

The “Writing Back Paradigm” and the Relevance of Postcolonial Stylistics

R. Kalpana^{[a],*}

^[a]Dr., Assistant Professor, Deptment of English, PSG College of Technology, Coimbatore, India.

*Corresponding author.

Received 10 October 2016; accepted 22 December 2016
Published online 26 January 2017

Abstract

Postcolonial writers writing in English resorted to various strategies and deviations to maintain the cultural distinctiveness and nativity of both text and context. This practice is also true of postcolonial writers in the postliberalisation era. These strategies and deviations, as a process of “acculturation”, have been described by the use of terms such as “abrogation” and “appropriation” by Ashcroft et al. (1989). This article collects examples from the works of various postcolonial writers as reviewed by various critics and analyses various strategies, deviations and innovations attempted by these writers to mark their distinctiveness.

Key words: Post colonial; Stylistics; Abrogation; Appropriation; Nativised; Nativisation

Kalpana, R. (2017). The “Writing Back Paradigm” and the Relevance of Postcolonial Stylistics. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 14(1), 13-17. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/9122>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9122>

INTRODUCTION

The term postcolonial stylistics can be defined as the “linguistic study of literature pertaining to post colonial era” (Sriraman, p.38). The stylistic aspects of postcolonial literature seem to deserve an exclusive, detailed study as against describing the same with the general rules and principles of stylistics for two reasons: One, the writers of colonized countries, put forth both an *overtly linguistic* and *covertly political* and *linguistic*

rebellion by refusing to conform to the norms of *Standard English*. In the process, by *appropriating* language, these postcolonial writers managed to create a distinct, special place for themselves in the world of language. This paper explores the strategies used by postcolonial writers to nativise the experiences through creative and nativised use of language. It also highlights how these writers created a niche linguistic space in world literature for themselves by their daring and willing suspension of adherence to the norms of colonial (standard) English.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

Ashcroft et al. (1989) observes,

... post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. There are two distinct processes by which it does this. The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of ‘English’ involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege. (p.37)

Secondly, by doing so, postcolonial literature exhibits immense samples of bilingual creativity, as exemplified in the repertoire of various discursal and stylistic strategies adopted by these writers. Post colonial writers have manipulated and played around language to express the nativised thought process and to bring out the cultural and emotional essence in so many different ways, thus bringing about a substantial change in the linguistic fabric of the English language. The various cultural, cultural and ethnographic signs embedded in the literatures of post colonial writers in English seem to lend a unique sensibility and extended cultural awareness to postcolonial

literatures, thus grooming it enough to emerge as a separate sub branch worthy of analysis. For these reasons, the relevance of a stylistic study of literature seems both justified and necessary, as identical linguistic approaches to describe the postcolonial writers' creativity seems inefficient, if not inadequate.

The "writing back" paradigm can be described using the three terms used by Peter Barry namely "adopt, adapt and adept". Though some of the major concepts of postcolonial theories such as mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence primarily refer to *ideologies, themes and content of the post colonial era*, they share a considerable relevance to the use of language as well. Barry (1995) talks about this kind of transition in post colonial literatures as a movement from "Adopt to adapt and adept". The "Adopt" phase, bears close resemblance to the "mimic" phase, where the postcolonial intellectuals, owed strict allegiance to the western way of writing - they thought, wrote like a western poet/author and used even the imagery of the West (eg Henry Derozio's use of the harp image). These writers strictly adhered to the norms provided by the "inner circle", assuming it to be universally valid. In the "adapt" phase, which can likened to a kind of hybridization, the postcolonial writer makes a "partial intervention in the genre" by adapting the European form to the African/Indian subject matter, as a licensee ; and lastly, in the adept phase, the writer breaks free and in a bout of absolute independence, remakes or recreates the form to their own specification and brought into play a variety of registers, styles, voices and tones with least effort (Barry, 1995, p.196). This can be viewed upon as a kind of *customization* where the writer, becomes more conscious and versatile user of the different various types of englishes based on region, class and proficiency. From a humble trainee to a licensed, semi-autonomous user in the first two phases, in the third, the colonized writer attains a kind of leap—he becomes a more autonomous and confident user of language where he "recreates, transforms, abrogates, or appropriates" the English language to reflect the native cultural and emotional experience. Sriraman records these three stages as being exemplified in the writings of Venkataramani, Raja Rao and Salman Rushdie respectively (p.33). Further examples can be witnessed in the case of Arundathi Roy and other authors such as Aravind Adiga, Anita Desai, who have forayed into writing in the post-colonial, post-liberalisation era. This led to the emergence of various kinds of world englishes, which marks an era in the history of literature as the emergence of the "Writing back" paradigm. Thus, temporally, the writing back paradigm marks not just the postcolonial era , but also include the authors in the post-liberalisation era who dealt with multifarious aspects of colonialism, neo-colonialism and allied themes. Thus, Barry's use of the terms "adopt, adapt and the adept" refer not just to forms, but also to the language as exemplified in the

writings of different postcolonial authors. It is important to understand that the postcolonial writers mostly wrote of the

... the tension between the abrogation of the received English which speaks from the centre, and the act of appropriation which brings it under the influence of a vernacular tongue, the complex of speech habits which characterize the local language, or even the evolving and distinguishing local English of a monolingual society trying to establish its link with place. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.38)

This tension resulted in the extension of the English into various englishes and also in the "Sanskritisation and "Kannadisation" of Raja Rao's English and "Yorubization" and "Igboization" of Amos Tutola's and Chinua Achebe's English and the "chutnification" of Rushdie's English.

This section deals with various strategies adopted by postcolonial writers to acculturate and nativise the context through various strategies at the *lexical, syntactic, discursive and rhetorical levels*. Firstly, let us look at some examples at the textual strategies used by these writers at the lexical levels. Postcolonial writers resorted to various strategies *such as* direct lexical transfer, hybridization and loan translation. Words such as *hobbyhorse, heirloom, scapegoat, lathicharge and policewala* are examples of hybrid words (qtd in Sriraman, p.25). Works of postcolonial authors contain a lot of native words used as they are. While standing strong as cultural and ethnographic signs in a text, these words were sometimes used with parenthetical glossing and sometimes, without a gloss, calling for the application of a range of complex interpretive skills. While Naipaul uses the word "Hubshi" without any translation, Rushdie, in his novel "Shalimar the clown" goes a step further and uses words such as Salwar kameez, bachkot, trabab, sarangi, mehendi, karakuli topi, purohit without any glossing or translation. In his "Midnight's children", he assigns a separate chapter titled "abracadabra" with an explanation. He uses a number of Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani words, phrases and expressions such as "angrez" (Englishman), "phut-aphut" (in no time), "nasbandi" (sterilization), "dhoban" (washerwoman), "feringee" (the same as "angrez"), "baba" (grandfather), "garam masala" (hot spices), "rakshasas". While Rushdie weaves these words into the text without any explanation, Raja Rao provides an exhaustive gloss in parenthesis to bring out the socio-economic importance of the word "Khadi" and "Zamindar" to help the reader understand the connotative import and significance of the movement and the grandeur of the landlord. This ensured that the readers do not just superficially relate *khadi* to any homespun cotton cloth and *zamindar* to any landlord, along the lines of linen or a councilor. Further, postcolonial literatures are also embedded with a lot of calques, which refer to words that are literally transported from one language to another. Some examples of calques include

“A coconut and betel leaf goodbye”
“Invitation rice” (Kanthapura)
“Always the same Ramayana”

Coconut and betel leaf are considered to be auspicious in Hindu tradition and signify an auspicious return gift given to those attending the wedding as a token of gratitude and honour. Mere translation of it as “guests were bidden good-bye /adieu” would deprive the text of the cultural significance of this practice. Further, postcolonial writers also coined a lot of *neologisms*, which refer to the creation of new lexical forms in English generated by the linguistic structure of the mother tongue. Sriraman quotes the example of the use of the word “purity-heart” by the Bengali poet Chinmoy, a fusion of pure heart and heart of purity. Other examples include “ask the waters of the Hymavathy”, “if we touch but with the dirt of a coin”, “such hang lip hagglers” (Qtd in Sriraman, p.38). According to him, such expressions exhibit coextensivity between language and cultural space, though it could be dismissed by native speakers as “colloquial” or unidiomatic”.

While these words mark the lexical distinctiveness of postcolonial literatures in English, Kachru quotes further examples where this is extended at the level of the sentence. The use of *native metaphors and similes, direct translation equivalence of phrases of blessings and eulogy, curse words and expressions of curse* are typical of postcolonial literatures, which managed to keep both the nativisation of the text and the cultural context intact. Some of the native similes used by Achebe to invoke the cultural milieu are as follows: “like bush-fire in the harmattan, like a yam tendril in the rainy season, like a lizard fallen from an iroko tree” (qtd in Carter & Brumfit, 1986, p.33). In Kachru’s opinion, providing such translation equivalences, “... is one of the a productive devices for correlating the speech event with its appropriate formal item”. The works of Raja Rao, Kushwant Singh and Mulk Raj Anand contain many examples of such expressions and a few examples are presented below:

“*May she have a hundred male issues*” (An expression of blessing where begetting male children is considered to be an honour—Raj Rao’s “Kanthapura”)

“*Cherisher of the poor, what does your honour fancy*” (A term of eulogy which also marks class—Khuswant Singh in “Train to Pakistan”)

“*Learned Maharaja, anything you deem fit*” (An adjective of eulogy and also a class marker—Raja Rao’s Kanthapura.)

“*May thy womb be dead*” (An expression of curse used in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s “He who rides a tiger”)

“You spoiler of my salt” (A term of indictment, indicating ingratitude—Mulk Raj Anand’s “Untouchable”) (qtd in Kachru, 1986)

While the terms “cherisher of the poor and Learned Maharaja” are to be considered terms of honour, these expressions are also markers of social class. When it come to using these expressions, the postcolonial writers resorted to both translating and transcreating to create both contextually and stylistically fitting innovations. Such native proverbs and similes are not in use just in Indian English, but also in African English. Kachru also gives the following examples regarding the use of proverbs by Chinua Achebe

“I cannot live on the bank of the river and wash my hand with the spittle” (Kachru, 1968, p.34).

“A person who chased two rats at a time would lose one”. According to Herskovit, such equivalence lend the “grammar of values” (qtd in Kachru, 1968, p.34).

Codeswitching and *codemixing* are two strategies frequently used by postcolonial writers. While code mixing refers to scattering of words from a different language/dialect, codemixing involves including a whole clause or a phrase from a different dialect /language/register. Ashcroft et al present immense examples of such codemixing and dialectical and registerial variations. An example of code-switching can be seen in CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE’S “HALF OF A YELLOW SUN”

He took him into his *obi* (hut)
I *choro* bread? (145)
Unripe fruit from the *ube* tree (8)
Anugom, I’ll give this more thought. (251)
Well done, Jisien *Ike*. (309).

Narayan makes use of an effortless mixing of code in his *The Painter of Signs* (Narayan 1978, p.91). The following two lines illustrate how it happens .

“I feel as if we had known each other several Janmas,” he said rather plaintively.

“It is imagination really” she said. “Do you believe in reincarnation?”

Such direct reference to the Hindu concept of reincarnation serves a very important function of highlighting the cultural and religious significance of the term

Syntactic fusion, which refers to the meshing up of two linguistic structures is an example of license taken by postcolonial writers. Ashcroft refers to ample instances of such syntactic fusion in John Kasaipawalova’s stories.

Grammatical deviations, where the linguistic authority of the inner circle or the centre is blatantly rejected, are

galore in postcolonial literatures. Both African and Indian literature contain numerous examples of such deviations. Some examples are listed below:

- a) Use of noun as verbs: (eg: Their boss might *angry* them; *Full* up with their heads).
- b) Metonymic use of adjectives: Eg: *bloody* swearing.
- c) Use of double comparisons: *more happier*.
- d) *the absence of tense markers in the following lines of Derek Walcott.*
 "The fog swirl and swell into sails, so close
 That I saw it was sails, my hair grip my skull
 It was horrors, but it was beautiful" (qtd in Ashcroft, 1995).
- e) Use of interrogatives without inversion (you want one glass lassi?)
- f) Use of pronouns in accusative forms (Dem accuse me...).
- g) Use of ing forms in stative verbs ("You are knowing").

Some of the grammatical deviations are representative of a certain class /level of education. If Raja Raos and Naayan's English mark a certain cline of Indianness, Kachru and Sriraman present various instances of English as used by particular social classes. In the poem "Good bye party to Mrs. Pushpa", the use of progressive form of verbs for static verbs (You are knowing); verbs used in static sense (Mrs. Pushpa is coming from very high family) and the use of verbs twice in place of an adverb (is smiling and smiling) are indicative of a particular class—the speaker represents an urban middle class with a certain level of education, but not necessarily a high degree of proficiency in English. This is also evident in the kind of English spoken by Muthiah and Ratnam in the Malaysian writer Maniam's play "The Cord" Such grammatical deviations if gathered, would provide more instances of a kind of cline ranging from the usage of highly educated variety of the Indian English to the least educated variety, which indicate a bit of code mixing. These devices have been used cleverly by various authors as a part of metatext, which reflect the various social classes, educational levels and cultural contours.

Unusual collocations and compound expressions: Collocation refers to the habitual co-occurrence of certain words and postcolonial literatures present a lot of examples of such collocations. Deviant and unusual collocations were also interwoven either consciously or unconsciously by postcolonial writers into their writings. A liberal use of such collocations can be found in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* as follows:

"Clock-hands "Biryani of determination", Carrot and stick affair". Postcolonial literatures also contain a lot of unusual *compound expressions* such as "overandover", "updownup", "downdowndown", "suchandsuch", "noseholes", "birtheaddeath", "whatdoyoumeanhowcanyousaythat", "nearlynineyearold", "almostseven",

and "godknowswhat", which are galore in "Midnight's Children".

Compound qualifying/classifying adjectives, might not fit in with the idiomatic English and might appear to be an attempt at "Phrasemongering" or a bold attempt at subverting the accepted linguistic norms, find a wide and extensive use in postcolonial literatures. Some examples include Corner-house Moorthy, Waterfall Venkamma, Nine-beamed House Range Gowda. It is to be understood that these adjectives serve an identifying function here. The use of verb as an adjective, eg "Bangled" in "Bangled widow" and the use of descriptive epithets and compounds in Kanthapura are a few more examples.

Though the grammar, syntax and punctuation are according to the norms of Standard English, it can be seen that the interpretability and intelligibility of the text requires an understanding of the religious and cultural contexts, much different from the expected historical, cultural and social milieu of English literature. The following paragraph from Kanthapura is an example of interesting use of narrative style, typical of Indian way of thinking.

"Today," he says, "it will be the story of Shiva and Parvathi". And Parvathi in penance becomes the country and Siva becomes heaven knows what. "Siva is the three-eyed", he says and Swaraj "and Swaraj too is three-eyed: self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, Khaddar". "And then talks of Damayanti and Sakunthala and Yasodha and everywhere there is something about our country and something about Swaraj".

For the above text to be interpreted, the entire set of words Siva, Parvathi, three-eyed God etc have to be explained in detail.

The distinctiveness of postcolonial literatures can also be noticed at the various rhetorical devices and the narrative techniques used.

...And the cart men say, As you like, Timmaya, but he spits on them and calls them sluts and says, "the Mahatma is born once and not twice, and if ye be such hang-lip haggles, I'll go up and come down once, twice, thrice, a hundred times..." and they all turn their carts and say "you are funny fellow—but you say there is a Mathatma ...upon us". And then we climb into the carts and ..lean over one another(Kachru, 1968, p.33)

The entire narrative stretch bears close resemblance to the *harikatha* style of narrative tradition, similar to the one found in Tamil *kadha kalatshepams*, a practice of telling religious stories for moral inculcation. Salman and Narayan have owed their allegiance to the *harikatha narrative style*. Further, the use of direct speech shouts for our attention. The interpretation is not just at the grammatical level but also at the discursive level. A few other techniques, described by Kachru, involve nativisation of cohesion and cohesiveness and nativisation of rhetorical strategies. The uses of such unique rhetorical strategies also mark a stamp of distinctiveness. The covert imposition of syncatic and lexical varieties of the

alien language were abrogated by the colonized who found unique ways to preserve their distinctiveness. Kachru also quotes the following as some examples of *speech initiators* which might appear empty, but serve an important function of contextualizing the text.

:our people have a saying: as our people say: It was our fathers who said, elders have said (qtd in Kachru, 1986, p.33).

Once again, these openers might neither conform to the Gricean maxim of quality nor that of relevance, but serve the unique function of preserving the orality of the discourse, while taking a lot of linguistic and cultural presuppositions for granted.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the examples described in the earlier sections explain how the writing back paradigm has emerged really strong and proves assertively to the centre, through sheer persistence and the quality and range of their writing, that they this paradigm is here to stay and has occupied its' rightful place. In addition to displaying a

huge volume and depth of stylistic repertoire, postcolonial writers, despite being considered to be contextually and linguistically esoteric, have also managed to create a distinctive place for themselves by offering plenty of linguistic data for interesting stylistic analysis.

REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The empire writes back*. London: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (Eds.). (1995). *The post-colonial studies reader*. London: Routledge.
- Barry, P. (1995). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Kachru. (1968). *Bilingual's creativity*. In Koul (Ed.), *Language, style and discourse*. New Delhi: Bahri Publications.
- Kachru. (1986). Non-native literatures in English as a resource for language teaching. In Brumfit & Carter (Eds.), *Literature and language teaching*. OUP.
- Sriraman. (2012). Stylistics. In Lavanya (Ed.), *Block III. PGDTE course material*. EFLU, Hyderabad.