



LINGUISTIC MARKERS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TENSION IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' 'CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF' THROUGH A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS USING LEECH AND SHORT THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This research article examines the stylistics markers repetition, figurative language, lexical choices, grammatical deviation and structure that made tension in the play. This research explains how Tennessee Williams made tension in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof through language. Pressure and suppressed truth like most of the tension in the play is generated not only drama events but by his linguistic choices. This study investigates the linguistic markers of psychological tension in Tennessee Williams' cat on a hot tin roof through a stylistic analysis based on Leech and Short's theory of style. The study applies key stylistic tools such as parallelism, deviation, and foregrounding to selected from Acts I, and II of the play. The study shows how William style portrayed in it with the help of Leech and Short theory. The research demonstrates how William manipulation of psychology, and foregrounds theme of mendacity, repression and desire. This research argues that Williams deliberately manipulates language like rhythm, pauses, contradiction, silence and structures having no standard and it creates tension both on the surface of dialogue and its inner meaning. The research examines that psychological tension is constructed through syntactic deviation, including fragmented sentences, abrupt interruptions, and ellipses, which depicts Brick's emotional withdrawal to communication. Maggie repeated dialogues to silence and talking emphasize the emotional distance between her and Brick. Brick's minimalist responses often shows incomplete utterances of dialogues work as linguistic markers of repression and denial. Emotionally charged vocabulary is being used in Act II like in the scene between Brick and Big daddy where both shared confrontational dialogues with each other. The research demonstrates that Williams' strategic manipulation of linguistic patterns plays an important role in mirroring psychological tension, highlighting the effectiveness of stylistic analysis in uncovering the emotional depth.

KEY WORDS: Conflict, Mendacity Repetition, Silence, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Grammatical Deviation

INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) has psychological realism, and mendacity. The dramatic power of the play is largely derived from the sustained, suffocating tension that the Politt family. The tension rooted in issues of inheritance, repressed sexuality, failed marriage and forthcoming of death of the patriarch. The entire play vibrates with tension. Tennessee William *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is widely recognized for its powerful emotional landscape, where relationships are fragile, truth is uneasy. Tennessee Williams is well known for depicting characters with deep emotions. The friction between silence and words, between what is unsaid or spoken and it becomes the central stylistics engine of the play's dramatic power. He creates tension throughout the play. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* the characters hide the truth, argue, and struggle with their feelings. This creates tension throughout the play. The play's tension not only increases from the plot but especially from the language characters' use. The characters like



Maggie, Big Daddy, Gooper, Mae, and Brick speak in fragmented, repetitive and in emotional language that depicts their frustration and fear.

This research applies Leech and Short's stylistic Model as shown in *Style in Fiction* (1981) as its primary framework. This model provides a systematic method for linking language form with psychological interpretation, making it especially suitable for the analysis of dramatic dialogues.

This model helps in examine how linguistic choices in literary texts contribute to meaning, emotional effect, and characterization (Nawaz et al., 2024). The rationale for selecting Leech and Short's model lies in its strong focus on parallelism, deviation, and foregrounding which are central to this study in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, psychological tension is largely conveyed through broken dialogues, repetitions, emotionally charged speech, and silences rather than through only explicit narration. This model helps to identify linguistic patterns such as fragmentation, pauses, unusual lexical choices and repetition that stand out against normal language use. The research demonstrates how Tennessee Williams stylistic choices function as linguistic markers of psychological tension.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs Leech and Short's stylistic framework, focusing on their concepts of parallelism, deviation, and foregrounding, to analyze the linguistic markers of psychological tension in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Leech and Short's framework allows for an exploration of how Williams uses language—through repetition, fragmented syntax, and emotionally charged vocabulary—to create psychological conflict and emotional depth. The application of parallelism through repeated phrases and syntactic deviation through broken sentences reflect the characters' internal struggles, particularly in moments of repression, denial, and frustration. Foregrounding, as described by Leech and Short, is evident in Williams' use of powerful metaphors and charged lexical choices, which draw attention to key emotional moments and amplify the tension in the play. This theoretical framework provides a systematic method for understanding how Williams' linguistic choices construct psychological tension, underscoring the role of language in portraying complex emotional and psychological states.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What specific linguistic features stylistic create psychological tension in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*?
2. How do repetition, lexical choices and syntactic structures contribute to the building of tension in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*?

RESAERCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify and analyze the key stylistic features that construct psychological tension in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
- To examine how Leech and Short's stylistic theory can be applied to understand these features and their impact on the dramatic tension in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* play.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has frequently examined the characters, themes, cultural contexts of the play. Tennessee Williams *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) has been explored in drama, psychology, gender studies, and American cultural criticism. This literature review systematically explores the play through the lens of stylistics, particularly the framework of leech and short's (1981)



model of style This literature review overview relevant scholarly work on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* it studies on stylistics, and analysis of drama tension in literature. It shows that many scholars explored Williams' portrays of mendacity, Southern culture, psychological repression, and identity. The stylistics marker of tension is not being addressed in detail, showing a clear gap that the present study aims to fill.

Quinn (1973) explains that men function as both a stylistic device and thematic device throughout Williams work. Quinn notes that the characters where lying act as a verbal trigger that intensify tension and expose emotional wounds within the family. This research provides a detailed philosophical exploration of theme of mendacity in four plays adding *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Quinns work helps in understanding the tension but leaves unexplored the linguistic structures by which these tensions are expressed.

Davis relates the plays tension to the family's inability to communicate honestly. Davis argues that broken speech, emotional explosion, reflect a family structure collapsing under the weight of unspoken truths. He compares *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to King Lear, showing family conflict, emotional breakdown, and tension. He shows how dramatic irony and emotionally loaded dialogue as key elements of tension. The linguistic mechanics, prosody, lexical choices, syntactic structures remain unexamined. this study interprets tension thematically rather than stylistically.

The part of stylistic features in character construction where Jabbar (2021) uses cognitive stylistics to examine Maggie's speech, result that her constant repetitions, rapid shifts in pronoun use, self-accountability reveal insecurity, anxiety and desire. he offers a worthy contribution by providing a cognitive stylistic analysis of Margaret's character. His study shows how Margaret's speech patterns, emotional bursts, narrative self, reveal her need of validation and inner conflict. Jabbar's analysis highlights how linguistic choices shape character psychological mindset, however, his study limits only to Margaret character and does not extend to broader markers of tension among all characters in the play.

Nicolay (2011) identifies generational conflict as key contributor to tension. It shows that contrasting speech styles Brick's detached responses and big daddy's direct and confrontational dialogue create friction on stage. The study depicts that William uses a range of stylistic markers the repetition, emotional vocabulary, silence and speech patterns in order to constructs dramatic tension in *Cat on Hot Tin Roof*. Several scholars have examined Williams' dramatic style more broadly Mann suggests that psychological tension is in linguistic forms, constructed through theatrical rhythm, dramatic pauses, and symbolically charged speech. His work gives valuable highlights into Williams' stylistic tendencies. It does not examine *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in detail through stylistic analysis.

Adler (2012) investigates William's dramatic craft in a streetcar named desire and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, showing Williams' skill in shaping emotional conflict through language. It does not use a formal stylistics model nor examine lexical and grammatical structure in detail.

Stylistic theory provides essential frameworks for examining dramatic tension, linguistic foregrounding, and tension. Leech and short model highlights the importance of foregrounding, parallelism, lexical pattern and deviation tools that reveals how tension is manifested in discourse. Leech and short offer foundational concepts in stylistics that are crucial to understanding how language constructs emotional intensity. Williams' dialogue relies on



emotional conflict. Major studies have not applied Leech and Short's model specifically to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, despite the play being rich with stylistic material.

Stylistic study of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Aftab, Khan, and Alam (2025) highlight how repetition, pauses, fragmented syntax, and deviant structures create dramatic tension and existential unease. Their work explains the potential for stylistics especially foregrounding and deviation to show how the tension that emerges organically from dramatic dialogue. Similar stylistic markers such as fragmented speech, pauses, and other factors serve as mechanisms for constructing tension in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Culpeper, Short, and Verdonk (1998) explore drama from the perspective of linguistic pragmatics and stylistics. Their work investigates how tension in dramatic discourse emerges from clashes in conversational norms. According to their work, stylistic analysis of drama must include conversational strategies. They do not apply them particularly to Williams' play, leaving room for stylistic investigation.

Shackelford (1998) highlights how linguistic silence functions as emotional resistance while Ferrante says that the pressure to maintain dignity forces characters into patterns of denial, linguistic concealment and performed truth therefore it produces further tension in their speech. Linguistic behavior either silence or verbosity plays a crucial role in generating tension. Thematic observations are not sufficient without stylistic examination.

The importance of stylistics in understanding dramatic tension can also be connected to the foundational work of Leech and Short (1981) who gives a model for studying the style of fiction and dramatic texts. Categories like lexical choice, foregrounding cohesion, grammatical structure, and speech and thought presentation. They offer tools for analyzing how tension is linguistically constructed. It remains largely unused in studies of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. This gap shows the potential contribution of a stylistic study in Leech and Short's framework.

Williams (1955) himself uses symbolic and metaphorical language to reflect internal conflict and such symbolic forms often rely on stylistic techniques. Dialogue in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* frequently contains interruptions, incomplete sentences, non-cooperative responses, and pragmatic failures. No major study examined these markers systematically, stylistic features are crucial for constructing tension because they signal emotional friction, miscommunication, and psychological conflict between characters.

Williams' *Early Stories* (2025) reveal his interest in inner turmoil, repression, and emotional conflict, themes that surface linguistically in his plays. Together, these studies support the present research by creating that psychological tension in Williams' drama is deeply rooted in linguistic structure, that justifying the application of Leech and Short's stylistic framework to systematically employ linguistic markers such as repetition, foreground patterns, and patterns in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Moreover, Khalil's (2025) research focuses on fragmentation in American drama provides valuable insights into Williams' linguistic style. By analyzing *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, He demonstrates how fragmented dialogue, incomplete sentences, and emotional disjunction reflect inner conflict and psychological instability. The findings of this research are directly applicable as Williams apply similar linguistic strategies in Brick's speech and Maggie's repetitive, emotionally charged dialogue.

This study aims to explore how tension is created not only at the level of theme or character but at the linguistic level, with the help of Leech and Short's stylistic model to *Cat on*



a Hot Tin Roof we will reveal linguistic mechanisms through which William constructs psychological tension, emotional intensity, and dramatic tension.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive stylistics methodology. Close reading is being used to identify linguistic patterns across selected dialogues from the play. Close reading is a systematic and detailed analysis of a literary text that focuses on language, structure, imagery, tone and stylistic choices to reveal deeper meanings and interpretations. The methodology focuses on the application of three key stylistic concepts from Leech and Short's model like parallelism, deviation, and foregrounding. Parallelism is examined through the repetition of words, phrases, and sentence structures that reinforce emotional pressure and unresolved inner struggles. Deviation is analyzed at lexical, semantic levels and syntactic to analyze unusual words choices, broken sentences, contradictions that reflect characters' psychological conflicts. Foregrounding is used to identify linguistic patterns that stand out from ordinary language and draw the reader's attention to moments of heightened tension. This research is done on key selected scenes where psychological tension is most intense. The conversation Brick and Maggie have in Act I, which reveals repression, denial and emotional frustration. In Act II, focusing on Brick's confrontation with Big daddy, where their dialogues depicts truth and inner conflicts, emotional breakdown through repetitive accusations, interruptions and aggressive verbal patterns. This methodology ensures a clear, focus and replicable analysis of how linguistic patterns function as markers of psychological tension in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The stylistic findings depict psychological tension to demonstrate how Williams' language constructs emotional conflict at both individual and interpersonal levels. Data was taken from key scenes involving Brick and Maggie's marital struggle. Original is used to analyze how stylistics markers helps to create tension throughout the play primary data source is original text.

DISCUSSION

Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is one of the most stylistically rich plays of modern American drama, psychological conflict and emotional violence are not only in plot and character but also in the linguistic fabric of the text. With the help of detailed examination of the text, it becomes clear that Williams' linguistic choices especially through lexical selection, repetition, foregrounding, metaphoric deviation syntactic fragmentation. It serves as markers of marital conflict, familial crises, psychological instability, sexual repression. Williams' style is not ornamental but it is a functional aesthetic that reveals suppressed desires, social conflict, and emotional strain. Williams frequently break the rules of normal conversational structure. This is one of the strongest forms of deviation. That frequently foregrounding theory identifies as a key source of artistic effect.

Markers of tension in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Repetition as a stylistic

Repetition is a form of foregrounding it heights emotional intensity and highlights psychological stress on repetition is one of the most significant mechanisms through which Williams builds tension.

“You won’t? You won’t? You won’t? Maggie.”
“Bull! Bull! Bull!” (Big Daddy) (Williams, 1955).’
“Brick? Brick, are you listening to me? Brick!”



Maggie repeatedly calls brick by his name. Repetition is used to foreground insistence, panic, emotional hesitation and confrontation. The name Brick symbolizes something solid, unmovable and unresponsive, showing the tension of Maggie's emotional neediness against brick's coldness.

Big daddy uses repetition

'You're lying! You're lying, brick !'

It shows anger, disbelief, and emotional scene, creating immediate dramatic tension.

'I don't want to talk about it.'

'Stop talking.'

Brick repeatedly says these lines. Repetition has two effects, it signals brick's psychological repression and it intensifies the emotional pressure between Maggie and him. Leech and Short note that repetition marks psychological fixation, brick's repeated refusals show the deepness of his internal conflict, especially about skipper, desire, and guilt.

These lexical choices create a core emotional tension

"I can't stand the smell in this room? Did not you notice it, Brick?" (Williams, 1955). "Did not you notice the powerful odor of mendacity?" (Williams, 1955)

Williams employs lexical markers of tension to create strong lexical choices to intensify emotional conflict.

"Why did the skipper drink that night? why, Brick?"

Most the plays dialogue functions as repetitive questioning, a strategy that increases psychological stress. Brick's lack of answer shows the tension through silence (which is also a stylistic choice that absence of speech becomes a form of speech).

Brick's cold words like "click" and "disgust" show emotional detachment. The imbalance is itself stylistics a marker of tension silence also builds tension like Brick's silence leads Maggie to speak in increasingly lengthy monologues.

Maggie speaks extensively, and brick ignores answering. The title is a metaphor of tension itself. I feel the time like a "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (Williams, 1955). Leech and Short's theory defines expressive deviation. It foregrounds emotional instability with the help of Maggie's metaphor.

One of Williams' stylistic markers of tension is syntactic fragmentation incomplete sentences, broken structures and ellipses. Ellipses and broken syntax can be seen in dialogues like

"Just.... Stop" Maggie.

"Drink... that's all".

Leech and short defines that syntactic fragmentation reflects states of mind her. Brick's fragmented sentences mirror his fragmented emotional world. Stylistic encodes Brick's trauma because ellipses shows emotional suppression and hesitation.

The length images create stylistic pressure. The pauses create tension by forcing the audience to fill in the emotional gaps. Maggie's stream of consciousness structure conveys her anxiety and desperation, creating tension between Brick's emotional void and overflowing emotion. We see elements in following dialogues of Maggie

"Living with someone you love can be \..... well..... the hardest thing in the world."



“You can’t even stand a drink without breaking down inside. Brick, you drink and drink and every glass lights up that switch and then click it goes off and you’re cold again.”

Maggie frequently uses long, breathless sentences. Leech and Short shows that contrast in patterns of sentences between characters shapes stylistic tension. William opposes Maggie’s expansive, emotional syntax to brick’s short, clipped structure.

The leech and short model is designed to provide a systematic linguistic description of a text’s style. Emotional breakdown mirrors broken syntax. We can analyze syntax pattern tension like might be it’s just....(Brick) (Williams, 1955) and I try, I really try, Brick(Maggie) (Williams, 1955). Long unbroken monologue reflects anger and frustration by the use of short sentences. Interruptions are also frequent like most of the time Maggie cuts brick off.

Lexical selection is one of the clear stylistic markers in the play. Big daddy’s lexicon is explosive like mendacity, crap, spit it out, crap, bull. These words are foreground stylistically because they break social norms and therefore create linguistic deviation.

Mendacity becomes a linguistic symbol of the Politt family’s moral,

‘The whole thing is a pack of lies!’

Character shows anxieties. big daddy’s obsession with truth vs. lies linguistically mirrors the tension of the family’s deception shows his cancer.

According to leech and short, dialogue becomes significant stylistically when it reflects patterns of power struggle, and emotional instability. Interruptions as tension markers, Maggie interrupts brick repeatedly

“I don’t” (Brick)

“You don’t what? Tell me!”

Maggie forces conversation with brick resists. Tension grows only not through what is said but through the structure of the dialogue.

‘Shut up! Wait! hold on now!’

Big daddy frequently interrupts characters with these imperative interruptions establish dominance and increase dramatic aggression.

Brick remains silent. The silence is in through contrast with Maggie’s linguistic overflow, creating psychological tension. after Maggie’s long speech.

Williams uses figurative language to create emotional pressure. Sexual and animal imagery Maggie’s metaphor.

“Living with someone you love can be like living with a tiger.”

The comparison intensifies emotional volatility and foregrounds danger, instability, and desire.

Big daddy’s language is saturated with earthy, bodily imagery

“I knocked around in the gutters of the world.”

Symbolic lexical fields that William creates tension by introducing words associated with heat (hot roof, burning, sweat, itch), alcohol (drink, glass, liquor cabinet), lies (mendacity, cover up, lie). These semantic fields emotional stakes and build dramatic tension linguistically.

You can’t be alone without liquor and you can’t stand a person talking to you about you feelings and you can’t admit the truth about skipper!

Brick’s style was minimalist and fragmented that brick’s short, cold responses highlight emotional paralysis.



“No, Nothing. Leave it.”

The tension exists in the contrast between Maggie’s verbosity and Brick’s resistance.

Big daddy’s style is aggressive, confrontational .His speech patterns (repeated insults, harsh diction) linguistically move every scene he enters. The lexical intensity creates a threat atmosphere.

“You have been lying to yourself! Lying! L-Y-I-N-G.”

Mendacity is a system that we live in.

We can get it that rapid shifts between short and long sentences ,foregrounds key words (truth, lie, mendacity), Brick’s ”click”, rapid shifts between short and long sentences .interruption and doubling of phrases.

The spelling out of L-Y-I-N-G is an orthographic deviation foregrounding verbal violence. Brick’s abstract, Philosophical phrasing contrasts sharply, creating stylistic friction.

Lexical deviation (unusual/ harsh words, mendacity, bull), metaphors and symbolic imagery (cat on a hot tin roof , click), repetition of words, phrases , themes, and contrastive sentences patterns (long vs. short sentences), broken syntax and ellipses , interruptions, silence, refusal to answer and sound patterns that mimic emotional harshness.

He uses repetition to show psychological fixation, unusual words and metaphors (cat, click, mendacity) to emotional strain. He uses Long breathless structures relates to Maggie and short, clipped structures for Brick to create interpersonal conflict and emotional. Through stylistics analysis, it becomes clear that tension in *Cat on a Hot tin roof* is not only thematic or dramatic. It is fundamentally linguistic, embedded in the very structure of Williams’ language.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that Tennessee Williams uses specific language techniques, like repetition, broken sentences, and strong emotional words, to create psychological tension in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. By applying Leech and Short’s stylistic theory, the research explains how these language choices reflect the characters’ inner struggles and conflicts. Techniques like repetition and unusual sentence structures highlight the emotional tension between the characters, especially their feelings of repression and frustration. This analysis demonstrates the importance of language in shaping the emotional depth of the play and helps us understand how Williams uses words to create a tense and dramatic atmosphere.



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