

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*: A Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract

The plays of George Bernard Shaw offer criticism of modern societies and especially the glorification of war as in *Arms and the Man*. The present study investigates the usefulness of the application of Michael Halliday's (2014) concept of "register" to Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and uses a stylistic reading of the play to show how the term could yield important findings in the underlying meaning of the play. The research intends to identify the major components: field, tenor and mode in the play. The study shows that the concept of "register" can be applied to literary texts to explore the hidden meanings of the text and especially in *Arms and the Man* which deals with the glorification of war by statesmen. The present study highlights the role of the concept of register in shedding light on literary texts especially modern plays. It offers a new reading of the play because the linguistic aspects are a reflection of the depth of the underlying meanings of the literary text. The study recommends that the concept of register should be used by literary critics as a means of literary analysis.

Keywords: *Arms and the Man*, George Bernard Shaw, pragmatics, realism, register, stylistics

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Introduction:

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* received mixed critical since its production in 1894 (Weintraub, 1992, p. 65). The play was published under the title "Pleasant Plays" and critics considered it as "Shaw's first 'pleasant' play" (Di Yanni, 2005, p. 1291). Srinivas (2014) discusses the importance and significance of the play as well as other plays by George Bernard Shaw in "The Early Plays of George Bernard Shaw: An Analysis." Siddiqui and Raza's (2012) study "Realism in *Arms and the Man*: A Comparative Study- Realism and Idealism" claim that *Arms and the Man* is a realistic play because of its elements (P. 48). In another study entitled "Sexism or Gender Differentiation and Class Differentiation in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*" the critical opinion focuses on "class and gender differentiation in George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* and find the disadvantages of these differences in society" (Azizmohammadi & Zohreh, 2014, p. 6). Hasim's (2015) study also entitled "The Defense Mechanism of Raina Petkoff in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* Play: A Psychoanalytic Approach" is a study that offers a psychoanalytical reading of *Arms and the Man*, and its purpose is "to analyze the major character's personality based on the structural elements and psychoanalytic perspective of Sigmund Freud" (P.3). The present study investigates the major themes of Shaw's *Arms and the Man* by applying Michael Halliday's concept of "register." Moreover, a stylistic approach is important because literary stylistics is considered as synonymous to literary criticism and might yield a more accurate analysis of the power of language in giving meaning (Ogunsiji, Dauda, Daniel & Yakubu, 2013, p. 17). Thus, the study of the play from a stylistic perspective reveals the complexity of the play and its cultural appeal to a universal and international public.

Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*:

Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* is a distinguished play in terms of its themes and language. Greenblatt asserts that George Bernard Shaw "created a drama of ideas, in which his characters strenuously argue points of view that justify their social positions" (Greenblatt, 2006, p.1745). The play extensively uses figures of speech and symbols. There is also the presence of many dialects that enrich the play. Moreover, the language of drama is different from other genres because it is not like poetry or fiction, as it is "designed to present its statements in a combination of action and words" (Ogunsiji, et al., 2013, p. 61). Therefore, a stylistic analysis will provide a better understanding of the underlying meaning of the text.

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* can be understood by applying the concept of "register" as devised by Michael Halliday which is "defined as a 'variety of language, corresponding to a variety of situations'" (as cited in Lukin et al., 2011, p. 187). This concept is helpful in analyzing *Arms and the Man* because it forms a link between literature and linguistics by focusing on the linguistic aspect of the text to yield meaning. The play is a skillful drama because it relies heavily on the use of language in moving the action forward. Moreover, the play is an example of how Halliday saw the concept and how "The development of the concept of register reflects a need to explain variation according to use and arises from a concern with the importance of language in action" (Lukin et al., 2011, p. 190). Drama is in its essence relies on a writer who intends to compose a play not only for reading but for acting, which means that the

words used should convey a sense of action. Therefore, a stylistic analysis becomes important because a significant element in a drama is dialogue and it is vital to show a dynamic interpretation of the internal struggles and intellectual ideas of the play.

Pragmatic stylistics involves an analysis of two levels: lexical-semantic level and syntactic level. Under the lexical-semantic level, an analysis deals mainly with word choice. A stylistic analysis also examines the communicative situation, talk turns, ellipsis, conjunction, lexical cohesion reference (which includes anaphoric and cataphoric). Moreover, the syntactic level involves defining sentences in terms of simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Therefore, the lexical-semantic level and the syntactic level provide a comprehensive analysis of the text and a better understanding of audiences or readers. *Arms and the Man* is classified under "Pleasant Plays" (Srinivas, 2014, p. 159) because the play includes a sense of humor. The language is more complex and sophisticated to the general audiences of the theater. It presents to the reader and spectator an intellectual sensation. An analysis using the concept of "register" by Michael Halliday can be useful because "register" involves a study of "a variety according to use in the sense that each speaker has a range of varieties and chooses between them at different times" (Ogunsiji, et al., 2013, p. 99). In the play, for example, the mother, Catherine, uses a different dialect when she speaks according to the addressee and her actions are typical of some people who use different dialects and her "register" varies according to "topic, setting, participants, medium, etc" (Ogunsiji, et al., 2013: 98). Similarly, Catherine's speech to her daughter Raina is different from her speech to Louka (the maid). The formal and informal level of the language sheds light on domestic stability and its relationship to ideology and social interaction because it highlights the role of the public sphere in shaping national identities.

Arms and the Man is a play that deals with the idealization of violence in a humorous way. Greenblatt describes Shaw as one having "insistent rationality made some of his contemporaries view him as bloodless" (Greenblatt, 2006, p.1745). Shaw portrays in the play the idea that no one can win a war. The reason is that everybody in a war is a loser, even the triumphant ones because of sacrifices made in order to achieve a victory. Moreover, the narration becomes engaging to the audience because the play takes into account different perspectives. The scene denounces social conventions in favor of ambiguity so as to allow readers the ability to find a better value system in human interaction. Shaw also wants to emphasize the idea that war does not achieve any real solutions and that violence entails more violence and destroys countries and individuals. Shaw witnessed more than one war in his life. His experience taught him that people's problems can be solved by negotiations and coming into close physical contact in order to come up with solutions. Shaw expresses the theme concerning war through the opinions of the protagonist Bluntschli on war.

Critics have pointed out the social aspects of Shaw's literary work. The critical consensus is that "Shaw used the theater as a tool of social reform, presenting situations which challenged conventional attitudes, directing a stream of ideas at audiences, provoking while entertaining" (Alexander, 2004, p. 300). In *Arms and the Man*, for example, Shaw presents the characters as having different opinions about the war. The first opinion is by Raina who has an idealistic view

on war and considers herself as useless because she cannot take part in the war because girls are "faithless little creatures" (1.1.34). Her reaction raises a critical question on her feminine nature. The readers are left to consider the young lady as a product of modernization and as an anomaly in society.

Stylistic Analysis:

The choice of the vocabulary and structure emphasizes the general themes of the play. For example, Shaw is in the following dialogue trying to highlight an underlying meaning concerning the impact of war on civilians:

LOUKA: if you please madam, all windows are to be closed and the shutters made fast. They say there may be shooting in the streets. (RAINA and CATHRINE *rise together, alarmed.*) The Serbs are being chased right back through the pass; and they say they may be run into the town. Our cavalry will be after them; and our people will be ready for them, you may be sure, now they are running away. (*She goes out on the balcony, and pulls the outside shutters to; then steps back into the room.*)

CATHERINE (businesslike, housekeeping instincts aroused): I must see that everything is made safe downstairs.

RAINA: I wish our people were not so cruel. What glory is there in killing wretched fugitives?

CATHERINE: Cruel! Do you suppose they would hesitate to kill you- or worse?

RAINA :(*to LOUKA*): Leave the shutters so that I can just close them if I hear ant noise.

CATHERINE: (authoritatively, turning on her way to the door): Oh no, dear: you must keep them fastened. You would be sure to drop off to sleep and leave them open. Make them fast, Louka.

LOUKA: Yes, madam. (*She fastens them*) (1.1.55)

As the above quotation illustrates, Shaw decides to focus on three women; Louka, Catherine, and Raina. Catherine is "a middle- aged affected woman who is Raina's mother" (McNabb, 2003: 2). On the other hand, her daughter, Raina is "a young Bulgarian lady" (DiYanni, 2005: 1292). All the characters have strained relationships: the mother and her daughter, on one hand, and the housemaid on the other. The higher social role is indicated in the mother as her language tends to be official and imperative especially when she addresses Louka (the housemaid) through the use of imperative sentences. Her role is enhanced by the Yes/No replies of the maid.

In an earlier speech, Catherine and Raina were talking positively about war. They were very proud of their men and Raina felt that she was useless because she could not participate in the war efforts. But when Louka came and warned them, Catherine changed her behavior and language. Moreover, as they moved to discuss domestic things, the spectators could spot changes in Catherine's attitude towards her maid Louka. Therefore, an analysis of the play requires applying the concept of "register" as a tool of analysis. According to Halliday, "register" includes that one should pay attention to identifying field, tenor, and mode. "Fiel'" can be generally defined as "to what is happening" (Ogunsiji, et al.,2013, p.102), and "field" according to Halliday refers

to “what is going on in the situation” (Halliday, 2014: 33). In the opening scene, Louka came in order to inform and warn Lady Catherine and Raina that there was a battle going on and that a surge of the enemies’ soldiers would invade people’s homes and that women would have to be aware and close all doors and windows. Lady Catherine was terrified after hearing this news, but her daughter Raina did not show any apprehensions. Because the story is set in the war period, the words and expressions used by characters are related to war and violence.

The second aspect in discussing register is related to identifying “tenor.” The general definition of “tenor” is “the style of discourse” (Ogunsiji, et al. P.102). The conversation in the house at night between mother and daughter and the maid shows a level of informality because the mother wants to advise her rebellious daughter and draw her attention to the serious situation. In a crucial scene, the mother shouted: “Cruel! Do you suppose they would hesitate to kill you- or worse?” (1.1.51). Moreover, a military relationship seems to govern the relationship between Lady Catherine and Louka because it relies on the use of imperatives and the readers are aware that they are affected by the atmosphere of an ongoing battle.

The third element in analyzing register is “mode.” The definition of “mode” is how a writer “emphasizes the channel of communication such as spoken or written” (Ogunsiji, et al., 2013, p.102). “Mode” is important in analyzing the play because any drama relies on performance. The frequent use of words for example “Oh, no,” indicates a fragmentation in the dialogue because ideas are not carefully articulated. The play relies on frequent dramatic moments to highlight emotions that are intense.

If we analyze the play’s discourse, we can find that the play is centered on the role of women in war. There are three major characters who represent social classes: two ladies and a housemaid. The conversation starts with the requests made from the housemaid who uses if clause type sentences and the conversation ends with imperative questioning\ answering techniques that is used by Lady Catherine (the mother). The idea that the window should be closed is articulated in different varieties according to social role and situation. There are eleven clauses in the conversation: two imperatives, two interrogatives, and seven informative sentences. Also, the cohesive ties in the text are an ellipsis, conjunction, and cohesion and reference. An example of an ellipsis can be illustrated in the following example:

CATHERINE: Make them fast, Louka.

LOUKA: Yes, [I'll make them at once] madam. (1294)

The ellipsis indicates a reduction in speaking or a kind of shortening sentences in the speech that affirms her prompt response to the command. The second example is on the use of conjunctions which adds emphasis to the spoken discourse. The play maintains a level in the lexical cohesion that strengthens the meaning embedded in the text as in the following example:

RAINA: I wish our people were not so cruel. What glory is there in killing wretched fugitives?

CATHERINE: Cruel! Do you suppose they would hesitate to kill you or worse? (1294)

The writer uses pronouns and references to achieve cohesion in the text. The previous text is abundant in the use of references such as you, they and them. As an example, Louka uses "they" to refer to the Serbs on more than one occasion. Another example from the text is the answer "If you please, madam," which indicates that (You is a cataphoric reference to madam). On the other hand, Raina's answer "Leave the shutters so that I can just close them if I hear any noise" is an example of an anaphoric reference, ("them" is an anaphoric reference to the shutters).

At the lexico-semantic level, the use of words and expression reveal a lot of hidden meanings, for example, words such as windows, shutters indicate a world that is outside and full of danger. The choice of the word "fast" instead of "close" when the mother said: "Make them fast, Louka" (1.1.72) for the shutters which implies that the mother wanted the world to be tightly shut outside because she was worried about the security of her home.

Similarly, there are words that indicate a conflict in the play such as shooting, fugitives, alarmed, chased, ready, cavalry, running away, safe, cruel, glory, and kill. The purpose of the use of particular words is to emphasize the main theme in the play which indicates that war is a serious event and has monumental social and political implications.

The writer's choice of the major characters as women is used to emphasize the simplicity of all domestic enthusiasts who believe that war is important because men fight for their motherland. Shaw, therefore, reshapes the real image of war and treats war in a humorous way. Shaw relies heavily on Raina who is a romantic idealist. Srinivas (2014) asserts that "Shaw's strips war of its heroism and love of its romantic glamour through the creation of a "chocolate-cream soldier" (p. 160). Therefore, the following encounter between Raina and the "chocolate-cream soldier" who readers later discover that his name is Captain Bluntschli and who could be described as "a Swiss officer in the Serbian army" (DiYanni, 2005, p. 1292). Thus, the encounter with people from different classes helps to show the false ideas about war such as the one Raina upholds. In this encounter, Captain Bluntschli shows a more realistic version of war and offers an alternative to specific social concepts that offer a more sensible interpretation because they are guided by reason. In the following example the language of each character shows a different perspective on war:

RAINA (*crouching on the bed*): Who's there? (*The match is out instantly.*) Who's there? Who is that?

A MAN'S VOICE (*in the darkness, subduedly, but threateningly*): Sh-sh! Don't call out; or you will be shot. Be good; and no harm will happen to you. (*She is heard leaving her bed, and making for the door.*) Take care: it's no use trying to run away.

RAINA: But who-

THE VOICE (*warning*): Remember: if you raise your voice my revolver will go off. (*Commandingly*) Strike the light and let me see you. Do you hear.... Excuse me disturbing you; but you recognize my uniform? Serb! If I'm caught I shall be killed. (*Menacingly*) Do you understand that?

RAINA: Yes.

THE MAN: Well, I don't intend to get killed if I can help it. (*Still more formidably*) Do you understand that? (*He locks the door quickly but quietly.*)

RAINA (*disdainfully*): I suppose not. (*She draws herself up superbly, and looks him straight in the face, adding, with cutting emphasis*) Some soldiers, I know, are afraid to die.

THE MAN (*with grim good humor*): All of them, dear lady, all of them, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can. Now, if you raise an alarm-

RAINA (*cutting him short*): You will shoot me. How do you know that I am afraid to die?

THE MAN (*cunningly*): Ah, but suppose I don't shoot you, what will happen then? A lot of your cavalry will burst into this pretty room of yours and slaughter me here like a pig; for I fight like a demon: they shan't get me into the street to amuse themselves with: I know what they are. Are you prepared to receive that sort of company in your present undress? (1.2.91-117)

The above quotation illustrates the concept of "field" which is essential in our understanding of the concept of "register." On the other hand, "Field" according to Halliday is "what is going on in the situation" (2014, 33). The main characters are Raina and Captain Bluntschli and the conversation was going on at night. The rise in action begins when the Captain was seen hiding in Raina's room. He began to threaten Raina not to make any noise or face death. Raina, on the other hand, did not seem to be afraid of him and her reaction confused him. What is interesting about this example, in particular, is how the participants react to war. This conversation symbolizes the first encounter between Raina and reality. Captain Bluntschli stands for reality. At the beginning of the conversation, the language is formal. The whole atmosphere is about war, and there is the use of the imperative and the reliance on commands which seem to be in decorum to the occasion. The particular use of language is crucial in emphasizing the main themes in the play. Moreover, the dialogue redirects Raina's thoughts which are provoked by the forces of the outside world. Shaw points out to the public that domestic disapproval of the war and its gothic nature is important as a first step for the intervention and stopping the escalating aggression that most war-monger countries adopt as a policy. Moreover, the ferocity of the killing of innocent people in the desire to inflict extreme pain on the other party undermines any emotional ideas of nationalism that is used often as a pretext for loyalty to acts of savagery and aggression.

Another major element in the study of "register" is "tenor." According to Halliday (2016), "tenor" is defined as "who is taking part in the situation ... status role" (p. 33). For example, Captain Bluntschli used at the beginning threats: "THE VOICE (*warning*): Remember: if you raise your voice my revolver will go off. (*Commandingly*) Strike the light and let me see you." (1.2.98-99). Therefore, the Captain's desire for power is indicated by a strong form of diction. He is also portrayed as strict, stern and as capable of an extensive use of the imperative to show his status as an officer because he can cast orders. He wants to dominate others by his presence. The young lady obeyed him, but she told him that she was not afraid which seems incongruous to her actions. The roles of victim and victimizer are left to challenge readers' expectations.

The nature of the dialogue changed as the characters were revealed to be a man and a woman. The conversation began with a question from Raina. When she repeated the question, the answer came immediately from Bluntschli, and he threatened her. Captain Bluntschli used two different varieties in this conversation; at the beginning, he threatened Raina, but then he spoke politely. The language also changed according to class, and, therefore, it changed from informal to formal.

At the lexical-semantic level, there are many words that indicate threats and commands especially at the beginning of the conversation. Words such as (Don't, call out, shot, harm, revolver, go off, menacingly, kill, soldiers, alarm, shoot, die, cavalry, burst, slaughter, demon). In this scene, Bluntschli used the word "slaughter" when he answered Raina's question, and he imagined how Bulgarian and Russian soldiers would come to her room and kill him. The word "slaughter" indicates a sense of savagery and violence. He added "I know what they are" which indicates that some people enjoy war because they like violent acts. The word "slaughter" indicates they will kill him in order to be perceived favorably by other people. No one will ask about the morality or reason behind the killing because it is their duty to kill him. In fact, the dialogue between Raina and Bluntschli shows the universal themes in general, and especially the theme of violence in war. Shaw discusses the common ideas about war which are timeless and are often organized by politicians who are interested in implementing agendas that revolve around the interest of a minority elite in power. Srinivas (2014) comments on the characters in Shaw's early plays and he states that "His characters exist, not merely as his mouthpieces, but because he has something very earnest to say through them" (p. 161). Shaw in his play wants to draw the audience's attention to the horrors of war. Siddiqui and Raza assert that "Shaw wanted to entertain the people but with a serious message" (2012, p. 46). Shaw manages to reveal his message through the choice of characters and the dialogue. They are not politicians and the encounter between them is meaningful.

The language between Raina and Bluntschli at the beginning was full of threats which suited the situation and occasion. Their language lacks clear statements, and sometimes they interrupted each other. For example, Raina interrupted Bluntschli while he was talking, and he used fragments and repetitions in his answer, such as, "all of them, dear lady, all of them". The use of repetition adds more emphasis to the nature of their relationship. Here, Bluntschli wanted to inform Raina that being afraid of death in war is real and that all soldiers are afraid to die. The purpose of the conversation is to shatter illusions of war.

Thus, a stylistic analysis of the play shows that language is "a resource for making meaning; so the text is a process of making meaning in context" (Halliday, 2014: p.3). Another example from the play also yields a new meaning to war in the play:

CATHERINE: Of course I shall be too delighted if (*appealingly*) Captain Bluntschli really wishes to stay. He knows my wishes.

BLUNTSCHLI (*in his driest military manner*): I am at madam's orders.

SERGIUS (*cordially*): The settles it!

PETKOPFF (*heartily*): Of course! (3. 3.1319)

The concept of “Field” in the scene can be illustrated as in the example when Captain Bluntschli came for the second time to Petkoff’s house in order to return the coat that Raina gave him when he came to her room. Lady Catherine did not want to make her husband Petkoff and Sergius (Raina’s fiancé) meet Bluntschli, because she did not want them to know about what happened in Raina’s room, but then she discovered that they already knew him. In fact, Petkoff asked Bluntschli to stay with him and he asked his wife Catherine to invite him as well. Bluntschli decided later to stay with them.

As to the second component “Tenor”, there is an uneven distribution of characters in some of the scenes in the play; three men and a woman which indicates that there is no equality in the conversation. The language they use is formal because the characters are from the upper class. Therefore, the use of the formal language gives them more power and higher status. In one of the scenes, all the men were officers, but Lady Catherine spoke sarcastically to Captain Bluntschli in order to make him feel that he was lower than them which was not true because at the end of the novel Lady Catherine and her husband discovered that he was an upper class gentleman. Bluntschli knew that Catherine did not want him to stay and answered in his “in his driest military manner” as if Catherine was a commander by saying, “(I am at the madam’s order)” (1319). This also indicates that even Bluntschli himself did not want to stay, but he stayed according to orders.

In the above example “Mode” is portrayed in Catherine’s speech at the beginning when she stated that he knew how to detect her true wishes which is ironic because both of them did not want him to stay. However, he realized that he could not refuse because of the presence of Petkoff and Surgus. Therefore, he agreed but in a way that made Catherine recognize that he did not want to stay. Sarcasm and irony are significant in the conversations because they illustrate the meaning of human interactions. Shaw, therefore, asserts his position as a skillful satirist who is able to use human interaction to highlight the predicament of modern society.

The significance of the findings of the present study supports the accumulating evidence on the importance of using the concept of “register” which had not received sufficient critical attention in its application to literary texts. The concept of register entails that language is multidimensional and centers on the language of everyday use. Literary texts by definition use language which carries cultural significance as well as universal themes. The play focuses on national themes that use sensationalism to entice modern individuals in the arms race. George Bernard Shaw in the linguistic construction of the play manages to show the hypocrisy that promotes the idea of war.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the present study followed a stylistic analysis of *Arm and the Man* by George Bernard Shaw according to the concept of the register to point out Shaw’s witty use of language. This study proves that literary dramatic texts rely heavily on language to elicit meaning. It also shows that the concept of the register is helpful in analyzing literary themes. Moreover, the use of

register helps in explaining the use of individual utterances and sentences to yield meaning to the audience. It gives a precise analysis of the literary work especially the language which helps readers to achieve a better understanding of Shaw's satirical ideas on war and society in *Arms and the Man*. The readers at the end of the play through its careful construction feel the feeble notions that modern societies believe concerning political principles. In modern democracies, especially western ones, there is a discrepancy between social and political ideals and human nature. There is an unrealistic notion of idealism concerning war and Shaw shows the realities of war. Therefore, Shaw remains a humanist who is famously taught at most universities because he advocates the necessity of looking at politics as having a direct impact on individuals and the necessity of renouncing idealism.

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