**Foregrounding**

In stylistics, the notion of **foregrounding**, a term borrowed from the Prague School of Linguistics, is used to refer to ‘artistically motivated deviation’.

The term foregrounding, when used in a literary sense, is a linguistic strategy that refers to the act of shifting attention away from a main action or thought, by giving prominence to something else that is occurring in the storyline. It is commonly used in poetry as a means to deviate from normal speech patterns and bring attention from the typical everyday subject being addressed, drawing attention instead to the use of language, metaphors and alliteration.

Foregrounding is a significant literary stylistic device based on the Russian Formalist's notion that the very essence of poeticality lies in the "deformation" of language. The Prague scholar Jan Mukarovsky (1891-1975) shaped the notion of foregrounding into a scholarly literary concept.

"Foregrounding" literally means "to bring to the front." The writer uses the sounds of words or the words themselves in such a way that the readers' attention is immediately captivated. The most common means employed by the writers is repetition. Our attention is immediately captivated by the repetition of the sounds of certain words or by the words themselves and we begin to analyse the reasons why the writer is repeating this particular sound or word.

In the tongue twister, "she sells sea shells on the sea shore" it is plain that 's' and 'sh' are foregrounded for their euphonic effect.

In Julius Caesar Act III Sc.2 Mark Antony in the famous funeral speech mocks at Brutus by repeatedly referring to him as "honorable" and each time ironically implying the exactly the opposite.

According to formalist critics, foregrounding is a stylistic device that draws attention to itself by way of its defamiliarization from everyday speech. It is the practice of making something stand out from the surrounding words or images. It is “the ‘throwing into relief’ of the linguistic sign against the background of the norms of ordinary language. It refers to the range of stylistic effects that occur in literature, whether at the phonetic level (e.g., alliteration, rhyme), the grammatical level (e.g., inversion, ellipsis), or the semantic level (e.g., metaphor, irony). As Mukarovský pointed out, foregrounding may occur in normal, everyday language, such as spoken discourse or journalistic prose, but it occurs at random with no systematic design. In literary texts, on the other hand, foregrounding is structured: it tends to be both systematic and hierarchical. That is, similar features may recur, such as a pattern of assonance or a related group of metaphors, and one set of features will dominate the others

There are two main types of foregrounding: parallelism (grammar) and deviation.

Parallelism can be described as unexpected regularity, while deviation can be seen as unexpected irregularity. As the definition of foregrounding indicates, these are relative concepts. Something can only be unexpectedly regular or irregular within a particular context. This context can be relatively narrow, such as the immediate textual surroundings (referred to as a 'secondary norm' or wider such as an entire genre (referred to as a 'primary norm'.

For example, the last line of a poem with a consistent metre may be foregrounded by changing the number of syllables it contains. This would be an example of a deviation from a secondary norm.

In the following poem by E. E. Cummings, there are two types of deviation:

“light’s lives lurch

a once world quickly from rises

army the gradual of unbeing fro

on stiffening greenly air and to ghosts go

drift slippery hands tease slim float twitter faces

Only stand with me, love! against these its

until you are, and until i am dreams...”

Firstly, most of the poem deviates from 'normal' language (primary deviation). In addition, there is secondary deviation in that the penultimate line is unexpectedly different from the rest of the poem.

Nursery rhymes, adverts and slogans often exhibit parallelism in the form of repetition and rhyme, but parallelism can also occur over longer texts. For example, jokes are often built on a mixture of parallelism and deviation. They often consist of three parts or characters. The first two are very similar (parallelism) and the third one starts out as similar, but our expectations are thwarted when it turns out different in end (deviation).

Foregrounding can occur on all levels of language. It is generally used to highlight important parts of a text, to aid memorability and/or to invite interpretation. Verdonk states that foregrounding is the psychological effect a literary reader has as s/he is reading a work of literature.

The purpose of foregrounding is to sharpen readers' vision and understanding of the event, feelings, circumstance, concept, etc. that the author wants to point out in the hope of giving readers new clarity, epiphany or motivation etc. The favored techniques for creating foregrounding are patterns, such as repetitions; ambiguity, in which meaning is clear but conclusions may be variable; metaphor; tone; parallelism; and diction. Structural elements may also be foregrounded, such as character development and plot structure. Any of these devices may be used to defamiliarize the literary work through linguistic dislocation (i.e., atypical language usage) so that the reader is struck by the author's points and aims while submerged in a "strange" perspective of life and the world.















