

A Contextual Semantic Study of Similes in Olu Obafemi's *Wheels* and Razinat T. Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife*

By

Adamu, Isah Babura

Department of English and Literary Studies, Bayero University, Kano

aibabura.eng@buk.edu.ng

08060300368

&

Inuwa, Mahmud

Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Ibnmahmud00@gmail.com

07085566884

Abstract

*Figures of Speech are among the variety of stylistic devices literary writers use for embellishment, decoration and ornamentation in their works. The purpose of using them is to make what is said more vivid, purposeful and memorable. They spur the reader's imagination making it leap from one idea to another. Against this backdrop, this paper, using Firth's (1957) Contextual Theory, examines the use of similes (one of the predominantly deployed figures of speech by literary artists) in Olu Obafemi's *Wheels* and Razinat Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife*. As a text-based study, qualitative method is applied. Precisely, one hundred and ten similes are identified in the two texts. The finding shows that the two writers deploy them not just as style but also to depict their main contextual, thematic preoccupations. While Olu Obafemi uses them to treat issues ranging from social injustice, class distinction, abject poverty to role of youth in peace making and conflict resolution in postcolonial Nigeria, Razinat Mohammed, on the other hand, uses them to discuss the themes of love, marriage, betrayal and intra-gender conflict and victimization, among others, thus making their texts uniquely poetic.*

Introduction

In the bid to enhance the quality of their creative works and make compelling reading among the teeming readers, literary writers especially novelists enormously deploy numerous stylistic devices ranging from point of view, suspense, flashback, irony, proverb, metaphor and simile, among a plethora of other poetic devices. The employment of such devices is means to an end but not an end in themselves. Apart from using them as style, they are equally helpful in revealing the writers' thematic concerns. In other words, it is through the use of such literary devices that writers convey their ideas to readers. According to Abubakar (2017:185):

Every individual has his peculiar ways of doing things. Style is the term used to capture this inherent human phenomenon, which is also applicable to one's distinctive mode of expression, both orally and in writing. The style of a writer (also known as 'idiolect') is, thus, his unique way or pattern of communicating his views, feelings or messages.

Thus, the style of a work is limited to its choice of words (diction), point of view, use of tropes – figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, paradox, oxymoron and sentence structure, among other techniques peculiar to a writer. Against this background, this paper, as the title depicts, sets out to undertake a contextual study of similes in Obafemi's *Wheels* and Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife* in order to depict how they deploy these devices to embellish their works, thus making them not only uniquely poetic but also use them to depict their thematic concerns thus providing the dual purpose that these devices could be put into in literary compositions.

Simile: A Conceptual Review

Simile is among the predominant figures of speech deployed by literary artists in embellishing their works. According to Akano, Olaniran and Ukoyen (2007:54), simile refers to simple comparison. It is a clear comparison between two different objects that have a certain quality in common. Also, Muhammad (2007:65) posits that, 'Simile is a figure of speech that compares two things using the comparative words 'like' or 'as'. Closely related to Muhammad's definition is Adedokun's. He defines it "as a comparative figure of speech used to compare one thing with another. The key words for each comparison are: as, like, as if, and as though. In simile, two unlike things are explicitly compared" (Adedokun, 2011:179). Giving a more comprehensive definition of simile, Gumel (2012:16) explains that:

A simile is that figure of speech in which a likeness is definitely or formally expressed. The objectives or situations compared maybe of different kind and quality, but similarity can be noticed or observed in certain areas and this resemblance can be easily seen.

On his part, Lawan (2012:73) sees simile "as a comparison between two fundamentally dissimilar things that have certain qualities in common." For Abrams and Harpham (2012:130), "In a simile, a comparison between two distinctly different things is explicitly indicated by the word "like" or as."

Making his contribution to the meaning and importance of simile in literary work, Murphy (1997:22) writes that:

The word 'simile' only means: like. When the poet uses a simile he makes it plain to the reader that he is using a conscious comparison. He does this by drawing the reader's attention to the comparison by using certain words: like, as, as though, as if, as...as, as...so.

In essence, simile, from what is discernable in the above definitions, is a comparison of two unlike things by using 'like' or 'as...as', thereby creating a mental picture in the mind of a reader of what are compared.

Methodology

The paper employs qualitative method as its methodology. Therefore, it is a text-based research which relies on written materials as sources of data. All the data are collected from *Wheels* and *The Travails of a First Wife* – the two primary texts and some secondary sources. Precisely, one hundred and eight similes used in the two novels are drawn and contextually analysed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in the analysis of the two texts is contextual theory of meaning. As a theory, contextual theory pioneered by Firth (1957) is a semantic as well as pragmatic one. In other words, the theory focuses on what linguistic form means as well as what it is used for (Oyeshile 2000, Pushpinder and Jindal 2008) because the fields of Semantics and Pragmatics are essentially concerned with the study of meaning. According to Firth, the pioneer of the theory, language is only meaningful in the context of situation.

Importantly, the theory maintains that in the analysis of the meanings of words and sentences, a certain set of features from the external world of context are worthy of consideration, i.e who is the speaker, who is the hearer, what is the role of each, and what the situation is. Against this background, this paper, as pointed out earlier, further adopts the contextual theory of meaning because meaning is easily derived or identified through the context in which they are used. Thus, the conglomerate of similes used in the two texts are equally meaningful in the context they appear and used, hence amenable to study. It is therefore logical that they are analyzed based on the contexts they are used in the texts.

Synopses of the Novels

Set in a fictional Giro town, *Wheels* (1994), the only novel published by Olu Obafemi, the prolific Nigerian playwright, chronicles the familial life of Musa Sonja, the father of the protagonist in the novel, who due to social injustice and selfishness of the bourgeoisie class (represented by Seun's father) lives in a rented 'facemeifacemyou' house with his wife Abeke. As a retired soldier, Sonja gallantly

fought in the 'hot battle' but was asked to go immediately after the battle because of his low level of education. Structurally, the novel is divided into three parts: The First Part is a flashback. It narrates the miserable life of Sonja who after his dismissal from work (because of his low level of formal education) engages in petty business. He sells goat and leopard skins to neighbouring villages to make ends meet. On his way back to Giro one day, he is attacked by three robbers who take away virtually all he possesses. In the Second Part, Kofo, the protagonist-cum-narrator, tells about the kind of life poor people like his father experience in Giro and how they are exploited by the rich people. The Third Part of the novel narrates the school and love life of the children of the rich and poor – Kofo and Kemi and how they try to reconcile their parents and do away with social injustice. Some of the thematic thrusts of the novel range from abject poverty, social stratification, education, injustice, exploitation, friendship, the role of youth in peace making and conflict resolution.

On its part, *The Travails of a First Wife* (2015), Razinat Mohammed's second novel which is set in Maiduguri, mirrors the miserable matrimonial life of Zarah Zanna whose husband's decision to marry two other women on the same day puts her in a terrible condition throughout the text. Zarah's inability to conceive again (having aborted one pregnancy after another) after the birth of Babagana, (Ibrahim's 17 year illegitimate son) compels Ibrahim (a very attractive handsome young man whom Zarah heartily loves) to marry Kellu (Shuwa) and Fantere (Fulani) simultaneously. Eight months and twenty-one days after the marriage, Fantere gives birth to baby girl (Mairama) and five days later, Kellu also gives birth to two bouncing boys (Abdul and Abdan). This enrages Zarah as Kellu and Fantere regard her as a barren woman. As a result, she asks Babagana (who is in her mother's custody) to come and spend his holiday with her in order to show to her co-wives that she, too, has a child with Ibrahim. On his part, Ibrahim begs her never to disclose their secret. Thus, getting tired of seeing Zarah in his house coupled with her constant threat to reveal his secret, Ibrahim divorces her for a lame excuse (she refuses to sell her rented house in Damaturu he orders her to). However, with the intervention of Zarah's paternal uncle, Baa Gubdo Zanna, Ibrahim promises to bring her back. The novel ends on the very day Zarah comes back to her unfriendly marital home. Some of the issues treated in the text range from poverty, friendship, love, marriage, polygamy, jealousy, betrayal, illegitimacy, politics, modernity, barrenness, moral decadence among youth to female education, among a plethora of other issues dexterously addressed in the text.

Similes in *Wheels*

In Olu Obafemi's *Wheels*, similes are predominantly used. They serve dual purposes. Apart from being used as style for embellishment, they equally help in realising the author's thematic preoccupations. They are listed below based on their functions:

Depicting the Theme of Social Injustice through Similes

(1) The thought, **like a long shadow in the evening stay on my mind** and I can neither suppress it nor wish it away. It makes me feel completely lonely (p.93).

(2) The security men move forward, but Sonja ignores them. They await orders, but none is given. They freeze... **Sonja's eyes glow like red coal as he faces the crowd** (p.99).

(3) Children of our land, we have heard the message. **It carries hope, which like Akara, wrapped in banana leave needs unfolding before we can eat it** (p.103).

(4) The crowd begins to depart, mainly in grim quiet, **filing like a column of black ants after** a burial (p.104).

(5) I fear this manner of parting. It leaves a deep gulf, **like a wide fissure in a piece of furniture** (p.104).

Excerpts 1-5 depict how the author employs similes to discuss the issue of social injustice in the novel. As a Marxist writer, Obafemi artistically uses the medium of the novel to enlighten poor people like Sonja on the need to fight against all forms of social injustice meted on them in the society.

Depicting the Theme of Social Stratification through Similes

(6) On the other side of the bridge where we live, **there are all sorts of crowds swarming like flies inside tiny one room tenant houses** (p.31).

(7) Mansions and rented slums, Vee-boots with tainted glasses against rickety motor bikes; opportunities and privileges versus deprivation and want. These tangles lay on our path, **like labyrinths on the way to a castle of love** (p.113).

In excerpts 6-7, the author uses similes to depict social stratification in Giro community. In other words, in the society portrayed in the novel, there are two classes of people: the rich and the poor. Seun, Gbenga, Kemi and Rekiya's fathers who live in Government Reserved Area represent the well-to-do individuals in the society while Sonja, Garuba and Koori, the majority masses who live in Government Rejected Area, the facemeifacemyou houses, represent the poor people in the society.

Depicting the Theme of Insecurity through Similes

(8) In a short distance ahead, about fifty metres away, there was an up-shot of glowing flames, **like an ascending satellite** (p.16).

(9) Abeke is violently angry, **her eyes glowed red like cold ash** against Gorilla who clutches her precious breast (p.20).

(10) Their boss, veritable leader of a motor-bike rider's raid, felled by a woman, an unarmed, untrained woman for that matter. **Commander, felled like a termite-devoured log** (p.20).

(11) She hurriedly untied him as the horn-blare got uncomfortably near and **death closed in like a fog of darkness at the arrival of dusk** (p.23).

(12) Musa gently gathered his earthy possessions; his valiant wife, his traumatized innocent son and **like the wood-insect, gathered them on his only other possession**, the second-hand engine on two wheels (p.23).

(13) **Then this sudden speed like a blind horse**. What is not the matter? Abeke completely let the steam off. Stop sleeping or stop dreaming. At least take me and my child home in one piece (p.26).

(14) **The possibility of death in these moments hung around his neck like a heavy load...** What would have happened, if those vultures got their way through and did it to her (p.27).

Similes in excerpts 9-14 depict how social injustice, exploitation and capitalism lead to insecurity in Giroland. Poor people like the three robbers who attacked Sonja and his wife Abeke cannot afford three square meals. As a result, they resort to robbery as their means of livelihood. Ironically, virtually all the people they rob are poor like them because the rich people do not even follow such bad roads where they usually carry out their operation.

Depicting the Theme of Protest through Similes

(15) The Imam's voice is blade-edge sharp. It is spiced with truth. **The power of truth pierces like the tinge of a needle on a brittle skin** (p.33).

(16) **Falsehood is silent as night, as truth reigns**. I cannot see the Imam now as I am too small and huge people take the front spaces (p.33).

(17) **The Imam's voice sounds like a roaring lion** and his tiny muscles swell around the neck **like a python about to spill its venom** (p.33).

(18) **The prophet looks like a solid Iroko tree in my child's eyes**. He is frightfully sullen and sad-looking. There is fire in his eyes (p.36).

(19) **In this trance – like torrent of passion**, Kofo goes into a slumber and the rest of the evening activity comes to him in a dream (p.38).

Similes in excerpts 16-19 depict how people like Imam who also resides in the face-me-if-you-houses try to resist against social injustice and exploitation in the society. He uses his sermon not only to preach to the wicked rich people like Seun's father on the repercussion of capitalism and exploitation but also to enlighten the poor people to verbally and actively fight for their rights.

Accentuating the importance of Education through Deployment of Similes in *Wheels*.

(20) Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angles', and **my voice sounded like the tinkling cymbal mentioned in the verses**, I have become something of a celebrity at every End of Year activity in our school (p.53).

(21) They point to our girls. **The teachers are nodding like lizards**, walking towards our girls (p.55).

(22) Although it is dark and the sun has yielded its place to a slow and gentle approach of moonlight, **like a shy bride on her first day in the bridegroom's family house**, we feel the nearness of the innocent giggles of the approaching girls (p.56).

Similes in excerpts 21-22 depict the theme of education. It is an irony that the children of the rich like Seun, Gbenga and Kemi despite all the flamboyant life they have are not as intelligent as the children of poor like Kofo and Seidu. In fact, the author uses the characterization of Kofo to further reveal that poor people can only fight for their rights when they are well-educated.

Depicting the Theme of Friendship and Love through Similes in *Wheels*

(23) Time seems to drag when you are on the waiting side; when you are expecting. **Every breath passes like an hour and the world appears to stand still** (p.58).

(24) He is the one who sees tomorrow from yesterday. Kofo is like that. Strange, queer and quiet. **But in his eyes, you find a stagnant water, clear like a mirror** (p.60).

(25) Love is Aladin's wonder lamp. It comes and shines from where you least expect it. **My love for you is as deep as all the five oceans in the world poured into one** (p.85).

(26) Please give me my paper... I shout after them, running after them. **But their feet are swifter than the hyena's hind limbs** and they are soon beyond my reach (p.83).

(27) A good turn without thanks is **like a midnight robbery** (p.88).

(28) I fear this manner of parting. It leaves a deep gulf, **like a wide fissure in a piece of furniture** (p.104).

(29) Seun begins and the memories of old school days **tumble back like a fresh spring water** (p.104).

(30) The words drop from Kemi's mouth **like the heavy hands of a new rain** (p.105).

(31) Kemi turns around sharply, piercing through me again, **like the sharp blade-point of the warrior's dagger** (p.109).

(32) He turns to Gbenga and looks at him straight in the eyes. Yes, you are perfectly right. I am a plain coward. Like all cowards, I try to evade the truth and hide the issues, wishing them away. **Yet, truth is like smoke** (p.129).

(33) Kemi brightens up. I move towards her, slowly, but she signals me not to. I obey. **She stands there like an angel after a vision on the arrival of the messiah** (p.130).

Similes in excerpts 24-33 depict the theme of friendship and love between the children of the rich like Seun, Gbenga and Kemi and the children of the poor like Kofo and Seidu. Kofo and Kemi love each other mutually. They want to use it as a powerful weapon to bring an end to the persistent hatred and enmity between their parents.

Depicting the Role of Youth in Peace Making and Conflict Resolution through Similes in Obafemi's *Wheels*

(34) 'Look, here they come! **Look at them crawling on their hands like animals!** What bravery! (p.59).

(35) I turn around quickly and find that Kemi has stood up half-way in a perfect squat. Arms akimbo. **The tiny dimples on her cheeks make smile appear like a broad laugh** (p.110).

(36) Kofo. You are too deep. **Your words prick me like a tailor's sewing needle.** I feel a burden of guilt in my heart (p.111).

(37) Sonja may be stern, but he is not wicked. **Mama Kofo is forever as calm as the water in the family drinking pot** (p.115).

(38) **The tears vanish like white foam from washing powder on top of the water in a pan.** She responds quietly (p.123).

(39) I put her down gently sitting her on my lap on the grass under the huge Odan tree. **The tears pour like spring from our big village waterfall.** I try to wipe the tears but it keeps pouring (p.131).

(40) Stop being a coward. Yes, I know you are not a coward. **The moment of courage is the moment truth drops like a bomb in a silent room** (p.143).

(41) Dad and Mum. Don't leave. Don't go. **This is the time and age when truth like smoke must rise to the sky.** Let us hear the truth out for the sake of the future (p.147).

Similes in excerpts 35-41 clearly depict the indispensable role youth of Kofu's generation play in fighting against injustice and marginalization meted to poor people in their community. To achieve this, they organize a get-together party and invite both the rich and the poor and treat them equally.

Other Instances of Similes as Aesthetic Strategies in Obafemi's *Wheels*.

(42) **The smell of the first rain of the year is fresh, like a newly opened deodorant.** The earth breathes warmth and the thin hands of the rain spread across the sky (p.30).

(43) A Skinny lanky player from the other team called Ringo Star is causing an amazing sensation. **He has dribbled and wriggled and twisted like a slippery snake** right from his own half of the field into the last quarter of ours (p.48).

A. I. Babura & I. Mahmud, **A Contextual Semantic Study...** AKSU
Journal of English

(44) **The threaded, beaten bottled cocks tied around their dancing anklets like bangles** give enough sound to warn us of the exact distance they have covered in their motion towards the cars (p.56).

(45) I see the **big coca pods pointing downwards like the milk-laden breasts of a pregnant cow** (p.56).

(46) On the far side of the huge gorge are **various creatures, some look like gnomids, demons, witches, spirits, and ghosts** (p.57).

(47) Surprise, shock and the unexpectedness of their action left me in total stupefaction. **My head began to turn round like a bicycle wheel being pedalled by a fast rider** (p.72).

(48) I found a red glow across the sky. **The moon bulges out like a huge globe** and its blushing grin does not leave the impression of a light (p.73).

(49) Kemi breaks into a run without looking back. I watch her light feet and very balanced gait fleeting along, **like an egret on the homeward flight** (p.112).

Similes in excerpts 43-49 are not used to depict a particular theme. Instead, they are poetically used to reveal the personality traits of some characters and to create a mental picture of what are compared.

Some Highlights of Similes as Aesthetic Coloration in Razinat T. Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife*

Like Obafemi in *Wheels*, Mohammed in *The Travails of a First Wife*, also uses many similes as style and as conveyer of the main thematic preoccupations in the novel. In other words, similes, in Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife*, are deployed in different context throughout the narration in the story. These encompasses those of love, marriage celebration, polygamy, jealousy and betrayal are artistically rendered through similes.

Depicting the theme of Love through Simile

(50) **Like a colossus**, he loomed over her frail body. She was sitting at his feet on the floor, on a large brown carpet, a sky blue veil covering her head and shoulders (p.3).

(51) That day, he had suddenly begun to stammer **like a fool** (p.9).

(52) He had licked the tears on her face with his tongue **like a dog or sheep** would lick its newborn puppy or kid(p.9).

(53) She made an effort to also, relax but the tension she felt was **like a balloon**, determined to block her airways (p.17).

(54) She wept silently as she walked the path away from her home and the pains of loving a man such as Ibrahim her **like a bolt** (p.18).

(55) Her heartbeats raced on one after another in quick succession. She could hear his labored breathing almost **like someone beneath a fallen wall** (p.42).

(56) He felt **like he had suddenly touched a life wire** and was flung meters away (p.43).

(57) She turned to look at him **sleeping like a baby**; his closed eyes were even more attractive than she had ever imagined (p.98).

(58) He touched her soft body and **his excitement shot like lightning from his brain** to his lower abdomen (p.127).

(59) Her skin was luscious the tissue of a succulent ripe fruit. She was delectable and ready **like a fruity smoothie** to be drunk (p.186).

The excerpts above indicate how Mohammed employs similes to depict the love between Kellu and Ibrahim as well as between Ibrahim and Zarah. As a postgraduate student of Mass Communication at the University of Maiduguri, Kellu deeply loves Ibrahim for nine years before she eventually marries him as a second wife. Also, Zarah, Ibrahim's first wife, dearly and excessively loves being a very handsome man. In fact, as hinted in the narrative, "She had never considered another man in the thirty years or more that she had known him. It had always been him. He was the very air that she breathe" (p.5).

Depicting Festivity and Marriage Celebration through Simile

(60) Then **like catching a flu**, the floor was quickly filled to capacity as dancing enthusiasts whirled themselves from one end of the floor to another until the wee hours of the morning (p.65).

A. I. Babura & I. Mahmud, **A Contextual Semantic Study...** AKSU
Journal of English

(61) **Kellu shone like a cataclysmic variable in the florescent light** as she was led, head bowed until she disappeared into the dark interior of Ibrahim's black jeep that was at hand to convey her to his home (p.85).

(62) Bilki peeped through the window and could not believe that the entire village seemed to have moved into the town to see where one of their own was to live. **It was like winning a jackpot** (p.106).

(63) The villagers filed out of the vehicles **like black ants**, in a straight line as though, they were on a Para-military training parade ground (p.106).

(64) **Kellu smelt like someone who had been marinated in a bath full of perfumes** (p.186).

In these excerpts, the author uses simile to portray how Kanuri/Shuwa (Kellu's family) and Fulani (Ibrahim's third wife's family) celebrate marriage ceremony. Kanuri, in the first day of their marriage celebration, perform *Wushe Wushe* – a traditional sitting where women roll-on Laffayas (a five yard long veil used by Kanuri and Shuwa women are expected to cover their entire body) and dance with their male partners. On their part, Fulani women from Fantere's family wear multi-coloured scarves around their heads and shoulders and sing in chorus while accompanying bride to her husband's house.

Depicting Culture of Polygamy and Issues of Jealousy through Simile

(65) When she opened her mouth, he saw two or three strands of saliva stand in vertical lines **like metal rods on a prison door barricading the inmate**. They like their host's drawn face were signs of defiance of the action (p.52).

(66) His disappointment was enormous as he watched for any movement from her. **She was as still as a corpse** (p.57).

(67) The sorrow that had enveloped her **like a sudden violent wave on a tranquil sea surface** was involuntary (p.71).

(68) At the repeated mention of the word, fright would grip her, **like one lost in a grim forest and a twinge of pain would run down her spine** (p.81).

(69) They recognize that her fate could befall anyone of them. So it was a pain that radiated from the particular to the general. **It was like death, it could be anyone's turn** (p.81).

(70) "I hear nothing but what they are saying Ya Kolo." **She said whimpering like a child** (p.88).

(71) She took short and quick breath **like someone who had been running a marathon** (p.88).

(72) Since that day, most women saw **Ibrahim as a bad bug** that should be kept at bay from further associations with their husbands for they feared he could be infectious (p.109).

(73) She could not contain her sorrows and as she began to cry afresh whimpering

like a frightened child weak from unknown bouts of fever (p.112).

(74) She was sure they needed to visit the bathroom in order to say their morning prayers so she wiped her face dry of all traces of tears but **like a mask, she wore her sorrows on her face** (p.113).

(75) She thought of the other woman called Fantere and wondered at what motivated Ibrahim to marry her. Apart from her heavy back side there was nothing else. **Her nose was so large and sat on the face like a clay mole on a doll's face** (p.119).

(76) **Her mouth fleshy and pink like raw meat stands in detached flays** giving her face the appearance of someone in a perpetual act of pouting the lips (p.119).

(77) Coming face to face with that sort of reality was **like having poisoned gas** slowly infiltrate your pores only to settle in your heart (p.126).

(78) She began to scratch herself all over **like a dog with scurf** and he wondered what had come over her (p.132).

(79) He felt her grip on his legs weaken **like a limp rag doll** that had no strength whatsoever to hold tight and he felt sorry for her (p.134).

(80) It happened that Kellu had obviously found some Indomie hidden away in an unused sets of pot in one of the cupboards and had retrieved all to another hiding place and **like a tigress**, had kept watch to see which of the women was responsible for hiding the Indomie sachets in the first place (p.143).

(81) "It will not get to that Zarah." His voice was suddenly mellowed **like the cry of an abandoned kitten in search of its mother** (p.154).

(82) When she responded to Zarah's greetings, **her voice came like a pitiful mouse-squeak**. That was enough vindication for Zarah (p.159).

(83) Everyone around her edged her nerves and **she went about the house like a dreadful, marooned creature in the wilderness** (p.166).

(84) She was all alone and by and by, everything in her presence went blank. **Like a rolling movie, her whole life was before her very face** (p.167).

(85) Everyone was raw and sore from childbirth whereas, **she was as hard as an Iroko tree** (p.169).

(86) **She sat still like a plastered post on an abandoned street.** Her heart pummelled its rib cage as though it wanted to exit to fight for its right (p.171).

(87) She watched as they disappeared into Fantere's room and then **like a wet chicken**, dragged herself to her own room where she sat on the sofa and wondered at the malaise that had befallen the woman (p.193).

(88) **Her mother's aged eyes looked glassy but open as wide as wrinkles on her old face could stretch;** she was in wonder again at what news she was to hear from a problematic marriage as that of Zarah's (p.199).

(89) "What?" **she was shivering like a large jelly on a saucer** (p.201).

(90) There was nothing old age could not do, she concluded. **They were like wilted vegetables**, lacking moisture and thus strength to carry themselves around much less lift a voice at something the other was doing (p.218).

(91) One thing was certain though, she resolved not to continue to feed her 'pains', **for like hunger, it needed to be fed** (p.220).

Some of the excerpts above depict how the author employs similes to portray how jealous Zarah is as a first wife. She refuses to eat because she never expects Ibrahim to marry a second wife having known how she dearly loves him and is ready to do everything he likes. She aborted three of his pregnancies before they married. Also, as an employed graduate, Zarah takes all his responsibilities before he gets a job. On her part, Kellu fails to see the reason why Ibrahim ends up marrying a very ugly woman like Fantere whose nose as she describes it, "is very large and sits on her face like a clay mole on a doll's face." He is not the paragon of virtue she expected. Thus, she totally hates Fantere as her co-wife. Fantere also hates Zarah, Ibrahim's senior wife.

Depicting Betrayal through Simile

(92) Hajja Arkwayer sat **like a statue** in an ancient museum listening and thinking of the unthinkable alternative (p.46).

(93) She sat still **like a plastered post on an abandoned street.** Her heart pummelled its rib cage as though it wanted to exit to fight for its right (p.171).

(94) The battle had left her territory since the man of the house did not care if she indeed was still a woman or in fact had begun to grow long white **beards like that of Ustaz Isah Abdullah** (p.194).

(95) The more she tried to understand his reasons for the extreme actions the more she failed to grasp at anything tangible because all the reasons her brains provided melted into nothingness **like lather blown into the air** by playing children (p.202).

(96) All she could tell was that he had planned his action long before then and was in wait for her slightest mistakes to pounce on **like a boa constrictor** in wait for its victim (p.202).

(97) As she stepped onto the veranda, she instinctively felt **like a stranger** stealing out of someone else's house (p.204).

(98) He said slowly **like a sick man** to whom talking in itself was an arduous task (p.206).

(99) She had a hunch that Ibrahim had for long intended to do away with her sister and saw him **as a predator** lying in wait for the right opportunity (p.207).

(100) Zarah felt a sharp pain run through her chest. **It was like poisoned gas** infiltrating her pores (p.208).

(101) "I mean emm... you did nothing wrong to this man and it is wrong for him to pronounce divorce on your head **as if you are some rag doll**" (p.208).

Excerpts 92-101 depict how the author employs similes to accentuate the ambience of betrayal in polygamous families. Ibrahim as a polygamist is portrayed as a deceiver. He deceives both Zarah and Kellu by refusing to tell them of intention to marry Fantere as his third wife until on the wedding day. Also, to prove how deceitful he is, he divorces Zarah as she no longer satisfies his sexual desires.

Other Contexts of Similes in Razinat T. Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife*

(102) The boy's voice was **like an arrow** shot into her heart, poor soul, she thought and fell on the floor before her mother and the tears begun to pour (p.25).

(103) She had a full feminine chest and her round hips flanked from both sides of the wrapper **like the exterior of a peacock** ready to seduce (p.35).

(104) He was given a rise in his work place as an assistant to the overall manager of the telecommunication outfit called, ECONET, in its Maiduguri branch. It was since then that he had risen **like the tendril of a water hyacinth** that spreads over a river in matter of hours; Ibrahim grew rich within a twinkle of an eye (p.68).

(105) People thought it was a demonstration of sheer joy; little knowing that he had acted impulsively **like someone experiencing a bizarre nightmare** (p.110).

(106) The thought of her mother lying on some Makkara (a bamboo stretcher used for carrying the dead) dead and cold, and she was unreachable **like thunderbolt** (p.174).

(107) As she struggled for more air supply to her lungs, the veins on her breasts also struggled for space as they ran in riotous criss-cross spurting out milk all over the carpet **like blood rushing out of a knife stab** (p.188).

(108) Ya Kolo could not believe her ears as she stood wide eyed before her sister who was by then, **fuming like a chimney exuding black smoke** (p.208).

(110) Of course she was, thought Ibrahim, and he felt like he might hazard a look at the old face. When he did, **the old man's face was brown-black like some piece of aging fruit** (p.211).

The similes used in these excerpts are not for the purpose of depicting a particular theme but to clarify the issue at hand and create a vivid picture of what are compared in the mind of the curious reader. In other words, some of them like 103 and 105 depict the personality traits of the characters, Kellu, for instance, others like 107 and 109 depict the joyous or sad situation which the main character Zarah finds herself.

Conclusion

From the discourse so far, the paper is basically concerned with contextual analysis of similes deployed by Olu Obafemi in *Wheels* and Razinat T. Mohammed in *The Travails of a First Wife* and explored how they use them not only as style for embellishing their works but also to treat the main thematic preoccupations in the creative contexts of their respective novels. While Obafemi focuses mainly on the context of injustice, class distinction, insecurity, protest, education, friendship and the role of youth in peace making and conflict resolution, Mohammed, on the other hand, largely dwells on issues dealing with female gender. As such, the affections of excessive love and its attendant repercussion, polygamy, jealousy and betrayal are treated and given prominence through the creative utility of similes in *The Travails of a First Wife*. Thus, the meanings of virtually all the similes used in the novels can be discerned easily in the contexts they appear. In essence, the contexts in which the similes are used in the two novels play a crucial role in realizing the thematic intentions and meanings in the texts and to the readers.

References

Abrams, M. H. and Harpham, G.G. (2012). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Tenth

- Edition. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
- Abubakar, A. T. (2017). "A Stylistic Analysis of Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*." *Yankari: Journal of English, Literature and Linguistics*, 1.1, 185-202. Gadau: Bauchi State University.
- Adedokun, A. O. (2011). *A Comprehensive English Grammar for Schools and Colleges*. Ibadan: Penand Ink Publisher.
- Akano, A., Olaniran, O. and Ukoyen, V. A. (2007). *English Language for Senior Secondary School*. Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited.
- Firth, J. R. (1957). *Papers in Linguistics*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Gumel, L. S. (2012). "The Nature, Concepts and Functions of Literature". *Introduction to Literature and Literature Teaching*. Jigawa: College of Education Gumel.
- Lawan, M. I. (2012). *Handy Literature: Prose, Drama and Poetry*. Kano: SM Graphics.
- Mohammad, M. (2007). *A Select Glossary of Literary Terms*. Kano: Yabi Printing.
- Mohammed, R. T. (2015). *The Travails of a First Wife*, Lagos: Origami Books.
- Murphy, M.J. (1992). *Understanding Unseen: An Introduction to English Poetry and the English Novel for Overseas Students*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Obafemi, O. (2015). *Wheels*, Ibadan: Kraftgriots.
- Oyeshile, O. A. (2002). "Philosophy and Language: The Nature of the Philosophers interest in Language". *Studies in English Language*, Pp. 168-181. Ibadan: Enicrownfit Publisher.
- Pushpinder, S. and Jindal, D. V. (2008). *An Introduction of Linguistics: Language Grammar and Semantics*. Prentice Hall: India Private Limited.