

A stylistic study of selected poems in Jide Balogun's 'The Desert in the River'

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ABSTRACT: Every society in a quest for nationhood undergoes series of stages, which are inevitable and necessary for its growth. Nigeria's pursuit for legitimate growth and development has been hampered by certain hindrances which have brought the nation to disrepute and slow development. This paper explores, from a linguistic perspective, the varying thematic issues that have impeded the growth of the nation. The paper x-rays the thematic nuances as discussed in Jide Balogun's 'The Desert in the River' using stylistic tools. Five poems were purposively selected from the collection. The selection is done across the five parts of the collection. The study found that, the theme of corruption and bad leadership pervade the texts and the duo stood as the hydra-headed monster to the growth and development of the nation. Also, the theme of power and unity are evident in the text. The author posits that unless power is appropriately dispensed and unity is fostered among different divides, development is a mirage. The study therefore concludes that, beyond the frantic quest for industrialisation, proper attention must be devoted to dealing with corruption in the land, bad leadership, creating avenue for unity and ensuring proper dissemination of power and justice.

Keywords: Industrialisation, linguistics, national development, poems, stylistics.

INTRODUCTION

Language has been utilised as a tool for communication from time immemorial. It is a powerful instrument for influencing thoughts and ideas. It is obvious that language is an essential tool for human survival. It follows logically that no civilization can survive in the absence of language (Ogungbe and Oyedeji 2017). Language, according to Olaoye (2013), is the vehicle via which people's culture is conveyed. It is a storehouse of a people's culture, industry, and exploits that acts as an indicator of identity. Language is what distinguishes humans from other animals. The importance of language in human civilization cannot be overstated.

According to Halliday (2004), language affects the human thinking process. He describes it as an instrument for implementing social reality. He further states that, language serves three main purposes, which he classifies as Ideational, Cognitive, and Emotional. Ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions are all examples of meta-functions. The ideational function is concerned with

the use of language to convey one's experience of the actual world, inner awareness, and symbolization. Language users are engaged in maintaining social connections via the interpersonal function of languages. Conversations at meetings, social events, and teaching are all be examples of such interpersonal relationships. This use of language promotes social cohesiveness and helps to maintain the social fabric of the community. Textual function refers to the use of language to produce various types of texts. One thing to keep in mind is that language usage at these various levels varies, as does style.

This research looks at the stylistic elements in Jide Balogun's poem "The Desert in the River" as a jumping off point for examining the thematic problems raised in the poetry (Balogun, 2010). These thematic problems have been identified as an albatross around the neck of any real progress in Nigeria. The article highlighted, among other things, the urgent need to deal with these albatrosses

since they are already dealing with the Nigerian citizens, and if this status quo continues, the country may collapse. The study therefore explores the specific stylistic expressive means deployed in the poems as they constitute thematic issues in Nigeria.

Style and stylistics

Every writer has peculiar and distinct way of presenting ideas to readers. This peculiar trait is characterized as the writer's insignia, because choices are made by the writer out of many competing forms. So, the field that studies this distinct expressive means employed by writers is stylistics. It will be appropriate to first dissect what constitute style before exploring the concept of stylistics further. Crystal and Davy (1969, p. 9) define style in four different ways, and their concept served as a springboard for several other researchers who have studied in this area. They define style as:

- a. Some or all of a person's linguistic habits. There is a collection of language and its linguistic quirks that define a person's individuality here.
- b. Some or all linguistic patterns shared by a group of individuals at one point in time, such as Augustan poets.
- c. The efficacy of a method of expression.
- d. Literary language as a feature of 'good, effective, and beautiful writing'.

Furthermore, Leech and Short (1989) claim that stylistics is a linguistic endeavour performed with the goal of investigating the literariness of a text and explaining the relationship between language and the aesthetic function of texts. This implies that stylisticians are tasked with addressing the issue of "why" a writer employed language in a certain manner and for what purpose. Readers in the media are often confronted with the problem of explaining the relationship between particular uses of language and current events. This is seen even more in column pieces, which have a stronger connection with literary discourse. In the view of Osuala (2009, p. 12), stylistics is "a field of contemporary linguistics dedicated to the thorough study of literary style, or to linguistic choices made by speakers and authors in non-literary settings". Poets use language in novel ways in order to discover what is fresh and to go a bit farther in order to explain the many surrounding problems that may give the reader something to think about.

According to Milic (1971), as quoted in Lawal (1997, p. 34), "an author's style has a consistency owing to the habitual nature of the writing process, and this consistency may be identified, quantified, and utilized to establish consanguinity between an unknown and a collection of authenticating text". Buffon's (1700) cited in Ogungbe and Oyedeji (2020) believes that style is man himself.

Everyone has a unique style of speaking and writing that

has become second nature. According to Ibrahim and Akande (2000, p. 57), "style is the linguistic coating or dressing of one's thoughts, ideas, and emotions in a manner that is distinctive or unique to a specific author". In order to convey ideas and thoughts, authors have deliberately or subconsciously utilized particular language components, expressive methods, and communication tactics that are more than just reoccurrences but have taken on a consistent shape. Wales (2001, p. 373) defines style as "the perceived way of expression in writing or speaking". Style is therefore the way in which the thought of writers is expressed in a way that is peculiar to them.

Jide Balogun's 'The Desert in the River'

Language remains one of the means for effecting literary thought. Balogun's collection of poems is a work that has been used to question authority (Balogun, 2010). The collection is divided into five parts including: Pulsating Pulse, Nature, Supremacy, Mandate and Painful Exits and Decadence. Part one (1) discusses issues that have to do with corruption, bad leadership, and the economic and socio-cultural situations prevailing in the society. Similarly, it addresses issues of justice and misuse of power. Also, it vividly describes the Nigerian kind of election circle and the behaviour of politicians who when they need votes become beggars and after they have won elections "they become pompous, arrogant and uncontrollable".

Part two (2) which contains seventeen poems is titled 'Nature' and captures the issues of religion, philosophy and humility. The poet makes a universal appeal for decorum irrespective of faith, philosophy and values. His appeal is not directed to a specific territory, rather, he makes a general appeal to the global community.

Part three (3) titled 'Supremacy' shows the mortality of man and the immortality of God. It shows that this life is vanity and life is a gift that must be spent well with the fear of immortality and remembrance of mortality. Additionally, the part shows that men are not like God. It explicates the duplicitous and villainous nature of man, but show that God is supreme and does not act like men.

'Mandate' which is the fourth part is the longest part with 21 poems. This part brings out the romantic nature of the writer. The part is laden with love lines and emotional thought that are capable of melting a hardened heart. The part also discusses other themes around man's philosophy and patriotism.

The final part 'Painful Exits and Decadence' is written as a dirge to remember his teacher. More broadly, the part is written to show the inevitability of death as it is inherent in everyman.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts an eclectic approach to undertake a broad categorization of the stylistic devices deployed in

Jide Balogun's poems. The analysis cuts across lexicosemantic expressive means, syntactic expressive means and phonetic expressive means under the various approaches to the study of style which are briefly discussed below.

Style as choice from variant and competing forms

According to Osundare (2003), style as choice is the most author-oriented since it transcends the physicalities of the language employed to the many dynamics and imperatives that style provides. This approach to style tends to offer information on how the user of language deploys language successfully to communicate with others, as well as the methods and forms of communication chosen for effectiveness. He differentiates between pre-verbal and verbal decisions. The latter is concerned with the speaker's or writer's psychological, cultural, or dytypic decision, which typically informs his/her linguistic choice. The former is the actual application of the decisions made. As a result, it is critical to recognize that the pre-verbal decision precedes and heavily affects the spoken choice.

Style as difference

Osundare, in his 2003 treatise further notes that style as difference can be studied as variation and deviation. He uses the schema in Figure 1 to demonstrate this.

A text's stylistic analysis will be ineffective and incomplete unless it is compared to other texts in order to discover its points of similarity and differences. Texts vary significantly from one another. A stylistic examination of texts therefore digs not only into particular linguistic media, but also into variances and deviations in language usage, as well as the themes and motifs that are posited as a period's literary heritage.

From the schema above, style as difference anchors two perspectives – variation and deviation. Language use according to this approach to style varies in three ways – code, subject and author. Since language itself is a dynamic tool for human communication, its status is also anchored on its variability. Code oriented variation according to Osundare may be lexical, syntactic and rhetorical. The subject oriented variation is seen as the most rigid and impenetrable of the other categories because, the fields of human activities which it deals with are many and varied. It follows that every human activity has its own peculiar way of manifestation and a means, a dialect for articulating and communicating in the process. This aspect basically deals with inimitable use of language in professions.

Author oriented variation is in line with the view that style is man himself. There is a widely accepted view that every author has discreet style which is not only a mere case of co-incidence but a case of permanence. No two persons

talk in the same way. Writers have personal idiosyncrasies which undercut their treatise and works which have become a personal signet. Osundare (2003, p. 26) says that "without doubt, some writers leave a personal stamp on style due to the penetrating uniqueness of their stylistics execution, a disposition which invites epithets such as 'inimitable, eccentric' etc., from critics".

Style as iteration

This approach to style research views style research as a predominant and simultaneous use of linguistic and extra-linguistic characteristics for successful communication. It is a technique that digs into elucidating how language components summon other discourse aspects that contribute to communication efficiency. According to Osundare (2003, p. 29), "this view attributes style to a habit, a characteristic, or a linguistic behavior that, through established practice, has become the signature of a language user or an area of linguistic experience." The style of a text cannot be defined by the dispersed or sparse usage of linguistic affordances; rather, style is the aggregate of frequencies of linguistic elements that seem to have consistent shape. According to Enkvist et al. (1964, p. 28), "style is concerned with the frequencies of linguistic elements in a particular context, and therefore with contextual probabilities."

This theoretical approach has been chosen in order to effectively analyse the poems from the vantage of choices made by the author to x-ray the things that go on in the fibers of Nigeria. Also, the approach affords an eclectic rummaging of the various parts of the selected data.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a content analysis of selected poems in Jide Balogun's Collection. The selected poems are purposively selected from each of the part. The themes cut across, corruption, bad governance, power and unity. A broad categorization method of stylistic analysis is adopted to analyse the selected data. This is done so as to be able to categorise the thematic issues in the selected poems.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Metaphor

This is a direct comparison of two ideas with objects or phenomena that have similar qualities. Also, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) see metaphor as a device of poetic imagination and a rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language (p. 4).

1. Masquerade – 'Masquerade' (2).
2. Outwardly white and bright, inwardly black and dark – 'Masquerade' (2).

3. Hey! What kind of human head is this? 'Kari, wetin you' (13).
4. Na there you go to white college – 'wetin you kari' (13).
5. Travelling in loneliness on the road – 'The Path to True Peace' (35).

A masquerade is a masked entity shrouded within conventional cultural beliefs about the idea of a spirit being which represent the deity of a people. The author uses masquerade as a metaphorical depiction of Nigerian leaders. His conceptual belief is that Nigerian leadership is shrouded within the power and privileges that come with positions. Masquerades are characteristically distanced from people operating from a realm usually higher than their own. Although Nigerian leaders are elected from among the people, they have isolated themselves from the people they are supposed to serve. The author has deployed the language affordances at his disposal to directly compare Nigerian leaders to masquerades. Furthermore, superstition holds that nobody without being customarily appointed sees a masquerade and survives. In Nigeria, before elections, Nigerian politicians are seen everywhere, campaigning, lobbying, and "begging" for the votes of the people; but once they are elected, they become "masquerades" – inaccessible and too busy to see the people of their constituencies. Sample two (2) "outwardly white and bright, inwardly black and dark" further describes the nature of Nigerian leaders. They come to share money and tokenisms. They appear to be appealing to the masses, but their intentions are dark and black.

Sample three (3), "Hey! What kind of human head is this?" delves into how the country's security issues are handled, particularly when the corrupt leaders are involved – the "powerful". The poem 'wetin you kari' metaphorically lampoons the Nigerian leaders. Although the poem is written in plain language, its meanings are deep and implicit. In Nigeria, the "powerful" get away with offences that the "less powerful" are sent to prison for. The scene created here is a situation where a military officer has caught one of the "powerful" with a human head, and sample four (4) shows the boasting of the officer that the offender will go to jail. "White college" is a metaphorical representation of prison. In the end, there was order from above that it was all a set-up, alas! The offender was released. This is how justice is perverted in favour of the "powerful" in Nigeria. This trend has hampered meaningful growth in the country.

"Travelling in loneliness on the road" sample five (5) is used to represent "death" – the inevitable. The sample in the poem points to the fact that death is inevitable and it talks to the authority that death is the end of every man. Every man, including the "powerful", will walk down that lonely road. This line is used to help the readers know that death awaits everyone; hence, live an impactful life that will positively be remembered.

Irony/Sarcasm

This is a deliberate way of humorously expressing two opposite ideas, especially one that deviates from the literal meaning. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary (2017), irony is the use of words that mean something different from their intended meaning for the purpose of humour.

6. The path to peace is narrow, rugged and dogged – 'The Path to True Peace' (35).

This sample shows that there is a path that leads to peace. The path is narrow, rugged and dogged. The meaning of this is shrouded and implicit. This line could elicit death, which can be deciphered clearly from the poet's intention. However, beyond this, one could locate this line within the socio-political prevailing situations in the nation. The country is bereft of peace. This is because the leaders and the led are unwilling to follow the narrow, rugged and dogged path that leads to peaceful co-existence. Until there is peace, meaningful development cannot happen in the country. Insurgency, militancy, agitations for secession, calls for revolution... cannot help the nation attain nationhood. They have hampered the growth and development of the nation.

The expression is peculiar to Nigerian English and Nigerian English-based pidgin. Such words are unique to the demographic sociolinguistic peculiarities of the Nigerian speech community (Oyedeji, 2018).

7. You're going to die in jail! Chei! "Also, 'Na frame up! Hands off! 'Kari, wetin you' (13).

This is a clear use of Nigerian pidgin and it elicits deep meaning. This is used to buttress the point made earlier in the discussion under metaphor. It shows the language used by the Nigerian security officials and how they boast when they catch an offender. In this sample, the author demonstrates to the readers that in a nation where few people are more equal than others, development and sustainable growth cannot really occur. Again, the line exposes the rot in the security sector of this country. This trend has made many Nigerians lose hope in the security officers of this country. They obey orders from above in order to keep their jobs at the expense of justice. This has crippled the judicial system in Nigeria and has disillusioned the minds of the people. The accumulation of perverted justice has led to jungle justice and the nation is gradually slumping into anarchy.

Onomatopoeia

This is the formation or use of words that imitate the sound associated with something (Microsoft Encarta 2009).

8. Chei! " 'Kari, wetin you' (13)
9. Shaun, sir! 'Kari, wetin you' (13)

"Chei!" is onomatopoeic and it metaphorically represents a horrible situation. It exemplifies and creates a picture of having something unusual at hand. Many times, Nigerians use this expression to show utter displeasure and weird surprise. This expression is used by the author to express surprise upon the discovery of "an exhibit" (an incriminating object) in a man's car. The expressions foreground the author's disbelief in seeing a man with a human head. This has become a common trend now during the build up to an election. Politicians go diabolic about elections. They go the extra miles to do whatever they can do to win elections. This level of desperation has filled Nigerian election circles with bloodshed and the unnecessary loss of life among the electorate and innocent citizens. Until Nigerian elective offices are demonetised, this trend will persist, and meaningful development cannot happen in the face of this situation.

The second sample "Shaun Sir" is a military term indicating salutation to a superior officer. The sound is symbolic of a popular expression in the Nigerian demographic space, "oga at the top". In the military, disrespecting or rebelling against a superior officer is called mutiny and an offending officer must be court-martialed. In the poem, the author creates a situation where a junior officer is made to obey orders from above even when there is overwhelming evidence to prosecute the offender. In Nigeria, investigation is almost a waste of time as the maxim goes, "justice delayed is justice denied". 'Wetin you carry' is a poem that examines and questions the Nigerian judicial system and how the powerful one percent of the citizens escape justice.

Anastrophe/Stylistic Inversion

This entails the use of language that goes "against" the canonical arrangement of nominals and adjectivals. Stylistic inversion does not alter the structural meaning of an expression; rather, it adds logical emphasis or additional emotional color to the sentence's rudimentary meaning (Oyedemi 2020).

10. Head under the shade, face under the mask – 'Masquerade' (2).

Poets have poetic licence to stylistically use words and arrange them in ways that go against the norm. When this happens, it attracts attention and emotional colouring. Within the purview of foregrounding theory, such use of words has stylistic import. The expression above violates the canonical sentence structure and it is for effect. It describes the typical masquerades and how they are dressed. Again, traditionally, masquerades are distant from the people and they are usually seen as something that cannot be touched, hence, they are given special

recognition. Our politicians are metaphorically described as masquerades; their heads are consistently under shade and their faces are masked behind tinted glasses. Ironically, they are seen almost everywhere before elections, begging for the votes of the people. However, their heads go under shades and their faces become masked from the people once elected. The pleas and voices of the people usually fall on deaf ears. In a democracy, the people are supposed to be the most powerful, not the leaders. The reverse is the case in Nigeria. This trend has brought the nation into world disrepute.

Repetition

It is a figure of speech that shows deliberate and logical emphasis to attract the attention of readers to a particular structure and repeats such words, sounds, expressions, and clauses in succession or even without particular systematic placement (Kemertelidze and Manjavidze, 2013, p. 2).

11. Head under the shade, face under the mask, hands under the glove, legs under the socks – 'Masquerade' (2).
12. 'Masquerade' (2) – Mouth open to speak, ears open to hear, eyes open to see, nose open to smell.

Repetition in text is basically for emphasis. However, beyond emphasis, aspects of texts are repeated for very obvious reasons. In sample eleven (11) above, the expressions are parallel and "under" is repeated throughout in the expressions. This is to show the dressing style of the masquerades and their metaphorical colouring or their secret tendencies, their tendency to hide continuously under something. Manifesting in deceitful forms and manifesting the more you look the less you see syndrome. In sample twelve (12), the structures are also parallel and they are used to describe the expectations of the people. The electorates during elections are usually filled with false hope and aspirations. They are usually expectant of good governance from the elected officers. These expectations are usually dashed, and this has resulted in political apathy.

Personification

It is the attribution of human qualities to objects or abstract notions. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), personification occurs when "a physical object is further specified as being a person" (p. 32).

13. The sky will be caged – 'If Men Were...' (29).
14. The moon will be arrested – 'If Men Were...' (29).
15. Reveal the antidote for your menace – 'To You, Death' (46).
16. You are the whirlwind that blows with rage – 'To You, Death' (47).

The author of this collection, driven by the reality of death, speaks to authorities and every man who sees life on earth as the end. He wants the readers to see the earth as a means to an end and not the end itself. So, sample thirteen (13) "the sky will be caged" shows the weirdness of man and the things that men can do. Sample fourteen (14) "the moon will be arrested" also buttresses that fact. The author tries to show that wickedness lies in the heart of men, but men are not God. The author imagines a situation where men were God. Even in Nigeria, some "powerful" men see themselves as God. Hence, they trample on people, deny them their rights, and feel okay doing it. The author, through this samples, shows the readers that God is above everyone and His supremacy transcends the gamut of human conception and contraption.

Samples (15) and (16) personify death. So, the author asks death to reveal the antidote for its menace. The poem is typically a dirge and the author wrote the poem to mourn good people. It is sad that Nigeria has lost heroes. Nigeria has lost great men and women who would have turned the situation around for the country. It is because of this that the author asks death to reveal its antidote. Obviously, death cannot hear his voice or the numerous questions that people ask when they lose a beloved individual, but the author's dirge brings to light the fact that Nigeria has lost great individuals.

Metonymy

Metonymy is a type of metaphor which entails the use of one entity to refer to another entity that is related to it such that there is a transfer of meaning from the referent to the symbol (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p. 35).

17. Eternity is where peace is found– 'The Path to True Peace' (35)

The use of eternity in this expression refers to death. Again, the author has deployed the use of eternity in this sense cautiously to remind people of life beyond the earth and that this is where peace is found. "Eternity is where peace is found" is a call to reason. It is a call to pursue what is right. It is a call to be courteous and careful. The author highlights that there is a path to true peace. This poem ironically means that there is no peace here or the peace people crave for here is false. People do quite a number of things here in a bid to get peace. Some kill, steal, maim, lie and so on, but what they get is not true peace; rather, they get false peace.

Conclusion

Every society in a quest for nationhood undergoes a series of stages, which are inevitable and necessary for its growth. The growth of Nigeria is hinged on many factors, which if they are not addressed, will make attaining

nationhood illusory. From the foregoing, therefore, it is discovered that, as the author has highlighted through various linguistic expressive means, Nigeria is undergoing a gross challenge with governance. The leaders are not responsive to the plight of the people. They have made themselves "masquerades", yet upon election, the masses have great hopes and expectation from them. These expectations are often dashed against the wall.

The study also found that varying linguistic expressions are used to call people to reason. The author foregrounds the inevitability of death. This he uses to remind people, including the "powerful", to tread softly as there is a Supreme Being that is above everyone. Nigerian leaders therefore need to rise up to responsible and responsive leadership that will translate into palpable growth and prosperity for all. Also, they need to listen to the voice of reason that has pervaded the literary world evident in the works of Jide Balogun.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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