
DISCOURSE TECHNIQUES IN ASIKA EMMANUEL IKECHUKWU'S OMEILE

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ABSTRACT

The use of language has remained a very important issue in the analysis of any discourse. Discourse here involves language plus context according to some discourse analysts. It looks at how language can be used to achieve objective aims in human development. This paper focuses on the discourse techniques evident in *Omeile*, a poetic piece put together by Asika, Emmanuel Ikechukwu. It explores his mastery and poetic use of some language features in his poem. This paper focuses mainly on his creative blend of African proverbs in the lines of his poetry, it looks at his conscious use of code mixing to convey the desired ideas, and it looks at his diction and placement of words that stands him out as a descriptive writer. Finally we shall journey through his use of figures of speech, placed strategically to travel through the mind and thinking of a man really caught in chains and captivity of civilization. Our most important aim in this discourse analysis is the discourse techniques employed by the poet, to present to us this poetic ballad of an uncivilized man.

What Is Language

Ofoegbu (2008:1) defines Language as the human system of communication. "It is a means by which humans alone communicate" (1). Language is man and man is language. Man uses language for his everyday interaction. Sapir on the other hand, says "language is but a garment" of thought which should be "jogging along with it, hand in hand (15)"

What Is Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is that branch of linguistics which deals with the application of approaches to analyze written, spoken or sign language. Discourse is, at the very least, language plus context (x). This assertion by Woods (2006) looks at discourse as language in use. Johnstone (2008) sees discourse as the actual instances of communicative action (2). Woods (2006) and Johnstone (2008) separate discourse from analysis. They believe that for a better understanding of the term Discourse Analysis, it was proper to separate them. The both agree that in defining discourse, analysis is brought into play. They also believe that the analysis of any discourse is in the discourse of analysis.

What Is Discourse Technique

Discourse Techniques refers to the language technique used by authors to achieve an aim in a given piece. It refers to the language habit of a writer. It looks at the use of language by a writer especially in a work of literature. This Discourse Techniques vary from author to author; writer to writer etc. Discourse Techniques has been employed by very many writers and to this end we can say that very many writers have evolved a kind of discourse techniques, used by them alone. Some Discourse analysts may call it stylistics but I have chosen to call it discourse technique. Our focus in this paper is on the discourse technique of Asika, Emmanuel Ikechukwu's *Omeile*. We shall explore his language habit in this poetic piece and see how he has used language in this work.

Discourse Techniques in *Omeile*

As mentioned earlier, discourse technique refers to the language habits of a writer in a given text. We shall see how Asika Emmanuel Ikechukwu used proverbs, code mixing, diction/placement of words and figures of speech, to pass his message in *Omeile*.

The Use of Proverbs

His use of proverbs in *Omeile* is very well woven inside *Omeile*. In as much as it is a poem that laments about the destruction of our traditional African society by civilization, he has used proverbs to warn the reader about the impending doom that awaits us, if we abandon our culture.

The mother goat knows on whose skin the drummer rattles (8)

The leopard knows in his heart whose skin adorns the shoulder of the mighty king (8)

When the sound of the tusk is heard the elephant remembers the voice of the lone brother lost (8)

These proverbs points to the warning signal that is sounded and given to Africans about the dangers of abandoning our culture in the name of civilization. There is a comparison between his use of proverbs and lament, to Ola Rotimi's the gods are not to blame and Kofi Awoonor's songs of sorrow 1 and 2 respectively. *Omeile* is mostly speaking in proverbs. This is a predominant feature in *Omeile*. These proverbs at each point in the text play a significant role.

He preaches about equality with: Then the kite will perch and so the eagle as they once did (8)

He talks about his experience in war with: The old woman never grows old in the dance she knows in her heart(9) and:Only the little bird knows the drummer that beats the drum (9)

His use of proverbs is very timely in *Omeile*. He warns as well as advices. The proverbs are mostly translated from his native language – the Igbo language. Instead of rendering them verbatim from his native language, he rather interprets them in Igbo language without losing its original Igbo flavor. He did not attempt at transliteration rather he interpreted Igbo proverbs with the English language. For example

Omeile, don't wrestle with the gods (14)

Remember it is the leaf that sweets a goat that kills it (14)

Omeile, the bush that detest the basket let it not produce mushrooms (14)

Omeile, the hen that feed should not lose its side gaze (14)

His use of proverbs sometimes flow with the lines of the poem. He structures them in such a way that one might think that they follow themselves but that is a discourse technique which he injects into the lines to captivate his readers. For example

When a hunter kills a man and kill a lion, what will he kill tomorrow (15). The going of a war, is not like its coming! (15)...like sleep that doesn't know how to dance, until they carried the music to her doorstep (15)

We can see another instance of this flow and follow up of proverbs in

The goat has eaten palm frond on my head (42)

The snake I saw on the bush path has finally turned a python (42)

The moon has appeared in the day (42)

The yam has grown tendrils from bottom (42)

... Alas water has splashed into the eyes of a cow (42)

This string of proverbs creates meaning in the poem. Not only do they create meaning they also form part of the lamentations of Omeile. The poet masterly uses these proverbs to capture the wandering attention of the reader.

Again we can find such instances in:

If a trap refuses to catch a prey may it be kind enough to return the bait (47)

If a child refuses to sleep should he also deny the mother same? (47)

When fire descends on the mother and descends on the child, the mother first removes her own fire before the child (51).

The heavy rain has beaten the guinea fowl so long it might now consider losing its spots and colour (51)

He who gathered the ants infested firewood, let him wrestle all the lizards until he defeats them (63)

Our people advice that no one should touch the lion whether he is dead or alive (63)

Without head the snake is only rope (65)

The stream never consumes a man it does not see his leg (65)

The leopard knows in his heart whose skin adorns the shoulder of the mighty king (8)

When the sound of the king's tusk is heard, the elephant remembers the voice of the lone brother lost (8)

The old woman never grows old in the dance she knows in her heart(9)

Only the little bird knows the drummer that beats the drum (9)

The use of proverbs in Omeile can be compared to Ola Rotimi's "the gods are not to blame" even when both works belong to different genres of literature. Rotimi uses his proverbs (translated without loss of flavor from Yoruba to English) to educate his readers. He blends his proverbs with the lines of his work. Asika on the other hand blends his proverbs with the lines of his poem. In some cases we find the proverbs following themselves as lines of the poem while in some cases he uses the proverbs to lament. For example: The goat has eaten palm fronds on my head (42)

The rain has beaten me, in the safety of my Obi (59)

Alas the water has splashed into the eyes of a cow (4)

This use of proverbs in Omeile are very strategic as they capture and bound the reader leaving him to wonder at the mastery of proverbs and usage of proverbs by such a young writer even in the midst of civilization, which he duly criticized in his work. His use of proverbs is not careless but timed. His works over the years have been known to be filled with proverbs but no one expected him to blend such with the lines of poetry. Omeile is a pointer to the fact that Nigerian writers are very creative especially with their environment and choice of words. Asika's discourse technique as regards the use of proverbs in the lines of a poem and as the lines of a poem are very unique as this can only be seen in Ola Rotimi's the gods are not blame, which is drama text.

The Use of Code Mixing

The use of code mixing has never been a far cry in the works of Asika, Emmanuel Ikechukwu. They are prevalent in his works and Omeile is no exception. Code mixing is the usage of two different languages in a given language discourse or a sentence string. The use of code mixing in Omeile makes the work a Nigerian creation and a master piece. The way the poet weaves his lines with his knowledge of both the English language and the Igbo language suggests that he is bilingual and proficient in the languages. Even the

title of the poem was borrowed from the Igbo language. It means someone who does great things. The use of code mixing in the poem is synonymous with the work itself. Hardly a line or lines go by without the presence of code mixing. This use of the element of code mixing gives flavor to the work and the message intended. The blend of native words from the Igbo language presents the reader with an environment of the Igbo traditional scene. We can find code mixing on almost every line in the poem, expressing specific ideas at specific times. The examples are abounding in the work.

I have palm oil smeared in Ukpaka and Mangala fish (6)
Like the memories of Omarimma, my first love (7)
Let the yokiliyo sound be heard (8)
See the little bird perching on the ngige (8)
Let me hear the voice, the uya danda (9)
We stood before the chief priest Ikenga the great (11)
Ikenga shook the oji (12)
He who wants to know all the "nso ala" (14)
When gbalagbala goes excessive it becomes madness (14)
Omeile anya saa, be careful my son (15)
I painted your eyelashes with Otangele, dark as indigo (32)
Ihe di woro ogoli was the name (32)
The great dibia reincarnated in him (39)
She wore no jigida, nothing around her jingles (41)
May Amadioha... (63)
May ngene... (63)
May ogwugwu... (63)
May omaliko... (63)
Let ulasi... (63)
It is all man for himself now, Onyenanke ya (84)

His use of code mixing in the lines of this poem is very significant. In as much as he is a descriptive writer, he has refused to describe in the afore mentioned instances rather, he falls back to code mixing as an escape hatch because he does not want to lose the Igbo flavor of his work. Code mixing and not description, will give his work the much needed flavor and tonic he believes. The way he has weaved these borrowed words, blends so much with the character of Omeile and Ikenga. Because Omeile is a traditional warrior. The poet has bestowed on him the power to code mix. Ekemma is a direct opposite of Omeile. She did not code mix rather she leans more on civilization.

The poet's use of code mixing as a means of expression points to the fact that indeed Omeile is a warrior caught in chains of civilization and his mastery blend of it points to the fact that Omeile is a poetic ballad. It is a free verse poem but it is caught in the chains of code mixing as a means of expression, another discourse technique employed by the poet to captivate his audience. This discourse technique may not be peculiar to him alone but we cannot deny the fact that his usage of them in the lines of the poem was a means of expression by first the poet and then Omeile himself; a means by which so many is said with a single expression. Just like the poet affirmed in line 13, page 84, it is all man for himself now, Onyenanke ya (84) so also it is all man for his discourse technique. Finally, it can be concluded that code mixing is the very foundation of Omeile. The names of the

principal actors Omeile and Ekemma were also borrowed from the Igbo language. It is not out of place to say that the poet would have gone for western names but chose instead to remain African. Just like Kofi Awoonor in his "songs of sorrow I and 2", Asika Emmanuel Ikechukwu used African names and scenes, refusing to go western. The both poems criticized the destruction of the traditional African society by civilization. Both poems were built on code mixing.

Diction and Placement of Words

Diction and placement of words are two key areas of Omeile. In fact they make the work stand out. Diction refers to a writer's choice of words while placement of words refers to the way a writer arranges his words. The diction of Asika Emmanuel Ikechukwu's Omeile is multidimensional. First of all we can find the use of biblical passages as a style of writing in Omeile. This is evidenced in: Land, fame, vanities, things of the world. It was there before we came, they will still remain rooted to the earth years after our voices are hushed (26)

These lines take resemblance from the bible is in book of Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 2, that talks about vanity upon vanity is all vanity.

Another pointer to biblical resemblance in Omeile is seen in: No sunshine ever hurts you during the day nor the terrifying rainfall in the night (34)

These lines take resemblance of the biblical Psalm 91 verse 5 and 6 that say "you need not fear any dangers at night or sudden attacks during the day; or the plagues that strikes in the dark or the evils that kills in daylight."

Another evidence of biblical elements in Omeile is seen in:

Let this hour be his last, let no breathe come again from his lungs, let him be cursed and blinded to death, let him drink from the cup of their vengeance, let him die the death of a coward (57)

The above lines were taken from Psalm 109 verse 6 to 20. The resemblance of these lines and the ones found in the above mentioned Psalm 109, are no different. Again the poet has imported biblical passages to form part of his diction in Omeile. Though this unique feature is not dominant in Omeile, but their usage are timely and adds flavor to the lines. It may escape the eyes of an ordinary reader or one who is not versed with the bible, but it is worthy to note here that it will not escape the eyes of a discourse analyst because these are common and popular passages in the bible.

The choice of words in Omeile, falls under the simple and everyday vocabulary. The use of the Nigerian version of the English language is predominant. The poet in his usual manner of writing has avoided the use of high sounding and jaw breaking grammars. He prefers to go with the simple and everyday vocabulary, blending it with proverbs and code mixing and in some cases he employs description to drive home his point. At best the poet can be seen as a descriptive writer that paints pictures of people, places, events, and situations etc in the minds of his audience. His mastery use of proverbs and code mixing makes it a lot easier to read the poem. His injection of these two predominant elements lends credence to the fact that his discourse technique is shared by only him and his careful introduction of biblical passages at strategic lines proves that his discourse technique is multidimensional. His placement of words cannot be overlooked in Omeile. This placement of words is done in such a way that meaning is not lost and the flavor

with which Omeile is cooked is not lost too. The placement of words remains ones of the high points in Omeile. For examples

Ikenga stood before me, eyeball to eyeball we look (13)

When gabalagbala goes excessive, it becomes madness (14)

Red oil of blood (15)

But the precious liquids from the eyes of my goddess (28)

Six years I toiled for Ekemma, another six years went by, what long years to acquire the secret (44)

Ekemma now fries her hair with oil inside an oven (46)

They were offering burnt offerings with sticks, as they chew the sticks and pour out smokes from mouths, noses and ears (56)

May your soul rest in pieces (57)

Like huge beaten dogs they are (59)

His placement of words in Omeile follows a pattern of description. In his attempt to describe, he puts certain words side by side thereby creating meaningful pictures in the minds of his readers. The poet as mentioned earlier is a descriptive writer and he in this work has lived up to that reputation. This is evidenced in page 19 lines 12 to 22. His descriptive attitude was visible in page 20 lines 8 to 17. Again the poet described an after war environment on page 23, lines 1 to 25. Page 25 lines 5 to 15 points to the poet's descriptive habit. In page 31, lines 3 to 18, describe Ekemma in Omeile. He continues with this description of Ekemma on page 33, lines 1 to 17.

The poet's love for description was well witnessed on page 37 lines 2 to 26. The rot of civilization was described on page 55 lines 1 to 17. We can go on and on and on to point evidences of the poet's descriptive habits but the issue here is that the poet has also built the entirety of his work on description. Something he did with the aid of proverbs, code mixing, diction and his placement of words. Description is the habit of Omeile, the main character and the poet, Asika Emmanuel Ikechukwu. Description has helped in adding flavor to the boiling pot of poetry christened Omeile by the master poet. Again this brings us face to face with the peculiar discourse technique employed by the poet in Omeile. Severally he has been criticized by many of his critics at being over or too descriptive. They say his description makes his works dry and boring. On the other hand we should not overlook the stylistic angle of writing. Every writer wants to create his writing style and be known for that. Asika in Omeile, is only sticking to a style of writing he has acquired, built and mastered over the years. That his discourse techniques include descriptions makes him a descriptive writer – a style that marks him out among writers in the world. Finally his diction and placement of words is quite unique in poetry. His blend of proverbs, native words from Igbo (code mixing) and blending them with descriptive words brands his style as peculiar and christians him a descriptive writer; a term that suits his discourse technique.

The Use of Figures of Speech

In poetry, figures of speech have formed the foundation of writing poetry. Over the years, it has remained the backbone of poetry. Some see it as the writer's diction but some others separate it from diction. In this paper I have looked at figures of speech, different from diction because separating them, gives more insight as to the poets discourse

technique. The predominant figure of speech here is the Rhetorical Question (RQ). The frequent use of this figure of speech points to the confusion, and disbelief in the mind of Omeile as to what civilization has wrecked in his life. The constant questions with no answers and no one to answer them (even the readers) proves that Omeile shuttles between sanity and insanity in his thinking as pointed out in the preface by the poet as Ekenweofia (3). Most of the questions were absurd and really kept the readers marveled at his level of sanity. Some other figures of speech were used but we have to point out that the predominant was the Rhetorical question which proves the mental imbalance of Omeile. We shall for the purpose of comprehension group the figures of speech.

i. Rhetorical Questions

Page	8	lines	11	and	12
Page	10	lines	9, 15	and	16
Page	14	line	19		
Page	15	line	5		
Page	19	lines	1	and	2
Page	23	line	25		
Page	26	lines	1	and	2
Page	29	line	18		
Page	32	lines	4	and	7
Page	35	lines	17	and	22
Page	44	line	11		
Page	47	lines	3, 4	and	13
Page	50	lines	12		
Page	51	lines	2		
Page	59	line	9		
Page	67	lines	1	and	2
Page	79	lines	22	and	23
Page	82	line	2,3,5,6,7,8,18,21,22, and 23		
Page	83	line	1		
Page	84	line	3		

Indeed from the above assessment Rhetorical Questions formed the greater part of his use of figures of speech.

ii. Similes

Page	11	line	9		
Page	25	line	9		
Page	26	lines	21	and	22
Page	29	lines	5, 6, 9, 10	and	11
Page	31	line	19		
Page	32	lines	24	and	25

iii. Personifications

Page	9	lines	17	to	20
Page	10	lines	25	and	26
Page	51	line	17		
Page	69	line	7	to	8

iv. Metaphors

Page	12	lines	15, 16	and	17
Page	26	line	7		
Page	28	lines	7	and	8

Other figures of speech used were Onomatopoeias on page 12 lines 19 and 22, page 56 line 21. Oxymoron was used on page 25 line 4. Hyperbole was use in Page 25 lines 5 and 6, page 35 line 19. Paradox was used in page 10. The use of figures of speech is very important in poetry. This work Omeile is leaning heavily of the use of Rhetorical Questions. These questions in as much as they form part of the poetic lines are the many unanswered questions, going through the mind of Omeile. This discourse technique is also peculiar to the poet hence we can brand it his language habit. Of course we do not expect to get answers. His fine blend of figures of speech especially with his predominant use of figures of speech raises some doubts as to the sanity of Omeile in the poem. In a nutshell, he questions civilization and its advent to the traditional African society.

CONCLUSION

We have in this paper, looked at the discourse techniques employed by Asika Emmanuel Ikechukwu in his poetic Omeile and pointed out that the use of proverbs, code mixing, diction, placement of words and figures of speech form the foundation of his language and language use. We have also pointed out peculiar language habits he employed to reach out to his audience in Omeile. This poetic ballad is the soliloquy of Omeile, talking to himself (sometimes aloud), dangling between pain, anger, joy and disbelief. This ballad takes us through a journey of a man shuttling between the boundaries of sanity and insanity. Finally, the discourse techniques used here groups this work into Nigerian literature under poetry. This is evidence in his use of language proverbs, diction, placement of words and code mixing.

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