

SEMANTIC DEVIATION IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S "AH, SUNFLOWER.": A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The primary aim of the study is to investigate William Blake's poem "AH, SUNFLOWER." through the level of semantic deviation in the theory of foregrounding. This study focuses on how, through figurative devices such as metaphor, personification, and symbols, the semantic deviation employs different and hidden meanings of the text. Through the use of metaphor, the theme of loyalty and consistency, adoration and devotion, and natural beauty and youth is conveyed. Through the use of personification, the meanings of measuring time, a reminder of the passage of time, the connection between god and humanity, and natural creativity are uncovered. The use of symbols employs the concepts of a place of peace, paradise and heaven, romantic past, death of a young girl, purity and innocence, emotional numbness, place of isolation, cycle of life, and spirituality. William Blake's poem "AH, SUNFLOWER." may further be analysed through different tools, such as the Fairclough three-dimensional model and the Text-world theory.

Keywords: Stylistics, Foregrounding, Deviation, Semantic Deviation, William Blake

Introduction

Foregrounding is a theory that emphasises certain parts of the text through linguistic devices to enhance the text's aesthetic appeal. It produces effects such as surprise, focus, and emphasis. Foregrounding is mostly used in poetry to understand the meaning and style of a text. It is an essential technique for making writing strange. Leech (1969) argues that foregrounding is a technique that emphasises one element of the text to highlight unusual aspects. Building on this concept of foregrounding, William Blake's poem masterfully conveys ideas and themes in his poems.

William Blake was considered mad by his contemporaries due to his idiosyncratic views. The singularity of Blake's works makes it difficult to classify because he blended the genres, combining elements of poetry, art, philosophy, and mysticism (spiritual and philosophical beliefs). Pierre and Green (2023) argue that several works of William Blake contain short and memorable statements that express a general truth, insights, and principles, and sometimes combine them with poetry and prose. As a romantic poet, William Blake's works carry the themes of nature, expression of emotion, mysticism, spiritualism, and individualism (Study Smarter, n.d.).

Statement of the Problem

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics that studies the linguistic features in literary and non-literary texts to explore the style. It focuses on how language creates effects in the text, conveys meaning, and shapes readers' responses. Foregrounding is a stylistic theory used as a tool to examine and analyse literary and non-literary texts to uncover concealed themes and

ideas. Therefore, the study is conducted to investigate and analyse William Blake's "AH, SUNFLOWER." through the theory of foregrounding to uncover hidden themes and messages.

Research Objectives

1. To examine what linguistic features are used as semantic deviation through the theory of foregrounding in William Blake's "AH, SUNFLOWER."
2. To analyse as to how meanings are suggested as semantic deviation through the theory of foregrounding in William Blake's "AH, SUNFLOWER."

Research Questions

1. What linguistic features are used as semantic deviation through the theory of foregrounding in William Blake's "AH, SUNFLOWER."?
2. How are meanings suggested as semantic deviation through the theory of foregrounding in William Blake's "AH, SUNFLOWER."?

Literature Review

Birch (2005) expressed that style is defined when a language remains under the supremacy of a specific configuration of syllable structure that makes each author's style differ from others due to the linguistic levels of the authors. Style is the unique manner in which something is expressed, communicated, or presented. Each author has a different style due to their own perspective, which makes them different from others. Additionally, style is different from culture to culture and mind to mind (Leech, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that style is different from area to area because each area has distinct properties and a distinct lifestyle; style tells the mindset of people. Style is not only different from author to author due to their stylistic features, as every writer has a unique set of vocabulary in their schemata, but also varies from culture to culture in spoken and written form.

Longman (2023) states that stylistics is the study of style in written and spoken language. Carter and MC Carthy (2014) and Widdowson (2014) have the same point of view that stylistics is a bridge between literature and linguistics. Therefore, stylistics is not only the study of style in written and spoken language, but it also works as a mediator between linguistics and literature, such as foregrounding, the theory of stylistics, which analyses literary works. Leech and Short (1981) stated that foregrounding is a deviation that is an inspiration that guides an artist's creative process. Verdonk (2002) noted that foregrounding has a psychological effect on the reader; for example, it attracts the reader's attention. Martindale (2007) argues that foregrounding has two subparts: deviation and parallelism. Thus, foregrounding is a creative force that persuades the readers, and foregrounding is all about deviation and repetition. Leech (1969) argues that linguistic deviation that occurs in speakers' and writers' writing is a normal feature of literary work. In other words, it is a disorder of the normal process of communication, leaving a gap, as it were, in comprehension of a text, where everyone will interpret it according to their mind and thoughts.

Mikulić (2022) analysed William Blake's poetry through motifs of plants and flowers. This paper aims to analyse William Blake's poem "AH, SUNFLOWER." In this poem, the flower can be interpreted as a symbol of spiritual longing and women setting new goals.' The "Poison Tree" can symbolize repressed human anger, "My Pretty Rose Tree" through rose symbolize fruition and human joy, "The Sick Rose" symbolizes rose as a destructive element of jealousy, "The Lilly" symbolizes purity, innocence, and true love, "The Blossom" has also multiple interpretation clear from the above discussion that numerous use of flowers and plants in the poem means to convey deep meanings in poetic works and represent human life and experiences. The language of flowers is typically found in William Blake's poetry, and it will

create artistic depth and a lasting effect on the readers, writers, and cultural landscape. It encourages critical thinking in readers and writers.

Jepri et al. (2021) use semiotic analysis using Riffaterre's theory of displacing meaning caused by metaphor and metonymy in the form of personification, simile, and synecdoche in his book *Semiotics of Poetry*. The aim is to find out the type of displacement and, through displacing meaning, reveal women suffering in the poems "The Sick Rose", "Earth's Answer", "My Pretty Rose Tree", "London", and "AH, SUNFLOWER.". There are two types of suffering revealed through displacing meaning: mental and physical suffering, which includes sadness, avoidance behaviour, selfishness, restraints, jealousy, fear, abuse, violence, unsoundness, evil, death, poverty, and disease.

Mulyati (2019), in the article "The Analysis of Five William Blake's Poems," uses a qualitative and descriptive approach in the poems "The Sick Rose", "A Poison Tree", "The Lamb", and "London." To reveal some results which are limited to diction, figures of speech, and themes. The theme of "The Sick Rose" is about the girl who is ill. The theme of "AH, SUNFLOWER." is death, but not the bad side of death. "The Prison Tree" reveals the bad side of human nature: anger and the desire to win against enemies. The themes of "The Lamb" are religion, the greatness of god, his creation and tenderness. In addition, "London" symbolises the injustice faced by the London people from the government side. Lastly, the poem "AH, SUNFLOWER." has been analysed through the lenses of literary criticism, qualitative and descriptive approach, and displacing meaning. However, the theory of foregrounding has not been applied so far; the aim of the researcher is to apply the theory of foregrounding to William Blake's poem "AH, SUNFLOWER." to uncover hidden themes.

Research Methodology

The main aim of the study is to analyse William Blake's poem "AH, SUNFLOWER." through the semantic deviation level of foregrounding in stylistics proposed by Geoffrey Leech in 1969. Semantic deviation is applied to the poem to uncover different meanings through the use of figurative devices, which give a more profound understanding of the text and present it in a new way.

Data Collection Tools

The extensive reading method is used for data collection, which is known as the method of documentation. Furthermore, both primary and secondary data are used to analyse the text. The primary data means the words used in the text through which semantic deviation occurs, and the secondary data are books, journals, articles, newspapers, and reports, which are used as arguments.

Data Analysis Tools

The tool of analysis is the theory of foregrounding, a stylistics theory that analyses text objectively, providing a deep understanding of the text and offering new ways for researchers.

Research Paradigm

Paradigm is a systematic and critical approach to understanding complex ideas and concepts (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Paradigm is a fundamental framework, structure, or a person's comprehensive and fundamental perspective on the world that guides researchers or investigators (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Without selecting a paradigm first, no structure supports the later choices regarding methodology, design, and method (Okensina, 2020). Thus, a paradigm is a systematic approach that guides researchers from the beginning. So, there are various research paradigms, which are positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, and

pragmatism. This study selects constructivism as the research paradigm because the study of deviation is qualitative. Constructivism paradigm uses contextualised investigation, uses a qualitative data collection approach, and an inductive data analysis approach (Krauss, 2005). The study selects constructivism (interpretivism), as it is more suitable compared to positivism, post-positivism, and pragmatism because constructivism (interpretivism) focuses on an inductive approach; qualitative data collection tools; and reality is subjective and multiple. Post-positivism focuses on objectivity and subjectivity. However, positivism focuses on independent reality, objectivity, external reality, empiricism, deductive logic, observation (practical), and verification. Pragmatism focuses on mixed-method research, qualitative and quantitative, and inductive and deductive approaches.

Theoretical Framework

Leech (1969) argues that stylistics is literary style or the study of language use in literature. Language is a tool through which we can communicate and express our feelings, emotions, and knowledge, and having extensive knowledge of a language will help a lot in understanding the literary text critically. Leech and Short (2007) define stylistics as the study of the relationship between artistic achievement and the way language is used. It focuses on important text and linguistic features in which it is created (Leech & Short, 2007). Thus, it can be said that stylistics is the study of style and linguistic features of a text and the use of language, which carry meanings, depending on the style used by the author. The knowledge is expressed through language, and extensive knowledge is necessary for understanding the text. Leech (1969) states that semantic deviation is a kind of “nonsense” or “absurdity”, which has no meaning in dictionaries. It is a metaphor with which such a trait is to be considered “nonsense”. Therefore, the use of it in such a way that it conveys a strange meaning, and in poetry, it is the transfer of meaning, and it has no clear meaning.

Data Analysis

In the theory of foregrounding, the level of semantic deviation is used to analyse William Blake’s poem “AH, SUNFLOWER.” to examine how the use of figurative devices conveys different meanings of the text, providing a deeper understanding of the poem.

Table 01: Semantic Deviation in William Blake’s “AH, SUNFLOWER.”

S. No.	Deviation	Type of Semantic Deviation	Reference	Line	Page
1	Semantic deviation	Metaphor	AH, SUNFLOWER weary of time,	01	75
2		Personification	Who countest the steps of the sun;	02	
3		Symbol	Seeking after the sweet golden clime	03	
			And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,	06	
			Arise from their graves, and aspire	07	

In the above table, six columns are present. The first column is about the serial number, and the second column shows the deviation in the poem, which is either a metaphor, personification or symbol. The third column is about the type of deviation, which is semantic deviation, and the fourth column shows the lines in which semantic deviation is present, which may be through words, phrases, and sentences. The fifth column shows the poem “AH,

SUNFLOWER.”, in which semantic deviation occurs. The sixth column shows the frequency of semantic deviation, and the last column shows the page number of the poem in the book.

1. “Sunflower”

In William Blake’s poem “AH, SUNFLOWER.”, the first line in the first stanza grabs attention through a semantic deviation technique called metaphor, which compares two unlike things without using like or as. “**Sunflower**” is presented as a human being, which reflects the human soul that is exhausted in the world. Similarly, the sunflower is tired from the passage of time and wants to reach its destination. As humans, the metaphor “**Sunflower**” foregrounds various themes. The first theme is loyalty and consistency, such as the sunflower follows the sun’s footsteps throughout the day, which is its true nature and love for the sun. The theme of adoration and devotion is symbolised through the ability to follow the sun. The sunflower represents natural beauty and youth, as people plant sunflowers to decorate their homes and use them for nutrition. In Pakistani society, particularly in Pashtun society, it is used to appreciate someone’s devotion and love as a sunflower.

2. “contest the steps of the sun;”

“**contest the steps of the sun;**” is a semantic deviation in the second line of the first stanza of William Blake’s “AH, SUNFLOWER” that attracts attention through personification, giving a human-like quality to nonliving things, and creating vivid imagery. Sunflower is not human, but here it is reflected as a human quality. Sunflower faces the sun, and then it follows the steps of the sun. It is said that when the sun rises, the light falling on the sunflower’s petals causes them to start moving. Thurlow (n.d.) states that sunflowers follow the sun to grow. We can do the same thing by following our dreams to reach positivity in life, through which we can grow and find happiness. It reflects the theme of measuring time because the sun’s movement is used to track the hour of the day. The movement of the petals of the sunflower marks the time and movement of the sun. Counting the steps of the sun reflects the theme of a reminder of the passage of time, which means it does not stop for everyone. The sun’s light gives the sunflower energy for its growth and illuminates the sunflower. The movement of the sunflower evokes the natural creativity and god in the reader’s mind. Further, it evokes a connection between god and humanity: nothing is without god. It reflects the theme of observing the life cycle, birth, death, and rebirth, as the sun’s daily journey can be seen as a symbol of the life cycle. In Pakistani society, it means following someone, such as students following teachers, and children obeying their parents.

3. “sweet golden clime”

Semantic deviation occurs in the William Blake poem “AH, SUNFLOWER.” through symbolism, as Study.com (n.d.) asserts that symbolism is the use of objects, colours, or other elements to define abstract ideas or meanings behind literary interpretation. The phrase “**sweet golden clime**” in the third line of the first stanza symbolises the connection between the human and the sunflower journey. It represents the place of peace and rest, warm weather, nourishment, and growth for the sunflower, where it completes its growth journey. In the same way, the human journey is completed when they reach their destination, the place they want to go. The sunflower also intends to reach its destination, which means completing its journey of growth and nourishment. In literature, it symbolises paradise and heaven, free from trouble and hardship. It represents a country that is rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty. Lastly, it symbolises the romantic past, such as a girl or boy thinking about childhood memories when they played and went with their parents to the market. In the context of Pakistani society, it is a place where people eat a lot of food, they have a lot of money, they buy everything they want, and do not work.

4. ‘pale virgin’

“pale virgin” is a semantic deviation in the second line, “**And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,**” of the second stanza. In the text, it symbolises the dead young girl who is covered with snow. The snow covering her body represents the purity and innocence of death because they are unable to be corrupted. It reminds us of death, which is a natural experience of human life. It gives another essential idea that life is not permanent but has a fleeting nature. It symbolises emotional numbness, that she cannot feel what is happening. In a literary sense, it symbolises weak women and their vulnerability, that they are weak and unable to defend themselves. It also shows the purity and innocence of women who do not lie and do their work honestly and politely when talking with others and making decisions. In the context of scholars, it refers to those women who are morally uncorrupted; they do not maintain lustful relationships with the opposite gender.

5. “**graves,**”

The word “**graves,**” is taken from the poem “**AH, SUNFLOWER.**” by William Blake. It reflects in the text the place where a dead young woman is buried, and they are unable to do anything, like they cannot feel, drink, dance, or engage in other activities of life. Literally, symbolizes the place of isolation where no one can be with you; even when we say in daily life what we will do, the answer we will give is alone in the grave. Reflect the cycle of life, such as first we are born and gradually become old, and one day, we all die and are buried in the grave. It symbolises spirituality because it reminds us of the afterlife, which connects us to god. In the context of Pakistani society, the grave is a place of peace because people say the tensions of the world have not ended in this world; it will be finished only when you are buried, and worldly pleasures have no benefits.

Findings, Conclusion, & Recommendation

The study found the theory of foregrounding by applying the level of semantic deviation to “**AH, SUNFLOWER.**” by William Blake. The study found words as semantic deviation: “**SUNFLOWER**”, the phrase “**contest the steps of the sun;**”, **sweet golden clime**”, “**pale virgin**”, and “**graves,**”. The study analysed William Blake’s poem “**AH, SUNFLOWER.**” through foregrounding, which attracts the readers through different figurative devices. In the Theory of foregrounding, semantic deviation is applied to the poem “**AH, SUNFLOWER.**” to find out the meaning gained by readers from the text which is not found in the dictionary. In the first line of the first stanza, semantic deviation is found through the metaphor of the sunflower that the sunflower is like a human tired of the passage of time, and it reflects beauty and loyalty. In the second line of the poem “**AH, SUNFLOWER.**”, the semantic deviation is found through personification because a human-like quality is given to the sunflower; she moves like a human’s face and follows the sun and completes the journey of growth and nourishment. It gives the theme of measuring time. In the third line of the poem “**AH, SUNFLOWER.**” by William Blake, through the symbol for sun-flower the rest of the place is the warm weather. **AH, SUNFLOWER.**” may further be analysed through different tools, such as Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Text-world theory.

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