

**POSTCOLONIAL READING OF WOLE SOYINKA'S THE LION
AND THE JEWEL AND JEAN PLYYA'S LA SECRÉTAIRE
PARTICULIÈRE**

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ABSTRACT:

In literary criticism, both the context and the content of a given text; speech, graph, image, or picture are essential. It is the totality of these two elements that pave the way for a better understanding of any given text. Hence, since the purpose of every communication or speech act is comprehension, this study examines the stylistic profile of Wole Soyinka and Jean Pliya in *The Lion and the Jewel* (1964) and *La secrétaire particulière* (2001) respectively. The study adopts the French 'explication de texte' technique as its methodology to carry out a textual analysis of the two selected plays. As a theoretical framework, the study uses Edward Said and Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial theory which interrogates the effects of the interactions between the centre and the margin with the view to reconstructing the worldview on matters of history, race, identity, and culture. Findings reveal that in resisting colonial domination and imposition, the two African playwrights take advantage of linguistic manipulations in the composition of their literary texts. With the application of transliteration, direct translation, proverbs, figures of speech, allusions, lexical borrowing, and grammatical and phonemic corruption, the writers are able to foreground their intention to post-colonialize and *africanize their* literary works.

Keywords: Context, Content, Postcolonial theory, Deconstruction, Stylistics

1. Introduction

The choice of Wole Soyinka and Jean Pliya, two African playwrights, is informed by the fact that they have an inclination towards the deconstruction of the colonial principles in their works in terms of context and content. A text, whether verbal or non-verbal, is constructed within a situational context and a cultural context. It is, however, expressed in a given language. J. R. Firth and Malinowski perceive meaning as a “function in context” (Kamalu, 2018: p. 71). This implies that the situation in which an expression is made determines its meaning which also has to bear with the cultural indices surrounding the utterance in question. Both the context of the situation and the context of culture are traits of a writer’s style. A writer’s diction, registers, grammatical structures, and innovations result in his style.

Style is a reflection of someone’s personality. Someone, in this context, could be a writer or a speaker. Personality should be read in this situation as the mentalistic and sociocultural aspects of oneself. Style is the manner of writing or speaking by an individual. African writers’ contacts with their native and other cultures either formally or informally have contributed to their robust style of writing. Commenting on Wole Soyinka, Tanure Ojaide (1994) cited by Tunji Azeez (2001: p. 301) asserts:

His knowledge of Yoruba literature; ...demonstrates his profound knowledge of Yoruba myths and worldviews. To Soyinka, “the African World” is synonymous with the Yoruba World: hence references to his traditional African influences are essentially Yoruba.

Suffice it to say that the worldview of an African writer, irrespective of whichever village, town, tribe, or nationality he/she comes from, can be considered, by extension, as an African worldview and their understanding of the cosmos.

The word stylistics is derived from the combination of two words, namely; Style and linguistics. Stylistics can be simply explained as the study of the language of literature (Michael Toolan, 1996: viii; Pushpinder Syal and Jindal, 2010). In other words, stylistics deals with how meanings are formed through language in literary texts. Paul Simpson (2014: p. 3) is of the view that “stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language”. Language, which can also be regarded as linguistic code, allows its users to demonstrate their experiences, imagination, and knowledge of their natural and sociocultural world. Apart from its communicative function, language has other roles. Stefan Sonderling (2009: p. 88) asserts that “language is not a simple medium for communication but is a powerful and complex social communication system that requires better understanding.” One could

therefore, contend that stylistics studies the ways fictional, non-fictional, and visual resources, as well as discourses, pass across different meanings to their readers, listeners or viewers. There is practically an interrelationship between stylistics and the context of a text; spoken or written. Paul Simpson (2014: p. 3) remarks:

...stylistics is interested in language as a function of texts in context, and it acknowledges that utterances (literary, technical, or scientific) are produced in a time, a place, and in a cultural and cognitive context. These ‘extra-linguistic’ parameters are inextricably tied up with the way a text ‘means’. The more complete and context-sensitive the description of the language is the fuller the stylistic analysis that accrues.

Relying on Simpson’s assumption it is believed that situational and cultural contexts determine an author’s linguistic choices and meanings therein. For the purpose of communicating effectively his/her beliefs, ideologies, and emotions to readers and/or listeners, stylistics and stylisticians are concerned about the writer or the speaker’s linguistic choices. Reflecting on the application of stylistics, Ikenna Kamalu (2018: p. 17) notes:

...stylistic approaches can be and have been employed to study non-fictional or non-literary texts like advertising, academic writing, political speeches, news reporting, and other semiotic regimes such as TV and pictorial advertising, film, multimodal publications, ...

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the stylistic approach is capable of investigating different texts; literary or otherwise. However, at all times, stylisticians who work on postcolonial texts pay serious attention to the peculiarities of language features like lexis, grammar, semantics, morphology, phonetics, phonology, figurative expressions as well as graphology among others. This is one of the reasons for paying attention to the stylistic elements employed by the two selected writers in their chosen plays.

The choice of Wole Soyinka and Jean Pliya, is informed by the fact that they have an inclination towards the deconstruction of the colonial principles in their works in terms of context and content.

2.Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study is premised on the Postcolonial theory as perceived by Edward Said and Homi Bhabha (1978; 1994). Their perception of literature and society is guided by how a particular creative writer and his/her context capture the colonial historical experiences, how they beat through the experiences, and then design a new way of life in an attempt to decode the world both in its past and present nature. Said and Homi’s postcolonial theories explore the wider interactions between the West (Europe) and the colonized nations. The postcolonial theory also concerns itself with subjects like the issues of

identity, civilization, and class struggle. Identity, as used here, connotes race, history, culture, language, and core values among other things. With its intention to deconstruct the colonial tendencies and principles, Postcolonial theory, having attempted to comprehend the root cause(s) of colonialism and its adverse effects on the colonized, tries to reconstruct issues of identity and culture around the world. The choice of postcolonial theory in this study is informed by the fact that it will enable stylisticians to understand how and why a given author has adopted particular situational and cultural contexts in the construction of his/her literary work. The study adopts a quantitative research approach which is based on close reading techniques. It carries out a survey of the contexts and the contents of the two selected plays to identify linguistic features in them and thereby produce a descriptive analysis of the stylo-linguistic elements. The purpose of choosing the two texts is to establish the application of linguistic postcolonialism in African texts, whether such a text is written in English or French language.

3. Discussion and analysis of linguistic features in Wole Soyinka's *The lion and the jewel* and Jean Pliya's *La secrétaire particulière* as Postcolonial Writings

This part of the article examines six linguistic features in the two selected plays and discusses the findings. The six features are transliteration and direct translation, elements of orality, lexical borrowing, figures of speech, allusions, and grammatical/ phonemic corruptions. Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* henceforth "LJ" is originally written in English while Jean Pliya's *La secrétaire particulière (Confidential Secretary)* is originally written in French henceforth "SP" in this article. Since the colonial era, many African creative writers were committed to the defense, maintenance or sustenance, and promotion of African cultural heritage. For instance, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ousmane Socé, David Diop, Ferdinand Oyono, Camara Laye, Sembène Ousmane, Ahmadou Kourouma, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'O, and Chinua Achebe among others celebrated African cultures. They also fearlessly confronted the "mission civilisatrice" tendencies of the colonialists. The African writers have demonstrated that Africans have cultures, minds, senses, and feelings. Through the contexts (language usage; formation of words, structural patterns, and deviations) and contents (messages and their meanings) of their literary creativities, they have proved that African cultures and traditional values are not in any way inferior to the Western cultures and civilizations.

Based on the backdrop of the foregoing facts, with the use of words, expressions, and other paralinguistic properties, the two selected playwrights, Soyinka and Pliya, address the issue of cultural

conflict between Africa and Europe in *The Lion and the Jewel* and *La secrétaire particulière* respectively. In their genuine efforts to communicate with their audience, especially their fellow Africans, the writers decolonized both English and French languages in the best ways they could. Transliteration, direct translation, elements of orality, lexical borrowing, figures of speech, allusions, and grammatical and phonemic corruptions are stylistic elements that shall be considered to demonstrate the linguistic postcolonialism in the selected literary texts.

3.1 Use of Transliteration and Direct Translation

The act of replacing words or expressions in a particular language with the alphabet of another language is described as transliteration. It is not the same as translation. Simply put, translation is putting the message in a given language, say language X into another language Y. While language X can be said to be the source language in which the message is originally presented, language Y is the target language to which the message is transferred. In translation, emphasis is on the message or the content of a given script. However, direct translation is translating word for word without considering the peculiarities in each of the languages that are involved in the translation process.

One might not arrive at a good translation if certain factors such as structural patterns, word formations, and cultural and extra-linguistic parameters are not considered. In an attempt to get the attention of their audience on the one hand, and for their audience too to understand their subjects, on the other hand, many African writers make use of transliteration and direct translation in their literary compositions. They deconstruct the original English or French language through the technique of transliteration cum direct translation. In the two selected plays, the two African playwrights play on and around these writing techniques.

Examples of the use of transliteration and direct translation in the selected plays are:

- a) *to husband his wives* (**LJ**, p. 47). It implies being a worthy bed partner to his wives. The word husband which is primarily a noun is verbalized in this context which also indicates a form of creativity.
- b) *my beard tells me* (**LJ**, p. 47). It means I know from experience.
- c) *child of my thoughts* (**LJ**, p. 49). This can be translated as a product of my thinking.
- d) *Les murs ont des oreilles* (**SP**, p. 39). It means the walls have ears. This is an expression of warning for someone to be careful or take caution, especially when discussing a third party or a sensitive issue because no one can tell whether someone else is listening or watching.

- e) *qui ne risque rien, n'a rien* (SP, p.37). It means he who does not risk anything will have nothing. The expression educates men and women to take risks when necessary because it is believed that life itself is a risk.
- f) *wet for your pains* (LJ, p. 1). It means serves you right.
- g) *break the jungle's back* (LJ, p. 24). It connotes cutting through the thickest part of the jungle.

Through the use of transliteration and direct translation, as demonstrated in the examples above, it is clear that Africans are neither robots nor *table rase*. They are human beings; highly creative and original in their own ways. They have minds of their own. Another reason for the use of the two writing techniques under discussion is the poor level of Western education acquired by the majority of Africans. Hence, the writers have to come down to the level of the African audience in the use of their words and in the construction of their sentences. Soyinka and Pliya have expressed the African worldview and mode of perception as regards certain issues with the help of those expressions that are transliterated or directly translated.

3.2 Use of Elements of Orality

It is believed that the foundation of every piece of literature around the world is oral literature because man knows how to talk or communicate verbally before he acquires writing skills. Some African writers buy into the use of elements of orality like proverbs, traditional songs, and other folkloric expressions to lace their writings. A proverb, for example, is an expression that captures a fundamental truth and can be adopted in situations. According to Cornelius Gulere (2000: 3):

Proverbs and riddles are some of the commonly applied forms of orature in day-to-day communications among serious-minded people. Whether in song, story recital, or statement, they make a person wiser, more sociable, happier, and more respectable in society.

In simple terms, a proverb can be said to be an adage, an enigma, a maxim, a parable, or a sententia that can be associated with a familiar illustration.

The instances below are some of the stylo-linguistic features that explain the application of certain elements of orality in LJ and SP.

- a) *If the tortoise cannot tumble / It does not mean that he can stand* (LJ, p.42). This saying suggests that if you have not lost something does not mean that you will win.
- b) *When the child is full of riddles, the mother / Has one water-pot less* (LJ, p.42). This implies that if you speak the way you do, then you must have an advantage you are keeping to yourself.

- c) *Until the fingernails / Have scraped the dust, no one can tell / Which insect released his bowels* (LJ, p.43). This utterance denotes that unless we put it to the test, we will not know. In other words, seeing is believing.
- d) *Quand le chat est parti, la souris danse* (SP, p. 39). It implies when the cat is not around, the rat dances, or in the absence of a cat, rats take over the house.
- e) *Quand on a un parent sur le pommier, on est sur de ne pas manger des pommes vertes* (SP, p. 67). This proverb captures the African worldview and belief orientation that when you have someone in authority, you cannot suffer.
- f) *Il faut battre le fer quand il est chaud* (SP, p. 73). This expression points out that a stitch in time saves nine and that one should not wait till the eleventh hour before doing what is needed regarding an issue. The use of traditional songs is another element of orality and style in African literature. In Wole Soyinka's play, the following native songs are used:
- i) *N' ijo itoro, Amuda el'ebe l'aiya.* and *Gbe je on'ipa* (LJ, p. 24). These are songs used to mock the warders and for fun. They can be literarily translated as they drunk palm wine; thick-chested hostage-taking agents and hold your peace, baton-wielder.
 - ii) *Yokolu Yokolu. /Ko ha tan bi / Iyawogb'oko san'le / Oko yo 'ke.* It is a funny Yoruba song that implies Hurray! Hurray! See how the wife has thrown the husband. And now, he has got a hunchback (LJ, p. 44)
 - iii) *Hei-ei-wo-rah!* (LJ, p. 46). This utterance is a cry to chase animals out of their hiding places. The playwright as a hunter reflects possibly on one of his hunting adventures to re-enact an African experience.

Elements of orality such as proverbs, traditional songs, and other folkloric utterances are used by African writers to connect their literary works with the cultural realities of their place. Such elements are indeed crucial local content properties. In addition, the use of these cultural intangible items of orality in African texts, as portrayed by Wole Soyinka and Jean Pliya, is intended to showcase, protect, sustain, and promote African culture. This also concerns the question of racial identity.

3.3 Application of Lexical Borrowing

This is a situation whereby a writer makes use of some words from another language different from a particular language he/she has adopted as the mode of discourse. Rachael Bello (2001: p. 97) has this to say about the lexical process:

These are means by which a language enriches itself. Firstly, a language needs to enrich itself by expanding its lexis to remain alive.

Secondly, new forms have to be borrowed or adopted to keep abreast of inventions in fields such as science, technology, and industry. The English lexicon (and other languages like French) is made up of many borrowed items. Examples are chef, alcohol, gari, restaurant, etc.

The use of lexical borrowing in the selected plays, especially Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* is, therefore, not out of place. However, apart from enriching the English lexicon, the African writer has applied lexical borrowing to post-colonialize his text and decolonize the minds of his fellow Africans as well as send a message to the colonial masters.

The following lexical items are examples of lexical borrowing in Soyinka's play: *odan* tree = the Yoruba word for a banyan tree (**LJ**, p. 1), *belle* = a French word for a beautiful girl (**LJ**, p. 1), *Bale* = the traditional ruler in Yoruba land (**LJ**, p. 11), *gangan* = the Yoruba talking drum (**LJ**, p. 15), *Kabiyesi* = a Yoruba salutation for a king (**LJ**, p. 16), *Akowe* or *Alakowe* = a literate person (**LJ**, p. 16), *Sango* = Yoruba god of thunder (**LJ**, p. 23), *Oyayi* = an exclamation of intense pleasure (**LJ**, p. 31), *Adogan* = a traditional fireplace of three stones/stands on which pots are placed for cooking (**LJ**, p. 55) and *sekere* = a traditional Yoruba musical instrument with a net of beads mounted round the body of an empty gourd. It is played by striking the beads against the gourd with the fingers and the palms (**LJ**, p. 61).

With the application of lexical borrowing which often results in code-mixing or code-switching, such as *teacher wa* (our teacher, **LJ**, p.16) and *Chief Baseje* (head of destroyers, **LJ**, p. 16), the writer is able to inject local colours to his discourse. One could, therefore, attest that lexical borrowing is an essential element of style, particularly for authors of postcolonial literature. However, Pliya does not probably fancy the use of lexical borrowing in his play under review.

3.4 Application of Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are connotative expressions that provide imagery and/or concrete pictures of ideas. Similes, metaphor, irony, hyperbole, personification, oxymoron, synecdoche, and alliteration are examples of figures of speech. They are also called rhetorical figures (Ogundokun, 1997: p. 36). Through the use of figurative expressions, writers are able to form mental pictures in the readers' minds.

The dominant figure of speech employed in the two selected plays is a metaphor. A metaphor is a direct way of comparing two things of different classes based on the feature of similarity between the two things compared. Simply put, metaphor is saying one thing is another without the use of the word "like", "as" or any other possible lexical item. From the titles of the two plays, one can note the use of metaphor. In the metaphoric titles; Soyinka has metaphorized Baroka,

the village king as “the lion” and Sidi, the village’s beautiful girl as “the jewel”. Pliya, on his part, has drawn a symbolic representation of the character called Nathalie with the title *La secrétaire particulière* in his play.

Other examples of metaphor in the plays are: “...the devil’s own horse” = a car (LJ, p. 10), *one-eyed box* = a camera (LJ, p. 10), *unopened treasure-house* = body of an unspoiled maid, virginity. This is used to describe Sidi, the beautiful virgin girl in the story (LJ, p. 32).

Moreover, it is ironic that the stranger who came to Ilujinle did not give the expected prominence to the personality of Baroka, the traditional ruler in the production of his magazine. Instead, he placed the picture of the village belle, Sidi almost everywhere. The expression *Christians on my father’s shrines* (LJ, p. 42) indicates an ironic situation when something blasphemous happens. Christians are expected to be seen in the churches and not at the shrines. The author uses this particular expression to paint the coming of the Whites to Africa, especially the Europeans as unwanted and as an abomination. Similarly, it is paradoxical that Nathalie, the confidential secretary to M. Chadas could not pass the placement examination. “Nathalie, capable, si compétente, si dévouée a échoué” (SP, p. 79).

Again, *Ta tête dure comme caillou* = Your head is as hard as a stone (SP, p. 51) is an example of a simile while *Ces papiers me donnent mal à la tête* (SP, p.52) which means these papers are giving me a headache is a personification. The word “papers” is given an attribute of a person through the use of the verb “give”.

3.5 Exploring Allusions

An allusion is a hint or a reference to something which is expected to be known but in-explicitly mentioned. Allusion could be classic (a reference to ancient times, events, etc.); religious (a reference to personalities, places, and events in the holy books e.g., biblical allusion), or contemporary allusion – a reference to persons, places, and events in the modern time.

In this study, findings reveal that in their plays, Soyinka and Pliya employ allusion. On page 20 of his play, Soyinka makes reference to names like Ruth, Rachel, Esther, and Bathsheba used in the holy Bible. While Ruth, Rachel, and Esther are regarded as faithful women, Bathsheba is a symbol of evil because she married King David when Uriah, her husband, was sent to war in order to get him killed. This can be described as a biblical or religious allusion. The use of allusions have shown that the African writers, representing their people, are abreast events and beliefs in the Bible and around them. Hence, Africans are not inferior in their mental capacity when compared with other peoples of the world.

In his play, Pliya makes reference to the colonial era through his protagonist, M. Chadas when he says:

Ah! Quelle chaleur! L'intérieur d'un four serait plus agréable que ce bureau. Comment les administrateurs coloniaux avaient-ils pu rester dans notre pays sans climatiser? Leurs intérêts devaient bien être considérables pour qu'ils aient accepté d'y vivre si longtemps. Ah! ...Le franc C.F.A. (SP, p. 40)

M. Chadas, Pliya's main character in *La secrétaire particulière* laments how the colonial administrators endured the very hot temperature and harsh weather in the tropical region of Africa for so long if not for their selfish interests such as the love of money.

Another instance of allusion is when Le Militaire, the soldier man recounts his war experience during the World War II and other wars. He remarks: "*Ici présent ancien combattant, croix de guerre, ancien d'Indochine, d'Algérie, médaille militaire; numéro matricule 27.84.75. J'ai vu Paris, Versailles, soldat inconnu. Ah! 14 juillet à Paris*" (SP, p. 50). The kind of allusion employed in Pliya's *La secrétaire particulière* can be described as contemporary allusion. Places like Algeria, a country in Northwest Africa, and Paris, that the character mentioned still exist and are known to people.

3.6 Employment of Grammatical and Phonemic Corruptions

Grammar has to do with the rules and principles that guide the usage of a language. It deals with morphemes, words, phrases/groups, clauses, and sentences. Adebukunola Atolagbe (2001: p. 21) observes:

A phoneme is the smallest unit of language - the speech sound - which combines with other speech sounds, used for communication in a linguistic or speech community; it is contrastively meaningful.

Deviations from the norms and conventions that guide the structural formation of English and French at the levels of grammar and phonetics/phonology are regarded as grammatical and phonemic corruptions in this study.

There are sometimes certain difficulties in the realizations or productions of some phonemes by Africans as a result of language interference (a situation whereby the native language has an adverse effect on the pronunciations of English, French, or other foreign languages). For example, the English language and French language have more vowels than most native African languages. Hence, some English or French words are wrongly pronounced by Africans.

Furthermore, grammatical items that make up some sentences syntactically may be wrongly chosen and thereby turn such sentences ungrammatical. In postcolonial texts, some creative African writers intentionally apply this phenomenon to deconstruct the White man's language and give it a new design.

Premised on the backdrop of the issues above, Soyinka and Pliya employ grammatical and phonemic deviations as pertinent stylistic features in their plays under review. Examples of grammatical and phonemic deviations in Soyinka's *The lion and the jewel* and Pliya's *La secrétaire particulière* are given below:

The words “**Misita**” and “**Guru morin**” (LJ, p. 16), “**brabararian**” (LJ, p. 62) are the adulterated forms of Mister/Mr., Good morning, and barbarian respectively.

On page 50, utterances like “Ouvre bien **zieux**”, “...j'ai fait guerre contre **zallemands**” and “...toujours **rouspéter**” illustrate phonemic corruptions in Pliya's *La secrétaire particulière*. In the utterance, the speaker pronounces yeux as zieux; allemands as zallemands and instead of saying respecter, he says rouspéter.

Grammatical corruptions exist in the following sentences in Pliya's play “*Si les Blancs **revenir, moi retourner combat*** (SP, p. 51). There are at least three grammatical errors in this sentence. The verbs – **revenir** and **retourner** are not conjugated and the pronoun **moi** is inappropriate in the sentence. The sentence is supposed to be put as; Si les Blancs reviennent, je retourne combat or Si les Blancs reviennent, je vais retourner combat.

Other examples of wrong sentences are: *Merci chef. Moi venir demander travailler. Depuis **démobilization moi rien faire, moi chômage complet**...* (SP, p. 54). These sentences should be written as: **Merci chef, je voudrais demander un emploi. Depuis ma **démobilisation, je n'ai rien fait. Je suis complètement au chômage.****

As a matter of fact, these errors are put in the text on purpose by the author with the view to deconstruct and reconstruct the French language of the colonial master. This is possible by deviating from the standard form of a particular language as handed down to Africans by the native speakers, the colonial masters.

4. Conclusion

The use of stylistic approaches in the analysis of texts allows stylisticians to explain how and why a text is what it is and why it produces certain interpretations. The study has provided insight into how and why many African creative writers explore certain elements of style in their literary works. The study demonstrates that Wole Soyinka and Jean Pliya in their plays *The Lion and the Jewel* and *La secrétaire particulière* respectively employ transliteration, direct translation, lexical borrowing, proverbs, native songs, allusions, and grammatical and phonemic corruptions on purpose, particularly to reflect the situational and cultural contexts of their stories. In fact, they are able to reconstruct the Western mentality about Africans having deconstructed and decolonized the European idea of “*civilisatrice*”. Hence, as stylisticians and practitioners of postcolonial

theory, it is evident that the selected plays can be described as postcolonial texts linguistically and in their message contents. Soyinka and Pliya have attempted to close the gap of inequality between the strong and the weak by condemning the superiority tendencies of the West, the perceived oppressor. The two African playwrights also frown at the single narrative of the powerful imperialists.

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