
Lexico-semantic Analysis of Selected Poems from Ushie's *Eclipse* in Rwanda

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Abstract

It is affirmed that literary scholars do not write in nothingness; they always present literary work to serve as a mirror of life in order to evoke universal human experience and, most of the time, to relay things that happen to human beings. In the same vein, Ushie's Eclipse in Rwanda has been lexically and semantically presented to reflect or imitate the realities of life. This study, therefore, attempts a lexico-semantic study of selected poems from Ushie's Eclipse in Rwanda. The essence is to reveal the author's creative development in language to achieve his purpose in the selected poems. Using Halliday's Context of Situation as its theoretical framework, the study brings to the fore lexico-semantic features embedded in Ushie's collection of poetry. In total, seven (7) poems were purposefully chosen for analysis based on the lexico-semantic features identified in each of them. This study reveals that Ushie deploys lexico-semantic features such as simile, metaphor, and hyperbole to foreground his intended messages. The deployment of certain lexical items, such as "leopard," "lamb," "mountain," etc., reveals that Ushie evokes images from his natural environment. Within the Nigerian cultural context, the poet uses the delicacy of boiled yam and red palm oil, a peculiarly African traditional treat, to communicate his intentions. These deliberate patterns or choices constitute the core of what stylistics entails. Thus, the study concludes that Ushie's characteristic manner of expression is a result of certain lexico-semantic features consciously deployed to convey his messages.

Keywords: *Ushie, Eclipse in Rwanda, Lexico-semantic, Halliday, and Situation context.*

Introduction

Stylistics deals with a writer's or speakers distinctive manner of expression. It is a discipline that has been given many definitions by different scholars. Oluikpe (1979, p. 51), for instance, defines it as “the art of writing. It involves the selection of words and constructions, the length of sentences and their complexities, and the organisation of the total expression.” For Oluikpe, the appropriate choice of words, the variation of sentence structures, and how they are organised to make meaning all belong to the field of stylistics. According to Widdowson (1975, p. 3), stylistics entails:

The study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation. What distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism on the one hand, and linguistics on the other hand is that it is essentially a means of linking the two. Stylistics involves both literary criticism and linguistics as its morphological makeup suggests: the “style” component relating it to the former and the “-istics” to the latter.

Again, Widdowson identifies language and literature as the constituents of stylistics, which can be derived not only from their meaning but also from the nature of the word itself. Stylistics, therefore, plays a mediating role between linguistics and literary criticism. In actual practice, the role played by linguistic and literary stylists is not easy to define. In this regard, Ngara (1982) clarifies that the literary stylistician has a wider domain because, in addition to using the analytical tools of the linguist, such as grammar, lexis, phonology, etc., he or she must also concern himself or herself with the wider issues of deviation from the norm. He or she must,

according to Ngara (1982, p. 12), “deal with the relationship between language and character, between author and audience, and inevitably between linguistic features and content value.” The linguistic stylist, on the other hand, Ngara says, applies the methods of language such as grammar, lexis, phonology, and graphology to the study of the language of literature in order to contribute to linguistic theory.

Stylistics is not necessarily interested in a mere instance of linguistic usage or application or simply concerned with the variability between two different authors or writers, but rather particular about the “unusual” way in which language is manipulated to communicate a message and how as well as why readers respond to texts the way they do. In other words, stylisticians do not enter into the analysis of language use for the sake of it but are concerned with the deviation from the norms. In the words of Leech and Short (2007):

Stylistics, simply defined as the (linguistic) study of style is rarely undertaken for its own sake, simply as an exercise in describing what use is made of language. We normally study style because we want to explain something, and in general, literary stylistics has, implicitly or explicitly, the goal of explaining the relation between language and artistic function. The motivating questions are not so much what, as why and how. From the linguist's angle, it is “why does the author here choose to express himself in this particular way?” From the critics' viewpoint, it is “how is such-and-such an aesthetic effect achieved through

language?” (p.13)

Leech and Short's definition clearly emphasises the primary function of stylistics: the study and description of language use with the aim of highlighting the peculiar manner of expression that a particular writer deploys and the various functions of literature through language. Wales (2011, p. 104) affirms that “stylistics can be used as a cover term to cover the analysis of non-literary varieties of language or registers that study the perceived manner of expression in writing or speaking, just as there is a perceived manner of doing things, like playing squash or painting.” Thus, style is conceived as idiolect, and as Crystal and Davy (1969) rightly put it, the study of an author's work through this theory is “an attempt to isolate, define, and discuss those linguistic features which are felt to be peculiarly his, which help to distinguish him from other authors” (p. 77).

It is important to discuss the relationship between stylistics and poetry, especially because a chunk of the analysis will be derived from a poetry collection called Ushie's *Eclipse in Rwanda*. According to Verdonk (2013), it is assumed that “prompted by their artistic talent, poets consciously or intuitively let themselves be guided by certain principles of selection and arrangement while operating at the five levels of organisation in language, namely: semantics, lexis, syntax, phonology, and graphology. On the one hand, poets bend language rules and use language in innovative ways to convey their thoughts” (p. 12). On the other hand, stylisticians study the peculiar manner in which these poets use language. Stylisticians are concerned with how their choices contribute to the analysis and interpretation of their works. They are also interested not just in what is presented, that is, not only in what form of language is used, but also in why, amidst other expressions, a writer chooses one over the others. Stylistic study involves the analysis of language at any level, such as phonology, graphology, grammar, and lexico-semantics. The latter forms

the preoccupation of this study.

Lexico-semantic analysis, according to Khan and Jabeen (2015), is the study of the way in which individual words and idioms tend to pattern in different linguistic contexts on the meaning level. Stylistics is interested in an individual writer's use of words in a particular context, that is, the special meanings attached to words by writers and speakers as well as the ways in which these words are interpreted by readers and listeners. At the level of lexico-semantics, the focus is on the style of speaking or writing determined by the choice of words of a speaker or writer and on any use of language that will not give a literal interpretation unless interpreted imaginatively.

According to Lyons (1977, p. 24), lexical semanticists are usually concerned with the meaning of words, how they are depicted in the mind of the speaker, and the way in which they are employed in texts and discourse. The diction of a writer or an author could be denotative, which means that the words do not have any further interpretative meaning. It could be connotative, in which case the words attract various associative meanings, feelings, and ideas that usually cannot be obtained from the bare form of the word itself. The effect of such words in the context in which they are used, as well as the reader's interaction with them, is the thrust of lexico-semantic analysis in the field of stylistics.

There are many kinds of lexico-semantic features, some of which can be categorised according to their different functions: simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, metonymy (transfer of meaning); irony, paradox, oxymoron, antithesis, sarcasm (category of contrast); hyperbole, euphemism, litotes (category of degree); and other miscellaneous types such as pun, rhetorical question, etc.

Stylisticism, a 19th-century invention, brings the significance of language and meaning to the spotlight. The conception of literature goes beyond its themes and contents to embrace the structure, pattern, manner, nature, or

form of the language used to achieve meaning. Commenting on the significance of language, Escobar (1992) posits that “language has a more involving function and determines, if not dominates, our sensibilities in relation to how we respond to issues in our world” (p. 1). Hence, this study will showcase a stylistic approach to selected poems from Ushie's *Eclipse in Rwanda* and will take special interest in revealing the significance of their form (language use) in a bid to solidify the argument that language is inseparable from literature itself and to establish a connection between content and form, which is an aspect of literary analysis that is perhaps under-exploited.

The study is concerned with the manner in which Ushie expresses himself, as well as how he uses his unique choice of words to communicate his message. It is interested in isolating the lexico-semantic features embedded in Ushie's seminal collection *Eclipse in Rwanda* as well as discussing them as the poet's peculiar manner of expression. The examination of the effects of language use and the consideration of the context of usage and its implications all form crucial objectives of the study. Thus, seven (7) poems have been selected for analysis from Ushie's *Eclipse in Rwanda*. These poems have been purposefully chosen based on the lexico-semantic features identified in each of them, which are important to the study. These features are simile, metaphor, and hyperbole. The objective of this work is therefore to bring to the fore how Ushie exploits selectively meaningful words, phrases, and sentences to bring out certain identifiable patterns of meaningful relationships in the collection by carrying out certain lexico-semantic analyses of the seven (7) selected poems in order to explicate their thematic preoccupation.

Synopsis of the Collection

In *Eclipse in Rwanda*, Ushie comments on the historical war in Rwanda between the Tutsi and Hutu—a war that had way more than 700,000 people as victims. His collection reverberates with linguistic innovations

that exude artistic freshness. The collection is divided into three parts, consisting of twenty-five poems. The first part borders on themes that appeal to varying human conditions. In some of the poems, Ushie assumes the role of a fighter whose mission is to give voice to the voiceless, and in others, he is a social critic, a satirist, and a commentator. Perhaps Ushie's resolve to take on these roles is made evident in "Song of Sisyphus," where he cries out, "I will sing the song lifelong. I cannot change my song until it turns into household words. "I will sing; I will sing; I will sing the same song forever." The criticism of a corrupt and dishonest representative of the people is brought to light in "Town Crier," symbolised by a persona willing to be manipulated and tossed by leaders who do not have the interests of the masses at heart. These poems reveal the inner inclinations of a poet who has taken on the task of speaking for the voiceless and standing up for the oppressed. It is this responsibility that has produced a collection replete with poems that are at once eloquent, relatable, and relevant.

Existing of Related Literature

Yeibo's (2011) study, "A discourse-stylistic analysis of mood structures in selected poems of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo," looks at mood structures such as declarative, interrogative, imperative, and indicative moods and how they are used in language to portray the way people communicate, the roles they have, and even their attitudes in particular discourse situations, using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as its theoretical framework. The study reveals that the tenor of discourse determines the choice of language used to make discourse meaningful in specific discourse contexts. The study concludes that poetic discourse has a meaningful exchange because it is an interactive event in which participants play various roles, and that the different mood structures adopted by speakers and writers are dependent on the goals or purposes of language use in specific discourse situations (p. 202).

Yeibo (2011), like the present study, uses poetry as its point of analysis and reference, but it differs from the present study, especially in the part where Yeibo adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and focuses primarily on mood structures; the present study concentrates on the stylistic dimension of language use by poets with emphasis on Halliday's Context of Situation.

Another study, by Abioye and Ajiboye (2014) on “A Lexico-Stylistic Analysis of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, explores how the lexical choices in the novel have been stylistically made to create a synergy between the language used in the text and the environment in which it is used. The study reveals that Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*'s linguistic inspiration and style are largely Nigerian, and the choices are aesthetic and socio-culturally relevant to the text's linguistic composition, as the culturally rich expressions are able to provoke vivid images in the reader, which the reader can readily identify with. The study concludes that the lexico-stylistic markings of the text are territorial and socio-functional and that they acquire “a hue of Nigerianness and are functional in recreating the territorial setting of the text and in providing aesthetics that add to the overall quality of the text” (p. 16).

Ibraheem's (2014) study is in contrast with the present study in at least two ways. First, Abioye and Ajiboye (2014) examine the author's lexical choices in a novel, while the present study analyses the linguistic choices of two writers in the genre of poetry. Second, while Abioye and Ajiboye (2014) aim to show how the author's lexical choices are products of Nigerian culture, the present study is interested in how the writer's decisions help foreground their meaning.

Ibraheem's (2014) research on “A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Poems in Adekoya's *Here and There*” explores the phonological, graphological, lexico-semantic, and syntactic features inherent in the selected poems using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics as its ideological

mapping. The study reveals that the poet uses phonological foregrounding, graphological deviation, linguistic parallelism, iconic supplements, paradigmatic and syntagmatic signposts, figurative language, normative syntactic constructions, and other rhetorical features to stylistically project messages such as the ridiculously sluggish pace of growth in Africa, the terribly ugly conditions of living in Nigeria, the proud cultural heritage of the poet, the agonies of misgovernment, the saddening reverberations of the Nigerian civil war, and the disillusioning truths about the much hyped, technologically advanced United States of America. The study concludes that certain deliberate linguistic choices help to bring out the intentions of the writer.

This study is nearly identical to the present study in that both are interested in the writer's linguistic decisions and how the decisions help foreground their intended meanings. In contrast, the present study will use Halliday's Context of Situation as its theoretical template, which is distinct from Ibraheem's use of systemic functional linguistics.

In a similar vein, Khan and Khan's (2015) study on "Stylistic Analysis of Anna Swell's 'Black Beauty'" discusses the aesthetic use of language in the novel by analysing several literary devices. In analysing the language of the novel, the researchers employ Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, in which the text is analysed by using different interconnected levels, including the formal level and the situational context level. In addition, the study analyses both phonological features (sound repetition, sound elision, and elongation of sounds) and graphological features (punctuation marks, capitalization, spelling, brackets, hyphenation, dashes, and pictures). The study reveals that "a text with multi-layered meanings can be evaluated in a better way within the matter of the formal functional dimension of language representation" (p. 613). It is concluded that aesthetic language in the text fosters comprehension, especially in a text with multiple layers of senses.

The study differs from the present study because, while Khan and Khan (2015) explore only phonic and graphic devices of language in the text and how the author makes use of these devices of language in the text to acquire the particular effect of theme and style, the present study incorporates lexico-semantic devices to show how the writers' choice of words aids in the realisation of their intended meaning.

Yeibo and Micah's (2016) study, "A lexico-semantic reading of Rosemary Ede's *Avarice at Dusk*," examines lexico-semantic devices such as local signifiers (native proverbs, idioms, code-mixing and code-switching), figurations (simile, metaphor, alliteration), lexical repetition, and lexical relations (synonymy and antonymy) deployed to transmit or reinforce textual meaning and achieve aesthetic beauty. Yeibo and Micah (2016), using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as the theoretical template, show how a given African writer has responded to and interpreted the challenges of her society in contemporary or post-colonial times through the instrumentality of language (p. 14). Hence, Yeibo and Micah's (2016) adoption of the Hallidayan model for analysis is particularly justifiable against the backdrop that it facilitates the analysis of stylistic data based on the nature and workings of language in specific contextual situations.

The present study adopts Halliday's Context of Situation as opposed to Systemic Functional Grammar, which Yeibo and Micah use. Furthermore, the current study branches out by not only making a lexico-semantic analysis of selected poems, but also accommodating other aspects of style markers such as graphology and phonology.

From the foregoing analyses of related studies, Yeibo (2011) examines Clark-Bekederemo's use of mood structures in order to achieve certain goals in specific discourse situations. While Abioye and Ajiboye (2014) explore the lexical choices in Kaine Agary's novel in order to reveal their "Nigerianness," Ibraheem's (2014) study presents the writer's linguistic

choices and how the decisions help bring out the intended meanings. Moreover, Khan and Khan (2015), like Yeibo and Micah (2016), discuss the aesthetic use of language by analysing several literary devices deployed by the writer to transmit or reinforce textual meaning and achieve aesthetic beauty.

Theoretical Framework

Halliday's Context of Situation forms the theoretical framework for this study. The Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) is often regarded as the earliest proponent of this theory, succeeded by his student John Rupert Firth (1890–1960) and subsequently Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday (1925–2018). In Malinowski's words, the primary function of language is “to be regarded as a mode of action rather than as a countersign of thought” (Malinowski, 1923, p. 297). For Malinowski, Firth, and Halliday, language is not a mental system but a mode of action, and thus, the context of a situation is an indispensable approach to meaning analysis. Through his study of the Kiriwinian language spoken by the inhabitants of Trobriand Island in the South Pacific, Malinowski practically distinguished his claims. From his research, he came to the conclusion that a person's physical as well as cultural environment help shape the best approach to full experience and understanding of any natural language. In other words, language cannot be taken in isolation but is a crucial derivative of the way of life of the people speaking it.

Halliday's Context of Situation consists of these aspects: field, mode, and tenor. He explains that the field is the subject matter of the text. It answers such questions as what the text is all about and what the participants in the discourse are doing. Halliday and Hasan (1994) describe it as “the total events in which the text is functioning, together with the purposeful activity of the speaker or writer; it thus includes the subject matter as one element in it” (p. 22). In this aspect, a writer or speaker is interested in what

he or she will write or speak about; in other words, the concern of the language user. This could be related to fields such as fishing, engineering, science and technology, etc. It could, on the other hand, be topical, portraying symbolic language such as metaphors, similes, etc., and because it uses words from different fields, it justifies the name “topical” (Halliday and Hasan, 1994, p. 22).

Mode of discourse, for Halliday and Hasan, is the function of the text in the event, including therefore both the channel taken by the language—speech or written, extempore or prepared and its [genre], or rhetorical mode—as narrative, didactic, persuasive, phatic communion, and so on (p. 22). "Tenor" refers to the participants in the conversation. It includes such issues as the participants' status with one another. It refers to “the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent or temporary, among the participants involved” (p. 22).

The three aspects of Halliday's Context of Situation can be applied to any event of language use and, when taken together, help to identify the situational context of the discourse and thus account for the aspect of language in use. Halliday and Hasan, Firth, and Malinowski's positions on context of situation are relevant to the study because they serve as an anchor to the understanding that certain contexts (political, social, or cultural) play a role in Ushie's use of words and overall language use.

Data Presentation/Analysis

Extract 1

We listen to your mouthing of those
iron-fisted, self-armouring laws of *the leopard*
roared through your pay-staked tongue

We watch the cosmetic camaraderie of the rented
camara-daring crowd shouting hosanna to
the leopard, long live the general

We watch, we listen, town crier, but we
can't hear your voice nor see the
true you besides that *mannequin*,
screened like chameleon's colour for safety...
("Town crier", p.14)

Extract 2

In the solemn church building
where anxieties are lowered
every Sunday...
But the mind remains fixed at its
Fears *like boiled yam's hypocrisy*
as its clear-white centre mocks its
long romance with red palm.
("Home-reel", p.20)

Extract 3

"Behold, man's inhumanity to man!"

Screamed the newscaster...

an island surrounded by *sees of tears*...

of emotions fired from the sea

of tv viewers;

You sit as witness of those

Hewman technollogical returns which,

Like the witch, thrive in human blood.

We view the screen and scream in shame:

What wrong this four-year old?

What hurting word? What hurting deed?

Yet, there you are, *wordless lamb*.

("To Bose", p.18)

Extract 4

So do you reel up, Gani, banished to

Gaunt Gashua, in your official car-

the black maria – while the *cruel gods*,

musng in their blindness, brisk about

their art, flash past like the night

thief haunted by his own shadow,

by approaching dawn.

("For Gani", p.27)

Extract 5

Koi Koi Koi Koi

Her shoes crackle on the tiled floor,
rhythmic like ticks of the seconds-hand.

Whistling filament of kiln-tanned hair.

*Glowing rose-red lips like the
danger sign on the highway...*

Clinking bangles, a sparkling necklace,...
sharp eye liner, eye shadow, a “shakara” mascara...
A filtered, designer's voice jingles...

Kuru, Kruu, Kruu Kuru...

A missile of frothy perfume
fuming from arm's pits
breeze-rattled hair like hen's undergrowth...

(“Lady X”, p.34)

Extract 6

blame is the praise
whether I *skin the ant*,
bring home a live lion,
fetch a legged snake or
pull hair from the hand's palm.

(“Song of the orphan”, p.54)

Extract 7

THIS NOON

this no man's
hill standing here in
silent surrender can erupt. Its
earth-tearing bubbles, hotter
than the bellows-fired metal,
will wash down the seams of the hill
like a punctured dam and the angry flood
will veer into burrows and crevices, will
flush out the thousand season's mountain
of squalor. The fiery flood, its tensed,
ill-tempered muscles, will push past
palaces of princes, kings and those
architectural cynosures housing
trader, clergyman, civil servant
and politician; housing earsore
tales, housing eyesore deeds.

From here, the flood will
flush down each

decaying leaf, each dead wood
 each violent odour, each
 mess. Wooo wooa wooa
 the flood will roar down
 the hill, will be re-invigorated
 at every hurdle by those
 long chained sparks in the
 heart of the hill, long
 bottled, deep deep be-
 neath the

Sun-crafted smiles flashed from rock surfaces, oblivious to the raging kiln within. From this tensed heart of the hill, the fermented energy will fire upwards, uncork the hill, and dart dirtwards until it will wash this immovable hill of filth into that all-cleansing ocean away from these towering hills and valleys, away from these flood-washed, sun-polished leaves, which the wind caresses gently. This afternoon, there will be a volcano on this unknown hill.

Lexico-semantic Features

Simile

Simile is a trope of meaning in which two different objects, concepts or ideas are compared with each other through the use of “like”, “as”, “than”, “resembles”, “as...as”, “remind...of”, “similar to”, etc. According to Ozo-Mekuri (1999), “a simile is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two (sometimes unrelated) entities or events.

The purpose of this sort of comparison is to persuade the hearer to establish a similarity in a particular quality or attribute of the things or events compared. The comparison is made by the use of the words 'as' and 'like.'" (p.112).

In "Town Crier", we find the poet's use of simile:

We watch, we listen, town crier, but we
can't hear your voice nor see the
true you besides that *mannequin*,
screened like chameleon's colour for
safety... (p.14)

In Nigeria's socio-political context, the poet decries the actions of the "town crier," who connives with corrupt political leaders to misinform the public. One of the ways he highlights this is in his use of simile, where he compares the towncrier's puppet role to a "mannequin or screen like a chameleon's changing colour for safety" (line 27). In other words, just like a mannequin is helpless in its use for displaying different styles of clothing to the taste of the fashion designer, and just like a chameleon reflects the colour of its environment without truly possessing a unique colour, the "town crier" is made to become an emissary of deceptive propaganda other than having a voice of his own.

One observable pattern in Ushie's use of simile is his deployment of imagery from the environment. This is perhaps due to his rustic background. Aboh (2017) clarifies this by revealing that "his background exerts influence on his works, which, themselves, draw from his immediate society....His agrarian background later, in myriad ways, shaped his lexical configuration, as evident in his preponderant use of nature-based imagery."

In “Home-reel” (p. 20), the poet again makes comparisons using concepts peculiar to the African traditional setting. In lines 42–52, he says:

In the solemn church building

where anxieties are lowered

every Sunday...

But the mind remains fixed at its

Fears *like boiled yam's hypocrisy*

as its clear-white centre mocks its

long romance with red palm.

(“Home-reel”, p.20)

Ushie describes a situation where even when in church — a place of relief from anxiety — the mind still finds its way to fixate on its worries and fears. This situation is made vivid through the comparison involving a traditional African delicacy — boiled yam and red palm oil. In other words, the “clear white centre” (line 51) of the yam, even after being soaked (“long romance”, line 52) in oil is analogous to the situation of the “solemn church building” (line 42). The poet again identifies with nature when he describes the pathetic condition of an orphan whose world “hangs/upside down like the bat” (p.52).

Metaphor

Metaphor is an implied resemblance between two things that are not similar. The implicitness of comparison in metaphor is the essence of figurative language generally. The literary significance of metaphors in

Ushie's poetry is that they deny the readers a literal sense and so induce them to find interpretations beyond the functional meaning usually captured. Also, just like in simile, the poet makes use of metaphor to establish a connection with the environment/nature and he deploys concepts easily relatable in the African traditional setting.

In “Town Crier”, Ushie uses the word “leopard” to refer to corrupt political leaders who equip themselves with selfish laws at the detriment of the masses. Thus, he says:

We listen to your mouthing of those
iron-fisted, self-armouring laws of *the leopard*
roared through your pay-staked tongue
(“Town Crier”, p.14)

A leopard is commonly known to be a wild animal that is selfish and fierce in its attacks on preys. This comparison becomes apt in the socio-political context of Nigeria where the leaders are “iron-fisted” (line 2) and selfish, doing so with “self-armouring laws” (line 2) at the expense of the people. This metaphor is used again in line 10:

We watch the cosmetic camaraderie of the rented
camara-daring crowd shouting hosanna to
the leopard, long live the general
(“Town Crier”, p.14)

In “To Bose”, there are examples of metaphors in:

What hurting word? What hurting deed?

Yet, there you are, *wordless lamb*. (p.18)

The phrases “hurting word” and “hurting deed” refer to the inhuman violence on the little girl who is compared to a wordless lamb. And here, we see the poet's identification with nature by referring to an animal — the lamb. In “For Gani”, the poet writes:

So do you reel up, Gani, banished to
Gaunt Gashua, in your official car-
the black maria – while the *cruel gods*,
musing in their blindness, brisk about
their art, flash past like the night
thief haunted by his own shadow,
by approaching dawn.
(“For Gani”, p.27)

Here, the metaphor “cruel gods” refers to the leaders who destroy the people instead of saving them. These comparisons create mental images of the situations and things described by Ushie.

Hyperbole

This is a figure of speech that occurs when the poet exaggerates something in order to emphasize it. Ushie uses this trope to create aesthetic effects. Instances of hyperbole can be found in his poems, such as “To Bose,” which portrays the pathetic condition of a child who had a six-inch nail driven into

her skull by an unknown person. In order to paint a clear picture of the sorrow and anguish that reverberate around her in the hospital bed, the poet says:

Rested on a hospital bed-
an island surrounded by *seas of tears*
you are the target of those shots
of emotions fired from the sea
of tv viewers;

(“To Bose”, p.18)

The plethora of sympathy for the victim is exaggerated by the use of the phrase “seas of tears” (line 4). One interesting thing about Ushie's use of hyperbole, as is also the case with simile and metaphor earlier discussed, is his recourse to nature itself. He appears to fall in love with the natural environment so much that even while establishing comparisons or even making descriptions, he cannot help but draw his materials from his natural habitation. This can also be found in "Volcano," where it says:

flush out the *thousand season's mountain*
of squalor
...until it will wash this immovable hill
of filth into that all cleaning ocean'

(p.28)

Hyperbole is used here to exaggerate the effect of the volcano on the mountain. By using the phrase “thousand season's mountain” (line 10), the poet showcases the power of the fire in its flushing away of a mountain that stood for many seasons long. Again in “Lady X”, the poet makes use of hyperbole to create an effect:

Glowing rose-red lips like the traffic

danger sign on the highway (34)

The comparison of the colour of the lady's lips to the traffic danger sign stands as an exaggeration of the redness of her lips. Figurative expressions or tropes give aesthetic qualities to Ushie's poems in *Eclipse in Rwanda*. In his poems, Ushie uses them to give depth to words and meaning. For instance, this quality can be seen in expressions such as “skin the ant,” “bring home a live lion,” “fetch a legged snake,” and “pull hair from the hand's palm” in “Song of the Orphan.”

blame is the praise

whether I *skin the ant*,

bring home a live lion,

fetch a legged snake or

pull hair from the hand's palm.

(“Song of the orphan”, p.54)

An orphan is usually without a father or mother. Helpless, an orphan's efforts or hard work are easily taken for granted or even abused, regardless of the weight of such efforts. The poet portrays this circumstance through a number of figurative expressions. Each of these expressions conjures up images in the minds of the readers and contributes to the meaning of the poem.

Conclusion

From this study, we can confidently conclude that writers have unique ways of expressing their thoughts. A writer can adopt a distinct manner of expression by using to full advantage one linguistic element or the other, which is the business of stylistics. . It can be deduced from this study that Ushie's characteristic manner of expression is a result of certain lexico-semantic features consciously deployed by him to convey his message. These features are stylistically relevant. We also reach the conclusion that the cultural and socio-political contexts that inspire Ushie's poetic musings influence the way he crafts and uses his words, as well as how he configures language to reflect meaningful patterns. Therefore, Ushie's choice of words is a pointer to his style deliberately deployed to highlight the agonising realities of the Nigerian situation and his discontentment with the attitude of the leaders.

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