

In these last two pieces, Leslie Shown and Ananda Esteva use excerpts from their poems to explain the guidelines on diction (#7b) and line breaks (#7e).

A Short Discussion of Diction

Leslie Shown

from *slow southern song*

lyin in bed all by myself on one of those you know oh so
lazy sunday mornings
wonderin bout how come i don't hear no sweet man
singing to himself in the
kitchen while he makes me blueberry pancakes and puts
on the kettle for tea

from *trying not to slip on ice*

I move slowly through the dark territory of loss
edging off the map of love which knew your name
stumbling backwards from your life
the country I most longed to travel

In both of these poems, a woman is reflecting on the absence of her lover. Yet the difference in diction, or style of speaking, in the two poems makes them very different from one another. In the first poem, I use short and simple words that roll off the tongue easily and create a sense of lightness. In the second poem, I use line breaks and more complex words to create the sense that this woman is choosing her words very carefully and slowly. Rather than lightness, I want to convey mournfulness.

The consistency of a voice within a poem is an important part of making the poem coherent, of making it tell a story. For example, if I tried to write a poem in which a woman started out speaking the language of "slow southern song" and then began to speak the language of "trying not to slip on ice," you would probably end up wondering if the speaker had suddenly changed, rather than experiencing the poem as a coherent event.

Leslie Shown has degrees in English Literature and Environmental Science and Policy. Her husband, her garden, her dog, and poetry are her passions.