



RESEARCH PAPER

An Investigation of Stylistic Strategies in Wole Soyinka's *Telephone Conversation*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of present study is to investigate stylistic strategies in Wole Soyinka's poem *Telephone Conversation*. The present research is mainly based on qualitative method. It incorporates Leech and Short's *Style in Fiction* while focusing on different levels of stylistic analysis. The findings reveal that Wole Soyinka has very exquisitely employed stylistic devices at phonological level in the form of alliteration, consonance, assonance, onomatopoeia, contractions and rhyme in this poem. At morphological level, the poem contains inversion, compounding, backformation, slang and jargon. Capitalization is graphological deviation. At Lexico-semantic level the writer has employed different stylistic devices such as simile, hyperbole and hyponymy to convey deep meanings. Syntactic deviation in the form of parallelism and foregrounding play a great role. These stylistic devices contribute in conveying the overarching theme of racism. The present research is delimited to Wole Soyinka's one poem it can be further extended to his other poetical works.

KEYWORDS Style, Stylistics Devices, Artistic Expression, Racism

Introduction

The scientific study of style is termed as stylistics in linguistics. The writers play with words to make their style effective. Style of writing discerns a poet from other poets. Wole Soyinka is famous for his captivating style. He is a first Nobel Laureate Nigerian (African) poet, novelist, political activist and playwright. He was endowed with Nobel Prize in 1986 for his wonderful writings. His style of writing is very interesting and suggestive. The purpose of present research article is to investigate stylistic strategies in his poem *Telephone Conversation*. As the title of the poem suggests it is conversation between a white biased lady and black tenant. The poet artistically depicts that how he has to face offensive behavior of the white lady in a so-called developed city of London which seems to be an epitome of justice in the world. The dominant theme of the poem seems to be racism, biasness, absurdity and othering. The purpose of the present article is to bring to light that Wole Soyinka has applied symmetrically and explicitly stylistic devices and highly ornamented diction in his poem *Telephone Conversation* to put an utmost importance on racism, biasness, absurdity faced by black people in white societies even after the end of apartheid.

Literature Review

The main purpose of literature review is to review the literature related to present study. The aim is to identify the research gap and justification for the present research project.

Oladejo & Fatuase (2022) have conducted critical discourse analysis of the poem *Telephone Conversation* to bring to light the poet's aim of writing this particular poem which is hidden in connotative meanings of the diction employed by poet. This particular study also employed Searle's (1975) speech act theory along with critical discourse analysis. The findings of this research project suggest that language play an important role in building our perceptions, behaviors, actions and reactions. Few Stylistic devices have also been identified by the researchers.

Khan, Babar & Raza (2022) have examined the poem *Telephone Conversation* while applying postcolonial theory. They focus was to bring to light the phenomenon of othering, racism and stereotyping faced by black people in white dominated societies. The findings suggest that biasness towards non-western black people is still prevalent in the social contact between the colonizers and colonized.

A lot of research has been done in the domain of stylistics. But a brief look at the previous researches on Wole Soyinka's poem shows that none of them aims to investigate the above mentioned particular poem while keeping in mind the five levels presented by Leech and Short. The main objective of present research project is to analyze the poem while incorporating the five levels of stylistic analyses proposed by Leech and Short in *Style in Fiction*.

Material and Methods

The primary data for this brief research article is Wole Soyinka's poem *Telephone Conversation*. The poem has been analyzed stylistically while incorporating various levels of stylistic analysis presented by Leech and Short in the book *Style in Fiction*. The present study is based on general stylistic methods and techniques with the incorporation of Leech and Short's *Style in Fiction* (2007). Stylistic analysis is conducted because it proposes awareness about the internal patterning of the poem. In simple words, stylistics is the scientific study of style. According to Leech & Short (2007), stylistics concerns with the investigation of style for its own sake. It aims to describe the usage of language in various pieces of writings. They further proclaim that main focus in stylistic analysis is to examine the linguistic patterns in any text. It is an interesting approach of analysis that employs science of linguistics on literary texts. In stylistic analysis linguistic methods are used to interpret both literary and non-literary texts. A stylistic analysis follows different levels.

This study adopts mainly qualitative approach. But sometimes quantitative analysis is also conducted to quantify the frequency of a specific stylistic strategy. This research methodology aligns with the purpose of the research.

Results and Discussion

The stylistic analysis of the poem is conducted under the different levels such phonological deviation, graphological deviation, morphological deviation, Lexico-semantic deviation and syntactic deviation.

Deviation at Phonological Level

Another name for phonological level is Phonostylistics. As discussed in section 4 phonological level deals with the aesthetic use of sounds. This specific use of sounds acts as musical instrument of language which turns the ordinary sentences into symphonies of sound. Moreover; repetitions commit the message to the memory and keep the reader

focused. The phonological features which occur in the short story are alliteration, assonance, consonance and rhyme.

Alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of same consonant sounds at the beginning of the closely connected words. These are series of verbal drum beats which gives the lines in verse a catchy rhythm. Alliteration makes the words stick into memory.

Flight of fancy, till truthfulness changed her accent (repetition of /f/ sound)

Consonance: Consonance refers to the repetition of same consonant sounds at the beginning, middle and end of the words which are close together, creating a rhythmic or forceful effect. Here are some examples from the story.

Silence, silenced transmission of pressurized good-breeding. Voice when it came (repetition of /s/ sound)

The price seemed reasonnable, locationn (/n/ sound repeated in stressed syllables)

Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived (/n/ and /l/ sound repeated)

Off premises and nothing remained (/r / sound repeated)

Of rancid breath of public hide and speak (/r / sound repeated)

By ill-mannered silence surrender (/s / sound repeated)

You-mean like plain or milk chocollate (/l / sound repeated)

Her accent was clinical, crushing in its light (/k / sound repeated)

Down in my passsport." Silence for spectroscopsic (/s/ sound repeated)

Are peroxide blondes, Friction caused--- (/r / and /d/ sounds repeated)

My bottomm raven black-one moment madam! – sensing (/m/ sound repeated)

About my ears, "Madam", I pleded, wouldn't (/d / sound repeated)

See for yourself (/s/ sound repeated)

Assonance: Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds within words that are next to or close to each other. Assonance creates a smooth melody in sentences and adds musical quality to writings making it more engaging and appealing to the ear. Wole Soyinka has used assonance to build the tone and emotional setting of the poem.

The price seemed reasonable, location (/i: / sound repeated)

The landlady swore she lived (/I / sound repeated)

Off premises and nothing remained (/I / sound repeated)

But self-confession. 'Madam". I warned. (/ə / sound repeated)

I hate a wasted journey (/ei / sound repeated)

Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled (/ɪ/ and /əʊ / sound repeated).

Rhyme Scheme: Rhyme Scheme creates a rhythm in the writing when the ending words are identical in verse lines. The form of this poem is verse paragraph. There is 35-lines single stanza with no meter.

Contractions: Contractions refer to the sequence of sounds where two words are reduced into single one with the use of apostrophe. Contractions are frequently used in spoken discourse. But in written discourse contractions are not the norm. Wole Soyinka's use of contractions makes the conversation lively and compelling in the poem. The following are the examples of contractions in the poem. Don't once. WHAT'S once. Wouldn't once. ISN'T twice. That's once.

The aesthetic use of sounds in the form of alliteration, assonance, consonance creates a harmony and rhythm in the poem which can be felt by the readers even in the absence of rhyme scheme in the poem.

Onomatopoeia: It occurs when the sound of words resembles the sound of objects.

Omnibus squelching tar

The above statement is an example of onomatopoeia in the poem. Squelching is the rubbing sound of tires on tarred street. There is the echo of the incident occurred earlier because of uncivilized white landlady.

1) Deviation at Graphological Level

The graphological deviation occurs in the poem in terms of capitalization.

Capitalization: "HOW DARK"?.....I had not misheard "ARE YOU LIGHT"

OR VERY DARK. Button B button A. * Stench

"ARE YOU DARK OR VERY LIGHT" Revelation came

Hard on mouth piece. "WHAT'S THAT" conceding

"THAT' DARK. ISN'S IT" Not altogether.

The question poses by the white lady are in capital letters. The dark color is repeated 4 times and light color 2 times. All the time represented in capitalized form. These highlight the binary opposite of white and black. The poet dismantles that binary. Whites are considered learned and black as savage. Here the white lady acknowledges that she is unaware of and asks for information from black person. These are capitalized to put a great emphasis in the mind of the reader to suggest the trials and troubled faced by black man in Whiteman's land. Capitalization of these words illustrates the main theme of the poem which is to highlight the sick, racist and anti-black mindset of the fair-skinned. The landlady's concern should be on the behavior, ethics and economic position of the potential tenant not on his skin color. This capitalization signifies that the main concern of the landlady. Her main concern is only the black skin of the tenant regardless of his intellect and manners.

Deviation at Morphological Level

Morphological features occur in the poem in terms of inversion, compounding, clipping, backformation, borrowing, coinage, acronym, slangs and jargons.

Inversion: Inversion in morphology involves the inversion or departure of normal word order. It occurs thrice in the poem.

“Caught I was foully” instead of I was caught foully.

“Considerate she was, varying the emphasis” Instead of she was considerate.

“DON’T KNOW WHAT’S THAT IS” instead of what is that. Plus in this statement the pronoun I is deliberately omitted by the white lady. Because it is hard for white woman to acknowledge her ignorance in front of black man.

Compounding: When two or more than two free morphemes are combined then we have the phenomenon of compounding. Compounding is used 16 times in this text. Compounding is one of hallmark of African variety of English. Wole Soyinka has abundantly applied compounds in his postcolonial poem *Telephone Conversation*. Compounding is used 17 times in this specific poem. The examples of compounding in the poem are: reasonable: (reason+ able) , landlady: (land + lady), Indifferent: (in + different), self-confession: (self + confession), good-breeding: (good+ breeding) , lipstick: (lip + stick), gold-rolled: (gold +roll) , cigarette-holder: (cigarette + holder) , hide-and-speak: (hide + and + speak), double-tired: (Double + tiered), ill-mannered: (ill + mannered), dumbfounded: (dumb+ founded), wave-length: (wave + length), afterthought: (after + thought), passport: (pass + port), mouthpiece: (mouth + piece), thunderclap: (thunder + clap) .

Backformation

Backformation in morphology occurs when there is a reduction in the certain letters of words as one type of part of speech to another kind of part of speech. For example noun is change into a verb. An adjective is changed into a verb. There is one example of backformation in the poem. For instance, **locate** (location).

Slangs: Slangs are very informal words and non-standard expressions. They are not thought to be suitable for formal situations. These are considered vulgar. It occurs three times in the poem.

Foolishly, madam ---by **sitting down, has turned**

My bottom ravens black....one moment, madam,” -----sensing

Wouldn’t you rather see yourself?

These are the ending lines of the poem where poet is reflecting his anger and disgust. The tenant in is talking an offensive way and vulgar way about his bottom which has turned raven black. He is not even discussing his bottom rather he invites the white lady to have a look at these. She gets angry and puts the receiver back. Throughout the poem he tries to be well-mannered and polite. But the racist attitude of the white landlady turns him to be offensive and abusive.

Jargons: Technical terms of specific fields in morphology are discussed under the heading jargon. These occur five times in the poem. The examples are: self-confession and revelation (related to religious discourse), Sepia, tar, peroxide (related to chemistry), gold (gemology), lipstick (cosmetics), friction (related to physics). Wole Soyinka Mohsin has employed jargons from different fields of knowledge in the poem to make his style more effective.

Deviation at Lexico-Semantic Level

Deviation at Lexico-semantic level occurs in the form of lexical-items and their meanings. This level of stylistic analysis is concerned with lexical items and their meanings. At this level the purpose is to identify and examine figure of speech, diction, vocabulary items etc. Lexico-semantic features occur in the poem in the form of simile, hyponymy

Hyponymy: Hyponymy is the inclusion of words in a set. In this poem color is the hypernym and black, gold, red, brunette and sepia are hyponyms. Another example of hyponymy is related to body. Body is hypernym and palm, hand, feet and ears are hyponyms. Hyponym of skin color and body in the poem questions the metanarrative ideology related to the skin color of human body. Human beings cannot be solely termed as black, brown or white only. But each and every one is made of different skin colors depending on different parts of their body.

Hyperbole: Hyperbole is an exaggerated statement. The statement 'Palm of hand and soles of my feet are peroxide blonde' is exaggerated because the poet who has black color is stating that the palms and soles of his feet are of light color. So he has the trace of white skin color in some parts of his body.

Simile: A simile is a comparison between two things which have one feature common while using words as and like. "You mean like plain or milk chocolate". Black tenant's skin color is compared with plain or milk chocolate in this simile.

Deviation at Syntactic Level

It deals with how words group together to make phrases and sentences. The syntactic deviation in the poem occurs in the form of deautomatization and parallelism, etc. The analysis at the syntactic level unveils the prevailing tone of racism in the poem. At the beginning the tenant has used very sophisticated and polite statements. But because of the rancid racism of the white lady he becomes vulgar in the closing sentences of the poem.

Parallelisms

Parallelism as a stylistic device occurs when parts of a sentence are grammatically same or similar in construction. There can be a repetition of word, phrase or an entire sentence. Such repetition is as effective, rhythmic and compelling as repetition of sounds. **Silence, silenced** transmission of pressurized good-breeding. Voice when it came. This parallelism reflects the state of mind of white landlady at knowing the identity of tenant as black man.

Red booth. **Red** pillar-box. **Red** double tired. The repetition of **Red** reminds of the setting which is unnamed country. But red suggests it to be England. There are red booths and red and red pillar boxes. Moreover, the repetition of red creates an image of anger which is felt by the black tenant.

OR VERY DARK. **Button B button A.** * Stench. The parallelism in the form of repeating the word **button** highlights the phenomenon of dehumanization faced by black man in the lands of whites. It suggests that he has been turned into the status of a machine and he has to select which button he is. At the same time the poet mocks at such foolish question asked by white lady.

De-automatization: One of the features of foregrounding in stylistics is the de-automatization of automatic expressions. It occurs once in the poem. The phrase **hide and speak** is the deautomatization of the automatic expression **hide and seek**. This deautomatization suggests the double standards of the white people who propagate equality and humanity publically but they are still racist in their private life.

Conclusion

To conclude we can say that the poet has deliberately employed different stylistic strategies in the poem *Telephone Conversation*. There is a deliberate deviation at phonological, graphological, morphological, Lexico-semantic and syntactic level to convey deep meanings. The repetition of different devices creates harmonious effect, commits the message to the memory of the readers and keeps them focused on the overarching theme of racism in the poem. Stylistic features of the poem create a specific effect, determine the tone and highlight the overarching theme of racism and absurdity.

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