

# Graphological Sensitivity and Multimodal Literacy in Language Education: A Stylistic Analysis of Joe Ushie's *Hill Songs*

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## Abstract

Graphology, often described as the visual representation of language in written form, has traditionally been viewed as the written equivalent of phonology. This study revisits and redefines graphology, situating it within the broader field of language education and stylistic pedagogy. Using Joe Ushie's *Hill Songs* as a case study, the paper explores how graphological deviation functions as a device of meaning and aesthetics, and how these visual features can be harnessed to enhance multimodal literacy among language learners. The study, anchored on the theory of multimodality, examines the interaction between visual and linguistic elements to demonstrate how meaning extends beyond words to encompass the arrangement, spacing, and typographical organization of text. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive design, drawing insights from stylistic analysis and linguistic observation of seven purposively selected poems. The findings reveal that Ushie's poetry employs graphological devices such as punctuation distortion, capitalization, spacing, and pictographic alignment not merely for artistic effect but to foreground meaning, emotion, and ideology. From an educational perspective, these graphological choices offer teachers and learners valuable tools for enhancing reading comprehension, creative writing, and analytical reasoning. The study argues that integrating graphological awareness into language education cultivates learners' sensitivity to visual dimensions of language and improves their interpretive competence. It concludes that the graphological model proposed in this study not only bridges the gap between linguistic form and artistic function but also provides a pedagogical framework for developing multimodal communicative skills. Consequently, graphology should be seen as an essential component of modern literacy education, capable of fostering deeper engagement with both the visual and linguistic properties of written discourse.

**Keywords:** Graphology, Multimodal Literacy, Language Education, Stylistics, Joe Ushie, Visual Communication

## Introduction

As a relatively new and independent linguistic discipline, stylistics investigates the peculiarities with which language functions in a text. The linguistic levels of analysis have often been the hallmark of any stylistic analysis of a text. These levels include: Lexis, syntax, morphology, graphology, phonology, semantics and others. Related literatures like Isidore, 2010, Chatman, 1967, Van Peer, 1980 etc. have revealed that researchers attempt exploring at a stretch, all these levels of analysis in a text. This, however, heralds some deficiencies in the individual linguistic levels. This is why the present study specifically addresses how the author negotiates intentions and communicates meaning through the device of graphology.

Graphology is viewed as a linguistic level of analysis that is concerned with the study of graphic aspects of language. Put simply, Graphology is the study of language in print. The concept

of graphology as a linguistic level of analysis is particularly prominent in stylistics and multimodality. McIntosh in his paper entitled “Graphology and Meaning” opined thus: “I have used the word ‘graphology’ in a sense which is intended to answer, in the realm of written language, to that of ‘phonology’ in the realm of spoken language” (McIntosh, 1961 cited in Eva, 2015). In other words, graphology is to written language what phonology is to spoken language. McIntosh’s definition caught on and developed in the sixties and served in its attempt to integrate more levels than the traditional ones when analyzing written texts. This concept became popularized mainly in UK stylistics, and more generally applied to the description and study of poetry and literary texts, although this was not always the case, according to Crystal and Davy (1969).

As time advances, Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964:50) see the need to expand the scope of graphology to include spellings, punctuations, capitalizations, italicizations and many other graphic resources related to language matters. This move however, has given rise to many other linguists like Vachek (1973), Sampson (1985), Coulmas (1991, 1999), Harris (1995) and Eva (2015) who also have researched about the concept of graphology with focus on the properties of alphabets and their historical evolution. How graphology may affect an author’s meaning and produce aesthetic effects has been the major focus of scholars within the stylistics jurisdiction in recent times. Graphology, unlike other linguistic genres such as syntax, phonetics or morphology, is a controversial concept whose meaning tends to be blurred. According to (Eva, 2015:2), this confusion is occasioned by two factors: the non-linguistic meanings (intuition) attached to this concept and the varied treatment the word has received from dictionaries, manuals and works of reference in general. Wales (2001) has attempted a seemingly clearest and most complete definition of graphology so far, since it clarifies its meaning and incorporates many other features beyond the letters of alphabet, for example: punctuation and spacing. Given the recent relevance of pictures and images in communication, there is an attempt, currently, to integrate some graphological elements into the study of communication modes. In order to highlight the semiotic potential of type-face, (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001) have delved into the creation of meaning through certain graphological elements such as typography, print layout as well as colour. Graphology, in this study, refers to the visual and typographical features of written language—punctuation, capitalization, font, layout, and spacing—which serve as tools for meaning-making. The study views these features not merely as decorative or aesthetic, but as integral elements that influence comprehension, tone, and interpretation. In language classrooms, especially in the teaching of poetry, essay writing, and creative composition, graphological awareness can develop learners’ ability to interpret written discourse beyond words, encompassing visual and structural cues.

Despite all these studies, literature in this field is yet to outline or categorize a standard parameter for graphological analysis, which is the major concern of the present study. Together with this setback, there is also a general consensus that graphology is neither relevant nor interesting in itself and, to some extent, a greater number of people still misunderstand the real meaning of this word (Eva, 2015). In view of these controversies surrounding the concept of graphology, the following sections of the study gives in-depth insights into the linguistic nature of this term as well as explain how the concept has evolved from once being simply analogous to

phonology, to later becoming a complete and independent principle comprising many different elements within its ambit.

This study examines therefore, the pedagogical value of graphology through Joe Ushie's *Hill Songs* (2000), demonstrating how visual features contribute to linguistic meaning and how such awareness can be applied to classroom teaching. In doing so, the research connects stylistic theory to practical strategies for developing multimodal literacy—an essential skill for 21st-century language learners. Consequently, the following research questions are answered in this study:

- i. How does Joe Ushie's use of graphological devices in *Hill Songs* contribute to meaning and aesthetic experience?
- ii. In what ways can graphological awareness enhance learners' reading and writing skills in language education?
- iii. How can multimodal literacy be integrated into language pedagogy through the analysis of graphological elements in texts?

### **Theoretical Issues and Review of Related Literatures**

The present study draws upon Multimodality as a theoretical framework. The theory of multimodality tries to provide tools capable of analysing the visual aspects in language, which is very helpful when working with graphology. Given the afore-description, this theory becomes imperative to investigating the level of graphological deviation in the poetry of Joe Ushie. The Multimodality theory is a recent theoretical framework that integrates some of the elements to be considered within the spectrum of graphology. Multimodality has contributed to the understanding of graphology in two respects: the identification of writing as a particular mode of communication (hence displaying its own particular features) and the meaning potential of some graphological aspects like layout or font. In relation to the status of writing as a mode of communication, multimodality has claimed that writing has more differences than similarities when compared to speech and that writing is a border category as it displays some spatial aspects (Kress 1996). This idea is essential to an understanding of graphology, because it reasserts the visual nature of this level of analysis and its proximity to other visual modes of communication such as images.

Furthermore, multimodality tries to provide tools for the analysis of visual aspects in language, which is very helpful when working with graphology. Regarding the meaning potential of visual elements, multimodality deals with some concrete graphological aspects, namely writing systems (Kress, 1996), layout (Kress 1996), spelling (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996), font and colour (Kress 1996; Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). As mentioned above, multimodality addresses particular visual issues of language in a bid to improve the understanding of certain graphological aspects.

Eva (2015) observes that the very first problem when dealing with graphology is its unclear meaning. This confusion with vague meaning may be due to its *double filiation*, i.e graphology as it concerns the study of writing systems, and as it also concerns character analysis based on handwriting. On most occasions, it is this non-linguistic use of the term that most commonly comes to mind when using the word *graphology*, as recorded in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2011). It views graphology as the inference of character from a person's handwriting. The theory underlying graphology is that handwriting is an expression of personality; hence, a systematic analysis of the

way words and letters are formed can reveal traits of personality. (Harris, 1995) Graphologists note such elements as the *size of individual letters and the degree and regularity of slanting, ornamentation, angularity, and curvature*. Other basic considerations are the general appearance and impression of the writing, the pressure of upward and downward strokes, and the smoothness of the writing. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2011)

This non-linguistic meaning is further complicated by the uneven treatment that graphology has received from previous researchers. While some research has directly ignored its linguistic meaning and just concentrated on its psychological aspects, other studies have reflected its linguistic nature. In this sense, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2013) elaborately defines the linguistic side of *graphology* as “the study of written and printed symbols and of writing systems”. Although this definition appears in fourth position, there is however, a third possibility when defining graphology which consists of giving prominence to its linguistic value.

Whilst the proposals by McIntosh (1961) and Halliday et al. (1964) were crucial for the expansion of the concept in linguistics and stylistics, they still failed to clarify the elements to be analyzed within this category. For this reason, the definition adopted by this study is that given by Wales (2001: 182-183) in *A Dictionary of Stylistics*. For her, *graphology* or *graphemics* is the study of graphemes and any other element related to the written medium, and of the linguistic system that is manifested through these:

The study of such units [graphemes] in a language is called graphemics or graphology. [...] Graphemics also embraces other features associated with the written or graphic medium: punctuation; paragraphing; spacing, etc. Different registers make particular use of such graphological features as: size of print and capitalization in newspaper and advertising lay-outs; different typefaces and sizes in dictionaries such as this one; special lines in poetry, etc. [...] Graphology can also refer to the writing system of a language, as manifested in handwriting and typography; and to the other related features [...] e.g. capitalization and punctuation. (Wales 2001: 182-183).

The novelty of the definition offered by Wales (2001) lies in the fact that it broadens the spectrum of elements to be analyzed within the category of *graphology* beyond the letters of the alphabet, which is something that has not been considered until very recently. She also gives equal importance to the writing system itself and to the discipline that focuses on its analysis, since these are the key aspects that define the concept of *graphology*. In short, Wales (2001) aims to go beyond the traditional perspective in the treatment of *graphology*.

#### ***Levels of analysis within the Graphological framework: enquires into previous categorization***

Various scholars such as Levenston (1992) and Lennard (2005) have attempted series of proposals for a standard pattern of categorization of the elements within the graphological framework of linguistic stylistic analysis. The present study is in a way, an extension of the previous proposals. Notwithstanding the few setbacks that enwrap the proposals of these two scholars, their works constitute a valuable contribution to the study of graphology. Their researches are a positive response and reaction to one of the controversial questions in relation to this level of linguistic

analysis: what are the different levels and sub-levels to be included under the term graphology. Their proposals imply a great step forward in linguistics and stylistics studies because they organize graphological features in a systematic and structured way. Accordingly, Levenston (1992) criticizes the lack of critical approaches to the study of graphology and proposes four major schemes within the graphic representation of language. They include: Spelling, punctuation, typography and layout (see table 1) below.

Table 1. Levenston’s (1992) proposal on the study of graphological elements

1. Spelling	Formal vs. informal language Diacritics Archaisms Dialects Interlanguages Eye dialects Eye rhymes Puns
2. Punctuation	Absence of punctuation Patterned punctuation
3. Typography	Italics Other typefaces
4. Layout	

Levenston in his proposal above aligns his thoughts with Firth’s (1957) model of linguistic description, stressing the significance of graphology like that of other linguistic levels such as phonology, semantics, grammar or lexis for the study of literary texts. As a result of this, Levenston (1992) further solicits more attention for graphological elements and though his book is of less theoretical density (Eva, 2015), it became vital since it appeared the only comprehensive approach to the role of graphology in literature. This was before Lennard’s proposal emerged.

However, Lennard’s (2005) proposal differs from that Levenston’s (1992) in its aim and scope. Although both scholars cover the concept of graphology to considerable extent, Lennard is devoted to *composition* and *punctuation*. He labels what we call graphology as punctuation and devotes attention not just to punctuation marks but also to spelling, typefaces or spacing, to mention just a few. Lennard (2005) unlike Levenston also proposes a scheme of eight different descriptive levels that enhance the analysis of matters affecting *graphology* according to his publication – *The Poetry Handbook* (2005). According to (Eva, 2015), the scale is organized from the more rudimentary elements —the letterforms that punctuate the blank space in a page— to the more complex ones —the creation of a book as a complete unit of punctuation—.

Table 2. Lennard's (2005) proposal on the study of graphological elements

1. Letter-forms punctuating the blank page
2. Interword spaces
3. Punctuation marks
4. Words or other units distinguished by font, face, colour, sign, or position
5. The organization of the page and opening
6. Pagination
7. The structures of grouped pages
8. The MS, TS, codex, scroll or leaf as a complete object punctuating space or a constituent

### ***Present study categorization of graphological devices***

The present study presents a modification arising from the previously proposed models in the study of graphological elements, the example of Lennard's (2005) and Levenston's (1992). The present model is occasioned by the need to accommodate the invading trends of graphology as preached in Ushie's poetry, and to further stand in the gap created by Levenston's and Lennard's. The schemes are grouped into five levels and presented in the table below. A detailed explanation of the model is provided afterwards.

Table 3: Present Study categorization of graphological devices

S/N	CATEGORIZATION	DESCRIPTION
1)	Punctuation	Punctuation marks, inter-word spaces, absence of punctuation, patterned punctuation
2)	Orthography	Spellings, hyphenation and lexical truncation, abbreviation etc
3)	Typography	Structure, unusual arrangements of stanzas, lines, words and individual letter, shape, paragraphing, line-spacing, letter-spacing (tracking), colours, page layout etc
4)	Pictography	Graphical elements, pictures (visual stanzas), special signs and symbols like asterisks, superscript and subscript etc
5)	Fonting	Font type, Bold and Italicization, Capitalization and decapitalization, Font Size, underline, strikethrough, outline, Font colour etc

### ***Punctuation***

Punctuation involves the use of certain marks to clarify meaning of written material by grouping words grammatically into sentences and clauses and phrases. It is general notion that punctuation marks are tools to organize and arrange words to facilitate readability. Punctuation marks aid in the better comprehension of meaning and grammatical relation of the words. According to Dukiya (1991) cited in Segun and Samson (2017), punctuation marks are used in writing to provide the same signals such as pause, voice pitch or stress that we use in speech to delineate one word or group of words; to aid the reader to understand the writer's idea easily and early. Among the

significant punctuation marks are: full stops, commas, brackets, colons, exclamation marks, and use of capital letters, question marks, quotation marks, hyphens and others.

In English, the use of punctuation marks to signal pauses and changes in rhythm and intonation in sentences are guided by rules which poets do not adhere to strictly because of the poetic license they enjoy. This liberty enables poets to deviate from the rules and conventions of standard spoken and written prose by violating the rule of punctuation. However, this linguistic freedom is most effectively used to achieve a distinctive of language and grandeur of announcement. Joe Ushie is a good example of this uniqueness. The poet, Joe Ushie, fully utilizes and enjoys the poetic license in his poetry especially in some of the selected collections like *Hill Songs*, *Popular Stand and Other Poems*, *A Reign of Locusts* and others. Ushie's avoidance of capitalization at the beginning of sentences and the scrambling of punctuation marks, for instance, represent an effort to break down the syntactical (logical) integrity of the sentences. However, Joe Ushie employs the following punctuation marks: full-stops, semicolons, exclamation signs, inverted commas, apostrophe, commas, parenthesis, hyphen, ellipses, and question marks.

### *Orthography (spellings)*

Orthography may be defined as the conventional spelling system of a language. Saad (2016) observes that orthography has to do with the principle underling spelling of words. To some extent, spelling also represents pronunciation. So, in poetry, the deviation examples are easily identified in orthographic arrangement, i.e (the way in which the words are spelt).

However, Ushie is one of the most daring poets who try to go beyond the conventionally sanctioned poetic licenses in matter of verse typography, presumably because he finds the available orthographic system inadequate for expressing himself fully. Hence, he creates new coinages and truncate existing lexical items in order to actualize his intentions and express his messages. Orthography comprises: spellings, hyphenation and lexical truncation etc. However, Orthography describes or defines the set of symbols used in writing a language, and the rules regarding how to use those symbols (Cahill and Rice, 2014).

### *Typography (structure and arrangement)*

Typography means the structure, arrangement, style, and appearance of the printed words on the page. Typography, according to the present study model of categorization, comprises: structure, unusual arrangements of stanzas, lines, words and individual letter, line-spacing, letter-spacing (tracking), shape, paragraphing, colours, page layout etc. In literary creation, discarding of capital letters and punctuation marks where conventions call for them, jumbling of words and eccentric use of parentheses are expressive devices for many writers. The term typography, according to Haley, (2012), is also applied to the style, arrangement, and appearance of the letters, numbers, and symbols created by the process. It studies the general features or appearance of printed matter.

Typography not only has a direct correlation with honouring the tone of the text, but also shares the responsibility of making the readers commence the reading process as well as sustaining the reader's attention throughout the body of text. Although typography can potentially be utilized to attract the reader's attention to commence the reading process, and create a beautiful/attractive piece of text, the craft of typography is not limited to aesthetics. Typography is a craft that is not stringently encompassed with the aesthetic appeal of the text. On the contrary, the object of

typography is to make the reading experience practical and useful. The use of bold colours, multiple typefaces, and colourful backgrounds in a typographic design may be eye-catching; however, it may not be appropriate for all bodies of text and could potentially make text illegible. Overuse of design elements such as colours and typefaces can create an unsettling reading experience, preventing the author of the text from conveying their message to readers.

#### *Pictography (graphical elements)*

This is the effective means of employing all the possibilities of visual patterns in poetry. According to the online Encyclopedia Britannica, Pictography is the expression and communication by means of pictures and drawings having a communicative aim. These pictures and drawings (called pictographs) are usually considered to be a forerunner of true writing and are characterized by stereotyped execution and by omission of all details not necessary for the expression of the communication. A pictograph that stands for an individual idea or meaning may be called an ideogram; if a pictograph stands for an individual word, it is called a logogram (*q.v.*). Pictographs are also used as memory aids in texts and they perform the function of signaling deep meanings in literary works. Examples of pictographs include: pictures (visual stanzas), graphical elements (the act of making texts appear as what they mean), special signs and symbols like asterisks, superscript and subscripts etc.

#### *Fonting*

A font may be defined as the graphical representation of text that may include a different typeface, point size, weight, color, or design. Different fonts are utilized to add style to a web page or document. That is to say, they may be used to set or match the "tone" of the text based on the content. Additionally, certain fonts affect readability depending on the medium. According to the Wikipedia online free encyclopedia, a font is seen as a particular size, weight and style of a typeface. The word "font" refers to the delivery mechanism of the typeface design. According to the Present study categorization of graphological devices, fonting comprises the following: font type, **bold** and *italicization*, CAPITALIZATION and decapitalization, font size, underline, strikethrough, outline and font colour. Font is a colligation of how meaning is delivered in a literary work. Hence, the size and style of a font and its oblique or cursive nature are sensitive and integral part of graphology and must be given attention when undergoing stylistic analysis of a text.

#### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design, employing stylistic and interpretive methods to analyse selected poems from Joe Ushie's *Hill Songs* (2000). The qualitative design is most appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the stylistic features and linguistic choices that convey meaning and visual aesthetics in the text. Seven poems were purposively selected from the collection based on their prominent use of graphological devices such as punctuation deviation, capitalization, hyphenation, and pictographic arrangements. These poems—"Mother's Back," "Cloud Phases," "Hillside Rill," "Battles," "A Ray of Faith," "Balloon," and "The Gun"—were subjected to graphological and stylistic analysis to interpret how Ushie's visual manipulation of text enhances meaning and communicative effect. The analysis followed the multimodal theoretical framework, which accounts for how different semiotic

modes—verbal, visual, and spatial—interact to produce meaning. Each poem was examined at five graphological levels: punctuation, orthography, typography, pictography, and fonting. This categorization, adapted from and modified after Levenston (1992) and Lennard (2005), provides a structured means of analysing graphological deviations and their interpretive significance. The insights drawn from this analysis form the basis for discussing how such visual and typographic awareness can inform teaching practices and improve students’ multimodal literacy in language education.

### ***Hill Songs (2000)***

Apart from being a glorification of the poet’s homeland in all respects, the ‘hill-songs’ as contained in this book are in a way, a contrast to the many socio-political issues and events of which the obvious resultant outcome remains a distorted calligraphy. Published in the year 2000, the fifty-seven poem crafted collection is a reflection of the poet’s identification with nature and humanity as well as his lamentations and protests about the worsening and saddening social and political status quo of his country, Nigeria. Seven poems are randomly selected from this collection for graphological analysis. They are:

#### **“Mother’s back”**

In the open grain field  
lying in surrender  
her bent back  
is the earth  
on which  
hot-tempered sun  
exhausts its fury  
into which the rains sink  
on which I ride home  
at dusk,  
and which must be bent  
at the hearth  
if we must feed.

Her bent back

like Atlas’

is  
the  
pi-  
II  
ar  
of  
the

earth (Hill Songs, pg. 52)

**Table 4: Graphological description of the poem “Mother’s back”**

S/N	Graphological Devices	Types of Graphological Deviation
1	Typography	Unusual arrangements of stanzas, words and lines (monostich).
2	Orthography	Hyphenation Lexical truncation
3	Fonting	Decapitalization CAPITALIZATION

The poem above is a glorification of the poet’s motherland through the image of the mother’s back as a metaphor of pride. Described as ‘bent back’ (lines 3), the poet glorifies the studiousness and hardworking of his people. Eventually, he concludes with an impressive remark thus: ‘Her bent back/ like Atlas/ is the pillar of the/ earth.’

The conspicuous graphological devices of deviation in the poem include: unusual arrangement of stanzas, words and lines; hyphenation and lexical truncation; CAPITALIZATION and decapitalization. There is a conscious flout of the CAPITALIZATION rule in poetry which states that every line must begin with a CAPITAL letter. This deviation is informed by the complex grammatical structure of the poem. The avoidance of this linguistic norm is to enhance the smooth flow of thoughts in the poem. In lines 15, there is a deployment of monostich “Her bent back”. Monostich is simply a one line stanza. The significance of this effect is to foreground the main idea of the poem. Lastly, towards the ending region of the poem, there is a creative use of graphical element to visualize the stanza thereby creating a beautiful mental picture of a pillar. This effect is achieved with the aid of the following devices: conscious hyphenation and truncation of lexical items, CAPITALIZATION and decapitalization.

**“Cloud phases”**

Time hangs the white cloud  
                                  up in the sky  
To mark the day’s bloom;  
Time hangs the dark cloud  
                                  up in the sky  
To mark the day’s gloom

Born on hills below the clouds  
I learnt this lesson early:

                                  d  
                          or          o  
          hill                  w  
up                          n    hill I am moving forward

*(Hill Songs, pg. 53)*

**Table 5: Graphological description of the poem “Cloud phases”**

S/N	Graphological Devices	Types of Graphological Deviation
1	Typography	Unusual arrangements of stanzas and words
2	Orthography	Lexical truncation
3	Fonting	Decapitalization
4	Punctuation	Absence of full stop

Through the devices of decapitalization, lexical truncation and unusual arrangement of stanzas and words, the poem above expresses the poet’s identification with nature. In the beginning part of poem, the poet acknowledges the supremacy of nature as played out in ‘time’. However, in the last stanza of the poem, the poet persona strongly expresses optimism and determination about the future. The conscious truncation of the stanza and word arrangement in the concluding part of the poem is a creative attempt to visualize the images of the words: “up”, “hill” and “down”. To reinstate the poet’s continuous determination and optimism against the future and to exercise the action in the progressive verb “moving”, the poem ends without a full-stop

**“Hillside rill”**

·  
·  
tap  
·  
·  
·  
tap  
·  
·  
·  
it  
  
t  
  
r  
i  
c  
k  
l  
e  
s  
  
ne-  
ver

hing      gus-

ne-  
ver

hing      rus-

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tap

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tap

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it

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r  
i  
c  
k  
l  
e  
s

but surrounding  
its every pool  
down its course  
are evergreen groves:  
the yield from its trickles  
though it gushes not  
though it rushes not  
(*Hill Songs*, pg. 57/58)

**Table 6: Graphological description of the poem “Hillside rill”**

S/N	Graphological Devices	Types of Graphological Deviation
1	Typography	Unusual arrangements of stanzas and words
2	Orthography	Hyphenation Lexical truncation
3	Fonting	Decapitalization
4	Punctuation	Use of ellipses Absence of full stop

The poem above requires a deepening sense of graphological consciousness and meaning relation in order to be understood. A streamside adventure, the poem is a reflection of *light at the end of the tunnel*. The poem is one which betrays the expectations of the oppressors who are only being deceived by the trickling state of the “Hillside rill”. The hillside rill is a metaphor of the nation’s commonwealth which situates in the hands of the few class of persons enjoying superior intellectual or social and economic status in the society. The poet has intentionally deviated from the linguistic function of ellipses – which is to show the omission of words or letters in a sentence. The patterned repeating of Ellipses and the noun: “tap” in the poem is suggestive of an attempt to arouse the aural and oral senses of the reader. This effect however, also, enhances musicality in the poem as well as visualizes the trickling state of a rill. The overall structure and appearance of the poem defamiliarizes the reader as it deploys an unusual stanza arrangement to picture the mental image of water dropping in bits. Again, there is a patterned repetitive use of hyphens to truncate words in the poem, for example:

ne-  
ver

gus-  
hing

ne-  
ver

rus-  
hing

Noticeably, this truncation breaks the two-syllabic words (never, gushing, never, rushing) into one syllable thereby causing a pause in its realization. This effect therefore, is an aesthetic way of visualizing the words and an attempt to describe and demonstrate the trickling state of the rill at the hillside. The use of small letters all through the poem is very symbolic and depicts a logical implication of the word “rill” which means ‘a small stream’. Finally, the absence of a full-stop in the poem is conscious. It is indicative of a continuous yielding of ‘evergreen groves’ from this ‘trickle’, even though it neither rushes nor gushes. This effect also, is a strong assurance to the teaming masses under the subjugating hands of the oppressors of a time when justice and equity shall apply in the distribution of the nation’s commonwealth.

**“Battles”**

Blind in one eye  
She supports by the hand  
Her husband who is blind  
In both eyes;  
Their child on her back  
Some load on her head  
Battling for survival  
(*Hill Songs, pg. 61*)

**Table 7: Graphological description of the poem “Battles”**

S/N	Graphological Devices	Types of Graphological Deviation
1	Punctuation	Absence of full stop

According to Murthy (2012), a full stop is used at the end of every Declarative or Imperative sentence. The poem above, which is a reaction to the character of a virtuous blind mother as a metaphor of a nation battling for survival, has flouted the linguistic norms of punctuation through the absence of a full-stop. The poem “Battle” is a pathetic way of describing the agony and torments facing the Nigerian nation. The avoidance of full-stop in the poem is an intentional attempt occasioned by the need to indicate the continuous and perpetual sufferings and struggles of the people.

**“A ray of faith”**

When I contemplate  
the vastness of the sky,  
the sands of stars  
above the clouds,  
the immensity of the sea,  
the rise and fall of trees,  
the dishes of the world  
wrapped in peel and shell,  
the beauty of the butterfly,  
the beauty of the hills  
in night’s hood,  
the language of the ant,  
the canary’s manipulation  
of her million tunes, then  
the arguments for His absence  
and the evidence for His presence,  
I know to whom to bow.  
(*Hill Songs, pg. 71*)

**Table 8: Graphological description of the poem “A ray of faith”**

S/N	Graphological Devices	Types of Graphological Deviation
1	Fonting	CAPITALIZATION Decapitalization

“A ray of faith” is a poem which totally references and acknowledges the supremacy of the Creator of mankind. Crafted into seventeen lines without a clearly defined stanza, the poem is an analogy to the popular biblical Psalms and David who was bent on praising the creator anytime he considered the mighty works of His creation. In an attempt to proclaim and declare his loyalty to the Creator’s supremacy, publicly and without shame or intimidation, the poet intentionally foregrounds this loyalty through his conscious and skillful use of CAPITALIZATION. Although the poem begins with a CAPITAL letter and ends with a full-stop, which is indicative of a complete sentence in English. The poet also, CAPITALIZES the possessive pronoun “His” in all its occurrence. However, the significance of this foregrounding is that the pronoun references God.

**“Balloon”**

[Tang!

The news       d  
                          r  
                          o  
                          p  
                          p  
                          e  
                          d

Like a metallic tear of rain  
In the heart of the dry season:  
I am one cousin less!...

...Akinsheye, son of my Aunt,  
Dawn to dusk  
You pedalled

          d                   the Abeb hill  
          e  
          s  
          c  
          e                   g  
          n                   n  
          d                   i  
          i                   d  
          n                   n  
          g                   e

a            c  
           n     s  
           d     a  
 (*Hill Songs, pg. 72/73*)

**Table 9: Graphological description of the poem “Balloon”**

S/N	Graphological Devices	Types of Graphological Deviation
1	Pictography	Graphical element: visual stanza

The poem is an elegy penned to mourn and lament over the sudden demise of the poet persona’s uncle – Peter Akinsheye Ayade. The dominant graphological device of deviation in the poem is the use of graphical element. According to Crystal and Davy (1969) cited in Segun and Samson (2017), graphical element is seen as the “organization of utterances into symbolic visual shapes”. The intentional truncation of the following lexical items: “dropped”, “descending” and “ascending” is for a purpose – a way of appealing to the reader’s senses and to present the poet’s mood in a visual and unconventional technique.

**“The gun”**

Symbol of peace  
 Symbol of strength  
 Symbol of law  
 Symbol of being

Aargh! Its voluminous barrels  
 From where wisdom falls;  
 Aargh! Its generous barrels  
 From where life runs.

From hill to hill  
 its damning force echoes.  
 Symbol of thrones from whose  
 Wide nostrils mangled dawns are breathed.

At its trigger’s whims,  
 its muzzling, ceiling mercies  
 we are prostrate  
 we of the vales  
 we of the earth  
 we, of life.  
 (*Hill Songs, pg.23*)

**Table 10: Graphological description of the poem “The gun”**

S/N	Graphological Devices	Types of Graphological Deviation
1	Typography	Unusual arrangement of stanza

The gun, primarily is a weapon that discharges a missile at high velocity (especially from a metal tube or barrel), according to (Lewis, 2010). The above given definition is the dictionary meaning of the word: “gun”. The poet however, presents the gun in a different picture – as a symbol of peace (line 1); symbol of strength (line 2); symbol of law (line3) and as a symbol of being (line 4). In the beginning region of the poem, there is an unusual and unfamiliar arrangement of stanza – a distortion of indentation, rightward. The first stanza of the poem however, deviates from the conventional indentation form. This graphological deviation is being informed by the intention of the poet to create by way of emphasis, the connotative implication of the gun as symbol of peace, strength; law as well as being. This indentation effect foregrounds the message contained in the poem.

### *Educational Implications of the Study*

This research fundamentally reconsiders prevailing approaches to language education. It extends beyond the conventional focus on cultivating proficient reading and writing skills, advocating instead for an awareness of the visual presentation of text and its contribution to meaning. Although graphology is frequently regarded as a minor stylistic concern, it in fact forges a significant link between linguistic and visual communication (Nkopuruk and Saheed, 2019). The incorporation of graphological analysis into classroom practice has the potential to transform both student engagement with texts and instructional methodologies, particularly in contexts where verbal and visual elements converge. For instance, in the domain of reading, when students are encouraged to observe features such as spacing, punctuation, or unconventional capitalization—as exemplified by Ushie in *Hill Songs*—they develop the ability to interpret cues that transcend mere vocabulary. Directing students’ attention to such textual choices fosters a deeper understanding of tone, rhythm, and emotional nuance, thereby rendering the act of reading more dynamic and participatory. Rather than passively absorbing information, students actively construct meaning, employing inferential skills akin to those of investigators (Nkopuruk, 2024). The cultivation of visual literacy through these means instils analytical habits that extend well beyond the confines of English studies, equipping learners to discern detail and infer meaning across diverse textual encounters.

The implications for writing are equally significant. When students recognize the expressive potential of layout, typographic choices, and spatial organization, they become more intentional in their own writing practices. Ushie’s employment of graphological devices demonstrates that effective writing encompasses not only grammatical correctness but also the aesthetic and affective dimensions of textual form. Educators can leverage these insights to guide students in composing essays, poetry, or digital content that are both linguistically precise and visually compelling, thereby integrating creativity with rigorous language use. Furthermore, multimodal literacy is now an imperative rather than an elective skill, given the ubiquity of advertisements, social media, and digital narratives that continuously blend verbal and visual elements. By engaging with graphological techniques, particularly through the study of poetry, students acquire competencies necessary for interpreting and producing complex multimodal texts.

This enables them to appreciate the interplay between visual and verbal modes of communication, a capacity that is increasingly vital as distinctions between text and image continue to blur.

It is also essential that teacher preparation and curriculum development evolve accordingly. Both pre-service and in-service educators should receive substantive training in the critical analysis and pedagogical application of visual aspects of writing. Assignments might include emulating Ushie's stylistic choices, experimenting with alternative layouts, or deconstructing visual poetry. Such activities not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also foster creativity, cultural sensitivity, and communicative confidence. Nevertheless, this research demonstrates that graphological analysis warrants recognition as a central component of literacy instruction, rather than a marginal supplement. Conceiving written language as an integration of verbal and visual elements empowers students to engage with texts on a more profound and meaningful level. It is therefore imperative to establish graphology as a foundational element of language education.

### **Conclusions**

Graphology constitutes a central aspect of the relationship between written language and its visual presentation on the page. In this study, it is evident that graphology is not merely ornamental or a minor detail within stylistic analysis; rather, it serves as a substantive instrument for exploring questions related to language and education. Consider Joe Ushie's *Hill Songs* as an illustrative example. A close examination of his work reveals the extent to which he derives meaning from elements such as spacing, punctuation, capitalization, and the arrangement of words on the page. Ushie does not employ these features solely for stylistic purposes; instead, he utilizes them to communicate, directing readers' interpretation and engagement with his poetry. His deliberate deviations from conventional norms—such as the use of ellipses, unconventional hyphenation, or unique stanza configurations—demonstrate that meaning in written texts emerges not only from lexical choices but also from their visual structuring.

This insight holds particular significance for language educators. Ushie's poetry exemplifies that the visual dimension of language transcends mere decoration; it offers a compelling avenue for fostering multimodal literacy, an essential competency in an era increasingly dominated by digital and visual communication. When students are taught to identify and interpret these visual cues within texts, they begin to perceive language as a multidimensional construct, extending beyond syntax and phonology. This practice enhances not only their comprehension but also their capacity for creative and analytical thought. Thus, the integration of graphology into classroom practice enables students to appreciate that meaning is embedded not only in linguistic content but also in visual form. Furthermore, when students recognize that features such as layout, capitalization, punctuation, or typeface can influence the tone or emphasis of their writing, they are encouraged to engage in more experimental and innovative practices. Writing becomes both an intellectual endeavour and an artistic pursuit. This heightened awareness cultivates linguistic proficiency, nurtures creativity, and develops a meticulous attention to detail—all of which are fundamental to robust language education.

The present study also addresses a notable gap in both research and pedagogy by proposing a new taxonomy for graphological features, one that aligns with the demands of contemporary multimodal communication. This model delineates five categories: punctuation, orthography, typography, pictography, and fonting. Through this framework, educators and researchers are

equipped with a practical methodology for analysing and instructing the visual aspects of written texts. The approach promotes interdisciplinarity, connecting language, literature, and communication studies. Therefore, graphology merits a prominent position within both stylistics and language pedagogy. As an instructional resource, it actively engages students, cultivates their sensitivity to nuanced visual elements, and enables them to write with a heightened awareness of how form influences meaning. As a theoretical construct, it underscores that writing is an interplay of symbols, structure, and visuality. The true value of graphology resides in its capacity to produce discerning readers and innovative writers—individuals adept at navigating an increasingly visual and multimodal communicative landscape. Accordingly, this study maintains that language education, in Nigeria and globally, should place graphological literacy at the core of teaching, research, and curricular development.

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