Stylistic Analysis of "This is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams

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Abstract: This paper delves into William Carlos Williams' poem "This is Just to Say" employing four levels of stylistic analysis: phonological, morphological, graphological, and lexico-syntactic. At the phonological level, attention is given to the poem's rhythm, the use of alliteration, and the arrangement of sounds and words in the poem. The repetition of sounds and the use of simple, everyday language contribute to its musicality. At the Morphological level, the use of derivational and inflectional affixes is present. The structure and formation of words are also examined. Williams uses concise and straightforward language, with primarily monosyllabic words, contributing to the poem's accessibility and clarity. The brevity of the lines mirrors the brevity of the apology being offered in the poem. On the other hand, the typography which consists of informal tone and layout is explained in the Graphological level. It is revealed at this level that the author does not use any punctuation marks. The poem's short lines and lack of punctuation create a sense of rhythm and flow, enhancing its oral quality. Lastly, through the identification of different figures of speech, the author conveyed his poem in an artful way which is analyzed at the Lexico-syntactic level. The lack of complex syntax mirrors the directness of the speaker's confession. The simplicity of the language belies the complexity of human relationships and the emotions involved in admitting wrongdoing. By dissecting the poem "This is Just to Say" through these four lenses, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of William Carlos Williams' stylistic craftsmanship and the deeper layers of meaning embedded within the poem.

Keywords—stylistic analysis; phonological level; morphological level; graphological level; lexico-syntactic level

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Style and Stylistics

The concept of Style does not exist in a vacuum; it has meaning when language is used to communicate the message. Linguistic form can be interpreted as a set of possibilities for the production of texts, and thereby linguistic form makes possible linguistic style. Stylistics is the study of linguistic style, whereas (theoretical). Linguistics is the study of linguistic form. Linguistic form is generated from the components of language (sounds, parts of words, and words) and consists of the representations - phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, etc. - which together form a code by which what we say or write has a specific meaning. Stylistic choices are designed to have effects on the reader or listener, which are generally understood as (a) communicating meanings that go beyond the linguistically determined meanings, (b) communicating attitude (as in persuasive effects of style), and (c) expressing or communicating emotion.

1.2 Stylistic Analysis

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Wales, K. (1990), said that "the goal of most stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or to relate literary effects to linguistic causes where these are felt to be relevant". In that case, there is a deeper cause for a stylistics to look formally into the features of the text; whenever a stylistics studies a text in a deeper sense the layers of meaning that hides within the selection will closely reveal than just the basic plot.

On the contrary, Barry claimed that rhetoric teaches "its students how to structure an argument, how to make effective use of figures of speech, and generally how to pattern and vary a speech or a piece of writing to produce maximum impact." He says that stylistics' analysis of these similar qualities—or rather how they are utilized—would, therefore, entail that stylistics is a modern interpretation of the ancient study. Thus, stylistics is the pursuit of understanding key elements of style that affect a given audience's interpretation of a text. The

stylistic analysis of this paper includes the following level of analysis:

Phonological Level it is the study of the sound system of a language and also describes formal rules of pronunciation. It focuses on analyzing sound patterns, the utterance of different words, and forming systemic use of sound in language to know about the meaning, ideas, focuses, and idiosyncratic behaviors in a text.

Morphological Level refers to the study of how words are formed, where they originated from, what are their grammatical forms, what the function of prefixes and suffixes in the formation of words, the system of gender, number, and others.

Graphological level of stylistic analysis is a method used in literary studies and linguistics to analyze texts based on their visual or graphic features.

Lexico-syntactic level of stylistic analysis is a method used in linguistics and literary studies to analyze the stylistic features of a text based on its vocabulary (lexis) and syntax (sentence structure). Hence, through the use of these four features in stylistics, one could appreciate the patterns, forms, and levels that are present in the selection.

1.3 Introduction to the Author: William Carlos Williams

"This Is Just to Say" is a famous poem by American poet William Carlos Williams, first published in 1934 in his collection titled "Spring and All." Following Pound, Williams was one of the principal poets of the Imagist movement; though, as time went on, he began to increasingly disagree with the values put forth in the work of Pound and especially T. S. Eliot, both of whom, he felt, were too attached to European culture and traditions. Continuing to experiment with new techniques of meter and lineation, Williams sought to invent an entirely fresh—and singularly American—poetic form, whose subject matter was centered on the everyday circumstances of life and the lives of common people.

1.4 Introduction to the Poem: This is Just to Say

"This Is Just To Say" is a short poem by William Carlos Williams, first published in 1934. It's a simple yet powerful piece that captures a moment of apology and reconciliation. The poem takes the form of a note left by the speaker to someone they have wronged. In just 28 words, Williams conveys a sense of sincerity and regret for having eaten plums that were presumably meant for someone else. The poem's brevity and directness invite readers to contemplate themes of guilt, forgiveness, and the complexities of human relationships.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted in this study. It employs the content analysis research design to examine the stylistic choices made in the poem.

2.2 Source of Data

The source of data is the poem "This is Just to Say" written by William Carlos Williams.

2.3 Analysis of Data

The method applied in the analysis of data in this paper was thematic analysis which was used to determine, interpret, and analyze the elements, themes, and meanings of the poem in four stylistic levels.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 On Phonological Level

3.1.1 On Alliteration

so **s**weet   (Line 6)

According to Wales (2011), alliteration is the repetition of the initial consonant in two or more words. Simpson adds that alliteration is a type of rhyme scheme that is based on similarities between consonants (2004, p. 16).

3.1.2 On Rhythm

According to Dell Hymes, rhythm in the context of language is the patterned recurrence of stress, intonation, and timing in speech. He emphasizes that rhythm plays a crucial role in communication, influencing the flow, emphasis, and overall effectiveness of spoken language.

The poem is a three-stanza poem that is separated into sets of four lines, or quatrains. The lines are limited to one or two words only, spoken by a first-person narrator. Additionally, as one reads through this piece it becomes obvious that the words are almost all single-syllable. There are only seven that stretch to two or three syllables. This creates a sense of unity within the text, a feeling that does exist within the meter or line.

Williams chose to write this piece without a specific rhyme scheme or metrical pattern in mind. It is composed in what is known as free verse. That being said, it does not mean the lines are not organized in a specific way. The line breaks are systematically scattered throughout the short narrative and all the words are arranged for the greatest impact.

"This Is Just To Say" is a snapshot of a poem, a moment in time, a tiny field of 28 words, 37 syllables, and 3 stanzas. The title reads like a first line and there's a temptation to follow straight on into the poem proper. Almost before you know it, you've finished reading, perfectly reflecting the quick burst of energy that created the poem in the first place.

3.1.3 Summary of Findings on the Phonological Level

At the phonological level, William Carlos Williams employed musical devices, such as alliteration in their poetry. On rhythm, the poem "This Is Just To Say" by William Carlos Williams doesn't adhere strictly to a particular rhythmic pattern like iambic pentameter or trochaic tetrameter. Instead, it's written in free verse, meaning it lacks a regular meter or rhyme scheme. However, it does have a certain cadence and flow created by the careful arrangement of words and phrases. The poem is composed of short lines and simple language, giving it a conversational tone that enhances its overall impact.

3.2 On Morphological Level

3.2.1 On Affixation

Affixation, according to Hamawand (2011), is the morphological process of deriving a new word by adding an affix, namely a bound morpheme, to a root or base.

3.2.1.1 Inflectional

3.2.1.1.1 On Nouns

the plum*s*   (Line 2)
3.2.1.1.2 On Verbs
sav*ing*   (Line 7)
According to Richard Nordquist, an *inflectional morpheme* is a suffix that's added to a word (a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb) to assign a particular grammatical property to that word, such as its tense, number, possession, or comparison. Inflectional morphemes never change the grammatical category (part of speech) of a word. Inflectional morphemes in English include the bound morphemes -*s*; -*en*; and -*ing*.

In the poem, the inflection –*s* is attached to the noun "plum", making it plural, and -*ing is attached* to the noun "save".

3.2.2 On Derivational

According to Martini (2016), derivational morphemes are bound morphemes or affixes that derive (create) new words by either changing the meaning or the part of speech or both English only has prefixes and suffixes. Bound morphemes can be inflectional or derivational. In English, derivational morphemes can be prefixes and suffixes.

Verb
Eat*en*-past participle of eat

In the poem, the derivation -*en* is attached to the verb "eat", changing its tense into a past participle.

Summary of Findings on the Morphological Level

Based on the analysis made at the Morphological level, it is derived that the poet only incorporated the use of morphemes to indicate aspects of the grammatical function of a word, i.e. inflectional morpheme, and also, to form words of a different grammatical category, i.e. derivational morpheme.

3.3 On Graphological Level

By this analysis, the study adapted Levenston's (1992) proposal where four (4) different levels within the graphic representation of language are used.

3.3.1 On Spelling

3.3.1.1 Formal vs. Informal Language

William Carlos Williams used an informal tone of language. The speaker is casual, forthright, and a little guilty. Williams wanted his poetry to be rooted in reality, with strong images (he was a keen Imagist) and a local feel. "This Is Just To Say" is a work of intimate detail; just a few words laid out neatly that hold so much more.

Then there's a need to step back. Although the poem, the note, is very short and seems like a personal confession of sorts (actual husband to wife) there is much more going on beyond the immediate field. Who could the speaker be confessing to? It's not necessarily a wife, it could be a friend, a partner, or a lover. The plums could be a metaphor—sweet, delicious, fresh—for sexual activity, for love. Or temptation?

3.3.2 On Typography

Typography is the art of arranging letters and text in a way that makes the copy legible, clear, and visually appealing to the reader. It involves font style, appearance, and structure, which aims to elicit certain emotions and convey specific messages. In short, typography is what brings the text to life (Hannah, 2022).

The poem starts with a title that is styled in capital each word and other capitalization is also present like I *(pronoun)* and forgive *(verb)* which is the first word of the first stanza and third stanza respectively. This suggests the beginning of two different sentences. The rest are in lowercase typography.

3.3.3 On Layout
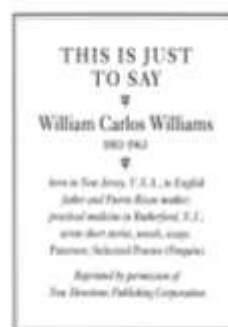
Figure 1. The version of the poem above is a reprinted copy of the New Directions Publishing Corporation

Layout means the arrangement of predetermined items such as image, text, and style on a page. It establishes the overall appearance and relationships between the graphic elements to achieve a smooth flow of message and eye movement for maximum effectiveness or impact.

Based on the figure above, the poet made use of a three-stanza poem. The alignment of the poem is left-justified as can be observed in Figure 1 which means that the text used the left margin as its reference point. Text at the left margin touches the left margin while text on the right margin wraps naturally where the words break. A justified text allows easier reading.

The form and lineation are crucial to the success of this little poem. Short lines need to be read with care, as a lack of rhyme and rhythm tends to make the reader wary. If you're reading these lines for the first time be ready to change tack at the end of lines 8 and 10.

3.3.4 Enjambment: It is defined as a thought in verse that does not come to an end at a line break; instead, it rolls over to the next line. For example,

> I have eaten
> the plums
> That was in
> The ice box

3.3.5 Summary of Findings on the Graphological Level

There is no use of punctuation marks in the poem "This is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams, however, there are other graphological devices used in the poem such as lineation and enjambment. William Carlos Williams, known for his minimalist and imagist poetry, often avoided traditional punctuation marks to create a more immediate and fluid connection between the reader and the poem's content. This stylistic choice enhances the sense of spontaneity, rhythm, and visual impact in his works, allowing readers to engage more directly with the imagery and themes without the interruption of conventional punctuation.

3.4 On Lexico-Syntactical Level

3.4.1 On Parts of Speech

There are eight parts of speech in the English language: noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection. The part of speech indicates how the word functions in meaning as well as grammatically within the sentence. An individual word can function as more than one part of speech when used in different circumstances. Understanding parts of speech is essential for determining the correct definition of a word when using the dictionary.

3.4.1.1 On Nouns

A noun is a word used for a place, person, or thing (Ahmad, 2022). There are four nouns used in the poem which are *plum* (line 2), *icebox* (line 4), *saving* (line 7), and *breakfast* (line 8).

3.4.1.2 On Pronouns

A pronoun is defined as a word that replaces a noun in a sentence (Ahmad, 2022). A pronoun is usually substituted for a specific noun, which is called its antecedent. There are five pronouns used in the poem. The pronouns employed in the poem are *I* (line 1), *that* (line 3), *you* (line 6), *me* (line 9) and *they* (line 10).

3.4.1.3 On Verbs

A verb shows the happening or state of something (Ahmad, 2022). There is a main verb and sometimes one or more helping verbs. ("She can sing." Sing is the main verb; can is the helping verb.) A verb must agree with its subject in number (both are singular or both are plural). Verbs also take different forms to express tense. The verbs used in the poem are: *have* (line 1), *eaten* (line 1), *forgive* (line 9), and *were* (line 10)

3.4.1.4 On Adjectives

An adjective is defined as a word that gives information about a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase (Ahmad, 2022). It usually answers the question of which one, what kind, or how many. Articles [a, an, the] are usually classified as adjectives. There are four verbs employed in the poem; *which* (line 5), *delicious* (line 10), *sweet* (line 11), and *cold* (line 12).

3.4.1.5 On Preposition

Prepositions are the words that are put before nouns or pronouns. These denote in what relation the person or thing indicated by it exists, about something else (Ahmad, 2022). Some examples of prepositions are words like "in," "at," "on," "of," and "to." Only the preposition *in* (line 3) is used in the poem.

3.4.1.6 On Conjunction

Conjunctions are simply words that join sentences, clauses, and sometimes words (Ahmad, 2022). There are three kinds of conjunctions: coordinating, paired, and subordinating. There are only three conjunctions employed in the poem which are: *and* (line 5), *for* (line 8), and *so* (line 11).

3.4.2 On Figure of Speech

A figure of speech is a word or phrase using figurative language—language that has other meanings than its normal definition. In other words, figures of speeches rely on implied or suggested meaning, rather than a dictionary definition. We express and develop them through hundreds of different rhetorical techniques, from specific types like metaphors and similes to more general forms like sarcasm and slang (https://literarydevices.net/this-is-just-to-say/).

3.4.2.1 On Imagery

Imagery is used to make readers perceive things involving their five senses. The poet employed imagery such as *"I have eaten/the plums"*, *"they were delicious/so sweet"* and *"that were in/the icebox."*

3.4.2.2 On Irony

Irony is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meanings of the words. The poet uses this device in the ending lines of the poem where the speaker's apology lacks true meaning. For example,

"Forgive me
they were so sweet
and so cold"

3.4.2.3 On Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between objects that are different. *Plums* are the metaphor for the speaker's happiness.

3.4.2.4 On Symbolism

Symbolism is using symbols to signify ideas and qualities, giving them symbolic meanings that are different from the literal meanings. Plums might symbolize the premature death of an object or person.

3.4.3 Summary of Findings on the Lexico-Syntactical Level

It is inferred that the use of figures of speech like imagery, metaphor, and irony evokes the speaker's guilt and the complex emotions surrounding a simple apology for eating someone else's plums. On the other hand, in parts of speech, the poet uses simple lexical items, yet makes sure that these can help in transferring the poem's message and can help produce imagery.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, "This Is Just To Say" is a masterful example of William Carlos Williams' ability to imbue everyday experiences with profound significance. Through its structural simplicity, plain language, vivid imagery, and thematic richness, the poem invites readers to contemplate the complexities of human desire and the nature of confession.

"This Is Just To Say" is a concise and evocative poem by William Carlos Williams, characterized by its simplicity and directness. It consists of a note left by the speaker apologizing for consuming plums that were likely intended for someone else. The poem's brevity and informal tone invite readers to contemplate themes of intimacy, guilt, and the ordinary moments of everyday life.

The stylistic analysis of the poem "This is Just to Say" by William Carlos William has four levels which are: Phonological level, Morphological level, Graphological level, and Lexico-Syntactic level that unfolds different variety of linguistics form such as the discovery of its rhythm and the use of alliteration. At the Morphological level, the use of derivational and inflectional affixes is present. On the other hand, the typography, informal tone, and layout are explained in the Graphological level but there are no punctuation marks used in the poem. Lastly, by identifying the different figures of speech employed by the poet, the poem is conveyed in an artful way which is analyzed in the Lexico-Syntactic Level.

5. RECOMMENDATION

This paper analyzed the stylistic features of "This is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams. The four levels of stylistic analysis on the poem still need further analysis especially under graphological and lexico-syntactic levels as these levels are ambiguous in their scope and definition in stylistic analysis and need further research to find out the scope to avoid overlapping with another stylistic level of analysis. The analysis of free morphemes under the morphological level of analysis was not included and must be explored and analyzed by future researchers.

6. APPENDIX

This is Just to Say
by William Carlos Williams - 1883-1963

I have eaten

the plums

that was in

the icebox

and which

you were probably

saving

for breakfast

Forgive me

they were delicious

so sweet

and so cold

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