



A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

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Abstract: Literary texts have largely been analysed from the perspective of literary criticism, literary stylistics. This paper is a linguistic stylistic analysis of Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*. The principal aim of the paper of the paper is to identify and analyse linguistic features used in the play. For a systematic analysis, these linguistic features are clustered into phonological, graphological, lexical, grammatical and semantic levels of analysis. *A Doll's House* is a play that explores family relationships, friendship and patriarchy among other thematic concerns. Helmer Torvald, one of the main characters, is the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in the play. The study adopted a desktop research; the researcher read the text and identified linguistic features which he intuitively felt to be stylistically foregrounded. The results show that the author has effectively used linguistic features to develop the themes and characters of the play. The study concludes that stylistics provides the linguistic toolkit instrumental not only for the analysis and understanding of a given text, but also for the performance of the acted forms of art like a play (drama). Linguistic stylistics is a tool that can be used to analyse any form of text.

Keywords: *A Doll's House*, Doll, Lexical, Linguistic, Patriarchy, Stylistics

1. Introduction

The principal goal of this paper is a stylistic analysis of Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*. The interest of linguists and language enthusiasts is to study how language is used in texts-spoken and written. In other words, language is at the centre of any textual analysis. The academic discipline which studies language linguistically is called linguistics Crystal and Davy [1]. The study of linguistic features in a given text is what, basically, is referred to as stylistics. Crystal and Davy add that stylistics, studying certain aspects of language variation, is therefore essentially a part of linguistics. Verdonk defines stylistics as "the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect [2]." Stylistics is therefore a linguistic approach that can be used to study not only literary texts, but also non-literary texts such as legalese and journalese. Simpson argues that "stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language [4]." He adds that whereas linguistic features do not of themselves constitute a text's 'meaning', an account of linguistic features nonetheless serves to ground a stylistic interpretation and to help explain

why, for the analyst, certain types of meaning are possible. This postulation augments the significance of linguistics to the interpretation of literary and non-literary texts. According to Wales [4] "the goal of most stylistic studies is to show how a text works: but not simply to describe the formal features of style for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text." In other words, in a stylistic analysis, it is not just the identification of linguistic features that is of concern: we also look at the effectiveness of these features, how the use of such features aid in the interpretation of the text. This paper identifies linguistic features in *A Doll's House* [5] and shows how the features aid in the understanding of the text.

A Doll's House is a three-act play written by Henrik Ibsen and first published in 1879. In the play, Nora, a house wife hides her financial problems from her husband Helmer Torvald. Helmer had fallen ill, and had to be taken to Italy so as to save his life. In order to finance her husband's going to Italy, Nora forged her father's signature to enable her get a loan of 250 pounds from Krogstad, a fellow employee at Helmer's office. This loan is kept as a top secret by Nora, and she works day in day out to repay the loan, albeit

surreptitiously. However, Krogstad, after being fired, sends a letter to Helmer detailing Nora's deceit. The secret is therefore let out. Helmer insists that Nora's deceit has harmed his reputation. He dismisses the fact that she borrowed the money to save his life. This kind of reaction from Helmer is far from what Nora had expected. She therefore cannot forgive Helmer for his egotistical, unsympathetic and insensitive behaviour. She re-examines her status as a daughter, wife and mother, and decides to seek freedom from being a wife and mother. She cannot forgive the patriarchal society. She leaves Helmer and the children.

2. Literature Review

Stylistics can basically be defined as the (linguistic) study of style Leech and Short [6], and style is defined by Bussmann [7] as the characteristic use of language in a text. Stylistics is a discipline that has been largely studied under literature, as a method for analysing literary texts, namely poetry, drama and novel. According to Bradford, "Stylistics enables us to identify and name the distinguishing features of literary texts, and to specify the generic and structural subdivisions of literature [8]." As such, stylistics, for a long time, been regarded as being related to only literary studies or literary criticism.

Widdowson [9] postulates that the value of stylistics is that stylistics can provide the means whereby a stylistician, or someone learning stylistics can relate a given piece of literary writing with their experience of language. Although Widdowson restricts the use of stylistics to literary writing, it is undeniable that at the core of his postulation is the centrality of language in literary stylistics. He relates stylistic analysis to literary criticism by stating that the stylistic analysis cannot replace literary criticism, but that it can prepare the way for literary criticism to operate more efficaciously. Leech [10] explicitly brings out this association that does exist between linguistic description and literary criticism. He views stylistics as the one which most neutrally represents the bridge between linguistic and literary studies. Linguistic and literary studies are like two inseparable sides of one coin. Stylistics is the point of intersection between linguistic description or language use and literary studies. This paper concerns itself with linguistic description of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

Simpson [3] observes that the preferred object of study in stylistics is literature. However, he is quick to clarify that the traditional connection between stylistics and literature brings with it two caveats, the first of which is that creativity and language as used should not be seen as a preserve of literary writing. The second caveat, and the more relevant to this study, is that techniques of stylistic analysis "are as much about deriving insights about linguistic structure and function as they are about understanding literary texts [3]." His argument puts linguistics, the study of language structure, at the centre of a stylistic analysis. He elucidates that the question "What can stylistics tell us about literature?" is always paralleled by an equally important question "What

can stylistics tell us about language?". This study answers the latter- what stylistics can tell us about language.

A number of studies have been carried out on *A Doll's House*. Baseer et al [11] studied the symbolic language used in *A Doll's House*, from the feminist perspective. This was relevant to this study because symbolism is an aspect of (linguistic) stylistics, studied under the semantic level of analysis. The findings aided in a deeper understanding of symbolism and its role.

Hooti et al [12] studied *A Doll's House* from the perspective of postmodernism. They discussed notions such as women's emancipation, irony and conflict. They conclude that *A Doll's House* points to the inescapable notion of self-identification and the absolute right of each individual (single or married) to disengage from the restricting shackles of modern world. But more importantly, their handling of irony, which is one of the objects of analysis in this paper, provided invaluable insight.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the approach by Simpson [3] and Crystal and Davy [1]. Simpson defines stylistics as "a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language [3]." To do stylistics is therefore to explore language, and particularly the creative use of it. According to Simpson, the practice of stylistics conforms to the following three basic principles, cast mnemonically as three Rs, the first one of which stipulates that stylistic analysis is *rigorous*. By rigorous he means that a stylistic analysis is underpinned by structured models of language and discourse that explain how we process and understand various patterns in language. The second R stipulates that a stylistic analysis is *retrievable*, that is, a stylistic analysis is organised through explicit terms and definite criteria. The meanings of these terms and criteria are acceptable to other stylisticians. The last R stipulates that a stylistic analysis is *replicable*: the methods used in the stylistic analysis should be transparent enough to allow other stylisticians to verify them. In other words, a stylistic analysis is scientific.

The above principles are in consonance with Crystal and Davy [1], that the work of a stylistician is three-fold: to identify the range of linguistic features which people feel to be stylistically important, and specify a precise way of talking about them; to outline the system of analysing these features, and to decide the function of the features by stratifying them into some categories. Features are pieces of speech or writing (a word, phrase, clause or sentence) identifiable from the main text.

Simpson explains that "language in its broadest conceptualisation is not a disorganised mass of sounds and symbols, but instead an intricate web of levels, layers and links [3]." Therefore, any utterance, discourse or text (literary or otherwise) is organised through clearly defined levels of analysis. Crystal and Davy identify the levels of analysis as phonetic/graphetic, phonological/graphological, grammatical, lexical and semantic. Simpson broadens the scope:

phonological/phonetics, graphology, morphology, syntax (grammar), lexis analysis, semantics and pragmatics. He refers to them as levels of description. In this study, the levels that were considered for analysis are phonological, graphological, lexical and semantic levels.

4. Methodology

The study adopted a desktop research. The researcher read relevant texts for background information on stylistic (linguistic) analysis, literature review and theoretical framework. The text, *A Doll's House* with the aim of exploring what linguistic features were used and their functions in the contexts in which they were used. The guiding principles in the process of analysis are the principles stipulated by Crystal and Davy [1] and Simpson [3]. The levels of analysis (levels of description) are phonological, graphological, lexical and semantic. Each level of analysis was studied independently. Linguistic features which the researcher intuitively felt to be stylistically foregrounded were identified, noted down and the corresponding function described.

5. Phonological Level

This level of description involves the basic sound units and combination of such sound units. Wales [4] defines phonology in relation to poetry as the conscious foregrounding through cohesive patterns of repetition of sound, by alliteration, assonance, rhyme etc. Otieno [13] explains that it is at this level where we examine "possible syllable structure of a given language and the various ways in which syllables can be combined to achieve certain effects and create aesthetic appeal." These phonological devices include alliteration, consonance, assonance, repetition, rhyme, onomatopoeia and prosodic (suprasegmental) features. Although these are features that are commonly used in poetry to create musicality, they can also be used in full texts such as plays and novels. In *A Doll's House*, repetition, onomatopoeia, alliteration and assonance are used.

5.1. Repetition

Repetition is the recurrence of a word, a phrase, a clause or a whole sentence in a text. In addition to creating rhythm, such recurrence is used to give prominence to a particular point the author intends to convey. To emphasise her plea for money from Helmer, Nora says repeats the word "please"

Nora: Oh, do! Dear Torvald, *please, please* do! (p 5)

When Nora lies to Helmer that she has not eaten macaroons, he, to show that he does not trust her, superciliously responds as follows:

Helmer: *There, there*, of course I was only joking. (p 7)

Just when Mrs. Linde is about to leave Nora's house, the voices of Nora's children are heard on the staircase. This elicits excitement in Nora.

Nora: There they are! There they are! (p 30)

She runs to open the door and tells them repeatedly: *come in! come in!* This shows the closeness and love that exist

between Nora and the children. However, after Krogstad's visit and the subsequent blackmail, Nora is not in the mood of talking to the children. When asked by the maid if she can allow the children to come in, she emphasises her refusal by repeating the word "no."

Nora: *No, no, no*. don't let them come in to me! You stay with them, Anne. (p 48)

In her threat to Krogstad, Nora says: "you will see, you will see." (p 75). In Act 2, Krogstad asks Mrs. Linde if she will give up her bank job to him. She responds that that would not benefit him. Krogstad seems to think through this response, a situation that is captured in the following repetition:

Krogstad: Oh, *benefit, benefit*- I would have done it whether or not. (p 87)

In addition to creating rhythm, the following utterance by Krogstad emphasises his commitment to withdrawing the letter he had written to Helmer:

Krogstad: Yes, of course *I will. I will wait* here until Helmer comes; *I will* tell him he must give me my letter back- (p 90). Later, when things seem to go her way, Mrs. Linde and Krogstad are warming up to each other, she is very excited. This exhilaration is amplified by the following repetition:

Mrs. Linde: (tidying up the room and laying her hat and cloak ready) What a difference! What a difference! Someone to work for and live for- (p 91)

Repetition is used to bring out Nora's desperation, to the extent that she thinks of killing herself, perhaps as the ultimate self-sacrifice. This is the point at which she is almost descending into madness.

Nora: (gropes distractedly about, seizes HELMER'S domino, throws it around her, while she says in quick, hoarse, spasmodic whispers) Never to see him again. Never! Never! (puts her shawl on her head) Never to see my children again either- never again. Never! Never! (p 102)

To stress her resolve to leave Helmer, Nora says, "Yes, I know. Let me go! Let me go! (p 103).

5.2. Alliteration

Alliteration is the recurrence of the same consonant sounds in words that are adjacent to one another. The recurring sound should be in the word-initial position. Norgaard et al state that "alliteration has a cohesive effect, since identical sounds tend to tie words together if they occur in close vicinity [14]." Alliteration can be used in a text not only for mnemonic effects, but also as a way of foregrounding certain aspects of that text. The following are examples from *A Doll's House*:

Helmer: Well, out with it! (p 5).

Nora: No, never. Papa died just at that time. (p 19).

Rank: Silk stockings. (p 66)

Nora: We will have champagne, Helen. (p 83)

In the above utterances, the underlined consonant sounds are used for mnemonic effects and to give prominence to certain aspects of the writer's message.

5.3. Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia refers to the use of words whose sounds imitate or echo their sense. According to Leech [15], onomatopoeia takes the form of a resemblance between what a piece of language is like, and what it actually refers to. This device is not extensively used in *A Doll's House*. But below are two examples:

Helmer:.... A song bird must have a clean beak to *chirp* with- no false notes! (p 44)

Nora: Your skylark would *chirp* about in every room, with her song rising and falling- (p 57)

Apart from its mnemonic effect, the onomatopoeic word "chirp" brings out the chauvinistic and condescending nature of Helmer. Nora is not a human being but a bird, a song bird that would chirp around.

5.4. Assonance

Assonance is the recurrence of a vowel sound in two more words in a sentence or utterance. This repetition serves the same purpose as alliteration and consonance-mnemonic effects and for highlighting certain aspects of the writer's message as illustrated by the underlined vowel sounds in the following examples from *A Doll's House*:

Nora: No, don't go, no one will come in here it is sure to be for Torvald (p 23).

Rank: The only one who would gladly give his life for your sake (p 68).

Nora: That he will never do! (p 75).

Mrs. Linde: (who has read the card) I see he lives at the corner here (p 79).

Nora: We will have champagne, Helen (p 83).

Mrs. Linde: Gone out of town (p 84).

Mrs. Linde: Nils, did you really think that? (p 86).

Helmer: But she is terribly self-willed this sweet little person. (p 92)

Helmer: You blind foolish woman! (p 113).

6. Graphological Level

Simpson [3] defines graphology as the patterns of written language: the shape of the language on paper. It accounts for the written or printed structure and patterning. It therefore encompasses features such as spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, italicization and paragraphing. In this paper, only a few aspects of punctuation were studied. They include the semi-colon, the dash, and the quotation marks.

6.1. Use Of Dashes

A Doll's House is a dramatic text, written to be acted out (performed). Dashes, among other punctuation marks, would therefore be immeasurably useful as elements of prosody. As Short [16] aptly puts it, "if you pay close attention to the linguistic form of (parts of) dramatic texts, you can infer a huge amount of information about an appropriate way to perform them." The dash therefore marks a dramatic pause. It is used in *A Doll's House* to heighten anticipation, hence

creating suspense, as illustrated by the following examples:

Mrs. Linde: You don't recognise me, I suppose.

Nora: No, I don't know- yes, to be sure, I seem to- (*suddenly*) Yes! Christine! Is it really you? (p 9).

Mrs. Linde: Nora- who was that man? (p 24).

Nora: Flesh coloured. Aren't they lovely? It is so dark here now, but tomorrow-. No, no, no! (p 66).

Krogstad: Could you really do it? Tell me- do you know all about my past life? (p 88)

Helmer: Two cards- of Rank's. (p 100).

In drama, just like any other everyday conversation, is bound to have interruptions as interlocutors take turns to speak. The dash is used as a mark of such interruptions. This is evident in *A Doll's House*.

Nora: I told you about our trip to Italy. Torvald would never have recovered if he had not gone there-

Mrs. Linde: Yes, but your father gave you the necessary funds. (p 17).

Nora: She is. But I don't see-

Krogstad: I knew her too, once upon a time (p 33).

Nora: No, no one; but-

Mrs. Linde: And comes here every day? (p 54)

Krogstad: Do you mean that you will-?

Nora: I have enough courage for it now. (p 75).

Dashes have also been used in the play to introduce a restatement or an explanation to an earlier stated statement. The following data explain this phenomenon.

Nora: Speak low. Suppose Torvald were to hear! He mustn't on any account- no one in the world must know, Christine, except you. (p 17).

Nora: What right have you to question me, Mr. Krogstad? - You, one of my husband's subordinates! (p 33).

Nurse: What an idea! It can easily be put in order- just a little patience. (p 49).

Nora: I have been greatly wronged, Torvald- first by papa and then by you. (p 110)

Nora: Or anything else should happen to me- anything, for instance, that might prevent my being here (p 78)

Krogstad: Yes, of course I will. I will wait here until Helmer comes; I will tell him he must give me my letter back- that it only concerns my dismissal- that he is not to read it (p 90).

6.2. Semi-colon

Semi-colons are used to mark pauses longer than those of commas. These long pauses can be dramatically used to elicit reactions from and to create suspense in listeners during a live performance. They are also used to create rhythm. In order to create balance by giving equal position or rank, the semi-colon is used to link independent clauses in sentences.

Nora: He must, Christine. Just leave to me; I will broach the subject very cleverly (p 16)

Rank: I have no idea; I only heard that it was something about the Bank (p 26).

Krogstad: Good. But below your signature there were a few lines constituting your father a surety for money;

those lines your father should have signed (p 37-38).

Helmer: And you were to appear to do it of your own accord; you were to conceal from me the fact of his having been here; didn't he beg that of you too? (p 43)

Semi-colons have also been used in a serial list- to separate one item or a set of items from the other as demonstrated by the example below.

Nora: Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy- (p 4)

Semi-colons are used with conjunctive adverbs. In which case, the semi-colon is placed just before the adverb linking clauses in a sentence.

Helmer: No, I am not sure of that; besides, you gave me your word- (p 7)

Helmer: no. but there is no need as a matter of course, he will come to dinner with us. (p 7)

Nora: Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so, I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. (p 21)

6.3. Quotation Marks

Quotation marks have three basic functions in writing: to enclose direct speech (direct quotations), to enclose unusual words, and to enclose titles of short works of art such as poems and short stories. In *A Doll's House*, quotation marks are used to enclose direct speech, utterances of some characters reported verbatim. Helmer says that Krogstad always adopts a familiar tone with him. The utterance of Krogstad is enclosed within quotation marks, thus "I say, Helmer, old fellow!" (p 60). In performance, this direct speech will call for extra-linguistic features such as intonation and facial expressions to bring out the disgust and contempt Helmer has for Krogstad. On realizing that they are out of trouble; that Krogstad has sent the bond back, Helmer tells Nora that they will forget the agonies they have suffered and instead only keep saying, "It is all over! It's all over!" (p 107).

7. Lexical Level

This level deals with the vocabulary of a language. It studies the manipulation of language at the word level. The main interest to a stylistician is how a writer or a speaker ingeniously spins lexical items to crystallize his or her thoughts, to conjure emotions and to concretize events and characters in their speech or writing. Crystal and Davy [1] explain that at the lexical level, information about the choice of specific lexical items in a text (a choice which will of course be closely related to subject matter), is given.

7.1. Use of Nouns

A number of nouns have been repeatedly used to develop the personality and attitude of the main characters in *A Doll's House*, and to bring to the fore some of the underlying thematic concerns of the play. The first set of such nouns used by Helmer include concrete nouns *skylark*, *squirrel*, *(song) bird*, *(singing) bird* and an abstract noun *darling*.

(calls out from his room) Is that my little lark twittering out there? (p 2)

(following her) Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings. (p 3)

And I would not wish you to be anything but just what you are, my little skylark. (p 6)

Well, my skylark does that anyhow. (p 57)

Come, come, don't be so wild and nervous. Be my little skylark, as you used. (p 83)

(from the door way on the right) Where is my little skylark? (p 84)

Now my little skylark is speaking reasonably. (p 95)

(kissing her on the forehead) Goodnight, my little singing-bird. (p 102)

.... Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my frightened little singing-bird. (p 108)

Is it my little squirrel bustling about? (p 2)

What is this? Is my little squirrel out of temper?

.... Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. (p 7)

.... And that is as it should be, my own darling Nora. (p 61)

You fascinating, charming little darling! (p 95)

Yes, my own darling. (p 96)

.... *(puts his arms round her)* My darling wife, I don't feel as if I could hold you tight enough. (p 101)

Both yours and the children's, my darling Nora. (p 112)

At a glance, these concrete nouns appear polite, gentle and romantic, meant to create intimacy thereby endearing Helmer to Nora. They portray Nora as a beautiful, enchanting bird or animal, whose main role is to entertain. She can only be "twittering" and "bustling" (p 2). She cannot think for herself; she has no personality. It is no wonder that Nora later on confesses that she has merely been performing tricks to please Helmer. Nora has been reduced to an object of enjoyment or entertainment. In a bid to have Krogstad back to his job at the Bank, Nora tries to please Helmer by subserviently using the same nouns:

Nora: If your little squirrel were to ask you for something very, very pretty-? (p 57)

Nora: Your squirrel would run would run about and do all her nice tricks if you would be nice, and do what she wants. (p 57)

Nora: Your skylark would chirp about in every room, with her song rising and falling- (p 57)

More precisely, the use of these words foregrounds the character and attitude of Helmer. He is male-chauvinistic, with a condescending attitude, and therefore fits well in the play as an embodiment of male-chauvinism and patriarchy. The intent of the author is to show the impact of patriarchy on individuals such as Nora. Nora is like a child, a playing thing, a doll. It is imperative to note that Nora also uses the word "darling" to refer to her children, almost in a similar fashion used by Helmer to refer to Nora.

Helmer uses another set of nouns which have outright negative denotation:

That is like a woman! (p 3)

.... The same little featherhead! (p 3)
 Aha! So my obstinate little woman is obliged to get someone to come to her rescue? (p 45)
 Nice? – because you do as your husband wishes? Well, well, you little rogue.... (p 56)
(putting his papers together) Now then, little Miss Obstinate. (p 61)
 You blind foolish woman! (p 113)
 Little featherbrain-are you thinking of the next already?
 Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again? (p 2)
 By addressing Nora as a featherhead (featherbrain), Miss Obstinate, rogue, spendthrift and as a (little) woman, Helmer elevates himself above Nora; he is “superior” and belongs to some form of hegemony. Nora, on the other hand, is relegated to the periphery. She, and by extension the women folk, are dishonest and have no brain. They have to depend on the likes of Helmer for guidance and supervision.

7.2. Use of Adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe nouns, and are therefore very important elements in sentences. We use adjectives to express quality of a person or an object. In *A Doll's House*, certain adjectives are used recurrently to accentuate attributes of main characters, hence developing the principal issues of the text. One of the repeatedly used adjective in the play is *little*, which is used more than ten times by Helmer to refer to Nora.

Is that my little lark twittering out there? (p 2)
 Is it my little squirrel bustling about? (p 2)
 Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again? (p 2)
(following her) come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings? (p 3)
 Very well. But now tell me you extravagant little person (p 4)
 Is my little squirrel out of temper? (p 4)
 You can't deny it, my dear little Nora. (p 6)
 ... but just what you are my sweet little skylark (p 6)
 It's a sweet little spendthrift, but she uses up a deal of money (p 6)
 Of course, you couldn't, poor little girl. (p 8)
 Well, well, you little rogue (p 56)
 My little Nora, there is an important difference between your father and me. (p 59)
 Now then little Miss Obstinate (p 61)
(Kissing her on the forehead) Goodnight, my little singing-bird. (p 102)
 My poor little Nora, I quite understand, you don't feel as though you could believe that I have forgiven you everything (p 107)
 Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my frightened little singing-bird. (p 108)
 The adjective, *little*, means small in size or amount; miniature or diminutive, tender, delicate. When used to describe Nora, the implication is that Nora is so brittle and fragile that that she needs protection. She needs protection just as her “little” children need protection. She refers to her children as *the sweet little darlings* (p 21, 42); *my sweet little baby doll* (p 30); *my nice little dolly children* (p 31); *my little children* (p 73). Helmer puts Nora on the same pedestal with

the children, which makes him maintain superiority over her. In so doing, the underlying male dominance that the author explores in the play is brought to the fore.

The adjective “sweet” is also used severally in the play. In the first place, it is used to describe the closeness and love between Nora and her children:

I have felt obliged to use up all he gave me for them, the sweet little darlings! (p 21)

You are a clever boy, Ivar. Let me take her for a little Anne. My sweet little baby doll! (p 30)

Run away in, my sweet little darlings. (p 30)

Secondly, the adjective is used more than twelve times by Helmer in reference to Nora, the effect of which is to create a jointly-constructed view of women in an exceedingly male-dominated society. In many patriarchal societies, a woman is socially created as irresistibly gorgeous, “sweet” to the eye; in behaviour and in all her mannerisms. It is for this reason that she has to be reprimanded not to even have a bite at a macaroon; macaroons will ‘spoil’ her teeth, thereby disfiguring her appearance. Just like Nora addresses her children as “sweet” to bring out their attractiveness, Helmer addresses Nora as “sweet” to highlight the fact that Nora is, or must be, sweet in appearance.

And I would not wish you to be anything, but just what you are, my sweet little skylark (p 6).

Not a single minute, my sweet Nora. You know that was our agreement (p 91)

But she is terribly self-willed, this sweet little person (p 92).

It is imperative to note that it is after the Tarantella dance that we see Helmer being sexually attracted to Nora. Helmer asks Mrs. Linde: “Just take a good look at her. I think she is worth looking at. Isn't she charming, Mrs. Linde?” (p 92). The net effect of this kind of description of Nora, and women in general, is to amplify hegemonic masculinity that the author underscores in the play.

Another adjective that the author uses continually in the play is *dear* (*dearest*). “Dear” is an adjective that expresses affection-that one is greatly loved or liked by another person. For instance, Nora expresses her affection for her father when she tells Mrs. Linde: “My dear, kind father....” (p 13). Similarly, Mrs. Linde and Nora use *dear* to express great likeness for each other (p 28). Helmer also uses this word severally to refer to Nora:

You can't deny it, my dear little Nora (p 6)

My dear Nora, I can forgive the anxiety you are in, although really it is an insult to me. (p 61)

But, my dear Nora, you look so worn out. Have you been practising too much? (p 81)

But my dearest Nora- (p 91)

Why shouldn't I look at my dearest treasure? (p 95)

But my dear Nora- (p 109)

At surface level, the use of this adjective is meant to express Helmer's love and affection for Nora. But a broader look at the repeated use of the word in the context of the play suggests that Nora is relegated to the periphery as Helmer is elevated to a higher pedestal. In other words, the use of this word perpetuates hegemonic masculinity. Other adjectives

that are used to build the personality of Helmer as egocentric and self-righteous are *miserable* creature (p 103), *blind, foolish* woman (p 113), *obstinate* little woman (p 45), *heedless* child (p 117), *womanly* helplessness (p 107), *helpless* little mortal (p 80) and *thoughtless* woman (p 104)

7.3. Use of Pronouns

One of the most repeatedly use pronoun in the play is the possessive pronoun “my”. It is used extensively by both Helmer and Nora. Nora uses it largely in reference to her children as can be seen in the following examples:

My sweet little baby doll (p 30)

Run away in, my sweet little darlings (p 42)

Show it, then; think of my little children (p 73)

Helmer uses the word more repeatedly than Nora, and generally in reference to his wife Nora:

Is that my little lark? (p 2)

Is that my little squirrel bustling about? (p 2)

Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again? (p 2)

Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings (p 3)

You can't deny it, my dear little Nora (p 6)

And I would not wish you to be anything but just what you are, my sweet little skylark (p 6)

Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling (p 7)

My little Nora, there is an important difference between your father and me (p 59)

And that is as it should be, my own darling (p 61)

Be my own little skylark, as you used (p 83)

Where is my little skylark? (p 84)

The pronoun has been used to show possession or ownership. Nora uses it to show her ownership of the children; the children still need her protection. They are too young to be given some level of independence. However, the recurrent use of this word in reference to Nora puts Nora at the same level as the children. Nora is possessed by Helmer in the same fashion someone would possess property. She has to be guided, controlled and restricted like a child. For instance, she should not even have a bite at macaroons. Her opinions are not taken into consideration. Her feelings and desires do not matter to Helmer. Her life, actions and behaviour are socially constructed by the society and supervised by Helmer, the possessor. This equation of Nora with an object or property defines the tenets of patriarchy. It is for this reason that Nora, in an attempt to persuade Helmer to let Krogstad keep his job at the bank, subserviently tells him:

Your squirrel would run about and do all her tricks if you would be nice, and do what she wants (p 57)

Your skylark would chirp about in every room, with her song rising and falling (p 57)

In other words, Nora says what Helmer would like to hear: that Nora is his property.

7.4. Use of Contracted Forms

Contracted speech is an aspect of spoken language. A play

is basically a dialogue, spoken language meant to be performed. It takes the form of an ordinary speech or conversation. Therefore, use of contracted or speech forms makes a play conversational and informal, which reflects our everyday interaction and conversation. A contracted speech form shortens speech by dropping one or more letters giving it a friendly tone. In doing so, the pace of the play is increased. The following are examples of truncated speech forms used in *A Doll's House*:

You can't deny it, my little Nora (p 6)

There's the bell (*She tidies the room a bit*) There's someone at the gate. What a nuisance! (p 8)

I mustn't be selfish today (p 11)

That's a lot, isn't it? (p 13)

You are proud, aren't you, of having worked so hard and so long for your mother? (p 16)

Don't laugh at me! (p 20)

No, I daren't; it's so shocking (p 27)

I won't have him here (p 64)

I shouldn't have thought so (p 86)

7.5. Use of Interjections

Interjections are words that express strong emotions. They express a wide range of emotions. An interjection is usually followed by an exclamation mark. A play, being a dialogue where actors and actresses interact as they execute their role, is bound to have interjections because interjections will help intensify various emotions in the play. In *A Doll's House*, many interjections are used to express various emotions, some of which are surprise, disgust, pain, discovery or sudden realisation, disappointment, amazement, sympathy, pleasure, grief and satisfaction. Examples of interjections used in *A Doll's House* include the following:

Nora: *Oh, do! Dear Torvald; please, please do!* (p 5). This expresses disappointment.

Mrs. Linde: oh, I see. It was just about that time that he died, wasn't it? (p 13) (surprise)

Nora: My Goodness, can't you understand that? (p 19) (surprise)

Rank: Ah! Some slight internal weakness? (p25) (sudden discovery and realisation)

Nora: What are they? Ah, I daresay you would like to know (p 31) (pleasure)

Helmer: Aha! So my obstinate little woman is obliged to get someone to come to her rescue? (p 45) (satisfaction and triumph)

Nurse: Good heavens! – went away altogether? (p 50) (surprise)

Nora: Oho!- you don't mean to say you are jealous of poor Christine? (p 66) (pleasant surprise)

Helmer: Well, let me look.... Aha! (p 81) (satisfaction)

Helmer: Pooh! This room is hot. (p 93) (disgust)

Nora: Alas, Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you. (p 112) (pity, concern)

8. Semantic Level

This level deals with the meaning of words, phrases clauses and sentences as used in given contexts. It stretches longer than the single lexical item. According to Crystal and Davy [1], semantics studies the “linguistic meaning of a text over and above the meaning of the lexical items taken singly.” Concepts, figures of speech and semantic resourcefulness are studied at this level of analysis. Specific aspects of semantic ingenuity studied here include symbolism, hyperbole, irony imagery (metaphor, simile and personification) and idiom.

8.1. Irony

Cruse defines irony as “a species of figurative language in which the intended meaning of an expression is usually some kind of opposite of the literal meaning [17].” In other words, there is blatant contradiction or discrepancy between the spoken and the intended meaning. There are three types of irony. The first one is verbal irony, which according to Wales [4] “is found when the words actually used appear to contradict the sense actually required in the context and presumably intended by the speaker.” There is incongruity between what is said and what is meant. The second one is the irony of situation, where the discrepancy is between what is expected or believed and what actually happens. The third type is dramatic irony. In dramatic irony, there is double perspective: the perspective of the reader and that of the character. The character's actions or words are clear to the audience, but not to the affected character. The three types of irony are evidently used in *A Doll's House*.

8.1.1. Dramatic Irony

There are instances of double perspective of the audience (reader) and Helmer Torvald. Helmer is portrayed as ignorant or as having inadequate knowledge of certain happenings around him, but the reader is aware of such happenings. The first instance is when Helmer does not want to retain Krogstad as his employee at the bank. This is because Krogstad is morally sick: “he forged someone's name” (p 46), and therefore Helmer cannot forgive him. This comment is ironical. The reader knows that Helmer is living with a similar character in his house-Nora, but Helmer does not know this fact. Nora forged her father's signature in order to get a loan of 250 pounds from Krogstad. This irony not only develops the theme of deceit and family relationships, but it also builds suspense.

Another instance of dramatic irony is when Nora denies that she has been eating macaroons. She even lies to Helmer that she should not think of going against his wishes (p 7). But in real sense, she has actually taken a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eaten some (p 2). Whereas Nora and the reader know the truth- that she has been eating macaroons, Helmer lacks this knowledge, hence dramatic irony. This irony is a hint of disobedience and rebellion. The author is preparing the audience for the rebellion of Nora later on in the play.

In Act 3, just before the secret about the bond is out, Helmer tells Nora: “Do you know, Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some danger, so that I might risk my life's blood, and everything, for your sake” (p 101-102). Although the reader knows that Nora is threatened by the impending disclosure of her secret, Helmer does not know this. This irony helps build suspense in the play as the reader is anxious to find out how Helmer will behave when Nora's secret is eventually revealed.

At the beginning of Act 1, Helmer warns Nora: “No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt” (p 3). Little does Helmer know that Nora borrowed 250 pounds from Krogstad, and therefore their home depends on borrowing and debt. Nora has been repaying this loan, albeit covertly. Nora and the reader know what Helmer is ignorant of.

When Helmer moves towards the hall door in order to see if some letters have come, Nora tells him: “Torvald, please don't. there is nothing there” (p 81). The reader has the knowledge that Krogstad himself dropped a letter in the letter-box. Nora's statement is just meant to delay the reading of the letter. As this happens, suspense and tension are developed. As readers, we are just waiting for the “explosion” to take place.

8.1.2. Situational Irony

Helmer tells Nora: “Do you know, Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some danger, so that I might risk my life's blood, and everything, for your sake” (p 101-102). When that time comes, he does not support Nora as he had promised. Instead he calls Nora a criminal, a liar and a hypocrite (p 104). According to him, Nora has put him through a scandalous situation- she has sullied his reputation. He cannot even allow her to bring up the children: “I can't trust them with you” (p 105). Through this irony, the author develops the theme of hypocrisy and family relationships. He is also portrayed as an egocentric, self-righteous and pretentious.

Nora and Helmer discuss Krogstad's forgery. Helmer tells Nora: “He forged someone's name” (p 46). Ironically, before this dialogue, Krogstad approaches Nora about her own forgery of her father's signature. There is discrepancy between what is expected or believed and what actually happens. Forgery is moral sickness that Helmer cannot forgive. It is least expected that a member of his family could culpable for this kind of moral sickness. Situational irony is also evident in the conversation between Nora and Mrs. Linde where Nora gloats after the promotion of Helmer: “He is able to take up his work in the Bank at the new year, and then he will have a big salary and lots of commissions.... It will be splendid to have heaps of money and not need to have any anxiety, won't it?” (p 11-12). Nora envisages a happy life with Helmer's promotion. However, it is the converse that happens. She lives a life of desperation. She eventually decides to leave. The use of this irony foregrounds Nora's materialism and vanity.

Helmer comes in with some papers under his arm and asks

Nora: “Yes. Has someone been here?” (p 43). Nora denies that someone has been there. This response is incongruent with what the reader, Helmer and even Nora herself know. Krogstad has just left the house, and Helmer saw him going out of the gate. This is a lie; it is part of the theme of deceit that Ibsen explores in the play.

Nora has frequently been reprimanded by Helmer for eating macaroons. But when they are preparing for a banquet, Nora calls out for macaroons in the presence of Helmer (p 83). This is a show of rebellion and desire for independence. The author is setting the stage for the rebellion witnessed towards the end of the play.

8.2. Symbolism

Symbolism refers to the use of symbols to represent ideas or meaning. Wales [4] defines a symbol as a sign, whether visual or verbal, which stands for something else within a speech community. In textual analysis, a symbol can be a character, place, object, action or event that has meaning in itself, and also stands for something else more than itself.

The Christmas tree is used symbolically in the play. As the play begins, Nora tells Helen to keep it hidden from the children until it is dressed up. Similarly, Nora tells Torvald that no one can see her in her dress until the evening of the dance. Both the tree and Nora use attractive decorations to conceal their real selves. Therefore, the tree symbolises Nora’s position in the “doll’s house” as a playing thing. Just like the tree, Nora is a mere flashy ornamental element in the home; pleasant to look at and admired, but not capable of action. Given that at this stage the family is preparing for Christmas celebrations, the tree can also be said to be a symbol of celebrations, family happiness and unity. At the beginning of Act II, when Nora is alone, and her mental condition has begun to deteriorate, the stage directions partly read: “The Christmas tree in the corner by the piano, stripped of its ornaments and with burnt down candle-ends on its dishevelled branches” (p 49). This is after Nora is blackmailed by Krogstad and the secret is revealed. As the psychological condition of Nora deteriorates, the Christmas tree becomes dishevelled. At the beginning both the tree and Nora are pretty, but towards the end, their conditions are deplorable.

The macaroons that Nora has been reprimanded from eating are symbolic. She eats some macaroons (p 2), but when asked by Torvald, she denies that she has eaten macaroons. Doctor Rank is utterly alarmed when Nora offers him macaroons, which she lies were given to her by Christine (p 27). He is alarmed because he knows too well that macaroons are forbidden in Torvald’s house. As Torvald and Nora wait for the banquet, Nora calls Helen out to avail macaroons (p 83). Macaroons are a symbol of deceit, disobedience and desire for independence. Just like a child, Nora is continually rebuked for eating them. Torvald does not want Nora to sully her attractiveness; macaroons will spoil her teeth. By disobeying Torvald, Nora is rebelling against hegemonic masculinity perpetrated by Torvald and his ilk. She seeks freedom from being treated like a child, like a doll.

Another symbol in the play is the New Year’s Day. A new year is basically a signal of a new beginning, rebirth, renewal or regeneration. This new beginning can be looked at from different facets. At the beginning of the play, Nora and Torvald are looking forward to the new year as the beginning of a new stage in their lives; Torvald is promoted, and according to Nora; “It will be splendid to have heaps of money and not need to have any anxiety, won’t it?” (p 11-12). In other words, the new year means a happier phase of their lives. However, by the end of the play, there is a new dramatic awakening. Nora becomes aware of her problems, that she is merely a doll transferred from her father’s hands to Torvald’s (p 111); the wonderful thing she hoped would happen did not happen (p 116, 117), and that she was living with a “stranger” who did not understand her (p 120). There is also a new beginning for Krogstad and Christine. The “two shipwrecked people” rekindle their marriage (p 88). This renewal will increase Krogstad’s standing in the community; Nora will have someone to work and live for.

The Tarantella dance is symbolic. On one hand, it symbolises deception and playing of tricks. It is important to note that Nora dances Tarantella at Helmer’s bidding. After the dance, Helmer remarks: “I imagine that you are my young bride and that we have just come from the wedding, and I am bringing you for the first time into our home” (p 96). He only ruminates on her being his young bride after the dance. It is also after the dance that we see Helmer sexually attracted to Nora. On the other hand, tarantella dance is an expression of Nora’s inner emotional conflicts. The dance has some healing power; it is therapeutic. Helmer notes that Nora dances as if her life depended on it (p 82). She begs him to allow her one more hour to continue dancing (p 91). The dance is also a signal of rebellion. She does not want to leave the dance arena. When forced by Helmer to leave, she warns him: “you will repent not having let me stay, even if it were only for half an hour” (p 92). At the end of the play, she leaves Helmer.

The costume Nora uses in the dance, that of Neapolitan fisher-girl, represents Nora’s unreality. Helmer dresses her up, in a similar fashion as Nora dresses up the Christmas tree which is later on dishevelled. Mrs. Linde tries to mend the dress, symbolising the mending of the marriage between Nora and Helmer. When Nora takes off this fancy dress (p 108) and changes into an everyday dress (p 109), she is symbolically getting rid of her past life with Helmer. She shifts from the world of unreality to a new world, a new awakening; she becomes a new entity with a new individual identity free from Helmer.

The title of the play, *A Doll’s House*, is symbolic. Dolls are objects to be played with. Nora tells Helmer that her father used to call her his doll child, and played with her just as she used to play with her dolls (p 111). Similarly, she has been a doll in Helmer’s house. Her children have been her dolls (p 112). Apart from symbolising impermanence, “a doll’s house” expresses hegemonic masculinity; women are like dolls to be played with just like one would play with a child.

The notion of impermanence is also foregrounded when Nora buys dolls for her daughter; she says that the daughter will soon break them (p 4). After the dance, Nora does not want Helmer to drag her back to the doll's house; there is regeneration in her.

The shutting of the door that is heard at the end of the play symbolises the shattering of the illusion of Helmer and Nora's marriage. There is nothing to mend now.

8.3. Metaphor

Wales notes that in metaphor, one field of domain of reference is carried over or mapped onto another on the basis of some perceived similarity between the two domains [4]. Metaphor is a trope that is used to make sense of abstract or unfamiliar experiences in terms of simpler and more familiar experiences. The basic principle here is comparison (of the unfamiliar and familiar experiences). The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another, Lakoff and Johnson [18].

The first comparison can be drawn between Nora and the pet names that are used by Helmer to refer to her. He calls her a song-bird, skylark and squirrel. These words reflect the innocent, polite or gentle nature of Nora. She is just as gentle or innocent as the bird or the squirrel. At a different level, the use of these metaphorical nouns elucidates the egocentric nature of Helmer as well as the patriarchal nature of this society. Nora is being regarded as a child, whose desires and opinions are of no value. Helmer does not think of her as an adult because she is a woman.

Doctor Rank says that in the next fancy-dress ball he will be invisible; that there is a big black hat that when put on, makes one invisible (p 99). The big black hat that Doctor Rank hints at wearing in the next fancy dress-ball is death; that he will be dead by that time. The title, *A Doll's House*, is an extended metaphor. An extended metaphor is one that is developed in great detail- it runs throughout the entire play. Nora was a doll in her father's house; she is now a doll in her husband's house, and she has dolls (her children) in the same house). Nora is treated like a playing thing and a helpless child who needs protection from Helmer and his ilk. Helmer tells Nora: "Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my little frightened singing bird.... I have broad wings to shelter you under" (p 108).

Krogstad tells Mrs. Linde that he is a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage (p 87). Being shipwrecked describes the extent of (emotional) damage Krogstad suffered when Mrs. Linde left him to marry her late husband. Krogstad is also described as morally diseased. This is because he forged documents, which utterly sullied his reputation.

8.4. Similes

Similes are the converse of metaphors in terms of comparison. Whereas metaphor is a direct comparison of two entities, simile is an indirect comparison. In other words, in a

simile, one object or entity is said to be like another; in a metaphor one entity is said to be another. When Mrs. Linde asks Nora if her husband came back quite well from Italy, Nora answers: "As sound as a bell" (p 13). That is to say, her husband came back healthy.

Nora compares the role she played when she was responsible for the sustenance of the family during their one-year stay in Italy to the role men usually play. She tells Mrs. Linde that "it was like being a man" (p 21). That role made her feel like a man supporting the family during that period. In addition, men are portrayed as superior to women; the responsibility of supporting and sustaining the family rests on the shoulders of a man.

After learning about the impending death of Doctor Rank, Helmer scornfully remarks: "He, with his suffering and his loneliness, was like a cloudy background to our sunlit happiness" (p 101). This simile expresses Helmer's lack of sadness for Doctor Rank's death, begging the question, "were they really good friends?" Additionally, Helmer's egocentric nature is brought to the fore.

After the Tarantella dance, Helmer believes that their relationship will emerge even stronger. He therefore assures Nora of his absolute protection using the simile: "I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws" (p 108). He is committed to ensuring that Nora is safe.

8.5. Hyperbole

Cruse defines hyperbole as "a figure of speech involving deliberate exaggeration for rhetorical effect, to increase impact or attract attention [17]." The exaggeration is incredible; it is an overstatement. In drama, hyperbole is often used for emphasis as a sign of emotion or passion, Wales [4].

Mrs. Linde calls Nora a child (p 16). This is an exaggerated description because Nora is not a child. However, according to Mrs. Linde, Nora knows very little about the burdens and troubles of life. The efficacy of this exaggeration is to foreground Nora's innocence and naivety as far as burdens and troubles of life are concerned. Similarly, when Nora tells Nurse she (Nora) would like to tear the fancy dress into a hundred thousand pieces (p 49), we know that is an incredible exaggeration. It is herculean task to tear the dress into a hundred thousand pieces. It is Nora's distressed and desperate state that are being emphasised by this hyperbole.

Mrs. Linde tells Krogstad: "But now I am quite alone in the world- my life is so dreadfully empty and I feel so forsaken" (p 88). That Mrs. Linde is lonely and lacks a companion is highlighted. She is a "shipwrecked woman" (p 87), who is longing for someone to work and live for and a home to bring comfort into (p 91). It is for these reasons that she says that she is alone, and that her life is dreadfully empty. This is hyperbolic because she for sure is not the only human being in the whole world, and her life is not empty in the literal sense.

After the secret is revealed through Krogstad's letter,

Helmer has the following to tell Nora: “Now you have destroyed all my happiness.... And I must sink to such miserable depths because of a thoughtless woman” (p 104). Helmer is infuriated by what Nora’s act of betrayal. His reputation is at stake. But to say that all his happiness has been destroyed is a deliberate exaggeration.

9. Conclusion

The focus of this paper was a linguistic analysis of Henrik Ibsen’s play, *A Doll’s House*, based on the approach of Crystal and Davy [1] and Simpson [3]. It studied phonological, graphological, lexical and semantic levels of analysis. The paper established that the above levels of stylistic analysis have been effectively used by the author to communicate the intended message. The phonological and graphological devices, for instance, aid in the realization of the text as a play. A play is an acted work of art; the prosodic effects created by the use of phonological and graphological features of language aid the performance of various parts of the play. At the lexical level, the author has employed words (nouns, pronouns, adverbs and adjectives) that help foreground the attitude and personality of various characters, and develop the main thematic concerns of the play. Such concerns include family relationships: the relationship between Nora and the father; Nora and the husband; Nora and her children, and between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde. Helmer continually refers to Nora as a skylark, a singing bird, a squirrel, featherhead and as a spendthrift. This reference depicts Helmer as an egocentric and self-righteous man, and as an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in the play. Men are portrayed as being superior to women; women are treated like children, mere playing things.

At the semantic level, semantic features such as imagery, symbolism, irony and hyperbole have been employed to stylistically develop the characters and the main themes of the play. For instance, use of dramatic irony exposes Helmer as self-centred, self-righteous and ignorant of a number of issues happening around him. The audience is given a superior perspective from which to peer into the character of Helmer, the epitome of male chauvinism. Linguistic stylistics is therefore a method of interpreting a text. As Simpson [3] puts it, “To do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use.”

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