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Metaphors Of Hybridity As Fusion: A Stylistic Analysis Of Short Story 'A Temporary Matter' By Jhumpa Lahiri

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ABSTRACT

The study at hand analyzes Jhumpa Lahiri's short story A Temporary Matter through a stylistic analysis using metaphors of hybridity as forms of fusion. The current research study aims to explore the ways in which metaphors are constructed in the text. Additionally, it shows the ways in which linguistic features contribute to the creation of hybrid meanings that combine emotional, relational and cultural experiences. Furthermore, to answer the research questions, the study employed Contemporary Stylistics and Conceptual Blending Theory developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). For this purpose, a qualitative research design was adopted, and through the close reading technique, the data were collected from the selected textual excerpts. The analysis discloses the major elements in the narrative that contributed to meaning construction in the narrative and functioned as metaphorical spaces where multiple meanings are fused, such as the temporary power outage, the imagery of light and darkness, culinary practices and the game of confession. Notably, these metaphors reflect themes of grief, emotional distance, marital conflict, cultural identity and human connection. More crucially, the findings reveal that Lahiri's minimalist style and simple language effectively convey complex emotional and cultural realities. Consequently, the study plays an important role in the interpretation of human relationships and identity formation in literary texts.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri; A Temporary Matter; Contemporary Stylistics; Conceptual Blending Theory; Hybridity.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of linguistics as an autonomous discipline, along with its application to literary studies, created new avenues in twenty first century literary

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criticism. In like manner, Roger Fowler (1971:9 as cited in Jaafar, 2008) claims that several important advancements within and related to linguistics worth greater attention from literary critics because they introduce innovative approaches to reading and analysis. Literary criticism, as a scholarly field, has consistently embraced such methodological innovation. The main purpose of this study is to apply the tools of stylistics to the analysis of the short story *A Temporary Matter* by Jhumpa Lahiri. This study shows how linguistic features help us understand deeper meanings in literary texts. It focuses on how metaphors of hybridity are presented as forms of fusion in the story. Through stylistic analysis, the research explores how language, symbolism and narrative techniques shape themes of identity, loss and emotional connection. The study also highlights how simple language can carry complex cultural and emotional meanings. Notably, stylistics, therefore, acts as a bridge between linguistics and literature. By combining these two fields, this research offers a clearer and more systematic interpretation of *A Temporary Matter*. Additionally, stylistics is concerned with the role of linguistic features of syntax, figurative language and vocabulary in text, and their effects (Sukma & Djuharie, 2026). Stylistics focuses on how the formal features of a language can be utilized to construct a meaning and a reaction of a reader (Ahmed et al., 2025; Hayat et al., 2026; Nawaz et al., 2026). Moreover, it offers analytical aids to researchers in a way that allows them to objectively talk about literary language.

While taking into consideration, the present study embedded itself within contemporary stylistics to explore how language constructs meanings in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story *A Temporary Matter*, a narrative that portrays a strained marital relationship unfolding through moments of silence, routine and emotional distance. Paul Simpson (2022) claims that stylistics is concerned with how patterns of language create meaning and aesthetic effect. In addition to this, Dan McIntyre (2025) highlights its role in linking formal linguistic features with deeper literary interpretation. Likewise, metaphor has been conceptualized as a cognitive and discourse-based tool rather than a simple decorative device. Kovecses (2022) defines metaphor as a conceptual process that structures thought and experience. Ahmed et al., (2024) describes it as a linguistic resource for representing complex emotional and social realities. Therefore, in Lahiri's narrative, metaphors of hybridity emerge through everyday language and situations, reflecting emotional fragmentation, cultural duality and the fragile nature of human relationships. Her minimalist style, marked by simplicity and subtle symbolism, allows ordinary events to carry deep psychological and cultural meanings, making the text highly suitable for stylistic investigation.

Undeniably, this study adopts a qualitative approach through close reading of the text. It is grounded in stylistics, focusing on figurative features (Roger Fowler, 1971). The research is guided by the concept of metaphor of fusion, based on conceptual blending theory by Gilles Fauconnier (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). It examines how hybrid meanings are constructed through metaphor. The

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researchers selected a short story "*A Temporary Matter*" by Jhumpa Lahiri, published in Interpreter of Maladies in 1999 (Lahiri, 1999). This framework helps reveal themes of identity and emotional complexity. Therefore, by focusing on both textual detail and conceptual meaning, this study shows that language in *A Temporary Matter* is not only descriptive but also deeply expressive, shaping readers' understanding of emotional and cultural experience in a sophisticated way and a powerful manner.

Research Questions

- How are metaphors of hybridity constructed as forms of fusion in *A Temporary Matter* by Jhumpa Lahiri?
- How does a stylistic analysis of linguistic features reveal the function of these metaphors of hybridity as fusion in the text?

Research Objectives

- To examine how metaphors of hybridity are constructed as forms of fusion in *A Temporary Matter* by Jhumpa Lahiri.
- To analyze how stylistic features of language reveal the function of these metaphors of hybridity as fusion in the text.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a qualitative research design grounded in close textual analysis, which is most appropriate for investigating the stylistic and linguistic dimensions of literary discourse. Rather than quantifying linguistic features, the qualitative approach allows for an in-depth, interpretive examination of how metaphors of hybridity function as forms of fusion within Jhumpa Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter". The design is descriptive and interpretive in nature. It situates the analysis within the theoretical frameworks of Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) and Contemporary Stylistics (Simpson, 2022). This enables a systematic yet nuanced exploration of language, meaning, and narrative structure. Furthermore, the primary data for this study are drawn exclusively from the short story "A Temporary Matter" by Jhumpa Lahiri, published in her debut collection Interpreter of Maladies (1999). The text was selected purposively because of its rich deployment of figurative language, minimalist prose style and its thematic engagement with cultural identity, grief and relational rupture. These qualities render it highly suitable for stylistic investigation. Moreover, relevant textual excerpts, including metaphorical expressions, figurative imagery, narrative events and stylistically significant lexical and syntactic choices, were systematically identified across the entire narrative and compiled as the analytical corpus of the study. Notably, the principal research technique employed is close reading, a method widely adopted in stylistic and literary analysis to examine the precise ways in which language creates meaning (Giovanelli & Harrison, 2022). In this study, close reading is theoretically informed by Conceptual Blending Theory, which provides a cognitive framework for tracing how distinct conceptual domains, such as domestic disruption, emotional withdrawal and cultural identity, are fused through metaphorical blending to

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generate emergent narrative meaning. Therefore, the technique involves identifying metaphorical constructions, mapping their conceptual input spaces and analyzing the hybrid meanings produced in the blended spaces. Thus, particular attention is given to diction, syntax, imagery and narrative sequencing as stylistic carriers of meaning.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The analysis proceeds from micro-level linguistic features, such as individual lexical choices and syntactic structures, to macro-level narrative patterns, demonstrating how conceptual blending operates across the text of Lahiri's short story. Findings are presented discursively, integrating close textual evidence with theoretical interpretation to produce a rigorous and replicable stylistic account of the narrative.

The Power: Fusing Domestic Disruption and Relational Collapse

The short *A Temporary Matter* by Jhumpa Lahiri initiates with a public announcement which notified residents that power will be cut for one hour every evening for five consecutive days from electric company. This was because the electric company was repairing the damage caused during a snowstorm. However, it seems a logistical inconvenience, but it possesses two hidden spaces if it is looked at through the lens of Gilles Fauconnier's Conceptual Blending Theory (2002). The first space is the literal, physical domain of interrupted electricity which is darkness, stop usage of electric appliances and suspended routines. Additionally, the second space is the psychological and relational domain of Shukumar and Shoba's marriage which was characterised by mutual withdrawal, unspoken grief following the stillbirth of their child, and the progressive dimming of emotional intimacy.

"The notice informed them that it would last only an hour, beginning at eight p.m."
(Lahiri, 1999, p. 1).

The temporal element in the phrase "only an hour" activates both input spaces simultaneously. In the literal space it signals limitation while in the psychological or relational domain it ironically anticipates briefness and controlled the couple's communication. The Conceptual Blending Theory fuses the meaning conveyed by the above phrases not to interpret separately but to have unified meaning and get a hybrid experience. Consequently, the aim of conceptual blending is that the blended space inherits selectively from both inputs and generates emergent meaning. Moreover, the insight that departure, like a power cut, can be temporary or permanent depending on the will of those who endure it.

Light and Darkness as Hybrid Metaphors of Emotional Visibility

The repeated imagery of light in the short story *A Temporary Matter* functions as a compelling hybrid metaphor. It is the one that fuses the literal act of enlightening a darkened room with the psychological act of making the self-visible to another person. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002), conceptual blending is driven by the phrase "vital relations," cross-space functions that link elements across the two input spaces through shared structure. Moreover, in the short story, the vital

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relation which connects the two inputs domestic light source and emotional openness. They both spaces work as adjacency pair which reveals what has been concealed. Furthermore, under candlelight, Shukumar and Shoba start confessing each other the small truths, they hid from each other throughout their months of separation. The candlelit evenings proved to be the emotional evenings where the couple shares everything about their past. In these dark evenings, they both shared with each other the necessary information which they could not be able to share in the lighted evenings. Lahiri writes this situation as:

"In the darkness, things were said that could not have been said in the light" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 9).

There is a famous saying "Every end is a new beginning." This saying reveals that the power cut has proven to be the new beginning for the relationship of Shukumar and Shoba. They shared what they would not be able to share in the illuminated evenings. The darkened evenings have carried the emotional connection in the life of this couple. Consequently, this linguistic economy is characteristic of Lahiri's minimalist stylistics, wherein simple diction performs complex cognitive and emotional work.

Culinary Ritual as a Cultural and Emotional Hybridity

The cooking of Shukumar during the power cuts functions as one of the most sustained metaphors of hybridity as fusion in the short story. This event engages simultaneously the fields of cultural identity, domestic labour and relational care. Additionally, he prepares an elaborate meal using ingredients such as rice, lentils, dishes rooted in Bengali culinary tradition every evening. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) identify "integration networks" as backbone of conceptual blending, wherein various spaces contribute frames which work as a unified blended space. In the culinary scenes, at least three input spaces are active:

1) *The frame of Bengali domestic tradition (associated with maternal care and cultural belonging).*
2) *The frame of the American household in emotional crisis.*
3) *The frame of Shukumar's personal grief and guilt.*

Moreover, cultural identity and relational pair are two of the elements which are represented through events of cooking that took place every single day. It is one of the moments in the short story which took Shukumar close to Shoba and built an intimacy and strong bond between them through the cultural hybridity. Lahiri describes it as:

"He began to grow more deliberate with his cooking, timing the dishes so that they were ready when she walked through the door" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 5).

In the same course, the phrase "more deliberate" is lexically significant which depicts deliberateness imports intentionality and care from the relational domain into the physical act of cooking which enacts the blend at the level of individual word choice. Consequently, the hybridity is not only thematic but is encoded in the syntax and diction of the short story of Lahiri.

The Game of Confession as a Blended Space of Truth and Performance

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In the short story, Shoba starts the game of confession in the night. There was confession of the couples who must disclose the secret of the past life. Moreover, the game has some rules, and it was given a proper structure for the achievement of intimacy and emotional disclosure. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) were of the opinion that the blended spaces generate developing structure that cannot be reduced to either input. In the narrative, the developing structure is a hybrid communicative mode in the form of confessions that are simultaneously true and intimate and strategic. The game was composed of sheer honesty from both partners to achieve the emotional connectivity between them without thinking about the danger of revealing one of the truths from their past life. In the same course, Shoba reveals the truth of her one trip that she had once lied to Shukumar and Shukumar confesses the reality about the sex of their stillborn child without telling her. The progressive escalation of these disclosures tracks the deepening of the blend: as the confessions grow weightier, the game-frame dissolves and the intimacy-frame takes over. Consequently, the exchange of truths and the content of grief and betrayal generate such a tension, and the blend is the site where that tension is held and eventually dissolved.

The Return of Light as Metaphorical Irony: Fusion and Dissolution

The final scene of the story reveals an ironic but devastating reversal of the fusion it has been building. Finally, on the fifth evening, Shukumar delivers his most shattering confession where he had cradled their son and known him in a way Shoba never could. Furthermore, Shoba replies by telling him that she has signed a lease on a new apartment and she has intentions to leave. Meanwhile, the power restored. Lahiri writes:

"They wept together, for the things they now knew" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 22).

The restoration of electric power mapped the return of emotional normalcy and relational distance. It functions as a hybrid metaphor of cruel irony in the narrative the meaning which is conveyed through the restoration of power is the illuminated end of the stories and relationship of Shukumar and Shoba. Significantly, Fauconnier and Turner (2002) argue that the power of a blended space lies in its capacity to compress multiple vital relations into a single and imaginatively integrated scenario. In this closing moment, compression is maximal: light, grief, knowledge, separation, and irrevocable loss are fused into a single image. The title of the story *A Temporary Matter* itself revealed as a hybrid metaphor which refers ostensibly to the power outage but becomes a designation for the marriage itself. Furthermore, what was supposed to be temporary, was in fact the only space in which genuine connection became possible. while, on the other hand, the marriage itself was the temporary matter all along. The highest order emergent meaning the story produces through this repeated irony is realised not through explicit statement but through the accumulated logic of the blended spaces. Consequently, the stylistic analysis *A Temporary Matter* reveals that conceptual blending is not a local decorative device but the organising cognitive architecture of the text. Through that cognitive

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architecture the hybridity of culture, of emotion, of identity are made not merely thematic but experientially immediate for the reader.

Findings

- **The power outage** fuses the literal loss of electricity with the psychological withdrawal between Shukumar and Shoba. Its stated temporariness ("only an hour") comes to mirror the unresolved, provisional state of their marriage, confirming that even minor narrative details activate both domains at once.
- **Light and darkness** function as hybrid metaphors of emotional visibility: candlelight blends physical illumination with psychological openness, so that darkness, paradoxically, becomes the condition under which honesty is possible. This inversion is what enables the couple's confessions.
- **The culinary ritual** fuses cultural identity, domestic labour and relational repair. Shukumar's Bengali cooking blends three input spaces, cultural tradition, marital crisis and personal grief and the hybridity is encoded even at the level of diction, as in the phrase "more deliberate."
- **The confession game** blends honesty, memory, grief and strategy into a single communicative mode. As disclosures escalate, the game-frame dissolves into a pure intimacy-frame, culminating in Shukumar's revelation about their stillborn child.
- **The return of light** produces an ironic, maximally compressed fusion: restored electricity maps onto both emotional resolution and permanent separation. This reveals the title itself as a hybrid metaphor, since "a temporary matter" ultimately names the marriage rather than the power cut.

Together, these findings indicate that hybridity in the story operates as an active, time-bound process of fusion rather than a static condition, consistent with conceptual metaphor theory's account of emergent, blended meaning and hybridity as dynamic identity negotiation. More crucially, it shows that Lahiri's minimalist diction is not incidental but the primary vehicle through which this fusion is achieved.

CONCLUSION

The current study has explored the use of metaphors of hybridity as forms of fusion in a short story *A Temporary Matter* written by Jhumpa Lahiri. In the same course, the current study applied a stylistic approach using Conceptual Blending Theory for a better understanding of different linguistic and metaphorical elements which worked together to create deeper meanings in the story. Furthermore, the stylistic analysis of the short story revealed the artistic qualities of Jhumpa Lahiri to carefully express complex emotions and experiences through simple words, images and symbols. The findings of the study reveal that the power cut in the short story is not only a physical event but also a representation of the emotional distance between Shukumar and Shoba. This power cut has played a vital role in bringing emotional connectivity between the couple in *A Temporary Matter*. Significantly, using this metaphor the writer of the story reveals the domestic disruption which collapsed their relationship. The light and

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darkness show honest communication and the painful realization of the truth that ultimately led to separation. Similarly, Shukumar tried to reconnect with his wife Shoba through the traditional or cultural approach in the form of cooking Bengali meals for her. In this way, cultural practices and emotional experiences are fused together. Likewise, the game of confession becomes a blended space where honesty, memory, grief, and intimacy come together. More significantly, through these confessions both characters gradually reveal hidden feelings that had remained unspoken for a long time. Notably, the analysis shows that Lahiri's minimalist writing style plays a significant role in creating these meanings. Her simple vocabulary, short sentences and ordinary domestic settings allow readers to experience profound emotions without the need for elaborate language. The study confirms that stylistic analysis is an effective tool for uncovering the deeper layers of meaning embedded within literary texts. Along with this, the analysis is methodological: applying Conceptual Blending Theory alongside Contemporary Stylistics shows that emergent meaning in minimalist prose is frequently carried by small, structurally repeated devices, such as the recurrence of light and darkness, rather than by explicit authorial commentary. This indicates that minimalist fiction may reward blending-theory analysis more productively than more descriptively elaborate prose, since the sparseness of the language leaves the reader's inferential work. Therefore the blending process itself, more exposed and more analytically tractable. Taken together, these insights extend existing scholarship on Lahiri and on hybridity by showing that fusion in this narrative is deliberately temporary, and that this temporariness is itself the story's central metaphorical and structural achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, a stylistic analysis has been carried out on the short story *A Temporary Matter* by Jhumpa Lahiri using the framework of Metaphor of Hybridity as Fusion. Further researchers may apply systemic functional analysis using the transitivity model, or another framework drawn from the interpersonal or textual meta-function for understanding of meaning. Future research may also be carried out on the same short story using a discourse analysis framework, such as the cognitive model developed by Van Dijk or the historical approach developed by Ruth Wodak. Furthermore, beyond these directions, several further avenues merit attention. Comparative research could extend the metaphor-of-hybridity-as-fusion framework used here to other stories within "Interpreter of Maladies," or to Lahiri's longer fiction such as "The Namesake," in order to establish whether the fusion patterns identified in "A Temporary Matter" recur across her wider body of work or are specific to this narrative. More crucially, Corpus-assisted stylistics could complement the present close reading by quantifying the frequency and distribution of light, darkness and domestic lexis across Lahiri's corpus, thereby testing at scale the minimalist patterning that this study identifies through manual analysis. Thus, pedagogical research could

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explore how the Conceptual Blending Theory and Contemporary Stylistics framework used in this study might be adapted into classroom materials for teaching close reading and metaphor analysis to undergraduate students of literature and linguistics.

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Appendix

Researchers' Note

This study is the result of the collective academic efforts of all three researchers. The researchers worked collaboratively throughout every stage of the study, including conceptualizing the research, reviewing the relevant literature, collecting and analyzing the textual data, interpreting the findings, and preparing the final manuscript. Each researcher made a meaningful intellectual contribution to the design, execution, and refinement of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and affirm that this work is original,

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