



Cohesion, Style, and Ecological Consciousness in Bassey's "Return to Being": A Discourse-Stylistic Approach

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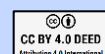
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ABSTRACT

Discourse-stylistic devices are crucial in creating meaning and coherence in poetry. Studies in the discourse stylistics of poetry remain limited, with most existing studies focusing on the genre's stylistic aspects. Thus, this study is among the first to examine Nnimmo Bassey's eco-poem "Return to Being" through a discourse-stylistic approach. Drawing on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework and Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic model, the study explored how the use of cohesive devices and stylistic choices contributes to the poem's environmental message. The findings revealed that grammatical and lexical cohesive devices were used to enhance the poem's coherence. The grammatical cohesive devices found include reference and conjunction, while substitution and ellipsis were absent. Again, lexical cohesion was achieved through repetition, synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, and collocations. Moreover, Bassey employed stylistic features, including grammatical categories and figures of speech, to highlight the devastation of the Niger Delta's natural environment and to call for its restoration. The findings deepen our understanding of the use of discourse-stylistic devices in eco-poetry.

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1. Introduction

Language plays an important role in shaping and changing social norms by influencing how people behave, perceive, and interact with one another. It serves to express feelings and convey deeper meanings through different forms of literature, such as poetry. The textual function of language enables writers, especially poets, to address local, national, and global issues through their work. Often, poetry does more than reflect society; it aims to bring about change.

Language use is a critical component in analyzing poetic discourse. Wales (2011) observes that poetry is a form of discourse and can contribute to broader discussions. Emphasizing its unique style, Wales (2011) describes poetic language as highly creative and marked by originality and innovation. Woods (2006) explains that discourse is both language and context. Discourse analysis examines how language functions in specific situations to create meaning. Jaworski and Coupland (1999) note that "discourse analysis is not just about language reflecting social order; it also shapes how individuals interact with society" (p. 3). Stylistics, on the other hand, involves a detailed analysis of

an author's or poet's choice of language in their literary works. It views literature as a form of communication between the writer and the readers. Hence, discourse analysis and stylistics are broad fields that explore the functional aspects of language (Opara, 2005, as cited in Yeibo, 2011). The two disciplines interact with each other through various methods of interpretation. Discourse analysis focuses on what is communicated within a text, whereas stylistics is concerned with how linguistic choices are employed to construct and convey meaning. This distinction underscores the complementary relationship between the two disciplines, with discourse analysis emphasising meaning in context while stylistics examines the linguistic features through which meaning is achieved (Widdowson, 1975). Recent studies also reflect growing scholarly interest in language and discourse analysis across different forms of texts (Antwi et al., 2026; Jameel, 2024). This growing interest further highlights the relevance of discourse-oriented approaches in literary and linguistic studies.

Significantly, discourse stylistics is an analytical approach that focuses on identifying, describing, and explaining the stylistic features found in a text or discourse situation. It examines the form and function of language elements that go beyond individual sentences within specific social, historical, or cultural contexts. Simpson and Hall (2002) state that "Discourse stylistics views literary texts as instances of naturally occurring language use in a social context, where discourse analysis should reveal as much about the contexts as about the text" (p.136). Carter and Simpson (1989) believe that discourse-stylistic analysis aims to be more thorough and detailed by examining a wider range of textual features, and its methods provide an initial framework for analysis and interpretation.

Most studies in discourse analysis and discourse stylistics (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Carter & Simpson, 1989; Yule, 2006; Zamruddin & Arafah, 2019) have mainly focused on prose narrative texts as data. One reason given for this is the complicated nature of poetry, which makes it harder to analyze. This is also likely because key features of cohesive and coherent discourse, such as references, conjunctions, and punctuation, are more commonly found in prose. This study argues that although such concerns are valid, poetry can still be effectively analysed through discourse cohesion, because poetic meaning is produced not solely by linear grammatical structure but also by the patterned relationships among lexical, semantic, and contextual elements that create textual unity despite apparent fragmentation. Thus, the present work challenges these assumptions by examining the intra- and inter-textual properties of poetry from the perspective of discourse stylistics. Although poetry may seem "disjointed," it actually contains some of the most complex connections in language. Consequently, this study analyzes the cohesive and stylistic features of Bassey's eco-poem "Return to Being" (2021). Further research using a discourse-stylistic approach to poetry could deepen our understanding of the cohesive and stylistic devices used in eco-poetry.

2. Literature Review

A number of studies have examined how language is used in poetry and other forms of discourse to create meaning. Aziz and Ghani (2023), for instance, conducted a discourse-stylistic analysis of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Binsey Poplars" to highlight the differences between poetic and non-poetic language. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework and Perrine's (1969) theory of figures of speech guided their analysis. Their findings revealed the use of several cohesive and stylistic devices to communicate meaning effectively. Repetition was the most dominant cohesive device,

while personification was the most frequent stylistic feature. Similarly, Ufot (2021) analyzed Ushie's poetry using a discourse-stylistic approach and found that cohesive and dialogic strategies such as repetition, anaphora, deixis, and presupposition helped create interaction between the poet and readers. Both studies agree that cohesive devices contribute significantly to meaning construction and coherence in poetry. Despite this similarity, the two studies differ in focus and scope. Aziz and Ghenni (2023) concentrated mainly on cohesive and figurative devices in a single poem, whereas Ufot (2021) examined broader discourse features across several poems. Methodologically, both studies relied heavily on qualitative description and paid less attention to how different linguistic features interact to shape ideological meaning in poetry. In addition, while these studies successfully apply discourse-stylistics to poetry, they focus on non-African poems or poets other than Bassey. This creates room for further discourse-stylistic studies on African eco-poetry.

The stylistic analysis of poetry has also received considerable attention. Gambari-Olufadi and Salihu-AbdulAkeem (2022) examined selected poems from Tanure Ojaide's *Narrow Escapes* to explore poetic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study identified stylistic devices such as puns, personification, allusion, and analogy as important tools for expressing the poet's experiences and intentions. Similarly, Diko and Lucas (2020) analyzed Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* and found that stylistic devices such as similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions, and parallelism were used to highlight social issues and inspire social change. Likewise, Akinbode et al. (2023) used Leech and Short's (1981) stylistic model to analyze Osundare's "The Leader and the Led" and identified stylistic features such as similes, metaphors, alliteration, and assonance. These stylistic studies share a common interest in how poetic language communicates deeper meanings and social concerns. Most of them also agree that figurative devices strengthen the thematic message of poetry. However, they differ in the stylistic features they prioritize and in the themes they explore. For example, Gambari-Olufadi and Salihu-AbdulAkeem (2022) focused on pandemic experiences, while Diko and Lucas (2020) emphasized revolutionary and environmental themes. A major limitation across these studies is that they focus mainly on stylistic features without paying much attention to discourse elements such as cohesion and coherence. As a result, the relationship between stylistic choices and textual connectedness is not fully explored.

Furthermore, Agustin and Bram (2023) investigated the phonological, graphological, and grammatical features in Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art," Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," and Keith Douglas's "Villanelle of Spring Bells." Their findings showed that consonance and assonance were dominant phonological features, while punctuation marks contributed to graphological meaning. They also found that prepositional phrases were the most frequent grammatical elements in the poems. This study differs from many earlier stylistic studies because it pays attention to multiple levels of language analysis rather than focusing only on figures of speech. However, the study remains descriptive and does not critically examine how these linguistic features contribute to wider social or ideological meanings.

Corpus-based studies further strengthen this position. Crossley et al. (2016) investigated cohesive devices in written discourse and found that lexical cohesion and reference are strongly linked to text quality and coherence. Their findings converge with earlier literary studies in showing that repetition and reference are key cohesive resources. However, their focus is on learner writing rather than literary texts, which shows a methodological divergence between corpus-based linguistics and literary

stylistics. Similarly, Zamruddin and Arafah (2019) applied a discourse-stylistic framework to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Their study shows that stylistic regularities such as lexical repetition and syntactic patterns contribute to narrative coherence and ideological meaning. This finding, however, differs in that it uses prose narrative data rather than poetic texts, which are more condensed and metaphorically dense.

Some studies have focused specifically on Bassey's poetry. Anasiudu (2022) examined *We Thought It Was Oil, but It Was Blood* using postcolonial ecocriticism and critical functional linguistics. The study found that Bassey's use of deixis, pronouns, adjectives, and metaphors reflects the ecological and socio-political struggles of the Niger Delta. Similarly, Maledo and Kadiri (2024) analyzed protest in selected poems from the same collection using Grice's Cooperative Principle. Their findings showed that implicatures and conversational maxims strengthen the communicative force of Bassey's ecological protest. Likewise, Ohwawworhua and Orhero (2019) investigated eco-activism in Bassey's "I Will Not Dance to Your Beat" and Albert Otto's "Letters from the Earth" using Buell's second-wave ecocriticism. The study revealed that both poets employ poetic strategies to challenge environmental injustice and advocate ecological preservation. These studies converge in presenting Bassey's poetry as a strong form of environmental activism and social protest. They also agree that language is central to expressing ecological concerns and resistance against exploitation. However, they differ in their theoretical orientations. Anasiudu (2022) combines ecocriticism with critical functional linguistics; Maledo and Kadiri (2024) adopt a pragmatic approach; while Ohwawworhua and Orhero (2019) rely on ecocriticism. These differences show that Bassey's poetry can be studied from different linguistic and literary perspectives. Nevertheless, the studies focus mostly on ecological themes and protest, with less attention given to the interaction between cohesion and stylistic features in shaping poetic meaning.

The reviewed studies show that stylistic analysis remains the dominant approach in poetry studies, while discourse-stylistic analysis has received comparatively less scholarly attention. Most of the studies rely on qualitative and descriptive methods and focus more on identifying linguistic features than on critically explaining how these features work together to construct meaning and ideology. In addition, studies on Bassey's poetry mainly examine poems from *We Thought It Was Oil, but It Was Blood*, and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat*. To the best of our knowledge, Bassey's eco-poem "Return to Being" (2021) has not received scholarly attention from a discourse-stylistic perspective. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining how cohesive and stylistic devices interact to shape the poem's environmental message and ideology.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this study is guided by Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework for analyzing cohesion as well as Leech and Short's (2007) model for analyzing texts stylistically. The cohesion framework proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976) is adopted to address the discourse aspect of the analysis, while the stylistic analysis is conducted using the Leech and Short (2007) model. Each of these models sheds light on the present study.

3.1 Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Cohesion Model

Halliday and Hasan (1976) posit that the notion of cohesion "... is a semantic one and refers to the relations of meanings that exist within a text and that define it as a

text” (p. 4). Cohesive ties or devices are linguistic tools that create cohesion. These elements help us form coherent, understandable, and meaningful texts. Cohesion is important in creating a text, which requires a structure that differs from that of a single sentence. Therefore, cohesion is an internal feature of textuality. As Yule (2006) notes, analyzing cohesive ties in a text helps us understand how writers organize their ideas and can influence our judgment about the quality of the writing. The elements of a text need to be connected in some way; they should not just be a random collection of sentences. The connection between these elements relies on reference and meaning. Cohesion involves grammar and vocabulary, and Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorize it into two main types: grammatical and lexical.

Grammatical cohesion refers to the employment of various grammatical elements to establish explicit relationships among sentences. It is achieved through using grammatical cohesive devices to connect text segments in a specific manner so that readers can discern the elements referred to, replaced, or omitted (Harmer, 2006). Grammatical cohesion is further divided into reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. According to Nunan (1993), referential cohesion helps us create clear connections between elements that are hard to understand without context. References can be classified into three types: personal, demonstrative, and comparative.

Secondly, substitution refers to replacing one item with another in a text. It helps maintain cohesion by avoiding repetition and creating grammatical links between words, phrases, and clauses. Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify three types of substitution: nominal (for nouns), verbal (for verbs), and clausal (for clauses). Again, ellipsis involves omitting certain elements in a sentence or clause. Halliday and Hasan (1976) describe ellipsis as “substitution by zero” (p. 143), meaning that the omitted item can be understood from the previous sentence or clause. Essentially, when an item like a noun, verb, or clause is left out, it allows other parts of the text to fill in the gaps. Lastly, conjunctions differ from substitution, reference, and ellipsis in that they do not refer back to something previously mentioned in the discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The main role of conjunctions is to link sentences together. Halliday (1985) explains that conjunctions indicate specific relationships between clauses or longer sections of text. They can be classified into four types: additive (connects units that share similar meanings), adversative (expresses opposing ideas), causal (introduces reasons or results), and temporal (indicates the order of events).

On the other hand, Halliday and Hasan (1976) define lexical cohesion as the “cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary” (p. 274). It is the category of resources that is purely semantic because it enables text receivers to find texts meaningful rather than random collections of unrelated sentences. Lexical cohesion is categorized into two main types: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration involves either repeating a linguistic element directly or through synonyms, superordinates, or closely related terms. Again, collocation refers to the occurrence of two words within the same lexical environment without necessarily having a direct semantic connection. These devices establish interrelationships within a text, enabling readers to draw inferences essential for comprehension (Crossley et al., 2016).

3.2 Leech and Short’s (2007) Stylistics Model

Leech and Short (2007) outline four categories for analyzing texts stylistically: lexical category, grammatical category, figures of speech, and context and cohesion.

However, this study examines the grammar and figures of speech in the text, as it focuses more on the poem's literary style. The grammatical category covers sentence types, sentence complexity, clause types, clause structures, noun phrases, verb phrases, and other phrase types. Figures of speech involve both grammatical and lexical patterns, as well as phonological schemes. Leech and Short (2007) note that stylistic analysis can apply to spoken language, written texts, literary works, and everyday language; however, it is traditionally associated with written literature. Widdowson (1975) describes it as a way to study literary discourse from a linguistic perspective. Stylistic analysis can either support existing interpretations of a text or offer new interpretations that challenge previous readings. Thus, stylistics primarily examines how language is used and the effects it produces.

4. Methods

Bassey's eco-poem "Return to Being" (2021) was selected as the data for this study. This poem was purposively sampled for its explicit focus on environmental devastation and its potential to reveal Bassey's use of language to convey his ecological concerns. A qualitative content analysis approach was employed to examine the poem's discourse and stylistic elements. The analysis was guided by Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework and Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic model. The poem was read several times to ensure familiarity with the text before the coding process began. The coding categories were derived from the two theoretical frameworks. Grammatical cohesive devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction were identified based on Halliday and Hasan's cohesion model. Lexical cohesive devices such as repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and collocation were also identified and categorized. In addition, stylistic features such as grammatical categories and figures of speech were coded following Leech and Short's stylistic framework.

The coding process was carried out manually by carefully examining each line of the poem and assigning identified linguistic features to their appropriate categories. Frequency counts were conducted by recording each occurrence of the identified cohesive and stylistic devices throughout the poem. Repeated items were counted only when they performed a cohesive or stylistic function within the context of the poem. To enhance the reliability and consistency of the analysis, the coding process was repeated at different stages, and the identified categories were cross-checked against the theoretical frameworks. This process helped minimize possible coding inconsistencies and strengthened the credibility of the findings. Finally, the relationship between the poem's cohesive and stylistic features and its environmental message was interpreted qualitatively.

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and their discussions on the cohesive devices employed in "Return to Being." The analysis is guided by Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework.

5.1 Categories of Grammatical Cohesive Devices

Grammatical cohesion involves using grammatical elements to create clear connections between sentences. It is achieved through cohesive devices that link parts of a text, enabling readers to identify references, substitutions, or omissions (Harmer, 2006). Table 1 shows the distribution of these devices in the poem.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of grammatical cohesive devices

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Reference	33	76.74%
Conjunction	10	23.26%
Substitution	0	0%
Ellipsis	0	0%
Total	43	100%

A total of 43 instances of grammatical cohesive devices were found in the poem. The pattern of grammatical cohesion in the poem shows a strong reliance on reference (76.74%) and conjunction (23.26%), while substitution and ellipsis are absent. This distribution reflects the poet's style and how he constructs meaning through explicit expression rather than implicit cohesion. These findings show that the poem's meaning is primarily built through explicit linking and lexical reinforcement rather than through structural omission or substitution. This is significant because it demonstrates how cohesion is used not only for textual unity but also to reinforce environmental ideology through repeated, interconnected semantic fields such as "carbon," "Mother Earth," and "climate debt." Thus, the study shows a clear interaction between cohesive density and ecological emphasis, which has not been sufficiently highlighted in earlier studies on eco-poetry.

Specifically, the finding on reference reflects that of Aziz and Gheni (2023). Their study was a discourse-stylistics analysis of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Binsey Poplars." Their finding revealed reference as the dominant grammatical cohesive device used in the poem. The similarity in findings could be due to the shared themes of the two poems. Both "Binsey Poplars" by Hopkins and "Return to Being" by Bassey are eco-poems that focus on nature and environmental concerns. Since these poems describe landscapes and environmental change, they may rely heavily on reference as a cohesive device to maintain clarity and connection between ideas. More so, the findings on substitution and ellipsis could reflect the observation that they "are more characteristically found in dialogues" (Halliday, 2000, p. 337) and "they are seldom used in formal writing" (Liu & Braine, 2005, p. 647).

5.1.1 Reference

References have been divided into three subtypes: personal, demonstrative, and comparative. Among these, the poet only utilizes personals and demonstratives with a frequency count of 5 and 28, respectively. Personal references involve personal and possessive pronouns that help distinguish speech roles from other roles (Coffin & Mayor, 2004). The excerpts below illustrate the poet's use of personal reference.

[1] "What children have I spawned, Mother Earth groans" (Line 15)

[2] "Are you too far gone to hear?" (Line 21)

[3] "Shall we look, exiled, silent, sullen, sunk and annihilated as our trees metamorphose into carbon sinks?" (Line 31)

Bassey uses the personal reference "I" in Line 15 to refer to Mother Earth speaking. The poet gives nature a voice, thus making it a sentient being that suffers due

to human actions. This strengthens the poem's emotional appeal, which makes the environmental destruction feel more personal and tragic. Unlike many other protest poems, the poet himself does not use "I" as a speaker. Instead, the only time "I" appears is when Mother Earth laments her fate. Moreover, in Line 21, the poet employs the pronoun "you" to challenge the audience, making them active participants in the conversation. The poet is questioning the reader's awareness and willingness to act in restoring the environment to its glorious beginning. This rhetorical question forces the audience to reflect on their responsibility in the destruction of the Nigerian natural environment.

Moreover, the poet uses the pronoun "we" inclusively (Line 31) to express a shared human experience, in which the speaker includes themselves and the audience in the suffering and potential downfall caused by environmental destruction. The use of "shall we" poses a rhetorical question that challenges whether humanity will passively accept this fate or take action to preserve the natural environment. Meanwhile, "our trees" in the same line reinforces a collective bond with nature. The poet does not say "the trees" but rather "our trees" to show personal and collective ownership. This makes the destruction more painful because it is not just about nature—it is about losing something deeply connected to the people's lives.

Demonstrative reference is considered "... a form of verbal pointing" where "a speaker identifies the referent by locating it on a scale of proximity" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 57). The definite article "the" is the most frequently used reference relation in the poem. However, the poet uses the definite article in contextually ambiguous references, where it refers to something that could be interpreted in multiple ways without clear antecedents, as shown below.

[4] "The battle rages" (Line 1)

[5] "The dream is gone, the cock has crowed" (Line 32)

The definite article (in Lines 1 and 32) signals that the fight against environmental destruction is ongoing and reinforces disillusionment, respectively. The poet uses "the" exophorically, perhaps because he assumes that the audience is already aware of the devastation of the environment and its consequences. However, without prior context specifying their referents in the discourse, this use of *the* word does not create a cohesive link. Instances where it serves generic or ambiguous purposes do not contribute to cohesion within the text. Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify this type of reference as exophoric. They note that "It is only the anaphoric type of reference that is relevant to cohesion since it provides a link with the preceding portion of the text" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 51).

5.1.2 Conjunctions

Biber et al. (1999) observe that the function of conjunctions is "to make semantic connections between spans of discourse of varying length" (Biber et al., 1999, p. 558). Halliday and Hasan (1976) identified four types of conjunction relations: additive, causal, adversative, and temporal. Among these, additive, adversative, and temporal conjunctions were used by the poet with a frequency count of 7, 1, and 2, respectively. The identification of conjunctions in this study followed Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework. However, a distinction was made between cohesive and non-cohesive uses of conjunctions. In particular, additive conjunctions such as "and" were only counted as cohesive when they linked two clauses or propositions that contributed to the development of meaning and progression of ideas in the poem. In "Return to

Being,” the poet uses the additive “and” 15 times, but only 7 instances were used cohesively to strengthen the poet’s message, as shown in the extracts below.

[6] “The betrayer seeks a branch to ape a pendulum swing / And one or two shed a tear for the press” (Lines 33/34)

[7] “Flutes whisper a dirge long forgotten suddenly emerging from the depths of years of erased histories / And finally humans return to being” (Lines 37/40)

The poet uses the conjunction “and” (Line 34) to connect different consequences of betrayal and destruction that the poet noted in Line 33. Similarly, “and” (Line 40) links the restoration of lost histories to the ultimate act of human reconnection with nature.

Moreover, temporal conjunctions indicate sequence or time. The poet employs temporal conjunctions such as “as” and “finally” to establish a sense of progression and movement in the poem, often marking transitions between destruction and resistance as illustrated below.

[8] “As daughters and sons of the soil pick up pieces of sacred hills, rivers, forests” (Lines 38)

[9] “And finally humans return to being” (Lines 40)

The poet uses “as” (Line 38) to signal an ongoing process of reclamation, while “finally” (Line 40) marks a resolution. It suggests that despite the prolonged devastation of the environment, there is hope for positive change. These temporal conjunctions show that while destruction has occurred over time, so does it have the potential for restoration.

5.2 Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion is the “cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 274). It is the category of resources that is purely semantic because they enable text receivers to find texts meaningful and not random collections of unrelated sentences. Lexical cohesion had a frequency count of 50 in the poem. The major types of lexical cohesive devices found include reiteration, which involves repetition, synonyms, antonyms, and hyponyms, as well as collocations. Table 2 shows the distribution of these devices in the poem.

Table 2. Distribution of Lexical Cohesive Devices

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Repetition	10	20%
Synonym	9	18%
Antonym	8	16%
Hyponym	7	14%
Collocation	16	32%
Total	50	100%

The distribution of lexical cohesion devices in the poem provides key insights into the poem’s thematic concerns and the poet’s stylistic choices. The next sections analyze each of these elements.

5.2.1 Repetition

Repetitions are instances where words are reiterated verbatim within the text, along with instances where words undergo changes to indicate shifts in tense or number. The frequency of repetitions in the poem reveals the urgency of the poet's thematic concerns. One of the most significant areas of repetition relates to environmental destruction and climate change. The word "carbon" appears multiple times in "carbon budget," "carbon slave," and "carbon sinks." This reveals the poet's ongoing effort to highlight government forces that drive ecological harm. This repetition reinforces the idea that nature has been reduced to a commodity, where carbon is not seen as a natural element but as something to be exploited and traded.

Similarly, the repeated use of "Mother Earth" (three times) emphasizes her suffering under human exploitation. The poet presents her as both a victim and a force that is waiting to rise in resistance. More so, "funeral drums" appears twice in the poem to intensify the sense of grief and loss associated with environmental devastation. The finding on repetition corroborates that of Aziz and Ghani (2023), who found repetition as the predominant lexical cohesive device in a discourse-stylistics analysis of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Binsey Poplars." The similarity in findings suggests that repetition is a key lexical cohesive device in eco-poetry, where poets often use repeated words and phrases to emphasize urgent ecological concerns.

5.2.2 Synonymy

Synonymy refers to the use of different words with similar meanings to create cohesion in a text. Bassegy uses different words with similar meanings in the poem to create variety while emphasizing the same ideas throughout the poem. This discourse marker strengthens cohesion and ensures that certain concepts remain central to the reader's interpretation. The words "carbon budget," "climate debt," and "carbon sinks" share the general semantic feature of environmental destruction. These expressions reveal how nature has been reduced to financial and political calculations, making it clear that environmental exploitation is driven by profit rather than sustainability. Similarly, "biosphere," "ethnosphere," "habitats," and "habitations" share the general semantic feature of living environments. The poet perhaps uses these synonyms, which have negative general semantic features, to emphasize how human and non-human spaces are under threat. These different but related terms show that the destruction of nature remains a dominant concern throughout the poem.

5.2.3 Antonymy

Antonymy refers to the use of words with opposite meanings to create contrast and cohesion in a text. Bassegy uses opposing words to emphasize the struggles between destruction and preservation, oppression and freedom, death and rebirth. The poet uses antonymy in the poem to explore life and death. Words such as "alive" and "annihilated," "awake" and "sunk" are antonyms because they contrast in their general semantic features. The statement "Mother Earth awakes" suggests a rebirth of nature and human consciousness. The poet perhaps desires to show that while the ecosystem is being destroyed, there is still hope for its restoration if people take the right action. Moreover, words such as "colonize" and "return to being" suggest that just as colonial forces once enslaved people and stole their lands and took away their dignity, today's economic and environmental policies continue to exploit the people and their natural resources.

5.2.4 Hyponymy

Hyponymy refers to the relationship between a general term (superordinate) and its more specific instances (hyponyms). In the poem, the general category of “nature” is represented through specific words such as “biosphere,” “ethnosphere,” “forests,” “rivers,” “hills,” and “trees.” These elements all belong to the natural world. The poet uses these hyponyms with the intention to emphasize that ecological damage is widespread and affects multiple aspects of the environment. Again, the general idea of “colonial exploitation” is expressed through specific terms such as “colonial geographies,” “slave,” “exiled,” and “trophy hunters.” Bassey’s choice of these hyponyms shows that colonialism was not just about land theft but also about enslaving people and exploiting their resources.

More so, the poet utilizes the concept of “resistance” to reflect specific words like “daughters of the soil,” “awake,” and “return to being.” These expressions highlight different aspects of fighting back against environmental destruction and colonial oppression. “Return to being, for instance, implies a restoration of identity and balance with nature.

5.2.5 Collocation

Collocation refers to words that frequently appear together due to semantic association. It is the habitual co-occurrence of words, which strengthens connections between sentences and contributes to text coherence. Bassey utilizes collocations such as “carbon budget,” “climate debt,” and “carbon slave” to reveal how state actors drive the destruction of the environment. These expressions link the natural world with systems that control and exploit it. The poet reveals that climate change is not just a natural disaster but a consequence of human greed. The poet also uses collocations related to disease and health, particularly in references to pandemics and zoonotic diseases. The poet uses collocations such as “deadly scourges” and “novel coronavirus” to show how human exploitation of nature leads to health crises. The poet suggests that deforestation, habitat destruction, and the mistreatment of wildlife contribute to pandemics. Thus, he draws our attention to the interconnectedness of human and environmental health.

5.3 Stylistic Analysis

5.3.1 Grammatical Category

The symbolic significance of the title “Return to Being” is central to the ecological ideology of the poem. The phrase suggests a movement toward restoration and reconnection between humans and nature. The word “return” implies that this state of harmony once existed but has been disrupted by human actions such as environmental exploitation and degradation. The expression “being” extends beyond physical existence to include a deeper sense of identity, awareness, and ecological belonging. It suggests a condition in which humans recognise themselves as part of the natural world rather than separate from it. In this sense, the title frames the entire poem as a call for ecological renewal and moral reorientation, which reinforces the poem’s central environmental message.

Bassey employs a variety of functional sentence types to portray the harsh and bleak realities of the Nigerian landscape and its degraded natural environment. Three functional sentence types were found in the poem. These include declarative, interrogative, and imperative. There were no instances of exclamative sentences

identified in the data. This absence is stylistically significant as it contributes to the poem's controlled and reflective tone. Rather than relying on emotional outbursts or heightened expressions, the poet adopts declarative, interrogative, and imperative forms to convey meaning. This creates a sense of seriousness and restraint, which aligns with the gravity of environmental destruction being represented. The absence of exclamation marks therefore supports the poem's solemn, thoughtful, and reflective discourse style, which allows the ecological message to be communicated in a measured and persuasive manner.

To start with, declarative sentences are statements that provide information or express an idea. In the poem, declarative sentences establish the harsh realities of environmental degradation and human exploitation. The following textual instances illustrate the use of declaratives.

[10] "The battle rages." (Line 1)

[11] "The dream is gone, the cock has crowed." (Line 32)

The two excerpts above are declaratives that make direct statements. The first introduces the theme of conflict, possibly referring to the ongoing struggle for environmental justice. The second signals loss and betrayal, suggesting that humanity has already reached a point of no return in its destruction of nature. The brevity of these declarative sentences adds to their impact, which makes them feel like undeniable truths.

Likewise, the poet makes use of interrogatives in the poem. Interrogative sentences are used to ask questions, often to provoke thought. The poet frequently uses rhetorical questions to challenge and engage the reader. These questions do not seek direct answers but instead highlight injustices and environmental destruction.

[12] "Who must gobble up the carbon budget, wrap Mother Earth in endless bales of smog?" (Line 2/3)

[13] "Are you too far gone to hear?" (Line 21)

The excerpts are interrogative questions that do not expect direct answers. Specifically in Line 3, the rhetorical question reveals Bassey's concerns about the exploitation of the climate. The phrase "gobble up the carbon budget" suggests reckless pollution, while "wrap Mother Earth in endless bales of smog" visualizes a world suffocated by emissions. The poet does not expect an answer but forces the reader to consider who is responsible for the damage caused to the environment. Bassey criticizes state actors for their continuous exploitation of the Earth under the pretense of progress. In Line 21, the poet implies that people have become so desensitized to environmental devastation to the point that they no longer pay attention. The point interrogates whether people still have the capacity to act or if they are beyond saving the environment.

Lastly, imperative sentences issue commands or instructions. In this poem, the poet employs imperatives to urgently call upon humanity to take action to salvage the environment by changing its ways. The excerpts below illustrate the use of imperatives in the poem.

[14] "Hear the footsteps from the receding market squares." (Line 24)

[15] "Burst the funeral drums." (Line 20)

The first command (Line 24) urges readers to listen to the signs of change. It possibly refers to the voices of activists or the natural world reacting to destruction. The second command (Line 20) is more forceful. It suggests a need to disrupt existing

systems of oppression and environmental destruction. The use of imperatives creates a sense of urgency and involvement, as if the poet is addressing humanity directly.

5.3.2 *Figures of Speech*

“Return to Being” was also analyzed figuratively. Repetition, metaphor, personification, and symbolism were among the various figures of speech used in the poem. This finding is consistent with those of Diko and Lucas (2020) and Akinbode et al. (2023). Diko and Lucas (2020) analyzed the stylistic features of Osundare’s poetry collection *The Eye of the Earth*. They found that the poet used metaphors and symbolic language to highlight social issues and encourage readers to take action to create a fair society. The similarity in findings could be due to the nature of both “Return to Being” and *The Eye of the Earth* as eco-poems. Since both works aim to raise consciousness about environmental devastation, their use of similar stylistic features is not surprising, as these devices effectively enhance the poem’s message. More so, the study by Akinbode et al. (2023) was a stylistic analysis of Niyi Osundare’s “The Leader and the Led” using Leech and Short’s (1981) theory. They found, among others, the use of metaphors in the poem. This suggests that Bassey and Osundare have a socially conscious and reflective poetic style, as both poems share a broader theme of responsibility.

One outstanding aspect of the stylistic features of the poem is the repetition of words. Repetition is the deliberate use of the same words or phrases for emphasis and rhythm, as illustrated in the excerpts below.

[16] “Wrap Mother Earth in endless bales of smog... / What children have I spawned, Mother Earth groans.” (Lines 10 and 15)

[17] “Whose task is to pile the climate debt?” /And whose lot to be the carbon slave?” (Lines 4 and 5)

The poet's tone in the excerpts conveys lamentation and despair stemming from the degradation of the land. In Lines 10 and 15, the repetition and personification of “Earth” as a mother reveal her suffering at human hands. The repetition strengthens the theme of environmental destruction as maternal abuse. Similarly, in Lines 4 and 5, the poet uses “whose” at the beginning of both questions to establish a parallel structure. This reinforces the contrast between responsibility and suffering. The parallel structures enable the poet to reveal the unequal burden of climate change, where powerful forces exploit resources while ordinary people suffer the damage.

Further, Bassey employs metaphors to express deep concerns about colonialism and environmental destruction in “Return to Being.” The excerpts below illustrate the use of metaphors in the poem.

[18] “The commons enclosed, entrapped for delicate, bloodied trophy hunters.” (Line 12)

[19] “Tighten the tourniquets on hard hearts ensconced in hard hats.” (Line 16)

The metaphor used in Line 12 presents nature as a hunted trophy. The poet compares “the commons” (natural resources) to a trapped prey, just like an animal caught in a hunter’s trap. This metaphoric expression suggests that powerful forces have captured and enclosed natural resources for their own benefit. The phrase “bloodied trophy hunters” metaphorically describes those who exploit nature for personal gain.

More so, in Line 16, “hard hearts” represents people in power and is being compared to wounded bodies in need of a “tourniquet.” However, in this context, it is being “tightened” on “hard hearts.” This implies that these people lack compassion and

cannot be healed. Again, “hard hats” symbolize state and influential people who are heavily involved in environmental degradation. The phrase suggests that these individuals are emotionally hardened and prioritize profit over human and environmental well-being.

Likewise, Bassegy also makes use of personification in “Return to Being,” where human qualities are given to non-human elements such as nature and Earth. Through personification, the poet makes the environment and societal structures feel alive, thus giving them voices. This technique strengthens the poem’s message by showing how nature suffers, reacts, and even fights back against human exploitation. Textual instances are provided below.

[20] “What children have I spawned, Mother Earth groans.” (Line 15)

[21] “The dream is gone, the cock has crowed.” (Line 32)

In Line 15, Mother Earth is personified as a grieving parent who questions the actions of her “children”. “What children have I spawned?” suggests disappointment and sorrow, as though Earth regrets giving birth to humanity. The verb “groans” deepens this emotion by portraying Earth as suffering under the weight of human destruction. This personification reflects the deep connection between humans and nature, yet it highlights how humanity has betrayed its responsibility. Instead of caring for the planet, people have polluted, exploited, and damaged it. By making Earth a mother figure, the poet appeals to readers’ emotions, thus urging them to see the planet as something living and nurturing, and not just a resource to be exploited.

In Line 32, the “dream” is personified as something that can “go away.” Normally, dreams are intangible ideas, but here, the poet gives them an active movement. This makes it seem as if hope and possibilities have physically disappeared. Finally, symbolism is a powerful device that Bassegy employs in “Return to Being” to convey his environmental concerns. The poem is rich with symbols that reflect the tension between human exploitation and nature’s resilience. Textual instances of some symbolic elements in the poem are provided below.

[22] “What children have I spawned, Mother Earth groans.” (Line 15)

[23] “Burst the funeral drums...” (Line 10)

In Line 15, “Mother Earth” is a common symbol for nature, life, and fertility. In this sense, “Earth” is not just a physical entity but a living force that provides for humanity. However, instead of appreciating and preserving her, humans have polluted and exploited her resources. The word “groans” symbolizes suffering and disappointment. By presenting the Earth as a mother figure, the poet appeals to the reader’s emotions and sense of responsibility. It suggests that destroying nature is akin to betraying one’s own mother. This makes the reader feel guilty and nurtures the urgent desire to address environmental issues. More so, “funeral drums” used by the poet in Line 10 traditionally announce death and mourning. They symbolize loss and destruction. The act of bursting the drums suggests an intensification of the destruction.

6. Conclusion

This study conducted a discourse-stylistics analysis of Nnimmo Bassegy’s eco-poem “Return to Being.” The findings revealed the use of grammatical and lexical cohesive devices to enhance the poem’s coherence. Specifically, reference and conjunction relations were the identified devices, while substitution and ellipsis were not used. The findings on substitution and ellipsis confirm Halliday and Hasan’s observation that these

linguistic markers are often found in verbal discourse. Moreover, lexical cohesion was achieved through repetition, synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, and collocations.

Stylistically, the poet employed grammatical categories and figures of speech to highlight the deliberate human actions that contribute to environmental devastation in the Niger Delta. Basseý used grammatical categories such as declarative sentences, interrogatives, and imperatives to portray the harsh, bleak realities of Nigeria's landscape and degraded natural environment. Figurative devices such as repetition, metaphor, personification, and symbolism were employed to convey the devastation of the environment and to call for its restoration.

The study has important implications for both discourse stylistics and environmental discourse. The findings demonstrate that Halliday and Hasan's cohesion model is crucial for explaining how ecological meaning is constructed through explicit textual connections that organize environmental ideas in the poem. It also shows the relevance of Leech and Short's stylistic model in explaining how grammatical choices and figurative language shape tone and highlight ecological concerns. From a literary perspective, the study supports the view that eco-poetry is a form of discourse blending artistic expression and activism. The findings also contribute to discussions in eco-linguistics, as they show how language can be used to challenge human attitudes toward the environment.

This study analyzed only one eco-poem by Basseý. Future research could explore how other eco-poems use cohesion and stylistic features to influence environmental discourse. Comparative studies between "Return to Being" and similar works by other poets, for instance, could deepen our understanding of the recurring linguistic patterns used in eco-poetry.

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