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STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SENTENCE PATTERNS IN CAMARA LAYE'S THE AFRICAN CHILD

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a stylistic analysis of Camara Laye's The African Child. The thrust is to explore elements of stylistics such as simple sentence, one-word sentence, two-word sentence, truncated type, compound sentence and complex sentence used in the text. The paper deploys qualitative method due to its exploratory and explicit nature. Therefore, the paper selects its data purposively across the text by employing Leech and Short's (1981) model of analysis. In terms of theoretical framework, the paper adopts purposive checklists but focuses on grammatical categories. With this, the paper finds, among other things, that while some stylistic elements conform to the traditional pattern of sentences, others deviate from them in a number of ways. The paper concludes that stylistics offers feasible means of unveiling meaning in a literary work.

Keywords: Stylistics, simple sentence, truncated forms, compound sentence, complex sentence

Introduction

This paper is exclusively a stylistic study. The objective is to interpret the cohesive working of the different components of language in Camara Laye's *The African Child.*Hence, it identifies and analyses selected linguistic elements prominent in Camara Laye's *The African Child.* The paper shows how early writers deploy linguistic elements in their creative works to further the African cause.The very nature of stylistics combines linguistic and literary elements in one breathe. In this regard, the present paper looks at the communicative functions of language as proposed by Short and Leech (1981) as well as Halliday's theory which looks at the textual and linguistic functions as applicable to Camara Laye's *The African Child.* It shows that style, as an aspect of linguistics, offers relevant tools for the interpretation of the selected text.

Thus, the present paper focuses on using stylistics to investigate the various language variables deployed by Laye in the novel,*The African Child,*to emboss meaning. This is relevant to the extent it will advance interest in the work of Camara Laye especially as it unravels some distinct stylistic patterns enclosed in his novel. On the whole, the paper shows ways in which Stylistics provides a formidable means of understanding Camara Laye's *The African Child.*

Review of Related Literature

The concept of style can be defined as "an approach to the analysis of (literary) text using linguistic description" (Short 1996, p. 1). This definition shows that stylistics covers two broad areas; Literature and Linguistics. In this sense, the stylist on the one hand is critic and on the other a linguist. This means that the stylist uses linguistic analysis in order to describe and analyse literary texts. Prominent in this perspective is that the core of stylistics is the interpretation and analysis of literary text. The process of judging or explaining the role of language in a text involves the interpretation of such text. This is why several definitions of stylistics tilt towards the interpretative role of language in reading a literary text. Wales (2001) explains that the:

> goal of most stylistic studies is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake but to show their functional significance for the interpretation of text; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic 'causes', where these are felt to be relevant". This is why stylistics is seen as a multidisciplinary field. It simultaneously accommodates both literary and linguistic studies of a given text (p. 372).

This fact is corroborated by Ayodabo (2013P220) who posits that "because of its eclecticism, stylistics has increasingly come to be used as teaching tool in language and literary studies." The point in Wales proposition above is that stylistic study begins when prominence is given to, in the words of Kolawole (2012), "the cohesive working of the different components of language in a text, and the creative employment of every possibility that grammar offers" (p. 4).

Broadly speaking, stylistics is the branch of linguistics which takes the language of literary texts as its object of study (Ayodabo 2013). The reason is that literary text offers endless possibilities for linguistic analysis. This is so largely because every writer presents unique ways by which he/she uses language. Their choice and creative use of language opens up linguistic models which offer potentials for further stylistic analysis. Consequent upon this, Syal and Jindal (2008, pp. 60-61) opine that "every writer uses language in his or her own way, making changes and variations at each level of the language: words choice, sentence structure and sound pattern". This usage, therefore, provides for the systematic study of those features of style and variations in style at each level of language structure.

The prominent feature of stylistic is the study of style. The notion of style entails, according to Abdulrasheed (2016), "the particular way in which different things are done" (p. 52). To Chapman (1973:n.p), it is "the manner in which form is executed or the content is expressed". This shows that the purpose of stylistics is to explicate the connection between language use and function in terms of expressiveness. It is the unravelling of the peculiarities, where they exist, of the way an author deploys language or uses language to produce an effect – literarily and linguistically.

The concern of this paper therefore, is to explore the ways Camara Laye deploys language in his text – *African Child*, to achieve a literary effect.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts stylistic values associated with the linguistic data. According to Leach and Short (1981), the categories for the checklist are placed under four general headings: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. The focus here, however, is to examine grammatical categories.

The checklist for grammatical categories is divided into nine points: sentence type, sentence complexity, clause types, clause structure, noun phrases, verb phrases, other phrase types, word classes and general (Leach and Short (1981).

a. Sentence type – Does the author use only statements (declarative sentence), or does he also use questions, commands, exclamations, or minor sentence types (such as sentences with no verb)? If these other types are used, what is their function?

b. Sentence complexity – Do sentences, on the whole, have a simple or a complex structure? What is the average sentence length (in number of words)? What is the ratio of dependent to independent clauses? Does complexity vary strikingly from one sentence to another? Is complexity mainly due to (i) coordination, (ii) subordination, (iii) parataxis (juxtaposition of clauses or other equivalent structures)? In what parts of a sentence does complexity tend to occur? For instance, is there any notable occurrence of anticipatory structure (e.g. of complex subjects preceding the verbs, of dependent clauses preceding the subject of a main clause)?

c. Clause types – What types of dependent clause are favored: relative clause,

adverbial clause, different types of nominal clauses (that- clauses, wh-clauses, etc.)? Are reduced or non-finite clauses commonly used, and if so, of what type are they (infinitive clauses, -ing clauses, -ed clauses, verbless clauses)?

d. Clause structure – Is there anything significant about clause elements (e.g. frequency of objects, complements, adverbials; of transitive or intransitive verb constructions)? Are there any unusual orderings (initial adverbials, fronting of object or complement, etc.)? Do special kinds of clause construction occur (such as those with preparatory it or there)?

e. Noun phrases – Are they relatively simple or complex? Where does the complexity lie (in pre-modification by adjectives, nouns, etc, or in post-modification by prepositional phrases, relative clauses, etc.)? Note occurrence of listings (e.g. sequence of adjectives), coordination, or apposition.

f. Verb phrases – Are there any significant departures from the use of the simple past tense? For example, notice occurrences and functions of the present tense; of the progressive aspect (e.g. was lying); of the perfective aspect (e.g. has/had appeared); of modal auxiliaries (e.g. can, must, would, etc.).

g. Other phrase types – Is there anything to be said about other phrase types: prepositional phrases, adverbial phrases, adjective phrases?

h. Word classes – Having already considered major or lexical word classes, we may here consider minor word classes ('functional words'): prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, determiners, auxiliaries, interjections. Are particular words of these types used for particular effect (e.g. the definite or indefinite article; first person pronouns I, we, etc; demonstrative such as this and that; negative words such as not, nothing, no)?

i. General – Note here whether any general types of grammatical construction are used to special effect; e.g. comparative or superlative constructions; coordinative or listing constructions; parenthetical constructions; appended or interpolated structures such as occur in casual speech. Do lists and coordinations (e.g. lists of nouns) tend to occur with two, three or more than three members?

The data for this study are presented and discussed according to the above framework.

Data Presentation and Analysis

∞   The Use of Simple Sentences

A simple sentence is one that expresses a single thought and has only one verb or verb phrase (Ogungbe and Bossan 2013). This sentence type is deployed by Camara Laye in *The African Child* as can be seen below:

∞   It was entered by a rectangular doorway (p.12).
∞   I would cry (p.36).
∞   Our healer was not so intelligent (p.106).
∞   That is the custom (p.107).
∞   Women, too, are not allowed to tell anything about the rites of excision (p.107).
∞   Her voice was trembling a little (p.110).
∞   A tall, imposing man came up to me (p.122).

These sentences are considered simple because they express a complete thought and some of the simple sentences used in the text do not follow the conventional pattern of sentence construction. While some are composed of one word, others are of two words. These can be seen below:

∞   The Use of One-Word Syntactic Patterns
∞   No (p.34).
∞   Father! (p.21).
∞   My! (p.40).

As Azuike observes, the one-word syntactic patterns are emphatic items or particles that show "a ring of finality" as they are "not only concise and direct but also stylistically emphatic". Aligning with Azuike's position the above examples can be seen as one-word syntactic patterns. On page 34, for instance, the use of this emphatic, 'No' reflects the narrator's desire to assure his uncle that he is not, in any way, tired and hence, could continue with their journey to Tindican, a small village to the west of Kouroussa.

The use of single-word syntactic pattern, 'Father!' on page 21 shows the narrator's confusion at the sudden mood of his father who, he thought, was becoming transfigure into "an old man". Again, the use of 'My!' on page 40 is an exclamatory remark emphasizing on the narrator's looks – as a good looking person. This sense is seen in the expression: my! You're looking well!

∞   The Use of Two-Word Syntactic Patterns
∞   Come on! (p.35).
∞   Of course (p.35).
∞   Yes, father (p.75).
∞   Certainly not (p.76).

The use of two-word syntactic pattern as shown above also indicates the use of emphasis as a response to questions. It is, in this sense, used to provide a quick response to preceding question. This, in a sense, is employed to show the level of familiarity between interlocutors. Below are some examples:
∞   "Shall we go and see him as soon as we arrive?"
       'Of course' (p. 35);
∞   Will that do?'
       'Yes, father'(p. 75).
∞   Is it none of my business when my own son is being treated like a slave in your school?'
'Certainly not'(p.76).
It is noticed, however, that the last example indicates a sense of finality, a note of warning and a show of authority where the later displays the right to act in a particular way irrespective of the former's approval.
The two-word pattern is also used as a form of encouragement to other characters in the novel. This sense is also captured in the following sentence:

∞   Come on!' I would say to my uncle. 'We've lain here long enough.' (p.35).
In the above example, the narrator deploys this sentence type to encourage his uncle to be steadfast and resolve at completing the journey they have embarked upon.

∞   **Truncated Pattern**

Referred also as incomplete sentences, the truncated pattern conveys complete thought. To Nnadi (2010), this truncated type is "incomplete in the sense that certain grammatical elements necessary for a syntactically complete sentence are deliberately chopped off for some stylistic effects". The stylistic significance of this usage is that it creates while verisimilitude. Below are some examples of this type of sentences:

∞   For a little (p.40).
∞   It does, doesn't it (p.48).
∞   No, of course not (p.48).
∞   Make haste! (p.52).
∞   Now that's enough of that (p.56).
∞   Because! (p.64).
∞   Listen here, if you don't stop laughing at me…(p.64).
∞   Get that all swept up! (p.68).
∞   Will that do? (p.75).
∞   Certainly not (p.76).
∞   Yes, the time had come for me (p.79).
∞   A little (p.80).
∞   I'll try not to be (p.80).

These patterns are truncated because the finite verbs are deliberately chopped off. This can further be seen in the following examples:
∞   For a little while
∞   Make haste
∞   Now that's enough of that
∞   A little.
∞   Certainly not etc.

The absence of finite verbs in the above examples makes the syntactic forms incomplete in meaning and hence, referred in this study as truncated forms. These semantic forms, in the most part, survive only in the semantic and stylistic environments within which they are located.

It should be noticed also that the above syntactic forms are, at best, phrasal items. The following examples:

∞   For a little while'
∞   now that's enough of that'
∞   'a little' and
∞   Certainly not',show Laye's use of adverbial phrases as sentence types. The example:
∞   make haste', on the other hand, is a verb phrase;
      Other truncated types are seen in their elliptical forms as part of the sentence is omitted. Here is an example of elliptical form as used in the novel:
∞   "Listen here, if you don't stop laughing at me…"(p.64).
In this case, the remaining clause form that would have completed the sentence is completely left out and hence, truncated.
Furthermore, the example:
∞   I'll try not to be shows the use of sentence type without the objective case. In this sense, the object in the above sentence is left out making it incomplete in meaning and hence, truncated.

∞   The Use of Compound Sentence
Layedeploys a great deal of compound sentences in the novel. A compound sentence entails the joining together of two simple sentences through the use of conjunction. According to Okpeh (2018:59), the compound sentence has two independent clauses that are brought together using words such as: and, but, yet, or, nor, so, for, or a semi-colon. This sentence type, as Okpeh submits, is also known as the 'Double Sentence.'
The examples of compound sentences, as deployed in Laye's *The African Child*, include the following:

i.   Suddenly, I stopped playing, my whole attention fixed on a snake that was creeping round the hut (p.11).

ii. At last the reed was almost entirely swallowed up, and the snake's jaws were terribly close to my fingers (p.11).

iii. My father's hut was near the workshop, and I would often play there beneath the veranda that ran round the outside (p.12)

iv. Finally, at the head of the bed, hanging over the pillow and watching over my father's slumber, there was a series of pots that contained extracts from the plants and the back of trees (p.12).

v. As soon as you had crossed the workshop and gone through the door at the back, you could see the orange tree (p.13).

vi. We've been crawling along like tortoises, and now he's ready to run like a hare (p.36).

vii. But for the moment I would go into the hut only in order to take my clothes off: my grandmother felt that after walking from Kouroussia, the first thing to do was to give myself a bath (p.39).

viii.There she would soap me from head to foot with black soap, then rub me roughly down with a sponge made of tow from the dried stems of pulpy plants (p.40).

ix. I would leave the hut, all shining with wet, my blood racing under my gleaming skin, my hair black as pitch, and run to dry myself in front of the fire (p.40).

x. When you're growing up, you don't have much flesh on your bones (p.40).

xi. These posts used to play an important part in my visit to Trindican: everywhere there were to be seen these platforms mounted on the forked stakes that looked as if they were riding the great flowing seas of the harvest fields (p.41).

xii. With my little playmates I would climb the ladder to one of them and scare the birds, and sometimes the monkeys that came to raid our fields (p.41).

xiii. But it sometimes happened that we became absorbed in other games, and forgot why we were there (p.41).

xiv.I could not have said then why this was done: why the signal was given only after the first swathe had been cut in each of the fields (p.45).

xv. I only knew that such was the custom, and that was enough for me (p.45).

The examples provided above show that Laye's usage of compound sentence follows three categorizations of the compound sentences as captured in Okpe's definition. First, it is observed that some of the sentences are joined together by using the conjunction 'and'. Others, however, are joined together through the use of punctuation marks: 'comma' and 'colon'. In this light, examples 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, are brought together by 'comma' while examples 6, 12, 13, and 15 are joined together by the conjunction 'and'. In addition to these, it is observed that examples 7, 11, and 14 are joined together by using colon.

However, other examples especially 4, 5, and 9 cannot be deduced using the above categorizations. In these examples, for instance, the division of the sentence parts can be approximated by examining them at the sense level. This is largely so because these sentences have such elements as 'comma' and 'and' occurring in more than one places yet they never serve as dividing factor as suggested by Okpe above. In the following example, for instance, Laye deploys the use of compound sentence with three commas and the coordinating conjunction 'and' which undermines Okpe's definition which holds that these elements ('comma', 'colon' and 'and') serve to demarcate the two independent clauses that constitute the sentence. In this example, it is seen that the sense is divided not just with comma (',') and the coordinating conjunction 'and' but the completeness of sense lying thereupon. Thus, the sentence:

> Finally, at the head of the bed, hanging over the pillow and watching over my father's slumber, there was a series of pots that contained extracts from the plants and the back of trees (p.12)

can be broken into two clauses viz:

1. Finally, at the head of the bed, hanging over the pillow and watching over my father's slumber (clause I)

2. There was a series of pots that contained extracts from the plants and the back of trees (clause II).

In this sense, the first part serves as the dependent clause while the second serves as independent clause. The first clause comprises of an adjunct and

three phrases. Put together, they convey one 'sense' which, in language, is referred to as a simple sentence:

∞ Finally (adjunct),
∞ at the head of the bed (prepositional phrase),
∞ hanging over the pillow (verb phrase)
∞ watching over my father's slumber (verb phrase)

The second clause is the independent clause as it can stand on its own as a meaningful grammatical entity. The independent status of this clause is enhanced by the presence of subject and predicate. The deployment of this sentence type in the novel which is characterized by strings of long sentences, especially compound-complex sentence, might be the result of the difficulty of translation. The version we have is the translation of the original novel from French to English. Other such examples are captured below:

∞ As soon as you had crossed the workshop and gone through the door at the back, you could see the orange tree (p.13) (as seen in example 5 above)
∞ I would leave the hut, all shining with wet, my blood racing under my gleaming skin, my hair black as pitch, and run to dry myself in front of the fire (p.40) (as seen in example 9 above).

The Use of Complex Sentence

Another choice of sentence type noticeable in Laye's novel is the complex sentence. In a complex sentence, one or more subordinate or independent ideas are joined to a main idea. In other words, a complex sentence is one that has one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses (Okpe 2018). According to Nnadi (2010:197), the complex sentence is that in which the 'complete thoughts' are put together to form a sentence. Nnadi offers the following sentence to demonstrate the pattern of a complex sentence.

∞ She dislikes the rainy season because it disturbs her business. In this example, for instance, Nnadi (2010, p. 197) explains that what appears as two 'complete thoughts' have been put together to form a complex sentence. In this instance, one complete thought is being subordinated, or made to lose its independent status, hence giving us a complex structure.

From the above explanation, it can be deduced that what constitutes the linguistic string called 'complex sentence' is the combination of two "independent

sentences". In such cases, as Nnadi offers, one of the hitherto independent sentences loses its independence. What this means is that a complex sentence comprises of two simple sentences with each having a subject and verb; one of which has a subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun added, turning it into a dependent (or subordinate) clause (http://www.lamission.edu).

The use of this sentence structure is to demonstrate a sophisticated relationship between ideas, using the dependent clause to add information about the independent clause. In this case, the dependent (or main clause) can come before or after the independent clause. When the dependent clause begins the sentence, it acts as introductory material, and a comma comes before the independent clause.

Camara Laye's *The African Child* is replete with the use of complex sentences. Some of these include:

i.   When he saw that I did not receive him kindly, he turned away and departed the way he had come (p. 17)

ii. After that, we never mentioned the little black snake again; my father had spoken to me about him for the first time (p. 21)

iii. As if informed of his presence, my father at that instance would turn his eyes to the hole and give a smile (p. 21)

iv. So if a woman, accompanied by a go-between, crossed to the threshold of the workshop, I would follow her in at once (p. 22)

v.   Nevertheless, for he was not allowed to take too many liberties with tradition, for it is part of praise-singer's task to preserve it (p. 23)

vi. That's what all women say, when they want an ornament (p. 24)

vii. But perhaps it would be better if I talked about their 'attendance' rather than their 'supervision'; they were more like nurses than superiors (p.106)

viii. The rule is enforced simply to avoid my delay in the healing of the wounds; I do not think any other explanation ne be sought (p.107)

ix. The simplest, though not the least laborious way, was by using phrases with

refrains that had to be whistled in a certain way (p. 107)

x. But this time I spoke it very low, like a lament, sadly, as if it were a lament for myself (p. 109).

xi. By the third week, I was allowed to see my mother (p. 108)

xii. When one of the younger men came and said my mother was at the door, I leapt to my feet (p.108)

These examples demonstrate two usages by Laye: one is his conformity to Nnadi's definition of complex sentence and the other his violation of such all in one fell swoop. The following example instantiate Laye's use of style as conformity.

∞ When he saw that I did not receive him kindly, he turned away and departed the way he had come (p.17)

∞ As if informed of his presence, my father at that instance would turn his eyes to the hole and give a smile (p.21)

∞ When one of the younger men came and said my mother was at the door, I leapt to my feet (p.108)

These examples show that a complex sentence comprises of two independent sentences with one loosing such status by appending a subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun to it. They also demonstrate the fact that such 'dependent' clause can precede the 'independent' clause. When this is the case the dependent clause introduces the main clause. These three examples, as seen below, begin with the dependent clause thus:

∞ When he saw that I did not receive him kindly….

∞ As if informed of his presence ….

∞ When one of the younger men came and said my mother was at the door…

Their significance lies in the larger strings they belong is in the way they offer the ground for understanding cause and effect of an action. In this sense, the second

premise is dependent on the first. Laye's choice of this sentence type helps in building up tension in the text.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of style in Laye's *The African Child.*The objective is to interpret the cohesive working of the different components of language in Camara Laye's text. This is relevant to the extent that it has explored and unraveled some distinct stylistic patterns enclosed in the novel, *The African Child.* The choice of thesestylistic patterns shows how Laye ingeniously deploy language to comment on burning societal issues in the pre-colonial era; a time when the tradition engendered mutual understanding and respect for all. The study finds that the aesthetic features of language are better enhanced through the use of the selected stylistic patterns explored in this study. By deploying these linguistic elements, the study demonstrates further that stylistics is a viable means of understanding a literary text.

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