

BEING UNSTUCK IN TIME: INTERPRETING THE DEICTIC SHIFT IN KURT VONNEGUT'S *SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE*

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***Abstract** - Going through the journey together, what makes the travel writing of Samuel Johnson differs with the biography of himself written by his travel-mate, James Boswell? One engrossing narrative; The Scarlet Letter has different voice of writing with another brilliant short story The Fall of the House of Usher despite the fact that they were written by two American writers around the same period (Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe). Each writing has different style from one person to another in a way that various perception is carved into distinct types of understandable language. In an early case, typical sense of language production and personal writing style do become crucial factors in constructing enriched and structured forms of literary works on any genre. Writing as a productive skill and an ideological exploration play a critical role for authors to express their language ability. Field of study to analyze language creation in literary works is called stylistics. Some texts in literary works can somehow affect reader's thought or emotional feeling. This connection is related to the distance between the speaker and the reader, focusing on how a speaker transfers his language and in what way the reader grasps the textual meaning. Analyzing this special connection over time and space elements in stylistics is called deixis or deictic shift. Along with the idea, this essay will explore the deictic shift in Slaughterhouse Five or The Children's Crusade.*

***Keywords:** stylistics, deictic shift, Slaughterhouse Five, Vonnegut*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tooland defines stylistics as understanding the craft of writing and comprehending anatomy and functions of language. He further argues that stylistics tries answering the issues about particular language or discourse subsystem under scrutiny, specific derived questions concerning the text, and broader nature with wider implications (Tooland, 2011). Stylistics analyzes the use of language, discusses the textual effects and techniques used by authors in producing literary works to build specific understanding on readers. Jeffries argues that the ways in which language used as specific texts, can help to embed ideology in our outlook on the world (Jeffries, 2010). What makes a literary work differs from one to another is

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its language features, such as: the formality of language, sentence structures, paragraph construction, and the application of precise diction or word choice. In literature, those comprehensive lists are produced neatly by the authors featuring spacial and temporal aspects which implicitly appear in a text world.

Deictic is a term which representing time, space and society in a text world. Jeffries and McIntyre assert that deictic shift was first introduced by Duchan et al (1995) as one single unified theory in papers collection and discussed as linguistic encoding of spatial and temporal relations between objects and entities (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010). In literature, deictic shift tries to draw the way readers comprehend projected deictic centre or in this case, the character or narrator in a story. Galbraith (1995) wrote in her summary of Bühler's work about three elements of speaker's deictic field; immediate physical space and time in which a speaker is located, pragmatic context in which a speaker enables addresses to understand speaker's deictic reference, and a context in which a speaker refers to his imagination beyond immediate time and space element (Jeffries & McIntyre). In *Language and Literature*, deixis is interpreted as formal devices in language for indicating the way speaker is related to what he refers to (Sinclair, 1998).

Massimiliano Morini defines deixis as:

... in order to understand what is going on in a literary work, the reader has to 'renounce' his/ her own deictic centre (his/her spatio-temporal and perceptual position in the real world) and assume a deictic centre that is located within the fictional world. This acceptance involves, first of all, a spatial and visual repositioning, because every scene has to be experienced from a point in (imagined) space; even a simple narrative clause like 'X came into the room' entails a visualization from inside the room, for instance. But the reader's experience of a literary work is much more complex than that, as it also involves temporal and perceptual positioning. When they enter the fictional world, readers must accept that they are living vicariously in a different time and place from their own, and that they are experiencing everything as told or experienced by someone else (a narrator, a poetic *persona*, a focalising reflector) (Morini, 2014).

One of the challenges in reading that it sets the reader the task of making sense to situations in the text. To make sense of the situation, the readers have to assure of building the totally different world out of the world they are living in. This whole new world in reading activity is called the text world. The text world is also defined as the effort of constructing logical communicative event while reading (Jeffries & McIntyre). Text world somehow differs with discourse world. Discourse world is 'the immediate real-world situation in which a writer communicates with a reader' (Jeffries & McIntyre), which means that discourse world is the persuasive interaction that implicitly or explicitly addresses particular audience created by the writer. Meanwhile, text world is the result of assumption-making within the reader's mind in which can be influenced by reader's specific circumstances, like personal background, emotional impression, perceived interpretation, or language absorption.

Jeffries and McIntyre argue about five types of deixis according to Levinson (1983); place deixis, temporal deixis, person deixis, social deixis and empathetic deixis (Jeffries & McIntyre). Place deixis encodes physical setting within the situational context. The most common signs of pure deictic place are *here and there* as the strong characters to describe position toward or from an object at the moment of writing. Meanwhile, temporal deixis is indicated from the adverbs of time or most frequently *now, then, tomorrow, and yesterday* to encode metaphorical distance between narrator and reader. Person deixis and social deixis somehow have interconnected relation. Personal pronouns like *she, he, him*, become the signs of person deixis, in which to encode relative distance from the writer while social deixis is related to perceiving social distance between particular characters. The last encoding tool of deixis; empathetic deixis, deals with psychological attitude or certain feeling of emotion between two characters in a story.

II. METHODS

This study used stylistics approach in analyzing a literary work by Kurt Vonnegut entitled *Slaughterhouse Five*. *Slaughterhouse Five* is an autobiographical fiction from Kurt Vonnegut which narrates the life of Billy Pilgrim, someone who is unstuck in time. The historical setting takes place around World War II, at the time when destructive bombing hit Dresden, Germany and most Americans were kept as war prisoners.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the novel, there is a short story about Vonnegut trying to transfer his experience at war in a piece of writing. *Slaughterhouse Five* is the story about time-travel. It has twisted plots. Many times unpredictable scenes pop up as the story goes and jump over either past or future life event of the main character, Billy Pilgrim. Billy is an American optometrist. There is this planet called Tralfamadore which becomes Billy's philosophical grip in understanding life and he once was put in an asylum because people thought he was crazy. The bombing in Dresden, Germany on 13-14 February 1945 has a strong historical value which influences major situation in this book. To answer the question on how Vonnegut developed his deictic style, we might want to take a look at some passages presented in his book. Here is the first:

I went back there with an old war buddy, Bernard V.O'Hare, and we made friends with a cab driver, who took us to the slaughterhouse where we had been locked up at night as prisoners of war. His name was Gerhard Muller. He told us that he was a prisoner of the Americans for a while. We asked him how it was to live under Communism, and he said that it was terrible at first, because everybody had to work so hard, and because there wasn't much shelter or food or clothing. But things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment, and his daughter was getting an excellent education. His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire storm. So it goes. (Vonnegut, 1970)

Above passage is taken from the third paragraph of the first chapter. From the first line, the personal pronoun demonstrates a first person narrative with no explicit audience. *There* here is called place deixis and it is a *pure deictic sign*. Pure deictic is related to deictic center (ourselves) and deictic projection (reference point) from deictic shift theory in which 'suggesting that readers are able to feel involved in a narrative by experiencing vicariously events from a viewpoint other than their own' (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010), which means *there* can be interpreted easily by the reader because the place is situated in the previous paragraph. *There* refers to Dresden, Germany, the place where Billy left his tragical experience behind. Vonnegut later involved another place deixis which is *the slaughterhouse*. The spatial explanation of *the slaughterhouse* fills in the readers' desire about what relates the

place with the narrator. Yet, it is not called as pure deictics because they do not state reliable or acknowledged position in space of the narrator. Moreover, lack of description tends to get readers acknowledge little about the slaughterhouse's physical setting. It is only stated that the slaughterhouse is where Billy and his friend were captured and stayed for a while as war- prisoners. Nothing more is explained. How horrible was the room and how probably some spots could trigger emotional reaction for Billy or between Billy and other prisoners are not explicitly stated.

Insufficient description toward setting continues with the absence of place where the cab- driver was kept by Americans. Was it also at the slaughterhouse in Dresden? Or maybe in any other cities in Germany, or even United States? It might be easily concluded that current domicile of the cab- driver is in Dresden, but we have little knowledge about his previous life. Otherwise, there is a temporal deictic in a statement, *But things were much better now*. Concerning at the moment of reading, a comparison appears to be obvious between what happened *now* and what might happen *before now*. Yet, the reader is not informed about that specific circumstances. *I, we, us*, as the personal pronouns are called person deixis; they encode the writer and readers within a situational context and their relative distance. From the first sentence, the narrator prefers an active voice to introduce another character, Bernard V.O'Hare. Instead of just stating his name, he describes him as *an old war buddy*, which syntactically preserves as a referent to emphasize Billy's crony that has been through ups and downs in the period of war. The absence of title such as Mr or Sir or Dr, has made clear the intimate connection. The same thing happens to Gerhard Muller, the cab-driver which becomes a friendly new acquaintance. Both indications reflect that its social deixis does not appear recondite. One of the statements, *His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire storm*, might seem redundant to be told by someone you just knew. Nevertheless, the similar experience as war prisoners brought awareness to the cab driver to share his tragic incident. It is determined as empathetic deixis. The activity of sharing stories is undertaken only with people who are interested in you and to whom you particularly want to relate. The narrator gives a sign of interest by asking how it felt to live under Communism to the cab-driver. This initial process can result in an engaging empathetic effects within a story.

Last sentence in the paragraph should have caught our attention; another pronoun *it* with other words which become the unforgettable phrase in this narrative; *So it goes*. This wistful phrase is repeated so many times to end particular paragraphs. However, *it* here does not refer to preceding subject in the previous sentence. The utterance in fact comes after someone or something (e.g. a glass of wine) has come to the end of existence. *It* may refer to death. For Vonnegut, death is an unavoidable phase in life cycle and everyone should not avoid the existence of that reality.

The first thing to notice when reading this novel is the fact that it has two narrators. The first one is Kurt Vonnegut himself (whose passage was discussed previously), telling about his initial effort to write this book, and the second is about his fictional character, Billy Pilgrim. This transition involves a deictic projection in terms of person deictic shift from first person narrator to the third person narrator. The deictic projection puts the reader a proper position within a text world. Below is another paragraph from the second narrator, taken from second chapter of the book.

He was treated in a veteran's hospital near Lake Placid, and was given shock treatments and released. He married his fiancée, finished his education, and was set up in business in Ilium by his father-in-law. Ilium is particularly good city for optometrists because the General Forge and Foundry Company is there. Every employee is required to own a pair of safety glasses, and to wear them in areas where manufacturing is going on. GF&F has sixty-eight thousand employees in Ilium. That calls for a lot of lenses and a lot of frames. (Vonnegut, 1970)

While the other paragraphs normally begins with the pronoun Billy Pilgrim, however, this paragraph chooses to use the pure deictic sign of *he* until the rest of the paragraph, assuming that the pronoun *he* is referring back to Billy. The deictic center here is Billy and his point of view toward the text world is obvious. In other words, there is a very strong preference for the latter mentioned of the character based on the former sentences to use a pronoun; male or female, in order to fit gender (*him, his, her, he, she*).

The problem lies in the missing parts of temporal deixis. It is not stated in what year or when does the marriage really take place, for example. The ambiguity of time is not cleared up since there was no temporal coordinates of Billy's deictic field. Did he get married soon after he got the treatment? Or maybe two months later? Or a year

after his previous event? Based on order of sentences, *Billy got a treatment in a hospital, was released, got married with his fiancée, finished education, and set up in business*, Billy live events go along chronologically. Readers' interpretation about temporal deixis must be following the consecutive sentences, that whatever year it is, Billy finished his education *after* he got married. There is also no conjunctions. Usually, conjunctions serve precisely to connect up previous material with the next material. These sentences, like other sentences in this book, give the impression that readers are already positioned in the text, but in a more relaxed way.

The general past tense is used in the first two sentences making it unclear whether each event happens for a long or short period of time. Meanwhile, the rest of paragraph use present tense. The adverbial clause of place *Hospital near Lake Placid*, specifies the spacial deixis in the story, assuming that it is a particular spot in New York. Another spacial deixis, *there* refers to Ilium, a fictional city, also takes place in New York. To use present tense in a place that does not exist in real world, Vonnegut tries to convince the reader about that place's presence. This refers to the first context of speaker's deictic field, the real time context based on Galbraith (1995). Vonnegut in this sense provides an immediate physical location in which a speaker is located. Ilium is where the main scenes evolve. It is the place where Billy grows up and lives his successful life as an optometrist after marriage. The story continues:

Billy became rich. He had two children, Barbara and Robert. In time, his daughter Barbara married another optometrist, and Billy set him up in business. Billy's son Robert had a lot of trouble in high school, but then he joined the famous Green Berets. He straightened out, became a fine young man, and he fought in Vietnam. (Vonnegut, 1970)

The only spacial deixis here is *in time*, which is a particular moment at the unspecified time. Again, the author chooses not to provide detail information about time. To emphasize each of his character's role, Vonnegut uses active voice in all of his sentences. Looking at the cognitive meaning, according to Halliday (1970), the verb can represent the process (Sinclair, 1998). The verb *became* reflects a process, both for Billy and Robert, but does not describe an intentional process because the result or goal of the process does not come into existence. Billy, Barbara and Robert

as the participants play a role as subjects or actors, not as the recipient of a given service or actions. The only recipients here are *another optometrist* and the pronoun *him*. Barbara is seemingly described in the story as an obedient daughter that takes a good care of her father. The fact that she married an optometrist proves that she acknowledged her father's job quite well. Robert, on the other hand, was a rebel when he was child and ends up representing virtue by contributing himself in the war. Based on interpersonal function, Billy seemingly does not possess this kind of desired father-children emotional bonding. He tends to ignore the psychological development of his biological children.

Early in 1968, a group of optometrists, with Billy among them, chartered an airplane to fly them from Ilium to an international convention of optometrists in Montreal. The plane crashed on top of Sugarbush Mountain, in Vermont. Everybody was killed but Billy. So it goes. While Billy was recuperating in a hospital in Vermont, his wife died accidentally of carbon- monoxide poisoning. So it goes. (Vonnegut, 1970)

Unlike previous examples, this one provides the clear time adverbial; *early in 1968*. There are two pure person deixis here; *them* which refers to a group of optometrists and another *them* that refers to Billy and other optometrist. Both of them function as the recipients of a service. The sentence *Everybody was killed but Billy* seems to turn an extraordinary event to simple utterance of Billy escaping death. Pragmatically, the adverbial places *from Ilium to Montreal*, and *Sugarbush Mountain in Vermont* present clear communication between speaker and addresses because the speaker enables readers to understand the deictic reference. Besides, the sentences provide textual meaning to point out logical sequence of units. According to interpersonal function, similar with his children, very few stories are told about Billy's romance life. Even when her wife passed away, there was no sad feeling expressed from Billy's character. This type of utterance requires the reader to extend beyond Billy's immediate physical and temporal location and jump into Billy's memory.

And then Billy swung into life again, going backwards until he was in pre- birth, which was red light and bubbling sounds. And then he swung into life again and stopped. He was a little boy taking a shower with his hairy father at the Ilium

Y.M.C.A. He smelled chlorine from the swimming pool next door, heard the springboard boom. (Vonnegut, 1970)

To use the term of deictic shift theory, the readers push into Billy's deictic field. This passage contains a fast flashback and brings the readers to push back and forth along the specific point in time, in this case, from Billy's pre-birth into his childhood. There is a term called *push* which means a flashback in narrative that constitutes a push back along the temporal continuum of a story, *going backwards until he was in pre-birth* is called as push. As Jeffries and McIntyre state *push* suggests an active movement on the part of the reader' in a sense that readers need to engage more intense to the speaker's past imagination while '*pop* suggests a movement that is involuntary' since the reader is taken back to reality. They further argue that a 'move out of the fantasy world of a character and back into the basis-level text world constitutes a *pop* up level of discourse' (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). The statement *and then he swung into life again and stopped* is considered as a pop.

IV. CONCLUSION

One of the intriguing aspects from Vonnegut's is his style in describing horrible and tragic events. Based on stylistics approach, he uses a relatively simple and straightforward style of prose. The way Vonnegut telling the story is as if a person talking with a stranger on a moving train. In order to let the conversation going, he just presents general information without expecting that stranger to listen closely or likely to seek deeper about his personal life. Similarly, many times he describes complicated incidents by using language the people usually speak to kids. Vonnegut tries to deliver the message that people should confront their fear, not to deny it, like the way he ought to face the horrible experience of war. Drawing on the literary devices of flashback and flash forward, Vonnegut sometimes ignores the restrictions of spacial and temporal elements. Vonnegut, the writer-narrator, successfully involves reader to be unstuck in time and move freely through narrative time, mixing descriptions of historical context, the visualised fantasy and his personal experience. To conclude, the more deictic information provided in the text, the richer a reader's conception of the deictic field will be, therefore increasing the degree to which the reader feels involved in the text. Further analysis under stylistics perspective will be

appreciated to better comprehend the writing style of the prominent authors *Stylistics*, especially in other classical literary works. *Deictic shift*

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