

## The Appreciation on the Flexible Language in *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*

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### Abstract

In *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book (TM)*, the typical and striking linguistic features attract readers' and scholars' attention all the time. Through the whole text, its linguistic features are always extending. The thesis aims to explore its lexical deviation, phonological over-regularity, semantic foregrounding features, and grammatical category.

**Key words:** Lexical deviation; Phonological over-regularity; Semantic foregrounding features; Grammatical category

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### INTRODUCTION

According to Leech and Short's analysis at the beginning of the book *Style in Fiction*, stylistic analysis should be produced as choice, deviance and frequency which altogether constitute the typical stylistic feature—foregrounding. Leech and Short provide us with a method of a stylistic analysis which aims at how to analyze a text with linguistic measures. This mode includes four general categories: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. In the thesis,

the flexible language in *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* will be appreciated from the following aspects: lexical deviation, phonological over-regularity, semantic foregrounding features and grammatical category.

## 1. LEXICAL DEVIATION

### 1.1 Graphics

In the first sight of the novel, the graphology deviation in its print catches readers' attention. Just as when we meet a stranger for the first time, our attention is probably focused on his or her appearance. When we open the first page of the novel, a vivid and interesting picture of a monkey leaps to our eyes immediately. Then, if we take an overall look at the beginning of each chapter, we will find that there is the same vivid and interesting monkey image there. Caught by the same monkey image, readers may find out that this monkey image is just like something. It's just the Monkey King image that is mounting the clouds and riding the mist with his golden cudgel. This Monkey King image is extremely familiar to our readers, not only to our Chinese readers, but also to foreign readers. For this monkey is so famous in Chinese history, it firstly appears in one of Four Great Chinese Classical Novels—*Journey to the West*. Here, Kingston uses this special graphics to catch the eyeballs of readers. This special stylistic feature is so prominent, while its function not just lies in its attractive appearance but most importantly, it contains some uncertain implied meanings. What will Kingston choose to write, traditional Chinese story or something else? Is the protagonist a typical Chinese image or someone else? When we go on reading the text to the first line, a name of a place occurs, "San Francisco" (Kingston, 1983, p.3). If the protagonist is a Chinese image, why is he or she in San Francisco? If he or she is not, who is our protagonist? Bringing with these puzzles, readers will produce a lot of associations in their minds. There is one point which must be assured. That is to say there are

surely some connections between the protagonist and the traditional Chinese image. Because of this typical Chinese image, an invisible Monkey King, Kingston brings our readers into a latent world in which, to some extent, the things are dotted with Chinese elements. This stylistic feature, initially, seizes readers by its unusual feature—the special graphic. The curious readers will be certain to go further into the novel.

### 1.2 Irregular Capitalization

Then, some special words appear on the right of the graphic. The main body of the novel starts. While, a different feature occurs again, each letter of the first three words is capitalized—“MAYBE IT COMES” (Ibid.). As we all know, normally, the first letter of the first word in a sentence, proper nouns and titles should be capitalized, but not all the letters are capitalized. Here, each letter of these three words is capitalized, which is also a kind of graphology deviation. On page seven of *TM*, there is another sentence: “THIS IS CINERAMA!” (Ibid, p.7), in which all three words are capitalized. This sentence is a direct speech. For a direct speech, it just needs to make the first letter of the first word in it capitalized, but here, capitalization is used in each letter of the words in the sentence. Having a look at the long paragraph, one third of the description is about the scenery on the subway by Wittman. After two world wars, many things have changed, and with the development of the science and technology, many new things occur and many new objects appear. “Cinerama” is one of the representatives at that time. In the postmodern period, with the wide spreading of televisions, the development of computers, the invention of hydrogen bombs and satellites, Electronic Times is coming. But, the world wars make people’s optimistic illusions dashed to the ground. During the Second World War, the fascists’ massacre, the explosion of atom bombs and the sharpening of the domestic social conflicts make most of writers rethink profoundly that why the development of science and technology is utilized for the purpose of the wars, and why the advancement of science and technology brings people horrors and uneasiness. Kingston belongs to these writers, so she makes a deviation of the type of print. Although the new and advanced things “the Muni bus” and “the cinerama” appear, Wittman, including other passers-by, feels little excited or cheerful. Wittman feels a little weird about just sitting on the subway. Then, he takes out a book to read in order to let himself to keep easy instead of enjoying the scenery along the road traveling by underground. (Reading is a traditional way for people entertaining themselves, and now Wittman still prefers it.) Here, by this graphology deviation, Kingston intends to stress that the new development of science and technology aggravates people’s pain represented by Wittman, who are wanderers and the unemployed with doubts about the future. This is a kind of existentialism keynote, being popular in most

of postmodernist novels and seen as the common point of them.

### 1.3 Italics

Besides the irregular capitalization of letters, italics are also typical in the shape of print. In Chapter One of *TM*, the italics can be viewed in two types. Without any doubt, one of them is the italics of names and titles of books, movies or newspapers. The other one is the narration uttered by the narrator and the protagonist. There are about seven italic sentences or short paragraphs in the first chapter. Two of them are uttered by Wittman. One is the description of people’s reaction to his appearance when he is born. That sentence is just a fictive sentence which centers on description. The other one is at the end of the first chapter, a short paragraph, and it’s an emotional sentence which produces Wittman’s potential power. The statement shows that Wittman is going to break the silence and burst out. This change of Wittman is so delightful and significant; therefore, it deserves some certain deviation which distinguishes Wittman’s previous inner minds. So here, one italic sentence comes out. The other five sentences or paragraphs are uttered by the narrator. When the narrator voices, the narrator is staying aloof from the things happening in the novel, for this reason, the narrator can deliver opinions dispassionately and logically. That is why our narrator can guide our protagonist to notice changes, search truth, express inner-thoughts and show sympathy to his beloved. On these crucial moments, our narrator can afford to help the protagonist when he is in confusion. Owing to the enlightenment to Wittman, those important sentences must be seen obviously, and then the narrator’s italic sentences appear during conversations between Wittman and Nanci. These italic sentences and short paragraphs are just like bridges connecting conversations between the previous one and the following one. In this way, a discourse is organized and linked by the narrator’s utterances.

## 2. PHONOLOGICAL OVER-REGULARITY

Next, let’s have a look at the phonetic patterning of phrases or sentences. In Chapter One, there are three typical examples in phonological over-regularity, which are derived from the first chapter and are all in appearance at pivotal moment. These three examples are as the following. “Being outdoors, in Golden Gate Park, he stepped over to a tree and knock-knocked on it, struck a match to it. Lit a cigarette.” (Ibid, p.3) “Her voice sang, rang, banged in the echo-chamber tunnel.” (Ibid, p.5) “They get to wear their palette on their grey sweatshirts, and spatters and swipes on their blue jeans.” (Ibid, p.29) In the first example, there are three short vowels in four dynamic verbs—[e] in “stepped”, [ɔ] in “knock-knocked”, [ʌ] in “struck”, and [i] in “lit”. These short vowels express a kind of relaxing, brisk and dissipated feeling. After

the beginning “suicide scene”, when readers read these three conjoint phonetic symbols, they will breathe a sigh of relief. Wittman comes back to the real life, facing real things, making sure real things by himself and once more putting himself into his life after refreshing with a cigarette. This is one crucial moment—the beginning of his following life, which is full of readers’ guesses and expectations. In the next example, there are still three interesting dynamic transitive verbs—“sang, rang, bang”. This sentence occurs as the F.O.B., a family of Chinese Americans who just come to the American land. This is the sentence spoken by the mother towards her little child who is eating sunflower seeds. Among them, there is assonance. Assonance is a repetition of the identical vowel or diphthong in stressed syllables. It is one of the important phonological features of literary texts (Wang, 2000, p.101). It can be easily noticed that the words—“sang, rang, bang” carry the assonance. They are stressed rhythmically in the same sentence. Interestingly, we can find that the meanings of these words are already associated with each other. More significantly, these words may be said to represent the voice process, from articulation to transmission. Therefore, we can see that the assonance here, not just contributing the musical effect to the sentence, but also to its meaning. Here, Kingston uses the assonance to show that Wittman has made fun of this new Chinese American family, which can be manifested from him being unsatisfied with their inept dressing and the subsequent speaking tone. This is another great moment. Wittman is not satisfied with Chinese Americans’ living condition, and it is time for him to alter with his motion. For the last one, this sentence is the comment said by the narrator. Throughout the whole novel, the narrator’s commentary is permeating almost everywhere. Nanci follows Wittman into his house, which, in Wittman’s mind, may be an artist’s workshop, but to the narrator, it is not the same as an artistic studio and moreover, Wittman himself is also lacking in resemblance compared with an artist. Thus, Kingston uses, to be exact, fifteen vowel phonetic signals to convey more intensive supervision to Wittman in order to make him strongly notice that he should exert himself in realizing his ideals. In a word, in these three important places, Kingston employs the skill of phonological over-regularity to serve for the development of the plot better.

In the first chapter, the emergency of the idiomatic language and the colloquial language is another typical characteristic. Next, several examples are in preference, such as the idiomatic language—“dude, get it right, do-it-yourself, play-by-play, bring you down, new green poems, Gig, Jive, interbang, etc.” (Ibid, pp.4-32) and the colloquial even the impolite language—several times of utterances about “shit”, seven times of “bitch”, “fuck”, “goddamn”, “you buncha bastards” (Ibid, pp.5-33). These words vividly describe the feeling or the state of the

people who are living at that certain time and on a certain condition. On special circumstances, with the prevailing people’s belief in God’s death, people believe nothing. They have lost their spiritual pillar and only can depend on themselves, but unfortunately, they have no ways to face the cruel reality of that period. Thus, we can see an image of a hippie, Wittman. Thus, we can see an image of an angry man, who has only given vent to his dog—“Bitch. You fucking bitch.” (Ibid, p.6) The types of these words are a kind of better description of people’s inner-world at that time and thus, our readers can be receivable with these informal words rather than disgusted with these informal words.

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### 3. SEMANTIC FOREGROUNDING FEATURES

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#### 3.1 Co-Reference

Moreover, cross-reference is made up of pronouns which can be also used to make the structure cohesive. Next, a short paragraph will be taken as an example.

“I’m writing a play for you, Nanci,” said Wittman. “Wait for me while I write for you a theater; I will plant and grow for you a pear garden. Then she did look at him—he’s wonderful. She stops in her tracks to look up at him. She took his upper arm with her two hands. “I’ll write you a part,” he said, “where the audience learns to fall in love with you for your ocherry skin and round nose and flat profile and slanty eyes, and your bit of an accent.”

(Kingston, 1989, p.28)

In English, for instance, the overlap between the pronoun and determiner classes is very striking (Leech & Short, 2001, p.81). Here, the pronouns “I, you, she, he, me, you, him, your, her” are scattered all over the paragraph. This kind of usage functions at “providing semantic and structural continuity” (Wang, 2000, p.160). These pronouns in the passage “not only provide discourse cohesion, but also have the function of arousing the readers’ curiosity so that they may be immediately involved in reading the story” (Ibid., p.61). In the above case, it is necessary for the readers to go further into the next part, then, the image of each pronoun will become clear as well as the readers will know that which items the pronouns refer to. Thus, great suspense is produced and such use of co-reference is the characteristic of literary discourse (Ibid.).

#### 3.2 Repetition and Parallelism

Here, we are going to consider some foregrounding features departing in some certain ways from general norms or rules of communication by ways of the language code, for example, exploitation of irregularities comparing with formal patterning, or of deviations from the linguistic code. In “Trippers and Askers”, several types of figures of speech are frequently opted, such as

simile, metaphor, repetition, parallelism and irony, etc.. Among them, repetition and parallelism are especially striking. Then, some examples will be chosen for the analysis.

“Ho sick, la. Ho sick,” she said.  
“Good eating. Good eats.”  
Uncool. Uncool!

(Kingston, 1989, p.5)

These three examples include two types of repetition—immediate repetition and intermittent repetition. The first and the third sentence belong to immediate repetition and the second case is intermittent repetition. Both of them not only combine the lines together and give unity to the idea expressed, but also intensify the meaning released in the repetition. The relationship between these sentences is very interesting. The first two cases are said by the mother who is an F.O.B. These repeated phrases vividly portrays the “newcomer” image who still feels strange and unfamiliar with the new culture and new condition, thus, she feels rather weary of his child, even of his new experience. At the same time, maybe owing to this factor, she utters informal or abnormal sentences as the examples show. Meanwhile, as an old Chinese American, Wittman also performs his dissatisfaction to this new F.O.B. The repetition here just shows the great intensified feeling of Wittman and new F.O.B.

He, out of it, knows ugly and knows Black, and also knows fat,  
and funny-looking.  
And dig his allusions. And laugh sincerely at his jokes. And  
were he to take up dandy ways.

(Kingston, 1989, pp.12-13)

These two cases are exerted to illustrate parallelism. The strong and intense feeling is brought out mainly by these two parallel structures. Firstly, the sameness in meaning can be implied by the sameness in structure. Secondly and more significantly, with these juxtaposed units, the emotional feeling expressed through them gets more and more strong and gets its climax in the final parallel unit.

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## 4. GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY

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### 4.1 Sentence Structures and Subjunctive Mood

One of the attractive features in grammatical categories is the author’s preference to how to select sentence structures and organization. It is obvious to see that simple sentences, non-finite sentences and subjunctive mood are popularly used by Kingston. She selects simple sentences to be in line with the informal and colloquial characteristic of Wittman. It is in accordance with the protagonist’s image. So is the use of the non-finite sentences, which make readers feel easy to grasp more information and messages about our protagonist and other characters at

one time. The two types of sentence structures show us the author’s terse style. The subjunctive mood is also used in Wittman’s narration and by the narrator. The tense can appropriately embody and reflect people’s pity to the past, their guesses to the present, their expectations to the future, and more specifically, the social background and condition, for our protagonist Wittman and his fellows, Chinese Americans—what they must do and should do. There is one more feature. It is the structure-end-focus sentence. There are two instances. “Up the stairs to this fancy hothouse (built with Crocker money), where unlikely roses and cacti grow, climbed a man and a dog.” (Ibid., p.6) “Out of a pocket, he took his Pilke.” (Ibid., p.8) In these two examples, there is a common point that the emphasis or the centre is at the end of each sentence. The suspended structure lures readers to make the answer or the truth clear. It effectively functions in attracting readers to reach much further in reading and appreciating the plot and the novel.

### 4.2 Punctuation

Then, if making a general survey of all sentences, a kind of punctuation is frequently used which also functions in forming a striking feature. It is the question mark. In four paragraphs, question marks nearly occupy half of the punctuation marks. There is an example in the following.

Did I hear wrong? Hallucinating again? She means me? Who you talking to? You talking to me, girl? You talking about me? Am I too paranoid, or what? She hadn’t called me a name, had she? Someone called her that? Who called her that? Who called her that? Who she quoting? Was she hear English wrong like any greenhorn F.O.B.?

(Kingston, 1989, p.23)

Every sentence in this short passage is ended with a question mark. This short passage is a selection of a paragraph in which the author describes the process of Wittman’s long-time thinking after Nanci’s surprising and unexpected sentences “I won’t play an oriental prostitute.” and “No ching-chong chinaman foe me.” (Kingston, 1989, p.23) Every question mark is just from his inner heart. Every question mark vividly implies his uneasiness and loss. Every question mark is the sign of his puzzle and bewilderment to Nanci, who is his long-beloved and also an Asian American. Thus here, every question mark is necessary, proper and just to the very point. Moreover, here, the ceaseless question marks perfectly strengthen the emotional effects of Wittman’s inner thoughts. These question marks also unfold Wittman’s Chinese feelings and predict his searching for his as well as his fellows’ new position and identity.

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## CONCLUSION

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The striking stylistic foregrounding features of the flexible language are embodied vividly and incisively in *TM*

especially in Chapter One “Trippers and Askers”. As a fiction, this chapter is the beginning of the story which makes the foundation for the development of the whole text. And the function of foregrounding language features serve a lot for the texture and structure of the whole novel as well as paving the foundation of the plot of the whole novel.

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