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A Stylistic Analysis of Foregrounding in E.E. Cummings' "maggie and milly and molly and may"

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study is to describe how foregrounding aid in the interpretation of E.E. Cummings' "maggie and milly and molly and may".

Methodology: The poem's interpretation of meaning was analyzed through foregrounding structures such as parallelism, repetition, and deviation. Data were gathered and tabulated. Additionally, data analysis and interpretation were performed on the gathered data. Finally, a conclusion was reached as a result of the analysis and interpretation.

Results: the foregrounding used by Cummings speaks to the truth of life, the fact that life is not all smiles, and the fact that everyone has a unique experience of life. This poem manages to meddle with the hearts and thoughts of the readers while still being lighthearted and entertaining.

Conclusion: These linguistic features of Cummings' poem were investigated in order to get a thorough understanding of the language concepts used and to provide a clear interpretation of the poem's meaning. This poem transports the reader to another plane of existence, one that goes beyond the literal and touches on the metaphorical.

Keywords: Stylistic Analysis, Foregrounding, E.E. Cummings' "maggie and milly and molly and may"

INTRODUCTION

A significant difference exists between the language of poetry and the language of everyday life because in ordinary language, there is no systematic violation of the linguistic standards, but in poetic language, there is a systematic violation of the linguistic norms. In literary studies and stylistics, foregrounding is a linguistic strategy that draws the reader's attention away from what is said and toward how it is said.

The various linguistic features used within a poem conveys meaning and interpretation to the text. Linguistic features that are foregrounded within literary works such as poems are used to emphasize and interpret it's meaning. The term stylistics was created from the concept of style. Stylistic analysis seeks to uncover the artistic principles that guide a writer's choice of language. Every writer, and every text, has unique qualities (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 74, as cited in Amin & Majeed, 2020).

The theory of foregrounding is the most important theory in the stylistic analysis of any literary text since it inspires the poetic language and the writer's style, and thus makes them more creative and interesting. The poet employed foregrounding in order to communicate the poem's significant meaning to the readers (Najm & Kareem, 2021).

Foregrounding theory helps in comprehending poems. Reading other poets' work can teach one about the surface as well as the style of expression, the role those styles play in the poem, and the poet's inner world and emotions expressed in the poem (Chen & Zhao, 2015).

In poetry, foregrounding assists readers in developing a coherent understanding of the connotation of foregrounded lines; it is presented as striking, evocative, and interpretively challenging (Wadi & Jamsheer, 2021).



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The foregrounding technique enables readers to identify the linguistic and literary patterns that are essential to the poem's meaning. A writer intentionally creates certain words in his writings in order to grab the reader's attention, to gain prominence, or to deviate from the norm (Uzoamaka & Jayeoba, 2020).

Not only do poets use a variety of devices to encrypt and amplify their aesthetic vision, but they also use them to materialize formal beauty in their verse. The eccentricity of a poet is determined by both his ideological adaptation and his artistic oddities (Seddeek & Elyamany, 2018).

Due to the poem's simplicity in comparison to his other poems, EE Cummings' "maggie and milly and molly and may" is seldom investigated linguistically.

Theoretical Framework

Foregrounding is one of the devices studied in stylistic. It is a systematic violation of standard conventions. This is principally and essentially based on Shklovsky's and Jan Mukarovsky's concept of foregrounding. According to Mukarovsky (1932), communication becomes secondary in poetic language, and the foregrounding of meaning permits literature to offer new meanings with an intricacy and complexity that conventional language does not permit. Foregrounding is a linguistic style that seems to have been created with literary-aesthetic aims in mind.

Foregrounding is a type of intentional deviation from arts. It is divided into two types, quantitative foregrounding refers to the frequent occurrence of certain language components or parallelism, and qualitative foregrounding that refers to the violation of language rules or also known as deviation (Leech & Short, 2007).

Research Questions

The aim of this study is to describe how foregrounding aid in the interpretation of E.E. Cummings' "maggie and milly and molly and may". Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What are the parts of the poem that are foregrounded through parallelism, repetition, and deviation?
2. What interpretation of the poem can be revealed based on foregrounding?

METHODS

Corpus of the Study

Edward Estlin (E.E.) Cummings was born in the Massachusetts city of Cambridge. He went to Cambridge Latin High School, where he majored in Latin and Greek while studying there. Cummings received both his BA and MA from Harvard, and his early poems were published in *Eight Harvard Poets*, a collection of poetry published by Harvard University Press (1917). As one of the most artistic poets of his day, Cummings experimented with poetry form and vocabulary in order to develop a distinctively unique style. A typical Cummings poem is sparse and precise, relying on a few important words that are eccentrically arranged on the page in order to convey meaning. Some of these terms were coined by Cummings, who often did so by combining two commonly used words to create a fresh synthesis.

His poem "maggie and milly and molly and may" was originally published in the collection *95 Poems*, which was released in 1958. The speaker takes the audience on an emotional journey via the eyes of four little girls. Despite the fact that these girls are simply playing on the beach, they are feeling a variety of emotions, some of which are more pleasant than others. Cumming's "rule-breaking" when it comes to the usage of capitalization and punctuation can be seen throughout the poem, and the reader will notice multiple instances of this throughout the lines in the poem. This is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Cumming's work, which distinguishes him from other poets.

"maggie and milly and molly and may"
E.E. Cummings

maggie and milly and molly and may
went down to the beach(to play one day)

and maggie discovered a shell that sang
so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles,and

milly befriended a stranded star



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whose rays five languid fingers were;

and molly was chased by a horrible thing
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles:and

may came home with a smooth round stone
as small as a world and as large as alone.

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
it's always ourselves we find in the sea

Data Gathering Procedure

The poem's interpretation of meaning was analyzed through foregrounding structures such as parallelism, repetition, and deviation. Data were gathered and tabulated. Additionally, data analysis and interpretation were performed on the gathered data. Finally, a conclusion was reached as a result of the analysis and interpretation.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the parts of the poem which are foregrounded through parallelism, repetition, and deviation were determined. Interpretation of the meaning of the poem was drawn based on the foregrounded structures. Lastly, conclusion was achieved based on the analysis of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. What are the parts of the poem that are foregrounded through parallelism, repetition, and deviation?

1.1 Parallelism

Table 1. Foregrounding on Parallelism

Language/Text used in the poem	Linguistic/Language Form
maggie discovered a shell	subject + verb + object
milly befriended a stranded star	
as small as a world	as + (x) + as + (y)
as large as alone	
we lose	we + verb
we find	
and maggie	and + (x)
and molly	
and milly	
and may	

Parallelism is the recurrence of lines or segments of lines that are not phonologically related but have a same syntactic pattern. It appears in consecutive or non-consecutive verse lines. In the poem, there are textual patterns that used similar syntactic structures such as subject + verb + object, as + (x) + as + (y), we + verb, and and + (x).

In lines 3 and 5, "maggie discovered a shell that sang" and "milly befriended a stranded star", both with the pattern subject + verb + object, the poet wanted to highlight the activities or items discovered on the beach by the characters. Another is in line 10, "as small as a world and as large as alone", with the pattern as + (x) + as + (y), shows two contrasting similes that gives the poem story-like sound that is present in most nursery rhymes. Moreover, the pattern we + verb which can be found in the last couplet of the poem, "we lose" and "we find", brings up the idea of loss, for the first time in the poem which is contrasting to the other couplets where the girls each



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found something on the beach. Lastly, the pattern and + (x), "and maggie, and milly, and molly, and may", represents the distinction of each character, whereas at the same time, putting them in equal stance.

1.2 Repetition

Table 2. Foregrounding on Repetition

Language/Text used in the poem	Linguistic/Language Form
"and" was mentioned 7 times throughout the poem	lines 1, 3, 4, 7, and 8
/m/ sound	(m)aggie, (m)illy, (m)olly, (m)ay

Repetition is merely a series of words, phrases, and at times whole lines that are repeated over and over again. The result is often appealing to the ear, and the poet may choose to use it for a specific reason. The poet repeats the conjunction "and" seven times in the poem in lines 1, 3, 4, 7, and 8. the repetition of the conjunction "and" before the names of each girl in the poem helps to differentiate between the four characters and to establish some type of independent domains for them, which also helps to group them together in a certain manner.

Another example of repetition is the repeat of the sound /m/ in each of the girls' names, which lends this line a musical character, similar to a melody, and makes it seem like a nursery rhyme. This recurrence of consonant sounds at the start of syllables is referred to as alliteration, and it helps to establish a melodic connection between each of the alliterated words. In essence, each of the girls' names has this /m/ sound, and it is inferred that each of the girls is identical or equal in some way. The names mix together are unremarkable and each girl's personality are also unremarkable.

1.3 Deviation

Table 3. Foregrounding on Deviation

Language/Text used in the poem	Linguistic/Language Form
decapitalization of names	maggie, milly, molly, may
excessive use of conjunction "and" in a single line	and milly, and molly, and may
punctuation mark period (.) appeared only once	"as small as a world and as large as alone."
fragmentation or the use of parenthesis	(to play one day) and (like a you or a me)
article modifying a pronoun	"a you", "a me"
noun and adjective as the objects of comparison	"as small as a world and as large as alone"

Graphological deviation is one of the artistic experiments that deviates from the rules of writing, such as not using capital letters, punctuation, odd use of parentheses, and so on. They need to be looked at not only because they make different parts of the text stand out, but also because they show how important the situation and personality of the character of the poem are. Cummings' style of writing poetry is shown by breaking the rules about capitalization and punctuation in general. He likes to write the names of people and places in small letters. Throughout the poem, the names of the four girls, Maggie, Molly, Milly, and May, are written in small letters, implying that there is nothing particularly noteworthy or remarkable about them. Moreover, in the first line, the names of the girls, except for Maggie, are introduced by the conjunction "and" which separates the four characters from one another.

Cummings is also notable in his style when it comes to deviation in using punctuation marks. In this poem, there is just one period, which appears at the end of line 10 of the first stanza. This suggests that the speaker speaks quickly, it suggests that he is reading aloud from a storybook or nursery rhyme. The single period before the last couplet in the poem isolates it from the narrative of the characters, emphasizing the poem's end. Another is the use



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of fragmentation or parenthesis in lines 2 and 11, which are "(to play one day)" and "(like a you or a me)," respectively, which offers extra information about what Cummings was trying to convey.

Another deviation is found in line 11, "(like a you and a me)", where the indefinite article "a" is used to modify the pronouns "you" and "me," the poet moves away from the girls and reintroduces the poem to both the speaker and the reader, connecting them in their quest for a more universal self, the step that follows the defining of a more ordinary and individual identity. A grammatical deviation was also discovered in line 10, which is "as small as a world and as large as alone" where "alone", which is an adjective, was used as the object of comparison in contrast to "world", which is a noun, this immortalizes the adjective "alone".

2. What interpretation of the poem can be revealed based on foregrounding?

The presence of only one punctuation mark period in this poem, the repetition of the /m/ sound, and the frequent use of the conjunction "and" create the impression that the poet or speaker is speaking quickly, as if reading a story or reciting a nursery rhyme. It is clear that the poet is attempting to lighten the mood of the poem by being playful. However, by isolating the last couplet with a period, the poet emphasized the seriousness that the poet wished to communicate, resulting in a poem with depth.

"maggie discovered a shell" and "milky befriended a stranded star" employ parallel structure to explain their contrasting beach experiences, which is mostly owing to the fact that they are each their own unique people with their own personalities, ideas, fears, and beliefs. This is corroborated by the girls' names being decapitalized and the usage of the conjunction "and" before each name. The poet emphasizes each character's individuality while making them appear equals, like all human beings in the world.

Everyone, including all human beings on the face of the world, suffers loss at some time in their life, including the loss of one's own identity. There is a well-known adage that says that whenever we lose something, something better will come along to take its place. Using the parallel structure in "we lose" and "we find" combined with the deviation that is enclosed in a parenthesis, (like a you and a me), the poet attempts to connect with the readers while confronting them with a kind of universal truth concerning identity, the loss of, and the gaining, of.

As a result, the foregrounding used by Cummings speaks to the truth of life, the fact that life is not all smiles, and the fact that everyone has a unique experience of life. This poem manages to meddle with the hearts and thoughts of the readers while still being lighthearted and entertaining.

Conclusion

Through the stylistic devices of foregrounding and their varieties, one may arrive at the correct interpretation of the poem, even without previous knowledge of the literary work. Not to mention the fact that language are the key to the door that goes straight to the meaning and interpretation of any literary genre. Deviation occurs when the language's norms and regulations are violated. It is a significant stylistic strategy that poets use to achieve aesthetic goals. Deviation, as an artistically deliberate distortion of a poem's linguistic components, is a defining aspect of Cummings' poetry. By emphasizing foregrounding qualities like as parallelism, repetition, and deviation, readers are able to comprehend the poems, resulting in a satisfactory level of interest in the poetry.

These linguistic features of Cummings' poem were investigated in order to get a thorough understanding of the language concepts used and to provide a clear interpretation of the poem's meaning. This poem transports the reader to another plane of existence, one that goes beyond the literal and touches on the metaphorical.

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