Formalistic criticism of Khalil Mutran and Sohrab Sepehri’s poems from Defamiliarization and Deviation perspective

Ali Sayadani
Assistant Professor of Arabic Language and Literature,
Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University,
Tabriz, Iran

Ali Rasouli
M.A of Arabic Language and Literature, Allameh Tabataba'i University,
Tehran, Iran

Ali Khaleghi
PhD Student of Arabic Language and Literature,
Imam Khomeini International University,
Qazvin, Iran

(Received: 2016/06/13, Accepted: 2017/09/24 Date of publication: January, 2020)

Critical approaches have sometimes moved away the focus of their attention from the work itself to issues about the works and their structure. The approaches have been successful in exploring, identifying and delineating historical, philosophical and ethical aspects of literary or art works. Text-oriented criticism approaches to literary investigation, being affected by linguistics-oriented perspectives, flourished in the early 20th century. In this regard, Russian formalism and linguists had a significant role in changing 20th century’s literary criticism. They believed that all important things of a literary work are within the text itself and such factors as historical conditions resulting in the formation of the text or the aim of the work or the life of the author are less important. In addition, such techniques that

* E-mail: a.sayadani@azaruniv.ac.ir (Responsible Author)
** E-mail: a.rasouli1371@gmail.com
*** E-mail: khaleghi@gmail.com
defamiliarize the language of poems, move the audience from meaning away to language itself and language elements. This way, meaning would be a device helping the language.

Defamiliarization is one of the most significant terms of formalism. The term in literature means using different art techniques that makes literary language look unfamiliar, deviate linguistic norms and this way makes the communication process longer and the understanding process more pleasurable. Deviation was then introduced by formalism. They claimed that defamiliarization in poetic language happens through deviation, that is, conscious deviation from ordinary language. The deviation from dominant norms makes language more dynamic, changes language habits, and encourages contemporary poets to pay attention to this technique of structuralism. Defamiliarization is divided into semantic, lexical, syntactic, phonetic, dialectic, and written techniques.

Sohrab Sepehri is among the great modernist contemporary poets like Nimayoushij who changed the form and meaning of Persian contemporary poetry. He should be considered among the pioneers of defamiliarizing Persian contemporary poem. Various kinds of language foregrounding can be found in his poems. In Arabic language, Khalil Mutran, a contemporary Lebanese poet, is known also as one of the pioneers of modernist literary innovation. To liberate language of classic poem from imitation, Mutran used language foregrounding and deviated from the main characteristics of poem, with changes in method and content. Sohrab Sepehri and Khalil Mutran made use of various deviations (phonetic, temporal, stylistic, dialectic, semantic, syntactic, and written) in their poems in Persian and in Arabic poetry, respectively. All the deviations somehow helped to make texts dynamic and take audiences’ attention. The deviations are considered among the poetic image innovating. The aim of the study was to answer the following questions: 1. what kinds of defamiliarization have been used in Sohrab Sepehri and Khalil Mutran’s poems? How the defamiliarizations can be used? How much and in what ways have Sohrab Sepehri and Khalil Mutran used the artistic technique? What are the similarities and differences of the two poets in using the technique?

Several researches have been conducted on defamiliarization and formalistic criticism of the language of poem, but ere is not such an independent study using formalistic criticism on defamiliarization and deviation in Sohrab Sepehri and Khalil Mutran’s poems. This study then aimed the gap.
The necessity and importance of the study lies in that formalist critics believe that one can discover meaning through “form” and “formal elements” and understand a text. The works of the two poets have good capacities for presenting different elements of defamiliarization.

In this research the poems of the two poets have been criticized from formalist criticism focusing on deviation and defamiliarization which is based on Wilman’s French school. The main characteristic of the poems of Sepehri and Mutran is applying the mentioned techniques. The study showed that Sohrab’s poems was like a force renovating the repeated traditions of literature with new principles for Persian literature as a result. The language of Mutran’s poem, in comparison, was over regular language, but though he defamiliarized the familiar language, his language remained clear and communicating. In other words, contemplating on the text, the audience could understand the hidden meaning. So the most important findings of the study are: in Sepehri’s poems, different kinds of semantic deviation have a high frequency using personification, paradox, innovation in expressions, symbolism, and synesthesia. This is the result of his thinking style, that is, his special attention to mystic meanings. Mutran, as like, using semantic deviation through metaphor, paradox, symbolism, and synesthesia, has made the language of his poem remarkable. This kind of defamiliarization has been used for talking about Arab community’s problems, as this has always occupied his mind. Moreover, the poets have used lexical and phonic deviations in their poems in several occasions. This is the result of the community and environment they lived in, which is full of different voices. The nature’s music has influenced their poems in the way it has changed the structure and meter of their poems. The change and dynamicity move the audiences’ mind away from the normal and traditional language of poem to an unknown world. Maybe the only difference between the poets is higher frequency of unfamiliar structures and more innovative expressions in Sepehri’s poems. This study dealt with different aspects of defamiliarization in poems of Sohrab Sepehri and Khalil Mutran using a descriptive analytical method.

Key words: Persian and Arabic Contemporary Poetry, Defamiliarization, Deviation, Mutran, Sepehri.