

Stylistic Analysis of Satire in Selected Igbo Written Poems

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Introduction

Satire, which is the act of using humour or exaggeration to criticise, has always been a part of human society and literature. Although, its use is most apparent in literary works that focus on social practices, it is also present in some African literatures such as poetry. Satire in Igbo literary tradition is shaped, by the dynamics of cultural practices especially issues relating to marriage, family, social status of individuals, colonial administration and its operations in Nigeria. In fact, contemporary Igbo poets have used satire to crystallize the malaise affecting the traditional Igbo society and other issues affecting Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

Satire is a literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation and scorn. Nwoga (1971) contends that rural communities employ satire, particularly effective ways, to check the conduct of their members because of the face-to-face nature of social interactions that are typically, conducted in such places. He observes that the close-knit environments in which people live ensures that everyone knows everyone else, and no one wants to be the object of gossip or ridicule among his or her neighbours. In the opinion of Egudu (1972:78), "... the aim of satire is

always to expose an offender to shame or disgrace with a view to making him behave better.” Wehmier (2005) defines satire as a way of criticising a person, an idea, an institution in which one uses humour to show faults or weakness of something. In the context of this study, satire is the use of language devices to expose and criticise people's behaviour or vices in a piece of work. From the above definition, it can be seen that some poets employ satire as a tool for criticising a person, an idea or an institution or government humourically. Some Igbo writers have used stylistic elements such as irony, sarcasm, and ridicule among others to reflect the attitudes of people in a society. This can be seen in some Igbo poetry such as *Utara ntị*, *Uche bụ akpa*, *Akị na ụkwa* and *Ibeene*.

The concept of poetry has been defined differently among scholars. Williams, (2002) defines poetry as a form of [literature](#) that uses [aesthetic](#) and rhythmic qualities of [language](#) such as [phonaesthetics](#), [sound symbolism](#), and [metre](#) to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, the [prosaic](#) ostensible [meaning](#). It is the art of writing stories, experiences and thoughts into verse (Nwadike, 2003). Poetry is also defined as creative work characterised by artistic language, wonderfully structured, which is full of philosophical and emotional impact (Marius, 2008). Poetry provides the opportunity for poets to express their views, ideas, experiences and feelings to the readers. Nkoki (2014) explains that a poet could see what an ordinary eye cannot see and feels what an ordinary man cannot feel and thus, creates his own words and presents his feelings and experiences in a way that would arouse the feelings and emotions of the readers. A professional poet may also use the art of poetry to serve the society by putting into literary forms, the values, beliefs and feelings of the society. In the context of this study, poetry is conceived as a creative work characterised by artistic language, wonderfully structured in styles.

Style is conceived as an interpretation of the distinctive linguistic elements in writing of a text (Bloomfield, 1976). Awa (2015) contends that style refers to some or all the language behaviours of one person or group of persons, or the way language is used in a particular genre, period, school, writing or some combinations of these. In other words, stylistics explains the peculiar choices made by an individual or social group in the use of language and it examines both written and oral texts. Initially, stylistics investigated only literary texts but Brown (2005) hints that nowadays, it inquires into various kinds of text such as, recipes, novels, advertisements, films, news reports, songs, lyrics, religious and political speeches, as well as poems; which is why there are linguistic and literary stylistics. Stylistic in this study refers to methods used in interpreting distinctive satirical poems in Igbo selected poetry texts.

The stylistic analysis of written Igbo satirical poems has become needful in this study to complement other studies in the areas, which have different objectives with the present study. The study seeks to;

1. identify language devices in selected Igbo poems.
2. analyse the language devices of satires in the selected Igbo poems.
3. classify the satirical elements based on their language features

The study adopts the descriptive design. Descriptive design according to Nworgu (2015) is a design that aims at collecting data, and describing in a systematic way, the features and characteristics of a given population. The design is appropriate for this study because it is based on analysis and describing of satirical poems in selected poetries. The data for this study are drawn from four written Igbo poems.

Excerpts of stylistic elements such as metaphor, simile, and onomatopoeia, among others are fished out for analysis.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored on formalist literary theory expanded by Penn (2008). The theory is relevant to this study because its emphasis is on use of language elements in written text such as satirical elements: ridicule, hyperbole and euphemism. Since the theory also deals with the analysis of style of the text, it used in this study to group or categorize satirical elements in the four selected poems and analyse them based on the poets' styles of presenting the satire in the texts.

Data presentation and analysis

Identification of the language devices in the selected poems

a. Rhetorical question

A rhetorical question is a [figure of speech](#) in form of a [question](#) that is asked to make a point rather than to elicit an answer. Ladusaw (1980) suggests that rhetorical questions function like regular questions and invoke a set of possible answers. An example of this is stated below as extracted from *Onye Ire Abụọ*, stanza 6.

Asị asọ ụbọchị Eke,	Not ashamed to lie on Eke day
Ka ọ na-asọ ụbọchị Orie,	Talk more of respecting Orie day
Ọ ga-asọnu Nkwọ, Ka ọ bu Afor?	Will he then respect Nkwọ or Afor?

b. Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named. Richard (2012) defines onomatopoeia as the use of words that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to. Okeyika extracts an example of this, from Ego ụwa as follows:

Ná-èmè íhé ntị nùrù sùò wúrúwúrú	Doing what is it unpleasant to the ears.
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c. Idiom

An idiom is a figure of speech that is used to express a situation with ease by using expressions that are completely unrelated to the situation in question. William (2010) defines idiom as an expression whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meanings of its constituent elements. An example of this is extracted from *Onye ire abụọ* by Nwaozuzu as follows:

L ₂₀	Nkè Í kwùrù kà m tinyèrè n'àkpà púrú èpú.	<i>The one you said, I put inside a leaking bag</i>
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d. Proverb

A proverb is a simple, concrete, traditional [saying](#) that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience, often using [metaphorical](#) and [formulaic language](#). Achebe (1958) states that proverbs serve as oil with which words are eaten. Onyejekwe (2011:129) argues that proverb is metaphoric and requiring concerted thoughts but quickly adds that it

encapsulates character and wisdom. An example of this is extracted from *Onye ire abụọ* by Nwaozuzu as follows:

Ó tèélá á hụwàrà ónyé árá nà ńkírínká útē	<i>Seeing a mad man with a torn mat is no longer new</i>
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e. Simile

Simile is a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid. Egudu (1979) contends that one basic trait of simile is the abnormality or unusual nature of the likeness established between the two items being compared. It is this unusual or abnormal comparison, which helps to generate shock or surprise, and, therefore, pleasure in a poem in which simile is the basis of imagery. An example of this is extracted from *Onye ire abụọ* by Nwaozuzu as follows:

Ó mēwēlā ọnū kà íkè álǐká *He has positioned his mouth
like lizard's tail*

Analyses of the language devices in selected Igbo poems

a. Rhetorical question

Nwaozuzu (2015) in her poem *Ụmụ nnadi* in stanza I expresses rhetorical question as one of the language device in the following lines in example 1:

1. L ₃ Gínĩ ká ā nà-àkọ?	What are they talking?
L ₄ Gínĩ ká ā nà-àsị?	What are they gossiping?

In the above lines, the poet uses rhetorical question to portray bad attitude of some group of people who engage in mainly in slandering others. This group of people rather than find work to do, only gossip and lay aspersion against others. The message being communicated through this poem is that people should form the habit of engaging themselves in useful works rather than substituting time that would have been allocated to works to gossip against people.

Another example of rhetorical question is found in *Onye ire abuo* in the following lines as presented in example

2.	<p>L₇ Ónyé íré àbùó, Ì nà-égèkwá?</p> <p>L₈ Òtísàrà ényì nà ényì; Ì nà-ánúkwá?</p> <p>L₁₁ Ì bìákwa òzò?</p>	<p><i>Hypocrite, are you listening?</i></p> <p><i>Separator of friends; do you hear?</i></p> <p><i>Have you come again?</i></p>
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In the above lines, the poet uses rhetorical question to criticise the attitude of the hypocrite whom she portrays as dishonest and responsible for disunity. The point of view of the poet is that people should desist from causing disunity through lies and gossip as has become so common in our contemporary society.

In *Ala anyi a* by Ifeka, the poet uses rhetorical question in the following lines as can be observed in example 3.

3	<p>L₄ Ò bù n'úgwú?</p> <p>L₅ Ò bù n'òwúwá ányánwū?</p> <p>L₁₁ Tètára ānyī īkpē?</p>	<p>Is it in the North?</p> <p>Is it in the East?</p>
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L ₁₄ À sị ná ọ̀ bù ékpémékpé?	Judge us? They said it is religion.
L ₂₄ Ọ̀ nwùrù ànwù?	
L ₃₉ Krāīst ò kèrè ònwé yā ābūò?	Is it dead?
L ₅₅ Kà ọ̀ bù m̀mádù kà á ná-égbù?	Did Christ divide Himself into two?
L ₅₇ À nà-ètínýé yā òsè?	Is it human being that is being killed?
L ₇₅ Gíní kà ndị́ úgwú gà- émé hā?	Is it being added pepper?
L ₇₆ Hà bù ndị́ ótú Krāīst?	What will the Northerners do to them? Are they Christians?

The poet uses rhetorical question to explain the problems confronting Nigeria in general, and religious practices in particular. These problems are evident in both Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria, and include envy, violent, religious extremism and destructive attacks by different Christian denominations. One of the rhetorical questions posed by the poet to religious fanatics is whether they are fighting for a god that cannot fight for himself. The message of the poet is that Nigerians should learn religious tolerance, unity, respect for one another and proper understanding of religious teachings in order to live harmoniously with one another.

b. Onomatopoeia

Nwaozuzu (2015) in her poem *Onye ire abụọ* in stanza 1, uses onomatopoeia as one of the language features in the following lines, (see example 4 below)

4. L₂ Íré zám zàm zàm.

In line 2 in example 4, the poet uses onomatopoeia to portray the level of loquaciousness of a deceptive person, who rather than say things the way they are, uses every opportunity to convince unsuspecting ones through lies. The poet's expression is that people should be careful of liars and deceptive persons whose aims are nothing but to harm others.

In *Ego uwa* by Okeyika, the poet also used onomatopoeia in line 14 as presented in example 5.

5. L ₁₄ Ná-èmè íhé ntị nùrù sùó wúrúwúrú	doing what is it unpleasant to the ears.
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The poet in example 5 above uses sound to satirizes the evil power of money. The central message in this language expression is that money is the root of all evil hence people should be careful the way they search for it.

c. Idiom

Nwaozuzu (2015) in her poem *Onye ire abụọ* expresses idiom as one of the language features in the following lines:

L ₂₀ Nkè Í kwùrù kà m tinyèrè n'àkpà púrú èpú.	The one you said, I put inside a leaking bag
L ₂₁ Ó bù nmírí á wùnyèrè nà nàkàtà;	It is water poured into a basket;

L ₂₂ Kà á nà-àwúnyé, kà ó nà-àwùpù.	As it is being poured; it leaks.
L ₂₃ Ndí ámāghī àgáwá íwètà ìkó.	Those that do not know, go to bring cup.
L ₂₄ Ìkó nà ònwé yá pùkwàrà èpú.	And the cup itself is leaking.

The poet uses the above idioms to condemn hypocrites whose attitudes frequently cause problem in society. Such behaviour is evident in contemporary Nigerian society, especially among our politicians who often make promises they will never make effort to keep. Consequently, the poet's message is that people with such tendencies should know that the masses are aware of their lies.

Another poet Ifeka Ogochukwu in *Ala anyị a* used idiom as a satire in the following lines: See example 6 below:

L ₁ Ànyị̀ bùzị̀ ázụ̀ m̄mīrī̀ tànàhùrù̀	We have become fish lacking water
L ₂ É sēpūrū̀ ànyị̀ ọ́nú n'árá íné ānyị̀	We have been prevented from sucking our mother's breast
L ₁₇ Mà ńdí nā-ēkpē àkū́ ísị̀ n'àlà	Both those praying by knocking their heads on the ground
L ₁₈ Mà ńdí nā-ēkpē àchílị̀ ākā ēlū̀	And those praying by raising their hands
L ₁₉ Há nílḕ bùzị̀ ọ̀bàrà nà- ágụ́ hā	All are yearning for blood
L ₂₆ M̄mírī̀ ānyị̀ kà ànyị̀ jì égó ànụ̀	Our water, we now buy with our money
L ₂₇ Ónyé éjīghị̀ ēgō, àkpírī̀ ākpōō yā n̄kū̀	One without money becomes thirsty
L ₂₈ Níhìnà ànyị̀ bù ázụ̀ m̄mīrī̀ tànàhùrù̀	Because we are fish lacking water

The poet (Ifeka Ogochuwku) explores idiom in satirizing problems inherent in Nigeria in general, and religious practices in particular, pointing at the height of economic challenges and socio-religious evils bedeviling Nigeria. Using idiom, the author reflects the level of religious killings and corruption in Nigeria. Using idiom, the poet conveys the message that Nigerian political elites and

religious leaders should retrace their steps in order to revitalise the Nigerian state.

d. Proverb

Nwaozuzu (2015) in her poem, *Onye ire abụọ* expresses proverb as one of the language features in the following lines as presented in example 7.

7.	<p>L₁₈ Ó tèélá á hùwàrà ónyé árá nà nkírínká útē L₄₅ Ûfù ná-àgbá, yá nà ózú ínēkwū. L₄₆ Ánú láá táá, échí nà éché yā.</p>	<p>Seeing a mad man with a torn mat is no longer news The evil that men do lives with them. A new day brings new opportunities</p>
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The poet explores the above proverbs to satirise the hypocrites affirming that genuine people have become familiar with their awful and corny attitude. The poet's expression points that these hypocrites should change their attitude, hence, any evil they commit will definitely hurt them, (observe example 8).

Another poet Ifeka Ogochukwu in *Ala anyị a* used proverb as a satire in the following lines:

8.	<p>L₈ Ñké ȡwȡwā ānyāānwȡ jȡgbȡrȡ ùdèlè L₉ Mā sìgbȡó ñkákȡȡ ná ìsì L₄₀ Ághá ùlȡ bù ághá bȡrá ògbȡgbȡ L₄₁ Nȡhìnà ȡ gà-ázàrá ùlȡ zàrá ēzȡ (p.73)</p>	<p>That of the East is worse than vulture And more disgusting than the smell of a shrew. Home-war' is a war that came to kill Because, it will be wipe both house and compound</p>
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The poet uses the proverbs in example (7) and (8) to satirize the evils been perpetuated in both the northern and eastern parts of Nigeria. She points out that the evils perpetuated by some people in areas are very bad, because they could bring destruction to the nation.

e. Simile

Nwaozuzu (2015) in her poem, *Onye ire abȡȡ* expresses simile as one of the language features in the following lines as presented in example 9.

9. Ó mēwēlā ȡnȡ kà ìkè álȡká *He has positioned his mouth
like lizard's tail*

This language device is used by the poet to satirise the lying nature of the referent, who in the poem is perceived as a liar. The expression condemns the attitude of lying, especially when one has formed it as a habit.

Classification of satirical elements in the selected poems

Satirical elements are many, but include humour, euphemism, sarcasm, exaggeration, ridicule, and others. They are used in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice or folly in a written word or poem as in this study. In this context, satirical elements found in the selected Igbo poem are classified and analyzed as follows:

Ridicule: the act of using words, gestures, images, or other products of expression to subject someone or something to contemptuous and dismissive language or behaviour.

Nwaozuzu (2015) in her poem *Umụ Nnadi* in stanza I used ridicule as a satirical element in the following example 1:

Na-akocha; na-atucha	criticising, attacking
Ha na-akoto nwanna ha	they criticise their brother

In the above lines, the poet ridiculed people who engage in criticism, attacking and defaming of their brothers. This type of attitude is very common in our society, where people will appear as friends, but engages in character assassination at the back of the person.

Another example of ridicule is found in *Ala anyia* as presented in example 2 below:

N' ugwu, ndiyom ka e wedara n'ala	In the North women are downgraded
Ha na umuagbogho n' amaghi nwoke	They and virgins
Si na ha bu anu na-ebu apa mma	Said that they are sufferers of violence
Ekperekpe a, o bu nke umu	This religion, is it for women

nwaanyi	
Ka ha ana-erere ya ọgwu	Or are they selling its medicine
Zaa ajuju, gi na-akpukoro ha	Answer, you that take them away
Kpukoro kpugara chi gi	That take them to your God

In the above lines, the poet ridiculed the traditional practices of Islamic religion in the Northern Nigeria, where there are lots of religious excesses and intolerance. The poet did not only ridicule the attitude to forcing people into religion, but other practices that devalues the image of women as a result of religious excesses in that area. The ridicule is proper based on today's experiences in the North, where someone is considered infidel if he/she is not an Islam. This religious fundamentalism, strict and excessive practices is what has given rise to insurgency as well as Boko haram terrorism in the North.

In addition, the poet also used ridicule in Ala anyia as presented in example 3 below:

N' ọwụwa anyaanwụ!	In the East
Ha si na ha bu ndi otu Kraist	They said they are Christians
Kraist bu ntọala okwukwe ha	Christ is the foundation of their faith
Mana ndi si agburu Rom puta	But those from the Roman denomination

Sị na nke ha ka mma karịsịa	Said theirs is the best
Karịsịa n'ihì na ha bu ụzọ	The best because they are the first
Ndị si Ngland pụta nọ na mkpagbu	Those from England are in trouble
N' ọwụwa anyanwụ ala anyị a	In the Eastern part of our land
Nke mere na Nkwere	What happened in Nkwere
Na Nkwere ka e ji abali kụdaa ụlọkwa	A church was demolished at Night in Nkwere
Ụlọkwa ndị si agburu Ngland	A church from England denomination
Mana ha bụkwa otu okwukwe	But they are of the same faith
Burukwa otu ọbara	Of the same blood also
Ha na-emezi nke a	If they do this
Gịnị ka ndị ugwu ga-eme ha?	What will Northerners do to them?
Ha bụ ndị otu Kraịst? (p.74-75)	Are they Christians?

The poet in the above stanza ridiculed the attitude of Christians, especially fight among denominations. The poet particularly ridiculed Roman Catholic Church in one part, for their claim of being the foundation of Christianity in the world, and in the other side, for instituting violence against

gị.	lies await you
Ndị i kagburu n' ụka sị gị bịawa.	Those you killed through your gossips are asking you to come

In this context, the poet was referring to the level of gossiping by idle people who slander and character assassinate others. She however, used satirical hyperbole when she used an exaggerated statement that should not be conceived literary, thus: Ndị i tughuru n' asị na-eche gị. Ndị i kagburu n' ụka sị gị bịawa. From this expression, the poet implies that people can be killed through gossip or slander, while in real sense, this is only exaggerative.

Moreover, in Ala Anyia, the poet used hyperbole to express as follows in example 6:

Ma ndị na-ekpe akụ isi n' ala	those who pray by knocking their head on the ground
Ma ndi na-ekpe achịlị aka elu	And those praying by raising their hands.
Ha niile buzi ọbara na-agụ ha	All are yearning for blood

The above statement was made by the poet to express the evils been committed among both Muslims and Christians. She was emphasizing on the negative attitudes evident among these religious; and in church particularly, where people who are supposed to emulate Christ, engages in different social vices. However, the author's use of the term “ha niile buzi ọbara na-agụ ha” was exaggerative and indicative of satirical hyperbole, hence, Christians cannot be yearning for human

blood either by involving in killing of people or condoning killing.

Euphemism: This term refers to polite, indirect expressions that replace words and phrases considered harsh and impolite, or which suggest something unpleasant.

In *onye iru abụọ*, the poet used euphemism to express as follows in example 7:

Ihe e kwuru n'ụtụtụ,	What was said in the morning
Na nke chihie gbara iche.	Is different from the afternoon version
Nke mgbede dịkwa iche	That of evening is also different

Rather than using a direct term such as liars to express the attitude of the gossipers, the poet used a substituted polite terms which are devoid of harshness in the stanza above. Ordinarily, the raw and direct term for people who said different thing in the morning, afternoon and night are liars, but calling them liars is simply raw and harsh.

Summary of findings and conclusion

Summary of findings

The study has stylistically analysed satire from four selected Igbo poems - *Ụmụ nnadi'* by Nwaozuzu, *Onye ire abụọ* by Nwaozuzu, *Ego ụwa* by Okeyika and *Ala anyị a by Ifeka* Ogochukwu. Based on the analysis, the following language devices were identified in the poems: rhetorical questions, onomatopoeia, idioms, proverbs and simile.

Taking into cognizance the analyses of the language devices of satires in the selected poems, the poets use rhetorical questions to portray bad attitudes such as dishonesty, hypocrisy gossip, religious fanaticism, violence, destructive attacks by different Christian denominations, and other problems confronting Nigeria in general, and religious practices in particular. The message of the poets is that Nigerians should be tolerant, united, have respect for one another and live harmoniously with one another. The poets equally used onomatopoeia to portray the lying attitudes of some people, who rather than say things the way they are, used every opportunity to convince unsuspecting ones. The poets used idioms to condemn hypocrites whose attitudes frequently generate problems in society. The poets to satirise hypocrites also used proverbs. The poets use proverbs to satirise the evils that have been perpetuated in both the northern and eastern parts of Nigeria. The people responsible for Nigerian problems are advised to change their attitude; hence, any evil they commit will definitely hunt them.

Furthermore, satirical elements in the poems were identified, classified and explained. Ridicule, hyperbole and euphemism were three major satirical elements used in the poems. One of the poets ridiculed people who engage in criticism, attack and defame others. Satirical ridicule was also used against traditional practices of Islamic religion in the Northern Nigeria, where lots of religious excesses and intolerance are prevalent. Moreover, satirical ridicule was used on attitude of Christians, especially fight among denominations. One of the poets particularly ridiculed Roman Catholic Church in one part, for their claim of being the foundation of Christianity in the world, and in the other side, for instituting violence against Anglican Church some years ago in Nkwere. Hyperbole was used in different context of the study. One of the poets use of the term “ha niile buzi ọbara

na-agu ha” was exaggerative and indicative of satirical hyperbole, because, Christians cannot be yearning for human blood either by involving in killing of people or condoning killing. Rather than using a direct term such as liars to express the attitude of the gossipers, which was indicative of satirical euphemism. Finally, the formalist literary theory supports the analysis of the study because its position was on analysis of language elements or satirical elements as used in the study.

Conclusion

This paper has carried out a study on the stylistic analysis of satires in selected Igbo written poems. Guided by three objectives, the first identified some language devices such as rhetorical questions, onomatopoeia, idioms, proverbs and similes in the selected poems. Based on the second objectives, the study found that the poets used rhetorical questions to satirise inappropriate attitudes such as dishonesty, hypocrites, gossip, religious fanaticism, violent, destructive attacks by different Christian denominations, and other problems confronting Nigeria in general, and religious practices in particular. On classification of satirical elements, ridicule, hyperbole and euphemism were identified, classified and explained in context of the poems. From the expression of the poets, there is a serious need for Nigerians to be tolerant, united, and live harmoniously with one another.

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