

# A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *KING BAABU*

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## Abstract

Stylistics explores the linguistic features of a text; it is primarily concerned with the use of language and its effect in a text. This study aims at analysing the stylistic features in Wole Soyinka's *King Baabu*. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as well as Stylistics are the theoretical frameworks on which this study is hinged. Particularly, this study employed the metafunctions of language in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and some stylistic tools to analyse the selected data. The Random Sampling Technique was used to select the data for analysis across the text. The Ideational and Interpersonal Functions of language as features of the metafunctions of language as well as rhetorical schemes and tropes were explored in the text via the selected and analysed data. The data for analysis were carefully selected across the play based on how important they were to the various levels of analysis carried out in the research. The findings revealed that there is frequent use of Interrogatives in the text. The interrogatives, as observed in the text, are mostly used by King Baabu (a general). The frequent use of interrogatives may be linked to the fact that the play, being in a military set up, is full of questions from senior officers requiring answers.

**Keywords:** stylistics, metaphor, simile, allusion, personification, process

## Introduction

Natural language contains systematic variations at all levels of its structure such as phonology, morphology, lexicology and syntax. These variations offer the widest possibilities of language to be used to fulfil different communicative functions in various contexts. Stylistics is a branch of linguistics which deals with expressive resources and

functional styles of a language. Expressive means of a language are those phonetic, lexical, morphological and syntactic units and forms which make speech emphatic. Expressive means introduce connotational (stylistic, non-denotative) meanings into utterances. This implies that certain language units bear stylistic markers as they appear in particular contexts of human linguistic interaction (Plett 1977 cited in Wales 2001, p.143).

### Concept of Stylistics

Michael Toolan defines stylistics as, “the study of the language in literature” (1996: viii). It is basically concerned with the understanding of technique or the craft of writing. A stylistician brings to close examination the linguistic particularities of a literary work, an understanding of the anatomy and functions of the language (Toolan ix). Ofuani and Longe see it as “solely concerned with the investigation of the artistry of language usage in literature” (1996, p.359). Ndimele (2001, p.15) defines stylistics as “a branch of linguistics which studies the application of linguistics to the study of literature”.

Stylistics is part of applied linguistics and not a core branch. It is a method of practical criticism to help explain intuitive reader responses to a work of literature without any criticism of ‘badness’ or ‘goodness’ of the writing (Asher and Simpson 4378). To Philip Anagbogu et al., stylistics is, “the application of the knowledge of linguistics to literary appreciation”. (2010, p.33).

Leech (2008, p.1) defines it as, “the linguistic study of literary texts”. Enkvist (1973, p.11) regards it as discipline “concerned with the theory and analysis of style”. But these definitions are too eclectic. Leech and Short (2007, p.11) see it as “the linguistic study of style” or “the study of language as used in literary texts, with the aim of relating it to its artistic functions”. Finally, Welleck and Warren (1977, p.176) opine that, “linguistic study becomes literary only when it serves the study of literature, when it aims at investigating the aesthetic effect of language” (Eyoh 2005, p.29).

According to Crystal and Davy (1974), there are four different ways in which style can be defined. The term may be used to mean a selection of language habits, the occasional linguistic quirks that characterizes a person's individuality. It could be used to refer to the language habits a group of people have in common. When used to refer to the effectiveness of a mode of expression, style is sometimes given a restricted meaning. This is often the case when value judgments are made on the effect on the reader or audience.

Literature is a field par excellence for stylistics. So, stylistics is a bridge science creating a bond between linguistics and literature (Akwanya 2004, p.163). In other words, it synergizes the boundary between linguistics and literature; ensuring their interdependence. This is because “a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconvertant with linguistic method are equally flagrant anachronisms” as opined by Jakobson in Onwukwe (2009: i).

Onwukwe (2009) further condemns the separation of literature from language as students are made to specialize in either of them. According to her, it is impossible for one to specialize in literature without being competent in the language in which the literature is written. Conversely, the mastery of the various levels of linguistics – phonetics/phonology, syntax, semantics and morphology – would be unnecessary if the person cannot make creative use of the levels of linguistics mastered. Hence, stylistics comes to create a symbiotic relationship between language and literature so as to be competent in both.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Halliday takes a “trinocular perspective” on the function of human language. In other words, language is a multifunctional construct consisting of three metafunctional lines of meaning. They are: the ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and the textual metafunction, respectively (Halliday 29-30).

The ideational function of language is related to the communication and interlinking of ideas. It can be broken down into the experiential and logical functions. In experiential function, the speaker expresses the elements of his/her speech in ways that communicate his/her ideas. The speaker refers to people, objects, actions, events, states, features and qualities, and relationships of location, time, manner, reason, and so on. Within the experiential component of the grammar these are grouped and accounted for under the headings of participant / participating entity (relating to people, objects and abstractions - typically nominal), process (actions, events and states - typically verbal), attribute (features and qualities - typically adjectival), and circumstance (relationships of location, time, manner, reason, etc. - typically adverbial). The role relationships between the participants and the process would also be specified. The logical function relates the prepositional ideas and elements of these ideas to each other on an equal or subordinate basis. It thus encompasses relationships of coordination, subordination, apposition and modification.

The second function of language is the interpersonal one. Language enacts our personal and social relationships with other people around us because man is a gregarious and social animal. This function is both instrumental interaction and informational interaction. With respect to instrumental interaction, language may be used to influence the behaviour of others in order to get things done. It accounts for the fact that through the use of their chosen 'illocutionary force', people issue commands, make requests and put forward suggestions to direct people's actions/behaviour; they offer goods to the addressee, offer to perform a service for him or her; and they express their will/wishes. With informational interaction, people give or seek (content/factual) information. They make statements to impart information and ask questions to seek information; they utter exclamations (incorporating some content element) by way of reactive comment (Halliday 2004, p 29-30).

Lastly, language plays a textual function. This textual function organizes the language in a textual corpus in such a way as to give it narrative coherence and message cohesion. Halliday describes this as the one whereby language serves as a means to create texts as opposed to merely isolated and disconnected sentences. It is the function which organizes a text as units of information and to avoid unwanted redundancy. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), there are four ways in which cohesion is achieved in English language: reference, ellipsis and substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

The Hallidayan model, from what we have discussed so far, is appropriate for this work because it is based on linguistic analysis of discourse or text; making choices from the vast resources of language to create and express meaning as well as spotlighting the different contexts and functions language perform. We shall see the effectiveness of this theory in the analysis of Soyinka's *King Baabu*.

## Textual Analysis

### Ideational Metafunctions

#### A. Existential Processes

1. *I have a family.* (pg. 52, act 2, scene 1)  
 Actor = I  
 Process = have  
 Goal = a family
  
2. *The General is ready to see comrade Rout.* (pg. 25, act 1, scene 3)  
 Actor = The General  
 Process = is ready to see  
 Goal = comrade Rout

In the above examples of existential processes, datum 1 has the 'to have' verb as the process. The 'have' verb is used with the first person pronoun 'I', the second persons pronoun 'you' and with the third person plural pronoun 'they' in the present tense. However, the verb

'have' as used in the datum 1 is used with the first person pronoun 'I'. In datum 2, 'is' which is a form of to be verb is used. Verb 'is' can be used either as a main verb or an auxiliary verb. As a main verb, it is used to show the state of being of the noun while as an auxiliary verb; it is used with the main verb to show action. In datum 2 however, the verb 'is' is used as an auxiliary verb in the present tense.

### **B. Material Processes: processes of doing**

1. *He's waving at us.* (pg. 71, act 2, scene 3)

Actor = He

Process: is waving

Phenomenon = us

2. *He followed you here.* (pg. 90, act 2, scene 5)

Actor = He

Process: followed

Phenomenon = you

In datum 1, the process 'is waving' is a combination of the to be verb 'is', used as an auxiliary verb, with the action verb 'waive' in the progressive tense. The verb structure is also a transitive verb because it is being followed by an object which receives the action of the verb.

In datum 2, the process 'followed' is the past form of the verb 'follow'. Here again, the verb is a transitive verb which is followed by an object receiving the action of 'follow'.

### **C. Relational Processes: processes of being**

1. *The Army's no good.* (pg.42, act 1, scene 5)

Possessive = the Army's no good.

2. *He was so funny.* (pg. 83, act 2, scene 4)

Possessive = he was so funny

In the relational processes, the possessive is used. The above examples as extracted from the text show that an entity possesses a character which can be attributed to him or her. In datum 1, 'no good' is attributed to 'the Army'. Soyinka uses this to show that clause structures can be attributive.

#### D. Behavioural Processes

1. *He's waiting right here.* (pg.26, act 1, scene 3)  
 Behaver = He  
 Process = is waiting here
  
2. *I looked everywhere.* (pg.36, act 1, scene 5)  
 Behaver = I  
 Process = looked everywhere

The behavioural processes, as exemplified by Soyinka, show that the clause structure accommodates intransitivity. Soyinka uses this intransitivity of a clause in datum 1 and 2 above to show that it is not all clause structures that must carry a transitive verb. For instance, the verb structure 'is waiting' in datum 1 plays the role of an intransitive verb as it is not followed by an object. Consequently, in datum 2, the verb 'looked' is an intransitive verb, as it is not followed by an object but an adverb.

The use of these types of clauses by Soyinka shows that he is not a boring writer who just conforms to only a type of clause structure; but employs different clause types in his writing to show his prowess in the use of English. From the explanation above, it can be convincingly said that the transitivity system can effectively analyse clauses.

#### The Interpersonal Metafunction

The interpersonal function mirrors the tenor parameter of register and is evidenced in two main ways: through verbal interaction and exchanges with others and through personal mediation (Morley

2010). Morley (2010) further states that the interpersonal metafunction includes: instrumental interaction and informational interaction.

### **Instrumental interaction**

With respect to instrumental interaction, language may be used to seek to influence the behaviour of others in order to get things done. It accounts for the fact that through the use of their chosen 'illocutionary force, people issue commands, make requests and put forward suggestions to direct people's actions/behaviour; they offer goods to the addressee, offer to perform a service for him or her; and they express their will/wishes (Morley 2010, p.13). Some of the manifestations of this function in the text are illustrated below.

#### **(a) The Imperative Sentence:**

Some examples from the text include:

1. *You must beware woman.* (pg. 58, act 2, scene 2)
2. *Oh, shut up.* (pg. 79, act 2, scene 4)
3. *Take him away.* (pg. 94, act 2, scene 5)

There is an intentional use of imperative sentences by the playwright in the play. This is because the military domain is portrayed in the play. Imperatives are used to give clear and straight forward instructions. An example is datum 2 where Oriental instructs King Baabu to beware of women if he must have a smooth reign as king. Also, imperatives are used to give commands as seen in data 2 and 3.

#### **(b) Requests**

Some examples from the text include:

1. *Will you please leave everything in our hands?* (pg., 29, act 1, scene 3)
2. *Will you please let his majesty do his own thinking?*(pg. 62, act 2, scene 2)

Examples of requests listed above are indications of when the play shifts from Military to democratic environments. These requests are made when Baasha Bash becomes 'King'. This use of requests by him is opposed to his personality as a military general.



(c) **Suggestions:** these are ideas or plans put forward for consideration (Stevenson and Waite 2011, p.1442).

1. *I propose we begin with the public sector.* (pg. 13, act 1, scene 2)
2. *Please, I hope that you will agree that this is no time for coyness.* (pg. 28, act one, scene 3)
3. *Your Excellency, I think it is now time to show yourself to the people.* (pg. 39, act one, scene 5)

Just like request as outlined earlier, suggestions in the play indicate shifts in the play from military to democratic environments. This also is an indication that it is in the democratic system of government that suggestions are allowed.

### **Informational interaction**

With informational interaction, people give or seek (content/factual) information. They make statements to impart information and ask questions to seek information; they utter exclamations (incorporating some content element) by way of reactive comment (Morley 2010:13). Examples of informational interaction in the text include:

#### **(a) Declarative Sentence**

Some examples from the text include:

1. *I no doing anything.* (pg. 9, act 1, scene 1)
2. *An audit never hurt any organization.* (pg. 18, act 1, scene 2)
3. *Your husband has our support... He clearly has the welfare of the people in mind.* (pg. 28. Act 1, scene 3)

The declarative sentences listed above are predominantly used in the play when General Basha decides to move from military to democratic rule. This is in contrast to how Basha spoke when he was a serving military general. This informs the reader that the military register is different from that of democracy.

#### **(b) The Interrogative Sentence**

Some examples in the text include:

1. *Early in the morning what for?* (pg. 5, act 1, scene 1)
2. *How many coup-pies have you had a finger in?* (pg. 8, act 1, scene 1)
3. *Did you call me madam?* (pg. 10, act 1, scene 1)
4. *So what are we in the army contributing to your effort, General?* (pg., 15, act 1, scene 2)

The interrogative sentences listed above expose the play as that which portrays the military domain. Most of General Basha's speeches are full of interrogations. Even when he becomes 'king', he cannot consciously do away with interrogations in his speeches. This shows how he has gotten used to the use of interrogation as a military general.

### (c) The Exclamatory Sentence

Some examples from the text are:

1. *What a moron!* (pg. 18, act 1, scene 2)
2. *Consultations over mere rumours!* (pg. 33, act 1, scene 5)

As exemplified, exclamatory sentences in the play are used by Basha's wife, Maariya. She uses the exclamatory sentences to express her pain and surprise at how her husband and some of his junior officers and followers act on both relevant and irrelevant issues.

Rhetorical Schemes and Tropes

Tropes are figures of speech that involve a deviation from the expected and literal meaning. While Schemes are figures of speech that involve a deviation from the typical mechanics of a sentence, such as the order, pattern or arrangement of words (Florman B. 2017. Web).

### Metaphor

Some examples in the text include:

1. *...you goat-fucker from the winds of wilderness* (pg. 6 Act 1, Scene1)

The above expression is used to show how Basha is contented with just anything he gets, so long as he is able to fend for himself.

2. ....He`s barricaded himself in there with his family, plus all the heavy loot from oil royalties. (pg. 7 Act 1, Scene 1)

The expression 'the heavy loot from oil royalties' shows how Basha enriched himself with the resources gotten from the natural resources in the land.

3. *Democratic virus* (pg. 12 Act 1, Scene 2)

The phrase above is a metaphor that compares leadership operation to the deadly virus. A virus like HIV is incurable. Comparing democracy to virus disease is implying the decadence in the political structure the play-text satirizes.

### Repetition

1. *The people are angry, very angry* (pg. 18 Act 1, Scene 2)

The repetition of 'angry' lays emphasis on how angry the people are and this also brings musicality to the play.

### Allusion

1. *To the winds of wilderness whence forth thou comest* (pg. 8 Act 1, Scene 2)
2. *Render to Caesar what is Caesar`s and unto God what is God`s.* (13 Act One, Scene Two)

The first expression above is a reference to the Bible in Mathew 22:20-22. This statement is rendered by King Baabu when he wants to milk the banks of their hard earned money. He also uses the statement to justify the fact that he is at the elms of affair at that time and the people must do his bidding.

### Simile

Some examples in the text include:

1. *but why you dress yourself like a prize cow on show at agricultural fair?* (pg. 40, act 1, scene 5)

2. *Does a jig, spreading out his agbada like a peacock's tail.* (pg. 43, act 1, scene 5)

In the examples above, datum 1 compares Basha's dressing to that of a cow on agricultural fair. Indeed, Basha was dressed in different attires simultaneously. His reason being that, he wanted to show the people that he cares for them all at the same time without prioritising one above the other. Also in datum 2, Basha's dance step is being compared to when a peacock spreads its tail. This implies that he does not know how to dance.

### Personification

1. *Problem is parade grounds also not fertile* (pg. 17 act 1 scene 2)  
Fertility in the above expression is a quality of human being that is used to characterise how bad the parade ground is. Therefore not suitable for cultivation.
1. *Democracy is about to be midwifed by military* (pg. 18 Act 1, scene 2)

This implies that democracy is about to be overtaken by military juntas. Midwife is a catalyst in a birth process. Therefore, the work of midwifery is only capable of being performed by humans.

The above examples of rhetorical tropes and scheme are important to the ongoing study because they support our claim that stylistics is the meeting point of linguistics and literature. The importance of the tropes and schemes therefore is that they give literariness to the text. They also make the sentence deeper and leave the reader with the sense of wonder. They also bring life to the words used by the writer. Lastly, they enhance the reader's idiosyncratic uniqueness.

### Conclusion

This research has examined the use of language in Soyinka's *King Baabu*. The study shows that Soyinka ingeniously employs diverse characters and several narrative techniques e.g. Basha (King Baabu),

Maariya, Tikim, Potipoo, and the likes to comment on burning societal issues as regards the military, coups and counter coups and the effect of an unsuccessful coup. Soyinka in the play *King Baabu* employs the use of different stylistic elements under the Metafunctions of Language such as; Ideational Function - Experiential Function and Logical Function, Interpersonal Function - Instrumental Interaction and Informational Interaction and Textual Function - Grammatical Cohesion and Lexical Cohesion. This has shown that stylistics is actually a tool to be used to enhance our understanding of the use of language whether literary or non-literary.

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