

Stylistic Analysis of Instagram Poem by Rupi Kaur



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ABSTRACT: This research focuses on analyzing the graphological, phonological, morphological, and semantic features of English poems from Kaur's books "Home Body" and "The Sun and Her Flowers," which were posted on Instagram between May and July 2023. Using Simpson's stylistic theories (2014), the analysis selected three poems from each of Kaur's books. The findings indicate that the poet employs stylistic elements as follows: graphologically, the use of all lowercase letters throughout her poems reflects intimacy and vulnerability, with minimal punctuation, only using a period at the end of each stanza. Phonologically, the poems lack a consistent rhyme scheme, relying instead on the natural flow of language and the emotions conveyed through words. Morphologically, the poet uses simple and concise grammatical structures to effectively communicate emotions and thoughts through straightforward sentences, drawing readers into her perspective and experiences. Semantically, the poet employs various figurative language elements, including metaphors, imagery, personification, symbolism, rhetorical questions, and repetition. The implication of this research is that Kaur's stylistic choices, such as lowercase letters, minimal punctuation, natural language flow, simple grammar, and diverse figurative language, enhance the intimacy, emotional impact, and accessibility of her poetry.

KEYWORDS: Stylistic, graphology, phonology, morphology, poem

INTRODUCTION

Stylistics is a field that bridges language and literature, focusing on language use in both literary and non-literary texts. It examines a wide range of language varieties and styles in different contexts, whether spoken or written, monologue or dialogue, formal or informal, scientific or religious. As Widdowson (in Mode, 2015) stated, "The study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation... what distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism and linguistics is that it links the two." The object of stylistic analysis is a particular piece of language, such as a text, with poetry being a notable example. Poetry captures personal emotions and experiences with universal values, representing diverse styles and subjects that engage readers' imaginations and convey broader meanings.

A poem is a piece of writing arranged in lines, often rhyming, chosen for their sound, imagery, and ideas. Poetry, as literature, serves as a method of expression. According to Egudu (in Safitri and Rosa, 2018), poetry is "a vital and meaningful form of expression by which the individual poet may convey his thoughts and feelings on experience." In the digital era, poems are also published online, with Instagram being a platform to reach a global audience. Instagram poems have a unique style and aesthetics suited to the modern era.

Several studies have analyzed language in poetry. Ayuni Kabobu Heda (2021) from Sanata Dharma University explored figurative language in seven of Rupi Kaur's poems, identifying personification, simile, hyperbole, and metaphor. Similarly, Ferawati, Sultan, and Iskandar (2022) from Makassar State University analyzed figurative language in Kaur's "Milk and Honey" and "The Hurting," highlighting the variety of expressions used. Both studies focused on figurative language, but this research applies a broader stylistic analysis, examining phonology, phonetics, graphology, morphology, and syntax based on Simpson (2014).

This research analyzes the stylistic elements in Rupi Kaur's Instagram poems. Kaur, a Canadian poet, gained popularity on social media for her short visual poetry. Despite her popularity, there has been little analysis of the stylistic elements in her poems. This research aims to fill that gap, expanding readers' knowledge and enhancing their interpretation of Kaur's work.

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Stylistics

Stylistics involves the description and analysis of the variability of linguistic forms in actual language use. Simpson (2014) stated, "Stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in the primacy of language." The functional significance of a text's linguistic features guides its interpretation. While these features alone do not determine a text's meaning, they provide a foundation for a stylistic interpretation, helping to explain why certain meanings are possible for the analyst.

A stylistic analysis must adhere to three basic principles, known as the three 'Rs'. First, it should be rigorous, meaning it must be based on an explicit analytical framework rather than a disordered and impressionistic sequence. It relies on structured language and discourse models that explain how we process and understand language patterns. Second, it should be retrievable, meaning the analysis must follow explicit criteria and terms that other stylists can approve and understand. Third, it should be replicable, meaning the method must be transparent enough to allow others to verify it, either by testing it on the same text or applying it to other texts. The principle is that the analysis should be accessible and verifiable.

The goal of stylistic studies is not only to describe linguistic form but also to demonstrate its significant function in interpreting the text. While there are many ways to understand literary works, stylistic analysis significantly enhances our awareness of them. According to Simpson (2014), to better depict the subject matter of literary works, stylists should examine literary writings using a variety of components.

1. Graphological Level

According to Leech (1969), graphology goes beyond orthography and encompasses the entire writing system, including punctuation, paragraphing, and spacing. It deals with the formalized rules of writing, focusing on the systematic formation, structure, and punctuation of sentences.

- a. *Punctuation*. Punctuation involves the marks used in writing to divide sentences and phrases. It is the system of using punctuation marks (Cuddon, 1999), which include the full stop, comma, colon, semicolon, question mark, exclamation mark, apostrophe, hyphen, ellipsis, quotation marks, parentheses, and brackets.
- b. *Paragraphing*. Originally, paragraphing was indicated by a short, horizontal stroke below the beginning of a line where there was a break in the sense. For practical purposes, a paragraph is a passage, section, or subdivision in a piece of writing, usually dealing with one particular point or aspect of the subject presented. The length of a paragraph can vary greatly (Cuddon, 1999, p. 637).

2. Phonological Level (Sounds)

Sound patterning in poetry functions linguistically to convey a poet's purpose or concern (Wichmann, Hammarstrom, Stadler & Christiansen, 2016). Poetry utilizes various forms of sound patterning. According to Lodge (2009), "Phonology is the study of linguistic systems, specifically how sound represents differences of meaning in a language." Phonology deals with sound patterns, rhyme schemes, and the pronunciation of words within sentences.

- a. *Rhyme Elements*. Rhyme elements include patterns such as stressed patterns and rhyme schemes followed in poetry (Johnson et al., 2014). English poetry often relies on rhythmic patterns, though some irregularity is typically imposed on these patterns, known as rhythm. Rhythm is expressed through a series of syllables, some stressed and some unstressed (Oliveira et al., 2005). Stress refers to the emphasis placed on a sound or syllable by pronouncing it more loudly or forcefully than others in the same word or phrase. In poetry, stress highlights a syllable or word as part of the poem's rhythm. According to Lodge (2009), there are four basic rhythmic patterns in poetry: 1) Iambic Rhythm: Each 'foot' consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable; 2) Trochaic Rhythm: Each foot consists of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable; 3) Anapestic Rhythm: Each foot consists of two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable; 4) Dactylic Rhythm: Each foot consists of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.
- b. *Alliteration*. Alliteration is the repetition of the same letters or sounds at the beginning of words that are close together (Johnson et al., 2014). While systematically used in Old English poetry, in Modern English poetry, it is generally used for a particular effect. It is closely related to onomatopoeia and involves the succession of the same consonant sounds, usually at the beginning of successive words.
- c. *Consonance*. Consonance is a type of half rhyme in which final consonants are repeated but with different preceding vowels. It involves the close repetition of identical consonant sounds before and after different vowels, such as in "slip - slop," "creak - croak," and "black - block" (Cuddon, 1999, p. 176).
- d. *Assonance*. Assonance occurs when two syllables in words that are close together have the same vowel sound but different consonants or the same consonants but different vowels (Cuddon, 1999, p. 58). Sometimes referred to as 'vocalic rhyme,' it involves the repetition of similar vowel sounds, usually close together, to achieve a particular effect of euphony.

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3. Morphological Level

Mark and Kirsten (2005) state that "Morphology refers to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed." This level focuses on the construction of words by adding prefixes and suffixes to root words.

- a. *Affixes*. Affixes involve forming new words by adding morphemes to existing words, which can be either prefixes or suffixes. Prefixes typically alter the meanings of words, while suffixes often change the part of speech (Yule, 2010).
- b. *Coinages*. Coinages refer to the process of creating new words from existing ones (Cuddon, 1999, p. 145). For example, combining "milky" and "way" creates "milky way," which has a distinct meaning from the individual words.

4. Lexico-Syntax

Lexico-Syntax combines "lexis" (vocabulary) and "syntax" (sentence construction). Lexis refers to the vocabulary used in any writing, while syntax refers to how words group together to form phrases and sentences (Tallerman, 2015). Lexico-syntactic patterns can include unusual or inverted word order, omission of words, and repetition.

- a. *Anastrophe*. Anastrophe is the inversion of the usual word order to emphasize certain words and focus the reader's attention (Cuddon, 1999, p. 37).
- b. *Parenthesis*. Parenthesis involves inserting extra information, an afterthought, or a comment within a sentence, interrupting its normal flow. This is usually indicated by dashes, commas, or parentheses (Cuddon, 1999, p. 639).
- c. *Ellipsis*. Ellipsis entails the deliberate omission of words that are implied by the context, creating brevity, emphasis, or ambiguity (Cuddon, 1999, p. 256). Historically, ellipses were marked variably with continuous lines, hyphens, or points.
- d. *Asyndeton*. Asyndeton is the deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses, producing a hurried rhythm (Cuddon, 1999, p. 59). This rhetorical device omits conjunctions, articles, and pronouns for speed and economy, often used in modern poetry for compact expression.
- e. *Anaphora*. Anaphora involves the repetition of a word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses, commonly used in ballads, songs, oratory, sermons, and various literary forms (Cuddon, 1999, p. 37).
- f. *Epizeuxis*. Epizeuxis is the emphatic repetition of a word or phrase without any breaks, used to produce a special effect (Cuddon, 1999, p. 283).

5. Figurative Language

Figurative language involves words or groups of words that exaggerate or alter their usual meanings through figures of speech. According to Bradford (2005), "Figurative language may involve analogies to similar concepts or other contexts and may involve exaggerations." Various types of figurative language include:

- a. *Hyperbole*. A figure of speech that exaggerates something to capture the reader's attention, often called overstatement.
- b. *Simile*. A comparison using the words "like" or "as," directly comparing two unlike things.
- c. *Metaphor*. A comparison made between two essentially unlike things without using "like" or "as," stating that one thing is another.
- d. *Personification*. Attributing human characteristics to animals, objects, or ideas, giving them human-like qualities.
- e. *Repetition*. The repeated use of sounds, words, or phrases to emphasize their importance and intensify meaning.
- f. *Symbolism*. Using a visible object, place, person, or experience to represent something beyond its literal meaning. For example, a "flower" can symbolize beauty or a beautiful girl.
- g. *Onomatopoeia*. Words that imitate or suggest the sounds they describe.
- h. *Irony*. Using words to convey a meaning that is opposite to their usual meaning.
- i. *Litotes*. An understatement where an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite.
- j. *Antithesis*. A balanced construction where words are opposed but presented in parallel structure.
- k. *Paradox*. A statement or situation that seems self-contradictory or absurd but may reveal an insight into life.
- l. *Synecdoche*. A figure of speech where a part represents the whole or vice versa.
- m. *Pleonasm*. The use of redundant words to emphasize a point, even if the meaning is already clear.
- n. *Metonymy*. Using the name of one object or concept to refer to another related object or concept, such as "the bottle" referring to "strong drink."
- o. *Euphemism*. Replacing a rude or impolite expression with a more refined or polite one.

METHOD

The research methodology adopted for this study is qualitative in nature, aiming to elucidate the various stylistic theories evident in Rupi Kaur's poems. The researchers followed a structured approach consisting of several steps:

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- a. Determining the unit of analysis, which involved defining the amount of text considered as a unit for coding purposes.
- b. Establishing the sampling criteria to select representative samples of Kaur's poems for analysis.
- c. Identifying key stylistic elements and constructing coding categories based on the identified objects within the poems.
- d. Drawing conclusions from the analysis of the coded data.

The data analysis proceeded as follows:

- a. Repeatedly reading Kaur's poems to develop a comprehensive understanding of the context and themes portrayed in her Instagram poetry.
- b. Marking instances of figurative language, including hyperbole, irony, litotes, metaphor, and personification, and conducting a detailed analysis of their intended meanings and effects.
- c. Categorizing the identified stylistic elements according to established stylistic language theories.
- d. Providing explanations for the stylistic features observed in the poems, encompassing graphological, phonological, morphological, and semantic aspects inherent in English poetry.

Validation of Findings

Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) define validity as the extent to which qualitative data is accurately measured, and reliability as the consistency of qualitative data measurement yielding expected outcomes. Here's a refined version of the provided text:

1. Credibility

Credibility refers to the assurance that qualitative research outcomes are reliable and trustworthy from the perspective of research participants. To ensure credibility, several steps were taken: (1) Member-checking involved providing participants with numerical codes corresponding to the data being analyzed, followed by creating a form to verify whether any data remained unanalyzed. (2) Peer discussions were conducted to seek assistance in evaluating data analysis, ensuring comprehensive coverage of all data. (3) Writers ensured rigor by meticulously re-reading and cross-referencing all analyzed data against summary findings.

2. Transferability

Transferability concerns the degree to which qualitative research findings can be applied or generalized to other contexts or settings. In this study, transferability was enhanced by comparing respondent data with research findings to derive detailed conclusions. Consequently, the research findings can serve as valuable resources for subsequent studies.

3. Dependability

Dependability underscores the significance of acknowledging the evolving context of ongoing research. In this investigation, dependability was achieved by meticulously documenting all research findings throughout the research process. During data analysis, writers engaged in thorough review and reconciliation of dialogue transcripts with relevant theoretical frameworks.

4. Confirmability

Confirmability, or objectivity, pertains to the degree to which research findings can be confirmed by others. In this study, confirmability was ensured through expert validation, involving tests conducted by individuals possessing competence and expertise within the same field of study. The research outcomes were corroborated by fellow researchers with specialized knowledge relevant to the subject area under scrutiny.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of three poems by Rupi Kaur is structured around an examination of various language levels, including phonological, graphological, grammatical, and semantic aspects.

Poem 1 "Home Body", page 51 (posted on July 24, 2023):

sometimes

i love you means

i want to love you

sometimes

i love you means

i'll stay a little while longer

sometimes

i love you means

i'm not sure how to leave

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sometimes
i love you means
 i have nowhere else to go

Table 1. Poem 1 “Home Body”

Level of Language		Total
Phonological Level		5
Rhyme	?	
Rhythm	?	
Alliteration	?	
Assonance	?	
Consonance	?	
Graphological Level		6
Font Style	?	
Font Size	?	
Alignment	?	
Line Breaks	?	
Capitalization	-	
Punctuation	?	
Overall Layout	?	
Grammatical Level		8
Sentence Structure	?	
Verb Usage	?	
Pronouns	?	
Contractions	?	
Noun Phrases	?	
Adjective Phrases	?	
Adverbial Phrases	?	
Sentence Fragments	?	
Semantic Level		1
Figurative Language	-	
Implied Meaning	?	

Poem 2 “The Sun and Her Flowers”, page 213 (Posted on June 29, 2023):

i stand
 on the sacrifices
 of a million women before me thinking
what can i do
to make this mountain taller so the women after
me can see farther legacy

Table 2. Poem 2 “The Sun and Her Flowers”

Level of Language		Total
Phonological Level		3
Rhyme	?	
Rhythm	-	
Alliteration	-	
Assonance	?	
Consonance	?	
Graphological Level		
Font Style	?	

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Font Size	?	6
Alignment	?	
Line Breaks	?	
Capitalization	-	
Punctuation	?	
Overall Layout	?	
Grammatical Level		
Sentence Structure	-	7
Verb Usage	?	
Pronouns	?	
Contractions	?	
Noun Phrases	?	
Adjective Phrases	?	
Adverbial Phrases	?	
Sentence Fragments	?	
Semantic Level		
Figurative Language	?	2
Implied Meaning	?	

Poem 3 “The Sun and Her Flowers”, page 146 (Posted on May 14, 2023):

what if
 there isn't enough time
 to give her what she deserves do you think
 if i begged the sky hard enough my mother's soul would
 return to me as my daughter so i can give her
 the comfort she gave me my whole life

Table 3. Poem 3 “The Sun and Her Flowers”

Level of Language		Total
Phonological Level		
Rhyme	?	4
Rhythm	-	
Alliteration	?	
Assonance	?	
Consonance	?	
Graphological Level		
Font Style	?	6
Font Size	?	
Alignment	?	
Line Breaks	?	
Capitalization	-	
Punctuation	?	
Overall Layout	?	
Grammatical Level		
Sentence Structure	-	7
Verb Usage	?	
Pronouns	?	
Contractions	?	
Noun Phrases	?	
Adjective Phrases	?	

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Adverbial Phrases	?	
Sentence Fragments	?	
Semantic Level		2
Figurative Language	?	
Implied Meaning	?	

Utilizing a meticulous selection process, 54 instances of stylistic data were chosen for comprehensive examination within the scope of the research. Drawing upon Simpson's (2014) theoretical framework, the data in the preceding subsection were meticulously categorized and analyzed, yielding the following insights:

In "Home Body" (page 51), the poet adeptly employs five elements from the Phonological Level, six elements from the Graphological Level, eight elements from the Grammatical Level, and one element from the Semantic Level. This orchestration crafts a narrative that immerses the reader in a rich tapestry of experience.

Conversely, "The Sun and Her Flowers" (page 213) artfully incorporates three elements from the Phonological Level, six elements from the Graphological Level, seven elements from the Grammatical Level, and two elements from the Semantic Level. This amalgamation constructs a unique fabric of language, intertwining layers of meaning and imagery.

Similarly, "The Sun and Her Flowers" (page 146) captivates its audience by utilizing four elements from the Phonological Level, six elements from the Graphological Level, seven elements from the Grammatical Level, and two elements from the Semantic Level. This exploration delves into the depths of emotions and concepts, offering a profound engagement with the reader.

Each poem showcases a diverse array of linguistic elements, showcasing the poets' creativity and mastery across multiple levels of expression. However, the distribution of elements varies among the poems, with "Home Body" exhibiting the highest count in the Grammatical Level, while "The Sun and Her Flowers" share similar counts across the remaining three levels.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After scrutinizing the data from three of Rupi Kaur's Instagram poems, the researchers identified stylistic elements employed by the poet across various linguistic dimensions:

In terms of graphological features, the poet consistently utilizes lowercase letters throughout her poems, fostering an atmosphere of intimacy and vulnerability. Furthermore, the poems employ minimal punctuation, typically ending stanzas with only a period, enhancing the sense of fluidity and continuity.

Regarding phonological features, there is no discernible rhyme scheme present. Instead, the poems rely on the natural cadence of language to convey emotion, allowing the words themselves to evoke feeling and meaning.

In the realm of grammatical structure, the poems exhibit simplicity and conciseness, effectively conveying the poet's emotions and thoughts through straightforward sentences. This direct approach draws readers into the poet's perspective and enhances their connection to the experience being described.

Semantic analysis reveals the presence of various figurative language devices, including metaphor, imagery, personification, symbolism, hypothetical questions, and repetition. These elements add depth and complexity to the poems, enriching their thematic content and emotional resonance.

While this research offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its theoretical limitations. Future studies in this area could explore alternative theories of stylistics or focus on specific stylistic elements to uncover additional nuances and variations in poetic expression.

Stylistic analysis provides a profound exploration of the intricate layers of language within a poem, enabling readers to uncover hidden nuances, emotions, and intentions. By examining elements such as phonology, graphology, grammar, and semantics, we gain deeper insight into the poet's unique voice and perspective. This analytical approach enhances our understanding of the poem's themes, tone, and literary techniques, fostering a richer appreciation for the artistry of poetry. Engaging with stylistic analysis not only enriches our intellectual understanding but also deepens our emotional connection to the work, sharpening our critical thinking skills in the process.

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