

## FOREGROUNDING AS A LITERARY DEVICE

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### ABSTRACT

Foregrounding is a literary technique that's employed in order to draw attention to a specific part of a poem, novel, short story, or other literary work. Foregrounding works in tandem with a variety of other literary devices. Writers use these literary devices to make parts of their writing more important or more effective. A poet might choose to use some, or all, of the following at points within their writing and in this research foregrounding has been studied in poetry, moreover, it has been attached different examples from stylistics and systemic functional linguistics' point of view.

**Keywords:** Foregrounding, literary devices, metaphor, amplification, simile, anastrophe, hyperbole, alliteration, antithesis, parallelism, anacoluthon.

When one of these literary devices is used, the reader is likely to take note of that particular part of the text more than the lines around it. It stands out, or is brought into the foreground, in comparison to other lines or stanzas. One of the best examples uses the literary devices antithesis and parallelism as examples of foregrounding. It is found in Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities. The novel's famous opening lines read:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way [1].

The lines contrast "best" with "worst" and "everything" with "nothing." By repeating the structure of the first line, he draws attention to all those which follow and force the reader to

question what exactly makes this “time” so interesting. Let’s take examples of foregrounding in poetry: love is thicker than forget by E.E. Cummings. Cummings’ poetry is the source of many foregrounding examples. He is well-known today for his very unusual grammatical choices, lack of punctuation, and habit of capitalizing some words and not capitalizing others (including his own name). This poem provides a good example of foregrounding in the following lines:

love is more thicker than forget  
more thinner than recall  
more seldom than a wave is wet  
more frequent than to fail

These lines, which also serve as an example of parallelism, use anaphora through the repetition of “more” at the beginning of lines two, three, and four. The repetition of the word “than” partway through the line adds to the foregrounded aspects of this section. There is another section of text in which “less” is used in the same way (starting three lines) which also makes this section stand out Paradise Lost by John Milton.

Milton’s famed ‘Paradise Lost’ contains a wide variety of literary devices from metaphors and allusions to similes and examples of hyperbole. It also features numerous examples of foregrounding/ Consider these lines, spoken by Satan, after waking up in Hell.

Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:  
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice  
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n.  
But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,  
Th’ associates and copartners of our loss  
Lye thus astonisht on th’ oblivious Pool,  
And call them not to share with us their part  
In this unhappy Mansion, or once more  
With rallied Arms to try what may be yet  
Regaind in Heav’n, or what more lost in Hell?

The repetitive structure in the famous line “Better to begin in Hell, then serve in Heav’n” makes the line stand out and because of this, it has become one of the best-known lines from this long epic. Additionally, within this passage, Milton uses anaphora (seen through the repetition of “Here”), alliteration (seen in “faithful friends”), and more[ 4,6,8].

The study of literary stylistics or distinctive styles in writing looks at the role of foregrounding by analyzing the effect that it has on a piece as a whole. In other words, how does foregrounding impact the composition of a piece and the experience of readers? These excerpts from scholarly writing on the subject attempt to define this.

"Foregrounding is essentially a technique for 'making strange' in language, or to extrapolate from Shklovsky's Russian term -ostranenie, a method of 'defamiliarisation' in textual composition. ... Whether the foregrounded pattern deviates from a norm, or whether it replicates a pattern through parallelism, the point of foregrounding as a stylistic strategy is that it should acquire salience in the act of drawing attention to itself," [9] .

"This opening line from a poem by Roethke, ranked high [for the presence of foregrounding]: 'I have known the inexorable sadness of pencils.' The pencils are personified; it contains an unusual word, 'inexorable'; it contains repeated phonemes such as /n/ and /e/," [7] .

"In literature, foregrounding may be most readily identified with linguistic deviation: the violation of rules and conventions, by which a poet transcends the normal communicative resources of the language, and awakens the reader, by freeing him from the grooves of cliché expression, to a new perceptivity. Poetic metaphor, a type of semantic deviation, is the most important instance of this type of foregrounding," [3] .

Foregrounding from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics presents a slightly different angle, described in the following passage by linguist Russel S. Tomlin, that looks at the device on a much smaller scale. "The basic idea in foregrounding is that the clauses which make up a text can be divided into two classes. There are clauses which convey the most central or important ideas in text, those propositions which should be remembered. And there are clauses which, in one way or another, elaborate on the important ideas, adding specificity or contextual information to help in the interpretation of the central ideas [2]

M.A.K. Halliday offers another description of foregrounding in systemic functional linguistics: "A great deal of stylistic foregrounding depends on an analogous process, by which some aspect of the underlying meaning is represented linguistically at more than one level: not only through the semantics of the text—the ideational and interpersonal meanings, as embodied in the content and in the writer's choice of his role—but also by direct reflection in the lexicogrammar or the phonology," [ 5,10] .

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