

LINGUISTIC PECULIARITIES OF HEMINGWAY'S PROSE

*When you want to find the truth  
about Hemingway's life, look first to his  
fiction.*

Hemingway is lauded as one of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century. Considered a master of the understated prose style which became his trademark, he was awarded the "Man is not made for defeat". This is one of many quotations of the author Ernest Hemingway that reflects not only his personal outlooks on life, but many facets of his works of novels and short stories. A writer of controversy to this day, Hemingway has become somewhat of a legend for his literary stature and prose.

As one of the most influential American writers of the 20th century, Hemingway pioneered a generation of writing style. He is famous for his unique writing style-iceberg theory. Hemingway is a productive writer. In his lifetime, he finished six long pieces of fictions and more than fifty medium and short stories. Among them, *A Farewell to Arms*, the representative work of the Lost Generation, is the symbol of the formation of iceberg theory. And *The Old Man and the Sea* is considered to be the climax of his special writing style. In 1954, Hemingway won Nobel Prize in literature for "his powerful, style-forming mastery of the art of narration". In 1932, in *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway used an effective metaphor to describe his writing style for the first time: "The dignity of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water"<sup>1</sup>. Hemingway compared his creation to an "iceberg" and used iceberg theory to summarize his art style and skills. He said: "I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show". Hemingway's play *The Fifth Column*, novels *The Snows*

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<sup>1</sup> Hemingway E. *Death in the Afternoon*. Scribner Book Company, US, 1969, p.18.

*of Kilimanjaro, Death in the Afternoon, Green Hills of Africa and The Old Man and the Sea* are typical works of iceberg theory.

Think of an iceberg: one eighth of it is above the water, all of the rest is implied. One must go very deep beneath the surface to understand the full meaning of his writing. Regarding this, there are two viewpoints: Some criticize him for being excessively succinct, because there are just two main characters in *The Old Man and the Sea* and both the language and structure look very simple.

According to Hemingway's explanation the iceberg theory is molding a distinct image with the succinct and direct writing, the feeling and thought of the writer himself are hidden in the image to the largest extent. Thus, the emotion is plentiful, though included but not exposed; the thought is profound, though deeply concealed but not obscure. On account of this, the sensibility and perceptibility of literature are combined skillfully, leaving the readers to explore the emotion and thought of the work through the feeling of these distinct images. Succinct words, distinct images, plentiful emotion and profound thought are the four fundamental elements of iceberg theory for further study, that is, the words and images are the so-called "1/8" while the emotion and thought are the so-called "7/8". The formers are specific and visual while the latter are implied in the former. The words portray the images; the emotion is embodied in the images; the thought is embodied in the emotion. According to Hemingway's aesthetic view, the real beauty should be the organic combination of the natural beauty and artistic beauty. Good works should not be the accumulation of rhetoric, but of one's own particularity. He objects to the ornate diction which is flashy and without substance; he also objects the meticulous descriptions of the character and complicated and delicate analysis of the mentality, because in this case, the readers can take in everything at a glance. He advocates that the writer should express the most complicated meaning by the most succinct words while avoiding the useless circuitousness.

In his works Hemingway focused on the individual. As Hemingway described in one of his works, "All art is only done by the individual. The individual is all you ever have and all schools only serve to classify their members as failures. The individual, the great artist when he comes, uses everything that has been discovered or known about his art up to that point, being able to accept or reject in a time so short it seems that the knowledge was born with him, rather that he takes instantly what it takes the ordinary man a

lifetime to know, and then the great artist goes beyond what has been done or known and makes something of his own”<sup>1</sup>.

As a novelist, Hemingway is often assigned a place among the writers of ‘*the lost generation*’, along with Faulkner, Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos and Sinclair Lewis. These writers, including Ernest Hemingway, tried to show the loss the First World War had caused in the social, moral and psychological spheres of human life. They also reveal the horror, the fear and the futility of human existence. True, Hemingway has echoed the longings and frustrations that are typical of these writers, but his work is distinctly different from theirs in its philosophy of life. In his novels ‘a metaphysical interest in man and his relation to nature’ can be discerned. Hemingway has been immortalized by the individuality of his style. Short and solid sentences, delightful dialogues, and a painstaking hunt for an apt word or phrase to express the exact truth, are the distinguishing features of his style. He evokes an emotional awareness in the reader by a highly selective use of suggestive pictorial detail, and has done for prose what Eliot has done for poetry. In his accurate rendering of sensuous experience, Hemingway is a realist. As he himself has stated in *Death in the Afternoon*, his main concern was ‘to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were that produced the emotion you experienced’<sup>2</sup>. This surface realism of his works often tends to obscure the ultimate aim of his fiction. This has often resulted in the charge that there is a lack of moral vision in his novels.

A close examination of Hemingway’s fiction reveals that in his major novels he enacts the general drama of human pain, and that he has used the novel form in order to pose symbolic questions about life. Hemingway shows us an eternal artistic world of his own unique style. Through his works, we can not only feel the charm of his words, but also understand the deep connotations of his works. The trials and tribulations undergone by his protagonists are symbolic of man’s predicament in this world. He views life as a perpetual struggle in which the individual has to assert the supremacy of his free will over forces other than himself. In order to assert the dignity of his existence, the individual has to wage a relentless battle against a world which refuses him any identity or fulfillment. This observation is probably the right key to understand Hemingway, the man and the novelist.

On the dimensions of portraying figures and describing their psychology Hemingway is a master. A close study of Hemingway’s men characters will

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<sup>1</sup> Hemingway E. *Death in the Afternoon*. Scribner Book Company, US, 1969, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Hemingway E. *Death in the Afternoon*. Scribner Book Company, US, 1969, p.21.

involve a careful observation and a detailed description of the language phenomena at various levels.

Hemingway's style is seemingly rather simple and direct. He was trying to put down what he saw and what he felt in the best and simplest way he could tell it. That's why he banished all literary frills from his writing. The *Sun Also Rises*, for instance, contains almost no metaphors or similes, very few adjectives, and even fewer adverbs. Hemingway wanted to focus on "things" in themselves, and so he used only simple nouns, and simple verbs. His style, compared to the style of other writers is simple. Hemingway believed that he portray his characters through their physical and emotional reactions.

In an attempt to analyze Hemingway's prose in terms of types of narration we can see that two types prevail in his works: entrusted narrative and dialogue. In an effort to make his writing more plausible, to impress the reader with the effect of authenticity of the described events, the writer entrusts some fictitious character with the task of story-telling. The writer himself thus hides behind the figure of the narrator, presents all the events of the story from the latter's viewpoint and only sporadically emerges in the narrative with his own considerations, which may reinforce or contradict those expressed by the narrator. This form of the author's speech is called entrusted narrative. The structure of the entrusted narrative is much more complicated than that of the author's narrative, because above the narrator's image, there stands the image of the author, the true and actual creator of it all, responsible for all the views and evaluations of the text and serving the major and predominant force of textual cohesion and unity. Entrusted narrative can be carried out in the 1st person singular, when the narrator proceeds with his story openly and explicitly, from his own name, as in *The Sun Also Rises*. Consequently in such type of narration we come across literary words both general and special, which contribute to the message the tone of solemnity, sophistication, seriousness, gravity, learnedness. In Hemingway's narrative we come across a considerable number of foreign words and expressions. His fiction is flooded by Spanish, Italian, German words and expressions. This technique helps to create the desired cultural atmosphere and to have the intended aesthetic impact on the reader.

*"What's yours?" he asked.*

*"Otro loco mas", said the barman and turned away.*

*Otro loco mas (Spanish)-another fool (Selected Stories, p. 128)*

*"Ha perduti qualche cosa, Signora?"*

*"There was a cat", said the girl. "A cat?" "Si, ilgatto".*

*"A cat?" the maid laughed. "A cat in the rain?"*

*Ha perduti qualche cosa, Signora? (Italian)-Are you looking for something ma'am?*

*"Sì, il gatto".- Yes, the cat. (Selected Stories, p. 174)*

*"No, not today. I will provide everything for tomorrow. **Pane, salami, formaggio**, good stuff for all of us". (Selected Stories, p. 176)*

*They had her measurements, and a **vendeuse** who knew her and her tastes picked the dresses out for her and they were sent to America.*

*a vendeuse (French)- a shop assistant (A Canary for One, p. 180)*

*"I'm offering to put you on tomorrow night", Retana said. "You can work with young Hernandez and kill two **novillos** after the Chariots". "Whose **novillos**?" Manuel asked.*

*Manuel picked it up and put it in his pocket.*

*"What about a **cuadrilla**?" he asked. (The Undefeated, p. 192)*

*"There's the boys that always work forme nights", Retana said. "They're all right".*

*"How about **picadors**?" Manuel asked.*

*"They're not much", Retana admitted. (The Undefeated, p. 192)*

*The words novillo, cuadrilla and picador are Spanish words. Novillo means a bull, cuadrilla means a group of riders taking part in a bullfight, and picador is also of Spanish origin meaning a horseman who pricks the bull with a lance in the early stages of a fight to goad and weaken it. As we know bullfighting originated in Spain and was very popular there. The use of Spanish words when talking about bullfighting creates a specific natural atmosphere.*

*However, the narrative is not the only type of prose observed in Hemingway's works. A very important place here is occupied by dialogue, where personages express their minds in the form of uttered speech. In Hemingway's dialogues, apart from general colloquial words we come across slang forms, vulgarisms, dialectal words, etc. In *Farewell to Arms* we find a number of such words ("son of a bitch", "whore", "whore hound", etc.).*

*"You **bitch**", he said. "You rich **bitch**. That's poetry" (Selected Stories, p.280)*

*"What's the idea?" George asked.*

*"None of your **damn** business", Al said. "Who's out in the kitchen". (The Killers, p. 66)*

*"How you like this **goddam** war?"*

*"Rotten". (Farewell to Arms, p. 29)*

*They dropped me once more before we reached the post.*

*"You **sons of bitches**", I said. (Farewell to Arms, p. 45)*

“Come on, you polak **son-of-a-bitch**”, Jack said to Walcott. (*Selected Stories*, p. 147)

As we see vulgarisms used by most male speakers in Hemingway’s dialogues, are *highly emotive and expressive*.

Here are a few examples of slang forms:

“Did you **have a jam** with Soldier?”

“Not a jam”, I said. “He just told him to go back to town” (*Fifty Grand*, p. 116) To *have a jam with somebody* is a slang form which means *to quarrel, to have a dispute with somebody*.

“Do you suppose **he’s got the con?**” (*Selected Stories*, p. 128) To *get the con* here means *to feel fit*.

“I ain’t sleep for a week”, Jack says. “All night I lay awake and **worry my can off**. I can’t sleep, Jerry”. (*Selected Stories*, p. 130)

To *worry one’s can off here* means to be anxious or uneasy about something uncertain or potentially dangerous. If we look it up in the Oxford Dictionary we can see that the denotational meaning of *can* is a container, especially for liquids, usually of thin sheet metal, but in this expression it acquired an interesting connotative value.

“I guess I was pretty **stewed** last night”, he started. “You weren’t bad”. (*In Another Country*, p. 78)

In Collin’s dictionary the word *stewed* is marked as a slang form synonymous with the word *drunk*, *i.e.* intoxicated with alcohol to the extent of losing control over normal physical and mental functions.

So from the above stated we can conclude that Hemingway’s fiction, especially the speech of his men characters is rich in slang forms and expressions which help to create a certain informal atmosphere. In their exchange of remarks the speakers expose themselves. So dialogue is one of the most significant forms of the personage’s self-characterization, which allows the author to seemingly eliminate himself from the process.

In Hemingway’s fiction we also come across archaic and poetic words. He evokes an emotional awareness in the reader by a highly selective use of archaic words such as *thee*, *thou*, *thy*, etc. As once said, Hemingway has done for prose what Eliot has done for poetry. Here *aft* a few examples.

“Maria, I love **thee** and **thou** art so lovely and so wonderful and so beautiful and it does such things to me to be with **thee** that I feel as though I wanted to die when I am lovely **thee**”.

“Oh”, she said. “I die each time. Do you not die?”

“No. Almost. But did **thee** feel the earth move?”

"Yes. As I died. Put **thy** arm around me, please". (For Whom the Bell Tolls, p. 160)

"But I loved it more. One does not need to die". "Ojala no", he said. "I hope not". "I did not mean that".

"I know. I know what **thou meanest** We mean the same". "Then why did you say that instead of what I meant?" (For Whom the Bell Tolls, p. 263)

"Say that you love me".

"No. Not now".

"Not love me now?"

"Dejamos. Get **thee** back. One does not do that and love all at the same moment."

"I want to go to hold the legs of the gun and while it speaks love thee all in the same moment".

"**Thou** art crazy. Get **thee** back now".

"I am crazy", she said. "I love **thee**."

"Then get **thee** back".

"Good. I go. And if **thou dost** not love me, I love **thee** enough for both".

For Maria, love heals the unseen scars of her past. (For Whom the Bell Tolls, p. 270)

Through the use of archaic words Hemingway seeks to evoke the style of older speech and writing. He tries to show that his male characters though being morally and psychologically aimless are capable of tender feelings; they expect a happy life and the fulfillment of their romantic wishes. And again and again, in Brett, Helen, and now Maria, we can see female characters in Hemingway's literature impair the men who love them. The choice to love brings difficulty, yet again and again the characters choose to love and live.

As far as dialectal words are concerned, it should be mentioned that they are normative and devoid of any stylistic meaning in regional dialects, but used outside of them, carry a strong flavour of the locality where they belong. They differ also on the lexical level, having their own names for locally existing phenomena and also supplying locally circulating synonyms for the words, accepted by the language in general.

His fiction is especially rich in gender-biased dialogue introductions. It is evident that Hemingway wrought a self-image as the he-man of American letters, the writer who created an exclusively male preserve - athletes, prize fighters, sportsmen, killers - a world of "men without women", where outdated models of heroism were still incessantly sought and worshipped. These dialogues allow the writer to portray a power imbalance that appears total and the men's seeming

dominance becomes more and more clear. Men's struggle to win women's capitulation is violent as what they want is the power to have everything. Hemingway gives many clues about the gender bias as his characters were composites of real people.

The study of the major syntax shows that the number of participial constructions is prevailing. Both present and past participles are used in his participial phrases that modify nouns and pronouns. As we can see from the following examples participles add vigor to his writing as they add information to the sentences.

*The negro looked over at the little man, **lying breathing heavily**. His blond hair was down over his forehead. His mutilated face looked childish in repose. (Selected Stories, p. 62)*

*Sam, the nigger, **standing in his apron**, looked at the two men sitting at the counter. "Yes, sir," he said. Al got down from his stool. (Selected Stories, p. 72)*

*Inside the kitchen he saw Al, his derby hat tipped back, **sitting on a stool** beside the wicket with the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun **resting on the ledge**.*

*Nick and the cook were back to back in the corner, **a towel tied in each of their mouths**. (Selected Stories, p. 78)*

*Black bull with a horse on his back, **staggering short-legged, then arching his neck and lifting, thrusting, charging** to slide the horse off, **horse sliding down**. (The Undeafeted, p.209)*

*Macomber, **looking back**, saw his wife, with the rifle by her side, **looking at him**. He waved to her and she did not wave back. (The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber, p. 268)*

*"He's dead in there", Wilson said. "Good work", and he turned to grip Macomber's hand and as they shook hands, **grinning at each other**, the gun-bearer shouted wildly and they saw him coming out of the bush sideways, fast as a crab, and the bull coming, nose out, **mouth tight closed, blood dripping**, massive head straight out, **coming in a charge**, his little pig eyes bloodshot as he looked at them. (The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber, p. 269)*

*Wilson stood up and saw the buffalo on his side, his legs out, **his thinly-haired belly crawling with ticks**. (The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber, p.272)*

The abundant use of participial constructions in the above-mentioned examples creates a certain poetic effect which will be very difficult to translate and to transfer into Armenian. The participial constructions used by Hemingway may undergo certain transformations during the translation process in order to make them sound as natural and suggestive as they are in the original.

However, it should be mentioned that Hemingway always manages to choose words concrete, specific, more commonly found, more Anglo-Saxon, casual and conversational. He seldom uses adjectives and abstract nouns, and avoids complicated syntax. Hemingway's strength lies in his short sentences and very specific details.

*"You're my alarm clock", the boy said.*

*"Age is my alarm clock", the old man said. "Why does old man wake so early? Is it to have one longer day?"*

*"I don't know", the boy said. "All I know is that young boys sleep late and hard".*

*"I can remember it", the old man said. "I'll waken you in time". (The Old Man and Sea, p. 54)*

The simple sentences and the repeated rhythms used here hit at the profundities that the surface of the language tries to ignore. Its simplicity is highly suggestive and connotative, and often reflects the strong undercurrent of emotion. Indeed, the more closely we watch the less rough and simple the characters appear.

In his works Hemingway defined true masculinity. The works of Ernest Hemingway generally center around the concept of heroism. Each of his novels contains a "Hemingway hero" – a man of honor and integrity who expresses himself not with words, but with action. However, the Hemingway hero is not motivated by glory or fortune. Hemingway's heroic figures are driven by a need to find inner peace in a modernized world that cannot provide them with the answers they seek.

Apart from the language style of descriptions of Hemingway's men characters, his writing techniques are also worth paying close attention to. Though Hemingway's sentences are short and simple he tries to implicate people's imagination in what is happening by using a great number of stylistic devices, especially syntactic ones, such as one-word sentences, climax, asyndeton, polysyndeton, different types of repetition, which emphasize the logical and emotional value of his words, accelerate the rhythm and semantic significance. Hemingway's prose is flooded by repetitions in all types of discourse, be it a narrative, a description, a dialogue or something else. Through the repetition of different lexical and syntactical units Hemingway was able to build a pattern of images of men characters. Indeed, in many respects his men characters are regarded as the embodiment and symbol of hard-boiled literature. With the help of polysyndeton his sentences seem to move in one direction, they evoke a feeling of simplicity and continuity. The absence of any artistic tricks and structural complications

also gives us a direct and vivid perception of facts conveyed by the images. Hemingway is also good at gradually increasing the speed of the sequence of images. This allows us to get a more direct and accurate perception thus manipulating the emotional intensity of the passage. Through focusing on his men characters, by emphasizing their individuality and knowledge Hemingway portrayed a true man character and identity.

Ernest Hemingway's works stand among the best known affirmations of a value system in which the games of combat must be played with honesty, completeness and grace. Fishing, bullfighting and hunting can be rituals of manhood, reaffirmation of the male role. The arts of fishing, bullfighting and hunting, as revealed in Hemingway's works, in turn reveal the arts of writing.

***Vitality and death, contentedness and pain, disease and survival all coexist in Hemingway's writing as one: life.***

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1. Culler A., The Art of Fiction, US, Scribners, 1975.
2. Hotchner A. E., Papa Hemingway. Random House, New York, 1955.
3. Hemingway E., Death in the Afternoon. Scribner Book Company, US, 1969.
4. Hemingway E., Selected Stories. Moscow Publishers, Moscow, 1971.
5. Hemingway E., The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway. New York, Scribner's, 1938.
6. Hemingway E., The Sun Also Rises. Scribner, New York, 1926.