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Stylistic Analysis of Ola Rotimi's Hopes of the Living Dead

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Abstract

This paper explores the writer's choice of language and linguistic techniques which are effective in passing across his message. It discusses the stylistic rudiments Rotimi uses in realising the play. The stylistic features include: diction, sentence types, code-mixing, Nigerianisms, punctuation marks, figures of speech, use of music or songs and the use of gestures. The main theoretical thrust is style as an individual in which all other facets of style rally round. This is what Middleton (32) calls "the idiosyncrasy of expression by which we recognise a writer." Leech and Short (11) see it as "...the linguistic habits of a particular writer...". Ola Rotimi uses language (through literature) as an instrument of national cohesion especially in a pluralistic culture and multi-linguistic environment.

Introduction

Language which is dynamic and changes with time is a special tool of communication. The use of language makes man unique and distinct from other animals and as such, man is considered a higher animal.

Lyons gives some properties of language as: A set of commonly accepted symbols (8). This is one of the features of language. Rules of grammar are what distinguish language from other forms of communication. They allow a finite set of symbols to be manipulated to create a potentially infinite number of grammatical utterances. Language is also seen as systematic and referential. Dwight Bolinger says:

Language is our most complex system of signs; an intricate structure of words and relationships that interpenetrates our world thoroughly (10). He also says language can be non-verbal or in form of gestures, like eye contact, head movements, facial expressions, sounds from the clearing of throat and so on which are arts in communication.

Lyon says: "Language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory arbitrary symbols" (4).

Femi, Akindele and Wale, Adegbite say what is imperative about language is that it is used "to establish social relationship" (2).

The characters of Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* are reflective of people in multilingual society whose diversity is exploited by corrupt leaders to perpetuate their nefarious activities in power. Rotimi attempts to bridge the linguistic divide in order to attain a utopian society by experimenting with multilingualism on stage. Multilingualism represents a situation where an individual or society speaks more than two languages. The Oxford companion to the English language defines multilingualism as "the ability to use three or more languages either separately or in various degrees of code mixing" (222).

Mansour (1993) captures multilingualism as "communication through several languages" (1). A possible explanation for this is found in the Holy Bible's account of the "confounding" of the existing language (tongue) at Babel (Gen. 11:4-9).

The effort made by Ola Rotimi in this text, to use literature as an instrument of national cohesion, especially in pluralistic culture of linguistic environment, is commendable. Adebite and Banjo (1975) acknowledge that Nigeria is a multi-lingual nation with an estimated (250) ethnic groups that speak over 400 languages (90). Since literature reflects and mirrors life, it can be written to explicate virtually all human endeavours.

All the political delineations in Nigeria since independence have been done across linguistic demarcations, leaving the nation with the uneasy idea of majority versus minority, and the idea of marginalization. According to Idebbe and Sure, as quoted by Lyons (8): "Language has been a useful tool for the purpose of political manipulation, discrimination and exploitation".

Rotimi uses language as the leading motif through the use of polyglots in the play. Abati sees it as "using varieties of English Language as a thread that must unite a country in diversity" (40). This major concern in the play revolves round some emasculated or using his words, "chosified" individuals in the contemporary society.

Style

Over the years, the concept of style has been defined in various ways. From the Italian word "stylus"-a pointed object used for writing. This is what style meant more than 2000 years ago. It is now not concerned with the tool of the writer but the definition of style points to characterize the writing itself. Style is the way something is said, done, expressed or performed, a style of speech or writing. All figures of speech fall within the domain of style.

Abraham sees style as "the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse" (40). It is how a speaker or writer says, whatever it is that he says.

Style is the control of language that is appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context of the writing task. It is evident through word choice and sentence fluencing. Azuiki quotes quite a number of linguists who share the same line of thought after saying the concept of style is "nebulous", "elusive", "slippery" and a "setting target" (110) for all its practitioners.

Enkvist (5) laments that style as a concept is "notoriously slippery" and difficult to codify into concrete terms which allow operational study.

Style is given more restricted meaning when used in evaluative sense, referring to the effectiveness of a mode of expression. This is seen in the

popular definition of style as “saying the right thing in the most effective way”. Crystal and Davy (1980) also refer to style as language associated with literature as a characteristic of “good”, “effective” and “beautiful” writing.

The common issue peculiar to the definition of style given by Turner (1979), Crystal and Davy (1980) and Fowler (1966) is “variation in the use of language”, “language habits” and “choices” in the use of language respectively.

Azuike (1992) outlines six different rubrics that will help make the concept of style more accommodating for analytical reasons. They are:

- Style as a deviation from the norm.
- Style as an individual.
- Style as content and form.
- Style as choice.
- Style as a product of context.
- Style as good and beautiful writing.

These six rubrics of style are inter-related but few differences appear in the sort of information each offers (instead of boring the readers). HowTraditionally, an intimate connection is seen to exist between a style and an author’s personality. This is motivated by the Latin tag “stilus virum argint”- “the style proclaims the man”, Leech and Short (1981). Each writer has a linguistic “thumb print”, an individual linguistic habit which somehow reveals him in all that he writes.

In the language of Literature for example, writers present their views by adapting a particular manner which will set them apart from others in the same profession or field. By doing so, their corresponding audience and readers tend to recognise them, by their write-ups, wherever they may be found. Style as an individual will be the primary focus of this research as other components will be part of the writer’s idiosyncracies. Style here refers to a writer’s idiosyncrasy because it is the direct expression of an individual’s mode of expression. Style is therefore engraved in writing such that it becomes a reflection of the personality of the writer.

Stylistics can be described by and large, as the study of style of language usage in different contexts either linguistic or situational. It is concerned with the examination of grammar, lexis, semantics as well as phonological properties and discursive devices. Stylistics examines oral and written texts

in order to determine crucial characteristic linguistic properties, structure and patterns influencing perception of the text.

Diction

Diction means both choice of words and vocal expression or enunciation. It is much connected to register. In linguistics, a register is a subset of a language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting. The examples below demonstrate certain words that form distinct registers in various fields:

- Language of the Military:
 - Captain (11)
 - matron: As you were!...(6)
 - ring leaders (16)
- Language of medicine (medicalese):
 - Editor: ...hospital authorities. (8)
 - Matron (10)
 - Editor: The Patients in wards G. and H... (23)
 - Senior medical officer (103)
- Language of Law (legalese):
 - Petition (24)
 - Authorities (24)
- Language of religion:
 - Jesus wept! (14)

Sentence Structure Analysis

The sentence structure is a vital linguistic element of a writer's style. It is through this element that thoughts, feelings and emotions of a writer are expressed to his audience.

Sentences are classified in three ways namely: By structure, intention and by stylistic use. The stylistic classification includes cumulative or periodic.

Ola Rotimi uses four basic sentence types in his play, *Hopes of the Living Dead* namely: Periodic, cumulative or Loose, simple and the compound sentence types.

Periodic sentence

A periodic sentence (also called a climatic sentence) delays the main idea until the end and presents subordinate ideas first. This kind of sentence according to Ebest (2000) can lend emphasis to main points and create suspense.

In discussing the importance of the periodic sentences, Leech and Short (1985) say it's an "anticipatory constituent" which must therefore be held in the memory until the major constituents are interpreted.

In the examples below, the periodic sentence has been strategically used to create suspense and to sustain and retain readership.

Supt: "No! no..." to survive in life, a man must have faith in himself and in his creator" (75).

Court Clerk: "to control a country, a good leader must try to discipline his disciples!" (100)

Harcourt Whyte: "we fool ourselves. If we think that the world outside will give us peace to continue to be as of one blood, together, in this place..." (22).

Nweke: "...he says when the reply to our petition comes; government may want to talk to us" (38)

The stylistic significance of the periodic sentences above is that it sustains readership and it creates suspense in the mind of the reader.

Loose Sentence

Rotimi also makes use of the loose sentence structure in which trailing constituents predominate over anticipatory constituents. A loose sentence structure is "natural" in that it makes things easy for the reader, addressee, or receiver and incidentally for the addresser, or the writer by reducing the amount of syntactic information that has to be stored in decoding. The following are typical of this sentence structure.

Hannah: Some people started gathering into groups with their own kinds (22)

Nweke: How did you get all the way to Kafachan?

Harcourt Whyte: The SMO ask us to report tomorrow morning, ten o'clock (39)

“Be not afraid,” says the voice of hope... (110)

Leech and Short (1985) describes the loose sentence structure to consist of “trailing constituents”. The linear chain of ideas follows the Linear progress of the text, like a train with linked wagons moving along a railway track. From the example above, using the “train linked wagons moving along a railway track” analogy, a normal everyday form of speech is evident.

Text 1:

The SMO asks us to report ten, o'clock tomorrow morning

TRAIN

WAGON

Text 2

“Be not afraid” says the voice of hope.

TRAIN

WAGON

The train carries the direct message while the wagon(s), the additional information.

Loose structures are characteristics of a literary style which aims at natural simplicity and directness, rather than rhetorical effects. Rotimi also uses the simple and compound sentences in his play, *Hopes of the living Dead* but at a nine to ten percent proportion (90:10). There is no doubt that Rotimi uses the simple sentence to make his play simple and easy to understand by his audience as against the conventional conversational style in plays.

The periodic and loose sentence structures are two poles between which style of sentence structures can stand. We can therefore say that the most neutral style of writing is one that combines both anticipatory and trailing constituents and achieves balance.

Tone

The tone used by Ola Rotimi in his play, *Hopes of the Living Dead* is a serious one. The seriousness of issues discussed in the play are reflected in the

tone. The tone is also pessimistic and reflective of the pains and anger the lepers are going through as a result of the painful treatment by the society.

Code- mixing/use of many languages

Code- mixing helps signaling a situation where an individual or society speaks more than two languages. The Oxford Companion to the English Language defines multilingualism as “the ability to use three or more languages either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing” (222).

Femi and Adegbite (1999) assert that “the speaker varies the language or dialect he uses in a particular communication according to the topic, audience/ participants, setting or situation, purpose and function” (27). From the foregoing, Rotimi considers his audience, situation and the purpose of writing. The primary purpose of code-mixing in this play is to ensure national cohesion, most especially in a pluralistic, cultural and linguistic environment. He achieves this by using nine (9) Nigerian Languages: Kalabari, Edo, Ibibio, Hausa, Isan, Igbo, Yoruba, Tiv, Itshekin and also pidgin which cuts across the Geo-political zones in Nigeria.

Text 1- Kalabari

Hannah: Mi bobiri be ye fate? (is that all for this evening?)

Harcourt Whyte: Ibite mingba ba lasaki (that’ll be all; we may continue tomorrow) (5)

Text 2-Edo

Inmate: Ikhan ya sa amen ye ete uben (asking for hot water for his sores).

Nweke: (to patient) ya to ta (go and sit down) (7)

Text 3- Ibibio

Dancer: Ami ndi da ka ntom mi tutu idaga nke? (for how long am I supposed to hold this position.(8-9)

Text 4-Hausa

Mallam: Yanzu me ke faruwa? (what’s the matter now?(5)

Text 5- Isan

Inmate: Biekia ruan yani Osato unemhim Osato

Eiye me bha we, wowo ze mhem bo egbe

Bha dan mhen (17)

Text 6- Igbo

Femal inmate: H-e-u! Gini ga-eme kwanu anyi ugbua? (what will happen to us now?) (21)

Text 7-Yoruba

Mama Misi: Jimoh, Kilode? (What's the matter Jimoh?) (25)

Text 8- Tiv

Catechist: Flua! - (put it down)(52)

Text 9- Itsekiri

Female inmate: A ghan wino jo eye ebinren (they're burning the women's ward) (53)

Text 10-Pidgin

Mallam: no, no sing, Mallam no well (don't sing, mallam is not healthy) (5)

Sergeant: Leave that gun! You hear! I go shoot you, oh!

I go shoot you o! no come near me...(63-64).

Watchman: Madam, e say him dey come nownow (10).

As stated earlier, Rotimi's characters are reflective of a multilingual society whose diversity is exploited by corrupt leadersto perpetuate their nefarious activities in power. Experimenting with multilingualism on the stage.Ola Rotimi bridges the LINGUISTIC divide so as to attain a utopian society by experimenting with multilingualism on stage.

Adegbite and Banjo (1975) have acknowledged that Nigeria is a multilingual nation with an estimate of about 250 ethnic groups that speakover 400 languages (90).

The different tongue and tribes in the play depict the universality of the pandemicprosy. These sufferers came from different parts of the country, having different cultural, social, religious, ideological backgrounds.

The stylistic use of many languages preaches unity in diversity, irrespective of any academic or social difference. This ingredient of style in Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* captivates readers' attention as a multilingual speaker to his listener.

Use of Nigerianisms

Femi and Adegbite, (1999) in their discussion on the English language in Nigeria point out the fact that "there is no gain saying the fact that English has become a Nigerian Language" (58)

Nigerianisms are common words and expressions used in the Nigerian society. It is as Femi and Adegbite describe, "the cultivated and redomesticated as well as indigenized to accommodate the culture and tradition of the people". They also add that "the variety of English language used in Nigeria has certain features which distinguish it from other forms of English Language. These features are manifested at the lexico- grammatical, phonological and discourse levels." (62). In their definition of Nigerianism, Femi and Adegbite (63) clarified that Nigerianism can be "classified as an interference type in that they show some characteristics of Nigerian languages. Thus, when any Nigerian speaks English, irrespective of his/her level of education; he/she has little or no difficulty identifying the accent or style as Nigerian".

In the following examples from Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead*, it can be observed that the principal feature in Rotimi's use of Nigerianisms is lexical which constitutes what Femi and Adegbite (1999) call the semantic extension"-addition of meaning to be standard English word, "semantic shift"-the redefinition of the characteristic patterns of a word within the semantic field so that its central context becomes marginalized and vice versa. "Coinage"- new lexical items are derived via prefixation, suffixation and reduplication.

Catechist: Crazy people! (15)

Court Clerk: But no matter (11)

Hannah: Don't miss Hannah me (9)

Editor: That's right... Mallam, long time no sing (5)

Mallam: No, no sing. Mallam no well, Malaria. No well- me (5).

Text 1

Catechist: Crazy people! (15)

Here, the word “crazy” does not actually mean that the people are insane; it connotes a sense of anger from the speaker who consequently addresses the people as “crazy” meaning they are not reasonable enough in their approach. The language in the text is peculiar to Nigeria; a kind of coinage or loan creation where certain items like “long-leg” (nepotism), go-slow (traffic jam), cash madam (wealthy woman), spray money (spend lavishly), sugar daddy (a much older male lover) and so on are commonly used.

Text 2

Court clerk: But no matter. (11).

Hannah: Don't miss Hannah me. (9)

In the first excerpts above, an addition of meaning is given to the English word “matter” which contextually means “problem”. This kind of inference is what Femi and Adegbite (1999) call “semantic extension” (68). Similarly, an additional meaning is given to the text “Don't miss Hannah me”, but here it is not on a lexicon but in the stretch of utterance as a whole. The text in context implies that the hearer doesn't want any disturbance or is probably angry. These are commonly used in Nigerian English.

Text 3: Mallam, long time no sing

No, nosing. Mallam no well. Malaria. No well –me.

The feature of Nigerianism in the above excerpt is referred to as a “Discourse feature” – Femi and Adegbite (69). In this text, there is an overt lack of subject – verb agreement thus:

Mallam, long time no sing- Mallam it's been long that you sang.

Here, long time no sing means it's been long that you sang. This indicates the embedding of the syntactic properties of Nigerian Languages in the derivation of an English sentence, that is Adjectival/ Subject agreement Femi and Adegbite (1999).

Foregrounding

The point of interest here is the conscious and consistent patterns that are a deviation from the language norm. This deviant Language patterns are used to elaborate the idiosyncracies of the writer Ola Rotimi and deviates in spellings and interpretations paramountly.

Text 1- Tiv language

Catechist- er we u agu or u chiviringn

Meaning:he says you are a very important man.

Here, the word “chivirign” is wrongly spelt. The correct spelling is “chivirigh”. Similarly, Rotimi made “mistakes” in some of his interpretations thus:

Text 2- Hausa Language

Mallam: Yanzu me ke faruwa ne?

Meaning: what’s the matter with you?

The actual meaning for the question above is “Now, what is happening?” and not “What’s the matter with you now?”

Figurative Language Analysis

Simile: Simile is comparison between one thing and quality with another using “as” or “like”. Most of the time, it is the comparison between two unlike things.

Harmsworth (1977) defines simile as: The comparison or likening of two things having some strong point or points of resemblance, both of which are mentioned and the comparisons directly stated (109).

Harcourt Whyte: “...the lizard likes to sit down, relaxed, brothers... like the frog”. (19).

Editor: “Lepeer madam. I am a leper-like the rest...of them...” (8)

Catechist: “...like a smooked he-goat” (9)

Song:”...sweetness like bitterness” (41)

Ola Rotimi uses these figures of speech in his play for effect. He compares two things which ordinarily would not come together.

Personification: It is a figure of speech in which human qualities are ascribed to inanimate objects or abstract ideas. It is an important figure of speech frequently used by many writers

...”a nerve rackling night” (20)

“...the lizard likes to sit down, relaxed, brothers...” (19).

The use of this figure of speech adds beating to the play. Though they are not frequently used, they are of great relevance each time they occur, throughout the play.

Symbolism: It is a literary device used in writing. A symbol is something which is itself yet stands for or suggests or means something different. Here, one thing is used to stand for something different.

-Court Clerk symbolizes or represents Solomon in the Bible.

- Hannah symbolizes the queen of Sheba

- Harcourt Whyte represents Moses.

Ola Rotimi deliberately uses this figure of speech to link his characters in the play to some particular characters in the Bible.

Punctuation marks

Rotimi deviates in some ways from the general way these punctuation marks are used in writing. The mark of exclamation, which is supposed to be rarely used to signal emphasis, excitement, surprise, anger is used frequently in Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* as his style. Even where a question mark or a period should have been used at the end of some sentences, Rotimi uses exclamation marks.

Text 3

Editor: That one! Don't call him that. Let no one – in my presence call him that! He's not mad...Dr. Fergusson is not...m-a-d (14).

Editor: Tomorrow! (18)

Here, the use of the mark of exclamation is somehow abused. In the second text above, a question mark is supposed to be used to enquire but it's been used as an exclamation.

Rotimi also uses colons both at the middle and at the end of his sentences as against the conventional use of colons at the middle of sentences. He also uses them as end-punctuation in songs and after questions.

*****Text 4**

Catechist:

... words of good cheer I bring you :... (53).

Conclusion

This study focuses on the importance of language to human society which is indispensable. The importance of language in the society is not just for communication but also a means of expressing ideas and emotions especially in writing. This particularly sets man above other animals. Language serves as a vehicle with which the cultural ethos of a society is transmitted. Thus, the importance of language cannot be over-emphasised. Literature could be used as an instrument of national cohesion especially in a pluralistic culture and multi-lingual environment as Ola Rotimi has done in his play.

The study also examined style and stylistics from different points of views. Different people have defined these terms differently. Altogether, the research has viewed style from six (6) different rubrics; style as a deviation from the norm, style as individual, style as choice, style as content and form, style as product of context and style as good and beautiful writing. These six rubrics of style are inter-related though with slight differences. The review ultimately maintains that an intimate connection exists between a style and an individual's personality.

The diction reveals a careful and apt selection of words which the researcher believes the writer uses as technique to appeal to his audience. The choice of words is simple and easy to comprehend. There is also unity and cohesion exhibited throughout the play. The playwright uses simple words and tries to reduce excessive formality in his play by using local expressions and Nigerianisms to express himself. This makes the message of the playwright clear and easy to convey.

On the sentence level, Rotimi has demonstrated a skillful handling of language. He uses over 90% of simple sentences, which are short and clear. He also uses loose and periodic sentences all with the aim of passing across his message to his audience.

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