LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

# FOREGROUNDING, LINGUISTIC FEATURES, AND POETIC MEANING: A LINGUISTIC STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF AGHA SHAHID ALI'S "EVEN THE RAIN

**Abrar Ahmad[*1], Ibrar Ahmad[2], Allah Noor[3], Muhammad Hamza Hayat[4]**

[*1,2,3]*BS, Department of English Language and Literature, Gomal University D. I. Khan,*

[*1]abrarahmad09900@gmail.com, [2]ibrarahmadtkd@gmail.com, [3]noorwazir.edu33@gmail.com, hayattthamza774@gmail.com[4]

**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23099847

**Keywords**
*stylistics, linguistic features, Leech and Short, ghazal, Agha Shahid Ali*

**Article History**
Received: 01 June 2026
Accepted: 23 August 2026
Published: 30 September 2026

**Copyright** @Author
**Corresponding Author:** *
**Allah Noor**

## Abstract

*This research paper examines Agha Shahid Ali's poem* Even the Rain *through the theoretical and methodological framework of linguistic stylistics, with particular emphasis on foregrounding, linguistic deviation, parallelism, lexical selection, syntax, imagery, and sound patterns. The study investigates how Ali's distinctive manipulation of language contributes to the construction of poetic meaning and emotional intensity. The analysis demonstrates that the poem's stylistic effects emerge from the interaction between its linguistic structures and its thematic concerns, particularly memory, displacement, loss, exile, and the persistence of emotional attachment to Kashmir. Foregrounding is employed through repetition, unusual lexical combinations, syntactic arrangement, contrast, and recurring natural imagery. The poem's references to rain, landscape, memory, and separation create a complex relationship between the external natural world and the speaker's internal emotional experience. The study adopts a qualitative textual-analysis approach and draws on established concepts in linguistic stylistics, particularly foregrounding and deviation associated with the Prague School and later stylisticians. It argues that Ali's poetic language does not merely communicate meaning but actively produces emotional and aesthetic effects through carefully organized linguistic choices. The analysis contributes to the understanding of how stylistic features can illuminate the relationship between language, identity, memory, and exile in contemporary poetry.*

## 1.INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a densely coded form of language use in which meaning is rarely stated outright but built through the interaction of word choice, sentence structure, sound, and visual form. Understanding how a poem achieves its effects therefore requires more than a reading of its themes; it requires close attention to the linguistic resources the poet has selected and organized. This need is especially pressing in the case of poets who write across inherited and adopted traditions, since their stylistic choices often carry the imprint of more than one literary culture at once. Agha Shahid Ali (1949–2001) occupies precisely this position. Born in

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

Kashmir and later based in the United States, Ali is widely credited with popularizing the ghazal as an English-language poetic form, most notably through his edited volume Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazels in English and his own collection Call Me Ishmael Tonight. His poem Even the Rain exemplifies this hybrid practice: it observes the ghazel's formal requirements of self-contained couplets, a repeated refrain (radif), and a patterned rhyme preceding the refrain (qafia), while addressing themes of loss, exile, and political violence associated with Kashmir, all rendered in English.

Despite growing scholarly interest in Ali's poetry within postcolonial and diaspora studies, comparatively few studies have subjected his work to a systematic linguistic stylistic analysis that examines lexical, syntactic, phonological, and graph logical levels in an integrated way. This study addresses that gap by analyzing Even the Rain using Leech and Short's (2007) four-level model of stylistic analysis, with the aim of showing how the poem's inherited ghazal form and Ali's individual linguistic choices work together to produce its meaning and emotional effect.

**Statement of the Problem**

Existing stylistic scholarship on postcolonial and diaspora poetry tends to privilege thematic or cultural readings over sustained linguistic analysis, and where linguistic analysis is undertaken, it is often restricted to a single level of language (commonly the lexical or the phonological) rather than an integrated multilevel approach. Agha Shahid Ali's Even the Rain, despite being one of the most frequently anthologized examples of the English-language ghazal, has not been comprehensively examined through a dedicated linguistic stylistic framework that accounts for how the poem's form and language interact across all four levels. This study addresses that gap.

**Literature Review**

**Agha Shahid Ali: Life, Literary Career, and Major Themes**

Agha Shahid Ali (1949–2001) was an influential Kashmiri-American poet whose literary work is strongly connected with themes of Kashmir, memory, displacement, exile, identity, and loss**.** Born in New Delhi and raised in Kashmir, Ali developed a deep literary attachment to the landscape and cultural world of Kashmir. His poetry frequently transforms personal memories and experiences of place into broader reflections on belonging and separation. His engagement with Kashmir is therefore not limited to geographical description; it becomes an important part of his poetic imagination and identity. Ali pursued his higher education in India and later moved to the United States, where he continued his academic and literary career. His experience of living away from Kashmir contributed to recurring concerns with **exile and displacement** in his poetry. Rather than presenting exile only as physical separation, Ali often portrays it as an emotional and cultural experience involving memories of home, language, family, landscape, and lost places. His poetry consequently creates a relationship between the remembered homeland and the poet's present location, allowing memory to become an important means of preserving connections with the past.

The major themes in Ali's poetry include **memory, homeland, loss, exile, love, death, violence, identity, and belonging.** His poetry frequently combines personal experience with historical and political dimensions, particularly in relation to Kashmir. He is also recognized for bringing the **ghazal** into contemporary English-language poetry while incorporating rich imagery, symbolism, repetition, and musical language. In *"Even the Rain,"* these broader concerns are particularly relevant because natural imagery and emotional memory interact to create a poetic meditation on separation and attachment to place.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

**Agha Shahid Ali's Poetic Style**

Agha Shahid Ali's poetic style is characterized by **rich imagery, symbolism, metaphor, repetition, musicality, and carefully selected diction.** His poetry frequently combines personal experiences with wider historical and cultural concerns, particularly those associated with Kashmir, exile, memory, and loss. He often uses images of landscapes, seasons, rain, gardens, cities, and remembered places to express complex emotional states. His language can appear simple at the surface level while carrying deeper associations of displacement, belonging, separation, and remembrance. A distinctive feature of Ali's style is his ability to connect the **personal with the collective.** Memories of family, homeland, and childhood often become vehicles for discussing broader experiences of migration, cultural identity, political violence, and exile. His use of symbolism enables physical objects and natural phenomena to represent abstract emotions. Similarly, repetition and parallel structures create emphasis and musical quality, while metaphor allows emotional and historical experiences to be communicated indirectly. These stylistic features give his poetry multiple layers of interpretation.

Ali's poetry also demonstrates a strong interest in **sound and formal structure,** particularly through his engagement with the traditional Urdu and Persian **ghazal.** He adapted aspects of this form for English poetry while maintaining an emphasis on rhythm, recurrence, lyrical expression, and emotional intensity. In *"Even the Rain,"* his poetic style is especially significant because natural imagery is closely connected with memory and displacement. The poem illustrates how Ali transforms an ordinary experience of rain into a complex poetic expression through foregrounding, figurative language, symbolism, and emotionally charged diction.

**Linguistic Features and Poetic Meaning**

Linguistic features play a central role in shaping the poetic meaning of Agha Shahid Ali's *"Even the Rain."* The poem uses carefully selected **diction, imagery, metaphor, symbolism, repetition, syntax, and sound patterns** to communicate meanings that extend beyond the literal level. The poet's lexical choices create associations with nature, memory, place, and emotional experience, while figurative expressions allow concrete images to represent abstract ideas such as loss, longing, displacement, and belonging. Through these linguistic choices, ordinary experiences are transformed into emotionally significant poetic expressions. The relationship between **linguistic form and meaning** is particularly important in stylistic analysis. Repetition can emphasize particular emotions or ideas, while syntactic arrangement can control rhythm, pace, and emphasis. Similarly, imagery enables readers to visualize the poet's emotional world, whereas metaphor and symbolism establish connections between physical objects and psychological experiences. Foregrounding makes certain linguistic patterns especially noticeable, encouraging readers to interpret them as significant elements of the poem's overall meaning.

In *"Even the Rain,"* linguistic features therefore function as more than decorative elements. They contribute directly to the construction of themes related to **memory, exile, homeland, identity, separation, and loss.** The interaction between linguistic choices and poetic context produces multiple layers of meaning and allows personal experience to acquire wider cultural and emotional significance. A linguistic-stylistic approach consequently demonstrates how the poem's meaning is created through the combined effects of **language, structure, imagery, and context.**

**Foregrounding**

Foregrounding is one of the most influential concepts in stylistics. The concept is associated particularly with the Prague School and has subsequently been developed within modern stylistics. Foregrounding occurs when

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

linguistic elements attract unusual attention because they depart from normal expectations or because particular patterns are repeatedly emphasized.

Two major mechanisms of foregrounding are commonly identified:

- Deviation
- Parallelism

Deviation occurs when a writer deliberately departs from expected linguistic or semantic patterns. Parallelism occurs when linguistic structures are repeated or arranged in patterned relationships. In poetry, foregrounding can make particular words, phrases, images, or structures more noticeable and thereby increase their interpretative importance.

**Agha Shahid Ali and Poetic Language**

Agha Shahid Ali's poetic language is characterized by a distinctive combination of emotional intensity, vivid imagery, cultural references, and musical expression. His poetry frequently explores themes of memory, displacement, exile, loss, identity, and attachment to place. Rather than presenting these themes in a purely direct manner, Ali uses carefully selected words and images to create multiple layers of meaning. Natural elements such as rain, snow, mountains, rivers, gardens, and seasons often become connected with personal memories and cultural experiences. His language therefore transforms ordinary physical objects into emotionally significant symbols. Another important characteristic of Ali's poetic language is his use of repetition, metaphor, contrast, and carefully structured syntax. These linguistic features create emphasis and contribute to the rhythm and emotional movement of his poems. Repeated words and expressions can reinforce feelings of longing and remembrance, while contrasts between presence and absence, homeland and exile, and memory and reality deepen the thematic complexity of his poetry. His metaphors frequently connect the external landscape with the speaker's internal emotional condition. Through these stylistic choices, Ali demonstrates how linguistic form can intensify poetic meaning and invite readers to interpret seemingly simple images at deeper emotional and symbolic levels.

Ali's poetic language is also strongly connected with cultural and geographical identity. His representation of Kashmir is not limited to a physical description of a region; instead, Kashmir becomes a space of memory, belonging, separation, and cultural consciousness. His use of place-related imagery enables personal experience to acquire wider historical and cultural significance. In *"Even the Rain,"* for example, natural imagery and sensory language contribute to an emotional relationship between the speaker, memory, and place. From a linguistic stylistic perspective, Ali's poetry is therefore significant because its meanings emerge through the interaction of lexical choices, imagery, sound, syntax, repetition, and figurative language. His poetic language demonstrates how stylistic patterns can transform personal experiences of memory and displacement into complex literary expression.

**Conceptual Review**

**Stylistics**

Stylistics is the branch of linguistics concerned with the systematic study of style in language, particularly in literary texts. It provides analytical tools for moving beyond subjective impression toward a more objective account of how linguistic choices produce meaning and effect. In this study, stylistics refers to the interpretative study of how linguistic structures and patterns are deliberately employed in a text to construct meaning, emotional resonance, and aesthetic effect.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

**Linguistic Features**

Linguistic features are the structural elements of language operating at different levels — lexical, syntactic, phonological, and graphological — that a writer selects and organizes to produce a text's distinctive character. In poetry, such features are consciously manipulated: word choice may carry symbolic weight, sentence structure may be fragmented for emotional effect, sound patterning may reinforce mood, and visual layout may guide interpretation. Linguistic features are, in short, the organized elements of language that writers intentionally shape to encode meaning and influence how a text is read.

**Style**

Style refers to the distinctive way a writer uses language within a text. It reflects the writer's individual creative choices as well as the contextual and formal traditions within which they write. In the case of Agha Shahid Ali, style is shaped not only by personal voice but by his deliberate adoption of the ghazal's formal constraints, which he adapts to the resources of English. Style, then, is the unique configuration of linguistic choices — including inherited formal ones — through which a writer expresses ideas and shapes a text's tone and meaning.

**Foregrounding**

Foregrounding is the stylistic principle by which certain elements of a text are made to stand out through deviation from linguistic norms or through patterned repetition. Leech and Short (2007) describe foregrounding as operating through two complementary mechanisms: deviation (departure from expected linguistic norms) and parallelism (repetition of linguistic structures). In a ghazal such as Even the Rain, the repeated refrain is a clear instance of parallelism-based foregrounding, while the poem's abrupt syntactic breaks and its mixing of incompatible semantic fields are instances of deviation-based foregrounding. Foregrounding is, therefore, the deliberate highlighting of linguistic elements through deviation and repetition in order to intensify meaning and draw the reader's attention to key thematic concerns.

**Poetry as Literary Text**

Poetry is a condensed and artistic form of language use in which meaning is often implicit and layered, requiring close analytical attention to uncover its full aesthetic and thematic depth. The ghazal, as a poetic form, imposes its own additional layer of formal density: each couplet must function as an autonomous unit of meaning while also participating in the cumulative effect produced by the recurring refrain across the whole poem. This dual demand — autonomy at the level of the couplet, cohesion at the level of the whole poem — makes the ghazal a particularly rich site for stylistic analysis.

**Empirical Review**

Stylistic analysis of diaspora poetry and hybrid poetic form has increasingly drawn scholarly attention as more poets write across inherited and adopted literary traditions. Comparative work on poets who adapt classical non-English verse forms into English — including the ghazal, the sonnet-sequence, and the villanelle — has shown that formal constraints inherited from another tradition often produce distinctive lexical and syntactic patterns not found in poets working purely within a single tradition. Such studies typically adopt a qualitative descriptive method, examining how repetition, rhyme constraint, and stannic form shape word choice and sentence structure, and have generally found that inherited form functions as a generative constraint rather than a limitation, prompting semantic innovation within a fixed structural frame. This line of research is

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

relevant to the present study because Even the Rain is precisely such a case of formal inheritance shaping linguistic choice.

The Studies on repetition and refrain in poetic discourse have examined how recurring lexical items accumulate shifting meaning across a text, a phenomenon closely related to the ghazal's radif. Such work, generally grounded in stylistic and cognitive-poetic frameworks, has found that a repeated word or phrase does not simply repeat a fixed meaning but is reinterpreted by its surrounding context each time it recurs, producing a cumulative and often destabilizing effect on the reader. This is directly relevant to the recurring refrain in Even the Rain, whose sense shifts subtly from couplet to couplet. The research on rhetorical questioning and syntactic fragmentation in elegiac and protest poetry has shown that interrogative and elliptical sentence structures are frequently used to stage unresolved grief or unanswered political accusation, positioning the reader as a silent addressee who must supply answers the poem withholds. Such findings are pertinent to Even the Rain, in which interrogative syntax dominates and no couplet supplies a definitive answer to the questions it raises. The religious syncretism in postcolonial poetry has examined how poets combine allusions from multiple religious and cultural traditions within a single text to construct a hybrid symbolic register that resists reduction to any one tradition. This body of work is relevant to Ali's poem, which draws on biblical, Hindu, and broadly South Asian cultural allusions within the same short text.

Studies on graph logical convention in classical verse forms adapted into English have considered how formal markers specific to a source tradition such as the ghazal's maqta, in which the poet's own name appears in the final couplet are preserved or adapted when the form is transplanted into a new language. Such research typically finds that these graphological conventions, when retained, create a distinctive form of self-reference not native to English lyric tradition, collapsing the usual distance between poet and speaking voice. Taken together, these strands of research demonstrate growing interest in the stylistics of hybrid and diasporic poetic forms, yet they remain largely fragmented: studies tend to isolate a single device (repetition, rhetorical questioning, intertextuality, or graphological convention) rather than integrating lexical, syntactic, phonological, and graphological analysis within one framework applied to a single text. Few studies apply a systematic multilevel model specifically to Agha Shahid Ali's Even the Rain. The present study addresses this gap by applying Leech and Short's four-level model comprehensively to the poem, offering an integrated account of how its linguistic features operate together.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored exclusively on Leech and Short's (2007) Model of Stylistic Analysis, as set out in Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose. Leech and Short propose that the style of a literary text can be systematically examined across four levels of language:

- **Lexical level:** the analysis of word choice, including diction, figurative language, and semantic fields;
- **Grammatical (syntactic) level** the analysis of sentence structure, including clause type, mood, ellipsis, and word order;
- **Phonological level :** the analysis of sound patterning, including rhyme, meter, alliteration, and assonance; and
- **Graphological level:** the analysis of visual and typographical features, including punctuation, capitalization, line breaks, and stannic arrangement.

Central to Leech and Short's model is the concept of foregrounding, achieved through either deviation from linguistic norms or parallelism (patterned repetition). Foregrounded elements are those a text makes

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

psychologically prominent through unexpected or repeated linguistic choices, and it is at these foregrounded points that stylistic meaning is most concentrated.

Leech and Short's model is particularly well suited to the present study for two reasons. First, its four-level structure provides a systematic and replicable procedure for moving through a text methodically, rather than relying on impressionistic or purely thematic reading. Second, its concepts of deviation and parallelism map naturally onto the formal architecture of the ghazal itself: the radif is a clear instance of parallelism, while the poem's syntactic fragmentation and its mixing of incompatible lexical fields are clear instances of deviation. This makes Leech and Short's model an especially appropriate single framework through which to examine Even the Rain, without the need for additional theoretical apparatus.

## Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the linguistic stylistic features of Agha Shahid Ali's Even the Rain. The qualitative approach permits an in-depth examination of language use — focusing on diction, syntax, phonology, and graphology — without reliance on numerical or statistical data. Descriptive analysis identifies, categorizes, and interprets stylistic structures within their literary and cultural context, revealing how the poet's linguistic choices shape meaning and reader engagement. Even the Rain was selected for its rich and internally consistent stylistic features: its adoption of the ghazel's formal constraints, its dense figurative and allusive vocabulary, its patterned syntactic variation across autonomous couplets, and its distinctive graphological conventions, including the maqta. Because the poem is a copyrighted literary work, direct verbatim excerpts are not reproduced in this study; instead, the analysis describes and paraphrases the poem's linguistic patterns and content in order to respect copyright while preserving the analytical integrity of the study. Readers are encouraged to consult the original poem, published in Agha Shahid Ali's collection, alongside this analysis.

A four-level analytical framework, drawn directly from Leech and Short's model, guides the study: lexical features (diction, figurative language, semantic fields), syntactic patterns (sentence type, ellipsis, interrogative mood), phonological devices (rhyme, refrain, sound patterning), and graphological elements (stanzaic form, capitalization, the maqta convention). Reliability and validity are supported through systematic, level-by-level analysis, clear categorization of features, and consistent grounding in Leech and Short's theoretical categories, producing a structured and replicable stylistic study of the poem.

## Results and Discussion

### Text Selection

The poem selected for analysis is Even the Rain by Agha Shahid Ali, a Kashmiri-American poet celebrated for adapting the classical Persian-Urdu ghazal form into English verse. The poem consists of fifteen couplets (shers), each self-contained in meaning yet bound together by a repeated closing phrase that functions as the ghazel's radif (refrain). In line with ghazal convention, the final couplet contains the poet's own pen name, a device known as the maqta. Because the poem is protected by copyright, direct lines are not reproduced here; the analysis instead identifies and discusses the linguistic patterns and devices as they occur across the text.

### Lexical Level

At the lexical level, Ali's diction draws together vocabulary from strikingly different registers — the domestic, the religious, the political, and the elegiac — often within the same couplet. Words associated with everyday social life (a house party, drinks, a perfumed fruit) sit beside words drawn from scripture and ritual (a biblical

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

pillar of salt, a Hindu cremation ground, the Bible itself), producing a lexical field that resists a single cultural anchor. This deliberate mixing of sacred and secular vocabulary can be read, in Leech and Short's terms, as semantic deviation: words belonging to incompatible domains of experience are placed within the same syntactic frame, forcing the reader to search for a connection between them.

The poem's most significant lexical choice is the phrase that closes every couplet, which functions simultaneously as vocabulary item and structural refrain. Its meaning shifts subtly from couplet to couplet — at times suggesting mercy, at times punishment, at times an accomplice to grief — so that a single recurring lexical item accumulates several, sometimes contradictory, senses over the course of the poem. Personified abstractions form another lexical feature: forces such as fire, memory, and an unnamed adversarial figure are given capitalized, agentive status, functioning as grammatical subjects capable of desire and intention. This personification, a lexical-semantic device, blurs the boundary between the poem's psychological interior and its historical, political exterior.

**Syntactic Level**

Syntactically, the poem relies heavily on the interrogative mood. A large proportion of its couplets close on a question, and several couplets embed a question within a question through parenthetical interruption — a dash inserted mid-clause that stages the speaker breaking off, correcting himself, or supplying an answer he did not expect to give. This pattern of self-interruption produces what Leech and short describe as foregrounded deviation from expected clause structure: the reader must reconstruct a complete proposition out of fragments separated by dashes and rhetorical pauses. The ghazal form itself imposes a syntactic constraint that becomes stylistically significant: each couplet must stand as a grammatically and semantically autonomous unit, independent of the couplets before and after it. Ali exploits this constraint by varying sentence type from couplet to couplet — declarative statements, imperatives, rhetorical questions, and elliptical noun phrases lacking a finite verb all appear in sequence. This syntactic restlessness enacts, at the level of form, the poem's thematic instability: no single grammatical mood dominates for long, mirroring a speaker who moves between mourning, accusation, memory, and address without settling. The Pronominal reference is similarly unstable. The addressee shifts across the poem sometimes a beloved, sometimes a divine figure, sometimes an adversarial "Enemy," sometimes the reader — without the syntax ever supplying a fixed antecedent. This sustained referential ambiguity is a syntactic strategy that supports the poem's political and elegiac double voicing.

**Phonological Level**

Phonologically, the poem's defining feature is the ghazel's twin apparatus of radif and qafia: an identical refrain phrase closes every couplet, while the word or phrase immediately preceding it varies in a patterned rhyme or near-rhyme across couplets. This structure produces a chant-like, incantatory rhythm distinct from the variable line lengths of free verse; the recurrence of identical closing sounds at regular intervals lends the poem an aural insistence, as though the refrain were being invoked rather than simply stated. In Leech and Short's terms, this patterned repetition constitutes phonological parallelism, in which sound recurrence reinforces semantic and emotional continuity even as surrounding content changes from couplet to couplet. Internal sound patterning within individual couplets — assonance across long vowel sounds, alliterative clusters, and shifts in stress that slow or quicken particular lines — contributes further to the poem's oral, performative quality. Because the refrain word itself carries associations of both natural phenomenon and

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

elegiac symbol, its constant phonological return functions almost as a knell: each repetition lands with a slightly different emotional weight even though the sound remains unchanged.

**Graphological Level**

Graph logically, the poem's couplet-by-couplet layout, with a clear stanza break after every two lines, visually enacts the self-contained nature of each ghazal sher, distinguishing it from continuously enjambed free verse. Selective capitalization marks the poem's personified abstractions — the recurring capitalized nouns referring to forces such as fire, memory, and the adversarial figure — visually elevating them to the status of proper nouns or named agents, reinforcing the lexical personification discussed above. Capitalization of religious and geographical proper nouns similarly anchors the poem's shifting settings and belief systems within the same visual register as its personified abstractions, flattening the distinction between the human, the divine, and the natural.

The most striking graphological feature is reserved for the final couplet, where the poet's own name appears within the text itself — the maqta convention of the classical ghazal. This self-naming, printed as it would be spoken, turns the page into a site of self-address: the poet becomes both speaker and, in the closing line, an object addressed by the refrain. In Leech and Short's terms, this constitutes a graphological deviation from ordinary lyric address, since the signature typically belongs outside the poem's utterance rather than inside it; its inclusion collapses the boundary between author and speaking voice at the moment the poem closes. Together, these four levels show how Agha Shahid Ali's stylistic choices are inseparable from the ghazal form he inherits and adapts: lexical mixing of sacred and secular vocabulary, syntactic instability through interrogation and fragmentation, phonological insistence through radif and qafia, and graphological self-naming at the poem's close all work together to stage a grief that is at once personal, political, and formally inherited.

The linguistic stylistic analysis of Agha Shahid Ali's *"Even the Rain"* demonstrates that **foregrounding, imagery, metaphor, symbolism, repetition, and lexical choices** play an important role in constructing the poem's meaning. The poet uses familiar natural images in distinctive ways, allowing ordinary experiences to acquire deeper emotional significance. Rain functions beyond its literal meaning and becomes associated with memory, separation, longing, and attachment to place. Through foregrounding, particular expressions and images attract the reader's attention and encourage interpretation beyond the surface level of the poem.

The analysis further reveals that Ali's **diction, syntactic patterns, repetition, and figurative language** contribute significantly to the poem's emotional atmosphere. His carefully selected vocabulary creates connections between the natural world and the speaker's inner experiences. Repetition reinforces important ideas and gives emotional emphasis, while metaphor and symbolism allow abstract experiences such as loss, displacement, and remembrance to be expressed through concrete images. The combination of these linguistic features creates both cohesion and emotional intensity within the poem. Overall, the findings show that **the poetic meaning of "Even the Rain" emerges from the close relationship between linguistic form and thematic content.** Ali transforms natural imagery into a means of expressing complex experiences of memory, identity, belonging, and displacement. The poem demonstrates how stylistic choices can deepen interpretation by creating multiple layers of meaning. Thus, the analysis confirms that foregrounding and other linguistic features are not merely decorative elements but essential components through which the poem communicates its emotional and thematic significance.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

The analysis of Agha Shahid Ali's **"**Even the Rain**"** reveals that foregrounding plays a significant role in creating the poem's emotional and thematic impact. The poet uses repetition, unusual word choices, contrasts, and carefully arranged images to draw attention to particular aspects of memory, loss, and displacement. These foregrounded elements interrupt ordinary patterns of language and encourage the reader to focus on the relationship between natural imagery and human experience. The recurring presence of rain, for example, functions not merely as a description of nature but as a symbolic element associated with memory, separation, and emotional reflection. Through these stylistic choices, Ali transforms an ordinary natural phenomenon into a meaningful poetic device. The linguistic features of the poem further demonstrate how sound, diction, syntax, and imagery contribute to poetic meaning. Ali's vocabulary combines simple expressions with emotionally charged and culturally significant words, producing a language that is accessible yet deeply evocative. His syntactic arrangement creates pauses and shifts in emphasis, while the use of repetition strengthens the sense of continuity between past and present. Imagery also plays an important role in connecting physical landscapes with psychological states. The rain, landscape, and other natural references can therefore be understood on both literal and symbolic levels. These linguistic patterns demonstrate how stylistic choices shape the reader's interpretation without relying solely on direct explanation. the findings indicate that the poem's poetic meaning emerges through the interaction of foregrounding, linguistic structure, and imagery. Ali's stylistic techniques create a layered representation of memory, belonging, separation, and emotional attachment. The poem demonstrates how linguistic deviation and parallel patterns can make particular words and images more prominent, allowing ordinary experiences to acquire deeper significance. From a linguistic-stylistic perspective, **"**Even the Rain**"** illustrates the way poetic language can transform personal and cultural experiences into broader reflections on identity and displacement. Thus, the results support the argument that Ali's poetic effect is produced not only by what the poem communicates but also by how its language is organized and foregrounded.

## Conclusion

The present study examined Agha Shahid Ali's *"Even the Rain"* through the perspective of linguistic stylistics, with particular attention to foregrounding, lexical selection, syntax, repetition, imagery, sound patterns, and figurative language. The analysis demonstrates that Ali's poetic meaning is closely connected with his distinctive use of language. Rather than functioning merely as a medium for communicating ideas, language becomes an essential part of the poem's aesthetic and emotional structure. Through carefully selected linguistic features, ordinary experiences and natural elements are transformed into expressions of memory, loss, displacement, and emotional attachment to place. The analysis further shows that foregrounding plays an important role in creating the poem's poetic effect. Through repetition, parallel structures, semantic associations, unusual combinations of words, and vivid imagery, Ali draws attention to particular aspects of the speaker's experience. The imagery of rain and landscape is especially significant because it connects the external natural world with the speaker's internal emotional condition. The contrast between physical presence and emotional absence strengthens the poem's representation of longing and remembrance. In this way, linguistic choices contribute directly to the construction of the poem's deeper meanings.

Overall, *Even the Rain* demonstrates the close relationship between linguistic form and poetic interpretation. Ali's use of lexical, syntactic, semantic, phonological, and figurative features creates a multilayered poetic experience in which language, memory, place, and identity are interconnected. The study concludes that

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

linguistic stylistics provides a useful framework for understanding how Ali's poetic language produces aesthetic and emotional effects. His manipulation of language enables personal experiences of separation and memory to acquire broader cultural and human significance, making *"Even the Rain"* a valuable text for stylistic and literary analysis. The linguistic stylistic analysis of Agha Shahid Ali's Even the Rain, conducted through Leech and Short's (2007) four-level model, reveals a poem in which inherited formal convention and individual linguistic choice are inseparable. At the lexical level, the poem mixes sacred, domestic, and political vocabulary to produce a semantic field resistant to a single cultural reading. At the syntactic level, interrogative mood, ellipsis, and unstable pronominal reference stage a grief that cannot settle into a single grammatical form. At the phonological level, the ghazel's radif and qafia produce a chant-like insistence that reinforces the refrain's accumulating, shifting meaning. At the graphological level, stannic form and the maqta convention visually enact both the autonomy of each couplet and the collapse of distance between poet and speaker at the poem's close.

The study concludes that Leech and Short's model, though originally developed with prose fiction primarily in mind, is well suited to analyzing hybrid poetic forms such as the English-language ghazal, where a poet's individual style operates within — and against — a set of formal constraints inherited from another literary tradition. It is recommended that future stylistic research on diaspora and cross-cultural poetry continue to apply integrated, multilevel models of this kind, as they are capable of capturing how inherited form and individual voice interact to produce meaning.

**Recommendations:**

- **Promote Linguistic Stylistics in Literary Studies:** Universities should encourage the systematic use of linguistic stylistics in literature courses to help students examine how language contributes to literary meaning.
- **Strengthen Stylistic Analysis in English Literature:** Literature curricula should include major concepts such as foregrounding, deviation, parallelism, lexical choice, syntax, imagery, metaphor, and sound patterns.
- **Encourage Interdisciplinary Research:** Researchers should combine literary studies with linguistics, discourse analysis, cognitive stylistics, and cultural studies to develop broader interpretations of contemporary poetry.
- **Develop Research on Agha Shahid Ali:** More scholarly studies should examine Ali's poetry from linguistic, stylistic, postcolonial, cultural, and diasporic perspectives, particularly his representations of Kashmir, memory, displacement, and identity.
- **Use Digital and Corpus-Based Methods:** Future researchers may employ corpus-analysis software to systematically identify recurring lexical, grammatical, semantic, and phonological patterns in Ali's poetry.
- **Encourage Comparative Studies:** Scholars may compare *"Even the Rain"* with other poems by Agha Shahid Ali or with works of other South Asian poets to examine similarities and differences in the representation of exile, memory, and place.
- **Improve Access to Literary Resources:** Academic institutions should provide students and researchers with access to scholarly books, literary databases, journals, and digital resources related to stylistics and contemporary poetry.
- **Integrate Local and Cultural Context:** Stylistic analysis should consider the cultural and geographical contexts underlying literary texts while maintaining a clear distinction between textual evidence and interpretive claims.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

• **Promote Research-Based Teaching:** Teachers should use poems such as *"Even the Rain"* to demonstrate how specific linguistic features can support interpretations rather than relying exclusively on thematic summaries.

• **Encourage Further Empirical Research:** Future studies should investigate reader responses to foregrounded linguistic features to examine how stylistic choices influence readers' emotional and interpretive responses.

## REFERENCES

Ali, A. S. (2003). *Call me Ishmael tonight: A book of ghazals*. W. W. Norton.

Ali, A. S. (2009). *The veiled suite: The collected poems*. W. W. Norton.

Carter, R. (2004). *Language and creativity: The art of common talk*. Routledge.

Childs, P., & Fowler, R. (2006). *The Routledge dictionary of literary terms*. Routledge.

Cook, G. (1992). *The discourse of advertising*. Routledge.

Fowler, R. (1996). *Linguistic criticism* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1971). Linguistic function and literary style: An inquiry into the language of William Golding's *The Inheritors*. In S. Chatman (Ed.), *Literary style: A symposium* (pp. 330–365). Oxford University Press.

Jeffries, L., & McIntyre, D. (2010). *Stylistics*. Cambridge University Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.

Leech, G. N. (1969). *A linguistic guide to English poetry*. Longman.

Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.

Leech, G. N. (2008). *Language in literature: Style and foregrounding*. Pearson Longman.

Leech, G. N., & Short, M. H. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). Pearson Longman.

Miall, D. S., & Kuiken, D. (1994). Foregrounding, defamiliarization, and affect: Response to literary stories. *Poetics, 22*(5), 389–407.

Mukarovsky, J. (1964). Standard language and poetic language. In P. L. Garvin (Ed.), *A Prague School reader on aesthetics, literary structure, and style* (pp. 17–30). Georgetown University Press.

Nørgaard, N., Montoro, R., & Busse, B. (2010). *Key terms in stylistics*. Continuum.

Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. Routledge.

Short, M. (1996). *Exploring the language of poems, plays and prose*. Longman.

Toolan, M. (1998). *Language in literature: An introduction to stylistics*. Arnold.

Verdonk, P. (2002). *Stylistics*. Oxford University Press.

Wales, K. (2011). *A dictionary of stylistics* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Widdowson, H. G. (1975). *Stylistics and the teaching of literature*. Longman.

Shklovsky, V. (1965). Art as technique. In L. T. Lemon & M. J. Reis (Eds.), *Russian formalist criticism: Four essays* (pp. 3–24). University of Nebraska Press.

Stockwell, P. (2002). *Cognitive poetics: An introduction*. Routledge.

van Peer, W. (1986). *Stylistics and psychology: Investigations of foregrounding*. Croom Helm.