

**PHONETIC SYMBOLISM IN NIYI OSUNDARE'S
*EYE OF THE EARTH***

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Abstract

The language of Nigerian poetry in general, and Osundare's poetry in particular is a well studied area of inquiry; however, the subject of rhythm and accompanying aspects such as onomatopoeic effects, alliteration and assonance, appear to have received more attention than the acoustic frequencies of the segmental sounds. Moreover, rigorous investigations of the acoustic property of intonation in Osundare's poetry are relatively rare. Therefore, using Ohala's frequency code theory to carry out a phonostylistic analysis, this paper examines how the fundamental frequencies (F_0) of vowel sounds and intonation in Osundare's "Harvestcall" and "Our Earth will not Die" in the collection, *Eye of the Earth* are employed in both poems. Analysis revealed that Osundare harmonises the acoustic features of English and Yoruba vowel sounds to convey multiple layers of meaning in the two texts examined. Furthermore, he uses the low tones, more often associated with declarative sentences, to serve imperative functions in "Our Earth Will Not Die" in order to portray the supernatural use of the spoken word in Yoruba worldview; that is, 'àṣẹ' (spiritual command/authority). The examination of phonetic symbolism in Osundare's poems using Ohala's frequency code theory has helped to identify new dimensions of Osundare's artistry as a bilingual, and fresh interpretations of his poems in ways that are useful for scholars in the fields of literature and linguistics. In addition, this study has modified Ohala's frequency code theory to include imperative statements rather than interrogative and declarative utterances only.

Introduction

The presence of certain vowel sounds in a word is believed in some fields to induce different reactions in the hearer or decoder of a message. The subject of sound symbolism, also known as phonetic symbolism, has garnered attention amongst diverse and unrelated interest groups such as car manufacturers, social scientists, ethologists, economists, marketers, advertisers, product/brand managers and manufacturers of consumer goods, linguists, psychologists, cognitive scientists, applied linguists and creative writers to mention but a few. Sound symbolism refers to the non-arbitrary connection between certain classes of speech sounds and

the meanings of the words or morphemes in which they occur. It includes but goes far beyond onomatopoeia, which entails just the imitation of natural and non-natural sounds. Scholars, in appreciation of the fact that the creative manipulation of speech sounds is almost synonymous with good poetry and, oral poetry (like Osundare's) in particular, tend to examine the sound devices of poems more in terms of alliteration, consonance, and assonance, which are all aspects of articulatory phonetics. In comparison, researchers seem to have given relatively very little attention to the acoustic phonetic properties of segmental and non-segmental sounds in poetry and how these properties are symbolically deployed using two different languages to convey the bilingual poet's message. Consequently, this study attempts to fill that gap by carrying out a phonostylistic analysis using Ohala's acoustic-phonetics-based frequency code theory to investigate the use of sound symbolism in Niyi Osundare's "Harvestcall" and "Our Earth Will Not Die".

Niyi Osundare stands out among a significant number of poets in Nigeria (such as Tade Ipadeola, Tanure Ojaide, Remi-Raji, Odia Ofemun, representing the new generation; and Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo and Christopher Okigbo of the early generation of Nigerian writers), who use English as a second language for their craft; he is also regularly acclaimed as one who has incorporated, wholesale, elements of Yoruba oral poetry such as *oriki*, *ewi*, *ekuniyawo*, *ijala*, *oduifa*; and the use of traditional musical instruments like *bata*, and *agba* drum, into his art. In addition, many of Osundare's poems are written clearly to be vocalized and performed, thus oftentimes involving stage directions at the beginning and at intervals within a single poem. It is for these reasons that his poems easily suggest themselves as most appropriate for phonostylistic analysis.

By phonostylistic analysis, I refer to that branch of stylistics that is concerned with the study of the figurative use of sounds in literary texts. The online Termium Plus' website for terminology and linguistic data bank defines phonostylistics as "...the new science which analyzes the variations of the spoken language, and attempts to describe how they transmit subjective information along with the basic message."

The scope of this paper is limited to the examination of the acoustic features, in terms of fundamental frequencies, of vowel sounds and intonation: both features also being the focus of the frequency code theory. The vowel sounds analysed in both poems are limited to those which occur in the following three word classes only: nouns, verbs, and adjectives because they are the specific parts of speech that convey the basic information about a subject (nouns), its attributes (adjectives), and its action (verbs). The preference for the frequency code theory employed in this study is on the basis of its being grounded in phonetics, which is the main concern of this research on Osundare's poetry. Out of Osundare's over ten volumes of published poetry (African Books Collective, 2015), *Eye of the Earth*, a volume comprising 18 poems was randomly selected for this study; and from it, two poems; namely, "Harvestcall" and "Our Earth Will Not

Die” were purposively selected for phonostylistic analysis. Both poems were selected because of Osundare’s directive that there should be a change in the pace (speed) and mood (ambience) within their structure. The assumption of this study is that, based on Ohala’s frequency code theory, there will be a corresponding meaningful change in the vowel types contained in Osundare’s word choices.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of sound symbolism has attracted attention and made significant impact in diverse disciplines, ranging from biological science, to branding and supermarket pricing. In Saussure’s opinion, linguistic signs are arbitrary, and there’s no systemic correspondence between form and meaning (1916): this was the generally held notion for many years. Over time, other linguists (Sapir, 1929; Jespersen, 1933) used psycholinguistic experiments to establish that non-arbitrary correlations do exist between form and meaning, especially in relation to vowel sounds. Testing the use of *mal and *mil, two nonsense words, to describe two sizes of tables, one big, one small, Sapir asked 500 participants of mixed ages and genders to use either the word *mal* or *mil* to describe the tables. Eighty percent of the participants chose *mal* to describe the large table. Similar experiments with nonsense words have been conducted across languages and cultures, and the outcome remains the same: high (closed) front vowels like /i/ inherently express smallness, while the low (open) back vowels like /a/ naturally suggest largeness. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) even state further, with many examples, as cognitive scientists, that there is a systematic relationship between form and meaning, also at the level of syntax.

Investigating sound symbolism in the field of marketing, Shrum and Lowrey (2007) conducted experiments with different proposed artificial brand names for various product categories. In the experiment for beer, as a product category, the researchers observed that for beer that was described as “cold, clean, and crisp” participants preferred names that contained front vowel sounds, whereas back vowel sounds were quickly associated with attributes of beer such as “smooth, mellow, and rich.” In a series of earlier brand marketing experiments, Klink (2000, 2003) observed that front vowels /i, e, ɪ, æ/ and fricative consonants /f, v, s, z, θ, ð, ʃ, ʒ, h/) in brand names were most linked with lighter colours than back vowels (/ɑ, ɔ, u, ɒ, u:/) and plosive consonants (/p, b, t, d, k, g/) were. Researchers have also investigated the effect of phonetic symbolism on consumers’ perceptions of prices. Coulter and Coulter (2010), for example, found out that consumers perceived \$7.66 as being less expensive than \$7.22, and this was because the high (open) front vowel /ɪ/ in /sɪks/ ‘six’ is more representative of smallness and diminutiveness. This, the authors say, explains why prices ending with -9 have more spending appeal to consumers than prices ending with numerals containing low back vowel sounds.

Other recent studies in phonetic symbolism have moved from experimenting with nonsense words to studying real sounds in actual speech: an example is Yardy (2010), which examines sound symbolism in lullabies, heavy metal music and swear/profane words. Also, Sidhu and

Pexman (2015) conducted a gender-based research on sound symbolism and English first names and found out that participants associated round vowels with feminine names, while front vowels with their sharp-sounding quality were associated with male names in English. The aforementioned reviewed works examined sound symbolism in contexts outside poetry; nevertheless, as Jakobson states, "Poetry is not the only area where sound symbolism makes itself felt, but it is a province where the internal nexus between sound and meaning changes from latent into patent and manifests itself most palpably and intensely." Existing works devoted to sound symbolisms in poetry include Hymes (1960), Baicchi (2000), and Weaver (2013) but none of them is based on African poetry.

Regarding the language of Osundare's poems, scholars have investigated his collections from various linguistic perspectives; for instance, Otemuyiwa and Akinyosoye (2015), Dick (2015), Jimoh and Odetade (2016), and Aminu and Oluwagbenga (2017) use a stylistic approach. Ogungbemi (2016) on the hand examines Osundare's poetry using discourse strategies, while Olaleye (2015) adopts a pragmatic approach but none of these studies are primarily focused on phonological aspects of Osundare's works. Known studies that have paid significant attention to sound in Osundare's poetry include Odebunmi, Aladeyomi and Olaniyan (2004), Osoba (2008), Anyokwu (2013), and Sogunro (2014) but their emphasis was not on acoustic (as distinct from articulatory) phonetic properties of the segmental sounds, or the fundamental frequencies of intonation patterns used by Osundare.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Ohala's frequency code theory (1983; 1994; 1997) to investigate the acoustic sound symbolism in the fundamental frequency (F_0) of vowel sounds contained in Osundare's poetry. The theory postulates that the physical size of referents is associated with the acoustic frequencies of the speech sounds that are used in referring to them. In other words, certain sounds express smallness and lightness, while others symbolize the concepts of large, heavy. Ladefoged and Johnson (2011) define frequency as "the rate of oscillation in air pressure in a periodic sound wave"; it is a technical term used in acoustic phonetics. The English high front vowels /i:, ɪ/ have a high fundamental frequency (F_0) and express smallness, sharpness, lightness; while the low back vowels /ɔ, ɑ/ have a low fundamental frequency (F_0) and are associated with largeness, roundness, and heaviness.

Much of the foundation of Ohala's theory is based on biological correlations with his observation of non-verbal communication among animals, and according to him, small animals use a high F_0 while large animals use a low F_0 due to the difference in the size of their vocal tract. In this regard, Ohala argues that just as a dog yelps (high pitch; closed front vowel-like sound) as a sign of surrender or growls (low pitch, back-vowel like sound) as a sign of hostile aggression, in the

same way, human beings consciously or involuntarily vary their speech sounds for specific purposes. Therefore, in line with the theory, the use of a high F_0 usually suggests that the speaker is of less social standing, is unsure, lacks confidence, or is being polite/conciliatory; whereas employing a low F_0 conveys the impression of power, self-sufficiency, confidence, assertiveness and authority. Margret Thatcher, one time prime minister of Britain for instance is reported to have deliberately worked on her speech to adopt a low frequency voice pitch in order to sound bigger, more aggressive, threatening and authoritative.

Generally, according to Ohala (1997), the principles behind sound symbolism can also explain the reason for the universality of intonation patterns; how and why the mouth is shaped to smile, and also express anger; the reason for the difference in the male and female vocal tract of animals including humans; and the adaptation of human vocal organs for speech. With regard to human speech sounds in particular, the frequency code theory states the following (Ohala, 1997):

1. Concerning intonation, a cross-language pattern exists that associates higher F_0 with questions and lower F_0 with statements. Also, the use of high F_0 shows politeness or deference to the person spoken to, while the use of low F_0 expresses anger, aggression, or threat. The person asking a question can be viewed as requiring the cooperation of the person to whom the question is addressed. Therefore a suppliant intonation is appropriate. A declarative statement, on the other hand, signals the speaker's self-confidence and control of the information conveyed.
2. The following sound types are predominant in the expression of "small": high front vowels like [i: ɪ y e], and "large": low back vowels like [ɑ: ʌ ɒ ɔ].
3. The cross-language and cross-species use of acoustic frequency to convey impressions of size (and related concepts) is labelled, the "frequency code".
4. There is cross-species recognition and exploitation of the frequency code: the association of high acoustic frequency with smallness and low acoustic frequency with largeness.

Assumptions of the Study

Based on the above postulations of the frequency code theory concerning the intonation of interrogative sentences indicating supplication versus the intonation of declarative sentences indicating self-confidence, or assertion; and the use of high (closed) front and low (open) back vowel sounds to convey the impressions of small versus large, “and related concepts” the assumptions of this study are that:

Assumption 1: The sections denoted as lively by Osundare in “Harvestcall” and “Our Earth will not Die” will contain more high front vowels (HFVs) than low back vowels (LBVs) in the verbs (action words) to convey the lightness and fast pace of the lively music that the author requires in Part one of ‘Harvestcall’ and Part Two of “Our Earth will not Die”.

Assumption 2: The lively sections in both poems that talk of largeness, plenty and abundance will contain more LBVs than HFVs in the nouns and adjectives.

Assumption 3: The rising tune intonation of the interrogative statements in both poems will comprise messages containing the poet’s supplications; entreating the corporation of the addressee.

Methodology

Out of the 18 poems in *The Eye of the Earth*, as earlier explained in the introduction of this paper, this study has purposively selected only “Harvestcall” and “Our Earth will Not Die” for analysis. The selection of the poems is based on the fact that since they are both structured to reflect two different moods: one lively and the other solemn, as indicated in Osundare’s notes at the beginning and towards the end of both poems, they are expected to contain distinct sound symbolisms that reflect the changes in tempo and mood. The change in the pace of the music also marks a change in the direction of the message. In order to have a balanced quantity of data for the comparison of sound symbolisms used when the poem’s mood, tempo and message change, an equal number of lines in the first and second parts of the two poems were selected for the phonostylistic analysis.

For “Harvestcall,” the study is limited to Lines 1-21 in Part 1, which call for “lively bata music” and Lines 58 – 76 in Part 2 where the music “lowers in tempo, becoming solemn”; giving a total of 21 lines in each section (please see Appendix A). The same procedure was followed for “Our Earth will not Die”, which has 48 lines. Specifically, analysis is limited to only Lines 1 – 14, requiring a “solemn, most elegiac tune”, and Lines 35 – 48 in which the “music turns festive, louder” (Osundare, 2012): giving a total of 14 lines in each section (please see Appendix B).

Since the frequency code theory interprets sound segments in terms of size, a feature ascribed to nouns; speed, a feature connected with verbs (action); and descriptions of a noun, a function assigned to adjectives, this study has focused only on the vowel sounds in the three aforementioned word classes; nouns, verbs and adjectives, as the conveyors of the significant sound symbolisms. The words belonging to each of the three word classes in the selected lines were first extracted, and the vowel sound contained in each word was classified under two headings: front versus back. Secondly, the number of occurrences of each word class and each of the HFVs and LBVs they contain was counted and converted to simple percentages for ease of analysis. Discussions were based on the result of the quantitative analysis, and interpreted in line with the argument of the frequency code theory concerning sound symbolic features of vowel sounds and intonation.

Analysis and Discussion

Analyses and discussion of each of the two poems are based on the three assumptions earlier mentioned in Section 3.1 of this paper, namely:

1. The lively sections in “Harvestcall” and “Our Earth will not Die” will contain more HFVs than LBVs in the verbs.
2. The lively sections in both poems will contain more LBVs than HFVs in the nouns and adjectives.
3. The tone and message of the interrogative statements in both poems will be suppliant.

“Harvestcall”

The percentage occurrence of HFVs and LBVs, as well as the percentage of nouns, verbs and adjectives in which they occur in the lively and solemn sections of “Harvestcall” are presented in Tables 1 and 2. In terms of parts of speech/word classes, nouns constitute the highest word class with an equal 57% occurrence in both the lively and solemn music/subject matter sections; thus reinforcing the idea that the poem is more about subject matters than about actions. Subjects and objects include (a) concrete nouns referring to names of places and of food crops – *Iyanfoworogi*, barns, earth, sky, yam, *aroso*, *feregede*, *otili*, *pakala*, pounded yam, pumpkins, seeds; kitchen utensils – pestle, mortar, knife and (b) abstract nouns such as hunger, contention, anger. There is, however, relatively more action in the solemn section signified by 24% verb forms compared to 19% verbs in the lively section of the poem; and more adjectives in the lively section (24%) than in the solemn section (19%).

Table 1: Distribution of nouns, verbs and adjectives, and front and back vowels in the selection from Part 1 and Part 2 of “Harvestcall”

	PART 1: LIVELY (Lines 1-21)	PART 2: SOLEMN (Lines 56-76)
NOUNS	57%	57%
VERBS	19%	24%
ADJECTIVES	24%	19%
HIGH FRONT VOWELS	58%	63%
LOW BACK VOWELS	42%	37%

The next three subsections are discussions of findings on the reality of the assumptions in this study, based on the frequency code theory.

Assumption 1:

The lively sections in “Harvestcall” and “Our Earth will not Die” will contain more HFVs than LBVs in the verbs.

This assumption is based on the fact that the frequency code theory associates high front vowels with the symbolism of smallness and the related concept of lightness, which connotes speed (action) and this is expected to be conveyed in lively music/mood/tempo dictated by Osundare. The results presented in Table 2 show that this is indeed so, as the lively section of “Harvestcall” contains 71% verbs with HFVs as against 29% verbs with LBVs. It is noteworthy however, that the solemn section also contains more verbs with HFVs (90%) than verbs with LBVs (10%), thus seemingly also conveying a sense of lightness and speed. An examination of the verbs in the solemn section reveals that many of the verb forms refer to actions relating to the glorious past described in the lively section, and this explains why they contain HFVs. For example, the verbs in the lines below are a recollection of actions in the past, when life was good and filled with plenty, and not referring to the present solemn situation and mood:

- 59. Which **beckoned** lustily to the reaping basket.
- 61. The yam pyramids which **challenged** the sun
- 64. the pumpkins which **caressed** earthbreast
- 67. the pods which **sweetened** harvest air
- 68. with the clatter of **dispersing** seeds

Perhaps this is why the poet needs to write a specific note outside the lines of the poem to slow down the pace by directing that “music lowers in tempo, becoming solemn”. In other words, it is the external directive that reduces the speed and symbolism of lightness, not the phonetic features of the words used in the poems.

Table 2: Distribution of front and back vowels contained in nouns, verbs and adjectives in selection from Part 1 and Part 2 of “Harvestcall”

	PART 1: LIVELY (Lines 1-21)			PART 2: SOLEMN (Lines 56-76)		
	NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES	NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES
HIGH FRONT VOWELS	47%	71%	79%	45%	90%	78%
LOW BACK VOWELS	53%	29%	21%	55%	10%	22%

Assumption 2: *The lively sections in both poems will contain more LBVs than HFVs in the nouns and adjectives.*

The basis of this assumption is that the frequency code states that LBVs symbolise roundness and largeness and the “related concepts” (Ohala, 1997) are taken here to include abundance, stability, bulk and ampleness. Therefore, the lively sections in particular referring to abundance and the glorious time past when “barns brimmed with yams fattened by merciful rains and the tempering fire of the upland sun” (Osundare, 2012, xi) are expected to contain nouns and adjectives conveying largeness. The result presented on Table 1 shows that the assumption is partly correct as only the nouns have more LBVs (53%) than HFVs (47%), while the adjectives that describe them have more HFVs (79%) than the expected larger number of LBV-bearing adjectives (21%). The reason for this is probably because the poet’s emphasis is on painting the picture of the gaiety of nature in the glorious past rather than the roundness and abundance which are already assumed and conveyed in the overall message of the section. For instance, “pounded yam” is described as possessing “feted arms”, the yams in *Iyanfoworogi* at harvest time are described as “randy”, and the sound of the knife peeling the yams in preparation for cooking is humorously described as “noisy war” (the HFV in each adjective is indicated in bold and underlined).

Examples of nouns containing LBVs indicated in bold font and underlined in the lively section are: *Iyanfoworogi* (the word occurs three times in the data and contains four back vowels), **war**, **arms**, **combat**, **mortar**, **hunger**. It will seem that the last five words in the list of examples all connote negativity when viewed in isolation and not properly disambiguated; however, in the context in which Osundare uses them in “Harvestcall”, they actually add to the liveliness and humour of the message and reinforce the theme of vivacious tranquillity in the glorious past when the only ‘violence’ was that caused by the knife peeling the “fattened” yams and the pestle pounding the yam in the mortar. Hunger in that beautiful past was very momentary and it was caused by the time taken to prepare the food; today, however, there is an endemic starvation

because “the rich and ruthless squander earth’s wealth on the invention of increasingly accomplished weapons of death, while millions of people perish daily from avoidable hunger” (Osundare, 2012).

As observed in Assumption 1 where there was an unexpected larger number of verbs with HFVs than LBVs in the solemn section, there are also an unexpected larger number of nouns with HFVs, and the same reason applies: the nouns refer to the situation in the past years of abundance rather than the present phase of leanness and scarcity of food after “the schoolyard jilted the farmstead...” (Osundare, 2012).

Assumption 3: *The tone and message of the interrogative statements in both poems will be suppliant.*

Ohala argues that because questions are said on a high fundamental frequency (pitch), the resulting intonation also conveys the impression of smallness in size and that the enquirer is usually requiring cooperation and support from the person being asked for a response; therefore, the tone and attitude is diffident or suppliant. Declarative statements on the other hand, are said with a low F₀ and therefore convey a sense of authority, self-confidence, aggression or threat. Consequently, this study presumes that since Part two of “Harvestcall” is made up of 7 occurrences of the adverb “where”, and one occurrence of the adverb, “How” all used to ask questions encased in 5 question marks (?), the “voice” of the author here will be suppliant. Specifically, the lines in question are between Lines 56 and 76, all in the solemn music section. No questions are present in the lively section.

- 56. But where are they?
- 57. where are they gone;
- 60. Where are they?
- 61. the yam pyramids which challenged the sun....
- 63. Where are they
- 64. the pumpkins which caressed earthbreast....
- 66. Where are they
- 67. the pods which sweetened harvest air....
- 68. with the clatter of dispersing seeds?
- 69. Where are they? Where are they gone?...
- 76. How can our hearth be so cold?

The recurring questions without answers sound like a desperate cry and an appeal for help to search for and bring back the glorious times past. The repeated wh- in “where” and “which” combined with other [w] sounds in words like “sweetened”, “with”, “womb”, “awaking”, “quickenings”, “waking”, “with”, “warm” and “how” all work together to give an impression of

whining: that is, a “cry, moan, or plead with a long, plaintive, high-pitched sound” (Encarta Dictionary). If the insistent questioning and repeated [w] sound in the questions give an impression of pleading, then it is correct to say that the tone of the speaker is suppliant; thus fulfilling Assumption 3 as correct, based on the frequency code theory.

“Our Earth will not Die”

This is the last poem in the collection, and it ends on a strong note of hope; so much so that Osundare calls for a celebration with loud festive music. The structure of “Our Earth Will Not Die” is a reversal of the order of moods in “Harvestcall”. Whereas the latter starts on a lively note and ends on a mournful tune, “Our Earth Will Not Die” begins on an elegiac tone but ends with a festive melody. Tables 3 and 4 present the percentage occurrence of high front and low back vowels, and the distribution of nouns, verbs and adjectives that appear in the lively and solemn sections of “Our Earth Will Not Die”. Both the solemn and the lively sections of the poem contain more nouns (52% and 55%) than verbs (30% and 29%), thus demonstrating that the poem is essentially descriptive rather than being a narration of events.

Table 3: Distribution of nouns, verbs and adjectives, and front and back vowels in selection from Part 1 and Part 2 of “Our Earth will not Die”

	PART 1: SOLEMN (Lines 1-14)	PART 2: LIVELY (Lines 35-48)
NOUNS	52%	55%
VERBS	30%	29%
ADJECTIVES	18%	16%
HIGH FRONT VOWELS	60%	64%
LOW BACK VOWELS	40%	36%

Table 4: Distribution of front and back vowels contained in nouns, verbs and adjectives in selection from Part 1 and Part 2 of “Our Earth will Not Die”

	PART 1: SOLEMN (Lines 1-14)			PART 2: LIVELY (Lines 35-48)		
	NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES	NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES
HIGH FRONT VOWELS	83%	40%	67%	56%	54%	100%
LOW BACK VOWELS	17%	60%	33%	44%	46%	0%

Assumption 1: *The lively sections in “Harvestcall” and “Our Earth will not Die” will contain more HFVs than LBVs in the verbs.*

The result presented in Table 3 confirms the assumption as correct as “Our Earth Will not Die” has 54% of verbs with HFVs as against 46% that have LBVs. Expectedly also, there are many more heavy, and therefore, grave sounding LBVs contained in the verbs in the solemn section than the lively section. This is unlike the occurrence in “Harvestcall” which recorded many HFV verbs in the solemn section because the content was actually about querying the disappearance of the lively glorious past. In “Our Earth Will Not Die”, the verbs in the solemn section contain mainly LBVs (60%), thus reflecting the slow pace and solemn mood as they talk about the present desecration of the earth which is now: “**slaughtered**”, “**mauled**”, “**coughing**” (LBVs written in bold and underlined),

Assumption 2: *The lively sections in both poems will contain more LBVs than HFVs in the nouns and adjectives.*

As regards this assumption, the result presented in Table 4 indicates a total contradiction. There are more nouns (56%) and adjectives (100%) with HFVs rather than the LBVs (44% nouns and 0% adjectives) that this study presumed would be used to symbolise largeness, abundance in the lively section of “Our Earth Will Not Die”. Here again, as deduced with Assumption 2 for “Harvestcall”, the poet’s use of phonetics and phonology (sound symbolism) appears to be more for conveying the message of gaiety and light heartedness while using grammar (word classifications) to convey the themes of abundance and largeness. Of note is the 100% occurrence of HFVs in the adjectives used in the lively section. The adjectival words themselves are very effectively employed to convey themes of rising/development, spiritedness, joyfulness, merriment, freedom, and freshness. Examples of such adjectives are: “new”, “westering”, “resplendent”, “blooming”, “content” and “jubilant”. The confident high sound of hope in a brighter future is evident in the generous outpour of adjectives used to describe almost every single noun in the lively section: “a new rain”, “the westering sun”, “a new coin”, “blooming harvests”, “eyes of grass and grace”, “a jubilant thunder”.

Assumption 3: *The tone and message of the interrogative statements in both poems will be suppliant.*

Just as with the sentence types in “Harvestcall”, all the interrogative sentences in “Our Earth Will Not Die” are found only in the solemn section of the poem. The three questions however fall outside the first 14 lines selected for analysis in this study and Assumption 3 therefore seems not directly applicable to the data selected for the present study of sound symbolism in “Our Earth Will Not Die”. However, a look at the postulations of Ohala’s theory in the discussion of the theoretical framework in Section 3 of this paper shows that there is a corollary: if a sentence is not a question, it means it is a declarative sentence and according to the theory, whereas

questions convey suppliance, “[a] declarative statement, on the other hand, signals the speaker’s self-confidence and control of the information conveyed.” In as much as there are no interrogative statements in the selected data, the existence of declarative statements are very significant in the frequency code theory and add major meaning to Osundare’s message in “Our Earth Will Not Die”.

The authoritative voice of Osundare is indisputable as he predicts a future glory, and paints a vision of when the earth, “our earth’s head”, will once again stand on its neck. The confidence and veracity of the poet’s declaration is palpable and further reinforced with the six repetitions of “will” in Lines 35 – 48. Osundare seems to use this modal verb, not like a request, suppliant in tone, neither is it merely declarative; rather, it is used as a command, an *àṣẹ* demanding precise execution. The Yoruba word, *àṣẹ* is not just a noun meaning power; it is a profound philosophical concept in Yoruba worldview. According to Yagbe Awolowo, *àṣẹ* refers to “mystical, preternatural and esoteric powers”. It implies “command and authority. The ability to make whatever one says happen; often summarized as ‘so be it’/ ‘It definitely shall be’”. He elucidates further that *àṣẹ* is:

... a component of the life force breathed into each human being by God; it is spiritual power; it is the power to create everything – gods, ancestors, spirits, humans, animals, plants, rocks, rivers, and voiced words such as songs, prayers, praises, curses, or even everyday conversation. Existence according to Yoruba thought, is dependent upon it [*àṣẹ*]; it is the power to make things happen and change. The power of the word is an important part of harnessing Ashe... [A] person who, through training, experience, and initiation, learns how to use the essential life force of things to willfully effect change is called an Alaashe....Textual fragments which possess Ashe-Power are clearly rich in metaphor and allusion – as in most poetry are sensed and intimate rather than formally explicated....

The above explanation of *àṣẹ* by Yagbe Awolowo not only confirms association of the sound symbolism of low intonation with declarative statements; it also extends the use of low pitch to include imperative statements. It is significant and highly symbolic that “Our Earth Will Not Die” is the concluding poem in the collection of *The Eye of the Earth* and that the very last lines are carriers of *àṣẹ* thus confirming the role of the poet not only as a messenger or prophet but also as an agent of change, “an *Alaashe*” with the power of words as his/her instrument for establishing the change.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has examined the use of phonetic symbolism in Osundare's "Harvestcall" and "Our Earth Will Not Die" based on the frequency code theory, and adopting a phonostylistic approach. The investigation was based on three main assumptions of the occurrence of high front and low back vowel sound segments in the nouns, verbs and adjectives contained in both poems, as well as the prosodic feature of intonation based on the high/low fundamental frequency of question versus statement sentence types. Findings revealed that both poems were more descriptive of subjects than a narrative of actions, and that the phonetic features of vowels served more as a means of dictating the speed and ambience of lively versus solemn sections in both poems. Also, the study revealed that whereas "Harvestcall" ends on a note of supplication through the presence of high pitch intonation in the series of question, "Our Earth Will Not Die" ends on a strong prophetic note of hope with an imperative tone of irrevocable *àṣẹ* conveyed in the use of low pitch intonation. Osundare harmonises the acoustic features of English and Yoruba vowel sounds to convey multiple layers of meaning in single texts. Furthermore, he extends Ohala's theory beyond the use of low tones for declarative sentences, by using the low tone much more to serve imperative functions in order to portray the supernatural use of the spoken word in Yoruba worldview.

In conclusion, the examination of phonetic symbolism in Osundare's poems using Ohala's frequency code theory has helped to identify new dimensions of Osundare's artistry as a bilingual poet, and fresh interpretations of his poems in ways that are useful for scholars in the fields of literature and linguistics. Finally, in the context of this paper, this study has modified Ohala's frequency code theory to include imperative statements rather than interrogative and declarative utterances only.

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APPENDIX A

HARVESTCALL (To be chanted to lively bata music)

1. This is Iyanfoworogi
2. where garnished in green
3. pounded yam rested its feted arms
4. on the back of stooping stakes
5. This is Iyanfoworogi
6. where valiant heaps cracked finally
7. from the unquenchable zeal of fattening yams.
8. This is Iyanfoworogi
9. where yams, ripe and randy,
10. waged a noisy war against the knife;
11. here where, subdued by fire,
12. efuru provoked mouthful clamour
13. from the combat of hungry wood
14. the pestle fights the mortar
15. the mortar fights the pestle
16. a dough of contention smooths down
17. the rugged anger of hunger.
18. Here where yam wore the crown
19. in the reign of swollen roots
20. amid a retinue of vines and royal leaves
21. between insistent sky and yielding earth,...

IV

(Music lowers in tempo)

56. But where are they?
57. Where are they gone;
58. aroso, feregede, otili, pakala
59. which beckoned lustily to the reaping basket.
60. Where are they
61. The yam pyramids which challenged the sun
62. in busy barns

63. Where are they
64. the pumpkins which caressed earthbreast
65. like mammary burdens
66. Where are they
67. the pods which sweetened harvest air
68. with the clatter of dispersing seeds?
69. Where are they? Where are they gone?

70. Uncountable seeds lie sleeping
71. in the womb of the earth
72. uncountable seeds
73. awaiting the quickening tap
74. of our waking finger.
75. With our earth so warm
76. How can our hearth be so cold?

APPENDIX B

OUR EARTH WILL NOT DIE

(To a solemn, almost elegiac tune)

1. Lynched
2. the lakes
3. Slaughtered
4. the seas
5. Mauled
6. the mountains
7. But our earth will not die
8. Here
9. there
10. everywhere
11. a lake is killed by the arsenic urine
12. from the bladder of profit factories
13. a poisoned stream staggers down the hills

14. coughing chaos in the sickly sea...

(Music turns festive, louder)

35. Our earth will see again

36. eyes washed by a new rain

37. the westering sun will rise again

38. resplendent like a new coin.

39. The wind, unwound, will play its tune

40. trees twittering, grasses dancing;

41. hillsides will rock with blooming harvests

42. the plains batting their eyes of grass and grace.

43. The sea will drink its heart's content

44. when a jubilant thunder flings open the skygate

45. and a new rain tumbles down

46. in drums of joy.

47. Our earth will see again.

48. this earth, **OUR EARTH**