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## Computational Stylistic Analysis of Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*

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### Abstract

*A language is a communication tool for sharing ideas, emotions, and thoughts in spoken or written form. Writers use different linguistic structures to communicate their views for specific meanings. Stylistics aims at exploring such use of language to explore different lexical categories. The linguistic model of Leech and Short (2007) reveals the descriptive and interpretive nature of these lexical categories in Oscar Wilde's (1888) 'The Selfish Giant' with the help of a computational tool known as AntConc. The mixed-method analysis of lexical categories shows the writer's artistry to employ different lexical items with different frequencies to give meaning to the text. Six lexical categories with frequency of 1490 were categorized as, 615 nouns (41%), 336 verbs (23%), 293 conjunctions (20%), 137 adverbs (9%), 91 adjectives (6%), and 18 particles (1%).*

**Key Words:** Stylistics, AntConc, Oscar Wilde, The Selfish Giant, Leech and Short

### Introduction

Stylometry is a comparative study of statistical stylistics of different writers or genres ([Oxford Languages, 2021](#)). It examines various written strains, such as literary writings, speeches, legal documents, news reports, commercials, and humor. Linguists define stylistics as a bridge between linguistics and literary criticism, including the application of linguistic methods and principles to literary texts, which is why stylistics is referred to as “linguistic criticism” or “literary linguistics” ([Fowler, 1989](#); [MacCabe et al., 1988](#)). Additionally, [Almahameeda \(2020\)](#) states that stylistics refers to applying linguistic norms to literary composition. Given [Verdonk \(2002\)](#), stylistics studies language's distinguishing traits, emphasizing their functions and effects.

[Widdowson \(2014\)](#) defines stylistics as the study of literary language from a linguistic viewpoint, in which stylistics establishes a link between literary criticism and linguistics. He continues, “Stylistics is an area of mediation between two disciplines... that Stylistics can provide a way of mediating between two subjects: English Language and Literature”. Although there is no broad agreement on the concept of stylistics, it is acknowledged that stylistics is a distinct subject that acts as a bridge between linguistics and literature. Style is a Latin term that refers to how a writer employs language, word choice, sentence structure, and poetic elements.

The style reflects the writer's thumbprint expressing ideas, emotions, and even personality to the intended audience ([Shafi, 2019](#)). One can

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sometimes accurately guess an author's name based on one's writing style. Some writers deviate from linguistic norms by violating language subsystems, including phonetic, graphological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic systems- distinguishing one's style. Therefore, Stylistics aims at exploring such use of language, which together constitutes style. Writers use different stylistic devices to code their thoughts in a particular way for a specific language. Hence, there is a need to explore the author's style and use different linguistics and grammatical terms in the text to make it more catching (Khan et al., 2014).

For this purpose, the researchers have chosen a short story, *The Selfish Giant*, by a well-known short story writer, Oscar Wilde (1845-1900). He is the most famous for his contribution to English literature, especially in short stories. He tries to discuss and eradicate social evils from society. He belonged to the late Victorian Age and was a well-known dramatist, poet, and prominent short story writer. Moreover, he possessed a sharp and witty intelligence coupled with a gift for the proper use of language. Owing to contribution in literature, Wilde's masterpiece is stylistically analysed by following the Leech and Short's Model with the help of computational Tool: AntConc because computational tools save time and produce reliable results in researches (Ullah, Arif, & Qaisar, 2020).

### Problem Statement

Language is a system of rules based on thoughts. Literary writers select this system in a particular genre for a certain purpose and within a given context to communicate their thoughts (Siddiq et al., 2021). Stylistics aims at exploring such use of language, which together constitutes style. Writers use different stylistic devices to code their ideas in a particular way, in a specific language. Hence, there is a need to explore other stylistic devices to provide an integrative stylistic analysis of the short story *The Selfish Giant* (1888) by Oscar Wilde.

### Research Objective and Questions

The current study aims to analyze the stylometry and lexical categories within the short story of Oscar Wilde, *The Selfish Giant*, with the help of a computational tool, AntConc. It aims at answering

the following question: What type of stylistic features in terms of lexical categories are employed by Oscar Wilde in his short story *The Selfish Giant*? There are certain delimitations for this current study: First, this present study is delimited to Oscar Wilde's (1888) *The Selfish Giant*. The research delimits dominated lexical categories encoded in the short story.

### Significance of the Study

Stylistics naturally bridges the divide between linguistics and literary studies, which is fascinating and critical for individuals with a broad interest in the English language and literature and those with a particular interest in stylistics. The current study is of immense importance because it integrates linguistics with literature and explains specific effects and meanings that the writer intended to create. Certain stylistic devices are studied from different dimensions, which evokes the curiosity to look for creative manipulation and their stylistic effect. It will encourage people interested in doing stylistic analyses on various literary works and those interested in studying works of Oscar Wilde.

### Literature Review

In this section, the researchers have reviewed the past literature to find out the gap in the literature. Written literature portrays distinct themes of literature (Hussain, Arif & Saleem, 2021), which reveal society (Hassan, Shafi, & Masood, 2021). So, these works of literature must be traced (Roohi, Masood, & Mushtaq, 2021). Thus, this section consists of a conceptual and a research review.

### Conceptual Review

Stylistics is defined as "the study of literary discourse from a linguistic perspective." He continues, "...what differentiates stylistics from literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other is that it is fundamentally a way of connecting the two" (Widdowson, 2014, p. 3). According to Abrams and Harpham (2015), "[Stylistics] stresses on the need of objectivity by concentrating intently on the text itself and on the process by which linguistic components and patterns in a text achieve their meanings and literary effects".

Between 1910 and 1930, stylistics emerged as a separate field via a few Russian Formalists and British and American semanticists. They emphasize the importance of studying the aesthetic use of literary and non-literary text. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, stylistic studies grew in popularity, with statisticians using descriptive techniques of linguistic theories to literary works such as American and European structuralism, Transformational Grammar, and systemic-functional grammar. These new branches paved the way for many new domains of study ([Masood et al., 2020](#)).

Several publications were devoted to stylistics developed during the 1970's, so stylistics was recognized as a distinct subject. In the 1980s and 1990s, interest in stylistics waned as many linguists shifted their focus to cultural and mono-linguistic study. However, the case for studying stylistics remains intact since critics continue to use linguistic tools to interpret literary works ([Cureton, 1992](#)). The objective of stylistics is "to employ analysis to increase comprehension of the literary objectives and functions served by specific uses of language" ([Carter & Long, 1991, p. 121](#)).

The objective of the majority of stylistic research is not just to describe the linguistic form but also to establish its significance for text comprehension. This discipline has aided several academics in better comprehending literary works. Without a doubt, stylistic analysis is not the only way to comprehend literary works; yet it significantly contributes to their appreciation. Stylists have examined literary texts via various components to represent the substance of these literary works in some manner ([Elnaili, 2013](#)).

Stylistics is a link between the text and its context.

One can conduct a stylistic textual analysis with a variety of methods. A simple analysis may be accomplished by commenting on the author's grammatical constructs or word choice. On the other hand, one may perform sophisticated analysis by evaluating the author's level of imagination or originality. Stylistic analysis may help bolster judgments about writing by delving into the intricacies of a particular genre ([Amir, 2018](#)).

## Research Literature

[Song \(2009\)](#) used Leech and Short's Model to analyze *Miss Brill's* lexical and grammatical features. He explained how Mansfield created a sense of uncertainty by using vague words and expressions that foreshadow the themes and ending of the story. After analyzing sentence structure at the grammatical level with the help of qualitative research, the researcher concluded that Mansfield's style was sensitive, delicate, lyrical, apparently impersonal, but evocative. As this study provided information about the style of Mansfield, so the investigation of discourse is important in stylistic analysis ([Ahmed, Shafi, & Masood, 2021](#)).

Another significant research was carried out by [Zia \(2017\)](#) on John Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*. This study discussed the significant style levels and then extracted and explained stylistic techniques to evaluate this magnificent poem by the famous and adored poet. The poem's corpus was analyzed stylistically using AntConc software programs. A systematic rhyming scheme was applied to study the employment of nouns, adjectives, Hellenistic mythological references, hyphenated words, off-list unique terms with symmetrical alliterations, assonances, and consonances. Finally, he uncovered the perplexing themes of annihilation, emptiness, and death. Stylistics devices are extracted and scrutinized to create the meaning more precise and more delicate.

In another study, [Zheng \(2014\)](#) analyzed the linguistic features of Martin Luther's speech by categorizing words into common and literary. He explains the friendly and warm effect created with the use of common words and the solemn atmosphere created by the literary terms such as obligation, vault, exile, etc., to show his concern for the rights of blacks. The study discovered that the King enlivens his discourse via his deft use of lexicology, semantics, syntax, and phonetics, all of which contribute significant interest and beauty to his delivery.

[Khan et al. \(2015\)](#) statistically analyzed Tabassum's short story *The Last Word*. The short tale is evaluated aesthetically in terms of figures of speech, taking into account grammatical, lexical, and phonological schemes, using Leech and Short's checklist of linguistic and stylistic characteristics. The authors focus on the features of repetition,

parallelism, alliteration, consonance, assonance, and rhyme. They discovered that the use of apostrophes and rhetorical questions gave the text the appearance of an address made by a gardener to his fellow gardeners upon his departure from the garden. Additionally, they determined that rhyming, alliteration, consonance, and assonance generate a musical sound pattern.

[Amare \(2002\)](#) used stylistic analysis to explain some English poems by Tsegaye Meehan, Solomon Deressa, and Eyasu Corfu. She suggests that the study's primary purpose is to examine the poets' language usage and determine how the language communicates meaning in each poem and reveals the repeating themes in each poem. However, Amare continues, "the other goal is to demonstrate the efficacy of the stylistic analysis technique in revealing the meaning of the poems to arrive at a reliable explanation of literary works." She followed Geoffrey Leech and additional sources in her work.

[Demelash \(1997\)](#) examined the stylistic method's utility in teaching poetry to students of Foreign Languages and Literature, specifically those enrolled in the course "Verse and Drama." The research concludes that a stylistic approach to literary analysis, focusing on textual language, is beneficial for teaching literature. It brings students to a greater comprehension and appreciation of the literary text. However, the researches mentioned above have shown a gap in previous literature regarding the computational analysis of Oscar Wilde's short story *The Selfish Giant* by following Leech and Short model, which needs to be fulfilled. So, this current study will fill the gap by doing Oscar Wilde's short story analysis with the help of AntConc.

## Research Methodology

### Theoretical Framework

The stylistic analysis aims to find out the reason behind the writer's specific usage of the words. Every text has qualities peculiar to it; therefore, findings of one text feature cannot be universalized and applied to other text analyses. Therefore, understanding text necessitates a new study of the reader with the help of [Leech and Short's Model \(2007\)](#), which states, "every analysis of style in our term is an attempt to find out the artistic principles behind a writer's choice of language." Moreover, this model is chosen

to serve as the backbone of the current research paper. The model is comprised of certain categories, namely, grammatical category, lexical category, the figure of speech, cohesion, and context. These categories are an apparatus of linguistic description that is used to analyze the style of prose text.

There is no reliable technique and a clear-cut method for selecting what is significant; however, the emerging computational methodologies produce more effective results than traditional ones ([Masood et al., 2021](#)). [Leech and Short's Model \(2007\)](#) sees a text from different aspects and dimensions, but the focus is only on the lexical category in this current study. These dimensions reveal the style of the writer and its literary age ([Masood & Shafi, 2020](#)).

### Lexical Categories

The term 'lexical category' refers to the Noun, verb, adjective, and maybe additional categories ([Haspelmath, 2012](#)). The frequency of these items is calculated by analyzing the frequency of usage and semantic effect on the text. The researchers are also concerned with lexical categories from the selected short story. They would find out the amount or the frequency of each type from Oscar Wilde's short story. The following lexical categories are seen in the text.

#### Nouns

Nouns are to be collected from the selected text with the help of computational software 'AntConc,' and different forms like Singular and Plural forms, proper Noun and its forms also would be extracted.

#### Adjectives

An adjective is also one of the linguistic categories, which explains the degrees of adjectives in the text.

#### Verbs

Verbs are the most important category of the lexical category. Therefore, various kinds of verbs would be collected and categorized according to the respective categories and forms like verb present, past tense, verb 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, verb base forms, etc.

#### Adverbs

Different adverbs would be explored through computational tools along with their frequencies to certain degrees.

### Particle

Particles also fall under the lexical category are used by different writers to give meaning to certain words. These would also be extracted from the selected data.

### Nature of the study

This research is based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches of analysis. The study is descriptive and integrative, and it aims at exploring the grammatical, stylistic types encoded in the text concerning certain frequencies.

### Research Paradigm

The current mixed-method study follows the post-positivist research paradigm. The data for the analysis is downloaded from the internet and then processed by a computational tool called AntConc software because the statistical details about a writer's style are revealed efficiently by the computational tools ([Masood, Shafi, & Darwesh, 2020](#)). The research incorporates both the quantitative and the qualitative methods of analysis.

### Data Analysis Tools

The short story *The Selfish Giant* is downloaded from the internet in .pdf format. Then it is converted to a .txt file with the help of 'AntText Converter' software. After conversion, with the help of 'TagAnt' software, 58 different defined tags are added to the file. After this, the specific tagged file is open in

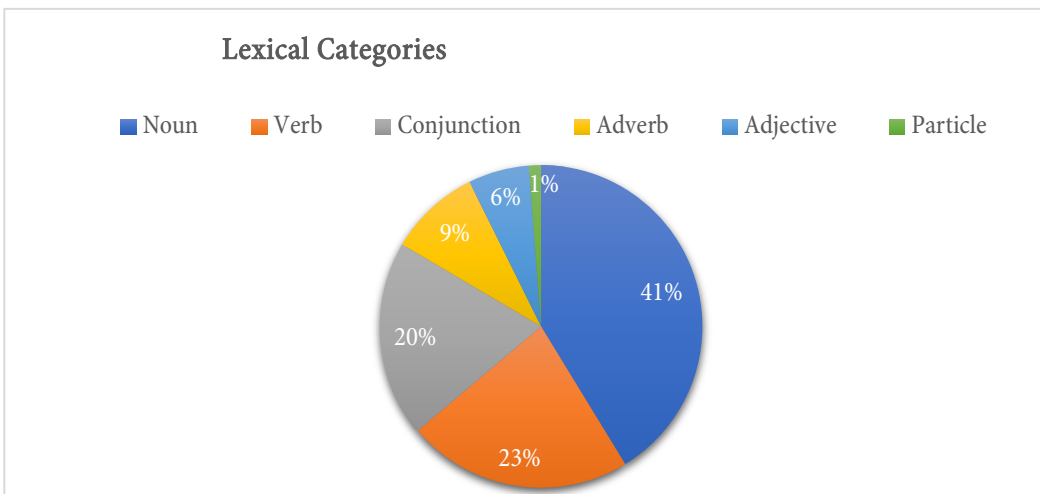
'AntConc,' a corpus data analysis software for data analysis.

### Findings and Discussions

*The Selfish Giant* is a story of a giant and children who used to play in a giant's garden. However, after some time, the Giant gets selfish and forbids children to play in his garden. The garden, which is accustomed to the playing of children, wears a silver coat of autumn. All the flowers fade, and trees shed their leaves. Spring never visits his garden. Hails and snow cover the entire garden. So, realizing his consequences, the Giant allows all the boys to play in his garden, which leaves him happy forever. Even his death pleases him. He dies among a variety of beautiful flowers. *The Selfish Giant* appeared in Oscar Wilde's collection of stories called *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in 1888.

### Lexical Categories

Noun, Adjective, Verb, Adverb, Conjunction, and particle falls under this category. Data related to these have been taken from AntConc. Overall, there are six types of lexical categories found by researchers 1490 times with the help of AntConc. These are categorized as 615 nouns, 336 verbs, 293 conjunctions, 137 adverbs, 91 adjectives, and 18 particles in the short story. In terms of overall comparison of lexical categories, Oscar Wilde has used 41% nouns, 23% verbs, 20% conjunctions, 9% adverbs, 6% adjectives, and 1% particles.



Graph 1.

### Noun with its Categories

The extracted data from AntConc shows that Oscar Wilde has used Noun with its different categories 615 times. Singular Noun (day, ground, winter, wall, tree, garden, grass, grey, pearl, axe, window, sword, cloak, armchair, playground, boy, heart) were used 248 times. The writer also used Plural nouns (games, stones, nails, children, flowers, birds, people, eyes, hands) 77 times. The writer also used singular proper nouns like 'Giant, Autumn and King' 62 times. The writer also used personal pronouns (him, we, it, he, I, she, me) in his story, and the extracted frequency is 187. Analysis revealed possessive pronouns (your, his, my) 33 times in the story. Wh-pronoun (Who, What, Whom) were seen eight times in the story.

### Verbs with its Different Foams

Verbs are essential in each sentence, and in a piece of writing, different foams of verbs are employed with the need for narration in the story. The same is the case with the current analyzed story of Oscar Wilde. The AntConc has found out 336 verbs in the short story. There are 5 'verb be, base form' (be, to be), 55 'verb be, past foam' (was, were), 2 'verb be, past participle foams' (been), 7 'verb be, present, 3rd person, singular foams' (is), 4 'verb be, present non-3rd person foams' (am, are), 2 'verb have, base form' (have), 13 'verb have, past foam' (had), 5 'verb have, present 3rd person singular foams' (does), 1 'verb have, present non-3rd person foam' (do), 53 'verb, base forms' (go, play, put, come), 126 'verb, past tense foams' (took, saw, built, looked, broke, jumped, blew), 24 'verb, gerund/participle' foams' (crying, running, wandering, roaring, dressing, twittering, waving), 30 'verb, past participle foams' (heard, limited, kissed, stretched, crept, stayed), 8 'verb, present, non-3rd person foams' (let, like, believe) and 1 'verb, present 3rd person singular foam' (heads).

### Conjunctions

Conjunctions have much importance in writing because they work as a backbone in every text as they make cohesion and coherence in the text. Oscar Wilde has used conjunctions a total of 293 times. Coordinating conjunctions (and, but) were used 108 times. Only subordinate conjunction (in) was available in the text with a total frequency of 185.

### Adverb with its Categories

In every piece of writing, adverbs are used to give additional information about the other word. The same is the case with Oscar Wilde's short story. There are 137 adverbs used with their types. There are 114 simple adverbs (softly, not, gently, Suddenly) in the short story, and then there is only one comparative adverb (longer) used by the author. As compared to a comparative adverb, the author has used superlative adverb (most) 4 times in the story. The corpus computational tool also shows that there are 18 wh-adverbs (when, why, how).

### Adjectives with its Categories

Adjectives play an important role in writing. They used to qualify other Noun and used them as an artistic ornament in the text. In the short story, Oscar Wilde has used adjectives 91 times with two different categories. Simple adjectives are used 88 times in the text (old, dusty, golden, wicked, huge, low, great, little, delicate). The software also highlighted the comparative adjective (more), and it is used only one time. The writer has also used superlative adjectives two times in the text, and the examples are (most, best).

### Particle

In grammar, a particle is a range of words that fall outside the traditional eight parts of speech – Noun, verb, pronoun, adjective, preposition, adverb, interjection, conjunction. Yet, there is no doubt about its value in language. Particles do not change. In the short story by Oscar Wilde, particles are used 18 times to give a certain meaning to the text. The examples are (put up, look out, knockdown).

### Conclusion

The computational stylistic analysis of [Oscar Wilde's \(1888\)](#) short story *The Selfish Giant* was completed by following the [Leech and Short's Model \(2007\)](#) with the help of AntConc. The main focus of this current study was on lexical categories, and in this category, five main items were studied: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and particles. The data analysis shows that the writer has used more nouns than other lexical items, suggesting that the story has a descriptive style rather than narrative. In terms of

adjectives, vividness and clarity are created with the help of adjectives and their degrees. The writer also uses different forms of verbs. The writer adopted a technique to move in the past and present according to the demand of the story. The use of adverbs shows that ample description of information is given to certain objects to clear the image to the readers. Less use of particles is also found in the short story. It is

recommended for future researchers to research the style of Oscar Wilde's short stories by following the stylistic approach and the specific model used by the researchers in the current study to further explore the new dimensions in the writing style of the author. This analysis extends to thematic analysis ([Fatima, Ahmed, & Shafi, 2021](#)).

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