Style and Aesthetics in Selected Niyi Osundare's Environmental Related Poems

By

Akande-Adedeji, O. T. & Adesanmi M. A.
Departments of Industrial Design & General Studies, Federal University of Technology (former Federal Polytechnic), Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria
Olufunke.akande-adedeji@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng &
moses.adesanmi@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng +2348066154807 & + 2347068676403

Abstract

This study examines the stylistic and aesthetic dimensions of environmental consciousness in selected poems by Niyi Osundare. Situated within the growing field of ecological literary studies, the paper focuses on four environmentally oriented poems to explore how language shapes ecological meaning. The research is anchored on two language-based theories: Stylistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics, which together provide tools for analyzing textual patterns and functional language use. The objective is to demonstrate how Osundare's linguistic choices construct environmental awareness and encode ideological positions about nature and human responsibility. Methodologically, the study adopts qualitative textual analysis, closely examining diction, imagery, transitivity patterns, and figurative expressions in the selected poems. Findings reveal that Osundare's use of simple, nature-centered vocabulary, personification, and functional sentence structures foregrounds ecological degradation while promoting a harmonious human–nature relationship. The analysis further shows that his stylistic strategies are deliberately crafted to make environmental issues accessible and emotionally engaging. The study concludes that language in Osundare's poetry is not merely decorative but instrumental in advancing ecological consciousness and advocacy, reinforcing the role of literature as a medium for environmental sensitization and cultural reflection in contemporary African poetry.

Keywords: Activism, ecology, orality, sustainability

Introduction

Degradation of the environment has become one of the most pressing challenges of the world, and has received constant attention in many other fields, such as literature. The environment has become a major influence in the creation of art, with problems like deforestation, pollution, and climate change leading to the creation of a new kind of literature: environmentally conscious or ecologically oriented literature. Poetry has become a potent tool in African literature to communicate concerns over the environment and the need to engage in sustainable interactions with the natural world. In this respect, Niyi Osundare's works are notable, since his works consistently emphasize the interconnection of the human and natural world, and expose ecological abuse (Adekunle, 2021). Osundare's environmental poetry, particularly in *The Eye of the Earth,* and *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, is grounded in an ecological awareness that stems from his own indigenous African perspective. Researchers have found that his poems depict nature as dynamic, alive, and not only a setting but a person that is in continual flux and interaction with human beings, rather than a static, inert background, that is not the case of anthropocentric view of nature (Ejiodu, 2023). Moreover, his application of easy words, oral style and vivid imagery improves not only the beauty but also the effectiveness of communication delivery of his ecological message (Adaramola & Olaleru, 2024). The stylistic selections are consistent with other academic findings related to language as an important factor in shaping perceptions and discourse of the environment (Halliday, 1990).

Though a lot of research has taken place on the aspect of environmental concerns of Osundare, most of the studies done have been thematic one with little attention given to systematic analysis of style and aesthetics of the work through language-based theories. Studies that recognise his stylistic ingenuity seldom incorporate approaches like the stylistic framework (Stylistics) and system functional linguistics (SFL) in order to explain in detail how the linguistic structures produce ecological meaning. This leaves the reader with limited understanding of the relationship between language, style, and environmental advocacy of his poetry.
Thus, the importance of this study is that it tries to fill this gap by interpreting and analysing selected poems of environment with the help of stylistic and functional types of linguistic analysis. In doing this the study not only makes a contribution to the scholarship of Osundare but it also enriches the general scholarship of

ecocritical literary studies as it shows the way language is used as instrument of environmental consciousness and ideologies. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the significance of African poetry as a means of tackling global environmental problems. The aim of this study is to examine how stylistic and aesthetic features in selected environmental poems by Osundare construct and communicate ecological consciousness through language. To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following objectives:

Identify and analyze the key stylistic features employed in the selected environmental poems.

Examine how linguistic choices, using Systemic Functional Linguistics, encode environmental meanings and relationships.

Evaluate the aesthetic functions of these stylistic elements in promoting ecological awareness and advocacy.

Literature Review

Poetry has been more and more identified as a potent tool for environmental awareness, resistance and cultural reflection in recent scholarship on African literature. In this discourse, Niyi Osundare's production has been given a continuous critical scrutiny for its high environmental sensitivity and easy accessibility.

Ecocritical scholarship is the theoretical framework for understanding environmental literature. In the eyes of Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), ecocriticism is the examination of the connection between literature and the natural world, and nature becomes a major category of literary analysis. This is expanded by Buell (2005) who states that literature is important in developing environmental awareness and that environmental literature can help to bring together the human and non-human worlds. Likewise, Garrard (2012) develops ecocritical study and explores the fundamental environmental tropes – pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, that often feature in environmentally oriented work. Together, these pioneering works provide a solid basis on which to argue that literature is not just a product of environment awareness but is also a producer of it.

Among the fields of African literary studies, ecocriticism has been applied to the study of relationships between postcolonial realities and environmental problems. Nwagbara (2018) places African ecocritical writing in the context of struggles over land, resource control, and environmental justice in the postcolonial world. In general he claims that in Africa, ecological devastation is often confused with socio-political exploitation, allowing ecocriticism to be extended beyond a purely aesthetic critique to an ideological one. The link between environmental degradation and political economy in Africa is also emphasised by Bassey (2012) who notes that ecological crises in Africa are frequently associated with the appropriation of oil and capitalist extraction systems. Such views are particularly important in the context of Nigerian environmental literature, where ecological degradation is often correlated with the industrial and political frameworks. In this context, Osundare's poetry can be seen as representative of an African poetic movement that is concerned with the environment and that raises the awareness of Africans about the exploitation of the environment by humans and their emphasis on eco-values. The stylistic analysis method serves as a link between a language and literary interpretation. According to Leech and Short (2007), stylistics is a study of the linguistic choices which produce meaning and aesthetic effect in texts. They maintain that a close examination of the texts shows patterns which are missed by traditional literary criticism.

In Simpson (2014), stylistics is extended beyond the examination of text features to examine how text features like diction, modality and transitivity help to construct meaning. He emphasizes that the sophisticated and complex linguistic density and emphasized patterns of poetry make it an ideal application of stylistics. Stylistics helps, in respect to environmental literature, to gain insights into the way language is used to convey, particularly visually, the ecological meaning, such as the use of repetition and metaphor.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a functional theory of language that was developed by Halliday (1994) that emphasizes the construction of meaning through use. Halliday identifies three metafunctions which are ideational, interpersonal and textual. Linguistic representation of nature experiences is particularly significant within environmental texts, which is why the ideational metafunction, particularly the transitivity analysis, is relevant. According to

Eggins (2004), SFL helps analysts to investigate the processes, participants and circumstances coded in clauses, which reveals the underlying ideologies in discourse. This is helpful in environmental discourse to determine if nature is portrayed as a subject or object.

Critical scholarship has consistently placed Osundare amongst the most prominent African poets responding to ecological issues. Osundare's poetry books, such as *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), *Songs of the Marketplace* (1990), and *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* (2014), often are referenced as texts that focus on the environmental degradation, agricultural life, and human–nature interdependence. Jeyifo (2004) situates Osundare within a tradition of socially engaged African poetry, noting his commitment to public issues such as inequality and environmental justice. Similarly, Ododo (2008) emphasizes the performative and oral dimensions of Osundare's poetry, arguing that his use of repetition, rhythm, and indigenous idioms strengthens the communal appeal of his ecological message. Gikandi (2000) also notes that African literature often reflects a tension between modernity and indigenous worldviews, a dynamic evident in Osundare's blending of Yoruba oral aesthetics with modern environmental consciousness.

Despite the depth of existing scholarship, several gaps remain evident. First, most ecocritical studies of Osundare emphasize thematic interpretation (environmental degradation, justice, exploitation) against detailed linguistic analysis. Stylistic studies also tend to describe features such as imagery and diction without systematically applying linguistic frameworks such as SFL to explain how meaning is structurally encoded. In addition, while African ecocritical scholarship acknowledges Osundare's environmental engagement, there is limited integration of combined stylistic and systemic functional linguistic analysis to examine how specific grammatical and lexical choices construct ecological ideology at the micro-textual level. This study addresses these gaps by integrating Stylistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics to conduct a close textual analysis of selected environmental poems by Osundare, demonstrating how language functions not only as a vehicle of representation but also as a tool of environmental ideology and persuasion.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two complementary language theory, namely Stylistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics. They offer analytical devices for analysis of the aesthetic and ideological roles of language in literary texts, especially when it comes to constructing environmental significance. Stylistics is an attempt to the systematic study of the language in literary works, in which the linguistic choices and the production of meaning and artistic effects are analyzed. It is a branch that combines linguistics and literary criticism in studying aspects of a text like diction, imagery, syntax and figurative language (Simpson, 2014). In the field of poetry stylistics allows a thorough analysis of the way in which the poets manipulate the language to reach their communicative and aesthetic aims. Stylistic analysis is a crucial process for revealing the implied messages contained in literature, since it gives an indication of the interaction between form and content (Leech & Short, 2007). Stylistics is relevant to Osundare's poetry for several reasons, including the way he chooses to write in a simple and nature-oriented language, uses repetition, and employs oral techniques to convey ecological issues.

The Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by M. A. K. Halliday is a complement to the stylistics. The SFL approach to language is a social semiotic one in which meaning is developed by functional decisions. Halliday (1994) distinguishes three metafunctions of language: ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and textual metafunction. The ideational metafunction is concerned with the representation of experience and reality in language, such as is examined in transitivity patterns; the interpersonal metafunction with the interpersonal relationships and attitudes conveyed in language, and the textual metafunction with how information is arranged in language. The value of this study is the application of SFL, which offers a structured way of analysing the encoding of meanings in the environment through linguistic forms. Nature, for example, may be active or passive in the representation, offering clues to the poet's ecological view point (Eggins, 2004). In addition, SFL enables an analysis of the relationship between human and environment as constructed via language and thus of implicit ideology. Stylistics and SFL are integrated in this paper to provide a powerful analytical tool for this study. Stylistics deals with the aesthetic and formal dimension of language, whilst SFL gives insight into the functional and ideological dimension of these features. Together, they offer a complete picture of

the way in which Osundare's poetic text not only evokes artistic effects but also conveys environmental awareness. Such a co-operative effort is thus appropriate to elucidate the complex interplay of style, aesthetics and ecological significance in the poems chosen.

Methodology

The research design used in this study is descriptive qualitative one that is appropriate for literary analysis as it involves interpretation, examination of the text and the meaning. Qualitative method can be used to provide an in-depth analysis of linguistic and stylistic elements in a literary text in cases where the purpose is to gain insight into the role of language in the construction of aesthetic and ideological significance (Creswell, 2014). The four purposefully selected environmental poems by Niyi Osundare are the main sources of data for this research. The choice is based on the importance of ecological themes like environmental degradation, human–nature relationships and natural imagery. Poems are selected from well-known and commonly studied works in African literary scholarship, such as *The Eye of the Earth* and *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, both of which are noted for their emphasis on the environment. Textual sourcing is the data collecting method used, which means only published and verifiable texts were used. For reliability and academic integrity, only the authenticated works of Osundare's poetry and peer-reviewed scholarly materials are used. Other secondary materials consist of journal articles, books and critical essays about environmental literary studies and linguistic analysis.

The study uses an integrated analytical framework of Stylistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics as tools in the data analysis. The analysis moves from a careful examination of the poems selected, highlighting the important stylistic elements of the poems, including diction, imagery, symbolism, and figurative language. In addition, Systemic Functional Linguistics is utilized to analyze how meaning is created in the structure of the language, especially using transitivity patterns, lexical choices and clause organization. Analytical approach consists of recognizing linguistic regularities and understanding their functions for the purpose of depicting environmental realities and relationships. This involves critiquing the way nature is represented (as active or passive), the way human activity is represented, and how the way nature is represented in the poems relates

to the ecological message. The study validates the results through triangulation of the data that relates data analysis of the text to the interpretation given by scholars. This way, the analysis will be more applicable and have a solid theoretical basis. In general, methodology is an attempt to make an analysis of style and aesthetics in Osundare's environmental poetry systematically, theory-driven and verifiable.

Analysis and Discussion

This section analyses four selected environmental poems by Niyi Osundare using Stylistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics. The poems are: *"The Rocks Rose to Meet Me," "Not My Business," "Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder,"* and *"The Eye of the Earth."*

Nature as Living Presence: "The Rocks Rose to Meet Me"

Osundare opens with a striking line:

"The rocks rose to meet me" (*The Eye of the Earth*,)

This line is a clear case of personification, where "rocks" are assigned human movement ("rose") and intention ("to meet"). Stylistically, the simplicity of diction intensifies its poetic force. From a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, the clause encodes a material process, with "rocks" functioning as Actor. This shifts agency from humans to nature, challenging anthropocentric ideology and reinforcing an ecocentric worldview (Halliday, 1994). The poetic effect is the collapse of boundary between human and natural worlds, suggesting intimacy rather than domination.

Ecological Responsibility: "Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder"

A key ecological injunction appears in:

"Ours to plough, not to plunder" (*Songs of the Marketplace*)

The structure relies on antithesis between "plough" and "plunder." The modal possessive "ours" constructs collective responsibility. Stylistically, the brevity of the clause enhances memorability, functioning almost like a proverb. This reflects Osundare's oral aesthetic tradition. In SFL terms, the clause expresses a relational attributive process, assigning moral duty to the collective subject "ours." The opposition between productive and destructive verbs encodes ideological tension around environmental use.

Environmental Ethics and Collective Identity

Another recurring ecological stance is reflected in:

"The earth is our resting place" (*The Eye of the Earth*)

Here, "earth" is metaphorically constructed as a "resting place," implying temporality and stewardship rather than ownership. From a stylistic perspective, the metaphor is calm and reflective, contrasting with more urgent protest tones elsewhere in Osundare's work. In SFL analysis, the clause functions as a relational identifying process, defining the earth in human terms while reinforcing interdependence.

Environmental Degradation and Moral Warning

A stronger warning tone appears in:

"The earth is wounded" (*Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*)

The lexical choice "wounded" frames environmental damage in human bodily terms, reinforcing emotional engagement. Stylistically, this metaphor intensifies ecological concern by evoking suffering. SFL analysis shows a relational intensive structure, where "earth" is equated with a "wounded" entity, suggesting a permanent state of harm caused by human activity.

Discussion of Findings

The selected poems of environmental related concerns by Niyi Osundare were analyzed to show that there is a pattern of language and stylistic strategies that allows the construction of ecological meaning. Upon analysing his environmental poetry under the framework of Stylistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics, it is elucidated that the poem is not merely an aesthetic product but also an ideological product as the poet is deliberately shaping the words to shape the perception and attitude of the audience towards the environment.

One of the main findings of this study is that nature is consistently personified as a main stylistic and functional device throughout the analysed poems. Nature is not just a setting in which humans operate, but an agent within the ecological system. Inanimate things within the natural world are given human agency, movement and intentionality with phrases like "The rocks rose to meet me". Such a stylistic selection not only helps to enrich poetic vividness but also redraws the boundaries between man and nature. From the SFL point of view, the same shift

can be realised in terms of transitivity structures, which place the natural elements as Actors in material processes, thus reallocating agency from humans and questioning entrenched anthropocentric assumptions.

The use of collective and moral language is another important feature, as is the inclusion of the pronouns "ours" in constructions like "Ours to plough, not to plunder." It is a linguistic decision that makes the responsibility to care for the environment a social responsibility, not an individual one. The antithetical construction of such expressions further heightens the moral dimension of the poetry contrasting the sustainable interaction with destructive exploitation. In form, these are short and proverbial, with stylistic characteristics that highlight the importance of oral poetic heritage in the transmission of the environmental message and make it easy to remember. In addition, it highlights a conscious choice for the use of a simple and accessible diction that is instrumental in enhancing the communicative scope of the poems. Osundare's language is not overly complex, but instead includes direct, understandable phrases that are easily understood by a wide range of people. The simplicity of the style does not compromise the sense of the poetry but adds emotional immediacy and increases the power of persuasion when it comes to the ecological message. It also reflects the pedagogical and activist approach of his poetry, which aims to resonate with readers outside of the academic arena.

The analysis also revealed that the environmental meaning in the selected poems is systematically encoded by the functional choice of grammar. Nature is built up through the poems' relational and material processes both as living entity and as experience. For example, the relationship of "the earth is wounded" situates the environment as a sufferer, while the material process "actions that affect or transform the natural world" brings this emphasis. These linguistic set-ups are not arbitrary, but they do reveal a strong ideological placement in which the degradation of the environment becomes prominent as a result of human activity. All these findings highlight a richness of themes and a linguistic strategy in Osundare's environmental poetry. The interplay of stylistic elements and functional linguistic constructions uncovers a conscious attempt to combine esthetic quality with environmental awareness. Through his poetry, he not only expresses artfully but also reflects on the culture and intervenes in the ecological

landscape, raising awareness of the environment and urging people to take collective responsibility for protecting it.

Conclusion

The general objective of the present study was to investigate the stylistic and aesthetic elements of selected environmental poems by Niyi Osundare based on Stylistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics approach. The analysis was focused on the linguistic means used in the chosen poems to create ecological meaning and influence readers' sense of humans and the natural world. The results indicated that Osundare has consistently incorporated the sense of beauty and ecology into his poetry. The poems mystically animate nature through stylistic devices like personification, metaphor, antithesis, and simplicity of diction. The representation is a depiction of the natural world that is not anthropocentric but gives agency and voice to the elements of the natural world, re-positioning people as players not dominators in the ecological system.

Besides, the analysis based on Systemic Functional Linguistics shows that these stylistic features are systematically represented linguistically in the grammatical structures, including transitivity patterns and relational processes. Nature is often shaped as an actor or as lived, and human action is assumed to have an environmental impact. This linguistic structuring amplifies the message of the ideology of ecological responsibility and environmental stewardship. The study also shows that the linguistic strategies of Osundare such as the use of language which can be easily understood by the recipients, oral poetic elements, contribute to the effective communication of his environmental message. His poems have successfully connected artistic creativity with social commitment to make ecological issues understandable and convincing to the general public. Finally, it concludes that Osundare's environmental poetry is a remarkable linguistic and aesthetic intervention beyond the mere nature of art representation. It serves as a medium for awareness of ecological issues, moral reflection and social critique. This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the role of language in raising environmental awareness and confirms the significance of literary work in dealing with the current ecological problems through combining the stylistic analysis with the theory of language which is called systemic functional linguistic.

References

Buell, L. (2005). *The future of environmental criticism: Environmental crisis and literary imagination*. Blackwell Publishing.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Eggins, S. (2004). *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics* (2nd ed.). Continuum.

Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Glotfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. University of Georgia Press.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1990). New ways of meaning: The challenge to applied linguistics. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6, 7–36.

Leech, G., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). Pearson Longman.

Nwagbara, U. (2018). *Ecocriticism and African literature: Postcolonial perspectives*. Routledge.

Ododo, S. E. (2008). Performance aesthetics in Nigerian oral poetry. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*.

Osundare, N. (1986). *The eye of the earth*. Heinemann.

Osundare, N. (1990). *Songs of the marketplace*. Heinemann.

Osundare, N. (2014). *Green: Sighs of our ailing planet*. Kraft Books.

Simpson, P. (2014). *Stylistics: A resource book for students* (2nd ed.). Routledge.