

COHESION IN SOME SELECTED IGBO POETRY

BY

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Abstract

Reading and understanding poems possess a daunting task, given its condensed diction that has multiple layers of meaning. It is against this background that the study analysis types of cohesion in some selected Igbo poems. The study adopts Systematic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory by Halliday. Under methodology, the study adopts descriptive research design. The data are excerpts (poems) from six (6) Igbo poetries that portray types of cohesion. The types of cohesion identified in the poems include: phonological, lexical, syntactic, graphology, and rhythm. They described how and why the seven (7) poems from different poetry mean what they do. The results of textual analysis show that cohesion is part and parcel of poem hence, gives meaning to poem. The study concludes that cohesion in poem is reliable in constructing the unity and whole meaning of a poem thereby enhances reader's understanding

Keywords: The Igbo, Igbo Poetry, and Cohesion

Introduction

Poetry is an art form using concentrated, rhythmic, and often figurative language to evoke emotion and meanings beyond literary interpretation, differing from prose by its focus on sound, imagery, and unique structure (stanzas and line breaks) rather than straightforward narrative. Poetry has cohesion or internal pattern and repetition far exceeding those of most other non-literary genres. In other words, poetry has repeated refrains, parallelism, regular stanzas, rhymes, meter, rhythm, interactive assonances, alliteration and similar devices. The phenomenon of cohesion in literature and particularly in Igbo poetry shows that literature is an art that the literary texts are constructed to produce in us a kind of experience in art in which symmetry and interplay and differences play a major role. Cohesion is a linguistic technique of creating unity in a discourse readable and meaningful. It is a strategy of enhancing an effective communicative goal. Either in speech or in writing, cohesion plays a prominent role in eliciting meaning in discourse. It explains how meaning is constructed based on the semantic relations that are established between and among lexical and grammatical elements in discourse. Schiffrin (1987:62) writes that "... cohesion has to do with semantic meaning" The paper therefore concerns itself with the task of exposing types of cohesion in poems in some selected Igbo poetry. The Igbo whose poem is discussed in this study are said to be a Nigerian tribe located in Anambra, Imo, Enugu, and Ebonyi States.

Conceptual Review

The Igbo

The Igbo is a major ethnic group in South-eastern Nigeria. According to Slattery (2010) the primary Igbo states in Nigeria are Anambra, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi and Enugu States. They are also more than 25% of the population in some Nigerian states like Delta and Rivers States.

The Igbo are largely blessed with Igbo language which is one of the official languages of Nigeria. It is part of the Benue-Congo group of the Niger-Congo family of languages believed to have originated in the 9th century.

Igbo Poetry

Poetry applies to many forms in which man has given rhythmic expression to his most imaginative and intense perception of his world, himself and the interrelationship of the two. Only through an examination of its origins and certain aspects of its nature, can anything significant be said about poetry. According to Akporobaro (1994) the origin of poetic expression is concealed in the dim past of man. No literary historian presumes to point out the beginnings of poetry though, the first conscious literary expression took the form of primitive songs. Evidence pointing to this interference comes from early tribal ceremonials; races which have no written literature employ poetic and rhythmic forms in their local ceremonies. Poetry is nature and everything in nature renders itself to poetry. Nnamdi – Eruchalu (2022) poetry is an essential property of all human societies. It dwells in the realm of feelings and emotions and is expressed in specially crafted language. It is deeply embedded in human life and living; tongue, chime, tribe, class, level of literacy, notwithstanding (Maduakor, 2019). Igbo poetry is a rich, multi-faced art deeply embedded in the cultural, social and spiritual life of the Igbo people of Nigeria (Ezikeojiaku, 1993). He added that Igbo poetry exists in two primary forms; traditional or oral poetry, which have been passed down through generations and modern or written poetry, which gained momentum around the time of the Nigerian Civil war.

Cohesion

Every writer wishes to make their points clearly to their readers, with pieces of writing. What is easy to read and have logical links between

the various points made. This coherence of expression is created by grammar and vocabulary (lexis) through cohesion. Cohesion implies to the glue that joins ideas in a text together to form a whole. According to Halliday & Hasan (1976) cohesion is concerned with a relatively neglected part of the linguistic system: its resources for text construction, the range of meanings that are specifically associated with relating what is being spoken or written to its semantic environment. They added that it describes a method for analysing and coding sentences, which is applied to specimen texts. Robert de Beaugrande and Wolfgang (1981) see cohesion as the way in which the components of the way in which the components of the surface text (the actual words we see or hear) are mutually connected within a sequence. It focuses on grammatical dependencies hence, how syntactic structures, repetition and substitution map onto one another to connect phrases, clauses and sentences. Hoey (1991) defines cohesion as the way in which certain words or grammatical features of a sentence connect that sentence to its predecessors (and successors) in a text. He focuses on lexical which emphasizes on the way texts hold together, prioritizing how words in the same semantic field (collection) create connections across paragraphs.

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories which identify cohesion in poetry, but this work will limit itself to Systematic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory. It originated in 60's from the work of British Linguist Micheal Alexander Kirkwood Halliday by the Prague school, the anthropologist He expanded on the theories of his mantor, J. R. Firth, and was also influenced by Bronislaw Malinowski, and Louis Hjelmslev. Halliday viewed language as a meaning making resource and a 'network of systems' of choices, rather than just a system of grammar, with the goal of understanding how language functions in social contexts (Martin, 2016). The model of SFL theory affirms that language is a social activity that takes place in a social context. It is

basic tool for coding information, and it only functions effectively if the decoder (listener/ reader) is able to understand and make meaning from the information. Meanwhile, making meaning out of discourse is paramount in the orientation of Systematic Functional Linguistic because as linguistic elements are used in coding information, they are largely understood within the context of their production. The justification for adopting this theoretical framework is the premise on the fact that the entire dimension of the theory centres on functional rather than structural hence, focuses more on eliciting meaning from linguistic elements in the texts.

Empirical Studies

Several studies have been carried out on cohesion in poetry but not much has been carried out by scholars from the perspective of cohesion in some selected Igbo poetry. The study of Chukwu, Ugwuanyi & Amoke (2021) examines texture in Okigbo's poetry, an exploration of cohesion It reveals that Okigbo's poetic language is neither disparate nor deny access to the poetic text. Ebi (2012) examines aspects of textual cohesion in selected poems of Clark Bekeremo. It reveals that cohesive ties have the potentials to combine with other elements of language to unify different parts of a text. Adekemi (2023) examines cohesion as a linguistic-stylistic strategy in the poem IRO by Akinwunmi Isola. The study reveals that cohesive devices are reliable instruments in the text construction, in this case, a poem.

Methodology

The study adopts qualitative research design and descriptive research methods which involves observing and describing the behaviour of the object without influencing it. Appraisal tools form the major sources of data collection while secondary sources of data include other relevant materials relating to poetry and cohesion. The researcher reads poems to identify the different types of cohesion

used in its construction. Pieces of data that illustrates each types of cohesion are extracted and written out for discussion. For ease of reference, poetry, text, stanza (lines where the data were drawn from) are included in the discussion.

Data Analysis

Phonological Cohesion

Phonological cohesion takes the form of alliteration and assonance. It is concerned with the sound, patterns, rhyming scheme, alliteration consonance, assonance, and vocalization words. According to Eze and Olu (2009:147) it occurs where there is textual patterning created by the repetition of similar sounds. Illustration in the excerpt below taken from *Abụ na Egwuregwu Ọdịnaala Igbo* p.70 -71 titled “Onwa na Ifere” by N. Ugonna. Example 1

Nwa nnemereocha nọ n’ọnwa, Child of mother-in-law in the moon,
Nye m ọnwa, ọnwa na ifere, Give me moon, moon to fly,
Nye m ifere, ifere nza, Give me fly, nza to fly,
Nye m nza, nza akwụ ya, Give me bird, bird’s nest,
Nye m akwụ ya, akwụ ya mbele, Give me its nest, mbele its nest,
Nye m mbele, mbele Oru, Give me work, work and motor,
Nye m Oru, Oru na ụgbọ, Give me motor, bamboo boat,
Nye m achara, achara nsịkọ, Give me bamboo, bamboo and crab etc.
Nye m Okpu, Okpu na mbe, Give me hat, hat and tortoise etc.

In stanza 1, line 17 of the above poem, the poet showcases a high degree of proficiency in textual patterning of his poem. He makes exuberant use of alliteration and assonance for embellishment

thereby creating more unified and coherent text or poem. Beginning from line 2 through line 19 of the poem, there is reoccurrence of nasal labial velar plosive /ny/ in words such as ‘nye’. In line 2 through 19 as consonants and reoccurrence, there is half closed back vowel [e] for assonance. Also the repetition of the bilabial nasal /m/ in lines 2 through 19 described above as personal pronoun.

Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion refers to the words associated with the text. Ali, Abbas, & Mugair, (2020) describe lexical cohesion as:

the level concerned with the use of vocabulary in language.

It studies the function of direct and figurative meanings and

the way in which the contextual meaning of the word choice

of specific lexical items in a text, their distribution in relation to one another, and their meanings.

The above implies that cohesion can also be achieved by the use of words that belong to the same paradigmatic relation called lexical cohesion. It abounds in lexical matching. Let’s examine the excerpts taken from p.19 of *Akpa Uche* titled “Adamma” by C.W.O. Ajaegbu.

Otu nwunye m hụrụ taa, The woman I saw today,

Aha ya bụ Adamma, Her name is Adamma:

Adamma mara mma nke ukwuu, Adamma is very beautiful,

Guzoro kwekem. Stand straight.

Adamma toro ogologo, Adamma is tall,

Ọ bụ asaawa e ji ama atụ, She is a symbol of animal fur,

Ahụ ya niile na-eme pukopuko, Her whole body is soft,

Agiri isi ya di yoriji. Her hair is curled.

Imi ya di warawara, Her nose is narrow,

Anyia ya na-eke riri; Her eyes is piercing;

Eze ya na-enwu Dika owa, Her teeth shines like a torch,

Mkpisi aka ya di sam. Her fingers are fine.

Adamma bitutu mma aka, Adamma is very beautiful,

Ekele ya gosiri umeala, Her greeting signified humility,

Ochi ya Dika ihe, Her smile is like light,

Nke mumuwawari na-enye n'ochichi. Which mother-in-law gives in dark.

In the above poem, lexical cohesion is achieved by the repeated use of words whose inherent semantic features portray both attributes of Adamma and her beauty. In the poem, Adamma is given the attributes of beauty with the following clauses - “Guzoro kwekem” - line 4, stanza 1; “O bu asaawa e ji ama atu” - line 2, stanza 2; “Ahụ ya niile na-eme pokopoko” - line 3, stanza 2; “Agiri isi ya di yoriji” - line 4, stanza 2; “imi ya di warawara” – line 1, stanza 3; “Anyia ya na-eke riri” – line 2, stanza 3; “Eze ya na-enwu Dika owa” – line 3, stanza 3; “Mkpisi aka ya di sam” – line 4, stanza 3; “Ekele ya gosiri ume ala” – line 2, stanza 4; “Ochi ya Dika ihe” – line 3, stanza 3; and “Nke mumuwawari na-enye n'ochichi” – line 4, stanza 4. The lexical cohesion in context adds great meaning to the poem thereby making it readable and decodable.

Example 2 from *Eke-Une* p.12 - 15 by E. Obike. In this poem, certain epithets refer to specific character such as treacherous character. Eke Une is painted as treacherous character and described with these words: “Isirikisi mmuo” – line 145, “Immenkeleime” – line 148,

“Ochịntị-Une isieke” – line 222, and “Obuuruomenike”– line 227 etc. The above words are used to describe one who relishes crisis.

Example 3 from *Nri Uche* p.68 “Ọkụ Nyọọ A Wusa Ọwa” by I.U. Nwadike.

Ebe esu nwuru bu ili ya. The grave of millipede is where it died.

Ebe onye dara ka chi ya kwaturu ya Where one falls is where his god pushes him down.

Ebe chi jiri, a wusa ọwa. Where night comes, one stops.

Ije ụwa bu ndọlị ndọlị. Life is about struggling.

The following words, “nwuru”, “dara”, “kwaturu”, “jiri”, belong to the same paradigmatic relation to emphasize on struggles to one’s destiny.

Graphological Cohesion

Graphological cohesion deals with writing mechanics which help readers to understand the relationship between ideas when used effectively. This level deals with writing mechanics such as full stop, quotation mark, hyphen, comma, semi-colon, colon, capitalization and question mark, exclamation mark etc. It also includes spacing, bold prints, small prints, and italics (Hazim, Aswan and Sarab 2020). In essence, graphological cohesion in poetry is a powerful tool poets use to shape the readers experience, guide their interpretation, create a more profound and memorable poetic effect. Example 1 from *Okebalama (Akwukwo Abụ Igbo)* p.71 “Onye Ma Echi?” by C. C. Ezebube.

Oge m nọ n’okporo Fegge

Nke Otu Ọnịcha

Agbagharị wheel n’okporo *Coal Tar*

Mụ na pantị *seven colours*

Ishi ha ka mbadamba ihu igwe

Ntị ha ka ogbe akwụ

Ebe kwashiorkor ji anyị ete epele

Here, the use of capital letter in stanza 1, line 2, “Otu”, line 3 “Coal Tar” and stanza 2, line 8 “A & B” is used to draw attention to specific phrases hence, reflect a character’s emotional state towards knowing what tomorrow holds. The use of italics in stanza 1 lines 3 and 4 “Coal Tar”, “Seven Colours” helps to create a visual pattern that mirrors the poem’s themes. The absent of punctuation such as comma, full stop, colon, semi-colon etc. in stanza 1 and 2 excerpt at the last stanza emphasizes connections between ideas.

Syntactic Cohesion

In this type of cohesion, a word or sentence is repeated over and over to create emphasis or emotion. This could be illustrated from extract taken from *Utara Ntị p.30* “Aririọ” by E. N. Emenanjo.

Ihe ndị mmadụ chọrọ What people need

abụghị okpokpo bekee na Igbo na-atọ ka ụtụ. it’s not big English and Igbo that is as sweet as a bird

Ihe ndị mmadụ chọrọ What people need

bụ mmiri a ga-añụ ãñụ na nri a ga-eri. is the water to drink and the food to eat.

In the above poem, the repetition of the sentence, “Ihe ndị mmadụ chọrọ” is to emphasis on the utmost needs of people.

Rhythm

Rhythm is another form of language cohesion. It is so because even if rhythm involves some kind of transformation on the part of the poet, such newness is realized through conforming to what is obtainable in the language that is the established communicative possibilities. Eze & Onu (2009: 146) assert that, rhythm in Igbo is non-metrical. It implies that Igbo rhythm composes of regular recurrence of breath pause which give rise to fast or slow rhythm, the recurrence of equal time duration in consecutive utterances and the recurrence of sense balance, which produce the rhythm that is tied to the sense. Example from *Utara Nti* p.21-22 by Nolie Emenanjo.

Udele si ndi Okenye anwuna Vulture said adult should not die

Maka ndi Okenye nwuo because adults die

Umuka ahurja ya n'oku. Children roast him on fire.

Here, the 2 & 3 sentences in each of the stanza balance or complement the sentence 1 in order to achieve balanced thought. Hence, the above poem features on equal time duration based on regular recurrence of breathe pause.

Findings

It is revealed in the study that cohesion in poetry is a reliable instrument in text construction, in context; a poem hence helps to showcase the poet's intents and makes the poem readable and understandable. Also reveals that cohesion serves as a link that holds poem together and give it meaning.

Conclusion

In this paper, attempt has been made to identify the types of cohesion in some selected Igbo poems. In the cause of conducting this research, it was observed that students find it challenging to read and

understand poems without cohesion. The outcome of the study shows that cohesion is part and parcel of poem hence, poet cannot do without it.

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