

Review

An Eco-Lyrical Delineation of Environmental Songs: A Study of T.Y Bello's "The Land is Green" and Michael Jackson's "Heal the World"

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the lyrics of songs composed about the environment through the application of linguistic tools of eco-linguistics. The paper explicates the underlying meanings of utterances embedded in the lyrics of two musicians: a Nigerian named T.Y Bello and an American named Michael Jackson. The paper sets out to show how these two artistes represent the world in their songs. The two songs are: *The Land is Green* (2008) and *Heal the world* (1991). T.Y Bello's "The Land is Green" was released in 2008 in a debut album, *Greenland* which took two years to develop. T.Y Bello earned herself a Nigeria Music Award as well as a Sound City Award because the Album. She describes the album as a journey of her everyday life. Her music is an embodiment of family, love and nation. The song can best be described as song written to motivate Nigerians, and to liberate them from a place of despair to a place of hope. Michael Jackson's "Heal the World" is from his album *Dangerous*, released in 1991. In a 2001 Internet chat Jackson said he was most proud to have composed and its release followed the creation of the Heal the World Foundation, a charitable organization which was designed to improve the lives of children. An organization meant to teach children how to help others. The use of language in the songs is critically examined in the paper to shed light on how the world is represented in the songs.

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Eco linguistics explicates the interrelationship between language and ecology (environment); an approach to linguistic study fronted by Halliday (1990), as a new recognizable form of the ecological humanities where he provided linguists with the motivation to consider the ecological context and consequences of language. In his postulation, Halliday stressed 'the connection between language on the one hand, and *growthism*, classism and *speciesism* on the other, reprimanding applied linguists not to ignore the role of their object of study in the growth of environmental problems' (Fill, 1998: 43). This therefore means that Eco linguistics, focuses on 'critiquing forms of language that contribute to ecological destruction, and aiding in the search for new forms of language that inspire

people to protect the natural world' Stibbe (2015: 1). On a deeper layer of this approach to linguistic analysis, 'Eco linguistics explores the more general patterns of language that influence how people both think about, and treat, the world by expounding the way and manner in which humans live as well as how they influence the entire environment.

The aim of Eco linguistics therefore is to investigate the role of language in the development and possible solution of ecological and environmental problems. Most environmental scholars or Eco linguists use the concept of the eco-system metaphorically for language world systems which they analyze with the help of concepts transferred from biological ecology. This they do by carping language on the levels of *langue* and *parole* and pointing out un-

ecological language uses and "anthropocentrism" which represent nature from the point of view of its usefulness for humans. In a wider understanding, the "growthism", "sexism", "classism" and "anthropocentrism" inherent in many languages and language uses are criticized.

On a general note, discourses of divergent views are of interest to Eco linguistic analyses, and in the context of verbal arts, along with nature writing, musical lyrics are no exception in this regard. The study therefore is an analysis of the lyrics of two nature songs titled "*The Land is Green*" by T.Y Bello and "*Heal the World*" by Michael Jackson. Our priority in this study is to critically examine the coded meanings in those songs and demonstrate how the artistes have in their own ways assisted in ensuring that they contribute significantly to the sustenance of the ecosystem. The study does this by looking at the metaphoric references to the way in which the world is represented in the songs in focus.

T.Y BELLO'S THE LAND IS GREEN

A Brief Note on T.Y Bello and the Song

Toyin Sokefun-Bello popularly known as T. Y. Bello is a Nigerian singer, songwriter, photographer and philanthropist. She initially was a member of the defunct gospel band group called Kush. She is equally a member of the Nigerian photography collective, Depth of Field. TY Bello is an indigene of Ogun State south west Nigeria. She studied economics at the University of Lagos and practiced journalism for a while before venturing into photography. Apart from being a musician, TY Bello is the official photographer to Nigerian former President Goodluck Jonathan. In the year 2008, TY Bello released her debut studio album, which she called Greenland. The album, which took two years to develop, was produced by Mosa Adegboye. TY Bello earned herself a Nigeria Music Award as well as a Sound City Award on account of the Album.

Review of the lyrics

There are quite a number of stylistic/linguistic embellishments in the lyrics of the song. The sole aim of those linguistic features is to draw the attention of the people to the beauty of the natural environment and the need for its preservation for the sake of humanity. The artiste achieved this through the use of linguistic features which assist in bringing out not only the beauty but the deeper and intended meanings of the song.

The Use of Metaphors

There is an extensive use of metaphoric expressions in T.Y Bello's song "*The Land is Green*". In order to approach this analysis from the perspective of metaphor, we take a closer look at the cognitive linguistic approach to discourse

analysis. This approach considers metaphor as one of the important features of language and, according to this view, much of human understanding of everyday experience is structured in terms of metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Taylor, 1995: 133). Metaphor through this means is 'a device that involves conceptualizing one domain of experience in terms of another' (Lee, 2001: 6). Accordingly, every metaphor links two conceptual domains, the 'source' domain and the 'target' domain, making up what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call a 'conceptual metaphor' (e.g. LOVE IS A JOURNEY) that underlies many everyday expressions which are the actual realizations of that conceptual metaphor (e.g. 'Their relationship isn't going anywhere.'). One conceptual metaphor that the lyrics particularly make use of is the NATURE IS A LIVING THING metaphor, which runs through the stanzas of the songs:

*Standing in the rain
as the clouds got grey
[Found the rocks of the earth say]
seasons just beginning
sunlight is high and clouds make [wind]
for the pouring of my blessings
will not be afraid*

As seen in the above stanza, the natural world is personified and given the attributes of a living organism. The point is that by personifying the natural world, its fundamental value as a living organism comes to the surface, encouraging respect and care for it, just as any living being deserves. The musician sees the land as a metaphor for survival and inclines this to the supernatural believe of the earth being the ultimate harbinger of all good things. This is clearly spelt out in the following stanza:

*I see it now i understand i know
so i embrace a dance
in the rain, it's for my seed to grow
for every prayer & every seed i've sown
lord of harvest knows i am reaping back a
hundred folds*

The ability and capability of the earth to return whatever is sown in manifold is reflected in the singer's believe that the earth is rich and therefore needs to be sustained. This is captured in such expressions as:

*In the rain, it's for my seed to grow
for every prayer & every seed i've sown
lord of harvest knows i am reaping back a
hundred folds*

Here the earth becomes a metaphor for the natural growth and development thus confirming Stibbe's (2015: 71) view that 'one key criterion for judging metaphors of nature is whether they place humans within or outside nature'. In the above stanza nature is seen as a living being and as such depicts a process of growth and development. Specifically, nature has been metaphorically depicted as a mother because of the variety of NATURE IS A LIVING THING approach to Eco linguistic study which is, the gendering of nature as a female being, which is specifically realized in these lyrics by the use of feminine attributes of fertility. The

chorus of the song is onomatopoeic, re-echoing the greenness of the land. This also dovetails into the Biblical allusion of believing and hoping for better days as exemplified in the two stanzas below:

*the land is green, is green, oh oh oh
the land is green, is green, can't you see
the harvest is ready, the Lord of harvest told me
so
its green, its green for me
its green, its green for me*

*Standing alone can be a heavy blow
and my vows i won't be breaking
though heart is aching
i got a word and i won't let go
is your will i'm seeking
so i keep on believing*

In the entire song, nature is seen as having feminine attributes and as such the signification of the natural world as a mother –focuses on the life-giving and nurturing qualities of nature. This in turn gives a sense of high reverence and sacredness for the natural world; but at the same time, one could still argue that it evokes 'parallels between the oppression of women by men and the oppression of the earth by humans' (Stibbe, 2015: 71). As Berman (1994: 258) states, 'many common expressions such as 'rape of the land', 'virgin forest', 'Mother Earth' ... reinforce patriarchal dualisms and hierarchical traditions which continue to objectify women and Nature, and perpetuate the separations of humans from each other and the non-human world'. She goes biblical by saying she won't break her vows and keep to the promises of her creator even as the lord of the harvest has told her so. Again, the need for the preservation of the natural habitat is requested for so as to appeal the Almighty creator of the universe. To achieve this, the song writer is of the view that there is the need for the collective effort of all and sundry as she observes:

*Standing alone can be a heavy blow
and my vows i won't be breaking
though heart is aching
i got a word and i won't let go
is your will i'm seeking
so i keep on believing*

This brings to the consciousness of all human beings that there is the need to preserve the earth and not destroy it under any guise. By means of rhetorical examination of the audience and her fans as well as all humans, she enquires to know why the people seem not to see that the land is green. This is closely followed by the readiness of the harvest which was promised in stanza (2) above. *The land is green, is green, can't you see? The harvest is ready, the Lord of harvest told me so, its green, and it's green for me.* The artiste did not only focus on this avenue but delves into the journey metaphor to expose the movement and consistency in the life she has chosen to live:

*I thought it was over
i thought you were done with me
but we're just beginning, wow
my life is a journey
I will work with you
I will go o, where you want me to
yes I will go*

This seems prophetic and thus typifying a journey into an unknown land where the ultimate forces are unknown. She acknowledges that her life is a journey and pledges to work with that unseen figure in the song. This is cyclic and endless pointing to the infinitesimal nature of human life. The artiste concludes that if the nature is adequately preserved, the end result will be to the advantage of the human race. So, there is the need to hold firm and dearly to the tenets of natural preservation as she states: *I can see, the harvest is ready cos he told me so it's green and its all mine.*

MICHAEL JACKSON'S HEAL THE WORLD

A Brief backgrounder on Michael Jackson

Michael Jackson was born on August 29, 1958 and died on June 25, 2009. He was an American singer, songwriter, record producer, dancer, actor, and philanthropist. His musical career earned him the name "King of Pop" as his contributions to music, dance, and fashion along with his publicized personal life made him a global figure in popular culture for over four decades. The eighth child of the Jackson family, Michael made his professional debut in 1964 with his elder brothers Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, and Marlon as a member of the Jackson five. He began his solo career in 1971. In the early 1980s, Jackson became a dominant figure in popular music. His music videos, including those of "Beat It", "Billie Jean", and "Thriller" from his 1982 album *Thriller*, are credited with breaking racial barriers and transforming the medium into an art form and promotional tool. Jackson's 1987 album *Bad* spawned the U.S. *Billboard* Hot 100 number-one singles "I Just Can't Stop Loving You", "Bad", "The Way You Make Me Feel", "Man in the Mirror", and "Dirty Diana", becoming the first album to have five number-one singles on the *Billboard* Hot 100. He continued to innovate with videos such as "Black or White" and "Scream" throughout the 1990s, and forged a reputation as a touring solo artist. Through stage and video performances, Jackson popularized a number of complicated dance techniques, such as the robot and the moonwalk. His distinctive sound and style has influenced numerous artists of various music genres. *Thriller* is the best-selling album of all time, with estimated sales of 65 million copies worldwide. Jackson's other albums, including *Off the Wall* (1979), *Bad* (1987), *Dangerous* (1991), and *History* (1995), also rank among the world's best-selling albums.

Review of the lyrics

The lyrics of *Heal the World* throw more light on the rights and welfare of human beings in a hostile environment. The lyrics criticize the inhumanity in the world and calls for a reversal of order. Particularly, the song focuses on the strivings and the need for humanity to live normal lives by ensuring that they sustain the natural environment. The use of the human heart as a symbol of pain for the torture of the natural habitat is a metaphor the dehumanizing experiences by the human race. This metaphoric depiction symbolically stands for all humans who share the same situation of painful experiences. This is demonstrated in the way the living nature of humans is made salient through the use of linguistic devices such as personification and naming, as well as maintaining the active voice throughout the lyrics as the artiste observes in the opening stanza:

*There's a place in your heart
And I know that it is love
And this place could be much
Brighter than tomorrow
And if you really try
You'll find there's no need to cry
In this place you'll feel
There's no hurt or sorrow*

The above stanza substantiates Stibbe (2015: 162) believe that salience is 'a story in people's minds that an area of life is important or worthy of attention'. The lyrics of Michael Jackson give high salience to humans as living individuals by using personification, naming, and assigning them active participant roles. Jackson achieved this by adopting Personification which projects characteristics that normally belong to humans onto inanimate objects and non-human objects. In the lyrics under discussion, this happens specifically by the use of personal pronouns:

*There are ways to get there
if you care enough for the living
Make a little space
Make a better place*

*Heal the world
Make it a better place
For you and for me
And the entire human race
There are people dying
If you care enough for the living
Make it a better place
For you and for me*

Personification in the lyrics as depicted above remains at a realistic level and does not go too far to turn into the kind of anthropomorphism that is typical of depicting humans in a real world. The nature portrayed in the lyrics is made prominent by being specifically named. This naming is repeated throughout the song, makes nature as a living individual more and more salient to the audience. Throughout the lyrics, the natural habitat is represented as the subject of active clauses and as the dynamic

participant of material and mental processes. The following are instances of the representation of the natural environment in a specific form:

*If you want to know why
There's love that cannot lie
Love is strong
It only cares of joyful giving
If we try we shall see
in this bliss we cannot feel
Fear of dread*

*We stop existing and start living
The it feels that always
Love's enough for us growing
so make a better world
Make a better place*

The insistence on giving an active participant role to nature as a character is to the extent that nature remains the agent of the action, and not the patient. This again gives more salience to the natural habitat which is portrayed as a living being by assigning it an active role in a clause that would normally be structured differently. The artiste's view that the world does not lie signifies the sincerity and the bond between nature and the love for it is effectively captured in line 2 of the first stanza above. There is therefore the assurance that where there is love there can hardly be fear or dread. This is clearly depicted in the second stanza of the above lyrics where fear will vanish and humans will stop existing and start living. As found in the Hallidayan concept of growthism, love is enough for us, growing so we can make a better world by making a better place. This projection of peace demonstrates how war equipment are turned into plowshares. This means that with the right attitude, wars will give way to peace, growth and nourishment. See the stanza below:

*And the dream we were conceived in
Will reveal a joyful face
And the world we once believed in
Will shine again in grace
Then why do we keep strangling life
Wound this earth, crucify its soul
Though it's plain to see
This world is heavenly
Be god's glow*

*We could fly so high
Let our spirits never die
in my heart I feel you are all my brothers
Create a world with no fear
Together we cry happy tears*

*See the nations turn their swords into
plowshares
We could really get there
if you cared enough for the living
Make a little space
to make a better place*

From the above lyrics, Jackson tried to demonstrate how he could heal the world in many ways. He did this by using his music to demonstrate the plight of humanity, especially the blacks and the need for the unification of ideas to create a peaceful world. He also created a charity through this song to give a voice to the voiceless and raise a standard for humanity. Jackson had a reason for healing the world and he used that great and actually healed the world through his music. "Heal the World" might be one of the most beautiful songs ever produced by Michael Jackson who was a gentle soul tormented by an abusive childhood, a relentless media, and an isolating fame.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the lyrics of songs whose thematic preoccupations focus on the environment. The paper sheds more light on the underlying stories behind the songs. In particular, the use of language in relation to the environment was critically examined. The lyrics contain specific stories and different ways of modeling the environment. The songs exploit a variety of linguistic features to communicate their message, and this paper explored those linguistic strategies. The paper revealed that nature songs have something to say in support of humanity and are capable of transforming the world by painting a picture of the destructive tendencies of humanity. This could possibly be a way of contributing to the reinvention of the natural habitat which has been destroyed by man.

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