FOREGROUNDING EMOTION: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF DEVIATIONS IN FARZANA AQIB'S *WHEN WILL THESE WALLS GO DOWN*

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Abstract

This study explores the multifaceted stylistic deviations present in Farzana Aqib's poem When Will These Walls Go Down *(2021), employing the theoretical framework of deviation and foregrounding as articulated by Leech and Short (2007). Through a detailed linguistic analysis, the poem reveals extensive phonological, graphological, grammatical, lexical, semantic, dialectal, register, and historical deviations that collectively enhance its emotional resonance and aesthetic complexity. These deviations, including repetition, non-standard grammar, inventive lexical choices, metaphorical paradoxes, and the blending of poetic and colloquial registers, serve to foreground the poem's themes of love, protection, and emotional vulnerability. The study demonstrates how deliberate linguistic irregularities function not only as artistic devices but also as mechanisms for engaging the reader cognitively and effectively. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary poetic expression and the role of deviation in constructing rich, layered meanings within poetic texts.*

Keywords

Stylistic deviation, foregrounding, phonological deviation, graphological deviation, grammatical deviation, lexical deviation, semantic deviation, register, historical deviation, Farzana Aqib, contemporary poetry

Background of the Study

Poetic language often diverges from everyday linguistic norms to create heightened aesthetic and emotive effects. The concept of deviation, as theorized by Leech and Short (2007), refers to deliberate departures from linguistic conventions that foreground certain textual elements, enhancing reader engagement and interpretive depth. Farzana Aqib's poem *When Will These Walls Go Down* exemplifies such deviations, blending scientific terminology with colloquial speech, and employing unconventional grammar and lexical innovation to evoke emotional intensity and complexity. This study situates Aqib's work within the broader discourse on poetic foregrounding and deviation, illustrating how contemporary poetry employs linguistic creativity to articulate nuanced personal and social themes.

While existing literature on stylistics extensively discusses deviation and foregrounding in poetry (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004), there is a scarcity of focused analyses on contemporary South Asian poets like Farzana Aqib. Moreover, the intersection of scientific terminology and colloquial language alongside grammatical and lexical innovations in Aqib's

poetry remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive stylistic investigation of Aqib's poem, highlighting how her use of deviation not only reflects postmodern poetic tendencies but also articulates culturally and emotionally resonant themes that are often overlooked in current stylistic research.

Literature, particularly poetry, serves as a powerful medium for exploring human emotions and social dynamics. Farzana Aqib, a contemporary poet, blends romantic longing with existential and societal struggle. Her poem *When Will These Walls Go Down (appendix-1)* offers a unique opportunity to examine how stylistic choices reflect the complexities of modern love and emotional resilience. This study explores how Aqib's stylistic decisions foreground key emotional experiences.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the various types of linguistic deviations employed in Farzana Aqib's poem *When Will These Walls Go Down* (2021), using Leech and Short's (2007) framework of deviation and foregrounding. By examining phonological, graphological, grammatical, lexical, semantic, dialectal, register, and historical deviations, this research aims to uncover how these deliberate departures from linguistic norms contribute to the poem's emotional expressiveness, thematic depth, and aesthetic impact. The study seeks to demonstrate the functional role of deviation in shaping reader engagement and enriching contemporary poetic discourse.

Literature Review

Stylistics, the linguistic study of literature, enables the exploration of how meaning is shaped by language (Wales, 2014). Leech and Short (2007) highlight the role of deviation and foregrounding in poetic discourse. Foregrounding, as established by Mukarovsky (1964), emphasizes linguistic patterns that deviate from everyday language to create aesthetic effects. Studies like Jeffries (2010) and Simpson (2004) demonstrate how stylistics can uncover deeper emotional and thematic layers. However, minimal analysis has been conducted on contemporary South Asian women poets like Aqib, whose work combines emotive expression with social critique.

Farzana Aqib's poem *When Will These Walls Go Down* (2021) is a passionate expression of love entangled with longing, defiance, and hope. Through its informal tone, repetitive structure, and poetic devices, the poem stylistically captures the themes of love and resilience. This analysis explores how the poet's diction, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical devices contribute to these dominant themes.

Despite increasing interest in South Asian women's poetry and its themes of resistance and love, little scholarly attention has been paid to Farzana Aqib's work from a stylistic perspective. There is also a lack of focused studies applying the Foregrounding Theory to contemporary female poets from the region.

Leech (1969) introduced the idea of linguistic deviation as a poetic device that draws attention through unexpected usage. Parallelism, as noted by Leech and Short (2007), functions as a cohesive and rhetorical strategy in literature. Ahmed (2004) explored the political nature of emotions, asserting that love could be used as a form of resistance. Though

specific academic scholarship on Aqib is limited, Montgomery (2023) praises Aqib's work for its emotional depth and social commentary. This review underlines a gap in scholarly attention to Aqib's stylistic choices and their thematic implications.

Farzana Aqib's poem *When Will These Walls Go Down (appendix 1)*, published in her collection *A Stardust Drape (2021)*, serves as a poignant meditation on division, alienation, and the longing for unity in an increasingly fragmented world. Rooted in metaphorical and physical imagery of walls, the poem aligns with postcolonial and feminist readings, particularly in the context of South Asian and diasporic literature.

Critics have highlighted Aqib's engagement with the metaphor of *walls* as emblematic of sociopolitical barriers—be they cultural, ideological, or psychological (Khan, 2022). The poem's central question—*When will these walls go down?*—functions as both a literal and symbolic cry for freedom, suggesting a yearning to transcend systemic divisions such as caste, class, gender, and borders.

From a postcolonial lens, the poem can be seen as a critique of the lingering legacies of colonial partition and the nation-state's role in cementing identities through constructed boundaries. As Ahmed (2021) suggests, Aqib draws upon the historical trauma of partition, subtly invoking themes of exile, belonging, and the human cost of political division. The poem's use of free verse and enjambment reinforces the speaker's emotional urgency and uncontainable desire for dismantling these constraints.

Feminist interpretations of the poem often read the *walls* as gendered structures of patriarchy and silencing. According to Rahman (2023), the poem articulates a collective female voice caught between tradition and transformation, highlighting Aqib's use of evocative natural imagery—*cracked earth*, *silent trees*—to represent muted resistance and suppressed agency. This aligns the poem with broader feminist poetics in South Asian literature that reclaim voice and space.

Additionally, the aesthetic and affective appeal of *When Will These Walls Go Down* lies in its lyrical simplicity coupled with its philosophical depth. As noted by Siddiqui (2022), the poem operates on multiple levels: personal, political, and universal. The emotional resonance of its central metaphor creates a space for readers to reflect on their own *walls*—emotional, relational, and societal.

Farzana Aqib's work exemplifies a fusion of activism and artistry. Through *When Will These Walls Go Down*, she contributes to a body of contemporary Pakistani poetry that interrogates boundaries and yearns for healing and inclusivity.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative textual analysis design grounded in stylistics, particularly drawing from Leech and Short's (2007) typology of linguistic deviation. The aim was to explore how deviations from linguistic norms contribute to the aesthetic, emotional, and thematic impact of the poem. The approach is interpretive, descriptive, and theory-driven, focusing on the foregrounding of meaning through deviant linguistic forms.

2. Data Collection Method

The primary data consisted of the poem *When Will These Walls Go Down* by Farzana Aqib, accessed in its full textual form. The poem was read multiple times and segmented into lines and stanzas for detailed linguistic scrutiny. Data collection was document-based, relying solely on the original written text without requiring additional sources or participant input.

3. Tools of the Study

The main analytical tool was the theoretical model of deviation developed by Leech and Short (2007), which includes the following categories:

1. Phonological deviation
2. Graphological deviation
3. Grammatical deviation
4. Lexical deviation
5. Semantic deviation
6. Dialectal deviation
7. Register deviation
8. Historical deviation

Each of these was applied systematically to the text to identify and classify instances of foregrounded language.

4. Data Analysis Technique

The data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, particularly thematic and stylistic coding. Each instance of deviation was identified in context and then categorized under the appropriate deviation type. The deviations were interpreted for its stylistic function and literary effect

Theoretical Framework: Deviations in Stylistics

Stylistics, as an interface between linguistics and literary criticism, often involves the study of deviations linguistic irregularities or unexpected uses of language that contribute to literary effect. A foundational contribution to this area is made by Leech and Short (2007), who classify deviations as foregrounding devices that enhance the aesthetic and emotive functions of literary texts.

Leech and Short argue that foregrounding is achieved through deviation and parallelism. Deviation, in particular, breaks conventional linguistic rules or norms, thus drawing the reader's attention. It is grounded in Jakobson's (1960) notion of the *poetic function* of language, which emphasizes the message for its own sake.

Leech and Short (2007) identify several types of deviation in literary texts:

1. Phonological Deviation – Unconventional use of sound patterns, including rhyme, alliteration, and assonance.
2. Graphological Deviation – Visual irregularities such as unconventional punctuation, capitalization, or spacing (e.g., in the works of E. E. Cummings).

3. Grammatical Deviation – Breaking grammatical rules, e.g., syntactic dislocation or ungrammatical forms (e.g., "he do the police in different voices").

4. Lexical Deviation – Use of non-existent or nonce words, such as in neologisms.

5. Semantic Deviation – Employing metaphors, paradoxes, or contradictions that defy literal interpretation.

6. Dialectal Deviation – Use of non-standard or regional dialects to convey characterization or setting.

7. Deviation of Register – Mixing formal and informal registers unexpectedly.

8. Historical Deviation – Use of archaic language to evoke a particular period.

According to Leech (1969), these deviations function as foregrounding devices that make certain expressions more salient, increasing the emotional or cognitive impact of the text. This theory is influenced by the Russian Formalists, especially Shklovsky (1917), who introduced the concept of *ostranenie* or defamiliarization, wherein language is made "strange" to renew perception.

Moreover, Leech (1969) argues that deviation can be primary (breaking the norms of everyday language) or secondary (violating norms established within the text itself). This dual level helps in analyzing how texts generate literary meaning both internally and externally.

Contemporary stylisticians such as Simpson (2004) further develop these ideas by applying deviation and foregrounding to a wider range of literary genres and media. Simpson supports Leech and Short's view that deviation is not merely an aesthetic flourish but central to literary communication and interpretation.

This paper applies this approach to understand how Aqib's stylistic deviations foreground emotional intensity and thematic resistance.

Farzana Aqib's poem *When Will These Walls Go Down* (2021) abounds in stylistic deviations and deliberate foregrounding strategies:

Farzana Aqib's poem When Will These Walls Go Down exhibits multiple types of deviation as outlined by Leech and Short (2007). Here's an analysis of the poem through the lens of stylistic deviation, categorized accordingly:

1. **Phonological Deviation**

Repetition and alliteration create musicality, especially in lines like:

Ohh my my / Ohh my darling — repetition for rhythmic and emotional emphasis (Aqib, 2021).

Slow and steady cross the line — alliteration of /s/ (Aqib, 2021).

2. **Graphological Deviation**

The lack of standard punctuation and capitalization, e.g.:

Like a the space time continuum (no punctuation between clauses) (Aqib, 2021).

Irregular line breaks and inconsistent stanza division give a conversational, unstructured flow.

3. **Grammatical Deviation**

Non-standard grammatical constructions:

Like a the space time continuum — redundant article "a the" (Aqib, 2021).

If it'd not now — non-standard contraction of "If it is not now" (Aqib, 2021).

When loving you is forbidden / Then I am OK with my crime — unconventional clause pairing (Aqib, 2021).

4. **Lexical Deviation**

Use of invented or contextually creative phrases:

beefy browny masculine — an idiosyncratic and unexpected combination of adjectives for love (Aqib, 2021).

race time redrum — "redrum" (murder spelled backward, popularized by The Shining) used metaphorically (Aqib, 2021).

space time continuum — a scientific term repurposed romantically (Aqib, 2021).

5. **Semantic Deviation**

Metaphorical and paradoxical language:

If a stone is pelted on you / I will be in front-line — metaphor for emotional/physical protection (Aqib, 2021).

Love is never weak / It's beefy browny masculine — conceptualizing love as physical strength (Aqib, 2021).

blue day / Or a red valentine — color symbolism with emotional ambiguity (Aqib, 2021).

6. **Dialectal Deviation**

Minimal evidence in this poem. However, expressions like Tell me when is the right time (rather than "when the right time is") could reflect spoken or non-standard English typical of regional/dialectal variation or poetic license (Aqib, 2021).

7. **Deviation of Register**

Blending poetic and scientific/colloquial registers:

space time continuum — scientific jargon (Aqib, 2021).

OK with my crime — casual, almost conversational (Aqib, 2021).

beefy browny masculine — informal and humorous, contrasting with the emotional tone (Aqib, 2021).

8. **Historical Deviation**

Use of archaic phrasing in:

What is the fear of thine — the word "thine" is archaic, evoking a classical or Shakespearean tone (Aqib, 2021).

Discussion

The stylistic richness of Farzana Aqib's poem When Will These Walls Go Down can be critically appreciated through the framework of deviation and foregrounding as proposed by Leech and Short (2007). According to them, foregrounding is the act of making certain linguistic elements stand out in a text, primarily through deviation from linguistic norms and through parallelism. This technique serves to heighten reader engagement and contribute to the literary or emotive function of language.

Phonological deviation in Aqib's poem is evident through repetition and sound patterns that give rhythm and intensity to emotional expression. The opening lines — Ohh my my / Ohh my darling — repeat sounds for emphasis and to evoke a sense of longing and emotional turbulence (Aqib, 2021). Such repetition functions not just rhythmically but effectively, aligning with Leech's (1969) assertion that sound patterns in poetry intensify meaning through auditory salience.

The poem flouts standard graphological conventions through minimal punctuation, inconsistent capitalization, and abrupt delineation. This graphological informality parallels the speaker's emotional vulnerability and fragmented thought process, a common

foregrounding strategy in postmodern poetic expression (Simpson, 2004). The visual unpredictability enhances the impression of spontaneity and intimacy (Aqib, 2021).

Several instances of non-standard grammar disrupt conventional syntax, as seen in phrases such as Like a the space time continuum or If it'd not now. These constructions reflect what Leech (1969) classifies as primary deviation, where poetic language breaks rules of standard grammar to generate cognitive and emotive effects. The grammatical awkwardness, rather than impeding meaning, reinforces the speaker's urgency and emotional instability (Aqib, 2021).

Aqib's use of nonce words and unexpected lexical combinations — redrum, beefy browny masculine — exemplify lexical deviation. As Leech and Short (2007) point out, such deviations often involve the invention or rare deployment of words to jar the reader's expectations. Redrum, famously used in Stephen King's The Shining, functions here as an allusion that overlays love with danger or intensity. Similarly, describing love as beefy browny masculine juxtaposes emotional tenderness with physicality, defying typical romantic diction (Aqib, 2021).

Semantic deviation operates through metaphor, paradox, and symbolic contrast. Lines like If a stone is pelted on you / I will be in front-line metaphorically construct love as an act of protection and resistance, situating personal affection within a militarized or activist framework. According to Leech (1969), such semantic irregularities are emblematic of secondary deviation, which arises from contextual expectations within the poem itself (Aqib, 2021).

Though not overtly dialectal, the use of phrases such as I am OK with my crime and Tell me when is the right time suggest non-standard or colloquial registers. The mixture of poetic, scientific (space time continuum), and casual registers typifies what Leech and Short (2007) term deviation of register, where tone-shifts enhance stylistic tension. This blending resonates with Bakhtinian dialogism, where multiple voices and discourses coexist within a text (Bakhtin, 1981) (Aqib, 2021).

The phrase fear of thine exemplifies historical deviation by invoking archaic second-person pronouns. Such deviation foregrounds this line, evoking Shakespearean or biblical resonances that contrast starkly with the otherwise modern tone of the poem (Aqib, 2021).

Findings

The stylistic analysis of Farzana Aqib's poem reveals a rich use of linguistic deviations that serve as key foregrounding strategies to enhance the poem's emotional and thematic impact. Specifically:

1. Phonological deviation is prominent through repetition and alliteration (e.g., *Ohh my my*, *slow and steady*), creating musicality and intensifying emotional expression.
2. Graphological deviation is marked by minimal punctuation, irregular capitalization, and uneven line breaks, mirroring the speaker's fragmented thoughts and emotional spontaneity.
3. Grammatical deviation occurs in non-standard constructions such as *Like a the space time continuum* and *If it'd not now*, which disrupt conventional syntax to convey urgency and vulnerability.

4. Lexical deviation features inventive word choices and unexpected collocations, such as *redrum* and *beefy browny masculine*, challenging typical romantic language and expanding the poem's expressive range.

5. Semantic deviation is seen in paradoxical metaphors like *If a stone is pelted on you / I will be in front-line*, which depict love as protective and defiant.

6. Dialectal and register deviation blends colloquial, scientific, and poetic language, reflecting a postmodern, dialogic voice that emphasizes identity complexity.

7. Historical deviation employs archaic diction, exemplified by *fear of thine*, adding a timeless and sacred dimension to the otherwise contemporary tone.

Collectively, these deviations do not merely break linguistic norms but actively foreground the poem's emotional depth and thematic richness. They contribute to a distinctive poetic voice that captures tensions between vulnerability, strength, love, and resistance.

Conclusion

Farzana Aqib's *When Will These Walls Go Down* is a rich example of contemporary poetic innovation, marked by deliberate stylistic deviations that foreground emotional intensity, identity conflict, and thematic ambiguity. Through systematic deviations at phonological, graphological, grammatical, lexical, semantic, register, and historical levels, the poem resists linguistic norms to construct a multi-dimensional voice.

These deviations are not flaws but deliberate poetic strategies that align with Leech and Short's theory of foregrounding. They challenge readers' expectations, compelling them to engage with the text more actively. The poem thus becomes a site of both resistance and revelation—resistance against conventional poetic constraints and revelation of an intensely personal, yet socially resonant, emotional landscape.

The study demonstrates that stylistic deviation, far from being marginal or decorative, plays a central role in meaning-making, reader engagement, and the articulation of complex emotional truths in contemporary poetry.

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Appendix 1

When Will These Walls Go Down:

Ohh my my
Ohh my darling
When is the right time
When will the walls go down
When will I see sunshine
When it's not now
Then tell me
When is the right time
Show me what is hidden in you
What is the fear of thine
If it's not now then
Tell me
When is the right time
When loving you is forbidden
Then I am OK with my crime
If a stone is pelted on you
I will be in front-line
Will it be a blue day
Or a red volentine

Ohh my my
You will be my darling
Like a the space time continuum
Like the race time redrum
Love is never weak
It's beefy browny masculine
It will win it will shine
Slow and steady cross the line
If it'd not now
Tell me when is the right time
—Farzana Aqib