Examining Written Norm Deviation in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish

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Received: 22 September 2016 Accepted: 5 February 2017

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction
Written norm deviation is a foregrounding element in today’s poetry in which poets distance themselves from conventional means of writing and employ various ploys in writing and line arrangement of their poetry. Although this matter does not change the major meaning of the poem, such strategies only adds an objective notion to the poem, completing its message to some extent. As a powerful, contemporary Arab poet, Mahmoud Darwish has exploited norm deviation in his works through various means. In this study, it is attempted to explain and analyze the most prominent instances of his exploitation.

2. Theoretical Framework
Norm deviation is a newly emerged principle and phenomenon in literary criticism which has significantly been taken into account in structural studies and contemporary linguistics. This phenomenon is one of the formalists’ most significant findings, which forms the basis for discussions on stylistics today. Formalists introduced literary language as “deviation from the norm” and studied various styles according to this principle (Shamisa, 2002, p. 157).

In fact, deviation from norm involves moving away from the dominant principles of norm-based language as well as inconformity with the common language. In case of a proper artistic application, “it may introduce some foregrounding to the language and put an end to the automated norms of language which are no longer capable of aesthetic transfer” (Salajegheh, 2004, p. 50). However, certain scholars such as Leech consider a boundary...
for this and believe that "deviation from norm could continue until it does not disturb communication and involves translatable foregrounding" (Leech, 1969, p. 40).

In Arabic language, deviation from norm is called al-Enziyah. It is worth mentioning that deviation from norm is an artistic improvement used by poets to translate their own emotional experiences, and it is not exclusive to the poets of a certain era. Following the World War II, Arab poets turned towards modernism and rejected many of the accepted norms in poetry and prose. The first people to follow modernism in Arabic literature were Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Nazik al-Malaika (Abbas, 2004). Until now, a number of studies have been conducted in the area of paranormal in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, each pointing out a part of various paranormal instances in his poems, including phonetics, mixed, and rhetorics; however, the present study is an attempt to complete these findings by examining the deviation from norm in Darwish’s poetry.

3. Method
The present research is a descriptive-analytical study.

4. Findings
Mahmoud Darwish is a powerful poet who has used written norm deviation in his poems through various means, the clearest instances of which are pointed out in this study. One of the most obvious of these instances is the use of dots over letters, which usually occurs amidst the text or at its end. In fact, if the poet had intended to express the entire events, he should have used more words; this would naturally have increased the volume of his messages, forming a type of prolixity in his words. This also allows the reader to imagine their own interpretations over the dots and understand the poem’s content as they wish. In some cases, Darwish has used dots and pauses instead of a full verse; for instance, in the first verse of the ode, “KafarQasim” he portraits people who are dreaming of wheat and violets. He uses dots instead of words as he continues to better demonstrate the abundance of their dreams and wishes.

Another method of written norm deviation is the use of certain shapes to explain the purpose and intention of the poet as well as inducing them to the reader. One of the most artistic poems of Mahmoud Darwish is the ode called “Metr Muraba’a fi al-Sejn”. In this poem, he has used a type of unique style of writing, creating a sort of written norm deviation of poetry which is in line with the poem’s contents. He has written this poem in continues lines, which ultimately forms a square with four corners. The poet is attempting to describe prison, its space and its emotions, and express the challenges and hardships he had to face. Yet, to better demonstrate such hardships to the reader, he has employed a type of particular writing which is one of a kind. Given the contents of this poem revolving around describing a prison, Darwish has written this poem in the form of a prison itself. This means that he has written his verses back to back, in the form of a long line with no spaces, which forms a square at the end of the poet depicting a prison cell usually in the form of a square.

Darwish has used other writing styles in his poetry; one of them involves writing the same verse in a poem in two different forms. He writes the first verse horizontally and then repeats it vertically, laying out the words of the verse in a fixed, separated manner. Doing
so, the poet places more assertion on his words and transfers the meaning and content of his poetry to the readers, better, and clearer.

Another method of deviation from norm employed by this poet is the use of dash at the beginning of verses. By doing so, he intends to communicate a particular semantic load to the reader through each verse; in fact, it is a type of independent element which serves the whole, plays a certain semantic role, and transfers a particular message to the reader.

5. Conclusion
Mahmoud Darwish has employed deviation from norm at the written level through various means:

- The use of dots at the beginning of verses.
- The use of dotes rather than a whole poetic verse.
- The use of certain punctuations such as squares, brackets, dashes, and slashes.
- Writing a verse horizontally and repeating it vertically word by word.
- Darwish has also neglected the old presentation norms and principles, breaking the structure of verses by writing them in short or very long length.

Keywords: Mahmoud Darwish, Poetry, Written norm deviation.

References (In Arabic)


References (In Persian)

References (In English)