



Linguistic Foregrounding and Thematic Projection in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*: A Study in Stylistic Criticism

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the deployment of linguistic foregrounding in Okara's *The Voice* at the levels of lexis, syntax and semiotics and within the framework of stylistic criticism. Its findings identify category rule violation, selection restriction and collocation rules violation, creative transliteration, doubling of subject and verb to BE, and use of metaphors, symbols, and irony as some of the foregrounded aspects of the language of *The Voice*, which constitute part of Okara's idiolect in the novel. The findings also show a correlation between the message in the novel and these stylistic devices. The paper recommends further research in the areas of phonostylistics, clause structure, graphology and message in *The Voice*.

INTRODUCTION

This essay explores the deployment of linguistic foregrounding in Okara's *The Voice* and demonstrates the keen correlation operating between this stylistic device and the various themes and vision of the novel, relying on textual and contextual analysis for its deductions and propositions. It has five sections with I focusing on a review of related literature, II on the critical framework used for the study and III on lexical foregrounding and thematic projection in *The Voice*. Section IV focuses on syntactic foregrounding and thematic projection and V on semiotic foregrounding in relation to themes and vision of life projected by the author.

Copious critical works exist on Okara's *The Voice*. The majority of these works, however, focus on Okara's failure or success in his experiment on language. Few of them, as this study reveals, have related the language to the theme and sub-themes in the work. Few still have worked on linguistic

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foregrounding in *The Voice*, a situation which underscores the significance of this study and the relevance of the review.

Comparing Okara to Achebe and Kourouma, Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike state categorically that Okara's "experiments in *The Voice* have not been successful" (262). The troika contend that Okara fails because, unlike Achebe and Kourouma who try to convey the rhetoric and tone of their mother tongue, he focuses more on arranging his English words according to Ijaw syntax (262). They charge that Okara's results do not work because the author merely reproduces English (word for word) in Ijaw without any attempt to discover and use idiomatic equivalents, inventing them where none exists. The authors list the stylistic features of African oral narratives which, they argue, are lacking in Okara's experiments to include proverbs, legends, fables, puns, jokes, similes, metaphors, allusions, hyperboles, declamatory speech, rhetorical devices of conversation and public oratory. It does appear that the troika are basing their conclusion on scientific methods of translation, but not on the fluidity of literary language which Okara has exploited for effect. It seems premature at this point to defend Okara's experiments in relation to the use of African oral narrative in *The Voice*. The appropriate segment of the study will elucidate the position shortly. For now, let us take Dathorne's views on the language of *The Voice*.

Dathorne opines that Okara's different English based on Ijaw syntax seems contrived at times and does not work (93). He alleges that the language isolates the characters from the reader as the author's technique dims both actions and characters. Ironically, Dathorne's views are preceded by intelligent discussion of themes, characters and symbols in *The Voice*, a situation which contradicts the allegation of contrived language which isolates the reader from characters. Besides, the three examples of expressions considered contrived by Dathorne: "Do not anything fear"; "his inside is sweeter than sweetness" and "Is his meaning in life to plant it in people's insides by asking if they've got it?" (93) prove good examples of linguistic foregrounding as we shall show in due course. That Okara's language in the novel at other times succeeds has however been acknowledged by Dathorne.

Like Dathorne, Abiola Irele doubts the viability of Okara's experiment, seeing it as "a further complication of the problem installed at the very centre of linguistic expression of African imagination by Tutuola" (5). Irele is however concerned with a more general context: the difficulties posed by the language question to literary creation in Africa. He wonders how much of the African tone can really be felt and appreciated by a non-African audience in the works of African writers in European languages. Okara's experiment, like Achebe's, has certainly not provided a complete answer to this vexed question, but it is a significant contribution to the answer. It is far from being a failure as Edgar Wright, another critic, suggests.

Wright, in a contribution: "*The Critical Evaluation of African Literature*" published in a work of that title and edited by him, declares that:

Okara has failed ... to handle the registers and their implications of mood and social context that are inextricably involved in the use of language, nor has he, ... been able to skip the difficulty by creating a consistent style, easily comprehensible but clear of language-tied social or emotional overtones, that creates its own level or register (16).

He however acknowledges the judgement by “sensitive and well-informed critics” which upholds *The Voice* as a successful experiment in language, arguing that his purpose is to draw attention to difficulties that face the experimental writer who draws on the capacities of two languages and attempts to conflate the two realistically, difficulties which, according to him, “are even more acute for the critic who has to interpret the result from the basis of only one language” (17). What need be said here is that African literature in “experimental” or “domesticated” English is primarily for related African audience and critic either of whom necessarily goes to work with the mother tongue and English as a second language. The non-African audience or critic who elects to read or interpret such literature must take pains to learn the domesticated language. Seen from this perspective, the African experimental writer such as Okara has no difficulties in putting his mood and tone across since many features of African oral narrative: proverbs, riddles, fables, legends, metaphors, etc. cut across African peoples and cultures. Approaching Okara’s *The Voice* from the reading glasses of a speaker of English as a first language will almost always lead to disappointments and negative evaluation of the language used in the work. As Wright himself has acknowledged, many African critics and non-African critics who take the pain to learn have made positive critical responses to the experimental language in *The Voice*. It is to this set of critics we now turn attention.

Chidi Maduka has illuminated the heroic qualities of Okolo – the protagonist of the novel – whom he describes as a prophet whose voice has given expression to what catastrophe awaits his society which lacks “it” (moral probity). Though Maduka does not focus explicitly on language, his adept handling of character delineation and approving treatment of Okara’s theme and vision in the work leave no one in doubt about his positive critical response to *The Voice*. The fact that Maduka quotes the metaphoric and aptly transliterated language in which Okara expresses Okolo’s apocalyptic vision of the world at pages 110 – 111 of the novel (Maduka 34), underscores the critic’s recommendation of the experimental language in *The Voice*.

Similarly, the language used in *The Voice* receives elaborate commendation from Emmanuel Ngara in his *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel*. Ngara pertinently delineates the poetic qualities of the language, its relationship with characters, its symbolic character, etc, and concludes that Okara’s ‘experiment with Ijaw syntax, idioms and modes of thinking through the medium of English is a realistic assertion of the writer’s cultural independence’ (56). Ngara further asserts that: “[...] Okara’s experiment will take its place as one of the most important in the history of Anglophone literature in Africa” (57). Though the idiom sounds foreign to speakers of standard English, Okara, according to Ngara, seldom sacrifices

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clarity and readability. Ngara further opines that the richness of imagery and symbolism that characterizes *The Voice* gives it a poetic quality that can only be paralleled by Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, "if at all" (57). It is however pertinent to note that Ngara employs a general stylistic approach to the study, but not foregrounding, though this is detectable in places within his work. Specific application of the stylistic device of foregrounding to Okara's *The Voice* which is our pursuit in this study yields even further insights into Okara's *The Voice*.

The Voice further receives a positive critical response from Ezenwa Ohaeto in an article titled "Gabriel Okara" published in *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature* Volume two. Ohaeto opines that Okara's "use of unconventional English with its attendant peculiarities ... enables him to add another dimension to the art of novel writing ... despite the heavy handedness of Okara's moralistic story, the novel succeeds (82). Similar positive response has also come from Okikwelu whose work on *The Voice*, from the perspective of transliteration, yields tremendous insights. Okara's ingenuity, according to Okikwelu, lies in his adoption of intralingual rather than Achebe's interlingual method of transliteration: the passage from ordinary to idiomatic language takes place within Ijaw language before being translated into English. Okikwelu proposes that by writing *The Voice*, Okara has outdone his predecessors in Africanizing the colonial language (286).

Adaptation of colonial language to African rhythm and idiom forms the basis upon which Palmer judges the success of the language experiment in *The Voice*. Whatever Okara's purpose, says Palmer, the experiment is quite successful; capitalizing on Ijaw rhythm, Okara infuses a certain poetic quality into his style, Palmer concludes. The conclusion drawn by Palmer strikes similarity with that drawn by Taiwo who considers "Okara's strange English ... his peculiar invention in which his hero expresses his 'voice' ... and defines his relationship with a changing world" (69). Taiwo judges the language of *The Voice* justified and inseparable from the total meaning and the universal message of the novel. Okara, taiwo contends, is remarkably successful in achieving the various levels of speech appropriate to character and situations, and in adapting his adopted style to different circumstances.

Like Taiwo, Udoh upholds the success of *The Voice*, hence its language. In his contribution to *literary Parade* – a book of readings – Udoh illuminates the work's themes and delineates its characters showing the success of the author which is of course, discernible within the context of the work's peculiar language. Theme or quest motif also receives the attention of Akwanya and Anohu in their *50 Years of the Nigerian Novel*, who commend Okolo's selfless search for "supreme reality" (65). Their object and findings however, do not centre on language as does this study.

In his study on Anglophone African writers who have received critical attention from literary scholars and critics globally from 1976 to 1999, Lindfors shows that Okara's ... novel has received little critical attention in the last three decades, fizzling out of the list of 20 famous writers between 1996 and 1999 (113). This finding does not enunciate the irrelevance of *The*

Voice to current African, nay world community. On the contrary, it indicates the need for continuous discussion of Okara's significant contribution to African literature through his unique novel. This study is therefore a response to this need. So far we have demonstrated that many critics have upheld Okara's language in *The Voice* as a huge success and a major contribution to the evolution of literary language rich in African oral embellishments and at the same time intelligible to non-Africans. Having gone so far, we may now turn attention to linguistic foregrounding in literary criticism as an aspect of literary style.

Foregrounding or de-automatization as proposed by Mukarovsky involves achieving the aesthetic qualities of language by surprising the reader into fresh awareness of, and sensibility to, the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an automatized background of communication (Quoted by Leech and Short, 28). As is well-known, "to be truly creative, an artist must be destructive ... of rules, conventions and expectations" (Leech and Short, 29) within the language which he/she uses. This destruction of rules, conventions and expectations constitutes an aspect of foregrounding as discussed by Alo (2006:24). Yankson describes the device as "any deviation from the normal" linguistic code (the background) which "brings the message to the forecourt of the reader's attention" (3). Sougou in a recent article has explored Achebe's defamiliarization of his readers with the language, characters and narrative structure of his earlier novels in relation to *Anthills of the Savannah*. The implication of all this is that there are many aspects to the phenomenon of foregrounding even as there are to the phenomena of language and literature. These aspects have been amply discussed by Ngara, Eyoh 2001 and Eyoh 2005 as levels of stylistic criticism. A writer may adopt foregrounding at the level of sound or lexis or syntax or semiotics, etc. This study limits itself to foregrounding at the levels of lexis, syntax and semiotics since no satisfactory work could be done on all aspects of the device in a short study like this. Specifically, the study focuses on the following constitutive elements of the chosen levels of foregrounding: category, selectional and collocational restriction rules violation under lexical foregrounding; transliteration, pattern repetition and doubling of subject and verb under syntactic foregrounding, and metaphor, symbols and irony under semiotic foregrounding. Each level is explored in relation to message, beginning with lexical foregrounding, the subject of the next section.

As is widely known, Okara's *The Voice* dramatizes conflict between truth and falsehood, between light and darkness and between moral rectitude and moral bankruptcy. Okolo, the protagonist in the story, returns from school where he has developed and sustained the philosophy of integrity and uprightness bequeathed to him by his father. His reformist and puritist stance in Amatu community poses a great threat to Izongo and his cohorts who symmetrically constitute the antithesis of Okolo's uprightness – the philosophical *IT*. Izongo and his forces of darkness exile Okolo (on charges of madness) to Sologa where *IT* has no place either. A combination of fate and providence returns Okolo to Amatu where he dares Izongo with Izongo's

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cohorts and faces brutal annihilation being tied hands, legs and back-to-back with Tuere – a falsely accused witch – and set to drift and drown. The subject is couched in various stylistic devices including category rule violation.

The story starts with the omniscient author's declaration that some of the townsmen had said that "Okolo's eyes were not right, his head was not correct". According to the omniscient author:

So the town of Amatu talked and whispered, ... Okolo had no chest, they said. His chest was not strong and he had no shadow ... all because he dared to search for it. He was in search of it with all his inside and with all his shadow (23).

This quoted text demonstrates a category rule violation in respect of the word *inside* which, in English language grammar, belongs to the adverbial or prepositional category, but which is used here as a member of the nominal group. This violation allows the narrator to capture the Ijaw view of, and word for the English word *mind*. Okara therefore adapts English language to enhance the communication of his message to his primary audience – the Ijaw – and other communities in Africa which have similar words for the *mind*. The Ibibio for instance call it *esit-idem* or *esit* which translates into *inside body* or *inside* or *conscience*. This word, which is widespread in the various episodes of the story intensifies the transliterated character of the English used in the novel and forcefully drives home the related message since the foregrounding (the violation) springs a surprise, particularly for the non-Ijaw or non-African audience.

Thus, Tuere the falsely accused witch, achieves not only poetic but also thematic effect in her dialogue with Okolo on the difficulty of finding *it*, in the new dispensation in Amatu. Instead of talking about everyone who has sealed his conscience and fear freezing the minds of the masses while the ruling class have their minds lifted for wealth, she rather talks of everybody "locking up his inside against *it*" and fear locking up the *inside* of the low, "and the *insides* of the high (being) filled with yam" (34). At Sologa, he who owns the eating house where Okolo calls to eat gives Okolo some 'teaching words' against searching for *it* in Sologa, speaking not about Okolo's *mind* but about *inside*:

This thing that is driving you is in your inside. You in your inside see the world like a tree falling and with your hands you want to hold it, knowing you will be crushed to death. Do not think any more, my man. The people who have the sweetest insides are the think-nothing people ... (84).

This category rule violation thus constitutes a significant point of style in the novel, typifying Okara's idiolect and achieving local character in the English language deployed in the story. It runs through the book, being found at page 26, 29-34, 36-42, 46-57, 69-74, 82-86, 88-95, 98-103, 105-114, 116-117, 121, 124-126.

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Okara also demonstrates his idiolect and states his message in violation of selectional restriction/collocational rules in English language by superimposing Ijaw selectional rule on English. Words in English language select, and habitually co-occur with others, based on selectional restriction and collocational rules. A distortion of these rules, like the violation of category rule treated above richly characterizes the story in *The Voice*. Again, the narrator’s declaration at the beginning of the story provides some examples of this violation as shown in italics below:

Some of the townsmen said Okolo’s eyes were not right, his head was not correct. This they said was the result of his knowing too much book ... (23).

The noun phrase (NP) *eyes* selects and collocates with the finite BE verb *were*, negated by the adverb *not*, but does not select or collocate with the adjective *right* in standard English. It normally would select and collocate with *open* or it would take another form to express the intended sense: “Okolo’s eyes were not open. Or, Okolo was blind”. However, it is possible that the Ijaw language, like Ibibio, would select *right* in this circumstance; thus, in Ibibio, one can have: *Enyen Okolo ifoono* (pl). *Eyes Okolo are not right/good*, a combination which violates the rule in English. Similarly, the nominal, *head*, does not select the adjective *correct* nor does the verbal group *know(ing)* select or collocate with *book* in English language, though both cases may be acceptable in Ijaw as again typified by Ibibio.

- 1) *Iwod* *ifonno* (sl)
 Head is not correct (good)

- 2) *Odiono* *nwed eti eti*
 He knows book very much.

All this effectively intensifies the local character of the language in the novel by foregrounding the Ijaw speech form and backgrounding the standard English form. The aesthetic and communicative effect is that any literate Ijaw and many literate Nigerians can appreciate the language and understand the story with ease. Other examples of the violation are:

Straight things (words) (49) (truth) (*nnen nnen* (akpan) *iko* – Ibibio)
Wonder held Okolo (47) (*Mkpaidem omum Okolo* – Ibibio); (Okolo (wondered/was surprised/was shocked/was amazed, etc)

Your nonsense words stop (24): Here nonsense, a noun which is normally the object or subject of a verb or complement of a subject, is made to select a noun as its object acting as an adjective. This pattern is rife in Nigerian languages such as Ibibio and indubitably Ijaw. In Ibibio for example, the expression would read:

Ndisme iko mfo odo etre
Nonsense words your that stop

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Sweet inside (26, 84, 107): the word **sweet** normally selects a noun in English as its object, such noun being edible and tasteful.

Here in the novel, it does not only select an adverb but also an inedible and tasteless object. This violation is found in Ibibio language. The utterance in Ibibio for example is:

inem *esit*
sweet inside/heart

esit being polysemous – meaning both *inside* and *heart*. Knowledge of this lexical foregrounding enables the critic of *The Voice* to appreciate the originality of Okara's craft in poetically bending the English language to suit his art.

The device of foregrounding is also copiously deployed at the syntactic level of language through the agencies of transliteration, repetition and doubling of subject and verb to *Be*. We begin the illustration with transliteration.

The utterance by the third messenger already cited above is pertinent here:

1. "Your nonsense words stop" (24).
 adj adj N V

As shown earlier, this is an almost direct transliteration from LI, drawing attention to the disrupted syntactic order. In standard English, this would sound: stop that nonsense.

v adj n

Other utterances like:

- 2) Izongo his head shook (47).
- 3) A person who speaks not the straight thing (49),
- 4) They cannot their insides change as you change loin cloth (50),
 and
- 5) Well, I have spoken many teaching words but they have not

entered your ears (51) exemplify the use of transliteration to constructively and creatively violate the normal English syntax. The English version of 2) would be, Izongo shook his head (SVO), but in the transliterated form, it has the structure (SOV). The phrase in (3) represents a liar in English. It captures the sensibility and idiom of the Amatu people more than English word would. Utterance number 4) has the pattern SVOVA against English structure SVOA while Tobeowei's utterance in 5) has the English equivalence: I have advised you but you would not heed the advice. It is important to note that the violation or foregrounding in each case enriches the aesthetic quality of the experimental language and emphasizes the message it communicates, doing so better than the standard English equivalence would have done since the local language is largely poetic and descriptive, thus, a person who knows that the chair he sits on is made of *Abura*, cheap soft wood, but say it is made of *Iroko* is not merely *a liar* but one "who speaks not the straight thing (the truth)" as Okolo tries to educate Tobeowei.

Repetition is also copiously employed by Okara in place of elaborate coordination of syntactic structures of language with the effect that emphasis is

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dramatically achieved where it is needed. In chapter one of the book the in-road of corruption which erodes *IT* is announced by the narrator through the stylistic device of repetition:

[...] words of the coming thing, rumours of the coming thing were in the air flying like birds, swimming like fishes in the river ... (23).

The images of birds flying and fishes swimming with the repetition of the phrase: “of the coming thing” underscore the ubiquity of the corrupting force and reinforce its devastating effect on the society as well as reveal the task for Okolo, Tuere and Utule who epitomize integrity and rectitude. Similarly, repetition mixed with telling description brings alive, Okolo’s arrest and torture by agents of Izongo:

The people snapped at him like hungry dogs snapping at bones. They carried him in silence like the silence of ants carrying a crumb of yam or fish bone. They put him down and dragged him past thatch houses that in the dark looked like pigs with their snouts in the ground: pushed and dragged him past mud walls with pitying eyes; pushed and dragged him past concrete walls with concrete eyes; pushed and dragged him along the waterside like soldier ants with their prisoner. They pushed and dragged him in panting silence, shuffling silence, broken only by an owl hooting from the darkness of the orange tree in front of Chief Izongo’s house ... on and on they pushed and dragged him. Round and round they went with their blind feet. This way they turned and that way they turned like a dog with a piece of bone looking for a corner ... (38-39).

The evocative character of this description of the incident would have been lost in formal standard English clauses and sentences. But the descriptive, repetitive, poetic and dislocated language employed by the author not only defamiliarizes us with the normal English clause but also provides a vivid picture of Okolo’s torture and suffering in the hands of Izongo’s agents of darkness. A similar device is used to re-enact Okolo’s experience in the hands of the agents of the Big One in Sologa (76-78):

The voice chuckled and said: ‘We are taking you to a place where you can find it.’ At this two chunks of darkness detached themselves from the darkness and gripped Okolo’s hands and pushed him through the black black night like the back of a cooking pot. Through the black black night Okolo walked, stumbled, walked. His inside was a room with chairs, cushions, papers scattered all over the floor by thieves. Okolo walked, stumbled, walked. His eyes shut and opened, shut and opened, expecting to see a light in each opening, but none he saw in the black black night. At last the black black night like the back of a cooking pot entered his inside and grabbing his thoughts, threw them out into the blacker than black night. And Okolo walked, stumbled, walked with an inside empty of thoughts except the black black night.

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The powerful description, poetry and music here attain grandeur and glamorous proportions, dramatizing the tragic horrors through which Okolo has passed in his search for *it*.

The deployment of double (repeated) subjects and double (repeated) verbs to **BE** in sentences also constitutes a significant aspect of Okara's idiolect in the novel. Here are some examples:

1. *Your nonsense words stop* (24)
 S S V
2. *Izongo his head shook* (47)
 S S V
3. *If my left foot against something hits as I walk, it is a warning be*
(second messenger (24))
 A S V (S)C V
4. *Your hair was black black be ...* first messenger (2).
 S V C (C) V
5. *If you are coming-in people be*, then come in (27)
 S V C V
6. *Are you a stranger man be?* (18)
 V S (S)C (S)C V

Numbers 1, 3 and 4 occur in the conversation among Izongo's messengers while they are on their way to Okolo's house on Izongo's instruction. Number 2 is the narrator's comment describing Izongo's shock at Okolo's stout rejection of the offer by Izongo to be one of the Izongo's men. Number 5 is Okolo's invitation to the three messengers, and 6 is a question the owner of the eating house in Sologa asks Okolo. As shown above, 1 and 2 have the syntactic patterning: SSV, violating the conventional principle of a basic English sentence: SV. In other words, there are two subjects in each of 1 and 2. Numbers 3 – 5 have the structure SVCV in violation of the conventional syntax of this sentence based on a verb to **BE**. It normally should have the pattern VSC(A): Are you a stranger (visitor) (here)? But it is predominantly deployed in the text based on the pattern VSCV, which repeats the stative verb.

This patterning conjures up the character of the narrator's LI. The effect of the domestication of the syntax of English is the insight it gives into the characters in, as well as setting of the story. The sentiments, ignorance, beliefs and thoughts of characters are freely expressed in the deformed version of English used in the work. The language, full of surprises, intensifies the strangeness of the erosion of values in Amatu and Sologa communities and heightens the conflicts between *IT* (truth, Okolo) and *falsehood* (Izongo). Along with syntactic disordering the author uses semiotic foregrounding to state his message. This constitutes the focus of the next and final segment of the study.

Certainly, semiotic foregrounding occurs when there is a prominence of imagery as well as symbols which draws attention to itself and loudly to the message. Okara employs a preponderance of metaphors, symbols and irony to embellish his art and to dramatize his message in the story. The informant

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who tells Okolo of the futility of, and madness in searching for *IT* in Sologa speaks in metaphors:

Look, my man, stay here with us. This thing you are searching you cannot find here. You can only this thing find in rubbish heaps or in night soil dumps and those who go here do not come back. If they do, everybody will run away from them ... because of the stench ... (83)

The scatological images of rubbish heaps and night soil dumps strike a fitting metaphor for the devastating and tragic level to which ethical values in Amatu and Sologa have sunk. As Tuere puts it, *IT* cannot be found in Amatu because “fear has locked up the (minds) *insides* of the low and the (minds) *insides* of the high are filled up with yam” (34), yam serving as a metaphor for wealth. The incongruous connection between the mind and yam foregrounds the message.

A central symbol which underscores the conflict in the novel is darkness which symbolism comprises Izongo, his council of Elders and all their cohorts. This darkness is in constant conflict with light which is represented by Okolo, Tuere and Ukule, the cripple. Light symbolizes the word, the Truth and *IT*: it can therefore not be extinguished. Thus, Tuere tenderly tends the embers of fire in the midst of thick darkness (38). She lights the lamps in the dark hut and cuts the rope tying Okolo’s hands (52), acts which symbolize freedom and victory of light over darkness, of truth over falsehood, of Okolo over Izongo. Though Tuere and Okolo are brutally made to drown, Ukule the cripple, one of the representatives of light, lives to tend the spoken words: “Your spoken words will not die” (127).

Semiotic foregrounding is also employed at the level of irony to register the message in the novel. Tuere, rejected and cast away by the Amatu society which rejection Okolo had tacitly endorsed (31) turns out to be the one who provides protection for Okolo against Amatu. Okolo is rejected by those for whom he fights: the three messengers sent to capture him are representatives of the “low people” he fights for (25). Abadi, Izongo and all the collaborators ironically see themselves as stone and Okolo, the truth, as egg:

If an egg rolls against a stone the egg breaks and if a stone rolls against an egg, the egg breaks ... (121).

The ironic metaphors of stone and egg intensify the crass arrogance and ignorance exhibited by Izongo and his agents. Of course, the reverse of the assertion is the truth: the “egg” a metaphor for the word (the truth) is, according to the scriptures, an hammer which breaks the rock or the stone in pieces (Jeremiah 23:29). The death by drowning of Okolo and Tuere does not diminish or destroy the word or the truth. *IT* lives on and reigns victorious ultimately.

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This essay, in conclusion, has isolated three levels of linguistic foregrounding employed by the author, namely, lexical, syntactic and semiotic. Specifically, it has identified category rule violation, selectional restriction and collocational rules violation, transliteration, doubling of subject and verb to BE and use of metaphors, symbols, and irony as some of the foregrounded aspects of the language of *The Voice*. It has also attempted to establish a correlation between the message of the novel and these stylistic devices. As shown in the study, the English language deployed in the novel is embellished with the author's LI which has copious similarities with other Nigerian languages. Other areas of stylistic study such as phono stylistics, clause structures, and graphology are feasible in the work and are recommended for further study.

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