



Semantic Deviations in *The Three Strangers* by Thomas Hardy

Syeda Mahnoor Saeed¹, Dr. Zulfiqar Ali², Dr. Tariq Khan³

¹Lecturer, City University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar

²Associate Professor, City University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar

³Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Malakand, Pakistan

Abstract

By far, human language is an effective means of communication, while linguistic choices assist in interpreting and understanding the meaning and message of the words used by the writers. In unison, linguistic deviation brings a telling diversity and evocative defamiliarisation to human interest. The present position paper attempts to analyse the semantic deviations in *The Three Strangers*, a short story by Thomas Hardy. Since figurative speech changes the meaning of an actual word. The present study will explain why writers opt for such deviations in writing. The data is examined through foregrounding theory, as Mukarovsky (1975) propounded. Thus, the present study aims to highlight and evaluate the semantic deviation (not confused with semantic evasion) in the selected sample. The study's findings and results reveal that the writer has employed the given stylistic technique in similes, metaphors, and personifications to help the reader have portrayed a vivid and vibrant visualisation of the storyline. Further research on stylistic deviations such as phonetic (e.g., alliteration, rhyme), morphological (e.g., word formation), and grammatical (e.g., inversion, ellipsis) levels can be done.

Keywords: stylistics, linguistic deviations, linguistic choices, defamiliarisation

Introduction

Stylistics is a branch of Applied Linguistics, defined as studying style in and of a text. Style can be interpreted in various ways; there are several stylistic approaches to analysing a text; and this variety in Stylistics is due to the significant influences of other branches of Linguistics and Literary Criticism (Katie, 1989). Initially, it dealt with literary texts, but the scope of Stylistics widened in the 1960s, and non-literary works began to be analysed.

By and large, “language has a meaning” and conveys a definite message (Castillo, 2015, pp. 67-76). Eventually, when humans use language, they thus tend to comprehend its implied and intended meaning. When they converse with one another and subsequently read books, articles, and other materials, they should consider the purpose of the language used. Because of its productivity, a language potentially enfolds several layers of connotations. Therefore, humans employ critical-creative thinking while decoding the implied meaning of language and arriving at a logical conclusion.

Language is considered a tool of effective communication (Herman et al., 2020), which implies language is a type of communication that is used to engage and improve inter-and-intra-personal connections, such as acquiring or delivering information, as well as expressing ideas or engaging in other activities (Sitorus & Herman, 2019; Sinaga, 2020; Yunita & Herman et al.,



2021). It is essential to discern the information and ideas being conveyed thereof. As a result, listeners must be able to decipher all embedded meanings in a language.

Understanding what the speaker is trying to transmit relies primarily on its intended and implied implication. It is the vaguest and most contentious term in linguistic theory (Purba et al., 2021). Humans, when using languages in everyday life, such as conversation, text, songs, and other modes and means, their goal is to obtain its sense and import—reading a text, whether an article, a book, or something else, has a particular meaning. Likewise, each communicative expression in language passes on a piece of specific information or knowledge.

Literary style is a way of linguistic expression marked by distinctive qualities that seek to transmit the message to the reader clearly and convincingly; keeping the reader attentive, engaged, and interested by exhibiting the writer's skills, knowledge, and abilities (Hacker, 1991; Sebranek et al., 2006). That is a distinct, distinguishing and defining feature of literary works.

The phrase deviation refers to “any pronunciation, word, or sentence structure that does not conform to a norm” (Richards et al., 1993, p. 105). In linguistics, the term “norm” refers to “a regular practice in speech and writing” (Crystal, 2003, p. 319). There are two different kinds of norms. Both general and specific, as well as internal. The general norm refers to the traditional methods in which a given language or literary style is employed, whereas the local norm refers to establishing it by the author in a specific piece (Awonuga et al., 2018).

A short story is a fictional prose narrative that usually features a few characters and has a linear plot. A single final effect is generally conveyed in only a few significant episodes or scenes in a story. Characters are revealed in action and dramatic encounters but are rarely wholly developed, favouring the economy of setting, succinct storytelling, and avoiding a complex storyline. Despite its restricted scope, a short story's ability to deliver a “full” or satisfying presentation of its characters and theme is judged frequently.

The short tale was rarely regarded as a separate literary form until the nineteenth century. However, while short prose fiction may appear to be a relatively new genre in this regard, it is nearly as old as language itself. Jests, anecdotes, studied digressions, short allegorical romances, moralising fairy tales, short myths, and abridged historical legends have all been loved by humans. None of them is short stories because they have been defined since the nineteenth century, but they form a substantial part of the modern short story's context. A single causative effect is communicated in a short story's few significant episodes or scenes.

The study aims to probe the linguistic deviations in Hardy's *The Three Strangers* that first appeared in 1883. A pessimistic critic and novelist, his tragic vision projects disappointment and dismay. In his literary oeuvre, fate plays an overpowering role that permeates everything. In his works, the characters are helpless and hapless victims in the hands of fatal fate. Such themes and motifs resonate in his other literary works, like *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and to name a few.



This study analyses the linguistic deviations from the perspective of “foregrounding” by Jan Mukařovský (1891–1975). It refers to the variety of stylistic effects found in literature—the phonetic (e.g., alliteration, rhyme), morphological (e.g., word formation), grammatical (e.g., inversion, ellipsis), or semantic (e.g., metaphor, the irony) levels.

Stylistics attempts to study the linguistic deviations on various levels, which specifically can be studied in the literature (Crystal, 1980). As a literary writer, Thomas Hardy has linguistically deviated from the traditional language norms—which does not account for grammatical violation. His poems such as *The Ruined Maid* and *During Wind and Rain* employ linguistic deviations. Such stylistic variations and violations prompted the researchers to analyse these deviations in the short story under reference.

Research Objective

- To probe the Semantic deviations used in “The Three Strangers” by Thomas Hardy.

Research Question

- How and why are semantic deviations used in the short story “The Three Strangers”?

Statement of the Problem

In writing, linguistic deviations change the actual meaning and message of the word. The readers find it hard to interpret the intended and implicit message behind the apparent use of language features as the author sometimes avoids conveying the message in plain language; instead, he manipulates the language to create an oblique impact. The current study underscores the reason for using such linguistic deviations in the select sample and thus analyses it through a given theoretical underpinning.

Significance of the Study

The current study adds more information about the linguistic deviations done in Thomas Hardy’s literary works. Research has been conducted on his poetic works from different perspectives. However, this study attempts to surface the latent and intended meaning conveyed through figurative language beyond the typical reader’s comprehension.

Literature Review

Stylistics

The term “stylistics” is derived from the Latin word “stylus,” which means “writing tool”. In general, style refers to how a writer employs language to express thoughts, ideas, and messages to evoke readers' specific responses and reactions besides achieving other intended objectives. Stylistics investigates the different linguistic choices writers use to bring an interpretive effect to written text (Halliday, 2002). Stylistics study diversity and deviation in language and how their characteristics situate them in a particular context. Moreover, it strives to thrive on the concepts that describe why individuals and groups utilise language in certain ways, including socialisation, meaning production and reception, critical discourse analysis, and literary criticism. Hence, the



study of linguistic style and the final effect it wants to achieve is known as stylistics (Crystal, 1980).

Charles Bally, a French linguist, is credited with developing stylistic research. He extrapolates stylistics to study emotive impacts and processes in all languages. The writer's style for Short and Leech (2007) is to describe how they communicate meaning to the target audience.

Language Deviations

Language deviation is a type of poetic technique and literary device. The poets use it to drive home their essential purpose and quintessential origin. In possession of a poetic license, a poet uses selected phraseology and chooses words to create a make-believe scenario and setting. As per dictionary definition, a poetic license is the freedom to deviate from the conventional path of language used to develop originality and create freshness in his poetic opus. Leech (1968) defines poetic license as the poet's liberty to disregard rules and regulations fundamentally complied with by language users. This poetic liberty results in the linguistic variation typical of a poem. It is often referred to as linguistic variation in poetry. Language deviation, in and of itself, refers to language that does not adhere to the established principles of language usage.

According to Aquilina, the term deviation may refer to a divergence from the standards of the language as a whole, or it may refer to the norms of literary creation and even those inside a specific work (2014). A deviation is a juxtaposition used to spotlight linguistic deviations from regular bars (Stockwell & Whiteley, 2014; Menninghaus et al., 2015). There is a chance that the writing will vary from an "internally or externally standard" pattern. A deviation may arise at the sentence level or any other level if a unit deviates from the custom and seems "grammatically, phonologically, or perhaps semantically inadequately," as per Crystal (2008, p. 134).

Yastanti and Setiawati view that "Semantics is the study of meaning in language...it is a descriptive subject that studies the meaning of words and phrases apart from their contexts of usage" (2018, p. 2). It indicates that semantics is the study of language meaning since the speaker's message to the target has a purpose or objective in a communication system. The message determines the implicit meaning in communication, and the meaning in speech is deciphered and decided by how well the speaker uses the language or engages with the communication receivers.

Contextual meaning is received by and decoded according to the socio-cultural setting. Contextual meaning is the meaning of a lexeme or word inside its context,' Anindya explains (2018). The meaning of word context comprises several components that influence the speaker's word choice. Various essential factors such as gender, setting, purpose, level of familiarity, the context of communication, the mood of speaker and listener, time, place, the channel of the context, completeness and linguistic context are among the variables that impact the use of contextual meaning in language (Rifardi, 2017). Each component establishes the meaning in language to conveniently understand the speaker or listener.



Semantic Deviation

The departure of meaning is referred to as semantic deviation. It denotes that the word, phrase, or sentence meaning is uncertain, vague and complex. Similarly, it is feasible to translate the term “semantic deviation” into a “nonsense” or “absurdity” (Leech, 1968). The process by which literal absurdity leads the reader to comprehend a metaphorical phrase is known as transference of meaning in poetry. Such peculiarity and idiosyncrasy of a poem add freshness and originality to its purpose. This deviation is a prerogative of a literary language, but it is unusual and odd in routine life, for it creates ambiguity.

A semantic deviation is an epitome of a paradox. From a literary standpoint, it alludes to the inconsistent juxtaposition of incompatible concepts with the goal of shocking exposition or unexpected disclosure. It is necessary to examine seemingly contradictory statements and draw conclusions to reconcile or explain their presence (Rescher, 2011).

According to Leech, the semantic deviation is fundamentally concerned with tropes: “foregrounded abnormalities of content” classified into semantic oddity, the transmission of meaning, and genuine deceit (1969, p. 131). The uniqueness of phrases is organised into five categories; examples include pleonasm, periphrasis, contradiction, tautology, and oxymoron. Semantic oddity consists of figurative language: metaphor (including personification), metonymy (including synecdoche), simile, tautology, and oxymoron. Metaphor, in this regard, is the significant figure of speech, wherein one object, concept, or activity is alluded to by a phrase or expression that generally relates to something vice versa (Baldick, 2001).

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which the name of one item is swapped for the name of another object with which it is linked. Synecdoche, contrastingly, is described as the principle of applying the term for the component as a whole and is a kind of metonymy (Li & Shi, 2015). A simile is another semantic anomaly that includes an explicit comparison between two items or actions. In most similes, ‘like’ is used (Cruse, 2006).

Personification is a figure of speech that describes inanimate objects embodying human traits, essentially changing anything into a living, feeling person (Ricoeur, 1977). In a communication paradigm, personalisation is distinct and distinguishable; however, an optional feature connected to a message, while anthropomorphism is an intrinsic human quality especially linked to productivity.

On the other hand, rhetorical personification extends beyond anthropomorphism by employing metaphorical discourse. A metaphor is established when an item is related to a human being. The thing is contrasted to a person to impart some personal trait or human quality to the object. To emphasise the anguish of their sound, “the drummers were crying today”, for example, indicates that drums are like humans (Turner 1987).

Methodology

The present study pursues the qualitative paradigm of research. Thus that uses the theory of foregrounding for substantiating the argument at hand. Foregrounding is a method based on



literary stylistics founded on the Russian Formalist's belief; that the "deformation" of language is rudimentary to poetry. Jan Mukarovsky (1891-1975), a Prague academic, developed the concept of foregrounding into an academic literary scholarship. In which the writer captivates the reader's attention by exploiting the sounds of words or by employing the words themselves. Repetition is the most effective strategy and powerful technique used by the authors. The recurrence of the sounds of certain words, or the words themselves, immediately captures the readers' attention, and they begin to analyse why the writer is repeating this particular sound or word. The theory explains all the fundamental linguistic features of the language. However, the present study concentrates on the semantic deviations in the given sample, which is analysed through the checklist evolved by Leech and short.

Analysis

This section analyses the semantic deviations done by Hardy in the short story. The story begins with the personification "a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and maybe standing there now". Analysing the cited line, the writer has given the human quality to the non-human object. "lonely" and "stood" are the attributes used for humans while "cottage" is non-living. The writer has used personification to delineate a vivid image of the scenario for the readers. The writer has once again used personification in the other line, "the wind up here blew unmistakably when it did blow" wind cannot be blown "mistakably", as the mistake is a human trait. Secondly, there were not any humans who would blow the wind. The writer has used this personification to tell the readers about the place's weather and help them visualise the setting and situation of the house. Mistakably is an adverb modifying the verb blow, but the writer has referred to it with wind and weather, which is not controlled by any human or living being; nonetheless, the writer has given this human quality to the physical nature that surrounds us. In the following line, "at least some starved fragment of ancient hedge is usually taken advantage of in the erection of these forlorn dwellings". 'starved' is again a personification that is used for the non-living 'ancient hedge'. It exhibits that the house is longing for humans for quite some time.

"Detached and undefended" —these two phrases foreshadow an evil figure's visit to the residence (which can be the residence of criminals). The place appears to be physically isolated, making it more difficult for police enforcement to safeguard it (even though there was a party going on). The metaphors "Detached and undefended" are used for the house to provide a view of the house alone. The writer has joined two opposite ideas through this metaphor, called an oxymoron. First, the house is isolated, which means no human can reach it quickly, and there is no human presence. It can shelter the criminals or any other wonderer. Second, the house was isolated, but later in the story, a party was going on in the house, which indirectly implies that the house was not forlorn. Many people cannot reach or find the house at the same time and place, and there must be humans who invited others to the party, for there would not be any starved fragments in the site as it must be lively. In the line "The level rainstorm smote walls, slopes, and hedges like the clothyard shafts of Senlac and Crecy", the writer has used personification and simile. 'Smote',



which denotes a human quality given to downpours owing to the force and effect on the house, is similar to human strength. Cloth-yard is a simile for an archer's shaft. Senlac refers to Senlac Ridge, the hill where Harold II's forces were situated during the Battle of Hastings. Crecy was the site of a fight during France's Hundred Years' War.

According to Philip V. Allingham, contrasts nature's apathetic antagonism, exemplified by the “level rain-storm,” with man's purposeful and premeditated inhumanity toward man. Another oxymoron used by the writer in the story “Black-coated tribes” — the colour black is commonly applied in literature, art, and other forms of expression to depict death and decay. Even though the first stranger is not clad in black, Hardy uses the phrase to imply his imminent death. Hardy has again used the metaphor later in the story “the performers moving in their planet-like courses, direct and retrograde, from apogee to perigee”. “Planet-like course” refers to the specific place where the performers were dancing, but that habitat was their whole world where they were busy dancing, not caring about the world and moving from one place to another. Hardy has chosen the metaphor “apogee to perigee,” which refers to the moon's orbit that is not exactly round, and its distance from earth differs over its monthly trajectory. The moon's eccentric orbit takes it to apogee — its farthest point from the Earth—every month and then to perigee—the moon's closest point to Earth—two weeks later. Hardy refers to this notion as the dance where people enjoyed their dances; a distance between them has designated apogee to perigee.

Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar are used as a metaphor in the story. "Timon" is the name of a fabled Athenian citizen who is an evident epitome of misanthropy, a person who despises humans and their local habitat. Based on this character, Shakespeare produced a tragedy called *Timon of Athens*. "Nebuchadnezzar" alludes to Nebuchadnezzar II, the Babylonian monarch who, according to the Bible, went insane and spent seven years in the wilderness. Nebuchadnezzar was “compelled away from humans and ate grass like cattle,” Hardy uses these two historical examples to portray the emptiness and ennui around the shepherd's house. “They clinked together” is again an oxymoron. The only person in the room who appears to be genuinely enjoying the hangman's song about his trade is the man he is set to execute the next day, which is ironic. The first stranger extends kindness to the hangman, despite the hangman being unable to do his duties the following morning.

Discussion

The term deviation may relate to deviating from the conventional norms of the language as a whole, or it may allude to the customs of literary production and even those inside a particular piece. Since semantic deviation is the divergence from meaning; thus, the purpose of the word, phrase, or sentence is ambiguous. It is also reasonable to interpret ‘semantic deviation’ into ‘non-sense’ or ‘absurdity’ (Leech, 1968). The writer has used figurative devices for the visualisation of the audience. In the story, personification and similes are used to drive home how the non-humans are given the attributes of humans. The writer has used personification where he has granted the human qualities to the inanimate things like a “lonely stood cottage the wind blew mistakenly”.



Similarly, similes like “apogee to perigee” and “planet-like courses” are used where the writer has used references from the scientific background to elucidate the setting. Similarly, metaphors “Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar” and “Detached and undefended” refer to the scenario and elaborate on it compared to the metaphors cited. The cited metaphors could be called hyperbole as well as they explain the image writer wants to display through writing.

Conclusion

It is concluded through the analysis that semantic deviations enacted by Hardy in the short story *The Three Strangers* are deliberate and advertent. These deviations reinforce certain things he wants his readers to converge on. Hardy's similes and personification help the reader have a vivid image of the scenario. The following diversities brought into the text through these linguistic deviations make his work different from other writers. Such styles in writing are the writer's choice through which they convey or narrate a story. Simile and personification intensify the effect of events and helps the reader concentrate on such sites. The writer has used diversities through which he wants the reader to discern his perspectives and perception as well. In contrast, metaphors are used to enable readers about the scenario and its relation to specific events that he has used metaphors, which at the same time acts as hyperbole in writing since they create an extravagant effect in writing.



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