

# The Application of Stylistics in the Identification of Participants' Relationships in Wole Soyinka's "Abiku"

Alexis Aondover Tsavmbu, PhD

Department of Languages and Linguistics,  
Federal University Dutsin-ma, Katsina State-Nigeria.

[aondoversavmbu@gmail.com](mailto:aondoversavmbu@gmail.com)

[08034689676](tel:08034689676)

&

Eventus Edem, PhD

Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University  
Obio Akpa Campus, Akwa Ibom State.

[dreventusedem@gmail.com](mailto:dreventusedem@gmail.com)

08023573487

## **Abstract**

*This study was motivated by the disagreement between literary critics and linguistic analysts who create the impression of being different sets of professionals instead of partners in language scholarship. The aim is to show that literary and linguistics analyses are two complementary approaches that can be used for the study of Soyinka's "Abiku" specifically and literature generally. The objective is to generate stylistic evidence that corroborates literary interpretation of Soyinka's "Abiku" in such a way that the participants in the poem are identified and their roles interpreted for a better understanding of the poem. Because stylistics is conceived here as the point at which literary and linguistics methodologies meet for deepening illumination of texts generally and literature in particular, the methodology is a blend of literary criticism and linguistic analysis guided by M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) in such a way that the literary statements made about the poem are supported by linguistic evidence. The key finding is that two thematic paths identify two participants in the poem: Abiku on one hand and Abiku's mother or the community on the other. In terms of participants' relationship, verifiable evidence proves that between Abiku and its mother or the community, Abiku operates from the position of strength. We recommend that the scientific study of language (linguistics) should be integrated into literary analysis for better results than where either of the two is adopted independently.*

**Keywords:** stylistic analysis, literary criticism, synergy, participants' relationship, 'abiku'

## **Introduction**

In literature, characters (participants) are created for plot expansion; ultimately to communicate the writer's message. This is the case irrespective of genre. The participants so created are assigned specific roles, for instance as protagonist, antagonist, major character or minor character as the case may be; depending on what the writer wants to achieve. These roles not only determine how each participant behaves, but how what he does affects other participants in the same work of art. Consequently, understanding the participants in a work of art, what they do and how that which they do affects other participants is critical in the interpretation of literary work. This is what is meant by participants' relationship. Since literature uses language as its building block, both literary and linguistics scholars have, over the years, undertaken this task of identifying participants' relationships in works of art: "this concern has never been the exclusive preserve of just one set of professionals" (Tsavmbu, 2019: 3).

However, the problem is that literary and linguistics approaches, rather than enrich the study of literature, have unfortunately become sources of disagreement between their practitioners. Both literary and linguistics scholars have engaged in the unnecessary controversy as to who is better equipped to study the language of literature. The argument was actually started by Harold Whitehall in 1951 when he pronounced that no criticism can go beyond its linguistics. Vendler supported Whitehall's position in 1966 when she said that as far as the study and comprehension of literature is concerned, "linguists are the ones who give a great light to those (non-linguistics critics) who walk in darkness" (Vendler, 1966: 457). Literary critics hotly contested such claims. Jeffares, for instance, cannot see linguistics offering more to literary studies beyond "a new vocabulary, a new jargon" (Jeffares, 1965: 7). The details of this controversy are well documented in "the Bateson-Fowler controversy" (Fowler, 1971: 43-79). Similar scathing rejoinders were made by other literary critics in what Osundare describes as an "unnecessary and essentially counter-productive war of supremacy" (Osundare, 1982: 2).

The position of this paper is that such disagreements between linguistics and literary scholars are not healthy for language scholarship. While linguistics scholars are concerned with the form of a literary work, literary scholars uphold content and downplay form. However, while it is true that there can be no form without content, the organist theory shows that there cannot be

genuine artistic content without form. According to the organist theory, a good work of art is nothing but a studied and well-wrought integration of form and content; that what exists between form and content is a dialectical relationship in which form shapes content and content in turn illuminates form. Put in another way, just as a container is of little relevance without content, one can hardly have content without a container. Our opinion is that an understanding of this interdependence can pave way for a more profitable analysis of the formal properties of a work of art, as done by linguists, without doing violence to or neglecting the content, which is very important to literary critics. According to Osundare, "we can ... admire the intricate strokes of a painting, the luminescence of its colours, even the shape of its canvass, before going on to its content, its subject matter, and from there to its meaning and import" (Osundare, 1982: 5). Therefore, the best way to mediate in this controversy between linguistics and literary scholars is to affirm that an examination of the formal features of a work should not become an end in itself. Every formal step should lead towards a clearer and more rewarding understanding of the content of a work. Formal analysis should thus be seen as a temporary break-down to reveal the technical parts of a work. The inevitable aim should be to put them all back and re-establish their unity with content.

As Fowler (1996:3) has succinctly put it, "a writer's technique is, immediately and ultimately, a craft in language". This implies that language is not just a medium of literary expression, but an enabling factor that aids the status of literature as a communication enterprise. In its own turn, literature enriches language ideationally, lexically and structurally. It extends the expressive and cognitive frontiers of language and creates new possibilities. Spencer, Walter, Enkvist and Gregory (1964: 60) point out that "literature can be regarded as part of the total patterning of a culture as relatively self-contained institution of that culture". This is their way of affirming that language, literature, and criticism have an invigorating rendezvous in culture.

All this implies that there is more to gain by seeing the relationship between linguistics and literature as that of interpenetration and mutual illumination rather than of opposition and hostility. This paper deploys stylistics to harmonise the concerns of both literary and linguistics scholars. This is because the paper construes stylistics as the point where literature and linguistics meet with each complementing the other. The thinking here is that

linguists' concern for the technical details of language should complement literary critics' interest in what language works upon. This, in turn, illuminates a text by pointing out what might have escaped either of the two. This is the approach that has been adopted here in the analysis of Soyinka's "Abiku".

Soyinka's "Abiku" has been in the public space for decades and has attracted lots of criticism. However, much of this criticism has been from the literary angle. In this study, the existing literary interpretations of the poem are compared with stylistic findings. Consequently, in line with the approach recommended by Crystal and Davy (1969: 16), the analysis starts "by bearing in mind what is already known" from literary studies gleaned from review of related literature. From this impressionistic beginning, verifiable linguistic evidence is quantitatively isolated to either confirm or reject what is already known about the poem. This linguistic evidence is based on foregrounded/deviated features.

Our mention of foregrounding/deviation is restricted to statistical deviation. Leech has drawn a distinction between "determinate" and "statistical" deviation (Leech, 1969: 55) which is important to this paper. Statistical deviation, which is preferred here, is a quantitative measure of linguistic differences between the domain and the norm. Determinate deviation, on the other hand, is non-quantitative (Leech, 1969: 36–71). This distinction is important because stylistic statements made in this study are all based on quantitative measures of identified foregrounded features.

The aim is to show that literary and linguistics stylistics are two complementary approaches that can be used for the study of Soyinka's "Abiku" specifically and literature generally. Against this backdrop, the paper's key objective is to generate stylistic evidence for the interpretation of Soyinka's "Abiku" in such a way that the participants in the poem are identified and their roles interpreted for the poem's better understanding.

#### **Review of Related Literature**

Several scholars have studied the works of Wole Soyinka. However, and to the best of our knowledge, none has done so with the objective of identifying the participants and their relationships using the method deployed in this paper; a method that synergises both literary and linguistics methodologies. For instance, a stylistic analysis of Wole Soyinka's poem was attempted by Hatem Abed Rasha (2017) using the speech acts theory. Rasha justified the

application of the speech acts theory by saying that it is suitable for “connected text, spoken or written, thus speech acts operate as language in action” (Rasha, 2017: 175) and since literature is discourse, the use of the speech acts theory in that work was justified. However, the critic failed to demonstrate how the theory operates particularly within the context of the poem being 'stylistically' analysed. He only gave a commentary of Wole Soyinka's poem. At the end of the study, there did not appear much by way of either methodology or major findings arising from the application of the theory.

Like the other poets of his generation, critics have compared Soyinka's works, particularly his earlier ones, with those by European writers. One such critic is Maduagwu (2011) who identified a mythic imagination in the literary creativity of both William Blake and Wole Soyinka. Maduagwu's work was a general survey of the creation and application of myths as artistic structures for interpreting the nature of human life. According to him, Blake and Soyinka employ myths, which Phillip Wheelwright classified as “Primary, Romantic and Consummatory” (2011:109). He explained that primary myths often constitute cultural projections of knowledge that are meant to be accepted as literal truths which present knowledge poetically. Maduagwu believed that both writers “draw upon intuition and faith” (2011: 99) saying Romantic myths, unlike primary myths, draw upon man's desire to create systems that rise above the ordinary. He said that man indulges in Romantic myths in his quest to add a sense of wonder to reality. For Maduagwu, consummatory myths draw upon primary and romantic myths and create symbolic insights into man's nature and his world. Drawing extensively from the works of the two writers across genres, Maduagwu submitted that Blake and Soyinka project creative impulses which attest to the fact that the consummatory mythic consciousness incorporates into itself, the authoritative nature of Primary myths as well as the fictive nature of Romantic myths. Nevertheless, consummatory myths are distinctive in being able to consider the two other levels as providing materials for a profound exploration and understanding of man, his experiences and his universe. Therefore, in their consummatory myths, “these writers advance creative images and symbols (in the Primary and Romantic myths), which illuminate their speculations on the nature and goals of life. Thus, consummatory myths are embodiments of creative symbolizations of life” (2011: 108).

Soyinka's creativity has generally left no doubt about his commitment to his

country. This was made clear in Niyi Akingbe's study of Wole Soyinka's poems that were produced during his twenty-five months of incarceration by the Gowon administration. According to Akingbe, Wole Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt* is a distillation of deep-seated anger against what he perceived as his “unjustified confinement of twenty-five months by the administration of General Yakubu Gowon during the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970” (2014: 124). Soyinka is believed to have approached Nigeria's haunting, turbulent political history from a mediation of fact and fiction rendered in poetry. His poems that belong to this category are believed to exteriorise his mind as it shuttles back and forth from life to death, fuelled by the fear of palpable death. The poems dwell on notions, conceptions, symbolic actions and relations lifted clean from their social, historical and literary contexts which are fused into an ideal worldview whose coherence is purely conceptual. Akingbe's essay therefore evaluated the intersection of history, literature and society. It did this to examine the façade of nationhood as orchestrated by the political upheaval and internecine conflict, essentially moderated by the pulsation of Soyinka's mind while in solitary confinement. It further examined the poetics of *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, as it underscored suspended fear of expression and the need to give expression to an “ever greater pressure of grim experience in Nigeria's chequered political trajectory” (Akingbe, 2014: 124).

With the above objectives in mind, Akingbe proceeded to chronicle Soyinka's plight and sojourn in detention in a Nigerian prison and his attendant reaction to the perceived physical and mental suffering caused by incarceration. The researcher showed how Soyinka, in an attempt to prevent the Biafran secession from becoming a civil war, was misunderstood by the federal authorities, who subsequently hauled him into twenty-five months detention. Akingbe also proved that *A Shuttle in the Crypt* is a retrospective anthology, uncovering the brutality and highhandedness of the military administration of General Yakubu Gowon in silencing dissent opinions. It is therefore apt to say Akingbe's work examined the inherent falsehood in Nigeria's journey to nationhood as grounded in *A Shuttle in the Crypt*. The artificiality of the Nigerian federal state which reflects in the narrative of ethnic differences, mediated by the 1966 political crisis, leading to the destruction of social and political equilibrium in the country and metamorphosing into the civil war (1967–70) was also evaluated. The work, though relevant in getting the broader picture of Soyinka's political commitment as a poet, is at the opposite end of the pole with this research in

terms of methodology as well as aim and objective.

Akinbode (2013) carried out a study which methodology appeared to be similar to this research. He attempted a stylo-semantic appreciation of Wole Soyinka's 'Dawn'. Like the present study, Akinbode affirmed the relevance of stylistics in the study of literature. However, his methodological inclination was a marked departure from this work particularly in his denunciation of literary methodology: "The application of such theories [linguistic] in any linguistic interpretation of a literary text has been proved to be a more objective critical response to the text. It has also revealed the lapses and subjective nature of impressionistic and expressionistic criticism" (Akinbode, 2013: 284). Statements like this made by stylisticians create the illusion of an incurable defect dogging literary stylistics, to which only linguistic stylistics is the antidote. The position of the present work is that nothing could be farther from the truth. With such perceived superiority of linguistics stylistics over literary methods of analysis, it is practically impossible to bridge the "schism between linguists and literary critics" (Akinbode, 2013: 284) that Akinbode alluded to in his statement of the problem. Secondly, Akinbode's work differed from the present one in terms of theoretical framework. Whereas Halliday's SFG is adopted as the preferred theoretical framework for this study, Akinbode employed Prague Linguistic Criticism referred to as Dialogic Theory.

Arising from the above review is the fact that although Wole Soyinka's works have been widely studied, to the best of our knowledge, there is no study on his works generally and specifically on "Abiku" that either analyses participants' relationships in the poem or adopts the methodology deployed in this paper. This paper therefore, fills the vacuum by deploying stylistics, using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar to not just identify but analyse the participants' relationships for a more fruitful study of the poem!

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for the study is Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), first introduced by Michael Halliday in the late sixties. SFG is radically different from the traditional view in which language is a set of rules for specifying grammatical structures. In this view, language is a resource for making meanings; hence grammar is a resource for creating meaning by means of wording. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), "A systemic grammar is one of the class of functional grammars,

which means (among other things) that it is semantically motivated, or 'natural', in contradistinction to formal grammars, which are autonomous, and therefore semantically arbitrary” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 1999: 3).

Unlike the 'grammar as rule' type of theory, SFG takes the resource perspective rather than the rule perspective, and it is designed to display the overall system of grammar rather than only fragments. That is why it has come to be known as a Systemic Functional Grammar. In Halliday's terms:

The theory behind the present account is known as 'systemic' theory. Systemic theory is a theory of meaning as choice, by which a language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as networks of interlocking options... whatever is chosen in one system becomes the way into a set of choices in another, and go on as far as we need to, or as far as we can in the time available, or as far as we know how. (Halliday, 1984: xiv)

In SFG, 'clause' rather than 'sentence' is the unit of analysis. In SFG, a clause is a unit in which meanings of three different kinds are combined. Three distinct structures, each expressing one kind of semantic organisation are mapped onto one another to produce a single wording. These semantic structures are referred to as Meta-functions. First, the interpersonal meta-function is concerned with the interaction between speaker and addressee. It is concerned with the grammatical resources for enacting social roles in general, and speech roles in particular, in dialogic interaction for establishing, changing, and maintaining interpersonal relations. The building-blocks of this semantic function configure as subject, finite, predicator, and complement.

2Secondly, there is the ideational meta-function which is concerned with 'ideation' or formation of ideas on how a clause construes meaning. According to this second meta-function, the transitive grammar of a clause contains a process unfolding through time, the participants involved in the process and optionally the circumstances associated with the process. From the configuration of process + participants + circumstances, the process is the most central. Participants are close to the centre; they are directly involved in the process by bringing out or being affected by the process in some way. Their nature will vary according to the process. Circumstantial elements augment this centre in some way but their status is rather peripheral. This

implies that a clause in its ideational function is a means of representing patterns of experience. According to Halliday (1984), these processes are what people employ to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them. The processes are sorted out in the semantic system of the language and expressed through the grammar of the clause.

There are six such processes: the first is the material process which construes procedure as a sequence of concrete changes brought about by a human or a human-like actor. Second is the mental process concerned with our experiences of the world of our own consciousness. They are clauses of sensing perception, cognition, intention, and emotion (Matthiessen, 2014: 249). The third is the relational process which serves to characterise and to identify; modelling both material and sensory experience as being rather than as "doing" or "sensing". In addition, there are the behavioural processes which are processes of physiological and psychological behaviours, like smiling, coughing, laughing, breathing, and so on. We also have the verbal process which refers to processes of 'saying' of any kind. It covers "any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning" (Halliday, 1984: 129)." Finally, there is the existential process, which shows that something exists or happens. While existential clauses are not very common in discourse, they make an important, specialised contribution to various kinds of texts. For instance, in narrative texts, "they serve to introduce central participants in the placement (setting, orientation) stage of the beginning of a story" (Matthiessen, 2014: 308).

The third meta-function is the textual. It is concerned with the creation of text with the presentation of ideational and interpersonal meanings as information that can be shared by speaker and listener in text unfolding in context. This meta-function consists of two sub-functions, theme and rheme. "Theme functions as the starting point for the message" (Halliday, 1984:39). It is the element which the clause is going to be about and has a crucial effect in orienting listeners and readers. As a starting point of the clause, it is realised by whatever element comes first while Rheme is the rest of the message, which provides the additional information added to the starting point and which is available for subsequent development in the text. These three metafunctions of SFG are critical in the methodology adopted for the analysis as explained below.

## **Methodology**

The methodology is guided by the clause structure configurations of

Halliday's SFG. In SFG, the clause is the “primary channel of grammatical energy” (Halliday, 1984: 59). That is why clause structure is not only important in the linguistic interpretation of discourse generally but poetry in particular. It is true that unlike prose, which is written in sentences, poems are written in lines. However, like all texts, poetry lines are composed of all manner of clauses including major, embedded, elliptical, and minor clauses. These are plotted on the following template and their frequencies quantitatively determined.

| TITLE OF THE POEM |             |           |      |      |      |      |      |             |           |
|-------------------|-------------|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|-----------|
| Cl.               | Participant | Processes |      |      |      |      |      | Participant | Circ.     |
| Fr.               | Agency      | Mat.      | Beh. | Men. | Ver. | Rel. | Exi. | Medium      | Advs/Pps. |
| 1.                |             |           |      |      |      |      |      |             |           |
| 2.                |             |           |      |      |      |      |      |             |           |
| 3.                |             |           |      |      |      |      |      |             |           |
| <b>Total</b>      |             |           |      |      |      |      |      |             |           |

(Key: Cl. = clause, Circ. = circumstances, Fr. = Frequency, Mat. = Material process, Beh. = Behavioural process, Men. = Mental process, Ver. = Verbal process, Rel. = Relational process, Exi. = Existential process, Advs/Pps. = Adverbs/Prepositional phrases)

This template was adapted with modifications from Matthiessen (2014: 356 - 58). It contains five main columns. The first is for clause frequency where the numbers of clauses are serially entered from the first to the last. These numbers are important during the analysis for reference purposes.

The second column is for participant-agency and contains the actor/subject/theme of each clause, depending on which of the three meta-functions is foregrounded. Therefore, a participant-agent may be an “actor”, a “behavior”, a “senser”, a “sayer”, an “existent” or an “attributor/identifier” depending on the process type represented in the clause.

The third column is for processes. According to the third meta-function, the theme of a clause extends from the beginning up to the first element that has an

experiential function as participant, circumstance or process. The remainder of the clause is the residue that may contain verbal groups, nominal groups, as well as adverbials and prepositional phrases. The third column of our template above is composed of the first element in the residue, the verbal group, which construes the six processes of SFG as labelled. However, in presenting data on Soyinka's "Abiku", only the processes represented in the poem have columns created for them.

The fourth column is for participant-medium. This is a compulsory entity in clause structure configuration of SFG irrespective of the process. As an obligatory structure in all the six processes, the participant-medium is of two types depending on the transitivity functions of the clause in question. It could be the actor when the clause is intransitive but receiver/goal if the clause is transitive. This fourth column is therefore only concerned with the type of participant-medium construed as goal/receiver because the other type would be naturally captured as participant-agent under participant roles.

Finally, the fifth column is for circumstances, which are composed of adverbial and prepositional groups. Included here are also certain circumstantial adjuncts of extent realised by nominal groups without the preposition "for" as well as nominal groups with adjectives as head. Word groups in this column may not be directly involved in the process but may be attendant on or associated with it in terms of indicating time, space, cause, manner or one of a few other types. For each of the columns in the template, the features are quantitatively determined and the totals as well as percentages recorded in the rows entitled total. This is because conclusions in this work are based on 'statistical' rather than 'determinate deviation' (Leech, 1969: 36–71) as explained in the introduction above.

### **Data Presentation: Wole Soyinka's "Abiku"**

Abiku is a Yoruba word meaning "born to die". It is the name given to the spirit of a child who does not live for long, but chooses to be reborn several times to the same family. The belief is that a woman whose firstborn is an Abiku usually ends up childless. It is also believed that the Abiku has a binding pact with others like it in the spirit world to return as a result of which though implored by its parents and community to remain alive, it refuses to do so and, at the first opportunity, returns to the spirit world. According to the belief, the number of years a child lives to die depends on the oath taken in

allegiance to membership of Abiku cult in the spirit kingdom before it returned again to the agonised mother. Mothers are thus subjected to pain and sorrow as they watch their children go through the torment of death. In their agony mixed with the hope that their child might live if only the Abiku goddess desires, mothers light midnight lamps in prayers to the goddess for their children to stay. Rituals and sacrifices are also made to appease it, but according to this tradition, an Abiku chooses to be indifferent to the plights of its parents as it enjoys taunting and tormenting its mother by repeating the cycle of birth, death and rebirth in short successions. Also as means of preventing them from coming back, a dead Abiku has marks placed on the body, mainly on the face, breast, or somewhere visible for people to recognise it as a spirit child if eventually it returns in rebirth. Whether such beliefs are true or not is completely immaterial here. What is important is that critics believe that this Abiku myth has informed Wole Soyinka's poem and this is what we seek to either confirm or disprove.

*The Application of Stylistics in the Identification of Participants' Relationships in Wole Soyinka's "Abiku"*

| Clause Structure of Wole Soyinka's "Abiku" |                                     |                       |      |      |      |                            |   |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|------|------|------|----------------------------|---|
| Cl.  | Participant                         | Processes             |      |      |      | Participant                | Circ.   |
| Fr.  | Agency<br>(Theme/subject<br>/actor) | Beh.                  | Men. | Ver. | Rel. | Medium<br>(goal/receiver)  | Advs/Pps.   |
| 1  | In vain your<br>bangles             | cast                  |      |      |      | Charmed circles            | at my feet;   |
| 2  | I                                   |                       |      |      | am   | Abiku,                     |   |
| 3  |                                     | calling               |      |      |      |                            | for the first<br>And the<br>repeated time.                            |
| Second Stanza                              |                                     |                       |      |      |      |                            |   |
| 4  | Must I                              |                       |      | Weep |      |                            | for goats and<br>cowries<br>For palm oil<br>and the<br>sprinkled ash? |
| 5  | Yams                                | do not<br>sprout      |      |      |      |                            | in amulets  |
| 6  |                                     | To earth              |      |      |      | Abiku's limbs.             |   |
| Third Stanza                               |                                     |                       |      |      |      |                            |   |
| 7  | So when the<br>snail                | is burnt              |      |      |      |                            | in his shell  |
| 8  |                                     | Whet                  |      |      |      | the heated<br>fragments,   |   |
| 9  |                                     | brand<br>me<br>Deeply |      |      |      |                            | on the breast.  |
| 10   | You                                 | must<br>know          |      |      |      | Him                        |   |
| 11   | When Abiku                          | calls                 |      |      |      |                            | again.  |
| Fourth Stanza                              |                                     |                       |      |      |      |                            |   |
| 12   | I                                   |                       |      |      | am   | the squirrel teeth,        |   |
| 13   |                                     | cracked               |      |      |      | The riddle of the<br>palm. |   |
| 14   |                                     |                       | Reme |      |      | This,                      |   |

(Key: Cl. = clause, Circ. = circumstances, Fr. = Frequency, Mat. = Material process, Beh. = Behavioural process, Men. = Mental process, Ver. = Verbal process, Rel. = Relational process, Exi. = Existential process, Advs/Pps. = Adverbs/Prepositional phrases)

### **Data Analysis**

Wole Soyinka's "Abiku" contains one hundred and eighty-four (184) words in thirty-two clauses of different configurations. The breakdown shows that participant-agency accounts for 28%, behavioural process has 18%, mental process has 0.5%, verbal process has 0.5%, relational process accounts for 2%, participant-medium has 23% and circumstances account for 27%. This means that the processes account for 21% of the data, participants have 51% and circumstances have 27%.

The above analysis shows that participants have been foregrounded in Wole Soyinka's "Abiku" and a closer look at entries in this group reveals at least ninety-four related entries, amounting to 51% of the entries for participants. These are 'bangles' and 'charmed circles' in clause 1, 'Abiku' in clause 2, 'goats and cowries' and 'palm oil and the sprinkled ash' in clause 4, 'yams' and 'amulets' in clause 5, 'the snail' in clause 7, 'the squirrel teeth' in clause 12, 'the riddle of the palm' in clause 13, 'the god's swollen foot' in clause 15 and 'libations' in clause 17. Others are 'white dew' and 'flesh-birds' in clause 22, 'the spider' in clause 24, 'the oil from lamps' in clause 26, 'the supplicant snake' in clause 27, 'the ripest fruit' in clause 30, 'in the silence of webs' in clause 32 and 'shaping mounds' in clause 34. These are stylistically relevant because they are rather nocturnal words, which have collectively conjured and projected fearful emotions that are consistent with the traditional concept of Abiku already reviewed in the poem. These words, put together in any context, are capable of igniting that sense of trepidation that one gets when one encounters something mystical particularly if he or she is conversant with the supernatural world. The fact that such register amounts to as much as 51% of entries for participants is therefore not without consequence and goes a long way in confirming existing beliefs about the Abiku cult.

Investigation of the points of departure of the thirty-two themes in the poem reveals the existence of two thematic paths identifying two participants. The first path links the theme of clause 1 which has "in vain your bangles" as theme. This connects with the themes of clauses 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, and

27 to identify the first participant preferably called Abiku's mother or the community as these themes either name Abiku's mother or the efforts made by other community stakeholders to contain Abiku in either world. The second thematic path links the first person personal pronoun "I" which is the theme of clause 2 with its variants such as "must I", "mother! I", "where I" and so on in the remaining clauses to identify Abiku as the second participant in the poem. It is for this reason the poem presents two participants identified as Abiku and the mother or the community in which the Abiku is born. That the Abiku is accorded with more of the actions, as shown by the clause structure analysis, shows that it is Abiku rather than the mother or the community that is operating from a position of strength.

Fourthly, of the three processes featured in this poem, the behavioural process is clearly foregrounded having accounted for 85% of the entries for processes. This raises two pertinent questions: whose behaviour is depicted in the poem? And what is the poet's attitude towards such behaviour? The data has thrown up these questions and to answer them requires closer look at the entries for behavioural process above. For the first question, both the behaviour of Abiku and that of the community are depicted in the poem. However, verbal groups representing Abiku's behaviour account for a higher percentage of the data indicating that between the two participants, Abiku rather than the community is operating from a position of strength as noted in the above paragraph. In other words, in majority of the clauses, it is Abiku rather than the community that is the actor placing Abiku in a stronger position stylistically. This is why there are as many as twenty clauses or 63% of the behavioural process verbs representing what Abiku either has done or can do while the community has only twelve corresponding verbs or 37%. As for the poet's attitude towards the behaviour mirrored in the poem, the fact that Soyinka has ascribed as much as 63% of the actions to Abiku rather than to the community suggests that the poet's sympathy is more with Abiku than with the community. Further linguistic evidence indicating more regard to Abiku than to the community is found in the statement, "I am Abiku", in clause 2. This apparently simple declaration is indicative of the poet's admiration of Abiku because only two stylistic situations call for one to introduce oneself in such a manner. The first is when one's identity is in doubt but this is not the case here since the mother or members of this community are not strangers to what Abiku is as evidenced by the various efforts made to keep it in the underworld or to stop it from dying too early. That leaves the second stylistic situation that calls for such a statement which is when one

does not intend to leave any doubt as to how important or powerful one is. This second instance is the case here; that is why the statement “I am Abiku” is reinforced by more accolade such as “I am the squirrel teeth, cracked/The riddle of the palm” in clauses 12 and 13 as well as the warning “...remember/ This and dig me deeper still into god's swollen foot” in clauses 14 and 15. Therefore, if the poet did not have more respect for Abiku than the community, he would not have caste Abiku in a position to brazenly celebrate its power over the community in this manner.

### **Conclusion**

From the analysis carried out, verifiable evidence was generated to prove that the entries for participants are all nocturnal words, which have collectively conjured and projected fearful emotions that are consistent with the traditional concept of Abiku already reviewed in the poem. This is stylistically relevant because these words, put together in any context, are capable of igniting that sense of fear that one gets when one encounters something mystical particularly if he or she is conversant with the supernatural world. Related literature shows that literary critics have arrived at the same conclusion on the message of the Soyinka's “Abiku”. Also, the paper has been able to establish two thematic paths identifying two participants: Abiku on one hand and Abiku's mother or the community on the other hand. There is also verifiable evidence to prove that between Abiku and its mother or the community, it is Abiku who is operating from the position of strength; that is why Abiku is accorded with more of the dynamic actions. In addition, examination of processes shows that the actions carried out by Abiku against its mother are injurious and distressing. It is therefore recommended that since the building block of literature is language, integrating the science of language (linguistics) into the analysis of literature offers higher yields than where either of the two is adopted independently.

### **References**

- Akinbode, O. (2013). “Stylo-Semantic Appreciation of Wole Soyinka's Poem 'Dawn'”. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 3(5), 284–291.
- Akingbe, N. (2013). “Writing violence: Problematizing nationhood in Wole Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt*”. *TYDSKRIF VIR LETTERKUNDE*. Vol. 50 (2), 124–47.
- Akingbe, N. (2014). “The Articulation of Social Decay: Satire in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry”. *African Study Monographs*, 35

- (3&4), 183–203.
- Bateson, F. (1971). "Literature and Linguistics: Reply by F.W. Bateson" in Roger Fowler, *The Languages of Literature*. London: Henley Routledge and Kegan Paul, 54–64; 75–79.
- Biography.com Editors (2017). "Wole Soyinka Biography.com". A&E Television Networks, July 21, 2015. Web. Retrieved October 27, 2017.
- Crystal, D. and Derek D. (1969). *Investigating English Style*. London: Longman.
- Fowler, R. (1966). "Linguistic Theory and the Study of Literature". *Essays on Style and Language*. Roger Fowler (Ed.) London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1–28.
- Fowler, R. (1971). *The Languages of Literature: Some Linguistic Contributions to Criticism*. London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Fowler, R. (1977). *Linguistics and the Novel*. London: Methuen.
- Fowler, R. (1996). *Linguistic Criticism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1994). *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K. & Matthiessen, C. (1999). *Construing Experience through Meaning*. London: Cassell.
- Halliday, M.A.K. & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 3rd ed. London: Edward Arnold.
- Rasha H.A. (2017). "A Stylistic Analysis of Wole Soyinka's the Telephone Conversation". *Contemporary Research in India*. 5(3), 175 – 77, Web. Retrieved 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.
- Jeffares, N. (1965). "Editorial". *A Review of English Literature VI*. 7-8.
- Leech, G.N. (1969). *A Linguistic Guide to Poetry*. London and New York: Longman.
- Maduagwu C. (2011). "The Mythic Imagination and Literary Creativity of William Blake and Wole Soyinka." *The Journal of International Social Research*. Volume: 4 (17), 99–109.
- Matthiessen, M.I.M.C (2014). *Review of Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar* (4th Ed.) London: Edward Arnold.
- Osundare, N. (1982). "Cautious Paths through the Bramble: A Critical Classification of Style Theories and Concepts". Ibadan Annual

- African Literature conference. Theme: Language and Style in African Literature.
- Soyinka, W. (1968). *Idanre and Other Poems*. London: Methuen; New York: Hill and Wang.
- Soyinka, W. (Ed.) (1999). *Poems of Black Africa*. London: Heinemann.
- Spencer, J.W., Nils E.E. and Michael G. (Eds.) (1964). *Linguistics and Style*. Oxford University press.
- Vendler, H. (1966). "Review of Essays on Style and Language". *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 16. Roger Fowler (Ed.) 457–63.
- Tsavmbu A.A. (2019). "A Stylistic Study of Selected Poems of Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Odia Ofeimun". An Unpublished Thesis Submitted to Postgraduate School, Benue State University Makurdi, In Partial Fulfilment of The Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Literature in English.
- Whitehall, H. (1951). "From Linguistics to Criticism". *Kenyon Review*. XIII: 710-14.