

## A LINGUISTIC STYLISTIC EXPLORATION OF LEXICO-SYNTACTIC FEATURES IN SONYE TESS ONWUEME'S COLLECTION OF PLAYS

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### **Abstract**

This study examines a lexico-syntactic analysis of Osonye Tess Onwueme's collection of plays: *Lost in the Paradise*, *Broken Calabash*, and *Wazobia*, aiming to explore the specific lexical and syntactic choices the playwright employs to communicate her thematic concerns regarding marriage, politics, and culture. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study is grounded in Halliday's (1978) Social Semiotic Theory and Leech and Short's (2007) Model of Stylistic Analysis. The findings reveal that Onwueme's style is highly functional; she utilises a blend of simple and compound words, vivid descriptive language dominated by nouns and adjectives, and a dynamic range of sentence structures to create a distinct authorial voice. Her integration of borrowings from Nigerian languages serve to ground the plays in their cultural context and foreground her social critique. The study concludes that Onwueme's linguistic choices are not merely aesthetic but are conscious, artistic acts that function as a form of advocacy to dismantle stereotypes, question authority, and champion the cause of the marginalised.

**Keywords:** Linguistics, Lexico-Syntactic, Onwueme, Stylistics,

### **Introduction**

Post-colonial African literature is deeply shaped by socio-political realities, with playwrights such as Osonye Tess Onwueme emerging as social critics and visionaries. Her plays critique power structures, challenge oppressive traditions, and envision alternative futures, positioning her as a prominent voice in African feminist and post-colonial discourse. Through her works, Onwueme interrogates societal norms and political failures while addressing themes such as oppressive customs, the quest for self-determination, and post-colonial disillusionment. Central to her artistry is her use of language, particularly linguistic stylistics, which enables her to transmit powerful social messages. Analysing lexical, syntactic, and semantic features provides insight into how she constructs characters' voices, shapes arguments, and evokes both emotional and intellectual responses. This study therefore seeks to provide a holistic appreciation of Onwueme's artistry and her contribution to African drama by bridging the gap

between her thematic concerns and linguistic craftsmanship.

While numerous scholars have applied stylistic analysis to the works of Nigerian and African authors, a substantial gap exists in the scholarly literature regarding a detailed linguistic-stylistic examination of Onwueme's plays. This research aims to fill that gap by examining *Lost in the Paradise*, *Broken Calabash*, and *Wazobia*. Specifically, it investigates the lexical and syntactic stylistic features that characterise these plays and demonstrates how such features foreground the underlying messages and broader socio-cultural concerns they communicate. By focusing on the interplay between form and meaning, the study highlights Onwueme's distinctive linguistic patterns as a vehicle for engaging pressing issues of marriage, politics, and culture in contemporary African society

### **Literature Review**

#### **Style and Stylistics**

Leech and Short (1981) define style as "the cover of our feelings and it is the tool of the

writer to transfer the message to readers". This definition emphasizes style as a functional and expressive vehicle for the author's intent. They also state that style "proclaims the man," which suggests that there is an "intimate relationship between the choice of language and the author's personality". Crystal (2008) views style as the variation in language use according to the context. He defines it as "the perceived distinctive manner of expression in writing or speech." This highlights the observable and recognisable features of language that differentiate one text from another. Halliday (1971) describes style as motivated choice. For him, style arises from a writer selecting from the available options within a language's system. This idea is echoed in the principle that "style arises from motivated choices made from the repertoire of a language".

The concept of style as a series of deliberate choices is central to the study. The research operates on the premise that Onwueme's "choice of diction differentiates" her from other writers and that her style is a "tool... to transfer the message to readers" about critical societal issues like marriage, politics, and culture. The analysis of her lexico-syntactic choices - from nouns and verbs to sentence complexity - is an investigation into her unique authorial "style". The study aims to connect these linguistic choices to her personality and thematic concerns, reflecting the idea that "style proclaims the man"

Halliday (1976) offers a concise definition of stylistics as "the linguistic analysis of literary texts". This places the focus on applying rigorous linguistic methods to literature. Bossan and Aliyu (2014) describe stylistics as "the study of style used in literary and verbal language and the effect as writer or speaker wish to communicate to reader or hearer". This definition highlights the focus on the communicative effect of stylistic choices. Short (1996) views stylistic analysis as "a method of linking linguistic form, via reader inference, to interpret in a detailed way and thereby providing as much explicit evidence as possible for and against particular interpretations of texts". This emphasizes its role in providing objective, evidence-based literary interpretation. Toolan (1996) states that the concern of stylistics is to

"look out for one or more (recurrent) patterns, repetition and recurrent structure that are foregrounded in a text". This points to the methodology of identifying prominent linguistic features. Simpson (2004) notes that while stylistics can be applied to any text, "the preferred object of study in stylistics is literature". This acknowledges the strong traditional link between the field and literary studies. This provide the premise for the examination of Osonye's collection of plays.

### **Linguistics Stylistics**

Linguistic stylistics is a discipline that systematically explores how language is used in texts to create meaning and effect. It bridges the gap between linguistics, the scientific study of language, and literary criticism, the interpretation of texts. By applying linguistic models and methods, stylistics aims to provide a rigorous and objective account of the stylistic choices made by speakers and writers and the impact of those choices on the audience (Simpson, 2014). The core principle is that every use of language involves choices from the linguistic system, and these choices are what constitute a text's style. The analysis of style is typically conducted at various interconnected levels of language. Linguistic stylistics provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the intricate ways in which language is used to create literary and non-literary texts. By examining the phonological, graphological, lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels of a text, stylisticians can offer detailed and evidence-based interpretations of how texts work and what they mean.

### **Authorial Review**

Ahmed (2019) in a work titled, A Stylistic Analysis of Julie Okoh's *the Closed Doors* explored the use of language in Okoh's Closed doors by paying close attention to the use of Morphology, Graphology, Phonology, Syntax, Lexico-semantic and Rhetorical Schemes and tropes in her work. Findings indicated that at the level of syntax- Okoh employed Nigerian Pidgin, simple and non-simple sentences to drive home her Message(s). At the level of Morphology, Okoh uses compounding, derivational morphology and borrowing among others, to enrich the text. Thus, the present study is similar to that of Osonye Tess

Onwueme, because both are linguistic studies of texts.

Mustapha (2020) analysed The Shepherd's Psalm using linguistic and literary approaches. The study questioned the claims of stylisticians favouring literary stylistics over linguistic stylistics, arguing that both approaches can effectively analyse literary texts. The findings support the interplay between linguistics, literature, and stylistics, providing a complementary analytical read for both linguists and literary scholars.

Babiker and Hamdan's (2022) linguistic stylistics analysis of Chinua Achebe's novel, *Arrow of God* adopted analytical checklist to explore lexical and grammatical categories in the functional linguistic field. The sample composed of hundred words and two hundred and fifty different sentences types that have been used in the context so as to analyse Achebe's style. The study found a high frequency of material and verbal processes, with dynamic verbs, adjectives, and simple sentences providing clarity. Compound and complex sentences focus on specific constituents for emphasis. The study used a purposive sampling approach, not focusing on Giwa's *From Fatika with Love*.

In another study, Dadjo (2022) explored the linguistic and stylistic devices in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, describing and interpreting lexical categories and figures of speech used to convey meanings. The study was anchored on Leech and Short (2007) model of stylistic. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Thus, the frequency distribution of the lexical categories was established as follows: verbs 37.07%, nouns 25.84 %, adjectives 22.47%, adverbs 14.6%. The proportions of figures of speech are as follows: simile 20%, metaphor 18.33%, personification 18.33%, repetitions 13.33%, parallelism 11.66%, alliteration 11.66% and irony 6.66%.

Iroegbu's (2022) study examined J. P. Clark's poetry, focusing on contrastive and degenerative transitivity. The analysis revealed deliberate foregrounding of lexical forms, particularly those related to participants and processes, in some poems, suggesting a negative

shift in lexico-semantic forms, indicating a degenerative essence.

Khan, Maan, and Khan (2022) conducted a linguistic stylistic investigation of Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*, analysing its language system and structure, using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics for analysis. They found irregular words and structures, violating grammatical rules, creating compounds, and violating selectional restrictions. The study also found multiple themes due to deviant language.

Madu et al. (2022) work analysed Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Forlorn Fate*, focusing on language features and Halliday's Systemic Functional Theory of Grammar. The study found that Habila used various sentences and clause structures to effectively communicate their messages.

Babiker and Ahmad (2023) in another linguistic stylistic analysis, explored the lexical and grammatical categories in "Things Fall Apart". The researchers adopted functional linguistic approach to conduct this study. Since the analysis concentrated on lexical categories, grammatical categories, the data were purposively collected based on these two linguistic features. The sample composed of two hundred and fifty (250) words and one hundred (100) different types of sentences and utterances. Findings showed that there is a high frequency in the use of material and verbal processes of which are dynamic verbs; adjectives and simple short sentences were used to give clarity and simplicity of message. Compound and complex sentences are used for emphasis.

Betu (2023) analysed Amos Tutuola's *Feather Woman of the Jungle* using intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. The study found logical sentence progressions but deviations due to language choice. Literary devices like simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, hyperbole, alliteration, and symbolism were used. The study also identified three characterization methods and examined the author's style of writing.

Akeju-ahmad and Shobowale's (2024) examined Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* explored her use of linguistic choices to address gender roles in Nigerian society. The study used Systemic Functional Linguistics and qualitative

analysis at morphological, graphological, syntactic, and lexico-semantic levels. The findings revealed the importance of language use in the text's structural relevance and writer's intention.

While numerous scholars have applied stylistic analysis to the works of various Nigerian and African authors, a significant gap exists in the scholarly literature concerning a detailed linguistic stylistic examination of Osonye Tess Onwueme's plays. This research aims to fill a gap in scholarly literature by examining Osonye Tess Onwueme's plays, specifically *Lost in the Paradise*, *Broken Calabash*, and *Wazobia*. It focused on the unique linguistic features and patterns used by Onwueme to transport and address societal issues like marriage, politics, and culture, providing a novel contribution to the understanding of her authorial style.

### Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative content analysis for a stylistic examination of Osonye Tess Onwueme's *Collection of Plays*. The research population comprises all of Onwueme's published plays, from which a sample of three specific works - *Lost in the Paradise*, *Broken Calabash*, and *Wazobia*—was selected for analysis. A purposive random sampling technique was utilised to identify and excerpt specific linguistic and stylistic devices through a process of close reading and annotation. The collected data was then analysed using a textual descriptive method grounded Halliday's (1978) Social Semiotic Theory and Leech and Short (2007) Model of Stylistic Analysis, with the analysis structured around various levels of language, including syntactic, lexico-semantic, morphological, features. The final step involves synthesising these findings to interpret Onwueme's overall authorial style, explaining how her linguistic choices function to create specific aesthetic effects and convey her artistic message

### Theoretical Framework

#### Halliday's Social Semiotic Theory

Halliday (1978) postulates that language is a "social semiotic" - a system of signs that people use to create meaning in social situations. This

posits that language is a social phenomenon and that linguistic choices are inherently linked to the social context in which they are made. Every linguistic choice, from a single word to a complex sentence, is a meaningful act. This theory provides the interpretive power as it moves beyond description to explain *why* certain linguistic choices are made and what they *do* in a social context. According to Halliday, meaning in language is organised into three simultaneous strands, known as metafunctions. These are used to interpret the lexico-syntactic data identified through the Leech and Short model.

- i. The Ideational Metafunction: This is language used to represent reality and experience. It explains how Onwueme's lexico-syntactic choices (e.g., choice of verbs, active/passive voice) construct the world of the play, portray events, and represent characters' actions and motivations.
- ii. The Interpersonal Metafunction: This is language used to enact social relationships, express attitudes, and influence behaviour. Analysis here focuses on how choices in mood (e.g., declarative, interrogative) and modality establish the power dynamics, social roles, and relationships between characters.
- iii. The Textual Metafunction: This is language used to organize the message and create a cohesive and coherent text. Analysis of syntactic arrangements will explain how Onwueme organises information within her sentences to guide the audience's focus and create dramatic emphasis.

#### Leech and Short's (2007) Stylistic Model

This model suggests that literary style interpretation relies on a detailed description of its linguistic features, as it is a manifestation of a writer's linguistic choices, motivated by their artistic vision and work context. Foregrounding is a key principle, highlighting linguistic features' significance (Leech & Short, 2007). Leech and Short's framework provides a structured method for analysing literary texts, examining linguistic features and their connection to aesthetic function, offering objective, evidence-based support for literary judgments. For the purpose of a lexico-syntactic analysis, the core categories of the model

are:

### 1. **Lexical Categories**

This level focuses on diction, or the author's choice of words. The analysis here investigates how the vocabulary of the plays contributes to characterisation, theme, and tone. Key areas include:

- i. **Word Classes:** Examining the predominant use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. For instance, are verbs typically dynamic (denoting action) or stative (denoting states of being)? Are adjectives descriptive or evaluative?
- ii. **Semantic Fields:** Analysing clusters of words related to specific concepts (e.g., fields of struggle, royalty, poverty, or liberation) to reveal thematic preoccupations.
- iii. **Figurative Language:** Identifying and analysing tropes such as metaphor, simile, personification, and irony as lexical choices that create deeper layers of meaning.

### 2. **Grammatical Categories**

This level examines the arrangement of words into larger units, focusing on sentence structure or syntax. This is crucial for understanding the rhythm, pace, and complexity of the dramatic dialogue. Key areas include:

- i. **Sentence Types:** Analysing the functional type of sentences - declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory - and how their frequency contributes to the dramatic tension and interpersonal dynamics between characters.
- ii. **Sentence Complexity:** Examining the structural complexity of sentences. This involves looking at the ratio of simple, compound, and complex sentences. A character who speaks in short, simple sentences may be perceived differently from one who uses long, complex sentences with multiple subordinate clauses.
- iii. **Clause and Phrase Structure:** Investigating the structure of clauses (e.g., subject-verb-object

order) and the complexity of noun and verb phrases. These choices impact the flow and emphasis of speech.

Leech and Short's model focuses on stylistic interpretation of linguistic observations in dramatic texts. It is suitable for lexico-syntactic studies, with Lexical and Grammatical categories. Halliday's theory provides an interpretive lens for Onwueme's style, linking lexico-syntactic patterns to themes, character development, and social issues.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

#### **Lexical Category**

Lexis is the total vocabularies that make up a language or the body of words known and used by a particular person. This includes parts of speech and a general observation in relation to other features like, coinages, borrowing, etc.

#### **Nouns**

A noun is naming word, identifying people, places, animals, things, ideas and concept. Nouns are the most dominant word class and they are categorised into common nouns/concrete, abstract nouns, and proper nouns. Each play in her collection of plays uses diction according to the subject of discussion of the writer for precision and explicitness. Onwueme therefore employs words from the register of theatre. This collection of plays by Tess Onwueme feature the provocative concerns and experiences of global women and youth in today's struggle with poverty, environmental pollution, cultural imperialism, exploitation, race, gender and class inequities, along with the unresolved historical relationship matters between peoples of African descent in Africa and the Diaspora, dramatised in the contexts. Onwueme repeatedly employed certain words for the purpose of emphasis. For instance, the word 'AZONA' is employed ten times on page 15 & 16 respectively. Here are some examples below: (Onwueme, 2009)



**Table 1: Use of Nouns**

Parts	Noun Type		
	Proper	Common	Abstract
1	Sonia pg. 6, Ubulu pg. 9, Niger pg. 12, Russian pg. 19.	Father pg. 4, dog pg. 7, wife pg. 8, man pg. 14.	Truth pg. 1, water pg. 8.
2	Wayne pg. 21, Igbo pg. 31, Athol pg. 54, China pg. 69.	Women pg. 5, student pg.6, university pg.18	anger, peace
3	Martin Luther pg. 44, Soyinka pg. 50, Benue pg. 77.	Priest pg. 14, lion pg.18, child pg.26	Life pg. 32, death pg. 39, lies pg. 48.

Table 1 is a presentation of the different types of nouns that helped not only in identifying different countries and states but also help in identify a particular country as some point in time. For example, one of the themes of the first play is racism and identity. There are specific nouns that show this: ‘blacks. These nouns are quite precise, explicit and peculiar as they helped in carving out a particular group from the others. Most importantly, some of these nouns are used symbolically to represent a larger entity in the

society as a whole. For instance, blacks- represent Africans as a whole and what they do.

#### Verbs

Verbs are the backbone of every sentence and are also obligatory elements. As defined by Nordquist (2017) a verb is customarily a part of speech (or word class) that describes an action or occurrence or indicates a state of being. They are the third dominant word class after adjectives. Onwueme’s collection of plays are replete with dynamic verbs which majorly show actions rather than state.

**Table 2: Use of Verbs**

Part	Dynamic	Static
1	Walk pg. 4, Allow pg. 6, subvert pg. 9, took pg. 12.	Remember pg. 54
2	Provoke p.g.14, interested pg.18, catches pg. 21, published pg. 25.	Alive pg. 64
3	Compiled pg. 28, emerged pg. 33, has pg. 33 contributed pg. 50	

Table 2 is a presentation of the some of the verbs employed in the collection of plays. They are effectively selected to vividly describe each action.

**Adjectives:** An adjective is a word that belongs to a class whose members modify nouns Adjectives are the second dominant major word classes after nouns. Onwueme also employs adjectives not only to describe human beings and things as they are, but also to paint a picture of reality in her collection of plays. Adjectives are well

exemplified to distinguish and specify the characters and the places/cities within which the different events take place. On page 11 of part one, the author uses “clean” and “white” to describe the kind of cloth needed for the occasion. The part two is notable for the use of the adjectives. Example from the text include: “range and beauty”, which was use to describe Nigerian culture, “artistic”, which was use to describe the outlook of a Nigerian bridge.

**Table 3: Use of Adjectives**

Plays	Descriptive	Proper	Possessive	Quantity
1	Civilized pg.2.	American pg. 8	bat’s pg. 21	Some pg. 55
2	Ambitious pg. 4	Nigerian pg. 10	ECHI’s pg. 31	Few pg.55
3	Distinguished pg. 7	European pg. 15	Death’s pg. 33	Most pg. 72

Table 3 is a reflection of the various adjectives used in each of the selected essays. Adjectives are varied to enhance non-redundancy. Most of the

adjectives are attributive in terms of function. Some of the adjectives are formed from verbs – oppressed world, nagging signal, forthcoming

work, etc. Onwueme deploys different adjectives to express images and perspectives and manages to paint pictures in the narrative in addition to communicating her message. She also reflects her experiences in different situations. Adjectives particularly stand out since there is no sentence that does not contain an average of three adjectives.

#### Adverbs

Iyiola (2013, p.136) sees Adverbs as the least dominant in the major word classes. This can be

attributed to the need to avoid redundancy especially since there is sufficient use of nouns and adjectives. The adverbs in the story perform different semantic functions such as referring to manner, place, direction, time and degree. The use of adverbs in sentences is meant to answer certain questions that relate to manner, place, frequency, time, and degree.

**Table 4: Use of Adverbs**

Essay	Manner	Time/frequency	Place	Degree
1	Politely pg. 15	-	-	-
2	Desperately pg. 18	-	-	Quite, really pg. 14
3	Inexorably pg. 32	every morning pg. 7	Here	-
4	Playfully pg. 37	Now. Pg. 9	-	-
5	Assiduously pg. 52	Often pg. 13	-	Only pg. 22.
6	Fervently pg. 63.	Sometime pg. 17	-	-
7	Uncompromisingly pg. 68	-	-	Too pg. 26.

The table 4 above shows some of the adverbs which have been used to perform different functions of time, degree, frequency place, probability, purpose and manner. There are more of adverbs of manner

since they give details on how an event occurs. Some of these adverbs are categorised as unusual by virtue of their formation. For example: achingly pg. 6.

**Table 5: Distribution of parts of Speech**

Part of Speech	Frequency of Noun	Frequency of Adjective	Frequency of Verb	Adverb
Part One	149	106	86	26
Part Two	177	98	81	11
Part Three	122	73	90	33
Total	448	277	257	70

Table 5 gives a vivid picture of how lexical items have been used in the collection of plays- nouns rank the highest and followed by adjectives. Generally, the nouns represent names for settings, characters and ideas in the collection of plays. Onwueme also employs abstract nouns to give life to her perception and ideas. Proper nouns are well exemplified to distinguish and specify the characters and the places/cities within which the different events take place.

#### 4.4 The Sentence

A sentence is a group of words that

expresses complete thought and makes sense when it stands on its own (Adaji & Ugwuanyi, 2012). Sentences are classified according to function and structure and are seen below.

##### 4.4.1 Sentence types based on Structure

In any literary work, different types of sentences are used as occasion demands. In the *Collection of Plays*, a variety of these types of sentences are employed. Onwueme's employment of all these types of sentences can be said to have enriched his work. Examples are presented below:

**1. The Simple Sentence:** A Simple Sentence expresses a single thought and has only one verb or verb phrase (Ogungbe and Bossan 2013, p.57). The author uses simple sentences in his novel to arrest the reader's attention and for easy comprehension of the novel. Examples of these sentences include:

- I am tired. (p. 1)
- My father came from Idu. ( p.12)
- I don't know (p.52)
- The moon is full. (71)
- I must talk to you (p.103)

The use of simple sentences by some of the characters is an important stylistics device used by the author to capture the mood of the characters. One of these instances can be found on page 12 where the father's presence is been announce. And on page 71, the moon is been reported to be full.

**2. The Compound Sentence:** A Compound Sentence is a combination of two simple sentences. It makes at least two coordinate statements and has the corresponding number of finite verbs. (Ogungbe and Bossan 2013, p.58). Examples from the text include:

- We come from America, but our ancestors are from here (p.9)
- You cut off the past and you'll lose your bearing.... (p.36)
- They may look dry like oranges in harmattan, but the milk,.... with saliva of infant (p.38)

**3. The Complex Sentence:** A Complex sentence has one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses (Ogungbe and Bassan 2013, p.58). Example from the text include:

- You belong to the white world, where you came from (p.10)
- He soon pulls a goatskin bag, from which he produces his snuffbox (p.21)
- The drama attracted a large crowd because of its relevance to the theme of Black identity (p.68)
- If our men force us to the wall, we must use it as our final weapon (p.77)
- I wish I had a choice when I was coming (p86.)
- I wish he had a choice when I was coming (p.86)
- I shouldn't mind that if I were you (p.89)

**4. Compound Complex Sentence:** A compound complex sentence has two main clauses and at least one subordinate clause, (Ogungbe and Bossan, 2013, p.58) Example from the text are:

- Yadiba scoops some of the snuff into his nostrils, which react by emitting blasts of joyful tears that sprinkle on the victims around (p.21)
- Perhaps you're one of those who think that Africans are like apes living on treetops, dancing naked all year round and eating other human beings (p.28)
- I raised my son, and supported you too, without ever asking you for anything except to take responsibility of teaching our son the values of African manhood (p.39).
- Light of beacon, which shines before us that we may see (p.48).
- I have always known, and my mother also tells that snails are evil (p.89)

**Table 6: Presentation of Sentence Types**

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Simple Sentence	5	23.8
Compound Sentence	6	28.5
Complex Sentence	5	23.8
Compound Complex Sentence	5	23.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>



### Sentence type Based on Function

In linguistics, sentence function refers to a speaker's purpose in uttering a specific sentence, phrase, or clause. Whether a listener is present or not is sometimes irrelevant. It answers the question: "Why has this been said?" (Iyiola 2013, p.284) The four basic sentence functions in the world languages include the declarative, interrogative, exclamative, and the imperative. These correspond to a statement, question, exclamation, and command respectively. Typically, a sentence goes from one function to the next through a combination of changes in word order, intonation, the addition of certain auxiliaries or particles, or other times by providing a special verbal form.

1. **The Imperative Sentence:** Imperatives are used to give a command or order. The subject of an imperative sentence is usually the implied 'you' and the verbs are in the base form (Iyiola 2013, p.175). Examples from the text include:
  - Come here! (p.26)
  - Get out! (p.76)
  - Adagor, shut up! (p.116)
  - Haa! Woman (p.145)
2. **The Exclamatory Sentence:** This type of sentence is used to express strong feelings of surprise, joy, pain etc. (Iyiola 2013, p.75). Examples from the text are:
  - Wonder shall never cease (p.12)!
  - It is the mouth of the gods that speaks (p.21)!
  - Don't think evil (p.27)
  - The master builder (p.39)
  - It is obsolete (p.96)
3. **Declarative Sentence:** These are sentences that give information or express a statement of fact. Declarative sentences are classified by the position of the subject which always precedes

the verb. The sentence also ends with a full stop (Iyiola 2013, p.174).

- I am the problem (p.9)
- I am the master builder (p.36)
- I am a child of this land... (p.40)
- I am a man (p.44)
- I have a magic wand with my jewel (p.100).

4. **The Interrogative Sentence:** The Interrogative sentence is used to ask questions and therefore ends with a question mark and is rendered with a rising tune (Iyiola 2013, p.174). Examples from the text include:
  - Where do you come from (p.8)?
  - What part of Africa are you from (p.27)
  - What else do you need (p.31)
  - How is your son (p.41)
  - How would you hurt me (p.46)

### 5. Asyndeton

This is a syntactic arrangement where clauses are connected together as a syntactic unit without the use of coordinators or subordinators. Rather, they are connected through the use of comma (Joseph 2015, p.179). This is also called parataxis. Onwueme in few instances deliberately omits 'explicit conjunctions' or 'connectives' in her sentences to enhance the dramatic effect. The rhetorical significance of parataxis is that it is used to express ideas that carry equal weight (Alabi, 2002). It also makes clausal expressions to be simple, concise and compact within a sentence, as illustrated in the sentences below:

- She would never leave me alone, she wouldn't just take off.... (p.46)

In the sentence above, the comma is used to coordinate the two sentences, instead of a conjunctive element. This is a form of creativity and another way of varying sentences.

**Table 7: Presentation of Sentence Functions**

Function	Frequency	Percentage
Imperative Sentence	4	21.1
Exclamatory Sentence	5	26.3
Declarative Sentence	5	26.3
Interrogative Sentence	5	26.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>

### Discussion /Summary of Findings

The stylistic analysis of collection of play reveals that she orchestrates various linguistic elements to create a distinctive authorial voice. Her style is functional, serving as a powerful tool to foreground the profound social and cultural issues at the heart of her plays: *Lost in the Paradise*, *Broken Calabash*, and *Wazobia*. In terms of morphological features, the playwright uses simple, compound words and phrasal compounds to describe ideas that cannot be named or described with a single word. Onwueme's morphological choices demonstrate a deliberate strategy to create a text that is both accessible and culturally authentic. The foundation of her dialogue is built with simple words, ensuring that the core messages of the plays are clear and impactful for a diverse audience. This clarity, however, is not simplistic. The playwright enriches her language through the skilful use of compounding, creating nuanced descriptors like "great-grandfather," "joy-or pain-coloured," and "Africa-thing" to convey complex ideas with precision. This technique allows her to describe unique cultural or emotional states for which a single English word may not have adequately projected. There are few instances of coinages 'wazobia', from the three indigenous Nigeria languages which refers to money (fifty naira).

Another significant linguistic element deployed in the collection of plays, is the integration of borrowings from Nigerian languages, such as such as "Oyinbo" (Yoruba for a white person), and coinages like "Wazobia" serve as a crucial stylistic marker. This act of linguistic appropriation grounds the plays firmly in their Nigerian setting and reflects the hybrid reality of post-colonial life. By weaving indigenous terms into the English dialogue, Onwueme challenges the dominance of the colonial language and asserts a distinct African identity, directly supporting the thematic concerns of plays like *Lost in the Paradise*, where the protagonist Sonia is on a quest for her African roots.

The lexical analysis highlights Onwueme's talent for creating a vivid and tangible world through her word choices. The statistical finding that nouns are the most dominant word

class, followed by adjectives, is key to her descriptive style. This lexical density allows her to paint detailed mental images for the audience, vividly rendering the settings, the physical appearance of characters, and the symbolic objects that populate her plays. The use of specific proper nouns for characters and places establishes a concrete reality, while abstract nouns like "truth," "anger," and "death" give weight to the plays' thematic explorations. The heavy reliance on attributive adjectives is particularly effective in characterisation. Words like "civilised," "ambitious," and "distinguished" are used not just to describe, but often to critique or reveal the underlying biases and conflicts within the social fabric. Onwueme's use of adjectives particularly stands out in her description of characters and events which are quite vivid. She describes events and characters in a way that they blur the line between imaginary and real life. This also help the readers to capture the mood, personality and attitude of the characters in the collection of plays. This descriptive precision, combined with the use of dynamic verbs that convey action and struggle, ensures that the audience can visualise and feel the weight of the characters' experiences. This technique is essential for foregrounding the injustices faced by women like Ona in *Broken Calabash* and *Wazobia*, whose struggles are made more immediate and palpable through this rich descriptive language.

Onwueme's handling of sentence structure is critical to controlling the rhythm, pace, and emotional tenor of her plays. She demonstrates immense flexibility, moving seamlessly between different sentence types to achieve specific dramatic effects. The use of short, punchy simple sentences like "I am tired" or "Get out!" serve to create moments of sharp tension, convey exhaustion, or signal an abrupt shift in the power dynamic of a scene. Conversely, she employs lengthy compound-complex sentences to delve into characters' elaborate reasoning, cultural explanations, or passionate arguments, allowing for deeper exploration of the plays' complex themes. Her use of varied sentence functions further enhances the dialogue's realism and impact. In her collection of plays, imperative

sentences convey authority and conflict, while exclamatory sentences highlight moments of shock, joy, or outrage. The use of interrogative sentences, especially rhetorical questions, directly engages the audience, forcing them to contemplate the moral and ethical dilemmas presented in the plays. This syntactic dynamism mirrors the ebb and flow of human conversation and conflict, making the dialogue feel authentic while strategically building and releasing dramatic tension to keep the audience invested in the unfolding struggles.

The most forceful aspect of Onwueme's style lies in her deployment of rhetorical schemes and tropes. These serve as the very engine of her thematic arguments. The analysis reveals that an extensive use of personification, a choice that is thematically significant. By giving human qualities to inanimate objects or abstract concepts - "The East wakes up, urging West to sleep" or "Death the grim reaper" - she elevates the narrative to a mythic or allegorical level. This allows her to critique vast, impersonal forces like tradition, colonialism, or patriarchy by making them tangible actors in the drama. Furthermore, metaphors such as "The pallbearer is himself a corpse-in-waiting") and similes in expressions like "Africans are like apes living on treetops" work to create powerful, often unsettling, comparisons that challenge the audience's preconceptions. The use of rhetorical questions is particularly potent as a

tool of social critique. When a character asks, "Are you not my daughter? Does my blood not flow in you?" the question serves to affirm a bond while simultaneously questioning the very traditions that seek to undermine it. Through these devices, Onwueme's language becomes a form of advocacy. It is a highly charged, persuasive, and poetic medium used to dismantle stereotypes, question authority, and champion the cause of the marginalised, making the foregrounding of her message both an artistic and a political act.

### Conclusion

This paper has successfully demonstrated the intricate relationship between Osonye Tess Onwueme's message and her medium of communication. Her stylistic choices are not merely aesthetic but are deeply functional, deliberately employed to foreground the salient issues in her plays. Through a unique blend of simple and complex word structures, vivid lexical descriptions, dynamic sentence rhythms, she crafts a distinct authorial voice. Her language becomes a form of advocacy - a persuasive and poetic medium used to dismantle stereotypes, question authority, and champion the cause of the marginalised. The analysis confirms that Onwueme's style is a conscious and artistic act, showcasing her as a masterful playwright who skilfully manipulates linguistic features to serve her artistic vision and social message.

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