



Poetry and Death of One Language: An Approach towards *Languagelessness*

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Abstract

The paper introduces the concept of languagelessness that can be practised in contemporary poetry. The term 'languagelessness' has been defined here. This article believes that the modern troubles faced by the current generations can be addressed by languageless poetry in literature. The essay also shows how this concept of languageless poetry has been formed, referring to the previous works of poetry in different languages and cultures. It has talked about the development of the concept through the poems of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Syd Barret, and French poets like Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, Apollinaire and others. The Current approaches to practising languagelessness have been discussed, and the roles of the poets and the readers in its further development have been detailed. The paper shows how this concept can promote an international way of thinking both intellectually and philosophically.

Keywords: Poetry, Languagelessness, Globalisation, Pandemic, Absurdity, Modernism

Received 15 Nov., 2022; Revised 28 Nov., 2022; Accepted 30 Nov., 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

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I. Introduction

Poetry is one of the earliest forms through which, with the use of a language, expressions have been made. The language here means not the expressions made of gestures or paintings full of colours and variety but those with grammar. In ancient times texts were not written. They were told, sung, painted on caves and memorised (Diringer, 17). Later, in many cases, books on science, religion, politics and many more started to get written as poems (Diringer, 90-91). In some ancient oriental cultures, this instance is not very rare. However, the present scenario of language has become quite ambiguous. From a realistic point of view, language is never a purified thing or a unique unmixed entity.

Rather one language has always borrowed from the other in terms of words, expressions, phonetic elements, scripts and others (Zokirov and Dadabayeva, 689). This has always acted as a mental and physical process, which has significantly contributed to the evolution of a language. Therefore, language, as well as the approaches of poetry, has been transformed. It is not very sensible to mention that any form of art, including poetry, reflects society. So, it is obvious that the language change will have been reflected in poetry too. In contemporary society, modern minds have a different approach towards society. Accordingly, the poetic language has not been impactfully transformed. Therefore, it is essential to break the conceptual barriers of the pure language of poetry. Abiding by societal transformations, the very notion of languagelessness needs to be embraced.

II. Discussion

This concept of *languagelessness* is not a very popular one. Even in contemporary society, this idea has a long journey left to walk. This very concept is vivid, and therefore, it requires a specific understanding. Languagelessness encourages the elimination of the barrier of language in poetry. In simpler terms, it promotes the formation of poetry in a way that is not bound to any specific language. It demands the death of one language in poetry and does not provide any backing to the purity of language in poetry. From here, the question arises that works. Well, languagelessness is not anarchic or developed without grammar. It evokes a specific meaning as taught by society. While practising this concept, the poet will not be bound to the grammar of any particular language. He can use as many different languages as possible in his poetic creation. Verses from different poets can be used.

The poet can also incorporate different signs, different sound words, ancient or lost expressions, and different forms to develop poetry as a painting. The poet will have the freedom to create new words as per

her/his necessities are concerned. Languagelessness incorporates a free space for the poet where a different but alternative and realistic world can be created. The readers might feel the world of languageless poetry is different from where they belong. However, languagelessness will manifest in the real world in its raw and original form. In the beginning, the readers may face difficulty comprehending such poetic versions' meanings. However, things will become much easier with time if they can be kept in practice. The faculty of knowledge can be developed by this practice too. The current lack of interest in reading poetry amongst the present generation can also be removed by introducing a new and diverse taste.

Contemporary society has faced several changes in a very short span. Such transformations have been vivid and rapid to the young generations of today. Youths born in the 80s and 90s have observed both growth and decline in society significantly more vividly than the previous few generations (Williamson et al., 3045). Therefore, their approach towards society has become distinguishable. These generations have seen the fall of the USSR and the decline of Communism with it, the rise of superpowers, globalisation and growth of material demands, the emergence of internationalised large-scale economies, the rapid growth of technology and its impact in day-to-day lives, mass destruction of environmental properties both due to the natural courses and human activities, terrorism, the advent of a pandemic crisis, fall of the international medical system and a huge number of deaths, corrupted politics, recession and unemployment, loss of jobs, migration, dictatorship and also the fall of dictators, the war between countries and fall of several organised lives, death of one of the longest reigned monarchs and many more. This observation impacts young minds differently (Lambovska et al., 59). They have changed the concept of moral values in today's lives. The dialogues of common people have been changed, and colloquial words must be included in the dictionary. On many occasions, people have agitated against the current system and governments. Such as Bhattacharya reports that eligible and qualified candidates for the teaching profession have protested for recruitment and against corruption in front of the education minister's residence in West Bengal, India (1).

On the other hand, the pain of the death of a near one, unemployment, laying off of employees at firms, and a crisis within the family due to this, have made today's individuals silent.

In many cases, people are unsure who to blame for this present condition. During COVID-19, the death of a huge number of people has made people question the vulnerability of life. Faith in a spiritual power has decreased, and a typical void has been created even after the interventions of religious institutions (Shoji and Matsue, 3). This reminds the present readers of the situation after the First World War, with which modernism in literature began. The periods of crisis had made people cry: sometimes they cried out loud, and often they whimpered. While creating a poetic piece, it is important to record the emotions. Currently, it is again one more time when literature requires a transformation. Like the Second World War, societal life has become a stagnant one where no development seems possible. The crisis has not only destroyed the economy but also affected human psychology. Everyone looks purposeless and unconfident about any change, and this is where absurdity takes birth. After the 1950s, European drama significantly responded to absurdity. Jones opines that existentialist thoughts have made paths for this development (370). In contemporary situations, the same existential monotony can be observed from where no one can escape, and all logic is subverted. Therefore, it is the responsibility of creative minds to deliver disoriented and uncertain writings that can be valuable for documentation.

The same monotonous nostalgic writings maintaining a good pattern and language of poetry are losing their value. It is very important to include today's anger and silence in poetry. It is not that difficult a task, although it sounds so. When a poet or creative person understands the present situation, observes the calamity and becomes a part of it, he automatically becomes capable of portraying the time and its restlessness according to its needs. The poet requires to identify himself with the sufferer. The psychological turmoil and existential crisis of the readers, as well as the general mass, have given birth to a peculiar lack of determination and made life a fragmented truth (Markowitz, 13). Therefore, the poet is required to challenge contemporary language and create disintegrated pieces which can reflect society.

Globalisation has brought a different kind of imperialism. The Western culture has been overpowered in this to the extent that any human being considers a perfect way of living should be that of the Western. According to Miller, globalising Western mental health has forced the general living of contemporary society to follow a "Western way of being a person" (131). On several occasions, the popularisation of Western psychiatric models has been objected to. This particular phenomenon has set a definition of 'success', to not reaching which people have suffered from severe distress. The vulnerability of life has contributed to not only depression but also contemporary people facing trauma and anxiety about future happenings. During the pandemic period, the use of drugs and alcohol has significantly increased. Roberts et al. argue that alcohol and other substances have increased from 21.7% to 72.9% and from 3.6% to 17.5% during the COVID-19 pandemic (109150). With certain restrictions, people were caged to their houses which contributed to depression. It was also contributed by the discriminative behaviour of those in the neighbourhood and the relatives. Social isolation is responsible for anxiety and trauma (Majumdar et al., 1193).

On the other hand, this fear and trauma due to vulnerability have not been reciprocated by the language of poetry to most. The transformation of language could inculcate such emotions and document the time. However, it has become significantly stagnant, and the growth of literature has suffered extra-ordinarily.

Miltonic purity in language has become ancient and fails to work in modern society. The readings of classical literature today have been a mere subject to compare with today's world. Therefore, many times, biblical values and classical thoughts are questioned (Smit, 52). Not only that, the literary pieces of the last century have been arguably criticised after hundred years. For instance, Yeats' *Leda and the Swan* has been criticised by modern feminist critics, and Yeats' viewpoint towards rape has been a subject of argument (Neimneh et al., 35). No literature is considered impure now. Rather the understanding of purity has been altered recently. The lifestyle and emotions of present-day people are beyond the context of purity. The urge to break the stringent rules of day-to-day lives has made people desperate. However, values are compromised in many arguments and dialogues, and misbehaviour from either side might occur. But this creates a new way or school of thought in which the preconceived notions of purity will be unimportant. For language, the puritan writings are also observed to become unnecessary as poetry develops further with time. In form, pattern, musicality, and language, a different thought can be incorporated in which all writings can be perceived as equally essential and of the same plain.

The very concept of languagelessness is not entirely new. One can find works similar to this idea not only in poems but also in music. However, despite being quite humanistic previously, such ideas were not much understood and kept aside from general people. This has been a learning area in society's scholarly and erudite sections. Despite being major poets in English literary history, the approaches of people like Thomas Stearns Eliot and Ezra Pound can be observed as a beginning of languagelessness. Works of English singer and songwriter Syd Barret are again similar to languageless approaches. Apart from poetry, such developments can also be seen in other literary genres. However, in this section, the approaches towards poetry will be prioritised.

The practice of using epigraphs in literature is not new and modern. A few lines in different languages and previous creative works that are regularly not noticed by the readers have become significant in the epigraphs. Erskine-Hill observes that in English epigraphs, majorly Latin verses are used (261). Such verses may be overlooked by an "impatient eye" while studying a Latin text, but they are very much focused after they are used in a great work (Erskine-Hill, 262-63). The epigraph has served as a preface to the text. Epigraphs are mostly taken from other literary texts, and similarity or contrast between the two is formed. Therefore, it serves the context of intertextuality too. However, epigraphs have also been adapted from texts written in languages other than Latin. For instance, the epigraph used in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has been taken from another prominent English text, *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. Eliot's *Gerontion* takes its epigraph from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. This intertextual practice can often be viewed as important for languageless approaches. Languagelessness develops a particular position where the barrier of different languages is obliterated, and a space is created where every human being can express their thoughts without being judged.

In his *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot uses different voices. His narratives in the poem are constantly changing, and the voices are transformed. This major work was published in 1922 after *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917). This timeframe is significant in Eliotesque poetry. In 1917, he already uttered, "I grow old", but the announcement of "We are hollow men" has some time left. After the first World War, the spiritual belief of every individual was strongly wounded.

On the other hand, throughout *The Waste Land*, Eliot is searching for the spiritual space to accommodate modern humans. He understands that the modern dilemma is obscure, and people have been suffering madness of a different kind where they lack faith and suspect even their being. This emotional turmoil had overcome the linguistic barrier. Eliot finds this absurd to record this disaster in one language. From the beginning of the epigraph, he finishes the language limitation. Throughout the poem, he glides through different languages such as French, German, Sanskrit and others (Zhang, 1149). On several occasions, the words he uses do not have any particular meaning, and it seems that he is trying to make some sounds. He takes his references from *Satyricon* to *The Upanishads*, from nursery rhymes to *Le Petit Prince*, from *The Happy Prince* to *The Spanish Tragedy*, from *The Book of Genesis* to *Inferno*, from *Tristan and Iseult* to *Les Sept Vieillards* and so forth. Eliot's objective seems simple: to break the barriers created in literature and create an international piece at the most crucial moment. The pain and trauma of the war have been translated into his work here. It is a well-known fact that Eliot has become more and more spiritual with time. During the publication of *Four Quartets* (1943), his spiritual mind has sufficiently matured. His *A Song for Simeon* (1928) had already been published by that time, where he demanded "thy peace". Still, the same obscurity, as well as the dilemma, is observed when Eliot says –

You say I am repeating

Something I have said before. I shall say it again.

Shall I say it again? (181)

It sounds like he does not know what he means. The pain of the generation is what it is termed. These lines were published in 1940 when the poet was observing the Second World War. Despite being significantly spiritual, his difficulty in expression can be portrayed. The objectives of languagelessness are similar: to record time the way it is. It does not require any particular meaning to produce. Yet it can signify the disaster of the time. To write grammatically correct poems full of beautiful imagery seems to be the act of an escapist at the time of the turmoil.

Like Eliot, Ezra Pound takes a similar approach in his *The Cantos*. It is a long and incomplete poem with 120 sections. Each section is a canto. These are majorly written between 1915 and 1962. The sections in this poem are formidably difficult for the common readers. However, it is claimed to be one of the finest works in modernist poetry. In *The Cantos*, Pound takes the help of numerous languages to express his emotion. Suclaims that his Chinese learning has been reflected here (1). He includes Chinese characters in his poems and uses several other European languages than English. The themes in this poem are interweaving. Personally, Pound was diagnosed with a serious mental illness in his later times. He was also viewed as a traitor to his native country. This clearly shows that he carries an entirely different personality. Pound was a friend of people like Joyce, Yeats, Henry James, Ford Maddox Ford and others. He also edited Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Therefore, it is obvious that his expressions were not regular and predetermined. His use of language and themes in *The Cantos* are sufficient to make a direction for the current approaches of languagelessness.

Apart from the two major poets discussed earlier, the contributions of the English singer and songwriter Syd Barret are worthy of being noted. His musical practices and literary approaches are significant for determining psychoanalytical development. Since themes and observations are not restricted to languagelessness, his works are essential to be studied by contemporary readers. Barret released his song *Maisie* in 1970. This particular composition consisted of several sounds that are not so easily comprehended. The gulping sound and the whistling sound have become parts of the song. Previously he worked with Pink Floyd, which produced psychedelic rock music at a revolutionary level (Palacios, 7). *Comfortably numb*, the band's most famous song probably begins with incomprehensible whispers, and finally, it enters into its musical genius. Barret might have taken his encouragement of polishing this particularly new genre from the band itself.

French poets have tried to achieve a unique status in poetry through their experimentation and developmental ideas. From time to time, they have broken the previous ideas developed in French poetry. Thus, they have formed an entirely new scope for studying their poetic creations. Like the British poets, they have also seen the change in human lives in the country during the 19th century. The extraordinary growth of industrialisation has transformed modern France (Knapp, 146-47). This very phenomenon has impacted the poetry of that particular time. The themes of poetry have transformed into any common place and shook off all heroic grandeur. Monarchy in France had already fallen in French Revolution, and democratic values were formed. After the French Revolution, the country had a better chance to practice freedom and equality. The political confusion was removed, and free spirit could sustain itself amongst its people. Knapp observes that French poetry's modern development prominently occurred after the revolution (146). Initially, it started to work on themes. The objectivities of poetry are removed initially, and the experiences and feelings of the poet are documented from a subjective point of view.

Victor Hugo is one of the giants of French poetry. Many of his poems contain a spiritual theme. In his poetry, nature, too, has become a very significant part. Like the philosophy of *The Upanishads* or Wordsworth's 'pantheism', Hugo mixes his spirituality with natural objects (Usama et al., 581). In his *Extase (Ecstasy)*, the poet-persona is alone in a typical natural grandeur in a dream-like state. He is incapable of returning to reality and feels that the grand design is the creation of God. In *Stella*, his romantic self is combined with the natural spirit. Hugo is considered one of the best poets in the Romantic movement in France.

Baudelaire's writings are a mixture of romanticism with France's cosmopolitan modernity, particularly Paris. His works reminisce of human psychological experience too. In his *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the poet explains an emotional, moral and intellectual experience. As claimed by Arthur Symons, this particular work of Baudelaire was created out of his entire intellect and cost all his nerves (347). His poems, such as *La Destruction*, *Le Voyage*, and *La Chevelure*, are filled with his emotional experiences. The poet assimilates beauty through his experience. He is conscious of his sufferings and understands that they are working as inspiration for his poetic self. In many cases, the poet becomes nostalgic, remembers his beloved and gets surrounded by his pains. Baudelaire creates a dream-like state for the readers where modernistic pain is inevitable, but his love conquers his agony.

The best time for French poetry to influence modern languageless art comes with 'cubism'. It gave birth to the poetry of patterns in French literature. With the avant-garde movement in Paris, the poets turned from artificial symbolism to multiple stimuli of the city's modern life (Rentzou, 5). The process of cubist poetry started brewing earlier, and the path of changing the course of poetry in the 20th century from the previous years was getting ready. However, Picasso's paintings helped the poets structure the concept solidly. The previous forms of writing poetry were broken, and a new form was created that became similar to painting. This

development from poetry was severe and had a huge impact on the later poets (Cottingham,74). The barriers to maintaining specific forms in poetry were not there in cubism, and the artist could work on any form he liked. One of the best practitioners of cubist poetry was Guillaume Apollinaire. He composed many poems that disapproved of the concepts of form and structure. He is observed by the poet who painted his words and played with them in poetry. Apollinaire's poem, *Visée*, is composed in the form of a sun. His *La Tour Eiffel* is structured as the Eiffel Tower of Paris. His *Il Pleut* is formed as rain. The poet tried to create visual poetry or poetic 'calligrammes' (Cottingham, 76). This approach is highly influenced by painting and has sufficient potential to direct languageless poetry.

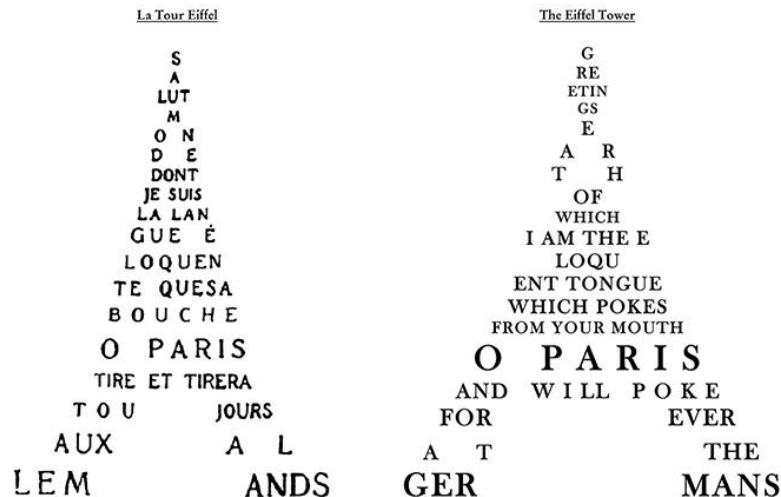


Fig. 1. Guillaume Apollinaire, *La Tour Eiffel*.
(Coughlan)

To become modern and languageless, contemporary poetry can include signs in poetic works. The punctuation marks can face limitations in expressing current experiences and emotions. Recent poetry, therefore, can incorporate punctuations according to the needs of the creation. Here, mathematical signs and those used in scientific studies can be incorporated, too, since languagelessness talks for the abolition of disciplines. For instance, the Greek alphabet α can refer to the beginning, and the 'lazy eight' symbol to infinity (∞) can signify endlessness.

III. Conclusion

The different approaches of languageless poetry are yet to be developed. However, some basic guidelines can be maintained while structuring this particular genre. As mentioned earlier, such poetic pieces should not abide by the barriers of language as well as form. The themes of poetry can be mixed depending on a basic link. The narratives can interchange so that the readers may have a particular scope for brainstorming. Languageless writings will be philosophically international. An international mind will be beneficial for understanding and developing a poem. Both the poet and the reader need to be inclusive so that intercultural communication can be prioritised. This will be significantly helpful for intellectual growth. Poetry will be based on current societal issues. The emotional turmoil of the current generations should be reflected in them. From a Marxist point of view, it can be observed that societal development is structured on the economy of a particular place (Maesse, 374). Thus, economic instability needs to be addressed through poetry. Poetry needs to focus on the ongoing restlessness and existential crisis.

Unlike music, poetry has limitations in implementing care and promoting a better lifestyle in such cases, but it has immense power to document the present agony (Pories et al., 438). Languageless poetry has a huge potential to produce new thoughts by breaking the concepts of purity in language. Using signs and patterns can create a better scope for learning. It can promote intertextuality, cultural diversity, equality and peace. Similar to absurdist theatre, it can be developed to speak for the needs of the time. Languageless poetry may not offer the basic comfort of reading poems as a spare time or recreational activity. It requires total involvement from the readers. This will also help the readers to live the poems and realise them intellectually. On the other hand, the poets practising languagelessness should be open to all forms of criticism. Only through an open mindset, further developments can be promised.

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