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A COMPARATIVE LINGUISTIC STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF ALIYU KAMAL'S *"PORTRAIT OF A PATRON*, AND *WOMEN WITHOUT BORDERS"* AND ZAYNAB ALKALI'S *"THE DESCENDANTS* AND *THE STILL BORN"*

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comparative linguistic stylistic analysis of selected works by Aliyu Kamal and Zaynab Alkali, focusing on sentence structure, sentence length, and diction in The Stillborn, The Descendants, Portrait of a Patron, and Women Without Borders. The study is grounded in Halliday's systemic functional grammar and informed by the stylistic framework of Leech and Short, adopting a qualitative, text-based analytical approach. Findings reveal that both writers used compound and complex sentence structures strategically, though with distinct stylistic orientations. Alkali demonstrates a balanced use of simple, compound, and complex sentences to enhance narrative clarity and emotional engagement. In contrast, Kamal exhibits a preference for syntactically complex and lexically dense constructions, particularly in *Portrait of a Patron*, reflecting an analytical and ideologically driven style, while adopting simpler, conversational structures in *Women Without Borders.* The study concludes that sentence structure is a key stylistic resource in shaping meaning, tone, and interpretation in literary texts and highlights the pedagogical relevance of linguistic stylistics in enhancing readers' interpretive competence. The implication of this study is that variation in sentence structure across texts provides valuable insights for

Keywords: linguistic stylistics; sentence structure; syntactic variation; systemic functional grammar; comparative analysis

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applied comparative linguistics by enhancing the understanding of syntactic patterning, stylistic differentiation, and discourse organization. It further contributes to linguistic analysis by demonstrating how structural choices reflect different communicative styles, which can be applied in language description, contrastive stylistics, and the teaching of English syntax in second-language contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Stylistic analysis provides a systematic framework for examining how linguistic choices contribute to meaning in discourse. Leech and Short (2007) propose that stylistic analysis involves the systematic examination of linguistic features such as lexical choice, grammatical structure, figures of speech, and cohesion, all of which interact to produce textual meaning. Similarly, Crystal and Davy (1969) emphasize that stylistic analysis operates across multiple levels of language, incorporating both linguistic description and contextual factors. Recent studies have further highlighted how linguistic features function as cues in discourse processing and meaning construction in contemporary stylistics (Crible et al., 2021; Gavins et al., 2021).

Within this framework, linguistic stylistics focuses on grammatical and syntactic structures as key resources for meaning-making. Sentence structure is particularly significant because it organizes information and influences interpretation. Chomsky (1965) argues that language is generative, enabling the production of an infinite number of sentences from a finite set of rules, thereby highlighting the centrality of syntactic variation in linguistic analysis. Contemporary linguistic research further emphasizes that syntactic variation and complexity are central to discourse organization and informational density in texts (Biber & Gray, 2016; Xu & Li, 2021).

Stylistics, as a discipline, examines linguistic choices and their communicative effects in texts. Simpson (2004) describes stylistics as the study of style in language use, focusing on how linguistic choices in texts generate meaning and interpretive effects. Similarly, stylistic theory emphasizes that language users make systematic selections from available linguistic resources in order to achieve specific communicative purposes (Leech & Short, 2007; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Recent stylistic scholarship reinforces this position by demonstrating how linguistic choices function to construct meaning, identity, and interactional effects in discourse (Simpson, 2004; Jeffries & McIntyre, 2014). These perspectives highlight the role of linguistic choice and variation in stylistic interpretation.

Despite extensive research in stylistics, there remains limited comparative linguistic analysis of sentence structure in Nigerian prose fiction, particularly in the works of Aliyu Kamal and Zaynab Alkali. This study addresses this gap by examining compound and complex sentence structures in *The Stillborn, The Descendants, Portrait of a Patron,* and *Women Without Borders.* By adopting a comparative linguistic approach, the study

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contributes to applied linguistics through the analysis of syntactic variation and stylistic differentiation across texts.

The study adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), which views language as a social semiotic system where grammatical choices encode ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. This framework enables an analysis of how sentence structure functions as a resource for meaning in context. Recent applications of Systemic Functional Grammar have further demonstrated its effectiveness in analyzing discourse organization and stylistic variation across different genres and contexts (Martin & Rose, 2021; Thompson et al., 2019).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the increasing application of stylistic analysis in literary and linguistic studies, there remains limited attention to the systematic examination of sentence structure as a stylistic resource in Nigerian prose fiction. While existing studies have largely focused on thematic interpretation and general narrative techniques, insufficient emphasis has been placed on how specific grammatical features particularly compound and complex sentence structures function in constructing meaning and guiding reader interpretation.

Furthermore, although the works of Aliyu Kamal and Zaynab Alkali have attracted critical attention, there is a clear gap in comparative linguistic stylistic studies that foreground syntactic variation across their texts. This lack of focused syntactic comparison limits a deeper understanding of how meaning is linguistically encoded through sentence construction and how stylistic choices differ or converge between authors.

This study therefore addresses this gap by conducting a comparative linguistic stylistic analysis of selected texts, with particular emphasis on compound and complex sentence structures, sentence length, and diction as key stylistic markers.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to conduct a comparative linguistic stylistic analysis of selected works by Aliyu Kamal and Zaynab Alkali, with particular focus on how sentence structure functions as a stylistic resource in meaning construction.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the use of compound and complex sentence structures in the selected texts.
2. Identify and describe the structural patterns of sentences employed by both authors.
3. Analyze variations in sentence length and diction as stylistic features.

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4. Compare the syntactic and stylistic tendencies of the two authors.
5. Evaluate how these linguistic features contribute to meaning construction and interpretive clarity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do the selected authors employ compound and complex sentence structures in their texts?
2. What are the dominant structural patterns of these sentence types in the selected works?
3. How do sentence length and diction function as stylistic devices in the texts?
4. What similarities and differences exist in the syntactic choices of the authors?
5. How do these linguistic features contribute to meaning and communicative effectiveness?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to stylistics and applied comparative linguistics by providing a focused analysis of sentence structure as a stylistic resource in Nigerian prose fiction. By examining how compound and complex sentence constructions operate in discourse, the study enhances understanding of the relationship between grammatical form and meaning.

The study is significant to scholars and students of English language and linguistics as it demonstrates the practical application of Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) in textual analysis. It also strengthens awareness of syntactic variation as a key factor in stylistic interpretation.

Furthermore, the study has pedagogical implications for second-language learning, as it can support learners in developing sensitivity to sentence structure, thereby improving reading comprehension, grammatical competence, and writing proficiency.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

This study focuses on a linguistic stylistic analysis of sentence structure in selected prose fiction texts. It specifically examines compound and complex sentence constructions, sentence length, and diction in *Women Without Borders, Portrait of a Patron, The Descendants,* and *The Stillborn.*

The analysis is restricted to the grammatical (syntactic) level of linguistic description, with emphasis on sentence structure as a stylistic resource for meaning construction. Other linguistic levels of analysis, including phonological and graphological features, are excluded from the study.

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Furthermore, the research is limited to the selected texts. The focus is therefore strictly on selected samples suitable for comparative linguistic stylistic analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), developed by Halliday. SFG conceptualizes language as a social semiotic system in which grammatical choices are functionally motivated and shaped by communicative context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Halliday (2014) further emphasizes that language is fundamentally a resource for meaning-making rather than a set of fixed structural rules.

Within SFG, language is organized around three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction expresses experience and events, the interpersonal metafunction encodes social relations and interaction, while the textual metafunction organizes linguistic elements into coherent and meaningful discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Of these metafunctions, the textual metafunction is most relevant to this study, as it accounts for how information is structured and sequenced within sentences and larger textual units. Sentence structure, therefore, is not merely a formal syntactic arrangement but a functional resource for organizing meaning in discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In this study, Systemic Functional Grammar provides the analytical lens for examining how compound and complex sentence structures operate as stylistic resources in the selected texts. It enables a functional interpretation of syntactic variation, showing how grammatical patterns contribute to meaning construction, stylistic variation, and communicative effectiveness in the works of Aliyu Kamal and Zaynab Alkali.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stylistics investigates the relationship between linguistic form and literary meaning. Leech and Short (2007) argue that linguistic features such as syntax, lexis, and cohesion are essential for interpreting texts. Crystal and Davy (1969) similarly propose that stylistic analysis operates across multiple linguistic levels, with grammar playing a central role in meaning construction. Recent corpus-based discourse and stylistic studies demonstrate that recurrent linguistic patterns in texts function as systematic resources for meaning construction and interpretation in discourse (Baker, 2020; Mahlberg, 2021).

Sentence structure is a key analytical unit in stylistics because it determines how information is packaged and interpreted. Variations between simple, compound, and complex sentences reflect stylistic choices that shape textual meaning. From a generative perspective, Chomsky (1965) explains that linguistic creativity arises from rule-governed syntactic systems, making sentence variation a productive site of analysis. Recent studies

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on linguistic variation show that differences in sentence structure are closely linked to genre distinctions and communicative purposes in written discourse, where writers adjust syntactic choices to suit context and meaning (Biber et al., 1999; Biber & Gray, 2016).

Sentence length and complexity also influence readability and discourse organization. Longer sentences often encode elaboration and abstraction, while shorter sentences enhance clarity and immediacy. These structural choices function as stylistic markers of authorial identity. Sentence length variation is widely recognized as a stylistic feature associated with register differences, readability, and discourse complexity in written texts (Biber et al., 1999; Biber & Gray, 2016; Leech & Short, 2007).

Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) provides the theoretical basis for this study. It conceptualizes language as a meaning-making system shaped by context, where grammatical structures realize ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Recent systemic functional linguistic studies emphasize that grammatical choices are central to the construction of meaning and the organization of discourse in texts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson et al., 2019).

Although stylistic studies have explored literary language extensively, there is still a lack of comparative syntactic analysis focusing on Nigerian prose fiction. This gap is particularly evident in studies of Kamal and Alkali, whose works have not been sufficiently examined from a sentence-structure-based linguistic perspective. Studies in African linguistics and discourse analysis show growing interest in language use in Nigerian texts, particularly in relation to discourse patterns, ideology, and sociolinguistic variation (Taiwo, 2007; Adegoju, 2014). However, comparative syntactic studies of prose fiction remain relatively limited within stylistic research traditions, especially in relation to detailed sentence-level analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive and analytical approach to examine linguistic features in selected literary texts. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on the interpretation of stylistic and syntactic patterns within their contextual usage. Stylistic analysis, as described by Leech and Short (2007), involves the systematic description and interpretation of linguistic choices in texts, making it suitable for analyzing sentence structure as a stylistic resource.

DATA SOURCES

The data for this study are drawn from four primary texts: *Women Without Borders* and *Portrait of a Patron by Aliyu Kamal,* and *The Descendants* and *The Stillborn* by Zaynab Alkali. These texts were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study's focus on sentence structure and stylistic variation.

The study relies on primary textual data obtained from close reading of the selected works. Relevant excerpts containing compound and complex sentence structures were identified, extracted, and subjected to syntactic analysis. Secondary sources, including scholarly books and journal articles, were consulted to support the theoretical and analytical framework of the study.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting textual excerpts from the primary texts. This involved the deliberate identification of sentences exhibiting compound and complex structures relevant to the research objectives. The selection was guided by linguistic criteria, particularly syntactic complexity, sentence length, and their functional role in meaning construction within the texts.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis is grounded in the stylistic model proposed by Leech and Short (2007), particularly their classification of linguistic features at the grammatical level. Within this framework, sentence structure is treated as a central stylistic indicator, providing insight into an author's syntactic and communicative choices.

In addition, the study adopts Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), as its theoretical foundation. This framework enables the analysis of sentence structures in relation to their functional roles in meaning-making, with particular emphasis on the textual metafunction, which accounts for how information is organized and sequenced in discourse.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data are analysed using a qualitative stylistic approach. Extracted sentences from the selected texts are examined based on the sentence structure (compound and complex constructions), sentence length, diction and lexical choice. Each selected sentence is subjected to syntactic and functional analysis to determine its structural composition and stylistic role. The analysis focuses on how these linguistic features contribute to clarity, emphasis, narrative progression, and meaning construction in the texts.

Furthermore, a comparative analytical procedure is used to identify similarities and differences in the stylistic choices of the two authors. This involves a systematic contrast of sentence structures across the selected texts in order to reveal patterns of stylistic convergence and divergence.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

To ensure reliability, the analysis is guided by consistent linguistic criteria derived from Leech and Short (2007) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). This ensures uniformity in the identification and classification of linguistic features across the dataset.

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Validity is enhanced through the use of textual evidence from the primary sources, ensuring that all interpretations are grounded in verifiable linguistic data rather than subjective inference. The integration of Systemic Functional Grammar further strengthens the analytical validity by providing a structured and theory-driven basis for interpretation.

Analytical Approach

This section presents a comparative linguistic stylistic analysis of selected excerpts from Aliyu Kamal and Zaynab Alkali. The analysis focuses on sentence structure (simple, compound, and complex), sentence length, and diction as key stylistic markers.

The discussion is guided by the grammatical framework of Leech and Short (2007) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Particular attention is given to how syntactic choices function as stylistic resources in meaning construction and narrative organization.

SIMPLE SENTENCE STRUCTURES

Simple sentence structures are widely used in both authors' texts to present information in a direct and accessible manner. Simple clauses typically encode a single process and function as basic units of experiential meaning in discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Biber et al., 1999).

In Alkali's *The Stillborn*, simple declarative sentences establish basic narrative information, as in:

- *"Baba is the father of Awa, Sule and Li."*
- *"The three children live with their parents."*

These constructions foreground clarity and ensure immediate comprehension of character relationships.

Similarly, in *The Descendants*, simple structures are often expanded through adjectival modification:

- *"She looked much fresher, much prettier, and a little happier than before."*
  Although structurally simple, such modification enhances descriptive detail without increasing syntactic complexity (Quirk et al., 1985).
  In Kamal's *Women Without Borders*, simple sentences are frequently used in dialogue:
- *"I loved Maje, I still do. We never quarrel."*
  These short structures reflect features of spoken discourse and contribute to immediacy and interpersonal engagement (Biber et al., 1999).

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Functionally, simple sentences in both authors enhance clarity and accessibility, foreground key information and support ideational meaning construction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014)

COMPOUND SENTENCE STRUCTURES

Compound sentences connect related ideas through coordination, linking clauses of equal grammatical status and contributing to cohesion and logical progression in discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Biber et al., 1999).

In *The Stillborn,* coordination is used to express sequential or contrasting events:

- "*The couple quarrels at night, and the woman unleashes her tension on the child the next day.*"

  Here, the coordinator *and* signals a sequential relationship.

  Contrastive coordination is also evident:
- "*She thought of talking to Awa, but quickly dismissed the idea.*"

  The conjunction *but* signals indicate contrast between intention and action (Quirk et al., 1985).

  In Kamal's *Portrait of a Patron*, coordination often appears within dense descriptive phrases:
- "*earning profits from bank loans or paying interest*"
- "*landed property and the risky transport system*"

  These structures present alternatives and expand informational content (Biber et al., 1999).

Overall, compound sentences establish logical relations and contribute to the organization of meaning in discourse through clause coordination (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Leech & Short, 2007).

COMPLEX SENTENCE STRUCTURES

Complex sentences represent a significant stylistic feature in Kamal's *Portrait of a Patron*, s syntactic complexity is associated with higher informational density and structural elaboration in written discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Biber et al., 1999). In systemic functional linguistics, such complexity is linked to clause combining and the expansion of ideational meaning, while corpus-based studies show that written registers typically exhibit greater structural embedding and lexical density than spoken forms.

In Alkali's texts, complex sentences often serve descriptive and clarifying functions:

- "*People whose relatives had gone to the prayer meeting that morning…*"

  Relative clauses refine meaning and enhance specificity.

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In *The Descendants*, complex structures are also used to extend meaning through clause embedding, particularly in discussions of education and social development, where additional experiential information is integrated into a single grammatical unit.

In contrast, Kamal's *Portrait of a Patron* shows higher syntactic density in the sampled excerpts, a feature commonly associated with formal written registers characterized by greater structural complexity and lexical density (Biber et al., 1999).

- *"For a man who didn't believe in earning profits from bank loans… he had taken the decision…"*

This structure involves multiple levels of embedding, reflecting abstraction and ideological depth.

Complex sentences function to encode layered meanings, support ideological discourse and organize hierarchical information (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014)

SENTENCE LENGTH VARIATION

Sentence length is a significant stylistic differentiator between authors. Variations in sentence length influence readability, pacing, and textual emphasis in discourse. Long, multi-clause sentences are often associated with syntactic density and analytical elaboration, while shorter sentences enhance clarity and immediacy in communication (Simpson, 2004; Wales, 2014).

In relation to narrative prose, Simpson (2004) notes that stylistic variation in sentence structure, including length and complexity, contributes to the overall interpretation of meaning and tone in texts. Similarly, Wales (2014) explains that sentence length is a key stylistic resource that writers manipulate to achieve effects such as emphasis, cohesion, and reader engagement. Alkali uses a balance of short and medium-length sentences to maintain narrative clarity and emotional flow. Kamal, however, frequently employs longer sentences with multiple embeddings, particularly in *Portrait of a Patron,* creating a dense analytical style.

In *Women Without Borders,* shorter sentences dominate dialogue, producing a conversational tone. Thus, sentence length contributes to readability, tone variation and stylistic identity

DICTION AND LEXICAL STYLE

Diction differs notably across the texts. Alkali uses simple, descriptive, and accessible lexical choices that enhance emotional engagement. Kamal, by contrast, employs formal and ideologically loaded diction such as obnoxious clinging to usury and purity ethic. This

reflects a more analytical and evaluative discourse style. Lexical choice is widely recognized as a central component of stylistic analysis because it reflects how writers construct meaning, stance, and perspective through language selection (Carter, 2004; Fowler, 1996). In addition, lexical variation contributes to the ideological positioning of texts, shaping how readers interpret social and moral meanings embedded in discourse (Fairclough, 1995).

In *Women Without Borders*, diction becomes conversational, reflecting everyday speech patterns. Diction therefore contributes to tone formation, ideological positioning and stylistic differentiation.

COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals clear stylistic differences and similarities in the use of sentence structure, sentence length, and diction in the works of Aliyu Kamal and Zaynab Alkali.

Both authors use simple, compound, and complex sentence structures; however, their frequency and functional deployment differ. Alkali demonstrates a balanced use of sentence types, combining simplicity and moderate complexity to achieve clarity and emotional engagement. Her syntactic choices support a narrative-driven style that prioritizes accessibility and coherence.

In contrast, Kamal exhibits a stronger preference for syntactic complexity, particularly in *Portrait of a Patron*, where sentences are often longer and more densely structured. These constructions reflect an analytical and ideologically oriented style. However, his use of shorter and simpler sentences in *Women Without Borders* indicates stylistic flexibility and sensitivity to discourse context.

Compound sentence structures function differently across the texts. In Alkali's works, they primarily support narrative continuity and logical progression, while in Kamal's texts, they are frequently integrated into more complex syntactic patterns, contributing to semantic expansion and abstraction.

The most significant divergence lies in the use of complex sentences. Alkali employs them in a controlled manner to elaborate meaning while maintaining clarity, whereas Kamal uses them extensively to encode layered and abstract meanings. From a systemic functional perspective, this reflects differing emphases in meaning-making: Alkali balances ideational and textual functions, while Kamal foregrounds ideational complexity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Differences in sentence length and diction further reinforce these stylistic orientations. Alkali's relatively shorter and clearer constructions enhance readability, whereas Kamal's longer and more lexically dense sentences contribute to a more formal and analytical tone.

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Overall, the findings indicate that sentence structure functions as a key stylistic resource through which both authors construct meaning, organize discourse, and shape reader interpretation.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the role of sentence structure, sentence length, and diction in shaping stylistic expression in selected works by Aliyu Kamal and Zaynab Alkali. The findings demonstrate that while both authors utilize similar grammatical resources, their stylistic preferences differ significantly.

Alkali's style is characterized by structural balance, clarity, and accessibility, supporting narrative engagement and emotional expression. Kamal's style, particularly in *Portrait of a Patron,* is marked by syntactic complexity, lexical density, and ideological depth, reflecting a more analytical orientation.

The study confirms that sentence structure is not merely a formal grammatical feature but a functional resource for meaning-making. Through the application of systemic functional grammar, it is evident that syntactic choices are closely linked to communicative purposes and stylistic effects.

From an applied comparative linguistics perspective, the study highlights the importance of analyzing syntactic variation as a means of understanding stylistic differentiation across texts.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The findings of this study have implications for applied linguistics, particularly in the areas of stylistics, discourse analysis, and language pedagogy. The analysis demonstrates that variation in sentence structure provides insight into how meaning is constructed and organized in texts. This has relevance for the teaching of English syntax, as it highlights the functional role of different sentence types in communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future studies may explore additional stylistic features such as cohesion, metaphor, and discourse organization. Expanding the scope to include a wider range of texts would also enhance comparative analysis. Further research may also investigate the pedagogical applications of stylistic analysis in second language learning contexts.

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