# ANALYTICAL STUDY OF STYLISTIC DEVICES IN FOUR SELECTED FRENCH AND ENGLISH POEMS

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## Abstract

Communication plays a major role in the affairs of man and the development of societies. The number one purpose of communication is understanding. Every writer or speaker often tries to make his/her belief, ideas, thoughts, emotions, and desires among other things comprehensible. A communicator does this through the use of words, collocations or expressions that vividly and precisely capture the context and content of his/her field of discourse. Quite a good number of scholars have worked and are still working on style of writers and speakers around the world. However, less attention has been paid to stylistic devices in texts. This study, therefore, examines issues such as register, figures of speech, allusion, symbolism, enjambment and mood in Four French and English poems. Quantitative research method which allows descriptive presentation of research findings is applied. The study is premised on the theory of Functionalism of text. The choice of the four selected poets is influenced by the fact that the authors are African writers of the colonial and the postcolonial periods. Niyi Osundare and Gbemisola Adeoti write in English while Léopold Sédar Senghor and David Diop write in French. Findings suggest that lexico-semantic interpretation of a text requires the understanding of a writer's poetic devices The study concludes that the knowledge of stylistic devices in a particular text will enhance its interpretation and its internalization.

*Keywords:* Stylistic devices, communication, African writers, Ogundokun, Lawal

## 1. Introduction

The ability to speak and use a language is one major thing that makes man a higher animal. It is a bond among the people of a linguistic community. Man has the faculty to acquire and learn as well as maintain more than one language at the same time. There are several things man can do with a language. Gimson (1980) as cited by Balogun (2017, p. 2) says language is:

> a system of conventional symbols used for communication by a whole community, the pattern of conventions covers a system of significant sound units, the inflection and the arrangement of words and the association of meaning with words.

As a follow up to Gimson's view on language, Osisanwo (2013, p. 1) sees language as: "human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication."

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However, language can be described as a system of communicating or expressing ideas, experiences, feelings and desires among other things; verbally or non-verbally through the use of certain symbols by a group of people. Apart from communicative/informational function, language performs other functions such the expressive function, aesthetic, metalinguistic, directive, phatic, conative, emotive, poetic and referential functions (cf. Geoffery, 1974)

An attempt to treat the register of a communicator will involve the understanding of lexicon and stylistics as well as the concept of a text. The lexicon specifies the peculiar features of a word. These subsume its morphological, syntactic, categorial and contextual features. The categorial and syntactic components are said to constitute the base component (cf. Lamidi, 2000, p. 61). Stylistics, written as *stylistile* in German and *stylistique* in French, is a branch of linguistics that enables linguists to explain the studies of style, especially in works of literature (cf. Daramola, 2001, p. 160). Any language that is functional in a given context is a text (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 10; Bloor & Bloor, 1995, p. 86). It is, however, important to add that a text could be in spoken or written form.

Now, what is a register? As applied in this study, a register is the feature of a text which indicates the particular occupational activity the language-user is engaged in (cf. Okoro, 2001, p. 222). There are many registers such as the language/register of advertising, agriculture, banking and finance, engineering, law, literature, military, medicine, politics, sports, technology and the language/register of transportation only to mention a few. According to Salami (2014, pp. 42 – 43), the term register is used in sociolinguistics to refer to:

> languages or language varieties according to use. Registers are sets of vocabulary usage associated with occupational or social groups. For example, computer scientists, medical doctors, bankers, engineers and so on use different vocabulary items. A computer scientist will talk about "template" while a civil engineer or a design engineer may refer to the same concept as "frame".

Simply put, registers are specific terminologies associated with a given vocation, calling, occupation or profession. Every register is the vocabulary of a particular discipline/profession. It is a pertinent feature of a text. Register is a way of presenting or painting similar idea/concept differently in accordance with the occupational perception of various vocations. For instance, a lawyer uses the word *client* while a medical doctor prefers to say *patient* and a banker goes for the word *customer*. As a matter of fact, the three word – client, patient and customer are referring to the same concept, in different situational contexts. Contextual classifications which produce different variations/varieties of text is known as register (cf. Gregory & Carroll, 1978, p. 64). Foregrounding the assertions above, Kamalu (2018, p. 102) observes:

> Writer and speakers select words and expressions that best communicate their intentions in context. Some scholars in stylistics, study lexical choices under vocabulary while some others integrate it into semantics or grammar.

In this study, however, lexical items are treated as part of vocabulary because our focus is more importantly on register.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Since the issue of register can be associated with functional stylistics, this study is situated within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Functionalism theory holds that every language either verbal or non-verbal is performing some roles in a given context. This idea of language being functional is postulated by scholars in the field of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The idea of Systemic Functional Linguistics is viewed as "ethnographic" and "anthropological" approach by Butler (1985, p. 4). According to Pride (1971, p. 1), "the study of language as part of culture and society is a task that defies neat delimitation". Hence,

there is an interrelationship between a society and its language. The utterance, *context of situation* is developed by Bronislaw Malinowski. Kamalu (2018, p. 71) points out that the systemic functional model is:

> The interdependence of meaning and context of situation. It is a linguistic model that combines the formal properties of language with its situational dimensions thus recognizing both the linguistic and extralinguistic forms and functions of language.

From all these affirmations above, one can note the connections among what a communicator says (subject-matter), how he/she says it (style) and why he/she says it. Therefore, the choice of a communicator's register is guided by the subject-matter at hand, the situational and sociocultural contexts that surround the subject-matter or field of discourse. As there is a relationship between society and its language, there is also a correlation between register and the profession that uses it. It is obvious that systemic fictional linguists believe that language use is said to be functional because it is meant to produce meaning which is controlled by situational and sociocultural (formal and informal) contexts. Significantly also, such a meaning depends on a process of choice.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1.0   *Niyi Osundare's "Ours to plough, not to plunder"*

The Earth is ours to plough and plant
the hoe is our barber
the dibble her dimple

Out with mattocks and machetes
bring calabash trays and rocking baskets
let the sweat which swells earth root
relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens

let wheatfields raise their breadsome hands
to the ripening sun
let legumes clothe the naked bosom
of shivering mounds
let the pawpaw swell and swing its headward breasts
Let water spring
from earth's unfathomed fountain
let gold rush
from her deep unseeable mines
hitch up a ladder to the dodging sky
let's put a sun in every night

Our earth is an unopened grainhouse,
a bustling barn in some far, uncharted jungle
a distant gem in a rough unhappy dust
This earth is ours to work not to waste
ours to man not to maim
This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder

**3.1.1**   In **"Ours to plough, not to plunder"**, Niyi Osundare advocates for orderliness, rectitude and restraints towards how human beings treat nature and the resources there-in. The poet suggests that the earth needs to be treated with care. The advantages of the earth to mankind underscore the need to protect it jealously. The sustainability of man depends largely on the

mother earth in terms of food supply, shelter, clothing and the supply of oxygen. Even upon death, human beings are kept inside the earth.

Register and the figures of speech are the stylistic devices that shall be considered in Osundare's **"Ours to plough, not to plunder"**

3.1.2 *Register.* The register of Agriculture is the dominant term employed by Osundare in his poem titled **"Ours to plough, not to plunder".** Words such as "earth" (land), plough (tilling of the land for planting), farm tools like hoe, calabash trays, baskets, dibble, mattocks and matchets are mentioned. Other terminologies that are associated with Agriculture in the poem include heaps (ridges), grain house, wheatfields and plants like legumes (vegetables or cover crops) as well as pawpaw. The poet writes:

The **Earth** is ours to **plough** and **plant**
the **hoe** is our barber
the **dibble** her dimple

Out with **mattocks** and **machetes**
bring **calabash trays** and rocking **baskets**
let the sweat which swells earth root

relieve heavy **heaps** of their tuberous burdens…

From the extract of the poem, one finds at least ten terms that are associated with the language/register of Agriculture in the first two stanzas alone. Before, the arrival of the Whites in Africa and the discovery of crude oil some years later, agriculture (farming and animal husbandry) was the major occupation of the Africans and people value the earth then. However, the discovery of crude oil and its exploration have caused a lot of environmental destruction, degradation and deforestation. As a matter of fact, this calls for caution and restraints for human sustainability and peaceful co-existence. The choice of the words for this poem is appropriate, informative, instructive and educative in its descriptive nature.

3.1.3 *Figures of Speech.* In his effort to create mental pictures and vivid descriptions of situations and what he intended, Osundare uses some literary devices that include alliteration, metaphor, repetition and personification.

a) Examples of Alliteration:

"**P**lough and **p**lant" (line 1); "**d**ibble her **d**imple" (line 3), "**m**attocks and **m**atchets" (line 4), "**s**weat which **s**wells" (line 6), "**h**eavy **h**eaps" (line 7), "**b**ustling **b**arn" (line 20), "**w**ork not to **w**aste" (line 22), "**m**an not to **m**aim" (line 23) and "**p**lough…**p**lunder"

The use of these alliterations brings about a perfect melodious sound effect that lace up the aesthetic value of the poem as a piece of art. When you plough, you plant, and the plant eventually provides food for human beings. Heavy heaps imply good yield; ridges with big tubers. The expressions: "**w**ork not to **w**aste", "**m**an not to **m**aim" and "**p**lough…**p**lunder" are instructive. They warn the inhabitants of the world to work on the earth but not to waste the resources there-in; to take good care of the earth and not to destroy it and to till the soil but not to raid or rape the earth of her goods.

b) Examples of Metaphoric expressions in Osundare's **"Ours to plough, not to plunder"**

"The hoe is our barber", (Earth as the) "Bread-some hands" of the wheatfields" and the "shivering mounds", the "earth's unfathomable fountain"; With these metaphoric expressions, the poet sees the earth as a reservoir of inexhaustible resources. Also, the earth is seen as an

"opened grain-house ". This means that the earth still has untapped resources in spite of several human activities. However, apart from calling the earth those beautiful names, the poet described the earth as "a bustling barn" and "a rough unhappy dust" because of the carelessness of man occasioned by his callous activities and the reckless use of technology which destroy the mother earth. As a stylistic device, the poet employs the metaphors to make mankind appreciate the reason for preserving the earth and its resources from collapsing.

c) Examples of Personification:

"…legumes clothe the naked bosom" (line 10). Legumes are personified as if they were human beings who could cover their nakedness with cloth. Another instance of personification is "… the pawpaw swell and swing its headward breasts". The pawpaw fruits are treated as if they were women endowed with breasts. Through the use of personification, the writer is able to transfer the attributes of person to non-human being. This has created concrete images in the minds of readers and gives out aesthetic values and even erotic feelings.

d) Repetition

The poet employs repetition for the purpose of emphasis and to underscore his motive to educate readers as regards the need to protect the earth and use the resources there-in wisely. For instance, the word earth is repeatedly used in the poem and the title of the poem, **"Ours to plough, not to plunder"** is also repeated in the last line.

e) The use of enjambment

Enjambment is a run-on-line technique which is often used as a stylistic device in poems. This technique of poetic writing is applied to make a poem flow like the flute and achieve a musical nature. The lines of such a poem are interwoven and run into one another. For example, see the fourth stanza of the poem under review:

Let water spring
from earth's unfathomed fountain
let gold rush
from her deep unseeable mines
hitch up a ladder to the dodging sky
let's put a sun in every night

### *3.2.1.* **Gbemisola Adeoti's "Ambush"**

The Land is giant whale
That swallow the sinker
With hook, line and bait
aborting dreams of a good catch
Fishers turn home at dusk
blue Peter on empty ships
all Peters with petered out desires

The land is a saber-foothed tiger,
That cries deep in the glade
While infants shudder home
the grizzled ones snatch their gut
from bayonets of tribulation
Halting venturous walk at dust

The Lord is a giant hawk
That courts unceasing disaster
as it hovers and hoots in space

The land lies patiently ahead
awaiting in ambush
those who point away from a direction
where nothing happens
toward the shore of possibilities.

***3.2.2.*** Adeoti's **"Ambush"** captures the hostility experienced by many African States after the attainment of self-rule in the 60s; the military incursion and its oppressive tendencies that dashed the expectations of the average Africans. Since the first coup d'état in Togo in 1963, there were several military invasions in governance in West African States like Nigeria, the home country of the poet. This sordid experience occasioned by incessant violent overthrow of legitimate government has impoverished the citizens psychologically, socioeconomically and politically. As stylistic devices, register and literary devices like metaphor, symbolism, allusion, alliteration, repetition and pun shall be examined.

***3.2.3*** ***Register.*** There are two major registers employed by the poet in the poem; namely the register of military and the language of fishery (by extension, agriculture). The subject-matter of the poem will be better understood and appreciated with an appreciable knowledge of the vocabularies which are associated with military and agriculture; especially fishery and/or hunting. For example, as a military term, "**ambush**" is a military strategy that implies a sudden attempt on somebody's life. It is an unexpected attack on a person or a group of persons by those who are already waiting for them in a hiding place. The poem presents two classes of people; the hunter (the fisher man) and the hunted (the fish). The hunter symbolizes the people in the corridors of power that manipulate and control the destiny of the less privileged. Unfortunately, the downtrodden who appear to be nonchalant and docile about taking charge of their destiny are the hunted (the fish or the game). The hunters, in the poem, are the postcolonial African leaders who ambushed the poor Africans socioeconomically, politically and otherwise. On the other hand, the following terms; "the land", "giant whale", "the sinker", "hook", "line", "bait", and "fishers" confirm the language of fishery or hunting in the poem.

***3.2.4.*** ***Literary Devices.*** Again, a stylistician who interrogates how and why a writer has adopted the use of a given technique in his/her writing should be interested in the application of figures of speech in a particular piece of writing, most importantly if such a text is a poem. The use of metaphor, personification, symbolism, allusion, alliteration, repetition, pun and run-on-line technique attract our attention in Adeoti's "**Ambush**".

a). Metaphor and Personification

With the use of these two poetic devices, the poet is able to consolidate the military cum fishery images in the poem. For example, he described the hunter as "giant whale", "saber-toothed tiger", "bayonets of tribulation", "Lord" and "giant hawk". All these descriptions connote the fact that the hunter (African postcolonial leaders) is oppressive, wicked and dangerous. In other words, these rulers and their associates are vultures and, or terrorists that lay ambush for their fellow Africans.

The word "land" is not only a metaphor but also a personification in the poem. The land is painted as "giant whale" that swallows the sinker… out desires" (first stanza). "The Land…walk at dusk" (second stanza) and the poet says again that "The Land is a giant hawk…hoots at dusk." These expressions illustrate the use of metaphor and personification at the same time in the same utterances. Apart from calling the land other names directly (metaphor), attributes of person are given to it (personification). Land is believed to actually have the attributes of human being and that is why it is often referred to as "the mother earth" who provides sustainability for all its inhabitants as a mother does for her children.

b)      Symbolism

In the poem, "giant whale", "saber-toothed tiger", "bayonets", "giant hawk", represent fear, confusion, war, impasse, oppression, force, uncertainty and death that come from the hunters, the oppressors of the downtrodden which often characterized unconstitutional and/or dictatorial rule. Contrary to the universal belief that land has mother figure, "the land" as used in the context of this poem symbolizes the hunters which can be interpreted as the postcolonial dictatorial African rulers.

c)      Allusion

There is a biblical allusion in the first stanza of the poem where the poet makes reference to Peter:

The Land is giant whale
That swallow the sinker
With hook, line and bait
aborting dreams of a good catch
Fishers turn home at dusk
blue Peter on empty ships
all Peters with petered out desires

The extract above reminds us of the biblical Peter, the fisherman who later became one of Jesus' disciples. Adeoti injects this biblical allusion as an element of his style either to underscore his religious affiliation or to demonstrate his knowledge of the scripture, as a student of Christian Religious Knowledge at some point, in the course of his studies.

d)      Alliteration

The use of a particular consonant letter/sound in an expression two or more times is indicated in the following examples from the poem under review as alliteration: The poet employs this literary device to enact a coordinated and pleasant sound effect.

"that **s**wallow the **s**inker" (line 2)
"all **P**eters with **p**etered out desires" (line7)
"as it **h**over and **h**oots in space" (line 16).

e)   Repetition

The expression "The land (is)…" appears in three places in the poem (see lines 1, 8 and 17). The poet uses this poetic device for the purpose of emphasis in order to draw readers' attention to his subject-matter and his commitment to his chosen field of discourse.

f)   Enjambment

The use of enjambment which is also known as run-on-line technique is evident in the poem as the lines of the poem are interwoven and no comma or full stop is inserted throughout the poem. The poet engages this writing strategy to make his poem musical.

g)   Pun

This literary device allows creative writers; especially the poets, to play on words. In his poem titled "**Ambush**", Adeoti plays on the word "Peter" in line 7 where he says: "all **Peters** with **petered** out desires" This kind of construction in language, besides being exciting and aesthetic, has serious metalinguistic function.

By and large, through the use of the registers of military and fishery as well as other poetic devices which serve as his stylistic elements, Adeoti is able to illustrate the postcolonial sad experiences of the common people in most African States where leaders have become terrors and citizens' hope and expectations are dashed. There are evidently themes of oppression, social

inequality, and docile followership. However, the poet indicates a slim ray of positive future towards the end of the poem when he says: "where nothing happens / toward the shore of possibilities".

### 3.3.1 David Diop's "Un Blanc m'a dit…"

> Tu n'es qu'un Nègre!
> Un Nègre
> Un sale Nègre
> Ton Coeur est une éponge qui boit
> Qui boit avec frénésie le liquid empoisonné du vice. Et ta couleur empoisonne ton sang
> Dans l'éternité de l'esclavage
> Le fer rouge de la justice t'a marqué
> Marqué dans ta chair de luxure
> Ta route a les contours tortueux de l'humiliation
> Et ton avenir, monster, damné, c'est ton présent de honte
> Donne-moi ce dos qui ruisselle de la sueur fétide de tes fautes
> Donne-moi tes mains calleuses et Lourdes
> Ces mains de rachat sans espoir pas!
> Le travail n'attend
> Et que tombe ma pitié de ton spectacle.
> Devant l'horreur

**3.3.2    David Diop's "Un Blanc m'a dit…".** The poems of David Diop explore the socio-political climate of the colonial period in Africa; the human condition in Africa in the 40s and the 50s. Diop expresses his belief in the concept of Negritude and his bitterness for the colonial system in his poems. He is a militant African poet who denounces the colonial invaders and the colonial administration at the same time. He aggressively preaches revolt and violence to bring the colonial system to an end. He calls the colonial masters dirty names such as brutes, exploiters, cheaters, hypocrites, imperialists and vultures among other names. Diop's intention of attacking the Europeans and their associates is to stop colonial rule in Africa.

**3.3.3    Register.** The use of military terms dominates the poem. As it has been pointed out, David Diop is an unrepentant militant writer. Words such as "sang" = blood, "l'esclavage" = captivity, "tortueux" = tortuous, "l'humiliation" = humiliation, "monster" = monster and l'horreur" = horror attest to the use of the language of the military or war.

### 3.3.4    Stylistic Devices

a)        Vulgarity

There is the application of vulgar abuse; that is, an offensive language or obscene utterance to describe someone or something. In the poem, **"Un Blanc m'a dit…"** which can be literarily interpreted as "A Whiteman once told me…", the expression *"Un sale Nègre"* meaning a dirty Black is used to paint a Blackman. This utterance directed toward the Blackman is cruel and vicious. It is unfair and unacceptable. The use of vulgarity is evident in lines 1 to 3 of the poem.

b)        Symbolism

In the mentality of an average Whiteman, the word *Nègre* (Black) symbolizes filthiness, ill-fated and/ evil. They believe the black colour connotes worthlessness and hopelessness (lines 10 and 11).

c)        Metaphor

In line 3, the Blacks are called *Nègre* (inferior being). The Blackman's heart is also described as a sponge in lines 4 and 5: "Ton Coeur est une éponge qui boit. Qui boit avec frénésie le liquid empoisonné du vice. Et ta couleur empoisonne ton sang". The Europeans see Africans as people without hope morally and economically. As though that was not enough, in line 6, the Whiteman believes that all Blacks are slaves: "Dans l'éternité de l'esclavage"

d) Allusion

Lines 13 to 15 of the poem make reference to the imperfection and sins of the black people. There is a biblical allusion to Noah's son who commits sin. The Europeans are of the opinion that Africans are the descendants of Noah's son who sinned against God. Hence, the Christian missionaries have come to Africa for the rebirth of Africans in order to redeem their souls. However, the poet does not believe in this narrative. He ends the poem by pointing out the hypocrisy of the Whites who claimed they are in Africa to win souls but ended up terrorizing the Blacks and syphoning African natural resources to their land. They do not pity or show mercy on the Africans. The Blackman's dignity does not mean anything to them. The Europeans humiliated, dehumanized and subjected the Blacks to unending forced labour.

e) Grammatical Implication of the use of the personal pronoun "Tu"

The use of "Tu" to refer to the Blackman is derogatory. It connotes the European thinking that the black race is inferior. Instead of using the personal pronoun "Tu" which is singular and does not accord any respect to the addressee, one expects the colonial master to use the personal pronoun "Vous" which is you plural and at the same time shows a mark of respect. The implication of this element of style is that the poet captures the European mentality of seeing their race as being superior to the black race.

f) Form

The poem is a narrative blank verse. The use of first-person narrative technique is evident in the title of the poem, **"Un Blanc m'a dit…"**. The speaker narrates his personal encounter with a Whiteman. Hence, he is an I-narrator. The personal pronoun in object form, "me" which is contracted to "**m'**" because of the two vowel letters: "e" and "a" standing together supports our argument with regard to the application of I-narrative style in the poem.

In brief, David Diop's **"Un Blanc m'a dit…"** (A Whiteman once told me…) is a militant poem that invites the Blacks to fight against the colonial imperialism. The poet undoubtedly condemns the activities of the colonialists and their associates, especially the White missionaries as regards racial oppression and segregation.

### 3.4.1 *Leopold Sédar Senghor's "Priere aux masques"*

Masques! O Masques!
Masque noir masque rouge, vous masques blanc-et-noir
Masques aux quatre points d'où soufle l'Esprit
Je vous salue dans le silence!
Et pas toi le dernier, Ancêtre à tête de lion
Vous gardez ce lieu forclos à tout rire de femme, à tout sourire qui se fane
Vous distillez cet air d'eternité où je respire l'air de mes Pères.
Masques aux visages sans masque, dépouillés de toute fossette comme de toute ride
Qui avez composé ce portrait, ce visage mien penché sur l'autel de papier blanc
A votre image, écoutez-moi!
Voici que meurt l'Afrique des empires – c'est l'agonie d'une princesse pitoyable
Et aussi l'Europe à qui nous sommes liés par le nombril.
Fixez vos yeux immuables sur vos enfants que l'on commande

Qui donnent leur vie comme le pauvre son dernier vêtement.
Que nous répondions présents à la renaissance du Monde
Ainsi le levain qui est nécessaire à la farine blanche.
Car qui apprendrait le rythme au monde défunt des machines et des canons?
Qui pousserait le cri de joie pour réveiller morts et orphelins à l'aurore?
Dites, qui rendrait la mémoire de vie à l'homme aux espoirs éventrés.
Ils nous disent les hommes du coton du café de l'huile
Ils nous disent les hommes de la mort.
Nous sommes les hommes de la danse, dont les pieds reprennent vigueur en frappant le sol dur.

**3.4.2** *Leopold Sédar Senghor's "Prière aux masques"* is a Negritude poem that celebrates the Black history, culture and traditional core values. The poet's idea deconstructs the European mentality that the Blacks around the world have no history not to think of them having culture or civilization. The poet practically accepts being black and he also demonstrate being a proud African. The poem is a form of response to the issue of identity. The writer does not shy away from whom he is despite the fact that he is abroad at the time.

**3.4.3** *Register.* The language of religion is the dominant terminology in L. S. Senghor's **"Prière aux masques"**. Senghor explores a religious aspect of the African people which is centred on ancestor worship to put it on record that the Blacks have their own way of offering prayers. The following terms from the poem evocatively connect readers with religion; traditional or foreign: "Prière" = prayer, "quatre points" = four cardinal points", "l'Esprit = (holy) sprit, "salue" = greet", "Ancêtre" = Ancestor, "gardez" = guide/protect, "eternité" = eternity, "vie" = life, "commande" = commandment or to instruct/order, "enfants" = children, "orphelins" = orphans, "Monde" = world, "espoirs" = hope, "l'huile" = (anointing) oil, "la mort" = death, "vêtements" = garments, "joie" = joy and "danse" = dance.

The terms show that religion is universal and it has global appeal. Religion in whatever form is an act of worship. It is a rite and its purpose includes to seek help from God, a spirited or superior being whom the worshippers believe can help them in one way or another. It is also established that religion can make one attain eternity and access unending happiness. Apart from offering prayers, many religious activities are often accompanied with songs, dance and merriment. From the title, **"Prière aux masques"** which can be literarily translated as "Prayer to the masquerade" it can be deduced that the poet has inclination towards religion.

**3.4.4** *Poetic Devices*
a)      Symbolism

In the title of the poem, **"Prière aux masques"**, the word *"masques"* symbolizes the ancestors or the gods. The words "Vous" and "mes Pères" (my fathers) as used in the context of this poem are also referring to the ancestors: Vous gardez ce lieu forclos à tout rire de femme, à tout sourire qui se fane / Vous distillez cet air d'eternité où je respire l'air de mes Pères. The use of "Vous" rather than "Tu" for the ancestors denotes that the speaker has respect for them. "Nous" as used in the poem represents the Blacks, especially the Africans. The pronoun "Ils" in lines 20 and 21, stands for the Europeans (the Whites): Ils nous disent les hommes du coton du café de l'huile / Ils nous disent les hommes de la mort.

b)    Metaphor

There are metaphoric expressions in the poem where the poet directly calls the ancestors other names. For instance, in line 3, the speaker in the poem says: "Masques aux quatre points d'où soufle l'Esprit"

In line 5, he qualifies the ancestors with the phrase – "Ancêtre à tête de lion". He goes further in line 8 to paint them as "Masques aux visages sans masque" meaning the ancestors are all-seer that nothing can be kept away from them. The writer uses the expressions of metaphor in this poem to x-ray his respect for the ancestors and indeed for the African cultural heritage.

c)    Apostrophe

The entire poem is a piece of writing addressed to the ancestors that are not physically present. Lines 1 –10 illustrate the writer's use of the technique of calling on a person or something in absentia with the intention of seeking assistance.

> Masques! O Masques! / Masque noir masque rouge, vous masques blanc-et-noir / Masques aux quatre points d'où soufle l'Esprit / Je vous salue dans le silence! / Et pas toi le dernier, Ancêtre à tête de lion / Vous gardez ce lieu forclos à tout rire de femme, à tout sourire qui se fane / Vous distillez cet air d'eternité où je respire l'air de mes Pères. / Masques aux visages sans masque, dépouillés de toute fossette comme de toute ride / Qui avez composé ce portrait, ce visage mien penché sur l'autel de papier blanc / A votre image, écoutez-moi!

Apostrophe shows the strong tie between the speaker and the addressee which is premised on faith. The speaker sincerely holds that the addressee has an extraordinary power to help him/her or to solve his/her problems. The speaker in the poem sees the ancestors as his forefathers who should come to his aid because they have the spiritual potency to do so.

d)    Personification

In lines 6 and 13, attributes of person are transferred to the dead; that is, the ancestors as if they were still alive: "Vous gardez ce lieu forclos à tout rire de femme, à tout sourire qui se fane" / Fixez vos yeux immuables sur vos enfants que l'on commande" The writer presents the ancestors as security agents that guide the citizenry all the time.

g)  Simile

Lines 8 and 14 contain indirect name callings and descriptions of the ancestors. "…, dépouillés de toute fossette comme de toute ride" and "Qui donnent leur vie comme le pauvre son dernier vêtement". The word "*comme*" which means "like" in English language is a marker of simile in the two examples. The use of simile in texts performs the same function as metaphor.

h)  Rhetorical Questions

These are questions that do not require answers. Senghor uses rhetorical expressions in lines 17 and 18 to reflect his emotional feelings and mood that are often associated with one's affective domain. The questions are: "Car qui apprendrait le rythme au monde défunt des machines et des canons? / Qui pousserait le cri de joie pour réveiller morts et orphelins à l'aurore?"

i)  Other poetic Devices in the poem

A critical study of the poem reveals that the poet also uses alliteration; "…une **p**rincesse **p**itoyable" (line 11) to describe the sorry state of Africa. The references to Africa (line 11) and Europe (line 12) are contemporary allusions. There are repetitions of a particular sentence pattern in lines 20 and 21: "Ils nous disent les hommes… / Ils nous disent les hommes" for the

purpose of emphasis and to draw readers' attention. The use of pronouns such as "Je", "Nous" and "moi" (I, We and me) by the poet confirms the adoption of the first-person narrative technique which is also called I-narrator. In other words, the writer is narrating a story in which he is involved.

In this free or blank verse poem, Senghor has attempted to educate the world that blacks, especially Africans do have history and culture and one such cultural heritage is religion. Africans worship their ancestors because they believe their help can come from those ancestors no matter where they (the offspring) are on the surface of the earth. This belief is in line with the omnipresent nature of the Almighty God in religions like Christianity and Islam.

## 4. Conclusion

In poetic analysis, the examination of stylistic devices allows one to explain the manner in which a text is constructed and the reason such a text is so constructed. This study is an eye-opener to how and why some African poets employ certain elements of style in their literary compositions. As a stylistician, one has been able to x-ray how and why the selected poets in this study apply register and other stylistic devices in their selected poems. With the application of register, figures of speech, allusion and symbolism, the poets fight against racial segregation, oppression and European superiority on the black race. It is therefore, evident that African writers are capable of decolonizing minds and deconstructing wrong perceptions not only through the contents of their literary works but also via the elements of style they employ in such literary works.

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