Morpho-Lexical Innovations and Socio-Political Themes in Joe Ushie's *a Reign of Locusts*

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on Joe Ushie's creative use of the morphological resources of the English Language to realise lexical innovations in his poetry collection A Reign of Locusts (2004). It has been argued that the contact between the English Language and Nigerian indigenous languages is responsible for the innovative use of language in Nigerian literature. However, this paper contends that Nigerian poets in general and Joe Ushie in particular, manipulates the linguistic resources of morphology to realise lexical innovations. The paper considers the creative use of compounding, affixation, blends, lexical hyphenation and lexical bracketing as morphological resources of lexical innovation that are stylistically and thematically motivated. It reveals that Joe Ushie manipulates existing morphological processes to create novel words. It further shows that Joe Ushie's lexical innovative processes are productive and creative and that the innovative lexical items are nonce formations that have not been integrated into the lexical stock of the English Language. It then suggests that close attention should be paid to such innovative lexis in creative writings in second and foreign language contexts (non-native) as they have the implications for increasing the lexical stock of non-native English in particular and Standard English in general.

Keywords: morphological resources; lexical innovation; Joe Ushie's poetry; socio-political themes; nonce formation

INTRODUCTION

The present study stems from our interest in the creative use of language in modern Nigerian poetry in the context of English asa second language in general and the seeming observation that morphological and lexical innovations are style markers in the poetry of Joe Ushie. The language of Nigerian poetry of the pre-independence era or first-generation writers as classified by Egya (2014 & 2019) has been described by Chinweizu et al. (1980) as archaic, unmusical, and obscure with inaccessible diction. Poets of this generation include Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara and Christopher Okigbo. Their poetry constitutes what Osundare (2002) considers as not poetry. To Osundare, poetry is not an esoteric whisper, not a clap trap, and not a learned quiz. Chinweizu et al. (1980), referring to this generation as 'euromodernist' poets, suggest that to write a serious and significant poetry, the poet should take every day sentence, chop it into metric lines, juggle the word order of each line, suppress all auxiliary verbs, inject neologism, shake up the rigid metric line and sprinkle as many foreign phrases as possible if the writer has such erudition.

The above suggestion becomes the trend in the language of the second-generation poets (post-independence era) and the third-generation poets (military era) (Egya, 2014,2019). The language of the poets of these two periods is 'a departure from the poetry of Soyinka and early Okigbo style to poetry that is public, social and relevant' (Osoba, 2013, p.29). This poetry Osundare (2002, p. 251) describes as "the hawker's ditty / the eloquence of the gong / the lyric of the market place / the luminous ray / on the grass's morning dew". And as Ogede (1996, p. 62)puts it, modern African poets are:

> …compelled by the need to sound factual and down-to-earth in re-creating the real mood of the down-trodden peoples born of their deprived status, the majority of the poets have been unable to resist the temptation of making recourse to the use of plain prosaic language as a natural discourse of poetic composition.

And Ayejina (1988) puts it thus:

> Young Nigerian poets were set to make poetry as relevant to the realities of their daily existence as possible, no more the pursuit of the clever, if esoteric line of Soyinka, the latinate phrases Of Okigbo and Echeruo or the Hopskinsian syntax of Clark (cited in Osoba, 2013, p. 29)

Their thematic preoccupation is the desperate situation of Africa and their stylistic hallmarks are clarity and directness of expression, formal experimentation and deliberate incorporation of African oral literary modes (Osundare, 1996, cited in Ushie, 2005).The second generation is pioneered by poets like Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Odia Ofeimun, Harry Garuba and Femi Fatoba. Poets of the third generation era include Ogaga Ifowodo, Olu Oguibe, Mike Nwosu, Nnimmo Bassey and Joe Ushie whose poetry is the subject of this study. In terms of content and style, there is no significant difference between the poetry of the second generation and the poetry of the third generation. As Garuba (2005) puts it, 'theme and style as markers of a specific literary period are obviously inadequate especially in modern African literatures because of their strong connection to a boundless extra-literary context' (cited in Egya, 2014 & 2019, p. 14). However, the content of their poems focuses more on the social, economic and political problems of Nigeria as a country. In language use, they adopt more radical strategies of linguistic innovations than their forerunners (Ayileru, 2011). In the light of the above, this study focuses on how Joe Ushie radically engages in linguistic innovations at the morpho-lexical levels with the aim of revealing the socio-political themes of his poetry and the implications of such linguistic innovations on the lexical stock of the English language in the Nigerian ESL context.

LEXICAL INNOVATIONS IN MORPHOLOGY

Lexical Innovation refers to the imaginative and creative use of novel lexical items. *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* sees it as a 'new phenomena in language, primarily in morphology, which emerged under the influence of various factors'. In the literature, such newly created words are called nonce-formations. Hohenhaus (2007) states that nonce formations refer to words that are newly and activity formed in performance as opposed to being retrieved from the dictionary. Nonce words are created by a speaker or writer on the spur of the moment to cover some immediate needs (Bauer, 2001). They are contextual coinages in a given communication situation and the speaker or writer does not aim to impose his or her spontaneous coinage on everyone (Dal & Namer, 2018). This explains why Joe Ushie engages in lexical innovations to meet some communicative needs. A major problem of nonce formations is their detection in text. However, one of the surest ways to detect nonce-information is to rely on clues furnished by the writer or to identify discursive schemas fostering the emergence of such coinages (Dal & Namer, 2018). This approach is adopted in this study.

Related to the lexical innovation and nonce formation is the distinctions made between morphological productivity and creativity. This distinction is connected with the opposition between intentionality and unintentionality (Dal & Namer, 2016). Morphological productivity is understood as the possibility for language users to coin unintentionally uncountable number of new morphologically complex words (Dal & Namer, 2016). Bauer defines morphological creativity as the native speaker's ability to extend the language system in a motivated but unpredictable (non-rule-governed) way in contrast with productivity, which is, instead, defined as ruled governed innovation. The summary of this opposition is that productivity is rule-

governed while creativity is not rule-governed, a violation of the rules of word formation. As Dal and Namer (2016, p. 79) put it, 'the term creativity is reserved for the case in which the (nonce) coined word obviously transgresses the morphological system, such as in poetry or playful creations'.

However, Lyons (1977) affirms that creativity and productivity are complementary terms indicating distinct ways of coining new terms or using new terms. He goes further to propose that creativity and productivity should be taken as hyponyms of innovation and distinguished according to whether or not rule governed is envisaged. This position is indirectly adhered to by Dal and Namer (2018) as they state that creativity should be considered as low case of productivity, in order words, it corresponds to the low pole of productivity continuum. And as Munat (2007) affirms, there is no obvious reason for the theoretical distinction that are claimed to exist between productivity and creativity as creative formations are less rule-breaking than might initially be thought. In this study, this approach is adopted. Both productive and creative nonce-formations in Joe Ushie's *A Reign of Locusts* are identified and analyzed as innovative new words which are stylistically and thematically motivated at the spur of the moment to enhance effective communication of its social and political messages.

SOME EXISTING LITERATURE

As noted earlier, Joe Ushie is grouped among the third-generation poets in the discourse of periodisation in Nigerian poetry (Mowarin, 2009; Ushie, 2005).This generation started in the early 1970s and late 1980s when the fortunes of Nigeria as a nation began to decline with serious social, economic and political problems. At this stage, the poets see it as their responsibility to document, expose, criticise and satirise the ills and injustices plaguing Nigeria as a nation (Maledo, 2019). Thus, Joe Ushie focuses on the social, political, economic and environmental ills plaguing his home country, Nigeria, in particular and Africa in general. He engages the corrupt and inept military and political class and identifies with the ordinary Nigerian people in the streets as he mirrors the total dislocation in every facet of Nigeria as a nation. This paper argues that Joe Ushie's success is partly due to his innovativeness in language use.

Innovative use of language is a prominent feature of literature in general and poetry in particular. It is also a major source of discourse in the use of English in the Nigerian second language context and in the criticism of Nigerian literature. For instance, Udom (2013) is a study of lexical innovations of the English used in the Nigerian second language environment. The focus of the study is on the validity of the lexically innovative words in the Nigerian environment. The paper concludes that the innovative words are valid since they are acceptable and intelligible Nigerian English usage. Most critics see lexical innovation in literary texts as a result of the contact between two languages. This position is clearly advanced by T'sou (2001, p. 35) in his study of lexical importation and innovation in Chinese languages thus: 'When languages come into contact… one common outcome is the diffusion of cultural items along linguistic boundaries. One clear manifestation of this cultural diffusion is the emergence of new lexical items in a recipient language'.

Michael (2013) follows the above argument as he affirms that lexical innovation occurs in the language learning process and lexical borrowing; he states that these two constitute the major causes of lexical innovation in a language contact situation. And in the Nigerian ESL context, most studies on the innovative use of language in literary texts are based on this approach. Adopting a stylistic approach, Mowarin (2013) investigates lexical and morphological innovations in Hope Eghagha's *Rhythms of the Last Testament* (2002). The paper argues more in favour of innovative lexis as a result of language contact situation.

However, it identifies affixations, collocational shifts, and neologisms among others as sources of lexical innovation used by the poet to foreground the themes of environmental degradation of the Niger Delta region, abject poverty, political misrule and hope for the emancipation of Nigeria from the hands of its tyrannical rulers. In the same vein, Oha and Anyanwu (2018) is a study of stylistic features of linguistic innovation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*; they identify the graphological, syntactic and lexico-semantic features of the text as innovative linguistic resources.

Ayileru (2011) also states that West African writers deploy linguistic innovative strategies to indigenise the language of the new West African novel. According to the study, the innovative linguistic strategies deployed are African orature, translation, transliteration, metaphor, metonymy pidginization and intra/intertextuality. This approach affirms the language contact position. Ushie and Aboh (2014, p. 129), adopting the CDA approach in their study of lexical innovation in Nigerian novels, see lexical innovation generally as 'the use of a new lexical unit, the modification of the root or any part of the structure of a word in a language'. To them, innovations occur from the existing patterns in the language in which conversation takes place. Although Mowarin (2013) affirms that the contact between English and Nigerian Languages results in lexical innovation in Nigerian poetry, this paper follows the line of argument of Ushie and Aboh (2014). This is in view of the fact that in a bid to depict the appropriate socio-political conditions in Nigeria, Joe Ushie engages in morpho-lexical modification of existing English words to arrive at appropriate stylistic and thematic reflection and refraction of the realities in the Nigerian social and political contexts.

Joe Ushie's poetry, the subject of this study, has also attracted the attention of scholars. For instance, Aboh (2013) examines the interface between language and social realities in the use of pronouns in Joe Ushie's poetry. He argues that Ushie brings his knowledge of linguistics to align with his artistic crafting of social realities through the use of pronouns. In another vein, Aboh (2010) discusses the role of lexical borrowing in the construction of identity and politics in Ushie's poetry. The paper affirms that poets indulge in lexical borrowing to assert their identity and engage the socio-political situation in the society at a point in time. Etim (2019) is based on the historical continuities in the life story and poetry of Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie. Adopting the New Historicist approach, the paper reveals that Ushie and Osundare do not only share commonalities and ideologies, but also, their poetry bear a common mark of struggle against tyranny, oppression, social justice and impoverishment of the masses by the new imperialist forces. Nkopuruk (2019) discusses how Joe Ushie negotiates intentions and meanings through the linguistic device of graphology. The paper adopts the multi-modality approach to show how the graphic resources of a text can elucidate the inherent meaning of the text. In the light of the above studies, this paper deviates in its approach to the study of Joe Ushie's poetry. It focuses not on innovation from the language contact perspective, but from the perspective of the morphological resources of the English Language with a view to identifying and analysing the morphological process involved in nonce-formation in Joe Ushie's *A Reign of Locusts*.

LEXICAL INNOVATIONS IN *A REIGN OF LOCUSTS*

The aspects of lexical innovations investigated in this study are those that are based on creative and productive manipulation of existing English words. Some of the processes deployed to achieve these are compounding, affixation, blends, lexical hyphenation and lexical bracketing. Explanations of these terms are provided at the level of analysis.

COMPOUNDING

Compounding is a morphological process of combining two or more words to form a new word. Plaq (2002) describes a compound as a word that consists of two elements, the first of which is a root, a word or a phrase, the second of which is either a root or a word. To Lieber (2009), compounds are 'words that are composed of two (or more) bases, roots or stems'. The three major types of compound in the English language are compound nouns, compound adjectives and compound verbs. In all, compound nouns are the commonest type (Plaq, 2002; Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002) and nouns, verbs and adjectives can combine more freely in compounding (Plaq, 2002). In most English compounds, the part of speech of the whole compound is the part of speech of the rightmost part of the compound. This rightmost part of the compound is regarded as the head of the compound as we have in 'flower pot' and 'book cover'. These are called endocentric compounds. Compounds like 'loud mouth' and 'pick pocket' whose semantic head is outside the combined words are regarded as headless compounds and they are traditionally called exocentric compounds (Plaq, 2002; Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002; Akmajian et al., 2010; Synder, 2016).

Compound words can be written without a space between parts of the words (closed compounds), with a space between parts of the words (open compounds), or with a hyphen separating the elements of the compound (hyphenated compounds). However, Akmajian et al. (2010) state that hyphen is used when a compound has been newly created or is not widely used. They further state that when a compound has gained a certain currency or prominence, it is spelt closed up, without the hyphen. This is observable in Joe Ushie's poetry. Majority of the identified innovative compound words are hyphenated with few instances of nonce created closed compounds. Compounding is a rich source of new words in English and it is extremely productive (Akmajian et al., 2010) as is shown in Ushie's poetry.

Joe Ushie also makes predominant use of innovative hyphenated compound words in his poetry. Such usages are thematically motivated and stylistically prominent. In the poem 'Musa's legacy', Ushie relies on the phonological resemblance to create the novel compound *team-bucked* from Timbuktu to illustrate how Mansa Musa of old Mali empire raped and conquered the city of Timbuktu despite the people' s resistance:

> In the twinkle of your sword
> *Timbuktu* was *team-bucked* (emphasis mine)

Team-bucked as used is a noun-verb compound with the contextual semantic implication that Timbuktu was conquered or rapped by the dictatorial team of Mansa Musa who is seen in this poem as the progenitor of modern dictatorship in Africa. Ushie draws on this to castigate the autocratic and dictatorial injustices of most African presidents. Thus, he describes the sit-tight Liberian leader, Samuel Doe, as *throne-glued Doe*. In the same vein, the social distance created by fear between the masses and the military ruling class during Ibrahim Babangida's regime in Nigeria gave rise to the innovative use of *fear-ruled lines* in 'Homage to the dragon' to foreground the fact that the military leadership creates a dividing line of fear between the rulers and the ruled. In the same poem, Ushie uses the compound word *hard-retrieved* to modify the word *throne* in describing the emerging democratic leadership which the people fought hard to regain from the military, some at the expense of their lives. Contrasting the extreme poverty and hunger ravaging the ordinary citizens and the affluence in which the politicians live in 'Mobile caskets', Ushie creates *hunger-bleached* as presented:

> How can our *hunger-bleached*
> Sheets of skin show
> On this opaque mirror
> Of your iron centaur? (emphasis mine)

As seen, the innovative creation and use of *hunger-bleached* to contrast with *opaque mirror* and *iron centaur* has thematic and stylistic effect in the context of the affluence of the

politicians and the abject poverty of the masses. Still on the theme of poverty, Ushie innovatively creates *ten-childrened* to modify *poor* in 'Our laugh will change' as seen below:

> We are the *ten-childrened poor*
> From whose gaunt bedsitter
> Laughter crackles like a miracle
> Shocking anxious neighbours. (emphasis mine)

As used, *ten* is a noun while *childrened* is a creatively derived adjective from the noun 'children'. Therefore, it is an adjective compound pre-modifying the noun *poor* which itself is a nominalised adjective formed through the process of conversion. In 'Akpan essian area', the poet focuses on the activities that go on in Akpan Essien Area, a very busy area in Uyo, the capital of Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria. The poet makes an unusual creative use of an adverb compound *all-ways* with two semantic implications. It can be phonologically interpreted as 'always', meaning 'at all times' and graphically it could mean 'all ways', in other words, 'every way'. This dual meaning is achieved thus:

> We stomp here *all-ways* (emphasis mine)

This could mean 'we stomp here always or from all the ways'. This same lexical item is used in another context with similar semantic implications as in:

> There's here the *all-ways* busy,
> then *always-starved head-counting* office
> with its idle demographic details
> of the nation's population (emphasis mine)

Here, *all-ways* has the semantic implication of 'all the ways' leading to the Population Commission's office are busy and the nation's Population Commission's office itself is 'always' busy. *Always-starved* is a creative adjective compound which modifies the noun 'office'. The office is always starved because the budgetary allocations to make it functional are diverted and embezzled by the politicians. *Head-counting* is also a creative adjective compound. It modifies the noun office. As used, it describes the function of the office; a better name would have been National Population Commission Office but the poet uses 'head-counting' to provide details. The use of *breast-shaped fruits* in describing the mango fruit in 'its *breast-shaped* fruits taste like love' is to innovatively create sensual feelings and visual imagery of love.

Furthermore, in 'Congo music I', Ushie uses innovative hyphenated compound words to underscore the hyperbolic effect of Congo music. These include *heart-winning smiles*, *plain-hearted Sylvie*, *Guinean-Senegalese Simone G*, *swift-flowing fee, earth-brightening stars* and *Lingala-laced lilies*. Through the above, the poet pours encomium on Congo music and musicians which he sees as temporary escape from the harsh realities of his society. This point becomes clear as he earlier addressed Congo music as 'the spring that thaws my winter' and as 'the light that ends my nights' in lines four and five respectively. It should be noted that the compound words are hyphenated adjective compounds and each modifies a noun head. In 'Cell' the poet expresses his captivity through a phonologically induced hyphenated compound, *heart-cuffed*, following 'hand-cuffed' to foreground his being 'arrested' by love. Conversely, in 'Sad bed', Ushie sings a dirge by creating a compound noun to encode the death of a loved one:

> Ah, our bed-room of rose
> Is now a *tear-room* of thorns (emphasis mine)

Creating the compound noun *tear-room* and contrasting it with 'bed-room' and contrasting 'roses' with 'thorns' foregrounds *tear-room* as an innovative noun compound. Thus, he describes his present melancholy as *wisdom-scorning*, another innovative compound. In recollecting his relationship with the loved one before the death, he creatively uses *all-ways* thus:

> And we went, *all-ways*,
> A snail and its shell. (emphasis mine)

This implies that they used to go to everywhere together, like the snail that never leaves its shell. His sad and lonely mood over the loss of a loved one makes him to describe death as *sky-wide absence* in 'Dark hour'.

In 'The bond', Ushie identifies humanity all over the world as one and in the same bondage. He identifies the downtrodden through creative compound words. In stanza 1, the poet says we are all one with the derelicts who are neighbours to *love-hunting dogs*, where *love-hunting* is innovatively created to modify *dogs*. In stanza 2, he creatively pitches *sun-soaked lepers* and *oil-soaked Nigeria*. This is a direct reference to Nigeria, an oil rich country that cannot take care of its citizens due to corruption. In the same stanza, the poet pitches *male-nested women* and *Islam-tensed Afghanistan*. *Male-nested* pre-modifies *women*. This implies that women are denied of freedom in Islam dominated Afghanistan. The poet also criticises the Igbos of Southern Nigeria who are *Christian-soaked* yet they still practice the *Osu* slave system despite their predominant Christian belief. He also sees the Germans pejoratively as *progress-drunk* in their annihilation of the Jews. This innovative use of creative compounds continues in stanza 4 thus:

> Those *bomb-burnt* bodies
> on Abacha's street of safety;
> these *gun-widowed* women
> in *religious-suffocating* Nigeria;(emphasis mine)

The compound word *bomb-burnt* is ironical and contrasting where we have a street of safety during General Abacha's regime in Nigeria. Also, *gun-widowed* is ironical in a country that is *religious-suffocating* with so many churches and mosque. These lexical innovations underscore the themes of deception and man's inhumanity in the political, social and religious cycles all over the world. In stanza five, the compound noun, *Iroko-muscled* is used to modifying 'truck pusher' to underscore the themes of toiling and suffering by the ordinary citizens of Nigeria with its abundant oil wealth. The only difference in all these, the poet claims, is in "name and clime" as we bear the same pain. He says:

> Your headaches are my back aches
> Your body-aches are my *soulaches*
> Your *shame-aches* are my *pain-aches*. (emphasis mine)

Here, *shame-aches* and *pain-aches* are innovative compounds which underscore the extent of shame and pain people are going through all over the world as a result of tyranny, false religious belief, corruption and bad governance.

Joe Ushie also explores closed compound words as one of his morpho-lexical resources. *Soulaches* as we have in the above analysis is a good example. However, a very prominent closed compound that permeates Joe Ushie's poetry is *hewman* which is phonologically modelled along 'human', though with a different semantic implication. The meaning of 'hew' as a word is to chop away or to mow down. It is morphologically yoked to 'man' to derive 'hewman' which means to chop away or mow down man. In 'Night, still' where the poet

handles the theme of military misrule and dictatorship, he uses *hewman bones*. In 'Homo sappers'which focuses on man's inhumanity and wickedness, he uses *hewman rage* and *hewmanity* to foreground the message of the poem. These usages have stylistic effect in foregrounding human wickedness and bestiality to fellow humans. In 'Cell' where the poet persona is in love, he longs to be caged by his lover thus: 'I long for your *heartmost* cell'. *Heartmost* is creatively formed along the line of 'innermost'. It is an innovative means of expressing how the poet feels and what he wants from his lover. Innovative compounds as exemplified about capture the essence of Ushie's thematic preoccupations. Hunger, diseases and poverty which ravage every nook and cranny of his country is captured in *hunger-bleached, ten-childrened;* inept military and political leadership is seen in *throne-glued, team-bucked, bomb-burnt, gun-widowed* and *fear-ruled.* The themes of human wickedness, pain and man's inhumanity is well captured through innovative compound words as we have seen.

AFFIXATION

Affixation is a word formation process that is concerned with the attaching of affixes to the root or base of a word to form new words. The processes of affixation in English can be divided into prefixation, suffixation and infixation, depending on whether the affix is added before the base, after it, or at some determined point within it. Thus, the affix itself may be a prefix, a suffix, or an infix (Mathews, 1991). In this study, our attention is focused on prefixation and suffixation as morpho-lexical innovative strategies as the table below illustrates:

TABLE 1. Innovative affixation

No.	Word	Prefix	Root	Suffix(es)	Poem / Page
i	ungoing	un-	go	-ing	Musa's legacy / 15
ii	unusualled	un-	usual	-ed	Musa's legacy / 15
iii	dis-laddered	dis-	ladder	-ed	Ladder / 17
iv	unbestial	un-	beast	-ial	Homo sappers / 27
v	homo sappers	-	homo sapiens	-er, -s	Homo sappers / 26
vi	tyrelessly	-	tyre	-less, -ly	Mobile casket / 31
vii	murderdoms	-	murder	-dom, -s	The bond / 91
viii	lossfully	-	loss	-ful, -ly	Sad bed / 85

Table 1 shows the identifiable creative use of affixation. The poet explores the phonological resemblance with 'ongoing' to realise *ungoing* in (i). *Un-* is a negative prefix added to particles to mean 'not' while *–ing* is added to verbs to form the progressive aspect. In the context of the poem, the military has inflicted wounds on the people but the poet does not see the emerging democracy as a palliative. In the same vein, the poet sees the scars inflicted on Africans during the slave trade era as *ungoing* in the poem 'Musa's Legacy'. Thus, *ungoing* means 'not going, permanent'. In *unusualled*, *un-* is a negative prefix that can be added to adjectives to mean 'not'. However, the use of *–ed* is unusual. As a derivational suffix, *-ed* is added to nouns to derive adjective but here it is creatively added to an adjective *unusual* to derive another adjective. By this, the poet retrospectively exhumes the deeds of Mansa Musa of the old Mali Empire. This lexical innovation is used to foreground the fact that his misdeeds in history (using humans as shields) are unprecedented till date as we can see below:

> How can we forget your human shield
> Of 500 slaves ahead and 500 following
> Each *unusualled* with a gold-adorned stall? (emphasis mine)

In the poem 'Ladder', the poet makes a comparison between those who are *laddered* and those who are *dis-laddered*. The prefix *dis-* means 'the opposite of'. As used, it means 'to remove ladder from'.The *–ed* suffix is a denominal adjective suffix which means 'to add to or

having'. The *laddered* are those who are up there by virtue of the commonweal of the people, they are those who enjoy the nation's wealth while the *dis-laddered* are those whose sweat and toil bore the *laddered*. This refers to the social and political stratification between the poor masses and the rich politicians. The poor masses are the *dis-laddered*; they are those who do not have the political means to enjoy the wealth of the nation while the *laddered* are the rich politicians. At the end, the poet concludes that both the *laddered* and the *dis-laddered* are equal in death.

'Homo-Sappers', as the title of the poem indicates, is a lexical creativity with phonological resemblance with 'homo-sapiens'. In the social context of this poem, *sap*, is a verb which means 'to destroy something or somebody gradually'. The *–er* morpheme is an agentive morpheme while the *–s* morpheme is a plural marker. With *homo* meaning human, the addition of *sappers* has a semantic implication of human destroyers. This is aptly stated in the first four lines of the poem thus:

> If you save a beast
> It goes its way
> If you save a man
> He kills you

In the same poem, the poet contrasts man's cruelty to man with the way wild animals take care of their kind. He concludes that man's attitude to his fellow man is *Unbestial*. *Un-* as a prefix is usually attached to adjective to mean 'not' while the suffix *–ial* is a denominal adjective suffix used to derive the adjective 'bestial' from the noun beast. Through lexical innovations, the poet makes a point that the cannibalistic instinct in humans is very much unlike what is seen in wild beasts.

In 'Mobile caskets' the poet consciously creates *tyrelessly* with phonological similarity with 'tirelessly'. The *–less* is denominal adjective morpheme which means 'without', while *–ly* is added to adjectives to form adverbs of manner. Through this, the poet creatively makes a distinction between the rich politicians and the poor masses. While the politicians cruise in their '*tyred* casket', the poor masses or their 'skeletons' watch them *Tyrelessly*. The semantic implication is that they cannot afford a tyre not to talk of a car. In *Murderdoms*, murder is a noun, *-dom* is a denominal noun suffix meaning 'domain' while *–s* is a plural morpheme. In unleashing his vituperations against African dictators, he refers to their domain as *murderdoms* as they are all busy killing their citizens whom they were meant to protect. *Lossfully* is coined in line with the pattern of *lustfully* in the poem 'Sad bed' to express a feeling of deep loss over the death of a close one:

> This ceiling eyes this naked bed lustfully
> The sky eyes the undressed sea lustfully
> Belly up, I eye this emptiness *lossfully*. (emphasis mine)

The suffix *–ful* can be attached to *lust* to derive an adjective 'lustful' which can also accept the deadjectival adverb suffix, *-ly*. This is not the case for 'loss'. Therefore, *lossfully* is a nonce-formation coined to encode the themes of loneliness and pain. Ushie predominantly makes use of innovative negative prefixes and suffixes to project his dissatisfaction with the existing social and political order. This foregrounds his anger and serves as a means of projecting his messages to his audience.

BLENDS

Lieber (2009) defines blending as a process of word formation in which parts of words that are not themselves morphemes are combined to form a new word. A blend then is a kind of

compound word where at least one component is truncated and reproduced only partially (Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002). As a type of compound, blends may consist of a full word and a splinter (part of a morpheme) or two splinters. Blends may make comprehension difficult because readers have to figure out their meanings which should approximate the meaning of the combining parts. Blends are cute, amusing and they work as a form of word play. They are attention catching and could attract readers to read what is being presented (Lehrer, 2007). Below is a table showing creative blends in Joe Ushie's *A Reign of Locusts*:

TABLE 2. Creative blends

No.	Blends	Source Words	Meaning	Poem / Page
i	softitutes	soft + substitute	A substitute that is not hard	Night, still / 11
ii	compagriots	compatriot + griots	Fellow poets or singers	Night, still / 11
iii	yester-death	yesterday + death	Previous killings or deaths	Homage to the dragon / 23
iv	atmosfear	atmosphere + fear	Atmosphere of fear	The exchange / 33
v	painometer	pain + kilometre	A unit of measurement of pain	The exchange / 34
vi	Hypno-trapped	hypnotise + trapped	To be trapped by someone else influence	Particle / 60
vii	cosme-thick	cosmetic + thick	Superficially effective	Particle / 60
viii	executhiefly	Executive + thief(ly)	A corrupt executive officer	Mobile casket / 31

From Table 2, *softitutes* is created by exploring the phonological similarity between the first syllables of the word 'substitute' and 'soft'. In the context of the poem, 'Night, still', the poet is seeking for other familiar issues / subjects to engage his songs since the era of military dictatorship is gone with the emerging democracy. However, this is not to be as the pendulum still swings 'between this dawn and that night'. In (ii), there is a phonological overlap in the final syllables of the two words. The blend is facilitated by the substituting the /t/ phoneme for /g/ phoneme in compatriots. The poet uses this lexical blend to seek for solidarity and cooperation from his fellow poets (griots) to be courageous and fearless in confronting the misrule of the military junta. As a hyphenated blend, *Yester-death* violates morphological rules because blends are not usually hyphenated. It is derived from a splinter 'yester' and a root word 'death' used to remind the military of their previous killings of innocent citizens they were meant to protect.

The blend in (iv) is also phonologically motivated in the similarity between the last syllable in 'atmosphere' and the root word, 'fear'. Post-modified by the prepositional phrase 'of pain', the entire phrase, *atmosfear of pain*, describes the social condition in the bone doctor's compound to be that of fear and pain. The '*painometre* of mango / leaves' is a metaphorical expression. To the poet, the leaves of the mango tree inside the bone doctor's compound are devices that notice, observe and take the readings of the physical and mental pains experienced by the broken bone patients. Thus, the mango leaves 'murmur mournfully'. *Hypno-trapped* and *cosme-thick* creatively violate the morphological rule of blend by being hyphenated. They are used in the poem 'Particles' to foreground resistance to the forces of state. In *hypno-trapped*, the poet personal was hypnotised and trapped in a fragile throne, but he was able to resist and escape. In *cosme-thick* the poet was lured by superficially effective promises; again, he is able to resist it too. As used, *Hypo-trapped* and *cosme-thick* underscore the themes of falsehood and deception. As noted on the table above, *Executhiefly* is a blend formed from 'executive' and 'thief' with an unproductive –*ly* morpheme attached to 'thief' in the creative process to derive an adverb from the noun 'executhief'. In the context of the poem 'Mobile casket' and in the Nigerian social context, an 'executhief' is a politician, an executive officer in a government sector or in a public sector who is corrupt. In this poem, the politician is said to be dead (though still living) and shrouded *executhiefly* in his *tyred casket*. This implies

that the expensive car he drives is acquired with resources stolen as an executive officer. Through these innovative blends, the poet expresses dual meaning in a single lexical item to project the desired theme. For instance, *atmosfear* expresses an environment that is fearful. *Yester-death* expresses previous killings by the military while *executhief* means an executive officer who is a thief. These are aspects of the socio-political context of Ushie's poetry.

LEXICAL HYPHENATION

Another device of morpho-lexical innovation is lexical hyphenation. This is a process of breaking up of a word into different syllables through the use of hyphen. The motivation behind this is to realize dual meanings in one word. Ushie uses this to achieve stylistic effect and social meaning. In 'Night, still', Ushie breaks the word 'bondage' into *bond-age* to mean the celebration of his bond and the period he has been in bond as we have in the lines below:

> And the bondsman
> Celebrates his *bond-age*; (emphasis mine)

In what follows, excerpts from the poem 'The exchange' are used to illustrate this device. 'The exchange' is focused on the pains the ordinary masses suffer from broken bones as a result of the avoidable accidents on the ever-busy untarred Oron Road in Uyo, Cross River State, Nigeria. The use of hyphenated words helps to reflect, refract and foreground the physical dislocation and prolonged pains in the memory of readers:

> Here, on some wild raw mornings,
> a forest of moving *crut-*
> *ches* – veterans from *auto–mobile*
> war on the streets – *wel-*
> *comes* you into that p(l)ain*com-*
> *pound* that empties
> into the stretch, under
> an empire of a sad mango tree. (emphasis mine)

Here the theme of physical brokenness is fully illustrated by the lexical pattern. 'Crutches' which is associated with broken bones in the real world is hyphenated into two separate lines 'Automobile' which is the agent of the broken bones is also hyphenated. The hyphenation of 'welcomes' and 'compound' are suggestive of prolonged pains and continuous movement of accident victims of fractured and broken bones into the compound. The use of lexical hyphenation to reflect physical dislocation is further seen in stanza five as each part of the bones that are broken is equally fragmented in its lexical presentation thus:

> Beneath the lush foliage
> of the sad mango tree
> we take our turns-
> old men, old women, ladies,
> then babies, each *brand-*
> *ishing* a broken *fem-*
> *ur,* a shattered *le-*
> *g* bone, a *col-*
> *lapsed* shoulder *joi-*
> *nt*, a tensed shin bone
> a twisted ankle-
> all ready for the bonesmith's
> anvil of pains. (emphasis mine)

As shown, 'brandishing' is hyphenated to capture how long it takes the victims to show their broken bones as a result of dislocation and pain. This manifests more in the pronunciation of *brand-ishing*. The hyphenation of 'femur' shows that the femur bone is no longer whole; it

has been disjointed. In 'leg', letter 'g' stands alone in another line. This underscores physical dislocation. Same for 'collapsed where we have *col-lappsed*, this draws attention to the disintegration of the bone and its inability to carry the whole body frame. And the hyphenation of 'joint' further foregrounds the disjointing of the whole bodily bones. Of interest in this stanza is that for every hyphenated word, the other component starts on the next line. This again is suggestive of disintegration of the body and the entire society from the multi-modal point of view. Thus, through the use of innovative lexical hyphenation, Joe Ushie projects the theme of physical, societal and even psychological disintegration.

LEXICAL BRACKETING

Lexical bracketing is a new lexical innovation process often used by Joe Ushie. It is a lexical reduction strategy which encloses a single letter of a word in a bracket to realize two different words with two different meanings within the same linguistic context. As a lexical innovative process, it is attention-catching and it helps in encoding double meaning on a single lexical item as we have in Table 3:

TABLE 3. Lexical bracketing

No.	Words	Derived words	Poem / Page
i	s(p)ent up	spent up & pent up	The termitarium / 20
ii	re(i)gn	reign & rein	Homage to the dragon / 22
iii	mobile (e)state	estate & state	Mobile caskets / 30
iv	p(l)ain	plain &pain	The exchange / 32
iv	p(r)ude	prude & rude	Dark hour / 89

In Table 3, (i) is a phrasal verb and the derived words are 'spent up' and 'pent up'. These words are condensed to *s(p)ent up* to aptly illustrate and foreground the central theme of the poem. 'Spent up' implies the physical and mental exhaustion of the people from excessive exploitation. 'Pent up' on the other hand implies deprival of freedom of expression. In 'Homage to the dragon', the poet pours his venom on the former military head of state, Ibrahim Babangida. In this poem, *re(i)gn* in the expression 'heydays of your r(e)ign', can be interpreted as 'reign' and 'rein'. 'Reign' refers to the period of exercise of maximum power as a king while 'rein' implies his period of total control over the entire nation. In (iii) as used in 'Mobile casket', 'estate' defines the type of car which the mobile casket typifies while 'state' refers to the current affluence status of the politician with the stolen funds. In 'The exchange', Joe Ushie is concerned with the pains of broken bones suffered by accident victims. The two lexical items derived from *p(l)ain* has two semantic implications. First, 'plain' is the description of the bone doctor's compound while 'pain' is the physical and mental feeling of suffering by the patients resulting from the broken bones. 'Dark hour' is a dirge to comfort Sonny Udoh who lost a loved one. In this poem, the poet describes death as a '*(p)rude* tax collector'. This implies that death is 'prude' and 'rude', meaning easily offended and sudden or unpleasant. Through this, the poet chides death for taking the life of a loved one so early. The above analysis shows that Joe Ushie uses lexical bracketing of a single letter in one word to innovatively create two words with double semantic implications. This is a lexical condensation strategy, a means of expressing more than one meaning in one word. The analysis of *re(i)gn* and *p(l)ain* above is very apt in the thematic potentials of this strategy in Ushie'spoetry.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown how Joe Ushie creatively and productively manipulates the morpho-lexical resources of the English language to encode socio-political themes in his poetry collection *A Reign of Locusts* (2004). It has demonstrated that lexical innovation in ESL and EFL contexts does not necessarily depend only on the contact between a foreign language and an indigenous language and that language users also extend the morphological processes and resources of the foreign language (in this case, English) in their lexical creative innovations. In this study, it has been revealed that Joe Ushie innovatively creates nonce-formations coined on the spur of the moment to cover some immediate communicative needs in the Nigerian socio-political contexts. Thus, their interpretations require support from the contexts as they are coined for performance and not listed in the lexicon of the English language yet (Bauer, 2001; Munat, 2007). Joe Ushie's lexical innovations are not neologisms since they have not been institutionalized in the wider Nigerian ESL speech community. They are confined to the text world of his poetry. However, such innovations have the potentials of becoming part of the lexicon of the English language in the Nigerian ESL context. Some of such nonce-formations have the potentials of increasing the word stock of the emerging standard Nigerian English in particular and Standard English in general.

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