VOL. 09 NO. 6,
AUGUST, 2025
E-ISSN 3027-1401
P-ISSN 3026-9148

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of Arts and Sociological Research (JASR)

Eroding Words, Eroding Worlds: An SFL and Ecostylistic Analysis of Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*

T. O. Adesanmi; & O. A. Adeagbo
Department of English, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria
Corresponding Author: adeagboolufisayo@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/ajasr.v9i6.043

Abstract
This paper presents an ecostylistic analysis of Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*, exploring the intersection of environmental degradation and cultural erosion in Niger Delta, Nigeria. This study employs a bipartite theoretical framework involving Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Ecostylistics to encode themes of ecological loss, resistance, memory, and cultural identity among the people of Niger Delta. The findings reveal how the novel presents the land as both a wounded body and a cultural archive where linguistic disfigurement reflects physical devastation and moral decay. Through close reading of selected excerpts, the paper argues that language in *The Activist* operates not only as a medium of ecological representation but also a contested site of ideological struggle and cultural survival. The study underscores the value of ecostylistics in uncovering the intricate entanglement of linguistic form, environmental consciousness, and cultural identity in postcolonial African literature.

Keywords: Ecological degradation, cultural identity, ideological contestation, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), ecostylistics, postcolonial ecocriticism.

Introduction
The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is popularly regarded as one of the most ecologically and culturally endangered zones in sub-Saharan Africa. Renowned for its biodiversity and longstanding indigenous knowledge systems, the region has experienced decades of environmental degradation and socio-cultural erosion resulting from sustained industrial exploitation particularly by multinational oil companies (Abhon, & Woforodo, 2024). Since the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri in

1956, extractive activities have intensified, leading to persistent oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, and water pollution (Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Watts, 2004). This environmental degradation has not only disrupted natural ecosystems but has also contributed to the disintegration of cultural identities, oral traditions, and community rituals intimately linked to the land.

Recent scholarship has increasingly highlighted the profound impact of environmental degradation on cultural practices and identities in the Niger Delta and other places across Africa. For instance, Titus (2021) explores, through music and poetry, how oil exploration disrupts both ecological systems and cultural expressions. His study emphasises the symbolic displacement of honey bees, a kind of broader environmental and cultural dislocations. This work underscores the role of artistic expressions in resisting environmental injustices and preserving cultural narratives. Furthermore, Esamagu (2024) delves into the psychological ramifications of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta by analysing Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*. Employing trauma theory and the concept of "slow violence," she illustrates how continuous ecological harm leads to collective trauma among affected communities. Her work emphasises the intertwined nature of environmental and cultural degradation, which highlights the need for nuanced analyses that capture these complexities.

In the same vein, and somewhat closely related to this current study, Ndubuisi (2017) examines Tanure Ojaide's *The Tale of the Harmattan*, focusing on the poet's use of aesthetics to convey social responsibility. Through ecocritical analysis, he demonstrates how Ojaide's poetry serves as a medium for environmental advocacy, reflecting the cultural and ecological crises in the Niger Delta. This study showcases the potential of literary works to address and challenge environmental injustices. Furthermore, Alu and Suwa (2012) analyse Ojaide's portrayal of the Niger Delta's environmental degradation with emphasis on the spiritual and cultural dimensions of land in Urhobo cosmology. Thus, their work highlights how oil exploitation damages the physical environment as well as disrupting the spiritual and cultural fabric of the local communities. This perspective underscores the multifaceted impact of environmental degradation on indigenous cultures.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the cultural and psychological impacts of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, there is a noticeable gap and need to apply SFL and ecostylistic framework to analysing such phenomena in prose narratives. Specifically, the application of a bipartite theoretical framework involving Systemic Functional Linguistics and ecostylistic approach to the study of Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* offers a new insight into our understanding of environmental and cultural degradation impacts on the people of Niger Delta in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to analyse the linguistic and stylistic strategies through which *The Activist* represents ecological degradation and cultural erosion in the Niger Delta (Nigeria). Meanwhile, the specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine how environmental degradation is linguistically represented in relation to cultural identity and tradition;
2. Identify stylistic features that foreground ecological and socio-political collapse;
3. Explore how the novel's language constructs or challenges dominant narratives about nature, culture, and resistance.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are specific environmental degradation (e.g., oil spills, deforestation) represented linguistically in relation to cultural disintegration in *The Activist*?
2. What stylistic strategies are employed to foreground ecological degradation and its broader implications?
3. In what ways does the novel's language construct or challenge dominant narratives about nature, culture, and resistance?

Ecostylistics: Language, Culture, and Environment

Ecostylistics builds on the intersection of stylistics and ecolinguistics, emphasising how language structures shape and reflect ecological and cultural consciousness. It draws upon systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and related tools to study how linguistic choices articulate environmental values, encode ecological disruption, and challenge anthropocentric ideologies (Goatly, 2007; Zawada, 2019). At the core of ecostylistic analysis is the belief that texts, particularly narrative fiction, represent ecological realities comprehensively, actively construct such realities, and mediate them through language (Douthwaite, et. al., 2017; Mohamed & Jaafar, 2023). Thus, the impact of transitivity, modality, appraisal systems, and lexical patterning are central in this regard. For instance, transitivity patterns help to uncover who is positioned as agent or victim in narratives of environmental change (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) while modality signals degrees of obligation and probability, often exposing the ideological positioning of narrators or characters concerning ecological action or neglect.

These tools are essential to examine how Ojaide not only chronicles the environmental destruction of the Niger Delta but also embeds critiques of cultural loss, displacement, and resistance in *The Activist*. Therefore, the novel has become a linguistic site where cultural identity and ecological crisis are entwined. This ecostylistic framework also emphasises intertextuality, particularly how indigenous linguistic and cultural references—such as proverbs, folktales, and oral traditions—are embedded within the narrative as both stylistic and ideological resources. These elements function as aesthetic features and as mechanisms for ecological memory and cultural resilience. The use of stylistic analysis with an environmental orientation, ecostylistics, enables a balanced reading of *The Activist*, where language is not merely a vehicle of representation but a tool for resistance, remembrance, and critique.

Overview of Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*

The awakening of identity and ecological ideas:

The root cause of the crisis in *The Activist* is the long-standing exploitation of the Niger Delta by multinational oil companies, with the complicity of state structures (Chukwu & Onyekachi, 2020). The narrative grounds this exploitation in systemic environmental degradation of oil spills, deforestation, and toxic waste which has led to the displacement of communities and the erosion of traditional livelihoods. The return of the protagonist in the first chapter of the book titled "Life of Activism" to his homeland after many years abroad marks a point of awakening, not just for him, but for a region in need of new leadership. His return unveils a Niger Delta that has become economically crippled and ecologically disfigured.

Ecological ideas are present through recurring motifs of land scarred by burnouts, rivers polluted with oil spills, and the spiritual significance of the environment to the people as their source, showing that people don't just live off the land physically, but also see it as sacred and central to who they are. The region's ecology is not just the physical terrain but a cultural and spiritual space. The disfigured landscape mirrors the moral and cultural collapse in the communities, signalling an environmental loss and cultural erasure. Through a careful and purposive choice of language, Ojaide highlights the spiritual connection between people and place, thereby framing environmental degradation as an assault on communal identity.

Activism in the main characters and their environment:

Activism in the novel emerges from multiple sources: formal university resistance through Omagbemi emergence as the Student Union Government in the chapter titled "Omagbemi", informal community responses through the Women of the Niger Delta in the chapter titled "Women of the Niger Delta", and the fierce self-assertion of the "Area Boys" through the emergence of Pere as the leader of the group in the chapter titled "Pere Ighogboja". The Activist catalyses this movement by bridging the gap between institutional and grassroots resistance. His refusal to accept oil money, his alliance with the "Area Boys", and his support for WODEFOR reflect a shift from rhetorical protest to embodied resistance. He challenges not only the oil companies but the cultural complacency that allows exploitation to persist by rejecting the money offered to him by the oil company to give a lecture, which does not profit anyone but the oil companies, a tactical means to silence the opposition in the chapter: "The Activist".

The main character's relationship with the environment is layered with meanings. He is both a returning son and an estranged observer. His emotional and ideological transformation parallels his deepening connection with the polluted land. The environment is never a neutral backdrop; it is active, wounded, and symbolically rich. For instance, the picnic scene at the river with Ebi in the chapter titled "Boating Downstream" becomes a moment of ecological mourning and nostalgic recollection. Thus, this chapter constructs the environment as both a site of loss and a catalyst for political awakening.

Conflict, escalation of situations, and resolutions:

The central conflict revolves around the struggle for control over land and resources. Oil companies seek to silence opposition through bribery, militarisation, and corporate propaganda, while the indigenes as local actors increasingly resist the perceived exploiters and oppressors. The escalation of the crisis begins with suspicion of The Activist, intensifies with the oil bunkering operations of the Delta Cartel, and peaks in the acts of public resistance noted in the student protests, the nude protest by WODEFOR, and ultimately, the political mobilisation. Resolutions in the text are partial and hard-earned. The Activist's emergence as governor suggests a political breakthrough, but it is not romanticised because the war is not yet over but a silver lining in the cloud of their challenges. The cost of the resistance is evident in lost lives, broken institutions, and moral compromises. Yet the narrative affirms that justice, though delayed, is still possible through collective mobilisation, cultural memory, and ideological clarity.

General reflection and intertextuality:

As noticeable in the last five chapters, the novel ends with a tone of sober recognition. The damage to the environment and cultural institutions is acknowledged as lasting. The death of Chief Ishaka, the neutralisation of student uprisings, and the co-option of local elites reflect the weight of entrenched systems. Yet there is also a sense of resilience expressed in women's protest songs, the preservation of oral traditions, and the revitalisation of political agency.

Intertextually, *The Activist* draws on oral history, folklore, and Pan-African revolutionary discourse to project re-echo other voices. The invocation of ancestral figures, local deities, and communal rituals situates the work in a broader history of resistance against perceived oppression and dehumanisation. It also connects to other literary works and traditions that link environmental justice to decolonial struggles. For instance, like Ojaide's earlier *Delta Blues* and *Songs*, which perform funeral rites for environmental martyrs and draw on oral-ritual forms to protest oil devastation (Nwagbara, 2010), *The Activist* continues this lineage of eco-poetic resistance. Similarly, the fusion of folklore and modern protest in Fela's Afro-beat, evoked earlier in the novel, echoes the reliance on oral tradition and song in First Nations poetry, such as Marilyn Dumont's work, where oral forms function as modes of cultural reclamation and environmental advocacy (Obakachi, 2023). In doing so, Ojaide creates a text where language serves both to record devastation and to renew cultural identity.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a bipartite theoretical framework by employing an ecostylistic approach which connects strategically with the ecolinguistic interest fondly explored by various researchers including Goatly, (2017), and Virdis, (2022); and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with emphasis on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) metafunctional analysis of text. The dual crisis of ecology and culture forms the thematic and ideological core of Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* (2015), a novel that engages with the political, environmental, and ethical tensions in the Niger Delta.

While previous critical approaches have foregrounded the novel's socio-political themes, this study advances a linguistically informed reading, adopting the interdisciplinary framework of ecostylistics and SFL. Ecostylistics, situated at the intersection of ecological criticism and stylistics, enables an analysis of how linguistic patterns construct and contest ecological ideologies (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001; Zawada, 2019). As an interdisciplinary field, ecostylistics combines ecology and stylistics for a comprehensive analysis and understanding of a given text (Virdis, 2022). Specifically, this framework explores how language is used to convey ecological ideas, promote sustainability, and shape environmental discourse. Thus, the relationship that holds among language, literature, and human environment is of great concern to researchers using the theory. More specifically, ecostylisticians examine language use in environmental context with particular focus on how language is employed to promote or influence eco-friendly practices through storytelling and narrative structures. In view of the foregoing, there is undeniable connection to ecolinguistics as evident in this current study. In other words, the study applies critical ecolinguistic tools (Stibbe, 2021) to examine how language is employed to reinforce or resist ecologically harmful ideologies as supported by selected excerpts from *The Activist*.

Generally speaking, the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) dwells on how language functions as a social semiotic system, meaning it is shaped by and shapes social contexts. It examines how choices in grammar and vocabulary realise meanings about experience (what is happening), interpersonal relations (how speakers relate to each other), and textual organisation (how messages are structured). By focusing on these functions, SFL reveals how language constructs reality, encodes values, and positions speakers and readers within specific cultural and ideological frameworks. In SFL, transitivity explores how actions, actors, and processes are represented. In *The Activist*, Ojaide often uses material processes (processes of doing) to show how oil companies act violently upon the environment, while the land and people are reduced to passive participants. By integrating insights from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Ecostylistics, this study investigates how Ojaide's language use encodes environmental consciousness, cultural memory and identity, and resistance to dehumanising antics of capitalists and their agents.

Methodology

The text, *The Activist*, was subjected to a repeated chapter-by-chapter close reading. This approach, as discussed by Bal & van Boheemen (2009), prepared the ground for the thematic analysis of activism and social injustice perceived and decried by the author. Through a detailed examination of relevant passages and characters in the text, the analysis explored how the author deployed narrative techniques to convey the complexities of activism and social change. In addition, selected pages were purposively read and analysed using SFL tools (process types, mood, modality, theme-rheme) and ecolinguistic principles involving framing, metaphor, and beneficial/destructive discourses.

As a matter of necessity, this study also considered the historical and cultural context in which the novel was written and how it influenced the narrative's contents explicitly or otherwise. In

summary, a qualitative approach was adopted to analyse the text, and the findings would be interpreted through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to enhance the message delivery and easy comprehension of the audience.

Text Analysis and Discussion

The study draws on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), especially transitivity and appraisal frameworks (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & White, 2005) alongside Stibbe's (2021) ecolinguistic model of discourse analysis. The analysis identifies how language constructs agency, encodes values, and critiques ideological assumptions tied to oil exploitation and its sociocultural impact. Rather than focusing on narrative or characterisation alone, the discussion foregrounds the stylistic features—lexical choices, metaphors, grammatical patterns—that shape the ecological and cultural meanings in the text. The goal is to show how linguistic elements work ideologically to resist the dominant narratives of development that erase indigenous ecological knowledge, communal autonomy, and cultural memory. In *The Activist*, Ojaide crafts a narrative that is linguistically dense with ecological symbolism and cultural commentary. The linguistic foregrounding of environmental and cultural crises is achieved through a range of stylistic devices that link the physical disfigurement of the land to the symbolic erosion of cultural heritage.

Transitivity and Environmental Violence

Ojaide's clause structures reflect both direct and indirect harm to the ecosystem while also encoding shifting agency and ideological positioning around blame and responsibility. Several material processes dominate passages in the novel, foregrounding change and destruction. He uses language to foreground the loss of ecological and cultural autonomy among Niger Delta communities. Through a careful layering of all of these processes (material, relational, behavioural, etc.), the narrative directs attention to the disempowerment experienced by rural populations who, once self-sufficient, are now reduced to recipients of charity. Expressions such as "had become recipients of charities" and "could no longer produce food" reveal a shift in agency from active producers to passive dependents, thereby marking a collapse of both economic independence and cultural identity. The stylistic focus on action processes, what people used to do (e.g., produce food, give gifts to visitors), compared to what they can no longer do, sharpens the sense of dispossession.

The use of the word "disfiguration" evokes a visual and almost surgical sense of damage, suggesting that the landscape has been deliberately altered, scarred, or deformed. In Hallidayan terms, the processes that contribute to this 'disfigurations' are largely relational and existential. The region "had a new face" (relational), and the signs "were already there" (existential), setting up a narrative of progressive decay. These grammatical choices locate damage not just in specific events but in the state of being— "being sick," "being disfigured"—and suggest an ongoing systemic collapse rather than a single catastrophe. Clauses like "our people watch their waters turn to poison, their land become crust... and the air become hot" use intransitive material processes with affected entities (waters, land, air) as

subjects. These processes display the environment as undergoing transformation, but crucially, without an explicit actor. The agents of harm are either implied or obscured, a pattern common in discourse that seeks to normalise structural violence (Stibbe, 2021). When agency is attributed, it is framed in strong adversarial terms as in: "the hands that want to strangle them." This metaphorical material process shifts the discussion into the realm of intentional violence, restoring a sense of human agency behind the environmental harm. The actor, though abstracted as "hands", suggests a deliberate campaign of suffocation, not just incidental damage. This clause becomes ideologically charged, implying that environmental collapse is the result of planned extraction policies rather than accidental consequences.

Furthermore, the expression, "The oil companies are discovering more oil onshore and offshore" presents oil companies as active agents in material processes of discovery and exploitation. Though the process itself (discovering) is neutral in tone, its placement in the causal sequence leading to *disaster* embeds it in a broader narrative of harm. This clause is followed immediately by the prediction: "We are in for disaster, if nothing is done…", a construction that removes agency again by using a passive existential structure, which reflects the pervasive sense of helplessness in environmental discourse. The Activist's call to "force the oil companies and the Federal Military Government to start doing something" reintroduces agency to the local population. This shift, where "we, the owners of the place" become actors, contrasts sharply with earlier clauses where locals were "watching" but "doing nothing." Through these transitions, Ojaide moves between material processes of decay and projected material action, thereby representing both environmental destruction and the potential for political resistance.

Finally, the relational clause, "The paradise of the olden days was degenerating fast into a kind of hell", captures the broader ecological narrative through metaphorical transformation. This process is not tied to a clear actor; instead, it suggests a structural inevitability, precisely, the kind of ideological framing that ecostylistic analysis works to unpack. In sum, the transitivity choices in this novel depict environmental violence as both visible and obscured, with Ojaide using patterns of agency and process type to navigate between mourning, blame, and mobilisation. The loss of the Niger Delta's ecology is represented not only as physical destruction but as a kind of existential undoing of place, identity, and future.

Appraisal and Attitudinal Language

Evaluative expressions construct emotional and moral responses to ecological loss. The emotional charge in this rhetorical question— "How can reducing a once self-reliant people to a dependent population be a sign of development?"— acts as a powerful judgment of social and economic systems that disguise exploitation as progress. Using Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal framework, the passage relies on affective and evaluative language to reject the dominant discourse of oil-fuelled modernity. The implied irony in the term "development" critiques narratives that equate extractive capitalism with progress, exposing the asymmetry between external profit and internal loss.

Ojaide constructs a powerful visual and emotional contrast between the past and present condition of the Niger Delta, using stylistic devices that frame environmental degradation as both personal and communal trauma. The narrator's reference to the region's "new face, an ugly or rather sick face" immediately personifies the landscape, transforming it into a living body that bears visible wounds. This metaphorical framing is central to the ecostylistic representation of environmental loss, where the land is not a passive setting but a participant in the social and ecological drama (Stibbe, 2021; Bloor & Bloor, 2007; Mohamed & Jaafar, 2023). The shift from "pristine" to "sick" indexes a deeper narrative of violation and transformation, aligning environmental disfigurement with moral and cultural decay.

The Activist offers a layered ecostylistic account of how environmental and economic collapse translates into cultural and moral disintegration. Ojaide frames crime not as a deviation from social norms but as a distorted adaptation to a ruined socio-ecological order. The linguistic representation of the "area boys" avoids crude demonization of the Area Boys. Instead, the description "not mindless robbers but hardened locals" introduces a subtle evaluative shift, presenting them as morally ambiguous products of a failing system. This choice reflects what Martin and White (2005) identify as *graduation* in appraisal theory: the narrator's language modulates intensity and judgement, framing the young men's violence as a symptom, not merely a choice.

The moral confusion is made explicit in the phrase "their morality and ethics were convoluted by the socio-economic dictates of the time." Here, Ojaide uses abstract nominalisation (morality, ethics, socio-economic dictates) to foreground structural forces over individual agency. From a transitivity perspective (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hong & Wang, 2022), the clause structure obscures clear causality, suggesting that morality itself is passively reshaped by context. This passivisation implies helplessness or loss of control—a discursive technique that heightens the sense of systemic breakdown. Moreover, the phrase: "take on the outsider" introduces a binary of insider/outsider that reflects the territorial logic of environmental dispossession. The land, once communally held, has become economically fractured, producing an adversarial stance toward anyone perceived as external. Thus, this passage encodes more than criminality; it indexes the collapse of cultural ethics that once regulated resource use, hospitality, and communal survival

Metaphor and Personification

While petroleum production has enriched multinational companies and elite actors, it has impoverished rural communities through oil spills, gas flaring, and land alienation (Emuedo & Abam, 2015; Atonye, 2023; Ikenga, et. al., 2022). These environmental consequences have had direct implications for indigenous cultural practices, especially those tied to land, water, and agriculture. *The Activist* captures this dual crisis of ecological degradation and cultural erosion, not only through narrative events but also through patterned language use that encodes loss, resistance, and redefinition. The Niger Delta's physical environment functions not only as a geographical setting in *The Activist* but also a linguistic symbol of cultural identity.

Ojaide metaphorizes the land as a violated body. He constructs a strong link between land and selfhood, where rivers, mangroves, and shrines represent communal memory and ancestral authority. As environmental degradation intensifies, these landmarks become symbols of dispossession, invoking what Basso (1996) describes as the loss of "place-making"—the process by which cultural identity is inscribed into the landscape. Ojaide's language foregrounds this spatial dislocation through repeated references to desecrated sites. The novel describes villages submerged by oil floods and flares, sacred groves cleared by bulldozers, and ancestral lands fenced off by multinational companies. These are not merely acts of physical destruction; they constitute what Lefebvre (1991) terms the "production of space" under capitalism, where spaces once associated with cultural meaning are repurposed for industrial profit.

Moreover, the linguistic encoding of place is often tied to affective registers. The narrative voice and those of various characters often employ elegiac tones, metaphors of mourning, and lexical patterns of nostalgia. These stylistic features elevate the landscape from background to central protagonist, embodying both cultural identity and its dissolution. Such representations position the landscape as a linguistic and ideological site of struggle. In this way, Ojaide's stylistic portrayal of place challenges the erasure of indigenous landscapes by making them linguistically visible, emotionally resonant, and culturally indispensable. Language becomes a means of reclaiming territory—not just in the material sense but in the cultural and epistemic sense as well.

Ojaide constructs the Niger Delta landscape as both a material space and a symbolic site of contestation. Linguistically, the land is often described in terms of depletion and disfigurement. Verbs such as choke, bleed, and wither are used metaphorically in the text to describe rivers, farmlands, and forests. This lexical patterning suggests a semantic shift where once-sacred ecological entities are now marked by suffering. The language of injury is pervasive, portraying the environment not as a neutral background but as an actor that bears the brunt of exploitation. Cultural dislocation is marked through the loss of indigenous knowledge systems. Ojaide indexes this loss by highlighting the breakdown of intergenerational transmission. Young people are portrayed as increasingly alienated from local practices, rituals, and idioms. For example, Vhopen has become a Christian, so "he no longer sings the songs of his father", a leading performer and composer in his quarters. He struggled so much to find the song of his father to sing, "he had lost his father's talent". Through the careful use of naming and lexical contrasts, the text contrasts older ecological registers, e.g., names of rivers, trees, deities, and crops, with newer, abstracted terms associated with urban life and global capital. The symbolic weight of this lexical shift is considerable: what was once rooted in community-specific meanings is replaced by economic terminologies that universalise and erase local identity.

Moreover, the use of metaphor and naming work ideologically together in the novel to signal cultural erosion. The land is often personified as a maternal figure, whose body is violated by oil drills and pipelines. This maternal metaphor does more than aestheticise loss; it serves as a moral indictment of the commodification of land. Naming practices in the text reflect similar

tensions. Place names carry historical and spiritual associations, yet they are frequently overwritten by commercial labels, as in the renaming of traditional fishing grounds into oil blocks. These stylistic choices create a discursive landscape where language itself becomes a site of resistance and mourning. In this way, Ojaide's *The Activist* functions not just as environmental fiction but as an ecostylistic artefact. The novel encodes environmental and cultural knowledge through its lexical and metaphorical patterns, making the Niger Delta both a geographical and linguistic space of struggle.

The phrase, "witness the wake of a destructive hurricane", introduces an extreme natural image to describe man-made devastation. This is an ecological metaphor that universalises the scale of destruction while implicitly critiquing the forces behind it. In ecolinguistic terms, this is a "story of destruction" (Stibbe, 2021), which replaces indigenous stories of harmony and interdependence. The hyperbolic scale, "child's play compared to now", further amplifies the sense of irreversible loss and positions the activist's return as a moment of both revelation and reckoning.

Intertextuality and Indigenous Knowledge

Ojaide integrates indigenous ecological worldviews, proverbs and references to deities and ritual practices into the narrative, thus embedding traditional ecological knowledge into the narrative. These intertextual insertions are not decorative; they serve as a counter-discourse to Western industrial modernity. For example, the frequent invocation of the river goddess and ancestral spirits grounds the environmental crisis within a cosmological framework that reinforces cultural identity (Egya, 2016). Ojaide maps the image of Ebi rising from the water as Mami Wata at the cove that is not yet marred by the oil water unto the water goddess which is to show the limitation of culture to a very small portion of the community at the very extreme end. Together, these stylistic features constitute a coherent ecostylistic texture that encodes the dual degradation of land and culture. They make visible the linguistic strategies by which literature participates in ecological and cultural advocacy.

The reference to indigenous food items (plantains, yams, beans, cassava, palm oil, and garri) carries more than nutritional value; it encodes cultural memory and ecological identity. These foods represent ties to land, tradition, and kinship practices that are now under threat. Their disappearance from local production, replaced by economic dependence on remittances, signals the erosion of a self-sustaining ecological knowledge system. In Stibbe's (2021) terms, this is a displacement of the "story we live by," where cultural stewardship of land has been replaced by narratives of dependency and commodification. The absence of an explicit agent behind the destruction phrases like "it was only the outsiders that gained" adds to the structural critique, as the damage is portrayed as systematic and externally orchestrated. Thus, the stylistic choices in the novel not only narrate ecological damage but also index the decline of cultural dignity, linguistic heritage, and community resilience.

There is a key moment in *The Activist* where Ojaide deploys musical intertextuality to connect the political consciousness of the protagonist with Nigeria's broader cultural memory. The reference to Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a figure emblematic of resistance against state violence and

postcolonial corruption, operates not merely as a cultural nod but as an intertextual anchor that situates the novel within a lineage of protest art. The recognition of Fela's song *Shakara Woman* amidst a soundscape, blending "traditional and modern types of music", mirrors the novel's thematic tension between continuity and disruption. Fela's music goes beyond entertainment; it serves as a form of protest, social satire, and political commentary. By aligning the protagonist's admiration with Fela's radical stance, Ojaide subtly casts The Activist himself as a cultural heir to Nigeria's dissident tradition. This intertextual strategy allows the text to draw on Fela's ethos without narratively restating it; the political force of the music enters the scene as ambient sound, shaping the mood and ideology of the setting.

Moreover, Fela's music embodies a fusion of "traditional and borrowed musical techniques," which resonates with the novel's broader aesthetic strategy: combining indigenous idioms with contemporary narrative forms. This mirrors the structure of the Niger Delta's own socio-political reality, where traditional knowledge and modern struggles coexist, collide, and reshape each other. It also echoes the ecological theme of hybridity and adaptation in response to environmental and cultural threat. Importantly, the phrase "assaulting the ears" introduces an ironic contrast. The overwhelming noise environment points to sensory overload, possibly reflecting the fragmented and chaotic state of postcolonial identity. Yet, within that cacophony, Fela's "irrepressible voice" stands out both in memory and ideology. This suggests that amidst cultural disorientation, certain indigenous-modern hybrids retain clarity, coherence, and resistance, just like The Activist himself, an academic with an indigenous flavour. Through this reference, Ojaide engages intertextual memory not simply to enrich the setting but to position *The Activist* in a cultural-political lineage of protest, fusion, and resilience. In ecostylistic terms, the moment affirms that cultural survival is not only a matter of preserving traditions but of reactivating them in new forms to meet contemporary crises.

The invocation of "Egba", "the god of war, revenge, and restitution", as a structuring force in the moral and ideological framework of *The Activist* foregrounds the presence of indigenous religious belief. The narrative does not treat "Egba" as mere folklore; instead, it functions as a cultural reference point that legitimises acts of resistance by the "Area Boys". The Area Boys are fighters trying to reclaim what was robbed from them back in their way. These sets of people were a transformation from a group called Boma boys, which was disbanded during the Civil War. They are the ones who morphed to become the Area Boys or the Egba Boys, because of their allegiance is to Egba, the god of war. Through this intertextual strategy, Ojaide inserts indigenous cosmology into the ethical terrain of the novel, offering a spiritual logic that competes with both state law and Western human rights discourse. The naming of the "Area Boys" as "Egba Boys" serves a dual purpose: it ties their identity to indigenous cosmological authority and frames their violent actions as culturally sanctioned acts of justice rather than mere criminality. This naming is not metaphorical—it is ontological. It reclaims indigenous epistemology as an active force in how violence, justice, and memory are constructed and interpreted within the community. In this sense, "Egba" is not just a deity but an ideological lens: a symbol of redress in a context where formal justice systems have failed.

The clause which describes "Egba" has a god who "helped his devotees to take back what had been forcibly taken from them" uses a material process to reinforce the idea of reclamation. The god is represented as an enabling force for agency, positioning the activities of the "Area Boys", however violent, not as random acts but as culturally coherent responses to historical dispossession. From an ecostylistic point of view, this illustrates how indigenous belief systems can be mobilised to reinscribe moral order in a disordered landscape. It also reflects the interplay between fear and reverence that often characterises traditional deities in oral cultures. Egba is "feared" and evokes "mass hysteria," yet he is invoked here not to suppress but to authorise resistance. This duality mirrors the ecological condition of the Niger Delta: simultaneously rich and ruined, sacred and defiled. By linking the Area Boys to Egba, the novel fuses cultural memory with present-day resistance, challenging external narratives that flatten indigenous practices into either barbarism or exoticism. In short, intertextual reference to indigenous spirituality is not just as cultural detail but as a narrative strategy to revalidate local agency in the face of extractive violence. Egba becomes both symbol and system, an indigenous grammar of justice through which land, power, and memory are contested.

Lexical Choices and Ideological Framing

As the physical and symbolic landscape of the Niger Delta deteriorates under the weight of industrial encroachment, *The Activist* enacts a form of resistance through language. The novel recuperates cultural memory not by recounting a static past but by embedding it in a dynamic linguistic framework that affirms collective identity. This resistance is stylistic and ideological, achieved through the deliberate retention and revitalisation of indigenous linguistic forms. Ojaide's integration of proverbs, oral chants, and ritual idioms acts as a textual archive of pre-colonial and pre-extractive cultural knowledge. These elements counteract the homogenising force of global capitalism that seeks to render local cultures obsolete. Their presence within the narrative is not nostalgic; it is insurgent. As Zawada (2019) notes, linguistic resistance in ecostylistics involves deploying language not only to critique environmental harm but to reassert silenced worldviews. These naming strategies always reflect ideological stances.

Characters in the novel often speak in hybrid registers, blending standard English with Pidgin and indigenous expressions. This multilingual layering resists linguistic hegemony and aligns with Pennycook's (2010) description of "language as a local practice." The heteroglossic texture of the text thus resists epistemic colonisation and reaffirms a plural cultural identity that is deeply embedded in place. In moments of narrative climax, such as the confrontations between activists and oil executives, the characters' speech shifts to heightened, poetic diction, rich in metaphor and repetition. These linguistic intensifications are stylistic acts of defiance, anchoring the political struggle in cultural rhetoric. Here, language does more than communicate; it performs resistance. Through these strategies, *The Activist* reclaims linguistic space as cultural space and refuses the erasure of memory by making speech itself a site of contestation. In doing so, it affirms the power of language not only to document but to defend the landscapes of identity.

The lexical field in the text is particularly charged. Words such as "hustling," "blackmail," "extortion," and "harassment" are strategically employed layered with local and global meanings. These terms operate both as criminal categories and as survival strategies, showing how collapsed ecological and economic systems have birthed new, fractured moral economies. The repetition of "they" as agent reinforces a collective identity referring to the Area Boys, yet the text avoids celebration or condemnation. Instead, there is a stylistic oscillation between empathy and critique. This is typical of what Stibbe (2021) calls "ambivalent stories," which resist simple ideological framing but still expose the systemic pressures behind destructive behaviour. The mention of "a tug-of-war" subtly repositions the environmental struggle as a political and ideological contest. The Activist's unexpected alliances with new partners signals a shifting terrain of resistance. Though understated, the phrase suggests that the environmental crisis has also generated a new form of collective identity, a theme central to the ecostylistic concern with how language constructs subject positions and social agency (Goatly, 2007). Ojaide's diction here collapses spatial, emotional, and ecological distance, creating a voice of witness that blends environmental mourning with political consciousness.

Ojaide uses a marked vocabulary that maps environmental destruction onto a field of violence and loss. Terms such as "the desolation of the water," "soot-black rain," and "brackish water" not only describe ecological damage but evoke a linguistic landscape of injury and mourning. These lexical choices construct the Niger Delta not just as an environmental crisis zone but as a wounded cultural space. This lexical field echoes what Stibbe (2021) describes as "stories we live by," in which recurring linguistic patterns reflect shared ecological narratives.

Summary

Ojaide's novel functions as an ecolinguistic resistance text, using linguistic features to reframe the Niger Delta not only as an ecological disaster zone but also as a cultural battleground. Transitivity patterns assign clear blame, metaphors rehumanize nature, and intertextual references revive indigenous environmental ethics. By positioning language as a site of ideological struggle, *The Activist* challenges dominant discourses of progress and development and instead promotes a worldview rooted in ecological balance and cultural memory. Through these stylistic choices, Ojaide shows how language becomes a site where environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and socio-political fragmentation intersect. The discourse does not simply *describe* brokenness, but performs it, reproducing the fractured moral and ecological landscape of the Niger Delta in its structure and tone.

Conclusion

This study has shown how an ecostylistic reading of *The Activist* reveals the intricate relationship between linguistic form, ecological consciousness, and cultural identity. Through the tools of SFL and ecolinguistics, it becomes evident that Ojaide not only narrates environmental destruction but actively contests it through language. The findings reaffirm the significance of linguistic analysis in environmental humanities and highlight the role of African literature in articulating sustainable and culturally grounded ecological imaginaries.

References

Abhon, A. & Woforodo, V. J. (2024). A Review of the effect of oil pollution on wildlife and biodiversity conservation in Niger Delta. *Nigeria International Journal of Innovative Scientific & Engineering Technologies Research*, 12(2), 43 – 59. https://www.seahipublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IJISETR-J-6-2024.pdf

Alu, N. A. & Suwa, V. Y. (2012). Tanure Ojaide: The poet-priest of the Niger-Delta and the land saga. *AFRREV LALIGENS*, 1(1), 132–144. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/laligens/article/download/107926/97759/0

Atonye, D. J. J. (2023). Acute health effects of crude oil spill in a rural community in Bonny, Rivers State, Nigeria. *Central Asian Journal of Medical and Natural Science*, 4(2), 244-259. Retrieved from https://cajmns.centralasianstudies.org/index.php/CAJMNS/article/view/1406

Bal, M. & van Boheemen, C. (2009). *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative*. University of Toronto Press. https://books.google.com.ng/books?id=jPj4Bq0H4JoC

Basso, K. H. (1996). *Wisdom sits in places: Landscape and language among the Western Apache*. University of New Mexico Press.

Bloor, T. & Bloor, M. (2007). *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203775660

Chukwu, R. N. & Onyekachi E. (2020). The battered hearts that throb in agony. *Forum for World Literature Studies*, 12(4), 568-586.

Douthwaite, J., Virdis, D. F. & Zurru, E. (2017). *The Stylistics of landscapes, the landscapes of stylistics*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Egya, S. E. (2016). Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and the rhetoric of environmentalism. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 53(1), 144–155. https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.53i1.2

Emuedo, C. & Abam, E. (2015). Oil, land alienation and impoverishment in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *European Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 3(2), 8 – 23.

Esamagu, B. O. (2024). Niger Delta poetry and traumatic inscriptions: A reading of Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*. *Àgídìgbo: ABUAD Journal of the Humanities*, 12(2), 522–539. https://journals.abuad.edu.ng/index.php/agidigbo/article/download/1172/654/4637

Fill, A., & Mühlhausler, P. (Eds.). (2001). *The ecolinguistics reader: Language, ecology and environment*. Continuum.

Goatly, A. (2007). *Washing the brain: Metaphor and hidden ideology*. John Benjamins.

Goatly, A. (2017). The poems of Edward Thomas: A case study in ecostylistics. In J. Douthwaite, D. F. Virdis & E. Zurru (Eds.). *The stylistics of landscapes, the landscapes of stylistics*. John Benjamins. pp 95–122.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Hong, Y. & Wang, C. (2022). A study of nominalization in the abstracts of linguistic academic papers. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 12(4), 11 – 15 https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v12n4p11

Ikenga, F. A., Edo, Z. & Ighoshemu, B. O. (2022). Good governance and the sustainable development of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: assessing the impact of government interventionist agencies. *Journal of Danubian Studies and Research,* 12(1), 251-274 Retrieved from https://dj.univ-danubius.ro/index.php/JDSR/article/view/2230

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell.

Martin, J. R. & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mohamed, Z. A. & Jaafar, E. A. (2023). An ecostylistic analysis of selected extracts from Michael Punke's novel. *The Revenant, Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(1), 1 – 15. DOI: 10.1080/23311983.2023.2244209.

Ndubuisi, P. K. (2017). The aesthetics of social responsibility: A study of Tanure Ojaide's *The Tale of The Harmattan*. *The Creative Artist*, 11(2), 136–150.

https://www.ajol.info/index.php/cajtms/article/view/175679/165104

Nwagbara, U. (2010). Poetics of resistance: Ecocritical reading of Ojaide's 'Delta Blues & Home Songs' and 'Daydream of Ants and Other Poem. *African Study Monographs*, 31(1), 17-30.

Obakachi, A. A. (2023). A comparative study of environmental struggles in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Marilyn Dumont of First Nations (Canada). *International Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics (IJLLL)*, 6(1), 1-14.

Ojaide, T. (2015). *The activist*. African Heritage Press.

Okonta, I. & Douglas, O. (2003). *Where vultures feast: Shell, human rights, and oil in the Niger Delta*. Sierra Club Books.

Pennycook, A. (2010). *Language as a local practice*. Routledge.

Stibbe, A. (2021). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by*. (2nd ed.) Routledge.

Titus, O. S. (2021). Music and poetry representations of oil exploration, honey bee (dis)placement and endangerment in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. *Bee World*. https://www.acls.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Music-and-Poetry-Representations-of-Oil.pdf

Virdis, D. F. (2022). *Ecological stylistics: Ecostylistic approaches to discourses of nature, the environment and sustainability*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Watts, M. (2004). Resource curse? Governmentality, oil and power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Geopolitics*, 9(1), 50–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040412331307832

Zawada, B. (2019). Towards an ecostylistics: Emergent themes in stylistics and ecolinguistics. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus*, 58, 183–199. https://doi.org/10.5842/58-0-831