (- - quality) and "not unkind" (- - politeness). Like the Cooperative and the Politeness Principles themselves, the poem establishes a tension between expectations and reality. In other words, two "attitudinal sub-worlds" the desire (want-world) and the belief (believe-world) - conflict with real life experience. Both belief and desire are included in the meanings of "ought to". The desires of having easy talk in bed and finding "true and kind", or "not untrue and not unkind" words are aborted in reality. The belief is not instantiated and the desire is not fulfilled.

Movement from the Micro to Macro Level

The integrative, bottom-up analysis of 'Barish' in the present paper is by no means the final word on the poem. Yet, it has at least one basic value, which is the accumulation of understanding resulting from the movement from the more micro to the more macro, from the very narrow level of the poem as form to the relatively broader level of the poem as discourse and finally to the most comprehensive level of the communicative context of the poem.

Thus, the lexical items, with their different denotations and connotations, and the basic grammatical categories and structures unite to produce the three main isotopies of the poem - language, love and nature. It is also those items, structures and categories that establish the cohesive chains and the three deictic sub-worlds of the poem - the past, the present and the optative. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, they are tools and indexes of the ideational components of the text.

The Conceptual Space of the Poem

The text's conceptual space is a function of those elements explored at its formal level. In the conceptual space of the poem, we encounter an emotional linguistic predicament of a speaker who is unable to communicate, a person who used to be honest. The dilemma seems to lie in the inability to tell the truth and be nice at one and the same time.

(A pragmatic approach, combining Grice and Leech, is used to shed more light on this linguistic crisis.)

Lack of Sympathy from the External Environment, Etc.

What makes the situation even more problematic is the lack of any support or sympathy from the external, non-human environment.

Many other aspects are explored at the level of the poem as discourse, probably because this is the densest level. It bridges the gap between the poem as form and the poem as a communicative event within a socio-historical context. It subsumes the text as representation, the interpersonal relationships in the text, its transitivity choices and ideological processes, the politics of pronouns and deictics, in addition to isotopies, cohesion and imagery.

An attitude of objectification and detachment dominates the text. The attitude is accompanied with a negative representation of the human participants and an anti-romantic representation of the environment outside. The findings of the analysis of the levels of form and discourse in the poem confirm many of the features of the communicative situation where it was written.

The poem is true to its own genre and author, to the poetic sensibility to which it belongs, with the notable exception of its minimal symbolism and ambiguity, and to the socio-historical conditions where it occurred.

Perhaps it is in the fitness of things that Shaharyar recently declared in his own characteristic manner that there is no other Urdu poet who could match him. Is this also an indication that he is lonely, and why not? After all, the man or woman at the top is always lonely!

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