

## Consuming Language-based Poetry in Iraqi Academic Classrooms of Post-Protests Era

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### Abstract

Since October 1/2019 till now, Iraqi university students participate in protesting publically in the streets South of Iraq. In order not to regard the classroom as part of state oppression, Iraqi academic teachers should consider the potentialities of pedagogical reform in the post-protests era. Teaching poetry should be particularly reconsidered. Instead of the usual passive methods of teaching which are generally based on form-content analysis, new participatory methods should be sought, esp. when a critical module, as language poetry, is approached. This paper is concerned with the new *poetics* of language poetry which Iraqi teachers and students should consider in academic classrooms. It recommends a reformed pedagogical rationale in response to a form of prose poems composed mainly of sentences that have no clear semantic transitions. The gaps created by ungrammatical and uncommunicative texts invite readers to participate, to bring on their own reading of language poems' *unreadability*. This pedagogical democracy, we hypothesize, coincides with the new voice the Iraqi students found in the post-protests era. To examine this hypothesis, we resort to experimental course on teaching language poetry followed by a test to the participants.

**Key Words:** Derrida; language; pedagogy; poetry; sentence; theory

**Introduction: The *Workshop Poem* or Poetry Written/Taught in Action**

The majority of the so-called language poets are academics teaching poetry, critical/cultural theory, and creative writing which makes the question of language poetry both literary and pedagogical. The *problematic* of teaching language poetry is even more complicated due to the fact that the language poets are concerned with a conception of poetry defined from the perspective of prose. In the hybrid or genreless writings of poets like Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, Michael Palmer, Lyn Hejinian, Susan Howe, Bruce Andrews, Michael Davidson, and Barrett Watten, the critical intelligence is generally privileged over the bardic, or orphic desire (Bartlett 1986:742). These poets are generally critical, practicing poetry in relation to language theory. Their 'means of poetic creation,' according to Lee Bartlett's "What Is 'Language Poetry'?", are Derrida's 'critical activity of deconstruction' and Barthes'/Kristeva's 'investigating a text as endless play of subtexts.' They found inspiration in the critical/cultural theory and creative writing programs to create the *workshop poems* that end up *voice* poetry or 'poetry of personality' (lyrical poetry defined from the perspective of the poet's first person narration) and call for the 'non or third person, whose indication is not presence but absence' (Ibid., 745). The poststructural understanding of reading, writing and epistemology, essentially based on new logical and philosophical patterns of language, formulated a *new aesthetics* that poets, teachers and students should consider in the texts of language poems. The crucial challenge to reading and teaching this literary production is understanding the logical and philosophical basics behind the meaning of 'unmeaning' (Chakroborty 2008:16). If we want to *read* a language verse, as Lyn Hejinian's 'It's not that this or that means something / to me but this! -or that! - means something to me,' which is totally non-lyrical and non-intentional, we should transcend beyond its rhetorical devices and subject matter in favour of the *concrete* words themselves. Because they are provocative or reactive, the words in language poems 'absorb' their reader. They initiate 'a multilevel reading' and 'nonsemantic effects', says the leading language poet, Charles Bernstein. 'The reader,' Bernstein continues, 'must use his imagination but he must use it to free himself from the fixed forms of thought which ordinary language imposes on our minds' (quoted in 'Artifice of Absorption'). For him, language is our epistemic tool to 'experience the world' ('Thought's Measure,' 61). He focuses on the materiality of language, and sets himself free from the restrictions of grammar and verse metrics. Thus, the materiality of the signifier in his saying, 'Bike chained to the No Parking / sign;' for example, is highly indicative of a co-sign, signifier of signifier, thinking abstractions in concrete words, which is 'the flesh of the imagination,' according to Hejinian. For her, the visual possibilities of language and consciousness stem from the tangible presence of language itself. This produces unconventional, sometimes unconceivable, experiments with language which make the language poet 'a poet of grammar,' 'a mechanic of syntax,' or 'technician of the human' (Aji 2006:341).

Language-based poetry requires seeking alternative participatory methods of teaching instead of traditional passive methods, esp. in the Iraqi academic institution where this understanding is communicated. The new ways of doing language poetry require a pedagogical transformation inside our classrooms. Instead of Hegelian dictating classroom-reproduction of imitative knowledge, the new classes should be inventive (Derrida's "The Age of Hegel"). If 'the truth and the sense of sentences collapse together,' says Ron Silliman, teachers should make themselves plain by experimenting with ways that are totally un-grammatical, and more dangerously un-poetic. Gregory L. Ulmer suggests using a 'deconstructive' teaching method, which proposes untried forms of teaching that are partly politicized or democratized. His pedagogical rationale coincides with the new radical mode in Iraq, it can be accurately termed 'post-pedagogical,' indicating that it is a move beyond conventional pedagogy (Ulmer 1985:157). It is basically a method of experimenting with teaching poetry, as it was written, *in action*. This method is generally student-based rather than teacher-based, which is an unfamiliar territory to both teachers and students in Iraq. The teacher's role is spectre-like in this type of classes, his only job is to run the class in an orderly manner and select required texts without authorizing a critical or judgemental opinion. He may only friendly suggest, as his students, one of multi-possible-readings of the recommended texts. The conventional teacher-student hierarchical relationship should be gradually overlooked in favour of a more *hospitable* philosophic discourse on the university. The teaching programme of language poetry must not be alienated from the radical deconstruction of traditional hierarchies (man/woman, white/black, west/east, human/animal, teacher/student), which is superseding in Michael Palmer's new logical adage, 'A and Not-A are the same.' This post-deconstructive logic is reflected even on his non-oppositional word-coinages; such as 'hellogoodbye,' which violates the temporal limits of beginnings and ends. Thus teaching language poetry for 2L Learners should be built on two factors: a good background information in English language that enables the learners to realize the linguistic deviation, and an acquaintance with post-structural theory to understand the philosophical justifications of this linguistic deviation.

### **Philosophy in Use: The Philosopher as a Pedagogue**

Prior to the emergence of language poetry, almost all poets used the same kind of *phonic* language, which is charged with intentionality and related notions of form and content. Shakespeare and Milton, Dryden and Pope, Eliot and Stevens follow common habits of poetic formation which guarantee the privilege of the *phone*, the system of hearing/understanding a poem. They handle certain attributes of language in order to write poetry such as rhyme, metre and the long-costumed rituals of the image. Their poems are not alien to their individual voice, logos (thought), and virtual presence of the speaking lyric *subject*. The semiotic paradigms of their poetry convey signifiers correlative to a

spatial/temporal outside world, or they produce signifieds and not things (concrete words) in themselves. They achieve referential effect so their texts do not close upon themselves, rather they are open to external meanings. They also advocate certain *poetics*, in which meanings do not impart unconditionally from writer to reader, but they are mediated through and filtered by 'codes' stored up in the literary competence of both writer and reader (Al-Khafaji 2014:440). 'At such a point,' claims Roland Barthes in his 'Is There Any Poetic Writing?' (50), 'it is hardly possible to speak of a poetic mode of writing.' In the postmodern sense, classical poets (modernists included), who confine thoughts within the compass of rhapsody, convey relations, not Words: 'They belong to an art of expression, not of invention' (Ibid., 47). Their words 'delight us because of the formation which brings them together, not because of their own power or beauty' (Ibid.).

Language poetry deviates from this aesthetic mode, it adheres into dissimilar tone and ethos (purpose). The conventional univocal mode of writing poetry was shifted into plurality of modes so that some sort of *problematic* is raised concerning the very nature of poetry itself, being confused more and more with prose. This move, strictly speaking, coincides with the poststructuralist *turn* of New French Theory (NFT) from twenty centuries of prioritizing speech into the primacy of *writing*. The concept of the sign and its entire logic was also destroyed. Writing is no longer a signifier of signifier (speech), and the signified is erased totally because it is already present as a self-sufficient signifier. The new *poetics* of language poetry stems from Derrida's project of *grammatology*, in which he *deconstructs* the subordination of writing to speech and of speech to thought. Derrida considers language as 'a species of writing' (OG, 8). In his course of prioritizing writing over speech, he undermines the history of logocentric metaphysics, the civilization of the Book, and the conventional system of signification in general. His notion of writing re-appropriates the notion of poetry as a phonetic production, so that it is no longer marked by rhyme, metre and all the devices that convey possibilities of a (spoken rather than written) message imparted by a speaking subject/poet whose immediate, though virtual, presence cannot be denied. A theory of poetry, which is built on the concept of the *phoné*, cannot erase the proximity of the *voice* of its speaker/poet, his thoughts as logos and the predetermined meaning that he produces and imparts to his readers. In Aristotelean philosophy, the spoken word is a symbol of mental experience (thought), and the written word is a symbol of spoken word. The *phoné*/speech, which is un-dissociable from the self-presence of the speaking subject in the entire Western philosophy, is subordinated for writing. Derrida enlightens the production of a new non-lyrical, non-intentional *poetics* which is directly related to his deviation from the very origin of the phonocentric signifier and the meaning of being in general as *presence*. He also introduces the concept of arche-writing which is essentially 'thinking of spacing,' the law that prescribes speech (Wortham 2010:113). Silliman takes arche-writing even further, claiming that the child, before the one-word stage, 'is playing with the babbling prosody of sentence

forms which are considerably longer, until gradually the intonation contours of normal speech are acquired.' This suggests,' Silliman continues, 'that the child *hears* sentences before it can break them down into smaller units-that is, that the sentence is in some sense a primary unit of language' (64-5). The written sentence, from the language poets perspective, is denied a moment of presence, a fixed origin, not even an originary point related to the poet himself because after all 'words choose the poet' not vice versa (*W&D*, 78). Everything in the sentence lacks centrality, except words that constitute it. This gives unprecedented priority to the materiality of the text (not even the New Critics went so far in considering it). The poet; thus, becomes the substance and servant of the text, and the Book is no longer telos to achieve totality of meaning. The voice of the poet is folded, the subject in its representation of itself is 'shattered and opened' (*W&D*, 79). Likewise, 'the book becomes a subject in itself and for itself,' but 'the destruction of the book, as it is now under way in all domains, denudes the surface of the text' (*OG*, 18).

Ignoring the authority of the poet or the *subject* in general and prioritizing the centrality of the text give unreserved liberality to the reader. This requires a central reform in the pedagogical rationale, how information is mechanically passed from teacher to student and back again, in response to the new *poetics* of language poetry which the Iraqi teacher and student should consider in academic classrooms. Instead of poetry of the line, the classroom community encounters new uncommunicative poetry of the word and the sentence. The consumers of language poetry *read* the word without its conventional relational discourse so this word is reduced into a kind of 'zero degree,' it is 'an ever-deferred project,' pregnant with all past and future significations (*WDZ*, 47). The poetic word, as in a dictionary, is devoid of contexts, or it is ready to accept any fresh context applied every time it is newly read. It 'fulfils like the sudden revelation of a truth.' The word is 'a whole; it shines with an infinite freedom and prepares to radiate towards innumerable uncertain and possible connection' (*Ibid.*). The word in a language poem is 'an act without immediate past, without environment, and which holds forth only the dense shadow of reflexes from all sources which are associated with it.' Thus the poetic word becomes 'generic,' in the sense that it is no longer directed in advance by selective connections or 'the general intention of a socialized discourse; the consumer of poetry.' Rather, it accepts all the possibilities of semantic relations even unexpected ones, it acts as 'a Pandora's box from which fly out all the potentialities of language' (*Ibid.*, 48). In the academic poststructural classes, it is consumed with 'curiosity' and 'sacred relish.' This richness of the poetic word opens the door for teachers and students alike to experiment with new interactive pedagogical methods. These methods are recommended by the language poet, Lyn Hejinian who develops, in her "The Rejection of Closure," a theory of an *open text*. It is a text 'open to the world and particularly to the reader...[It] invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies.' To



stimulate the reader's/student's participation, the *open text* 'engages in a series of disruptive techniques that expose the reader to the possibilities of meaning that he or she brings to the text.' What encourages 2L Learners to experiment with avant-garde readings is their openness to post-structural *rupture* in the text (unorthodox meanings or even meaninglessness), as reflected in Ron Silliman's saying: 'Old sentences heard new carry a different purpose.' In this sense, teachers of language poetry should consider minimizing their demands for the poet's intention, or searching relational discourse between words (metaphors, similes, and similar relational devices) and seek instead explosions of words. Instead of relations carrying the poetic words to meaning, words in language poetry are themselves the 'dwelling place' of a sudden revelation of truth,' says Silliman. He says also: 'sentences do not designate.' The language poet is primarily interested in the lexical words themselves more than their functionality. He glorifies the outside shape of words, their music, their *isness* or reality, and relegates their content or meaning. Thus, postmodern *poetics* creates a discourse full of gaps, absences, and instabilities opposed to the social function of language as a means of communication because the grammar of the language poet is bereft of its purpose. So the teacher and student alike should train themselves with new language logic and new sentence theory.

### **The Two Steins (Gertrude Stein and Ludwig Wittgenstein)**

In the preface to his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Ludwig Wittgenstein admits that he will never succeed to publish a *book* in the traditional sense of the word no matter how much he tried hard to do this. He says that he wrote down his thoughts only as *philosophical remarks*, or short paragraphs in which he shifts from one topic to another. His failure to compose a traditional book is felt when he tries hard to force his thoughts 'in any single direction against their natural inclination' (vii). This compelling action 'crippled' his thoughts. Thus his book comes as 'a number of sketches of landscapes,' it is 'really only an album.' His aphoristic method of composition highly influenced the language poets whose poetry is no longer line/stanza-based, but sentence/paragraph-based. They abandon the phonic premises of poetry, namely the presence of rhyme and metre, and dedicate their efforts towards a new conception of the *poetic*. Their conception of poetry is defined from the perspective of prose so the medium of this new *poetics* is prose poem, which is a piece of *poetic* prose that should be distinguished from utilitarian *prosaic* prose (Delville 1998:4). The poeticity of prose is undissociated to the new language logic and language philosophy advocated by Wittgenstein. He interrogates St. Augustine's saying in the *Confessions* (I.8.): "As I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express

my own desires." For Augustine, as all other traditional semioticians, the essence of human language is based on three premises:

1. Every word has a meaning.
2. This meaning is correlated with the word.
3. It is the object for which the word stands.

In this sense, language is 'a form of representation,' propositions representing facts and signs representing objects (*TLP*, 10). For conventional logicians, including Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), meaning is derived from long-established notions of syntactic logic, the logical plot that readers expect from the sentence plot, its grammatical word order or subject/predicate hierarchy. According to Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), 'not everything that we call language is this system' (PI,3). He gradually distances himself from the traditional syntactic logic of language. For him, the 'logically perfect language' is not only derived from 'rules of syntax which prevent nonsense' (*TLP*, 8). If we seek meaning in this narrow circumscribed way (Wittgenstein's earlier notion of syntactic logic), 'explanations come to an end somewhere.' Thus, he evades traditional notions of 'philosophical grammar,' and advocates instead *radical syntax*, or 'interrogating the possibilities of representation and habits of language.' For him, words are 'the kind of use they have' (no. 10) regardless of their structural word-order. This use is not limited to speech/hearing only. Rather, when a name is mentioned, what we recall in our minds is not only the picture of the thing being named (de Saussure's signifier-signified-referent relationship), but 'the name's being written of the thing named,' the materialization of the letter itself as a thing mentioned. The word is not necessarily 'pointing to its bearer,' a word can still be used in the absence of its bearer. In this case, the written word can substitute 'the presence of the bearer, and so could always be replaced by a demonstrative pronoun' to gesture the pointing at the bearer despite his absence.

Since the meaning of a written/spoken word is 'its use in the language,' says Wittgenstein (no. 43), it is essential to escape the primary element of teaching language according to systematic rules of grammar and syntax. An advanced teaching method should equivocate concentration on the simple components of a sentence, and adhere to the potentialities of its complex use. As a chessboard, the sentence is pregnant with quite different ways of looking at it, unlimited language-games that we (language users) can play with it. Generally, language-games are played according to: (a) 'the situation in which it is uttered or written,' (b) 'the rule may be an aid in teaching the game.' However, the rule is not always 'an instrument of the game itself' (no. 54). Sometimes, esp. in language poetry, the game played is not set down in a book of rules, so how can we teach ungrammatical language games? When Syntax teachers instruct their students in the correct use of language, teachers of language poetry deviate from grammatical correctness into teaching the poetic use of grammatical mistakes. The

problematic is even more complicated with teachers of non-native students (2L Learners) who are non-specialized and untrained in the essentials of poetry besides lacking communication sometimes in the use of common language itself. As foreigners, Iraqi students, for example, may conceive sentences differently in relation to a particular grammatical paradigms they have learnt, such as elliptical sentences. They do not realize that shortened and un-shortened sentences convey the same sense, or the same use according to Wittgenstein. They are not trained to attach the copula in mind, meaning/thinking the sentences. They do not realize the *language game* played on them. So beside training them to the use of grammatically logical and correct language, an extra effort should be given to 'new types of language, new language games' which everyday come into existence (*PI*, no. 23). The significance of such possibilities of grammatical transformations should not be absented from the classroom scene for learning language is far from naming objects and giving a strict word-order. Students should not only be taught how to place words in their proper place to prevent misunderstanding. Since misunderstanding is part and parcel of poststructural meaning-theory, they should be acquainted with settling the meaning for themselves. Sometimes, students guess the meaning, and their guess is either wrong, or right. So they think before they speak, or better they speak the meaning to themselves first. Moreover, if the learner of second language comes across a sentence that has no meaning; like Susan Howe's unpunctuated verse: 'Eye window soul body,' he would be puzzled by the nonsense corresponding to it. So when the sense is analyzed and found that it is mainly nonsensical, it would be reasonable to avoid word-categorisation and word-order. Here comes the importance of teaching the radical linguistic and semantic strategies of language poetry.

The alternative method used most frequently in teaching language-based poetry adheres to what has come to be called the 'new sentence.' The new sentence is grammatically incomplete and logically unacceptable. The bipartite subject/predicate division of the sentence is not clear which confuses the meaning and burdens the reader to work hard in order to make any possible sense. Such sentences are generally uncommunicative because they do not adhere to familiar sentence structure. The language poets derived their fascination with sentences from Gertrude Stein who 'did not write texts,' but 'composed sentences' (Simpson 2001:1). Like Barthes, Stein believes that throughout the history of writing, poetic language 'had become codified and petrified in received structures that lacked immediacy and vitality.' Steins questions the reliability of normative grammar and genre distinction. She violates and reshapes the conventions of language and writing in general by affirming the centrality of the sentence as a compositional unit. Strayed too far from familiar sentences, she formulates a New Sentence Theory which delineates any correlation to normative grammar, conventional punctuation and frustrates the notions of logical communication and discourse. In her new sentences, as 'The rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,' or 'One who meant one one at a time,' the traditional hierarchy of a subject frustrating a predicate is broken. She resists the authority of



the subject by sabotaging the common lexical acceptability. In her "Poetry & Grammar," Stein introduces a new grammar more appropriate for complex and ambiguous discursive functions in which she ignores spatial organization (punctuation), and temporal organization (syntax). In her grammar, orthodox parts of speech are radicalized, and her judgemental criterion to settle them is their vitality to integrate in endless number of contexts, situations, and meanings, or their adherence to Derrida's notion of 'iterability', the capability of the linguistic and non-linguistic signs to be 'repeated - to be iterable' (Al-Khafaji 2016:52). The worst, in her evaluation of the parts of speech, are nouns (names of things rather than personal names) and adjectives which are inactive so uninteresting: 'names are static, they have illusion and adjectives go with the nouns.' Verbs and adverbs are more interesting because they are active, they can be mistaken (they are progressive as far as meaning is concerned). Prepositions, for her, 'can live one long life being really nothing but mistaken.' Articles please her also, 'a and an and the please as the name that follows cannot please.' Writing with articles and using them will always have the pleasure of using something that is varied and alive can give. Conjunctions make themselves live by their work so Stein likes writing with them due to their vitality. She also likes writing with pronouns, they are not as bad as nouns because 'practically they cannot have adjectives go with them,' and 'they are not really the name of anything.' As far as the question of punctuation is concerned, the worst punctuation mark that she never used is the question mark which she always replaced with a period. Notice the first sentence in her "Poetry & Grammar," which is more likely a question in traditional grammar: 'What is poetry and if you know what poetry is what is prose.' She justifies her negligence of the question mark, saying: 'A question is a question, anybody can know that a question is a question and so why add to it the question mark when it is already there when the question is already there in the writing.' Similarly, exclamation marks are ugly and unnecessary, they 'spoil the line of the writing or the printing,' the meaning of exclamation is implied in the sentence so we do not need the exclamation mark. Her brand new modernist technique is ignoring quotation marks, saying 'perhaps someday they [readers or critics] will see it some other way.' 'Dashes and dots' are 'interesting spaces' for her. She believes that 'writing should go on' so 'what had colons and semi-colons to do with it, what had commas to do with it, what had periods to do with it what had small letters and capitals to do with it.' However, periods have some significance for her, she never ceased using them because 'stopping sometime did not really keep one from going on, it was nothing that interfered, it was only something that happened, and as it happened as a perfectly natural happening, I did believe in periods and I used them.' In brief, what she likes most in language is its 'lively,' 'mistaken,' and 'adventurous' elements, or those elements that provide 'the active life of writing.' Stein's new grammar and punctuation inspired the language poets who were fascinated by sentences whose completion, mastery and authority are ambiguous. For them, the sentence should not be closed to univocal, linear, patriarchal, *logocentric* interpretations, and should not be summarized by theme. Rather, it should be open or multidimensional. This

means that the sentence is no longer a syntactic integration which conveys one-route semantic signification, but every one of the integrated parts in the sentence enjoys the 'materiality of the signifier,' it has a definite and independent meaning. The sentence in language poetry contradicts prescriptive grammar and conventional logic. Therefore, the two Steins appealed to language poets who approached language from different perspectives so as to make the new sentence 'a unit of rhythm.'

The first language poet who realizes the evolution of 'such a thing as a new sentence' is Ron Silliman. He observed that, in the dawn of modern linguistics, a theory of the sentence was unwisely neglected because it is a constitutive unit of writing not speech, and modern linguists (de Saussure, Hjelmslev, Chomsky as others) were concerned with speech more than writing (cf. Derrida's critique of de Saussure). Even literary criticism, for Silliman, is mainly concerned with 'the study of reading, not writing,' it deals with the work of art as 'a series of sounds out of which arises the meaning' (229). A drastic change happened when post-structuralist thinkers, like Barthes, Derrida, and Todorov demonstrate an urgent demand for a new theory of the sentence which 'would lead us toward a new mode of analysis of literary products themselves' (231). The sentence is not what is limited between the initial capital letter and the final period, but it is 'anywhere from one word to several sentences long.' It is what constitutes arbitrarily, for the reader, a unit of meaning. Hence, we witness an evolution in the signification of the sentence 'from a syntagmatic focus to a paradigmatic one,' where each paragraph can be taken as 'a vitiated dialogue' dedicated to some listener or reader in search of his 'possible reactions' (232). This trend of writing is 'perfect for hallucinated, fantastic and dreamlike contents.' Nowhere Silliman used the new sentence techniques as he did in 'Ketjak,' the first part of his book, *The Age of Huts* (2007). The poet develops the length of his paragraphs from two-word sentence: 'Revolving door,' then this same sentence/paragraph is repeated at the beginning of all the following paragraphs, adding to it other sentences that are also subsequently repeated with new additions again and again. The sequence of the gradually prolonged paragraphs in the poem reminds us of the increasing width of the waves movement when a stone is thrown into water which is exactly the shape of the ritual dance performed by the islanders and known as Ketjak. Every time new sentences added to the paragraphs, the old sentences are naturally recontextualized and alter their meaning. The same sentences in the poem develop various narratives: 'repeating on paper that stanza one hundred times, each with a new pen,' or new meaning. The atmosphere of the poem grows gradually thicker and the paragraphs several pages longer till the starting word *door* assonates with the closing word *dream* in the last sentence: "It was the voice of Big Black, 'Awake, for nothing comes to the sleeper but a dream'."

### **The Necessity of Radicalizing Teaching Methodology in Iraq**

This paper instigates a complete review of the academic educational system in Iraq of the post-protests era, taking an advanced module on language poetry as a sample. It proposes untried methods of teaching; such as, deconstructive pedagogy. It covers every aspect of the educational process from building the curriculum, presentation of the material, to the composition of the exam paper. The main purpose of this reform is to avoid imposing a set of views or practices on the students, and enable them to read unreadable or unorthodox texts in their own way. Applying deconstruction into the scene of teaching in Iraq is very effective in dealing with avant-garde practices. It is very obvious to anyone acquainted with the local scene that most of the prominent Iraqi intellectuals are thinking in deconstructive terms whether they know or not. Because Iraq is practicing an un-lived intellectual freedom for the first time after 2003, the kind of freedom that enabled Iraqis to go protesting in the streets which they had not done for more than three decades, their intellectuals try their best to undermine long-lived models of politics, religion, literature, and teaching. What encourages this deconstructive mode of thinking is our urgent need for a move beyond conventional pedagogy and a pedagogy for an era of electronic media. As teachers, we need to move our teaching strategies beyond the book, to communicate poetry and the humanities in general with our young students by appropriating our pedagogical discourse. The student should be given 'the position of the reader of a text' (Ulmer, 161). Language poems, in particular, are very applicable in this context for they are intended in the first place to irritate the readers, to stir their queries, to expose their ideas in their own words, their own voice, their own logos. The political condition in the post-protests era makes the young students want to change the established system, to open the question of the nature of the educational presentation (the manner of transmitting ideas) adequate to a poststructuralist epistemology. The teacher's task is to help his rebellious students pass through this crisis, to integrate with universal acceptability. Teachers have now the opportunity to escape the traditional role of the model and authority that students should follow and identify with (the pedagogical transference effects practised since Socrates-Plato to Freud and beyond). In this sense the ethics of teaching should be drastically changed, and not necessarily for the worse if we, as teachers, know how to handle the teaching situation. The student should not only be asked on what is going on in the mind of his teacher, rather he should be helped to develop his own mind, to express his own voice, and to expose his own logos (thought). Of course, we are not recommending a total departure from basic imitative knowledge, but if the student becomes well equipped with a thorough study of grammatical forms; for example, he can be introduced into a new educational programme built on violating these rules. Pedagogical transformation is built on the deconstruction of our traditional classroom teacher-student-text relationship with the teacher on the top of the triangle as a super-power. The text, postmodern or experimental texts in particular, should be given centrality in the educational process and

both teacher and student are considered as readers of these texts. Thus, the postmodern class structure should be changed to coincide with a proper deconstructive method of teaching, which does not start with the new but with a conventional background information that will be deconstructed gradually. Students should be made aware that they are dealing with syntactic mistakes and semantic unconventionalities that make them irritating, but certainly something that they 'can be continuously using and everlastingly enjoying.'

### **The Sample**

The fifteen participants in this study are all taken from third- and fourth-year students of English language departments in two Colleges of Arts/Iraq. They were asked to enrol in an online course on Language Poetry. Being in the last two college years, these 2L Learners have already developed a good basic knowledge of English language that enables them to realize the ungrammatical-unpoetic productions of language poets. At the end of seven-week online course given in two hours per week, the students were required to sit for a proficiency test which is not structured to give grades, but to see if the participants are ready to give their own readings of language texts after participating in the classroom liberal interpretive activities, and to monitor the kind of motivations that inspire their readings. This sample comprised out of five male and ten female students.

### **Procedure**

An experimental teaching plan was employed in the online course. Opposing all traditional methods of teaching poetry in Iraq, our approach is student-based where 'teachers and students play an equally active role in the learning process' (Kucharcikova and Tokarcikova 2016:84). This approach is best described as 'learning by doing,' in which various teaching procedures were conducted; such as brainstorming, group work and seminar free discussions preceded by presenting supportive materials in the forms of pdf and PowerPoint programmes. We minimized lecturing to the basic information on the school of language poetry in order not to impose prior knowledge on the participants' analytical reasoning and help them to be self-confident of their critical opinions. They were very happy simulating the role of literary critics and defending their personal opinions which will definitely support the positive construction of their self-identity. The next step in the experiment was to give the participants a test to measure, qualitatively and quantitatively, the development of their reflective and argumentative abilities, freeing themselves from the fixed forms of language and literary devices while doing language poetry. The test consists of ten language verses which were supposed to be analysed by the students, each verse was followed by MCQ items to grasp the



motivations behind the students' understanding of the linguistic and logical deviations in the verses of language poems which were given to them. Every item in the test includes a short quotation from various language poets, attempting first at direct explications of the quotations taken, then asking the participants to decide whether the absence of conventional meaning in the quotations under consideration is due to one of the following five compositional reasons:

- non-logical/non-grammatical sentence structure
- hallucinating with non-sense
- liberal form of writing
- irreverent attitude to literary formalities
- deconstructionist approach to metaphysical hierarchies

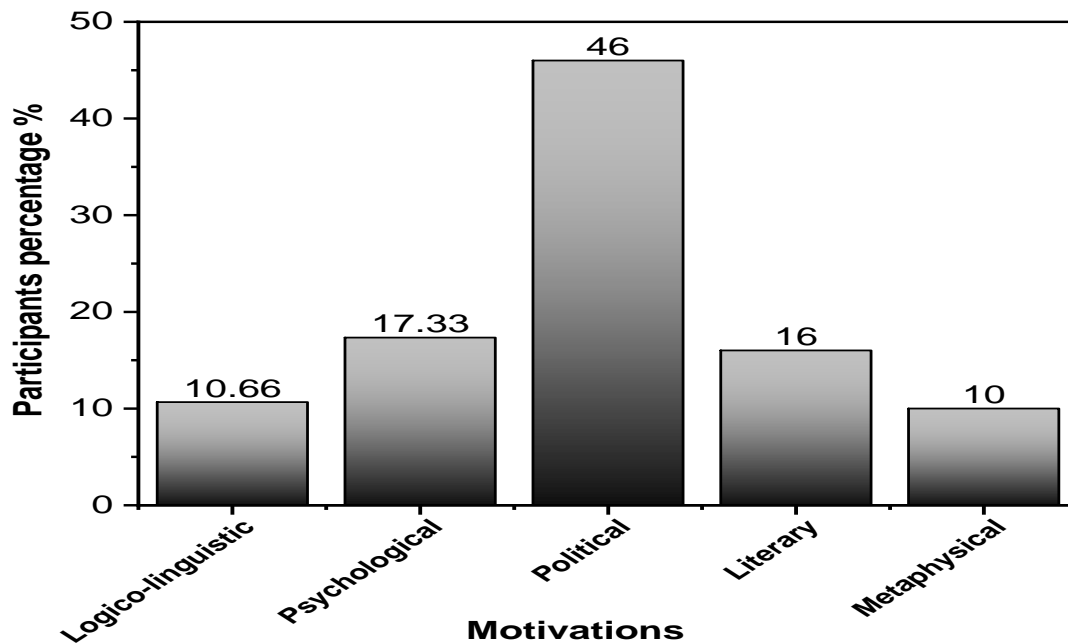
The participants who tick the first option are supposed to seek redemption of the logico-linguistic violation of conventionalities, the second option is done by those who are psychologically oriented, the third is the field of those participants who are politically radicals, the fourth is highly interesting for those who are well-acquainted with literary traditions and the last option is selected by religious fanatics who are *haunted* by the *spectres* of theosophic organization.

### Results and Data Analysis

The results of the test are presented in the following table and figure:

Question no.	A	B	C	D	E
1	2	3	6	3	1
2	1	2	7	4	1
3	1	1	8	3	2
4	2	3	6	2	2
5	2	2	6	3	2
6	2	3	8	1	1
7	1	2	9	2	1
8	2	3	7	2	1
9	2	3	6	2	2
10	1	4	6	2	2
Total	16	26	69	24	15

**Table 1: The choices the participants done in the test**



**Figure 1: The participants' percentages and their motivations**

The least percentage in our test shows a small number of participants who are highly influenced by reverent religious attitudes due to their theological teaching or way of rearing, and the next slightly higher percentage is related to those participants whose educational background concentrated on logical-linguistic background. The reason behind the very close similarity between religious and logical/linguistic motivations in our test is that Aristotlian logic is an essential part of the curriculum in all the stages of religious schools in Iraq. Thus, two participants of the tested sample interpreted Susan Howe's 'He (the Puritan God) is a realm of mystery and will always remain / unknowable, authoritarian, unpredictable,' as Divinity while the rest saw it as theo-political dictatorship.

There is also a slight difference between the percentages of the psychologically-oriented and literarily-oriented participants. Those participants who built language poetry deviations on psychological ground were fascinated by interpreting Charles Bernstein's 'Sad Boy's Sad Boy' as unconscious reflection on realism, an indication of a Lacanian 'mirror stage' identity-building or illusion and non-sense. The literarily-oriented participants, on the other hand, overlooked the unorthodox literary devises of language poetry and continued understanding

conventionally a verse, as Ron Silliman's 'ink as blood,' as a simile, hyperboles, irony or macabre.

However, the highest percentage is related to the participants who are politically motivated, a quantitative conclusion which coincides with our hypothesis at the beginning of our study. The participants were attracted to language poetry because it has its own ideological bearing. For example, six of the female participants identified themselves with the speaker of this language verse: 'First I find myself a Slave, next I understand my slavery, finally I re-discover myself at liberty inside the confines of known / necessity.' They saw themselves as victims suffering from highly patriarchal social structure and gender-based inequality which dominate over Iraqi society. Female participants went feministically also with Susan Howe's 'Gun goes on thinking of / the violence done to meaning,' which they have interpreted as an indication of Derridian *phallogocentrism* or the domination of western *Latinity* on Iraq. Similarly, most of the participants agree on the ideological demeanour behind Rae Armontrout's 'If not being (something) / is the same as being, / then I will live forever,' interpreting it as a liberal political voice which reflects their attitude in the demonstrations that they are raging and reminding them of all their friends who were killed violently in the protests. They also admired Bernstein's 'I want to write noise,' and considered it almost as a political slogan.

Generally, language poetry and the radical ways of doing it appealed to our students. They considered it as an un-conservative art form which emancipates the voice of the reader, as it emancipates the poet from 'the traditions of lyric harmony.' Thus, it is a radical school of poetry that requires radical methods of teaching to foreground political freedom in the rhetoric of the 'noise.' Iraqi students absorb this 'emancipation of sound' and domesticate it due to the poststructural claims of democratic textual reading that coincides with a democratic political scene they aspire to achieve in Iraq of post-protests era. Hence, they become highly functional and interactive in their poetry classroom, shifting from the poet's personal voice melody into the reader's 'super-voice melody.'

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