

The Aesthetics of Sound: A Stylistic Exploration of J.P. Clark's Dramatic Texts

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Abstract

Previous research on J.P. Clark's "Ozidi" and "The Raft" primarily focused on literary elements like theme, characterization, and subject matter. These examinations often overlooked the significance of sound devices in emphasizing stylistic interpretations and the author's communicative goals, both essential for a thorough understanding and interpretation of the works. This analysis, in contrast, delves into the stylistic importance of phonological tools as indicators of meaning within the texts. Using M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar for analysis, this study explores sound devices, including alliteration, assonance, and repetition, to highlight specific meanings. The phonological framework is key to capturing the essence and aesthetic appeal of J.P. Clark's dramatic works.

Keywords: Semantic indicators, stylistic interpretations, J.P. Clark, Ozidi, The Raft, Sound patterns.

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INTRODUCTION

At the heart of every literary masterpiece lies the expressive power of language. The intricate interplay of language within African literary landscapes has long been a point of contention among scholars, as evidenced by the works of Ogungbemi (2016a), Ogungbemi (2018), and Ogunsiji and Ogungbemi (2016). Since the vibrant 1960s, a fervent debate has surged, questioning the colonial languages' capacity to faithfully convey the profound socio-cultural and linguistic tapestry of Africa.

In a notable work by Yeibo (2011), which references Osundare's 2004 insights, African writers are intriguingly segmented into three definitive categories: the accommodationists, the gradualists, and the unyielding radicalists.

The accommodationists, epitomized by luminaries like Senegal's Leopold Sedar Senghor, unreservedly embrace the colonial tongues. Meanwhile, the gradualists, often depicted as those treading "the middle path," ardently advocate for a rejuvenation of the English language, infusing it with African essence. In contrast, radicalists, with torchbearers like Obi Wali and Ngugu Wa Thiong'O, fervently champion the resurgence of Africa's indigenous linguistic treasures in literary arenas. Their profound perspectives shine

through in works like "The Dead End of African Literature" and "The Language of African Literature." It is worth noting that the esteemed John Pepper Clark Bekederemo resonates with the gradualist philosophy.

Delving into Okpewho's 1990 analysis, "Ozidi" emerges as a captivating oral narrative performance. These narratives, harmoniously accompanied by the soulful cadence of music, exude a poetic allure. Okpewho meticulously highlights three distinct vocal cadences that breathe life into these performances: the immersive narrative-driven speech mode, the lilting song mode, and the exalted recitative mode, primarily reserved for hero-praising endeavors.

In a separate exploration, Akporobaro (2001:3-19) masterfully delineates the multifaceted dimensions of oral literature. From the palpable vibrancy of performance to the indelible imprints of orality, from the magnetic charisma of the artist to the rapturous engagement of audiences, from the ageless reservoir of memory to the spark of spontaneous creativity—each facet is vividly captured. As Akporobaro eloquently states, oral literary expressions transcend mere words, animated by evocative gestures, societal conventions, and the mesmerizing ambiance of their settings.

Through the discerning lens of Ogungbemi (2016b), "Ozidi" is unveiled in all its epic grandeur.

The very essence of epics is to magnify their central figures. These tales commence with a bold proclamation, followed by a celestial invocation, echoing Greek traditions or embracing cultural nuances. The narrative then plunges into the action's epicenter, adeptly using flashbacks to weave the tapestry of the tale, all while casting a luminous spotlight on the hero's monumental stature. It is in these moments that artful epithets emerge, each singing praises of the hero's valorous traits.

Clark (2010: 274) considers himself as a letter writer for his characters. Responding to critics of his plays, especially *The Raft*, Clark asserts that the characters in his plays are not

poetic personages but ordinary Ijaw persons working out their life's tenure at particular points on the stage. And they are speaking in their own voices and language to an audience, members of whom they expect to reach with a reasonable degree of sympathy and conviction".

Delving deeper into the intricate intricacies of language, he passionately argues that it's not merely grammar or class that distinguishes one language user from another. Instead, it's the unique tapestry of style, the vividness of imagery, and the strategic employment of literary devices. At its core, language operates as a complex code. Deviating from this code might lead to linguistic aberrations. Yet, it's this very deviation that the creative maestro might choose, purposefully breaching the conventional language code to achieve a mesmerizing stylistic resonance.

Historical analyses of "Ozidi" and "The Raft" have predominantly revolved around their thematic essence. For instance, "Ozidi" has been celebrated as an epic masterpiece, while "The Raft" is often interpreted as a profound allegory. Pioneering scholars, including the likes of Teilanyo (2007) and Egudu (1976), have delved into the thematic core of these plays. Yet, in their meticulous pursuits, they've often overlooked the myriad of stylistic nuances that these plays are imbued with. A particularly striking stylistic element in Clark's theatrical pieces is the rhythmic sound pattern. This study seeks to illuminate how these sound patterns not only enhance the plays but also poignantly mirror the socio-political contours of the society from which they emerged. Addressing this palpable oversight, our exploration endeavors to discern how phonological tools in J.P. Clark's "Ozidi" and "The Raft" enrich the narratives, crafting a distinctive stylistic signature for Clark in his theatrical compositions.

Levels of Stylistic Analysis

Diving into the multifaceted realms of stylistic analysis, we encounter layers such as graphology, phonology, morphology, and lexico-syntax. However, our journey will steer predominantly towards the

phonological layer, as it forms the crux of this study's investigative pursuits. Within the stylistic exploration, phonology emerges as a passionate dance of sound patterns, artfully weaving sounds to sculpt words and heartfelt utterances in language. These phonological wonders manifest through repetitive art forms, like the rhythmic cadence of rhyme and the evocative elements of alliteration, consonance, assonance, and phonaesthesia, to name a few. In our exploration, we'll immerse ourselves in three pivotal phonological tools: alliteration, assonance, and repetition. Through this intricate tapestry of sound devices, Clark masterfully unravels the profound meanings embedded within the texts.

Language, style, and stylistics

Languages, in their vast expanse, house a spectrum of expression styles, each resonating differently depending on the ambiance and intent. This stylistic spectrum oscillates between the structured confines of formality and the liberating realms of informality. It spans the dichotomy of written and spoken articulations, embracing everything from the precise lexicon of technical jargon to the rebellious notes of slang. It's intriguing to note the inherent contrast: written prose often dons a more formal attire compared to its spoken counterpart. Yet, exceptions abound, such as literary pieces that dance with informal written cadences and eloquently spoken discourses that rival written formality.

Delving into stylistics, Simpson (2004:1) passionately articulates it as "the exploration and dissection of texts through a linguistic lens." This fascinating realm bridges the worlds of literary critique and the intricacies of linguistics, not entirely claiming a domain but thriving in the overlap. Simpson illuminates that while literature often stands at the forefront of stylistic examinations, the discipline's gaze also extends to a medley of written manifestations, be it the persuasive allure of advertisements, the fervor of political manifestos, or the devout scripts of religion. At its core, stylistics endeavors to unveil the underlying principles that dictate the unique linguistic choices of individuals and the collective symphonies of societal groups.

Socio-cultural contexts of the texts

Clark is Nigerian more than simply Izon. The whole of Nigeria has inspired his work. The greatest inspiration has come from his people, the Izon, Wren (1984:1) refers to the Izon thus:

They may originally have been pioneers who moved south, opening new technologies in agriculture, or they may have been the victims of latecomers who forced them to make way in lands they settled first. In either case, in recent times they fully adapted to the circumstances of the country. Their adaptation and their

environment shaped them of course, and shaped Clark's art in large measure as well.

Nestled by the embrace of the sea, the Izon people are inherently tied to its rhythmic tides. Among them, beliefs in water spirits, revered ancestors, and divine entities are deeply interwoven into their cultural fabric. These water spirits, in particular, are granted a reverence that manifests vibrantly, especially as showcased in the commencement of "Ozidi". Often, they materialize through masquerades, donning enigmatic visages reminiscent of aquatic creatures.

Riddles, imbued with layers of meaning, are revered treasures within Izon folklore. Clark, with his meticulous craftsmanship, weaves these riddles seamlessly into both his poetic and dramatic works, enriching their narrative depth. A poignant moment in "Ozidi" underscores this: Ewiri, with a voice heavy with foreboding, cautions the assassins, hinting at the arrival of a son, burning with the flames of vengeance for his father's unjust demise.

Many years ago several
Of you here present planted a champion yam.
Well, that yam you sowed several seasons
gone by
Has now grown beyond arm's span.

(*Ozidi*, 64)

Within the vibrant tapestry of African culture, music emerges as an ethereal bridge connecting souls to the divine realm, a sentiment deeply echoed by Ogungbemi and Bamgbose (2021). Among the Izon, the melodies of children's songs weave tales of innocence and wonder. Clark, with his profound artistry, masterfully reincarnates these Izon songs into English, infusing his plays with their essence. A poignant scene from "The Raft" serves as a testament to this - as Kengide, with his fingers splayed wide against the horizon, unfurls a tale of hunger and yearning. Each finger, in turn, croons a melodious lament, painting a symphony of emotions.

O mu 'furu (Let's go and steal)
'Furute ye ki mien ma o (Steal for what?)
'Furu 'kumo (Don't steal)
O 'sowoumene (We shall hide)
E suo'gha (I am not with you)

(*The Raft*, 119)

Ogoro sings in imitation of the engine sound of a Niger company boat.

Lokoja's too far,
Lokoja's too far,
But over there lie riches

(*The Raft*, 116)

The melodic refrains of children's songs offer poignant reflections on the very heartbeat of Izon existence. Nestled alongside creeks and rivers, the Izon embrace a life deeply rooted in the waters' ebb and

flow. Their existence dances to the rhythms of the tides and seasonal floods. While the receding tides and arid spells often paint a canvas of absence, desolation, or even mortality, the surging floods herald a promise of renewal and rebirth. Yet, in a twist of irony, an overwhelming deluge or a rampant tide carries the potential for profound devastation. Wren (2004:16) states that:

It is tempting to base a philosophic principle on this paradox and apply it to Clark's works. His drama and poetry are both celebratory and pessimistic. His drama is paradoxical, whether heroic or tragic. The mood of Clark's work, overall, is ironic, as if his themes, like the tides, were subject to change, to mood, and to paradox.

Peeling Back the Layers of Ozidi

Nestled within the confines of Orua, a power vacuum emerges. Ozidi, though a worthy contender, finds his path to kingship obstructed by the presence of his elder sibling, Temugedege. Despite Temugedege's questionable suitability, the Council of State adamantly crowns him. Outraged yet bound by tradition, Ozidi demands due reverence for the new ruler. As the men of Orua embark on a perilous quest to procure an honor befitting their king, shadows of conspiracy darken the horizon. Treachery culminates in Ozidi's demise, orchestrated by those he once trusted. Amidst this turmoil, a beacon of hope emerges: Orea, bearing Ozidi's heir, seeks refuge in Ododama, the abode of Oreama, a formidable sorceress. As the child comes into the world, he is meticulously groomed in the arcane arts. The enigmatic Bouakararakabiri, a forest dweller with profound wisdom, bestows upon young Ozidi a charm of invincibility and a formidable seven-pronged sword.

Armed with purpose and power, Ozidi revisits Orua, seeking retribution. His journey culminates in a confrontation with the dreaded smallpox king. Stricken by the disease, Orea's timely intervention and her unique remedy ensure Orua remains untouched by the smallpox scourge.

Drifting Through The Raft

Amid the winding currents of the Niger Delta, "The Raft" unfolds a tale of four lumbermen: Olotu, Kengide, Ogro, and Ibobo. Fate's cruel hand sends their raft adrift, trapping it within the treacherous embrace of a whirlpool. Desperation fuels innovation as they fashion a sail, hoping to harness the wind's might. However, nature's fury splits the raft, dispersing its occupants. Olotu's half, propelled by the sail, ventures into the vastness of the sea. Ogro, in a bid to secure salvation, meets a tragic end. Kengide and Ibobo, despite their riverine prowess, find their journey cut short, with Warri remaining an elusive destination.

The Tapestry of J. P. Clark's Life

Born amidst the verdant landscapes of Kiagbodo, Delta State, on April 16th, 1935, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo embarked on a literary journey that resonated across borders. His academic pursuits led him to the University College Ibadan, and further afield to Princeton University. His oeuvre, encompassing "Poems and Song of a Goat" (1961) and "A Reed in the Tide" (1965), echoes the dual cultural influences that shaped him. Describing himself as a "cultural mulatto", Clark's works beautifully juxtapose Nigerian traditions with Western sensibilities. His magnum opus, "Ozidi", is a testament to his dedication to preserving the rich tales of the Niger Delta. As a luminary in the world of letters, Clark's legacy as a playwright, novelist, and poet remains unparalleled.

A review of relevant literature

Teilanyo's 2007 research delves deep into the nuances of figurative language translation present in J.P. Clark's masterpiece, "The Ozidi Saga." The inquiry meticulously evaluates Clark's translation prowess from Izon to English within this saga. While the translation is predominantly adept and harmonious, Teilanyo illuminates instances where the rendition has either enhanced, diminished, or subtly shifted the figurative essence when juxtaposed with the original Izon script, as perceived by a discerning Izon-English bilingual. Teilanyo contends that such alterations tarnish not just the source text, but also the intrinsic cultural fabric and the intended audience's experience. Advocating for a more authentic translation approach, Teilanyo suggests that translators remain fiercely loyal to the source-text's figurative richness, even if it necessitates being overtly literal or slightly deviating from the standard conventions of the target language. Annotations and glossaries could then come to the rescue. While Teilanyo's insights are invaluable, especially given the contextual parallels to our present exploration, its exclusive focus on figurative language in "The Ozidi Saga" and its non-stylistic nature make it a limited reference.

On another note, Egudu's 1976 analysis unravels the profound theme of economic vulnerability in J.P. Clark's narrative, "The Raft." Drawing parallels between the harrowing journey of the four protagonists, Olotu, Kengide, Ogro, and Ibobo, and the broader Nigerian experience, the research paints a poignant picture. These lumbermen, despite their seasoned maritime skills, tragically succumb to the sea's fury, mirroring Nigeria's paradoxical economic challenges despite its abundant resources. Egudu's perspective is thematically centered, making it a distinct study from our linguistically-oriented investigation.

Theoretical Framework

Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar stands as the bedrock for our analytical approach, shedding light not merely on the intricate architecture

of language, but also delving into the essence of discourse and its multifaceted roles. Halliday (1971) astutely observes that a linguistic feature dons a stylistic cloak when it conveys a distinct meaning, resonance, or significance. The crux here revolves around language's dynamic functionality within texts and its intertwined relationship with its intended purpose, as echoed by scholars like Akinola (2018) and Ogungbemi (2018).

This grammar intricately weaves together the semantic, phonological, lexical, and grammatical strands, providing a holistic view of language structure. Moreover, it dissects the function of language through a tripartite lens: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These pivotal dimensions, often hailed as the metafunctions of language in scholarly circles (Ogungbemi and Okunsanya 2016), enrich our understanding. Notably, our current exploration is deeply anchored in the textual dimension, which delves into the modality, coherent structure, and communicative essence of a given text. Elaborating on Halliday's textual metafunction, Leech and Short (1985:209) articulate it as the art of harnessing language to craft, comprehend, and convey information seamlessly. This metafunction serves as a bridge, connecting the discourse's content to broader concepts beyond its boundaries, a linkage that will soon be illuminated in our ensuing analysis.

Textual Analysis

Phonetic-Sound Pattern

In both "The Raft" and "Ozidi", alliteration and assonance serve as compelling sound patterns, meticulously woven to amplify themes of oppression, anguish, destitution, savagery, and deception embedded within. In deciphering these sonic nuances, we've charted our course by leaning on scholarly insights regarding specific sounds while also trusting our innate resonance with the text's auditory fabric.

Alliteration Explored

Defined as the echoing of initial consonants within neighboring words, alliteration stands as a phonetic hallmark, bestowing a harmonious rhythm to expressions. This stylistic flair not only enriches prose with an aesthetic allure but also sharpens emphasis, occasionally even sculpting the ambiance of the narrative. Within the texts at hand, one can't help but discern the deliberate repetition of specific consonant sounds, especially the plosive, glottal, and sibilant fricative tonalities.

Plosives in *The Raft* and *Ozidi*

Plosive consonants, as eloquently defined by Leech (1969:94-95), are those distinct sounds crafted by momentarily halting, then swiftly releasing, the lung's airstream. Beyond their mere presence in a group of consonants, plosives inject a unique auditory fabric: a striking immediacy interwoven with a gritty, unwavering intensity.

The alliteration of the voiceless Bilabial Plosive /p/ in *Ozidi* and *The Raft*

Below are some of the examples of the alliteration of the bilabial plosives /p/ and /b/ in the texts under study.

- (a) ... lions that should be out prowling are purring by the fireside. (13)
- (b) ... out of the poison pot. (18)
- (c) Will you turn him into a pulp of plantain (24) [a – c *Ozidi*]
- (d) ... that plant of poison. (131)
- (e) The head of boys proclaiming their puberty (106) [d – e *The Raft*]

In the instance labeled (a), the strategic utilization of the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ carries profound symbolism. There's an intrinsic urging towards aggression in its placement. The lion, infamous for its predacious nature, seems out of character, purring by the fireside when its innate instinct should drive it to prowl. The underlying message? Just as a lion should assert its dominance, so should the people of the land stand firm and unyielding. Transitioning to (b), Clark delves deeper into his portrayal of the Niger Delta, and by extension, Nigeria. The nation is metaphorically described as a "poison pot", a vessel carrying only turmoil, and in the direst of circumstances, heralding demise. The theme of brutality echoes again in (c). Here, Clark paints a grim image, suggesting the possibility of one being so brutally battered, they resemble the "pulp of plantain" – a testament to the profound depths of human cruelty.

Shifting our focus to "The Raft", Clark once more wields the force of bilabial plosives to depict societal realities. In the passage marked (d), the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ serves as a haunting reminder of the perceived contamination of the Niger Delta and the broader Nigerian landscape. Environmental neglect, frequent oil spillages, and the consequent degradation are stark realities of the region. Violence's relentless shadow emerges yet again in (e). The act of "proclaiming their puberty" alludes to a display of might and vigor, mirrored in the real world by acts such as pipeline vandalism and other aggressive manifestations. What is truly compelling is the recurring deployment of the voiceless bilabial plosives throughout the texts. This stylistic choice accentuates specific narrative nuances, showcasing how sound intricacies can effectively convey Clark's thematic intentions and the profound messages embedded within both masterpieces.

The alliteration of the voiced Bilabial Plosive /b/

In both examined texts, occurrences of the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ through alliteration are distinctly evident. J.P. Clark masterfully employs this sound device to enrich and convey the narratives' core messages to the reader. The following samples, labeled (a-d), further elucidate this stylistic nuance.

- (a) Your bones are not good for beasts of the bush to maul at. (14)
- (b) Blades go blunt on his skin but arrows bounce off his body. (22) [*Ozidi*]
- (c) You beast of the bush without sex. (99)
- (d) Board a boat, board a boat! (99) [f – i *The Raft*]

Within the context of (a), a palpable sense of intensity and force emerges, evoking sentiments of disdain, animosity, and aggression. This further underscores the idea that societal violence stems from a profound animosity amongst its members. Such antagonism is not exclusive to Nigeria but is, rather distressingly, a global phenomenon, fueled by rampant individualism. In (b), Clark intricately weaves the sound of the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ to accentuate the notion that aggression is becoming an ingrained part of the cultural fabric. People perpetually remain on the defensive, drawing confidence from the protective talismans they believe shield them. In the context of (c), Clark employs the /b/ sound to highlight societal condescension and arrogance. Tribalism fosters a sense of superiority, a sentiment deeply rooted in Nigerian society, where individuals often demean others, contributing to the nation's precarious state of security. Finally, in (d), Clark aligns the sharp, bursting nature of the /b/ sound with the people's mounting desperation. He suggests a collective urgency to "board the boat," symbolizing an escape from the looming disaster threatening to engulf the nation.

The alliteration of the Voiceless Velar Plosive

The alliteration of /k/ like the other plosive sounds discussed above suggests a kind of violence and confusion. A few examples in the texts include:

- (a) Until you bring him cowries and cows, we shall not sleep in this city. (15)
- (b) Whatever their crowd, those creatures cannot knock over a cow. (23) (a-b *Ozidi*)
- (c) A whole crowd of bush cows are crashing headlong. (91) (*The Raft*)

In example (a), the recurring sound of /k/ conjures an aura of turbulence and aggression, echoing the destructive nature of societal corruption. It paints a vivid picture of a society where tranquility remains elusive unless individuals grease the palms of those wielding power. Similarly, in (b), the repetition of /k/ symbolizes the sheer futility of unity and collective action. Clark employs it masterfully, juxtaposing the buzzing of tsetse flies with the populace's disjointed efforts to eradicate the looming menace of corruption—symbolized here by the imposing stature of a cow. Yet, in (c), Clark infuses a glimmer of optimism. The symbolic cow, a representation of endemic corruption, is depicted as on the verge of collapsing. This revelation serves as a beacon of hope for a land that's been deeply scarred by rampant corruption.

The alliteration of the Glottal Fricative /h/

The production of the glottal fricative, as elucidated by Gimson (1980:191), involves a process where air is forced from the lungs with notable intensity, leading to friction throughout the vocal tract. The sound /h/, with its inherent qualities of pressure and friction, exudes a raw, abrasive character. This stark tonal quality seems to be profoundly echoed in one of the examined texts.

- (a) Ozidi will hound us to death and haunt us thereafter. (15)
- (b) ... hit him hard and home until he falls down (22)
- (c) Now what I have spoken to you with the voice of the hyrax, have you heard...? (18) [*Ozidi*]

The resonance of the sound evokes images of intense suffering and the brutalities one human inflicts upon another, particularly when an influential figure preys upon someone more vulnerable. In instance (a), the phrases “hound and haunt” vividly capture the relentless pursuit, mirroring the oppressive tendencies of the powerful over the marginalized in society. Clark’s use of the glottal fricative in (b) paints an auditory and visual scene brimming with raw violence. It’s as if the reader is present, witnessing the cruel assault on Ozidi, feeling each blow, hearing each cry. Meanwhile, in (c), Clark draws a parallel between human characteristics and those of the hyrax, a small mammal native to Africa and Asia, known for its rodent-like features and cunning, sometimes stubborn nature. This comparison highlights the inherent animalistic tendencies in humans.

The alliteration of the sibilant /s/

The texts prominently feature the repetition of the sibilant sound /s/, serving as a potent expressive tool. As noted by Leech (1969:96-97), the dominance of such sounds in a text can evoke various auditory sensations like rustling, hissing, sighing, or whispering. This stylistic element is especially striking in “The Raft”.

- (a) You say you were simply sounding the stream (93)
- (b) So the storm can soak and swell them up? (110)
- (c) In the stream seems smooth (96) [*The Raft*]

In this context, the recurrent use of the sound evokes the sighs of distress and sorrow experienced by the lumbermen in “The Raft”, which symbolically mirrors the anguish endured by a vast number of Nigerians. Economic challenges drive the lumbermen into their perilous journey, where they face numerous hardships that elicit their sighs and moans. This mirrors the predicament in Nigeria, where individuals constantly grapple with daily challenges, leading many to unfortunate outcomes, much like the fate of the lumbermen.

Assonance

In discussing assonance, Adeyanju (2008:92) defines it as “the repetition of similar vowel sounds in nearby words.” Specific vowels in the texts being analyzed are emphasized. Much like their consonant counterparts, these vowels play a pivotal role in communicating and reinforcing the texts’ messages. In both “The Raft” and “Ozidi,” Clark leverages the repetition of specific vowel sounds to enhance meaning. Our analysis highlighted the assonance of vowels such as /ʌ /, /ɔ/, /ɔ: /, /i/, and /i: /, which we’ve categorized based on their type and purpose.

Assonance of /ʌ/, /ɔ/ and /ɔ: /

Many examples of these vowels are found in the two texts under study – *Ozidi* and *The Raft*. The examples are:

“corner”(9), “haunt” (15), “hawking” (19), “corpse” (25), “staunch” (26), “frog” (48), “skull” (48), “sword” (54), “tongue” (64), and “blood” (76). [*Ozidi*]

In *The Raft*, the following are noticed. “muddy” (94), “coconut” (100), “tongue” (104), “court” (104), “ashore” (104), “suckling” (106), “honey” (107), “flood” (107), “company” (116), “bottle” (119) and “log” (120).

The central themes of the examined texts revolve around issues of poverty, exploitation, subjugation, and indifference to the challenges faced by individuals. The vowels /ʌ/, /ɔ/, and /ɔ: / evoke the croaking sounds characteristic of frogs. This croaking mirrors the collective murmurs of the masses under duress. Similarly to the sibilants, these vowels resonate with expressions of disdain, such as “pshaw,” symbolizing a rebuke of the actions of those who exploit and dominate.

The assonance of / i: / and /i/

The repetition of the long and short vowels evokes the cry of pain and anguish in the texts under study. Examples from *The Raft* include the following: “People” (92), “roaring” (92), “fertility” (92), “moorings” (93), “knotting” (93), “bearings” (94), “huddling” (94), “dragging” (94), “grazing” (95) “drifting” (95) and “paralysis” (97). In *Ozidi*, we have the following: “sacrifice” (4), “politic” (6), “roaring” (7), “ravished” (7), “staggering” (10), “conspiratorial” (11), “decapitated” (11), “insulting” (14), “scampering” 18, “stream” (30) and “wretched” (31). These two vowel sounds help Clark to transmit textual meaning in the two texts, as they suggest discomfort from the masses who are being choked by the oppression of the leaders.

Further, we can say that these vowel sounds have been deployed deliberately by Clark to foreground aspects of meaning and also create aesthetic value.

Repetition

This phonological stylistic element allows for the repetition of parallel words in lines, enhancing the reader's focus on the writer's key message. It can also amplify the underlying meaning. By repeating words, a rhythmic quality is infused into the lines or sentences. Clark employs this technique both to express his narrative intentions and to imbue the texts with a sense of elegance and aesthetic appeal. Here are some instances of repetition from the texts to highlight our observations.

- (a) All this ululation in town
Tell me, to what end?
Oh, all this ululation,
Will you tell me to what end,
 You of seven crowns,
 My one and only son!' (The Raft, p. 133)
- (b) Death that has nothing to do
With God is what has struck;
Death that has nothing to do
With God is what has struck;
 It's Ozidi, the all-strong,
 Who's come to strike down man. (The Raft, p. 134)
- (c) Change your ways, change your ways,
 I say if you don't want to dig
 A grave for me before my time. (Ozidi, p. 59)
- (d) Hold it, hold it, my son, hold it!
 Has the back of the cat ever touched mud
 although
 I say hold it! Will you shame me? Hold it I
 say? (Ozidi, p.62)

In the works being analyzed, Clark utilizes repetition of specific words, phrases, and sentences in close succession and identical positions. This approach combines parallelism and repetition, showcasing Clark's ability to craft pragmatic and aesthetically pleasing narratives. Samples (a and b) are songs excerpted from The Raft. These songs emanate a vibrancy, brought to life by the word repetitions, emphasizing specific sounds and interpretations. Highlighting the repeated phrases and sentences underscores the texts' messages while adding a sonic layer. Additionally, such repetition adds a memorable, musical quality to the lines.

CONCLUSION

In this analysis, I have employed functional linguistics to explore how sound mechanisms interpret the meanings within J.P. Clark's "Ozidi" and "The Raft." My investigation underscores the pivotal role of phonological attributes in dissecting literary discourse. I have pinpointed and elucidated key phonological elements like alliteration, assonance, and repetition, which Clark masterfully leverages to convey textual nuances and enhance aesthetic appeal in both works. This analysis reaffirms that sound structures are as

crucial and valuable as other linguistic dimensions, including lexis, semantics, syntax, and morphology, in crafting narratives.

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