

**INTERPERSONAL MEANING ANALYSIS IN CHUMA NWOKOLO'S
THE GHOST OF SANI ABACHA**

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Abstract

This study attempts an interpersonal meaning analysis in Chuma Nwokolo's The Ghost of Sani Abacha. This study intends to identify and interpret the language structures and contextual meanings embedded in the text, within the confines of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). SFG is the theoretical framework adopted for analysis in this study because of the priority it has given language. Interpersonal meta-function is one, out of the three components of meaning making in SFG, which is basically concerned with relationship between speakers and their utterances in a given discourse and has mood and modality as its realisation forms. The analysis will concentrate on mood, that deals with sentence structures and modality, that deals with modal auxiliary verbs and other keys, within clauses and sentences in the text that contains them. Therefore, through purposive sampling technique with the aid of close reading, the study tries to answer these questions: what are the lexico-grammatical features for realizing the metafunctions of language and how are they related

to context? The study reveals that lexico-grammatical features are linguistic items that are found in clauses and sentences and contextual meanings lies between the context of culture and context of situation, and are related through various choices made by individuals in utterances. Since interpersonal meanings deals solely with context of situation, it reveals that Nwokolo's diction is complex and laced with vulgarity.

Keywords: Interpersonal Metafunction, Systemic Functional Grammar, Mood, Modality, The Ghost of Sani Abacha

Introduction

The study of language is so important that, Norman Fairclough states, that “using language is the most common form of social behaviour, and we depend on language in our public and private interaction, determining our relationships with other individuals and the social institutions we inhabit” (2). People use language to make meanings build up and be understood through choices of words and grammatical resources. This study is concern with the interpersonal metafunction, through which language is used to establish and maintain relations between the writer/speaker and their reader/listener. Halliday observes that “here, the speaker is using language as a means of his own intrusion into the speech event: the expression of his comments, attitudes and evaluations, and also of the relationship that he sets up between himself and the listener. In particular, the communication role that he adopts of informing, questioning, greeting, persuading, and the like” (333). The study will examine Nwokolo's language use in the text and what meanings do they bring to bear in the minds of the readers. As Geoffrey N. Leech and Mick Short rightly observe that, “examining the language of a literary text can lead to a fuller understanding of the text and thus appreciation of the writer's artistic achievement” (21). This study tries to explore, identify and interpret linguistic structures and contextual meanings in the text via mood and modality analysis.

The Text

The Ghost of Sani Abacha is a collection of twenty-six (26) short stories that have nothing to do directly with the former Head of State. Rather, it deals with everyday life experiences of Nigerians. *The Ghost of Sani Abacha* is a story in the collection that tells the story of a young man who aspires to be a politician, lives true to it and then when finally, at the top of his political career, becomes disappointed about the luxury of wealth. The story is told from the first person point of view, where the narrator is part of the story and tells about things that happened to him. In the end, the question on his lips was ‘is this all that is’?

Theoretical Framework

Systemic Functional Grammar/Linguistics deals with the notion that language has unique structures that can be effectively used to communicate. Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday believes that “language enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them” (106). It is from the point of view of language as an expression derived from the context of utterance that Systemic Functional Linguistics was developed by Halliday and his associates during the 1960s. This is why Mengyan Zhao and Yi Zhang agree that Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar, henceforth (SFG) as a tool “can be used in every genre of language to unveil the hidden meaning of language” (32). Francis Y. Lin and Alex X. Peng also claim that SFG, as put forward by Halliday and Matthiessen, pays “great attention to how the speakers generate utterances and texts to convey their intended meanings” (335). Halliday reiterates that “language only has meanings when interpreted within its context. There are two contexts in which social meaning is made; context of culture and context of situation” (497). According to SFG therefore, language has three metafunctions, namely; the ideational (field), interpersonal (tenor), and textual (mode). Field, tenor and mode in SFG, are also known as context of situation or registers. The ideational meaning is concerned with the clause as representation. Interpersonal meaning is concerned with the clause as exchange, while textual meaning is concerned with the clause as message.

In Interpersonal metafunction analysis which is our concern in this study, sentence according to Halliday and Hasan, “is regarded as a piece of interaction between the speaker and listener” (8). Geoff Thompson notes that interpersonal metafunction “plays the role of setting up and maintaining relations, and indicates the roles of the participants in communication” (27). Halliday points that interpersonal meaning can be expressed by “mood, modality and key. Later he added pronoun system, tense shift” (29). Betty Kirkpatrick affirms that “mood and modality are both related to the attitude of the speaker but they differ in how they are realized. Mood acquired its meaning because it was said to show the attitude of a particular verb indicated” (145). Suzan Eggins calls them “declarative, interrogative and imperative mood” (49). Ayoola M. Olusanya explains that the mood of a clause can be “identified from its grammatical structure, statement is realized by declarative mood, question by interrogative mood and command by imperative mood” (165). He goes further to add that “modality consists of modalisation, realized by modal verb operators such as will, can, must and so on and modulation which is realized by mood adjunct” (167). Interpersonal metafunction therefore, encompasses everything about the activities of an individual.

Methodology

This study derives its data from Chuma Nwokolo's *The Ghost of Sani Abacha*. It is a qualitative study with the aid of close reading that employed the purposive sampling technique, because the data is not focused in a precise area of the text. SFG is the chosen theory for this study because it places a high premium on meanings in language use and sees language as a social activity.

Data Analysis

Mood Analysis

The excerpts from the text will be in tabular form for ease of analysis and comprehension.

The Interrogative Mood

What do	you	want to do with yourself?
Comp. fin.	Sub.	Adj.
Mood		residue

The speech function is a question that was directed at the narrator by another character. It shows that there is an established relationship between the wife of the minister for oil and steel and the story teller.

Do	you	Know how a Professor of History like him became a Minister for oil and steel?
Fin.	Sub.	Pred.
Mood		residue

In this speech function, the wife of the minister tries to justify her extra marital affairs, by keeping her husband in position of power to her own benefit.

Do you	know why he	is still minister even though a whole Nigeria has been importing petrol forever?
Fin. Sub.	Obj.	Pred.
Mood		residue

This speech function depicts the true situation of the country. The question is not only directed to the narrator but also to the readers.

Is	this	It?
verb	Demonstrative pro.	Third person singular
Mood		residue

This speech function explains the confusion and disappointment of the narrator on issues related to power. He is asking himself the question having seen what poverty is, to seeing luxury, wealth and power. He wonders what then happens after enjoying all this at the expense of the poor masses.

The interrogative moods in the text are found in direct conversations between characters, except in situations where the narrator asks himself or directs it to no one in particular.

The Declarative Mood

She	was	the wife of the minister for oil and steel
Sub.	Fin.	Comp.
Mood		residue

This speech function introduces the woman and explains why she has the liberty to do what she does without minding the consequences.

I	was	getting the slap that changed my life.
Sub.	Fin.	Comp.
Mood		residue

The speech function here narrates, the first encounter of the author with the wife of the minister in the elevator. After the slap he got for touching her buttocks, that same night, he bedded her and had a pocket full with American dollars.

I	was	her toy boy for quite a few years.
Sub.	Fin.	Obj.
Mood		residue

This speech function further describes the mischievousness and indiscreet behaviour of the writer and the wife of the minister.

Following the narrative of the story, declarative sentences abound in the text, with each speech function presenting a different thing. Each speech function, depicts the deplorable state of Nigeria. The statements are meant to provide the reader with information as well as entertainment.

The Imperative Mood

Imperative mood gives authoritative command and absolute directive.

I	see!
Sub.	Fin.
Mood	

This speech function expresses surprise. The narrator is amazed to learn of how the minister for oil and steel got his seat.

What	balls!
Fin.	Obj.
Mood	

This speech function expresses both surprise and shock. The narrator is surprised that he could actually bed the wife of the minister for oil and steel, and in another part of the story, she (the wife of the minister) is shocked that she sent for him and he refused to come.

You	just leave that matter!
Sub.	Fin.
Mood	

This speech function expresses command. Here, the wife of the minister was asking the young narrator to cease from telling her to stop sharing her bed. It was said in anger as she tells him why she cannot stop.

What	a smell!
Fin.	Pred.
Mood	

This speech function tells the experience of the young narrator and his mistress. Despite the body smell that is covered with expensive perfumes, he still sleeps with her to enable him get the money he wants to sustain himself.

Modality Analysis

Modality has been classified by Halliday into Modalisation and Modulation. Halliday states that “modalisation deals with propositions that has degrees of probability and usuality, while, modulation deals with proposals that are expressed with obligation and inclination” (194).

Modalisation	Degree	Modality
She probably thought, what balls!	Median probability	An expression of the likelihood of an event to occur or happen.
You seemed the type that won't print everything you overhear today in tomorrow's edition.	Low probability	Not certain about the position of the reporter.
I remembered how the true Heaven on earth can only be found on that twenty fifth floor...	High probability	Expression of ability and able capabilities.

I can still feel its sting all right, on this right cheek.	High probability	An expression of ability and capability.
Modulation	Degree	Modality
That was curious, will you not admit?	Obligation and request.	An expression of willingness, request, and probable prediction.
Can you imagine lying on those beds?	High inclination	Ability and possible capability.

Analysis of Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Modal Auxiliary Verb	Modality	Samples from Text
Can	It is a strong modal auxiliary verb that expresses ability, permission, request, capability and possibility.	I can still feel its sting all right, on this right cheek. In this country, money can only take you so far. Can you imagine lying on those beds?
Could	This modal auxiliary verb is not as strong as 'can'. It expresses ability, request and possibility.	I could have retired on that bag on my shoulder, but I was not tempted in the least. I was owing Dabo Shogunle a few thousand naira that I could not pay, so I was dead already. There was nothing the police could do about it. I did not see that the black-suits downstairs could punish much

		worse than Dabo's boys. That; and the smell I could not get out of my nostrils. Could never forget those years of studying mimeographs on Nkuruma's philosophy in empty university libraries.
Would	It expresses desire, wishes, intention, willingness, and habitual action in the past possibility.	Yet, that would not have been enough to save my life. Any other minister's wife forced to stand with a minion in an elevator would stand shoulder-to-shoulder. She would not agitate them so.
Should	Expresses necessity, obligation, expectation and advisability.	I should never have read philosophy in school. You should not believe the official line about him dying at home in Aso Rock.
Will	It is a strong modal auxiliary verb that expresses insistence, intention, request, prediction and willingness.	That was curious, will you not admit?

From the above table, it is important to note that 'could' is used more frequently than the other modal auxiliary verbs. Following the narrative view point of the story, 'could' is mainly employed to tell more of the situation of the writer.

Analysis of Pronoun System

Personal Pronouns	
First (1st) person pronoun	<p>I wondered, is this really it?</p> <p>I never thought myself a politician.</p> <p>I remembered how the true heaven on earth is on the twenty-fifth floor.</p> <p>I grabbed at her buttocks.</p> <p>I sauced her peppered breast chicken.</p> <p>I hauled it and followed her.</p> <p>I built my Abuja mansion.</p> <p>I bought a Grand Cherokee.</p> <p>It was the thought of these waiting minions that excited me the most.</p> <p>The thoughts of windowless, teacher less classrooms, waterless taps and powerless electrical cables attempted to torment me.</p> <p>I would rather be Senate President than slave.</p>
Second (2) person pronoun	<p>You looked quite the objective journalist.</p> <p>How do you like that?</p> <p>It was just a brief grab; you understand?</p> <p>You cannot walk fast in those rooms.</p> <p>Now, can you imagine lying on those beds?</p> <p>Since then, you cannot book this suite unless you are a foreign head of state.</p> <p>You see how simple it was?</p>
Third (3) person pronoun	<p>She was easily the most beautiful woman in this hall that night, and she had just received a bribe that she was keen to salt away in her suite up on the twenty-fifth floor.</p> <p>She was the wife of the minister for oil and steel.</p> <p>Her husband may have been as scrawny and as wattled as a cockerel,</p>

	<p>but her security detail was no impotent joke.</p> <p>She slapped me in the elevator.</p> <p>She gabbled and slobbered in the grip of orgiastic joys.</p> <p>Her money was enough to pay off Shogunle, anyway.</p> <p>Her body was a different thing altogether.</p> <p>I had more balls than her husband.</p> <p>They all said I was mad, but I resigned immediately.</p>
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Regarding the table above, it clearly shows that the first person pronoun abounds in the story because of the narrative view point. The writer who happens to be the narrator of events, tells of happenings that involves him directly. The first person pronoun, gives the writer ample liberty to stitch the words as it pleases him and carry his readers along.

Analysis of Tense Shift

Tense Shift	
Past tense	<p>She had just received a bribe that she was keen to salt away in her suit up on the twenty-fifth floor.</p> <p>As I rolled off her, as I stood in that falling elevator, with shrunken balls and pockets swollen with more American dollars in tips, I asked myself, is this it?</p> <p>She gabbled and slobbered in the grip of orgiastic joys.</p> <p>I drove discreetly in the small hours.</p> <p>I was bedding the wife of the minister for oil and steel.</p> <p>The foreign prostitutes were worth their flight expenses.</p>
Present tense	<p>You seem the type that won't print everything you overhear today in tomorrow's edition.</p> <p>I can still feel its sting alright, on this right cheek.</p> <p>I see!</p>

	What ball! What a smell! You see how simple it was? Do you know how a professor of history like him became minister for oil and steel?
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The past tense abounds in the story because the writer is telling of an experience that he is part of. The dominant use of the past tense is in line with the choice of the narrative view point. If the writer had chosen to write in the present tense, the story would still carry the same message. Present tense is however seen in the story in direct conversations between characters.

Conclusion

Interpersonal meaning of a text deals with how a writer is able to use language to establish and maintain relations with a reader, to incite and influence readers’ attitudes towards his opinions. The above data presentation and analysis, concludes that interpersonal metafunction that, deals with all the activities of an individual, is indeed an ideal model for meaning making analysis. It also reveals that even lexico-grammatical items in clauses carry different meanings, depending on their context of use. Therefore, readers can represent and interpret the same events in different ways, they can unravel the thought of writers as they try to sort out ‘who does what to whom’.

The study also reveals that the author is an amazing writer that employed suitable linguistic resources. His diction however, is laced with vulgarity, impish and a bit complex. An outward look at the contextual meanings of the text reiterates, the way young people think about wealth and how to acquire it without much stress. It is hoped that the study would enhance a better understanding of interpersonal metafunction. Finally, Systemic Functional Grammar as a theory that perceives language as a social activity and a veritable tool for text analysis, has proven to be very significant and efficient in unveiling the hidden meanings of language in this study.

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