AWKA JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES (AJELLS)

Volume 10 Number 2
April, 2024

A Functional-Stylistic Study of Iconicity in Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughters*

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Abstract

The principle of iconicity maintains that language, for all its arbitrariness, is an iconic mirror of reality. The iconic use of language is a pronounced feature of poetry, especially in Osundare's art. This study is a functional-stylistic analysis of iconic features in Osundare's *Waiting Laughters.* A careful analysis of the grapho-syntactic patterns in the texts showed his conscious efforts to capture experiences through the form of his art. Specifically, findings in the study showed that three dominant features namely indentational highlighting, lexical fragmentation, and anaphora, act as a powerful rhythmic undercurrent which signal the message of the text - the rickety and ramshackle state of physical and socio-economic infrastructures in Nigeria and the overwhelming atmosphere of tortuous waiting (in vain?) for a better nation. The paper concluded that with the mimetic capability of these iconic sequences to produce and sustain meaning connections, the message of the volume attains timelessness, and gains even greater significance now more than ever before as the situation of things in the country cascades from bad to worse.

Keywords: iconicity, stylistics, arbitrariness, mimetic, significance.

Introduction

Poetic form differs significantly from prose form because of its distinctive use of suggestive language manifested in its economy of lexemes, its special exploitation of space vis a vis its use of lineation, stanzas and versification. These linguistic and graphological machinations are creatively contrived to stylistic effect. Thus, in poetry, language is artistically manipulated to give vent to the thoughts and experiences of the poet. It has been said that the primary purpose of poetry is to communicate ideas or the experiences which gave rise to it, and since these experiences are features of human life, poetry is life seen through a person's temperament (Egudu, 1996).

Niyi Osundare is a renown poet whose works have continued to address various aspects of human experience. His poetry represents an excellent template of style inspired by thematic concerns. As a stylistician, he is a skilled artisan of the linguistic medium with which he encodes his themes and ideological consciousness. Since breaking into the poetic spotlight with *Songs of the Marketplace*, his debut collection in 1983, Osundare has gone on to publish about thirteen other volumes of poetry whose messages are both revolutionary and transformative. The revolutionary edge of his poetry reflects in his Marxist posture and resolute rejection of the corrupt and oppressive socio-political system in Nigeria. He writes in defence of the cause of the ordinary man, and recommends himself as one committed to the well-being of the masses whose unfortunate fate is cunningly endangered by leaders in seats of power.

Waiting Laughters, published in 1990, is regarded by the poet in the subtitle as "a long song in many voices". His musings in the volume are submerged in one long song containing four movements which all relate to the thematic thrust suggested by the title – waiting. The volume is embedded with rhythm, motif, metaphors, imagery and various types of formal and 'verbal

calisthenics'. The volume is remarkable for its meaning suggestiveness through the use of linguistic patterns, a salient style marker which informs the focus of this study.

Over the years, a plethora of reviews and critical comments has come to trail Osundare's poetry. These range from consumerist comments in newspaper columns to serious academic studies in the form of articles, theses and dissertations. In Alu's (2007: 237) treatise, Osundare is described as "a poet devoted to serve the African peasantry". For Anyokwu (2011), Osundare is a poet who deploys his Yoruba oral-poetic and mythological concepts in the repudiation of all forms of injustices and oppressions.

From a linguistics orientation, Olayeye's (2017) pragmatic study of Osundare's *Random Blues*, selects three poems for speech act analysis because of their "assertive, penetrating and incisive messages" (2017: 47). His conclusion is that the study opens new grounds for the understanding of Osundare' poetry as words that have the propensity to not only inform, but also transform both reader and society for good (2017: 52). Ofuani and Okungbowa's (2018) study conceives Osundare's art as performance poetry. For them, the poet, through his carefully contrived grapho-phonological, syntactic, and dramatic elements, drags his audience into actual dramatization and performance of the poems to signal and demonstrate the importance of collective action against moral laxity, irresponsibility and all forms of oppression.

Ogoanah and Chikogu's (2011:69) study of Osundare's poetry focused on the artistic motivation and effects of the poet's "verbal calisthenics" manifested in unusual morphological formations, functional conversions, reconceptualisations, phonological puns of English lexical items, etc. They explained that the poet's infusion of strange neologisms and expressions into his poetry indicates his search for a unique language of literary expression "that can capture all of his complex variegated experience and artistic

burden" (2011:71). Ogungbemi's (2018) work shows Osundare's distinctive use of metaphors, especially animal metaphors in *Random Blues*. In the paper, the writer relates the semantic implications of such metaphors, arguing that the poet aptly captures corrupt leaders with animal metaphors because of "their animalistic and inhuman behaviours" (523-524). He concludes that the device has been deployed to give aesthetic colouring to the poems and to further enhance their thematic thrusts (2012: 72).

Despite their divergent approaches and concerns, all these reviews acknowledge, even if only implicitly, that Osundare's revolutionary vision and artistic burden are conveyed in his nuanced manipulation of language. More so, it is clear that Osundare's poetry has continued to supply researchers with abundant materials for study, and in this way, all the reviews presented above are relevant because of the various insights which they provide in the study of Osundare's poetry. However, from the available literature, it is not common to find a stylistic work dedicated to the analysis or description of iconicity or the principle of imitation in his poetry. In fact, we understand that the terminology itself and the objectives of this study have hardly been mentioned in previous studies on Osundare's poetry. In an attempt to fill this gap in the literature, this study undertakes to examine Osundare's manipulation of language as iconic: that is, the fact that the poetic lines and syntax present and represent a vivid capture/picture of experience.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

Already stated in this work is the fact that it is a stylistic exploration of those aspects of language that project the communicativeness of Osundare's verse. The major objectives of the study are summed up as follows:

i. To show that Osundare's poetry is a rich blend of linguistic and oral-poetic features where meaning is deducible through invention and suggestion.

ii. To identify and examine the dominant linguistic structures that are exploited as iconic structures serviceable for the representation of meaning and experiences in Osundare's poetry, particularly *Waiting Laughters.*

iii. The study aims to ascertain the poet's ideological commitment by focusing on how the poet exploits the symbolic and evocative value of graphic and syntactic features of iconicity as they relate to the objects and events which the poet uses them to signify.

Significance of the Study

The study provides pedagogical, economic, and political importance that would expand the information base of Osundare's revolutionary agenda of a new political order, economic reconstruction and a reformed socio-cultural value. His Marxist agenda of educating and mobilizing his audience towards collective action to assert their humanity and restore their dignity as a people is very crucial to this study. It therefore serves as a valuable and veritable reference material to stylisticians, linguists, literary critics, social critics, lecturers, students, and the general public.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions that this work seeks to answer and that will form the major preoccupation of the study:

i. What are the salient stylistic features of iconicity that lead to the suggestion of meaning in the texts?

ii. What meanings or ideologies are communicated through the functional analysis and interpretation of such features?

iii. What kinds of experiences (private, public, or universal?) are communicated by the poet in the iconic structures?

Conceptual Framework

Style, Stylistics, and Functional Stylistics

Style refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, in a given genre, etc (Leech and Short, 2007). Style, here, refers to a motivated pattern of language deployment of a person who intends to mean or act as conditioned by a given context of situation. Syal and Jindal (2012:57) on the difference between idiolect and style claim that style "is more often a matter of choice" made from available resources of language. Therefore, a communicator demonstrates style when he chooses words suitable for the explication of his vision or message.

Stylistics is, simply, the linguistic study of style. It is concerned with how language has been used within a text to encode meaning. In this regard, "the various forms, patterns and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text" (Simpson, 2002:2). A stylistic study therefore focuses on a text, and its specific goal is to explain how linguistic choices in the text serve a particular artistic function. It is the text's overall functional significance as discourse that acts as a gateway to its interpretation.

Functional or functionalist stylistics is a contextualized stylistic approach that emphasizes a study of the language of a text with recourse to the functional dimensions of such linguistic choices. This sub-branch of stylistics evolved as an attempt to solve the fundamental problem of Jakobsonian formalist stylistics; to narrow the gap between analysis and interpretation, or between the formal properties of language and language use (Weber, 1996:2).
Fundamentally, in this approach, the stylistician is primarily concerned with "the ways in which the formal properties of language are used to account for the variety of uses of language (meaning) and the motivations behind the selections and combinations that give rise to such meaning potentials" (Canning,

2014:46). Thus, for functionalists, the context of any linguistic output or language event is as important as the formal features that make up the language. It is, therefore, useful to conclude in this study that a functional stylistic study perceives the language of a text in relation to how it is used in a given context by concentrating on the meaning construed in the various textual situations.

Iconicity in Stylistics

Iconicity is derived from the word 'icon'. An icon is an image that more or less reflects a situation, object or concept in the real world (Roman Jakobson, cited in Fischer, 1997: 63). Thus drawings, traffic signs, and even gestures can be seen as icons. In similar fashion, writing systems may be iconic as ancient Egyptian or the Chinese ideographs were/are. Some scholars believe that all writing systems began in this way, e.g. Bolinger and Sears (1981). Bolinger (1980:18) explains that: "Arbitrary and conventional is a fitting description of distinctive sounds, less so of words, even less of sentences, and beyond that scarcely fits at all. The larger the scope, the looser and less arbitrary the system". This means that the higher the linguistic level, the less arbitrary language becomes. This miming of *meaning* with *form* found in language - especially in its motivated use in literary texts - is what iconicity denotes. It has also been noted that the awareness of form as meaning was accentuated in literature (and literary criticism) when poets began "to use form to break down the reader's 'stock responses'" (Davie, 1955: 102), thus creating a heightened responsiveness and sensitiveness to form as meaning signal.

In stylistics, the principle of iconicity (or imitation) maintains that language, for all its arbitrariness, is an iconic mirror of reality.Leech and Short (2007:188) even affirm that a fundamental characteristic of the rhetoric of literary texts is that it follows the 'principle of imitation': "literary expression tends to have not only a PRESENTATIONAL function (directed towards the reader's role as decoder) but a REPRESENTATIONAL function (miming

the meaning that it expresses)". According to them, iconicity is inherent in language and falls under the 'principle of imitation'.

Thus, a literary work, in its textual form, is a "'self-reflexive artefact': it's very physical substance imitates or enacts the meaning that it represents" (Epstein, cited in Fischer, 1997: 62).
Pertinent to this study is Fischer's (1997: 63-64) exposition that poets' use of iconicity is "more pronounced, more novel and more illustrative". He distinguishes between **imagic** iconicity and **diagrammatic** iconicity. According to him, in imagic iconicity, there is a direct one-to-one relationship between the linguistic sign and the signified, and this relation is iconic. Here, onomatopoeic words like 'miaow' (sound made by cat) where there is likeness in sound/shape are examples. In diagrammatic iconicity, however, such a direct, vertical relation is missing. Instead, "there exists an iconic link between the horizontal relation(s) on the level of the sign and the horizontal relations on the level of the signified" (1997:64). This is illustrated in the similarity between a body-object such as 'foot' and the lower part of a mountain. Here, a mountain has no leg or foot but we can say 'foot of a mountain' (an example of metaphor or analogy).

According to Fischer, diagrammatic iconicity is pervasive in poetic language because it has to do with the arrangement of signs for meaning signaling. Leech and Short (2007) also affirm that diagrammatic iconicity falls under the principle of imitation and emphasise that the ways of realising this type of iconicity is almost unlimited. According to them, some linguistic manifestations of diagrammatic iconicity in texts include sequential ordering, markedness, positioning of content words in terms of centrality *vs* peripherality, creation of distance/proximity, anaphora, repetition, parallel structures, analogy, metaphor (grammatical and/or cognitive), etc.

From the foregoing, it is clear that iconicity is inherent in language and constitutes one of the many stylistic contrivances by which poets flavour their art. In Osundare's *Waiting Laughters*, for instance, one of the ways of the poet's exemplification of form miming meaning is in the intense lengthening and manipulation of the verses in order to vividly demonstrate the feelings of the poet, and to capture the process of waiting, in print. This representational function of language in the text informs the focus of this study as it aims to explicate the iconic use of linguistic structures in Osundare's poetry.

Theoretical Framework

This work is based on the tenets of functional stylistics which itself is a sub-branch of M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) which is the base theory for the expression of the principle of iconicity in terms of the interpretation of meaning and the sociological effect of language use in the text.

Systemic Functional Grammar

Halliday's SFG is a theory which investigates and describes both the internal structure of language and its external, sociological significance – how language works in society. Halliday (1973:104) uses the term "function" in two different but related senses in the explanation of language. According to him, language is used in the sense of "'grammatical' (or syntactic) function in the first place to refer to elements of linguistic structures such as actor and goal or subject and object or rheme and theme. These 'functions' are the roles occupied by classes of words, phrases, and the like in the structure of higher units. Secondly, it is used to refer to the functions of language as a whole". Thus, for him, a functional theory of language is "one that attempts 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" (Halliday, 1996:331).

The crux of Halliday's theory teaches that that there are three main functions of language. These inherently predominant uses of language are labelled as 'metafunctions'. The three metafunctions are (1) the ideational function, (2) the interpersonal function, and (3) the textual function. The ideational function teaches that language serves for the expression of content. Through this function, a writer or speaker embodies, in language; his experience of the real world (Halliday, 1996: 332). It is further classified as the experiential and the logical. Choices in this category are determined among classes of things, qualities, quantities, time, places and the transitivity system. The interpersonal function is the participatory function of language. Here, a speaker or writer uses language as "the means of his own intrusion into the real world" (Halliday, 1996: 333). This function fosters communication among participants with varying degrees of cordiality. Mood, modality, person, and key are tools of transaction in this group. The textual function involves the creation of texts for varied communicative purposes. It is "through this function that language makes links with itself and with the situation; and discourse becomes possible" (Halliday, 1996: 334). This component provides the texture; that which differentiates language as an instance on its own and language that is contextually modulated and moderated.

Significantly, all three functions of language are not as mutually exclusive as they may seem. In fact, they are said to apply simultaneously in every text. This is why Halliday and Mathiessen (2004:31) describe the clause as "the primary channel of grammatical energy". Elsewhere it is said to be "… the mainspring of grammatical energy; it is the unit where meaning of different kinds, experiential, interpersonal, and textual, are integrated into a single syntagm" (2004:51). Hence in this study, it is only in combination with textual meanings that ideational and interpersonal meanings are actualized.

Understandably, function and meaning are the central focus of the Hallidayan approach to grammatical analysis. Language choices acquire deeper meaning when analysed against their contexts or situation. Consequently, meanings are realised by analysing the choices of words of an utterer against their socio-cultural motivations. Language is never produced in a vacuum. Thus at any point in time when people use language to express meanings, they do so in specific situations; and the form of the language they use is influenced by the complex and varying elements of those situations.

Functional systemic grammar, therefore, underscores a grammar of meaningful choices, not a grammar of mere formal rules. To render more intelligibly, "Functional grammar implies that grammar is seen as a resource for making meaning – it is a 'semanticky' kind of grammar, the organizing principle adopted is that of system: the grammar is seen as a network of interrelated meaningful choices" (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004:31).
In all, it is clear that the major underpinnings of SFG and functional stylistics rest on the fact that the models are based on the understanding that there is always an intrinsic and permanent link between form and meaning. It is the systematic study of this link that yields textual and contextual meanings as will be shown in the present study.

Research Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is qualitative. This approach is characterized by "inductive approaches to knowledge building aimed at proving, disproving, or lending credence to existing theories" (Leavy, 2017:9). This method also involves tapping into subjective experiences and meaning-making processes to acquire a depth of understanding, that is, detailed information from a small sample. This kind of research is generally appropriate when your primary purpose is to explore, describe, or explain phenomena (Leavy, 2017:9). The methodology has been adopted

here because it best suits the purpose of describing and explaining, some aspects of words and structures in *Waiting Laughters* and how they represent the poet's intended meanings.

The purposive sampling method has been adopted in this study as it evinces a technique whereby you sample with an overriding purpose or intent in mind. In this paper therefore, relevant and representative excerpts were extracted from some poems in the poetry collection. The extracted data were analysed in accordance with the aims of this study – to describe and explain observable textual features of iconicity in the primary data. Findings and conclusion were drawn from the analysis without recourse to arithmetic or statistical occurrences.

Thus, the observation technique was used for data collection. In this regard, the researcher carefully read, re-read, identified, and categorised some stylistic and iconic features in the poems, consequently extracting these as primary data for analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Grapho-Syntactic Structures of Iconicity in *Waiting Laughters*

The following dominant graphic and syntactic elements are used by the poet for meaning representation in the text (i) indentational highlighting (ii) lexical fragmentation/line truncation (iii) anaphora

Indentational Highlighting

Indentational highlighting, in the context of this study, refers to the deliberate use of deviant indentational structures in verse for special effect. Excerpts from the text are presented below:

TEXT A

i. Time
Ambles
in
diverse
paces

with
diverse
persons (29-30)

ii. The
Cris and cross
Rails

iii. The axe-man
came
saw
and nearly
conquered … (34)

In text, A(i), the exploitation of space and the indentation of the adjourning line epitomize the structure of the stanza. The stanza concludes a poem (or movement) in which the poet draws extensive comparison between the period of waiting and the actualization of the people's desires. The people are "Waiting/like a felon yoked to a tryst with the noose / a groom for the magic of the bridal/a husband pacing the scented corridors of the labour/ward" (1990:29). Here and in other places in the volume, very serious scenes are presented where the period between waiting and the expected outcomes is crucial. Yet in all these, time continues to move slowly with different steps, thereby adding to the monotonous pace of waiting. The graphic presentation of ideas in print here manifests in such a way that there are long breath pauses occasioned by the indentation of one-word lines in the stanza. The graphic presentation of the stanza dictates that one reads slowly, taking one word at a time. Thus, the message of the poem is reinforced with the exploitation of space as an important device used by the poet.

Text A(ii) is the aptest example of visual poetry in *Waiting Laughters*. In this verse, the messages are presented in visual and/or concrete terms as the conceptual expression is mimed by

the graphic medium. As a shaped poem, the graphological crafts which portray the message consist of 'lexico-graphic' patterns that are representative of the crossing of a rail or line at its junction.

Here, Osundare deploys this "criss-cross" pattern to paint a graphic picture of the dreary condition of the Nigeria rail system which lies in comatose because of corruption and mismanagement. Also, the splitting of the word "sleep" from its inflectional "-ing" morpheme in the next line, and the indentation of "steel" to final position in another line reinforce the moribund condition of the railway as well as the boring and monotonous atmosphere of waiting. The only vestiges that remind one of its existence are the creaking lines of iron besieged by "savage rust" (1990:32) criss-crossing the swampy and savannah terrains of the country.

In text A(iii), the use of elongated, breath-space pauses between the stanzas is employed to take care of punctuations as seen in prose. Indentation has also been employed to bring about some sort of structural changes in the three stanzas as opposed to the other stanzas in the poem. Here, the last stanza, comprising the word "conquered" is further indented from the rest to direct focus to the final word in the climax. This kind of indentational highlighting is a ubiquitous 'grapho-syntactic' contrivance of the verses in the volume.

Lexical Fragmentation/Line Truncation

Keen to create 'verbal tricks' on the printed pages for the purpose of poetic ingenuity and communicative expressiveness, Osundare further extends the range of stanza forms in the text through the use of line breaks and lexical fragmentations. These manipulations of lines further demonstrate the visual poetic and iconic nature of Osundare's art in the volume. The following excerpts show the varying degrees in which these devices are exploited in the text.

TEXT B

i. Wait

ing . . .
And the hours limp a –
long,
with
band-
ages
of fractured moments (29)

ii. And minutes
drag their

feet so
in - finitely

in grey
boots of

leaden hours
each wink
a wail

each wail
one eon

in the
sleepy chronology

of drastic
etherings

time ambles in diverse paces . . . . (36)

iii. For time it may take
Time it may take

The stammerer will one day call his
Fa – fa – fa – ther – ther's na – na – na – me! (74)

Text B (i) presents a pictorial depiction of the slow pace of waiting and the "fractured moments" that come in between different periods of waiting. In this instance, the line breaks are occasioned by words (like "waiting", "along", and "bandages") that are syllabically fractured to express the message of the poem. The poet uses these techniques to foreground the motif of waiting, a word that is fragmented into two lines. The slow pace of time also means that hours begin to "limp a - /long, culminating into "band- /ages/ of fractured moments. Thus, the poet presents an imagic representation of fractured moments through the use of fractured words.

Text B(ii) is another relevant sample of a verse in which words composing the lines and stanzas are fragmented for meaning encoding. Here, words and lines are reworked to project the message of tortuous waiting. It is not just hours limping now, but even minutes drag their feet "so in-finitely". The fragmentation of the word "infinitely" by detaching the prefixative "in – "further emphasizes the elongation of the hours and minutes of waiting. Also, the poet, through the fragmentation of words and lines, mimes the "sleepy chronology" he talks about in the verse. Here, leaden (heavy) hours "wink" a wail and "each wail/one eon". This suggests that the slow and heavy hours only bring more suffering to the people who are waiting. Also, the heaviness of the hours and time of waiting corresponds with the heaviness in reading the verse: an attribute engendered by the fragmentation and reworking of words and lines. Besides, the use of words such as "drag", "grew", "leaden" "wail", "sleepy" etc, conveys the spiritless, dull and sober atmosphere overwhelming the people who are waiting in the hope of a blissful and better tomorrow.

The poet mimics the mannerism of a stammerer through lexical truncation and fragmentation in text B(iii). Here, an imagic and onomatopoeic depiction of a stammerer's natural utterance is captured with the use of hyphenation. The hyphenation results in

the elongation of the words "father's name" and this corresponds with the period of waiting for the stammerer to come good in pronouncing his father's name. Contextually, the poet deploys the metaphor of the pathetic stammerer to represent the down-trodden, the have-nots, the nature-impaired people in the country, whose "water-pots are waiting in famished homesteads" and whose "rags are a commonwealth of lice" (74). The poet, in this poem, sends subtle warning to corrupt and thieving rulers as he compares the initial difficulty and jerky efforts of a stammerer when uttering words to the seeming difficulty in the efforts of the people to mobilize themselves for collective action against oppression and leadership brutality. The poet concludes that as the stammerer "wil one day call his / fa-fa-fa-ther-ther's na-na-na-me", so also a day is coming when there shall be a revolt from the people who have been taken for granted in the scheme of things. The word 'will' is deliberately mis-spelt as 'wil' in the poem to highlight a lexical deviation that signals a revolt against standard norms by the stammerer.

A more radical instance of the use of line truncation and fragmentation of words is shown in another poem (movement) from the collection:

iv. Long-
er
than
the
y
a
w
n
of
the
moon
in

a
sky
so
brown
with
heels
of
fleeting
fancies
a
diamond
tear
waits,
tremulous,
in
the
eye
of
the
cloud . . . (84)

The above poem which is the longest in the volume epitomizes the poet's sheer determination to match content with structure in the belief that both are, sometimes, complementary. In this poem, there is a merger of the graphic and phonic media so that the lines are read aloud or verbalized only with great difficulty and patience. This is due to the fact that the verse lines are made up of single words, and morphemes, as well as single letters as in the spread of the word "Yawn" over four lines. In the first two lines, the lexical word "longer" is fragmented into two recognizable morphemes "long" and "-er". With these truncations and fragmentations, the phonic aspect of the poem is almost lost while communication becomes difficult if each line of the poem is uttered as an independent unit separate from the other.

Observably, the truncations make the poem longer than it would be if the lines are rendered in sentences. But this elongation is graphologically justified when one considers that the poet tries to foreground through suggestive crafts, the long period of waiting before harvest comes. This long period of waiting will usher in despair and boredom as indicated by the associative word "yawn" which is spread across four lines to signal the distance in time between the period of waiting and the eventual harvest. However, the far-fetched dreams do not die prematurely as the expected rain comes in the form of "a diamond tear in the cloud /dropping / dropping / dropping" (84-85). In the end, the rain will bring life back to the dried up "tendrils" and the "drums/ of kicking / vows" will be waiting to celebrate the "rain-bow/harvest" (85). Thus, Osundare contrives to use the graphic elongation made possible with line truncations and fragmentations to admonish the suffering and expectant people in the nation that hope exists in the midst of the long wait for harvest and change; and that the long and gloomy period of boredom and despair will eventually birth celebrations and liveliness if the waiting is sustained by hope.

Anaphora

Anaphora refers to "the repetition of a key word or phrase at the beginning of successive lines" (Packard, 1994:7). It is a form of syntactic repetition that denotes anaphoric reference which is "backward-looking as distinct from cataphoric which is forward-looking" (Wales, 2014:20). In poetry, and echoing Wales, anaphora, is used for cohesion and connection of discourse as well as to 'hammer home a point' or to arouse strong feelings. Osundare deploys this device in his texts to communicate strong intentions in order to necessitate change. *Waiting Laughters* is an apt example of a collection where anaphora features as a conspicuous stylistic device in the negotiation of meaning. The following lines from the text are representative textual evidence:

TEXT C

i. Waiting

like the grass honing every blade
for the flesh of the dew
Waiting
like the uncircumcised penis of okra
peeping out of the pepuce of dawn
Waiting
like the tyrant for his noose
Still waiting
the drums, for the riot of the leg
leathery tales and answers bruised and bent
like the question-mark of the stick,
Still waiting
Rumour slaps the tabloid of ill-
literate mornings
Just waiting
for the tadpole's flowering into frog
in the busy belly of indifferent waters
(14-16)

The lines above aptly capture the various scenes and/or instances of waiting through the unobtrusive deployment of anaphora. Here, the pervasive occurrence of the word "waiting" as the subject of elliptical (verbless) clauses and the extension of the word by some adverbial elements ("still waiting", "just waiting"), which further lengthens the slow movement of time and the consequent periods of despair, serve to syntactically depict the very act of waiting as something that entirely overwhelms and engulfs the whole nation and its citizenry. More so, the word is made prominent in the negotiation of meaning in the text given the initial position it occupies in so many instances. Everything and everyone seems to refer back to 'waiting' as a commanding factor in the scheme of things. In this way, Osundare has succeeded in his effort to adequately thematize and concretize the idea of waiting through anaphora. One can also say that anaphora has been effectively deployed to underline descriptive and emotional effects.

Findings and Conclusion

As have been demonstrated in this study, instances of linguistic iconicity made conspicuous in the text epitomize the spirit of Osundare's thematic creation to his readers. The overriding intention here has been to show that Osundare's poetic ingenuity is best appreciated when one considers his poetic output as mimetic and/or laced with representational value.

Pertinently, Osundare, through his motivated use of indentations, lexical fragmentation and anaphora as graphic and syntactic structures of iconicity, has fulfilled his poetic duty of having to speak as 'man to man' in *Waiting Laughters*. Evident across the volume studied in this work is his conscious efforts to dramatise his poems and to vivify his experiences through the form of his art. In encoding his artistic message in print, therefore, the poet seems to invite the serious reader to make iconic connections in the texts; to relate form with function, structure with sense.

A careful analysis of these patterns in the volume has made prominent the fact that the various realities and experiences captured in the analysed texts are by no means entirely private or personal to the poet. Osundare, the people's poet as he is now fondly called, speaks for the people; his people. The poet, through his motivated linguistic choices, captures, in his iconic sequences, the boring and monotonous atmosphere of tortuous waiting in Nigeria. The poet vents his resentment through lines that concretely capture the frenetic and frustrating happenings in a nation in perpetual decline, degradation and decay.

In his artistic depiction of inclement realities like the rickety and ramshackle state of the physical and socio-economic infrastructures in Nigeria, the frustration and suffering of the people who continue waiting (in vain?) for a better Nigeria; Osundare's unmistakable message to mindless, thieving and

corrupt politicians is that the people will, one day, take their rightful place in the scheme of things, just like the seemingly helpless stammerer in the text will one day call his father's name. Thus, with the imitative functions of visual devices and the mimetic capability of iconic sequences to produce and sustain meaning connections, the message of the volume attains timelessness, and gains even greater significance now more than ever before as the situation of things in the country cascades from bad to worse.

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