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Literary Language: A Unique Experimentation

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Abstract

Literary language is a style or form of language used in literary writing. The intent of this investigation is to disclose how and why literary writers foreground their texts and what meanings and effects are associated with foregrounding, deviation, creativity, Style and aesthetics on literature. This paper therefore appraised the characteristics of the language of literature, with a view to revealing the potency of creativity, style and aesthetics in some African and non-African poems and novels, which in turn portrays the skilfulness and dexterity of literary writers. Specifically, it examined the foregrounded parts of selected literary works; and to achieve this purpose, linguistic benchmarks were applied to these literary works. The descriptive system of data analysis, primary and secondary data collection methods and the foregrounding/deviation theory were employed. This survey therefore revealed that the literary genius contravenes the linguistic norms deliberately because he or she believes that the most proficient means of achieving distinction in writing is the use of distorted and strange forms. Thus, style heightens the language of literature to create a special effect and special meaning to the audience in order to arousing the interest and consciousness of the reader and society at large.

Key Words: Deviation, Foregrounding, Literary Artist, Literature and Stylistics.

Introduction

Nnolim (2009) defined Literature as a language embellished with pleasurable accessories. He continues that it is around the embroidered use of language that the creative oomph of the story deploys itself. To toe the line of Nnolim, Nwahunanya in Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2009, p. 24) noted that "Literature is an imaginative verbal construct that emerges from the creative consciousness of literary artists. In confirmation of the above opinion, Nnolim in Awa (2014, p. 2) gave a most terse and laconic definition of literature as:

That writing which is more emotionally moving than intellectually instructive;
 that writing which primarily deals with a make-believe world;
 that writing whose language is highly connotative rather than denotative,
 that writing which is symbolic rather than literal,
 that writing which is figurative rather than plain;
 that writing we regard as “verbal works of art”,
 that writing that is remarked by its fictionality and imaginative import;
 that writing in which ideas are wrapped up in symbols, images, concepts;
 that writing which normally catapults us into another world of appearance and reality through the powers of the imagination;
 that writing in which the aesthetic function dominates;
 that writing in which the ultimate aim of the author is to produce an object of art.

This particular definition captures the whole plan of this enquiry because it is all about foregrounding, which takes pleasure in defamiliarization of speech, the otherness of language, literariness and aesthetics of literary exploration. Accepting language as a requisite tool in the hands of a literary artist Wellek and Warren in Nnabuihe (2004, p. 15) noted that:

Language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of pictures, or sounds of music. But one should know that the language is not mere inert matter like stone but is itself a creation of man and is thus charged with the cultural heritage of a linguistic group.

Taking the vision of the above writers, Williams in Emezue (2012) is of the opinion that the literary artist expresses all his perspectives through language. This means that there is an unassailable tie between language and literature. In corroborating this, Brain (1993) believed that Literature cannot be detached from language. This belief takes credence in the words of Fowler, Leech and Short and Osundare in Emezue (2012) when they said that an idyllic literary artist must know how language operates and if a writer does not know anything about linguistics, he or she is like a sculptor who does not understand the language of the wood he is using. Hence, literature is language in use and man’s superlative use of language is revealed in literature. This is why Emezue (2012) agreed that “No serious study of literature is complete without recourse to language.” Consequently, Abugu (2010, p. 1) attested that: “Language and Literature are inextricably connected, in the sense that language is the basic raw material or medium, through which literature is produced, whether they are novels or poems, plays or folktales...”

While language is a system of communication, literature is the content being communicated. Literature, in all its forms, cannot exist outside language. Literature therefore involves the manipulation of language for creative purposes. Specifically, literary resourcefulness involves a manipulation of language for beauty and signification. Creativity involves the production of novel, useful, surprising and unpredictable works. Creativity entails the creation of something different from others like a work of art, a novel, a joke, and the like. This idea makes Goodman and O’ Halloran in Awa (2014) to say that “Artistic creativity is a product of outstanding writers and extraordinary property of imaginative people and it focuses on the writer’s skill in manipulating the overall linguistic form of the text.” Accordingly, the main element of literary creativity is foregrounding. The formalist critics are of the opinion that foregrounding is a

stylistic device, which takes pride in defamiliarization of everyday speech and conclude that “the essence of ‘poeticity’ is the deformation of language.” Foregrounding consequently is defined simply as “to bring to the front.” So, writers arrange words in such a way to attract the attention of their audience. Taking this view point, Mstultz in Awa (2014, p. 33) said:

Foregrounding" literally means "to bring to the front." The writer uses the sounds of words or the words themselves in such a way that the readers' attention is immediately captivated. The most common means employed by the writers is repetition. Our attention is immediately captivated by repetition of the sounds of certain words or by the words themselves and we begin to analyse the reasons the writer is repeating this particular sound or word.

Goodman and O’ Halloran (2016) then upheld that the major constituents of foregrounding are deviation and repetition of linguistic structures. Deviation entails making stylistic choices that depart from the tenets of everyday language while repetition of linguistic patterns entails twisting of natural language patterns. Thus, foregrounding focuses on how literary artists say something rather than to what they say. Affirming this view, Jakobson in Goodman and O’Halloran (2006) describe literature especially poetry as “organised violence committed on ordinary speech” because words, phrases and other grammatical structures depart from what is expected. As a result, they describe deviation as “expected irregularity in a text” while Mukarovsky in Goodman and O’ Halloran (2006, p. 60) described it as “a deviation from the standard” or “an aesthetic intentional distortion from the standard”.

The above citations imply that literary language is artistic expression in which an ideal critic who is apparently grounded in basic linguistics conveys his ideas aesthetically more beautiful and stylized for attraction, beautification and signification. And so, his language prioritizes the mode of communication of his message above the message itself. All these bring literariness to the fore.

Theoretical Review

This investigation is hinged on foregrounding theory. It is postulated by Mukarovsky who described foregrounding as the calculated contravention of the rules of language to make the literary piece stand out. He believed that the distortion of the norm is the soul of literary works and that it is inappropriate to ask the literary artist to abide by the norm. Foregrounding theory is the most important theory within stylistics analysis and foregrounding analysis. It is the most important part of the stylistic analysis of any text. Foregrounding theory assumes that literature employs unusual forms of language to break up the reader's routine behaviour and replace commonplace views and perspectives by new and astounding insights and sensations. Consequently, literary language deviates from norms which characterize the ordinary use of language at the morphological, phonological, grammatical, semantic, syntactic, graphological, lexical and pragmatic levels. One way to produce foregrounding in a text then is through linguistic deviation, which introduces extra linguistic patterns into a text such as by repeating linguistic structures more than we would ordinarily. This leads to linguistic and stylistic deviation. They occur when a literary artist chooses not to abide by the rules of his language. He transcends the rules and exceeds the limits of the linguistics modus operandi which characterizes the language. It is the breaking of rules which others obey. So, in literary parlance, deviation is taken as poetic licence or writer’s license. There are basically, two types of foregrounding, parallelism and deviation. Parallelism is described as unexpected regularity while deviation is expected irregularity. Foregrounding is generally used to highlight important parts of a text to make for memorability and to invite explanation. Nordquist (2018) maintained that foregrounding makes the attention to shift away from what is said to how it is said. Halliday

in Nordquist (2018) described foregrounding as the phenomenon of linguistic highlighting, where features of the language of a text stand out, while Simpson (2004) said foregrounding is a technique for making strange in language or a method of defamiliarization in textual composition.

This study, adopts the theory of foregrounding or deviation because foregrounding is the preoccupation of this exploration. This exploration basically looks at how the literary artist toes the line of linguistic slips just to capture the interest of his/her audience.

Style and Stylistics

Kolawole in Lawal (1997) defined style as the management of language while Stylistics involves the application of linguistics to literature. Particularly, stylistics is the violent management of language in the art of literature. Adebayo in Lawal (1997) sees stylistics as the analysis and description of the linguistic features of a text in relation to their meaning. But Leech and Short and Alabi in Awa (2014) defines stylistics as the linguistic study of style. So, stylistics looks at what use is made of language, and what is going on within the language. Thus, the concern of stylistics is language variation and the distinctive features within and across texts. Ohman, Crystal, Daway, Levin, Ojaide in Awa (2014, p. 40) see stylistics as “an account of the semantic force of phonetics, intonation, syntax, lexical structures that a writer employs in his text.” Hence, Awa (2014, p. 40) cited that “stylistics is purposive and selective in that it relies on the features of a text to explain the role of language in a particular text.” As a result, Widdowson (1975) viewed stylistic as a connection between linguistics and literature. In his own view (Bloomfield, 1976) explained stylistics as the interpretation of the linguistic elements in a text. He continues that stylistics explains the peculiar choices made by an individual or social group in the use of language. So, style can be described as the linguistic habits of a particular writer or the way language is used in a particular genre, period, writing or by a particular school of thought. It is therefore possible to sift “the style of Adichie, the style of Shakespeare, the style of Milton, the style of the eighteen century writers, the style of the Victorian period, Elizabethan or Romantic period and the style of the African writers and even the style of an anonymous writer.” Style enables a writer to make an enabling choice. So, style is also a deviation from the norms of language. Here, the literary artist drops all the linguistic rules forced on him by linguistics for artistic liberation, beautification, enchantment and information. Armed with poetic license, the literary writer deviates syntactically, or grammatically where word-order rules are neglected. So, the norm of grammatical accuracy and acceptability are slighted. Graphologically, rules guiding the way and pattern of putting graphic symbols on paper to encode meaning are overlooked. Phonetically, common acceptable accents are lapsed. Lexically, restrictions on words keeping company are tossed aside. Morphologically, word-formation guides are cast aside and at the discourse level, rules governing text organization are passed over. These stylistic deviations make for foregrounding, which aims at making a work strange in order to achieve defamiliarization and to make a work stand out, causing the readers’ attention to shift away from what is said to how it is said (Nordquist, 2018). A foregrounded work then stands out from ordinary writing.

Stylistic Deviation

The first component of literariness is stylistic deviation. Stylistic deviation is altering the vocabulary, syntactic structures, discourse structures for the purpose of creativity in literary texts. This results in defamiliarization. A license is an official permission or permit to do, use or own something. Fortified with this authority, the literary artists commit all the linguistic deviations observed in literary works. Language deviation refers to the intentional selection or choice of language use outside of the norm. Stylistic deviation is concerned with the use of

different styles from the expected norm or language use in a given genre of writing. This is based on the ideas that there are rules, conventions and regulations that guide the use of language which must be executed. But these conventions are not complied with. Yet, instead of reprimanding the literary artist (the linguistic outlaw), he is admired and eulogized. As a result, Awa (2011, p. 41) maintained thus:

Therefore, the poetic immunity of the literary artist – the poet,
the novelist and the playwright has paved way for
infringements in their literary artifacts.

As a consequence, at the graphological level for instance, we may see capital letters where they are not supposed to be. At the syntactic stage, subject and verb may not agree in number or the normal order of the clause elements may not be observed. For instance, Adjuncts may come before the subject. At the lexico-semantic point, words that shouldn't keep company are deliberately brought together. Goodman and O'Halloran in Awa (2014, 35) cites a good example of stylistic deviation from the first and second lines of Ariels's song in Shakespeare's Tempest

Full Fathom Five thy Father Lies
Of his bones are corral made

The first line shows a grammatical deviation.

Full fathom (fathom) five (adverbial of place) thy father lies

They explain that in the English language grammatical structure, adverbs of place usually come at the end of the sentence. So, the "unmarked" arrangement then is

Thy father (subject) lies (verb) full fathom five (adverb of place). Goodman and O'Halloran suggest that there is also a second grammatical deviation in the second line of the text.

Of his bone are corral (coral) made

In the normal English Language structural arrangement, this should have read:

Corals are made of his bones.

In all, stylistic or linguistic deviation enables the literary writer to achieve unique aims experiences and effects, which he would not have been able to achieve using everyday normal and standard language because deviation enables him or her to transcend the limits of the language (Leech 1985).

Linguistics Benchmarks

Awa (2011) and Awa (2015) gave a guide on grammatical correctness and acceptability. She maintained that there are regulations on language use at all levels of linguistic analysis. Phonologically, common accent is recommended for language users for the sake of comprehensibility and interpretation. The Syntactic level recommends that the phrase, clause, and sentences patterns are not to be broken. Thus, the Noun phrase and the Verbal phrase are necessary sentence components and so, omission of any of these components is not tolerated as it renders the sentence ungrammatical. Semantically, improper collocation of words is not accepted as this renders the combination outlandish. So, words must keep their natural company. Orthographically or graphologically, words must be spelt correctly, days of the week, sentences, geographical locations, personal names, months, historical events, book titles, plays, poems, languages and the like must begin with capital letters. Finally, at the sentence level, transitional

markers and linkages should be used at the intersentential and inter-paragraph levels for coherence, logical and effective endings. The omission of these rules makes the works bizarre.

The Literary Artist, The Linguistic Outlaw

Literary writing is an incredible expedition. The poetic license offered to the literary artist results in literariness, defamiliarization, deautomatization, linguistics foregrounding. The literary writers can therefore, going by the words of Osundare in Lawal (1997) 'bend', flout or break all the linguistic "thou-shall-nots" "linguistic rules for creativity for stylistic effects." In other words, the literary artists jettison all the linguistic rules tied on him for literary liberation and consequently, Awa (2011) opined that he opts for structures to match his communication needs. Osundare in Awa (2011, 4) opined that this is a mark of creativity and sagacity on the part of the literary artist in the following words:

The remarkable writer is one who has been able to bend if not break the pre-set rules of language, the linguistic outlaw who has flouted its hallowed thou-shall-nots. Every language has within its system a loophole, an elastic edge for the adventurous user to widen and stretch. Not infrequently, language users ignore or even reject the choice forced on them by language, substitute their own choices, thus liberating their styles and language...

Analysis of Linguistic Deviations in Literary Works

Structural Parallelism

Isabella or the Pot of Basil

And she forgot the stars, the moon and the sun,
And she forgot the blue above the tree,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not; but in peace.
Hung over the sweet Basil evermore
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.

In Keats' *Isabella*, the first four lines of stanza 53 is replete with repetition used to portray the heavy weight of sorrow of a girl whose lover was killed by her brothers who hated the boy's advances to their sister and for stylistic consequences. In a "marked" sentence, a single sentence would serve this purpose thus;

As a result of her grief, she forgot the moon, the star, the sun,
the dell and the chilly autumn breeze.

The same applies to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. As an eloquent story-teller who knows the effect of hammering on linguistic elements such as words, phrases and clauses, Achebe utilizes the power of repetition to highlight the enormity of the defilement done on Umuofia people and on their culture by western culture (Onuigbo, 2019)

All our gods are weeping
Idemili is weeping
Ogwugwu is weeping
Agbala is weeping

All the others are weeping
Our dead fathers are weeping

Yankson in Awa (2011, 11) argues that the pattern is an enlargement of a single noun phrase (NP) into six places. This typifies linguistic foregrounding or breach of the linguistic rule because a single statement “**All our gods are weeping**” would have been enough but Achebe decides to evoke all the other gods for rhetorical effects and to depict the extent of damage done against the people of Umuofia by Western culture.

Okpanachi in Awa (2015, 54) displays such structural repetition in his “The Eaters of the Living.” He exploits the clout of repetition to emphasize the corrupt tendencies of African politicians thus:

Ours is a nation of eaters
They eat everything and everyone
They eat like the termites
They eat like the locust
They eat like cancer cells
They eat like acids
They eat the festering sores of the people
They eat our phlegm
They eat our corpse
They eat names and reputations
They eat our money

Okpanachi uses repetition to stress a nation ravaged by anomie, corruption, violence and inordinate ambition and power and thus the degeneration indicative of postcolonial failure and this fact necessitates his preoccupation with funeral imagery.

Graphological Deviation

Lawal (1997) brings in Soyinka’s POST MORTEM from “Idanre and Other Poems” to reveal graphological departure.

there are more functions to freezing plant
than stocking beer, cold biers to mortuaries
submit their dues, harnessed – glory be

in the cold hand of death
his mouth with cotton filled, his man – pike
shrunk to sub – soil grub

fore - knowledge after death?
his flesh confesses what has stilled
his tongue: masked fingers think from him
to learn, how not to die.
let us love all things of grey; grey slabs
grey scalpel, one grey sleep and, grey image.

(Awa, 2011) argues that Soyinka specifically writes the whole “Post Mortem” in the lower case to express his astonishment and bafflement at the way in which the extraordinary structure of man is so cruelly reduced in death both in size and in status, which signifies the impermanence, nothingness, meaningless and vanity of life.

Again, some poems take uncanny arrangements, as seen in Dylan Thomas's "vision and prayer." The aim is simply to make artistic statements.

"Vision and Prayer" By Dylan Thomas

i
W h o
Are you
Who is born
In the next room
So loud to my own
That I can hear the womb
Opening and the dark run
Over the ghost and the dropped son
Behind the wall thin as a wren's bone?
In the birth bloody room unknown
To the burn and turn of time
And the heart print of man
Bows no baptism
But dark alone
Blessing on
The wild
Child.

I
Must lie
Still as stone
By the wren bone
Wall hearing the moan
Of the mother hidden
And the shadowed head of pain
Casting to-morrow like a thorn
And the midwives of miracle sing
Until the turbulent new born
Burns me his name and his flame
And the winged wall is torn
By his torrid crown
And the dark thrown
From his loin
To bright
Light.

When
The wren
Bone writhes down
And the first dawn
Furied by his stream
Swarms on the kingdom come

Of the dazzler of heaven
 And the splashed mothering maiden
 Who bore him with a bonfire in
 His mouth and rocked him like a storm
 I shall run lost in sudden
 Terror and shining from
 The once hooded room
 Crying in vain
 In the cauldron
 Of his
 Kiss

In the name of the lost who glory in
 The swinish plains of carrion
 Under the burial song
 Of the birds of burden
 Heavy with the drowned
 And the green dust
 And bearing
 The ghost
 From
 The ground
 Like pollen
 On the black plume
 And the beak of slime
 I pray though I belong
 Not wholly to that lamenting
 Brethren for joy has moved within
 The inmost marrow of my heart bone

Grammatical Deviation

Awa (2011) presents some syntactic deviation. This is category rule defiance and the most frequent syntactic violation in literature especially in poetry is hyperbatons. Otagburagu (2009, p. 18) described hyperbaton as the “Arrangement of words out of their usual order.” It is the distortion of the normal syntactic sequence of SVOCA arrangement. Hence, the literary artist can place adjuncts or verbs at the initial position of his sentences. Therefore, the following arrangements are feasible in literary works.

VOSA – verb + object +subject +adjunct

VSOA – verb + subject + object + adjunct

OVSA – object + verb + subject + adjunct

SAOV – subject + adjunct + object + verb

Now fades the glimm’ing landscape on the sight (AVSA)

Culled from Gray’s “Elegy written in a country churchyard”

... line 5

This line has the word order of AVSA – Adjunct + verb + subject + adjunct instead of

The glimmering landscape fades now on the sight. (SVAA)

A particular word class could be used as another word form; as seen in Gerald Manley Hopkins's "Windhover". He refers to **the mastery of, the achieve of the thing**. The lexical item **achieve of the thing** belongs to the verbal group but in the above line the poet has placed it in the nominal category. In line 27 of the "Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard" we have:

How jocund did they drive their team afield. "Jocund", which is an adjective is used in the place of an adverb, "Jocundly". This sentence should have read **How jocundly did they drive their team afield**. In Awoonor William's "Song of Sorrow" line 2 a transitive verb has been used intransitively. **But those who are lucky sit in the middle and forget** "Forget", a transitive verb is used intransitively. Helon Habila ignores all the "hallowed thou shall nots" of grammar for creativity to take precedence; as seen in the following expressions in his *Measuring Time*.

- a. "We speaks English," the scout said impatiently interrupting Idrissa's hesitant translation (P.63)
- b. We likes people speaks good English (P.63)
- c. Tomorrow we leaves. We goes to Chad, if you survives Chad, after many monthses, we goes to Libya for trainings. Comes here by six a.m. tomorrow. (P.63)
- d. Samuel Paul wants me to go with him to Liberia because we are now strong friends... (P. 9)
- e. But let me tell you step by step how I come to this place. (P.130)
- f. Me and one of the patients sometimes help the French men to bury the dead.
- g. I think she hate all of us. (P. 136)
- h. Then she say "I want to thank you" (P.137)
- i. The doctors were over happy. (P. 140)
- k. I want to say that I am outside Liberia now, and things are more better than they have been so far...

It is a sad story and he cries whenever he remember.

By design Habila ignores the dictates of grammar to show class distinction, because the users of the nonstandard statements are school dropouts. Again, Habila uses this medium to bring to light the neglect and abandonment meted to these youths by society and their parents. Again, it is for humour and to whet his creativity.

Semantic Deviation

Awa (2011) describes semantic deviation as the violation of the selection restriction rules. It entails the breach of collocation rules. For instance, a verb could be made to keep the company of a non-human object, as in **The heavens wept**. This is personification. It is used for rhetorical and theatrical effects. William Wordsworth bestows animate and human features on an inanimate noun, daffodils thus:

I wondered lonely like a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils...

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze...
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance...
 The waves beside them danced;
 but they outdid the sparkling waves in glee.

Wordsworth personifies the daffodils, as if they were capable of human feelings and actions such as dancing and jocundity. This is a breach of collocation rule because in the English language code all these violate the rules of word collocation. In Yankson (2006) Achebe vested on inanimate objects like flutes and drums human qualities by making the drum to beat and the flute to sing. Sleep and silence, abstractions, have been made to swallow Umuofia, a clan. Ekwe, a gong has been made to talk, which up until now has been the exclusive preserve of man who has + animate + human attributes. All these make for the heightening of literary essence. (Awa, 2014).

Fowler (1981:87) cites a good example of personification with T.S Eliot's Rhapsody on the "Windy Night"

The lamp sputtered,
 The lamp muttered in the dark.
 The lamp hummed:
 'Regard the moon,
 La lune ne garde aucune rancune,
 She winks a feeble eye,
 She smiles into corners,
 She smoothes the hair of the grass.
 The moon has lost her memory....'

In this extract 'lamp' a noun phrase (NP) with the features [-human-animate] keeps company with (VP) 'muttered', 'sputtered', 'hummed', 'winks', 'smiles' and 'smoothes' with the features [+human+animate]. An inanimate object has been bestowed with the attributes of animate being.

Conclusion

These citations indicate that literary language is artistic expression where an ideal critic who is grounded in basic linguistics conveys his ideals aesthetically more beautiful and stylized to capture the attention of his audience. Thus, his language prioritizes the way of transmitting his message above the message itself. Literary language is all about linguistic and stylistic deviation. It is about the otherness of language, literariness, defamiliarization, foregrounding of language which heightens the aesthetics, signification, communication and meaning in literature. The literary writer is allowed in contrast to the everyday speaker to turn aside rules, conventions and maxims of language. Providentially, the literary writer is celebrated and applauded rather than reproved by describing him as a remarkable writer for having bent, broke or flouted the pre-set rules of language, all for literary penchant.

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