

A Lexical-Semantic Study of Change in Energy and Climate Terminology in Niyi Osundare's *they too are the Earth* and *Earthwatch*

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ABSTRACT

In recent time, the rate at which scholars show interest in climate change and energy transition related discourse has been on increase especially in the aspect of lexical and semantic shifts, reflecting evolving societal, scientific, and political priorities. This study examines both the semantic and lexical dynamics of energy and climate-related terminologies in two of Niyi Osundare's poems: *They Too Are the Earth* and *Earthwatch*. From the lens of Halliday's transitivity framework, the study investigates how Osundare's lexical choices enhance the transformation of environmental and energy discourses over time, emphasizing humanity's relationship with nature and energy resources. It employs a qualitative lexical-semantic analysis, combining close reading of the poems with corpus linguistic methods. Significant devices are identified and analysed in line with their denotative and connotative meanings, considering their alignment with broader historical shifts in energy and climate narratives. Findings reveal that Osundare captures the interplay between destructive energy practices and the potential for sustainable alternatives. The poet tactically critiques humanity's exploitation of natural resources in *they too are the Earth* while emphasis is placed on ecological imbalance and the urgent need for corrective action in *Earthwatch*. The study also exemplifies Osundare's creative use of metaphor and imagery by linking scientific discourse with poetic expression and enabling a broader cultural resonance of issues in energy and climate. The study submits that Osundare's work not only reflects but also anticipates shifts in energy and climate discourses. This makes its poetic language to be relevant as a critical medium for reviewing ecological and energy concerns, advocating for sustainable coexistence with nature. This research contributes to the understanding of how literature demonstrates and shapes public awareness and consciousness on global environmental challenges.

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Introduction

The fields of literature, environmental discourse, and linguistic analysis presents a veritable platform through which how lexical and semantic choices frame ecological concerns can be explored. With the intense nature of the current global discussions around climate change and energy transitions, how these topics are exploited in literature means a lot for public perception and policy advocacy [1]. Poetry, as a highly figurative and emotional medium, is specially positioned to capture and identify with the evolving attitudes toward energy consumption and environmental stewardship. Niyi Osundare, a prolific literary icon, one of Africa's most celebrated eco-poets, employs his literary work to critique unsustainable human behaviors while vehemently routing for environmental harmony. In view of that, Osundare's poems, *Earthwatch* and *They Too Are the Earth*, are very rich texts for examining shifts in the language of energy and climate. Using Michael Halliday's Transitivity system, this work explores how Osundare's language encodes actions, actors, and processes related to climate and energy, highlighting and shaping historical and ideological transformations.

Recent research works, no doubt, have interrogated the role of transitivity analysis in uncovering the ideological underpinnings of environmental texts [2,3]. Despite that, there is still a paucity

of research applying this framework to literary texts by focusing on energy and climate change. This present study addresses this gap through the integration of Halliday's Transitivity theory with a lexical-semantic focus, providing a peculiar understanding of Osundare's environmental advocacy. It aims to contribute to the continuous expanding field of eco-linguistics, offer insights into how literary texts engage with global ecological challenges. By situating Osundare's work within the contemporary climate discourse, the research underscores the role of African literature in global sustainability debates.

Objectives of Study

- Examine how lexical choices Niyi Osundare's poetry reflect evolving energy and climate concerns,
- Investigate the processes, actors, and circumstances represented in *Earthwatch* and *They Too Are the Earth* using Halliday's Transitivity theory.
- Identify semantic patterns that showcase ideological stances on sustainability and environmental justice.

Literature Review

The unwavering connection of language, energy, and climate change has been increasingly explored across disciplines, not limited to eco-linguistics, systemic functional linguistics (SFL), and African literature. This research synthesizes relevant studies in these domains, identifies existing gaps, and equally situates the current study within the broader global scholarly discourse.

Eco-linguistics and Climate Change

Eco-linguistics examines and highlights the role of language in shaping ecological consciousness and influencing environmental behavior [1]. In this work, Stibbe explores the potential of narrative and metaphor in constructing ecological ideologies, emphasizing the importance of linguistic framing in mobilizing public action. Similarly, Halliday had earlier critiqued the anthropocentric nature of language [4]. This work calls for a systemic reconsideration and review of how environmental issues are represented. From the aspect of discourse analysis, Suhadi et al. examines the ideological framing of environmental discourse in media [2]. The work illustrates how language can perpetuate or challenge ecological narratives. No doubt that these studies highlight the linguistic dimensions of environmental discourse, yet, limited attention has been paid to the integration of literary texts into eco-linguistic analyses, most especially in the context of African poetry. The present study sets to address this gap by applying linguistic framework to Niyi Osundare's environmentally focused selected poets.

Transitivity in Literary Analysis

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly Halliday's Transitivity theory, provides a robust framework for analysing how actions, participants, and circumstances are represented in texts. Making submission on this, Wang demonstrates the utility of Transitivity analysis in uncovering ideologies in literary texts [3]. The research highlights its ability to reveal underlying power dynamics. Similarly, Eggins also interrogates how transitivity choices encode meaning, shaping readers' understanding of agency and responsibility in narratives [5]. Writing on the literature and environmental contexts, studies such as Zhao and Zhang explore transitivity patterns in climate change reports, showing how linguistic choices influence perceptions of accountability [6]. Those notwithstanding, research works incorporating Transitivity theory to African literary works remain limited, despite the rich ecological themes available in the region's poetry. The present work sets to reduce this gap by analysing Osundare's work, linking linguistic patterns to environmental ideologies using transitivity theory.

African Eco-Literature

African literature, especially poetry, has long been occupied with themes of nature, environmental degradation, and sustainability [7,8]. Poets, including Niyi Osundare use their work to critique exploitative practices while advocating for ecological harmony. In *They Too Are the Earth and Earthwatch*, Osundare's style of combining vivid imagery with didactic elements enhances the process of highlighting humanity's responsibility towards the environment. Closely related scholarly contributions such as Okuyade and Egya worked on eco-critical themes in African poetry [7,9]. Their papers demonstrate how writers challenge postcolonial resource exploitation and advocate for sustainable practices for the benefit of the larger society. Even with all that, there is still a dearth of linguistic analyses that focus on the lexical and semantic nuances of these texts. By focusing on Osundare's energy and climate-related terminology, the present study closes the gap between literary and linguistic approaches to African eco-literature.

Energy and Sustainability Narratives

Central and common theme in the recent global climate discourse remains the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Boussalis et al. analyse media framing of energy transitions [10]. Findings from the study reveal how lexical choices shape public

attitudes toward sustainability. The research work of Carvalho focuses how language of climate and energy are constructed in political discourse, emphasising the importance of language when it comes to driving policy [11].

The review of literature done so far in this work revealed that many studies have examined environmental themes in African literature and also applied transitivity analysis to texts. But few have combined these approaches to explore the linguistic representation of energy and climate change. The present study addresses this gap from the lens of Halliday's Transitivity theory as a framework to chosen poems. At the same time, it focuses on how processes, participants, and circumstances encode ecological ideologies by conducting a lexical-semantic analysis of energy and climate-related terms in Osundare's work, and tracing their alignment with global sustainability narratives.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored in Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with a special focus on the Transitivity System. As part of the ideational metafunction in SFL, Transitivity presents a useful framework for the analysis of how language reflects processes, participants, and circumstances in texts. It explores how experiences are linguistically structured, providing insights into the ideologies enshrined in textual representation [12]. Transitivity analysis entails the exploit of three basic entries as working tools. The first is Processes. This describes the types of actions or events that are being showcased, including material - actions/events, mental - thoughts/perceptions; relational descriptions/attributions, and verbal - speech/communication. The second entry is that of Participants. Here, the entities involved include actors, goals, and sensors. The third and the last is Circumstances which make available additional information about time, place, manner, or cause.

This framework is particularly appropriate for analysing Niyi Osundare's poetry. It allows for the unpacking of how linguistic choices reflect ecological ideologies. By examining these elements, this study sets expose how Osundare's poetic language critiques unsustainable practices and advocates for ecological balance.

Methodology

This work employs a qualitative approach that blends textual analysis with linguistic and semantic analysis, ensuring a comprehensive examination of Osundare's eco-poems *They Too Are the Earth and Earthwatch*. These poems were purposively selected for their thematic focus on environmental and energy issues. The analysis focuses on stanzas and lines that either explicitly or implicitly discuss energy, climate, and sustainability.

This study employs a two-pronged approach of Transitivity Analysis and Lexical-Semantic Analysis for its analytical framework. While the former facilitates the process of selecting and categorising processes, participants, and circumstances in the selected poems, analyse patterns of material processes to examine actions related to energy and climate, and equally explore relational and mental processes uncovering attitudes and ideological stances, the latter approach enhances how energy is extracted, and climate-related terms, and analysing their semantic and connotative meanings, and identifying patterns of metaphor and imagery, linking lexical choices to ecological themes. Conclusively, this methodology ensures a detailed and systematic exploration of how Osundare's linguistic choices encode and critiques certain ideologies surrounding energy and climate issues.

Analysis of they too are the Earth and Earthwatch Using Manual Transitivity and Lexical-Semantic Analysis

This section is devoted towards applying Halliday's Transitivity framework and lexical-semantic analysis to Niyi Osundare's They Too Are the Earth and Earthwatch. Selected excerpts from the poems are analysed with the aim of identify processes, participants, and circumstances. The focus of the analyses explored here revolves around how Osundare critiques environmental exploitation and at the same time advocates for sustainability focusing on energy and climate themes.

Analysis of they too are the Earth

The earth writhes under the steel claws of greed, her veins drained, her lungs choked by the black of profit.

Transitivity Analysis

Process Types

The term Writhe is a material process portrays the earth as an active participant suffering under exploitation. Similarly, Drained and choked are equally material processes reflecting destructive human actions toward natural resources.

Participants

The earth, as Actor is depicted as a victim of human greed while Steel claws of greed as instrument/agency symbolises industrial exploitation through human activities.

Circumstances

Under the steel claws of greed" reflects circumstance of cause and it vividly links destruction to human avarice.

Lexical-Semantic Observations:

As a metaphor, steel claws of greed personifies industrial machinery as predatory, highlighting the violent nature of energy extraction. Equally, terms such as veins and lungs create an organic analogy. As such, equating the earth's exploitation to the destruction of a living organism. Flames devour forests, Coal's blackened breath clouds the sun.

Transitivity Analysis

Process Types

The lexical item Devour is a material process that depicts fire as a destructive force. Equally, another material process Clouds demonstrates pollution's impact on natural systems.

Participants

Flames represent actor, it symbolises unrestrained resource consumption. Another actor is reflected in Coal's blackened breath and it represents fossil fuel emissions.

Circumstances

Clouds the sun is a circumstance of effect that highlights environmental degradation.

Lexical-Semantic Observations

The phrase Coal's blackened breath glaringly represents the king of pollution that human environment experience from fossil fuels. The idea of an uncontrollable energy consumption is suggested in the term Devour, critiquing a state of unsustainable energy practices.

Analysis of Earthwatch

Green dreams shrivel in the fumes of greed, The rivers groan under oil's poison.

Transitivity Analysis

Process Types

The lexical item Shrivel stands for the material process that illustrates the destruction of hope for sustainability. In related manner, Groan is a behavioral process which personifies rivers as victims.

Participants

Green dreams as a goal symbolises aspirations for ecological harmony while Rivers, actor, represents the side suffering the consequences of oil pollution.

Circumstances

Under oil's poison is a circumstance of cause that explicitly links degradation to various human industrial activities.

Lexical-Semantic Observations:

The use of the metaphor fumes of greed parallels industrial pollution with moral corruption in the society while green dreams reflect the fragile nature of ecological aspirations amid exploitation. The wind limps under the burden of smog, Fields shrink, shadows of towers loom.

Transitivity Analysis

Process Types

The term Limp is a behavioral process that personifies the wind as weakened by pollution. Similarly, Shrink is lexicon of Material process which describes the loss of fertile land.

Participants

The wind as an Actor is impacted by intensive human industrial activities. Consequently, Fields personifies goal, representing serious decline in agricultural activities.

Circumstances

Under the burden of smog signifies circumstance of cause and it is vividly linking harm to air pollution.

Lexical-Semantic Observations

The imagery of shadows of towers symbolises industrial dominance over natural landscapes.

In a way, the use of Limping wind evokes a sense of environmental fragility that emphasises the toll of unsustainable energy practices.

Discussion

Representation of Exploitation

The distribution of the lexical items in both poems foregrounds the destructive impact of energy practices, such as deforestation Flames devour forests and fossil fuel pollution Coal's blackened breath. These material processes demonstrate active harm caused by human actions, often framed through metaphors of violence.

Agency and Responsibility

The poet, Osundare, constantly portrays nature as an actor that is going through persecution, and suffering, emphasising its vulnerability The earth writhes, Rivers groan. Human actors are indirectly implicated with the use of metaphorical instruments like steel claws of greed, suggesting systemic, rather than individual, culpability.

Semantic Shifts for Sustainability

Lexical items such as green dreams and renewal are suggesting the idea of a counter-narrative of hope and the potential for ecological harmony. In contrast, their fragility within the poems underscores

the serious tasks of achieving sustainability while passing through exploitation.

Environmental Ideologies

Osundare's tactical blend of vivid imagery and semantic choices in these poems practically enhances his successful critique of the unsustainable energy practices while advocating for a more balanced coexistence with nature. The poet's linguistic patterns go in line with the global calls for focus on renewable energy transitions and ecological justice. This analysis, in a way, has demonstrated how Osundare's poetic language encodes ecological ideologies, blending critique and advocacy [13,14].

Conclusion

This study examined the lexical-semantic and transitivity patterns in Niyi Osundare's *They Too Are the Earth and Earthwatch*. It focuses on how the poet linguistically reflects energy and climate change. From the lens of Halliday's Transitivity framework, the analysis revealed that the poet is pervasive in his use of material processes to critique exploitative energy practices and expose environmental degradation. By deploying metaphors such as steel claws of greed and Coal's blackened breath, this work not only vividly demonstrates unsustainable industrial activities but also aligns with global discourses on the environmental impacts of fossil fuels.

Thus, how Osundare's personifies nature as active but beleaguered in instances as the earth writhing or wind limping under smog foregrounds the agency of natural elements, and at the same time critiquing human-driven destruction. Osundare's constant juxtaposition of the ideologies of destruction and renewal in his work exemplifies the poet's ecological ideology, thereby rooting for a transition to sustainability. Furthermore, the lexical analysis highlighted Osundare's stylistic use of semantic shifts to integrate local and global environmental concerns, emphasising the urgency of making serious moves towards preserving the planet for future generations.

In a nutshell, through the integration of eco-linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, and African eco-literature, this study fills a critical gap in the analysis of African poetry. It has equally demonstrated how literary texts can serve as powerful tools in the discourse of environmental advocacy, and also linking local ecological issues with global energy and climate concerns. Future research could expand this analysis to other African poets or rather employ quantitative methods to explore broader lexical patterns across Osundare's work.

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