A Stylistic Study of Akandu Stella Nkechi's *My Mother's Blessing*
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Abstract

Scholars have concentrated on the role of children's literature in espousing Nigeria's multiculturalism, gender, and, transfer of values to children. They often ignore the stylistic property of these texts and their effectiveness in displaying those ideas critics often discuss. This study, therefore, examines language as used in Stella Akandu's *My Mother's Blessing* (2013) to achieve aesthetic and didactic goals. Leech and Short's (2007) analytic model was used for this work, and it is divided into four major areas: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. The researcher investigates the author's many styles, which include the use of idioms, cohesiveness, and lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives to express obedience, hard work, and achievement for every child. The research findings reveal that children's literature becomes more interesting and appealing if its aesthetic and didactic values are appreciated and appropriated. It also concludes that the text under consideration has the potential to enhance children's vocabulary as well as their mental and emotional components because a child's future is dependent on his daily growth and development.

Keywords: *style, stylistics, children's literature, lexical category, figurative expressions, cohesion.*

Introduction
Style is revealed via the use of words and it distinguishes between two pieces of writing. Style, an ambiguous term, means different things to different people in different professions (Adejare 1992, p,1). For a psychologist, style is a sort of behaviour; for a critic or reader, personality; and for a linguist, formal patterns in function. Style thus is a function of each writer's linguistic ability and a purposeful attempt to shape or real fashioning of that capacity, linguistic know-how, into a distinct form of linguistic performance.

The medium of storytelling is one of the primary means by which people's styles are represented. Adults and children have different tastes in stories. So what appeals to an adult may not appeal to a child. Children's stories, for example, come in a variety of styles and teach a variety of moral lessons. It is critical to recognize the children's cognitive level, when educating them so that the style and approaches used do not complicate the child's grasp of what they are intended to learn. Famous Chinua Achebe, for example, was among those that led the way in this aspect. Some of his works for children include

Chike and the River (1966), *The Drum* (1977). Notwithstanding, Cyprian Ekwensi was one of the first authors to write for both children and adults; the only difference is that Ekwensi's approach was largely entertainment-oriented and he was less concerned with writing to educate and instill traditional African values in his young audience. As a result of modernity, most of his writing were focused on city-dwellers and the moral dangers to which African children in the cities are exposed. Examples of his works include *The Drummer Boy (*1960*), An African Night Entertainment (*1962*), Juju Rock (*1966*)*. Other famous authors who wrote for children between 1970s and 1980s are Mabel Segun- *My Father's Daughter (*1965*), My Mother's Daughter (*1985*)*. Flora Nwapa - *Emeka -Driver's Guard (*1972*), Mammy Water (*1979*)*, Eddie Iroh: *Without A Silver Spoon (*1981*)*. Other contemporary prolific writers for children include the likes of Akandu Nkechi Stella, Dapo Adeleke, Uche Peter Umez, Anezi Okoro and many others. The above-mentioned authors and books are African, and Nigerian based to be precise. These authors find it important to write and provide children with stories that will present an accurate image of Africa and Africans. Its culture and traditions, and also inculcate good morals through educational values.

According to Wang (2000, p, 20), "children's literature is good to children's minds in the combination of education, entertainment, and inspiration" due to its rich creative and aesthetic characteristics. When writing, it considers children's language and cognitive levels with the goal of attaching to literature and accomplishing educational, ethical, aesthetic, and artistic functions. It is a new literary genre that targets the mind and perception of a certain age group with its own idiosyncrasies, mentality, awareness, and educational techniques (Naguib,1991, p, 279). As it attempts to construct the child's individuality and inculcate healthy values, this type of literature plays an important part in shaping the child's personality, cognition, behavior, and style (Belkacem, 2015, p, 30-31). As a result, the scope of this article will be confined to the study of children's stories in general and children's literature in particular. The plot has several qualities, including power, excitement, and suspense.

Akandu is a writer whose choice of words, lexical elements, cohesion and context, and the use of idiom help to deliver her message clearly to the readers. There is the need to stylistically analyze her work in order to identify the various stylistic devices used in her short story to convey her message. This problem is what stimulated the researchers' interest to carry out a stylistic analysis of *My Mother's Blessing.*

Children's Literature
In general, literature is the representation or expression of life, cognition, and emotion via language structures. Children's literature can be summarized as literature that is aimed at children in their growing years and is suitable for their stage of mental and psychological development. It includes written material for children that are not yet interested in adult literature or do not yet possess adult reading skills (Bika'ee, 2003)

Childhood is a major factor that determines the contents of children's literature. There are a number of factors that determine the continuously changing concept of childhood. Therefore, some scholars argue that children's literature should be produced accordingly in order to meet the children's needs and contribute to their development. A review provided by Goldstone (1986), states that a seven-year child in the middle ages is considered an adult who is capable of engaging in every adult activity and the concept of childhood was almost non-existent. Consequently, children's literature is something that didn't exist at that time. 'Orbis Pictus' was the book that indicated the emergence of the notion of childhood with pictures in 1659 (Epstein, 1991, p, 2). The

year 1961 marked a remarkable change in the concept of childhood, the educational philosopher John Locke compared a child to empty vessels that needed to be filled (as cited in Goldstone 1986). With this new conceptualization, people started to pay attention to nurturing, developing, and filling their children's minds with the information needed for them to be productive members of their society. As a result, the content of children's literature changes to meet the needs of every generation. Children's literature is divided into three age groups: those aged 0 to 8 years, those aged 8 to 12, and those aged 12 to 16. This kind of literature comprises vocal, written, visual, and digital works that have the capacity to develop children's mental and emotional aspects.

Children's literature, as the name indicates, has been viewed by scholars as reading materials or writing aimed solely toward children. It may also be viewed as items or writings that aid youngsters in their development. It varies from adult literature in terms of language, topic, and cultural distinctiveness (Zhao and Jiang, 2013, p, 944-949).

Adetuyi (2017) carried out research on "the role of children's literature in the declaration of Nigeria as a multicultural state". The paper proposes that given the inherent role literature plays in character molding, children's literature should be replete with topics and ideas that promote a better understanding of cultures and diversities represented within Nigeria. This will thereby make children's literature a vital tool for promoting the declaration of Nigeria as a multicultural state.

In a similar way, Ngwuchukwu and Nwachi (2020) worked on "Nigerian children's literature: A viable tool for addressing social issues in Nigeria." The purpose of the study was to identify these social issues which include gender discrimination, insecurity, corruption, and sexual immorality, the causes of these social ills, the implications of these social issues, the relationship between these social issues and children's literature and also proffer children's literature as a solution to the decadence in the society. Also, Yusuf (2013) researched on "harnessing children's literature for Nigerian's transformation agenda". The aim of the paper was to examined the viability of children's literature as an alternative factor capable of fostering the much talked-about national transformation as postulated in Nigerian's current transformation agenda.

Uzegbu (2012) studied "gender transformation in children's literature in Nigeria: issues, challenges and consequences to gender equality". The research attempted a holistic study of issues, challenges and consequences involved in the transformation of perceived roles of boys and girls in children's literature in Nigeria. The research consisted of analyses of the content and context of selected children's literature, their language and illustrations, in Nigeria.

Finally, the works reviewed are similar to the current research because they are all analyses of children's literature from Nigeria. Most children's literature has a theme that is being projected and if these themes are properly put in use through various means of instruction from parents, teachers, guardians, and authors, they will do a great deal in the formation of a child's attitude from a tender age. However, the current study is a bit different from others in that it specifically examines the use of language and style in Akandu's *My Mother's Blessing*, focusing on the author's choice of words, lexical categories, idioms, and cohesion. This is therefore the gap that this study intends to fill.

Style and Stylistics
Style refers to how one expresses oneself. Language use has stylistic variants, just as there are different ways of doing things. The

distinctive feature of the style is based on the writer's selection and arrangement of various items of language based on the genre, form, topic, or author's overall disposition (Aworo 2017, p, 1). This implies that style can be simple or complex depending on the standpoint of the author. When the writer is at 0 degrees, the style is considered to be unmarked. Roland Barthes used the phrase "zero degrees" in 1967 to describe Camus's lack of style in his traditional French writing. Some scholars, such as Wales (1989, p, 484), have criticized the phrase, claiming that no writing can have a "zero style," neutral style, or transparent style. In fact, the lack of a distinct style might be considered syntactically significant.

As Holman noticed in terms of stylistics;
The arrangement of words in a manner that at once best expresses the individuality of the author and the idea and the intent in the author's mind, the best style, for any given purpose, is that which most clearly approximates a perfect adaptation of one's language to one's ideas. Style is a combination of two elements: the idea to be expressed and the individuality of the author, (1976, p, 432).

Many language researchers have assigned diverse interpretations to the term stylistics, which has a broad range. As a result, it might be simply defined as the study of style. Lucas (1955, p, 9) defines style as the effective use of language, especially in prose, whether to make statements or to rouse emotions. It may alternatively be defined as the description and study of the variability forms of linguistic items in actual language usage.

According to Leech, "the most effective technique of establishing both clarity and diction as well as assessing dignity is the employment of a changed form of words" (1969, p, 14). Furthermore, Aworo defines stylistics as "the study of the many styles that are present in either a specific utterance or a written text or document" (2017, p, 2). She goes on to say that one of the key concerns of stylistics is the constant occurrence of specific structures, things, and features in a speech, utterance, or text.

Verdonk states that stylistics, the linguistic/scientific study of style, can be described as the examination of distinctive expressions in language and the explanation of their purpose and impact (2002, p, 4-7). He went on to say that style does not appear out of nowhere, but that its production, purpose, and effect are deeply rooted in the specific context in which both the writer and the reader play critical roles, and that by doing so, we should be able to distinguish between two types of context: linguistic and non-linguistic context. The surrounding qualities of language inside a text, such as typography, sounds, words, phrases, and sentences, that are significant to the understanding of other linguistic components, are referred to as linguistic context. The non-linguistic background is even more complicated in that it might comprise any number of text-external factors that influence the language and style of a text. These are known as linguo-literary characteristics.

The notions of style and stylistic variation in language are founded on the fundamental idea that content can be coded in more than one linguistic form within the language system. As a result, style may be viewed as a choice of linguistic methods, departures from language standards, recurring elements of linguistic forms, and comparisons. Hence, stylistics works with a broad variety of language types and styles that may be used to create various texts, whether spoken or written, monologue or dialogue, formal or casual, scientific or religious, and so on (Aworo 2017, p, 3). According to the preceding research, style is the selection and arrangement of linguistic elements that can be chosen.

The study adopts Leech and Short's (2007) model of linguistic and stylistic categories as the analytical tool. Leech and Short (2007) propose an analytical template for doing linguistic stylistic analysis of texts, which they referred to as a checklist. This theory was first established in 1981 and updated in 2007 in their book titled *Style in Fiction*, second edition. According to them, every stylistic analysis is an attempt to find the artistic values underlying a writer's choice of language. Leech and Short argue further that all texts and writers have individual qualities and these qualities are what call the attention of stylisticians in order to select what is significant and dominant in texts. The checklist is therefore, a useful tool for doing a linguistic stylistic analysis and is suitable for this study. These scholars place the stylistic categories under four headings: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context.

Methodology

The study adopts the descriptive research design because it focuses on the discussion of relationships that exist between phenomena in other to describe, compare, contrast, analyze and interpret events. This design is analytical and interpretative in nature. Therefore, this choice is informed by the researcher's quest to analyze and interpret the author's choice of the linguistic features used in the text in order to drive home the central messages of the short story.

Plot Account: *My Mother's Blessing.*

Akandu Stella wrote the story *My Mother's Blessing*, a modern narrative for youngsters based on the experiences of the main character, Victoria. Victoria is raised in Eleme, in the South Eastern town of Niema in Nigeria. She is not only beautiful and compassionate; she is also charitable and hardworking. Victoria is always the subject of her mother's unceasing prayers, and she kneels before her mother every morning to receive maternal blessings. Victoria is an empathetic and loving character, as seen by her ongoing care and concern for the less fortunate, notably the elderly residents of her society. Victoria stands in contrast to her companions Fidelia and Edith, who exhibit negative characteristics. Her generosity and concern for others made her an appealing figure, and many local parents wished she might be their in-law. Victoria, on the other hand, did not consider marriage since she was focused on completing her studies up to the university level. When Victoria was abducted along with other village children, the entire community rushed out to rescue them. The bandits were apprehended and turned over to the police. Victoria eventually finished her school, obtained a decent career, and married a successful engineer.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section deals with the presentation and analysis of data gathered from the children's literary text. The use of diction, chapters, headings, and lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and several others were analyzed. Cohesion and its types, idiomatic expressions, and figures of speech were also presented and analyzed.

Diction – The language in children's stories is brief and straightforward. Depending on their age grade, the words are usually one or two syllables long. The material under consideration has short and basic terms that young children may quickly identify and understand.

Chapters are major text segments. They form the whole picture when put together. The children's short story consists of ten chapters that are well-arranged and meaningful.

Heading is the name of a text or its segment. It tends to disclose the plot of the narration. It refers to the visual conventions of arranging texts to assist reading and comprehension. The story has ten headings

written in capital letters that are eye-catching; they are meaningful and form parts of the story. Under each heading, there are pictures that displayed an activity being carried out in relation to what the headings mean. Some of the headings include:

VICTORIA THE GOOD GIRL, YOUNG VICTORIA HELPED A WIDOW, SUITORS VISIT VICTORIA'S HOUSE, VICTORIA AND KIDNAPPERS, VICTORIA ESCAPED, FIDELIA TURNS A NEW LEAF.

Lexical Category

Nouns – Akandu uses a good number of nouns to drive home her central message. All the characters together with what they stand for are all nouns since a noun names persons, places, things, and ideas. Some of the nouns used by the author are discussed below:

Proper Nouns are used to refer to the major characters in the story -Victoria, Maureen, Doris, Bernadine, Chika, and many other names that were present in the text.

Abstract versus Concrete Nouns – Wisdom, hunting, hunger, and rescue are some examples of abstract nouns. Other abstract terms are also employed to describe the characters' psychological states, such as happy, surprised, radiant, rejoice, merriment, and burdened. The author also mentioned natural occurrences like danger, harm, night, morning, and dark. While on the other hand, the story's most essential concrete noun is "cutlass." This term was utilized by the author as the primary instrument for the disintegration of human connections. Because it is a destructive weapon, everyone fears it. This is shown as follows: "Godwin rushed to them for help but they refused to listen to him. …he became desperate and brandished his *cutlass*" (39). Farm, bush, van, bed, firewood, bucket, and many more are examples of concrete nouns used in the story.

Collective Nouns are terms that refer to a group or collection of persons or objects in such a way that the group is discussed as a whole. Here are a few instances from the story:

Unknown to *the community,* kidnappers had laid ambushed waiting for the unsuspecting victims (30).
She took her parents to *the city* and she also enlarged her charity work (60).

Other examples are the old, the widows, the sick, the needy, and the masses.

Verbs – Akandu employs a variety of verbs in her writing to describe the deeds of Victoria and some of her friends. An action verb is a physical action th**a**t is performed with bodies or objects such as watch, climb, drive, take, run.

She will *take* a nap and woke up to do her homework (23).
He stumbled and fell; stood up and continued to *run* until he got to where there were people (39).

Stative Verbs – When used in a sentence, stative verbs do not refer to actions. Therefore, it is important to know that some verbs can be used as either action or stative verbs depending on their meaning in the sentence. Examples are have, want, and go.
She wondered what she would *have* told her husband if something had happened to her baby (55).

Auxiliary Verbs also known as helping verbs, are verbs that cooperate with other verbs to modify the meaning of a phrase. These include modifying the verb's tense or changing the mood of a statement.
…he *had* gotten their contact address…. (66)

Modal Verbs are a type of helpful verb that may be used to change the mood of a statement. Each modal verb is employed

differently and can communicate ideas like capacity, need, possibility, or permission.
"*Victoria's mother could not have wished for a better daughter*" …, (10).
"Fidelia *would fight* anyone who wanted to advise her", (19).
"Parents *should do* everything possible to groom their kids well" …, (69).

A regular Verb is one whose past tense form and past participle finish in -ed, -d, or the verb is a -t variant verb.
 "she *told* them to hurry up before they carry the other children away" (46).
 "Fidelia *buried* herself studying seriously for her exams" (62).
"She *left* her washed and unwashed clothes at the river bank" (5 5).

Irregular Verbs - A verb is irregular if its past tense and past participle do not finish in -ed, -d, or the -t variation. The spelling of these verbs frequently changes substantially or does not change at all.

 "Victoria's hope *came* alive when she sighted some glimmer of light from afar" (46).
"She *gave* them tough time when she was caught" … (44).
"She *knelt* down and her mum prayed for God's guidance and protection" (30).

Adjectives - Most of the adjectives used in the story have physical and psychological attributes. The physical adjectives like calm, young, better, weak, generous, pretty, biggest, and happiest, are used to describe an object and the appearance of characters. And psychological adjectives like curious, horrible, terrible, tough are used to describe the state in which Victoria's mother is when Victoria was kidnapped alongside other children.

She knew that her parents especially her mother would be in a *terrible* state now (33).

A*dverbs* are important in the story as a whole. They provide additional information about the verbs and events as the tale progresses. The author employs a wide range of adverbs to highlight her writing style.
Adverbs of manner, impatiently, hurriedly, quietly, silently, slowly, and collectively, are used to change the meaning of verbs and to explain how something is done to the reader.

The other children were crying while courageous Victoria was busy praying *silently*…. (37).
He tiptoed *slowly* towards the voices…. (39).
After the prayers, Victoria *hurriedly* left the house (30).

Every, usually, never, and ever, which are Adverbs of frequency are also used in the text to describe how frequently a particular activity occurs.

Vicky worked for her parents at home *every* Saturday (23).
But they *never* sent them away in anger…. (26)
Victoria was *usually* scarce whenever she wrote her exams (25).

Place adverbs are also employed to illustrate the movement of characters and their activities from one location to another. Examples: in, into.

The whole village was thrown *into* confusion (33).
She knew that her parents especially her mother would be *in* a terrible state now (33).

Adverb of time is also found in the text, and it signifies the time or era during which events occurred. Some instances include: immediately, suddenly, later, and already.

He *immediately* realized that the van was going to carry the victims…. (39).
Suddenly, a thought came into her mind and she summoned up courage (44).
They *later* went to bed (27).

A degree adverb expresses how much work is done; for example hardly, very.

Though she *hardly* visits her sick friends on weekends…. (24).

…except for the *very* weak persons who sat at the village center…. (32).

Cohesion

Cohesion occurs at the semantic level, it relates to meaning relations that exit inside the text and characterize it as a text (Halliday and Hasan 1976-2). Cohesion arises when one interpretation of a speech part is dependent on another. Cohesion is therefore divided into grammatical and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion includes devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, while lexical cohesion includes reiteration and collocation respectively.

Grammatical cohesion and reiteration from lexical cohesion are discussed below:

Conjunctions: As the name suggests, conjunctions are words that connect other words, phrases, or clauses. They are frequently arranged precisely in a text or discourse to bring the offered parts into a logical sequence. There are also several conjunctions in the narrative. They are used by the writer to create rich, elegant phrases that avoid the choppiness of several short sentences.

Coordinating Conjunctions are used in sentences to unite words, phrases, and clauses of equal grammatical rank. For, and, nor, but, or, yet, and, so, are the most common coordinating conjunctions of which are found in the text:

Mr. Gomba's son was determined to see Victoria *so* he told his mum to accompany him to see her (25).

Though she hardly visits her friends on weekends *but* she prays fervently for them…. (24).

Correlative Conjunctions are conjunction pairs that function together. Examples include either/or, neither/nor, and not only/but also of which are found in the text:

She was *not only* pretty and kind *but also* generous and hardworking (10).

Subordinating Conjunctions is a word or phrase that links a dependent clause to an independent clause. Because, since, as, although, though, and while, are common subordinating conjunctions found in the text.

She dragged herself on the ground *because* her feet were still tied (45).

Reference - Reference occurs when one item in a text points to another element for its interpretation. It is divided into endophora which is the interpretation of reference that lies within the text, and exophora is when the interpretation of reference lies beyond the text. For the purpose of this research, the study will only discuss the reference within the text which is an endophoric reference and is further divided into anaphoric and cataphoric, personal, demonstrative, and comparative references respectively

Anaphoric Reference – The backward reference is the most common cohesive device found in a text, it refers to something that has been mentioned before. Below are some examples:

Victoria's good behavior made some of the children to dislike *her*…. *(6)*.
"Her" is performing an anaphoric reference to Victoria.
As *Godwin* moved farther into the forest, *he* heard voices and became curious (39).
"He" is referring back to Godwin.

Cataphoric Reference – another common cohesive device is forward reference or cataphora. It points forward to the information that will be presented later. Below are some examples:

Victoria, *the good girl* (4).
"The good girl" is cataphorically referring to Victoria.
Everybody, both *young and old* sprang into action…. (32).
"Young and old" is cataphoric to everybody.

Personal Reference – "Personal reference is a reference by means of function in the speech situation, through the category of PERSON" Halliday and Hasan (1976, p, 7). Here are some examples:

She stopped every unnecessary play until after the exams (62).
In school, *her* exemplary life was never unnoticed…. (59).

Demonstrative Reference - this gives information by means of location and it uses references like this, that, those, there, then, now etc. For example,

She also knew that by *now,* they must have known that some children were missing (33).
The sight of Victoria carrying firewood at *that* tender age was not only entertaining…. (12).

Comparative Reference - this is expressed through adjectives and adverbs and serves to compare items within a text in terms of identity or similarity. Examples:

But Victoria was not looking for friends: she was *like* the popular proverbs that says…. (6).
Bernadine was kindhearted and respectful *like* Victoria (10).

Ellipsis is the process in which one item in a text or discourse is omitted or replaced by nothing. Ellipsis occurs when something that is structurally necessary is left unsaid, as it has been understood already, Halliday and Hasan (1976, p, 10). Examples:

She was not only pretty and kind, but (*she was*) also generous and hardworking (4).
She was in the bracket, is elided.
You will go out in peace and (*you*) will come back in peace (7).
You in the bracket is, elided.

Reiteration - Reiteration can be in the form of repetition, synonym, hypernym, or general word. All these devices have the function of reiterating the previous item, either in an identical or somewhat modified form and this is the basis for the creation of a cohesive tie between the items, Tanskanen (2006, p, 14). Certain terms in a modern children's story are brought to the children's attention by the writer. The term "*kidnappers*" for instance, is prominent in the story but was later replaced by "*criminals*", "*bandits*", and "*ritualists*". These words are somehow similar as they denote evil; they represent the world we live in today, which is dangerous and full of violence. People can do anything these days because of their need to gain material items as a results of the country's severe economic situation. Thus, children must be made aware of what is going on around them and taught how to protect themselves in order to learn the lessons that are required of them and ask the pertinent questions about society and its flaws.

Figures of Speech
Simile - This is a figure of speech that compares two different things using words 'like' or 'as'. Examples:

Bernadine was kindhearted and respectful *like* Victoria (10).

Personification - This is defined as a literary device that assigns human qualities and attributes to non-human or objects. Below are some examples:

Victoria's *hope came alive* when she sighted some glimmer of light from afar (46).

She feared more for the rest of the kids and prayed that *help should come soon* enough before it was late (46).

Imagery – This is the use of language by poets, novelists, and other writers to create images in the mind of the reader. Akandu uses some words like danger, harm, darkness and forest to create some mental pictures in the mind of her readers. These words depict some kind of undertone of fear of something bad or dangerous. While, on the other hand, the story's most important imagery is "cutlass." This term was utilized by Akandu as the primary instrument for the disintegration of human connections. Because it is a destructive weapon, everyone fears it. This is shown below:

"…but he left all the same; with a well sharpened *cutlass"* (38).
"Godwin rushed to them for help but they refused to listen to him …he became desperate and brandished his *cutlass"* (39).

One can imagine what this cutlass can do if misused.

Another mental picture is the scenario where the children were kidnapped. Their legs and hands were tied, and even their mouths were not left out, no food or water to drink from morning till dark. They were hungry, afraid and prayed that no harm or danger will come to them. For example:

She dragged herself on the ground because *her feet were still tied* (45).
They loosen *her feet, her hands* and uncovered *her mouth* (46).

This very incident will leave the readers' wondering how these children cope in the bush and all the suffering they go through in the hands of these criminals. Akandu used these images to depict the cruelty of man's inhumanity to man.

Idiomatic Expressions – The richness and creativity of human expression and communication are reflected in idiomatic expressions. Instead of using literal words and phrases, writers frequently utilize figurative language and expressions, such as idioms to conjure images in the minds of their readers. This artful use of language heightens the enjoyment and significance of a literary work. Akandu is one of those writers who employ idioms to make her work more interesting and captivating. This gives additional significance to the work and will aid in the mental growth of the children because idioms contain important messages when correctly understood and used. Idioms, as part of the literary style of writing, enhance aesthetic attractiveness and build an image in the reader's mind. Consider the following example:

"But Victoria was not looking for friends…. She was like the popular proverb that says 'good products sell itself without advertisement' (6).

This suggests that Victoria is a good girl, and you don't need anyone to tell you that; her character and lifestyle already reflect it. When the children realize that they don't need many friends or a large group of people to succeed in life, they will be able to be self-sufficient, self-disciplined, and selfless like Victoria. Everyone recognizes her in the village because she's an example of a good child and look like. Akandu portrayed her as God-fearing, a good daughter, a good kind-hearted girl, a good observer, and many other traits.

Even when it comes to reprimanding their children, most moms point to Victoria as an example.

"And as people say "bad company corrupts good manners" (4).

Every parent in the village prefers that their children associate with Victoria rather than

Edith and Fidelia. No good parent would want his or her child to have a horrible life and be content with it. Vicky's development as a decent child brought her mother joy and comfort. She has nothing to be concerned about, for any reason.

Edith and Fidelia are seen as obstinate and irresponsible children in both school and the community at large. Their personalities are diametrically opposed to Victoria's; she is the polar opposite of them in every way. This contrast is used by Akandu to differentiate between well-raised children and those who have opted to be worthless to their parents and society.

"They were indeed the black sheep of their families" (20).

Here, we have a mental picture of a rarely-seen animal, a black sheep. An idiom that displays Edith and Fidelia's negative or rebellious behavior in refusing to listen to helpful advice.

The statements *"Our elders advised that" early to bed early to rise"* and *"as you make your bed, so you lie on it"* (61) indicate that if one plans his or her life early, he or she will reap the benefits early. So, while you make goals for your life, remember that whatever comes of it, good or bad, you will be the one to reap the benefits, this is seen in the life of Victoria who got what she wants at the right time because she worked hard for it while the same idiom is applicable to Fidelia who is now a food seller on the expressway, sells fruits by the wayside while chasing cars. If she had listened to the advice of elders, she would have been happy like Victoria, who landed a lucrative job after finishing her undergraduate studies.

"The sight of gorgeous Victoria and her mother's mockery was the last struck that broke the camel's back". "Fidelia decided to take the bull by the horn to change her destiny" (62).

She became concerned and reflecting on her background, she regretted her past and decided to make a change. She returned to school and registered as an external candidate for WAEC. She admires Victoria's lovely life and aspires to be like her deciding to do whatever it takes to be successful and enjoy such a life." *In her mind, she concluded that she would rather be late than never"* (62). This means that it doesn't matter if Victoria got all she wanted before her, no matter how much time has gone by; it's better she got it late than never had it at all.

Findings

From the data presented and analyzed, the following were some of the major findings:

For starters, the text contains a wide range of lexical options. The lexical selection enhances the text's readability, comprehension, and enjoyment. One may certainly state that the writer uses more of the key parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and stylistic indexes to stress the point of properly raising a child and ensuring his or her education. Writers cannot write without employing these parts of speech since they are timely and appropriate in literary works. As a result, it is discovered that verbs account for the majority of word classes. It is used to depict activity and stages of events in the short tale. The verbs run, climb, and drive, for example, are employed to describe the status of Victoria, Godwin, and the kidnappers. Nouns, which are used to name characters, locations, and events, can also be found in the text. Adjectives have also been discovered to play a variety of physical and psychological purposes. Adverbs are also used in the text to accomplish various semantic purposes.

Furthermore, the author is very conscious of the text's time setting, hence, her choice of words and vocabulary; given that the work is a current fiction for children. A word like kidnappers was deployed and substituted with bandits, ritualists, and criminals. Because the reader sees and feels the

unpleasant impacts of what these evil perpetrators do to victims when they are abducted, this word choice provokes powerful emotional reactions in them. The word choice also gives the text a harsh reality of what happens on a daily basis in our society.

Akandu's use of grammatical cohesion such as reference, ellipsis, conjunctions, and reiterations from lexical cohesion in the short narrative is quite inventive. She deliberately chooses and combines words for aesthetic goals. Another textual element is the usage of idioms, imagery, personification, and simile from the plot. She employs this figurative expression to enhance the beauty of her work. They are regarded as vivid verbal images that breathe new life into any literary work.

Conclusion

The above stylistic analysis of the short story has brought out the features of the author's style in three of the categories proposed in Leech and Short's checklist. The most used are the lexical items alongside idioms (figures of speech) and the appropriate use of cohesion by the author plays a major role in developing the theme of a story.

When it comes to writing for children, language is crucial. The writer's word choice is critical since it is assumed that the children would be able to read, appreciate, and comprehend what is written. As a result, the story's language is plain and straightforward. This, in turn, will aid in the development of the child's language, emotions, behaviors, and mental capacities. Contemporary children's literature depicts a society's societal ideas through realistic characters, linkages to current events, and messages. Authors are seeking for contemporary events that highlight society's strengths and shortcomings in order to remind them of lessons to learn and questions to ask. As a result, the discussion of modern children's literature focuses not only on themes and settings but also on the representation of

beliefs and worldviews that might improve society's values.

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