

UNE ANALYSE STYLISTIQUE LINGUISTIQUE DE « LA FEUILLE BLANCHE » DE PAUL VALÉRY

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Résumé

Cette étude examine les éléments linguistiques, le style et les composantes esthétiques de « La feuille blanche » de Paul Valéry, publiée sur <http://www.goodreads.com>. Le poème se compose d'éléments linguistiques nécessaires et pertinents qui mettent en relief la beauté qui s'y trouve. « La feuille blanche » traduite par « The blank sheet » est un chef-d'œuvre qui révèle la capacité créatrice de l'esprit humain et le pouvoir de la plume à transformer ses contenus en codes appréciables. Il faut noter que la feuille vierge n'est en réalité pas vierge lorsqu'elle est maniée par un écrivain. Toute véritable création commence à partir d'un état de néant, de vide, de doute, de manque, d'obscurité et de chaos, bien qu'à des degrés variables de certitude. L'esprit humain fonctionne comme une machine de traitement qui fait passer le non-existant à l'existence. Le monde n'a pas encore connu le meilleur de l'écriture créative. Selon "La feuille blanche" « Il n'est rien de si beau que ce qui n'existe pas »

Mots-clés: feuille, surexcite, paralyse, blanche, beau

Abstract

This study investigates the linguistic elements, style and aesthetic components of Paul Valéry's "La feuille blanche" Published by www.goodreads.com. The poem comprises of necessary and relevant linguistic elements that portrays the beauty that lies therein. "La Feuille blanche," translated "The blank sheet is a masterpiece that shows the creative ability of the human mind and the power of the pen to generate her contents into appreciable codes. Registering the fact that the plain sheet is in reality not plain when handled by a writer. True creation begins from a state of noil, void, doubt, lack, darkness and chaos. Although, with varying degrees of certainty. The human mind serves as the processing machine that brings non-existence into existence. The world is yet to witness the best of creative writings. According to "La feuille blanche" "il nest rien de si beau, que ce qui nexiste pas" meaning "there is nothing so good as that which is not in existence."

Keywords: blank sheet, creative, human, mind, noil, void, chaos, doubt

Introduction

The world around man forms a certain percentage of his belief system thereby influencing his actions and decisions which in most cases results to attitude. A man's immediate environment affects him or her in some ways. This is the case of Ambrose Toussaint Paul Jules Valéry, whose ambition of becoming naval personnel got aborted as a result of a sudden feeling of attraction to the marine world. As a young boy, his experience of the world around him would later affect his perception, beliefs, actions and philosophy. He enjoyed reading the works of great authors like Victor Hugo, Verlaine and Mallarmé. These acts encouraged him to write and he equally associated himself with the likes of Pierre Louys and André Glide in 1892. At a point he abandoned poetry for thought and reasoning.

Valéry schooled at Montpellier. He was born on October 30th, 1871 in Sète. His passion for reading and music were equally in the list of his areas of interest. Paul Valéry soon began to write, starting with biography of Paul Valéry. He soon began writing rigorous titles such as "La jeune parque," and "Le Cimetière marine." www.goodreads.com has it that Paul Valéry's interest was sufficiently broad that he could be classified as a polymath. He wrote many essays and aphorisms alongside his poetry, drama and dialogues. Writing on the work of such an author with diverse alarming positive and negative experiences of life would require a good justice of note with careful observations. This would form the basis of our analysis of Paul Valéry's linguistics and style of output in his poem "La feuille Blanche" published in 1922. Our work would look at Paul Valéry's choice of language and his style of its application and the linguistic tone and message of the poem.

Literature Review

Studies in textual analysis are quite engaging. Considering the diverse mechanisms of language in use and several methodologies available to interpreters within or interested in the stylistics domain. We hereby review some research papers related to our work beginning with Adeleke's (2004) study, *Étude sémiostylistique du <Déjeuner du matin> de Jacques Prévert*, where he adopted *Sémiostylistique* approach which implies the combination of "semiology and stylistics" approaches to appreciate the linguistic elements that makes up the technical fittings of the poem as well as the manner of application of the said linguistic elements. This analysis of "Déjeuner du matin" successfully demonstrates the complementarity of semiology and stylistics. Using Saussure's theory of the sign, it reveals that Prévert generates political meaning indirectly through displaced signifiers like "tears". Using Bally's stylistics, it shows that lexical simplicity functions as a stylistic strategy of defamiliarization that produces polysemy and humanist impact. The conclusion that Prévert's "simple words are rich in meaning" is therefore theoretically justified. It is worthy of note that although this work is in the same domain as ours, there are slight difference in the approach applied in our work.

Soyoye's (2001) study, *Au seuil d'une aventure de M. Adiyi Bestman: Une analyse sémantique et grammaticale* elucidates the beautiful linguistic mechanisms that sums up the technical foreground and connotative ambiance of the poem through the use of semantic and structural methods of textual analysis. Calling on the attention of relevant stakeholders to the poem which he describes as a unique tool necessary to revolutionize the Nigerian French literature. Soyoye's analysis of "Au seuil d'une aventure" demonstrates how stylistic minimalism generates semantic complexity. By applying Jakobson's poetic function, the study shows that Bestman's 45-word poem achieved depth through metaphorical displacement with mundane objects "calebasse and ampoule" becoming signs for existential risk. The interpretation that the poem warns against "man chasing all that attracts without thinking of danger" is justified by the semiotic reading of "termite - ampoule". In conclusion, the author's central claim is that Bestman uses extreme lexical economy and surrealist imagery to create a poem that's semantically deep despite its simple form. It is an "artistic adventure" for the reader and a model for Nigerian francophone literature. We hereby specifically appreciate the fact that the poem "Au seuil d'une aventure" was written by a Nigerian by name M. Adiyi Bestman and analysed also by a Nigerian by name Festus Ayodeji Soyoye. This trail of continuity is one of the pointers of the rich depth of Nigerian French literature worthy of note.

Methodology

This study adopts the traditional descriptive stylistics and the speech act theory. The Traditional descriptive stylistics is used to generate objective linguistic data while the Speech

Act Theory is to interpret the pragmatic function of those formal choices within Valéry's poetic discourse.

Traditional Descriptive Stylistics Approach

Traditional descriptive stylistics is an empirical and taxonomic approach to textual analysis that focuses on the systematic inventory, classification, and description of observable linguistic features within a literary text. Originating with the 1909 work of Charles Bally's "Traité de stylistique française," this approach is grounded in the principle that stylistic meaning emerges from the formal properties of language. The methodology proceeds through four sequential stages:

- i) data collection through exhaustive textual scanning,
- ii) classification of linguistic items into established grammatical categories,
- iii) neutral description of formal patterns using the terminology of traditional grammar, and
- iv) functional interpretation that correlates formal choices with their potential stylistic effects.

We adopted this approach as a foundational analytical layer because it provides an objective, replicable basis for data collection which enables us to establish quantifiable evidence regarding lexis, syntax, and morphology before proceeding to theory driven interpretation.

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory, as contained in his seminal book *How to do things with words* in 1962, is a pragmatic framework developed by J.L. Austin and further formalized in 1969 by J.R. Searle in a foundational book titled *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. The theory posits that language is a form of action and that every utterance performs three simultaneous acts, that is:

- i) the act, which concerns the production of a meaningful linguistic expression,
- ii) the act, which constitutes the speaker's communicative intention or force such as asserting, requesting, or promising, and
- iii) the act, which refers to the effect or consequence produced on the hearer or reader.

We were able to move beyond surface description toward the analysis of pragmatic function with this theory. It provides a theoretical apparatus to interpret how Paul Valéry's poetic discourse functions as communicative action. Specifically, it allows for the identification of the poem's dominant illocutionary force and the examination of how the text positions its implied reader through perlocutionary effects such as paralysis, reverence, and aesthetic anxiety.

Le Poème

"LA FEUILLE BLANCHE"

Envérité, une feuille blanche

Nous déclare par le vide

Qu'il n'est

qui rien de si beau

Que ce n'existe pas.

Sur le miroir magique de sa Blanche étendue,

L'âme voit devant elle le lieu des miracles

Que l'on ferait naître avec des Signes et des lignes.

Cette présence d'absence surexcite

Et paralyse à la fois l'acte sans retour de la plume.

Il y a dans toute beauté une interdiction de toucher,
 Il en émane je ne sais quoi de sacré
 Qui suspend le geste, et fait l'homme
 Sur le point d'agir se craindre soi-même.

En Anglais

The Poem

"THE BLANK SHEET"

In truth, a blank sheet
 Declares by the void
 That there is nothing as beautiful
 As that which does not exist.
 On the magic mirror of its white space,
 The soul sees before her the place of the miracles
 That we would bring to life with signs and lines.
 This presence of absence over-excites
 And at the same time paralyzes the definitive act of the pen.
 There is in all beauty a forbiddance to touch,
 From which emanates I don't know what of sacred
 That stops the movement and puts the man
 On the point of acting in fear of himself

....source: <https://www.frenchtoday.com/french-poetry-reading/poem-la-feuille-blanche-valer>

Table 1: A Linguistics Stylistics Analysis of "La Feuille Blanche" by Paul Valéry

Noun	Adjective	Verb	Adverb	Pronoun	Preposition	Conjunction	Interjection	Articles
feuille (leaf) 1 vide (void) 1 beauté (beauty) 1 miracle (miracle)1 signes (signs)1 lignes (lines)1 présence (presence)1 absence (absence)1 acte (act)1 retour (return)1 plume (pen)1 interdiction (prohibition)1 geste (gesture)1 homme (man)1 point (point)1 fois (time)1	blanche (white)1 beau (beautiful) 1 sacré (sacred)1 tout (all)1 que(that) 2 qui (that)1	déclare (declares)1 n'est (is)1 voit (sees)1 ferait (would make)1 naître (to be born)1 surexcite (overexcites)1 paralyse (paralyzes)1 toucher (to touch)1 émane (emanates)1 suspend (suspends)1 faire (to make)1 craindre (to fear)1 agir 1	devant (before)1 soi-même (oneself) 1 ne.... rien1 (nothing) ne..pas(n ot)1 quoi(what)1	Il 2 Elle (she, it)1 l'on (one,)1 ce(that)1 qui (Which)1	à (at, to, in) 1 de (of, from)1 avec (with)1 que (that)1 sur (on, upon) 2 sans (without)1	et (and)2 que (than)1	envérité (in truth)1	une (a)1 la (the)1 ce (this)1 l' (the) 4 des(some) 3 le (the) 5 la (the) 2

Morphology

Word Formation

The poem is written in simple French making it easy to understand, although the sentences are complex with little use of words like “surexcite” and “interdiction.” The poem is easy to read and understand but would require some in-depth study for the purpose of analysis.

Prefixes and Suffixes

Words like "surexcite" and "interdiction" contain prefixes ("sur-", "inter-") and suffixes ("-tion") that modify meanings and show relationships between concepts (excitement and prohibition).

Syntax

Sentence Structure

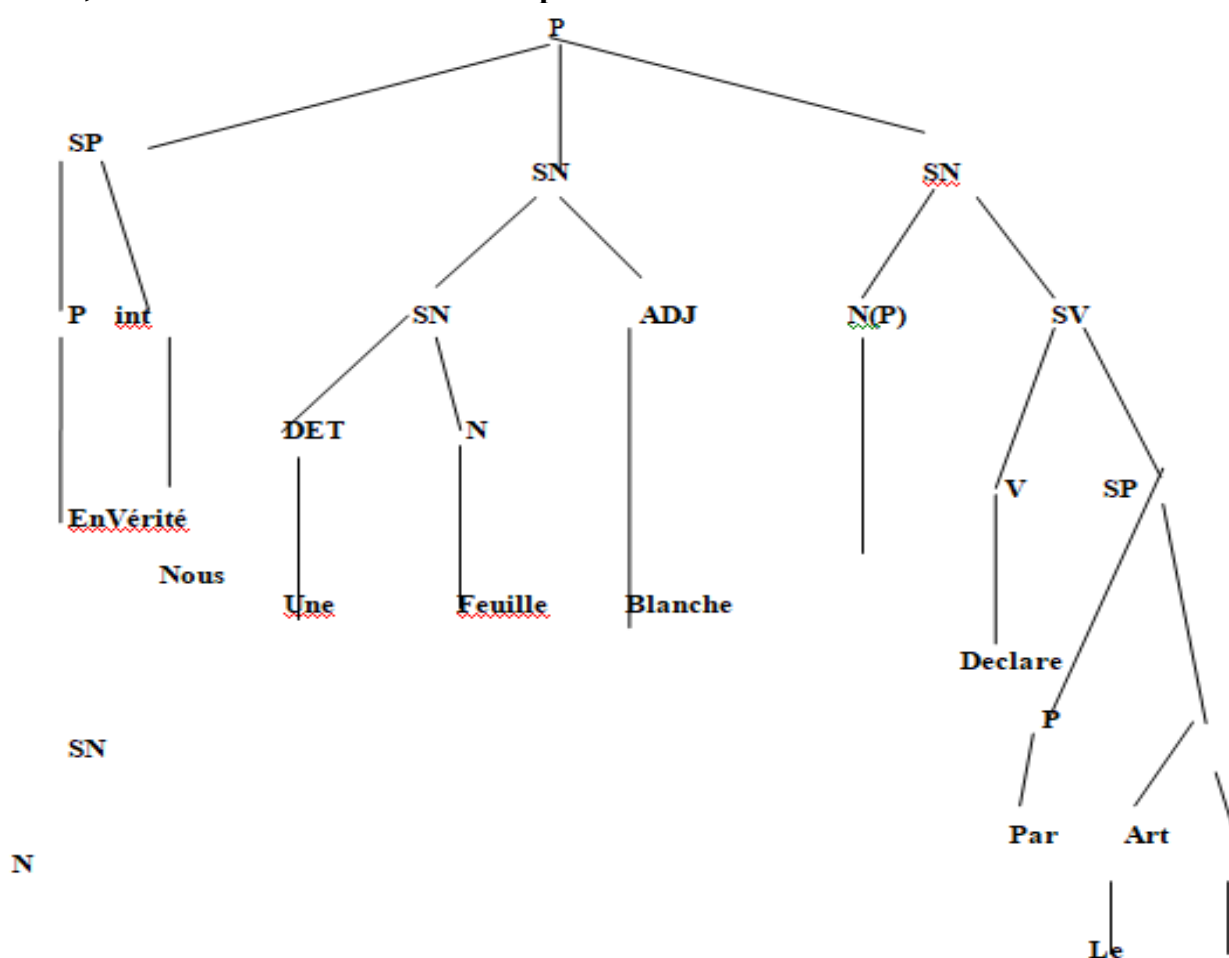
The poem primarily uses declarative sentences, some of which are quite complex and involve multiple clauses. For example, "L'âmevoitdevantelle le lieu des miracles"

Structural Analysis

Here is a sentence tree for a clearer representation of the structure of the main proposition of the poem. We earlier stated that the poem constitutes simple and complex propositions. The poem is a thirteen-line free style poem separated by different lines but connected by the conjunction and relative pronoun ‘que’ to form her complex structure.

Figure 1: L'arbreSyntaxique (Syntactic Tree)

Envérité, unefeuille Blanche nous déclare par le vide



Vide

Pragmatics

Speech Acts

The poem makes several assertions about beauty, creation, and inhibition, functioning as declarative speech acts. The line "Envérité, une feuille Blanche / Nous déclare par le vide" directly states a truth, positioning the poem as a philosophical meditation.

Implicature

Valéry implies that the act of creation is fraught with anxiety and reverence. The idea that "Il y a dans toute beauté une interdiction de toucher" suggests a sacredness that both inspires and hinders action.

Semantics

This section of our analysis shall take us through the methods of application of certain lexical and grammatical elements by the poet in the poem. According to Soyoye (1998), lexical terms include nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs while grammatical terms are articles, prepositions and pronouns. Lexical terms are words with semantic contents while grammatical words are only used for word function. The "feuille blanche" (blank sheet) is a powerful symbol of potential and creativity with its semantic fields "naître," "signes," "lignes" as (+creation), "interdiction," "paralyse" as (+inhibition), "sacré" and "interdit" as (+sacredness) and "Feuille" and "Blanche" as (+purity) weaving a complex web of meanings that reinforce the message of the poem. The poet personified certain inanimate abstract nouns putting them in the position of equal capability as humans. For example, "Feuille," the use of the inanimate noun translated as "leaf" in the poem is a great display of the poet's psychological endowment owing to the fact that "leaf" is a living thing and a part of the tree that hosts or houses the flowers which in turn buds to bring forth edible fruits. 'Feuille and âme' are (+human) in the poem. We see the dominance of Roman Jakobson's poetic function in the poem with the author foregrounding phonological and syntactic parallelism, thereby turning language into the subject of the poem, just as the blank sheet is both object and subject of creation.

Stylistic

Paul Valéry employs various parts of speech in "La feuille blanche" to craft a rich and evocative poetic experience. Here's an analysis of how he utilizes each part of speech:

- **Nouns:** Valéry uses nouns like "feuille" (leaf), "vide" (void), and "beauté" (beauty) to evoke imagery and convey abstract concepts. Each noun carries symbolic weight, contributing to the overall theme of the poem.
- **Verbs:** The verbs in the poem are to animate the imagery and actions described. For example, "déclare" (declares), "voit" (sees), and "ferait naître" (would make born) imbue the poem with movement and vitality, illustrating the dynamic relationship between the artist and the blank page.
- **Adjectives:** Valéry's use of adjectives such as "blanche" (white), "beau" (beautiful), and "sacré" (sacred) adds layers of sensory detail and emotional resonance to the poem.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ambrose Toussaint Paul Jules Valéry's "La Feuille Blanche" is rich in linguistic imagery. Valéry through his creative skill portrayed the possible experience of most seasoned writers each time with their blank sheets, hopefully looking up to the unseen reality

for a qualitative realization of their own world. "La feuille blanche " by Paul Valéry played host of 73 words in all with 16 nouns, 13 verbs, 7 adjectives, 5 adverbs, 7 prepositions, 3 conjunctions, 4 pronouns, 17 articles and 1 interjection. This itemization of the parts of speech used in the poem, makes it easier to understand the strength of value of (+human, + animate) given to 'La feuille' which denotes 'The leaf' and connotes 'The sheet of paper.' The poet's use of more nominal group of words is a reflection on his ability and interest in the unseen reality which he described as most endowed than the seen world using a non-human object 'La Feuille'. This is a masterpiece worth applauding for its language techniques, thoughtful linguistic crafting and style of delivery.

Through natural description, we see that Valéry strips language to its barest form and through speech act analysis stripped language functions as an assertive and expressive act that transforms the reader's blank mental state into creative potential, just like the blank sheet becomes a poem.

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