Comprehension is a process and consists of four stages - reception, perception, understanding and comprehension. This is the mentalistic, innate process and develops from the age of first month to 36 months. At the age of one month the child responds to his mother's voice. Then up to one year the child starts responding to words, things etc. Responding to a word is called 'Verbal reception' and responding to sound and colour is called non-verbal reception. It is the first stage which leads to perception.

Perception

Responding to various qualities of the object means perception. The word perception refers to the way in which the individual organizes and interprets the information coming to him through various senses. It is a subjective reflection of the objective reality, for example we recognize and differentiate between the colours 'red' and 'yellow'. This is called non-verbal perception. Every word has a definite meaning. It is a sign for a thing. It directs our attention to some item or to some aspect of an item. Perception has its own units. Perception of words out of context in which factors such as frequency and semantic attributes play an integral role. And the perception of words in context on which associated words exert an influence. At more complex levels, associative
grammatical and semantic factors are very important to the perception of speech, as shown in a variety of interesting tasks. The perception is not as distinct from such processes as comprehension and memory.

Thus at the age of six months the process of verbal and non-verbal perception starts. The information is filtered by the perceptual process. It is a sensory understanding which is brought into action by concrete stimuli. Words are understood and colours, sounds are recognised by child. This is called the verbal and non-verbal perception.

Understanding

Understanding is the third stage in the mental processes of comprehension. Perceptual process develops judging capacity. At the age of one year to eighteen months a child understands phrases, grammatical patterns and responds in action to commands. Through this process we understand the things represented by words, for example, a dog, a horse. Whenever a word is uttered or heard our mind reflects some sensation, which is the understanding of a word.

I. A. Richards (1929) in his Practical Criticism has defined understanding as a primitive sense, when nothing whatever happens in our minds beyond the mere perception of sound or shape of words as we do not understand them. It may be called non-verbal understanding.

Comparatively, any thought or activity or impulses stirred into activity by words and seemingly directed toward
what the words represent is the beginning of understanding, for example a dog, a horse.

At the same level understanding implies some degree of intellectual discrimination. Understanding means grasping the sense, realizing the significance and seizing the meaning. The understanding is a conscious perception conditioned by the activity which functions only under the influence of verbal stimuli. Intuitive perception is never a true understanding. Thus the process of verbal and non verbal understanding starts. The word or the object denoted by a word as understood by a child is called verbal understanding, and a picture, music, painting as understood by a child is called non verbal understanding.

**Comprehension**

Comprehension is an ability. At the age of 30 to 36 months the process of comprehension ability starts. It develops with age. Comprehension means understanding the object's sense, tone, feeling, and intention. Comprehension is a matter of abstracting features from a message and combining those features in some way to construct an overall meaning. If meaning is seen as being a variable depending on the context, then comprehension is a matter of narrowing down a global impression by ruling out alternative interpretations until a particular interpretation remains. Comprehension is building up of information and at other times narrowing down of information.

The verbal and non verbal comprehension process starts at the age of 30 to 36 months. Verbal comprehension
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means understanding the various features of a text or spoken words. For example we may indicate our understanding of a message by saying "I see", we may nod our head, we may proceed to carry out the command or we may just sit there. In non-verbal comprehension the individual understands music, paintings and responds to it. Comprehension means the understanding of the object or the thing that we look at or the text that we read or hear.

Reception, perception, understanding and comprehension are mental processes through which we grasp, seize the information, meaning, suggestion, message conveyed through the verbal and non-verbal, poetic and prose texts.
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II Linguistic and Poetic Comprehension

Linguistics is a scientific study of language. Poetry is written in language and is a major genre of language. So the study of poetry can be done scientifically by applying linguistics. Poetic comprehension becomes a part of linguistic comprehension. Poetry is language and any phenomena including poetry may be approached scientifically. Therefore if poetry is language and linguistics is the study of language, the knowledge of linguistics can be applied to the scientific study of poetry.

There is an essential difference in the aims of poetry and Linguistics, and therefore the approaches are bound to differ. The application of linguistic knowledge to literature is called stylistics. The result of linguistic analysis is a grammar which generates unobserved as well as observed utterances. The aim of stylistic analysis would seem to be to indicate the features shared by a particular class of messages. Linguistics is therefore concerned with the description of codes and stylistics is concerned with the differences among the messages generated according to the rules of the code.

Linguistic comprehension consists of the study of relationship of one sign to the other sign - syntax, the study of the relationship of the sign to designation, semantics, and the study of relationship of the sign to the user is pragmatics.

The poet enjoys freedom in the use of language. Words are basically sounds. Words are used in poetry to
improve the rhythmical quality of the poem. The poet rejects routine, licensed norms of language. So deviations are common in poetry. Such deviations are found at all levels, that is phonological, morphological, graphological, semantic, syntactic etc. Comprehension needs the revelation of such deviations. Phonological devices consist of phonemes, distinctive speech sounds. Graphology consists of the study of written language. Semantics studies the relationship of the sign to designation. Pragmatics reveals the relationship of the sign to the user. These devices analyse the language and reveal the meaning by approaching the text. Thus through these devices comprehension takes place and the real meaning of the poem is revealed. These are called the linguistic levels of poetic comprehension. Through the linguistic analysis of a poem we reveal a message, information, suggestion and the implication of meaning in the poem.

The message has a variety of performances, and a variety of interpretations. The message is described in terms of the relations of linguistic features. It is referred to as a performance or delivery, for example,

There is a big bear in the woods.
and There is a B1:G bear in the woods.

Suggestion originates in the efforts of the addressee to interpret the verbal behaviour with his communication partner as rational behaviour. We have to evaluate the verbal and non-verbal context for supplementary information that applies to the literal meaning. Thus the addressee tries to reveal the speaker's purpose of communication and
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finds out the meaning of the text or utterance.

Information

Information is the communicative way of each linguistic choice, independent of what meaning is conveyed. The amount of information in a piece of language is related to the predictability of one linguistic choice from another. In ordinary communication this predictability is high and the amount of information transmitted is comparatively small. Prose selections have low predictability but large information. A poem also conveys too much information provided we do careful reading and comprehension of the poem. For example T. S. Eliot's poems require high predictability to derive information.

Implications

The poets make liberal use of the language. Its implications or meanings need the comprehension of the text. Poetic and linguistic comprehension leads us to either a simple or a complex comprehension of a poem.

i. When the poem is full of suggestions and implications, the comprehension of the poem becomes complex - implied meaning suggested in the poem. We need the analysis of a poem from different levels to derive the meaning.

ii. When the poem gives a message that is information, the comprehension becomes simple, surface meaning being provided through messages and overt expressions.

Comprehension has two levels, simple comprehension and complex comprehension. In simple comprehension we understand the meaning of a poem in the first reading. Such
The poems having linguistic complexity lead to complex comprehension and the reading of such poems may not give us a complete comprehension. The obscurity in poetry results from the linguistic complexity.

A superficial understanding of a poem is enough for some purposes, but other poems may require richer, more penetrating interpretations. Such poems are linguistically complex and the comprehension of such poems is slow, for example 'The Waste Land' by T. S. Eliot.

Thus comprehension simple or complex, reveals the meaning of the poem. The understanding of poetic language is different from understanding the normal usage of language. Poetic language may include features that do not occur elsewhere. There may be deviations in the use of language. The use of language in literature is more complex than that in everyday speech. So it requires comprehension of the text at all the levels.

Semantics is the study of the relationship of sign to designation. Poetic language consists of images, figures, symbols etc. New words are coined by poets, sometimes grammatical deviations yield new meanings. Comprehension reveals all these devices and leads to the real meaning of the poem that is Comprehension.

In comprehending a poem one may not know the particular term for the particular device. But the meaning
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can be understood by the reader. We may understand the purpose of the device and its implication or message given by the poet through that particular language or linguistic device.

The reading of a poem reveals to us the meaning, through various devices and their implications used by the poet. This ability in comprehending the poem can be cultivated and developed. The language of poetry is condensed, concentrated and says more than the ordinary language can convey.

Thus comprehension of a poem requires understanding various linguistic elements and devices that contribute to the poem. Words appeal to our senses. they denote a certain meaning and connote different meanings, for example, 'Home' - denotes a place where one lives but connotes the meaning as a place, security, love, comfort. The words also arouse senses in our mind, for example 'Two hearts beating' appeals to our sense of hearing.

The words used to convey sense to our minds, are called images in poetry. In comprehension we come across an image in a poem but our reaction to it is slow. in poetic comprehension image-reaction takes more time than in prose comprehension. Thus image reaction is a part of poetic comprehension. This reaction means the understanding of the image that occurs in poetry.

Thus the comprehension of a poem may require more time for comprehension depending on the type of the poem. A simple poem will require less time, while a complex poem
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requires more time. We can understand a simple poem and comprehend it in short time. While the complex poem or poem full of images may require more time.

The paraphrase of a simple poem may be comprehended earlier than the actual poem. But the paraphrase of a complex poem may require more time for comprehension.

The comprehension of simple/complex poems may involve the following procedures:

On reading a poem the process develops in this way -

i> Comprehension : Starts after the first reading as in 'Daffodils'.

ii> Imagery : First reading - as in 'Daffodils'.

iii> Comprehension : First Reading - as in Blake's Songs of Innocence'.

iv> Imagery : Second reading - as in Blake's 'Songs of Innocence'.

v> Comprehension : Second reading - as in the poems of Pound, Yeats, Eliot.

vi> Imagery : Second reading - as in the poems of Pound, Yeats, Eliot.

vii> Comprehension : Second reading( The possibilities of comprehension at second reading & imagery at first reading cannot be ruled out.

Thus we can find out the time required for comprehension is less than the time required for imagery reading. It depends on the type of the poem.
Another device used by poet in poems is called Figures of speech. It is another way of adding information. It says something more than the ordinary language can say. There are a number of figures used by poets to convey another intention or meaning such as -

**Simile** - Means a comparison between the two similar things of a different category, for example. My love is like a red, red rose.

**Metaphor** - One thing is represented by the name of another thing, for example 'My love is a bird, flying in all directions' It is a direct comparison of two things. The bird becomes a metaphor of the poet's love. Sometimes substitute words are used to convey metaphorical idea.

**Allusion** - The poets refer to some past well known event in life or literature to convey his ideas. This device is called allusion which can confuse us if we do not know that incident or event, for example Gray's 'Elegy'.

**Metonymy** - The word is directly substituted which achieves emphasis. Such a word is closely associated with the substituted word, for example. The White House refers to the American Government.

** Allegory** - The way of presenting meaning in a veiled way as in Spenser's 'Fairy Queen'.

**Personification** - A non human object is attributed with human characteristics. The object is
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*Personification* - For example, 'Moon' referred to the beloved's beauty.

**Synechdoche** - The subordinate part represents the larger image, for example 'Factory hand' - hand refers to the complete human being.

**Symbol** - The most commonly used complex device. Symbol is used to represent what it is and something more. The images, metaphor and symbol may shade into each other. For example, 'lily' is a symbol of purity. The use of symbol creates obscurity in the poem. By analysing it we have to comprehend more information that is conveyed by the poet through it.

Through contrast devices like *paradox, irony, overstatement, understatement* are also used by poets. Paradox is based on contradictions. The words are used in more than one sense which contradict the idea.

*Overstatement* is an exaggeration used to reveal the truth. Understatements are exactly opposite to the overstatements. Irony is the way of saying one thing and meaning another. Generally sarcasm and satire are used to ridicule, criticise the human follies. Irony may have sarcasm or satire. It is found in a situation, in words and in dramatic situations. There is a contradiction in various elements as well as in the statement and an expectation.

In the comprehension of a poem we must be aware of these devices and deviations to comprehend the total significance and meaning of the poem.
Only the reading of the poem and listening to every word may not yield the complete meaning of a poem. It may require penetrating analysis of various linguistic and poetic devices to comprehend it.
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III Testing The Comprehension of Poetry

Marathi as a first language and English as a second language are studied by the majority of college students in Maharashtra. The majority of these students learn Marathi from the first standard up to the college level. And English is studied as a second language as a compulsory subject from the fifth class to the degree level classes in the colleges.

At the college level students are expected to have achieved language proficiency in both the languages. The study of poetry becomes compulsory at this level of learning English. And the student doing undergraduates courses is supposed to respond to and understand poetry. To find out the levels of learning at the undergraduate level, testing the comprehension ability of the student will be helpful to us.

Comprehension is an ability that simultaneously develops with language acquisition and language learning. The achievement and acquisition of mother tongue and second language through cognitive motor skills and ability of comprehension that is reception, perception, understanding and comprehension occur simultaneously. The ability of comprehension shows the learner's proficiency in the language.

Testing of comprehension means testing the achievement of language and language proficiency of the student. Testing helps in identifying students' proficiency and weakness. Comprehension of poetry is possible by reading poetry. Reading consists of grasping meaning in the language.
through its written form. Reading comprehension is tested by asking a student to translate a passage from the foreign language to the native language or by asking multiple item questions on a poem. Testing determines the attainment of the objective, the effectiveness of learning process and the accomplishment of the goal of education in general. Testing helps us to locate the precise areas of difficulties encountered by the students. It is the way of assessing the performance of the student in the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

The testing of comprehension of poetry can be defined as the ability to:

i. distinguish between letters and recognise the letter-sound relationship,

ii. recognise words and word groups requiring an ability to associate sound with their corresponding graphic symbols and understand the meaning,

iii. Understand the meaning of words and word groups in the context in which they appear,

iv. recognise structural clues and comprehend structural patterns,

v. Comprehend the plain meaning of sentences or any complete sequence of words,

vi. Perceive the relationship (temporal & spatial) and sequences of ideas as denoted by linkage & reference features,

vii. Comprehend longer units, other literary devices and select the main idea & other salient features,

viii. draw conclusions or make inferences,
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ix. scan & read for specific information.

x. read critically, quickly and with ease adopting a flexible approach and varying the reading strategies being applied according to the type of reading material used.

Testing of comprehension reveals whether there is any increase in the information of the student or not, whether the student has comprehended a large percentage of lexical items occurring in a non-specialised writing or not, and whether he is able to derive the meaning of unfamiliar items from the context in which they occur or not.

It can reveal the ability of understanding syntactical patterns and morphological forms, characteristics of the language, and show how to respond correctly to the graphic symbols.

Testing reveals whether the student has understood the writer's purpose and the central idea or not, whether he has grasped the subordinate idea and drawn a correct conclusion or not, whether the student has recognised the tone, the style of the poem or not, and whether he has understood the devices, methods by which the author conveys his ideas or not.

The testing of comprehension of poetry can reveal whether the aims and objectives of language learning and teaching are achieved or not.

The testing of comprehension reveals the proficiency of the student in the first and second language learning and the status of second language at present in the educational system. By testing we can get a clear idea about the first
Comprehension of poetry may be done by asking multiple choice questions, descriptive questions and writing impressions on the poem about its form, style, tone, words, and various stylistic devices used by the poet. The linguistic meanings are meant to include denotations conveyed by the language. The linguistic meanings are the use of lexical items in the poem that normally brings out the content.

Comprehension as a principal testing device in education has been used for a long time. It was a device to measure intelligence, short term memory, grasp of cliches, metaphor or figures of speech. These comprehension tests have remained remarkably unchanged. They still consist in short exercises linked to a short passage of prose or poetry. In comprehension testing it is important that the texts themselves should be worth spending time on.

In comprehension the student is expected to speculate generally on what might happen next, using clues from the present text. The students need to decide which statement or ideas are most important and appropriate. The students are asked to respond in writing by answering questions on the text. To answer these questions they need curiosity and interest in the poem. The testing of comprehension of poetry can thus reveal the proficiency of the student in language. Also, it will be helpful to locate the areas of failures of the students in comprehension of poetry in the first language and in the second language.