

A Stylistic Analysis of Phonological Poetic Devices in Selected Poems of Abba Gana Shettima

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive stylistic analysis of phonological poetic devices employed in selected poems by Abba Gana Shettima, a prominent and contemporary African poet. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of stylistics and phonology, the study explores the intricate interplay between sound patterns and poetic meaning in Shettima's works. Through a meticulous examination of phonological elements such as rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhythm, the paper elucidates how these devices contribute to the aesthetic appeal and thematic resonance of the poems. Furthermore, the analysis investigates the cultural and linguistic dimensions of Shettima's poetic language, considering its resonance with the socio-political context of Nigeria and its diverse linguistic landscape. By illuminating the phonological strategies employed by Shettima, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the poetic craft and cultural significance of his works, while also offering insights into the broader intersections between phonology, stylistics, and literary interpretation.

Key: Stylistics, phonology, semantics, poetic devices, poetry.

Introduction

Poetry, as a literary genre, encompasses a myriad of stylistic devices that transcend the mere conveyance of information, instead seeking to evoke emotions, provoke thought, and engage the senses of its audience. Among the arsenal or tools at a poet's disposal, phonological poetic devices stand out as particularly significant, serving to imbue verse with rhythm, musicality, and aesthetic resonance. Through the manipulation of sound patterns, poets craft a sonic landscape that complements and enriches the semantic content of their work, inviting readers to experience language in its most lyrical and expressive form.

Abba Gana Shettima, a notable contemporary Nigerian poet, emerges as a compelling figure within the landscape of African literature, whose works navigate the complexities of identity, history, and cultural heritage with nuance and depth. Hailing from the northeastern region of Nigeria, Shettima's poetry reflects the linguistic diversity and cultural richness of his homeland, while also engaging with universal themes that resonate across geographical and cultural boundaries. His verse, characterized by a blend of indigenous idioms, modernist sensibilities, and social commentary, offers a window into the complexities of Nigerian society and the human

condition at large.

The study of phonological poetic devices in the works of Abba Gana Shettima holds particular significance within the broader context of literary analysis and cultural studies. As scholars such as Eyoh (1998) assert, the examination of sound patterns and linguistic aesthetics in poetry provides valuable insights into the formal structures, thematic concerns, and socio-cultural resonances of literary works. By focusing on the phonological dimension of Shettima's poetry, this study aims to unravel the intricate interplay between sound and meaning, shedding light on the ways in which phonological devices contribute to the overall aesthetic experience and interpretive richness of his verse. Furthermore, the analysis of phonological poetic devices in Shettima's poetry offers an opportunity to engage with the rich tradition of oral poetry and performance that permeates Nigerian literary culture. As Adeeko (2012) observes, the oral tradition remains a vital source of inspiration and influence for contemporary Nigerian poets, shaping their stylistic choices, thematic concerns, and artistic sensibilities. Shettima's engagement with phonological devices can thus be seen as part of a broader continuum of literary practice that draws upon the sonic dimensions of language to evoke emotion, transmit cultural memory, and foster communal identity.

Moreover, the study of phonological poetic devices in Shettima's poetry contributes to ongoing conversations within the field of African literary studies regarding the formal innovations and thematic preoccupations of contemporary African poets. Scholars such as Diop (1986) argue for the importance of exploring the diverse stylistic strategies employed by African writers, highlighting the ways in which these strategies challenge conventional literary norms and offer alternative modes of expression. By examining the phonological aspects of Shettima's verse, this study adds to the growing body of scholarship on African poetics, offering new perspectives on the creative potential of language and the intersection of tradition and modernity in African literary

production.

In light of these considerations, this paper undertakes a stylistic analysis of phonological poetic devices in selected poems of Abba Gana Shettima. Through a close examination of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhythm, the analysis seeks to uncover the formal, thematic, and socio-cultural dimensions of Shettima's poetic language, while also situating his work within the broader context of Nigerian literature and the global poetic tradition. By elucidating the ways in which phonological devices contribute to the aesthetic and thematic richness of Shettima's verse, this study aims to deepen our understanding of his poetic craft and his contribution to the vibrant tapestry of African poetry.

Synopsis of the Selected Texts and the Author

Abba Gana Shettima, a poet, sociologist, and academic at the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, delve into poignant themes through his works. In "Kangale Kori," Shettima vividly recounts the harrowing experiences of the 1913-1914 drought and famine in Borno State, portraying the devastation wrought upon both people and animals. The term "Kangale Kori," coined from the Kanuri language, symbolizes the meager short stalks that epitomize the period of hunger and starvation. "Nightfall," another of Shettima's poems, explores the dichotomy of night as a time for rest for the virtuous and a cloak for nefarious activities perpetrated by robbers and criminals. Through vivid imagery, Shettima depicts the challenges faced by his community, urging authorities to address the issue of nocturnal insecurity. In "Nji," Shettima celebrates the significance of rainfall, or "Nji" in Kanuri, to the ecosystem, particularly in North-central Nigeria during the rainy season. Here, the poet underscores the pivotal role of rainfall in sustaining flora and fauna, highlighting the anticipation of farmers for bountiful rains to facilitate agricultural activities.

Transitioning from the poet's background and poem synopses, the study proceeds to data presentation, analysis, and findings. Employing a

descriptive analytical method, the research selectively samples data from the three poems. Purposive sampling, a non-probability technique in qualitative research, enables researchers to handpick samples based on specific characteristics deemed pertinent to the study's objectives. As Schutt (2015) notes, purposive sampling hinges on the researcher's judgment in selecting units that best serve the study's purpose, earning it the moniker "judgmental sampling." In this research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument for data collection, interpretation, and presentation, a role emphasized by Yoon and Uliassi (2022).

Literature Review

Stylistics, defined as the linguistic examination of style (Leech & Short, 1981), is employed in this study to explore the creative use of language in the texts and to understand not only which linguistic devices are employed but also how they are utilized by the author to convey messages and intentions, thereby enriching our understanding of literature (Simpson, 2004, p.3). In stylistics, analysts are interested not only in describing the language usage but also in understanding why authors choose particular expressions and how they achieve specific aesthetic effects through language (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 13). This reciprocal relationship between linguistic analysis and literary interpretation is considered a cyclic process, where linguistic observations stimulate or modify literary insights.

Poetic devices, also known as literary devices, are linguistic tools predominantly employed by poets to condense and creatively encode their messages. Tawfiq (2020, p.7) defines poetic devices as "elements of rhetoric relevant to the production of poetic language," which enrich language by imbuing a greater depth of meaning into fewer words (Wolowsky, 2001). Similarly, Harris (2005) and Sajo (2010) describe literary devices as rhetorical tools used by writers to enhance the effectiveness, clarity, and enjoyment of their writing. From these perspectives, poetic devices encompass a range of

techniques utilized in poetry and related texts to infuse language with power, clarity, creativity, and interest, thereby enhancing communication. Harris (2009, p. 2) suggests that poetic devices, also termed phonological devices, are utilized by writers to encode messages and showcase creativity in language use, operating at both phonological and semantic levels (Tawfiq, 2020, p. 17). Roach (2000) defines phonology as the study of how phonemes function in language and their relationships, emphasizing phonemic analysis as a fundamental aspect of phonology. The semantic level of phonological devices addresses meaning through metaphor, simile, personification, etc., while the phonological level encompasses the sound of a poem constructed through devices such as onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhyme. Various descriptions of these phonological devices are cited in Ogungbesan and Woolger (1978), Terry (2000), Harris (2009), Roach (2009), Khemka (2018), and Tawfiq (2020).

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound, mostly the first consonants of words or of stressed syllables in successive words. It is otherwise called "head rhyme". Khemka (2018) posits that alliteration is used to project meaning as well as reader's experience. An example can be drawn from an extract of the NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) news broadcast in the 2000s:

"From Kano to Kabah, Yola to Yelwa, Minna to Maiduguri all gathered for one man, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto".

The underlined consonant sounds are respectively - /k/, /y/, /m/ used by the reporter to communicate the message using contrasting sound pairs between words in sequence. The first sound /k/ is a voiceless velar plosive in terms of the presence or absence of voicing, place of articulation and manner of articulation. The second sound /y/ is a semi-vowel in English but a glottalised consonant sound in Hausa (UCLA, 2023). The third sound /m/ is a voiced, bilabial plosive sound.

Assonance

Assonance is the use of same vowel in two or more adjacent words. Terry (2000) and Tawfiq (2020) explain that the repetition of the vowel sounds in assonance may occur even when spelling varies.

Consonance

It is the repetition of the final consonant sound in stressed and unrhymed syllables. For example, “She stood on the road and criedo.”

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is a literary device in which a word is used to represent a sound. In other words, it refers to creating a word which describes its sounds. Examples are, “crack”, “pop”, “clap”, “splat”, etc. Onomatopoeia does not only imitate, resemble or suggest the sound it describes; it adds melody, humour, or lyrical effect to the message being encoded so as to make a reader laugh. Onomatopoeia is also used to represent sounds that animals make. They include, “meow” (for cats), “roar” (for lions), “moo” (for cows), etc.

Rhyme

It is a repetition of similar sounds in two or more words. Rhyming is peculiar to poetry especially in the end lines. Rhyme is also the resemblance in the sounds of words or syllables which often come at the end of lines or stanzas hence, the name end rhymes (Simons & Smith, 2010). They are divided into different types such as perfect rhyme, half rhyme, eye rhyme, etc.

Semantic Phonological Devices

The following are semantic phonological devices of language as outlined from the outset of the

Text 1 (Kangale Kori)

Alliteration

Cute <u>K</u> anuris <u>c</u> oined <u>K</u> angale <u>K</u> ori		(Line 1)
And farmers <u>s</u> takes <u>s</u> talled		(Line 3)
From the <u>k</u> raals of <u>K</u> ukawa		(Line 5)
<u>C</u> ame the tidings of <u>d</u> ying <u>c</u> ows	/k/	(Line 6)
Even as <u>m</u> others in <u>M</u> onguno <u>m</u> ourned	/m/	(Line 7)

Assonance

Came the <u>i</u> dings of <u>d</u> ying cows	/ei/	(Line 6)
Sapping <u>a</u> way their <u>a</u> idmen gallantry	/ei/	(Line 12)

discussion:

Personification

It is a figure of speech which gives the qualities of a person to an animal, an object or idea (Harris, 2005). Also, Louck (2018) and Tawfiq (2020) posit that personification is giving humanistic or animalistic features to abstract concepts. An example can be seen in Achebe (1958, p. 87), “The earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed”.

Simile

This is a figure of speech which makes comparison of two unlike things using the terms “like” or “as”. Examples are – “as white as snow”, “as busy as an anthill”. Also, in Achebe (1958, p.35) is an example, “...the air shivered and grew tense like a tightened bow”

Metaphor

Metaphor is another device that constructs meaning by identifying similarity. However, in metaphor, there is direct comparison without the use of “as” or “like”. Furthermore, Ogungbesan and Woolger (1978) submit that in metaphor, the writer does not indicate comparison using words such as “like” or “as”. An example can be seen in “Musa is a lion in the fight”. This contrasts with “Musa fights like a lion” which indicates simile.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

This section presents the data, analysis of the data and discussion of results. The analysis starts with the first poem *Kangale Kori*. It is made up of a single stanza of 18 lines in a narrative verse form.

Consonance

For millet stalks were stunted	/t/	(Line 2)
And farmers stakes stalled	/s/	(Line 3)
Came the tidings of dying cows	/s/	(Line 6)
Even as mothers in Monguno mourned	/s/	(Line 7)
Over lost fruits of motherhood	/s/	(Line 8)
And visited the anthills for survival	/s/	(Line 9)
With tears along nine tributaries	/s/	(Line 13)
Of babies diseased of empty barns	/v/ /s/	(Line 15)
And the dead buried in bundles	/d/	(Line 16)
Over tears flowing in haematic vales	/s/	(Line 17)

Rhyme

For millet stalks were stunted	(Line 2)
And farmers stakes stalled	(Line 3) end rhyme in lines 2 and 3
With tears along nine tributaries	(Line 13)
And from Bade came stories	(line 14) end rhyme in lines 13 and 14
Of babies diseased of empty barns	(Line 15)
And the dead buried in bundles	(Line 16)
Over tears flowing in haematic vales	(Line 17) end rhyme in lines 15, 16 and 17

Metaphor

Over lost fruits of motherhood
 (Line 8), fruits of motherhood used as a metaphor for children.

Personification

The peacocks of Magumeri

Grieved over empty granaries

Peacocks personified to grieve just like humans. (lines 10 & 11).

Text 2 (Nightfall)

The poem *Nightfall* contains 17 lines constructed in a single stanza. It is also in a narrative verse form similar to *Kangale Kori*.

Alliteration

The magnificent torch travelled west	/t/	(Line 1)
To reap and rape	/r/	(Line 8)
Insects searched for an inlet	/i/	(Line 10)
Crickets crawled out of their crypt	/k/	(Line 15)

Assonance

There is virtually no any instance of assonance identified in the poem.

Consonance

Until tomorrow morning	/m/	(Line 4)
To reap and rape	/p/	(Line 8)
Insects searched for an inlet	/s/	(Line 10)
For night rest	/t/	(Line 11)
Mosquitoes poised like mig jets	/s/	(Line 13)
To mop up any mammal found	/p/	(Line 14)
Crickets crawled out of their crypt	/r/	(Line 15)
And sent a tinkling cymbal of shrill	/t/, /l/	(Line 16)

Onomatopoeia

And sent a tinkling cymbal of shrill

Three words used.

(Line 16)

Rhyme

Irregular rhyming pattern is observed, with only a pair of lines (line 1 & 2) rhyming in their penultimate words.

The magnificent torch travelled west

(Line 1)

And everybody tarried home

(Line 2)

Simile

Mosquitoes poised like mig jets

(Line 13)

Metaphor

The magnificent torch travelled west

(Line 1)

Magnificent torch used as a metaphor for sun.

Personification

The magnificent torch travelled west

(Line 1)

The magnificent torch (which is a metaphor for sunlight), is given the feature of humans – travelling.

Text 3 (Nji)

Unlike the two poems analysed earlier, *Nji* contains four (4) stanzas of irregular number of lines. The poem has a total of 22 lines.

Alliteration

Men and animals were waiting

/w/

(Line 1)

Fear foreboding

/f/

(Line 1, stanza 2)

And birth to the flowering flora

/f/

(Line 6, stanza 2)

Snails in exile of solitude

/s/

(Line 4, stanza 3)

Assonance

Loaded with homes and hopes.

/au/

(Line 6, stanza 3)

Consonance

Loaded with homes and hopes

/s/

(Line 6, stanza 3)

Chameleons changed colours,

/s/

(Line 1, stanza 4)

In the nuts and bolts of life.

/s/

(Line 5, stanza 4)

Onomatopoeia

There is no any onomatopoeia observed in the poem.

Rhyme

Irregular rhyming pattern is observed except at the end of the following pair of lines as follows:

Giving life to the pairs of fauna

(Line 5, stanza 2)

And birth to the flowering flora

(Line 6, stanza 2)

Metaphor

At last the maiden beauty came

(Line 3, stanza 2)

And married the fertile clay

(Line 4, stanza 2)

In the line above, maiden beauty is used as a metaphor for rainfall which is said to have come and married the fertile clay.

Personification

At last the maiden beauty came

(Line 3, stanza 2)

And married the fertile clay

(Line 4, stanza 2)

Snatching us from the jaws of poverty

(Line 7, stanza 2)

And frogs prayed

(Line 2, stanza 4)

Rainfall is a teacher

(Line 4, stanza 4)

Personification occurs where it is expressed that the rainfall (the maiden beauty) came. The act of coming is a human attribute. Personification also occurs where it is expressed that the rain married the fertile clay. This literally means, it has rained (i.e., the long-awaited rain falls on the ground). Frogs are given the feature of human in line 2 of stanza 4 where it is expressed that they prayed, which literally indicates such croaking sounds of the frogs at night. Rainfall is also personified as a teacher in line 4 of the last stanza, stanza 4.

A Table indicating distribution of the phonological poetic devices in the three poems

S/No.	Poem	Alliteration	Assonance	Consonance	Onomatopoeia	Rhyme	Simile	Metaphor	Personification	Total
1	<i>Kangale Kori</i>	5	2	11	0	3	0	1	1	23
2	<i>Nightfall</i>	3	0	9	3	1	1	1	1	19
3	<i>Nji</i>	4	1	3	0	1	0	1	6	15
Total	3	12	3	23	3	5	1	3	8	57

Discussion of Findings

Upon analysis, it's evident that the poet employs eight distinct types of phonological poetic devices across the three selected texts: alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, rhyme, simile, metaphor, and personification. A total of 57 instances of these devices are identified, with "Kangale Kori" featuring 23, "Nightfall" containing 19, and "Nji" comprising 15. Notably, "Kangale Kori" showcases a predominant use of consonance with 11 instances, followed by "Nightfall" with 9 and "Nji" with 3, making consonance the most frequently utilized device, appearing 23 times collectively. Alliteration follows closely behind with 12 occurrences. This indicates a deliberate emphasis by the poet on certain thematic elements, particularly famine and security, as consonance and alliteration are repeatedly employed across the texts. Interestingly, personification is sparingly used in "Kangale Kori" and "Nightfall," while "Nji" sees six instances, suggesting varying stylistic choices based on the poem's thematic focus.

The poet's heavy reliance on alliteration serves to enhance the poetic flow and underscore the key messages of famine and security within the texts, aligning with Khemka's observation that alliteration imbues poetry with multiple layers of

meaning and reader experience. Similarly, the extensive use of consonance reflects the poet's intent to emphasize the significance of the conveyed messages, resonating with scholarly views that consonance in poetry prompts deeper reflection and engagement with rhyming words. Furthermore, the irregular rhyming pattern observed throughout the poems, with only five instances of rhyme, may intentionally reflect the tumultuous themes of famine and insecurity, accentuating the psychological distress experienced by the depicted characters. Onomatopoeia, though rarely utilized, is primarily employed in "Nightfall" to infuse humor, action, or melody, which contrasts with the prevailing tone of grief and lamentation, possibly explaining its limited usage across the texts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the stylistic analysis of phonological poetic devices in selected poems of Abba Gana Shettima has provided valuable insights into the intricate interplay between sound patterns, linguistic aesthetics, and thematic resonance within his works. Through a meticulous examination of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhythm, this study has illuminated the ways in which Shettima harnesses phonological devices to create a richly

textured poetic language that captivates the imagination and evokes profound emotional responses.

One of the key findings of this analysis is the centrality of phonological devices in shaping the formal structures and aesthetic appeal of Shettima's poetry. From the intricate rhymes that create a sense of harmony and unity within the verse to the rhythmic patterns that propel the reader forward, phonological elements play a crucial role in shaping the overall sonic landscape of Shettima's poetry. Moreover, the strategic deployment of phonological devices serves to enhance the thematic resonance of his works, allowing Shettima to explore complex themes such as identity, memory, and social justice with nuance and depth.

Furthermore, this study has highlighted the cultural and linguistic dimensions of Shettima's poetic language, demonstrating how his engagement with phonological devices reflects his deep-rooted connection to the oral traditions and linguistic diversity of Nigeria. By drawing upon indigenous idioms, musical rhythms, and oral storytelling techniques, Shettima's poetry embodies a synthesis of tradition and innovation, forging a poetic language that is both rooted in the cultural heritage of his homeland and responsive to contemporary concerns.

Additionally, the analysis of phonological poetic devices in Shettima's poetry contributes to broader conversations within the fields of African literary studies and stylistics regarding the formal innovations and thematic preoccupations of contemporary African poets. By exploring the ways in which Shettima navigates the complexities of language, identity, and artistic tradition in his works, this study adds to our understanding of the diverse range of voices and perspectives within African poetry and highlights the creative potential of linguistic experimentation and cultural hybridity.

Finally, the stylistic analysis presented in this paper underscores the significance of phonological poetic devices in shaping the aesthetic and thematic dimensions of Abba Gana Shettima's poetry. By unraveling the intricate layers of sound and meaning embedded within his verse, this study not only deepens our appreciation of Shettima's poetic craft but also offers valuable insights into the broader intersections between phonology, stylistics, and literary interpretation. As Shettima's poetry continues to resonate with readers both locally and internationally, the exploration of phonological devices serves as a testament to the enduring power of language to captivate, inspire, and provoke thought.

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