

Transitivity analysis of Nwachukwu-Agbada's *Love strokes*

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Abstract

This paper tries to show the connection between language and literature, using Nwachukwu-Agbada's "Love strokes", in "Love strokes and other stories". It discusses how the theory of language could be applied to literature. Adopting Halliday's transitivity theory, the roles of transitivity in portraying the processes, participants and circumstances in the selected text are pointed out, especially as it has to do with the theme of love expressed in the narrator's utterances, through identification, classification and analysis of material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes found in selected clauses. A total number of twenty-four processes are identified in twenty clauses studied. There seems to be a preponderance of mental process with emotive mental process being the most frequently used. Mental processes show the quantum of change in the unfolding experience taking place in the inner consciousness of the participants.

Introduction

There have been much studies and discussions on how transitivity analysis has been used by many scholars and researchers to interpret the inner and outward experiences of the participants in a prose work. Halliday (1980:221), started the analysis of literary work, *The Inheritors* by Williams Golding, using transitivity to

explore man's characters and thematic meanings in his work. Halliday defines transitivity as, 'the set of options disposed to the speaker to encode his experiences of the processes of his external world. Man uses language to interpret and represent the world around him; either perceived or imagine (Bloor et al, 1995:105). Genette (1972:10), concurs that the essence of language lies in its users' ability to figure out what is spoken or written to the situation they communicate. In line with the above, this study adopts Halliday's transitivity theory as its theoretical framework to identify, classify and analyze the clauses that construes the processes, participants, and circumstances, which depict the theme of love which explore social context in *Love strokes* by Nwachukwu-Agbada. The study will be guided by the following questions: what process types, participants and circumstances that are evident in the selected clauses in the story? Which process is prevalent and what are the experiential meanings construed by the choices in the transitivity system? *Love Strokes* is a narrative about a Fulani herds boy, Tumbido, who is expected to pass through "shero", a flogging competition, in which he has to be flogged by his opponent in a contest to determine how mature he is to marry a wife, as the culture of his tribe, Kastina-Ala, demands. He tries to dodge the competition by suggesting elopement with Taratu, and to lobby Mallam Shehu to ask his son, Yaro, to withdraw from the contest, so that he can marry Taratu, the love of his life, without passing through "shero". Tumbido eventually passes through "shero", wins the battle and collected his hard earned price, Taratu. In analyzing the structure of the clauses, this work will look into fiction/prose fiction, elements of a prose work (plot, setting, characters, themes, diction/language), transitivity, processes, participants, circumstances and short story as its conceptual framework.

Conceptual framework

Fiction/prose fiction

Fiction is used to denote any story or account that is not real. It could be fairy tales or stories about animals, human beings, countries or primordial times. Fiction is an imaginary art which deals in part or whole, characterize by events and characters that are invented by the writer.

Prose fiction is a story told from the imagination of the writer to entertain his/ her readers. Prose is any work in literature form. This means that most of the books we read are prose works. Prose is any work of art with complete sentences which constitute paragraphs in a narrative form. Kermode et al (1980:22) says that prose fiction is anything that might be handled with personal ventures of creativity and artistic freedom. Creativity signals that it is an imagination of the writer, while artistic freedom denotes the author's choice of words, expression and style. As a narrative, prose work is subject to the readers' understanding and interpretation. Its main function is to explore human experiences in order to educate and entertain the readers through story telling that deals with personal, cultural, social, or political issues around the world. It contains identifiable characters, locations, incidents that make the story appear real. These are the experiential aspect of language that this paper tries look at from transitivity aspect, through the identification and analysis of the clauses that construe the messages of love and cultural practices depicted in the story.

Elements of prose

Writers create stories based on their experiences, other peoples' experiences, and what happens around their environments. For any work of art to be considered as a prose, it must contain certain

intrinsic and extrinsic features or elements. Both features aids in the exploration of the constituent elements such as the plot, characters, setting, themes, and diction/ language.

Plot is an essential part of a prose work which describes the link between events that happen in a story. It is a series of events arranged according to incidents. Kenny in Nurgiyantoro (2009;167), stated that the plot presented in a story is not simple because the writer compiled the events based on cause and effect. Hence, plot is a compilation of incidents that are related in in pattern sequentially through cause and effect on how the reader views the story coincidentally. This is done to achieve artistic or emotional effects. It is a means of advancing events in a story to motivate characters, create urgency or to resolve conflicts. Simply put, a plot is the story line of a literary work. Aristotle in Freytag (1863), says that a plot is the most important element of prose that has a beginning, middle, and an end. Freytag (1863:223), posits that the ideal traditional plot line is divided into five parts namely; exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. These are known as “Freytag’s Pyramid”. In *“Love Strokes”*, the plot follows the same pattern according to Freytag’s Pyramid. The story centers on Tumbido, a Fulani herds boy, who fell in love with Taratu, a young girl, but has to pass through “Shero” in order to be considered man enough to marry her according to the culture of his people, Kastina-Ala in Northern Nigeria. As the custom and tradition demands, he passed through the “Shero” with his contestant, Shehu, who suffered defeat as a result of his epilepsies. Tumbido had to go home with the price of his victory – Taratu.

A character is a person or animal that takes part in the storyline of a prose work. In literature, characters aids readers to understand plot and themes in the story. A character is a representation of a particular class of or group of people. Characters are known from

what they say and what others say about them. Mineshima (2009:101-123), asserts that character are not only persons, but community, race, mental or moral attitude, the quality of reasoning, famous people or peasants. This definition agrees with the concept of characterization, where the actions of characters bring about the realization of the message or theme expressed in a story.

Setting describes time, place and atmosphere in a story. The characters in a story live at certain place and time. Therefore, the events experienced by the characters occur at certain times and place too. Abrams in Nurgiyantoro (2009:216), states that setting is also the foundation of the story that leads to the meaning of the places, times, and the social environments on the events that happened in the story. Lastly, the theme/ message is the ideas passed from the story .it refers to the moral lesson/s depicted in the story. It passes across the writer's intention. Usually, literary texts distinguish themselves from other texts by the subtleties and intricacies of their different levels of meanings and by the common fact that the actual meaning of the text is always implicit in the fabric of the work's devices such as language/diction. Language contributes to the effect in a story. Writers use language to pass their messages across to their readers. The language employed by the writer determines the style of the author. A writer could decide to use simple or complex language to convey the message. In "love Strokes", Nwachukwu-Agbada uses simple and humorous diction to drive home his message to his readers.

Transitivity

Halliday [1985:68], states that systemic functional linguistics [SFL], is a theory that finds language as a system and tries to explain the arrangement of language in terms of its usefulness.

Moreover, the goal of SFL is to build a model that places texts in their social context comprehensively with the resource that integrates and situates them [Martin, 1992:113]. Language use is structured in response to the needs of the people as social beings to fulfil three major functions in their lives known as meta-functions in order to represent (ideational function), to exchange (interpersonal function), and to organize experiences (textual function) (Saragih,2010:11). Analyzing the metafunctions in a text may help people understand the information contained in a text, especially how the themes develop. The paper is concerned with the ideational metafunction that deals with the transmission of ideas, which will be of benefit to finding out the themes contained in the selected clauses in the story. It functions to represent processes or experiences like actions, events, circumstances and relations that covers all the phenomena that can be expressed by a verb: event whether physical or not, stated or relations [Halliday, 1985:159]. Halliday further states that the processes are expressed through language that represents our world of conception. Transitivity specifies the different types of processes recognized in language structures. Transitivity language structures can be characterized as Agent + Process + Goal configuration that represents the function of language expressing the speaker's experience of the external or internal world [Halliday, 1971:58].

Processes, participants and circumstances

The first item in the transitivity system is the verb otherwise known as the process. Allerton (1979:54), states that the process is related to verb. Halliday (1973:134), says that transitivity is a set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience of the processes of the internal and external world of consciousness together with the participants in the process and the circumstances

of the process. The clause in its ideational function is the means of representing patterns of experience. Halliday states that the clause is the representation of processes consisting of the processes, participants and circumstances. Halliday in his “Introduction to Functional Grammar”, divides the transitivity process into six categories namely: Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential processes. Their interpretation lies behind the grammatical interpretation of word classes into verbs, nouns and adverbials (Halliday, 1985:102). According to Gallardo, (2012:234), human beings as language users are interested in events and actions in which participants do, feel, and say what they experience under which circumstances. The concept of process, participant and circumstance are semantic categories which explain how phenomena of the real world are represented as linguistic structures.

Halliday (1981:67), asserts that participants are directly involved in the process since every experiential type of clause has at least one participant. It is important to note that transitivity is not a property of the event itself, but the language user’s conceptualization of events which is manifested through language. Participants could be direct, oblique, and category participants.

Halliday describes material processes as embodying our external experiences which include actions and events. Material processes are processes of doing and happening. Kress (1976:95), posits that action encompasses both material and social actions. In the material world, processes like, farm out and paint, assign the participants as actor (initiator or doer) or goal (recipient or receiver). The mental process relates to our internal experiences. It is the process of sensing which flows from a person’s consciousness. Mental process could be perceptive, cognitive, emotive/affective, and desiderative. The world of consciousness is

identified with processes of sensing, seeing, feeling or thinking. Processes like think, observe, and perceive require at least two participants. The first, being a sensor and the second a phenomenon. These processes are identified with thoughts, memory, and cognition. Verbal processes are processes of saying realized by verbs such as, say, talk, asked (Kress, 1976). Participants here are the sayers responsible for verbal processes. The verbiage, is the nominalized statement of this process, and the receiver, the person at whom the verbal process is directed (Halliday, 1981). Behavioral processes are processes that reflect physiological and psychological behaviors such as coughing, watching, listening (Gallardo, 2012). Existential processes are processes that represent something that exists or happens. They are followed by a nominal group which functions as an existent which is often an event, but could be a phenomenon (Halliday, 1985:130). Leech et al (2007:165), states that the basic principle of participants are realized by nominal groups. For instance; in 'we had breakfast with John in the afternoon, the participant is 'we' (actor), breakfast (range), and with John (circumstance).

The last amongst the basic processes is the relational processes which deal with facts or things that are attributive or identifying. The attributive relation is defined as, 'A is an attribute of X. The basic processes are in a cyclical connection. For instance, material processes and mental processes overlap in the case of prevail, exist, remain, about, flourish, happen, emerge, occur, arise, follow, stand, grow and lie. The examples given above, fall into existential processes. Both behavioral and relation processes acquire only one participant. Verbal and mental processes overlap in coughing, breathing, smiling, dreaming, and starring. Moreover, processes like praise, criticize, slander, flatter, and insult overlap with mental and relational processes. They are known as verbal

processes that require two participants; the Sayer and the Verbiage (Leech et al 2007:165).

Participants

Participants are realized by nominal groups. Each process has a special participant. Participants are known from the action they perform in the process. Participants in material process is known as the actor, who is the doer of the action. Another participant in the material process is the goal, who is affected by the action in the process. The scope is the participant that is unaffected by the action in the process. The sensor or experiencer is the participant in the mental process. The sensor could be the preceptor (perception) of feelings such as seeing, hearing, feeling, sensing, perceiving, taste etc. The sensor could be a cognitive sensor which refers to the processes of thinking, knowing, believing, occurring, expecting, convincing, imagining, reminding, surprise, puzzle, strike, understand etc. Desideration is a sensor that desires, decides, wants, wishes, agrees, resolves etc. the affection/emotion sensor is the likes, adores, enjoys, cry, laugh, hate, loves etc. The second participant in mental process is the phenomenon. The phenomenon is the act, thing or fact perceived, felt or wanted (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014:245-250). Verbal participant is the sayer, who speaks, or says (speaker). The receiver is the participant to whom the saying is directed. The target is the participant targeted by the verbal process. The verbiage is what is said by the sayer. Behavioral participant is the behavior, who behaves, while the behavior is the participant affected by the process involved by the behavior. Participants in relational process are; the attribute who is the entity or attribute (quality) assigned or ascribed to the carrier. The carrier is the participant who carries the attribute. The attributor (assigner) assigns the quality. The identified (token) is

the participant indicated by an entity while the identifier (value) is the participant identified by the token. There is only one participant in existential process known as the existent. It is the entity which comes into existence as the process unfolds (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014:246).

Circumstances

Circumstances answer such questions as, when, where, why, how, and what. The principal types of circumstances are time (temporal), place (spatial), manner (means, quality, and comparison), cause (reason, purpose, and behalf), accompaniment (matter, extent, location, duration, frequency, degree, angle and role). Circumstance is the prepositional or adverbial aspect of a clause in transitivity.

Methodology

This study being a textual analysis is purposefully qualitative for to find out the experiential meanings construed in the selected clauses that represent the themes of love and culture and the influence of the transitivity choices made on the socio-cultural dispositions of the society in which the story is set. The story is coded as LS (Love Strokes). There are 20 clauses selected which are identified, classified and analyzed using Halliday's transitivity theory model known as Sydney Model (SM), to discover the processes, participants and circumstances in the clauses extracted from the story, "*Love Strokes*" by Nwachukwu-Agbada (1998). The primary source of data is the "*Love Strokes*", a short story in Nwachukwu-Agbada's, "*Love Strokes and Other Stories*", from where the clauses in form of data were selected and analyzed. Each of the clauses is expressed in tables and examined to determine the processes (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, or

existential), the participants and circumstances involved in the processes, for easy identification, classification and analysis.

Data analysis and discussion

The data are collected from the story, “*Love Strokes*” in “*Love Strokes and Other Stories*”, by Nwachukwu-Abgada (1998). The story forms the text for data analysis. The clauses were selected based on their close relationship with the themes of love and culture depicted in the story. The first step was to identify and assemble the clauses in their various processes, participants and circumstances. The clauses are presented in numerical order as follows:

Clause 1. It was perhaps out of love reasoned the boy.

It	Was	Perhaps	Out of love	Reasoned the boy
Identified/ token	Relational	Circum. (reason)	Identifier/value (Circumstantial)	Mental/ Senser

Clause 2. He knew when he was mature enough to take a wife.

He	Knew	when	He	was	mature enough	to take a wife
Senser	Mental	Circum. (time)	Carrier	Relational	Attribute	Circum. (matter)

Clause 3. Tumbido's face creased into a grin as he saw Taratu.

Tumbido's face	Creased	into a grin	as he saw Taratu.
Identified/Token	Relational (identifying)	Identifier (value)	Circumstance (manner)

Clause 4. The prospect of meeting her that night under the tree struck him.

The prospect of meeting her that night	under the tree	struck	him
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Clause 5. Taratu knew that he loves her.

Taratu	knew	That	he	loves	her
Senser (Participant)	Mental	Conj.	Phenomenon	Mental	Phenomenon

Clause 6. He needed to succumb to the laws of the land if he must have her.

He	needed to succumb	to the laws of the land	if he must have her.
Actor	Material	Scope	Circumstance (condition)

Clause 7. He hated the Shero, the flogging of the would-be bridegroom.

He	Hated	the shero, the flogging of the would-be bridegroom.
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon

Clause 8. Taratu sneaked into the slight darkness formed by the wide leaves.

Taratu	sneaked	into the slight darkness	formed	by the wide leaves
Actor	Material	Scope	Material	Actor (Participant)

Clause 9. He watched the shadow cast by her sampling figure on the sands.

He	watched	the shadow	cast	by her sampling figure	on the sands.
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon	Relational	Actor	Circum. (place)

Clause 10. He wanted her completely as his own.

He	Wanted	Her	Completely	as his own
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon	Circum.(manner)	Circum. (matter)

Clause 11. He could feel her presence.

He	could feel	her presence.
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon

Clause 12. Tumbido loves Taratu.

Tumbido	loves	Taratu
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon

Clause 13. I sell all my cattle and we run to Gongola, the great hills of Adamawa.

I	Sell	all my cattle	and	we	run	to Gongola, the great hills of Adamawa.
Actor	Material	Goal	Conj.	Actor	Material	Scope

Clause 14. Tumbido hated himself for mentioning death.

Tumbido	hated	himself	for	mentioning	death.
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon	Circum. (condition)	Verbal	Attributed

Clause 15. I won't like my wife to walk such a distance.

I	won't like	my wife	(my wife)	to walk	such a distance.
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon	(Actor)	Material	Scope

Clause 16. What if I die?

What if	I	die?
Circumstance	Actor	Material

Clause 17. You'll find cowards in the other world to marry.

You	'll find	Cowards	in the other world	to marry.
Actor	Mental	Phenomenon	Circum. (place)	Circum. (place)

Clause 18. Tumbido hardened himself.

Tumbido	Hardened	himself
Actor	Material	Goal

Clause 19. Tumbido kept shooting glances in the direction they hid Taratu.

Tumbido	kept shooting	glances	in the direction	They	hid	Taratu
Actor	Material	Scope	Circum. (place)	Actor	Material	Goal

Clause 20. Tumbido is Taratu's husband, announced an elder.

Tumbido	Is	Taratu's husband	announced	an elder
Token (identified)	Relational	Value (identifier)	Verbal	Sayer

Summary of data analysis

Clauses	Material		Mental				Relational		Verbal	Behavioral	Existential	Circumst.
	Ac /G l	Ac /Sc	P	C	D	E	Att	Ident.				
1				✓				✓				Reason
2				✓								Time /Matter
3								✓				Manner
4	✓											

18		✓										
19		✓										Place
20							✓	✓				
Totals	2	7	2	3	1	5	0	3	1	0	0	9

Discussion

From the above tabulation of participant – process – circumstance configuration in the transitivity analysis of selected clauses, the two major participants in the unfolding experience of love are the two lovers: Tumbido and Taratu. There are other participants as well, serving as the logical subject in the clauses depending on the author’s choices. It is seen that a total number of twenty-four processes are identified in the twenty clauses studied. There seems to be a preponderance of mental process (a total of eleven mental processes) with emotive mental process being the most frequently used. Mental processes show the quantum of change in the unfolding experience of their love as taking place in the inner consciousness of the participants. Perspective mental processes such as *watched* in clause 9 (*He watched the shadow cast by...*) and *‘ll find* in clause 17 (*You ‘ll find cowards in the other world to marry*) – that is, if Tumbido does not subject himself to the Shero (flogging) – show the experience of love as something that emanates from sensual experiences.

Similarly, three cognitive mental processes identified in clause 1, *reasoned in it was perhaps out of love* - that *he wanted Taratu, reasoned the boy*, and *knew* in clause 2 and 5 (*He knew he*

was mature enough to marry and He knew he loves her), confirm in strong terms the working of the innermost consciousness in the experience of love and the cognitive processes involved in rationalizing the quantum of change in the unfolding love for the love object, Taratu. Tumbido seals this inner conviction in the only one desiderative mental process *wanted* in clause 10; *He wanted her completely as his own*. This is conviction that *he loves her* (clause 5); *hated* in *He hated the Shero* (clause 7), *feel* in *He could feel her presence* (clause 11), *loves* in *Tumbido loves Taratu* (clause 12) and *like* in *I won't like my wife to walk such a distance* (clause 15).

The most frequently used process type is the scope processes which construe the domain of operation of the experience of love as illustrated by such clauses as:

He (Tumbido) needed to succumb to the laws of the land (that is, Shero, the flogging of the would-be groom that must precede the marriage proposal).

Taratu sneaked into the slight darkness

We run to Gongola, the great mountain of Adamawa

Tumbido kept shooting glances (in the direction they hid Taratu).

All the above are scope participants in the material process types that show how the lovers express their love as both internal and external affection that bond them together. The only two actor-goal configuration in clauses 4 and 13 depict this expression of love in concrete actionable terms.

In clause 4, (*The prospect of meeting her that night under the tree struck him*), actor – the one that does the deed (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:179), is *The prospect of meeting her (Taratu) that night under the tree* which is logical subject of the clause. This Actor is inanimate but assumes agency as an inner struggle in

Tumbido which has a strong physical, almost palpable impact on him considering the material process *struck* which imparts directly on the Goal (Tumbido). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the action of the Actor extends directly to the Goal who is also called the patient; the “sufferer” of the action done by the Actor (the “doer”), in the process of “doing”. There is also identifying relational processes that reveal the author’s identification of the two major participants especially in clause 20.

Tumbido is Taratu’s husband, announced an elder.

This is the happy culmination of the marriage custom that requires the bridegroom to go through a flogging ordeal, such that the above announcement by the elder, the only one verbal process in *announced an elder* in the selected clauses, comes as a welcome relief. There is only one Attributive Relational process, *he was mature enough to marry*. From the transitivity analysis of the data, there are no behavioral and existential processes. This does not mean that they may not be found in the text, but they are not evident in the clauses studied. The circumstantial elements, called indirect participants also occur in clauses 1, (reason), 2 (Time/Matter), 3 (Manner), 5 (Condition), 9, 17 and 19 (place), and 10 (matter). These circumstantial elements construe the experience of love in time, place, reason, manner and the matter the processes indirectly refer.

Conclusion

Transitivity has been used to understand the language of the participants and circumstances through a thorough analysis of the clauses in the story under study. The paper has illuminated the readers’ perceptions and attitudes with regards to people's culture, places and events, and therefore, becomes a potentially powerful

site for the dominance of one's mind. The work is able to reveal that language structures can produce certain meanings and ideologies, which are not explicit to the readers. The transitivity analysis was able to discover the relationship between meanings and wordings that account for the organization of linguistic features in the text. Through the study, we are immense into the thoughts and actions of the participants and the circumstances they find themselves, and wondered what would happen if we find ourselves in their shoes? The study has been able to create awareness between language structures in prose and the connection between linguistics and literature. This will help language students to understand how language of a given text creates authenticity in fiction. It also exposes how a reader can capture the subjective and elusive mind of the writer, using transitivity approach to unravel the writer's linguistic choices.

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