

Chapter Fifteen

LINGUISTIC DEVIANCES AS A STYLISTIC APPROACH TO LITERARY TEXTS: A STUDY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL POEM “SALUTE TO THE ELEPHANT”

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Abstract

Considering the rules of grammaticality and acceptability in the field of linguistics and language in general, one wonders if the creative writers will be spared of the violation or breaching of the language code for stylistic effects. It is worth noting here that the essence of this violation in language used among creative writers is to describe the formal features of texts, show their functional significance for the interpretation of texts and relate literary effects to linguistics causes where they are felt to be relevant. This paper which focuses on Linguistic Deviances as a Stylistic Approach to Literary Texts: A Study of African Traditional Poem “Salute to the Elephant” shall be considered under three sections. The first deals with linguistics deviances and literary texts, the second focuses on African Traditional poems and finally, stylistic analysis of ‘Salute to the Elephant’.

Linguistic Deviances and Literary Text

It is not uncommon to hear of ill-formed and well formed structures in the field of study that applies scientific measures to the study of language - Linguistic stylistics. This use of ill-formed structures (deviations) serves as a tool in the hands of literary writers for the purpose of achieving creativity in poetic works.

Deviation, therefore, refers to divergence in frequency from a NORM, such divergence may depend on:

- a. the breaking of normal rules of linguistic structure (whether phonological, grammatical, lexical or semantic); and so be statistically unusual/infrequent or
- b. upon the over-use of normal rules of usage, and so be statistically unusual in the sense of over-frequent. (Wales 117).

The term ‘linguistic deviance’ refers to the breaking of normal rules of linguistic structure at the phonological, grammatical, lexical or semantic level by literary writers in order to achieve stylistic effects.

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As Mukarovsky and Havranek (1932) believed, like the Russian FORMALISTS before them, it was the function of poetic language to surprise the reader with a fresh and dynamic awareness of its linguistic medium, to de-automatize what was normally taken for granted, to exploit language aesthetically. (Wales 182)

The act of DE-AUTOMIZE as used above is a conscious creative reality of language usage (which is) achieved by a variety of means, embedded in the term foregrounding.

Foregrounding - a popular term in stylistics - was introduced by Garvin in 1964 to translate the Prague school term of the 1930s, *aktualisace*, literally actualization. A text therefore can be said to be foregrounded when there are violations of linguistic norms with the linguistic features embedded in such texts 'highlighted' or 'made prominent' for specific effects, as against the background of the rest of the text.

Igiligi et al quoted in 'A Glossary of Literary Terms' said to foreground is to bring into the highest prominence to make it dominant in one's perception (14).

According to Yankson,

the normal language code is the background. Any deviation from the norm - the code - is the foreground because it brings the message to the fore court of the reader's attention. (3)

This issue of linguistic deviances, foregrounding, therefore serves as a great tool in the field of study - which draws on the models and terminology provided by whatever relevant aspects of linguistics - which delights in the abridgment of rules given in grammar as found in the Traditional Grammar.

African Traditional Poems

Poetry in one form or another is a cultural heritage of almost all peoples, whether or not they have a rational conception of what it is. (Senanu and Vincent 9)

This saying is applicable to Africans. The fact that poetry plays a pivotal role in the cultural heritage of human race cannot be underestimated. To Africa in particular, many of the norms, culture and value systems are embedded in the enrichment of oral tradition literature. A plethora detail of historical overview exists, notwithstanding much of the strength of African poetry could be said to be deep rooted in oral traditional poetry due to the fact that the identity structure of the poems are not destroyed of doubt. Oral traditional poems therefore have been utilized and manipulated by African poets in dealing with a wide range of problems and issues that border on African essence/way of life.

Prior to the colonial era, there exists among African cultural heritage, a way of life free from every form of Westernization. One of such aspects of African culture is the existence of enriched oral traditional literature. Many scholars agree on the existence of oral literature within African community before the advent of colonial masters in African communities. During this period, oral literature serves a significant role and was accepted to be part of the cultural heritage of traditional African community. To this effect, Umeh affirms that in Nigeria and perhaps in many other African countries, oral literature exists and forms an integral part of the life of different rural communities (26). Rural communities as pointed out above reveal evidence in support of the influence of western education and way of life in the urban areas.

Oral poetry for instance was being used for entertainment and relaxation. The use of oral traditional literature which is evidence among Africans comes in the form of folktales, myths and legend.

Traditional oral poetry, during the pre-colonial era therefore, dominated the African scene. But the advent of colonial masters in Africa results in drastical drop in traditional oral poetry. As a result, efforts were made in translating and documenting the oral literature in written form so as to prevent/arrest the inevitable extinction common to people's cultural heritage – language inclusive - as a result of imposition of foreign culture/way of life.

It is a common occurrence among the Yorubas to sing praises of people or objects as a result of peculiar attributes ascribe to them. The Yorubas like their Igbo counterpart of Nigerian are therefore well known for their traditional oral poems which come in the form of praise songs. Oral literature among the Yorubas of the western part of Nigeria includes a “chant” such as praises giving to a king - ‘ewi’ or to a notable person in the land - ‘oriki’ as well as ones ascribe to objects - animal in the case of “Salute to the Elephant”. This is somewhat similar to *Ode* as found in the English poems.

As such when traditional poems are subjected to literary analysis, it can be seen that they possess the same beauty of imagery and language with profound ideas. The same is applicable to “Salute to the Elephant”, a Yoruba oral chant which embodies one of the ways in which Yoruba cultural heritage is preserved hence the dynamic codifying nature of the Yoruba language as reveal in most of the Yoruba literary writers’ works i.e. Wole Soyinka’s “Eleshin Oba”.

This therefore influences the essence of the poem under analysis “Salute to the Elephant” around which this paper revolves.

All these are employed by the poet to create sound effects - an important aspect of phonological reality in poetical works.

Other examples of the use of pattern repetition in the poem include:

O elephant, possessor of a savings-basket full...
 O elephant, huge as a hill - /h/ Alliteration
Demon, flapping fans of war - /f/ Alliteration
Demon who snaps tree branches into many pieces
 and moves on to the forest farm
 I have fled to my father for refuge - /f/ Alliteration

Apart from the refrain created in the use of *demon* at the initial stages of the third and fourth lines above, there exist a number of phonological pattern repetitions in - /i:/, /is/, /m/ and /f/.

And hangs him up on a tree
 The sight ... stampede ... a hill of safety

Apart from the use of coordinating conjunction in *and* as an element of foregrounding, there are other sound effects as seen in *hangs him up on a tree* - /h/ and *the sight ... stampede ... a hill of safety* /s/ sounds respectively.

Mountainous Animal, Huge Beast who tears a man *like* a garment

animal and *beast* as used above are
synonymously related and both share in
common

{ Mountainous } + { Animal }
 { Huge } { Beast }

/+ size/

Mountainous and *huge* as shown above depicting *size* are in synonymous relation and thus belong to the same paradigm. Same is applicable in *animal* and *beast*.

Furthermore, while *mountainous* qualifies the noun *animal*; *huge* qualifies the noun *beast*, thus *mountainous* and *huge* are in syntagmatic relation with *animal* and *beast* which aids in creating the stylistic effect that the poet has in mind. As such, the use of semantic imports coupled with indirect comparison in this line of the poem give the poem its stylistic effects.

Swallows palm-fruit spiky pistil-cells
 Causes a tremor in a dense tropical forest who stands sturdy
 and alert,
 ... who stands sturdy and alert
 ... who walks slowly as if reluctantly

Apart from the use of *who*, – personification at the initial lines of the poem, there is further use of pattern duplication coupled with semantic imports in *slowly* and *reluctantly* and semantic relation in *sturdy* and *alert* reveals the watchful nature of the object of description.

The hunter's boast at home is not repeated when he really
meets the elephant

The hunter's boast at home is not repeated before the elephant

A look at the two lines above reveals the use of complex sentence structures among others.

Bellow are some examples of comparison within the structure of the poem:

Mountainous Animal, Huge Beast who tears a man like a garment

Ajanaku looks back with difficulty like a person

suffering from a sprained neck. - Comparison

My chant is a salute to the elephant. - Direct comparison.

Ajanaku is a metaphorical expression for the elephant.

Parallel Structures

This is an aspect of pattern repetition which could operate at all three levels – phonological, semantic and lexical - of linguistic organization. Thus, parallelism is a 'sameness' between two sections of a text, and can be structural or semantic (Fabb 137).

The functional effect that parallelism has either at structural level or semantic level in a literary text is that the poet's intense feeling is expressed through pattern repetition to achieve stylistic effects. Embedded in the poem "Salute to the Elephant" is a wide ranging in the use of parallel structures as exemplified below:

15 O elephant, who stands sturdy and alert,

who walks slowly as if reluctantly

36 Beast who carries mortars and yet walks with a swaggering gait

Some other language codifications worthy of note in this poem include:

Line 3 *demon, flapping fans of war* – is a metaphoric expression which refers to the elephant's destructive nature, as shown earlier in this paper, and its huge ears that indeed look like fans.

Line 9 *Ajanaku* – an attributive name for the elephant which literally means “killer of Ajana who captured live animals and kept a sample of each species but was unfortunately killed by the same elephant”.

Lines 30 and 32 *Oriiribobo* and *Otiko*- are both play on words and onomatopoeia referring to the size of the elephant.

Line 37 *Primeval leper* – a metaphoric expression which makes reference to the phalanges of the elephant which look like stumps, similar to limbs afflicted by leprosy – an image depicting a mixture of awe and disgust.

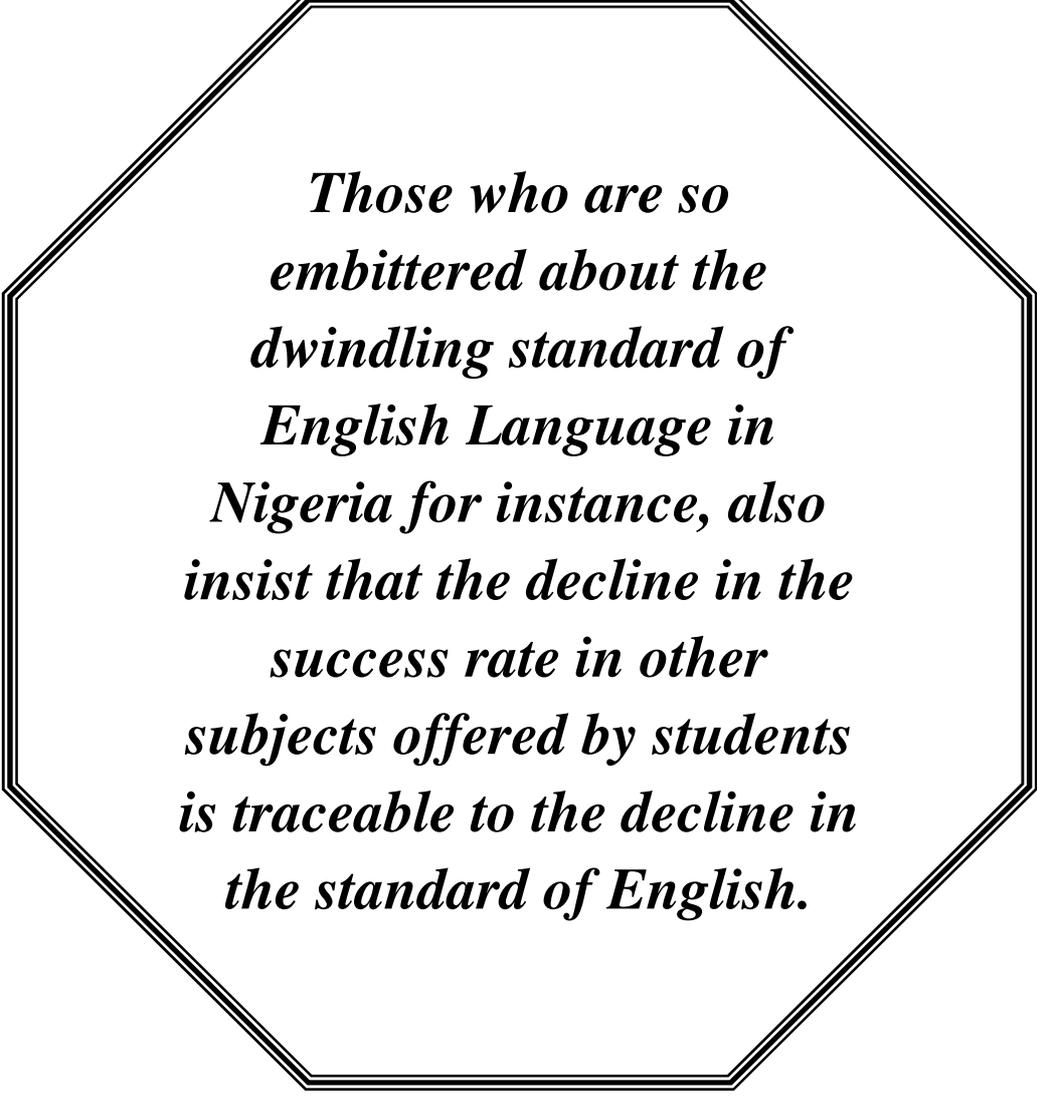
Conclusion

The fact that poetry plays a pivotal role in the cultural heritage of human race cannot be undermined. As such many of the norms, culture and value systems of African are embedded in poetry. As already shown, foregrounding, as a linguistic deviance, serves a great tool in the hand of literary writers. Its use among writers therefore is not a sign of ill-formedness but, rather, employ to achieve creativity in poetic works as shown in the analysis of the poem under analysis. It is around this skillful use of linguistic elements in literary work that influences this work. There are therefore a lot of linguistic deviances in this poem which aid to convey the poet’s intense feelings expressed through pattern repetition to achieve stylistics effects.

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Those who are so embittered about the dwindling standard of English Language in Nigeria for instance, also insist that the decline in the success rate in other subjects offered by students is traceable to the decline in the standard of English.