

When Syntax and Stylistics Meet in "Aubrey"

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Abstract

The language of songs can be seen as one of the results of the ever-changing system of language itself. In linguistic views, the language of songs is often seen as similar to the language of poems. That is, in the language of songs, the composers formulate some expressions to describe diverse experiences. Perhaps one of the most significant evolutionary changes of language system is the introduction of the new meaning(s) of a word as its internal states and its relationships to other words. The relationship between one word with another—strung both syntactically and stylistically—can produce meaningful strings and are capable of stimulating extra meanings. Applying the theories of syntax and stylistics, this paper is intended to analyze how some expressions in the song "Aubrey" offer some possible extra logical meanings and make it a very popular song in the 70s up to the present day.

Keywords: *extra logical meaning, metaphor, senses*

1. Introduction: Bread's Aubrey

As one among numerous compositions, Aubrey is considered one of Bread's best compositions. Since the day of its release, this particular song placed number 5 (five) out top ten Bread's best songs (Chipoy, 2013:1). The full figure of the list is (1) Everything I Own, (2) Make It With You, (3) If, (4) The Guitar Man, (5) Aubrey, (6) Lost Without Your Love, (7) Baby I'm A Want You, (8) It Don't Matter to Me, (9) Mother Freedom, and (10) Diary. While Aubrey is the title of the song, based on polling held in 2012 it is also one of the most popular names of newborn babies in the United States. The name places number 15 (fifteen) among the top 100 new-born baby names (Ann, 2013a:1).

Bread is the name of a rock band from Los Angeles, consisting of David Gates (as the key person as well as the songs writer), Jimmy Grian, Robb Royer, Mike Botts, and Larry Knechtel (who replaced Royer in 1971). They placed 13 (thirteen) songs on the Billboard Hot 100 chart between 1970 and 1977 (*elsewhere in numerous other similar discussions this song places 14 or 15 on the billboard*). The band was a prime example of a music genre which is later popularly known as soft rock.

Written by David Gates, this particular song Aubrey (out of some others in different albums) is one of the sources of royalty for David Gates. With Bread's albums David is capable of selling 250,000 copies each year which makes it sufficient for him to finance 1,400-acre cattle ranch in Northern California (Ann, 2013b:1). Out of some phrases and sentences in the lyrics of the song Aubrey, two phrases and three statements (sentences) will be taken as the data for analysis. The two phrases are "a not so very ordinary girl or name" and "a love that wouldn't bloom". The three sentences are "We tripped the light and danced together to the moon, but where was June?"; "And I'd go a thousand times around the world just to be closer to her than to me"; and "And I'd go a million times around the world just to say she had been mine for a day" (*hereinafter the data are printed in italics, instead of quotation marks, for clearer difference between the data and the text*). Applying the theories of syntax and stylistics, this paper is aimed at finding some possible extra logical meanings and senses carried by the phrases and the sentences.

2. Syntax and Stylistics: Some Theoretical Views

Quoting Hocket's view Ullmann states that, "two utterances in the same language which convey approximately the same information, but which are different in their linguistic structure, can be said to differ in style" (1973:40). Although in this definition Hocket uses the term utterances, in trying to find the meaning(s) contained in utterances semanticists will not be (and cannot be) concerned with the meaning of utterances themselves. Instead—as Palmer (1976: 9) suggests—they are concerned with the meaning of sentences. Palmer further clarifies that one cannot study semantics without assuming a great deal about grammar and other aspects of the structure of language. In this discussion, therefore, the information presented in the text (of Aubrey) will be analyzed—as Chafe suggests—in its unifying characteristic of literary product by considering its relation between text and context (1997: 14).

Meantime, quoting Valery's view Palmer defines stylistics as, "the study of what is extra logical in language" (1973: 41). Almost similarly, quoting Fish's view, Toolan (1990: 24-25) states that all stylistics is based on a set of interpretive assumptions of the value and validity of linguistic and structural description.

Furthermore, instead of defining the term stylistics, Wales (1989: 437-438) states that the goal of most stylistic studies is not simply to describe the formal features of texts in order to show the functional significance for the interpretation of the text, or to relate the literary effects to linguistic causes.

Very closely related to the above views of stylistics, Dixon states that when a language is used, meaning is both the beginning and the end point. A speaker—in his view—has some message in mind, and then s/he chooses words with suitable meanings and puts them together in appropriate strings. Dixon further clarifies that one has to consider the meanings of words, and their grammatical properties, and see how these interrelate (2005: 6). Almost similarly, in terms of relation between stylistics and words choice, Warner (1961: 31) also states that, “One of the marks of good English style is appropriateness or suitability”. In his view, the words should match the thought and the occasion. Thus, the choice of words and grammatical structures are the crucial elements in the business of style (*see also*: Friedman and McLaughlin, 1963: 74).

In line with the above statements, referring to Ellis’s view (1923: 163) and Burke’s view (1954: 50), Spencer (1964: 11) states that style involves saying the right thing in the most effective way. Based on this Spencer’s statement, one may reversely state that the effective use of language is the key concept in producing effective styles. In terms of literary products, therefore, one may also conclude that the stylistic value and validity of a literary product depends on how effective the language is used.

Also in line with all of the above statements, in discussing about ‘Given and New Information’ Nunan (1993: 44) states that there is some psycholinguistic evidence to suggest that second and foreign language learners acquire the standard structure of S+V+O word order before other patterns. He further hypothesizes that the notion of ‘standard’ word order has some sort of psycholinguistic as well as grammatical plausibility. Nunan proves this by exhibiting a phonic-based primer *The cat ate the rat*. This sentence—in Nunan’s analysis—exhibits the standard order of S+V+O. He then argues that there are numerous other ways the semantic content of the sentence could be expressed. They are: (a) *The rat was eaten by the cat*; (b) *It was the cat that ate the rat*; (c) *It was the rat that the cat ate*; (d) *What the*

cat did was ate the rat; (e)Ate the rat, the cat did; (f)The cat, it ate the rat; etc. In Nunan's view, the selection of the pattern of the sentence to be used depends on the context and the status of the information. That is, whether the information (also called the given information) has been introduced or assumed to be known by the reader or listener. In the above examples, the given information is *the cat*, while *the rat* is the new information (*see also: Meimunger, 2000: 20-23, where he calls the given information 'the topic' while new information 'the focus'*). Nunan finally concludes that 'it is the speaker or writer to consider which is the given and which is the new information' (*see also: Aarts, 1997: 97*).

Granted that the above Nunan's conclusion is true, one may conclude that a certain pattern a language user employs in stating something is based on his or her consideration. To be more precise, it is the language user's choice to use a certain pattern to express something s/he intends to say. Thus, when someone states:

- (1) *I go there occasionally.*
- (2) *Occasionally we go to the concert,*
but we go much more often to the theatre.,

is because it is his or her intention to put the adverb (occasionally) either at the end or the beginning of his or her statement. In short, it is his or her intention to emphasize the adverb, though the more usual position is elsewhere (*see also: Hornby, 1975:165-169*).

While all above discussions are centered-around the relation between stylistics and the effects, sense, meanings, or other values produced by the use of language in a certain way, Bradford looks at stylistics in different way. Referring to post-Renaissance education in Rome, Bradford (1997: 4) states that Plato and Aristotle did not disagree that rhetoric's conflicts were originated from the problematical relationship between language and truth. Rhetoric—in his view—provides human with names and practical explanations of the devices to perform various tasks of persuading, convincing, and arguing which are personally and collectively conducive. Taking metaphor as one example of the devices, Bradford (1997: 23-24) states that metaphor is capable of affecting the people perception in the topic being addressed (*see also: Cuddon, 1998: 406*).

Applying the above theoretical views, this paper is intended to analyze some expressions in *Aubrey* in 2 (two) long phrases, 2 (two) metaphorical statements, and 1 (one) statement with unusual position of adverb. It is also intended to find whether some certain words choice, words positioning, and patterns are capable of offering—to use Palmer’s (1973: 41) term—what is extra logical in language.

3. Some Expressions Bearing Extra Logical Meanings in *Aubrey*

Among other points of styles found in *Aubrey*, two of them are in the forms of phrases. They are *a not so very ordinary girl or name* and *a love that wouldn’t bloom*. In order to arrive at the meanings carried by these two phrases one should—as Palmer (1976: 9) suggests—consider the grammar and other aspects of the structure of the phrases. For such purpose the theories of Cross-Categorical Generalizations: X-bar Syntax—as proposed by Aarts (1997: 97)—and the Constituent Structure (IC)—as proposed by Stockwell (1977: 86-90), will be applied.

When measured by Aarts’s proposal, the first phrase, *a not so very ordinary girl or name*, can be categorized into the following X-bar:

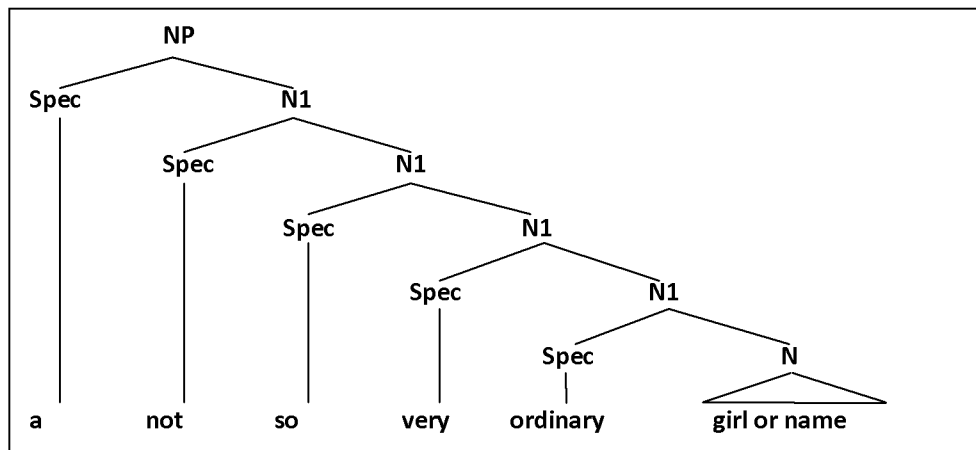


Figure 1
Cross-Categorical Diagram of the first phrase
proposed based on Aarts 1997:97.

In the above category Spec is the specifier, and N1 represents a further NP resulted from the breaking down of the NP analysis, while N (Noun) is the head of the phrase. When it is analyzed based on Constituent Structure (IC) as proposed

by Stockwell (1977: 86-90), however, the first specifier “a” will be the Art (Article) while the other specifiers will be the Adj (Adjectives).

Also based on above Aarts’s proposal, the second phrase *a love that wouldn’t bloom*, can be categorized into the following X-bar:

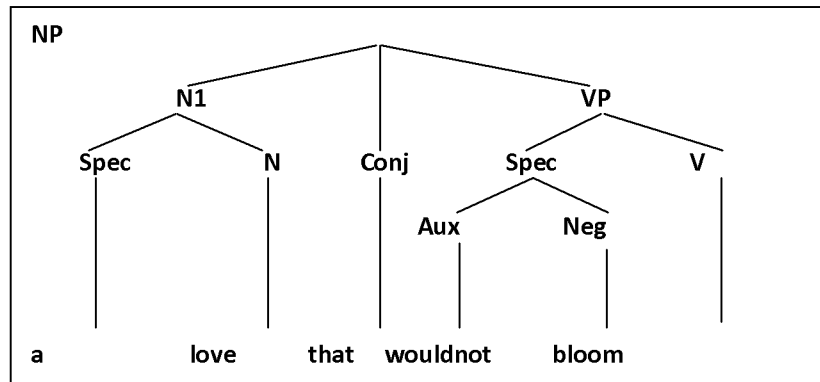


Figure 2
Cross-Categorical Diagram of the second phrase
proposed based on Aarts 1997:97.

Similarly, in the above category, Spec is the specifier, and N1 represents a further NP resulted from the breaking down of the NP analysis, while VP is the Verb Phrase (*also resulted from the breaking down of the NP*), N (Noun) is the head of the phrase, Conj is the Conjunction that connects the NP and VP, Aux is Auxiliary, Neg is Negative, and V is the Verb. Also similarly, when analyzed based on Constituent Structure (IC) as proposed by Stockwell (1977: 86-90), the first specifier *a* will be the Art (Article) while the second Spec will be the Adv (Adverb) that modifies the verb *bloom*.

The extra logical meaning that might arise from the use of the first phrase is that the *girl* being talked about is a girl who is *a not so very ordinary*. That is, the *girl* is *ordinary* but her being *ordinary* is *not so very ordinary*. While the phrase *ordinary girl* may not stimulate any particular sense or interest in the listeners, the use of *not so very* seems capable—to use Bradford’s term (1997: 6)—of achieving the emotive effect of the listeners. This is what also happens to the use of *a love that wouldn’t bloom*. The use of metaphor in the phrase offers the transfer of a flower attribute to non-flower phenomena of *love* that is capable of *blooming* (see: Bradford, 1997: 23-24).

The next statement that is capable of producing extra logical meaning is *We tripped the light and danced together to the moon, but where was June*. In this statement, there are two parts to consider. First, it is the first half of the statement which is in the form of sentence *We tripped the light and danced together to the moon*, and second, it is the second half of the statement which is in the form of a question *where was June*.

In the first half, metaphor is used. That is, instead of *tripping* the happy journey *to the moon* the phrase *tripping the light* is used. Thus the word *light* is used to replace the phrase *happy journey*. This use of metaphor is—again as Bradford (1997: 23-24) suggest—capable of stimulating the emotive effect on the listeners. This emotive effect of *tripping the light* seems to be reiterated by the use of *to the moon* which more or less means that the speaker (the singer) spends the honeymoon in the moon (*see also*: Baldick, 2001: 153; Jackson, 2007: 64).

The second half of the statement is stylistically even more stimulating. In this part the singer asks *where was June*, which means that he is asking when the month of June is coming. The point then is, why is it the month of *June* and not another month? Traditionally, especially in America and other northern sides of the world, *June* is the month when couples get married. Thus, questioning the time of marriage by using the word *June* is stylistically—as Warner (1961: 31) suggests—suitable to match the thought and the occasion (*see also*: Spencer, 1964: 11). In other words, the word *June* seems to be able to make the listener conceptualize—as Chafe (1970: 95) suggests—both physical objects and reified abstractions.

In the next statement, the singer states *And I'd go a thousand times around the world just to be closer to her than to me*. In this particular statement it can be seen that there are two stylistic devices are employed. That is, this statement can be seen in two different ways; in terms of hyperbole and by way of its structuralization.

Related to hyperbole, the singer states that *he goes a thousand times around the world just to be closer* to someone instead of himself. In this regard, anyone can think that “going *around the world for a thousand times*” even when one really has a chance to do it one will not do it, unless one is a pilot of

international flights. But even a pilot of international flights is also difficult to fly a thousand times within a pilot's career. The more normal and acceptable statement, therefore, should more or less read *And I go many times around the world just to be closer to her than to me*. Thus, it is the adverb of frequency *many times* that is—to use Jackson's term (2007: 124)—exaggerated into *a thousand times* (see also: Junus, 1994: 84). However, this is the part that stimulates the extra logical sense in the hearer.

In terms of structuralization, there are two things worth noted in this particular statement. First it is the use of two adverbs of time and secondly it is the use of infinitive with *to*. In normal order of the adverbs, the adverbial phrase *around the world* (also called Prepositional Phrase [PP]) should come before the adverbial phrase (also called Adverb of Frequency) *a thousand times* (see: Dixon, 2005: 31). The immediate reason is that because it is very normal when the word *go* is followed by *around the world* (see also: Ramaswamy, 2008: 97; 348-355). Hence, *go around the world*. However, as Nunan (1993: 45) proposes—it is the speaker (in this case the singer) to consider which adverb to put before or after another. One thing is sure, though, that putting *a thousand times* before *around the world* offers an emphasis on the frequency—the so many times—of the *going around the world*, which in its part is also capable of as Bradford (1997: 24) states affecting the people perception in the topic being addressed.

Another thing to consider in this particular statement is the use of the infinitive with *to* at the end of the statement. Although it is clear that *to be closer to her than to me* is an adverbial of purpose (see: Krohn, 1971: 125), in many discussions of English grammar this part is also called “infinitive with *to*”. As an infinitive with *to*, this form is generally used at the end of a sentence to indicate the purpose of an expression as in, “I went to the store to get some grocers” (Hornby, 1975: 33 and 205; Ramaswamy, 2008: 247, Thompson and Martinet, 1986: 334). Thus, it can be understood that the singer go a thousand times around the world for the purpose of getting closer to Aubrey than to himself.

Differently, at the end of the song the singer says *And I'd go a million times around the world just to say she had been mine for a day*. While the first part of the statement is similar to the previous statement where the adverb of

frequency comes earlier before the adverb of frequency, the final part of the statement is different. In this very final statement the infinitive with *to* is used to express a disappointment or—to use Thompson and Martinet's term—to express dismay. An example of a dismay is, "I ran all the way to the station only to find that the train had left (Thompson and Martinet, 1986: 173). In *I'd go a million times around the world just to say, she had been mine for a day* one can feel that the singer is so very disappointed. This statement also leaves a sense that in terms of stylistics the singer successfully ends his story by emphasizing the main point of the whole story in the song. That is—as Richardson suggests—that one way to end sentences well is to make sure the final words and phrases do not trail off or divert us from the main point (2002: 51).

4. Summary

As one of Bread's most popular songs that results in rich royalty to the writer, *Aubrey* is up to present day popular because of some stylistic and linguistic devices. When analyzed in terms of syntax, i.e. Constituent Structure (IC) as proposed by Stockwell (1977: 86-90) and Cross-Categorical Generalizations: X-bar Syntax—as proposed by Aarts (1997: 97), the first two phrases are capable of producing some extra logical meanings. The third phrase is also—metaphorically—capable of offering extra logical meanings by the transfer of a flower attribute to non-flower phenomena of *love* that is capable of *blooming*. It is these extra logical meanings that will in turns—to use Bradford's term (1997: 6)—linguistically achieve the emotive effect on the listeners. The other devices (*trip the light* and *where was June*) are in the form of metaphorical and culture-bound statements that are also capable of stimulating the emotive effect on the listeners because they are—as Spencer (1964: 11) suggests—suitable to match the thought and the occasion.

Finally another use of hyperbole (exaggeration) in the middle and at the end of the song, reinforced by putting the adverbs of frequency right after the verbs (*go*) then followed by the adverbs of preposition (*around the world*) is capable of producing some extra logical senses in the hearer (*see*: Jackson, 2007:124; Junus, 1994:84). That is, the singer expresses his disappointment by saying that he does so only to find that *Aubrey* had been his for a day. On the

whole, it can be concluded that when syntactic arrangement of words combined with stylistic devices in a tactful construction—as parts of “Aubrey”—is capable of emphasizing the senses as well as the meanings carried by the string of the words.

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