

Deictics and Stylistic Function in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's Poetry

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Abstract

Previous studies on J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry have concentrated on literary and some linguistic features, highlighting the nexus between theme and figuration in the works. However, such studies have not paid attention to the role deictics play in foregrounding stylistic functions in the texts, which is absolutely essential for a comprehensive description and interpretation of the poet's idiolect. This study, therefore, investigates the stylistic value of deictic words in encoding or reinforcing aspects of meaning and aesthetics in the poetry under study. Specifically, with M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics as the analytical platform, the study demonstrates that the deployment of personal pronouns 'I,' 'we', 'us' and 'me'; locative adverbs 'here', 'there/elsewhere' and temporal adverbs 'now' and 'then', helps the poet to relate his experiences, visions and propositions within specific spatial or temporal frameworks. The aim is to show that lexico-grammatical patterns of language use such as deictics have the potentials to combine with other elements of language to convey textual message and also achieve artistic beauty.

Keywords: Deictics, Stylistic function, J.P Clark-Bekederemo, Poetry

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that J.P Clark-Bekederemo is one of the leading lights of Nigeria's first generation of writers. This thesis springs from his historicity, the quantity and quality of his literary procreations and the prodigious critical attention and acclaim these works have attracted across the globe. However, unlike other Nigerian writers such as Soyinka and Osundare, there is an acute dearth of critical works on the language of the poet. Eyoh's (1997) *J.P. Clark's Poetry: A Study in Stylistic Criticism*

remains the only full-scale linguistic investigation of the writer's poetry. The critical fact is that this work is limited by its triadic focus on the phonostylistic, lexical and paralinguistic affective aspects of the poet's idiolect.

There is no doubt that language is very crucial to literary procreation and discourse. Todorov (1977) highlights this view when he defined literature as a verbal work of art. The implication is that, to fully grasp the meaning and aesthetics of a literary text (or any text for that matter), there must be recourse to language at all levels of linguistic description, because it is the singular medium of its expression. Dada (2004) explains:

A literary work contains a lot of codes and information that must be decoded in order to fully grasp the meaning of the work; it has sound patterns, semantic relations and syntactic organization. All these must be taken into account when reading a literary text.

The present study, therefore, seeks to fill the gap left by Eyoh's (1997) work in the area of lexis and grammar, by investigating the role deictic words play in encoding the meaning and aesthetics of the texts. Dever (1998) posits that, in creating any text, literary or non-literary, we must combine words to express complex ideas or relationships in sentences. Lyons (1977:249) echoes a similar viewpoint when he averred that "... the function of language tends to be reflected in its grammatical and lexical structure..." Against this background, the study demonstrates that lexico-grammatical patterning in a text is as crucial as any other level of linguistic description in encoding the message and aesthetics of literary discourse.

2. Theoretical Foundation/Literature Review

Stylistics is the branch of linguistics that focuses on style, particularly in works of literature. Cluett and Kampeas (1979) refer to it as the judgment of "the tangible manifestation of style". According to Allan et al (1988), the concept

.... studies the characteristics of situationally distinctive use of language and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language.

From the foregoing preliminary statements, we can see the watertight relationship between style and stylistics. It is the workshop of stylistics; the soil on which stylistics is sown. Hence, Babajide (2000) observes that where there is no style, there is no stylistics. What then is style? Basically, it refers to the way we do things – dress, talk, pray, dance, walk, etc. In a linguistic sense, the concept infers the specific manner a particular speaker or writer expresses himself. Leech and Short (1981:14-15) see it as “the way language is used in a literary text, with the aim of relating it to its artistic (or aesthetic) functions” According to Tomori (1977:53), “*there is a style in everything we say; so style cannot be isolated from language itself; but it is a distinctive aspect of language*”.

Through the ages, different scholars have come out with various theories to explicate the concept of language and its use, particularly in literary circles. This fact underscores the critical place of language in human existence, as it constitutes the bedrock of human socialization and civilization. The Russian formalism of the 1920s and the structuralist school of the 1960s postulate the existence of a special “poetic language”, as distinct from “ordinary” or “scientific” language. Wellek and Warren (1963) also distinguishes a poetic use of language, in the sense that, it is non-referential, non-practical, non-casual, etc. This implies that “poetic language” is unique as a result of its conscious use of linguistic and imagistic devices to foreground aspects of meaning.

Another fundamental aspect of the language of poetry is its deviant character. The language of poetry inherently and overtly deviates from linguistic conventions or norms, at all levels of its use i.e. semantic, phonological, lexical, syntactic, etc, because poets enjoy what has been referred to as poetic license. Hence Widdowson (1984:162) contends that, “it is common to find instances of language use which cannot be accounted for by grammatical rules,” in poetry. According to Crystal (1987), it is this deviant and abnormal feature of the language of poetry that stylistics focuses on. Chomsky’s (1957) Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG), is also germane to the present discourse, as it postulates the disparity and relations between deep and surface structures. The relevant point in Chomsky’s TGG is that the meaning of surface linguistic constructs like poetry is retrievable only in the deep structure. This point also underscores the fact that meaning in poetry texts is multi-layered and multi-faceted.

However, since the primary concern of the present study is on the functional aspect of language, we shall adopt M. A. K. Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), as our analytical model, in the sense that it focuses not only on the structure of language, but also on the properties of discourse and its functions in specific social and cultural situations. Specifically, the study adopts Halliday’s three metafunctions of language viz: ideational, interpersonal, and textual for the textual analysis. The ideational metafunction focuses on the subject matter or field of discourse, while the interpersonal metafunction refers to the tenor of discourse i.e. the social relationship that exists among participants in a given discourse situation, which has the potentials to influence or shape language use. The textual metafunction is particularly relevant to our study, as it focuses on the internal organization and communicative nature of a text. The pre-occupation of this study is to show how deictic words are organized with contextual considerations in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry, to foreground aspects of meaning and aesthetics in the texts.

Thus, our adoption of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar for textual analysis, is necessitated by its sociological and functional appeal. According to Opara (2005), Halliday’s claim in this theory is that language structure reflects the social uses to which language is put. In other words, we agree with Osakwe (1995:xiv) that “the language of the poet mirrors the function and purpose of a poem – like any other linguistic text which is also dependent upon major situational factors”. The critical point is that the linguistic-stylistic approach that we have used in the study enables us to examine and characterize the structural and functional aspects of a writer’s idiolect. Ayemoni (2004) posits that the approach offers three major benefits. Firstly, the analyst will be aware of the structural pattern of language permeating a text, to enable him identify the prominent or foregrounded stylistic features of the text. It also enables the analyst to be consciously aware of the kind of social variations, which the inherent linguistic features are identified with. Finally, the approach also enables the analyst to know the technique of putting these features down systematically in order to reveal the internal patterning of texts.

From available literature, a good deal of critical works have been carried out globally on different aspects of deixis in various languages, which underscores the importance of the concept in linguistic study. These include Barr’s (1979) “The Use of Deictic to Identify Participants in Bahasa Indonesia,” Colburn’s (1981) *The Function*

and meanings of the Erima Deictic Articles, Pryor and Farr's (1989) "Botin's Deictics: Go and Come," Busenitz and Robert's (1992) "Spatial Deixis in Balantak", Bartee's (1996) *Deixis and Spatiotemporal Relations in Lhasa Tibetan* Hale and Kadar's (1996): Deictic and Non-Deictic Senses of Kin Terms in Dhocolecaa", Mckenzie's (1997) "Downstream to Here: Geographically Determined Spatial Deictics in Aralle-Tabulahan (Sulawesi)", Shelden's (2002) "The Galela Particle 'ka': Four Deictic functions", and Mcfarland's (2008) "Deictic Pronouns in Philippine Languages." The critical point here is that no scholar had explored the stylistic value of deixis in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry, which is the preoccupation of the present study.

3. The Concepts of Deictics and Stylistic Function

Deictic elements (also called shifters), which are particular words whose referential meaning shifts with every new speaker or occasion of use are very critical in the analysis of referential items in stylistics and pragmatics. Generally, pronouns function as deictic words i.e personal pronouns such as I, me, you, she, he, it, and pronouns that refer to places and times such as here, there, now, then, respectively. Deixis that indicate the position or environment of the speaker in relation to spatial location such as locative adverbs (i.e. here, there) and demonstratives (this/that) are called "spatial deixis", while temporal adverbs such as now, then, which place a speech event in a specific or approximate time frame, are referred to as "temporal deixis". Personal pronouns such as I, me, you, she, it, etc, are called "person deixis".

Deictic words are important in stylistic and pragmatic analysis of texts as a result of their absolute dependence on context, for their explication or interpretation. The situational context from which the reference is made constitutes the "point of view" that must be understood to interpret the statement (Wikipedia online encyclopedia, 2009) Wikipedia (Ibid) illustrates this point inter alia:

If Tom is speaking and he says "I", he refers to himself,
but if Tom is hearing Betty say "I", then the Origo is
with Betty and the reference is to Betty.

In most languages, deictics function in two ways. These are termed proximal and distal deictic references. The first refers to things and places that are closer to the speaker; the other refers to things and places that are far from the speaker and/or closer to the hearer. Thus, the English language, for instance, has pairs such as this/that, and here/there. Some other languages have a three-way deictic system viz: proximal, medial and distal i.e near the speaker; near the hearer; far from both. Romance languages generally function in three ways.

Stylistic function, on the other hand, is an aspect of language function. According to Alo (1998), language function can be explained in two ways. Firstly, it refers to the specific use to which a writer or speaker puts the language (i.e. description, explanation, argument, persuasion, humour etc). Secondly, in stylistic description it refers to the communicative value or role of specific language categories (i.e. sentence, clause, word group, collocations, word and morpheme), in given social situations. Language function, therefore, implies varieties of language that are defined according to use. Halliday (1978) labeled language as a "social semiotic" in the sense that it evolves in a context and the environment in which people deploy language to serve communicative needs can shape its form and meaning. The analysis of the texts would demonstrate that J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry under study is dense with deictic words which not only preserve and project the expressive beauty of the works, but also help to capture intentions more vividly and produce desired meanings and effect on the audience or readers.

4. Brief Biography of the Poet

Born December 6, 1933 in Kiagbodo in the Ijaw area of present-day Delta State of Nigeria, to Ijaw and Urhobo parents (His father was Ijaw and mother Urhobo), Johnson Pepper Clark-Bekederemo had his primary school at Okrika (1940-1948) and Jeremi (1948), before proceeding to Government College, Ughelli, for his secondary education (1948-1953). He attended the University of Ibadan between 1955 and 1960. At Ibadan, together with a handful of other writers, he played a prominent role in establishing Nigeria and the continent of Africa as one of the major centres of Literature in English in the twentieth century. Of his Ibadan years, Wren (1984) remarks that Clark-Bekederemo "showed the most precocious talent that West African literary history had yet seen." The poet has worked as an information officer, journalist, and University professor. Apart from his poetry, Clark-Bekederemo is also a frontline African dramatist and scholar. He has also written a novel (travelogue) *America, their America* (1964), which is an account of his sojourn in America as a Parvin fellow at Princeton University (1962-63).

5. Contextual Issues in the Poetry

That language and context are two inseparable phenomena is a fact that has been long standing and established (see Leech, 1983:13). Morley (1985: 4) points out that, “context serves to itemize those aspects of the situation which have a bearing on the form used”. The critical point in that, context is an important aspect of language use. As we shall demonstrate in the analysis of the texts, the true meaning of a text can be thought of as a relationship between its linguistic elements and whatever contextual evidence is available for clarifying it. In J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry, certain variables constitute the context of situation. These include: genre type, background experiences of the poet, socio-political realities, and subject-matter.

6. Textual Analysis

The analysis in this section is based on poems purposively selected from *A Decade of Tongues* (1981, contains poems written between 1958 and 1968), *State of the Union* (1985), *Mandela and other poems* (1988), *A Lot from Paradise* (1999), *Of Sleep and Old Age* (2003) and *Once Again A Child* (2004), in order to strike a temporal balance between the writer’s early, later and latest poetry.

The critical point is that, in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry, the use of the personal pronouns ‘I’, ‘me’; the locative adverbs ‘here’, ‘there/elsewhere’; and the temporal adverbs ‘now’ and ‘then’, is a significant discourse strategy. These deixis run through the entire texts and help the poet to relate his propositions to specific persons, places and times, respectively, which is absolutely relevant for their understanding and interpretation. In other words, they help the poet to relive his experiences and register his visions within specific spatial or temporal frameworks. We shall now discuss each of these aspects of deixis in the following sections, to show their stylistic and pragmatic value or significance in the texts under study.

6.1 Person Deixis

In the words of Cornish (1986:1), a pronominal involves the avoidance of redundancy or repetition by the use of a semantically attenuated expression in place of a full lexical expression initially used. In English grammar, there are three levels of pronominalization viz: first person pronoun (singular: I, me; plural: we, us); second person pronoun (singular and plural: you); and third person pronominal (singular: she, he it; plural: they, them). The reference of a pronominal could be inclusive (as in we and us) or exclusive (as in he, she, it, they, and them). Brown and Yule (1983:214) point out that pronominals are used to refer to already given entities but their presence in texts brings about cohesive relationships. One stylistic feature of the poems under study is the preponderance of inclusive pronominal expressions in the writer’s latest poetry (i.e. 1999-date). Over 90% of the 29 poems in *A Lot from Paradise*, 44 in *Once Again a Child* and 58 in *Of Sleep and Old Age* contain or are dense with such pronouns as ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘me’, ‘us’ and adjectives such as ‘our’. This stylo-statistics clearly indicates that these collections or volumes are biographical materials other than volumes containing texts of creation. Hence Osofisan (2011:260-261) observes that Clark-Bekederemo’s “new poetry” is a rich assemblage of the spirits and sounds of his native kiagbodo, “... evoking now autobiographical details, now the family’s general genealogy, and now some significant but forgotten fragments of history ...” We shall now draw specimens of features from the texts in tabular form, to illustrate these views for further clarification (all underlinings mine):

	Exponent of Specimen texts	Source
i.	<u>I</u> find the photograph of an old man.	“A Photograph” (<i>Of Sleep and Old Age</i>)
ii.	Sleep for <u>me</u> is now the active state...	“A Time to Sleep” (<i>Of Sleep...</i>)
iii.	How can <u>I</u> string out...	“Untold Story” (<i>Of Sleep...</i>)
iv.	<u>My</u> grandmother, konomo, into whose arms <u>I</u> was delivered	“My Grandmother konomo” (<i>Once Again a Child</i>)
v.	When <u>my</u> mother woke us up.....	“The Mainly Rite” (<i>Once Again a Child</i>)
vi.	<u>My</u> father took the tough line.	“A Night Act in the Day” (<i>Once Again</i>)
vii.	A woman of <u>my</u> own blood	“A Night Act in the Day” (<i>Once Again</i>)
vii.	<u>We</u> were playing in an outer courtyard	“A Witch’s Touch” (<i>Once Again....</i>)
ix.	For three days and three nights, <u>we</u> stood in turns around your bed.	“Two Loves” (<i>A Lot from paradise</i>)
x.	You who gave <u>me</u> a lot from paradise.	“Land of the Gods” (<i>A Lot from Paradise</i>)
xi.	You wondered who <u>I</u> was within <u>my</u> house on the lonely cliff across our river.	“Icon in the Library” (<i>A Lot from Pradise</i>)

As we can glean from the table above, the repetitive use of the pronouns ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘my’ particularly foregrounds this aspect of meaning, as it continually draws our attention to the autobiographical character of these poems, as the pronominal referent centres on the poet. The implication of this strategy is that the poems give a more or less personal story of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, thus fulfilling his pledge in “A pledge” (*Once Again a Child*), to write “a poem of every matter of interest” he could “salvage” from the stream of his life. Based on this strategy, it can be further said that Bekederemo’s latest poetry is a documentation of his life. The strategy makes these poems overtly experiential and realistic.

6.2 Spatial or Locative Deixis

As we have earlier mentioned, locative adverbs such as ‘here’ and ‘there’ are predominant deictic forms found in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry. Specifically, they help to locate the distinction, even dichotomy, between the land of the living and the land of the dead; between Africa/Nigeria and the Western world; or between specific towns, tribes and cities, in Nigeria and the outside world. These deictic words essentially help the poet to differentiate or contrast his propositions about these specific locations which constitute the core of his poetry. The significant point here is that, the subject, phenomenon or place the author is writing about or commenting on, determines whether he uses ‘here’ or ‘there’. In other words, the closer or nearer the subject, phenomenon or place, to the author, he uses ‘here’ (i.e. proximal), while the farther the subject, phenomenon or place from the author, he uses ‘there’ (i.e. distal). Proximity, in this sense, could be determined either by the poet’s physical position or mental or imaginative position. The latter implies that the poet could imagine himself to be in a specific place and write from that perspective. As we have mentioned earlier, it is this inherent variability in usage, or meaning, in response to situational or contextual constraints, that etches the importance of deixis in stylistic and pragmatic analysis.

In “The Company of the Dead” (*A Lot from Paradise*), for instance, the deictic locative adverb “here” refers to the land of the living, while “there” refers to the home of the dead i.e. the world beyond. In this poem, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo wonders aloud about the great number of his friends and relatives that have died, suggesting that, if there is, indeed, life after death, there would be more of his friends and relatives in the world beyond than he has alive. For clarity and easy reference, the entire nine-line poem is presented below:

I think of all those who are gone,
Between relatives and friends
Across the world, at a dead loss
To their own, and none ever
Known to have come back for all
That held them **here**, and I smile
Somewhat to myself it couldn’t
Be greater company than **there**
If indeed there is such a state. (Emphasis mine) (p. 229).

The critical stylistic point here is that, the locative adverbs “here” and “there”, enable the poet to locate and contrast his thoughts and conjectures concerning life and death. This pattern of signification is also found in “The Court Beyond” (*A Lot from Paradise*), where the poet wonders how his father was faring in the world beyond, after holding court and being the supreme overlord of his compound on earth:

Where are you holding court now, old man?
The chair you adorned **here** in a square, sprang
Fourteen generations out of the soil
As the tree of your birth...
Now that you have entered **there** with the one
You called prime Minister of your court (p. 226)
(Emphasis mine)

For a similar use of the locative adverbs ‘here’ and ‘there’ (i.e. to contrast the physical world and the world beyond, see also “Debris of Day” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), “Rain in a Basket” (*Of Sleep and Age*) “A Time to

Sleep" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), A Hymn for a Friend in His Losses" (*State of the Union*), "Heron at Funama" (*State of the Union*), "A Song for Harlem" (*A Lot From Paradise*).

Another strategic stylistic use of the deixis 'here' and 'there' in the texts, has to do with a contrast between Nigeria and the rest of the world, particularly the western world. In other words, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo uses these locative adverbs to express his views, thoughts and propositions about contrastive socio cultural events and experiences in these places. In "Here Nothing Works" (*State of the Union*), for instance, Clark-Bekederemo highlights the substandard infrastructure and services provided in Nigeria, in contrast to the perfect functionality of these same infrastructure and services "elsewhere", apparently the western world or advanced countries. Specifically, the poet laments the worrisome contrast in the standard and quality of water supply, telephone services, the motorway, airways, etc, and wonders whether there is something inherent in our nature or times that prevents these things from functioning in our soil.

In "The Patriarchs at the Return to Civilian Rule" (*State of the Union*), the deictic word "here" also refers to Nigeria, in contrast to "other lands". In this poem, Clark-Bekederemo laments the return of first republic politicians such as Zik, Awo, Waziri, Aminu Kano, etc. to the political trenches during the second republic, instead of giving way to a new breed of politicians to pilot the political destiny of the nation, like what obtained elsewhere. In this situation, we find that the contrast highlighted by the locative adverbials "here" and "there", enables the poet to expose the general infrastructural inadequacy and moral decadence of Nigerians which have remained perennial clogs in the wheel of progress of this nation. In fact, Clark-Bekederemo insists that this is the reality of our being. The poet's attitude to all of this is overtly that of worry and frustration. For a similar use of the deictic words "here" and "there", see also "Handshake" (*State of the Union*), "A Time to Sleep" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), "Debris of Days" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), "Rain in a basket" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), etc.

In Bombay" (*Casualties*), Clark-Bekederemo uses the deictic locative adverb "here" for this Indian city: "**Here** nothing seems new: the rising /Estate is cancelled out by septic slums..." (emphasis mine). This confirms our earlier view that, the poet uses "here" for subjects, places or phenomena that are closer to him, depending on the context. The use of the deixis "here" in this context, tells us that the poet visited the city and wrote the poem on the spot. It is a product of the poet's physical experience and assessment of the highs and lows of this Indian city. Obviously, "Here nothing seems new" is a comparison with what obtains in Lagos in the poet's native country where the glow of Victoria Island or Ikoyi is "cancelled out" by the "Septic slums" of Ajegunle and erstwhile Maroko.

The poem "Last Rights in Ijebu" (*State of the Union*) also confirms our earlier view that the proximal "here" is used by the poet to relate actual experiences in specific places he has visited. This poem refers to the customary burial rites (or rights?) accorded the old in Ijebu, where sons-in-law play prominent roles. Clark-Bekederemo confesses that: "I had no idea, until I did the rite..." (p.157). Of course, the poet's wife Ebunola, is from Ijebu in South Western Nigeria. See also "A Song of New England", for a similar use of the proximal locative adverb "here".

In "Land of the Gods" (*A Lot from Paradise*), Clark-Bekederemo uses the distal "there" to refer to his native Kiagbodo Community. Two possible explanations are applicable here: The first is that the poet could have written the poem from a distant physical or geographical location from home i.e. Lagos. Secondly, he could have decided to imaginatively or mentally distance himself from the setting of the poem. This suggestion becomes plausible when we find that in "The Order of the Dead" (*Mandela and other Poems*), the poet refers to the same kiagbodo, his ancestral home, as "**here**" "... in a land/where the dead without blemish/Are buried in their homestead...", in contrast with "the dead in **other lands**" (p.204, emphasis mine).

6.3 Temporal Deixis

In J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry, the temporal adverbs "now" and "then" help the poet to situate the event and issues highlighted in the poems within specific time frames or periods. This is very strategic to the cumulative meaning of his texts because, whether a poet documents events, reflects on or recalls his experience, or comments on socio-cultural or political phenomena, poetry derives more relevance, concreteness and social appeal if specific time boundaries are clearly delineated. Specifically, in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry, the temporal deixis "now" and "then", are used to highlight present/past, old age/youth and life/death, respectively. A careful study of these contrasting temporal phenomena shows that the essential or core issues that the poet explores in his poetry, revolve around them.

In "The Traffic Now and Then" (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), for instance, the poet's use of the temporal deictic words "now" and "then" is very strategic. As the title of the poem depicts, the poet is able to capture and contrast the past pastimes of youths in the Niger Delta (i.e. then), to what obtains now. Using the river as the centre of

activity and oil as the economic commodity around which the activities revolve, the poet tells us that, in the past (i.e. then) “when oil in the land was of another kind” (i.e. palm oil), on sighting a big stern-wheeler boat in the river, youths

“...With no sense of wrong
 ...Rushed to the beaches
 And swam out to the ships,
 ...Offering a hand
 It was lively fair and traffic. (p. 31)

In contrast, the poet writes that, in the present times (i.e. now),

Youths, **now** with guns, go for tankers
 Today taking away before our eyes,
 The new oil of a sinking delta. (Emphasis mine) (p. 31).

No doubt, the temporal deixis “now” and “then” here, help the poet in contrasting the peaceful disposition of youths in the past, to the violent and daring disposition that youths in the Niger Delta exhibit today.

In “I Wake to the Touch” (*A Decade of Tongues*), the poet uses the deictic word “now” to contrast what happened the previous night in a dream, and what happened the next morning. Specifically, he recalls his sight of “a snake/slithering in the field, livid/where the grass is parched...” in a dream “last night”, and the fear and anxiety that this experience evoked in the morning. By using the temporal deictic “now”, the poet is able not only to demarcate the two events but also show the emotional and psychological chain that links both.

Also in “Aburi and After” (*Casualties*), the poet uses the deixis “now” and “then” to situate his doubts about General Gowon’s firmness and capacity to withstand pressure or contain crisis, before the Aburi accord was struck in Ghana in 1967:

I thought for a long time
 They were winging jack Gowon’s hand
 Wringing his hand for use of a rule
 Too broken **then** in the sand
 To flog a fly. (Emphasis mine)

But his doubts vanished after Aburi, with the implacable posture of the government: “And a keeper **now** at attention” (Emphasis mine). See also “Niger Delta Burning” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), “A Dying Breed” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), “Return of the Heroes” (*State of the Union*), for a similar use of the temporal deixis “now” and “then”.

“One Country” (*State of the Union*) is another poem where temporal deixis is used by the poet to effectively situate his comments. In this poem, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo highlights the contradictions within the Nigerian nation where proceeds of oil wealth from the Niger Delta, are used to transform “waste regions” into “garden cities” upcountry while the Niger Delta, the source of the wealth, remains barren and undeveloped. The poet contrasts what happens then in the historical past when Niger Deltans “kept the stranger at bay”, to “**now**” when the people are only anxious over their economic and political rights which majority tribes unjustly seized, in the name of one country.

In “The Plague” (*State of the Union*), the poet laments the upsurge of armed robbery in the country, ten years after the civil war. The use of the deictic word “now” relates the present times to the civil war and suggests that it is as perilous and unpredictable as the Nigeria civil war era. See also “Concerning My Command by General Olusegun Obasanjo and other Accounts of the Nigerian Civil War” (*State of the Union*), “Birthday at Wesleyan, Middletown, cf”. (*State of the Union*), “The Coming of Age” (*State of the Union*), etc, for a similar use of these deixis.

In Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry, the temporal deictic words “now” and “then” are also used to contrast life and death. These are very serious and fundamental time-sensitive human phenomena and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo uses these deixis to effectively delineate the different periods and raise vital socio-cultural and moral questions. For instance, in “Family Meeting for the Disposal of the Wreck” (*State of the Union*), the poet questions the rationale for holding extended family meetings and levying each member of the family, to bury the dead, when

the deceased was not taken care of when he was critically ill. This poem highlights the petulant neglect of the living and the bloated sense of obligation for the dead that characterize the social life of Africans. The repetition of the temporal deictic word “now” in both stanzas (i.e. the poem is made of two stanzas) of the poem, is, itself, a significant discourse strategy which foregrounds the needless and misplaced care for the dead which is the subject matter of discourse. See also “My Father’s House” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), “The Last of the Wives” (*of Sleep and Old Age*), “Homecoming” (*Mandela and Other Poems*), etc, for a similar use of the deixis “now” and “then”.

In the two-stanza poem “Dressing the Dead” (*Mandela and Other Poems*), this same discourse strategy is adopted by the poet. The temporal deictic word “now” is repeated three (3) times, to foreground the preoccupation of the text (i.e. death) and contrast it with life. For clarity and easy reference, we present the entire first stanza and the relevant lines of the second stanza of the poem *inter alia*:

All indigo **now** as the dye in his veins,
 He looked no different from the friend
 His wife had often had to help
 Out of his clothes, when flush with the gift
 Of an additional day, he came home
 At dawn, barely made it to bed,
 And promptly asked for coffee. Only **now**,
 He had to be helped into his best,
 After receiving a good cold bath...
 And **now** they were interlaced in white
 Across his chest perfectly at rest,
 Hands that, at a simple touch, could tell
 A mother why her child cried all night (p 185,
 Emphasis mine).

We find a similar mode of signification in the one-stanza poem “A Passing at New Year” (*Mandela and other Poems*). In fact, the one-stanza structure of the poem reflects its mono-thematic nature (i.e. the theme of life and death). The critical point is that, in this poem, there is a clear demarcation between life and death with the deixis “now” and “then”. The unfeeling and helpless state of death is conveyed in the line:

Now the white sheet he objected to
 When he came out of a day-long coma
 Was spread fully over his face (p. 193, emphasis mine).

This state clearly contrasts with the fact that, when the subject of the poem was alive, or came to be after the “day-long” coma, he could react with anger and disgust:

Then he would get up,
 He swore, and go home, regardless of cost
 Before they got him. (p. 193; Emphasis mine)

See also “A Royal Welcome” (*Mandela and Other poems*), “The Court Beyond” (*A Lot from Paradise*), etc.

In J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry, the deictic temporal adverb “now” also indicates the distinction between youth and its attendant energy and activity, and old age with its associated inertia and general sense of foreboding and anxiety that death is just around the corner. For instance, in “The Last Wish” (*Mandela and Other Poems*), the poet uses “now” to indicate the period of old age, in contrast with the period of youth or adolescence. It is actually a prayer for a peaceful death, and purveys the anxiety over the shape or colour of the end, associated with old age. Here is the entire four-line poem:

Now that where I am going
 Is nearer than where I began,
 May I be like the emerging child,

If the arrival is into light (p. 203).

It is no coincidence that the deployment of the deictic temporal adverbs “now” and “then” to perform the discourse function of delineating the contrast between youth and old age, is predominant in **J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s** *Sleep and Old Age*. This is clearly as a result of the preoccupation of the text i.e. a reflective and contrastive journey through his youth and old age. “Of Things Past” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*) clearly captures this preoccupation:

Old age truly is the time

To look back at events in the past,

Not to retrieve anything for some archive,

But I find, out of fear, the old try all

They can to fill the void

They see clearly in front. (p. 33).

For instance, in “A Woman Special to Me” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), the poet ruminates over how a step mother who was a bride then, had saved him from a merciless beating from his father who wrongly thought that he had absconded from school. The crucial point here is that, the poet contrasts the reticent disposition of the woman in her old age, as against her active and vocal disposition in her youth (i.e. when she was a bride), “**Now** I too am old” (P.5). The implication here is that, age enables him to see this contrast clearly.

In “A Time to Sleep” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), Clark-Bekederemo observes that, at old age, sleep “...is **now** the active state,/As I have nothing more here I care to do” (p. 8). Here the poet confesses that, when he is asleep as an old man, images and scenes crowd his mind “... sharper than all/I see in day time, if I stay awake” (p.8). In “A Gift of Age” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), the poet also highlights the same attribute of old age:

Now that I sit back

In the shadow of myself

I can see dizzy before me

The black hole down which my days

Disappeared... (emphasizes mine)

For the relationship between old age, sleep and death, see also the title poem “Of Sleep and Old Age” (p. 26).

In “Rain in a Basket”, (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), Clark-Bekederemo makes the point that, age endows on man a deeper understanding and mastery over life itself, and his environment. This is a universally accepted truism because, through experiences over the years, man by his very nature, becomes more philosophical and contemplative. This attribute of old age is conveyed by the poet, with the deictic temporal adverb “now”:

...**now** I am awake

To the fact that this thing we call

Life belongs to non of us here (P. 17; emphasis mine)

Hence, the poet remarks that, at old age, it has dawned on him that life is highly unpredictable. According to the poet, now, he has known that no one can predetermine how he would live or end, as life itself is by chance and God’s grace.

In “Time and Tide” (*Of Sleep and Old Age*), Clark-Bekederemo also highlights the contrast between youth and old age, in terms of energy and vitality and general weakness and strains associated with the two age groups/brackets, respectively, by deploying the deictic temporal adverbs “now” and “then”. On his youthful age, the poet writes:

Then I could drive from one border

Through several custom-posts,

And at the end of the day, still take a tour of night clubs

To Resume the beat at break

Of day (p.20 emphasis mine)

This was certainly Clark-Bekederemo's "season of surge" In contrast, with the coming of old age or his "season of dust", for instance, the poet admits:

Now, Just to be driven
On poufs across town creates
For me such a stress, it brings on
A cold, that puts me back some
Weeks in bed, if not for months. (p. 20 emphasis mine)

Note also the repetition of the deixis "now" in the second stanza, which performs the discourse or textual function of emphasizing or etching the contrast between old age and youth.

Also, in "To be or Not To be" (*OF Sleep and Old Age*), Clark-Bekederemo confesses that, "This life I lead I **now** find a load" (p.32). This assertion is obviously related to the strains and stresses associated with old age. However, the poet is still anxious and actually fears the end. This reality also enables us to pry into the psychological make-up of the old. Specifically, we now know that the fear of death is inherent in humans and cuts across all ages- whether young or old. No one actually contemplates "letting go", however stark the odds.

7. Conclusion

In the foregoing discourse, we have shown the stylistic value of deictics in the poetry of J.P Clark-Bekederemo. Specifically, we have shown that deictic words run through the entire texts and that the poet deploys these lexico-grammatical patterns of language use to relate his propositions to specific persons, time and place which not only makes the texts experiential and realistic, but also enhances their understanding and interpretation.

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