

LANGUAGE OF THE TEEN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE TEEN  
EDITION OF 'I AM MALALA'

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**Abstract**

Malala Yousafzai's *I am Malala* makes a good read not only from the perspective of her voice against those who constantly wage a war against humanity and all that is good in it, it also impresses the gen-Y children with its sheer language and tone. We have, in this paper, attempted to explore how and why she uses a certain set of vocabulary, expressions, punctuation marks, tone and style.

**Keywords:** Malalayousafzai, Teen, Tone, Punctuation, Language, Education, Immature.

**Introduction**

Malala Yousafzai shot to fame ever since she resisted the diktat of the Taliban, a group of militants, and other such forces against girls acquiring education. Her persistent campaign led her to win the coveted Nobel Peace Prize, making her the youngest ever Nobel laureate. But what is more interesting is the teen edition of the autobiography titled *I am Malala*, wherein she employs all sorts of linguistic devices which superficially seems to be immature use of English but they have an impact on the audience it is meant for. Her use of words, expressions, punctuation, style and tone make her autobiography an inspiring one for the millenials.

**1. Vocabulary**

In the teen edition of the book *I am Malala*, the young author uses certain words and expressions that enable her to connect with the people herage rather than the adults.

**1.1 Words**

Malala uses the phrase *girly girl* (Yousafzai: 11), possibly to refer to a girl with typical feminine characteristics. Similarly, she uses the phrase *boyish ways*(Yousafzai: 13), may be to mean the ways or methods that are masculine in nature. Here, she replaces the words feminine and masculine by the more informal terms such as *girly* and *boyish* respectively.

Moreover, the young writer employs certain words which are generally not used in a formal piece of composition. For example, when she writes: *I was finally able to skype with Moniba*(Yousafzai: 177), Malala perhaps intends it as a verb which is not a common practice in formal writing.

In addition, the teen ager uses the word *zigzagging*(Yousafzai: 6) to describe the movements of vehicles on busy streets. She also writes several other words informally such as *exam*(Yousafzai: 3) which is generally written as *examination* in standard narrative. Another example is the word *mishmash*(Yousafzai: 101), possibly to refer to something that is jumbled up.

## 1.2 Expressions

Yousafzai writes: *The road was a series of zigs and zags*(Yousafzai: 21) perhaps to refer to the twists and turns of the roads. Similarly, she writes: *a sibling thing*(Yousafzai: 129), to describe something typical of siblings. Some more such phrases that Malala uses in her book informally are: *everyday clothes*(Yousafzai: 81), *nonsense rhymes*(Yousafzai: 86), *ridiculously happy*(Yousafzai: 129), *sat dreamily*(Yousafzai: 123) and *love affair with his xbox* (Yousafzai: 181).

In my opinion, the crusader against gender bias uses these words and expressions (generally not used in formal discourse) with the intent of reaching out to the people of her generation, i.e. the teenagers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a better way thereby connecting to the readers to sync their minds with those of hers.

## 2. Style

In this book, the Nobel laureate often uses repetitions to convey certain messages. Although repetitions are not commonly used in formal writings, she employs them either to emphasize on certain points or to maintain an informal flow of conversation. When, for instance, she writes: *far, far away*(Yousafzai: 23), she probably means to talk about a place which is far off. Similarly, when she writes: *many, many things*(Yousafzai: 49), it could mean a lot of things.

The teen aged girl further writes: *But she did it again. And again*(Yousafzai: 123) wherein the word *again* gets repeated twice to maintain an informal and personal tone. Several other examples we have tried to identify are: *large, large TV*(Yousafzai: 3), and

*Mountain, mountain, mountain and just a sliver of sky*(Yousafzai: 21) which, besides highlighting the objects also demonstrate her childlike behavior.

Although such repetitions are considered un-English by professional writers, we feel that Malala probably uses them to enhance the reader's understanding. This is because such uses of repetitions are much used by the millennial children in conversations-and not in writings.

### **3. Punctuation**

In the autobiography, Yousafzai often displays inaccurate use of punctuation marks which in my opinion is due to the effect of her age. And the effect is a lack of cohesiveness in her writing. She broadly uses two punctuation marks: full stops and hyphens.

#### **3.1 Hyphens**

The overuse of hyphens shows a lack of professionalism and cohesion in her work. Malala writes: *I was too young- and too stubborn- to appreciate his words*(Yousafzai: 35), and *All girls- and all people are equal*(Yousafzai: 48). It is our understanding that these hyphens are redundant in the context.

The following sentences are some of the several other examples where the young award winning teen-ager displays incorrect use of hyphens:

- *I don't believe in fighting- even though my fourteen year old brother annoys me to no end.* (Yousafzai: 12)
- *The girl I was- before I left home.* (Yousafzai: 2)
- *A girl like any other- although I do have my special talents.* (Yousafzai: 11)
- *Their long, dark hair and pretty faces- made up with lipstick and henna- were lovely to see.* (Yousafzai: 17)

#### **3.2 Full Stops**

Malala's use of innumerable full stops can be observed in the following expression: *We argue over the TV remote. Over chores .Over who's the better student*(Yousafzai: 12). It would have been more appropriate to use commas or may be, semi colons rather than periods.

Let's analyze one more example to bolster our argument that Yousafzai makes too many uses of stops even when they seemed to be unnecessary: *How I missed my home. And my old school. And my books. And even ugly Betty*(Yousafzai: 103).

The following are a few more illustrations that display immature use of full stops:

- *I had had my taste of exacting revenge. And it was bitter.* (Yousafzai: 15)
- *Generally, when a Pashtun man loses an argument, he never really forgets. Or forgives.* (Yousafzai: 33)

We think the improper use of punctuation marks makes the writing appear shabby and immature. Furthermore, it reflects the unprofessional use of English which teenagers ordinarily indulge in. She uses lots of punctuation marks even when they are not really needed.

#### 4. Tone

A personal tone and a conversational style is maintained throughout the book. This means that the Nobel laureate writes her autobiography as if she is narrating it in a personal conversation. For instance, she says: *But boys are, well boys*(Yousafzai: 13). Sentences are generally not written in such a manner in formal pieces of writings but are rather used when two friends speak informally to each other. Sentences such as *They wouldn't take any other classes: no science, no maths, no literature*(Yousafzai: 34) and *Most Pashtun women would cry and beg and cling to their husband's sleeves*(Yousafzai: 50) puts our argument in perspective.

The repetitions of the words *no* and *and* in the sentences mentioned in the aforesaid passage add to the conversational style of Malala in her book. She also often begins sentences with *And so*(Yousafzai: 2), which is typical of teenagers while conversing.

Several other phrases and sentences that display the conversational style employed by the Pakistani teenager are: *Cook and laugh and talk*(Yousafzai: 15), *We cheered and clapped and jumped up and down*(Yousafzai: 57), *I said it seven, eight, nine times I lost track*(Yousafzai: 60), *I turned on the TV- and all I got was static. I switched stations. More static* (Yousafzai: 64), *Then we listened for the sirens. Then we prayed*(Yousafzai: 66), *Two taps, that was our code*(Yousafzai: 13).

Although the use of such a personal tone is considered to be incorrect and immature English, we are convinced that Malala has rightly used such a tone to connect more closely with her contemporaries i.e. the teenaged readers of her book. For instance, an adult would have probably written: *I went around the house multiple times* instead of *I went around the house once, twice, often three times*(Yousafzai: 50), as Malala writes in her inspiring book.

Similarly, she writes: *Finally, I cried. I cried and cried and cried some more. Oh, how I cried*(Yousafzai: 155). A formal writer would probably have simply written: *I cried immensely*. However, a teenaged reader can put herself or himself in Malala's shoes and feel the intensity of the situation because of the tone she uses in her book. The author achieves a greater intimacy with her readers or even demolishes the gap between herself and the audience it is aimed for.

### **Conclusion:**

In her book 'I am Malala' the brave young writer attempts to inspire the millennials to take hostile forces (e.g. the Talibans) head on to eliminate fear of attending school. In the teen edition of the same title, she raises her voice on behalf of all the children in the world who cannot speak for themselves. She achieves this by using personal tone and conversational style. She employs a style of English which bridges the gap between the readers i.e. the teenagers and the writer herself. Besides, Malala allows the reader to connect more intimately with the story of her life.

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