Exploring Dialogic Potential through Lexical and Grammatical Deviations in Shakespeare's *Othello*

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ABSTRACT
The paper focuses on the monologues as well as dialogues of the protagonist Othello to see how effectively the lexical and grammatical deviations lead to dramatic effects. The critical analysis is led through the guidance of oratorical or rhetorical features of the speech acts. It is noticed that the linguistic deceptivity through the use of antimeria which refers to the use of one part of speech as another such as a noun as a verb; heterography which refers to spelling in which the same letters represent different sounds in different words or syllables; paraprosdokian i.e. a figure of speech in which the latter part of a sentence, phrase, or larger discourse is surprising or unexpected in a way that causes the reader or listener to reframe or reinterpret the first part; using disfluency features in expressions which are interruptions in the regular flow of speech, such as using uh and um, pausing silently, repeating words, or interrupting oneself to correct something said previously; use of run-on sentences and predicate-structure focus and grammatical incorrectness lead to cognitive manifestations and expressions of emphatic motives adding to the artistic height of the play.

KEYWORDS
Deviations; rhetorical features; dramatic effect; disfluency features; cognitive manifestations.

1. Introduction

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the greatest British dramatist and poet does not need an introduction. As a matter of fact, his greatness as a literary artist is proved in multiple ways— may it be the choice of theme, style or language; the dramatic intensity or philosophy of life and so on. In addition, his mastery of language and deepest poetic sensibility are greatly appreciated. This is quite evident in all his plays and poems. As a token of this master craft, *Othello* (1603) can be taken as a case study.

Although a host of impressive characters like Iago and Desdemona are there, Othello as the protagonist draws the attention of the critical readership only because of his dialogues.

1.1 Life-story of Othello as the Protagonist

Shakespeare's well-known tragic protagonist Othello is a moor as well as a mercenary posted as a military general by the Venetian state. Having travelled widely and gained lots of experience in war, the ugly fellow happens to get recognition when he binds himself to Desdemona, the most lovable and beautiful daughter of the Venetian senator Brabantio. While spending nine months at

peace in Venice, he often gets an invitation from Brabantio to visit his home and spend time narrating his experiences of life. Miraculously, Desdemona is impressed and falls in love with him. They elope at a time when the rumours of fresh wars with the Turks make it inevitable that Othello's services will soon be required by Venice, and thus he has to go to Cyprus. A middle-aged Othello very often reflects on self-regard, and discipline and is not guided by passion. Admittedly, his lack of worldly experiences is very often reflected in his speeches and daily life activities as shown to us in the play. However, after being the victim of the villainous character Iago, he loses his mental balance and starts doubting the character and integrity of Desdemona. Iago's suspicions about the affair between Cassio and Desdemona hit him hard on his conscience. This results in a catastrophe in the life of the loving couple. He kills Desdemona with greater faith in morality and commits suicide the very next moment admitting that he lacks self-knowledge. A.C. Bradley in this context says about Othello that "His imagination is excited to intense activity, but it is the activity of concentration rather than dilation." (p.177). His "Sexual jealousy rising to the pitch of passion…" (p.177).

2. Literature Review
2.1 The Language Architecture of *Othello*

Apart from the theme of the play, it seems that the language architecture specifically the monologues as well as dialogues of Othello attract the attention of the readers to a greater extent. The textual features in some cases turn out to be quite impressive only because they are unusual and/or ungrammatical. A reference to the remark of Widdowson can be taken as he says, "… if grammar accounts for the knowledge the speakers have, why it is that speaker knows how to interpret ungrammatical sentences."

(Widdowson, 1972:294 quoted in Birch)? Widdowson further says that because there is more to literature than linguistic deviance, the analyst should not be asking the question:

> What are the linguistic peculiarities of this text and how can they be accounted for in grammatical terms?, but rather what is being communicated in this text and how are the resources of the language being used to bring this communication about? '
> (Widdowson, 1972: 299 quoted in Birch).

Literary and artistic notions in language sometimes go beyond the norms of grammar. Language in Shakespearean plays is a burning example in this regard.

2.2 Shakespeare's Grammar
Houston (1988) makes the following critical observations:

> It seems that Shakespeare was much more at liberty to switch these three basic components of a simple sentence like subject, verb and object. At times, he adopts SOV inversion. Another reason for Shakespeare's utilization of this order may be more practical. The romance languages of Italian and French introduced rhymed verse. Anglo-Saxon poetry was based on rhythm, metrical stresses, and alliteration within lines rather than rhymed couplets. With the introduction of rhymed poetic forms into English literature, there was a subsequent shift in English poetry. To quote John Porter Houston, "Verbs in Old French and Italian make handy rimes, and they make even better ones in English because so many English verbs are monosyllabic. The verse line or couplet containing a subject near the beginning and a verb at the end is a natural development."

It is also noticed that Elizabethans allowed for a lot more flexibility in word order, and Shakespeare not only realized that but he also took advantage of it. By utilizing inverted word orders, Shakespeare could effectively place the metrical stress wherever he needed it most—and English is heavily dependent on vocal inflexion, which is not so easily translated into writing, to suggest emphasis and meaning. In his usage of order inversion, however, Shakespeare could compensate for this literary shortcoming.

Shakespeare also throws in many examples of object-sub-verb may be in order to use this colloquially in many places as a transitory device, bridging two sentences, to provide continuity. He may also have used this as a device to shift the end emphasis to the verb of a clause. Also, another prevalent usage of inversion was the V-S order shift, which seems primarily a stylistic choice that further belies the Germanic root of modern English. Houston also points to:

> the effort to make language more memorable by deviation from spoken habits." This is the essence of poetry: a heightening of language (even colloquial) above that of prose, a heightening that produces an idealized, imaginative conception of the subject.

3. Textual Evidence of Lexical and Grammatical Deviations

The deviational features can be noticed in some of the words and word combinations in the dialogues of Othello. This can be presented in the following dialogues:

> OTHELLO. Let him do his spite:
> My services which I have done the signiory
> Shall **out-tongue** his complaints. ...
> May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune...

> **for know**, Iago,....I would not my **unhoused** free condition...
> (p.15)

It can be paraphrased as 'Let him do his worst,' said Othello. 'My record of service to the senate will contradict his complaints. That record is something I haven't yet revealed: I would only talk about it if I thought that boasting was a virtue. I come from a royal line and I've earned the position I've reached. You should know, too, Iago, that except that I love gentle Desdemona, I would never have risked my freedom for all the sea's worth. But look there. What are those lights coming this way?'

In this, the compounding word 'out-tongue' (exceed in eloquence in online Mariam Webster Dictionary) means to provide the right reply and go beyond the complaints. Also, he responds to Iago who tries to instigate Othello against Brabantio. Here, 'unhoused' suggests free from domestic care which more appropriately refers to his free will. Prefix 'out' and '-un' expresses his emphasis on his motives. 'for know' is an unusual combination which means 'You should know'.

Then, in another dialogue, he says:

> OTHELLO. **My speculative and officed** (actually to provide someone with an office but here, having a particular function) **instruments**,
> That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
> Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,
> And all indign and base adversities
> Make head against my estimation! (35-36).

Here, 'officed' means active; and he speaks as if he is giving a proclamation. The structure is as before: sub-v1- obj-v2

> OTHELLO. **All's well now, sweeting; come away to bed.**

[To MONTANO] Sir, for your
hurts, myself will be your
surgeon.
Lead him off. (p.79)

Adjective 'sweet' is used with –ing.

At the Level of Sentence: There are some deviations noticed in sentences which bear great importance in contributing to the dialogic potential of the play.

OTHELLO. Hold your hands,
**Both you of my inclining (a
party, following), and the
rest:...**
**Where will you that I go
To answer this your charge?**
(19)

Responding to the verbal attack of Brabantio, he never minds to speak of his emotion admixed with his simplicity and dramatic intensity. The sentence bearing the subject a long determiner phrase looks unusual. Similarly, there is the use of 'that' in the sentence which is unusual too. Here. Othello wants to say, "You may take me wherever you like. I am ready to comply with the charges against me." It seems that the lines are not only precise but also meaning-focused, not structure.

OTHELLO. (Exeunt IAGO and
ATTENDANTS.)
.....And, till she come, as truly
as to heaven...And she in mine.
(p. 29)

Othello tries to convince the Duke of Venice that there is no magic spell or anything like that. It is purely natural in which 'she come' is ungrammatical as in the normal rule, the verb has to take an inflexion of 's' to match with the third person singular number. The clause takes a pause after 'and' followed by a conjunctional phrase may be an expression of deep poetic emotion as represented by disfluency. The same pattern is repeated in the dialogues of Othello throughout the play.

OTHELLO. .... **For since these
arms of mine had seven
years' pith**,
....Their dearest action in the
tented field,
And little of this great world
can I speak,
**More than pertains to feats of
broil and battle,
And therefore little shall I
grace my cause
In speaking for myself. Yet, by
your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnish'd
(**without paint**) tale deliver
Of my whole course of love**;
what drugs, what charms....
(p.27)

Othello speaks out his heart relating to the matter of his marriage to Desdemona. He says that he does not have much worldly experience. His ignorance is also clear as he uses conjunctions 'for since' together; 'tented field' i.e. 'tent' has been used as a verb that means the war field full of tents; there is an inversion, ' I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver of my whole course of love' looks like possessing poetic spirit leading to alliterative effect.

OTHELLO. .... Of being taken by
the insolent foe
**And sold to slavery, of my
redemption thence
And portance (conduct,
bearing) in my travels'
history:
Wherein of antres (cavern)
vast and deserts idle**,
... which I observing,
...That I would all my
pilgrimage dilate, (to relate or
describe at length)
....But not intentively (with
undistracted attention**): I did
consent,
And often did beguile (cheat)
her of her tears,**

> **When I did speak of some**
> **distressful stroke**
> **That my youth suffer'd.** My
> story **being** done,
> ....And I loved her that **she**
> **did pity** them.... (p.31)

Here, the run-on sentences with verbs missing and pauses are marked in frequent gaps which reflect that the fluidity of the speech of Othello is marked by emotion and innocence. There is frequent use of 'do/did' which proves that he puts emphasis on certain statements that makes the sense oratorial. This repetition is an attempt to make the audience feel the truth of the matter.

> OTHELLO. **Please your grace, my**
> **ancient; (he who bears the**
> **ancient, an ensign)**
> **A man he is of honest and**
> **trust:**
> **To his conveyance**
> **(escorting) I assign my wife,**
> With what else needful your
> good grace shall think
> To be sent after me. (p.37)

The statement presents the new information first which is suggestive of the foregrounded features of his speech. He introduces the 'man' with a complementary clause only for the sake of emphasis followed by a clause starting with a prepositional phrase of purpose which means 'to escort' actually. In terms of the functional approaches, here the information structure contains a predicate-focus structure which is linked to other more general cognitive processes including attention orientation.

> OTHELLO. Your voices, Lords:
> beseech you, **let her will**
> **Have your free way**; I
> therefore beg it not
> ....**I will your serious and**
> **great business scant**
> For she is with me: no, when
> light-wing'd toys

> Of feather'd Cupid seal with
> wanton dullness. (p.35)

The use of 'will' both as verb and noun is very impressive and conveys the purpose with dramatic intensity. It is an example of conversion between a denominal verb and a deverbal noun.

> OTHELLO. **My life upon her faith!**
> **Honest Iago,**
> My Desdemona must I leave to
> thee: (p.37).

In the first line, the main verb is missing. There is irony in the juxtaposition of Othello's unquestioning trust in Desdemona's faith and his equally unquestioning conviction of Iago's honesty.

> OTHELLO. **It gives me wonder**
> **great as my content**
> To see you here before me. O
> my soul's joy!
> **If after every tempest come**
> **such calms**,
> ....'Twere now to be
> most happy; **for, I fear,**
> **My soul hath her content so**
> **absolute**
> **That not another comfort like**
> **to this**
> **Succeeds in unknown fate.**
> (p.57).

The normal wording is, 'It gives me pleasure....', but here it is 'It gives me wonder...'leading to a greater ironical effect owing to the innocence of Othello. Then, the other statement, 'If after every tempest come such calms' where 'calms' is actually calmness. But he uses so in order to bring about both metrically and for the falling cadence of the feminine ending, that have their own effectiveness.

> OTHELLO. **Come, let us to the**
> **castle**.
> News, friends; our wars are
> done, the Turks are drown'd.

How does my old acquaintance
of this isle?
**Honey, you shall be well
desired in Cyprus** (p.59)
The statement 'Come, let us to the castle'
misses the MV and 'Honey' the vocative
stands alone followed by a statement
'...you shall be desired in Cyprus.'

OTHELLO. Iago is most honest.
Michael, good night: to-morrow
with your earliest
Let me have speech with you.
[To DESDEMONA]
Come, my dear love,
The purchase made, the fruits
are to ensue;
That profit's yet to come 'tween
me and you.
Good night. (p.65)
The structure 'Let me have speech with
you.' Is actually 'Let me talk to you.' 'The
purchase made' is missing the verb.

OTHELLO. **Worthy Montano, you
were wont be civil** (p.77)
Othello uses here a unique verb structure
'were wont (without using apostrophe)'
and the dialogue is full of pauses.

OTHELLO. **Went he hence now?
(**p.95).
Apart from V-S-A structure, tense form
has deviated here.

xv. OTHELLO. Excellent wretch!
Perdition catch my soul,
**But I do love thee, and when I
love thee not,
Chaos is come again**. (P.99)
The paradox of 'excellent wretch' followed
by the wrong verb form 'is come.' It seems
as if Othello is out of track in the spell of
doubt and he speaks like a person losing
mental balance.

OTHELLO. ....
**Where virtue is, these are
more virtuous**.

**Nor from mine own weak
merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of
her revolt;
For she had eyes, and chose
me. No, Iago;
I'll see before I doubt; when I
doubt, prove;
And on the proof, there is no
more but this—
Away at once with love or
jealousy!** (p.103)
The normal sentence structure is broken
as it looks fragmented although the idea is
clear. In the clause 'Where virtue is..', the
emphasis is on 'is' followed by inversion
putting emphasis on 'will'. The last line
omits the subject and main verb to say,
'Away at once with love or jealousy!'

OTHELLO. **By the world**,
I think my wife be honest and
think she is not;
.... **Would I were
satisfied**! (p.115)
Here, Othello is maddened by being
befooled of his own honour. The dialogue
is introduced with a declaration or
swearing like 'By the name of God', it says,
however 'By the world' and then
continues the speech but the last line
'Would I were satisfied' is structurally
wrong.

OTHELLO. ....
After new fancies. **She, dying,
gave it me;
And bid me, when my fate
would have me wive**,
To give it her. I did so: and take
heed on't.... (p.125)
Deviations are marked as 'gave it me'
should be 'gave it to me'. Then, 'wive' is
used as a verb.

OTHELLO. 'Tis true: there's magic
in the web of it.
A sibyl, that had number'd in
the world

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The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sew'd the work;
The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk;
And it was dyed in mummy which the skilful
Conserve of maidens' hearts. (p.125).

'to course' is an unusual to-inf structure whereas 'the worms were hollowed' i.e. the passive structure; then 'conserve' refers to 'preserve'.

OTHELLO. By heaven, **I would most gladly have forgot it.**
Thou said'st, it comes o'er my memory,
As doth the raven o'er the infected house,
Boding to all—he had my handkerchief. (p.137)

The verb form is v-2 instead of v-3 in the first line. The last line is a fragmented statement introduced by a participial phrase.

OTHELLO. ………………
Should I repent me: but once put out thy light,
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again.
It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree. (p.189)

The sentence structure in **'Should I repent me**: but once put out thy light,' and **'It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree.'** It deviates the rule as 'me' as an object is used for the sake of emphasis and the entire statements of the dialogue are in a poetic form expressing the utter confusion of Othello.

OTHELLO. Out, strumpet…
weep'st thou for him to my face? (p.193)
OTHELLO**. I had forgot thee**: O, come in, Emilia;
Soft; by and by. Let me the curtains draw.
Where art thou? [Unlocks the door.] (p.195)

The correct verb form is ignored and there is inversion.

OTHELLO. It is the very error of the moon;
She comes more near earth than she was wont,
And makes men mad. (p.195)

Here, 'more near' and 'she was wont' are ungrammatical.

OTHELLO. **I am not valiant neither**, (double negative)
But every puny whipster gets my sword:
But why should honor outlive honesty?
Let it go all. (p.203)

4. Critical Discussion and Conclusion

It is evident from textual analysis that not only Othello but also other characters speak with lexical and grammatical deviations. For example: EMILIA. She said so: I **must needs** report the truth. (p.197)

The deviational features in the use of words and sentences and their respective grammatical forms no doubt add to the dramatic intensity or dialogic potential by bringing clarity in putting emphasis on the motives. The craft of linguistic deception through the use of heterography, paraprosdokian, or disfluency in Shakespeare is indeed splendid. The use of run-on sentences or predicate-structure focus leads to attention orientation.

According to Halliday (1976), authors treat:

...language as a meaning potential, the system of which is formed by the functions which language has evolved to serve. The functions of language are abstract and general categories of meaning for this author. They are few in number – the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual – and they determine the system of language. (Halliday, 1976, 21).

The study of Shakespeare's use of schemes in the tragedies illustrates that he is the supreme manipulator of words and recognizes the tragic potential in the use of rhetoric. In rhetoric, anthimeria or antimeria refers to the use of one part of speech as another such as using a noun as a verb and vice versa. This is called a conversion. In such expressions, a noun becomes a verb that is called a denominal verb, and when a verb becomes a noun, it becomes a deverbal noun. Shakespeare has made use of this style in many of his plays. *Othello* is one such great work. His portrayal of Othello is enlivened by a series of artistic attributes: like he is a very unusual character matched with the most beautiful lady Desdemona; the moor of Venice as he is named procures a lot of audience admiration for his simplicity, sensitivity and straightforwardness; and finally deep religious faith. All these are evident in his dialogues.

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