



**DEVIATION OF LINGUISTIC CODE IN POETRY:
DECODING AND PLEASURE OF READING**

Milind M. Ahire

Assistant Professor of English,
M.S.G.Arts, Science & Commerce College, Malegoan camp,
Dist. -Nashik, SavitribaiPhule Pune University, Maharashtra (India)

Abstract

English language as a discipline (a subject of study) has recently been introduced from the first standard in India. However, it has accumulated the position of a global lingua franca even before such introduction all over the world. Aims and objectives of introducing English as a subject of academic study vary according to the level of learners, but its requisiteness is undeniable at present. To be precise, introduction of English literature at university level is no more only the discipline but a medium to learn the language through its literature as it tends to provide authentic language input. Alongside, it serves the purpose to arise aesthetic desire. It may realize either reading or have literary reflection. Among many of its features, unique use of language in literary works is a potential feature. The present paper focuses on anormal/deviant use of language in literature. Further, it discusses how apparent deviant feature contributes to meaning and pleasure of decoding meaning.

Key Words: Deviation, Linguistic Code, Aesthetic Pleasure

1.0. Introduction

Literature is unique in its ability to use language which is charged, heightened and modified. A literary artist, in order to achieve such effect constructively violates the rules of normal language use. However, such violation is by nature creative and does not make a literary work meaningless which often is the case in normal language use. Moreover, it gifts a literary work a special quality which if understood, appeals to the aesthetic nature of the reader's perception.





A literary artist tries to achieve such effect in a number of ways, especially using literary devices. Such literary devices change reader's perception deviated from general one. These help the reader analyze a literary work and relish aesthetic pleasure by doing so. Deviation is one of such devices. It denotes to deliberate, systematic, and purposive violation of linguistic rules whereby use of language does not confirm to the prescriptive rules of grammar. In literature prescriptive rules of language use are deliberately violated to achieve intensity of emotions, feelings or thoughts. Deviation as a literary device may take different shades in poetry. Thus, we find phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, historical types of deviation in literary works. The present paper discusses often used shade of deviation, i.e. lexical and grammatical. Further deliberations focus on how deviation helps the reader analyze a poem and relish aesthetic pleasure by decoding sense. E.E. Cumming's poem 'Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town' has been selected as an example.

2.0. Deviation

In generative grammar it refers to a linguistic unit which is ungrammatical or ill-formed, i.e. which does not confirm to the prescriptive rules of the language. Deviation refers to divergence in frequency from a norm. Such divergence may occur by breaking normal rules of linguistic structure (whether phonological, lexical, grammatical) which is statistically infrequent. For instance, we can think of human behavior. Some people are considered as abnormal by society. Reason, their behavior does not confirm to the socially acceptable behavioural norms, therefore, they become abnormal. Their deviation (behavior) yields them a quality that is abnormality, i.e. violating the rules of normal behavior. In literary works especially in poetry different shades of deviation can be found. Irrespective of shade, all denote to the violation of customary or traditional way of using words. Such violation is deliberate and constructive with a purpose to foreground the idea effectively. Through violation, a literary artist tries to put forth something crucial at the focal point. As mentioned above, deviation has several shades. Let us discuss them in nutshell.





2.1. Lexical Deviation

In lexical deviation a literary artist makes use of new words or coins such words to create effect which normal words may not create. He/she uses such words or phrases to sharpen or intensify his/her sense of expressing his/her emotions. For instance, in T.S. Eliot's 'The Wasteland' (1922) the poet has used the strange combination of words. Usually in general conversation the prefix **-fore** denotes to 'beforehand' with a small group of words like 'foresee, forewarn, foretell, foreknow, etc. Eliot has used the word 'foresuffered' in the following line,

And I Tiresias have foresuffered all.

2.2. Grammatical Deviation

In grammatical deviation the position reserved for words of a certain class is filled up by a word from a different class. Regular or most common positions of words, where they seem most natural, are replaced by other words which in traditional way don't have grammatical right to be there. In grammatical deviation regular syntactic rules are bent; sometimes broken in order to achieve intended effect. Grammar is meant to represent the native speaker's knowledge and so to account for his/her ability to produce and interpret his/her language correctly. This compels us to believe that any sentence that is not generated by grammar is in principle not the part of speaker's knowledge and will therefore if produced not be interpretable. The following lines, for example, 'You through into an oven did a rabbit look' haven't followed syntactic rules as per grammar, however, is thought intelligible if it occurs in literature.

2.3. Semantic Deviation

It is reasonable to translate 'semantic deviation' mentally into 'nonsense or absurd'. An approach to poetic lines with general standards of significance leads us to non -sense interpretation, whereas to approach such lines in literary context helps us to generate meaning. Wordsworth's (2015) famous poetic line, 'Child is the father of man' may seem non -sense. Indeed, its face value is of a normal nature. The deliberate, unimaginative standards of the reader's imagination would see it impossible to understand 'A' to be 'B's father' while A is a child of B who is a man. Such superficial lines may not be intelligible when analysed with the





dictionary interpretation. The reader has to interpret the word father beyond the sense of a progenitor.(emphasis mine) Semantic deviation in poetry compels the reader to interpret words in other ways beyond their dictionary significance. On surface level, words in poetry denote regular or customary significance but at deeper level, here I mean at imaginative level, denote to something apparently of inscrutable significance. In poetry, semantic deviation leads our mind to interpretation at the level of thinking.

2.4. Dialectical Deviation

In dialectical deviation, the poet sometimes deviates from standard form of English to rustic or rural words, phrases and expressions to evoke rustic flavor. The sole purpose of dialectical deviation in poetry is to sensitize readers with sensibilities of the characters appear in the poem. Such license is very common to poets compare to prose writers. In Edmund Spenser's poem, The Shepherd's Calendar (1579) he uses homely provincial words like heydeguyes (a form of dance, rontes (young bullocks), weanell (new weaned kid or lamb, etc. to evoke the flavor of rustic naivety in keeping with the sense of pastoral.

2.5. Historical Deviation

Poets have the ability and freedom to range over the multifariousness of language irrespective of boundaries of dialect or register. In historical deviation a poet may make use of words, phrases, terms, quotations from the by gone age. T.S. Eliot has similar kind of view regarding this. He opines that a poet in the creation of a work of art must be aware of the past and has to modify/recreate the past with his/her individual talent. Historical deviation can be traced in Neo-classical poetry as Neo-classical poets followed classical literary figures. In doing so, they used Latin and Greek words which consequently reflected classical culture and sensibility in their poetry. T. S. Eliot's 'East Coker' (1940) is its best example.

The association of men and women
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie
A dignified and commodious, sacrament
Two and two, necessary coniunction,





Holding each other by the hand or arm
Which betokenethconcorde.

When literature is considered as a discourse, a linguist can describe how literary texts exemplify the system of language as represented in his/her grammar, or if they do not exemplify it then how it deviates from rules. Grammar denotes to represent a speaker's knowledge of his/her language therefore what is ungrammatical in principle making incomplete sense. But ungrammatical sentences in literary writing do make sense and a poem which deviates from grammatical rules as text is nevertheless interpretable.

The reader makes possible attempts to interpret a literary text. The disjointed syntax appeals to the reader's interest. Therefore, such disjointed syntax, if found in a literary work makes the reader interpret it with his/her knowledge of the principles of grammar. The reader looks at such lines from different angles, when he/she reaches to tangible interpretation, consequently relishes the pleasure of reading literature. Sentences following normal grammar do not make the reader involve higher level of thinking. Moreover, words used in literature individually as well as collectively bear significance. Therefore, the reader needs to diligent while reading a literary work. Such activity finally leads the reader to have pleasure in reading a literary piece.

In general conversation, intention of a speaker is conveyed with his/her stress on particular words. However, it is not feasible in poetry. Here, the reader is unaware of the poet's intention and try to decipher meaning only through printed words on paper. So, the poet makes special use of words having with him/her the gift of poetic license and foregrounds certain words to generate special meaning. This line of thought leads us to 'Prague Linguistic Circle' whose harbingers were Roman Jakobson (Russian), Jan Mukarovsky, and Rene Wellek. The circle views literature as a special mode of language use. The language that literature uses has different purpose to serve than the language of ordinary use. Jan Mukarovsky says " literature exemplifies the linguistic system in a different way to foreground, i.e. to bring something to the highest prominence, to make it dominant in perception, what is special while back grounding





the referential aspects”.(1998) The foregrounding of a linguistic unit provides a literary work the quality called defamiliarization.

Deviation in poetry furnishes this quality to its linguistic units by violating characteristically the norms of everyday language use. Such deviation defamiliarizes, i.e offers a new perception to reader’s experience of everyday language. When the reader comes across such defamiliarising or estranges perception while reading poetry, it leads him/her to the process of decoding and relishing aesthetic pleasure. This, as formalists view, offers freshness of sensation to mind.

3.0. Discussion

E. E. Cummings’s poetry is famous for his artistic use of deviation. The language used in Cumming’s poetry lacks (constructively) more or less one of the components of co-relation like expectancy, compatibility and proximity is not observed. We find absence of one of these components in Cumming’s poem ‘Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town’ which obstructs primary/surface meaning of a poem. A deliberate obstruction of primary meaning is often the cause of poetic meaning. Out with one of these components brings in the feature that is deviation. Here is his poem ‘Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town’ (2015)

Anyone lived in a pretty how town
With up so floating many bells down
Spring, summer, autumn, winter
He sang his didn’t , he danced his did.
Women and men (both little and small)
Cared for anyone not at all
They sowed their isn’t they reaped their same.
Soon moon stars rain
Children guessed (but only a few)
And down they forgot as up they grew
Autumn winter spring summer
That no one loved him more by more





Where by now and tree and leaf
She laughed his joy she cried his grief
Bird by snow and stir by still
Anyone's any was all to her.
Someones married their everyones
Laughed their carvings and did their dance
(sleep wake hope and then) they
Said their nevers they slept their dream
Stars rain sun moon
(and only the snow can begin to explain
How children are apt to forget to remember
With up so floating many bell down)
One day anyone died I guess
(and none stopped to kiss his head)
Busy folk buried them side by side
Little by little and was by was
All by all and deep by deep
And more and more they dream their sleep
Noone and everyone earth by April
Wish by sprit and if by eyes
Women and men (both dong and ding)
Summer autumn winter spring
Reaped their sowing and went their came
Sun moon stars rain.

Having read the poem the reader tries to put the words in normal order to comprehend its primary significance. He/she starts reconstructing the narrative which involves an attempt to bridge the gap between the way the narrative is put forth and the way it can be understood.





However, the reader needs to understand the nature of deviation as explained earlier and then move on to reconstruct the words into most possible normal order. This process is of transforming surface structure into deep structure. It is of less importance to mention what I have understood the poem as a whole since everybody's reading would provide variations in pleasing one's senses.

Grammatical deviation dominates this poem. The words, for instance, 'didn't, did, isn't' are used as noun which in general are verbs. Similarly, the word how, which is a question word is used as an adjective. Again, we have spilt phrasal verbs like up they instead of they grew up and other phrases which are reverse in order like women and men, dong and ding. Similarly, throughout the poem predicate is fore grounded and the subject is back grounded since it does not bear special significance but anyone. What happened is considered as more important than whom it happened to.

Here, the reader needs to interpret the poem with the help of his/her knowledge of language structure and further reinterpret the structure used in the poem within the framework of normal structure. This activity leads the reader achieve pleasure of reading poetry.

4.0. Conclusion

To conclude, I feel that the process of reconstructing the structure of a poem in a normal order taking place at cognitive level makes the reader engage him/her in the creative process of interpretation. The process yields pleasure at a point when the reader satisfies his/her search of a probable meaning. But in this process the reader does not neglect the anormal order used in the poem. He/she attempts to account for the poet's use of anormal structure on the basis of his/her understanding of the normal structure. Thus, it is deviation (of any type) that engages the reader in the creative process which yields pleasure of reading poetry. Alongside, another reason of pleasure in reading poetry or any form of literature is the feeling of the reader about his/her ability to analyze a poem though for a primary aim, i. e. understanding the meaning of a poem.





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