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# WHAT DOES THIS TEXT MEAN? STYLISTICS AND THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION

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## **1.1 Introduction**

Meaning is the key to communication; without it, people cannot relate with one another the way they should; in other words, language would be useless without meaning. For it is meaning that we pass across every time we use language. So, in order for a speaker or writer to make sense, he must communicate a particular meaning to his listener or reader. Without meaning, there would be chaos because people would find it difficult to understand one another and, as a result, social cohesion would be impossible.

But it is not only society that would be affected; individuals within the society, too, would be affected. Someone who cannot express himself clearly cannot be successful in life, for others would not understand him and he would continually be frustrated. Even if he had lofty ideas, he would not go far in life if he cannot communicate those ideas to others clearly (Maxwell, 2010).

So, in every use of language, whether in the spoken or written form, meaning is crucial. This lecture is very much about meaning in the use of language, specifically, the English Language. In discussing the issue of stylistics and interpretation, therefore, the emphasis is on the ways in which texts, whether non-literary or literary, can be made sense of.

The discussion below is thus carried out against the background of meaning in the use of language. Since linguistics is the scientific study of language (Lyons, 1981, 2002), the discussion also includes a consideration of the role of linguistics in the study of texts. Other issues discussed in this presentation are; the meaning of meaning, a brief history of stylistics on the other, the nature of literary communication, creation of the fictional world, use of English personal pronouns in both non-literary and literary stylistics, some key concepts in literary stylistics and, finally, a sample stylistic analysis and interpretation of a poem so as to demonstrate how some of these linguistic and literary devices operate in the actual study of literary texts.

## **1.2 What does the Word *Meaning* Mean?**

The subject of meaning has been studied for centuries mainly by

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philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists and, more recently, from the latter part of the 19th century, by linguists (Palmer, 1996). But there has not yet been a satisfactory answer to the question asked above. The reason for this state of affairs is that meaning is quite a complex subject. In view of this factor, time and space will not permit me to go into a detailed discussion of it here. I shall only discuss some key issues relating to the subject.

In an attempt to answer the question, What does the word *meaning* mean? Ogden and Richards (1923, 1949) suggest sixteen meanings of the lexical item. Similarly, Akmajian, et al (2004:238) give as examples eight sentences in which the word *mean* occurs.

- a. That was no mean (insignificant) accomplishment.
- b. This will mean (result in) the end of our regime.
- c. I mean (intend) to help if I can.
- d. Keep off the Grass! This means (refers to) you.
- e. His losing his job means (implies) that he will have to look again.
- f. Lucky strike means (indicates) fine tobacco.
- g. Those clouds mean (are a sign of) rain.
- h. She doesn't mean (believe) what she said.

As can be seen from these sentences, the different uses of the word “mean” can be paraphrased by other expressions (indicated by parentheses). So, we may not use the word and still communicate a clear meaning. Also, many of the uses of “mean” given here are not relevant to the study of language. These different uses of the word do not thus tell us anything important about the meaning of the word “meaning”.

This observation hints at certain problems in ascertaining the meanings of words. For instance, words do not have a one-to-one relationship with the things they refer to (Palmer, 1996; Saeed, 2003). Furthermore, the difficulty in defining the word “meaning” is further compounded by the fact that the English Language makes provisions for saying something and meaning something else. This is usually done through the deliberate use of irony, sarcasm, euphemism and utterances usually treated under speech acts. For example, one might say, John's performance was great! when one actually means the

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opposite. Also, one might say that someone is not exactly thin to mean that the referent is fat; someone who has died could be described as having passed away, checked out, croaked, gone south or joined the Choir Invisible (Awonuga, 2009). Furthermore, if I say to someone, “It is raining”, I may not just be giving him information; I may actually be warning him not to go out, otherwise he will get wet. So, although this sentence seems to give information, it is actually a warning. That is the illocutionary act of the utterance (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Palmer, 1996; Saeed, 2003; Akmajian, et al, 2004).

Another example of someone saying something and meaning something else is provided by what is usually referred to as doublespeak. Examples of this phenomenon are to be found in politics. For instance, white politicians and other white people generally in the United States use language indirectly to insult black people and other minority groups in the country. Such white people use what has come to be known as racially coded language (The Crunk Feminist Collective, Kuo). During the campaign for election to the White House for Obama's second term in office, former Massachusetts Governor, Mitt Romney, who was the Republican candidate, once vowed to “keep America American”.

When Romney positions himself as the keeper of American identity, he is implying that others are un-American. What does it mean by implying that our first black President might be un-American? Is it to question his values, his beliefs, his policies? Perhaps it is all of those things, but to deny that this is racially coded-language is naïve at best and wilfully ignorant at worst. (The Crunk Feminist Collective, p.3)

Romney's statement is clearly racist, and it is reminiscent of KKK's slogan in the 1920s to keep un-Americans out of America. KKK is an avowed racist group in the United States.

In addition, there are many racially coded words and statements that are used widely by white people in the country. Here are some examples.

#### 1. Thug

This word originally refers to someone involved in organized crime, but it is now used to denigrate young black people, especially black

men so as to create the impression that they are violent and irrational and should not be taken seriously.

## 2. Inner City

This phrase is now used to refer to black people, especially as white people have been leaving the inner city for the suburbs so as to avoid living together with black people.

## 3. Ghetto

Black people are now referred to as ghetto to designate them as sub-human.

## 4. Oreo

This word is used to describe someone who is black on the outside and white on the inside.

## 5. Uppity

When blacks behave well, speak well, dress well, they are usually referred to as “uppity”: it is only whites that are meant to appear and do well.

## 6. You people

This is a way of talking down to black people and denying their humanity.

## 7. Shady or Sketchy.

Both terms have long referred to neighbourhoods with heavily black or brown populations, prompting the stereotype that these communities are inherently unsafe and unwelcoming because of the areas' racial make-up. The recently launched Sketch Factor app was created by an all-white team of entrepreneurs to help users avoid “sketchy” or “bad” neighbourhoods. But in reality it's a tool to enable racial profiling. (Kuo Online)

## 8. Illegal

Anything black people do is “illegal”: they are “illegal immigrants” and they engage in “illegal rioting”.

## 9. Politically correct

This phrase is used by whites to address black people (“you're being too politically correct”) when black people ask for more inclusive language.

10. I am not a racist

Many white people hide behind this statement. For when they make it, the words, attitudes or the people or groups they are connected with betray their racist tendencies.

Yet another area of difficulty in ascertaining meaning in language is changes in the meanings of words and expressions. The meanings of many English words had changed and continue to change. Just one current example will suffice here. The word *gay* originally meant “happy and full of fun: gay laughter- she felt light-hearted and gay” (Turnbull, et al, 2010). Another meaning of the word is “brightly coloured: The garden was gay with red geraniums” (Ibid). But now these two meanings of the word are regarded as being old-fashioned, and the word “gay” is now used exclusively to talk about homosexuality and homosexual relationships. Thus, we have such expressions as “his husband” and “her wife”, which were unheard of before.

In addition, another difficulty posed by the term meaning is that of listeners mishearing what the speaker has said or is saying. According to the psycholinguistic literature, word recognition is challenging because word boundaries are blurred in speech, as we speak in a rapid stream (Taylor and Taylor, 1990). Thus, if one says the following sentence:

Anna Mary candy lights since imp pulp lay things  
rapidly, one may actually be saying,

An American delights in simple play things.

Here is another example: if one says “how to wreck a nice beach” rapidly, it will sound like “how to recognize speech” (Taylor and Taylor, 1990:211-212). This phenomenon is known as slip of the ear.

Furthermore, meanings tend to vary across dialects and idiolects (Akmaijian, et al 2004:229). The same word may have different meanings in British and American English. For instance, in British English, the word *bonnet* may refer to the hood of a car, but in American English, it refers only to a type of hat. The issue is further complicated by the fact that individual speakers of the same dialect of a language do not always speak alike. In other words, there are variations in the way that individuals use language.

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In view of the difficulty in defining the word meaning, linguists now focus on the meanings of individual words. Thus, instead of asking, What does the word “meaning” mean? language scholars now ask, What does this particular word, for example, *insurmountable* mean? This paper has taken a cue from this position of linguists. Thus, I shall not discuss meaning generally in non-literary and literary texts. Rather, I shall be concerned with the ways in which we can access the meanings of individual texts. This is the reason why the first part of the title of this lecture is “What does this Text Mean?” rather than talk generally about meaning in texts. I believe that this approach will help to clarify the issues involved.

This brief discussion of meaning is meant to show how complex the subject is and to situate the discussion in this presentation properly, since the stylistic study of texts, whether non-literary or literary, is very much concerned with the pursuit of meaning.

### **1.3 A Brief History of Stylistics**

Stylistics as we know it today has its roots in rhetoric as postulated and practised by scholars in ancient times. Interest in the subject was rekindled at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Swiss linguist, Charles Bally. It developed in two directions: linguistic stylistics, which Bally himself was concerned with, and literary stylistics championed by Karl Vossler (Herteg). Bally's linguistic stylistics established “an artificial separation between oral and written and it excludes written language from the research area of stylistics” (op.cit, p.1). It also excludes literature from the domain of linguistic stylistics. Bally had followers in Charles Bruneau and Jean Marouzeau but they differed from him by including the language of literature in the research field of stylistics.

Both linguistics and literary stylistics continued to grow during the 20th century. For instance, a major work in linguistic stylistics was published in 1964 by Enkvist, Spencer and Gregory, in which style and stylistics were discussed (Crystal, 1965). Furthermore, one of the areas of study that influenced stylistics was European structuralism, which was birthed by another Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Russian Formalism (Stockwell, 2006).

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Notable scholars in the Russian Formalist School were Jakobson, Barthes, Todorov, Levi-Strauss and Culler. Although the practitioners of Russian Formalism were sarcastically labelled “formalists”, it was this school that influenced the establishment of the Prague school of Esthetics. And it has contributed immensely to modern poetics, especially in the study of metaphor, dominance, foregrounding, trope, and so on. All these terms are widely recognized as important stylistic concepts today.

Stylistics emerged as a distinct approach to the study of literary texts through the work of Spitzer (1948), Wellek and Warren (1949) and Ullmann (1946), among others (Stockwell, 2006). But it was not until the 1960s that stylistics really came to the fore. It was also around this time that stylistics and its practitioners came under attack mainly by literary critics and philosophers.

Literary critics have railed against the 'cold', 'scientific' approach used by scholars of language in their analyses of literary texts, whilst linguists have accused their literary colleagues of being too vague and subjective in the analyses they produced. (McIntyre, Web)

This disagreement was best seen in the clash between F. W. Bateson, a literary critic and Roger Fowler, a stylistician (see Fowler, 1971). The disagreement got messy when it got personalized, with Fowler asking Bateson whether he would allow his sister to marry a linguist. Stylistics was also attacked by Stanley Fish (1980) but Michael Toolan (1990) rose to its defence (see also Jensen, 2015).

Stylistics began to flourish in the 1970s and, by the early 1980s, it

... had established itself as a coherent set of practices largely based in Europe, mainly in Britain and Ireland, with strong centers in the Germanic and Scandinavian countries, representation in Spain as a major EFL destination for British teachers, with a separate tradition of *stylistique* operating in France, Italy, Greece and Turkey. Stylistics also developed where teaching links to Britain were strongest in Australian, India, Japan, and parts of Africa in the commonwealth. (Stockwell, 2006:745).

Stylistics has continued to grow and is being studied in universities around the world today, including Nigeria.

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## 1.4 The Domain of Stylistics

There are different types of stylistics: linguo-stylistics, stylistics of decoding, functional stylistics, comparative stylistics, feminist stylistics, cognitive stylistics, discourse stylistics, pedagogical stylistics, linguistic or general stylistics, literary stylistics, and so on. I have since discovered that the eclectic approach to stylistic study is the most fruitful, and it is the one I have been making use of. One reason for this is that the different approaches overlap and they can conveniently come under the umbrella of linguistic or general stylistics and literary stylistics. These two approaches make use of aspects of the other ones. Therefore, attention in this work is on both of them.

### 1.4.1 Linguistic or General Stylistics and Literary Stylistics

The best definition of linguistic stylistics, to my mind, is that given by Turner (1973:7). According to him, "... stylistics is that part of linguistics which concentrates on variation in the use of language". This definition clearly places stylistics in the field of linguistics, thus making it a definition of linguistic or general stylistics.

Now, English, like other natural languages, is made up of different varieties. The word *variety* is an umbrella or general term which has register on the one hand, and dialect and idiolect on the other as its hyponyms. In linguistics, especially in stylistics and sociolinguistics, the term register "refers to a VARIETY of LANGUAGE defined according to its use in social SITUATIONS, e.g, a register of scientific, religious, FORMAL ENGLISH". (Crystal, 2003:393). Dialect and idiolect have to do with language according to user. There are different types of dialect: regional, social, occupational, rural and urban (Crystal, 2003:136-137). In Hallidayan linguistics, dialect subdivides into field or subject matter of discourse, mode or medium of discourse and tenor or style of discourse.

In linguistic stylistics, we carry out studies of registers such as the language of religion, language of sports, language of journalism, language of politics, language of science, and so on. Each of these registers has its own distinctive linguistic characteristics. My work in this area has focused on the language of politics and, more recently, the

language of sermons (Awonuga, C. and L. Chimuanya, 2016).

In connection with dialect, we also have national varieties of English, that is, the type of English that has been domesticated in different countries; for example, American English, Scottish English, Canadian English, Indian English, South African English, Ghanaian English, Nigerian English, and so on. Each of these varieties also has its own distinguishing linguistic characteristics. It is because of the multiplicity of varieties, including dialects and idiolects that we no longer speak of English as a homogeneous language. Rather it is heterogeneous, in the sense that it is made up of many languages. This is why we now talk of “Englishes”, and not just English. It is also for this reason that the belief in homogeneous language has been described as “the fiction of homogeneity” (Lyons, 2002:24).

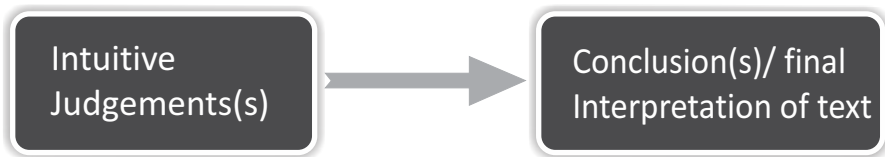
Still on dialects, it should be recalled that it was stated above that no two people speak alike and that the same person does not speak the same way all the time. The discussion so far shows that language is complex. Later in this presentation, I shall demonstrate how I have applied the tools provided by linguistics to the study of non-literary as well as literary texts.

Furthermore, there have been many definitions of literary stylistics. I cannot go through all these definitions here. But the basic issue to note is that literary stylistics has to do with the study of the language used in a literary text in an attempt to arrive at the author's intended meaning in that text. From this perspective, the following definitions are appropriate. First, according to Leech and Short (1981:15), literary stylistics is “the study of language as used in literary texts, with the aim of relating it to its artistic functions”. Second, Dita (2010:169-170) describes the subject as

... A language-centred approach [which] is necessary for the study of literature since all literature exists only in and through language. The central purpose of a linguistic analysis of a literary text is... to demonstrate both what has been communicated and how it has been communicated. Hence, a linguistic analysis that claims to explore meaning must take into account every factor contributing to meaning: organization, vocabulary, syntax, morphology,

phonology, among others.

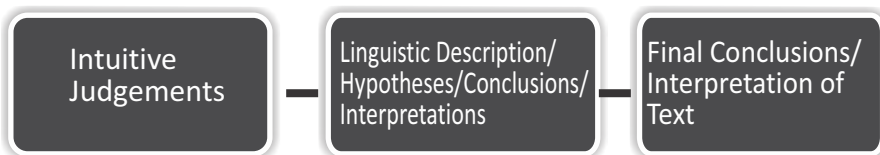
These two statements call attention to the central place of language in the analysis and interpretation of the literary text. This point is crucial for the practice of literary stylistics. What usually happens in literary criticism is that the critic goes from intuition to conclusion when analysing a text. But this is not sufficient for the proper analysis and interpretation of a literary text. For our intuitions in such a situation are not reliable. That is why the practitioners of literary stylistics have introduced and emphasized the level of linguistic description in the study of literary texts. Thus, one's initial intuitive judgements about the text are first validated by the discipline of linguistic description before one gets to one's final conclusion or conclusions on the exercise. To make this issue clearer, perhaps the following simple diagrams would be useful.



**Fig. 1: From Intuitive Judgements to Conclusions/Final Interpretation of Text**

*Source: Author*

This diagram shows that the reader goes direct from making intuitive judgements about the literary text to forming his final conclusion on the work. This way of studying a literary text is not reliable because there are no objective criteria employed in the interpretation effort. Literary stylistics fills this void with the emphasis on linguistic description, as Figure 2 below shows.



**Fig. 2: Study of the Literary Text Disciplined by the level of Linguistic Description**

*Source: Author*

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This diagram shows what happens in the analysis and interpretation of the literary text from the perspective of stylistics. The reader initially forms intuitive judgements as he reads the text. But rather than go on to the conclusion of his interpretation, he subjects his intuitive judgements to the rigour of linguistic description of the language patterns he observes in the text. And as he does this, he forms hypotheses and reaches conclusions before he comes to his final conclusion and ultimate interpretation of the text. This observation shows that the analysis and interpretation of the literary text is a process: the reader goes from one step to the other. It is for this reason that the expression, “the process of interpretation” occurs in the title of this lecture. One advantage of this phenomenon is that the reader is able to show how he has arrived at his overall interpretation of the text, and other scholars, too, are able to see how he has done this. Even if someone else does not agree with one's final interpretation of the text, he can at least see the route one has taken to get to that final point.

There is one other issue that needs to be commented upon here, and it is this. In the middle box of the diagram, we have “Linguistic Description/Hypotheses/Conclusions/Interpretations”. What this means is that during the analysis of the literary text, the reader forms hypotheses, reaches conclusions and is also in the process of interpreting the text. Thus, the reader makes assumptions about the meaning of the text and changes conclusions that he arrives at while analysing the text.

In light of the preceding discussion, Simpson's description of the way in which the stylistic analysis and interpretation of the literary text operates is germane. According to him (Simpson, 2004:2),

Stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language. The reason why language is so important to stylisticians is because the various forms, patterns and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text... while linguistic features do not of themselves constitute a text's 'meaning', an account of linguistic features nonetheless serves to ground a stylistic interpretation and to help explain why, for the analyst, certain types of meaning are possible.

This statement hints at the crucial role of the level of linguistic description in the interpretation effort: "...linguistic features... serve to ground stylistic interpretation..." In other words, the application of linguistic principles helps to put the stylistic analysis and interpretation of the literary text on a firm footing.

It can be seen from the preceding discussion that the level of linguistic description cannot be dispensed with in the study of the literary text. Without it, one's effort in interpretation would be shallow and unreliable. Also, the linguistic description of the language of the text endues one's analysis and interpretation of the literary text with objectivity. This is because linguistics is usually regarded as the scientific study of language. According to Lyons (2002:38; see also Carnie, 2002), Linguistics is a science for two main reasons. First, it

...is empirical, rather than speculative or intuitive: it operates with publicly verifiable data obtained by means of observation or experiment. To be empirical in this sense is for most people the very hallmark of science.

Second, linguistics also has, as already mentioned above, the property of objectivity. As a result, the level of linguistic description gives one's interpretation effort credibility.

One implication of the discussion in the last paragraph is that to be an efficient practitioner of stylistics, one must first be a competent linguist. A non-linguist cannot practise stylistics for, as we have seen, the level of linguistic description would be missing in his analysis, rendering his effort fruitless.

### **1.4.2 Text and Style**

I have been using the word "text" in the preceding discussion. The word also occurs in the first part of the title of this presentation. Also, the concept of style has been implied in my discussion of linguistic or general stylistics and literary stylistics. A brief comment on each of them here is in order so as to make my use of them clear. In linguistics, a text is any stretch of language that is meaningful (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Crystal, 2003). It could be a sentence, a paragraph, a page, a chapter in a book, or an entire book. The important thing about it is that it must be meaningful. Thus, a) below is a text while b) is not.

a. John goes to the office every day.

b.\* To goes the every day office John.

Each of these examples is a stretch of language, or a frame, or a string, in the sense that words are arranged in a sequential order in it. But b) is not a text because it does not make sense.

I have already commented on the subject of style, when I talked of the three parameters of language use in English: field or subject-matter of discourse, mode or medium of discourse and tenor or style of discourse. Now, style is basic to the two types of stylistics that we are interested in in this lecture: linguistic stylistics and literary stylistics. For one way in which we can define each of them is that linguistic stylistics is the study of non-literary style or style outside literature, and that literary stylistics has to do with the study of literary style. But style is notoriously difficult to define. One reason for this is that the notion is used in many disciplines such as aesthetics, linguistics, stylistics, poetics, music, architecture, arts, fashion, advertising, and so on.

For obvious reasons, I cannot go into a detailed discussion of style here. Suffice it to say that for me in this lecture, style is the technique that the writer uses to communicate his intended message to the reader. From this perspective, style and meaning are inseparable. Later in this presentation, I shall discuss the elements of style that writers engage in their works, whether non-literary or literary.

## **1.1 The Nature of Literary Communication**

The way in which a creative writer communicates his intended message to the reader is essentially different from the way in which messages are passed to listeners in day-to-day discourse situations. The creative writer has a point of view that he wishes to put across to the reader. But rather than say what he wants to say in a direct manner, he creates a fictional world which he peoples with characters who act out his point of view or the story he has created. The reason why the creative writer passes on his intended message to the reader in this indirect manner is that he is not sure about who exactly are going to read his works.

From this point of view, literature belongs to that group of written texts

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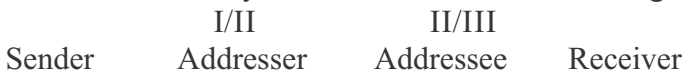
which are manifested in discourse situations where there is only one addresser but large numbers of addressees,

the vast majority of whom the writer has never met. Literature is thus a kind of discourse where the writer can assume relatively little about the receiver of his message or the context in which it will be received. (Leech and Short, 1982:258)

It is worthwhile to point out, in connection with the foregoing that a very large number of non-literary texts such as textbooks, academic journals, university handbooks and so on, have a clearly specifiable readership which is predictable in terms of the participant roles, subject-matter, etc., handled by register studies. The reader of fiction, however, is in no predictable social role, as is evident from the following statement by Widdowson (1975:51):

...a piece of literary discourse is in suspense from the usual process of social interaction whereby senders address messages directly to receivers. The literary message does not arise in the normal course of social activity as do other messages, it arises from no previous situation and requires no response, and it does not serve as a link between people or as a means of furthering the business of ordinary social life.

As a result of this factor, Widdowson distinguishes between “Sender” and “Receiver” (of a message) on the one hand, and “Addresser” and “Addressee” on the other hand. This distinction is crucial for literary stylistics for two reasons: a) it renders in linguistic terms the distinction between the real author and the implied author” which Wayne C. Booth (1961, 1983) makes, on the one hand, and that between the real reader and the “implied reader” made by Wolfgang Iser (1974, 1978) on the other. b) Widdowson's distinction is also crucial in that it effectively makes the point that the addresser and receiver of literary messages are not necessarily the same person. He thus characterizes literary communication in the following manner:

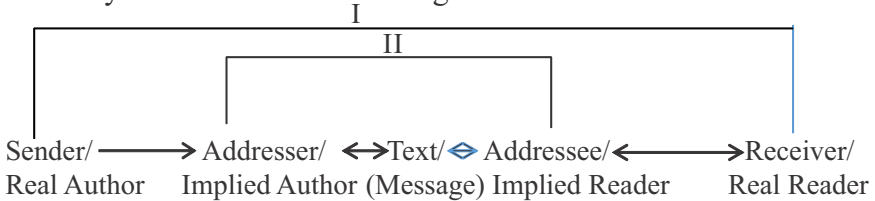


**Fig 3: Addresser – Addressee Relationship I**

Source: Widdowson, 1975:51

At one extreme is a sender who transmits a message to a receiver at the other extreme. But sandwiched between these two extremes is an addresser- who is distinct from the sender – coding a message to an addressee, who is a fourth party in the overall discourse situation. What we have in the literary discourse situation, then is a “communication situation within a communication situation” (Widdowson, 1975.50).

This way of talking about literary discourse is a very useful one indeed. For instance, novelists do not generally address their readers as real flesh – and – bone readers, since they do not know exactly who these readers are in real life. Rather, they address them as implied readers. And in order to do this, the real human author has to project a version of himself into each of his works. So, it is the implied reader that confronts the implied author in each literary text. Thus, although the real author or sender does not in most literary texts send his intended message directly to a receiver, the implied author directly sends his message to an implied reader. So, it is the implied author that shapes the frictional world, the message of the text can only be recovered from the text and not from the mind of the real author. In view of the foregoing, then, we can amend Widdowson's original representation of literary discourse in the following manner:



**Fig. 4: Addresser-Addressee Relationship II**

Source: Author

This simple diagram shows that there is a primary communication situation – marked I – and a secondary one – II. A real author has an individual view of reality which he wishes to express. But because this new reality is different from the one which he is aware of as a member of a sociological group, he projects a version of himself into the text so

as to create his own version of reality. At the other extreme is a real reader who decides for whatever reason to read a literary text. But since the text has not been prepared for him in particular, he has to achieve a rapport with it if he wants to decode its message successfully. He achieves the rapport by responding to the role mapped out for him in the text, which gives him subtle directions as to how to get to recognize the author's attitude to his subject. So, it is the implied author who directly addresses the implied reader in the text, although both the real author and the real reader constitute virtual backgrounds for the production and the reception of the literary message respectively. The arrow linking sender or real author and addresser or implied reader on the one hand and the implied author and the implied reader on the other are meant to show that the implied author and the implied reader are projected versions of the real author and the real reader respectively. The two-headed arrow connecting the addresser or implied author and the addressee or implied reader to the text is meant to show the close relationship that exists between each of the two concepts and the text, and between the two concepts themselves.

## **1.6 Basic Characteristics of the Language of Poetry**

It was stated above that literary communication is different from communication in non-literary situations, the difference being that the real author does not directly address the real reader as we have in face-to-face interaction. This observation gives rise to the nature of the situation which we have manifested in a literary text and of how this situation relates to the situation outside the text.

### **1.6.1 Context of Situation and Implied Context of Situation.**

To start with, there is the general situation in which the text has been produced. This is the situation outside the text – the social environment in which the text has been produced. It is also known as the given situation. But this situation, as it is, is not of any particular interest to a literary text, especially poetry, the main reason being that

poetry is virtually free from the contextual constraints which determine other, non-literary uses of language.

So, the poet has to create a situation within each of his poems in order to facilitate the development of his subject-matter. This situation, or sequence of situations is constructed within the poem through what are known as implication of context. (Leech, 1969)

### **1.6.2 Creation of the Fictional World**

Now, there are certain linguistic devices employed for the creation of the world within the literary text. As stated above, there are two types of situation in literary texts, especially poetry texts. These are: the context of situation and the implied context of situation that the world within the text is created. The creation of this world is typically carried out by means of certain linguistic markers, principally personal pronouns, demonstratives, and so on. But before I go on to discuss the uses of personal pronouns in literary texts, I would like to examine the nature of these pronouns and the ways in which they function in day-to-day interaction.

### **1.7 The Personal Pronouns in Contemporary Modern English**

The English personal pronouns belong to the broad class of pronouns which is made up of a closed set of items in the grammatical classification of words (Crystal, 2003). The personal pronouns take different forms “according to number, person, case and natural gender (Wikipedia). The following discussion on personal pronouns is based on my work (Awonuga, 2013), which was presented at a departmental seminar.

		Singular					Plural				
		Sub ject	Ob ject	Posse sive Deter miner	Posse sive Pron oun	Reflexive	Sub ject	Object	Posse sive Deter miner	Posse sive Pron oun	Reflexive
First		I	me	my	mine	myself	we	us	our	ours	ourselves
Second		you	you	your	yours	your self	you	you	your	yours	yourselves
Third	masc uline	he	him	His		himself	they	them	their	theirs	themselves
Third	femi nine	she	her		hers	herself					
Third	Neuter	it	its	-	itself						

### Personal Pronouns in Standard Contemporary Modern English

Source: Wikipedia

This table contains a classification of the basic personal pronouns in contemporary modern English. Although the table is self-explanatory, it is still important for me to make some comments about the way that some of the pronouns are used. First, these pronouns do not include other types of pronouns used in contemporary modern English, such as interrogative relative pronouns, for example, *who which, what*; demonstrative pronouns, for example, *himself, herself, themselves*; and indefinite pronouns- *one, anyone, nobody* (ibid).

Crystal also identifies “resumptive or shadow pronouns” and “lazy pronouns” (ibid). An example of a shadow pronoun is him in John, I like him. The term “lazy pronoun” or “pronoun of laziness”, is usually used in grammar and semantics to describe informal use of language in which there is no precise “match between a pronoun and its antecedent” (Crystal, 2003:261). The following sentences illustrate the point being made here clearly.

1. Janet wears her hat every day of the week.
2. Bola wears it only on Sundays.

The possessive pronoun *hers* should have occurred in the place of “it” in the second sentence. The way that latter sentence is, “it” would be assumed to be referring back to Janet's hat, which it is definitely not doing. So, “it” in the second sentence is a lazy pronoun.

The second issue in the way that English pronouns are used is that the personal pronouns contained in the table above are those that occur in standard contemporary modern English. Clearly distinguished from this category of personal pronouns are archaic forms and sub-standard forms. Examples of archaic forms are *thou, thee, thine, ye* and *thysself*. There are such sub-standard forms as *y'all, youse, 'em*, and so on (Wikipedia). Third, the reflexive form *myself* is also sometimes used to perform a non-reflexive function; for example, in the sentence, “This book was written by Professor Adebayo and myself” (Quirk, et al, 2008: 355-361), although some scholars advise against the use of reflexive pronouns in this way. But reflexive pronouns can also be used as intensifiers, as in “Bola made the dress herself”. There is also the use of “the so-called royal first-person pronoun” (Lyons, 2002: 157-158), *we*, which collates with *oursself*, as in “We have enjoyed ourself”. This utterance contrasts with “We have enjoyed ourselves” and “I have enjoyed myself”.

### **1.7.1 A Brief Historical Background**

In view of my use of the expression, “contemporary modern English” and the reference to archaic forms of English personal pronouns, it is important for me to put the use of personal pronouns in present-day English within the historical perspective. According to Singh (2005:84), the standard modern English personal pronouns have preserved, to a large extent, the distinctions of case, gender and number made by Old English between 500 and 1100. Examples of these distinctions are the difference between subject and object pronouns: *I* and *me*; that between masculine, feminine and neuter in

the third person: *he, she, it*; and singular and plural forms; *I* and *we*. Middle English, from 1100-1500, continued largely to retain these distinctions. But there were differences “in the loss of the [Old English] dual forms, and the falling together of [Old English] accusative and dative third person singular forms, such as *hine* and *him...*” (Singh, 2005:119). Furthermore, the third person plural forms that we have today came from the Middle English period.

The differentiation of person, case, gender and number persisted into the Early Modern English period, that is, from 1500-1700. But there were some important changes. For instance, the second person singular and plural pronouns, *thou, thee, ye* and *you* came to be used. By 1600, *ye* was no longer used and, by the end of the seventeenth century, the use of *thou* was no longer popular (Singh, 2005-157-158). In addition, in Middle English, *my* and *thy* were used before nouns with an initial consonant, for example, “my book”, and *mine* and *thine* before nouns beginning with a vowel; for example, “thine orange”. Also, *my* and *thy* were used attributively to modify nouns, while *mine* and *thine* were used “as possessives in nominal use” (op.cit., p. 158). But even though we no longer use *thine* in contemporary modern English, we still use *my* and *mine* to mark possession; for example “This is *my* book” (attributive), “This book is *mine*” (nominal). This distinction was also true of the other possessive pronouns, except *his*, which still functions as both an attributive and a nominal.

Until the early seventeenth century, *his* continued to be used as a neuter possessive pronoun. We have examples of this use of the pronoun in Shakespeare's writings as well as in the King James Version of the Bible, which was published in 1611.

1. As whence the sun 'gins his reflection shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break; (SERGEANT, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*)
2. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. (Ecclesiastes 1:5, *King James Version* of the Bible)

The possessive neuter pronoun, *its*, which came into being during the Early Modern English period, sometime during the late sixteenth century, has now effectively replaced *his* in this context. In the seventeenth century, the reflexive pronouns, such as *myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, *herself* (singular); and *yourselves*, *ourselves*, *themselves* (plural), came into being (Singh, 2005:159).

### **1.7.2 English Personal Pronouns and Participant Roles**

This last section leads us to the description of the category of person from the perspective of participant roles. In this connection, there is the need to distinguish between the “third” person on the one hand, and the “first” and “second” person on the other (Lyons, 1968: 276-278; Lyons, 1977; Levinson, 1983; 68-73). The referents of the first and second person, or the speaker and hearer, are typically present in the communication situation; but this is not true of the referent of the third person. Sometimes, there is the need to distinguish speaker from source and addressee from target (Levinson, 1983:72). He gives the following example, “You are to fasten your seat-belts now”, said by an air-hostess to passengers on a flight. The speaker here, the air-hostess, is the speaker, but she is not the source of the instruction. Similarly, the addressee may not be the target of the utterance; for example, “Tell John to see me tomorrow”, said to Bayo. It is clear from this utterance that Bayo is not the target, or receiver, of the message; John is. This point is particularly significant for the study of literary texts, as we shall see later in this paper.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the first person plural pronoun *we* cannot properly be called the plural of *I*, in the same way that *boys* and *cows* are considered to be plural forms of *boy* and *cow*. “In other words, *we* is not the plural of *I*: rather, it includes a reference to “I” and is plural (Lyons, 1968; 227; Cretiu, 2006: 3-4). In the same vein, the second person pronoun *you* may be either singular or plural. In its plural form, it may be “inclusive”, in the sense of referring only to the addressees or hearers present in the discourse situation. In this use, it is



plural of the singular *you*, in the same way that *boys* is the plural of *boy*. It may also be “exclusive”, in the sense of referring to “some other person, or persons, in addition to the hearer, or hearers” (ibid).

In addition, personal pronouns are also used as vocatives in English. In this use, they are typically “set apart prosodically from the body of a sentence that may accompany them” (Levinson, 1983:71). There are, from this perspective, two types of vocatives: calls or summonses and addresses. Summonses tend to occur initially in utterances; for example, “Hey you, you’ve just scratched my car with your bumper” (see Levinson, op.cit., p. 71).

Addresses are parenthetical and can occur in slots that parenthetical occur; for example, “The truth is, Madam, nothing is good nowadays”(ibid., after Zwicky, 1974). While all addresses can be used as summonses, not all summonses can be used as addresses: “you” in the former example cannot occur in the position of “Madam” in the latter.

There is also the use of *they* and its derived from *them* and *their* as singular pronouns. They are used in this way to avoid disjunctive constructions such as *he* or *she*, thus producing “gender-neutral language” (Wikipedia). But *they* takes a plural verb even when used with singular meaning; for example, “if a student is in doubt, they should contact the principal”. One way of avoiding this use of *they* is to rephrase the sentence: “Any student that is in doubt should contact the principal”.

If the referent of a pronoun is an animal, traditionally, it is the neuter pronoun *it* that is used. But when the animal's sex is known, especially if the animal is a pet, *he* and *she* are typically used. Similarly, *she* is also used to refer to inanimate objects “with which humans have a close relationship, such as ships, cars and countries considered as political, rather than geographical entities” (Wikipedia; Quirk, et al, 1975, 2008: 314-318).

The use of English personal pronouns becomes even more interesting when examined from the category of case. Pronouns in English can be

subjective or nominative; that is, they function as subject in independent or dependent clauses, they may be possessive, that is, they show possession. They may also be objective, in which case they function as the object of a preposition or as the recipient of an action (Web). For instance, the first person singular pronoun, *I* is the nominative, *my* and *mine* the possessive and *me* the objective or accusative. But the picture is not as straightforward as it looks, especially when the personal pronoun occurs in the sentence in its accusative form. For example, “You and I will go” is clear enough. But then, do we say, “He told John and I” or “He told John and me”? According to Lyons (2002:521), the expressions “He told you and I” and “between you and I”, etc., are now very common in the speech of middle-class and upper-class speakers of Standard English in England... This may be true of spoken English but it has been suggested that, in writing, “between you and me” would be more appropriate (Web). In this connection, a rule has been proposed:

Ask yourself what pronoun form you would use without adding the other person—“Grandma left *me* her rocking chair” (coming up with the correct form for the indirect object)—and then, when you add the other person, *don't change the form of the pronoun*: “Grandma left *Jayden* and *me* her rocking chair” (Web).

When the pronouns *he* and *his* refer to God, they start with a capital *h*: *He*, *His*. Finally, in this section, some English personal pronouns, especially *he*, can be the source of ambiguity. For instance, it is not always easy to interpret certain personal pronouns in certain contexts, as the following sentences show:

1. He coughed when he came in.
2. John believed that he had been too rash.
3. My friend missed the train and he has just arrived.
4. He missed the train and my friend has just arrived,

In sentence (1), the second “he” may or may not be co-referential with the first “he”. On this note, the utterance is ambiguous. Similarly, the

“he” in sentence (2) may be but not necessarily co-referential with “John”, thus resulting in ambiguity. Examples (3) and (4) are provided by Lyons (2002:169).

The fact that it is not always easy to interpret certain personal pronouns in certain contexts is also supported by a joke that was common in Nigeria at one time and by a Yiddish story. Both the joke and the story are reproduced below:

A. Say “You are as fool”.

B. “You are a fool”.

A. Say “*You* are a fool”.

B. “*You* are a fool”.

A. No, say “*You*”.

B. *You*.

A. *You* are a fool, not me.

B. *You* are a fool, not me. I am saying what you asked me to say.

A. Calm down.

B. I am calm.

A. (Pointing to himself.) Say “I am a fool”.

B. You are a fool.

A. No, *you*, not me.

B. No, *you*, not me.

It goes on and on. The ambivalent nature of the personal pronouns used in this contrived dialogue allows Speaker B pretend into a misunderstand Speaker A, thus creating humour.

The second example is a Yiddish story told by Levinson (1983:68), after Rosten, (1968: 443-444).

A melamed (Hebrew teacher) discovering that he had left his comfortable slippers back in the house sent a student after them with a note for his wife. The note read: “Send me your slippers with this boy”. When the student asked why he had written “your” slippers, the melamed answered: “Yold! If I wrote” my slippers”, she would read “my” slippers and would send her slippers. What could I do with her slippers? So, I

wrote 'your' slippers. She'll read 'your' slippers and send me mine”.

Here too, we can see the ambivalent nature of the pronouns *your* and *mine*. These two stories point to the interesting ways in which English personal pronouns are used. In the next section, I shall discuss, briefly, the classification of these pronouns.

The discussion in this section has shown some of the ways in which English personal pronouns are organized and put to general use. We have also seen that the pronominal system is quite complex. In the next session, I concentrate on some of the ways in which these pronouns are used in non-literary texts.

### **1.8 The Use of English Personal Pronouns in Non-literary Texts**

I shall now demonstrate some of the ways in which English personal pronouns are used in non-literary texts. English personal pronouns also occur prominently in situations where a speaker addresses an audience, whether it is an address by a politician, especially the President of a country, or by a Member of Parliament or Congress, and so on. The studies that have been carried out so far in this respect are of address by a President to the nation or his party or at the presentation of the budget in Parliament; or by a politician; or in politics in general. In a brief analysis in a leaflet titled “Your Last Chance to Vote for a Referendum on who should Run Britain—Westminster or Brussels”, Beard (2000: 23-24) notes that “pronoun reference is always important in putting over a piece of political persuasion” (p.24). He observes that the very first linguistic item in the title 'your' which is a possessive pronoun, suggests immediately that the reader is being addressed personally and that the impression that one has is that this pronoun is not just singular, but that it is also plural, as it addresses a single reader as well as other people in Britain. Furthermore, the repeated use of “we” in the leaflet suggests “a sense of collectivity” (ibid). Later in the passage, the referent of “we” changes to the

Referendum Party urging the British people to vote for them. The possessive pronoun “our”, too, occurs four times in the extract in question, the implication of this repetition being that the situation needed to be addressed seriously by the people so as to save themselves.

Another study, (Awonuga, 2005: 111-119) examines the address to the nation by Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo on Sunday, August 25, 2002. The address was titled “Sustenance of Democracy”. He focuses attention on Obasanjo's use of personal pronouns, lexical items, metaphor, analogy, repetition and the manifestation of echoes from the Bible. This review of the broadcast concentrates on Obasanjo's use of personal pronouns, focusing on such personal pronouns as *I, me, my, we, our, us, you, your, and their*. The first three of these personal pronouns *I, me* and *my* obviously refer to Obasanjo as the speaker: *I* occurs 15 times in the speech; *me* in “Let me...” occurs 3 times, and *my* once. The other pronouns have various referents and have different patterns of occurrence; *you* occurs 6 times, *your* twice, *we* 21 times, *our* 15 times, *us* twice, *they* once, *their* 4 times and *them* once (Awonuga, 2005: III). While the referents of these pronouns are clear, there is a place in the speech where it is not easy to clearly identify the referent of *we*.

We are firmly on course, but we must remain dedicated, committed and focused.

Does “we” here refer to the government, of which the President is its highest representative? Or does it refer to all Nigerians, the primary audience of the address? (op. cit., p.113). This example, as well as the one in the last paragraph, shows that the use of personal pronouns in political rhetoric is not as straightforward as it seems.

In addition to the foregoing, Abdulahi-Idiagbon (2010: 32-49) carries out a discourse analysis of campaign speeches by three Nigerian politicians: Okhai Mike Akhigbe, Donald Duke, both members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Abubakar Atiku of the then Action Congress (AC). It was found that personal pronouns such as *I,*

*mine, we, our, ours, and yours* are used in interesting ways in the speeches of the three speakers. For instance, *we* contrasts with *I*; and the possessive pronouns *mine, yours, our* and *yours* as used by the speakers have the implication of inclusiveness, suggesting that the politicians would run inclusive governments if elected into office (Abdulahi-Idigbon, 2010:41; see also Olaniyi, 2010). The reviews carried out in the last three paragraphs have shown clearly that English personal pronouns are used in interesting ways in political rhetoric. To further drive this point home, I carry out below a stylistic analysis of two extracts from a) the “Declaration Speech” of Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan, and b) 'Remarks by the President (of the United States) in the State of the Union Address”, focusing on the use of personal pronouns in them.

### **1.8.1 The Use of Personal Pronouns in President Jonathan's “Declaration Speech”**

President Jonathan's “Declaration Speech” was delivered on September 18, 2010 after the death of President Musa Yar' Adua. Here is an extract from that speech.

I discovered that by insisting that the right things be done, we could begin a turnaround in our power sector by involving the private sector in power generation and distribution (1). As you can see from the lower quantities of diesel that you are buying today, power generation has significantly improved (2).

I have put in place new gas policies and very soon, we will be saying goodbye to gas flaring in our oil fields (3). Working with the National Assembly, we rolled out a law that requires companies operating in the oil and gas sectors of our economy to utilize an appreciable percentage of their goods and services from local sources (4). We saw to it that normalcy began to return to the Niger Delta by ensuring governments fidelity to its promises, and this has helped to stabilize our national revenue (5) (Web, p.1).

We can see from this extract that President Jonathan uses the personal pronouns *I*, *we*, and *our* in sentence (1), *you* twice in sentence (2), *I* and *you* in sentence (3), *we* and *our* in sentence (4), and *we*, *its* and *our* in the last sentence. But the same pronoun does not always mean the same thing all the time. For instance, *we* in the first sentence is definitely referring to President Jonathan's government, to the exclusion of the generality of Nigerians. It is only the people in government that “could begin a turnaround in the power sector”. But “*our*” in “*our* power sector” refers to Nigerians in general. Furthermore, “*we*” in the fourth sentence has the government as its referent, as it is only the government that could roll out a law. However, “*our*” in “*our* economy”, in the same sentence has as its referent Nigerians in general, both those within and outside the government circles. “*We*” and “*Our*” in sentence (3) also refer to the generality of Nigerians: “*we*” [all Nigerians] will be saying goodbye to gas flaring in our oil fields [the oil fields belonging to Nigeria and, therefore, Nigerians].

In sentence (5) of the extract, “*we*” refers to only those people running the affairs of the country; they “saw to it that normalcy began to return to the Niger Delta”. Nigerians outside the government lack that platform; as a result, they were not part of the success story. But in the same sentence, “*our*” in “*our* national revenue” is referring to Nigeria's national revenue and not just to the government. The neuter pronoun “*its*” is referring to the government.

In addition, the first-person pronoun “*I*” occurs twice in the extract. In both cases, it refers to the President as an individual and head of the government. So, its use here is different from its use in the non-political sphere.

### **1.8.2 The use of Personal Pronouns in President Obama's “Remarks... in the State of Union Address”**

President Barack Obama gave the State of the Union Address to the United States congress on February 12, 2013. Below is an analysis of

an extract from that speech.

Now, as we do [continue to take direct action against those terrorists who pose the gravest threat to Americans”] we must enlist ourselves in the fight (1). That's why my administration has worked tirelessly to forge a durable legal and policy framework to guide our counterterrorism efforts (2). Throughout, we have kept Congress fully informed of our efforts (3). I recognize that in our democracy, no one should take my word for it that we're doing things the right way (4). So in the months ahead, I will continue to engage Congress to ensure not only that our targeting, detention and prosecution of terrorists remains but that our efforts are even more transparent to the American people and to the world. (Applause) (5) (Web).

In sentence (1), “we” occurs twice and has the people in government as its referent. In this context, it excludes members of Congress and Americans in general. In the second sentence, “my” in “my administration” refers undoubtedly to the government, it also hints at the position of the President in that government: he is the head of the administration. This use of “my” is complemented by “our” in “our counterterrorism efforts” to reinforce the reference to the American government. So also does “we” in sentence (3). The references to the government and Congress in this sentence show that there are two tiers of government represented at the speech event in question. In sentence (4), “I” and “my” (in “my word”) refer to the President both as an individual and as the head of the administration, thus complementing the use of “my” in sentence (2). The pronouns “our” and “we” are also used in sentence (4). The use of “our” in “our democracy” is particularly interesting. While the referent of “we” is clearly the government, that of “our” is ambivalent. On the one hand, it refers to those in government but, on the other hand, its referent includes the members of Congress and the American people as a whole.



In addition, the first-person pronoun “I” in sentence (5) complements “my” in the second sentence and 'I' in sentence (4). It, too, refers to President Obama as an individual and as the head of the American government, but more as the head of the administration. We can, for instance, insert “as the President” after “I” and it will make perfect sense; “I as the president will continue to engage Congress to ensure...” The possessive pronoun “our” occurs three times in sentence (5). In its first and third occurrences (in “our targeting, detention and prosecution...” and “our efforts” respectively), it is clearly referring to the people in government. But the second time it occurs, in “our laws and system of checks and balances”, its referents include all Americans, in the sense that the laws and system of checks and balances are those of America as a country, even though it was the government and Congress that originally put those laws and systems of checks and balances in place.

We can see from the reviews of the three studies above the stylistic analysis of the speeches by Presidents Jonathan and Obama that English personal pronouns are used in fascinating ways in speeches by politicians. The reviews and analysis also demonstrate that in political rhetoric, the relationships among the participants in the discourse situation are mediated by personal pronouns “which delineate a social or political 'space' in which people and groups have a 'position'” (Chilton and Schaffner, 1997: 216; Awonuga, 2005:III). There are two issues to be stressed at this point. The first is that personal pronouns are not the only major linguistic characteristics of the language of politics. The other characteristics are: metaphor, especially metaphors of sport and war (Awonuga, 1988, 2005, 2009; Beard, 2000; Grady, Oakley and Coulson, 1999; Lakoff, 1991, Lakoff 1995, Tsur 2002), metonymy, synecdoche, and analogy. Here, I have only concentrated on the use of personal pronouns in political rhetoric. The second issue to note here is that English personal pronouns are used in interesting ways not only in politicians' speech

but also in speeches in general. It is important to emphasize this point in view of the observation that the studies of the use of personal pronouns in non-literary texts carried out so far tend to give the impression that such pronouns are only used in political speeches. As a way of buttressing this statement, I analyse below an extract from a speech by a non-politician.

### **1.8.3 The Use of Personal Pronouns in 'I Have a Dream' by Martin Luther King, Jr**

On August 28, 1963, Dr. King, a clergyman delivered a speech that has come to be famous today. It was entitled “I Have a Dream” and delivered by the Civil Rights leader during a march on Washington, D.C. I analyze below an extract from that speech.

But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free (4). One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination (2). One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity (3). One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself on exile in his own land (4). So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition (5).

In a sense we have come to our nation's Capital to cash a check (6)...

(Copeland, et al, 1999: 751).

In sentence (1), “we” refers to the speaker and all those who had gone with him on the march on Washington, D.C., as well as other Negroes and the white supporters of the Civil Rights Movement who had not gone on the march. It can even be taken to refer to all Americans in general: every American “must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free”. This again is an ambivalent use of “we”, just as we saw

in the other texts studied above. In Sentences (2-4), the Negro is referred to in the third person (“the Negro”), the use of the definite article “the” indicating that the reference is to the typical Negro in the United States at that point in history. So, Negroes all over the country were still not free, and not just those who had participated in the march on Washington D. C. The “we” in Sentence (5) is also referring to the speaker as well as those who had marched on Washington D. C.; so also does the “we” in Sentence (6). But the referent of “our” in “our nation's Capital” in that sentence is not so clear. It definitely includes the speaker and all those at the venue of the address. But it also includes other Americans as well; for Washington D. C. is the capital of the country. Also in sentence (5), the references to the Negro in the third person are reinforced by the reflexive pronoun “himself” and the third person singular possessive pronoun “his”.

### **1.9 The Use of English Personal Pronouns in Literary Texts**

Earlier it was stated that English personal pronouns, demonstratives, and so on, are frequently used to construct the world within the literary text. Leech (1969:191) provides a list of these linguistic features and I hereby reproduce the items.

1. First and second person pronouns: *I/me/my/mine, we/us/our/ours, thou/thee/thy/thine, ye/you/your/yours.*
2. Demonstratives: *this, that, yon(der).*
3. Adverbs of place: *here, there, yonder, hither, thither, hence, thence, etc.*
4. Adverbials of time: *now, then, tomorrow, yesterday, last night, next Tuesday, etc.*
5. Adverbs of manner: *thus, so.*

It is important to note that the items that Leech provides for demonstratives are examples, as as they do not include the plural forms *these* and *those*. I shall first discuss the use of personal pronouns, demonstratives and so on before going on to examine their uses in prose fictional texts.

### 1.9.1 The Use of Personal Pronouns in Poetry Texts

According to Widdowson (1993:23), “the first-and second-person pronouns (*I* and *you* identify participants and provide the necessary terminals so to speak, whereby people are connected in communicative interaction”. I shall now discuss some examples that illustrate the issues being considered here.

1. “I am the enemy you killed, my friend...” (Owen)
2. “I am not yet born, O hear me...” (MacNeice)
3. “For I am every dead thing...” (Donne)

It is very clear from these lines from poems that the first person pronoun in them cannot be referring to the senders or real life and blood authors of the poems in question: Wilfred Owen, Louis MacNeice and John Donne. Each author has created a character known as the persona or the speaker of the poem or the “I” of the poem. In the first example, the persona is a dead man, very likely a soldier; the speaker in the second example is a foetus, still in the womb. The persona in the third example is a non-existent entity. There is no way any of them could have made the statement ascribed to them. In addition, it is not only the first personal pronoun that is always not made explicit in poems. The other personal pronouns are used that way too. For example, the referent of the third person singular pronoun *he* is not stated throughout a poem by A. E. Housman titled “Eight O’Clock”. Here is the first stanza of the poem.

He stood and heard the steeple  
Sprinkle the quarters on the morning town  
One, two three, four, to market place and people  
It tossed them down. (Web)

Similarly, in Gabriel Okara’s “Once Upon a Time”, the referents of *my*, *they* and *there* are not explicit.

Once upon a time, son,  
They used to laugh with their hearts  
And laugh with their eyes  
But now they only laugh with their teeth,

While their ice-block cold eyes  
Search behind my shadow. (Web)

The reader of each of these poems needs to work his way through the texts so as to unravel the identities of those referred to by the personal pronouns made use of. The referent in the first poem is about to be hanged for a crime he has apparently committed, but he is unrepentant: he “stood and counted them and cursed his luck”. His identity is not explicit. The pronoun seems to have been used in a generic sense or as a proper noun to refer to all criminally minded and defiant people: the only thing that the person regrets is that he has been caught, the impression being that, if given the opportunity, he would repeat the crime or even commit a more serious crime. In “Once Upon a Time”, it is clear that the speaker's attitude to the referents of “they” and “their” is not positive: they used to laugh with their hearts, but now they only laugh with their eyes and teeth and their eyes are “ice-block cold eyes”, the implication being that they are not sincere. They are likely to be a group of exploiters who are taking advantage of the person referred to as “my”.

The foregoing discussion hints at an important issue in the stylistic analysis and interpretation of literary texts: when the real, flesh and blood reader identifies the hints or cues dropped by the real, flesh and blood author in the text, he is functioning as the addressee or implied reader, and it is in this role that he can re-create what the author-as-person has already created. This means that the reader of a literary text is not meant to be passive; he must be creatively involved with the text if he wants to get the most of the reading experience.

### **1.9.2 The Use of Personal Pronouns in Prose Fictional Texts**

English personal pronouns are also made use of prominently in prose fictional texts, that is, short stories, novellas and novels. For instance, it is very common to find in prose fictional texts examples of “the use of third person pronouns which have no antecedent reference” (Widdowson, 1975:64). Below are three such examples. Here is the first one.

This was the third nightfall since he began to look for signs of the new moon (1). He knew it would come today but he always began his watch three days early because he must not take a risk (2). In this season of the year his task was not too difficult; he did not have to peer and search the sky as he might do when the rains came (3). Then the new moon sometimes hid itself for days behind rain clouds so that when it finally came out it was already half-grown (4). And while it played its game the Chief Priest sat up every evening waiting (5).

(Achebe, C. (1964, 1974) *Arrow of God*, p. 1)

This is the opening paragraph of *Arrow of God*. In the first sentence, there is reference to an unnamed person by the third person singular pronoun “he”. This reference pattern continues in the second and third sentences through the use of “he” and “his”. We still do not know the referent of the two pronouns. In the fifth and last sentence in the extract, there is reference to “the Chief Priest”. The phrase complements “he” and “his” in the sense that it is also third person reference. But we still do not have a name. So, someone reading the novel for the first time will have to wait till he gets to the third sentence in the second paragraph on the first page of the novel before he knows the identity of the person being referred to: Ezeulu.

The second example is similar to this first one.

SHE RAN, tree limbs and brambles scratching, grabbing, tripping, and slapping her as if they were bony hands, reaching for her out of the darkness (1). The mountainside dropped steeply, and she ran pell-mell, her feet unsure on the pine needles and loose stones (2). She beat at the limbs with flailing arms, looking for the trail, falling over logs, getting up and darting to the left, then the right (3). A fallen limb caught her ankle, and she fell again (4). Where was the trail? (5).

(Peretti, F. (1995, 2003) *The Oath*, p.3)

This passage is the opening paragraph of *The Oath*, a novel in the Christian fiction genre. Again, it is only the third person pronoun that is used, but this time the feminine “she”. In fact, it is this pronoun that

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is used throughout the first episode described in the novel from pages 3 to 4. So, we do not yet know the identity of the character in question, nor do we know what she is running from.

The third example is from a short story:

She stood in line outside the American Embassy in Lagos, staring straight ahead, barely moving, a blue plastic file of documents tucked under her arm (1). She was the forty-eighth person in the line of about two hundred that trailed from the closed gates of the American Embassy all the way past smaller, vine-encrusted gates of the Czech Embassy (2). She did not notice the newspaper vendors who blew whistles and pushed *The Guardian*, *The News*, and *The Vanguard* in her face (3). Or the beggars who walked up and down holding out enamel plates (4). Or the ice-cream bicycles that honked (5).

(Adichie, C.N. (2009) “The American Embassy”, In *The Thing Around Your Neck* (A Collection of Short Stories), p.128)

These are the sentences that make up the opening lines in “The American Embassy”, and we do not have a clue as to the referent of the third-person singular pronoun “she”.

The use of personal and neuter pronouns at the beginning of prose fictional texts in the way described above usually brings about suspense in the reader: he wants to know the identities of the characters referred to by the pronouns in questions; so he wants to read on so as to satisfy his curiosity. According to Widdowson (1975; 65):

Since there is no preceding discourse to which these sentences can relate, the pronouns have no reference and reader takes them, as it were, on trust... however, they do take on referential value from the discourse, then, pronouns derive their value *retrospectively* from what has preceded, in literary discourse it is common for them to derive their value *prospectively* from what follows.

Thus, cataphoric reference is quite common in literary communication. In the examples provided above, as already indicated, the reader has to continue reading so as to unravel the mystery of the referents of the pronouns “he”, “she” and “it”. He may not have to read far, as in the case of the example from “Arrow of God”, before getting to know the referent of the pronoun. But the reader of *The Oath* will have to read the novel a little longer before he gets to the referent of “she”: her name is mentioned for the first time on page 8 of the text – Evelyn Benson. To piece the opening event of the novel together, however, one has to read through the novel, as bits of information about what actually happened to Evelyn and her husband are scattered throughout the text. In “The American Embassy”, the referent of “she” is not revealed throughout, so the reader has to work things out for himself. This issue is crucial in the stylistic analysis of literary texts, for it makes the reader engage actively with the text in order to understand it.

In order to throw more light on the manifestation of cataphoric reference in prose fiction, I shall examine Festus Iyayi's novel, *Violence*. On page 17 of the text, reference is made “to the hand of a woman”; it is on the next page that we know her name: Queen, whose husband owns the Freedom Motel; Also on page 17, a character is introduced as “the driver of the car, a large black man in a lace *agbada*”. It is on page 22 that we know his name: Obofun, Queen's husband. On page 25, there is a reference to “some men downstairs” by Lilian, Queen's daughter. On page 26, we are told of “two men” drinking “a large bottle of whisky”. We still do not know their names. In the next paragraph, there is a reference to “the man in blue French suit”, the second man being the “other man”. It is in the next paragraph that we know that that other man is called Dala, and that he wears a grey French suit. It is on page 27 that we know that “the first man” is Iriso.

As the story progresses, Idemudia refers to his wife's aunt in “her



aunt's place" on page 38. Adisa herself refers to her aunt as "my aunt" on page 46 of the novel. On page 48, her name is mentioned as "Aunt Yasha". On page 253, the name "Salome" occurs in "Aunt Salome". There is clarification that needs to be made here. Either "Yasha" and "Salome" are both Adisa's aunt's names, or a slip has been made by the real author of the novel. On page 91, we have a reference to "Three men", and the identity of one of them revealed on page 92: Lami. Furthermore, Queen refers to her driver as "the driver" on page 94 of the novel; it is not until the reader gets to page 105 that he knows that the name of the driver is Aluiya. Finally, in this respect, there is a reference to an engineer that Queen has engaged to handle the execution of the contract that she got from government to build low-cost houses, on page 24. On page 234, we have more information about him: he "was a thin Greek. He had a pencil moustache on which each hair stood out like the quill of a porcupine". But we still do not know his name. It is not until page 249 of the text that we know that his name is Papiros Clerides. As pointed out earlier, this technique of delaying mention of a particular character's name impels the reader to want to read on, thus making him an active participant in the reading process. For he has to make necessary connections within the text if he desires to make sense of it.

English personal pronouns also play a unique role in the application of the narrative techniques of direct speech, indirect speech, free direct style, free indirect style or speech or represented speech and thought, represented perception, reflective perception, and so on, to the study of prose fictional texts (Simpson, 2004:32). A number of scholars (Cohn, 1966; Brenzwaer, 1970; Guiraud, 1971; Brinton, 1980; Leech and Short, 1981; Awonuga (1982, 1994; Short (1996, etc., have written in detail on the use of these techniques in prose fiction. But my interest here is in highlighting some of the ways in which personal pronouns function in relation to only one of the devices: free indirect style, because I believe it makes the point clearly. Free indirect style is

that narrative style which “expresses a character's thoughts and speech in the authorial past tense and third person but also in the character's own emotive language” (Brinton, 1980:363). One implication of this statement is that there are, in free indirect style passages, two voices: the voice of the third person narrator or implied author, who is the primary speaker in such passages, and that (or the words) of one of the characters—the secondary speaker (Guiraud, 1971:85 in the narrative in question (see also Awonuga, 1982 and Arua, 2014).

The best way to start discussing the use of free indirect style in prose fiction is to compare its linguistic characteristics with those of direct Indirect Speech: John said (that) he would see Mary the next or following day.

Free Indirect Style: He would see her the next day.

We notice that the first person singular pronoun “I” in the example of direct speech has changed to the third person “he” in indirect speech and free indirect style. This makes indirect speech and free indirect style similar to each other and different from the example of direct speech, on one level. On another level, both examples of direct and indirect speech are similar to each other and different from free indirect style, in the sense that they retain the names, “John” and “Mary”, while the example of free indirect style has done away with the two names, replacing them with “he” and “her” respectively. Thus, free indirect style favours the use of personal pronouns rather than names of characters. The following example is from a novel.

Her mother had pulled her close as a photographer approached;

later, after the flashbulbs went off, Olanna had called the photographer over and asked him please not to publish the photo (1). He had looked at her oddly (2). Now she realized how silly it had been to ask him; of course he would never understand the discomfort that came with being a part of the gloss that was her parents' life (3).

(Adichie, C. N. (2006) *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Lagos Farafina, p.34)

The first two sentences in this extract are the third person narration by the implied author: he is describing an incident that happens in the society of the novel. In Sentence (3), however, it is the thought of the character Olanna that is represented: the narrator now takes the reader directly into her mind to reveal her thought that is “hanging on the threshold of verbalization” (Cohn, 1966:103). This means that what is going on in Olanna's mind at this point in the story is the type of thing she might say aloud. Thus, we have in that third sentence the personal pronouns “she”, “him”, “he” and “her” – all of which are clear linguistic markers of free indirect style. They complement the fronted adverb, “Now”, which is also a marker of the technique. All of the narrative techniques mentioned above, at the beginning of this section, play a significant role in developing character and moving the story forward in prose fictional texts, and any stylistic study of this genre that ignores them lack depth.

In addition to these techniques of portraying character in fiction, we also have the use of dialect, idiolect, vernacular and slang. We also have the application of transitivity in clause structure to the study of prose fictional texts (Halliday, 1971; Kennedy, 1982). This is an important aspect of Halliday's grammatical system. One aspect of the use of this technique in stylistics is the way in which human body parts, elements of nature or inanimate objects are made to function in prose fictional texts. There are three elements in the transitivity system; these are: a) the process, represented by the verb; (b) the participants, the role of persons and objects; and (c) circumstantial functions, in English typically the adverbials of time, place and manner. The participant roles are those of actor, goal or object of result, and beneficiary or recipient, affected, and instrument of force. Here are two examples of the application of transitivity to the stylistic study of fiction.

1. A blur of sunlight was crawling across his hair.

(Golding, W. (1954, 1991) *Lord of the Flies*, p.20)

2. Out of the face stared two light blue eyes, frustrated now, and turning or ready to turn, to anger. (*Lord of the Flies*, p.27)

In the first example, “sunlight” is humanized through the word “crawling”. It is only human beings, especially babies, who crawl. In the second example, the eyes of the character in question are presented as if acting on their own volition, without the person they belong to being in control: they were frustrated and then turned to anger.

The preceding discussion hints at the concept of point of view in the prose fictional text. In literary stylistics, there are two types of point of view: fictional point of view and discursual point of view. Fictional point of view is the angle from which the story of the fiction has been told. It “is the slanting of the fictional world towards 'reality' as apprehended by a particular participant, or set of participants, in the fiction” (Leech and Short, 1981:174). For example, Achebe's *Arrow of God* was written from the perspective of Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu. We see the events narrated in the novel largely through his eyes. Discursual point of view describes the author's attitude towards his characters – whether he approves or disapproves of them. The author's attitude could also be neutral: he does not pass judgement on his characters. Rather, he allows the reader to assess them. This is usually done through language which expresses some element of value, either in its denotative sense or connotations.

Also, connected with point of view is the mode of narration in prose fiction. This is of two types: first-person narration and third-person narration. I shall focus on third person narration here because it is the more frequently used by creative writers. The next thing to note about it is that it is an “impersonal” style of narration in the sense that reference by the narrator to himself is narrative techniques occur together frequently in the same literary text. So, they are not mutually exclusive.

### **1.10 Some Other Aspects of the Stylistic Study of Texts**

So far, we have seen that personal pronouns in English play a prominent role in the analysis and interpretation of texts – literary and non-literary. In addition to the preceding discussion, however, there are other linguistic and stylistic tools that are made use of in the study of texts. I shall examine some of these here; but I shall focus on the stylistic analysis of poetry texts, as that is where most students of English at the tertiary level in Nigeria today have challenges. Thus, I shall, in this section, examine some key concepts used in the stylistic analysis and interpretation of poems.

A basic concept here is that of foregrounding. A term borrowed from painting, foregrounding refers to those elements of a work of art that stand out in some way. According to Russian formalist scholars at the beginning of the last century, the purpose of art and literature is to defamiliarize the familiar and by defamiliarizing a work of art or a text we make it stand out from the norm – it becomes foregrounded. (McIntyre, 2003:2)

This statement brings up a number of key issues in the study of the literary text. For instance, it talks of “those elements of a work of art that stand out in some way”, of literature defamiliarizing the familiar and of patterns standing out from the norm. These issues will be further discussed in the following paragraphs.

The issue of defamiliarizing the familiar was first raised by the Russian formalist critic, Viktor Shklovsky. For him,

...the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar”, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and lengthy of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Shklovsky, 1917, 1965:12)

He also states that

The purpose of art is to.... Make objects unfamiliar; to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of

perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Answers.com)

The concept of defamiliarization is further discussed by the Czech theorist Jan Mukarovsky (1932, 1964, 1970). The term that he uses is 'deautomatization'. According to him, foregrounding is related to the factor of deviation from linguistic and literary norms: "deviation in turn constitutes de-automatization of familiar linguistic and literary patterns (Awonuga, 2005:45). This means that, from this perspective, foregrounding is the opposite of automatization: "...automatization schematizes an event; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme (Mukarovsky, 1970:43. See also Douthwaite, 2000; Zimmerman, 2003).

The point being made by Shklovsky and Mukarovsky is that our use of language is automatic: we get so used to using it that we do not think of how we are going to use words before. For instance, in making the statement, "I went to Lagos yesterday", one does not think of the past tense of go or ask oneself whether to use go or went. The form of the verb to use has become automatic to one, as one has used the same from many times before. It has become familiar or automatic.

But the language used in poems tends to break this pattern of using language by defamiliarizing or de-automatizing language as we know it. In order to express his meaning as clearly as he can, the creative writer is persistently looking for new words and linguistic patterns to use. To do this effectively, he explores the resources of the language he is using to create new forms of the language. This is the way in which he defamiliarizes or de-automatizes language. It is for this reason that one should approach the reading of a poem as if one was learning a new language. A reader who expects a poet to use language in a familiar way will be disappointed and will not be able to make sense of the text.

Furthermore, the issue of deviating from a linguistic or literary norm needs further explanation. By norm in linguistics, we mean "a standard practice in speech and writing" (Crystal, 2003:319); that is,

the way in which certain linguistic patterns are used generally in English. For example, the expression, “a grief ago”, has violated a norm in the language. This is because the slot in the sentence frame occupied by “grief”, which is a noun, is normally occupied by temporal adverbs such as *day* (as in “a day ago”), *week* (as in “a week ago”), etc. This is an example of deviation from a general norm in English. The other type of norm is known as internal norm, which is typically set up within a particular literary text. For instance, a poet may use only lower-case letter in a part of the same poem. When this happens, we say that the poet has deviated from a norm that he himself has set up in the poem: the use of lower case letters.

From the discussion above, it is clear that there is deviation – type foregrounding. Leech (1969:42-55) gives eight types of deviation: lexical deviation, grammatical deviation, phonological deviation, graphological deviation, semantic deviation, dialectal deviation, deviation of register and deviation of historical period. There is no time nor space to go into a discussion of each of these types of deviation in this lecture, but whenever the need arises for me to refer to any of them in the sample analysis and interpretation of the poem, “As he Lay Dying” towards the end of this presentation, I shall certainly do so. But there is also a type of foregrounding that does not involve deviation: this is the non-deviation type of foregrounding. This type is manifested through repetition. For the purpose of this lecture, repetition takes two main forms: (a) direct repetition of words, phrases, clauses and sentences; and (b) parallelism. Parallelism, in turn, sub-divides into three types: (i) syntactic parallelism; (ii) immediate parallelism; and (iii) intermittent parallelism.

In view of this observation in the last paragraph, Halliday's (1971:339) definition of foregrounding is very useful.

Foregrounding... is prominence that is motivated. It is not difficult to find patterns of prominence in a poem or prose text, regularities in the sounds or words, or structures that stand out in some way; or may be brought out by careful reading; and

one may often be led in this way towards a new insight, through finding that such prominence contributes to the writer's total meaning. But unless it does, it will seem to lack motivation; a figure that is brought into prominence will be foregrounded only if it relates to the meaning of the text as a whole.

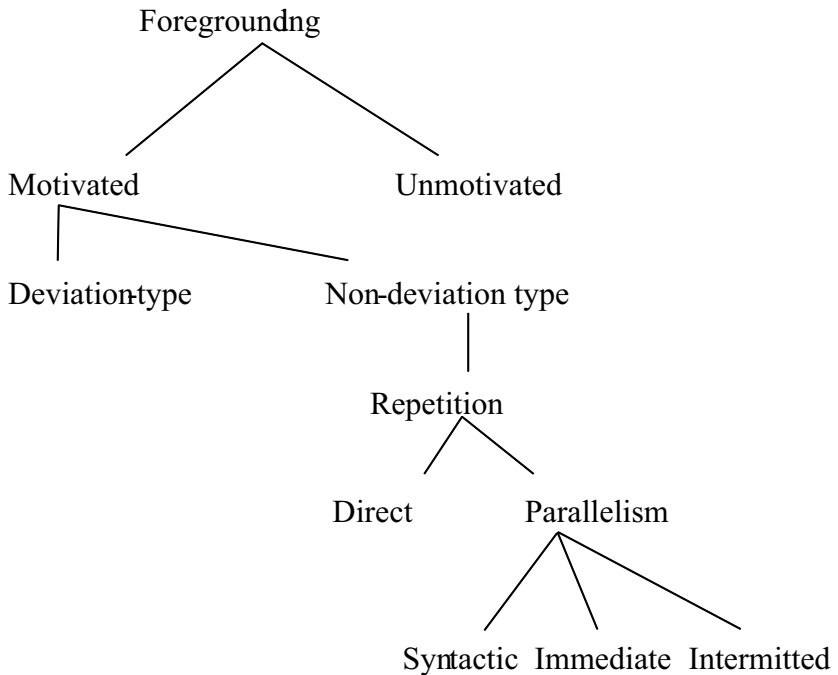
One important issue arising from this quotation is that the fact “that a particular pattern is prominent or dominant or “stands out in some way” does not necessarily mean that that structure constitutes an example of foregrounding” (Awonuga, 2005:47). The structure must contribute “to the writer's total meaning” to be regarded as a foregrounded element. Otherwise, it is not foregrounded.

The discussion above is well summarized by Simpson (2004:50) in the following words:

*Foregrounding* refers to a form of textual patterning which is motivated significantly for literary aesthetic purposes. Capable of working at any level of language, foregrounding typically involves a stylistic distortion of some sort, either through an aspect of the text which deviates from a linguistic norm or, alternatively, where an aspect of the text is brought to the fore through repetition or parallelism. That means that foregrounding comes in two main guises: foregrounding as 'deviation from a norm' and foregrounding as 'more of the same'.

This observation summarizes the preceding discussion of foregrounding very well: it brings together the two types of foregrounding – the deviation and non-deviation types. The discussion can be diagrammatically represented as follows:





**Figure 5: The Different Types of Foregrounding.**

*Source: Author.*

### **1.10 The Concept of Literary Language**

Foregrounding is an important concept in stylistics. Poetry texts contain examples of both the deviation-type and the non-deviation type. But this does not mean that stylisticians claim any special status for literary language, that is, the language used in the literary text. It is important to make this point because stylisticians have been criticized for claiming that literary language is superior to non-literary language. For instance, in criticizing Halliday's analysis and interpretation of Golding's *The Inheritors* (see Halliday, 1971), Diller (1998:157-158) states as follows:

That linguistic regularity gives no claim to literary excellence was pointed out by a quantitative linguist as early as 1965... If

linguistic regularity is no automatic mark of literary distinction neither is linguistic deviation. Many non-literary text-type (cooking recipes, death notices, weather reports and the like) deviate from 'ordinary' language even more markedly than do literary texts. The vast majority of texts, from avant-garde poems to private letters are unique 'individuals' and have to be received as such...

I would like to comment on this statement as follows. First, it does not appear as if Diller is writing from the linguistic perspective. Otherwise, he would have known that stylisticians do not claim that linguistic regularity and linguistic deviation are only manifested in literary texts.

They only point out that literary language is a variety of language, and that, as a result, we need to study its characteristic linguistic features as we do for other, non-literary language varieties... Thus, while agreeing with Diller that literary language shares linguistic regularity and linguistic deviation with non-literary language varieties, I would like to state that these features remain crucial for the interpretation of literary texts.

(Awonuga, 2005:46)

It is also important to point out here that just as metaphors and, indeed, other figures of speech play an important role in non-literary language, so also do they play an important role in literary texts. For instance, it is not possible to make sense of a poem without understanding the way in which figurative language, especially metaphor, has been used in it (Leech, 1969; McCaffery, 2000, Simpson, 2004; Smith, 2002).

Second, Diller talks of deviation from "ordinary' language". It is important to explain this concept and relate it with the practice of stylistics. The expression is usually used to refer to the language that we use in everyday face-to-face interaction (*Wikipedia*). It originated from the work of a certain philosophers, especially Ludwig

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Wittgenstein notably in his later work, Gilbert Ryle, J.L. Austin, Peter Strawson, John R. Searle and Norman Malcolm. The approach flourished in the 1940s under J.L. Austin and Gilbert Ryle. According to Wittgenstein, language should not be ambiguous; it should mean what it says. Also, Bertrand Russell, an early analytic philosopher, believed that:

...language is not significant for philosophy and that ordinary language is just too confused to be of use in solving metaphysical and epistemological problems.

(Awonuga, 2009:6)

Similarly, the British Empiricist philosopher, John Locke, held that:

All the artificial and figurative applications of words that eloquence had invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement; and so indeed are perfect cheats... they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where truth and knowledge are concerned cannot but be thought a great fault. [III, X, 34, 146].

(Quoted by Landow, 2005:2)

It is easy to see deep suspicion of figurative language in this statement. As far as Locke is concerned, figurative and connotative language, is “for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement;...” The implication here is that the use of figurative language cannot be separated from non-literary language. In the same vein, Wittgenstein's position that language should not be ambiguous cannot be sustained, as it is widely acknowledged in linguistics that every English sentence that we speak is potentially ambiguous.

The concept of ordinary language is therefore misleading. The sharp distinction that it makes between non-literary or “ordinary” language is not acceptable from the perspectives of linguistics and stylistics. For instance, cognitive linguistics holds that the distinction between literal and figurative language is no longer rigid (Fauconnier and

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Turner,2002:69). Similarly, it is now recognized in stylistics that there can be no sharp distinction between literary and non-literary language, since literary language is simply a variety of language, that is, one of the uses to which language is put (Awonuga, 2009).

In addition, the scholars of ordinary language create the impression that it cannot be used to whip up emotions. They forget that this is one of the effects of the use of language. Also, by dismissing the use of figurative language, they deny the obvious fact that non-literary language, as well a literary language, is rich in the use of figurative language. This point has been made clearly by cognitive linguists and me in recent times. According to Lakoff (1991;1995), a cognitive linguist, we use metaphors in our daily interaction with others. Thus, we use figurative language on a daily basis more widely than many people are aware of, the implication being, as was pointed out above, that non-literary language is very rich.

For instance, in our daily interaction with others, we use metaphors associated with parts of the body (“You can bang your head against a brick wall”; “You can turn your hand to something”; “You can keep someone at arm's length”; “You can get, pull your finger out”, “You can be out on your ear”; “You can get up somebody's nose”; “You can have eyes in the back of your head”; “You can face somebody down”; “You can take something on the chin”; “You can get something in the neck”; “You can shoulder a responsibility”; “someone may not have a leg to stand on”; “You can have feet of clay”; “You can turn or spin on your heel”; You can tread or step on people's toes”; “You can be down in the mouth”, and so on (Awonuga: 2009:12-18). The fact that these metaphors are usually regarded as “dead” metaphors does not detract from their being metaphors.

Figurative language is also used to describe what happens in different professions and areas of endeavour. For example, we use figurative language to talk about sports, religion, politics and so on. Euphemisms, too are widely used in our day-to-day interaction with others. The term “euphemism” refers to “the act or an example of

substituting a mild, indirect, or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive” (*The Free Online Dictionary*). There are thousands of euphemisms that are used in English, as they cover every area of human endeavour: the expression “not exactly thin” is used in place of “fat”; and “to bite the dust” can be used to mean “to die”, and so on. (Awonuga; 2009:27-28).

The preceding discussion shows that non-literal language is very rich, and that literary language is a variety of language. So, stylisticians do not claim a special status for it. But we still need to note that there is heightened use of figurative language in poems.

### **1.11. Sample Stylistic Analysis and Interpretation of a Poem**

I would like to conclude this lecture by demonstrating how the stylistic study of poems works in practice. The poem chosen for this exercise is reproduced below.

#### AS HE LAY DYING

As he lay dying, two fat crows  
Sat perched above in a strangling vine,  
And one crow called to the other:  
“Brother,  
Harvest his eyes, his tongue is mine.”

As he lay dying, two lithe hawks  
Caresse the wind and spied two crows,  
And one hawk hissed to the other:  
“Brother,  
Mine is the sleekest one of those.”

As he lay dying, two eagles passed  
And saw two hawks that hung in flying,  
And one said soft to the other:  
“Brother,  
Mark your prey.” As he lay dying.\*  
(Randolph Stow, 1935-2000)

(In Stow, R. (1969) *A Counterfeit Silence: Selected Poems*, Sydney:

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Angus and Robertson, p.7.

Also in Porter, P. (ed.) (1996) *The Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse*, South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, p.128

Before going into the analysis and interpretation of this poem, I wish to make the following preliminary comments. In analyzing and interpreting a poem, one can start from any part of the text: from the beginning, the middle or the end. There is no rule that demands that one should start at the beginning. The way to begin is to read the entire poem through several times. One should not be in a hurry to start writing. Reading the poem through a number of times would help one to get the feel of the poem though a number of times would help one to get the feel of the text. One should not worry about the meaning or theme of the poem initially. To do this is to tamper with the process of interpretation. And it is important to remember that it is not the flesh-and-blood author that is speaking in the poem, and that it is a character that the author has created in the text that is addressing the reader. So, as was pointed out earlier, the “I” of the poem is not co-referential with the author. In addition, one should approach the poem with an open mind, that is, without any pre-conceived ideas about what the text is likely to mean. (See also McIntyre, 2015).

I now proceed with the analysis and interpretation of the poem. Reading through it, we find that the clause, “As he lay dying”, occurs in the three stanzas – in line1 of stanza II, and in lines 1 and 5 of the third stanza. So, we can start our analysis and interpretation from this clause. There are four things we can say quickly about this clause. First, it is an example of direct repetition, having been repeated three times in the poem. Second, it is a dependent or subordinate clause, in the sense that it cannot stand on its own. Third, we notice the use of the third person pronoun “he” in the expression. In connection with the first point above, we recall that repetition is a manifestation of non-deviation type foregrounding. But we do not know yet if the clause is foregrounded yet, that is, whether it contributes to the total meaning of the text or not. We can only determine that after we have finished our

study of the poem.

The second point raised above is that because “As he lay dying” is a subordinate or dependent clause, it cannot stand alone. This means that at each point that it occurs, it forms part of a stretch of language or a complete sentence. Thus, in stanza I, we have “As he lay dying, two fat crows/Sat perched above in a strangling vine,...” (lines 1 and 2). In stanza II, we have “As he lay dying, two lithe hawks/Caressed the wind and spied two crows,...” (lines 1 and 2), and in stanza III, it occurs in the frame “As he lay dying, two eagles passed/And saw two hawks that hung flying,...” (lines 1 and 2). Thirdly, the third person pronoun “he” occurs in the clause in question. We notice that there is no previous reference for this pronoun in the poem. So, we ask, Who is being referred to as “he” in this clause? We cannot answer this question at this point in our analysis and interpretation. So, we go on with the exercise. The fourth point mentioned above is that the word *as* in English expresses simultaneity: one thing is happening at the same time that something else is happening. A human being referred to by means of the third person pronoun “he” and its variant “his” “lay dying”. The verb “lay” expresses a state. But we notice that the verbs used to talk about the birds in the poem express activity: “called” in “...one crow called to the other” (line 3, stanza I); “Harvest” in “Harvest his eyes” (line 5, stanza I); “Caressed” in “...Caressed the wind” (line 2, stanza II); “hissed” in “...one hawk hissed to the other” (line 3, stanza II); “passed”, in “two eagles passed” (line 1, stanza III); “said” in “...one said soft to the other” (line 3, stanza III); and “mark” in “Mark your prey” (line 5, stanza III).

There are three other verbs that need to be commented on here: “sat” in “sat perched above” (line 2, stanza I); and “saw” in “...saw two hawks” (line 2, stanza III); and “hung” in “that hung in flying” (line 2, stanza III). The verb *sit* typically denotes a state rather than activity. But the way it has been used in this poem, it also suggests activity, in the sense that it connotes watchfulness on the part of the two crows. They had obviously seen the dying person and are planning the

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strategy they will use to divide the “spoil” between them, as “Harvest his eyes, his tongue is mine” (line 5, stanza I) suggests. The second verb *see* expresses a state: once someone's eyes are open, he sees all sorts of things, both what he wants to see and what he does not want to see. The word is often contrasted with “look”. Looking at something involves mental and physical effort; that is why it is usually accepted that “look” involves activity. But again, the way in which “saw” has been used here implies mental activity, in the sense that the eagles are already working out how to share the prey. The last verb in this group is “hung” also in line 2 of stanza III. This verb, too, suggests a state but it also hints at the readiness of the hawks to take off at any time to start feasting on their prey (“Mark your prey”).

Having gone this far, we now ask, What is going on in this poem? We have already seen that the only human being referred to in the text by “he” is in a very weak state. In fact, he is dying. And then, we also see three pairs of birds of prey: “two fat crows” (Line 1, stanza 1), two little hawks (line 1, stanza II), and “two eagles” (line 1, stanza III). What is the relationship between these birds of prey on the one hand, and the human being portrayed in the poem? We cannot answer these questions at this stage of analysis and interpretation of the text. So, we continue with the exercise.

We now begin to see some linguistic structures in the poem. The first one is used in the introduction of the birds of prey; they are described in parallel structures, this time in the form of syntactic parallelism:

m	m	h
two	fat	crows (line 1, stanza I)
two	lithe	hawks (line 1, stanza II)
m		h
Two		eagles (line 1, stanza III)

**(Key: m = modifier, h = head)**

By syntactic parallelism we mean the repetition of a particular syntactic pattern either at the rank of the group or phrase, clause or sentence. Here the pattern that is repeated is the *mmh* structure of the

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group in the first two examples. But we find that the third example is only partially parallel to the first two groups, in the sense that it contains only one modifier while the first two are made up of two modifiers. We can now look more closely at the three examples. When we have syntactically parallel structures, there is always a correspondence set up amongst the words that occur in the sentences involved. The equivalence so set up may be one of similarity or contrast. In our examples, we have the direct repetition of the word “two” in each of the phrases involved. This shows that we can have direct repetition of words in syntactic parallelism. At the second modifier position in the first two expressions, we have the words “fat” and “lithe” to describe the crows and hawks respectively. The two crows are fat and this suggests that they are well fed. It is also probably for this reason that they are portrayed in a sedentary position: they “sat perched above in a strangling vine”. But, as was noted, although the crows are not presented as being physically active, they are mentally so, for they are seen to be alert to what is going on below them. In addition, the word “fat” properly describes the crow, which is a large black bird.

In the second example, the word “lithe” refers to the supple body of the hawk, which is a strong, swift and keen-sighted bird of prey. This word contrasts with “fat” in the first example, the implication being that the crow is not as fast as the hawk. This line of interpretation is buttressed by the additional information about the two types of prey that we are given in the poem. We can see a contrast in the following:

As he lay dying, two fat cows  
Sat perched above. . . (lines 1 & 2, stanza I)  
As he lay dying, two lithe hawks  
Caressed the wind. . . (lines 1 & 2, stanza II)

We have already noted the parallelism of “two fat crows” and “two lithe hawks”. We now notice that “Sat perched above” and “Caressed by the wind” are partially parallel structures. It is easy to see that the equivalence set up here is that of contrast: the sedentary posture of the

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crows is contrasted with the nimble nature of the hawk. The word “caress” describes a loving or affectionate touch. It is used here to portray the fond way in which the two hawks breasted the wind. It also suggests that they were definitely enjoying their flight when they sighted the two crows and the man referred to in “As he lay dying”. When it is used to refer to a body, the word “lithe” means bending, twisting or turning easily. The implication here is that the hawks have athletic bodies and that they make graceful movements with their bodies. Furthermore, the words “caressed” and “lithe” are used in the poem to humanize the hawks; for it is human beings who can caress people and the word “lithe” is also used to describe the human body. We also notice the expression, “caressed the wind”. It is only something the semantic feature + concrete that can be caressed like, as pointed out above, the human body. But in our example here, it is the wind that the hawks caressed. The wind is not substantial, as we cannot touch or hold it. So, this is an example of a humanizing metaphor. There is yet an issue that is to be noted here. Line 2 of stanza II reads:

Caressed the wind and spied two crows

The coordinating conjunction “and” in this example expresses simultaneity: the two hawks “spied two crows” as they “caressed the wind”. This again shows that there is a lot of activities going on, at least by the birds of prey portrayed in the poem. The word “passed” in line of stanza III shows that the eagles are in a different class.

So far, I have been discussing the first two examples of the syntactically parallel structures identified earlier. I will now discuss the third example, “two eagles passed”. Instead of having the *mmh* structure of the nominal group, it is the *mh* structure, meaning that the head is preceded by only one modifier and not by two modifiers as in the first two examples. For this reason, we say that this third example is only partially parallel to the other two examples. What then, is the significance of this parallelism? First, this is a deviation from a norm that the speaker of the poem has set up within the text: the words

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“crows” and “hawks” are preceded by two modifiers, but this norm is violated by the use of only one item based in part on what we know of the eagle in real life. We know, for instance, that it is a large strong bird of prey of the falcon family. We also know that the eagle is a highly regarded bird because of the aura of majesty that surrounds it. So, it is possible that it is for this reason that the speaker of the poem does not feel that it needs an additional modifier. This line of interpretation is enhanced by the word “passed” in the clause “two eagles passed” in line 1 of stanza III. The impression that one gets from the way in which the word has been used is that it enhances the dignity of the two eagles portrayed in the poem and, by extension, of the eagle in general. This observation is also supported by the third line of stanza III: “And one [eagle] said soft to the other”, as we shall see shortly.

Having identified some examples of syntactic parallelism in the text, we can now go through the poem to see if there are other examples of this linguistic phenomenon. We find that there are other examples.

They are set out in the following manner:

A <sup>1</sup>	S	P	A	
And	one crow	called		to the other (line 3, stanza I)
And	one hawk	hissed		to the other (line 3, stanza II)
			A	
And	one	said	soft	to the other line 3, stanza III)

(Key: A<sup>1</sup> = linking adjunct; S = Subject; P = Predicator or Verb; and A = adjunct)

The syntactic pattern that repeated in the first two examples is the A<sup>1</sup>SPA structure of the clause. But we find that the third example has the A<sup>1</sup>SPAA structure, meaning that it is only partially parallel to the first two. We also find that there is repetition at both the A<sup>1</sup> position occupied by “And” on the one hand, and the final adjunct position where “to the other” occurs in all the examples. I have also commented on the three types of birds of prey that occur in the poem. So, it is the equivalence of contrast that is set up at the Predicator position in the clauses in question. It is also the equivalence of contrast that is set up at

the Predicator position: “one crow called to the other”. The crow called to the other loudly. This observation is supported by the fact that the crow in real life usually emits a harsh cry. In the second example, “one hawk hissed to the other”. In English, the word *hiss* has negative connotations. One of its meanings is to make a sound that shows one's disapproval of somebody or something. It also means to say something in a quiet angry voice. In view of these meanings of *hiss* it is not surprising that the hawk that spoke viewed the other hawk with suspicion and hatred. The statement, “Mine is the sleekest one of those” contains an implied warning: Don't touch the sleekest one of the elements involved. It also has the implication of selfishness and greed. Also, the word *sleekest* shows that the hawk that spoke was referring to more than two elements: three, made up of the two crows in stanza I and the person referred to as “he” in the poem. So, the hawk that spoke is a nasty character.

The last line of stanza I, too, shows that the crow that spoke has an unpleasant character. There is also implied warning in his statement: “Harvest his eyes, his tongue is mine”. In other words, you can have his eyes, but don't touch his tongue; I have reserved that for myself. The word “Harvest” used as a verb means to reap from where one has sown. But here, the two crows want to reap where they have not sown. How can one harvest someone's eyes when one had not planted them where they are? There is also greed, hatred and wickedness manifested in the conduct of the crows. Furthermore, the crow that spoke used an imperative sentence, which is usually used in English to give commands: “Harvest his eyes”. But for one's command to be felicitous or succeed, one must be in a position of authority over the other person being commanded. Otherwise, the command will be rendered infelicitous, in the sense that it will not achieve the desired effect (see Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). So, it can be assumed that the crow that spoke was in a position to command the other crow to do or not to do something. It may also mean that the former was just trying to impose its authority on the other crow. In whatever way one looks at the issue,

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that crow does not present an attractive personality. Furthermore, the hawk that spoke is also personified through the use of “caressed” and “hissed”. I shall say more on this issue soon.

The third example is quite interesting. One eagle “said soft” to the other. The word “said” contrasts with “called” and “hissed” in the first two examples, in the sense that it is void of any type of connotation. To say something is to speak. In the first two examples, “called” implies speaking with one's voice unnecessarily loud, and I have shown that the word *hiss* has negative connotations. But in the third example, the word “said” is followed by “soft”. This word is normally an adjective in English, but it occupies the place of adverb in the example. One would have expected the word “softly” to be used, but the speaker of the poem has chosen to retain its form as an adjective. This is a manifestation of deviation from a general norm: in other words, it violates the way the word in question is typically used in the language. Viewed from another perspective, it is violation of the rule of selection restriction in English (Chomsky, 1957, 1965). Furthermore, the word “said” has been used to humanize the eagle that spoke.

In light of the preceding discussion, the use of the word “Brother” in line 4 of stanzas I and II becomes ironic. It has been shown that both the crow and the hawk are of unpleasant character. So, they do not come across as credible in the world of the poem. They are not therefore sincere in their use of the word. So, we do not believe them. But the use of “Brother” by one of the eagles comes across as sincere, especially when we recall that it said it “soft”, which shows respect for each other. This observation shows again that the two eagles come across as better behaved than the two crows and the two hawks.

There is also the issue of the use of the humanizing metaphor or personification in the poem. To recapitulate, we find that the two crows are personified through the use of such words as “sat”, “called”, “Brother” and “Harvest”. The personification of the two hawks is achieved through the use of such words as “caressed”, “spied”, “hissed” and “Brother”. The eagles are humanized through the use of

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the words “passed”, “said”, “soft” and “Brother”. We then ask, What is the purpose of this personification of the birds? But one important issue to consider here is the use of “prey” in line 5 of stanza III. As noted earlier, all the birds portrayed in the poem are birds of prey, and this is clearly attested to by the use of the word “prey” by one of the eagles (“Mark your prey”). Now the word *prey* has a denotative as well as connotative meaning. Its denotative meaning has to do with “an animal, a bird, etc that is hunted, killed and eaten by another” (Turnbull, 2010:1160). Thus, we talk of “birds of prey”, that is birds that kill for food. But we also have the expression, “prey on/upon [somebody/something]” which has as one of its meanings “to harm [somebody] who is weaker than you, or make use of them in a dishonest way to get what you want...” (op.cit, p.1161). From this point of view, the eagle is just like the crow and the hawk, in the sense that all take advantage of weaker animals to kill and eat them. This observation shows that the dignity and the majesty ascribed to the two eagles in the text has been downgraded: the eagles are no longer attractive to the reader.

We now have to decide the nature of the relationship between the birds of prey and the person referred to as “he” in “As he lay dying”. We have already noted that the birds are active in the poem. It is very clear that the referent of “he” is not active at all. We know this from the expression, “lay dying”. The word “lay” as the simple past tense of *lie (down)* describes someone lying down or in horizontal position. So, “lay” expresses a state not activity. This observation is buttressed by “dying”, which also expresses a state. Someone who is dying cannot be expected to be active; he is already very weak, his vital organs having packed up or in the process of packing up. This means that the only human being depicted in the poem by “he” is quite helpless while the birds of prey are quite active. So, the man is at their mercy. What does this tell us about the meaning or theme or subject-matter of the poem?

We know from the Bible that man was created to

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...have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

(Genesis 1:26, *King James Version*)

So, man was given dominion over all the earth, including “the fowl (or birds) of the air. But the picture is reversed in the poem: “the fowl of the air” are the ones dominating man, who is meant to be in charge. From this perspective, the referent of “he” now becomes clear: the pronoun symbolizes mankind or humankind, as the feminists like to put it. This is an example of the ways in which English personal pronouns are used in poetry and prose fictional texts. The referent of the pronoun is not indicated and the reader needs to work things out for himself. This is one level of meaning of the poem.

The other level of meaning can be described in the following manner. We saw in the analysis and interpretation of the text that the crows, hawks and eagles depicted in it are humanized by means of humanizing metaphors or personification. For example, the crows are humanized through the use of such words as “Sat”, “called”, “Brother” and “Harvest”; the hawks are personified by means of the words “lithe”, “Caressed”, “spied”, “hissed” and “Brother”; and the eagles through the use of “passed”, “said” and “Brother”. One implication that this line of reasoning has for the interpretation of the poem is that, by being personified by the speaker of the poem, the birds assume human qualities that enable them to behave like humans. They thus symbolize human conduct. As a result, we can deduce that just as some birds prey on other animals that are weaker than them, human beings, too, prey on other human beings by taking advantage of the weak and vulnerable ones among them. This is the ugly side of human nature.

Having arrived at this overall meaning of the poem, we can now identify the words and structures in the poem have contributed to the interpretation of the text. First, of all the words used to personify the birds (see the last paragraph) are foregrounded, as they have led to the

unravelling of the overall meaning of the text. Second, the examples of syntactic parallelism in the preceding discussion are also foregrounded because they have helped us to arrive at the meaning for the poem. It can thus be seen that the examples of deviation and repetition in the form of syntactic parallelism in the text are foregrounded.

It is important to note at this point that the analysis and interpretation of “As he Lay Dying” has shown that the stylistic interpretation of the literary text is a process: it is a step-by-step approach to the stylistic study of the literary text. Nothing is left to the imagination of the reader. The approach is comprehensive and painstaking one. The same thing is true of the analysis and interpretation of non-literary texts. I cannot demonstrate how that is done here, as it would take too much space and time.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this lecture, I have examined the application of stylistic principles to the study of both non-literary and literary texts. Since it is meaning that we are interested in in our analysis and interpretation of texts, the discussion has centred on the techniques made use of in working out the meaning of texts. In this connection, I examined areas of stylistic study in which I have been working, namely, the analysis and interpretation of both non-literary and literary texts: the study of the language of both types of text from the linguistic perspective. It was shown that my work has focused on the study of the language of politics and the language of sermons (non-literary texts), on the one hand, and the stylistic study of poetry and prose fictional texts, especially poetry and prose fiction. I then demonstrated the way in which the stylistic analysis and interpretation of a poem should be carried out. The reason for this is that the study of poetry is not popular with university students of English in Nigeria and they need to be motivated in this area of their academic endeavour.

I have not been able to go into detail on certain issues raised in this



lecture because of the vastness of the terrain that I have explored. As we have seen, stylistics is a broad area of study. Linguistics, in which it has its roots, is also very wide in scope. So, one cannot do justice to every area covered by these issues in one lecture. But I believe I have been able to highlight some of the important strands of stylistic studies.

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## INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES

(March 24, 2011 - March 31, 2017)

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled: “*Code Malaria: Eradication Developments for the Decade*” by Professor Ezekiel Adebisi of the Department of Computer and Management Information Sciences. March 24, 2011 (Vol. 1 No. 1)
2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled “Mono-Metallic Reforming Catalyst Life and Mortality: A Replica of human Life and a Panacea to Better Health” by Professor James Omoleye, Department of Chemical Engineering March 29, 2012 (Vol. 2 No. 1)
3. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled “Language Engineering and the Destiny of Man in Africa” by Professor Charles Ogbulogo, Professor of English and Dean School of Postgraduate Studies April 19 2013 (Vol. 3 No. 1)
4. The 4<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled “Microbial Life in the Presence of Carbon and Oxygen: Consequences for Man” by Professor Louis O. Egwari, Professor of Microbiology, Department of Biological Sciences and Director, Covenant University Centre for Research and Development February 14, 2014 (Vol. 4 No. 1)
5. The 5<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled “Sustainable Engineering: A Vital Approach to Innovative Productive Development and Community Capacity Building” by Professor Israel Dunmade, Professor of Sustainable Engineering, Department of Mechanical Engineering February 19, 2016 (Vol. 5 No. 1)
6. The 6<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled “Bastardisation of the Templates of Industrial Relations practice in Nigeria: All

- Actors in Employment Relationships are Accusative and Censurable” by Professor Olufemi J. Adeyeye, Professor Industrial Relations and Human Resource Development, Department of Business Management March 18, 2016 (Vol. 5 No. 2)
7. The 7<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled, “Deconstructing The National Development Agenda: The Role of Information And Communications Technologies (ICTS)” by Professor Charles K. Ayo, Professor of Computer Science & MIS, Department of Computer and Information Sciences. October 21, 2016 (Vol.6 No.1)
  8. The 8<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled, “What Does This Text Mean? Stylistics And The Process Of Interpretation.” by Professor Christopher Awonuga, Professor of Stylistics, Department of Languages and General Studies. March 31, 2017 (Vol.6 No.2)