

# **A LEXICO-GRAPHOLOGICAL STUDY OF SELECTED POEMS IN GBOGI'S *LOCOMOTIFS AND OTHER SONGS***

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the stylistic elements present in Tosin Gbogi's poetry collection, *Locomotifs and Other Songs*, specifically focusing on lexico-semantic and graphological features. It studies how the poet utilises unique vocabulary and physical imagery to emboss in the reader's minds resonant themes. Mounted upon the theory of Context of Situation, the paper emphasises the relationship between text and context. Employing the analytical method of critical thinking and Halliday's Context of Situation as its theoretical framework, the paper points out the different features of lexico-semantic and graphological data extracted from the poems. It examines the significance of features such as word blending and compounding, alongside foregrounded graphological features such as embolding, punctuation, concrete imagery and creative spelling. These features are shown to enhance the aesthetic and communicative power of the poems, enabling them to address critical issues prevalent in Nigeria and Africa. It is the conclusion of the paper that the deviations in which Gbogi's linguistic forms find expression compel a message of the need for genuine anger and action to address social deviations occasioned by corrupt leadership, as well as failed moral, social and democratic ethos.

## **Introduction/Background to the Study**

**Stylistics as a Concept:** Stylistics is defined as the study of style. It is the study of the different styles that are present in a given utterance or written text. The consistent appearance of certain structures, items and elements in a speech, an utterance or in a given text is one of the major concerns of stylistics. Burke (2014, p. 1) defines stylistics as "the study and analysis of literary texts". Stylistics requires the use of traditional levels of linguistic description such as sound, form, structure and meaning. It then follows that the consistent appearance of certain structures, items and elements in speech or in a given text is one of the major concerns of stylistics. While style may be regarded as a choice of linguistic means, as deviation from the norms of language use, recurrent features of linguistic forms and as comparisons, stylistics deals with a wide range of language varieties and styles that are possible in creating different texts, whether spoken or written, monologue or dialogue, formal or informal, scientific or religious, etc.

Again, stylistics is concerned with the study of the language of literature or the study of the language habits of particular authors and their writing patterns. From the foregoing, stylistics can be said to be the techniques of explication which allow us to define objectively what an author has done, (linguistic or literary), in his use of language. The main aim of stylistics is to enable us to understand the intent of the author in the manner the

information has been passed across by the author or writer. Therefore, stylistics is more interested in the significance of function that the chosen style fulfills. Significantly, Leech and Short (2007, p.30) declare that stylistics is “the study of language as used in literary texts, with the aim of relating it to its artistic functions”. Indeed, stylistics is not only the literary study of language but also the linguistic study of literature. On the one hand, linguistic stylistics investigates the linguistic features in a text. In relation to style, linguistic stylistics, therefore, points out those linguistic choices which a writer or speaker has made as well as the effects of the choices. However, this does not imply that linguistic stylistics ignores the meanings which a poem conveys. In fact, the meaning is the focal point. From the linguistic approach Crystal and Davy (1989, p.10) posit that:

the aim of stylistics is to analyse language habits with the main purpose of identifying, from the general mass of linguistic features common to English as used on every conceivable occasion, those features which are restricted to certain kinds of social context; to explain, where possible, why such features have been used, as opposed to other alternatives; and to classify these features into categories based upon a view of their function in the social context.

On the other hand, literary stylistics is primarily concerned with messages and the interest in codes (language) which lies in the meaning they convey in particular instances of use. The beauty of language and how it is used to capture reality is also the focal concern of literary stylistics. Literary stylistics takes interpretation as its aim. It is interested in finding out what aesthetic experience or perception of reality a poem, for example, is attempting to convey. Literary stylistics observes how the language systems are used as a means to its end and searches for underlying significance, for the essential artistic vision which language is used to express. From the above explanations, we notice that linguistic stylistics and the literary stylistics flow into each other which is in line with Ngara (1982, p.12) who points out that the literary stylistician has a wider domain because in addition to using the analytic tools of the linguist such as grammar, lexis, phonology, prosody, etc., he must also concern himself with the wider issues of deviation from the norm. He must “deal with the relationship between language and character, between author and audience, and inevitably between linguistic features and content value”.

### **Poetry and Stylistics**

In his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth famously described poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility”. Poetry is the product of a poet's powerful feelings, imaginative vision, and skilled craftsmanship expressed through the medium of language. This simply means poetry is peculiar to each poet which indicates that “style is the man” and each poet is licensed to use linguistic systems to express their emotions and feelings while highlighting the realities of his immediate society. Leech (1969, p.5) posits that:

The creative writer, and more particularly the poet, enjoys a unique freedom, amongst users of the language, to range over all its communicative resources, without respect to the social or historical contexts to which they belong. This means, amongst other things, that the poet can draw on the language of past ages, or can borrow features belonging to other, non-literary uses of language, as Ezra Pound and T. S.

Eliot, for example, have made use of the English of banal, prosody conversation in some of their poems.

Contemporary African poets project their artistic vision through the pain motif. The African pain motif enables poets to explore the human conditions and the prevalent issues in society as a result of the sociopolitical condition of society. Poets through their individual styles and licence are able to project their emotions of pain and disappointment. While the earlier phase of African poetry was a protest against cultural imperialism and the need to counter the negative image of Africa presented in European works, the contemporary phase of African poetry is preoccupied with the social, economic and political debasement prevailing in African societies. Achebe argues that any writer in Africa:

who ignores the major social issues of their time will end up being irrelevant like the absurd man in the proverb who chases after rats while his house is burning.

*Locomtifs and Other Songs* presents Gbogi as a committed poet of the people with his unique style which is in line with the opinion of Crystal and Davy (1969, p. 77) when they say:

To talk of studying the 'style' of an author does not usually imply a study of everything in the language he has used, but only an attempt to isolate, define, and discuss those linguistic features which are felt to be peculiarly his, which help to distinguish him from other authors --- a common use in literary criticism and questions of authorship identification, for example.

Gbogi through his creative style presents the state of being of the people and society at large cutting across the strata of politics, religion, love, nationalism, and the sharp pain of a society in search of healing.

### **Levels of Stylistic Analysis**

For a stylistician to successfully study any work of art either at the linguistic level or at the literary level, he/she must take into account the shape of the work (if it is written), the sound (when in speech or in poetry) the sentence form and structure and the contextual use of words. A stylistician is a person who studies any piece of language and is expected to undertake a stylistic study with the goal of asking certain questions like "why" and "how", and provides answers to these questions, which is the interpretation of the text, and gives value judgment. The formal levels at which this is done are phonological, graphological, lexico-semantic and grammatical.

Lexico-semantic features deal with word meanings (at the lexical level) including synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, hyponymy, denotation, and connotation, and longer expressions (at the semantic level) including allegories, parables, and tropes of meaning. Graphological features like spelling, punctuation and images are used for foregrounding in poetry and advertising. Phonological devices like metre, rhyme and alliteration convey meaning in poetry, drama and music. Grammatical features include morphological peculiarities of words and syntactic deviations from conventions to express thoughts. Overall, stylistic analysis examines how language is used to create meaning and effect in a text.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this paper is to reveal the stylistic significance of selected poems in Gbogi's *Locomotifs and Other Songs*. To achieve this aim, the specific objectives of the research are, to:

- i. show how the lexico-semantic features employed by the poet, such as lexical features and tropes of meaning are foregrounded;
- ii. reveal the specific graphological features, including punctuation, line breaks, and spacing, which contribute to the overall meaning and effect of the poetry; and,
- iii. reveal the poet's central preoccupations and the messages these features are communicating through these stylistic choices.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Several scholars have explored the concept of style and its significance in literary and non-literary works. But lexico-graphological study in literary works such as poetry, and in Gbogi's *Locomotifs and Other Songs*, in particular, has been neglected to the best of the knowledge of this researcher. This paper, therefore, examines the selected poems at the level of lexico-semantics and graphology. It also seeks to uncover how the poet weaves words and paints pictures and imagery in the minds of the readers, words and images that are aesthetically pleasing and significant. Furthermore, it establishes the thematic preoccupation of the poet such as corrupt leadership, failed democracy, abuse of power, moral and social decay, and history.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will be of immense value to those who have particular interests in stylistics, stylistic analysis and poetry. Though diverse researches have been carried out on different levels of stylistic features in poetry, this work is specific in that it focuses on the lexico-graphological features in some of the selected poems. It will serve as a referential source for any scholarly research to be carried out in areas similar to the focus of this paper.

### **Scope and Methodology**

As highlighted earlier, there are four major levels of stylistic features namely, phonology, graphology, grammar and lexico-semantics. Also, *Locomotifs and Other Songs* is a collection of 49 poems, it would be impossible to use all these poems as the primary source for the stylistic study of this paper within the given time and length. To make optimum use of the data, the scope of the study is restricted to selected poems and stanzas which reveal deviations in spellings, visual images, word blending, simile, metaphor, compounding, etc. Using the analytical method of critical thinking, this study focuses on both linguistic and literary effects at two different levels of stylistic analysis, namely, graphology and lexico-semantics.

### **Bio-data of the Poet**

Tosin Gbogi teaches in the Department of English Studies, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Nigeria. He received a master's degree in English Literature from Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK and is at present completing a doctoral degree in the Interdisciplinary Program in Linguistics at Tulane University, New Orleans, USA. Formerly a Senior Arts Editor at Kraft Books, Ibadan, Gbogi is the author of the poetry collection *The Tongues of a Shattered s-k-y*.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Context of situation focuses on the immediate linguistic and extralinguistic features of a communicative act. Halliday and Hasan (1985, p. 12) see the context of situation theory as the “environment in which meanings are being exchanged”. The term was first coined by Malinowski in 1922 to refer to the cultural context of use in which an utterance is located; furthermore, ‘the whole way of life’ (cultural context) has to be borne in mind in interpreting an utterance. However, Firth goes on to expand on the theory and emphasizes that meaning is context-dependent. According to Firth quoted in Udofot (1998, p. 69) context of situation is:

the meaning not only in terms of the linguistic element and the sense it makes to the hearer but also seems to see any word or utterance as meaningful in terms of who said it, to whom, where, in whose presence, with what objects around and what effect it has on the hearer/s.

Consequently, in modern studies, Halliday expanded it to mean the extralinguistic circumstances of use that influence the linguistic form of an utterance: not only the social and physical setting, but also such factors as social relationships, the nature of the medium, the task, and the topic. He proposed that there is a systematic relationship between ‘typical’ situations and the types of language employed within them. He goes further to break the theory of context of situation into field, tenor and mode of discourse models. The field of discourse refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component?

The tenor of discourse refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved? The mode of discourse refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like. From the above, we come to the understanding that text and context are related. Thus for a better understanding of a discourse, the text and the context should be placed side by side. This is based on the fact that text is made up of linguistic items or lexical items arranged to form a discourse and understood based on the context presented. For this reason, Gbogi’s *Locomotifs and Other Songs* will be analysed based on this theory to see how lexical items are arranged and what they mean in relation to the context of the physical environment on which the work is based.

### **An Overview of Stylistic Features in the Text**

#### **Lexico-semantic and Graphological Data in the Text**

**Text 1** commands the birds to fly home to their free-doom (p.18)

**Text 2** that is power's eventual desti-nation (p.33)

**Text 3** and frank-incense of licentious sins... (p. 34)

**Text 4** my brain fuzzy  
my path unpara-ll. (p. 60)

**Text 5** i, a pro-di(g)al  
g  
e  
r (p. 65)

**Text 6** i am clean  
clean like a holy book  
i am clean  
clean like the inside of the padre's chalice (p.34)

**Text 7** some things are like that:  
when a naytion stuffs between your legs  
a cunning island of pains  
gambling, such a naytion gambles with your love (p.17)

**Text 8** a naytion plants bitter leaves  
waits for sweet potatoes  
a naytion plants a full-blown buffon  
waits for signs magic and miracle from god  
a naytion plants a full-blown comedian  
says to him after the deluge: "bring back our girls" (p.18)

**Text 9** nelson, neon lights cast upon the night  
eons heavy with a cast of memories,  
language bares its final soul.  
soweto remembers the penal boundaries of up-rising  
on a night like this, nelson, a night like this when  
neon lights cast upon the world a cast of  
memories: a massacre so sharp  
and vile: a botha bold to a brainless core  
night on his lips, pronounces his race into the hate of  
dawn that brings robben island to its knees.  
en route, nelson is finally en route to free(dom) town  
let him have eternal peace, oh  
angels biko and brutus, quicken his pace to heavensgate (p.53)

**Text 10** all true love does: not end and not begin (p.17)

**Text 11** how  
how  
they  
dare  
death  
and live...(p.60)

**Text 12** i wonder...  
with  
s

i  
l  
e  
n  
c  
e...(p.79)

**Text 13** is the same who will judge him for his pedofun (p.67)

**Text 14** a naytion plants bitter leaves  
a naytion plants sanatorium  
a naytion plants tyranny (p.18)

### **Aspects of Lexico-semantic Features in the Text**

Lexico-semantic features in stylistics is a compound name derived from two sets of features: lexis and semantics. While lexis refers to the totality of words and their meanings semantics refers to the study and changes of meaning. Indeed, lexico-semantics refers to the way a writer employs individual words and longer expressions in terms of their meanings. Thus a stylistic analysis at the lexico-semantic level studies how words are employed in context. The lexical features examined in this text are specifically concerned with the choice of words in context. They reveal the specific ways in which Gbogi employs words, what these words mean and how they are written, which is in line with the opinion of Thorne (1988, p. 290) that:

We read poems (or should) in a way which is quite different from the way in which we read other texts, because in the case of other texts it is the imposition of one, and only one, meaning that is important. Learning to read a poem . . . is a matter of learning to hear what normally we must be deaf to: the inexhaustible ambiguity of utterances.

### **Lexical Features**

In Text 1, Gbogi uses "free-doom" blending "freedom" and "doom" which creates a powerful and ironic term that suggests a false or deceptive freedom that actually leads to destruction or doom. By using "free-doom", the poet highlights the irony and the oppressive reality masked by the guise of liberty, reinforcing the critic of tyranny and the false promises made by those in power. Text 2 shows the word "destination," splitting it into "desti-nation," which is not only a creative use of language but also serves to emphasise the idea of power ultimately leading to powerlessness. It cleverly combines the concept of power as a destination with the inevitability of its decline or loss of a nation, using the structure of the word itself to convey a deeper meaning.

In Text 3, Gbogi uses "frank-incense" instead of "frankincense" which is often linked with purity, spirituality, and sacred rituals. By altering it to "frank-incense," the poet juxtaposes its sacred connotations with "licentious sins," creating an ironic contrast. Its significance is to highlight the irony and contrast between the expected purity associated with frankincense and the actual corruption and licentiousness present in the poet's environment. This enhances the overall theme of moral and social decay. In Text 4, the traditional meaning of "unparalleled" (without equal) still resonates, suggesting that the speaker's path is unique, without comparison. However, the fragmented presentation "unpara-ll" adds a layer of irony, indicating that this uniqueness might come from confusion

and lack of direction rather than a positive distinction which explains the “fuzzy” state of the brain.

In Text 5, apart from the lexical meaning of "prodigal" this means someone who returns after a period of reckless behavior, placing "g e r" under "di" reinforces the idea of digging or going deeper into oneself. The lexical and graphological significance is that it symbolises a journey downward or inward, aligning with the theme of returning or coming back to a place of origin or to the "queen ido-to."

### **Semantic Features**

The dominant semantic features in the selected poems are tropes of meaning. A trope is a representative or symbol of something else. Tropes of meaning refer to figures of speech in literature and they are commonly employed for the purpose of foregrounding. Some of the common tropes of meaning foregrounded in this text are simile, metaphor, irony, and paradox.

#### **Simile**

Simile is an indirect comparison. It is a trope of meaning in which the characteristics of an entity are employed to describe another entity which is completely different but which has at least one quality in common with the first domain employing any of the expressions like: "like", "as", "as...as", "in manner of...", "reminds one of...". In text 6 we see simile in the comparison between their cleanliness to that of a holy book and the inside of a padre's chalice. Here, Gbogi captures the corrupt state of society and how everyone wittingly and unwittingly is guilty of the crime of putrefaction.

#### **Metaphor**

Like the simile, metaphor is also an indirect comparison but with the absence of the expressions such as "like", "as", "as...as", "in manner of...", "reminds one of...". Metaphor is the most important trope of meaning as it distinguishes a literary work from other forms of writing. According to Csábi (2014, p. 207), "metaphor is based on a resemblance, a pre-existing similarity between the two entities that are compared and identified; it is a shortened comparison." In text 7, the "cunning island of pains" metaphorically describes something painful and intrusive, suggesting a deep and complex emotional or physical violation. The metaphor extends further with the idea of a nation "gambling with your love," indicating recklessness or disregard for something precious.

#### **Irony**

Irony as a trope of meaning enables writers to say the exact opposite of what they mean knowing that their true meaning will be perceived by the reader or hearer. In Text 8, Gbogi presents a situational irony to convey a contrast between what is expected and what actually happens. It emphasises the discrepancy between the nation's actions and the outcomes they hope for, underscoring a critic of misplaced faith or leadership.

### **Aspects of Graphological Features in the Text**

In stylistic analysis, graphological features appeal to the sense of sight and is thus conveyed through the visual medium. In Gbogi's *Locomotifs and Other Songs*, the graphological deviations, unusual applications, distortion or peculiar use of these features are stylistically significant and serve as a means of foregrounding the poet's message. Foregrounding



according to Gregoriou (2014, p. 87) "refers to the property of perceptual prominence that certain things have against the backdrop of other, less noticeable things." Significantly, the collection exudes the concept of "style is the man". The poet consistently makes use of lower case letters throughout the collection including his own name, the cover title, human names like Tayo, Osundare, Nelson, McKay, etc, physical locations like Africa, London, Odiham, etc.

### **Embolding**

Embolding writings is an emphatic device employed in literary works like poetry and in non-literary works like advertising for the purpose of emphasis and foregrounding. In text 9, the poet employs the acrostic style, where the first letters of each new line spell out "Nelson Mandela". This technique ensures that Mandela's presence is felt throughout the poem, even as specific events and emotions are described. It also underscores his central role in the history and memory of the events being described.

### **Punctuation Deviation**

Gbogi unusually employs the colon (:) to indicate deviation from the rules of punctuations. The colon as a punctuation mark is primarily used to separate an introduction from the elements that come with the introduction. However, in text 10, the colon is used to separate the dummy auxiliary (does) and the negator (not) thereby accepting the idea instead of refuting it.

### **Concrete Image**

Poets often manipulate concrete and abstract images and shapes to communicate their messages. Text 11 and 12 show how Gbogi exploits concrete images in which the shape and structure of these stanzas are arranged to depict the subject matter of each poem. In Text 11, the disjointed and staggered layout reflects the disorienting nature of vertigo. It conveys a sense of instability and imbalance, which mirrors the poet's internal state of fearing the heights they have reached and the potential fall. Text 12 depicts a state of silence. The arrangement of "silence" slows down the reading pace and creates a visual pause, which draws attention to the word itself, emphasising the theme of silence, contemplation and wonderment.

### **Spellings**

Spelling is a graphological feature which refers to the combination of letters of the alphabet to compose words and sentences. In recent times, creative writers have become remarkably inventive in spellings and Gbogi is not left out. Indeed, text 13 and 14 show deviations in spellings such that "pedophile" is spelt "pedofun" to highlight the ironic situation of the mullah who teaches Arabic to "teenage girls at unislamic hours of the day". Also the introduction of an additional letter to "naytion" denotes that the nation is in fact not positive but a negative nay-tion.

### **Conclusion**

Tosin Gbogi's *Locomotifs and Other Songs* is a powerful and thought-provoking poetry collection that explores critical issues facing Nigeria and Africa. Through his skillful use of language, Gbogi delivers a compelling message about the need for genuine anger and action to address societal challenges such as corrupt leadership, failed democracy, moral and social

decay and social injustice. The analysis reveals how Gbogi employs various stylistic techniques at the lexico-semantic and graphological levels to foreground his central themes and messages. At the lexico-semantic level, the poet's innovative use of lexical features like blending, compounding, and word splitting creates new meanings that enhance the poems' impact.

Graphologically, Gbogi's unconventional use of punctuation, spelling, and visual imagery contributes significantly to the poems' aesthetic appeal and communicative power. Embodying, acrostic patterns, and concrete imagery engage the reader's senses and provoke deeper reflection on the subject matter. The consistent use of lower case letters, even for proper nouns, underscores the poet's unique style and his commitment to challenging societal norms. The poems' diverse themes, historical references, and tribute to African icons like Nelson Mandela and Kofi Awoonor make it a standout work that deserves recognition. Gbogi's stylistic choices not only captivate the reader but also inspire reflection and a call to action on the pressing issues facing Africa. In conclusion, *Locomotifs and Other Songs* is a remarkable achievement that demonstrates the power of language to effect change and promote social justice.

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