

Roy Makes The Syntax Tilt Towards the Spoken Form in *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract - The present paper looks into the structure of sentences used by the author. It is evident from the text that the author frequently deviates from the norms. Her style is inclined towards the spoken form. There are features like ellipses, prefaces and noun-phrase tags, fragments etc. Much has to be inferred from the context and surroundings. Type of sentences and word order are selected to convey specific meanings.

Keywords - Syntax, sentence, deviate, norm, ellipses, fragments, word-order.

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This is concerned with the way sentences are used by the author, what type of sentences are used – simple, compound and complex, the word order of the sentences – whether they are according to rules or deviations from some rule. Roy has used both marked and unmarked sentences, but what is worth seeing is the number of ways by which she achieves markedness. Then her syntax and language is inclined towards the **spoken** form, unlike most of the other Indian writers. It is not enough by saying that her English is close to the spoken version; it has to be proved.

But what are the features which indicate a spoken form? For this it has to be seen what are the **features** that represent the spoken variety of English. David Crystal says about the spoken thing that “it has less grammar ‘because it does not follow the rules’, which are found in writing.” (Crystal, *Encyclopedia English Language* 214)

He further says that speech is in sentences, but the kind of sentence organization found in speech is different from that found in writing. The writing is “polished”, unlike the speech. In writing the readers see only the finished product, but in Arundhati Roy’s case, the unfinished or unusually finished can also be seen.

The first thing that goes for speech is the grammatical reduction: There is frequent use of ellipses and contractions.

There are *non-clausal or grammatically fragmentary* components. (Biber et al 1043)

She uses “inserts” like “sorry, okay” etc.; she uses this in a special manner – most of her parenthesis fall into this category. *Stand-alone* words “rely heavily on their situational factors. There are many things/responses

that may be for a “non-verbal” action. Situational reference is also shown through the deictic items: this, that, these, those, there, now and specially the term *lay.ter*

Other features like “occurrence of disjunctive elements – prefaces and noun phrase tags, unembedded dependent clauses, non - elaboration”. Roy’s writing relies more on the context/shared environment. There is both types of “lexical density” – low and high. Sometimes the noun phrase is reduced to a simple “monosyllable”, and sometimes there is a lot of pre-modification. There is more pre-modification than post-modification as if the things/events are happening right in front of the narrator, who constantly compares the happening events to the other things to make the communication more interesting and familiar.

Attributive adjectives, noun modifiers and relative clauses are used for various situations. Usually they are absent in the speech/conversation, but certain characters do use them even while speaking, which shows the Indian English users’ inclination towards the bookish language.

Genitives are not much used as “an elaborative noun-headed, noun-modifying construction is rare in conversation”, but Roy uses a lot of possessives like yours, his, hers and theirs etc. – a feature of the spoken variety.

Above all conversation is “interactive” i.e. “ these are utterance-response sequences called adjacency pairs ... Here is one of the examples ...

Whose bowl is that.

- Mine.” (Biber et al. 1045)

After the initial description starting with short simple sentences, and then complex and compound, she quickly signals that hers would be a style close to the spoken variety. The first signs are that of ellipses and stand-alone words. On page 2, after repeating an **SVC** pattern twice, she ellipses the verb **be** from the third and makes it a **subj + complement** type, and then she even ellipses the **subject** to make it just the **complement** type. So the process goes **SVC---SC---C**:

The house itself looked empty. The doors and windows were locked. The front verandah bare. Unfurnished. (2) There is no bookishness of any sort, unless, of course if it is used deliberately by the author for certain characters. Then again there are two patterns of **SVC** and **SVOC**, where **C** is fronted, and the sentence becomes **CSVO**:

'Dizygotic' doctors called them. (2)

Then there are **non-clausal** units. A structure starts after a full stop, fresh and ends with a full stop, but is neither a clause nor a sentence:

Born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs. (2)

This is a **vb + prep + adj + conj + adv + adj + noun** combination. This contains neither a finite verb nor a subject, though it could be a case of ellipses. This feature has a high density in the novel. The word order in this case is different from what is normally found in the written register. Such non-clausal units are the hallmark of Roy's syntax.

Immediately after this is an example of **right dislocation**, another feature of the spoken form:

They never did look much alike, Estha and Rahel. (2)

Conversation relies heavily on lexical bundles i.e. more stereotyped, prefabricated sequence of words. The same common terms and expressions are repeated over and over again. So more than enough signals are there that indicate Roy's inclination towards the spoken form of the English language, and her competence to handle the English language not just as native writers, but like best of the native writers. One very beautiful example of conversational environment is when Comrade Pillai is trying to show off his son, Lenin's English to the Oxford-educated Chacko:

Comrade Pillai tried to kick-start Shakespeare. Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your -?' ... Comrade Pillai tried again.

'... lend me your -?' (274)

Though she uses all types of sentences, the way she uses them makes her different from the lot. And as F.S Scott says, "A writer's style is often expressed as much by the grammatical clauses and structure he prefers as by his choice of words." (Scott et al 16)

Roy's style can be singled out from the lot by her style of syntax. Sentences that are not simple, but **complex/long**, are the ones that require some thinking/analysis/contemplation to express some abstract concepts. Here the mind is at work comprehending some strange situation. In the case of complex sentences, the types mainly used are **that/when/though/after**. Ones, whose frequency is more than the others. And among these four it is the **that and when** types that predominate:

She noticed that Sophie Mol was awake for her funeral. (5)

Margaret told Chacko that she couldn't live with him anymore. (117)

Slightly less abstract are the ones where some other organ, other than the mind, are used:

...Rahel watched a small bat climb up Baby Kochamma's expensive sari with gently clinging curled claws. (6)

There are sentences when the Inspector deals with a harmless, helpless and hopeless woman.

He stared at Ammu's breasts as he talked. (8)

Most concrete concepts are presented by the short/simple sentences. For instance when Roy describes the weather conditions in Ayemenem in the months of May and June, and the effect that the monsoon has on both the animates and the inanimates are expressed in **short/simple sentences**:

The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees.

Roy deftly uses compound sentences to express a number of concepts, and foremost among these is the capacity of these sentences to hold more – two clauses/items of equal ranks. For instance with the negative characters like Chacko and Baby Kochamma, who have the tendency for more, no matter what it is, the compound sentences help bring out those inner workouts of the two. Chacko has greed for everything, and when Rahel asks him whether she can ask one question? His reply is *Ask me two.* (118)

Likewise, *Chacko lived in Canada now, and ran an unsuccessful antiques business.* (15)

So with the use of Compound sentences Roy shows things getting positive and negative in degrees. In most cases it is the Subject that is deleted/left out, and it is the verb (phrases) that form a chain of like categories conjoined by **and**.

Comrade Pillai took off his shirt, rolled it into a ball and wiped his armpits with it. (272)

Likewise the **complex** and **compound-complex/multiple** sentences can also be pointed out. But what is significant is the way they have been used to point out the complexities:

There were certain things about her husband that Ammu “never understood.” (40)

Long after she left him, she never stopped wondering why he lied so outrageously when he didn't need to. (40)

In the above case there is one main clause and two subordinate clauses. The husband's habits are in the background, and Ammu's inability to see any reason behind all that is foregrounded. The order of the clauses is main clause followed by subordinate clauses, which makes it a loose sentence structure. On the other hand is the one where the main thing is saved for the end to have a climactic integrated effect on the reader:

In November, after a hair raising, bumpy bus ride to Shillong, amidst rumours of Chinese occupation and India's impending defeat, Estha and Rahel were born. (40)

Here the background information comes first, and the foregrounded main clause comes later making it a periodic sentence. Roy moves 'to and fro' between these two types of syntactic organizations. Then there are sentences that are semantically deviant i.e. their surface structure is right, the word order okay, but something unusual can be noticed.

Two weeks later, Estha was returned. (9)

Here, Estha was returned by his father when he himself was adult enough to have his own volition. But he fitted into the category of animate creature, something less than a human being.

Another good example is the sentence:

Comrade Pillai tried to kick-start Shakespeare. (274)

Here the syntax is a normal **SVO**. But what is striking is the internal structure of the object – to infinitive clause, which is **VO**, with a **human/animate/celebrity** as the object. It is the verb that does not go with this object here, as it normally goes with the type **inanimate/machine/vehicle** type of object. But it is a usual practice in the Indian situation for almost anybody to evoke Shakespeare when it comes to showing off one's competence in the English language.

Roy uses this technique of deviation at structuring her sentences wonderfully, which makes her language seem as though some one were talking rather than writing. Hers is a style closer to the spoken form, unlike the most of the other Indian English writers, but like a native English writer. There is so much to write

about her linguistics, which shows her competence to handle the English language and do to it with ease what only good native writers are capable of.

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