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A linguo-stylistic analysis of Eddie Iroh's *Banan Leaves* (2007)

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Abstract

This work is a linguo-Stylistic study of Eddie Iroh's *Banana Leaves*. It examines the linguistic and stylistic elements used by the author which generally define his individual peculiarity. These resources were purposively identified for the study, through a critical analysis of the text. In all, a total of thirty extracts from the text were used to identify the peculiar linguistic and stylistic features. These elements include his diction, cohesive markers, graphology, sentence types as well as the narrative devices, character and characterization, and the descriptive ability of the author. The study found that Iroh is not economical in the use of punctuation marks. He also employed more of simple sentences and the diction is generally simple. Cohesive devices employed by the author such as linking adverbials, coordinating conjunctions, amplification, emphasis, etc. were used to create links within the text. The study found that he employed such stylistic tools as his descriptive ability in the text to express meanings to his target audience. Thus, Iroh through these linguistic and stylistic elements discussed in the study, has been established as a prolific writer. The study concludes that the employment of stylistic tools enhances better understanding of the text and also reveals Iroh's linguistic peculiarities and stylistic dexterity.

Keywords: Banana Leaves, linguo- stylistics, linguistics, style, stylistics

Public Interest Statement

The study seeks to show the relationship between a linguistic and literary analysis adopted by the author in treating the topic. The study also attempts an analysis of the novel to show how stylistic features reveal the strengths and weaknesses in the text and also to investigate the techniques the author has used to relate to his target audience. The research concludes that the employment of stylistic tools enhances better understanding of the text and also reveals Iroh's Linguistic peculiarities and stylistic dexterity.



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Introduction

Stylistics as a field of study poses an enigma to many scholars. Some believe it does not exist while others think it is a complex phenomenon that should not be discussed. This study, first of all, examines the concepts of 'style' and 'stylistics' and how they have been explained in different ways by different linguists. Since stylistics is considered the middle ground, a linguo-literary analysis of *Banana Leaves* is then presented. A linguistic analysis of the text is presented in the first part of the study while the second part is centered on the literary analysis of the text. Thus, the main objective of the study is the two-dimensional analysis of the text *Banana Leaves* with the aim of identifying the various linguistic as well as literary structures employed in the text. This study is significant because it highlights how language especially the English language is creatively and deliberately used to communicate through literature. It is hoped that this analysis would add to the existing knowledge in stylistics as far as the author's linguistic and stylistic idiosyncrasies are concerned. In the area of linguistics, the study assesses diction, cohesive markers, graphology, and sentence types according to function and structure. On the other hand, the literary aspect covers stylistic features such as narrative devices, character and characterization and the author's descriptive style.

Problem Statement

Many researches have been carried out on the writer Eddie Iroh bothering on the issues of poverty, nationhood, patriotism, war, history, aesthetics and tradition. These themes were mostly derived from his other works such as: *Toads of War*, *Forty-eight Guns for the General*, *Without a Silver Spoon*, and *The Siren in the Night*, among others. However, his text *Banana Leaves* has not been given an extensive analysis. Secondly, scholars interested in researching into the field of linguo-literary analysis need a coherent and current work in the field to update their knowledge. Both problems inform the desire to work on this particular study. The study intends to encourage more linguistic/literary analysis to answer questions like:

1. What are the salient linguistic and stylistic features in the text?
2. How do authors use the features/elements of language and style available to them to effectively express themselves to their target audience?

The primary data for the study is the text *Banana Leaves*. A critical study was done on the text to be able to identify and extract the salient linguistic and stylistic features. The study is thus an objective analysis that is based on identifiable features. There is no field research or the use of questionnaires. This study relies heavily on intensive and extensive research of related published works.

Literature review

The concept of style /stylistics

Style as a concept is a phenomenon that has been viewed by many as very complex. Some say it does not exist while to some, it is a controversial, troublesome and enigmatic subject of discussion.

Style became a discipline of its own after many have argued and written on the subject and problems of style/stylistics – style as a concept is central to stylistics. Style and stylistics are interwoven. Simply put, style is the manner of expressing one's thoughts. Just as there are various ways of doing things, there are stylistic variations in language use. A style can be good or bad, plain or unmarked. A style is said to be unmarked when the writing is of zero degree – 'degree zero' being a term first used by Roland Barthes to denote 'absence of style'. The term has however come under attack by those who disagreed with it, arguing that no writing can exhibit 'zero style', 'neutral style' or 'transparent style'.

Holman defines style as:

The arrangement of words in a manner which at once best expresses the individuality of the author, the idea and the intent in the author's mind. The best style for any given purpose is that which most clearly approximates a perfect adaptation of one's language to one's ideas. Style is a combination of two elements: the idea to be expressed and the individuality of the author (p. 432)

The concept of linguistic stylistics has to do with a stylistic study that relies heavily on the 'scientific rules' of language in its analysis. Such rules embrace the lexical, grammatical, contextual and cohesive categories. Literary stylistics differs from linguistic stylistics in that it dwells heavily on external correlates like philosophy, figures of speech, source of inspiration, etc. to explain a text. According to Gabriel Ajah and Emma Igiligi, "it is style that gives literature its 'literariness'" (2). In other words, it is style that makes one work different from another. When one is talking about style, one is referring to the distinctive way a person is seen or known to do certain things. It is more like saying style is an individual's or a group's signature. Thus, style is the means through which an individual uses the various linguistic/stylistic elements available to him/her to adequately express his viewpoint in communication or interaction. At this point, it is imperative to compare autopsy in medicine and stylistics in order to better appreciate the latter.

Autopsy in medicine is the process of carrying out an examination on a dead body to discover the cause of death. The result of an autopsy in medicine will always remain the same if this examination is repeated in several other medical centers. The difference between autopsy in medicine and a stylistic analysis of a particular literary work is that if the latter is carried out by two or more persons, the results will always be different. For instance, we have two prominent Nigerian poets who have written poems on the same subject matter titled "Abiku". What distinguishes Soyinka's "Abiku" from J. P. Clark's is a matter of style. The extent to which an author's or writer's audience is affected by his/her writing is to a large extent dependent on the choice or manner of his or her writing. Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short assert that "style is the way language is used" (9), which means that the expression of literary content is the same as style.

It has for long been established by researchers that a literary work is usually the outcome of a writer's creative ability. So, one particular interest to this research is to show the extent a writer/author manipulates the stylistic and linguistic resources at his disposal in order to achieve aesthetic

and communicative effects. Leech and Short view stylistics as ‘the linguistic study of style’ (13). According to them, stylistics is not a discipline of its own. It exists as a link between language and artistic functions. In their view, the linguist’s task is to answer the question, ‘Why does an author/writer choose to express himself in a particular way?’ And it is also the critic’s task to answer the question, ‘To what extent is such and such an aesthetic effect achieved through language?’

Widdowson sees stylistics as ‘the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation’ (3). In other words, he believes stylistics has no autonomy of its own; rather, it is a combination of both linguistic and stylistic criticism. In fact, Widdowson claims that the word ‘stylistics’ on its own shows that the first syllable ‘sty’ refers to literature while the combination of the second and third syllables ‘listics’ refers to linguistics.

The aim of stylistics is to give an objective account of how language is used in literature. In linguistics, it is concerned with identifying and classifying the elements of the language being analysed. On the other hand, in literature, it is concerned with commenting on quality and meaning in a given text. Carter and Simpson express a similar view as Widdowson in positing that stylistics is a bridge between linguistics and literature. They further hold the view that stylistics is the practice of using linguistics for the study of literature (3).

Synopsis of *Banana Leaves*

Banana Leaves is the story which celebrates the African family setting as depicted by Ure Chokwe. It is the story of hardship as well as the saga of a family which found strength and survival in traditional values. The author uses proverbs, indigenous language and pictorial illustration to drive home his point. *Banana Leaves* is a sequel to *Without a Silver Spoon*. The book is a winner of the International Board on Books for Young People Certificate of Honour. The story is for young people and teaches the lesson that honesty is the best policy. Ure comes from a poor but honest family, and works as a houseboy to pay his own school fees. Towards the end of his primary school days, he is accused of stealing money. He is saved by the well-placed total trust of his parents and teachers.

Linguistic Analysis of *Banana Leaves*

Diction

Diction generally is the choice of words a speaker or a writer uses. It refers to a writer’s choice of words in a text. The writer may use simple and concrete words and expressions or decide to use abstract and ambiguous expressions.

No two individuals can express themselves in exactly the same way except if someone mimics another. The choice of word is quite significant because it points to the direction the writer is heading, which could be the direction of the theme, subject matter, the topic of discussion or even the field/register. Through these, we could decide where to place the words as simple or complex, abstract or concrete. When the intended meaning is not properly conveyed, it could be said that the diction at that point is ineffective. The type of diction applied by a writer determines the level of appreciation by the reader/audience. If a literary work is ambiguous in nature without conveying

the intended meaning, then such work may not be appreciated by readers. Every writer's style is defined by his/her diction.

Diction can be defined as style of speaking or writing, determined by the choice of words by a speaker or writer. Diction, or choice of words, often separates good writing from bad writing. It depends on a number of factors. Firstly, the words have to be right and accurate. Secondly, words should be appropriate to the context in which they are used. Lastly, the choice of words should be such that the listener or reader understands easily. Proper diction, or proper choice of words is important to get the message across. On the other hand, wrong choice of words can easily divert listeners or readers, which results in misinterpretation of the message intended to be conveyed.

Banana Leaves has a prevalence of words and phrases that are associated with hardship and poverty targeted at young readers. Examples of such include *tattered clothes, badly torn, cane, crumbs, house-servant, leftover food, poor farmers, abject poverty, illiterate, toiled and tilled, living from hand to mouth, delivered a child on banana leaves, eating crumbs, crying, eating palm kernel for breakfast, taking turns to bath and use the toilet*, etc. Here are some examples of these words and expressions as used in sentences extracted from the text:

1. 'Father's glare was usually more fearsome than his cane'. (10 – 11)
2. 'His steps were slow, his feet bare and his short was as his shorts'. (12)
3. 'He wore old khaki shorts that were badly torn exposing his wrinkled buttocks rather unkindly'. (12)
4. 'In that period, they could hardly feed their families. They lived from hand to mouth'. (30)
5. 'In my home and village we have known nothing other than abject poverty'. (29)

The use of words such as the above clearly suggests the subject matter of poverty or lack to the reader even if he or she has not yet seen the title of the book.

Cohesive Markers

Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical linking within a text or sentence that holds a text together and gives it meaning. It means the connection of ideas at the sentence level. The essence of cohesion is for sentences to be unified, fit together, and stick together as a whole. The cohesion of writing focuses on the 'grammatical aspects of writing'. Cohesion is an important aspect of writing because it immediately affects the tone of one's writing. Even though it focuses on grammatical aspects of writing, it does not mean just 'grammatically correct' sentences; cohesive writing refers to the connection of one's ideas both at sentence level and at the paragraph level.

There are two very important linking cohesive devices in English which are both used in the texts under study. These are linking adverbials and coordinating conjunctions. According to Stella Mbaeze and Elias Ugwu, linking adverbials typically modify verbs or clauses. They can also be useful as linking devices to connect clauses to the content of the preceding text. They are used to state relationships between sentences, paragraphs and ideas. They further explain that coordinating conjunctions are words that join two elements of equal grammatical rank and syntactic importance. They can join two verbs, two nouns, two adjectives, two phrases, or two independent clauses. This

is done in order to form a compound structure.

Some of the Linking adverbials found in *Banana Leaves* include ‘however’ (10), ‘therefore’ (28), ‘meanwhile’ (27). Some of the examples extracted from the text using some of these cohesive devices include the following:

1. Quite mischievously, however, I sneaked my hand underneath my father’s legs to pinch my brother. (10)
2. I was very young, and he was therefore, not sure that my services would be good enough. (28)

Apart from the above, cohesion in a text can also be achieved with phrases. For example, *on the contrary*, *sure enough*, *at the same time*, etc. It can even be achieved by framing each sentence of the paragraph so the thought is easily carried from what precedes to what follows. The following is a list of additional cohesive devices found in the text under study.

1. **Amplification:** ‘Moreover’ (144), ‘furthermore’ (40), ‘again’. (22)
2. **Emphasis:** ‘truly’ (41), ‘indeed’. (20)
Some extracts from the texts include:
 - i. ‘...who must have been a truly wise man ...’ (41)
 - ii. ‘Udoka was indeed a living proof that not all God’s children were beautiful’. (20)
3. **Consequence:** Some cohesive markers are used to show the consequences of an action. Some examples include ‘in any case’ (100), ‘therefore’ (71) etc. as shown in the following extracts:
 - i. ‘In any case’ my uncle would be up from his siesta any minute, and I would have to cook his supper... (100)
 - ii. ‘We must, therefore, see how you can help.
4. **Contrast:** This type of cohesive markers contrast statements; for example ‘on the other hand’. (64)
 - i. ‘On the other hand’, there would be noisy protests of disappointment when the villain gained the upper hand. (64)
5. **Comparison:** They perform the function of comparing, for example ‘similarly’ (60).
 - i. Similarly, they took turns using the toilet as well as the tiny, smoke filled kitchen (6)
6. **Explanation:** Cohesive markers falling into this category give further explanation/clarification on something: ‘thus’ (108), ‘for’ (11).
 - i. ‘...for he knew that it was by His mercy that we had managed to survive thus far. (108)

In this text, Iroh uses linking adverbials, coordinating conjunction and other markers some of which have been presented above to piece ideas together. For instance, the use of ‘and’ and ‘therefore’ in the sentence ‘...I was very young and he was therefore not sure that my services would be good enough’ (28) is a good illustration of the inter-relationship between cohesive markers which leads

to a good grasp and better comprehension of a text. It is important to note that without the use of these cohesive markers, the author's narration would have, to a large extent, been semantically and syntactically flawed. The cohesive markers helped to logically and consistently form the whole text.

Graphology

David Crystal and Derek Davy define graphology (or graphemics) as 'the analogous study of language's writing system or orthography, as seen in the various kinds of handwriting and typography' (18). The clarity of the graphology (punctuation marks) in the text *Banana Leaves* contributes to the reader's understanding of it without much difficulty. The stretches of utterance between punctuation marks never pose any problem of speech. The reader moves from one punctuation to another, knowing that at each point, there will be a definable pause. Some of the graphological features used in *Banana Leaves* are: ellipsis, exclamation marks, question marks, period, parenthesis, etc. They help to ascribe a word or a sentence with different levels of interpretation. The following extracts on **ellipsis** were taken from the text.

1. 'No, Dede, it is not mine. It is just that....' (37)
2. 'Driver, you have passed the bus stop....' (37)

In essence, ellipsis helps in the economy of words which is what it has been used to do by the author of the text under study. The next graphological feature is the **question mark**. In the course of a dialogue, statements are made but questions do turn up occasionally. Sometimes, these questions may not be addressed to anyone, but they cannot be called rhetorical in the usual sense. Rather, they convey the commentator's anticipation and identify him, in his inability to give the answer, to the reader. Questions could be divided into three major classes according to the type of answer they expect:

Those that expect the answer 'yes' or 'no', those that contain a 'wh-element (who, what, how, when, etc.)' and expect a reply supplying the missing information, and those that do not need an answer at all. For instance:

'Do you sometimes look at yourself in the mirror, Udoka? (21) This requires a yes or no question.

'I now faced a dilemma. Do I refuse the cigarette and be seen by the gang to have broken rank, risking Tinto's violent reaction? Or do I take a drag, at the risk of rolling over in a fit of coughing, and be laughed at as the weakest member of the toughest gang in the city?' (129).

This does not require any direct response.

Quirk and Greenbaum point out that 'questions are primarily used to express lack of information on a specific point, and (usually) to request the listener to supply this information verbally' (p.

386). **Exclamation mark** is emotive in nature. It is primarily used to express the speaker's own feelings of surprise, urgency or strong emotion. It also adds clarity to meaning. The use of single words is very emphatic. It draws the reader's attention to important things and removes ambiguity or misinterpretation of any sort. The use of exclamation mark gives economy to word usage in the text. For instance, the following extracts are taken from the text and they buttress the points being made about exclamation:

1. 'Chewing gum!' Another hawker called out. (p. 67)
2. 'Walked from row to row calling out: 'Biscuits!'. (p. 66)
3. 'Sweet!' (p. 66)

It is discovered that there is a preponderant use of punctuation marks in the text. There is a dominant use of double quotation marks or inverted commas. Though it is a choice, some single words should have carried the single quotation mark especially because they draw attention to unusual and non-English words in the text. For example, "Oba" on page (126) should have been written with single inverted commas.

Sentence Structure

A declarative sentence makes a statement, states a fact and also conveys information. Sometimes, the use of exclamation marks helps to bring out such emotions. In *Banana Leaves*, there is no such use. All the declarative sentences are written without exclamation marks. **A simple sentence** contains only one clause. This has nothing to do with length; rather, a simple sentence conveys a single idea or thought. It is easy to understand since it makes the ideas explicit to the reader. The length of the simple sentence varies. Eddie Iroh uses more of short simple sentences. These short simple sentences drive their meanings straight into the reader's mind unlike the long simple sentences which demand more concentration on the part of the reader. The author seems to have a preference for simple sentences over the other two sentence types. The reason cannot be far-fetched – the target audiences of the author are the younger generation, so his choice of simple sentence makes his thoughts and ideas easy for the youth to assimilate. We find a proliferation of simple pointed sentences in dialogues, descriptions and other narrative sections of the novels. The use of short simple sentence seems to be a peculiarity of Iroh's writing – his style. Such is also noted in his novel *Without a Silver Spoon*.

His use of short and simple sentences is the nerve-centre which holds the entire narrative in *Banana Leaves*. He employs the technique of simple sentences to properly co-ordinate the various dialogues taking place amongst the characters. This is demonstrated in the excerpts below:

1. 'It is bad luck for Udala to fall on someone's head' (3)
2. 'That is no excuse'. (3)
3. 'He enjoyed inflicting pain'. (3)

Iroh in his peculiar narrative style, uses simple sentences to add depth to the characters and to give mobility and direction to the plot of the text. Apart from the above examples, there are other instances of the use of simple sentences in dialogues that take place among the characters in the novel. Consider these examples also:

1. 'I cannot say such a thing....' (91)
2. 'I am sorry Dede....' (91)
3. 'Please forgive me....' (91)

The author has shown how he has purposely chosen various sentence types to reveal his thoughts to his readers.

Stylistic analysis of *Banana Leaves*

Narrative Devices

Narration is the use of a written or spoken commentary to convey a story to an audience. Narration encompasses a set of techniques through which the creator of the story presents it. Point of view is the angle of considering things, which shows us the opinion or feelings of the individuals involved in a situation. Point of view is what the character or narrator telling the story can see, that is, his or her perspective. Every story has a perspective. A story can be told in three different ways: from first person, second person, and third person point of view. The first person is the most difficult point of view to write in because the author writes everything from the point of view of the main character. It is as if the character is speaking to the reader. The author uses pronouns like 'I' and 'me' or 'my' to describe the character. Let us examine this extract from *Banana Leaves* in which the major point of view is that of the main character UreChokwe:

As we began the journey into the city proper, I beheld a new world. The city was unlike anything I had ever imagined. The streets were ablaze with lights, something I had never seen before. Although darkness was fast approaching, it was like day light. I gazed and gazed... I saw buildings that were taller than the Iroko trees in my village. (57)

Almost every page of *Banana Leaves* shows the use of first-person narration. And as earlier said, even though the first-person point of view is more difficult to write from, Eddie Iroh is still able to manage it well, throughout this story. See another extract below:

I remember my father's words of wisdom ...I had prepared his favourite meal...I had learnt to cook well from living with teacher Steve... As I cleared the plates, I sensed he was in a good mood. I recalled my father once saying... my uncle had not done that. 'Uncle I want to say I am sorry for what happened at the Cinema last night', I began timidly. 'I know I should not have dropped my tray... 'I wanted to see his reaction' (86)

Characterization in *Banana Leaves*

One of the most developed characters in *Banana Leaves* that this research focuses on is Ure Chokwe, a very intelligent character, whose experiences and keen observations provide insights into a number of social issues handled in the novel. He is presented as ambitious, determined, devoted, intelligent and honest. Iroh uses one main character for his story. Ure Chokwe is a peasant boy who becomes a houseboy first to teacher Steve, then Uncle Ikenna. Ure Chokwe becomes a developed and changed character before the end of the story. Ure is portrayed as an ambitious and determined person; He is determined to go to secondary school, an ambition which he achieves at the end of the story. Ure's determination helps him to become a good cook while at Teacher Steve's house and also with Uncle Ikenna. Ure is transformed into a ruffian against his will.

‘I know that I had embarrassed and disgraced my family. But I know it was not really something I chose to do. There was no way I could blame myself entirely. I was a victim of a situation I could not get away from. I was idle and the devil had found work for me and other idle children in the street’. (147)

Ure Chokwe is also portrayed as a devoted character; he is hardworking and devoted to Teacher Steve and Uncle Ikenna, and both of them at some point call him ‘UreChokwe my boy’ (34, 87) when he serves each of them as their house-boy. Even Teacher Steve testifies to this to Ure's parents: ‘He told them that he was happy to assist them because I was a good boy’. (29)

Ure Chokwe is equally presented as an intelligent boy who is eager to go to school. In Ure's case, Teacher Steve is willing to help him through school but circumstances change their plans and intention until towards the end of the story, when he finally realizes the need to send Ure to school. Finally, Ure is portrayed as an honest boy; even in the face of danger, he would rather say the truth and protect his family's honour. ‘I never ever tell lies, uncle’, I replied bravely, wiping the tears from my eyes, ‘we don't tell lies in my family’ (78). The same thing happens when the mother of the lad they had stolen from comes to the house to report him. He does not deny what the woman says but rather confirms the woman's story, by simply confessing the truth. ‘I just cannot deny what I did because I know I did wrong, I replied’ (146). In view of the facts from the text as discussed in the foregoing paragraphs, we can conclude that Eddie Iroh indeed presented UreChokwe in *Banana Leaves* as a fully developed character: ambitious, determined, devoted, intelligent and honest.

The Author's Descriptive Ability

Iroh is good at description in this novel. He is able to use words to create mental pictures in the mind of the reader. The scenes and events are described using simple but captivating language to interest his readers. Some examples from the novel will suffice:

In my home and village, we have known nothing other than abject poverty. Dede did not go to school, nor did his siblings. His younger brother was a palmwine

tapper. His youngest brother was a drunk and a lay about. Their many sisters worked the farms with their father until they grew up and were married by husbands who were not better off. Thus, the cycle of poverty continued to trail my family from Generation to Generation. (30)

Eddie Iroh's description of poverty in this scene is very simple and very imaginative. Sometimes, he uses even simpler language to describe his characters. He is detailed in introducing his characters. The description of a school headmaster below attests to this:

Mr. Mathew, he had a face that never smiled, and hands that always swung a cane. He had a full head of hair, parted in the middle right down to the hairline of his forehead. His mouth had a nasty twist, and whenever he addressed an offending pupil, you had the impression that he did not really like young human beings. He rarely wore trousers, except on Sundays when he acted as the interpreter to the Irish Priest during Mass. In school, he wore white short-sleeved shirts, dark brown shorts, long matching hose and brown leather shoes. His shorts were of particular wide cut which the pupils nick-named bogey-bogey. I had no idea how they came by the name; may be because the shorts were baggy, but it became our secret nickname for the headmaster. (18 – 19)

Sometimes, he creates the image of a sad character or a sad situation. Iroh describes Ure's birth as an unfortunate one. 'Like the generations before me, I was born on banana leaves, at the back of the family mud house... to be born in this manner was the ultimate testament of poverty'. (p. 30). With all the descriptions and examples above, it can be seen that Eddie Iroh uses many descriptive elements to be able to express meaning to his target audience. Thus, various elements appeal to the readers' imaginative sense.

Conclusion

This study looked at the peculiar linguistic and stylistic elements employed by Eddie Iroh in *Banana Leaves*. It is found that the major linguistic resources deployed by the author include peculiar use of simple sentences to drive his meanings straight into the reader's mind as well as the use of single words for emphasis to draw the attention of the reader to important things, removal of ambiguity or misinterpretation of any sort while the dominant literary devices used in the text include, among others, his descriptive ability to express meanings to his target audience. It is concluded that the deployment of these linguistic and literary devices in the text is a proof of Iroh's style which makes him unique among other Nigerian writers.

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