



# **Grapho-Lexical Features of Selected Poems in Niyi Osundare's *Village Voices***

**Segun Aminu<sup>1</sup> and Samson Oluwagbenga<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Languages, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria.*

## **Authors' contributions**

*The two authors designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Language is a means of human communication. Indeed, the skillful use of language in poetry, one of the genres of literature, is significant for interpretation. Thus, language is regarded as an indispensable tool in the world of poetry. It is imperative to note that Niyi Osundare's poems are unique and outstanding among his contemporaries because of his style. Therefore, this paper examines how Niyi Osundare creatively employs grapho-lexical features to convey his socio-political messages in his poems.

*Keywords: Stylistics; graphology; lexis; poetry.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Language is the basic tool of poetry and other genres of literature [1]. Through the creative use of language; poetry achieves communicative and aesthetic effects. In the light of this, [2] describes poetry as "One variety of language where the fusion of language as art and language as a means of communicator is fully realized"(13).

A message, whether in poetry and other genres of literature, is communicated through the use of language (see [3,4,1]). Though, the language of poetry differs from the language of other genres of literature. Although, it may sometimes seem difficult to classify certain forms of literature as either prose fiction, drama or poetry, as a result of overlapping of features. [5] argues on the language of poetry as follows:

\*Corresponding author: Email: aminusegun2017@gmail.com, aminusegun@gmail.com;

*...nuanced, not explicit, connotative, rather than denotative, figurative rather than literal, symbolic rather than plain. And these are not normally expected from the language of a novel or any prose narrative. (10).*

This assertion portrays poetry as an art that uses language creatively.

*Village Voices* is written by Niyi Osundare, a poet, dramatist and literary critic, whose works include "The Eye of the Earth" (1986) "Moon Song" (1988), "Songs of the Seasons" (1999), "Waiting Laughters" (1990), "Selected Poems" (1992), "Midlife" (1993), "Thread in the Loom" (2002), "The Word is an Egg" (2002), "The State Visit" (2002), "Earth Birds" (2004), "Two Plays" (2005). Also, [6] is a collection of poems which comprises thirty nine poems that is classified into three different phases, which include: rising voices; voices about coming and going; and voices of anger and indictment.

However, the selected poems shall be examined at the level of graphology and lexis. These poems include "A Reunion"; "I Wake up this Morning", "A Dialogue of the Drums", "Killing without a Sword", "Sleeping at Five and Twenty", "Dying Another's Death", "To a Passing Year", "Search for a Wife", "Eating with all Fingers", "A Chicken story", "Advice, Cradling Hands", "Akintunde Come Home" and, "A Farmer on Seeing Cocoa House".

Stylistics is the study of style. Indeed, various scholars have dwelt on style and stylistics. Among them are [7-9,4,10]. There are various levels of analysis in stylistics which range from graphology, syntax, lexis to phonology. Therefore, since the major focus of stylistics is the "how" of a text formation, it becomes imperative that the various significant linguistic matrixes in a text, among which are lexical and graphological features are exploited in the selected poems.

On lexis, [11] submits that:

*Lexis is one of the levels of analysis in stylistics, and the use of lexical categories is meant to find out how choice of words involves various types of meaning. So, there are stylistically relevant things to be said about the way words or lexical items are patterned in different contexts.*

In consonance with this submission, [12] avers that

*the lexis of a language refers to all words employed for the purpose of communication in the language. It is imperative, to mention that, in any lexical analysis, the focus is usually on content words otherwise known as open ended words, and not on close ended or grammatical words.*

On graphology, [13] states that it is the characteristic line-by-line arrangement of poetry on the printed page (47). Hence, it is a graphic representation of language on paper. In this paper, insights, concepts and discoveries from graphology and lexis are drawn to analyse the selected poems which makes the approach and orientation to be stylistics, as frequency of linguistic items at various levels of textual organization and markers, which have definite contextual relationship with the text, are identified, analysed and discussed.

Previous scholars have applied the linguistic frame work of grapho-lexical to study various discourses. Such scholars include [14] that applies the current framework to speeches of former Nigerian Military Heads of State. Also, [15] and Akinkurolere [12] examine explores literary text and Inaugural speeches of speakers of state houses of assembly through lexical framework. This research combines both graphological and lexical frameworks in the analysis.

## 2. GRAPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Graphological rules are, sometimes, broken by poet deliberately for aesthetic purposes. Our focus here is on the distinctive uses of italicization, graphic onomatopoeia, pictorial, and punctuation marks etc.

### 2.1 The Use of Italicization

This is a type of printed letters which slant to the right. [16] posits that "italicization is used to express a special attitude, bias or opinion in a poems and for aesthetic purpose" (10). Niyi Osundare utilizes this feature to emphasize certain words and to convey his message in the poem. Here are deliberate instances of the poet's use of italicization;

"My friend asked for *pounded yam*"?

"I gave him *pounded yam* with *egusi* soup whose taste stuck the tongue to the plate. (13) "Killing Without a Sword".

*Sigidi* thirsty for a dance of shame craves a festival in the rain (9) "Not in my Season of Songs"?

Niyi Osundare uses the italicized lexical items "pounded yam", "egusi" and "sigidi" stylistically showing unfamiliar words. The italicized lexical items are specifically the Yoruba delicacies and earthen effigy. Hence, the purposes of the italicized lexical items are to create the poet's artistic vision and create impression on the minds of the readers.

## 2.2 The Use Graphic Onomatopoeia

Graphic onomatopoeia is also known as visual symbolism. It is common to poets to take advantage of poetic license to demonstrate unrestrained creativity in poetry, evident in [17], where he describes "tricks of print" visual experimentations" (20). These typographical and linguistic eccentricities are peculiar though not exclusive to poetry. It is therefore incontestable that poetry is an art that uses language effectively.

"Graphic onomatopoeia" as perceived by [18] is the "organization of utterances into symbolic visual shapes" (102). These techniques of graphic onomatopoeia, or spoken utterance using written symbols in creating visual relationships, are esthetically employed by Niyi

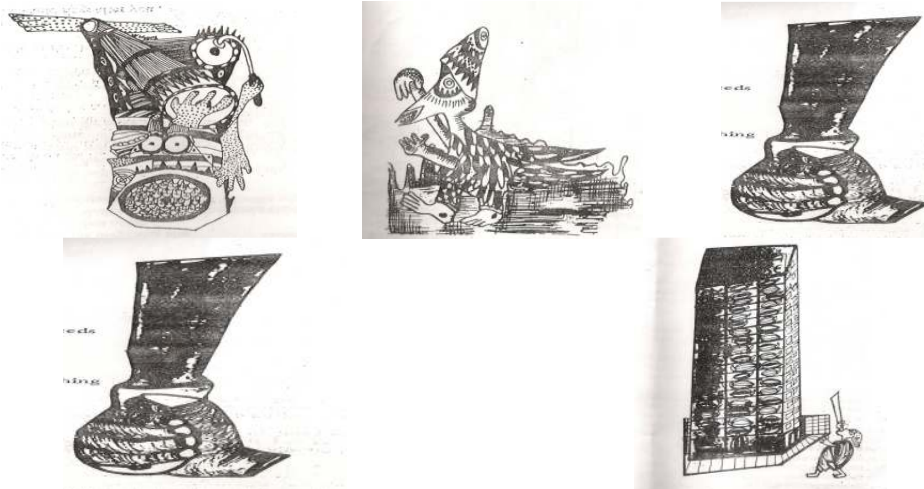
Osundare. The aforementioned extract illustrates this below:

Let this war be fought by  
Presidents' children  
Governors' children  
Senators' children  
Bankers' children  
Bishops' children  
Other who cut up the country like an  
unending cake (55).  
*"Dying Another 's Death"*.

This extract appeals to our senses. These visual symbols portray Niyi Osundare as a poetic architect. He is able to match his moods with the unconventional techniques that he adopts to express such moods. The above extract captures the poet's frustration and anger on those who cut the country natural resources like an unending cake by indicating that the war should be fought by the respective personalities stated above. However, the purpose of graphic onomatopoeia is to create visual sensibility to the readers/in the minds of the readers.

## 2.3 The Use of Pictorial

Pictorial is a print, drawing or pictograph that conveys a message. Niyi Osundare uses this graphological pattern in the following lines to convey his message.



**"A Dialogue of the Drums" (5)**

**"Advice" (19)**

**"Cradling Hands" (38)**

**"A Farmer on Seeing Cocoa House Ibadan" (51)**

**"Chicken Story" (14)**

In the pictorial above, Niyi Osundare presents pictures to illustrate what he is trying to say in a pictorial form. The purpose of pictorial is to create a perfect illustration of an object.

## 2.4 The Use of Punctuation Marks

It is generally accepted that punctuation marks are tools to organize and arrange words to facilitate readability. Punctuation marks are used in written or printed matter to indicate the separation of words into sentences, clauses and phrases. Punctuation marks aid in the better comprehension of meaning and grammatical relation of the words.

In the words of [19]:

*punctuation marks are used in writing to provide the same signals such as a pause, voice pitch or stress that we use in speech to delineate one word or group of words ... to aid the reader to understand the writer's idea easily and early. (134)*

Among the significant punctuation marks are: full stops, commas, brackets, colons, exclamation marks, use of capital letters, question marks, quotation marks, hyphens and others.

In English, the use of punctuation marks to signal pauses and changes in rhythm and intonation in sentences are guided by rules which poets do not adhere to strictly because of the poetic license they enjoy. This liberty enables poets to deviate from the rules and conventions of standard spoken and written prose without violating the rule of punctuation. However, this linguistic freedom is most effectively used to achieve a distinctive of language and grandeur of announcement. Niyi Osundare is a good example of this uniqueness. The poet, Niyi Osundare, fully utilizes and enjoys the poetic license in his poetry especially in some of the selected poems like "To a Passing Year", "Search for a Wife", and "Eating with all Fingers". However, Niyi Osundare uses the following punctuation marks, apostrophe, comma and question marks;

### 2.4.1 The use of apostrophe

Apostrophe is a mark used to show possession; this is simply ownership of what a thing is a part of, or other relationship. Niyi Osundare uses apostrophe as seen below:

Waves plant roaring foams on the things of the sealips, stands care the waters under belly  
A cradling corals in the ocean's ageless belly.

A gull rocket into the skies, bequeathing a grey feather to the waters flightless face (35)  
"To a Passing Year".

The above extract, shows a kind of stylistic placing of the graphical symbol – apostrophe. Osundare places the apostrophe in the possessive form.

### 2.4.2 The use of comma

According to [17], "the use of comma separates or sets off words and group of words within sentences. It also encloses expressions appearing within sentence" (71). In Niyi Osundare's collections, we observe the use of comma in "Search for a Wife". The extract below is an instance of the use of comma;

Whoever says, I am a curser,  
may he sees his own ear  
without a mirror,  
may Seponna turn his  
house into a furnace, may Sango, ... (28)

In the aforementioned above, we observe a profuse use of the comma. The comma is used in a series of parallel clauses to show that each of the lines has equal importance. The poem evolves a cursing atmosphere as a result of whom it may concern.

### 2.4.3 The use of question marks

The question marks function primarily when there is a need to ask questions of various kinds. Niyi Osundare uses these question marks to ask pertinent questions that he has no answer to, this can be seen below:

You jery up from sleep and find us eating  
you immediately want a scoop, just wait if we started this way.  
Would you wake up?  
To a single morsel? (15). "Eating with all the Fingers".

The question marks from the above extract show how Niyi Osundare uses style to question the poem persona. The first question mark is used to emphasize the second question asked.

## 3. LEXICAL ANALYSIS

A lexical analysis is an attempt to offer linguistic explanation to structure and meaning of a given text as can be deduced from the author's use of language [20]. A poet may decide on which word to use and for what purpose as he is at liberty to do so. Therefore, a lexical analysis of the use of

some unusual lexical items and their combinations will help to unravel the underlying meaning and idea in the text. However, Niyi Osundare uses proverbs, lexical collocation, borrowing and figures of speech.

### 3.1 The Use of Proverbs

Akporobaro [21] posits that “a proverb is a traditional saying that is concise, witty and figurative in form and usually expresses a truth derived from practical experience” (101). Niyi Osundare uses proverbs profusely in some of the selected poems such as “I wake up this morning; and “Sleeping at Five and twenty”. This is probably to attest to the fact that, in Yoruba culture, a good speaker uses traditional proverbs with skill and wisdom. Instances of the use of proverbs are stated below:

He who does not know fire,  
let him watch a forest blaze in the season  
before the rains.  
He who does not know the poet,  
let him listen to the footsteps of words. (2) “*I Wake up this Morning*”.

The poet, Niyi Osundare, uses this proverbial saying to describe the importance of poets in the society and how words serve as their major weapon of war in freezing the society from the shackles of socio-political ills. Another instance is stated thus:

We say a child is foolish, his mother says as long as he doesn't die  
what death kills a child faster 'than arrant folly? (12)  
“Sleeping at Five and Twenty”.

Niyi Osundare employs this proverb to convey the importance of wisdom rather than that of foolishness. Therefore, the purpose of the use of proverb in some of the selected poems in Niyi Osundare's *Village Voices* is to contribute and create artistic vision in the sense of morality and wisdom.

### 3.2 The Use of Lexical Collocation

According to [22], lexical collocation is “the habitual association of a word in a language with other words in sentences”, (64). This is because they are related in terms of meaning that must co-occur, for instance, ‘dark’ collocates with ‘night’. Robins further posits, “in poetry ideas and messages are presented by the poet’ choice of related words and these constitute, the lexical

set, which will be indicators of the theme or subject matter” (71). An instance of lexical collocation can be seen below:

I wake up this morning with a song in my throat, a youthful breeze harps the leaves rising feet drum the road to meet the upland sun, (1) “*I Wake Up This Morning*”.

In the above extracts, the word “youthful” cannot collocate with “breeze” they do not have similar semantic import. Niyi Osundare has used it for stylistic effect to make his message clearer to the readers.

### 3.3 The Use of Borrowing

This occurs in the form of references to other language forms, religion. and other English varieties apart from the Standard English usage, But the poet, Niyi Osundare predominantly borrowed from Yoruba language. Instances of these are stated below:

‘Bata’ which speaks with two elegant mouth (6)  
‘Gbedu’s majestic accent (6)  
‘Omele’ which carries a high-pitched face round like a moon caught (6)  
‘Ibembe’ urging virgin bride to dance (6)  
‘Sigidi’ thirsty for a dance of shame (9)  
And ‘Gangan’ which wasped its waist for the embrace of prodding arms (6)

The above extracts, show the poet borrows some words from Yoruba language such as ‘Bata’, ‘Omele’, ‘Gbedu’, ‘Gangan’, and ‘Ibembe’ are types of drum. ‘Gbedu’ is a royal drum, ‘Gangan’ is a talking drum, ‘Omele’ is a small drum that produces a melodious sound, ‘Sigidi’ is an earthen effigy. Niyi Osundare uses these borrowed words to convey his messages to the reader. The purpose of borrowing is to create uniqueness in a work of art.

### 3.4 The Use of Figures of Speech

According to [13], figures of speech are:

*Incidence of features which are foregrounded by virtue of departing in some way from general norms of communication by means of the language code; for example, exploitation of regularities of formal patterning, or of deviations from the linguistic code. (78)*

Meanwhile, [23] views figures of speech as: "An expression, usually within a sentence, which deviates from simple, normal speech to produce a fanciful or vivid impression, as simile, metaphor, personification, etc." (476). Also, M. H. [16] posits that a figure of speech may result whenever a speaker or writer for the sake of freshness departs from the usual denotation of words. Figurative is primarily poetic but could also constitute essential part of a whole necessary for completeness of the functioning of language (51). The figures of speech that can be seen in the selected poems are simile, metaphor, personification, etc.

### **3.4.1 The use of metaphor**

Metaphor, according to [16], is "a kind of figurative language in which two things are compared directly. However, there is no overt indicator of comparison (110). An example is:

My sole treads the dew rousing my body to  
the virgin cool of  
earth. (1) "I Wake Up this Morning".

In the aforementioned extract, Niyi Osundare describes and compares his body directly to the virgin cool of earth which represents new day. Another instance of metaphor can be seen below: "When I raise my voice the world will be my chorus" in line 7 of 'A Dialogue of the Drums'. According to the extract, Niyi Osundare metaphorically describes how he would raise his voice and the world would become his chorus which represents his "personal self". The use of metaphor gives intensity to the meaning conveyed; and the reader is persuaded to accept the poet's view.

### **3.4.2 The use of simile**

Abrams [16] describes simile as "a figurative expression which describes one person or thing as being similar to another". In simile, two things which are distinctly different are compared by the word "like" or "as" to indicate a relationship (219). This can be seen below: "I wear courage like a shield and see refusing to hide — those who pour poison in the village stream" as stated in line 1 of 'I Wake Up This Morning'.

In this extract, Niyi Osundare tells the reader about the importance of courage. The poet uses simile to draw a relationship between "courage" and "shield" to challenge those who pour poison in the village stream. Another instance is:

Come away from bubbles which melt like  
wax before a raging  
blaze. (22) "Akintunde Come Home".

The extract is also a perfect use of simile. The use of "like" in the structure "Akintunde Come Home" portrays pieces of advice from Niyi Osundare to Akintunde who probably might be the poet's son, to come back home and leave bubbles which melt like wax before a raging blaze.

### **3.4.3 The use of personification**

Hornby [24] defines "personification as a figurative expression where animate qualities are transferred to inanimate object" (351). Personifications are utilized by Niyi Osundare to highlight or foreground his message. The following extracts are some examples of the poet's use of personification:

The day has woken from the sleep time for  
the spinner to spin  
the spindle  
The day has woken time for the smith to fan  
smiling coals into  
hissing steel, (1) "I Wake Up This Morning".

In the above extract, the image of the day is used personified to represent human. However, the employment of "the day" here gives it the attribute of human who is capable of waking from the night sleep. Another instance of the use of personification is cited below:

*Esuru* grows swollen-headed and outgrows  
the prestigious belly  
of the mortar  
The wasp power-stung enters a race of  
waists (48). "A  
Villager 's Protest".

In the above extract, the poet, Niyi Osundare gives life to *Esuru* (a kind of yarn, soft, loose, tasty, but impossible to pound). Here it gives (*Esuru*) a human attribute who is capable of growing swollen-headed.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

In our examination of the graphological and lexical features of the selected poems of Niyi Osundare, the range of choices made by the poet has been brought to fore. Indeed, the lexis of the poems and its arrangements have helped Niyi Osundare to convey his messages through the graphological features— such as punctuation marks, graphic onomatopoeia, pictorial; and

lexical features – which include borrowing, lexical collocation, figures of speech and proverbs. Niyi Osundare extensively exhibits these two stylistic patterns to convey his socio-political messages to the readers and this has proven Niyi Osundare a great poet whose use of language is highly creative and artistic in nature.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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