

James Joyce's Experiments with Language - A Study

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Readers of James Joyce have been increasingly experiencing the kind of revolution he brought to English prose. He invented a new prose for his three novels, a kind of prose which if closely followed, was not only apt for his delineation of the character's thought process but was not evidently decked up or studded with tropes. His language is not abstruse; rather, it is an echo or reflection of the reader's own stream of unarticulated preverbal cogitations. He reads and marvels at the creative independence which Joyce enjoyed to delineate the most complex, i.e. human psyche. Joyce remains the true literary genius of all times till date, owing to his ingenuity. He mastered the technique of stream of consciousness; came forth as one of the most imaginative of his contemporary experimental novelists. He is a polyglot, who can play with words in a dozen languages. His deft coalescing of the lexis of divergent languages and his coinages have left the readers ponder over them for years. Hence his work represents a great labyrinth and his ingenuity has no match worldwide. His prose, therefore, remains a treasure which calls for brainy amateur and is certainly a wade through innumerable stumbling blocks.

His experiments with language is often startling and engages one's mind for a long time. Edward Albert calls Joyce, "A ceaseless experimenter", who is over anxious to explore the potentialities of a method once it is evolved, and in his use of the stream of consciousness technique and in his handling of the interior monologue, he goes further and deeper than any other (Warsi 1976: 6).

The stream of consciousness method aims to give the reader a direct access to the character's thought process, which is obstreperous and often bears indiscriminate intricacy. However, there is a kind of realism about it, which has attracted modernists' attention towards its ripeness with possibility of exploration. It has inspired them to deal with mostly untouched or unexplored aspects of the human personality with ground-breaking verbalism.

Joyce intelligibly renders various facets of human thought process namely, imaginative thinking, memory, reverie, hallucinations and strong emotions. Understandably, for all these, his linguistic experiments break the commonplace or anachronistic structures of language. Evidently, they are brittle in expressing the fluctuating impressions and come short in expressing the delicate and elusive shades of feeling.

Joyce expresses every possible characteristic of thoughts in their pre-verbal state. As we know that a person does not necessarily always think in well directed and logically linked manner, so Joyce's prose aptly exhibits this phenomenon through all possible linguistic experiments and deviations. Joyce gives a frank expression to the thought process being less careful about the formal constraints of traditional grammar. He imitates the psychic processes well by the means of extensive linguistic experimentation. There is surely a free play of language, guided by those patterns which a character's thoughts would impose. These patterns of language emulate the mental processes and the linguistic structures used are highly mimetic. It is this opening up of linguistic structures which allow Joyce the means to transgress the boundaries of established order and system to create new possibilities of fiction writing.

Roy K. Gottfried talks about Joyce's linguistic license and writes:

In creating a variety of unique constructions, Joyce makes clear an expression of his own self: the freedom of his syntax is ultimately his attempt to assert the possibilities of language which are themselves an assertion of his bodily being as a creator. In seeking a language less and less bound by general orders, more and more nearly unique, he seeks to assert his own person as artist. What he gestures towards is the construction of a language with an ontology of its own, an ontology which affirms his own being as an individually creating artist figure (Gottfried 1980: 154).

Joyce had to deviate from conventional linguistic patterns justifiably. He certainly does not want any restrictions or regulations which traditional grammar imposes and which destroys the immediacy of expression. Joyce's style though at time looks adventitious, is concernedly machinated. The expressions by Joyce's deviant language are very much comprehensible. His language has a significance which reverberates beyond the constructions themselves.

The discourse expresses the most intimate thoughts of the character, the closest ones to the unconscious. In order to present the most intimate and chaotic thoughts of his characters, Joyce makes use of many discourse features which are typical of the stream of consciousness discourse, for example, mixed modes of narration, lack of cohesion, colloquial expressions, repetition, shifting of tenses etc. The discourse reproduces the intimate thoughts without logical organization, following the seemingly chaotic pattern from which they naturally emerge. Impressions, impulses, ideas, perceptions about the external world create a kind of muddle inside human brain and all this is well depicted by Joyce in his narrative discourse.

The syntax here is chiefly expressive of immediacy or the natural influx. It incorporates the sudden transitions, often exhibited through shuffling of sentential constituents and commixture of past and present. Comingling of thought and speech, real and imaginary is experienced frequently. All seems jumbled together, giving the impression of real life itself. Instead of continuity, his sentences give an impression of a tendency to discontinue or abruptly break a flow of thought. Hence, speeches are full of interruptions and there is overlapping of time and circumstances. Joyce sometimes intentionally does not particularly worry about neatly finishing off a given action. He shows a tendency to throw overboard the concepts like intellectuality and logicity, being more inclined towards impressions and senses. Joyce gives us the speech as communication really is, irrespective of what traditionally we encounter in literature characterized by redundancies and syntactic breaks. Joyce's syntax aptly supports what David Daiches opines that the presentation of the unique constitutions of consciousness should be reflected in the individual's language (Latham(ed.): 27).

The general impression formed by a reader after reading his prose is that Joyce basically produces a deviant utterance by putting normal English words in an abnormal order and sometimes context. Hence, the resultant syntax is an altered English syntax. Strother B. Purdy writes, "We cannot assume that he started with a normal English sentence; he may have started with the idea of using the syntax of another language, like Latin or with syntax of his own invention" (Senn (ed.) 1972: 51).

Each and every sentence of *Ulysses* particularly, is a potential illustration of Joyce's some or other linguistic experiment. The remarkable quality of every Joycean sentence suggests something beyond examples of original and creative language. Each sentence is subject to an artistic process and has a sense of striking artistic originality. Apart from the features like discontinuity and disordering, we find the technique of condensation to render the psyche. In *Ulysses*, many times we find Joyce leaves out verbs, pronouns, and articles and often leaves sentences unfinished to achieve the effect of condensation.

While dealing with Joyce's sentences, we get a rich variety of sentence constructions. There are sentences of varying lengths, ranging from page-long sentences to one word sentences. The variety can also be seen in the manner in which sentences are lengthened or shortened. Truly, his deviations are not only striking but also are original.

Sentences of *Finnegans wake* are different from those of his other two novels. The sentence patterns in this novel diverge from those in any natural language grammar. ShaheenWarsi writes:

To evoke the original emotion many a time the dedicated novelist throws overboard the grammatically approved syntax and takes to a droll looking, highly fluid construction of sentences. The concluding lines of *Finnegans wake* serve as an example:

...First. Wepass through grass behush the bush to wish: A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming, far! End here, us then. Finn again! Take, Bussofthee, mememoree! Till thousands thee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the...' This soliloquy symbolizes the thinking and the feeling soul (Warsi 1976: 83).

The basic unit of all literary works is 'word', which is a counterpart of brick in a literary construction. The artistry of a writer is reflected from the choice of lexis he employs. But, perhaps Joyce usages of words defy all preconceived ideas about words which a writer employs to make his work comprehensible and enjoyable. Sisir Chatterjee writes:

James Joyce has always been fascinated by the exciting quality of words. A desire to experiment with language showed itself very early in his writings. Stephen Dedalus as a young artist shows great elation over the magic over the words:

He drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to himself:

-A day of dappled seaborne clouds. The phase and the day and the scene harmonized in a chord. Words. Was it their colours? He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue: sunrise gold... (Chatterjee 1970: 19)

The difference lies in the fact that Joyce chose words not only as a writer but as a musician, a linguist a philosopher and of course, as a man well versed with the human psyche. His concern with the words has brought him the honour of a great literary technician. In the words of Padraik Colum:

The problem of the writer of today is to process real words, not ectoplasmic words, and to know how to order them. They must move for him like pigeons in flight that make a shadow on the grass, not like corn popping. And so all serious writers of English today look to James Joyce, who has proved himself the most learned, the most suitable the most thorough going exponent of the value making word. From his early days Joyce has exercised his imagination and intellect upon the significance of words, the ordering of words (Colum, 1939).

Joyce genuinely felt the limitations of language for the rendering of psychic content and the artist inherent in him made him create his own words and sentence patterns. He used them to give us rich concoctions in *Ulysses* and more particularly in *Finnegans Wake*. Sisir Chatterjee writes, "As the most self-conscious artist of the word... Joyce attempted to confer upon language a complete autonomy." And through his wide variety of experiments, "Joyce endeavoured to create a verbal vision of life." (1)

Joyce, with his true creative impulse imitates a sense of fluid reality and divests words as far as possible of their traditional significance and form. He coins many of them and uses them by sometimes placing them in altogether new context irrespective of their meaning or suitability. The psyche of human beings at times defies logical articulation, so the ideas and sensations are such, which are mostly beyond the grasp of words and images. We find several kinds of neologisms by compounds, conversions and wrenching of lexical items. Repetition of lexical items in various ways also contributes to the depiction of the stream of consciousness of the characters. Joyce also exhibits his knowledge of many other languages by borrowing words from the and thus mixing the codes. His use of multilingual puns and portmanteau words demand special attention from the reader.

To sum up, being distressed over the limitations of language, Joyce plays a number of tricks with language. A close attention paid to Joyce's words, phrases, sentences is the best route to reading his works with insight and pleasure. Such experiments allow the reader to fully participate and become active in understanding and appreciating the novel. Hence, the reader is allowed to respond to his novels in his or her own manner. To go deeper than the socially accepted intellectual level to the level of unconscious, new language is required, hence Joyce's lexical deviation is justified.

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