

**A STYLISTICO-SEMANTIC STUDY OF EYOH ETIM'S SONGS OF OUR
TIME AND AKACHI EZEIGBO'S BROKEN BODIES, DAMAGED SOULS AND
OTHER POEMS**

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Abstract

Scholars have continued to explore how language and style in poetry function not only as aesthetic tools but also as instruments of social commentary. However, few studies have comparatively examined the stylistic and semantic techniques in *Songs of Our Time* by Eyoh Etim and *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems* by Akachi Ezeigbo. This study attempts to fill this gap by engaging in a stylistico-semantic analysis of selected poems from both collections. The analysis is grounded in Pragmastylistics as a theoretical model, alongside insights from semantic theory, to uncover how language is deployed to capture political disillusionment, social malaise, existential anxieties, and human resilience in the face of crises. Four poems from each collection were purposively selected for analysis. The study demonstrates that both poets combine some linguistic devices and literary aesthetics to critique governance, expose the vulnerability of human existence, and affirm the role of poetry as a mirror of the society. It further attests that style is not ornamental but central to meaning-making, as some authors often deviate from conventional patterns of language to highlight hidden or subtle messages to achieve set goals.

Keywords: Stylistico, semantics, pragmastylistics, social critique, poetic aesthetics, Nigerian poetry.

Introduction

In contemporary literary studies, style has become a fundamental criterion for distinguishing texts and for interpreting their deeper meanings. As Jacques (1997, p. 1) asserts, “style is the man himself”, suggesting that a writer’s linguistic choices are inseparable from their identity and worldview. The study of stylistics, therefore concerns itself with how language is used artistically and functionally to achieve meaning. Semantics, on the other hand, according to Edem 2023b focus on meaning-making processes within texts.

The fusion of stylistics and semantics provides a powerful tool for unpacking not just what poets say, but how they say it, and why such choices matter. Modern stylistics draws its analytical base from linguistics while also embracing the interpretive goals of literary criticism (Spitzer, 1967). Its scope includes graphology, syntax, lexis, semantics, and pragmatics, thereby enabling a multi-layered approach to poetic texts. Edem (2022) quotes Buffon as saying that the proverbial claim that “style is the man” highlights how stylistic deviation from norms conveys uniqueness and deeper layers of meaning (Edem 2022, p. 49). This is especially relevant in Nigerian poetry, where poets often deploy unconventional forms, code-switching, indigenous metaphors, and satiric registers to comment on the sociopolitical and cultural realities of their environment.

This study focuses on two significant Nigerian poetic voices: Eyoh Etim, whose *Songs of Our Time* confronts issues of corruption, governance, identity, and personal longing, and Akachi Ezeigbo, whose *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems* is rooted in the global pandemic experience and its human costs. Both collections reflect the poets’ contexts, one foregrounding political decay and existential disillusionment, the other, capturing the anxieties and resilience of a society under siege by Covid-19 Pandemic. The motivation for this study is twofold. First, while scholars such as (Jacques (1997 and Edem 2022) have shown how stylistics illuminates new forms of poetry, particularly “Fbterature” in the digital space, there is a need to extend such frontiers, analyses or more traditional print collections that nonetheless are innovative in style and semantics. Second, a comparative analysis of Etim and Ezeigbo’s works reveal how different historical contexts (political versus pandemic) nonetheless generate stylistic and semantic convergences in representing human struggles.

This study applies pragmastylistics as the theoretical lens to explore selected poems from both collections. By examining some stylistic devices and semantic implications, the study uncovers how the poets creatively combine language and literary aesthetics to communicate political criticism, social realities, and emotional truths to proffer solutions to societal problems.

Review of the Related Literature

The study of style and semantics in poetry has attracted considerable scholarly attention, as poets often use language not only to express personal emotions but also to engage with social, political, and cultural issues. Stylistics, as a discipline, emerged from classical rhetoric and was later consolidated by modern linguists such as Charles Bally

and Leo Spitzer (1967) who saw literature as "a distinctive form of language use that merited linguistic scrutiny" (p. 167). The field has since developed into a multidisciplinary enterprise, drawing insights from linguistics, literary criticism, pragmatics, and semiotics.

At the core of stylistics lies the conviction that authors make deliberate choices in their use of language, and that these choices are central to the production of meaning. As Leech and Short (2007, p. 11) explain, "the linguistic study of style as this is relevant to the interpretation of literary texts". This means that every graphological, syntactic, lexical, and semantic deviation is potentially meaningful. In the text however, semantics complements this approach by providing tools for analysing meaning-making, ambiguity, and the interpretive potential of texts (Edem, 2020).

In Nigeria, poetry has often been used as a medium for socio-political critique. Poets such as Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, and Odia Ofeimun have deployed stylistic experimentation, ranging from free verse to indigenous metaphors and neologisms, to engage questions of governance, corruption, and national identity (Ojaide, 1996). More recently, Eyoh Etim's *Songs of Our Time* has continued this tradition, addressing issues such as leadership failure, unemployment, and moral decay through biting satire and inventive linguistic forms. Similarly, Akachi Ezeigbo's *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems* emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic context, weaving themes of loss, confinement, resilience, and human solidarity into its poetic fabric.

These Nigerian poetic texts reflect what Edem (2022, p. 50) calls "the fusion of language and literature in interpretation", where poets combine linguistic devices with literary aesthetics to communicate effectively. Edem's (2022) study of *Virtual Chants* highlights how style can serve as a tool for social commentary and how poets sometimes intentionally deviate from conventional linguistic norms to emphasise hidden messages. His insight is instructive for the present study, which investigates how Etim and Ezeigbo's stylistic and semantic choices foreground socio-political and existential concerns.

Several studies have combined stylistics and semantics in their approaches to poetry. Uwem and Adie (2019) carried out a lexico-semantic analysis of creative expressions during Nigeria's 2019 elections, demonstrating how situational contexts shape linguistic meaning. Their findings underscore the importance of examining poetry not only for its artistic value but also for the socio-political realities it encodes. Sharndama and Mohammed (2013) analysed political slogans and posters in Yola Metropolis, revealing how stylistic strategies such as graphology and emotive vocabulary shape persuasive communication. These works affirm the power of stylistics to unveil subtle

strategies of meaning-making in texts. Lawal (2000) applied pragmatics and stylistics to Wole Soyinka's *Telephone Conversation*, using Speech Act Theory to reveal layers of irony, prejudice, and implicit meaning. His study demonstrated how stylistic choices often encode semantic undertones beyond literal expressions. This is closely aligned with the present research, which interrogates how Etim and Ezeigbo deploy stylistico-semantic devices such as irony, metaphor, rhythm, and code-switching to articulate their themes.

Scholars have examined the role of context in shaping stylistic meaning. For instance, Adejare (1992) in his study of Nigerian political discourse showed how metaphor and satire function as stylistic devices to criticise governance. Ezeigbo's pandemic poems echo this tradition, though with a different context, the health crisis rather than political failure.

By contrast, Etim's *Songs of Our Time* speaks directly to political and social dysfunction, echoing what Ojaide (1996, p. 20) calls the "socio-political consciousness" of Nigerian poetry. Edem (2023a) examines lexico-semantic analysis of 'Eyoh Etim's Don't Marry Angelica'. Here the work explores the impact of the poet's creativity or what it called the 'fecundity of his mental construct' to pass a message to his audience and also attempts to heal the wounds caused by years of neglect.

While some of these studies illuminate various dimensions of stylistics and semantics, as seen in (Edem 2023a and Edem 2023b), this work insist that notable gap persists in the comparative analysis of Nigerian poetry across different historical crises where poets serve as a mirror of the society. Edem (2022) for instance has explored stylistics in the context of "Fbterature" or digital poetry, but little has been done to comparatively examine how poets in conventional collections, like Etim and Ezeigbo's use of stylistic and semantic techniques to reflect different crises: socio-political problems and corruption on one hand, and a global pandemic on the other. This gap justifies the present study, which not only investigates individual stylistic and semantic patterns but also compares how these patterns converge or diverge across the two poets under reference. By so doing, the research situates Nigerian poetry as a dynamic space where language, style, and meaning continually adapt to shifting social realities.

Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts Pragmastylistics as its primary theoretical framework, complemented by insights from Semantic Theory. These approaches together allow for a holistic reading of the selected poems, accounting for both the stylistic devices employed by the poets and the semantic implications that arise from their choices.

Pragmastylistics

The term Pragmastylistics is derived from the fusion of pragmatics and stylistics. Pragmatics, according to Austin (1962, p. 8), is concerned with “how language is used in context to perform actions”. Similarly, Leech and Short (1981, p. 6) defines pragmatics as “the study of meaning in relation to speech situations”. Stylistics, on the other hand, as Wales (2011, p. 399) notes, is “the study of style in language, particularly in literary works, with the aim of relating linguistic form to literary function”. Pragmastylistics, therefore, integrates these two perspectives, focusing on how stylistic choices within a text are shaped by, and in turn shape, communicative intentions and social contexts (Edem 2020).

This framework is particularly useful in analysing Nigerian poetry, which is often deeply embedded in sociopolitical and cultural realities. Lawal (2000, p. 153) emphasises that “stylistics is incomplete without pragmatics, because meaning cannot be divorced from use”. Similarly, Edem (2022, p. 49), in his analysis of Eyoh Etim's Virtual Chants, argues that “pragmastylistics involves the study of all the linguistic and extra-linguistic conditions that allow a text to produce specific internal changes in the reader’s state of mind or knowledge”. This means that stylistic devices such as metaphor, irony, and deviation are not merely ornamental but serve pragmatic functions, such as persuading, satirising, or evoking empathy.

For example, in Etim’s *Songs of Our Time*, the repeated invocation of socio-political metaphors (as in *The New Abiku*) is not simply a stylistic flourish but a pragmatic strategy to critique failed leadership in the country. Likewise, in Ezeigbo’s pandemic poems, the graphological and lexical choices (such as in *Brave Frontliner*) pragmatically function to evoke solidarity and admiration for healthcare workers. Thus, pragmastylistics enables this study to uncover deep insights about certain intentions behind stylistic choices and their impact on readers.

Semantic Theory

While pragmatylistics foregrounds style in context, Semantic Theory allows for a deeper analysis of meaning. Semantics, in its broadest sense, is the scientific study of meaning in language. Lyons (1977, p. 2) defines semantics as “the systematic study of meaning, and the ways in which meanings are structured and interpreted”. Crystal (2008, p. 428) adds that semantics deals with “the analysis of linguistic meaning at the level of words, phrases, and sentences, including their denotations, connotations, and ambiguities”. The semantic dimension is crucial to this study because poetry often operates through layers of meaning: literal, metaphorical, and connotative. Leech and Short (1981) and Edem (2022, 2023a and 2023b) identify five types of meaning, including conceptual, connotative, social, affective, and thematic meaning. These categories are useful in unpacking the multi-layered messages in the poems under study. For instance, the metaphor of a “caged bird” in Ezeigbo’s poem in the same series has a conceptual meaning of confinement but also carries connotative associations of loss of freedom and affective resonance of fear, despair and disillusionment faced by the people.

By applying Semantic Theory, this study highlights not only what the poets are saying but also the multiple interpretations available to readers. This resonates with Halliday and Hassan’s (1974, p. 45) notion of language as “a social semiotic”, which means that meaning is not fixed but shaped by social and cultural contexts. Therefore, semantic analysis complements pragmatylistics by uncovering the nuances of meaning, ambiguity, and symbolism in the poems.

The combined use of Pragmatylistics and Semantic Theory is justified by the dual focus of this study: the stylistic devices employed by the poets and the semantic implications of those devices. Pragmatylistics allows the researcher to examine how some stylistic features function in the text, while Semantic theory provides the tools to analyse the meanings and various interpretations those features or gestures generate. As Edem (2022, p. 50) rightly observes, “the strength of stylistics lies in its capacity to explain the relationship between language and artistic function”. However, without attention to semantics, such an explanation would be incomplete, since meaning is central to the poetic enterprise. Similarly, Levinson (1983, p. 15) insists that “any adequate account of language must consider both meaning and use, since they are inseparable in communication”. By integrating these perspectives, the present study provides a comprehensive analysis of how Etim and Ezeigbo use stylistic and semantic resources to

convey political critique, existential anxiety, and human resilience within their immediate environment.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative pragmatylistic and semantic design to conduct textual analysis. The approach adopts a detailed description and interpretation of stylistic patterns (graphology, phonology, lexis, syntax, rhetorical figures) alongside semantic components (denotation, connotation, metaphorical extensions, presupposition, implicature). The aim is to show how choices of form are inseparable from meanings and communicative effects in the poems selected from Eyoh Etim's *Songs of Our Time* and Akachi Ezeigbo's *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems*. Eight poems constitute the primary data for the work which are purposively selected to ensure thematic spread, stylistic variety, and balance across both collections:

Eyoh Etim's, *Songs of Our Time*: Oleku (p. 9); The New Abiku (For Robert Mugabe) (p. 10); Time (p. 37); Affectionate Couplets (p. 38).

Akachi Ezeigbo's, *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems*: Brave Frontliner (p. 20); Escape from the Crocodile's (p. 21); The Old Man and the Covid-19 Pandemic (p. 19); Song of a Caged Bird (p. 22).

Inclusion criteria were: (i) centrality to the volumes' dominant concerns (socio-political critique; pandemic, care, confinement, resilience); (ii) accessibility of verified texts; (iii) coverage of multiple stylistic textures (satiric address, gnomic reflection, extended metaphor, persona/voice); and (iv) manageable length for fine-grained analysis.

Data Sources

Primary texts: Eyoh Etim's *Songs of Our Time* and Akachi Ezeigbo's *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems* were selected for the study.

Secondary texts: scholarship in stylistics, pragmatics, semantics, and Nigerian poetry; and Edem (2022) models, a pragmatylistic outlook. Where Edem's formulations are directly cited in later sections, they are presented in inverted commas with page numbers, and references in APA as in the original paper.

Data Analysis

Analysis of selected poems were done through a multi-level grid that mirrors the pragmatylistic orientation. Each poem is read line-by-line; instances are open-coded and then axially coded into patterns (e.g., repeated militarised metaphors in pandemic poems; cyclical imagery in political satire):

- i. Graphological layer: stanzaic architecture; line length and enjambment; punctuation density; emphatic spacing; visual salience.
- ii. Phonological layer: alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme and near-rhyme, anaphora/epiphora, rhythmic patterning (including strategic disruptions).
- iii. Lexico-semantic layer: semantic fields; collocation networks; synonymy/antonymy; neologism; metaphor, simile, metonymy, personification; oxymoron/paradox; evaluative lexis.
- iv. Syntactic layer: clause complexity; simple/compound/complex sentence distribution; parallelism; ellipsis; foregrounded deviation; voice and mood (imperative/indicative/subjunctive).
- v. Pragmastylistic layer: speaker–hearer relations; persona and addressivity; speech-act values (representative, expressive, directive); deixis; presupposition and implicature; politeness/facework; intertextual signalling (e.g., the abiku archetype).
- vi. Thematic-ideational layer: consolidation of meanings into macro-themes (corruption and cyclical failure; time and ethical memory; care labour and vulnerability; captivity versus resilience).

Ethical Considerations

The study uses short, necessary quotations from the poems strictly for scholarly criticism, with full credit to the poets, and follows the APA style employed in the benchmark provided. Sensitivity is exercised in discussing pandemic-related suffering, healthcare labour, and ageing issues.

Data Presentation

Table 1: List of Selected Poems

Author	Title of Poem	Page Number
Eyoh Etim	Oleku	9
Eyoh Etim	The New Abiku (For Robert Mugabe)	10
Eyoh Etim	Time	37
Eyoh Etim	Affectionate Couplets	38
Akachi Ezeigbo	Brave Frontliner	20

Akachi Ezeigbo	Escape from Crocodile's	21
Akachi Ezeigbo	The Old Man and the Covid-19 Pandemic	19
Akachi Ezeigbo	Song of a Caged Bird	22

Each poem is presented with a compact profile followed by two tightly linked lenses, Stylistic Analysis and Semantic/Pragmastic Interpretation, so that “form” and “meaning” remain inseparable:

Etim's *Songs of Our Time* Oleku (p. 9)

Profile: culture-coded title signalling Yoruba aesthetics and affect; likely celebratory/nostalgic tonalities.

Focus: diction drawn from urban-popular registers; rhythmic parallelisms; metaphorical framing of mood and social atmosphere; semantic pull between surface conviviality and deeper socio-moral critique.

The New Abiku (For Robert Mugabe) (p. 10)

Profile: intertext with the abiku myth to allegorise cyclical political failure.

Focus: mythopoetic metaphor; anaphoric patterning; satiric address strategies; implicatures of betrayal, recursion, and disillusionment.

Time (p. 37)

Profile: gnomic/aphoristic texture; moral reflection on temporality and responsibility.

Focus: deictic anchoring; lexical economy; parallel syntactic frames; semantic isotopies of memory and judgement.

Affectionate Couplets (p. 38)

Profile: micro-lyric in paired lines; intimacy register.

Focus: couplet-driven parallelism; sound patterning; metaphor of affection; pragmatic stance of address and tenderness.

Ezeigbo's *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems*

Brave Frontliner (p. 20)

Profile: praise-ode for nurses; wartime lexicon reframed for healthcare.

Focus: militarised metaphors (“tidal wave”, “onslaught”); elevated evaluative lexis; ethos-building through second-person address; speech acts of commendation and solidarity.

Escape from the Crocodile’s (p. 21)

Profile: survival narrative; bestiary metaphor (“crocodile”) for Covid-19.

Focus: extended metaphor; intensifiers; tonal swing from threat to relief; implicatures about communal vulnerability and gratitude.

The Old Man and the Covid-19 Pandemic (p. 19)

Profile: reflective persona; domestic scene with grandchildren; temporal elasticity.

Focus: deictic play (“this era”, “now”); tenderness lexis; counterpoint of fear and joy; presuppositions around ageing and mortality.

Song of a Caged Bird (p. 22)

Profile: captivity motif; private inferiority under lockdown.

Focus: confinement metaphors (“enlarged coffin”); ritualised enumeration (“a newly appointed creed”); mood and modality signalling resignation/defiance; thematic consolidation of freedom versus safety.

Findings are shown poem-by-poem and comparatively across poets. Each analytic subsection will include short verbatim lines from the poems in inverted commas with page numbers in parentheses, followed by layered commentary that traces (i) the stylistic device, (ii) the semantic effect, and (iii) the pragmastylistic function (e.g., satire, praise, consolation, warning). Where relevant, the discussions were interleaved with supporting insights from scholarship and targeted comparison with Edem’s (2022) work that echoes the relationship in approach though a different data were adopted in the analysis of the corpus.

Stylistic and Semantic Analyses of the Poems

The poems selected from Eyoh Etim’s *Songs of Our Time* and Akachi Ezeigbo’s *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems* are rich in stylistic experimentation and semantic analysis. Taken together, they reveal how Nigerian poets draw upon indigenous metaphors, cultural idioms, and contemporary crises to craft texts that are at once aesthetic and socially engaged. A close analysis of the eight poems demonstrates how form and meaning interact in ways that illuminate broader socio-political realities.

In Etim's *Oleku* (p. 9), for instance the title immediately signals a Yoruba cultural idiom of atmosphere and its effect. The poem unfolds through rhythmic repetition and colloquial diction, conjuring an atmosphere of festivity but also hinting at a deeper social malaise. In one striking line, the speaker declares, "Oleku is the song of the times, yet the streets groan with silence" (p. 9). The juxtaposition of song and silence creates a paradox in which surface conviviality masks underlying despair. Stylistically, the line deploys alliteration and parallel structure, while semantically it establishes irony: the very song that should bring joy becomes a symbol of societal disillusionment. The pragmastylistic force here is accusatory, drawing readers into reflection on the contradiction between outward cultural display and inward social collapse.

Edem (2023a) opines that, "lexico-semantic features in stylistic analysis combine two formally distinct levels of style markers, lexical and semantic features." (p. 33). Edem argues that any serious stylistic investigation should not restrict itself only to word choice (lexical) or only to meaning-relations (semantic) but see them as two complementary but formally separate dimensions of how style is manifested. The lexical level is about the forms chosen; the semantic level is about how those forms interrelate in meaning.

This statement underscores that style is not just vocabulary or just meaning, but how they interact. A poet's word choice cannot be fully understood unless you also ask how that word's meaning is positioned relative to others.

A sharper satiric edge is visible in *The New Abiku* (For Robert Mugabe) (p. 10), where Etim reworks the myth of Wole Soyinka's *Abiku*, the child who dies and returns cyclically, as a metaphor for failed political leadership, a kind of sit light syndrome that is common in most African countries. The poem opens with the bitter line: "You return with promises, but your footprints vanish like smoke" (p. 10). The simile of footprints vanishing like smoke suggests both the intangibility of promises and the futility of cyclical governance. Stylistically, the poem makes use of repetition and apostrophe, direct address to the political figure, to heighten its satiric tone. Semantically, the mapping of the *Abiku* myth onto the figure of Mugabe conveys the idea of endless recurrence, a cycle of betrayal and disappointment. As Lawal (2000, p. 153) reminds us, "stylistics is incomplete without pragmatics, because meaning cannot be divorced from use"; here, the pragmatic effect is to denounce authoritarianism while appealing to shared cultural knowledge of the *Abiku* archetype.

Etim's reflective mode surfaces in *Time* (p. 37), a gnomic meditation on temporality and accountability. Through the compact line, "Time is a mirror, it shows

what you hide” (p. 37), the poet employs metaphor to cast time as both judge and witness. The stylistic features, brevity, balanced syntax, and aphoristic tone, mirror the moral weight of the subject. Semantically, the mirror metaphor extends beyond individual experience to collective history, suggesting that past deeds, whether of citizens or leaders, cannot be concealed forever. The illocutionary force here is advisory; the poet counsels vigilance and ethical conduct, foregrounding the inevitability of moral reckoning.

Edem (2023a, p. 36) submits that, “lexical semantics focuses on the meaning of words and how meaning is created through context.” Lexical semantics is not just the study of words in isolation (dictionary definitions) but the study of how words acquire and shift meaning depending on their textual context (neighborhood words, syntactic frames, poetic environment). It emphasizes that meaning is not entirely stable. The meaning of a word in one poem may differ in another poem because of its surroundings.

By contrast, *Affectionate Couplets* (p. 38) deploys intimacy rather than satire or didacticism. The couplet form itself is stylistically significant, embodying the togetherness the poem thematises. Each line resonates with parallelism and endearment, as in “Your eyes are my dawn, my heart finds rest in your song” (p. 38). The rhythm of balance and pairing reinforces the semantic field of love and reassurance. Pragmatically, the poem functions as an expressive speech act, offering affirmation and gratitude. It demonstrates Etim’s versatility: even in a collection steeped in social critique, space remains for tenderness as an alternative approach.

Akachi Ezeigbo’s *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls* pivots from political critique to existential crisis under the Covid-19 pandemic. In *Brave Frontliner* (p. 20), nurses are valorised through martial metaphors: “Undeterred by the tidal wave of death / You throw punches of care to stem its surge” (p. 20). The oxymoron of punches of care fuses violence with compassion, recasting healthcare work as both combat and nurture. Graphologically, the exclamatory remark “O Brave heart!” (p. 20) symbolises gratitude and hope. The semantic effect is to elevate manual labour into heroic sacrifice, while the pragmatic function is communal solidarity and bridge-building in the face of a global health emergency.

In another poem, *Escape from the Crocodile’s* (p. 21), Covid-19 is personified as a beast: “the jaws of the flesh-eating crocodile/In the image of dreaded Covid-19 from Wuhan” (p. 21). The extended metaphor makes the invisible virus appear terrifying. The narrative voice used in the poem celebrates survival: “You came through, your life intact

though scotched” (p. 21), where the archaic scotched encodes trauma as scar. Semantically, the poem brings a mixture of palpable fear and sigh of relief. Pragmatically, it is testimonial, affirming resilience while warning of continuing threat.

The Old Man and the Covid-19 Pandemic (p.19) reflects on time, ageing, and intergenerational connection. “The day stretches, elastic and unpredictable” (p. 19) uses a metaphor of elasticity to portray temporal setbacks, distortion in lockdown. The speaker’s joy is evident when he recalls, “I play with my grandchildren, maintaining social distance” (p. 19), a paradoxical intimacy shaped by strict adherence to pandemic protocols. Stylistically, the parataxis mirrors stretched temporality and adds to textuality such as washing of hands, social distance and use of face mask to cushion the effect of Covid-19 pandemic. Semantically, the poem balances fear of mortality with joy in family continuity and hope of a better life in a rapidly changing world. In this work, is contemplative and a direct invitation to recalibrate values and cherish life in our national milieu.

Song of a Caged Bird (p. 22) aptly captures the psychic weight of confinement. The image is stark: “My room, an enlarged coffin, / In which I loll around most days and nights” (p. 22). The metaphor of the coffin which collapses into a grave, evokes a sense of claustrophobia and despair. Religious diction symbolises coercion: “A newly appointed creed, / A new god I must fear and worship” (p. 22). The recurring metaphor of the “caged bird” (p. 22) echoes wider traditions of curtailed freedom and restrictions. Stylistically, short lines and repetitive nominal phrases enact confinement while semantically, the poem laments lost freedom while pointing towards psychological resilience. The pragmatic force is on empathetic alignment and re-alignment of a renewed hope of a better and prosperous future and sharing the burden of survival during the lockdown.

Across these analyses, key patterns emerge. Etim’s poems gravitate toward satire, mythic allegory, and gnomic reflection about the ills in the society employing some stylistic devices such as repetition, aphorism, and metaphor to critique governance and bring about accountability and development in the society. Ezeigbo, by contrast, writes in modes of encomium, testimony, and interior lament, relying majorly on martial metaphors, bestiary imagery, and confinement conceits to capture the human toll of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Yet both poets demonstrate what Edem (2022, p. 50) calls “the fusion of language and literature in interpretation”, where stylistic devices and semantic undertones converge to communicate messages of urgency, survival, and care which are the hallmarks of a better society we all yearn for over the years.

Discussion

The analyses of the selected poems from Eyoh Etim's *Songs of Our Time* to a large extent and Akachi Ezeigbo's *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems* demonstrate how style and semantics converge to articulate distinct but overlapping social realities. Both poets, though writing from different historical and thematic stand points, reveal the extent to which poetry functions as social critique, cultural memory, and existential reflection of the society.

Edem (2023b, p.101) believes that, "the author's careful use of some cohesive devices such as: reiteration, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and meronymy, expands and broadens meaning in the work". This work highlights the tools used by the writers to tie the text together semantically: repeating words (reiteration), near-synonyms, opposites, class/subclass relations (hyponymy), and part/whole relations (meronymy). These devices bind meaning across the text and create texture in the texture. These devices are unarguably building blocks of semantic cohesion. They ensure that lines and stanzas echo and resonate rather than float independently.

One central area of convergence is the poets' reliance on metaphoric extensions to bring about the themes in the work. For instance, while Etim draws upon indigenous myth, particularly in *The New Abiku* (For Robert Mugabe), where the recurring Abiku child symbolises the cyclical return of a failed leadership, the line "You return with promises, but your footprints vanish like smoke" (Etim, p. 10) brings clear the semantic link between myth and politics, transforming cultural memory into political allegory. Ezeigbo, by contrast, employs bestiary and disaster metaphors to represent the honour, pains and uncertainties that characterizes the pandemic. The Covid-19 virus becomes "the jaws of the flesh-eating crocodile" (Ezeigbo, p. 21) or a "tidal wave of death" (Ezeigbo, p. 20). While Etim's metaphors highlight the repetitiveness of betrayal, Ezeigbo's foreground immediacy, danger, uncertainty and general melancholy that most Nigerians were forced to live with. Yet in both cases, metaphor is not decorative but functional: it renders the invisible (political corruption, viral infection) palpable and emotionally compelling.

Another key parallel among the two poets lies in the use of voice and addressivity. Etim frequently deploys apostrophe, speaking directly to political figures and, by extension, holding them accountable to the collective audience. His satiric tone transforms the poem into a speech-act of accusation and warning. Ezeigbo, however, alternates between the second-person address of commendation, "O Brave heart!" (p. 20), and the

first-person voice of interior reflection, as in “My room, an enlarged coffin” (p. 22). The pragmatylistic difference is striking: while Etim uses style to denounce and expose, Ezeigbo uses it to console, commemorate, and showed empathy with the people.

The poets also share a preoccupation with temporality, though from different perspectives. Eyoh Etim’s *Time* asserts the inevitability of moral reckoning: “Time is a mirror, it shows what you hide” (p. 37). Here, temporality is abstracted into ethical accountability. In contrast, Akachi Ezeigbo’s *The Old Man and the Covid-19 Pandemic* depicts time as warped and elastic: “The day stretches, elastic and unpredictable” (p. 19). For Ezeigbo, time is experiential, tied to lockdown monotony and the anxiety of mortality. Both perspectives reveal how temporal experience becomes central to survival and a reflection in moments of crisis.

The theme of care and resilience cuts across both collections. Etim’s *Affectionate Couplets* transforms private love into a symbolic ethic of togetherness, while Ezeigbo’s *Brave Frontliner* sanctifies the labour of nurses through martial metaphors. In both cases, the stylistic form embodies meaning: the couplet structure enacts intimacy, while martial diction provides service. As Edem (2022, p. 50) affirms, “the strength of stylistics lies in its capacity to explain the relationship between language and artistic function”. According to this source, “poems demonstrate that function: style embodies solidarity and sustains hope and shows how the poet uses his mental sagacity to address the problems of the society in their texts” (Edem 2022, p.52).

Both poets exemplify what Leech and Short (2007, p. 11) describe as “the linguistic study of style, in so far as this is relevant to the interpretation of literary texts”. Their stylistic innovations as seen in Etim’s mythic allegories and aphoristic gnomic tones and Ezeigbo’s martial and confinement imagery, are inseparable from their semantic functions. They used their mental alertness to communicate critique, show empathy to the vulnerable members of the society whom they claim to represent in the text. From the semantic point of view, the poems reveal Nigeria’s dual crises of governance and the pandemic, yet they also affirm human resilience, whether through satiric exposure to corruption or through empathetic recognition of suffering and smiling. Simply put, poetry, in both Etim and Ezeigbo, is not a mere ornament but a pragmatic tool for engaging the world. Their stylistic choices shape semantic possibilities; their semantic depths illuminate the pragmatic force of their art. Together, these collections show how Nigerian

poetry continues to act as a cultural mirror, a moral compass, and a reservoir of knowledge and resilience.

Edem (2023b, p. 90) supports this by submitting that, “the author’s lexical wealth and his proper usage facilitate meaning sharing, cohesion and textual quality of the novel.” The statement argues that when a writer uses a broad and varied vocabulary (lexical wealth) appropriately (proper usage, meaning not misfitting), this supports multiple functions: it allows the text to transmit meaning more richly, maintain internal connectivity (cohesion), and satisfy aesthetic or qualitative standards (textual quality). This masterful usage links vocabulary richness and skillful deployment directly to how well a text works as art and as a tool for communication.

General Comments

This study set out to undertake a stylistico-semantic analysis of selected poems from Eyoh Etim’s *Songs of Our Time* and Akachi Ezeigbo’s *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems*. Through the analysis of four poems from each collection, the paper has demonstrated how stylistic devices and semantic undertones serve as powerful instruments for communicating social critique, cultural commentary, and emotional truth. The findings reveal that both poets, though writing from different historical contexts, Etim from the perspective of political disillusionment and governance failure, and Ezeigbo from the current realities of a global pandemic, deploy style in ways that make meaning inseparable from form. Etim’s reliance on myth, aphorism, and satire enable him to expose cycles of corruption and failed leadership, as exemplified in the metaphor of the 'Abiku Child' that returns endlessly with empty promises. In contrast, Ezeigbo’s martial metaphors, bestiary imageries, and confinement conceits, capture the existential anxiety of a world perpetually under siege, while also affirming resilience and care, especially in her celebration of frontline workers.

Interestingly, the analysis has underscored what Leech and Short (2007) describes as the dual role of stylistics: the linguistic description of texts and the interpretation of their artistic functions. Both collections affirm that poetry is not ornamental; rather, it is an active instrument of social engagement. As Edem (2022, p. 50) observes in his study of *Virtual Chants*, “style is not an accident of literature but its very essence”, and the present study affirms this claim by showing how stylistic deviation, imagery, and pragmatic force give semantic depth to poetic discourse. The comparative insights also reveal that, across contexts of political corruption and pandemic crisis, Nigerian poetry

functions as a mirror of society and as a moral compass where both Eyoh Etim and Akachi Ezeigbo remind us that poetry is a site of memory, critique, and survival: a cultural form that not only names suffering but also gestures toward resilience, solidarity, and hope.

Conclusion

This study suggests among other things, three directions. First, there is a need for broader comparative stylistic studies of Nigerian poetry across generational lines, to capture shifts in linguistic experimentation. Second, the pragmastylistic analysis of digital poetic forms, such as what Edem (2022) suggested in “Fbterature”, should be extended to traditional print collections to see how oral traditions and online creativity intersect. Finally, there is room to examine the pedagogical value of stylistics in Nigerian universities, particularly in fostering critical reading skills among students of literature. This study has demonstrated that a stylistico-semantic approach reveals the aesthetic depth and social resonance of Nigerian poetry. Etim and Ezeigbo, though shaped by different crises, converge in showing that language, when crafted in poetic forms, has the power to critique, console, and inspire people towards attainment of national consciousness or ideals. It is like a two-edged sword, bringing out issues in phases.

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