

ANALYSIS OF STYLISTIC FEATURES IN BEN WEILOW'S SONG 'VODUN LIFE SPIRIT'

Analyse des traits stylistiques dans la chanson 'Esprit de Vie Vodun' de Ben Weilow

AYODELE ADEBAYO ALLAGBÉ

Laboratoire Lettres Education et Communication (LaboLEC), Université André Salifou (UAS), République du Niger
ayodeleallagbe@yahoo.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5398-9178>

FRANCK AMOUSSOU

Laboratoire Lettres Education et Communication (LaboLEC), Université André Salifou (UAS), République du Niger
courawin@yahoo.fr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2298-9529>

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the linguistic or stylistic features in Ben Weilow's song entitled 'Vodun Life Spirit'. Drawing on stylistics, especially on Leech and Short's checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories (lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context) (Leech and Short, 2007), and on the descriptive qualitative research method, the study specifically analyzes how the singer organizes language to encode meaning(s) in his aforementioned song. The findings reveal that Ben Weilow employs such lexical features as 'Vodun Life Spirit', 'Vodun Love Spirit', 'Mother Vodun Maou' and 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa'. He also uses terms like 'Dambada Houèdo', 'Tchango', 'Hèviosso Fire', etc. As it appears, these lexical features are abstract nouns which refer to spiritual agents, the main spiritual agent being 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' as it performs all the agentive actions in the text. Moreover, the results show that Ben Weilow uses, in varying proportions, sentence length and structure. They unveil too that the singer employs figures of speech like metaphor, allusion, metonymy, personification, etc. in his song. Finally, the findings indicate that Ben Weilow deploys lexical cohesion, reference and conjunction, the most dominant type being lexical cohesion. In conclusion, it can be established that all the linguistic features identified in the song are deployed to represent 'Vodun' as a positive spiritual force which pervades human life and everything. Therefore, this suggests that Vodun protects and empowers its children or worshippers against evil, provides them with all their (im)material needs and also gives them eternal joy.

KEY WORDS: Ben Weilow; song; stylistic features; spiritual agent; Vodun Life Spirit.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article vise à étudier les traits linguistiques ou stylistiques de la chanson de Ben Weilow intitulée 'Esprit de Vie Vodun'. Se fondant sur la stylistique, et particulièrement les catégories linguistiques et stylistiques de Leech et Short (catégories lexicales, grammaticales, figures de style, et cohésion et contexte) (Leech et Short, 2007), et la méthode de recherche qualitative descriptive, cette étude analyse notamment comment le chanteur organise la langue pour encoder le sens dans sa chanson susmentionnée. Les résultats révèlent que Ben Weilow emploie des traits lexicaux tels que 'Esprit de Vie Vodun', 'Esprit d'Amour Vodun', 'Mère Vodun Maou' et 'Mère Vodun Maou Lissa'. Il utilise aussi des termes comme 'Dambada Houèdo', 'Tchango, Hèvioosso le Feu', etc. Comme cela se voit, ces traits lexicaux sont des noms abstraits qui désignent des agents spirituels, le principal agent spirituel étant 'Mère Vodun Maou Lissa' puisqu'il exécute toutes les actions agentives du texte. En outre, les résultats montrent que Ben Weilow emploie, en proportions variées, la longueur et la structure des phrases. Ils révèlent également que le chanteur emploie des figures de style comme la métaphore, l'allusion, la métonymie, la personnification, etc. dans sa chanson. Enfin, les résultats indiquent que Ben Weilow déploie la cohésion lexicale, la référence et la conjonction, avec comme trait dominant, la cohésion lexicale. En conclusion, on peut établir que tous les traits linguistiques identifiés dans la chanson sont déployés pour représenter le 'Vodun' comme une force spirituelle positive qui imprègne la vie humaine et tout. Ceci suggère ainsi que le Vodun protège et fortifie ses enfants ou adeptes contre le mal, pourvoit à tous leurs besoins (im)matériels et les comble aussi d'une éternelle félicité.

MOTS-CLÉ: Ben Weilow; chanson; traits stylistiques; agent spirituel; Esprit de Vie Vodun.

Introduction and Conceptual Clarification

In oral literature, songs or oral poetry simply is often considered as a very rich sub-genre in that its language is highly imagistic and figurative in nature, and it ultimately aims to produce peculiar stylistic effects. Yeibo (2012, p. 180) seems to concur with the foregoing when he associates figurative language with stylistic functions: "The role played by figurative language in encoding the meaning of a literary text cannot be over-emphasized. Specifically, it serves both functional and artistic purposes. This infers that, figurative language acts as semantic signifiers in texts and also helps the literary artist in achieving beauty in form." In an attempt to show the importance of oral poetry, Finnegan (2017) emphasizes two of its characteristic features: style and performance. For this scholar, in oral poetry, style cannot be dissociated from performance. In fact, she cogently believes that "With oral poetry, the distinction between the two is not a clear one, and it is impossible to appreciate either fully without some understanding of the other" (p. 88). She further observes that oral art and written art share some socially recognized conventions in common. Therefore, as she argues, "Socially recognised conventions apply to oral as much as to written art, and are a part of accepted stylistic conventions as well as more obviously 'sociological' aspects, like social function or the economic position of poets" (p. 89).

The term 'style' has been mentioned above. There is a need to clarify it here. This term can be simply glossed as what distinguishes one language user from another (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010). According to Leech and Short (2007, p. 9), style

“refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on.” Concurring with the foregoing, Verdonk (2002, p. 1) states that “style in language can be defined as distinctive linguistic expression.” By the expression ‘distinctive linguistic expression’, Verdonk wants to suggest that every language user naturally uses language in an idiosyncratic or peculiar manner. Perhaps, an example will suffice to illustrate the preceding view. For instance, while writing a song or an oral poem, a song-writer or poet draws on language. Isn’t it? Of course, s/he makes choices in the language system to convey meanings. The choices the song-writer or poet makes in language naturally, we assume, produce stylistic effects on the audience. Bidu (2013) agrees with the foregoing and further observes that “Oral poetry results from mental processes [in order] to serve immediate personal, social or cultural purposes, which enforce its creativities” (p. 1).

As mentioned above, oral poetry is often considered as a very rich sub-genre in/of oral literature. However, this sub-genre has received little (not to say no) linguistic or stylistic attention. This paper seeks to fill in this research gap. It aims to examine the linguistic or stylistic features in a song entitled ‘Vodun Life Spirit’ written by Ben Weilow. The study specifically analyzes how the singer organizes language to encode meaning(s) in his aforementioned song. It draws its theoretical underpinnings from stylistics. Stylistics can be simply defined as the linguistic study of style in language (Leech and Short, 2007, p. 11). According to Verdonk (2002, p. 2), it can be referred to as the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect. Without dispelling the foregoing, Simpson (2003, p. 4) holds that “Stylistics is a method of applied language study which uses textual analysis to make discoveries about the structure and function of language.” Recall we stated and assumed earlier that the choices a song-writer or poet makes in language naturally produce effects on the audience. Note that we cannot explain how this happens objectively without drawing on a sound theoretical construct, stylistics, for instance. In fact, stylistics aims to account for how texts project meaning, how readers construct meaning and why readers respond to texts in the way that they do (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010).

1. Methodology

As mentioned earlier, this paper draws on Leech and Short’s checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories (Leech and Short, 2007) to account for how Ben Weilow organizes language to encode meaning(s) in his song entitled ‘Vodun Life Spirit’. It must be made clear from the onset that Leech and Short’s checklist is not the only relevant linguistic method available to the linguist. We have decided to apply this checklist here because we cogently believe that it best suits our research objective. Leech and Short’s checklist actually comprises four linguistic and stylistic categories, namely: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context.

We use the lexical categories to find out how the choices Ben Weilow makes at the lexico-semantic level encode meanings. We are particularly interested in the types of meaning his lexical choices make, and we do this by looking at four lexical categories (nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs). We also employ the grammatical categories to investigate how the choices that he makes at the grammatical level realize meanings. We specifically examine the length or complexity and structure of the sentences that he employs in his song. Again, since (oral) poetry has been claimed to be marked by figurative language (Yeibo, 2012; Bidu, 2013; Finnegan, 2017), we identify the various figures of speech (including phonological schemes) that Ben Weilow deploys to spice his song. Finally, we look at how he structures language lexicogrammatically, the cohesive features that he develops in his song to make it sound cohesive and coherent. We study too how these features interact with context to encode the singer's intended meanings.

Ben Weilow's song under scrutiny here was collected from the internet on the 10th of January 2023. The 10th of January is a highly symbolic date in Benin Republic. It is a date dedicated to the celebration of Vodun. In effect, Vodun was formally recognized as the official religion of Benin on January 10, 1996, and this date has ever since then been considered a national holiday in the country. The song that we analyze is entitled 'Vodun Life Spirit' online (<https://www.youtube.com>). We downloaded it from the internet by means of *Tubidy* and transcribed it. Then, we numbered the sentences and clauses therein (for instance, '1' stands for sentence and '1i' clause). Note that this song comprises French, English, Fon and Gun words or expressions (Fongbé and Gungbé are languages spoken in (the southern part of) Benin Republic). For convenience, we translated the French, Fon and Gun words and expressions into English. But there are words like 'Soya!' and 'Dji ku kui' which we could not translate, and as a result, we considered them as onomatopoeic expressions in our stylistic analysis. In point of fact, the song starts out with French and quickly switches into English. However, it is momentarily spiced with expressions from the aforementioned local languages to make it carry some local flavor and sound authentic. We carry out our subsequent stylistic analysis using a descriptive qualitative research method. Due to space limitations, we do not provide the full song-text here.

2. Analysis of Stylistic Features in the Song

We begin the stylistic analysis of Ben Weilow's song with lexical features .

2.1. Lexical Features in the Song

In this section, we look at such lexical features as nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs deployed in Ben Weilow's 'Vodun Life Spirit'.

Nouns and Adjectives

This song contains both physical or concrete nouns ('witches' in (2ii; 34 and 35iii); 'wizards' in (2ii; 34 and 35iii); 'Trees' in (14); 'Creepers' in (14); 'earth' in (17i); 'food' in (17ii); 'springs' in (19i); 'knife' in (29iii), etc.), and abstract nouns ('Vodun

Spirit' in (1ii); 'Vodun Love Spirit' in (2iii; 6 and 8); 'Vodun Law' in (3i); 'Vodun Life Spirit' in (4; 16; 26 and 27i); 'air' in (5); 'Eternal Life String' in (9i); 'universe' in (10iv); 'Mother Vodun Maou' in (10ii); 'power(s)' in (10iii and 29i); 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' in (14; 25; 34 and 36); '41 Vodun' in (14); 'thirsts' in (19ii); 'bliss' in (21ii); 'happiness' in (21ii); 'love' in (22); 'Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah' in (34; 35i and 35ii); 'Danbada Houèdo' in (25 and 36); 'Tchango Hèvioosso Fire' in (25 and 36); 'Ogou Vodun of the Iron' in (25); 'Sakpata, Vodun of the Earth' in (25); 'Dangbé, the Sacred Python' in (25), 'thunderbolt' in (27ii), etc. As it clearly appears in the foregoing, abstract nouns outnumber concrete nouns in this song. This suggests thus that the song is more concerned with abstract description; i.e. the description of spiritual agents.

Significantly, the physical or concrete nouns in the song occur as the head words of/in noun phrases ('witches and wizards' in (2ii; 34 and 35iii); 'Trees and Creepers' in (14); 'the earth' in (17i); 'your daily food' in (17ii); 'the springs' in (19i); 'a sharp knife' in (29iii), etc.). We can notice in the foregoing that 'witches and wizards' and 'Trees and Creepers' comprise each two nouns joined together with the coordinating conjunction 'and'. Though these nouns are concrete in nature, they stand for opposing spiritual forces in the song. While the song projects 'witches and wizards' as evil spiritual forces, it represents 'Trees and Creepers' as a material expression of Vodun Spirit. Note that the group of words 'Trees and Creepers' is preceded in the song by the attributive adjective 'Big'. This adjective encodes meanings about greatness, height, weight and power related to 'Trees and Creepers'. The determiner 'the' in 'the earth' and 'the springs', the possessive adjective 'your' and the attributive adjective 'daily' in 'your daily food', and the indefinite article 'a' and the attributive adjective 'sharp' in 'a sharp knife' also modify each their head word. Notice too that the use of the determiner 'the' in 'the earth' and 'the springs' indicates that these topographical features are definite; i.e. not general.

Like concrete nouns, most of (not to say all) the abstract nouns in this song are noun phrases, and predominantly have the term 'Spirit' as a head word (1ii; 2iii; 4; 6; 8; 16; 26 and 27i). Another striking feature in the song is that the singer mainly deploys nouns to modify other nouns. Consider how he does this in the following examples:

- i. Vodun Spirit in (1ii);
N + N
- ii. Vodun Love Spirit in (2iii; 6 and 8);
N + N + N
- iii. Vodun Law in (3i);
N + N
- iv. Vodun Life Spirit (4; 16; 26 and 27i)
N + N + N
- v. Mother Vodun Maou in (10ii);
N + N + N
- vi. Mother Vodun Maou Lissa in (14; 25; 34 and 36);
N + N + N + N

vii. 'Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah' in (34; 35i and 35ii).

N + N + N + N

It is obvious in the examples above that this song includes three patterns: 'N + N', 'N + N + N' and 'N + N + N + N'. Note that in examples (i. and iii.), a Fon word ('Vodun') is placed before an English word ('Spirit'/'Law') but in examples (ii. and iv.) a Fon word is placed before two English words ('Love Spirit'/'Life Spirit'). In examples (v. and vi.), on the other hand, an English word ('Mother') is placed before Fon words. While the English word ('Mother') is placed before two Fon words ('Vodun Maou') in example (v.), it is placed before three Fon words ('Vodun Maou Lissa') in example (vi.). Note also that the group of words 'Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah' (example vii.) which obviously shares the same pattern with example (vi.) does not contain any recognizable English expression. In other words, all the tokens that constitute it are Fon words. On the surface, this group of Fon words sounds more like an incantation than a name of a god. However, it is a name of a god, whom the singer characterizes in the song as "The terror of witches and wizards" in (34). Apart from these patterns, this song includes instances of attributive and predicative adjectives; these adjectives are either placed before or after the nouns they modify:

viii. It's the Eternal Life String (9i) (**attributive**);

ix. And (Mother Vodun Maou) makes you (her worshipper) strong (10iii) (**predicative**);

x. With all the powers of the whole universe (10iii) (**attributive**).

It can be deduced from the examples above that attributive adjectives predominate over predicative adjectives in the song. Another striking feature in this song is that most of the abstract nouns therein serve to designate spiritual agents ('Vodun Spirit' in (1ii); 'Vodun Love Spirit' in (2iii; 6 and 8); 'Vodun Life Spirit' in (4; 16; 26 and 27i); 'Mother Vodun Maou' in (10ii); 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' in (14; 25; 34 and 36); 'Vodun' in (14); 'Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah' in (34; 35i and 35ii); 'Dan-bada Houèdo' in (25 and 36); 'Tchango Hêviosso Fire' in (25 and 36); 'Ogou Vodun of the Iron' in (25); 'Sakpata, Vodun of the Earth' in (25) and 'Dangbé, the Sacred Python' in (25). In the song, Ben Weilow actually classifies the aforementioned spiritual agents into two categories: Mother Spirit (Mother Vodun Maou Lissa) and her begotten children (41 spirits, namely: 'Dan-bada Houèdo'; 'Tchango Hêviosso Fire'; 'Ogou Vodun of the Iron'; 'Sakpata, Vodun of the Earth'; 'Dangbé, the Sacred Python', and 'Big Trees and Creepers').

While Ben Weilow uses the term 'Vodun' in his song to exclusively designate spiritual agents, it must be borne in mind that this term has been deployed in sociocultural anthropological research on Vodun to refer to a spirit, a physical being or both at the same time (Strongman, 2008; Adjibodou, 2018; Nokso-Koivisto, 2020). Strongman (2008) in his study, for instance, emphasizes the trans-corporeal or trans-physical in Vodun, illustrating this with his personally lived experience of *Lasirenn* or *Mami Wata*. Like Strongman, Nokso-Koivisto (2020, p. 27) reports in her research work that her informants always stressed that Vodun is a spirit. She also quotes

Hamberger (2011, p. 316) who states, in contrast to her finding, that Vodun is a physical being who is situated in a specific location in the world; Vodun can displace itself but it is installed in a specific place for a certain time. Given the foregoing, Adjibodou (2018) establishes that Vodun has a nonlinear ontological continuum.

In effect, the abstract nouns 'Vodun Spirit' in (1ii); 'Vodun Love Spirit' in (2iii; 6 and 8); 'Vodun Life Spirit' in (4; 16; 26 and 27i); 'Mother Vodun Maou' in (10ii) and 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' in (14; 25; 34 and 36) deployed in the song name the same spiritual agent: Mother Vodun Maou Lissa. This indicates that the song is ultimately about this spiritual agent. Other abstract nouns like 'Vodun Law' in (3i); 'power(s)' in (10iii and 29i) and 'thunderbolt' in (27ii) used therein refer to the spiritual force of this spiritual agent. On the contrary, abstract nouns like 'thirsts' in (19ii); 'bliss' in (21ii) and 'happiness' in (21ii) found in the song-text point to human (im)material needs which only Mother Vodun Maou Lissa can provide or satisfy.

Verbs and Adverbs

As mentioned earlier, this song is ultimately about a spiritual agent: Mother Vodun Maou Lissa. However, the song is not just limited to the description of this agent. In fact, it describes the actions it performs and their spatio-temporal setting. Consider some of the actions the singer ascribes to Mother Vodun Maou Lissa in the examples below:

- xi. When this Jahgly song begins (1i) Vodun Spirit fills the whole village (1ii);
- xii. It gets rid of all evil (2i), witches and wizards run away (2ii), for they cannot withstand the fury of Vodun Love Spirit (2iii).

The verb 'fills' in (1ii) is an agentive verb with a non-human subject 'Vodun Spirit'. Likewise, the group of words 'gets rid of' in (2i), which is an idiomatic expression, is an agentive verb with a non-human subject 'Vodun Spirit'. This idiomatic expression can be rightly replaced with 'eliminates, dumps or disposes'. By contrast, the verbs 'run away' in (2ii) and 'cannot withstand', all agentive verbs, have a human subject 'witches and wizards'. The aforementioned human subject actually denotes human beings who have a spiritual power used for evil. However, as the representation indicates, the power held by 'witches and wizards' is infinitesimal before Vodun Spirit. In other words, Vodun Spirit is so powerful that no evil power like that of witches and wizards can survive its presence. Elsewhere, in the song, the singer further foregrounds the pervasiveness of Vodun Spirit's power:

- xiii. It's just *there in the air* (5i) for you to breathe in (5ii).
- xiv. It's just *there within you* (7).
- xv. You've got to feel it (8).
- xvi. It's the Eternal Life String (9i) that links you to everything (9ii).
- xvii. And as long as you stand in the trend (10i) Mother Vodun Maou lives in you (10ii) and makes you strong *with all the powers of the universe* (10iii).
- xviii. So I can say (11i) I'm *in you*, you, you (11ii) and you're *in me* (continuous chorus) (11iii).

- xix. It's just *there in the earth* (17i) that grows your daily food (17ii).
xx. It's just *there in the springs* (19i) to quench your many thirsts (19ii).

As it is obvious in the examples above, Vodun Spirit's pervasive power is mainly encoded in the stative verb 'be'. In point of fact, it is the present tense form 'is' of this verb that is recursively employed in the song (5i; 7; 9i; 17i and 19i). Other agentive verbs like 'links ...to' in (19ii); 'grows' in (17ii) and 'to quench' in (19ii), which are deployed in the song as well, have 'Vodun Spirit' as their subject. These verbs not only represent Vodun Spirit as a powerful being but also as a spiritual being whose power is present, permanent and pervasive. In addition, the present, permanent and pervasive nature of Vodun Spirit's power is foregrounded by adverbs. Note that the identified adverbs in the song are of two types: single-word adverbs (e.g. *there*) and phrases (e.g. *in the air*), but adverbial phrases predominate over single-word adverbs.

Consider the single-word adverb 'there' in (5i; 7; 17i and 19i). This adverb is used to encode permanence rather than place in the song. Likewise, the adverbial phrases 'in the air' (5i); 'within you' in (7); 'in you' in (10ii and 11ii); 'in me' in (11iii); 'with all the powers of the universe' in (10iii); 'in the earth' in (17i) and 'in the springs' in (19i) indicate both permanence and pervasiveness with regard to the power of Vodun Spirit. As it appears in the foregoing, the notions of pervasiveness and permanence of the power of Vodun Spirit are encoded in lexical terms dialectically related to Man ('you' and 'me'), on the one hand, and to Nature ('air'; 'earth' and 'springs'), on the other. Drawing on the foregoing, Nokso-Koivisto (2020, p. 27) holds that Vodun is associated with the four basic elements: **Earth, Fire, Water and Air**. These basic elements ontologically serve as the foundation of the belief system and world-view of the Fon people. And this is what Ben Weilow faithfully reproduces in his song.

In addition, the examples above clearly exude that Ben Weilow uses some verbs like 'to breathe in' in (5ii); 've got to feel' in (8); 'stand' in (10i); 'can say' in (11i); 'm' in (11ii) and 're' in (11iii) to encode behavior, perception, action, saying and state respectively. These verbs are assigned to human agents: 'you' (the implied audience) and 'I' (the singer). However, in the song, these human agents are not represented as powerful beings on their own. Indeed, they are projected as individuals who (should) depend on Vodun Spirit for their survival and protection in social life.

2.2. Grammatical Features in the Song

Here we discuss sentence length and structure in Ben Weilow's song.

Sentence Length

Significantly, Ben Weilow's song comprises in total forty-one sentences, six of which are minor sentences ('Soya!' in [15; 38; 39; 40 and 41] and 'Dji ku kui!' in [37]). As it appears, these minor sentences are predominantly one-word sentences and

sound onomatopoeic in nature. In fact, the thirty-five major sentences in this song vary in terms of structural length and grammatical intricacy. The song opens with a sentence with a relative considerable length (1); this sentence counts two clauses (subordinate + main), five phrases and eleven words. The next sentence is similar to and differs from the previous one in that it contains two clauses (main + main), eight phrases and twelve words. Sentence (3) is lengthier than Sentences (1 and 2) because it includes three clauses (main: subordinate + main), sixteen phrases and twenty-three words. Sentences (4)-(8), which immediately follow, are marked by brevity. Sentence (4), for instance, counts one clause, three phrases and five words. Sentences (9)-(11), on the contrary, show a greater intricacy akin to the one found in Sentences (1)-(3). Sentence (9), for example, contains two clauses (main + restrictive), eight phrases and eleven words.

Surprisingly, Sentences (12); (13); (14) and (16) slope back to the brevity characteristic of Sentences (4)-(8). Sentence (17) differs from the foregoing because it contains two clauses (main + restrictive); eight phrases and twelve words. In the same way, Sentences (18)-(19) contrast Sentence (17) in that they have a structure marked by brevity. For example, Sentence (18) counts one clause, three phrases and five words. Sentences (20)-(21) contrast the foregoing. For instance, Sentence (20) contains two clauses (main + restrictive); six phrases and eight words. By contrast, Sentences (22)-(23) are marked by brevity. Unlike Sentences (22)-(23), Sentence (24) comprises two clauses (main + main); six phrases and eleven words, some of which are repeated. Sentences (25)-(28), on the contrary, include a structure marked by brevity. Sentences (29)-(33) differ from the foregoing. For example, Sentence (29) consists of two clauses (subordinate + main); nine phrases and twenty-two words. Unlike Sentences (29)-(33), Sentence (34) is marked by brevity. Sentence (35) contrasts the previous one in that it contains three clauses (subordinate + subordinate + main); nine phrases and thirty-one words. The last full-length sentence (36) in the song differs from Sentence (35) because it has a short structure.

Sentence Structure

As implied above, this song begins with a sentence with a relative considerable length. This sentence is actually a complex sentence (1), and serves to foreground Vodun Spirit's power from the onset. The complex sentence is followed by a compound sentence (2). The third sentence is a simple sentence, including a reporting clause 'And Vodun Law says this:' and a quoted speech "Whatever you do to your neighbor in bad or good, it is to yourself that you do it". Sentences (4)-(9) are simple too, and seem to have a certain similar structure. But Sentence (9) stands out here because it has a defining or restrictive clause. Sentence (10), on the contrary, is compound-complex. Sentence (11) is a simple sentence, comprising a verbal process 'So I can say' followed by a verbiage 'I'm in you, you, you and you're in me'. The verbiage is actually the chorus continuously repeated in the song. Sentences (12)-(20) are simple sentences. Notice that Sentence (17) is marked here as it contains a restrictive clause. Notice also that Sentence (20) consists of a restrictive clause. Unlike

the foregoing, Sentence (21) is a compound sentence. The particularity of this sentence is that it has a nominal clause 'All you've got to do' as a subject. Sentences (22)-(23) are simple but Sentence (24) is compound. Sentences (25)-(28) are simple. Sentences (29)-(30) are complex sentences whereas Sentence (31) is a compound sentence. Sentences (32)-(33), on the contrary, are complex sentences. Sentence (34) is simple but Sentence (35) is complex. Finally, Sentences (36)-(41) are simple sentences.

2.3. Figures of Speech in the Song

In his song, Ben Weilow employs such figures of speech as metaphor, allusion, metonymy, personification, anaphora, hyperbole, rhetorical question, alliteration, assonance and parallelism.

Metaphor, Allusion and Metonymy

Ben Weilow employs metaphors in his song to encode a strong and indelible mental image about Vodun. The most striking and pervasive metaphor used in this song is 'mother metaphor'. A mother, by definition, is someone who gives life or performs mothering simply. In the song, the spiritual agent 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' is associated with mother(ing) roles. In other words, it is represented both as a biological and as a spiritual mother. For instance, this agent is depicted as the biological mother of 41 Vodun and Big Trees and Creepers (14). It is also portrayed as a caring, life-giving; empowering, powerful, protecting, providing and rewarding mother for all her obedient children or worshippers (3; 9; 10; 17; 19; 20; 21; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 32; 33 and 35).

Another metaphor deployed in the song is 'love metaphor'. In point of fact, this metaphor cannot be dissociated from 'mother metaphor'. Vodun's mothering roles encoded in the song are actually an expression of maternal love. As the song unmistakably indicates, Vodun knows what is (and isn't) right for its children. As a result, it warns them not to do evil. In fact, its golden law mentioned in the song is "Whatever you do to your neighbor in bad or good, it is to yourself that you do it" (3). The aforementioned law is *reminiscent of* or *alludes to* one of the two great commandments (the commandment is highlighted in the quote below) that Jesus Christ gave His disciples in the book of Matthew 22: 38-40: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. [...] ***Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself***" (emphasis ours). The foregoing clearly suggests that Vodun religion and Christianity share in common the promotion of love, mainly the love of one's neighbor.

Perhaps, there is need to mention here the appropriate term often developed in and by means of African oral traditions that best names this kind of love. The term is 'Ubuntu' borrowed from Xhosa language and claimed to be a South African philosophy (Tuwe, 2016). Tuwe (2016) defines *Ubuntu* as "I am what I am because of you." According to Ngomane (2019), *Ubuntu* simply means "Je suis car tu es" (**I am because you are**). It follows from these definitions to note that *Ubuntu* is an African

philosophy that promotes or encourages the development of such human values as common well-being, togetherness, fraternity, love, unity, (inter)connection, complementarity, etc. In the song under study, *Ubuntu* is materialized linguistically in its chorus. Consider how this is done below:

- xxi. I'm in you, you, you and you're in me (continuous chorus) (11 and 24);
- xxii. I am you, you, you and you are me (continuous chorus) (31).

The two sentences above overtly sound metonymic as “you” (in the second clause) logically replaces “I” (in the first clause), suggesting thus a relationship of mutual dependence or interconnection between men (including women). There are also other instances of metonymy in the song:

- xxiii. a. As true as I am in everything. (12)
b. And as everything is in me. (13)
- xxiv. As true as I'm in Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah, and as Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah is in me, I'm the terror of witches and of evil spirits and wizards. (35)

Three types of relationship emerge from the foregoing: Man-and-Man relationship (xxi. and xxii.) and Man-and-Nature relationship (xxiii.) and Man-and-god relationship (xxiv.).

Personification and Anaphora

In examples (xxiii. and xxiv.) above-mentioned, one has the impression that Ben Weilow personifies Vodun. In fact, his use of the token ‘I’ creates some confusion here. The listener will naturally attribute it to either the singer or ‘Vodun’. A question arises here: can Vodun live in or possess a human body? To answer this question, we need to question a sociocultural anthropologist. Adjibodu (2018, p. vii-xv) reports, in her study, that Vodun is a lived religion in which spiritual possession is rife, especially during festivities. She illustrates this with her personally lived experience; she attended the *Mami Wata* and *Mama Tchamba Festival* at *Temple Guda Fli Gbé* in Agata (Benin Republic) wherein *Mama Tchamba* took possession of the body of one of her adepts. The foregoing answer confirms once more the pervasive nature of Vodun’s power. In the song, Vodun’s pervasive power is further foregrounded *melodically* by means of anaphora:

- xxv. **Vodun Life Spirit**, no need to preach it. (4)
- xxvi. **Vodun Love Spirit**, no need to say it. (6)
- xxvii. **Vodun Life Spirit**, no need to show it. (16)
- xxviii. **Vodun Love Spirit**, no need to preach it. (18)

Hyperbole and Rhetorical Question

Significantly, Ben Weilow deploys hyperbole to embellish his song throughout. For instance, he starts his song with a very striking hyperbolic expression (1-2). This expression is meant to exaggerate the power of Vodun Life Spirit. Furthermore, he uses the underlined hyperbolic expressions in ‘Mother Vodun Maou Lissa lives in you and makes you strong with all the powers of the universe’ (10); ‘It’s just there in the

springs to quench all your many thirsts' (19) and 'It is the strong power that moves everything' (20) to amplify the power of Vodun. He also depicts the aforementioned spiritual agent as omnipresent; i.e. present in everything: Nature (air; earth; springs and thunderbolt) (5; 17; 19 and 27) and Man (7 and 10). In addition, he portrays Vodun Life Spirit as a mother of 41 Vodun and Big Trees and Creepers (14). He further employs the underlined expression in 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa begot Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah, the terror of witches and wizards.' in (34) to emphasize the power of Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah. On the contrary, he deploys the underlined expression in 'As true as I'm in Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah, and as Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah is in me, I'm the terror of witches and of evil spirits and wizards.' (35) to highlight his own power, which actually emanates from Vodun. Moreover, Ben Weilow employs a rhetorical question "For everything you do to your neighbor in bad or in good, don't you know you're doing it to yourself?" in (30) to involve his audience and make them contemplate the power of Vodun, in general and its golden law, in particular.

Schemes

Ben Weilow does not neglect sound or musical effects in his song. In fact, he deploys such phonological schemes as alliteration and assonance to create stylistic effects therein. Consider how he does so in the sentences below:

- xxix. When **this Jahgly song begins, Vodun Spirit fills the whole village** (1).
- xxx. **As true as I'm in Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah, and as Jahgly Jah Guiddy Jah is in me, I'm the terror of witches and of evil spirits and wizards** (35).

As it clearly appears above, in the first example, Ben Weilow employs the consonant sounds /ð/; /g/; /s/; /l/ and /v/ to form alliterative patterns. He also deploys the vowel sounds /ɪ/ and /əʊ/ in the same example to form assonantal patterns. Like in the first example, the singer uses in the second example the consonants /z/; /t/; /dʒ/; /g/ and /w/ to form alliterative patterns. In point of fact, the alliterative and assonantal patterns identified in the song sound rhythmical and melodious in nature. This is to say, the singer employs these patterns to produce and sustain a certain regular musical tone or cadence in his song. In the same way, he uses structural parallelism for the same effect:

- xxxi. a. Vodun Life Spirit, no need to preach it. (4)
b. Vodun Love Spirit, no need to say it. (6)
- xxxii. a. It's just there in the air for you to breathe in. (5)
b. It's just there within you. (7)
- xxxiii. a. It's the Eternal Life String that links you to everything. (9)
b. It's the strong power that moves everything. (20)

Notice that the pair of sentences in example (xxxi.) contains the following pattern (Vocative, Existent + full infinitive + Object), whereas the pair of sentences in example (xxxii.) includes this pattern (Subject + Verb + Adjunct + Adjunct). Moreover, the pair of sentences in example (xxxiii.) consists of this pattern (main clause + restrictive clause). As said earlier, Ben Weilow employs alliterative and assonantal

patterns which are rhythmical and melodious in nature, in his song. He combines these alliterative and assonantal patterns with structural patterns to enhance the regular musical tone or cadence suspected in the song. In addition, he draws on some local words or expressions which sound onomatopoeic in nature in order to create some local flavor and authenticity in his song: 'Soya!' in (15; 38; 39; 40 and 41) and 'Dji ku kui' in (37). Again, Ben Weilow uses 'Ooh, Ooh' in (26) plus the abbreviated form of 'Vodun Life/Love Spirit' (VLS) in (27 and 28) to emphasize the Mood and rhythm of his song. In addition, his use of the foregoing serves to enforce memorability, and mark the climax of his song.

2.4. Cohesion and Context

In this section, we identify the cohesive and contextual features that Ben Weilow deploys in his song.

Cohesion

We notice that Ben Weilow employs in his song three types of cohesion: lexical cohesion, reference and conjunction. But the cohesion type that he employs most is lexical cohesion. This is to say, this singer draws mainly on vocabulary to build patterns of meaning across his song. In effect, the type of lexical cohesion that he deploys most in the song is repetition. This suggests thus that Ben Weilow repeatedly employs some lexical items in his song: 'Vodun (Life/ Love) Spirit' (1; 2; 4; 6; 18; 26; 27 and 28); 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' (10; 14; 25; 34 and 36) and 'witches and wizards' in (2; 34 and 35). Note that the lexical items 'Vodun (Life/ Love) Spirit' and 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' are used to label the same spiritual agent: 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa'. In addition, the lexical item 'the Eternal Life String' in (9) is used as a synonym for Vodun. From this, we can logically infer that the song is mainly about Vodun. In fact, Vodun is represented in the song as a positive spiritual force. On the contrary, the second group of words 'witches and wizards' encoded in this song is projected as a rival spiritual evil force.

As mentioned above, Ben Weilow deploys less referential and conjunctive links in/across his song. In fact, all the endophoric reference items identified in the song are anaphoric reference items. For instance, in the song, we note that the reference item 'it' in (2i) is used to point back to the referent 'this Jahgly song' in (1i). But the reference item 'it' in (4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 16; 17; 18; 19 and 20) is employed to refer back to the referent 'Vodun Life Spirit' in (4). We also remark that the token 'they' in (2iii) is used to point back to the referent 'witches and wizards' in (2ii). As it clearly appears, 'Vodun Life Spirit' spans the whole text. Unlike endophoric reference items, there are only two exophoric reference items in the song: "I" and its variants 'me' and 'my' in (11i; 11ii; 11iii; 12; 13; 22; 24i; 31i; 31ii; 35i; 35ii and 35iii) and 'you' and its variants 'your' and 'yourself' in (3ii; 3iii; 3iv; 5ii; 7; 8; 9ii; 10i; 10ii; 10iii; 11ii; 11iii; 17ii; 19; 21i; 21ii; 22; 24i; 24ii; 29i; 29iii; 30i; 30ii; 30iii; 31i; 31ii; 31iv; 32i; 32ii; 33i and 33ii). Recall that we mentioned earlier that the singer uses the personal pronoun 'I' in a confusing

manner in the song. This implies that he employs the pronoun to refer to two antecedents: 'himself' and 'Vodun'. On the contrary, he uses 'you' to refer unambiguously to his 'implied' audience.

Moreover, we notice that Ben Weilow employs, in total, twenty-one conjunctions in his song: 'When' (1i); 'and' (2ii); 'for' (2iii); 'And' (3i); 'whatever' (3ii); 'for' (3iv); 'And' (10i); 'and' (10iii); 'So' (11i); 'As true as' (12); 'And' (13); 'that' (17ii); 'and' (21ii); 'As long as' (22); 'And if' (29i); 'For' (30i); 'cause' (31i); 'If' (32i); 'If' (33i); 'As true as' (35i); 'and' (35ii). Significantly, thirteen out of these conjunctions are deployed to ensure logical links between the sentences therein. This suggests thus that this song is internally well-organized; hence it can be said to be cohesive and coherent.

Context

We have just noted above that Ben Weilow deploys cohesive features, mainly lexical cohesion, to describe the spiritual agent 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa'. Actually, he depicts this agent from the third-person perspective. The significant recursive use of the token 'it' in the song (4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 16; 17; 18; 19 and 20) confirms this point. Indeed, the singer's use of the third-person is meant to make his description sound factual and objective. As it appears in the analysis, the facts about Vodun that Ben Weilow presents in his song stem from his knowledge, grounding and mastery of the Fon culture, cosmology and especially its belief system and world-view. For instance, his use of 'I' in the refrain "I'm in you, you, you and you're in me (continuous chorus)" (10) proves his understanding of the underlying philosophy of this culture: *Ubuntu*. Again, his use of the generic 'you' in the foregoing aims to address his audience, informing them about Vodun and the values it ontologically embodies, on the one hand, and inviting them to be part of its adepts, on the other, is indicative of his unfailing faith and belief in Vodun.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the linguistic or stylistic features in Ben Weilow's song entitled 'Vodun Life Spirit'. It has used Leech and Short's checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories (lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context) (Leech and Short, 2007), and the descriptive qualitative research method, to specifically analyze how the singer organizes language to encode meaning(s) in his aforementioned song. The stylistic analysis yields some important findings. Firstly, the analysis shows that Ben Weilow employs such lexical features as nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs in his song. It reveals, for example, that he uses more abstract nouns than concrete nouns, suggesting thus that the song is more concerned with abstract description; i.e. the description of spiritual agents. In fact, most of (not to say all) the abstract nouns identified in the song occur as noun phrases, and mainly have the term 'Spirit' as a head word (1ii; 2iii; 4; 6; 8; 16; 26 and 27i). Another striking feature in the song is that the singer mainly employs nouns to

modify other nouns. Note that three patterns have been found here: 'N + N', 'N + N + N' and 'N + N + N + N'. Note also that most of the abstract nouns in the song serve to designate spiritual agents ('Vodun Spirit' in (1ii); 'Vodun Love Spirit' in (2iii; 6 and 8); 'Vodun Life Spirit' in (4; 16; 26 and 27i); 'Mother Vodun Maou' in (10ii); 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' in (14; 25; 34 and 36); 'Vodun' in (14), etc.

In fact, the abstract nouns 'Vodun Spirit' in (1ii); 'Vodun Love Spirit' in (2iii; 6 and 8); 'Vodun Life Spirit' in (4; 16; 26 and 27i); 'Mother Vodun Maou' in (10ii) and 'Mother Vodun Maou Lissa' in (14; 25; 34 and 36) in the song label the same spiritual agent: Mother Vodun Maou Lissa. This indicates that the song is ultimately about this spiritual agent. As the analysis further exudes, this spiritual agent is assigned both stative verb 'be' (5i; 7; 9i; 17i and 19i) and agentive verbs like 'links ...to' in (19ii); 'grows' in (17ii) and 'to quench' in (19ii). The aforementioned verbs are modified by adverbs in the song. It must be noted that the identified adverbs in the song are of two types: single-word adverbs (e.g. *there*) and phrases (e.g. *in the air*), but adverbial phrases predominate over single-word adverbs in the song. In addition, the findings show that Ben Weilow uses, in varying proportions, sentence length and structure. They also unveil that the singer deploys figures of speech like metaphor, allusion, metonymy, personification, anaphora, hyperbole, rhetorical question, alliteration, assonance and parallelism in his song. Ben Weilow actually draws on the aforementioned figures of speech to produce stylistic and aesthetic effects in his song. Finally, the findings indicate that Ben Weilow deploys lexical cohesion, reference and conjunction, the most dominant type being lexical cohesion. In fact, he mostly employs repetition; a sub-type of lexical cohesion, and the most repeated lexical item found in the song is Vodun. Likewise, he employs the reference items 'it', 'I' and 'you' to refer to both spiritual and human agents: Vodun, himself and his 'implied' audience. In conclusion, it can be established that all the linguistic features identified in the song are deployed to represent 'Vodun' as a positive spiritual force which pervades human life and everything. This suggests that Vodun protects and empowers its children or worshippers against evil, provides them with all their (im)material needs and also gives them eternal joy.

References

1. Adjibodou, V. N. (2018). *Everyday Vodun: Affect, Materiality, and Knowledge in Southern Benin*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania. <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/3089>.
2. Bidu, D. F. (2013). Analysis of Creativity and Creative Context in Oral Poetry. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 4(1): 1-9.
3. Finnegan, R. (2017). *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. Second Edition. London: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
4. Jeffries, L. and McIntyre, D. (2010). *Stylistics*. First Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press.
5. Leech, G. and Short, M. (2007). *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to*

- English Fictional Prose*. Second Edition. Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited.
6. Nelson, T. (2006). *The King James Version of the Holy Bible*. Burgundy: DaVince Tools, <http://www.davince.com/bible>.
 7. Ngomane, M. (2019). *Ubuntu: Je Suis Car Tu Es. Leçons de sagesse africaine*. France: Harper Collins.
 8. Nokso-Koivisto, L. M. (2020). "We are so rich in culture!" Meanings and values of Vodun as cultural heritage in Ouidah, Benin. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Helsinki.
 9. Simpson, P. (2003). *Language through Literature: An introduction*. Second Edition. London and New York: Routledge.
 10. Strongman, R. (2008). Transcorporeality in Vodou. *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, 14(2): 4-29.
 11. Tuwe, K. (2016). The African Oral Tradition Paradigm of Storytelling as a Methodological Framework: Employment Experiences for African Communities in New Zealand. *Proceedings of the 38th AFSAAP Conference: 21st Century Tensions and Transformation in Africa*, Deakin University, 28th-30th October, 2015 (Published February 2016).
 12. Verdonk, P. (2002). *Stylistics*. First Edition. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
 13. Yeibo, E. (2012). Figurative Language and Stylistic Function in J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's Poetry. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3(1): 180-187.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to Ben Weilow (whose real name is **Mr. Benoît AHLÉ**, a retired Secondary School Inspector of English, from Benin Republic) for his collaboration and proofreading of the first draft of their paper. They especially thank him for translating the abstract into French.