

# A Stylo-Linguistic Study of Orality Markers in Selected Novels of Femi Ojo-Ade and Ramonu Sanusi

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## Abstract

Orality is a feature of oral literature that has found its way into the written form of literature. It is often used for stylistic effects and to foreground certain messages and aspects of texts. Ojo-Ade's *Les paradis terrestres (Paradis)* and *Les rêves d'une fille (Rêves)*, as well as Sanusi's *Le bistouri des larmes (Bistouri)* and *Un nègre a violé une blonde à Dallas (Nègre)*, have been studied thematically and stylistically by critics over the years, with less attention paid to the oral stylo-linguistic features of the texts. Hence, this study investigates orality markers in the selected novels. The study adopts close reading model for the collection of data and Irina V. Arnold's theory of foregrounding, which focuses on answering questions on literary motifs and highlighting how they come to gain prominence in texts as framework for analyses. Information from analyses reflects exclamatory remarks in sentential forms, repetitions through reiteration and syntactic parallelism as orality features in the texts. The study also explains the stylistic import of the identified markers. The markers add musicality to the texts and heighten the aesthetics, while foregrounding the thematic concerns. The research concludes that orality markers perform stylistic and aesthetic functions in the texts. The aesthetic appeal serves to make the reception of writers' messages on socio-linguistic, socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural harsh realities less intense to the audience.

**Keywords:** *Orality Markers, Exclamatory remarks, Repetitions, Syntactic parallelism.*

## Introduction

Language transmission currently exists in oral and written forms, with the former being the basic mode of transmission and acquisition (Balogun 201). In recent creative works like Mabanckou's *verre cases* (2005),

there has been an increase in oral forms of expression. Forms of orality in modern literary works include proverbs, riddles, tales, stories on legends, myths, epic songs and poems, songs, dramatic performances. These oral forms often enhance musicality in the texts. Oral forms are also used in modern creative writings to facilitate the transmission

of knowledge, cultural values, and social values (Uzochukwu, 2002).

A glance at some African literary texts written in French reveals the presence of the above-mentioned oral literary resources. Mustapha (2015) supports this assertion: "African writers using European languages often resort to the use of folkloric elements and indigenous storytelling modes." These African modes of oral expression draw on emotions and feelings to convey messages of import, often indicated in written texts with the exclamation mark as part of writing mechanics. "Exclamation marks," according to Olajuyigbe and Ojo (2011) in their explication of punctuation as mechanics of writing, "are used after an emphatic interjection after a statement that is genuinely exclamatory". Thus, it is an important indicator of words conveying emotion and feeling.

Femi Ojo-Ade, a prominent Nigerian author and naturalized US citizen, born in 1941 in Lagos, Nigeria, has an extensive literary portfolio spanning poetry, fiction, and criticism. He holds the distinguished position of professor emeritus in both French Studies and Black History. In his 2014 article "Africains et Africains-Américains: Rêve Raté, Ou Renaissance Millénaire," published in *écrits africains écrits francophone*, Ojo-Ade delves into themes surrounding African and African-American experiences, particularly examining unfulfilled dreams, education, research, and tourism. On the other hand, Ramonu Sanusi, a professor at the University of Ibadan and a Nigerian author writing in French, is known for works such as "Mama Tutu" and "*Le bistouri des larmes*." His bestselling book, "*The Spirit Child*," boasts sales of over 25,000 copies and was translated into "*La vie d'un enfant mystérieux*" in 2016.

Muotoo & Enefu (2019) argue that African youth migrate to developed countries in search of a better life, as depicted in contemporary literature, focusing on the challenges of immigration. Adedeji (2020) supports this perspective, highlighting the appeal of status elevation in Europe while acknowledging immigration's dangers and suggesting a return to Africa for happiness. Onyemelukwe (2019) notes that Ojo Ade's novels condemn racism, challenge the Western paradise myth, and explore the shift from colonialism to neo-colonialism.

Femi Ojo-Ade's *Les paradis terrestres (Paradis)* and *Les rêves d'une fille*, as well as Ramonu Sanusi's *Le bistouri des larmes (Bistouri)* and *Un nègre a violé une blonde à Dallas (Nègre)*, contain a repository of exclamatory sentences and repetitions. These forms of expression were used by the novelists in depicting the social, cultural, political, and economic realities in their texts. Olowolagba (2021) submits that exclamation and repetition function as puns and add aesthetics to a literary work. The use of the expressions in creative writings serve as relief for the reader, who would likely be drenched in the tales of harsh realities foregrounded by some novelists who engage in language manipulation in the course of creating their narrative in fictional works. Olowolagba and Otegbale (2021) further contend that syntactic parallelism and reiteration, along with proverbs, are mainly cohesive elements used for the purpose of emphasis. This study aims to examine the writer's stylistic use of orality, an aspect often overlooked in existing literature reviews.

### Methodology

The exploration of orality in the chosen texts is carried out using a careful reading of the texts in accordance with the principles of "explication de texte" or textual analysis. This framework enables a thorough

examination of the oral features of the texts. The study design is interpretative, which is to uncover the significance of orality in the texts. Excerpts and paragraphs are culled from the texts for analysis. This model of analysis also examines the writers' distinctive techniques of incorporating oral traditions and speech patterns into their work. The research further attempts to highlight the functions and influences of orality as well as the intricate interplay of written and oral modes of communication in the literary pieces.

### Exclamatory sentences in Ojo-Ade and Sanusi selected texts

In Ojo-Ade's *Paradis*, the use of exclamatory expression foregrounds the thematic concern of racial segregation. This is evident in the expression of a mother reprimanding her baby for his bewilderment at the black race at the embassy. During Ayo's visits to Mr. Grominsky for his application to get a permanent residence in Concorde, the narrator remarks, "-Tais-toi, Richard! Laisse-le tranquille ! Tu sais bien qu'il est nègre et qu'il n'est pas de chez nous (*Paradis*, p.19) [Shut up, Richard ! Leave him in peace! You know too well that he is black and that he is not from our country]. The exclamatory remarks reflect the oral conversation between parents and children, mostly used by Africans in familial relations. Using the French imperative "tais-toi" by the mother in addressing the child, the novelist foregrounds the superordinate and subordinate relationship that exists in conveying emotions, as depicted by the clausal expression "...il n'est pas de chez nous" [he is not from our country]. The consecutive imperative exclamatory remarks carry the tone of an emotional outburst against the child by the mother.

Contrary to the cause of emotional outburst in Ojo-Ade's *Paradis*, the cause of emotional outburst in *Rêves* is linked to the character's

religious inclination in the conversation between the narrator's parents. The mother remarks in a family discussion in preparation for the journey of their child to college, "Papa de Tee! J'aurais dû le deviner! Tu voudrais abaisser la religion au niveau de la politique et d'autres banalités" (*Rêves*, p.107) [Tee's father! I would have guessed it! You would like to reduce religion to the level of politics and other banalities]. The use of exclamation by the mother while addressing the father suggests her passion and commitment for her religious inclination. Religion is considered sacred by the character who defends her beliefs at all cost before her husband.

In Sanusi's *Bistouri*, exclamatory sentences play a crucial role in foregrounding harmful socio-cultural practices. The writer employs exclamatory sentences, reiterations and parallelism in underlining the consequences of female genital mutilation, on the character, a representation of the females who still undergo through such cultural rituals.

Malheur des malheurs ! Le Malheur qui avait conduit Yétoundé en prison, le Malheur qui avait fait d'elle la risée de tout le peuple, le malheur qui l'avait empêchée d'avoir des enfants et le malheur qui l'avait fait perdre son mari au profit de Binta. C'est le malheur des malheurs ; malheur qui a enfanté les autres malheurs. Le Malheur comparable aux autres Malheurs du Nigara lorsque le Général qui ne riait pas, jeta Massoudi en prison. (*Bistouri*, p.188).

[Misfortune of misfortunes! Misfortune that led Yetoundé to prison, misfortune that made her an object of mockery before all, misfortune that hindered her from having children and misfortune that made her lose her husband to Binta. It is misfortune of misfortunes: misfortune that gave birth to other misfortunes. Misfortune compared to other misfortune

of Nigara when the General, who does not laugh, threw Massoudi in prison.]

The play on such words as "*malheurs*" (misfortunes) emphasises and brings to the fore the overall effect of the barbaric, phallogocentric cultural practice of female genital mutilation in the text. Musicality is achieved through the usage of reiteration, which brings out the oral nature of the expressions and gives the work a specific stylistic outlook. The continuous repetition in quick succession also depicts the narrator's disapproval towards this ill-practice devoid of any positive implication for socio-cultural, economic, marital, or health benefits.

In *Nègre*, exclamatory remarks are deployed to portray the lives of certain characters and give specific salient information concerning them; language usage in the text performs didactic functions. A typical example is the narrator's uncle, whose comportment reads: "C'était la voix de mon oncle Ali Baba. Il avait cette sale habitude! Cette sale habitude de Nègre sauvage! Cette sale habitude de Nègre ivrogne!" (*Nègre*, p.9) [It was the voice of my uncle, Ali Baba. He had that funny habit. That funny habit **of wild Negroes!** That habit of drunken Negroes!]. The use of exclamation by the novelist at this juncture of the text is aimed at drawing the attention of the reader to the misery of the narrator's uncle.

Through imperative exclamatory remarks, the narrator further presents the hostile treatment of the former by the latter as he orders him "Prends ton sac! Prends ton sac! Prends ton sac, et va à Lagos te débrouiller comme tes camarades du village me dit-il. Je n'osai même pas dire un mot. Il fallait que j'obéisse à la lettre" (*Nègre*, p.12) ["Take your bag! Take your bag! Take your bag and go and hustle in Lagos like your mates", he said to me. I dared not say a word. It was like a military order. I had to obey to the letter].

The instruction of the uncle is a vivid example of a superordinate shouting down a subordinate in a typical oral exchange where no formal decorum is observed.

Exclamation in a blend of syntactic parallel expression in *Nègre* is further used to depict the life style and menace of criminal groups in the portrayed society. The narrator recalls his activities with other gang members in the excerpt below:

À Lagos, on s'est lancés dans des cambriolages et dans des crimes divers: On a cassé les banques à Lekki! On a cassé les maisons à Ikoyi! On a cassé les appartements à Ikeja! On a complètement cassé tous à Surulere! On a même violé les femmes à Opebi! (*Nègre*, p.37) [In Lagos, we were involved in several housebreaking and criminal attacks: We broke into banks in Lekki! We robbed houses in Ikoyi! We burgled apartments in Ikeja! We robbed Surulere completely. We raped women in Opebi!]

The use of exclamation marks in the above foregrounds the activities of criminal groups. The various exclamatory remarks by the narrator highlight the sudden feeling of awe and regret following the conquest of the group in that particular environment. The successive usage of the exclamatory remark underline orality, where speakers often repeat similar clause structures to foreground their points in an argument. From the submission of the writer, criminal gangs pose a threat to all sectors of the economy, sections of society, and categories of persons as houses, apartments (where people are robbed and women are raped), and banks (which are robbed)

### Repetitions as Orality Markers

Repetitions in the selected texts is analysed as repetition of words and parallel syntactic structures. Syntactical parallel statements are used in creating pun and musicality, while

foregrounding specific thematic concerns. In Ojo-Ade's *Paradis*, the postcolonial thematic preoccupation is achieved and foregrounded through the reiteration of the words "nègre" and "noir," which are used interchangeably in denouncing the recurrent issue of racism. We read

Le noir est toujours un porte-malheur alors que le blanc symbolise de la vierge, porte le bonheur. On fait le nègre, on travaille comme un nègre. On fait tout en noir, on broie du noir, on a des noirs. On parle du pot au noir, d'une série noire, d'une misère noire. A la base de toutes ces expressions se trouve le même concept que celui qui aide à fabriquer le jargon d'autres langues européennes : ignorance, méchanceté, esprit morne, embrouillement désespéré, mauvaise chance, saleté, et infériorité. (*Paradis*, p. 49)

[Black is always ill luck while white symbolizes what is pure, good luck. One acts like black, work like black. Do all in black, we crush black and get blacks. We speak about doldrums, from black series, from black misery. In the background of all these expression lies the concept that helps produce jargon from other European languages: ignorance, wickedness, dull mind, desperately confused, bad luck, dirty, and inferiority.]

The word *noir* appears nine times in the above excerpt. The multiple repetitions serve as cohesive elements foregrounds the thematic concern and creates musicality in the text. The use of pun marks the oral nature of the expression and adds to the aesthetic appeal of the text.

Similarly, Ojo-Ade's creative genius manifests itself in *Rêve*. In the novel, the plays on the word "journal" in its singular and plural forms: Que les temps sont évolués ! Regarde-moi ce journal, trop vide et trop couteux ! Si ce n'était une question

d'habitude, j'aurais arrêté d'acheter ces ordures d'actualité. Nos journaux ont bien évolué : On les a transformées de document d'information en moyens de propagande. Ils sont remplis de mensonge... Mensonge absolu et totaux, sans aucune exception ! et on parle tout de liberté et de vérité. Mama de Tee, rappelle-toi de beaux jours ? Les journaux nous offraient des vrais nouveaux. On brûlait d'envie de lire, de lire, sans arrêt... Et qu'est-ce qu'il y a à lire dans ses journaux ? Tu sais bien toi aussi, qu'il n'y a plus rien d'utile là-dedans. (*Rêves*, p.18-19 [emphasis ours])

[How time has changed! Look at this newspaper for me, so empty and too expensive! If not for habit sake, I would have stopped buying this daily rubbish. Our newspapers have evolved: we have transformed them from informative documents to means of propaganda. They are filled with lies... Absolute and complete lies without exception! And we speak daily of freedom and truth. Mama Tee, can you remember the good old days? The newspapers were giving us real news. We were burning with desires to read, to read without stopping... is there something to read inside this newspaper? You know well yourself that there is nothing useful within.]

Orality is achieved through the reiteration of the word "journal". The repeated word helps in foregrounding the state of the nation's media outlet, which was also deteriorating in the quality of information it gives to the public. From the expressions, it could be deduced that it's the media has assumed a new role as an instrument of propaganda. Thus, the thematic concerns of unreliability of contemporary media houses are achieved through the creative usage of the word journal.



In *Bistouri*, Sanusi's criticism of female genital mutilation is also achieved humorously through the use of reiteration, as the narrator explicates:

L'excision était comme un fétiche qui ne pouvait pas aider; mais à quoi sert donc un fétiche qui ne peut pas aider? Si un fétiche ne peut pas aider une personne, il doit la laisser telle qu'il l'a trouvée au lieu de la détruire. L'excision est donc comme ce fétiche et avait détruit la vie d'Abibatou. (*Bistouri*, p.81 [emphasis ours])

Excision was like a fetish that could not help; but of what use is it? If a fetish cannot help someone, he must leave it the way he found it, instead of destroying it. Excision was therefore like this fetish and had destroyed the life of Abibatou.

The repeated use of the word "fetish" used for an object imbued with spiritual or supernatural significance that is believed to possess or channel magical energies or entities helps to minimise the effect of the psychological pressure the reader feels from the frightening practice of female genital mutilation in the above context. The repeated words used consecutively in the sentences reflect orality and gives musicality to the text. Repetition also performs the purpose of foregrounding as it attracts the reader's attention to the thematic concerns, which includes the negative effect of cultural practice of female circumcision as captured in the text. Thus, reiteration performs a cohesive effect. Through foregrounding, the authors denounce the African tradition of female genital mutilation.

### Syntactic parallelism as orality marker in the selected texts

Orality is also depicted through syntactic parallel expressions. The text employs the technique as a stylistic tool to interrogate and foreground the concept of parental failure, its

consequence on the offspring and the society at large as the narrator explains in the excerpt below:

Le nègre de l'Afrique noire qui est pauvre comme souris d'église, pond des enfants comme des rats sauvages. Moi je trouve cela bizarre! *Voilà pourquoi leurs enfants* deviennent les enfants de la rue. *Voilà pourquoi leurs enfants* deviennent les bandits. *Voilà pourquoi leurs enfants* deviennent des enfant-soldats. *Voilà pourquoi leurs enfants* font la guerre au Libéria, en Sierra Léone, en Côte d'Ivoire, Partout! *Voilà pourquoi leurs enfants* fument le cannabis. *Voilà pourquoi leurs enfants* portent des Kalachnikovs sur leurs épaules. Et *Voilà pourquoi leurs enfants* deviennent drogués et tuent les hommes, les femmes, les vieux et les jeunes sans pitié dans les guerres partout en Afrique noire comme le charbon. (*Nègre*, Pp. 21-22. [emphasis ours])

[But the Negro of black Africa, whose poverty can be compared to that of a church rat, breeds like a wild rat. I find it strange.... No wonder, their children take to the streets. *That is why their children* become bandits. *That is why their children* end up as child soldiers. That is why they participate in the wars of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory-Coast and everywhere. *That is why their children* smoke cannabis. *That is why their children* carry Kalashnikovs on their shoulders. And *that is why their children* metamorphose into drug addicts and murder men, women, the old and the young, without remorse in the wars within coal-like black Africa.

The repetition of syntactical parallel sentences in the above instance depicts the language usage as oral, as it creates musicality and pun in the text. The expression "*voilà pourquoi leurs enfants*" [No wonder their children] is used repeatedly by the author for the sake of emphasis to underline the prevailing violence in Africa

among children, especially street urchins, following the failure of parents in raising their children owing to the current economic turmoil created by corruption. The repeated use of parallel expressions foregrounds the effect of family and societal failure on the children, who end up engaging in different vices and criminal activities. A similar approach is used to educate the reader about the activities of armed robbers and several criminals in the African milieu in the following excerpt:

Agbako m'a fait découvrir les boites de nuit diverses. Il m'a conduit auprès de ses amis où nous avons tous procédé un rite. A un rite d'initiation dans une école de cambriolage. *Là, on nous a appris* à faire le pickpocket. *Là, on nous a appris* à fumer le chanvre indien. *Là, on nous a appris* à violer les femmes. *Là, on nous a appris* à manier la kalachnikov. (*Nègre*, p.28 [emphasis ours])

[Agbako made me discover several night clubs. He drove me to meet his friends where we all performed a ritual. A ritual of initiation into the school of armed robbery! There, they taught and certified us in pickpocketing. *There, we learnt* to smoke Indian hemp. *There we learnt* how to rape women. We were equally trained in handling Kalachnikov]. (emphasis ours)

The use of “*Là, on nous a appris*” [There we learned] is an intentional play upon words by the author, which gives an oral undertone to the text. The reader is confronted with an informal speech pattern. The author employs this technique to alleviate the strain of continuous reading in the reader. This is achieved through the introduction of variations within parallel structures in the last nominal and verbal groups. This approach also serves as a method of providing the reader with momentary respite, which allows them to pause and subsequently gather momentum for further reading. The parallel sentence structures foreground the

reality of criminality as a vice among the young in Africa. It also reveals the numerous activities and engagements of the characters as they evolve from pickpockets to professional armed robbers. In a similar manner, the narrator foregrounds the result of the intensive training of the criminals as he remarks thus:

"À Lagos, on s'est lancés dans des cambriolages et dans des crimes divers: *On a cassé* les banques...*On a cassé* les maisons ...*On a cassé* les appartements...*On a complètement cassé* tous...*On a même violé* les femmes...(Nègre, p.37, [emphases ours])

[In Lagos, we were involved in several housebreaking and criminal attacks: we broke into banks; we robbed houses...We burgled apartments...We robbed everywhere... We raped women....]

The use of parallel syntactic sentences above highlights the musical quality of the writing. It emphasises the oral nature of communication obtainable in informal speech used among close acquaintances. Thus, familiarity is achieved between the reader and the writer in reading process. Also, the intentional repetition of certain elements underscores the writer's thematic focus on the risks posed by criminal groups to various strata of the society such as homes, organizations, cooperation, and vulnerable women.

The presentation of corrupt African leaders who emerge as dictators is also introduced to the reader through the oral method of expression in *Nègre*. The narrator recounts the names of Africa's dictators since immediately after independence of most African nations, explaining that:

Depuis notre indépendance chahcha, comme chante un bon Nègre, nos leaders ont dévalisé nos pays Nègres. *Il y a* Eyadema. *Il y a* Bokassa. *Il y a* Biya. *Il y a*

Houphouet-Boigny. *Il y a* Kountche. *Il y a* Kérékou. *Il y a* Samuel Doe. *Il y a* Idi Amin. *Il y a* Obasanjo. *Il y a* Babangida. *Il y a* Abacha. *Il y a* Busia. *Il y a* Campaoré. *Il y a* Sassou Nguesso. *Il y a* cet homme-là aussi de la Guinée Équatoriale... (*Nègre*, pp. 82-83, [emphasis ours])

[Since the time of our “*independence chacha*” as sung by a good Negro, our leaders had robbed our Negro countries. *There is* Eyadema, *there is* Bokassa. *There is* Biya. *There is* Houphouet-Boigny. *There is* Kountche. *There is* Kerekou. *There is* Samuel Doe. *There is* Idi Amin. *There is* Obasanjo. *There is* Babangida. *There is* Abacha. Also, *there is* Busia. *There is* Campaore. *There is* Sassou Nguesso. *There is* also that man from Equatorial Guinea...]

The use of the French impersonal expression, *il y a* translated as *there is* in English, is a veritable example of orality. The repeated use of *il y a* fifteen times in the excerpt above helps create a musical effect on the reader and adds to the aesthetic quality of the text. The recurrent use of “il ya” immediately followed by the name of a particular dictator from one country to another foregrounds the reality of dictatorship as a movement in Africa in general. Emphasis is achieved through this method. Sanusi’s presentation is akin to a friend speaking to his friend in an informal setting. Simple short sentences are constantly repeated with variations in the names of dictators as a means of emphasis.

### Conclusion

This study has identified and extensively discussed exclamatory sentences and repetitions in the form of reiteration as markers of orality in Ojo-Ade’s and Sanusi’s selected novels, respectively. These techniques, in line the presentation of the texts, underline in a lucid manner the experiences of the characters. Orality as a stylistic too, the techniques help to

foreground contemporary African societies bedevilled by the various thematic preoccupations covered by the novelists. Through the conscientious usage exclamations, reiterations and parallelism, failed romantic relationships plagued by the reality of racism is projected in *Paradis*, as the character is discriminated against and assaulted by the father if his white girlfriend. Religious inclination and values are foregrounded through exclamatory remarks in *Rêves*. In *Bistouri*, disgust for dangerous African traditional practices such as female genital mutilation is brought to the fore through exclamatory remarks, as societal vice of criminality is portrayed in *Nègre*. With respect to repetitions, reiteration is used by Ojo-Ade as an orality marker in creating musicality and aesthetics in his text as he foregrounds the identity struggles of Africans in Europe in *Paradis* and the death of media integrity in contemporary Africa in *Rêves*. Thus, whereas Ojo-Ade employs repetitions mainly at the singular linguistic unit level in the form of reiteration, Sanusi makes use of syntactic parallel structures as a form of repetition in foregrounding his thematic concerns on socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political issues. Therefore, although both writers used repetition as a means of orality, their approaches are distinct, thereby underscoring the place of individuality in the style of writers in the creation of written works.

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