

One-Clause Sentence as a Style Marker in the Poetry of Ebi Yeibo

Confidence Aihebholoria

Department of Languages, University of Delta, Agbor

Abstract

This paper investigates the stylistic use of one-clause sentences in the poetry of Ebi Yeibo, with a particular focus on how such seemingly simple structures convey complex socio-political realities of the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole. The study is motivated by the recognition that African poets often turn to pared-down linguistic forms not only for aesthetic effect but also to capture the immediacy of lived experience in societies troubled by poverty, corruption, and unstable governance. Yeibo's one-clause sentences, though grammatically elementary, often resonate with layered meanings that point to a fractured national identity and the burdens borne by marginalized communities. The research adopts a descriptive and interpretive approach. Twenty poems were purposively selected from two of Yeibo's collections – *Shadows of the Setting Sun* and *A Song for Tomorrow*. Within these texts, twenty one-clause sentences were identified and subjected to analysis using insights from Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. The framework allows for the exploration of sentence constituents—Subject, Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct—and how their deployment builds not only syntactic clarity but also semantic weight. By examining patterns such as //S/P/C//, //S/P/A//, and //S/P/C/A//, the study highlights the poet's deliberate recourse to brevity as a stylistic marker that mirrors political fragmentation and human suffering. Findings reveal that Yeibo's one-clause sentences are more than linguistic minimalism; they operate as rhetorical tools that dramatize neglect, betrayal, and resistance. Their economy of expression underscores clarity, urgency, and accessibility, while simultaneously foregrounding the tragic contradictions of Nigeria's democracy. The paper concludes that Yeibo's poetic strategy offers a subtle but powerful critique of governance and national development, demonstrating how stylistic choices can become instruments of social commentary.

Keywords: Stylistics, one-clause sentence, Nigerian poetry, Ebi Yeibo, Niger Delta.

Introduction

In every age and society, poets have sought to capture the pulse of their environment in words that outlive the fleeting moment. In Nigeria, where political instability, corruption, and inequality remain persistent realities, poetry often becomes more than

an artistic exercise: it becomes testimony, protest, and remembrance. Writers from across the Niger Delta in particular have wielded their craft as a mirror held up to the contradictions of wealth and want, abundance and deprivation, hope and betrayal. Among this group of socially conscious poets, Ebi Yeibo occupies a distinctive place. His verses speak with clarity, not by recourse to complex structures or elusive metaphors alone, but often through simple one-clause sentences that achieve a startling immediacy.

The one-clause sentence—frequently dismissed in grammar textbooks as the most basic or elementary unit of expression—takes on renewed significance in Yeibo’s poetry. By stripping down to the bare bones of Subject, Predicator, Complement, and occasionally Adjunct, Yeibo creates utterances that are both direct and unsettling. Such sentences do not meander; they land with precision, carrying the weight of communal frustration and collective memory. They stand as stylistic markers that crystallize an otherwise sprawling national predicament into short, almost aphoristic lines. When Yeibo writes, for instance, “The clan will continue to crumble,” he does not need embellishment. The one-clause form itself dramatizes inevitability and decay.

The Nigerian literary landscape has long been attentive to the ways language mediates social reality. From Chinua Achebe’s prose critiques of leadership to Niyi Osundare’s poetic indictments of corruption, the pattern is clear: form and content intertwine to create meaning. Stylistics—the linguistic study of style—therefore becomes a crucial tool for uncovering how writers encode ideological positions within textual features. Scholars such as Leech and Short (2007) have argued that stylistics is not merely about identifying patterns but about relating these patterns to artistic function and reader effect. In African literary contexts, where oral traditions and communal consciousness continue to shape creative production, stylistic choices often operate as cultural signifiers.

It is within this framework that Yeibo’s use of the one-clause sentence demands closer scrutiny. While studies of his poetry exist—often focusing on themes, imagery, or broader socio-political commentary—little sustained attention has been paid to syntax as a site of meaning. Yet Yeibo himself has remarked that the grammatical level is as crucial as metaphor or symbol, since poets deliberately select lexico-grammatical elements to deliver their message. The relative scarcity of research in this direction suggests a gap that this study seeks to fill.

The Niger Delta provides the immediate socio-political backdrop for Yeibo’s art. Rich in oil yet impoverished in infrastructure and opportunity, the region exemplifies what scholars such as Okuyade (2010) have described as “a persistent sense of gloom” born out of neglect and exploitation. From environmental degradation to political marginalization, the Niger Delta story is one of paradoxes. Poetry, for Yeibo, becomes both a personal and communal strategy of survival, a way of naming wounds that might otherwise fester in silence. The one-clause sentence is his scalpel: precise, sharp, and sometimes merciless.

This paper argues that Yeibo’s reliance on one-clause sentences functions as a stylistic lens through which the socio-political realities of Nigeria are refracted. By analyzing selected poems from *Shadows of the Setting Sun* and *A Song for Tomorrow*, the study demonstrates that brevity is not a sign of simplicity but of concentration. The one-clause sentence compresses meaning, heightening both its semantic and emotional force. Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1994) provides the analytical framework, enabling an exploration of how syntactic constituents interact with context to produce layered significance.

The importance of this inquiry lies not only in literary appreciation but also in what it reveals about the larger role of language in society. As Simpson (2004) notes, stylistics emphasizes language as central to meaning-making, but in political contexts, that centrality acquires urgency. Yeibo's sentences are small linguistic acts of resistance. They call attention to what Achebe (1983) once described as Nigeria's fundamental problem: a failure of leadership. By couching such critique in stark syntactic frames, Yeibo ensures that his poetry resonates beyond aesthetic pleasure, becoming a vehicle for social consciousness.

In pursuing this analysis, the paper proceeds as follows: first, it outlines the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Grammar and its relevance to literary stylistics. Second, it explores the field of stylistics more broadly, situating Yeibo within African poetic traditions that merge art with activism. Third, it analyzes the one-clause sentence as a stylistic marker, drawing on examples from the selected poems to illustrate patterns of subject-predicate arrangements. Fourth, it details the methodology employed in selecting and interpreting the data. The fifth section presents the analysis itself, showing how Yeibo manipulates syntax to foreground political critique. Finally, the paper concludes by reflecting on the implications of Yeibo's stylistic practice for the study of Nigerian literature and for understanding the ongoing crises of national development. In sum, the introduction situates this study at the intersection of language, literature, and politics. It recognizes Yeibo's work not merely as poetry but as a linguistic intervention in the Nigerian story. By turning to the humble one-clause sentence, Yeibo reminds us that sometimes the simplest structures can carry the heaviest truths.

Theoretical Framework

Every work of stylistic criticism requires an anchoring framework through which its analysis acquires coherence and explanatory power. For this study, the theoretical bedrock is Michael Halliday's **Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)**, a model of language that is particularly sensitive to the relationship between structure and meaning. Unlike formalist grammars that treat language as a static set of rules, SFG conceives of language as a **resource for making meaning**. It is a network of choices rather than a rigid prescription of forms, and as such, it lends itself to literary analysis where choice is never accidental but deliberate, calculated, and ideologically loaded (Halliday, 1994). Halliday's central claim is that language performs three broad **meta-functions**: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. These meta-functions form the backbone of his theory and provide a valuable way of reading poetry that simultaneously engages with lived experience, social interaction, and textual organization.

The ideational function is concerned with how language encodes experience. It describes the world, reports on actions, processes, and events, and assigns roles to participants. For Halliday, this is where grammar becomes a map of reality. In Yeibo's poetry, one-clause sentences are heavily invested with ideational content. When he writes, "Dictatorship is a hungry guest," the structure performs more than description: it captures a collective perception of tyranny as parasitic, consuming, and uninvited. The **Subject-Predicator-Complement** structure reduces a sprawling political critique into a compact linguistic nugget, allowing the poet to mirror reality with striking clarity. From a stylistic standpoint, the ideational function helps to explain why Yeibo consistently privileges simplicity. Long, complex sentences might dilute or obscure the image; a single clause, by contrast, allows meaning to hit directly, resonating with the stark realities of deprivation and betrayal in the Niger Delta.

The interpersonal function refers to the way language enacts social relationships. It is through grammar that speakers adopt roles—questioners, informers, persuaders, admonishers—and position themselves in relation to others. In poetry, this dimension highlights tone, attitude, and the implied relationship between poet and audience. Yeibo's one-clause sentences are remarkable for their authoritative voice. Sentences like "The clan will continue to crumble" or "This is the spot" carry the weight of inevitability, positioning the poet not as a tentative observer but as a communal seer or prophet. From the standpoint of SFG, this interpersonal role-taking is embedded in grammar. The declarative structure, frequently used in Yeibo's lines, is not neutral; it signals authority and certainty. In a society where citizens often feel powerless, Yeibo's confident one-clause assertions restore a sense of agency, at least within the textual space of the poem.

The textual function relates to how language organizes information into coherent, cohesive discourse. It is about texture—the property of language that enables it to function as text rather than a random string of words. Yeibo's preference for one-clause sentences might appear to undermine texture, given that complex syntax often provides multiple points of cohesion. Yet, paradoxically, the very brevity of his lines strengthens their textual coherence. Each clause stands almost like a proverb or maxim, self-contained but interwoven with others through thematic continuity. For example, across *Shadows of the Setting Sun*, Yeibo strings together simple declaratives that cumulatively build a narrative of corruption and despair. The cohesion is not in subordinate clauses or elaborate connectives but in the recurrence of themes: betrayal, poverty, leadership failure. Halliday's textual function, therefore, allows us to see how Yeibo creates unity through thematic repetition rather than syntactic elaboration.

Halliday famously described language as a **social semiotic**—a system of signs shaped by and shaping social life. This perspective is crucial for literary stylistics, especially in African contexts where literature often emerges as a response to political upheaval and cultural negotiation. Yeibo's use of one-clause sentences cannot be divorced from the socio-political semiotics of Nigeria. In a climate where political leaders often cloak failure in verbose rhetoric, the poet's resort to terse, uncluttered sentences is itself a symbolic act. It resists obfuscation and demands clarity, mirroring a communal yearning for transparency.

Another key element in SFG is the **rank scale**, which orders linguistic units hierarchically: sentence, clause, group/phrase, word, morpheme. Halliday emphasizes that each rank nests within the other, with the clause as a pivotal unit. Yeibo's poetry exploits this hierarchy by lingering at the clause level, refusing to elaborate into compound or complex sentences. This choice elevates the clause from being merely a subordinate element within a sentence to being the central building block of the poem. By consistently foregrounding the clause, Yeibo makes syntax itself a style marker. In practical terms, this study analyses one-clause sentences by breaking them into their constituent elements—Subject, Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct. This approach aligns with Morley's (1985) explanation of clause structure and facilitates the identification of patterns such as **SPC** ("Dictatorship is a hungry guest") or **SPCA** ("One tests the depth of a river"). Each pattern is then interpreted not just grammatically but functionally: what social meaning does the chosen configuration enact?

One might reasonably ask: why apply a Western-developed theory like Halliday's to African poetry? The answer lies in the adaptability of SFG. Because it prioritizes function over form, it readily accommodates texts from diverse cultural contexts. Moreover, African poets like Yeibo are themselves engaged in acts of cultural

translation, merging indigenous oral aesthetics with global literary forms. SFG provides a metalanguage through which this hybridity can be described without reduction. African stylistics has long been attuned to the role of brevity and repetition as communicative strategies. Proverbs, riddles, chants, and slogans often rely on simple sentence structures for their force. By situating Yeibo's one-clause sentences within this tradition, the analysis reveals continuity between modern written poetry and oral heritage. Halliday's framework, with its emphasis on meaning potential, allows us to interpret Yeibo's choices not as deficiencies but as deliberate echoes of indigenous semiotics.

The strength of SFG lies in its ability to bridge **linguistic detail** with **social significance**. For this study, that means demonstrating that Yeibo's syntactic patterns are not neutral but ideologically charged. The one-clause sentence becomes a stylistic fingerprint, linking the formal economy of expression with the political economy of scarcity in the Niger Delta. It is through Halliday's categories that we can trace this linkage with clarity. At the same time, the framework guards against over-romanticizing. By insisting on detailed grammatical analysis, SFG prevents us from reading political meanings into lines where syntax does not support them. It provides both a microscope and a telescope: zooming in on constituent structures while keeping sight of the social horizon.

In sum, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar equips this study with the conceptual tools needed to analyse Yeibo's poetry at the intersection of language and society. Its three meta-functions explain how one-clause sentences encode experience, negotiate relationships, and structure discourse. Its emphasis on rank highlights the elevation of the clause as a stylistic unit. Its semiotic orientation grounds the analysis in social reality. And its adaptability ensures that African poetic texts, with their blend of orality and modernity, can be rigorously examined without distortion. By applying this framework, the study positions Yeibo not only as a Niger Delta poet but also as a linguistically sophisticated craftsman who understands the political and aesthetic force of grammar itself. The one-clause sentence, through SFG, emerges not as a trivial structure but as a stylistic weapon—concise, deliberate, and deeply resonant.

Stylistics

The study of stylistics sits at the meeting point of linguistics and literary criticism. It is both a science of patterns and an art of interpretation, asking not only how language is structured but why a writer chooses one structure over another, and what effects those choices create. Stylistics thus serves as a bridge between the technical description of texts and their aesthetic or ideological implications. It provides the means to show, with evidence, how literature works at the level of language and why readers respond to it in particular ways.

The term *stylistics* has been defined in diverse ways, but most definitions emphasize its concern with style as realized through language. Leech and Short (2007) famously describe stylistics as "the linguistic study of style," while warning that style itself is a relational concept—it can mean the language of a particular author, a text, a genre, or even a historical period. For them, stylistics is not an end in itself but a way of linking linguistic choices to artistic functions. Similarly, Simpson (2004) notes that stylistics prioritises language but not in isolation; rather, it treats language as the central medium through which meaning, ideology, and emotion are conveyed in literature. Other scholars underscore the methodological dimension of stylistics. Syal and Jindal (2012) observe that stylistic analysis is distinctive because it offers *textual evidence* for literary judgments, grounding interpretation in observable linguistic features rather

than purely subjective reactions. This insistence on evidence does not reduce literature to mechanics; instead, it equips the critic to balance intuition with analysis, showing how aesthetic impressions are anchored in linguistic realities.

Central to stylistics is the idea that *style is choice*. Writers select from the available resources of a language to shape their texts, and these selections are seldom neutral. Crystal and Davy (1969) argued early on that style reflects the options a writer chooses from a repertoire of linguistic possibilities, whether at the level of lexis, syntax, or discourse. Yeibo's decision to rely heavily on one-clause sentences, therefore, is a stylistic act—it signals a preference for brevity, force, and clarity over elaboration. By doing so, he aligns himself with a tradition of African poets who deliberately bend grammar to serve the urgency of their socio-political commentary. Ikenna Kamalu (2018) stresses this point when he notes that the stylistician who regards style as linguistic characteristic will naturally ask: *What does the writer do with language? How are the resources of grammar and lexis deployed to project ideology?* This question is particularly apt for Yeibo, whose simple sentence structures expose the fractures of Nigerian society with startling directness.

One of the strengths of stylistics is its ability to connect micro-linguistic features with macro-literary effects. Leech and Short (2007) distinguish between foregrounding—where linguistic features stand out against a background of expectation—and deviation, where features deliberately break norms. In Yeibo's work, the frequent use of simple clauses achieves both. Against the background of poetic tradition that often prizes complex metaphor and elaborate phrasing, Yeibo's terse declaratives stand out as foregrounded. At the same time, they deviate from expectations of "high" poetic diction, choosing instead a plain style that mirrors the lived realities of his community. Simpson (2004) adds that stylistics is not about cataloguing features for their own sake but about explaining why certain meanings are possible in a text. Thus, when Yeibo writes, "Hyacinths are callous barriers on waterways," the interest of stylistics is not only in labelling the clause as **SPCA** but also in showing how this structure metaphorically equates political leadership with invasive plants, blocking the free flow of communal progress. The clause becomes an act of social critique, made potent by its syntactic simplicity.

Stylistics in the African context carries particular weight because of the continent's rich oral traditions and the sociopolitical conditions under which much literature is produced. African writers often oscillate between the aesthetics of oral performance—brevity, repetition, rhythm—and the demands of written literary form. Scholars like Obobolo (2015) have argued that the language of African literature is inherently expressive, steeped in history and collective memory. Stylistic analysis in such contexts must therefore account not only for formal features but also for cultural resonances. Yeibo's reliance on one-clause sentences can be understood in this light. Such structures echo the gnomic quality of proverbs, which are central to African oral traditions. Proverbs often compress wisdom into single clauses—"A child who washes his hands eats with elders"—where brevity and memorability are key. By adopting a similar strategy in written poetry, Yeibo taps into a cultural repertoire that his audience instinctively recognises. Stylistics allows us to see this continuity between the oral and the written, between ancestral speech acts and contemporary literary critique.

Another dimension worth stressing is the evidential role of stylistics. Too often, literary judgments are dismissed as subjective or impressionistic. Stylistics, by tying claims to observable linguistic patterns, provides what Short (1996) called "a disciplined form of intuition." It enables critics to show that their interpretation of

Yeibo's "The clan will continue to crumble" is not mere projection but grounded in the declarative structure, the unmodified subject, the progressive aspect of the verb, and the absence of mitigating adjuncts—all of which combine to produce a tone of inevitability. At the same time, stylistics resists the temptation of pure formalism. Its purpose is not to strip literature of meaning but to enrich our appreciation of it. As Widdowson (1975) once observed, stylistics is valuable precisely because it connects the technical and the affective, demonstrating how linguistic form becomes literary force.

For this study, stylistics provides both a method and a justification. Methodologically, it guides the selection and analysis of one-clause sentences, ensuring that interpretation rests on linguistic evidence. Theoretically, it explains why such analysis matters: because style is inseparable from meaning. Yeibo's style—the repeated use of one-clause sentences—is not a trivial accident but a central vehicle through which his poetry articulates the plight of the Niger Delta and the failures of Nigerian leadership. In sum, stylistics is the lens through which we can see the connection between syntax and society, between the spare grammar of Yeibo's lines and the stark realities they describe. It confirms that literature is not only art but also language in action, carrying with it the weight of cultural memory and political urgency.

The One-Clause Sentence and Style Markers

The one-clause sentence, also called the simple sentence, is the most elementary unit of syntactic construction. At its most basic, it consists of a single independent clause that expresses a complete thought. Traditional grammars often treat it as the starting point of syntactic instruction—less complex than compound or complex sentences and therefore associated with simplicity. Yet in the hands of a skilled poet like Ebi Yeibo, the one-clause sentence becomes a vehicle of compression, resonance, and force.

Roseline Adejare (1998) defines the simple sentence as a structure realized by a single alpha clause, often composed of the four key elements of clause structure: Subject (S), Predicator (P), Complement (C), and Adjunct (A). These elements combine in patterned ways to produce different syntactic configurations: **SPC** ("Dictatorship is a hungry guest"), **SPA** ("The clan will continue to crumble"), or **SPCA** ("One tests the depth of a river"). What unites them is their syntactic independence—they do not rely on coordination or subordination to stand as complete sentences. Morley (1985) reminds us that the clause itself is the "free" element in the rank scale: capable of functioning as a sentence in its own right. This freedom explains why the one-clause sentence has long been prized for its directness. It does not depend on supporting structures; it carries its own semantic weight. In everyday communication, such sentences are common—"The sun is hot," "Children play outside." In poetry, however, their deployment is seldom innocent. The choice to remain at the level of the clause rather than expand into multi-clausal complexity is already a stylistic signal.

A **style marker**, according to Yeibo (2011), refers to the linguistic elements a writer employs to achieve semantic and aesthetic effect. It is a device of foregrounding: a pattern that recurs often enough to be distinctive and meaningful. In Yeibo's case, the one-clause sentence emerges as a stylistic hallmark. Its recurrence across poems suggests deliberate craft rather than happenstance. Kamalu (2018) strengthens this view when he argues that the stylistician should examine how writers exploit language resources to communicate meaning effectively. For Yeibo, the exploitation lies in reduction—paring down syntax until only the essentials remain. What results is a line that resembles both a poetic utterance and a proverbial aphorism, blurring the boundary between art and wisdom speech.

Take, for example, the line: “*The clan will continue to crumble.*” At first glance, it is a straightforward declarative sentence. But closer inspection reveals why it functions as a stylistic marker. The subject (*The clan*) is communal, invoking kinship and heritage. The predicator (*will continue*) signals inevitability and endurance. The complement (*to crumble*) evokes decay, fragility, and collapse. The absence of modifiers or subordinate clauses intensifies the starkness of the assertion. The line reads like a prophecy, and its force derives directly from its syntactic economy.

It is tempting to conflate the one-clause sentence with simplicity in thought, but this would be misleading. Simplicity in form can mask complexity in meaning. African proverbs illustrate this paradox. Pithy, single-clause utterances often contain layered wisdom: “*One does not test the depth of a river with both feet.*” Yeibo’s poetry operates within this cultural tradition. His one-clause sentences are not primitive but proverbial, condensing history, politics, and philosophy into compressed forms. By selecting the one-clause sentence as his recurrent structure, Yeibo distances his voice from political doublespeak. Nigerian political rhetoric is often marked by sprawling sentences, filled with hedging, qualifications, and euphemisms that obscure accountability. Yeibo counters this with brevity. Each short clause becomes an antidote to verbosity, demanding that truth be stated plainly.

Yeibo’s use of one-clause sentences resonates with strategies used by other African poets, though with distinctive inflections. Niyi Osundare, for example, often employs repetitive, chant-like structures to foreground urgency: “*The land is green / The land is broken.*” Here, too, one-clause sentences predominate, giving his poetry the rhythm of protest and incantation. Christopher Okigbo, by contrast, tends toward elliptical, fragmented clauses that challenge coherence but achieve intensity. Against this spectrum, Yeibo’s approach is notable for its balance: his one-clause sentences are neither opaque nor ornamental; they are direct, unadorned, and politically charged. Globally, parallels can be drawn with modernist poets who used brevity to puncture convention. Ezra Pound’s dictum “Use no superfluous word” finds an echo in Yeibo’s syntax. Yet while Pound sought aesthetic conciseness, Yeibo’s conciseness serves a more urgent political and communal function.

What marks the one-clause sentence as a style marker in Yeibo’s poetry is not its occasional appearance but its **repetition**. When a feature recurs systematically, it gains prominence. Across *Shadows of the Setting Sun* and *A Song for Tomorrow*, one-clause sentences appear with striking regularity. This recurrence foregrounds them, making them the stylistic fabric of his verse. Readers come to expect them, and their rhythm shapes the perception of his voice. Foregrounding theory, as discussed by Leech and Short (2007), emphasizes that repeated deviation from linguistic norms draws attention to itself. In everyday discourse, complex and compound sentences are common. Yeibo’s consistent reduction to single clauses is a deviation from that norm, and its repetition makes it stylistically salient.

Consider the line: “*Hyacinths are callous barriers on waterways.*” The clause follows an SPCA pattern. On the surface, it is a description of vegetation, but metaphorically it indicts political leaders as obstacles choking the flow of progress. The power of the image lies in its grammatical clarity: subject (*Hyacinths*), predicator (*are*), complement (*callous barriers*), adjunct (*on waterways*). No syntactic clutter distracts from the comparison. The line is vivid because it is bare. Or take: “*The python strolls freely at Tuomo.*” The SPAA structure here combines image and critique. The python is not merely an animal but a symbol of predatory political leaders. The adjuncts (*freely, at Tuomo*) emphasize impunity and location, grounding the metaphor in local geography. Again, the one-clause structure heightens the image’s immediacy. In both cases,

syntax is inseparable from meaning. Had Yeibo chosen complex sentences—“Although the hyacinths spread, they nevertheless serve as barriers on waterways”—the force would diminish. Brevity here is not only stylistic but also rhetorical, reinforcing the urgency of critique.

Brevity has long been recognised as an aesthetic principle. In rhetoric, it is associated with clarity and persuasion. In poetry, it produces resonance, allowing a single line to echo with multiple interpretations. Yeibo’s one-clause sentences achieve this aesthetic while doubling as political acts. Their brevity mirrors the impatience of a populace weary of excuses. They embody the desire for truth stripped of rhetoric. Stephen Kekeghe (2014) captures this dilemma when he describes the modern Nigerian poet as caught between the quest to save himself and the burden of saving the nation. Yeibo’s choice of the one-clause sentence embodies this dual burden. His lines are personal in their voice but communal in their vision, brief in form but vast in implication.

The one-clause sentence in Yeibo’s poetry functions as more than grammar. It is a **style marker**—a repeated, foregrounded feature that defines his artistic signature. By relying on simple clauses, Yeibo aligns himself with oral traditions, resists political verbosity, and foregrounds meaning through brevity. His sentences are small but weighty, modest in structure but monumental in implication. Comparative perspectives show that while other poets employ similar strategies, Yeibo’s consistency sets him apart. His one-clause sentences embody both an aesthetic of brevity and a politics of clarity, making them central to understanding his contribution to Nigerian and African poetry.

Methodology

Every piece of stylistic analysis requires not just a framework but also a careful account of how data are gathered, organised, and interpreted. This study follows a largely **qualitative orientation**, with emphasis on descriptive and interpretive methods. The goal is not to measure frequency or produce statistical generalisations, but to show how specific linguistic patterns—one-clause sentences—are used by Ebi Yeibo to achieve stylistic and socio-political effect.

The research design is **descriptive** in the sense that it catalogues and explains the structural patterns found in Yeibo’s poetry. It is also **interpretive**, since the meanings of those patterns cannot be understood in purely grammatical terms but must be related to context—both literary and socio-political. Stylistics, as Leech and Short (2007) remind us, is a discipline that constantly balances evidence and interpretation. The design therefore keeps language at the centre but allows room for cultural, ideological, and historical resonance.

The primary texts for this research are two of Yeibo’s collections: *Shadows of the Setting Sun* and *A Song for Tomorrow*. These works were chosen for two reasons. First, they capture a wide span of Yeibo’s thematic concerns, especially the political and existential dilemmas of the Niger Delta. Second, they provide sufficient textual density for a stylistic study—containing a large number of short, aphoristic lines suitable for clause-level analysis. From these collections, **twenty poems** were purposively selected. The selection was guided by the presence of one-clause sentences that directly address socio-political realities. Within these poems, **twenty one-clause sentences** were identified as data points. This number was deemed adequate for stylistic illustration: large enough to reveal patterns, but small enough to allow for close reading of each sentence in its poetic context.

Analysis proceeds using **Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)** as developed by Halliday (1994) and further explained by Morley (1985). Each one-clause sentence is broken down into its constituent parts—Subject (S), Predicator (P), Complement (C), and Adjunct (A). Patterns such as **SPC**, **SPA**, **SPCA**, and **SPAA** are identified. These are then interpreted functionally: not just what the grammar looks like, but what it does in the poem. For example, the SPC pattern in “*Dictatorship is a hungry guest*” is not only described structurally (S = Dictatorship, P = is, C = a hungry guest) but also interpreted as a metaphor for tyranny’s parasitic nature. Similarly, SPCA structures like “*One tests the depth of a river*” are analysed as proverbial warnings that echo oral traditions while carrying socio-political critique.

The interpretive method draws on two dimensions:

- i. **Linguistic Interpretation** – Looking at the grammar, how the clause is structured, and what stylistic effect results from its brevity or configuration.
- ii. **Contextual Interpretation** – Situating the sentence within the poem, and the poem within the larger Nigerian socio-political environment. This double move ensures that analysis is neither detached from language nor divorced from meaning.

In practice, this means that every sentence was first analysed syntactically, then contextualised in terms of theme and socio-political resonance. This two-step process allowed for balance between the technical and the interpretive.

A methodological note must be made about **reflexivity**. Stylistic interpretation is never entirely neutral; it is shaped by the critic’s sensitivity to language and context. What one critic sees as “brevity for clarity,” another might view as “brevity for lack of depth.” To address this, the study anchors its claims in observable patterns, while acknowledging that interpretation is necessarily situated. Another limitation lies in **scope**. The study focuses on only two of Yeibo’s collections, leaving out other works that might enrich or complicate the findings. Similarly, only twenty one-clause sentences are examined, though Yeibo’s poetry contains many more. The rationale for this restriction is manageability: the aim is not exhaustive coverage but illustrative depth. Future research could expand the dataset to test whether the stylistic tendencies identified here hold across Yeibo’s entire oeuvre. Finally, there is the question of **generalisability**. Because the study is qualitative, its findings are not statistically generalisable to all of Nigerian poetry. Instead, they are **analytically generalisable**—that is, they provide insights that may apply to other poets with similar stylistic tendencies, but always with caution and contextual awareness.

Since the research deals with published texts, there are no human participants and hence no ethical risks in the usual sense. However, an ethical responsibility remains: to represent Yeibo’s work fairly, to avoid misreading, and to situate interpretations within cultural and political sensitivity. Poetry that speaks about poverty, exploitation, and leadership failures cannot be analysed as if it were neutral or decontextualised. Ethical stylistics requires attentiveness to the human realities behind the text.

The choice of descriptive and interpretive methods is justified on two grounds. First, stylistics by its very nature requires detailed description of linguistic features. Without such description, claims about style remain impressionistic. Second, interpretation is indispensable: the mere identification of SPC or SPCA patterns means little unless connected to meaning. By combining both, the study ensures rigour and relevance. Moreover, qualitative analysis allows for the richness of Yeibo’s poetry to come through. Quantitative methods—counting frequencies, calculating percentages—

would risk reducing the poetry to numbers, missing the nuance of metaphor and context. The interpretive method, though subjective, is more attuned to the layers of meaning that poetry generates.

In sum, the methodology of this study rests on purposive selection of poems, identification of one-clause sentences, descriptive analysis of their syntactic patterns, and interpretive exploration of their meanings in context. It is guided by Systemic Functional Grammar, informed by stylistic theory, and shaped by awareness of the socio-political realities of Nigeria. The approach is deliberately modest in scope but ambitious in intent: to show that even the simplest sentence structures, when foregrounded as style markers, can bear immense political and aesthetic significance.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In stylistic research, the movement from data to analysis is where language is shown to carry meanings beyond its surface grammar. For this study, twenty one-clause sentences were extracted from two of Yeibo’s collections, *Shadows of the Setting Sun* and *A Song for Tomorrow*. Each sentence was examined using the clause constituents of **Subject (S), Predicator (P), Complement (C), and Adjunct (A)**, following Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar. Eight basic clause patterns emerged: //P//, //P/C//, //P/C/A//, //P/A//, //S/P//, //S/P/C//, //S/P/A//, and //S/P/C/A//. The following table provides an overview of some of the sentences analysed:

Sentence	Source	Structural Analysis
A handshake is a prompter of memories	<i>Scramble sunlight</i> (<i>Shadows of the Setting Sun</i>)	SPCA
A politician’s mouth is full of monuments	<i>Broken covenants</i> (<i>Shadows of the Setting Sun</i>)	SPC
The clan will continue to crumble	<i>Apocalypse</i> (<i>Shadows of the Setting Sun</i>)	SPA
The python strolls freely at Tuomo	<i>The blaring bard</i> (<i>Shadows of the Setting Sun</i>)	SPAA
Dictatorship is a hungry guest	<i>Tears in the home</i> (<i>A Song for Tomorrow</i>)	SPC
One tests the depth of a river	<i>Worse devils</i> (<i>A Song for Tomorrow</i>)	SPCA

This table highlights the recurrence of the **SPC** structure, which is by far the most common in Yeibo’s selected poems. Out of the twenty one-clause sentences examined, more than half adopt this pattern, while the SPCA, SPA, and SPAA structures appear less frequently but with deliberate stylistic weight.

The **SPC** structure (Subject–Predicator–Complement) is the backbone of Yeibo’s style. Sentences such as “A politician’s mouth is full of monuments” and “Dictatorship is a hungry guest” demonstrate how this pattern lends itself to metaphorical density. In “Dictatorship is a hungry guest,” the subject (*Dictatorship*) is abstract yet personalised, the predicator (*is*) asserts equivalence, and the complement (*a hungry guest*) delivers the sting. The sentence functions simultaneously as description and condemnation. The brevity makes the metaphor unavoidable – there is no cushioning, no qualification.

The SPC structure here dramatises the parasitic nature of autocratic rule. Similarly, “*A politician’s mouth is full of monuments*” employs SPC to expose the emptiness of political rhetoric. The complement (*full of monuments*) is ironic: monuments are typically solid, but here they are insubstantial promises. The SPC pattern thus sharpens satire, making political critique accessible yet biting.

While SPC dominates, the **SPCA** structure (Subject–Predicator–Complement–Adjunct) appears in memorable lines such as “*One tests the depth of a river.*” This sentence carries proverbial weight, echoing oral traditions where wisdom is condensed into single clauses. Structurally, the subject (*One*) universalises the lesson, the predicator (*tests*) implies deliberate action, the complement (*the depth*) marks the object of inquiry, and the adjunct (*of a river*) grounds the action in metaphorical terrain. The line functions as a warning against reckless political or personal choices. Its brevity makes it gnomic, almost indistinguishable from indigenous proverbs. By employing SPCA, Yeibo expands the semantic field of his one-clause sentences, making them both instructive and cautionary. Another SPCA example, “*Hyacinths are callous barriers on waterways,*” vividly describes invasive plants but metaphorically indicts politicians as obstructions to progress. The adjunct (*on waterways*) situates the problem in the Niger Delta environment, making the metaphor both local and political. Again, the structure allows maximum clarity while anchoring critique in familiar imagery.

The **SPA** structure (Subject–Predicator–Adjunct) surfaces in lines like “*The clan will continue to crumble.*” The adjunct (*to crumble*) is not merely an afterthought but a thematic punch. The line paints an image of inevitable decay, the progressive aspect (*will continue*) signalling an unending process. In context, the poem laments the disintegration of communal unity under political and economic strain. The **SPAA** structure (Subject–Predicator–Adjunct–Adjunct) appears less frequently but achieves striking imagery. “*The python strolls freely at Tuomo*” is an excellent example. The subject (*The python*) is zoomorphic, but in Yeibo’s usage it symbolises predatory political actors. The two adjuncts (*freely, at Tuomo*) emphasise impunity and location. Here, the clause is more than description – it transforms an animal into a metaphor for political corruption, with Tuomo anchoring the critique in a real Niger Delta locale.

What unites these varied structures is their **simplicity**. One-clause sentences are inherently more explicit than complex sentences, and Yeibo exploits this clarity. His style resists ambiguity in favour of directness. In poems about corruption, betrayal, and environmental degradation, such clarity is itself a political statement. Where politicians obscure meaning with verbose speeches, the poet insists on plain truth. Simplicity also enhances **memorability**. One-clause sentences resemble proverbs, slogans, and chants – forms of expression deeply embedded in African oral traditions. In performance contexts, these lines can be recited, remembered, and reused as communal wisdom. Their stylistic force lies not just in what they say but in how easily they travel from page to mouth, from poet to people.

Thematic Patterns Revealed

The data reveal recurring themes encoded through one-clause sentences:

- i. **Leadership Failure** – Lines such as “*Dictatorship is a hungry guest*” foreground tyranny’s exploitation.
- ii. **Decay and Collapse** – “*The clan will continue to crumble*” enacts images of fragmentation.

- iii. **Obstruction and Betrayal** – *“Hyacinths are callous barriers on waterways”* portrays leaders as obstacles to progress.
- iv. **Proverbial Warnings** – *“One tests the depth of a river”* functions as communal caution.

Each theme is sharpened by syntax. The choice of one-clause sentences ensures that critique is direct, unavoidable, and resonant.

Placed alongside other Nigerian poets, Yeibo’s stylistic choices are distinctive. Niyi Osundare often layers his critique with parallelism and rhythm, while Tanure Ojaide deploys longer descriptive passages. Yeibo, in contrast, compresses. His one-clause sentences strike like proverbs—short, sharp, resonant. This marks him out in a tradition where verbosity is common. Globally, one finds echoes of this method in the terse declaratives of modernist poetry. Yet the difference is that Yeibo’s brevity is less about aesthetic experimentation and more about **political urgency**. The form mirrors the fractured state of Nigeria: broken clauses for a broken polity.

The analysis shows that Yeibo’s stylistic reliance on one-clause sentences is not incidental but systematic. The SPC pattern dominates, ensuring clarity and metaphorical bite. SPCA, SPA, and SPAA patterns diversify the stylistic repertoire, enabling proverbs, warnings, and vivid images. Together, these structures foreground themes of leadership failure, communal collapse, and the search for redemption. The stylistic simplicity is deceptive: beneath it lies ideological complexity. Each one-clause sentence functions as both poetic utterance and political commentary, bridging oral tradition and modern critique. The data thus confirm that syntax, far from being an inert grammatical layer, is central to Yeibo’s artistry and to his vision of social engagement.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine Ebi Yeibo’s functional use of one-clause sentences as a stylistic device and as a medium for articulating the socio-political challenges of the Niger Delta and Nigeria more broadly. Through descriptive and interpretive analysis, grounded in Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar, it became clear that Yeibo’s reliance on one-clause sentences is not a matter of simplicity but of strategy. These sentences operate as style markers, foregrounding brevity, clarity, and resonance in ways that amplify the political urgency of his message.

The analysis of twenty sentences across *Shadows of the Setting Sun* and *A Song for Tomorrow* revealed the predominance of the **SPC pattern**, with significant appearances of **SPCA**, **SPA**, and **SPAA**. Each structure, though grammatically basic, was shown to carry semantic density. The SPC pattern provided metaphors that exposed tyranny and hypocrisy—*“Dictatorship is a hungry guest”*—while SPCA structures resonated with proverbial caution—*“One tests the depth of a river.”* SPA and SPAA patterns enriched imagery, anchoring critique in local environments, as in *“The python strolls freely at Tuomo.”* Together, these patterns demonstrated Yeibo’s deliberate crafting of one-clause sentences as stylistic weapons.

What emerges most forcefully is Yeibo’s aesthetic of **brevity as resistance**. In a society where political leaders deploy verbosity to obscure truth, Yeibo responds with unadorned clarity. His lines resemble oral traditions of proverbs and chants, making them accessible, memorable, and portable. They move easily from page to performance, becoming communal speech acts rather than private reflections. In this

sense, Yeibo's poetry reaffirms the political role of art in African societies: literature as a tool not only of aesthetic expression but also of cultural memory and social critique.

The broader implication of this study is that syntax itself can be ideological. Often, stylistic analysis privileges metaphor, imagery, or symbolism, but Yeibo reminds us that even the most basic unit of grammar—the one-clause sentence—can bear immense weight. His poetry shows that style does not always lie in ornamentation; sometimes it lies in stripping away until only the essential remains. For scholars of Nigerian literature, this underscores the need to attend more closely to syntactic choices, not just thematic concerns, when analysing socially engaged texts.

At the same time, this research has limitations that point toward future directions. The analysis was confined to twenty sentences from two collections. While sufficient to illustrate the argument, a wider corpus could reveal additional patterns or variations. Moreover, comparative studies with other poets—both Nigerian and international—would further contextualise Yeibo's stylistic signature. It would be valuable, for instance, to explore how his one-clause sentences align with the minimalism of Osundare in protest poetry, or how they diverge from the elliptical density of Okigbo.

Future research might also investigate reader response to Yeibo's style. Do audiences perceive his one-clause sentences as proverbial wisdom, political indictment, or poetic artistry? Such empirical inquiry could enrich our understanding of how stylistic choices resonate beyond the page. Additionally, computational stylistics could be employed to test the frequency of one-clause structures across Yeibo's entire oeuvre, offering quantitative support to the qualitative findings presented here.

In conclusion, Ebi Yeibo's one-clause sentences are deceptively simple but profoundly effective. They crystallise the pains and paradoxes of the Niger Delta, expose the failures of leadership, and give voice to communal despair while hinting at resilience. As style markers, they define his poetic voice, situating him within both African oral traditions and global currents of literary concision. Most importantly, they demonstrate how the smallest unit of grammar can become a site of ideological struggle, where clarity itself becomes a form of resistance.

References

- Achebe, C. (1983). *The trouble with Nigeria*. London, UK: Penguin.
- Adejare, R. (1998). *Tertiary English grammar*. Lagos, Nigeria: Difamo Books.
- Alo, M. (1995). *Applied English linguistics: An introduction*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Aeddy Link.
- Bloor, T., & Bloor, M. (2004). *The functional analysis of English*. London, UK: Hodder Education.
- Crystal, D., & Davy, D. (1969). *Investigating English style*. London, UK: Longman.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Edward Arnold.
- Kamalu, I. (2018). *Stylistics: Theory and practice*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Kraft Books Ltd.

- Kekeghe, S. (2014). Ebi Yeibo's *The Fourth Masquerade*: Allegiance to homeland or nation? *Visual Arts Journal*, 4(1), 60–70.
- Leech, G., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Pearson Education.
- Morley, G. D. (1985). *An introduction to systemic grammar*. London, UK: Macmillan.
- Obobolo, V. (2015). The language of literature. In M. Nwala (Ed.), *Issues in the study of language and literature* (pp. 246–255). Ibadan, Nigeria: Kraft Books Ltd.
- Okuyade, O. (2010). Recent Nigerian bards and minstrels: Forms of counter narratives. *California Linguistic Notes*, 35(2), 1–16.
- Osakwe, M. (1992). *The language of Soyinka's poetry: A diatype of English* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Syal, P., & Jindal, D. V. (2012). *An introduction to linguistics, language, grammar and semantics*. New Delhi, India: PHI Learning Pvt Ltd.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1975). *Stylistics and the teaching of literature*. London, UK: Longman.
- Yeibo, E. (2011). Theory and practice in language studies. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 1(8), 928–933. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.1.8.928-933>