

Phono-Graphological Reading of Olu Obafemi's *Naira Hasno Gender*

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Abstract: The synergic relationship between linguistic forms and function has been an area of interest to linguists and scholars over the years. It is interestingly factual to assert that since the evolution of man till the present age, the major function of language is to communicate meaning. Different meanings communicated are dictated particularly by the context on which the language act is performed. In this study we examined the dramatic context or discourse using OluObafemi's play *Naira has no Gender*. Most of the academic studies of OluObafemi's plays and particularly, *Naira has no Gender* had been from the lexico-semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels, phonology and graphology have not received adequate attention hence this research. Using Halliday's model of systemic functional grammar we have investigated the phonological and graphological elements of the play such as lengthening of sounds, addition of sounds, sound repetition capitalization, italicization, spelling, dots and hyphenation. Our study revealed that through the interaction of these features, Obafemi has successfully and tactfully related burning national issues in Nigeria such as corruption, embezzlement of public funds, outright loss of conscience and insensitivity to the socio- economic plight of the populace. The study also revealed Obafemi's flexibility in the manipulation of language for positive change in the society.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of language in all its dimensions as a basic means of communication especially among humans is a view that many linguists and scholars uphold incontrovertibly. It is a veritable means through which human needs, desires, values, norms, challenges, ideologies, science and technology etc are encoded and communicated.

Language study is approached from different perspectives for effectiveness in the interpretation and understanding of the meaning encoded with it. This position underlines the emphasis placed by many linguists in various studies that language is a complex phenomenon and to be studied effectively, it is broken into major levels or areas. Within modern descriptive linguistics, language is studied from the following angles: phonetics, phonology grammar (comprising morphology and syntax) lexis and semantics. Interestingly stylistics as a field of linguistic study penetrates all the levels outlined above in order to illustrate the relationship between the linguistic style of the author and the functional elements of the study.

From this perspective Alo (1998:5) cited in Yeibo&Akerere (2015) opines that the descriptive study of style accounts for language use in texts from three distinct perspectives, in terms of focus and methodology through style as deviation; recurrence (i.e of language patterns – lexical, phonological syntactic etc) and textual function – i.e variations in sentence structures found in texts and their functions as elements of emphasis, focus or foregrounding through these levels of linguistic study – phonology, grammar, lexis, semantics, graphology and pragmatics.

Of these levels of stylistics study listed above, our focus is only on phonology and graphology. This choice is premised on the symbiotic relationship that exists between the two and our attempt to adequately explore their meaning import uniquely in texts to give off meaning. In fact, it can be claimed that structures and utterances without graphological flavour may appear ambiguous, incoherent and perhaps, meaningless. Lending credence to this assertion McIntosh (1961) cited in Gomez – Jimenez (2015:71) demonstrated the close relationship between graphology and phonology and how they are linked up with meaning in language. He considered graphology an analogous mode to phonology. In essence, he stated that he used graphology in a sense which is intended to answer “in the realm of written language, to that of phonology in the realm of spoken language”. This invariably implicates that graphology and phonology interact in spoken and written discourse to give shape and meaning to the preoccupations of the author.

The claim of McIntosh becomes clearer considering our working definitions of graphology and phonology respectively. In this study Wale (2001:183) defines graphology as “the writing system of a language

as manifested in handwriting and typography; and to the other related features ...e.g capitalization and punctuation. While Roach (2000:44) defined phonology as the study of the phonemes of a given language and how they function in that language. In other words, the study of how speech sounds function as a system. To investigate the phonology and graphology of *Naira has no Gender* implies an examination of how Obafemi stylistically employed them to foreground his message in the text.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been carried out on the phonological and graphological elements employed in the development of literary works by authors. Peer (1993) cited in Gomez – Jimenez (2015:71) investigated how graphological deviation may affect meaning and produce aesthetic effects. He considered particularly typographic foregrounding and its evolution as a poetic device.

Relatedly, Yeibo&Akerele (2014) studied the various graphological features used by Adiche in *Purple Hibiscus* to complement verbal signifiers and foreground critical and strategic aspects of meaning in relation to context of situation and textual functions. This study benefited adequately from M. A.K Halliday's systemic functional grammar as a tool with which the close relationship between language structure and language function in the text was explicated.

Akogbeto&Koutchade (2015) explored the phono-graphological style of Wole Soyinka's *Madman and Specialists*. They employed an eclectic theoretical approach by combining Leech (1969), Leech and Short (2007) and Halliday (1978 & 1985a) in their investigation. It revealed some aspects of style and meanings in the play. It also highlighted the aesthetic imports of graphological and phonological features which stressed the writer's idiolect and account for the way Soyinka had developed the major themes of his play.

Reiteratively, only a few works have been done on Obafemi's *Naira has Gender* specifically. Ugwu (2015) carried out a discourse analysis of the play. He examined how speeches of characters were formed in stretches of clauses and sentences and through it inferences were made that gave insight into the thematic preoccupations of Obafemi in the play.

Goodreaders.com featured a Marxist criticism of the play. Greater emphasis is on how Obafemi depicted two classes of the oppressed and the oppressor in the characters of Otunla and Chief Awadanu respectively. This class difference of the rich and the poor is further captured in more decadence in the socio-economic and political lives of Nigerian citizens.

Our latest study of Obafemi's work is a further investigation into the message of the play through phonological and graphological features foregrounded to explicate the meaning resources of the play.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

We have adopted Halliday's model of systemic functional grammar as our theoretical background in this study (1985). In this model language is viewed as a functional phenomenon in the sense that "it is designed to account for how the language is used". As a function-based grammar, therefore, systemic function grammar (hence forth SFG) is humanistic in approach. It tends to capture the fusion of language and society. It regards language as purely societal phenomenon. In other words, it is concerned with language in use. How do people use language to make meanings? Linguistic universals are approached by SFG as deriving not from any mental process as such but from the universality of the uses to which language is put in human societies. As a result, the view of SFG of language as a resource for meaning entails a view of language as choice: what did a speaker say in relation to what could have been said. This means the focus is on paradigmatic relations. What is important here is not simply the option chosen in itself but the option chosen in relation to other available options. (Lyons 1968:74 and Palmer 1976:67).

The indivisible relationship that exists between language, society and meaning underlines the choice of SFG in this study. Part of our preoccupation here is to investigate how Olu Obafemi's phonological and graphological stylistic features in *Naira has no Gender* have contributed to the overall understanding of the text. Also, how he employed these features or choices in affecting the socio-political situation of the society that serves as his audience. So far, all our discussions of Halliday's SFG have been geared towards language, society, context, meaning and function. Our study also entails investigating how these are brought to bear on the text. It is with respect to the above strong points of SFG that this approach is adopted as having greater relevance to our study than the form – based approach that analyzes styles only on the formal level of language with little or no recourse to meaning and context.

Contextualization of the play: *Naira has no Gender*

Naira has no Gender captures vividly the unpleasant experiences of Nigeria in the 3rd republic of civilian rule. What is crucial in the experiences presented is their features of predictability. That is, that our country Nigeria may not experience any serious positive change if certain revolutionary measures are not

decisively employed. Obafemi's prediction of 1993 prevails in the present situation of Nigeria in the new millennium.

The play is divided into five atmospheres. The plot of the play is woven around the stories of family life, viewed from different perspectives: the rich and the poor. In the first atmosphere, we encounter Otunla, a young and energetic village teacher who has proposed to marry Aina, a fairly educated village lady, and unemployed. This first part of the play captures their courtship and the issue of payment of bride price before the actual marriage commences. Otunla from all indications is unable to meet up with the demands and so in a sarcastic tone he said:

Oh yes. All the fees. I won't forget. Every Kobo for every article or commodity. Every fare of the marriage contract shall be duly sealed and delivered. Okay? (p. 11).

Otunla's reaction of equating marriage bride price with buying and selling reveals Obafemi's position about the excesses of marriage contraction in most parts of the Nigerian society.

Atmospheres two and three witness a contrast to the 'family' of Aina and Otunla. Here we have the family of chief Awodanu with evident setting of a rich home as shown in the stage direction, music set, television, video, refrigerator and assorted drinks, a true representation of clear lavish, surplus and obscene excess. Chief Awodanu is a full time politician but uneducated. He shares the story of the contract he had just won with the wife. The wife expresses her surprise.

Chief. I still don't believe it you won the contract only yesterday, and the cash is flowing already. No quotation. No seeing all the officials and ministry people. No lobbying, eh? (p 19).

The excerpt is a glaring case of corruption at its height. Details of the corrupt practices of Chief are given in the story of the election processes where he virtually converted his house to polling station with all the ballot boxes hidden there. That is not enough; he uses his daughter as bait to seal contract agreement and makes millions of naira. At the end he compensates his daughter. To Chief, it does not matter how you make your money Illori (1995). After all, 'naira has no gender'. "...cash. Cool naira. E no get relative. E no get sex, man o, woman o na di same. (p. 27).

Another important story of atmospheres two and three is our encounter with Dokun, chief's only son and Debby, Dokun's wife. They are close friends of Aina and Otunla. Debby and Dokun are pampered children of the rich; good education, holiday abroad, exotic cars for their use in fact, luxury in all spheres of life. The description of their wedding captures it all:

...Just see your friend and classmate, Dokun. I saw it all. I was present at his own wedding. Everything immaculate white; flower flakes, white; champagne, white; baby benz wedding car, white; the sport mustang car which his father gave them as a wedding present, spotless – white. I hear the mansion his father gave them for their honeymoon ...I hear it is also painted white (p. 14).

As friends of Otunla and Aina they promised to trick Chief out of some good sum of money to sponsor their friends' wedding, who on their own are too poor to have 'befitting' wedding. Although Dokun belongs to the camp of the rich, he stands as a symbol of human conscience; often at loggerhead with the father and his likes over the affairs of the nation. He says this to his father:

Keep running. Keep chasing the shadow. The world is poised to uproot the unequal culture. Truth is armed to stop this filth. Keep running. Keep chasing after the breeze. (p. 38).

In the last two atmospheres: four and five, the play captures the levels of man's inhumanity to man; a demonstration of injustice through enactment of laws with no human face. Some group of armed men parade the market and help themselves to some of the goods at the close of every market. Above all, they throw traders out of their stalls which they had earlier paid for without compensation or proper arrangement for relocation. This is done in the guise that the stalls affect the beauty of the city. Also, Aina's traditional marriage rites are done quietly but ask for the church (white) wedding, she appeals to the parents to forget about it. She and Otunla agree not to collect Dokun's father's money for the sponsorship of the wedding. This development is significant in the play; a symbol of the dethronement of the culture of waste in the new scheme of things advocated by the author.

In a simple fascinating story of family life, Obafemi ruminates on some important economic, political, social and domestic issues of Nigerian past and present. In the next section of this essay, attempts would be made to explore these thematic preoccupations of the author.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were collected from OluObafemi's *Naira has no Gender*. It is a play divided into five atmospheres- a stylistic fusion of Act and Scene. Instances of graphological and phonological stylistic values were selected for analysis. The analysis was anchored on Halliday's model of Systemic Functional Grammar. The benefit of Systemic Functional Grammar here is premised on its emphasis on how language functions as a system of human communication. The application of this model was intended to investigate the relevance of the graphological and phonological features identified to the overall communicative essence and meaning of the play.

Phono-graphological Analysis of the play: Naira has no Gender

As earlier indicated in the abstract and the introductory parts of the study the phono-graphological features deployed by Obafemi in the play on which this analysis is based include lengthening of sounds, addition of the vowel / 0/ at the end of an utterance, and sound repetition at the level of phonology. At the graphological level we analyzed essentially punctuation marks and spelling of stylistic relevance. These punctuation marks include: capitalization, italicization, dots and hyphenation.

Phonological Level:

Lengthening of Sounds - /n/, /j/ and /m/

This feature is a re-concurrent characteristic of spoken discourse, especially in Nigerian language situation where lengthening of sound is an aspect of our local languages. Drama (in this context) being a part of literature that is realizable in both spoken and written mode possesses this feature. The sounds lengthened in the data are mostly consonants. For instance, "mobilizationnnn" (P.24). It is used to draw attention to the issue of contractors collecting mobilization fee even before the quotation is submitted and contract approved. Another example is the lengthening of / j/ sound "shshshshsh" (P.10). Otunla uses the device to stop Aina from asking further question about his presence. This feature also occurs on (P.16) when Aina uses "Hmmm" to reveal her psychological state as she ponders over Otunla's statement that "...in a society like ours, (too much conscience) is not a virtue to possess in abundance" .

Addition of the Vowel /0/at the End of an Utterance

Aina, Otunla and Chief Awadanu employ the addition of the vowel /o/ at the end of certain utterances in our data. However, this device is mostly used by Chief not only to show that he is not well educated but also to emphasize the points he makes. Generally, it is important to add here that the addition of the vowel /0/ is one of the salient features of Nigerian English. Examples of its use in the data include: "This one no to marriage again o" (P.12) Otunla has used it in the text to express a feeling of disgust towards the over commercialization of marriage in some parts of Nigeria. Another instant of its use is found in Chief's expression. Siddon there. The matter na money matter cash. Cool naira. no get relative. E no get sex. Man o, woman o na di same (p27)

Its function here is to emphasize Chief's position about acquiring wealth. What is significant in life according to him is that, you are wealthy. It does not matter how you acquire it since naira has no gender. Chief Awadanu employs this feature in another instance to show the receptive nature of his party. He emphasizes that his party does not discriminate in any form no matter your tribal or religious background: ...Look, our party na the ideal party. No bias for tribe. No respect for religion Kristen – o, demdey. Moslem-o; na one; - Krislem o; na the same (P.23).

Sound Repetitions

Sound repetitions identified in the data are alliteration and assonance. Obafemi is not only a playwright but also a poet. His poetic experience is brought to bear in this play. Below is a sample of sounds repeated in the data:

- (a) singing a soothing song..... /s/ (P.9)
- (b) spoilssport..... /s/ (P.10)
- (c) slowly but steadily..... /s/ (P.39)
- (d)... then I saw the roguish sum stealing a rub at your smooth back...../s/&/r/ (P.10)
- (e) straight and simple..... s/ (P.53)
- (f) butter / bread...../b/ (P.26)

- (g) cheers to you bores and bullies...../b/ (P.32)
- (h) only on the mechanized farms of the foreign investors...../f/ (P.36)
- (i) all the fond respect does not fund a wedding reception...../f&/r/ (P.17)
- (j) home / hunting..... /h/ (P.10)
- (k)on your head to your husband's home...../h/ (P.10)
- (l)take the hunt, before the big hunt for your begins...../h/ (P.17)
- (m) yes, the will of the people wheeled away with wheel barrows /w/, /i:/ /i/.(P.23)
- (n) crooze the beautiful car...../k/ (P.20)

The tactful repetition of these sounds is to appeal to the reader's sense of hearing as well as to create aesthetic appeals.

Graphological Level:

Capitalization

The capitalization of "MO-BI-LI-ZA-TION" (fee) (P.24) and the letter 'm' and 't' in "Minister" and "Trade" respectively (P. 25) is for the purpose of prominence. Our attention is easily drawn to them and the idea which they depict. For instance, Chief Awadanu uses mobilization to draw his wife's attention to his wealthy status having been paid mobilization fee. On the other hand, "minister about trade" (P.25) is used to achieve humorous effect. It is a mockery on Chief for his lack of formal education. While others make money he as a "minister about trade" is expected to prepare the book about trade even when he is not educated. It is a cheap plot to deny Chief of any political position.

Italicization

Italicization is a foregrounding device that can be used to indicate change in speech form, draw attention to them, mark off loan words and in some cases, give stage direction. In the text, only the last two groups are predominant. Loan words are mostly drawn from Yoruba and Hausa languages in the text. Some examples of loan words italicized in the play are "*sakole*" (a fee paid on a piece of land leased out to one) (P.11) "*palemo*" (rate- some money usually paid to women to decorate a bride for marriage) (P.11), "*igbarun*" (a form of marriage fee) (P.11) "*omikun*"(the river is full) (P.11) "*aso-ebi*" (ceremonial uniform)(P.12), "*agbada*" (P.12) "*gababaya*"(at once) (P.22) "*dogoturanci*" (long English)(22) "*gaskiya*" (truly) (P.25) "*ofegbe'epe*"(you want to receive curse) (P.28) "*Oyan*" (P.48).

Stage direction is consistently italicized to separate them from the body of the text and to draw attention to the management of the stage and characters in case of when the play is staged. It also helps the author achieve verisimilitude and make the play pleasurable. Some examples of stage direction italicized include "*gets up to enjoy his story of success*" (P. 22) "*rearranges his agbada*" (P.21), "*takes a hard look of disbelief and bitterness at him*" (P. 20) etc

Dots

Another interesting graphological feature employed in the play is the use of dots. They are usually used to indicate ellipsis. That is, some items are left unmentioned such as the case with the following set of ellipsis:

Aina: Okay we shouldn't. It is just that anytime I remember his dashing cars....His sumptuous wedding and posh parties.... (P. 15)

The presence of ellipsis or dots here is an indication that there are many more things that Dokun enjoy that she has ellipated perhaps, out of bitterness for the state of poverty in which she and her proposed husband, Otunla, live in. Dots can also show a state of forgetfulness or loss of memory, and sometimes, inability. This is the situation with Chief when he said:

Mobilization cash for clear site for steel company way our government dey build for...wetindem they call...for industralisation. Our country must catch up with em...(P. 24)

Apart from the functions earlier mentioned, dots also serve narrative purposes. When dots are used, often time, the conversation does not terminate at that point, as it could elicit response from the listener either to help complete the ellipated item indicated by the presence of dots.

Hyphenation

It is a device used in joining two or more words to form a compound. The simple compounds comprising only a single hyphen dominates such as "dream – world" (P.11), "bush rat" (P.17), "love-cry" (P.23), "praise-singers" (P.52), "fruit-ladden" (P.35), "shadow-boxing" (P.37), "after-meal" (P.42), "near-nakedness" (P.43), "full-grown" (P.44), "full-time" (P.47).They are used to emphasize the ideas expressed by these compounds. Of particular stylistic interest is the complex compound used in the text: "Rural-Irrigation –

Funds-shall-continue-to-be-diverted-happily-ever-after-amen" (P. 36). The attention drawn to it is meant to expose the endless criminal tendencies of some political leaders and contractors. Funds set aside for boosting agriculture in the rural setting are continuously diverted for selfish personal use. The use of dash also shows a chain relationship among the perpetrators of this crime.

Spelling

In this aspect, we consider words that are intentionally mis-spelt. Chief's misspelling of adjective as "adjectif" (P.25) is meant to achieve humour and to show Chief's poor level of education. It is also used to denote a meaning of stealing that characterizes Chief's party. The use suggests a tactful combination of two words: 'abject' and 'thief'. The action of 'stealing' by Chief and some of his party members leaves the masses in wretchedness and abject poverty. Other words mis-spelt also, have satiric import. For example "industralasation" (P24) (where the letter 'i' is changed to 'a') is a mockery of policies meant to change the nation to an industrialized one but never saw the light of day. Instead huge sums are paid to "contractors even before quotations estimate and plan survey has been carried out" (P.24).

Similarly, the letter 'C' in democracy is changed to "z" (P.10) to show the 'craze' for political positions and sharing of public funds by a few in the guise of democracy. Also "adiology" (.28) in the place of 'ideology' is linked up with 'craze' earlier explained. Those who can not steal public funds remain wretched and have no good ideology in life and the reverse is the case for embezzlers. Chief Awadanu's statement summarizes this:He de go about learning yeyeadiology from suffer head people wey no get destiny. One of them be one wretched teacher wey no fit change in shirt once a week.... (p.28)

V. CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated the place of phonological and graphological stylistic features anchored on systemic functional grammar in the interpretation of the message of *Naira has no Gender*. It has aptly revealed the interaction of such graphological features as capitalization italicization dots, hyphenation, spelling and phonological elements such as addition of sounds, lengthening of sounds and sound repetition as the background on which the understanding of the play hinges.

Obafemi's tactful deployment of these features successfully is a revelation of his personality as a versatile and prolific writer who has experimented with the major literary genres of modern literature- prose, drama and poetry. In fact, his manipulation of certain vowel and consonant sounds further confirms his skillfulness and creative prowess even in poetry genre that are reflected in *Naira has no Gender*.

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