

**ON THE DEVIATION OF LITERARY LANGUAGE****Abstract**

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This paper argues against deviation in the language of literature. It argues that there is no special language variety, which can be called literary. Linguistic devices like metaphor, simile, etc. which have traditionally been thought to be exclusively literary are found elsewhere in language, i.e. in styles other than literature.

The paper goes on to define literature, which is argued to be an open category enjoying social recognition as literature. But this recognition is not without any basis. On the contrary,

**Introduction:**

Literary language is highly organized to produce effects on different levels other than what the words explicitly say. This extra level of meaning is called connotation, which is given a rather wide range of meaning – one that includes anything expressed by the text without necessarily being said explicitly.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it purports to fob into the question whether the language of literature is deviant from the normal standard in any significant sense. Second, if the material from which literature is made (i.e. its language) is found not to be special, not deviant from the norm, why is literature recognized as such? In other words if literariness does not come from linguistic deviation .where does it come from?

**Some Basic Notions****Language and Literature**

It is not easy to make a clear –cut distinction between language and literature since many aspects of this relationship are still vague and undetermined. It is often felt that:

*The studies of language and literature pursue divergent paths, each under its own momentum, and fail to cohere within a single discipline.*

(Leech, 1969:2)

This assumption neglects the fact that literature cannot be studied in any depth or in any respect apart from language. Wellek and Warren (1963:174) assert that:

***Language is quite literally the material of the literary artist. Every literary work is merely a selection from a given language.***

Thus, the relation between language and literature is a dialectal relation: literature has profoundly influenced the development of language and since language is the most important means of communication and the medium of expression, literary work cannot be properly understood or interpreted without a thorough knowledge of language.

In the widest sense of the term, literature is one of the fields, which exploits language to carry a certain type of message through one of its varieties called literary language. This variety always tends to go far off, and depart from the ordinary language. Crystal (1987:133) defines literature as:

***Any collection of texts of a writer, a period, subject field, or language variety. More specifically, it denotes those writings, which are considered worth preserving and subjected to aesthetic evaluation.***

On the other hand, Cluysenaar (1976:31) argues that:

***Literature can deviate against the language system itself, speech expectations or, indeed, against expectations that have been set up in the work we are reading.***

It should be emphasized that, for literary purposes, the phonetic level of a language cannot be isolated from its meaning. Besides, the structure of meaning is in itself amenable to linguistic analysis. Hence, we can investigate or write the grammar of a literary work or any group of works beginning with phonology, morphology, going up to vocabulary and rising to syntax. Anyhow, it is believed that the investigation of literary language linguistically, stylistically and aesthetically reveals that it is a variety of language which is regarded as the best among the other varieties in certain social or teaching situations. It is, thus, obvious that all the elements of style, figures of rhetoric or linguistic deviations are probably found in literary works or the language of literature.

The aspects of stylistic features and linguistic deviation are not specific for a given linguistic level. They are said to be the dominant and prominent features which permeate through all the linguistic levels in literature. Thus, the concept of deviation gives us a strong impetus and casts out an important demand for studying the language used in literature, which is the groundwork of this study.

Raymond Chapman (1973:13), who is noticeably concerned with stylistics and linguistics in literature, maintains that:

***Literature uses language as an artistic medium not simply for communication or even expression. It is considered and developed in a way that is impossible for everyday conversation or even for the more deliberate registers adopted for certain styles.***

Leech (1966:140) distinguishes literature from any other type of linguistic activity on the basis of using some deviant features:

Any literary work should involve, as much as possible, a considerable number of deviant linguistic features to depart from the dull, normal language.

Consequently, stylistics is mainly concerned with the application of linguistic science to the study and analysis of literature.

Stylistics, however, cannot be pursued successfully without a thorough grounding on general linguistics, and language is the medium of literature, then; linguistics would be the scientific study of literature. Accordingly, it is assumed that the best procedure to apply linguistic methods to the study of literature is to describe the language of a literary text by using linguistic categories. Further, the first step in stylistic analysis is to observe the stylistic features, linguistic deviations, and other distortions from normal usage, and attempt to find out their aesthetic functions.

This property gives the literary work some impetus to be highly appreciated and also to get a newer life. In short, the concept of linguistic and stylistic deviation should result in an urgent demand for studying and analyzing the language used in literature to shed light on its aesthetic and stylistic values.

#### ***Literal and Figurative Language***

The distinction between literal and figurative uses of language is essential and reasonable enough to figure out the features of each one and their implications and effects on language function. In general, it is difficult to determine the meaning of the term "literal" and "figurative" except by reference to general usage in the case of a language at a particular time. Thus, the literal sense of a word means the sense which a word has in other contexts and apart from metaphoric uses. In this regard, Cormac (1985:73) states that:

***Literal language seeks to use established categories to describe the natural world in common terms that can be universally comprehended.***

Apparently, one can define literal language as the use of ordinary language to express concrete objects and events, in other words; when one uses ordinary words in their dictionary senses to talk about objects or situations that are publicly perceived, one is speaking literary. If there is more than one dictionary meaning, the meaning of the term would be the most appropriate in the context of situation.

On the other hand, figurative language refers to the use of figures of speech to elevate the effect of a statement or its description. Ortony (1979:38) argues that:

***Figurative, in the most general sense, refers to any manner or method by which a writer or speaker gives a distinctive meaning to a succession of words and ideas. Metaphoric language seeks to create suggestive ways of perceiving and understanding the world and involves a conceptual idea different from that of literal description.***

Following the principle of stylistic analysis which has been based on tropes and schemes and on the diversions in language performance, figurative language is regarded as "deviant" by contrast to literal language which usually obeys the rules and the conventions of the language.

Nonetheless, since the figurative language occurs in divergent ways and is seen as deviant, it will be taken to follow certain rules of its own. i.e., it will be assumed that there are precisely definable methods and ways in which the rules of literal usage can be diverted or modified.

***Deviation in the language of literature:***

As Traugott and Pratt (1980:21) put it, "literary" discourse has many general linguistic characteristics " whether "phonological, syntactic, [or] semantic [which] occur with much greater frequency in literature than in other kinds of discourse " They give as examples "poetic devices like metaphor, alliteration and archaism [which] are commonly associated with literature, although they are, of course, not unique to it. " (ibid)

This feature of literary language is probably the idea of deviation that many scholars ascribe to this literary use of language. To support our discussion , the researcher will quote some formalists opinions in addition to a number of stylisticians and linguists

Mukarovsky's insistence on distortion or violation of the norm of the standard (quoted above) illustrates very well how emphatic authors are on the question of the deviation of literary language. The end for which ordinary language is used the transference of information; language is a means to an end. In the case of literature language becomes an end in itself; the meaning it conveys is secondary to the code itself (Todorov, 1987:12). Such characterization of literary language certainly makes of it a different system of expression when compared to ordinary language. Jakobson's original discussion of the different functions of language is very clearly formulated. He maintains that the six components of any linguistic utterance (addresser, addressee, message, channel, context, and code) receive different weighting in different situations. For example, if the addresser receives more emphasis, the function of language is emotive. If the message, i.e. the language itself, is the focus of the message, the function of language is poetic, or probably, literary in general. (See Jefferson, 1990:133 and Barthes, 1986:85:6). Language itself then is the end of the literary use of language. Though such a position can be defended in cases like certain lyrical poems, it is certainly hard to defend when it comes to other literary genres, especially fiction. Suffice it to say that many works of literature are read in translation as though they were original. (Burke and Brumfit, 1986:174 and also Widdowson, 1986:133). No doubt, the new translated text is no longer the original text, i.e. the language has been changed. And yet, much of the readers of such popular translation respond to this literariness. Otherwise, no translation of literary works would be of any significant value, i.e., literariness is not simply a fashion of manipulating

linguistic devices. If this were the case, changing the language in translation would cancel the literariness of the translated text altogether.

Formalists do not concentrate on form as their name suggests; they want to find "the specifics that distinguish literature from any other material", to use Jefferson's words (1990:128). They insist upon the literary/non-literary distinction in language. To them literary language is independent and unique and they try to pinpoint the features which make it unique.

In the same spirit, stylistics tries to define the "deviation" or "distortion" of literary language. But before going into that, a definition of stylistics should be mentioned here.

According to Leech (1985:39) stylistics is simply: "the study of style in texts of all kinds", style being "how language use varies according to varying circumstances." But he goes on to call this general study "general stylistics" to distinguish it from "literary stylistics" which is the study of style in literary texts". (Ibid: 39). It is this latter definition that is generally accepted for stylistics; In fact, Leech himself (as quoted in Carter et al 1989:13) defines stylistics "simply as a variety of discourse analysis dealing with literary discourse." Thus excluding non-literary uses from the domain of stylistics.

Stylistics then is the study of literature through studying its language. The main focus of such study for many stylisticians is to define the deviation of literary language from the norms of language use. A number of stylisticians in the 1960's devoted their scholarly effort to an attempt "to demonstrate the difference between a poet's grammar and underlying grammatical norms", Carter et al (1989:2). (See also de Beaugrande, 1987:57). It is here perhaps that one has to admit that the use of meter in poetry comes closest to deviation. No one can claim that the normal use of language employs meter; people do not talk in verse. (However, see below.) When a poet uses meter, he is being characteristically different from normal use of language. However, the structure of his language other than the second effect remains within the norms of language use and meter is simply a high degree of organization leading to special sound effects. Organization, as used in this paper, is a distinctive feature of literary usage and applies to all components of the literary work.

Leech (1985:40) defines deviation as "a discrepancy between what is allowed by the language system, and what occurs in the text". Taking this argument to its logical conclusion, one is led to a position of believing that literary language allows ungrammaticalness. Thorne (1970:195-6) talks of this ungrammaticalness in the language of certain poets and goes on to assert that for these poets the point of creating a new language seems to be that it enables them to say not only things that can be said in Standard English but also things that cannot be used. Clearly then, these scholars, like literary critics, assume that literary language is a special and autonomous form of discourse. Fowler (1986:7) criticizes literary critics for such an assumption. Turner (1973:16) insists that even "creative leaps" [like Dylan Thomas's "farmyards away"] are

not confined to poetry but are also found in slang and in technical language. Eagleton (1983:2) is a little more careful and speaks of "peculiar ways" of using language in literature. But still the literary/non-literary contrast is in back of these scholar's minds.

This emphasis on the difference between the language of literature and ordinary language seems to reflect an impoverished understanding of language. Fish (1980:101) believes that the very act of distinguishing between ordinary language and literary language leads necessarily to an inadequate account of both. Turner (ibid) states that expressions like those of Dylan Thomas 'farmyards away' which seem to be different from ordinary language do exist elsewhere in language. In this respect, Fowler (ibid) confirms that:

*The ultimate process in linguistic creativity is the formation of a whole new code, a system of new linguistic arrangement encoding a whole new area of knowledge.*

*These effects can be produced by the use of a vast range of every diverse linguistic technique: metaphor, clashes of style, parody, breaking of syntactic rules, invention of new words, etc. They may be found in texts of widely differing cultural status, from scientific articles to jokes to newspapers to political speeches. Creativity in language is not limited to 'literary' texts.*

Even meter which seems to be a distinctive feature of one type of literary discourse is claimed by some to exist elsewhere in language. Al-Nuwayhi (1971:31 ff) attempts a psychological explanation of the use of meter trying to ascribe the regular rhythm of meter to the 'vibration' of emotions. He finds this to be behind the strong relation between poetry and emotion. He gives a large number of examples of language use where speakers come up with words and phrases whose rhythm approximates that of poetry when these people get strongly emotional. He concludes: "In all the examples we have given from real life situations, we have found the normal prose of ordinary people under strong emotional impact coming close in its rhythm to the rhythm of poetry".(ibid)

Such a phenomenon of the use of metrical language under emotional impact, like other features of language in use, is still poorly studied in current linguistics. Literature is one style of language, one mode of language use. As such, it is part of "parole" not "langue" to use Sassurian terminology and no satisfactory grammars of parole exists yet. All descriptions of language idealize from the available data system of language and avoid going into the jungle of actual use of use of language in real life situations. Structural linguistics, "only undertakes to describe those aspects of language that can be accounted for in terms of dummy constructions, grammaticality, roles the service and the action of a mechanism." It "has no theory of parole, not even a rudimentary way of stating how real utterances differ from one another and how they are related to their speakers, hearers, and context" (Partt, 1977:15).

In view of the above discussion, any characterization of deviation does not seem to be based on objective observation. Deviation is by definition departure

from a norm. If the norm, in literary language as used by speakers, is poorly understood, departure from this norm cannot be definitively analyzed. Hence, any conclusions related to this issue remain tentative at present.

### *What is literature?*

So far argument has been made against a special variety of language used exclusively in literature. But such argument would remain useless without an attempt at a definition of literature. Part of the definition adopted in the present study comes from the belief that literature is what we as speakers of language consider being literature. It is what we put into that makes it literature; it is our willingness to be in the literary mode, so to speak.

When the text proves itself as literature the reader is willing to adjust and prepare himself for a literary experience not any other type of linguistic input. This reader's attitude adds to the text much of its literariness, but much else comes also from the text itself. The following paragraphs aim to look into those features which are characteristic of literature: These features are mainly conceptual rather than linguistic and that is probably why one's judgement of a 'good' work of literature cannot be as definitive as judging a 'grammatical' sentence. (Abelson, 1987:41).

Such characterization of literature makes it an open category (Fish, 1980:11 and Lodge, 1977 :35) defined not by virtue of the type of linguistic entity that counts as literature as much as by social recognition , i.e. accepting a certain piece of work as literature. Pratt (1977:87) quotes Richard Ohman expressing a similar view: "our readiness to discover and dwell on the implicit meaning is literary works [...] is a consequence of our knowing them to be literary works, rather than that which tells us they are such." She describes "the very notion of literature [as] a normative one".

A dramatic example of how language uses participate in making the text comes in Nida et al (1983:56-7). Here one can find the same group of sentences written twice: once in a poem format and then as a prose paragraph. As poetry, the words are felt to require deeper treatment and therefore one looks for what lies beyond what is said; as prose, the same words are only an introduction to something one expects to follow: one is waiting for further details to support what has been stated. For this is how prose progresses: what comes later supports earlier portions of the text. In other words, what the text declares itself to be dictates the receiver's attitude towards it.

However, for a piece of language to be considered for qualifying as literature, it should usually show certain characteristics which might be tendencies rather than definitive features. It is true that language is used in literature in "peculiar ways", as Eagleton (1983:2) puts it, but it still shares with other uses of language their grammar. When Steinbeck inserts, the clause where he had struck the gate into the sentences in "The Pearl" , Kino looked down at his closed hand and the knuckles were scabbed over and tight where he had struck the gate, he is using ordinary English construction. The appropriateness

of this sentence to "The pearl" does not come from a special grammatical feature. Rather, it is a consequence of how Steinbeck manages to put it in the right place to utilize the structure to maximal effect. The present event (Kino's locking at his closed hand) and the earlier event (his striking the gate of the doctor's house seeking treatment of his child) are juxtaposed through embedding. This juxtaposition of the two events serves a contrast vitally essential to the novel. Kino's striking the gate brings back an important scene where the rich doctor refuses to see Kino's sick child because he knows they do not have money. Now Kino has a big pearl—a great wealth—in his closed hand and the bitter reminder of the incident at the doctor's gate is there on the knuckles. One complete sentence is enough for Steinbeck to put all of this together. The sentence is a normal sentence of English, but here, in Steinbeck, it is utilized to the maximal effect of portraying Kino's mental situation. (ibid)

Here is another example from D.H. Lawrence's "Tickets, please" in which the tramway system goes off into the black, industrial countryside, up hill and dale, through the long ugly villages of workmen's houses, over canals and railways, past churches perched high and nobly over the smoke and shadows, through stark, grimy cold little market-places, tilting away in a rush past cinemas and shops down to the hollow where the collieries are, then up again, past a little rural church, under the ash trees, on in a rush to the terminus, the last little ugly place industry, the cold little town that shivers on cold on the edge of the edge of the wild, gloomy country beyond.

The actual reading of such a paragraph has the monotony, repetition, and breathlessness of boredom. The atmosphere of boredom is quiet appropriate for the type of life the characters in the story lead, the tram-car trip being an example of this boredom. The boring sentence structure reflects the boring atmosphere.

This effect is achieved by the repeated use of unusual number prepositional phrases. This use is within the normal grammar of English where there is no limit to the number of prepositional phrases used in such a construction. Lawrence achieves the desired effect of monotony and boredom by using the grammar to its fullest potential without breaking its rules.

Pratt (1977:51) is explicit and definitive in insisting on the similarity between the language of literature and other types of language use. She quotes Labov's description of the organization of natural narrative as displayed by speakers telling stories in natural settings and maintains that it "corresponds very closely indeed to the kind of organization we are traditionally taught to observe in narrative literature". She ascribes the formal similarities between natural and literary narrative to the fact that at some level of analysis they are utterances of the same type.

The general features that literature displays come mainly from organization based on planning. The kind of planning intended here is the basis of Ochs's (1979) distinction between "planned" vs. "unplanned" discourse. An example of



“planned” discourse is literature which, according to Toolan (1990:6), “might be treated as written to be read, and then rewritten to be read”. Pratt (ibid:116) contrasts literature with natural use of language on the basis of planning. She believes that the reader assumes that author on the literary work “had more time to plan and prepare his utterance than conversation allows and that he also had (and probably used) the opportunity to correct and improve on his utterance before delivering it to the audience.”

This organization certainly has a purpose. The author would like to present the reader with something that is worth his (the reader’s) time and effort. The reader is willing to spend such time and effort only if she / he gets anything out of the whole event. The author must produce something readable and tellable. Pratt (ibid:136) ascribes tellability to being “unusual, contrary to expectations, or otherwise problematic”. This is probably what formalists call “defamiliarization”. Connotation is what the text says beyond what is expressed on the surface; it is anything the reader can get from the text which is not stated explicitly. When Riffaterre (1990:110) speaks of two possible readings of a literary text, the second is probably the implicit one, the one that does not say on the surface but the one the text implies.

Barthes (1984:84) is very explicit in confirming this multi – level character of literary language. He maintains that:

*Every message.....includes at least one level of expression, or level of signifiers, and one level of content, or level of signifieds; the junction of these two levels forms the sign (or group of signs). However, a message constituted according to this elementary order can.... Become the simple expressive level of second message....; in short, the sign of the first message becomes the signifier of the second.*

The first – level signs constituting the textual units are not the source of literariness of the text. As Riffaterre (ibid:122) puts it, literariness is experienced “in a new awareness” triggered by the nature of the text. This new awareness is the signified of the second message of Barthes to whom literature is “a connotative semiotics”. (Ibid: 85). Literature is a double system whose second level is the connoted. It is what Fowler (1986; 85) refers to when he talks of writers producing extra levels of meaning over and above the meanings of component sentences.

Connotation in this wide sense of saying beyond what is actually said can also be achieved as follows. In many examples, literature is a certain variety of language put into the mouth of a certain character to help define that character from the language he uses. In such case the author is not telling us directly what type of character is being described; nevertheless, the words put into the character’s mouth reveal his type of character. Here a feature of language is utilized in describing the behavior of the character, in this case the linguistic behavior. When Dick Prosser in Thomas Wolf’s “The Child by Tiger” uses the dialect forms in “when you gits a little oldah yo’ handses gits biggah and you

gits a battah grip." He is acting in such a way to reveal his position – an average black person belonging to the poor part of society whose dialect includes these forms. (See , Ochs, 1979:77) where a related case of the 'planned' use of seemingly 'unplanned' discourse for special effects is discussed ; see also Burnley (1989:134) where Chaucer's use of French is discussed for its relevance to the character of the persons who use it.

The examples above show how a special feature of language can be utilized in an organized manner to express meaning not directly stated in the text. Literary language does not deviate from the norm of language use in order to be literary; rather, it makes use of resources available to all speakers of the language in an organized way. Chapman (1973:4) states that the speaker's is willing to apply a special standard of acceptability due to literary language's adhering to the norms which makes it acceptable to speakers. He (ibid:13) confirms that "much of the most striking literary language appears deviant when it is using, with singular economy and compression; the resources available to all native speaks" that characterized literary language which adheres to the norms of speech community without any deviation from its grammar.

These 'peculiar ways' of using language are peculiar only in their degree of intentional organization, and speakers of the language can say: "the music of the pearl rose like a chorus of trumpets in his ears". But only in a context where no music or songs are involved as in Steinbeck's *The Pearl* where only a figurative interpretation of a psychological state is possible do we get the literary value of such usage. This is especially true since Steinbeck has prepared us for such interpretation having repeatedly used expressions like "Song of the Family", "Song of the Enemy", "Song of Undersea" and others in contexts where only a psychological, not a musical interpretation is possible. This is language used in special ways to express meaning beyond what is literary said in words.

This paper has attempted to show that literary language has its characteristics as a special variety of language. This peculiarity does not rank as deviation from any norm; it is simply a difference that separated literary language from other stylistic varieties of language the way every other variety has its peculiarities in addition to it's including the common core it shares with all others. If literary language is deviant then all other styles are deviant to the same extent and are left with no norm to judge these varieties against .This situation may lead us to reject the idea of deviation in any significant sense.

However, it must be admitted that such a conclusion remains tentative in view of the size of the task at hand; investigating the language of literature cannot be conclusion unless a representative amount of data is investigated. Such data is obviously huge and varied. One might even suspect that the language of authors like Joyce in his *Ulysses* would be hard to classify within any norm constituting thus evidence to the researcher's conclusion.

In addition, understanding how language is used in real life situations is still below any satisfactory level to allow for confident assessment of how a certain

use of language is deviant from or is in conformity with the norms with language use. The situation clearly calls for further research into the nature of the language of literature, and other examples from other languages such as Arabic, Chinese, etc need to be examined to verify this point of view.

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