



**A STYLISTIC APPRAISAL OF SELECTED POEMS IN SOLA BABATUNDE'S
THE VALLEY OF VISION**

Gambari-Olufadi Kifayat

Department of English, University of Ilorin

kifaolufadi@gmail.com; 08033772676

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ABSTRACT: *Creative writers, poets, novelists and playwrights deploy linguistic forms that characterise literariness. More specifically, the peculiarity of language use in the poetic genre proves its suitability for stylistic appraisal. We analyse selected poems in Sola Babatunde's The Valley of Vision from a stylistic point of view to examine how the sociocultural standpoint of the poet is reflected in the poems. Six poems were selected purposively from the poetic collection and analysed using the conceptual bases of rhetoric and lexico-semantic variation. From the data analysis, it was found that elements such as figures of speech, analogy, transfer, idiom and loan words are employed in the text to unveil the linguistic background of the poet, unveil the thematic preoccupation of the poem, stir readers' emotion and create mental images in the minds of the readers. In conclusion, the use of stylistics as the conceptual basis for the study has revealed the reasons behind the choices made by the poet to attract readers' attention by making his poems accessible. The use of the tools of rhetoric and lexico-semantics has also revealed some facts about African poetry to facilitate readers' sense of interpretation.*

KEYWORDS: Stylistics; African Poetry; Rhetoric, Lexico-Semantics; Style Variation



INTRODUCTION

The essence of language cannot be overemphasised, as the removal of a language from a human based community will throw the society into chaos and pandemonium. Regarding this, Chomsky (1957, p. 196) states that if one has not developed language, one simply does not have access to the most of human experience, and lack of human experience results in the inability to do things properly.

Poetry is a literary genre which deploys language to communicate human experiences in the world. Since language is a medium of thought, a means of expressing our intentions and emotions, poetry uses a specialised language to communicate these elements of the human experience to the world. Poetry is an expression of thoughts through deliberate violations of lexico-grammatical rules which do not only foreground the poem as a medium but also highlight the poet's purpose. To discuss the language of poetry is to reveal those stylistic features which conform to the norms of language and those features which are deviations from these norms. Poets sometimes manipulate language to suit the communicative purposes based on the category of the audience for which the piece is meant, or sometimes, to reflect their linguistic identities. All these encapsulate the styles of the poets. Hence, this study examines Sola Babatunde's *The Valley of Vision* from a linguistic stylistic perspective. The reader expects to learn about Sola Babatunde and his literary incursions from this.

The Concepts of Stylistics and Rhetoric

Among the notable scholars who have contributed to the description of the field of stylistics, its analytical tools and tenets are Crystal and Davy (1969) and Turner (1973). Crystal and Davy (1969, p. 8) view stylistic analysis and its description as an art of clarifying linguistic problems of interpretation. Turner (1973, p. 7) on the other hand defines stylistics as a linguistic approach which concentrates on variation in the use of language often, but not exclusively, with special attention to the conscious and complex uses of language in literature. Turner's definition complements that of Crystal and Davy. Their view on stylistics is that it provides solutions to the problem of complexity in the use of language, especially in literary text through analysis and interpretation.

Also, Strazny (2004) opines that stylistics is the study of style in spoken and written text. Style is a consistent occurrence in the text of certain items and structures or types of items and structures among those offered by language as a whole. To him, a full stylistic analysis of a given piece, spoken or written, would describe the text at all traditional levels of linguistic description, i.e., sound (phonology), form (morphology/lexis), syntax and meaning (semantics). This view corroborates Simpson's (2004) claim that stylistic analysis is a method of textual interpretation in which there is primacy in language as a function of text in the context of time, place, psychology and culture. Simpson's description of stylistics above relates to the concept and domain of rhetoric. Gobir (2017) claims that stylistics and rhetoric are inseparable phenomena since a branch of rhetoric, which is Elocutio, serves as the basis for stylistics. In simple terms, Elocutio constitutes tropes and schemes deployed as tools of stylistic orientation. Gobir's description corroborates Wales' (2001, p. 372) exposition regarding the evolution of stylistics from rhetoric. Wales' submission transcends the historical foundation of rhetoric; her discussion extends to the description of the relationship between stylistics and rhetoric. She opines that the scope of rhetoric covers the display and exhibition of public speaking skills towards appealing to listeners' emotive senses.



Not only Elocutio, the Aristotelian tenets of rhetoric—which include Logos (tools that are symbols of fact and figures for justification of claims), Ethos (tools that signify and give credibility to claims), and Pathos (tools which are symbols of appeal and empathy)—constitute elements that are capable of persuasive manifestation by virtue of their stylistic imports (Higgins & Walkers, 2012). These tools do not only perform persuasive roles, but they contribute to style variation in all kinds of texts, especially the spoken texts.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is Adegbija's (1989) typology of Lexico-Semantic Variation of Nigerian English. Lexico-semantics as a linguistic concept constitutes two distinct but interrelated words: 'lexis' and 'semantics'. Lexis is the vocabulary of language which consists of all the words in a language: all word forms, having meaning or grammatical function. Semantics on the other hand, "is the study of the conventional meaning of words, phrases and sentences in a language" (Yule, 2002, p. 114). Contextualising the concept of lexico-semantics, Alo (2004) states that the language (words) spoken in a community mirrors the life of the people of the community. The vocabulary more or less faithfully reflects the culture whose purpose it serves (p. 74).

In relation to the submission above, five stages in relation to language development cycle were identified by Schneider (2007, p. 56). These are foundation, exonormative stabilisation, nativisation, endonormative and differentiation. This study is interested in the third stage in the developmental process given by Schneider. As part of the differentiation process to the nativisation of English in the Nigerian environment, the meaning of some words has changed. Some of the words are used in a new sense and as new words are created in likeness of the word formation process of English.

Adegbija (1989, p. 171) identifies five major classes of lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English as 'transfer', 'analogy', 'acronyms', 'semantic shift or extension' and 'coinages' or neologism. This typology alongside the rhetorical features of stylistics is analysed in the section on analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study constitute selected poems in Sola Babatunde's *The Valley of Vision* for data presentation and analysis. Six poems were selected purposively based on their thematic preoccupation from the poetic collection and analysed using the conceptual bases of rhetoric and lexico-semantic variation as features of stylistic analysis. Features of lexico-semantic variations by Adegbija (1989)—which include transfer of mother tongue (idioms and loanword), analogy, acronymy, coinages, semantic shift or extension, etc.—are identified and analysed in the poetic-texts.

Data Analysis

This section presents the lexico-semantic and rhetorical analysis of the selected poems in Sola Babatunde's *The Valley of Vision*. The data analysed in this section are examined on the basis



of the tools of stylistic significance. It is expected that these tools of *stylistic analysis* will considerably reveal the styles in the poem. The analyses of the poems are presented one after the other.

Datum One: *The Valley of Vision*

Houses are felled
to fortify the stronghold
and the earth is laid waste.
the hands that toiled are cut
and the branches are severed from the root
the birds are perched flew
the branches withered
and the earth is laid waste.
the earth is laid waste
for stomachs rumble like festival drums
the suppliant outstretched hands grow numb
and peep at the over-fed pockets and bellies,
peep behind the masked faces.
the earth is laid waste
spurious sacrifices float
for rumbling stomachs must not wither
and the parched throats must be assuaged.
the stronghold is perforated and plundered
and the guards feign ignorance;
the neglected hands sustaining the guards withdraw:
and the earth is purged:
Houses are felled
to fortify the stronghold
and the earth is laid waste.



Lexico-Semantics Analysis

The poet deploys lexical items to make meaning. An analysis of the lexical structure of his writing is a necessary step toward explicating his message or ideas.

Idiom

This is derived from the indigenous language of a community. It is used in a special way to convey meaning; it also deals with a peculiar language use. Illustrations abound as follows:

“the hands that toiled are cut”

“the stronghold is perforated and plundered”

“the earth is purged”

Rhetorical Analysis

Hyperbole

Hyperbole simply describes the use of exaggerated words and expressions. For example,

‘... outstretched hands grow numb,’

In the illustration above, the ‘hand’ that is ‘outstretched’ is overemphasised to stir the readers’ emotions.

Synecdoche

Synecdoche employs a part of the referent to stand for the whole, e.g.,

‘... outstretched hands grow numb,’ ‘for rumbling stomach must not wither.’

‘Stomach rumbles like festival drums.’

In the example above, ‘stomach’ and ‘hands’ are used in a symbolic manner. The words represent the complete individual. In the case of “stomach”, the poet refers to the bourgeois in the society while ‘hands’ represent the masses. These two words are used as a caricature of stratification in society.

Simile

Simile describes an indirect comparison of one thing to another. An illustration in the poem is

“...stomachs rumbles like festival drums.” Simile is used in the illustration above to generate humor.



Personification

Personification is an act of giving inanimate objects human qualities. In the poem, the following examples abound:

“... branches are served from the root.”

“... and peep at the over-fed pockets and bellies.”

“... the neglected hands sustaining the guards withdraw....”

Inanimate entities that are personified in the illustrations above include ‘branches’, ‘pocket’, ‘bellies’, and ‘hands’. Personification in the illustrations are issues as means of stirring the emotion of the readers, for the purpose of creating humour.

Datum Two: PSALM ONE

I am the *gbedu* tree

I can defy the billows of your storm.

I am the banana tree

I can parade my fresh plumpness

In the front of the carver.

I am the calabash

I won't pay homage at the bed of your sea.

I am not the reed

Tossed by the whims of your tide.

I am not the chameleon

That walks the earth so gingerly

And pleases them all with its colour.

I am the elephant

The grass that falls under my feet

Shall feel the weight of the forest mountain

I am the palm tree

I grow steadily to caress the clouds,

To defy your terrestrial dwarfing roof.



Lexico-Semantic Analysis

Loan Word

Loan word is a means of borrowing a word or words from the mother tongue (L1) to English or a second language. An illustration that abounds in the text is exemplified as follows:

“I am the *gbedu* tree.”

The word, ‘*gbedu*’, emanates from the name of a tree, ‘*gbedu*’, which describes a tree known as ‘teak’ with high social and economic values such as transportation, building, production of furniture, and so on. The use of the loan word, which is of Yoruba origin, is to epitomise strength.

Transfer of Mother Tongue

Transfer of mother tongue is a direct transfer of meaning from the immediate language (mother tongue) to the second language (English). Illustrations are cited as follows:

“I am the *gbedu* tree.”

“I am the banana tree.”

“I can parade my fresh plumpness...”

In the examples above, the sentences are direct translations of the mother tongue to the English language. The implication of these illustrations is to simplify the language of the poem for a better understanding of the poet’s message. Also, it is used to reflect the sociolinguistic background of the poet as a second language speaker of English language.

Rhetorical Analysis

Metaphor

Metaphor is a means of comparing one thing to another in a direct form. It usually compares two entities: the target and source domain. An example of metaphor in the poem is cited below:

“I am the *gbedu* tree.”

“I am the elephant.”

“I am the banana tree.”

In the poetic illustrations above, the target is the poet, which is represented with the lexis, ‘I’, while the sources for which attributes are used to represent the poet are ‘*gbedu*’, ‘Elephant’ and ‘banana’. The poet uses the first two words which depict strength, and the last one, which depicts the freshness of the poet.



Hyperbole

“I am the Elephant.

The grass that falls under my feet shall feel the weight of the forest mountain.”

The overemphasised ‘weight’ of ‘the elephant’ in the illustration above is not only for the purpose of creating humour or stirring the readers’ emotions; the use of hyperbole in the text simply explains the might of the poet compared to that of an elephant.

Datum Three: THIS DARK NIGHT (*ForThe Discourse at the Border*)

It is midnight

The enveloping darkness beclouds this terrain

Even to the accustomed feet

Walking the night is breath-taking

Ile to t oju eni su

Ma ma ti nderu bani o

Onile semi pele alejo mbo

Okunkun ko meni owo

In this palpable darkness

The familiar refrain is “*Iwo tani?*”

Night fall becomes the cloak for the night urchins

To hawl immodesty and deposit emptiness

On every unsuspecting door steep

Ile to t oju eni su

Ma ma ti nderu bani o

It is night fall

The erudite minstrel on our harried tower

Pawns the starved lectern



For a lousy rostrum

And in our syllabi of mutations

Electioneering gimmicks and theorems

Rank high at informed gatherings:

Eyete flies on in our forest of marionettes

As the hawk becomes the watch-dog for the brood

In this chocking darkness

We only mutate on political permutations

On our drained tower

The owl mans the gate at our clan's feast

The raven supplies the immaculate *aso-ebi*

As the vulture renders the melody

For our race' dance of miss-fortune.

Ile to t oju eni su

It is a long night

And in the long night of walk

The unseeing eyes recede in their sockets

At the frightening sights on our ambushed terrain

War cries resound in frightening and guttural tones

In the masquerading darkness

As a marauders gamble

With the sign posts of our legacy

In the harried night rest

The mind becomes a bee-hive!



Will there be a new dawn
When mystical beasts drown the long night
With shrill gender-less notes
In a self- annihilating syndrome
Of the sufferhead?

BUT the thickest night is always nearest to day.

There must be a new dawn
On the wheels of progress
To banish this long night of insanity.

Lexico-Semantic Analysis

Analogy

Analogy is described as an influence in word formation and a corrupter of idiom. Illustrations of analogy that abound in the data include:

“Sufferhead”

“*Aso-ebi*”

“night rest”

“unseen eyes”

The illustrations above exemplify the expressions and words used as analogy for the description of specific situations. ‘Sufferhead’ depicts oppression, ‘Aso-ebi’ describes the uniformity in terms of background, culture and history, ‘night-rest’ explains a period of relaxation after a day full of activities, and “unseen eyes” describes supernatural beings. All of these are specially created words employed for achieving stylistic effect through formation of words.

Loan Word

Illustrations of loan words in the poem are exemplified thus:

“*Aso-ebi*” (a uniform dress or dress code that is traditionally worn by the Yoruba or some African cultures as an indication of culture and solidarity during ceremony and festival period), and

“*Eyele*” (a kind of bird also regarded as dove or pigeon).



The two words illustrated above are of Yoruba linguistic orientation. The borrowed words are used to achieve linguistic variation and also reflect the linguistic background of the poet.

Rhetorical Analysis

Hyperbole

Hyperbole in the poem under investigation is exemplified as follows:

“In this choking darkness...

...The owl mans the gate at our clan’s feast...

As the vulture renders the melody

the mind becomes a bee-hive.”

On a basic level, the attribute ‘choking’ is bestowed on ‘darkness’, ‘manning of the gate’ for the ‘owl’, ‘rendition’ for ‘vulture’, and the ‘mind’ having the might of transformation. The essence of these usages is to create humour, and pass a serious message in a less serious manner by the poet.

Personification

Personification is an important rhetorical tool that abounds in the poem under consideration.

Examples include:

“The owl mans the gate at our clan’s feast...

As the vulture renders the melody

“war cries...”

In the foregoing illustrations, ‘owl’, ‘vulture’ and ‘war’ are given the attributes of human beings—“manning of gates”, singing, and crying to stir the emotions of the listeners and create a humous atmosphere amidst tension.

Synecdoche

An illustration of synecdoche is evident and prevalent in the lines of the poem investigated in this study. For example,

“... Even to the accustomed feet.”

“The unseeing eyes recede in their sockets.”

‘Eyes’ and ‘feet’ are characteristics of humans. In the lines of the poem, however, two categories of people are identified. ‘Feet’ refers to the first category of people, who are different from the ones represented with the ‘eyes’. Synecdoche is used to pass symbolic messages to readers.



Datum Four: IF A MAN DIES (*Dedicated to the memory of Fadoju and Mogaji*)

The fattened cow
Tells the long tale
Of a sumptuous dish
With its discarded bones
Condolences.

The glamorous petals of nature
Become laudable sacrifices

On the amorous altars
Of violent lovers,
Condolences.

If a man dies
Does he live again?

The straight and robust *Iroko*
Seldom ages in the forest
Neither does the luxuriant grass
Escape the graze of a famished cattle,
Condolences

The bitter-leaf scarcely sees
The defacing mandibles of insects

But the sweet potato
Must always host scavengers,
Condolences.

The salutary taste of honey
Soon fades on the tongue
But bitterness lingers
In the dark corners of the mouth,



Condolences.

If a man dies

Doesn't ne live again?

For

the decimated flesh witnesses

corruption

a processing into the primordial

loam

a mere dust

if a man dies,

he lives in dreams and nightmares

no more the reassuring breath

and the soothing caress;

not again the seeming immortal

presence.

If a man dies

Doesn't ne live again?

He lives in the dreaded transition

The spirt to the spiritual

The terrestrial to the celestial

He lives in the cycle of temporality

Leaving his kins to harvest the

fruits

Of his labour here.



Lexico-Semantic Analysis

Analogy

Analogy is characteristic of the poem under study and illustrations of analogy in the poem are cited as follows:

“The bitter-leaf scarcely sees the defacing mandibles of insects

But the sweet potatoes must always host scavengers....”

In the examples cited above, the instance and attributes of bitter-leaf and sweet potatoes are used as illustrations to explain the phenomenon at hand. Analogy is employed in the poem stylistically for effects.

Loan Word

The only loan word, which abounds in the poem is “*Iroko*”. The word is a Yoruba word which literally describes a tropical African tree regarded as a teak substitute. In the poem, the *Iroko tree* is alluded to pass a specific message across to the readers. In the poem, the inevitability of death is emphasised using the strength and long existence of the tree as justification. Despite all these attributes, the tree wanes with time.

Rhetorical Analysis

Hyperbole

“The fattened cow
Tells the long tale
Of a sumptuous dish...”

In the lines above, the use of hyperbole is to downplay the seriousness of the message being passed across to readers of the poem. Though humorous, the ‘cow’ which ended up as a sacrificial lamb emphasises the vanity of life and indispensability of death.

Personification

‘The bitter-leaf scarcely sees’
The defacing mandibles of insects...’

In the illustrations above, bitter-leaf is given the attribute of human being, which is the ability to ‘see’. Even though insects use the bitter-leaf as a means of sustenance, its strength of sight, which is bestowed upon it by the poet, is a means of achieving language variation in the poem.

Metaphor

In an attempt to describe and emphasise the vanity of life, the poet refers to man as ‘a mere dust.’ The entire text of the poem is metaphorical in nature; the lines are a direct comparison



of man and what is left of man after he dies. The use of metaphor by the poet is a means of creating mental images in the minds of the readers.

Datum Five: BYGONES

Let

Time's ceaseless motions

Heal the red scars

Of wounds inflected

By

Yesterday's blind passions

Erupting from ignorant hatred

Gone

Should be violent reprisals

Of calumnious campaigns

Be

Of immutable resolve

To rid our festering sores

Of all septic spots

By

Expunging cutthroat

Like an aching tooth,

From our troubled polity

Gone

Should be the ashes

That bequeathed deceitful smiles

Of contentment-fire flies

In our blinded view-

During yesterday's blaze



That ravaged this terrain.

So let bygones

Sprout a new dawn

From the pitfalls of yesterday

Of the gone by dawn

Let the rising sun

Dry our purple tears

As it sucks the dew

On the chaste leaves,

Opening our informed view

To the coming spring

1991

Lexico-Semantic Analysis

Analogy and Transfer

"...By yesterday's blind passion

...That bequeathed **deceitful smiles**...

In our blinded view dry our **purple tears**"

"Expunging cutthroat

like an aching tooth"

In the illustrations above, there are instances of analogy and transfer. "Deceitful smiles" and "purple tears" are both elements of transfer and analogy. This indicates that the poet uses a direct L1 translation technique for the description of the series of events in the poem to drive home his point, to make the poem easy to interpret. The 'smile' is not ordinary, hence the use of the adjective, 'deceitful' for adequate and precise description. The same is applicable to the 'tears' which are 'purple'. The colourful tears simply depicts deceit.

Rhetorical Analysis

Simile

In the poem direct comparison is made between two things or words, or words of unlike nature. Simile, as used in the illustration below, is used for achieving clarity of expression and meaning. The comparison in the illustration is made through the use of 'like'.



“Expunging cutthroat like an aching tooth.”

Personification

“That bequeathed deceitful smiles....

Yesterday's blind passion”

“Let

Time’s ceaseless motions,

Heal the red scars...”

In the poetic illustration above, ‘smiles’, ‘passion’, ‘time’ and ‘scars’ are personified through the endowment of the attributes of the animate entities, which are ‘bequeath’, ‘blindness’, mobility (‘motion’), and ‘healing’. The significance of personification in the poem is to stir readers’ emotion in a humorous manner.

Datum Six: SUPPLICATION

O Agelee Rock, implant me in your love

Let eternal sinews engraft my heart to yours.

Steel my heart against snaring wolves

That I might not be crushed by envious canine.

Break my dam against the ebbing floods

Pushing from the slit-arteries of time’s ceaseless flow.

Shield my lily-white robe from being soiled

Walking along their streets seething with runnels of slime.

Guide me against elephants of concern

That my budding spores may not see sad fruition in their
trod.

O Rock of offence, root my feet in your firm grip

That I might not be tempest tossed.

Let my banana stem flaunt its fleshy pumpness before
their carver.



And my *gbedu* be firmly rooted against their cyclone

Tutor me in your legend to over-flow

That I might perpetually proclaim your might.

Amen.

Lexico-Semantics

Transfer of Mother Tongue

The illustration of transfer of mother-tongue in the poem as exemplified below depicts the direct arrangement of lexical items in a manner that represents and conveys messages directly as it appears in the poet's L1.

“O Ageless Rock, implant me in your love”

“That I might perpetually proclaim your might”

“Amen.”

The use of transfer in the lines above is a form of apostrophe, an ode to an entity, which metaphorically symbolises the superordinate being, God. The transfer is used in a humorous manner to communicate the poet's message in a less serious manner.

Rhetorical Analysis

Metaphor

Metaphorical expressions are presented in this poem through the use of an apostrophe. In the illustrations below, the supernatural being, creature of the universe, God, is described using the symbol of the ‘rock’. The word is repeated twice throughout the poem. A rock is unshakable and immobile; this depicts the might of God as being untouchable and ever-living/immortal, hence, the choice of ageless.

“O Ageless rock”

“O Rock of offence”

Personification

The inanimate object which is invested with human qualities in the poetic extract below is the ‘rock’. The ‘rock’ is given attributes which include the ability to ‘love’, and the ability to make things possible, such as the ability to “Let eternal sinews engraft my heart to yours.”

“O Ageless rock, implant me in your love.”

“...Let eternal sinews engraft my heart to yours.”



The use of personification is to achieve language variation and create words of strong lexical qualities.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

In terms of meaning explication, the rhetorical devices as well as lexico-semantic features—such as figures of speech, analogy, transfer, idiom, loan words and so on—are employed to unveil the thematic preoccupation of the text. The poet made extensive use of metaphors like ‘gbedu’, ‘banana tree’, ‘elephant’, ‘calabash’ and so on, to depict strength, ability, freshness and so on. He compares himself with great things of life; not even the socio-political structure of the society can hinder his success, growth, physically or financially because he is firmly rooted by the spirit of God. Also, metaphors such as the comparison of the supreme being, God, with the rock depicts strength and immortality.

More specifically, synecdoche, idiom and analogy are used in the poem to create mental images in the minds of the readers, personification, metaphor and hyperbole are used in the poem to stir readers’ emotions, create a sense of humour and for the presentation and conveyance of serious messages in less serious manners. Loan words and transfer are especially used to display the linguistic background of the poet as a second language speaker of English, and also, to make the poem easier to understand by potential readers.

CONCLUSION

This study centers on the examination of selected poems in Sola Babatunde’s poetic collection, *The Valley of Vision*, from a stylistic perspective. More specifically, the tools of rhetoric and lexico-semantic features of stylistics are used to interrogate the text under investigation. The use of the rhetorical tools, as well as the identified lexico-semantic tools of Adegbija (1986) in his classification, has helped to demystify the myth behind specific styles and linguistic choices of the poet. Not only this, the use of the stylistic tools of rhetoric and lexico-semantic orientations aid meaning explications, as understanding the underlying and inherent meanings of poetic lines require the understanding of specific linguistic attributes of the poet and the context of the text.

The use of stylistics as the conceptual basis for this study has made this possible.

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