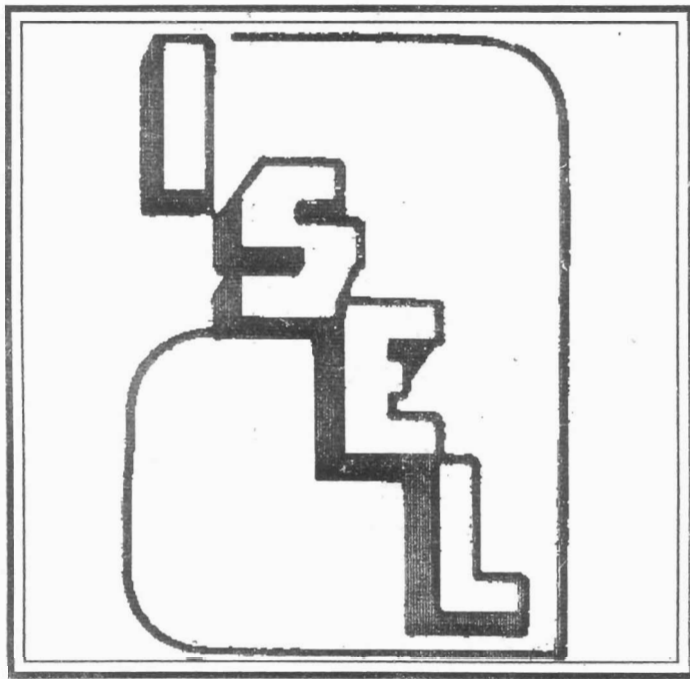


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## A Stylistic Analysis of Conflict Mediation Discourse in a Literary Text

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### Abstract

*The study does a stylistic study of an extract of conflict mediation discourse from Chinua Achebe's **Things Fall Apart**. It analyses the linguistic patterns that realise theme, transitivity, mood and modality in the extract. The goal is to make students observe the stylistic means by which the author has expressed content in English. The extract represents the speech of a character that has attempted to resolve a conflict in the novel. The linguistic stylistics approach is employed in the study and the linguistic theories utilized are Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Functional Sentence Perspective. Apart from demonstrating the application of linguistics to the interpretation of literary texts, the study projects the artistic qualities of content and form embodied in the novel. The study has relevance for the areas of rhetoric, stylistics, register studies and, particularly, for English Studies in an ESL situation.*

Key words: *stylistics, literary text, systemic functional linguistics, conflict mediation discourse*

### 1. Introduction

Enkvist (1973:27) explains the position of stylistics in relation to linguistics thus:

*We may --- regard stylistics as a sub-department of linguistics, and give it a special subsection dealing with the peculiarities of literary texts ---, make stylistics a sub-department of literary study which may on occasions draw on linguistic methods ---or regard stylistics as an autonomous discipline which draws freely, and eclectically, on methods both from linguistics and literary theory (emphasis ours).*

We would prefer the third of the three positions above to the other two. First, even as a sub-section of linguistics, the concerns of stylistics need not be restricted to a linguistic study of literary texts. The second position also implies, against our perspective, that literature subsumes stylistics and that the latter study can only be carried out within the scope of literary studies. It is, thus, within the purview of stylistics as an autonomous discipline that one can justify the existence of different branches of stylistics that abound in the field such as “linguistic stylistics” (Halliday 1967), “general stylistics”

(Crystal and Davy 1969), “practical stylistics” (Widdowson 1992) and even the consideration of stylistics in relation to genres, discourse analysis, literary discourse and ideological perspectives (Verdonk 2002).

We shall define stylistics in this paper as an empirical study of language features in texts, whether as “idiolect” (individual user’s style), “dialect (group of users’ style)”, register (style of usage), “classroom pedagogy” (effectiveness of message) or “choice” (comparison of items). Our target is to describe stylistics as a linguistic analysis of “choices” of language features in a literary text. Because the description has a linguistic focus, it is regarded as an exercise in linguistic stylistics, deriving impetus from Halliday’s (1967:218) popular definition:

--- the description of literary texts, by methods derived from general linguistic theory and within the framework of a description of the language in question; and the comparison of such texts with others, by the same and different authors, in the same and in different genres.

A stylistic study of language features in an extract of conflict mediation discourse is undertaken. The extract is taken from Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. The goal is to observe the stylistic means by which the author has expressed the content of mediation in English.

## **2. Statement of Problem**

In the opinion of stylisticians, an objective description of a literary text that can help to create awareness about the internal patterns of language in the text can best be achieved via a linguistic analysis of the text. Students thus require the knowledge and skills, not only to be able to integrate linguistics and literary studies by applying linguistic theories and description to the analysis and interpretation of texts, but, also, to be able to give their own personal responses to the texts, in addition to the knowledge gained from others. A text can elicit different responses from readers; the analysis of language and style of a text serves to enable a student to articulate a personal response to the text (Widdowson 1975, 1992; Carter 1982, Carter and McRae 1996).

We have observed, from our experience of teaching university undergraduate students in a non-native English environment that one of the most daunting tasks that can be assigned to the students, even at an advanced stage in their studies, is to make them do a stylistic analysis of a text, especially a literary text. The students may undertake linguistic description or literary appreciation separately with some confidence. But when it comes to integrating the two tasks, they demonstrate visibly their inability. An escape route for them is to simply rehash the ideas garnered from their lecture notes or previous works of critics and stylisticians. But regurgitation of other people's ideas is not the kind of response that we expect from those we intend to train to read, understand and give intelligent objective responses on texts that they have read.

### **3. Objectives and Research Procedure**

The present work is set to (i) analyse the linguistic patterns that realize theme, transitivity, mood and modality and other systems in the text; and (ii) describe the patterns in relation to the mediation motif expressed in the texts. The linguistic theories utilized for analysis are Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP). Just as the exercise of linguistic analysis makes the work relevant for linguistic studies, the analysis of extracts from literary texts makes the work applicable to literary stylistics. In addition, a description of the form and content of conflict mediation discourse could be a starting point for characterizing the register of the discourse.

The choice of conflict mediation discourse as literary sub-theme for linguistic analysis in this study might appear incidental and arbitrary, but there are significant reasons for doing so. First, the subject matter of conflict mediation is topical in present day politics and scholarship, considering the current effort being made at mediation in conflict situations and crisis resolution between individuals, groups, world bodies and organizations. Undoubtedly, the issue of conflict mediation has been, and should continue to be addressed from several perspectives, non-linguistic and linguistic. Even though a lot of studies have been carried out on conflict mediation in sociological and

sociolinguistics studies, conversation analysis, discourse analysis and pragmatics (Grimshaw 1990, Okolo 1995, Albert 2001, Jacobs 2002a, 2002b, Olomola 2002, *Bamboo Web Dictionary* 2004), studies from the perspective of linguistic stylistics are rare. This remains a gap to be filled as a part of the contribution which linguistics can make to the field.

The characteristic of literature as social discourse has justifiably been stated by scholars (Fowler 1981). Speaking on the narrative discourse, Mey (2000) claims that although a narrative has to be fictionalized, the fiction has also to ring true to be believable. Verdonk (2002) avers that since literature, like language, is an interaction between people and between institutions and people, a study that recognizes this perspective should stress its interpersonal and institutional dimensions, concentrating on those parts of textual structure which reflect and which influence relations within society.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*<sup>1</sup> is a novel that has been read widely across the world. The extract (see Text 1 below) represents the speech of a communal mediator in the novel. Mediation sessions form a part of the Igbo<sup>2</sup> communal ceremonies that come up at the village green at appointed times. The mediators (all male) are nine *egwugwu*<sup>3</sup>, each of whom represents a village of nine clans in the community. The leading "egwugwu", who is called "Evil Forest", is the spokesman for the mediators. His speech occurs in the mediation of an estranged relationship between a husband, on the one hand, and his wife and her relations, on the other hand.

It is worth noting that we have deliberately represented only the mediator's speech in the interactions and excluded the contributions of the disputants. This has served our purpose for the present study, which focuses on the "mediator's language" and not on "mediation interaction" per se.

TEXT 1 (Only the main clauses in the mediator's speech are considered and numbered.)

We have heard both sides of the case,' said Evil Forest. 'Our duty is not to blame this man<sup>ii</sup> or to praise that<sup>iii</sup>, but to settle the dispute.'<sup>iv</sup> He turned to Uzowulu's

group and allowed a short pause. 'Uzowulu's body, do you know me?'' 'How can I know you, father? You are beyond our knowledge,' Uzowulu replied. 'I am Evil Forest'<sup>vi</sup>. I kill a man on the day that his life is sweetest to him'<sup>vii</sup>.

'That is true,' replied Uzowulu.

'Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine'<sup>viii</sup> and beg your wife to return to you'<sup>ix</sup>. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman.'<sup>x</sup> He turned to Odukwe, and allowed a brief pause.

'Odukwe's body, I greet you'<sup>xi</sup> he said. 'My hand is on the ground,'replied Odukwe.

'Do you know me?''<sup>xii</sup>

'No man can know you,' replied Odukwe. 'I am Evil Forest,<sup>xiii</sup> I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth'<sup>xiv</sup>, I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots'<sup>xv</sup>. If your in-law brings wine to you let your sister go with him'<sup>xvi</sup>. I salute you.'<sup>xvii</sup>

*(Things Fall Apart, p.66)*

#### 4. Systemic Linguistics, Functional Sentence Perspective and Textual Analysis

The explication of Systemic Linguistics has been done in various works by the proponent of the theory itself, Halliday (1970, 1973 and 1985) and other scholars in the Hallidayan tradition, especially Berry (1975 and 1977) and Bloor and Bloor (1995).The framework suggests that when people use language to express meanings, they do so in specific situations and the form of the language that they use is influenced by the complex elements of those situations. The model further says that the meanings (ideational interpersonal and textual) that are expressed by language are realized at the phono – lexico – grammatical levels in form of options from various grammatical systems such as transitivity, mood, modality, theme, person, tense, etc. In this study, we shall describe the options made from some of these systems by a speaker to express the “mediation use” of language.

The wide application of Systemic Functional Linguistics to the analysis of literary texts also provides a basis for this study. For example, this study has derived impetus from, especially, the following studies: Hasan's (1971) analysis of W. B. Yeats's "The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water"; Halliday's (1973) analysis of the language of William Golding's *The Inheritors*; Keyser's (1980) analysis of Wallace Stevens's "The Death of a Soldier"; Burton's (1982) analysis of a passage from Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*; Lavid's (1991) analysis of a passage from

Barron Freeman's (1948) novella *Melville's Billy Budd*; Birch's (1989) analysis of a poem "Encapsulated" from Collin Johnson's (1986) *The Song Circle of Jacky and Selected Poems*; Adejare's (1992) analysis of Wole Soyinka's literary idiolect; and Adegbite's (2004) analysis of an extract in Pidgin English from Achebe's (1988) *Anthills of the Savannah*.

The Functional Sentence Perspective is useful in this study in terms of the study of thematic progression (TP) in texts. The seminal works of Danes (1970, 1974) provide us with the identification and illustration of five TP patterns (see also Bloor 1995) viz. the "constant", "simple linear", the "split-rheme" and "derived" TP. Further explanation on the analysis of themes in texts and suggestions on how to tackle some problems are provided by Fries and Francis (1992). Following some of the suggestions, we shall mention some aspects of the procedures adopted in the analysis of TP in this study thus:

- a. Normally, the theme precedes the rheme in an utterance, but what part of the utterances to constitute the theme depends on what part of the clause structure, Subject, predicator, complement and adjunct the speaker wishes to present first.
- b. The unmarked theme is the 'S' of the clause, while the marked theme is that (thematized) part of the clause that comes first, against its normally passive sentence in English is typically marked for theme.
- c. The theme of a polar interrogative clause is the question item plus the subject that may occur after it; the item serves as theme in a wh-interrogative.
- d. Conjunctions, disjuncts and conjuncts characteristically occur in initial position in utterances; hence, they are not normally regarded as theme alone, but occur as compound or multiple themes in conjunction with the thematic elements after them.
- e. The interclausal themes in a text are identified by observing certain cohesive links (Halliday and Hasan (1976) in a text in terms of co-references, semantic inference (involving ellipsis and substitution), lexical relationships, paraphrase, etc.

- f. The unit of thematic analysis is the main clause. Thus an embedded clause is treated as part of the main clause, which can function as theme or part of the rheme.
- g. The empty 'there' or 'it' functions as part of a complex theme together with the thematic element after it, e.g.: "There was a man/ in the garden." "It became necessary/ for all of us to go there". "It is you/ that we are talking to."

It is important to point out here that the identification of TP patterns in texts has enhanced the analysis and classification of text types by authors (Dubois 1987, Nwogu and Bloor 1991, Downing 2001).

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

### 5.1 Analysis

*No of Sentences* -12 (17 main clauses)

*Sentence Types*

1. Simple, non-future(present perfect), positive/ active
2. Multiple, non-future (present 3), negative/active, positive/ active, negative/ active
3. Simple, non-future present, positive/active
4. Simple, non-future present, positive/active
5. Simple, non-future present, positive/action
6. Compound, positive/active (2)
7. Complex, non-future present, positive/active
8. Simple, non-future present, positive/active
9. Simple, non-future present,
10. Multiple, non-future present, positive/active (3)
11. Complex, non-future present, positive/active
12. Simple, positive/active

<i>Sentence/ Types</i>	<i>Simple</i>	<i>Compound</i>	<i>Multiple</i>	<i>Complex</i>	<i>Total</i>
	7	1	2	2	= 12

There are twelve sentences in the text, which are predominantly of the simple sentence type (7). Other types that occur minimally are the compound (1) multiple (2) and complex sentences (2). There are seventeen main clauses in the extract.



## **Transitivity**

### *Processes*

1. Mental/ perception
2. Relational/ identifying (3)
3. Mental/ cognition
4. Relational/ identifying
5. Material/ action
6. Material/ action; Verbalized
7. Relational/ identifying
8. Verbalized
9. Mental/ cognition
10. Relational/ identifying (3)
11. Material/ action
12. Verbalized

### *Summary*

Material-3; Mental-3; Relational-8; Verbalized-3

### *Participants*

1. Senser (We), Phenomenon/range (both sides of the case)
2. Identifier/Token(Our duty), Value (to blame this man or praise that) Identifier/Token-ellipted, Value (to praise that)
3. Identifier/Token (I), Value (to settle the dispute)
4. Senser (you), Phenomenon/agent (me)
5. Identifier/Token (I), Value (Evil Forest)
6. Act/Operator (I), Goal (a man), Circumstance/Time (on the day...)
7. Act-covert (you), Range (to your in-laws), Range<sup>2</sup> (with a pot of wine)
8. Sayer (you), Receiver (your wife), Range/verbiage (to return to you)
9. Identifier(It), Value (not bravery), Circumstance/occasion
10. Sayer(I), Receiver (you)
11. Senser (you), Phenomenon/agent(me)
12. Identifier/Token, Value (Evil Forest)
13. Identifier/Token, Value (Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth)
14. Identifier/Token, Value (Fire-that-burns-without faggots)
15. Actor(you), Goal (your sister), Range (go with him)
16. Sayer (I), Receiver (you)

### *Summary*

Actor 3, Goal 2, Senser 3, Sayer 3, Identifier (Token) 8 Value (8) Receiver/Target 3.

Four options of process realise the message of the text, out of which the relational process (8) stands out. The other process options are the material (3), mental (3), and verbalized (3). All the relational clauses are of the identifying type in which

certain identifiers in form of social values (to blame this man, to praise that, to settle the dispute) and appellations (Evil Forest, Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth, Fire-that-burns-without-faggots) are assigned to identified tokens (our duty, I), which symbolize the authority (i.e. social power) that regulates social behaviour.

The mental clauses are both cognitive (know) and perceptive (hear). In both processes, the senser (disputant) knows and perceives (hear) a human subject (the mediator). verbalized (greet, salute) twice to receivers (disputants), while another sayer (a disputant) is expected to verbalize (beg) another receiver (disputant) in the text.

Lastly, three choices of the material action process (kill, go, and let) are made. Two of these are non-middle clauses in which participants realise actors (I, you) and goals (a man, your sister) and one is a middle clause in which only one participant (you) realises actor. The material actions are complemented by circumstances of time, place and means (on the day, to your in-laws, with a pot of wine) and a range (with him).

### **Mood and Modality**

- i. Declarative, Non-modal
- ii Declarative, Non-modal
- iii Declarative, Non-modal
- iv Declarative, Non-modal
- v Declarative, Non-modal
- vi Declarative, Non-modal
- vii Declarative, Non-modal
- viii Imperative
- ix Imperative
- x Declarative, Non-modal
- xi Declarative, Non-modal
- xii Interrogative, Non-modal
- xiii Declarative, Non-modal
- xiv Declarative, Non-modal
- xv Imperative
- xvi Declarative, Non-modal

#### *Summary*

Declarative- 12, Interrogative-2, Imperative-3

Non-modal 12

The predominant option of mood made is the declarative (12), while the interrogative (2) and imperative options occur sparingly (3). The declarative clauses project the presentation of social values and the personality of the mediator, while the few imperatives realise instructions given to disputants during the mediation task. The declarative clauses in the text are non-modalized, which shows the absence of modal expressions in the text.

### Theme

i	We	Unmarked
ii	Our duty	Unmarked
iii	But (our duty2(or...)	Unmarked
iv	Do you	Unmarked
v	I	Unmarked
vi	I	unmarked
vii	Go	Unmarked
viii	and beg	Unmarked
ix	It	Unmarked
x	I	Unmarked
xi	Do you	Unmarked
xii	I	Unmarked
xiii	I	unmarked
xiv	I	Unmarked
xv	Let	Unmarked
xvi	I	Unmarked

### Summary

Multiple-3, Simple-14, Constant 7, Derived-7, Simple Linear-2

All the 17 themes of clauses in the text are unmarked. The simple theme is more dominant, occurring 14 times in the text. The thematic projection is made up of the constant (7), derived (7) and simple linear (3) patterns. The constant theme is attributed to the repetition of pronouns “I” and “you” which refer to the mediator and disputants respectively. The alternation of “I” and “you” in the interaction is responsible for the derived theme, while the simple linear theme derives from shifts in the consequent representation of the mediator in rhemes and themes (see cls v and vi; xii and xiii).

The thematic content refers most to the mediator (11) as an inclusive member of a society (our duty, we) in cls ii-iv and as an individual person, though representative of the society (I), in cls vi, vii, xi-xv and xvii. The disputants are represented five times, three times explicitly in cls v, xii, and xvi and two times implicitly in cls vii and xi. Of these five times, the “accused” is mentioned three times and the “accuser” twice. Only one theme mentions a social fact (cl. x) as content in the text.

## **5.2 Discussion**

From the linguistic analysis above, some insights can be gained into the content of mediation representation in the text. First, the transitivity options have revealed that mediation primarily expresses relations among participants by identifying and making references to authorities, social values, obligations and social duties. Sometimes, human beings are either involved or committed to performing actions in the present or future. Constant appeal is also made to the cognitive and visual attention of disputants and ascertains their cooperation in the mediation exercise.

The options of mood have shown the characteristic traits of mediators to counsel mainly via assertions and a few instructions. Conflict resolution is thus perceived as social obligations/duties which interactants must perform in conformity with conventional regulations<sup>4</sup>. The status of the mediator towers above that of obsequious disputants in a strictly hierarchical society.

Lastly, the options of theme indicate the orientation of the mediator to the direct conversational nature of mediation speeches. References are made to disputants, mediators and third parties in the communication. The emphasis on the mediator’s personality and power and potency of social control in the themes and rhemes is indicative of conflict resolution by coercion, rather than by complex persuasion, as may be observed in some other sociocultural or cross-cultural contexts.

## 6. Conclusion

The linguistic analysis of mediation discourse has pedagogic relevance for especially, applied linguistics, literary (social) content interpretation and register studies. First, students will have the skills required to integrate both linguistics and literature which they have hitherto learnt as different disciplines (Carter 1982). Furthermore, they will have the capacity to form and express their own individual and collective reactions to texts through the language of such texts instead of their over-dependent reliance on “authoritative” critics in the field whose opinions they used to rehash.

Finally, teachers and students will realize that a linguistic analysis provides the metalanguage for an objective description of language in use, particularly the comparison of texts. Students need to be taught the vocabulary and strategies of applying linguistics to the communicative use of language. Meanwhile, the tentative statements made regarding the formal features of conflict mediation discourse also provide a starting point for the characterization of a register of mediation discourse. Further studies on the topic are thus required in cultural and cross-cultural studies for their confirmation or negation.

### Notes

1. Achebe's novel *Things fall Apart* is a narrative that depicts the experiences, travails and struggles of a hero, Okonkwo, in the Igbo society at the period the white man broke into it as missionary, trader and administrator (Higo, in Achebe, 1958: v).
2. The Igbo people constitute one of the major ethnic groups among the over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria.
3. The egwugwu is a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village. The masquerader is accorded the respect and dignity of an ancestral spirit.
4. Social convention represents a third voice in this communication. Mey (2000:287) identifies an underlining voice presence of an external authority in texts. According to him, the authority, which is internalized in us as the "third voice" of the superaddressee, (i.e. speaker, writer and hearer/reader) is itself an expression of the relations which characterize a particular societal environment. The weight of one's words or what can be said by whom and how depend on where the utterer and, by implication, listener stand in that balance.

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