



A Study of Names and Dialogues as Functional Tools in Iyayi's *The Contract*

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Received 19 February 2014; accepted 20 May 2014

Published online 27 June 2014

Abstract

This study discusses the manner in which names of characters and their dialogues have been deployed for meaning projection by Festus Iyayi in the novel, *The Contract*. It reveals the message projected in the novel as the predatory nature of man in the absence of law and order. This is foregrounded in the elitist insincerity and hypocrisy of the Nigerians, as they try to cover up their hidden crime by taken chieftaincy titles and by showing some open good that will reveal them otherwise. The names and dialogues of the characters involved are discussed as used to reveal religious, geographical and ethnic as well as continental spread of these characters. This is with a view to showing the universality of decay and corruption and above all human cannibalism. Dialogues are encoded using varieties of English to show differences in social status for the same purpose. The paper relies on the systemic text-linguistic model of literary text analysis where it is asserted that every literary text has a central message it projects and it is projected at three meta-levels.

Key words: Names; Dialogues; Functional Tools; Iyayi; *The Contract*

Ibileye, G. S., & Jibrin, M. B. S. (2014). A Study of Names and Dialogues as Functional Tools in Iyayi's *The Contract*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 8(3), 160-165. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/4558>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4558>

INTRODUCTION

This is a text-linguistic study that discusses the employment of names and dialogues in the projection of the message of *The Contract* by its author. The names employed are of characters and of places that are significant to the author's projection of the text's message. The argument in this paper is premised upon the tenets of the Systemic Functional linguistics where it is explicated that language use is backgrounded by its social functions. This is what M. A. K. Halliday refers to as language as social semiotics (Halliday, 1978 & 1994). The Systemic model of language study has, according to Berry (1975, p.23), great relevance for text study given its emphasis on the social function of language. According to Leech and Short (1981, p.31) Halliday and all those of the systemic school can be referred to as stylistic pluralists because of this interest in the semiological aspect of language. Eggins (2004, p.3) adds that language functions to make meanings which are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged.

It is against this background that this study is based on the Systemic Text-linguistic approach developed by Systemic linguists such as Adejare (1992) and Jolayemi (2000) where the age long argument that there are multiple messages inherent in a literary text is refuted for a more functional paradigm. The argument here is that a literary text has a central message it projects at different levels, using different devices that are deployed by the text producer for meaning making. Hence, the second order text (literary text) is considered a communicative occurrence (Baugrande & Dressler, 1981). This study falls within what Adejare (1992, p.23) calls second order level of meaning or what Jolayemi (2000, p.119) refers to as level of signification. In the aforementioned model of linguistic study, characters are considered special metaphors, as well as their names and dialogues that form

cohesive devices that constitute “textness” in a text. These combine with other text components to make the text a unified whole (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

1. THE MESSAGE PROJECTED BY THE NOVEL

The novel projects the predatory nature of man in the absence of law and order. This is evident in the elitist insincerity and hypocrisy that characterize the post colonial Nigerian society where the few elite have usurped the contracts, which are legitimate ways earning and fostering a country’s development, for illegitimate causes of personal enrichment, at the expense of the overwhelming masses. Worse still, the poor masses remain objects of diseases, robbery attacks and other social vices. The resultant effects of this injustice are death, decay and abject poverty and penury. The message presupposes a wanton destruction of human lives, leading to a total annihilation of a society where corruption is a way of life. The reason is that the elite do not spare anybody who dares stand in their ways. In the end, they will destroy one another in a bid to outsmart one another. This is the Nigerian society of *The Contract*. What follows is a discussion of the various ways in which names of characters and their dialogues have been deployed to project this message by the text producer. This discussion is done with recognition of the fact that the semiotic universe of the text constitutes an integral part of its interpretation.

2. NAMES

There are several names in *The Contract* which are significant to the projection of the message of the text. These names comprise names of characters, of important places, nicknames and titles. Names of characters are of interest in relation to the setting not as projectors of the message. The names are used to reveal the setting of the novel. They are largely drawn from the author’s immediate society which can be used to determine the text’s wider situation. Names such as Idebale, Agbon, Aikhon, etc, are Edo names. There are others such as Oloru, Alafia, Obala, Ogunpa, Wayo, etc, which are Yoruba names. *Mallam* sounds a nickname which can be said to be that of a Muslim, possibly from the Northern part of Nigeria. This shows the geographical setting of the novel. It shows that the novel is set in Lagos, which was the capital city of Nigeria, while the Edo names reveal the author’s immediate society. These names when put together are used as stereotypes to give the national coverage of the message of the novel, since the entire country constitutes the wider situation of the novel.

2.1 Titles

These are used to project the message of the text. The

titles include “chief”, “major”, “colonel” and “senator”. Each of these titles will be discussed.

2.1.1 Chief

Three characters were described using the title in the novel. They are chiefs Obala, Ogunpa and Ekata. These are people that the novel projects as dishonest and corrupt, yet they are chiefs. The author uses them to project the message that, how you acquire your wealth is not an issue but what is the issue is that you have wealth. They are honoured in society with chieftaincy titles, possibly, for using ill-means to acquire wealth. In short, they are thieves. This shows that the pervading disorder, decay and filth in the Nigerian society is not restricted to one ethnic group, as two of these chiefs are Yoruba while one is Edo.

2.1.2 Major and Colonel

These are in the military. There are two persons addressed using the titles: Major Alafia and Colonel Oyi. These are military men who have jettisoned their routine role of protecting the territorial integrity of the nation. They all have to come into the political scene because they also feel that they should take more than their own shares of the national cake. Major Alafia is a commissioner who takes part in the illegal percentage sharing from contracts, which are not executed in the right way for the benefit of the masses. These titles are used to project the message of decay, disorder and danger in a society in which those trained to kill now govern the people they are supposed to protect. When a slave begins to govern his master, in the immediate situation of the text, then the world is coming to an end. This shows also that corruption is not limited to one profession; it is rather a middle name of the Nigerian elite in all spheres of national life.

2.1.3 Doctor

The title ‘doctor’ in this novel is used to conform to its first sense of medical practitioner. There are only two of them used in the novel. Doctor Suralo is Ogie’s friend who was used to deceive Rose over abortion that she wanted to have. He was used by Ogie against Rose’s move to have Ogie’s child aborted, using the terminologies of his profession to confuse her. The second doctor Okuiya was the abortion expert that Eunice Agbon took Rose to, for the abortion of her baby. This also shows how deeply rooted in the filth, in the murder and in the overall degrading of human beings the medical profession is in the country. It also proves the point that no body or profession is left out in the decay. Doctors are trained to save lives but they now use their knowledge to kill instead.

2.1.4 Senator

The only senator in the novel is Senator Wayo, whose hotel—Wayo Hotel—is used by corrupt military administrators for meetings of percentage sharing. He is a politician whose proceeds of corruption were used to build a centre for corrupt activities. This shows that there is unity in corruption among all men who matter in the Nigerian society, irrespective of profession.

2.2 Nickname

Major Chop-Chop

This is a name given to the military administrator whose dignity and charisma have been put to best use in corruption. All he knows is how to siphon the wealth of the nation. *Chop-chop* is a coinage which originated from Nigerian pidgin which means eat. To embezzle has been trivialized given its widespread nature to mean 'to eat'. *Chop-chop* means in the Nigerian context to embezzle without restriction and shame. This is used to show the high level of indecency that has become the hallmark of most military officials who claim to intervene in politics in order to right the wrong. Major *chop-chop* uses his military might to intimidate every body in the society in order to go with his percentage. He is not bothered.

2.3 Names of Countries and Nationals

There are names of countries other than Nigeria that are of significance in the projection of the message of this novel.

2.3.1 Switzerland

This country is used as a projection of the message that human beings are predators once law and order are removed from society. Switzerland is used by the text producer to show how other countries aid and abet corrupt Nigerians and that encourages continued stealing. This is because they provide the enablement. No matter how much you are bringing, their banks are ready to keep. In the immediate situation of the author, he who keeps for the thief is also a thief. It is because Nigerians cannot keep the money that they steal that Switzerland is out to share from the loots in the form of bank commissions, and as a result, their government liberalizes its laws in favour of money traffic into her country. This projects the selfish and decadent nature of that society, and it is, in fact, a case for universal corruption and decay. What mitigates the effect is a function of where you are at a particular time. In a nutshell, every human being can be callous, filthy and a killer if there is an enabling environment. The enabling environment propels the time in which human apostasy and criminality can be seen.

2.3.2 Miss Gasfield

She is a British unmarried lady, brought to Nigeria to be used to perpetrate corrupt practices through planting of flowers. The white lady was employed to plant tropical flowers at the square and she was going there every morning to replant flowers in order to criminally prolong her stay and make more money. Since she was to be paid on a monthly basis and per seed of flower, she has to continue to justify her stay and maximize her opportunity by uprooting every flower planted the previous day and replanting new species of flowers:

And in the basket Miss Gasfield had sun flowers- the pale blue one- and dahlias, and while she planted these flowers, her servants watered them. But the next morning, Miss Gasfield went again with another basket of flowers, then she uprooted the ones she had planted the day before and planted the new ones

she had brought. (P.102)

Miss Gasfield was doing all this because the contract term was based on the number of flowers planted. Each morning she was taking her mischievous smiles to the administrator and at last she was paid for nine months doing the singular job of planting flowers at the square that she could do in a day:

Each morning, after planting the flowers, the woman went to the administrator's office and smiled that dry and corpse-like smile to the administrator and said she had planted two hundred flowers and the administrator congratulated her and said since it was agreed that each planted flower would cost three Naira, then the government owed her six hundred Naira multiplied by thirty, since flowers must also give pleasure on Sundays? And Miss Gasfield answered certainly, certainly...the woman collected some eighteen thousand Naira...then at the ninth month, Miss Gasfield ran away to England. (p.102)

This is a reflection of the universality of inherent evils in human beings. Every human being has double tendencies – evil and good, irrespective of culture and milieu. This is the essence of law and order. Once that is eroded, in any society, then it heralds anarchy. The following excerpt from the novel buttresses this view:

Inside every seemingly decent man or woman, a criminal waits to break out. The criminal in him would break out at the right moment, but not before then, nor before the moment had reached its own crisis. (P.141)

The only difference is that in Nigeria, the rate of criminality, decay and filth is far more alarming than the rate in most countries of the world. This fact can also be buttressed, as projected by the novel, using the following passage incorporated into the novel from another text written by Onise Ine who in his book of revolution says:

"if on the average, every normal human being in other parts of the world exhibits five senses, then the advantaged man and woman in Nigeria exhibits six. The sixth sense is the sense for theft, corruption, Robbery. But that is too harsh, he thought the sixth sense is for getting rich, not for robbery or theft. (P.123)

This passage tells the reality of the decay in the Nigerian system. It as well adds that what makes it different from what obtains in other countries is our inability to call the spade a spade. If only society can reject such rich rogues, they will be forced to think twice. Instead, society deifies and adores such filthy human rogues. So, the hopelessness is given liberal names that will alleviate the extent of the decay. Instead of calling a corrupt man a thief, he is called names that will make the sin seem normal. If you stand against it, or even comment against it, you will land yourself in detention camps. This is the situation of Nigeria with in the context of the novel. This is seen as illustrated using the following excerpt:

"A people gets the government it deserves", Onise Inehad written. That was a realistic statement, a correct one. It aptly described their country. But to think that something could be done about it, was clearly wrong. That was the idealism and it led nowhere except to the detention camps. (P.121)

This shows how those who have refused to comply with the corrupt doctrine of the country are treated. Those who dare to mention that something should be done to change a bad situation for a good one have to suffer untold persecution in the hands of the rich and the corrupt. Onise Ine, who dared that, got into detention and the students who assisted in the distribution of his book of revolution also suffered marksmanship. This is why the alarming majority even though know are cheated have accepted their hopeless conditions which give them the guarantee to 'survive' but not to 'live', to borrow terms from Rose Idebale, one of the character metaphors, (p.23). These are the features selected from the names used in the novel to project the double tendencies of man. It shows apostasy of human beings generally but that Nigerians are worse than other countries in terms of their selection of evil over good.

3. DIALOGUES

Dialogues constitute another element used by the author in the projection of his message in the novel (Jibrin, 2012, p.144). There are two varieties of Nigerian English prevalent in the novel: Interference and standard varieties. There is paucity of pidgin in the novel. The only trace of it in the novel is in the coinage of the nickname of the administrator, "Major chop-chop".

3.1 Interference Variety

This is also rarely seen in the novel. What is largely used is standard Nigerian English. The reason is that most of the characters are highly educated. Those who are not highly educated at least have been used to the city and given the sociolinguistic factor of the fictionalized situation are made to speak fairly good English. The overwhelming majority are the poor who have no association with the elite in any way. Every episode that involves them is seen through the eyes and heads and through the mouths of the educated characters. As a result, we will show instances of the few features of interference variety:

I hear that life is good there... you are not happy to have come home then (p.6).

You haven't seen anything yet, sir"...you ought to go round all the places (p.8).

As I said before, I am a contractor. I supply them with various items. Each week I receive a cheque of one hundred thousand Naira, I go to the bank, I cash it (p.17).

The excerpts (a) and (b) are taken from a single character metaphor who is an airport taxi driver. His English reveals a few features of interference variety, yet he speaks fairly good English. This is owing to the fact that he has been domiciled in the urban centre and has had contact with the English language for long. The only

thing that can make someone think of him as someone with a low level of education is his inability to render the verb of the first sentence in its past form. Otherwise, he has struggled over the years to speak good English as has been displayed in his performance in English. The second sentence is just an example of the many grammatical sentences in his interaction with Ogie Obala, on his return to Nigeria, after a four year academic trip to England. His sentence, "you haven't seen anything yet, sir" is given as justification for his killing of an innocent dog that was off the road. This he says to signal to Ogie that he is just a better devil, when the entire society in which Ogie returned to meet is taken into a holistic consideration.

The third sentence (sentence C above) is recoverable from Mallam Mallam, a character metaphor, who uses that to explain the nature of his job in the corrupt enterprise of the nation to his friend, Ogie. He started in good English, but he eventually marred it by his conclusion 'I go bank, I cash it' which can not be said to be pidgin completely. It is marred it by the omission of preposition and the article that should have come between the verb and the object of the verb in the sentence. This shows that he is not well educated. That he spoke fairly good English in the other areas could be explained as a product of his proximity to the elite.

The character, Onise Ine that had the awareness and tried to criticize the inactions of government and his students-believers, were treated like outcasts and so had their voices muffled. Onise Ine is in detention and can only be heard through his book referred to by Ogie and Rose; the students who demonstrated that their Vice Chancellor should resign for using government-school materials to build a personal house suffered marksmanship. The few who did not get killed, no longer had the courage to speak against corrupt practices anymore, knowing the danger involved. The majority of the masses resorted to fate by feeling that nothing can be done about the state. Trying to do anything may land one in some crisis. Therefore, if you cannot beat them you either join them or you remain poor forever. The passages below reveal this resolve.

You learn from experience. You see things you not only see them, they happen to you and so you come to accept what you have really known from the beginning. After that everything else is easy. You do not ask yourself anymore "shall I do this?" you just do it. You steal from your friends, they steal from you. You go to bed with their wives, they go to bed with yours...(p.19)

Well, it is not that I am worried about you. It is them that I am worried about; it is the every day, commonly accepted, believe-it-or-not practice that I am worried about. How can you *single handed* lift a vast organization, a government, the whole fabric of society. How could you lift it alone and hope to come out of it alive? (p.28)

Passage (a) shows Mallam Mallam's justification for joining the bandwagon of corruption. He believes that where ever corruption is the order of the day, you make things simple for yourself by conforming to the trend.

He, from that realization began to do things without bothering whether it was wrong or right. This conforms to the saying that a single tree cannot make a forest. The language of Mallam Mallam reveals several features of mother tongue. These mother tongue varieties are revealed in the instances in which his thought was organized. There is a lot of lexical items and sentential repetition in his language, which shows a Nigerian behind the mask of English. Such repetition, according to Oyeleye (1986), is a good feature of orality which constitutes an integral part of Nigerian literature. The second passage reveals a lot of features of Standard English, but there is the presence of a feature that has marred the syntax of that passage. As a result, one is left with no choice than to put it in the category of interference variety. In the sentence, "how can you single handed fight a vast organization", the word *singlehanded* is a wrong word chosen as a modifier of the verb *fight*. The adverb *singlehandedly* would have rendered the sentence syntactically well formed. Instead, the penultimate passage is given features of orality as a way of emphasizing the filth in society as it is done in the novel's immediate situation. This manner of emphasizing issues adds to the enormity of the decay in our society. The last passage on the other hand, reveals that no matter how intelligent Rose is projected, the fact that she could not get to the university is reflected in her English. This is used to show the injustice that permeates the society.

3.2 Standard Nigerian English

This is most dominant in most of the dialogues between characters, owing to the reason that the few whose voices are heard are either elitist or semi-elitist character-metaphors. The vast majority are left with no voice. Instances of such variety are selected for illustration:

my proposals are simple, but concrete. I suggest that we go in, not as individuals to compete against each other, but as partners. This combines our efforts and therefore renders competition from other contractors totally ineffective. (*Mr. Oloru to Chief Ekata*, p.118)

People in love are bound to convey each other. They take so much about each other for granted, whereas those who are not well in love are careful. They take nothing for granted...love is not as important in marriage as other things money for instance. (*Ogie Obala to Rose Idebale*, p.110)

You must persuade Mr. Obala to come out tomorrow evening to dinner with us. If you fail, our business folds up,... you understand of course what that means. Getting Mr. Obala out to dinner must be considered the most important single assignment in your career... so, use all the means at your disposal. (*Chief Ekata to EuniceAgbo*, p.75)

I am not telling you not to have your own life. But I want you to take off more time from your women and devote it to your work. Chief Ekata is a dangerous man. He is like a vulture, who waits for the wounded animal to die. If you have any value at all left for your life, then you'll avoid him. (*Mr Obala to Ogie Obala*, p.93)

When these excerpts are considered from the perspective of grammar, it can be said that they are syntactically well formed, and above all, are hardly distinguishable from Standard English. This will be discussed successively by showing the features that reveal their "nigerianness".

The first feature noticed in them is the presence of expressions that are formulaic in most educated Nigerians' English. They feature in two of the excerpts. The expressions "they take so much about each other for granted" in Ogie's statement is a popular expression in educated Nigerian English. In chief Ekata's words, there is also an instance of such cliché where he says "use all the means at your disposal".

Another feature of "nigerianization" noticed is the presence of a Nigerian proverb neatly incorporated as a metaphor in Chief Obala's words which enables him to achieve a kind of verisimilitude that registers a wonderful image in the mind of readers, and which adds flavour to the entire scenario and boosts the nativized image of Ekata that he wants to paint. "He is like a vulture who waits for the wounded animal to die". All this is to the effect that the fictionalized situations mainly concern Nigeria and Nigerians. The hopelessness of the situation begets the kind of seriousness of tone, which accounts for why pidgin is scarcely used due to its comic effect.

CONCLUSION

The paper discusses the manner in which a literary text can be interpreted using the three meta-levels of message projection by text producers discussed by Adejare (1992) as corroborated by Jolayemi (2000). It specifically discusses the peculiar manner in which the author deploys names of characters and their dialogues to project the message of elitist hypocrisy and insincerity culminating in the predatory nature of man in the absence of law and order. The names discussed include proper names, which are of persons (including those that are Nigerians and those of foreign nationals) as well as those of places that are both domestic and foreign. Others are nicknames that are used for identification of persons. The local names are used specifically to relate the setting to the text and to show ethnic, religious as well as professional differences. Characters' dialogues are discussed as portraying difference in social status as well as in educational backgrounds. Yet they are strongly united in corruption. All these are geared towards making a point for the universality of elitist hypocrisy and insincerity as well as of evil. It corroborates Adejare's view that a second order text has a central message it projects. It adds that the context of culture has a lot of influence on interpretation of a literary text, especially those produced by users of English as a second language. This is what Adejare refers to as immediate situation of the text.

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