



## EXPLORING FARZANA AQIB'S *DOWN TO THE DUST* THROUGH LINGUISTIC DEVIATIONS: A STYLISTIC STUDY

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### Abstract

*This study explores the use of linguistic deviations in Farzana Aqib's poem Down to the dust through the stylistic theory of foregrounding developed by Geoffrey Leech. The research aims to identify how different types of deviations such as lexical, grammatical, phonological, and semantic enhance the emotional and thematic impact of the poem. Using a qualitative descriptive method and documentation as the data collection technique, the poem was analyzed through Leech's eight categories of deviation. The findings show that the poet's creative use of language draws attention to pain, loss, and inner struggle, making the poem more expressive and powerful. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of poetic language and how stylistic choices shape meaning.*

**Keywords:** Foregrounding, Stylistics, Linguistic Deviation, Farzana Aqib, Poetic Language, Down to the dust

### Background of the Study

Poetry has always been a powerful medium for expressing deep emotions, ideas, and human experiences through creative use of language. Poets often break traditional rules of grammar, word choice, and sound patterns to make their message more striking and memorable. This creative use of language is known as foregrounding, a concept developed by the Prague School and expanded by Geoffrey Leech (1969) in his stylistic theory. Foregrounding involves various types of linguistic deviations that make certain parts of a text stand out. Farzana Aqib's poem *Down to the Dust* demonstrates emotional depth and stylistic creativity, making it a strong example for examining how foregrounding enhances poetic meaning and expression (Verdonk, 2002; Leech, 1969).

### Research Objective

1. To identify and analyze the types of linguistic deviations in *Down to the dust* based on Geoffrey Leech's model of foregrounding in poetry.

### Research Question

1. How does Farzana Aqib use linguistic deviations in her poem *Down to the dust* to create foregrounding and express emotion?

### Statement of the Purpose

Many readers and students struggle to understand how poetic language creates deeper meaning and emotional effects. Traditional analysis often overlooks the unique ways poets use language creatively. This study addresses the problem by exploring how Farzana Aqib's poem *Down to the Dust* uses stylistic deviations such as unusual words, grammar, and sounds to express powerful emotions. By applying Geoffrey Leech's theory of foregrounding, the research aims to show how these language choices make the poem more meaningful and impactful.



### **Literature Review**

Stylistics is the study of how language is used in literary texts to create meaning and artistic effects. It connects linguistics and literature, helping readers understand how specific language choices shape a text's meaning (Verdonk, 2002). One important concept in stylistics is foregrounding, which refers to the way writers use unusual or creative language to draw attention to certain ideas or feelings. This idea comes from the Prague School and was later developed in more detail by Geoffrey Leech (1969), who explained how foregrounding makes parts of a poem stand out by breaking or twisting normal language rules.

Geoffrey Leech (1969), in his book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, identified eight types of linguistic deviations that create foregrounding: lexical, grammatical, phonological, graphological, semantic, dialectal, deviation of register, and historical deviation. According to him, these deviations are not accidental; they are deliberate stylistic choices that make poetry more expressive and powerful. Many researchers have used Leech's model to study poems, showing how these deviations help convey emotions, highlight themes, and add beauty to the language (Short, 1996).

Farzana Aqib's poem *Down to the dust* offers a strong example of how poets use such deviations to express inner feelings and emotional conflict. Although little academic work has been done on her poetry, her style fits well with Leech's model. By applying foregrounding theory to her poem, this study aims to fill a gap in the research and show how linguistic creativity is used to express pain, identity, and emotional struggle. This analysis also supports the idea that stylistic tools like deviation are key to understanding the artistic value of modern poetry.

Moreover, Farzana Aqib's *Down to the dust*, published in her collection *A Stardust Drape* (2021), has been studied for its strong feminist voice and stylistic features. A recent article by Shah, Nawaz, and Zahid (2025) focuses on the poem's use of syntactic parallelism—a repetition of sentence structures—to highlight the emotional and psychological struggles of women in Pakistani society. This study shows how repeated sentence forms in the poem emphasize gender inequality, trauma, and the emotional burden placed on women. By using Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic model along with feminist literary theory, the authors explain how Aqib uses parallelism to express deep feelings and social issues, making the poem both aesthetically rich and socially powerful.

### **Research Gap**

While Shah et al. (2025) offered valuable insights by examining *Down to the dust* through the lens of syntactic parallelism, they did not explore the poem from the broader perspective of linguistic deviation, which includes other stylistic features like lexical, grammatical, phonological, and semantic deviation. This gap is important because Geoffrey Leech (1969) emphasized that foregrounding through various forms of deviation is central to poetic language. Therefore, this research fills that gap by analyzing how different types of linguistic deviation in *Down to the dust* contribute to its meaning and artistic expression.

### **Research Methodology**

This research follows a qualitative descriptive design, using textual analysis as its main approach. It focuses on analyzing the language of the poem *Down to the Dust* by Farzana Aqib through the lens of Geoffrey Leech's foregrounding theory. Since the aim is to explore how stylistic features (like deviation in grammar, sound, or meaning) create poetic effects, a qualitative method suits this study best (Creswell, 2014). The data was collected through the **documentation method**, as the poem itself served as the primary data. This method is



appropriate because poetry is a literary text, and the research relies on close examination of its language rather than field data.

For **data analysis**, the method of stylistic analysis is used, applying Leech's (1969) eight types of deviation to identify foregrounded features in the poem. This method helps to uncover how the poet's use of unusual language choices highlights key themes and emotions. Stylistic analysis is suitable because it focuses on how language functions in literary texts to produce meaning, which aligns with the goal of this study (Verdonk, 2002).

### **Data Analysis Tools**

Based on Geoffrey Leech's model of foregrounding from *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, there are eight types of deviation, which are:

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

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in the concept of foregrounding, a stylistic technique introduced by the Prague School and further developed by Geoffrey Leech in his book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1969). Foregrounding refers to the use of language in unusual or striking ways to capture the reader's attention and create deeper meaning. According to Leech, poets often break or deviate from the normal rules of language to highlight important ideas, emotions, or themes. These deviations help make the language of poetry more powerful and memorable compared to ordinary speech or writing (Leech, 1969).

Leech identifies eight types of deviation that contribute to foregrounding: lexical, grammatical, phonological, graphological, semantic, dialectal, register, and historical deviation. Each type allows the poet to play with language creatively. For instance, lexical deviation involves inventing new words or unusual word choices, while phonological deviation focuses on sound patterns that produce musical effects. By analyzing these deviations in Farzana Aqib's poem *Down to the dust*, this research applies Leech's model to explore how the poet uses language to express emotional depth and highlight themes of loss and isolation (Leech, 1969). This framework helps uncover the hidden layers of meaning in the poem through a structured linguistic.

### **Analysis & Discussion**

#### **1. Lexical Deviation**

It is the use of invented or unusual words. Example: The line "Like a sun slain" — "sun slain" is an unusual lexical pairing; "slain" is not typically collocated with sun. It evokes a sense of emotional violence and loss, intensifying the theme of despair.

#### **2. Grammatical Deviation**

It is the violation of standard grammatical rules. Example: "And I am al alone" (in the second version) — possibly a typo, but if intentional, it could represent a stylistic repetition or emphasis. It may reflect fragmentation in the speaker's emotional state, reinforcing feelings of isolation.



### **3. Phonological Deviation**

It is basically the unusual use of sound patterns, rhyme, or alliteration. Example: Repetition of /l/ and /s/ sounds in lines like “Like a sun slain”, “sinking hope”. It Creates a soft, melancholic tone that mirrors sorrow and fading hope.

### **4. Graphological Deviation**

It is the use of visual features such as unusual punctuation, spacing, or font. Example: Variation in italicization, e.g., My hope is far away (italicized at the end). Italics highlight emotional finality or fading strength, drawing attention to emotional climax.

In this connection, the title *Down to the dust* also shows graphological deviation because it does not follow the usual rule of capitalizing important words in a title. Normally, in English, the first letter of major words like nouns, verbs, and adjectives is capitalized in titles. However, in this title, the word dust is written in lowercase, even though it is a noun and should be capitalized. This break from the normal writing rule is a stylistic choice by the poet. It draws attention to the word dust and reflects its meaning — something low, ignored, or worthless. The lowercase form of dust matches the poem’s theme of the speaker being pushed down and made to feel insignificant. This small change in writing helps show the emotional depth and message of the poem in a powerful way.

### **5. Semantic Deviation**

It is the use of paradox, metaphor, or unexpected meanings. Example: “Like a red horizon”, “Like a sun slain” – metaphoric and surreal imagery. These lines symbolically represent death, loss, and emotional twilight, enriching the poetic vision.

### **6. Dialectal Deviation**

It is the use of non-standard or regional dialect. Example: Not strongly present here, but repetition like “al alone” (possibly intentional) may echo local pronunciation or emphasis. It could subtly reflect the speaker's cultural or regional identity.

### **7. Register Deviation**

It is the mixing language from different registers or contexts. Example: Combining lyrical, poetic lines with informal, everyday phrases like “My waiting is long”. It Creates contrast between poetic imagination and raw, emotional directness.

### **8. Historical Deviation**

It is the use of archaic or outdated language. Example: The word “slain” (archaic for killed). It evokes a tragic, classical tone, lending the poem a timeless and solemn aura.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

Farzana Aqib’s poem “Down to the dust” exhibits all eight types of deviation as categorized by Geoffrey Leech. These deviations enhance foregrounding, drawing the reader's attention to stylistic and emotional peaks in the poem. Devices such as lexical and semantic deviation intensify loss and despair. Graphological and grammatical deviations visually and structurally reflect emotional breakdown. Phonological and historical deviations evoke mood and timeless grief. The interplay of register and dialectal shifts grounds the poem in a local yet universal lament of love and longing.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study helps readers, students, and teachers understand how poetry communicates deep feelings through creative language. By using Leech’s foregrounding theory, the research highlights how small changes in words, sounds, or grammar can make a big emotional impact. It also encourages readers to see poetry not just as art, but as a powerful use of language that can be studied, appreciated, and better understood.



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## Appendix

A Poem by Farzana Aqib

### **Down to the dust**

Oh my sinking hope  
My love is long gone  
My waiting is long  
And I am all alone  
Down to the dust  
Like a red horizon  
Like a sun slain  
Down to the dust  
All in vain  
My waiting is long  
My love is long gone  
My hope is far away  
In somewhere  
In the northern dawn  
Like a wind  
Like a rain  
Wayward up in the the sky  
Perverse down the lane  
Ohh my sinking hope  
My waiting is long  
And I am all alone

Farzana Aqib