Linguistic – Stylistic Technique and the Effective Teaching and Learning of Poetry in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools *(Pp. 78-91)*

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of linguistic-stylistic technique on the effective teaching and learning of poetry in Nigerian senior secondary school. The sample of the study comprised of 310 senior secondary two (SS II) students from six schools randomly selected from Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigerian A non-randomized pre-test post test control group design was used for the study. The reliability co efficient of poetry in English Achievement Test (PEAT) was 0.75 using Kuder-Richardson formula 21. The student's t-test was used in the analysis of the data. The results showed that students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique achieved and retained better than students taught with traditional method in poetry. The results also showed an insignificant difference existing between the achievement of male and female students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique. It is recommended that linguistic-stylistic technique should be used in schools to teach various concepts in poetry.

Keywords: Poetry, Literature – in – English, Linguistic-Stylistic technique, Traditional Method.

Introduction

Poetry is an important aspect of literature. It is believed to be oldest of the literary genres. It is held to be closely connected with speech in origin. Literature itself is considered very crucial because it is the vehicle for

societies to give sensitive expression to the innermost thoughts and feelings of individuals as well as the community. Literature is the expression of the facts of life, or the interpretation of life, or of the beauty of life, in language of such enduring charm that men treasure it and will no let it die 9Ogunba, 1978). Robey (1983) pointed out that poetry conveys a considerable proportion of its feeling through the regular arrangement and sound of words. Of the three denominations of imaginative literature, poetry, prose and drama; Poetry has always seemed the most difficult and appeals less to a majority of readers. The distaste for poetry could be due to its language.

Nnolim (1990) noted that the language of poetry is nuance, not explicit, connotative rather than denotative, allusive rather than direct, figurative rather than literal, symbolic rather than plain. And these are not normally expected from the language of novel or any prose narrative.

Because the language of poetry challenges the intellect more than that of prose, prose is more popular with teachers and students (Nnolim, 1990). While only English poems appeared on examination syllabus, teachers depended heavily on study notes. Even then they regarded modernist poetry and its advent grade style with suspicion. However, since the introduction of modern African poetry, very loud grumbling has continued to be heard. Many teachers have the uneasy feelings that what is being peddled as poetry is actually being peddled as poetry is actually prose. The uneasy feelings can be traced to the fact that the traditional metrical forms for which earlier English poems are noted are absent from modern African poetry (Chinweizu, 1986).

Luzuka (1975) noted that the average reader and teachers of poetry in Nigeria, trained only in the appreciation of traditional English poetry, reacts indeed against all modern poetry, and therefore easily accommodate novelty. Possessed of reflexes conditioned as those of Pavlov's dog, he reacts readily to nay item out of the double vistas of the classics and the Bible, which according to Grierson inform English poetry. But the Slightest reference to the religion, history and oral tradition of his peoples leaves his sniffing at once for explanations.

It will be most inaccurate to give the impression that only the problem of modernist innovations in versification and that of poetic language stand between teachers and poetry. In fact, the change of obscurity which teachers

often make against poetry is not of language alone. According to Furbank and Arnold (1977), there are different categories of obscurity, symbolist obscurity, obscurity of allusion, witty obscurity, 'shock tactics' obscurity and illegitimate obscurity.

Yet another obstacle that stands between teachers and poetry is the seemingly unending controversies that characterize the study of literature in general and poetry in particular. Scholars do not just argue about form, they argue about content as well. Some argue that literature should be concerned with permanent values which transcend living otherwise, "there is danger of these sense of that which endures being lost in the exigencies of the present" (Spender, 1979).

Yankson (1987) concluded that moreover to anyone engaged in the teaching of poetry by the traditional method of teaching explanation, it becomes increasingly more difficult to show poetic experience – of poet and pupil alike – as significant and relevant in everyday life.

The teaching methods that attract adverse comments as above could be a reflection of a gap in current literacy studies which emphasizes the appreciation, criticism and theory of literature, while giving little thought to pedagogy. Perhaps it is not much to propose that while literacy studies should continue to do what it has been doing well, it should not neglect to use new inputs from linguistics, not only to describe the language of literature, but also to present literature itself to learners, both young and old.

This proposed can be anchored on the close relationship between language and literature as well as the fact that the language is peculiar, as literary scholars normally demonstrate. For instance, Ibitokun (1985) on Tutuola's language says,

> His (Tutuola's) novels are replete that linguistic ineptitudes from which even the most sympathetic reader with flinch but beyond or beneath these crudities is the speaking, singing and dramatizing
> voice of a Yoruba story teller … his inspirational force in its haste for self –exteriorization wrenches only …'lexis' from the basic pool of language …has he high education with the corollary pretentiousness to write in 'perfect'

> English, his imaginative afflatus would have left him. A peculiar situation is always needed for a creative consciousness to function. In Tutuola a smattering of English language is itself a help.

If literary scholars can find grotesquely ungrammatical language such as that of Tutuola aesthetically satisfying, then literary language deserves special attention, especially in the classroom where adolesce3nts are being taught to do close analytical and interpretative study of literary texts so that they can say what they find satisfying or objectionable.

Wellek and Warren (1982) observed that language is quite literally the materials of literary artistes; there is a close dependence of poetical history on linguistic history of poetry, poetry theories play an important part in the history of poetry; poetry is intimately associated with the sound and meaning of a language. Wellek and Warren concluded that language study thus become extraordinarily important for the study or poetry.

Traditional method is the mode of teaching which Vincent (1979) calls literacy and impressionistic. It is mainly teacher centered. The teacher begins his lesson by writing the title of the poem and the name of the author on the chalkboard. He dazzles the innocent students with his erudition on the sociology of the poem. He may read the poem to the class or gets a student to do so. He explains the figures of speech. The lesson ends after he has instructed his students to hunt for figures of speech. Expectedly, this method of teaching has not found favour with experts on education. They object on the ground that students must not be passive in the learning process. Ehindero (1986) insisted that for the teacher who wants to faithfully and professionally implement curriculum content, it is not enough to tech and learner specific, rigid and fragmentary right answers. Notes taken at the kind of lessons described above will be mere cram papers.

In contrast to the traditional method in which the teacher passes his own response to a poem on to his students, the linguistic-stylistic technique seeks to provide the students with the skills for interpreting poetry, as well as opportunity to practice such skills. This is to equip the students with the ability to tackle poems that are not studied in the class. This strategy is in consonance with Akinbobola (2006) that the teacher has to impart to the learner new ways of meeting novel situations, the transfer value of concepts

and how the learner can be taught to think. Linguistic – stylistic technique is a special device adopted by teachers in imparting knowledge, skill, abilities and altitudes expertly to facilitate students' achievement of their lesson objectives. The essential features of the linguistic procedure include:

(i)   The discussion of linguistic devices like diction, rhetorical figures, syntactic patterns and phonological items which are used to achieve emphasis and explicitness,

(ii)   Oral and visual presentation of the poem and

(iii)   Question – and – answer discussion of the poem (Bestman, 1995).

In selecting and presenting the linguistic devices, particular efforts shall be made to ensure that they remind the students of what they have learnt before. In addition, the devices shall have to be more general and more inclusive than the specific ideas that are to be discovered in the poems. In other words, the devices will serve as advance organizers to make learning and retention more effective. The advance organizer is a strategy in which the teacher helps students to make connections to new materials by highlighting the organizational and structural patterns of the new materials and indicating how it relates to other materials already learned. Advance organizes may be presented as written text, as graphics organizer, may utilize audio-visual supports, or maybe presented orally (Onwioduokit & Akinbobola, 2005).

The position being put forward is that students require an initial grounding in the study of the language of individual poems in particular and poetry in general, before they can benefit by the more sophisticated literary study of forms, and traditions. Put in different words, linguistic stylistic study should serve as a pre-requisite for a meaningful literary study, particularly where poetry is concerned, within the context of English as a second language.

Afolayan (1979) provides a clear description of the linguistic approach to the teaching of poetry when he says that the principle behind this method is that we try to extract in advance some of the linguistic difficulties in a text or texts, and familiarize the students with the English usage involved. At the outset we may do this without recourse to poetry or poems what we might try to do is deal with these problems as if they were part of a language course, that is by finding the basic linguistic structures, which are the difficulties in the poem and by them providing practice in these.

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that for poets language is the vehicle for the messages. Bestman (1995) corroborated this view when he said that writers use words as the "seed of creation" and that the poetic text engages the writer and the reader in a constant dialogue.

Statement of the Problem
Many teachers who teach English Language stoutly refuse to teach Literature alongside. A Small number of teachers do teach Literature because they love its fictive world and writers' masterful use of language. The teachers are aware of the educational and entertaining value of literature. Not only does Literature help to shape character in a positive way, it also enhances the acquisition of language. However, these teachers handle Literature with greater zeal than skill. In order words, the approach of these teachers is full of passion, but due to lack of skills, they seldom achieve their objectives. Since many teachers of Literature have greater zeal than skill, their instructional strategies often do more harm than good. Some scare students away from the study of poetry by insisting that poems should always be memorized, even when the students have little understanding of what the poems are saying. Some other teachers think that their work consists of line-by-line interpretation of poems. This study is therefore designed to find out the effect of linguistic-stylistic technique on the achievement of Nigerian Senior Secondary School students in English Literature and as a measure towards ensuring appreciable achievement and retention of learners in English Literature learning.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of linguistic-stylistic technique on the effective teaching and learning of poetry in Nigerian senior secondary school. The study is designed to achieve the following objectives.
   (1)   To compare the academic achievement of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method.
   (2)   To compare the retention ability of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method.
   (3)   To compare the academic achievement of male and female poetry students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at P<.05 level of significance.

(1)   There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method.

(2)   There is no significant difference between the retention ability of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method.

(3)   There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of male and female student in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique.

Research Method

Pretest –posttest control group design was used for the study. The population for the study was made of all the senior secondary two (SSII) English Literature students in the eight co-educational secondary schools in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria during the 2007/2008 academic session. The size of the population was 427 English Literature students. A random sampling technique through the use of balloting was carried out to select six schools from the population. The six schools were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. A total of 310 students constitute the sample of the study in their intact class setting. Poetry in English Achievement test (PEAT) was the instrument used to gather data for the study. The PEAT consisted of a fifty (50) multiple-choice items, constructed in poetry in English Literature. The test was used to determine the achievement and retention ability of students in poetry using linguistic-stylistic technique (experimental group) and traditional method (control group). The posttest and retention test contained the same questions as in the pretest but arranged in different order.

The instrument was face and content validated by two English literature experts. The instrument also showed reliability co-efficient of 0.75 using Kuder-Richardson formula – 21. The fifty multiple-choice questions of PEAT respectively consisted of three distractors and one correct option lettered A-D. The instrument was scored by the researcher immediately after its administration. Each correct answer was scored 1 mark and the maximum mark for each of the fifty multiple-choice questions was 50 marks.

Pretest was administered to the two groups (experimental and control groups) for one hour and the pretest results were used for the comparability of the groups before treatment was given. Treatment was given by the research assistants (English Literature teachers in each school) in each school for five weeks. The control group was taught using traditional method for the same period of time. The research assistants were trained and they were also provided with detailed instructions and well articulated lesson packages. The posttest was administered to the two groups after the treatment. Three weeks after posttest, retention test was administrated to the two groups. The data collected were analyzed using student's t-test. All hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significant.

Results

The pretest scores in the poetry in English achievement test (PEAT) of the students in the two groups were statistically analyzed as presented in Table 1. The analysis in Table 1 shows than the calculated t-value of 0.96 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at P<.05. Therefore the result shows that there was no significant different in the background knowledge of the students used for the study. Hence, any significance change in the course of the experiment would be attributed to the treatment.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method.

In testing the hypothesis, the posttest scores of the poetry in English Achievement Test (PEAT) of the traditional method served as the control group. The results were analyzed as presented in Table 2.

The analysis in Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 13.44 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at P<.05. Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between the academic achievement of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method was rejected. Table 2 also indicates that students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique achieved significantly better than those taught with traditional method.

Hypothesis Two
There is no significant difference between the retention ability of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method.

In testing the hypothesis, the retention test scores of the poetry in English Achievement test (PEAT) of the traditional method served as the control group. The results were analyzed as presented in Table 3.

The analysis in Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 16.27 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at P<.05. Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between the retention ability of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method was rejected. Table 3 also indicates that students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique retained significantly better than those taught with traditional method.

Hypothesis Three
There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of male and female students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique.

In testing this hypothesis, the posttest scores of male and female students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique in poetry were computed. The results were analyzed using t-test as presented in table 4.

The analysis in table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.34 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating a non-significant difference between the academic achievement of male and female students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique was retained.

Discussion of Findings
The results of hypothesis one indicated that a significant difference was found to exist between the academic achievements of students in poetry taught with linguistic –stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method. Students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique achieved significantly better than those taught with traditional method. This might have been due to the stability and clarity of the anchoring ideas that the linguistic-stylistic technique provided in the cognitive structure of the experimental group. Also, the linguistic-stylistic technique seeks to provide the students with the skills for interpreting poetry, as well as opportunity to

practice such skills. This study is in line with the finding of Akinbobola (2006) that the teacher has to impact to the learner new ways of meeting novel situations, the transfer value of concepts and how the learner can be taught to think. This study is in agreement with the findings of Dagoli (2000) that traditional method (expository does not promote learning in that under this method, many intellectual and skills are not learnt and also it kills the spirit of inquiry. This mighty also be due to the fact that the traditional method is a teacher-centered where learners learn by rote memory, concepts and principles.

The results of hypothesis two showed that a significant difference was found to exist between the retention ability of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and those taught with traditional method. Students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique retained significantly better than those taught with traditional method. This might be due to the fact that linguistic-stylistic technique seemed to make students to remember more conceptual ideas and were able to relate the test to prior knowledge. Also, this technique makes learners to be active, thus, make the process of learning to be self-sequenced, goal directed, with the goal perceived and the pace self-determined. Hence, it is intrinsically motivating and enhances retention. This is in line with the findings of Ebam and Ada (1998) that traditional method of teaching is noted for creating an atmosphere conducive to bore down and lack of interest becomes more pronounced. This is also in agreement with the findings of Bestman (1995) that linguistic stylistic technique is a device adopted by teachers in imparting knowledge, skills, ability and attitude to facilitate students' achievement and retention of the concepts taught.

The results of hypothesis three showed that there was no significant difference between the academic achievement of male and female students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique in poetry. The non-significant difference in the achievement of male and female students is in line with the findings of Nsofor (2001) who observed that both males and females could do well if exposed to similar learning conditions.

Conclusion
The results of this study showed that linguistic-stylistic technique is more effective in enhancing students' achievement and retention in poetry than the traditional method of teaching. Using this technique will enable the students

to understand the enjoy poetry, so that teaching it will become more rewarding to teachers.

Guidelines for using Linguistic-Stylistic Technique

- Carefully reading the poems that are to be taught in the classroom
- Extracting the linguistic elements such as sound, diction, imagery and sentence pattern that serve as key element in the poems and that can be difficult for students to understand.
- Teaching these linguistic elements in the classroom in the same way that similar elements of ordinary language usage are taught
- Teaching the select poems with questions that lead students to independent interpretation and analysis of the poems
- The use of dictionary game, drawing and drama should be encouraged to reinforce what students have learnt in the poetry lesson.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

(1) English literature teachers should adopt the use of linguistic stylistic technique in teaching various concepts of poetry at senior secondary school level.

(2) Seminar/workshops should be organized for English Literature teachers to appraise them with the use of linguistic-stylistic strategy

(3) Textbook authors should adopt the use o f linguistic-stylistic technique in presenting materials in their books of poetry. Teachers need to remember that the term poetry is not restricted to very sophisticated conditions by the established writers which are popular with examination bodies. A lot of poetry can be found in dailies and other publications which discusses everyday experiences in very accessible language.

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Table 1: t-test analysis of the pretest scores of students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and traditional method.

Method	N	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	DF	t-cal.	t-critical	Decision at P<.05
Linguistic-stylistic	153	10.24	3.96	308	0.96	1.96	NS
Traditional	157	10.68	4.08				

NS = Not Significant

Table 2: t-test of the posttest mean scores on the academic achievement of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and traditional method.

Method	N	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	DF	t-cal.	t-critical	Decision at P<.05
Linguistic-stylistic	153	42.65	4.12	308	13.44	1.96	*
Traditional	157	36.47	3.98				

*= Significant

Table 3: t-test of the retention test mean scores on the academic achievement of students in poetry taught with linguistic-stylistic technique and traditional method.

Method	N	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	DF	t-cal	t-critical	Decision at P<.05
Linguistic-stylistic	153	43.86	4.08	30.8	16.27	1.96	*
Traditional	157	36.54	3.87				

*= Significant

Table 4: t-analysis of academic achievement of male and female students taught with linguistic-stylistic technique.

Gender	N	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	DF	t-cal.	t-critical	Decision at P<.05
Male	75	42.20	4.02	151	1.34	1.96	NS
Female	78	43.10	4.22				

NS = Not significant