

Lexical Representation of Memory in “My Hills” and “Summer Rains” by Tamsula Ao: A Stylistic Study

Sourav Murasing

Research Scholar, Department of English, Tripura University

Abstract

Memory is an important aspect of poetic expression, particularly in writings that engage with personal experiences, cultural traditions, and historical consciousness. Tamsula Ao's poetry frequently reflects memories of people, places, traditions, and past experiences. This paper examines how memory is represented through lexical choices in selected poems of Tamsula Ao by adopting a lexical stylistic approach. The study focuses on memory-related vocabulary through qualitative textual analysis. It explores how Ao's choice of words contributes to the representation of memory. The study argues that her carefully selected vocabulary preserves personal and collective memories while establishing connections between the past and the present. By examining the lexical dimension of her two selected poems (for present study), this paper highlights how language functions as a medium for preserving memories and expressing cultural identity.

Keywords: Memory, consciousness, traditions, vocabulary, dimension, cultural identity

1.0 Introduction

Language is the primary medium through which poets express thoughts, experiences, and emotions. In poetry, every word carries significance, as the selection and arrangement of vocabulary contribute to the creation of meaning and artistic effect. Lexical choices, including repetition, association, and patterns of word selection, reveal the distinctive style of a poet and shape the reader's understanding of the text.

Lexical stylistics examines the relationship between vocabulary and literary effect. It studies how writers use words to create particular meanings, foreground experiences, and develop individual styles. The frequency, recurrence, and association of lexical items often provide important insights into a writer's artistic expression. Through the analysis of vocabulary, lexical stylistics enables researchers to explore how language functions within literary texts.

Memory is one of the recurring concerns in the poetry of Tamsula Ao, an important literary voice from Northeast India. Her poems frequently engage with experiences related to cultural identity, traditions, changing social realities, and connections with the past. References to people, places, customs, landscapes, and personal experiences create a rich network of memories that reflect both individual and collective consciousness.

Previous studies on Tamsula Ao's poetry have primarily focused on themes such as identity, history, indigenous culture, and human experience. Although her poems have often been discussed as expressions

of cultural memory, limited attention has been given to the lexical patterns through which memory is represented. This gap highlights the need for a lexical stylistic investigation of her poetry.

Therefore, this study examines the lexical representation of memory in two selected poems by Temsula Ao, namely “My Hills” and “Summer Rains.” Adopting a lexical stylistic approach, the paper analyses memory-related vocabulary to explore how language contributes to the preservation of personal and collective memories. The study aims to demonstrate that Ao’s carefully chosen vocabulary not only reflects remembered experiences but also contributes to the formation of her distinctive poetic style.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To examine how memory is represented through lexical choices in Temsula Ao’s selected poems *My Hills* and *Summer Rains*.
2. To identify the memory-related lexical items that contribute to the representation of remembrance in the selected poems.
3. To analyse how lexical choices contribute to the preservation and expression of personal and collective memories in the selected poems.

3.0 Theoretical Framework: Lexical Stylistics

This study adopts the principles of lexical stylistics as its theoretical framework. Lexical stylistics examines how the selection, arrangement, and repetition of words contribute to literary meaning and artistic effect. Unlike general stylistics, which investigates language at multiple linguistic levels, lexical stylistics focuses specifically on vocabulary and the stylistic significance of lexical choices.

According to Leech and Short, vocabulary is not selected randomly in literary texts. Every lexical item contributes to the creation of meaning and reflects the writer’s stylistic intention. Writers choose particular words to foreground ideas, evoke emotions, establish patterns of association, and shape readers’ interpretations. Consequently, lexical analysis enables researchers to identify recurring linguistic patterns that distinguish an author’s individual style (95).

Simpson also argues that stylistic analysis seeks to explain how linguistic choices produce literary effects. Lexical choices often reveal the dominant concerns of a literary work through repetition, semantic relationships, collocations, and lexical fields. Such patterns enable readers to recognise thematic continuity while appreciating the artistic organisation of language (27).

4.0 Methodology of the study

The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on textual analysis. It employs the principles of lexical stylistics to examine how vocabulary contributes to the representation of memory in Temsula Ao’s poetry. The study is based on close reading of two selected poems, namely *My Hills* and *Summer Rains*, chosen purposively because they prominently depict memories of places, nature, and personal experience.

The analysis focuses on identifying memory-related lexical items in the two selected poems. Lexical items are examined to understand how they contribute to the construction of meaning and the artistic representation of memory. The study is descriptive and interpretative in nature and relies entirely on textual evidence drawn from the two selected poems. It does not attempt a broader thematic or socio-political analysis but remains focused on the stylistic significance of lexical choices in representing memory.

5.0 Lexical Analysis of Memory in Temsula Ao's *My Hills*

The sounds and sights
Have altered
In my hills.
Once they hummed
With bird-song
And happy gurgling brooks
Like running silver
With shoals of many fish.
The trees were many
Happy, verdant, green
The seasons playing magic
On their many-splendoured sheen.
When summer went,
The hills echoed
With the wistful whispers
Of autumnal leaves
Fluttering to their fall
In the winter-smelling breeze.
But to-day,
I no longer know my hills,
The birdsong is gone,
Replaced by the staccato
Of sophisticated weaponry.
The rivers are running red,
The hillsides are bare
And the seasons
Have lost their magic,
Because
The very essence
Of my hills
Are lost
Forever---- (Ao 157)

In the poem *My Hills* by Temsula Ao, the vocabulary of remembrance is created mainly through words that recall the past condition of the hills and contrast it with the damaged present. The poem uses several lexical items that evoke memories of natural beauty, harmony, and a lost way of life.

5.1 Vocabulary of Memory in *My Hills*

Lexical item/expression	Lexical category	Relation to memory
Once	Temporal adverb	The strongest lexical marker of memory. It introduces the remembered past.

To-day	Temporal adverb	Contrasts the remembered past with the present.
have altered	Verb phrase	Indicates change from an earlier remembered state.
Were	Past-tense verb	Describes the remembered landscape.
Went	Past-tense verb	Refers to a recurring seasonal memory.
I no longer know	Verb phrase	Expresses loss of familiarity and memory.
Gone	Adjective	Marks the disappearance of what is remembered.
Replaced	Past participle	Signals substitution of the remembered past by the present reality.
Lost	Adjective/Past participle	Indicates irreversible loss of the remembered past.

5.2 Analysis

The strongest vocabulary of memory appears in the first three stanzas, where Ao recalls the hills before their destruction. Words such as “once,” “bird-song,” “brooks,” “trees,” “green,” “seasons,” “leaves,” and “breeze” create a lexical pattern associated with natural harmony and the lost past. These words preserve the memory of a landscape that existed before violence and environmental destruction.

The repeated use of positive descriptive words such as “happy,” “verdant,” “green,” and “magic” reflects the poet’s nostalgic memories of the hills. In contrast, the present condition is represented through words such as “gone,” “red,” “bare,” and “lost,” which highlight the disappearance of the remembered world.

Therefore, the vocabulary of memory in *My Hills* is constructed through nature-related lexical items that preserve the memory of beauty, peace, and harmony while expressing grief over their loss.

6.0 Lexical Analysis of Memory in Tamsula Ao’s *Summer Rains*

Summer rains have always
 Had a way with me.
 I remember a special summer
 Almost a life-time-long ago
 When the rains refused to come.
 Instead they seemed to want to only play
 Teasing with a few drops and scattered showers
 But mainly keeping maddeningly away
 While I burned with renewed heat
 And longed for some early reprieve
 Praying for the summer rains.
 Then on a sultry summer afternoon
 The heavens slid back hidden doors

And oh! How the crystal showers poured.
 They danced on rooftops, glided on panes
 Swelled gutters, muddied clothes on lines
 And flattened flowers in their beds.
 I watched their frenzied dance-steps
 As each drop tried to out-dance the others
 In that summer-dance of watery wildness.
 In a lightning flash of summer-madness
 I dashed out and joined the dancing drops
 To dance the muddy giddy rain-dance.
 The sun smiled on us that day adding
 Tiny diamonds to the dancing drops
 As they cooled my burning body.
 Many summer rains I've seen since then
 Sometimes soothing, sometimes burning more
 But nothing compares to the dancing rain
 Of that long-ago day of my maiden summer
 When sun-kissed raindrops danced on me. (Ao 223)

In Tamsila Ao's poem *Summer Rains*, the vocabulary of memory is mainly created through words and phrases that recall a past personal experience, especially the memory of a significant summer from the speaker's youth. The poem uses lexical items related to time, childhood, nature, emotion, and sensory experience to reconstruct the remembered moment.

6.1 Vocabulary of Memory in Summer Rains

Lexical item/expression	Lexical category	Relation to memory
Remember	Verb	The most explicit memory marker. It signals the act of recalling a past experience.
A special summer	Noun phrase	Identifies the remembered period as personally significant.
Almost a life-time-long ago	Temporal adverbial phrase	Indicates temporal distance between the present and the remembered past.
since then	Temporal phrase	Contrasts the remembered event with later experiences.
many summer rains	Noun phrase	Suggests accumulated memories over time.
Long-ago day	Temporal noun phrase	Reinforces the distance of the memory.
maiden summer	Noun phrase	Refers to youth or an early stage of life, evoking autobiographical memory.

That day	Demonstrative noun phrase	Points to a specific remembered event.
Then	Temporal adverb	Marks progression within the remembered narrative.

6.2 Analysis

The strongest vocabulary of memory appears through the expressions “I remember,” “a special summer,” “a life-time-long ago,” “that day,” “since then,” and “long-ago day.” These lexical items establish the poem as an act of recalling a significant personal experience.

The repeated use of summer, rain, and dancing creates a lexical pattern associated with joy, youth, and emotional attachment. The word “maiden” is particularly significant because it suggests a first or youthful experience that remains permanently preserved in memory.

Unlike a general description of rainfall, Ao uses memory-related vocabulary to transform the rain into a personal recollection. The lexical choices preserve not only the physical event of the rain but also the emotions connected with that moment.

7.0 Comparative Discussion

Although both *My Hills* and *Summer Rains* represent memory through lexical choices, they differ in the nature and function of remembrance. In *My Hills*, memory is primarily collective and cultural. The lexical items are largely associated with nature, homeland, and environmental harmony. Words such as bird-song, brooks, trees, verdant, and magic construct a lexical field that preserves memories of a peaceful landscape. These positive lexical choices are contrasted with words such as weaponry, red, bare, and lost, creating a clear distinction between the remembered past and the troubled present.

In contrast, *Summer Rains* presents memory as a personal and emotional experience. The poem relies on lexical items such as “I remember,” “special summer,” “that day,” “since then,” and “maiden summer” to reconstruct an important moment from the speaker’s youth. Nature-related vocabulary, including “crystal showers,” “raindrops,” “sun,” and “dancing drops,” recreates the sensory experience of the remembered event and strengthens its emotional significance.

Despite these differences, both poems demonstrate Temsula Ao’s distinctive use of lexical selection to preserve memory. Her vocabulary functions not merely as description but as a stylistic device that reconnects the present with the past. Through carefully chosen lexical items, Ao transforms ordinary experiences into lasting memories, revealing the close relationship between language, remembrance, and identity.

8.0 Conclusion

This study has examined the lexical representation of memory in Temsula Ao’s poems *My Hills* and *Summer Rains* through the perspective of lexical stylistics. The analysis demonstrates that Ao’s representation of memory is achieved not only through thematic concerns but also through her deliberate selection and organisation of vocabulary.

In *My Hills*, lexical choices associated with nature, homeland, and environmental harmony preserve the memory of a peaceful past while contrasting it with a present marked by loss and destruction. In *Summer Rains*, vocabulary related to time, nature, and sensory experience reconstructs a cherished personal memory, revealing the emotional intensity of remembrance. Although the two poems differ in their focus,

one presenting collective memory and the other personal memory, both demonstrate how carefully selected lexical items function as important stylistic resources for representing the past.

The study also shows that lexical stylistics provides an effective approach to understanding Tamsula Ao's poetic language. By examining patterns of vocabulary rather than relying solely on thematic interpretation, it becomes possible to recognise how individual words contribute to meaning, emotional effect, and artistic expression. Ao's lexical choices preserve memories of people, places, landscapes, and experiences while simultaneously reflecting cultural identity and personal consciousness.

Therefore, the study concludes that memory in Tamsula Ao's *My Hills* and *Summer Rains* is linguistically constructed through deliberate lexical selection. Her vocabulary not only recalls the past but also transforms remembered experiences into enduring poetic expression, establishing memory as one of the defining stylistic features of the selected poems.

References

1. Abrams, M.H. and G.G. Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning India Private Limited, 2015.
2. Ao, Tamsula. *Book of Songs: Collected poems, 1988-2007*. Heritage Publishing House, 2013.
3. Bradford, R. *Stylistics*. Routledge, 1997.
4. Crystal, D. And D. Davy. *Investigating English Style*. Longman, 1969.
5. Leech, G.N. *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. Longman, 1969.
6. Leech, Geoffrey, and Mick Short. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2007.
7. Lucas, F. *Style*. Cassel and Coy, 1995.
8. Misra, Partha. S. *An introduction to Stylistics: Theory and Practice*. Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2009.
9. Sebock, T. A. *Style in Language*. MIT Press, 1960.
10. Simpson, P. *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. Routledge, 2004.
11. Syal, Pushpinder and D.V. Jindal. *An Introduction to Linguistics: Language, Grammar, And*
12. *Semantics*. PHI Learning Private Limited, 2018.
13. Verdonk, P. *Stylistics*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
14. Wales, K. *A Dictionary of Stylistics*. Longman, 1989.
15. Widdowson, H.G. *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*. Longman, 1975.
16. Widdowson, H.G. *Practical Stylistics*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
17. Williams, J. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (9th ed.). Longman, 2007.