Phonological Foregrounding in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

Ebi Yeibo
Niger Delta University
Faculty of Arts
Department of English and Literary Studies
Wilberforce Island
Bayelsa State

Comfort Akerele
Stanbic IBTC Bank
Victoria Island
Lagos

Abstract

Writers generally utilize a wide range of linguistic and paralinguistic devices which include graphetic/ graphological, phonetic / phonological, semantic, lexical and syntactic, to communicate textual meaning and also enhance the artistic texture and flavor of their works. With M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, particularly the textual metafunction, as the analytical template, this study focuses on how sound or phonic elements such as alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia are systematically organized or patterned in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, to foreground stylistic meaning and serve aesthetic ends. The study demonstrates the fact that writers deliberately deploy lexemes not only because of their senses or signifying potentials but also as result of the suggestive power of their sounds in relation to context of situation and textual function. It, therefore, concludes that, as an integral or constitutive layer of language, phonic elements function as a veritable part of textual organization and are as useful and fundamental as other levels of language study in the construction of literary texts.

Keywords: Phonological foregrounding, Purple Hibiscus, Systemic functional grammar, stylistic meaning, social context

Introduction

As a social and cultural tool, language is deployed by human beings to serve a variety of purposes, which traverse all existential contexts or situations, including the ideational, interpersonal and textual (Halliday, 1978). This thesis explains why there has been a sustained and profound interest in language among scholars right from the grammarians and philosophers of ancient Greece, Rome and India including Plato, Socrates, Hermogenes and Cratylus who developed efficient, objective and systematic ways of talking about its nature, aspects of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and meaning and who formulated the first ideas of language viz: the Conventionalist and the Naturalist schools. The task of stylistics, as a functional linguistic discipline, is to apply the insights, methods and parameters of linguistics to the description and interpretation of language forms invested in specific contexts, in order to determine their effectiveness and appropriateness and also to characterize the speaker's or writer's unique mode or manner of expression. Instructively, stylistics focuses on all the constitutive layers or dimensions of language use, including graphics, lexis, semantics, syntax and phonology which are deployed by language users in distinctive ways to transmit textual messages and achieve aesthetic effects.

Alo (1998:5) confirms the foregoing thesis when he averred that the descriptive study of style accounts for language use in texts from three distinct perspectives, in terms of focus and methodology viz: style as deviation (i.e from linguistic norms or conventions), recurrence (i.e of language patterns-lexical, phonological, syntactic, etc), and textual function (i.e variations in sentence structure found in texts and their functions as elements of emphasis, focus and foregrounding), through the following constituent levels of language study:

 i. Phonology (sounds/sounds effects)

ii. Lexis (word usage and diction)
iii. Grammar (word and sentence structure)
iv. Semantics (units of meaning)
v. Graphology (orthography or writing system)
vi. Pragmatics (language for action or getting things done)

A close look at the above outline etches the fact that stylistic analysis is an empirical linguistic tool whose insights and methodologies do not only cover all aspects of language use but also accounts for all the linguistic choices made by individual authors and speakers in all communicative engagements or situations. Hence Alo (1998:1) posits that the verbal style encapsulates or embodies "… all the devices of language that are used to achieve communication goals in speech and writing …" Mullany and Stockwell (2010:47) corroborates this viewpoint inter alia:

Stylistic analysis can be conducted …. across the linguistic rankscale, from phonology, morphology and lexicology, through syntax and semantics, and up to text and discourse levels.

The significant point, however, as we have earlier mentioned, is that style which is the workshop of stylistics, distinguishes one form of language use from another at all these constitutive levels or layers, according to the specific interactive or communicative context. Hence Wales (1990 cited in Missikova 2003:18) defines style as variation in language, literary or non-literary, the set or sum of linguistic features as the characteristics of an author, or as the choice of items and their distribution and patterning. Crystal (2003a:440) lends credence to this view when he defined style as situationally distinctive uses of language by an author or speaker. Turner (1973:7) adds that stylistics focuses on variation in the use of language, often, but not exclusively, with special reference to the most conscious and complex uses of language in literature. The clear implication of Turner's viewpoint is that literary discourse represents a solid example or instance of contextual use of language by itself and thus, requires detailed analytical study and interpretation. In the main, the need for a linguistic examination of literary discourse, such as Adichie's text, is anchored on the notion that it is constructed with language and that it exudes a peculiar and distinctive style which attracts close attention. Alo (1998:3) highlights this thesis inter alia: Literary style … refers to the kind of language that is commonly found in these genres (of literature i.e prose fiction, drama, poetry) and is characterized by elegance, beauty in form and language. Literary rhetoric relies heavily on the use of figures of speech.

Ayeomoni (2003:187) adds that,… literary discourse more than any other discourse available for linguistic experimentation, of which general linguistic s provides tools for its analysis, manifests a high density and frequency of the occurrence of certain phonological, syntactic, lexical and semantic features which are often significant for its interpretation.

The "density" and "frequency" of style markers in literary texts must have prompted some scholars to posit that literary language constitutes the main focus of stylistics. Ufot (2013:111), for instance, sees stylistics as "the study of the language of literature which employs the various tools of linguistic analysis. It is a field of empirical enquiry in which insights and techniques of linguistic theory are used to analyze literary texts." Mullany and Stockwell (2010:44) believe that, "….the discipline of stylistics explores the relationship between language patterns and interpretation" and that "…. though stylisticians examine the whole range of texts in the world, stylistics has a particular interest in literary works, as the most prestigious examples of language use." Fowler (1975:11) also avers that, Focus on 'style'… entails close attention to the surface structure of literary texts, and an assumption that phonology, syntax, everything that makes up rhetoric, are of paramount importance in determining the identity of the literary work.

The critical point here is that the nexus between language and literature is watertight since language is the medium for literary communication. According to Dada(2004:3) "literature is written in language using the techniques and features of language such as tone, grammatical structure, diction and metaphor." Wellek and Warren (1999:22) adumbrate this fact when they averred that "language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of picture, or sound of music". In Todorov's (1977:22) view "literature has language as both its point of departure and its destination; language furnishes literature its abstract configuration." Dada (2004:1) also observes that "a literary work is written in language and to understand the work fully, there must be recourse to language in all its aspects – phonetics, phonology, semantics, syntax, etc".

Against this background, therefore it is imperative to examine how an African writer of world-wide acclaim has utilized the infinite potentials of language to negotiate meaning(s) for her text. According to Brumfit and Carter (1986), the literary text is seen as a self-sufficient language artifact and therefore constitutes a linguistically analyzable object in itself. A critical strand of the style of literary discourse, however, is that it is nourished by two integral and fundamental aspects: the verbal and the artistic. The implication of this hybrid texture is that any worthy effort to interpret or systematically analyse it must recognize these constitutive elements, what Dada (2004:34) referred to as "the expressive and affective." In other words, decoding or interpreting the meaning of a literary text involves a deliberate and conscious effort to link or harmonise these two componental aspects in order to relate linguistic forms to the world of the text. Ayeomoni (2003) highlights the imperative of this synthesis when he averred that linguistic stylistics relates language use in literary texts to its artistic function. According to Ufot(2013:111),

Doing stylistics in this sense… involves the exploration of language, specifically creativity in language use. It enriches our ways of thinking about language, and this is in turn offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of literary texts.

Wales (2011:318) defined phonology, which is the focus of the present study, as "the expression or realization of language in its spoken form." In Ofuya's(2007:14) view, it "describes the ways in which speech sounds are organized in English into a system". According to Katamba (1993:1), it is… the branch of linguistics which investigates the ways in which sounds are used systematically in different languages to form words and utterances. In order to understand phonology, one must have a grasp of the basic concept of phonetics, the study of the inventory of all speech sounds which humans are capable of producing.

Jones (2006:388) adds that, phonology focuses on Phonemic analysis in which the objective is to establish what the phonemes are and arrive at the 'phonemic inventory' of the language…. And the study of stress, rhythm and intonation…. The way in which sounds combine in a language is studied in phonotactics and in the analysis of syllabic structure.

Sunday (2008:40) echoes a similar viewpoint inter alia:

The phonology of a language can be investigated at two sub-levels: segmental and suprasegmental. Investigating the segmental micro-level entails looking at the phonemes- the vowels and consonants. The suprasegmentals include syllable, tone, stress, rhythm and intonation.

A stylistic study of phonological foregrounding in a literary text, such as Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, thus, involves a description and explication of salient elements of sound and the peculiar way they are organized or patterned in the text to highlight stylistic meaning. Hence Ufot(2013:111) avers that,

When a literary text is studied for its phonological features- the various characteristic patterning of metrical, as well as symbolic possibilities of sounds – this is invariably the subject matter of stylistics.

In other words, a phonological analysis of literary discourse focuses on how sound or oral elements function or are exploited by writers and speakers to encode textual meaning and also to achieve aesthetic beauty. Such sound elements include alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, consonance, etc. According to Babajide (2000:132),

At the phonological level of analysis, words are also examined in terms of their syllabic structure. Words could be monosyllabic, disyllabic or polysyllabic. In fact, the rhythmic effect that the use of parallelism and repetitive structure is likely to generate is also discussed in the consideration of phonological features.

Importantly, a phonological analysis of literary discourse is expedient and fundamental in the sense that writers choose or deploy words not only because of their sense but also as a result of the suggestive power of their sound. In other words, sound elements have meaning potentials which are significantly exploited by writers in specific contexts to transmit textual messages and achieve stylistic effects. Hence Alo(1998:45) observes that,

Every word in a language has its phonetic substance, vibration and quality. Each sound behaves in a certain way; some jar the ear; others soothe. The creative language user exploits the inherent qualities in speech sounds in his word choices … to produce special effects.

The notion of foregrounding itself is very crucial in stylistic analysis generally and refers to all the devices of language deployed by artists to draw attention to prominent and fundamental aspects of meaning.

In Mullany and Stockwell's(2010:43) view, these foregrounded devices constitute the 'style' of the text, in the sense that style "… can loosely be defined as the recognizable linguistic and discoursal patterns in the text." Leech and Short (2007) distinguish two kinds of foregrounding viz: quantitative foregrounding, which is concerned with recurrence of linguistic features in a text; and deviation, which focuses on violation of language codes or norms. Apparently, it is the latter aspect that forms the locus of Leech's (1970:121) definition of the term as "… the motivated deviation from linguistic or other socially accepted norms." According to Yankson (1987:3), "… the normal code is the background. Any deviation from the norm-the code - is the foreground, because it brings the message to the forecourt of the reader's attention." Thus, Mukarovsky (1970:43) observes that,

Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is the deautomatization of an act, the more an act is automatized the less consciousy executed; the more it is foregrounded the more completely conscious it becomes.

Instructively, Leech (1970:121) is of the view that deviation, as an element of foregrounding, can be studied from lexical, grammatical,, phonological, graphological and semantic perspectives. This implies that, as Mullany and Stockwell(2010:46) put it, "foregrounding can be analysed stylistically as a feature of textual organization," since a text contains all of these linguistic aspects. This is the task of the present study - to examine the phonological devices or elements that are prominently used by Adichie as a part of textual organization, to foreground stylistic meaning in her Purple Hibiscus. The aim is to highlight the strategic importance of sound elements in encoding textual meaning not only in Purple Hibiscus, but in literary discourse in general.

Theoretical Foundations

Over the years, the linguistic style of writers has been a subject of intense enquiry by scholars. The Russian formalists and prague school of the 1920s, for instance, saw style in literature as linguistic foregrounding i.e. they placed a high premium on the language of literary texts (Hawkes, 1977; Bennet, 1979; Lemon and Reis, 1965). The structuralists of the 1960s also emphasized the various linguistic devices used by writers to foreground aspects of meaning. According to Fowler (1990), linguistic formalism promotes the view that there is a special poetic language which is distinct from "Ordinary" or "scientific" language. Chomsky's (1957) Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) also delineates the peculiarity of the style of writers in terms of deviation i.e. the style of a writer or speaker is marked by constant violation of linguistic norms.

However, since this study focuses on a functional use of language, we shall adopt M. A. K Halliday's systemic functional grammar as the theoretical model for analysis. The interest of this grammar is not only in describing the structure of language, but also in explaining the properties of discourse and its functions. It revolves around the work of J.R. Firth in general and M.A.K. Halliday in particular. In Hallidayan (1971) perception, a formal feature is stylistic if it has a particular meaning, effect or value. This notion emphasizes how language functions in texts and the nexus between language and what it is used for, or to achieve. The critical point here is that, whatever linguistic resource that is worth describing must be put to use, in the sense that the description and interpretation are necessarily based on the situational variables that prompted its use. Hence Oha (1994:730) posits that the approach recognizes the interdependency of style, meaning and context of situation and that the latter should not be subjected to second fiddle position, or ignored, in the analysis of style.

In Systemic Functional Grammar, language structure is analyzed along semantic, phonological, lexical and grammatical lines. Language function, on the other hand, is examined from three angles viz: ideational, interpersonal and textual. These are referred to as the metafunctions of language. The ideational metafunction of language is synonymous with the field of discourse i.e the subject matter or propositional content of the text and the context of language use i.e is it a religious or socio-political subject? According to Adeyanju (2008:86), it "… implies that language serves as an instrument for the encoder (speaker, writer) to express and articulate his idea and experience internally". The interpersonal or interactional function, at another level, refers to the tenor of discourse i.e the social relationship that exists among participants in a specific discourse situation, which can influence or shape language use. According to Ogunsiji (2001:77), it "… helps to establish and sustain social relations. The textual aspect is particularly germane to the present study. It is concerned with the mode; the internal organization and communicative nature of a text. Leech and Short (1985:209) see Halliday's textual functions of language as "… ways of using language to organize, understand and express information for effective communication".

In Adeyanju's (2008:87) view, it suggests "… the availability of an internal structure which makes it possible for the writer or speaker to construct texts that are not only coherent but also situationally appropriate". The main point is that, the textual metafunction relates what is said in a text to ideas outside the discourse, as we shall demonstrate in the present study.

Brief Biography of the Author

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born 15th September, 1977 in Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria and was educated at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) secondary school; her father was a Professor of Statistics and later Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University. She was a student of Medicine and Pharmacy at UNN for a year and a half before leaving for Drexel University, Philadephia; Eastern Connecticut State University; and John Hopkins University, Baltimore.

Chimamanda Adichie is one of the most universally acclaimed and decorated African writers of her generation. Her works include Purple Hibiscus, Half of a Yellow Sun, The Thing Around Your Neck and Americanah. Purple Hibiscus won the Hurston Wright legacy award for best debut, fiction category (2004); Commonwealth Writer's Prize for best first book (Africa) 2005 and Commonwealth Writer's Prize (Best first book, Overall) 2005. It was also shortlisted for the Orange Prize for fiction (2004) and longlisted for the Booker Prize (2004), among others.

Synopsis of the Text

Purple Hibiscus is a story of Kambili, a fifteen year-old girl growing up in a sifling Catholic household in Enugu, Nigeria. Her wealthy father, Eugene Achike, with strict Catholic doctrine, dictates to and oppresses Kambili, her brother, Jaja and their mother Beatrice. While generous and politically active in the community, he is repressive and fanatically religious at home. Eugene's religious fanaticism, mercantile attitude and over-bearing nature end up imprisoning, stifling and incapacitating those whom he professes to love the most. He has even repudiated his own father for refusing to convert to Catholicism and turns his grand children against him, allowing only fifteen minutes a year with him at Christmas; but things change when Nigeria begins to fall apart under military coup. Eugene sends his children to stay with his sister, Ifeoma, a University Professor. Here, Kambili and Jaja meet their cousins, learns what it means to be free to speak their minds, laugh and argue. They discover a life and love beyond the confines of their father's authority. This new knowledge and awareness challenge their values and lift the silence and shadow from their world and in time, give rise to devotion and defiance.

Contextualizing the Text

Purple Hibiscus captures the complex political and religious struggles occurring in Nigeria. It highlights the country's history and cultural experiences from her independence times. Nigeria attained her independence in 1960. This was followed by instability and series of coups which caused a great turmoil. The turmoil in the country resulted in corruption which caused further instability and successive coups. Political unrest, chaos and violence rage as military coups unfurl subjecting the society to tyranny. This is highlighted in the text under "leader, Big Oga" which echoes the atmosphere of the time, symbolized by the reign of General Sani Abacha, who took over Nigeria in 1993. During this time, there were incessant arrests and jails of critics and activists and foremost intellectuals and educators fled the country to avoid rising autocratic rule, intimidation and deteriorating social services. It was at this time that a celebrated writer, Ken Saro Wiwa was executed with other human rights activists and Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations. This is the backdrop or context against which the story of "Ogechi Nwankiti" in the text is crafted. Abacha died in 1998 and was succeeded by General Abdul Salam Abubakar, who attempted to restore democracy. A former General, Olusegun Obasanjo became the elected President of Nigeria and was inaugurated in 29th May, 1999.

Adichie also touches on the rich diversity of her people and their traditions, the variety of their religious beliefs and philosophy. She explores Western versus African cultures by contrasting the legacy of colonization – its religions, language and customs with traditional cultural values. Devout Africans (traditionalists) who are unfamiliar with the peculiar religious practices of others (especially Christians) tend to be seen from a detached, ironic point of view in Nigeria. The contemporary Nigeria has a variety of religious beliefs – christians, muslims and practitioners of traditional religion. These are the relevant contextual situations which inform linguistic patterning in the text.

Textual Analysis

In the spoken system of language, different sounds are combined into clusters with each cluster giving us a particular meaning. As we have already mentioned, the study of the potential clusters of sound is referred to study as phonology. According to Halliday (1978:138),

A great deal of stylistic foregrounding depends on an analogous process, by which some aspect of the underlying meaning is represented linguistically at more than one level: not only through the semantics of the text in the ideational and interpersonal meanings, as embodied in the content and in the writer's choice of his role – but also by direct reflection in the lexicogrammar or the phonology.

Babajide(2000:132) adds that, "phonological analysis is carried out by describing the delicate and deliberate combination of sounds that produce effects…" In Hibiscus Purple, various sounds have been deliberately and consciously combined to convey strands of the underlying meaning and also for stylistic effect. This section will demonstrate how sound patterns such as alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia have been markedly and recurrently organized to mediate or impact on textual meaning. In other words, we shall show how these clusters of sound generate, modify or extend meaning and achieve aesthetic effect.

Alliteration

This is a figure of repetition of consonantal sounds at the beginning of words that are close together. According to Trask (1996:15), it is a phonological device used where we have the repeated use of the same initial consonant sound in a string of words in a connected text. In Purple Hibiscus, Chimamanda deploys the device to mediate meaning and also to achieve stylistic effect, in the sense that the text exhibits recurrent alliterative contouring across words as exemplified in the following lines:

Mama placed the fresh palm fronds,
Which were wet with holy water …, (3)

In the extract above, Adichie employs the /w/ alliterative pattern, apparently to suggest and reinforce the contextual meaning. This sound can be said to have the natural potential to suggest softness, something mild or malleable, particularly when associated with the textual signification, which has something to do with selectional possibilities or conditioning in relation to context. According to Alabi(2008:254), …textual selection is largely constrained by context. Context, in this regard, is both a theoretical construct and a sociological construct, a sum total of the setting, whether physical or non-physical, or circumstance surrounding a discourse. The choices language users make become meaningful and distinctive only when they are used under 'unique' and 'appropriate' situations.

Wales(2001:54) lends credence to this view when he averred that, on the threshold of choice, a language user is free to select features from available resources of language at his or her disposal and the choice is partly conditioned by the demands of the genre, form or theme of discourse (see Alabi, 2008:254). Alabi (2008:254) adds that this proposition covers selectional constraints placed on the phonological patterns of utterances in relation to context. The critical point is that, as Crystal and Davy (1969:10) observe,

The aim of stylistics is to analyse language habits with the main purpose of identifying from the general mass of linguistic features common to English as used in every conceivable occasion, those features which are restricted to certain kinds of social contexts; to explain why such features have been used as opposed to other alternatives, and to classify these features into categories based upon a view of their functions in social contexts.

Instructively, we can observe that the bilabial approximant /w/ occurs five times, closely in the line, which creates a sound harmony; thereby imbuing the text with musical quality, mnemonic effect and rhetorical value. 'Water' and 'wet' naturally suggest coolness or a soothing or calming effect the sound gives the text a soft texture, matching it with the meaning of the text. In other words, it is an iconic relation of the phonic elements or sounds to the sense, resulting in form functioning as metaphor. Below are other /w/ sound patternings in the text:

Wednesday, when we would …(5)
Wafer, was, what one … (6)
What we wanted to … (209)
Off-white wall with the … (7)

On the other hand, the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ is generally supposed to have the natural ability to suggest hardness or harshness hence the forceful release or burst (plosion or explosion) of the consonant. We find this in the line below, for instance:

The Purple plant had started to push out …(9)

The sound occurs three times and this reduplicative or repetitive form not only arrests and stimulates the attention of readers, it also helps the author to transmit textual meaning, as its suggested hardness explains for the pushing out of the purple plant. The purple plant is the Purple Hibiscus itself which, in the context of the novel, is the symbol of defiance and stronger (hardness) sense of self.

Another instance of the deployment of this style in the text is found in the extract below:

Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating study from siesta, siesta from …(24).

It is clear that the alveolar fricative /s/ occurs four consecutive times in this context– "separating study from siesta, siesta …" These sibilants suggest the sound /SSSS/ made by the meticulous separation of time in the schedule. The power of the word "separate" and the sound /s/ occurring together in the context of the text help to reinforce the meaning of the text. According to Yankson (1987:55),

The sibilant is one sound which seems to have a fairly wide suggestive range, but like any other sound, this suggestive power is latent (to quote Leech); it has to be activated by a particular linguistic context.

To show the liberal alliterative pattern adopted in the text, we would indicate other instances selected at random from the text:

/p/	… palm pressed together (4)
	… papa's promise … (60)
	… placed a pretty China plate down … (304)
/s/	… Successive Sunday
	Soon, the suitors will start to come … (64)
	Sitting still in the sofa … (86)
	Skull with sunken eye sockets … (86)
/f/	…few flaccid flakes floating (101)
	flaky fufu … (64)
	food flasks full of … (304)
/b/	… benches beneath … (55)
	… belly button… balloon … (55)
	… bomb blast … (201)
	… bread … bournvita for breakfast (162)
/h/	… harmattan haze had ease him … (83)
	… hair held atop her head
/m/	… money meant for making … (54)

Looking at the value and the liberal investment of this device in the text, it would become apparent that Adichie has not only succeeded in deliberately exploiting its meaning potentials, but has also used it to give panache and beauty to the language itself. Widdowson (1978:222) has drawn our attention to the fact that,

At the heart of literary creation is the struggle to device patterns of language which will bestow upon
the linguistic items concerned just those values which convey the individual writer's personal vision.

Assonance

According to Alabi (2008:255), assonance is "a half-rhyme realized by the recurrence of the same stressed vowel sound in two or more words; usually within the same grammatical stretch." Adeyanju (2008:92) defines it as "the use of the same vowel sound in the middle of nearby words." It is the effect created when two syllables in words that are close together have the same vowel sound but different consonants. One way Adichie has advanced meaning in the novel is by marking certain vowel sounds out by way of repetition.

This strategy or technique is in tandem with Leech's (1969:78) thesis that, … repetition is a fundamental if primitive device of intensification…. By underlying rather than elaborating the message, it presents a simple emotion with force, it may further suggest a suppressed intensity of feeling – an imprisoned feeling, as it were, for which there is no outlet but a repeated hammering at the confining walls of language.

Yankson(1987:30) adds that "the stylistic effect of … repetition is to emphasize those items and structures that have been repeated so as to place the messages they carry at the forecourt of the reader's mind." The significant point here is that repetition (whether lexical, structural or phonological) is for the purpose of reinforcing meaning and enhancing the musical quality of texts. As we have shown so far in this study, phonological frequency or reduplication as an element of foregrounding is found in the phonemic and rhythmic quality of texts. We shall now examine this pattern of signification in the line below from Adichie's text, for illustration:

Things st<u>ar</u>ted to fall ap<u>ar</u>t at home …(3)

The sound /a:/ in 'started' and 'apart' in the extract above is naturally longer in length in its production. It occurs at the significant words of the introductory sentence. Although, the line is rather slow, the undercurrents within the family and the sinister tone are evident. The sound reflects the slow but inherent and steady collapse which belies both a family and a nation. This becomes more specific, that is, the dislocation or disintegration of both family and nation, as the story progresses. What is significant here is that, as Leech (1969) observes, a configuration of sounds suggests a particular type of reference only if that reference is in any case invoked by its meaning. The primary business of stylistics is to unravel this underlying interface (i.e. between reference and meaning). Alabi(2008:254) echoes this view when he stated that, "… the highest goal of stylistics is moving from formal description of identified styles to rhetorical interpretation of texts", according to the given context.

Other vowel sounds which Adichie has repeated and employed to effect meaning include:

/ai/   … his eyes met mine for signs (63)
         … reply for a while … high life
/u:/   … my room, my school, … the crook (19)
         … soup swooping through … (32)
/ei/   same shade
         … pale face (30)
/Əu/   … t<u>o</u> f<u>o</u>ld the clothes … (19)
         … h<u>o</u>st, because h<u>o</u>st came cl<u>o</u>se t<u>o</u> (6)

The above stylistic pattern leaves a powerful sensibility in the mind of the reader, as Adichie uses a systematic repetition of vowel sounds to negotiate meaning and achieve musicality for, as Yankson(1987:29) puts it, "… repetition … adds to the music quality of the text. An essential quality in all music is repetition." However, this scholar(1987:44) adds that, "… no sound segment or sound pattern has meaning perse. Any meaning that a sound may have is bestowed or, sometimes, imposed, upon it by the linguistic context." What is particularly evident in the text is that the marked phonic reduplicatives of alliteration and assonance contribute to meaning making and engender a regular, effective and affective rhythm.

Onomatopoeia

This is a literary device employed to reflect the sense in the sound of words that are used to imitate or suggest the sound in the real world. According to Balogun(1996:356), onomatopoeia is "… an instance when the sound of the word actually captures the sounds being described." In Ufot's (2013:119) view, the term derives from Greek, meaning 'name making' and "refers to the tendency of words to echo their meaning by their actual sounds …." In Purple Hibiscus, words that contain similar sounds to the sound they describe have been deployed to foreground aspects of meaning. The significant thing about the use of this device in the text is the effective exploration of descriptive sounds to attract and effect meaning. Thus, Adichie creates a pattern of suggestive sounds in the novel whose meaning matches the meaning of the text. For illustration, let us examine the excerpt below:

Papa turned onto the dirt road, and soon I heard the screech-screech of the low underbelly of the Mercedes scraping the bumpy, sun-backed dirt road (55).

The sound /kr/ in "screech" repeated again in "scraping" echoes the sound made by the underbelly part of the Mercedes in scraping the bumpy road. Supported by the meaning of the text, Yankson(1987) refers to this as echoic effect. The extract below further underscores this part of Adichie's stylistic technique:

Aunty Ifeoma was scraping a burnt pot in the kitchen, And the kroo-kroo-kroo of the metal spoon in the pot seemed intrusive (165).

The (kr) sound in "kroo" and in "scraping" echoes the sound made by the metal or iron spoon used in scraping burns from the pot and, therefore, reinforces the meaning of the text:

Then the clink-clink of forks and spoons scraping against plates would echo over the house (22).

The /kl/ sound in "clink" reflects the sound made by forks and spoons in scraping against the plate of food. Other instances of sound suggestive of their senses in the text include:

> … slap-slap sounds on the marble floor (7)
> … The thump-thump-thump of the pestle (11)
> … Buzzing bees that bumped against … (5)
> … Chattering at the backyard … (91)
> … Making clucking sounds … (102)
> … Muttering that the … (102)
> … Shattering … (207)
> … Whispered … (248)

Hence Yankson (1987:54) observes that onomatopoeia as a sound or phonological aspect of stylistic analysis,… is perhaps the most subjective area of literary appreciation. It is generally agreed that certain words like 'slushy', 'splash' and 'buzz' echo the sounds the words refer to …. Any sound features which a poet may employ to echo, suggest or enact meaning can work only in conjunction with the meaning of the … text.

Leech (1969:97) also asserts that,… this power of natural sounds or other qualities (evoked by onomatopoeic references) is relatively weak – too weak to operate unsupported by meaning – and because of its range, is only latent.

The significant fact that ensues from the foregoing pattern is that Adichie has used words in the text to capture the sounds in real world. Therefore, it is clearly not an accidental or cosmetic form, but a deliberate design to effect or affect meaning. Simply put, sound segments do not exist in isolation but are deliberately foregrounded as a part of the semantic system of the text.

Conclusion

In this study, we have demonstrated the importance of the phonological dimension of language use in the analysis of literary discourse by identifying, describing and interpreting salient phonological features, such as alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia, which Chimamanda Adichie has exploited to encode textual messages and achieve aesthetic beauty in her Purple Hibiscus. The study confirms that, as an integral layer of language use, phonic elements are as fundamental and useful as other levels of language study, such as lexis, semantics, syntax, morphology, etc, in the construction of texts, and that creative writers do not only consciously and deliberately utilize words because of their senses or signifying potentials, but also mainly because of the suggestive power of the sounds of these verbal choices and preferences. This sensitivity to sound substances, amongst other linguistic resources, gives literary language its inherent colour and delicate pattern which make it particularly attractive to stylisticians. This point is echoed by Siyal and Jindal (2010:60) inter alia:

Stylistics is that branch of linguistic which takes the language of literary texts as the object of its study. Out of the main types of variation that occur in language, it is variation in literary style that is most complex, and thus offers unlimited scope for linguistic analysis.

What is particularly critical in this study, however, as we have already mentioned, is that the propensity for considering phonic elements in the choice of lexemes among creative writers has much to do with their strategic relevance or importance to the making of literary discourse. Literary discourse itself, we have earlier mentioned, and as the study shows, is a concrete example of contextual variation in language use and the peculiar and distinctive patterning it exudes is attributable to its dual verbal and artistic form.

Hence the study has necessarily and systematically analysed and interpreted the organization of phonic substances or configurations in Adichie's text in relation to their functional (in terms of the meanings or messages they convey) and artistic value in the given contexts. This is in cognizance of the goal of stylistics as espoused by Wales(2001:370) which is to … not simply… describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects or themes to linguistic 'triggers' where these are relevant.

Alabi(2008:252) also essentialises the relevance of phonemic analysis and of relating textual or stylistic meaning to the given context inter alia:

The concept of style is amorphous; it requires appropriateness of context for it to be stabilized, meaningful and effective. The effectiveness of a given language text therefore rests on the oars of form and situation. Generally, textual cohesion is a product of lexical organization. In this vein, the phonological structure of the words that make up a text as a whole contributes to effective transmission of the intended message.

It is also noteworthy that the foregoing approach is clearly in consonance with the functional leaning of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL), which we adopted as the theoretical and analytical template for the study, in the sense that its scope covers not only the structure of language, but also the properties of discourse and their functions in contextual situations. The critical fact is that language function, in this Hallidayan model, implies varieties of language that are defined according to use in the three metafunctions viz: ideational, interpersonal and textual. Halliday (1978) describes language as a "social semiotic" because it is a product of contexts and the environment in which people deploy language to serve communicative needs, such as Adichie's text, can shape its form and meaning. Thus, this model, particularly the textual metafunction, has enabled us to examine and characterize the structural and functional aspects of marked and recurrent sound elements deployed in the text, to foreground stylistic meaning and aesthetics. This is a core objective of stylistics itself for as Simpson(1997:4) puts it, "stylistics is a method of applied language study which uses textual analysis to make discoveries about the structure and function of language" used by a particular author or speaker. Syal and Jidal(2010:6) explain the thesis further:

Style is important in literature as each literary text is an individual use of language reflecting the unique personality and thoughts of the writer. In literary criticism, it is said that 'style is the man'. Every writer uses language in his own way, making changes and variations at each level of the language: word choice, sentence structure and sound patterns.

References

Adeyanju, D. (2008). "Season's Greetings from a Cleric: A stylo-Semantic Analysis of Pasto Adeboye's New Year Compliments". In Atoye, R.O. (Ed). Papers in English and Linguistics. Vol. 9.

Adichie, C. (2004). Purple Hibiscus. Lagos: Kachifo Limited.

Alabi, T. A. (2008). "Phonolexical foregrounding in Oduduwa and Sango as Samples of Traditional Religious Drama in Nigeria". In Atoye, R. O. (Ed.). Papers in English and Linguistics. Vol. 9.

Babajide, A.O. (2000). "Of Style and Stylistics". In Babajide, A.O. (Ed.). Studies in English Language. Ibadan: Enicrownfit.

Bloor, T. and Bloor, M. (2004). The Functional Analysis of English. London: Arnold

Capmpsall, S. (2008). "Glossary of Linguistic Terms"
        http://www.englishbiz.co.uk/grammar/mainfiles/grammaroa.htm. Retrieved 14th September, 2014.

Crystal, D and Davy, D. 1969). Investigating English Style. London: Longman

Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). An Introduction to Functional Grammar. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). An Introduction to Functional Grammar. London: Edward Arnold.

Katamba, F. (1989). An Introduction to Phonology. London and New York: Longman Group.

Leech, G. (1969). A Linguistic guide to English Poetry. London: Longman.

Leech, G.N. and Short, M.H. (1981). Style in Fiction. London and New York: Longman.

Leech, G.N. and Short, M.H. (2007). Style in Fiction. (2nd Ed.) Pearson Education Ltd.

Leech, G. (2008). Language in Literature. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited

Locke, T. (2004). Critical Discourse Analysis. London: Continuum.

Mullany, L. and Stockwell, P. (2010). Introducing English Language: A Resource Book for Students. Oxon : Routledge.

Ogunsiji, A. (2000). "Introductory Semantics". In Babajide, A.O (Ed.) Studies in English Language. Ibadan: Enicrownfit.

Prochazka, M. (2010). The Prague School and Theories of Structure. P.196 footnote 4.

Roach, P. (2000). English Phonetics and Phonology. Cambridge: CUP

Simpson, P. (2004). Stylistics: A Resource Book. London: Routledge.

Siyal, P. & Jindal, D.V. (2010). An Introduction to Linguistics. New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited.

Sunday, A. B. (2008). "Compound Stress in Educated Yoruba English". In Atoye, R. O. (Ed.) Papers in English and Linguistics. Vol. 9.

Trask, R.L. (1996). A Dictionary of Phonology. London and New York: Routledge

Ufomata, T. (1996) "Phonetics" in Longe, V. U. & Ofuani, O.A. (Eds.) English Langauge and Communication. Benin City: NERA

Ufot, B.G. (2013). "Phonology and Stylistics: A phonoaesthetic Study of Gray's Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." In English Linguistics Research. Vol. 2, No. 2.

Wales, K. (2001). Dictionary of Stylistics. (2nd Ed.). Pearson Education Ltd.

Yeibo, E. & Alabrabra, T. (2011). "Sound and Stylistic Meaning in Helon Habila's Measuring Time." In Theory and Practice in Language Studies. Vol. 1, No. 9.