

## **Roman Jakobson's Theory of Poetic Appreciation in Relation to Linguistics**

**Aktar Islam**

Research Scholar

Department of English, Lalit Narayan Mithila University

Darbhangha, Bihar, India

### **Abstract**

Roman Jakobson was one of the most influential literary linguist as well as theorist in the literature of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though he was considered as the founder of Moscow Linguistic Circle (1915), he was also involved in a second Russian Formalist group (OPOJAZ) along with Victor Shklovsky and others. However, he permanently left Moscow and settled in Prague where he founded Prague Linguistic Circle. It is well-known that he was a connecting link between Formalism of 1920s and Structuralism of 1960s. Again, Jakobson escaped from Prague because of the political turmoil, and he finally settled in USA. Throughout his long academic career, he wrote a number of essays, and books. Some of his very influential essays have been translated in English by different scholars. The essays are *On Realism in Art, Futurism, Dada, The Dominant, Problems in the Study of Language and Literature, Linguistics and Poetics, Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances, What is Poetry?* etc. Among these essays, *Linguistics and Poetics* contains some of his most important contributions to the understanding how language works. Here, he also has mentioned various poets and dramatists for the appreciation of poetics in relation to linguistics. In my full-fledged article, I would like to present an overall introduction and analyze some of the major facts from this particular essay in depth and detail.

**Keywords:** Literary Linguist, Formalism, Structuralism, Poetics, Analyze

Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) has been hailed as one of the most influential Linguistic critics of literature. Though he was born in Russia and was a founder member of 'Moscow Linguistic Circle', he consistently moved on from the narrow confines of Pure Russian

Formalism into the Post-war literary theories based on Linguistic studies such as Structuralism, Post-structuralism and even various Cultural movements relating to issues of gender, ethnic background and several interrelated studies. As one critic rightly remarks, “his work has been influential in a wide variety of disciplines, including cultural anthropology, psychoanalysis, translation studies, film and media studies, rhetoric, aesthetic, musicology, folklore studies, and art history.”<sup>1</sup> However, the fact remains that in all his researches, his basic belief of the study of language as an integral part of the study of literature has been most visible. In fact, he has been credited with providing a discipline ‘linguistic turn’ in critical theory (Jameson, 1974).<sup>2</sup>

Among his various papers, his essay entitled *Linguistics and Poetics* holds a pride of place and its importance is next only to his two other papers *The Dominant, Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances*. However, to the present researcher *Linguistics and Poetics* appears to be a very lucid and major statement cum exposition of constructing a New Poetics on the basis of a literal appreciation of the basic principles of the science of Linguistics.

The essay in question *Linguistics and Poetics* begins with a query, “what makes a verbal message, a work of art?” and tries to answer the question in an unambiguous manner, “poetics deals with verbal structure and tries to tackle the issue of verbal message in terms of jurisdiction of Linguistics” because it is a ‘global science’ of verbal structure and tries to form a New Poetics accordingly for the appreciation of literary studies.<sup>3</sup> (Poetics may be regarded as a integral part of Linguistics.) With this approach, Jakobson moves on to elaborate that devices studied in Poetics are not confined to verbal art alone. In fact, he speaks of the possibility of converting literary text into a motion picture and others forms of fine arts such as music, ballad, graphic arts and even frescoes and pieces of sculpture. In fact, he quotes from a wide variety of arts forms only to prove that many poetic features do not belong to just the science of language but they are applied to a whole ‘theory of signs’ in terms of general Semiotics. He is quite sure that there are various kinds of verbal structure and linguistics is quite competent to tackle various kinds of discourses and their relevance (truth value). But what distinguishes a poetic discourse is a special kind of verbal arrangement and segments in literary discourses. In fact, Jakobson discusses various kinds of complex poets from different languages namely, English, Polish and even Cyprian poets who were long forgotten or ignored.<sup>4</sup> Gradually, he moves to the problem of synchrony and diachrony

and wants to establish that normative grammatical approach is quite inadequate and unsatisfactory in dealing with experimental poets like Hopkins or a highly visionary poet like Blake. As a matter of fact, Jakobson takes into consideration the usefulness of both synchronic and diachronic approaches in evaluating different poets like Shakespeare on the one hand and Donne and Marvell, Keats and Emily Dickinson on the other. The cases of James Thompson and Longfellow also draw the attention of Jakobson because some of the poets mentioned, do not have high artistic values but their contributions cannot be ignored simply because they do not follow the set norms. In fact, Jakobson pleads for a liberal and inclusive approach so that any new experimental poet may be given high due defining the norms of Classicism.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Jakobson is aware of the ‘arbitrariness’ as well as a kind of accepted ‘code’ which unites speech forms into a system based on ‘relations’ and ‘binary opposition’. But coming to poetic speech or language, he finds variety of poetic functions of the language which he designs as follows:<sup>6</sup>



He finds a large number of constitutive factors in any speech event in course of verbal communication. Obviously, there is an ‘addresser’ who sends a message to the ‘addressee’. But, in order that the ‘message’ should be meaningful or relevant, there must be a ‘context’ which may be sometimes plain or ambiguous. But, in cases the ‘message’ must be verbal and expressed in terms of a ‘code’. But, lastly, there must be a ‘contact’ which is a kind of physical channel as well as a psychological connection between the ‘addresser’ and the ‘addressee’. However, Jakobson realizes that each of the six factors determines a different function of language and the six basic aspects of language as mentioned above, must be understood correctly and in their diversity. This verbal structure of a ‘message’ depends primarily on the ‘predominant’ function. It is in the discussion of various functions that Jakobson applies a tool of psychology and uses terms like ‘referential’ ‘denotative’, ‘connotative’ on the one hand and the ‘emotive’ or expressive function on the other. It is in this context of the two major function of language that Jakobson shows his class and, in fact, he moves beyond the simple notion of a ‘code’ and

‘context’ and illustrate that ‘emotive’ elements of language can be excluded from Linguistic study. In course of the distinction, between the two major uses of the language with a reference to the ‘addresser’ as well as ‘addressee’, Jakobson shows his awareness of the speaker’s attitude. While he is aware of the connotative function in terms of assertion, he shows that there are other dimensions of language which have additional verbal functions. In this context, he uses the term, ‘metalinguistic’ function where the dominant function is superseded. Jakobson rightly points out that poetic functions “promote the palpable of signs and depend on the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects”.<sup>7</sup>

As a matter of fact, Jakobson discusses the issue of the special kind of poetic language in depth and detail and through copious examples from literature, music and drama. Shakespeare, Moliere, Hopkins, Alexander Pope, not to forget Chinese and Russian verse, are quite literally quoted. Even the American symbolist, Edgar Allen Poe and French symbolists Paul Verlaine and Stephane Mallarme are also utilized for the purpose of distinguishing between the simple language of normal communication and the ‘metalanguage’ of poetry where the poetic function moved beyond the mere lexical code or grammatical function concentrating on the special kind of message and variation which poetry employs. Jakobson remarks, “poetic function is not the soul function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function whereas in other activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent”.<sup>8</sup> In his analysis of the special form of poetic language, Jakobson finally comes to two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behavior namely, ‘selection’ and ‘combination’. That is why in poetic language we find several kinds of synonym and substitution and no simple rule of selection or rejection can be prescribed. As Jakobson rightly remarks, “the poetic function projects the equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence”.<sup>9</sup> In fact, in poetry various permutations and combinations take place because of placing one syllable against another syllable of the same sequence and yet word stress gathers a different connotation. This is possible because syllables are converted into ‘unit of major’ and serve the purpose of different kind of sequence building. In poetry, grammatical rules are violated for the sake of an intended or multiple poetic functions. In Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Jakobson notes a similar kind of arrangement of figures of speech sometimes by repetition and sometimes by adding a few qualifying words. The purposes are, of course, different. It is well-

known that Caesar's famous announcement on his victory was put into repetition of three verbs which have a climatic effect. In original Latin, the effect was achieved through alliteration and in the English translation, the three verbs achieve the same purpose without the use of alliteration- ('Veni, vidi, vici'-Latin and 'I came, I saw, I conquered'-English). This measure of sequences is a well-known device in poetry for achieving a special function of emphasis and gradual rising tone. In the poetry of G. M. Hopkins, the resources of poetic language are fully exploited because Hopkins defined verse as 'speech wholly or partially repeating the same figure of sound'. Hopkins was quite sure that all verse cannot be regarded as poetry. Though in many jingles and advertizing lines, laws of grammar are violated yet there is a limit to this violation of rules or sequence, subordination and coordination. Jakobson rightly sanctions the adoption of the poetic means in the context of emotive use of language. It is in this context that he justifies the need for a new critics based on the special requirements of poetry. As he rightly observes, "poetics in the wider sense of the word deals with the poetic function not only in poetry .....but also outside of poetry when some other function is superimposed upon the poetic function".<sup>10</sup> Counting of syllables and their actual numbers in terms of stress is necessitated by the poetic intention and no hard and fast rule can be laid down. In this context, he also calls attention to movements like 'vers libre' and 'sprung rhythm' of Hopkins (accentual verse). Not only this, he also quotes Wimsatt and Beardsley in support of "the major stress of the major words".<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Jakobson turns his attention to Russian poetry and meters along with Chinese versification in support of liberalization of the principle of 'word-stresses' as against the traditional method of prosody. Again, he quotes lines from Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Frost for showing that poetic function moves beyond simple rhythmical variation. He also speaks of the 'design' and 'instance' as correlated terms and quotes from the lines of various English poets to illustrate the point that even ordinary words, both nouns and verbs, and sometimes even adjectives can be manipulated to achieve miraculous effect. For this reason, he draws our attention to various individual passages, lines and expressions from diverse poets and dramatists such as Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, G. M. Hopkins and even, Edgar Allan Poe. In fact, he shows that even an ordinary word, 'absurd' acquires a different connotation in the play, 'Hamlet' ('No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp'). Apparently at first sight, this may create an impression of poetic ornamentation but in Hamlet's mind, it expresses his bitter reaction and as

such its prose paraphrasing cannot achieve the desired effect of the speaker's contempt of royal authority. The same is true of many lines from Hopkins' well-known poems particularly sonnets like *The Windhover* and some of his 'terrible sonnets' (*No Worst, There is None* etc.) where rules of grammar are violated and the use of repetition and alliteration as well as obsolete words used in different altered parts of speech acquires a special effect. The opening lines of *The Windhover* are too well-known and the same process of creating new words or expressions through the use of a hyphen creates a dramatic effect of tension. As Hopkins rightly observed in the preface to his poems, "two rhythms are in some manner running at once".<sup>12</sup> In other words, rhythm is very much different from simple rhyme and such variation and use of homonyms (I-eye, eve-eave) creates a special effect. Now, rhyme can create an effect of condensed case of a general observation but in Hopkins' case parallelism has a special function because he sees in nature an outward sign of spiritual grace. In the case of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* particularly the famous speech of Mark Antony, the dramatic possibilities of poetic speech are fully exploited and here the verb, 'speak' is exploited in various ways creating an effect on contrast between two speakers namely, Antony and Brutus and here the common figure of irony is exploited in a very oblique and creative manner and the neutral readers and theatre goers are thoroughly shaken by Antony's speech. In well-known poem *The Raven* by Poe, a similar symbolic effect is created through repetition and alliteration. Even, the reference to Pallas does the trick and a kind of haunting effect is created. Finally, Jakobson also draws our attention towards sound symbolism and quotes Pope's well-known line, "the sound must seem an Echo of the sense for a wider application". Though this norm usually refers to the need of a proper harmony between word signs and sound signs, Jakobson takes it to be an ideal case of the balance between metaphor and metonymy in terms of precision and suggestivity. It is true that Jakobson does not use the word, 'imagery' and its various kinds but he certainly draws the attention of literary critics for a proper use of linguistics with greater competence. His last words in the essay are a kind of reminder to both who neglect the importance of linguistics and to those who take the binary opposition between 'sign, signified and signifier' into a narrow mould.

In short, the present essay shows Jakobson's insight into the subtleties and niceties of a literary discourse in terms of basic principle of linguistics as well as wide application of literary language in terms of displacement as well as condensation. In short, Jakobson's importance lies

in his acute analysis of the ways in which a poetic language works especially through the dual uses of ‘metaphor’ and ‘metonymy’ and the dominance of a particular mode in a particular case.

## References

1. Rayan, Michael (General Editor), Castle, Gregory, Eaglestone, Robert and Booker, M. Keith. *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. p. 275.
2. Ibid. p. 275.
3. Lodge, David (Edited by) and Wood, Nigel (Revised and Extended by). *Modern Criticism and Theory-A Reader*, Pearson, 2011. p. 49.
4. Ibid. p. 50.
5. Ibid. p. 51.
6. Ibid. Pp. 51-52.
7. Habib, M. A. R. *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory-A History*, Blackwell Publishing, 2005. p. 619
8. Lodge, David (Edited by) and Wood, Nigel (Revised and Extended by). Op. cit. 54.
9. Ibid. p. 56.
10. Ibid. p. 57.
11. Ibid. p. 57.
12. Ibid. p. 62.