

A LEXICO-SEMANTIC READING OF ROSEMARY EDE'S AVARICE AT DUSK.

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ABSTRACT: *Rosemary Ede's debut play has, so far, not been subjected to intensive and extensive critical examination, particularly from a linguistic standpoint, to show how a new generation playwright has responded to and interpreted the onerous challenges of her postcolonial African society through the instrumentality or facility of language. with M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional grammar as the theoretical template, this study, therefore, investigates the lexico-semantic devices such as local signifiers (i.e. native proverbs and idioms, code-mixing and code-switching), figurations (i.e. simile, metaphor, alliteration), lexical repetition, and lexical relations (i.e. synonymy and antonymy), which have been deployed by the author to transmit or reinforce textual meaning and achieve aesthetic beauty. The study adumbrates the fact that the making of a literary text is a conscious artistic activity, since writers make deliberate linguistic choices from the vast range of options available to them to appropriately and effectively convey their visions and achieve requisite stylistic effects, in relation to social context or discourse situation.*

KEYWORDS: Lexico-Semantic, Rosemary Ede, Avarice at Dusk, Systemic Functional Grammar, African Literary Discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Language subsumes the symbols and sounds which are combined in various ways for the purpose of human communication, interaction or socialization, either in spoken or written form and is usually broken down into distinctive areas, broadly speaking, for elaborate analytical discourse or study which include the following: phonology (sound system), morphology (internal structure and formation of words), lexis (organization of words and word relations), semantics (meaning of words and utterances) and syntax (sentence formation). The critical fact is that language is very crucial not only for the transmission of messages in the day-to-day interaction of human beings but also in oral or written literature which covers or encapsulates the socio-cultural and artistic visions and viewpoints of creative writers. Hence Leech (1996:36), for instance, defines the concept as

*...an arbitrary system of conventional spoken
or written symbols by means of which human
beings as members of a social group and
participants in its culture communicate.*

What is particularly relevant or useful in the foregoing viewpoint is that it sees language both as a convention and as a socially defined or constructed communicative phenomenon. This

infers that language is both a communicative and socializing agent and tool. Finnocchiari (1964:8) also amplifies the sociological and anthropological content or component of language when he defined the concept as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture, to communicate or interact.”

Essentially, in the study of how a particular writer, such as Ede, has deployed language to negotiate the meaning of a text, it is absolutely necessary to delineate the aspect(s) of language within modern descriptive linguistics (as we have outlined above) which the scholar focuses on. This is because, as Alo(1995:13) observes, “language is a complex phenomenon and to be studied effectively, it is broken down into major levels or areas.” The implication of this thesis is that lexis and semantics, which constitute the heart or fulcrum of the present study, are distinctive aspects of language study which can be deployed by writers and speakers, along with other areas, for social and communicative purposes. Lexis refers to the word-stock of a language that services human speech and writing. Howard and Etienne (2000) describe the concept as the stock of words in a given language. Akande (2005) see it as the totality of the vocabulary or word stock of a language. The critical fact that ensues from these definitions is that lexical items are meaningful units that are combined by writers and speakers to form the phrases and sentences with which they communicate. This means that writers and speakers must combine words into meaningful sentences to pass across textual messages or propositions. The term is, thus, very clear and unambiguous, unlike its synonym ‘lexicon’ and covers such areas as synonyms, collocations, idioms, registers, phrasal verbs, loan words, lexical transfers or borrowings, neologisms and coinages, parts of speech, and even figurative language. Semantics, on the other hand, deals with all forms or shapes of meaning in language i.e. word meaning, sentence meaning, utterance meaning, contextual meaning, social meaning, denotative meaning, connotative meaning, etc. It is, therefore, implied in its scope that meaning permeates the entire gamut or fabric of language and communication. Significantly, to be able to deliver meaning, a writer or speaker must deploy lexical items, as the two concepts (i.e. lexis and meaning) are mutually intertwined or inseparable. Hence Alo(1995) observes that as a level of language study, lexis seeks to elucidate how words mean and how they interact with one another meaningfully. Though meaning production is essentially through the verbal system, which provides the communicative framework among human beings, the concept, broadly speaking, extends to all elements or symbols that are used for communication, that is, both verbal and non-verbal signifiers. The overt implication of this fact is that pragmatic semantics is essentially concerned with the meaning element in any context that has referential and cognitive value.

The concepts of style and stylistics are also central to a study of the language of a particular literary text such as Ede’s *Avarice at Dusk*, in the sense that it is an exploration of language variation in two critical ways. Firstly, the language of literature, broadly speaking, is distinguished by its figurative mode, in terms of being functional (i.e. passing across particular messages) and aesthetic (i.e. beauty in form) to catch the attention of readers. Hence Leech and Short (1981) observe that the language of literature is quite distinct and peculiar in the sense that it is a combination of aesthetics and functionality. Secondly, a particular writer’s style is also distinct and recognizable against the backdrop that each individual writer places a linguistic stamp on his/her works by wittingly or unwittingly deploying preferred or favoured lexical patterns, grammatical structures or modes of meaning making, etc. in a frequent and recurrent manner, to the extent that it becomes the manifest or demonstrable linguistic trait or idiosyncrasy of such a writer. This contention explains why Crystal and Derek (1969) see the

concept of style as the language habits of a given writer. Miller and Currie (1970) add that it is the linguistic techniques with which a given writer presents or transmits his vision of the world to his readers. The individualistic and contextual tendency of arts or style is also eloquent in Osundare's(2008:6) postulate that "all art communicates, but not with equal urgency or promptitude, not in the same style". In a nutshell, the concept of style can be reduced to a matter of idiolect, as it essentially reflects the peculiarities or characteristics of an individual's use of language in a given context which, as we have already noted, can be used to distinguish one writer from another. Stylistics, on the other hand, "investigates how the resources of language are put to use in the production of actual messages" (Widdowson, 1996:138). Simpson (1997) sees it as a method of applied language study which uses textual analysis to make discoveries about the structure and function of language. It is a branch of general linguistics which applies the techniques, insights and principles of textual analysis to describe, evaluate and make informed discoveries about language choices made by individuals and writers to communicate and socialize. The critical point in a study of this nature is that stylistics describes and assesses the mode of communication of a given writer in a particular text as distinguishable from the way another writer communicates or the same writer communicates in another text. As a result of its peculiar mode, (which we have highlighted), however, literary stylistics has the added goal of showing the nexus or connection between functionality and aesthetics in a writer's use of language in a given context. Hence Leech and Short (1969:123) define the concept as the linguistic study of style with the goal of explaining the relationship between language and artistic function. Mullany and Stockwell(2010:47) also hint at this nexus or interface when they posited that "Stylistics is both a form of literary criticism and a form of applied linguistics, and is at its best and most successful when these can be combined seamlessly".

As an African writer, Ede's work, broadly speaking, also exudes significant traits of what can be described as the peculiar complexion or nuances of language and style in Africa literature. This literature generally refers to the creative writing by Africans, or non-Africans, which reflects African socio-cultural experiences, viewpoint, sensibilities, mores, values, philosophies, norms, customs, traditions, linguistic predilections, etc, and which are communicated in any language, including imperialist languages such as English, Portuguese, French, etc. According to Gordiner (1970), African writing entails any forms of literary works by Africans, or by a writer of any other continent or colour who shares with Africans the experience of the African socio-cultural and historical environment, both mentally and spiritually. Essentially, every literature springs from a given environment; every writer gets his raw materials or tools(which traverse the physical, cultural, social and spiritual) from a particular geographical or social setting or space. Thus, language and style in African literature, as in any literature of other continents, is steeped in the peculiar African socio-political moorings, histories, experiences and traditions. Mainly as a corollary of colonialism, the literatures of African countries are expressed in imperialist languages, even though inherent features of Africa oral tradition, proverbs, mythology, etc, dot, and even saturate, the works. Since the focus of this study is on a drama text, it is expedient to underscore or foreground the fact that African drama, particularly, uses a surfeit of religious ritual, mime, myth, custom, the folk narrative technique, songs, dance, etc, which reflect the totality and essence of African performance repertoire. Ahwefeada (2001:286) adumbrates this fact inter alia:

It is imperative to note that of all the three major genres of literature; drama, prose and poetry, it is in drama that the appropriation of the appurtenances of folklore is most

palpable. This is so because drama best approximates true

life experience in its representation of human existence.

The scholar (ibid) further observes specifically that Nigerian dramaturgy is prodigiously indebted to folklore as Nigerian playwrights, starting from James EneHenshaw who published *This is Our Chance* in 1954, have continued to "... explore and appropriate the rich resources and motifs that are residual in the mine of folklore..." Alo (1998) has summarized or aggregated the various ways in which the language and style of African literature in colonial languages can be adapted to the nuances of African languages which are approximated or contextualized by individual authors to add local colour to their texts viz: coinages, borrowings, the use of native similes and metaphors, native rhetorical patterns, native proverbs, idioms, culturally dependent speech forms and syntactic modes, deviation, code-switching and code-mixing, transliteration, etc.

Against the foregoing background, it is crystal clear that the present study shows how a given African writer has deployed the potentials of lexis and semantics, as veritable components of language, to capture her socio-cultural environment in her debut play *Avarice at Dusk*. Quite apparently, as a new work and writer, Ede's text suffers a dire dearth of critical insights and comments, particularly from a linguistic standpoint. The present study fills this gap and ultimately serves as a basis for the effective comprehension and interpretation not only of Ede's text, but of African literary discourse in general.

Theoretical Foundation

Over the years, scholars have propounded various theories to explicate the phenomenon of linguistic style in literary texts. The Russian Formalists and the Prague school of the 1920s, for instance, emphasized the aspect of linguistic foregrounding in literary style (Hawkes, 1977; Bennett, 1979; Lemon and Reis, 1965). The structuralists of the 1960's also stressed the importance of language in foregrounding the style of a given author (see Hawkes, 1977; Culler, 1975). These schools of language study contend that linguistic formalism highlights the poetic nature of literary language which is distinct from "ordinary" or "scientific" language. Noam Chomsky's (1957) Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) is also interested in the form of language use, rather than functional dimensions. This theory is particularly interested in language variation and the departures from or violation of linguistic norms by literary scribblers as a device for stylistic foregrounding. Transformational Generative Grammar also focuses on the concepts of deep and surface structures, suggesting that the meaning of surface linguistic constructs lies in the deep structure.

Systemic Functional Grammar, which provides the theoretical framework for the present study, is subsumed within functional linguistics and revolves around the works of J. R. Firth. It focuses on style i.e. the varying forms of linguistic performance by speakers and writers. This implies that it does not only focus on the structure of language, but also on the properties of discourse and its functions in specific social and cultural situations. In Systemic Functional Grammar, language structure is analyzed along grammatical, phonological, lexical and semantic lines. Language function, on the other hand, is examined from three angles viz: ideational, interpersonal and textual. These are called the metafunctions of language which we adopted as the analytical model for the present study. The ideational metafunction refers to the field of discourse; the interpersonal, the tenor of discourse; the textual, the internal organization and communicative nature of a text. M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SGF)

is particularly germane to the present study because, the semantics implications of lexical choices in a text belong to the functional dimension of language use. The choice of this model is thus justified by the very high priority it gives to the sociological aspect of language (Berry, 1975:22), as opposed to Chomsky's mentalistic or psychological transformational grammar. Hence Bright (1992:120) explains that, the model accommodates the various "ways in which language is integrated with aspects of human society" in the sense that it highlights the role contextual or socio-cultural variables play in determining the meaning a text.

Brief Biography of the Author

As we have earlier indicated, Rosemary Ede is an emergent writer from Bayelsa State, in the heart of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Born October 7, 1984, she attended Government Secondary School, Kpor, Gokana, Rivers State of Nigeria between 1999 and 2000 for her Senior Secondary School Certificate, before proceeding to the Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, for a B.A. (Hons) degree in English and literary studies and the University of Calabar, for an M.A. in English. Ede has been a teacher and journalist.

Synopsis of the Text

Ede's *Avariceat Dusk* is a creative documentation of human selfishness, greed and wickedness in the face of a struggle for self-determination and control of natural resources by the Niger Delta people of Nigeria. It foregrounds the internal problems of management and prudent allocation of resources that are bound to arise in the Niger Delta when or if the clamour for resource control eventually yields the desired results.

The victory "Woyengi" (God) has won for the people in the play, by restoring their palm tree plantation, depicts the victory of the people over their oppressors who hitherto controlled their God-given resources through government policies and laws that deprived them of their heritage. Having achieved this 'victory', it is now incumbent on the people to determine how these resources are to be utilized to the ultimate benefit of the masses. However, Chief Peletu succeeds in manipulating the society or citizenry by suggesting that a committee made up of imbeciles, selfish and irresponsible persons (i.e. Ebisondo, Chief Pereowei, Ogbodobiri, Tombara) be constituted to handle the sensitive job of transacting business with the plantation (the natural resources) on behalf of the society and using the proceeds to embark on a massive development of the society. There is no gainsaying the fact that Chief Peretu only uses this committee, which he actually heads, as a conduit pipe to siphon a good chunk of the money for his own personal comfort, aggrandizement and enjoyment. The Chief is actually a replica of the character, values and mundane priorities of postcolonial African rulers. Through the opposition of Akpotu (a side-lined member of the committee), who is eventually killed, the youth of the community (Kpokopoama) are pitted against chief Peretu and his cohorts. The intrigues and conflict reach their summit when the youth turn violent and militant in a bid to free the society from the grips of these evil men who have by now become stupendously and dangerously rich. They eventually succeed in capturing and sentencing them.

This is certainly a story of human wickedness and selfishness which inherently stunt societal growth. It throws dire light on the other side of resource control and suggests that the eventual victory of the oppressed vis-a-vis resources control should not be seen the end of the struggle, as other intractable issues that border on human foibles are bound to arise. In other words, the achievement of resource control should not make the true militants or genuine patriots to go to sleep, or be complacent, as there is a greater and more urgent need to install a responsible and

astute and visionary leadership who would manage the resources prudently and productively for the betterment of society. In all, the eventual arrest and sentencing of Chief Peretu and his committee of evil men show that, inspite of the physical, psychological and emotional turmoil and devastation the people were subjected to, occasioned by avoidable waste, desolation and death, and familial and communal bonds going awry, good must ultimately triumph over evil in human affairs.

Textual Analysis

In this section, we shall focus on significant lexico-semantic elements the author has deployed in the text to pass across textual messages and achieve aesthetic purposes. In other words, the concern of this section is to randomly select and highlight aspects of lexis and meaning which the author has used to foreground messages and her artistic vision, under appropriate sub-headings. However, it must be noted from the outset that, in terms of the analysis of lexemes in relation to their semantic implications in the given sociolinguistic contexts, which is the focus of this section, we shall be guided by Halliday's (1966:159) view that lexical items can be 'simple' 'compound' and 'phrasal, according to how they constitute units of meaning. As Carter and McCarthy (1988) put it, multi-word units behave largely like single words for the purposes of examining meaning relations in the lexicon.

Use of Local Semantic Signifiers

As we have indicated in the introductory section, African writers generally use local idioms or proverbs, lexical transfers from the L₁ to the L₂, native rhetorical or syntactic patterns, code-mixing or code-switching, local pantheon, etc, to contextualize aspects of indigenous meaning and reflect local colour in their works. In the main, writers such as Achebe, Okara, Ola Rotimi and J.P Clark-Bekederemo use such local devices or lexical choices to foreground local experiences or phenomena and contextualize aspects of indigenous socio-cultural meaning in their texts to. In Ede's text, these elements are found to be a dominant and pervading aspect of the author's style. In fact, the degree of deployment of source language or L₁ features is so high that one can conveniently say that Ede's debut play is written in Ijaw and English. Code-mixing and code-switching, for instance, is a veritable aspect of the rhetoric or speech pattern of the text. This is a situation where lexical choices in the local or L₁ code are used in the L₂ text. While code-mixing deals with the deliberate deployment of one or two L₁ words in an L₂ sentence, code-switching deals with an outright change of code to either the L₁ or L₂, as the case may be. The significant point here is that, in both instances (i.e. code-switching and code-mixing), we are dealing with a situation which involves mixing two or more languages in speech. Hence Hudson (2001:55) observes that it is", the inevitable consequence of bilingualism." This scholar(2001:51) adds that "to get the right effect the speakers balance the two languages against each other as a kind of cocktail – a few words of one language, then a few words of the other, then back to the first for a few more words and so on". As we have already pointed out, this is virtually to foreground cultural realities or phenomena or to achieve some stylistic effect on the consciousness of readers who may or may not be conversant with these lexical choices, as we find in the following textual instances:

- i. First of all, I thank Wonyengi, our great mother for this awesome victory. (p.3)
- ii. M-o-n, You are very correct. (p.6)
- iii. Dolodolooo! Chief Peletu, the young man has not said anything abominable to warrant your curse. (p.8)
- iv. E-bi-do! Peletu and Eriza, I say enough! (p.10)

- v. He is cleaning up fishes he just caught from the river, he sits facing his mother who is pounding fufu in a mortar. (p.15)
- vi. Te-ki? What is it? (p.23)
- vii. In-yo, tubaki Ogboodangimiyo? (p.12)
- viii. Peletu bi seiteme (p.16)
- ix. Ine binaotu, that was how it happened (p.35)

The foregoing illustrative examples from the text show clearly that code-mixing and code-switching add local colour to a text. Ede has virtually used this device to establish her L₁ identity and also to foreground the setting of the text, which is unambiguously the Ijaw area of the Niger Delta. Trask(1995:85) has drawn our attention to the fact that language is a very powerful means of declaring and maintain one's identity", particularly in a bicultural or cross-cultural context. Hence, as Adejare(1992:192) observes, the presentation of African speech form in literature in English is a common feature of the works of several African writers in English.... Traces of matter tongues are most pronounced in the works of Nigerian writers. Interestingly, the author explains some choices through apposition and also provides a glossary at the end of the text to help with the L₁ lexical choices. 'Wongengi' in item (i) refers to the creatrix God or the almighty God. In Izon cosmology, God is seen as a woman. Thus, this cosmological reality is established in this text by the author's choice of lexeme which is a direct transfer of the L1 item. In (ii) above, M-o-n means 'yes', which is followed by the emphatic apposition "You are correct". Item (iii) means "take it easy" while item (iv) means "it is enough"! What is fundamentally clear in all the instances of the use of this device in Ede's text is that, it is used to encode, capture or reinforce aspects of cultural meaning which gives the text a peculiar Izon flavor and thus, consolidates its thematic roots in the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

Another aspect of L1 one features deployed in the text which is a significant style marker is local idioms or proverbs. These are short and witty or wise sayings of the local speech communities. They are popular and pictorial or imagistic expressions which are used to establish, make explicit, explicate, underscore or reinforce a moral truth. In the text, Ede uses the device copiously to reinforce aspects of cultural meaning and also to give the text some local flavour. We shall examine a few instances of the use of the device and outline its semantic impact or implication in specific contexts in the text, for the purpose of illustration:

- (i) One does not go to sleep when one's house is on fire (p.4). This means that if one is confronted with a problem, one does not rest or relax until it is solved. What this implies in the context is that the people of Kpokpoama must deliberate on how to manage the resources of the land, because it is a burning issue, so to speak. In other words, this is a problem that the people must solve as a matter of utmost urgency and commitment.
- (ii) Not a hard nut to crack (p.13). This means that it is not a difficult and insurmountable problem. In the textual context, Chief Peletu says that the issue of selecting the leadership of the kpokpoama Development Committee was easy, as he would personally head it.
- (iii) Chief, they brought this water to wet the ground (p.23). This is a generally known or popular Nigerian idiom which means bribery or gratification, to facilitate a given transaction or business. This is money or gift that is unaccounted for. Interestingly, in the context, this is Tombara's response to Peletu's enquiry: "...didn't they bring kola for us". The point is that 'Kola' is a variant or another form of the term. What is critical here is that, both are used as a local euphemism for bribery or any form of gratification.

- (iv) ...a stubborn grasshopper ends up in the hunter's cooking pot (P.). Akpotu's stubbornness or obduracy in not cooperating with Chief Peletu ultimately lands him trouble.
- (v) The shell of a tortoise is no defense for it inside the cooking pot (p.50). In the context, this means that the soldiers guarding Chief Peletu cannot protect him.

Generally, it needs to be added that the use of such colloquial or conversational forms which mark the everyday speech of locals helps not only to remind readers about the veracity or credibility of the issues canvassed or highlighted in the text as strands of their socio-cultural and histo-political existence but also make the lines that carry them engaging, memorable, refreshing and enduring. Hence Bamgbose(2004:612) sees nativization in three ways viz: (a) linguistic nativization, (b) pragmatic nativization and (c) creative nativization. According to this scholar (ibid), the last two reflect the world view, rhetoric and idiom of the native or L₁ society, which must take the world of the context into account. Crucially, this connection between the content of a text and extant or practical realities outside the world of the text is in consonance with the Hallidayan systemic functional model which we adopted for textual analysis in this study. The model, as we have earlier mentioned, attaches prime importance to the nexus between semantics and pragmatics, such that meaning is dependent on or clarified by the daily experiences or actions or inactions of actual societies, as captured by the given author.

Another significant interlingual or cross-cultural element predominantly used in Ede's text is African rhetorical patterns. Since the conflict of the text hinges on leadership tussle, oratory is a natural attendant element. Politicians, rebels or militants always play on human emotions or intelligence through oratory to achieve their targets. An aspect of such oratory in the text is the use of the Ijaw (African) rhetorical pattern. Specifically, the call and response technique which precedes a speech in the Ijaw L₁ to instill order and attention is very prominently deployed in the text. Here is an illustration:

Kalaowei: (Rises) Ahhhnn, great people of Kpokpoama!

All: (Especially the youth). Yaa!

(p.7)

The deployment of Izon gods also adds local colour to the text. This is a testimony to the fact that Africans are very religious, basking mostly in a dual religious heritage; they believe in the almighty God and other lesser gods which regulate the day-to-day lives of the people. Thus, in Ede's text, apart from 'Wonyengi' which refers to the creatrix (i.e. female in Izon mythology or cosmology), there are other gods which the people of Kpokpoama believe in and serve or worship. These include the "Spirits of the ancestors," "the guardians of our forefathers", 'Ayakirifagha, protector of the oppressed", "Aziniki, the faithful messenger of Wonyengi". All these gods or pantheon constitute the religious or spiritual world of the Kpokpoama people whose powers they seek or tap to untie any knotty issue or protect them and also grant them victory or success when confronted with any difficult situations. The people visit shrines where the priests chant, do incantations, and pour libation to their ancestors for victory or success, after making the necessary sacrifices. In the text, Kalaowei and his group go to the forest to fulfill this religious obligation for protection and fortification before attacking Chief Peletu and the soldiers brought to the community to maintain the peace (p.63).

Figurations

Figurations or figures of speech are forms of language whose meaning is beyond literal interpretation. According to Ogunsiji (2005:56), figures of speech deal with “suggestive or the connotative use of language”. Generally, figurative devices such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, assonance, paradox, onomatopoeia etc, are used by writers for meaning extension or reinforcement. Ogbulogo(2005) avers that, in semantic study, figures of speech operate from the point of extension of meaning resulting in polysemy or transfer of senses. In the text under study, the dominant forms of figuration deployed by the author are apparently simile, metaphor and alliteration.

Similes are used in a text for meaning extension and reinforcement. They are comparisons between two unlike things which share some common trait, by using words as ‘as’, “like”, ‘as though’ and ‘as if’ etc. According to Ndimele (1999:112),

A simile is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two (sometimes unrelated) entities or events. The purpose of this sort of comparison is to persuade the hearer to establish a similarity in a particular quality or attribute of the things or events compared. The comparison is made by the use of the words as and like.

The critical point is that, as we have earlier mentioned, the two things being compared are not similar in all respects or aspects, but in the aspect that is being compared. Thus one can compare a lion and a man in the area of strength i.e. John is as strong as a lion. In Ede’s text, the use of simile abounds. However, we would highlight only a few of the many strategic instances, for illustrative purposes because of the limited scope of the study:

- i. If we emulate them, soon Kpokpoama will be as beautiful and developed like those famous cities (p.11)
- ii. Zitua, her husband is seated on his local armchair, gulping some homemade gin and blabbing into space like a deranged person (p.15).
- iii. The next morning is really riotous in Kpokpoama, the death of Akpotu and Peletu’s disappearance has (sic) spread like wild fire. (p39).
- iv. Chief Peletu is now feared like a god (p.50).

The instances of the use of simile we have shown above are self-explanatory. We may therefore not make any further explanation according to the specific contexts, other than to say generally that the images used in the comparisons are invariably culled from the socio-cultural milieu of the society of the text and make propositions pictorial and incontrovertible.

Another figurative use of language in the text is metaphor. A metaphor is a compressed simile, in the sense that we compare one thing to another in terms of a common trait or quality they share without using ‘like’ or ‘as’, etc. This means that in metaphor, we say directly that one thing is another. As Ndimele (1999:112) put it,

Metaphor is like simile in the sense that both of them involve a comparison between two entities or events. Where the difference lies is that whereas in a simile the comparison is overtly stated, in a metaphor

the comparison is covertly expressed (i.e. implied). Whereas in a Simile X is like Y, in a metaphor X is Y.

Halliday(1985:320) sees the concept as the variation in the use of words such that words have transferred meaning. As in the case of simile, is to reinforce meaning or make meaning vivid and pictorial. As in the previous instance also, we shall give a few random examples from the text for purposes of illustration:

- (i) Is it hunger that gnaws at our children and women? (p. 6)
- (ii) (ii) Won't we with our hands butcher ourselves? (p. 10)

A close look at the instances of metaphorisation above is that both of them are related to animals. The first context above (i) implies or suggests that hunger is either a rat or squirrel or other rodents that can gnaw at human beings. To "gnaw at" is to bite with rage or to wear away with the teeth. According to Hornby (2010:638), to gnaw is "to keep biting something or chewing it hard, so that it gradually disappears". Ordinarily, 'hunger' has no teeth. But in this context, it has the extended meaning of having functional teeth to bite or wear away human beings. In the second context (ii) above, butcher has to do with cutting up meat. Hornby (2010:194) states that butcher is to "kill animals and cut them up for use as meat" or "to kill people in a very cruel and violent way". Though Ede's use of the item in this context could apply to both senses, it is in the first sense that the intended meaning is more graphically and imagistically conveyed, when transferred to human beings. Hence Ogbulogo (2005) avers that, in semantic study, figures of speech operate from the point of extension of meaning resulting in polysemy or transfer of senses.

The point the author seems to suggest in this context is that when the money accruable from the sale of the plantation comes, because it is so much, men could behave like animals. No doubt, money is the root of every evil; it could make human beings to sell or kill their brothers and sisters, friends and even parents. Ede implies by this usage that human beings could turn animals and actually cut themselves to pieces. This is a valid statement on human psychology and desperation. In fact, literature inherently achieves stylistic foregrounding through such deviant or extended forms which play on the elasticity or malleability of language. Lakoff (1993: 1-2) captures this fact inter alia:

- ... the locus of metaphor is not in language, at all but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another. The general theory of metaphor is given by characterizing such domain mappings. And in the process, everyday abstract concepts like time, states, change, causation, and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical. The result is that metaphor (that is, cross-domain mapping) is absolutely central to ordinary natural language semantics and that the study of literary metaphor is an extension of the study of everyday metaphor.

According to Leech (2008:15),

Literature is distinguished from other varieties of linguistics activity... all by the number and importance of the deviant features it contains. The highly deviant character of these features is to be measured not only by the important degree of descriptive delicacy at which they operate, but also in most cases, by an extreme lack of institutional generality. To all intents and purposes, the

typical deviation in literary language can be considered unique to the text in which it occurs...

As Mukarovsky (1964:58) also observes, "literature is aesthetically purposeful distortion of 'standard' language such that literature foregrounds its longing, it calls attention to itself through its form." The critical point is that, in most cases, literary metaphorical expressions are semantically odd and syntactically incongruent. Short (1982), for instance, classifies metaphor as semantic deviation which he defines as meaning relations that are logically inconsistent and paradoxical in some ways. What is particularly important in this context is that, as we see in the text this prophecy of man being potentially capable of butchering is fulfilled when chief Peletu achieves his dream of being chairman of the Kpokpoama Development Committee and, as expected, promptly corners the proceeds from the sale of the palm tree plantation to himself and eventually 'butchers' Akpotu. The Youths led by Kalaowei rise against him and mayhem engulfs the entire community and human beings are actually butchered like animals. Importantly, we also find instances of metaphORIZATION in the text when chief Izongo hails Chief Peletu by his praise names: 'The mighty Iroko' and 'Cobra', in the following context, for instance:

- (i) The mighty Iroko that does not bend to the wind (p.44)
- (ii) Who does not fear the cobra? (p.44)

Thus Chief Peletu is considered firm, solid (the mighty Iroko) and vicious, heartless (cobra). It is noteworthy that these traits turn out to be his Achilles heels which lead to the ultimate tragedy of the text.

Alliteration is another figure of speech (sound) that is predominantly deployed in Ede's text. This figurative device refers to the recurrence of the initial consonant in, at least, two or more words in a sentence or line of poetry. Like all figures of speech that are associated with sound, such as onomatopoeia, assonance, rhyme, etc, in Ede's text it is used to requisite social and cultural foreground aspects of meaning and achieve aesthetic purposes. A few illustrative examples are presented below:

- (i) Angalazige: Look at our children; they can't go to good schools because their parents cannot afford the fees (p.6).
- (ii) Yet those big and beautiful cities were built with and developed with our resources (p.6).
- (iii) Oh! People of kpokpoama will this victory not kill us?

Will it divide us? Will it make brother betray brother?

Will it make father slaughter his son? (p.18)

It is clear from the above instances that the author makes use of alliteration to add beauty and aesthetics and to foreground requisite social and cultural meanings in specific contexts. There is no doubt that the repetition of these consonantal phonemes i.e. the bilabial plosive /b/ in 'big and beautiful "and" brother betray brother' above or the sibilant/s/ in 'slaughter his son' above produces some rhythm or melody which delights the senses and exerts some pleasurable but haunting auditory impact on

readers, in addition to heightening the mood of the context, particularly against the backdrop of the impending tragedy in the text.

Lexical Repetition

In Ede's text, there is also an ample use of lexical repetition. This strategy helps to underline or highlight the importance of such words or lexemes to the specific context or to the cumulative meaning of the text. Instances selected randomly from the text include the following:

- (i) Chief Peletu:....come right to me my favourite, come and see money.
We are rich! (Grins) we are rich! (p.24)
- (ii) Akpotu: look brothers, those buyers paid far more than what he announced. Meaning far more than what he announced (p.35).
- (iii) Soldier: (walks in and salutes) Permission to fall in sir. Chief Izongo is here with a visitor to see you sir. (p.43)
- (iv) Chief Peletu: Kalaowei! I suspect Kalaowei (p.56)
- (v) 3rd woman: See! See, oh see destruction, see ruin that is now our companion. See, violence is now ours to bear: see,.... (p.60)
- (vi) Priest:.....Deliver the head of the tyrant in their hands. (Charged) Yes! Deliver the head of the tyrant into their hand..... Great mother, I beseech you; deliver the head of the tyrant in their hands (p.64)
- (vii) Town crier: come out young and old, come and behold the end of the man who plundered and raped our land; come and see nemesis has caught up with them; Wonyengi has brought judgment this day to Kpokpoama. Come and see, come and see! (p.67/68).

From the underlined lexemes in the different contexts above, we can see the importance of lexical repetition to contextual meaning in the text. Generally it performs the singular function of foregrounding or making prominent the given aspect of meaning through amplification, intensification or emphasis, as the thematic concerns of the text revolve around these issues or aspects. This implies that lexical repetition performs the additional function of helping the author to achieve cohesion or textuality in her work. In fact reiteration and collocation are the two lexical devices deployed by language users for the achievement of cohesion in a text reiteration involves repetition of lexemes, superordinate/hyponym and synonyms/near synonym (see Osisanwo, 2003:28-31).

Lexical Relations

Lexical relations are also prominently used in Ede's text, to convey aspects of textual meaning which are germane to thematization in the text. Lexical relations refer to the associative structure of vocabulary. According to Alo (1995:20) "it has been shown that every word is surrounded by a network of associations which connects it with other words". Forms of word relations include synonymy (sameness of meaning), antonymy (oppositeness), hyponymy

(inclusion), whole-part relations, conversions', etc. In this study, we shall focus on the use of synonyms and antonyms in Ede's text as a result of their consistent and recurrent use to show semantic unity and conflict or opposition in specific contexts:

As we have already indicated above, synonyms are words that show sameness of meaning but are different in form. Ogbulogo(2005) defines the concept as a lexical relationship of close relatedness in meaning. Longe(1996) sees it as a situation whereby two or more forms are associated with the same meaning.

The critical fact is that synonyms are used to etch, delineate or emphasize beliefs, convictions, positions, ideas or concepts in specific contexts in Ede's text which (also as we have highlighted in the preceding section) help to achieve cohesion. This is in tandem or in sync with Carter and McCarthy's (1988:201) contention that,

Surface cohesive ties such as synonyms should not be looked on just as interesting formal patterns, but as manifestations of how we are making sense of the message of the text.

For textual illustration of this device, let us look at the following randomly selected contexts:

- (i) Chief Peletu:... Imagine a plantation that is rightfully ours; a plantation that is on our soil, grown by our ancestors and nurtured by Wonyengi, we have no access to its yield. We have no share in the proceeds.....(p.4/5).
- (ii) We were marginalized, exploited....(p.5)
- (iii) Chief Peletu:... How will a man of your age offer such ridiculous and useless advice? (p.6)
- (iv) Alare: I mean who can judiciously and efficiently manage it so that we will not experience domestic colonialism? (p.2)
- (v) Chief Izongo:..... Are we here to quarrel and fight each other or to unanimously solve our problem? (p.10)
- (vi) Town Crier: come and behold the end of the man who plundered and raped our land. (P.67/68).
- (vii) 3rd woman: See! See, oh see destruction, see ruin.....

We can glean from the illustrative examples above that Ede has deliberately deployed the lexical device of synonymy to highlight or foreground aspects of meaning which are germane to the thematic thrusts of the text. Perhaps it needs to be emphasized that the notion of foregrounding itself is very crucial in a stylistic analysis of this nature since it refers to all the devices of language deployed by artists and language users generally to draw attention to aspects of discourses. In the view of Mullany and Stockwell (2010:43), the foregrounded devices constitute the style of the text in the sense that style "... can loosely be defined as the recognizable linguistic and discursal patterns in the text."

Antonymy on the other hand, refers to opposite words or lexemes. In other words, the lexemes that are antonyms are in a contradictory relationship. Ogbulogo (2005) observes that an antonym presents two opposing propositions at the same time. In Babatunde's (1995:6) view,

it is the relationship that holds between a proposition and its negation. Halliday and Mathiessen (2004:574) posit that antonyms (like synonyms) also function as cohesive ties and meaning reinforcers in a text. We shall use a few random examples from the text for the purpose of illustration:

- (i) Chief Izongo: we all know the matter at stake, how do we manage the resources? How do we guard it from future exploiters (p.4).

We can see that ‘manage’, which is positive, altruist and prudent in connotation is placed against “exploit (ers)” which is negative, selfish and destructive in connotation.

- (ii) Alaere:.... Indeed, Wonyengi did well in bringing back what is rightfully ours but I foresee that this very victory might be our defeat (p.17)

- (iii) Ipamo:..... you know, Ipamo of yesterday is no longer Ipamo of today.... (p.22)

The contradictory (or opposing) lexemes in the textual contexts we have used for illustration in (ii) and (iii) above are self-explanatory. What is important is that the author has consciously used this lexical device to highlight or foreground conflicting, contradictory or paradoxical significations in the text, playing on lexical items which are functionally related to the thematic preoccupations of the text and thereby functioning as veritable elements of cohesion.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have examined the lexico-semantic devices deployed by Ede to transmit textual messages and achieve aesthetic beauty in her debut play *Avarice at Dusk*, using the analytical parameters or template of M.A.K. Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar. The areas of focus include local signifiers such as native idioms and proverbs, code-mixing and code-switching; figurations such as simile, metaphor, alliteration; lexical repetition; and lexical relations such as synonymy and antonymy. The major aim is to show how a given African writer has responded to and interpreted the challenges of her society in contemporary or post-colonial times through the instrumentality or facility of language. This confirms the thesis that language and society are so closely connected or intertwined in the sense that language is an integral aspect and an index of societal mores, lores and world views and can, in fact, be manipulated in diverse ways to define society itself. In this sense, it must be noted that our adoption of the Hallidayan model for analysis is particularly justifiable against the backdrop that it facilitates the analysis of stylistic data based on the nature and workings of language in specific contextual situations. The implication is that text-making is a conscious artistic activity, since writers make deliberate linguistic choices from the vast range of options available to them to appropriately and effectively convey textual messages and achieve requisite stylistic effects, in relation to social context or discourse situation.

Importantly, one of the diverse ways in which African writers, such as Ede, have manipulated language and demonstrated its creative potentials, as we have noted earlier, is to accommodate local or indigenous structural, discourse and rhetorical patterns or nuances in the L2 text. This is overtly imperative, even inevitable, if such writers must effectively capture the entire existential landscape and cultural realities and processes of the African society, using colonial linguistic media such as English, Portuguese and French, since the Whorfian hypothesis reveals

that each language has embedded in it a distinctive culture and world view (see Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1995). As Ukoyen (1997:77) observes,

A literary text is first and foremost a cultural and artistic product. Unlike the natural sciences which are based on absolutes, literature and art in general are the products of culture and civilization, themselves deeply rooted in history and ethnicity. Therefore, a literary text, however revolutionary and innovative it may be, is never a mere assemblage of words pure and simple; rather, it is the offshoot of a specific heritage, a particular culture whose imprint it inevitably bears.

Grieve (1964:13) also expresses similar sentiments in relation to the African situation inter alia:

In Africa, English is a vehicle of African cultures as well as of English, and in these cultures concepts exist which do not exist in English culture. If English is to be an effective mode of communication in Africa, therefore, it is essential that it adapts itself so as to be able to express these concepts.

AS Alo (2006) put it, nativisation of English in non-native English environments is motivated by the need to use English to express socio-cultural concepts and experiences in the new environment (see also Bamgbose, 1998, 2004; Bamiro, 1994; Igboanusi, 2002). There is no doubt that this imperative also prompted Banjo (1970:51) to assert that the English language "...has to adapt to the Nigerian environment. In fact there is nothing anybody can do about it", as we find in Ede's text.

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