

Aesthetics Of The Marriage Of Anansewaa: A Stylistic Analysis Of Sutherland's Language

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Abstract

This paper seeks to espouse the philosophy of African culture specifically, Ghanaian by the explicit use of language by the playwright. It is important that the works of writers be appreciated by readers and critics. The study analyses the literary stylistics of Sutherland's play *The Marriage of Anansewaa* by focusing on the linguistic patterns and their communicative functions. It discusses linguistic foregrounding by analysing the paradigmatic associations that exist among the lexical items and their literary significance; this includes the use of linguistic parallelism in Sutherland's 'mboguo' (songs) and her use of appellations. Finally, it unveils the dramatic techniques that create and heighten suspense and their aesthetic significance to literary discourse. The conclusion gives a reflection on Sutherland's effective use of language and the aesthetic significance in projecting Ghanaian culture.

Key words: aesthetic - culture - stylistics – linguistic foregrounding - paradigmatic associations – linguistic parallelism – 'mboguo' - appellation.

1. Introduction

Aestheticism involves the styles and techniques employed by writers to make a beautiful work of art that is meant to excite. The aesthetics hold the view that art should be perceived for its entertainment purpose and not for instruction that is "art for art's sake" (Pater 1967); however, African writers seek to combine both the entertainment aspect as well as the instruction to chronicle events in their continent. They hold the view of Plato who presumes that literature should "give pleasure and instruction". Like Horace, a work of art should delight, teach and persuade listeners i.e. 'docere', 'delectare', 'movere' aspects of poetry.

The aesthetics of Sutherland's play can be derived from her style employed in telling the story. Like the early playwrights, the African playwrights also use parody, thus create humour and excitement in their plays. Efua Sutherland in her quest to portray Ghanaian culture couches her diction beautifully so as to sustain readers' interest. She is a creative writer since she employs elements such as linguistic parallelism and foregrounding to convey her message. Widdowson (1975) posits what a creative writer does with words:

*At the heart of literary creation is the struggle to device
patterns of language which bestow upon the linguistic items
concerned just those values which will convey the individual
writer's personal vision.*

2. Theoretical Framework

Leech and Short (1981) perceive stylistics as an interface between linguistics and literary criticism. In their view, stylistics presents literary text as its object and uses linguistics as a means to an end. Linguistic parallelism refers to the use of pattern repetition in a literary text for a particular stylistic effect. (Yankson 1987) He identifies parallelism at three different levels of linguistic organization: phonological level, semantic level and the syntactic level. Leech (1974) sets up a relationship of equivalence between linguistic items and strongly urges a connection between them. Yankson (1987) defines Paradigmatic Association as the nature of semantic relation that can exist among lexical items that occur in the same grammatical slot and the literary significance of the relationship. These include synonymous relations, antonymous relations, contextual conditioning, neutralization of semantic opposition etc.

In Ghana, there is a story telling art called 'Anansesem' by the Akan speaking people. 'Anansesem' literally means Ananse stories, and it is used both for a body of stories told and for the story telling performance itself. Although this storytelling is usually a domestic activity, there are some specialists who have given it a full theatrical expression with established conventions. This system of traditional theatre is developed and classified as 'Anansegoro'. The narration of 'Anansegoro' is usually accompanied by 'mboguo' an aspect of traditional music which is played or sung during storytelling to arouse and sustain the interest of the audience. It is referred to as musical performance in the folktales performed in the Ghanaian society. Sometimes, 'mboguo' perform significant function as it helps to advance the plot of the story. According to Sutherland, it is the convention for 'mboguo' to be contributed by the audience present so as to be able to reflect mood, quicken the pace of the

performance or inspire the general participation of people present. Vansina (1985) share the same view on performance and indicates that in story telling the audience play significant role in the performance:

The public is active. It interacts with the teller, and the teller provokes this interaction by asking questions, welcoming exclamations, and turning to a song sung by all at appropriate points of the action. (p.34)

3. Linguistic Interpretations of Selected Mboguo

Efua Sutherland includes musical interlude in the performance of the play. This type of music in local parlance 'mboguo' is performed in Anasesem (Ananse's stories). 'Ananse' refers to the spider and it is used as a character in the story-telling who is depicted as wise, cunning and humourous. In the foreword of this play, Sutherland indicates that 'Ananse appears to represent a kind of Everyman, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self-examination'. The significance of 'mboguo' cannot be underestimated as it is aimed at arousing the interest of play. It also reflects the mood of the plot as it unfolds to the next Act. The play begins with 'mboguo' which is used to usher in the cast. The song recounts the plight of the protagonist, Ananse who also joins the players to sing. The 'mboguo' below exemplifies the theme of hardship in life:

*Oh life is a struggle
Oh life is a pain;
Oh life is a struggle,
Oh life is a pain
In this world.*

*Life is a struggle,
Citizens,
Life is a pain
In this world.*

*Life is a struggle,
Friends,
Life is a pain
In this world. (p.1)*

The use of the images 'struggle' and 'pain' foreground the theme of hardship. Linguistically, parallelism occurs at three levels: semantic, syntactic and phonological. Semantically, there is pattern repetition in the first four lines which indicates that they belong to the same paradigm. Intratextually, 'a struggle' is synonymous with 'a pain' and 'citizens' (line 7) is synonymous with 'friends' (line 11), and they exist in the world of adversity. At the phonological level, there is repetition of sounds which give an end rhyming scheme of ababc adbc adbc. Also there is an internal repetition of [s] sound in every line which makes the tone very soft. There is also parallelism at the syntactic level in the sense that ideas are syntagmatically related in a linear sequence. This means that the structures have syntactic equivalents or similar patterns. Consider the following:

Oh life is a struggle = [Oh] + NP + VP + NP (S V C)
Oh life is a pain = [Oh] + NP + VP + NP (S V C)

Another 'mboguo' ushers in Act Two to significantly enlighten the audience about the gradual development in Ananse's life and reveals the fact that the protagonist is not ready to accept his situation. This 'mboguo' foregrounds the theme of suffering. Sutherland alludes to the plight of daughter of Odum, a rich and powerful man in a folktale.

*Am I not Odum's child?
Am I not Odum's child?
Oh I hate the sun!
Abena e,
I'd rather be dead.*

*Oh, delicate one
Abena e,
Abena e,
I'd rather be dead.*

I never did toil

*Abena e,
Abena e,
I'd rather be dead.*

*Unseasoned one,
Abena e,
Abena e,
I'd rather be dead.*

*Oh pitiful one,
Abena e
Abena e
I'd rather be dead.*

The aesthetics of the 'mboguo' in this Act can also be linguistically analysed. The first two lines elaborate syntactic repetition which has an elocutionary force of foregrounding her message in the mind of the audience in order to highlight the condition of the protagonist, Ananse and by so doing Sutherland alludes to the wailing of Abena, Odum's daughter. Leech G. (1974) posits the essence of repetition: *'..repetition is a fundamental if primitive device of intensification... By underlining the message rather than elaborating the message, it presents a simple emotion with force, it may further suggest a suppressing intensity of feeling- an imprisoned feeling, as were, for which there is no outlet but a repeated hammering at the confining walls of language.'* The repetition therefore hammers home the message and it embodies linguistic parallelism which is used for rhetorical emphasis. Also the repetition of 'Oh' which is an interjection signifies the solicitation for sympathy on the part of the lady. Consider the following pattern:

At the phonological level 'Abena e' has been repeated nine times in the song. The repetition of the sound [eI] in Ghanaian tradition (Akan) signifies the intensity of the call and the need for attention. It is to emphasize the entrenched position of Abena who regrets the situation and the direction of her life. This presupposes the plight of Ananse who is in distress and not ready to accept his situation.

Naturally, situations change and improve, and this has been beautifully presented by the playwright in the form of a song. At this point Ananse's condition improves for the better and this is also a representation of affluent Ghanaian citizens and the value they place on things they consider important.

*I'm heading for town on a buying spree.
I'll be seen with the best of the spenders,
And when I return expect me to bring
 The latest cloth in town,
 The latest suit in town.
Yes tomorrow, I go to church
To deposit with the spenders.
 Those born on Sunday,
 Those born on Monday,
 Those born on Tuesday...(p.24)*

Syntactic structure		Aesthetic Significance
1. VP + NP + (NEG) + NP	Am I not Odum's child?	The repetition of rhetorical question with a parallel structure foregrounds the message of hardship and suffering of the lady in question who happens to be a royal.
2. ADJ.P + NP	Delicate {Oh}Unseasoned (one) Pitiful	The use of attributive adjective in which the adjectives premodify the nouns they precede. They belong to the same paradigm since they are synonymously related. They are used here to describe the lady as a dependant who is ignorant about life.
3. NP+VP+ADJ.P(SVC)	I'd rather be dead	There is pattern repetition of these structures which connote negation to buttress the unbearable situation the person is experiencing to the extent that she is ready to die than live with hardship.
4. NP+VP+ADJ.P(SVC)	I never did toil	
5. NP + VP + NP (SVO)	I hate the sun!	

There is again parallelism in the above ‘mboguo’ and the pattern repetitions are as follows:

Syntactic structure		Aesthetic significance
1. NP+VP+PP(ADV.P)	I+am heading+for town on a buying spree I+will be seen+with the best of spenders	The semantic implication of these structures is that Ananse’s condition has improved, and he expects to be given recognition wherever he goes. Also his appearance should commensurate his class.
2. NP+PP/ADV.P	The latest+ {cloth }+in town {Suit }	
3. NP+VP+PP(ADV.P)	Those+born +{on}+ Sunday } {Monday } {Tuesday }	

4. Appellations and their Aesthetic Significance

Sutherland employs the technique of using accolades to describe and praise important characters in the play. Appellations refer to attributes that are given to chiefs in the Ghanaian society to praise and honour them so as to appear important. Sutherland uses different and suitable appellations for all the three chiefs. Let’s consider the one for Chief of Akate, Togbe Klu VI:

*‘Prickly- Pear!
 Cactus keeping guard
 On your territory’s border,
 To your left your territory,
 To your right the sea;
 Tough and vigilant one,
 Thanks to your prickles
 The enemy bleeds,
 Thanks to your capacious leaves,
 Those whom you love
 Will always find within them
 Water to refresh them’. (p.7)*

The imagery used in the above appellation foreground the theme of protection. Togbe KluVI has been described as a sweet and succulent protective barb that is watchful and wakeful, for he serves as a protective shield for his people and does not allow the enemy to harm them. He serves as a source of water which his love ones use to quench their thirst. Syntactically, parallelism is evident in Sutherland’s use of NPs to describe Togbe Klu VI ‘Prickly-pear’ (NP); Cactus keeping guard (NP); Tough and vigilant one (NP). Parallelism is again seen in the lines 4&5 to portray Togbe Klu’s authority. Also in lines 7&9, there is pattern repetition which semantically refers to the appreciation and gratitude from people.

*To your left your territory = PP + NP
 To your right the sea = PP + NP
 Thanks to your prickles = VP + NP
 Thanks to your capacious leaves = VP + NP*

Another appellation Ananse writes for Chief of Sapase can also be analysed linguistically. The first two lines are the use of NPs to describe the Chief whose authority is beyond measure. This is because he is protected by his ancestors and gods as indicated in the third line. Chief of Sapase spreads his tentacles to all people and does not

discriminate but welcomes all people to his abode. This poem of six lines foregrounds the theme of supremacy and acceptance.

*'O Mighty-Tree-of-Ancient-Origin!
Mighty-Tree-of-Ancient-Origin,
Rooted in the shrine of deity!
Countless branches in which
Benighted wandering birds
Are welcome to shelter' (p.6)*

5. Linguistic Violations

Efua Sutherland uses countless violations of the English language. These violations are technically referred to as the category rule violation (a deliberate misplacement in the normal language code) and selectional restriction rule violation, thus a breach of the English language code. (Yankson1987) The use of 'head drink' (p.18) is to symbolize the token of a sum of money and drinks which are formally handed over to the family of the prospective wife. In 'head drink', a noun with the features of human has been given an inanimate attribute. Conferring a human feature on 'drink' is a breach of sectional restriction rule. In the normal language code, the noun phrase 'head' selects for its subject a noun phrase a lexical item with its semantic feature human. Significantly the use of 'head drink' is to present the culture of Ghana to the outside world; however, Ananse's interest in the 'head drink' also highlights his plight and foregrounds the theme of hardship.

Other examples of violations are used when Ananse in his bit to express his excitement for receiving good news from Chief-Who-is-Chief's Messenger says:

*'Delicious news! Cut a little whisky with me, Mr Honourable.
Hey, bring the drinks!... Sweet news, Mr Honourable...'* (p.31)

Sutherland's vivid imagery 'delicious' and 'sweet' are adjectival phrases with features of edible items have been given feature /+unchewable/. In the normal language code, delicious and sweet select a lexical item with semantic feature /+ food/. Again, In 'Cut a little whisky with me', there is a breach of selectional restriction rule. The verb 'cut' usually selects for its direct object noun phrase a lexical item with the semantic feature /+ solid/. In this instance, the verb phrase 'cut' has selected for its direct object 'drink' with a semantic feature /+ liquid/.

6. Setting

Sutherland's diction depicts that this story is from the African setting. She uses some words in the Ghanaian language once in a while to depict the traditions and culture of the Akans in Ghana. These words are further translated for readers who cannot read and understand the local language. Examples are as follows: "as I am standing here in my colo trousers" (p.14). The word 'colo' is a coinage which is clipped from the word 'colonial' which means 'out of date' or 'not in fashion'. The significance of this expression is to unveil the plight of the protagonist who claims to be in a deplorable situation. Ironically, he is portrayed as an old fashioned person because of his appearance. Another example is the use of the word 'Agoo' (p.22) which symbolizes a vocalized knocking; it usually elicits response from whoever is inside the room. At this point Ananse receives visitors from Chief of Sapaase.

Also, there is a song in Act three which begins with the word 'Aba e' (p.37) which means 'we are on our way, here we come'. This song is usually sang to outdoor a girl about to go through the puberty rites, an initiation rites that ushers a young girl into adulthood. Immediately they finished singing the song, Aya, the grandmother of Anansewaa, calls for an important item for the ceremony: 'Ah, bring out my precious bead. My bota bead, my gold child'. (p.38) 'Bota' refers to one of the famous beads in the African society which is popularly known as the Aggrey bead. Beads are very much cherished among some tribes in Ghana. Another important item that they used for the ceremony is 'nyanya'; 'nyanya' is a vine used in ritual ceremonies which is believed to have the power to purge and avert evil forces, and to purify. Significantly, it is used for protection. Additionally, 'sensemise' is used as a refrain expressing sense of joy; it is to portray the excitement that goes with ceremonies performed in Ghanaian society.

*Sensemise e
We welcome you this day
Sensemise e
We welcome you this day
Sensemise e
We welcome you this day (p.41)*

The writer uses African names for almost all the characters, some of which are Ananse, Anansewaa, Aya, Abena, Akwasi, Yaw Barima, Ayekoo, among others. Word like 'kente' and money symbolizes wealth of the chiefs.

7. Literary Devices Employed

7.1 Hyperbole

Sutherland employs numerous devices for aesthetic significance and also to convey her vision. She uses imagery and symbolism to characterize Ananse. Ananse claims that 'the world is hard' and expresses his situation by using imagery in the form of exaggeration:

'While life is whipping you, rain also pours down to whip you some more...'(p.1)

'I've been thinking, thinking and thinking, until my head is earthquaking'.(p.2)

He again exaggerates his situation in the following: "Where is that typewriter I bought for you at a price that nearly drove me to sell myself?" (p.2). Ananse boasts and creates the impression that he has been able to buy a typewriter for his daughter despite his hardship. Also Ananse affirms his predicaments by indicating his dissatisfaction in the mysterious world: "The world is puzzling. Is puzzling. The world is really puzzling (p.45). Another exaggeration is seen when Ananse describes his daughter as senseless and unreasonable: "she is a baby at the breast" (p.50) referring to Anansewaa who is too old to be sucking breast.

7.2 Humour and Farce

Humour is evident in Ananse's statement: "you think am walking around this world playing ludo?" (p.13). The humorous aspect has the potential of lessening the serious impact of Ananse's actions. Another humorous part is when Ananse calls upon his daughter to practice death. The process was very hilarious, for instance, where he asked her to open her eyes widely and stiffen her limbs, accordingly she does this with laughter. The Nanka episode is also interesting and hilarious and considered as a big joke in the story. Ananse starts the joke with tears and weeping. The lies Ananse told his mother and aunty and their reaction also creates humour.

Farce is a kind of drama which is meant to principally provoke laughter, using exaggerated characters and complicated plots. It is full of absurd episodes, ludicrous situations and knocks about action. A close reading of *The Marriage of Anansewa* reveals the play as a farce. For example, the money and gifts which the four chiefs shower on Anansewa with hope of brightening their chances is quite absurd especially when they had not set their eyes on her. Therefore, the fact that the chiefs failed to question the integrity of Ananse about his daughter and the marriage as a whole but went ahead to shower money for her upkeep is unthinkable. Akwasi's blatant ignorance of the customs in relation to marriage is also a farce. This is because he was forcing Akosua to marry him based on the mere fact that he buys her gifts. We wonder why he does not know the basic customary law regarding marriage, and so his ignorance is quite surprising and farcical. Ananse's inconsistent behaviour throughout the play is also ludicrous and hence a farce. He appears gorgeously and happily in a suit for a business meeting and in no time, he complains of heat in the garden when it dawns on him he is running out of time for his daughter's marriage. Then again, his mood changes dramatically and becomes happy when a messenger appears to offer him an outrageous amount. At the end of Act 2, Ananse calls for the audience sympathy because he is struck by an earthquake of headache; all these show how absurd, ludicrous and farcical the play is.

7.3 Suspense

Suspense is another superlative technique which aides Sutherland to sustain interest in the play. Sutherland presents her message with the help of elliptical constructions. Ellipsis presents dots which show omissions. Hawthorn (1985) differentiates between 'marked ellipsis' and 'unmarked ellipsis'. An unmarked ellipsis is used when the text does not display that something is actually missing. Sutherland uses marked ellipsis in the course of the play to demonstrate lots of dramatic suspense and almost all the characters use ellipsis. An example is when Ananse tries to explain to his daughter the reasons for the arranged marriage.

*... I'm not saying I want that much. But what if a few things
can come my way... if a few things ...a few things can
come ... I'm not saying I'll eat chicken every day, but
what about a little fish today, and tomorrow, a little meat
on which I can count? I'm not saying my only daughter
Anansewa must become a Judge of the Supreme Court...
but what about her finishing her secretarial course? And
perhaps... well...perhaps... (p.3)*

Another ellipsis is used in the interaction between Chief-Who-Is-Chief's Messenger and Ananse:

Messenger: '...it won't be very long before er...he will be completing

*the preparations for sending people er...to come and er...
Ananse: (almost plucking the words off the man's lips) I'm all ears
Messenger: I mean that people will come to place on the table for you;
the head drink for the lady, your daughter. (p.31)*

From the lines above, Sutherland uses ellipsis marks to depict the arousal of Ananse's interest in the message from the messenger.

7.4 Monologue

Monologue is also used as a distinct technique to highlight the difficulties of Ananse and his cunning behaviour to extract wealth from the four chiefs. *'I am concerned, and if you so desire laugh at me. It's no one else's fault but mine that no fewer than four chiefs are after me to claim my one daughter and terrifying me into this state'*(p.52). The writer uses this technique for readers and audience to know Ananse's mind as a terrified and disturbed man who allows four different chiefs to claim his only daughter's hand in marriage.

Sutherland also employs the use of soliloquy for a purposeful reading in the play. Christie expresses her desire for Ananse to select her as his partner:

Christie: (to herself) why doesn't he tell me what the trouble is? Well here I go. This man George? For how long am I going to serve him before I get him?' (p.51)

Sutherland portrays Ananse as cunning, insensitive and opportunistic character who only uses Christie to achieve his selfish interest without considering her interest.

7.5 Simile and Metaphor

Simile: *"you don't know what feelings are breaking and ebbing like waves inside me"* (p.35). Ananse is in a difficult situation and compares his feelings to waves which mean that he is progressively disturbed about his plight. Also Anansewa in protest to his father's decision asserts that *'I will not let you sell me like a parcel to a customer'* (p.11). Here the playwright seeks to emphatically emphasize importance of a woman and the fact that she cannot be purchased or be given away so easily. Another example is when the writer deliberately compares the coming of the four chiefs, Anansewa's suitors to fire blazing through a grass in the expression below: *'they are racing here like fire blazing through grass'*.(p.48) The playwright emphasises the seriousness and aggressiveness with which the four chiefs are claiming Anansewa's hand in marriage and this builds the climax of the play.

8. Conclusion

Culture is very distinctive in every society because it differs from one society to another. African writers portray their culture to the outside world through poems, music, drama, novels etc. Sutherland as a prolific playwright has succeeded in projecting Ghana's cultural values through Ananse stories and has given it a full theatrical expression in terms of style and form. This paper has revealed the stylistics of Sutherland's play and her artistic goal through the techniques which are evident in the combination of linguistics and literary criticism in the analyses. It has also brought to bear the playwright's use of poetry in the 'mboguo', appellations and other devices used including the suspense, monologue, imagery etc. all these aesthetically foreground the various themes presented in the unfolding of the story.

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