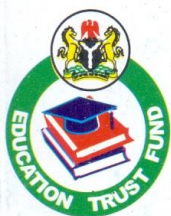
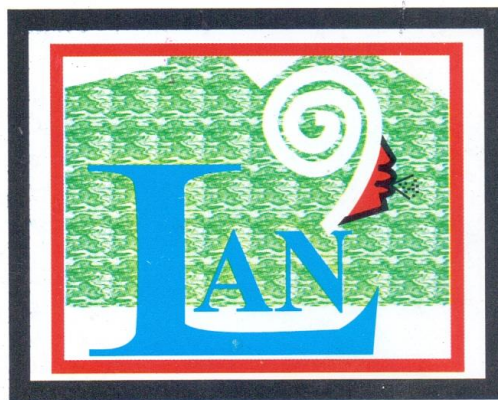


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Context and Style in Adebowale's "Esu Challenges Olowo" and "Olowo Tackles Esu"

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The style of a text is not only marked by appropriateness of linguistic choices made alone, but also by being the most effective medium as the conveyor belt via which the envisaged understanding and response are achieved. An autonomous or decontextualised structure cannot be taken as a body of text. A language feature becomes a style when it is appropriated in the right context. By implication, the appropriateness and effectiveness of linguistic features that constitute style in a given text is dictated by the underlying social construct. Hence, this paper showcases how a good knowledge of the native context of Adebowale's poems can trigger effective appreciation of the foregrounded and taken-for-granted details in his work which is presented in English as a 'foreign language'. Overall, the analysis reveals the centrality of cultural context in digging out the facts behind meaning embellishments and presuppositions in the understanding of native poetry cast in foreign language.

Introduction and Background

One dominant role of any language is that it is a vehicle of expressing culture. The widespread use of English language in Nigeria has conferred on the variety typical Nigerian flavours in an attempt to bend it for the purpose of context expression. This peculiar quality is noticeable in virtually all literary works, most especially, produced by Nigerian writers for Nigerian consumption. However, one unique thing about Adebowale's collection – *A Night of Incantations and other Poems* – from where the data for this study are sourced directly is that of the persuasive illocutions which choke his manner of presentation. The content is not only cast in appropriate mode but also in highly effective and emotive incantatory mode. Thus, the suspension of the subject matter on compelling textuality is analogous of the irresistible force of generating intended perlocution in the addressees with the chant of incantations in the Yoruba sociological milieu.

This ideological posture is the basis for linguistic creativity and stylistic density in Adebowale's poems. Since it is indisputably arguable that context is central to linguistic realization, symbolization, and meaning negotiation therefrom, it becomes necessary to determine the extent to which the illocutionary force borne by the data have not only met the felicity conditions but also the extent to which the global meanings intended have been communicated.

It is noteworthy at this point that our primary data for this study are adaptation and translation of an episode culled from a long stretch of a full-length novel: *Igbo Oloдумare*, originally written in Yoruba by D. O. Fagunwa (translated into English as *The Forest of God* by G. A. Ajadi). The protagonist in the novel, *Olowo-Aiye* (clipped *Olowo*) is a great hunter who has a mission of accomplishing a heroic task of

embarking on an adventure into *Igbo Olōdumare* – a forest that mortals dare not visit. *Olowo*, in preparation for the perilous sojourn, makes series of sacrifices before he takes off for both physical and spiritual fortification of self. Even though his escapades are tortuous, he is able to wade through the danger zones one by one. One of such danger zones is *Igbo Idakeroro* (translated the ‘Silent Jungle’) – silent because of intense evils lurking around that make the place inhabitable for living creatures. It is in this silent jungle as a phase in *Olowo*’s adventure that he runs into a deadly imp – *Esu-Kekere-Ode* – who claims to have been banished from the Heavens by God Himself owing to enormity of atrocities he had committed there.

So, the twin poems of Adebowale used in this study are a poetic recreation of the verbal tussle which vividly depicts the encounter between the brave hunter and the imp. The first poem, “Esu Challenges Olowo”, is the onslaught charge by the supernatural being while the second, “Olowo Tackles Esu”, is the mortal response from the brave hunter. The two poems, put together, create an astounding dialogic effect which makes them appealing to stylo-linguistic consideration.

Theoretical Construct

Style is the product of text in context. A word in a text acquires stylistic significance when it is juxtaposed with other words in the linguistic context. Similarly, context narrows down a hitherto broad reference which an expression ordinarily has. This explains why the tenets of systemic functional linguistics are veritable tools of analyzing style. Enkvist (1964: 20) posits that:

A ‘meaning-area’ is also difficult to determine. Even if we do so by semantic-field techniques, we must in practice start by listing all the contexts in which the items involved occur. It would therefore be simpler to focus directly on context than to appeal to meaning. And if we approach meaning through referents or things-meant, we are again moving from rigorous linguistics into extralinguistic territory.

In essence, a clear definition of context allows for a clear and accurate result of meaning negotiation process especially in the area of language style. The idea of context here subsumes the situation, the speaker, the addressee and their relationship in the light of the environment. Apart from the socio-physical, the spatio-temporal projections which a text has also provide useful insights into the ‘real’ meaning of a style on a given occasion of use. Hence, a thorough analysis of style can only be accomplished when a number of intersecting contextual relationships are considered.

Thus, style becomes a link, a mediating frontier between context and linguistic form. It follows then that contextualization of structures is imperative if foreign language readers or students are to acquire a grasp of their stylistic impact (Enkvist, 1964:33). In so doing, the linguistic configurations which are marked by their frequency of occurrence, convergence of textural patterns, variation or deviation of choices become contextually bound. Conversely, non-stylistic choice is context-insensitive; exhibiting a spectrum of neutrality when viewed from an empirical pedestal.

However, style-shifting may occur within the spread of a given context. The fact remains that slight intra-contextual variation would have necessitated it. And in the like manner, the style would have to be “aligned” to mirror the slightest configuration in the context. Many literary effects are based on a shift of style, a switch from one stylistic set to another, a drift in the probabilities of a linguistic set to another; a drift in the probabilities of a linguistic item when it is measured against the norm of the context (Bradford, 1997). In English as a Second Language context like Nigeria, the discourse audience should work out a formidable pattern for active drill involving the choice between style markers in context as well as a definition of what constitutes a given context from the markers of style. When a context is well studied, its textual expression is better appreciated as the context ultimately supplies the necessary clues with which the implicit bits of informative structural properties can be understood (Burton, 1982:211). Therefore, an analysis of style becomes rewarding only when it is based on matching text against contextually related norm which may implicitly be embedded in the past experience of the participants involved. The worldview, certain taken-for-granted facts and figures and even the discursal goals influence what is said, how it is said, interpreted and the effect generated.

From a functional perspective, context plays a nucleus role in determining what constitutes textual style and the effect for which it is used. Since language does not exist in a vacuum, its component ‘styles’ can only be realized and actualized in ‘desirable’ discourse setting. The various levels of context influence the mind of the language user in a way. And since the human mind is the major source of utterances, it becomes logical to say that the correctness, appropriateness and effectiveness of a corpus of language can only be achieved when attention is paid to context as the motivating factor for text composition, and at the same time the dissecting framework for textual decomposition. The foregoing implicates that the style of a text is an aggregate of the contextual probabilities of its linguistic structure.

Field, Tenor and Mode of Discourse

The vocabulary of a language is seen not as a vast number of independent lexemes, but as groups of lexical items which are structurally realized to confer a certain peculiarity on a domain of reference. However, with the dynamic nature of language, categorial overlapping of vocabulary items may occur where different sensibilities would be expressed by one word and conversely, where different words would refer to the same concept. This means that the multiplicity of meanings of certain words makes them susceptible to different situations of use as constrained by communicative functions which the user intends to perform. The variability of the semantic constituents of words is, however, stabilized by attaching them to specific, but idiosyncratic, domains of use.

In studying poetry, which of course is our target, owing to the prevalence of metaphoric associations and transfer, the intended meanings of words become ‘registered’ and ‘meaningful’ only when they are perceived in the light of the context(s) in which they have been used. Context can be approached from the perspectives of its established variables. These are the field, the tenor and the mode (of discourse). In Wales’ (2001:151) words, field (of discourse) is presented as a crucial element in a study of language which is associated with register. Her view is that the

term 'field' is "one of the distinguishing criteria by which certain textual features can be correlated with certain contexts of situation". Field denotes the on-going action in a social circumstance which has a meaning peculiar to that social setting. Essentially, it is a discourse configuration which includes the subject matter of the action in progress.

It is deducible from the foregoing that, though not always clearly determined especially out of context, field of discourse refers to subject matter or activity which parades a discourse. This makes the concept highly significant in a functional analysis of a language corpus. To Halliday and Hasan (1976:22), field is "the total event in which the text is functioning, referring to inherent features of the situation and the events taking place with the emphasis on institutional areas of activity and function". The physical setting and its inherent features and activities, participants, world knowledge and semantic domain constitute both variable and invariable elements of the field of discourse. These elements of field are basic imperatives of the context of situation which in turn influence selections of elements in the other two categories of tenor and mode (Leckie-Tarry, 1995:37). In the words of Kress (1985:133), field is "the ideological underpinnings of a given institution". This means that field is a product of a larger social process derivable from the socio-cultural contexts where social structures and cultural practices mediate between language forms and their corresponding functions.

Tenor is used to describe the participants in the social interaction, their social roles and role sets, in the meaning-making process of discourse generation: the relationship between and among those who are taking part in discourse – all in relation to the field of discourse. Tenor is significant for the choice of situational features which determine context-sensitive registers. In essence, it presents itself as a correlate of Halliday's level of interpersonal function of language. On this issue, Wales (2001:388) presents her thesis as follows:

Tenor involves the relationships between participants in the situation, their ROLES and status. This will affect the kind of language chosen, particularly in respect of the degree of FORMALITY... Tenor correlates with Halliday's general component or function of language, the INTERPERSONAL FUNCTION, associated with relations between discourse participants, and reflected in choices of MODALITY and INTONATION, etc.

Tenor pertains to "the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary among participants" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:22). The level of formality, role relations and the degree to which focus is placed on the participants' factor constitute the variables which pre-design the tenor of any given discourse. In essence, tenor involves the social relations among participants, whether real, imagined or envisaged; meaning that construction and interpretation of the tenor variables are socially and interpersonally constrained. The tenor of discourse deals with the degree of formality on the scale of social situations which linguistic expressions mirror. The language users operate between the two extremes of formality and informality in an attempt to achieve effective communication; i.e. using the language form which best expresses the relationship which transpires between discourse participants.

Mode relates to the communicative function which a text is made to perform by the use of a given channel. Mode includes the status assigned to text organization on an occasion of use. The status and function assigned to textuality is dictated, as well, by its relationship with the social structure and social action (Kempson, 1991:160). Basically, all languages are essentially speech. Even though much of the analysis of language is done on written language, the fact remains that the oratory features find their ways into the written language. This accounts for why, virtually, all human languages are spoken but not all are committed into writing. Thus, the primacy of speech is suggestive of its influence on the written mode. However, a literary artist, especially a poet, may wish that his writing be read as if it is spoken. This would automatically constrain him to use 'styles' which have affiliations to orature.

Mode in linguistics is conceived in terms of the format or genre of discourse. It refers to the totality of situational factors which subscribe to medium of communication. Mode is a general term for a wide spectrum of linguistic and literary approaches used in achieving purpose or function of communication. In literary stylistics, mode is a force to reckon with in an attempt at correlating the linguistic forms of the literary genre with their respective functional loads. On the correspondence of mode on the one hand with other contextual variables on the other hand, Leckie-Tarry (1995:44-45) subscribes:

The configuration of these variables, and those from field and tenor, motivates the selection of medium as the first level of linguistic realization, which then feeds back into the mode variable, and also the two other metafunctions. All elements of mode are constrained by the configuration of elements within the other two variables, and they in their configuration motivate the process of realization.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the bond between medium and language function is a strong one. The mode of discourse sets the ball rolling for linguistic realization. It is perceived by Halliday (1978:44) as a contextual hinge on which the textual metafunction is suspended.

Concept of Poetics

Poetry is considered as an outburst of a mind duly possessed by philosophical idea wrapped in elevated language. This makes it amenable to infinite stylistic investigation at virtually all levels of linguistic analysis. Certain aspects of prosody cannot but be duly marked to adequately encapsulate and convey the loaded and 'impregnated' meaning; both expressive and impressive. Consequently, readers or audience of poetry need to travel an extra distance to unfold the semantic mysteries inherent in poetic expression; thereby facilitating its semantic decomposition. In the words of Sinclair (1982:171):

Poetry... uses two routes of communication: one conventional, where words are built into phrases along accepted lines, decoded in a manner that in principle could be automated; and the other a problem solving system, where unique combinations are suggested that have no conventional meaning. Though they

are latent in the structure of the language, the language does not typically make use of them. By this route, the meaning of a latent pattern is assessed in relation to conventional, precise and basic meaning.

Given the understanding that poetry exhibits some quality – force, intensity, density, texture, incandescence – which makes it exceptional, its language has a life beyond its most obvious function, which is to ‘mean’. Reading it is an experience demanding and receiving more of the reader attention than is the case with non-poetic texts. An intricate fusion of loaded semantic import borne by images of varying proportions with elevated, highly intoned ‘configured’ expression as the linguistic medium is imperative. This evokes extensive impressions through the intensive expressions which have symmetry with the thematic concern of the discourse itself in alignment with the motivating context. Hence, the next section will attempt to analyse our data in the light of the foregoing on context and poetry.

Textual Analysis

To start with, it needs to be stated that the mode of discourse, being the linking bridge between content and function in discourse, generally plays a major role in meaning negotiation process especially when one approaches a complicated discourse as poetry from the exploit of language forms and functions. This means that the medium of discourse delivery is central in explicating the field and the tenor variables as intended.

In the encounter between *Esu* and *Olowo* (pp. 72-74), the field of discourse tends to emphasise the disparity between the prowess of god or ‘supernaturalism’ and the powers of mortals. This idea is even reiterated in the words of *Esu*:

I am immortal!
I keep the skulls of those stronger than you
Inside my cooking pot.
The spinal cord of your superior
Are preserved in the corner of my apartment.

As a poem which borders on the challenge between ‘superordinate’ and ‘subordinate’ beings, the tenor function of the discourse is to make *Olowo* suffer the pangs of emotional blackmail for having over-stepped his bounds as a mere mortal – an ordinary man who encroaches the den of a deadly ogre. This idea is encapsulated in the following extract.

Don't you know, Olowo-Aiye,
That the lion and the antelope
Do not see eye to eye?
That the leopard and the cow
Are never friends?
You saw me.
I saw you.
I was advancing
And you were also approaching

You never took to your heels!
You walked up to me with impunity
Are you not afraid?
Are you not scared?
Are you not frightened?

The cue of rhetorical questions which seal the extract is intended to generate an emotional impact of heightening the addressee's feeling of guilt.

The field of discourse in the poem is foregrounded by a vivid picture of the setting painted by the assertive mode of the preamble of the first poem. "Esu Challenges Olowo" (pp.72-74) presents a dramatic lit-orature where a supernatural being, an urchin confronts *Olowo* – the brave hunter, a mere mortal – in a duel. This information is a necessary precondition for a full grasp of the content. Better still, the original master-piece written by D.O. Fagunwa is a prose work with a more accessible plot development. The context of the jungle where the encounter takes place, the desolation and the frightful picture of the 'sorrow-laden... lonely... self-conceited, one-eyed dwarf who carries heavy bundles of whips' give indication of the weird circumstance in which the exchange takes place. This is expected to have implication for the interpretation of what is said or left unsaid by both parties in the context of the poems.

Also, in the verbal context between *Esu* and *Olowo*, (pp. 72-73), the long stretch of parallel structures there is a textual manifestation of the long battle-line drawn between the duo. The implication of this mode of discourse for meaning negotiation is that none of the two contestants is prepared to bend for the other; hence a tensed atmosphere of the impending catastrophe is recreated in the poem. To sum it up, this device creates a stringent tie between the 'imaginary reality' in context and the medium of text delivery such that the scenario being painted is appreciated in the same way. A better picture of the atmosphere is painted in the following lines:

You have climbed the tall tree
Beyond the leaf's apex
And you will fall, headlong,
Into the very bottom of the deep well below.
You have consumed poison today
And you will be rewarded with instant death
You have planted groundnut
On an un-weeded farmland
And you must prepare
For a bumper harvest of thorns
Don't you know, Olowo-Aye,
That the lion and the antelope
Do not see eye to eye?
That the leopard and the cow
Are never friends? (pp. 72-73)

Adebowale seeks to amplify his poetic intention with recurrent use of anaphora. This strategy is extended to the extract that follows:

*Are you not afraid?
Are you not scared?
Are you not frightened?
Haven't you heard about me before?
Haven't you heard about me before?
Haven't you been told about me before?* (p. 73)

The effect of anaphora in this regard coincides with Corbett's (1971:473) position. Apart from the marked rhythmic pattern it offers at successive stages of the discourse, it amplifies the emotional effect the text is composed to generate. Specifically, the cases of anaphora cited are meant to perform emphasizing function. The use of anaphora here equally increases the pressure being mounted on *Olowo* as a way of inducing him to atone for his offence of encroachment. *Esu* (p. 73) laces his interrogation of *Olowo* with marked anaphora. This is a deliberate attempt to evoke and emphasize a ceaseless feeling of guilt in the addressee having overstepped his human bounds of invading his territory.

Adebowale effectively represents the field of discourse which underlies his textual presentation with the use of proverbs and analogies that is typical of the rich, undiluted cultural milieu of Yoruba traditionalism. This strategy situates the poem in the appropriate context for effective meaning negotiation. Let us consider the following:

*He who tries to catch rain water with a basket
Deceives himself.
He who stands on a rail-line
Is knocking the gate of Heaven.
An adult who sees a snake
And does not take to his heels
Will die a sudden death* (pp.75-77)

In response to the intimidating challenge from *Esu*, *Olowo* resorts to popular and pragmatic means of fortifying himself against the impending arsenals from *Esu*, his adversary. Beyond aestheticism, the analogies used by *Olowo* (pp.75-76) are for an affective end – to strengthen and embolden self in an attempt to resist the intimidating advances from *Esu*. At this level, given the clues supplied by the context, it becomes easier to 'trace out' the intended meanings of some of the highly embellished structures and word forms which abound in our data. The examination and appreciation of these peculiar lexico-semantic choices made by the writers, in short, enable analysts of texts to gain access to implicit and extensive bits of structural form in literary language as we have in the poems under consideration.

A lot of facts are taken for granted in the first six lines of "Olowo Tackles Esu" (p. 75). Having understood the role-relation between *Olowo* and *Esu-Kekere-Ode* in the context of the poem, the synthetic nature of the introductory verses implicates that

extra-textual pieces of information are needed for a full grasp of the authorial stance and focus.

Esu-Kekere-Ode!
You condemned imp
Whom the Almighty banished
To a sorrow-laden solitary life
Inside the dilapidated Anthill Home
Here in the lonely jungle of silence...

This extract presupposes that the 'urchin' (addressed as 'imp') had committed grievous atrocities for which he was condemned and cast in damned solitude far from the luxury of the Heavens. The assumption generated here leads the readers to begin to create a mental picture of *Esu's* ordeals. This consequently yields serious implication for understanding the tenor variable sustained in the poems. For instance, with the information, it becomes easier for readers to establish who the protagonist is as opposed to the antagonist. Gradually, the imagination begins to create a link with the NEW information being supplied in the poem – such that a repeat of *Esu's* unpalatable expedition and travail is anticipated in his encounter with *Olowo*. This probably explains why the next two lines seek to sound *Esu* a note of caution marked with the imperative [!].

Beware!
Be warned!

The succinctness and brevity of the note of warning sounded here is an attestation to our conclusion.

The marked presentation of information structure either through presumption or prolepsis is imbued with a fairly high level of rhetorical effects. This unique discourse mode brings to the open entailed and assumed facts which cohere to complement other artistic devices in giving a literary work its unique and idiosyncratic identity; especially poetry whose exposition, more often than not, is done in intoned and configured language which is far from the ordinary in its utter nakedness.

The recurrent dashes and ellipsis dots that characterize the manner of textual delivery indicate continuity in the persecution and the protracted verbal tussie before the violent encounter between *Esu* and *Olowo* (pp. 72-74). At another level, the devices drop a hint about the speechlessness that such rhetorical war of words commands on the part of the (presumed) audience.

Here in the lonely jungle of silence...
Round the forest of Akokura – (p. 75)

From one heaven to another heaven...
Esu-Kekere-Ode – (p. 76)
Esu-Kekere-Ode – (p. 77)

In addition, in the encounter between *Esu* and *Olowo* (pp. 72-74) and the reaction in "Olowo Tackles Esu" (75-77), the mode involves some elements of interrogations and assertiveness. This is intended to paint a vivid picture of the power tussle for supremacy between the duo. Recurrent question marks, full-stops and exclamation marks are indicative of the 'stamps' of such magnitude of power wielded at both ends. Let us consider the stylistic significance of the deluge of interrogations first.

Who on earth are your parents?
What do you amount to?
And what are you worth?
What has become of you?
And what have you become?
What are you looking for?
And what are you looking at?
What do you want?
And what is the matter with you?
What are you seeing?
What are you thinking about?
Where are you coming from?
Where are you going? ...
Are you not afraid?
Are you not frightened?
Haven't you heard about me before?
Haven't you been told about me before? (pp. 72-73)

In the extracts from "Esu Challenges Olowo" (pp. 72-73), there is an unbroken chain of recurrent question marks. Apart from boosting the rhetorical prowess of the oral artistry enmeshed in the poem, it has a propensity of suspending the tenor function of intimidating *Olowo* to whom the questions are directed. No room whatsoever is given to *Olowo* to respond to any of the deluge of queries. This is intended to subdue the ego of man as a mere mortal who lacks the wherewithal to respond to storming challenges from the supernatural forces personified in the character of *Esu* – the imp.

An interesting point worthy of note at this juncture is the peculiar way in which *Olowo*'s response is assertively marked in "Olowo Tackles Esu". Exclamation marks are used on several occasions to consolidate his firm stand; expressing a strong resistance and 'better-imagined-than-mentioned' humiliation which *Esu* is bound to be subjected to.

Esu-Kekere-Ode!
Beware!
Be warned!
Take your time!
Steer clear of me!
Esu-Kekere-Ode –
Look round this forest
This very minute!
And say your last prayer! (pp. 75-77)

This recurrence of exclamation marks is intended to show immense authority and power of resistance wielded by the protagonist. This device has a way of exhibiting the tenor or interpersonal implication borne by its mode of delivery.

As a way of consolidating the weight of his mode of delivery, Adebowale deploys marked iconic representations to create a superlative impression of the grievous encounter in the minds of the readers. The icons underlined in the following extracts from the encounter between *Esu* and *Olowo* give clue of the tense atmosphere in the poems; that the context is a similitude of a deadly dungeon.

I keep the skulls of those stronger than you
Inside my cooking pot.
The spinal cord of your superior
Are preserved in the corner of my apartment. (p. 73)

These icons are used to paint a vivid picture of the deadly duel between *Esu* and *Olowo*. The sense of deadly, beastly and destructive tendencies is evoked by lexical choices as in 'skulls' and 'spinal cord'. These iconic representations are further corroborated by collocational ranges which intensify the fearful 'cannibalistic' atmosphere which parades the poems. The fact that such iconic representations are said to be universally understood, across cultural and linguistic boundaries as despicable and horrific makes Adebowale's choices not only appropriate but also effective in all ramifications.

In "Esu Challenges Olowo" (pp. 72-74), *cook/ okra soup/ prepare/ pepper soup/ cartilage/ fat meat/ soup pot/ kitchen/ amala* and *pounded yam* are collocates of delicacies – the stock-pile of which is used by the urchin to scare the brave hunter that he would be 'devoured' with relish. These lexical choices are deliberately used to corroborate the content of the extract just given (above). This strategy is imbued with a power of achieving cohesion in the entire discourse as a textual representation of a true-to-life circumstance.

In the hunter's response however (in "Olowo Tackles Esu", pp. 75-77), *condemned, banished, sorrow-laden, lonely* and *solitary*, among others, are collocates used to resist the urchin's missiles of mystification and emotional blackmail. At this point, it is worthy of note that the tenor function becomes manifest and this is instantiated by repetition as discernible in the following:

Esu-Kekere-Ode!
Esu-Kekere-Ode –
Esu-Kekere-Ode – (pp. 75-77)

Repetition is used here to evoke a sense of fear in the opponent: to sweep him (the urchin) off-balance so that his zeal to attain victory is humiliated and subdued to such a level that he begins to make costly mistakes in the encounter. Particularly, the discourse mode here gives a clearer picture of the field as it cohesively links the linguistic context of the poem with the socio-cultural context of the pragmatic world of reality. In other words, the repetition of *Esu-Kekere-Ode* three times is a call to order by the brave hunter. Apart from textual emphasis and speechlessness it instigates as

punctuated by exclamation mark and dashes respectively, the device creates a strong tie between the text and Yoruba cosmology: where when one's name is 'invoked' or called three times, the illocution engendered is that of serious warning and caution. This idea is what is embellished in the repetition as a pragmatic way of placing the text within the framework of the context it expresses.

In an attempt to bind the varying stylistic resources being manipulated into a unified body of perception, Adebowale stylishly incorporates cohesive markers into his package. Hyponymy and meronymy are predominantly marked among others in close succession to foregrounded the field of discourse of the poems under study for stylistic effects. Let us consider the following instances:

- Hyponymy → *beasts – snake/vultures/lions/hyenas* (pp. 75-77)
- Meronymy → *body – flesh/liver/bones/marrow/shin/legs, etc.* (pp. 75-77)

The co-hyponyms of 'beasts' above are used to paint a vivid picture of the terrain which goes with the lexemes in the minds of the readers. The co-meronyms, in their own respect, are used to reinforce meaning, by textually suspending the undertone of total humiliation and destruction *Esu's* invincibility would be subjected to. The cumulative effect of this strategy is complemented by intermittent use of conjunctions in both poems – i.e. "Esu Challenges Olowo" and "Olowo Tackles Esu". Conjunctions like *and, with, as, that, etc.*, feature recurrently by setting many lines in motion. This also performs cohesive function; binding the lines in the two poems, in their totality, into a dramatic discourse with turns events and acts.

To cap it up, in order to effectively espouse the interpersonal relationship between the participants in the discourse situation, Adebowale puts reference into a peculiar use. This feature in our data functions to specify the tenor property of the entire discourse. Notable among the numerous occurrences is the peculiar endophora; a highly marked case of anaphoric reference. In Adebowale's "Esu Challenges Olowo" (pp.72 – 74) for instance, a frequent use of *I/me* in contrast with recurrent use of *you/your* establishes a strong extra-textual tie between *Olowo* and *Esu* as contestants in the duel. This same feature permeates "Olowo Tackles Esu" (pp. 75-77) throughout. This further creates inter-textual bond between the two poems as dialogic poetic pieces.

Conclusion

In the encounter between *Esu* and *Olowo*, the war of words between the duo is a textual imitation of the impending physical tussle. The recurrent questions and imperatives in the two poems are indicative of quarrel, argument, misunderstanding, disagreement and assault (both verbal and physical) which cohere to paint a clearer picture of the context being espoused. In *Esu's* initiation of the challenge, the unbroken chain of rhetorical questions for instance is textually strategic: a device employed by the urchin to 'demean' *Olowo*; make him suffer emotional defeat first so that he is made amenable to destruction so easily. A comparison of this poem with *Olowo's* response is not as loaded as the urchin's initiation. This is a textual manifestation of the elastic limits of man in the face of boundless prowess of the

supernatural. The textual patterns in the two poems usher a dialogic effect into the entire collection leaving a serious implication for the tenor of discourse.

Generally speaking, the two poems seem to be united in the peculiar mode of delivery they share. As pointed out earlier, the mode of delivery especially in Adebowale's poems is basically incantatory. This automatically calls for short, saucy lines which are 'designed' to punch the psyche of the readers and put them on their toes as they read along. This strategy is complemented with climactic presentation of content. To achieve the desired effect, stylo-rhetoric devices like interrogatives, imperatives, repetition, analogy and parallelism, amidst others, feature recurrently in both poems.

Essentially therefore, this study espouses the centrality of context in meaning negotiation, using linguistic resources as the pivot. Since context is not a linear phenomenon, its non-static variables of the field, tenor and mode should be intensively explored particularly in complicated discourse as poetry. This would ultimately yield desirable and objective exercise of decoding exactly the envisaged meaning of a text not minding its lexicogrammatical fluctuations.

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Appendix

Esu Challenges Olowo (Bayo Adebawale; pp. 72-74)
(In Memory of D.O. Fagunwa and for G.A. Ajadi)

Tell me –
Olowo-Aiye,
Who are you?
Who on earth are your parents?
You bastard.
You pompous idiot.
Ordinary mortal.
What do you amount to?
And what are you worth?
What has become of you?
And what have you become?
What are you looking for?
And what are you looking at?
What do you want?
And what is the matter with you?
What are you seeing?
What are you thinking about?
Where are you coming from?
Where are you going?...
Certainly you are in double trouble today!
You have climbed the tall tree
Beyond the leafs' apex
And you will fall, headlong,
Into the very bottom of the deep well below.
You have consumed poison today
And you will be rewarded with instant death.
You have planted groundnut
On an un-weeded farmland
And you must prepare
For a bumper harvest of thorns.
Don't you know, *Olowo-Aiye*,
That the lion and the antelope
Do not see eye to eye?
That the leopard and the cow
Are never friends?
You saw me.
I saw you.
I was advancing
And you were also approaching.
You never took to your heels!
You walked up to me with impunity.
Are you not afraid?
Are not scared?
Are you not frightened?
Haven't you heard about me before?

Haven't you been told about me before?
 I – Esu-Kekere-Ode: The terrible wizard
 Who lives inside the Mansion
 Of an Anthill in the deep forest.
 I am immortal!
 I keep the skulls of those stronger than you
 Inside my cooking pot.
 The spinal cord of your superior
 Are preserved in the corner of my apartment.
 I use the hefty chest of
 Stubborn people like you
 As cushion chairs inside my sitting room...
 It is a long time since I ate human flesh!
 After I have killed you today,
 I'll enjoy your flesh for three whole days.
 I'll cook okra soup with your skull
 And prepare pepper soup
 With the cartilage of your chest.
 That fat meat of your buttocks
 Will enrich my soup pot
 And I'll keep the rest of your flesh
 On fire in my kitchen
 For future delicacies
 Of *amala* and pounded yam.

Olowo Tackles Esu (Bayo Adebawale; pp. 75-77)
(In Memory of D. O. Fagunwa and for G.A. Ajadi)

Esu-Kekere-Ode!
 You condemned imp
 Whom the Almighty banished
 To a sorrow-laden solitary life
 Inside the dilapidated Anthill Home
 Here in the lonely Jungle of Silence...
 Beware!
 Be warned!
 You self-conceited, one-eyed dwarf
 Who carries heavy bundles of whip
 Everyday of your life,
 Like a load of sin
 Round the forest of Akokura –
 Take your time!
 Steer clear of me!
 I am too strong for you.
 You never can subdue me
 In a face-to-face combat.
 Here I stand erect before you
 With grace and enormous strength.
 He who tries to catch rain water with a basket

Deceives himself.
He who stands on a rail-line
Is knocking at the gate of Heaven.
An adult who sees a snake
And does not take to his heels
Will die a sudden death
And hurry straight to the Spirit World.
An animal that underrates a hunter
Shall sleep the sleep of death
Inside the burning oven.
The demon that underrates me
Will fall headlong
From one heaven to another heaven...

Esu-Kekere-Ode –
Know today
That pride is the beginning of destruction.
Today you will be thoroughly humiliated
Instead of you eating me up
It is me who will tear your body into pieces
With hot bullets from my dane gun.
I will cut your body into chunks
With powerful incantations
And distribute your flesh
To the beasts of the forest.
You shall instantly become feast for vultures
Perching on the high branches of the surrounding trees
And the hungry lions
Lurking around the open grassland
Of the Sudan savannah.
Your liver will be eaten fast and raw.
The hyenas will laugh heartily
As they break your bones noisily
And suck the marrow
Inside the shin of your two legs.

Esu-Kekere-Ode –
Look round this forest
This very minute!
And say your last prayer!