

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEM 'DREAMS' BY LANGSTON
HUGHES**



¹Shakiaz Ahmed

²Kashif Jamal

^{3*}Nasim Gul

¹MS English (Linguistics) Scholar, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST) Kohat, KP, Pakistan. Email: shakiazahmad@gmail.com

²BS English (Linguistics), Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST) Kohat, KP, Pakistan Email: Itskashifjamal758@gmail.com

^{3*}Lecturer, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST) Kohat, KP, Pakistan. Corresponding Author Email: naseemgul2016@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper intends to present stylistic analysis of Langston Hughes's poem '*Dreams*' (1922) by examining in detail, its phonological, morphological, and pragmatic features/levels. The analysis reveals the poet's use of literary devices and techniques to convey the importance of holding onto one's dreams and their interpretations. The major findings of the study highlight the poem's unique and rich style, symbolism and rich imagery and powerful messages, while making it, a linguistic masterpiece and an excellent source of inspiration for readership, writers and literati. In the same vein, this study contributes into a deeper understanding of Hughes' poetic artistry and the significance of '*Dreams*' in literary discourse. Finally, the study aims to guide researchers who desire to work in the arenas of literature and linguistics to appreciate literary genres, particularly poetry by well-known poets in the realms of literature.

Keywords: Stylistics, Phonology, Morphology, Pragmatics, Langston Hughes, Dreams

Introduction

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics that focuses on the scientific study of style and its effects in the production of any literary metrical composition. Stylistics deals with literary and non-literary text. It is considered a bridge between linguistics and literature as it is the intriguing study of language style in literature, unfolding how authors craft meanings and atmosphere through their unique of words. In the same way, as opined by Assadi (2025) "stylistics, as a discipline, seeks to uncover the distinctive characteristics that differentiate one writer's work from others by investigating key linguistic and structural elements." Correspondingly, Mugair (2013: 316) claims that stylistics is an in-depth study of writing to achieve specific effect by diction and its appropriate order in the formulation of text. Additionally, it is concerned with the study of style in texts (Leech, 2007). According to Wales (2011: 397), style refers to a person's perceived unique way of writing or speaking.

Based on the aforementioned definitions there are various degrees or levels of stylistic analysis in the same text is examined on the basis of numerous levels, viz. Phonological, Morphological, Lexical, Syntactic, Graphological Semantic, Pragmatic, and Discourse

analysis among others. In brief, phonological analysis examines sound patterns (Levin, 1962), Morphological analysis explores word structure/s (Crystal, 2008), lexical analysis focuses on word choice and its effects (Halliday, 1971; Gul et al., 2024), and syntactic analysis investigates sentence structure (Toolan, 1998), Semantic analysis uncovers meaning (Leech, 1969), pragmatic analysis considers contextual meaning (Grice, 1975), and discourse analysis looks at larger textual structures (Fairclough, 1992; Gul et al., 2023). Furthermore, these levels collectively provide a comprehensive understanding over literary style and its subsequent effects on readerships.

However, in the context of this study, Langston Hughes was one of the prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance, celebrated for his powerful and impressive poetry that captured the essence of the African American experiences. His style is characterized by its accessibility, musicality, and deep exploration of themes such as racial identity, social justice, and commendable struggles in the fabrics everyday life. Hughes's diction/the choice and use of words in literature is marked by its use of common, conversational and idiomatic language, rich imagery, and rhythmic pace that reflect major themes of struggle, hope and identity which contribute to unique and expressive voice.

In the same vein, in his poem '*Dreams*', Hughes employs concise and pathetic style in order to convey the importance of holding onto one's dreams. Notwithstanding, the diction is simple yet powerful, with phrases like "Hold fast to dreams" and "For if dreams die / Life is like a broken-winged bird / that cannot fly." Through this imagery, Hughes intentionally uses such style and diction to convey 'the fragility and beauty of dreams', emphasizing their crucial role in giving meaning and purpose to life. Undeniably, the poem's conciseness and directness add to its emotional impact, making it a compelling and thought-provoking work that resonates with readers.

Research Questions

- How does stylistic analysis apply to the poem's '*Dreams*' phonological and morphological levels?
- How does stylistic analysis at the pragmatic level reveal the meaning and interpretation of the poem '*Dreams*'?

Research Objectives

- To examine the morphological and phonological features/levels of the poem

'*Dreams*' through stylistic analysis.

- To conduct a stylistic analysis of the poem '*Dreams*' at the pragmatic level.

Significance of the Study

The study provides a deeper understanding of Langston Hughes' poetic style and artistic vision, contributing to the field of literary analysis and stylistics. By examining the major themes and messages conveyed in the poem '*Dreams*', in this regard, the study offers insights into Hughes' work and enhances appreciation and interpretation among readers and scholars. The study also aims to add to the critical commentary particularly on the poem '*Dreams*' and generally to other poems written by other bards/poets.

Rationale

Numerous studies are conducted on Langston Hughes' other major poems, viz. *Mother to Son* (1922), *I, Too* (1926), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) and *Harlem* (1951), but the poem *Dreams* (1922) is less explored from the perspective of stylistics. Therefore, this study is conducted to explore the linguistic and literary features of Langston Hughes' poem '*Dreams*', by analyzing the poet's usage of literary devices and techniques to convey the major themes and messages prevailing in the poem. Correspondingly, it aims to contribute to the scholarly discourse on Hughes' works and poetic style, providing a nuanced understanding of the poem's significance and relevance to readers.

Literature Review

Words have the power to shape our perceptions, evoke emotions, and connect us with other as stylistic analyses the linguistic choices that shape and reshape, construct and reconstruct our perceptions, beliefs, evoke emotions, and create connections between writers and readers. Stylistics as a branch of linguistics, uncovers that how people use language in different ways to express themselves in various contexts From ancient times to now, it helps to understand that how language works and how people uses language effectively to convey meaning and create effects. Stylistics; where linguistics meets literature, unlocking the power of words and recapitulates the past events' effects with present events. Similarly, as opined by (Sinclair, 1991; Habib et al., 2025; Gul et al., 2022) "the language of literature is not a separate entity from the language of everyday life, but rather a particular use of the same linguistic resources." Correspondingly, stylistics is the study of literary language from stylistics integration

(Widdowson, 2014; Gul et al., 2023). Additionally, 'Stylistics' is a word which is derived from style and 'style' is the outcome of the Latin word *Elocutio* which means style. Thus, 'Stylistics' refers to the study of style; it may be the style of a person or the style of a writer.

A Dictionary of Literary Terms defines style as "The characteristic manner of expression in prose or verse; how a particular writer says things. The analysis and assessment of style involves examination of a writer's choice of words, his figures of speech, the devices (rhetorical or otherwise), the shape of his sentences, and the shape of his paragraphs-- indeed, of every conceivable aspect of his language and the way in which he uses it. Style defies complete analysis or definition... it is the tone and voice of the writer himself; as peculiar to him as his laugh, his walk, his handwriting and the expression on his face." Moreover, (Lucas 1955; Ahmed et al., 2024; Ishtiaq et al., 2021) state that, "the effective use of language, especially in prose, whether to make statements or to rouse emotions. It involves first of all the power to put fact with clarity and brevity." Furthermore, (Bilal, et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2025) claim that, "the use of language by a speaker or a writer in an effective way is called style."

However, Langston Hughes (February 1, 1902 - May 22, 1967) was a renowned American poet and playwright. His writing style was marked by simplicity and a deep connection to African American experiences (Rampersad, 1986; Sajjad et al., 2023). Hughes' poetry examined themes of equality, and social justice, using simple language to convey powerful messages. His work celebrated African American culture and reflected the struggles and triumphs of black Americans. With a unique voice, Hughes gave expression to the hopes, optimism, wish and confidence, making him a celebrated figure in American literature.

Methodological Framework

This qualitative research study examines Langston Hughes's poem '*Dreams*' through a detailed analysis of its linguistic features. The researcher explores phonological, morphological, and pragmatic aspects to uncover the poet's intended meaning and artistic craft. By investigating the interplay of language and theme, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of Hughes' poetic style and the profound insights conveyed through his work. Through this analysis, the research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the poem's significance and its contribution to literary discourse. The

study's findings will shed light on Hughes' poetic craftsmanship.

Data Analysis

Phonological Level

The field of phonology investigates how languages structure sounds into distinct patterns. Phonologists investigate various key questions related to sound organization in languages. They explore how languages distinguish between different words through sound organization, and what constraints or restrictions languages impose on sound sequences. Additionally, phonologists study the changes or alternations that occur in sounds when they appear in illicit sequences. Finally, they investigate how sounds are grouped into larger units such as syllables, stress feet, words, and phrases, providing a deeper understanding of the complex sound systems found in languages.

However, in this paper, the poem '*Dreams*' by Langston Hughes has been analyzed, like alliteration, assonance, consonance, repetition, and rhyme scheme have been highlighted.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line in quick successions, such as the sound of /d/ in "dreams die" or /b/ in "broken-winged bird."

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line, such as the sound of /i/ in "Life is a broken-winged bird" and the sound of /o/ in "That cannot fly."

Consonance

Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line, such as the sound of /f/ and /d/ in "For if dreams die" and in "Hold fast to dreams." It means that consonance refers to a combination of musical notes that sound pleasant together.

Repetition

Repetition refers to recurrence of some words, phrases, or a line to stress the main idea. The poem shows the repetition of "Hold fast to dreams." This verse emphasizes the main idea of the dream.

Rhyme Scheme

Rhyme scheme refers to the pattern of rhymes at the end of lines in a poem. The poem follows an ABCB rhyme scheme, and this pattern continues until the end in both stanzas.

Morphological Level

Morphology is a crucial part of language study that examines how words are structured and formed. The most basic unit of a word is a morpheme, which is the smallest meaningful part of language that can't be broken down further. There are two main types of morphemes: free morphemes and bound morphemes. Free morphemes can stand alone as words and make sense on their own, while bound morphemes need to be attached to another morpheme to have meaning. Another important concept in morphology is the "root," which refers to the core part of a word that other morphemes are added to. Free morphemes can be used independently in a sentence, and they play a key role in forming words. Therefore, from the poem '*Dreams*', free morphemes, bound morphemes and roots are the following:

Free Morphemes

- Hold
- Fast
- Dream
- Life
- Bird
- Field
- Snow
- Go
- Die
- Fly

Bound Morphemes

- -ed (in "broken-winged" and "frozen")
- -en (in "broken" and "frozen")

Roots

- Hold
- Fast
- Dream
- Life
- Wing

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

- Bird
- Field
- Snow
- Go
- Die
- Fly
- break (in "broken")
- freeze (in "frozen")

Pragmatic Level

Pragmatics is about understanding how people use language to communicate effectively in various contexts, taking into account the social, cultural, and environmental factors that influence the meaning of what is being said. In the poem '*Dreams*', Hughes has used some certain pragmatic features that have been highlighted as followed:

Metaphor

Metaphor is a suggested comparison between two unlike things in order to point out a similarity; a metaphor DOES NOT use the word like, as as, or than. In this poem, the comparison of "Life" to "a broken-winged bird" and "a barren field" are metaphors. Here, Hughes equates life without dreams to a bird that cannot fly and a field that is barren, conveying the idea that life loses its beauty and vitality without dreams.

Symbolism

Symbolism refers to any person, object, or action that has additional meaning beyond itself. Therefore, dreams are symbolic of hope, aspirations, and the driving force behind human endeavors. The bird and field can also be seen as symbols: the bird represents freedom and the ability to soar, while the field represents fertility and growth. The snow that freezes the field can symbolize the cold, harsh reality of a life without dreams.

Imagery

Imagery refers to mental pictures which are created by descriptions of the senses, so that we can see and feel what the character is experiencing. Therefore, the poem is rich in imagery, with vivid descriptions that evoke powerful images in the reader's mind. Examples include:

- a broken-winged bird That cannot fly (visual imagery)

- a barren field Frozen with snow (visual and tactile imagery)

Additionally, the imagery helps to create a sense of desolation and hopelessness, emphasizing the importance of holding onto dreams.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to discover the style and methods used by Langston Hughes while writing the poem 'Dreams'. The poem was stylistically analyzed on three fundamental grounds: phonological, morphological, and pragmatic, revealing the poet's use of various literary devices and techniques to convey the importance of holding onto one's dreams. The analysis proved that the poem has many hidden features that require interpretation, and the poet's use of metaphors, imagery, and other devices creates a vivid picture, igniting a spark of hope and serving as an excellent source of inspiration for the disheartened youth, making the poem a linguistic marvel.

Recommendations

The study on stylistic analysis of Langston Hughes' poem 'Dreams' highlights the poet's masterful use of phonological, morphological, and pragmatic devices to convey the significance of holding onto one's dreams and their interpretations. The findings suggest that further research on other literary works could benefit from a similar approach, uncovering new insights into the poet's craft and artistic vision. Furthermore, future studies could explore other levels of stylistic analysis, such as lexical, grammatical, or semantic analysis, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Hughes' poetic style. Additionally, comparative studies analyzing multiple poems or poets could provide valuable insights into the use of literary devices and techniques in different contexts.

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Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

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Appendix

Poems “Dreams by Langston Hughes”

Hold fast to dreams

For if dreams die

Life is a broken-winged bird

That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams

For when dreams go

Life is a barren field

Frozen with snow.