

## LEXICO-STYLISTIC STUDY OF EMMANUEL ESEMEDAFE'S "THE SCHOOLDAYS OF EDORE"

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper is a Lexico-stylistic study of Emmanuel Esemedafe's "The Schooldays of Edores" and examines the socio-political system responsible for the excruciating poverty, pain and agony of the Niger Delta people and the Nigerian nation. The method of analysis is qualitative as well as descriptive and interpretative, employing M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and the concept under it as basis for the analysis. In this analysis, the researchers argue in line with the findings of the paper that the author's stylistic use of lexical items reveal the neglect of nation building the Nigerian political leaders.*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper examines critically Esemedafe's choice of lexical items, such as nouns, adjectives, adverbs etc. employed systematically to delineate Niger Delta people's woes caused by the socio-political system of Nigerian nation. In the words of Achebe "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (22). Achebe's words clearly reveal that the Nigerian politicians are absolutely callous and heartless, and responsible for the killing social conditions of the Niger Delta people and Nigerian nation. Relatively, Okuyade avers that "the despair and bureaucratic failure of African governments have created a permanent mood of depression for the African people" (1). The works of many literary writers like novelists have stylistically explored the socio-political and historical life of the people. Also, literary texts make judicious use of language to explicate issues plaguing the Nigerian nation. Novelists employ language to unfold messages of enormous importance to the reading population. Nutsukpo notes that "the significant role which language plays in literature cannot be overlooked. It is the vehicle through which the literary artist brings his vision and message to life and the mechanism by which the reader makes a personal connection with the literary work" (603). The words of Nutsukpo show the expressive nature of language in the human society.

Finally, many of the works on Esemedafe's novels have been on literary evaluation, and not linguistics. However, his novel evokes the interconnectedness of poverty, despair and social system the becloud the Niger Delta people and the Nigerian nation. This present study focuses on lexico-stylistic which is a crucial aspect of language.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/ LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many scholars perceive stylistics as the linguistic approach to literary works. Simpson remarks that "stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primary of place is assigned to language" (3). He adds that "...contemporary stylistics ultimately looks towards language as discourse: that is, towards a text's status as discourse, a writer's deployment of discourse strategies and towards the way a text "means" as a function of language in context" (8). Simpson stresses the primacy of language in achieving meaningful evaluation in any literary discourse. Similarly, Pushpinder and Jindal aver that "stylistic study provides clear evidence in the text, on the basis of which judgements can be made "(62). This puts the interpretation of a literary text on the linguistic resources employed to express ideas and meaning in the text. Moreover, Leech and Short consider stylistics as "the linguistic study of style...describing what use is made of language" (11).

Also, Jeffries and McIntyre remark that "the central concern of stylistics is with the style of particular texts, whether they are representative of a genre, an author, or themselves alone" (15). Relatively, Tomori reiterates the aforesaid that "there is style in everything we say; so style cannot be isolated from language itself; but it is a distinctive aspect of language" (53). It is clear from the above that style and stylistics cannot be parted. They are two in one and have afforded writers the capacity to carry out analyses at different level of language. Furthermore, the human language is an invaluable tool for defining every human society. It serves as the means for self-expression, and maintaining social cohesion. Also, language is the resources of literature. It is therefore, distinct from the scientific language. Obobolo remarks that "literary language is expressive. Literature contains thoughts and its language is emotional. This distinguishes literary language from scientific language which is denotative and aims at one-on-one correspondence between sign and its referent" (247). In lieu of the above, it is clear that words or expression in literary texts like novel emanate from the writer's imaginative power and mental construct.

The focus of this paper is on the lexico-stylistic aspect of language, and the theoretical framework selected for the analysis is the Systemic Functional Grammar by M.A.K. Halliday. This theory has been selected because of its sociological and functional basis. Halliday views as a systematic, meaning-making resource. Nwala notes that "in systemic functional grammar, language is conceived as 'a network of systems,' not just rules. The system makes the user to make choices" (94). However, Kamalu remarks that "fundamental to the claims is the understanding that language is a product of social system and therefore cannot be studied independent of its social and cultural context" (73). He adds that "...Halliday argues that the formal properties of language cannot be studied in isolation –it has to include its situational dimension" (73). This means that the theory (SFG) embraces the formal and situational dimensions of language delineation. Quoting Oguniji (2002:8), Kamalu notes that "the lexical, grammatical, phonological and/or graphological dimensions of language are accounted for at the formal level, while the situational variables of it are highlighted on the situational level" (73). Systemic Functional Grammar laces itself with meaning (semantic) and use (functional). In the words of Morley "...systemic formally incorporates a semantic functional dimension...it interprets a language as being an enormous systems network of meaning potential" (43).

Similarly, Kamalu avers that “Halliday’s work highlights the meaningfulness of linguistic elements. Halliday insists that meaning underlies linguistic forms and recognizes grammar and meaning as being co-existential...” (74). Meaning is extremely important in the use of language. Halliday did not distinguish meaning from grammar. He believes that grammar consist of meaning. In communication, meaning promotes the basis of language existence as a social instrument. Also, the functional aspect of language enables users explore invaluable functions in relationship with other users in linguistic context.

In Systemic Functional Grammar, Halliday draws up three semantic components known as the metafunction: ideational, which delineates the underlying content of an utterance. It is classified as experiential (to share ideas) and logical (connects the ideas on the same grounds); interpersonal, which is concerned with the interaction among language users and textual, which points to textual or graphological prearranged information. It is important to note that this paper employs the ideational and interpersonal components because they focus on the author’s stylistic use of lexical items, like nouns, adjectives, adverbs etc. to foreground meaning and aesthetics in the novel.

## **ANALYSIS**

Esemedafe’s stylistic use of words triggered myriads of issues, such as poverty, despair and social system brought upon the Niger Delta people and the Nigerian nation by the socio-political system of the Nigerian politicians. The words are:

Igbiri street was like many other streets in Warri.

Populated and usually busy, it curved out, and one could not stand at the beginning of it and see its end.

It had streetlights that never illuminated the nights.

The government installed the lights a few years ago.

They shone for a short while and, for some inexplicable reasons, went off indefinitely. For several years, things remained the same. The floor of the street was stony and bumpy, and several gaping holes spread through it.

There was no drainage system (10).

The pronoun “it” is used repeatedly at strategic places not only to stress the existence and location of the street but also to explicitly express the infrastructural decay of Igbiri. The qualifying adjectives and adverbs: “curved”, “never”, “illuminated” (the nights), (went-off) “indefinitely”, “several”, “years”, (things) “the same”, (floor) “stony” and “bumpy”, “gaping” (holes) and “drainage” (system) are stylistically employed to show the neglect of infrastructural development in the Niger Delta region. The lexical items above underpin the poor roads and the dearth of electricity in the Niger Delta communities. The absence of the above social amenities has birthed extreme poverty in the region. There are accessible roads, and power to stimulate businesses in the environment in which the common Niger Delta people live. The author’s lexical choices provide an insight into the poor living conditions of Deltans, and the abandonment of nation building by the Nigerian political leaders.

## **Lexico-stylistic study of Emmanuel Esemedafe's "The Schooldays of Edore"**

Also, in the excerpt:

Igho and Edore set out at 5: pm. Before they left, Erhumu instructed Edore on what he must do while hawking. He must not keep quiet; he must announce his wares at intervals. While Igho screamed, 'sweeeeetyaaaaam!' Edore must cry, 'fiiiiiineoiiiiil!' Before they set out, Erhumu asked him to rehearse and he screamed, 'fiiiiiineoiiiiil!' He was so raw that everyone laughed. As they left, the mothers wished them good luck and successful outing (54).

The author's words reveal the spread and existence of street urchins in the Niger Delta region. The lexical items, such as "hawking", "sweeeeetyaaaaam!", "fiiiiiineoiiiiil!" and "announce" evoke the large number of Niger Delta people living in absolute penury. The people are forced to the street by the economy plundered by the political leaders. Niger Delta region is blessed with rich natural mineral resources, yet the natives wallow in unending poverty. The people have to hawk, announce and scream their poor goods in order to avoid starvation.

Lastly, the author's employment of the lexical items in the excerpt below show that government owned hospitals in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta region are less concerned about the health of the people.

The patients who were waiting in front of Dr Dollars' office on the adjacent block were already becoming impatient and tired. Some cursed government hospitals and their ways.

'Na money nai no dey,' a woman regretted. 'If money dey I Know where I for go. I for no dey come here con see nonsense.

See where time dey, doctor never come hospital'. Those who were tired of sitting down stood up and paced up and down the corridor to pass the time (69).

The modifying adjectives and adverbs: (patients) "impatient and tired", "government" (hospitals), "nonsense", (doctors) "never" (come) etc. depict that the Niger Delta natives have no access to good health care. The words point to the fact that doctors in government hospitals have other jobs that make them shift attention from providing medical care for the people who are ill. Also, the political leaders have failed to spend more on health, leaving the Nigeria hospitals with less or no medical equipment. In the Niger Delta region, some communities have no hospitals. And those that have lack medical personnel and sophisticated facilities. This has wrapped most Niger Delta natives in poor health.

## **CONCLUSION**

Esemedafe's choice of words has systematically revealed how the Nigerian socio-political system orchestrated excruciating poverty, despair and untimely death of the Niger Delta people. The lexical items also show that the Nigerian political leaders are not bothered about the human and capital development of the Nigerian nation. It is all about "self" (political leaders) and "other" (the common Nigerians) syndrome which has shaped the common Nigerians deeply in the doldrums of extreme penury.

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