

EXPLORING THE IDIOSYNCRASIES OF OKOYE IN *MEN WITHOUT EARS*

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates Okoye's idiosyncrasies in *Men without Ears* to effectively communicate important and sensitive issues in the society. These issues include political rivalry, corruption, flamboyancy, greed, relationship with other people, and so on. Ifeoma Okoye satirically exposes the ills in the society, with the aim of effecting changes. The study makes special efforts to explore the various ways in which Okoye's peculiarity in the use of language is being demonstrated in the text. These are traced in the writer's choice of words, linguistic features of grammar, semantics, lexis and rhetorical devices that have been used distinctively by Ifeoma Okoye in *Men Without Ears*. The work establishes that Okoye is mindful in her choice of words and employs precision in the use of language, is concise and humorous, which relaxes readers while consciously using linguistic and stylistic devices in order to effectively communicate her message and for aesthetic purposes as well. The study concludes that Okoye demonstrates a skilful use of language in her text.

Keynotes: *Language, Communication, Idiosyncrasies, Linguistic features, Men without Ears*

INTRODUCTION

Language which is dynamic and changes with time is a special tool for effective communication. Language can be manipulated by a writer to achieve his purpose. A writer, using his poetic license can make his work very unique, beautiful and effective while passing across his message to the audience. The use of language makes man unique and distinct from other animals and as such, man is considered a higher animal. According to Bollinger, language is a "tradition", a way of identification and *expression of one's fastidiousness, elegance and imaginativeness* (3). This definition identifies the communicative function of language, as well as the writer's unique features or idiosyncrasies. This is reflective in his in his choice of words, "fastidiousness and elegance".

Ifoema Okoye, a great feminist writer (though not a radical one) writes to effect changes in the society. This text, *Men Without Ears*, is comical and also satirical in nature. Okoye consciously and carefully uses words to expose the social ills prevalent in our society in a bit to correct them. The language in this text is generally simple and easy to understand. Okoye uses her novel to express hatred, irritation and despair over the corrupt activities that have become prevalent features in the society. This is depicted in her careful choice of words throughout the text. The novel shows misplaced priorities of different characters or people in a society. Uloko Adaba, for instance is seen as a person living in pretentious wealth and moral decadence. Ifeoma Okoye casts a satiric eye on Nigerians to express her displeasure at the people of little substance who show off in flamboyant attires, though their wealth is from dubious and suspicious sources.

Analysis

Sentence Types

Okoye uses different types of sentences in her text, *Men Without Ears*. This combination adds to the beauty of the text. Examples of these sentences are:

- **Periodic Sentences**

Periodic sentences present the main idea(s) at the end of the sentence. This helps in creating suspense. Okoye tries to create suspense as a means of passing across her message. Examples of periodic sentences in the text are:

Boiling with rage, I found a quiet corner in which to nurse my anger. (2)

I realized with regret that Uloko had been too busy to take good care of father... (33).

The significance of the periodic sentence in Okoye's text is that it sustains readership and it creates suspense in the mind of the reader and to sustain and retain readership.

- **Loose sentences:**

Loose sentences on the other hand present the main idea(s) in a text at the beginning of the sentence. Okoye uses loose sentences alongside periodic sentences for effectiveness and also to create balance. Examples from the text include:

Depositing my luggage ... in front of me. (2)

Everybody is making as much money as he can these days... (12).

A loose sentence structure is "natural" in that it makes things easy for the reader, by reducing the amount of syntactic information that has to be stored in decoding.

Okoye's use of both the periodic and the loose sentence structures in the text helps in achieving directness, simplicity and rhetorical effect.

Sentence Structure Analysis

Sentence structure is very vital in any given text. The way or manner in which a writer uses his sentences contributes to how effective his text will be. A writer will achieve maximum effectiveness in communicating his message to his audience if he uses sentences well. The use of too many long sentences in a text may hinder the effective comprehension of the readers, and Okoye tries to avoid that.

- **Simple Sentence**

A simple sentence is one that contains a subject (S) and a predicate (P), with or without a complement (C). It basically contains one main idea. It shows the relationship between the subject and the action of the structure. A simple sentence hits on points directly. An Example from the text is:

S	P	C
//Anny's father /	laughed /	without humour //

(162)

The stylistic implication simple sentences are presenting a thought that is easy flowing as such. This has a positive effect on the reader because it gets the reader to concentrate his thought on one simple idea. Simple sentences present ideas clearly and easily understood as primarily, they convey but a simple meaning at a time.

- **Compound Sentence**

It is a type of sentence that contains two main ideas, joined by a co-ordinating conjunction. Okoye uses simple compound sentences for clarity in her text.

Example:

Main idea

Conj.

Main idea

//Uloko has come to the land of people without ears/ and /is bent on cutting off his ears too// (49)

Compound sentence offers the reader two distinct ideas, each of the ideas is important enough to be stated in an independent sentence; but to imply through the structure of the sentence, that they make a logical unit. Okoye uses compound sentences to bring units of actions and ideas of equal status to form forceful meanings. For effective communication, she brings together a string of ideas, that if separated will lose the desired input.

- **Complex sentence**

A complex sentence consists of one main independent clause and one or more dependent clause(s). Okoye uses complex sentences in this text that are simple and easy to understand.

An example is:

Main clause

dependent clause

//I had only read three letters,/ when...people began to rush//. (5)

Okoye uses complex sentences to present ideas in their order of importance. This is vital because there are intricacies of thought and nuances of meaning that cannot be expressed in either simple or compound sentence.

- **Compound-Complex Sentence**

It is a type of sentence that contains two main ideas or independent clauses with one or more dependent ones. It is worthy of note that Okoye tries to avoid such sentences in order to maintain simplicity and unambiguity in her sentences. Okoye uses simple and straight forward sentences in order to

effectively pass across her message in a subtle but striking and simple manner.

Okoye's Linguistic Peculiarities

Diction and Register

Okoye's choice of words in this text is quiet simple and easy to understand. This makes her work straightforward and quite unambiguous. Examples of the words she uses are: contentment (1), depositing (2), shuttle (9), mercenary (28), and so on. She also uses compound words like well-dressed (5), gentle-man (5) and so on. These compound words are very familiar words and easy to understand within her context of usages.

Lexico -Semantic Analysis

Words are very vital in any written text. The choice of words of a writer determines the beauty and effectiveness of his message to the audience. A text with simple diction is more understood than one with a complicated diction. In this analysis, attention is given to meaning(s) generated by the lexical items (words). She draws richly from a wide range of registers, some of which are:

(i)Language associated with politics: Obi (9), government (29), Igwe(37), chief(56)

(ii)Language associated with Agriculture: Manufacturer, exporter/importer (56)

(iii)Language associated with Business: Business(9), contractor, supplier, distributor (56)

(v)Language associated with Transport: Luggage(2) Airport (16), lounge(5), driver (31)

All these examples portray the fact that Okoye tries to use simple diction and words that are very appropriate to the setting, background and situations in the text.

Nigerianisms

These are colloquial words and phrases used in the Nigerian context. Examples are: god-fatherism (90), which means a political sponsor, palm-greasing (90), meaning bribery, you can have it on me (8), meaning I'll pay the bills, and so on. These Nigerianisms add colour and Africanise the text. Okoye uses Nigerianisms in this text bearing in mind that most of her African audience, especially Nigerian audience share common knowledge of these expressions or could easily decode their meanings as used in each context. This brings out the "Nigerianness" of the text.

Code-mixing/code-switching

Okoye uses a combination of words and phrases that reflect the three major languages in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). This Africanises adds flavour and aesthetics to the text and helps to maintain the African or natural flavours of these words by not translating them into English language. Her effort could also be seen as sending home a message of unity of this great nation, to her audience. Examples of such words are: Agbada (10), buba (20), Igwe (37) suya, moi-moi, foo-foo (87), and so on. The mixing of codes by Okoye makes her writing "natural" and typical of a Nigerian society.

Use of pidgin: Okoye uses pidgin as a low variety in the text. Examples are seen used by the man at the airport who wanted to help Uloko get a quick pass: You dey travel, sir? I fit help you get one, sir (2), among many others. The use of pidgin in

the text shows the linguistic gap between the characters. This variety is spoken by people of low social status in the text. This shows character-code concordance (agreement) among Okoye's characters because the status of all her characters tallies with the language variety they speak.

Collocations

This is the combination of words in a language that are often used together. Okoye juxtaposes two contrasting words side by side in her text for emphasis. This placement of two opposite words side-by side is called Oxymoron in Literature. Examples from the text are:

Thrive on disorderliness (1), Ill at ease (1), I cried with joy (10), gorgeously over-dressed (24), Laugh without humour (162), Overwhelmed with guilt (164), among others. Okoye consciously uses these words and phrases to satirize and draw the attention of the readers to the flamboyancy (gorgeously over-dressed) of the people and how they glory in "anomalies" and "vain things" in the society, in a bid to correct them.

Use of Italics

Okoye deliberately italicises certain words in a bit to lay emphasis on them. I see this as of linguistic interest or value. All words that are not English words for example *Igwe*, *obi*, *Agbada*, *buba*, *moi-moi* and so on are italicised. Other examples are: "without money, you are *nothing*" (43), I could not imagine *myself* enjoying such a room with a heavy loan on my shoulders (97), among others. Okoye uses italics on certain words to lay emphasis like in the first example above. People, in the society she presents are seen as "worthless and common" without money which leads them into a mad rush;

using dubious means to become rich or to be seen as rich. Okoye frowns at this character and tries to correct the notion that money is "everything" in life.

Figurative Language Analysis/Okoyes Literary Peculiarities Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are very vital in writings. They add beauty to writings. According to Kennedy & Dana (814): "A speaker uses such for freshness or emphasis. He departs or deviates from the usual denotation of words... they often state truth that more literal language cannot communicate; they call attention to such truth, they lend them emphasis". Some figures of speech used in the text are:

- **Repetitions**

Titles were repeated on several occasions for emphasis and attention is usually drawn to the repeated words or phrases. Titles like Orimili, Osisinaami ego and so on are repeated. Epithets or slogans for names are also repeated for example: Young millionaire, Money maker, Ichie gold, Swiss bank, Cash madam, Bank, Madam true money and so on. Okoye repeats all these in order to emphasize on the extravagant life of her characters and the quest to be known and reckoned with by all means, in the society.

- **Exaggeration**

Okoye makes use of this throughout her text. Examples: long gold chain with pendant as large as a saucer (10), Titles of the characters like Uloko (the sea that never dries), Aka-ji-Aku (the hand that makes money) and so on. Young millionaire also told Chigo that: "a Professor's monthly salary is less than what I give my wife for chop money" (56). This is a deliberate exaggeration because he is not a rich man but tries to "show-

off" as one. Okoye uses such examples and many others to satirize the fake lives of her characters in a bid to portray themselves as wealthy people.

Symbols: A symbol suggests more than its literal meaning. Kennedy & Dana(955-56) say:

"A symbol is a visible object or action that suggests some further memory in addition to itself.... symbols ...have no conventional long-established meaning, but particular meanings of their own. Symbols generally do not "stand for" any one meaning, not for anything absolutely definite; they point, they hint, or, as Henry James puts it, they cast long shadows" (251).

Examples from the text include: hat with feathers (38) (for an Igwe), long gold chains, glittering rings, lace agbada among others symbolize a wealthy person.

Tone

Kennedy and Dana say:

"To understand the tone of a story, then is to understand some attitude more fundamental to the story than whatever attitude the characters explicitly declare....The tone of a story like a tone of voice, may convey not simply one attitude, but a medley...often the tone of a literary story will be too rich and completed to sum up in one or two words The tone could be sarcastic, humorous, happy, ironic and so on" (171).

The tone in *Men Without Ears* is mixed. The tone in the text expresses sadness in some aspects especially when Uloko's father dies, enthusiasm, pride and so on. The tone is also comical. Okoye combines all these tones in a bid to subtly but firmly pass her message across. This blend of tones is quite commendable.

Feminism

In presenting the realities of the society, Okoye presents gender issues in a special way. Okoye subtly creates situations that depict the female counterparts as oppressed by the males. Her stand on feminism acknowledges the family life as important and brings out the relevance of a woman in every home. She presents a society where women virtually have no say in their homes. This makes them "voiceless or silent" to a large extent. Anny, Uloko's wife says: " He doesn't listen to me when I try to restrain him from doing something I believe will harm his health".(53) 'I've talked to Uloko several times about the way he spends money but he won't listen to me ... he threatened to send me back to my parents if I would not let him live his life'(98). Uloko also snapped at her when she tries to give him an advice, "who asked for your advice?"

Anny desires to further her studies but her marriage to Uloko serves as an impediment to achieving this ambition because he believes she will become "too big-headed" for him to control if she goes to a university. Such statements and treatments portray the issue of male dominance or superiority. Okoye tries to correct the notion that women are "second class citizens" to be trampled upon. Women are indispensable parts of men in the society.

Okoye uses language in a Prophetic way

This could be seen in the words of Chigo (43) and Uloko's father (49), prophesying that the road he is taking will surely lead to his destruction. These statements came to pass in his lifetime and Okoye tries to convey the message that a simple lifestyle should be cherished above ostentatious living which leads to destruction.

Epithets/ aliases for names

In this text, the characters make people know who or what they are by adding the name of their profession before their names. Examples are:

Mr. Engineer Akah (4)

Uloko is addressed as "orimili" meaning the sea that never dries (21).

"Akaji- Aku" meaning the hand that makes money (21).

Uloko insists on addressing his brother as, accountant Chigo Adaba (22).

Others are: Young millionaire, money maker, Ichie gold, Swiss bank, Cash Madam, Madam, Madam True money, Bank (24)

This also shows that women were not left behind in this crazy quest for money making and "prestige".

Young Millionaire introduces himself as: Chief Alike Otaka, alias young millionaire- exporter/importer, manufacturer's Representative, Building and civil Contractor, clearer, Forwarder, general supplier, Bee and Soft drink distributor (56). All these aliases for names and epithets are deliberate attempts by Okoyeto expose the quest by the characters to be known as "big men" and not ordinary men since they see the title, "Mr." as that of ordinary men. Okoye satirizes this and hopes to evoke change in the society.

Humour

Okoye, even though presenting sensitive and serious issues decides to use humour in her text to satirize. Examples of humorous statements are:

"Those men and women who wore headgear fought tooth and nail with the wind for their possession (5)

"...long gold chain with a pendant as large as a saucer... (12)

The Igwe "wore a hat with a brim as wide as a canopy... (38).

Even though trying to be comical, Okoye presents sensitive issues of flamboyancy, extravagant living and pride in her characters and tries to effect change in the society. She presents serious issues in comical ways but still passes her message across. This is commendable as morals and values get into the sub-consciousness of readers (in a lighter mood).

Proverbs

Okoye uses translated local proverbs which add flavour and depicts the African culture in her text (even though she translates them into English). They are common features of the Nigerian society especially the Igbo society. Example: Our elders say that a fly who refuses to heed advice follows a corpse to the grave (115). This proverb is prophetic of Uloko's life. He hardened his heart against corrections from his father and brother which led to regrets and his untimely death. Another example is "A toad does not run in the day time for nothing" (122), and so on. It is worthy of note that all her proverbs are appropriately used and fit all the situations in the text.

Use of idioms

Okoye uses quite a number of idioms in her text. These idioms are drawn from her local environment but translated into English language to cater for a wider range of audience.

Examples of idioms in the text are: I felt ill at ease as I pushed my way through the chaos (1), I was beside myself with joy (3), Boiling with rage, I found a cute corner in which to nurse my anger (2) and so on. The use of idioms in this text adds to its beauty and richness.

Metaphoric language use

The entire text is full of metaphors. The title of the text itself is metaphoric and proverbial. *Men Without Ears* means *Stubborn Men* and not the literal meaning that they have no ears. The title of the text is a direct translation of an Igbo saying. We see a striking use of metaphors in Okoye's *Men without Ears* which is deliberately employed to emphasize the themes of corruption and egotism that permeate the text. Metaphors evoke mental pictures in the mind of the reader, making him perceive the persons and things described in a clearer light. Okoye uses a lot of metaphors which evoke clearer pictures of the level of moral decadence and quest of the people to make money by all means including using dubious means of getting money. Other examples of metaphors are: "Lagos airport was pandemonium" (1), Uloko thundered (4), Lagos Airport is a madhouse (10), Her wings must be clipped. (44), Shopping is hell for me. (113), Among others.

Narrative Technique

Okoye uses the first person narrative technique in this text. She deviates from the 'crowd' by adopting the first person point of view instead of the third person or omniscient point of view, which many authors seem to adopt. This kind of narrative technique draws the reader closer to the realities in the text. This is because this narrative technique makes the text easier to read and comprehend. It also has the advantage of giving the readers first-hand information because the narrator is part of the characters in the text. A limitation of this narrative technique is that it provides a 'one-sided' or 'one-angled' information to the readers unlike the omniscient point of view that tells the story from all angles and also reveals the thoughts of the readers.

Language of Communication

Okoye uses the English language instead of her native language or any other language to write her text. This is of great advantage because it meets a wider audience, not just in Nigeria where English is our official language but also a language used in many parts of the world. This makes her text easier to study and covers a wide range of audience.

CONCLUSION

The features of this unique text include a generally simplified diction, use of proverbs, a diversified register, figurative language use, loose and periodic sentences, compound and complex sentence types, among others. Language is very dynamic and definitely, no two individuals can use language in exactly the same way. Their language use must differ in one way or the other. Since language is a medium of communicating thoughts and ideas, it must be simple enough and straightforward so that the reader can comprehend the message the writer is trying to pass across. This makes the work simple to understand. Okoye's careful choice of words reveals that bribery, corruption, moral decadence and desperation to get wealthy are the orders of the day in the society she portrays. This is as a result of the craving for wealth and flamboyant living of men and women in the text.

Okoye's linguistic and stylistic peculiarities in *Men Without Ears* are interesting and original. Even though this is not an exhaustive investigation into the text, this study has been able to investigate some linguistic, and stylistic features which are original and worthy of note in the text. In some instances, she uses nigerianisms, proverbs, colloquial words and phrases and so on. All these combine to give the text a unique "flavour" that is peculiar in a way to *Men Without Ears*.

All the constituent parts of her paragraphs harmoniously contribute to achieving the intended effects. She gives her sentences a rhythm that cooperates and intensifies the feeling and messages she is trying to produce. Her diction reveals careful and apt selections of emotive and humorous words which the researcher believes is a technique by the writer to appeal to his readers. All these combine to give her unique idiosyncrasies worth studying.

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