

# Resourcefulness of Figurative Language in Selected Essay Discourses of Niyi Osundare and Ray Ekpu

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## Abstract

'Figurative language,' a potent resource indispensable to all modes of discourse, is one of the stylistic devices with which creative writers articulate more than they literary mean. This study seeks to account for the artistic utilisation of figurative language as ideological tool for socio-political agitation in selected essay discourses of Niyi Osundare and Ray Ekpu. The objectives of the study include: to identify the predominant figurative tropes used in the essay texts; uncover the role of figurative language in encoding textual messages; and determine how figurative language has been used by Osundare and Ekpu to reflect the socio-political realities in their society. A total of eighteen essays were sampled, 9 each from Osundare's and Ekpu's publications in *Newswatch*. The twenty-four extracts examined through M.A.K Halliday's metafunction of language reveals that similes serve to derive explicitness and broaden cognitive range; metaphors function to animate texts and transfer meaning; and personification aids to establish mood and raise essence of discourse subjects. Osundare and Ekpu employ these figurative tropes in relating intricate and abstracts ideas, and constructing imagery in order to enhance the comprehension of specific concepts. The study submits that the expressive power of language resides largely in this stylistic device which forms the cornerstone of the beauty of literary language.

**Keywords:** Essay Discourse, Figurative Language, Niyi Osundare, Ray Ekpu, Socio-political issues

## 1. Introduction

Language is one way that ideologies are created, sustained and opposed (Baker & Ellece, 2011: 57). It forms the bedrock on which most of the social practices in the world operate (Bloor & Bloor, 2007: 5). It is undeniably the means by which meaning is encoded in literature. The language of literature is configured in an artistic way, employing figurative language (Ogbulogo, 2005: 73). Figurative language implies the use of illustrative words or expressions to convey a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation. Leech (1969: 147) defines it as the

“rejection of an orthodox, but unacceptable interpretation and the discovery of an unorthodox, figurative interpretation”. Also, Wales (2011: 160) says it is a kind of language that “describes a very common type of extension of meaning for a word resulting to polysemy or multiple meaning”. Following Platt (1977) as cited in Ogbulogo (2005: 74), the meaning conveyed by figurative language “departs from the linguistic norms of everyday language in some ways either semantically or syntactically”. The crucial point to note from the afore-stated definitions and claims is that, figurative language is an obvious deviation from the conventional meaning or interpretation of words, and it represents the mainspring of the beauty of literary language.

To account for the significance of figurative language, Abrams (2009: 118) observes that it is integral to the functioning of language and indispensable to all modes of discourse. Yeibo (2012: 180) says it “serves both functional and artistic purposes..., acts as semantic signifiers in texts, and also helps the literary artist in achieving beauty in text”. Murthy (2007: 539) affirms that it is widely and efficiently deployed in literary discourse to “express ideas and feelings in an impressive manner”. From the foregoing comments, it is axiomatic that figurative language is an exceptional communication device that can be utilised to intensify all messages. It helps to relate intricate and abstracts ideas; constructs imagery in order to enhance the comprehension of specific concepts, and give force to words or expressions by using distinct emotional, visual and sensory connections.

Considering the significance of figurative language to all modes of discourse, the present study explores its artistic utilisation in selected essay discourses of Niyi Osundare and Ray Ekpu. These essays, particular those of Osundare, have been chosen for investigation because not much systematic study has been done on them; unlike his well-research poetry, plays, autobiographies and interviews that showcase his prowess as a writer and commitment to national issues.

## **2. Ideology and the Socio-politics of Osundare’s and Ekpu’s Essays**

Nigeria’s socio-political issues are thematic preoccupations that have significantly populated Nigerian literature over time. These socio-political concerns have endangered the country and frustrated her efforts at attaining speedy development. For this reason, literature across the various genres has been deployed in addressing these national issues with a view to spreading awareness and proffering solution to them. Writers such as, Niyi Osundare and Ray Ekpu are

two among the many writers in Nigeria whose works reflect these socio-political problems. Their interest in Nigeria socio-political issues is influenced by their concern for humanity. Hence, both writers see the essay genre as a medium to seek justice for the oppressed and condemn all forms of exploitation, domination, alienation, and inefficiency. Finally, they view peaceful protest as a powerful instrument for revolutionary transformation while campaigning for equality between all humans.

One of the strong appeals of the artistic productions of Osundare and Ekpu hinges on their exploitation of the power of creativity to expose the Nigerian environment of degeneracy. Though both writers discuss issues that are germane to the political formulation of the country differently; their ability to weave these national issues into their essays lies in their innovative use of language. To explore the innovative aspect of their language use, the present study, therefore, investigates the use of figurative language as ideological tool for socio-political agitation in their essay discourses. It is our intention in this article to demonstrate how this stylistic device has been effectively utilised to uncover both writers' experience of socio-political situation in Nigeria. We also plan to examine the role of figurative language in encoding the socio-political contents of the essays and the desired effect(s) it creates in the readers.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, particularly the 'metafunctions' of language as the theoretical model because it views language as a semantic system for constructing meaning. Every language user, within this model, is offered a variety of options which are both syntactic and semantic. The circumstance within which these options are assembled comprises three main functions (ideational, interpersonal and textual) which language is said to realise (Finch, 2002: 93; Clark, 2007: 146).

The ideational function refers to the use language to represent or conceptualise all aspects of human experience (Halliday, 2014: 30). It is realised by means of configurations of participants, processes and circumstances in the linguistic system known as 'transitivity' (Norgaard, Busse & Montoro, 2010: 99). This function of language accentuates language as a central tool of "thought, a symbolic code, with which we represent the world ourselves" (Finch, 2002: 93).

The interpersonal function refers to the use of language to enact our personal and social relationships with others (Halliday, 2014: 30). It is connected to the associations that are established between interlocutors in communication, and analysed mainly in terms of ‘mood’ and ‘modality’ (Norgaard, Busse & Montoro, 2010: 101). This component of the meta function stresses language as “an instrument of transaction by which we represent ourselves to others” (Finch, 2002: 93).

The textual function, particularly relevant to this investigation, is concerned with the use of language to build up sequences of discourse, organising the discursive flow, and creating cohesion and continuity as it moves along (Halliday, 2014: 31). The two main resources for the creation of textual meaning are: ‘Theme’ and ‘cohesion’ (Norgaard, Busse & Montoro, 2010, p.161). According to Halliday (2014: 89), ‘theme’ is defined as the “element which serves as the point of departure of the message”. Cohesion, on the other hand, describes the relation of meanings that exist within a text. It is introduced by the use of lexical and grammatical items. The lexical items include, lexical relations, lexical incorporations, figurative language, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, etc. Conversely, the grammatical items include reiteration, reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, identification, etc. These lexico-grammatical features serve as means through which textual messages are tied and encoded in a text.

#### 4. Research Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive qualitative research method. Essays that had ample use of figurative language were purposively selected based on their thematic concerns and relevance to the subject of the investigation. A total of eighteen essays were sampled, nine each from Osundare’s *Dialogue with My Country* and from Ekpu’s essays in *Newswatch* as captured below.

S/n	Osundare’s Essays	Ekpu’s Essays
1	“Parable from Koma” (PKF, 1986)	“Leadership: the flock or the fleece” (LTFOTF, 2010)
2	“Nigeria Image Problem” (NIP, 1995)	“A Time for Peace” (ATFP, 1994)
3	“The Real Gains of SAP” (TRGOS, 1989)	“We, the Untitled” (WTU, 1985)
4	“Tears for my Country” (TFMC, 2002)	“Corruption” (2001)
5	“Not Mess Transit” (NMT, 1988)	“Dreams, Shattered Dream” (DSD, 1993)
6	“The Untouchable” (TU, 1999)	“On Eve of Passover” (1993)

7	“Abominations” (A, 1996)	“A Dialogue with the Future” (ADWTF, 1986)
8	“Scars of the Season 11” (SOTS11, 1986)	“Day After the Party” (DATP, 1987)
9	“Murderers, be not Proud” (MBNP, 1986)	“A Nations Questions” (1992)

The study employed M.A.K Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar, particularly the metafunctions of language. The choice of this model is hinged on the fact that it is flexible and very embracing. Also, it relates language form to function and provides for how language is used in social contexts to achieve particular goals. To carry out the analysis, the essays were thoroughly read in order to identify the figurative expressions used. The figurative expressions identified were subjected to content analysis in order to determine how they have been used in reflecting the socio-political realities of Nigeria.

### **5. Contextualisation of the Selected Essays**

The section reviews the contents of the selected essays. Osundare’s “Parable from Koma” (1986) reveals the nightmares of rural Nigerians. “Scars of the Season 11” (1986) laments the inadequate provision of equipment in most of Nigeria’s teaching hospitals. “The Real Gain of SAP” (1989) censures government’s harsh economic policy and the inexplicable hardship this has had on the masses. “Nigeria Image Problem” (1995) captures government’s muzzling of the press, harassing of journalists and perpetrating of electoral fraud. “The Untouchable” (1999) hits at Nigeria politicians and public office holders who extort the nation’s treasury and undermine the nation’s constitution. “Not Mess Transit” (1988) reflects Nigeria’s culture of replacement rather than maintenance, and criticise government for using this avenue to embezzle the nation’s treasury. “Tears for my Country” (2002) focuses on the issues of hunger and deprivation, the poor educational system, and the dysfunctional social and political order in Nigeria. “Murders, be not Proud” (1986) relates the injustice done to the press during the military era. “Abomination” (1996) recounts the judicial murder of some Nigerian journalists and laments the annulment of Nigeria’s 1993 general election.

Ekpu’s “We, the Untitled” (1985) criticizes politicians for replacing the nation’s cultural values with the mad rush for titles. “Leadership: the Flock or the Fleece” (2010) discusses the subject of leadership and attribute the nation’s problems to bad leadership. “A Time for Peace” (1994) describes the unrest situation in Nigeria owing to the various crises it has witnessed.

“Corruption” (2001) discusses the moral decadence which has permeated all facets of the country. “On Eve of the Passover” (1993) depicts Nigeria’s problem of electoral fraud and intimidation of the masses regarding their votes. “Dreams, Shattered Dreams” (1993) captures some of the factors that have impeded the realisation of the nation’s dreams conceived at independence. “A Dialogue with the Future” (1985) criticizes government’s lack of interest in quality education which is meant to provide a better future for the youths. “Day after the Party” (1987) chronicles Nigeria’s history and attributes the nation’s current travails to the waywardness of Nigeria’s politicians and the inability of government to manage the nation’s resources. The next section delves into the analysis.

## **6. Textual Analysis and Discussion**

This section explores the artistic utilisation of figurative tropes in the selected essay texts in order to determine how they have been deployed as ideological tool in depicting Osundare and Ekpu’s experience of the socio-political situation in Nigeria. The figurative tropes examined are simile, metaphor and personification.

### **6.1.1. Simile as a Device for Broadening Cognitive Range and Deriving Explicitness**

Simile involves a comparison between two events which may not be related Ogbulogo (2005: 78). Murthy (2007: 539) sees it as a figure of analogy employed in contrasting two different entities with a common quality. Wales (2011: 383) says it is a situation in which “two concepts are imaginatively and descriptively compared”. Majority of the type of simile used in the selected essays are single and paired similes. The discussion of simile begins with Osundare’s corpus.

Commenting on the absence of social amenities in some parts of Nigeria and chiding the government for its failure to address the myriads of problems bedevilling the nation over the years, Osundare observes that, “There are times in a nation’s history when its abuse past springs up like a monster and clings to its negligent dream like an inscrutable leech” (PFK, 5). In this text, one finds Osundare’s exploitation of simile when he compares the “abuse past of a nation” to “a monster” and “its negligent dream” to an “inscrutable leech” respectively. These comparisons achieve specificity in that a definite image of the nation’s past and its dream is evoked in the reader through the figurative use of the lexical items, “monster” and “leech”. The first lexical item evokes an image that is ugly and terrifying while the second captures that which is parasitical or bloodsucking. Terror as portrayed by the image of monster results from

oppression of the masses while bloodsucking on the other hand alludes to their exploitation by their so-called leaders. Thus, both lexical items are employed to describe a country whose past is characterized by a track record of oppression, exploitation and violation of citizens' rights. Such appalling and mind-boggling image of Nigeria's past portrayed by the essayist is a result of government's neglect of its citizens as well as failure to execute projects that are meant to better their lives. Apart from this function, simile facilitates the processing of the conceptual content through the kind of portrait it creates in the reader's mind, and also help in broadening Osundare's cognitive range by showcasing his ability to recall relevant issues from the past in order to clarify the subject being discussed. In all, using a "monster" to describe a nation's past and "leech" to depict its negligent dream gives us an idea of how contemptible the nation's past must have been.

We encounter another use of simile in Osundare's essay when he speaks about election fraud in Nigeria and uses the 1993 general election in Nigeria as a reference point. He, thus, proceeds to lament the disannulment of that election by the government remarking that, "Since that foul annulment of 1993, Nigeria has been behaving like a giant in a stupor, plodding from one monstrosity to another" (NIP, 67). The application of simile in this text presents a similar situation in terms of specification of reference, though differences exist in terms of discourse subject. Here, Nigeria has been compared with "a giant in a stupor". Osundare makes no effort to offer any explanation for "a giant in a stupor": he leaves it to our imagination. However, the context in which the expression is deployed serves as a clue for the reader to decipher the writer's idea of the kind of giant being alluded to.

Also, Osundare's reliance on simile is equally captured in his essay titled, "The Real Gains of SAP" where he censures government's harsh economic policy on the masses and attributes the drastic increase in poverty among Nigerians as one of the principal sources of health problems in the country. Describing poverty as a cankerworm which has eaten deep into the very fabric of the Nigerian society, Osundare invites the reader to participate in his discourse subject when he says that, "Isn't this a situation we have come to know as intimately as we know the lines of our palms?" (TRGOS, 45). The writer's use of simile in this text shows a relationship between "...a situation" which we have come to know as intimately as we know "the lines of our palms". Osundare compares "a situation" with "the lines of our palms" in order to clarify the

experience which he presents. The lexical items “a situation” signify poverty and hardship whereas “the lines of our palms”, on the other hand, denotes an established truth. Through this comparison, the writer shows that the subject of poverty in Nigeria is not new to all Nigerians.

Finally, Osundare speaks bitterly of the numerous crimes committed by Nigerians and the government stating that the country is fast turning into a dysfunctional state where no one is held accountable for anything. This ugly situation compels the writer to declare that, “The Nigeria stink is as stubborn as the he-goat which harbours its nuisance” (TFMC, 365). The imageries of “stink” and “he-goat” are deployed to explicitly capture the ideas being presented. The lexical word “stink” connotes “crimes” while “he-goat”, on the other hand, suggests “obstinacy” and “odour” in this context. In comparing “Nigeria stink” with “the he-goat”, the writer attempts to amplify his image of crimes as an intractable problem in the country that stinks badly. The semantic extension achieved by the use of similes in this text enriches the mental range to which the writer seeks in foisting his images.

The application of similes equally abounds in Ray Ekpu’s discourses; they serve as semantic devices through which he expresses concerns over the country’s pathetic plight while also satirising its ills. For example, in speaking on Nigerian’s preparation for public office and the craze for titles which has replaced the country’s cultural values, Ekpu laments that Nigerian politicians, even the miscreants among them, travel outside the country and returned speedily with PhDs which they never studied for. This prompts the writer to state that the Nigerian political space has been populated with politicians bearing “Dr.” as titles, and that “knowing the genuine doctor from the phoney one was something like finding a pin in a hay stack” (WTU, 10). Here, Ekpu compares the “genuine doctors” with the “phoney one” in order to heighten the significance of his discourse subject. The aim here is to hit at universities in the world where certificates are awarded to the undeserved; thus, making it extremely difficult to recognize those who laboured diligently to get such certificates.

In his essay titled, “Leadership: the Flock or the Fleece”, Ekpu recalls October 1st, 1960s noting that with the nation’s vast resources; Nigerians had thought that life would be better for them. Unfortunately, the essayist laments that after many decades of independence, “we are like a false pregnancy: every symptom is there but no baby” (LTFOTF, 6). The lexical items “we” and “false pregnancy” are employed figuratively in this context. The former denotes “Nigeria’s

bright hope for the future” while the latter on the other hand, signifies “the nonfulfillment of the hope”. Therefore, the writer compares the lexical item, “we” connoting “Nigeria’s dream of a bright future” during independence with that of “false pregnancy”; thus, indicating the non-realisation of the nation’s dream being alluded to. Simile provides Ekpu the avenue to express his regret over Nigeria’s inability to achieve its dream after several decades of independence. The extended comparison here enables him intensify the significance of the discourse subject.

The message of political crisis in Nigeria is displayed impressively in Ekpu’s discourse by the use of simile. Commenting on the rancour among the different political parties in the country and the effect this has had on the masses, Ekpu expresses concern that, “the Nigerian political crisis is becoming something like a festering sore which didn’t receive treatment in time when it was just a little wound” (ATFP, 8). Here, comparison is made between the “Nigerian political crisis” and a “festering sore”. The image of “a festering sore” is figuratively deployed in this text to connote the deteriorating state of the nation’s political crisis. Through this comparison, the writer attempts to show that the crisis being alluded to has aggravated owing to nonchalance of Nigerian leaders; thus, making it difficult for them to fix.

Finally, Ekpu comments on the issue of misappropriation of nation’s resources among public office holders citing “a survey done a few years ago [which] showed that projects executed for Nigerian governments cost as much as thrice what they cost in other African countries” (C, 42). In this extract, the misappropriation of nation’s resources is figuratively expressed. The contrast made is between the “projects executed for Nigerian government” and those of “other African countries”. The writer’s aim of contrast is to uncover the moral decadence which has corroded the Nigerian government with a view to amplifying his message.

The above analysis on the utilisation of simile in Osundare and Ekpu’s essays show that similes serve as a semantic device to derive explicitness, broaden cognitive range, and heighten significance of discourse themes. Also, through this figurative device, Osundare and Ekpu are able to clarify and enrich the experience they present as well as achieve precision. Whereas Osundare shows predilection for paired simile; Ekpu, on the other hand, opts for single simile. That they pay close attention to this rhetorical trope in their literary craft is a mark of their creativity as essayists.

## 6.2. Metaphor as a Device for Animating Texts and Transferring Meaning

Metaphor expresses “an explicit comparison of literally unlike things” (Douglas, 2004: 293). Put differently, it is an implied simile in which the two entities compared are treated as one (Murthy, 2011). Also, Wales (2011: 265) notes that metaphor “makes sense of relatively complex, abstract or unfamiliar experiences in terms of more familiar ones”. Norgaard, Busse & Montoro (2010: 107) regard metaphor as “a kind of linguistic embellishment” and a contrast between two dissimilar entities where the quality or meaning of one entity is transferred or mapped unto the other. Following I.A Richards (1937) as cited in Adagbonyin (1999: 322), has observed, metaphor consist of two parts: the tenor and the vehicle. “Tenor” refers to the subject to which attributes are ascribed while “vehicle” denotes the object whose attributes are borrowed.

Equally, Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 5) employ the terms “target” and “source” domains in their description of metaphorical structures. Where the “target” domain signifies the concept area from which metaphor is drawn, the “source domain” refers to the concept area to which the metaphor is applied. From the foregoing, tenor (target) and vehicle (source) must have some “similarity in order for the metaphorical analogy to seem appropriate” (Wales, 2011: 266). In creating relevant mental pictures, metaphor provides Osundare and Ekpu the opportunity to clarify their experience apart from helping them embellish their texts. The three types of metaphors identified in the essays are synaesthetic, extended, and animistic or humanizing metaphors. The discussion of metaphors begins with Osundare’s corpus.

Osundare comments on the subject of lawlessness in the country through metaphor. Recounting most of the barbaric practices perpetrated by religious fanatics in the country, the writer remarks that, “Nigeria is not a country; it is an insufferable embarrassment” (TFMC, 364). Here, Osundare employs synaesthetic metaphor, a type of metaphor which according to Leech (1969:158) “transfers meaning from one domain of sensory perception to another”. We are at once struck by the strangeness of the propositions Osundare offers here. This strangeness results from the incompatibility between what the reader has always recognised or understood “Nigeria” to be, i.e. “a country” and what he is now being forced to accept that “Nigeria” is an insufferable embarrassment. The new proposition offered by the essayist, however, constitute the figurative level of consideration, while the literal is that which the reader has always held as the meaning of Nigeria. Despite the clash between the literal and the figurative which Osundare brings to bear

on the perception of Nigeria, it is obvious that a ground still exists between tenor and vehicle, tenor being Nigeria (that which is being talked about) and vehicle being the proposition the essayist makes to describe it. The ground can be explained this way: Nigeria is anything and, therefore, can be ascribed a range of descriptive qualities. One of such qualities is what is actually presented: it is an insufferable embarrassment. When the myriad of problems coupled with the atrocities committed in Nigeria are considered generally, we see that it fits squarely into what Osundare here states that it is- only that he has portrayed it from his perspective and from how he views it thereby transferring meaning from one domain of metaphorical structure to another.

Another national issue captured in Osundare's essays is that of government's development contracts and projects and how they often breakdown immediately after commissioning. This is why Osundare in his essay titled, "Not Mess Transit" concludes that, "Government job is nobody's job" (NMT, 29). A close study of this extract shows the writer's engaging in linguistic fabrications intended to achieve metaphorical ends. Here, we observe similar use of synaesthetic metaphor. The semantic aberration created by the metaphorical proposition, "Government job is nobody's job" arises from the reader's literal understanding of what "government job" is against the background of the new proposition being offered by Osundare. "Government jobs" could imply: (i) employment opportunities for the masses provided by the government or (ii) development projects such as road construction and building contracts awarded by the government. These explanations certainly clash with the position contained in the text that "government job is nobody's job". For government's job to be said to be nobody's job (not just compared with employments or projects mentioned above), indeed presents some kind of oddity. Yet, the ground is clear, especially when we consider the semantic properties associated with "government job" in the context of the text. These include: + shoddy planning, + incompetent execution, + lack of foresight and + frequent collapse while those belonging to "nobody" include: + unemployment and + insignificant. Now, when all these features are considered together, we see that they share a common characteristic of + Negative, hence the ground of the metaphor. Seeing the frequent breakdown of development projects executed by the government, the essayist is not only irked by the wasteful spending of nation's resources, but also feels sympathetic to this condition. He sees the situation as a testimony to the fact that all is not well in

Nigeria where majority of the citizens languish in deprivation and penury amidst its variegated resources being wasted by the government.

Other metaphorical structures in Osundare's texts are basically built into similar patterns as above. The essayist, in making his direct comparisons and yoking incompatible ideas together, neutralizes whatever semantic oppositions may have tended to exist. Semantic range is extended and ideas being projected are made to achieve greater force. This is what happens in his essay titled, "Nigeria Image Problem" when he writes that, "All of the world, the image of Nigeria is that of a corruption-ridden, disorganised, unstable, and shamelessly pretentious country" (NIP, 68). Here, Osundare employs extended metaphor, that is, a type of metaphor in which "a number of figurative expressions are developed" (Leech, 1969: 158-159). In this text, Osundare makes the following propositions about Nigeria: it is "corruption ridden", it is "disorganised", it is "unstable", it is "shamelessly" and it is "pretentious". Obviously, these propositions negate the meaning of Nigeria provided in the dictionary. The essayist, here, then merely distorts in his attempts to describe Nigeria. He uses a variety of descriptive features in order to intensify Nigeria's contemptible state and also to extend his meaning. This, he achieves by providing attributes that it does not literary share.

Similar liberties are exercised in the essay titled "The Untouchable" where Osundare employs concrete metaphor, a type of metaphor where concreteness or physical existence is attributed to abstraction (Leech, 1969: 148), in speaking against politicians and government officials who have little or no regard for the law. Hence, in this essay, he states that, "The man is a law unto himself" (TU, 91). In literary creating the impression that tenor and vehicle are the same, Osundare also foists "incompatibles" and "impossibilities" upon the reader. To convey his unique vision, "the man" which represents the tenor of the metaphorical expression "the man is a law unto himself", to Osundare is compared to "a law" denoting the vehicle. From our literal understanding, a man is certainly not a law. In fact, the word refers to an adult male human. But what Osundare has done here is merely to provide semantic extensions for his idea of "the man", as one who represents Nigerian leadership. Through this metaphorical proposition, we are reminded of past military dictators and past and present political bigwigs of the civilian era who violate the constitution and greatly undermined Nigeria's socio-political development.

There are various metaphorical patterns that are consistent in Ekpu's essays. In fact, Ekpu's discourse on violence among political parties in Nigeria is captured with metaphors. Speaking on the manner in which politics is practiced in the country, the writer remarks that, "Politics is a battle for power..." (OEOP, 22). Here, we are introduced to the synaesthetic metaphorical expression "Politics is a battle for power", where meaning is transferred or mapped from one field or domain to another. The collocational breach in this metaphorical proposition arises from directly comparing the abstract feature "politics" (tenor) with another abstract feature "battle" (vehicle), which the essayist tells us it is. The semantic oddity is immediately striking because "politics" is not given the literal interpretation as contained in the dictionary. The semantic properties for "politics" include: +Government, + legislature, + Power while those belonging to "battle" include: + struggle, + fight and + assassination. A close observation of the aforementioned features indicates that the lexical items "politics" and "battle" have different semantic properties. Whereas the first has the characteristic of + Positive, the second, on the other hand, is + Negative. To this end, Ekpu uses the negative features of "battle" to present his view about the way and manner in which politics is practiced in Nigeria.

The theme of war and its grave effects on the nation's economy is figuratively expressed in Ekpu's essay. Recalling some of the crises which Nigeria has witnessed, Ekpu concludes that, "War is death, war is hell, and war is everything objectionable" (ATFP, 10). He employs extended metaphor to relate to the reader his view about the concept of war. Here, "War" refers to the tenor (target) of the metaphor, that is, the concept or object which is being discussed, whereas "death", "hell" and "everything objectionable" are the vehicle (source), what Leech (1969: 151) calls the "purported definition". Clearly, the meaning that is being conveyed here is that "War" has the qualities we associate with "death", "hell" and "everything objectionable", which in a general sense is disgusting and undesirable. Thus, meaning is transferred from the metaphorical terms, "hell", "death" and "everything objectionable" to the tenor, "War" thereby providing Ekpu the opportunity to clarify his thought about the devastating effects of the discourse subject.

Commenting on the high rate of unemployment, rise in poverty, increased inequality and high government borrowing, Ekpu laments that, "today, the economy is in a pathetic shape" (DSD, 6). The writer employs synaesthetic metaphor in this text in capturing the state of the nation's

economy. The lexical items “economy” and “pathetic shape” represent two domains of sensory perception in this discourse. “Economy”, which represents the tenor of the metaphorical expression is mapped or transferred to “pathetic shape” denoting an abstraction, something that is deplorable, dismal, appalling etc. functioning as the vehicle of the metaphor. At a face value, these purport to be some definitions or interpretations of “economy” given by the writer; but it is plainly not the definition for the concept we would expect to find in a dictionary. We therefore realise that the writer’s proposition in this context is to be taken in a figurative sense. Through metaphorical proposition, Ekpu uses the metaphor of ‘pathetic shape’ to depict the deplorable state of the nation’s economy.

Finally, the essay titled “A Dialogue with the Future” is equally notable for its metaphorical structuring. To capture the moral degradation in most schools in the country, Ekpu mentions that, “the magic paper is a clearance certificate” (ADWTF, 16). In this essay, metaphor provides not just a conventional explanation of what clearance certificate means to Ekpu, but also sets the tone for what to expect in terms of linguistic fabrications designed to achieve communicative impact. Here, the writer alludes to most schools in Nigeria where students are required to tender clearance certificate before they can be admitted into classes. Clearance certificate is a piece of document that serves as evidence that the student has met the financial requirement vested on him by the school. However, to project the moral decline in our schools, Ekpu employs the concrete metaphorical proposition “the magic paper is the clearance certificate” to show that in present time, such certificates are not enough to grant students entrance into classes. In notional terms, “clearance certificate” is the tenor of the metaphor – that which is actually under discussion while “magic paper”, on the other hand, is the vehicle. From this metaphorical configuration, the figurative meaning of “magic paper” is derived from the literal meaning of “clearance certificate”. From the foregoing, the essayist uses the lexical item “magic paper” to represent bribe which students must tender alongside their clearance certificate in order to be granted entrance into the school.

Metaphor, as the analysis above has shown, no doubt constitutes an important facility in Osundare and Ekpu’s lexico-semantic configuration. Both writers employ extended, synesthetic and concrete metaphors. Judging from the deliberate manner both writers exploit metaphor as a

figurative trope, it is obvious that they see it as a means of animating their texts, apart from aiding ideational focus and conceptual content.

### **6.3. Personification as a Device for Establishing Mood and Raising Essences**

Personification is another aspect of figurative language completely utilised in the essays of Osundare and Ekpu. It is “the attribution of qualities of life to inanimate things and abstract ideas Ogbulogo (2005:86). To Adagbonyin (1999: 40), the term involves the “endowing of inanimate objects and abstract concepts with life or with human attributes or feeling”. The motivation behind the use of personification by Osundare and Ekpu is to raise essences and also to draw attention to the message being conveyed as illustrated in some of the essay pieces selected for this study.

Osundare, in his essay titled, “The Real Gain of SAP” reflects on the adverse effect of starvation and malnourishment among hapless Nigerians. He declares that without doubt, it must be clear to those who still have eyes to see, and a conscience which is alive, that “...the greatest killer in our country today is hunger, with malnutrition as its faithful handmaiden” (TRGOS, 45). Here, Osundare enlivens the abstract concepts “hunger” and “malnutrition” in such that they are made to have life to perform human like attributes. The result is that these lexical items convey a vivid image of the contemptible state in which hunger and malnutrition had plunged Nigerians. We have earlier noted that the essential force motivating Osundare’s use of personification is to raise the essence of his discourse themes, so that greater sympathy can be shown to them.

A more obvious use of personification is equally exemplified in the essay titled, “Abomination” where he speaks sympathetically of innocent Nigerians whose new buildings, in different stages of completion, were demolished by agents of the government. This is the reason behind Osundare noting that, “An angry dust rose from the chaos completely obliterating the sun” (A, 321). The writer, in this text, argues that such atrocious acts by the government on the citizens are inhuman. We see the lexical item “dust” through Osundare’s portrait, as a human being who is capable of expressing anger. Osundare’s direct address to the “dust” has an affective tone; it creates greater rapport between the essayist and the object and heightens emotional impact.

Abstract phenomena are largely personified in “Scars of the Season 11” where Osundare attempts to paint a picture similar to the one in his essay titled “Abomination”. Here, he laments that, in a country which boasts of some of the most accomplished medical experts in Africa, “nothing can be more harrowing than watching helplessly as avoidable death makes a short work of the hapless population” (SOTS 11, 11). The lexical item “death” is given animate potentials to help the essayist capture the overwhelming mood of fear owing to the termination of human lives by this phenomenon. The fear, he states, exists in “... makes a short work of hapless population” in the extract. Osundare gives death the power to truncate (like human beings) performing the role of an executioner.

Finally, we notice the endowing of inanimate object with life or with human attributes in the essay titled, “Murderers, be nor Proud” where Osundare reports the assassination of Nigeria’s veteran journalist, Dele Giwa. The writer expresses amazement at how such gory occurrence could still transpire in a country where human right is upheld. It is the manner in which the journalist was executed that prompted Osundare to remark that, “So the parcel bomb has made its triumphant entry into Nigeria at last!” (MBNP, 349). Observe that in this text, the “parcel bomb” is viewed as an invader who intrudes into a place or territory. The animation of the parcel bomb, when judged in its own terms, readily frustrates our appreciation of the standard meaning of words. For one thing, it has no life of its own; for another, it is incapable of walking, let alone of making a successful entry into Nigeria. Nevertheless, what Osundare aims at is symbolism. The parcel bomb represents an advanced or sophisticated weapon for mass destruction. This interpretation comes out readily because the actions Osundare ascribes to the parcel bomb are actually those the parcel bomb is incapable of performing literally; only a human being is able to carry them out.

The use of personification to raise essence and draw attention to the message communicated is equally evident in Ekpu’s discourse. For instance, recalling the first republic when the lid on political activities was lifted in Nigeria, Ekpu writes that, “a strange epidemic had gripped the land” (WTU, 10). What he aims at in this discourse is representation. Observe that the lexical items “strange epidemic” which is an inanimate object has been given human characteristics in order to make it more relatable. The attribution of animate qualities to “strange epidemic” presents some kind of oddity because what is being alluded to has no animate

characteristic; hence, it is incapable of gripping the land. However, the writer in this text employs the symbol of “strange epidemic” to depict the replacement of cultural values with the craze for titles and that of “gripping” to exemplify the extent to which the mad rush for titles has characterized the nation’s politics in that period. Personification, as used here, helps to establish the writer’s mood of sorrow over the replacement of cultural values with the mad rush for titles.

However, Ekpu evaluates the various political systems in Nigeria and remarks that, “old questions still arise, begging for new answers” (ANQ, 4) as to why none of the political system has worked perfectly for the nation since independence. Here, we find another obvious use of personification in Ekpu’s corpus. The personification is derived from the expression, “old questions still arise, begging for new answers”. Observe that in this text, the abstract concept, “old questions” is animated in such that it is made to have life to perform human like attribute. To achieve this, the abstract concept is paired with the dynamic verbs “arise” and “begging” which denote actions that are meant to be performed only by human beings. The essence of personification is to draw attention to writer’s discourse subject. By animating “old questions”, the writer attempts to draw attention to the abstract concept in order to foreground the importance of the questions being alluded to.

In the essay titled, “Day after the Party”, personification creates a picture of Nigeria’s moral decline. The absurdity Ekpu creates in this essay when he observes that “corruption stuck to Nigeria like mistletoe [and that it sank its claws into the flesh of the polity” (DATP, 16) is better felt when we carry out a componential analysis of the features involved in this proposition:

Corruption	=	-ANIMATE, -HUMAN, -LIVE
Stuck	=	+HUMAN ACT, + ANIMATE, +LIVE
Sank	=	+HUMAN ACT, +ANIMATE, + LIVE
Claws	=	+ANIMATE, + LIVE

What makes the above proposition “unacceptable” when the standard meaning of words is considered is that “corruption” does not have the capacity to “stick” or “sank” and does not also have claws because it is neither human, animate nor live. The lexical items “stuck” and “sank” are property or attribute of living things. There is, therefore, a clash in attributing human or animate values to non-living or non-human things.

Finally, Ekpu comments on a recurring trend in Nigeria politics where politicians make unrealistic pledges in a bid to capture the attention of the electorates and win their votes. Describing the election campaign preceding the 1993 general election in Nigeria, the writer remarks that, “the promises have come flowing in torrents” (OEOP, 3) and that, this of course, is the stock-in-trade of politicians, to make promises they may, will or cannot fulfil. Here, Ekpu animates the lexical item “promises” in such that it is made to perform human like attributes. He achieves this by pairing the lexical item with the dynamic verb “come” which denote an action that can only be performed by an animate entity. This is to enable him relate his discourse subject on the insincerity of Nigerian politicians which is why the masses have lost faith in them. As the above analysis has clearly shown, Osundare and Ekpu’s use of personification indicate that there are limitless possibilities to which language and meaning can be extended.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper has focused on the artistic utilisation of figurative language as ideological tool for socio-political agitation in selected essay discourses of Niyi Osundare and Ray Ekpu. The objectives include: to identify the predominant figurative tropes used in the essays, uncover their role in encoding textual messages, and determine how Osundare and Ekpu have deployed figurative language in reflecting the socio-political realities in their society. The twenty-four extracts examined through the aid of M.A.K Halliday’s metafunctions of language reveal that similes, metaphors and personification are predominant figurative tropes used in the collection studied. Simile serves as a stylistic device to derive explicitness, broaden cognitive range, and heighten the significance of textual messages. Metaphor provides Osundare and Ekpu the opportunity to transfer meaning from one domain of sensory perception to another and to create relevant mental pictures of national issues in order to clarify their experience of the socio-political situation they present. Personification helps to establish both writers’ mood and raise essences of discourse subjects so as to draw attention to them. The socio-political contents of the essay texts was largely influenced by Osundare’s and Ekpu’s ideological orientation. Figurative language, as the study has shown, is quite resourceful in that it creates a special effect, clarifies an idea, makes writing more colourful and forceful, and above all forms the mainspring of the beauty of literary language. This work adds to the literature on the study of figurative language and also provides a platform for understanding meaning in African literary works.

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