Linguistic Features of Solidarity in African Literature: A Study of Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead*

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Abstract

African literary writers are conscious of their existential experiences in colonial and post-colonial eras. Their works focus on attacking the perpetuation of the status-quo: colonialism, corruption and gender discrimination. This explains why their themes are mostly historically rooted. Solidarity is one of the thematic concerns of post-colonial African literary writings, as in Ola Rotimi's Hopes of the Living Dead. The themes of the play are national solidarity, self-reliance and purposeful leadership. African literary writers communicate their themes by relying heavily on principles of effective communication which are essentially linguistic conventions. Linguistic features of communication are systematic and functional. According to Fowler (1981), "linguistic structure is not arbitrary. It is determined and motivated by the functions it performs." Deploying insights from phonology, grammar, stylistics and pragmatics, this study is poised to reveal language use in African Literature, as a purposeful and productive indulgence, rather than being incidental. The study is anchored on Text Analysis Theory and Lee's (1997) Cognitive Grammar Theory in the analysis of selected data from Hopes of the Living Dead. The study concludes that in writing as solidarity, linguistic features are used for the purpose of persuasive speech, and such features include specific clause structures, focused speech acts cohesive devices, image-conjuring diction as well as events-connecting nouns and pronouns.

Keywords: African Literature, Solidarity, Grammar, Stylistics, Text Analysis Theory, Cognitive Grammar Theory

1. Introduction

African literature reveals how the interactions of intra-text characters convey themes, including the theme of solidarity. There are different studies on language use in literature; African Literature is not an exception. This paper examines language use in selected linguistic structures from the play *Hopes of the Living Dead* with a view to establishing how language use impinges on the theme of solidarity. Across the basic literary genres of literature (drama, prose/fiction and poetry), African writers deploy linguistic features that facilitate the

communication of the common themes of colonialism, corruption, oppression and gender discrimination. As Adegbija (1999) rightly notes, "language use is not incidental. This study treats "writing as solidarity" as a kind of genre. It is a cross-domain study which explores insights from grammar, stylistics, pragmatics and phonology to reveal linguistic perspectives in communication of themes in the play, with focus on the theme of solidarity.

2. *Hopes of the Living Dead*

Hopes of the Living Dead is a play set in Nigeria. The immediate physical context is Port Harcourt, in Rivers State. It narrates the experiences of a group of lepers who are confined in a ward of the General Hospital. Subjected to inhuman treatment, the lepers mobilize one another for their liberation. The play satirizes colonialism in Nigeria, and by extension, the larger society. The author's message is clear: solidarity, self-reliance and purposeful leadership are instrumental to the progress of society.

There are major and minor characters in the play, reflecting the more gifted and less-gifted. The hero is Harcourt White. It can be postulated that there are three categories of audience in the play: the first is the make-belief intra-text audience (characters within the text as partakers in social discourse and interpersonal relations); the second is the non-immediate extra-text audience (Ghanaians with their awareness of colonialism and the corruption in post-colonial Ghana); the third is the global context extra-text audience (non-Ghanaians who read or watch the play on stage).

In terms of plot, the entire play consists of Happenings: Happening One (Crisis); Happening Two (Strain of Leadership); and Happening Three (Solidarity and Movement). Towards the end, SMO comes to IDH, telling the patients about the authority's decision to take them away from the Infectious Disease Hospital to their villages until the proposed Leper's Hospital at Uzuakoli is ready.

3. Stylistics

The term "Stylistics" refers to the study of style which concerns all the factors that determine language use. According to Banjo (1982), stylistics is "the exhaustive study of the role of language in literary works." Leech and Short (1981) posit that style can be applied to both spoken and written, both literary and non-literary varieties of language, but by tradition, it is particularly associated with written literary texts. In a stylistic analysis of any text, the analyst focuses not only on the linguistic aspects of language use, but also on the extra-linguistic factors that determine the meanings of words and sentences in the text. In such an analysis, patterns of language use and their meanings are identified. Oloruntoba-Oju (1999, p. 127) opines that "style is almost synonymous with variety. Style refers in a simple way to manner of expression, which differs according to the various contexts producing the variation. For instance, style may differ according to place (e.g. Western or African), time (e.g. Old English, New English, Classical Poetry, Modern Poetry, etc.), individuality (e.g. the style of Shakespeare, style of Soyinka, etc.) and modality (written, verbal, simple, complex, formal, informal, plain, poetic, etc.)." The analysis of linguistic features of African literary texts is immersed in stylistics. According to Simpson (2004, p. 3), "to do stylistics is to explore language, and more specifically, to explore creativity in language use. Doing stylistics thereby enriches our ways

of thinking about the language and as observed, exploring language offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of (literary) texts …".

4. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is defined as simply "the study of language use" or "the study of linguistic phenomena from the point of view of their usage properties and processes" (Verschueren, 2003, p.1). in a similar vein, Choudhary (2019, p.1) defines pragmatics as "a subfield of linguistics and semiotics that studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning". (See Mey, 2001 for more perspectives on the meaning of pragmatics). Theoretical concepts in Pragmatics include: (a) **participants** (users of language in context); (b) **speech acts** ("locutionary act" which is an utterance with determinate sense and reference; "illocutionary act" which is the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence by virtue of the conventional force associated with it; and "perlocutionary act" which is the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence); (c) **context** (the relevant aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance or discourse); (d) **non-verbal communication** (non-linguistic communication); (e) **inference** (the process of making logical conclusions from all that a particular context provides to arrive at what a speaker means); (f) **presupposition** (facts that the participants of discourse take for granted in a particular context of communication); and (g) **shared knowledge** (common background information shared by the participants of discourse). Theories of Pragmatics are crucial for a better understanding of the instrumentality of Pragmatics in the explanation of language use in African Literature. In this regard, see Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Grice (1975), Bach and Harnish (1979), Adegbija (1982), Mey (ibid.) and Acheoah (2015).

5. African Literature

African writers are conscious of their existential experiences in colonial and post-colonial era. Their writings focus on the perpetuation of the status-quo: colonialism, corruption, gender discrimination, etc. In writing against unacceptable social order, African writers make readers to oscillate between reality and illusion, and this is achieved through multiple devices, including skillful use of linguistic elements. Literary writers do not keep quiet about societal vices. Freire (1972) sees the trend of silence in the face of bad governance and suffering as, "the fruit of historical and sociological situations, not an essential characteristic of people's behavior". Literary writers are pathfinders, leading legitimate rebellion against unacceptable social order, restoring society to rectitude, and awakening the consciousness of readers[1].

6. Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical framework guiding the study

6.1 The Text Analysis Theory
Marjory Meechan (2004) presents elaborate perspectives on the Text Analysis Theory:

Text analysis, both written and oral, concentrates on the linguistic structure of discourse, both within and between utterances. These kinds of studies include analysis of pragmatics and speech act theory … A prominent sociolinguistic approach to text analysis uses variationist methodology. The variationist approach to discourse operates under the assumption that although a variety of structures may be used to fulfill any one

discourse function, patterns in the variation found in natural conversational speech show that there is structure in discourse. An important tool in variationist analysis is the sociolinguistic variable, which roughly speaking, encompasses alternative ways of saying something. For example, in (i) the variable involves question, which can have a variety of forms. Following the standard conversation in variationist sociolinguistics, the question label is placed in parenthesis to indicate that it is a variable.

(i) (Question)

Wanna drive?

Do you want to drive?

You want to drive?

In the study of structure in discourse, any set of utterances with equivalent discourse functions can constitute a variable. To determine which utterances are functionally equivalent, utterances in specific types of discourse units, such as narratives or lists, are analyzed to isolate their function. For example, narratives are composed of several different clause types. Abstract clauses, which contain a general summary of the experience to be narrated, will sometimes appear at the beginning of the narrative. More often, orientation clauses will begin the narrative to give the background to the story, including who was involved as well as where and when it took place. Complicating action clauses describe the events of the story and each event generally appears in the order it took place. Evaluation clauses consist of comments regarding the events. Finally, the narrative may end with a coda clause that serves to shift the time of the narrative back into present time. Example (ii) shows a narrative analysis with most of these elements.

(ii) Narrative example from southern Alberta English Corpus …

a. Abstract: Well, there was one time

b. Orientation: When I was driving with my mom

c. Orientation: I just – just got my learner's,

d. Orientation: We're going to my – had a banquet-hokey bouquet

e. Orientation: and it was snowing outside, everything

f. Complicating action: and all of a sudden, I just lost control of the car going down into a coulee.

g. Orientation: Cap's sowy going over

h. Orientation: and I'm just turning it this way,

i. Complicating action: slammed on the brakes.

j. Orientation: There's my mom

k. Orientation: Just looking.

l. Orientation: just praying, eh

m. Complicating action: and l w – I just – I missed the barricade by this much

n. Complicating action: and then I came to a complete in an in – into …

o. Evaluation: It was close

p. Complicating action: sa – I got out of the car.

q. Complicating action: I said, 'mom, you're driving now'.

r. Evaluation: I think that was the closest thing

s. Evaluation: that I came to even experiencing anything

t. Evaluation: that would be – even be close to death.

This approach to discourse can be very valuable for examining the role of discourse markers. These are elements that bracket utterances and organize the sequence and relationship between events and participants in the discourse … Speakers are not generally aware of discourse markers but they are important signals in discourse. For example, in (iia), the speaker's use of "well" may be expressing the feeling that while the experience was harrowing, there was never any strong danger of death. Cohesive devises are also important for tracking participants and events in discourse, as an examination of temporal and spatial reference clearly shows … Pragmatics and discourse analysis have revealed that speakers have conventions for reference in discourse. For example, the pronoun "it" is generally found after the full NP "the car" in discourse. This is called anaphoric reference. In less frequent cases, a pronoun may precede the full noun phrase, a case of cataphoric reference. For example, in (iig), the speaker might have used the clause in (iii):

(iii) It's slowly going over, the car.

The function and structure of discourse marking is still not very well understood … one of the problems of studying discourse markers is the fact that they often perform multiple functions depending on the type of clause or adjacency pair where they are found and their position in the clause …"

6.2 **Lee's Theory**

According to Lee (1997), the Cognitive Grammar notions of frame, profiling and radiality are:

> useful discourse analysis tools. The notion of frame varies from that
> used in the ethnography of communication (where the frame is key of
> activity being engaged in, e.g. joking) or interactional sociolinguistics
> (where the frame relates to the contextual structures invoked by
> individual words and the concepts they denote. Profiling relates to

foregrounding on element within the frame, and radiality describes how to refer to situations that are different yet connected by a central or prototypical meaning.

7. **Methodology**

This study hinges on the Projection Principle (cf. Adejare 1992) for the selection of data from *Hopes of the Living Dead*. The Projection Principle states that through the analysis of selected linguistic structures from an entire text, conclusive submission(s) can be made about research phenomena. The selection of the samples is based on content. To facilitate referencing, the dialogues are labeled as utterances (Utterance 1 to Utterance 31, henceforth U.1-U.31). The analysis presents pragmatic background of the entire dialogue before identifying and discussing the linguistic features deployed by the writer. In this regard, insights from related fields of language study are explored to prove that in presenting writing as solidarity, literary artists simply explore the linguistic conventions of the medium of communication, referred to as Operative Language (OL) in Acheoah (2015).

8. **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

In this section, the thirty-three utterances are presented and analyzed.

8.1 **Presentation of Data**

U.1 MATRON: With drumming and dancing! Where do you think you are?

U.2 EDITOR: (With malevolent calm) In the hospital. The General Hospital of the Imperial Majesty King George V of England, situated in the land of Port-Harcourt in the colonial Territory of Nigeria, West Africa, the world.

U.3 MATRON: Is that supposed to be plain madness or a display of high intellect in geography?

U.4 CAT: It's neither.

U.5 MATRON: Beg your pardon!

U.6 CAT: You asked a simple question and he gave you a simple answer.

U.7 MATRON: (Curtly) No one is seeking your opinion (turns again to Editor). In the first place, I was addressing him (indicates Nweke). Since when did you become a spokesperson for the … (restrains herself from describing the group) or who do you think you are?

U.8 Another question.

U.9 EDITOR: Leper, madam. I am a leper like the rest of them (with a sweep of the arm taking in the entire inmates). Lepers, lepers, all at the mercy of the hospital authority. (p. 6)

U.10 HW: We must choose now. The SMO wants people to speak for us. Each one, tell one.

U.11 EDITOR: No need, brother. We've already chosen our leaders. You and CC are the first two.

U.12 HW: First two what?

U.13 NWEKE: (Irritably) Whose idea was that? (p. 38)

U.14: HANNAH: Mallam proposed it, we all approved (Embarrassed) No, no, no-no things have to be done properly.

U.15 EDITOR: It is the wish of the people.

U.16 HW: Nothing is settled yet, my lords.

U.17 SUPT: What's there to settle?

U.18 HW: Our right.

U.19 What right?

U.20 HW: A chance!

U.21 SUPT: To say?

U.22 HW: To exist.

U.23 SMO: Not here!

U.24 Where then?

U.25 SUPT: Your homes.

U.26 HW: You joke!

U.27 SMO: The cheek!

U.28 HW: You'll see.

U.29 SUPT: See what

U.30 HW: Our strength.

U.31 SMO: In flouting the law?

U.32 HW: In demanding justice!

U.33 SUPT: (Imperious sternness) Now, you listen to me! (pp. 46-47)

8.2 **Analysis of Data**

In as much as the drummers are in a hospital ward, they are aware of the implications of such a physical setting; they know the appropriate and inappropriate dispositions to manifest in such a place. In terms of "domain and role relations", the lepers are not supposed to be drumming in a hospital. See Oloruntoba-Oju (1999) for insights on "domain and role relations". Acheoah (2015) refers to such a meaning-laden discourse disposition as Behavioral Implicature (BI). By drumming in the hospital, the lepers perform an intentional, face-threatening non-verbal act to

convey "anger". Its illocutionary forces (illocutionary acts) are "condemning", "agitating" and "warning"; the act is used to: condemn the way they are confined; agitate for their freedom; and send a warning signal to their oppressors – a signal that solidarity is building up towards revolt. The text presents master-subordinate (oppressor-oppressed) relationship. For example, U.1 implies that the encoder is higher in social status than the addressees (conventional implicature). Like U.1, U.3 also signifies that the encoder is higher in social status than the addressee. See Grice (ibid.) for an understanding of conventional and conversational implicatures. U.2 is not an appropriate response for U.1 in the sense that the encoder violates the Maxim of Quantity in the Cooperative Principle of Conversation (cf. Grice ibid.). However, the underpinnings (oppression and struggle for freedom) prevent the language of the lepers from reflecting the social relationship. That is, the language of the lepers does not signify respect, regard and honor towards the representatives of the hospital authority: MATRON and SMO. On the other hand, the lepers represent the suffering masses who are often in the majority: EDITOR (the encoder of U.1, U.2 and U.15), CAT (the encoder of U.4), HW (the encoder of U.10, U.12, U.16, U.20, U.22, U.24, U.26 and U.28), NWEKE (the encoder of U.13), HANNAH (the encoder of U.14), SMO (the encoder of U.19, U.23, U.27 and U.31) and SUPT (the encoder of U.17, U.21, U.25 and U.33). The psychological underpinning is tense. The lepers feel the pains of solitary confinement and oppression. They are conscious of their previous social status. There is speaker-hearer shared knowledge about the fact that U.2 is an extraneous response (more information than is needed). That is why MATRON infers that the response is rude. In our real world, if prisoners behave like these lepers to prison authority, the readers' world knowledge is negated. Given the fact that lepers are people who are stigmatized, confined and relegated, it is instructive that the writer uses lepers as characters. This implies that if the most miserable of humans could confront constituted authority, there is a very serious issue to resolve. The lepers do not disregard themselves, and so they have the daring mind to disrespect and attack constituted authority. These are the background issues that impinge on the linguistic features identified and discussed below:

8.2.1 Interrogatives

In the text, interrogatives abound in U.1, U.3, U.7, U.12, U.13, U.17, U.19, U.21, U.24, U.29 and U.31. While some of the interrogatives are leper-to-leper utterances, others are uttered by hospital staff to lepers. Interrogatives build up the conflict in two dimensions: representatives of the hospital agitate for subordination from the lepers while the lepers agitate for freedom[2]. The illocutionary forces of these interrogatives from the side of the hospital staff are: asking, prohibiting and warning. In asking (secondary illocutionary act) as in U.1, U.2, U.7 and U.19, the encoder prohibits the action of the lepers, and warns them by implication (primary illocutionary acts). The illocutionary acts of the leper-to-leper interrogatives are: asking and rejecting. The writer skillfully uses these two utterances to establish a background for solidarity moves to begin; without such disunity and confusion among the lepers, solidarity moves do not have any basis. In terms of function in the text, interrogatives are used to condemn status-quo and behavior.

8.2.2 High Pitches

In English phonology, it is believed that "high' is an inbuilt phonological feature of certain linguistic stretches. For example, speakers do not really have to be emphatic in producing

questions (interrogatives) since the hearers' auditory organs receive an interrogative sentence as "ending with a high pitch" (non-terminal intonation contour). Even though the interrogative clauses in the dialogues are short, their high pitches are perceived. See Acheoah (2013) for insights on prosodic features of linguistic stretches.

8.2.3 **Speech Acts**

In the entire text (U.1-U.33), speech acts are deployed with specific speaker-based illocutionary goals, and are interpreted accordingly by the addressees. John T. Kearns, cited in Savas L. T. (1994, p. 50) notes that "a linguistic act, or speech act, is an intentional, meaningful act performed with an expression or expressions. Even though the word 'speech' suggests saying something out loud, the two expressions 'speech act' and 'linguistic act' are used interchangeably for acts performed with expressions, whether they are out loud, in writing, or 'in one's head'. Both speakers/writers and their audiences (when they understand the speakers/writers) perform linguistic acts." The dialogues in U.1-U.33, are like that of a colonized world, where the colonizer and the colonized unleash "war of words" without any hope of reconciliation. Interestingly, the speech acts performed with oppressive tendencies (asking, prohibiting, and warning) and those performed with the desire for freedom (asking, declaring, directing and informing) are performed with appreciable felicity conditions. For example, while HW's linguistic contributions are informed by his position as head of the lepers, the SMO and MATRON speak from the understanding that they represent the hospital authority. This mindset is essentially about invoking the necessary contextual nuances for an utterance, as in Lee's (ibid.) theory in which "frame" relates to the "contextual structures invoked by individual words and the concepts they denote". Austin (ibid.) contends that speech acts can be felicitous (happy) when the required conditions are fulfilled. For example, the participants and their linguistic contributions should be appropriate for the context situation.

8.2.4 **Grammatical Categories**

In the dialogues, elements of grammar include: personal pronouns, modal auxiliary and clause structure. These elements convey discrete messages therein. For example, the contracted modal auxiliary "will" as in "You'll see" (U.28) implies "certainty" (conventional implicature). The performance of face-threatening acts in a revolt-driven discourse relies on elements of grammar.

The message-driven potential of clause-structure can be understood from the perspective of "spread of events" in the use of English tenses. Yau (2013) ponders on the "spread of the event" or state described by the verb and its argument in the use of the English past perfect. He notes that "the past perfect is viewed as having a single meaning, but its perfect sense construction interacts with the sentential elements and structure." The potential to spread the events or proposition of a sentence is a product of the semantic interaction between verbs and other linguistic units in a sentence. Different tenses present propositions in the data of this study, including the simple present and future tense. These tenses establish cause-effect phenomena. Although the utterances are short as if they are sentence fragments, they are sentential. In English grammar, there are acceptable fragments, given the intertextuality feature of the dialogue. Intertextuality means one text reads another. Stubs (1983) is instructive on the concept of intertextuality in discourse. The short forms of the adjacency pairs make the happenings (actions) faster, build the conflict and signal the next scheme of things (outcome of the solidarity and struggle).

9. **Conclusion**

This study identifies different linguistic features that facilitate "writing as solidarity" in *Hopes of the Living Dead*. Broadly speaking, the features are phonological, grammatical, stylistic and pragmatic. Each feature is significantly functional in the dialogues of the characters, as they struggle to liberate themselves from the shackles of oppression. For example, the rising pitch signals anger and agitation. The writer creates the textual characters and their linguistic contributions to the entire text, focusing on thematic concerns. In writing as solidarity, African literary writers reveal the correlation between linguistic features and states-of-affairs that language addresses. This study shows that in *Hopes of the Living Dead*, characterization reflects affiliation (human connections/relations) in the sense that characters either have intra-text affiliations (as in the good writing backgrounds which Editor, Court Clerk, Catchiest and Hannah have due to their kind of professions) or extra-text affiliations (as in Harcourt White's correlation with activists in society). Thus, Ola Rotimi proves his awareness that "affiliations" and "stereotypes" are crucial in conveying the theme of solidarity in the play.

Notes

[1.] This is the Functionalism perspective of literature – verbal artistry as utility.

[2.] Conflict can be viewed from both political and social angles. Socially, it is an expression of agitation between parties with conflicting interests. Politically, it is among parties who struggle for power and resources. The conflicting parties may be individuals, groups or countries. Theories which explain the causes of conflict include Human Needs Theory, Relational Theory, Political Theory and Transformative Theory. The Human Needs Theory expresses the view that without certain basic needs, humans cannot survive. The Relational Theory posits that conflict is the product of social interactions that operate among people from different socio-cultural backgrounds. According to the Political Theory, the state is the platform where people or groups with conflicting interests clash over certain benefits. Thus, a weak state informed by poor leadership, breeds conflict among group therein. The Transformative Theory contends that conflict is generated by perceived inequality and injustices driven by socio-cultural, religious, political and economic forces within a state. In the contemporary world, conflict is being resolved with changing approaches.

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