

A CRITICAL STYLISTIC STUDY OF WOLE SOYINKA'S RE-ENACTMENT OF ACTIONS IN *INTERVENTIONS I, IV AND VIII*

Idara Esimaje Thomas

Department of English

University of Uyo, Nigeria

Email: idaraethomas@uniuyo.edu.ng

Phone Number: +234 813 774 4422

Abstract

Wole Soyinka's *Interventions* are mostly comments on socio-political issues in the Nigerian Society. Previous studies on Soyinka's *Interventions* have focused on critical discourse analysis and critical metaphor analysis with little attention paid to the critical stylistic use of language in the depiction of leadership ills. This study is, therefore, designed to explore Soyinka's re-enactment of actions in *Interventions I, IV and VIII*. Lesley Jeffries' Critical Stylistics, with specific focus on the tool of representing actions/events/states, was adopted as its theoretical framework. The Descriptive Design was used. The study explores how Soyinka uses material actions to present Nigerian leaders' dereliction of duty which has entrenched decay in various spheres of the society. Sadly, "the weeds of atonement" have been forced on the backs of the masses who obviously do not commit the crimes, but bear the brunt of the wrongdoings and are further pressured into seeking non-existing redress. Ironically, while the proletariat are busy making supplications, their leaders are busy looting and plundering everything within sight that would have brought succour to the suffering commoners. Conclusively, the Nigerian leaders' disregard for their responsibilities has paved way for the quagmire the nation currently finds itself in. Rather than fashion ways for the nation's emancipation from its despondent state, its current leaders continue to tow the lines of their predecessors. Hence, the pitiable state in which the country finds itself currently.

Keywords: Critical stylistics, Representing actions/events/states, *Interventions*

Introduction

Various studies have been conducted on Soyinka's *Interventions*. Among such are Hunjo (2010), Thomas (2015) and Thomas (2023). Hunjo (2010) uses theories drawn from critical discourse analysis and political discourse to open the readers mind to Soyinka's political struggle against colonial political relics that constantly affect Nigerian leaders' duty to evolve strategies that would offer a lasting solution to the misery of the masses. The research portrays Soyinka as a statesman since his texts are sites for communal communication where members participate in events that are connected at various societal levels; and cultural events in which the text producer is a member of the interactions he produces in his works. The study reveals socio-political ideologies and shows how language is used to expose resistance to colonial structures and Nigeria's postcolonial democracy. It portrays Soyinka as using lexical items to deliberately construct and build ideologies that would hopefully prompt the text consumers to take steps to remove non-democratic practices in Nigeria's post-colonial politics.

Thomas (2015) analyses language use by paying attention to the "expressive" value of metaphor in the language and discourse of social change in Nigeria in Soyinka's *Interventions III*. The research deploys Critical Metaphor Analysis and Cognitive Semantics by Charteris-Black as the theoretical framework in identifying, interpreting and explaining how metaphors are used in *Intervention III*. The research shows how an in depth understanding of the convergence of language and social reality offers a better comprehension of how public discourse shapes and is equally shaped from the use of language in context specific ways. The work explores Soyinka's use of his immediate audiences' common background to create analogies and reflect the immediate discourse context. It notes that the subject matters which are morality and national issues are not discussed abstractly, but in a vivid and pictorial manner which leaves the messages imprinted on the minds of the listeners and audiences. It observes that in terms of frequency, disease metaphors are more frequently used than other metaphor types/domain, since diseases are easily comprehended by humans and often, they are ready to go the extra mile required to get a cure. The disease domain is used to reflect the decay and rot in the Nigerian nation, with the hope that Nigerians would go to any length to find a 'cure' for its malaise. Taking the context of use and co-text of the metaphors into consideration, the research concludes that they depict how Soyinka deploys

language as an “expressive” tool, to portray in a pungent way the problems in the society, and how he advocates for a radical change and a revolution.

Thomas (2023) investigates the names and descriptions given to Olusegun Obasanjo, a former president of Nigeria by Soyinka using the *Interventions* as its source for data and Jeffries’ Critical Stylistic tool – naming and describing – as its theoretical framework. The study explores how Soyinka names and describes Nigeria’s former president, Olusegun Obasanjo disparagingly using noun phrases. The research reveals in detail, former president, Olusegun Obasanjo’s corruption while in power, his exploitation, mismanagement and misappropriation of the nation’s resources as well as his ploys to stay relevant and mute the voice of any discerning individual or group. The study cautions the Nigerian society against looking for a quick fix to the socio-political problems that plague the country, especially when such solutions are offered by former leaders who had done worse than their successors but are counting on the social amnesia which easily besets the masses to come back and continue from where they had stopped. Consequently, the portrayal of this public figure which directly reflects the nature of most political figures in Nigeria and the world at large, leaves little to be desired or expected from political office holders and sheds light on why most socio-political problems have defied solutions. It buttresses the ideology that you cannot give what you do not have.

The present research builds on Hunjo (2010), Thomas (2015) and Thomas (2023). First, it expounds on the texts used by Hunjo (2010), who analysed *Interventions I, You must set forth at dawn* and *Climate of fear*, by examining *Interventions I, IV* and *VIII*. Hunjo’s theoretical framework was based on critical discourse analysis and political discourse whereas the theoretical framework of this study is based on insights drawn from Jeffries (2007, 2010) critical stylistics. Second, Thomas (2015) focused on *Interventions III* while this study focuses on *Interventions I, IV* and *VIII* and its theoretical frame unlike Thomas (2015) which was critical metaphor analysis is critical stylistics. Thomas (2023), on the other hand, paid attention to the critical stylistic tool of naming and describing while this study explores the critical stylistic tool of representing actions/events/states.

From the foregoing, representing actions/events/states as a critical stylistic construct has not been explored to analyse Soyinka’s portrayal of leadership ills. Therefore, this study explores Soyinka representation of

actions/events/states using *Interventions I, IV and VIII* as its source for data and Jeffries' (2007, 2010) Critical Stylistic tool, representing actions/events/states, as its theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework

Critical stylistics was propounded by Jeffries (2007, 2010,). It is concerned with stylistic choices, and the study of writings which can illuminate the selections which a writer or speaker makes, whether purposely or not, as well as a writer or speaker's ability to create covert ideologies in an effort to sway or influence, since the methods of embedding ideology are shared through "the whole range of communicative situations in which we find ourselves on a daily basis" (Jeffries 2010: 6 - 7). Critical stylistics has ten sets of analytical tools to follow in carrying out the critical analysis of texts (Jeffries 2010: 6). However, Jeffries (2010: 6) notes that the tools "can be used either individually or as a set to establish what a text is doing". This study, therefore, adopts one tool – representing actions/events/states for its analysis.

Representing actions/events/states considers the writer or speaker's choice of lexical verb since each of these picks has significances on the way a scenario is viewed by the text consumer (Jeffries 2010: 37 - 40). Actions refers to "what is being done"; events to "what is happening" and states – "what simply is". The descriptive analysis here, is founded on the idea "that the verbal elements of a clause – also known as the Predicator – is where the actions and processes" which occur "between these entities are typically represented." The transitivity model is what is adopted here. It allocates lexical verbs to a number of dissimilar sets – material action processes, verbalisation processes, mental cognition processes and relational processes – depending on the type of process or state they seem to be labelling.

Material actions are the foremost prototypical verbs, denoting things that are done or happen, frequently in corporeal manners, but also in a more abstract manner (Jeffries 2010: 40). The actual verb is referred to as the Process, the other participants are the Actors and Goal. Though the Goal might be absent, the Actor and Process are always there for all three material actions.

The material actions ... are *intentional* and performed by a *conscious being*, and these form one subset of material actions, which we will call 'Material Action Intentional' or MAI for convenience. This main category also includes *unintentional* actions by *conscious beings*, known as 'supervention', and these will be called 'Material Action Supervention' (MAS) ... The final subcategory of material action verbs is known as 'Material Action Events (MAE) and refers to the use of verbs with an *inanimate Actor*, where human agency is either missing or played down. Many verbs are able to be used in both MAI or MAS and MAE contexts (Jeffries 2010: 40 - 41).

The second process is Verbalization (V). It describes any act that makes use of language, since this connotes that they have a human Actor, they usually appear to be quite related to material actions. The third process which is the Mental process generally denotes what occurs with humans. The last is the Relational process which embodies the fixed or unwavering connexions between Carriers and Attributes, rather than any alterable or vigorous activities. The transitivity model is valuable for indicating how the universe is being depicted by a text or a group of texts, and to work out which category is relevant one needs to know what occurred in the situation being described. Sometimes, even when the context is specified, it is usually not always easy to be sure which type of transitivity is appropriate (Jeffries 2010: 44 - 45).

Method of data collection and analysis

Interventions I, IV and VIII were purposively selected for their descriptive representation of actions/events/states which constitute leadership ills. A content analysis of the texts based on Soyinka's word choice was done to determine what and how they represented actions/events/states which constitute leadership ills in the *Interventions*. Here the text producers' choice of verbal items which encode material action is considered since each of these selections has consequences for the way in which the scenario is perceived by the text consumer.

Data analysis and Discussion

In critical stylistics, representation of actions/events/states refer to the choice of verbal items, and their significance for the manner in which they affect text consumers perception of the text producers' ideas. Data, here, is sourced from *Interventions I, IV and VIII* by identifying, analysing and examining how language is used in representing actions/events/states. Soyinka's choice of verbs, verb phrases, etcetera, were considered. This aided the understanding of the way language is used to portray leadership ills in the *Interventions*. The key words are in bold font below for ease of recognition.

Excerpt 1

Impeach away, and **let** the chips fall where they will! But **do not temper** with the 'constitution' in order to **solve** the dilemma of a bunch of manipulators who were never legitimately **installed** as people's representatives in the first place.
(Soyinka 2010: 66 - 67)

In excerpt 1, the verbs – **impeach**, **let**, **do not temper** and **installed** – are all material action events (MAE) processes, because the actors are not explicitly mentioned. These words create a sarcastic tone in this context since anyone familiar with the way politics is played in Nigeria knows that often, impeachment of public officials is done for the wrong reasons and rarely carries the same literal meaning – the act of removing someone from public office because one has committed serious crimes and misdemeanours or because of other gross misconduct – like it does elsewhere. Moreover, the Nigerian constitution that the 'elected' representatives of the people have refused to temper with hardly takes care of the interest of the masses and is in dire need of being tempered with yet the Nigerian legislators (*manipulators*) would not, least their self-serving ways get affected.

Excerpt 2

I **am bombarded** by Gani's clamorous voice **demanding**: "Is it not that same militrickster who **erected** that fraudulent edifice we **tried to restore**

to its rightful owners? Is it not the same one I **took** to court and who **was let off** the hook through technicalities? Isn't he the same one who **converted** a cheque issued by ex-governor Orji Kalu for their party the PDP, to his personal account? ... Are you telling me that he is still **pointing fingers, muddying up waters, conspiring to install** his stooges in office, **setting up** coalitions of deceit? Was he perchance a different individual but with the same name whose presidency as well as re-election campaign **ran up** the highest tally of political fatalities ever undergone in the nation? ... Remind me, who was the exultant overseer of the rape of democracy! ... Did you say it is the same president **decrying** the rot in governance and society? Well, he certainly was well placed to know, you should really take him more seriously! (Soyinka 2018: 46 - 48)

The material action intentional (MAI) processes in excerpt 2 are primarily carried out by Soyinka, Gani and Obasanjo. In the excerpt, Soyinka used the questioning technique to foreground his message and reawaken the consciousness of the public to some problems mockingly discussed. The verbal phrase **am bombarded** figuratively means to attack something or someone by directing objects at them. In this instance, Soyinka is 'attacked' by the late Gani who 'directs' a list of questions at him and by extension the audience by inquiring about the status quo of one of Obasanjo's dubiously acquired asset, Bells University, which they had tried to restore back to the masses through a court case which was dismissed on technical grounds. Questioning is further used to specifically mention several instances where Obasanjo jettisoned his leadership roles for personal gains, some of these instances of dereliction of duties have continued to haunt the Nigerian nation till date. Yet being who he is Obasanjo has continued to delude himself into believing he was a saviour of some sort despite all evidence to the contrary.

Excerpt 3

this time round they **press** the weeds of atonement on the backs of the people, **exhort** them to **close** their eyes, **kneel** on the ground and **pray**. When the people **rise**, **open** their eyes, the sackcloth is still theirs to keep, but the nation's real estate **has vanished**. The mineral resources **have evaporated**. The oil **has seeped** through underground tunnels. The treasury **has sprung** a leak. Most humiliatingly of all, the nation's dignity, security and self-confidence are violently depleted, resulting in abject pleas for Amnesty for the most horrendous crimes against humanity, even as those violations **are being inflicted** – indeed escalated – against innocents. (Soyinka 2013: 80)

Excerpt 4

When the missionaries came, say the converts, they **pressed** the bible into our hands, **told** us to **shut** our eyes, **kneel** on the ground and **pray**. When we **opened** our eyes, we still had the bible, but the land **was gone**. Today's missionaries are different, and their internal allies – for there always have been internal heirs of criminal gain – wear khaki instead of royal beads and robes. And this time round they **press** the weeds of atonement on the backs of the people, **exhort** them to **close** their eyes, **kneel** on the ground and **pray**. When the people **rise**, **open** their eyes, the sackcloth is still theirs to keep, but the oil **has vanished**. The mineral resources **have disappears**. Even the treasury **has been emptied**. These are today's citizens of Argos. They are the communicant cast of *The Flies* in the eternal ritual of Power and profanity in predatory opposition to the sanctity of Freedom. (Soyinka 2010: 291)

In excerpts 3 and 4 above, the verb phrases **press, pressed, exhort, told, close, shut, kneel, pray, rise, open** and **opened** are all Material Action Intentional (MAI) processes because the actors are properly identified whereas **has vanished, have evaporated, have disappeared, has seeped, has sprung, has been emptied** and **are being inflicted** are Material Action Event (MAE) processes because the human agency is consciously played down by the author while the inanimate actors are magnified. In excerpt 4, we have “the weeds of atonement” being forced on the backs of the masses who obviously did not commit the crime but are pressured into seeking forgiveness from God.

Sardonically, this pitiable situation is the situation the masses in the Nigerian nation find themselves in, even in the twenty-first century. Additionally, as mockingly depicted in the excerpts, while the proletariat are busy making the said supplication, their leaders who are not overtly mentioned here loot and plunder everything within sight that would have brought succour of some sort to the already suffering commoners. In excerpt 4, the missionaries mentioned in the first sentence refer to the early missionaries while “Today’s missionaries” is used connotatively to refer to the neo-colonialists in their varied forms and their partners who are the “internal heirs of criminal gain”.

Excerpt 5

those who stuff back the lie in the throats of male monsters and contest their arrogant proclamation that the creative – but not the procreative – life-span of a girl child should stop at eleven, ten, even all the way down to eight or six. From then on, they **can be forced** to bed, **used, abused, physiologically and psychologically damaged, discarded and replaced**. Yes, I believe that it is perhaps in such places that we should look for the heroes of our times and predicament, those who sternly question the disposition of men who call themselves the nation’s lawgivers, but pander to the sexual perversions of religious masqueraders. (Soyinka 2013: 113 - 114)

Excerpts 5 is a critique of a Nigerian leader whose extreme Islamisation view glorifies the sexual subjugation of the girl-child from an early age, under the guise that since Prophet Mohammed supposedly married Amina at age six and consummated the marriage when she was nine, then Muslims were permitted to abuse female children in the name of marriage. Therefore, as Soyinka notes “they **can be forced** to bed, **used, abused, physiologically and psychologically damaged, discarded and replaced.**” The words in bold font are material action intentional (MAI) processes describing the acts of leaders – such as Ahmed Yerima, a governor of Zamfara State, Nigeria, from 1999 to 2007 and a three-term senator from 2007 to 2019 – who are ‘religious masquerades’ who hide behind religion to perpetuate hideous acts.

Excerpt 6

Is ours a nation that treats morality as only another commodity that can be **bargained** for, and **purchased** at a discount? (Soyinka 2010: 38)

In excerpt 6, Soyinka uses material action intentional (MAI) processes which are in bold font above and finance metaphor to foreground the message and ask a vital rhetorical question aimed at encouraging the text consumers to reflect on the issues raised. Finance metaphor: **bargained**, which means to negotiate the terms of an agreement with somebody or to exchange one thing for another; **purchased**, which is the act of buying something using money or its equivalent, and discount, which is a reduction in the usual price of something, are used to question the moral standing of the Nigerian nation. Subsumed under this excerpt are questions such as: is marrying a thirteen-year-old right or wrong? Is killing another human because of different religious conviction right or wrong? Is assassinating one’s political opponent right or wrong? Is subjugation of the masses right or wrong? Is looting and irrational purchase of unnecessary items by a few to the detriment of the majority and to a nations’ current and future growth right or wrong? From the foregoing, it becomes evident that if one must ponder before knowing one’s stand or believes that any circumstance could make any of those acts right, then one’s is a morality that can be bargained for and purchased at a discount.

Conclusion

Poignantly, it would be apt to restate conclusively that the Nigerian leaders' disregard for their responsibilities has paved way for the quagmire the nation currently finds itself in. Rather than fashion ways for the nation's emancipation from its despondent state, its current leaders continue to tow the lines of their predecessors. Hence, the pitiable state in which the country finds itself currently.

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