Poetic Violence on Practical Language

Mohan Kumar Tumbahang (PhD)
Reader (English)
Mahendra Multiple Campus, Dharan, Nepal

Abstract:- This paper entitled 'Poetic Violence on Practical Language' attempts to analyze the kind of language employed in the poetry in relation to the practical language which serves the purpose of day to day communication. Main focus is laid upon the issue of how the poetic language most often defies the norms and rules of the ordinary (practical) language variety. The everyday communicative speech has to bear the regular violence on the part of poetic language. The study attempts to follow the qualitative research design which involves collecting non-numerical data especially the literary text or discourse for analytical and interpretative purpose. After the related data have collected, the linguistic or more specifically the stylistic theory is applied to analyze compare and interpret the collected data. The findings of this study are that the basic linguistic aspects: foregrounding, musicality, and metaphorical expression are determinant to differentiate poetic writing from the rest writings. Fundamentally, there are three key points: sound pattern, word order/arrangement and the meaning system (semantics) which are inherent features in the poetry and they depart from the mode of practical language variety. The individuals who are interested in having the insight into the linguistic features of the poetic language structure, they can be benefited from this article. Moreover, language teachers, students and linguists may get help to some extent from this study.

Keywords:- Automatized, Deviation, Foregrounding, Phonic Texture, Rhythm, Violence.

I. INTRODUCTION

As it is observed the kind of language used in poetry and in ordinary communicative language (Victor Shklovsky has termed it as 'practical language'), one can notice a remarkable difference between the two varieties. The idea expressed in theverse lineand especially the form of poetic language is the fundamental feature to differentiate the one from the other. According to Aristotle "poetic language must appear strange and wonderful; and, in fact, it is often actually foreign" (as cited in Shklovsky, 1917, p. 6). Here Aristotle seems to emphasize the feature of the poetic language that is essentially distinct, and it should not look/feel like common one or more specifically the practical language variety. For this reason, the classical English poems were found to be employing either Greek or Latin language. The only motif they had was to make their poetry look strange. In this regard Dave, Verma and Aggarawala (1980) point out, "Poetry is an art of expressing noble thoughts in melodious rhythmical language"(p. 405). This

statement clearly hints at the nature and quality of the poetic language. Especially, one can discern that poetic language is an art that means it requires high attention and practice. Likewise, poetic language should have melody and rhythm that lead to the exquisite quality of music.

Regarding the poetic device,Jakobson views, "it (poetic feature) is like oil in cooking, you can't have it on its own but when it is used with other food, it is more than mere addition. It changes the taste of food to the extent some dishes no longer appear to have any connection with their counterparts." From the statement it is inferred that poetic language cannot serve as a means of daily communication just as we cannot have oilas the daily meal to satisfy hunger. The practical (ordinary language variety) on the other hand, is simple, straightforward, familiar and automatized. It serves the function of daily communication. Hence Jakobson(1960) observes, "Poetry is organized violence committed on every day language." Obviously, he means that poetry does not necessarily follow the rules applied in the ordinary speech, but however the violence is not uncontrolled and chaotic manner rather it is organized.

It is also equally true that poetic language makes use of the same materials as the practical language yet the pattern is essentially different. In this regard Lazar (1993)states, "poetry may differ linguistically from more usual ordinary form of language"(p. 98). He further states that poetry generally reorganizes syntax, invents its own form of vocabulary, freely mixes registers and creates its own pronunciation. This statement clearly indicates that poetic language is different from the ordinary one in four counts. These four features are syntactic form (sentence structure), types of vocabulary (i. e. archaic, high-sounding, or even nonsensical/bound lexical items), language variety (i.e. words from many different fields such as religious, sports, music, play, farming, etc.) and the sonic texture (mainly the supra-segmental features like intonation, stress, pitch, melody, rhyme, rhythm, etc.). To this context, Leech's (1988) saying is more relevant for he maintains the view that poetry has been described as deviating from the norms of language. Deviation in poetry is, in this sense, an inevitable notion but the matter is only the degree of distortion. The similar view has been forwarded by Crystal (2007) as he declares as, "poetic language breaks too many rules and there is danger of falling over the edge of language into intelligibility"(p. 72).Likewise, Widdoson (1983) also holds the same view and thus expresses hisidea as, "poetry has been characterized as deviating from the norms of language." Having considered these all views, it will, however,be a sheer nonsense to draw the conclusion that poetic language is entirely meaningless. Lazar (1993)in this

regard clarifies as"even though poetry frequently breaks the rules of language, it by doing so communicates with us in a fresh original way"(p. 99). And thus, poetry is not an absurd expression but it is a clear, vivid and sharp or cutting expression in comparison to the everyday communicative language.

Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984) one of the founder members of Russian Formalism compares the poetic language and practical communication with dance and walking respectively. He, maintains that "walking, for example, is an activity which as we go about in everyday life we have ceased to be aware of; but when we dance, the automatically performed gestures of walking are perceived anew" (as cited in Jefferson &Robey, 1984, p. 27) A dance is merely a walk in his view, even more accurately, it is a walk designed to be felt. It is safe to conclude that every day language is made strange in poetry.

II. PROBLEM, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The language of poetry is markedly different from 'the practical language' or the everyday communicative speech form. It is because, as Wellek (1969) refers to it that poetry is a tight universe of sound and meaning, so closely interlocked that we cannot distinguish content and form. He further states that poetry exploits the resources of language to the utmost, removing itself from ordinary speech by sound and meters and all the devices of imagery. It means that poetic language is deviated from the ordinary speech or it imposes an organized violence on the ordinary speech variety. Now the question rises as how the poetic language causes the 'controlled violence' to the everyday communicative speech, and what specific pointsare responsible to distinguish the poetic language from that of the practical language.

In this paper, the study tries to solve the research questions like what are the differences between the poetic language from the ordinary language; and how the poetic language causes violence onto thepractical language.

The specific objectives of this proposed study will be as follows:
a. To point out the differences between the poetic language and practical language;
b. To and discuss and analyze the reasons as to how poetic language violates the norms of ordinary speech or the practical language;

Regarding the methodology, the proposed study has applied the qualitative research design since it involved annotation, analysis, interpretation and explanation. This research work has primarily based on the poetic texts for the necessary data and the related materials were obtained through library consultation and internet. Sources of textual references such as published and unpublished works, documents, reports, manuscripts, pedigrees, books, booklets, journals and magazinesrelated to the study were consulted, collected and reviewed as the secondary resources. The

study has availed both linguistics and literary theories to analyze and interpret the obtained data. For the theoretical insights, the related writings by Victor Shklovsky (1917),Jakobson (1960), Traugott&Pratt (1980), Widdowson (1983),Jefferson &Robey (1984), Leech (1988), Lazar (1993), Crystal (2007), and Simpson (2011) have been duly consulted for comprehending and expounding the issue in this study.

III. CRITERIA FOR DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

➢ *Foregrounding vs.Backgrounding*
Normally a text is structured in a certain pattern. More specifically the text should follow the pattern as has been prescribed in the rule. But this grammatical patterning is not always followed in the textual arrangement in poetry. The term foregrounding literally suggests that the intended portion of the text is brought to the fore regardless of grammatical norms. This process of foregrounding definitely deviates the usual norms. This is done primarily to give emphasis on particular aspect and portion of the syntactic structure. In this regard, Simpson (2011) states, "foregrounding refers to form of textual patterning which motivated specially for literary-aesthetic purpose." It is therefore foregrounding is essentially a technique for making strange in language. The strangeness in language has further its motif that is, it gives shock to the reader and thus writing becomes automatically outstanding from other. Krishnaswamy and Nagarajan (1988) observe, "By foregrounding we mean the use of any device of language in such a way that its use itself attracts attention and perceived as uncommon." They seem to indicate that it is not only the process of placing certain part of the sentence/expression in the fore but also use any other device to make text uncommon. As Simpson (2011) points outforegrounding comes in two main guises: foregrounding as deviation from a norm and from more of the same (i.e. through repetition or parallelism).

In English we may encounter the following types of sequences:
a. The boy saw the man   (SVO)
b. John I invited – not Smith.   (OVS)
c. Govern thou my song.   (VSO)
    Milton
d. Strange fits of passion have I known. (OSV)
    Wordsworth
e. Pensive poets painful vigils keep.   (SOV)
    Pope
(Source: Crystal 2007)

The above last three quoted lines by the famous English writers are essentially from poems and they are deviated from the ordinary norms of grammar. The English assertive/declarative sentence has SVO pattern. These last four lines do not follow SVO pattern rather they are seen in the poetic form. Among them Wordsworth's line 'Strange fits of passion have I known' has appeared as the title of one of his poems. It is obvious that the syntactic deviation occurs primarily with two purposes that is, to make the

expression strange and to impose the emphasis on the foregrounded chunk. According to Abrams (2000), "to foreground is to bring something into highest prominence, to make it dominant in perception." Apart from the foregrounded chunk the rest are naturally or tacitly backgrounded which are of little prominence. Wales (2001) rightly supports Abrams' view stating, "foreground is thus throwing into relief of the linguistic sign against the background of the norms of ordinary language." It is the process in which the chunk is made outstanding from the rest. Keeping this point in view Cuddon (1998) opines, "in a sense, foregrounding is an art which reveals art rather than concealing it."

> *Musicality vs. Non-Musicality*

It is perhaps not an exaggeration that the music is the soul of poetry. For poetic expression, it is an inevitable thing or quality without which a poem is not considered to be a poem. But to talk about music is not an easy business as we simply think of it. In this regard, Comley (2005) states, "the musical element in poetry is the hardest to talk about because it is non-verbal yet it is important in all poetry." Basically various linguistic as well as paralinguistic sounds are arranged or combined in such a way that, these sounds tend to produce melody and rhythm at the same time. Such phonic texture of segmental and supra-segmental features happens to set a verse line to music. It is reason that poems are not read as ordinary prose writing but recited in melodious tune associating regular rhythm. When we are dealing with the sonic texture, we are essentially dealing with the prosodic features of the poetry. Unlike the ordinary speech variety, poetry usually consists of musicality in its expression. Candidly speaking, we do not converse by singing in our day-to-day communication and there lies the fundamental difference between poetry and practical language variety. Let us consider how the poetic lines are distinctive from other expressions as below:

We think our fathers fool as wise we grow
Our wisest sons no doubt will think us so
Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

This couplet rhymes together and consists other prosodic features like alliteration, regular rhythm of weak (unstressed) followed by strong (stressed) syllable, every two syllables forming an iambic foot. There are altogether ten syllables or five feet and hence iambic pentameter lines. Both verse lines have final sound /əʊ/ i.e. *grow* /grəʊ/ and *so* /səʊ/ that is why they two lines rhyme together. So therefore the verse lines must have the two vital elements to produce musicality. These elements are regular rhythm and rhyme.

> *Figurative vs. Literal Meaning*

Poetic language that seems strikingly different from the practical language is in terms of semantic or meaning aspect. Poetry usually does not use the primary or dictionary meaning rather it employs the secondary or figurative meaning for its purpose. From the general outlook, this is an explicit deviation of the practical language norms. In this regard Jefferson and Robey (1984) point out the distinctive feature of lexical meaning in poetry than that of practical language. They state that "poetry differs from ordinary

language in that it activates the secondary or collateral meanings of a word simultaneously, a strategy which would disrupt ordinary communication which depends on the absence of ambiguity through there being only one functional meaning for a word." They further quote Ekhenbaum (1965)"as words get into verse, they are as it were, taken out of ordinary. They are surrounded by a new aura of meaning,"(p. 129). By this it is inferred that the language used in the poem is by no means a literal one. Let us consider BhupiSherchan's a brief poem which he recited upon his arrival at Dharan on a request by the then Literary Circle gathered to welcome him. His brief poem reads as:

alikatilepht	(A few left)
alikatirait	(A few right)
anikehilepht-rait	(And some left-right)
bicharodharan	(Poor Dharan!)
aaphaimachhahairan	(Wearied itself)

(This poem'sNepali version was told me (to this paper writer) bymy colleague, late Chandra Mani Adhikari in an occasion who was the then lecturer of Nepali Department at Mahendra Campus, Dharan (Nepal) and suddenly passed away on 32ndShravan 2068 VS/17th August 2011 AD.I pay my profoundest tribute to the departed soul.)

In the above poem, when we consider from its literal sense, it seems to be absurd. But when we look into its secondary meaning automatically it becomes vivid and it depicts the types of people residing in Dharan. The poem implicitly tries to say that there are mainly three kinds of people living there. 'Left' is associated with the people following leftist ideology or communism. It is true that Dharan seems to be the pocket area of the progressive people because they have been leading every local as well as central level election since 2030 VS or so. This does not necessarily mean that there are no rightist people. They are there in a considerable number. The word 'right' thus suggests that there are people who follow the democratic ideology. Then who the left-right people are! Can they be the neutral mass with the tacit support for both the leftist and rightist? No, but they are particularly British Armies no matter whether they are in-service or ex-service men. The poet calls them as 'left-right' because they perform left and right during the 'parade'. Dharan in the east and Pokhara in the west are well known places where there are British Army's ex-service men dwelling in a large number. Dharan has been personified and it wearied much because these three groups do not seem to come together and unite for the pious deed of nation's as well as countrymen's peace, progress and prosperity. They, specially 'left','right' and 'left-right' plunge into meaningless debate like Jonathan Swift's saying as which end of an egg should be broken to get the yolk. Obviously, this sort of debate is worthless and trivial because it does make any difference of which end of the egg you break. After all, you get the desired thing.

The poem as we have observed, is entirely metaphorical. The major word class like 'left', 'right' and 'left-right' have been used metaphorically. Fabb (2004) observes that "metaphor arises where the logical form of an utterance must be rejected in favor of another proposition

derived by the use of bridging inferences which link the two propositions." To clarify this statement, we can suppose the word 'left'. The logical utterance means that the word's basic meaning has been rejected in order to favor another proposition i.e. the leftist people. Yet the word 'left' bridges the two propositions at the same time. Similar is the case with the words like 'right' and 'left-right'. Comley (2005) maintains, "in metaphor, thing and image are not presented as a direct analogy (**A** is like **B)** but by discussing on in terms of the other (**A** is**B'**ish)." In other words, metaphor is essentially an implied simile.

Including metaphor, the literary devices such as image, hyperbole, parallelism, comparison, repetition or any other trope are potentially all equally effective in committing poetic violence on ordinary language. These literary devices are called figures of speech of which Wren and Martin (1999) hold the opinion that "a figure of speech is departure form of ordinary expression or the ordinary course of ideas in order to produce a greater effect." The use of figure of speech in expression suggests that it the deviation from the ordinary norms of language. For instance, 'A' is never 'B' in the ordinary sense but 'A' is 'B' in the figurative speech and sensible in the metaphorical expression or in the literary language.

IV. LINGUISTIC DEVIATION

Language deviation in this regard refers to the breaking of the ordinary grammatical norms and rules in the speech or in writing. This phenomenon proves to be one of the major causes in making the expression or discourse incomprehensible to the readers or listeners. Pointing to this intricacy of poetry, Crystal (2007) views as, "Authors take risk when they push language to its limits. If they break too many rules, they can fall over the edge of language into unintelligibility,"(p. 72). Likewise, Pope (2010) views about how poetic language differs from the ordinary language as "poetry both disturbs and reforms the pattern of routine language," (p. 89).Following the ordinary norms in literary writings can be impossible, it is "because literary works are often highly individualized and because their internal structure depends on other factors than purely linguistic ones" (Traugott& Pratt, 1980, p. 28).In the poetic expression, the deviation is usually a commonplace. Thus, the case of linguistic deviation is noticed in three major areas. They are:

*Sonic Texture (Phonological Deviation):*According to the Russian Formalists, sound or sonic texture is the primary one.It denotes that sounds in poetic expression are arranged in a particular sequence so as to intensify meaning to the audience. Here, the violation of the standard norms concerns with the foregrounding of the sonic aspect of ordinary speech, which in common conversation remains less important to the referent set of utterances. Poetry is 'speech organized in its entire phonic texture' (as cited in Jefferson &Robey 1984, p. 37) and not just ordinary speech with added musical embellishment. In other words, the foregrounded phonic elements in poetry are often ignored in practical speech.To this point, Lazar (1993) holds the opinion as, "It (Poetry) patterns sounds and orders rhythms"

(p. 98). There is a greater correlation between sounds and meaning in the poetic expression. In this regard, Alexander Pope (1991) rightly opines, "The sound must seem an echo to the sense"(p. 120). Here, Pope implies that the sounds correlate the meaning in the poetic expressions. For this reason, the verse is recited with a proper rhythmic balance but not said just as in the casual conversation. The question may arise as how the poetry deviates from the standard norms of the grammar. Its reply can be made by the counter question as 'Does anyone sing or express the verse lines while in the everyday conversation?' Presumably enough, no one communicates by singing in an ordinary speech situation. Hence, the poetry has defied the norms of grammar in terms of phonic pattern.

Lexical Meaning (Semantic Deviation): Generally lexical meaning refers to the word meaning or the meaning denoted by the dictionaries. This kind of meaning is also known as the primary or denotative meaning of a word which shows the relationship between words and objects in the world of experience. For instance, 'a rose' in its primary meaning denotes a kind of woody perennial flowering plant of a genus 'Rosa'. But when it is associated with the meaning of a beautiful young lady, love, prime youth, transient or the like, it is not the primary (literal) meaning of the 'rose' rather it is secondary (figurative) or connotative meaning. In the figurative meaning, one moves (goes) beyond and above the literal meaning and when a word leaves its primary meaning, it rises up to call for multiplicities of associations. This kind of associative meaning is semantic deviation. Thus, the usual dictionary meaning is deviated and that suggests something else.

While talking about the poetic language, it is essentially distinct from the ordinary or practical language variety in that, it activates secondary or collateral meanings of a word in a parallel way – a technique which would interrupt ordinary communication which depends on the absence of ambiguity through there being only one functional meaning for a word.As Eikhenbaum (1965) puts it, "as words get into verse, they are, as it were, taken out of ordinary speech and they are surrounded by new aura of meaning" (as cited in Jefferson &Robey, 1984, p. 28).The poetic language is found to be freely exploiting the figures of speech in the expression where the figures are a kind of deviation against the rules and norms set by the grammar. In this regard, Alexander Bain (1866) opines that a figure of speech may be a deviation from the plain and ordinary mode of speaking for the sake of greater effect. Most of the lexical items in the poetry are not designed for the primary meaning but the vocabulary is especially for the associative meanings. When the words are not used to denote the dictionary (primary) meaning, it is technically called as semantic deviation.

*Word Order (Syntactic Deviation):*Word order is another deviation occurred in the poetic expression. This means that the words are not ordered as prescribed in the standard norms. So-called random at word order results from the idea of the poet's foregrounding as well as backgrounding the specific notion. This kind of distortion is pervasive in poetry

because the poets are said to have the poetic license that is, they are held at certain liberty to distort/break the established norms of grammar. Abrams (2000) forwards Dryden's definition as the liberty which poets have assumed to themselves in all ages of speaking things in verse which are beyond the severity of prose. By availing the poetic license, "poets reorganize syntax, invent its own vocabulary, freely mix register and create its own pronunciation. Poetry draws creative on a full range of archaisms and dialects and generates vivid new metaphors" (Lazar 1993, p. 98). Likewise, Leech (1988) holds the opinion that this is the reason poetry has been characterized deviating from the norms of language. Regarding this violation of rules, Widdowson (1983) argues that poetry frequently breaks the rules of language but by so doing, it communicates with us a fresh, original way. He further claims that the poetry, like God *Shiva*, destroys and recreates a newer linguistic structure. The violation of the established linguistic rules does not necessarily mean that it creates obstacle in the communication rather the meaning is surcharged by a new way. One must suppose that the distortion is deliberately fashioned for an effect. A single innocent looking line is laden with multiplicity of meaning. In other words, an expression is resounding and echoing diverse meanings. This is the way; the expression becomes more vivid and graphic as well.

V. CONCLUSION

Language of poetry is essentially different from the practical or the language used in the daily communication. Poetic language is differentiated from the practical one in three counts as foregrounding, musicality and embellishment. Similarly, there are three elements that set the poetry off the ordinary language variety. The first element is the sonic texture employed in the poetic expression. Linguistic sounds are patterned in a systematic and regular order that produces rhyme, rhythm and melody in the expression. This kind of musicality is usually absent in the ordinary conversation or in the practical speech. The second is the lexical meaning. It refers to the semantic aspect of lexical items. In poetry, the secondary or figurative meaning is activated leaving behind the primary meaning of the words. Third point is the word order which is related to the syntactic structure of the utterances. Poetry does not necessarily follow the standard norms (SVO Order) ordinary speech. Thus, poetic language deliberately violates the ordinary norms in different linguistic levels setting it off the practical language variety.

REFERENCES

[1]. Abrams, M. (2000). *A glossary of literary terms* (VIth ed.). India: Gopson Paper Ltd.

[2]. Comley, N. R. et al. (eds.) (2005). *Elements of literature*. New Delhi: OUP.

[3]. Crystal, D. (2007). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language.* Cambridge: CUP.

[4]. Cuddon, J. (1998). *A dictionary of literary terms and literary theory.* Delhi: Maya Blackwell.

[5]. Dave, M. J. et al. (1988). *New college composition.* New Delhi: Atma Ram & Sons.

[6]. Erlich, V. (1981).*Russian formalism: History and doctrine*. Mouton: s-Gravenhage.

[7]. Fabb, N. (2004). Linguistics and literature. In Aronoff, M.; Miller, J.R. (eds.).*The handbook of*

[8]. *linguistics.*Cowley Road: Blackwell.

[9]. Jefferson, A.& Robey, D. (. (1984). *Modern literary theory: A comparative introduction.* Basil:

[10]. Blackwell.

[11]. Jakobson, R. (1960). Closing statement: Linguistics and poetics. In Thomas A. Sebeok. (ed.). *Style in language*. New York: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

[12]. Krishnaswamy, N., Verma, S., & Nagarajan, M. (2000). *Modern applied linguistics.* Chennai:

[13]. Macmillan.

[14]. Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and language teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[15]. Leech, G. (1988). *A linguistic guide to English poetry.* London: Longman.

[16]. Simpson, P. (2011). *Stylistics.* Noida, India: Routledge.

[17]. Wales, K. (2001). *Adictionary of stylistics.* Malaysia: Pearson Education.

[18]. Wellek, R. (1963). Concept of form and structure in twentieth century criticism. *Concept of criticism.*New Haven: Yale University Press.

[19]. Widdowson, H. G. (1983). The deviaant language of poetry. In Brumfit, C.J. (ed.).*Teaching*

[20]. *literature overseas: language-based approaches.* London: Pergamon.

[21]. Wren, P. C. & Martin, H. (1999).*High school grammar and composition*. Delhi: S. Chand & Co.