Language Used In Poetry

“In a poem the words should be as pleasing to the ear as the meaning is to the mind.” -- Marianne Moore
The Human Brain

- Divided into 2 parts
- Each half has its own function

Left Brain:
- Logic
- Reality

Right Brain:
- Creativity
- Emotions
To clarify . . .

When you are looking at big puffy clouds . . .

Your right brain tells you, “Hey! That one looks like a bunny.”

While your left brain tells you . . .
So, which half do you use when studying poetry?

Here are a few hints:
- Poetry requires creativity
- Poetry requires emotion
- Poetry requires an artistic quality
- Poetry requires logic
The repetition of sounds

Example: hat, cat, brat, fat, mat, sat

My Beard

by Shel Silverstein

My beard grows to my toes,
I never wears no clothes,
I wraps my hair
Around my bare,
And down the road I goes.

Here is another example: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrcdq2viZg
When reading a poem out loud, you may notice a sort of “sing-song” quality to it, just like in nursery rhymes. This is accomplished by the use of rhythm. Rhythm is broken into types.

- Iambic
- Anapestic
- Trochaic
- Dactylic

Most Used
These identify patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry.

That means one syllable is pronounced stronger, and one syllable is softer.

iambic:  

anapestic:  

trochaic:  

dactylic:  

unstressed  

stressed
The length of a line of poetry, based on what type of rhythm is used.

The length of a line of poetry is measured in metrical units called “FEET”. Each foot consists of one unit of rhythm. So, if the line is iambic or trochaic, a foot of poetry has 2 syllables. If the line is anapestic or dactylic, a foot of poetry has 3 syllables.
A comparison between two usually unrelated things using the word “like” or “as”.

Examples:

Joe is as hungry as a bear.
In the morning, Rae is like an angry lion.
Let’s see what this looks like in a poem we have never seen before in our lives.

Ars Poetica
By Archibald MacLeish
A poem should be palpable and mute as a globed fruit,
Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—
A poem should be wordless As the flight of birds.
An implied comparison between two usually unrelated things.

Examples:
Lenny is a snake.
Ginny is a mouse when it comes to standing up for herself.

The difference between a simile and a metaphor is that a simile requires either “like” or “as” to be included in the comparison, and a metaphor requires that neither be used.
An extended metaphor carries a metaphor throughout part or all of a poem.
Giving human characteristics to inanimate objects, ideas, or animals.

Example:

The sun stretched its lazy fingers over the valley.
Explains, clarifies, or illustrates by drawing a comparison.
In the example below, the poet uses the analogy of deleted computer files to clarify the idea that memories exist someplace but are inaccessible.

Age betrayed her daily now.
Memories gone, but where?
Somewhere inaccessible,
The way a computer file
Deleted accidentally,
Is there
But not there.
Allusion

A reference to another piece of literature or to history.

Example: “She hath Dian’s wit” (from Romeo and Juliet).

This is an allusion to Roman mythology and the goddess Diana.

The three most common types of allusion refer to mythology, the Bible, and Shakespeare’s writings.
The repetition of the initial letter or sound in two or more words in a line.

To the lay-person, these are called “tongue-twisters”.

Example: How much _dew_ would a _dewdrop_ _drop_ if a _dewdrop_ _did_ _drop_ _dew_?
Let’s see what this looks like in a poem we are familiar with.

She Walks in Beauty

I.

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that’s best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies.

These examples use the beginning sounds of words only twice in a line, but by definition, that’s all you need.
The repetition of consonant sounds in stressed syllables.

Gulls gracefully pass across the sky.

The repeated s sound creates a sense of graceful movement from word to word.
Repetition of a vowel sound.

Windows tinted in my ride when I drive in it.

The repetition emphasizes a key idea.
Using the same key word or phrase throughout a poem.

This should be fairly self-explanatory, but . . . at risk of sounding like a broken record . . .
Valued Treasure

by Chris R. Carey

Time to spend; Time will eventually

Time to mend. show us the truth.

Time to hate; Time is a mystery;

Time to wait. time is a measure.

Time is the essence; Time for us is

time is the key. valued treasure.

Time will tell us Time to spend;

what we will be. time to mend.

Time is the enemy; Time to cry . . .

time is the proof. Time to die.
Valued Treasure

by Chris R. Carey

Time to spend;
time to mend.

Time to hate;
time to wait.

Time is the essence;
time is the key.

Time will tell us what we will be.

Time is the enemy;
time is the proof.

Time will eventually show us the truth.

Time is a mystery;
time is a measure.

Time for us is valued treasure.

Time to spend;
time to mend.

Time to cry . . .

Time to die.
Refrain

The repetition of one or more phrases or lines at the end of a stanza.

It can also be an entire stanza that is repeated periodically throughout a poem, kind of like a chorus of a song.
Phenomenal Woman

by Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.

I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s size

But when I start to tell them,

They think I’m telling lies.

I say,

It’s in the reach of my arms,

The span of my hips,

The stride of my step,

The curl of my lips.

I’m a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That’s me.
I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It’s the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing of my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I’m a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That’s me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can’t touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them,
They say they still can’t see.
I say,
It’s in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
... The grace of my style.
I’m a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That’s me.

Look familiar?

That is refrain.
Words that spell out sounds; words that sound like what they mean.

Examples: growl, hiss, pop, boom, crack, ptthhhbbbb.
Noise Day

by Shel Silverstein

Let’s have one day for girls and boyses
When you can make the grandest noises.
Screech, scream, holler, and yell –
Sneeze – hiccup – whistle – shout,
Laugh until your lungs wear out,
Toot a whistle, kick a can,
Bang a spoon against a pan,
Sing, yodel, bellow, hum,
Blow a horn, beat a drum,
Rattle a window, slam a door,
Scrape a rake across the floor . . . .
An exaggeration for the sake of emphasis.

Examples:
I may sweat to death.
The blood bank needs a river of blood.
An expression where the literal meaning of the words is not the meaning of the expression.

It means something other than what it actually says.

Example:
Carla didn’t mean to let the cat out of the bag.
Imagery

Using words to create a picture in the reader’s mind. Using sensory language (words or phrases that appeal to the five senses).
The thick, rosy hamburgers sizzled on the grill…

or

When the classically beautiful woman smelled the freshly popped popcorn, she imagined the golden streams of butter glazing lightly over each kernel.
A word or image that signifies something other than what is literally represented.

Examples:
- Dark or black images in poems are often used to symbolize death.
- Light or white images are often used to symbolize life.
Connotations are emotional connections we make with words. Words can have positive or negative associations.

**Denotation**

Denotation is the dictionary meaning of a word.

The actress is a diva.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denotation: successful female performer.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative arrogance, ego, bossiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive power, confidence, talent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context:</strong> the actress has a temper tantrum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• The attitude the author projects in a poem.
• Word choice and other poetic elements work together to convey the tone.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination of Elements</th>
<th>Tone Created</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Word Choices:** exquisite, rare, inspire  
**Connotations:** positive  
**Meter:** musical | • respectful  
• admiring |
| **Word Choices:** isolated, loneliness  
**Connotations:** negative  
**Meter:** slow beat | • sorrowful  
• pitying |
| **Word Choices:** willy-nilly, whoops  
**Connotations:** positive, amusing  
**Meter:** bouncy beat | • Carefree  
• playful |