



## **Dialectical Re-Lexicalization in Festus Iyayi's Literary Idiolect: Componential Analysis Approach**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A conflation of factors such as the social situation that provides the universe of discourse in Festus Iyayi's novels, the ideological leaning of the writer and the paradigms of the characters of the literary works condition the literary idiom of the three novels under study- *Violence, The contract and Heroes*. The dialectics of defining and redefining of concepts from opposing paradigms with the privileged comprador class, on the one side of language use, and the underprivileged class, on the other, produce the conflicts in the novel, linguistically speaking. The audience is then left to appreciate how the members of the two classes either use the key terms in the novels from the conventional meaning paradigm or from the subversive perspective. This study then, using the componential analysis approach, explores this creative relexicalization and reaches the conclusion that the social situation or reality in the fiction the metaphor for language and language is the metaphor for the social reality. And this accounts part for Iyayi's literary idiolect in the novels.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Conventionally, language is used to refer to the real world or to communicate real world situations. Richards (1972) calls this use of language "reference". Such a communication reflects the objective reality depending on the text genre. In scientific writing the language is characteristically colourless, striving to be objective, and communicating the information to the audience in clear, terms, although using its text register. Language can also be used to refer to imaginary world. The displacement characteristic of language permits the literary artist to imagine and capture the past (even the present or even project into the future) removed in temporal and spatial distance from the audience. This use of language Richard calls "emotive use" and it is used

### *Dialectical Re-Lexicalization in Festus Iyayi's Literary Idiolect*

for the “sake of the effects of an emotion and attitude without any reference to occasion” (p. 112).

A literary artist takes a slice of the real world, using the resource of language and semiotic strategies, fictionalizes it, perhaps typifies or reflects it in a context and produces a craft that is aesthetically satisfying and perhaps intellectually provoking a thought. Phenomenalistic interpretation of metaphor (as characteristic of literary texts) considers the novel genre of literature as “a large scale metaphor” because if the text is fictional, it will be concerned with an imaginary world and language, a semiotic system as used in the novel of the imaginary world will need “be interpreted in terms of similarity or Analogy with the world that we know”, (Goatly, 1977, p. 5), as metaphor.

Beside, a Marxist concept of literature is a reflection of material reality, a representation of historical reality, a representation which reflects the class ideology, which the writer identifies with, although it may be coloured by the writer's apprehension of it. It is a figurative reflection of reality and not necessarily a mirror reflection of reality. The implication of this to the interpretation of a text of a Marxist leaning is that of an approximate one, one which the metaphors and symbols used have a small distance between the thought and the proposition.

#### **The social situation in Nigeria as a metaphor of language in Iyayi's novels**

Language has the capacity for representing reality ‘referentially through words and structures’ and “metaphorically” through its own internal and external forms”, (Halliday, 1980, p. 87). What language represents referentially and metaphorically is a product of social reality. Language therefore becomes a metaphor of reality and reality a metaphor of language. The social reality produces the context within which language comes alive. Of course, the social reality “yields the fields of discourse” or “material reality” which is the source of register, metaphor inclusive. Kuhn quoted in Clancy (1989) states that “metaphor springs from paradigm”, i.e. a set of beliefs about the world (p.2). Literature takes a slice of social reality and fictionalizes it by means of manipulating the displacement characteristic of language. It is instructive to point out that Marxist theory of literature hinges upon the notion of “reflection” of the life of a given society, “a reflection of objective reality”, so much so that literature is conceived of as “an historic reality”, (Macherey and Balibar, 1980, p. 292). In fact, Mao Tse – Tung quoted by Macherey and Balibar, lends his voice to such a conception of literature thus: “workers of literature and art, as ideological forms are products of the reflection in the human brain of the life of a given society” (p. 292).

Dialectical materialism, which is a central notion of Marxism, believes that “existent material reality” can be objectively reflected in the mind and can determine thought. It follows, therefore, that a committed literary writer

reflects an “existent material reality” in his mind and then reflects it in his work, mediating content and form both to achieve an aesthetic appeal and to perform a social function. This influence of the social reality on the writer and on his writing, correlates with Halliday’s assertion that the individual (in this case the text writer) and his text are products of the social situation among other correlates such as interpersonal or role relationship and the form of his product. Social (or material) reality is therefore not just the source of thematic concern of a work of art, but also a metaphor of language.

Iyayi, a literary artist with a Marxist bent, having the moral burden of conscientising the deprived and under-privileged aligns with, and speaks for, them. He further takes upon him the moral burden of denouncing and deploring corruption in all its ramifications in Nigeria, seeing it as an inherent and endemic corollary of capitalism. To Iyayi, capitalism thrives on corruption and short- changing both the masses and the nation, without a conscience. He, therefore, presents and represents the capitalists as not just the ones who feed on the blood of the poor, as it were, but as people who can eat and destroy one of their own who would not be true to their type. This is the social (or material) reality that inhabits the universe of discourse of the three novels-*Violence, The contract and Heroes*.

It is understandable, then, that Iyayi represents and reflects characters and their conception of this social reality from conflicting paradigms along lines of the bourgeoisie and the masses. And if social reality becomes the metaphor for language and language metaphor for reality, it follows that the definition of the key concepts in the world of the three novels along these lines is apt. This fact explains why the bourgeoisie and the masses redefine the terms, ‘violence’, ‘struggling’, ‘corruption’, ‘survival’ and ‘heroes’ that cut across the three novels.

Componential analysis is the “analysis in terms of components- the total meaning of a word being seen in terms of a number of distinct elements or components of meaning (Palmer1981, (p. 108). This approach of exploring and explicating meaning of lexical items enables us show logical relations that are associated with the lexical items (Palmer 1991, p.1110. In order to delineate the boundaries of a lexical item, componential. analysis attempts to consider components of meaning of the item in terms of binary opposites, eg between male and female, animate and inanimate. However, in its application to the analysis of key lexical terms in literary works that captures the conflicts concerning common concepts from differing paradigms: the privileged class and the underprivileged class, strict binary oppositeness is not followed. But rather, the components of meaning from the logical orientation of members of each of the classes are delineated to show how meaning can be encoded conventionally and creatively, depending on the ideological underpinning of the language user.

### Relexicalization of concepts in the three novels

The title of the novel, *Violence* is generated from the Marxist paradigm, as part of the thesis of the novel, captured in the situation. The usage "violence" is not a literal, conventional one, but rather a metaphorical, subversive one, or a second order meaning. Violence from the conventional definition or primitive meaning denotes physical action, brutal assault, rough treatment and bodily harm. The metaphorical, subversive definition of violence which Idemudia, and by extension Iyayi uses, is generated by, and is akin to the former. It is rather constitutive meaning-what is sometimes called semantic extension. When Idemudia labels poor wages, too much work, too many hours of work and frequent firing of labourers because they demand for higher wages "violence", he simply means that these acts by their employers constitute violence. He believes that a concert of all these leads to "a slow and gradual debasement of himself, his pride as a man" and they engender the use of physical action, of brute force, etc. This is the general frame into which all other acts and state of predicament, which debase a man fit. The actual contents of that frame are many and varied in dimensions. All these do more violence to the soul of man than the physical violence.

The face value of the title, *Violence* suggests a mob action, a brute force, which a group of revolutionaries or masses are being stirred up to unleash on the bourgeoisie. But beneath the surface is the intellectual content of the dimension of violence and the dialectics of the material situation, (a mock situation within the larger, actual situation).

While the bourgeoisie and their bureaucratic collaborators seek to use the term from the conventional idiom point of view, the masses use the term from a subversive point of view. The former defines violence differently from the masses' definition.

Bourgeois (conventional) definition of violence componentially analyzed is:

- + Hooliganism
- + Terrorism
- + Irresponsible and barbaric acts
- + Armed robbery targeted at the propertied men.

The latter rather defines it variously as the lack of opportunities, disparate treatment to patients, and malnutrition in the society where a few reel in surfeit, and failure to recognize this syndrome or pretending otherwise. This is given vent to by the counsel for the Defence in the playlet. He unites the usage thus:

It is the society, the type of economic and hence the political system which we are operating in our country today that brutalizes the individual, rapes his manhood... when such men of poor and limited opportunities react, they are only in a certain measure, answering violence (metaphorical definition) with violence (conventional definition) **addition mine** *Violence* (p. 186).

The Masses' (subversive) definition of 'violence' conversely is:

- + Lack of opportunities
- + Disparate treatment to patients

*Godwin Oke Ushie*

- + Malnutrition of the poor in the face of surfeit of the rich
- + Glossing over this syndrome
- + Rape of manhood
- + Reaction against this syndrome.

Part of the thesis of this novel then is that the society is providing very fertile grounds, very cogent reasons and causes for an inevitable revolutionary action, hence the phrase “answering violence with violence”. Herein lies the dialectic in the novel’s fictional situation.

The word “struggling” is another term that is conceived of and used differently, from the paradigms of the masses and the privileged class, respectively. Idemudia, a representative of the masses, is at the hospital ruminating on his life, which has been characterized by unending struggle that hardly pays off, everyday. As a result, he sells his blood to make money, so that his family would not starve, so they would survive. Selling blood, making money not to starve, to survive are semantic extensions of struggling and fighting within this context.

Componentially analyzed, it is thus:

Struggling – to make money

- + Fighting
- + Sweating (ie in the over powering heat of sun)
- + Daily return home from fruitless long wait
- + Sale of blood to be able to feed
- + Giving out blood at a laughable price
- + Survival
- Giving up
- Starvation
- Escaping

In contrast, the privileged who have enough to eat and drink, chatter in Freedom Motel glibly on how to make money (their own concept of struggle): “They talked about money, how to steal to make money, cheat to make money, work to make money, make money to make money. Steal goods and equipment ... cheat and even murder in the name of government” (p. 281). Thus, componentially, their idiom of making money (or struggling) includes:

- + Stealing huge sums of money
- + Cheating
- + Working
- + Making money to make money (investing)
- + Stealing goods and equipment
- + Duping
- + Murdering in the name of government

Clancy (1989) asserts that metaphor is a “prime determinant of action (pp. 8-29). This is the reflection of the user’s beliefs. The entailment arising from this metaphor-paradigm and belief- action relationships explains why members of this comprador class do anything to eliminate others. They see all their action as a struggle for survival.

### *Dialectical Re-Lexicalization in Festus Iyayi's Literary Idiolect*

In the novel, *The contract*, as in the other two, although members of the lower class know and even loathe the ugly reality, they cannot react against it. They recognize their limitation, limitation occasioned by hunger, unemployment and helplessness. They accept to be used as 'any other instrument' (*The contract* p.75) and to be exploited. Female applicants submit themselves to be taken to the "slaughter" to be sexually exploited as part of job interviews, in which most times, they are to even successful. Therefore, the word "survival" componentially analyzed means the following:

Survival

- + Getting more (or having) an advantage over rivals
- + Indulging in any vice(s) that would ensure having an advantage over others
- + Cheating
- + Joining cults/fraternities
- + Seducing men with women
- +Stealing
- + Offering bribes to get contract awards
- + Eliminating rivals
- Virtue
- conscience/morality
- Decency

However, "survival" in their idiom is not the same as survival for the poor. These components of the meaning of survival are what shape their actions, thoughts and understanding of their reality.

Survival, to the desperate poor people, then means:

- + Accepting to be exploited provided they can afford their feeding
- + Toiling to feed
- + Chaotic scrambling for scarce opportunities
- + Asking for favours
- + Cheating by overcharging clients
- Accepting to starve

In the idiom of this class, corruption is given a euphemized, harmless, pleasant definition because in their world view, it is justified and excused. Corruption, may therefore, be componentially analyzed thus:

Corruption

- + A way to survive
- + A way to get rich
- + Vice
- + Roguery
- + Theft

To both the critical realists and the poor masses, corruption has no other name, even if they cannot extricate themselves from it. Corruption, componentially analyzed is:

- + Stealing public funds
- +Demanding for percentages of contract values
- + Inflating contract values
- + Expropriating public facilities for private use

*Godwin Oke Ushie*

- + Indulging in roguery
- + Committing crime
- + Robbing with pen and paper
- + Decay
- + Leprosy which all suffer from

In the context of the novel, *Heroes*, there are two opposing definitions of the concept of “heroes” arising from the paradigm of two classes: the oppressor class and the oppressed class. The oppressors expropriate and usurp this honour of heroes. They win in the war because they succeed in dealing with the commoners, who are their common enemies, by reducing their enemies number and gaining from their losses. They gain financially and economically. They gain by acquiring new territories by extending by their boundaries. They gain because they secure themselves and their loot while the masses are exposed to dangers, high risk, hunger and insecurity. The generals who represent the incumbent political leaders expropriate this honour. From this class paradigm therefore, the term “heroes” is componentially analyzed thus:

- + Generals on both sides of the war
- + Those who jointly work to reduce the enemies of the rich.
- + Those that make maximal economic gains from the civil war.
- + Those that make territorial gains from the war.
- + Usurpers of the honour due to the real heroes.
- + All those who qualify to be members of this class.
- + Political religious, business and academic leaders.
- + Those whose manipulations/stratagems win the war.
- Those who work/die for the interest of the nation (the patriots and nationalist)
- Members of the lower class (the rank and file, the peasant farmers and the working class).
- Victims/casualties of the war.

Conversely, a componential analysis of a meaning of heroes from the paradigm of the commoners contrasts as follows:

- + The ordinary soldiers who fight with barely enough arms and ammunition on both sides of the war.
- + Victims of propaganda and manipulation
- + Those that pay supreme price, sacrificing their lives for the unity of the nation.
- + Those that are denied their dues by the privileged.
- + Losers in the war
- All those who profit from the war
- The generals and political, economic, religious and academic elite.

Looking then at these attributes, members of this class who show these attributes are the true heroes, nationalists and patriots.

## CONCLUSION

In seeking to conscientize the underprivileged class or the commoners in Nigeria on the need to identify the true enemy of the nation and also speak for them, Festus Iyayi exposes the corruption and evils characterizing the society as a corollary of capitalism. He repeatedly presents these vices from the bifurcated paradigms of the privileged class and the underprivileged class, each redefining the terms as they serve their purpose. The mercantilist propensity of the privileged class is responsible for their members commodifying the Nigerian Civil War situation in *Heroes*, maximizing profit making in *The Contract* and *Violence*. It is against this background that this class (im)morality and idiom/metaphor are derived. On the other hand, the underprivileged class that carries the burden of serving the needs of the rich people and catering for their own needs do any thing to survive, even if it means working against their own interest. They acquiesce to the exploitative propensity of the privileged class; they therefore either redefine terms away from the privileged class perspective or in the terms realistic perspective depending on which one serves their purpose. The componential analysis approach is used as a model to analyze the interlacing stylistic marker that reverberate the three novels: the redefinition of terms and concepts. Iyayi deliberately dislocates either the conventional definition, or subverts the definition as used by the oppressor. He rather uses the terms from the working class idiom and paradigm to mediate the authorial ideology (Ushie 2007, p. 228). The componential analysis of the term of the bifurcated worlds of the oppressor and the oppressed reverberate in all the three novels. The redefinition of terms therefore becomes a code in the literary pragmatics of Iyayi (Ushie 2007, p. 228). The social reality in the trilogy of a sort becomes a metaphor for language and language a metaphor for reality in the novels.

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**Godwin Oko Ushie**

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