

# Morphological Coinages and Compounding in New Nigerian Poetry: A Reading of the Poetry of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare

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## Abstract

Extant studies on the poetry of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare have largely concentrated on socio-political and environmental issues as well as the authors' deployment of folk traditions. This study, however, focuses on the stylistic use of morphological coinages and compoundings by Ushie and Osundare in their poetry. Applying the Morphological concepts of coinage and compounding, this study identifies and explicates the purposes served by such techniques and their effects on the selected authors' poetic finesse. The study finds that, in order to convey specific meanings or articulate distinctive indigenous ideas, the Nigerian poets under study employ deliberate lexical innovations, including coinages and compounding. The study reveals that much of the laudable poetic aura attributable to Osundare's and Ushie's poetic works derives partly from their punchy explication of issues through distinctive morphological experimentation. The implication is that besides enriching meaning and aesthetics, this morphological experimentation positively impacts the Nigerian poetry.

**Keywords:** Morphological coinages, Compounding, New Nigerian Poetry, Nigerian English Lexicon

## Introduction

Literary engagements have played a pivotal role in the enrichment and expansion of the lexicons of many languages in the world. Through the activities of creative writers, new words and expressions are created and subsequently incorporated into many languages. This process is typically characterised by the coining and compounding of new lexicons or 'nonce words', which involves the invention of a new word to describe a particular situation or experience for which no adequate term previously existed. Such 'nonce words', according to Maledo (2021, p. 12), "are created by a speaker or writer on the spur of the moment to cover some immediate needs." Nonce words are related to the notions of morphological creativity and productivity. Bauer (2001, p. 15) defines morphological creativity as the ability of the native speaker to extend the language system in a motivated and unpredictable (non-rule-governed) way, in contrast with productivity, which is instead defined as a rule-governed innovation. This even applies to the ability of a non-native speaker of a language to create new morphological entities that are rare and not rule-bound but are meaningful and can be incorporated into the language. Next to

morphological creativity is productivity, which "is understood as the possibility for language users to coin unintentionally unaccountable number of morphological complex words" (Maledo, 2021, p. 13). It is worth noting that while morphological productivity adheres to the rules of word formation in a language, morphological creativity is far more an experimental process which often violates the rules of word formation but by so doing create a recognisable word that has meaning. However, both linguistic activities have the capacity to generate and integrate new words into the lexicon of a language.

In spite of the enormity of the task of standardizing the Nigerian Variety of the English Language, and the inability of Nigerian linguists to actualize it, Nigerian scholars, poets, and authors have aggressively engaged words and expressions with nuances peculiar to the Nigerian context. With this, they deliberately invent new words (coinages) or create new shades meaning from existing words by joining two words (compounding) to appropriately capture their thoughts and express exactly what they feel. They have also tried to capture and express unique experiences from the Nigerian context in a manner that such can be easily understood by Nigerians,

who largely constitute their primary audience. This paper addresses the following objectives: to identify the ways and manner in which Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie have utilized morphological coinages and compounding in their poetry, to examine the purposes served by such poetic style, and its implications for Nigerian poetry and the development of a standard variety of the Nigerian English. To this end, the key research questions to be addressed in the paper are: to what extent are the linguistic concepts of morphological coinage and compounding deployed in the poetry of Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie?; what purposes are they deployed to serve by these poets?; and what impact do emergent Nigerian poetic styles have on Nigerian English, Nigerian poetry, and the broader global development of poetry and language use?

The paper is arranged into five sections. The first part is the introduction, where the main issues of the paper are highlighted. This is followed by a section that explains the notions of morphological coinage and compounding, which are the linguistic frameworks that would provide the guiding principles to be applied in the study. Next is a discussion on the use of morphological coinages and

compounding as a distinct style in the poetry of Niyi Osundare, followed by a part that dwells on the poetry of Joe Ushie. The last part is the conclusion, in which the major points raised in the paper are reiterated.

### **Morphological Coinage and Compounding**

Morphology may be referred to as the study of the internal framework of the smallest independent unit of a language, called words. It is a Greek compound word that is made up of 'Morph', which means 'shape or form', and 'ology', which means 'to study'. It is a sub-discipline of linguistics that was first named in 1859 by a German linguist, August Schleicher (the University of Sheffield, 2023). It is a level of language description that explores all the intricacies and processes involved in word creation and formation. It also explores the different word formation processes like coinages and compounding.

Schmid (2015) posits that form 'morphos' assesses the internal constituents and shape of lexemes as well as the model, and rules underlying their arrangement. By doing this, morphology resides at the conventional border between grammar (the rule-based generative aspect of a language)

and the lexicon (the unique, memorized aspect). Morphology examines two aspects of a linguistic symbol, structure and significance, blending them to explain both the constituent elements of words and the principles governing word formation. These principles involve varying ways used to generate new words by utilizing existing words and morphemes, including compounding, which involves combining two or more words to create a new complex lexeme.

Further, Oiry (2009) asserts that the morpheme is a unit of study in forms of words; therefore, a morpheme represents the tiniest unit of meaning in a word – essentially, the smallest fragment of a word that adds significance to the overall meaning of the word. He further identified two types of morphemes, the free and the bound morphemes. The free morphemes refer to morphemes that are independent and can stand on their own, while bound morphemes are morphemes that are dependent on the free morphemes. The distinction between the free and bound morphemes is important in word formation processes, because new words are created mostly by adding bound morphemes to free morphemes, especially in the English language.

English, a West Germanic language, originated with the arrival of Germanic invaders from present-day northwestern Germany, the Netherlands, and southern Denmark to the British Isles (Mijwe, 2018). It initially comprised of different dialects, among which West Saxon was particularly prominent. It was later influenced significantly by the Scandinavian conquerors, who established a Danelagh of Danelaw in the North and East of England, where their laws prevailed over the Anglo-Saxons. Also, migrations from Germanic and Norman groups during the 8th to the 11th centuries further shaped the language. As a result, today's English language vocabulary is a fusion of influences from Scandinavia and continental Europe, France, and other countries, and the language is widely recognized as a global language today, boasting of an extensive lexicon that bigger than that of any other languages. Its abundant vocabulary effectively covers social and technical contexts due to the various word formation processes like 'Borrowing', 'Coinages', and 'Compounding', obtainable in the flexible processes of the language's morphology. Shobha and Singh(2021, p. 29) gave examples of a few English expressions and words that materialized because of the aforementioned

processes, especially compounding and borrowing, such as: cigar (Spanish), amen (Hebrew), ski (Norwegian), sauna (Finnish), mammoth (Russian) paprika (Hungarian), marmalade (Portuguese), turban (Turkish), divan (Persian), tea (Chinese), judo and jujitsu (Japanese), ketchup (Malay), taboo and tattoo (Polynesian), mumbo-jumbo and voodoo (African languages), hammock, hurricane, and tobacco (Caribbean).

Compound words are mostly a concatenation of borrowed words, which are also free morphemes, and English words to form a separate, although related meaning from each of the free morphemes in the compound. The fusion of words from the vocabularies of other countries and the English language is also one of the major processes of word formation in Nigerian English. Nigerian English is the variety of the English language used in Nigeria, a West African country. Characterised by multilingual speech communities due to the impact of colonialization, the English used in various regions of Nigeria, rich in their own peculiar culture and language has a superfluous vocabulary and unlimited word formation processes.

### **Morphological Coinages**

Language, as a dynamic entity, constantly adapts to the evolving needs

of communication. One remarkable linguistic phenomenon that exemplifies this adaptability is morphological coinage, a process through which new words are ingeniously crafted by altering the structure of existing ones. This method allows speakers to express novel ideas and concepts by tapping into their linguistic repertoires. Morphological coinages underscore the creative potential embedded within language, and shed light on the intricate ways in which words are born. They involve manipulating the morphology of a word to produce new lexical items. Unlike the wholesale creation in borrowing, coinage capitalizes on the amalgamation of familiar elements to forge something entirely new. For instance, neologisms are created through coinage and possess a sense of novelty while carrying an inherent connection to their parent words.

Morphological coinage encompasses various mechanisms, each reflected within a linguistic landscape in distinctive ways. One such mechanism is compounding, where two or more independent words are combined to form a new word. For instance, the word, "webinar", referring to the concept of online seminars, is born out of the fusion of "web" and "seminar".

Blending, is another mechanism, which involves merging parts of two or more words to create a new term. The word, "Brunch," formed by blending "breakfast" and "lunch", which illustrates how language adapts to the modern pace of life. Clipping, another coinage mechanism, is the process of shortening a word to produce a compact, and yet impactful coinage; "phone" from "telephone" and "ad" from "advertisement" exemplify the efficiency of this mechanism. Further, the mechanism of backformation flips the usual process of coinage by deriving a new word from an existing one through the removal of affixes. The emergence of "edit" from "editor," or "televise" from "television," showcases this mechanism's transformative potential. The English language is filled with many morphological coinages that have seamlessly been integrated into everyday speech. "Selfie," a compound blending of "self" and "photograph", showcases self-documentation trends in the digital age.

"Bromance," a blend of "brother" and "romance," captures the unique camaraderie among male friends. Morphological coinages contribute to the English lexicon's dynamism, providing an avenue for linguistic innovation. They enhance the ever-

expanding scope of human experiences, granting speakers the means to articulate nuances that traditional words might fail to capture. As societies evolve, morphological coinages facilitate the adaptation of language to modern realities.

### **Morphological Compounding**

Compounding is a major word formation process. Schmid (2015) defines it as a process of combining at least two independent lexical morphemes or simple lexemes to create a more complex lexeme. Compounds can be distinguished from syntactic phrases by several criteria: they typically bear primary stress on the first constituent and are lexicalized, with meanings that extend beyond the literal sum of their parts. Morphologically, two-lexeme compounds are termed root compounds and classified by the word classes of their constituents, whereas those incorporating bound morphemes alongside free ones are known as synthetic compounds.

However, while some compounds are obvious in their morphological makeup, and in some cases present as "N+N" (Noun + Noun = backyard), "V+N" (Verb + Noun = Danceroom), and so on, Roig-Marín(2021) posited that most

compounds in the English Language do not carry an obvious structure in their morphological composition but are formed through blending as the case with many neologisms. As new words, neologisms are documented in dictionaries to further enrich the vocabulary of the English language. Booij (2007) affirms that the boundary between derivation and compounding is often blurred, noting that construction morphology operates within a hierarchical lexicon comprising general word-formation schemas and their specific instances. This framework allows for intermediate levels between individual words and abstract schemas, enabling generalizations about complex words and explaining how affixes may emerge from compounding patterns. In compounding, the combination of words and stems as lexical elements may be generated in three different ways: open compound words with spaces between the words (*ice cream*), closed compound words with no spaces (*firefighter*), and hyphenated compound words (*up-to-date*) (Ellis, 2022). A compound word has its own different meaning that is entirely different from the meanings of the words it is made up of. This is related to portmanteau words, also known as blended words, which are derived from using parts of some words

to make up another word. For instance, the word 'internet' is derived from two words-'interconnected' and 'network.' Portmanteau words are formed by blending segments of two or more words (Ellis, 2022). The central question in interpreting compounds is how to determine the relationship between the two components. The possible interpretations range from compounding rules, component semantics, to context of use, which their relative importance has been widely debated. Schmid (2015) posits that in terms of morphological form, if compounds consist of nothing else than two lexemes, they are commonly called root compounds and described in terms of the word classes of their constituents. Compounds containing bound morphemes in addition to free ones are known as synthetic compounds. The most frequent and productive types of compounds in terms of morphological components are:

- 1) Nominal compounds with the formulas: N+N (Noun + Noun), Adj + N (Adjective +Noun), and V + ING (Verb + ing).
- 2) Adjectival Compounds with the formulars: N + Adj, N + (V + ing), Adj + (V + ing)

True verbal compounds, i.e., complex lexemes with verbs as heads which are

formed through compounding, do not seem to exist in English or are in any case very rare, but may exist in other languages.

Compounds are complex lexemes composed of at least two free morphemes. Root compounds consist of free morphemes, typically nominal or adjectival, while synthetic compounds incorporate bound morphemes. Endocentric compounds contain a head constituent, as in 'doorbell', which functions as a hyponym of bell. Exocentric compounds are those whose meanings are not determined by a head constituent but lie outside the literal interpretation of the compound; for instance, 'scarecrow' does not denote a type of crow. Compounds can exhibit a variety of internal relations, and the types of semantic structures and internal relations that can be realized by compounds are virtually unlimited.

Also, morphological coinage is a testament to the versatility and resilience of human language; it represents the capacity to reshape existing words into new forms, thus demonstrating the boundless creativity of human expression. Through compounding, blending, clipping, and backformation, language users continually contribute to the vibrant

tapestry of linguistic evolution. Morphological coinage exemplifies language's living nature; it projects language as that which evolves alongside the society it serves. Building on the foregoing, this study examines the morphological coinages in the poetry of Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie, with particular attention to the types of morphological compounds they employ, including nominal, adjectival, endocentric, and exocentric forms (Schmid, 2015). The study further interprets the morphological coinages and compounds within the socio-economic and political contexts of the poems, highlighting their functions, the procedures of their formation, and their semantic significance. It also examines how these creative morphological strategies reflect Nigerian society and contribute to the emergence of a new poetic tradition in the Nigerian literary landscape.

### **The Poetry of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare**

Hardly can anyone be said to have effectively discussed Nigerian poetry without mentioning Joe Ushie, whose remarkable foray into poetry began in 1992 with the publication of his collection entitled *Popular Stand*. Regarded as a poet who is "overtly

abreast with the political history and evolution of Nigeria [ and one whose] voice is national in appeal and multi-dimensional in orientation" (Nwosu, 2011, p. 356), Ushie is perhaps one notable Nigerian poet who has bestrode the Nigerian poetic thoroughfare with a kind of creative fanfare that is charged with immeasurable angst and a mood that induces deep contemplation on the ever ricocheting socio-political incidences and events that have characterized life in contemporary Nigeria. His poetry has attracted a good number of critical engagements. In a recent study, Maledo (2021, p. 13), classified Ushie among Nigeria's "third generation poets who started in the early 1970s through the early 1990s when "the fortunes of Nigeria as a nation began to decline with serious social, economic and political problems [and these poets] see it as their responsibility to document, expose, criticise and satirise the ills and injustices plaguing Nigeria as a nation." Third generation poets in Nigeria act as the society's watchdog by conscientizing the people and checkmating the actions and activities of those entrusted with public leadership through their poetry.

As Edung (2020, p. 139) notes, "Ushie's poetry has received considerable critical

attention. A good part of this attention has been focused on themes which include principally the socio-political, the socio-economic and the environmental malaise experienced mainly in his native Nigeria and in Africa at large" so in order to chart a new empirical course, he carried out a semiotystylistic study of Ushie poetry thereby demonstrating that Ushie communicates his messages through patterns created with meaningful language units. According to Udoiwang and Akpen (2023, p. 343), Ushie is a revolutionary poet whose "poetic oeuvre constitutes a potent weapon for the overthrow of the unfeeling, inept and repressive social systems that define postmodern socio-political order." For them, Ushie utilizes the resources of poetry to carry out the functions of a socio-political crusader. Ukeme and Orhero (2019, p. 115) investigated the use of satire in Ushie's poetry and concluded that as a notable satirist, he uses pun, ridicule, sarcasm, farce, innuendo, irony, travesty, and their satirical tools to pursue his quest for change despite the prevailing upheavals hindering national growth and development in Nigeria. Furthermore, though Maledo's (2021) study focuses on the morphological resources in

Ushie's poetry, its emphasis is on general morphological innovations like affixation, blends, lexical hyphenation, and bracketing. Also, the study concentrates on Ushie's single poetry collection, namely *Popular Stand* without paying attention to the poet's creativity in using morphological coinages and compounding, especially in his other poetry collections. There is also a gap in the comparison of Ushie's style of morphological creation with that of other poets.

On the other hand, Niyi Osundare is one Nigerian poet whose poetry is innovative in language and thematic preoccupations. Egya (2017, p. 45) asserts that Osundare is arguably one of the most autobiographical of all poets writing in Nigeria today, who seems to have "burst onto the literary scene in the early 1980s with an innovative poetic voice." Nwosu (2022, p. 120) regards him as "the first Nigerian poet to raise serious alarm over the state of the environment and the glaringly destructive conduct of people towards it." Alabi (2021) sees him as a poet of nature who is interested in the survival of the earth with its attendant environmental issues. This implies that Ushie is not just a product of the intellectual milieu of his era but a

creative artist whose work embodied the spirit of the time and the masterly interpretation of reality. This critical acclaim of Osundare's poetic exploits is manifest in his innovative and ingenious use of language.

Critical attention to Osundare's poetry dates back to the early 1980s when he emerged with his inaugural collection titled "Songs of the Market Place." Let us highlight a few studies on his poetry in recent times. Among such studies is that of Olaloye and Ekwueme-Ugwu (2020), who argue that most studies on Osundare's poetry have concentrated on thematic aspects, neglecting his use of figurative and linguistic expressions that aid him in the resourceful negotiation of meaning. Thus, the authors applied Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar to analyse Osundare's application of figurative devices to clearly convey his poetic intentions and meanings. A similar study by Ndifon (2022) examined Osundare's use of imagery as a poetic technique to amplify and convey his dominant themes; while another by Ohia (2017) argues that Osundare "does more than celebrate nature in his poetry as he is more like an environmentalist who draws attention to the consequences of human activities on the earth" (p. 158). Anolue (2022) studies Osundare's poetry

from a religious angle, examining the concepts of time and nature as it relates to Osundare's portrayals of 'Olusunta', an animist god of his hometown town Ikere Ekiti. The study evaluates the panegyric dimensions of the poem "A Song to Olusunta," which Osundare used to evoke the spirit of the Olusunta, who is yearly celebrated by its Ikere-Ekiti 'animist' worshippers. Oluwabukola and Nureni's (2021) study applies the theory of Deconstruction to comparatively analyse Osundare's poem "Poetry Is" and Abubakar Othman's "Wordsworth Lied." In their analysis, they demonstrated "the ways in which language is not the true medium for the representation of truth, knowledge, and beliefs" (p. 82). It is evident that no study so far has focused on the deployment of morphological coinages and compounding in the poetry by Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare. This identifies the gap which this paper intends to address, as it focuses on the utilization of morphological coinages and compounding in the major poems of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare, comparing the styles of the two authors.

### **Morphological Coinages and Compounding in Joe Ushie's Poetry**

No Nigerian poet is so much interested in concatenating new morphological expressions in his poetry like Joe Ushie.

He has adopted this innovative experimentation in the use of language gainfully in almost all his poetic engagements. The first aspect to be considered is morphological coinages, which are words generated at the spur of poetic moments to enable the expression and explanation of ideas and notions as explicitly as they are conceived. In Ushie's (2004) *A Reign of the Locusts*, the poet in the course of his poeticizing, invented so many new words that are apparently strange to Standard English but are typically Nigerian expressions. In the second poem in the collection entitled "Night, still" through which the poet sadly recollects the harrowing experience of Nigeria during the long period of the reign of military dictators, Ushie manufactures some entirely new but meaningful words as illustrated in these lines:

We wake, now, from the long night/Of ill omen, of lying on heaps of/Siblings' bones, of eight-long tyrants/Of crocodiles nurtured by *hewman* flesh/of mad dogs out-biting mad dogs..../ And the bard like a vulture feasting/On own child's carrion, seeks *softitudes*/For the long night's symbol of vulture..../Fear not

*compagriots*/There's enough  
carrion for your quills....(Ushie,  
2014, p.1)

The new coinages in the lines above are distinctly italicised. The first one, "hewman", has the same sound as the word 'human', but it gives the meaning of the act of tearing humans apart. The eight long dictators who forcefully usurped political power in Nigeria from 1983 up till 1999 are likened to crocodiles that feast on or revel in trampling on humans by hewing them, tearing their flesh, and feeding on it. Their emergence in power at various times is regarded as a sign of ill omen as they are said to be crushing people's bones like crocodiles and acting more like mad-dogs. They equally regard humans as "softitudes"- easy preys to feed on like vultures. The poet, however, calls on other poets- "compagriots" not to relent in their opposition of these dictators. The above word is derived from the mixture of some parts of two words- "compatriots" which means patriotic elements in a society and "griots" a French word depicting roving poets. Marrying aspects of the two words together, Ushie created a portmanteau word with a distinct meaning.

The title of his other poem, "Termiterium" (Ushie, 2014), is also a coinage that depicts the abode of termites where they carry out their various activities. . However, it bears the deeper meaning of a place where the majority toil and suffer while the minority relish and enjoy. 'Termiterium', which is synonymous with the habitation of termites, where the majority of the termites are enslaved, labouring for the benefit of the king and queen, who are sequestered but feed and survive through the labour of other termites. With such an ingenious title, Nigeria is regarded by the poet as a big 'termitarium' where, after the majority had labored to force soldiers who usurped power to return to their barracks and hand power over to civilian politicians, these Nigerian masses are pushed aside while a few politicians are left to enjoy the dividends of democratic governance. Thus, the Nigerian political system, as observed by Ushie, is a 'termitarium' where many toil and suffer while a few rejoice and enjoy the benefits in the system. Similarly, Ushie invents other new words in the collection as seen in the last line of the short poem titled "The uniform": "Bluish or darkish/The colour remains same/The cowed's pregnant palms/Delivering into wolfish trays/*Cobwebbing the nations*

*paths*" (Ushie, 2014, p. 28). Anyone conversant with events in Nigeria would note that recently the Nigeria Police changed their uniform from black to blue but Ushie is lampooning them in the poem that a mere change of uniform does not beget a change of attitude as they still collect inducements from motorists in their various checkpoints that are dotted like cobwebs across the country, The invention and use of the coinage 'cobwebbing' is apt as the numerous checkpoints mounted by men of the Nigeria police obstruct and delay movements as a cobweb would do to some flying objects, and like the cobwebs, most motorists are trapped – delayed for hours unless they grease the palms of the men in dark or blue uniform by delivering some naira notes into their wolfish trays.

In another poem in the collection, "Mobile Caskets", Ushie sees the majority of those riding cars with tinted glasses as those riding a '*liprousine*'. "How do we look, brother/From inside your *liprousine*" (Ushie, 2014, p. 31). The poet here twists the morphological composition of the highly admired vehicle named limousine into '*liprousine*' to show his displeasure with such vehicles, which are usually acquired through corrupt means in the Nigerian society. To the poet, the car is not just

'tinted' but 'tainted' and thus suffers from leprosy. No wonder he calls it a "*liprousine*" and instead of admiring it, he regards it as a 'mobile casket'. The sense of morphological invention exhibited here is ingenious and similar to the one used in the following line in another collection named *Yawns and Belches* (Ushie, 2018, p. 76): "Onto a river we encountered a Suswam who swam with us into the /Dangerous land of *polytriks* for slaughter/We escaped back to the road/Where we met Maku who bade us mark his words." These lines are used in the poem "The Quest," which recounts various sordid experiences of members of academic staff of universities in the hands of Nigerian political leaders who 'played dangerous tricks' with the welfare of the university lecturers. In the lines above, Ushie recalls the experiences of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), an umbrella body for members of academic staff in Nigerian universities, while negotiating for their welfare over the years with numerous government officials. In the above line, allusion is made to Suswam (Gabriel Suswam), a one-time member of the Nigerian House of Representatives and Chairman House Committee on Education. Instead of playing ordinary politics with the ASUU members when

they came for negotiations of their welfare, he (Suswam) played dangerous *polytriks*; he hoodwinked them, and such an attitude has continued unabated in Nigeria. The same sense of novel word-creation is applied in the lines below in another collection entitled *Eclipse in Rwanda*, where the word "*wintersaults*" is not only generated but stylistically used for poetic efficacy. "The first day/after your loud/absence, my mind/*wintersaults*/on this concrete/void we plough/this will-o'-wisp/Now the race stops/This day" (Ushie, 2018, p. 37). The poet bravely tinkers with the English word "somersault" in the lines above by changing it to "*wintersaults*" and with that he expresses the depth of agony experienced by the poet persona on such bereavement caused by the exit of a true friend. The sad sense of loss and melancholy is likened to one's experiences during winter, -- a terribly cold and uncomfortable season that contrasts with summer, a hot temperate season characterised by sunshine, brightness, and flourishing and blooming of flowers. So to accurately capture the sense of loss and loneliness, and the way the mind breaks down with grief and turns cold as a result of the death of a friend, the poet coins the word "*wintersault*" indicating the kind of terrible jolt his mind experienced rather

than an ordinary shock or a somersault at a friend's death.

In another vein, Ushie's morphological innovations in his poetry are also characterised by word compounding, especially the type in which a hyphen is used to weld or bond the structure of two different words together to generate a new word with a new meaning. Examples of such morphological structures abound in the collection *A Reign of Locusts*. For instance, in the poem "Musa's Legacy" which satirizes the wasteful and profligate legacy of Mansa Kanka Musa, a one-time emperor of the Mali Empire of Western Sudan, who embarked on one of the costliest pilgrimages to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, but ended up begging for the means to return to Africa after wasting his gold and resources in Mecca. Some lines with compounded words in the poem read:

How can we forget your  
baggage train  
Of 80 camels each bearing  
*slave-dug* gold?  
How can we forget your  
human shield  
Of 500 slaves ahead and 500  
following,  
Each unusualled with a *gold-*  
*adorned* stall?

Ah Massa Musa, say to me in a whisper  
 How did they fare, those *dawn-to-dusk* diggers  
 At gold mines in Wangara and Walata?  
 And what was their lot, those human rodents  
 At copper mines in Takedda?  
 (Ushie, 2004, pp. 12-15)

We have put the compound words in italics for easy identification. The first one, "slave-dug" emphasizes how the gold was derived while the second one, "gold-adorned" indicates the ornamental nature of the camel-driven caravans that bear Musa's pilgrimage baggage of gold and other costly metals, which he ended up spending wastefully on just a pilgrimage to Mecca. The pain of such wastage is heightened by Ushie when he contemplates the fate of "those dusk-to-dawn diggers" who slaved to produce such ornaments; who were treated like 'human rodents' at the copper mines, yet the proceeds of their efforts were squandered by one thoughtless leader in the name of a religious observance. The compound words cushioned the poet's efforts to express the event in a way the readers would easily identify and ascertain the enormity of the origin of resource flight in Africa, and since then

as the poet versifies, most African dictators have perfected the act of stashing and wasting hard-earned African resources abroad as if they are building on the legacies of Mansa Kanka Musa. Also in another poem, "Homage to a Dragon" (in the same collection), which is a special dedication to Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, who is reputed as one of Nigeria's virulent military dictators. Some parts of the poem express thus:

....I shrank from you/Into an ant's hole/Where the *lily-livered*/reeled *fear-ruled* lines/In the heydays of your rei(g)n/..../Not when you accouter/For another round/Of your sojourn/On our *hard-retrieved* throne.../Now that your hands grope again/For the dagger of our *yester-death*;/For the dagger of our second death.... (Ushie, 2004, pp.22-23).

In the lines captured in the excerpt above, the persona bemoans another attempt by the dictator (Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida), who terrorized Nigerians during his reign as a military leader, to vie for president as a civilian. He recounts that as a poet, he was 'lily-livered' (afraid) during his reign as military ruler and as such could only

make 'fear-ruled' lines (non-attacking or making critical statements); but now, the poet is surprised that the dictator is "accoutre"-preparing, to have a shot at their 'hard-retrieved throne" which signifies a civilian government. The coining and use of the compound word "hard-retrieved" is deliberate as it allows the poet to portray the long years of struggles suffered by democratic forces in Nigeria before the military relinquished power in 1999 to a democratically elected president. The poem's persona laments that the attempt by the former dictator to capture power again reminds the people of 'the dagger of our yester-death" which is the poet's way of expressing the horrendous experiences the people had to grapple with in the dictator's first reign. Thus, with the above morphological compounding, Ushie is able to express his thoughts in poetic form adequately.

Also, in the poem "Mobile Caskets," which castigates the use of tinted cars by high-class politicians, the poet questions: "How can our *hunger-bleached*/Sheets of skin show/On the opaque mirror/Of your iron centaur?" (Ushie, 2004, p. 30). By compounding the two words "hunger" and "bleached", the poet satisfies his urge to explicitly

present the arrant behaviour of most politicians, who 'hide' themselves in tinted vehicles-(mobile caskets) and are unable to properly see or assess the plight of those they are leading, and unable to observe their skins which have been grossly tanned by hunger. It is pertinent to note that a hunger that has gone to the extent of bleaching one's skin is indeed a serious one. This kind of pattern is applied in the use of another compound word, "ten-childrened" in the stanza below:

We are the *ten-childrened* poor  
From whose gaunt bedsitter  
Laughter crackles like a miracle  
Shocking anxious neighbours

(Ushie, 2004, p. 44)

The morphological compounding in the first line above is quite complex as the root word "ten" has a stem "children" joined to it with a hyphen and a suffix "ed" added to the stem to turn it into a noun—"ten-childrened" which indicates a very penurious kind of poverty because a poor man with ten children is almost at the 'peak' of poverty for the troubles of the ten children alone, are capable of killing him. The "ten-childrened" state of poverty is an acute one, and this is a transfer of local thoughts into poetry by Ushie, for in most traditional Nigerian societies, when it is idiomatically said

that a phenomenon like hunger has children, it depicts quite a terrible state of such a notion. For instance, in Nigerian parlance, once it is said that the hunger that visited a family came with some children, it means that the hunger is quite severe. It is this kind of sense that Ushie experiments with in the first line above by insisting that in spite of the ash-mouthed state of poverty the poet persona and his cohorts are in, their neighbours are surprised at the kind of crackling laughter they exhibit, though such laughter is synonymous with Nigerians. A popular Nigerian musician Fela, Anukulapo Kuti, calls it 'suffering and smiling'. The poet alludes to this Nigerian kind of feigned laughter when he further chants in the poem that "Ours is the smile of the roast goat head,/The flashed teeth of the drowning" (Ushie, 2004, p. 44). Despite being constantly put in the quandary by their senseless political leaders, Nigerians usually pretend that all is well by regularly putting on a cheerful look. In the poem "Particle" Ushie (2004) introduces two new words into the Nigerian English lexicon in the two stanzas below:

I am the blind mortal  
*hypno-trapped* on fragile throne  
yet I crush and mangle the low  
I am the fallible stirred

into dance by *cosme-thick* praise songs  
and frenzied with jeers for cheers (p. 60).

Perhaps, unsure that the word "hypnotised" would clearly bring out the exact meaning he intends to pass across, the poet fuses part of the word with a more easy to grasp stem "trapped", thus reaching deeper to derive the meaning he wants to express. The poet seems to be saying that one who is hypno-trapped is more in a deeper troubled state than the one who is merely 'hypnotised'. The same kind of morphological experimentation is carried out when he blends some parts of the word 'cosmetic' with 'thick' to indicate a kind of highly (thick) artificial eulogies that are poured on the poet-persona who occupies a high position but yet undermines the poor. One would readily infer that the 'praise-songs' lavished on such a wicked ruler are not real but contrived. The same stylistic pattern pervades these poetic lines from the poem "The bond": "those *bomb-burnt* bodies/on Abacha's streets of safety;/those *gun-widowed* women/in *religion-suffocating* Nigeria...." (Ushie, 2004, p. 91). It seems that the poet's motive for introducing each of these compound words is to make room for

deeper contextualization of the thoughts. As an excerpt culled from a poem that calls one's attention to the plight of poor women who straddled Nigerian highways as beggars during the despotic reign of Sani Abacha, one of Nigeria's worst dictators, the poet has to create these new words in order to realistically recreate the terror visited on Nigerians during the Abacha era. Due to the stiff opposition given to the regime by pro-democratic movements, a lot of violence was visited on the people, such that bomb-burnt bodies littered the streets because most protests turned violent and bombs were detonated in markets and other public places by some agents of the state to cause panic in the land. Most pro-democracy activists like Pa Alfred Rewane, a financier of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), a pro-democratic group that fought Abacha's dictatorial rule to a standstill, were allegedly murdered by the regime, thus reducing their wives and those of other killed social crusaders to "gun-widowed" women. Religious conflicts were clandestinely fuelled by government agents, leading to numerous religious crises, and making Nigeria turn into a "religion-suffocating" nation.

Sometimes, the motive for the blending of words by Nigerian poets is to make

their poetry typically Nigerian. This is evident in the diction of the following lines, culled from the poem "The sot" in Ushie's collection entitled *Popular Stand* (1992); the poem recounts the experiences of a notorious drunk residing in a Nigerian roadside bush: "Drink-drenched like foam in water/The drunk, rising from the roadside bush/Swears to beat up all damned fools jeering/At him as he were drunk" (Ushie, 1992, p. 17). Then, talking to himself, the drunkard enthused:

Let them build their skyscrapers  
In Lagos, London or Lisbon  
In Abuja, America or the Atlanta  
I build mine her,  
In my holy tummy, my Temple,  
Hallelujah!  
And if you talk nonsense  
I give you *one-blow, seven-die*,  
Hallelujah!  
There is truth in the bottle.  
(*Popular Stand* 18)

Introducing the drunk as a "drink-drenched" fellow, it takes another compounding of words for the poet to illustrate to the reader some attributes of the drunk. He showcases where the drunk is soliloquizing and bragging about the fact that all the money he makes ends up in his tummy as he spends it entirely on drinks while other

people build mansions with theirs. Then he threatens to give "one-blow, seven-die" to anyone who talks ill of him. The expression, "one-blow, seven-die" which Ushie derives through morphological compounding, is typically Nigerian. There is irony in the statement as one would wonder how an ordinary blow could kill seven persons at a go, but such expression indicates the intensity of the kind of blow that anyone who maligns the drink-drenched man would receive; a blow that would swiftly kill or neutralize the receiver. It is a direct transposition of a Nigerian-Igbolized expression "one blow, seven *akpus*" which means a kind of fatal blow that would generate seven bumps (*akpus*) on the receiver's head once it is given. With this kind of linguistic expression put on the mouth of the drunk persona, Ushie realistically portrays him as a typical Nigerian drunkard from the way he uses the speech nuances of Nigerians. Ushie, by this act, seems to be popularizing the use of Nigerian English expressions. Morphological compounding is also used by Joe Ushie in his poetry to indicate scenarios and phenomena that are typically Nigerian as evident in the following lines: "Unceasingly, they brush/past like anxious warriors/in *starch-stiffened/flushy* wheezing brocades/through those famished

vehicles/parked in the yard/like soldiers maimed in battle...." (Ushie, 1998, p. 24). The poem talks about the movements and dress habits of coquettish ladies, or the so-called "slay queens and mamas" who are in the habit of jumping from one man's bed to another in quest of wealth. The poet likens their prowling movements to those of soldiers angling for battle, though they are stunningly attired in "starch-stiffed brocades." The ladies are presented in a manner that their appearance in starched cloth is a typical Nigerian attire. In Nigeria, it is fashionable to apply starch to a brocade material while washing it and after drying it, the cloth which has been hardened by the starch is straightened with hot iron such that when one wears it, it only hangs on one's shoulders and extends exquisitely around the one wearing the cloth, thus giving the wearer a kind of aura and braggadocio. In Ushie's *Hill Songs* (2000a), another collection of his poetry, we also encounter the use of these compound words. In the poem entitled "Mother hen" which is dedicated to Kudirat Abiola, the slain wife of Moshood Abiola, the acclaimed winner of Nigeria's 1993 Presidential election, which was annulled by the military regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babanginda. Abiola mysteriously died on the day he was

released from the government's custody in 1998 during the military regime of General Sani Abacha. Thus: "Alas!/And the mother hen is struck/Protesting the cock's fate..../O hear that shrill sneer/From the hissing hills/From the hissing brooks/From the hissing birds/From every passing company/Of *terror-rising hurry-Cain*" (Ushie, 2000a, p. 24). As shown by Ushie in the last line above, through compounding, terrorising acts were on the rising trend during Abacha's regime, and it was blowing like a hurricane. However, the adoption of the word "hurry-Cain" gives additional meaning to the expression by introducing the meaning of a kind of humanistic betrayal that was fast creeping into Nigeria then. The government of Sani Abacha, which sponsored the killing of its subjects, then betrayed the people's trust just as Cain did to his brother, Abel, in the Bible. The gruesome killing of Kudirat Abiola while she was protesting the illegal incarceration of her husband shows the high level of insecurity then and indicates a kind of governmental perfidy that was spreading hurriedly all over Nigeria then. This sense of spiraling governmental betrayal is aptly captured in the expression "terror-rising hurry-Cain," which connotes a people in government who are in a hurry to not

only betray but kill their brothers/sisters just like Cain did.

Furthermore, in the poet's collection *Eclipse in Rwanda* (2000b) a similar tendency to compound words prevails in the poem "Town crier", which is a satire on the official government spokesperson or Minister of Information during a military regime, using series of compound words, the poet berates the manner, mien and carriage that is applied in carrying out the responsibilities akin to that office, thus resulting in the Minister turning to a "Minister of mis-information who merely serves as a conduit through which government's obnoxious policies are relayed to the masses:

We listen to your mouthing of those  
*Iron-fisted, self-armouring* laws  
of the leopard  
Roared through your *pay-staked*  
tongue (Ushie2000b, p. 14)

It is worthy to note Ushie's choice of words above as the draconian (*iron-fisted*) and self-serving (*self-armouring*) laws of the dictator are said to have been ferreted through the "pay-staked" tongue of the minister. An analysis of the new word "pay-staked" shows a tongue that has been pinned to a static point with money, such that it utters

only what the bidder instructs. The same style is deployed in the poem "Eclipse in Rwanda," which recalls the genocide that happened in Rwanda in 1994. The

event is poetically reported thus:

See the innocent child urging the fallen/mother to rise and go, for it's nightfall/See that youth perforated by *man-made deaths*,/See the farmlands ploughed by missiles..../Look! Brother, look:/at the hotel in some foreign capital,/some *hemp-eyed* drunkard with his/*tank-filling* tankard is paying for/more fuel to burn the mother land" (Ushie, 2000b, p. 23).

The poet regards the horrible ethnic cleanings which claimed the lives of up to five hundred thousand Tutsis within four months in Rwanda as "man-made deaths". Sure, the killings are orchestrated by the Hutus against their tribal neighbours, the Tutsis. From the experience of the Rwandans, Ushie cast aspersion at some charlatans in other parts of Africa who, with their "*hemp-eyed*" (red-eyed or blood thirsty) mien, are discussing how to set their countries on the path of genocidal wars or aggravate ethnic rivalry in their localities. This is captured by the

metaphoric expression of using the 'tank-filling tankard" to gather more fuel that would aid in burning their motherlands.

### **Morphological Coinages and Compounding in Niyi Osundare's Poetry**

Osundare's innovative use of morphological coinages and compounding in his poetry is not in any way total, but observable in his inaugural collection, *Songs of the Market Place* (1983), as in some of his other collections of poetry. In the introductory poem "Poetry Is", Osundare (1983, p. 3) uses poetry to define poetry and thus enthused:

not the esoteric whispers  
of an excluding tongue  
not the claptrap  
for a wondering audience  
not a learned quiz  
entombed in *Grecoroman* lore

His application of poetic nuances in the excerpt above to critique poetry and poesy, though instructive, is made glaring in the last line where he infuses the word "*Grecoroman*", a blending coinage that encapsulates something that is a mixture of Greek and Roman attributes. He deploys the coinage to harp on the fact that an interesting and enjoyable piece of poetry should not be 'entombed'-hidden or obfuscated by the

application of Greek and Roman expressions; it should not also slavishly ape the Greek or Roman poetic traditions but should stand out on its own. This is similar to his invention and use of these novel English words "toughbiced", "tipperfulls", and "sweatfields" in the poem "Excursions" where a stanza reads: "halfnude, *toughbiced* labourers/troop in *tipperfulls* from *sweatfields*/drilled by foremen soulless like/a slavemaster, a few kobo greet/the miserly homecoming/of a pilgrimage (Osundare 1983, p. 8). In the excerpt above, the persona, who is a wandering, reveals various scenarios that illustrate the nagging vagaries of poverty in society. The presence of coinages helps to make visible the plight of unskilled workers in most companies, especially in civil engineering and construction sites, where these unskilled workers, who are "halfnude, tough biced labourers" are usually seen in the evening, loaded in uncovered tippers, returning to their homes having earned a few kobo that could only sustain them just for the day. The coinages help to illustrate the state of their physical appearance, which is usually haggard despite the fact that they look muscular and strong.

In another poem, "Sule's Chase" where the poet castigates mob mentality and the half-measure application of laws in society, a mere pilferer (Sule) is mobbed to death by a mélange of an angry mob who besieged him simply because he stole a loaf of bread. Osundare, in poetically narrating this application of jungle justice, introduced some new morphological creations by generating some new English morphemes through the act of blending many words. First, he makes use of compounding to identify the woman who raised the alarm by describing her as "A barrel-buttocked woman [who] blows the whistle/for the fastest race in Lagos" (Osundare, 1983, p. 18). The compound word as used here adds additional meaning to the line as Osundare uses it to exactly capture the picture of a typical make-shift shop-owner in Lagos who is usually buxom and exceedingly blessed with a protruding and extremely large backside. Then once she raises the alarm, Sule, who might have picked the loaf of bread out of hunger, takes to his heels as the poet narrates: "And Sule has/the *once-in-a-life* luck/of leading Lagos in a race." The compounding of a whole phrase into a word "once in a life" is a rare linguistic innovation used by the poet to capture the importance and kind of race Sule is embarking on, as the whole of Lagos,

including people of different races, status, and occupations, participated in the chase. At a point, Sule has to struggle to manoeuvre through the gridlock of Lagos traffic as Osundare (1983, p. 17) narrates: "Sule climbs mountains/Of fresh assorted garbage/Traverses valleys/Of liquefied stench/Tears through traffic/In *bumper-to-bumper* grave/And loops into an alley,/Target of brute missiles/From every corner." The expression 'bumper-to-bumper', which is typically Nigerian, clearly helps the readers to make a mental picture of the intensity of the traffic hold-up which Sule has to contend with, and in the end, he is captured and beaten to death, still clutching to a loaf of bread. He is in that state even when the police arrive to take away his mangled corpse. This can be compared with the complex blending of this adverbial clause "From swamp to savannah" (Osundare, 1983, p. 30) in a poem entitled "The Nigerian Railway" which captures the snaky movement of trains as it glides from the swamps in the Niger Delta region to the savannah landscapes of Northern Nigeria. In the collection, this style is further used by Osundare (1983, p.55) in the poem "For Hiroshima" which lampoons the brute and beastly nature of man where the has been a practicing or test-

ground for all kinds of lethal weapons as was the case of Hiroshima in Japan during the second World War where America first detonated the atomic bomb causing colossal damage to both flora and fauna inhabiting the city. In order to effectively recount such a sordid occurrence, he invents some words that helps him to portray the gravity of heartlessness and inhumanity that was visited on Hiroshima. In stanza three of the poem, the poet's voice chants:

when *bloodmen* send *fireatoms*  
on massacre missions  
a legion unaware of the  
*powerwrestle*

are guneapigs in a tinderbox

The Americans that sent the atomic bomb to Hiroshima and also Nagasaki in Japan are regarded as 'bloodmen' to depict their ruthless attitude during the war and what they sent are described as 'fireatoms' which depicts the workings of an atomic bomb which continues to explode into fireballs even while it has been reduced to smaller atomic particles, thus causing massive and irreparable destruction. Those unaware of the reason for launching the atomic bomb, which is a result of the "power wrestle" between America and Japan, become the "guinea pigs" who are thrown into the quandary of the

"tinderbox" and almost pulverized. With the interventions in coinages, Osundare is able to express to his satisfaction the horror that the world experienced in Hiroshima during the Second World War, where countless human lives were lost, and those who survived the immediate explosions died gradually, having been exposed to the high radiation of the atomic bomb.

The practice of inventing new morphological coinages is also deployed by Osundare in his collection titled *The Eye of the Earth* (1986). In the poem entitled "They too are the earth" where the poet wears the toga of a Marxist and canvasses that the poor should be given equal opportunity and privilege as the rich, Osundare (1986, p. 45) introduces a coinage: "They too are the earth/the old dying distant deaths/in narrow abandoned hamlets/they are the earth/women battling centuries/of maleficient slavery." The italicisation is deliberate as it highlights Osundare's novel use of the English word, "maleficent" in a dynamic manner, not to depict the "absence of efficiency" but to express the chauvinistic idea of male-domination. In a sense, he seems to be saying that women battling centuries of male domination and enslavement should be treated as important denizens

of the earth. Similarly, in another poem in the same collection with the title, "What The Earth Said", the poet brings a new word to the limelight when the persona sings: "I have seen native executhieves hold forth for the alien wolves" (Osundare, 1986, p. 46). Here, there is a re-jigging of some letters of the English word "executives", which refers to 'leaders' or 'administrators' of a group, to derive the new word "executhieves", which is a portmanteau word that incorporates the meanings of the words "executives" and "thieves." In the line, the poet speaker expresses utter disillusionment at the manner local leaders collude and connive with foreign neocolonialists to defraud, cheat, and impoverish their own people, thus turning themselves to "executhieves"- leaders who prey on those they are leading. It is evident that Osundare adopts such a poetic style that entails the construction of new words and terms in order to accurately capture ideas that suit the vagaries of contemporary Nigerian society.

### Conclusion

The paper has established that Joe Usie and Niyi Osundare utilized the two linguistic resources of morphological coinages and compounding as deliberate stylistic devices in their poetry. In the

current study, we noted a kind of similarity in the patterns of word-coining by the two poets. For instance, in the collection *Yawns and Belches*, Ushie (1986, p. 18) uses the singular form of the coinage *executhief* to describe people who steal with their positions or offices and *hewman* to express some inhuman situations faced by the masses, while in the *The Eye of the Earth*, Osundare (1986, p. 46), uses the plural form of the same coinage-*executhieves*, to describe native corrupt leaders who siphon their countries' treasure and *hueman*, to metaphorically recount the pride of the chameleon over its ability to change its colours.

However, while Ushie (2018) makes use of hyphens in most of his morphological compoundings: (*Yawns... war-shippers* (p. 23), *low-bernates* (p. 42), *air-bound* (p. 28)), Osundare (1986) lumps the words together without any hyphens: (*The Eye... maleficient* (p. 45), *factorylords* (p. 46), *ironwood* (p. 5). With the use of such styles, the two poets express their exact thoughts and manifest meanings that are quite tangential and contextual to the Nigerian environment. The styles are observed to have enabled them to appropriately situate their poems in the Nigerian socio-political context while strengthening the link between Nigerian

English's neologisms and its speech community. It is equally observed that the morphological styles examined are more prevalent in Joe Ushie's poetry than that of Niyi Osundare, but in all, the two poets, through instances such as Nigerian neologisms are not only popularizing some notable Nigerian morphological usages but are also increasing the horizon and scope of the Nigerian variety of the English language. It is also noticed that through the creation and application of these new words that are typically Nigerian in their poetry, the poets are able to produce poetic lines that are highly evocative, insightful, and realistic. With that, they emphasize the role literature plays in the development of a language, especially in the formation and popularization of new morphological forms. It is expected that more Nigerian poets would adopt this dynamic style as it is capable of enriching the Nigerian English, which is in dire quest for development and standardization. However, the formation and incorporation of innovative coinages and compounding are among the outstanding linguistic devices that have had great impact on the poetry of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare. This style is perhaps part of what makes their poetry to be reckoned with in Nigeria and the world at large.

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