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A Stylistic Analysis of Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken": Phonological, Graphological, Morphological, and Lexico-Syntactic Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an in-depth stylistic analysis of Robert Frost's iconic poem, "The Road Not Taken," focusing on four levels of analysis: phonological, graphological, morphological, and lexico-syntactic. Through qualitative descriptive methods, the research explores how Frost's use of rhythm, meter, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and enjambment contributes to the poem's overall meaning and aesthetic appeal. The morphological analysis examines word formation and grammatical structures, while the graphological level delves into the visual presentation of the text. Lexico-syntactic analysis highlights the poem's vocabulary and sentence structures, uncovering the subtle complexities and stylistic nuances that enrich Frost's exploration of choice and consequence. The findings reveal how these elements synergistically enhance the poem's thematic depth and literary artistry. This comprehensive analysis offers valuable insights into the intricate stylistic techniques employed by Frost, contributing to a deeper understanding of his poetic craft.

Keywords: Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken", stylistic analysis, phonological analysis, graphological analysis, morphological analysis, lexico-syntactic analysis, qualitative descriptive analysis, poetry, literary techniques.

1. INTRODUCTION

Style, as articulated by renowned scholars, encompasses the unique manner in which a writer conveys thoughts

and emotions through language. According to Richard Ohmann (1971), style is fundamentally the method through which a writer communicates ideas. Language,

therefore, serves as a versatile tool that can be manipulated in myriad ways to express the same thought. Jonathan Swift (1712) further refines this concept by defining style as the proper arrangement of words to articulate thoughts effectively. In essence, style is the distinctive way a writer uses language to convey ideas, concepts, and emotions, involving elements such as word choice, tone, sentence structure, and literary strategies. These components combine to create a unique voice that distinguishes one writer from another and significantly influences the overall impact and effectiveness of a piece of writing.

According to Leech and Short (2007), stylistics is the (linguistic) study of style, which is the way language is used. They argue that stylistics explores how authors create effects through their linguistic styles and how readers interpret those effects. Based on our research and understanding, stylistics focuses on analyzing various elements of a poem or literary piece, such as figures of speech, rhyme, meter, and diction.

Stylistics has two primary goals: to help students understand the literal and hidden meanings of a poem and to aid readers in interpreting the text and its messages. This approach helps readers expand their knowledge and awareness of the language being used, making literary pieces, like poems, more engaging and accessible.

Stylistic analysis is the examination of various language styles in texts to uncover the meaning, message, or intent behind the chosen linguistic devices. It involves critically analyzing elements such as tone, diction, syntax, and rhythm in written or spoken communication. Thornborrow and Wareing (1998) state that while stylistic analysis was traditionally viewed as a way to interpret the meaning of a literary text, there is now a more pragmatic orientation towards

linking textual choices to social and cultural contexts (as cited in Ahmad, M., Khan, Ahmad, S., & Ijaz, 2015, pp. 10-11). This does not imply a complete shift in the approach to interpreting meaning but rather an emphasis on exploring how specific linguistic features, such as word choice, interact with the text's context and its intended and perceived effects.

Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken," published in 1916, is about the journey of life and the impact of decisions on one's future. It emphasizes that choices in life should be made carefully to avoid future regrets. The poem suggests that once a decision is made, it is difficult to change and start again, highlighting the importance of making informed and thoughtful choices.

This study aims to:

- Illustrate the significance of decision-making in one's life.
- Share insights about Robert Frost's poem and his writing process to inform readers about becoming a good author and creating meaningful poetry.

The primary question this study seeks to answer is: How do the stylistic elements affect the flow and meaning of Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken"? This study focuses on the phonological, graphological, morphological, and lexico-syntactic levels of analysis, examining how each contributes to understanding the poem's hidden meanings. By exploring these elements, the study aims to deepen the appreciation and understanding of Frost's work and contribute to the field of literary studies.

The importance of stylistic analysis in understanding and interpreting literary texts has been demonstrated in various studies. For instance, Jeyakumar and Pushpanathan (2016) explored the stylistic elements in Frost's poetry, emphasizing the role of phonological

patterns in enhancing thematic depth. Li and Shi (2020) conducted a stylistic analysis of modern poetry, illustrating how diction and syntax contribute to meaning-making. Smith (2019) examined metaphor and symbolism in literary works, highlighting their importance in conveying complex emotions and ideas. Zhang and Yu (2018) analyzed narrative techniques in contemporary fiction, demonstrating the interplay between narrative style and reader interpretation. Nguyen (2022) investigated the stylistic features of Vietnamese poetry, showcasing the cultural nuances embedded in linguistic choices. Jose (2022) examined the semantic expansion in the Gospel of Matthew, illustrating how stylistic analysis can uncover deeper meanings in religious texts. Jose and Jose (2024) conducted a comprehensive stylistic analysis of T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," showcasing the intricate interplay of linguistic elements in modernist poetry.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study is divided into four levels of stylistic analysis: phonological, graphological, morphological, and lexico-syntactic analysis. Each of these types of stylistic analysis was applied to the poem to uncover how Robert Frost wrote it and what served as his inspiration while writing "The Road Not Taken." This study used qualitative descriptive analysis to explore the stylistic techniques employed by Frost in this iconic poem. The four levels of stylistic analysis are as follows:

2.1. Graphological Level

Graphological analysis involves exploring the structure and patterns of handwriting, as well as the principles of spelling. According to Leech (1969), graphology goes beyond orthography, encompassing the entire writing

system, including punctuation, paragraphing, and spacing. Alabi (2007) added that a graphological discussion of style entails the foregrounding of features such as quotation marks, ellipses, periods, hyphens, contracted forms, special structures, full stops, colons, commas, semicolons, question marks, dashes, lowercase letters, gothic and bold prints, capitalization, small print, spacing, and italics. In simpler terms, graphology examines how sentences are structured and the use of punctuation to convey meaning and emphasis.

2.2. Phonological Level

Phonological analysis focuses on the study of linguistic systems, specifically how sound represents differences in meaning within a language. According to Lodge (2009), phonology deals with sound patterns, the rhyming scheme, and the pronunciation of words in sentences. This level of analysis explores the auditory aspects of the poem, including rhyme, rhythm, and meter, to understand how these elements contribute to the overall effect of the poem.

2.3. Morphological Level

Morphological analysis examines how words are formed by adding prefixes and suffixes to root words. It also involves identifying and understanding parts of speech, such as nouns and verbs, as well as recognizing special language features like emphasis and unusual language use. 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 of analysis helps uncover the structural complexity and creativity within the poem's language.

2.4. Lexico-Syntax Level

The lexico-syntactic level combines 'lexis' (vocabulary) and 'syntax' (sentence structure) to examine how words are assembled into phrases and sentences. Understanding these patterns aids in identifying linguistic characteristics and can be useful in stylometric analysis. By examining features such as unusual word order, word repetition, and syntactic structures, unique patterns and styles can be uncovered. This level of analysis explores how Frost's choices in vocabulary and sentence structure contribute to the poem's meaning and emotional impact.

2.5. Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data for this study consisted of the text of "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. Analysis was conducted through close reading, focusing on identifying significant phonological, graphological, morphological, and lexico-syntactic elements within the poem. These findings were then compared and discussed in the context of existing literary criticism and linguistic theory, supported by relevant scholarly sources. The analysis also incorporated insights from related studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of Frost's stylistic techniques.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Phonological Level

3.1.1. Rhythm and Meter

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood," The poem follows an iambic tetrameter, creating a steady and rhythmic flow. Iambic tetrameter is a rhythmical pattern with four beats of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable.

3.1.2. Rhyme Scheme

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both And be one traveler, long I stood And

looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth;"

The rhyme scheme of the poem is ABAAB, CDCDD, EFEFF, GHGGH. In the first stanza, the three A rhymes include "wood," "stood," and "could" (lines 1, 3, and 4), whereas the B rhymes include "both" and "undergrowth" (lines 2 and 5). This rhyme scheme is consistent across all stanzas.

3.1.3. Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds, emphasizing certain words. The use of alliteration in the poem enhances its poetic quality and expresses deeper meaning.

1. "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,"
 - The repetition of the "d" sound in "diverged" and "wood."
2. "And sorry I could not travel both"
 - The repetition of the "t" sound in "travel" and "both."
3. "Though as for that the passing there"
 - The repetition of the "th" sound in "though," "that," and "the."

3.1.4. Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words. It enhances the rhythm and creates musicality. In lines 11–15, the O sounds are repeated across the stanza:

"And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back."

3.2. Morphological Level

In stylistic analysis, the morphological level focuses on the structure and formation of words in a text. In "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost, several morphological features can be identified:

3.2.1. Inflectional Morphology

Inflectional morphology examines how words change their forms to indicate grammatical distinctions such as tense, number, and person. Examples from the poem include:

- "diverged" (line 1): past tense of "diverge"
- "stood" (line 3): past tense of "stand"
- "looked" (line 4): past tense of "look"
- "trodden" (line 12): past participle of "tread"
- "sigh" (line 16): present tense, indicating the speaker's current feelings

3.2.2. Derivational Morphology

Derivational morphology involves the process of creating new words by adding prefixes or suffixes to existing ones. Examples in the poem include:

- "roads" (derivational suffix -s)
- "traveler" (derivational suffix -er)
- "grassy" (derivational suffix -y)
- "wanted" (derivational suffix -ed)
- "passing" (derivational suffix -ing)
- "equally" (derivational suffix -ly)
- "doubted" (derivational suffix -ed)

3.2.3. Word Choice

The poem's specific words, such as "diverged," "traveler," "trodden," and "traveled," significantly contribute to its theme of decision-making and paths in

life. A morphological analysis of these words sheds light on the poem's exploration of the complex nature of decisions and their impact on one's life journey.

3.3. Graphological Level

3.3.1. Period/Full-stop (.)

"In leaves no step had trodden black." (Line 12) *"I doubted if I should ever come back."* (Line 15)

In the poem, periods are used twice, indicating the end of sentences. In line 12, the speaker says no one has walked on the leaves, and in line 15, the speaker expresses uncertainty about returning. The periods clearly define the boundaries between these distinctive ideas.

3.3.2. Semi-colon (;)

"To where it bent in the undergrowth;" (Line 5) *"Because it was grassy and wanted wear;"* (Line 8)

Semi-colons are used twice, connecting two independent clauses that are closely related. They suggest a stronger connection between the ideas in those lines.

3.3.3. Comma (,)

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood," (Line 1) *"And having perhaps the better claim,"* (Line 7) *"Had worn them really about the same,"* (Line 10) *"Yet knowing how way leads on to way,"* (Line 14) *"I took the one less traveled by,"* (Line 19)

Commas are used five times, indicating pauses or separating ideas within sentences. They help clarify the structure of sentences and enhance understanding.

3.3.4. The Use of Italics

Italicizing poetry distinguishes it from the surrounding text and helps convey its artistic and rhythmic qualities. It also pays homage to the original author's style and intention. In "*The Road Not Taken*," the verse "*And be one traveler, long I stood*" is italicized to emphasize the moment of decision and reflection, highlighting the speaker's contemplation and the weight of the choice before them.

3.4. Lexico-Syntax Level

3.4.1. Personification

"*To where it bent in the undergrowth;*" (Line 5) "*And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black.*" (Line 11) "*Oh, I kept the first for another day!*" (Line 13)

In this poem, the words "bent," "lay," and "kept" are examples of personification, where non-human entities are described as though they are people, providing them with human characteristics.

3.4.2. Metaphor

"*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,*" (Line 1) "*And be one traveler, long I stood*" (Line 3) "*Yet knowing how way leads on to way,*" (Line 14) "*And that has made all the difference*" (Line 20)

Metaphor is used to compare two unrelated things and make a statement about one of them. In this poem, "diverged," "stood," "leads," and "difference" are metaphors that illustrate the idea of making choices and the impact of those choices on one's life.

3.4.3. Enjambment

"*And sorry I could not travel both*" (Line 2) "*And looked down one as far as I could*" (Line 4) "*Though as for that passing there*" (Line 9) "*And both that morning equally*

lay" (Line 11) "*I shall be telling this with a sigh*" (Line 16) "*And that has made all the difference*" (Line 20)

Enjambment is used to connect ideas by carrying a sentence or phrase to the next line without pausing. This technique allows the poem to be read more easily and smoothly, enhancing the flow and connecting the ideas within the poem.

By examining the graphological, phonological, morphological, and lexico-syntactic aspects of "*The Road Not Taken*," we can discover and understand the various elements and complexities involved in Frost's stylistic choices, providing deeper insights into the poem's meaning and impact.

4. CONCLUSION

The stylistic analysis of Robert Frost's "*The Road Not Taken*" reveals the intricate and deliberate use of various linguistic and literary devices that contribute to the poem's enduring impact and significance. By examining the poem through phonological, morphological, graphological, and lexico-syntactic levels, we gain a deeper understanding of how Frost's choices enhance the thematic essence of decision-making and the complexities of life's journey.

On the phonological level, the consistent iambic tetrameter and the rhyme scheme (ABAAB, CDCCD, EFEEF, GHGGH) establish a rhythmic flow that mirrors the contemplative nature of the poem's content. Alliteration and assonance further enrich the poem's musical quality, emphasizing key moments and emotions.

Morphologically, the use of inflectional and derivational morphology demonstrates the grammatical nuances and the formation of words that reflect the poem's exploration of choices and their consequences. Words

like "diverged," "traveler," and "trodden" are carefully chosen to encapsulate the theme of paths and decisions.

Graphologically, the strategic use of punctuation marks—periods, semi-colons, and commas—provides clarity and structure to the poem, guiding readers through the speaker's reflective journey. The italicization of specific lines highlights moments of significant introspection and decision-making.

On the lexico-syntactic level, Frost employs personification and metaphor to imbue the poem with deeper meaning, presenting non-human elements with human characteristics and drawing comparisons that illuminate the complexity of choices. Enjambment enhances the poem's readability and connectivity, seamlessly linking ideas across lines.

In conclusion, Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" exemplifies the power of stylistic elements in conveying profound themes. The poem's rhythmic patterns, word choices, punctuation, and literary devices work in harmony to depict the universal experience of making choices and contemplating their implications. This comprehensive analysis underscores the richness of Frost's poetic craft and its ability to resonate with readers across generations, inviting them to reflect on their own paths and decisions.

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