

## A Stylistic Analysis of *Ekun Iyawo*

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### Abstract

Stylistics is the study and interpretation of texts from a linguistic perspective. It also attempts to establish principles capable of explaining the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language, such as socialization, the production and perception of meaning, critical discourse analysis and literary criticism. Thus, stylistics is a distinctive term that may be used to determine the connections between the forms and effects within a particular variety of language. This paper, therefore, examines the stylistic analysis of "Ekun Iyawo" (a sub-genre of oral poetry sung by the bride as she prepares to leave for her husband's home). The objective of the paper is aimed at appreciating the beauty of language, by giving an in-depth linguistic analysis to the strident song which the poet singer renders at this joyful occasion. Our analysis shows a preponderant use of poetic devices such as alliteration, anadiplosis, anaphora, epiphora, etc. Also, the syntactic elements found in the poem are brought out and discussed. The writers conclude that "Ekun Iyawo" (bride's Song) is an important aspect of marriage ceremony in Yoruba land. In view of this reason, therefore, this age long tradition of our ancestors must be upheld.

**Keywords:** stylistics, metafunctions, ideational, interpersonal, textual, alliteration, anadiplosis, epiphora, anaphora, parallelism, ellipsis, Ekun Iyawo

### Introduction

This study aims at investigating how language in African poetry, an example of *Ekun Iyawo* in this study, is deployed to achieve the intended function of expressing cultural aesthetics and reality in Yoruba marriage tradition. In the culture of Yoruba, *Ekun* (weep) is a paralinguistic medium of expressing feelings and emotions like pain, sorrow, nostalgia, etc. Even in certain circumstances, people use it to express joy.

Oral poetry is an element of oral literature – a form of unwritten literature that produces the genre which plays a primary role in the upsurge of African written literature. Finnegan (1977, p. 2) posits that oral literature forms are presumably natural, communal, unconsidered and relatively liberated from the constraints of social differentiation, of prescribed principles and socially organized conventions. As human beings are social beings who use language to communicate, oral poetry, like other genres of oral literature is a communal product and an affordable luxury not affected by the socio-economic imbalance that characterized man's modern society. The social significance of oral poetry is felt in its lasting effects on human social and moral development and sustenance. Although *Ekun Iyawo* may be said not to be vague due to civilization, yet, it remains a desirable aesthetics that adds colour and flavour to marriage occasions in some parts of Africa.

Oral poetry is infused with numerous stylistic features that seem to commemorate the ideal functions of language which, according to Halliday (1985), are the ideational, interpersonal and textual. The numerous instances of the patterns of foregrounded lexical choices of the poet complement the above mentioned functions and reveal overtly the cultural and societal expectations of a bride in a typical traditional Yoruba setting. The immediate and remote implications of the poetry call for a proper analysis and functional interpretation, particularly through stylistics, to relate the form with the content.

In the light of this, it is important to expatiate the above highlighted language metafunctions. By metafunctions, it means the different modes of meanings construed through the grammar of a language. The ideational meaning implies that language has the grammatical resources for construing the experience of the world around us (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Stockwell (2005, p. 7) indeed claims that "all our experiences, knowledge, beliefs and wishes are involved in and expressible only through patterns of language that have their roots in our material existence". Language in *Ekun Iyawo*, like other genres of human communication, serves as a tool for the poet to express his cultural orientation about the unfolding mandatory transition from spinsterhood to marital status. This cultural experience, in relation to the poem, has its specific and unique attendant demands which leave no room for choice making on the part of the bride.

The interpersonal metafunctions relates with the use of language to enact social roles in general and speech roles in particular, in dialogic interactions, i.e. the use of language for establishing, changing, and maintaining interpersonal relations (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Halliday (1985, p. 20) summarizes interpersonal meaning as a way of using language to act. The interpersonal metafunctions reflect ways in which language users establish and maintain social contact. Meanwhile, the textual metafunctions function as a language means of organizing the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions into a linear and coherent whole (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks & Yallop, 2000, p. 31). Textual meaning accounts for how both ideational and

interpersonal meanings are intricately brought together for effective communication. Halliday (1994, p. 161) avers that “the ‘textual component’ in language is the set of options by means of which a speaker or writer creates his meaning in a text”.

The manifestation of these functions in *Ekun Iyawo* depicts the poem as contextually appropriate on the one hand and the language of the poem as effectively comprehensive on the other. The section that follows explores the theoretical framework adopted for this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

It was stated earlier that the aim of this paper is to examine the implications of *Ekun Iyawo* through drawing on the stylistic features of the poem at the phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic planes. However, to do this without giving keen attention to the contextual background that underlies the drawn stylistic elements will undermine not only the social value of the poem but the social character of language.

Teaching in a second language context – known as Second Language Teaching (SLT) – mediates cognitively between the learners L1 and the Target language. The cultural similarities or differences governing the use of the two languages are points of interest in the SLT classrooms. Several approaches for simplifying the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) have therefore been offered and addressed under such disciplines as Psycholinguistics, Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis and Pedagogical Stylistics.

Stylistics is commonly but wrongly conceived to concern itself with giving a descriptive account for the language features of texts in a rather mechanistic and non-evaluative way (Stockwell, 2005, p. 7). But stylistics has proven to be an analytical tool that can be reckoned with for the objective and context-sensitive analysis of (non)literary texts. Wales (2001, p. 373) submits that the eclectic nature of stylistics has made it to be used as a significant teaching tool in language and literary studies for both native and foreign learners of English (see Widdowson, 1992). The choice of literary texts as data for stylistic analyses is informed, in part, by their unique language features which in some ways set them apart from common speech or writing. In poetry, for instance, style and structures are a kind of end in each because they together signal to the audience the type of communication intended (Finnegan, 1977, p. 89). The inference from the foregoing is that stylistics can be deployed as a practical medium for teaching sound patterns, grammar and semantics of a language.

In this section, a cursory exploration of the predominantly marked stylistic features foregrounded in the data – *Ekun Iyawo* would be undertaken. These include alliteration, anadiplosis, anaphora, epiphora and parallelism and syntactic analysis. These highlighted stylistic devices will be deployed for the analysis of the poem, *Ekun Iyawo*. It is moreover important to add that these features will be examined closely and concomitantly with Halliday’s language metafunctions purposely to show the intrinsic relations between the forms and functions of language in human social and linguistic interactions.

Alliteration, which is the repetition of the same consonant sound at the initial of nearby words, usually characterizes poetic language and is often used for emphasis and memorability (Wales, 2001).

Anadiplosis is a figure of rhetoric that involves the repetition of the word or phrase of one verse or sentence at the beginning of the next to reinforce the progression of ideas (Wales, 2001, p. 3). It provides the means of entrenching logical connectivity and continuity in the ideational meaning of discourse.

Anaphora is a lexico-syntactic element which entails the repetition of a word, phrase or clause at the beginning of successive stages of verses in poems. It can be effectively deployed for descriptive and emotional effect. Epiphora on the other hand is the opposite of anaphora. It is a rhetorical figure which involves the repetition of the same word, phrase or clause at the end of a verse at successive stages.

Parallelism is a rhetorical figure that could be described as similarity in the syntactic patterns of a pair or sequence of related words, phrase or clause. It is parallel structures that usually display obvious connection in meaning between the repeated units to reinforce equivalence (Wales, 2001).

This section has been devoted to the definition and explanation of the stylistic features marked in the data used in this study. The following section focuses on the detailed analysis of the data.

### **The Stylistic Analysis of the Data**

The poem, (*Ekun Iyawo*) under study is a bride’s chant where the bride singer expresses her emotion as she is scheduled for leaving her parents home for her suitor’s. In the text, the bride appreciates her mother’s effort for her proper upbringing, and assures her that she will follow her footsteps in her own matrimonial home. A cursory look at the entire text shows that the joy of the bride singer knows no bound as she uses this opportunity to call on everyone to felicitate with her on this joyful occasion.

#### **Alliteration**

The repetition of initial consonants in the poem, *Ekun Iyawo* creates musical effect and enhances the poetic rendition of the bride’s chant. The extract below illustrates the different ways alliteration impacts on the musicality of the poem.

Original text	Translation
E <u>ku</u> <u>kike</u> ti e <u>ke</u> mi	<i>Thanks for the pampering as you pampered me</i>
E ku <u>gige</u> ti e <u>ge</u> mi (lines 1&2)	<i>And thanks for the honour as you honoured me</i>
Emi Adunni ti mo de <u>be</u> mo <u>bu</u> <u>boju</u> (line 10)	<i>I, Adunni got there and splashed my face</i>
Mo <u>jo jo</u> mo <u>jo</u> dojudede oko	<i>I danced till I got to my husband's frontage</i>
Oko fi naira kan lemi ni waju (17-19)	<i>My husband patted my head with a Naira note</i>
Mo <u>jo jo</u> mo <u>jo</u> dojudede ale	<i>I danced till I got to the frontage of my concubine</i>
Ale fi ponun kan lemi niwaju	<i>My concubine patted my head with a pond of Naira</i>
E ba n koko po ku orire (20-22)	<i>Convey my glad tidings to my kind husband</i>
E si ba n kale po ku asedanu	<i>Relay my pitiful message to the wasted concubine</i>

The alliterative repetitions of /k/, /g/, /t/, /m/, etc. in the extract above create a melody which makes the poem easily musical. Besides, the alliterative sounds help to produce spontaneous emotion. Alliteration provided the poet (i.e. the bride) with the avenue to directly address the emotion of her audience. This enhances a cordial tenor between the poet and her listeners. For instance, in lines 17-19 (cited above), the repetition of /m/ and /j/ captures both the experiential and interpersonal functions of language in that the cultural background of the poet values cordiality far more than hostility.

### Anadiplosis

The poet uses anadiplosis to maintain the progression of ideas. The importance and significance of some ideas are given discourse reinforcement in the poem through anadiplosis. For instance, 'ileke' (beads) adorn female rumps to add to her beauty. However, the absence of 'ileke' or a shortage in its length or number is interpreted as sexual perversion and this is seriously condemned in the society.

Oju mi wa doju oge	<i>My countenance radiates elegantly</i>
Idi mi wa didi ileke	<i>My waist becomes adorned with beads</i>
Ileke ti e ba ka ti ko ba pe	<i>The beads you count but becomes incomplete</i>
Gbogbo aye e ma a tu mi laso lo	<i>The world should render me naked</i>
Sugbon e maa tu tobi mi	<i>But spare me my inner-skirt</i>
Ohun ti mo mu waye nbe labe aso (lines 11-16)	<i>My birth-price is hidden beneath</i>

In the extract above, anadiplosis in the repetition of *ileke* at the end of line 12 and at the beginning of line 13 shows a logical connection between *ileke* as an object of beauty and as a symbol of chastity. Some other instances of anadiplosis in the poem are:

Mo jo jo mo jo dojudede oko	<i>I danced till I got to the frontage of my husband</i>
Oko fi naira Kan lemi niwaju	<i>My husband patted my head with a Naira note</i>
Mo jo jo mo jo dojudede ale	<i>I danced till I got to the frontage of my concubine</i>
Ale fi ponun Kan lemi niwaju	<i>My concubine patted my head with a pond of Naira</i>
Esi ba n kale po ku asedanu	<i>Relay my pitiful message to the wasted concubine</i>
Asedanu ti ba ile ore nu je	<i>The wastefulness that brings sadness to a friend's house.</i>

Also, in the above, *oko* (husband) is contrasted with *ale* (concubine). While the former is fortunate, the latter is unfortunate. Anadiplosis enhances coherence through the maintenance of balance among discursive variables. In other words, anadiplosis, as illustrated in the samples above, expresses the experiential function of the people's socio-cultural beliefs. Anadiplosis emphasizes the link between language and the experience it is used to enact.

### Anaphora

Anaphora, the repetition of a word or phrase or clause at the beginning of successive stages is a rhetorical figure of repetition for underlining descriptive effects in literary works. A language user often attaches some measure of emotion to the experience being described and this is sometimes achieved through anaphora. For instance, the extract below supports this statement.

Meje logun, meje nire	<i>In all, there are seven Ogun</i>
Ogun dara ni gbaja	<i>Ogun is a good deity</i>
Ogun ikola agba agbo	<i>Ogun ikola demands for a ram for worship</i>
Ogun falefale to doyun leyin odi (lines 88-91)	<i>Ogun falefale is embraced by all in the countryard.</i>

The poet praises ‘Ogun’ (the Yoruba mythological god of iron). The successive repetition of ‘Ogun’ consecutively is aimed at placating the god to save the poet from the destructive end of anger. This is justified by the poet in line 118:

*Emi rubo kesu ma se mi o – The devil should move away from me.*

Anaphora plays a significant role in panegyric. The repetition of ‘e’ in lines 2-4 foregrounds the poet’s adulation of her mother

Iya mi, iya mi	<i>My mother, my mother</i>
E ku kike ti e ke mi	<i>Thanks for the pampering as you pampered me.</i>
E si ku gige ti e ge mi	<i>And thanks for the honour as you honoured me</i>
E ku ogbon ti e da si mi ninu	<i>Thanks for the wisdom that you bestowed upon me.</i>
Ti o jaso lo (lines 1-5)	<i>It is greater than bales of clothes.</i>

The plural pronominal (e) anaphorically refers to the poet’s mother as the object of the panegyric. The repetition of ‘e’ is important not only for emphasis but for the strong show of appreciation intended by the poet. Anaphora is also deployed in lines 25-32 to heighten the poet’s mix emotion of sadness and joy resulting from nostalgia.

Emi n lo loni omo onile-nla	<i>I am set to leave today, the one and beloved daughter of yours</i>
Emi n lo ibi won fabere gunyan	<i>I am leaving for the place where a needle is used to prepare pounded yam</i>
Ti ko gbodo ni koko	<i>The food must have a good taste</i>
Emi n lo bi won forogun roka	<i>I am leaving for the place where an ordinary sticks is an instrument used to stir yam flour</i>
Ti ko gbodo ni koko	<i>The food must have a good taste</i>
Emi n lo bi omo keekeke bu ni	<i>I am leaving for the place where little kids insult people at will</i>
Tia a o gbodo bu u di	<i>No one dare insult them</i>
Emi n lo lonii omo onile-nla (lines 25-32)	<i>I am set to leave today, the one and beloved daughter of yours</i>

### Epiphora

Epiphora is the direct opposite of anaphora structurally in that it involves the repetition of the same word, phrase or clause at the end of successive stages. While anaphora is used for unity and focus, epiphora is for end-focus. However, both are similar in respect of the stylistic effects they have in texts. Epiphora like anaphora is a device of repetition which places emphasis on a word, phrase or clause at the end of successive lines of poetry primarily to mark the poet’s emotional affiliations. See the extract below for illustration.

Iya mi, iya mi	<i>My Mother, my mother</i>
E ku kike ti e ke mi	<i>Thanks for the pampering me as you pampered me.</i>
E si ku gige ti e ge mi	<i>And thanks for the honour as you honoured me</i>

The repetition of ‘mi’ as seen above foregrounds the strong emotional bond the poet shares with her mother. The use of vocative at the beginning of the poem gives a sense of spontaneity to it. This sense of presence is enhanced through the interpersonal relationship established by the use of epiphora ‘m’ which has a filial relation with ‘e’ through the intermediate role of ‘ike’, ‘ige’ and ‘ogbon’ which the mother provides as parental service for the poet. Epiphora, in the instance above, shows ‘mi’ (me) as the receiver of the services or gestures.

Some other instances of epiphora in the poem are cited below:

Ara waju o gbodo de be	<i>The forerunners must desist</i>
Ero eyin eyin o gbodo de be (line 8-9)	<i>The descendants must desist</i>
Omo onile-nla	<i>The one and beloved daughter of yours</i>
Emi n lo lonii omo onile-nla (line 24-25)	<i>I am set to leave today, the one and beloved daughter of yours</i>

While the first sample (in 8-9) places emphasis on the verbal and adverbial elements 'de be' (must desist), the second emphasizes the poet's self adulation.

### Parallelism

Parallelism i.e. the similarity of features in successive lines of poetry (Adeyanju, 2008, p. 91) features prominently in the poem (*Ekun Iyawo*). Parallelism in this text creates a resonating pattern through total manipulation of various Yoruba words which the poet-singer uses. The following lines in the poem reveal other parallel structures that keep resonating throughout the poem.

E si ku gige ti e ge mi	<i>And thanks for the honour as you honoured me</i>
E ku ogbon ti e da si mi ninu	<i>Thanks for the wisdom that you bestowed upon me.</i>
Ti o jaso lo (lines 1-5)	<i>It is greater than loads of clothes.</i>
E ku ogbon ti e da si mi ninu.	<i>Thanks for the wisdom that you bestowed upon me.</i>

Ara waju o gbodo de be	<i>The forerunners must desist</i>
Ero eyin eyin o gbodo de be (line 8-9)	<i>The descendants must desist</i>

Oju mi wa doju oge	<i>My countenance radiates elegantly</i>
Idi mi wa didi ileke (Lines 11-12)	<i>My waist becomes adorned with beads</i>

The similarities in the structural patterns of the above samples create a textual effect by focusing the listeners' attention on the primary intention of the poet. The above lines reveal the structural and stylistic means by which the bride singer portrays her personal belief and understanding of the roles of the gods and her parents in bringing her to maturity.

### Syntactic Analysis

As it applies to other poetic forms, *Ekun Iyawo* (bridal chant) allows some constructions that would be stylistically marked in ordinary Yoruba conversation. Going through the poem, one notices the use of 'E' as it runs round the whole poem. The choice of this word is quite deliberate. It is for the purpose of emphasis. It shows what the bride singer feels at this occasion. She uses first person subjective pronoun to praise herself. Instances of the use of this device are found in the poem.

In some constructions from the text, e-construction is elliptical with respect to certain lexical items. Take for instance, in line (19), the full sentence could be derived from this sentences given.

Original text	Translation
<u>Mo</u> jojo jojo dojudale (line 19)	I danced till I got to the frontage of my concubine (line 19)
<u>Mo</u> jojo jojo emi Adunni doju ale (line 19)	I danced till I Adunni got to the frontage of my concubine (line 19)

In addition, the poet uses reference as a stylistic device to denote the importance of the occasion. Examples of this are found in lines 10, 17 and 39.

Original text	Translation
<u>Emi</u> Adunni ti mo de be mo bu boju (line 10)	I Adunni I got there and splashed my face (line 10)
<u>Mo</u> jojo jojo doju oko (line 17)	I danced till I got to my husband's frontage (17)
<u>Emi</u> naa wa yo loke bi ogede (line 39)	And I also emerge like banana (39)

The underlined words in the above examples are references. They are categorized as such because they refer and share direct relationship with the bride singer. More so, example of ellipsis in the text concerns the verbal marker 'Ki'. This lexical item ought to have appeared in the text. Its absence in line 21 is not very surprising because it is finally recoverable from the context.

Original text	Translation
Ale fi poun kan lemi niwaju (line 20)	My concubine patted my head with a pantry of Naira
(Ki) e ba n koko po kun oriire. (line 21)	Convey my glad tiding to my kind husband

As a matter of fact, in the above context, 'ki' is optional in ordinary spoken Yoruba, most especially, in the dialect of Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State where the poem is popular.

Finally, the message of the text is very compelling. This is because the poem, *Ekun Iyawo* relies heavily on shared cultural knowledge. In the text, the cultural belief of the poet is demonstrated clearly in so great a way that in effect the translation fails.

Original text	Translation
Ogede, kii gbe nu gbo so (line 40)	Banana grows not in an infertile forest (line 40)
Adase nii hunmo iba kii hunmo (line 48)	The child who strives alone is forsaken, not the seeker of help (line 48)
Abijilaya n te kute ile (line 70)	Boisterousness is the attitude of rodents (70)

All the above expressions are metaphoric and they can only be understood in the context where they are used.

### Conclusion

In Yoruba land, the marriage ceremony is considered sacred. It is an institution that everyone accords respect. This is why the bride, on her wedding day, becomes the cynosure of eyes. It is a ceremony that attracts the attention of relatives, friends and well wishers both within and outside the vicinity. In the night of the wedding ceremony, the bride goes before the male elders of the family to obtain blessing. The eldest of the elders starts the prayer, asking the ancestors to protect the bride as she moves a step further in life. He/she also admonishes her to be of good conduct in her new abode. All other male and later female members take their turn to pray for her and advise her. After these prayers, she then turns to her mother for prayer and blessing in form of bride's song of departure *Ekun Iyawo*. It is at this stage that *Ekun Iyawo* (bride's song) begins. It is one of the most significant parts of marriage ceremony. At this occasion, everyone is moved into both the emotions of joy as well as sympathy and therefore empathizes with the bride as she renders this melodious song in tears.

From the foregoing, we can discern that *Ekun Iyawo* (bride's song) is a veritable source of data for stylistics. As revealed thus far, the poem uses stylistic devices such as anadiplosis, anaphora, epiphora, etc. predominantly to make the poem effective. Therefore, the poem analyzed in this study can be used for teaching and learning in language classrooms. Through stylistics, the forms and functions of language can be taught effectively.

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