

Style as the Man Itself: Focus on Language Strategy in Five Selected Nigerian Dramas

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Abstract:

Style as the Man Itself: Focus on Language Strategy in Five Selected Nigerian Dramas' namely Charles Okwelume's *Babel of Voices*, *Diet of Violence*, Toni Duruaku's *Cash Price*, Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Blackout* and Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy*. It also examines the playwrights' emerging trends on the stylistic peculiarities of the selected texts. The impacts focus on the linguistic tongue of these three major ethnic tribes in Nigeria (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) as reflected in the playwrights' choice of words or diction. The findings review the relevance of exposing audience to other native languages/dialects of the peoples of Nigeria. These x-ray prospects and challenges of these ethnic languages/dialects not going into extinction as envisaged. The research method leans on literary works to interpret these dramas while Stylistic approach is deployed to unraveled the intent of these works built in theoretical framework that are subjected to empiricism, criticism and writers' lenses to the society where these texts originate meant to communicate these topical issues that are controversial.

Keywords: Style, Man, Language Strategy & Selected Texts.

I. Introduction

Dan Amadi posits that (1999) one charge against the African writer is that his work is culture centred and by implication that he is a cultural entrepreneur. The reason leans on appraisal and the first creative works of Amos Tutuola and Chinua Achebe published in squinting and transliterated versions of English language by Faber in 1952 and Heinemann, 1958 (Nnaji and Nwokorie, 2019). Other cultural artifacts published in Nigeria remained irrevocable in terms of its themes, styles and writers' lenses perceived through the society.

Style originated from The Greek and Roman writers and classical scholars. Linguistic scholars are of the view that (Ebeogu, 1998) ... any discussion in the area of style was a discussion in linguistics, since individual manipulation of language, no matter the how idiosyncratic, could only be done within the ambience of the "scientific" rules guiding the operation of that language.

In the guise or context of this paper, 'Style as the Man Itself: Focus on Language Strategy in Five Selected Nigerian Dramas' namely Charles Okwelume's *Babel of Voices*, *Diet of Violence*, Toni Duruaku's *Cash Price*, Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Blackout*, and Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy*, style can be defined according to Abrams as (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1997) the manner of linguistic expression while linguistics is 'the science of a language'. Thus, style, linguistics and language cannot be divorced from literary studies especially in literary theories and criticisms. These three concepts in the scholarship of Humanities fall back to literary epoch's right from immemorial. Style itself is the chief or principal ingredient associated with most creative writers of recent or contemporary time like Achebe, Soyinka, Chaucer, Shakespeare etc.

Having defined the key concepts, it is pertinent to explain how these playwrights weave or deploy various ethnic languages / dialects in translated versions to promote and to project their whims and caprices of native customs in order to explore or to communicate their intended themes to audience in the selected or aforementioned texts. This authenticates the fact that no writer can go beyond his linguistic repertoires of his environment as internalized in most of these literary fictions under explication.

II. Methodology & Methods/Theoretical Framework

The research method is library which involves sorting out books, journals or articles, works (literature) etc on the subject matter. The paper also attempts to explain the topic under consideration using stylistic approach. Style is one of the major issues in the scholarship of writing in the centuries. It also considers diction, expertise and ingredients or what the creative writer deploys in his fiction distinct from or peculiar to other writers to attract audience or readers. That is to say, style is the man itself. This unveils the meaning of these dramas and aesthetics of ethnic languages in Nigerian cultural polity in line with its social reality conveyed in these masterpieces.

III. Discussion/Empirical Study

This leans on observation of facts and investigation of the works under discussion. It explores the significance of these dramas especially the impacts or awareness to social reality also the importance in resolving stigma attached to culture problems. In the exploratory survey of these selected dramas, attempts shall focus on stylistics or language of the texts in order to highlight how this works in pari passu (hand in glove) to buttress its usefulness or relevance in the society imbued to impact meaning.

On textual stylistics, Sanda is versed in language mastery as italicized in the structure incorporating Nigerian English which Inyang

Udofot (2000) described as 'social stratification of English'. Thus (Nwokochah 2000),

Sanda: It's better this way just enough for expenses as we proceed. If we run against a *brick wall* and *we wouldn't have* to abandon the search, then we have wasted your If I give them too much to begin with, they will think the bread (money) is without limit. For instance,

Sanda: (To Boyko) Someone old enough to be your father is talking and *you keep putting your mouth* in his. Don't mind him Sir.

There is ostentatious English variety in translated idioms below (Nwokochah, 2000):

MC: Ladies and gentlemen, I think we are about to witness something rarer than the sight of an elephant giving birth. We are about to witness the secrets of the other side of the moon. At the end of a fruitless hunt we sighed and got ready to make do with a wild tuber. When we pulled it from the hot what did we find? A whole roast antelope! And they say the age of miracle makers is gone.

MC: I am bewildered, mystified, confounded, disconcerted and discombobulated

(Cries of More! More! More! Finish the vocab! Plus applause).

MC: It is my great honour and privilege to finally declare open this engagement ceremony between the illustrious families of Chief Honourable Surveyor Kingboli, B.Sc. Cantab, Order of Merit, honorary Doctorates and chieftaincy titles too numerous to mention – and Professor Sematu, B.A., M.A., D.Sc., former Minister of Oil And Petroleum resources and Ambassador Extraordinary to many nations in his long and illustrious career. Please put your hands together for the living heads of these two families.

The variety of English used by the 'Mother of the Day' is that of Educated Yoruba English filled with idioms and humors (Nwokochah 2000):

Mother of the Day: Ehn, forgive me our elders, but it was the cockatoo who pecked too deep inside the iroko wood pursuing a worm, that is why its beak is bent till today, You see me here because that man who was here before jeered that there were no more tricks in the masquerade pouch. The masquerade said 'turn your head and look behind you'. The man turned to look but he saw nothing unusual. 'I don't see anything' he said, 'That's the trick, said the masquerade. Till today, you can encounter the man still walking about with the head turned this way. When he recovers, he will be back with us.

Mother of the Day: I don't know what is wrong with the children of this modern age. Did you see that? I have a mind to send her back to the village where she can be properly educated If you are in a hurry we are not. *If you and your hus sorry o, you see even I have caught the hurry-hurry disease.* Yes, if you and your - intended – are thinking of packing up the food and drinks to stock your new home, *you've got another think coming*

Of importance, Chinua Achebe's poetry entitled 'Misunderstanding' exposes proverbs on its "belief in the duality of things" – existence. Thus, (Nnaji P., 2019) "the words of the elders are words of wisdom." Igbo language as reflected in the works by these playwrights is meant to showcase the richness of the Nigerian culture.

There are also inclusion of Yoruba words like megad (security), konkere (sand), ewa (type of food - beans or beautiful girl), agbada (cloth), and other coinages used in Nigerian setting such as wahala (problem), bread, manure, kain kain (sound), so-o- say and the o' intonation often observed in Nigerian English compared to Standard English:

Barber: Morning – o security.

Sanda: No – o. This one na so – o – say.

No wahala.

Mother of the Day: *sorry o, you see even I have caught the hurry-hurry disease.*

There is stratification of English in terms of standard and nonstandard varieties for convenience says Udofot (Nwokochah 2000):

Barber: A quick wash and a new agbada and no one can tell the difference between the and a retired General. I tell you an agbada is the greatest leveler in the history of clothing. Of course, the material I can make all the difference but the difference does not show that much at night.

A critical outlook of the play shows that Trader, Boyko, Cyclist, Prisoner, Shop worker, Newsvendor and Passenger use non-standard variety. There is co-switching in apparent disorder according to Udofot (Nwokochah 2000):

Trader: The neighbourhood owe you plenty. Until you came here, begin organize everybody, we just dey run about like chicken wey no get head.

The varieties of English or language use and its pronunciation as Udofot highlighted are used by various levels of social class or group which show certain individuals and level of social class. For instance, Judge and Museyi 'brand' is different as educated person before taking to streets compared with Trader and Sanda as showcased in the text (Nwokochah 2000):

Judge: You will be proud to remember this moment, my friend. You have all, in many ways, contributed to the last act of my transfiguration. Here, boy.

Sprinkle it gently, then use this comb to distribute the fire dust along the strands of majesty.

Trader: The only thing wey I know understand be, how 'e get money for pay that kind hairdresser. Only proper saloon fit do that kind hairstyle.

Sanda: Does anything about the Judge still surprise you.

Trader: Oga, you think say he be actually judge before? He siddon court dey pass judgment?

Sanda: No-o. I thought you knew all about him.

Trader: No. Na so 'e dey like everybody else. Just as you come meet all of we. Nobody dey ask questions but this time, I jus' wan' know.

Sanda: He was never a judge. But he was a lawyer. And he got debarred.

Trader: De-wetin?

Sanda: Debarred. Struck off the roll of lawyers. Not allowed to practice.

Trader: Ah! Wetin 'e do?

Sanda: I have forgotten. It was a long time ago. I was just a school boy at that time.

Though Sanda did not turn out as a graduate from the university yet his experience and knowledge imbibed while in school compelled Misyi at end to marry him instead of Kingboli's son whose father is into illegal mining, looting and importation. She deliberately boycotted the wedding top class of the society in order to write off the wrongs of the rich in social ladder or mistakes in marriage or gap between the haves and have not. That is, between two, the rich and the poor masses in order to start up a fresh life free of corrupt practices.

On a critical stand, Femi Osofisan's *The Midnight Blackout* start with humor also uses The Band Leader to introduce the drama (Osofisan 1994):

Honoured guests, friends

Permit me on behalf of the one and only African SAPOMATIC Band Of which I am the humble leader (bows)

To welcome you all Tonight to the launching of our latest album, 'The Midnight Blackout!'

.... You see the whole idea for this album

Started from an anecdote

Which we happened to hear one evening

While we were playing and entertaining at the exclusive staff Club

.... It was such an interesting, SAPPYMOROUS STORY.

In flashbacks, Osofisan (1994) enacts the story of SAP in apparent repetitions and irony of the slogan, 'those who are wise ride their Benz', there is use of popular proverbs, 'seeing ... is believing' and 'obstreperous' --- is repeated four times and once in pages 28, 32, 36, 62 and 79 for emphasis. The playwright exhibits power of language and proper mastery of Igbo and Yoruba words interwoven together to express sorrow, shock and abuse. For example (Osofisan, 1994):

JUOKWU: Eziokwu! ... I'm sure the story must be going round the campus now, with all kinds of embellishments, about Professor Juokwu and his raging wife! .

'Eziokwu' in Igbo language means of a truth.

Another example is (Osofisan 1994) but ... Osebuluwa (God)! It is obstreperous! You saw us with your own eyes - Chineke! 'Osebuluwa' is a borrowed word from Onitsha dialect used by Catholics as depicted in their liturgy. It also means the same thing as 'Chineke' - (God, the Creator), an exclamation repeated in the play. 'With your own eyes' and 'Use your head' are Nigerian English described as tautologies or worn-out expressions which tame or bend English language. The Yoruba name Iyabo is given to a married woman and the use of 'ye-ye' (ridiculing) in play by Akingbade or Akubundu referring to Prof Juokwu as a stupid person in Yoruba language as seen in drama respectively.

On a critical view point, most of the characters in the play are drawn from Igbo names namely, Juokwu, Iberibe, Akubundu or Akingbade (wealth is life) and Chin Chin is derived from the first syllable of Chinwe's name. The choice of 'nchokoto' - Igbo game of indoor and outdoor of twelve holes with forty-eight seeds is properly relayed by the playwright. The word No! Mba!, is Igbo word for rejection while 'Igwekala' means Heaven is greater than earth or name of one of the gods in Igbo land, 'Ihukwalam Eshi - shi (have you seen me such trouble! My God! ---11, 'Uwa di egwu! --- (the world is terrible) are amazing words of surprises. 'Eze eluigwe' (God of Heaven), 'my wife!, She wakes up?', 'Onwum erula Chukwu nna. That is, his death is close by or nearer as shouted by Prof Juokwu when the wife discovered his tricks of luring her to sleep to chase other women. Chinwe also said that she is dead if Prof Juokwu knows about his secret letter the wife bribed her with ten naira to betray her Master. That is disgrace described as (Osofisan, 1994) 'obstreperous.'

The playwright relies on sarcasm to derive his message or theme. It is sarcastic - You, a 'professor of medicine' dealing with 'commercial services.' 'New catch' refers to new girl friend, a metaphor while others are realized in similes and repetitions. For instance, 'Like the river Niger, isn't it?' My pet! Like a cat or a little parrot! 'She pushed me off, and I turned and ran away like a madman, my heart pounding wildly in my breast ... ah such is life repeated in text respectively. It is ironical and humorous for Iberibe to continue proposing to Obioma who betrays him to marry Prof. Juokwu - 'an obstacle' as well, a friend's wife.

Cash Price (Duruaku: 1917) also started with a song. The Lyric, 'My body is the Temple' is an allusion drawn from the Bible also serves as repetitions in the text. Another example is, 'man does not live by bread alone' (1997), an allusion derived from the Bible.

These portray the didactic or moral nature of the drama imbued to impact significantly.

The playwright uses The Anchorman to instill humor and irony to his audience (Duruaku, 1997):

(Sneaking a look at the couple on stage) Well, I am the guy who knows how and where this show began. I'll bridge the play and your imagination. I'm a bridge builder; Julius Berger, you know (smiles). But I promise not to interrupt the play.

The Anchorman uses *antonomasia* (an attributes of a well known person) as figure of speech to address himself while the audience know he is not the real Julius Berger.

The dramatist relies on the repertoires of Nigerian English which are internalized in this fictive play, 'I can still smell my youth service uniform' (Duruaku 1997) and 'Of course, you've always been a woman's man' as seen in the drama. There is appropriate diction to match the situation and context using 'stealing' and yet, the meaning is understood (1997):

Marie: I'm so happy that you like them. With these, no girl stands the chance of stealing your man.

Chinwe's choice of words in Standard English demonstrates her level of academic exposure:

Chinwe: (Glares at him) Stop this farce, Obinna. Can't you understand? Leave me alone. You've been pestering me at my office. Now you have the temerity come here. Who knows how many people saw you enter here besides Marty. Please leave.

While Sunday uses non Standard English (Pidgin for the matter) to show his level of education which is humorous while page 54 is cited three times (1997):

Sunday: So I go dey for door dey watch una mahe una finish chop. Sunday no do that one o. Some time, you go buy bell ring am so that I go hear am for my room. But to come tanda for door for sake say I go see when you eat finish, na lie be that.

Sunday: Madam na message. As I dey come back from Church, I see that womanwey dey come here with big bag. (Chinwe looks up quizzically) I mean that Madam wey dey rub war paint for him face. Yes Ma. She say make you remember to keep the money for house here so that she no go come for office come take am. She say she go come before 7 o'clock for sake say her plane go commot for 9 o'clock.

Sunday: Madam say him go Church, then go see him sister. But na for the man dem begin go.

Sunday: Believe am, Sir. Since you tell me make I de observed, I see say the man dey live for one big house for 5 Independence Layout Road. Some time, na there dem dey. (pause) E fit be Madam go Church kwa! Or him sister house.

Sunday: (sighs) Madame! I no wan report you, but oga wan punish me. (Shakes his head sadly).

Sunday: Because him get money, him think say everybody go dey bow foram (he spits) Yeye man. I dey happy with the small one I dey get. See Madame say him dey go Church. Which kin Church she fit go with that talk for gospel, him no go fit sabi. (laughs derisively) All right oo!

Thus, Osofisan uses same word 'yeye' to describe a stupid or hopeless foolish man while Duruaku (1997) deploys irony as in Church 'kwa' (again) and idioms to create humor:

Jeff: (Absent-mindedly walks to a wall poster) Only smart fishes learn to keep away from generous bait (reads the inscription). "I can resist except temptation" (laugh).

Obinna: You should know her. That chic gave me quite a race at the Poly.

Refused to fall for my powerful speeches. You know her.

Here, 'chick' means a belle, beautiful girl or lady.

There are use of similes. For instance (Duruaku 1997):

Obinna: I'll drain her resources, move in like a Good Samaritan, rope her in, then explore her before I pass her to Daddy Briggs (smiles and lights a cigarette).

Obinna: Needing money is like a cancer.

Personification is also used to create humor and sober reflection (Duruaku, 1997):

Obinna: Have you ever felt the stifling demand for funds? It's terrible It keeps eating away at you; following you about like a hungry dog; you go to bed, it's bothering you; you want to rest, it's gnawing at you.

IV. Conclusion

Soyinka uses Master of Ceremonies (MC), Osofisan Band Leader, Duruaku Anchorman, while Okwelum Narrators. The playwrights also showcase these scripted dramas tapping from various ethnic languages to display their literary arsenals in order to parody the situation. There is cohesion in stylistic devices used in the dramas which showcase mastery of language by the playwrights. In summary, the language and styles exhibited by the characters diction by the playwrights' choice correlate with the level of their education and social status hence code-mixing and code-switching are allowed to any varieties. Academic exposure is one of the determinant factors of language in use or context of situation as relayed by discourse analysts is also applied in these dramas. The Non-Standard Variety type of language is serves as lingua Franca among the low educated characters. That is, language of intimacy or familiarity.

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