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## **A Stylistic Analysis of Online Political Commentaries of The Edo 2020 Gubernatorial Election**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined a stylistic analysis of online political commentaries of the Edo 2020 gubernatorial election held on 19th September 2020. The researcher selected six political commentaries from two online newspapers (Independent and Daily Post). The focus of this study was to analyze the collected data based on the purposes of the study that covers syntactic, phonological and graphological features found in the selected political commentaries. The analysis hinged on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as its theoretical framework, while the method was qualitative research analysis. However, the descriptive survey method was employed to analyze the collected data. Therefore, the findings showed simple, non-simple sentences and declarative and imperative sentences. Moreover, phonological devices such as repetition, alliteration, assonance, and consonance were found therein. Also, foregrounded elements such as abbreviations or shortened words, symbols, and the use of small letters instead of capital letters to start sentences are evident in some of the comments. Also, the commentators dominantly deploy deviational and non-deviational foregrounding to captivate readers' attention. On this note, the researchers, therefore, concluded that all these stylistic features make this study unique, thereby differentiating it from other stylistic analyses.

**Keywords:** Foregrounding, Phonology, Political Commentaries, Stylistics, Syntax

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## 1. Introduction

Style is an attribute peculiar to an individual. It is all about the presentation of writer's ideas for reader's understanding and to create meaningful linguistic effects in the writer's literary text. It can be seen as a manner or way of doing things. This view is strengthened by Onyekwere, Chibueze, Rosecolette, Martins, & Quinette (2012, p. 408) that "Style is a manner or way of doing something special." In terms of linguistics, style is the manner of expression in writing and speaking (Suhadi & Baluqiah, 2017). In the light of this, style is a systematic use of language either in speaking or writing to specifically create some linguistic features. So, style, as a systematic use of language, can inclusively involve the use of signs and symbols.

Signs and symbols are therefore symbolic in the use of language for communicative purposes. So, when language of communication is embedded in signs and symbols, the use of language to convey information can be said to be stylistic. These signs and symbols are styles that underline the linguistic features that give any literary text peculiar stylistic effects. They are equally linguistic elements that mark distinctions in the use of language by two different individuals. Consequently, the examination of these linguistic features in any literary text is the focus of stylistics. Complementarily, Qian (2006) believes that stylistics studies the use of language in specific context and it attempts to account for the characteristics that mark the language use of individuals and social group. Suhadi & Baluqiah (2017) equally give a related opinion that stylistics is concerned with the study and interpretation of any form of writings from a linguistic perspective.

Stylistics, being the study of style, is very crucial in the field of language analysis. It is premised on the use of style in language or textual analysis. Yemet (2019) asserts that stylistics possesses a fundamental theoretical and methodological foundation to analyze language. Hence, when stylisticians involve in stylistic analysis, their major task is to identify the message a text is trying to convey through the reliance on the linguistic evidence in the text (Ogunsiji & Farinde 2010). In order to achieve this task, stylisticians are expected to understand that, when analyzing literary text, the basis of levels should be borne in mind. To give credence to this Tariq (2018) opines that while making stylistic analysis, its levels are identified as, Phonology, Graphology, Lexico-Syntax and Morphology. In a nutshell, stylisticians have to investigate literary texts through different levels so as to help reflect the content of the literary texts. Subsequently, Ogunsiji & Farinde (2010) opine that stylistic analysis deals with the examination of how a writer or a speaker uses all the available linguistic resources to convey his ideas and the peculiarities in his choice. It is therefore the type of analysis that enables the analyst to identify 'why' and 'how' in the text being studied.

It is on the above writers' opinion that the researcher is interested in conducting this study using online newspapers as a means of conducting research into the analysis of political commentaries. This, however, will definitely make a difference from any of the studies

previously conducted using stylistics as an analytical tool. One of them is Olusanya (2016) that carried out “A Stylistic Analysis of Language of Politics in the Acceptance Speech of President Goodluck Jonathan.” The focus of the study is to pay attention to the special features that differentiate language of politics from other forms of language use in advertisement, religion, science and technology. Even though Olusanya (2016) and other stylisticians have made some reasonable attempts perhaps similar to mine but they have used different approaches in conducting researches into stylistic analysis. The present study therefore is an attempt to fill some of the gaps yet to be filled in the previous studies already carried out on stylistic analysis by analyzing political commentaries on online newspapers with focuses on syntactic features, phonological devices, and foregrounded elements. Therefore, the desire of the researcher to conduct this research informs the title of this study: *A Stylistic Analysis of Online Political Commentaries of Edo 2020 Gubernatorial Election*.

The general purpose of the study is to analyze the stylistic features inherent in the selected political commentaries of Edo 2020 gubernatorial election on online newspapers. Specifically, the study intends to achieve the following purposes:

1. to analyze and identify the syntactic features of the selected commentaries
2. to determine the extent in which phonological devices manifest in the selected commentaries
3. to examine the foregrounded elements found in the selected commentaries

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Style

Style is an attribute peculiar to different individuals. It refers to the way things are being done by different individuals. In an ordinary term, Murana (2011) sees style as “manner of doing things.” By extension, it is seen as how an individual talks, writes, prays, dresses, dances, sings, walks, eats, sleeps, among others. The concept of style has been used by different scholars to mean different things. Linguistically, the concept of style could be seen as a distinct pattern employed by a particular speaker or writer to present himself/herself which in turn brings about a clear distinction in his/her speech or work. Thus, style is an indispensable ingredient in language use and choice. So, the importance of style in language is stressed as follows:

*Style has to do with peculiar way of using language to achieve a striking effect. It is like saying that language is the ingredient of style; style uses language to achieve aesthetic, linguistic glory that produces a remarkable effect. (Onyekwere et al 2012, p. 408)*

Backing this opinion, Lawal (1997) says that style is an aspect of language that deals with choices of diction, phrases, sentences, and linguistic materials that are consistent and harmonious with the subject matter. He explains further by saying that style involves the narrative technique used by a writer in terms of choice and distribution of words and character. Suhadi and Baluqiah (2017) opine that the term 'style' is used in linguistics to describe the choices which language makes available to a user, above and beyond the choices necessary for the simple expression of a meaning. They posit further that style is a variation in the use of language whether in a literary way or non-literary way. It is the different kinds of narrative options used by a narrator linguistically.

## **2.2. Stylistics**

Stylistics is derived from the word 'style'. It is a recent development with the attempt to study style. Thus, reactions to imprecision of literary studies and an attempt to put criticism on a scientific basis gave birth to stylistics. Stylistics is a linguistic discipline primarily concerned with text analysis using linguistic framework, that is, linguistic levels of analysis as its analytical tool. Different individuals, groups of linguists, and literary critics have given different views on stylistics. So, stylistics is not limited to literary analysis. It is a discipline that has been approached from many perspectives for serving various meanings, purposes ranging from communication to command and persuasion even though stylistic works initially started with literary text. It is on this background that stylistics is sometimes called literary linguistics or literary stylistics (Suhadi & Baluqiah, 2017). They, however, posit further that the focus of stylistics in this modern era has expanded to cover wide areas of linguistic analyses such as manuals, recipes as well as novels and advertisements. Complementarily, Tariq (2018) is of the view that stylistics in modern time is an analytical science which covers all the expressive aspects of language as phonology, prosody, morphology, syntax, and lexicology. So, the focus of this study covers syntax, phonology and graphology (foregrounded elements).

## **2.3. Syntax**

Syntax deals with how different classes of words are brought together to form a sentence. Huda, Ali and Mahmood (2014) claim that syntax is about sentence construction and how words are grouped together to make phrases and sentences. It is the sequential construction of words to form larger units such as phrases, clauses, and sentences. It plays crucial role in sentence construction by ensuring mutual relationship among the different units brought together to form a sentence. Sharndama and Mohammed (2013) justify that syntax describes the grammatical relations that exist between words and other units within the sentence. The grammaticality of a sentence is determined by syntax because it revolves around how words are combined to form larger grammatical units such as phrases, clauses, and sentence. Hence, it is rule-governed. According to Farinde & Ojo (2005), at this level of stylistic analysis, the analyst is concerned with the syntactic arrangements of words to forms phrases, clauses and

sentence patterns. This study therefore looks into syntactic arrangement of words by analyzing and identifying the syntactic features of the sentences in the selected political commentaries.

#### **2.4. Phonology**

Phonology is the study of how sounds function in a given language. According to Lodge (2009) phonology describes the ways in which speech sounds are organized and generated in language. He asserts further that phonology is the study of linguistic systems in such a way that sound represents differences of meaning in a language. In the same vein, Ofuya (2007) believes that phonology describes the ways in which speech sounds are organized in English into a system. Phonology basically deals with the sound patterns, the rhyming scheme and utterance of the word in the sentence. Therefore, it is interesting to say that at this level of analysis that attention should be given to some components because phonology has to do with the sound in any literary work. This study therefore delves into manifestations of phonological devices such as repetition, alliteration, assonance, and consonance in the selected political commentaries.

#### **2.5. Foregrounding**

In literary studies and stylistics, foregrounding is a linguistic strategy of calling attention to certain language features in order to shift the reader's attention from what is said to how it is said. In systemic functional linguistics, foregrounding refers to a prominent portion of text that contributes meaning, contrasted with the background, which provides relevant context for the foreground (Richard, 2020). It is the symbolic characteristic of literary language forms (Zhang, 2017). In the view of Ogunsiji & Farinde (2010), foregrounding is viewed as “putting to the front”. They stress further that it is used to refer to factors of deviation from linguistic and literary norms. Also, Leech (2001) opines that foregrounding is a type of intentional deviation from arts. Thus, foregrounding is stylistic distortion achieved through deviation from the writing norm. As deviation from the writing norm, foregrounding is therefore seen as a product of irregularities in literary text. The irregularities can be as a product of excessive repetition or parallelism.

Foregrounding is perceived to be de-automatized use of language. Before the principle of foregrounding was developed by Mukorovsky, there was automatized use of language in a literary text with adherence to writing conventions. To consolidate this, Anderson (2014, p. 16) expatiates that, “The automatized (routine) use of language, which requires strict adherence to the conventions of language, schematizes it or puts it in a more general and acceptable way thus produces familiar meanings only.” In line with the view of Ogunsiji & Farinde (2010) on foregrounding as factors of deviation from linguistic and literary norms, this study examines the foregrounded elements as a result of deviant use of words in the selected political commentaries.

## ***2.6. Online Newspapers and Political Commentaries***

Online newspapers are newspapers published through online platform. They are otherwise known as digital newspapers. Globally today, there is a fast growth of publications in online newspapers. In Nigeria today, there are keen interests in online newspapers by Nigerians. Thus online newspapers have become popular since the rise of Internet accessibility in the country. This development has encouraged Nigerians to begin to rely on the internet for news. Olley and Chile (2015) ascertain that the newspaper industry in Nigeria has also joined the world trend of publishing daily newspapers on the internet. Presently, most of the Nigerian newspapers are available online.

Political commentaries or discourses are associated with commentaries that are political. The commentators involved are political actors, authors who are basically political analysts and experienced politicians. The same can be said of online political commentators even though some of them are deficient in language usage in terms of grammar and sentence construction. However, the goal of stylistic analysis is to account for distinctive use of language as a result of the particular choices made by individual writers or speakers. It is on this background that the researcher intends to use stylistics as an analytical tool to analyze online political commentaries of Edo 2020 gubernatorial election.

## ***2.7. Theoretical Framework***

The theoretical basis of this study is anchored on Systemic Functional Grammar. It is a linguistic theory with a wider scope in language analysis. It emphasizes “choice” as a hallmark of language use by its users. Akinwotu (2018) opines that it is a theory of language that emphasizes the importance of the choices made by users of language in their linguistic performance. Thus, every language user is allowed to make choices in their use of language for a better linguistic performance. He stresses further that the theory provides tools for the description of the choices made by language users in any given linguistic context. So, choices can be freely made to enhance linguistic features in the use of language without much attention to rule governing the correctness of sentence construction. This idea however negates the traditional assertion that considers language as rule-governed which does not allow creativity in the use of language. It is on this basis that Bavail and Sadighi (2008, p. 15) assert that, “Systemic functional grammar takes the resource perspective rather than rule perspective and it is designed to display the overall system of grammar rather than only fragments.” This, therefore, implies that the theory is encompassing and it takes into consideration how language works in terms of human interaction. To buttress this, Halliday (1985) opines that language had evolved in the process of carrying out certain critical functions through human beings interaction with their social environment since the explanation of how language works needed to be grounded in a functional analysis. Subsequently, systemic functional grammar therefore perceives language as a resource for making meaning and meaning conversely resides in systemic patterns of choice. In view of

this, this paper examines some linguistic features that manifest in the use of language by online political commentators in respect of the choices made by them. It is believed that some linguistic features inherent in the selected political commentaries under investigation make this paper different from other stylistic analyses because it takes place in a distinct social context. Specifically, it identifies and analyzes some choices made by online political commentators.

### 3. Method

To investigate into stylistic analysis of online political commentaries of Edo 2020 gubernatorial election, the researcher collected data for the analysis. The data collected for this study cover some areas of stylistic analysis such as syntactic, phonological and graphological levels. The data were collected through observation method by studying the use of language by political commentators in respect of the political headlines of Edo 2020 gubernatorial election on online newspapers. The researchers adopted a multi stage sampling technique to select 6 comments for the analysis to collect the data from *Independent* and *Daily Post* (online newspapers). Hence, the methodology in which this research was carried out was qualitative research analysis in which the descriptive survey method was employed for the analysis of data collected for this study. The choice of this method was borne out of the fact that the study was interested in describing and analyzing the stylistic features inherent in selected online political commentaries of Edo 2020 gubernatorial election.

### 4. Analyses and Discussion

The analysis of this study is based on stylistic features inherent in the selected online political commentaries of Edo 2020 gubernatorial election using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as its theoretical framework. It focuses on syntax, phonology and foregrounding. All these features are identified in the selected data to realize the general objective of this study which is to stylistically analyze some linguistic features inherent in the selected political commentaries. Consequent upon this, 2 political headlines with 6 commentaries in which each headline consists of 3 commentaries (3 data) are selected for analysis. To aid the simplicity of the analysis, the researcher groups the headlines and data using numbers and the English language letters of the alphabet system.

**HEADLINE 1: Edo People Should Defend Their Votes in Any Way Possible- Amori-Independent**

**Datum A:**

.....EDOLITRS SHINE YOUR EYES!!!!!!

With a notorious serial election rigging and mandate stealing APC political party around, VIGILANCE is the watchword.

#SHINE YOUR EYES#

### Syntactic Features:

- S                      P                      C
- i.            ///..... EDOLITRS /SHINE /YOUR EYES!!!!!!!!!!!!///
- A
- ii.            /// With a notorious serial election rigging and mandate stealing APC political party
- S                      P                      C
- around, /VIGILANCE /is /the watchword.///
- P                      C
- iii.            ///#SHINE /YOUR EYES#///

This comment is made up of three simple sentences. Two out of the three sentences are imperative while the remaining one is a declarative sentence. They are basic and non-basic simple sentences with SPC, ASPC, and PC structures respectively.

### Phonological Devices:

- i.            Repetition: The following words are repeated in the comment; shine, your, and eyes
- ii.            Alliteration: /s/ alliterates in serial...stealing; and /p/ political party
- iii.            Consonances: /l/ is repeated in serial ... stealing; and /t/ in political party
- iv.            Assonance: /i/ assonates in serial...stealing...political; /ai/ in SHINE ... EYES

### Foregrounded Elements:

The commentator foregrounded some of the words in this comment for the purpose of emphasis. Words such as EDOLITRS, SHINE, YOUR, EYES, VIGILANCE are written in capital letters instead of small letters. Foregrounding also manifests in the over usage of ellipsis before the first word “..... EDOLITRS” and exclamatory mark at the end of the last word in the first sentence “EYES!!!!!!!!!!” Also, the use of “#” before the first word and after the last word in the last sentence is an example of foregrounding.



**Datum B:**

edo people are not cowards, come 19sept they will VOTE and defend their VOTES.

**Syntactic Features:**

- |     |   |          |          |
|-----|---|----------|----------|
|     | <b>S</b>  | <b>P</b> | <b>C</b> |
| i.  | ///edo people /are not /cowards,///                       |          |          |
|     | <b>ð</b>  |          | <b>ð</b> |
| ii. | ///come 19sept they will VOTE //and// defend their VOTES. |          |          |

This comment consists of one simple sentence and one non-simple sentence. The simple one is a declarative sentence having the basic structure of SPC. On the other hand, the non-simple one is a compound sentence having the structure of two independent clauses.

**Phonological Devices:**

- i. Repetition: The only repeated word is “vote”
- ii. Alliteration: /ð/ alliterates in they ... their
- iii. Assonance: /ə/ assonates in peopleu ... cowuards; /e/ in sept ... defend; and /i/ in will ... defend
- iv. Consonance: /d/ and /n/ are repeated in and defend

**Foregrounded Elements:**

Words such as edo, VOTE, and VOTES are foregrounded by the commentator. “edo” as used in the comment is given the status of deviational foregrounding because it is a proper noun expected to start with a capital letter “E” rather than small letter “e.” Likewise, VOTE and VOTES are written in upper cases instead of lower cases for the purpose of emphasis to attract readers’ attention.

**Datum C:**

Yes, they should do everything possible to guides their votes, because I remembered what happened during the reruns elections in Kano state where THUGS were hired to disrupt elections processes with dangerous weapons and letter on declared the winning stronghold INCONCLUSIVE the most annoying thing is that the police and other security apparatus were present and watching!!!

Meanwhile external forces were hired to unleashed terror on the citizens.

EDOLITES shine your eyes because this is the agenda!!!

### Syntactic Features:

i.  $\delta$   $\beta$   $\beta$   
 ///Yes,///they should do everything possible //to guides their votes, //because I  
 $\beta$   
 remembered //what happened during the reruns elections in Kano state //where  
 $\beta$   $\beta$   
 THUGS were hired //to disrupt elections processes with dangerous weapons //and  
 $\delta$   $\delta$   
 //letter on declared the winning stronghold INCONCLUSIVE //the most annoying  
 $\beta$   
 thing is //that the police and other security apparatus were present and watching!!!

	<b>δ</b>	<b>β</b>	
ii.	///Meanwhile external forces were hired //to unleashed terror on the citizens.///		

iii.        **δ**                      **β**  
              //EDOLITES shine your eyes //because this is the agenda!!!!//

This comment is made up of three non-simple sentences. The first sentence is a very long multiple complex sentences consisting of three independent clauses and six dependent clauses while the remaining two are each consists of one independent clause and one dependent clause thereby making them complex sentences.

## Phonological Devices:

- i. Repetition: Words such as to, were, hired, and elections were repeatedly used by the commentator in this comment.
- ii. Alliteration: /w/ alliterates in where... were; and /ð/ in that the
- iii. Assonance: /i/ assonates in annoying thiing; and this is; and /ai/ in shiine ... eyes
- iv. Consonance: /ð/ is repeated in this ... the; and /<sup>h</sup>/in annoying thing

### Foregrounded Elements:

Words such as THUGS, INCONCLUSIVE, EDOLITES are written in capital letters instead of small letters. They are therefore foregrounded by the commentator.

**HEADLINE 2: Edo Decides: Voters scramble for cash as APC leaders allegedly share money-** *Daily Post*

**Datum A:**

tinubu and oshiomole at work! chop apc money but vote for PDP/Obaseki

**Syntactic Features:**

δ                      δ

- i.        ///chop apc money //but// vote for PDP/Obaseki

Apart from the phrase that starts it, this comment comprises only one non-simple sentence said in imperative mood. It is therefore a compound sentence that has the structure of two independent clauses.

**Phonological Devices:**

- i.        Assonance: /æ / assonates in and ... at; and /ʌ/ in money but
- ii.      Consonance: /t/ is repeated in but vote; and /p/ in chop apc

**Foregrounded Elements:**

Both “apc” and “PDP” are foregrounding even though they are written in acronyms. “apc”, the acronym for All Progressives Congress is an example of deviational foregrounding by writing it in small letters instead of capital letters while “PDP” the acronym of People Democratic Party is an example of a non-deviational foregrounding. They are both used by the commentator to get the attention of the readers. Also, “tinubu” and “oshiomole” being proper nouns denoting the names of persons are supposed to start in upper cases as in “Tinubu” and “Oshiomole.” The small letter “c” in “chop” is equally foregrounded being the first letter of a sentence.

**Datum B:**

this is what they are known for, even rigging the election is their expert game. hmmmm, oh God help my people

**Syntactic Features:**

δ                      β

- i.        /// this is //what they are known for,///

$\beta$ 

- ii. */// even rigging the election //is their expert game.///*

**S**                      **P**                      **C**

- iii. ///hmmmm, oh God /help /my people///

This comment is a mixture of one simple sentence and two non-simple sentences. The simple sentence has non-basic simple sentence pattern due to the interjections “hmmmm, oh” preceding the subject. On the other hand, the non-simple ones are complex sentences with each containing one independent clause and one dependent clause.

## Phonological Devices:

- i. Alliteration: / ð/ alliterates in this ... they
- ii. Assonance: /i/ assonates in this is
- iii. Consonance: /l/ and /p/ are repeated in help ... people

### Foregrounded Elements:

The commentator employed deviational foregrounding by starting each of the sentences with a small letter instead of a capital letter.

**Datum C:**

Stop giving flimsy excuses for your glaring woo...Not only APC is sharing money PDP also doing that.

Put ten million Obasekis together they can't stop single Pastor Ozagie Izeyamu from winning. This is already won battle.

### Syntactic Features:

**P**                      **C**                      **A**

- i. *///Stop giving /flimsy excuses /for your glaring woo...///*

$$\delta \qquad \delta$$

- ii. *///Not only APC is sharing money //PDP also doing that.///*

 $\delta$   $\delta$ 

- iii. ///Put ten million Obasekis together //they can't stop single Pastor Ozagie Izeyamu from winning.///

## S P A C

- iv.     ///This /is/ already /won /battle.///

There are two simple sentences and two non-simple sentences in this comment. The simple ones are imperative and declarative sentences. They have non-basic simple sentence structures of PCA and SPAC respectively. On the other hand, the non-simple sentences are both compound sentences with each containing two independent clauses.

### Phonological Devices:

- i.       Repetition: The only repeated word is “stop”
- ii.      Alliteration: /s/ alliterates in stop single; and /g/ and /n/ in giving ... glaring
- iii.     Assonance: /ɔ:/ assonates in for your; and /i/ in This is
- iv.      Consonance: /t/ is repeated in can't stop; and /z/ in flimsy excuses

### Foregrounded Elements:

APC and PDP are the only foregrounded words. This is a non-deviational foregrounding to give them prominence by the commentator in order to attract readers' attention. Also, the use of ellipsis is an instance of foregrounding. Instead of four dots (....), the commentator used three dots (...) to end the first sentence.

## 5. Conclusion

The choices of language and styles made by language users are veritable linguistic elements in any literary texts. Every language user is allowed to make choices in their use of language for a better linguistic performance. Relatedly, this same idea manifests in the use of language by different political commentators on online political commentaries. Therefore, this study has carried out an investigation into a stylistic analysis of online political commentaries of Edo 2020 gubernatorial election. It is primarily carried out to analyze stylistic features inherent in the selected political commentaries. Consequent upon this, it is noteworthy that the analyzed comments are: Syntactically, they are structurally a conglomeration of simple and non-simple sentences without any instance of a multiple sentence while they are functionally embedded in declarative and imperative sentences without any instance of interrogative and exclamatory sentences. Phonologically, phonological devices such as repetition, alliteration, assonance, and consonance fully manifest in all the analyzed comments. Graphologically, some of the comments and the sentences therein start with small letters rather than capital letters. Also, the use of abbreviations or shortened words and symbols are evidential in some of the comments. In the same development, the commentators dominantly deploy deviational and non-deviational foregrounding to captivate readers' attentions. Hence, it is believed the aforementioned linguistic features that manifest in the analyzed political commentaries are attestations to fact that different writers make different

choices in their use of language. It is no doubt that this has made this paper a unique one and it has made it different from other stylistic analyses.

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