

Social effectiveness of style in Olusunle's "visions"

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ABSTRACT: From the dimensions of pluralism and multilevel approaches to investigation of textual style, style is viewed as the totality of the linguistic ingredients which cohere to confer effectiveness on a text, whether spoken or written. These linguistic ingredients become meaningful, hence effective, when they constitute appropriate linguistic choices in a social context. Thus, this paper seeks to argue for the imperativeness of context of situation (whether immediate or wider), in stylistics and at the same time re-presenting established elements of language as functionally potent variables of measuring and interpreting the stylistic density of a given poetic discourse. It is presupposed that poetic analysis comprises a consideration of correlates of pattern and figures; paradigm and syntagm. It is evident that poetic language typically organizes figures along the chain and violates established patterns at points of choices. These patterns are specially styled in poetry such that they combine in an idiosyncratic fashion to harmonize the message with its medium in relation to its spatio-temporal contexts. This makes stylistics an indispensable tool of exhaustively appraising and appreciating a poetic text.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to emphasize the resourcefulness of context in the appreciation of poetry. The social construct in which a poem is composed provides the necessary pivot around which the linguistic structure revolves. Society creates and consumes literature generally for its own self-assessment and evaluation; as a way of ensuring the overall development of the mind and the entire social superstructure. So, an intensive understanding of a socially motivated work of art is suspended on a consideration of a certain sociological milieu which feeds and sharpens the ideological perception which a literary artist celebrates.

Increased interest in linguistic approaches to literary studies has led to the emergence of a corollary standpoint between the extremes of language forms and language functions. Stylistics is a discipline which deploys applicable linguistic methodologies and tenets in giving a functional interpretation to textual styles. This approach to textual analysis seeks to establish the relationship between the affective tendencies surrounding the mind of language user and features of linguistic structure. This is not an inclination towards the impressionistic ruptures of literary criticism. Rather, it is a formalized framework of empirically testing for determination and verification of contributory roles of linguistic properties to the effectiveness of the overall discourse. On the indeterminate nature of style out of context, Lawal (1997: vi) writes:

Style which occupies the tricky border-line between language and literature, between language forms and functions, continues to loom large . . . in the relative treatment of the theory of style and its practical application to the study of texts of divergent genres, and also in the relative treatment of the different arms of stylistics as an interdisciplinary field.

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The implication of the foregoing is that a study of textual style can be approached in the light of the shape it takes in the context in which it is used. This culminates in a multilevel approach of studying the concept as occasioned by contextual provision. Since style can be undertaken as a choice made from an array of variant forms the linguistic repertoire of a language presents; as a deviation from the norm; and as a configuration of recurrent features, it proves to be a mediating frontier between and among language form, information value, medium, context and function. So, if textual style is the organization and realization of linguistic features in a text (Kress 1987: 126), then certain questions like "What is the social construct that gives rise to both the appearance and organization of these 'stylistic' linguistic features?" need to be asked. Conversely, the effect of these linguistic patternings on the part of the consumers of the text in their specific social positioning is another issue. All of these are determined by the socio-cultural setting underlying a given linguistic composition or expression. In a nutshell, the style of a text constitutes the totality of the semiotic elements which combine to confer on a given text its idiosyncratic pattern and through which the functional essence of a text is engendered. It is against this background that the social construct of Nigeria is brought to the fore in the explication of Olusunle's poetic discourse.

STYLISTICS AND POETRY

Stylistics is the confluence of literary arts and linguistics. Its applicability to poetic tradition as the most problematic genre of literature (see Kiparsky 1981; Jones 1986), requires an intensive understanding of the intricacies associated with the linguistic mode of expression, the poetic text in itself and the preponderance of context in meaning encoding and decoding processes. Hence, in order to bring readers of poetry closer to down-to-the-rudiment understanding and appreciation of the piece, it is pertinent to employ some modules of analysing textual style. Stankiewicz, as cited in Kolawole (1997: 3) writes:

The student of poetry is in no position to describe and to explain the nature of poetic language unless he takes into account the rules of language . . . just as the linguist cannot properly understand the forms of poetic expression unless he considers the *forces of tradition and culture* that affect the specific character of poetry (Italic mine, for emphasis).

This is not to say that stylistics has come to replace literary criticism. Instead, it complements, in a more scientific way, the varying modules of literary criticism. And poetry, by virtue of its highly self-styled and 'fingerprinting' tendencies, requires a more objective mode of perception and appreciation. Stylistics becomes a handy tool of probing into and displaying the message carried by the frequency distributions and transitional probabilities of (a discourse's) linguistic features, especially as they differ from those of the same features in the language as a whole.

Freeman (1970: 4) presents a triadic perspective of style as deviation from the norm; style as recurrence or convergence of textural pattern; and style as a particular exploitation of a grammar of possibilities. Incidentally, all these markers of style have become inseparable elements of foregrounding in poetry. This is why Mukarovsky (1970:40–59) characterizes poetic language as an esthetically purposeful distortion of standard language which deliberately breaks the rule in order that a given passage attracts attention. However, an out-of-context analysis would prove unrewarding as 'norm' is a variable phenomenon;

that is, what is marked becomes effective only when it is contextualized (i.e. perceived and interpreted in the light of its co-text and context of situation where such an element has been deployed for use). In the long run, these intricacies associated with a study of poetry generally make it a peculiar and idiosyncratic form.

Language is an expression of the social system. This social system requires meaning relations to be realized such that the meaning potential of the linguistic expression is in congruity with the social semiotic (Butler 1985: 62). On the relevance of context to poetic analysis, Carter (1989: 69) is of the opinion that poems cannot be fully interpreted only by reference to the linguistic context of discourse. This suggests that meaning of the text is also sharpened by the mode which the language of the text adopts. In other words, the linguistic analysis of a text must be conjoined with analysis of the poem which attends systematically to the networks the text creates as part of its place within socio-historical and cultural contexts. Hence, the underlying thrust of this paper is to foreground the fact that meanings of poetic texts should be sought beyond the levels of lexicogrammar.

Of all forms of literature, poetry appears to have a relatively stable form with respect to epochal distribution. Unlike visual arts which undergo sporadic physical changes, it is not easy to spot any major change. However, in the area of structural and meta-structural elements, certain variations, drifts and shifts in styles and conventions are quite discernible. There is no gainsaying that the relative importance of these variations has serious implication for metafunctional interpretation of poetry. In contemporary English for instance, variations in textual and textural patterns of a discourse are influential as investigative media through which what is stated, what is implied and what has been taken for granted or entailed can be accessed.

Given this background, poetry, owing to its peculiar and densely marked features, rises beyond ordinary linguistic composition of commonplace. Hence, its interpretation requires a higher-order level of meaning negotiation. This explains why a contextual analysis of the formal linguistic features and their unique, varying or deviant patterns is instrumental in dissecting a language corpus for the REAL (beyond the imagined) information value of a poetic discourse. This is necessary in view of the admixture of 'given-ness' and 'new-ness' which are juxtaposed in poetry. On justification for studying stylistic variants, Leech and Short (1981: 133–4) write that it is:

only by considering unrealized possibilities can we find the nature of a writer's achievement. Definitions have both a positive and negative element: what occurs is only meaningful against the background of what does not occur. And by limiting ourselves specifically to stylistic alternatives we can pin-point the inferences from the text which are the basis of literary appreciation.

In this way, it becomes easier to focus on the stylistic value of a given text by comparing the choice(s) made from the standpoint of the choice(s) not made: "what might have been written, but wasn't" (Leech and Short 1981: 133). When the values of original text/language and its variant alternatives are brought under inspection, it gives some clear substance to the intuition the reader has in decoding the meaning engendered (beyond the surface) in the text.

It is worthy of note that style is an amorphous embodiment of a text and it is said to be a starting point for an investigation of a text. A text, according to Butler (1985: 63), is constituted by "any instance of language that is operational as distinct from citational sentences in a grammar book". Halliday and Hasan (1976) use the term to refer to any

passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole. Owing to the fact that style subsumes the overall network of selections a language user uses on a particular occasion, it becomes a little dangerous to give a generalized pronouncement about how these textual ingredients may be studied independent of the social circumstance. In essence, a detailed analysis of textual style can only be achieved by specifying and utilizing the specific areas/approaches to be covered/used. This will eventually put the study on a firm basis of observation and evidence. This is why Leech and Short (1981: 12) maintain that the soundness of the statements about authorial style relies on the statements we can make about particular texts. Hence, it puts one on a safe footing to say that style is a linguistic characteristic of a given text for a correct, sound and effective interpretation. This is a way of fulfilling the bulk of the artistic function for which the text is designed in the first place.

Language shapes perception which, in essence, is an extension of reality. It expresses thought and just as Sapir (1951) and Whorf (1956) have put it, the interaction between language and thought is mutual. Where a given stretch of language is used artistically, it calls for power of linguistic intuition to understand and appreciate it. In the same vein, the complexity of linguistic expression spawns meditative thoughts which produce further linguistic enquiry for its actualization and decomposition. This relational cycle repeats itself to give a given poetic text its unique identity, hence, the need for stylistics in the understanding of poetry.

FINGERMARKS IN ITS SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

Fingermarks (Olusunle 1996), is a collection of poems that laments social, political, economic and religious agonies that characterize all facets of Nigerian life. It recreates problems that rear their ugly heads from social vices such as corruption, indiscipline, sexual immorality and various forms of unrest. The collection places more emphasis on the sub-themes of urbanization, modernization and their consequences. Hence, *Fingermarks* takes a revolutionary step at evolving a radical thematic and aesthetic essence of indigenous poetry. This fact is engendered by the grandeur of style which Olusunle incorporates.

The writer of *Fingermarks* – Tunde Olusunle – is a Nigerian poet whose writings frown at all forms of oppression, alienation, subjugation, mystification, dehumanization, etc. which are perpetrated by the ‘elites’ against the ‘vassals’. He stands as a representative poet who hoists the flag of the philosophical ideology of social demystification widely canvassed by the likes of Femi Fatoba, Niyi Osundare, Olu Obafemi and Femi Osofisan. He presents his message in form of a lamentation for a lost glory of a country whose promising future has been compromised and bartered.

Olusunle’s collection of poems is divided into three segments. The first segment of the collection – “Vistas” – is characterized by poems which expose or state the problem. Here, he states and confirms the truth-conditionality of his message for the purpose of arousing and arresting the reader’s interests for a serious assessment of the issues raised. The second segment of the collection – “Variform” – consists of poems which nurse the ‘emotional wounds’ sustained in the first part. On the platform of style, he employs the potential social function of language to buttress his course of argument so that he makes plain and clear his assertions in the first segment. The stylistic effect of this is that it carries the message to a point of climax such that the audience/reader is fully charged to yield to his ‘antidote’.

The last segment constitutes our data for this study. This segment is what he tags "Visions". It comprises six different poems which display a high level of unity of purpose. These poems (see Appendix) are revolutionary in content and style. A high level of sociological inputs is necessary in decomposing the thematic essence of the segment. Just as a pent-up anger finds a bursting exit to explode, the alienation, violence and mystification which parade the first two segments of the collection need to be 'eased off'. Little wonder then that "Visions" is revolutionary in content, language and form.

Overall, the triadic division of the collection is aimed at achieving a stylistic texture which underlies the 'form' of the text in consonance with the logicity and coherence in thematic embellishments paraded in "Vistas", "Variform" and "Visions". This calls for a systematic module of dissecting the philosophical stance of the poems; hence the application of stylistics in the analysis of the poems involved.

Therefore, in the next section, given the understanding that context influences text composition and that texts are actualized by situations, we shall apply the same in negotiating embellished meanings in our sample data. This will enable us to see in clear terms, how social experience constrains text composition and by which the same can be decomposed on a stylo-functional pedestal which, according to Halliday as cited in Kress (1985: 126), is where attempts are made "to explain linguistic structure, and linguistic phenomena, by reference to the notion that language plays a certain part in our lives; that it is required to serve certain universal types of demand". This approach provides a useful insight into language use especially in the context of stylistic studies. It is true that style is a textual phenomenon; the making of the text in itself takes a functional alignment with the provision of the situation surrounding the composition of the text in the first place. Olusunle's poetic discourse in his visionary poems is 'styled' in such a manner that the socio-cultural setting of the discourse is engendered in the text. Thus, the only way to dissect the piece effectively is by paying credence to its social configuration and implication.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Our analysis in this section will follow the systemic hierarchy of structural development (see Halliday 1985), beginning with the level of substance (i.e. phonic and graphic). The level of 'form' will follow suit where lexicogrammatical features will be brought under introspection. The interaction between substance and form as constrained by situation will equally be taken into consideration in the course of the analysis. Cohesive markers and rhetorics in the light of their functional applicability to the data under study will also be investigated in order to show how they have been peculiarly configured to achieve envisaged stylistic effects.

Phonology

Alliteration

Poetry generally is celebrated for alliterative potential as a phonetic feature. Olusunle nonetheless uses the technique in a peculiarly distinctive manner. Both conventional and alternating alliterations are simultaneously used throughout the text. These are used to foreground the anxiety, urgency of positive reaction, etc., which the text is intended to stimulate in the readers. In a number of cases, almost the entire stanza of the poem

is rendered using strong alliterative verses. This is essentially associated with poems which Olusunle uses to present the antithetical contrast between 'thematic investment' and 'consequent expectation'. Let us consider the following extract which constitutes a whole stanza:

*Then shall they arise!
Scorched scions of pauperized parents
Who tilled but thirsted
Who farmed but famished
Who wetted but wanted
Who hoed but hoped
Who sweated but starved ("Armageddon", p. 64).*

Though there is occasional intrusion of assonance, this has been stylishly blended within the cues of the alliterative verses. In the context of Nigerian languages which defy consonant clusters or closed syllables, assonance is functionally used to demystify the pent-up emotion engendered in alliterative lines which, in turn, are basically suspended on consonantal manipulations. Hence, in this case, assonance can be interpreted to have been used to diffuse the tensions raised by consecutive occurrences of alliterations. Instances of assonantal balance can be found between /ɔ:/ and /əʊ/ as we have in:

*Scorched and pauperized /ɔ:/ and
hoed and hoped /əʊ/.*

In order for him to challenge and charge his audience to fuel his crusade, Olusunle puts alliteration into a prominent use when he functionally stylizes /k/ and /m/ as presented in the following extract:

*There,
A massive cathedral
With candles, cassocks, crosses
Crashed in rage-lit flames
Here,
A towering mosque
With its mats, minarets, mufflers,
Crumbled in fury-fanned fire ("The fire next time", pp. 65-6).*

There and *here* which open the two stanzas respectively are effective cohesive devices blended with phonologically distinctive words to balance his views on the two principal religions in Nigeria. The writer maintains a neutral stand as far as possible owing to the sensitivity of religious issues in the country. When one comes across a Christian *cathedral with candles, cassocks and crosses* or a Muslim *mosque with its mats, minarets and mufflers*, the reader's excitement is raised especially when one considers the alliterative /k/ and /m/ in words which overtly constitute "trademarks" of the two religions which underpin the thematic preoccupation of the poem.

A consideration of "Prophecy" (p. 63) reveals a different use into which alliteration is put by Olusunle as a way of foregrounding the context characterized by 'bombarding' alienation as signalled by cues of plosives and fricatives:

*And Government Reserved Areas
Shall turn
Ghost Ridden Areas
And bedrooms blood-pools
And cosy cars comfy coffins
And silk suits silk shrouds ("Prophecy", p. 63).*

The style of the last three lines of this text presents a clear case of marked phonological pattern. The poet superimposes on the alliterative verses, the unflinching will, and the irresistible determination to effect a social change. The hurried rhythm produced by strong alliterative verses which stands out as a major phonological device is an indication of how emotion and attention can be raised as a result of the inherent power of persuasion in 'good oration'.

Granted that texts are products of social agents in given spatio-temporal contexts, their values and meanings change as one moves from a context to another. The foregoing entails that no text can be a site of realization of a single discourse. As institutions do not speak, their expressions are by individuals who are institutionally and discursively formed in specific ways, and who therefore refract discourses in line with their own formation. Olusunle's visionary poems are by no means an exception. The social context which instigates his revolutionary composition should be borne in mind if premises and argument of his poems are to be fully grasped. To achieve this, using the stylistic potentials of English in a second language situation, Olusunle concretizes the seemingly abstract complex interrelation of the producer of the text, the text in itself and the consumers of the text on the socio-political and economic premises underlying his poetic argument. The thematic preoccupation of the text finds a formidable vent for expression by means of the poet's artistic recreation of social reality in his context-induced mode of delivery.

Graphology

Slant indentation

Slant indentation is a major graphological technique used by a writer when each of the lines/verse is indented from the point at which the preceding one starts. One interesting thing about Olusunle's adoption of this technique is that on the three occasions where the slant indentation is used, there are three lines/verses (triplets) involved in each case. At the same time, these three sets of slant triplets have been used at definite points of literary climax. This unique quality coincides with the significance of 'three' as a number, especially in the Nigerian socio-cultural milieu. For instance, when one's name is invoked thrice, it signals emphasis, warning, caution or alertness to wage an unflinching war against all odds, as the case may be. The indented triplets are given as follows for clear illustration and investigation:

- I.
Ashes ...
Coal dust ...
Rubble ... ("The fire next time", pp. 65–6).
- II.
The rattle of the gong
The sound of the trumpet
The voice of the town crier ("Message", pp. 67–8).

In the cases cited, it is apt that the thematic pre-occupations of the triplets are climactic; each unfolding its message in order of magnitude. The stylistic import of this technique is that it seeks to draw the reader's attention to the endless rise in social vices so that a timely antidote can be sourced and applied before matters get out of hand; as hinted by the recurrent ellipses and enjambment in I and II respectively.

Ellipsis period

Ellipsis period is another graphological device which recurs frequently in the text. It refers to a three dots punctuation mark (...) which is used to indicate such omission, formally, in writing (as illustrated in I above). Olusunle foregrounds the emotional predisposition of his target audience through his frequent use of ellipsis. As a matter of style, this technique can be said to have been used to capture the speechlessness which accompanies the dilemma, instigated by undue social, political, economic and religious agonies which parade the thematic focus of the text in the outside world of reality. Another form of ellipsis is marked lexical/syntactic ellipsis which characterizes "Visions". This will be examined shortly.

The linguistic forms in a text have to be accounted for by virtue of its bearing with the social institutions. Any corpus of language organized from this point of view automatically initiates codes through which relevant values and meanings of an institutions are expressed (Kress 1987: 134). This implies that socially generated codes which characterize the data under study are constant reminders of the inextricable relation of social institutions with structures, processes and forms of language; the reason being that all language use is always organized from that point of view and expressive of such meaning.

Lexis

Processes and participants are represented in "Visions" in a specially context-constrained pattern. At the level of ideational component of grammar is the deverbalization processes in various forms – most importantly where verbs + '-ing' progressive inflection are used as adjectives to create a clearer picture of the situation in its progression. Examples include:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Touching (tunes)</i> | (p. 60). |
| <i>Rot-frothing (gutters)</i> | |
| <i>Cigar-puffing (vampires)</i> | |
| <i>Towing (Task Force Chairman)</i> | (p. 61). |
| <i>Tripping (overlord)</i> | |
| <i>Sense-assaulting (sights)</i> | (p. 62). |

Quaking (rabble)
Blazing (sun) (p. 64).

Blood-coughing (men)
Whistling (whips)
Building (sites) (p. 67).

In all these examples, the sense of the verbal component is sustained and re-echoed in seemingly endless fashion, especially with the pseudo-progressive *-ing* inflection. This ushers in some level of affective tendencies into the textuality of the text, that is, as it brings into a recall the image of the ongoing 'mystifying' situation in the country.

One prominent lexicogrammatical feature of "Visions" is sparse use of borrowings which litter the two preceding segments. This is meant for a purpose; at least, it presents the information value of the last segment as being very serious over and above the preoccupation of other preceding segments. It carves a unique identity of an 'end' which the earlier segments seek to attain. This serious tone is necessary if the effectiveness of the 'clarion call' being sounded in the text is desirable.

Where he chooses to express his intention in English language throughout, he makes incessant recourse to the linguistic fertility of the local languages from where direct translations are drawn so that the indigenous sensibility forms the basis on which the translation into foreign tongue (English) is based. This ultimately provides evidence that the structure of a linguistic feature reflects the social structure and orientation of the intended audience – in the case of readership of the poems under study.

To foreground his change in relation with what obtains in the earlier sections of the collection as a way of signalling a change in tone and attitude, he chooses not to use a 'distancing' third person but inclusive first person throughout. In view of the fact that the problem troubles all, he clamours for the solidarity with Niyi Osundare, a representative of the course of the common man (and the masses at large). The following illustration would suffice.

Our songs
Sting our haunted listeners
To dim our sun
In our prime
They pounce on us
Leaving us in limbo (p. 60).
Let us clear (p. 61).
Of our manifold miseries
Part relics of our sour past
Will paint our gory plight (p. 64).
Of our people's sweat (p. 67).

On the contrary, third person has been used in a specially marked and deictic fashion to label the oligarchs who have chosen to exalt themselves in riches built of proletariats' sweat. This lexical device is intentionally used by the writer to create a picture of social stratification which characterizes the subject of the poem (i.e. castigating those who are working to alienate the vassals in the country). For example:

They pounce on us (p. 60).

pot-bellied marauders
Thieving drones and ten-percent administra-tors
Cigar-puffing and gold-toothed vampires
To the touring Task Force chairman (p. 61).

The tripping overlord and his entourage
That they may not bob up (p. 62).

On the clique of mindless
Perpetrators of general lachrymose (p. 64).

Let those ogres
Rethink (p. 67).

Let them rethink (p. 68).

The use of plural pronouns *our/us* and *they/those/them* refers to different groups of people. In the former (i.e. *our/us*), the poet includes himself in the group of the oppressed who seek for freedom and justice. On several occasions where he uses *they* and its variants, he stylishly disassociates himself from the “bad eggs” that infiltrate socio-economic lives of the masses with poverty, corruption, violence, etc. In essence, with the lexical paradigm, the writer erects a group of protagonists as distinct from that of antagonists, using mere cohesive devices. Throughout the text, while *we*, *our* and *us* have been recurrently used to show a sense of togetherness and collective responsibility on the part of the protagonists, the use of *they*, *them* and *their* have the perpetrators of violence as referents.

Syntax

Similarly, syntactic ellipses have been deployed in the text to properly situate words and expressions in their appropriate contexts. The device boosts the poet’s effort at explicating the subject matter within the Nigerian terrain of occurrence to enhance readers’ understanding and appreciation. The presence of a predicator [P element] in a major clause is mandatory as Osisanwo (1999: 30) confirms. However, in “Visions”, certain clauses with ‘pseudo-predicators’ are incorporated for stylistic effects. For instance, there is a deliberate omission of the [P] elements within a cue of consecutive clauses in just one poem. The lines are presented thus for a closer analysis:

The time is near
When Mansions and Villas
Shall turn
Ghost Ridden Areas
And bedrooms blood-pools
And cosy cars comfy coffins
And silk suits silk shrouds
And club-houses cemeteries (“Prophecy”, p. 63).

It is interesting to note that the verbal group [shall turn] in the extract is embedded in the structure of the first sentence to which the last four clauses – each opened by ‘And’ – are added. Hence, the elision of the obligatory [P] element of a clause structure renders such

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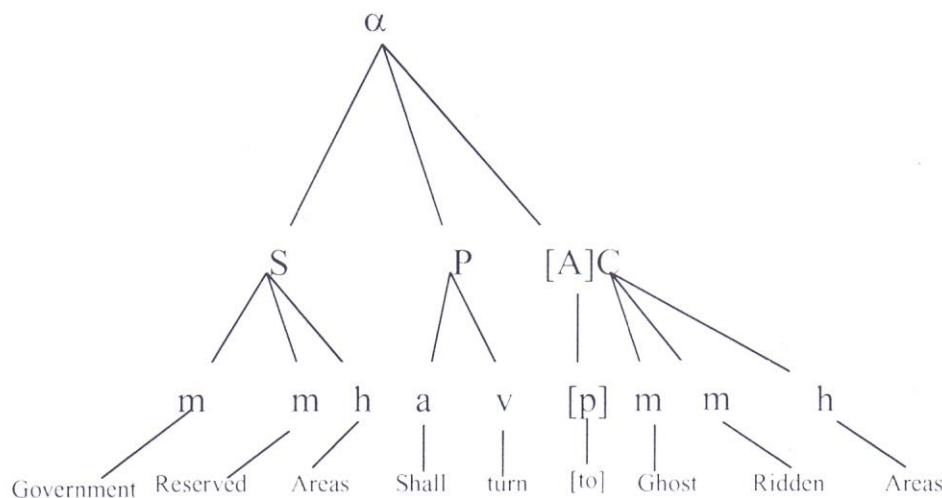
Similarly, it should be noted that for the last elements in the clauses to qualify or be realized as adjuncts (and not complements), one really needs to note the elision of the preposition 'to'. The elision of the predicators in the examples is a mirror of how our contemporary crop of leadership has been severed from a true sense of responsibility. This device, apart from giving the text the beauty of word economy it deserves as poetry, has an affective effect of creating text-context cohesion. It unfolds the unflinching self-will to forge ahead to make the seemingly impossible move towards 'demystification' a possibility.

This ellipsis is what Alabi (1999: 174) explains as "the deliberate omission of a word or words which are readily implied in the content". Also, *Let us clear* is deliberately omitted several times (as the major nominal and verbal elements), in the first stanza of "Environmental sanitation" (p. 63).

[Let us clear] (skipped)
With diggers and daggers
And sharp edged cutlasses
 [Let us clear] (skipped)
With shovel and spikes
And twine-bound brooms
 [Let us clear] (skipped)
With scythes and spears... ("Environmental sanitation", pp. 61–2).

In the real text, the parenthesized lines are completely absent. Yet, the information can only find a complete and sensible import when one makes a cataphoric reference to the 'openers' of the 'major' sentences (i.e. *Let us clear*) in the succeeding stanzas.

Among other examples, a similar feature recurs in "Prophecy" (p. 63) where the prepositional "to" is presupposed as exemplified thus:



In addition, the succeeding four lines in this same poem have the entire verbal elements deleted as identified earlier in this section. Closely tied to this, at this point, is the deliberate

omission of the prepositional element "to". The stylistic essence of this is to produce a kind of hurried rhythm. Corbett's (1971: 470) citation of Aristotle's observation that asyndeton (being related to ellipsis), is appropriate for the conclusion of a discourse is confirmed by what obtains in the last one-third of the collection. This, according to Alabi (1999: 174) has the tendency of producing "the emotional reaction that can be stirred by, among other means, rhythm". Olusunle also intends to create excitement amidst his hurried loaded message as such omissions, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 172), do not distort comprehension, rather, they arouse interest and anxiety which are likely to be ignited by a state of perpetual speechlessness in the real context of language use. Hence, this device is a direct textual imitation of the true-to-life context being expressed.

Cohesive markers

Furthermore, as a way of pairing the lexicogrammatical choices and patterns with the context of situation, Olusunle uses a complementary distribution of cleansing tools in the following extracts to perform foregrounding function. The literal sense behind this is that all hands (just as all tools), must clear the deck to achieve a total sanitation of the various anomalies on the ground. Cohesive markers are not spared in an attempt to instigate appropriateness of the linguistic correlates with the social realities. *And, with, but, if, because*, among numerous others, are used to achieve textual unity. With this, the writer is able to exhibit the unity of thought which is most desirable on the part of the audience. Also, the connectives have been used to create a free-flow of ideas from the standpoint of looking at poetry as a spoken/oral discourse. The following underlined connectives illustrate our point:

If because
We like tireless parrots. . .
If because
Our songs like scorpions . .
If they converge to confer. . .
If they lurk in pitch-dark alleys
Masked and missile-armed;
If like the panther its prey . . . (p. 60).

With diggers and daggers
And sharp-edged cutlasses
With shovel and spikes
And twine-bound brooms
With scythes and spears
And broad-mouthed spades
With hoes and hatchets
And stern faced bull-dozer (p. 61).

And bedrooms blood-pools
And cosy cars comfy coffins
And silk suits silk shrouds
And club-houses cemeteries (p. 63).

With the preceding extracts, it is clear that the pervasive use of connectives is peculiar in the text under study. Hence, it becomes logical to say that the piled-up connectives are ways by which the mounted pressure and tension in the earlier sections are eased; or rather diffused. The tendency for the poet to ease his tension has called for the over-use of compound noun phrases and structures which, in turn, requires the excessive use of connectives as seen in the extracts.

Rhetoric

In the classical sense, rhetoric is an art of speech as a means of persuasion. In the contemporary sense, its meaning extends to the power of persuasion inherent in 'good' and effective use of language regardless of whether spoken or written. The textuality of the data under study is 'stylized' in such a way that the envisaged perlocution is generated. This is accomplished through specially foregrounded modes of expression; principal among which are speech act forms, code-mixing, code-switching, marked lexicogrammatical range and idiomatic/proverbial expressions.

Olusunle seizes the opportunity of the affective implication of the emotive "Variform" to steer, direct or instigate 'his audience' into embarking on a particular course of action. He takes into consideration the natural order of getting social obligation accomplished. The extracts that follow are attestations to our observation:

*With tippers and trucks
And waste-disposal vans
Let us clear
Junk-plunged and rot-frothing gutters* (p. 61).

*Arise and set for the streets,
Like a troop of wounded cubs,
Unleashing pent-up anger
On the clique of mindless
Perpetrators of general lachrymose.* (p. 64).

*Surely,
This is a foretaste
Of prophesised self-destruction
For earth shall be razed
Not again by water
But by fiery flames of fire.* (p.66).

While the first extract (above) mobilizes, the second instigates and the third warns. These acts are embellished in the text in successive order. This is a textual imitation of a high level of organization which is required to move a degenerating society forward.

This explains why Olusunle's choice of 'directives' as the recurrent speech acts at the latter stage of the text is preponderant as a way of sounding a note of finality. The poet retires with the hope that the struggle he has ignited shall be carried to the point of triumph. This act of directing is of a unique stylistic significance in the text. With this, the writer diffuses the tensions mounted on the psyche of 'the people of his poems' by giving them a clear assurance of total 'demystification' with the armour of advice and warning.

Variations in linguistic features are patterned or structured in alignment with the linguistic characteristics or competence of the envisaged addressee. Because Nigeria's literacy level is well below half the size of her population (Adeyanju 2005: 187), Olusunle hammers at this recurrently as he continually engages in mixing and switching of codes which identify, first and foremost, with the sociolinguistic level of competence of most Nigerians, especially with reference to English as the linguistic medium of his poetic expression. The functional essence of these 'visionary poems' as a whole is to sensitize, mobilize, persuade and gain the solidarity of concerned countrymen and women to rise and fuel the social crusade of revamping all strata of our national life in Nigeria. Therefore, for effectiveness of the linguistic mode, switches and mixes of styles, especially of grammatical persons, which constitute index of formality and solidarity are what Olusunle uses to express his poetic sensibilities from an array of possible alternatives.

A language user may switch to another language as a signal of group membership and shared ethnicity with the addressee. Brief phrases and words may be introduced into the core language (in use) to achieve this purpose. Olusunle appears to have put all these to work in his collection. All of these culminate in a rhetorical effect of winning the populace to his side of argument to rise to the challenge of his call to seek total demystification which is the underlying intention of the composition in the first place.

On the interpersonal motivation for switch, Holmes (1992: 41) writes:

the switch reflects a change in the social situation and takes positive account of the presence of a new participant. A speaker may similarly switch to another language as a signal of group membership and shared ethnicity with an addressee. Even speakers who are not very proficient in a second language may use brief phrases and words for this purpose.

"Visions" addresses both the writer's intention and readers' needs. Having understood the hydra-headed problems facing Nigerian society, the writer is committed to a course of mental emancipation. He feels that it is through adequate mobilization that the consciousness of the people can be re-awakened. This is why his lines in the latter part of the text (i.e. "Visions"), underscore the zeal and the call to rectify the anomalies in "Variform". The following extracts provide a confirmation of this opinion:

Let us be soothed by this balm;

Let us be consoled

(p. 60).

Then shall they arise

Arise and set for the streets

(p. 64).

The uses of *Let us* and *Arise* are stylistically marked. They exhibit persuasive implication as they stand to win the 'readers' consent to fuel his crusade.

"Environmental sanitation" (pp. 61–2), a poem in the collection, is specially marked for its rhetorical density. The poem opens with suspense in the first stanza, as the main clause which completes its sense lies in the following stanza. This is an instance of anastrophe (i.e. an inversion of the usual syntactic order), with a marked theme. An extract is given as follows for clearer illustration:

With diggers and daggers
And sharp-edged cutlasses
With shovel and spikes
And twine-bound brooms
With scythes and spears
And broad-mouthed spades
With hoes and hatchet
And stern-faced bulldozers
With baskets and basins
And deep hollow headpans
With tippers and trucks
And waste-disposal vans.

Let us clear
Junk-plunged and rot-frothing gutters;
Let us clear
Sordid stretches of mountainous slums;
Let us clear
Lace-clad and pot-bellied marauders;
Let us clear
Thieving drones and ten-percent administra-itors; (p. 61).

The piling-up of usual collocates in the first stanza creates a persuasive effect. The incessant use of *Let us* in the latter part of the poem is also persuasive. It aims at enjoining the readers to co-operate with the writer to fight a common course. *Daggers*, *cutlasses* and *spikes* are essentially weapons and not 'cleansing tools'. Also, in "Visions", it is not only the 'junk-plunged and rot-frothing gutters' and 'stretches of mountainous slums' that need to be sanitized but also the 'pot-bellied marauders' and 'thieving drones' (politicians) who do not live up to their responsibility of fulfilling their electoral promises. This is well foregrounded by his use of 'administra-itors' instead of the norm – 'administrators'. This is deliberately done to achieve a reverberation of the high level of betrayal (of public trust) which characterizes leadership roles in Nigeria. This equally sheds more light on the understanding that *daggers*, *cutlasses* and *spikes* are icons of revolution. The sociological implication vis-à-vis the daunting impact of the stylo-rhetorical devices used here is that of mounting a stringent resistance to douse the wrath of all odds. Thus, the socio-cultural perception of these tools is presupposed and this makes a detailed scrutiny of the circumstance imperative if embellishments that characterize the texts are to be fully deciphered.

The use of proverbial and idiomatic expressions is not left out as a means of prompting the audience to accept the views of the author. Olusunle utilizes the opportunity offered by his fertile socio-cultural background to the fullest by using idiosyncratic expressions whose imports are very convincing and persuasive. Just as people use figures of thought to represent complex meanings, the effectiveness of his mode of communication becomes enriched when one considers the premium placed on proverbial expressions in meaning negotiation processes in a country like Nigeria. An example of such expressions which have the power of persuasion and conviction is given in the text extract that follows:

The wise cripple forewarned
Never tarries to hear the crackle of cannons
Never waits to see the bruises of battle (p. 67).

This proverbial expression has a direct impact on the effectiveness of the text. Since the understanding and intrinsic appreciation of a literary text rests on the oars of the social construct, just as Achebe (1959) subscribes, proverbs oil the wheel of interaction and makes the illocution more enduring. Owing to the fact that Nigeria is a nation where proverbial expressions are treasured, Olusunle translates the popular Yoruba proverb *ogun asotele kii pa aro t'o ba gbon* into English. This aphorism has a tendency of echoing the message in a compelling form.

The rhetorical markedness of the last poem – "Message" (pp. 67–8) alone is worthy of note. The opening stanza contains a wise-saying and the poem closes with another. The stylistic significance of this device in connection with the connotations of "Message" is the emotive influence which it exerts on the readers' sensibility to seriously consider the warnings wrapped in-between the lines, and eventually yield to his opinions. For instance, let us also consider this extract which incidentally marks the end of the whole collection:

*Let them rethink;
Wise sayings muttered in fragments
Make whole sense to the thoughtful minds* (p. 68).

This is an adaptation from the Yoruba *oro die l'anso fun omoluabi, t'o ba de inu re, a di odidi*. The lines generate a persuasive implication of making the reader or audience, as the case might be, agree with his point of view. In addition, it has a way of commanding the solidarity of his envisaged audience when one considers what proverbial expressions from one's own indigenous language do to one's psyche. It is noteworthy at this juncture that the poet uses these distinctive proverbs within the space of the last poem in the collection. Apart from using the device to textually sign off his poetic expression; to sound a note of finality in his collection, the affective tendency of instigating an enduring impression on the minds of the audience is equally borne by this grand style.

It should be brought to the fore that these proverbial expressions were sourced from the linguistic context of Yoruba socio-cultural milieu. The fact remains that all Nigerians, especially the Ibos, appreciate the worth of proverbial language. Hence, to make the style appeal to a sense of belongingness of all Nigerians who are the target audience, the wise sayings have been translated into English. It is true however that the weight of the translated versions may not remain the same, they have a peculiar way of driving home a message in a better light. Apart from their persuasive potential in spoken discourse, they offer the text a unique identity of being a viable vehicle of cultural expression.

CONCLUSION

The poems encapsulated in Olusunle's "Visions" opt for a socio-political and economic renaissance through his highly embellished linguistic devices. To achieve this, the poet carefully savours his words and expressions to achieve the desired purpose of persuading his audience towards liberation. His expressions are brief, lucid and concise. This is not unconnected with the fact that the discourse is meant to mobilize the audience for a just cause, hence, the writer remains audience-conscious throughout the text.

In "Visions", the clamour for social renaissance as the subject of the poems calls for a mode that can best suspend the content. This is possibly why the tone which characterizes the text as a whole is revolutionary with undertones of optimism for success. This has

a tendency of boosting the rhetorical vitality of the text as the intended audience is unequivocally charged to fuel the crusade of achieving total demystification to a logical conclusion. Equally of note is that the rhetorical density of a given text utilizes the various formal levels of language like phonology, graphology and lexicogrammatical resources to be effective. Hence, the excursions made into those aspects in the rhetorical explication of the text should not be seen as an irrelevant tour on its own but as a means to an end. In essence, this is done to give a clear linguistic description of the various elements which cohere into the 'persuasive force' engendered in the text under study.

To sum it up, it is deducible from the analysis conducted in this paper that text and context are inextricably intertwined; bound together by co-text. It can be concluded that the choice of lexicogrammatical constituents of the poems studied is largely motivated by context for its own very expression. Hence, a study of poetry as complicated discourse, especially in a second or foreign language, requires a judicious application of contextual clues in order to arrive at the kernel of the message as intended by the writer.

APPENDIX

Cheer up, brother (for Niyi Osundare)

If because
 We like tireless parrots,
 Whistle touching tunes from dawn to dusk;
 If because
 Our songs like scorpions
 Sting our haunted listeners;
 If they converge to confer
 To dim our sun
 In our prime
 If they lurk in pitch-dark alleys
 Masked and missile-armed;
 If like the panther its prey
 They pounce on us
 Leaving us in limbo
 Blood-bathed, bruise-battered;
 Let us be soothed by this balm;
 That our trauma is history replayed;
 For so they did Paul at Lystra.
 Let us be consoled that our dreams expressed;
 Expressed in songs
 Will someday blossom
 Into dreams fulfilled. (p. 60).

Environmental sanitation

With diggers and daggers
 And sharp-edged cutlasses
 With shovel and spikes
 And twine-bound brooms

With scythes and spears
 And broad-mouthed spades
 With hoes and hatchets
 And stern-faced bulldozers
 With baskets and basins
 And deep hollow headpans
 With tippers and trucks
 And waste-disposal vans.
 Let us clear
 Junk-plunged and rot-frothing gutters;
 Let us clear
 Sordid stretches of mountainous slums;
 Let us clear
 Lace-clad and pot-bellied marauders;
 Let us clear
 Thieving drones and ten-percent *administra-itors*;
 Let us clear
 Dirt-dotted and carcass-clotted motorways;
 Let us clear
 Cigar puffing and gold-toothed vampires
 Now is the time to sweat
 And not to smile
 To the roving TV crew;
 Now is the time to work and not to wave
 To the touring Task Force chairman;
 Now is the time to clear
 And not to cheer
 The tripping overlord and his entourage
 Let us sing this morning
 A spirited requiem
 For all sense-assaulting sights.
 Dumping them bam! In deep-dug pits
 That they may not bob up
 Again and again. (pp. 61–2).

Prophecy

The time is near
 When Mansions and Villas
 And Government Reserved Areas
 Shall turn
 Ghost Ridden Areas
 And bedrooms blood-pools
 And cosy cars comfy coffins
 And silk suits shrouds
 And club-houses cemeteries.
 For the is near

When the underdogs suddenly shall rouse
 From their depressed slumber and deathly nap
 Hewing recklessly the harbingers of their calamities. (p. 63).

Armageddon

If perchance
 The vengeance-dangling noose of time
 Nips not in our day
 The toad necks
 Of the monstrous monitors
 Of our manifold miseries,
 'Tis doomsday deferred.
 When time is ripe,
 Cobwebbed pots in kitchen cupboards;
 Rusty racks and ragged robes,
 Part relics of our sour past
 Will paint our gory plight
 In detail
 For the yet unborn.
 Then shall they arise!
 Scorched scions of pauperized parents
 Who tilled but thirsted
 Who farmed but famished
 Who wetted but wanted
 Who hoed but hoped
 Who sweated but starved.
 Then shall they arise
 With bloodshot balls
 And fists full of revenge,
 Arise and set for the streets,
 Like a troop of wounded cubs.
 Unleashing pent-up anger
 On the clique of mindless
 Perpetrators of general lachrymose. (p. 64).

The fire next time

Ashes...
 Coal dust...
 Rubble...
 Grim souvenirs
 Of that quaking rabble
 Fuelled lately
 By flared religious tempers,
 Now litter the expanse
 Of the once sedate landscape.

Here,
 Prophets and Mallams,
 Popes and Imams
 Butted and brawled in frenzied clash.
 There,
 The massive cathedral
 With candles, cassocks and crosses,
 Crashed in rage-lit flames.
 Here,
 A towering mosque
 With its mats, minarets, mufflers,
 Crumbled in fury-fanned fire.
 The act of madness rehearsed,
 Guerrillas gasp in retreat,
 Like drunks in stupor.
 They soothe the scars of war
 Beneath the blazing sun.
 Surely,
 This is a foretaste
 Of prophesised self-destruction
 For earth shall be razed
 Not again by water
 But by fiery flames of fire. (pp. 65–6).

Message

Let those ogres
 Rethink
 Who boisterously gulp the juice
 Of our people's sweat:
 The wise cripple forewarned
 Never tarries to hear the crackle of cannons
 Never waits to see the bruises of battle
 For,
 The rattle of the gong
 The sound of the trumpet
 The voice of the town crier
 Shall not be heard
 When a brutal thunder
 Swoops on the mirth-spoilers.
 The storm gathers,
 Anger stalks in the clouds;
 Defiant voices will rise resonantly
 In unrehearsed unison;
 From the abyss of forlorn mines
 Where a million blood-coughing men
 Cringe beneath strokes of whistling whips