

SOUND SEQUENCES AND STYLE IN IDRIS AMALI'S "WAR OF ANTS"

RACHEAL MUSA DADA

Department of English,
Faculty of Languages and Communication Studies
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai
Email: racheal@ibbu.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper investigates the role of sound sequences, particularly assonance and alliteration, in shaping the stylistic structure of Idris Amali's Efeega: War of Ants. Despite significant research on the thematic and cultural dimensions of Amali's work, the phonological features of his poetry, especially their contribution to narrative impact and aesthetic value, remain under-examined. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how assonance and alliteration influence the poem's rhythm, emotional tone, and thematic expression. Employing a qualitative and descriptive analysis, the paper identifies key instances of these sound devices and examines their functional roles in the poem's broader meaning. The findings suggest that assonance and alliteration not only enhance the musicality of the poem but also serve as tools for emphasizing significant thematic concerns, reinforcing emotional depth, and highlighting the poem's oral tradition roots. The study underscores the importance of phonological elements in African poetry, offering insights into how sound patterns can deepen the reader's engagement with the text and amplify its cultural resonance.

Keywords: Sound, Sequences, Style, Amali, Alliteration, and Assonance.

Introduction

Poetry is a highly auditory and rhythmic form of literary expression that relies on sound devices to create meaning, evoke emotions, and establish structural coherence. Among these devices, assonance and alliteration play significant roles in shaping the musicality and stylistic identity of a poem. Assonance, the

repetition of vowel sounds within closely connected words, enhances the fluidity and internal harmony of poetic lines, while alliteration, the repetition of initial consonant sounds, sharpens the rhythm and reinforces key thematic concerns (Abrams and Harpham, 2015). Alliteration is "the repetition of the same consonant sound, especially at the beginning of words that are close together, to produce a poetic or rhetorical effect" (Wales, 2011, p. 17). Assonance is "the repetition of similar or identical vowel sounds, especially in stressed syllables, in closely connected words to achieve euphony or a poetic effect" (Preminger & Brogan, 1993, p. 86). According to Leech (1969), phonological patterns such as assonance and alliteration enhance the auditory experience of poetry, making it more engaging and memorable. The strategic placement of these elements can influence the pace, mood, and emotional intensity of the poem. Jacobson and Waugh (1979) further highlight that sound patterns are not arbitrary; rather, they interact with semantics to create deeper levels of meaning. Through the deliberate use of these phonetic strategies, poets achieve a balance between sounds and sense, ensuring that their verses resonate both visually on the page and sonically in performance (Preminger and Brogan, 1993). In the context of stylistics, Simpson (2004) emphasizes that phonological parallelism contributes to foregrounding, a process where linguistic elements are made more prominent to attract the reader's attention. This technique is particularly effective in poetry, where sound repetition not only enhances aesthetic appeal but also plays a role in shaping interpretation.

Idris Amali, a celebrated Nigerian poet and literary scholar, is renowned for his intricate manipulation of sound patterns to create a compelling poetic experience. His collection *War of Ants* exemplifies a conscious effort to use assonance and alliteration as stylistic tools that shape the rhythm, tone, and interpretative depth of his poetry (Egudu, 2002). Amali's use of assonance results in a lyrical quality that amplifies the emotions embedded in his verses, often lending them a haunting, meditative or even urgent cadence. Similarly, his reliance on alliteration enhances the musical structure of his lines, producing a persuasive effect that underscores the thematic intensity of his subject matter (Finnegan, 2012). The thematic preoccupations of *War of Ants*-which include socio-political struggles, existential conflicts, and human resilience, are reinforced through these phonological techniques. By repeating certain vowel sounds, Amali creates lingering echoes that sustain the mood and emphasize the meaning (Crystal, 2008). Likewise, his strategic placement of alliterative sequences strengthens the impact of his words, making them more memorable and rhetorically effective. These devices not only contribute to the poem's aesthetic appeal but also serve a functional purpose in drawing attention to key

ideas and enhancing the overall oral and performative nature of his work (Okpewho, 1992).

This paper undertakes a critical exploration of the interplay between assonance and alliteration in *War of Ants*, analyzing how Amali employs these elements to achieve textual cohesion, emotional depth, and stylistic distinctiveness. By examining selected poems from the collection, this study will illustrate how sound sequences shape the poets' artistic vision and contribute to the larger tradition of oral poetics in African literature. The research aims to demonstrate that Amali's use of phonetic repetition is not merely ornamental but integral to the construction of meaning, reinforcing the thematic and emotive layers of his poetry (Nwagbara, 2010).

African poetry, deeply rooted in oral traditions, places significant emphasis on the use of sound to convey meaning and engage audiences (Okpewho, 1992). Finnegan (2012) notes that African oral poetry relies on phonetic repetition, including assonance and alliteration, to enhance performability and audience retention. These sound devices are often used to reinforce communal values, narrate historical events, and critique socio-political issues. Oral literature scholars such as Nketia (1974) and Oloruntoba-Ojo (1999) have observed that African poets utilize phonological techniques to simulate drum rhythms and tonal variations, making their poetry highly musical and performative. Amali, as a poet influenced by oral traditions, demonstrates this phonological dexterity in “*War of Ants*,” where assonance and alliteration are employed for rhythm.

Research problem

Despite the extensive study of African poetry and its reliance on oral and phonological traditions, limited scholarly attention has been given to the specific role of sound devices such as assonance and alliteration in shaping poetic meaning. While previous studies on Idris Amali's works have examined his thematic concerns, socio-political engagements, and oral influences, there is a noticeable gap in research that critically explores the systematic use of sound sequences in his poetry, particularly in *War of Ants*. Poetic devices such as assonance and alliteration are not merely decorative but serve as fundamental components that enhance rhythm, mood, and thematic emphasis. However, there is insufficient scholarly discourse on how these elements contribute to the overall aesthetic and communicative power of Amali's poetry. This lack of analysis leaves questions unanswered regarding how phonological patterns influence interpretation, audience engagement, and the poet's stylistic distinctiveness within the broader context of African literature. Therefore, this

study seeks to address the gap by examining how Amali strategically employs assonance and alliteration in *War of Ants* to enhance meaning and create a distinct poetic style. By focusing on the phonetic structures embedded in his poetry, this research aims to uncover the deeper connections between sound and poetic function contributing to the broader understanding of linguistic artistry in African poetry.

Review of related literature

Given the significance of sound patterns in poetry, this section reviews existing empirical studies on assonance and alliteration with a focus on their application in African poetry and specifically in Amali's *War of Ants*. Fabb and Halle (2008) conducted a linguistic analysis of poetic meter, emphasizing how assonance and alliteration contribute to phonological cohesion. Their findings indicated that vowel repetition (assonance) creates a sense of euphony and continuity, while consonant repetition (alliteration) enhances rhythm and sonic texture. This conclusion supports Carter's (2011) study on poetic aesthetics, which found that phonological patterns influence emotional resonance and thematic structuring. In another study, Cureton (1992) examined how assonance and alliteration shape cognitive processing in poetry. His research involved eye-tracking experiments to determine reader engagement with sound patterns, concluding that repetitive phonemes improve recall and comprehension. This aligns with Duffell's (2008) assertion that sound devices in poetry not only serve an artistic function but also facilitate audience interaction by enhancing memorability. Tsur (2006) explores the cognitive effects of sound repetition in poetry. His study applied experimental phonology to examine how assonance and alliteration shape auditory perception and reader response. The result suggested that these phonological features enhance aesthetic appreciation and contribute to emotional arousal in poetry, supporting Jakobson's (1960) theory of poetic function.

Yankah (1995) conducted an extensive field study on Akan oral poetry, demonstrating how assonance and alliteration function as mnemonic devices. His findings showed that poets use sound repetition to structure their narratives and maintain listener engagement, reinforcing oral transmission traditions. This study complements Oduko (2013), who analyzed Hausa praise poetry and observed that phonological parallelism enhances the lyrical quality and interpretative depth of poetic compositions. Adebayo (2017) examines the presence of alliteration in Yoruba poetry, conducting a phonetic analysis to show how consonant repetition enhances poetic meter. His study found that poets use strategic sound patterns, adding layers of meaning to poetic performance.

Similarly, Ngugi (2019) studies Swahili poetry, noting that sound sequences contribute to both rhythm and cultural identity, bridging written and oral poetic traditions. Olawale examines sound parallelism in Igbo poetry, conducting a spectral analysis to measure phonemic repetition. His findings indicate that assonance and alliteration work synergistically to create tonal variation, thereby enhancing the musicality of Igbo poetic forms. This aligns with findings by Adeyemi (2021), who conducted an acoustic analysis of Nigerian poetry, demonstrating that vowel harmony and consonantal clusters reinforce semantic depth and audience reception. Okonkwo (2015) analyzed contemporary Nigerian poetry using computational methods to assess phonological frequency in selected works. His research reveals that poets often use structured sound repetition to reinforce central themes and create distinctive poetic voices. In a similar route, Ajibade (2021) conducted a corpus-based study on alliteration in Nigerian poetry, finding that consonantal repetition is frequently employed to highlight key socio-political messages. This study aligns with Ojo's (2020) findings on poetic foregrounding, which suggest that assonance and alliteration enhance textual cohesion and audience engagement in Nigerian poetry.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing textual analysis to examine the use of assonance and alliteration in Idris Amali's *War of Ants*. Since poetry is a highly structured form of literature that relies on phonological and stylistic elements, a qualitative method allows for an in-depth exploration of how sound patterns contribute to meaning and aesthetic expression. The primary data for this study consist of “the eye of the sun”, “Where are the stars?”, “Jos: we do not know” and “These thousand calls” are all selected poems from “*War of Ants*”. A poem is chosen based on its richness in phonological patterns, particularly the presence of assonance and alliteration. Additional secondary data is gathered from scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on poetic sound devices, African poetry, and stylistics. Words containing assonance and alliteration are identified, transcribed, and analyzed in all the selected poems.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts two theoretical frameworks: The Rhetorical Structure Theory by William Mann, Sandra Thompson, and Christian MIM Matthiessen of the University of Southern California, and Optimality Theory by Alan Prince and Paul Smolensky.

The Rhetorical Structure Theory is concerned with text structure that is used as the theoretical basis of computational text planning. It intends to describe texts

rather than the process of creating or reading and understanding them. Text structures in RST are hierarchically built on small patterns called schemas. The schemas, which consist of the structural hierarchy of a text, describe the functions of the parts rather than their form characteristics. As a result, this theory is related to the study in the sense that it concentrates on the part of the poems which includes Alliteration and assonance.

Optimality Theory, on the other hand, is a constraint-based theory that deals with specific restrictions on the forms of a structure. It deals with the way phonological systems are organized, namely, the role of output targets. This means that phonological representation may change from their lexical form to their output form, eg., /lik+d/ 'leak+past pronounced /likt/. Intrinsic relation between change and the condition of change. This means also, regular changes take place under specifiable conditions; this is due to the nature of the change being intrinsically associated with the nature of the conditions that trigger it. In cases of deletion and insertion, universality and difference, Phonological grammars are highly limited. As a result, some structures and patterns must always be present, or others cannot arise. And that the presence of certain patterns implies the presence of others, or if present, can only occur under certain conditions. For instance, it is not every language that disallows closed syllables and it is not every language disallowing closed syllable will permit deletion to eliminate problematic structures that might have given rise to them. It is against this background that Optimality Theory designed Faithfulness constraints, which suggest that a word should match the morphological form (such as plural tram + -s as in trams). But words like buses and dogs do not follow this constraint which makes follow Markedness constraints. Because of the nature of the conflicting constraints, it is not possible to satisfy one constraint without violating the other, given that no form can satisfy all constraints. There must be some process of selecting forms that have minor constraint violations from others that have major constraint violations, which involves hierarchical ranking of constraints. This theory is also associated with the study with reference to the phonological relevance of the poem as depicted in its Alliteration and Assonance

Data Presentation and Analysis

“The eye of the sun”

The cows, camels, goats, sheep, and donkeys
In groups gather in brood
Under huge neem canopies
At dawn
Awaiting the eye of the sun

Through enveloping haze and dust
Of a dawn
As the market days
Are not far in the horizon
Emerging with the sun

“The Eye of the Sun” is a reflective and symbolic poem that portrays a tranquil rural scene at dawn, using the gathering of animals under neem trees as a metaphor for the rhythmic cycle of nature and the anticipation of life's daily routine. The poem focuses on a moment of stillness just before the sun rises and activity begins, suggesting a deep harmony between the natural world and human life. The “eye of the sun” functions as both a literal sunrise and a powerful symbol of awakening, illumination, and time. Everything: animals, nature, and implicitly, humans wait for this “eye” to appear, showing how life in this setting is organized around natural forces. This reveals a culture deeply connected to the earth and dependent on natural cycles, especially as market days (a symbol of human economic life and interaction) are said to emerge with the sun. The poem, in essence, explores patience, the quiet beauty of rural life, and the interdependence between nature and human activity. It captures a timeless scene where the rising sun signals the start of purpose, motion, and community.

Alliteration can be seen in the first and second poetic lines of the poem. The consonant sound /k/ is contained in the words cows and camels. Likewise, the bilabial, velar, voiced sound /g/ is represented in the words “group” /gru:p/ and “gather” /gæðə/ respectively.

Cows /kauz/, camels /kæməls/ and group /gru:p/, gather /gæðə/. The /k/ sound is repeated, creating a strong rhythm and a memorable phrase. The repetition pulls the listener's or reader's attention and adds musicality.

Assonance can also be seen in the last line of the poem. The /i/ vowel sound is dominant in the word “emerging” and is also repeated in the word “with,” creating a pleasing, harmonious sound. Emerging /imə:dʒɪŋ/, with /wið/. The alliterative and assonance flavor in the lines is a deliberate and stylistic measure by the author to create a sound effect in the memories of his readers

“Where are the stars?”

Maiduguri
Where are the stars and the moon
I fraternize with at this nightly hour?

Where are the stars
As I sit in the pitch-dark
Suburbs of Maiduguri, our citadel of learning
Savouring the gentle breeze
After the hateful day of the sun
As the rains and false rains
Have not come?

Maiduguri
Where are the stars
As the world covers me
In thick blanket of darkness?
Thick pregnant black clouds harbor oceans of water
As they move over my head in huge canopy
Egrets in white outfits in their thousands
Dived joyously in and out of the thicket of clouds

Maiduguri
Where are the stars
As I sit in this peaceful night
Of the next hateful dawn of the sun?
At the edge of the dawn
As the mass clouds only sail over our steads
Another abortion hailed in grief

“Where are the stars?” is a deeply reflective and melancholic poem that uses the absence of stars and the moon in Maiduguri's night sky as a metaphor for loss, despair, and the lingering shadow of conflict or environmental crisis. The poet expresses a longing for the familiar beauty and comfort of celestial bodies, once sources of companionship and peace but now obscured by darkness, clouds, and a heavy, almost ominous atmosphere. The repeated question “Where are the stars?” reveals a deep emotional void and a sense of displacement or sorrow. Maiduguri, once portrayed as a “citadel of learning,” is now cloaked in darkness, both literal and metaphorical. This darkness is not merely the absence of light, but the presence of oppressive, pregnant clouds a symbol of unfulfilled promises, grief, or threats looming overhead. The poet contrasts the peaceful night breeze with the “hateful day of the sun,” possibly suggesting a climate of harshness, suffering, or socio-political tension that daylight brings. The rains and false rains point to the unpredictability of weather, of fate, of life in this context. The

peaceful moments of night are only temporary, as another “hateful dawn” approaches, bringing a sense of dread. Nature is alive in the poem, the egrets in white, the thick black clouds, and the canopy of sky, yet these elements are layered with irony. The natural world continues in cycles, but those cycles now feel foreign, detached, and even complicit in the emotional or societal “abortion” the poem ends with a powerful metaphor for hope cut short or life lost prematurely, perhaps hinting at tragedy, conflict, or broken potential. This poem is not just a lament about the night sky; it is a poetic cry about what has been lost in a place once full of meaning. Through nature's veiled beauty and haunting absence, the poet reflects on the emotional and existential darkness that now envelops Maiduguri, questioning whether the stars and what they represent will ever return.

Alliteration is traceable to line six of stanza three of the poem. “As they move over my head in huge canopy” the repetition of the bilabial, nasal, voiced consonant sound / m / is seen in the words “move” /mu:v / and “my” / mai /, the words “ head” / hed / and “ huge” / hju:dʒ / also have the glottal, fricative, voiceless sound / h / in it.

Assonance is more paramount in the poem than alliteration. The title of the poem has assonance in it. The words “are” / a: / and “stars” / sta:z / have the /a: / sound contained in them. The title is repeated in the second line, giving the poem the same phonological pattern. The third line “I fraternize with at this nightly hour” has the repetition of the vowel diphthong sound /ai/ in “I” /ai/, “fraternize” / frætənaɪz / and “nightly” /naitli /. In the same line, the words “with” /wið/ and “this” /ðis/ contain the sound / I / in them.

In the second stanza, the title of the poem “where are the stars” is repeated in the first line, embedded in it the /a: / sound in “are” / a: / and “stars” /sta: z /. The next line, “As I sit in the pitch-dark” has the / I / in the words “sit” /sit/, “in” /in/, “the” / ði / and “pitch” / pitʃ /. The fifth line of the stanza, “After the hateful day of the sun” has the vowel diphthong sound / ei / encapsulated in the words “hateful” / heitfəl / and “day” /dei /.

Again, the title of the poem “Where are the stars” is repeated in the third stanza of the poem, giving it an emphasized call. The vowel sound /a: / is audible in the words “are” /a:/ and “stars” /sta:z /. In the fourth line, “In thick blanket of darkness” has the sound / I / in “in” / I /, “thick” / θɪk / and blanket /blæŋkɪt/. The seventh line goes thus: “Egrets in white outfits in their thousands”. / I / vowel

sound is contained in the words “egrets” / igrɪts /, “in” / ɪn /, “outfits” / autfɪts / and “in” / ɪn /.

The last stanza has the title of the poem “Where Are the stars” repeated in it for the fourth time. For the fourth time also, the sound /a:/ is distinctively present in the words “are” / a:/ and “stars” / sta:z/. In the following line, “As I sit in this peaceful night” has the sound / I / contained in the words “sit” / sɪt /, in/in / and “this” / ðɪs /. The schwa sound /ə/ is seen in the words “another” / ənəðə / and “abortion” / əbɔ:ʃn /, in the last line of the stanza.

“Jos: We do not now know”

Jos

I woke up in you
 Into very cold embrace
 At the dark dawn still
 Silence stood still
 As if your field of coldness possesses no soul
 As the clock hanging on the fragile wall of my heart
 Tic-toc, tip-toeing silently
 The birds of dawn and *anyenye* ants
 Chirrup, chirrup punctuating
 The cold peace of silence
 The vehicles hooting and blaring...
 The distinct cock crow, quacking of pregnant fowls
 In search of where to lay their burden

The clear getting sky blue
 Invaded by
 The lazy air emerging from
 The late waking city of Gwosh
 The homestead of Birom of moose fame
 Where women do the tilling of rocky farmland and quarry
 With babies strapped to their backs cracking granite
 And inflated frontiers of unharvested quadruplets
 While spouses wine and rest away
 In the turbulent stream of moose of Gwosh fame

Jos of cold fame where plunderers
 That ate up its earth surface
 Had inhabited with their kindreds

To make the tropical temperate Jos their homes
Where peace reigned
Jos peace forgotten as fear grips Gwosh

Jos I witness the departure of the clouds and light
That bears fruit for all
As we have swallowed the pill of hate
Jos now bloody ground
For criss-crossing of crest, crescent and cross

Let us take the pills of peace prescribed
To breathe life once more
In peace

The poem “Jos: We do not now know” serves as a poignant meditation on memory, place, and violence, using the city of Jos as a metaphor for lost innocence and disrupted peace. Structurally lyrical and thematically reflective, the poem opens with an atmosphere of emotional and physical coldness. This “cold embrace” functions symbolically, representing both Jos's temperate climate and its emotionally frigid, conflict-ridden present. The poet deploys natural imagery, birds chirping, fowls searching for nesting places, not merely to depict life but to illustrate an uneasy continuity of routine amidst trauma. The symbolic use of sound (*flic-toc, tip-toeing silently*) juxtaposed with the silence of the city reflects the dissonance between inner anxiety and outward normalcy. Cultural references to Gwosh (the indigenous name for Jos), Birom women laboring, and the consumption of “moose” expose the poet's critique of gender imbalance and the legacy of exploitation. The city is no longer simply a geographical space but a contested identity, reshaped by colonization, migration, and ethnic strife. The most powerful metaphor emerges in the “criss-crossing of crest, crescent, and cross,” encapsulating Jos's transformation into a battleground of religious and political ideologies. Yet, the poem ends on a note of redemption—a call to “take the pills of peace” implies that healing is possible if society commits to reconciliation and unity.

Alliteration is quite dominant in the poem, especially in the first stanza of the poem. In line four, Amali depicts “At the dark dawn still” the alveolar fricative voiced sound /d / is visibly present at the beginning of the words “dark” /da:k / and “dawn” / dɔ:n /, creating an explosive phonological pattern. The subsequent line says thus: “Silent stood still”, sequencing a sibilant sound of alveolar, fricative, voiceless sound /s / in “silent” /sailənt /, “stood” /stud / and “still” /stil

/ . The alveolar, plosive, voiceless consonant sound / t / is prevalent in line eight of the poem: “Tip-toe, tip-toeing silently”, especially in words like “tip” / tip /, “toe” / təu /, “tip” / tip / and “toeing” / təuiŋ /. This repetition creates a sound that is similar to the action of the words. The palatal-alveolar, affricate voiceless sound / tʃ / is repeated at the beginning of the words “Chirrup, chirrup” / tʃɪrɪp /, emphasizing on a phonological sequence through repetition. In the last line of the stanza, the velar, plosive, voiceless sound / k / creates a sequence from Amali's stylish pen: “The distinct cock crow, quacking of pregnant fowls” the sound is contained in “cock” / kɒk /, “crow” / krəu / and “quacking” / kwækiŋ /.

The third stanza of the poem has a trace of consonant sequence in the fourth and the last line. “To make the tropical temperature Jos their homes”. The Alveolar, plosive, voiceless consonant sound / t / is visible in the words “tropical” / trɒpɪkəl / and “temperature” / temprətʃə /. The line: “Jos peace forgotten as fear grips Gwosh” is also punctuated by the labio-dental, fricative voiceless sound / f / in the words “forgotten” / fəɡɒtn / and “fear” / fiə /, giving the lines some memorable rhythm.

The next stanza has a repetition of the labio-dental fricative voiceless consonant sound / f / in the second line of the poem, “That bear fruit for all”. The words “fruit” / fru:t / and “for” / fɔ: / can be seen with the traces of / f / sound at their initial. In the last line of the stanza, an overwhelming repetition of the velar plosive voiceless consonant sound is punctuated with prepositions and conjunctions. “Forcriss-crossing of crest, crescent and cross”, words like “criss-crossing” / kris krɔsiŋ /, “crest” / krest /, “crescent” / kreʒənt / and “cross” / krɒs / are knitted to establish a kind of trans-euphonic atmosphere.

At the final stanza, the bilabial, plosive, voiceless consonant sound / p / is prominent in the first line “Let us take the pills of peace prescribed”, especially in the words “pills” / pɪls /, “peace” / pi:s / and “prescribed” / prəskraɪbd /. This repetition creates a sound pattern that lingers in the memory of its audience as the poem ends.

Assonance has gained prominence in this poem. The diphthong vowel sound / əu / can be heard in line six of the poem “As if your field of coldness possesses no soul”, particularly in words like “coldness” / kəʊldnes /, “no” / nəu / and “soul” / səul /. In line eight: “Tic-toc, tip-toeing silently” the line has / i / vowel sound in “tic” / tɪk /, “tip” / tip / and “toeing” / təuiŋ /. Line eleven has the repetition of / i / and / ə / vowel sounds in the word “chirrup” / tʃɪrɪp /, and with another / i / vowel sound in the word “punctuating” / pʌŋktju:eiɪŋ /.

Similarly, in the thirteenth line, the vowel sound /I / is visibly present in all the words except one. “The vehicles hooting and blaring”, the words “the” / ði /, “vehicles” / vi:ikəl /, “hooting” / hu:tiŋ / and “blaring” / bleəriŋ / are all dotted with the / I / vowel sound.

In the second stanza, the fourth line: “The late waking city of Gwosh” has embedded in some of the words such as “late” / leit / and “waking” / weikiŋ / the diphthong sound / ei /. It also has the vowel sound / I / in “weikiŋ / and “city” / siti /. The vowel sounds / I / and / æ / are traced in line seven of the poem: “With babies strapped to their backs cracking granites”, peculiarly in words like “with” / wið / and “babies” / beibiz /. On the same line, “backs” / bæks /, “cracking” / krækiŋ / and “granites” / grænit / all have the / æ / vowel sound fraternizing with them.

The third stanza of the poem has the famous / I / vowel sound sandwiched in most of the words in line three. “Had inhabited with their kindreds”, words like “inhabited” / inhibit /, “with” / wið / and “kindreds” / kindridz /. The last line of the stanza says thus: “For criss-crossing of crest, crescent and cross” words like “criss-crossing” / kris-krɔsiŋ /, “crest” /krest/, “crescent” / krezənt / and “cross” / krɔs / all have an impactful rhythm to the end of the poem.

“These thousand calls”

I listen to:

Thousands of calls to the minarets
Piercing the chilly air of Jos at dawn
As the tolling of a thin bell
Came faintly through these numerous calls to the minarets
Of another pregnant dawn of the city of Gwosh
The home of cold and moose
Where the crest and cross criss-crossing
Gather against insatiable desires
Of unborn dreams

“These thousand calls” reflects the contrasts between the spiritual, cultural, and emotional dimensions of Jos and Gwosh. The poem opens with the sound of calls to the minarets, symbolizing religious devotion and communal life. The chilly air of dawn adds to the quiet solemnity of the moment, suggesting a peaceful yet uncertain atmosphere. The tolling of a bell, faint but present, contrasts with the louder calls—a symbol of the struggle between the spiritual and the material, as Gwosh is depicted as a place of both “cold” and “moose” (possibly referencing

its hardness, strength, or toughness). The poem's mention of “crest and cross criss-crossing” suggests religious or ideological conflict, while the phrase “insatiable desires of unborn dreams” conveys a sense of frustrated aspirations, unfulfilled hopes, and ambitions that have yet to come to fruition. Overall, the poem seems to explore the tension between faith, hope, and the harsh realities of life in Jos and Gwosh.

Alliteration has gained prominence in line eight of the poem: “Where the crest and cross criss-crossing” the repetition of the velar, plosive voiceless consonant sound / k / at close intervals in the line has not only confirmed the skillful pen of the author but has also translated a habitual sound pattern to his audience as the line filters into their ears. “Crest” / krest /, “cross” / kros / and “criss-crossing” / kris-krosɪŋ / are contained in them the / k / consonant sound.

Assonance is notable in a number of lines in the poem. The first three words in the third line have the vowel sound / I / dwelling in them. “Piercing the chilly air of Jos at dawn”. “piercing” / piəsɪŋ /, “the” / ði / and “chilly” / tʃɪli /. The seventh line: “the home of cold and moose” has the diphthong sound / əu / in the words “home” / həum / and “cold” / kəuld. Again, the eighth line: “Where the crest and cross criss-crossing” has the vowel sound / I / in the word “criss-crossing” / kris-krosɪŋ /. At the ninth line: “gather against insatiable desire” has the schwa vowel sound / ə / in the following words “gather” / gæðə /, “against” / əgeɪnst / and “insatiable” / ɪnseɪəbəl /.

Findings and Conclusion

The analysis of Efeega: War of Ants reveals that Idris Amali skillfully employs assonance and alliteration to enrich the poem's stylistic texture and deepen its communicative power. These sound sequences enhance the musicality of the poem, echoing the rhythms of oral tradition and contributing to its auditory appeal, particularly in performance settings. Through repeated vowel and consonant patterns, the poet emphasizes central themes such as unity, resistance, and collective struggle, using sound to draw attention to moments of political or cultural significance. The patterns also serve to intensify the poem's tone and mood; for instance, harsh, abrupt consonants underscore conflict and urgency, while softer sounds convey reflection or harmony. Additionally, the clustering of specific sounds often aligns with symbolic imagery, thereby reinforcing meaning through sonic suggestion. This stylistic strategy not only strengthens the poem's emotional impact but also situates it within a broader cultural framework, where oral aesthetics remain vital. Overall, Amali's use of assonance and alliteration functions as a deliberate artistic choice that enhances both the

aesthetic and thematic dimensions of the poem.

The study of sound sequences in *Efeega: War of Ants* reveals that Idris Amali's use of assonance and alliteration is central to both the aesthetic and thematic construction of the poem. These devices are not merely stylistic flourishes but serve to enhance rhythm, amplify emotional tone, and highlight key thematic concerns such as unity, resistance, and cultural identity. Rooted in oral poetic traditions, the sound patterns help to bridge the gap between performance and text, offering a layered reading experience that appeals both to the ear and to cultural memory. Amali's strategic repetition of sounds mirrors moments of conflict, solidarity, and reflection, transforming the poem into a rhythmic and ideological landscape. Sound functions as a mnemonic and expressive tool, reinforcing the poem's message while evoking shared histories and struggles. This underscores the importance of analyzing phonological features in African poetry, as they are deeply embedded in the meaning-making process, enriching both the reader's engagement and the poem's cultural significance.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2015). *A glossary of literary terms* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Adakole, M. (2015). "Phonological devices in Idris Amali's Poetry: A stylistic perspective." *Nigerian Journal of Literary Studies*, 7(1), 45-62.
- Amali, I. (2014). *"Efeega: War of ants."* Ibadan. Kraftgriots
- Attridge, D. (2013). *Poetic rhythm: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Egudu, R. N. (2002). *African poetry and the poetics of orality*. African World Press.
- Finnegan, R. (2012). *Oral literature in Africa*. Open Book Publishers.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics* (6th ed.). Blackwell.
- Egudu, R. N. (2002). *African Poetry and the poetics of reality*. African World Press.
- Jakobson, R., & Waugh, L. R. (1979). *The sound shape of language*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Leech, G. N. (1969). *A linguistic guide to English poetry*. Longman.
- Lodge, D. (2009). *The art of fiction: Illustrated from classic and modern texts*. Penguin.
- Musa, S., & Audu, B. (2018). "Sound patterns and thematic emphasis in Idris Amali's *War of*

- ants.” *Journal of African Poetics*, 5(2), 89-105.
- Nketia, J. H. K. (1974). *The music of Africa*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Nwagbara, U. (2010). “Poetic imagination in Nigerian poetry.” *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 5(2), 67-83.
- Okpewho, I. (1992). *African oral literature: Backgrounds, character, and continuity*. Indiana University Press.
- Oloruntoba-Oju, T. (1999). “Sound and meaning in African poetry.” *Research in African Literatures*, 30(3), 75-88.
- Preminger, A., & Brogan, T. V. F. (1993). *The new Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics*. Princeton University Press
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
- Tsur, R. (2008). *Poetic rhythm: structure and performance, an empirical study in cognitive poetics*. Sussex Academic Press.
- Wales, K. (2011). *A dictionary of stylistics* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education