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## Foregrounded: a comparative stylistic analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and its Turkish translation

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### Abstract

Style can be, shortly, defined as the way language used in a given context. Literary style, on the other side, usually refers to the style in a given literary work and it is the essential element that makes a literary work unique. Literary style can be defined as the linguistic patterns chosen by a particular author intentionally or unintentionally among all of the other options that are not chosen by her/him. These selected patterns by author are individual linguistic habits which are inseparable part of author' identity and style. Direct style, which is a type of style, is chosen to be studied and it is to dictate someone's words without any change, in other words, verbatim. The concept of translation of style is relatively new field of study. The studies that combine two disciplines – translation studies and stylistics – are paved the way of new approaches about translation of style. Meanwhile, some stylistic analysis approaches are started to be applied into translation of style. The focal point of this present study is to evaluate the stylistic features of the source text and target text and to reveal the differences between them. As a case study, the novel by Zora Neale Hurston entitled "Their Eyes Were Watching God" which was written in direct style and its Turkish translation "Tanrıya Bakıyorlardı" are selected. As for theoretical framework, a comparative stylistic analysis will be carried out between two texts according to the stylistic concept of foregrounding. Foregrounding is a stylistic feature that has the effect of defamiliarizing the reader by breaking the familiar patterns. Finally, the two texts will be compared and analyzed on their foregrounding levels through the usage of dialect.

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## 1. Introduction

Literary works possess different linguistic features than the standard language. The main reason of this can be explained with their different purposes. Standard language usages carry the purpose of communication whereas the use of language in literary works has no purpose as such. The language in literary works is named as style and style can be defined as “the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given person” (Leech & Short, 1981). Each work carries a distinctive style that makes it unique. The study of style is defined as stylistics and it focuses on various modes of expressions, mainly in literary works as well as other kind of texts. In this brand of study, analysis has been carried out with the examination of the stylistic features in a given text. These stylistic features, known as linguistic deviations, have an effect on the reader and it is a whole new concept that is called as foregrounding.

### 1.1. Foregrounding

Foregrounding is a term that is suggested by Jan Mukorovsky for defining the effect of the stylistic variations on the readers. He explains that poetic language is different from the standard language, as standard language is the norm of language and it is for the purpose of communication. In poetic language, on the other hand, the purpose of communication remains in the background and replaced by the aesthetic purpose. This purpose is achieved by foregrounding which is “the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become.” (Mukorovsky, 1932). According to Mukorovsky, a constant usage of something is automatization and this automatization creates a scheme; hence, “foregrounding means the violation of the scheme.” (Mukorovsky, 1932)

As stated in the passage above, foregrounding suspends the act of communication by breaking the norm. This foregrounding effect can be obtained by stylistic variations in literary works and these variations can be at phonetic level (e.g., alliteration, rhyme), the grammatical level (e.g., inversion, ellipsis), or the semantic level (e.g., metaphor, irony)” (Miall & Kuiken, 1994).

Mukorovsky states that foregrounding exists in standard language but it does not follow a pattern and it is not consistent. Instead of quantity, consistency is important in foregrounding, it should be systematic to fall into the category of foregrounding.

Foregrounding leads defamiliarization. Defamiliarization is suggested by Victor Scklovsky (Shklovsky, 1989) and can be defined as to make the readers see familiar thing in a new, unfamiliar way. It is to make reader think outside the box, so to speak. It is the immediate effect of the foregrounding; therefore it is the natural process that happens after the reader encounters the foregrounding element. Defamiliarization compels and challenges the reader’s ordinary perception, it evokes feelings. As a consequence of this, it prolongs the reading process and elongates the reading time. As mentioned before, foregrounding is a repeated pattern, accordingly, defamiliarization, also, follows an order and not incidental. This repetition eventually causes refamiliarization, which occurs when the reader gets used to the foregrounding elements and internalizes them. This process is identified by Miall & Kuiken (1994) in three steps: “First, these novel linguistic features strike readers as interesting and capture their attention (defamiliarization *per se*). Second, defamiliarization obliges the reader to slow down, allowing time for the feelings created by the alliterations and metaphors to emerge. Third, these feelings guide formulation of an enriched perspective (. . .)” (Miall & Kuiken, 1994). In this excerpt, all stages of foregrounding are described. The striking linguistic features are the foregrounding stylistic elements, which leads to defamiliarization as stated in the passage. The enriched perspective on the novel that is gained by the readers can be interpreted as the refamiliarization, since the readers get accustomed to the stylistic features that grasp their attentions at the beginning of the novel.

### 1.2. The Author

In this study foregrounding will be discussed through a comparative stylistic analysis. The novel that is selected to be studied is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston.

Zora Neale Hurston is an African American author, anthropologist, folklorist and activist. She is one of the most important and effective figures in Harlem Renaissance which is a cultural, literary, artistic and intellectual movement started in African American community in 1920s.

She was born in 1891 in Alabama. She later moved to Eatonville, Florida with her family. She studied anthropology in college and carried out many anthropological researches in the following years. Aside from her researches about African folklore, she wrote many books, fictional and non-fictional, and published her studies and short stories etc.

In 1937, she published her most acclaimed work *Their Eyes Were Watching God* which was inspired from a tumultuous love affair. It is the most widely known work of Hurston and it caused a controversy among critics and writers. After this novel, she published many works but none of them received this kind of reaction and attention.

She died in 1960 and buried in an unnamed grave. Years later, her grave was discovered by another African American woman writer, Alice Walker.

### 1.3. The Book

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* was written in 1937 by Zora Neale Hurston. It is the story of an African American woman Janie Crawford and the novel focuses on her life and loves.

Janie lives with her Nanny who is her grandmother, after her mother leaves her and runs away. Nanny was a slave and she gave birth to Janie's mother after she was raped by her master. Just like her mother, Janie was also a consequence of a rape, which is the main reason of her runaway.

Nanny wants Janie to live free and healthy life and thus she make her marry an old and wealthy farmer Logan Killicks. Even though Janie does not love him, she accepts to marry him in order to make her Nanny happy. She tells her grandmother about her dislike of him but Nanny accuses of her being ungrateful and consoles her by saying she will love him eventually.

After the death of her grandmother, Janie runs away with a man she is flirting named Joe Starks and leaves her loveless marriage.

Joe Starks and Janie goes to Eatonville – a place which influenced the author's life, also – and Joe establishes a successful business, even, ends up being the mayor of the town. As year passes, Joe and Janie grows distant from each other and, finally, Janie realizes that Joe chose her not because of his love but because he thought she was a perfect candidate wife for his future plans. Tension grows between them and they had a huge fight that ends with Joe beating up Janie. This final incident separates them from each other completely and they stay that way until the death of Joe, although Janie tries to reconcile a few times.

It is after the Joe's death, Janie encounters the love of her life, Tea Cake. Tea Cake is gentle and considerate to her and these features of him makes her fall in love with him. Janie and Tea Cake marry and live happily until the arrival of the hurricane Okeechobee. While Janie and Tea Cake are trying to survive, they are attacked by a rabid dog and Tea Cake gets bitten by it. He gets sick and could not recover. Under the influence of the illness, he attacks Janie and Janie shoots him as an act of self-defence. As a consequence, Janie is charged with murder. After trial, it is understood that Janie is innocent. She is released and then, she arranges the funeral of Tea Cake of which she thinks he deserves. The novel ends with Janie telling the whole of her story to her friend, Pheoby.

The novel narrates a story of African American heroine, which is an unconventional stereotype and she does not settle down until she finds the true love she is seeking. Considering the circumstances of that time, this type of narration of a woman character is an attempt of pushing the boundaries at that time. From this perspective, the novel is also seen as a feminist novel. The novel is, also, groundbreaking on another aspect. It uses African American vernacular, also known as Black English, which is something unusual. Since it narrates the story of

African American people and one black woman in particular, it involves examples of black oral tradition and is known as one of the most important masterpieces of African American literature.

The usage of Black English dialect in the novel will be studied within the framework of foregrounding concept. A comparative stylistic analysis will be further carried out between the novel as source text and its Turkish translation as target text. The novel's Turkish translation *Tanrıya Bakıyorlardı* was made by Ayşe Şirin Okyayuz Yener and Ayla Okyayuz Yazal in 2002 and will be referred as TT from now on.

## 2. Analysis

Table 1. Example 1

ST	TT
' <b>Lawd</b> ' Pearl agreed, ' <b>Ah</b> done scorched-up <b>dat lil</b> meat and bread too long to talk about. <b>Ah kin</b> stay 'way from home long as Ah please. <b>Mah</b> husband ain't fussy.' (Hurston, 2009 [1937], p. 5)	' <b>Doğru,</b> ' diye atıldı Pearl, ' <b>Ben</b> işlerimi bitirene kadar ellerim ayaklarım şişti, bana işten söz etmeyim. Canımın istediği kadar dışarıda <b>kalmırım. Benim</b> adam huysuz değildir hiç.' (Hurston, 2002, p. 7)

In this example, the elements that belong to African American vernacular are "lawd" for "lord"; "ah" for "I"; "dat lil" for "that little"; and "mah" for "my". When ST is compared with TT, it can be seen that these distinctive words of the dialect is chosen to standardize in Turkish and translated with the standard language words. As for the level of their foregrounding, source text startles and defamiliarizes the readers by unfamiliar language usages and captures their attention, whereas target text uses standard usages that does not have foregrounding effect on the readers, hence, it does not defamiliarizes the readers in any way.

Table 2. Example 2

ST	TT
' <b>Yuh skeered</b> to lemme know <b>whut</b> it is,'cause yuh know Ah'll tear it tuh pieces. You got to have a <b>subjick</b> tuh talk from, do yuh can't talk. If uh man ain't got no bounds, he ain't got no place tuh stop.' (p. 85)	'Bana <b>ne</b> olduğunu söylemekten <b>korkuyorsun</b> , çünkü seni lime lime edeceğimi biliyorsun. Konuşmaya başlamak için bir <b>konu</b> olmalı, yoksa konuşamazsın. Eğer bir insanı bir konuyla sınırlamazsan o da konuşup durur.' (p. 92)

Second example has more complex words than the first one and it is seen that the more complex the words get, the more different the spelling gets. The spelling of complex words such as "scared" and "subject" is altered as "skeered" and "subjick" and become distant from their standard version. In TT, on the other hand, there is no hint of change from the standard version; the equivalent words are given in a standard way. Hence, once again, the existent foregrounding effect in ST is lost in TT.

Table 3. Example 3

ST	TT
'Dat's somethin' for de young folks, Janie, you out <b>dere</b> jumpin' round and won't be able tuh <b>git</b> out de bed <b>tuhmorrer.</b> ' (p. 104)	'Bu gençlerin oynayacağı bir oyun Janie, <b>sahada</b> bu konuşma, zıplamalardan sonra <b>yarın</b> Tanrı bilir yataktan <b>kalkamayacaksın.</b> ' (p. 111)

Since the novel reflects the black oral tradition, the words are written in a way that is close the way they are sounded. In this excerpt, the word “tomorrow” is given as “tuhmorrer” and “there” is given as “dere”. They are distant from their standard spelling but close to the way they pronounce. In TT, both words are translated with standard Turkish words and do not have any traces of any dialect. They sound as if they are spoken by a well-educated man, rather than a black person that lives in the rural area and speaks a dialect of a minority. TT stays far behind in giving the foregrounding effect in ST and uses familiar concepts rather than defamiliarization.

Table 4. Example 4

ST	TT
<p>‘You was twice noble tuh save me from <b>dat dawg</b>. Tea Cake, <b>Ah don’t speck</b> you seen his eyes <b>lak</b> Ah did. He didn’t aim tuh jus’ bite me, Tea Cake. He aimed tuh kill me stone dead. Ah’m never tuh <b>fuhgit</b> dem eyes. He <b>wuzn’t</b> nothin’ all over but pure hate. Wonder where he come from?’ (p. 222)</p>	<p>‘Beni <b>o köpekten</b> kurtarmakla çok büyük, çok önemli bir şey yaptın. <b>Galiba</b> sen köpeğin gözlerini görmedin ama ben gördüm. Amacı sadece beni ısırarak değildi Kurabiye. Beni öldürmek istiyordu. Herhalde o gözleri asla <b>unutamayacağım</b>. Nefretten başka bir şey <b>yoktu</b> o bakışlarda. Acaba nereden geliyordu?’ (p. 235)</p>

In this final example, both of texts follow a repeated pattern. ST remains faithful to the dialect which is chosen as a foregrounding stylistic element of the novel. By the time the reader reaches this page, refamiliarization of the reader would be happened. Therefore, the reader would assume that “dawg” refers to “dog”; “speck” refers to “expect”; “lak” refers to “like”; and “fuhgit” refers to “forget”. As for the target text, the translators, also, follow a pattern of standardization from beginning to the end. Although they remain faithful to their policy, they fail to give and reflect the foregrounding that exists in source text. This final example shows, yet again, that the authentic word of Black English dialect is given with their standard Turkish equivalences such as “köpek”, “galiba” and “unutmayacağım”.

### 3. Conclusion

In this study, the concept of foregrounding is examined with a comparative stylistic analysis. The chosen examples from source text and target text are analyzed in accordance with their foregrounding levels. The excerpt from source text has shown that the dialect in the novel is the foregrounding stylistic feature which is an inseparable part of the novel’s identity. This dialect grasps the readers’ attention and defamiliarizes them by enabling them seeing the familiar thing in a new and unexpected way. It, also, prolongs the reading time which is an expected effect of foregrounding. Through the end of the novel, the readers get used to the dialect, hence, the refamiliarization of the foregrounding elements is obtained. Thus, it is safe to say that the foregrounding effect is successfully achieved in the novel which is the source text of this present study.

However, the comparison between the chosen examples from source and target text has shown that the dialect is not fully transferred into Turkish in the Turkish translation of the novel. The existent dialect in ST is neutralized in translation; therefore, it does not give any hint of the dialect at all. The main reason of this standardization act might be the fact that Turkish language does not have any equivalent dialect that belongs to African people or emphasizes the existence of African people. Consequently, the translators chose to standardize it rather than compensating it with another dialect in Turkish. This might be understandable but it still does not change the fact that the translation has lost the foregrounding effect that exists in the original.

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