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A Stylistic Analysis of Ndidi Chiazor-Ememnor's *If They Tell The Story*

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Abstract

This research is a stylistic analysis of Ndidi Chiazor-Enenmor's 2020 novel, *If They Tell the Story*. The study notes that writers use language in a peculiar way which makes them different from others. This peculiarity in writing constitutes a writer's style. A writer's unique style reflects their ideological point of view and leads the reader to their stance on a particular issue. Style is the soul of the embedded meanings in a literary piece. The analysis of linguistic style in poetry has been the major concern of most language scholars over the years. However, there is little attention given to the linguistic description of the style in prose forms, especially the style of authors of recent novels. It is against this background that the research was undertaken to examine linguistic stylistic features in Ndidi Chiazor-Enenmor's *If They Tell the Story* and also assess how these features are foregrounded as well as the way they help to convey the ideas in the novel. The theoretical framework deployed for the work is foregrounding theory propounded by Mukarovský (1970). This study reveals that the stylistic features used by the author are morphological foregrounding, graphological foregrounding, and syntactic foregrounding. The study concludes that the use of these linguistic features is not only for aesthetic purpose but also to facilitate the conveyance of the message which the author has for the readers.

Keywords: stylistics, foregrounding, Jan Mukarovský, morphology, graphology, semantics

Introduction

Language is the means by which people communicate their thoughts and feelings. In point of fact, "The mere thought of a world without language elicits depressive boredom and retrogression" (Urujzian and Etuk, 2023: 271). Etuk and Akpan (2023:69) agree to this when they state that "It is through language that emotions, desires, thought, religious and socio-political views and beliefs of individuals, groups of individuals and that of an entire community of people are expressed". Likewise, Etuk and Urujzian (2018) assert that "Humans use language, in a distinct way, to communicate their feelings, desires and beliefs" (87). It is through language that power relations are exposed, ideologies revealed, and concepts communicated. As already acknowledged, "Language serves as the impeccable register of a society's collective memory, recording and preserving historical facts concerning the people, their worldview and perceptions" (Etuk, 2021:3). A writer's unique style reflects their ideological point of view and leads the reader to their stance on a particular issue. Style is the soul of the embedded meanings in a literary piece. Abdulmughni (2019:422) cited in Akpan (2023:718) defines style as "the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse. It is how a speaker or writer says whatever he says". To Etuk and Urujzian (2024:192), "…style is a combination of the manner and purpose of expressing an idea by an author or a group of authors". Thus, the style of an individual author or writer, thus, sums up his or her perception or certain ideology. This aligns with Valiyeva (2018:34) who opines that "the style of a writer is so closely connected with the content of his soul, that the experienced eye can see the soul through his style".

Creativity or style could also be expressed through language since a writer's syntactic, morphological, and graphological choices, among others, constitute his/her style. Consequently, style can be defined as the peculiar way of expressing thoughts by an individual. It equally reveals the character or sense of reasoning

and judgment of the individual. Lodge (2001:56) affirms this when he states that "style is the means by which the ...encoder ensures that his message is decoded in such a way that the reader not only understands the information conveyed, but shares the writer's attitude towards it". Therefore, it is through an individual's style that his attitude toward the subject of his discourse can be revealed.

Jaafar (2014: 239) opines that one, among the numerous contributions of stylistics to the study of literature, is the provision of objective methods of analysis. Thus, stylistics as an interdisciplinary field serves as a bridge between literature/literary criticism and linguistics. Its application can be used in the study of non-fiction, journalism, popular texts, religious works, advertising, popular culture, and politics, among others. In the opinion of Paul (2004: 3) "the preferred object of study in stylistics is literature, whether that be institutionally sanctioned 'literature' as high art or more popular 'non-canonical' forms of writing". This indicates that stylistics seeks to examine the language of literary works or simply put, to describe the writer's choice of diction. Consequently, Paul (2004:2) avers that "stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language". As a conceptual field of discourse, stylistics tries to establish and explain the different choices people make in the use of language in their writings.

Furthermore, Hill (1958:406) defines stylistics as "those relations holding among linguistic entities which are statable, or maybe statable, in terms of wider spans than those which fall within the limit of a sentence". These linguistic entities which fall within the limit of a sentence include graphology, words, phonology, or sound patterning, among others. An explicit definition of stylistics is that which is given by Berry (1977:4-5), thus: "Stylistics is the application of linguistics to the study of literature. The application of linguistic tools in the interpretation of literary texts, thus,

provides a bridge between literature and linguistics". This is because a stylistic analysis of a literary text reveals the linguistic choices made by a writer. Thus, it could be concluded, therefore, that stylistics is the linguistic examination or assessment of the language of literature (Aitchison, 1999).

A linguistic stylistic analysis could be carried out at different levels, depending on the interest of the researcher. Most linguistic stylistic analyses are carried out on levels such as graphology, lexico-syntax, morphology, phonology, et cetera. Each of these levels focuses on a specific aspect of stylistic analysis. At the graphological level of stylistic analysis, the primary concern is the identification of patterns of punctuation, capitalisation, font size, font colour, and style. Ist'anah (2017:86) confirms that "the use of certain capitalization and punctuation is figured out ..." at this level of analysis, to unravel the reason behind the writer's usage. At the level of morphology, patterns of word formation, the deployment of archaism, the use of 'potential English words', and other aspects of morphological deviations are examined. The phonological analysis of a text takes into consideration the rhyme patterns and rhythm deployed in the text.

Novels are typically crafted in a narrative form, which allows the author to leverage an expansive repertoire of linguistic devices to effectively convey a broad spectrum of meanings. These instruments may encompass a range of literary techniques such as vivid imagery, sensory details, and figurative language. The employment of such techniques enables writers to create intricate characters, plotlines, and themes that resonate with readers on multiple levels. By utilising these techniques, authors can effectively evoke a vibrant portrait of their story, resulting in an immersive and evocative narrative experience for the reader.

In view of this, Syal and Jindal (2010:61) argue, thus: "Out of the many types of variations that occur in language, it is the variation

in literary style that is most complex, and thus offers unlimited scope for linguistic analysis". Writers use different linguistic elements to communicate to the readers, thereby creating special effects with the use of words. The form of language in prose is different from everyday communication, especially when considering narratives that examine subjects of oppression and discrimination of persons on the basis of race or gender. Narratives of the oppressed people are likely going to reflect an array of emotions. It is at this point that writers of prose narratives use diverse forms of linguistic devices to exhibit creativity while conveying a message.

Every theme or subject matter projected by writers is done through the use of some linguistic devices which are unique, and thus vividly represent the writers' ideology or points of view. Etuk and Okon (2024: 88) aver that "Language is a reflection of one's emotions, beliefs and ideological positions". As it is the concern of linguistic stylistics, stylisticians are interested in how language is used to achieve certain aims or effects in literary works. It is generally acknowledged among scholars that language has set rules which must be adhered to, to have meaningful expressions. However, the language used in literary works seems to possess some linguistic features which defy the laid down rules, yet writers are able to communicate or speak to the minds of their readers. The novel as a genre of literature is a recent one, compared to drama and poetry. Its unique nature is reflected in the manner language is used by writers.

It is important to analyse the language used in literature to understand what makes up creativity, style, and unconventional forms, and how they contribute to conveying ideas through writing. This involves delving into the intricacies of Chiazor's novel and examining the various linguistic techniques employed by the author. By doing so, we can gain a deeper insight into the writer's unique style and how it contributes to the overall meaning

of the text. By carefully exploring the nuances of Chiazor's writing, we can better appreciate how creative language choices can enhance the impact and effectiveness of written communication. It is against this backdrop that the researcher embarks on "A Stylistic Analysis of Ndidi Chiazor-Ememnor's *If They Tell the Story* with a view to examining the writer's style through her choice of linguistic devices in the novel.

Statement of the Research Problem

Stylistics is the linguistic interpretation of literary works. Its focus is on the various language usages which contribute to the overall meaning of a piece of writing. Many scholars have investigated some literary works using linguistic tools. For instance, Jaafar (2014) carried out a stylistic analysis of selected poems of E. E. Cummings to make the texts' meaning explicit. Also, Putri (2018) made a stylistic analysis of Thomas Hardy's "During Wind and Rain" where he emphasised the graphological, morphological, lexico-syntactic, and phonological levels of analysis. Urujzian and Etuk (2024) undertook a lexico-semantic analysis of selected songs of Wizkid where they "examined the lexical choices and methods of their employment in the data to communicate meaning and accentuate style" (313). Furthermore, Dadjo (2022) examined the lexical categories and figures of speech used in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel.*

However, there is little attention given to the linguistic description of the style in prose forms, especially the style of authors of recent novels. It is against this background that the researcher undertakes a linguistic stylistic study of Ndidi Chiazor-Enenmor's *If They Tell the Story* to analyse the style of the text using linguistic tools and to also examine how the author chooses specific linguistic items to convey the ideas in the novel.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the linguistic devices used by the author and how these devices enhance the expression

of thoughts and facilitate the understanding of the novel. The specific objectives of the study are to:

i. identify the writer's style through her use of linguistic devices in the novel;
ii. examine how the linguistic devices facilitate the writer's portrayal of events and incidents in the text;
iii. analyse how stylistic features impact the interpretation and understanding of the novel;
iv. draw conclusions on the prevalent stylistic features in the text and how these features impact the overall understanding of the novel.

Research Questions

The following research questions are projected from the objectives:

i. How is the writer's style revealed through her use of linguistic devices in the novel?
ii. How do linguistic devices facilitate the writer's portrayal of events and incidents in the text?
iii. How do stylistic features impact the interpretation and understanding of the novel?
iv. What conclusions can be drawn on the stylistic features prevalent in the text and how do these features impact the overall understanding of the novel?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study is limited to the linguistic stylistic analysis of Ndidi Chiazor-Enenmor's literary work *If They Tell the Story*. Therefore, every analysis and the conclusions drawn herein are based on the findings of the study, especially concerning the style of the author of the novel. In this linguistic stylistic analysis, the emphasis is on the linguistic devices used by the writer.

Research Methodology

This section of the work discusses methods and procedures for carrying out the research. The procedures are discussed under

subtitles such as research design, sample and sampling technique, and method of data analysis.

Research Design

The research design is the central approach adopted to synergise the different parts of a study in a coherent and cohesive manner, in order for one to effectively address the research problem. It is the entrepot for data gathering, assessment, and analysis. This study deploys a qualitative research design. The design is adopted to enable the researcher to draw inferences and make deductions from the data collected for analysis.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sampling technique used for this study is the purposive sampling technique. The choice of this technique stems from the fact that it enables the researcher to select or choose only relevant data for analysis. According to Black (2010), this sampling method does not offer a probability or equal chance for all constituents of a population to be selected. Rather, the researcher selects data based on certain requirements which align with the purpose of the study. This does not only save time but facilitates accurate and objective analysis of data.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected for the study are analysed using the linguistic foregrounding theory as the theoretical model. The theory addresses the different stylistic or linguistic deviations used by authors to achieve one aesthetic aim or another. Therefore, by linguistic style, the foregrounded linguistic devices are analysed using this theory as a guide. Furthermore, data for the current study are analysed based on the specific objectives of the study.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to have a set of interpretative and analytical rules or models that guide the analysis of concepts or the interpretation of a

phenomenon when embarking on research. These sets of rules or models are commonly referred to as theories. Theories serve as an analytical guide for researchers, allowing them to analyse data in a more structured and meaningful way.

In the context of this study, the theoretical framework being used is the foregrounding theory propounded by Jan Mukarovský (1970). Foregrounding is a stylistic concept that refers to the use of language to emphasise certain aspects of a text or discourse. Wadi and Jamsheer (2021) opine that the foregrounding theory was propounded by Mukarovský, the Czech theorist from the Prague School of Linguistics. It is used by linguistic scholars like Leech and Short (1981: 48) to point to the "artistically motivated deviation". The foregrounded linguistic elements are "the parts of the text which the author, consciously or unconsciously, is signalling as crucial to our understanding of what he has written ..." (Short, 1969:36). This framework is particularly useful for analysing language use in different contexts, and can help researchers uncover patterns and trends that may not be immediately apparent. By utilising linguistic foregrounding as a theoretical framework, this study aims to provide a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Van Peer and Hakemulder (2006) argue that the term 'foregrounding' can be used in a linguistic context to refer to the practice of emphasising certain linguistic features or elements in a text. This technique can be used to create a particular effect or to draw attention to a specific aspect of the language being used. It is commonly employed in literary analysis and can involve a variety of linguistic devices, such as repetition, alliteration, and metaphor. Ultimately, the purpose of foregrounding is to enhance the reader's understanding and appreciation of a text by highlighting its linguistic qualities. According to Özünlü (2001: 74), foregrounding could be identified as "a linguistic unit in a position other than its conventional position in a sentence or in narration. The other way

to realize foregrounding is achieved through emphasizing a particular linguistic unit. The process of emphasizing is again created through the use of any grammatical unit in a non-conventionalized position".

Furthermore, Mukarovský (1970:43) holds that "foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is the deautomatization of an act, the more an act is automatized the less consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded the more completely conscious does it become"**.** The automised features are those linguistic elements which do not create any special effect on the listeners or readers in any way. In this regard, Wadi and Jamsheer (2021) argue that the normal or traditional use of linguistic devices in literature or any form of expression cannot be said to be foregrounding. Foregrounding entails a form of deviation from the conventional use of language. Therefore, "foregrounding indicates the variety of stylistic influences that come about in literature, that is the phonetic/phonological level (e.g., "alliteration, rhythm, rhyme, meter"), morphological level (e.g. word formation), syntactic level (e.g., inversion, ellipsis), or semantic level (e.g. simile, metaphor, metonymy, irony,)" (Wadi and Jamsheer, 2021:83). This presupposes that stylistic foregrounding is the intentional deviation from the normal morphological, semantic, syntactic, phonological or graphological deployment of linguistic devices in a text.

The concept of stylistic foregrounding is based on the idea that authors may intentionally deviate from the usual patterns of language used to achieve specific effects in their writing. Such deviations may take various forms, including changes in the way words are formed, alterations to sentence structure and grammar, the use of unusual or unexpected vocabulary, and modifications to the visual appearance of the text. These deviations are not accidental or incidental, but rather are carefully crafted choices made by the author to create a particular effect or convey a certain message to the reader. Stylistic foregrounding is an important tool

for writers who seek to engage and captivate their audience, and it is a key aspect of literary analysis and interpretation.

Thus, the theory of foregrounding has been chosen as the most appropriate for this study as it not only recognises the unusual or artistic use of language by literary authors but also delves into how these deviations are perceived by readers or listeners of a text and how the highlighted elements affect the comprehension of the text. This aligns with the goals of the present research, which aims to identify the author's linguistic peculiarities or style and investigate how these linguistic features impact the overall understanding of the text. Moreover, the theory of foregrounding is utilised in this study because it is the most fitting approach for analysing the text and addressing the general research inquiries.

Analysis of Linguistic Stylistic Foregrounding Features in Chiazor-Enenmor's *If They Tell the Story*

Stylistic Foregrounding of Morphological Features

At this level of analysis, concentration is on the structure of words used in the text, the formation of words through coinages and neologism; local colouring and others.

Compounding

This involves the use of words which have more than a free morpheme. Sometimes, compound words are separated by a hyphen. This is usually used for semantic and stylistic purposes. The following are some examples in the text:

Excerpt: 1: Compound Words

> Kolanut-stained -p.18; Pot-belly- p.19; Tale-bearing - p.21; Money-making - p.50; Half-hearted - p. 67; Periwinkle-littered - p.47; Home-based - p.18; Poorly-dressed - p.57; Ill-fitted p.- 53; Worry-sick - p.68;

	Hand-out - p.71; Broad-chested - p.90; Shame-faced – p.91; Half-listening – p.95; Pick-pocket (p.29)

Data presented in the table above shows that morphological features in the text are divided into three; compound words, coinages, and local colours. Compound words have more than one free morpheme, usually with or without a hyphen. Coinages are words formed by combining two words of different word classes or words of different languages. Local colours are the native language expressions imported into the text, which is written mainly in English. All these have different stylistic effects, especially as they are foregrounded in the text.

The author uses a significant number of compound words in the novel. There are seventeen compound words which are spread across the entire text. Most of them are used as qualifiers. In the English language, qualifiers are most often adjectives describing a noun's quality. For instance, the use of *kolanut-stained* (p.18), *tale-bearing* (21), and *broad-chested* (p.90) are meant for the vivid description of nouns: persons, events and incidents in the text. *Pick-pocket* (p.29) is a word which refers to a person who steals or the act of stealing from someone's bag, especially in a crowd. This pattern of theft is very common in most populated cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, and others in Nigeria. Also, the use of the Nigerian Pidgin English *abeg* (p.63) suggests the multilingual setting of the novel, thereby highlighting the linguistic setting of parts of the novel.

The widespread use of these words entails the foregrounding of the morphological element, which in turn gives the readers a clear mental picture of every event and person described in the text. This means that the reader is provided with enough clues and descriptions such that no significant meaning or message conveyed could be lost at the point of interpretation of the text. The

foregrounding of these compound words is evidence of the writer's power of description through her choice of words. This kind of description itself further foregrounds the text as a good piece of story.

Coinages

Coinages explain a word formation method wherein new words are formed by a combination of two syllables of words from the same language or a formation of word from the local stock which bears semblance with the Standard English. Examples are:

Excerpt 2: Coinages

obodo oyibo (p.22); *Ehya!* (p.99);
Nah and *hian* (p.79); *ada m, nooo* – p.251;

Furthermore, the author of the text uses a few coinages. These morphological forms give a clear idea about the sociological context of discourse in most of the conversations introduced by the author to make the reading of the text interesting. For example, *obodo oyibo* (p.22) is a coinage from the Igbo and Yoruba languages used to refer to Europe, the land of the Whites as *oyibo* translates. Also, *Ehya!* (p.99) is an interjection in the everyday Nigerian Pidgin English and informal dialogue, which is used to express empathy with a victim of any sort of ill luck or disaster. *Nah* and *hian* (p.79) as used in the text are discourse fillers which are peculiar to informal conversations among Nigerians. The use of these fillers and interjections in the intermittent dialogues in the text foregrounds the author's conscious effort to depict the social milieu in which the text is set. Thus, this stylistic feature does not only hold the aesthetic appeal of any reader regarding the conversations, but also of the stylistic representation of the text's setting.

Interestingly, these words are italicised in every context of their usage in the novel. This quickly creates effects in the minds of the readers at the sight of these words. Van Peer and Hakemulder

(2006) maintain that foregrounding could be used in a linguistic context to emphasise certain linguistic features or elements in a text which the writer consciously or unconsciously uses to appeal to the senses of the reader. In the instance of this study, the foregrounded linguistic features, like the coinages, are deployed by the author to facilitate the readers' understanding of the context or social environment of her story. This makes sense of the thematic concern of the author of the text and the relationship with society from which the text is produced.

Local Colouring

Local colouring here means the use of native language in the text. The use of local colouring is another foregrounded linguistic feature in the novel. Some examples are given, thus:

Excerpt 3: Local colours

> omugwo (p.21), abacha (p.38), umuada (p.105), otite (p.12); ama m ihe ichoro bia nga biara ime vom – p.68; elubo – p.80; ada m, nooo – p.251; mechie anya – p.44; o ji ochi eme oji – p.14; obiara ohuru – p. 26, 27; uno akwa – p.161; aso ebi- p.117

This element speaks volumes of the specific society in which the author uses her art to critique. Apart from the incorporation of the native language, Igbo, as a celebration of the writer's cultural heritage, this linguistic feature points to the Igbo traditional society as the inhabitation of repressive, abusive and oppressive cultural values as reflected in frequent abuse of the central character, Azuka, by her husband. This stylistic element allows the writer to celebrate her culture as an important aspect of existence, while also accusing the custodians of the culture of the malevolence propagated in society.

The use of *omugwo* (p.21), *abacha* (p.38), *umuada* (p.105), *otite* (p.12) and others in the text is suggestive of the author's knowledge of the cultural values of the Igbo traditional society, and her indictment of same culture and tradition in the humiliation and abuse of women. *Abacha* is a kind of delicacy popular in the Igbo community. Also, *otite* (12) is an Igbo cultural festival which brings everyone together. All these punctuate the author's closeness to her culture. *Omugwo* is the Igbo traditional rite performed by the mother when her daughter gives birth. The humiliation and abuse Azuka suffered was because she was yet to bear a child, and for this reason her mother would not perform the *omugwo*. It was equally for this reason that Azuka entered into an abusive marriage with Nduka.

On the whole, these stylistic elements not only draw the readers' attention to the uniqueness and creativity imbued into the work by Chiazor but also serve to mark the distinctive feature of the text: the writer's style. This aspect of style is foregrounded by the use of different linguistic devices, thereby creating an impact on the minds of the readers and shaping their understanding of the text. To buttress this, van Peer and Hakemulder (2006) argue that foregrounded elements in a text are linguistic deviations which capture the readers' attention and cause them to appreciate the aesthetics in the work and restructure their minds towards a proper understanding of the text beyond the written words.

Stylistic Foregrounding of Syntactic Features

Syntax entails the rules guiding the linear structural pattern of a sentence or any other meaningful strings of words. In this level of analysis, the focus is on the prevalent structure of the sentences used in the text. It could be hypotactic or paratactic sentence structures. Each of them has certain stylistic implications in the text. Hypotactic structures comprise complex sentence structures. In Chiazor-Enenmor's *If They Tell the Story*, some of the hypotactic structures could be seen in sentences such as: "She

hated the way he sat, shaking his two legs together, like someone suffering from epilepsy" (p.12); "In her bitterness and regrets over her disrupted education, Unoaku held her brother, Nwike, to ransom" (p.36); "whenever he was sure Azuka was alone in the room, he would creep into the room noiselessly"(p.48); and "If your vagina is itching you, it is not my husband that will assuage it" (p.50). However, these are not stylistically relevant to the study because they are not different from the usual way of using complex sentence structures. They are regular features in other literary texts. This is without prejudice to the fact that the hypotactic structures are typical of narratives such as the novel. Be that as it may, the verbal elements such as 'hated', 'shaking', 'suffering', 'held', 'creep', 'itching', 'assuage' et cetera employed in the text all emphasise different tense forms in line with the ideological positions embedded in the text. According to Udoka, Umoh and Etuk (2020: 58), "Tense is a category that locates the action of a verb on a timeline in relation to the time of speech relating to the action in question".

Parataxis or paratactic sentence structures are prominent in the novel. This structure is the foregrounded syntactic feature in the text. Normally, sentences with paratactic structures are simple sentences with the subject + verb + object + complement (SVOC) structure. Examples of this syntactic structure are scattered across the novel. For instance, the first sentence in the text: "Azuka's nascent beauty captured the hearts of many men" (p.10), has a paratactic structure. Other examples are: "We cannot question God" (p.22); "It's true." (p.22); "My wife sells clothes" (p.39); "Life in Port Harcourt was tough for Azuka" (p.46); "Azuka was glad" (p.45); and many others. This pattern of sentences makes it easy for the understanding of the message conveyed by the author, though it is not a foregrounded linguistic element.

The foregrounded syntactic feature is the unusual one-word and two-word sentences that feature in the text. This is because they

attract the readers' attention, even though they are deviant forms. These deviant forms are the foregrounded forms. Wales (1991:182) opines that:

> … within the literary text itself linguistic features can themselves be foregrounded or 'highlighted', 'made prominent', for specific effects, against the (subordinated) background of the rest of the text, the new 'norm' in competition with the non-literary norm. It is this 'internal' foregrounding that critical attention is largely focused on. Foregrounding is achieved by a variety of means, which are largely grouped under two main types: deviation and repetition, or paradigmatic and syntagmatic foregrounding respectively. Deviations are violations of Linguistic norms: grammatical or semantic, for example.

It suffices to state that syntactic deviation is foregrounded in the novel, and that is artistically motivated. For instance, the use of one-word sentence in the text below is a conscious deed of the author.

Excerpt 4: Single and Two-Word Sentences

> No. She is merely a child…." (p.13); "Yes, Sir." (p.17); "Sorry." (p.52); "No!" (p.55); "Yes, Mama" (p.57); "I promise." (91); "I do" (91); "Yes *nah*!" (120); "Dr. Osato smiled" (121); "I see" (133)

Thus, the syntactic structure is foregrounded not only for aesthetic purposes but also for semantic reasons. Most of those sentences are

meaningful in context, and so provide the readers with the clarity of information needed to understand the text. Beyond this, the syntactic structure punctuates the commands and authority with which the central character receives and is related, respectively. For instance, "Yes, Sir" (p.17); Sorry (p.52) and "I promise" (p.91) are all pointers to the subservience position of women in society, just like the author portrays the suffering and humiliation of Azuka. Therefore, the foregrounded syntactic structure goes beyond enhancing the explicit understanding of events and incidents to unfolding the implied or embedded meaning in the text.

Stylistic Foregrounding of Graphological Features

This level of analysis focuses on the deviation in the use of graphological features like punctuations, text colour and size, italicisation, structural organisation, use of images and signs and other significant features. Most of these graphological features could be foregrounded by an author either for stylistic (aesthetic) or semantic effect. In the novel, the author makes use of diverse forms of punctuation like the full stop, comma, double quotation marks, hyphens, question marks, and exclamation marks. These graphological elements feature throughout the text but are used in the everyday pattern. Therefore, there is no significant stylistic implication for such usages, and cannot be taken to be foregrounded.

The font size, type and colour of words in the text are normal and legible for readers without any form of sight impairment. These stylistic features are not automatised in any form, and so do not constitute foregrounded linguistic devices in the text at the graphological level. However, one graphological feature which makes an imposing presence in the text is italicisation. Throughout the novel, there is a significant use of italicised words. Most of the linguistic local colours imported into the text are italicised and such usage is foregrounded for both linguistic and aesthetic purposes. Examples of italicised words include:

hian (p.79), *Ehya!* (p.99), *obodo oyibo* (p.22), *omugwo* (p.21), *abacha* (p.38), *umuada* (p.105), *otite* (p.12), *obiara ohuru* (pgs.26 and 27), *ukpo ugede (*p.47), *elubo (*p.80), *uno akwa* (p.161), *aso ebi (*p.117), *igba ndu* (p.31), and others.

It is worth noting that there is no glossary provided for these words and phrases written in the Igbo language. Therefore, the author foregrounds them not only to draw the attention of the readers to the aesthetic nicety used to embellish the story but also to immediately signal the language change. Such incorporation of native language does not stall the understanding of the text but furnishes the reader with the knowledge of the linguistic community which forms the background of the story.

In terms of structural organisation, the novel is divided into three parts of unequal chapters. Part 1 is entitled 'Dreams', Part 2 is 'Reality', while Part 3 is entitled 'Illusions'. This organisation of the text has a stylistic effect. It helps the reader to understand the content of each section. The different titles are summaries of the whole novel. For instance, the first part of the novel chronicles Azuka and Chima's expectations of dreams of becoming rich and having a happy married life. The second part portrays reality as a direct contrast to their dreams. They meet disappointment in different dimensions of their lives, and come to terms with the understanding of reality. The last part strictly entails the demystification of marriage by the author, and Azuka's break away from the illusions around marriage, as popularised in African traditional marriage. Regardless of the fact that such structural organisation is common in contemporary prose fiction, it is important to note that there is a systematic alignment of this structure with the subject matter of the novel. Consequently, it is

regarded as an effective foregrounded graphological feature used by the author.

Moreover, italicisation is also foregrounded in certain expressions used in the novel. The author uses this stylistic feature to make bold and emphatic of the message conveyed through those expressions. For instance, the use of italicisation in the expressions:

> *Maternal Instinct Bookshop*" (p.122); "*How to Boost Ovulation and Sperm Production Naturally Through Food*" (p.122); "*Termination of Appointment*" (p.225); "*The accounts department will work out payment due to you. The money will be paid to your account by the end of the month*" (p.226); "S*olidarity forever. Solidarity forever. Solidarity forever. We shall always fight for our rights*. (p.66); *University of Suya, Faculty of Meatology*" (p.94).

These and others are used to highlight both the writer's aesthetics as well as the message sent to the readers. In the first example highlighted above, readers' attention is quickly drawn to the foregrounded expression. Beyond this is the embedded message conveyed by the caption. Firstly, it informs the readers of a bookshop which deals with books on women's psychology and problems about childbearing. Secondly, the inscription implies that the problem of barrenness mostly affects women or is most often attributed to women in African societies like the Igbo communities; thus, the use of the word "maternal" is one of the operating words there. Moreover, the book title *How to Boost Ovulation and Sperm*

Production Naturally Through Food as one of the wares in the bookshop is evidence of the fact that childlessness is a major factor for unsuccessful marriages in most African societies. Invariably, the foregrounded graphological element reveals the author's ideological stance on infertility in marriage in African societies.

Furthermore, a passage in the text is foregrounded through the stylistic feature of italicisation. This is used by Chiazor-Enenmor to critically and explicitly address the issue of abusive marriage in African societies, especially as it concerns women's welfare. The excerpt below reveals a significant message through graphological foregrounding.

> *Real Issues. Most women who are stuck in an unhappy marriage are afraid to quit. But they put their lives in jeopardy when they remain; sometimes they get killed and thereby quit. It's the way society views divorce and separation. Society, my foot! Look, I am not an advocate for broken marriage, especially where there are children from the union. But for crying out loud, when a man turns you into a punching bag, you quit, simple. The same thing goes for the man, when the woman becomes aggressive and volatile, you take a walk. There is no macho man in the grave* (p.295).

The foregrounded excerpt above is replete with great messages. For instance, the writer notes that most women who are in abusive marriages decide to remain there because of the socio-cultural implication of quitting or divorcing their husbands. However, this set of women most often lose their lives as a result of continuous violent abuse by their husbands. Therefore, the author suggests that

whether the women choose to listen to social tantrums or not, they still quit their marriage through death. The message sent to women is that quitting an abusive and unhappy marriage is the best thing to do instead of waiting to die in the end: "*But for crying out loud, when a man turns you into a punching bag, you quit, simple"* (italicised in the original text, p. 295).

This graphological effect facilitates the writer's vivid expression of her thoughts on violent and toxic marriages, as well as her position on these. Most importantly, the attention of every reader is easily captured by the foregrounded graphology and thus enhances the understanding of the author's ideology on gender violence, and the overall understanding of the text. The effect is not only meant to attract readers' attention but also to call their attention to the central message of the text. Consequently, the writer's use of the foregrounded graphological device serves both aesthetic and semantic meaning.

Stylistic Foregrounding of Lexico-Semantic/Semantic Features

At the lexico-semantic level, meaning is considered in terms of how words function with others in a sentence structure. This implies that word meaning at this level has been extended beyond the everyday meaning to a contextual and creative semantic import. Udofot (1998:6) holds that "…a semantic analysis of a given language should show not only what meaning a particular word or sentence usually has but also its meaning when it is in company of other words". In the novel, the author has employed the devices of lexico-semantics to give some special meaning to the text. Regarding this, the writer uses devices of meaning transfer such as hyperbole, metaphor, personification, and borrowings.

Most of the expressions are hyperbole and metaphors. The author uses them to create a lot of imagery while expressing various shades of meaning through them. For instance, the expression: "A

pool of tears gathered in her eyes, threatening to break its bank…" (p.111) draws an image of a water pool in the mind of the reader. To say that someone's tear is a pool of river threatening to break its banks has a condensed meaning. The implied meaning is that the victim of the circumstance which brings about this feeling only manages to control their emotion to avoid an outburst of cry. In other words, the author uses this to express the state of being of the central character, Azuka. She is constantly in tears which is capable of forming a river of tears. In this scenario, one can quickly spot the semantic import used by the author. There is a comparison between a pool of water and tears clouding a person's eyes. This creates a vivid image of the central character, Azuka, and facilitates a proper understanding of her plight.

Furthermore, the author creates special meaning in the text to creatively pass her messages through the use of the figures of exaggeration and imagery to help the readers have a better understanding of her message. For instance, in narrating the Biafran's plight during the war and their experiences during the sharing of relief items, especially food, Azuka's mother says: "The line would stretch from Nkwo Ezemezu to Ugwu Ani" (35). In this context, the author creates the imagery of the distance and length of a line in which people had to queue up to get food. One can only imagine the struggle and suffocation that accompanied this strenuous adventure for survival.

Similarly, the author deploys personification as a figure of speech to create both semantic effect and aesthetic appeal in the novel. For instance, her description of Chima's countenance when he realized that his journey to Europe was drawing near gives readers an insight into Chima's emotions. Unigwe describes him, thus: "Chima's eyes leaped with joy" (24). "His eyes glittered with hope. His face was creased with worry" (25). To say that someone's eyes leapt is semantic incongruity because it is unimaginable for a person's eyes to jump out of the sockets,

especially in normal circumstances. Mukarovsky (1970:47) avers that "to criticize the deviations from the norm of the standard as faults, especially in a period which, like the present, tends towards a powerful foregrounding of linguistic components, means to reject poetry". The expression means not the actual jumping but the gleaming of the eyes.

However, the author's use of the word "leaped" to describe Chima's emotion gives a clear understanding of his state of being. This is the same thing with the second group of sentences. The author implies that although the boy's eyes look bright and expressive of hope, there lay the doom of illegal migration and the disconnection from loved ones looming in his eyes. Therefore, amidst the joy of the hope of travelling abroad lay the burden of transportation expenses and the sadness of leaving family and friends for a long while. Regarding the semantic deviation foregrounded in the text, as in the examples above, Mukarovsky (1970:47) avers that "to criticize the deviations from the norm of the standard as faults, especially in a period which, like the present, tends towards a powerful foregrounding of linguistic components, means to reject poetry". Thus, foregrounding theory recognises these forms of deviation (automatisation), and considers them critically important in the assessment of the language or style which writers use in their literary works.

All these are instances of deviation from the semantic 'norm' that foregrounding theory examines, among other things, in literary texts. Chikogu and Ofuani (2012: 143) submit that "the theory of foregrounding views style as deviation or departure from the norm. They note that at the centre of the theory is the assumption that there is always a normal pattern of language use but a shift from this becomes an identified style of an author or writer. Thus, the author's use of these foregrounding features serves both aesthetic and extra-semantic purposes. The perfect combination of these features and other stylistic devices gives the work a top-notch style

which does not only appeal to literary critics but also become significant in terms of linguistic analysis. The use of those figurative tools, for instance, adds a special semantic effect to the work.

The use of imagery and extended meaning of words and expressions in a piece of writing can provide readers with a clear understanding of the message being conveyed. These devices are commonly referred to as foregrounded devices as they go beyond the ordinary use of language at the semantic level. This concept is supported by the foregrounding theory which emphasises the significance of analysing the process of automatisation in foregrounding. In essence, the use of these devices helps to highlight and emphasise key ideas and concepts in a text, making it easier for readers to comprehend and appreciate the author's message.

Conclusion

This work attempted a stylistic analysis of Chiazor-Enenmor's *If they Tell the Story* by using the theory of foregrounding, a linguistic stylistic theory which was propounded by Mukarovský (1970). The theory was later modified and used by scholars such as Leech and Short (1981). This research aimed at the analysis of some of the deautomatised linguistic features in the novel at the morphological, syntactic, graphological, lexico-semantic and semantic levels in order to examine how each of them has influenced the production of the entire text, and the understanding of the message passed by the author. It was observed that the author employed various foregrounded linguistic features at multiple levels, including morphological, syntactic, lexico-semantic, and semantic. Furthermore, it was revealed that the author used certain stylistic devices such as local colouring, italicisation, paratactic sentence structures, and extended meanings that are embedded within metaphors and hyperboles. These foregrounded stylistic devices used extensively in the novel,

played a significant role in shaping the overall tone and meaning of the text. The author's masterful use of these stylistic devices not only enhanced the narrative but also elevated the reader's experience of the novel. Thus, the study concluded that the author's use of linguistic features was both creative and purposeful.

From the analysis of stylistic features in the novel, it became apparent that the writer's use of linguistic devices played a significant role in facilitating the portrayal of events and incidents. Specifically, the author's choice of simple syntactic structures contributed to making the story interesting and clear to the reader. Moreover, the imagery created through the use of symbols and figurative expressions was essential in vividly expressing the writer's stance and the message she intended to send to the readers.

One unique graphological device used by the author is italicisation. For instance, her advice for victims of an abusive marriage, which was creatively but assertively expressed was made conspicuous through the use of italicisation. The use of this device effectively communicated the author's message while also engaging the reader's attention. These linguistic features, therefore, not only added to the aesthetic effect of the novel but also contributed to the clear portrayal of events and the proper understanding of the thematic concern of the text by readers.

Through the use of these linguistic devices, the author skillfully conveyed her message in a way that was both effective and engaging. Readers could fully grasp the story's events and themes, as well as the implied meaning in each instance of deviation. In conclusion, the author's use of linguistic devices in the novel was effective because it helped in the full understanding and appreciation of the story's messages and themes.

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