

# **THE CREATIVE USE OF LANGUAGE**

## **AN ESCAPE FROM BANALITY**

- Theoretically, any language user can produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in that language. In practice we make very limited use of this inventive capacity, finding it easier to rely on a limited repertoire used over and over again. This implies that most language users are not ‘creative’ in using their language.
- A literary man is nothing if not creative, and since language is his medium, we might well ask how he could be creative without using language in some sense creatively.
- We may characterize the creative impulse of the artist, on one dimension, as a flight from the banality of ‘a worn-out literary fashion’. One of the ways to leave the old fashion is by using the most unlikely resources, such as the terminology of aeronautics, finance, computer or cyber-space.
- Post-modern authors, for example, determine to get rid of the modern literary tradition to divide literature into three major genres (poetry, novel and drama) and to put popular literature under the classic one.
- Avoiding banality can be seen from two dimensions:
  - a. the banality of the literary convention in the past;
  - b. the banality of the everyday usage of the present.

## **TWO MEANINGS OF CREATIVE**

- An author may be said to use language creatively if:
  - a. he makes original use of the established possibilities of the language;
  - b. he actually goes beyond those possibilities, that is, if he creates new communicative possibilities which are not already in the language.

- Linguistic creativity then can be regarded as ‘inventiveness’ or ‘originality’.
- Examples:
  1. *The polar bears of the Arctic ice-cap have recently taken to wearing false eyelashes as a protection against snow-blindness.*
  2. *Eins within a space and a wearywide space it wast ere wohned a Mookse.*

Sentence 1 is original because of the unlikelihood of the event it describes.

Sentence 2 is original in a more radical sense than (1), which was regularly formed according to the rules of English. Sentence 2 breaks the rules of the language so markedly that we might be in doubt to treat it as written ‘in English’ at all.

- Therefore, being linguistically creative is the means to being creative in the literary sense.

Question 1:

In what ways is the author of this little piece of a novel creative?

*While I was thinking these thoughts a little stream was running softly somewhere in my mind, a little stream of reminiscence. What was it? Something was asking to be remembered. I held the book gently in my hands, and followed without haste the course of my reverie, waiting for the memory to declare itself.*

## **DEGREES OF LINGUISTIC AUDACITY**

- Any text, either literary or not, contains some information. The amount of information in a piece of language is related to the predictability of one linguistic choice from another.

- In ordinary communications (such as in business letters), this predictability is high, and the amount of information transmitted is comparatively small. A single glance at a business letter is often enough to tell a reader the substance of its message.
- On the other hand, the selections in a serious prose made have on the average a low predictability, and the amount of information conveyed is relatively large. A page of literary prose has to be read with careful scrutiny: it conveys too much information to take in on a superficial reading.
- By the standard of the accepted linguistic code, any selection which is not of the selections allowed by the rules has a null probability: the occurrence is impossible. But for an author, it's quite possible.
- Example:
  1. *a minute ago*
  2. *some months ago*
  3. *many moons ago*
  4. *several performance ago*
  5. *a few cigarettes ago*
  6. *three overcoats ago*
  7. *two wives ago*
  8. *a grief ago*
  9. *a humanity ago*

The direction from 1 to 9 shows the normal use which is deviated to the more audacious.

Question 2:

What about the following?

*Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's throng's Lord.*

Discuss the creative use of language in the following excerpt of Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour*

She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.