

Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies 8: 2
December 2016, 187-208

Still in the Woods: a Stylistic Reading of Osundare's Essays

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Abstract

Most stylistic investigations in literature have dwelt on the analysis of the major literary genres – poetry, drama and prose-fiction - which enjoy wide readership from the public and frequent patronage from stylisticians. However, essay, though a sub-genre and medium by which other genres of writing, art, and culture are interpreted, has not been accorded much critical attention from stylistics perspective. This paper examines the choice of linguistic features deployed in the selected essays of Niyi Osundare and how they enhance his precision in expressing meaning, aesthetics and appeal of the texts. The data comprise of six essays selected from *Dialogue with my country*. The analysis is informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)'s approach to phonology, grammar, and lexico-semantics. Findings reveal that Osundare employs the resources of language in a special way to create meaning, project life and culture, communicate truth, and express the beauty of art. Sound elements such as alliterative structures are deployed to achieve certain effects and create aesthetics appeal. Grammatical features such as the nominal and verbal groups as well as sentence types enhance the themes communicated while lexico-semantic features such as compound words, idiomatic expressions, and figurative tropes, etc., are deployed to clarify his thoughts and feelings. The linguistic choices employed identify and describe the author's experiences and style, thereby enabling readers to comprehend his message and appreciate

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his linguistic creativity. The study does not only conclude that the linguistic manipulations in the selected texts show that Osundare is an innovative essayist who adopts a simple style, which is ideologically motivated in his presentation; it also submits that linguistic creativity is not exclusive to the domain of drama, poetry, and prose-fiction, but extends to their sub-genres.

Keywords: stylistics; language; literature; nationhood.

1. Introduction

Literature may be referred to as a work of art written in different forms such as poetry, prose fiction, plays, stories, essays and may also consist of texts based on information as well as imagination (Dubey 2013:84). To Ujowundu (2013:307), it is a creative work of art that uses the vehicle of language to project modern issues such as class struggle, leadership problems, matters of security or issues on national development. Duhan (2015:192) sees literature as an imitation of human action, which often presents a picture of what people think, say and do in the society. He goes further to assert that literature reflects the virtues or good values in the society for people to emulate. From the foregoing, it is evident that literature expresses reflects and informs the society through the medium of language. This is achieved by pointing out the negative aspects of the society so as to pave way for reformation. To this end, writers use literary works to criticise societal ills in their bid to reconstruct society for the benefit of the populace. Such a role does not preclude the essayists.

In Nigeria, over the years, the various genres of literature have been used as weapons for addressing societal concerns. Niyi Osundare is one of those Nigerian writers whose literary oeuvre border on humanity. He is a well acclaimed Nigerian author who commenced writing in the 1980s. Osundare is a poet, dramatist, critic, essayist, human rights activist, and a media columnist who has written over ten volumes of poetry, two books of selected poems, four plays, a book of essays, and numerous articles on literature, language, culture, and society

(Osundare, 2003). He has witnessed the obvious deterioration of the Nigerian society which is the reason why his oeuvre from the various genres recounts the history of Nigeria, with a view to unearthing the developmental setbacks of Nigeria as a nation and equally proffering solution to the challenges of nationhood in Nigeria.

The challenges of nationhood in Nigeria have been attributed to many factors. For instance, Adebisi (2007:20) ascribed them to the socio-political history of the country which is replete with inter-ethnic rivalry, mutual distrust, bigotry and ethnic disparagement. To Adetiba (2012:179), “conflict, marginalization and resource control have precipitated the very low socio-political and economic development of the country”. Balogun and Otti (2007) attributed these challenges to the incessant violence and unrest resulting from the struggle for the control of socio-political and economic dominance among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. This view is further corroborated by Badmos (2010) who also argues that the incessant conflict among the ethnic groups in Nigeria and the rise of insurgences in the country are part of the reasons. Gambari (2016:2) notes that the challenges are from: (a) history (b) socio-economic inequalities; and (c) leadership. As a final point, Achebe (1983:1) corroborates Nigeria’s ugly profile thus:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge or personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.

From these comments, it is obvious that the challenges of nationhood in Nigeria vary and are equally enormous. However, it must be noted that attaining a developed state as a nation does not happen by accident but rather through conscious efforts by

men and women with vision and determination (Gambari 2016:1). Gambari further asserts that building a nation is a dynamic process that needs continuous development and re-creation. It is an unending process as true nation-builders never rest because all nations are constantly facing new challenges. If we concede to Gambari's argument, then Achebe (1983) must be right for affirming that the only challenge to nationhood in Nigeria is wrong leadership. In fact, Osundare (2011: 236) on this note adds that "the history of our country is a sickening chronicle of rulers, military or civilian, who ruled as if the people did not matter". The profiled situation necessitated the emergence of literary works which have been used by Nigerian literary artists to address the deluge of problems confronting the nation.

2. The stylistics of essay

Stylistics studies the language used in literature and through this medium maintain the interplay between the disciplines of linguistics and literary studies (Widdowson 1975). What this implies is that the object of study in any stylistic investigation is literature; and texts (from any of the genres) serve as database on which stylistic theories are established, verified, and applied (Jefferies & McIntyre 2010). Studies in stylistic practice over the years have shown that poetry, drama, and prose-fiction texts have been far more engaged for linguistic or stylistic research than the essay genus. Works from a variety of literary genres have been used to combat nationhood challenges but among them, only the major genres have been accorded much critical attention. In fact, in analysing literary texts, stylistic analysts most often choose texts from these major literary genres which enjoy wide readership. As observed by Simpson (2004) and Jefferies and McIntyre (2010), the analysts use linguistic models, techniques, and methods to approach the study of style in order to explore creativity in language use. They draw from their investigation any pattern or features that they find in the literary texts they examine.

This study focuses on the *essay*, which is one of the minor literary genres or, according to Good (2014:14), an "invisible

genre” in the sense that it is commonly used but hardly researched into. This is because while other genres, according to Diyanni (1997), are generally characterised by the use of imaginative portrayal, suggestive language, and figurative forms in addressing nationhood challenges, the essay is factual, more direct, and explicit. This study therefore examines the array of linguistic features deployed in the selected essays of Niyi Osundare and how their choices enhance his precision in expressing meaning, aesthetics and appeal of the texts.

3. Theoretical framework

Systemic Functional Grammar developed by M.A.K. Halliday, is a functional and structural model (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter 1997) in which linguistic properties are approached and described at some interrelated planes, integrating the major planes of substance, form and context. The plane of substance is divided into phonology and graphology. Whereas the phonic substance is realised in phonology which studies the sound patterns of a given language, the graphic substance is realised in graphology which refers to the “writing system of language” (Crystal 1985: 143). The plane of form is the coordination of the phonic or graphic material into patterns that transport meaning. It integrates syntax and lexis while context relates language form to the non-linguistic features (Tomori 1974:44-45). Syntax refers to the way words, phrases and clauses are arranged and formally grouped (Wales 2011: 412). Lexis on the other is the levels of form at which open set patterns function in language. Open set patterns are those features of a language which the rules of grammar cannot cover and as such are known in everyday terminology as the vocabulary of the language (Tomori 1977:46). Working within the SFL tradition, language use can be accounted for from the formal and situational perspective. Whereas the former accounts for meaningful patterning at the phonology/graphology, grammatical and lexico-semantic sub-levels, the latter provides for the contextual variables of language events (Ogunsiji 2007: 267). The present study accounts for language use at the formal perspective, hence explores the sound elements, grammatical devices and lexico

semantic features in the essays under study with a view to showing how they enhance the essayist's precision in expressing meaning.

4. Contextualisation of essays

This section contextualises the data for study. Seven essays are selected for this investigation. The first essay, *Parable from Koma* (1986), examines the grinding poverty and sub-human existence of rural Nigerian folks, for whom the phrase, *the Koma people*, is used as an apt metaphor. The text depicts the prevailing famine and other areas of lack in Nigeria as a result of the squandering of its rich national resources. The focus in *Not Mess Transit* (1988) is on Nigeria's culture of replacement rather than maintenance; the multi-million contracts and projects executed by government; and how they fail soon after commissioning. In *The Real Gains of SAP* (1989), Osundare's concern is on the Structural Adjustment Programme introduced by the government ostensibly for the economic relief of the citizenry but unfortunately it ended up subjecting the masses to greater poverty and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The essay titled *Nigeria Image Problem* (1995) unravels the high level of insincerity; the vices perpetrated by the Nigerian government; and criticizes the government over these ills. *The Evil that Men Do* (1998) depicts the woes and trauma of Nigerians under military dictatorship, which introduced summary arrests and torture of suspects and even innocent Nigerians who confronted government officials over their misdeeds. Finally, "The Real Abusers" (1993) speaks bitterly of the physical damage done to the nation's currency by government and its agents. The choice of these essays, among others, is hinged on the fact that they strictly address nationhood challenges in Nigeria.

5. Textual analysis

5.1. Phonological analysis

Of all the phonological features (e.g. assonance, sound elision, etc.) used in Osundare's essays, alliteration, which is a "pattern

based on consonant sounds” (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010: 36) is the most dominant, as evident in the analysed in section 5.1.1.

5.1.1. Alliterative structures

Some of the alliterative realisations in the essays are:

- (1) **F**reest and **f**airest (NIP, p.67).
- (2) **C**lique and **c**rushed (NIP, p.67).
- (3) **B**een and **b**ehaving (NIP, p.67).
- (4) **D**ark **D**ays (TETMD, p.85)
- (5) **S**quad and **s**trike (TETMD, p.85)
- (6) **B**e **b**rought to **b**ook (TETMD, p.85)
- (7) **C**ommandos and **c**ollaborators (TETMD, p.85)
- (8) **M**any and **m**illions (TRGOS, p.45)
- (9) **T**reatment and **t**yphoid (TRGOS, p.45)
- (10) **S**ource and **s**eedy (TRGOS, p.45).

There is hardly any of Osundare’s texts selected for study that does not use one form of alliteration or the other. For example, in excerpts (Nos. 1-3), Osundare in *Nigeria’s image problem* (1995) speaks on the June 12th general election in Nigeria and criticises the military government for its annulment. In these excerpts, the voiced labio-dental fricative /f/, the voiceless velar plosive /k/ and the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ form the alliterative structures which create reinforcement among the words “freest and fairest”, “clique and crushed” and “been and behaving” respectively. The phrase “free and fairest” describes the transparency of the election process, “click and crushed” relates to the annulment whereas “been and behaving” unravels the consequence of the annulment which plunged the entire country into tragedy. These alliterative structures establish an alliterative bond in the aforementioned words. Because they also ensure chiming, they create a reinforcing connection between these words which vividly describe the election process and its aftermath.

In (Nos.4-7), culled from *The evil that men do* (1998), Osundare depicts the woes and trauma of Nigerians under military dictatorship, which introduced summary arrests and torture of suspects and even innocent Nigerians who confronted

government officials over their misdeeds. The alliterative structures deployed are the voiced alveolar plosive /d/, ‘dark’ and ‘days’, the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/, ‘squad’ and ‘strike’, the voiced bilabial plosive /b/, ‘be’, ‘brought’ and ‘book’, and the voiceless velar plosive /k/, ‘commandos’ and ‘collaborators’. ‘Dark days’ as used here create a sense of repugnance and consternation associated with that period as Osundare speaks of the murder of innocent Nigerians, politicians as well as journalists of high repute. The words “squad” and “strike” as well as the phrase “commandos and collaborators” etc., refer to the agents used by the government to perpetrate heinous crimes. Finally, the essayist uses the phrase “be, brought to book” to propose that, for justice to have its full course, these murderers must be made to account for their deeds. These phonemes create a reinforcing connection (chiming) between the words.

As for excerpts (Nos.8-10), from “The real gains of SAP”, Osundare creates alliterative structures with the following words ‘many’ and ‘millions’ with the voiceless bilabial nasal /m/ in common, ‘treatment’ and ‘typhoid’ with the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ in common, and ‘source’ and ‘seedy’ with the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in common. The rhyming of the above mentioned words are linked by alliteration and the presence of these phonemes create alliterative bond among the words. From the analysis presented above, it is obvious that the attention Osundare pays to sound in his essays is a value-rendering one. He weaves dozens of alliterative structures. The stylistic significance of these alliterative structures are that they: confer some degree of musicality on the texts, heighten the tone and mood of the texts, and enable the essayists to communicate his thoughts and emotions through sounds as well as draw the readers’ attention to the semantic import of the lexical items in the texts.

5.2. Grammatical analysis

As earlier stated, syntax is one of the levels of form at which a finite set of rules operates to produce sentences that are well formed in any language (Tomori 1977:45). The grammatical

analysis in this study is delimited to the group structure and sentence types. The next sub-section begins the analysis with the group structure.

5.2.1. The Group structure

A group is defined as “an extension of a word” (Halliday 2004: 311). It is the stretch of grammatically coherent words without a subject and finite verb and can contain one or more words functioning like a single lexical item. In English, the nominal group has (M) H (Q) structure. This implies Modifier, Head, and Qualifier. The most essential element in the group is the “head”; followed by a modifier, an element that comes before the “head” and finally the qualifier which comes after the “head”. Out of the three i.e. modifier, head and qualifier, only the head is obligatory; hence (M) and (Q) are put in brackets in the notation. In the analysis of the group, the focus in this paper is on the nominal group structure. Osundare employs this feature in different degrees. He relies heavily on the modifier and qualifier to increase the structural complexity of the nominal groups in the selected texts. These help to contribute to the general meaning which he tries to convey. The following sample passages from our data will serve as a case in point.

- (11) A shocking breed of such Nigerians (PFK, p.3).
- (12) Their night (PFK, p.4).
- (13) The unavailability of spare parts (NMT, p.30).
- (14) The usual electioneering war songs (NIP, p.67).
- (15) The cost of most social services (TRA, p.53).
- (16) The unstable fate of the naira (TRA, p.53).

Table 1: Nominal Group Structure

NO	MODIFIER	HEAD	QUALIFIER	STRUCTURE
11.	A shocking	breed	of such Nigerians	mmhq
12.	Their	night		Mh
13.	The	unavailability	of spare parts	mhq
14.	The usual electioneering war	songs		mmmmh
15.	The	cost	of most social services	mhq
16.	The	fate	of the naira	mhq

The excerpts above corroborate our earlier claim that modifiers and qualifiers are typical features of Osundare's texts. Modifiers show up in texts (No.11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16). The first observation is the fact that these excerpts are characterised by a variety of nominal group structures which is part of Osundare's style (see table). The various headwords in the nominal groups are preceded by modifiers made up of distinct elements ranging from adjective, adverb and determiners. A careful examination of these extracts reveals that adjective has the highest frequency of occurrence. For example, the adjective: 'shocking' in (No.11) function as a modifier stylistically deployed to project Osundare's themes of poverty, underdevelopment, oppression and neglect of rural Nigerians. While 'shocking' is used to describe the noun *Nigerians*, the deictic element 'their' in (No.12) present the reader with a more descriptive picture of the condition or state of the Nigerians being portrayed. In fact, they also bring to the fore the inequality between the rich and the poor in the society.

Another observation is that the common noun *breed* in excerpt (No.11) functions as an adjective to add to the semantic nucleus in this structure. This helps to vividly portray the subjects which Osundare refers. Other elements which work together in these structures to give additional information to the various headwords in the texts are adverb (e.g. usual) and determiners (e.g. a, their, and the). The determiners deployed can be classified into specific and non-specific determiners. The specific determiners (e.g. the, their etc.) used in the texts have the function of identifying a particular head that is being referred to. According to Halliday (2004:312), these determiners are used to indicate what quantity of the head is involved- all, some or none. In the texts under analysis, these determiners work in relation with other elements to supply additional information to the headword which in turn enables it express experiential meaning. Also, excerpt (No.14) is characterised with the use of copious modification which include determiner, adjective, and adverb. The modifiers used in the text provide additional elements of meaning by relating the issues discussed to the headword, which in turn help it to express experiential meaning.

There are also instances of the use of qualifiers in Osundare's texts which show in excerpts (No. 13, 15 and 16). Whereas excerpt (No.13) portrays Nigeria's culture of replacement rather than maintenance; the multi-million contracts and projects executed by government, and how they fail soon after commissioning. Osundare in (No.14) berates the power that be for the magnitude of corruption in Nigeria and in (No.16) laments the damage which the government and its agents have done to the national currency. For example, the prepositional phrases *of such Nigerians* in (No.11), *of spare parts* in (No.14), *of most social services* in (No.15) and *of the naira* in (No.16) are used as qualifiers in the nominal group. They have the exact function of qualifying the headwords in the nominal groups. The inclusion of these qualifiers in the texts gives the nominal groups a complex structure.

However, Osundare's choice of *mh* and *mhq* types of nominal group structure in the above texts is remarkable. They

provide Osundare the avenue to factually and explicitly project the various society ills and vices which have posed hindrances to nationhood in Nigeria. A careful study of the analysis under the nominal group structure reveals that the social issues addressed are those which border on humanity. As a social critic and human right activist, Osundare believes that he owes the people this role. In essence, his art dwells in a concern for life and humanity.

5.2.2. Sentence types

The sentence is the highest or the largest of the grammatical units. A sentence is a group of grammatically related words that express a complete thought (Murthy 2011). Both structural and functional criteria are taken into consideration in classifying sentences. Structurally, a sentence is classified into simple, compound, complex and compound - complex sentences. In functional terms, it has the following categories: declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory, requests. The following excerpts illustrate the use of structural and functional aspects of the sentence in his essays:

- (17) Yet the people's night are lit by the moon, their water comes from darksome ponds (PFK, p.4).
- (18) There is no sign at the moment that this problem is getting the right prescription (PFK, p.4).
- (19) But for the Nigerian swindled millions SAP is nothing but absolute pain (TRGOS, p. 45).
- (20) Isn't this the situation we have come to know as intimately as we know the lines on our palms? (TRGOS, p.45).
- (21) What about us, the people of Nigeria, so violently denied our right to choice of information? (NIP, p.67).
- (22) What about the over 10, 000 media-related workers deprived of their means of livelihood by the government's brutal clam down? (NIP, p.67).
- (23) Are these the people who really disgrace the naira? (TRA, p.51).

- (24) The unstable fate of the naira since the advent of SAP has thrown the entire economy into chaos (TRA, p.53).

From a close scrutiny of the above excerpts culled from the selected essays, the contention is that the majority of the sentences generated are complex in nature. Stylistically, this could also be an unconscious transfer of the essayist's verbal speech style/habit into writing. Osundare speaks in long sentences. The function of 'negotiation' also takes place in his oral speech pattern; hence, the tendency to be 'interpersonal' even in writing. In terms of the functional aspect, these sentences perform different functions as they are used to provide additional details to the essays' content. For example, excerpts (Nos. 17, 18, 19 and 24) are declarative in mood whereas (Nos. 20, 21, 22 and 23) are configured using the interrogative mood. The declarative moods offer factual information to the reader. Osundare gives information about his personal perception and experiences of social issues in Nigeria with a view to making his message real as well as convincing enough to elicit a positive reaction from the readers. This is part of his efforts to support and re-orientate the masses. However, the instances of interrogative mood are used to demand the readers' opinion and agreement on the subject put forward by the interrogative clauses. The interrogatives are the signs of the essayist's negotiation with the readers. Also, they perform ideational and interpersonal functions of language in the essays. This participatory mode is a signal to the readers to get more involved in the affairs of the country. The interrogative style is also a development of the speaker/audience relationship in oral literature that is later deployed in modern writing.

5.3. Lexico-semantic analysis

Lexical features identified and analysed here are compound words, idiomatic expressions, and figurative use of language. The next sub-section contains an analysis of the creative manipulation of compound words.

5.3.1. Compound words

Compounding is a creative means of word-formation where two lexical items are fused to form a new one, which is viewed as a single fixed unit (Wales, 2011:75). The lexical item formed as a result of this fusing is termed compound word (Murthy, 2011:338). Such lexical item can be a single word (*greenfly*); hyphenated (*green-fee*); or open as in a phrase (*green belt*). As evident in the following excerpts (Nos.1-13), Osundare creatively fused certain words through compounding:

- (25) “...new exotic” (TRGOS, p.43).
- (26) “...shocking breed” (PFK, p.4).
- (27) “...craggy nooks” (PFK, p.4).
- (28) “...racist masturbation” (PFK, p.4).
- (29) “...pretentious country” (NIP, p.68).
- (30) “...brainchild” (TRGOS, p.45).
- (31) “...clampdown” (NIP, p.67).
- (32) “...a jaw-breaking mumbo jumbo” (PFK, p.4).
- (33) “...cobra-harassed” (PFK, p.4).
- (34) “...image-mending” (PFK, p.4).
- (35) “...herbal-nourished” (PFK, p.5).
- (36) “...champagne-drenched” (TRGOS, p.45).
- (37) “...mind-boggling” (TRGOS, p.45).

A careful examination of the excerpts above shows the artistic manipulation of compound words. Excerpts (Nos. 25-29) exemplify open compounds; (Nos. 30-31) illustrate single compounds, and (Nos. 32-37) hyphenated compounds respectively. In (Nos. 27, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35 and 36), for example, Osundare’s “Parable from Koma” (1986: p.3), examines the grinding poverty and sub-human existence of rural Nigerian folks, for whom the phrase, “the Koma people”, is used as an apt metaphor. The lexical items “shocking breed”, “craggy nooks”, “a jaw-breaking mumbo jumbo”; “cobra-harassed”, “image-mending” and “herbal-nourished” are compound adjectives in varying degrees exploited to depict the prevailing famine and other areas of lack in the country as a result of the misuse of its rich national resources by the government. This

description highlights the contemptible condition of the rural people projected in the text.

However, in (Nos. 26, 31 and 38) culled from “The real gains of SAP” (1989), the essayist criticises the SAP and IMF, contending that instead of favouring the Nigerian masses, these policies had helped to enrich the minority in society. Osundare adds further that SAP became an avenue for government officials to stack up their foreign accounts, ride in new exotic cars, erect mind-boggling mansions, and attend champagne-drenched parties, while leaving the populace to die in poverty and starvation. What is significant in this piece is the choice of the lexical items: “new exotic”, “mind-boggling” and “champagne-drenched” etc., deployed by the essayist to depict how government officials lavish the nation’s resources while the masses languish in starvation.

As for (Nos. 34 and 36), from *The Nigeria image problem* (1995), the text berates ‘the power that be’ for the magnitude of dehumanisation and subjugation of innocent Nigerians. Osundare notes that in Nigeria, the press is muzzled; journalists and conscientious citizens who insist on freedom and justice are harassed; and staff members of most newspaper firms are deprived of their means of livelihood by the government. While the lexical item “clampdown”, describes the oppression and suppression of innocent Nigerians by the government, “pretentious country” on the other, shows that after the atrocious activities of government have been committed, their representatives portray a positive image of the country before the international community, which is why the essayist uses the phrase “pretentious country” to describe the high level of hypocrisy practised by the government.

In all, the use of compounds (whether single, open or hyphenated) add various shades of meaning to the essays content and according to Douglas (2004:287), they “forcefully and graphically” create vivid impression of the essayist’s ideology being described.

5.3.2. Idiomatic expressions

Idiom is a “group of words established by usage and having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words” (Douglas 2004:293). Also, idioms are seen as “expressions whose meanings are different from the sum total of the meaning of their constituent words” (Okesipe & Okolo 2013:142). The creative exploitation of idiomatic expression is a sure indication of one’s fluency in a language (Douglas 2004:293). Osundare demonstrates his competence in the use of English language through the manipulation of idiomatic phrases. The following texts illustrate the use of idiomatic expressions in his essays:

- (38) “... hit the nail on the head” (TRGOS, p.44).
- (39) “... sweeping them under the carpet” (NIP, p.68).
- (40) “...keep them under lock and key” (NIP, p.68).
- (41) “...kept the nation in line” (TETMD, p.84).
- (42) “...in broad day light” (TETMD, p.85).
- (43) “... brought to book” (TETMD, p. 85).
- (44) “...believe my eyes” (NMT, p.29).

The aforementioned extracts exemplify Osundare’s creativity in the use of idiomatic expressions. As can be seen above, he has a clear grip of the use of the English language. Excerpt (No.38) speaks on the deteriorating state of Nigeria’s economy, rendering many citizens skeptical about the country’s future. Government is cognizant of the fact that the economy is diminishing and unemployment is increasing and though they comment on these problems, they fail to directly unravel their causes. The idiomatic phrase “hit the nail on the head” is used by Osundare to condemn such attitude contending that the root causes of the nation’s challenges should be clearly made known to the public and not concealed. In excerpt (No.39), the essayist comments on the various misdeeds of the government and how they are concealed from the public, hence the deployment of “sweeping under the carpet”. As for (No.40), Osundare depicts the woes and trauma of Nigerians under military dictatorship. The expression “keep under lock and key” refers to radicals who are detained by the government for speaking up for the citizenry.

Excerpt (No.41) captures the despoliation of Nigeria and Nigerians. The phrase “kept the nation in line” describes how Nigerians were deceived, exploited, defrauded; denied their rights, brutalised and subjugated by so-called leaders who, in fact, impose themselves on the masses. Whereas (No.42) recounts one of those crimes often committed by the government during the day, in (No. 43), Osundare contends that all those who have perpetrated crimes in Nigeria should be made to account for their misdeed. Finally, in (No. 44), the essayist expresses his utmost astonishment over the degree at which the nation’s rich national resources are squandered on substandard projects by the government; and how they fail soon after commissioning.

As the analysis above has shown, idioms constitute a significant stylistic feature of the selected essays of Osundare. They are part of the beauty of the language of the selected essays and are Standard English expressions.

5.3.3. Figurative language

Figurative language is a stylistic device deployed in literary works to express ideas and feelings in an extraordinary manner (Murthy 2011:539). Writers create special meaning in their use of language through the extensive and efficient manipulation of figurative tropes (Douglas 2004:292). In the essays under study, Osundare utilises figurative devices for the purpose of aesthetics. The following texts illustrate the use of figurative language in his essays:

- (45) There are times in a nation’s history when its abuse past springs up like a monster... (PFK, p.5).
- (46) It was like witnessing the death of a goddess (NMT, p.29).
- (47) Isn’t this a situation we have come to know as intimately as we know the lines of our palms? (TRGOS, p.45).
- (48) ... where foreigners live like princes while the natives starve on the crumbs from their tables (TRA, p.53).

- (49) ...the Koma situation is a missionary's delight (PFK, p.5).
- (50)Government job is nobody's job (NMT, p.29).
- (51) ... turned Nigeria into a paradise for spectators and users (TRA, p.53).
- (52) ... the greatest killer in our country today is hunger...(TRGOS, p.45).
- (53) ... the naira knew its father's name (TRA, p.52).
- (54) ... the advent of SAP has thrown the entire economy into chaos (TRGOS, p.53).
- (55) The real tragedy is that of the living-dead of children growing up with a remarkably low brain-count... (TRGOS, p.46).

The figurative devices noticeable in the above passages are simile (as seen in Nos. 45-48), metaphor (Nos. 49-52); personification (Nos.53-54); and oxymoron (No.55). Simile, which is the first on the list, refers to the "comparison derived from likeness perceived between two referents" (Chapman, 1973:75). To Murthy (2011:539), the term is used to compare two different things having a common quality and finally, Okesipe and Okolo (2013:378) submit that it contains an overt contrast of two things through the use of "as" or "like".

In excerpt (No.45) from "Parable from Koma", Osundare portrays the dismal development in Nigeria where the basic needs of humanity, food, housing, clothing and other basic necessities of life have become the preserve of a privileged few. Therefore, he notes that "there are times in a nation's history when its abuse past springs like a monster..." (p.5). Here, the use of analogy provides Osundare the opportunity to relate the situation profiled above with that of a monster. Connotatively, Nigeria's past is described as horrible and despicable.

In excerpt (No.46), for example, the essayist in "Not mess transits" focuses on misuse of the nation's resources and misplacement of priority by government. In this piece, he compares the failure of government's projects to that of a goddess. As for (No.47) cited from the "The real gains of SAP", Osundare criticizes the Structural Adjustment Programme of the

government which created an avenue for its agents to loot the country's treasury, plunged Nigerians into debt peonage as well as subjected them to extreme poverty. The figurative device used here relates the situation profiled above to the lines of our palms. What this suggests is that Nigerians are now accustomed to the life of poverty just like the lines of their palms. Finally on the use of simile, Osundare in excerpts (No.48) culled from "The real abusers" speaks on the battering of the national currency by the various fiscal policies introduced by the government and how this situation has made life in Nigeria more comfortable for foreigners than the citizens. Hence, a comparison is made between the foreigner who live in affluence and the citizens who live in penury.

Metaphor is described as "an explicit comparison of literally unlike things" (Douglas 2004:293). Put differently, it is an implied simile in which the two things compared are treated as one (Murthy 2011:539). Also, Wales (2011:265) adds further that metaphor "makes sense of relatively complex, abstract or unfamiliar experiences in terms of more familiar ones". Excerpts (Nos. 49-52) exemplify Osundare's deployment of metaphorical expression. It should be noted that in each of these excerpts, the fields or domains of reference (e.g. "the Koma situation" in (No.49); "Government job" in (No.50); "Nigeria" in (No.51) as well as "the greatest killer" in (No.52) respectively, are carried over or mapped onto another (e.g. "Missionary's delight" in (No.49), "Nobody's job" in (No.50), "Spectators and users" in (No.51) and "hunger" in (No.52),etc., on the basis of some perceived similarity between the two fields. Although these fields or domains are literally dissimilar, they are only similar in their quality.

Personification is the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human of an abstract quality in human form (Douglas 2004:293). This view is supported by Wales (2011:315) who notes that in this figurative trope, inanimate object, animate non-human or abstract quality is given human attributes. What the foregoing discussion implies is that personification is the idea of representing an object with a person or an action only capable of being done by

a human being. A careful examination of excerpts (No.53 and 54) reveal this application. In (No.53), for example, we may curiously ask: Can the Naira know the name of its father? How can an inanimate object have a father? This is an act capable of being performed only by a person, which the essayist claims an object has performed. Similar situation applies to (No.54) human characteristic is attributed to an inanimate object.

Oxymoron is a figurative device which contrasts seemingly opposing words for witty or striking effects (Wales 2011:298). This application is evident in (No.55) where Osundare comments on the repercussion of government's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which has plunged less privileged Nigerians into starvation, with a huge mortality rate traceable to malnutrition. Here, the two contradictory words "living" and "dead" are placed side by side. As the above analysis has demonstrated, the figurative trope deployed here help to embellish the essayist's diction as well as has been described in a picturesque.

6. Conclusion

This study has carried out a stylistic investigation of Niyi Osundare's essays. It showed that Osundare deploys a host of linguistic features in crafting the selected essays texts. Linguistic features such as alliterative structures, nominal group, declarative and interrogative sentences, compound words, idiomatic expression, as well as figurative language are deployed to enhance his precision in expressing meaning, aesthetics and appeal of the texts. These made the selected essays interesting and readable as they help to project the challenges of nationhood in Nigeria. Osundare's experience as a social critic and human right activist is reflected in his essays with the use of language clearly showing that he is a master of his art who adopts a simple style in discussing issues that border on humanity. The study concluded that linguistic creativity is not exclusive to the domain of drama, poetry, and prose-fiction, but extends to their sub-genres such as the non-fictional genre of the essay.

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