

# "Linguistic Strategies in Poetry: A Descriptive Analysis of Artistic Choices and Deviations"

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## ABSTRACT

Authors and poets use different stylistic deviations or strategies in writing their poems to better convey emotions, scenarios, and stories to appeal to the reader's experience. These deviations are not negative, but rather a deliberate choice made by the artist to create an expressive and creative effect in their works. Elements like archaic language, syntax inversion, non-standard grammar, colloquial language, and pronoun usage help the author develop their pieces. However, studies show that too much usage of these creates confusion, misunderstandings, and preservation difficulties when translating into a universal language. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to assess linguistic features and stylistic deviations in a purposeful sample of 20 poems chosen from a variety of poets from different historical times and cultural backgrounds. This paper helps explore the linguistic strategies of famous poets through their literary works, deviating from the rules of Standard English to evoke a stronger connection with the audience. Through the examples of famous poets such as Shakespeare, Blake, and Milton, it can highlight how archaic language serves both historical knowledge and confusion, and how syntax inversion rearranges certain words to improve the meaning and give emphasis to certain words in a line or stanza, which can be strenuous. While with non-standard grammar, it discusses how poets like Cumming and Shakespeare break the conventional rules of grammar, hoping to give a more pleasing and aesthetic effect when reading their works. Additionally, simultaneously usage of colloquial and formal language might affect the clarity and professionalism of the poem. This paper will walk through the deviations of authors from the standard of English grammar to help create an aesthetically pleasing and powerful piece of literature.

**Keywords:** linguistic strategies, stylistic deviations, archaic language, syntax inversion, non-standard grammar, colloquial language, pronoun usage

## INTRODUCTION

Change is inevitable, and language is not excused when it comes to change. Aside from language being a simple means of communication, it is also used artistically by writers such as poets or novelists. As time changes language, writers adopt it, exploring every single element and experimenting as much as they could to create linguistic strategies such as syntax inversion or archaic language. Choosing any of these strategies helps the author enhance their writing and deepen their literary piece. Although it might bring texture to their artwork, it can still create problems among enthusiasts and readers.

One of the literary problems enthusiasts are facing is the difficulty of translating foreign poetry to other languages. According to Zhao (2021), every language has distinct speech sounds, word meanings, and grammatical structures that make it extremely difficult to translate poetry flawlessly. Furthermore, it is highly challenging to properly translate prosodic elements of poetry from one language into another that has few similarities because different languages typically have quite different rhythms, rhymes, and tones. One of the examples is Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. It is written in 14th-century Italian and in a rhyming verse form he invented called "terza rima." Dante created this poetry style especially for it, and it is difficult to translate into English (Australian Catholic University, 2023). Because of this, one might completely miss the depth of the original style of the structure and misinterpret the meaning of the poem.

In the Philippines, archaic language is also a problem. Older novels and poetry are mostly written in pure and deep Tagalog words. A poem by the famous poet Francisco Balagtas, *Florante at Laura*, contains words like “nang-aaklas” and “giting,” along with using formal second-person pronouns like “ikaw” and “iyo.” This can create confusion with the students, as it is not commonly used in modern language.

In the secluded areas of the Davao Region, vernacular poetries and chants are the most common literary works, especially in tribes like Ata and Mandaya, though they are passed down through speaking rather than writing. The poetries are filled with metaphors, syntax, and dialects that do not directly translate into English, making it hard to understand by the people outside the tribe.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of literature, particularly poetry, language is dynamic and changes over time in relation to cultural influences. By studying the history of English, we encounter expressions that were previously prevalent but are now rarely used. Language also acts as a window into the past. The use of archaic language and grammar, which highlighted the ways in which poets from earlier eras employed to form expression. The term “archaism” is derived from a Greek word meaning “from an earlier time.” In terms of terminology, it refers to a language that is no longer commonly spoken and does not constitute a part of contemporary everyday speech (Girsang et al., 2023). Older poetry typically employs archaisms to convey a particular tone, literary style, or historical context.

Form and meaning are closely related in poetry. Syntax inversion is the technique used by poets to improve both rhythm and emphasis. Writers frequently innovate with word sequences and line arrangements similar on how questions are constructed. An inverted sentence rearranges the typical sequence of words through positioning the verb before the subject. In certain instances, this type of structure is required to adhere for a certain grammar rule, and it also utilized to draw attention or emphasis on some part of the sentence (Beare, 2025). The poets reverse the sentences to match a rhyme scheme, highlight the main points, or to establish rhythm.

Non-standard grammar as poetic license has provoked much scholarly discourse since 2014 about its contribution to the meaning and expression of poetry and its disenfranchisement of rules of language. By manipulating grammar, poets can create substandard grammar in their works to give utterance to real voices through cultural identities, emotions, and so on. In an interpretive study of a fifth-grade classroom in the U.S., revealed that children often, with great effect, deploy elements of poetry, such as stanza breaks, varying rhyme schemes, alliteration, and metaphor. These characteristics- including various helped-on types of non-standard grammatical structure- are at the forefront of young poets' attempts at articulating complex ideas and emotions from their social and cultural experience (Certo (2015).

In this perspective, grammar education must include poetry as a constitutive part (Arindora et al., 2021). Their findings reveal that exposing learners to poems employing non-standard grammar draws the learners' attention to the grammar of their language ranging from strict grammatical rules to an appreciation for linguistic creativity.

A pronoun is defined as a word or phrase that is used as a replacement for a noun or noun phrase which is called the antecedent of the pronoun. These little words can do anything that a noun can do and form the very building blocks of a sentence. Pronouns include the following: he, she, you, me, I, we, us, this, them, that. A pronoun can act as a subject, an object in the direct and indirect senses, or serve in a variety of functional roles, filling in for any person, place, animal, or thing (*English Grammar Rules - Pronouns*, n.d.).

Language register commonly known as register refers to the choice of language that the speaker uses in different situations or circumstances (Nordquist, 2024). In the world of literature—specifically in poetry, this plays an important role in determining or expressing the emotion, tone, and meaning of the poem that the author wants to convey. Colloquial language is one of the common types of register. This functions differently and has an impact on various poems.

Colloquial language is a language that people commonly use when engaging in conversations in their everyday lives. This is the most basic and natural form of communication and is used by all people in society regardless of their background and status in the society (Fattah & Salih, 2022). In poetry, colloquial language is often used

by authors to establish the character and tone of the poem. The informal tone and everyday speech patterns help the readers connect to the character of the poem or the poem itself.

## Theoretical Basis

Victor Shklovsky introduced the idea of defamiliarization (also known as *ostranenie*) in his 1917 essay "Art as Technique" (also known as "Art as Device"). This phrase was used by Shklovsky, a prominent member of the Russian Formalism movement, to characterize a literary technique that challenges readers' perceptions of the familiar by making them perceive everyday objects in an unusual or new way. In literature, defamiliarization refers to the use of devices that deviate from readers' typical expectations, such as complicated syntax, unique punctuation, unusual word selections, and narrative frameworks (Gilliam Writers Group, 2025).

In this analysis, poems from Maya Angelou, Robert Frost, and John Milton use syntax inversion, deviating from the normal arrangement in Standard English. They used the same way, defamiliarization, to make the readers pause and understand the line. According to Ortiz (2023), it is an effective approach that makes readers reevaluate their viewpoints and drives them to view the world in a new and energizing way. For authors, defamiliarization serves as a means of taking readers to new places, stimulating their creativity, and increasing their interaction with the written word.

Jakobson's Poetic Function has spilled over into many other fields from its point of departure in literary studies: cognitive poetics, semiotics, and communication studies, to name a few. Cognitive poetics is interested in the interplay of form/structure of the poem—rhythm, sound patterns, metaphor—with cognitive processes like memory and perception, which in turn affect readers' language processes (Maartens, 2016).

In semiotics, this aspect is further taken on where the poetic form contributes to meaning with the intention of highlighting the very act of communication, thus bringing the attention of readers to the construction of meaning (Bouissac, 2018).

In communication studies, Jakobson's theory has been applied to illustrate how form in political speeches and advertising creates memorable and persuasive messages in ways like poets' use of form to enhance emotional weight (Huang, 2021). In all cases, Jakobson's Poetic Function signals how linguistic form creates human experience in diverse domains, with structure always playing a key role in the communication process.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive qualitative method was used in this study to analyze linguistic traits and stylistic variations in a purposive sample of 20 poems selected from a variety of poets from various historical eras and cultural backgrounds, including canonical authors like Shakespeare, Angelou, Cummings, and Frost. The chosen poems were picked because they make extensive and varied use of non-standard linguistic elements, such as pronoun shifts, syntax inversion, non-standard grammar, colloquial expressions, and archaic language. These elements are not seen as grammatical mistakes, but rather as intentional artistic choices that enhance poetic meaning and reader engagement.

To find and classify these differences, each poem was closely read several times. The researchers then placed these deviations in the context of the poem's tone, structure, and historical situation. Using the theoretical frameworks of defamiliarization and Jakobson's poetic function as a guide, thematic analysis was then used to group related stylistic choices and explain their purpose. In addition to recognizing the interpretive difficulties these deviations may present to modern readers and translators, this methodology seeks to demonstrate how poets imaginatively work with language to enhance emotional resonance, aesthetic worth, and thematic depth.

## DISCUSSION

### Archaic Language

Archaic language, which is also known as "archaism," is a word or phrase that is no longer used today and is

considered extremely old-fashioned (Nordquist, 2019).

**Example #1:** A poem by the famous poet William Shakespeare, entitled *Sonnet 18*.

William Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, which are all known for their emotional depth and poetic beauty. Among them, Sonnet 18 stands out as one of the well-known. This poem expresses the admiration of a young man for his beloved by comparing her to nature. The use of archaic language in this poem enhances its classic tone and gives it a lasting, timeless quality (Suliman & Alkilani, 2022). The poem exemplifies how old-fashioned language enhances poetic expression in his time. For example, in the line, “*Nor lose possession of that fair thou owes,*” and “*Nor shall death brag thou wanderest in his shade,*” the archaic word “*thou*” is another form of “*you*” used for a singular person, while “*own’s*” can mean “*own*” or “*owe*” depending on context. Here, it likely means “*possess*.” Moreover, the word “*wanderest*” is an archaic verb form of “*wander*.” This type of language was very common in Shakespeare’s time, but it can be difficult to interpret today due to its outdated words.

**Example #2:** A poem by the famous poet William Blake, entitled *The Tyger*.

“Thee Tyger” is the fifth poem in *The Songs of Experience* by William Blake, published in 1794. It came five years after *The Song of Innocence*, which was published in 1789. In this poem, Blake describes a powerful and beautiful tiger and asks how such a dangerous creature could have been created (Sibaprasad, 2015). During his era, he also used words that are no longer used today. For instance, in this part of the poem, “*Burnt the fire of thine eyes*” contains an archaic word, “*thine*,” which is an archaic possessive pronoun of “*your*.” In modern readings, the archaic word “*thine*” may cause confusion and misinterpretation because it’s no longer used today. Without understanding its meaning, readers might mistakenly interpret the word “*thine*” as a symbol name, or even an object, rather than recognizing it simply as “*your eyes*.” This illustrates how older forms of English can hinder understanding for modern readers.

**Example #3:** A poem by the famous poet John Milton, entitled *Paradise Lost*

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a significant masterpiece in English literature that follows the classical epic tradition. It retells the biblical fall of man using elevated language and traditional epic elements. By using those elements, John Milton creates a deeply layered and refined literary work (Neamah et al., 2024). Milton’s way of writing fits the theme because of its formality and timelessness, just like many old epic stories. For example, in this part, “*Didst inspire that shepherd...*” the word “*didst*” is an archaic second-person singular form of “*did*,” while “*inspire*” is still used today, but in this context, it carries a more divine, prophetic meaning. Words like “*didst*, *hast*, *know’st*, and *thou*” are not used in modern English. These older forms can be confusing, especially to readers unfamiliar with Early Modern English. Milton’s way of writing includes references to classical mythology; without background knowledge of it, modern readers might miss important meanings or messages.

## Syntax Inversion

Syntax inversion is an unusual order of parts of speech that appears in artistic text to achieve a specific effect or highlight certain ideas (Muhudullaev, 2023). This inversion breaks the normal sentence structure to draw the reader’s attention and enhance the artistic quality of the work.

**Example #1:** A poem by the famous poet John Milton, entitled *Paradise Lost*.

*Paradise Lost* by John Milton is an epic poem that retells the biblical story of humanity’s origin, focusing on Satan’s rebellion and eventual fall of Adam and Eve, which leads to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Betu, 2024). Through elevated language, classical allusions, and frequent use of inverted syntax, Milton evokes the magnificence of ancient epics. In this line of the poem, “*Of man’s first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden tree...*” In standard English, the right structure would be “*The first disobedience of man and the fruit of the forbidden tree.*” The main problem of this for modern readers is that it disrupts the expected sentence order, making it difficult to identify the main subject and action of the sentence. This syntax inversion can confuse readers because it delays the main point of the sentence.



**Example #2:** A poem by the famous poet Robert Frost, entitled *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost is a very well-known poem of the 20th century, which captures the social aspects of human life. The poem carried a personal nature with hidden meanings conveyed throughout its stanzas (Wiranota & Arifin, 2024). This poem fits in this theme because Frost intentionally manipulates the word order for poetic effects. For example, in this line, “*Whose woods these are I think I know,*” this inversion delays the subject and the verb, which at first can make the sentence slightly confusing. In modern English, this can confuse the readers because the words are not in the usual order that they are expected to be placed. However, Frost does this on purpose to make the line smooth and fit the rhyme and rhythm of the poem, which may still cause a brief pause in understanding for the readers.

**Example #3:** A poem by the famous poet Maya Angelou, entitled *Still I Rise*.

"Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou is a powerful poem about strength and endurance and about affirmation. It addresses the struggles of racism against Black women, which the writer portrays with a positive and strong tone throughout the poem (Sangeetha, 2016). This poem also aligns with the theme because Angelou often rearranges the standard word order in her lines. For instance, “*You may trod me in the very dirt, but still, like dust, I’ll rise.*” A phrase that has syntax inversion is “But still, like dust, I’ll rise.” This might confuse the readers, as they might expect that it would say “I’ll rise still, like dust” instead. This unusual order can make the reader pause for a moment to understand it, but Maya does this on purpose to make the message impactful

### Non-standard Grammar as Poetic License

The act of a writer or poet altering facts or guidelines to enhance the intrigue or impact of a story or poem is known as poetic license. (*Poetic License*, 2025).

**Example #1:** A poem by the famous poet William Shakespeare, entitled “*Sonnet 18*”.

“Sonnet 18” was written by William Shakespeare, one of the famous English poet and playwright. In this sonnet, Shakespeare addresses a beloved young man and begins his inquiry with “Shall I compare thee to a summer's day. In Sonnet 18, Shakespeare praise the beauty of his beloved and compares all ways in which she is superior to a summer's day. This poem is primarily about love's constancy and how it immortalizes a person.. (Hyun, 2018). “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May” that the use of auxiliary “do” in present simple positive is uncommon in modern English and is here used deliberately for emphasis and poetic effect. These lines exemplify how a poem contravenes the rules of standard English for effect.

**Example #2:** A poem by the famous poet E.E. Cummings, entitled “*i carry your heart with me (i carry it in)*”.

The surreal love poem “i carry your heart with me (i carry it in)” was written by E. E. Cummings, the American poet celebrated for his unique poetic style, organically characterized by variations in grammar, punctuation, and the use of lowercase letters. The poem praises the integrity of love through the magnitude it holds, for love is the one that binds the lovers with each other, as well as a force that gives meaning to the world around them. Love is painted with a plethora of rich imagery, metaphors, which become almost nature-oriented with such terms as sun, moon, and the “tree called life” (Admin, 2019). The poet employs unconventional syntax and punctuation. “i carry your heart with me (i carry it in my heart)” intentionally shows the non-capitalization of “I” along with the ungrammatical use of parentheses and a complete lack of punctuation throughout the piece.

### Pronoun Usage

Pronouns refer to any word that replaces a noun and antecedent. Mostly, they are known as grammar substitutes in English. (Academy & Academy, 2016).

**Example #1:** A poem by the famous poet Emily Dickinson, entitled “*Because I could not stop for death*”.

The poem by Emily Dickinson, “Because I could not stop for Death,” is about the inevitableness of death, the passage of life into eternity, and the speaker's composed acceptance of this universal condition which is almost

like a serene acceptance (Robinson, n.d.). In *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*, there is another confusing pronoun. Emily personifies "Death" as a driver and refers to him as "He," which tends to elude the reader since "He" would be typically considered a person, contrary to an abstract. Such pronouns in the poems turn out to be but very rarely a matter of chance. The effect becomes one of undermining meaning, strengthening mystery, or daring to direct reader engagement. Understanding such pronoun uses engenders appreciation of the thematic complexity and artistic innovation of the poems.

**Example #2:** A poem by the famous poet William Shakespeare, entitled "*Sonnet 18*".

"Thou," "thee," and "thy," that Shakespeare employs in *Sonnet 18* make the reading difficult for modern audiences. The matter of gender addressed is also left ambiguous, and lines like "And often is his gold complexion dimm'd" throw an ill-timed masculine pronoun ("his") into the mix that clouds the subject's recognition.

## Colloquialism

Using colloquialisms in poetry makes the poem more authentic and relatable, providing connectedness between the readers and the poem. Although colloquial language may enhance personal expression and relatability in poetry, habitual usage of this may cause confusion in formal language settings and may compromise clarity and professionalism, which weakens the poem's seriousness and timelessness, especially if overused or applied inappropriately (Briones et al., 2024).

**Example #1:** A poem by the famous poet Robert Burns, entitled "*To a Mouse*".

"To a Mouse" was written by Robert Burns---the national poet in Scotland. He got his inspiration in making this poem after he accidentally destroyed a mouse's house with his plough. He felt sorry for the mouse and decided to make poetry that expresses his deep sorrow for the mouse (Druckenmiller, 2023). What makes this poem an example of colloquialism is that it is written in the Scots dialect, which shows the poem's regional and cultural identity. One of the lines in the poem "*Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, timorous beastie...*", which means, "Sleek, tiny, timorous, cowering beast", is one of the examples of colloquialism that is in the poem. The usage of the author of its own dialect, helps the readers appreciate the beauty of the dialect and builds a strong sense of connection with the readers. However, reading and understanding this poem would be difficult for some readers who are not familiar with the dialect, which might lead to their limited access and emotional connection to the poem.

**Example #2:** A poem by the famous poet Langston Hughes, entitled "*Theme for English B*".

"Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes is a monologue written by a 22-year-old black student from Columbia University. They are given an assignment to write one page that is "true" to himself which urges him to explore the issues of race and identity (Aguirre, 2024). One of the examples of colloquial language in poetry is Langston Hughes' poem "Theme for English B". In the line "*I guess being colored doesn't make me not like the same things other folks like who are other races*", Hughes used casual phrases like "I guess" and "folks" which we typically hear in everyday conversations. This makes the poem more authentic and relatable to some readers. On the downside, it lacks literary sophistication due to its informal tone that the readers might perceive.

**Example #3:** A poem by the famous poet Carl Sandburg, entitled "*Chicago*".

"Chicago" is a well-known poem that is written by Carl Sandburg to vividly describe the city's lively energy and its flaws (Sally, 2022). The line from the poem "*They tell me you are wicked and I believe them...*" demonstrates plain and conversational language to capture the raw characteristics of the city. On the contrary, this lessens the poem's elegance and refinement, which the readers expect in a traditional poetry.

## CONCLUSION

Poetry is not just about fancy words; it's about how those words are used that makes them fancy. This article shows how poets use different language techniques, may it be like old-fashioned words, unusual grammar, and even everyday slang to make their poems more powerful and meaningful. These strategies don't just affect how

a poem sound, they also influence the readers who tries to unravel their life-changing impact. Whether it is Shakespeare’s using of archaic words such as “thou” and “thee” or Langston Hughes incredible writing, these choices help shape how we feel and understand poems. This is the beauty of poetry, sometimes these styles can be confusing, especially for modern readers, and sometimes they are just meant to be confusing that none will ever find their true meaning, but they’re part of what makes poetry so unique and mysterious. These words, twisted or simple, old or new, help us make sense of the world around us, or at least remind us that we’re not alone in trying. After all, these creative language choices help poets tell their stories in ways that are memorable, emotional, and deeply personal.

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