

# Patterns of Lexical Choices and Stylistic Function in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's Poetry

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## Abstract

Previous studies on J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry have concentrated on literary and some linguistic features, highlighting the relation of theme and figuration in the works. However, such studies have paid little attention to the role lexical relations play in foregrounding stylistic functions, which is very crucial for a comprehensive interpretation and understanding of the poet's idiolect. This study, therefore, investigates the stylistic value of sense relations, lexis and thematization, and indigenous idioms in the texts.

Michael Halliday's three metafunctions of language (i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual), within the broad discourse-stylistic theoretical framework, were used for the analysis, especially as they reflect the interface between form and function. Six volumes, which cut across the three distinctive phases of the poet's creative career (i.e. early: 1958-1968, *A Decade of Tongues*; later: 1970-1988, *Casualties, State of the Union, Mandela and other Poems*; latest: 1999-date, *Of Sleep and Old Age, Once Again a Child*), were purposively selected for a detailed investigation.

The textual metafunction has particularly facilitated the investigation of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, contradiction, lexis and thematization, and cultural idioms, as elements of signification and cohesion in the texts, in relation to their social and ideological context. The study reveals that, lexical patterns are deliberately deployed to convey aspects of meaning and achieve cohesion in the texts. Specifically, synonymy functions as an element of semantic unity; Antonymy, of semantic contrast; Hyponymy, of inclusive meaning; Contradiction, of paradoxical relations; Lexis, of thematization; and indigenous idioms, of cultural meaning. It also reveals that all these devices function as elements of cohesion and coherence in the texts.

The study demonstrates that the choices a particular writer makes from alternative linguistic resources at his disposal, are determined by the subject matter and other social and contextual variables. It, therefore, enhances the understanding and interpretation of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetic idiolect in particular, and literary discourse in general.

**Keywords:** Clark-Bekederemo, Poetry, Lexical patterns, Stylistic function, Discourse-Stylistics

## 1. Introduction

This study applies the methods and insights of linguistics to the description and interpretation of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetic idiolect, using discourse-stylistic parameters. It demonstrates that, a linguistic exploration of literary discourse is not only adequate, but is also necessary and rewarding.

The need for a linguistic study of literary discourse is based on the notion that the literary text is constructed with language. Wellek and Warren (1977:22) highlight this view when they posit that "language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of picture, or sounds of music". In Todorov's (1977) view, literature has language as both its point of departure and its destination; language furnishes literature its abstract configuration. Against this background, therefore, it is necessary to analyze how a writer has used the potential of language to encode meaning(s) in the literary text. According to Brumfit and Carter (1986), the literary text is seen as self-sufficient as a language artifact, and as an object in itself. The critical point is that, the centrality of language in a literary text makes the study of the patterns of language use in this context quite fundamental and useful.

The present study examines language use in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry, focusing on lexical categories such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, contradiction, lexis and thematization and the appropriation of indigenous idioms, as linguistic patterns for encoding the meaning of the texts.

### *1.1 The Concepts of Lexical Choice and Language/Stylistic Function*

Language is usually described or studied at different levels viz: phonology (sound), morphology (internal structure of words), lexis (words), Semantics (meaning). Lexis is, thus, one of the levels of language study. The term originated from Greek and came into prominence in linguistic circles in the 1960's. It is particularly used by British linguists for the vocabulary of a language or sub-language, especially of its stock of lexemes. The term became popular because it is unambiguous, unlike its synonym "lexicon". Alo (1995:18) defined lexis as "...the level of linguistic analysis and description concerned with the way in which the vocabulary of a language is organized". In linguistics, lexis describes the storage of language in our mental lexicon as prefabricated patterns that can be recalled and sorted into meaningful speech and writing. Thus, lexis, as a concept, has a distinct identity from other traditional levels of linguistic study or interpretation, as it refers specifically to the word-stock of a language from which writers and speakers make choices for self-expression according to their purpose or intended meaning. The areas lexis covers include synonyms and antonyms, collocations, common idioms, and figurative language, proverbs and phrasal verbs, registers, homonyms and homophones, prefix and suffix, general knowledge of words, special loan words, neologism, adjectives and prepositions, etc.

The point is that the rationale for studying the nature and functioning of the vocabulary of a text is to decode the meaning of the text (i.e. lexis as semantic markers or signifiers). This notion is echoed by McCarthy and Carter (1988) when they averred that, most scholarly works on lexis over the years have discussed the term within semantics. For, as Socrates put it, "words have the power to reveal..., conceal and signify all things; they... also turn things this way and that" (See Eyoh, 1997:90). Alo (1998) shares a similar viewpoint viz: "As a level of language study, lexis seeks to elucidate how words mean and how they interact with one another meaningfully..."

Fundamentally, a writer taps from and exploits the vast resources of language for his imaginative creations. Lexical items help the writer to crystallize his thoughts, express certain emotions and create images all of which give literature its peculiar expressive beauty. In this regard, writers depend on lexical items and their connotative implications, to convey their intended meanings. Therefore, the writer must choose the appropriate words to effectively convey the intended meaning and also achieve aesthetic beauty. This is inevitable because a writer must use linguistic resources imaginatively to have the desired effect on the reader or audience. This explains why writers, particularly poets, make lexical choices with great care to achieve the delicate target of conveying meaning in the best way possible. In fact, an artistic effort must achieve a fusion of meaning and imaginativeness in language use.

Language is a product of man's need for self-expression and communication, as a social animal. Basically, therefore, language is a social and functional phenomenon; a tool of social engineering in our day-to-day existence as human beings. Fundamentally, human beings function in myriads of social situations and language serves as the instrument of expression in all of these situations. Hence various scholars have defined the term in terms of its social function. Language function refers to the purpose or goal of language use in any given context. The functions of language cover six basic communicative and social areas viz: informational, expressive, phatic, directive, ideational and performative (Ndimele, 2005). According to Alo (1998:5), the term function has two meanings:

Firstly, it refers to the specific uses to which the writer or speaker puts the language (e.g. description, explanation, argument, persuasion, humour, etc). The term 'function' is also used in the context of stylistic description to refer to the communicative value or role of specific language categories (sentence, clause, word group, collocation, word and morpheme).

Language function, therefore, implies varieties of language that are defined according to use. This means that the context of use determines the meaning of the word or phrase. Thus, a word or phrase could have a particular meaning in one context, and another in another context. This view tallies with Halliday's view of language and grammar in particular, as a whole system of choice or option with complex relations between them. Hence the definition of language according to function focuses on language use in contexts of situation and postulates that meaning is multi-layered and can be interpreted at various levels.

Stylistic function is an aspect of language function. The critical point is that the specific communicative or social function that a speaker or writer deploys language to perform has the potentials to shape its use. Halliday (1978)

labeled language as a ‘social semiotic’ in the sense that it evolves in a context and the environment in which people deploy language to serve communicative needs can shape its form and meaning. According to Ogunsi (2000:53), the “social circumstances” of language use are pertinent in determining stylistic meaning because, “... language is not a monolithic entity – it varies according to some factors like geographical location, subject matter, medium (spoken or written), sex, age, role relations etc.”

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

J.P. Clark-Bekederemo is certainly one of the frontline writers in Africa. This position is based on the writer’s historicity, all encompassing accomplishments (i.e. poetry, prose, drama, scholarship), and the quality and volume of criticisms which his works have evoked across the globe. However, a great deal of studies on the writer’s poetry focus on the literary and thematic features, thereby neglecting the linguistic aspects. Critics have paid little attention to lexical relations and their stylistic value, which is very crucial for a detailed interpretation of the texts and apt characterization of the poet’s idiolect. The present study, therefore, focuses on these aspects, in addition to lexis and thematization, and appropriation of indigenous idioms, all of which highlight the social and cultural value of words deployed in the text to convey the poet’s vision. The aim is to unlock hidden shades of meaning in the texts. Specifically, the study provides answers to the following research questions:

- i) What are the specific lexical patterns employed in the texts?
- ii) How do they relate to their social, cultural and ideological contexts?

## 2. Literature Review/ Theoretical Foundations

The concept of style has attracted multifarious viewpoints which gave rise to different theories for its classification and exploration. Style, basically, is variation in language use or the varying forms of linguistic performance by speakers and writers. The critical point is that, as Alo (1998:1) put it, “The verbal style includes all the devices of language that are used to achieve communication goals in speech and writing...”. Stylistics, on the other hand, investigates how a writer or speaker deploys the phenomenon of language to communicate. It is the branch of general linguistics that focuses on style, particularly in works of literature. According to Allan, B. et al (1988), it is

... a branch of linguistics which studies the characteristics of situationally distinctive use of language with particular reference to literary language and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language.

Over the years, various theories have been propounded by scholars to explain the phenomenon of linguistic style in literature and guide its exploration as a critical approach. These theories reflect the dichotomies in the perception of the concept by different scholars. The Russian formalists and Prague school of the 1920’s, for instance, see style in literature as foregrounding (see Hawkes, 1977; Bennett, 1979; Lemon and Reis, 1965). Along with the structuralists of the 1960’s (Hawkes, 1977; Culler, 1975), they stress the significance of the medium i.e. language. According to Fowler (1990), linguistic formalism postulates the existence of a special poetic language, which is distinguishable from “ordinary” or “scientific” language. Hence Wellek and Warren (1963:22-26), largely drawing on the semantic theory of Richards, espouses a distinct poetic use of language i.e. it is non-referential, non-practical, non-casual, etc. This theory is upheld by Noam Chomsky’s (1957) Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG), which sees style as deviation i.e. the style of a writer or speaker is delineated by his constant departures from linguistic norms. This is another critical strand of the language of poetry, in the sense that it overtly contravenes phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic rules. Widdowson (1984:162) delineates the deviant nature of poetry when he observed that, “it is common to find instances of language use which cannot be accounted for by grammatical rules”. In fact, Crystal (1987:71) contends that stylistics focuses on “deviant” and abnormal features rather than broader texts or discourses (Wetheril, 1974; Leech, 1957; Cluysenaar, 1976; Fowler, 1981, 1986). It is this deviant pattern or form that, Roman Jakobson (a theorist of TGG) refers to as the “poetic function” of language i.e. forms of language that draw attention to themselves. Chomsky’s (1957) deep and surface structures is also a fundamental theoretical aspect of style, since the meaning of surface linguistic constructs like poetry, is retrievable in the deep structure. This thesis justifies Groden and Kreworth’s (1997:3) contention that Chomsky’s Transformational Grammar, signaled the arrival of stylistics as an independent critical discipline. Osundare (2003) talks of three concepts of style viz: choice, difference and iteration. For this scholar, “choice” is further subdivided into preverbal and verbal choice i.e. the thinking process of the writer/speaker and the actual usage of language in the verbal form. The scholar explains “difference” in terms of variation and deviation. This means that style implies saying

something in different ways and also violating linguistic norms. According to the scholar, the concept of iteration emphasizes repetition of linguistic elements for focus and emphasis.

The systemic functional grammar that provides the theoretical framework for the present study, is subsumed within functional linguistics. The interest of this grammar is not only in describing the structure of language, but also in explaining the properties of discourse and its functions. It revolves around the work of J.R. Firth in general and M.A.K. Halliday in particular. In Hallidayan (1971) perception, a formal feature is stylistic if it has a particular meaning, effect or value. This notion emphasizes how language functions in texts and the nexus between language and what it is used for, or to achieve. The critical point here is that, whatever linguistic resource that is worth describing must be put to use, in the sense that the description and interpretation are necessarily based on the situational variables that prompted its use. Hence Oha (1994:730) posits that the approach recognizes the interdependency of style, meaning and context of situation and that the latter should not be subjected to second fiddle position, or ignored, in the analysis of style.

In Systemic Functional Grammar, language structure is analyzed along semantic, phonological, lexical and grammatical lines. Language function, on the other hand, is examined from three angles viz: ideational, interpersonal and textual. These are referred to as the metafunctions of language. The ideational metafunction of language is synonymous with the field of discourse i.e. the subject matter or propositional content of the text and the context of language use i.e. is it a religious or socio-political subject? The interpersonal or interactional function, at another level, refers to the tenor of discourse i.e. the social relationship that exists among participants in a specific discourse situation, which can influence or shape language use.

The textual aspect is particularly germane to the present study. It is concerned with the mode. Leech and short (1985:209) see Halliday's textual functions of language as "...ways of using language to organize, understand and express information for effective communication" (see Opara, 2005). The main point is that, the textual metafunction relates what is said in a text to ideas outside the discourse, as we shall demonstrate in the present study. It is concerned with the internal organization and communicative nature of a text. In this model, cohesion is examined both lexically and grammatically. The lexical aspect examines sense relations and lexical repetitions, as we shall see in the present study. The grammatical aspect on the other hand, examines repetition of meaning through reference, substitution and ellipsis.

The language of African literature has its socio-cultural peculiarities. The historical fact of colonialism, which made countries in the continent either Anglophone or Francophone, etc, has made the imperialist languages the media of literary expression. However, African writers have devised various strategies to contextualize indigenous meaning in these imperialist languages. Adejare (1992) avers that traces of African mother tongue are most pronounced in the works of African writers. Alo (1998) summarized these "traces" or peculiar linguistic characteristics of the literature viz: coinages, borrowings, native similes and metaphors, native rhetorical devices, transliteration, native proverbs and idioms, etc.

The dominant critical focus on African poetry has been on the traditional literary and thematic features of texts. Linguistic/stylistic studies are generally sparse (see Eyoh, 1997). Vincent (1979:220) hints at a general and more acute problem about the lexical aspect of language use in poetry viz: "one main factor which inhibits explication of modern African poetry is the general insensitivity of the average reader to words". The few works that attempt a linguistic/stylistic appraisal of poetic creations in the continent include: Anozie's (1985) "Equivalent Structures in Soyinka's Poetry: Toward a Linguistic Methodology in African Poetry Criticism," Ofuani's (1987) *A Stylistic Analysis of Okot P'Bitek's Poetry*, Osakwe's *The Language of Wole Soyinka's Poetry: A Diatype of English*, Eyoh's (1997) *J.P Clark-Bekederemo's Poetry: A Study in Stylistic Criticism*. Edonmi's (2000) *A Text-Linguistic Enquiry into Osundare's Poetic Idiolect*, and Ushie's (2001) *Many Voices, Many Visions: A Stylistic Study of 'New' Nigerian Poetry*.

Importantly, from the corpus of available literature, J.P Clark-Bekederemo's poetry has not been given intensive linguistic enquiry like other African poets, such as Soyinka and Osundare. In fact, Eyoh's (1997) *J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's Poetry: A Study in Stylistic Criticism* remains the only full-scale work that applies linguistic insights and methods to the study of the poet. However this work is limited by its triadic focus i.e. it shows the phonological, lexical and paralinguistic affective aspects of the poet's idiolect. At the level of lexis, the scholar focuses on five features he identifies as characteristics of the poet's idiolect viz: simplicity of language, evocation of the sensation of pain, a preponderance of dynamic verbs, ubiquity of aquatic imagery, and copious deployment of proper nouns.

It is also apparent that no scholar had used the discourse-stylistic theoretical framework in the study of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetic idiolect. The two-pronged model is a new area of research within the functional

linguistic tradition. Basically it is concerned with the identification, description and explanation of stylistic features in a given discourse; hence it is a discourse-based stylistics. The crux of the model is that, as Opara (2005) put it, “while Discourse analysis analyses WHAT is communicated in Discourse, stylistics analyses HOW it is communicated” (emphasis mine). Unlike other modern linguistic models, which study invented or isolated aspects of language, Discourse-Stylistics examines the form and function of linguistic constructs which are beyond the sentence, in specific social, cultural or historical contexts, as explored in the given discourse. The critical point is that, the model enables the analyst to establish both the discourse and stylistic features in the text, by exploring the network of interdependences among linguistic and extra-linguistic features, which help the text not only to mean, but also to achieve cohesion and coherence. Discourse itself is composed of structure, meaning and action (Schriffin, 1987). The concept originates from the discovery that language operates within a pragmatic context and that it is necessary to delineate and apply that context to its explication. This explains why sub-disciplines of discourse analysis, such as pragmatics, conversation analysis, speech act, and ethnography of speaking (i.e. co-operative principle), are relevant functional approaches to language study. This also justifies the adoption of Halliday’s systemic functional grammar, as the analytical model for our analysis, in that it also relates formal linguistic patterns in texts, to their given communicative contexts.

### 3. Research Methodology

J.P. Clark-Bekederemo has been active and consistent in the creative enterprise for over fifty (50) years now (1958-2010). Therefore, his oeuvre is so expansive that a study of this scope cannot reflect all his published poems or titles. The analysis is, thus, based on poems purposively selected from his *A Decade of Tongues* (1981, contains poems written between 1958 and 1968), *Casualties* (1970), *State of the Union* (1985), *Mandela and other Poems* (1988), *Of Sleep and Old Age* (2003), and *Once Again a Child* (2004). These titles cut across the three distinct phases of the author’s career viz: early (1958-68), later (1970-1988), and latest (1999-date). We believe that these poems enable us to strike a temporal balance between the writer’s old and new poetry.

We have established that the present study examines patterns of lexical choices and their stylistic value in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry. This inevitably requires that all his poems are extensively studied. The methodology adopted for this study is that, the poems are given a linguistic reading, which involves paying particular attention to lexical patterning in the texts. After the linguistic reading, all the lexical patterns discovered are organized into relevant analytical categories and explained in detail. The method involves classifying the textual features, indicating how the terms are used and the textual distinctiveness marking usages or language habits that stand out within the text (Leech and Short, 1985:47; Allerton, 1979:18; Opara, 2005).

### 4. Brief Bio-Data of the Poet

Born December 6, 1933 in Kiagbodo in the Ijaw area of present-day Delta State of Nigeria, to Ijaw and Urhobo parents (His father was Ijaw and mother Urhobo), Johnson Pepper Clark-Bekederemo had his primary school at Okrika (1940-1948) and Jeremi (1948), before proceeding to Government College, Ughelli, for his secondary education (1948-1953). He attended the University of Ibadan between 1955 and 1960. At Ibadan, together with a handful of other writers, he played a prominent role in establishing Nigeria and the continent of Africa as one of the major centres of Literature in English in the twentieth century. Of his Ibadan years, Wren (1984) remarks that Clark-Bekederemo “showed the most precocious talent that West African literary history had yet seen.” The poet has worked as an information officer, journalist, and University professor. Apart from his poetry, Clark-Bekederemo is also a frontline African dramatist and scholar. He has also written a novel (travelogue) *America, their America* (1964), which is an account of his sojourn in America as a Parvin fellow at Princeton University (1962-63)

### 5. Contextual Issues in the Poetry

That language and context are two inseparable phenomena is a fact that has been long standing and established (see Leech, 1983:13). Morley (1985: 4) points out that, “context serves to itemize those aspects of the situation which have a bearing on the form used”. The critical point in that, context is an important aspect of language use. As we shall demonstrate in the analysis of the texts, the true meaning of a text can be thought of as a relationship between its linguistic elements and whatever contextual evidence is available for clarifying it. In J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry, certain variables constitute the context of situation. These include: genre type, background experiences of the poet, socio-political realities, and subject-matter.

### 6. Textual Analysis

We need to establish that, the study goes beyond the analysis of the meaning and stylistic value of individual words or lexical choices. It also analyses multi-word language units, as used in the context of the texts. This is in

cognizance of Halliday's (1966:15) thesis that, in the analysis of lexical categories which reflect contextual meaning, the scholar should be concerned with "simple", "compound", as well as "phrasal" groups. As Carter and McCarthy (1988) put it, multi-word units "... behave largely like single words for the purposes of examining meaning relations in the lexicon".

### 6.1 Synonymy as a Device for Semantic Unity and Cohesion

Synonymy simply describes a lexical item that is in some sense similar in meaning with a preceding one. It is not a straightforward repetition of the same lexical item but a repetition of the sense of it. Ogbulogo (2005) defines the concept as a lexical relationship of close relatedness in meaning. According to Longe (1996), synonymy refers to a situation whereby two or more forms are associated with the same meaning. The critical point is that, in many of the poems in the collections selected for this study, there are instances of both partial and complete synonymy. In "Time and Tide" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), for instance, the following lexical items illustrate the lexico-semantic operation of synonymy:

Strain  
Stress  
Cold  
Aches  
Pains

In this poem, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo describes the kind of rigor mortis that is characteristic of old age. He expresses the realization that many of the things that a man does without difficulty in his prime become very hectic and energy-sapping for him with old age. The words 'strain', 'stress', 'cold', 'aches', and 'pains' are used in extending this idea and elaborating it. The critical point is that, all these words have similarity of meaning and they are used by the poet in tracking the readers through the message of the poem. They serve in clarifying the period, which the poet describes as the "season of surge". The synonymous lexical items further serve in amplifying the message of the poem; the poet uses them in describing different perspectives on the problems of old age.

Similarly, in "Diminishing Returns" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), which exhibits thematic unity with "Time and Tide", the following synonymous lexical items also serve in achieving the same cohesive effects as the ones considered above. They include "little", "dwindling", "diminishing" and 'few'. All of these suggest diminution or downturn in the power of man as occasioned by old age. They all suggest a big sense of loss. Through these lexical items, the poet is able to develop the theme of declension as the general feature of old age.

In "A State of Siege" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), the following lexical items deployed are synonymous and contribute to the unity of the poem's message: "killed", "attack", "shoot", "cut". All of these words are synonyms of violence and tension which the poem describes. The poem describes the general violence characteristic of the modern period, the violence from armed robbers, kidnappers and assassins and describes this precarious situation as a state of siege. The word 'siege' itself suggests insecurity and lack of freedom. Other synonymous lexical items in the poem which perform this function include: 'mayhem', 'wailing', 'locked' and "terror".

A similar lexico-semantic function as the ones above is found in "The Years Emit" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), where the synonymous lexical items "emit", "sparks" and "light up" – all of which suggest the idea of illumination are found, and in "Shadows in a Mirror" (*Once Again a Child*), where the synonymous words "cracked" and "broken" are deployed to describe an old famous house which now becomes nothing but a shadow. The critical point here is that, as Carter and McCarthy (1988:201) put it, surface cohesive ties, such as synonyms should not be looked on just as interesting formal patterns, but as manifestations of how we are making sense of the message of the text.

### 6.2 Antonymy as a Device for Semantic Contrast and Cohesion

Antonymy describes lexical items which are opposite in meaning. These words, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:574), also function as cohesive ties in a text. In the poems of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo under study, the device is used in achieving or expressing contradiction of ideas. Some of them appear in the form of phrasal expressions. For instance, in "The Snake Killer" (*Once Again a Child*), a poem which describes a very funny woman who acts strangely by attacking without fear, any snake she finds but who runs her heart out at the sight of a millipede. The two antonymous phrasal lexemes which describe this contradictory behaviour are "took

on” meaning to face with courage and “sped out” meaning to run away. The expressions are found in the following text:

...who took on any snake that came... But  
let her see a millipede and she sped out  
through the gate.

These expressions indicate that the woman is both bold and timid. The contradictory relation of the lexemes helps the poet in achieving the humorous sense he wants the poem to produce in readers. The contradictory behaviour of this woman is further projected by the adversative conjunct “but” which the poet uses in connecting the two contradictory aspects of the woman’s behaviour.

Similarly, in “The Last of the Wives” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), antonymous lexemes and phrasal lexemes are deployed in describing the ordeal of the last of the wives of the poet’s father. This woman is depicted in the poem as not having the child of her own but who did not suffer any form of loneliness until now because she was always surrounded by children from the other wives. But now both the husband and other wives are dead, and the woman now experiences the other side of life. In capturing this experience vividly, the poet uses the two contradictory pairs below:

- (a) alone – A woman now lives alone  
company – Where once she had the company of other wives.
- (b) laughed with most – laughed with most  
quarrel with none – was known to quarrel with none.

In ‘a’ above, the poet is able to create the effect of loneliness by introducing its opposite almost immediately. In ‘b’, the poet describes the quality which he probably wants readers to admire in this woman. Ordinarily, given her condition, the woman is not expected to laugh but here, she laughs most. She is also expected to quarrel with all but here she quarrels with none. These contradictory ideas are not just there in the poem; they are significant for showing the virtues of “the last of the wives”.

In “A Time To Sleep” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), there are several contradictory lexemes and ideas. The entire poem is paradoxical; it is a reversal of the ideal. For instance, sleep which is expected to describe a passive state is described as an active state. The darkness that generally characterizes night is now replaced by light; it is the period that the poet sees very clearly the experience of his youthful age and things that he had long forgotten. These contradictory phenomena or concepts are expressed with the contradictory lexemes “dark” and “beam”. The lexeme “dark” is minus light while “beam” is plus light. This paradox is extended in “Debris of Days” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), where antonymous lexemes “coming” and “go” are used for creating a special sense. We find the lexico-semantic device further in “Those Closest to Me” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), where contradiction is created through antonymous lexemes – “Closest” and “distant”, and “far” and “reach”. The entire poem is reproduced below to reveal this contradiction:

Those closest to me  
Grow distant every day  
But those far away  
I reach quite easily

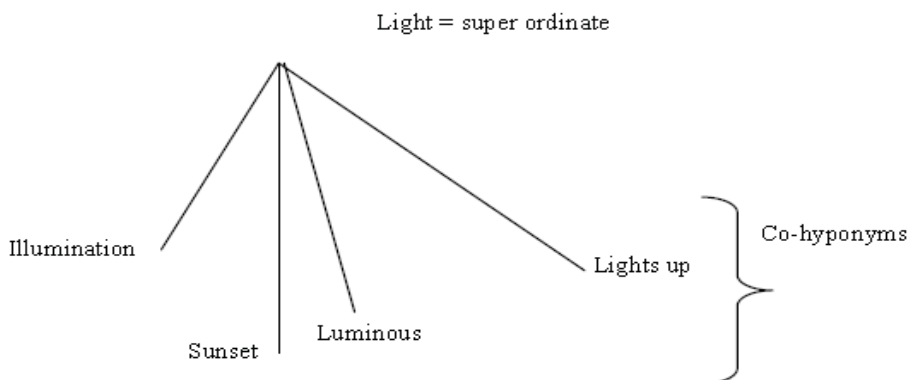
As we can see in the text, the use of the adversative conjunct ‘but’ helps in etching the overall contradiction.

Generally speaking, most of the poems in “*Of Sleep and Old Age*” are both ironical and paradoxical. The choice of antonymous lexemes in most of the poems in this collection serves in appealing to readers’ sense of understanding of the difference between ideals and realities.

### 6.3 Hyponymy as a Device for Inclusive Meaning and Cohesion

Hyponymy is a term of inclusion, where there is a superordinate or general term which covers a range of specific terms which are technically referred to as co-hyponyms. In the words of Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:574), hyponymy is a kind of elaborating relationship in which a lexical item represents a class of a thing. It is simply a relation of meaning inclusion, in which the meanings of certain lexical items are included in one lexical item. According to these scholars, this contrasts with metonymy which they describe as extending relations. The scholars, however, indicate that both concepts often work together in the development of a text (p. 576). In the poems under study, several instances of hyponymous relations are observed. Some of these are analysed below.

In “A photograph” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), J.P. Clark-Bekederemo describes the photograph of his father who hitherto was a mere name with “no face and figure”, since the family had no photograph of him. Through this photograph, the poet describes his father as the light of the whole community. His fame in the old colonial district is described in the imagery of light and illumination. Lexical items that paint the picture of light which his father represented in his extended family as well as the whole community include: ‘illumination’ (line 16), ‘lights up’ (line 5), ‘luminous’ (line 50) and the contrastive ‘sunset’ (line 39). The relationship between these words can be represented thus:



Similarly, in “The Years Emit” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), where the same idea of light is involved, the following hyponymous lexemes are deployed in reinforcing the sense: ‘emit’, ‘sparks’ and ‘lights up’.

Also in “My Father in his Thirties” (*Once Again a Child*), where J.P. Clark-Bekederemo describes his father’s high handedness and his impression concerning how he and other children were being treated by his father, contains some hyponymous lexemes which point in the sense of domestic enslavement. These words include:

Control  
 Confinement  
 Held  
 Lodged  
 Enclave  
 Cordon  
 Fenced

All these words suggest lack of freedom of movement and help to tie the text together. In other words, they serve in illuminating the fact that Father Ambakederemo really had a total control over his many children, particularly in his thirties and that the children, particularly Clark, had a feeling of being enslaved.

#### 6.4 Contradiction as a Device for the Expression of Paradoxical Relations for Cohesion

According to Ogbulogo (2005), contradiction presents two opposing propositions at the same time. J.P. Clark-Bekederemo does not only express elaborate relations in his poems; he also expresses contradicting relations. This is true of the association of certain words which do not have the kind of semantic relationship discussed above, but rather whose association is that of disassociation. In “A Hymn for a Friend in His Losses” (*State of the Union*), for instance, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo talks about the contradiction between man’s aspirations and his actual potentials or abilities, and highlights man’s limitations and helplessness in the face of death with these contradictory propositions, respectively: we seek to “... swim a sea who cannot cross a stream” and “we seek to plumb death/who flounder here in sleep” (i.e. note the contradiction in the underlined words; there is unity in form and message). Specifically, the contradictions in this context lays bare man’s inherent limitations in spite of his grandiose or bogus dreams, aspirations or fantasies. The bottom line is that, in spite of our presumptiveness, nobody on earth has “... made it to and from the other shore”.

In “A language Apart” (*A Lot from Paradise*), where the poet hints at the extraordinary understanding between his father and his consort, even without verbal communication, we find the juxtaposition of the contradictory lexemes “silent talk”. This means that there was a non-verbal but potent understanding between the couple, which was beyond the comprehension or penetration of neighbours or family members. In this vein, the poet suggests that there was a “secret tongue” that held them together, or that created the bond.



Also, in “Letter from Kampala” (*A Decade of Tongues*) which is addressed to the poet’s wife, Eburnola Clark-Bekederemo, the poet enunciates the feeling of nostalgia that envelopes human beings when they are away from home. The contradiction of being physically far away, but psychologically and emotionally attached to loved or intimate ones at home is captured with the contradictory lines: “I go farther in order/ To come home to you” (note the underlined lexical choices). Of course, this contradiction adumbrates the fact that “east or west, home is the best”. Also, in “A Night Act in the Day” (*Once Again a Child*), where we find the expression “Iron Wood”. This raises the question – how can it be iron if it is wood? Though the association of the two words describes the phenomenon of contradiction, their choice is strategic in the poem as they amplify the description of the door which they describe, making it more concrete than when described simply as being hard.

6.5 Lexis, Thematization and Cohesion

In many of the poems under study, certain lexemes are chosen and frequently used to suggest themes and to amplify important messages. In “A call to Heaven” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), for instance, the choice of **all** is strategic. In the six-line poem, which evokes some ugly sense of death, **all** is repeated thrice. This repetition is suggestive of the end that characterizes human life. After “all”, there is nothing again. So, with this lexical choice, the theme of nothingness of life is projected. We also find this strategy in “Rain in a Basket” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), which projects the theme of emptiness of life. In this poem, life is referred to as “this thing”. The choice of the lexeme “thing” is to reduce life to nothing, something nameless and insignificant. Other lexemes that suggest this theme include ‘hollow’ (line 3), ‘drops’ (line 10) and ‘sinking’ (line 14). All these reinforce the metaphor of “Rain in the Basket” which, in African metaphor, describes the folly in engaging in actions that are fruitless or have no good ends. This strategy is also used in “To Be or not to Be” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), and “Of Things Past” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), where the lexeme “void” is used to suggest the theme of vanity or emptiness of life.

Similarly, in “The years Emit” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), there is the deployment of words for meaning suggestion. The poem can be regarded as a celebration of success or years well spent. It is a pleasant recollection of the good old days, of places visited and people met. Two lexemes point to this pleasant experience. They are **sparks and light**. These words, as their componential analysis below shows, have positive connotation:

Sparks	light
+ Illumination	+ Illumination
+ Clarity	+ Clarity
+ Vision	+ Vision
+ Life	+ Life
+ Beauty	+ Beauty
+ Vitality	+ Vitality

In “Untold story” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), there is the operation of lexical substitution. In this poem, J.P Clark-Bekederemo tries not to use the word “tell” because the story of the poem is an untold one. He therefore uses the near-substitution of the word – “string out” and “display”. This design is strategic as it relates systematically to the title of the poem.

Semantically opposite expressions are placed side by side for meaning projection in “Time and Tide” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*). The strategy helps to illuminate the view that time is a devourer of beauty and strength. It further reinforces the idea that as man grows old, so does rigor mortis set in. Some of these expressions are presented below:

S/N	Youthfulness	Old Age
i.	Without effort	With strains
ii.	To drive	To be driven
iii.	... would never end	... at an ebb
iv.	... pick up...	... lower myself into a chair...

As could be noted from the illustration above, the strategy is used to draw a distinction between old age and youthfulness which also connects logically with the title of the poem “Time and Tide”. The pains of old age, which this poem suggests, are further revealed in “Answered Prayer” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), a somewhat paradoxical poem in which Clark-Bekederemo sees nothing too good in praying for old age. Two lexemes are used in driving home the view that old age is an unpleasant experience, which ironically, people pray for. These words are: ‘crutches’ and ‘groping’ (Line 5).

In “New year” (*A Decade of Tongues*), there is the repetition of the lexeme “finished” to be suggestive of the end, which heralds the beginning of the New Year. In “Sacrifice” (*State of the Union*), Clark-Bekederemo selects lexical items that have negative connotation. This relates to the theme of the pains of sacrifice, which the poem depicts. The view of the poet in this poem is that Nigeria, which is personified in the word “she”, demands the sacrifice of everybody in her times of need and that the sacrifice will certainly or inevitably be painful. Three words readily suggest this view. They are **mounds, weeds and thorns**. These words describe the Nigerian situation, which her citizens must consciously work to improve upon or reverse. To work in such a field with mounds, weeds and thorns is, therefore, a task that takes only sacrifice to accomplish.

We find similar signification pattern in “My Father’s House” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*) and “The Lagos – Ibadan Road before Shagamu” (*Casualties*). In “My Father’s House”, two words “market” and “courtyard” are used to suggest liveliness and emptiness, respectively. The five-line poem describes a household that was once full of life but is now in a degenerating state. This sense of loss is reinforced by the expression “not even an echo... I hear my heart beat”. Similarly, in “The Lagos – Ibadan Road...”, five lexical items with negative connotation are carefully chosen to describe the ugly and dangerous nature of this road. The words are “groaned”, “trapped”, “odd”, “rocked” and “groan”. The superordinate term for all these words is ‘pain’, suggesting that traveling on this road is never a pleasant experience.

#### 6.6 Appropriation of Indigenous Idioms for the Expression of Cultural Meaning

Many of the poems under study contain expressions that are typically Nigerian or African. Such expressions do not only endow the poems with rich socio-cultural meaning but also serve to record experiences more vividly than using non-Nigerian/African modes of expression. The critical point is that, Clark-Bekederemo exploits the vast linguistic and socio-cultural resources of his native origins, to contextualize the meaning of his texts. Functionally, this strategy adds what Roy Campbell referred to as “local colour”, to the text (See Arthur Ravenscroft, 1979:15). It also helps the poet to achieve the desired effect on his readers. For an illustration of this practice is, “The Last of the Wives” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), in which the word “home” is shown to have overt cultural signification. This means that, interpreting the word as used in the following excerpt from the poem, would require a proper understanding of the African world view that sees this world as a “market” and heaven or the land of the dead, as the “home”:

Now the great fair has dispersed  
And husband and all other wives  
Have gone their separate ways  
To homes in a place nobody knows.

In order to keep to decorum, Nigerians or Africans in general, do not call some things by their name, particularly the reproductive part of men or women or things that are generally believed to be unpleasant. The use of ‘home’ in the excerpt above is to tone down the “brusk” effect of death. This design is also found in “What Time Brought” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*) and “Washing the Dead” (*Mandela and Other Poems*), from where the following excerpts are drawn respectively:

- (a)       Until all her seeds were shed  
              Had left her such a picture,  
              The bird that fluttered...
- (b)       ...Doctor in attendance, out of no  
              Morbid concern, gathered the thing  
              Between her palms, while...

The underlined expression in each of the excerpts above refers to female “reproductive eggs” and “male reproductive organ”, respectively. This is also true of the expression “trimmed my manhood” in “The Manly Rite” (*Once Again a Child*), where “manhood” is used to connote male reproductive organ.

Also, in “Between Abuse and Blow” (*Once Again a Child*) a poem in which the poet recalls the tongue lashing and smacking he often received from his parents when they were alive, there is a manifestation of that cultural mode of signification. The relevant point here is that, the poet refers to the land of the dead, or eternal resting place, to which his parents have gone, in a culturally-driven euphemistic manner:

More so as I went further  
 Away from home, I shall feel  
 Sore to the day my brother,  
 Who took after them, and I  
 Each go where they have gone.

(p. 55)

The same cultural mode of signification is also found in “My Father in His Thirties” (*Once Again a Child*), where the death of his grandmother is referred to as “taken from me” viz:

And being no longer with my grandmother,  
Taken from me at two in another place,  
 I began to have, even when in the middle  
 Of a game in those crowded compounds,  
 Full of laughter and fights,  
 A feeling of being lost in a fair.

Another significant “interlingual” lexico-semantic design (the term refers to the transference of African oral traditional speech forms to the English language. See Adejare, 1992), is that many of the titles of the poems under study are derived from the wise sayings of the people and their folktales. Examples include “Rain in a Basket”, “Urhobo Saying”, “The Birth of a Cub”, “Grass of the Earth”, “A King of Trees”, “Lions and Leopards in the Night”, and so on. All of these reflect, the cultural experiences of the poet and his traditional leaning. Hence Ifie (1994:15) asserts that Clark-Bekederemo employs “...the translation of Urhobo idioms, parables, riddles and folktales” in his poetry. Also important here is the symbolic use of animals to connote or contextualize aspects of indigenous meaning, which is a dominant lexico-semantic stylistic device employed in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry. For instance, the owl is a symbol of doom, darkness or death, in Ijaw mythology (see “Abiku” in *A Decade of Tongues*); the snakes in “The Imprisonment of Obatala” (*A Decade of Tongues*), have cosmic or ritualistic implications, as snakes and iguana belong to the water goddess in Ijaw mythology; hence some snakes and iguana are totems for its worship. Other animal symbols used in the poetry under study include: the dragon, leopard, crocodile, buffalo, bat, squirrel, cow, river bird, etc. The totality of these indigenous usages in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry results in functional and aesthetic dualism, as their meaning can only be decoded against the backdrop of the relevant linguo-cultural context. The implication of this thesis is that, Clark-Bekederemo’s poems under study draw materials from oral sources and are dependent on such sources for their proper understanding and apt and comprehensive interpretation.

Furthermore, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo has inclination for the use of indirect referring strategy and a conscious design to inject in his poems a polysemous character i.e. to open up his poems to multiplicity of interpretation that must however be socio-culturally relevant. Illustrating this practice is “A State of Siege” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), which is a satire of the activities of the Nigerian police and the unserious manner they handle the matter of state security. For instance, the expression underlined in the excerpt below gives readers the task of meaning production:

In cold blood, with the police  
 Often out of sight and hearing  
 Doing what everybody knows?

This strategy is also noticeable in,

And so, the first officer  
Of law of the land is shot  
 Dead in bed, with wife judge-  
 Superior locked up in her room.

The underlined expressions above can be interpreted through allusion to the Nigerian situation particularly the social injustice, which surround the killing/murder of Chief Bola Ige, the nation's Attorney General.

## 7. Conclusion

In this study, we have examined patterns of lexical choices and their stylistic value in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry. The study reveals that the construction of a poetry text is a linguistically conscious activity, as the author carefully chooses words from the vast range of options at his disposal, to effectively and appropriately encode the desired meaning and achieve cohesion in his texts, in relation to context of situation and textual function. As our illustrative texts reveal, this practice in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry cuts across the three distinctive phases of the poet's creative career viz: early, later, and latest.

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