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Stylistic Deviations in Ali's Twilight in Delhi (2007)

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Abstract
This study investigates stylistic deviations in Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi (2007), highlighting how the author employs non-standard English features to create a distinct narrative style. Drawing on stylistics theory (Leech & Short, 1981) and research on Pakistani English (Rahman, 1990; Baumgardner, 1993), the paper analyzes deviations in syntax, lexis, and semantics, including tense variations, prepositional and article usage, hybridization, preposed phrases, and semantic shifts. The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach, identifying and categorizing deviations to examine their narrative and cultural functions. Findings suggest that these deviations not only reflect local linguistic identity but also enhance the novel's stylistic richness and reader engagement.

Keywords: Stylistic Deviations, Pakistani English, Syntax, Lexis, Semantic Shifts, Twilight in Delhi, Non-Native English.

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1. Background of the Study

Pakistani English is a non-native variety of English that has evolved under the influence of Urdu and regional languages. As a literary medium, it often exhibits features distinct from Standard British English in syntax, lexis, and semantics. *Twilight in Delhi* (Ali, 2007) portrays the life and culture of Delhi before the Partition, using Pakistani English to reflect local speech patterns, cultural expressions, and social realities.

Stylistic deviations in this novel serve multiple purposes: they capture the rhythm of local speech, preserve cultural idioms, and enhance narrative vividness. These deviations are important for understanding the linguistic identity of Pakistani English in literature.

Recent scholarship on *Twilight in Delhi* has increasingly emphasized its linguistic and stylistic innovation, highlighting how Ahmed Ali's prose exemplifies the nativization of English in a Pakistani context. Studies show that Ali deliberately integrates Urdu lexical items and code-switching into English, preserving cultural specificity and reflecting local speech patterns, rather than producing errors (Marryum, Ahmad, & Xuanyu, 2022; Shahid, Kousar, & Haider, 2024). Linguistic analyses also identify stylistic deviations at lexical, syntactic, and semantic levels that serve as foregrounded literary strategies, enhancing narrative vividness and reader engagement (Khan, Maan, & Khan, 2022). Corpus-based research further demonstrates a patterned hybridity in Ali's language, illustrating how semantic shifts, syntactic innovations, and untranslated sociolinguistic codes convey cultural identity and the rhythm of local speech (Gondal & Maqbool, 2021). Comparative studies of narrative style underscore that these deviations are deeply influenced by cultural and social contexts, shaping the novel's distinct literary voice (Umair, Javaid, & Malik, 2025).

These recent findings align with earlier theoretical work on Pakistani English as a non-native variety shaped by Urdu and regional languages, which manifests in deviations from Standard British English in syntax, lexis, and semantics (Rahman, 1990; Baumgardner, 1993). Within this framework, the stylistic deviations in *Twilight in Delhi* can be interpreted as deliberate strategies that preserve cultural idioms, reproduce local speech rhythms, and enhance narrative expressiveness, reinforcing the novel's contribution to the identity and aesthetics of Pakistani English literature (Ali, 2007).

2. Statement of the Problem

Pakistani English, as a non-native variety, exhibits systematic deviations from Standard English in grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. While much research has explored deviations in Pakistani English broadly, few studies have focused on literary texts, particularly Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (2007), to examine how these deviations function stylistically. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing linguistic deviations in the novel, aiming to understand their narrative significance, cultural representation, and contribution to the author's unique literary style.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in stylistics theory, particularly the approach of Leech and Short (1981), which emphasizes the analysis of literary language at multiple levels, including syntax, lexis, and semantics.According to Leech and Short, literary style is how language expresses meaning in a text. They introduce the idea of foregrounding, which draws attention to language through deviation (breaking language rules) and parallelism (repetition).

It also draws on non-native English studies and research on Pakistani English (Rahman, 1990; Baumgardner, 1993). Rahman (1990) describes it as a nativized variety influenced by Urdu and regional languages, with features like flexible tense use, variations in articles and prepositions, and retention of cultural vocabulary. Baumgardner (1993) adds that South Asian English often incorporates local words and cultural concepts directly into English, which in literature helps authors achieve cultural authenticity, express identity, and create a local narrative voice.

By combining stylistics and Pakistani English theory, this study interprets the linguistic deviations in *Twilight in Delhi* as both foregrounded stylistic choices (Leech & Short, 1981) and markers of localized English (Rahman, 1990;

Baumgardner, 1993). This dual approach allows us to understand Ali's language as a creative tool that conveys both literary artistry and cultural meaning.

This study focuses on deviation, such as unusual tense use, altered sentence structures, Urdu borrowings, and figurative meanings in *Twilight in Delhi* (Ali, 2007), showing that these are not errors but deliberate strategies to create emotion, emphasis, and aesthetic effect.

4. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive method using a text-based analysis of Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (2007). Data were collected from the novel through systematic reading, identifying instances of linguistic and stylistic deviations, including deviations in tense, article and preposition use, preposed phrases, lexical borrowing, and semantic shifts. Each deviation was categorized according to its linguistic type and analyzed in terms of its stylistic function, narrative effect, and contribution to the representation of Pakistani English. Findings were interpreted through the lens of stylistics and non-native English frameworks to highlight patterns and authorial intent.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section identifies and interprets non-standard English features in *Twilight in Delhi* using Leech and Short's (1981) model of stylistic deviation together with scholarship on Pakistani English (Rahman, 1990; Baumgardner, 1993). The analysis shows how Ahmed Ali deliberately departs from Standard British English norms to construct a localized narrative voice that reflects Indo-Muslim cultural life and linguistic identity.

5.1. Grammatical Deviation: Progressive Aspect with Stative Verbs

Ali frequently employs the progressive form with verbs that are typically stative in Standard English:

"…and the poets are feeling the lack of …" (p. 4)

In Standard English, verbs of cognition and emotion (e.g., *feel, know, believe*) usually resist the progressive. According to Leech and Short, this represents grammatical deviation, where normal syntactic restrictions are relaxed for stylistic effect.

This construction gives emotional and psychological states a sense of immediacy and continuity, transforming static feelings into lived, ongoing experiences. It mirrors South Asian English usage, where progressive forms are more flexible — a feature noted in Pakistani English studies (Rahman, 1990).

5.2. Syntactic Deviation: Pre-posed Descriptive Phrases

Ali often uses descriptive phrases before nouns instead of full relative clauses:

"An old lady in her fifties is lying on one of …" (p. 7)

"At the foot of the palm henna tree …" (p. 7)

These compressed modifiers resemble reduced relative clauses and reflect Urdu's tendency toward dense nominal modification. Leech and Short classify this as syntactic deviation, where expected clause structures are stylistically condensed. These structures create visual immediacy and poetic compactness, allowing scenes to unfold like cinematic snapshots. They also transfer the rhythmic and descriptive style of Urdu prose into English.

5.3. Lexical Deviation: Borrowing and Hybridization

Ali incorporates Urdu vocabulary directly into English discourse:

"…all the Mussalmans …" (p. 8)

"…ices and sherbets …" (p. 23)

Leech and Short describe this as lexical deviation, while Baumgardner (1993) identifies such borrowing as a key process in the nativization of Pakistani English. These words serve as cultural anchors, grounding the narrative in Indo-Muslim social life. Instead of translating cultural realities into Western equivalents, Ali

preserves indigenous terminology, thereby enhancing authenticity and ethnolinguistic identity.

5.4. Semantic Deviation: Poetic and Contextual Meaning Shifts

Ali's language often stretches conventional meanings:

"Night envelop**es** the city, covering it like a blanket." (p. 3)

Here, the verb *envelopes* creates a metaphorical semantic extension, a type of semantic deviation in Leech and Short's framework.

Such expressions create lyrical imagery, blending poetic sensibility with narrative prose. This reflects the influence of Urdu literary aesthetics, where metaphor and personification are central stylistic devices.

5.5. Deviations in Articles and Prepositions

Pakistani English often shows variation in article usage due to substrate language influence (Rahman, 1990). Ali's constructions reflect this pattern:

"…all the Mussalmans …" (p. 8)

The definite article appears where Standard English might omit or vary usage, reflecting transfer from Urdu, which lacks an article system equivalent to English.

These variations subtly mark the narrative voice as culturally localized, reinforcing the sense that the story emerges from within the Indo-Muslim linguistic environment rather than from an external English viewpoint.

5.6. Overall Stylistic Effect

From a stylistic perspective, these deviations are not linguistic deficiencies but foregrounding devices (Leech & Short, 1981). By deviating from Standard English norms, Through his deliberate use of linguistic deviation, Ahmed Ali creates a stylistic effect that aligns with what Leech and Short (1981) describe as foregrounding, particularly through deviation from established linguistic norms.

By departing from Standard British English structures, Ali produces a sense of defamiliarization, a concept rooted in stylistic theory whereby ordinary language is made striking or unfamiliar, thereby compelling readers to pay closer attention to the texture of the text. The use of progressive forms with stative verbs, unusual syntactic compression, and semantic extensions slows down automatic reading processes and heightens stylistic awareness. As Leech and Short (1981) argue, deviation disrupts linguistic expectations and intensifies reader engagement, transforming language into an aesthetic object rather than a transparent medium.

At the same time, Ali's stylistic choices serve to preserve cultural specificity, a defining feature of postcolonial literary expression. His incorporation of Urdu lexical items such as *Mussalman* and *sherbet*, along with culturally embedded expressions and imagery, reflects what Baumgardner (1993) identifies as the lexical expansion and hybridization characteristic of South Asian Englishes. Rather than replacing indigenous concepts with Western equivalents, Ali retains culturally marked vocabulary, thereby resisting linguistic homogenization. This strategy reinforces the Indo-Muslim social and historical setting of the novel and allows English to function as a vehicle for local cultural realities. Rahman (1990) similarly observes that Pakistani English frequently integrates indigenous lexical and semantic patterns, reflecting processes of linguistic nativization shaped by contact with Urdu and regional languages.

Furthermore, Ali's prose reproduces local speech rhythms and syntactic patterns, particularly through pre-posed descriptive phrases and flexible tense usage that echo Urdu narrative structures. Urdu often favors dense nominal modification and rhythmic descriptive flow, and Ali transfers these structural tendencies into English prose. This syntactic and rhythmic adaptation corresponds with Rahman's (1990) observation that Pakistani English exhibits structural

influence from substrate languages, particularly in patterns of modification and aspectual flexibility. The resulting prose carries an unmistakably South Asian cadence, distinguishing it from Standard British narrative conventions.

Finally, Ali blends Urdu narrative aesthetics with English prose, creating a hybrid literary style that merges poetic imagery, metaphorical density, and emotive expression with the structural framework of English. The lyrical personifications and semantic extensions in descriptions such as "Night envelopes the city" demonstrate what Leech and Short (1981) term semantic deviation, where figurative intensification enriches literary effect. This blending reflects a broader postcolonial strategy in which English is reshaped to accommodate indigenous literary traditions rather than merely replicating metropolitan norms. In this way, *Twilight in Delhi* exemplifies how linguistic deviation operates simultaneously as an aesthetic device and as a marker of localized identity within Pakistani English literary discourse (Baumgardner, 1993; Rahman, 1990).

In terms of World Englishes, the novel exemplifies what Baumgardner (1993) calls the localized literary use of South Asian English, where English becomes a vehicle for indigenous cultural expression rather than a purely colonial linguistic form.

The stylistic deviations in *Twilight in Delhi* demonstrate a deliberate literary strategy that merges English with Indo-Muslim linguistic and cultural patterns. Through grammatical, syntactic, lexical, and semantic deviations, Ali constructs a distinct narrative style that reflects Pakistani English's evolving identity. These features enhance not only the novel's aesthetic richness but also its cultural authenticity, positioning the text within the broader tradition of postcolonial literary Englishes.

6. Conclusion

Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* demonstrates that Pakistani English in literature is a dynamic, evolving variety with its own stylistic norms. Deviations from Standard English whether syntactic, lexical, or semantic serve literary and cultural purposes, capturing the essence of pre-Partition Delhi and the lived experience of its characters. The study of such deviations highlights the broader role of Pakistani English in representing local identities and narrating cultural realities.

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