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A Comparative Stylistic Analysis of Selected Short Stories by Yiyun Li and Zadie Smith

Mishal Hameed

M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

Hira Ali*

Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

hira.ali@wum.edu.pk

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

This study conducts a comparative stylistic analysis of Yiyun Li's *Hello Goodbye* and Zadie Smith's *Kelso Deconstructed* using Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short's (2007) model of stylistic analysis, with a focus on lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative close reading with quantitative analysis using the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK), the research examines how each author's lexical choices reflect their narrative perspective and thematic concerns. The findings reveal that Li's style is characterized by emotional restraint and introspection, utilizing abstract nouns and stative verbs to convey psychological depth and familial silence. In contrast, Smith's narrative is rich in dynamic verbs, socially charged nouns, and evaluative modifiers, reflecting her themes of racial injustice, historical memory, and metafictional commentary. This study demonstrates how lexical categories serve as powerful tools in shaping narrative tone and meaning, while also showing how digital stylistics can enhance literary interpretation through interdisciplinary methods.

Keywords: Comparative stylistic analysis, Lexical categories, Themes, Narrative perspectives, Literary Fiction

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature has increasingly reflected diverse cultural identities, social realities, and linguistic innovations. Within this evolving landscape, Yiyun Li and Zadie Smith have emerged as two influential literary figures whose writings offer rich ground for stylistic analysis. Despite originating from different cultural

and geographical contexts, Li from China and later the United States, and Smith from Britain with Jamaican heritage, both authors share a common narrative strength, the capacity to interweave complex human emotions, socio-political themes, and nuanced characterization through language. Their short stories, *Hello Goodbye* by Li and *Kelso Deconstructed* by Smith, demonstrate strikingly different linguistic and stylistic strategies that align with their thematic intentions and narrative perspectives.

Stylistics, as defined by Leech and Short (2007), is “the linguistic study of style, particularly in works of literature,” offering tools to investigate how language functions artistically and communicatively in texts. A comparative stylistic analysis of Li and Smith enables a deeper understanding of how authors craft narrative voice and express thematic concerns through lexical and grammatical choices. This becomes particularly significant when analyzing short stories, where brevity necessitates precision in language use. According to Simpson (2004), stylistic analysis can uncover “the subtle interplay between linguistic form and literary function,” revealing the textual mechanisms that shape a reader's interpretative experience. Li and Smith's short stories, though similar in form, reveal radically different stylistic designs that mirror their distinct worldviews and literary objectives.

Yiyun Li's prose is often characterized by minimalism, restraint, and emotional opacity. In *Hello Goodbye*, she uses sparse description, internalized narration, and a subdued tone that mirrors the emotional disconnection of her characters. Critics have noted that Li's style is influenced by her deliberate distancing from her native language, Mandarin, as well as her desire to “write without sentimentality” (Staley, 2010). This restraint aligns with broader themes in her fiction, such as isolation, silence, and the ambiguity of familial relationships. Her use of abstract nouns and stative verbs suggests a narrative voice more concerned with internal states than external action.

Conversely, Zadie Smith's *Kelso Deconstructed* embodies linguistic vibrancy, humor, and social critique. The story revisits the real-life murder of Kelso Cochrane, employing postmodern fragmentation, shifting perspectives, and richly layered language. Smith's narrative voice is energetic, often ironic, and marked by cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and dynamic verbs. As Head (2003) notes, Smith's fiction often grapples with “the hybridities of modern British identity” through a style that is as multifaceted as the themes it explores. In *Kelso Deconstructed*, the lexical density and frequent use of evaluative adjectives and adverbs serve to question historical narratives and foreground racialized experience.

By examining the lexical choices and stylistic strategies used in these two short stories, this study highlights how language functions as a vehicle for meaning, ideology, and emotional resonance. The analysis emphasizes the importance of stylistic criticism in exploring how authors' linguistic preferences are shaped by cultural positioning, thematic intention, and literary innovation. Through a comparative lens, the study reveals how Li and Smith, though stylistically divergent, both exemplify the powerful role of language in crafting compelling and socially

engaged fiction.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this research is to conduct a comparative stylistic analysis of selected short stories by Yiyun Li and Zadie Smith, using Leech and Short's (2007) model of stylistic analysis, with a specific focus on lexical categories: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. By analyzing *Hello Goodbye* by Li and *Kelso Deconstructed* by Smith, this study aims to explore how the authors' lexical choices reflect their respective narrative points of view and thematic concerns. This study also seeks to uncover the significant stylistic differences between the two authors, shedding light on how language operates as a vehicle for meaning, emotion, and cultural expression in contemporary fiction.

Research Objectives

The study sets out the following objectives:

1. To examine how these lexical categories contribute to the construction of narrative point of view and the expression of key themes such as identity, silence, race, and fragmentation.
2. To compare and contrast the stylistic choices of both authors, highlighting how cultural context and narrative strategy influence their use of language.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following key research questions:

1. How do the lexical categories (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) reflect themes and narrative points of view in the selected short stories by Yiyun Li and Zadie Smith?
2. What are the significant differences between Yiyun Li and Zadie Smith in their use of lexical categories?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance in bridging literary stylistics with cultural and narrative analysis by examining how Yiyun Li and Zadie Smith use lexical choices to reflect their distinct thematic concerns and narrative voices. By focusing on two culturally and stylistically diverse authors, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how language shapes meaning in fiction and how stylistic features such as the use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs highlight the emotional tone, themes, and point of view. Moreover, the integration of computational tools such as NLTK for part-of-speech tagging introduces an innovative, mixed-methods approach to literary analysis, offering a replicable model for future interdisciplinary research. This study not only enriches discussions in comparative literature and stylistics but also fosters greater appreciation for how language functions as a tool of cultural expression and literary identity in contemporary short fiction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of language and literary meaning has long been the subject of stylistic inquiry, with stylistics offering a systematic framework to explore how textual choices construct narrative, emotion, and ideology. Leech and Short's (2007)

seminal work, *Style in Fiction*, laid the foundation for the linguistic analysis of prose fiction, proposing a comprehensive model that includes lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical features. Their framework emphasizes how stylistic elements such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs contribute to a text's thematic and narrative design. According to Leech and Short, the stylistic analysis of fiction not only reveals an author's language but also bridges the gap between form and meaning, a perspective crucial to understanding the divergent narrative strategies of Yiyun Li and Zadie Smith.

Recent developments in stylistics have emphasized the value of applying both qualitative and quantitative approaches to literary texts. Jeffries (2010) and Simpson (2004) argue that modern stylistics benefits from being interdisciplinary, drawing insights from linguistics, literary theory, and digital tools. Simpson's (2004) model of point of view, for instance, reinforces how grammatical features can indicate ideological positioning and character psychology. These insights are especially relevant when comparing authors from different cultural backgrounds, as they bring unique syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical patterns into their narrative constructions. In this light, Li's sparse, introspective style and Smith's energetic, socially engaged prose invite a comparative analysis that foregrounds linguistic contrasts and their narrative effects.

Critical analysis of Yiyun Li often highlights her minimalist prose and psychological depth. Li's stylistic restraint is frequently linked to her bilingual identity and conscious distancing from Chinese literary traditions. Staley (2010) notes that Li seeks to write "without sentimentality," a choice that results in emotionally detached narration and understated lexical patterns. Huang (2017) observes that Li's stories often feature abstract nouns, internalized verbs, and reduced adjectival embellishment, aligning with themes of trauma, silence, and exile. These stylistic choices reflect what Du (2015) calls a "quiet rebellion against expressive language," reinforcing the emotional ambiguity in her narratives.

In contrast, Zadie Smith's fiction is widely recognized for its polyphonic style and vibrant linguistic textures. Head (2003) suggests that Smith's writing embodies a postmodern aesthetic marked by hybridity, irony, and intertextuality. Her short story *Kelso Deconstructed* exemplifies this approach, blending satire, fragmented narration, and vivid lexical choices to interrogate racial injustice and historical memory. Critics such as Bentley (2008) emphasize how Smith uses stylistic experimentation to challenge dominant cultural narratives, often through lexical variety and verbal play. Moreover, her use of evaluative adjectives and dynamic verbs creates a rhythm that reflects both character subjectivity and broader socio-political critique. These stylistic markers provide a striking counterpoint to Li's more restrained approach.

Comparative studies that explore authors from different cultural and stylistic traditions have underscored the potential of stylistics as a tool for cross-cultural literary analysis. Burke (2014) contends that stylistic comparison can uncover "deep structures of meaning shaped by cultural logic and linguistic form." When applied to

authors like Li and Smith, who navigate issues of identity, memory, and marginality from differing geopolitical perspectives, stylistic analysis reveals how language becomes both a personal and political instrument. Although comparative stylistic studies of these two authors remain limited, the present research contributes to this emerging area by analyzing how lexical categories, basic yet powerful linguistic elements, encode narrative voice, cultural identity, and emotional depth in distinct ways.

Previous studies have successfully applied Leech and Short's model to literary works to investigate stylistic differences. Bibi and Sultana (2021) conducted a stylistic analysis of Pakistani English fiction using the model and found that variations in lexical categories directly influenced tone and reader interpretation. Similarly, Khan and Iqbal (2020) used stylistic tools to explore gender and identity in South Asian fiction, demonstrating how lexical patterns can be linked to cultural ideologies. These studies affirm the utility of stylistic frameworks in analyzing not only form but also thematic content and social context.

Research Gap

While previous studies have widely analyzed the individual styles of Yiyun Li and Zadie Smith, there remains a notable gap in comparative stylistic research that systematically examines their short stories using a linguistic framework like Leech and Short's model. Most existing studies focus on thematic, cultural, or narrative aspects rather than detailed lexical analysis across authors of different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the integration of computational tools such as NLTK for part-of-speech tagging remains underutilized in literary stylistics, particularly in comparative studies. This research aims to fill that gap by combining traditional stylistic analysis with digital methods to explore how lexical categories function in constructing narrative voice and thematic emphasis in *Hello Goodbye* and *Kelso Deconstructed*.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the stylistic model proposed by Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short (2007) in their seminal work *Style in Fiction*. Their framework provides a systematic method for analyzing the linguistic features of fictional texts, offering insight into how authors use language to shape narrative point of view, character, theme, and reader engagement.

Leech and Short divide their stylistic model into four main categories:

1. Lexical categories
2. Grammatical categories
3. Figures of speech
4. Cohesion and context

This research specifically focuses on the lexical categories, which include:

- **Nouns:** Convey ideas, concepts, people, and objects that ground the narrative world.
- **Verbs:** Express action, mental states, or conditions, and are essential in determining the narrative's tempo and tone.

- **Adjectives:** Modify nouns and contribute to description, tone, and evaluation.
- **Adverbs:** Modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, adding precision, intensity, or perspective.

According to Leech and Short, analyzing lexical items reveals how authors construct narrative voices and represent inner or social realities. For instance, frequent use of stative verbs may indicate introspection or stasis, while dynamic verbs may convey energy or tension. Similarly, the density and type of adjectives and adverbs influence the emotional or evaluative color of the prose.

In the context of this study, the model is used to compare Yiyun Li's restrained and minimalist narrative style with Zadie Smith's dynamic and socially critical voice. The framework facilitates a close reading of how both authors strategically use lexical items to reflect their thematic concerns, such as emotional repression and personal loss in Li's work, and racial identity and fragmentation in Smith's.

By applying Leech and Short's model, this paper seeks to uncover the deeper linguistic structures that shape each author's storytelling technique. It also demonstrates how the choice and frequency of specific lexical categories contribute to the creation of distinct literary styles rooted in differing cultural, social, and narrative traditions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines both qualitative textual analysis and quantitative computational linguistics to examine the stylistic features of Yiyun Li's *Hello Goodbye* and Zadie Smith's *Kelso Deconstructed*. The methodological framework is grounded in Leech and Short's (2007) model of stylistic analysis, which categorizes language into four areas: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. The focus of this study is on lexical categories, particularly the use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

The qualitative component involves close reading and manual annotation of both short stories to identify stylistic patterns and thematic alignments in the use of lexical items. This includes examining how certain types of nouns (e.g., abstract vs. concrete), verbs (e.g., stative vs. dynamic), adjectives (evaluative, emotive, descriptive), and adverbs function to reflect narrative voice, tone, character portrayal, and thematic focus.

The quantitative component utilizes Python's Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) to conduct part-of-speech (POS) tagging. Each short story was pre-processed by removing non-narrative elements such as page numbers and formatting artifacts. The texts were then tokenized and passed through an NLTK POS tagger to extract four targeted lexical categories. The resulting data was visualized and compared to identify significant stylistic tendencies and divergences between the two authors.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. Lexical Categories in Yiyun Li's "Hello Goodbye"

1. Nouns

Yiyun Li uses a high proportion of abstract and introspective nouns to reflect the internal lives of her characters and the emotionally muted tone of the narrative. These nouns often relate to memory, regret, emotion, or relationships. For example, words like “sadness”, “luck”, “choice”, “marriage”, “regret”, “memories”, “silence”, “motherhood”, and “pandemic”. These lexical items emphasize subjective experiences rather than action or material detail, reinforcing the introspective and emotional restraint of Nina’s point of view. The frequent mention of familial roles (e.g., mother, father, daughter, husband, children) aligns with the story’s core themes of parenthood, female identity, and social roles.

2. Verbs

The story is dominated by stative verbs (e.g., was, seemed, thought, felt, believed) rather than dynamic or physical verbs. These verbs correspond to internal perception and contemplation rather than external activity. For example, words like “remembered”, “wondered”, “knew”, “believed”, “wished”, “regretted”, and “felt”. This choice reflects the limited third-person narrative point of view, where the action unfolds primarily in Nina’s mind, rather than in dramatic external events. The low degree of physical action in the story echoes its thematic emphasis on emotional endurance, psychological weight, and the quiet unfolding of life over time.

3. Adjectives

Li uses adjectives sparingly, but when they appear, they are often emotionally or morally evaluative rather than vividly descriptive. The adjectives tend to reflect Nina’s internal judgments and her emotionally subdued worldview. For example, words like “harmless”, “old”, “awkward”, “tired”, “dull”, “young”, “forgettable”, and “uncharacteristic”. These adjectives support themes of nostalgia, resignation, aging, and self-doubt. Descriptions are understated rather than vivid or sensorial, aligning with the narrator’s detached and reflective voice.

4. Adverbs

Adverbs in the story tend to function as modifiers of time, certainty, or emotional tone, often appearing in clauses that express hesitation, ambiguity, or qualified emotion. For example, words like “perhaps”, “sometimes”, “never”, “always”, “barely”, “quietly”, and “slowly”. These adverbs convey emotional vagueness, hesitation, and temporal distance, reinforcing the theme of emotional suppression and Nina’s preference for living in the present over analyzing the past or speculating about the future. The use of such adverbs also mirrors Nina’s indirect communication style, consistent with her limited third-person perspective and inner restraint.

```

IDLE Shell 3.12.4
File Edit Shell Debug Options Window Help
Python 3.12.4 (tags/v3.12.4:8e8a4ba, Jun 6 2024, 19:30:16) [MSC v.1940 64 bit (AMD64)] on win32
Type "help", "copyright", "credits" or "license()" for more information.
>>> import nltk
>>> from nltk.tokenize import word_tokenize
>>> from nltk.corpus import stopwords
>>> from nltk import pos_tag
>>> import string
>>> text = """With her right hand patting and her left hand supporting an unseen head that was weighty for the flexible neck, Nina held baby-shaped air between her palms. They hardly had a past, assuming that their past consisted of a backpacking trip to Wales to spend their twenty-fifth birthdays together. Both Katie and Nina were Silicon Valley marketing professionals who were sure they would soon start the next big thing. Around the ottoman, Nina waddled. They viewed their future as a game of connect the dots, from ideas to IPOs. Following the wedding, Katie had stopped working in marketing and had started a boutique spice shop with two other women. At twenty-seven, Nina was not helplessly young, but she was also not confined to a mildewed marriage. A night smooched by drinks and youthful optimism can be resistant to even the coarsest sandpaper. Although neither of them understood it at the time, they were predictable because they were impressionable. Nina swatched back to shaking the air after blinking twice. Katie had simply chuckled at her own situation and Raymond's predictability. Nina wept uncharacteristically."""
>>> text = text.lower()
>>> tokens = word_tokenize(text)
>>> stop_words = set(stopwords.words('english'))
>>> tokens = [word for word in tokens if word not in stop_words and word not in string.punctuation]
>>> pos_tags = pos_tag(tokens)
>>> nouns = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('NN')]
>>> verbs = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('VB')]
>>> adjectives = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('JJ')]
>>> adjectives = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('JJ')]
>>> adverbs = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('RB')]
>>> print("Nouns:", nouns)
Nouns: ['hand', 'hand', 'head', 'weighty', 'neck', 'air', 'palms', 'past', 'trip', 'wales', 'birthdays', 'silicon', 'valley', 'marketing', 'professionals', 'thing', 'nina', 'game', 'dots', 'ideas', 'wedding', 'katie', 'marketing', 'spice', 'shop', 'women', 'nina', 'marriage', 'night', 'drinks', 'optimism', 'sandpaper', 'time', 'nina', 'air', 'situation', 'raymond', 'predictability']
>>> print("Verbs:", verbs)
Verbs: ['patting', 'left', 'supporting', 'held', 'assuming', 'consisted', 'backpacking', 'spend', 'katie', 'start', 'waddled', 'ipos', 'following', 'stopped', 'working', 'started', 'confining', 'mildewed', 'smooched', 'swatched', 'shaking', 'blinking', 'wept']
>>> print("Adjectives:", adjectives)
Adjectives: ['right', 'unseen', 'flexible', 'nina', 'baby-shaped', 'twenty-fifth', 'nina', 'next', 'big', 'ottoman', 'viewed', 'future', 'connect', 'boutique', 'twenty-seven', 'young', 'youthful', 'resistant', 'coarsest', 'understood', 'predictable', 'impressionable', 'chuckled']
>>> print("Adverbs:", adverbs)
Adverbs: ['hardly', 'together', 'sure', 'soon', 'helplessly', 'also', 'even', 'back', 'twice', 'katie', 'simply', 'nina', 'uncharacteristically']

```

Figure 1. Extraction of lexical categories from NLTK POS tagging

How Lexical Categories Reflect Theme and Point of View

The nouns anchor the story in emotional and familial realities, often abstract, supporting themes like regret, motherhood, and memory. The stative verbs reflect a character-driven, psychologically rich narrative with minimal external action, highlighting Nina’s introspective point of view. The adjectives are minimal and restrained, underscoring the narrative’s emotional flatness and the characters’ quiet discontent. The adverbs indicate hesitancy, temporality, and emotional ambiguity, all of which contribute to the narrative’s subtle tone and the protagonist’s cautious engagement with life. Together, these lexical choices create a stylistic texture that mirrors the themes of quiet endurance, suppressed emotion, and unspoken longing, while grounding the story in a limited third-person perspective that is deeply introspective yet emotionally guarded.

2. Lexical Categories in Zadie Smith’s “Kelso Deconstructed”

1. Nouns

Smith uses a high frequency of concrete and socially loaded nouns to anchor the story in everyday reality while invoking historical and racial themes. For example, words like “thumb”, “Olivia”, “funeral”, “knife, racism”, “police”, “riot”, “body”, “story”, and “narrative”. These nouns reflect the material conditions of life for Black Britons in 1950s London, grounding themes of racial violence, historical erasure, and communal grief. The frequent recurrence of nouns related to violence and the body (blood, wound, death, corpse) aligns with the theme of racialized vulnerability. Smith also uses ideological nouns like irony, narrative, history, and memory to draw attention to the constructedness of storytelling, reinforcing her metafictional narrative voice.

2. Verbs

The verbs in *Kelso Deconstructed* are dynamic and physical, reflecting action, movement, and often conflict, but they are also interspersed with reflective and cognitive verbs that align with the story's introspective and philosophical tone. For example, dynamic verbs (walked, clutched, stabbed, bled, ran, slammed, and watched). These emphasize the immediacy and brutality of events, particularly around the murder scene. Reflective verbs (knew, thought, understood, believed,

remembered, wondered). These show Kelso’s and Olivia’s consciousness, and also support the omniscient and interpretive narrator’s presence. Verbs like “show”, “tell,” “narrate”, and “deconstruct” explicitly invoke metafictional commentary, foregrounding the narrator’s concern with how stories are constructed.

3. Adjectives

Smith uses evaluative and ideologically charged adjectives that signal emotional intensity, character judgment, and thematic emphasis on race, violence, and irony. For example, words like “black”, “white”, “bloody”, “meaningless”, “ordinary”, “historical”, “deconstructed”, “real”, “silent”, and “tragic”. These adjectives guide the reader’s emotional response, highlight political realities, and reinforce the narrator’s moral positioning. Words like “tragic”, “futile”, and “inevitable” also echo the omniscient narrator’s foreknowledge of Kelso’s fate, enhancing the tone of fatalism and critique.

4. Adverbs

Adverbs in the story serve multiple functions; they indicate time, intensify emotion, or add an ironic narrative tone. For example, words like “quietly”, “eventually”, “already”, “still”, “violently”, “literally”, “ironically”, and “barely”. Temporal adverbs like “eventually”, “already”, and “still” reinforce the historical structure of the narrative, connecting past and present. Ironic and intensifying adverbs (ironically, literally, violently) support the narrator’s critical commentary on storytelling conventions and societal indifference. These adverbs contribute to the self-aware, layered narration, where the speaker seems to question or undercut traditional narrative expectations.

```
>>> text = """Kelso is originally from Antigua. He works as a carpenter. Olivia is a Jamaican trainee nurse. His goal was to one day be able to afford to study the law
. The curb, the cobbles, the cobbles, and the blood. Kelso touched the sash with the hubs of his hands. Braced himself. With his hand motionless and wedged between
his thigh and the armrest, he sat glumly in his chair. We decided to get out of it fast. The room was a run-down rental on Portobello's Bevington Road. The anguish
was difficult to endure and in some ways shameful. The room was stiflingly hot. Oh, I will, Livvy, I certainly will. He sat glumly in his chair, his hand very sti
ll."""
>>> text = text.lower()
>>> tokens = word_tokenize(text)
>>> stop_words = set(stopwords.words('english'))
>>> tokens = [word for word in tokens if word not in stop_words and word not in string.punctuation]
>>> pos_tags = pos_tag(tokens)
>>> nouns = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('NN')]
>>> verbs = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('VB')]
>>> adjectives = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('JJ')]
>>> adverbs = [word for word, tag in pos_tags if tag.startswith('RB')]
>>> print("Nouns:", nouns)
Nouns: ['kelso', 'works', 'trainee', 'goal', 'day', 'afford', 'study', 'law', 'curb', 'cobbles', 'cobbles', 'blood', 'kelso', 'hubs', 'hands', 'hand', 'motionless',
, 'glumly', 'chair', 'get', 'room', 'portobello', 'bevington', 'road', 'endure', 'ways', 'room', 'livvy', 'hand']
>>> print("Verbs:", verbs)
Verbs: ['antigua', 'touched', 'braced', 'wedged', 'decided', 'sat']
>>> print("Adjectives:", adjectives)
Adjectives: ['olivia', 'jamaican', 'nurse', 'able', 'sash', 'thigh', 'armrest', 'sat', 'fast', 'run-down', 'rental', 'anguish', 'difficult', 'shameful', 'hot', 'ch
air']
>>> print("Adverbs:", adverbs)
Adverbs: ['originally', 'carpenter', 'stiflingly', 'certainly', 'glumly', 'still']
```

Figure 2. Extraction of lexical categories from NLTK POS tagging

How Lexical Categories Reflect Theme and Perspective

Nouns focus on physicality, racial identity, and ideology, grounding the narrative in both social realism and historical critique. Verbs alternate between action and cognition, supporting a style that is narrative and reflective, consistent with the omniscient, metafictional point of view. Adjectives provide evaluative coloring and highlight emotional and political realities, reinforcing themes of grief, violence, and injustice. Adverbs enhance the ironic, philosophical tone of the

narrator and provide temporal orientation, further aligning with the story’s hybrid structure of reflection and immediacy.

Together, Smith’s lexical choices emphasize that language itself is a vehicle of resistance, remembrance, and reconstruction, mirroring the story’s central themes of racial injustice, memory, and the limits of narrative representation.

3. Significant Differences in Lexical Categories Between Li and Smith

Lexical Category	Yiyun Li – <i>Hello Goodbye</i>	Zadie Smith – <i>Kelso Deconstructed</i>
Nouns	Dominantly abstract, introspective nouns (silence, memory, regret, motherhood), reflecting internal emotional states and restrained expression.	Dominantly concrete and socially charged nouns (knife, blood, history, riot), grounding the narrative in physicality, violence, and social reality.
Verbs	Predominantly stative and psychological verbs (felt, thought, remembered), indicating internal reflection and emotional inertia.	Predominantly dynamic and physical verbs (stabbed, walked, bled), conveying action, immediacy, and social interaction. Also includes reflective verbs.
Adjectives	Sparse and understated, often emotionally neutral or subtly evaluative (awkward, tired, dull), mirroring the narrator’s restraint and subdued tone.	Emotionally and ideologically charged, often evaluative and political (bloody, tragic, silent, historical), reinforcing themes of injustice and irony.
Adverbs	Minimally used, often indicating temporal uncertainty or emotional ambiguity (sometimes, barely, quietly), supporting themes of silence and repression.	Used frequently to create ironic tone, intensify actions, or comment on narrative (literally, ironically, eventually), reinforcing metafictional voice and critical distance.

Discussion

1. Lexical Focus

- Li’s lexical choices are inward-looking, mirroring her protagonist’s psychological depth and emotional ambiguity.
- Smith’s lexical field is outward-facing, highlighting physical action, political critique, and social history.

2. Tone and Narration

- Li’s minimalist style uses restrained vocabulary to evoke a quiet, reflective tone, consistent with a limited third-person perspective.
- Smith’s diction is rich, dynamic, and often ironic, matching her omniscient, metafictional narrator.

3. Emotional Texture

- Li's language expresses emotional withdrawal and quiet suffering.
- Smith's lexical style reveals emotional urgency, tension, and satire, even in tragic contexts.

4. Cultural and Ideological Weight

- Li emphasizes individual memory and interpersonal nuance, often with linguistic detachment.
- Smith foregrounds collective memory, race, and power, often through bold, evaluative language.

The lexical differences between Li and Smith reflect not only their individual stylistic identities but also their distinct cultural, thematic, and narrative concerns. Li's restrained lexical choices mirror her themes of emotional endurance, familial uncertainty, and introspective narration, while Smith's lexically rich and politically charged language emphasizes racial injustice, memory, and narrative construction. These contrasts confirm how lexical categories serve as powerful tools of thematic and ideological expression in contemporary fiction.

Findings

The stylistic comparison of Yiyun Li's *Hello Goodbye* and Zadie Smith's *Kelso Deconstructed* reveals distinct linguistic patterns that align with each author's narrative technique, thematic focus, and cultural lens. An analysis of lexical categories, specifically nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, demonstrates that both authors strategically shape their stories through lexical choice to reflect tone, worldview, and character psychology.

In *Hello Goodbye*, Yiyun Li favors abstract nouns, stative verbs, and muted adjectives, which construct a minimalist and introspective narrative voice. The frequent use of nouns such as regret, memory, and silence and verbs like felt, thought, and remembered reflect the story's thematic emphasis on emotional restraint, personal loss, and internalized conflict. The narrative remains tightly focused on the protagonist Nina's inner world, with the limited third-person point of view reinforcing themes of emotional detachment, maternal ambiguity, and quiet endurance.

Conversely, in *Kelso Deconstructed*, Zadie Smith uses concrete nouns, dynamic verbs, and evaluative adjectives and adverbs to construct a stylistically rich, socially engaged narrative. Nouns like riot, body, and funeral, and verbs such as stabbed, ran, and bled convey urgency, trauma, and racialized violence. These are complemented by adjectives like tragic, ordinary, and bloody, and adverbs such as ironically and violently, which reveal Smith's critical, omniscient perspective and support her metafictional commentary on the failure of language to fully capture human suffering.

The contrast in lexical categories highlights deeper differences: Li's style is quiet, restrained, and introspective, while Smith's is vivid, ironic, and politically charged. While Li's narrative offers emotional subtlety and reflection, Smith's engages with collective history and ideological critique. This stylistic divergence underscores how each author's linguistic choices reflect their cultural background,

thematic priorities, and narrative aims.

CONCLUSION

This comparative stylistic analysis of Yiyun Li's *Hello Goodbye* and Zadie Smith's *Nettle*, grounded in Leech and Short's (2007) model, has revealed how lexical categories reflect not only individual authorial style but also deeper thematic and cultural dimensions. By examining the use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, the study has shown that Li and Smith craft distinct narrative textures that align with their respective literary concerns and perspectives.

Li's use of abstract nouns, stative verbs, and subdued modifiers constructs a narrative voice that is emotionally restrained and inward-looking. This reflects the themes of psychological isolation, silence, and personal endurance. The limited third-person perspective serves to reinforce Nina's emotional ambiguity and the understated tone of the story. In contrast, Smith's stylistic approach is grounded in active, sensory, and ideologically charged language. Her lexical choices amplify themes of racial injustice, historical violence, and the politics of storytelling. The omniscient, self-aware narrator engages with the reader directly, challenging narrative conventions and exposing the tensions between memory, representation, and erasure.

Overall, the findings underscore that stylistic analysis, particularly through lexical categories, offers valuable insight into how authors shape meaning through language. The contrast between Li's minimalist prose and Smith's dynamic, layered narration illustrates the diversity of contemporary fiction and the significance of stylistic choice in reflecting identity, ideology, and narrative vision.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this stylistic analysis, several recommendations can be made for future research and academic practice:

1. Future studies should include a broader range of short stories from each author to capture a more comprehensive stylistic profile. Comparative research across genres or regions may also uncover deeper patterns in contemporary fiction.
2. While this study focused on lexical categories, researchers are encouraged to examine additional components of Leech and Short's model, such as grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion, for a more holistic understanding of stylistic variation.
3. The integration of Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools like NLTK proved valuable. Future research could benefit from using more advanced tools (e.g., corpus linguistics software, sentiment analysis, or stylometry platforms) to deepen linguistic insight and scale analysis.
4. Scholars in literature, linguistics, and digital humanities should collaborate to refine mixed-methods approaches. Integrating cultural theory or sociolinguistic frameworks can enhance the interpretation of stylistic features in diverse texts.
5. The methods used in this study could be incorporated into higher education curricula for stylistics, encouraging students to critically engage with texts

through both close reading and digital methods.

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