

FOREGROUNDING THROUGH SEMANTIC DEVIATION IN PAKISTANI FICTION IN ENGLISH: A STYLISTIC STUDY OF METAPHORICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study examines how metaphor functions stylistically in Pakistani fiction in English through the concept of foregrounding, particularly semantic deviation. The study argues that semantic deviation acts as an important foregrounding device that intensifies ideological meaning. The research employs a qualitative stylistic textual analysis of metaphorical expressions taken from selected Pakistani novels in English. The study primarily applies Leech's (1969) theory of foregrounding and semantic deviation, supported by ideas of defamiliarization (Shklovsky), aesthetic function (Mukařovský), conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson), and ideological stylistics (Simpson). The findings show that different forms of semantic deviation are widely used to foreground themes such as identity, political conflict, and national trauma. The novelty of the study lies in applying the concept of semantic deviation in foregrounding theory to the analysis of metaphor in Pakistani fiction in English. The study contributes to stylistics and postcolonial literary studies by demonstrating that metaphor in Pakistani fiction functions as a key tool for expressing deeper social and ideological meanings.

Keywords: Foregrounding, semantic deviation, stylistics, Pakistani fiction in English, metaphor, postcolonial discourse, defamiliarization

1. Introduction

Pakistani fiction in English has emerged as a significant postcolonial literary corpus articulating concerns of identity, nationalism, migration, extremism, capitalism, and memory. Writers such as Mohsin Hamid (2000, 2007), Kamila Shamsie (2002, 2009, 2017), Bapsi Sidhwa (1988), Mohammed Hanif (2008), and Jamil Ahmad (2011) employ metaphor not merely as ornamentation but as a structural device for ideological articulation.

While much scholarship has addressed postcolonial themes in these works (Ashcroft et al., 2002), limited attention has been given to how stylistic mechanisms particularly semantic deviation produce foregrounding effects that intensify meaning. This study seeks to fill that gap by applying Leech's (1969) foregrounding theory to metaphorical constructions in Pakistani fiction.

Many Pakistani writers have used the English language to present local experiences to a global audience. Among the most influential novelists are Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohammed Hanif, and Jamil Ahmad, whose works portray different aspects of Pakistani society and its historical and cultural complexities. Their novels often address issues such as colonial legacy, migration, religious identity, and political conflict, which have shaped the socio-cultural landscape of Pakistan (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002; Rehman, 2011). For example, Mohsin Hamid explores globalization and identity crisis in *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), while Kamila Shamsie examines history, diaspora, and political conflict in novels such as *Kartography* (2002), *Burnt Shadows* (2009), and *Home Fire* (2017). Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) presents the trauma of the Partition of India, Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) satirizes military politics in Pakistan, and Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* (2011) portrays the life and struggles of tribal communities along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border. Together, these writers contribute significantly to Pakistani Anglophone literature by presenting powerful narratives that reflect historical realities and social transformations (Shamsie, 2017; Hamid, 2007; Sidhwa, 1988).

2. Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how metaphors are used in Pakistani fiction in English to create special meaning and attract the reader's attention. Using Leech's (1969) theory of foregrounding and semantic deviation, the study analyzes how writers use unusual language to highlight important themes such as identity, politics, national history, and social issues. The study shows that metaphors in these novels are not only decorative but also help express deeper ideas and messages.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Foregrounding Theory

The concept of foregrounding originates in Russian Formalism. Shklovsky (1917/1965) introduced *ostranenie* (defamiliarization), arguing that literature disrupts habitual perception. Mukařovský (1964) further developed this concept, defining foregrounding as deviation from linguistic norms.

Leech (1969) translated these insights into linguistic stylistics, distinguishing between deviation and parallelism. Semantic deviation, according to Leech (1969), occurs when selectional restrictions are violated when abstract entities are treated as concrete, or non-human entities are assigned human qualities.

Simpson (2004) later expanded stylistics into ideological analysis, arguing that linguistic form encodes power relations.

3.2 Metaphor Theory

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) revolutionized metaphor studies by arguing that metaphor structures cognition. Black (1962) introduced the interaction theory of metaphor, emphasizing tension between source and target domains.

3.3 Pakistani Fiction and Stylistics

Postcolonial critics such as Ashcroft et al. (2002) highlight language as a site of resistance. However, detailed stylistic analysis of metaphor as deviation remains underexplored in Pakistani literary scholarship. This study integrates stylistics with postcolonial reading.

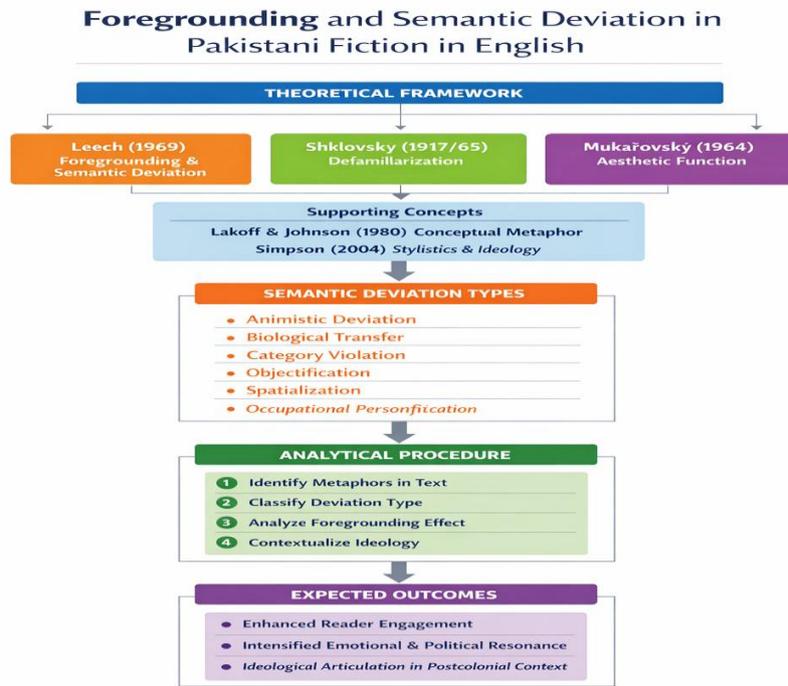
5. Theoretical Framework

This study mainly follows the theory of foregrounding given by Leech (1969). Foregrounding means making some words or expressions stand out so that readers pay special attention to them. According to Leech, writers often do this by using semantic deviation, which means using words in unusual or unexpected ways. When normal meanings are changed, the language becomes more powerful and interesting.

The study also uses some supporting ideas from other scholars. Shklovsky (1917/1965) introduced the idea of defamiliarization, which means making common things look new and strange so that readers think deeply about them. Mukařovský (1964) explained that literature has an aesthetic function, which means it uses language beautifully and creatively, not just for giving information. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) said that metaphors are not just poetic devices; they shape the way we think and understand the world. Simpson (2004) explained that stylistics can show how language expresses ideas about society, power, and ideology.

In this study, semantic deviation includes different types. Animistic deviation happens when non-living things are given human qualities, like saying "the desert is a judge." Biological transfer means comparing something to a living body process, like saying "money is oxygen." Category violation happens when two very different things are compared, such as calling a person a "Janissary." Objectification means describing an abstract idea as a physical object, like saying "power is a gun." Spatialization means turning ideas into places or spaces, such as

“faith is a battlefield.” Occupational personification happens when a mental ability is described as having a job, like saying “memory is a cartographer.”



All these types of semantic deviation help writers make their language more powerful and meaningful.

6. Methodology



This research uses a qualitative textual stylistic analysis, which means the study carefully examines the language of literary texts instead of using numbers or statistics. The focus is on understanding how writers use metaphors in their novels. The data for this study consists of metaphorical expressions taken from different Pakistani novels in English, such as *Moth Smoke* (Hamid, 2000), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, 2007), *Burnt Shadows* (Shamsie, 2009), *Home Fire* (Shamsie, 2017), *Kartography* (Shamsie, 2002), *Ice-Candy-Man* (Sidhwa, 1988), *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (Hanif, 2008), and *The Wandering Falcon* (Ahmad, 2011).

The analysis follows a few clear steps. First, the researcher identifies the metaphors used in the novels. Second, each metaphor is classified according to its type of semantic deviation, such as personification or category violation. Third, the study explains how the metaphor creates foregrounding, meaning how it makes certain ideas stand out. Finally, the researcher connects the metaphor to its ideological meaning, showing how it reflects ideas about society, politics, identity, or power.

7. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section undertakes a stylistic analysis of metaphorical constructions in selected Pakistani fiction in English through the theoretical lens of foregrounding, with particular emphasis on semantic deviation.

7.1 Theoretical Positioning: Foregrounding as Ideological Intensification

Leech (1969) conceptualizes foregrounding as deviation from linguistic norms, achieved either through parallelism or deviation. Semantic deviation occurs when selectional restrictions are violated when inanimate objects act, abstract concepts occupy physical space, or human beings are reduced to objects.

However, foregrounding is not merely aesthetic deviation. Simpson (2004) argues that stylistic choices encode ideological positioning. When metaphor violates ontological categories, it not only attracts attention but also restructures conceptual hierarchies. In postcolonial contexts, such restructuring destabilizes colonial epistemologies and nationalist mythologies.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further demonstrate that metaphor structures cognition itself. Thus, semantic deviation in fiction reshapes the reader's conceptual understanding of nationhood, faith, capitalism, and authority. This chapter therefore reads semantic deviation as a site where stylistic and ideological forces converge.

7.2 Capitalism and Biological Mapping in *Moth Smoke* (Hamid, 2000)

In *Moth Smoke*, the metaphor "Money was oxygen" exemplifies biological transfer. Here, economic capital is mapped onto the most fundamental condition of life. The semantic violation equating an abstract economic construct with a physiological necessity foregrounds capitalist intelligence.

This metaphor functions at two levels. First, it intensifies class anxiety by collapsing survival into financial access. Second, it enacts what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) would call an embodied metaphor, grounding socio-economic structures in bodily experience. The deviation destabilizes the presumed neutrality of economic systems, reframing capitalism as a suffocating structure.

Similarly, "The city was a furnace" transforms Lahore into an industrial object. This category violation foregrounds moral and atmospheric pressure. The metaphor defamiliarizes urban space, rendering it oppressive and mechanized. In Leech's (1969) terms, the deviation disrupts semantic expectation, compelling interpretive recalibration.

Thus, in *Moth Smoke*, semantic deviation encodes late-capitalist existential anxiety.

7.3 Identity and Temporal Collapse in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, 2007)

The statement “I was a modern-day Janissary” collapses temporal and cultural categories. A twenty-first-century Pakistani financial analyst is equated with an Ottoman slave soldier. This categorical violation foregrounds imperial complicity.

The metaphor operates as defamiliarization (Shklovsky, 1917/1965), disrupting the reader’s habitual understanding of globalization. Corporate assimilation becomes a reenactment of imperial servitude. Through semantic deviation, Hamid destabilizes neoliberal narratives of meritocracy.

Moreover, “September 11 was a crack in the mirror” spatializes national identity as reflective surface. The crack signals epistemological rupture. In this metaphor, the nation becomes fragile self-image, foregrounding post-9/11 identity fragmentation.

Foregrounding here functions as ideological exposure.

7.4 War, Trauma, and Embodied Geography in *Burnt Shadows* (Shamsie, 2009)

“Borders are scars across the earth” exemplifies animistic deviation. Geography is endowed with bodily vulnerability. The earth becomes wounded flesh. This metaphor foregrounds Partition trauma by materializing political violence onto landscape.

The semantic violation assigning biological injury to terrain intensifies affective response. As Mukařovský (1964) argues, aesthetic foregrounding heightens perceptual awareness. Here, political abstraction becomes embodied suffering.

Similarly, “History is a knife” objectifies temporality into weaponry. The metaphor reframes history as active agent of violence rather than passive chronology. This aligns with postcolonial critiques of historiography (Ashcroft et al., 2002), where the past is not neutral record but instrument of domination.

Thus, semantic deviation in *Burnt Shadows* encodes historical trauma.

7.5 Ideological Spatialization in *Home Fire* (Shamsie, 2017)

“Faith was a battlefield” spatializes belief into combat terrain. This deviation violates ontological boundaries between internal conviction and physical war zone. Foregrounding transforms theology into militarized space.

In Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) terms, this reflects conceptual metaphor (ARGUMENT IS WAR), but Shamsie intensifies it by embedding it within diasporic Muslim identity. The metaphor dramatizes ideological polarization in post-9/11 Britain.

“The state was a stern father” further animates political structure. Through personification, nationalism assumes paternal authority. This deviation foregrounds authoritarian governance while invoking patriarchal symbolism.

Semantic deviation thus exposes ideological power structures embedded in modern nation-states.

7.6 Domestic Irony and Partition in *Ice-Candy-Man* (Sidhwa, 1988)

“The country was being sliced like a cake” juxtaposes celebratory domestic imagery with geopolitical dismemberment. The metaphor’s semantic violation generates defamiliarization by trivializing catastrophic violence.

This irony foregrounds colonial arbitrariness in drawing borders. As Leech (1969) notes, deviation attracts interpretive focus; here, the domestic domain intensifies political critique.

“Partition was a monster” animates historical event into predatory being. Personification transforms political abstraction into embodied terror, foregrounding trauma’s uncontrollable agency.

Thus, semantic deviation becomes a vehicle of historical witnessing.

7.7 Satirical Objectification in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (Hanif, 2008)

“Power was a loaded gun” objectifies authority into lethal instrument. The metaphor foregrounds dictatorship’s volatility by equating governance with imminent violence. Hanif’s satire relies heavily on category violation, as in “Politics was a circus.” Governance becomes spectacle. This deviation destabilizes legitimacy and exposes performative authoritarianism.

Foregrounding here operates through absurdity, intensifying critique through exaggeration.

7.8 Landscape and Moral Agency in *The Wandering Falcon* (Ahmad, 2011)

“The desert was a silent judge” exemplifies animistic deviation. Landscape assumes moral authority. The metaphor foregrounds tribal codes beyond institutional law.

By assigning evaluative capacity to environment, Ahmad reconfigures sovereignty. Nature supersedes state. This aligns with Simpson’s (2004) argument that stylistic form encodes ideological worldview.

Thus, semantic deviation articulates alternative epistemologies rooted in tribal ethics.

7.9 Urban Fragmentation in *Kartography* (Shamsie, 2002)

“Memory is a cartographer” represents occupational personification. Cognition acquires professional agency. The metaphor foregrounds identity construction as mapping process.

This deviation destabilizes fixed geography, suggesting that cities exist through narrative reconstruction. Karachi becomes palimpsest of contested memory.

Foregrounding here operates as epistemological inquiry.

This analysis demonstrates that semantic deviation, as theorized by Leech (1969), functions as a central stylistic strategy in Pakistani fiction in English. Through violations of ontological boundaries, metaphor destabilizes habitual perception and intensifies ideological critique.

Foregrounding, rooted in defamiliarization (Shklovsky, 1917/1965), operates not merely as poetic ornament but as epistemological disruption. In postcolonial narrative contexts, semantic deviation reconfigures categories of nation, identity, power, and memory, compelling readers to confront the constructedness of political and social realities.

Stylistic analysis, therefore, proves indispensable for understanding the ideological force of Pakistani Anglophone fiction.

8. Findings and Conclusion

The study shows that Pakistani fiction in English often uses metaphors in unusual ways to grab attention. Personification is the most common type. These metaphors highlight social, political, and emotional issues, such as identity, national trauma, capitalism, and power. Using these deviations makes the text more interesting and thought-provoking for the reader.

This study also finds that semantic deviation is one of the most important stylistic techniques used in Pakistani fiction in English. Writers often use unusual comparisons and unexpected meanings to make their language more powerful. Among different types of deviation, personification giving human qualities to non-human things is used most frequently. The study also shows that metaphors are not just decorative; they carry important ideological meanings, especially in postcolonial contexts. Through foregrounding, these metaphors make readers think more deeply and pay closer attention to important social and political issues. Deviation strengthens the emotional and political impact of the text.

In conclusion, the study confirms that semantic deviation, as explained by Leech (1969), plays a central role in creating foregrounding in Pakistani fiction in English. By using metaphors in

unexpected ways, writers challenge normal ways of thinking and encourage readers to reconsider ideas about political power, national history, economic inequality, and identity in diasporic contexts. In this way, stylistic deviation becomes an important tool for expressing social and political ideas in postcolonial literature.

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