


Contextualizing Morphosyntactic Features in Wole Soyinka's *Ake-the Years of Childhood*

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ABSTRACT

The term 'morpho-syntax' has a dual meaning because it is a combination of both morphology and syntax. These two are language components that a stylistician can adopt in any write-up. This act by a stylistician is what brings about the uniqueness of a write-up which is based on individual's use of language. It is also termed the morphology of linguistics adopted by a writer to achieve communicative effectiveness. Wole Soyinka's language is said to be complex to most readers, possibly due to the morpho-syntactic features inherent in his text. Thus, the thrust of this paper is to identify the morpho-syntactic features and to discover the reason for the complexity of Wole Soyinka's language in his book titled: *Ake- The Years of Childhood*. Using the functional stylistics as our model of analysis, we examined factors that are obviously and silently responsible for his complexity of languages, such as code-mixing, direct translation from Yoruba into English, a single word or sentence having several interpretations, coinages and his sentence structures. From our analysis, we discovered that the factors mentioned above are actually responsible for the complexity of Soyinka's language and truly his use of language stands as a barrier to general readers comprehending most of his works.

1. Introduction

Style cuts across both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of life. Non-linguistically, style can be related to fashion such as hair-do, cloth design, cooking, fishing, etc., while linguistics deals with the way a writer or a speaker writes or speaks that makes them different from other writers. No two human beings do things exactly the same way. Sociolinguists, in studying language behaviour in society, have identified what they call idiolect, that is to say, the particular language habits which an individual exhibits that are peculiar to him alone. No two speakers of the same language are found to use the language exactly the same way, hence each person manifests their idiosyncrasies.

Work could be seen as interesting, uninteresting or boring to comprehend. More often, how work is seen depends on the style in which the writer or an individual has decided to use. It is believed that no utterance or work is without a style; even if it seems plain, in its plainness is where the style lies. According to Fowler (1993) "Style is a manner of expression describable in linguistic terms, justifiable and valuable in respect of non-linguistic factor". According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2002), style is derived from the Greek word "stilus" a classical method of using wedged wood to print letters on waxen tablets. The emphasis here has been placed on the written form. Thus, making it an intellectual conception and since style becomes associated with the way people write, the act is said to be usually capable of revealing the nature and temperament of the writer. However, it must be noted that style now goes beyond the written text and has to do with spoken words or utterances.

According to Finch (2000), "Stylistics is concerned with using the methodology of linguistics to study the concept of style in language". The history of stylistics as it concerns literary texts cannot be complete without referring to formalism, a 20th-century Russian school of literary criticism that flourished from 1914-1928. It began in two groups: OPOYAZ (an acronym for Russian words meaning "Society for the study of poetic language") found in 1914 and led by the literary critic Viktor Shklovsky; and the Moscow linguistic circle, founded in 1915. Both groups made use of the linguistic techniques of Ferdinand De Saussure. The

formalists were basically concerned about the language of the author, how he uses language to create beauty in a work of arts. That is why it seems as if attention is given more to a literary text, but now stylistics deals with literary and non-literary texts. Fowler (1973) claims that "Style- a property of all text, not just literary, may be said to reside in the manipulation of variable in the structure of a language, or in the selection of optimal or latent feature". Stylistics is an aspect of language that has attracted many scholars' attention, which has resulted in different ideas and opinions about stylistics. Some scholars see stylistics as a branch of linguistics, while some see it as a discipline on its own and some other extremists see it as just part of applied linguistics. They believe that there should be nothing like stylistics because it is just a minor part of applied linguistics.

Stylistics cuts between literature and linguistics. In fact, some scholars see it as two different parts, which is why they believe that we have linguistics and literary stylistics. However, to some scholars like Wale (1989), the two are the same.

According to her, it is called literary stylistics "because it focuses on literary text; linguistics because its models are drawn from linguistics". This shows the connection between the two.

For years, the primary interest of stylistics has been the analysis of types, fluctuation, or the reasons for choosing a given style as in any language. That is why an individual may decide to use language in a particular way. A single thought can be expressed in a number of ways depending on the connotations or the desired result that the message is to produce (Wisniewski 2007). This means that the impact which a work or an utterance is expected to make on the reader depends on the style of the writer and the language determines it. In this paper, the interest is a stylistic analysis of Wole Soyinka's *AKE-The Years of Childhood*, due to the challenges we have encountered in reading most of his works. In fact, his works crossing from drama to prose and poetry are not one of those works that most students will be eager to read. Soyinka's use of language in his works has become a matter of controversy in the literature. His readers, most often, find it difficult to decode his message.

It has been argued that the nature of their reader should influence the way a writer uses language. So many scholars believe that Soyinka does not take this into consideration when writing. There was a serious argument over the relationship between a writer's use of language and their readers between Chinweizu et al. (1975) and Soyinka (1975). Chinweizu et al. in effect accused Soyinka of failure or even refusal to communicate with the ordinary Nigerian bilinguals (most Nigerians who possess their mother tongue and the English language or another indigenous language) and of using in his poetry esoteric language directed towards communicating with readers outside Nigeria, most especially the European readers. Chinweizu et al. (1975), as quoted by Banjo (1996) believe that Soyinka's "syntax is Shakespearean". Banjo (1996), who supports Chinweizu et al. view, believes that one cannot be too sure that the readers outside Chinweizu et al. are also referring to understand Soyinka. In essence, Banjo (1996) doubts if anyone ever understands Soyinka. They all believe that Soyinka's difficulty can be attributed to nothing but his style.

Soyinka strongly responds by defending his right to explore the whole gamut of the Nigerian conditions, including the modern aspect and to choose his imagery from the full range of the contemporary Nigeria experience (Banjo 1996). It is clear that Soyinka does not see anything wrong with his style, so whoever is interested in the work of this literary genius must commit himself to understand his style.

Palmer (1979) also expresses her uneasiness about the language of a book that is regarded as an embodiment of Soyinka's literary skill as a poet, playwright and a novelist – *The Interpreters*. Views such as these have left the impression that Soyinka's language makes his texts incomprehensible. Ogungbesan (1979) has observed that while Soyinka is idolized as a literary genius, a novel like *The Interpreters* is only sometimes mentioned but hardly read even in the universities. Therefore, Soyinka's literary language has become a difficult task for both scholars and general readers of his texts. If many readers of his texts succeed in reading just a few pages, as Moors (1971) observes, it could be summarized that a few understand Soyinka's work in depth because of his style, which can be specifically related to his use of language.

Language has enough variable features sufficient for every writer to choose from and make them unique. Enkvist (1964), who also identifies the variable features in a language, sees it beyond lexis alone; he claims, "it is important to note that stylistic choices exist on a number of different levels not only in the lexis. It may involve phonetic features...phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences and larger units". With this, we can distinguish between styles and language by saying language is the total structure in a given text, while style deals with the variation in the use of language.

The functionalist tradition in literary linguistics is particularly associated with Michael Halliday, who is believed to be the founder of the practice of stylistics. According to Turner (1973), Stylistics is that part of linguistics that concentrates on variation in the use of language, often but not exclusively, with special attention to the most conscious and complex uses of language in literature.

2. The Synopsis of the Text

Ake-The Years of Childhood is a biography that recounts Soyinka's first eleven years centred on his home life in Abeokuta, within the parsonage compound, where his father "Essay" is the headmaster and his mother "wild Christian" is a homemaker and a market woman. Soyinka gave a mental picture of Ake's environment, how it has been beautified by nature. The rock, he said formed a colony around the ancient town. The inquisitive Wole wants to know why wild Christian calls uncle Sanya "Oro" (an evil spirit), and his mother narrated how Sanya, despite several warnings, still leads other children into a deep bush searching for snails. Everybody will be busy in search of a snail while Sanya plays around and at the end of the day, his basket will be filled with the biggest of snails; this baffle everyone. The final revelation into Sanya's personality is when the spirits he is always talking to refuse to allow him to go after a narrow escape, he falls ill; it is a sacrifice to the spirits that delivers him because they want him to stay with them since he is a part of them.

Wole recounts his experience with the band that leaves him a lost child after walking an unimaginable distance at the age of three and how his ability to speak the English language saved him on time. His untimely admission into school, relationship with Osiki who loved him because of his steady lunch of pounded yam and how he chased him into a senior student's cutlass during one of their intense plays; how he invited his friends home for his birthday without anything to offer because he did not inform his parents earlier, because he expected they should never forget something as important as that, the sudden change of mood in the house, the loss of shade his little sister, his initiation into an occultic group by his grandfather, his experience at the federal government college and finally the gradual growth of the women's union were all Soyinka reflected in his book.

3. Textual Analysis

The ability of a writer to use a word to perform more than one communicative function is capable of adding to the difficulty of comprehending meaning. For example, the word "ran" which is the past tense of the word "run" functions as a noun and a verb, in the example below:

...was surprised to discover that they also ran their own shop (P. 38)

"ran" in this context functions as a verb and means to operate, manage, or be in charge of a business, while in another context, although the word still retains its class as a verb, it gives a totally different meaning.

Mostly however, the walls ran smoothly (P. 36)

"ran" in this context means the wall stretches from one place to the other. Another example used in the text is the word "Lawyer". The word can only function as a noun and means a person who is trained and qualified to advise people about the law and to present them in court, but in the context of using it has been converted into a verb thus:

If you catch him he would lawyer his way out. (P.90)

"Lawyer" in this context means "argue". The word is made to function as what a lawyer does. In another context, the word is made to function appropriately as a noun thus:

Be careful, Mr Lawyer. (p. 54)

The manipulation of word to mean different things in different contexts has been one of those things that have added to the complexity of Soyinka's language. This does not imply that some words do not have more than one meaning or perform more than one function. For example, the word "Home" functions as a noun, an adjective, adverb and a verb. In the example below, it functions as a finite verb in the past tense:

...watched the physical disposition of everybody else and homed on the tin (p. 90).

"Homed" in this context means aimed at something and moved straight towards it. In another context, the word takes over its noun function, for example:

... then return home for a leisurely breakfast. (p. 116)

In this context, it means a house or place where someone lives with their family. The word in the two contexts makes sense. But a word like "medicine" can only function as a noun grammatically and literary means a substance that is taken when one is ill or a course studied and therefore it is either an inanimate noun or an abstract noun, but in the example below, the word is made to function as an animate noun.

Medicine and food led separate lives ... (p. 39)

The word in this context is personified; it has been given the attribute of a human being that lives; although it still means substance taken when ill or to remain healthy. In another context, this same word is used and still functions as a noun but gives a totally different meaning:

You forget mama's medicines are not very pleasant ... I don't have to fake shivering when I see I'm going to receive mama's flogging (p. 66)

From the context, one can deduce that both "medicine" and "flogging" are synonymous, giving "medicine" a totally different meaning. Another word that the author has manipulated to perform differently and mean something totally different from its literal meaning is the word "glue". Grammatically, it functions as a noun or an adjective, but the author makes the word to function as a verb, therefore changing its original meaning.

...the other children were able to glue their car to the door (p. 11)

From this context, one can deduce that "glue" means to "eavesdrop" which means the children listened secretly from the door. In another context, the word gives another totally different meaning, even though it retains its verbal function

All eyes were glued to Akeamy's body (p.167)

From this context, it means all eyes were fixed on Akesmy's body.

We have examined the individual word functions; we shall now consider that of the sentence. At the sentence level, we shall examine functions as assigned to language by Jakobson (1961), who himself is a functionalist. First, he talks about the referential function. Language becomes referential when it is used to refer to something or somebody, as in the following examples:

Well you know your uncle Sanya. He was angry for one thing the best snails are on other side of the stream. So he continued to complain that those Oro were just being selfish and he was going to show them who he was. Well he did. About a week later he led us back. And he was right you know. We gathered a full basket and a half of the biggest snails you ever saw. (p. 6)

Language in the excerpt performs a referential function because it is reporting an event that has happened in the past.

Le'moo underwent a mental transformation at some point during the next hour, because his next specific act was to try and hold the dismembered rose to the stalk. He began by freezing a long time staring into vacancy. (P. 73).

Language also plays a referential role here because it refers to the encounter of Le'moo with the essay. Another function given to language is the emotive function and this has to do with the language that conveys emotion, as in the following excerpt.

I swear I did not drop her. I swear by God I did not drop her anytime. I looked after her, at no time did she drop from my hand I swear. (p. 96).

The language above conveys emotion, with the serious aim of convincing. It must be noted that an utterance is capable of performing more than one function and this can also contribute to the difficulty a reader encounters in completely comprehending the message of an author who intentionally does this, that is, making an utterance to convey more than one meaning or perform more than one function. The quotation above, for instance, also performs the persuasive function. According to Richard (1929), language also performs a poetic function. The major complexity in Soyinka's works is in his attempt to make language perform this function. Poetic language is not easy to interpret as it is open to several interpretations, for examples:

The sprawling undulating terrain is all of Ake. More than mere loyalty to the parsonage gave birth to a puzzle, and a resentment that God should choose to look on his own pious station, the parsonage compound from the profane heights of Itoko. (p. 1)

The above quotation is highly poetic because for one to get the message it carries adequately, there has to be a close reading of it. It is a description of the mountains that surround the personage, which is called Itoko that from the top of the hill, one can see the personage compound. The language here can also be said to perform a referential function because it refers to Ake's environment. Another reason why poetic language is complex is that, most often, it does not make sense semantically and does not conform to the rule of grammar, for example

The organ took on a dark, smoky sonority at the evening service and there was no doubt that the organ was adopting its normal sound to accompany God's own sepulchral responses. (p. 1)

The "organ" in the above quotation has been personified because the duties attributed to it can only be carried out by a human being and this is one of the reasons why the language is poetic. Words such as "dark" and "sonority" which are contrasting ideas, are used side by side in referring to the same object and this is only acceptable when one is poetic. One of the beliefs of the functional model is that socio-cultural influence most often is inevitable when an individual uses language. This is another factor that has contributed to the complexity of Soyinka's language. He uses a lot of code-mixing, direct translation from Yoruba into English and the Pidgin English, for example

Look 'am master, a no be lie. Look genuine Morocco leather, e fit you, big man like you must have leather brief-case for carry file. E be genuine put 'am on more shirt or torosa... (p. 48)

A reader, who does not understand or can not read the Pidgin English, automatically loses the message that lies therein. Despite the fact that the language used here is not the Standard English, it performs a function of persuasion; the seller tries to persuade the man to buy a brief-case and after all, every language has its own peculiar context and the choice of words is effective because there is no communication break down between those involved.

4. Coinages

This is another process of word-formation. There are some words that are coined which although they are not proper words of English, but perform appropriate functions. This reveals Soyinka's creative use of language, for instance:

Sending the offenders supperless to bed was not going to solve anything ... (p. 89).

With the addition of the suffix "less", it gives the word "supper" a new meaning, which means "sleeping without food" and it functions as an adjective. "super" grammatically functions as a noun and means the last food for the day. Another example is:

I did not know that akaralogic and atarodimensis were making his tongue to dance. (p. 55)

Both the word "Akaralogics" and "Atarodimensis" have passed through the process of blending. For "Akaralogics", "Akara" is a Yoruba word for bean cake and "logic" is a Greek word borrowed into English that means "a way of reasoning or explaining something". The two words function individually as nouns and also the combination of them as used in the context. "Atarodimensis" is a combination of "Atarodo" a Yoruba name for small pepper and the suffix "dimensis" does not have a dictionary entry, but it may be a derivation from dimension or another coinage.

5. Conclusion

This work has shown so far that every writer has their own style. The way he uses language is what determines the nature of his style. Soyinka has been noted for his complex styles; the way he uses language basically brings about his works' complex nature. The different functions he assigns to language, even outside its linguistic function and meaning, contributes to the difficulty people encounter; his creativity with words such as coining a new word, a typical example from our analysis are the words "Akaralogics" and "Atarodimensis". These words have passed through the process of blending "akaralogic". For instance, "Akara" is a Yoruba word for bean cake and "Logic" is a Greek word borrowed into English which means a way of reasoning or explaining something, but Soyinka has brought these words whose meanings are far apart to function as one. In conclusion, one can say that Soyinka's style actually stands as a barrier between him and his readers in general.

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