



Speaking Beads and Remembering Culture: A Stylistic Study of Parallelism and Semantic Deviation in Ama Ata Aidoo's "Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks"

Benjamin Adjei

Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

Email: benjaminadjei111@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v8i5.2766>

APA Citation: Adjei, B. (2026). Speaking Beads and Remembering Culture: A Stylistic Study of Parallelism and Semantic Deviation in Ama Ata Aidoo's Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 8(5), 305-318. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v8i5.2766>

Received:

06/07/2026

Accepted:

16/08/2026

Keywords:

Bead,
parallelism,
semantic
deviation,
stylistics

Abstract

Poetry provides an important medium through which cultural experiences and collective memories are expressed and preserved. This study examines the forms and stylistic functions of parallelism and semantic deviation in Ama Ata Aidoo's 'Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks', with particular attention to their representation of Ghanaian cultural memory. The study adopts an exploratory qualitative design and is guided by Leech and Short's (2007) *Linguistic and Stylistic Categories* framework. Through close textual analysis, the study identifies phonological, syntactic and semantic parallelism, as well as semantic deviations realised through personification, metaphor, imagery and hyperbole. The findings show that parallel structures create rhythm, balance, emphasis and oral resonance, while semantic deviation gives beads symbolic and human qualities that foreground identity, emotion, historical experience, indigenous knowledge and communal memory. The study concludes that Aidoo transforms beads from decorative objects into repositories of Ghanaian cultural memory. The findings have implications for stylistic theory, literary research, teaching and the preservation of indigenous cultural knowledge.

1. Introduction

Poetry gives expression to experiences and cultural realities that ordinary language does not always capture adequately. Unlike ordinary language, poetry “deviates” from everyday speech and from prose by using devices by which its language draws attention to itself” (Leech, 1969, p. 43). Poets arrange words to recreate communal experiences and invite readers beyond literal meaning. Alobaidy and Halawachy (2020) aver that poets express personal viewpoints about societal issues through a myriad of figurative devices. Widdowson (1992) similarly observes that “poems are uses of language, but in many ways, they are peculiar uses of language. Their meanings are elliptical and elusive, deflections from the familiar. They seem often to be perversely obscure in their flouting of conventional standards of clarity and common sense” (p. 12). Poetry interprets life through distinctive patterns and departures from familiar usage. The relationship between linguistic expression and literary meaning is central to stylistics. Verdonk defines stylistics as “the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect” (Verdonk, 2002, p. 4). Stylistics identifies linguistic features and explains how they shape meaning and reader response. Simpson (2004) describes it as connecting linguistic description with literary interpretation, while Short (1996) maintains that literary effects emerge partly from language patterns noticed by readers. Stylistic analysis therefore examines how phonological, lexical, grammatical and semantic choices contribute to interpretation.

Parallelism and deviation are ways through which poetic language becomes prominent. Leech (1969) identifies both as forms of foregrounding. Parallelism involves repeated sounds, words, phrases, clauses, grammatical forms or meanings, producing rhythm, balance and emphasis. Semantic deviation occurs when expressions depart from conventional meaning through metaphor, personification, paradox, oxymoron, hyperbole or unusual collocation. It assigns unexpected qualities to familiar objects and encourages interpretations beyond the literal level. Leech's (1969) account of poetic language therefore treats repetition, ambiguity, parallelism and deviation as resources for foregrounding meaning. These devices are significant in African poetry, which often draws on chants, songs, praise poetry, proverbs and dirges. Repetition sustains rhythm and memory, while semantic deviation animates ancestors, places and objects, turning them into bearers of history and identity.

Ama Ata Aidoo occupies an important position in African literature. Her writings address questions of gender, colonialism, cultural identity, social injustice, nationhood and the experiences of African women. Although many critical studies have concentrated on her drama and fiction, her poetry equally demonstrates her skill in the creative use of language. Her collection *After the Ceremonies: New and Selected Poems*, published in 2017, addresses colonial history, independence, motherhood, gender relations and African cultural experience. *Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks*, one of its long poems, presents beads as more than ornaments by associating them with family, royalty, divination, labour, love, grief, spirituality and belonging. Arthur, Adu Gyamfi and Asubonteng (2015) describe Ghanaian beads as cultural texts whose meanings depend on the wearer, bodily placement and social occasion. Aidoo gives the bead an active poetic presence. The title presents the bead as capable of speech; a semantic departure grounded in personification. Expressions such as "wrapped in joy" and "carry my grief" transform the bead into a bearer of emotion, history and shared memory. Parallel structures reinforce this symbolism through recurring words, phrases and clauses that create rhythm and oral resonance. Existing studies offer cultural interpretations but limited stylistic analysis.

Shenoda (2017), for example, reads the poem as a "lyrically playful" presentation of Ghanaian social, spiritual, and ritual life. He foregrounds the bead as more than an object: it is a talismanic presence and a "barometric mirror" of everyday Ghanaian experience. Shenoda's discussion importantly connects Aidoo's poem to West African traditions of praise and naming poetry, showing how the poem adapts inherited African poetic forms to speak to people, places, and social realities. However, Shenoda's account remains primarily interpretive and contextual. Although it recognises the poem's playfulness and praise-poetic orientation, it does not offer a sustained linguistic analysis of the recurrent structures, sound patterns, grammatical repetitions, or semantic departures through which that playfulness and cultural resonance are realised. Toure (2025) extends the discussion by locating Aidoo's poems within a feminist reworking of African indigenous poetic traditions. The study highlights praise poetry, song-like patterns, sound effects, Akan proverbs, and symbolism, arguing that Aidoo challenges the male-dominated character of indigenous African poetry. It thus clarifies the ideological and gendered importance of her use of oral resources. However, Toure (2025) treats these features mainly as evidence of indigenous poetics and women's empowerment rather than as interconnected linguistic choices. The study does not systematically distinguish phonological, syntactic, and semantic parallelism from semantic deviation or show how they jointly construct the bead as a bearer of collective memory. Yitah (2023) offers another important perspective by situating Aidoo's poetic work within networks of love, friendship, commitment, historical consciousness, and communal connection. This approach clarifies the ethical and emotional concerns that animate Aidoo's poetic vision and is especially valuable for understanding the enduring human bonds that inform her work. Nevertheless, Yitah's memorial and biographical emphasis does not focus on the detailed linguistic organisation of "*Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks*." As a result, it does not explain how particular lexical choices, repeated clause patterns,

sound correspondences, figurative expressions, and personifications make these relationships perceptible in the poem's language. Against this background, the present study differs from earlier contributions in method and analytical focus. Rather than centring primarily on theme, biography, feminist ideology, or cultural context, it examines observable textual patterns. The study analyses phonological, syntactic, and semantic parallelism alongside semantic deviation, including personification, metaphor, imagery, and hyperbole. This approach complements cultural and feminist readings by showing how recurrent imperatives, coordinated clauses, sound patterns, semantic contrasts, and human actions assigned to beads make their cultural meanings prominent and memorable.

Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following questions: What forms of parallelistic structures and semantic deviation are dominantly used in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks*? How are these parallelistic structures and forms of semantic deviation used to represent cultural memory in Ghana in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks*? These questions provide the basis for examining not only the dominant stylistic patterns in the poem but also how Aidoo uses such linguistic choices to foreground Ghanaian identity, history, cultural practices and collective memory.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Deviation and Parallelism in Poetry

Deviation is a central means of foregrounding in stylistics. Foregrounding makes linguistic features prominent for emphasis, interpretation, and aesthetic effect. It operates mainly through parallelism, which creates unexpected regularity through repetition, and deviation, which creates unexpected irregularity by departing from linguistic norms. Both processes disrupt automatic reading and draw attention to the form and meaning of language. Empirical research shows that foregrounding shapes literary response. Van Peer and Chesnokova (2017) compared original poems containing deviation and parallelism with versions from which foregrounding had been removed, treating both as measurable resources influencing perceptions of literariness. Van Peer et al. (2021) provide an updated empirical account of foregrounding as deviation and parallelism, reinforcing that patterned repetition and departure from norms jointly disrupt automatic reading and invite closer attention to form and meaning. Knoop et al. (2023) similarly found, among 78 participants, that more complete processing of self-identified foregrounded passages was associated with higher state-empathy scores. This suggests that foregrounding does not automatically produce emotional effects; its impact depends partly on how deeply readers recognise and interpret marked language.

Deviation is not mere error, but a motivated departure from an established linguistic or textual norm. Leech (1969) observes that writers use language creatively to produce "a sort of unexpected surprise," (p. 56) while Mansoor and Salman (2020) describe deviation as the licence that permits poets to use forms that ordinary language would normally reject (p. 8). Short (1996) similarly maintains that a deviant feature becomes meaningful because it contrasts with what readers expect. Leech's (1969) account systematises deviation across lexical, grammatical, phonological, graphological, semantic, dialectal, register and historical levels. Later studies sometimes separate morphological and syntactic deviation, producing a nine-part classification. Across these categories, poets manipulate words, sentence structures, sounds, spelling, typography, dialects and registers to foreground meaning. Semantic deviation is especially prominent in poetry because it disrupts ordinary meaning relations. It occurs when a word, phrase or sentence appears vague, illogical or literally impossible (Awonuga, Chimunya & Meshioye, 2018). Leech (1969,) associates such deviation with "absurdity," which prompts readers to search for figurative meaning (p. 45). Its common forms include metaphor, personification, simile, irony, paradox, oxymoron, pun and hyperbole. These devices make familiar objects carry emotions, ideas and cultural meanings beyond their literal functions. Empirical studies suggest that foregrounded deviation shapes readers' responses by slowing reading and intensifying emotional engagement; Miall and Kuiken (1994) link it to

longer reading time and stronger affect, while Hakemulder (2004) and Van Peer, Hakemulder, and Zyngier (2007) associate it with aesthetic evaluation. Alhaqbani (2024) examines the use of semantic and syntactic deviation in AlYoucif's selected poems in order to uncover their artistic significance and illuminate concealed layers of meaning. Studies by Sanhadi (2012), Widodo (2004), Saleem (2009), Ibrahima, Mugairb and Abbas (2020), and Mwinwelle et al. (2021) confirm its usefulness in poetic analysis. In Aidoo's poem, semantic deviation transforms the bead into a speaking bearer of Ghanaian identity, emotion and cultural memory.

Parallelism is a major concept in stylistics and one of the principal techniques of foregrounding. Balogun (2015) traces the term to the Greek word *parallelos*, meaning "beside one another." In language, it refers to the arrangement of related ideas in corresponding forms across words, phrases, clauses, sentences or larger textual units. Unlike deviation, which foregrounds unexpected irregularity, parallelism foregrounds unexpected regularity through recurrent linguistic patterns. Leech (1969) and Short (1996) therefore treat it as a noticeable repetition of form which encourages readers to compare the repeated elements and interpret their relationship. Jakobson (1960) places parallelism at the centre of poetic language. His claim that the poetic function "projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" means that elements selected because of similarities or contrasts in sound, grammar or meaning are arranged together in a sequence. Equivalence thus becomes a structuring principle of poetry rather than a decorative addition. Repetition may involve sounds, rhythms, word classes, sentence structures or related meanings. Such regularity also permits variation because repeated structures draw attention to the words or ideas that change within them. Parallelism commonly operates at phonological, syntactic and semantic levels. Phonological parallelism includes rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance and recurring stress patterns. Syntactic parallelism repeats similar grammatical constructions, while semantic parallelism places synonymous, contrasting or complementary ideas in corresponding positions. Yankson (2011) argues that semantic and syntactic parallelism may be reinforced by phonological parallelism. These levels often work together to produce cohesion, emphasis, rhythm and musicality. Studies across poetic traditions confirm these functions. Al-halhooli, Al-Khawaldeh and Shureteh (2017) identify structural, semantic and morphological parallelism in Arabic poetry. Okunowo (2012) shows that parallel patterns in Osundare's poetry function as meaning-bearing style markers, while Thwala (2017) associates syntactic and semantic parallelism with unity, development and rhythm. Recent empirical research also indicates that parallelistic diction strengthens emotional response, beauty, liking and melodiousness. In Aidoo's "Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks", parallelism provides a useful framework for examining how repeated forms organise cultural images, intensify meaning and recreate the rhythm of oral performance.

2.2 Bead usage in the socio-cultural context

Beads hold an important place in many African societies because their significance extends far beyond personal adornment. They function as material signs through which people express identity, social status, gender, age, spirituality, emotion and group membership. Vanhaeren (2005) observes that beads and other personal ornaments serve as markers of affiliation, wealth, class, gender and social position. They also function as amulets, media of exchange and instruments of courtship. Their meanings therefore arise from the cultural settings in which people produce, wear, exchange and interpret them. In Ghana, beads are closely connected with the cultural practices of the Krobo, Akan and other ethnic groups. Affum (2009) describes beads as an integral part of Krobo culture, where they feature in naming ceremonies, puberty rites, marriages, festivals, chieftaincy practices and funerals. Their colours, materials, arrangements and positions on the body communicate meanings recognised within the community. During the Dipo initiation ceremony, for instance, beads mark a girl's transition from childhood to socially recognised womanhood. In this context, they function as signs of transition, communal acceptance and cultural identity. Arthur, Adu-Gyamfi and Asubonteng

(2015) regard traditional Ghanaian beads as cultural texts. They identify synecdochic and metonymic relationships between beads and their wearers, showing that their meanings depend on who wears them, where they are placed and the occasion on which they are used. Beads therefore communicate through shared cultural associations rather than through physical beauty alone. Agyemang, Ngulube and Dube similarly aver that Krobo socio-cultural life is closely connected with indigenous bead-making knowledge (Agyemang et al., 2019). Bead production supports livelihoods and tourism while enabling knowledge, skills and cultural values to pass from one generation to another. The craft consequently serves both economic and cultural-preservation purposes. Beads also communicate emotional and spiritual conditions. Ndaa, Kwakye and Shann (2021) note that particular beads indicate happiness, grief, group membership and spiritual or social status in Ghanaian communities. Beyond Ghana, Ogundiran (2022) shows that, in Nigeria, Yoruba glass beads have represented power, wealth, prestige, ritual authority and value across generations. These studies establish beads as active participants in social relations, ceremonies and systems of cultural memory. In “Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks,” Aidoo draws on these socio-cultural meanings and presents beads as voices through which Ghanaian identity, emotion, history and communal continuity are expressed and preserved.

3. Theoretical framework

This study adopts the linguistic and stylistic categories framework developed by Leech and Short (2007) in *Style in Fiction*. The framework provides a procedure for identifying linguistic features that contribute to the meaning and effect of a literary text. Leech and Short (2007, p. 9) view style as the use of language by a writer in a context and for a purpose. Their approach therefore links linguistic description with literary interpretation and enables researchers to examine textual features consistently. Simpson (2004) similarly presents stylistics as the systematic study of language in literature, while Wales (2011) stresses the importance of relating textual choices to their communicative and aesthetic functions. Jeffries and McIntyre (2010) support a linguistically grounded approach to literary interpretation that permits analysis to be explained and verified. Makhloof (2020) also confirms the usefulness of Leech and Short’s checklist as a heuristic instrument for examining stylistically significant choices in literary texts. Leech and Short (2007) organise their analytical checklist into four categories: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. Lexical categories examine vocabulary, word classes, semantic fields and patterns of word choice. Grammatical categories address sentence structures, clause types, phrase patterns and syntax. Cohesion and context deal with textual connections, reference, discourse relations, participant relationships and the communicative situation. The figures of speech category focus on language that becomes prominent through deviation from ordinary norms or through noticeable regularity.

The present study draws mainly on the figures of speech category because it accommodates the analysis of parallelism and semantic deviation. Leech and Short (2007) divide this category into grammatical and lexical schemes, phonological schemes and tropes. Grammatical and lexical schemes account for repetition, anaphora, syntactic balance, coupling and parallel structures. They also reveal relationships among corresponding words, phrases and clauses. Phonological schemes examine sound patterning through alliteration, assonance, rhyme, rhythm and related devices. Tropes involve alterations of conventional meaning through metaphor, personification, paradox, irony and other forms of semantic deviation. This framework suits the analysis of Aidoo’s “Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks” because it supports a structured examination of repeated patterns and figurative departures. It guides the study in explaining how parallel structures organise cultural images, create rhythm and reinforce oral resonance, while semantic deviations give beads human qualities and symbolic agency. The framework therefore helps demonstrate how Aidoo transforms beads into speaking bearers of Ghanaian identity, emotion, history and cultural memory.

4. Methodology

The study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design to examine the stylistic functions of parallelism and semantic deviation in Ama Ata Aidoo's "Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks." This approach is appropriate because the study seeks to identify linguistic patterns in the poem and interpret how they contribute to the representation of Ghanaian cultural memory. The poem constitutes the primary source of data and comprises 221 lines structured into fifty-two (52) stanzas. The entire poem formed the analytical corpus of the study. All 221 lines and fifty-two stanzas were closely read and examined for instances of parallelism and semantic deviation. Parallel structures were identified at the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels, with attention to recurring sounds, lexical items, grammatical constructions and related or contrasting meanings. Semantic deviation was examined through the dominant forms identified in the poem, namely personification, metaphor, imagery and hyperbole. The units of analysis therefore consisted of relevant words, phrases, clauses, sentences and groups of lines in which these stylistic features occurred. Following the identification of these features across the complete poem, representative extracts were purposively selected for detailed discussion. Selection was based on the recurrence and prominence of the linguistic patterns and, importantly, their relevance to the study's focus on Ghanaian cultural memory. The extracts presented in the analysis are therefore illustrative examples drawn from patterns identified throughout the poem rather than the only portions of the poem examined. The analysis is guided by Leech and Short's (2007) Linguistic and Stylistic Categories framework, particularly its treatment of schemes and tropes. The identified structures were first described linguistically and subsequently interpreted in relation to their stylistic and cultural functions. Through close textual analysis, the study establishes how Aidoo employs parallelism to create rhythm, balance, emphasis and oral resonance, while semantic deviation extends the meanings of beads beyond their material function to foreground Ghanaian identity, history, emotion, indigenous knowledge and collective cultural memory.

5. Discussion

5.1 Analysis of Parallelism

This section examines the parallel structures identified in Ama Ata Aidoo's "Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks." Attention is given to recurring noun phrases, adjectival phrases, prepositional phrases, and simple and compound sentence patterns to reveal their grammatical, phonological, semantic and stylistic significance. The analysis is supported with textual illustrations from the poem.

Yet if a string of beads is fine, line 133

It sings, line 134

It dances, line 135

It jumps, line 136

And sizzles. line 137

The extract begins with the conditional clause, *Yet if a string of beads is fine*, followed by four related verbal structures. Lines 134 to 136 share the same syntactic pattern, subject + verb, realised through the third-person singular pronoun *It* and the present-tense lexical verbs: *sings*, *dances* and *jumps*. The verbs carry the third-person singular inflection and agree grammatically with the pronoun subject. The repetition of *It* at the beginning of successive lines creates anaphoric and syntactic parallelism. Its separate graphological placement also makes the recurring subject-verb pattern visually prominent and keeps the bead at the centre of the actions described. The final structure, *And sizzles*, differs slightly because the pronoun subject is omitted. The missing subject is recoverable from the preceding lines, making the expression an elliptical continuation of the established pattern. The conjunction *And* completes the sequence and gives the final action additional emphasis. This controlled variation within the

repeated structure prevents monotony while preserving grammatical unity. Phonologically, the extract is marked by the recurrence of the sibilant sound /s/, especially in string, dances, jumps and sizzles. The related voiced sibilant /z/ also occurs in *beads*, *sings* and the final syllable of *sizzles*. The repetition of these hissing sounds produces alliteration and consonance, creating a soft but energetic musical effect. The sound pattern supports the meanings of “sings” and “sizzles” by imitating sound, movement and liveliness. It also strengthens the oral and performative quality of the lines. Semantically, *sings*, *dances*, *jumps* and *sizzles* are dynamic verbs sharing the semantic feature /+action/. They are not exact synonyms, but they belong to related semantic fields of sound, movement, energy and performance. Their attribution to beads creates personification because beads cannot literally perform these actions. The parallelism therefore interacts with semantic deviation to transform the bead from a decorative object into an expressive cultural presence. This interpretation supports the position of Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2015), who contend that “the poetics of Ghanaian beads, that is the non-discursive practices involving the use of Ghanaian beads, are located in the beads’ cultural textuality worthy of linguistic analysis” (p. 39). The repeated actions assigned to the bead reveal this cultural textuality because the bead communicates through sound, movement, craftsmanship and ceremonial use. Stylistically, the pattern celebrates the beauty and vitality of Ghanaian beads and presents them as performing cultural identity. The gradual progression from singing to dancing, jumping and sizzling creates an ascending intensity. Each verb adds a new sensory quality, allowing readers to hear and visualise the bead while recognising its role in Ghanaian artistic life, communal ceremonies and cultural memory.

Speak to me of beads, Grandma, line 33

speak to me. line 34

Talk to me of beads, Nana, line 35

talk to me.” line 36

The structures above are parallel because they contain corresponding imperative structures. Lines 33 and 35 follow the syntactic pattern verb + prepositional phrase + prepositional phrase + noun. The imperative verbs *speak* and *Talk* occur in the initial position, while *to me* and *of beads* function as their complements. The nouns *Grandma* and *Nana* are vocative nouns identifying the elderly female person being addressed. Although the grammatical subject *you* is omitted, the imperative construction makes the subject understandable. Also, lines 34 and 36 repeat shortened versions of the preceding structures, *speak to me* and *talk to me* share the pattern verb + prepositional phrase. The repetition creates syntactic parallelism and reinforces the persona’s desire to receive cultural knowledge. This deliberate pattern reflects Leech’s view of style as a distinctive mode of expression. Leech (1969) avers that “style is the manner in which something is written or spoken, serving as an identification of the individual behind the communication.” Aidoo’s repetition of related imperative structures therefore identifies her style and strengthens the urgency of the speaker’s appeal. Semantically, *speak* and *talk* are contextually conditioned synonyms under the feature /+verbal communication/. Similarly, *Grandma* and *Nana* share the semantic features /+female/, /+elder/ and /+kinship/. Their use presents the older woman as a custodian of communal knowledge. The repeated expression *to me* foregrounds the younger generation as the recipient of inherited cultural knowledge. In Ghana, beads are associated with naming ceremonies, puberty rites, marriage, chieftaincy, festivals, funerals, spirituality, beauty, social status and group identity. Asking *Grandma* or *Nana* to speak about beads therefore represents a request for knowledge about Ghanaian history, values and social practices. Stylistically, the parallel imperatives create insistence, intimacy and an oral call-and-response rhythm. This interpretation reflects the view that stylistics combines the subjective judgment of the reader with linguistic description to explore the artistic element and overall effect of a text (Short, 1996). The linguistic repetition supports the interpretation that the younger generation seeks cultural guidance from the older generation. Beads function as cultural ornaments whose meanings must be explained and preserved.

Through this pattern, Aidoo presents beads as links between generations and as symbols of identity, memory, continuity and belonging in Ghanaian society.

Give me a bead that's wrapped in joy; line 25

find me a bead to carry my grief. line 26

The two lines above are parallel because they display similar imperative structures. In both constructions, the grammatical subject *you* follow the structure verb + indirect object + direct object + postmodifier. The pronoun *me* functions as the indirect object, while the noun phrase *a bead* functions as the direct object. The repetition of *me a bead* creates lexical and syntactic parallelism and foregrounds the bead as the central object desired by the persona. In the poem the verbs *Give* and *find* occur in the same syntactic position and share the semantic feature /+provision/. Although they express slightly different actions, both communicate the speaker's request to receive a bead suited to a particular emotional condition. The difference between the structures appears in their postmodifiers. The relative clause, *that's wrapped in joy* describes the desired quality of the first bead, while the infinitive clause *to carry my grief* states the function of the second bead. The end words *joy* and *grief* are antonyms and create semantic or antithetical parallelism. Their placement at the ends of the corresponding lines gives both emotions equal prominence. The contrast suggests that beads remain relevant during opposing moments of human experience. They accompany celebration, happiness and fulfilment, while also expressing sorrow, loss and mourning. Within Ghanaian life, beads appear during marriages, festivals, puberty rites, funerals and mourning ceremonies. The parallel structures portray beads as cultural objects that record and communicate the joys and sorrows of communal life.

The final structure considered in the analysis of parallelism in Aidoo's poem focuses on the comforting and supportive roles assigned to beads in Ghanaian life. The extract contains repeated grammatical forms and contrasting lexical items arranged in corresponding positions. These patterns draw attention to the collective benefits associated with beads and strengthen the unity of the poetic expression. The repetition also produces rhythm, balance and emphasis, while the contrasting words broaden the range of experiences represented. Through these parallel structures, Aidoo presents beads as objects that remain relevant across changing emotional and social conditions. The extract is presented below:

Beads can lift the heaviest heart. line 151

beads can warm us when we are cold, line 153

and cool us when we are hot. line 154

Crucially, the lines display lexical, syntactic and semantic parallelism. Lines 151 and 153 begin with the repeated structure *Beads can*, comprising the plural noun *Beads* as subject and the modal auxiliary *can*. This repetition foregrounds beads as the main agents responsible for the actions expressed by the verbs *lift* and *warm*. The two lines follow the broad syntactic pattern subject + modal auxiliary + lexical verb + object. Line 153 extends this pattern with the subordinate adverbial clause *when we are cold*. The conjunction *and* coordinates *cool us when we are hot* with *warm us when we are cold*. The subject *beads* and the modal auxiliary *can* are omitted in line 154 but remain recoverable from the preceding line. Its complete underlying form is *beads can cool us when we are hot*. This ellipsis avoids monotonous repetition while preserving the grammatical balance between the two lines. Semantically, *warm* and *cool* occupy corresponding syntactic positions and form an antonymous relationship. The adjectives *cold* and *hot* also form an opposing pair parallelism. The repeated pronoun *us* presents Ghanaians collectively as the beneficiaries of the cultural functions of beads. Again, the verbs *lift*, *warm* and *cool* share the contextual feature /+support/ because they describe the positive influence of beads on Ghanaians. The parallel structures used by Aidoo in the poem impose equal prominence on the different forms of comfort associated with beads. They also create

rhythm, balance and cohesion, while portraying beads as enduring companions in the changing emotional and social experiences of Ghanaian communal life.

5.2 Analysis of Forms of Semantic Deviation

Having established how parallel structures create rhythm, balance and cultural emphasis, the discussion now turns to semantic deviation, through which Aidoo moves beyond structural regularity to figurative expressions that deepen the cultural meanings of beads. This section of the analysis examines the forms of semantic deviation identified in the poem. The discussion focuses specifically on personification, metaphor, imagery and hyperbole, showing how these stylistic devices depart from ordinary semantic expectations to foreground the cultural, historical and emotional significance of beads in Ghanaian life.

5.2.1 Personification

Personification is a form of semantic deviation through which human qualities, actions or emotions are assigned to non-human entities. It results from a departure from normal semantic selection because actions associated with human beings are attributed to objects or abstract ideas. This corroborates what Mansoor and Salman (2020) describe as the licence that permits poets to use forms that ordinary language would normally reject. In Aidoo's "Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks," personification is first foregrounded in the title. The verb *speaks* gives the bead the human ability of speech and prepares the reader for its portrayal as a communicative cultural agent. The title suggests that beads possess voices through which Ghanaian history, identity, emotion and indigenous knowledge are expressed. Aidoo transforms beads from passive ornaments into active participants in Ghanaian social and cultural life. This personification is further developed in the expressions, *They welcome us here in the palest white* and *bid us farewell in black*. The pronoun *They* refers to beads, while the verbs *welcome* and *bid* describe actions normally performed by human beings. The *palest white* represents beads associated with birth, naming ceremonies and joyful beginnings, whereas *black* suggests death, mourning and final departure. Beads thus appear to receive individuals into the African community and accompany them at the end of life. Through this semantic deviation, Aidoo foregrounds the transience of human existence and presents beads as cultural companions that preserve memories of arrival, belonging and departure. Another significant expression the poet presents occurs in stanza 29, line 123: *Great beads never talk*. This statement translates the Akan proverb *Ahwenepa nkasa*, literally suggesting that valuable or genuine beads do not speak. The proverb ordinarily teaches that people of worth do not need excessive self-advertisement because their quality is evident through their conduct. Within the poem, the apparent denial of speech creates an ironic tension with the title and other personified descriptions. Although great beads never talk literally, they communicate silently through their colours, designs, materials, history, wearers and ceremonial contexts. Their cultural value speaks without verbal sound. The paradox shows that silence itself becomes a language through which knowledge is preserved and transmitted. The idea is reinforced in lines 129–132:

*If a string of beads is truly fine
It can speak in a million tongues
It will have something for all
And say the most amazing things*

The verbs above assign human capacities to beads. *Speak in a million tongues* stresses the numerous meanings communicated through bead colours, arrangements and occasions of use. Through personification, Aidoo gives beads cultural agency as they welcome, bid farewell, speak silently; becoming repositories of Ghanaian identity, emotional experience, and proverbial wisdom.

5.2.2 Metaphor

While personification gives beads human agency, metaphor extends their significance by relating them to other conceptual domains through which history, identity and cultural

experience are understood. Metaphor is a form of semantic deviation through which one entity is understood in terms of another without explicit comparative markers such as like or as. It creates an implicit relationship between unlike entities by presenting one as the other, allowing the poet to deepen the meanings attached to familiar cultural objects. In this regard, Kövecses (2015) argues that poets work under the same conceptual pressures as ordinary people, especially what he describes as the “pressure of coherence,” and that context partly accounts for the creative use of metaphor in poetry. This view is particularly relevant to Aidoo’s poem because her metaphors emerge from the historical, social and cultural contexts in which beads acquire meaning in Ghanaian life. A significant example occurs in the lines, *I dread the chevron / It was a weapon/and of oppression* (lines 105–107). The source domain is *weapon*, while the target domain is the *chevron* bead. Weapons suggest fear, injury, domination and destruction. By presenting the chevron as a weapon, Aidoo transfers these negative qualities to the bead and foregrounds its connection with colonial commerce, exploitation and enslavement. The bead becomes a material reminder of unequal encounters between Europeans and Africans.

Another metaphor appears in *Our spirit’s window to the world* (stanza 36, line 148). A window provides access and visibility. The metaphor presents beads as channels through which Ghanaian beliefs, emotions, histories and artistic knowledge become visible to the wider world. The possessive pronoun *our* gives the expression a communal dimension. Also, the statement *You are our life’s companion* (stanza 50, line 206) further presents the bead as a constant partner in human existence. The *companion* metaphor foregrounds the presence of beads in naming ceremonies, puberty rites, marriages, festivals, chieftaincy, funerals and mourning. Through these metaphors, Aidoo presents beads as cultural objects that preserve painful history, express collective identity and accompany Ghanaians throughout life. Together, the metaphors powerfully connect material culture with memory, spirituality, endurance and national self-representation.

5.2.3 Imagery

In the poem, the meanings created through metaphor become more immediate through imagery, as Aidoo allows the cultural presence of beads to be seen, heard and physically felt. Imagery refers to the use of descriptive language that appeals to the senses and helps readers see, hear, feel, taste or smell what a poet presents. Yuldasheva (2024) avers that imagery is not mere decoration but a dynamic device that stimulates readers’ senses, emotions and perceptual engagement with texts. Visual, auditory and tactile imagery are the dominant forms Aidoo use to drive home her message. Through these sensory images, Aidoo gives beads colour, sound, movement and physical presence. The beads therefore appear as active cultural objects rather than silent ornaments. Visual imagery is prominent in *See how they shine incandescent* in stanza 4, line 18 and *See how they glow / in a million hues* in lines 19–20. The verbs *shine* and *glow* are obvious as they appeal directly to sight and stress the brightness and beauty of the beads. The phrase *a million hues* enlarge their colour range and suggests variety. The beads reflect the diversity of Ghanaian artistic traditions and the different meanings attached to colours. This colourful presentation continues in *Blue beads, green beads / yellow beads and grey* in lines 167–168. The listing of colours creates a vivid picture and shows how beads communicate identity, mood, status and occasion. Similarly, *Cascades of white beads for the mother* in line 55, stanza 13, presents the beads as flowing in great quantity. The use of *Cascades* creates an image of abundance, while *white* suggests purity, honour and celebration. Aidoo also creates imagery which appeals to readers sense of hearing. In lines 121–122: *They say that cheap beads prattle/rattle, and tattle*, the verbs imitate continuous and sometimes unpleasant sounds. The repeated /t/ and /r/ sounds strengthen the rattling effect of beads. Cheap beads are therefore judged by the noise they make. In contrast, *It sings* (line 125), gives the fine bead a pleasant musical quality. Again, stanza 32, line 134, *Every bead laughs out aloud* presents beads as producing joyful human sound. These auditory images make bead culture appear lively, communal and performative. Tactile imagery also appears in *Wash me some*

beads to warm my skin in line 202, and *And cool us when we are hot* in line 154. The contrasting sensations of warmth and coolness appeal to touch. They suggest that beads remain close to the body and provide comfort in different conditions. Through these images, Aidoo presents beads as objects that are seen, heard and felt in Ghanaian life.

5.2.4 Hyperbole

Alongside these sensory representations, Aidoo also employs hyperbole to intensify the scale of bead production, use and cultural significance. As a form of semantic deviation, hyperbole deliberately exaggerates ideas beyond literal possibility in order to create emphasis, intensity or emotional effect. In “Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks”, Aidoo employs hyperbole to magnify both the labour involved in bead production and the widespread cultural significance of beads in human society. This is evident in stanza 43, where Aidoo states, *Their making uses endless hours* in line 175/*the how, the when, the what of it /The wearing is by a billion souls* (lines 175 – 177). The expression *endless hours* exaggerate the amount of time required to produce beads. The hours involved in bead-making are not literally without end, but the exaggeration foregrounds the patience, skill, care and sustained labour required in the craft. Aidoo draws attention to bead-making as an artistic and cultural practice rather than a simple mechanical activity. The following expression, *the how, the when, the what of it*, reinforces the complexity surrounding the process by suggesting that bead production in Ghanaian context involves knowledge of methods, timing, materials and cultural purpose. The statement *The wearing is by a billion souls* is another clear instance of hyperbole. The number *billion* does not necessarily represent an exact count of bead wearers; it stresses the extensive social reach and enduring popularity of beads across communities and generations. Aidoo foregrounds the enormous cultural value of beads. Their production demands commitment, while their use reaches across generations, ceremonies and social groups. Her use of hyperbole strengthens the poem’s presentation of beads as enduring symbols of craftsmanship, identity, continuity and collective cultural memory.

6. Summary of findings and conclusion

The study demonstrates that parallelism and semantic deviation are central to the representation of cultural memory in “Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks.” Phonological, syntactic and semantic parallelism create rhythm, balance and oral resonance while reinforcing the social and cultural functions of beads. Personification, metaphor, imagery and hyperbole move the bead beyond its material function and present it as a carrier of identity, emotion, historical experience and indigenous knowledge. The interaction of these stylistic features is particularly significant because it connects poetic form with Ghanaian cultural experience. Aidoo consequently transforms beads from decorative objects into repositories through which communal histories, values and memories are communicated across generations. The study therefore demonstrates the usefulness of stylistic analysis in explaining how linguistic choices contribute to the preservation and representation of indigenous cultural memory.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to a qualitative stylistic analysis of a single poem by Ama Ata Aidoo. Its findings therefore cannot be generalised to Aidoo’s entire poetic corpus or to Ghanaian poetry as a whole. Although the entire poem was examined, the detailed discussion presents selected illustrative extracts rather than a quantitative frequency analysis of every occurrence of parallelism and semantic deviation. The interpretation of cultural memory is also based on textual evidence and existing scholarship on Ghanaian bead culture rather than ethnographic interviews or reader-response data. These limitations do not undermine the textual findings but define the scope within which the conclusions should be understood.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

This study has examined the stylistic significance of parallelism and semantic deviation in Ama Ata Aidoo’s “Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks,” with particular attention to how these

linguistic features foreground Ghanaian cultural identity, history and collective memory. Future research could extend the present analysis to other poems in Aidoo's *After the Ceremonies: New and Selected Poems* to determine whether similar patterns of parallelism and semantic deviation characterise her broader poetic style. Comparative studies could also examine Aidoo alongside other Ghanaian poets to establish how linguistic foregrounding contributes to representations of indigenous culture and collective memory. Further research could investigate Aidoo's adaptation of Akan proverbs, oral performance patterns and indigenous cultural expressions from a stylistic perspective. Reader-response studies involving Ghanaian readers could additionally examine how cultural familiarity with beads influences the interpretation of foregrounded expressions in the poem. Such studies would extend the present textual analysis by connecting linguistic patterning with culturally situated reader responses.

6.3 Implications for Theory, Research and Practice

The study has implications for theory, research and practice. Regarding theory, the application of Leech and Short's (2007) Linguistic and Stylistic Categories framework demonstrates its usefulness in explaining how linguistic choices create meaning in poetry. The framework effectively accounts for the stylistic significance of parallelism and semantic deviation in "Ghana: Where the Bead Speaks." It also shows its relevance for analysing literary texts rooted in indigenous culture, history and communal experience. In terms of research, the study contributes to stylistic scholarship on African poetry, particularly studies on parallelism and semantic deviation. It adds a linguistic perspective to discussions of Ama Ata Aidoo's poetry by showing how specific language patterns construct beads as carriers of Ghanaian identity, cultural memory and historical experience. The study may guide further research on similar stylistic features in Ghanaian and African literary texts. In practice, the study provides useful material for teachers and students of Stylistics, African Literature and related disciplines by demonstrating how parallelism and semantic deviation can be identified and interpreted in poetry.

7. References

- Adu-Gyamfi, V. E., Arthur, P., & Asubonteng, K. (2015). The poetics of traditional Ghanaian beads. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: H, Interdisciplinary*, 15(2), 39–52.
- Affum, M. A. (2009). Beads in the Krobo culture [Unpublished master's thesis]. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.
- Agyemang, B. K., Ngulube, P., & Dube, L. (2019). Utilising knowledge management methods to manage beads-making indigenous knowledge among the Krobo communities in Ghana. *South African Journal of Information Management*, 21(1), a1008.
- Alhaqbani, N. (2024). A stylistic analysis of the foregrounded deviation in the modern Saudi poetry with a particular emphasis on AlYoucif's selected poem. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.58256/gngjyy32>
- Al-halhooli, M. A., Al-Khawaldeh, N., & Shureteh, H. (2017). The linguistic technique of parallelism in Al-Ahwas Al-Ansari's poetry: A stylistic study. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 6(1), 189–201.
- Alobaidy, N., & Halawachy, H. (2020). "Let us call it a truthful hyperbole!" A semantic perspective on hyperbole in war poetry on Iraq (2003). *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 2(4), 151–166.
- Awonuga, C., Chimuanya, L., & Meshioye, C. (2018). Deviation-type foregrounding and literary interpretation: The example of James Kirkup's Thunder and Lightning. *International Journal of Language and Literature*, 6(1), 69–79.

- Balogun, S. (2015). A linguistic stylistic analysis of parallelism in inaugural speeches of Presidents Barrack Obama and Goodluck Jonathan [Unpublished master's thesis]. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Ibrahima, A., Mugairb, S. K., & Abbas, A. M. (2020). Semantic deviation in Al-Sayyab's The Detective and Eliot's Ash Wednesday poems. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 11(10), 727–744.
- Jakobson, R. (1960). Closing statement: Linguistics and poetics. In T. A. Sebeok (Ed.), *Style in language* (pp. 350–377). MIT Press.
- Jeffries, L., & McIntyre, D. (2010). *Stylistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2015). Context and poetic metaphor. In *Where metaphors come from: Reconsidering context in metaphor* (pp. 117–131). Oxford University Press.
- Knoop, C. A., Hakemulder, J., & Kuiken, D. (2023). Foregrounding and empathy: How readers' processing of marked passages relates to state empathy. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 13(1), 1–29.
- Leech, G. N. (1969). *A linguistic guide to English poetry*. Longman.
- Leech, G. N., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Makhloof, S. (2020). Leech and Short's checklist of lexical features in *Style in Fiction: A theoretical analysis*. *International Journal Online of Humanities*.
- Miall, D. S., & Kuiken, D. (1994). Foregrounding, defamiliarization, and affect: Response to literary stories. *Poetics*, 22(5), 389–407.
- Mwinwelle, P., Adukpo, J., Asante-Anyimadu, G., & Avevor, A. (2021). Marketisation of technical education: A literary stylistic exploration of Ghanaian technical university anthems. *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies*, 5(2), 112–133.
- Ndaa, P. O., Kwakye, A. H., & Shann, S. (2021). Beading as a therapeutic activity in Ghana. *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, 77(1), 36–39.
- Ogundiran, A. (2022). A mosaic of Yorùbá ontology and materiality of pleasure since AD 1000. *African Studies Review*, 65(4), 1–30.
- Okunowo, Y. (2012). Patterns of parallelism as trope of meaning in Osundare's poetry. *Academic Research International*, 2(2), 715–723.
- Saleem, M. (2009). An analysis of semantic deviations on T.S. Eliot's celebrated poems: Ash Wednesday [Unpublished master's thesis]. International Islamic University, Islamabad.
- Mansoor, M. S., & Salman, Y. M. (2020). Linguistic deviation in literary style: A stylistic analysis. *Cihan University-Erbil Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 7–16.
- Sanhadi, F. E. (2012). Linguistic deviation on William Shakespeare's selected sonnets [Unpublished M.A. thesis]. Universitas Mulawarman.
- Shenoda, M. (2017). Verse Africa: The malleable poetics of some contemporary African poets. *World Literature Today*, 91(5), 40–41.
- Short, M. (1996). *Exploring the language of poems, plays and prose*. Longman.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. Routledge.

- Thwala, J. J. (2017). The syntactic and semantic parallelism in selected C. T. Msimang poetry. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 52(1–3), 123–130.
- Toure, S. J.-L. (2025). Feminising African indigenous poetry: An analysis of the poetry collection *After the ceremonies* by Ama Ata Aidoo. *Akofena*, 17(3), 77–88.
- Van Peer, W., Hakemulder, J. F., & Zyngier, S. (2007). Scientifically studying literary reading. John Benjamins.
- Van Peer, W., & Chesnokova, N. (2017). Foregrounding and defamiliarization: A study of readers' responses to poetic language. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 7(2), 189–220.
- Van Peer, W., Chesnokova, N., & Zyngier, S. (2021). Foregrounding in poetry and prose: An empirical study of deviation and parallelism. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 11(2), 203–232.
- Verdonk, P. (2002). *Stylistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Wales, K. (2011). *A dictionary of stylistics* (3rd ed.). Longman.
- Widodo, M. S. R. (2004). *An analysis on Psalm* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. Universitas Kristen Petra.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1992). *Practical stylistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Yankson, K. E. (2011). *An introduction to literary stylistics*. University of Cape Coast / Pacific Publishers.
- Yitah, H. (2023). Of bonds and commitment: In memoriam Ama Ata Aidoo. *African Studies Review*, 66(4), 1024–1027.
- Yuldasheva, M. B. (2024). The function of imagery in contemporary poetry. *Tadqiqotlar: Scientific Journal of Literary Studies*.