

Communicative Strategies in Contemporary Nigerian Drama: A Stylistic Analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *The Lottery Ticket*

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Abstract: The study is a stylistic analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *The Lottery Ticket*. Like other contemporary Nigerian dramatists, Yerima is engaged in the quest for suitable forms with which the Nigerian experience can be transmitted through drama. We examine the stylistic features in the Play. We mainly hinge on the Communicative Model of stylistic theory for the analysis of four data selected via defined parameters. The analysis reveals that the Play is characterized by authorial use of diverse stylistic and rhetorical devices: cohesive devices, point of view, pidgin and figurative language. Thus, the structure of the play is functional. We rely on the Projection Principle to extend the stylistic features of the play to contemporary Nigerian drama.

Keywords: Contemporary Nigerian drama, style, stylistics, Communicative Model of stylistic theory, Projection Principle, rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

The post-independent African state is one bedeviled by significant leadership-induced poverty, corruption, religious charlatanism, wars, unstable political system, dictatorial governance, inadequate basic amenities, as well as a myriad of other problems. Yerima's [1] *The Lottery Ticket* published in 1996 is a serious attempt at condemning the preposterous stance of the Nigerian government. It is a socio-political realist play because it ponders on the existential reality of Nigeria which is its setting. The play deals with the "impermanence of human existence" and the "will to survive in an almost impossible scenario". It discusses the decadence that permeates the nation's social and political spheres over the past two decades, 1990-2012.

In this study, we investigate the stylistic devices which constitute Yerima's communicative strategies (rhetoric) in the play.

METHODOLOGY

Style, Stylistics and Stylistic Analysis

Kolawole [2] defines stylistics as "style and its study". In stylistics, texts of various disciplines can be seen as "language in action". Having a clear understanding of the term "stylistics" therefore presupposes a clear understanding of "style" which refers to the way language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose. Banjo [3] defines stylistics as "the exhaustive study of the role of language in literary works". In stylistics, there is a meeting point between literary and non-literary study of texts. Stylistics is a registration of a writer's artistic

pro prowess in communication of themes, and this process is achieved through the manipulation of the linguistic repertoire at the disposal of the writer. Selecting or ordering language, as well as deviating from the norms is the concern of style. Leech and Short [4] posit that style can be applied to both spoken and written, both literary and non-literary varieties of language, but by tradition, it is particularly associated with written literary texts. Abrams [5] opines that the characteristic of a work may be analyzed in terms of: its diction, or choice of words; its sentence structure and syntax; the density and types of its figurative language; and its rhetorical aims and devices. Vocabulary modification is the most obvious and accessible aspect of style.

Ahmed Yerima and Contemporary Nigerian Playwrights

Ahmed Yerima is a dramatist of socio-political realism who used the medium of drama to comment on the prevailing socio-economic and political situations in his own country, Nigeria. Yerima treats thematic issues with an alluring difference. In some of his works, for example, *Othelo*, *Little Drops*, *The Sisters*, *Mojagbe*, *The Lothery Ticket* etc., we see a true blend of poetry and the indigenous, artistic style of chants and proverbs; music and dance coalesce to give an African performative style. Some of his works blend myth, poetry and folklore to present a picture of traditional African elements. In many cases, elements drawn from contemporary African and world realities come together to carve a positive position for human society. The nature and character of the Nigeria, especially in terms

of power access and accumulation of resources, are recurring subjects in Yerima's plays.

Modern playwrights demonstrate the ability to create mutually divergent characters. The purpose is to encompass within their work, the whole range of people involved in the action with their different opinions and attitudes. This divergence captures the existential experiences of the category of people in social class structure. The reader of a work of art has to collaborate with the author and produce the meaning with him, and he must share with the author, a number of narrative and literary conventions to be able to do this (cf. Vajime [6]). Nigerian drama communicates to the reader through the textual analyst. Therefore, the stylistic analyst can access meanings beyond the writer's spectrum. The themes of the drama of recent Nigerian playwrights are the result of an individual search for a spiritual solution to the country's socio-political problems and self-survival in the midst of the nation's numerous crises. The ideology of the Nigerian Third Generation dramatists is an expression of individual survivalism, placing emphasis on the survival of an individual in a chaotic society as opposed to socialism which was characterized in the works of the earlier playwrights. One's survival is self-dependent and not reliant on any governmental intervention. The term "Individual survivalism" is used to define the strategy and sub-culture of individuals or groups anticipating and making preparations for future possible disruptions in local, regional, national, international, social and political order. The dramatic forms that are constructed within the ideology of individual survivalism create realistic characters that represent individuals within the playwright's current surroundings in their society.

In the words of Prakash Khuman [7] "Realism is a style of writing that gives the impression of recording or 'reflecting' faithfully an actual way of life." This does not mean that realism presents actual events of life as they occur but instead makes a representation of life by selecting some real life occurrences for inclusion in the text. Khuman further states that the term "realism", refers "sometimes confusingly both to a literary method based on detailed accuracy of description and to a more general attitude that rejects idealization, escapism, and other extravagant qualities of romance in favor of soberly recognizing the actual problems of life (ibid p.34)". Since collective struggle for group emancipation has failed in Nigeria, individuals strive to conquer direct obstacles to a better life. The Third Generation playwrights scrutinize contemporary Nigerian reality and dare the characters to overcome obstacles and make progress in whatever ways they can. These playwrights expect their reader-audience to have an ability to distinguish between the oppressive and dictatorial government of most of the leaders depicted in their plays. In this case, the reader-audience can relate these villainous characters to the political leaders in their own

society. It is expected by the playwrights that these plays might help the reader-audience to come to terms with their everyday reality and also in the realization of their daily struggle for survival. Therefore, most of Yerima's plays are focused on individual survival strategies rather than an elusive utopian society as the one that is presented in the plays of the Radical Dramatists. Yerima presents characters that strive to emerge from the strangulating laws and suffocating treatments given by the government and society at large. To these characters, attention is not focused on fighting for the freedom of the group by rousing collective heroes, but finding an opportunity for individual survival with or without external support.

Experimental Procedure

We adopt the Communicative Model of stylistic theory as the analytical framework for this study. Lawal [8] submits that this Model is eclectic in nature because it is the amalgam of insights from pre-dating theories on a stylistic-analyst approach to texts. The theory explains the interaction between message and medium through socio-linguistic and rhetorical agencies informed by writer-reader or speaker-hearer shared remote and immediate knowledge. Although we do not intend to use the diagram in the literature to present this stream of thought, it should be stated that the different elements of the Model are as follows:

- SPEAKER OR WRITER;
- MESSAGE (i.e.) writer's or speaker's impression in the form of ideas, beliefs, knowledge, feelings and attitudes, etc. on the one hand, or listener's or reader's impression decoded in the form of ideas, beliefs, knowledge, feelings, etc.;
- MEDIUM i.e. writer's or speaker's expression encoded in the form of: (i) A rhetorical mode (the primary stylistic device which incorporates linguistic norms and directs pragmatic interpretation of textual properties); (ii) Linguistic "norms", constants, variants, and deviants.

We note that various stylistic concepts evolved by stylisticians explain ideas in the Communicative Model of stylistic theoretical framework. These concepts include: ambiguity (words having two or more meanings), collocation (meanings which words have in syntagmatic relations), cohesion and coherence (Cohesion has to do with unifying a text through cohesive devices while coherence has to do with lexical appropriateness towards communicative discourse), repetition (repeating linguistic items for both communicative and aesthetic purposes), texture, (using various cohesive devices such as reference, conjunction, ellipsis and lexical cohesion to derive a unified text), etc.

We select four micro-structures from their macro-structure (the entire extended body of discourse which is the Play).

Adejare cited in Emuchay [9] argues that the Projection Principle helps an analyst to procure entire messages in a text via selected linguistic structures. Our selection of data is based on parameters from Emuchay (ibid.), and they include: clarity of message, quality of semantic features, linguistic richness, accessibility of message, depth and thematic coverage.

ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present four data for both analysis and discussion. Although this approach of incorporating discussion with textual analysis may not be conventional, we choose it so that through brief comments from related literature, we can establish the fact “that rhetoric in verbal artistry is essentially the product of different stylistic devices. Consider the data:

Datum One

See heen, diabetes na wen bigman don chop many sweet things. Atiritisna wen bigmansidowndey drive motodey chase women. Which moto you get, pass pasenja for molue bus? Herpatensionna wen you wori for account weydey London, you wey be say naajo you dey do. High blood na wen life sweet bigman and everything wey him dey do na highlife, e chop leg of chicken, he chop woman leg, wash am with odeku (*All laugh at Landlord's analysis*). (P. 514)

Datum One reveals that Yerima employs “point of view” in the play. This device refers to the techniques used in narrations. It helps to position the narrator. Ahmed Yerimah’s *The Lottery Ticket* is presented with the Third Person Omniscient Narration, and this necessitates the dominant use of nouns and pronouns in the Play to link characters with events. Third person pronouns alienate the writer from the story. However, this narrative strategy produces the super-ordinate, all-knowing position which the writer has over his characters, and makes it easy for the writer to “enact” his thematic concerns; the writer takes a position despite the fact that he is detached from the plot. Abrams [5] evolves the “showing” and “telling” methods of characterization in narratives. We note that the stylistic potency of the telling method over the showing or dramatic method is that the former affords a writer the opportunity to make his evaluative remarks on the actions and utterances of the characters as the story unfolds whereas the latter only leaves the reader making inferences or deductions from what the characters say and do. In exploring the advantages which the telling method affords the writer, the omniscient point of view enables the writer to capture a wide range of characterization possibilities as he clings to his didactic and thematic concerns.

Datum Two

Mama Lizi: But Tuba Cola people get sense. Dey wan sell plenty, den dem go give people one hundred thousand naira. See wayo. Dat one na money? Dey don make millions well well, den dem go give us only hundred thousand. Everybody natief for dis kontri. Dey just dey punish poor man.

Landlord: Madam na money o. Nobody force anybody. Na you get your money, na you drink am.

Mama Lizi: Ha Oga Landlord. You wey God don bless. You get house for Lagos, you dey collect money, wetin you wan take hundred thousand naira do?

Landlord: I go take am marry your Lizi. I don old, I need small girl wey go dey rob my back till I die.

Mama Lizi: Heeh, so na your hidden agenda be dat? Men self, wayo full una head.

Lizi: God forbid.

Landlord: Wetin God wan forbid? E good say since my wife run commot for house run follow that yeye 419 boy wey god don soda him yansh, e good say make I sit down dey look ayanyan? ...Lizi good. Na you go bury me.

Lizi: I say God forbid. I no go bury oldman. God forbid! No be me go do replacement wife for you. You dey forget say I train as tailor. (P. 501)

Yerimah’s realistic presentation of language typical of the markets and streets is impressive. Besides having some witty remarks, figurative devices in Datum Two include: pun, innuendo and hyperbole on the part of the Landlord and Mama Lizi. These figures of speech enhance the comical nature of the Play. Figurative devices are used therein to produce both communicative and appealing effects.

Datum Three

“Tuba Cola don come again oh! *Tuba Cola has arrived again*

Yeah! Come see naira, yanfuyanfu *Come and see naira large amount*

One hundred thousand naira Naira rain dey fall oh! *Naira rain is falling*

“Tuba Cola don come oh! *Tuba Cola has arrived*

Na today we go know oh! *We will know today*

All the people wey don buy lottery ticket *Those who already bought the lottery ticket*

Na today result go come out for ten o'clock

The result will be out today at 10 o'clock

Woman, men, pikin wey dey drink Tuba *Women, men and child that drinks*

Tuba Cola go collect plenty money *Tuba Cola will get a lot of money*

Buy one bottle collect plenty money *Buy one bottle, receive a lot of money*

Mama Lizi: But Tuba Cola people get sense. Dey wan sell plenty, den dem go give people one hundred thousand naira. See wayo. Dat one na money? Dey don make millions well well, den dem go give us only hundred thousand. Everybody natief for dis kontri. Dey just dey punish poor man.

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One of the cohesive devices used in the play as in Datum Three, is repetition. This device does not just achieve sound effect, but is also theme-driven. The repetitive items include: “Tuba Cola”, “come”, “naira rain”, “don come” and “na you”. References and substitutions are also obvious cohesive devices in this Datum. References are words whose meanings can only be discussed by referring to other words in the text, e.g. personal pronouns. In this Datum for example, “Dey” refers to “Tuba Cola people”; “that one” refers to “one hundred thousand naira”; and “You” refers to “Oga Landlord”. References are therefore substitutions which are used to prevent repetitions. Another cohesive device in here is the use of conjunctions. Halliday et al [10] evolves four categories of conjunctions:

and in all this time he met no one (*additive*).

Yet he was hardly aware of being tired (*adversative*).

So by night the valley was far below (*causal*).

Then, so dusk fell, he sat down to rest (*temporal*)

Datum Three has both causal and additive conjunctions. Consider these extracts:

Women, men and (additive conjunction) child that drinks Tuba Cola

... so (causal conjunction) na your hidden agenda be dat?

Furthermore, the use of usual collocates abound as part of the lexical cohesive devices in the Datum. Examples are: “women”/”men”/”pikin”; “lottery”/”ticket”/”result”; “Landlord”/”house”/ “collect money”.

Datum Four

Landlord: ... Oga Sajent, how much you want?

Sajent: Good una get sense. Each dead body na three hundred naira. Say I come look for them, two hundred naira. (P.484)

Datum Four, Like the others, reveals Nigerian Pidgin elements as a stylistic technique in the play. The tripartite functions of pidgin expressions in the Play as observed in this study include: the production of comic relief, articulation of crucial messages and alluding. Although quite a number of pidgin corpora abound across our data, examples of such pidgin expressions in Datum Five are: “Oga”, “una” and “na” which are used in stretches. A Synthesized English, NPE (Nigerian Pidgin English), breaks “ethnic gulf” and also allows for barrier breakage between the high and the low within the society. Average Nigerians look at Nigerian Pidgin English as a recognized language in its own right, with sufficient differences in vocabulary and structure which distinguish it from Standard English. A stylistic device, Nigerian Pidgin English is also used to create humour and heighten the thematic foci of religious charlatanism in the play.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study corroborates Fowler’s [11] submission that it is a crucial thing for the stylistic analyst to focus on the surface properties of literary text as they apply to rhetoric. In the same vein, Wales [12] cited in Ayodabo [13] notes that “the goal of most stylistic studies is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic ‘causes’, where these are felt to be relevant”. The dramatic genre presupposes authorial use of diverse stylistic techniques, and this process is message-driven as every literary writer communicates central and subthemes through the agency of linguistic and extra-linguistic elements. The various stylistic devices which Ahmed Yerima employs: point of view, cohesive devices (substitutions, conjunctions, collocation, repetition, references), Nigerian Pidgin English and figures of speech interact with his thematic concerns. Therefore, the African playwright interacts with his readers through the social realities he shares with these readers. Acheoah submits that the term “Geoimplicature” captures the interpersonal function of language built around the “everydayness” of users of the language in any given geographical region. See Acheoah [14-16] for regional and stylistic variants in the language use.

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