Exploring Textual Meaning in Chukwuemeka Ike’s Sunset at Dawn: A Systemic Functional Approach

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Abstract
The goal of this research work is to apply one of the three meanings developed by Halliday (1985), the grammar of textual meaning, to two extracts selected from Chukwuemeka’s Sunset at Dawn (1976). This focus on textual meaning aims at unveiling the hidden linguistic resources or codes incorporated in the novel. It also aims at bringing out how the author of this novel has organized and established Themes to construct clauses in order to convey his message. Through a descriptive approach, the grammar of Textual meaning is studied in Chukwuemeka’s Sunset at Dawn (1976). The qualitative descriptive method used in this article is supported by a quantitative method in using descriptive statistical analysis to calculate the percentage of the different fields. The study reveals that the Theme/Rheme structure is an essential component in the construction of a cohesive and coherent text. This has enabled us to assert that Sunset at Dawn by Chukwuemeka Ike is a well-written novel.

Keywords:
linguistic resources;
rheme;
sunset at dawn;
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theme;

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1. Introduction

The use of linguistic methods is a useful way of analyzing literary texts successfully since the reader must have an understanding of how the language functions and how it operates (Koutchadé 2016:299). The present study aims...
at unveiling the hidden linguistic resources or codes incorporated in Chukwuemeka Ike’s *Sunset at Dawn*. In fact, *Sunset at Dawn* is a war novel between Nigeria and Biafra that has lasted thirty-months. The Biafrans are the one who has suffered more from the dire consequences of that war since it happens at Biafra land. Some thirty thousand Igbos have been brutally murdered and their property is looted and/or destroyed.

The goal of this study is to apply one of the three meanings developed Halliday (1985), i.e., the grammar of textual meaning, to two extracts selected from the Chukwuemeka’s novel. As a matter of fact, this work clarifies how textual meaning makes sense within a language in literary texts, in general, and in *Sunset at Dawn*, in particular. This study helps to account for how the writer of *Sunset at Dawn* has organized and established Themes to construct clauses in order to convey his message. There are a set of studies in lexico-grammar which shed light on language use. It must be noted that the investigations in this field have been made and studied by scholars. Thus, Koutchadé & Loko (2016), have carried out an analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013) using the Systemic Functional Linguistics. They have used this theory to carry out a lexico-grammatical analysis of some selected extracts from the novel. From the analyses they have conducted, they have noticed that the systemic functional approach has been instrumental to unravel Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s perception of the world-view, the social relationship language has played in the texts. They come to the conclusion that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as all language users, has predicted the meanings that are likely to be exchanged and the language that is likely to be used when she has written *Americanah*.

Similarly, Koutchadé (2015), has dealt with Theme patterns, an aspect of the grammar of textual meaning whereby he has analyzed the language of Adetunji Ogundimu’s *A Silly Season* through some selected extracts. The Theme patterns analysis in those extracts reveals a high use of topical unmarked and textual Themes. The analysis also reveals the presence of marked topical Themes, interpersonal Themes and marked dependent clauses as Themes in the extracts. He concludes that all these features have contributed to the understanding of Ogundimu’s novel.

In addition, Koussouhon & Méhouénou (2016), have explored systemic functional grammar with an emphasis on the grammar of textual meaning in Akachi Ezeigbo’s *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Their study helps to uncover the deep messages conveyed in the two selected extracts from the novel in which they have applied the grammar of Theme/Rheme in the process of describing their meanings about the experience, the social relationships between interactants as well as the rhetorical structure of their discourse. The ensuing discussion has revealed how Akachi Ezeigbo discloses the dialectical roles African women hold as individuals in society and as wives in their husband’s houses.

As far as Yokossi (2013), is concerned, he has explored the Textual and Interpersonal Meanings in Ogundimu’s *The Insiders, A Silly Season* and *Behind the Mask*, to disclose how the SFL theory can contribute to a better understanding of a writer’s fiction. The mood analysis of the texts has revealed a huge number of declarations, which denotes that the participants mainly exchange information. This is suggestive of the strong desire of the writer to convey his message. The relatively important number of both interrogatives and imperatives has helped him realize the role relationships and power relations between the interactants in the fictional books. The choice in Modality (modalization and modulation) unveils the personalities of the participants in the extracts with a stress on their attitude, mood, on the basis of the roles they play in the fiction. Adjuncts, according to this researcher, not only exhibit the written mode of the texts but also help to the understanding of the interaction between the participants

2. Materials and Methods

According to Eggins (1994: 169), "textual meanings are meanings to do with the organization of the message itself." In other words, the textual meaning of language is an interpretation of language in its function as a message. At clause level, the textual meaning is concerned with how inter-clausal elements are organized to form unified whole texts that make meanings. It indicates the way the text is organized or structured. This specific type of meaning is realized through the Theme system of language (clause). The Theme system is in its turn, represented by the Thematic structure of the clause which comprises two major elements: Theme and Rheme. According to Halliday (1985: 39), Theme is the element which serves as "the starting point for the message; it is what the clause is going to be about". The Theme contains familiar or "given" information already mentioned somewhere in the text. In other words, the Theme is the element which comes first in the clause. So Theme identification is based on order. Once the Theme is identified, the remainder of the clause belongs to the Rheme. Thus, the Rheme is the part of the speech in which the Theme is developed and since the Theme contains familiar information, the Rheme contains
unfamiliar one. In short, the identification of Theme coincides with that of the Rheme, the Rheme being everything else.

Different types of elements of clause structure can be identified to be Theme:
- Topical Theme: this is an element of the clause to which a Transitivity role can be attached and which occurs in the first position in a clause. It can be marked (atypical) or unmarked (typical).
- Interpersonal Theme: a clause constituent is labeled interpersonal Theme when it could be assigned a Mood label (but not a Transitivity one) and occurs at the beginning of the clause. The constituents which can function as interpersonal Themes are the unfused Finite (in interrogative structures), and all the four categories of Modal Adjuncts: Mood, Polarity, Vocative, and Comment.
- Textual Theme: it realizes cohesion in relating clauses to their context (Dosso Kumou et al., 2018).
- Structural themes: they are relative pronouns or Wh-elements which bear neither the position of carrier nor that of topical. They usually occur after the clause boundary (Koussouhon & Dosso Kumou, 2014).
- Multiple Theme: it is a Theme made up of two or more Themes, i.e., the topical Theme in a clause plus any textual or interpersonal Themes preceding it (Bloor & Bloor, 2004).

As a matter of fact, the mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods are adopted in the study. Two extracts have been selected from Chukwuemeka’s Sunset at Dawn; they are analyzed through topical, textual, interpersonal, structural and multiple themes developed in the extracts. In order to facilitate their discussion, the findings of the analysis are summarized and distributed in a table. The following keys (Koussouhon & Dosso Kumou, 2014), are used for the identification of each type: [Th:Utp] = Unmarked Topical Theme, [Th:Mtp] = Marked Topical Theme, [Th:strtp] = Structural Topical Theme, [Th:tx] = Textual Theme, [Th:str] = Structural Theme, [Th:int] = Interpersonal Theme, [Th:mul] = Multiple Theme

3. Results and Discussions

For the purpose of the analysis, texts are broken into clauses and patterns of Themes are identified (see the appendices). Then they have been counted and tabulated according to their categories. The frequency of Theme types with their related percentages is summarized in table 1 below:

| Theme types | Extract 1 | | | Extract 2 | |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Unmarked | 121 | 75.15% | 161 | 76.67% |
| Topical | Marked | 02 | 1.24% | 01 | 0.47% |
| | Structural | 10 | 6.21% | 09 | 4.28% |
| Textual | 12 | 7.47% | 27 | 12.86% |
| Interpersonal | 04 | 2.48% | 00 | 00% |
| Structural | 11 | 6.88% | 12 | 5.71% |
| Multiple | 01 | 0.62% | 00 | 00% |
| Total Themes | 161 | 100% | 210 | 100% |

The table above gives an account of the statistical distribution of theme types in the two selected extracts from Sunset at Dawn and the practical analysis carried out in those extracts reveals a predominance of unmarked topical themes in both extracts (i.e. 75.15% in extract 1 and 76.67% in extract 2). This indicates that the extracts about concrete actions carrying along material, physical and psychological deed. The important number of topical Themes also shows that clauses within them are made up with participants. The textual themes rank second in both extracts (7.47% in extract 1 and 12.86% in extract 2) followed by structural themes (6.88% in extract 1 and 5.71% in extract 2). Interpersonal and multiple themes rank last in the first extract respectively with 2.48% and 0.62% but they are absent in the second extract. This ranking is the key to open the door for a critical analysis of the two selected extracts.

Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings of the two Extracts

3.1 Critical Discussion of the Findings from Extract 1

The theme identified in the extract shows an overall number of 161 themes. Out of this figure, one hundred and thirty-three (133; 78.60%) is topicalized; these themes are unmarked, marked or structural. The same extract contains twelve (12; 7.47%) textual themes, eleven (11; 6.88%) structural themes, four (04; 2.48%) interpersonal themes and one (01; 0.62%) multiple theme. The investigation of Theme patterns in the first extract from Chukwuemeka’s Sunset at Dawn, reveals the presence of topical and textual Themes in the identified clauses. It is noticed that topical Themes are predominant in the extract. This predominance suggests that, in all the clauses from the extract, there is at least a constituent in each clause to which a transitivity role such as Actor, Sence, Behave or Circumstance is identified. Such a situation indicates that the extract reveals experiences (meanings about reality) shared by the participants (Chief Madukegbu Ukadike and Mazi Kanu) in the extract in particular and in the novel, to a large extent, in general.

Other Theme patterns studied in the first extract from the novel, Sunset at Dawn, are textual ones. These are elements which, occurring in the first position, do not express any interpersonal or experiential meaning but are playing an important cohesive role in relating the clauses to their situational context in the extract (Eggins, 1994:181) cited by Koutchadé & Loko (2016:80). The rates of 7.47% and 6.88% for the textual theme and structural theme show that the writer has attached importance to the organization of his message by using a lot of conjunctions to make the story cohesive, and thus understandable. The presence of interpersonal Theme (2.48%) denotes some short dialogues that occur in the extract between Chief Madukegbu Ukadike and Mazi Kanu, which starts with a town crier who delivers a message of the War Council to men and women of Obodo requiring them to donate food items to the Council: one big yam by every taxable male, five cassava tubers or one cup of gari by every woman and one tin of palm oil by every village. There is a little conversation between Mazi Kanu and Chief Madukegbu Ukadike concerning that issue. These food items are collected to feed soldiers, refugees, and other civil servants. As a matter of fact, the unmarked topical themes in clauses no 2, 12, 14, 16 and 32 indicate the presence of a local civil defense committee aiming at protecting Obodo people from further disastrous consequences resulting from the Biafran-Nigerian war. As it can be noticed, the whole story revolves around Dr. Amilo Kanu, his family and relations and Duke Bassey from Anang Province, Professor Emeka Ezenwa from Onitsha, Barrister Chike Ifeji and Dr. Osita. Biafran forces are ill-trained, ill-equipped, hurriedly assembled. By August, surprisingly while Nigerian troops from the Nsukka sector are slowly gaining grounds, Biafran forces gallantly capture Mid-West and proclaim it the Republic of Benin. Nigerian Federal Military Government now declares full-scale war on Biafra. In spite of all these, by late September 1967, there is an abortive coup by some highly placed Biafran army officers and civilians. The fate of Enugu seems to be uncertain since the first enemy mortar landed, and more continue to land. The ongoing war gives birth to some refugee camps which have welcomed some refugees. This can be noticed in clauses no 57, 62, 68, 85 and 86. Roughly, this extract reveals some disastrous consequences of the Biafran-Nigerian war upon the people.

3.2 Critical Discussion of the Findings from Extract 2

As in the first extract, theme patterns have been identified in the second extract from the novel under study; and here a total number of two hundred and ten (210) have been identified. Out of this number, 171 (81.42%) are topical and rank first, 27 (12.86%) are textual themes and 12 (5.71%) are structural themes. The conversation then shifts to Chief Madukegbu Ukadike (Chairman of the Local Council and Chairman of the Obodo War Council) and Dr. Amilo Kanu’s wife, Fatima. In fact, Chief Madukegbu Ukadike comes to find out whether Fatima still receives any molestation of any kind from anybody in Obodo because of the marks on her face as Fatima is not a native of Obodo. Amilo Kanu’s wife, Fatima. In fact, Chief Madukegbu Ukadike comes to find out whether Fatima still receives any molestation from anybody in Obodo because of the marks on her face as Fatima is not a native of Obodo. But Fatima is not happy at all at being left there by her husband, Dr. Amilo Kanu. She doesn’t know whether she should call it molestation, as there’s hardly a day she goes out when she doesn’t run into one incident or another. She thought her marks would make it clear that she not Igbo. They are angry when she can’t reply in Igbo, as if there was a law that only speakers of the Igbo language can use the roads in Biafra! Many of the Biafran soldiers cannot speak English very well, that why they prefer communicating in the Igbo language. Chief Madukegbu Ukadike as Chairman of the Local Council and Chairman of the Obodo War Council, reassures Fatima that he will see what he can do about that issue adding that he will find enough people who can speak English to replace the other ones. But the only matter which annoys Fatima so much is their movement from Enugu to Obodo because she is not happy at all at being left there by her husband, Dr. Amilo Kanu. For instance, when Chief Madukegbu Ukadike
would like to know whether Fatima can stay long at Obodo, her answer is promptly negative as in clauses n°165, 166, 167, 168 and 169. Moreover, considering the clauses from n° 77 down to n° 84, it is clear that Fatima doesn’t find herself comfortable at all. Even her father-in-law, Mazi Kanu is also uncomfortable as he finds it impossible to communicate with his son’s wife because Igbo is the only Mazi Kanu’s communicative language. And Fatima as far as she is concerned, she speaks Hausa and English as she is a literate Hausa woman. It is known very well that the wife Dr. Kanu has married is the kind with whom his father cannot converse without hiring an interpreter. The doctor wants her to stay at Obodo until the house he is putting up for her is ready. Is it not a big shame that Doctor should be the long- mouthed mouse which waits until labor pains set before building a nest for its use.

4. Conclusion

In a nutshell, this study has explored textual metafunction in Chukwuemeka Ike’s *Sunset at Dawn*, using systemic functional linguistics. From the practical analysis, it has been revealed the predominant Theme type in the two selected extracts is topical. This result means that a great majority of the two extracts starting point features transitivity participants, whether circumstances participants, processes, or subject’s participants. Based on the table and on the identification in the appendix, a general outcome reveals that the subject participants are predominant in all the two extracts. This indicates that Chukwuemeka Ike not only sets the structural organization of the conveyance of his message with more subjects as clause-initial elements but also wants his readers to pay more attention to the subjects first than any other elements. These subjects may vary in function. They may be actors, behavers, *sensers*, sayers etc. Textual Themes are also of a great importance in the extracts. The figures at this level show that the writer has made use of 39 linking clauses in the three selected extract from Chukwemeka’s fictional art.

In the same way, structural Themes are also present in the selected extracts as they have their role to play. They represent 6.88%, 6.01%, and 5.71% respectively in the first extract and in the second one. This suggests that Chukwuemeka Ike has made use of structural elements in his novel. This type of Themes gives an average of 5.46% in the three novels under study. This dissertation has studied the language of *Sunset at Dawn* a novel written by Chukwuemeka Ike following the theories of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). It has explored systemic functional grammar with an emphasis on the textual meaning in Chukwuemeka’s fictional literary arts.

Roughly, a linguistic investigation of the textual meaning in the novel reveals that the Theme/Rheme structure is an essential component in the construction of a cohesive and coherent text. Through the choice of some thematic elements, the spoken features are organized in such a way to make the readers know that the author makes use abundantly the unmarked Themes. They are defined in term of any element of the clause to which a Transitivity function can be assigned. All this has enabled us to assert that *Sunset at Dawn* by Chukwuemeka Ike is a well-written novel.

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Statement of authorship
The authors have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The authors have approved the final article.

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Appendices

The following keys have been used in the present work:

\[ \text{[Th:Utp]} = \text{Unmarked Topical Theme}, \quad \text{[Th:Mtp]} = \text{Marked Topical Theme}, \quad \text{[Th:strtp]} = \text{Structural Topical Theme}, \quad \text{[Th:tx]} = \text{Textual Theme} \], \quad \text{[Th:str]} = \text{Structural Theme} \]
\[ \text{[Th:int]} = \text{Interpersonal Theme} \]
\[ \text{[Th:mul]} = \text{Multiple Theme} \]

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Theme Analysis in Extract 1


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woman [Th:Utp] leave their village to item. I'm afraid it’s late and the water for my bath must be getting cold. Thanks for your concern for my welfare.’ ‘Good night, Madam.’ Chief Ukadike heaved a sigh of relief as he moved to the rear of the compound where a space had been fenced round for her use as a bathroom. Her fearlessness, her daredevil attitude (to be more exact) stunned him. As she-trotted off in the short dancing steps characteristic of white girls or been to’s*, Chef Ukadike shrugged his shoulders. He would not like to be Fatima’s husband. She was definitely the type of wife who-wore the trousers; he was certain that her chest would be a jungle of masculine hair! ‘Nwata gbuje!’ he shouted Mari Kanu’s salutatory name.