

A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE LEXICAL CHOICES IN AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO'S *ROSES AND BULLETS*

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Abstract

This paper x-rays the stylistic significance of the lexical choices in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* using Leech and Short's (2007) model of linguistic stylistics as a framework. The study focuses on the categories of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, as well as semantic fields and connotations, to explore how diction conveys themes of war, love, and survival. The findings reveal that Ezeigbo employs a deliberate violent and tender lexicon-bullets and roses-as a stylistic device to dramatize the destructive impact of the Nigerian Civil War on human relationships, particularly on women and children. Her lexical choices serve symbolic, emotive, and evaluative functions, reinforcing the tension between destruction and resilience.

Introduction

Literary language is often distinguished by its special selection and organization of words. The study of language and style in literature plays a crucial role in the understanding of how a writer or speaker conveys emotions and feelings to readers or audience. Literary works are product of a writer's style and language. One such writer whose works reflect the interplay of language and style is Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo whose works under study present rich text for Linguistic stylistic study. In war novels, lexical choice becomes particularly significant because diction not only records events but also conveys the brutality of violence and the endurance of humanity. Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* (2011) presents the Nigerian Civil War from a humanistic perspective, intertwining the personal love story of Ginika and her lover with the collective trauma of conflict. This paper analyses the lexical fabric of the novel, showing how Ezeigbo's diction functions stylistically to capture the paradox of tenderness amid violence.

The Concept of Style and Stylistics

Style is understood as an emphasis (expressive, affective or aesthetic) added to the information conveyed by the linguistic structure, without alteration of meaning, in other words, language expresses and that style stresses. The concept of style can be said to be amorphous, as it is difficult to pin down to single, specific proposition or even a set of propositions. The multiplicity of definition to which style is amenable informs the different views and theories of style. The term "Stylistics" on the other

hand is derived from the word "Style". Its pre-linguistic meaning is the manner of writing, speaking and doing. Stylistics can simply be called the study of style. It is the yoking together of style and linguistics. In a similar vein, Banjo (1982) opines that Stylistics is the exhaustive study of the use of language in literary works. This definition by implication means that Stylistics is the application of theories and methods of linguistics to the study of texts (notably, literary texts). This definition points to the fact that, literary texts such as Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*" (2011).is a raw material that Stylisticians can dissect using Stylistic theories for analysis.

Linguistic Stylistics

Ayeomoni (2004) notes that linguistics stylistics occurs alongside other terms as "Stylistics", "Modern Stylistics", "The New Stylistics" and "Literary Linguistics Stylistics", pointing out that the term "Linguistics" is however used by Freeman (1973) because "it makes it quite clear that it is the linguistic study of texts that is being referred to and not just the study of style in its broadest sense". Ayeomoni therefore, defines Linguistic Stylistics "as an analytical approach that helps readers to objectively study both literary pieces and non-literary materials". In line with Ayeomoni's conception of Linguistic Stylistics away from the literary-text-bound definitions offered by Turner (1993) among others, Linguistics Stylistics can be domesticated as a branch of Applied Linguistics concerned with the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of texts of all categories, whether literary or non-literary, constructed with the verbal apparatus of a language from the perspective of Linguistics. Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*" (2011) is not an exception to this interpretation, analysis and evaluation Linguistic Stylisticians is subject to.

Levels of Style/Stylistics

Stylistics is of many levels. For Khan (2014: 11), the division of Stylistics level includes: Graphology, Phonology, Grammar, and also Lexis. A similar division was also used by Khan & Jabeen (2015:128) that there are five levels of Stylistics-Phonetic level, Phonological level, Graphological level, Grammatical level, and Lexical level. In a similar vein, Leech & Short (2007: 101-106), divided the levels of Stylistics into four:

- i. Semantic Level: Semantics relates to the meaning of word, phrases, or sentences. According to Yule (1996: 4), it is the study of relationship between linguistics form and how words literally connect to other things. In other words, semantics is the study of meaning in language. The way to understand the meaning should have a careful thought about the language people speak and the way people used it.
- ii. Syntactic Level: Syntax covered the term of language level which lied between words and the meaning of utterances. Syntax is the study of the

relationship between linguistic forms, how they were arranged in sequence and which sequences are well-formed. It includes lexical choice (choice of word expression from the vocabulary) and also grammatical choices combining those words into the sentences. In the other word, it is the grammar above the word or the grammar of sentence structure.

- iii. Phonological Level: Phonology is concerned with how sounds are produced. The phonology or the sound systems of language itself is concerned with how the sounds function in the relation to language.
- iv. Graphological Level: Graphology in a text has some Semantic and Stylistic implication which can be revealed through the analysis. This feature has special characteristic by using marks. They are punctuation that includes capitalization, italicization, hyphenation, and dotting. Relating to the present study, graphology describes the several marks which appear in the novels and emphasize on the punctuation, capitalization and also italicization. Leech & Short (2007) maintains that graphology is a writing system. In the other word, it is an alternative system of realization to phonology. Graphology is a part of style concerned with such matters as spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, italicization, and paragraphing. It suffices to explore some of this graphological aspect:
 - a. Italicization: It is a type of writing which indicates intonation, tone, stress, pauses and emphasizes on a particular word or phrase. It is also for distinguishing functions of individual parts of a text such as headings, notes; partly as aesthetic requirements.
 - b. Capitalization: This uppercase letter is used for marking and underlining the division of the initial letters or whole words, phrases and headings; lettering; spacing; bracketing of additional or explanatory information; and highlighting the names of the documents and new sections by the use of bold or another font. Straus (2008: 70) divides it in several functions; (1) Capitalize the first word of a quoted sentence; (2) Capitalize a proper noun; (3) Capitalize the person's title when it precedes the name; (4) Capitalize any title when used as a direct address; (5) Capitalize the word of salutation; and many others.
 - c. Punctuation: It is the type or system of marks used in writing which divides sentences and phrases that are used for easing the transcription and reading comprehension. Meanwhile, punctuation aims to clarify the meaning of words by separating sequences word into units and indicating the kind of the sequences. He also adds that a good punctuation will make a sentence easy to read. Price (2003: 23-31) presents the punctuation into ten marks divisions;

- i. Commas otherwise called 'pause of breath'. The insertion of commas may totally change the meaning of a sentence. It can be used between the main clause of a sentence and subsidiary clauses. In addition, it is normally joined by conjunction such as 'and', 'but' and 'although'.
- ii. Semicolon and colon. It is used for introducing a long list of things. It separates main clauses which could be written as sentences.
- iii. Quotation marks. It is used for closing a direct speech. It is commonly used for quoting actual words, source of an idea, opinion or a piece of information. People can use double quotation marks to quote a quotation inside, and it can be separated by single quotation marks too or vice versa.
- iv. Apostrophe. It can be used in two ways: to indicate the omitted letters in the middle of words; to indicate the possession which mostly use 's' (it is divided into two categories that is singular and plural).
- v. Full stop, period or point. It is used at the end of sentences. It is also used in abbreviations where letters have been omitted from the end of a word such as Prof. or Dr.
- vi. Question and exclamation marks are used at the end of sentences in a form of question and exclamation. They can replace the function of full stop. Beside question mark is used for interrogative sentence, exclamation is used in commands, surprising statements, and emphatic utterances.
- vii. Hyphen and dash are used to join two separate concepts of compound. Hyphens are normally used to break long words across lines, while dashes are used to indicate a separate though, related concepts.
- viii. Parenthesis is not only represented by bracket marks but there are also dashes and commas. These marks functions are for elaborating and giving an example of something without breaking the meaning of the main ideas. Parenthesis must always be used in pairs.
- ix. Capital letter known as an initial letter in the beginning of sentences. The initial capital letter also appears in proper nouns such as specific person (name), place, or thing, example. Professor Amodu Jonah, Doctor Hamza, Homo Sapiens.
- x. Omission marks/ellipsis mostly begins with (...) which represents that the words may be omitted and to fill the gap. It also appears in a quotation when there is no irrelevant purpose anymore with the context.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by Leech and Short's (2007) model of stylistic analysis, particularly the category of lexical choices, which involves examining nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and semantic fields. According to Leech and Short, the

vocabulary of a text provides insight into its thematic concerns, tone, and ideological stance. Lexical analysis therefore helps to uncover how Ezeigbo's diction enacts meaning beyond mere narration.

Lexical Analysis of the text

Nouns: The novel's nouns fall into two dominant groups:

War lexicon: *bombs, bullets, corpses, starvation, soldiers, ruins*. These are concrete nouns that foreground physical destruction.

Peace lexicon: *roses, garden, home, child, mother*. These are words that symbolize love, beauty, and tenderness.

This lexical polarity dramatizes the thematic contrast between life and death, war and peace.

Verbs: Dynamic action verbs shape the narrative's intensity:

Violent verbs: *explode, bleed, flee, kill, burn*. These emphasize brutality and instability.

Tender verbs: *embrace, whisper, nurture, long*. These are used to foreground human intimacy.

The verbs reinforce the oscillation between survival in wartime and the persistence of love.

Adjectives: Adjectival choices provide evaluative colouring:

War: *bloody, charred, devastated, mutilated*.

Humanity: *innocent, helpless, tender, brave*.

Through adjectives, Ezeigbo positions the reader to condemn war and sympathize with victims, especially women and children.

Adverbs: Adverbs such as *brutally, suddenly, violently, quietly, tenderly* modify verbs and intensify emotional responses. They capture both the abrupt intrusion of violence and the subtle endurance of affection.

Semantic Fields and Connotations

The diction of *Roses and Bullets* draws on overlapping fields of meaning:

War/Military field-foregrounding violence and survival.

Nature/Peace field-emphasizing beauty, fertility, and fragility.

Domestic/Family field-underlining the disruption of homes and relationships.

Psychological/Emotional field-reflecting fear, hope, grief, and resilience.

The lexical items carry symbolic resonance. For instance, *Roses* connote love, fragility, and hope. *Bullets* connote destruction and masculinity. *Blood* signifies sacrifice and trauma. *Mother* and *child* evoke innocence and vulnerability.

To expatiate further on this, below are excerpts from the text that buttresses further the place of lexical items in Ezeigbo's text (*Roses and Bullets*).

Excerpt One

Ginika found herself in a school compound which seemed deserted. This place once teemed with pupils, she mused. The war had driven them to their various homes. The compound was overgrown with grass in many places. Kanu Ofodile led the way and took them round the nearest building to the entrance. It was after they had negotiated it and got to the other side of the compound that Ginika's breath was taken away for a moment by the large crowd that met her gaze. She was sure there were at least six hundred people standing in the crowd, men and women, though there were more men as was to be expected. In awed silence, she followed closely behind Ofodile. Pg 49

Lexical Categories

The following are the lexical features used in the above excerpt:

Nouns: Concrete nouns: "*school compound*," "*pupils*," "*war*," "*grass*," "*building*," "*entrance*," "*crowd*," "*men*," "*women*." These help establish a realistic, war-affected setting.

Abstract nouns: "*silence*," "*awe*." These contribute to Ginika's emotional state and the atmosphere of the scene.

Verbs: Action verbs: "*found*," "*teemed*," "*driven*," "*led*," "*negotiated*," "*got*," "*met*," "*followed*." These are used to convey movement and discovery.

Stative verbs: "*seemed*," "*was sure*." These show Ginika's perception and introspection rather than direct action.

Adjectives: "*deserted*," "*overgrown*," "*nearest*," "*large*." These describe the transformation of the school and the overwhelming size of the crowd.

Adverbs: "*closely*." This emphasizes Ginika's careful, almost fearful movement.

The lexical choices used in the excerpt above contrast emptiness and fullness, as the deserted school transitions to a crowd-filled space. The verbs and adjectives highlight desolation, movement, and awe, shaping the reader's emotional engagement.

Excerpt Two

As the car meandered along damaged roads, she looked out of the window and saw houses with bullet marks and cracked walls and wondered why they were still in this appalling condition six months after the war ended. Perhaps the owners did not have the money to repair the houses. The war had impoverished most people in the East. The wreckage of war still defaced the city, she thought sadly: Lagos was the opposite. There was no sign at all in the city that a gruesome war had been fought in the country for almost three years.... Pg 374

Lexical Categories

The following are the lexical features used in the above excerpt:

Nouns: The excerpt includes concrete nouns like *car, roads, window, houses, bullet marks, walls, wreckage, city, war, money, Lagos, country*, which establish a vivid setting of post-war destruction. Abstract nouns such as *condition, war, people, sign* emphasize the contrast between devastation and recovery.

Verbs: Action verbs like *meandered, looked, saw, wondered, did not have, defaced, fought* highlight movement, observation, and contemplation.

Adjectives: *damaged, cracked, appalling, impoverished, gruesome* enhances the sense of destruction and suffering.

Adverbs: *sadly* expresses Ginika's emotional response, reinforcing the contrast between Lagos and the war-torn East.

The lexical choices reinforce the stark reality of war's aftermath and the inequality in recovery between different regions. The contrast between wreckage and no sign at all in Lagos creates a powerful visual and emotional impact.

Excerpt Three

IT WAS indeed a period of homecoming for many people especially those who had been in the Biafran army and displaced persons who had been refugees So when Nwakire visited Ginika in her

aunt's house the very day Uncle Ray returned home, she found herself dancing around the compound, jubilating. Pg 343

Lexical Categories

The following are the lexical features used in the above excerpt:

Nouns: The excerpt contains concrete nouns like *homecoming, people, Biafran army, displaced persons, refugees, house, compound, Aunt, Uncle Ray*, which establish a post-war setting centered on return and reunion.

Verbs: Action verbs such as *visited, found, dancing, jubilating* convey movement, excitement, and celebration.

Adjectives: *displaced and refugees* highlight the struggles of those affected by war, while *jubilating* suggests a strong emotional reaction.

Adverbs: *especially* emphasizes a particular group (Biafran soldiers and refugees), while *indeed* reinforces the significance of the homecoming.

The lexical choices create a tone of relief and happiness after a difficult period, contrasting past struggles with present joy

Excerpt four

A radio addict, Ginika glued her ears to Radio Biafra for news about the invasion of Port Harcourt. She did not get much information there and she knew it was deliberate, The information unit did not want to alarm the populace further by providing news about the situation, so the best thing to do was to withhold information. Instead, a familiar voice bleated in Igbo, "Ogu na-agariri n'iru n'iru na Gakem the battle is still raging in Gakem." Ginika hissed; she did not want to hear about Gakem, in Ogoja area. She wanted to know what was happening in Port Harcourt, the gateway to the sea, the garden city. Radio Biafra was not forthcoming, so Ginika sought other options. Listening to the BBC and Radio Kaduna analyse what the loss of Port Harcourt meant to Biafra, Ginika wept bitterly; it was like rubbing salt into an injury. A jubilant announcer in Radio Kaduna cried in delight, "To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done..." Pg 65

Lexical Categories

The following are the lexical features used in the above excerpt:

Nouns: Concrete nouns: "*radio*," "*news*," "*information unit*," "*battle*," "*gateway*," "*sea*," "*garden city*." These establish the political and geographical significance of Port Harcourt.

Abstract nouns: "*invasion*," "*information*," "*situation*," "*loss*," "*delight*." These reflect war, secrecy, and emotional turmoil.

Proper nouns: "*Ginika*," "*Radio Biafra*," "*Port Harcourt*," "*Gakem*," "*Ogoja*," "*BBC*," "*Radio Kaduna*," "*Nigeria*." These provide historical specificity and realism.

Verbs: Action verbs: "*glued*," "*invaded*," "*withhold*," "*bleated*," "*hissed*," "*sought*," "*wept*." These depict Ginika's desperation, frustration, and grief.

Stative verbs: "*knew*," "*was not forthcoming*." These highlight Ginika's awareness of censorship and propaganda.

Adjectives: "*Radio addict*," "*familiar voice*," "*jubilant announcer*." These enhance Ginika's attachment to news, frustration, and emotional impact.

Adverbs: "*Bitterly*." Strengthens the intensity of Ginika's grief.

The lexical choices portray a stark contrast between information control (Biafra) and enemy propaganda (Nigeria). The emotional weight of Ginika's reaction is heightened through powerful action verbs and abstract nouns related to war and loss.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from the excerpts reveal that:

- In excerpt one there is a contrast between emptiness and fullness – deserted school vs. large crowd.

The lexical items establish a war-affected environment (pupils driven away, overgrown grass). The use of action and stative verbs conveys both movement and perception. The adjectives highlight desolation (deserted, overgrown) and awe (large crowd). These build tension and dramatize Ginika's emotional response.

- In excerpt two, the lexical choices highlight post-war destruction (bullet marks, cracked walls, wreckage). There is a contrast between the East (devastated) and Lagos (recovered, no signs of war).

The adjectives (*damaged*, *appalling*, *impoverished*, *gruesome*) foreground devastation. The adverbs (*sadly*) express Ginika's emotional pain. This emphasizes inequality in recovery and the long-lasting scars of war.

- Lexical items in excerpt three reflect homecoming and relief (*refugees, displaced persons, return*). The action verbs (*visited, dancing, jubilating*) evoke joy and movement.

The adjectives (*displaced, refugees*) is used to recall past suffering while jubilating stresses joy. The adverbs (*indeed, especially*) add emphasis to the celebratory tone. This highlights transition from suffering to joy, reinforcing hope.

- Lastly, excerpt four lexical choices stress censorship and propaganda (*withhold information, bleated voice, jubilant announcer*).

The proper nouns (*Port Harcourt, Gakem, BBC, Nigeria*) anchor the narrative in historical specificity. The action verbs (*glued, sought, wept, hissed*) is used to capture Ginika's desperation and frustration. The adjectives (*radio addict, jubilant announcer*) emphasize emotional investment and propaganda tone. The adverbs (*bitterly*) heighten grief and emotional weight.

Across all four excerpts, several broad patterns emerge:

- Contrast as a Stylistic Device: Ezeigbo frequently juxtaposes emptiness vs. fullness (deserted school vs. large crowd), destruction vs. recovery (East vs. Lagos), and suffering vs. joy (refugees vs. homecoming). This stylistic contrast sharpens the emotional and thematic impact of the narrative.
- Lexical Realism: Concrete nouns such as bullet marks, corpses, refugees, Port Harcourt root the narrative in war-time Nigeria, ensuring historical realism. The heavy use of proper nouns also gives authenticity to the setting and events.
- Emotive Lexicon: Adjectives (appalling, gruesome, jubilant) and adverbs (sadly, bitterly, closely) load the narrative with emotional charge. They guide readers' responses-eliciting pity, anger, or relief.
- Psychological Insight: Stative verbs (seemed, was sure, knew) reveal Ginika's inner world-her awe, despair, and frustration. This stylistic use of verbs balances external war events with internal reactions.
- Thematic Reinforcement: Each lexical cluster reinforces the novel's central concerns: war's destruction, propaganda, displacement, survival, and eventual glimpses of hope. Language itself becomes a symbolic battlefield—between silence and speech, sorrow and joy.

Conclusion

Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* demonstrate how lexical choices function stylistically to embody the paradox of war alongside love. The lexical choices foreground the human cost of war, dramatize inequalities in recovery, and highlight both despair and resilience. They function not only descriptively but also symbolically, drawing the reader into the paradoxical world of "roses and bullets."

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