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Language as a Mirror of Cultural Identity: A Stylistic Analysis of Arabic Poetry by Mahmoud Darwish

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Abstract

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This study is intended to examine the poems of Mahmoud Darwish through a stylistic approach in order to reveal the relationship between language, culture, and identity within the context of the Palestinian nation's non-violent struggle. Mahmoud Darwish, as the national poet of Palestine, uses language not merely as an aesthetic medium but also as a symbol of cultural resistance and as an expression of the people's collective identity. This research is a qualitative study employing library research methods, analyzing stylistic elements and the complexity of linguistic symbols that represent culture in poems integrating aesthetics and politics. It contributes to understanding the use of language style as a medium of cultural resistance and as a reflection of Palestinian identity, expanding the comprehension of the interconnection among

language, culture, and struggle within the framework of literature. The findings show that Mahmoud Darwish's poems are rich in metaphorical, symbolic, and repetitive language styles that reinforce messages of alienation, longing for the homeland, and broader depictions of resistance against colonization. The analysis indicates that the use of language in Darwish's poetry functions strategically as a tool of non-violent resistance that fosters collective awareness and strengthens Palestinian national identity amid social and political pressures. Thus, Mahmoud Darwish's poetry possesses not only literary aesthetic value but also serves as an effective instrument of cultural resistance.

Abstrak	
Kata Kunci: Mahmoud Darwish, stilistika, identitas kolektif	Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji syair-syair karya Mahmoud Darwish melalui pendekatan stilistika guna mengungkap relasi antara bahasa, budaya, dan identitas dalam konteks perjuangan nonkekerasan bangsa Palestina. Mahmud Darwish, sebagai penyair nasional Palestina, menggunakan bahasa bukan sekedar sebagai medium estetika, tetapi juga sebagai simbol perlawanan kultural dan ekspresi dari identitas kolektif masyarakat. Penelitian ini merupakan studi kualitatif dengan metode library research, yang menganalisis unsur-unsur stilistika dengan kompleksitas simbol bahasa yang merepresentasikan budaya dalam dalam syair yang mengintegrasikan estetika dan politik, sebagai kontribusi dalam mengungkap penggunaan gaya bahasa sebagai media perlawanan kultural dan refleksi identitas masyarakat Palestina, yang memperluas pemahaman mengenai relevansi bahasa, budaya, dan perjuangan dalam bingkai sastra. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa syair-syair karya Mahmoud Darwish sarat dengan gaya bahasa metaforis, simbolik, dan repetitif yang memperkuat pesan tentang keterasingan, kerinduan hati akan tanah air, dan gambaran besar mengenai resistensi terhadap penjajahan. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan bahasa dalam syair-syair karya Mahmoud Darwish memiliki fungsi strategis sebagai alat perjuangan nonkekerasan yang membentuk kesadaran secara kolektif dan memperkuat identitas nasional Palestina di tengah tekanan sosial dan politik. Dengan demikian, syairsyair karya Mahmoud Darwish tidak hanya memiliki nilai keindahan secara sastra, tetapi juga berperan sebagai instrumen resistensi kultural yang efektif.

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Introduction

Language is a symbolic system that is used in interacting as a means of communication, language is not only used to convey information but also a form of expression from the mind such as constructing questions, giving orders, and even creating a complex meaning (Richard, 2008). According to Ibn Jinni, language is the sounds spoken by each group of people to convey their intentions, in this sense language is interpreted as a sound that has a function to express or communicate something that is in the heart or mind to other people where this phenomenon occurs in the social interaction of the community (Nandang & Kosim, 2018), from both we can conclude that language is a manifestation of symbols that are used as a tool by society to convey information and express expressions in communication.

The process of human communication in the scope of social interaction cannot be separated from the role of culture, culture can be understood as a way of life owned by the human community, and has a tendency to be passed on to the next generation, culture itself has the meaning of all power, creation, taste, and karsa produced by humans, its various forms can be in the form of architectural works, the breadth of knowledge and technology, art, Spirituality and so on, culture can also be interpreted as the way a human community lives (Salsabila et al., 2023).

The relationship between language and culture is classified into two categories, the first category is called subordinative where language is under the scope of culture or in other words language is a product of culture, subject to cultural values, in practice language is used as a tool to express culture, and culture is regulating the use of language, then the coordinating category of language and culture has an equal relationship none higher because Both influence each other, which is understood by language not as a cultural product but equally important and has a role in building culture, in the view of Sapir Whorf or linguistic relativism language itself can affect the way of human thinking, value systems, and even the perspective of life in society (Mujib, 2009).

One of the features of language and cultural products is poem, poem is one type of old poetry that originated from Persia, poem entered Indonesia along with the process of the entry of Islam in Indonesia, poem itself comes from the Arabic language *Shi'ir* or *Shu'ur* which means a conscious feeling, then the word develops into *Shi'ru* which means poem in the context of knowledge (Sri Astuti, Valentinus Ola Beding, 2021). Poem has historically been used as a medium to voice ideas, feelings, and even national values, poem is not just a series of beautiful words, but it is a form of reflection of the culture, history, and collective soul of a community, as in the Arabs, poem is not just art, poem is a means of struggle, resistance, and a symbol of identity (Piah, 1989).

In an effort to understand the meaning of poem as a product of language and culture, an approach is needed, one of which is with a stylistic approach, stylistics itself is a discipline that combines linguistic studies with literary studies with the aim of extracting aesthetic meaning in the use of language, especially literary works or poem. In this context, stylistics is used as a tool for linguistic structural analysis such as syntactic diction, and rhetorical style,

It is also a bridge of deep understanding of the message and nuances constructed by the author stylistically to provide a softener for the reader to know the variety of variations in the use of language that may seem simple but turns out to have complex communicative and expressive powers, both containing ideology, identity, or images of certain cultural uniqueness. This makes stylistics relevant in studying meaning-laden texts, such as poems, short stories, and even religious texts. As explained by Istianah, stylistics provides space to interpret texts in a multidimensional way because they depart not only from the literal meaning, but also from the structure of language and the social context that surrounds it (Istianah, 2014). Thus, stylistics is an important method in exploring the depth of meaning of a text as well as revealing the distinctive style that characterizes the identity of its author, such as Mahmoud Darwish and the poems he has made.

One of the great poets who represents the power of poem is Mahmud Darwish, born in the midst of conflict and oppression of colonialism Mahmud Darwish was able to make poems that transcend literary boundaries and integrate historical ways with his nation, he made poem a form of peaceful resistance, an expression of longing for the homeland, as well as a philosophical reflection on the meaning of the existence of independence and identity (Frangieh, 2004).

The culture raised in Mahmud Darwish's poem is not just a culture of Arab or Palestinian identity, but a culture of struggle, resistance, and humanity universally through the representation of various metaphorical dictions that describe the collective experience of the Palestinian community with poetic language. Through his work, Mahmud Darwish succeeded in proving that poetry is not just art but a cultural forum that lives with human history.

Method

The research method used is a qualitative research method, in the qualitative research method data can be collected by observation techniques, interviews, tests, documentation, and literature studies, while the data collection technique used in this study is a literature study. Library research, this method is a qualitative research method by deducing data from literature sources that are relevant to the topic being discussed either through digital literature sources, books, journals, or previous research results that are considered relevant with Mahmoud Darwish's poems, which reflected the culture of Palestinian society. This method relies on critical analysis skills. The flow of the application of this method is to collect data from literature or relevant library data sources, conduct critical analysis by reading and writing the results of information processing from the results of critical analysis previously carried out (Matusiak & Osisnska, 2023)

Result and Discussion

Stylistics

Stylistics is a discipline of linguistic branch that studies the style of language, or how a language is used, as well as the use of all linguistic elements in texts, especially literary texts in order to reveal the meaning of the aesthetic effects contained in a text, according to Istianah stylistics has a function as a linguistic approach in studying literary works, which provides experience to readers about the dimensions of beauty and expression of an ideology (Istianah, 2014). Stylistics does not only discuss the form of language, but also explores its functions and effects in the literary context, the stylistic approach provides space for an in-depth analysis of the selection of diction, sounds, sentence structures, and various rhetorical devices used by authors.

In stylistics there are several main building theories, the stylistic approach focuses on structural analysis in the use of language in a literary work, in the view of Widdowson and Leech (Short, 2018) the term expressive stylistics is known which pays attention to the depiction of emotional expressions and experiences that the poet experiences personally in the poems he makes. Then in ideological stylistics, language is seen as a medium used in voicing certain ideologies, especially in literary works that contain the spirit of resistance or national identity.

Paul Simpson in *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students* states that stylistics is an interdisciplinary discipline that combines linguistic methods with literary interpretation to explain how the effects of meaning arise from certain language choices (Alami & Waezzadeh, 2021). This highlights that language in literary works cannot be understood only as a purely structural means of communication, but also as an expressive and aesthetic means that have a dual function: conveying meaning while creating an emotional experience for readers.

Stylistic analysis does not stop at the description of language forms, but goes further to understand its function and impact on the reader. The choice of diction, the use of metaphors, sentence structure, and rhythmic patterns that

seem technical turn out to have certain ideological and emotional meanings. Stylistics seeks to explain the relationship between language choice and its interpretive effect, how language works in shaping the reading experience, building atmosphere, and giving rise to distinctive aesthetic reactions. Through Stylistics, answers can be found regarding the author's distinctive way of expressing himself, the choice of diction to achieve aesthetic value and the implications that arise for meaning (Ilmi, 2021) .

Stylistics is somewhere between linguistics and literary criticism, which examines how the choice of linguistic forms, both phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic, contributes to the formation of aesthetic meaning. Stylistics as a field of linguistics that presents an approach and method to analyze the purpose and function of texts. The stylistic analysis method is divided into two major parts, namely microanalysis and macro analysis (Voice et al., 2025) .

1. Microanalysis studies minor elements in language such as sounds (phonology), word forms (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), and word choice (lexical). Through this analysis, researchers can see how word choices and sentence arrangements are used to create a particular style in the text.
2. Macro analysis looks at broader elements, such as the way the story is structured (narrative), the author's point of view or voice (voice), and the values and ideologies implied behind the text.

In addition, there are also several combined techniques used in stylistics:

1. Concordance analysis, which is searching for a specific word or phrase throughout the text to see patterns in its use.
2. Keyword analysis, which is looking for words that appear most often or are most typical in the text compared to other texts.
3. Transitivity analysis, used to see how actions and perpetrators are described in sentences for example, who does something and who becomes a victim.
4. Reader experiment, which is to examine how readers understand and feel the language style used in the text.

The stylistic approach to Arabic texts emphasizes that analysis is not simply reading the content or meaning of surfaces, but exploring how language-forms (lexical, syntactic, phonological, rhetorical) function to construct aesthetic meaning and effects in the text (Julian et al., 2024).

The stylistic approach in Arabic text analysis is a method that examines language as a means of aesthetic expression and contextual meaning in texts. Stylistics aims to reveal the relationship between linguistic forms and the meanings produced, so this research examines not only the content of the text, but also how the message is conveyed through the choice of language styles, syntactic structures, sound patterns, and rhetorical devices used by the writer or speaker. In the context of qualitative research, stylistic analysis is descriptive-analytical, which is to describe and interpret text data in depth without using a statistical approach.

In the study of Arabic texts, stylistics play an important role because the Arabic language is known to be rich in aspects of sound beauty, rhythm, and complex grammatical structure. Stylistic analysis of Arabic texts makes a significant contribution to the development of Arabic language and literature. This approach makes it possible to understand how linguistic elements such as word choice, sentence structure, and sound rhythm construct aesthetic meaning and communicative messages in the text.

A concrete example is found in a study by Walidah et al. 2020 entitled "Stylistic Analysis in Surah Al-Najm", which uses qualitative research with literature studies (library research). They read the surahs many times to collect data and then analyze the semantic and imagery aspects of the surahs such as noun and verb preferences, variations in sentence structure, synonyms and antonyms in semantic aspects, and styles such as *isti'ārah*, *majāz*, *kināyah* in imagery. The results show that these stylistic elements support the affirmation of themes and aesthetic impressions in the text (Z, 2020).

In addition, research such as Ircham 2019 in "Educational Values in The Arabic Imperatives (A Stylistic Analysis of the Qur'an)" shows how stylistic

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approaches can be used to uncover hidden educational values in the form of language: this study describes how the form of al-amr commands in the Qur'an through a particular language style contains the values of obedience, compassion, and responsibility. The method used is also qualitative-descriptive with a literature approach (Ircham, 2019).

Stylistic analysis is also applied to Arabic literary texts. F. A. Dahroj's 1998 dissertation entitled "The Stylistic Approach and Its Application to Arabic Poetry" is one of the early studies that outlines the application of Western stylistic theories to classical Arabic poetry. The researcher analyzed the diction selection, metrical patterns, and syntactic structure in Arabic verses to show how poets constructed emotional moods and moral messages through language forms. The results of his research confirm that stylistic approaches can bridge linguistic and literary analysis in understanding the uniqueness of Arabic expressions (Dahroj, 1998).

The research conducted by Hilal Abiyyu Hilal and his colleagues in 2024 entitled *Stylistic Studies of the Book of Adab Sulukil Murid* by Habib Abdullah bin Alawi Al-Haddad is one of the contemporary studies that applies a stylistic approach to classical Arabic texts that are religious and sufistic. The *Book of Adab Sulukil Murid* was chosen as an object because it is a religious literary work that is full of moral advice, spiritual teachings, and reflections on students ethics in taking the path to Allah. Through a stylistic approach, the researcher seeks to reveal how the beauty of language, diction choices, and rhetorical arrangements in the text serve to convey spiritual and pedagogical values (Hilal, 2024).

Overall, stylistic analysis of Arabic texts makes a significant contribution to the development of Arabic language and literature. These studies illustrate that the stylistic approach in the study of Arabic texts functions not only to identify linguistic forms, but also to uncover the value of meaning, aesthetics, and psychological messages contained in the text.

In the context of Mahmud Darwish's poems, the stylistic approach provides a framework for understanding the way poets use language as an

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aesthetic as well as an ideological tool. For example, in the verse "أحن إلى خبز أمي" (I Miss My Mother's Bread), simple repetitions and imagery such as "bread" and "coffee" evoke strong sentimental nuances, forming a symbolic meaning of longing for homeland and family warmth. Phonological analysis reveals a choice of soft sounds that add to the emotional feel, while syntactically, the use of parallel structures reinforces the emotional effect.

In contrast, in the poem "بطاقة هوية" (Identity Card), Darwish combines narrative and confrontational language styles to show resistance to dehumanization. Dictions such as "note", "children of eight", and "are you angry?" are part of a rhetorical strategy to assert one's existence in the midst of oppression (Juma, 2021). This is where ideological stylistics come into play – reading poetry not only as a personal expression, but as the collective voice of a colonized nation. Thus, the stylistic approach in Mahmud Darwish's work opens up space for understanding poetry as an aesthetic form that is full of emotional meaning and political struggle.

Analysis Of Cultural Values In Mahmud Darwish Poetry

Poem "أحن إلى خبز أمي" expresses a deep longing for mother and home. The cultural values that emerge are very thick with family ties and respect for mothers as a symbol of affection, life, and family identity. Diction such as "خبز أمي" (my mother's bread) and "لمسة أمي" (mother's touch) signify the emotional intimacy inherent in Arabic culture, where the mother is not only a domestic figure, but also the center of the family's collective values and memory. It also emphasizes the importance of nostalgia and cultural roots in shaping individual identity (Joseph, 2000).

And poem "بطاقة هوية" voices national identity and resistance. The opening sentence "سجل، أنا عربي" (Note, I am an Arab) is a declaration of identity in the midst

of the attempt to erase Palestinian culture. Diction such as *وأطفالي ثمانية* reflects the values of the extended family, which in traditional Arab society is seen as a social power and a symbol of honor. The question *فهل تغضب؟* is a critique of the power system that discriminates against Arab identity. This reflects the spirit of resistance, which many researchers refer to as a form of resistance literature (Khalidi, 1997).

Poem *جواز سفر* raises the theme of alienation and identity crisis. The phrase *لم يعرفوني في الظلال التي تمتصّ لوني* describes how human beings are reduced by the system to a "colorless shadow" a powerful symbol of the loss of humanity behind political and administrative bureaucracy. Mahmoud Darwish uses metaphors to show that Palestinian identity is not recognized in a global system that is more interested in documentation than the reality of life. The diction *جرحي عندهم معرضاً* is a satire on how Palestinian suffering is often consumed as a spectacle without empathy, reflecting the value of self-esteem and resistance to the commodification of suffering(Najjar, 2004). The specifics can be seen through the following table:

Table 1: Analysis Of Cultural Values In Mahmud Darwish Poetry

Stylistic Aspects	Poem 1 أَحْنُ إِلَى خَبْزِ أُمِّي (I miss my mother's bread)	Poem 2 بطاقة هوية (Identity Card)	Poem 3 جواز سفر (Passport)
Main Themes	Longing, motherly love, love of life	National identity, resistance	Alienation, loss of identity
Phonology	The soft and repetitive sound of "ummi", "ḥinnu"	Loud and firm consonant sounds	A soft, long sound reflects sadness

	brings a touch of emotion	"", "ڤ", "ڤ" forms of firmness	
Lexical	لمسة as a symbol of home and love	بطاقة، أطفال عربي as a symbol of collective existence	as ظلال، لون، جرح a metaphor for identity removal
Syntax	Repetitive and parallel structure: أحسن إلى is the rhythm of prayer	Short sentences, commands: سجل is a confrontational style	Long metaphorical sentences are an emotional stream of thoughts
Rhetoric	Metaphor of love and death: أخرج من دمعي أمي	Sharp irony: وهل تغضب؟ is a satire on the oppressor	Metaphor for wounds becomes a spectacle: جرحي معرضاً لسائح
Central Symbols	Mother emblem of the homeLembang bread of warmth of life	An identity card is an acknowledgment of existence	Passport as a tool of denial of existence
Tone / Atmosphere	Sentimental, emotional, personal	Assertive, challenging, political	Melancholy, bitter, symbolic
Implicit Messages	Living to be loved for the sake of your mother, not yourself	Identity is not a number: a human is not a statistic	Palestinian identity erased in the global system

These three poems by Mahmud Darwish reflect the strong use of stylistics to convey messages of identity, feelings, and resistance in the context of Palestine.

The Role and Impact of Mahmoud Darwish's Poems

Representing the Voice of Palestine: Darwish's poem became a symbol of the struggle for a deep Palestinian identity. His works give voice to oppressed Palestinians and show the complexity of their identities who continue to struggle despite being in exile. Darwish's poems often depict suffering, loss, and struggle in the midst of oppression, bringing awareness to the outside world about the Palestinian situation(Shihab, 2000)

Strengthening Palestinian National Identity: Darwish's poems, such as "Bitaqat Hawiyya" ("Identity Card"), greatly strengthen Palestinian identity awareness by emphasizing that identity is inseparable from the homeland. Despite the colonial conditions, he emphasized that the Palestinian national identity was alive in every word of poem he delivered(Khalidi, 1997)

Literature as a Form of Resistance: Darwish's poetry is a very strong form of literature of resistance. As a poet born in the context of colonialism, his works had a profound impact on political consciousness by evoking thoughts about freedom and human rights for Palestine. Poems such as "*Ahinnu Ila Khubzi Ummii*" show how literature can be used to fight oppression and safeguard the hopes of the colonized nation (Abdullah, 1993)

Creating Intercultural Dialogue: Mahmoud Darwish played an important role in building bridges between cultures, with his poems translated into multiple languages, opening up space for people from outside the Arab world to understand the Palestinian struggle. Darwish was also able to combine the Arabic literary tradition with a more universal form of modern poetry, creating a space for international dialogue

Influence on Other Poets and Writers: As an influential literary figure, Darwish inspired many young poets in the Arab world and outside the Arab world to use literature as a tool of resistance. Darwish's works helped define contemporary Arabic literature, with a simple but meaningful style of language, and a powerful message about freedom and human rights.

Influence on Politics and Thought: Darwish's poems also had a great impact on political and social thought, especially in the context of the Palestinian freedom struggle. Darwish's works raise philosophical aspects of life and death, as well as evoke thoughts on humanity and justice(Wahid, 2007)

International Admissions and Awards: Darwish's poetry received international awards that further strengthened his influence in world literature. His works were known not only in the Arab world, but also in the Western world, introducing the Palestinian struggle to an international audience and having a profound impact on world literature

Conclusion

This study concludes that Mahmoud Darwish's poems exemplify the deep interconnection between language, culture, and identity, where poetic expression becomes a powerful medium for conveying themes of homeland, resistance, longing, and collective memory. Through a stylistic lens, the analysis demonstrates that Darwish's use of emotional diction, symbolic imagery, and culturally rooted expressions highlights the aesthetic richness of modern Arabic literature while reinforcing its function as a cultural and ideological instrument. His poetry not only embodies literary beauty but also serves as a voice of resilience and a testimony to the Palestinian experience.

A notable and unexpected finding of this study is the extent to which Darwish's stylistic choices operate simultaneously on artistic and political levels. The subtle interplay of linguistic rhythm, metaphorical depth, and cultural symbolism reveals how his poems construct a narrative of non-violent resistance that resonates far beyond the borders of Palestine. The analysis also uncovers that Darwish's aesthetic techniques carry universal human values—justice, dignity, identity preservation—that enable his poetry to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, influencing readers globally and fostering empathy toward oppressed communities.

Despite these insights, the study acknowledges several limitations. First, the analysis focuses on a limited selection of Darwish's poems, which may not fully represent the breadth of his stylistic evolution throughout his literary career. Additionally, this research concentrates primarily on stylistic elements without conducting a broader comparative analysis with other contemporary Arab poets, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of modern Arabic literary trends. Lastly, the study does not engage deeply with socio-historical archival sources, leaving room for future research to integrate interdisciplinary approaches that combine linguistics, cultural studies, and political history.

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Authors' Contribution Statement

The authors declare that this research is the result of a collaborative effort. Rayhan Muhamad Ridwan led the conceptual framework, literature review, and overall research design. Ade Nandang contributed to data collection, analysis of stylistic elements, and organization of the research findings. Astri Khodimatus Sholihah was responsible for textual interpretation, cultural analysis, and the refinement of the theoretical section. Rizkiyatul Hasanah handled the drafting, editing, and final synthesis of the manuscript. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the article, and each author shares equal responsibility for its content.

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