

Morphological Deviation as a Stylistic Marker in E.E. Cumming's Poetry

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Abstract

E.E. Cummings's poetry represents an irresistible challenge for linguists who are interested in describing and analysing the aesthetic use of language. He is one of the poets who are often sensitive to the productive properties of morphemes, in other words, he utilizes creativity by producing new words for saturating their aims.

(Falk, 1978: 35)

Deviant morphology is not merely a minor element of his poetic technique. On the contrary, almost every one of his poems contains marks of such a technique. Readers' understanding of Cummings's art would be greatly enhanced if those readers could understand the machinery behind this deviant technique.

The words that Cummings deviantly coins are central vehicles of his poetic message. The present paper is intended to manifest a precise theoretical account of the process involved when a reader encounters a word formed by the deviant use of a morphological process. It may help the reader to use his grammatical competence to arrive at an acceptable reading of the deviant form. Moreover, it sheds light on a range of morphological processes which Cummings violates. Each section illustrates the theory of deviation in specifying the distribution and use of the relevant form in the standard usage, the distribution and use of the forms in Cummings's poetry and the semantic effect of the deviant forms in Cummings's poetic message.

Cummings's deviant forms are provided in their poetic contexts in order to substantiate the paper with authentic evidence and familiarize the reader with the mechanism of morphological deviation in Cummings's poetry. References are supplied to page numbers in Harcourt, Brace and Jovanvich's Complete Poems: 1913-1963 for each word discussed, for instance, *unanimal* (620) of this edition of Cummings's poems.

0. Introduction

E.E. Cummings's poetry presents an irresistible challenge for linguists who are interested in describing and analysing the aesthetic use of language. Deviant morphology is not merely or major element of his poetic technique. On the contrary, almost every one of his poems contains

marks of such a technique. Readers' understanding of Cummings's art would be greatly enhanced if those readers could understand the machinery behind this deviant technique.

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manifest a precise theoretical account of the process involved when a reader encounters a word formed by the deviant use of a morphological process. It may help the reader to use his grammatical competence to arrive at an acceptable reading of the deviant form. Moreover, it sheds light on a range of morphological processes which Cummings violates. Each section illustrates the theory of deviation in specifying the distribution and use of the relevant form in the standard usage, the distribution and use of the forms in Cummings's poetry and the semantic effect of the deviant forms in Cummings's poetic message.

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1.2. The Language of Modern Poetry

After 1914 there was about as much variety in the kinds of language used as there was in the kinds of rhythms. The works of a number of earlier writers, including Walt Whitman, the prose of Oscar Wilde, Robert Browning's subversion of the poetic self and Emily Dickinson, represent the roots of the modern poetic English language (Walter et al., 1974: 223).

Linguistically speaking, language can be used to persuade, influence and communicate ideas, feelings and emotions though it is sometimes used for purely aesthetic reasons. In writing poetry, for example, poets may manipulate words in the same way an artist models clay or paints a

picture (Aitchison, 1999: 20). To Crystal (1985: 30), language is the poet's repertoire from which he can create his own world.

Such a powerful and complex use of language represents the base of the literary effect of language; that is why it is highly difficult to define the meaning of a literary work. The language of a literary work represents the medium of its message; the meaning of any text is encoded (embodied) in its linguistic form. To be specific, it is the only means the poet has for communicating his ideas or feelings; it is the most reliable means for understanding the poet's intention (Ibid).

Eliot considers language an important tool for expressing and digesting a poet's objects, new group of objects, feelings and aspects. Being aware of the complexity of his period, the modern poet employs or uses language in a way that serves and reflects the vague, complex and ambivalent emotional experience he undergoes (Walter et al., 1974: 223).

To illustrate, Eliot thinks that the language of modern poetry fuses two elements; feeling and thought. "Modern poets", states Walter, "will be condemned if they do not feel their thoughts as immediately as the odour of the rose". To express complex meanings, some modern poets often depart from the simple accepted norms of the social talk. Their choice of language, together with the variety of rhythms they employ and tone of "serious humour" they frequently adopt, express the ideas and feelings poets have about the modern world (Ibid).

As a result, the language of modern poetry tends to be complex, and deviant. Ambiguity is considered a merit rather than a demerit because the modernists believe that the language of "good" poetry should

be removed from everyday usage. The common deviant complex form of modern poetry is not merely ornamental, on the contrary it is a functional complexity which reflects the ambivalent, vague experience undergone by the modern poet (Cook, 2003: 62).

1.3. E.E. Cummings as a Modern Poet

Edward Estlin Cummings, the son of a minister, was born, and educated in Cambridge, Massachusetts; in 1915 and 1916, he received his B.A. and M.A. from Harvard. After studying art for some time in Paris, he began to experiment with new techniques of writing such as unconventional typographical arrangements, oddities of spelling and the abolition of capital letters (Walter et al., 1974: 294).

To refine his technique, Cummings tries to rescue language from the discursive, analytic abstractness that threatens to deaden it (Pearce, 1961: 363). He is one of the poets who are often sensitive to the productive properties of morphemes, in other words, those who show creativity by producing new words for saturating their aims (Falk, 1978: 35).

Reading Cumming's work, one feels the novelty of a technique through which Cummings does not so much aim at giving life to words but to their grammatical-syntactic context. He attempts at wrenching words out of their common regular grammatical and syntactical functions so as not to give life to the substance, (meaning) of a sentence but to its structure (Pearce, 1961: 364).

Cummings exploits creativity as a characteristic of human language in a highly dramatic way. The nonpoets' creativity is not usually regarded artistic, but,

nevertheless, it does serve as the basis for producing new words which were neither produced nor encountered in the past, as it is represented in the following poetic lines:

helves surling out of eakspeasies per(red)
hapsingly
progress he and she-ingly people
trickle curselaugh groping shrieks bubble.
(Falk, 1978: 35)

1.4. Cummings' Deviant Morphology

To express feelings, Cummings deliberately distracts syntax and alters parts of speech making verbs function as nouns and vice versa (Ellman and O'Clair, 1988: 547). His poems are set up in a way that inhibits words from reflecting the normal tendency and helps instead to achieve what is called self-transcendence; or self-realization despising all that might prevent it. He forms his poems in a way that reflects the lyrical impulse of the modern world. They are set up to make the reader envisage a man who may avoid being victimized and manipulated or depersonalized (Pearce, 1961: 358) and (Ellman and O'Clair, 1988: 547).

Linguistically speaking, morphology is the scientific scrutiny of the internal structure of the smallest grammatical units; morphemes. To Crystal (2003: 134), any sort of violence to the English morphemes; i.e., "ill-formed morphemes", is referred to as a deviant morphological construction. Such a sort of "ill-formed morphemes" represents a major element of Cummings's poetic technique and a central vehicle of his poetic message. Understanding Cummings's use of deviant morphology helps one to understand and appreciate his highly individual art in order to grasp his meaning in a better way.

To define the idea of morphological deviation precisely, one should understand

what the standard English morphology is. English derivational morphology includes four semantic and grammatical components which are:

1. Derivational affixes in standard usage normally carry a meaning of their own. Derivational meanings are much more diverser than inflectional categories which do not have a clearly identifiable meaning, but only a syntactic function (Haspelmath, 2002: 61-68).

2. Stems and affixes

Morphemes can be classified into free and bound morphemes. The former refers to that kind of morphemes which can stand alone having certain meaning while the latter refers to those which can not stand on their own as lexemes. Usually the stem is a free morpheme as in the case of likely where like is the stem of the word and a free morpheme. However, the matter is not always easy. For instance, in the word possible the ible seems to be attached to the stem poss, that is itself bound (Kuiper and Allan, 1996: 150-51).

3. Strict semantic and grammatical rules hold between the affix and the base in almost all cases. Some affixes only attach to verbs, such as 'en' or 'ize'. Others only attach to nouns, for example 'ance' or 'sion' and so forth.

4. Finally, the combination of an affix and bases usually produces a word in only one lexical category. Sometimes the affix preserves the lexical category of the base, for instance, both 'able' and unable are adjectives. Sometimes it does not, as in enable that is a verb due to the addition of 'en'. In interpreting a deviant form, then, a reader must manipulate four variables that are: affix-meaning, base-meaning, affix-base, selectional

restrictions and output category restrictions (Falk, 1978: 41).

1.4.1. The Deviant Use of the Negative Prefix Un-

The negative prefix (un-) is one of the largest groups of morphemes that Cummings coins. Grammatically speaking, un- combines with adjectives and their related nouns and adverbs to form new adjective, nouns and adverbs. The un- prefix is used as a negative prefix that means "the opposite of", e.g., unhappy, unofficial, etc., or "not" as a privative prefix before nouns, e.g., unleash, unhorse, etc., and as a reversitive prefix before verbs; i.e. un- combines with verbs to form new verbs. Verbs that are formed in this way express the idea of reversing the process or state of the original verb, e.g. do/undo or cover/uncover, etc. (Quirk et al., 1985: 1540). Before nominal bases, un- alters the noun into a verb. In other cases, category membership is not affected (Kuiper and Allan, 1996: 138).

Cummings's deviant use of the un-prefix can be obviously seen in the following poetic contexts:

unlove (765)
 unlove's the heavenless hell and
 homeless home
 of knowledgeable shadows (quick to
 seize
 each nothing which all soulless wraiths
 proclaim
 substance; all heartless spectries,
 happiness)

unwish (554)
 pity this busy monster, manunkind,
 not progress is a comfortable disease:
 your victim (death and life safely beyond)
 plays with the bigness of his littleness ...

Unearth (541)
leaf of ghosts some
few creep there
here or on
unearth

With nominal bases, Cummings uses un- as a negative prefix to form nouns (i.e. unlove, unwish and unearth). Such words are deviant because un- only combines with nouns to produce "privative" verbs in standard usage. Here, Cummings uses the adjective base meaning of un-, "not," and the verbal -/adjectival- base category restriction to fill in the gap in English that there are no nouns with un-.

As far as the poetic effect is concerned, Cummings's use of the prefix un- with nominal bases represents his major thematic device. In his poetry, Cummings glorifies the spiritual, the unique, the illimitable, the fragile, the timeless, the beautiful and the supra-physical over the merely physical, materialistic, mundane, scientific, prosaic and political. To him, it is only the former entities that form the true life or world. The latter are simple and represent "unlife" or "unworld" (McIntyre, 2005: 7).

Moreover, Cummings uses English morphology to say "where the normal person sees something (i.e. the world, life, man, etc.), I [Cummings] see two distinct realms (i.e. the world and the unworld, life and unlife, man and unman)". Making un- a noun- producing, negative prefix, Cummins fragments normal reference, increases the number of nominal distinctions available to the grammar of English and, as a result, redefines his concept of what a true world should be. He uses English morphology to perform the age-old poetic task of separating the poetically valuable elements of reality from those that reflect the

mundane aspects of existence (McIntyre, 2005: 2-6).

1.4.2. The Deviant Use of the Adverbs of Manner "-ingly"

Another substantial group of word that Cummings coins is "-ingly" adverbs formed from a verbal stem, the present participle suffix -ing and the -ly adverbial suffix. It is possible for the sharp-eyed reader to notice that such adverbs function as manner adverbials "manner process adjuncts" (Kuiper and Allan, 1996: 141). These adverbs can be paraphrased "in a way" where the adjective base of the -ly adverbs fills in the blanks. A main controlling rule in the conversion of the participial adjectives to form manner adverbs appears to be the gradability of the adjectives involved. Interestingly, only a very few adjectives in English are non-gradable. A few stative adjectives; a- adjectives like asleep, afloat, etc., certain technical adjectives such as, atomic, hydrochloric, etc. and adjectives of provenance, e.g. British, American, etc. are non-gradable (for further information, see Quirk et al., 1985: 434-35).

The outstanding fact about the "-ingly adverbs" that Cummings coins is that they are almost all derived from non-gradable participial adjectives or those which are only marginally so. The following poetic lines by Cummings:

livingly (658)
here
a livingly free mysterious
dreamsoul floatstands
oak by birth by maple
pine ...

Kissingly (161)
Seeing how the limp huddling string
of your smile over his body squirms

Kissingly, i will bring you every spring handfuls of little normal worms.

In English, there is a productive process whereby verbs may be converted to -ly manner adverbs by way of their present participles but such a process is not applicable upon such verbs; 'kiss' and 'live'.

Literally speaking, Cummings resorts to such a technique as a major vehicle of poetic metaphor. Each time he coins an adverb from a non-gradable base, he forces the reader to grade the adjective involved. To clarify, the reader must create a world just like that of the poet, see 1.4.1, in which phrases such as "the very kneeling dusk" are possible. He must extend, fragment and differentiate the base concept until he can produce a concept of sufficient complexity that is gradable. (McIntyre, 2005: 7)

1.4.3. The Deviant Use of -fully Adverbs

Cummings's third group of words to coin is -fully adverbs. Such adverbs are formed from a nominal, e.g., carefully or verbal, e.g., forgetfully, base, the productive adjectival suffix -ful and the adverbial suffix -ly.

Grammatically speaking, English has two complementary suffixes that are: -y and -ful which convert verbal and nominal bases to adjectives with the meaning "having x" or an analysis that depends upon the idea of gradability that is extremely unstable. Gradability is often dependent on semantic complexity which in turn often depends on familiarity and frequency of use (Quirk et al., 1985: 435-58)

In addition, the semantic generalization behind the distribution of such suffixes appears to be that -ful operates with bases which indicate "state-of-

mind" but -y does with "non-state-of-mind bases" (Ibid). Consequently, the reader may observe Cummings's poetic use of such suffixes in:

Childfully (402)

who before dying demands not rebirth
of such than hungrily more swiftness as
with (feel) pauseless immeasurable

Now

cancel the childfully diminishing earth
-never whose proudly life swallowed is
by...

and in his prose context:

Rainlife whispers mistfully. (755)

Darkness eats a distance birdfully.
(350)

Phantoms fountain brightshaowfully.
(681)

The earth diminishes childfully (402)

To illustrate, Cummings uses the -ful suffix with "non-state-of-mind" adjectives and then he converts these forms to adverbs via -ly. Clearly, Cummings's words are unacceptable in normal usage because they violate "the state-of-mind- selectional restriction" between -ful and the nominal base (See Quirk et al., 1985: 247-48).

Since the -ful suffix demands that its nominal base be a "state-of-mind" concept, when Cummings coins such words as mistfully he forces the reader to animate and personify the base noun, i.e., conceive a world where mist is state-of-mind (see 1.4.1). The use of words such as mistfully reveals Cummings's fondness of the morphological deviation. In the everyday world, rainlife, darkness, phantoms and the earth are all subjects of sentences which do not have states of mind. However, in Cummings's poetic world, these subjects become

animated and personified. Inanimate subjects perform animate and even human actions, e.g. "darkness eats a distance", and so forth. Cummings uses English morphology to increase the number of possible conceptual distinctions available to the language. On the other hand, he uses grammar to perform an aesthetic task and such a use of language is applicable to Eliot's belief that language is an important tool to the poet for expressing and creating new objects, see 1.2, (Walter et al., 1974: 223).

1.4.4. Cummings's Conversion of Verbs

Converting verbs into nouns represents another group of words that Cummings coins. Grammatically speaking, conversion is very common in English but it is rather difficult to deal with since nothing happens to the lexeme's form in such a word formation process. One can notice [N drink], e.g. Give me a drink, [V drink], e.g. she drank the water, the noun drink and the verb drink have the same form but differ in their syntactic category and consequently also in their meaning. Being different in both, their syntactic category and meaning, such a pair is of similar lexemes, and the process that connects them is referred to as conversion (Kuiper and Allan, 1996: 150).

Moreover, conversion is different from derivational affixation where the latter has a guide through which one can know the new lexeme is derived from the base lexeme by the addition of an affix which the former lacks (Quirk et al., 1985: 1558). To Kuiper and Allan (1996: 150), most nouns can be converted to verbs, e.g., supermarket might become a verb saying 'we are going to be supermarketting until 11 o'clock. Conversion may happen with adjectives, as

[A yellow], e.g., a yellow tulip, [V yellow], e.g., the paper yellowed gradually.

Reading Cummings's poetry, one can see different rules of conversion. He converts verbs to nouns and then inflects for the plural with -s as in:

cants (536)
so far your nearness reaches
a lucky fifth of you
turns people into eachs
and cowards into grow
our can'ts were born to happen
our mosts have died in more

English allows verbal base to be converted freely to nouns or vice versa. However, the purely verbal functions of the verb cannot convert. That is, words like a walk exists but not a walked (tense), a walk (person), or a has walked (aspect). In other words, the lexical meaning of the verb can be nominalized but not the associate verbal functions (Quirk et al., 1985: 1559-560).

Building verbal functions directly into nominal conversions, Cummings is able to create nouns that are far more dynamic than those acceptable in normal usage. Such dynamic nouns reflect Cummings's concern for the verbal aspects of things. Moreover, he creates nouns which immediately reflect their individuality through building or conversing grammatical persons into nouns (McIntyre, 2005: 22). To Ellman and O'Clair (1988: 547), Cummings conveys his feelings through his deliberate distribution of syntax and alternating parts of speech making verbs to function as nouns and so on.

1.4.5. Cummings's Conversion of Function Words

Another group of nouns that Cummings coins is conversions of various

function words, e.g. interrogative adverbs, demonstratives, subordinate conjunctions, indefinite pronouns and negative particles. Each of such nouns is either inflected for the plural with -s or contains the abstract nominal suffix -ness. As with the verb-conversion in (1.4.4), Cummings exploits these words as if they were true nouns.

In English, function words such as "ifs", "buts", and "maybes" occur in a scrap of dialogue depending on what is termed 'type-token'. In other words, the normal way of doing this is through proceeding sequentially from the given to that which is new or unknown to achieve what is called 'thematic connection' (Quirk et al., 1985: 1430). McIntyre (2005: 22) illustrates such a type-token conversion in the following situation:

imagine that someone says:

I can't swim.

I can't walk.

I can't play ball.

I can't do anything.

One could reply saying, "Stop giving me all those can't's and try!" However, it is impossible to accept such a use of the word 'can't's' unless having the discourse precedent; proceeding from the known as a point of departure towards the unknown (Quirk et al., 1985: 1430).

As far as Cummings's conversion of function words is concerned, he disregards discourse precedents and uses token conversions without perceptible restrictions, for instance,

Whys (716)

dancing to feel

nots are their ways

stones become eyes

and

Whens (577)

darling

sweet this creative never
known

complexity was born before the moon
before God wished Himself into a rose
and even ...

hows (175)

i like your body. I like what it

i like its hows. i like to feel

of your body and its bones, a firm-

smooth ness and which i will

again and again and again

Cumming's manipulates such nominalized function words as major vehicles. The unworld is a "How-town" where people are consumed with ifs, whens, wheres. That is to say the people of this unworld are fond of the "how" of conveying such a sort of idea with these conversions following from the grammatical process involved in token conversions. Since token conversions refer primarily to speech acts (tokens) and only secondarily to entities (concepts) (Falk, 1978: 264), Cummings can bring his poetry closer to the actions (speech acts) of the people he is describing. He can use the nominalization of these general sentential operators to characterize people according to their dominant speech patterns.

1.4.6. Cummings's Conversions of Quantifier

Finally, quantifiers are another group of words Cummings convert into nouns and then inflects for the plural with "s" or "-ness". In normal usage, token conversions with quantifiers are much less frequent than with that set of function words discussed in (1.4.5). However, the words all, both, half, most, etc. are quantifiers that do not occur

with the 'quantitative' determiners like every, (n)either, each, some, any, etc. Both may be used with plural nouns and has dual number, e.g. all (the) day(s), all (the) furniture. In addition, all may be used as independent pronouns such as,

All/both/half passed their exams.
(Quirk et al., 1985: 258)

As with other nominal conversions, Cummings uses these quantifiers as pure nouns with no perceptible restriction of quantifiers:

mosts (537)
our can'ts were born to happen
our mosts have died in more
our twentieth will open
wide a wide open door ...

and

eachs (537)
so far your nearness reaches
a lucky fifth of you
turns people into eachs
and cowards into grow
boths (569), neither (569)

...

toomany-ness (528)
a people shaped toomany-ness far too
and will it tell us who we are and will
it tell us why we dream and will it tell
us how we drink crawl eat walk die fly
do?

A notalive undead too-nearishness.

Being virtually prohibited except in pure token references, the forms alls, manys, eachs, mosts, etc. are all considered deviant uses of quantifiers in the standard English.

For Cummings, these nominal quantifiers represent major thematic vehicle, e.g., mosts are the people of mass

society, the unworld. Such people do not deserve a name more specific than a quantifier or indefinite pronoun. They are merely unpeople who live "unlives" in the "people shaped too many-ness". On the other hand, sometimes people become "eachs" and experience "alls", i.e., they realize a spiritual transcendental experience (see 1.4).

To express his view on the value of individuality in human existence, Cummings uses such nominal set operators. Quantifiers provide pure symbols of uniqueness (each) and completeness (all) as opposed to anonymity (most) and indecisiveness (both/neither).

2. Conclusion

This study investigates the use of deviant morphology in Cummings's poetry to create novel poetic effects. Cummings uses the morphological processes of English to perform a wide range of poetic tasks. He creates an entire universe of entities that realize their potential more than the use. Those who merely exist (the unworld) through breaking the constraints on the category membership of the bases of un-+nominal forms. Violating the constraints on the gradability of the participial bases of -ingly adverbs and the complexity of the bases of ly adjectives, he creates a poetic semantics of metaphorically graded verbs and semantically complex nouns. Moreover, he personifies and mentalizes his poetic universe through breaking the "state of mind" constraints of adjective bases of -fully adverbs. Converting finite verbs to nouns, he separates a world of truly active, positive, self-conscious entities from a world of non-finite, de-personalized and negative entities.

Presenting a coherent and revealing analysis of the deviant use of morphology in

poetry depends on a detailed account of the morphological process in standard usage. In other words, before one can understand how a poet manipulates the grammatical competence for poetic effects, one must know what that competence is. Cummings exploits the English morphological processes in a highly systematic manner to perform traditional poetic tasks of metaphor, personification, poetic reference, aesthetic perception, semantic compression and universal statement.

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الخلاصة:

يقدم شعر Cummings تحدياً لا يقاوم لعلماء اللغة المهتمين بوصف وتحليل استخدام اللغة الجمالي. يمثل الانحراف في تركيب الكلمة عنصر أساسي لأسلوبه الشعري لاحتواء كل قصيدة من قصائده على علامات لمثل هذا الأسلوب. ان فهم الغرض من استخدام مثل هذا الأسلوب يساعد على تطوير فهم القارئ لفن Cummings بشكل كبير.

ان الكلمات التي يخلقها Cummings تمثل عوامل أساسية لفهم المعنى المراد. إذ يعرض البحث تفسيراً نظرياً مختصراً لما يواجه القارئ من تراكم متخالف لقواعد تركيب الكلمة في اللغة الإنكليزية. وقد يساعد البحث القارئ على استخدام قدرته النحوية للوصول إلى قراءة مقبولة لمثل تلك التراكم المتخالف. علاوة على ذلك، ان البحث يسلط الضوء على سلسلة من المخالفات التركيبية للكلمات التي يستخدمها Cummings. حيث ان كل جزء في البحث يوضع نظرية الانحراف التركيبي محدد التوزيع والاستخدام لتلك الكلمات في اللغة الإنكليزية الفصحى مقارنة مع الاستخدام الشعري المخالف لتلك التراكم والتأثير المعنوي لمثل تلك التراكم بشعر Cummings.

ولتوضيح تلك الاستخدامات التركيبية في شعر Cummings ولجعلها تبدو مألوفاً للقارئ، تُقدم تلك التراكم المتخالف لقواعد تركيب الكلمة في اللغة الإنكليزية بمواضع استخدامها الشعري.