



## AN ANALYSIS OF SENTENCE STRUCTURES IN MARIAMA BA'S SO LONG A LETTER: A STYLISTIC APPROACH

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study analysed sentence structures in Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter. It employed a linguistic-stylistic approach with emphasis on examining how the author's structures created aesthetic patterns and values. The Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) was applied in the analysis of certain aspects of the literary language. For clarity, the tree diagram was occasionally used to display constituent parts of sentences/clauses arising from the various sentence patterns. TGG features were used to describe sentence patterns like foregrounded, elliptic, parallel, fragmentary structures. This not only underscored the inter-relationship among literature, linguistics and stylistics, it revealed Ba's (un)conscious ability to manipulate language through the transformational power of the TGG. Though found an appropriate framework for the analysis of literary language, a major implication of the use of TGG in this study is its inadequacy to describe/account for contexts in situation.*

**KEYWORDS:** Stylistics, Style, Linguistics, Sentence Structure, TGG

## INTRODUCTION

Man's survival is made relatively easy because of the linguistic ability he possesses that enables him to creatively communicate his thoughts in varied social settings. Language used in different occasions necessitates the choice of specific varieties of style, sentence patterns/structures suitable for communicating intended messages. Therefore, contextual consideration is given to the choice users make with regards to words, group and sentence structures, prosodic features and the like. Writing is the representation of language in a textual medium through the use of codes. The codes are governed by a set of rules which generate well-formed sentences. Yankson (1987) observes that one of such rules is that every lexical item in English belongs to a particular grammatical category like a noun, a verb, an adjective. It must be noted that some ill-formed sentences are generated when the rules of lexical insertion are broken. Ironically, the breach of the rule is the hallmark of the literary artists. Instructively, such breaches are not haphazard but systematic. This is not only done to make meaning but to create special stylistic effects – poetic licence. In this study we set out to examine the sentence structures employed by Ba in passing across her message and their effects on the message and the reader.



## Linguistics, Style and Stylistics

Style and stylistics like other concepts in linguistics have been divergently defined by various scholars, each emphasizing different aspects. Despite the interest various scholars have taken in the study of style, Enkvist (1964) notes that style has proved notoriously hard of straight definition; meaning that style has several connotations that make it difficult to be defined accurately. Crystal and Davy (1969) define style “as a pattern of linguistic features of a particular writer or the way language is used in a particular genre, period, or school of writing”. Leech and Short cited in Norgaard et al (2010) define style as the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose. This implies that style is not restricted to a particular author but can be considered as the feature of a situation, a character, a particular text or linguistic expression investigated over time.

Evidently, there is a close relationship between stylistics, linguistics and literature. Stylistics is the study of devices in language (such as rhetorical figures and syntactic structures) that are considered to produce expressive or literary style. It is the study of varieties of language whose properties position that language in context. It attempts to establish principles capable of explaining the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language. This, by implication, means that stylistics relates to the study of style used in literary (and other forms) language and the effect the writer/speaker wishes to communicate to the reader/hearer. The difference between a stylistic and a linguistic statement, according to Spencer and Gregory (1964), is that the former is necessarily comparative, thus aligning the position of Oha (2003) that stylistics describes and evaluates while linguistics only describes. In analysing the language of a text, the sentence structures are to be isolated and evaluated with the sole aim of determining their functional (stylistic) significance.

## The English Sentence: Types, Structures and Functions

Because there are certain observable regularities and rules, no language, English inclusive, allows sentences to be formed by stringing words together randomly (Stockwell, 1977). Syntax, concerned with the study of sentence formation and understanding, is central to this word order. The sentence is, however, the foundation upon which meaning is made in any text in natural language. As important as letters and words are, they can hardly make meaning on their own. To make a complete sentence means that words are structured in an acceptable way. This is what, in modern grammar is termed **well-formedness**. Well-formedness, as opposed to correctness presupposes that a language user knows what combination of words is used to form an acceptable meaningful sentence. But to what extent does the creative writer conform to the (traditional) rules in sentence formation? Answer(s) to a question(s) of this nature form(s) the nucleus of this study.

In classifying the sentence into structural types, Lamidi (2000) shows three major kinds namely simple, compound and complex sentences. These are, however, the traditional classifications of sentence types. But Lamidi brings an insight into the definition of the sentence. For instance, he notes that the simple sentence consists of an independent clause which contains Noun Phrase (NP), INFL and VP components only. This simply means that such a sentence has one finite verb and in the elementary sense, indicates the doer/receiver of the action (the NP). This is not always the case as can be seen in “It is raining”. Attention has to be drawn to the fact that INFL, which stands for INFLECTION is a term used in Government and Binding (GB) to replace Transformational Grammar AUX (auxiliary), an



obligatory constituent of the sentence. Compound sentences refer to structures in which two independent clauses are joined together by conjunctions like *and*, *so*, *or*, *then*, *but* (e.g. Ngozi cooked and Emeka ate the food); and complex sentences contain a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses which are usually attached to a main clause through a subordinate introducer technically called complementizer (or Compl). E.g., *When I arrived, he was not at home*. While a complementizer refers to a word used to introduce a complement clause, a complement in the GB, is a word or group of words which combines with a head-word to project that headword into a larger structure of the same kind. For example, in the expressions: “close the door” and “after school”, *door* is the complement of close and school, the complement of *after*.

Sentence types, coupled with the functions they perform create some patterns and variability. Sentence variability, as with the case of sentence functions, brings about these patterns:

- |       |                                    |   |  |
|-------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| i.    | S+V                                | - | Uju sings  |
| ii.   | S+V+O                              | - | Emeka Killed the goat.   |
| iii.  | S+V+O <sup>i</sup> +O <sup>d</sup> | - | (where O <sup>i</sup> is indirect object and O <sup>d</sup> Direct object) e.g. “Telecom officered Kate a job”. – While “Kate” is the O <sup>i</sup> , “job” is the O <sup>d</sup> ) |
| iv.   | S+V+C                              | - | Okoro is a teacher.  |
| v.    | S+V+O+A                            | - | Nnanna killed the goat slowly.   |
| vi.   | S+V+A                              | - | He runs fast.  |
| vii.  | S+V+C+A                            | - | Ijeoma became a lecturer last year.  |
| viii. | O+S+V                              | - | God, we trust in you.  |
| ix.   | A+S+V                              | - | Peacefully, they departed.   |
| x.    | A+S+V+C                            | - | Honestly, Eme is a tailor.   |
| xi.   | S+A+V+O                            | - | Nneka quietly left the house.  |
| xii.  | S+A+V+A                            | - | She even left hurriedly.   |
| xiii. | S+A+V+O+C+A                        | - | We formally declared Ralph a thief last year.  |

(Oha’s 2000 idea of sentence structure)

## METHODOLOGY

The concept of Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) is the theoretical model for this study. TGG is considered apt in the area of descriptive linguistics (Brown & Miller, 1982).



The TGG consists of three distinct levels of organization which are the base, the transformational and the phonological components. Because a human has the ability to abstract from language a finite number of simple sentences, each of these levels has its own set of rewrite rules for generating a sentence. Also, the transformational generative grammar as outlined by Chomsky in *syntactic structures* (1957) and modified in 1965 in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* has three main components or levels of operation namely: the phrase structure, the transformational and the morphophonemic components. A phrase structure grammar is one that consists entirely of phrase-structure rules. Transformational grammar includes both phrase structure and transformational rules. The transformational rules depend upon the application of the phrase structure rules and have the effect of converting or transforming one phrase marker into another. The rules that he uses to transform the simple sentences into other sentences, (complex, multiple, fragmentary etc.) are described by the linguist as transformational rules.

## THE ANALYSIS

This study sets to isolate, describe and evaluate sentence structures in Ba's *So Long a Letter* with a view to analysing their stylistic significance. Such stylistic devices as foregrounding, sentence fragmentation, pattern repetition, category rule violation, linguistic parallelism as well as sentence types, patterns and functions with their possible overlaps with the transformation rules are explored and analysed.

### Bio-Data of Mariama Ba

Mariama Ba was born in 1929 in the West African country of Senegal. A former teacher and civil servant, she was a divorced mother of nine children after her marriage with Obeye Diop, a one time member of the Senegalese Parliament, failed. Ba won the Noma Prize for her first novel. She died in 1981 before the publication of her second novel, *Scarlet Song*.

### Summary of the Novel

Ba's *So Long a Letter*, an epistolary novel, recounts the experiences of Ramatoulaye who feels betrayed with the secret marriage between Modou Fall, her husband of many years and Binetou, her daughter's friend. This is in spite of the Islamic and cultural injunctions that allow/approve such marriage. It is in order to express her feelings that Ramatoulaye, in a letter to her friend, Aissatou, reveals her anger, frustrations, and disappointment at her husband's attitude in particular and, in fact, the society, religion and custom that allow this marriage. Through characters' dialogue, Ba creates a compelling literary piece.

### Sentence Structures in *So Long a Letter* and Their Stylistic Effects

#### *Sentence Types*

Ba's use of (short) simple sentences in the novel instead of complex ones or other types is very remarkable and outstanding. It is our candid opinion that this approach enhances the readers' appreciation of the text. It also symbolizes the writer's free and simple flow of thought.



The simple sentences, marked by their brevity, conciseness and precision are not only dominant but observed to be punchy, definitive, rhythmic and musical. In her lamentation over Moudou's attitude after taking Binetou as a second wife, Ramatoulaye bemoans her situation thus:

I was not deceived, therefore.

I no longer interested Moudou, and I knew it.

I was abandoned ...I faced up to the situation

bravely... But my loneliness would emerge at

night, burdensome (p52).

In the first sentence, for instance, there is a negation, NOT. The sentence could as well have been "I was deceived, therefore". It is remarkable to note that the NOT negation imposes a difference both in interpretation and meaning going by the negation function of the TGG (where a new element, especially a negative marker, can be inserted into a structure) as well as the notions of the deep and surface structures. Yet, the sentence remains a simple one for possessing one finite verb *deceived* accompanied by an auxiliary verb to be "was". The main verb is *deceived*.

Ramatoulaye, nostalgic of her past relationship with Aissatou writes:

Our common habits sprang up at their usual times. I missed dreadfully our nightly conversation...Like opium, I missed our daily consultations. I pitted myself against shadows. The wanderings of my thoughts chased away all sleep. I side-stepped my pain in a refusal to fight it...My sadness dissolved (pp.52-53).

Considering the notions of Deep Structure (DS) and Surface Structure (SS) of TGG, such verbs as *chased*, *side-stepped* and *dissolved* as indicated in the simple sentence in this passage impose a meaning on the DS that is different from the SS. This confirms our claim that the DS in literary language encapsulates a connotative meaning. Take for instance, the semantic implications of the words *chase*, *side-stepped* and *dissolved* and the connotative meaning they bring to bear on the structures in which they occur.

In capturing the power of women, Daouda, a politician and the suitor of Ramatoulaye, notes through these simple sentences:

But you women... you demolish. You destroy. Imagine a large number of women in the Assembly. Why, everything would explode (p.60)

It is instructive to note that each of the finite verbs (demolish, destroy, explode) in this excerpt carries with itself beats of power that is illustrative, explanatory, incisive and forceful as shown by the simple sentence pattern. Ramatoulaye, in asserting her position as well as reassuring herself of victory over oppressive cultural inhibitions like forced marriage, expresses her feelings this way, still characterized by simple sentences:



I look Tamsir straight in the eye. I look at Mawdo. I look at the Imam. I draw my black shawl closer. I tell my beads. This time I shall speak out (p.57).

With the pattern repetition of “I look...” and the instrumentality of the simple sentence, the language becomes musical, dramatic and forceful.

### ***Tense Structures in So Long a Letter***

A closer look at the text reveals that there is inconsistency and admixture of tenses (a tense being the form a verb takes to show time and action). Using present and past tenses interchangeably, Ba applies the past tense in recounting her past experiences and encounters and applies the present tense in making comments about personalities and their actions, situations and ongoing events. For example:

The family meeting held this morning in my sitting room is at last over. You can easily guess those who were present...Binetou who is even thinner...the **Mirasse** commanded by the Koran requires that a dead person be stripped of his most intimate secrets...(p.9).

On this excerpt, one would have expected that she writes “The family meeting held this morning...(was) at last over” since the introductory verb HELD is in the past, thus accounting for the reason why other verbs should have been in the past tense form. The first sentence contrasts with the last in the text in which the writer describes the requirement of the Koran in the present tense, “requires”. This is because the sentence explains a religious truth (in Islam) that is eternal – just like saying that “while in the school, my teacher taught me that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West”. Because the sentence expresses an eternal truth, “rises” and “sets” are forms of verbs different from the introductory verb “taught” despite the rule governing this application. We observe that this style pervades the entire text. Ba uses the present tense to bring freshness into the story and by implication makes the past to be immediate and now. Though the use of simple present tense to express habitual events/statements is not peculiar to Ba, its mode and pattern of usage establishes it as a stylistic tool by her.

### **Fronting of Prepositions**

Another method that marks Ba’s style is the fronting of prepositional phrases, e.g.

- i. On the fine sand, washed by the waves...(p.21).
- ii. In the evening, the fishermen would return from their labourious outings (p.21).
- iii. In our different ways, we suffered the social constraints and heavy burden of custom (p.19).
- iv. In loving someone else, he burned his past, both morally and materially (p.12).
- v. In the midst of life, in the midst of poverty, in the midst of ugliness, young Nabou would often triumph with her knowledge and experience (p.47).
- vi. Under the wondering gaze of the Kids...(p.21).





From the underlined phrases, it is evident that the sentences are headed by the prepositions *in*, *on*, *under* showing relationship in time and space as emphasis is laid on such time and space. The sentences (ii) and (iii) would probably have been written in instances like:

- a. The fishermen would return from their labourious outings...in the evening.
- b. We suffered the social constraints and heavy burden of custom in our different ways.

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that there is a category rule violation in which there are shifts in the place and location of the subjects, “The fishermen” and “We” respectively. The stylistic implication is the foregrounding effect in which the reader is drawn out to share in the feelings of the author. Casting the sentences with prepositional fronting is of stylistic significance thus forcing the reader to be in empathy with the writer.

### ***Introductory Adverbials***

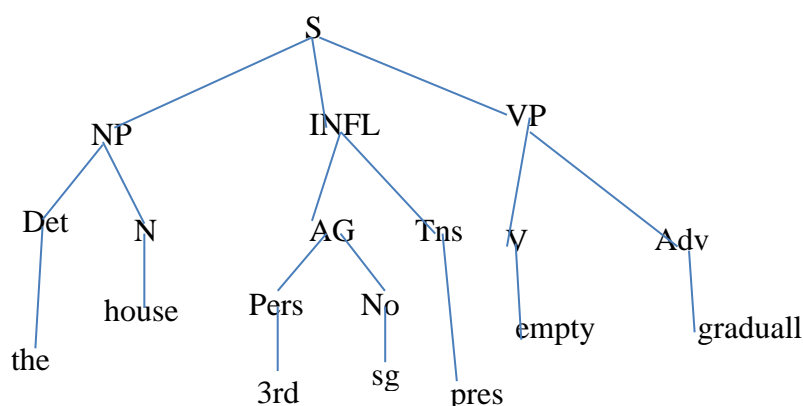
Like fronting of prepositional phrases, Ba also uses introductory adverbials for stylistic effect. The consistent use of introductory adverbials, in the text, either as single words, phrases or clauses is significant and noticeable. To show sentence variability with varying patterns opposed to the traditional SVO structure, usually considered as the norm, the writer (un)consciously deviates from such structure and writes thus:

- i. Gradually the house empties (p.7)
- ii. Vehemently, they recommended marabouts...(p.48)
- iii. If over the years, and passing through the realities of life, dreams die, I still keep intact my memories...(p.1)
- iv. Yesterday you were divorced. Today I am widowed (p.1)
- v. Even though the primary schools are rapidly increasing...(p.18).

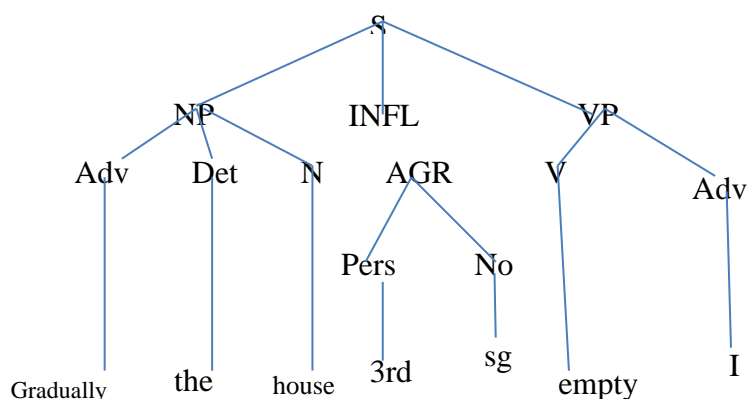
It is to be noted that the mode and frequency of occurrence of these sentences, rather than deviation in usage, make them stylistic. The obvious sentence patterns in sentences i – iii are ASV, ASVO and ASVCPO. These structures occur to show the departure from the traditional sentence patterning. Ordinarily, structures in the sentences (i) and (ii) could have been “The house gradually empties” and “They vehemently recommended marabouts”, thus indicating the traditional function of the adverb as a verb modifier so that “gradually” and “vehemently” will be directly modifying the verb “empties” and “recommended”. But the adverbs are brought to the initial sentence positions for emphasis. This shift however does not change the meanings of the sentences both in the deep and surface structures. These adverbials as a matter of fact, build up an uncertainty and at other times, expectation in the mind of the reader. Stylistically, the fronting of these adverbials, particularly, “Gradually”, “Vehemently”, “If” and “Even though...” add credence to the import of the novel as a literary work primarily concerned with manner or attitude. There is no doubt that Ba uses introductory adverbials and the fronting of



prepositional phrases for stylistic effect. Let us consider the following tree diagrams on introductory adverbial using the sentence, “Gradually, the house empties”.



**Figure 1(a) showing the deep structure analysis of adverbial fronting**



**Figure 1(b) showing surface structure derivation from adverbial fronting**

Though it is obvious that the fronted element is not a part of the subject (S) and so, cannot be attached to the subject NP, the adverbial, “gradually”, in 2(b) is moved to the subject position as an emotive device and to sustain the rhythm in the author’s use of language to further her style. The symbol, t, leaves a trace that an item has been moved using the transformational rule of move alpha which enables a lexical item to be moved anywhere but still leaving the sentence grammatical. Affix hopping rule applies to the INFL and verb components to have empty + pres + AGR to yield the surface string, empties.

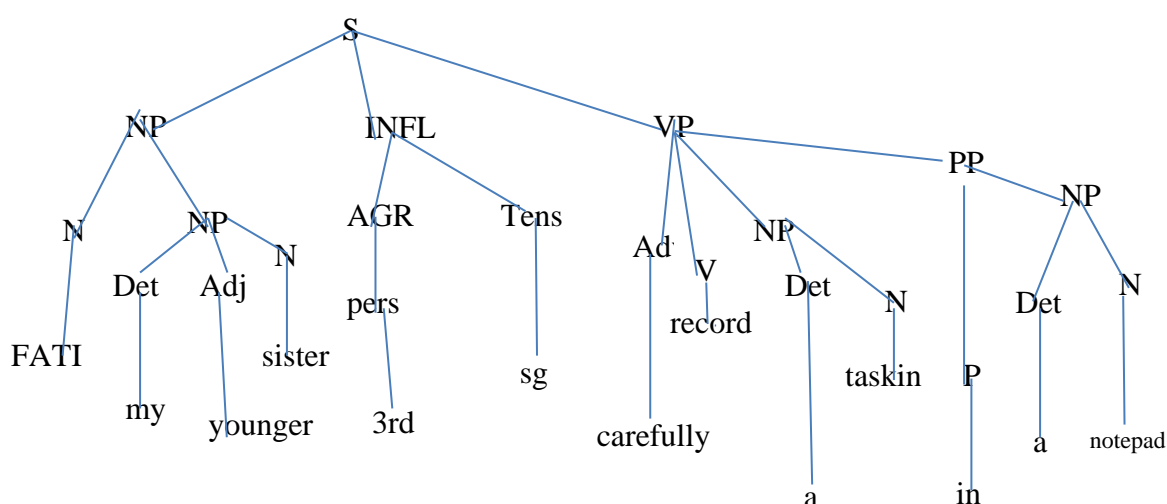




### *Nouns in Apposition*

Also important in the novel is the use of nouns in apposition. A noun is in apposition when it is immediately preceded by another co-referential noun, and in which case the second noun explains more the first. For example, “Ikenna, the footballer, won the award”. Here footballer, a noun, is in apposition to another noun, Ikenna because it (footballer) follows the noun, *Ikenna*, closely. The noun in apposition and the noun as a complement of another are almost the same but they are distinguished by the syntactic position of the word in the sentence. E.g. In “Ikenna is a footballer”, footballer is a complement of the noun, Ikenna while in “Ikenna, the footballer won the award”, *the footballer* is in apposition to the noun, Ikenna. In the two circumstances, however, “footballer” points at Ikenna and explains his identity.

While there are so many instance of the use of nouns in apposition in the text, let us use the example, “*Fatimi, my younger sister, carefully records my takings in a note-pad*” (p.6) to make a tree diagram illustration:



**Figure 2: Tree diagram showing nouns in apposition**

In the example shown on the diagram, “Fatimi and ‘my younger sister’ are in apposition with the latter explaining the former. This is for emphasis. Other examples of nouns in apposition in the text include:

- i. Tonight, Binetou, my co-wife, will return to her SICAP villa (p.7).
- ii. Modou, a practical man, led his unions into collaboration, with the government... (p.25).
- iii. ...You remember Daouda Dieng, my former suitor.../...Daouda Dieng, a candidate for my hand! (p.59)



- iv. ...Old Tamsir, Modou's brother, and the Imam from the Mosque in his area...(pp. 9/36).

The underlined noun phrases are in apposition to the subject nouns preceding them. These phrases are used in such a manner that they serve as re-enforcements to the subject nouns; they not only lay emphasis on these immediate nouns preceding them, they explain them. This is to say that the writer uses this device to be detailed and concise in her reference.

### **Sentence Functions:**

In terms of the functions performed by the sentences in the novel, the use of rhetorical questions or the interrogative sentence type is prevalent. In trying to fathom reasons why Modou married Binetou, Ramatoulaye rhetorically asks:

Was it madness, weakness, irresistible love? What inner confusion led Modou Fall to marry Binetou?...Madness or Weakness? What inner torment led Modou to marry Binetou? (pp 11/12).

In another instance, Ramatoulaye poses such soul-searching questions to herself as:

And I ask myself. I ask myself, why? Why did Modou detach himself? Why did he put Binetou between us? (p.56)

And going ahead to express her anger at the marriage of Mawdo to Nabou, Ramatoulaye reveals to Aissatou, her conversation with Mawdo:

I was irritated. He was asking me to understand.

But to understand what? The supremacy of  
instinct? The justification of the desire for variety?

I could not be an ally to polygamic instincts.

What, then, was I to understand. (p.34).

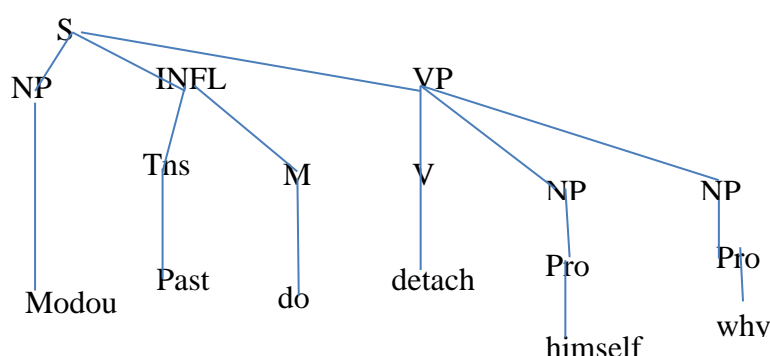
Remarkably, these interrogative sentences or rhetorical questions, as can be seen in this excerpt, evoke a voice of anger, distress, lamentation, overflowing emotion and disappointment. But talking from the TGG viewpoint, the interrogative sentences are transformations of the simple sentences from which they are derived. For example, such interrogative patterns in the text as:

Madness or weakness? Heartlessness or irresistible love? What inner torment led Modou to marry Binetou? (p 12)

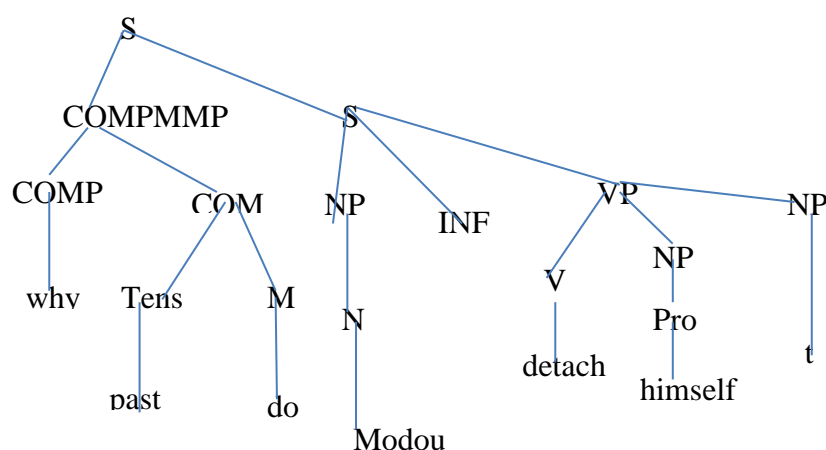
could have been written in the declarative pattern to read: *Madness, weakness, irresistible love, heartlessness, inner confusion or torment led Modou fall to marry Binetou*. But the rhetorical patterns broken into fragments bring about special stylistic effects that capture the agitated state of the mind of the writer as well as the attention of the reader.



Closely tied to transformation are the notions of basic and derived sentence forms. The application of transformations results in the derivation of specific structures. A basic sentence contains related structural features which are commonly known as constituents. The basic sentence may also differ in structure from some other sentences due to the application of transformational rules. Such application produces derived sentences like interrogative sentences, negative and passive constructions etc. Let us consider this rhetorical question in the text: Why did Modou detach himself? Note however that transformations operate in two parts. The first involves Structural Description (SD) which refers to the original sentence form before the application of transformation. The second involves Structural Change (SC) which is the new or altered form after transformation is applied. The following examples suffice.



**Figure 3(a) showing basic structure for wh-question fronting.**



**Figure 3(b) showing derived structure for wh-question fronting.**

In this schema, the wh-word “why” which originated in the VP of the declarative marker is moved to the COMP position in the derived P-marker thereby leaving a trace with an index at the extraction site. As with the practice, Tense and Modal move to the COMP nearer to the



NP in line with the AUX-NP Inversion Rule yielding, ‘why do’, then the Affix Hopping Rule applies (past + m=did) to yield to surface structure, why did Moudou detach himself?. Note that two movements apply in wh-movement. The application of the AUX-NP Inversion rule moves tense and modal to the COMP nearer to the NP while the second rule is the move- $\alpha$  (Move alpha) in which the wh-word, why, is moved from its original position of object within the declarative sentence to another position. The movement is for topicality. The wh-word is fronted by the author for emphasis and stylistic effect. The examples in 3(a) and (b) are used to make generalization about the pattern of interrogative and rhetorical questions.

### **Other Stylistic Devices in *So Long a Letter***

Other than the distinct and varying sentence patterns used and identified so far in the novel to achieve special stylistic effects, obvious and significant stylistic devices used by the writer are linguistic parallelism, sentence fragmentation, linguistic foregrounding, pattern repetition, category rule violation, code mixing and code-switching. It is instructive to note that whatever device that is used in the novel for the realization of special effects is achieved through the use of varying sentence structures.

### ***Ellipsis***

Apart from wh-questions, there are also elliptical constructions used by Ba to add meaning and beauty to the realization of the themes. We noticed its application in this text as a literary device. Using the following excerpt,

Moudou, friend of the young as of old...

Moudou, good brother, good husband, good Muslim...(p.4).

it is seen that the writer does not just complete the structures to allow readers to infer but also to portray the strangeness of the husband’s action and further show her inability to reconcile the sudden turn of event.

The line, “Moudou, good brother, good husband, good Muslim...” creates the impact of a dirge. It is a *nunc dimitis*. Apart from the repetition of Moudou and such figures of speech as simile in “Moudou, friend of the young as of old...” and “Moudou, at ease as much in a suit as in a caftan...”; metaphor in “Moudou, the lion-hearted, champion of the depressed...” and the use of assonance and alliteration in “Moudou, good brother, good husband, good Muslim...” to describe him (Moudou), the use of ellipses creates musicality thus making the expression poetic.

The technique of ellipsis also elicits interest, curiosity and tension in the reader as he/she is left guessing. This is exemplified by this declaration.

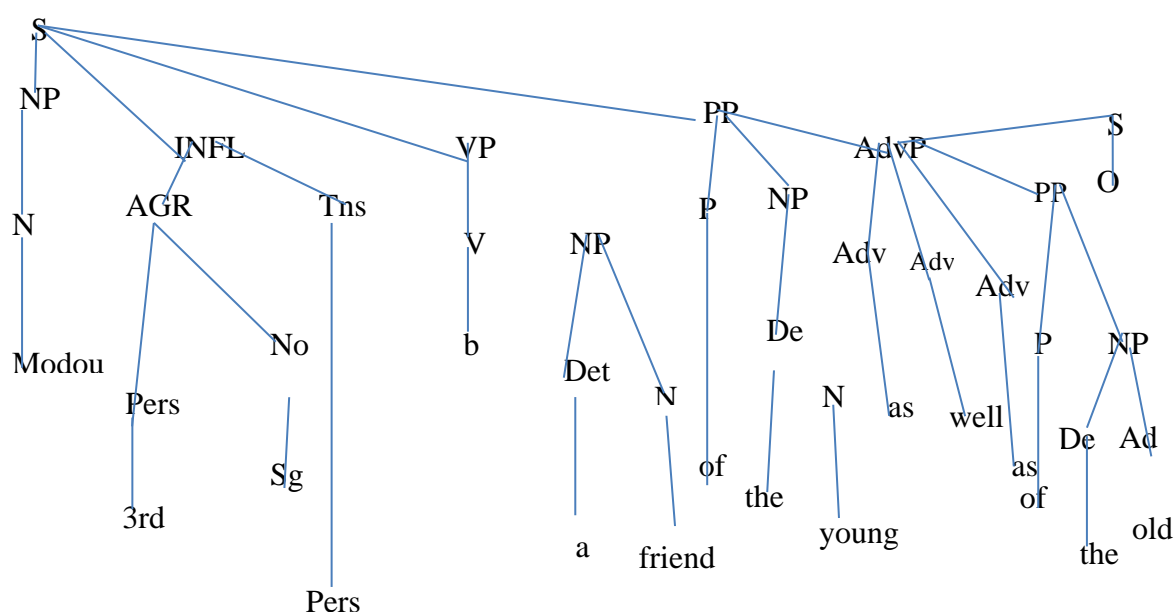
...unanimously disapproved of by my children, who were under Daba’s influence, I chose to remain. Moudou and Mawdo were surprised, could not understand...(p.45).

Though, it is explicit that Ramatoulaye refuses to remarry, the use of ellipsis in trying to interpret the inner workings of the minds of Moudou and Mawdo is like as Wales (1989) has suggested, the representation of the interior monologue in Ramatoulaye’s mind. Ramatoulaye, writes in her letter:



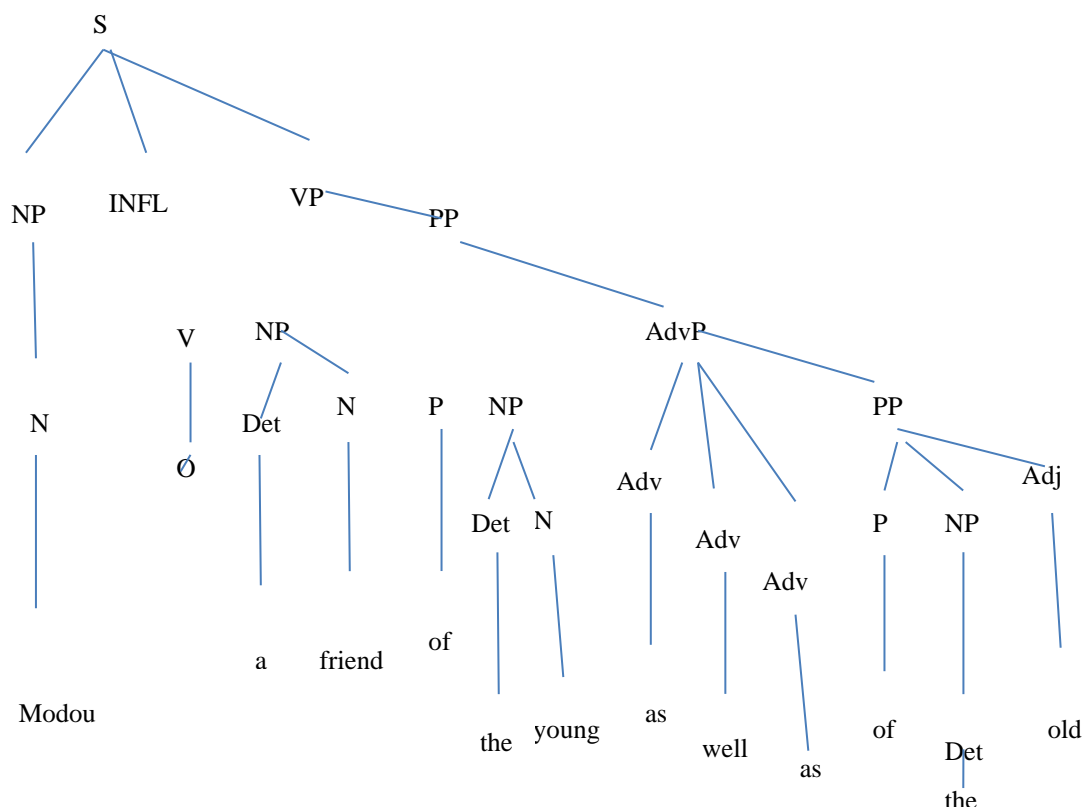
I was not divorced...I was abandoned: a fluttering leaf that no hand dares to pick up, as my grandmother would have said. (p.53).

Though “divorced” and “abandoned” are contrasts and expressions of negativity, there are indications of other thoughts in the mind of Ramatoulaye which she does not reveal. With this expression, however, she carries pity and sympathy for herself. The surface representation does not reveal her inner feelings. In the depth of her heart, she has torrents of things to say. The surface structure does not say it all. We thus have to uncover the internal structure of the elliptic sentence using the following example to make a generalization: “Modou, friend of the young as of the old...” In this sentence, the embedded clause is ellipted leaving the reader to infer from the context, the information not stated. The sentence undergoes vowel deletion in which the copular *be* is omitted for the stylistic effect of ellipsis. The sentence could as well be, “Modou is a friend of the young as of the old” as illustrated on the tree diagram below:



**Figures 4(a) showing derived structure for elliptic sentence.**

This sentence, ‘Modou is a friend of the young as well as of the old’ does not bring out the emotive undertone as the elliptic pattern has. Using the ellipsis helps to recover the deleted verb in the surface string. Let us consider the following surface structure tree configuration:



**Figure 4(b) showing analysis of elliptical construction**

Note that the INFL and the V are not on the surface structure because the writer has intentionally deleted the copular *be*, she has disorganized the sentence at the deep structure by the deletion of the INFL and the verb for stylistic effect. The effect of the deletion appears on the surface structure. Consequently, we notice that on the P-marker, the INFL is not filled because of the absence of the verb where an affix can hop on. In this case, the affix hopping rule does not apply. No affix is hopped onto any verb since the verb is merely understood to exist in the context of the usage. The INFL and the V are empty and are left bare in the realization at the surface structure. The elliptic portion is a stylistic device used by the author to arrest the minds of the readers and get them guessing.

### **Linguistic Parallelism**

Ba weaves her language into unique patterns that adequately describe/convey the various moods to her readers. One of such devices employed to achieve this purpose is linguistic parallelism. In harnessing linguistic parallelism in the novel, therefore, efforts are made to look at it from the different angles it has been discussed as well as ascertain how these enhance the desired stylistic goals in the novel. Apart from being childhood friends, Aissatou and Ramatoulaye share a common feature of not having husbands, both being separated from their spouses through divorce and/or death. Ba uses form and language to capture this natural affinity through the balancing of both the idea and the grammatical structure:





Yesterday you were divorced

Today I am widowed (p.1)

In representing these parallel structures linguistically, we will have: Adverb + Pro + Verb + Participle with the two adverbs “Yesterday” and “Today” in paradigmatic relationship with each other. They are synonymously related under the general feature/ + time /. Similarly, the two past participle “divorced” and “widowed” are related synonymously under the general feature / - husband /. This juxtaposition of ideas is similar to the instance in this excerpt:

I shed tears of joy and sadness together, joy is being

loved by my children, the sadness of a mother who

does not have the means to change the course of events (p53)

Besides reflecting the similarity in the plights of both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou in the passages, the literary significance of the patterns of language on the text is that form and language have been used to reinforce the message of the text. Ba applies structural parallelism and pattern repetition to achieve a certain communication effect as in the following text:

My efforts cannot for long take my mind off my disappointment.

I think of the suckling baby, no sooner born than orphaned.

I think of the blind man who will never see his child's smile. I think of the cross the one armed man has to bear. I think ... But my despair persists, but my rancour remains, but the waves of an immense sadness break in me! (p.12).

Apart from the repetition of “I think”, such parallel structures as suckling baby/orphaned; the blind man/... see his child's smile; the cross/ the one armed man has to bear, etc, build a powerful effect on the reader and as well dramatize the situation. However, the three adjectives – “Suckling”, blind” and “one armed” are in paradigmatic relationship with one another sharing the same feature (+ vulnerable) while the noun phrases, baby, and man as shown in the passage belong to the same paradigm and share the same semantic feature (+ human).

Still on the use of linguistic parallelism in balancing of ideas with similar ones, Ramatoulaye writes:

The nation is made up of all the families, rich or poor,

united or separated, aware or unaware. (p.89)



## Pattern Repetition

Ba writes:

Teachers... form a noble army accomplishing daily feats,  
never praised, never decorated. An army forever on the move, forever  
vigilant. An army without drums, without gleaming uniforms... (p23).

The combined use of sentence fragments like “An army forever on the move, forever vigilant. An army without drums, without gleaming uniforms” as well as a noticeable sound pattern together builds up rhythm thereby heightening emotion. A look at the phonological aspect of the structures shows that the use of consonantal sounds including the velar nasal /n/ and the fricative /f/ and the vowel /e/ form a sound pattern that is musical and of significant stylistic relevance.

In another example of pattern repetition, a particular word (and not a phrase) is repeated thus:

Moudou, friend of the young as of old.... Moudou, the  
Lion-hearted, champion of the depressed... Moudou, at  
ease as much as in a suite as in a caftan ... Moudou good  
brother, good husband, good Muslim ...(p.4)

The repetition of the name, Moudou, is emotive. It builds up this emotion to a heart-rending height. This repetition heightens the pain of Ramatoulaye and evokes the feeling of sympathy for her. It makes her feelings very sincere, in addition to the aesthetic effect resulting from the repetition.

## Foregrounding

In describing the predicament of one of their mutual friends, Jacqueline, Ramatoulaye writes:

A teaching post in Senegal must have corresponded to her  
dreams of escape. She had come therefore, but all her  
frustrated dreams, all her disappointed hopes, all her  
crushed re-volt connived to attack her throat ... (p 44).

The phrases, “but all her frustrated dreams”, “all her disappointed hopes” and “all her crushed revolt” foreground this context such that the frustrations of Jacqueline are brought to the fore. While “all her ...” is repeated, “frustrated dreams”, “disappointed hopes” and “crushed revolt” are personified as they are given human forms and roles thus conniving to attack Jacqueline’s throat, an ailment she is suffering from. There is also foregrounding in this excerpt:

What a crowd on public holidays! Numerous families  
would stroll about, thirsty for space and fresh air. People



would undress, without embarrassment, tempted by the  
benevolent caress of the iodized breeze and the warmth  
from the sun's rays (p21).

In this passage, there is an application of the selection restriction technique in which "families thirst for space and fresh air" instead of water which is the right collocation. Also, people are caressed by the iodized breeze rather than by fellow human beings. There is also foregrounding of imagery. This occurs when there is prominence of imagery which draws attention to itself. This mechanism is utilized in the text under review. Consider this excerpt:

The dried blood from the wounds leaves dark and repulsive  
stains on the ground... the red blood irrigating the same  
organs. These organs situated in the same places, carryout  
(sic) the same functions (p79).

In this excerpt, there is foregrounding of images of colour – dark and red. The images of a supposedly caked dark (red) blood is reinforced such that the reader can hardly fail to appreciate the effort of the writer to graphically give account of the situation. Through the use of the technique of selection restriction rule, blood is applied here in the sense of water that irrigates a farm thus drawing the attention of the reader to the expression. Stretched further, the expression, "... the red blood irrigating the same organs. These organs, situated in the same places, carry out the same functions" euphemistically refer to the physiology of the male sexual organ as well as the biological functions. The sentence structure and its usage in this regard are literary.

### **Sentence Fragmentation**

That the novel is epistolary, explains the use of sentence fragmentation as a stylistic feature. It is close to the language of speech. It is imperative therefore to note that sentence fragmentation is a particular device whose application and usage Ba has exploited. Instances of the device abound in the text under review. Using question marks to achieve sentence fragmentation Ba writes:

I was irritated. He was asking me to understand. But to understand what? The supremacy of instinct? The right to betray? The justification of the desire or variety?...

What, then, was I to understand? (p34).

This excerpt captures the thought line of Ramatoulaye when she narrates her encounter with Mawdo to Aissatou as well as revealing the latter's argument for taking Nabou as a second wife. The fragments, "The supremacy of instinct?" "The right to betray?", "The justification of the desire for variety" are expressions which, though without verbs, really bring to fore the genuine concern of Ramatoulaye for her friend and reveal her subsequent condemnation of polygamy. In another instance, she writes:



*Madness or weakness? Heartlessness or irresistible*

*love? What inner torment led Moudou Fall to marry*

*Binetou? (p12)*

While this last sentence, though rhetorical possesses a verb form “led”, the first two expressions in the passage do not; yet all of them have similar effect. It is instructive to note that fragments hardly make meaning when isolated, but are explanatory when connected in a body of structures or situated in a proper context. These expressions will suffice as examples:

- i. Oil stains on the walls, balls of crumpled paper. What balance sheet for a day (p7);
- ii. Nearly twenty years of independence! When will we have the first female minister involved in the decisions concerning the development of our country (p61).

Except example (i) is situated in the context within which the expression is used, it can hardly be understood. Though without a verb, it is still vivid in the description made with it. For the second example, the expression ending with exclamation is only meaningful when connected with the second leg of the passage thus capturing the concern of Ramatoulaye over the under representation of the women folk, twenty years after independence.

Notably, sentence fragments cannot be represented on the tree diagram thus affirming the fact that linguistic principles do not, at all times, account for the literary language.

### **Selection Restriction Rule**

The selection restriction rule is concerned with the violation of collocation rules. This is very common in literature. The expression:

I thank God for my eyes which daily embrace heaven and earth... (p12)

is a good example of selection restriction rule showing.



Here, eyes, heaven and earth are used as if they were humans that can embrace or engage in some form of emotional activity. But since the novel is about love and disappointment, this violation conjures seductive feelings that can best be described as biting and catchy. Another example is:

The walls that limit my horizon for four months and ten  
 days do not bother me (p8).



Where a similar illustration is made thus:

Walls	Limit
↓	↓
[+ animate]	[+ action]
[ + concrete]	[+ animate]

“Wall” as used here assumes the persona of a human being that restricts the movement of the writer. The essence of the expression is to highlight the writer’s frustration. It also shows that the writer is caged though determined to bear and surmount it all.

Though Ba may not have intentionally set out to write the way she has done, there is no doubt that the basic elements of stylistics such as foregrounding, selection restriction rule, sentence fragments, ellipsis and other forms of repetition are adequately utilized. The application of these forms of the language of literature, therefore, explains her style.

## CONCLUSION

The study of a literary text based on the evaluation of the use of language in the given text is the foundation upon which stylistics is built. Our attempt at analyzing Ba’s work has been able to establish the fact that a literary artist unconsciously manipulates the resources of language and creates a special effect. This is why the language of literature is termed a systematic deviation. It is the concern of stylistics to investigate and evaluate this language use and establish the peculiarity to which it has been put. This is what we have attempted in this study.

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