A Brief Analysis of E.E. Cummings's Poem from the Style as Foregrounding

Hongping CHEN & Zheng ZHAO

School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University (Baoding), No.689, Huadian Road, North District, Baoding, Hebei Province, China 071000

ABSTRACT: E.E. Cummings is considered as the represent poet of American modern experimental poem. He has remained as a symbol of the pioneering spirit of modern poetic practice because of his unusual artistic style of poem. This paper discusses E. E. Cummings' Poetry on the basis of foregrounding theory from three prospective—lexical deviation, graphological deviation and syntactic deviation. It aims at helping reader to build up a better way of thinking to understand the meaning and aesthetic value of poems.

KEYWORD: E.E. Cummings; Poetry; foregrounding theory

1 INTRODUCTION

Edward Estlin Cummings (October 14, 1894-September 3, 1962), known as E.E. Cummings, was an American poet, painter, essayist, author, and playwright. His works includes 2900 poems, autobiographical novels, four plays and several essays. He is thinking as a famous figure of 20th century English literature. Cummings also is a painter; in his poems he shows the characteristic of the harmonious of poetry and painting. Cummings abandoned the traditional rhymes and syntactic structure of predecessors' works and even refused to follow the way the poem usually taken to express their feeling and meaning. Even more he takes a unique way of printing

The term foregrounding is a concept of pictorial arts, referring to that part of the composition that appears to be closest to the view. (Mayer, 1969)

Foregrounding theory has a special position in stylistic theories. It was firstly introduced into the poetry appreciation then gradually applied in the stylistic analysis. In the creative process of the work, the writer is pursuit for the effect of expressing and the way of showing main idea, they put words in an unconventional use to achieve their aim. Through the special use of language to achieve this effect, we call it foregrounding. Russian formalism had first put out the concept of foregrounding, while the Prague School made further development about the concept. It was Leech and Short that explore the idea that foregrounding include both deviant features and linguistic phenomena.

In stylistic analysis, foregrounding refers to the prospect of literary, artistic value or the highlight of the back grounding skill. The remarkable characteristic of foregrounding is language deviation. Language deviation is the mean of the poet to show their idea while the foregrounding is the aim they want to achieve.

When we talking about how to analysis the linguistic features of the poetry, there are many concepts are put forwarded by different schools in every period such as the "general", "deviation" and "foregrounding". However, all their concepts are discussing about the artistic and variability of the poetry. The so called deviation refers to the violation of rules such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, writing and other aspects. After Russian formalism had come up the concept of foregrounding, the British stylist Leech divided the foregrounding into tow part one is syntagmatic foregrounding and the other is paradigmatic foregrounding.

Geoffrey Leech makes a systematic summary of deviation. In his book, *a Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1969), he categorizes deviation into eight types, i.e. lexical deviation, grammatical deviation, phonological deviation, graphological deviation, semantic deviation, dialectal deviation, deviation of register and deviation of historical period.

This paper based on the Leech's theory analysis Cummings' poem from the prospective of graphological deviation, syntactic deviation and lexical deviation.

In the book *Essentials of English Stylistics*, graphological is meant the encoding of meaning in visual symbols. Graphological deviation can occur in

any sub-area of graphology, such as the shape of text, the type of print, grammetrics, punctuation, and indention.

Syntactic deviation refers to the departures from normal grammar. It has many features for example the unusual clause themes and phrase structures.

Lexical deviation in literature refers almost exclusively to neologisms or the coinage of new words. The new words that the literary writer invents are usually made up for use on only one particular occasion, and can therefore be called 'nonce-formations.It can be divided into three aspects, affixation, compounding and conversion.

2   THE ANALYSIS OF "IN JUST"

1. *in Just-*
2. *spring   when the world is mud-*
3. *luscious the little*
4. *lame balloonman*
5. *whistles   far and wee*
6. *and eddieandbill come*
7. *running from marbles and*
8. *piracies and it's*
9. *spring*
10. *when the world is puddle-wonderful*
11. *the queer*
12. *old balloonman whistles*
13. *far   and   wee*
14. *and bettyandisbel come dancing*
15. *from hop-scotch and jump-rope and*
16. *it's*
17. *spring*
18. *and*
19.   *the*
20.   *goat-footed*
21. *balloonMan   whistles*
22. *far*
23. *and*
24. *wee*

This poem in just- is a lyric of Cummings' *Tulips and Chimneys* which was published in 1920. This poem is saying that in the spring, the world is full of vigor. There are some children are playing in the town, while in the distance comes to a man who sells balloons, thus make the children happier. In this poem Cummings combines the nature scenery with the human, through the deviation to show the liveness of the nature. In this poem, there is a accidental deviation from the common norms. It is more oddity in the shape of text, the unconventional forms without titles and punctuation and the grammar and the choice of words are significant.

2.1   *Graphological deviation*

What is most striking in this poem is divided in 24 lines and each line is not ranged in a regular way. In one line there would be many words while in the anther there would be one word . In this shape of text, people would be full of interest to know what exactly the poem would be saying. In this poem, the words "whistles far and wee" are repeated in three times. The first deviation is in line 5, and only the word "*far*" has distances with other words. In lines 12-13, this time," *far and wee*" are in one line and the spaces among the three words are bigger then the line 5. In line 22-24"*far and wee*" each take a line in this poem. This change of the words also shows that the man who sell the balloon are coming from the distance and after the children buying the balloons he also goes his way, far away from us. Cummings shows this change with the space among words and readers can have a vivid image about what happened.

In the second, capitalization and decapitalization are often used to express writers' idea and emotion. At the beginning of the poem, the capitalization of the word "Just" means the spring is just beginning. The capitalization gives reader a strong sense and impression of the spring is coming. In line 6 "*eddieandbill*" and line14 "*bettyandisbel*", those are the names of the Eddie and Bill, Betty and Disbel. The decapitalizations of the names of the children give reader the sense that those children are so little ,in other words ,they are in the tender age. In line21, there is an capitalization of Man. When we looking at this two line 20-21, it is saying about a goat-footed ballonman, it makes people to recall the Faun which is an imaginary creature like a man with goat legs and horns. The capitalization of the Man gives more evidence to people that the man who sells the balloon is Faun

Thirdly, there is only one clause run over. It is shown that the writer try to make the effect that the poem is a whole part and only one clause also represent the unity of the discourse. It made a strong effect to arouse the reader's expectation and interest. Because when reader read the first line "in just-" whit the hyphen, he gets a sense of incomplete and want to know more about the poem what would be saying in the next. Thus we are driven to the second line and after reading it our discredit can be answered. But a new expectation is aroused at the same time by the hyphen in the second line .When we review about the whole poem, we may find each line of the poem creates a pulling-forward effect such as the hyphen in line2 and the conjunction word in line 15. If only reading few lines about the poem, we may confuse about the meaning of the poem .After we finish the reading of whole poem, the reader may feel that's what is taking in the poem.

2.2 Syntactic deviation

In Cummings' poem, it is often seen that he likes to disregard the grammatical and the syntax. He always creates the confusion and broken sentences verse in a new way. While in this poem "in just-", he didn't use many syntactic deviation in there. However, in the beginning of this poem" *in Just- spring*", Cummings disrupted the conventional syntax order "*just in spring*". Through this change, he emphasis the word "just" to show that it is spring, not summer, autumn or winter. And it also shows the poet's love to the spring and the beautiful sight in this season

2.3 Lexical deviation

The so-called lexical deviation can be achieved in adding affixes, convert the parts of speech and compound words. People can create words based on the specific emotion and context to achieve unexpected results. Cummings imitate the children's language to create the "mud-luscious","puddle-wonderful","eddieandbill","bettyandisbel","ballon-man", "goat-footed". All those words showed the children playing in the ground after the spring rain.

The words "mud-luscious", "puddle-wonderful" means the muddy and puddle are pleasant in this poem . This makes vivid scenery that the children are play happily on the muddy ground after the spring rain.

The name "eddieandbill", "bettyandisbel".

Are compound words as "Eddie and Bill","Betty and Isbel ". The two names merged in one word to show the close relation among the children and also give reader the impression that the children are running hand by hand to the man who sell the balloon. The word "ballonman" in there have special meaning. Firstly, it means the man who sells the balloon. Secondly, it means that the man looks like a mixture of balloon and man because he sells so many balloons and the balloon around them makes him look like a balloonman.

3 THE ANALYSIS OF "ME UP AT DOES"

Me up at does
out of the floor
quietly Stare
a poisoned mouse
still who alive
is asking What
have i done that
You wouldn't have

This is a short poem have only 8 lines and 26words. It is not easy to understand for the first time we read it. However, after we rearrangement, we may see the poem very clearly.

A poisoned mouse /who is still alive /does Stare quietly/ out of the floor /up at me /is asking What /have i done that /you wouldn't have

Through this rearrangement, we can see, it is talking about a little mouse questioned the human why poisoned him. Cummings is longing for the harmony for the nature. In this poem, he shows us a screen that human unharmonious action that kill the animals. Also, this screen can not with out the help of the foregrounding.

3.1 Graphological deviation

First of all, this poem have no title and no punctuation, it is abnormal. However, it is the effect Cummings wants to achieve. Through this way, he show it's special of his poem to the world and representation his pursuit of specialization, and the struggle and challenge to the normal. This poem has no punctuation, it is written as one sentence seemed as a whole and looked more united.

In the second place, it is unique for the capitalization and the decapitalization. In this poem, there only four words that are capitalized "*Me, Stare, What, You*" In there, *Me* and *You* are in the sentence-initial while *Stare* and *What* are in the back grounding. However, the personal pronoun I is decapitialized. As Cummings adore to the nature, he always decapitalized the "*I* "as" i" in his poem. While in this poem, the decapitalized "i" is not the represent of the human, but the capitalized "*Me*" and "*You*". In there, "*Me*" and "*You*" are capitalized; we can clearly understand the mouse is not puniness as people always think. He can also be considered in an equal place. It is the balance the poet created. In the "*What*" "i" and" *You*","i" is the mouse call himself while "*What*" and" *You*" is the question for the human. In there, it shows the muse knew his puniness and facing with human in a modesty mentality. And it also makes a sharp contrast for the huge image of human.

Moreover, after scrutinized the whole poem, it is easily to find that the author used the symmetrical balance to express the main idea of this poem. We can see, the two capitalized words "Me" and "You" are in the same position of two lines. The word "Me" in the first line of the poem while the "You" is in the last line of the poem. Form this arrangement of the words, it formed a visually balanced. Also, the spaces between the two lines are symmetrical. There are six lines between the two lines. All those features can give reader a visual impact and also they emphasis the main idea that human and the mouse are in the equal position.

3.2 Syntactic deviation

In this poem, it is most striking in there is the syntactic deviation. In the line 1-4, Cummings

boldly against the grammar rules, refused to follow the traditional pattern of subject –predicate object method. He put the object "Me" in the front of the preposition "at", while the auxiliary "does" and the predicate "stare" are in different lines with the adverbial of place "out of the floor" are in the two verbs. The subject is putting in the behind of the predicate. In line 5, Cummings put the adverbo "still" in front of the interrogative pronoun "who".

It is hard to understand why Cummings expresses his mind in such a disorder for the first time. After the analysis, reader can clearly know that such a disorder expression can express the focus of the poem perfectly and produce a wonderful glowing effect. We can see the rearrangement of the poem, and compared with the Cummings' poem, it is boring or even not can be called a poem, it is only a sentence. The original poem, though it is short and the words are simple language used in daily life, while through the foregrounding, Cummings make these ordinary words produced an incredible artistic effect. It has two functions.

Firstly, the mouse questioned the human in calm but this calm is a false appearance. It is chaos in his inner-mind for the poison made the mouse miserable. From the disorder of the chaotic sequence, we can vividly feel the pain the muse felt before his death. In the second, when human faced with the poor eyes and calm question, human's heart is no longer calm for they do feel ashamed and embarrassed. Rat's calm in facing death and human's inner confusion made a confronted contrast, which reflects the human's tiny.

4 CONCLUSION

Cummings is one of the most innovative poets among the contemporary poets. He broadens the meaning of the poetry through the language test, enhanced the visual effects of the poem, and thus earns him a unique place as an experimental poet. He insists that everyone is unique, and the knowledge should not bury the imagination. Cumming's poem often made the linguists excited for his special style of the poem.

Through the discussing of Cummings' poem from the prospective of foregrounding, we have a better understanding about Cummings' poetry. And also providing a way to appreciate and analyze of other poems through the foregrounding theory. When we read other poets' work, we can not only to know about the surface but also to understand the technique of expression, to analyze what role those techniques are play in the poem and made immersive experience to the inner world of the poet and the emotions the poem expresses.

REFERENCES

[1] E.E. Cummings.1997, *Tulips and Chimneys* England: Liveright Publishing Corporation
[2] Leech, G.N. 1969. *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. London: Longman.
[3] Mayer, R . 1969. *A Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques.* Happer &Row
[4] Hu Zhuanglin. 2001, *Course in Linguistics* Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press
[5] Wang Shouyuan, 1990, *Essentials of English Stylistics* Shandong: Shandong University Press