

Foregrounded Syntactic Structures and Deviation as Markers of Freedom: A Stylistic Reading of Ben Okri's *Tales of Freedom*

Khabyr Alowonle Fasasi^{[a],*}

^[a]PhD, Senior Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Nigeria.

* Corresponding author.

Received 22 October 2021; accepted 9 November 2021

Published online 26 December 2021

Abstract

Although linguistic stylisticians aver that meanings in literary texts are products of interactions among the various levels of linguistic analysis, scholarly investigations of meanings in texts have largely focused on the lexico-semantic level. The paper attempts a stylistic reading of Ben Okri's *Tales of Freedom* with focus on investigating the contributions of the syntactic structures and deviations to the meaning-making process. Relying on insights from MAK Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, the paper examines how the grammatical structures in the text are deployed to negotiate and foreground the major themes in the text. Analysis reveals that the central theme of freedom and the sub-themes (dialectics between slavery and freedom, struggles of life and, human life as a journey) are not only projected at the lexico-semantic level but also structurally expressed through stylistically deployed syntactic categories such as equating groups to clauses, curt responses, clusters of syntactic categories, sentence order deviation and, co-constructions. Analysis supports the scholars' claim that meaning in literary text can be gleaned from the various levels of linguistic analysis. The paper concludes that one of the hallmarks of a good literary artist/text is to foreground meaning at the various levels of the language.

Key words: Stylistics; Syntactic structure; Deviation; Foregrounding; *Tales of Freedom*

Fasasi, K. A. (2021). Foregrounded Syntactic Structures and Deviation as Markers of Freedom: A Stylistic Reading of Ben Okri's *Tales of Freedom*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 23(3), 17-24. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/12342>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12342>

1. INTRODUCTION

It has long been established that Stylistics as an area in linguistic studies functions to close the gap between literary criticism and linguistic investigations of literary texts since Stylistics helps to deepen interpretation and understanding of texts. Stylistic approach to texts also imbues students of literature with required confidence in analyzing any literary work. Simpson maintains that stylistics uses 'linguistic analysis to provide a window on the devices which characterize a particular work' (1992, p.48) while Carter (1996) believes that Stylistics helps to enhance skills of interpretation and to encourage reading between the lines. Carter further argues:

Stylistics provides students with a method of scrutinizing texts, 'a way in' to a text, opening up starting points for fuller interpretation. The method is detailed and explicit, it shows how you reach or begin to reach an interpretation. (1996, p.5)

Since all texts, especially literary texts, are products of language, a linguistic investigation of literary texts will yield numerous advantages. Little wonder then when Simpson (2004, p.3) maintains that the stylistic enterprise:

Has an important reflexive capacity insofar as it can shed light on the very language system it derives from; it tells us about the 'rules' of language because it often explores texts where these rules are bent, distended or stretched to breaking point.

A stylistic analysis of any literary text is expected to focus on the levels of linguistic analysis, namely the grammatical (syntactic), lexico-semantic, graphological, phonological, and so on. This is in line with Thornborrow and Wareing's (1998, p.8) claim that 'analysing language on the levels of phonology, syntax and so on...is in our opinion a direct and straightforward way to understand literature better'. While doing the analysis, Fasasi (2013, p.78) avers that the focus of scholars 'is to appreciate the aesthetic values and study the linguistic structures of the text'. This will help the analyst to arrive at 'interpretation in a detailed way and thereby providing

as much explicit evidence as possible for and against particular interpretations of texts' (Short, 1996, p.27). To these scholars therefore, style cannot be separated from meaning. These scholars, according to Short (1996, pp.27-28), 'recognize that style and meaning are inextricably linked with one another...and this recognition has led to the modern concern with the relationship between linguistic form on the one hand and the meanings and effects which readers infer from it on the other'.

Osundare (2003, p.29) submits that the concept of reiteration 'views linguistic elements of a text as existing not in isolation but in disciplined company; each element recalling, repeating and reiterating the other with the result that a well-executed text becomes a skillful patterns of echoes'. The above implies that linguistic elements in a good work of art should interrelate as patterns of a system and such patterns should be describable at various linguistic levels. The patterns thus created are expected to systematically contribute significantly to the beauty or aesthetics of the work as well as to its meaning. Leech (2008) and Haynes (1995) echo this claim by saying 'if a poem is a fine and complex organism, one would expect to find not just its vocabulary, but its organization on various linguistic levels, working towards the same end' (Leech, 2008, p.44), and stylistic orchestration 'is the idea that patterns reinforce each other' (Haynes, 1995, p.31).

It is in the light of the foregoing that this paper is poised to investigate the contributions of the syntactic structures to meaning generation in Ben Okri's *Tales of Freedom*. Although there have been evidence of a number of research investigations of Ben Okri's literary oeuvre, some of which include O'Connor (2017), Gray (2017; 2016), Costantini (2015) and Coundouriotis (2015), none, to the best of this researcher's knowledge, has been devoted to unearthing the motivations for, and functions of, the syntactic choices found in Okri's *Tales of Freedom*. Further, there is paucity of research on the stylistic analysis of African stories/fiction from the viewpoint of syntax. Adopting the Hallidayan grammatical model for the stylistic analysis therefore, this work is concerned with how the structures of the language are intricately deployed to echo and negotiate meaning and, to foreground the major themes in Okri's *Tales of Freedom*. It is our hope that doing this will further support the argument that meanings in literary texts can be expressed and projected not only at the lexico-semantic level but also at other levels such as the syntactic level of analysis.

2. SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES, SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR AND MEANING IN LITERARY TEXTS

Syntax is a term used traditionally to refer to the area of linguistics concerned with the relationships among words in a sentence and the manner in which words are

strung together to make sense. More broadly referred to as grammar, the field serves as the linguistic background that encodes 'social meaning, reveal attitude, show interpersonal relationships, and enhance textual cohesion' (Kamalu, 2018, p.116). Clearly stated, it is the structure and ordering of the sentences (syntax) that allows the reader to understand the relationships among the participants, understands characters' attitudes towards one another, recognize social meaning and appreciate the texture of any literary text. No wonder Wolosky (2001, p.28) maintains that 'Piecing words together, working through patterns, suspending understanding and directing attention, are experiences mediated by the syntax'.

Systemic grammar has proved very useful for stylistic analysis because it provides fairly adequate and semantically sensitive taxonomic and functional approach (Wales, 1989). Systemic functional grammar which begins with the work of Halliday from the late 1960s notes the major units of linguistic analysis as morpheme, word, group, clause and sentence and theoretical categories as unit, structure, class and system. The idea of 'system' in the grammar is important, as grammar is seen as a network of options or choices. Each aspect of grammar can be analysed in terms of a set of options and the options are dependent upon the context (Wales, 1989). The analysis helps to arrive at the social and linguistic functions of the syntactic patterns: the reason this grammar is referred to as systemic functional grammar. In attempting a syntactic analysis of a text, elements of syntax which can be investigated include the group, the clause, the mood, transitivity, syntactic parallelism, variation of sentence structure/inversion among others. Specifically the analysis will concentrate on such foregrounded syntactic patterns that are important for social and textual meaning.

The study thus utilises the principles of Systemic Functional Grammar which perceives language as a network of systems used to perform certain social functions. SFG is concerned with how speakers and hearers use language to make meanings with each other as they carry out their social activities. Perceiving language as a semiotic system deeply involved in the negotiation, construction, organisation, and reconstruction of human experiences, SFG holds that linguistic choices contribute in a systematic way to the realisation of social contexts. As a result of this socio-functional view of language, it is expected that the language used in literary text should be different from the day-to-day language of common people, especially when such language, as we have in the text under study shows strong indications of constant dialectics between freedom and slavery, uncertainty about life journey, and freedom as ideological imperatives which the author, through certain characters, intends to communicate to the readers.

We see the text under study as a semiotic invention through which language has been specifically patterned in order to perform certain functions such as when masters

order their slave and the latter hasten to comply with such orders. No wonder Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p.31) posit that 'the systemic analysis shows that functionality is intrinsic to language'. Halliday argues that this functional organisation of language is a determinant of the form taken by grammatical structures and he proposes three meta-functions of language. The ideational meta-function is the ability to express human experiences, making reference to entities and building up categories and taxonomies. The interpersonal meta-function, represented by mood and modality, is used to express speakers' attitudes, socio-economic roles, relationships and actions towards one another while the textual meta-function concerns the construction of meaningful and coherent text which should be relevant in the specific context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Of special relevance to this paper are the structural choices, the interpretation of the choice codes and the attitudes/effects of such codes on the characters and readers as social beings. The functional classifications of language are also very important since such functional language use incorporates the use of language to enjoin or persuade, to reproach, to command and educate, to unite, solidarise and identify as a group for the achievement of a collective goal.

3. CONCEPTUALISING BEN OKRI'S TALES OF FREEDOM

Ben Okri's *Tales of Freedom* is a book divided into two halves. The first half contains a short story entitled *Comic Destiny* while the second half is made up of thirteen short stories called 'stokus'. A stoku is a short story written in the mode of a haiku. A haiku itself is a Japanese poetic tradition patterned along three lines of measured syllables and usually thematising the season or natural objects. While the only story in the first half of the text takes slightly more than half of the book, the stories in the second half are between two and four pages long.

The first half of the book entitled *Comic Destiny* is a novella chronicling a group of people who are lost in a forest including an escape from an asylum, an old man and woman and their slave, Pinprop. They speak in fragments, alternately and discordantly like characters who are confused, in a dream or trance or in a ritual. This pattern of dialogues is symbolic and through it, the author communicates his salient messages of love, family and ambition. The dialogic mode makes the novella appear play-like and characters living and speaking into emptiness while the terse lines give the work both a dramatic and poetic colouration. Just as the dialogues are symbolic, the setting and, indeed, everything in the novella are symbolic. Words and sentences are carefully crafted and deployed to create a unique literary code laden with paradoxes. Therefore, the narrative technique is

unique as it is a strange combination of poetry and prose, of strange symbolism and commonplace experiences.

The second section of the book which contains thirteen short stories captures a unique moment in the characters' lives. Highly symbolic and carefully crafted as the first part, they chronicle more familiar experiences, easier to understand and with more clearly perceived plot. The stories which are witty, touching and thought-provoking chronicle flashes of moments: visions, insights or paradoxes in the characters' lives as they differently navigate the journey of life. Gray (2016, p.4) maintains that Okri's stokus treat a number of 'esoteric subthemes as rejuvenation and validation ('The message'), overcoming prejudice and social stratification ('The mysterious anxiety of them and us' and 'The racial colourist'), innocence and poetic justice ('The secret castle'), self-knowledge ('Belonging'), the futility of war and the virtue of selflessness ('The war healer')'. Such sub-themes bothering on human life as a journey and the dialectics involved in the quest for freedom are the focal points of the masterpiece under investigation.

Generally speaking therefore, the book is centered on the concept of freedom. It is a meditation on the condition for true freedom as it thematises freedom, the constant dialectics between freedom and slavery, liberty and servitude, human life as a journey and the mundane struggles of humans in their strange world. The work encourages readers to exhibit resilience and focus while confronting the avalanche of challenges bedeviling humanity. It is in the light of the above thematic focus that the current research investigates, from the stylistic standpoint, the contributions of the syntactic structures to meaning generation in Ben Okri's *Tales of Freedom*. The paper holds that the instances of syntactic structures and deviant structures in the text are important signifiers of meaning and aesthetics as they help to foreground the central notion of freedom.

4. SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES AND DEVIATION AS MARKERS OF FREEDOM OKRI'S TALES OF FREEDOM

A number of syntactic patterns and deviant structures observed in the text are important to our understanding of the messages in the text as they help to foreground the major themes. Some of these patterns, discussed in what follows, include elevating groups to the level of sentences, curt responses, grammatical clusters, sentence order deviation and, co-constructions.

4.1 Equating Groups to Clauses/Sentences as a Marker of Freedom in *Tales of Freedom*

The dialogues between the New Man and New Woman (Okri, 2009, pp.103-107) are largely in groups: nominal groups and adverbial groups but presented as complete sentences, with full stop ending each.

'Now let's start again,' New Man.
'And again.'
'Go back to the earth.'
'To simple beginnings.'
'To what grows.'
'To sunlight.'
'And flowing water.'
'To inner light.'
'And fresh air.'
'Good breathing.'
'And sweet silence.'
'To new dancing.'
'And music.' (Okri, 2009, p.103)

'Let's go back to the source,' said the New Woman.
'Of rivers.'
'Of worlds.'
'Of dreams.'
'Of realities.'
'Of friendship.'
'Of fellowship.'
'Of what the heart feels' (Okri, 2009, p.104).

The violations of the syntactic norm (deviation) foreground the excerpts and are resorted to in order to give freedom to the groups. By elevating groups to the level of clauses/sentences, the author discards the grammatical constraints weighing down the nominal and adverbial groups from freely functioning as sentences, thereby discarding the obstacles to freedom. Incidentally, the salient subthemes in the conversations include nature and innocence, simplicity of life, dream, and happiness is free. All of these are salient to achieving the overarching theme of freedom.

In *The Comic Destiny*, Okri indeed presents grammatical groups in the form of clauses/sentences. In the excerpt below, we observe that eight successive nominal groups of different types are imbued with the status of complete sentences.

'Ugliness,' began Pinprop, 'and the cruelty of myth. The excessive stench of putrefying bodies. Too much blood and tiredness and iron in the throat. Small places turning septic, and large spaces tumbling into confusion. And people becoming hell. And hunger bloating too many bellies. Tiredness and tiredness and chaos. And fear, Sir, limitless fear. (Okri, 2009, pp.9-10).

For instance, 'Ugliness and the cruelty of myth' is a complex NG realised by Noun + MHQ while 'The excessive stench of putrefying bodies' is an NG realised by an MHQ. The three characters have just escaped from a prison or a confinement and are now free. In other words, their erstwhile status of prisoners or being in confinement has changed and they are free. In line with this, Pinprop's final response regarding where they are and what brought them there structurally reflects freedom after confinement. Nominal groups are incomplete and confined expressions whereas clauses/sentences are complete and free. The NG structures presented as complete clauses therefore imply that the confined characters now are free beings.

Earlier, Pinprop, the slave who is a talkative arrived the clearing to meet Old Man and Old Woman who are impassive and silent. Seeing them in that mood, Pinprop claims he does not feel like being talkative, yet he laughs and says:

A yes to this, a no to that. Yes, sir, yes, madam. A solid yes. The vote is taken.
Skeletons. Biographical trees. Routines and routines. Tiredness, sir, and old age.
Slavery and acceptance. Secret freedom. A dance to all that, sir and madam. A dance and a song. (Okri, 2009, pp.77-78)

In the above are twelve grammatical structures separated by full-stops which make them appear as sentences. However, with the exception of 'The vote is taken', all the other structures are nominal groups (NG) realised variously as MHQ (A solid yes), MH (Secret freedom; Biographical trees), compound NG (Routines and routines; Tiredness, sir, and old age), H (Skeletons), etc. Elevating the nominal groups to the status of clauses deviates from the norm of the language and foregrounds the structures, as it suggests an attempt to break free from the shackles of slavery. Pinprop is a slave and the three have escaped from confinement and, are exposed to 'freedom'. Further, through the deviant nominal groups, Pinprop seems to be appealing to the others to freely accept whatever situation they find themselves, since accepting one's situation is true freedom. The pattern of elevating syntactic groups to the level of clauses and sentences seem to be pervasive in the text as we observe further examples thus:

An attraction. Something wonderful. (Okri, 2009, p.52)
A great feeling. (Okri, 2009, p.52)

The elevation of syntactic groups, especially, adverbial groups and nominal groups to the status of clauses and sentences as observed in the above are instances of foregrounded deviant syntactic structures aimed at elevating characters from their low level to free beings. The characters struggle to be free just as the groups struggle to become full sentences.

4.2 Curt Responses as Markers of Imprisonment in Okri's *Tales of Freedom*

In 'The Secret Castle' we read of a journey involving a number of passengers among them are school children and workers. A young boy, Reggio makes friendly conversation with a young woman and the men in her company regard Reggio with suspicion. The description of the lady shows she is not free (sat impassively, staring straight ahead, as if she were dead, or going to die.) though she craves freedom (Her face, or, rather, her eyes lit up only when the boy spoke to her...) (Okri, 2009, p.177). The conversations:

'Do you like those hills?'
'Yes.'
'Do you like that cloud?'
'Yes.'

'Do you like that horse in the field?'
 'Yes.'
 'Do you like that car going past us?'
 'No.'
 'Do you like this bus?'
 'Yes.'
 'Do you like school?'...
 'Yes.' (Okri, 2009, p.178).

The short Yes/No responses of the young woman are as a result of her lack of freedom. The one-word syntax of her responses to twelve questions in all shows her fear of the freedom to communicate though she is willing to. She apparently wants to warm up to a conversation with a stranger but the thought of her 'masters' is holding her back. To the boy, 'she was like a calf being led off to the slaughter.' (Okri, 2009: 179). Further questions from the boy only elicit similar monosyllabic responses as the above:

'Do you like fields?'
 'Yes.'
 'Do you like rivers?'
 'Yes.'
 'Do you like roads?'
 'No.' (Okri, 2009, p.179).

S P A P P C P C

His father, who was the bus driver, / was / beside him, / (was) shouting, / (was) waving / his arms, / (was) defending / his son. (Okri, 2009, p.181)

While the men are beating his son, his father practically performs a number of actions simultaneously rather than successively. The spontaneity of the many actions is aptly captured by the absence of the conjunction 'and' between the last two clauses in the multiple complex structures. This is a form of structural deviation since the author stretches rules of the language beyond limit and

abandons the conjunction which ought to link the actions in succession. As a reflection the chaotic situation and the urgent need to free his son from the men, the clauses are urgently and simultaneously produced, without attention to the norm of the syntax. Stretching of grammatical affordances of language beyond limit is further seen in this example:

S P A P A P A

The bus / chugged / across a bridge, / (chugged) past an orchard, / (chugged) (past) an isolated villa, / (chugged) (past) vineyards, /

P A P A P A

(chugged) (past) a crumbling castle, / and / (chugged) (past) a field with a white horse staring at the sky. (Okri, 2009, p.182)

There are at least six clauses brought closely together through the use of ellipsis as the driver is driving to solve the problem on the journey. The man must free his son from the hands of the men and, he is ready to embark on a series of efforts to achieve his aim. Such overuse of clauses in succession reminds of the series of successive efforts humans must make to find solutions to life problems.

In 'The Legendary Sedgewick' (Okri, 2009, pp.159-165), Sedgewick, a great cricketer of old is to play alongside 'a proper legend of the game – a man called Jackson' (Okri, 2009, p.163). Jackson is the man of the moment while Sedgewick is considered an old hand. But even when 'Sedgewick had done something truly magical and inexplicable' (Okri, 2009, p.164), the author writes:

S A P C C C

Sedgewick, / meanwhile, / remained /himself simple, / ordinary, / plain. (Okri, 2009, p.164)

Of interest in the above simple sentence is the preponderance of the adjectives which function as Complements of Subject. The complements which have similar semantic import are used in succession to reiterate

certain message and pattern. Such reiteration amounts to stretching the linguistic resources beyond limit: a form of deviation. The deviant form becomes necessary since the author intends to contrast the enigmatic performance of

Sedgewick with his simple appearance on the one hand, and to compare the known legend of the game, Jackson with the forgotten Sedgewick on the other. Further, the foregrounded form contrasts the uproar caused by his magical performance to his simple, ordinary self. The cluster of Complements (realised by the synonymous adjectives) is therefore important to foreground the theme of greatness and freedom in simplicity.

C S P C S P C S P C

Many countries / you / have crossed, / wolves /you / have battled, / hard men /you /have transcended, /cunning men /

S P C S P

you / have eluded, / seducing women / you / have slithered away from. (Okri, 2009, p.194)

From the above, one first observes that there are five independent clauses having the same reiterated pattern of CSP. By fronting the Complement instead of the Subject in each clause, Okri gives prominence to the laudable achievements and successes of his character over the character. The grammatical subject 'you' has been displaced and the complements (rhemes) have been fronted to the theme position for the sake of emphasis. The fronted structures are now the psychological subjects since they are the main messages which readers are expected to focus on. Incidentally throughout the text (191

A A A A A A A

And so again and again, /in an epic journey, /in exile, /after falling / and /rising, /toiling / and /becoming hunchbacked,

S P C

/ I / find / only silence. (Okri, 2009, p.194)

Here, the SPCA order is not only violated but the Subject is preceded by a cluster of seven adverbial groups such that we have AAAAAASPC structure. As in the previous example, the author overstretched the syntactic affordances beyond limit with the recurrence of the adverbial group. The adverbial groups (which belong to the rheme) are brought into prominence by being fronted as the multiple themes since the author wants to emphasise the series of struggles, hurdles, ups and downs that characterise the journey of life. Therefore, little or no attention is given to the rest of the clause since the grammatical subject 'I' has been stripped of its thematic role. After all the life struggles, what matters is freedom (silence).

4.5 Co-constructions as Markers of Unity and Freedom in *Tales of Freedom*

Co-constructions are morpho-syntactic structures in interactions which occur when another speaker completes a structure initiated by the first speaker. Referred to variously as collaboratively built sentences, sentences-in-progress and joint construction of turns, co-constructions show how cooperation takes place between speakers in conversations through coordination. In the text under study, Okri deploys co-constructions such as seen below:

'Let's go, then.'
'In unity and love.'

4.4 Syntactic Deviation as a Marker of Struggle before Freedom *Tales of Freedom*

Syntactic ordering normally comes in the SPCA pattern and any unusual arrangements of syntactic structures are considered deviant. Okri resorts to the use of deviant syntactic structures to express certain messages. For instance, the following occurs on page 194:

– 197), the character has no name (represented by 'You') and no gender attachment. Therefore, the author presents a character free of name, free of gender and free from any specific location/setting but foregrounds the life struggles and experiences of the character. The disorganised syntactic structures therefore echo repeatedly the chaotic struggles and difficult experiences of a human being in the course their life journey, until they 'have it all to live, in peerless freedom' (Okri, 2009, p.196). Another instance of deviation of the syntactic order can be seen in the example below.

'Let's just go.'
'In peace and tranquility.' (Okri, 2009, p.70)

The above sentences are uttered in turns by the young woman and the young man. Both the second and the last expressions, uttered by the young man, are simply uttered to complete the first and third clauses uttered by the young woman as if they are produced by a speaker. From a speaker, the sentences would read:

Imp. P A A

'Let's / go, / then, / in unity and love.'

Imp. P A

'Let's / just go / in peace and tranquility.'

In another example, Old Woman and Old Man take turns to react emotionally to Pinprop's act of insubordination in the following excerpt:

'I suggest a chaining, a skinning and a hanging.'
'All at once.'
'With great celebration.'
'And relief.' (Okri, 2009, p.83)

In the above, each successive turn is a continuation of the previous one such that the four turns come as a single turn produced by a speaker. Rewritten, the four turns appear as:

S P C C C A A
'I / suggest / a chaining, / a skinning / and / a hanging / all at once, / with great celebration and relief.'

The examples above show evidence of coordinated minds of the characters as they collaborate in carrying out conversational tasks. It shows that the speaker can read the mind of the other and they share similar thought processes. This portrays the characters as collaborating and cooperating in unity. The unity of thoughts and of utterances as seen in the excerpts breed freedom between the characters (the young woman and the young man; Old Woman and Old Man) since their agreements in thought and actions, their silences, and their unity gives thematised freedom. Further, in syntactically connecting one's thoughts or speeches to that of another smoothly and without structural hindrances or lack of coordination, there is freedom. No wonder the characters do not argue or fight between themselves, but often argue and fight with Pinprop.

Between New Man and New Woman, there are examples of joint construction of turns which point to the theme of freedom. The first example below is eight jointly constructed utterances by New Man and New Woman. The utterances have been re-presented as a single speaker's contribution immediately after:

'Let's dream again,' said New Man.
'Like we used to as kids.'
'Of Eden when it was new.'
'And after we have restored it.'
'With love.'
'And courage.'
'With patience.'
'And wisdom.' (Okri, 2009, p.105)

Imp. P A A A A
Let's / dream / again, / like we used to as kids, / of Eden when it was new / and / (...) after we have restored it with love and courage, with patience and wisdom.'

The cooperation and collaboration between the characters in producing the utterances reflect in the free-flow of one syntactic pattern progressively into another without any hindrance. Therefore, the syntactic freedom observed in the sentences-in-progress reminds of the freedom the author foregrounds and thematises in the text. Another example is presented below:

'Let's play again,' said New Woman.
'As on the first day.'
'When we were the garden.'
'And the garden was us.' (Okri, 2009, p.106)

The example has been re-presented as an utterance as follows such that the four syntactic contributions alternately rendered by the two speakers appear like a sentence, since the second and third contributions (adverbial group and adverbial clause) progressively add to the first contribution while the last completes the sentence. The free coordination of the contributions is a function of cooperative minds and thought processes between the characters. The characters are therefore free in thought and minds, just as the structures are freely connecting to enhance a meaningful whole.

Imp. P A A A
Let's / play / again / as on the first day / when we were the garden and the garden was us.

In all the examples above, the full-stops between one syntactic contribution and another seems to depict a stop, separation or constraint. Despite this however, the syntactic structures still go out beyond the constraints to cooperate. Mutual cooperation and collaboration therefore brings about unity and freedom.

CONCLUSION

The research work whose focus is to investigate the contributions of the syntactic structures to the processes of meaning negotiation and meaning-making relies on insights from MAK Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar to unearth how the grammatical structures in Ben Okri's *Tales of Freedom* are deployed to negotiate and foreground the major themes in the text. Analysis reveals that the central themes of freedom, constant dialectics between slavery and freedom, struggles of life and human life as a journey are structurally expressed and foregrounded through a number of uniquely deployed syntactic categories. Such syntactic categories stylistically employed include equating groups to clauses, curt responses, clusters of syntactic categories, sentence order deviation and co-constructions. Analysis proves that Ben Okri has artistically deployed these stylo-syntactic aesthetics in *Tales of Freedom* to thematise freedom. The paper concludes by supporting the earlier scholars' claim that meaning in literary text can be gleaned from the various levels of linguistic analysis and, that one of the hallmarks of a good literary artist is to foreground meaning at the various levels of the language.

REFERENCES

- Carter, R. (1996). Look both ways before crossing: Developments in the language and literature classroom. In R. Carter and J. McRae (Eds.), *Language, literature and the learner: Creative classroom practice*, (pp.1-15). Longman.
- Costantini, M. (2015). Transcending historical violence: Uses of myth and fable in Ben Okri's *Starbook*. *Callaloo*, 38(5), 1118-1134.

- Coundouriotis, E. (2015). Things of poverty and war: Ben Okri and thing theory. *Callaloo*, 38(5), 1089-1099.
- Fasasi, K. A. (2013). Phonostylistics: Teaching sounds as meaning in poetry. *African Journal of Arts and Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 78-83.
- Gray, R. A. (2016). Promoting the poetic cause in Ben Okri's stokus from tales of freedom. *Literator*, 37(1), 1-10. DOI:10.4102/lit.v37i1.1233
- Gray, R. A. (2017). Recovering our true state of being: Ben Okri's fable, 'The Comic Destiny', *English Academy Review*, 34 (2), 35-50, DOI: 10.1080/10131752.2017.1411465
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Hodder Education.
- Haynes, J. (1995). *Style*. Routledge.
- Kamalu, I. (2018). *Stylistics: Theory and practice*. Kraft Books Limited.
- Leech, G. (2008). *Language in literature*. Pearson Educational Limited.
- O'Connor, M. (2017). A dangerous love: Ben Okri's persisting commitment to literary experimentation. *Atlantis*, 39(1), 189-204. Retrieved July 31, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26330877>
- Okri, B. (2009). *Tales of freedom*. Random House.
- Osundare, N. (2003). *Cautious paths through the bramble: A critical classification of style theories and concepts*. Hope Publications.
- Short, M. (1996). *Exploring the language of poems, plays and prose*. Pearson Longman.
- Simpson, P. (1992). Teaching stylistics: Analysing cohesion and narrative structure. *Language and Literature*, 1(1), 47-67.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
- Thornborrow, J., & Wareing, S. (1998). *Patterns in language: An introduction to language and literary style*. Routledge.
- Wales (1989). *A dictionary of stylistics*. Longman.
- Wolosky, S. (2011). *The art of poetry: How to read a poem*. Oxford University Press.