

Stylistic Devices In Buchi Emecheta's 'The Bride Price'

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Abstract

This paper explores the stylistic device employed by Buchi Emecheta to create innovation in her novel "The Bride Price". The innovations are the use of chapter headings and the provision of backgrounds to episodes. It has been ascertained from this study that contrary to some assertions by some scholars about the structure of linguistic analysis, Buchi Emecheta's self-account is coherently organized. This organization is exploited by the author to create expectations in her readers about the stylistic devices. It is therefore important to study how the writer has used various stylistic devices to pass her message across and bring the text closer to the readers through meaningful interpretations.

Keywords

Stylistic, African, Rhetoric, Device, The Bride Price.

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Introduction

The style consists of how each author handles the language to suit his or her specific thematic concerns. Ajeigbe rightly says that, “language is the dress of thought, and the style is a particular cut and fashion of the dress”.

The concept of style was first used in connection with the Rhetoric of ancient Greece (Missikova, 2003:10; Ajeigbe, 2007). Ajeigbe (p.307) explains that although Rhetoric has developed and aspect of it have become expanded, there are other legacies of the old Rhetoric concept of style that are still very relevant. He states that “It was basic in traditional rhetoric and criticism to distinguish between manner and matter, that is, what was said and how it was said. “Similarly relation to Nigerian English Literature, what the writer has written and how he or she has presented it makes up his or her style. To understand the style of an author one needs to take time to study it, and the study of style is referred to as stylistics. Stylistics is the study of the interpretation of text from both literary and linguistic perspectives. In view of the above, these works, the stylistic devices of Buchi Emecheta,s ‘The Bride Price’.

Stylistics

The word ‘stylistics’ is an amalgamation of two words, style, and linguistics. According to the Leech and Short (1981:13),” the linguistics study of style is called stylistics.” Crystal (2008: 460) maintains that stylist stylistics is a branch of linguistics that studies the features of situationally distinctive uses of language, and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made...” Abubakre (2012:262) says that “stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics, the scientific study of language”.

Stylistics reaches the border of two disciplines: literature and linguistics. According to Niazi (2013), “literary stylistics refers to the study of style used in literary language. It can be regarded as a blend of form with content”. Lawal(2003:26) draws an analogical statement of what the position of style is in stylistics. He says, “style is to stylistics what language is to linguistics.” In the light of these definitions, it is evident that style and stylistics are closely related. This is because style serves as the bedrock of stylistics. Without stylistics, the style will not be appreciated and without style, stylistics will not be possible”(Jide, 2011).

“Stylistics is the aspect of linguistics which deals with the occasion of distinctive language use objectively by providing both the literally in functional interpretation of such usage in literally and non - literally discourse”(Abubakre, 2012:263).

Stylistics is a combination of linguistic analysis and literal criticism. The study will adopt an intensive study of related materials and close textual analysis of the novel, *The Bride Price*’ using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Analysis These are only a few among the several works that have been done on Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*. Although scholars have touched on different aspects of the novel, little work has been done on the linguistic analysis of the text and this is the focus of this study.

Qualitative Analysis:

Lexical Analysis

(A) Recapitulation

Some words in the text are repeated exactly the same way or with similar forms as exemplified below:

- “If a girl wishes to live long and see her children’s children she must... very long time”.
- “Not only was she a girl but she was much too thin for approval of a parents, who would rather have a strong and plump little girl for a daughter.” (3)
- “you’d think girl is going to be there the whole day, the way Nna- and is behaving.” (10)
- “A girl belonged to you today as your daughter, and tomorrow, before your very eyes, would go to another man in marriage”. (12)

Here the word ‘girl’ is used to refer to a girl’s ‘dream’ - something she hoped for, and her desire. The repetitions have been used to connect different parts of the text and to unify its meaning.

(B) Substratum

There are instances where Buchi has used indigenous languages, as shown in the following examples:

- “Iyawo’ - Yoruba word for young wife.
- “Opoho” - Igbo word for woman.
- “Okei” - Igbo word for young man.
- “Odo”- Igbo word for mortar.

The author is from the Igbo tribe of Nigeria and she was brought up in Lagos, a Yoruba society. Apparently, she had been exposed to these two languages. By using Nigerian languages, although sparingly, she is identifying with them.

(C) Collocation

There are a number of collocations have been used to achieve Cohesion in the text. Examples are:

- “You ought to be at work”. (1)
- “She looked tired, as if the hot sun had squeezed the very juice of life from her.” (17)

- “We have no father anymore.”(24)
- “... the girls greeted him with his praise name: ‘Bringer of Peace’

(D) Coinages And Neologism

The coined or invented words in the text take two forms. Some words are formed from existing lexical stock in English. Examples from the text area:

- “Made mam” - refers to a successful man.
- “Touch not”- is very sensitive to touch.
- “Jesus’ fashion” - refers to style of growing one’s hair to the shoulder level. It is believed to be the hairstyle of Jesus.
- “Go slow” _ traffic congestion.

Other coin words have their roots in the existing lexical stock in the mother tongue bracket (a Nigerian language). These words are:

- “Koboko” - Pidgin word for a long cane.
- “Boli”- (Yoruba) refers to roasted plantain.
- “Craw-craw” Pidgin word for rashes.
- “Yoruba - Ngbati accent” - In Yoruba, this word is used to describe when a person speaks English with the tonal effect of the Yoruba language.

Coining or making new words from already existing forms is typical of Nigerian English because , the language is in continuous contact with other Nigerian languages.

(E) Metaphor

Buchi Emecheta uses extended metaphors in the story. The first exemplifies the conflict that Aku- nna and her brother feel, caught, as they were, between traditional culture and European customs. she creates an image of fish caught in a net, referring to Aku-nna and Nana-nndo as:

- “helpless fishes...(who) could not as it went back into the sea, for they were trapped fast, and they were still alive because the fisherman was busy debating within himself whether it was worth killing them.”

There is another metaphor Buchi Emecheta has used where Aku-nna and Chike sitting under a tree, watching a group of brown ants:

- “No single any deviated y the main column, all followed the same route one after the other, as if at the command of the power invisible.”

With these lines, Buchi is trying to say that ants and their willingness to follow that invisible power. She refers to this example of the people of Ibiza following the traditional way without questioning the reasons behind them. when Aku-nna asks Chike why the ants are following one another Chikeresponse:

- “Because each ant would be lost if it did not follow the footsteps of those in front, those who have gone on the very path before.”

The death of Aku-Onna is also an example of a metaphor. Why did she die? Was it because she was too young and malnourished as suggested by the doctor? Or was it because her stepfather in vengefulness and voodoo-like practice, calls her spirit back home? If her death is looked at as a metaphor, it plays on the main conflict of the story. Inside of Aku-nna, the clash between the European world and the traditional world ultimately lead to her death. Her death acts as a metaphor for all young African women who struggle with the new culture that cries out for independence and reliance on self, and the old culture that thinks with a male-dominated, grounded mind. Her death is a symbol of the psychological deaths that these Women must pass through in an attempt to be reborn into a new role for themselves.

Buchi Emecheta, however, reminds the reader that contrary to this interpretation of the metaphor of Aku-nna’s death, the villagers used it differently. Instead of freeing the women, the story of Chike and Aku-nna became a metaphor for death – a death with no heaven on the other side. “Every girl born in Ibiza after Aku-nna’s death was told her story, to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wishes to live long and see her children’s children, she must accept the husband doesn’t for her by her people, and The Bright price must be paid.” P 176-177.

(F) Idiomatic Expressions

A wide range of idiomatic expressions run through the entire novel. These idioms are used to make expressions brief and more vivid. For example, when the father of Aku-Onna is dead Uzo says to her: “The pity of it all, ‘put in Auntie Matilda,’ is that they will marry her off quickly in order to get enough money to pay Nna-Ando’s school fees.”³⁶

Buchi Emecheta lays the stress on how attitudes vary from urban women to those from rural. The former tend to be more independent yet bonded to their families. Unlike the rural women who wreck their backs in farming the land and act as “means of transportation” to carry crops, the urban and educated women don’t want to be enslaved by any kind of patriarchal tradition. Buchi merges into Aku-nna’s inner feelings and read through her mind. She described the plight that weighs the protagonist down and epitomizes Aku-nna’s apprehension and the unlikelihood of becoming a prospective submissive rural woman following the death of her father:

- “Nine months after the death of her husband, a hut was built for her next to Ogugua’s mother’s, and in time it was there was visited at night by Okonkwo. She was his fourth wife”. 73

Emecheta has depicted the system of patriarchy and the social changes through idioms:

- “In the olden days slaves used to be sent to missionary schools simply to appease the disapproval of the white missionaries: but later events were to show that it was the same educated slaves who ended up commanding key positions.”⁷⁴

Aku-nana's bitter experience as a married woman is summarised in the idiom, an adaptation of the original form, 'life is not a bed of roses'. Aku bears all the cruelty and injustice, which is thrust upon her. She didn't say anything in protest. But when injustice was beyond her endurance, she flared up and stands against the cruelties, she rejected all the customs and traditions which are meant only for girls and women:

- “A kind of strength came to her, from where she did not know. She knew only that, for once in her life she intended to stand up for herself, to fight herself, for her honor.”¹⁰

The women entering unacceptable marriages were prophesied to be either unable to conceive or to die during childbirth. Aku attempts to defy this Ibiza tradition by falling in love with Chike and finally marrying him. Her bold attempt to challenge the ancient Igbo laws is deeply resented by the members of her family and village community of Ibiza. Her furious step-brothers take a pledge to terminate this love affair. They say: “The son of Ofulue? Do you mean Chike, the school teacher? But he is the son of slaves...She should be interested in him to that extent!” He admonishes the act and warns her by saying, “I will kill her if this is true”, Osenekwu swore to himself.⁷⁹ When the news of Ali's sexual maturity reaches Okonkwo, he is impelled to have a patriarchal talk with her: “Aku-Onna, Chike Ofulue is only a friend...Now that you have grown, this friendship must gradually die. But die it die!”¹¹⁶ Upon learning about the apparent love affair between Aku-nna and Chike, Aku-nana's mother reacts intensely: “Ma Blackie cried and crushed her fortune in being saddled with such a daughter. Had they even seen a girl like this daughter of hers? Who was wanted by so many good families but who preferred to choose a common...”¹²¹

Some of the idioms descriptively explain a thought, while others give images of action in order to produce a more thought-provoking image of what was said or done in a particular situation. Generally, the use of idioms makes flowery the language of the narrative.

(G) Simile

There is a copious use of similes in the text. In fact, simile is used more than any other in the text, the following are adequate examples:

- “Akunna knew that she was too insignificant to be regarded as a blessing to this unfortunate marriage.”(3)
- “She looked tired, as if the hot sun had squeezed the very juice of life from her.”(17)
- “Alice was a new bride, and like Akunna she was almost fourteen; her husband worked as a clerk at the treasury.”(20)
- “Aku-nna felt as if she was not there, as if she had passed into that realm where nothing exists”. (24)
- “Aku- Onna, from the day of her marriage, had seen the romantic side of her life being shattered like broken glass, about her.”(25)
- “His blackness shown like polished black leather.”(7)
- “She felt like Jesus, who amazed His dumbfounded disciples...”.
- “Aku-nna had to be allowed to stay in school so that she could be married to a rich man, from one of those newly prosperous families springing up like mushrooms all over Ibiza.”(75)

These similes have been used in a descriptive way to highlight qualities. Their recurrence in the novel adds humor and color to the text and this helps to sustain the interest of the reader.

(H) Irony

The irony is a literary device. In the present text, it is used to quicken the mind of the reader so that he or she can think deeper, the meaning of the statement is not got from the literal meaning of the words. Also because ironies are dryly humorous, they add a kind of hilarity to the text. Some examples are:

- “The pity of it all,’ put in Aunty Matilda ‘is that they will marry her off very quickly in order to get enough money to pay Nna-Ando’s school fees.’(36)
- “This is the fate of us women. There is nothing we can do about it. We just have to learn to accept it.”(37)
- “Aku-nna and Ogugua will get married at about the same time. Their bride prices will come to me. you see the trend today, that the educated girls fetch more money.”(75)
- “What’s so special about her that the doctor has to pay such a heavy price.?”(76)
- “Maybe the examiners have never heard of it. I am not quite sure myself what you aim to become after this sociology course. An office worker? A politician? We have too many politicians already, and anyway you don’t need a university degree to be a politician. Any fool can be a politician; you just have to teach yourself how to tell convincing lies like a gentleman, that’s all.”(87)

- “She watched and listened to a group of chattering birds who appeared to feel safe and undisturbed by her presence. She noticed that they were building a nest. Each bird brought a strand of palm leaf, clutching it previously in its beak then laying it down artistically in a right place.”(90-91)

(I) Understatement

Understatement has discreetly handled in the text by Buchi Emecheta. Below are some examples:

- “Was she not alone, by herself, enjoying this luxurious moment of sweet self-pity?”(90)
- “Because each ant would be lost if it did not follow the footsteps of those in front. Those who have gone on that very path before.”(92)
- “It’s about time you decided whether you are going to stay with us or die. Today foot, tomorrow head- all on you alone! And another thing, if you think I am going to that stream just to satisfy a sickly sister you will have to think again, because I’m not going, and that is a fact.”(97)
- “There is one thing I beg of you. Whatever you do, don’t spoil that girl - don’t disvirgin her before you are sure she will be your wife. There is no worse fate for any woman in this town than that of one who arrives at her husband’s couch polluted.”(109)

Quantitative Analysis

Here is a presentation of some stylistic devices identified in ‘The Bride Price’

Table 1. Showing the frequency of selected lexical and rhetorical devices in the novel.

SIMILE	83
METAPHOR	20
IRONY	07
EUPHEMISM	16
COINAGE	12
IDIOMS	30
ANALOGY	05
COLLOCATION	12
ONOMATOPOEIA	11

From the table above nine rhetorical devices with a total of 196 occurrences are analyzed in ‘The Bride Price’. The 83 occurrences of simile equal 35.4% percent

of the overall occurrences of rhetorical devices. Metaphor equals 8.01%, irony and analogy equal 2.1% each, euphemism equals 4.57%, coinage equal 5%, idioms equal 10.14%, collocation and proverbs equal 4.3%, personification equals 3%. Simile takes the highest percentage. This shows that the Buchi Emecheta prefers to use these forms of expressions over the other ones. Although both simile and metaphor are employed, Buchi has used more of simile; this is because the direct nature of the simile makes the comparison straightforward and easy to identify. She prefers to simile which reflects her choice of simple, comprehensible language.

Findings

After the analysis, it was discovered that Buchi Emecheta has used expressive language to achieve a stylistic effect. The narration is generally simple and comprehensible; this ensures a smooth reading. One does not need to keep referring to a dictionary in order to understand the words.

The lexico-semantic analysis of this work entailed the use of collocates for cohesion, Simile and metaphor for comparison, irony for humor, hyperbole for exaggeration, and onomatopoeia to give sense to the readers through the sounds. The use of indigenous words, idioms, proverbs and sayings were also explored.

It was also found that Buchi Emecheta used more of simile than any other figure of speech in the text. There are about 83 occurrences of simile in the text. Buchi Emecheta draws comparisons from the Bible, social events, literary texts and from her imagination.

She uses a lot of biblical references because of her exposure to Christianity from childhood, literary texts because she is well-read and social events to show the context in which the events in the novel take place.

In order of frequency idiomatic expressions are widely used. There are 20 idiomatic expressions in the text. Buchi Emecheta intercepted from the wide variety of English Idioms to enhance narration. She uses her sense of humor in her ironic statements and in the use of simile and metaphor.

It was also found that words like “low bride price”, “female child”, “inferior”, and “black” are scattered in the text. These words are often contrasted with the words like “high bride price”, “male” and “white”. The use of these contrasting words echo the central idea of the novel which is the female child is seen as a bride price and the groom is seen as a pricer.

Conclusion

From the analysis carried out and the findings, I can say that the use of language is a significant part of the meaning of the novel as it reveals the setting and

themes. The language is straightforward and this makes for a smooth reading of the text. Buchi Emecheta's 'The Bride Price' is characterized by a figurative idiomatic and proverbial expressions. Her sense of humor is communicable and this relaxes the reader and adds to the enjoyment of the novel.

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