LANTAN Scope: Journal of Language Studies
A Publication of the Language Teachers Association of Nigeria

ISSN (P): 3092-9296 ISSN (E): 3156-691X
[Vol-1, Issue-2, November 2026]
Website: www.lantanscope-journal.com.ng

WRITING FANTASY: LANGUAGE USE IN BEN OKRI'S *THE FAMISHED ROAD*

Chiluba P. Ogoke[1*], Chris C. Onyema[1]

[1]*Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria*

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ABSTRACT

This research was focused on a lexico-semantic analysis of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. The aim was to identify and characterise the lexico-semantic devices used in the novel to foreground the specific themes and features of fantasy writing. The theoretical framework of the research is a synergetic approach that incorporated theories on fantasy writing and Leech and Short's (2007) Linguistic Stylistic Model. This synergetic approach provided the analytical tools required to view language as a network of interrelated sets of options for making meaning. A qualitative content analysis of data revealed that the author employed peculiar linguistic choices such as lexical borrowing, terms of poverty, morbidity, supernatural, violence and concretion of abstract terms. These are deployed to underscore common themes of fantasy such as absurdism, hybridism, political and economic dichotomy, eco preservation and magic encoded in the text. It is concluded that lexico-semantic features can be used to not only unlock the currents of meaning in literary texts but also to characterise fantasy writing as a domain of communication.

Keywords: *Lexico-semantic, style, stylistics, fantasy, speculative fiction*

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INTRODUCTION

Language can be defined as a complex system of codes and symbols used among people of a social group for the expression of thoughts, feelings and ideas. While this definition may appear rather simplistic – seeing that it assumes that speakers of a language must belong to the same social group – it does, however, feature noteworthy key points. A language is a system of codes in the sense that it comprises a network of vastly different essential

*Corresponding author email: ogokechiluba@gmail.com

subcomponents (phonology, semantics, syntax and morphology), which are governed by rules to form a unifying whole.

Literature, simply defined, is any written or oral piece presented in an artistic form for the purpose of instructing, educating and entertaining. Language is intricately linked to literature and affects the beauty of literary texts. Different languages from different peoples and cultures have different views on agency, passivity, word order, and so forth. Boroditsky (2018) explains that the Spanish language frequently excludes the cause of an unpleasant accident in a sentence, without passivizing the verb. This creates an air of politeness that can influence the mood of literary texts written in Spanish. Again, the French language, known for its tenderness, is effective in writing romantic texts. Latin, with its numerous theological terms and the thrilling phonological effects, was (is?) suitable for writing religious and spiritual texts.

An interesting viewpoint of style is that it is individualistic. This assertion draws strength from de Saussure's (1916/1959) Structuralism, from which two key terms, *langue* and *parole*, derived. In paraphrase, *langue* is the system of codes and rules within a language available to a user, while *parole* refers to an individual's choice of language use in practical contexts/situations. Suffice it to say that *langue* is abstract and *parole* is concrete. It is this concrete aspect of language that could lead to deviations that stylisticians are interested in. Leech and Short (2007) define aptly style as 'the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose…. Style, then, pertains to *parole*: it is selection from a total linguistic repertoire that constitutes a style' (p. 9).

Stylistics is the linguistic study of style and the effects thereof. There are four basic levels of stylistic analysis: lexico-semantic, phonological, graphological and structural/grammatical stylistics. This classification is in line with that of Leech and Short (2007). Lexico-semantic stylistics focuses on specific terms and their meanings in different contexts in which they create unique effects. For example, there could be terms of romance, war, ecology, trauma, magic, geared towards foregrounding the prominent themes in a text. Lexico-semantic analysis is also interested in parts of speech, word formation types (blending, coinages, clipping, compounding and back formation), unusual collocation, category rule and selection restriction rule violations, names and simplicity/complexity of diction. Chris Onyema (2010) included discourse, that is the descriptive level above the sentence with the significant implicatures it embodies, as a level of stylistic analysis.

As much as fantasy fiction tends to project an escape from reality, the important themes therein still trickle down to real life issues. In addition to this, Okorafor (2009) asserts that fantasy stories possess a method, purpose and realness. She explains that the fantastical properties of fantasy tales draw shape and form from what is known and real. Bulla (2018) aptly describes fantasy as 'a genre or mode that is inherently devoted to the challenge of representing the unrepresentable' (p. 3). She believes that the fantastic occurrence is 'an

inexplicable breach or 'déchirure' in the fabric of reality, prompting questions on the relationship between real and unreal, natural and supernatural, possible and impossible, subject and object' (p.10).

Fantasy literature is largely imaginative. One of its distinct features is the blend of the natural, preternatural and the supernatural. There is also the reticent autodiegetic narrator who is usually young and surprisingly adventurous, rebellious, impulsive and curious. The narrator either becomes a participant observer or a fully engaged character on a quest. Other prominent features include hybridism, spirit characters, heightened imagery, cannibalism, animals with human behavioural attributes, animated objects, hallucination, dialogism, dreams, and a seemingly utopic environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Guignery (2014) examines the supernatural, mythology and binarism/dualism in Okri's *TFR* in relation to the Western literary tradition of realism. She marks the forest as a boundary between 'inside and outside' (p. 2), with inside being the physical world and outside being the non-physical world or the 'problematic Other' (p. 3). Guignery believes that the forest is depicted as a place that embodies mythological and supernatural elements, where spirits, mysteries, and ancient stories that transcend conventional notions of reality can be encountered.

Chukwumah (2015) observes that Okri's magical bar setting in *TFR* tilts the narrative away from the stronghold of realism. He explores the interaction between characters and their surroundings. He further explains that this unique link between Okri's characterisation and setting (spiritual, moral and intellectual settings) reflects the destinies of the characters and their decisions.

Brazzelli (2017) assumes a socioecological viewpoint that describes the forest as a place of 'impenetrable darkness' (p. 151) which, however, is the home of valuable natural resources. She notes that the deforestation and exploitation by the Western colonisers have degenerating and disorienting effects on the African colonies. She further highlights the forest as a popular motif in Nigerian literature, which signifies: a place of taboos and the preservation of religious and social order, a place of chaos, fantastic spirits and mysterious forces, and a complex ecosystem at the mercy of aggressive neocolonial exploitation.

Although there is an abundance of insightful literature on Okri's *TFR* using linguistic and literary tools, this researcher anchors the essence of this paper on the fact that there is a paucity of literature that critically examine the deployment of lexico-semantic in fantasy writing. Therefore, this paper is a nuanced examination of how Okri employs lexico-semantic elements to enhance the fantastical aspects of his narrative.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design adapts a qualitative analysis of Ben Okri's *TFR*. The approach includes an examination of the narrative techniques employed in the novel to explore how the author's blend of lexico-semantic devices and fantasy projects his storytelling strategies and thematic concerns. The analysis is guided by a synergy of fantasy and Leech and Short's (2007) linguistic stylistic model.

Attebery (1992) defines fantasy as a complex genre that rewrites the rules of reality, expands literary possibilities, creates believable impossibilities, reinvents traditional plots, characters, settings, and storytelling frameworks, and pushes literary boundaries. Attebery highlights four key strategies used by fantasy writers: extrapolation, analogy, metaphor, and metonymy. Mendlesohn (2008) investigates how fantasy authors use language, imagery, and symbolism to create a sense of wonder and enchantment. She further identifies four primary rhetorics of fantasy: the portal-quest, the liminal, the intrusion, and the immersive. Leech and Short (2007) align with the simple definition that stylistics is the linguistic study of style. They formulated the following heuristic checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories: lexical, grammatical, figures of speech (schemes and tropes), and cohesion and context.

LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF BEN OKRI'S *THE FAMISHED ROAD*

This analysis reveals that although fantasy and magical realism, for instance, have similarities, there are clear distinctions between the two subgenres of speculative fiction. Mendlesohn's liminal, intrusion and portal-quest rhetorics of fantasy align strongly with the assertion that Okri's *TFR* belongs to the literary subgenre of fantasy. The novel has the liminal feature of fantasy in the sense that there is a blurry boundary between the real and the fantastical. It is also intrusive because the real is constantly invaded by fantastical elements.

Again, Azaro's birth signifies his journey through the portal that transported him from the spiritual to the physical on a quest to satiate his curiosity. Therefore, while magical realism maintains a realistic setting, Okri's *TFR* merges both realism and otherworldly features. Azaro has one foot on earth and another in the spirit world. His ability to permeate the dreams of other characters offers a quasi-shifting point of view that grants the reader a broader perspective of events than typically allowed by first person narratives. His stream of consciousness and experiences are constantly and rudely intercepted by spirit beings and spirit worlds.

A holistic view of the diction of Okri's *TFR* reveals an interesting level of complexity that is not contained in the individual words themselves, but in the ingenious manner in which Okri weaves them into unfamiliar linguistic environments to create appealing stylistic effects. The complexity of the diction of the text, therefore, reflects the fact that proper linguistic appreciation of the text relies on the reader's ability to make connotative inferences. Table 1, below, encapsulates the lexico-semantic analysis of *TFR*.

Table 1: Lexico-Semantic Features of *TFR*

S/N	**Lexico-Semantic Feature**	**Textual Example(s)**	**Significance/Character's Behaviour**
1	Selection restriction rule violation	The Famished Road, Yellow wind, white waves of exhaustion, white wind and famished road	Ensoul inanimate things, heighten imagery, fear, eeriness, incongruity and ominous warning
2	Lexical borrowing	Ogogoro and abiku	Emphasis on locality
3	Terms of poverty and suffering	Rats, holes, slack, blackened and weak.	Economic dichotomy/subjugation, day-dreaming, hallucination and hopelessness
4	Clipping	Lazarus → Lazaro → Azaro	synonymy
5	Unusual collocates	Yellow blood, green leopard and desert vowels	Violence, brutality and force
6	Descriptive Onomasticon	The beggar girl, the photographer, the female midget and the police officer	Psychological distancing or disengagement, Puerile state of mind and mystery
7	Terms of violence and morbidity	Razor incision, punches, blood, swollen, fight, push, broke, blow, crush, kill, shoot and cracked	Interrealm conflict, physical, psychological, social, economic and political chaos
8	Contrapuntal terms	World of the Living vs. world of the Unborn, they (bad politicians, imperialists and rich people) vs. us (the poor)	Economic inequality and subjugation
9	Dehumanising verbs	Waddle and appear	Grotesque imagery and fear

In Okri's *TFR,* selection restriction rule violation ensouls the inanimate, highlights the improbable feature of fantasy and collectively heightens imagery. In the opening paragraph of Book One, Chapter One, the narrator says, 'And because the road was once a river it was

always hungry' (p. 3). This example violates the selection restriction rule in the sense that 'road' in its denotative form is [-animate].

However, the narrator imposes a [+animate] feature to stress on how the road has maintained its dangerous quality of feeding itself with human (and not just the ones buried into it), even though it is no longer a river that drowns people. This establishes a diegetic relationship of the road as the predator and humans as the prey. A similar notable mention of the road reads: 'The road woke up' (p. 9). It appears that, within that context, the road tends to 'wake up' (a +animate quality) when it anticipates fatal chaos. Also consider the following: 'The stomach of the road.'/ 'Does the road have a stomach?'/ 'Does the sea have a mouth?' (p. 17).

Apart from stating that the road has a stomach, the back-and-forth conversation between Azaro and the giant turtle strengthens the earlier established diegetic fact that the road was once water. The giant turtle further poses an existential question: 'How does the sea eat/kill so much if it does not have a stomach?' Azaro states: 'Then she waddled off into the darkness' (p. 205) in reference to Madame Koto. The verb 'waddle' is usually restricted to penguins, ducks and some other animals with very rotund midriff. He also states that Madame Koto 'appeared out of thin air' (p. 204).

The use of these dehumanising verbs and the violation of the selection restriction rule in the use of 'waddle' amplifies Azaro's growing fear of Madame Koto and to refer back to the grotesque imagery earlier painted by Azaro:

> She was fat as ever, plump as a mighty fruit, but her face had become a little bit more frightening than I remembered. She did not have her white beads around her neck. Her face was darker; her eyes shaded with eye-pencil, made her look mysterious. The quantity of wrappers round her waist increased her volume (p. 204).

The excerpt above suggests that Madame Koto is accustomed to wearing 'white beads'. As is examined subsequently, white is an ominous colour that symbolises danger, magic and spirituality in the text, as opposed to it being a symbol of peace in real life. It does seem that Azaro is strongly convinced that Madame Koto's involvement with the Rich Party is gradually turning her into a fearsome being who feeds ravenously on the poor. The narrator uses Madame Koto as a metaphor for some Nigerian politicians who feed greedily on the poor masses till it becomes anatomically apparent. This, interestingly, extends further to Azaro's later conversation (yet another back-and-forth conversation) about rats with the photographer:

> 'Because they are never satisfied. They are like bad politicians and imperialists and rich people.'
> 'How?'

> 'They eat up poverty. They eat up everything in sight. And one day when they are very hungry they will eat us up.' (p. 233)

The expression 'The wind blew spells over the sea' (p. 13) connotes that 'wind' which is [-animate] is capable of blowing spells, a [+animate] quality. Same applies to: 'I heard the air whispering, the walls talking, the chair complaining, the floor pacing, the insects gossiping' (p. 21). A similar example reads: 'A fly alighted on his lower lip, wringing its spindly arms, drinking of his sleep' (p. 26). The expression suggests that 'sleep' should co-occur with 'drank', which usually occurs with nouns that are [+concrete and +liquid].

The use of concrete terms to represent abstract terms in the text affirms Bulla's (2018) assertion that fantasy is dedicated to representing the unrepresentable. The following excerpt follows the same stylistic pattern: 'The images seemed to breathe, to be watching my every movement, to be listening to my thoughts.' (p. 13).

Similarly, the feeling of horror is provoked by the sentence: 'The rain poured down and the wind, faintly howling, banged away' (p. 26). The wind is animated and can howl like a canid and bang like a human. 'Lightning struck again. It seemed intent on the house' (p. 26) amplifies the personification of the lightning as a conscious being that is capable of having intentions, and heightens the atmosphere of horror. The three sentences (from p. 26) used by the narrator imposes a sense of foreboding on the reader. These examples (from pp. 13, 21 & 26) further stress the themes of enchantment, fascination and allure, all critical indexicals of fantasy, that pervade the novel. There are other peculiar cases of selective restriction rule violation occurring with 'white' or 'yellow' as the premodifying adjective of abstract nouns that heighten imagery and mystery. Examples are: white waves of exhaustion (p. 20), white enchantment (p. 13), white earth (p. 17), yellow blood (p.7), white forms floating (p. 21), white eye of the moon. Thus, any mention of 'white' or 'yellow' arouses an overwhelming feeling of dread, foreboding, suspicion and curiosity on the reader, even when used normally such as: yellow webbed feet (p. 16), 'shining white eggs . . . white smocks . . . white horse' (p. 12) yellow powder, yellow glasses (p. 475), and white moths (p. 9).

A noteworthy mention is the mysterious 'man in white' (pp. 467, 468, 470 & 473) who brutally beats up Dad, and is later revealed by Azaro to be a 'Fighting Ghost' (p. 470). Dad fights a similar battle with 'Yellow Jaguar' (p. 355), who also has a 'yellow pair of eyes' (p. 354). Azaro notices that the rats have 'teeth of yellow diamond' (p. 71). That is also the case with the police officer who arrives in a 'white car' (p. 19) to pick up Azaro. The strategic use of 'white' foreshadows doom and unpleasant spiritual encounters for Azaro in the police man's house, which eventually comes to pass. Similarly, Azaro observes that kola-nut is served with a white saucer during the somewhat occult meeting of the eight figures in the police officer's house.

Likewise, a 'yellow wind' (p. 38) foreshadows the summoning of a numinous, limping woman dressed in a 'white robe' (p. 38) who singlehandedly wrenches a wooden pole out of

the earth and drags it into the forest. Subsequently, an owl suddenly falls, turns into 'yellow water' (p. 39) and evaporates. The narrator subtly accuses the workers in 'yellow helmets' (p. 277) of destroying the forest.

Terms of poverty and suffering are also used in the text to suggest a sharp contrast between two different realities. Chapter One of Book One reads thus:

> There was much feasting, playing and sorrowing. We feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity. We played much because we were free. And we sorrowed much because there were always those amongst us who had just returned from the World of the Living. They had returned inconsolable for all the love they hadn't understood, all the suffering they hadn't redeemed.... (p. 3)

The excerpt above establishes a polarity between the World of the Living and the World of the Unborn, implying that while the latter is blissful, the former is filled with sorrowing and suffering. The hyponyms of poverty and suffering capture the absurdist theme that interpenetrates the plot to reveal the tragic cycle that binds the lives of the main characters, especially Dad who frequently suffers the Near Success Syndrome. These terms include: 'struggles' (p. 500), 'not much money' (p. 500), 'Mesmerised by hunger' (p. 25), 'the amnesia of hunger' (p. 326) and 'poor' (pp. 33, 321 & 411).

Rats and ash are also used as cohyponyms of poverty in the text. As Azaro aptly states, Mum keeps 'muttering to herself about rats and poverty' (p. 78). The word 'rats' is metaphorically substituted for or juxtaposed with poverty in several parts of the text. Making poverty animate captures the manner in which: poverty is found in the most expected places, is insensitive to suffering, and consumes ravenously, even when it seems that their host does not have food for themselves. As Azaro puts it, 'The rats continued chewing away our lives' (p. 189). Also, when Azaro asks Mum what she put on her injured toe, she simply says 'Poverty' (p. 79) and 'Ash' (p. 79). Similarly, 'heat' (p. 43), a consequence of lack of electricity in the ghetto, is said to make everyone appear older. The strategic choice of the word intensifies imagery and points an accusing finger at the politicians who refuse to provide basic amenities, but would rather share *garri,* coins and poisonous milk during electoral campaigns.

Azaro describes the new living condition of his parents using keywords and phrases like: 'earthworm', 'wall-geckos', 'lizards', 'mosquito', 'ant-mounds', 'slack', 'sacks', 'blackened pots', 'cracks in the walls', 'holes in the zinc', 'cobwebs', 'smoke', 'fly', 'browning' (p. 32) and 'crooked nails' (p. 33). These words share a semantic bond and are, in this context, under the semantic fields of suffering and lack. These lexemes of poverty and suffering foreground the degree of economic and political subjugation that constrict the overall wellbeing of the people in the text. It also exposes the dichotomy between the poor versus the Rich Party/the Party of the Poor. The text uses animistic metaphor to refer to the politicians as rats in order to highlight their rabid inhumanity towards the poor.

Lexical borrowing is employed by the author to hint at origin and to retain the local ambience of the narration. Examples include: 'abiku' (p.4) and 'ogogoro' (p. 413). By metaphorically stating that 'Our country is an abiku country' (p. 478), the text captures the inconsistent and epileptic nature of the country's development, including the sorrow and suffering it inflicts on its citizens. *Ogogoro* is used to lay emphasis on the local type of alcohol consumed by the poor, in contrast to beer consumed by the rich. Notice that Dad drinks beer after defeating Green Leopard and declares, 'Life gets better' (p. 413).

There is also clipping as a word formation process where the protagonist's name, Azaro, is clipped from 'Lazaro' (p. 4), which was initially clipped from Lazarus. Apart from this being a form of Biblical allusion, the stylistic effect here is that Azaro is made to synonymise *abiku* in the text. Thus, instead of picturing 'God has helped' – as is the original meaning of Lazarus – when Azaro is mentioned, the reader rather pictures 'The one who comes and goes'.

Terms of violence and morbidity in the text generally present a descriptive portrayal of the chaos that manifests in a socially, politically, psychologically and economically dysfunctional society. These terms also articulate the ideological conflicts between the physical world (the known) and the spiritual world (the unknown), and the desire to solve spiritual problems using desperate physical methods. For instance, Azaro narrates how 'razor incisions' (p. 4) are made on infants suspected to be abiku, provoking an unsettling imagery of a baby's tender skin tearing and blood seeping out.

Also, the brutal fights between Dad (Black Tyger) and his opponents (Yellow Jaguar, Green Leopard and Fighting Ghost) are narrated using several terms of violence like punches, pain, blood, swollen, fight, push, broke, blocked, assault, blow, crush, kill, shoot, cracked and scraped. These words underscore the severity of pains Dad undergoes to achieve small wins. His fights with spirits symbolise the inner battle Dad consistently faces on the issues of identity and purpose, considering that he often attains clarity after these fights.

Terms of vulgarity are used in the text for humourous effects. For example, the word 'fuck' (pp. 293 & 294) is repeated rather frequently in a somewhat casual exchange between two women. They insinuate that Madame Koto's involvement with politics equates intercourse with politics [-animate], and is consequently pregnant. This absurd conclusion is not too far from Azaro's fear of Madame Koto's swollen abdomen, legs and neck since her active dealings with politics. Considering that politics is perceived as evil in the text, Azaro believes that Madame Koto is pregnant for/with evil. Other vulgar terms within this same exchange are: cunt, cheap prostitute, anus and shit.

Toponyms and anthroponyms in the text are quite unconventional and more descriptive, with less familiar proper nouns. Some of the proper nouns are in phrasal forms: 'King of the Road' (p. 258), Rich Party, Yellow Jaguar, Green Leopard and Fighting Ghost. Notice that Azaro's parents are simply called Mum and Dad. Some of the very few proper

nouns in the text are Madame Koto, 'Ade' (p. 481), 'Sami' (p. 470) and 'Ughelli' (p. 480). Apart from these, most places or persons are simply identified by their profession, position or physical appearance: the police officer, the photographer, the landlord, Madame Koto's bar, the world of the living, the female midget and the beggar girl. This technique reflects the puerile mind of Azaro and induces an air of mystery dominant in fantasy narratives.

Similarly, there are terms for preternatural beings that imbue the reader's mind with fearful and awe-inspiring imagery, which are equally common features of fantasy. Examples of this in the text (p. 460) include: chimeras, sirens, satyrs, minotaurs and four-headed spirits. Further examples include 'Tender sibyls' 'fauns', 'fairies' and 'benign sprites' (p. 4). There are other numerous examples of such otherworldly beings that strike a balance between the featuring of beings from the different realms that seem to collide in Azaro's consciousness. This collision is aptly portrayed in his market encounter with spirit beings (p. 15) and several other encounters at Madame Koto's bar. It is important to note that hybridism plays a key role in the description of preternatural being in fantasy writing. So, apart from the scenes at Madame Koto's bar and the market encounter that features hybrid spirits, Azaro also encounters an old man with 'golden hooves' (pp. 244 & 245).

Terms of spirituality and jujuism are used to underscore the Africanness of the text. Examples include 'obscure prophecies' (p. 4), 'enchantment' (p. 4), 'incantations' (p. 6), 'hallucinations' (p. 11), 'calabash' (p. 22), 'lapis lazuli', (p. 6), 'spells' (p. 30), 'white cockerel' (p. 30), and 'cowries' (p. 30). There is also the use of the mystic number seven in 'seven mountains' (p. 5) and 'seventh man' (p. 26). The number is often used as a significant number in African folklore, especially stories involving the protagonist's detailed journey into the spirit world. According to Larkin (2024), the number 7 is said to be a highly spiritual number full of mysticism, and is believed to represent a powerful connection with universal energies and strengthening psychic capabilities.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

a) Summary

This study examined the lexico-semantic features of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road (TFR),* with the aim of identifying and characterising the linguistic devices through which the novel foregrounds major themes and conventions of fantasy writing. The study adopted a synergetic theoretical approach that integrated theories of fantasy writing with Leech and Short's (2007) Linguistic Stylistic Model. This framework provided a basis for examining language as an interconnected system of choices through which literary meanings are constructed and interpreted.

The qualitative content analysis revealed that Okri employs a range of distinctive lexico-semantic devices, including lexical borrowing, poverty-related vocabulary, terms associated with morbidity, supernatural elements, violence, and the concretisation of abstract concepts. These linguistic choices contribute to the representation of absurdism, hybridism,

political and economic dichotomy, environmental preservation, and magic within the narrative. They also enhance imagery, establish the novel's distinctive atmosphere, and shape the reader's understanding of the social, political, and existential realities depicted in the text.

The findings demonstrate that lexico-semantic features perform both aesthetic and thematic functions in The Famished Road. Through his deliberate selection and manipulation of language, Okri depicts hopelessness, exposes economic inequalities and social subjugation, represents the absurdity of human existence, and highlights the brutality of misfortune and the pervasive nature of violence. Furthermore, the interaction between linguistic conformity and deviation enables the author to construct an imaginative world in which the ordinary and the extraordinary coexist, thereby reinforcing the novel's fantasy characteristics.

b) Conclusion

The study therefore concludes that lexico-semantic analysis provides a valuable means of interpreting literary texts and understanding the linguistic mechanisms through which fantasy narratives communicate meaning. *The Famished Road* demonstrates that language is not merely a medium for narrating events but also a creative resource through which writers construct fictional worlds, articulate complex experiences, and establish the thematic and generic identity of their works. The study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between language, literary meaning, and fantasy writing in African literature.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that literary scholars should give greater attention to lexico-semantic features when analysing African literary texts, particularly fantasy narratives, because these features reveal how linguistic choices contribute to thematic development, characterisation, imagery, and genre formation. Researchers should also consider combining linguistic stylistic models with theories of fantasy writing to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how language and literary imagination interact in the construction of fictional worlds.

Scholars, publishers, and literary institutions should promote the study of African fantasy literature as an important avenue for exploring African cultural experiences, socio-political realities, indigenous worldviews, and imaginative traditions. Future literary analyses should examine how lexical choices and semantic patterns represent poverty, inequality, violence, political oppression, environmental concerns, and other social issues in African literary works.

Teachers and lecturers of literature and stylistics should incorporate lexico-semantic analysis into their teaching to help students develop critical reading skills and appreciate the relationship between linguistic form and literary meaning.

c) Recommendations for further Studies

It is necessary to expand the understanding of stylistic practices in African fantasy writing so as to deepen scholarly understanding of the relationship between language, imagination, culture, and ideology in African fantasy writing. It would also extend the contribution of linguistic stylistics to the study of contemporary African literature and provide a stronger

basis for understanding how writers use language to represent complex human experiences. Based on the foregoing, the following suggestions are made for further studies:

i. Comparing the lexico-semantic features of *The Famished Road* with those of other African fantasy novels to identify similarities and differences in linguistic strategies, thematic concerns, and representations of the supernatural.
ii. Investigating emerging stylistic trends in contemporary African fantasy stories, focusing on how writers adapt lexical and semantic resources to reflect changing cultural, political, and social realities.
iii. Examining how stylistic devices are employed to represent colonial histories, postcolonial identities, cultural hybridity, political resistance, and social marginalisation in African fantasy literature.
iv. Examining the phonological, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, and discourse features of The Famished Road and other African fantasy texts to establish how different linguistic levels interact in the construction of literary meaning.
v. Exploring how readers interpret the lexico-semantic features of African fantasy narratives and how these linguistic choices influence their understanding of the supernatural, absurdism, cultural symbolism, and socio-political themes.
vi. Employing corpus-linguistic tools to investigate recurring lexical patterns, semantic associations, and distinctive stylistic features across a larger collection of African fantasy texts. Such studies could complement qualitative analysis and provide additional evidence for identifying characteristic features of the genre.

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