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**A LINGUISTIC STYLISTICS ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POEMS IN CHINYELU
AGWU'S *IT'S NO FANTASY* AND HALIMA AMALI'S *I WANT TO JOIN THEM***

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Abstract

This study conducts a linguistic stylistic analysis of selected poems from *It's No Fantasy* by Chinyelu Agwu and *I Want to Join Them* by Halima Amali, with the objective of examining how linguistic and stylistic features convey meaning, reflect cultural identity, and engage with pressing social and political themes. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive research design, the study applies Paul Simpson's (2004) stylistic model to analyse poems purposively selected for their thematic and stylistic richness. Through close reading and textual analysis, the study investigates diction, syntax, imagery, repetition, and rhetorical devices across both anthologies, which span the period from 2016 to 2022. Findings reveal that Agwu's reflective and symbolic language emphasises postcolonial healing, memory, and cultural rootedness, while Amali's direct, chant-like style foregrounds resistance, urgency, and political defiance. Both poets use stylistic features deliberately to align with their ideological aims whether reconstructing national identity or dismantling structures of oppression. The study concludes that poetry functions as a civic intervention, bridging personal experience and collective resistance. It recommends the inclusion of such works in educational curricula, interdisciplinary research, and advocacy. Further suggestions include supporting emerging sociopolitical poets and digitally archiving their works for broader impact and preservation.

Keywords: Linguistic stylistics, Nigerian poetry, Sociopolitical critique, Cultural identity, Female poets

Introduction

In recent years, Nigerian poetry has evolved into a dynamic space for exploring national consciousness, cultural identity, and sociopolitical realities (Adéwólé, 2019; Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2020). Amid this evolving literary landscape, female voices have emerged with renewed vigor, offering fresh perspectives shaped by personal, regional, and national experiences (Kolawole, 1997; Nwankwo, 2020). This study undertakes a linguistic stylistic analysis of selected poems from two contemporary Nigerian anthologies Chinyelu Agwu's *It's No Fantasy* and Halima Amali's *I Want to Join Them* with a view to uncovering how language is used as a vehicle for thematic expression and socio-political commentary (Leech & Short, 2007; Wales, 2014).

Both poets employ distinctive linguistic and stylistic techniques to reflect on contemporary Nigerian issues such as insecurity, corruption, gender inequality, and cultural dislocation (Agwu, 2022; Amali, 2016; Okeke, 2020). Agwu, writing from a southern Nigerian perspective, fuses traditional African oral storytelling techniques with modern poetic forms, creating a rich tapestry of metaphor, satire, and imagery that addresses the nation's chaotic sociopolitical state (Nwosu, 2018; Okafor, 2021). Her work, characterised by a trilogic structure, juxtaposes the natural order of the jungle with Nigeria's fractured social realities, drawing attention to the pressing need for national reconstruction (Agwu, 2022).

Similarly, Amali, writing from northern Nigeria, employs bold, honest, and emotionally charged language to spotlight the often-overlooked experiences of northern Nigerian women (Amali, 2016; Nwankwo, 2020). Her anthology, divided into five parts, engages with the themes of marginalisation, political instability, and social critique through direct and expressive diction (Okeke, 2020; Okafor, 2021). Both poets reflect the pluralistic nature of Nigerian society, and their

works resonate with a shared commitment to cultural authenticity, justice, and identity in an ever-evolving socio-political environment (Adegbija, 2004; Awonusi, 2006).

While the thematic content of these poets has garnered some literary attention, the stylistic and linguistic intricacies of their works have not been adequately studied particularly from a linguistic stylistics perspective (Simpson, 2004; Leech & Short, 2007). This gap in scholarship underscores the need for a detailed examination of how these poets utilise language to construct meaning, elicit emotion, and promote social awareness (Wales, 2014; Carter & Simpson, 1989).

Accordingly, this study focuses on a linguistic stylistic exploration of selected poems from the two anthologies. It examines how poetic language through diction, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical strategies is used to reinforce thematic concerns and produce aesthetic effect (Jakobson, 1960; Short, 1996). The study further investigates how both poets' linguistic choices reflect their socio-cultural identities, regional affiliations, and gendered experiences. By analysing the stylistic features embedded in their poetry, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary Nigerian female poets are reshaping literary discourse and expanding the boundaries of African poetic tradition (Eze, 2019; Okafor, 2021).

Although Nigerian poetry has received considerable scholarly attention, there is a noticeable lack of linguistic stylistic analysis focused on the works of contemporary female poets (Kolawole, 1997; Adegbija, 2004). Most studies emphasise thematic concerns while overlooking how language is used to construct meaning and engage with social realities. Specifically, the stylistic features in Chinyelu Agwu's *It's No Fantasy* and Halima Amali's *I Want to Join Them* such as diction, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical strategies have not been adequately explored (Okeke, 2020; Simpson, 2004).

This gap limits the appreciation of their artistic expression and the role of language in shaping sociopolitical commentary. Thus, this study addresses this scholarly neglect by analysing the linguistic and stylistic elements in selected poems from both anthologies, aiming to highlight how these female poets use language to reflect identity, culture, and contemporary Nigerian issues.

The main aim of this study is to conduct a linguistic stylistic analysis of selected poems from Chinyelu Agwu's *It's No Fantasy* and Halima Amali's *I Want to Join Them* in order to examine how linguistic and stylistic features are used to convey meaning, reflect cultural identity, and engage with socio-political themes in contemporary Nigerian society. Specifically, the study set out to identify and analyse the major linguistic stylistic features present in the selected poems from the two anthologies and to examine how the identified stylistic features enhance the poets' thematic concerns and contribute to the overall aesthetic and emotional impact of the poems.

Style is the distinctive way in which language is used by an individual writer to achieve particular effects, express ideas, or reflect cultural and social identity. According to Leech and Short (2007), style refers to the choices a writer makes from the linguistic options available in a language system. In Literature, it encompasses the author's use of diction, sentence structure, imagery, and figurative language to craft meaning and evoke emotional responses. In this study, style is analyzed as a critical tool through which both poets articulate their lived realities and sociopolitical concerns.

Stylistics is the systematic study of style in language, especially in literary texts. It draws on linguistic principles to explore how texts create meaning and effect through language. Wales (2014) defines Stylistics as the study of the relationship between linguistic form and literary function, emphasising that stylistics bridges the gap between linguistics and literary criticism. This

study employs stylistic tools to examine how the linguistic form in the selected poems enhances their thematic richness and expressive power.

Linguistic stylistics focuses more narrowly on the application of linguistic theories to literary style. It involves analysing texts at the phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic levels to uncover the relationship between form and meaning. According to Simpson (2004), linguistic stylistics seeks to explain how and why particular language choices produce particular effects in a text. In this study, linguistic stylistics provides the framework for analysing how Agwu and Amali use language strategically to address themes such as identity, corruption, insecurity, and gendered experience in contemporary Nigeria.

Poetic language is marked by its imaginative and often symbolic use of words to communicate deep emotional or philosophical content. It typically includes the use of metaphor, rhythm, sound patterns, and other literary devices. Jakobson (1960) notes that the poetic function of language foregrounds the message itself and drawing attention to how something is said rather than just what is said. This study investigates how poetic language in the two anthologies serves as a powerful medium for social commentary and personal expression.

Themes refer to the central ideas or messages explored in a literary work. In poetry, themes are communicated not only through content but also through stylistic choices. Abrams and Harpham (2015) emphasise that themes in poetry often emerge from the interplay between language, form, and context. In this study, thematic elements such as political unrest, cultural identity, and resistance are examined in light of how stylistic techniques are used to reinforce these ideas in the poems of Agwu and Amali.

Reader response theory suggests that the interpretation of a literary text is shaped by the reader's personal experiences, emotions, and cultural background. Fish (1980) argues that meaning is not fixed within a text but is created through the interaction between the reader and the text. In stylistic analysis, reader response is relevant in assessing how linguistic and stylistic features influence reader perception, emotional engagement, and understanding. This study considers how the stylistic choices in the selected poems are likely to impact readers, particularly in terms of empathy, awareness, and cultural reflection.

Empirical Review

Nsah et al. (2025) introduced AfriSenti benchmark sentiment datasets across 14 African languages using annotated social media data. Their findings underscore the need for language-specific resources in sentiment analysis. They recommend expanded datasets for underrepresented linguistic research. Ahmad et al. (2025) conducts cross-lingual sentiment analytics across 15 African tongues. Methodologically, the research employs comparative modeling of emotion metrics. The findings reveal significant heterogeneity in emotional expression. It recommended customising sentiment tools to reflect cultural nuances.

Gogo (2025) read *I Want to Join Them* as a socio-political engagement. Through literary-expository analysis, she shows how Amali uses irony to critique corruption and elite excess. It recommended foregrounding performative poetic critique in contemporary literary theory. Onoye (2024) investigated the rise of Facebook Writers among Nigerian poets under 40, classifying them as a fourth generation using Garuba's framework. Utilising qualitative analysis of social-media-published poetry circa 2023–2024, the study finds poetic voices that foreground queer awareness,

self-reflection, and digital subversion. It recommended broader academic recognition of digital platforms in literary studies.

Anasiudu (2024) applied a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach to Nigerian poetry across three generations. Employing descriptive qualitative methodology, the study reveals how linguistic features evolve according to shifting poetic objectives. It suggests expanded use of SFL as a tool for examining African literary forms. Onyejizu (2024) compared thematic concerns in Idris and Halima Amali's poetry focusing on leadership failures, corruption, and unrest. Using qualitative textual and postcolonial analysis, the research finds that their poetry serves as ideological critique. It called for incorporating such poetic works into political and literary discourse.

Onyejizu (2024) situated Halima and Idris Amali's work within Nigeria's sociopolitical landscape, using New Historicist qualitative analysis. Their poetry is shown to confront authoritarianism, corruption, and decay. It underscored the role of contemporary poetry in envisioning social reform. Mba (2024) probed the position of the girl child in a patriarchal African society via Evwierhoma's poetry. Employing feminist discourse analysis. The findings show that patriarchy undermines female potential while poetry reveals interrelated struggles. The study called for integrating female-centered poetic narratives into feminist scholarship.

Awuzie (2023) analysed Tanure Ojaide's poetry, exposing the poet's dissent against Nigeria's political failures. Through thematic and discourse analysis of selected poems, the study uncovers a counter-hegemonic narrative rooted in societal collapse. It recommended integrating dissident poetry into curricula on political and cultural studies. Nwiyi and Ape (2023) analysed satire in Amali's *Faces of Shame* through close textual reading. The study shows that sarcasm, irony, and

lamprooning serve the poet's social criticism. It recommended critical appreciation of satire as a proactive poetic form for societal transformation.

Eguavon and Aikoriogie (2022) studied metaphors of hunger and empty silos in Amali's poetry using metaphorical analysis to tie emotional and economic famine. The study finds that the poet connects personal anguish with national scarcity. It suggested attention to ecological-economic symbolism in literary critique. Muhammad et al. (2022) described multilingual sentiment datasets for Nigerian languages, emphasizing linguistic diversity in computational analysis. The study used corpus and Natural Language Processing (NLP) analysis; it finds language-specific models outperform generic ones. It recommended further investment in localised AI for indigenous literary processing.

Edegba and Fakeye (2022) analysed students' beliefs about poetry and literacy and their impact on achievement in Poetic Literature-in-English among senior secondary students in Ibadan, Nigeria. Adopting a correlational survey design, they collected data using validated instruments and analyzed results using Pearson correlation and multiple regressions. They found that while students exhibited high levels of belief and literacy, these factors only modestly predicted achievement in poetic literature. The study recommended adopting creative, interactive teaching approaches, establishing poetry clubs, and organising reading competitions to foster engagement and improve performance in poetry.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in Nigerian poetry, there remains a significant gap in the linguistic stylistic analysis of works by contemporary female poets such as Chinyelu Agwu and Halima Amali. While existing studies focus mainly on thematic and ideological content, they often overlook how language and stylistic choices including diction, syntax, and imagery shape meaning

and reflect sociopolitical realities. Additionally, the unique regional and gendered perspectives these poets bring to Nigerian literature have not been adequately explored through established frameworks like Simpson's (2004) stylistic model. This study addresses that gap by analysing selected poems from *It's No Fantasy* and *I Want to Join Them*, offering new insights into the interplay between language, identity, and poetic expression.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Paul Simpson's (2004) theory of stylistic analysis, which provides a comprehensive framework for examining how language functions in literary texts to generate meaning, evoke emotional responses, and express ideological positions. Simpson propounded this theory in his influential work *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students* (2004), where he offers a multidimensional approach to literary interpretation through language analysis.

Simpson views stylistics as a discipline situated at the intersection of linguistics and literary criticism, integrating both technical and interpretive approaches. His model is especially suitable for poetry analysis, as it allows for the detailed examination of linguistic choices such as diction, syntax, and figurative language while also addressing broader literary effects and ideological meanings.

Simpson's theory is structured around three overlapping components: style in Language – focuses on linguistic elements such as grammar, lexis, phonology, and cohesion; style in Literature – emphasizes the literary functions of language and how it contributes to aesthetic value; style and Ideology – examines how stylistic features reflect power relations, cultural norms, and ideological perspectives.

This tripartite framework is highly relevant to the current study, which analyzes selected poems from *It's No Fantasy* by Chinyelu Agwu and *I Want to Join Them* by Halima Amali. The poets' use of stylistic elements such as metaphor, imagery, repetition, and sentence structure is rich with thematic depth and ideological significance. Simpson's theory provides the analytical tools needed to: identify and categorize stylistic features in the texts; interpret how these features shape meaning and emotional impact; reveal the poets' ideological positions on contemporary Nigerian issues such as insecurity, governance, gender inequality, and identity.

Furthermore, Simpson's model allows for a culturally grounded comparison between the two poets Agwu from southern Nigeria and Amali from the north highlighting how regional and gendered perspectives influence their stylistic choices. By employing this theoretical lens, the study not only captures the aesthetic richness of the poems but also uncovers the deeper social, political, and ideological messages embedded in their language.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive research design rooted in textual analysis and guided by Paul Simpson's (2004) stylistic model. It focuses on selected poems from *It's No Fantasy* by Chinyelu Agwu and *I Want to Join Them* by Halima Amali. Using purposive sampling, poems were chosen based on thematic relevance and stylistic richness. Data analysis involves close reading and applying Simpson's three-tiered framework: style in Language, style in Literature, and style and ideology to uncover how linguistic choices shape meaning, evoke emotion, and express socio-political commentary. Ethical considerations include proper citation and respect for authorial intent.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

This section analyzes how Chinyelu Agwu and Halima Amali use poetic style to express themes of power, memory, resistance, and identity. While Agwu’s lyrical approach focuses on healing and cultural remembrance, Amali’s direct, satirical tone challenges injustice. Their stylistic choices reflect their ideological aims, showing how poetry can serve both as a tool for reflection and a catalyst for change.

Overview of Poetic Styles

Both Agwu and Amali utilise linguistic stylisation as a deliberate tool to convey ideological stances and shape emotional and cognitive responses. A prominent feature across both collections is the use of repetition, declarative syntax, symbolic imagery, and aural devices such as alliteration, assonance, and plosive sounds to create urgency and resonance.

- In *Agwu’s* work, repetition often reinforces continuity “we speak / we sing / we rise”—highlighting cycles of memory and resilience.
- In *Amali’s* poems, repetition functions as a mobilising force “We shall pull them down” serving as a rhetorical chant designed to galvanise action.

While both poets write from a place of postcolonial consciousness, their stylistic executions differ significantly. Agwu’s language leans toward lyrical subtlety and symbolic reclamation, while Amali embraces satirical directness and performative confrontation.

Thematic and Ideological Preoccupations

The data reveals six thematic pillars underpinning both collections:

Critique of Power and Authority

Agwu's "Call Me Father" critiques patriarchal and political structures using emotive lexis, symbolism, and dense poetic minimalism, exposing the failures of performative leadership.

Amali, in contrast, uses grotesque imagery and political satire in "Seats of the Oppression" to visually and linguistically destabilise elite power and its material indulgence.

Both poets undermine traditional authority figures but differ in tone *Agwu* opts for reflective critique, while *Amali* is confrontational and urgent.

Media, Language, and Truth

In "Fake News," *Agwu* critiques digital misinformation using media-specific diction, ironic tone, and disjointed syntax, reflecting post-truth disorientation.

Although *Amali* does not directly address media manipulation, her poems like "Unholy Men" indirectly criticise media complicity in trivialising real suffering, contrasting real grief with sensationalised political performance.

Disengagement and Complicity

Agwu's "Sleeping" portrays national apathy with subdued language and elegiac tone, suggesting that silence is a form of complicity.

Similarly, *Amali's* "I Wonder" explores doubt and moral paralysis using speculative language and fragmented syntax, reflecting internalised social trauma.

This stylistic mirroring stillness in syntax, ambiguity in diction reflects a shared concern over the populace's psychological retreat in times of crisis.

Memory, Land, and Cultural Identity

"Walking Through the Land" by Agwu is an example of land as archive, utilising natural lexis and griot tradition to root identity in ancestral history.

While Amali is less nature-centered, she uses bodily and spatial metaphors ("ballooned buttocks," "cracked mirrors") to depict identity degradation and historical dislocation.

Both poets regard memory as a site of resistance, but Agwu's tone is restorative, while Amali's is accusatory.

Resistance and Collective Power

Both poets employ the first-person plural "we" to frame activism as a shared, moral imperative.

Amali's "We Shall Pull Them Down" utilizes plosive repetition and minimal syntax to imitate protest chants, while Agwu's "Without the Guns of Fear" emphasises nonviolent unity and symbolic reclamation.

The poets differ ideologically Amali's resistance is deconstructive and revolutionary, Agwu's is reconstructive and visionary.

Trauma, Migration, and Global Responsibility

In “For Those Who Go Across the Seas,” Agwu uses symbolic maritime imagery to critique forced migration and global apathy.

Amali’s “There Is Pain” and “I Wonder” act as poetic testaments to collective trauma, often expressed through cyclical structures and visceral language.

Here, both poets collapse the boundaries between personal grief and public injustice, demonstrating that suffering is a shared social burden.

Stylistic Comparisons and Contrasts

Feature	Chinyelu Agwu (<i>It’s No Fantasy</i>)	Halima Amali (<i>I Want to Join Them</i>)
Tone	Reflective, lyrical, restorative	Urgent, satirical, defiant
Language Style	Emotive, symbolic, fluid	Blunt, chant-like, fragmented
Imagery	Land, rivers, ancestral memory	Grotesque body, ruins, seats, satire
Ideology	Postcolonial healing, cultural memory	Anti-elite resistance, political defiance
Stylistic Device	Enjambment, natural lexis,	Plosives, repetition, concrete
Emphasis	alliteration	nouns
Purpose of Poetry	Reconstructing national identity through truth and memory	Dismantling unjust systems through exposure and satire

Chinyelu Agwu's *It's No Fantasy* and Halima Amali's *I Want to Join Them* both use poetry to address themes like power, resistance, trauma, and identity, but in contrasting ways. Agwu's style is lyrical, symbolic, and restorative, focusing on memory and cultural healing. In contrast, Amali uses a blunt, satirical, and urgent tone to challenge injustice and provoke action. While Agwu reconstructs through reflection, Amali deconstructs through confrontation. Despite their differences, both poets show how poetry can be a powerful tool for social and political engagement.

Intersection of Style and Ideology

A significant observation is that form and content are deeply interwoven in both poets' works. For example:

Amali's abrupt, chant-like lines mirror the confrontational nature of her political stance.

Agwu's lyrical cadence and enjambment reflect her focus on continuity, memory, and rootedness.

The stylistic choices are not incidental but integral to their ideological projects: Amali's syntax destabilises power, while Agwu's rhythm restores continuity.

Thematic Synthesis

Both poets navigate similar thematic terrains such as power, memory, resistance but approach them differently:

Agwu restores by remembering.

Amali resists by exposing.

Despite these differences, both converge on the idea that language is an act of political agency, capable of both healing and upheaval. Their works embody the belief that poetry can function as civic intervention inviting participation, remembrance, and transformation.

Conclusion

This study has examined selected poems from *It's No Fantasy* by Chinyelu Agwu and *I Want to Join Them* by Halima Amali using a qualitative, stylistic approach rooted in Paul Simpson's (2004) model. The study has revealed that both poets employ language not merely as a tool for artistic expression but as a powerful medium for socio-political critique and cultural engagement.

Despite differences in tone and stylistic execution, both Agwu and Amali demonstrate a shared commitment to confronting injustice, preserving memory, and invoking collective consciousness. Agwu's poetry leans toward postcolonial healing, emphasising land, ancestry, and remembrance as pathways to reconstruction and unity. In contrast, Amali's work foregrounds anger, urgency, and resistance, using satire and grotesque imagery to dismantle political hypocrisy and mobilise action.

A major finding is the alignment between stylistic choices and ideological intent. From repetition and plosive sounds to fragmented syntax and symbolic imagery, each poetic device functions not in isolation but as part of a deliberate strategy to shape thought and provoke emotional and ethical reflection. Both poets collapse the boundary between the personal and political, positioning poetry as a civic intervention capable of bridging memory and justice, voice and resistance.

In essence, *It's No Fantasy* and *I Want to Join Them* are united in purpose: to expose, resist, and reimagine. They affirm the role of poetry as a living, dynamic force in postcolonial Nigerian society one that not only critiques but also constructs, not only mourns but also motivates.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed. Firstly, political poetry should be incorporated into educational curricula at both secondary and tertiary levels to encourage critical thinking, political awareness, and ethical reflection among students. There is also a need to promote cross-disciplinary collaboration among scholars in Linguistics, Literature, and Political science to deepen understanding of national consciousness and postcolonial identity through stylistically rich poetry.

Furthermore, emerging voices in sociopolitical poetry, particularly those of contemporary Nigerian poets like Agwu and Amali, should be supported by literary institutions, cultural organizations, and publishers, as their works play a crucial role in challenging injustice and promoting unity. Future research should focus more on the intersection of gender and poetic resistance, especially in the works of female poets who confront both patriarchal and political oppression.

In addition, poetry should be utilised as a powerful tool in advocacy and public discourse, with NGOs, activists, and media platforms leveraging its emotive power to amplify marginalized voices and address societal issues such as corruption, displacement, and inequality. Lastly, there is a strong need to create digital archives of socially engaged poetry to ensure broader accessibility

and long-term preservation, particularly in an age where digital media significantly shapes public memory and discourse.

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