
Linguistic Analysis of Kwesi Brew's "The Mesh"

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Abstract

The notion of linguistic analysis has been examined in many ways by various researchers. In several studies, linguistic analysis has been referred to as the scientific analysis of a language sample used to describe the unconscious rules and processes that speakers of a language use. These studies have looked at linguistic analysis from concept extraction, as is the case with rules-based linguistic analysis, to textual analysis, as well as analysis of language and its structures. Studies have further shown that the goal of linguistic analysis is to understand the content of a text. In view of the foregoing, this paper examines the various linguistic concepts employed by African literary writers and how they "wrestle with words and meaning" to convey their unique visions. The paper revolves around how sentence patterns and linguistic concepts serve as tools for linguistic analysis of Kwesi Brew's "The Mesh". Findings of the study showed evidence in support of the use of several linguistic patterns employed by the poet for creative effects. Such linguistic tools include: linguistic concepts at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantics and lexical levels; parallel structures ("leave" and "come") that are in antonymous relation; the use of synonymously related lexis as in cross-road, darkness, doubts which belongs to the same semantic category /+uncertainty/; the use of paradigmatic relation as seen in "darkness" and "doubts" for sharing the same alveolar at the

initial position. Other analytical tools worthy of mention are pattern repetition, parallel structure, sentence patterns structure and linguistic foregrounding which are used for stylistic effects.

Key words: Linguistics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, foregrounding

1.0 Introduction

The quest for the proper patterns of language to be used by poetic African writers in passing across their individualistic intended meanings and ideas constitutes a problem. It is worthy of note that this problem of struggle for the patterns of language to be used results in the over-use of pattern repetition. To pin-point this, Widdowson (1975:1) puts it thus:

At the heart of literary creation is the struggle to device patterns of language which will bestow upon the linguistic items concerned just those values which will convey individual writer's personal vision.

It is this issue of choice in the creative use of language, especially literary language that constitutes a problem to African literary writers and poets; as well as the violation of linguistic norms in an effort to achieve stylistic effects. This is what this study sets out to explore. It is worthy of note here that the essence of this violation in language use is to relate literary effects to linguistic causes where these are felt to be relevant. The purpose of this study, then, is to bring to the fore the various linguistic concepts and other factors (stylistic features) which help to enhance the linguistic analysis of texts. This study is limited to the analysis of the use of linguistic deviation in the works of African literary writers and how they "wrestle with words and meaning" in order to convey

their unique visions. The paper therefore gives a linguistic analysis of Kwesi Brew's "The Mesh".

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Linguistic concepts as tools for linguistic analysis

For any would be stylistian, the knowledge of linguistic concepts will enable such a one to do with ease proper stylistic analysis of a given text or passage of prose or poetry. Linguistic concepts, therefore, refer to those terms found in the field of linguistics or language study and are of great importance to textual analysis, be it linguistic or literary analysis. Such linguistic concepts include phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexis.

2.1.1 Phonology

One of the linguistic concepts that play an essential role in linguistic analysis is phonology. Phonology is the sub-discipline within linguistics that concerns itself with "the sounds of language". Simply put, it is concerned with the function, behavior and organization of sounds as linguistic items (Lass; 1984:1).

It is the branch of linguistics which investigates the ways in which speech sounds are used systematically to form words and utterances (Katamba, 1989: 60). Akinjobi (2006:6) states that "phonology studies the sound patterns found in human languages. It studies how speech sounds form systems and patterns". According to Fromkin and Rodman (1997), "Phonology is also the term used to refer to the kind of knowledge that speakers have about the sound patterns of their particular language". From the above definitions, it can be summarized that the phonology of a language is the system and pattern of speech sounds and the tacit knowledge that the speakers have of the sounds. It generally refers to the study of sound patterns of a given human language.

In linguistic stylistics analysis, the knowledge of phonology cannot be overemphasized because some of the dominant stylistic features in a given text or poetry may have phonological patterns of speech sounds, meter or rhyme. These features could include stress and intonation which ought to be mastered and well understood before justice can be done to textual stylistic analysis.

2.1.2 Morphology

Studies by Aronoff and Fudeman (2011); Siegel (1974); and Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) show that morphology encompasses the mental system involved in word formation and is the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed. In other words, *morphology* denotes the study of the morphemes of a language and how they are combined to form words. According to Ajah and Igiligi (1997:12), “morphology is the study of the minimal significant variations in the forms of words. It deals with various forms that words can take” (1997:12-13). At the morphological level, the various forms through which a poet forms and uses words to achieve creativity are of great importance in linguistic stylistics.

2.1.3 Syntax

Syntax is another important linguistic tool that cannot be overemphasized. The term ‘syntax’ is from the Ancient Greek *syntaxis*, a verbal noun which literally means ‘arrangement’ or ‘setting out together’. Traditionally, it refers to the branch of grammar dealing with the ways in which words, with or without appropriate inflections, are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence. Therefore, it is concerned with the study of the formation of grammatical units larger than the word (Matthews; 1982:1). Syntax is a central component of human

language that deals with how sentences are constructed (Van Valin Jr, 2001).

Syntax, according to Cohen (1998), “is the study of the arrangement or grouping of words in a sentence and their grammatical and meaningful relationships to each other”. From the point of view of Jowitt (1991:107), “syntax often deals with the structure, use and meaning as well as the combinational properties of such words (auxiliaries, conjunctions, determiners, preposition, pronouns) and so trespasses upon the territory of morphology, lexis and semantics”. A set of principles that constitute rules according to which words are combined into sentences - syntactic structure – which may come in the form of inversion, antithesis and parallelism in the hands of poets is of great interest in linguistic analysis.

2.1.4 Semantics

In linguistic analysis, the study of meaning, reference or truth plays an important role in the hand of linguistic analyst (Liddell & Scott, 1843; Kroeger, 2019; Levin & Pinker, 1991). A number of scholars have given their views on the notion of linguistic meaning – semantics also called semiotics, semiology - as the scientific study of meaning in natural and artificial languages (Kroeger, 2019; Jackendoff, 1990; Giannini, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Crystal (1997:50) defines semantics as “the study of the meaning of linguistic forms”. (1997:50).

In the words of Igiligi and Ajah (1997:13), “semantics is the association of words or word patterns with meanings. It is the study of the meaning of words and of words combinations in phrases and sentences”. We can infer from the different definitions here that semantics is the branch of linguistics which deals with

meanings of words and sentences. Its study is concerned with accounting for uniformity in the use of language. In stylistics, the link that may occur between two items in the form of synonymous or antonymous relationship to achieve stylistic effect(s) is of a great import.

2.1.5 Lexis

The term *lexis* refers to the entire stock/complete set of all possible words (vocabulary) in a language (Ajah and Igiligi 1997; Nordquist, 2019). According to the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, lexis comprises of "all the words and phrases of a particular language". Lexis or lexical items, therefore, could be used to distinguish the types of words used in a text – poetry - by a poet from the style of another poet. Lexical features serve as tools for stylistic effect when, for instance, a text contains barbarisms, provincialisms, archaisms or neologisms. Such features when examined help in distinguishing the style of one poet from the other as afore mentioned.

2.2 Sentence Patterns as a tool for Linguistic Analysis

In stylistic analysis, sentence pattern is an important factor that contributes to the achievement of creative effect by an author – a poet. A sentence has been variously defined by various linguists and one of such is Igiligi's definition of sentence as a group of words having subject and predicate and which expresses a complete thought (1997:21).

Different types of sentence patterns or structures therefore, are taken into account in stylistics analysis of a text. A poet can use a sentence against the normal norms of the rule of grammar. The question here then focuses on identifying whether an author or poet uses sentence according to function or whether

he uses sentence according to structure which consists of structure within structures – Seven Kernel Sentences – SV, SVO, SVC, SVA, SVOO, AVOA, SVOC – as well as compound complex and multiple sentences.

Apart from classifying sentence according to function or according to structure, Ajah and Igiligi identify the fact that sentence can also be broadly classified into two types namely:

- i. The Periodic Sentence
- ii. The Loose Sentence

The periodic sentence is that type of sentence “in which the main idea or sense remains suspended or delayed until the end of the sentence” (Ajah and Igiligi; 1997:23). For instance, in the sentence “if I become rich, I shall help the poor”. The main idea is suspended or delayed until the end of the sentence. It is worthy of note here that most periodic sentences are introduced by subordinate clauses. This therefore serves as a major tool in the hands of poets.

The loose sentence on the other hand is the type of sentence “in which the main idea is followed by loosely joined component parts” (Ajah and Igiligi; 1997:23). As Strunk and White (1995) pointed out “an occasional loose sentence prevents the style from becoming too formal and gives the reader a certain relief. Consequently, loose sentences are common in easy; unstished writing”. A good example is found in the example below:

“I shall help the poor, if I become rich”,

Here, the pattern begins with a simple sentence - the main idea – then followed by loosely joined components parts – such as strings of subordinating structures.

2.3 Linguistic foregrounding and linguistics stylistics

Foregrounding is a popular term in stylistics most especially in the analysis of poetical works. The term *foregrounding* was introduced by Garvin in 1964 to translate the Prague School term of the 1930s *aktualisace*, literary 'actualization' (Wales; 1989:182). A text is therefore said to be foregrounded when there are violations of linguistic norms at grammatical, phonological or semantic level. 'Foregrounding' refers to the property of perceptual prominence that certain things have against the backdrop of others, less noticeable things (Gregoriou, 2014).

According to Yankson (1987:3), the normal language code is the background. Any deviation from the norm – the code – is the foregrounding because it brings the message to the forecourt of the reader's attention. Furthermore, Ajah and Igiligi (1997:14) quoted in "A Glossary of Literary Terms" posit that "to foreground is to bring into the highest prominence to make it dominant in one's perception". In textual literary/linguistic analysis, linguistic features can themselves be foregrounded, or 'highlighted' and 'made prominent', for specific effects against the background of the rest of the text. It is around this – 'internal' foregrounding that critical attention is largely focused. Foregrounding therefore plays an important role in any linguistic analysis. Linguistic foregrounding, therefore, is a stylistic operation which violates linguistic grammaticality and acceptability. In other words, it violates the linguistic rules that accounts for grammaticality and acceptability. The violation of linguistic rules that accounts for grammaticality and acceptability does not sum up to unacceptability. Instead, it enhances communication and conveyance of message.

In the words of Wales (1989:438), linguistic stylistics "... refers to a kind of stylistics whose focus of interest is not primarily

literary texts, but the refinement of a linguistic model which has potential for further linguistic or stylistics analysis”. One thing worthy of note in this definition is the shift from critical interpretation and evaluation of literary texts to the application of linguistic model which has potential for further stylistic analysis. This shows that linguistic stylistics deals with the linguistic description in literary interpretation. At this point, linguistics concepts are employed in textual analysis.

Notwithstanding, it should be noted here that literary criticism which focuses on the description and evaluation of individual literary texts ceases to exist and is now incorporated into linguistic criticism, which seeks to draw out the social significance of all textual practices.

3.0 Kwesi Brew’s Biography

Kwesi Brew was born in Cape Coast, Ghana, in 1928. Educated in Ghana, he first joined the civil service before travelling widely as a diplomat for his country. His poetry deals mainly with the recollection of moments of past experiences which have really moved him. As such, the main qualities of his writing are studied simplicity, careful attention to detail and a highly controlled tone and rhyme. His muted style therefore stands in contrast to the two other major Ghananian poets – Awooner, Kofi and Okai, Atukwei. Among Kwesi Brew’s poems are ‘*The dry season*’, ‘*The executioner’s dream*’, ‘*The sea eats our lands*’ and ‘*A sandal on the head*’.

Kwesi Brew’s “The Mesh”

*We have come to the cross-roads
And I must either leave or come with you.
I lingered over the choice
But in the darkness of my doubts*

5. *You lifted the lamp of love
And I saw in your face
The road that I should take.*

From "A Selection of African Poetry" by K.E. Senanu and T. Vincent

3.1 Discussion of Kwesi Brew's "The Mesh": The Linguistics Perspective

"The Mesh" is a brief but subtle poem which serves as evidence in support of the poets studied simplicity with careful attention to detail. The most interesting thing about this poem is its title – The Mesh – which depicts a complicated situation or system that is difficult to escape from – *LOVE*. It is described as a material woven together like a net. Indeed, love could be such complicated. "The Mesh" particularly encapsulates the moment of certainty and assurance when love is naturally given and accepted. The poet paints a vivid picture of two people grasping the dawning love between them. The uncertainty, notwithstanding, as shown in the opening – first line – of the poem later gave way for assurance and acceptance as "you lifted the lamp of love".

The poem started with the first-person pronoun (plural) – "we" and moves to "I" personalized in lines 2 and 3. It further depicts second person pronoun "you" before finally ending with the personal pronoun "I". The "we" refers to the two lovers which is further broken down into "you" and "I". The cross-road in "we have come to the cross-road" reveals the first indecisiveness between the lovers which brought about the "... lingered over the choice" because of the *darkness of my doubts* till the lamp of love

was lifted to give way for the assurance and acceptance of love between – “you” and “I” – the lovers.

Embedded in this poem are several linguistic patterns employed by the poet for creative effects.

Some of such patterns include:

- i) cross-road }
 darkness }
 doubts }

The above pattern belongs to the same semantic category /+uncertainty/. Thus, they are synonymously related.

ii) We have come to the cross-road

The pattern above is an example of loose sentence. It also contains the sound pattern in

/k/ - come to the cross-road

/b/ - come to the cross-road

iii) And I must either leave or come with you.

The pattern in (iii) above is a parallel structure with “leave” and “come” in antonymous relation. This same paralleled structure is repeated in lines 4 and 5 of the poem. *But in the darkness of my doubts/You lifted the lamp of love as in darkness and doubts* as well as *lamp* and *love* where *darkness* is a representation of uncertainty as in *doubts* while *lamp* signifies *light, hope*, the disappearance of darkness that paves way for *love*.

- iv) I must
 I lingered
 I saw
 I should

This is an example of pattern repetition as found in lines 2, 3, 6, and 7 of the poem with SV structure as in:

I + $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{must} \\ \text{lingered} \\ \text{saw} \\ \text{should} \end{array} \right\}$

- v) And I must
 But in the darkness
 And I saw

The use of coordinating conjunctions at the beginning of lines 2, 4, and 6 of the poem is an example of foregrounding.

vi) But in the darkness of my doubts

“darkness” and “doubts” are in the same paradigmatic relation for sharing the same alveolar at the initial position. There is also a phonological relation in “my” and “doubts”, “darkness” for belonging to the same phonological category (vowel).

Below is the breakdown of the sound patterns in the poem:

/k/	in	–	We have <u>come</u> to the <u>cross</u> -road
/ɒ/	in	-	<u>come</u> to the <u>cross</u> -road
/ðu/	in	-	<u>to</u> the <u>cross</u> -road
/ai/	in	–	<u>I</u> must <u>either</u> leave; my <u>doubts</u>
/d/	in	–	<u>darkness</u> of my <u>doubts</u>
/l/	in	–	you <u>lifted</u> the <u>lamp</u> of <u>love</u>

Another instance is seen in:

darkness and doubts
/a:/ /ðu/

Although the two sounds are not the same but the fact that they both belong to the same long vowel sounds and their being di-

syllabic as in dark/ness; doubt/s, serve as a pointer to the creative use of stylistics effect.

3.2 Other Sentence Patterns

First and foremost, a critical look at the poem shows that it contains five (5) sentence patterns. These sentence patterns worthy of note in the poem include:

- 1) We have come to the cross-road – Simple sentence
S V PP
- 2) And I must either leave (you) or come with you. - Complex Sentence
Conj. S V V PP
Conj. Sentence (i) Sentence (ii)

This consists of two simple sentences joined with the aid of coordinating conjunction *and*, but the use of *either* and *or* neutralized the complex nature of the sentence; thus rendering the sentence in a strings of subordinating structure. Below is the breakdown of the pattern (2) above. Thus, the pattern contains two simple sentences as in:

- i. I must leave you. – Simple Sentence
ii. I must come with you. – Simple Sentence

I must either leave (you) or come with you. – Complex Sentence

- 3) I lingered over the choice. – Simple Sentence

S V PP

4) But in the darkness of my doubts, you lifted the lamp of love. –
Compound Sentence

Conj. PP S V NP

The above sentence is introduced with coordinating conjunction *but*, this, notwithstanding the expression *in the darkness of my doubts* is a dependent clause complementing the second segment, *you lifted the lamp of love*, as strings of subordinating structure.

5) And I saw in your face the road that I should take. –
Compound Sentence

Conj. Sentence

Although the above pattern starts with coordinating conjunction *and*, the sentence remains a compound sentence:

I saw (in your face) the road (that I should take).
S V O SC

The sentence pattern contains the subject "I", verb (saw) and the object of the sentence (the road) while *in your face* and *that I should take* are adverbial phrase and subordinating clause respectively modifying the verb *saw* and the object of the sentence *the road*, indicating the road to be followed.

4.0 Conclusion

This study gave a linguistic analysis of Kwesi Brew's "The Mesh". In the analysis of data, the various linguistic concepts employed by African literary writers and how they "wrestle with words and meaning" in order to convey their unique visions are brought to the lime light. Such linguistic concepts - phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexis - serve as veritable tools for the analysis. Other analytical tools worthy of mention are sentence patterns structure and linguistic foregrounding which are used for stylistic effects.

Embedded in the text are several linguistic patterns employed by the poet for creative effects. The findings of the study shows evidence in support of the use of pattern repetition as found in lines 2, 3, 6, and 7 of the poem with SV structure. Also, the pattern in data (iii) is a parallel structure with *leave* and *come* in antonymous relation. There are allusions to the use of synonymously related lexis as in *cross-road*, *darkness*, *doubts*, which belongs to the same semantic category /+uncertainty/. The analysis also showed the use of paradigmatic relation as seen in *darkness* and *doubts* for sharing the same alveolar at the initial position. There is also a phonological relation in *my* and *doubts*, *darkness* for belonging to the same phonological category (vowel).

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