LEVELS OF LINGUISTIC DEVIATION IN FAULKNER'S *AS I LAY DYING*

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ABSTRACT

Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* abounds with various kinds of linguistic deviations to such an extent that they might be regarded as being one of the most prominent stylistic markers in the novel above. They have been explored throughout this paper according to the various levels of linguistic analysis: *phonological level, syntactic level, morphological level, lexical level, and semantic level.* Moreover, the deviations scored throughout the novel are employed specifically for literary- aesthetic purposes. Though the deviations are not confined to one level at the expense of the others, they have been characterized by various degrees in terms of their limits of deviance and aesthetic employment. Consequently, some levels of deviation have been foregrounded against the others insofar as the aesthetic function of language is concerned. Thus, *the syntactic* and *semantic levels of deviation* proved more radical and important than the other ones. Nevertheless, this does not deny the purposeful interconnectedness of the core levels of the language in *As I Lay Dying* without which we will lose a crucial part of our attempt to understand what Faulkner has written.

1. Introduction

Every stylistic study needs to begin with a linguistic theory or scheme and relate to a piece of spoken or written language, or *a corpus* of an author's writing . Under such a perspective, this paper comes to be just an attempt to relate Michael Riffaterre's theory of deviation* to Faulkner's "*As I Lay Dying*", taking into consideration the deviant features that constitute a distinctive marker of Faulkner's novel. Apart from Riffaterre's argument about the widely held concept of "*defamiliarization*", the question of this paper is the linguistic deviation insofar as it involves departure or *veering* from the orthodox use of language or from the reader's expectations at certain linguistic levels and ranks.

Since language is not a haphazard mass of sounds and symbols but is instead an intricate web of levels, layers and links (Simpson, 2004:5), thus the deviant linguistic features displayed throughout "*As I Lay Dying*" are identified across a number of interrelated levels of linguistic description. However, some levels and deviations have been neglected such as : *Discoursal* level, *Graphological* level, *Internal deviation*, and *External deviation*. This is because, on the one hand, there is still a heated debate concerning the validity of some of these levels and deviations (see Finch, 2000:22), and on the other, they do not, seemingly, represent areas of interest to Faulkner's attempts to overstep the limits of language. Moreover, the extra-linguistic function of the deviant features are taken into consideration so that one

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* See Riffaterre, Michael. "Criteria for Style Analysis," Word, xv (April, 1959), 154-74

can explain why they have been employed and what aesthetic end they have served.

2. Phonological Deviation

It is true that stylistic studies are mainly concerned with the linguistic investigation of written language (Enkvist, 1967:69), however, phonology has much to contribute because it is the only means that enables the stylistician to examine the phonetic potential of certain written texts. Faulkner's presence throughout *As I Lay Dying* makes itself so evident first of all through his efforts to reproduce what one may call a *dialect pronunciation.* The linguist may find it so easy and ideal if all dialogues in a novel were set down in phonetic transcription. But Faulkner's attempt to convey the peculiarities of the regional pronunciation, *American southern pronunciation* according to the novel, results in what one may think as an error in spelling, such as the words shown in the following table that have been spelt phonetically rather than alphabetically:

Table -1-

Deviant Forms at the Phonological Level in *As I Lay Dying*

Deviant Form	Page	Standard Form
Sho	passim	Sure
Ere	passim	Here
nigh	56	Nine
dassent	24	Does not
Et	passim	Ate
ketch	35	Catch
Hit	35	It
Gittin'	36	Getting
Kin	36	Can
Jest	37	Just
Git	37, 38	Get
keer	38	Care
Sot	38	Set
Yit	38	Yet
Kilt	45, 46	Kill
Dust	46	Dusk
Gal	97, 122	Girl
dursn't	121	Does not
Brung	153	Bring
Riz	96	Rise
Mought	56	Might

It   should
be noted, however, that Faulkner resorts to the

graphological forms to convey certain phonetic features to the reader's sight doing his best with the inadequacies of the alphabet. Thus, he sets out to create his own interesting and original visual patterning through deviation from and contrast with the conventional phonetic transcription of dialect or idiophonic speech.

3. Morphological Deviation

This level of deviation is not open and feasible to those writers who are not interested in exploring the boundaries of language. Faulkner's experiments in morphology throughout *As I Lay Dying* invite us to recognize him as a serious writer overwhelmed with inescapable desire to reveal the features of substandard American English.

Faulkner's morphological liberties are so appealing particularly through the following points:

1. adding the (-ed) participle to irregularly inflected verbs:

   "sawed", (18); "throwed" (33); "knowed" (passim); "growed" (186); . . . etc.

2. archaic past inflections are used: "holp" (29,72) instead of the regular inflectional form *helped*.

3. the suffix (-eth) is added comically to certain verbs (Marling,1988:25):

"I am the chosen of the lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth."

(85)

4. as for pronoun forms and inflections, the same contradiction is found with the accepted morphological norms. Thus, the inflection of *mine* and *thine* extended by analogy to the possessive pronouns for the third person singular, as in : "hisn" (passim); "hern" (73), and for the first person plural, as in : "ourn" (74). "Hisself" (passim) substitutes for the reflexive pronoun *himself*. Furthermore, the objective forms of personal pronouns substitute for the subject:
"*me* and *him* were born close together" (211)

It is true that Faulkner seems, at this level, more radical and confident of his attempts to exploit the language to the full, so that its resources no longer held any secrets for him.

4. Syntactic Deviation

Though the deviant syntactic features in *As I Lay Dying* are very common and interestingly divergent, they are still far from being unique, besides they hold a high degree of frequency in Faulkner's language in this novel. They lack the uniqueness of those typical deviant features confined to the text in which they show up. The deviations at this level stem partly from Faulkner's painstaking attempt to verbalize the syntactic features of oral communication.

It is really so hard to comprise all the ramified ranks of syntactic deviation throughout the novel, however, some of them are highly frequent and appealing. For example, as far as verbs are concerned, one finds the following:

1. the auxiliaries (is/was) are used in the plural :
   "the boys was . . ." (Faulkner,1988:37)*, "they was . . ."
   (86,109,149), "we was . . ." (108,109,186), "but the roads is good . . ." (26), "Riches is nothing . . ." (10).
   2. the auxiliary (were) is used in the singular:
   "he were . . ." (146), "the front axle were . . ." (34)

3. sometimes the auxiliaries are totally neglected, and it is so   frequent to lose the modal auxiliaries in perfective aspect:

   "it kind of . . ." (154), "what you going . . ." (193), "He come . . ." (22), "to taken . . ." (9), "ought to taken . . .' (30), "he taken . . ." (15), "I done . . ." (29),

4. the auxiliary (do) used with third person singular pronouns:

   "she don't . . ." (passim), 'Jewel don't . . ." (24), "Anse don't . . ." (29), "It don't . . .." (24,69), "He don't . . ." (passim), . . .etc.

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5. the (-s) verbal form is not restricted to third person singular pronouns, but extended to other persons:

" . . . that folks says . . ." (22,82), "I says." (passim),
"I asks . . .' (166), "the boys wants to . . .' (89),

Furthermore, there are certain constructional devices, used by Faulkner, modeled on the patterns one may encounter in the eloquence of everyday speech (Marling, 1988:32). One of them is *inversion* which entails a sort of split or break in the syntactic relationships:

"A good carpenter, Cash is" (8)
"New Hope, 3 mi . it will say" (93)
"kind of pleased astonishment he looked" (95)

The first thing to notice is the deviation, via inversion, of the normal syntactic sequence : *Cash is a good carpenter - it will say, New Hope,3 mi - he looked kind of pleased astonishment.*

Many structural missings are also found in elliptical constructions : either part of the statement, for example, is missed as in

"Glad to go," (22)

or a clause of the sentence is omitted,

"Which is a good thing." (58)

or the sentence is uncompleted,

"It's because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that goddamn box." (15)

"It's because I am alone." (49)

Although syntactically correct, these sentences do not fulfill their promises. "It's', in the two last examples, in no

way defines what the causal subordinate clause appears to explain. That is to say, there is a complete failure to figure out any apprehension of cause-and-effect relationship.

Faulkner's language, throughout certain portions in the novel, has unsettling and may be disturbing effect due to misapplication of syntactical categories or the substitution of one syntactical category for another. This is another interesting area that shows how far Faulkner was preoccupied with practising the limits of the syntactical possibilities. *As I lay Dying* provides us with several examples in this concern, yet there are two particular ones that underscore a puzzling play on "verb *to be"* :

> "And since sleep is *is-not* and rain and wind are *was*, it is not. Yet the wagon *is*, because when the wagon is *was*, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel *is*, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if am not emptied yet, I am *is*."
>
> (italics mine)*
> (65)
> ". . . detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is*."
>
> (48)

Chapman (1974:46), insightfully, points out that there is no need to deal with all kinds of deviation as being inevitably

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* All italics inside the quotations from the novel are mine.

ungrammatical or *contrary to any rules*,rather, they may result from the overuse of the linguistic possibilities.

Consequently, the outcome might be a sentence which is syntactic but unacceptable or sounds odd.

One of the most evident examples of such a kind of deviation in *As I Lay Dying* is the overuse ,or profusion, of *double*, even *triple*, negation:

" I reckon she *never* had *no* use for them now." (10)
" But I just *can't* seem to get *no* heart into anything." (33)
" He *couldn't* buy *no* team from *nobody*." (149)

The novel is so much studded with these double negatives that they should be added to the deviations already listed. This kind of "multiple negation" is entirely different in the sense that more than one negative form is used but the meaning is still that of a single negative (see Quirk,1988:186); this may underline the redundant tendency and verbosity of spoken language.

One more example of syntactic deviation in *As I Lay Dying* may indicate how easily the list of such deviations could be lengthened : *them* , as a pronoun, has strangely been used as a demonstrative:

" *them* others   .   .   ." (15)
"one of *them* spoted   .   .   ." (123)

or sometimes as a possessive pronoun :

"He's takin' back *them* spades . . ." (190)
"He got *them* teeth." (208);
"I could a toted *them* shovels." (206)

5. Lexical Deviation

So far, the deviant features that have been noted may give the measure of Faulkner's linguistic variety and possibilities, but the deviations at the lexical level underscore the author's interesting peculiarities, they can show us the real scope of his linguistic wealth. However, the lexical level is "a level of linguistic form at which variables,[or deviations], can be treated with the greatest freedom," (Fowler, 1970:16), yet, in *As I Lay Dying*, such variables/deviations have been drawn upon the resources of colloquial speech in a way that suits Faulkner's purposes.

The most obvious examples of lexical deviation are related to *neologism* in its broad sense as making up a word which did not previously exist (Short,1996:45). Though it is apparent that one aspect of Faulkner's vocabulary is the profusion of words with a negative prefix or suffix, it is those negative words which have been coined by him that hold our concern :

"unalone" (52); "unlamped" (65); "uninferant" (83); "unvirgin" (137); "unwinded' (111)

or he may add the suffix (-ness) to a certain kind of adjectives as in : "aloneness" (136).

More strikingly, he creates some negatives by the addition of (no) or (not) as a suffix : "is-not" (65), or as a prefix which is so frequent throughout the novel :

"not-fish" (45); "not-blood" (Ibid); "not-moving" (154); "not-Anse" (138); "no-sound" (164); "no-wind" (Ibid); "no-hand" (Ibid); "no-strings" (Ibid)

It has been noted by Marling (1988:28) that these negatives are not simply "the reverse of an affirmation: the negation preserves within the substance of the word the idea of what it is denying"(ibid.), and paradoxically such a negation sometimes even reinforces the meaning it might be supposed to deny.

Furthermore, Faulkner's creative lexical attempts extend to manifest themselves through the creation of some notable and unusual compounds: for example, "crop-toothed" (14), turns to be 'tooth-cropped" on page (145), "grease-fouled" (61); "bone-gaunted" (88); "straddle-legged" (91), "dangle-armed" (151).

If compounds play no prominent part in *As I Lay Dying*, the novel gives us another dimension of Faulkner's taste to pile up so many *qualifying words*, and often there are clusters of *three, four* or even *five* adjectives attached to a single noun :

"the long hot sad yellow days" (24)
"an expression sudden, intent, and concerned" (81)
"a wild, sad, profound and despairing quality" (115)
"his pale empty sad composed and questioning face"
(93)

The lexical outcome of such a piling up of qualifying words may seem confusing. The cumulative effect of the adjectives is scattering enough to exert the reader's capability of pursuing a writer who needs to say everything whether through : coining new words or piling them in handfuls onto the page.

6. Semantic Deviation

In his attempt to express through language the most inexpressible, Faulkner resorts, this time, to deviation on the semantic level. Throughout *As I Lay Dying* this kind of deviation has been revealed as a sort of *semantic absurdity*. The semantic links have drastically been ignored and suppressed, they are apparently and logically inconsistent or paradoxical in some way.

In a sentence like "Pa shaves every day now because *my mother is a fish*." (80), the statement of the subordinate clause provides us with a juxtaposition of *semantic incompatibles* (see Fowler,1970:150): (*mother* vs. *fish*), besides, the causal relation between the two clauses is absurd. The same absurdity is expressed in so many other examples:

> "Jewel's mother is a horse." (75)
> "I hollering running and hollering and Dewey Dell hollering at me Vardaman you Vardamnan you
> Vardaman . . ."   (119)

One further interesting example is :

"My brother he went crazy and he went to Jackson too. Jackson is farther away than crazy."

(201)

There is an attempt to twist the semantic features of words, (*Jackson* vs. *crazy*), attributing such a referential mix to the verbal meaning of *went*. So, whether it has been used in the same meaning as " . . . he *became* crazy and he *moved to* Jackson . . .", it does not matter since the second meaning of *went* as *moved to* became dominant and this in turn entails that *crazy* is not an adjective but an adverb of place. That is, the confusion between the literal and metaphorical meanings of *to go* (*to go* to Jackson vs. *to go* crazy) leads to the absurd equation of *crazy* with the place name.

Moreover, Faulkner's figurative language is sometimes expressed or signaled by some kind of a deviation in the *collocational range* or throughout what Leech and Short (1981:149) call "deviant collocation". For instance :

"the furious *tide* of Jewel's despair" (78)
"The sound of the saw *snores* steadily into the room" (39)
"I would think of him *dressed* in sin" (138,139)
"*mournful* water" (111)
"her pole-thin body clings *furiously* . . .," (77)

The collocations of (*tide* vs. *despair*), (*saw* vs. *snores*), (*dressed* vs. *sin*), (*mournful* vs. *water*), (*clings* vs. *furiously*) are characterized by unexpected connections which carry their referential meaning beyond the expected collocational

range. With Faulkner, one should remember that the differentiation between figurative and literal language is a matter of *referential semantics*. Accordingly, it is rare in *As I Lay Dying* for words to retain their literal/referential meaning right to the end. They are likely to be set with other words with which they have no natural affinity or semantic link. This constitutes the linguistic premise that Faulkner relies on in his novel so that he tries to load his language with as much figurative meanings as he can.

7. Aesthetic Function

It has been claimed that linguistics has no contribution to literary studies more than stylistic description and it is too limited to go beyond (Payne,1969:174). But such a limitation seems to be invalid insofar as the stylistic description is both *selective* and *purposeful* (ibid.). Mere description is undeniably not an end by itself, it is of no great use unless one sets out to exercise it as an access to get a profound understanding of the way the language works. Accordingly, the description itself must be purposeful, and to be rewardingly productive it needs to focus on certain distinctive linguistic features [i.e, deviation] that underlie the artistic principles and stylistic value of the writer's choice of language (Leech and Short,1981:74).

Taking into consideration the cyclic relation that holds between *linguistic observation* and *literary insight*, this paper is concerned with linguistic observation as a point that stim- ulates literary insight. This, in turn, triggers the questions of the use of linguistic description achieved so far

in this paper: how is linguistic deviation in *As I Lay Dying* used for a specific aesthetic purpose? What is the artistic effect achieved through Faulkner's linguistic deviation?

It should be noted, however, that all the deviant features in the novel under study are first and foremost tools; they are used as a screen to display the various peculiarities of *the American Southern dialect*. That is, they are instrumental in establishing the social and cultural level of the characters throughout the novel. It is true that Faulkner tries to give his characters a language that is capable of revealing their own distinctive, rustic, cultural, and regional flavor. This has principally been achieved throughout the following :

1. phonological deviation to bring out the pronunciation features of common speech, specifically the dialect spoken by *the small hill farmers in northeastern Mississippi*,
2. morphological deviation has been handled carefully by Faulkner to correct the shortcomings and offset the diffuseness of ordinary speech, restoring to language part of its flexible power of suggestion,
3. syntactic deviation, with all its ramified aspects, has been used as an attempt to figure out the patterns and characteristics of reported conversations and oral or spoken language. This kind of deviation has, occasionally, been a measure or a device of characterization which signals every character with certain syntactic features and departures,
4. lexical deviation that serves essentially to work out the rustic vocabulary which distinguishes the

familiar world of colloquial speech and every day life,

5. semantic deviation which represents Faulkner's utmost achievement to heighten the effect of mental disarray which makes itself felt through the suppressing of logical semantic links, creating a disturbing atmosphere or a total failure to understand.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to associate each stylistic variant/ deviation with a particular stylistic value. Yet, there are special significances associated with one kind of variants/deviations rather than another. What has been achieved above, though it is not final, is just an attempt to link the linguistic observation to its possible aesthetic function.

8. Conclusion

Faulkner's language in *As I Lay Dying* abounds with deviations which are ramified across various levels of analysis. The most striking feature of these deviations is that they are pervasive : Faulkner ceaselessly reshapes all levels of language for his own ends. Nevertheless, the deviant features do not hold the same degree all through the levels concerned. It is evident that the *syntactic level* involves highly deviant features which are most indicative of Faulkner's efforts to bridge the gaps beyond the limitations of language. The deviations at the other levels are, however, less deviant in this respect, but they still, though with different degrees, reflect Faulkner's

irrepressible attempts to overcome the inadequacies of language.

In addition to the levels at which they operate, and their own degree of indication, deviations are distinguished from each other by their own importance in terms of the aesthetic function that might be ascribed to them. Consequently, Faulkner's *semantic deviations* are more important and radical in this respect so that his deep suspicion and frustration with the referentiality of language is often expressed in his most deliberate semantic absurdities.

After all, Faulkner deviates from the orthodox form of language-use to draw attention to his skeptical attitude towards language, thus, he foregrounds his dissatisfaction with the representational function of the language at most of its levels.

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