

Diction In Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset At Dawn*: A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract: A Key purpose for exploring the language of a given text is to determine the extent to which an author of such text has organized and deployed (exploited) its limitless potentials to encode or relate the intended message and social vision. This paper therefore, investigates aspects of lexical choices/patterning in Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset At Dawn*, in order to establish their connotative implications and how they cohere in the text. With M.A.K Halliday's *Systemic Functional Grammar*, as the model of analysis, the paper reveals that the construction of a literary text is a linguistically conscious activity. This is evident as the lexico-semantic dynamics of Ike's text explored are critical and strategic both in stylo-rhetoric and in the actual message delivery. The paper confirms the fact that the linguistic choices which a given writer makes from a multitude of options at his disposal are determined by both the context and subject matter. This is because, these twin elements choose their own variety of language. The quality and of course the beautiful appreciation of the author's lexical choices however, are really foregrounded within the context of correct interpretation of such choices.

Keywords: Diction, lexical patterning, lexico-semantic dynamics, Stylo-rhetoric, Linguistic choices.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of linguistic stylistics has to do with a stylistic study which relies wholly on the scientific rules of language in its analysis. Such rules will embrace the lexical, grammatical, figures of speech, context and cohesion categories. Linguistic stylistic differs from literary stylistics in that while the former abstracts and describes the elements of language used in conveying a certain subject matter, the latter dwells heavily on external correlates (these include history, philosophy, source of inspiration, etc) to explain a text, with occasional leap into the elements of language used.

Literary stylistic and linguistic stylistic seems to have different emphases and methods of operation. Whereas, the former operates on the aesthetics and values, the latter presents a scientific analysis especially working with such tools as grammatical, systematic and phonological components of the language.

According to Nnadi (2010:2), with the application of linguistic standards in literary works, the literary critic felt threatened and some fought stoutly to resist the encroachment.

In spite of these initial conflicts, linguistic stylistics has come to stay. The term was coined by Donald Freeman in 1968, apparently to put to rest the unnecessary verbal feud that existed

II. THEORETICAL MODEL OF ANALYSIS

The linguistic style of writers has been a subject of intense debate and enquiry by linguistics and scholars over the years. It is on record that in the 1920's for instance, the Russian formalist and the Prague school saw style in literature as linguistic foregrounding while the structuralist of the 1960's emphasized the various linguistic devices used by writers to foreground aspect of meaning. The debate/enquires did not stop in the 1960's but continued through the 1970's with the popularization of J.R Firth's *Systemic Grammar* by M.A.K. Halliday in his *Systemic Functional Grammar*. The SFG was a development from his earlier work tagged "Scale and Category Grammar".

Since in this paper focuses on a functional use of language we shall adopt M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as the theoretical model of analysis. The interest of this paper in the model is not only in describing the structures of language but also in the explication of the various properties of this discourse and functions. The critical point deducible from the notion of this model is that whatever linguistic resource that is worth describing, must be deployed in such a way that the description and interpretation are based on the situational variables that prompted its use. This is why Oha (1994:730) posits that "the approach recognizes the interdependence of style, meaning and context of situation and also that the latter should not be subjected to second fiddle position or even ignored in the analysis of style".

Language structure, in systemic Functional Grammar, is analyzed along the lines of lexis, structures, phonology and semantics. Halliday provided three dimensions of language function to include: the ideational function, inter personal function and the textual function which we equally referred to as the meta functions of language. This model according to Nnadi (2010:49) provides a "fairly exhaustive and semantically sensitive taxonomic and functional approach to style". Also according to Adeyanju (2008:86) the ideational metafunction of language. "...implies that language serves as an instrument for the encoder (speaker, writer) to express and articulate in idea and experience internally". The input of the above position is that ideational metafunction of language is synonymous with the field of discourse and the language of use. The interpersonal function on the other hand, refers to the tenor of discourse (which means the social relationship that exist among participants is a specific discourse situation, which can influence or shape language use. However, the textual metafunction, which is very important to this paper (study), is concerned with the mode, the internal organization and communicative nature of a text. Halliday's textual function of language is seen by Leech and Short (1985:209) as "... ways of using language to organize, understand and express information for effective communication". The sense here is that the textual metafunction relates what is said in text to ideas outside the discourse. Scholars have therefore come to regard systemic grammar as a useful framework for stylistic analysis. This is what this paper is set to demonstrate.

III. PREVIOUS STUDIES

There seems to be few previous studies done in the related area of linguistic stylistic analysis, especially on Chukwuemeka Ike's work. The few studies previously carried out and which are related to this present paper lent credence to the work at hand. The earliest linguistic stylistic study available is the one done by Igboanusi (1995). His unpublished Ph.D thesis, recognizes the importance of lexical innovation in some of the writings of Chukwuemeka Ike, John Munonye and Nkem Nwankwo. This work which he refers to as "Igbo English novels" concentrated on the works of the three authors with particular reference to the lexical selection in their works.

Other related works are the articles/papers by Macpheson Azuike and Victor Aire in Kanchawa Ugbabe (2001). While Azuike's paper captures the diction and stock phrases that constitute the beauty of *The Bottled Leopard* on the one hand, Aire's paper discusses the lexico-syntactic features of *Sunset at Dawn* and the stylistic effect of translation of dialogue originally done in the Igbo language. However, this researcher noticed some elements of misinterpretation of some of the Igbo words in Aire's work and makes an attempt at presenting the actual translation/interpretation of those words.

Finally, Nnadi, (2010) looks at the linguistic stylistic characteristics of ten (10) works of Chukwuemeka Ike. His work seems to be the only elaborate attempt at analyzing Ike's works from a linguistic stylistic frame of analysis. His reason is simply because previous works concentrated on merely the literary stylistic analysis. Just like the work of Igboanusi (1995), Nnadi's work dwelt on a general analysis of lexical selection, plural and clausal typology as well as sentence and punctuation patterns in the ten (10) selected works of Ike.

This paper therefore differs from every other work as it looks at *Diction in "Sunset at Dawn"* with a view to addressing the choices made by Ike in the novel and the contributions of such lexical choices to the overall success of the novel.

IV. DICTION IN "SUNSET AT DAWN"

Sunset at Dawn is a tale of destruction, hardship and war. It is a world where there is so much pain, stress suffering and where too many lives are cut down in their prime. Hence, it is not out of place to see the flagrant use of such language that is colored by bitterness. A language that is anything but pleasant. The choice of words in this tale of war, were carefully made by Chukwuemeka Ike in order to reflect (potray) the inner feelings of those at the receiving end. We are told from the onset that every Biafran called their former compatriots who now turned enemy 'vandals' (9). The word vandal, by etymology (which appears for the first time in the text and enclosed in quotes, showing a detachment of the author's feeling from that of his characters) stands for a person who engages in senseless and willful destruction of lives and property. Hence, according to the text, every Nigerian civilian or military alike is a vandal (92). Worthy of note also is that there are other words used in the text which are not synonymous with vandal but seem to have such a semantic ring of bitterness and approval. These words used by Biafrans to refer to Nigerians include: blood-thirsty sex maniacs (65), godless people (113) Jigger-infested vermins (60), murderess in the north (94), vampires (31). In the same token of selective vocabulary which reflects an attitude of disapproval towards the enemy, we see the use of such words as:

- ✓ 'harbingers of death' - (114),
- ✓ 'the python that was forced to uncurl itself' - (116), and
- ✓ 'a shelling monster' - (30).

The expressions above are used to refer to the Nigerian warplanes as in 1; the figurative reference to the motorized second division of the Nigeria Army at Abagana and the Nigerian Army's ferret respectively. In fact, the bitter state of mind among Biafrans, are depicted in the use of these words

and invectives. It is equally important to note the extent of deliberate foregrounding of the word *vandal* in the text as against other words by the relative frequency of usage by the author. This appears up to about sixty (60) times in the novel.

Also, there are other classes of words and expressions which are frequently used by the narrator in the text. These classes of words are meant to describe the very nature of the vandalism perpetrated by Nigerians. They include but not limited to atrocities (14), carnage (32), cold-blooded murder (145), cold-blooded slaughter of innocents in Biafra (143), extermination (31), genocide (135); massacre (2), pogrom (14) etc. It seems safe to say that the author used this group of words to enclose the gruesome perpetration of the pogrom or genocide. Typical examples are stated as follow:

“...those nauseous scenes of gorged eyes, ripped womb and headless bodies”, (10) of Halima’s husband (Uche) in the hands of her fellow Hausas, who “plucked out his two eyes, ripped open his stomach and then left him in the open to die painfully...” (94)

Another example is painted of the “ten Hausa soldiers taking turns to rape Fatima’s school friend in Ogoja, the last of them going through it all without even caring that their victim was by then already dead”. (92)

More so at the Umuahia raid, “five Biafran Red Cross workers were killed, one of them... neatly chopped in two. A woman... had been disemboweled, her intestines spread over the staircase...” (180). Chukwuemeka Ike by the use of this class of vocabulary, tries to spare his reader the constant repetition of such gory but factual details as illustrated above.

It is pertinent to note that the author, in this tale of war, taps greatly from his apparently in exhaustible register as related to military and warfare which is enhanced by his personal experiences in the said war. Here in the text (novel), we see a host of other vocabulary usage that appear strange to the non-initiated reader. What the statement means is that aside the commonly known military vocabulary such as bullets, bombs, battalion, rifles, rockets etc, there such words as armada, bazooka, bull’s eye, bunkers, common balls, commandeer, conscript, ferret, light arms, mig (used in place of mirage planes) saladín, strafe, stragglers etc.

The author’s artistic fusion of Igbo lexical items and expressions to which he attaches parenthetical explanations and/or translation in a glossary at the end of the novel, is also worthy of note. It is obvious that the author deliberately employs this artistic strategy in order expressly ventilate his thoughts, opinions, and equally to fully identify with the carnage and wickedness perpetrated against his own people. It is a form of lexical foregrounding. Hence, victor O. Aire quoted in (Ugbabe 27/28) saw this artistic maneuvering as lexico-syntactic characters of the text.

Here him,

It is obvious that most of the time and especially in the rural areas like obodo town, conversation is carried out in igbo. To corroborate this impression, the narrator retains many Igbo words and expressions, which are distinguished from the English by being printed in italics (the same, of course, applies to words from other Nigerian languages, which also have their place in the glossary). Some of such expressions highlight the creative way in which Ike applies linguistic interference as can be surmised from the following

examples. First of all, the sound of shelling transcribed as kwapu kwapu unu dum (49) is interpreted phono-stylistically as an “Igbo onomatopoeia for the sound of the mortar. Literally: pack and quit, pack and quit, all of you” (250).

Furthermore, we noticed the author’s use of peer group slang. This is evident in the conversation between professor Ezenwa and his friend Barrister Chike Ifeji (sic) that what “the rising sun lacks in draught, it compensates for in skirts”. They satisfy all tastes “skirts” here refers to the Biafran girls. He also maintained that one of them he gave a lift was ready for him but there was nowhere to sample her (36). What the phrase alone means is that there was no privacy to have erotic relaxation with her. Other examples of peer group slangs include:

- ✓ Bird hunting –(37)
- ✓ Peeling his ripe paw paw (162) - striping her naked
- ✓ Go-slow (48) –fever
- ✓ Generator (65)- groundnuts mind with pop corn
- ✓ Headlight (162)- a woman’s breast
- ✓ Push me I push you (162)-local gin
- ✓ Troop carrier (163)- condom
- ✓ Shelling (163)-for sexual intercourse

Another aspect of Ike’s diction has to do with Onomastics. This deals with his choice of names and their meaning in direct relation to the story. Though the intensity of onomastics in sunset at dawn is not much, certain important aspects are pointed out in a previous study by Aire thus:

For instance, the Igbo name Amilo means “I do not know the enemy” which is quite appropriate since it is the first name of the war-hero, Amilo Kanu killed in the bombing of a Biafran military hospital. Amilo’s father, bereaved twice during the war, bears the name Onwubiko which is a supplication to death. Perhaps the most prominent Igbo name is that of the egocentric, boastful veteran, Ukadike, meaning “a big man talks big...” he claims the title ‘Ezeahurukwe’-(the chief you acknowledge at sight’ (57) a title which, “focused attention on the contrast between the diminutive, inconsequential size of the anointed chief and the domineering, impressive personality of the pretender” (57)

Aire made a wonderful attempt at representing the entire thought of Ike in his interpretation of certain words (names) used in the novel. However, I think that his (Aire’s) interpretation of some of the Igbo names used in the novel by Ike do not seem to tally with the correct representation of such names. A typical example of such misinterpreted names is ‘Ukadike. This name I believe is rightly interpreted as ‘a strong man’s talk’ (as opposed to ‘big man’ in Aire work). Ukadike is a compound name (ie made up of two names) comprising ‘uka’ and ‘dike’ meaning separately as talk/word and strongman/warrior respectively. Hence, a combination of these separate names produces –‘Ukadike- a strongman/ warriors talk.

Interestingly, the lexical choice of such name carefully represents the reality (mood) of the war. Another name that suffers a similar fate is Ezeahurukwe. This means ‘the king who is acknowledged at sight.

It should be noted that this observation of mine is not aimed at underrating the efforts of Aire in his work.

Finally it is fascinating to note the adoption of a lexico-syntactic simplicity in the authors description from the sack of

Obodo to their ultimate drift into St. David refugee camp. This is the result of his successful and uncomplicated diction to capture even the minutest details of the predicament of Obodo people. This lexico-syntactic simplicity is manifest in the words and expressions which are within the vocabulary range of the average reader. This is in sharp contrast to the three other blood-chilling descriptions in the novel, whose lexical selection is intent upon painting a gory picture of what obtains in an air raid or military ambush. More so, it is clear here that the simple diction used here is justified since the story is winding with the sack of Obodo. It is pertinent to mention that right from the onset, the author has used Obodo as a typical Biafran village and the protagonist, Dr. Amilo Kanu, is located there. Therefore, Obodo falls, Amilo dies, the war ends and Biafra is erased from the map. The author's story ends.

V. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, we have established the value of diction in Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* in the sense that it serves as a veritable vehicle for the negotiation of the various messages embedded in the text. This study demonstrates the fact that lexis contributes bits of language ingredients which are meaningfully combined for the realization of linguistic expression and human communication. As distinctive elements of language, it is important to note that, lexis and meaning play very strategic roles in the production of literary text as a form of human communication. This position agrees with Ajulo's (1994:2) belief that 'lexis is a linking bridge which connects linguistic forms and functions.'

However, it must be pointed out that diction and meaning as well as other linguistic elements do not function by themselves. Hence, this study has demonstrated how the choice of words in the text communicated the desired meaning intended by the author, and differs from the meaning of such words outside the text. This, of course reveals the linguistic dynamics and nuances of Ike's *'Sunset at Dawn.'* No wonder

Ndimele (1999) tagged meaning, as 'a harlot among words, a temptress who can seduce the writer or speaker from the path of intellectual chastity.' It therefore becomes safe to conclude that the construction of a literary text is a conscious process in the sense that any meaningful linguistic construct is a product of a deliberate lexical choice with particular contextual frame.

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