A Functional Perspective on Okpanachi and U Tam' si's "Corruption" and "A Game of Cheat Heart"

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Abstract

In order to understand the significance of social dimension in work (s) of art/ communication, this work begins its analysis from the text, examining its overall structure as a slate on which ideological context are inscribed at various levels. The paper examines the lexical choices made by the poets in order to understand the world that they seek to project. And comes out with the findings that Functional Perspective to poetry analysis shows profound details in surfacing the interconnected circuits of lexical elements, social context and how they function in the texts to create network of meanings, as well as immerse the reader into the world that the poets unravel. Overall, the texts aid to ground the notion that language is a semiotic for culture; through linguistic choices, the reader gains profound insight into the rich society, culture of the pre-colonial Congo and the state of the Nigerian nation; the tyrannical rulers who seek to undermine the masses.

Keywords: verbal art, iconosemiotic, transitivity, deautomization, functional.

1.1 Introduction

1.2 A Brief on Tchicaya U Tam' si

Geral Felix Tchicaya U Tam' si (1931-1988), was a Congolese poet. His poems are considered by critics as hermetic and possess elements of African surrealism. His use of imagery is vivid and rich, and the themes incorporated in his poems promote humanity; dignity, honor, self actualization, among other things.

U Tam' si's poems and his reputation have traversed beyond France and francophone Africa. His poetic niche sets him apart from his contemporaries. His profound and passionate identification with the suffering of Africans, especially of the Congo forms a thread that runs through his poems.

U Tam' si's poems may be considered as disjointed on the surface, but the aesthetic and themes are recoverable from the imageries intertwined in his dense use of language. And since figurative use of language is most easily identified with poetry, his poems exhibit aesthetically rich weave of carefully chosen diction that seeks to arouse our wakefulness to action; to growth, to liberation.

1.3 A Brief on Musa Idris Okpanachi

The multiple award winning poets, Musa Idris Okpanachi is an esoteric, modern Nigerian poet. His verses are deep, poignant, and revealing. Okpanachi's messages are premised on the reality of our times. His manipulation of the linguistic code to get across his poetic themes is quite commendable and thought provoking. His poems often encompass a structure that takes us through an elevation of sort; innocence, strife, chaos that culminates into a crescendo. "Eaters of the Living" is revolutionary in its use of language and presentation. A style shared by few of his contemporaries. It seeks to make us see the same thing in a new light.

The poems awake our senses to reality, to our problems anew, as though we were hitherto unaware of their presence.

Although some of his dictions are complex and dense, the body of his works is easy to comprehend. The imagery in his poems leaps at your sense of perception and these are pervasive in his works.

1.4 Introduction

1.4.1 Language Use in Art

The nature of verbal art of which poetry is a part is premised on linguistic explications. Mukarovsky argues that statements made about the theme of a work must pass through linguistic analysis:

> Modern study has convincingly shown that even a theme, is connected to language bilaterally: not only is linguistics expression governed by its theme, but the theme is also governed by its linguistics expression…not even theme therefore eludes linguistic analysis (55).

Although he does not view extra- linguistics phenomenon any less significant, rather he clarifies that linguistic orientation to verbal art signifies a methodological perspective and not its being a limitation of the subject matter of scholarly study.

1.5 Methodology

Various research methods abound, but for the purpose of clarity and brevity, the method adopted for this study is the qualitative approach; due to its rich, contextualized and systematic approach to data analysis. Data from the two texts; Okpanachi's "Corruption" and U Tam' si's "A Game of Cheat Heart" forms the basis of the analysis.

Due to the interpretive nature of this work, data from the two texts will be retrieved and subjected to critical contextual analysis. The texts will be examined to uncover evidence of socio-cultural functions of language elements.

The qualitative content analysis method forms the conceptual framework for categorizing and delineating the data for analysis (Jeong, 2003)

This methodology focuses on the quality of the content as a basis for analysis and is more meaningful than alternative methods such as the quantitative content analysis, the frequency count, survey research (e.g., Grabowski, Suciati, & Pusch, 1990; Hiltz, 1990; Phillips & Pease,

1987) and evaluative case studies (e.g., Mason, 1990; Phillips, Santoro, & Kuehn, 1988) as ultimately, it is the richness of the text, that determines whether meaning has been established, not how often language elements occur. Socio-cultural evidences of language functions, and how these contribute to meaning will be determined in the text.

Many instruments have been designed for qualitative content analysis of texts (Garrison et al., 2000; Marra et al., 2004). Such tools are meant to provide a means of coding potential aspects of the texts for analysis. For some, their analytical framework is narrow. This work sets out to critically examine the texts contextually to ascertain the extent and richness of the texts' social functions through Halliday's theory. Also, these coding templates often end up as merely de-contextualised pointers, which themselves tell little, create only surface level understanding of the concepts at stake, if anything about the discourse in such texts. The objective then is to explore the complexities of meaning in social context, using the Functional Linguistic theory as a guide. Some lexical elements have been examined as and how they merge to exhibit meaning in context.

1.6 Content

In "A Game of Cheat Heart and "Corruption", we could view the total network of meaning as in reality a merging of smaller networks of complex units of meaning, but related in a relatively simple way, which taken in isolation would amount to fragmentations devoid of complete sense. Each function could be looked at as corresponding to one of the functions of language delineated by Halliday : ideational, interpersonal and textual, with each function defining a set of options which are meaningful.

The method of distinguishing which linguistic patterns are highlighted in verbal arts is to consider its contribution to the thematic thrust of the work as a whole. This relationship as Halliday notes is a functional one:

> If a particular feature of the language contributes by its prominence, to the total meaning of the work it does so by virtue of and through the medium of its own value in the language – through the linguistic function from which its meaning is derived (98).

Since Systemic Functional Linguistics gives credence to the concept of text and context, the various choices of words and the semantics attached to them are anchored to each individual

poet's contextual orientation and the creative repertoire available to them. It is also evident that while the diction of "A Game of Cheat Heart" is tight, "Corruption" is easily accessible in terms of the language used.

Transitivity as a cornerstone of the semantic organization of experience instantiated in verbal art is what Halliday explains as:

> The set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience of the processes of the external world and of the internal world of his own consciousness, together with participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances: and it embodies a very basic distinction of processes into types, those that are regarded as due to an external cause, an agency other than the person or object involved and those that are not (119).

These can be seen in "A Game of Cheat Heart" and "Corruption", in the former , U Tam' si experiences the Europeanization of his Congo; the indelible footprints of the colonizers on not just the valuable resources of the victims but on their subjugated souls (psychology) as well forms his external experience as explained above. The internal world of his own consciousness could be said to be the particularized agony, suffering that he goes through with others like him; a shared human experience of their discontent with the context of ruler ship, colonial occupancy or disorientation of the time in which they wrote, their inner turmoil generated by the experience, together with the participants which could be classified into the colonizers and the colonized including the attendant circumstances in these processes. In the latter, the external world of "Corruption" could be viewed as the actions of the corrupt leaders instituted in positions of leadership. The internal world of his consciousness could be said to be his anger, turmoil at the decadence of the system that is meant to work for all, rather than a few and his struggle for a resolution to our collective predicament.

This work, besides seeking a realization of the linguistic patterning in the overall structure, also seeks a 'deautomatization' a term coined by Mukarovsky which Halliday adopts as opposed to

prominence. The partial freeing of the lower levels systems from the control of the semantics so that they become domains of choice in their own rights (131).

The complex internal relationship of personal encounter, allusions, dreams etc. intricately woven into the themes of the texts are built from the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic systems of mood and polarity.

In line with these developments from Halliday, Hassan in articulating the role for linguistics in the study of verbal art, notes, " without linguistics, the study of literature must remain a series of personal preferences, no matter how much the posture of objectivity is adopted (104).

In talking about the theme of a work, Hassan defines theme as the deepest level of meaning in verbal art; it is what a text is about when dissociated from the particularities of that text (97).

Particularly, U Tam' si's use of fragmented language could be seen as a ploy to make a parallel with the enormous aura of colonialism, lost identity etc., to disconnect the reader from his worldview of normative poetic structure, to direct his readers to discover more possibilities of meaning in bare fragments.

In the first line of U Tam' si's collection of poem, Agony; the use of an adjectival phrase heralds the rich imagery that is pervasive in the body of the poems: "There is no better key to dreams" (Agony, line 1, stanza 1)

The readers' mind is invited to feast on the descriptive prowess exhibited in the narrative of the poems.

In distinguishing poetry from other genres/ arts, there exists a higher tendency of patterning culturally normative words to mean something different, more profound. We could consider this an instance of manipulating the linguistic code to suit particular intents of the poet. These manipulations have been explored in both selections of poems, as whole ranges of words that are inherent in the texts are woven to surface the themes of the poems.

In weaving the linguistic fabric of the text by the poets, Hassan's view of language as a manipulative code to explicate creative possibilities of art says:

> There exist two levels of semiosis: one that is the product of the use of natural language itself a semiotic system through foregrounding and re-patterning of the first order meanings… The art of verbal art consists of the language in such a way that this second order semiosis becomes possible (98).

In articulating the beauty of language and poetry, our point of fascination with both is not due to their articulating our cultural difficulties; but that they do so with such covert clarity that seeks to awaken a deep reaction from within us, within our creative faculties.

In the realization of a poem's unity the syntax, lexical choices exploited in the poem, the overt and covert coordinates of all the lower and higher order elements are validated; just like an intricate architectural masterpiece is brought to life through a combination of minor and major elements of building and designs. In poetry, art is considered as a function of the alignments of the different selections of minute details on varying scales across different functions and within different systems. The poet's creative imagination in essence instantiates the unarticulated implicity latent in the cultural milieu in which s/he operates.

Most instances of actions in the selected texts exhibit lexical and grammatical metaphors.

As the linguistic resource for organizing discourse, textual meaning helps to create a coherent thematisation in the selected texts. In "A Game of Cheat Heart", there is the thematisation of Europeanization of the Africans (the Congo to be precise), the siphoning of their valuable resources to enrich the colonizers and adversely impoverish the colonized. The theme of the majority of the clauses in the poems is tied up with either the agony of the victims, their lost identity, fabricated genealogy that they seek to rewrite or with the Europeans themselves. The general points of significance are the search for self identity, uprooting the myths that bind Africa; the Congo to servitude.

There exist in "A Game of Cheat Heart", initial letters that are put in lower cases and very sparse use of punctuations. The line breaks without punctuations, adding another level of ambiguity to the poems besides speed; since it would be difficult to designate a phrase as belonging to one unit of sense rather than another. This could make for more possibilities of meaning. The absence of punctuations could also be said to add enigmatic beauty to the text while mostly adding immense strength to the poems thematic concerns. Not all the lines (in fact very few) begin with a capitalized word. The lack of punctuations seems to present a fragment or a breathless utterance. U Tam' si makes very good use of the inner vision through his dense imagery that runs through all his poems. This makes for deft use of details; evoking the picture in the readers' minds' eyes.

It does seem that an unpunctuated poem is closer to a fragment of a longer arc that is marked of in sections. "A Game f Cheat Heart" expresses complicated ideas, and explores enjambment in order to make readers experience the intensity of the experience that the poet is concerned with, the agony of servitude, striped identity, and plundered natural resources is reinforced throughout the poems. Where a poem stops, there seem to be a continuation in the next poem of the ordeal of the poet (agony).

The functions of the lexico-grammatical patterns in the selected poems play the reinforcing role of accumulated agony that the poet seeks to portray. These can be seen in lines 31-41:

> A charnel house offers a feast
>
> Where his bowels are eaten first
>
> Then his arms then his memory
>
> Where the putrid bodies eat each other
>
> by the glimmer of fire-flies
>
> which each carries at his temples
>
> striving to resemble the Christian god

there where they drink the slow song of the nightingale

one innocent spares his legs

scrapes from the bowl of ebony –wood

the last scrap of his memory

This style of writing brings to mind, the literary and creative styles of E.E Cummings, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Samuel Bekhet among others. On the other hand, "Corruption" seems to present more coherent lines of thoughts than "A Game of Cheat Heart". Where a thread of thought ends another seems to fill the void, creating balanced thoughts. The first poem in the series is replete with 28 material process of the agent. The second poem presents four imperative material processes, although it is more of a metaphor for peace. The third poem ironically depicts the deceit of the ruler's effort to discretely curb dissent; this is presented in seventeen material processes. The subsequent poem is made up of 11 lines with 7 material processes. It represents our inner conscience. The fifth poem unlike the others contains less material processes that is continued in the last poem. Overall, "Corruption" replicates more material actions than are present in "A Game of Cheat Heart". The pervasive use of the verbal phrase in a way reveals an overarching tendency of dictatorship; move to action, willingly or otherwise.

1.7 Iconosemiotic

In the use of linguistic elements to explicate the strife between the Congo (used to refer to the people) and the French colonizers for the control of the natural resources, we see the iconic representation of the French as stealthy, manipulative, and portrayed through symbolic natural elements that seek to overwhelm its victim. The Congo is presented as a helpless human being, (often a boatman), seeker of truth, pure, subjugated spirit that evokes the empathy of the reader, predictably the weaker of the two parties in the conflict. The lexical items in the lines "For the sun kills", "Those whom the moon startles", "while the peevish sun stabs at them", "the sun pricks the side of the fisherman" all seem to express the meaning that indicts the colonial power

in unfavorable ways. The instances below create emotive attachment between the reader and the experiences expressed in the poems. Congo is metamorphosed as edible, capable of being eaten "A charnel house offers a feast", "Where his bowels are eaten first", "Then his arms then his memory". The Congo River is an impressive icon of identity tied to the poetic narrative; it leads the readers along a geographically rich situated landscape. In "Corruption" on the other hand, the ruled masses and all other factors capable of improving it are represented as edible surmises that the ruler eats without reserve.

Furthermore, there exists a dramatic ploy to stifle dissent by maiming or killing the victim secretly but honoring him in public view in order to conceal the deceit of the leaders on the rule of law. In summarizing this section, we can surmise that the choice of emotionally charged lexes serves to heighten the semantic intensity and expressiveness, as well as the evaluative stance and effectiveness of what is said. "A Game of Cheat Heart" and "Corruption" are visually dominated by the titles: subjugation, deceit, tyranny and the semiotic functions of the colourful and evocative natural elements of the Congo and the Nigerian leadership mess presents forceful rhetoric features.

1.8 Transactive Model

Linguistic structures often represent a certain kind of reality. Indirectly, they are possible tools of controlling reality and articulating ideology. In the analysis, a modified view of transactive structures was adopted as is derived from the logical structure of action sentences premised on Davidsons, who views it a necessary condition that the agent be active rather than passive. "That the agent does something rather than being acted upon. We input agency only where it makes sense to ask whether the agent acted intentionally" (94).

We realize that in most cases where actions are perpetrated, the affected is often the one at the lower end of the power spectrum. The semantics of the agentive and affective roles further employs the use of first person deixis to change the reality by emotively representing the Congo

experience as shared business that concerns all. In "Corruption" the use of third person plural deixis is more pervasive and creates the understanding that the "they "is mutually acknowledged by the reader and the poet, based on the early premise "ours is a nation of eaters…"All these contribute to intensify the connotation of helplessness and passivity that the poem seeks to place the Congo, the ruled masses.

1.9 Modality

Paul Simpson views modality as "a speaker's attitude towards or opinion about the truth of the proposition expressed by a sentence" (47). It could also be established as the speaker's attitude towards the situation or events described by a sentence. Hence, this could be seen as an important exponent of the interpersonal function of language. In the texts, modality has been exploited to pin the attitudinal feature of language.

As is reflected in the titles of poems, modality in "A Game of Cheat Heart" and "Corruption" asserts the truth of the proposition in the texts, by revealing the processes of stealthy penetration of the agents established in both texts into the domain of the affected. The colonization of third world countries is often as a game of deceit. The agent pretends to be on an exploration in the country of interest, then interest in the indigenous lifestyle or missionary activities are embarked on, subsequently, the colonization takes place. In the same vein, the politician pretends to be concerned about the electorates, then he pretends to establish justice and equity for the good of the governed and when he finally gets his way, he becomes corrupt and exploits the masses and the resources that belong to them. In the analysis, the noun phrase "A Game of Cheat Heart" is reducible to "deceit" and "Corruption" to "moral depravity of the political leaders".

1.10 Textual/Intertextual Rhetoric

In "A Game of Cheat Heart", the style of the poem is narrative, while in "Corruption" it is both narrative in some instances and instructive in others with the use of imperatives.

A rhetorical question as a feature of social discourse entails the modification of written text in the direction of dialogue. This is exploited especially in "A Game of Cheat Heart" to effect the structural transformations at different points in the poems. In lines 1-16 of "Agony", there begins a narrative of the boatman and the journey he must undertake to seek cure for his leprosy, which was interrupted by rhetorical questions in lines 17 and 18 which not so much echoes the voice of the author as it does the reader. At this point, the reader is allowed to give voice to his skepticism of the cure being sought in the series of linked actions in the narrative. Here the author's and reader's voices in the overarching responsibilities premised on the political and historical concerns raised in the poems are merged. In lines 149,151, 162, 163, 164, 195, 224, 226, of "Strange Agony" and line 9 of "The Hearse" in "A Game of Cheat Heart" rhetorical questions are raised as final elements of speech acts that seem to emphasize the Congo suffering and evoke the spirit of revolution cum patriotism in the poems:

> what country
>
> what Congo for God's sake
>
> But what walls will fall down
>
> What Congo be reconquered
>
> but what land
>
> Where are these men
>
> What are these men
>
> What country

In this case, the rhetorical question is used to foreground the voices of the interested parties; the French and the ruler; the author merges his voice with the latter rather than with the reader. Although the author merges his voice with other parties in asking the questions, the answer is left pending and is characterized with the same double voicing that allows for contradictory views in an argumentative style.

In "A Game of Cheat Heart" intertextuality is explored in the poem in line 37 "striving to resemble the Christian god" referring to the French seeking through pretense to colonize the Congo by assuming the spirit of kindness embodied by Christians". Subsequent lines 98, 101, 107,110-111,161 allude to Christianity, most likely due to it being the religion of conquest. "For Saint Anne of the Congo"

Line 190 of "A Game of Cheat Heart" refers symbolically to Kimpa Vita baptised around 1684 as Dona Béatrice. She was a strong sympathizer for the Congo liberation. Her revolt, during which she captured the capital Mbanza Kongo, was short lived. For many, she is the African version of Joan of Arc and an early symbol of African resistance against colonialism because, for her outspokenness, she was martyred. In "Corruption" we see intertextual rhetoric at play in "The god We Made" line9-10 "Lord of sapped Economy…" referring to the General Ibrahim Babangida's SAP (Structural Adjustment Programme) in July 1986 which was at the expense of the masses and a huge failure. The weaving of different texture into the poems' narrative creates a kaleidoscopic/ spectacular array of imagery and historical background to comprehending the thematic stance of the poems.

A functional perspective to the selected poems was explored to gain varied insights into the text and texture in the poems, besides offering some understanding of communicative purposes. The linguistic investigation of how language can be used to create significant themes and thrust the themes as though they were personal experiences that the readers are part of offers a fascinating perspective to poetry analysis. The power representations reveal through subjective and objective positioning of nominals to represent the acting agent and affective agent, it moulds the emotional stance of the readers to accede to what the poems seek to achieve; anger, contempt and the entrenched zeal to seek liberation, better ruler ship and fair society for all. Thus, we are able to see the power inherent in the linguistic choices that people make and how they manipulate this position to effect change in the reader's mindset.

1.11 Conclusion

The article portrays that a close study of the 'word' and its underpinings can identify the type of

social practices that have contributed to their formation.

 Poetry unlike any other text enacts an intertextual paradigm. The analogy between the

constructed social realities provides empirical evidence for certain atmosphere and the emotional

and discursive involvement of the reader which creates a fertile soil in which certain ideological

contexts are subtly developed in the text construction. This ideological context becomes an

inextricable and irreducible part of its world which in a process of appropriation permeates

through the reader. And appropriation is what Ricoeur views as an act of dispossession through

which one may relinquish a prior self and deepens one's understanding of oneself and others by

virtue of the meaning inscribed in texts (in Thompson, 183), this process in turn takes the reader

through a voyage from the text to the society that imbues the words with its hues. In this case the

society of the Congo greatly adored nature and was immersed in traditional adoration prior to its

colonization. The text of U Tam' si explores linguistic codes that are imbued with rich natural

imagery and colours. While "Corruption" uses language elements that immerse the reader in the

fear, unrest, and power exploitation in the societal milieu that the text seeks to evoke.

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