



INFLUENCE OF THE VARIABLES OF LANGUAGE IN THE FORMATION OF LITERATURE

ANURADHA SHARMA

Assistant Professor
Ch. Bansi Lal University
Bhiwani



**ANURADHA
SHARMA**

ABSTRACT

In this paper I aim to trace the relation between language and literature. It is very clear from the essays of many 19th and 20th century philosophers and socio-linguists that language influences an individual's thoughts and which consequently influence his ideas and writings. Raymond William, Bakhtim, Gadamer, Adorno and some other thinkers have invested many years for their lives in proving that language, literature and culture are inter-related and a writer can't write in isolation however objective he pretends to be; this influence of a particular culture and society of his epoch can't be escaped. Stephan Greenblatt's "Culture" also defines culture and its role in literature and literary criticism. Thus there is an unbreakable relation between language, literature and society. Though it's not a universally accepted fact, many philosopher and thinkers doubt this relationship between language, literature and culture but according to the popular assumption, the language of a piece of writing is always determined by the society one lives in and thus literature reflects the time and history of a particular society in which it gets composed. A writer's works are deeply affected by the culture he lives in. Literature is an inseparable part of culture and it cannot be understood outside the total context of the entire culture of a given epoch. The factors that affect literature could be social, economical or political. It is impossible to study literature apart from an epoch's entire culture, it is even more fatal to encapsulate a literary phenomenon in the single epoch of its creation which usually is done, never enable us to penetrate into its semantic depth.

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INTRODUCTION

Thinkers like Gadamer stress on the fact that the language pre-forms the thoughts and imagination of the author and he/she writes under an unconscious spell of language while the others believe that language do not play any important role in the kind of literature produced at a particular time in history. One could only judge it better if he/she is aware of the difference between language

and literature. In simple words, Language is a method of communication and literature can be the content being communicated through language. In literature, language is meticulously crafted, not just to inform a reader but to persuade him/her, to play and poke at his/her mind. Literature is a lot more complicated than the language being used. Though one could also argue that language is not treated very seriously each time a text is written as the

writer takes some liberty and develops his own style of writing. In literary texts, the grammatical system of the language is often exploited, experimented with, or in Mukarovsky's words, made to "deviate from other, more every day, forms of language, and as a result creates interesting new patterns in form and in meaning." One way that this happens is through the use of non-conventional structures that seem to break the rules of grammar.

Literature, whether oral or written, expresses people's thoughts, feelings, views, culture, etc. Thus, literature cannot exist outside language, since language is the medium of expression; people use language to construct poems, stories, plays, etc. In other words, literature involves the manipulation of language for creative purposes. In literature, language is manipulated for the expression of a people's culture. While language is the medium used in expressing people's culture, literature is the reflection of this culture. Literature itself has been described as a bundle of material, oral or written, which reflects how people live their lives. In Nigeria, for instance, the indigenous languages, as well as the English language, have been used in expressing the people's culture as reflected in their literature. Although English is a second language there, it has become a medium for expressing Nigerian culture. However, the Nigerian writer has had to Nigerianize the English language by compelling it to express unaccustomed culture. Chinua Achebe is one Nigerian writer who has used English language to bring out the aesthetic values of Igbo culture. He uses English in expressing Igbo proverbs, insisting that "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe 1976:5). In *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, etc., Achebe manipulates English to express the African culture and world view, carefully and effectively.

Language gives the literature of people its peculiarities. For instance, one of the distinguishing features of Nigerian literature is not only the abundant presence of Nigerian proverbs, idiomatic expressions and figures of speech, but also transferred lexical items (L1) used in Nigerian environment. In Achebe's works, for instance, he uses many indigenous words such as

nza, ogene, Afo, Nkwo, Eke, Iroko, nzu, etc which have no English equivalents, to express Nigerian concepts. If he had translated these words into English, they might not have carried the proper degree of solemnity or implied a sufficient sense of the reverence in which such words are held by the local audience. Thus, the peculiarity of Nigerian literature in English is that it is produced in the Nigerian variety of English language known as Nigerian English. It is a variety of English which Achebe describes as "new English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding." Indeed, it is the use of language that distinguishes African literature from British or American literature, for instance, in spite of the fact that they are all produced in English language.

One very important area, in which the inextricable link between language and literature is quite evident, is in the expression of what can be called divine tradition and culture. There is no doubt that Biblical language has become a universal language which transcends both racial and linguistic boundaries. The culture or way of life projected in the message of the Bible, particularly the message of the New Testament, is not peculiar to any people's tradition and culture. It is a way of life whose distinguishing feature is faith in Christ and His sacrifice and gospel of salvation – a way of life that is common to the body of believers regardless of their individual race, language or nationality.

Thus, literature as a product of a given language implies that we also have a peculiar brand of literature which is clearly a product of Biblical language; it expresses 'the divine tradition' (the godly or Christian way of life). The reality of God and people's quest for the knowledge of Him as revealed in His word, the Bible, has given birth to what can be described as Bible-based literature: literature that expresses the peculiar culture and world view of the believers. Although human language is used as the medium of communication in this brand of literature, its message transcends the boundaries of human languages and cultures. In fact, the language of Bible-based literature has assumed a universal status: it is a language characterized by Biblical concepts and their equivalents in whatever language

is used as a medium of communication. Works of literature in this category have one thing in common: they are intended to teach moral lessons. To ignore the existence of this brand of literature is to ignore reality itself. While it is undeniable that literature is the manipulation of language for creative purposes, it must be noted that the usefulness of literature to the human society depends largely on how the writer uses language. Like a house whose structure and value depend on the quality of materials used by the builder as well as his or her expertise in the use of these materials, the value of a work of literature also depends on the writer's choice of language as well as his or her ability to use language creatively and in a manner that is beneficial to the human society. What can be deduced from the above paragraphs is that every work of literature is the product of a given language and that the aesthetic and moral value of a work of literature certainly depends on the use of language. Thus, language is the medium of literature as marble or bronze are the materials of the sculptor.

To produce a good work of literature, the writer must be able to manipulate language for the purpose of conveying a message that is both meaningful and useful to the audience. Language is influenced by our thoughts and whatever we speak or write reflects our views about the world, which gets formed with our experiences that we gain through interaction with people who hold some other perspective of the world than ours. But it's only helpful if we know how to convey our meaning without beautifying our language. Watson believes that thinking is a sub-vocal speech. We think to ourselves with the help of words. This is how we develop a discourse in our minds but this discourse can only be labelled as 'universal' by coming in contrast with people who have different perception than ours and thus a unified experience can be gained. But most of the time it's not possible because our mind has some prefixed notions about things which we have developed with our personal experiences and thus we can't escape prejudice towards the things that exists in the world. The authors argue that one expresses the world experience through language which all together is a

vast experience and sometimes quite far from reality.

We learn and speak language in accordance to our socialization, though now a day's more with "reason" and less with "conventions". But still can't escape the prefixed linguistic conventions of the society we belong to. Nietzsche argues that, "language is a prison house" which means a speaker or a writer can't escape the influence of the time and society he lives in. Thus language is not a fixed ideology, it changes with time. The hypothesis bought out by Sapir and Whorf about language relativity and language determinism stresses on the fact that our cultural background determines our thinking and thus when we think in terms of language, our thoughts get limited to the linguistic constraints, losing the essence of universality.

Though language plays the most vital role in the formation of a piece of work but sometimes it also binds the writer into the time and space and limits the intentions to his/her audience and cease a writer to say what he/she actually wants to convey. His mind becomes so obsessed with using the words, syntax and metaphors in a beautiful way that the main focus gets shifted to something less important in the text. Often, getting of one's too technical destroys the richness of the text because it's always the matter/content that matters and not the length and use of language if it would be right to say.

Since every language has its distinctive peculiarities, the innate formal limitations and possibilities of one literature are never quite the same as those of another. The literature fashioned out of the form and substance of a language has the colour and the texture of its matrix. The literary artist may never be conscious of just how he is hindered or helped or otherwise guided by the matrix, but when it is a question of translating his work into another language, the nature of the original matrix manifests itself at once. If we look at as how far a piece of writing is completely translated into other language we will notice that language often fails to convey the emotions and feelings attached to the original text by the writer. Though a piece of writing is not always judged by its language, a writer often writes under the pressure of using the

most appropriate words and he could not differentiate between the use of beautiful language and adequate language. Language plays an important role in translation which too is responsible in the circulation of literature. Both Benjamin and Gadamer accept translation as an important function of language which allows a piece of literary work to be read, interpreted and understood by different linguistic groups. According to Gadamer, translation is the interpretation of a text according to the author which gets influenced by various social, cultural and linguistic factors. He also believes that when the translation of a text starts taking place its originality gets lost somewhere. Ultimately instead of the emergence of a new text, translation gives birth to new interpretations of the same text.

A translation appears as something unique in Benjamin's words for it has the potential to convey what he calls a 'pure language', where the 'mutually exclusive' differences among two languages can coexist and where the 'complementary intentions' of these languages can be communicated. He believes that all languages carry some thing in common and thus languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express. Thus to demonstrate what he defines as the 'kinship of languages' in a translation, the form and the meaning of the original have to be conveyed 'as accurately as possible'. However this does not mean that the translation has to be a perfect copy of the original. Accuracy and literalness play important role in translation but not at the cost of its authenticity. According to Adorno, "Properly written texts are like spider webs: tight, concentric, transparent, well-spun and firm. They draw into themselves all the creatures of the air. Metaphors flitting hastily through them become their nourishing prey. Subject matter comes winging towards them. The soundness of a conception can be judged by whether it causes one quotation to summon another." Thus the restrictions of language also limit the excellence of a writer who is often bound to produce a piece of writing into the restricted realm of language.

A literary work is the reflection of a writer's mind and thoughts, which too are not spared by the influence of language. What we think, we speak and what we speak comes out of the language we possess and sometimes when we don't have enough words to express, we develop our own vocabulary. There are other views that language and thinking are two different phenomena and thus we don't need a language to think, but as when we learn to speak, we learn which word goes with which thought, as an expanded vocabulary helps us think more broadly, more precisely, and a lot faster. Gadamer and few other philosophers and socio-linguists believe that language influences thoughts and which consequently influence writing. Literature at every level is the production of thoughts thus it is important to know to what extent does language influence or pre-determine thought. One of the most controversial answers comes from Benjamin Whorf, the student of renowned anthropologist Edward Sapir: language not only influences thought; language determines thought—thought cannot exist without language. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, at least in its strongest form, has been discarded by mainstream psychologists. After all, it's not difficult to come up with many examples of thought that do not involve language, such as mentally rotating an object or learning how to juggle. But a weaker form of the hypothesis has yet to be disproved: the idea that the available linguistic expression does to a certain extent constrain our thoughts. 'Just as language means constantly practicing modes of expression and argument, so our formation of conviction and opinion is also a way of introducing us into a set of pre-formed articulations of meaning.' (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. P 548). Gadamer further says that the fact that we move in a linguistic world and grow up into the world through an experience pre-formed by language does not at all remove the possibilities of critique. On the contrary, the possibilities of going beyond our conventions and beyond all those experiences that are schematized in advance opens up before us once we find ourselves, in our conversation with others, faced with opposed thinkers, with new critical tests, with new experiences.

Conclusion

Language is not an independent entity. It is influenced by the conventions and social norms behind which there are always economic and hegemonic interests and thus we find a great difference in the language of literary works produce during different periods in history. Language has many forms- writing, reading, speaking and reciting. Speaking is the easiest way of language use. In speaking, one word brings forth another, and hence our thinking gets promulgated. Reciting is the opposite of speaking. In reciting one is always aware of what is coming out and the possible advantage of a sudden inspiration is precluded. Writing is the most difficult form of language use; here one is bound to follow some grammatical rules and thus written literature is more acknowledged than oral literature. This makes writers more conscious in making the choice of words from the stock of language. However dominant role language plays in the formation of a piece of writing its creative importance could not be ignored. It's impossible to express oneself completely in the absence of language. Either in the case of expressing original text or translation, language plays a central role. To say it more clearly, I would like to conclude the discussion with Gadamer's words from his essay "To What Extend Does Language Pre-form Thoughts?" where he argues, "Language is the single word, whose virtually opens for us the infinity of discourse, of speaking with one another, of the freedom of "expressing oneself" and "letting oneself be expressed. Language is not its elaborated conventionalism, nor the burden of pre-schematized with which it loads us, but the generative and creative power to unceasingly makes this whole once again fluent."

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