

The Place of Grammar in a Stylistic Study: An Analysis of Niyi Osundare's Open letter to President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan

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Abstract

This study examined the role of Grammar in Linguistic Stylistic analysis of Niyi Osundare's **Open Letter to President Jonathan**. The study identified, analysed and related the prominent grammatical components in the letter to its socio-political context. The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data. Additionally, the data were analysed using the purview of the linguistic approach of stylistics. It was discovered that the grammar of the language of the text was deployed in a manner of appealing to President Jonathan to willingly and graciously accept the outcome of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. The study equally demonstrated that grammatical devices employed in the letter illuminated the style of language-use of Osundare in political discourse. The study concluded that grammar has an important role to play in studying political discourses as it enhances the discovering of their intentions.

Key words: Stylistics, Grammar, General Elections, Outcome, Nigeria

1. Introduction

1.1 Synopsis of Niyi Osundare's Open Letter to President Jonathan

Considering the anti-democratic posture of African leaders, especially where it comes to conceding defeat to opponents, Niyi Osundare was motivated to write President Goodluck Jonathan appealing to him to accept willingly and graciously the outcome of the 2015 General Election in Nigeria which might determine the fate of the country, Nigeria in future. Niyi Osundare was born in 1947 in Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. He is a prolific poet, playwright,

literary critic, and activist. He was once Professor of English and Head of Department of English from 1993 to 1997 at University of Ibadan, Ibadan; and, later appointed Professor of English at the University of Orleans in 1997. He is happily married.

1.2 Goodluck Ebele Jonathan

Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was born on 20, November 1957, in Otueke, Bayelsa state Nigeria. He holds a B.Sc. degree in Zoology, M.Sc. in Hydrobiology/Fisheries Biology, and PhD in Zoology from the University of Port Harcourt. He is married to Dame Patience Jonathan. He is a

frontline Nigerian politician who served as Deputy Governor of Bayelsa state before December 2005; but got sworn in, as the substantive governor of the state after the erstwhile governor was impeached. He equally served as Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2007, later sworn in as substantive President of the Federation in 2010, when the Senate confirmed him following the death of the then President Yaradua. After this, he contested the election as President in 2011 and 2015. He won the election of 2011 but lost that of 2015. So, he is the immediate past President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

2.0 Background to the Study

2.1 Grammatical Theories: A Brief Review

Grammar is a system of rules which allows the users of a particular language to create meaning by building both meaningful words and larger constructions of sentences (Wilcox, 2004:23). More specifically, it is the study of those systems and patterns that operate in a language to give meaning to an utterance. The system of grammar includes sub-divisions of phonemes, morphemes, and syntax. Phonemes are the smallest units of sound that make a difference in meaning concerning the production of words (Kolln & Funk, 1998: 395). Aitchison (1998) calls grammar “systematic study of language” Since grammar is a science, that is, a systematic study of language, it must describe and analyse the basic facts of language and explains and interprets the laws governing the behaviour of language. There are various theories of Grammar, some of which are:

2.1.1 Traditional Grammar

Traditional or Classical grammar was the grammar in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was the grammar based on the structural analysis of Latin and Greek languages. This grammar introduced

the categories of gender, contrasts of masculine, feminine and neuter. It also introduced parts of speech: noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, preposition, conjunction and interjection. Other legacies of traditional grammar include those of tenses, such as the present, past and future, and the analysis of sentences into subject and predicate. Its theory introduced cases: accusative, genitive and ablative, and the categories of number and voice (Asiyanbola, 2012:16-17).

2.1.2 Structural Grammar

Scholars like Ferdinand de Saussure, Leonard Bloomfield, Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum among others are associated with this school. They see language as having a structure with several units combined to make a whole language. For instance, phonemes can be combined to form a morpheme, morphemes can be combined to form a word, words can be combined to form a phrase, phrases can be combined to form a clause, clauses can be combined to form a sentence, and sentences can be combined to form a text or discourse (Asiyanbola, 2012: 23). Tomori (1977) explains that Bloomfield enunciated the notion of constitute and constituents while the notion of constitute that Katz and Postal renamed construction (Katz & Postal 1964) some years after. The constitute is the larger unit that comprises the smaller units or constituents. Therefore, the larger units (constitute) can be divided into smaller units (constituents).

2.1.3 Tagmemic Grammar

The first name given to this theory in 1954 was “gramemic”, which was in 1958 renamed “tagmemic”. Both terms are carry-overs from Leonard Bloomfield who first used the term “gramemic” to denote a bound morpheme (Tomori, 1977: 1-9). Kenneth Pike, Longacre,

Walter and Cook borrowed the term and used it to denote a functional form, for instance, noun, verb, phrase, etc. (Walter & Cook, 1969; Longacre, 1964). It could be referred to as a “slot and filler” mm (Asiyanbola, 2012: 31-32). Tagmemic grammarians also introduced the idea of allotagmas which refers to the variants of fillers that fill each function. Equally, they propounded another theory called matrix mapping technique (MMT) which could be used alternatively with the Transformational Generative Grammar.

2.1.4 Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG)

Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) is based essentially on the rules that specify well-formed strings of minimal syntactically functioning units which assigns structural information of various kinds to those strings and to strings that deviate from the well-formedness in a certain respect (Asiyanbola, 2012:33). Chomsky (1965) sub-categorizes Transformational Generative Grammar into context-sensitive as opposed to context-free and selectional rules involving componential analysis of the noun phrases (NPs) in a string. Tomori (1977) says phrase structural grammar analyses utterances in terms of their syntactic constituents.

2.1.5 Systemic/Functional Grammar (SFG)

Systemic Functional Grammar is a functional approach to language use in which the purposes of language use are deciphered through speaking, listening, reading and writing are verified (Asiyanbola, 2012: 49-50). So, the main pivots of Systemic Functional Grammar are that a particular clause can be viewed or assessed as a process (ideational function). It can as well be viewed as a speech act (interpersonal function) and textual meaning analysis.

2.2 Linguistic Approach: Stylistics

Stylistics was developed in the twentieth century and aims at showing how linguistic features of a text, such as the grammatical structure of sentences, contribute to overall meanings and their effects (Barry 2002). Matthew (1997) defines stylistics as the study of the style of language use. Dare (1991: 59) also defines stylistics as a discipline devoted to the systematic, methodical and scientific study of style. Hence, stylisticians identify how different structures combine to form meaning in a text. Crystal & Davy (1980), writing on “the concern of Stylistics” believe that stylistician, ideally, knows three things or features which linguistically untrained people do not: a stylistician is aware of the kind of structure which language has, and thus, the kind of features which might be expected to be of stylistic significance; he/she is aware of the kind of social variation which linguistic features tend to be identified with, and he/she has a technique of putting these features down on a paper in a systematic way to display their internal patterning to a maximal effect (12-13). Linguistic Stylistics, according to Halliday (1976) is an application; it is the only way to ensure the theoretical validity of a statement. Clark (2005) sees the current concerns of stylistics as a set of complementary and mutually dependent strands of interpretive practice:

[t]hat which is concerned with the formal and linguistic properties of the text as an isolated item in the word; that which refers to the points of contact between a text, other texts and their readers/listeners; that which positions the text and the consideration of its formal and psychological elements within a socio-cultural and historical context (Clark, 2005: 1).

So, practical stylistics involves close reading of the verbal texture of texts; and its basic practice (Widdowson, 1975, 1992). This process makes submissions on a text retrievable and recoverable and allows people to agree or disagree. While, on the other hand, Wales (2001: 373) says that “Stylistics is only ‘objective’ in the sense of being methodical, systematic, empirical, analytical, coherent, accessible, retrievable and consensual”.

2.3 The Grammatical Model

The grammatical model for this study is Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) following Halliday’s initiation in 1964 and as modified in 2014. This grammatical model was chosen because it accounts for different functions of the language features as it affects human communication; it equally describes events and is thus found relevant to the work. So, the researchers apply this form of grammar to this study by identifying the grammatical features permeating the data and relating them to the socio-political context of the text.

2.4 Aim and Objectives

This study aimed to investigate the role of grammar in the stylistic analysis of Niyi Osundare’s open letter to President Jonathan. The objectives are to

- i. identify prominent grammatical components in the letter;
- ii. analyse the identified grammatical components in the letter; and,
- iii. relate the identified grammatical components to the context of the text to decipher the inherent messages of the letter.

2.5 Scope of Study

The open letter contains 9 paragraphs. However, only the last paragraph of the letter which he wrote on January 31, 2015 was considered for this study. This was done to save room for an in-depth analysis of the text. Besides, this is the portion of the text that contains its main message.

2.6 Method of Data Analysis

The selected data, that is, the last paragraph of Niyi Osundare’s Open Letter to President Jonathan contains 10 sentences. So, for easy classification and analysis, a code was developed as follows:

(S1) Mr President, your party, the PDP, has ruled Nigeria for over 15 years now; it has established an unconscionable control over all the levers of power.

(S2) You will scatter this country if you allow them to use that power to disadvantage the other parties.

(S3) The major cause of Nigeria’s electoral fiasco is the refusal of the ruling party (at national and state levels) to allow a peaceful change of power.

(S4) That kind of civilized democratic transition is often seen as a sign of weakness.

(S5) And when the ruling party makes peaceful change impossible that way, it invariably makes violent change inevitable.

(S6) Please don’t make a mockery of the “I” (standing for “Independent”) in INEC.

(S7) Let victory go to whichever party the Nigerian people choose to embrace.

(S8) Again, as I told one of your predecessors at this kind of electoral juncture a couple of years ago, please remember there is life after power.

(S9) Let us do everything to circumvent the 2015 apocalypse.

(S10) Make sure History does not write you down as the last President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Source:

<http://secure.saharareporters.com/.../letter-president-jonathan-niyi-osundare>

To exhibit the role of grammar in stylistic analysis of the text, the main pivots or metafunctions of the Systemic Functional Grammar which are **Ideational Meaning Analysis [IDMA]**, **Interpersonal Meaning Analysis [INMA]** and **Textual Meaning Analysis [TMA]** are applied to the analysis of the data. Hence, the major components of each of the metafunctions are as follows:

IDMA: The major component is transitivity.

INMA: The major component is mood.

TMA: The major component is thematic structure.

Equally, in the identification and analysis of the grammatical components, these grammatical components are identified:

S signifies **Subject**

A signifies **Adjunct**

P signifies **Predicator**

C signifies **Complement [intensive/ extensive]**

Conj. signifies **Conjunction**

3. Analysis of the Data

S **P** **C^{extensive}** **A**

S1: Mr. President|, your party, the PDP| has ruled |Nigeria| for over 15 years now

The transitivity analysis of the predicator “**has ruled**” shows that **S1** encodes a process that takes place in a physical environment. So, **S1** uses a material process “**has ruled**” with the agent “**your party, the PDP**” as the sole participant, and “**Nigeria**” as the affected and this equally is accompanied by the circumstantial adjunct of time “**for 15 years now**” which all are used to call the attention of Mr President to know how long his party, has been ruling the country, Nigeria. The indicative mood of the predicator is non-modalised; the finite is in the present perfective auxiliary “**has**”; the remaining part of the sentence is the residue. Also, the thematic structure, “**Mr. President**” is the Theme and the rest of **S1** now functions as the Rheme. “**Mr. President**” which refers to Dr. Goodluck Jonathan singles out the addressee, from among his party members because the matter concerns him most. Hence, **S1** implies that if Mr President who is representing his party loses the forthcoming General Election, he should accept willingly because his party has been ruling the country for over 15 years.

S **P** **C^{extensive}** **A**

It| has established| an unconscionable control |over all the levers of power.

The transitivity analysis of the predicator “**has established**” depicts a material process with the agent “**It**” and “**an unconscionable control**” as the affected, accompanied by circumstantial adjunct of

place **“over all the levers of power.”** The predicator is a non-modalised indicative mood while the finite is comprehended in the present perfective auxiliary **“has”**; and, the remaining part of the sentence is the residue. **“It”** is the Theme and the rest of **S1** is the Rheme. The Rheme informs Mr. President that his political party, PDP is becoming objectionable by Nigerians. Hence, Mr. President should accept without grudges.

S **P** **Cextensive** **A**

S2: You| will scatter| this country| if you allow them to use that power to disadvantage the other parties

The transitivity analysis of the predicator (verbal group) **“will scatter”** depicts a material process with the agent **“You”** and **“this country”** as the affected, accompanied by the rankshifted circumstantial adjunct of condition **“if you allow them to use that power to disadvantage the other parties.”** The verbal group depicts an indicative modalised mood of intention or ability; the finite is exhumed in the present modal auxiliary **“will”**; while the rest of the sentence is the residue. **“You”** is the Theme while the other part of the sentence is the Rheme. The Rheme implies that Mr. President has the ability and the power to break Nigeria if he could allow his ruling party to frustrate the hopes of other parties in the forthcoming election. But, if on the other hand, he graciously accepts the result of the election, then Nigeria stands on the path of history. This, also, implies that power, if misused or abused, could engender crisis or chaos. However, if power is used positively, it could lead a nation into a path of glory.

S **P** **Cintensive**

S3: The major cause of Nigeria’s electoral fiasco| is | the refusal of the ruling party (at national and state levels) to allow a peaceful change of power.

The intransitivity analysis of the predicator **“is”** depicts a relational process with the agent or the carrier **“The major cause of Nigeria’s electoral fiasco”** and **“the refusal of the ruling party (at national and state levels) to allow a peaceful change of power”** as the identifier. The predicator depicts an indicative of non-modalised mood and the rest of the clause being the residue. The mood is fused in the present progressive auxiliary verb **“be”**. The subject of the clause which is a topical theme **“The major cause of Nigeria’s electoral fiasco”** is the Theme of the sentence and the rest of the clause is the Rheme. So, both the Theme and the Rheme have the implicature that the major problem of electoral processes is the refusal of PDP (the ruling party) to allow a peaceful change of power. And, Mr President is thus being counselled not to align with the PDP proposal of truncating the election; but he should make sure he accepts willingly the outcome of the election.

S **P** **A**

S4: That kind of civilized democratic transition| is often seen| as a sign of weakness.

The passivisation and the discontinuous intransitivity of the predicator **“is often seen”** is of the mental process; it takes place in the cerebral domain with **“civilized democratic transition”** accompanied by a circumstantial adjunct of manner **“as a sign of weakness.”** The mood of the predicator is non-modalised. And, the finite predicator **‘is’** is in the present progressive auxiliary verb **“be”**; the rest of the

clause is the residue. The syntactic structure has the components (SPA) which constitutes a topical theme. In this case, the subject (S) component is the Theme and the rest of the clause is the Rheme. The writer uses the features of this structure to appeal to Jonathan not to use his power to spoil the chance(s) of others; he should allow the election to be free and fair.

Conj. A S A

S5: And | when the ruling party makes peaceful change impossible that way| it |invariably|

P Cextensive CIntensive

makes| violent change |inevitable.

The transitivity of the predicator “**makes**” is a material process that takes place in a physical environment. The agent is “**it**” and the affected is “**violent change**” being intensified by an adjective “**inevitable**”; accompanied by a rankshifted circumstantial adjunct of time “**when the ruling party makes peaceful change impossible that way**” and an adjunct of manner respectively “**invariably.**” The mood of the predicator is indicative which is non-modalised. And, the mood is made up of the subject and the fused finite which is in the inflected singular predicator “**makes**”. The other elements of the clause constitute the residue. The Theme is the conjunction “**and**”, and the rest of the clause is the Rheme. This syntactic structure is used to appeal to President Jonathan not to allow his party to change the election result as this could engender violence. So, he should accept the outcome of the election as it is.

A P Cextensive

S6: Please| don't make | a mockery of “I” (standing for “Independent”) in INEC.

The transitivity of the discontinuous predicator “**don't make**” is of material process, and could take place in a physical environment. It does not have an agent, but the affected is “**a mockery of the “I” (standing for “Independent”)** in INEC because the mood is imperative. So, the mood is in the emphatic auxiliary predicator “**do**”; and the remainder of the clause is the Residue. The Theme of the clause is “**Please**” and the rest of the clause is the Rheme. This implies that the writer uses the Rheme to appeal to Mr. President to allow the elections to be conducted freely and fairly with the implicature that Mr. President should not override the outcome of the election.

P C P A

S7: Let| victory| go| to whichever party the Nigerian people choose to embrace.

The transitivity of the “**let**” imperative predicator is of a material process which takes place in the physical environment. It does not have an agent, but the affected is “**victory**”. The mood is imperative which is exhumed in the “**Let imperative clause**”. The remainder of the clause is the Residue. The Theme of the clause is “**Let**”, and the rest of the clause is the Rheme. This implies that the writer uses the let imperative clause to appeal to Mr. President to allow Nigerians to make their choice and that he should accept whatever comes out of it. The use of the let imperative clause further indicates that it is the democratic right of Nigerians to elect whoever they want, and so, President has no choice.

A A

S8: Again| as I told one of your predecessors at this kind of electoral juncture a couple of

A P S P C^{intensive}
years ago| please |remember |there| is| life after power.

The transitivity of the predicator “remember” is of mental process which takes place in the cerebral domain. It does not have an agent, but the affected is “there is life after power”. The mood is imperative identified in the bare form of the verb “remember” accompanied by the circumstantial adjunct of time “again”, and rankshifted circumstantial adverbial clause of comparison “as I told one of your predecessors at this kind of electoral juncture a couple of years ago”. The rest of the clause is the Residue. The Theme of the clause is “again” and the rest of the clause is the Rheme. The Rheme is semantically used to appeal to Mr. President that he should never forget that whenever he leaves the office, he will automatically become an ordinary citizen afterwards.

P C^{ext} P C^{extensive}

S9: Let| us| do| everything to circumvent the 2015 apocalypse.

The transitivity of the predicator “let” is a material process that can take place in the physical environment. It does not have an agent, but the affected is the complement “us”. The mood is imperative which is exhumed in the “Let imperative clause”. The rest of the clause is the Residue. The Theme of the clause is “Let”, and the rest of the clause is the Rheme. This implies that the writer uses the theme let to appeal to Mr

President to allow the Nigerians collaboratively avoid the impending doom.

P S -P Cext P+ A

S10: Make sure| History |does not write| you | down |as the last President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The transitivity of the discontinuous predicator “does not write down” is of material process. Hence, it takes place in the physical environment. The agent is “History” which is introduced by an imperative expression “make sure that”; and the affected is “you” accompanied by a circumstantial adjunct of manner “as the last President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”. The indicative mood is non-modal. The finite is in the emphatic singular auxiliary “does” and the rest of the clause is the Residue. The Theme is “make sure” which projects an imperative mood and the rest of the clause is the Rheme. This imposes directive on Mr. President not to tamper with the outcome of the election. Mr. President should know that Nigeria is not destined to end in chaos.

4. Discussion of Findings

The grammatical analysis of the speech reveals how grammatical components of sentences like subject, predicator are used to package meanings and to project the messages of the text. The analysis further shows that it is in the transitivity that the highest number of differences occurs. The table below shows the number of the process types for the 10 sentences:

Table 1:

| Process Types | Sentence Number(s) | Occurrences | Percentages (%) |
|---------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Material | 1,2,5,6,7,9 & 10 | 8 | 73 |
| Relational | 3 | 1 | 09 |
| Mental | 4 & 8 | 2 | 18 |
| Total | --- | 11 | 100 |

All the predicators in the material process are encoded in active voice while the verbal group in the relational process is in an intensive relationship; hence the relational process expressed the way things are within the sentence (S3) showing the relationship between the entities or giving their properties. From the mental process, the verbal group in sentence 4 is encoded in the passive voice, consequently, making the affected to appear in the subject/agent position. Therefore, the affected expresses the physical entities of the study and the verbal group in sentence 8 is encoded in commanding voice and consequently concealing the subject of the sentence. So, the sentences as a whole have 8 circumstantial adjuncts as in:

Table 2:

| Kinds of Adjunct | Sentence Number(s) |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Time | 1,5 & 8 |
| Place | 1 |
| Condition | 2 |
| Manner | 4,5 & 10 |

The three occurrences of the circumstantial adjunct of time indicated in the extract simply show that the moment of the impending election is very important and needs careful attention. Also, the three reacted circumstantial adjuncts of manner suggest the manner President Jonathan reacts to the outcome of the election in Nigeria

based on the advice given to him. The mood feature shows that the mood element in the first six sentences, that is, S1 to S6 are indicative while the last five sentences, that is, S6 to S10 are imperative.

Also, the imperative mood is used by the writer to indirectly impress it on Mr. President that he should not make Nigeria to disintegrate. The use of the declarative suggests that the writer believes that if the President could adhere to the writer's appeal, then Nigeria would definitely progress even after the election. In addition, it is also noted that S2 has 1 modal finite in the material process. S1, S3 and S10 have one (1) each non-modal and non-fused finite in material processes. S5 has one (1) non-modal, but fused finite in the material process. Also, S5 has one (1) non-modal finite in mental process. And, sentences 6, 7 and 9 have imperative moods in the material process, while S8 has an imperative mood in the mental process.

It also impresses it on Mr. President not to make Nigeria disintegrate. And, the analysis of the thematic structure shows that there are no interpersonal themes in the sentences. However, there are textual themes in S5 and S8, while the rest of the 10 sentences have topical themes. But, S1 has a marked theme, that is, a topical theme which does not function as a Subject. This marks the theme as vocative. Hence, it is suggested that Mr President should not make the election personal but make it free and fair.

5. Conclusion

The linguistic stylistic study of this write-up reveals the role of grammar in the analysis of this political text: *Niyi Osundare's Open Letter to President Goodluck Jonathan*. This study, thus, proves that grammar plays a relevant role in the stylistic analysis of texts. The analysis shows that the three metafunctions of Systemic Functional

Grammar are deployed to project the message of the text which is to appeal to President Jonathan to willingly and unconditionally accept the outcome of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria.

These messages as identified in the Letter are not only significant but distinctive. The distinctive features are realized from the peculiar grammatical features that highlight the author's style. Therefore, it could be averred that the peculiar style of Niyi Osundare makes the messages of the Letter not only understandable but relevant in communicating the various issues happening in the country in respect to the General Elections.

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