

**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NIYI OSUNDARE’S  
“BLUES FOR THE NEW SENATE KING”**

**Matthew Abua Ebim**

Department of English & Literary Studies

University of Calabar, Calabar

E-mail: [meabua@yahoo.com](mailto:meabua@yahoo.com), [ebim.abua@unical.edu.ng](mailto:ebim.abua@unical.edu.ng)

Phone: +2348038881284

**Note:**

This paper was presented at the Osundare Research Conference, (ORC) hosted by the Department of English, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu Ode Ogun State. November 1-4 2016.

<http://tasued.edu.ng/conference/osundare>

**Abstract**

Numerous researches have been carried out on the writings of Niyi Osundare, ranging from drama to poetry and such works have focused on both literary and linguistic models as forms of criticisms. Most of Osundare’s critical writings create fictional characters to depict the morally decadent nature of the African socio-political landscape using Nigeria as a paradigm. However, Osundare’s most recent poem “Blues for the New Senate King” did not adopt his usual style of “fictionalism” in terms of characterization. The focus of this study therefore is to examine the choice of language in the poem with a view to taking out important pieces of information that are relevant to the African continent nay the Nigerian social life. The study is basically a qualitative interpretation of the poem in regard to its linguistic and tonal style by linking literary criticism to linguistics. This is an important aspect of textual analysis as it deals with the manipulation of words by a writer and creates a distinct style through which the writer reaches out to his readers. The study explicates the poetic style of Osundare in the deployment of linguistic resources to achieve satirical effects by adopting linguistic-stylistics as the analytical approach. The study aims at explicating the issues raised in the poem to emphasize the crucial information about Nigerian leaders. The analysis divulges that the poem exposes certain national issues in Nigeria which are very germane to the development of the democratic process. It also reveals that Osundare’s aim is to bring about social reformation in the society. The implication of this study is that it has contributed to the field of stylistics by illustrating the interface between literary and linguistic features in poetic forms that advocate a positive approach to the style of governance in the Nigerian society.

**Key Words:** Linguistic-Stylistics, Discourse, Modern-Day Governance, Osundare

### **Introduction**

This paper sets out to interrogate the concept of Political Discourse Analysis (henceforth PDA) whose notion is perceived to be ambiguous, on the platform of Critical Discourse Analysis as a way of uncovering the filaments of political maneuverings in the poetry of Niyi Osundare. PDA is both political, and a critical enterprise; in the spirit of contemporary approaches in CDA, it would mean therefore that critical-political discourse analysis deals especially with the reproduction of political *power*, *power abuse* or *domination* through political discourse, including the various forms of resistance or counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance. In particular such an analysis deals with the discursive conditions and consequences of social and political *inequality* that results from such domination (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993b).

This paper therefore demonstrates what we mean by political discourse and how it can be studied most interestingly, that is, critically using Niyi Osundare's poem as a paradigm. The relevance of this is that PDA deals with issues that are discussed in political arena whose analysis is relevant for the new cross-discipline of discourse studies. Indeed, most scholars doing political discourse analysis are linguists and discourse analysts (see, e.g. Chilton 1985, 1988; Wilson 1990; Wodak & Menz 1990). However, when we consider the *use* or application of discourse approaches in political science, we find that it is one of the few social sciences that so far have barely been infected by the modern viruses of the study of text and talk.

### **Conceptualizing Political Discourse Analysis (PDA)**

There is this believe that political discourse is about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions, such as presidents and prime ministers and other members of government, parliament or political parties, both at the local, national and international levels. Some of the studies of politicians take a discourse analytical approach. In the USA, especially studies of presidential rhetoric are numerous. From the interactional point of view of discourse analysis, we therefore should also include the various *recipients* in political communicative events, such as the public, the people, citizens, the 'masses', and other groups or categories. That is, once we locate politics and its discourses in the public sphere, many more participants in political communication appear on the stage. The same applies to media discourse, which also needs to focus on its audiences. And also in medical, legal or

educational discourse, we not only think of participants such as doctors, lawyers or teachers, but also of patients, defendants and students. Hence, the delimitation of political discourse by its principal authors' is insufficient and needs to be extended to a more complex picture of all its relevant participants, whether or not these are actively involved in political discourse, or merely as recipients in one-way modes of communication.

Specifically interesting for PDA is the fact that many of the political actions or practices are at the same time discursive practices. In other words, forms of text and talk in such cases have political *functions* and *implications*. That is, politicians talk politically if they and their talk are contextualized in such communicative events such as cabinet meetings, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, rallies, interviews with the media, bureaucratic practices, protest demonstrations, and so on. Again, text and context mutually define each other, in the sense that a session of parliament is precisely such only when elected politicians are debating (talking, arguing, etc.) in parliament buildings in an official capacity and during the official session. This integration of political texts and contexts in political encounters may of course finally be characterized in more abstract terms as accomplishing specific political aims and goals, such as making or influencing political decisions that is decisions that pertain to joint action, the distribution of social resources, the establishment or change of official norms, regulations and laws, and so on. That this domain is essentially fuzzy hardly needs to be emphasized. What may be clear for official political decision making by politicians at all levels, or even for various forms of political protesters and dissidents, is less clear for the decisions and discourse of, say, corporate managers, professors or doctors in other but overlapping domains of social life. In the sense that the latter's decisions and practices affect the public at large or large segments of the public, also their actions and discourse become more or less 'political'.

Since people and their practices may be categorized in many ways, most groups and their members will occasionally 'act politically', and we may propose that 'acting politically', and hence also political discourse, are essentially defined *contextually*, in terms of special events or practices of which the aims, goals or functions are maybe not exclusively but at least primarily political. This excludes the talk of politicians outside of political contexts, and includes the discourse of all other groups, institutions or citizens as soon as they participate in political events. From our discourse analytical point of view, such a contextual definition at the same time suggests that the study of political discourse should not be limited to the structural properties of

text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures.

### **Norman Fairclough's Discourse as Social Practice in CDA**

Norman Fairclough is one of the key figures in the realm of CDA. For him, CDA is a method for examining social and cultural modifications that could be employed in protesting against the power and control of an elite group on other people. He is of the opinion that language, which shapes our social identities and interactions, knowledge systems, and beliefs, is also shaped by them in turn. He bases his analyses on Halliday's systemic-functional grammar. In *Language and Power* (1989), he calls his approach Critical Language Study, and considers the first aim of his approach as helping to correct the vast negligence in relation to the significance of language in creating, maintaining and changing the social relations of power. This first goal tends to be the theoretical part of Fairclough's approach. The second one which is helping to raise awareness to the question that how language can influence the dominance of one group of people over the others could be considered as the practical aspect of his approach. He believes that awareness is the first step towards emancipation.

Fairclough has put a great emphasis on raising the level of people's consciousness, for he assumes that in discourse, the subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing, and they are unaware of the potential social impact of what they do or utter.

### **Text and Discourse**

Fairclough considers language as a form of social practice. This way of thinking implies some other notions. First, language is a part of the society and not somehow external to it. Second, language is a social process. Third, language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other (non-linguistic) parts of society (Fairclough, 1989, 22). The remarkable point in Fairclough's view is that all linguistic phenomena are social, but it is not true the other way round.

For instance, when we are talking about the political words such as democracy, imperialism, or terrorism we use linguistic elements, but this is only part of the whole politics. Therefore the relationship between language and society does not observe a one to one correspondence; rather, the society is the whole and language is a part of it. The second implied notion – i.e. language is a social process – is meaningful only when we take discourse as different from text,

like Fairclough. Fairclough's notion of text is exactly the same as Halliday's, and this term covers both written discourse and spoken discourse. For him text is a product, not a process. Fairclough employs the term *discourse* to refer to the complete process of social interaction. *Text* is merely a sector of this process, because he considers three elements for discourse, namely *text*, *interaction*, and *social context*. In addition to text itself, the process of social interaction involves the process of text production and text interpretation. Hence, text analysis is a part of discourse analysis.

In comparison to the three aspects of discourse, Fairclough (1989, pp. 26-27) identifies three dimensions for CDA:

**Description** is the stage which is concerned with formal properties of the text.

**Interpretation** is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction by seeing the text as the product of the process of production and as a resource in the process of interpretation.

**Explanation** is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context, with the social determination of the process of production and interpretation, and their social effects.

In all these stages we are concerned with analysis, but the nature of it is different in each stage. Analysis in the first stage limits its boundaries to labeling the formal properties of the text and regards text as an object. In the second phase, CDA goes through the analysis of the cognitive process of the participants and their interactions. Finally in the third stage, the aim is to explain the relationship between social events and social structures that affect these events and also are affected by them.

### **Osundare's "...New Senate King" as a Political Testament**

This particular poem can be taken to be a paradigm shift from the usual style of the poet; the style of fictionalization of characters. This time Osundare dares the political players by naming names without any iota of fear through the stylistic feature of foregrounding which he achieved through structural repetition:

*He wanted so desperately to be king of senate  
Haba! He wanted so desperately to be king of Senate  
He only cares for three big people: "I, Me, and Myself"  
He only cares for three big people: "I, Me, and Myself"  
His feet never know the way to the house of Honour  
Yes, his feet never know the way to the house of Honour*

Although there is the patterned rhythmic effect of musicality in the constant repetition of certain lexical items in the above stanza, one can argue that Osundare the poet uses this device to create an overall rhythm for the poem. By means of repetition, Osundare carries the reader along and familiarizes s/he with the message while reading the poem. The poem draws the attention of the audience to the manner in which the present president of the Nigerian senate emerged. There is a high level of political conspiracy and connivance with political opponents to ensure that the leadership of the senate favours who the leading party rejects. This “ascension” of the throne in the words of Osundare typifies the crowning of a rejected king. The despairing and egoistic manner in which this “political coup” was orchestrated and plotted and subsequently discharged leaves much to be desired. Through the use of personal pronouns, Osundare vividly captures the rapacious attitudes of politicians:

*Power-intoxicated, blinded by ambition  
He only cares for three big people: “I, Me, and Myself”  
Say, Power-drunk, blinded by ambition  
He only cares for three big people: “I, Me, and Myself”  
A renegade old book with phoney letters  
Vacuous, thumb-stained on History’s shelf*

Stanza two of this poem is a typical personification of a gluttonous attributes of a nation enamoured in a dance of shame epitomized in anguish, betrayal and antics as a way of setting up opponents to achieve selfish aims. Historically, politicians can be said to be possessive, grabbing and keeping even that which they do not need. The individualistic approach to life rather than collectivism portrays the Nigerian politician as one whose interest in the game is that of selfishness which on the long run does not favour the masses. To demonstrate how disconnected the new senate king has emerged, Osundare uses pronouns ‘He’ and ‘His’ which are third person pronouns to show the New Senate King as being detached from the voters, You and I, that is second and first person pronouns respectively. This position shows the new senate king as having inordinate ambition which could destroy the collective achievements of the new palace. There is also the use of compound words in the poem, such as “power-drunk”, “power intoxicated”. The use of such compound words demonstrates a high level of overbearing influence of a power hungry monstrous being whose aim is to sabotage his fellows to achieve his aim. This is in accordance with the saying that absolute power corrupts absolutely and that power gets intoxicated by means of its acquisition.

The epitome of this situation is that the Nigerian politician is insatiable, corrupt, rapacious and uncivilized due to s/he quest for wealth and more wealth

that may no longer make meaning. By adopting the Machiavellian style of power acquisition and its retention, Osundare sees the new senate king as a man who is a specialist in political maneuvering after which he gets fascinated and suddenly forgetful. Integrity, courtesy and balance are thrown to the wind and the culture of skimming, outsmarting and maneuvering take centre stage. This is effectively captured in the “mutilation” and bending of the rules to favour the new kids on the block.

This is captured in the stanza below:

*A discredited enemy behind his tarnished banner  
True scion of a cold and crooked clan  
He trampled the people's Hope in the shameful mud  
Broken banks, broken dreams, and broken lives  
He's a fitting heir to dubious pedigree  
They plod through life like shameless masquerades*

Osundare uncovers the character of the new senate by deploying the adjectives of discrediting in the very first line of the poem. The stanza genealogically traces the blood lines of the new senate king, his family antecedents and the rationale behind his character and tags him a perfect peg in a perfect hole. These are the choice of words he deployed in achieving his aim. Osundare reveals the treachery of the new senate king who hides under a “*tarnished banner*” who is described as an apple that can hardly fall far from its tree. A man whose stock in trade is to *trample the people's Hope in the shameful mud* as a result of his *crooked clan*. This is traceable to the *broken banks, broken dreams, and broken lives*. Osundare reveals the attitude of the poet personae as a man who operates with impunity “like a shameless masquerade”. The integrity of the poet personae is further scrutinized from the perspective of his wondrous attributes in jumping parties. These anti party activities are vividly captured in the stanza below:

*“integrity” is visibly missing in his diction of deceit  
**PDP** in the morning; **Labour** at noon, **APC** at night  
And **WE THE PEOPLE** is the absent factor.*

The word “integrity” is foregrounded as used in the above stanza contextually foregrounds the morally bankrupt character of the poet personae. He is portrayed as an epitome of moral bankruptcy. Through the use of linguistic foregrounding by means of inverted commas Osundare depicts the poet personae as a man of questionable integrity to capture the attention of the readers who already conceive the idea that ‘integrity’ is missing in the dictionary of the New Senate King. It has become a norm that Nigerian politicians deploy all forms of rhetorical strategies to manipulate the electorate

who vote the politicians and immediately get disempowered. Empty promises become the norm after normal electioneering. The way and manner in which the poet persona jumps from one political party to the other is unimaginable and leaves much to be desired. Osundare foregrounds the expression “AND WE THEPEOPLE” and gives it prominence to show the absence of collectivism as an ideology in the lexicon of politicians. The lack of morality amongst political players is captured in the stanza:

*He stabbed noble Faith and Trust in the back  
Wind-vane politicians with multiple tongues  
Behold the people ask: Who will save us from our prostitutes  
in power?  
They plod through life like shameless masquerades  
Our rulers stink like festering corpses  
They tilt the till to their bottomless pocket  
And cripple the nation with their ruinous pocket*

The deployment of the linguistic metaphor of “He stabbed noble Faith and Trust in the back” portrays the poet personae as a traitor whose stock in trade is approbation and reprobation: the business of speaking from both sides of the mouth. Their slippery tendencies are also deftly captured in the use of the term “prostitutes” referring to a set of people who have no qualms in engaging in business with any suitor provided their interest is served. Through unnecessary colluding, the senate president conspires with other members of the house to unleash violence on the masses. The act of speaking in tongues is sermonic but the senate king is said to have “multiple tongues”-a feature of deceit avarices and licentiousness. We can therefore conclude with considerable justification that Niyi Osundare is one of the most prolific poets whose poetry is richly coloured by common expressions of traditional life while exposing societal ills that have enamoured the African continent and turned it into a laughing stock. His poetry is a reflection of the world view of his people, cultures and political struggles cum experiences. Osundare’s poetry is accessible to everyone because in it he assumes the voice of the unlettered peasants and villagers ‘who speak plain without feigning sophistication’. In terms of Thematization, Osundare’s themes are many and varied; ranging from a preoccupation with the poor and down-trodden in society to an engagement with Africa’s socio-political problems and a revolutionary vision calls for a new world order with Africa as a paradigm.



### Conclusion

Our preoccupation, so far, has been to undertake the socio-stylistic analysis of Niyi Osundare's "Blues for the Senate King". In the course of the paper, we provided some definitions of stylistics and also examined some levels of language analysis that can be applied to the analysis of literary texts. These levels of language analysis (Graphology, Phonology, Lexico-Semantic features and Morphology) were explained and later applied to the analysis of the poem. Our analysis also includes highlighting the various ways through which the poet communicates his message to the audience. Through his peculiar use of language, the poet, Niyi Osundare, portrays the New Senate King's insatiable lust for power and material things. The poet employs the use of compound words, figurative expressions like simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole, foregrounding, collocates etc. Finally, it is important to state that Niyi Osundare in this poem has successfully satirized the greedy attitude of Nigerian political elite whose stock in trade is to emasculate the poor masses and leave them financially, emotionally, economically and psychologically crippled.

### References

- Abrams, M.H. (1981): *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Byron, Lord George (1973). 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' Ed. Frank Kermonde and John
- Hollander. *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*. Vol. 2. London: Oxford University Press
- Chilton, P. A. (2004). *Analyzing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. New York: Routledge
- Ekwutosi, Onwukwe. (2009): *An Introduction to General and Literary Stylistics*. Owerri: Alphabet Nigeria Publishers. In Ikonne, C. Oko, E & Onwudinjo, P. (eds) *African Literature and African Historical Experiences*. Ibadan: Heinemann. PP. 73-81.
- Fairclough, N. L. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. L. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. L. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. England: Longman,
- Kehinde, Ayo. (2005): "Rethinking African Fiction in the Era of Globalization: A Contest of Text and Context" *Journal of Nigerian English Association*. Vol. 6, No. 1 Pp. 87:100

- Leech, G. (1969): *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. Essex: Longman Group, U.K. Ltd.
- Leech, G. and Short, M.H. (1981): *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, London: Longman.
- Lodge K. (2009): *A Critical Introduction to Phonetics*. London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Mark A. & Kirsten F. (2005): *What is Morphology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Niyi Osundare (2015) “Blues for the New Senate King” Culled from Facebook:  
<http://blogs.premiumtimesng.com/?p=167986>
- Osunare, Niyi. (2014): “Merit Award Won’t Silence me as Critic”. The Guardian Newspapers. Retrieved 2016-11-19.  
[www.nguardiannews.com/news/nationalnews/191915-merit-award-won't-silence-me-as-critic-says-osundare](http://www.nguardiannews.com/news/nationalnews/191915-merit-award-won't-silence-me-as-critic-says-osundare)
- Osundare, Niyi. (2008): *The Writer as Righter*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- Osundare, Niyi. (1986). *The Eye of the Earth*. Ibadan: Heinemann,
- Pope Alexander (1952). ‘An Essay on Criticism’ Ed. Walter Jackson Bate  
*Criticism: The Major Texts*. New York: Harcourt Brace & World.
- Simpson, P. (2004): *Stylistics. A Resource Book for Students*. London: Routledge Publishers.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1984). *Prejudice in discourse*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Van Dijk, T. A (1987a) *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Van Dijk, T. A (1987b). *Textbook examples of racism. The reproduction of racism in Social Science Textbooks*. Amsterdam: Socialistische Uitgeverij Amsterdam.
- Widdowson, H.G. (1975): *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*. London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Wordsworth, William. (1990). ‘Tintern Abbey’.Ed. Stephen Gill. William Wordsworth. New York: Oxford University Press.