

**Article**

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**Stylistic Communication Deciphered from  
Goo Goo Dolls' "Iris"**

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**Abstract**

This essay deals with features of stylistic communication deciphered from Goo Goo Dolls' *Iris*. The features are patterned in the text and discourse of the song lyric. The features are patterned as sound devices, process participants and vocabulary communicated within the song lyric. The analysis caters for relationship between grammaticalness and interpretability of the lyric. The analysis is framed within nature of literary communication in stylistics. The pattern creates communication act which is self-contained, independent of social context and expressive of reality.

**Keywords:** text, discourse, grammaticalness, interpretability, literary communication

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**1. Introduction**

A song lyric is a special kind of poem. The song lyric is normally written to be sung. The lyric is characterized through its euphony. There is music in the lyric. Rhythm, meter and rhyme are apparent in the song lyric. Speech is also present in the lyric. Not only is the song lyric noticeable from its devices of sound, but it is also noticeable from its literary communication.

A song lyric has potential for stylistic communication. The lyric has latent features of literary communication in stylistics. It has lines which can be accounted for as a text as well as discourse. It presents grammar of the text. It also renders interpretation of the discourse. Grammaticalness and interpretability of the song lyric are related to each other in literary communication in stylistics. The relationship between the two features is significant in stylistic communication.

It is literary communication that this essay is mainly concerned with. Euphony is complementary to process participants in this stylistic communication. Rhythm, meter and rhyme are featured as the text of the song lyric. Verbal activity units are featured as the discourse of the lyric. The text and discourse serve

the nature of literary communication in this study of stylistics.

In the first position this study is based upon a postulate stating that every literary work is a series of sound devices. It is from the sound devices that the meaning of the literary work arises [1]. Thus, the meaning of a poem arises from its sound devices. The sound devices of the poem attract attention and constitute an integral part of its aesthetic effect. The sound devices can be demonstrated through its rhythm, meter and rhyme.

In the latter position, this study is based upon a premise that it is quite common to find deviant expressions in a literary work. Deviance of this linguistic kind is not a defining nature of literature. What seems important to the nature of literature is that the language of the literary work should be fashioned into patterns required by the actual language system. Whether the features of the features are deviant or non-deviant or both is of secondary importance. The literary work needs not be deviant as a text but it needs to be deviant as a discourse [2].

The literary work is recognized as a text not because of its length, but because of its location in a particular context. The meaning of the text does not come into being until it is actively employed in a context of use. The process of activation of the text by relating it to the context of use is called discourse. This contextualization of the text is actually a reader's reconstruction of the writer's discourse. Therefore, the text can be realized by the literary work as long as it is found to record a meaningful discourse when it is related to a suitable context of use [3].

In brief, this study starts off with sound devices, which comprise the rhythm, meter and rhyme of Goo Goo Dolls' "Iris". Over and above the sound devices, deviant expressions in the song lyric are demonstrated through the process participants of the lyric. The lyric is then employed in the context of stylistic communication.

This study takes its main reference from books on literary theory, stylistics, and the teaching of literature, music and poetry. The main reference is supplemented with album recordings and the official website of Goo Goo Dolls.

Relevance of bringing the song lyric in this study is justified in terms of literal, stylistic and individual factor. Literally, the song lyric offers euphony in its intrinsic study of literature. Euphony presents readers with an insight on sound devices of the lyric. Rhythm, meter and rhyme of the lyric are revealed in this term.

Stylistically, the song lyric offers a text and discourse in its literary communication. This literary communication presents readers with an insight on grammaticalness and interpretability of the lyric. Process participants are revealed in this stylistic communication.

Individually, the song lyric offers emotion in its reading. The lyric is normally written to be meaningful. In order to grasp the meaning the readers have to start with a process of making imaginative interpretation of the reality it represents. Interaction with the lyric usually involves a deeper level of mental processing and greater personal involvement and response. Such a lyric is generally motivating and enjoyable. The readers who have worked with song lyrics have usually learnt about reading critically, emphatically and creatively.

One additional relevance of the song lyric in this study is that the song lyric is widely open to multiple interpretation. Two readers seldom interpret a song lyric in a similar way. The space between one individual's interpretation and another's lends itself to discussion and interaction.

## **2. Methods**

The method of stylistic analysis becomes preferable when the analysis attempts to describe a style systematically according to linguistic principles [4]. The style appears as the individual linguistic system of a literary work. The style of *Iris* in this stylistic communication is made of the song lyric's grammar and interpretation and is presented in its individual context.

In this stylistic communication a sender does not address a message directly to a receiver. There is a communication situation within a communication situation [5]. The meaning of the message is self-contained and independent on who sends it and who receives it. The value of 'I' and 'you' derives partly from an addresser and addressee respectively and partly from the acquisition of third person which is given upon them by the context.

## **3. Results**

Firstly, sound devices of the song lyric concern with the rhythm, meter and rhyme of it. In the lyric, each line is divided into feet. Each foot is divided into stresses or syllable sound. The feet and stresses reveal the overall rhythmic pattern [6]. The feet and stresses in the song lyric constitute the rhythm, meter and rhyme of it.

Secondly, there is a tendency in the lyric to produce the series of feet and stresses at more or less regular intervals. These regular intervals are sensed through the reading of each line of the lyric while the foot is tapping on the floor regularly to coincide with the feet and stresses of the lyric. This regularity is linguistically labeled as isochrony [7].

Thirdly, verbally expressed activities in the song lyric are grouped into a small set of basic kinds of process. The set is characterized into material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal and existential process [8]. A material process is present when something physical and observable is done or happens. A mental process has one human or human-like participant of thinking, feeling and perceiving. A relational process has the condition or status of being. A behavioral process is about physiological and psychological behavior of participants. A verbal process communicates an implicit message to an implicit addressee. An existential process represents that someone or something exists or has happened.

Lastly, vocabulary mentioned in this study is about metaphorical words. A word is metaphorical only when it has both literal and figurative meaning together. A metaphor cannot exist without a context [9]. The vocabulary of *Iris* therefore exists within its context.

In classroom practice, this procedure can serve a pedagogic purpose. Poetic analysis of song lyrics is viable to teach a few poetic elements in pop songs [10]. Elements of style in Goo Goo Dolls *Iris* can be drawn out of this stylistic communication.

Moreover, in song lyrics certain words go together as to become familiar expression [11]. Analysis of such expression is viable to show how everyday language can be used in the song lyrics to raise awareness of common collocation, including metaphor.

#### 4. Discussion

##### 1.1. Meter and Rhyme

The lyric of Goo Goo Dolls' *Iris* is built in four stanzas. Each of the four stanzas is structured in a quatrain. The over and above scansion<sup>1</sup> on the lyric is displayed below:

- - × | - - × | - - × | -  
And I'd give up forever to touch you  
- - × | - - × | - - × |  
'Cause I know that you feel me somehow  
- - × | - - × | - - × | - - ×  
You're the closest to heaven that I'll ever be  
- - × | - - × | - - × |  
And I don't want to go home right now

In the first stanza anapest occurs three times almost evenly on each line. That makes the metrical verse of the stanza anapest trimeter.

- × | - - × | - - × | -  
And all I can taste is this moment

(-) - × | - - × | - - × |  
And all I can breathe is your life |  
(-) - × | - - × | - - × |  
'Cause sooner or later it's over  
- - × | - - × | - - × |  
I just don't want to miss you tonight |

In the second stanza anapest occurs three times evenly on each line, too. That makes the metrical verse of the stanza anapest trimeter. Each bracket (-) indicates silent syllables which complete a line with an odd number of spoken stress. Each of the brackets is intended to produce regularity in the correlating lines. This regularity denotes the meter of the lines.

- - × | - - × | - - × |  
And I don't want the world to see me |  
- - × | - - × | - - × |  
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand |  
- × | - - × | - - × | -  
When everything's made to be broken  
- - × | - - × | - - × |

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<sup>1</sup> This scansion is based on the reading of the lyric while the foot is tapping to coincide with the feet and stresses of the lyric in juxtaposition to stress pattern cited from *Macmillan English Dictionary*.

I just want you to know who I am

In the third stanza anapest trimeter makes the metrical verse of it. Likewise, the metrical verse of the fourth stanza below is also anapest trimeter.

- - × | - - × | - - × | -  
And you can't|fight the tears|that ain't coming  
- - × | - - × | - - × |  
Or the moment of truth|in your lies|  
- × | - - × | - - × | -  
When everything feels|like the movies|  
- - × | - - × | - - × |  
Yeah you bleed|just to know|you're alive|

The isochronous pattern of feet and stress is the basis of verse which has regularity of rhythm and meter for the whole lyric. The rhythm and meter of Goo Goo Dolls' *Iris* are then patterned in anapest trimeter. This kind of pattern has almost twice as many unaccented syllables as accented ones and the combination of the unaccented and accented syllables recurs three times in every line. This combination of syllables can be taken in every breath every reader takes. Every reader can read the whole lyric naturally since s/he can read it lightly. The reader can then memorize and/or sing the whole lyric melodically in an easy way.

Words do not rhyme perfectly in the lyric. Each of the stanzas does not have similar ending sound in its lines. In every stanza the words rhyme in *abcd* scheme. This particular rhyme scheme distinguishes end-line sound of one stanza from that of the other stanzas. The difference marks vibrant vocabulary used in the lyric and enlivens the thought to be communicated through the lyric. The lyric's rhyme scheme, accordingly, aids the reader to plotting its thought scheme along the structure of the lyric.

The sound devices of the lyric are patterned in unrhymed anapest trimeter. This pattern creates a longer reading beat but shorter reading pace. This pattern consequently brings about dynamics and tempo in the reading of the lyric. Accents of the lyric correspond regularly to the rhythm of its music. The pace of the reading beat is at a proper speed, which is in time with the music beat of the lyric. Reading the words deployed in every line of the lyric, the reader can, therefore, snap her/ his fingers repeatedly according to her/ his reading pace.

In addition to the four stanzas, there is actually a refrain in the lyric. This refrain is nearly similar to the third stanza; except that the fourth line of the third stanza is replicated four times to form it. Thus, this refrain is a septet.

And I don't want the world to see me  
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand  
When everything's made to be broken  
I just want you to know who I am  
I just want you to know who I am  
I just want you to know who I am  
I just want you to know who I am

The replicated line may serves to augment an appeal in the lyric. The appeal may not be

addressed to the reader by the lyricist. Instead, it is addressed by a persona to her/ his interlocutor. So great is the appeal that it is written over four times. Seemingly, the persona really wants her/ his interlocutor to know her/ him more than just anyone else does.

### 1.2. Rhythm

In addition to the aforementioned way of analyzing the meter of the lyric, this essay applies rhythm of its music. The rhythm is stress-timed. The stressed syllables in the verse are marked as beats (B) and the unstressed as off-beats (o). All along the lyric, the stress-timed rhythm is displayed as follows:

<pre>(o) (o) B   o o B   o o B   o And I'd give up forever to touch you o o B   o o B   o o B   'Cause I know that you feel me somehow o o B   o o B   o o B   (o o B) You're the closest to heaven that I'll ever be o o B   o o B   o o B   And I don't want to go home right now</pre>	<pre>D5      E7      G5 And I'd give up forever to touch you Bm      Asus4   G5 'Cause I know that you feel me somehow D5      E7      G5 You're the closest to heaven that I'll ever be Bm      Asus4   G5 And I don't want to go home right now</pre>
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In the first stanza there are two unstressed syllables between beats<sup>2</sup>. Double off-beats (o<sup>2</sup>) hence occur three times almost evenly on each line. The beats mark the picking of the tonic or the root notes. The beats thus mark the chord change in the lyric.

<pre>(o) o B   o o B   o o B   o And all I can taste is this moment (o) o B   o o B   o o B   And all I can breathe is your life (o) o B   o o B   o o B o   'Cause sooner or later it's over o o B   o o B   o o B   I just don't want to miss you tonight</pre>	<pre>D5      E7      G5 And all I can taste is this moment Bm      Asus4   G5 And all I can breathe is your life D5      E7      G5 'Cause sooner or later it's over Bm      Asus4   G5 I just don't want to miss you tonight</pre>
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In the second stanza double off-beats (o<sup>2</sup>) occurs three times evenly on each line, too. That makes the rhythm of the stanza recursive. Each bracket (o) indicates silent syllables which complete a line with an odd number of spoken stress. Each of the brackets is intended to produce regularity in the correlating lines. Like the aforementioned metrical verse, this regularity denotes the meter of the lines in the lyric.

<sup>2</sup> This stress-timed rhythm is based on the picking pattern which the writer interprets by using an acoustic guitar, with downstroke picking marks beat (B) and upstroke picking marks off-beat (o) in time with the chord change.

o o B | o o B | o o B |  
 And I don't want the world to see me |  
 o o B | o o B | o o B |  
 'Cause I don't think that they'd understand |  
 (o) o B | o o B | o o B o |  
 When everything's made to be broken |  
 o o B | o o B | o o B |  
 I just want you to know who I am |

Bm Asus4 G5  
 And I don't want the world to see me  
 Bm Asus4 G5  
 'Cause I don't think that they'd understand  
 Bm Asus4 G5  
 When everything's made to be broken  
 Bm Asus4 G5  
 I just want you to know who I am

In the third stanza three beats makes the rhythm of it. Bm, Asus4 and G5 make the running chords of the stanza, which becomes the chorus part of the song. Similarly, the rhythm of the fourth stanza below has also three beats. The stanza has D5, E7 and G5 as its running chords.

o o B | o o B | o o B | o  
 And you can't fight the tears that ain't coming  
 o o B | o o B | o o B |  
 Or the moment of truth in your lies |  
 (o) o B | o o B | o o B | -  
 When everything feels like the movies  
 o o B | o o B | o o B |  
 Yeah you bleed just to know you're alive

D5 E7 G5  
 And you can't fight the tears that ain't  
 coming  
 D5 E7 G5  
 Or the moment of truth in your lies  
 D5 E7 G5  
 When everything feels like the movies  
 D5 E7 G5  
 Yeah you bleed just to know you're alive

The lyric is made of four chords, namely D5, E7, G5, Bm and Asus4. The chord G5 acts as a pivotal chord, where the other running chords balance on. The chord affects how the words in the lyric are sung and thus how emotion is carried along the lyric. Although the words in each stanza do not rhyme perfectly, emotion is meticulously planned around a particular intention.

To decipher the intention communicated through the words deployed in the lyric, it is helpful to group the verbs deployed in the lyric into a small set of basic kinds of process. This set is concerned with verbs of process.

### 1.3. Processes and Participants

The diagram below displays the process and participant types<sup>‡</sup> set out in each stanza of the lyric.

Stanza	Clause	Process	Participant
1	And I'd <u>give up</u> forever to touch you 'Cause I <u>know</u> that you feel me somehow <u>You're the closest to heaven</u> that I'll ever be And I <u>don't want</u> to go home right now	mental mental relational mental	senser senser carrier + attribute senser
2	And all I <u>can taste</u> is this moment And all I <u>can breathe</u> is your life 'Cause sooner or later <u>it's over</u> I <u>just don't want</u> to miss you tonight	mental mental relational mental	senser senser carrier + attribute senser
3	And I <u>don't want</u> the world to see me 'Cause I <u>don't think</u> that they'd understand When <u>everything's made</u> to be broken I <u>just want</u> you to know who I am	mental mental relational mental	senser senser carrier senser
4	And you <u>can't fight</u> the tears that ain't coming Or the moment of truth in your lies When <u>everything feels</u> like the movies Yeah you <u>bleed</u> just to know you're alive	mental  relational behavioral	senser  carrier + attribute behavior

Mental process and senser participant dominate the classification in the diagram. Relational process and carrier + attribute participant are set out once in each stanza. Behavioral process and behavior participant are set out only once in the whole lyric.

The lyric is mainly concerned with subject pronoun I as a human participant doing mental processes. The subject pronoun becomes the doer of giving up, knowing, (not) wanting and (not) thinking. The subject pronoun also has the ability to taste and breathe. Yet, the subject pronoun you is set out not to have the ability to fight in the lyric.

The relational process in the lyric involves subject pronouns you as well as it (everything) as the carrier participants connected with relative pronouns feels as well as

<sup>‡</sup> Referred to from processes and participants in Michael Toolan. 2004. *Language in Literature*. London: Arnold. Pp. 75 – 105.



are and is. The attribute participants involve heaven and movies. The clause ‘When everything’s made to be broken’ has no attribute participant.

From the diagram it is feasible that the lyric is mostly structured of static actions. Both you and I act intangibly. They act in an abstract manner. You and I communicate through their senses. That makes the communication sensibly understandable to their readers. The communication is stylistically perceived in the realm of mind by the readers.

## **5. Conclusions**

Stylistically, the words are communicated both in metrical verse as the lyric text and in metrical expression as the lyric discourse. The lyric is written in unrhymed anapest trimeter, which creates its exceptional dynamics and tempo. The lyric is structured in four chords, which creates its emotional rhythm and tone. The lyric is set out within static verbs and/or phrasal verbs, which create its intangible, yet understandable expressions. In all, Goo Goo Dolls’ *Iris* communicates stylish resonance and perception.

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