Chapter 8
Foregrounding and De-automatization
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Foregrounning and De-automatization

8.1. Foregrounding

A further concept of style that has been favored by the generative frame of reference, is the concept of style as deviance. Deviant style is constituted by a deliberate departure from the linguistic norms. One of its chief proponents in this century is Jan Mukarovsky, a leading and literary critic of the Prague school in the 1930s. He speaks of style as ‘foregrounding’ which means bringing something to attention or making something new. Mukarovsky (1970: 42) states “the violation of the norm of the standard, its systematic violation, is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language; without this possibility there would be no poetry”. Everyday usage of language, according to Mukarovsky, automatizes or conventionalizes the language to the point that its users no longer perceive its expressive or aesthetic potential. Traugott & Pratt (1980) mention that literary language de-automatizes or foregrounds language by violating the norms of everyday language. Mukarovsky points out that the literary language is foregrounded because in literary language there is a conscious deviation or violation of the linguistically accepted norms, whereas the standard or everyday language is backgrounded which is used against foregrounding. Linguistically speaking, backgrounding means to follow the accepted norms of a language and foregrounding is just the opposite.
One is led to ask here why do the literary writers deviate or violate the scheme of the language. Why do they resort to the abnormal use of language? The answer is that they do so in order to make their language more distinguishable than in ordinary or non-literary language. Therefore, the concept of foregrounding has been central to much recent works in stylistics. These studies have sought to establish what methods literary writers use to make their style different from standard language and place these foregrounded elements in focus.

Leech (1970) elucidates that motivated deviation from the linguistic or other socially accepted norms has been claimed to be a basic principle of aesthetic communication. The norms of language are regarded as a 'background' against the features which are prominent because of their idiosyncrasy. In making choices which are not permissible in terms of the accepted code, the poet extends or transcends the normal communicative resources of his tongue.

Mukarovsky propounds another name for foregrounding that is de-automatization. One of the differences between everyday language and literary language is that the former is constructed spontaneously without thinking about the words, phrases or sentences. That is, there is an automatic use of linguistic elements in daily usage of language. He calls such language automatized. However, the literary language is de-automatized because the literary writers are conscious and aware of words, phrases and sentences they use. The violation of the accepted norms of language is called de-automatization (foregrounding) which is the opposite of automatization, that is, the de-automatization of an act, the more an act is automatized,
the less consciously the act is executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become.

According to Prague school, foregrounding is not only confined to creative writing, but is also found in joking, speech and children language-games. Literature, however, is distinguished by the consistency and systematic features of foregrounding.

Foregrounding as Leech (1970) elucidates can be observed at the different levels of linguistics\(^1\). For example, at the phonological level poetry is bound with de-automatization. Rhyme, onomatopoeia, alliteration\(^2\) and so on de-automatize the spoken norms and make the language as literary. The following examples are some of the SDs that show the conscious deviation from the accepted linguistic norms at the phonological level:

**Rhyme**

1-"Eighteen hundred Scots,
Their plaidies tied in knots
And dangling pewter pots
(The dirty, low-down sots)
at the battle of Copenhagen."

(The Battle of Copenhagen)

**Alliteration**

1-" Means many buttons more undone
The author wife or wives
Give me the hife or hives"

(And everything the author knows)

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\(^1\) See Leech approach page (53)

\(^2\) See SDs at the phonological level page (68)
Onomatopoeia

1-"We saw steam from it and then later came the noise of the whistle. Then it came chu-chu-chu steadily larger and larger...

(FWBT: 29)

However, these phonological SDs are conventional or automatized features of literary language. In applying the idea of foregrounding, one must carefully distinguish these levels of analysis. Of course, such automatized literary conventions are themselves subject to de-automatization. Indeed, for Mukarovsky, it is essential for literature to continuously make itself lively by violating its own norms. For example, the enjambment in following lines from Hemingway's poem, "The Age Demanded", is a type of violation of the norms of poetry.

1-"The age demanded that we sing and cut away our tongue. The age demanded that we flow and hammered in the bung. The age demanded that we dance and jammed us into iron pants. And in the end the age was handed the sort shit that it demanded."

(The age Demanded)

Thus, Hemingway's free verse and the use of enjambment in his poems are, within literature, acts of foregrounding even though they in some respect bring his text closer to the spoken norm.

Generally, the words in poem are arranged like notes in music or steps in a dance; they appear in a succession but they

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3. See the enjambment page (83)
as well create depth in harmony and movement, as if the coordinates of spatial relation were transposed into temporal arrangement. This assures the idea of automatization and conventionality of such arrangements in poetry writing, i.e. poetry is a deviant type of discourse which exploits the resources of conventional language to an extent in order to develop contradictory quasi-system of its own. This system is compound of both langue (the particular conventions exist in the mind of the poet) and parole (the poet's individual performance of a language) which derive from disruption and normal linguistic principle (Widdowson 1979).

Inversion, parallelism, etc at the syntactic level are also kinds of de-automatization. If we consider stylistic inversion for example, we will note that the literary writers violate the syntactic structure of a language by changing the word order of a sentence. Inversion is one of the forms known as an emphatic construction. What is generally called traditional word order is nothing more than an unemphatic construction. Emphatic constructions are regarded as non-typical structures and, therefore, are considered as violation of the regular word order in the sentence. For instance;

1." The strange light the sun made in the water ..."  
(OMS: 35)

2."The night before I left the field hospital Rinaldi came in to see me with the major from our mess."  
(FTA: 80)

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4 - See inversion page( 114 )
The syntactic foregrounding, in the examples above, can be considered as a violation of the normal sentence order. In the first example, the object, 'the strange light', comes before the subject of the sentence. And in the second, the adverbial phrase 'the night before I left the field hospital', stands before the subject. This kind of foregrounding which is called emphatic word order is widely used in the literary language.

Parallelism as Leech (1969) defines it as a kind of foregrounded regularity. It is sometimes used as a technical means in building up other SDs. As an SD, it always generates rhythm, in as much as similar syntactical structures repeat in close succession. For instance;

1- "Pull, hands, he thought. Hold up, legs. Last for me, head. Last for me. You never went. This time I'll pull him over"

(OMS: 91)

2- "I can do nothing with him and he can do nothing with me, he thought. Not as long as he keeps this up."

(OMS: 47)

3- "You were born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish."

(OMS: 105)

Foregrounding can also be observed at the semantic level. A literary metaphor, for example, is a semantic oddity which demands that linguistic form should be given something other than its normal (literal) interpretation. A metaphor frequently manifests itself in a highly unpredictable collocation or sequence of lexical items. In the first following metaphoric examples, there

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5 - See metaphor page( 156 )
is a collocative clash between ask and bird, take rest, small bird and in the second the collocative clash is between happiness, plane.

1-" How old are you?" the old man asked the bird. "Is this your first trip?"

..."Take a good rest, small bird," he said.

"Then go in and take your chance like any man or bird or fish."

(OMS: 54, 55)

2-"We could take thy happiness in a plane," he said absently. "And go over in the sky like the little pursuit planes shining in the sun," she said. "Rolling it in loops and in dives. Que bueno!" she laughed. "My happiness would not even notice it." Thy happiness has a good stomach," he said half hearing what she said."

(FWBT: 161)

To make a sensible arrangement of the words, one would have to substitute the inhuman noun 'bird' for any human noun in the first example and the inanimate noun 'happiness' for any animate noun in the second one. The deviation, in the examples above, consists in the selection of items which lie outside the normal range of choices at a particular place in structure, if we set up the frame 'the old man asked____, Take a good rest, small____', it is easy to make a list of nouns which would predictably fill the empty space. But the noun 'bird' which is used in the text as 'the old man asked the bird' is not available for selection in this position. Hemingway here disregards and violates the normal condition of choice.
8.2. Cohesion and coherence

Any piece of writing, if it is to make sense at all, uses vocabulary and syntactic structure to bond or connect sentences together. The random selection of words does not in itself make a sentence, so too a random selection of sentences does not create a coherent text. To make a text comprehensible, there should be two main ways in which sentences are combined with each other within a text; they are cohesion and coherence. These concepts work together rather than independently in helping one to understand the ways in which a text makes sense.

Cohesion was popularized by Halliday and Hasan (1976). It refers to the ways in which phonological, lexical and syntactic features connect within and between sentences in a text. But coherence as Clark (1996) point out is more to do with semantic features. It refers to the way in which a text makes a consistent sense to the readers with or without the help of cohesion.

A literary writer helps the readers to read his writing by use directive signals to make connection in and between sentences. These include the ways in which sentences are sequenced and how one thing leads to another implication and so on. In a text, the signals act as cohesive ties or devices of cohesion. They hold the writing together not only because of relationships between the ideas or events which are represented through lexis, semantics or syntactic structures, but through connecting forms in the lexis and syntactic structures themselves.
From the works under study and with the reference to the approach of Leech, cohesion can be divided into four different kinds:

1- Phonological cohesion
2- Syntactic cohesion
3- Semantic cohesion
4- Discourse cohesion

1- Phonological cohesion

Sound pattern is a very important aspect which influences a writer's choice of words. It is particularly significant when it comes to writing verse of any kind. Phonology can be a source of cohesion in a text. The following examples show how Hemingway, in his poems, uses phonological SDs as tools of cohesion.

Alliteration

1- "Gland for the financier, Flag for Fusilier, For English poets beer, Strong beer for me."

(Robert Graves)

Assonance

2- "Keep yourself clean and neat"... So lead a clean and wholesome life and join them in the sky."

(Advice to a Son)

Consonance

3- "When gin is gone and all is over Then horses, bees and alyske clover Receive our sorrows and our joys;"

(Country Poem with Little Country)
Rhyme

4. "Eighteen hundred Scots,
   Their plaidies tied in knots
   And dangling pewter pots
   (The dirty, low-down sots!)
   at the battle of Copenhagen."

(The Battle of Copenhagen)

Alliteration, assonance, consonance and rhyme, in the above instances, involve a textual patterning created by the repetition of the same or identical sounds. They are the most obvious and easy ways in which a poem can be made phonologically cohesive. This means that such cohesion is very superficial and easily perceived.

A more complex kind of phonological cohesion is that which is created when there is a kind of interaction between a phonological pattern and a meaning pattern. This kind is observed in onomatopoeia which is a kind of phonological pattern where the sound of a word imitates the meaning it refers to. Consider the onomatopoeic examples below:

**Direct Onomatopoeia**

1. "Then he heard a noise come sweeish-crack-boom! The boom was a sharp crack that widened in the cracking and on the hillside he saw a small fountain of earth rise with a plume of gray smoke. Sweeish-crack-boom! It came again, the swishing like the noise of a rocket and there was another up-pulsing of dirt and smoke farther up the hillside."

   (FWBT: 459)

**Indirect Onomatopoeia**

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* See onomatopoeia page (70)
"As he said that, the women started to curse in a flood of obscene invective that rolled over and around him like the hot white water *splashing* down from the sudden eruption of a geyser."

(FWBT: 149)

2- Syntactic cohesion

The structure of a sentence is a unifying relation. The words are combined with one another to form a cohesive relation between them in a sentence. Such relation can be sensible if it creates connection with other sentences in the same text. If one takes the two SDs (ellipsis and repetition), one will find a kind of contradiction between repetition and ellipsis in the sense that repetition is used to repeat the same phrase or clause in order to reinforce descriptions and emotional effect. But ellipsis functions in such a way to avoid unnecessary and tedious repetition. Both of them have a role to play in the cohesion of a text. Below are given some examples that illustrate them.

**Repetition**

1- "But he must have looked through his fingers, because when they came to the edge of the cliff with him, he knelt again, throwing himself down and clutching the ground and holding to the grass, saying, *'No. No. No. Please. No. Please. Please. No. No.'*

(FWBT: 114)

**Noun Ellipsis**

1- *I said good-by at the hospital at about five o'clock and went out.*

(FTA: 156)
Verb Ellipsis

2- "That's very kind of you," the old man said.
   "Should we eat?
   "I've been asking you to," the boy told him gently."
   (OMS: 20)

3- Semantic cohesion

Any text is not only a string of grammatical sentences but rather a unit of a different kind called semantic unit. A group of sentences construct a text. Being a semantic unit, there should be cohesion between these sentences. That is, the understanding of the semantic unity of the text lies in the cohesion among the sentences of which it is composed. The cohesion between utterances in any text can be noted in the relation with the preceding and following sentences (Halliday & Hasan 1976).

The study of cohesion helps the reader to pick out the patterns of meaning running through the text and arrive at some kinds of linguistic account of what the text is about. It makes the readers easily follow the meaning which appears in the text. However, Leech (1970) argues that this kind of meaning is superficial and can be applied to any English text. But the literary text is coherently complex. The reader needs to go beyond the normal meaning to comprehend the literary meaning. The using of imagery through exploiting unusual
collocation may create cohesion within a text. For instances:

**Metaphor**

1. "We could take thy happiness in a plane," he said absently. "And go over in the sky like the little pursuit planes shining in the sun," she said. "Rolling it in loops and in dives. Que bueno!" she laughed. "My happiness would not even notice it." Thy happiness has a good stomach," he said half hearing what she said."

(FWBT: 161)

**Metonymy**

2. "some American ambulance units were to be sent down and this hospital would look after them and any other American on service in Italy."

(FTA: 80)

**Irony**

3. "But it would not drop that easily. How many is that you have killed? He asked himself. I don't know. Do you think you have a right to kill any one? No. but I have to. How many of those you have killed have been real fascist? Very few. But they are all the enemy to whose force we are opposing force. But you like the people of Navarra better than those of any other part of Spain. Yes. And you kill them. Yes. If I don't believe it go down there to the camp. Don't you know it is wrong to kill? Yes. But you do it? Yes. And you still believe absolutely that your cause is right? Yes."

(FWBT: 304)

**Simile**

4. "She is like a mountain and the boy and the girl are like young trees. The old trees

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1. Semantic features are more to do with coherence than cohesion because they have concern with the meaning that makes sense to the readers.
are all cut down and the young trees are growing clean like that."

(FWBT: 136)

Metaphor, metonymy, irony and simile, as shown in the examples cited above, are some semantic SDs used to describe language that aims to achieve a particular effect. They create a kind of literary coherence in the text.

4-Discourse cohesion

The primary determination of whether a set of sentences do or do not constitute a text depends on the cohesive relationships within and between the sentences which create texture. The texture can be achieved by cohesion. The cohesive relation of some elements in a discourse is dependent on that of another. In this regard, Halliday and Hasan (1976: 4) write "The one PRESUPPOSES the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it". The SDs at the discourse level which are used by Hemingway display the discoursal cohesion of the text. For example, deictics and its types are terms for words or phrases which relate utterances to time, places, or people without actually naming them by using nouns. For instance;

Cataphora

1-He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish."

(OMS: 9)

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8 - See diectics and its varieties page (203)
In the 'OMS', Hemingway starts it, cataphorically, by use the pronoun 'he' and then the common name 'old man' to refer to the proper name 'Santiago' that will come later in the text.

**Anaphora**

1- "It was papa made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him."
"I know," the old man said. "It is quite normal."
"He hasn't much faith."
"No," the old man said. "But we have. Haven't we?"
"Yes," the boy said."

(OMS: 10)

**Exophora**

3-"What's that?" she asked the waiter and pointed to the long backbone of the great fish that was now just garbage waiting to go out with the tide"

(OMS: 126)

That = fish's backbone

Another type of cohesive relationships in texts is indicated by formal markers which have a role to play in relating what is about is to be said to what has been said earlier. These are called connective discourse markers. They join sentences with each other to make a text coherent. Some of them are:

**Additive**

1-"But he was such a calm, strong fish and he seemed so fearless and so confident. It is strange."

(OMS: 84)

**Adversative**

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2. "The boy had given him two fresh small tunas, or albacores, which hung on the two deepest lines like plummets and, on the other hand, he had a big blue runner and a yellow jack that had been used before; but they were in good condition still and had the excellence sardines to give them scent and attractiveness."

(OMS: 31)

Casual

1- "God help me to have the cramp go," he said. "Because I do not know what the fish is going to do."

(OMS: 60)

Temporal

1- "As he stood breathing deep and then listening to the night, he heard first, firing far away, and then he heard an owl cry in the timber below, where the horse corral was slung. Then inside the cave he could hear the gypsy starting and the soft chording of a guitar."

(FWBT: 59)

8.3. Concluding remarks

Foregrounding has been acknowledged to be one of the main features of aestheticism in literary communication. The language of literature is distinguished by systematic aspects of foregrounding that can be observed at the different linguistic levels.

Cohesion and coherence are the two main features that make a literary text comprehensible. Cohesion refers to the way in which phonological, syntactical aspects connect within and between sentences to make a text, while coherence refers to the way a text makes consistent sense to the readers.