

Antonymic Relation as a Trope of Meaning in the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide

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Abstract

This paper is a stylistic study of antonymy as a trope of meaning in selected poems of Tanure Ojaide. As one of the most prolific contemporary Nigerian poets, Ojaide's writings have been approached from different literary and linguistic perspectives; however, there appears to be a paucity of studies on oppositional relations in his writings, in particular, and in Nigerian creative writings in general. Therefore, this study examines antonymic lexical relations in selected poems of Tanure Ojaide to show how Ojaide conceptualises the inherent messages of his poems through lexical antonymy. Six poems are purposefully chosen from three different collections of Tanure Ojaide for this study. This selection is guided by the manifestation of appropriate lexical relations of antonyms in expressing the inherent messages of the poems. In our methodology, features that manifest antonymic relations are extracted from the poems for analysis. The findings reveal that Ojaide appropriates lexical oppositions conventionally and unconventionally in depicting the deterioration in the well-being of individuals and the environment in his poetry. It concludes that lexical sense relations of antonymy enable the poet to delineate different shades of opposition and conceptualise the different realities of the human condition in our contemporary society

Key words: antonymy, meaning, stylistics, poetry, lexical relation, Tanure Ojaide

Introduction

One of the most prominent figures among contemporary poets in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is Tanure Ojaide. A prolific and committed writer, Ojaide is forthright in following and interpreting his home country, Nigeria. He is committed to his society consciously, and his commitment to literature, especially poetry, is no less conscious (Okome, 2002). Okome (2002, p. 10) further sees Ojaide as "the most prominent poet to come out of the Niger Delta after J.P. Clark". His concern with the despoliation of his Niger Delta environment in his poetry earned him the title "The Poet-Priest of the Niger Delta (Alu & Suwe, 2012) and "The Poet Laureate of the Niger Delta" (Okome, 2002).

Most of his poetic works reflect his life experiences. Thus, he states in his "Self Portrait" that "In all my writings, my early upbringing in the Niger Delta continues to feed and fuel my imagination." Okome (2002, p. 9) asserts that in Ojaide's poetry, he creates "a rich and textually diverse world in which the map of his locality, his Niger Delta origin, is dutifully foregrounded in the larger map of his country and of the world".

As one of the third-generation poets, according to Ushie's (2005, p. 11) classification, Ojaide views his poetry as a means to document, expose, critique, and

satirise the maladministration and injustices plaguing every facet of his country, Nigeria, as a nation. As a prolific poet, his poetry has received a lot of critical attention from the literary, linguistic and cultural perspectives. This study, therefore, is a further engagement of the poetry of Tanure Ojaide from the perspective of linguistic study, focusing on antonymy as a trope of meaning to reveal how antonyms as a linguistic feature are deployed to communicate his socio-economic, political and eco-critical messages.

Antonymy: Oppositeness as an Aspect of Human Existence

Antonymy is used for the oppositeness of meaning (Palmer 1981, p. 94). Carter (2012, p. 34) refers to it as a kind of contrast in meaning that has to do with the notion of semantic oppositeness or unrelatedness. In advanced stylistic study of opposition in texts, Jeffries (2010) makes a distinction between conventional and unconventional oppositions. Conventional opposition refers to the context-free notion of the capacity of words to be related by oppositeness. Conventional oppositions reflect the idea that although there is nothing intrinsic about these relationships, their importance may vary between languages and cultures. There are four main subtypes of conventional or canonical oppositions identified by lexicologists and linguists. These are complementarity, converseness, incompatibility and polar/gradable antonyms (see Carter, 2012; Palmer, 1996; Lyons, 1968). Complementarity is where the presence of one sense component excludes another.

This is a case of absolute antonyms, and they are mutually exclusive types of opposites in the sense that one cannot be both at the same time, and there is no gradability. Examples include pairs like *boy-girl*, *dead-alive*, and *man-woman*. This is also referred to as binary antonymy. Converseness or relational antonymy is a contrastive lexical relation where there is a measure of logical reciprocity or reversal of relationship. Items involved in this oppositional relation are mutually dependent, as we have in *husband-wife*, and *master - servant*. It contrasts with complementarity in that there is interdependency of meaning (Carter, 2012:34). Incompatibility refers to relational contrast between items in a semantic field. For instance, to say “today is Monday” excludes every other day of the week (Carter, 2012:34). The fourth demarcation is referred to as polar or gradable antonymy. This is the most common, and it is used to refer to gradable opposition in the sense of lexical items which are not in one or the other relationship but imply the possibility of gradation between them. These different shades of oppositeness will go a long way to underscore how Ojaide reflects the reality of societal opposition in the real world in his poetry.

Unconventional or Creative Opposition

Jeffries (2010) introduced the concept of the construction of oppositional meaning in texts. As the name implies, unconventional or creative oppositions are oppositional relations which are textually constructed. Pairs of words whose oppositional relationship arises specifically from their textual surrounding. This type of oppositional relationship arises specifically from their textual surroundings, and they are triggered by textual features. Jeffries (2010:1) refers to such oppositional relations

as *constructed*, *created*, or *unconventional* opposites; Mettinger (1994) calls them non-systemic semantic opposites, while Murphy (2003) refers to them as non-canonical antonyms. Creative opposition occurs when non-canonical opposites are juxtaposed in texts. This results in the contextual creation of new opposite relations (Jeffries, 2010).

Jeffries (2010, p. 33) identifies structural (grammatical) and semantic (lexical) triggers of textually constructed oppositions. Structural triggers are the syntactic means by which a text producer creates textual oppositions. These include negation, parallel structure, coordination and comparatives. Negation makes use of the negative marker, not, never, in place of, instead, preposition and adverb in creating opposition. Parallel structure is more evident as a syntactic trigger of opposition. Citing Leech (1969, p. 67), Jeffries observes that “every parallelism sets up a relationship of equivalence between two or more elements ... a connection either of similarity or of contrast”. All coordinating conjunctions indicate opposition in a certain context, with *but*, *or* and *yet* indicating more than. In the same vein, comparative structures can be said to trigger contextual oppositions. Some of these can work together in a text, as Jeffries (2010) provides an example below: ...let the professionals remember that the politicians that the public likes best are *not the aloof ones but the human ones*. The opposition created here is “aloof” and “human”. It is effectively set up by the negative element, *not* enhanced by the parallel structure (*the X ones*) and contrasted using the conjunction *but* with a negative meaning.

Lexically triggered oppositions are those unconventional oppositions which depend on the lexical choice of the text producer rather than structural choices. There are two categories of lexical triggers: explicit mention of oppositional relations and influence of conventional opposites in context (Jeffries, 2010, p. 50). In the first case, a verb is chosen whose meaning sets up some kind of contrast. Such verbs may include *compare*, *transform* and *change* as seen in the example below:

To change from a bum
to a billionaire

where *bum* and *billionaire* are placed in textually constructed opposition triggered by the verb *change*. In the second case, the closeness of conventional opposition in the context of the created one has a way of influencing the analyst to interpret the constructed opposite with conventional pairings (see Jeffries, 2010, p. 50).

Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, the poetry of Tanure Ojaide has attracted the interest of many scholars. Abdurraheem (2025) investigates animal symbolism in three collections of Tanure Ojaide's poetry. The findings reveal that through the predominant use of material verbs and a few instances of mental processes, Ojaide employs the actions and activities of both predatory and small animals in his collections to symbolise the barbarity, brutality, and tyranny of Nigerian/African political leadership. Maledo (2023) conducts a lexical analysis of Tanure Ojaide's poetry to interpret the

relationships between hypernyms (superordinate terms) and hyponyms in depicting Niger Delta issues in the selected poems. The study is grounded on the premise that hyponymic classifications are significant because they reveal insights into a writer's culture and worldview. The paper utilises the Lexical Field approach, a structuralist semantic method that identifies lexical sets within a text, covering specific areas of meaning (semantic fields). Nwagbara (2010a and b) views Ojaide as an eco-critical poet who rejects ecological imperialism in his poetry. He asserts that Ojaide's poetics emerge strongly in resisting environmental and socio-economic decline, which threaten the natural world. Maledo (2019a) identifies key graphological features in selected poems by Tanure Ojaide. It analyses and categorises these features, relating them to the socio-political contexts of the poems to better understand their stylistic use of language.

Akani (n.d.) examines the persistent factors undermining the beauty and pleasure of the Niger Delta environment. The paper assesses Ojaide's concerns using eco-critical theory, which sees art and society as interconnected entities that, when studied, reveal underlying beauty and emotion. The study concludes that despite extensive writing on African literature, little has been said about the Niger Delta. Awuzie (2017) offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of Tanure Ojaide's poetry. The paper suggests that Ojaide's poetry reflects symptoms of personal and societal neurotic tendencies. It reveals that Ojaide's poetry is dominated by the archetype of the "wounded healer"—a symbol of a wounded personality who also acts as a messianic figure. Ativie (2007) analyses Ojaide's Delta Blues and Home Songs (1997) from a cohesion perspective. The study examines how these works help the poet unite different sections of his texts, focusing on endophoric reference. This discourse-oriented approach relates to the textual functions of language. While these forms assist in conveying messages to the reader, the paper remains silent on their overall communicative role.

From a critical stylistic perspective, Kadiri et al. (2022) is a study of Tanure Ojaide's *Fate of Vultures and Other Poems*. The study adopts naming and describing as its critical stylistics textual conceptual-functions with insights from Adejare and Adejare's (2006) description of nominal group structure as its analytical framework. It concludes that Ojaide embeds his resistance, political ideology, and social meanings in the chosen poems by using naming and description as key stylistic devices. Seeing parallelism as a linguistic means of depicting additive thought and in conveying semantic re-iteration in both spoken and written texts, Maledo (2019b) studies syntactic parallelism in Ojaide's poetry. the study adopts Halliday's (1961) clause structural description of SPCA as its analytical pattern to portray syntactic parallelism in the selected poems. It concludes that the use of structural parallelism is functional in Ojaide's poetry as it evokes a monotonous rhythmic quality, aesthetically pleasing when read out, and it affords the poet a means of achieving meaning and structural identity.

Adagboyin (2002) examines the rhetorical impact of pronominal usage in *Fate of Vultures and other Poems*, while Ibhawaegbele (2012) discusses how pronominal forms are employed in Tanure Ojaide's *Fate of Vultures* as signs of power, resistance,

and solidarity. According to Bodunde (2002), Ojaide's prominent aesthetic in *Delta Blues and Home Songs* is the appropriation of the Niger Delta's physical environment as an object in the depiction of the deterioration in the well-being of individuals. Similar to how Tsaaor (2013) analyses *Delta Blues* from the standpoint of post-colonial discourse, Adekoya (2013) focuses on the first section of *Delta Blues* with an emphasis on the impact of oil exploration on the Niger Delta's natural environment and population. From the assessment above, Tanure Ojaide's poetry has gotten a lot of attention, but not much from the standpoint of antonymic lexical relations. Thus, the relevance of this study.

Methodology

This study makes use of both primary and secondary sources of data. Our primary data consists of six poems selected from three poetry collections of Tanure Ojaide. They include "You Don't Have to Be" (*The Beauty I have Seen*, 146), "On New Year's Eve, 2006" (*The Beauty I Have Seen*, 76), "When Tomorrow is too Long" (*Fate of Vultures and other Poems*, 18 – 19), "Players" (*Fate of Vultures*, 15), "Favouritism" (*In the House of Words*, 31- 32), and "The area boy" (*In the house of words*, 107 - 109). This selection is essentially based on the manifestation of the linguistic feature of antonyms. In the analysis, lexical items and structures relevant to the focus of our study are extracted from the poems and presented for analysis. Where necessary, the clause structural pattern of SPCA is used to indicate structural opposition as triggered by syntactic parallelism. The poems are examined one after the other.

Data Analysis

In the poem, "You Don't Have to Be" (*The Beauty I have Seen*, 146), Ojaide's conceptual view of humanity is foregrounded through the use of antonymous lexical items that are mutually interdependent to project his conceptual view of domination, discrimination and racism. In stanza one, *Jewish* is in antonymous relation with *Auschwitz*. In the context, it recalls the Holocaust, in which about six million Jews were systemically murdered by Nazi Germany. Also, *black slavery* in stanza two presents the domination and racial segregation of Black Africans during the era of the slave trade and the current racial discrimination around the world. This is also projected in the pairs of *foreign* and *discrimination* in stanza four. *Minority* and *dominion of big numbers* contrast the type of ethnic domination going on in most parts of the world, especially in the poet's country, Nigeria, in which minority tribes of the Niger Delta that produce the oil, the wealth of the nation, are subjected to and dominated by other larger tribes. *Homeless* and *vagaries of life*, and *rich* and *uncertainty of tomorrow* are also antonyms indices of the poet's conceptual views of discrimination and domination in society.

One interesting aspect of the lexical field of this poem is its reference to humanity in general. Through this, the poet kicks against all shades and types of segregation and domination around the world. By implication, *Jewish*, *Auschwitz*, *black*, *slavery*, *native*, *foreign*, *discrimination*, *minority*, *dominion of big numbers*, *homeless*, *vagaries of life*, *rich*, *uncertainty of tomorrow*, *crippled*, *handicapped*,

star, and *volatility of the weather* form a lexical field, as they are all mutually interdependent in the context of the poem. They have a sense of relation of domination and segregation. Thus, the social issue of domination is foregrounded in the ideational meaning of the poem.

Through lexical antonyms in “On New Year’s Eve, 2006” (*The Beauty I Have Seen*, 76), Ojaide satirises the ills and injustices in his society at the end of the year 2006. Antonymic sense relation provides Ojaide a means of depicting a semantic field of injustices and abnormalities in his society. The poem is divided into sections One and Two. In Section One, the antonymic sense relation is the major sense relation deployed. In stanza one, *treating*, *bearable disease*, *fatal infection*, and *impurities* are antonyms to form a lexical cluster to foreground the poet’s ideational meaning of sickness, which is part of the abnormalities that ravage the entire society. *Breaking*, *stick*, *bent* and *bow* also form a cluster to foreground the needless destruction, wastefulness mismanagement in the society. *Stick*, as used in the context of this poem, is symbolic. *Preordained verdict* and *trial* foreground injustice in stanza three. In stanza four, *overstretched hand* contrasts with *amputated*. In this context, the poet is questioning when the excesses of the oppressors will be curtailed.

A prominent feature of this poem is the use of parallelism to create contextual opposition. The first three stanzas of Section One exhibit parallelism as the *-ing* verbal structure, followed by a nominal group, is repeated in each line:

// Treating / a painful but bearable disease / with fatal infection // P C A
 // clearing / impurities / from the street / with a mudslide // P C A A

// breaking / the stick meant to be bent into a bow // P C
 // drowning / the dirty child / in a pool / instead of washing him with a bucket // P C A A

// giving / a preordained verdict / before the trial is done // P C A
 // burying / the sick child / instead of allowing the patient to go underway // P C A

In the first line of the first stanza above, the opposition between *painful* and *bearable* is triggered by the conjunction “but”. In the second line, *clearing impurities* contrasts with *mudslide* through the use of the preposition “with”. In the first line of stanza two, *stick* and *bow* are contrasted through the verb phrase, while in the second line, the contrast between *drowning the dirty child* and *washing him* is triggered by the preposition “instead of”. In line three, *preordained verdict* and *trial* are contextual antonyms triggered by the preposition “before”, while in the second line, *burying the sick child* is a contextual antonym of *allowing the patient to go either way* is triggered by the preposition “instead of”. What is obvious in the above analysis is the use of the P C structure or the use of the *-ing* verb plus a nominal group plus a prepositional group in the first three stanzas of Section One. Thus, we have the clause structure P C:

P C
Treating / a painful but bearable disease
clearing / impurities
breaking / the stick
drowning / the dirty child
giving / a preordained verdict
burying / the sick child

as the most constant structure of the stanza. Stanza five has a parallel structure A S P C:

// Despite the blindfold / the world / knows / the hangman // A S P C
// despite our profuse tears / we / see / the murderer's profile // A S P C

In which “the blindfold” is a contextual antonym to “the hangman”, and “our profuse tears” contrast with “the murderer’s profile.” The use of parallelism in stanzas one, two, three, and five highlights how stanza four stands out in meaning because it diverges from the established pattern, thus:

when will the overstretched hands of the callous one
be amputated by the saviour of small ones?

Presented in an interrogative mood, the stanza asks the ultimate rhetorical question of when the revolution incubating in the poet’s heart will start. More significantly, it forms a textual antonym between “the callous one” and “the saviour”. This, in a way, is suggestive of a call for immediate revolution.

Ojaide brings the poem to an end using antonymic sense relation to foreground the theme of hopelessness at the end of the year 2006 in the last three stanzas, where armed marauders are in contrast with victims, the monster is in contrast with the pious ones, and *decomposing corpse* contrasts with *birth*, *conception* and *beautiful one*. This, in a way, suggests disappointment as there is no end in sight to the injustices in society.

In “When Tomorrow is too Long” (*Fate of Vultures and Poems*, 18 – 19), Ojaide, through his manner of use of words, berates politicians as deceptive tricksters and magicians. Therefore, the poet warns the people not to fall into the antics of the juggler-politicians through the use of antonyms. The poet explores the lexical relation of antonyms to express his messages in the poem, as shown in the following lexical pairs:

honey cake / ashen loaf
throws out / takes in
one thing / more than seven
beneficiaries/victim
head/tail
frolic/live

loot of a flood/drought of denials

In the above, the antonymous relationship between *honey cake* and *ashen loaf* shows deception. *Cake* and *loaf* are synonyms, while *honey* and *ashen* are opposites. Modifying *loaf* with *ashen* in this context shows the trickster nature of the politician who *presses* a *cake* that is made of *honey* into a *loaf* that is *ashen*. *Throws out* and *takes in* are also lexical opposites, which underscores greed and exploitation. The politician *throws out one thing* and *takes in more than seven*. Thus, the people suffer denial and exploitation. This is further expressed in the antonymic relation between *beneficiaries* and *victim* and *head* and *tail*, where the politician is the *beneficiary* and *head*, while the people are *victim* and *tail*. The opposition in living conditions of the politician and the people is captured appropriately through antonyms in *frolic* and *live*, and *loot of a flood* and *drought of denials*. The above vividly captures the contrasting opposition in the living conditions of the politicians and the people. The poet also shows that what the politicians call democracy is not democracy in the real sense. This is seen in the expression *trappings of democracy* in stanza four. This lexical relation is contradictory. Free democracy has become “trappings”, suggestive of the fact that the so-called democracy is a deception. Thus, the poet warns the people to shun it.

In the poem, “Players” (*Fate of Vultures*, 15), Ojaide lampoons African leaders by presenting a lexical field of buffoonery of African kings through the use of lexical antonyms to create two lexical sets which project the foolishness of African kings/presidents as shown below:

lexical set A

king
crown
barbaric
oath
inauguration
toothsome pearls
royal
rank

lexical set B

actor
stage costume
theater
gesture
set drums
ritual
stage
acting
role players

Through the above lexical sets, Ojaide ridicules the president-actor-kings in charge of most African countries. These lexical sets present the setting of dramatic theatre through which the kings/presidents are actors; *the crown* in set A is in constructive opposition with *stage costume* in B, creating the semantic implication of irrelevance and dishonour. To a very large extent, some lexical pairs in the above lexical sets form textual opposition to further diminish the place of African presidents and leaders. *King* and *actor* form unusual opposites to relegate the office of African presidents to that of dramatic theatre in which an African king is a *leading actor*. The process of *inauguration*, with its *set drums* and *stage*, is seen as a mere *gesture* and *acting* with African kings as *players* in the act, while *oath*-taking is just a *ritual*, not binding on

African leaders. Another instance of contrastive opposition, which helps to project the overall insincerity of African kings/presidents, is seen in lines 12 and 13:

He'll not remember his oath;
it was mouthed, he will argue,

Oaths and *mouthed* in the above are textual oppositions. *Oaths* should be “sworn to” or “taken” but not *mouthed*. This makes the lexical relation between *Oaths* and *mouthed* unusual, underscores the deception, and unseriousness of African leaders who see the act of oath-taking as a mere verbal ritual which should not be taken seriously afterwards. The above lexical relations foreground the sarcastic message of African leaders as unserious and laughable showmen at the detriment of their roles. Thus, Olafioye (2002, p.53) puts it that those African politicians, especially Nigerians, are sarcastically baptised “players”, a denunciatory, disreputable social stamp on pretensions beyond repair.

In lines 3 to 5, Ojaide uses parallelism to trigger a textual antonymic relation to foreground the fact that African presidents prefer “stage acting” to effective discharge of their responsibilities:

S	P	C	A
// He / will prefer / his stage costume / to the crown; //			
S	P	A	
// He / will show up / in every theatre //			
P	C	A	
// Make / a theatre / of every day //			

The first line in the above excerpt has an SPCA pattern, while the second has SPA. The third has PCA (with the S and the modal auxiliary, *will*, ellipted but recoverable from the context). In this parallel structure, the subject and the auxiliary verb can be said to be repeated to enhance parallelism and rhythm. The complements in lines 1 and 3 and the adjunct in line 2 have one semantic implication in common: they all refer to the concept of theatre and play acting. Noting that the subject of these clauses is *he*, which cataphorically refers to the king in line one of this poem, one can say here that this parallel structure helps to foreground the rest elements in each clause, which project and underscore African leaders as players and actors.

Ojaide’s focus in “Favouritism” (*In the House of Words*, 31- 32) is the frozen relationship and bickering rivalry between mothers-in-law and their sons’ wives in our modern society. He uses the lexical sense relation of antonyms to depict the attitude of both towards each other:

A	B
mother	wife
mocks	looks down on
orthodoxy	imported accessories, pale, soft
farm	gym

village	city
sacrifice	true love
mum	talkative
rides footroen (treks)	drives (in a car)

In the context of this poem, *mother* is opposed and in contrast to *wife*; while *Mocks*, which means to ridicule, or scorn, and *looks down on*, a phrasal verb, meaning to treat as inferior, are also in contextual opposition. While the mother is *orthodox*, the wife is *pale*, *soft* and depends on *imported accessories*. Through this, the poet creates a generational gap between the mother-in-law and the wife as the wife is seen to deviate from accepted norms and conventions of orthodoxy, and this the *mother* does not approve of. This picture is an apt representation of our modern women and wives who are very much unlike their mothers and their mothers-in-law, who belong to the era of *mahogany stock* and *study plant*. Thus, Ojaide pitches the orthodoxy of the mother-in-law and modernity of the wife.

Furthermore, the poet's mother goes to the *farm* and lives in the *village*, while the wife goes to the *gym* and lives in the *city*. Those lexical pairs are antonyms. The mother treks (*rides a footroen*) while the wife drives (a car), and the mother is *mum* (talks less) while the wife is *talkative*. And the poet persona is torn between *sacrifice* and *true love*: *true love* for his wife and *sacrifice* for his mother. This underscores the confusion in which the poet finds himself. This bickering rivalry has caused him sleepless nights and has also affected his manhood, as he tells us in stanza twelve. Furthermore, this rivalry and opposition between the poet's persona's *mother* and his *wife* is further highlighted through other lexical antonyms. In stanza six, the poet tells us that they are always at loggerheads even if they are on the same page on an issue. This is seen in the antonymous pairs of *same point* – *opposite directions*.

According to Ojaide (2006:128), the Area boy is a young male “that claims sovereignty over their area, usually militant and jobless, and extorts money through unofficial levies”. They live in illusion and delusion. So, in the poem, “The area boy” (*In the house of words*, 107 - 109), through the lexical relation of antonyms, Ojaide shows this illusory belief and the actual reality in the lives of the area boys. This is presented in a tabular form below:

illusion	reality
one endless blue song	constant pain
a comic	every insult
noisy	without communicating
a castle	rat-infested room
king's table	on the floor
jollof and jolojolo (salad)	stale bread, meatless soup and eba
a royal suit	ochred jumper
millionaire	penury

The above lexical pairs are contextual antonyms, and through them, the poet illustrates the illusory life of the area boy and the reality on the ground. To him, his life is *one endless blue song* full of happiness, but in reality, he is in *constant pain*. In this lexical pair, *endless* and *constant* are opposites, while *song* and *pain* can also be seen as constructive antonyms. To the area boy, every *insult* he takes is *comic*, and he is *noisy* all the time *without communicating* any sense. This is very true in our daily lives as we encounter the area boys always generating noise without making any sense. The area boy lives in *a rat-infested room*, but deceives himself that it is *a castle*, while he sets his food on the bare *floor* and believes he dines on the king's *table*. His pauperised meal is *stale bread*, *meatless soup* and *eba*, but he says that he eats *jollof* and salad while his *ochred jumper*, to him, is a *royal suit*. He lives in abject *penury*, but thinks himself a *millionaire*.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the extent to which Ojaide explores the lexical relation of antonymy in his poetry. Ojaide uses antonymy to contrast, among other things, the powerful and the weak, the dominating and the dominated, the ruined environment and the primal environment, and the exploiter and the exploited. The poet also distinguishes various shades of opposition in the real world with the aid of lexical sense relations of antonymy. As noted, the world we live in is characterised by oppositeness as an aspect of human existence, and in creative writing and other forms of discourse, such oppositeness appears either as canonical or creative oppositeness. The selected poems reveal that at the lexical level, the poet expresses his worldview and the realities of the human condition in contemporary society. The dual nature of our politicians is vividly depicted by contrasting their promises with their lies in "The Players", using antonymous lexical relations to highlight the buffoonery of African kings through the employment of lexical antonyms that form two sets, illustrating the foolishness of African kings and presidents. Additionally, the contrast between our modern wives and their mothers-in-law in contemporary society is made evident through lexical antonymy, just as antonymic relations expose the falsehood of the life of the area boy in "area boys."

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