

The Features and Effectiveness of Non-Native English Usage in an Extract from *Bombay Duck*

Hirofumi Tabuchi

Introduction

This extract (p. 18) is taken from *Bombay Duck* by Farrukh Dhondy.

In this essay, I would like to analyse this extract in terms of non-native English usage.

I would also like to consider the situation and how Gerald Blossom thinks of himself and receives his fate, and what kind of effects non-native English usage achieves by examining the writing techniques of Farrukh Dhondy.

I. The Features of Non-Native English Usage

(parentheses inserted by author)

I

Fortune smiles. Is a routine with fortune. No guffaws, no big
laughs, just Mona Lisa auditioning and being blood claat quizzical.
(It) (clot)

Backayard, them woulda ask her, 'Whey 'tis yuh smile at girl?
(Backhome) (they) (would) (What are you smiling at, girl?)

Yuh have a date with a Yankee sailor?' Maybe sometime she frown,
(You) (sometimes) (frowns)
but she don't wail and bawl and call on her mother and God's mother and
(doesn't)

the mother of the devil to rescue her. And she ain't no whore neither,
(isn't a whore, either)

because when she bestow herself she don't want payment or bread or
 (bestows) (doesn't)
 slackness - only, eventually, your soul.

II

In my case, boss, she came in three disguises. First as a school
 teacher who tell me, 'Gerald Blossom, you have to be joking!'
 (tells)
 I never hear this expression. I wasn't joking but the English tell me I
 (have never heard) (told)
 have to be. Maybe it was a false alarm, a mistaken identity thing. I see
 fate and think it's fortune.

III

Then in the darkness of my bedroom, a Buddha, he smiled. A gift
 (It was)
 from an uncle who came back from Hong Kong. A plastic Buddha
 (Is was)
 which glowed in the dark when yuh plugged it in. And I check it and
 (you) (checked)
 it smiled and the next day my father's woman, she have a big fight with my
 (had)
 dad and she who used to torture me was gone.
 (went away)

IV

And the next time, brother, it maybe wasn't fortune at all, it was
 (maybe it)
 fate, coming to the fancy dress ball - my life. She came dressed as a little
 English man in the uniform that the middle-aged hippy-maan them wear,
 (Englishman) (,) (men)
 balding with blue cord trouser. And I knew him on the spot, boss, because
 (trousers)
 you can't be an animal on the ark and not know Noah. Me boss, G
 (My)
 Blossom, alias Ali Abdul Rahman, yours truly, or crucially as we say,
 being an actor, recognised the man of the moment, the one and only David
 Stream Esq etc, a director, *the* director, of Britannic Theatre. I knew
 (etc.,)
 him as a sheep knows his shepherd as a squaddie knows Winston when
 him pass on the beach at Dunkirk.
 (he passes)

a. Interpretation

The first paragraph begins with “Fortune smiles. Is a routine with fortune”. The first paragraph is written in the simple present tense. The second, third and fourth paragraphs are written in the simple past tense. The use of the simple present tense means that fortune is not temporal but fortune comes regularly as a routine. This fortune is just like Mona Lisa’s enigmatic smile. The expression—‘Just Mona Lisa auditioning’ is very humorous. The word ‘auditioning’ is related to Gerald Blossom’s job as an actor. This fortune sometimes frowns, but does not want payment, bread, slackness but only soul.

In lines 4-7, I can also find humorous and ironical expressions. The repeated use of the same meanings is a conspicuous characteristic of this author. It has an emphatically emotive effect. It is not so serious but has a humorous and exaggerated effect.

“She don’t *wail* and *bawl* and *call on her mother* and *God’s mother* and *the mother of the devil* to rescue her.”

The ironical expression is found in the last line of the 1st paragraph.

“And she ain’t no whore neither, because when she bestow herself she don’t want payment or bread or slackness - only, eventually, *your soul*.”

Fortune only wants Gerald Blossom’s soul. In the 1st paragraph, ‘soul’ is a very serious word but the author does not use this word seriously.

In the 2nd paragraph, fortune came in a school teacher’s disguise. The thought which Gerald Blossom has can be misunderstood or cannot be communicated successfully, but he thinks it is a fortune.

As with the 1st paragraph, I can find the repeated use of the same meaning.

“Maybe it was a *false alarm*, a *mistaken identity* thing.”

Gerald Blossom has an optimistic view.

In the 3rd paragraph, the word ‘smile’ is used in a humorous way.

As for the image of Buddha, I regard Buddha as something holy, noble and spiritual. The author’s way of writing is very humanistic and humorous.

The first line of the 3rd paragraph shocks me. “A Buddha, he smiled, *in his bedroom.*” The lexical collocation of ‘Buddha’ and ‘bedroom’ is very humorous and awkward and is not semantically tightly connected.

Also, the author does not write “A Buddha smiled…” Instead, “A Buddha, he smiled”. Buddha is very close and near to us because Buddha was referred to by the use of the pronoun ‘he’. Furthermore, we begin to know that Buddha was a gift from an uncle who came back from *Hong Kong*. Hong Kong is notorious for ‘phony brand goods.’ As we have expected, the gift was a *plastic* Buddha. The fact that Buddha was made of plastic shocked me very much. Buddha smiled when he plugged it in. To my way of thinking, Buddha smiles spiritually for the people who believe in Buddhism, not mechanically.

Buddha is a holy spirit and the symbol or backbone of the people in Buddhist countries. In the 3rd paragraph, Buddha was demystified and brought back to earth. Buddha smiled, but his smile is not a real, genuine smile.

As for Gerald Blossom’s father’s woman (mistress), he was tortured by this woman but she went away. So he is more pleased now.

In the 4th paragraph, he said it was fate, not fortune. He said his life was like coming to a fancy dress ball, but it is not real (realistic) because people come to the ball in disguise.

I can find many humorous and exaggerated expressions.

“She [Fortune] came dressed as *a little* English man in the uniform that *the middle-aged hippy-maan* them wear, *balding* with blue cord trouser.”

This amusing description is of Gerald Blossom’s superior, David Stream, the director of Britannic Theatre. He (David Stream) is short, a hippy-man and bald. In lines 4-5,

“And I knew him on the spot, boss, because *you can’t be an animal on the ark and not know Noah.*”

This expression is exaggerated, quoting the ‘Noah’s Ark’ incident from the Bible. Also, when Gerald Blossom refers to himself, it sounds humorous and exaggerated.

“*G Blossom, alias Ali Abdul Rahman, yours truly, or crucially* as we say,”

I have never heard the informal expression referring to ‘I’—“Yours truly, or Yours crucially”. I only know that “Yours truly” is often used at the end of a formal letter.

The same writing technique can be found when the author refers to David Stream.

“the man of the moment, the one and only David Stream Esq etc, a

director, the director, of Britannic Theatre”

The author tries to depict the contrast of both people—Gerald Blossom and David Stream. Gerald Blossom is in a lower social status than David Stream.

This expression is like an introduction by a master of ceremonies on a show because it aims at emphatic effect and highlights his career. But this introduction is not so serious because the word “*Esq etc*” is added.

In the final line, the relationship is quite conspicuous because social movements presented in the metaphors are from lower to higher. In other words, from a sheep’s eye to a shepherd, from a squaddie’s eye to Winston Churchill.

Gerald Blossom may be in the lower class of society but he knows his role or position and accepts his fate and looks forward optimistically to his fortune. He is not totally satisfied with the present situation because there are some ironical expressions in this extract. (Fortune smiles but is not a real smile.) But he has a very optimistic view of his life.

II. An Analysis of Linguistic Features

Lexis

In the first and fourth paragraphs, we can find many binaries or comparative words.

1st Paragraph	fortune	—fate
	guffaws, big laughs	—Mona Lisa’s smile
	smile	—frown, wail, bawl
	God	—devil

	soul	—payment, bread, slackness
4th Paragraph	fortune	—fate
	Noah	—animal
	shepherd	—sheep
	Winston (Churchill)	—squaddie
	director	—actor
	(see)	—(think)

Also, we can find many biblical and religious words in the whole text.

soul
God's (mother)
(the mother of the) devil
Buddha
sheep
shepherd
ark
Noah

These biblical and religious words are often used to give some exaggerated, emotive effects to the readers in an ordinary conversational text.

Structure (Conspicuous structure of the text)

The author's typical way of writing is from general to specific (from whole to part).

This semantic parallelism or repetition is used to highlight the 'value system' which the text is assuming.

Fortune comes in three disguises in paragraphs 2, 3, 4 but the author depicts the examples of false (not real) fortune.

Even if they smile, it is not a real smile.

Spoken Features in a Written Text

- The use of 'and'

'And' does not normally come at the beginning of a sentence but in spoken discourse, it is quite common.

- The use of 'Vocative'

'Boss', 'brother', 'me boss' are used to address people although they do not know each other. The effective use of 'vocative' makes the text lively and vivid.

- Ellipsis

Ellipsis is extremely common, especially in speech. The use of ellipsis has a discourse function, in that it creates an atmosphere of proximity and intimacy.

- Colloquial (Informal) and Slangy Expressions

'blood *claat quizzical*'
(clot)

'*Whey 'tis yuh...?*'

'*she ain't no whore neither*' (multiple negative)

'a mistaken identity *thing*'

'backayard', 'woulda', 'maan', (intrusion of 'a')

These features are typical of conversational mode.

- Repetition

'a false alarm, a mistaken identity'

'she don't wail and bawl'

'G Blossom, alias Ali Abdul Rahman, yours truly, or crucially

'a director, the director'

Repetition can make a text easier to remember (e. g. a repeated phrase or refrain); this is particularly important in oral literature.

Examples of Non-Native English Features

I can find many examples of Non-Standard English.

1. Double and multiple negatives are common :

she *ain't* no whore neither.
(isn't a whore, either.)

2. Occasionally 'them' or 'dem' is used to mark plurality overtly :

hippy-*maan* them
(men)

3. There is some lengthening of 'a' :

hippy-*maan*
(man)

4. Absence of sequence-of-tense constraints :

I *wasn't* joking but the English *tell* me I *have to* be.
(told)

5. Present tense in place of progressive form

Whey 'tis yuh smile at girl?
(What are you smiling at, girl?)

6. The use of resumptive pronouns, not only after focused nouns, as in some colloquial styles of English :

a Buddha, he smiled.

7. The pluralization of many English nouns :

No guffaws, no big laughs

8. The use of 'ain't'—(the negative present of 'be') :

She *ain't* no whore neither
(isn't)

9. The deletion of the 's' in (the) third person singular verbs
(omission)
she *frown*, she *bestow* herself.
(frowns) (bestows)
10. There is no concordial agreement between subject and verb :
She *don't* wail
(doesn't)
She *have* a big fight
(had)
11. /t/and/d/tend not to occur in word-final position after /f/, /k/, /l/, /n/
and/s/ :
I *check* it
(checked)
12. Questions are distinguished from statements mainly by intonation :
Yuh have a date with a Yankee sailor ?(rising intonation)
13. Use of the uniform negator 'no' for most negative utterances :
No guffaws, *no* big laughs.
14. The lack of orthography : yuh→(you)

I can safely say that this variety evinces many features of non-native English.

Conclusion

The text has a comic immediacy because of the lack of a uniform orthography and of standardized norms from the linguistic point of view. Also we can find many spoken features such as 'and' (initial position of a sentence), 'vocative', 'ellipsis', and 'slangy expressions'. In particular these slangy expressions give the text a lively, energetic and engaging feel. This produces the humour.

In this text standardized and non-standardized sentences are mixed and entwined with each other. Furthermore, frequent use of biblical and reli-

gious words produces a funny effect.

The humorous character of Gerald Blossom is due to the author's imaginative and humorous way of writing.

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(from Farrukh Dhondy, *Bombay Duck*)