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UNRAVELING ARTISTRY: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF 'ONCE UPON A TIME' BY GABRIEL OKARA THROUGH THE LENS OF SHORT'S (1996) MODEL OF LINGUISTIC DEVIATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In this research study, Gabriel Okara's poem "Once Upon a Time" is subjected to a stylistic analysis that is based on Mick Short's (1996) model of such an examination. The poem is riddled with semantic and morphological contradictions, all of which are in keeping with the poem's overarching topic of hypocrisy. The research indicates, through an analysis of these deviations as stated by Short (1996), that the speaker of the poem is angry about the hypocritical character of people and expresses this anger through the poem. This anger is communicated through the speaker's dissatisfaction with the nature of individuals, and those features are analysed by applying the parameters described by Short (1996). The speaker has a dream of a world in which people are sincere, open, and untainted in their displays of love

and friendship towards one another. This is the world that the speaker wants to see. Quite contrary to Okara's view of the world and the people living in it, it is a bed of thrones for almost everyone; the only good they can think of is one's own self and own interests.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential aspect of human life, as it serves as the fundamental means of expression, communication, and understanding of the world. Throughout history, the connection between language and humans has been inseparable, making their separation impossible. The study of language dates back over two thousand years, with ancient Greek scholars delving into its complexities. Today, language remains a central focus in the Western humanities, attracting not only linguists but also philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, and scholars from various disciplines.

In daily life, humans employ different forms of language, each with its own unique characteristics. Literature, for instance, possesses its own distinctiveness. It encompasses more than mere words on a page; it is an art that evokes pleasure through the skillful arrangement of words. Among the forms of literature, poetry holds particular significance. This study aims to explore the poem "Once Upon a Time" by Gabriel Okara, focusing on the various deviations employed within and the underlying meaning and message conveyed by these deviations. The presence of these deviations presents a challenge to readers in comprehending the poem, prompting the researcher to analyse them in order to enhance its accessibility and understanding.

The Concept of Style

Style, as described by Leech (1969), is the manner in which something is written or spoken, serving as an identification of the individual behind the communication. It encompasses various aspects such as figures of speech, word choice, and sentence structures. The term "elocutio," derived from Latin, refers to style in the Greek sense and encompasses the diction and overall style of a language. Leech and Short (2007) go into more detail about the definition of style, highlighting its contextual nature and how it depends on things like the person using it, the goal of communication, and so forth.

Lang (1979) argues that the theory and study of style are not contingent on the outcomes of this discussion, as style possesses distinct features that are linked to meaning. Consequently, texts may exhibit linguistic differences but still share similarities in their styles. Abrams (1999) provides a traditional definition of style, considering it the mode of linguistic expression employed by writers or speakers. It involves analysing specific aims, sentence patterns, word choices, and types of figurative language used by an author.

Lehman (1996) suggests that style can be attributed to genres, individuals, periods, or languages. Scholars attribute certain writings to Shakespeare based on their style, distinguishing between his Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. Furthermore, style can be applied to languages themselves, with German often regarded as obscure and French conveying clarity. Therefore, style encompasses various applications and manifestations.

Stylistics

Stylistics studies different styles and analyses expressions in language to understand their purpose and effect (Verdonk, 2002). It examines literary discourse from a linguistic perspective (Widdowson, 1975). Stylistics serves as a middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism, mediating between the two disciplines and offering an interdisciplinary approach (Widdowson, 1975). It combines the subjective judgement of the reader with linguistic description to explore the artistic elements and the overall effect of the text (Short, 1996). Stylistics prioritises language as a means of textual explanation, as the various forms and patterns of language structure are indicative of the text's function (Simpson, 2004). Textual meaning can be discovered through linguistic features, although literary stylistics incorporates external elements like history and philosophy (Isidore, 2010).

Stylistics involves the study of style and language use, with literary stylistics focusing on the relationship between language and artistic function (Leech & Short, 2007). It applies scientific rules such as lexical, grammatical, contextual, and cohesive elements, as well as figures of speech (Isidore, 2010). In recent years, stylistics has expanded to include approaches such as corpus, critical, cognitive, pedagogical, pragmatic, gender, and neuroscience studies (Burke, 2017). Despite arguments that stylistics can be mechanical and lifeless, it aims to provide a systematic approach to criticism rather than a completely scientific one (Amare, 2002).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How does the utilisation of linguistic deviations in Gabriel Okara's poem "Once Upon a Time" contribute to its dominant theme?
2. What aspects emphasise the presence of hypocrisy in Gabriel Okara's poem "Once Upon a Time"?

Problem Statement:

Stylistics, an interdisciplinary field encompassing linguistic and literary criticism, has gained significant importance in the present era compared to the traditional emphasis on literary criticism alone (Leech and Short, 2007). While literary criticism allows for diverse interpretations, stylistics focuses on how writers manipulate language. Employing a stylistic approach can enhance comprehension regarding the convergence between literary criticism and the employment of linguistic forms in interpreting literary texts. Often, individuals possess ideas but struggle to articulate them effectively through language. Advertisements, newspaper articles, and literary texts contain numerous inscriptions whose figurative meanings and implied messages may elude readers due to the authors' deliberate linguistic choices. Consequently, the researcher aims to employ a stylistic approach and analyse deviations based on Mick Short's (1996) model of stylistic analysis. This descriptive approach seeks to understand the language objectively, with a primary focus on the selected literary text, the highly figurative poem "Once Upon a Time." By

examining the deviations in this poem, the researcher aims to facilitate easier comprehension for readers.

Significance of the Research Study

This research study is based on stylistics holds great significance as it combines linguistics and literary studies, making it an intriguing and important field for individuals interested in the English language and literature, particularly those with a specific interest in stylistics. Furthermore, it serves as inspiration for those who wish to conduct stylistic analyses on various types of literary texts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dr. S. Veeramani (2014) conducted research titled "Diasporic consciousness in Gabriel Okara's poem 'Once Upon a Time'." In this study, he examines the concept of diaspora and how the poem refers to it through different words. Veeramani explains that in countries colonised by Europeans and Americans, indigenous people often develop a sense of 'double personality,' 'double culture,' and confusion about their identity. Okara, in his poem, expresses nostalgic feelings for a time before the arrival of colonisers when people were authentic and genuine. The influence of the colonisers led to the loss of culture, values, and traditions among the lower class, which imitated the upper class. Similarly, Nigeria, Okara's home country, experienced a loss of cultural identity due to colonisation by the British. Okara employs linguistic deviations to convey his nostalgia.

Maratabali, Sumerabatoool, Wajid Riaz, Anila Mubarak, and Rana Batool (2018) analysed E.E. Cummings' poem titled "She Being Brand" in their research on stylistic analysis of deviations. They explore how Cummings effectively utilises stylistic deviations in his poems, employing unconventional punctuation, capitalization, line splitting, and other visual elements that guide readers' pace and comprehension. This study shares similarities with the present research as both focus on the use and creation of deviations.

Abbas (2017) conducted a study called "Exploring Types of Linguistic Deviations in the Poem Adonais," which identifies eight types of linguistic deviations: lexical, grammatical, phonological, semantic, graphological, dialectical, register, and historical period deviations. Abbas applies Leech's theory to define these deviations and discovers that six out of the eight types are present in the poem. These deviations violate grammar rules but enhance the poem's aesthetic value, prompting readers to interpret phrases and sentences beyond their surface meaning. This study differs from the present research in that Abbas uses Leech's theory, while the present study is based on Mick Short's model of stylistic analysis. Furthermore, Abbas identifies six types of deviations, while the present study identifies two—semantic and morphological.

Uzma Khalil (2016) focuses on linguistic deviations in the selected poems of E.E. Cummings. Her research, titled "Linguistic Deviations are Not Linguistic Blunders," analyses two poems by Cummings to demonstrate the significance

of deviations in creating a poetic effect. Khalil identifies seven types of deviations: discourseal, semantic, lexical, grammatical, phonological, graphological, and morphological. Both studies share similarities in the identification of deviations but differ in the types of deviations identified.

Hira Ali, Ijaz Asghar Bhatti, and Ali Hassan Shah (2016) conducted a stylistic analysis of Emily Dickinson's poem "Hope is The Thing with Feathers." Their research aims to analyse the poem at the graphological, grammatical, phonological, and lexical levels. The poem metaphorically depicts hope as a bird that remains faithful to us during hardships. The researchers apply stylistic techniques and methods to analyse the poem, observing that deviations, such as dashes, reflect the poet's personal life experiences. This study aligns with the present research in recognising that deviations in a poem make certain parts more noticeable and create a pleasant effect on readers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The research approach employed in this study is qualitative. Throughout the research, the researcher solely utilised this qualitative approach to gather and analyse non-numerical data.

Research Method

The research method used in this study is analytical. The researcher will analyse the poem "Once Upon a Time" using Mick Short's (1996) model of stylistic analysis. The purpose of the analysis is to examine the text, which expresses the poet's nostalgic feelings for the past and his desire to change his present behaviour.

Research Framework: Deviations

Deviation, according to Mick Short (1996), is a linguistic phenomenon that significantly impacts readers or listeners' perception. Deviated sections within a text tend to be more noticeable compared to other parts, creating a foregrounding effect. The Oxford Dictionary (2022) defines deviations as actions that deviate from established rules or accepted standards.

TYPES OF DEVIATIONS

Discoursal Deviation

In discourse, sentences are typically interconnected to form higher units of linguistic organisation, following the assumption that a text should start from the beginning. However, certain literary texts deviate from this rule. For example, John Donne's poem "The Canonization" begins in the middle of a conversation, creating a pleasant effect in the argument. Similarly, Edward Thomas' poem "Adlestrop" starts with the immediate response "Yes," establishing a conversational tone.

Semantic Deviation

Semantic deviations involve meaning relations that are logically inconsistent or paradoxical. These deviations often rely on metaphors to convey characterization. Dylan Thomas' poem "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines" presents a series of paradoxes, such as the presence of light without the sun, flesh without physical existence, and tides without a sea. The interpretation of such poems largely relies on the readers' imagination.

Lexical Deviation

Lexical deviations are characterised by the use of newly coined words or neologisms by poets. These words may not have existed previously in the language. For instance, Dylan Thomas' play "Under Milk Wood" introduces the compound noun "jolly roger," referring to the pirate's skull and crossbones flag.

Grammatical Deviation

Poems often deviate from grammatical norms to create foregrounding effects. Poets intentionally manipulate grammar rules, assuming that readers are familiar with these rules. For example, Robert Graves' poem "Flying Crooked" intentionally alters the normal construction by placing the conjunction "and" between each noun phrase, highlighting each noun separately.

Morphological Deviation

Morphological deviations occur at the word level, involving the addition of suffixes or endings that are not typically used. In e.e. Cummings' poem "from spiralling ecstatically this," the poet demonstrates the extendibility of the morphological series by adding the suffix "-less" to nouns, producing words like "hopeless," "hatless," and "sunless."

Phonological Deviation

While phonological deviation is less emphasised in written literature, it holds significance in terms of poetic meaning and effect. Unusual pronunciation or stress patterns can be employed for rhyme schemes or to convey specific meanings. In Ted Hughes' poem "Crow's First Lesson," the capitalised word "Love" indicates a different pronunciation, emphasising God's role as a teacher.

Graphological Deviation

Graphological deviation refers to visual elements of a text, such as line breaks and capitalization patterns. These deviations do not necessarily correlate with phonetics. For example, Michael Horovitz uses graphological deviation in his poem "Man-to-Man Blues" to visually represent the descent to hell on the

page. Ted Hughes' poem "Crow's Vanity" employs oddities in punctuation and spacing to create perspective.

Internal and External deviations

External deviation refers to deviations that deviate from norms external to the text, while internal deviation occurs when a text deviates from its own established norms. For instance, if a poem is written in rhyming couplets but includes a couplet that does not rhyme, it constitutes an internal deviation. In Ted Hughes' poem "October Dawn," the last stanza deviates internally by featuring the only full rhyme in the text, drawing attention to its content despite not offering additional information.

By examining these various types of deviations, the researcher aims to analyse the poem "Once Upon a Time" and understand its stylistic elements and effects.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Summary of the Poem:

In "Once Upon a Time," the poet expresses nostalgia for a time when people were sincere and honest. Addressing his son, the poet compares people's behavior in the past and present. He reminisces about an era when people genuinely expressed their emotions, laughed from the heart, and had authentic connections. However, in today's modern and busy world, people often greet each other without warmth, offering superficial smiles and laughter that fail to reach the eyes or touch the heart. The poet highlights how welcoming gestures are often insincere, used as a deceptive courtesy. Nowadays, people are primarily interested in meeting individuals who possess wealth, power, success, or fame, disregarding and disrespecting those without such privileges.

Semantic Deviations

Text 1

**Once upon a time, son,
1
they used to laugh with their hearts
2
and laugh with their eyes:
3
but now they only laugh with their teeth,
4
while their ice-block-cold eyes
5
Search behind my shadow.
6
Stanza 1 (Okara, 1978).**

The poet employs semantic deviations in the given lines of Text 1. By using expressions such as "to laugh with their hearts," "laugh with their eyes," and "laugh with their teeth," Okara connects unrelated elements. These semantic deviations occur in lines 2, 3, and 4 of Text 1. Laughing with one's heart or teeth is not literally possible, as laughter or a smile is primarily visible on the face. The phrases "laugh with their hearts" and "laugh with their teeth" exhibit semantic oddity, resulting in semantic deviation. The underlying idea is that people do not genuinely laugh; they merely create a facial expression of laughter. This suggests that their outward behavior does not align with their true desires, revealing their hypocrisy.

In line 5, the phrase "ice-block-cold-eyes" symbolizes repressed emotions. Eyes are not literally cold or hot. The expressions "Ice-block-cold-eyes" and "search behind my shadow" in lines 5 and 6 also involve semantic oddity, leading to semantic deviation. While one can perceive an individual's emotions, feelings, and sympathy through their eyes, Gabriel Okara describes eyes as ice blocks, which lack emotions since ice is an inanimate object. Similarly, coldness signifies a lack of emotions, sympathy, empathy, and feelings. As humans, our emotions and feelings define our humanity, so lacking these qualities makes individuals less human.

In line 6, the word "shadow" symbolizes social status. According to the poet, contemporary relationships are based on material possessions. People form connections based on their social standing, seeking personal gains even in greetings and relationships. They tend to attach themselves to those who possess wealth or positions in order to benefit from these associations. Their emotions and feelings are not genuine or pure. Rather than genuinely desiring relationships, they feign friendliness for the sake of material benefits. This further exposes their hypocrisy.

Text 2

There was a time indeed

1

they used to shake hands with their hearts:

2

But that's gone, son.

3

Now they shake hands without hearts

4

While their left hands search

5

My empty pockets”.

6

Stanza 2 (Okara, 1978).

The phrase "shake hands" in line 2 of text 2 does not literally match the phrase "their hearts," which serves as an adverbial phrase. "Heart" symbolizes genuine and sincere feelings, implying true emotions, love, and friendliness. The poet creatively connects the act of shaking hands with the concept of

heartfelt emotions. However, it is not physically possible to shake hands with hearts, as people typically shake hands with other people's hands. Thus, the expressions "shake hands with their hearts" and "shake hands without hearts" contain a semantic oddity, resulting in a deviation from the literal meaning.

Shaking hands is widely known as a gesture of friendly relations and is culturally ingrained. The underlying idea is that in the past, people were authentic and honest. When they shook hands, they did so without any ulterior motives or greed. However, in contemporary times, people have become increasingly selfish. Even when they exchange greetings, they lack genuine friendliness and emotional connection, seeking only personal benefits. This reveals their hypocrisy.

Text 3

So, I have learned many things, son.

1

I have learned to wear many faces

2

Like dresses – home face

3

Office face, street face, host face

4

Cocktail face, with all their conforming smiles.

5

Stanza 4 (Okara, 1978).

Okara introduces semantic eccentricity in line 2 of text 3 by using the phrase "to wear many faces." Although the word 'wear' typically implies the act of donning something wearable as its object, in this context, faces cannot be literally worn like clothes, shoes, or hats. The poet intends to convey that he has acquired the ability to adapt his behavior based on the situation. In contemporary times, individuals often alter their personas to fit in with their environment, which reveals their underlying hypocrisy.

Text 4

And I have learned too

1

to laugh with only my teeth

2

and shake hands without my heart.

3

I have also learned to say, 'Goodbye',

4

when I mean 'Good-riddance':

5

to say 'Glad to meet you',

6

Without being glad; and to say 'It's been

7

nice talking to you', after being bored.

8

Stanza 5 (Okara, 1978).

Learning without genuine emotions is insufficient for true laughter and heartfelt connections. The act of laughing or smiling only affects the face, while the expressions "laugh only with my teeth" and "shake hands without my heart" in lines 2 and 3 of text 4 indicate a semantic anomaly, leading to a deviation in meaning. The heart symbolizes emotions, feelings, and friendliness, and shaking hands represents a cultural gesture. The poet aims to convey a message to his son, expressing that he used to be different but has learned from a society that values coldness and indifference. Each person has their own way of smiling and strives to please those around them, conforming to societal expectations. The poet experiences intense guilt and self-disgust, realizing how he has lost his true identity and become fake. The underlying idea is that people do not genuinely laugh or shake hands, revealing a disconnect between their inner and outer selves, showcasing their hypocrisy.

Text 5

But believe me, son.

1

I want to be what I used to be

2

when I was like you. I want

3

to unlearn all these muting things.

4

Most of all, I want to relearn

5

how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror

6

shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs!

7

Stanza 6 (Okara, 1978).

The phrases "unlearn all these muting things" and "shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs" in lines 4 and 7 of text 5, connect contrasting elements in Okara's poem. However, it is important to note that these phrases should not be interpreted literally. Comparing "teeth" to a snake's fangs in line 7 presents a contradiction, as a snake's appearance is not reflective of its true nature. Although the poet may seem humble, honest, and kind on the surface, the comparison suggests a hidden deceitfulness. By likening the laughing person's teeth to snake fangs, the poet implies that people can be as venomous as snakes, concealing their true intentions behind a friendly facade. Essentially, the poet desires to exploit others and gain material benefits through deception, revealing his underlying hypocrisy.

Morphological Deviations

Text 6

So, I have learned many things, son.

1

I have learned to wear many faces

2

Like dresses – home face

3

Office face, street face, host face

4

Cocktail face, with all their conforming smiles.

5

Stanza 4 (Okara, 1978).

Text 6 is replete with morphological deviations. It is not possible to have different faces for different places like home, office, street, host, bar, etc. It is clear that people wear clothes, shoes, hats, masks, glasses etc, but it is impossible to wear faces like dresses. The phrases “homeface” “officeface” “streetface” “hostface” and “cocktailface” in the lines no 3,4 and 5 are morphological deviates. The phrases “homeface” “officeface” “streetface” “hostface” and “cocktailface” involved morphological oddity which causes morphological deviation.

Their combination shows that a person's home face is inseparable. He won't have the desired social effect if he wears a workplace or street face at home. This home and this face are inseparable. Because they're family, they're real, and they don't look for each other's shadows at home. They search each other's shadows in the office and on the street. When they meet in the office or on the street, they check for riches. They create friends for material gain. The host's duplicity shows as guests leave their houses to say farewell but really say good riddance. Cocktail faces represent bar faces. Alcohol, spirits, fruit juice, and cream make the drink. Brainly.com (2022) defines cocktail face as "a kind of facial expression best for the party". Bargoers drink, eat, chat, and dance. Diverse folks frequent the bar. People act joyful there but are not. Home and office faces are incompatible. These faces have a set behaviour and are inseparable. It means someone acts differently at home than at work. Accordingly, behaviour, emotions, feelings, interests, and sympathies will alter. Their inner and outer selves contradict each other, showing their dishonesty.

CONCLUSION

One community subjugates another through colonialism. A dominant group or authority controls others for economic gain (Wikipedia, 2022). The Collins English Dictionary (2022) defines colonialism as a powerful nation directly managing less powerful nations to gain power and money. This authoritarian system threatens local languages, cultures, and customs. Gabriel Okara's poem "Once Upon a Time" depicts Nigerian society's changes. The poet feels saddened by Western civilization after British colonisation, according to

studies. Colonialism suppresses other nations by changing their culture, language, and lifestyle. In the poem, Okara recalls a period when people were pure, real, and honest before Western society made them materialistic. Colonialism has corrupted their culture and made them self-centred. Being part of this culture, the poet has learned to act superficially and adapt to varied settings. The poem worries about Western influence on African traditions. The poet admires honesty, kindness, simplicity, hospitality, and contentment. "Once Upon a Time" evokes a fairy tale while the poet laments cultural and personal changes. The poem discusses cultural problems, loss of innocence, and true vs. artificial emotions. Colonialism has made individuals selfish, only welcoming others with a purpose, the poet laments.

This study examines Mick Short's (1996) concept of variations and how they give each poem's parts significance. The poem's meaning is what matters. Poets transmit specific meanings. This research seeks to understand "Once Upon a Time" by examining variances and their impact on the poem. Gabriel Okara's poetry conveys significance through grammatical irregularities. By unravelling the language complications generated by deviations, stylistic analysis can reveal the poem's meaning. "Once Upon a Time" explores societal crises, selfishness, hypocrisy, and innocence lost. The poet addresses his son and feels nostalgia for the past. "Once Upon a Time" can be hard to understand. Analysing the text's variations reveals the hidden meaning. The poem's deviations explain selfishness. Okara calls her eyes ice boxes and laughs and grins. He compares laughing teeth to snake fangs, suggesting individuals are poisonous.

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