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Lexical and Morphological Innovations in Selected Poems of Remi Raji and Ademola DaSylva

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Abstract

The interest of linguists has been to understand the nature of language by exploring how linguistic resources are deployed to encode meanings in texts. However, one of the major challenges which make poetry a difficult text among literary genres is an inability to perceive the morphological devices contained in poems. This paper therefore is a stylistic analysis of how Remi Raji and Ademola DaSylva exploit their linguistic dexterity at morphological and lexical levels to invent lexical items which aptly capture their intended messages. To achieve this aim, the study attempts to: discover the morphological inventories deployed by the poets to generate new lexemes; examine how the newly generated lexemes are functionally used to contribute to the overall messages of their selected poems;

and to identify the devices common to both poets and isolate those that uniquely give each poet an authorial fingerprint. The specific morphological innovations attestable in their works are done by means of lexical bisection, lexical coalescence, lexical metathesis and nonce formation. They employ the devices for meaning intensification. Also, while the devices of lexical coalescence and nonce formation are common to Raji and DaSylva, the devices of lexical bisection and lexical metathesis uniquely give them authorial fingerprints respectively. The study concludes that literary texts such as poetry, which seemingly appears impenetrable, can be easily accessible, if attention is given to the morphological inventiveness deployed by the poets.

Introduction

Human potentialities reflect their tangible essence in how language users display their creativity in language. Language as a tool for social interaction sublets itself to language users, especially poets, to manipulate its internal resources to convey meaning. According to William O'grady and John Archibald, it is "the characteristics of human language that allows novelty and innovation in response to new thoughts, experiences, and situations" (524). Creativity in language

is more pervasive in literary texts. However, among the genres of literature, poetry is generally considered the most difficult text to readers and analysts because poets often exploit their innovative dexterity in language to enrobe their messages. This explains why Bakhtin asserts that "the language of the poetic genre is a unitary and singular Ptolemaic world outside of which nothing else exists and nothing is needed" (286). Leech and Short are also of the view that "the poet, more obviously than the prose writer,

does interesting things with language...in poetry, aesthetic effect cannot be separated from the creative manipulation of the linguistic code" (2).

Wales emphasises that "not that creative language is confined solely to poetry; but in poetic discourse unusual words and structures, and phrases rich in connotations, seem most heavily concentrated" (359). Ursula Stephany also submits that "languages are constantly faced with the necessity of adapting their lexical stock to new communicative needs" (28). In the light of this, the exploration of meaning in poetic discourse requires an ability to perceive the innovative devices used on language resources by the poet. This paper therefore explores how Remi Raji and Ademola DaSylva exploit their creative potentialities at morphological and lexical levels to convey messages in their selected poems. Through this endeavour, insight is gained into how language works in literary texts, especially poetry.

Structured Practitioner Notes

It is generally known that poetry is a complicated literary discourse because of the manner in which poets often manipulate morphological components of language by creating lexical words to masquerade their messages. Thus, poetry is distinguished for its richness in lexical innovations. Morphologically processes that are commonly attestable in poetry include blending, transfer, acronym, compounding, among others. The specific morphological innovations which the present researchers evolved from the analysis of selected poems of Remi Raji and Ademola DaSylva are

lexical bisection, lexical coalescence, and lexical metathesis. Identification of these innovative devices unveils the hidden shade of meanings embedded in the selected poems. It is expedient therefore for readers of poetry to pay attention to morphological strategies deployed by poets to create unfamiliar lexical items in order to arrive at the intended messages of poems.

Purpose of the Study

This paper is a stylistic analysis of how Remi Raji and Ademola DaSylva exploit their linguistic dexterity at morphological level to invent lexical items which aptly capture their intended messages. To achieve this aim, the study attempts to:

- i) discover the morphological inventories deployed by the poets to generate new lexemes;
- ii) examine how the newly generated lexemes are functionally used to contribute to the overall messages of their selected poems; and
- iii) identify the devices common to both poets and isolate those that uniquely give each poet an authorial fingerprint.

Methodology

The research methodology is essentially descriptive and analytical. Four poems are purposively selected from Remi Raji's *Webs of Remembrance*. Four poems are also purposively selected from Ademola DaSylva's *Songs of Odamolugbe*. Using linguistic techniques, the morphological properties of lexemes are dissected in order to show how they contribute to inferencing of the communicative intention of the poets.

Theoretical Preliminaries: Lexical and Inflectional Morphology

William O'grady and Videa de Guzman point out that "linguists use the term morphology to refer to the part of grammar that is concerned with words and word formation" (98). Bloor and Bloor also define morphology as "(i) the form of a word. (ii) The study of word formation" (259). Robins defines morphology as "the study of shape of words" (20). Spencer and Zwicky are of the view that "morphology is at the conceptual centre of linguistics...because it is the study of word structures and words are at the interface between phonology, syntax and semantics" (1). Linguists have identified lexical and inflectional morphology as two subdivisions of morphological study. In a bid to distinguish between the two areas, Stephany asserts that:

inflection is concerned with the study of word-forms and the processes by which they are formed. Derivation studies the structure of lexemes, of words in the sense of lexical units, and of lexical, as opposed to inflectional processes, i.e. the rules by which languages form new words. These domains of morphological study have therefore been called inflectional and lexical morphology (28).

However, there seems to be no clear-cut distinction between the two domains of morphology. This explains why O'grady and Guzman are of the view that "because inflection and derivation are both commonly marked by affixation, the distinction between the two can be subtle and is sometimes unclear which function a

particular affix has"(113). They further attempt to postulate three criteria that can be used to distinguish between them. These are category change, order, and productivity. Following their insights, each of these is exemplified as follows:

1. **Category change:** This criterion concerns how some affixes can change word class of words while some do not. For instance, cup (singular noun) + s = cups (plural nouns); help (simple present) + -ed = helped (past/participle). These are inflectional affixes because they do not change the grammatical class of the words (cups and helped) though they differ with their respective roots in terms of number and tense respectively. In contrast, derivational affixes change the word class in the following examples: harmony (noun) + -ize = harmonize (verb); employ (verb) + -ment = employment (noun).
2. **Order:** This criterion concerns how derivational affixes must be added with the base morpheme before inflectional affixes in word formation process. This can be illustrated as follows:
 - i. employ (base) + ment (derivational affix) + s (inflectional affix) = employments * employ (base) + s (inflectional affix) + ment (derivational affix) * employments
 - ii. hamony (base) + ize (derivational affix) + s (inflectional affix) = harmonizes * hamony (base) + s (inflectional affix) + ize (derivational affix) = * harmonisize
3. **Productivity:** This criterion concerns how inflectional affixes have freedom to combine with base with minimal

exceptions; while derivational affixes apply to restricted classes of base. For instance, the plural marker "s" can be added to any noun that grammar permits to take plural form apart from few exceptions like sheep, oxen, teeth, criteria, etc. in terms of productivity, the affix (-ize) can combine with only certain adjectives to form a verb. E.g. modernize, legalize, etc. but not* newlize, *lawfulize, etc.

It is obvious from the foregoing discussion that morphology explores the internal structures of words in order to account for how new words are created. Rus avows that "a lexical innovation can imply the use of a new lexical unit, the modification of the root or of the semantic structure of a word in a language" (5). In the light of this, conducting a stylistic analysis of a text at morphological level entails an exploration into how morphological components of language have been employed in the text to create meaning. To explicate the messages in the selected poems of Remi Raji and Ademola DaSylva, a practical exploration into the lexical structures is done in the next section.

Analysis of Data and Discussion of Findings

The lexical and morphological devices attestable in the selected poems of the two poets are lexical bisection, lexical metathesis/swooping, lexical coalescence and nonce formation, though they are mutually exclusive in the use of some of these. How the two poets employ the various devices to accentuate their messages is discussed next.

Lexical Bisection (Splitting)

O'Grady and Guzman point out that "some morphemes behave like words in terms of their meaning and function, but are unable to stand alone as independent form" (119). This submission aptly explains the device of lexical bisection in which a single lexeme having one sense is broken or bisected into two or more words as a way of realising two senses which each of the new components accommodates. The two poets are mutually exclusive in the deployment of the device of lexical bisection for poetic effects because it is not attestable in any of DaSylva's selected poems. Excerpts that follow illustrate the use of this device in two poems of Raji:

the conning command –

ants are waiting...

The Bullet is waiting

to cast its bloody vote (Stanza 4, line 3-6:
Raji's *An African voting game* (42-43).

It is Friday

the clouds of another holiday
gather, like a convention of drones
marching in directions other than the
East. Allah Akbar!

half the day makes the week-
end sweeter, Allah Akbar, it is Friday.

roadblocks germinate
against common crimes
it is Friday a battalion of beggars
munching mantras & eager symphonies
to hesitant pockets ...
Raji's "*Out for worship I*" (50).

In Raji's *An African voting game* (42-43), for example, the lexemes "command" and "ants" are fragments of the lexeme

“commandants”. The lexical and morphological innovative dexterity of the poet is displayed in how the lexeme “ants” is extracted from the word “commandants” and transposed to the beginning of the next line. Thus, each fragment “command” and “ants” is made to stand as independent form in their new locations. In this way, each of the fragments “command” and “ants” in its linguistic context has the tendency to convey a different sense which may not be wholly part of the semantic property of the root lexeme. The root lexeme “commandants” literary refers to military officers. The morpheme “command” is a military term which relates to giving an order or instruction, while the lexeme “ants” functioning as the suffix refers literarily to “destructive” insects that consume substances. In this poem, foregrounding both the “military” and “destruction” through the fragments of the word “commandants” has special significance. This is evident in the expression “the bullet is waiting to cast its bloody vote”. Through this, the poet portrays the military system of government in African politics as “destructive” agents consuming national resources. The significance of Raji’s foregrounding would not go unnoticed because mapping of the conceptual meanings of the fragments is a necessary step to obtain the information values of the lexemes.

Also, the bisection of the single lexical item “commandants” into fragments produces a textual imitation of political “unsteadiness” or “mutability” as a result of the infamous military incursion into governance. Considering the general atmosphere of insecurity under a military

dictator, the bisection of “commandants” may be a means to avoid direct reference to militarism. Thus, through the device, meaning is underscored.

In Raji’s *Out for worship I* (50), the single word “weekend” is bisected into two fragments “week-“ and “end” over a line boundary and distributed in such a way that a fragment ends a line while its complimentary part is transferred to begin the next line. In the excerpt above, the expression “half the day makes the week-” is capable of terminating at the line where it occurs as a single clause. The expression “end sweeter, Allah Akbar, it is Friday.” can be functionally independent as an imperative clause, if the fragment “end” is seen as a verb following an unlexicalised vocative nominal lexeme. However, the lexeme “weekend” which is bisected into two free morphemes enforces a continuation between the lines. The title of the poem “It is Friday” (the day that ends a week and begins the period of “weekend”) seems to be an external factor determining the structure of sentences in the poem. This reflects on how the poet breaks the lexeme into fragments by making a fragment to end in one line and pushing the remaining fragment to continue in the succeeding line. This device achieves a textual imitation of how the end of a week leads to the beginning of another week.

In addition, as a necessary precondition for understanding the analysis of the device of lexical bisection in this poem, the poet composes the poem to expose the evils associated with overcrowded streets “roadblocks germinate against common crimes” on a religious day. To enforce a continuation between the lines, the two fragments “week-“ and “end” require a kind

of coagulation to realise the lexeme "weekend". The coagulation reflects how all manners of people (including crime perpetrators and beggars) congregate in a place of worship. This further demonstrates that the morphological device of lexical bisection provides textual interplay between the morphological forms and the message.

Lexical Metathesis (Swooping)

Sotiloye defines metathesis as "a process whereby segments interchange positions" (44). In other words, metathesis or swooping is a linguistic device in which fragments of words transpose or change their positions in word structures of two or more words. Janda claims that "morphological metathesis is rare because it is marked" (88). This may explain why the use of metathetical device is exclusively peculiar to DaSylva. Textual example of this in his *The news, like the acetylene flame* (53) is as follows:

*She died June 23, dear mother,
To stubborn fate she had surrendered and
died;
We had offered our all, in ignorance
Entrusted her to mercenaries.*

The twigs and the grass preyed upon,
crushed

Under world of greedy armoured-ants
and soldier-tanks

DaSylva's *The News, like the Acetylene flame* (53).

Before the soldier-termites overrun
The homestead of our season's
Harvest joy in the twilight
DaSylva's *For Adelugba at 60* (92).

The lexical items "armoured-ants" and "soldier-tanks", which are innovatively derived from "armoured-tanks" and "soldier-ants" to encode meanings, are germane to the discussion of lexical metathetical device. The lexemes "ants" and "tanks" are extrapolated from their usual compound lexemes "armoured-tanks" and "soldier-ants" and yoked together with the root lexemes "armoured" and "soldier" by swapping their positions to realise "armoured-ants" and "soldier-tanks".

The expression "She died June 23, dear mother, to stubborn fate" in the excerpt helps to determine the "spatio-temporal location" of the poem. The poem is designed to capture the state of affairs on June 23 when a former Nigerian military dictator annulled the June 12 Presidential Election in Nigeria. The lexeme "armoured-ants" foregrounds both "military" and "destruction" by considering the fragments of the word. The lexeme "armoured" refers to a military instrument, while the lexeme "ants" functioning as the suffix refers literally to "destructive" insects in an organised group. Thus, the nation died "to stubborn fate" under the military system. It is obvious that the use of lexical metathetical device is a means to underscore the message of the poem. The general atmosphere of confusion, insecurity, hopelessness, and despondency surrounding the regime of the Nigerian military dictator who depended on stocked armoury "armoured-tanks" and his military men "soldier-ants", may suggest why the poet masquerades the lexeme "armoured-tanks", an instrument of war, as "armoured-ants" to avoid a direct reference.

Adjoining to the device of lexical

swooping is lexical substitution. This is evident in the word "soldier-termites" in DaSylva's *For Adelugba at 60* (92). The unusualness of the lexeme "soldier-termites" attracts attention because our mutual expectancy anticipates the word "soldier-ants". The swooping of the fragment "ants" with "termites" is an instance of substitution because the word "soldier-ants" is not present in the poem. The lexeme "soldier" foregrounds militarism. The lexeme "termites" refers literally to "destructive" insects in an organised group. The conceptual mapping of these senses suggests that military is a destructive system of government. This necessitates the invitation of the poets to other proactive agents of change.

Lexical Coalescence

Oyebade submits that "coalescence is the fusing together of two segments" (68). In other words, coalescence is a process of merging or coagulating two or more words without omitting a part of the various lexemes. Coalescence is done in such a way that the newly created word, realised by means of coagulating separate words, has gained such a power of expressiveness by absorbing the meanings of different words attached together. Examples of these marked lexical items are:

Oh yes, I tried to believe
that his bones now simmer
in Dante's sulfuric region
broiling in the tutorial vice
of Amin-Bokassa-Doe-SeseSeko
School.

Raji's *Malediction for a maximum ruler* (32-33).

A child that learns early to wash his
hands sits with elders:

One evening, Oja-Logunja, Ogunba,
Oba Areje, Agbada, Isola,
Olatunji, Osundare, Omamor, Okafor,
Okinba, Higo, Irele-e-e-e

Darah and Ibitokun had invited me to a
dinner in Baba Faleti's

House; there the sayings of our elders
had tasted like pounded yam!

Your chameleon has given birth to its
songspring,

It is the turn of *Qdámolúgbe* to dance as
heir apparent; my

Songsworm pays homage to the earth,
the earth

Opens its lode for my songsworm to
enter:

DaSylva's *My hoe nips at mother earth*
(12).

The excerpt from Raji's *Malediction for a maximum ruler* (32-33), contains a compound lexeme "Amin-Bokassa-Doe-Sese-Seko". This lexeme is derived through the coagulation of serially quoted names (Idi "Amin", Jean Bédel "Bokassa", Samuel Kanyon "Doe", and General Mobutu "Sese-Seko") of some infamous African leaders who have received retributions for their evil deeds. To arrive at fuller meanings of the derived lexeme, readers are tasked to search for external information about the fragments coalesced or blended to derive the lexeme. The first fragment "Amin" is detached from the names of President Idi Amin of Uganda who was connected with cannibalism and massacre of masses. The second fragment

"Bokassa" is detached from Jean Bédél Bokassa of the Central African Republic, President (1966-1977) and Emperor (1977-1979). He was arrested, tried, and convicted on murder charges stemming from his 14 years in power. The third fragment "Doe" is detached from the names of Samuel Kanyon Doe, military president of Liberia (1980-1990) who was accused of brutality and corruption. His regime resulted to civil war. The forth fragment "Sese-Seko" is extricated from the names of General Mobutu Sese-Seko, an infamous president of Zaïre who introduced erratic dictatorial policies. The foregoing information external to the poem evidently supports the idea that the meaning of the expression may be elusively opaque to the reader who is not familiar with the names. Raji constructs the poem to express intense curse "Malediction for a maximum ruler" on the Nigerian despotic ruler (General Sanni Abacha) classed among the four despicable, nefarious and repugnant African leaders. It is obvious from the analysis that the device of lexical and morphological coalescence has the tendency to expand the thematic scope of the poem because each fragment alludes to different names of personalities.

In DaSylva *My hoe nips at mother earth* (28), he seeks to pay homage to some individuals he calls "elders" from whom he derives sources of his wisdom. As presented in the excerpt, he specifically mentions their names as "Oja-Logunja, Ogunba, Oba Areje, Agbada, Isola, Olatunji, Osundare, Omamor, Okafor, Okinba, Higo, Irele-e-e-e Darah and Ibitokun". The word "songspring" is a coagulation of the lexemes "song" and "spring". Also, the word

"songsworm" is a coagulation of the lexeme "songs" and "worm". The word "song" conveys the sense of poetical compositions. This alludes to poetry. The word "spring" conveys the sense of source of origin. The word "worm" refers to a parasitical organism. The mapping of the senses of these words conveys an idea that DaSylva's poetry is independent of higher source of inspiration. As result of the multiple sources, he refers to himself as a "son of many mothers". Therefore, as a dependent "singer" or "poet" who has an attachment to many sources, the coalescence of words into a single lexeme has stylistic significance of providing a textual imitation of the message.

Adjoining to lexical and morphological device of coalescence is blending. This is attestable in one of DaSylva's poem presented as follows:

A chick among was 'gressive and greedy...

Ate more often than others, [...]

Several cycles of identical chicks,
Golobalized new-breed politricksters!
DaSylva's *Goloba* (78).

Globalisation as a political policy of oppression is the major theme in DaSylva's *Goloba* (78). He, therefore, constructs the poem to condemn the self-centeredness of the ruling class. To reinforce the message, he deploys the device of lexical coalescence by merging the words "politics" and "tricksters" into a single lexeme "politricksters". The lexemes "politics" conveys the sense of governmental system. The word "tricksters" conveys the sense of defrauder using trickery skills to oppress other. Mapping the senses of

the two lexemes produces the intended message contained in the word. The blending of the two lexemes into a single word harmonises with the message about the self-centeredness of the ruling class.

Nonce Formation

It is deducible from the term "Potential Vocabulary" introduced by Tournier that nonce formations are words which are potentially created by an individual who is constrained by certain factors to express certain meanings in a particular context. Textual evidences of this morphological technique are underlined in the excerpts below:

Their *hosi' battoir* has recorded another death.

Some lousy ulcer burns in my gong's throat,

Its bleeding heart aches its broken tail!

DaSylva's *My hoe nips at mother earth* (28-32).

ifi were clinton

i would clinch one more victory

in the lewinskian lap of tender nights

Raji's *St. clinton's song* (61-62).

In Dasyulva's *My hoe nips at mother earth* (28-31), the lexeme "hosi'battoir" is created to intensify the message. The lexeme foregrounds the lexemes "hospital" and "abattoir" because the creation of the lexeme involves the blending of both words. The hybridisation of the two lexical stocks underscores the idea that the hospital which is supposed to salvage life has become slaughterhouse as a result of poor maintenance of the medical agency by the

government. This lexeme "hosi'battoir", therefore, heightens the emotional impact of the idea that life is unsafe where healing should be received.

In Raji's *St. clinton's song* (59-60), the underlined lexeme "lewinskian" is used as a premodifier in the structure of the nominal group "lewinskian lap". The word foregrounds "Lewinsky" taken from Monica Lewinsky which is the name of the lady with whom Clinton's sex scandal was allegedly connected. The derivation process involves the deletion of the last letter "y" in the noun "Lewinsky" and the addition of suffix "-ian" to form the adjective "lewinskian". The ingenuity displayed in such a derivational process constrains the new lexeme to conform to the morphological rules for deriving English adjectives from nouns. This demonstrates that nonce formation represents new words that are created to enable language users capture new experiences or situations.

Conclusion

The present study is an attempt to use linguistic techniques to account for how new lexical stocks have been morphologically created to capture new experiences and situations encountered by the two poets. The study demonstrates how morphological resources contained in poems can be explained appropriately in order to gain easy access to the messages enrobed in unusual lexical items. The aesthetic properties of language which have been unveiled show how language works in literary texts. The study has also reflected the distinctive use of language by showing how each poet uniquely employs certain morphological devices to

underscore his messages. The approach used in this study has provided better insights into nature of language in literary texts, especially poetry. Thus, meaning, which is the message conveyed in each text, would have been imprecisely elusive if attention is not given to the morphological and lexical resourcefulness employed by the poets. Therefore, it can be concluded that poetry, which seemingly appears impenetrable, can be easily accessible, if attention is given to the morphological and lexical inventiveness deployed by the poets.

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