

## Subtextuality of Narrative in the Fiction of Uche Nnyagu's *Dear Mother*

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### Abstract

This paper rationalizes the existential naivety of the infantile innocence, which was influenced by the external social construct of being like thers. The author is unaware of himself, therefore, he mirrors himself through the lens of his immediate tenor. The narrative structure of *Dear Mother* reenacts the events of the affective involvement of the participants and processes, through the lexical expressions which invoke nostalgic semiotics of the author's experience. The conceptualised use of language in the text represents experience in language which was characterized by lexical consciousness. Language is used here as an object of thought and world-view/ideology. Ideational metafunction serves as the model used in this paper to extrapolate, through the textual analysis, the writer's "undefiled" philosophy installed in his brain, which continued to expand on a vast scale, until it gave rise to the creation of *Dear Mother*: which unconsciously represents the writer autobiographically against his initial and extrinsic intent, that is, his mother's biography. It is about encoding experiential meanings that involve the material world, the experience and value-system. The text- in all -foregrounds the author's formative inexperience which is a function of immediate and wider tenor.

Keywords: Language, ideational, metafunction, semiotics, subtextuality

### Introduction

Life is lined with a tread of conscious and subconscious actions which shape events, that is every action done by human person is influenced by the intellect or fatalism, in which we are the actors. Our actions and inactions are influenced or as the function of our epistemic experience regardless of its littleness, but the effect is enormous. This initiates us into the world of reality which tapers into practical experience. This experience is as a result of the chains of events that nurture every individual person to be conscious of the socio-psychology of himself and society. Now, the thought of the individual person, the participant in the real-world situation, should have matured to the point of expressiveness and conscious experiences of his social cognition.

Linguistic language, that is language spoken or written within a socio-interactional domain, is only way of representing reality. Because there are other ways, in what I call, symbolic language represents reality, for instance' taking a photograph or making a drawing. These elements represent semiotic images that exist in the thought, in the consciousness and in the reality of an individual person. These representational images, lurking in the thought, consciousness or reality, facilitate in the negotiation of meaning which is being informed by the social forces of the participants. But the thoughts are controlled and limited to the confines of the visual images; because the photographer takes an image by standing on a particular place, and thus chooses what to include in that visual image, what to focus on, etc. However, in "*linguistic*" language, even though there are building codes to follow an individual person, the philosophy/worldview and the event/situation, which influence the choices the participant makes in the language, the participant. But, the participant, that is the language user, is not the lexical hub of the choice of the language, rather our society which is centrifugal and centripetal sociocultural force of the social linguistic variables or resources.

### **Construction of the order**

In our present social order, the way we confer in order to present our complex thoughts and ideas has been evolving to what Wells calls "distinctively human semiotic" (Halliday, 2003, p.69). It is a specific way of conversing which is being enabled by the process of language. This facilitates interactions, which influence the process that helps us to construct the microcosms in which we find ourselves living "our little universes of doing and happening, and the people and things that are involved therein" (Halliday, 2003, p. 116).

Unconsciously, there is some semiotic activity during this language interaction that participants interpret of having two macrocosmic poles of orders (social and natural order) which they are fully part of its *beingness*. All through human existence and down the history lane, these reflective and contemplative forms of dialogue have employed dependably on the same resources, such as, spontaneous, ordinary, everyday and natural spoken language. These are seen, according to Malinowski, as having some coefficient of weirdness, which is found in the more esoteric contexts of its use (Malinowski, 1935, p.78).

The entire dialogic construct is a social order which by definition is interactive. That is, at the micro level, where the individual person is known by talking and also listening to him, and he responds accordingly, in the same natural language. Similarly, at the macro level, the dialogic construct is with nature which is also interactive, but in another guise (Prigogine and Stengers, 1985, pp. 41-44). So, "when we want to exchange meanings with physical or biological nature we have to process information that is coded in very different ways, and that may need to go through two or three translation before we can apprehend it" (Halliday 2003, pp. 116-117).

### **Microgenesis of Writers Experience**

It is a process-oriented approach to the study of mental phenomena on the structural development of thought of an individual person. This highlights the development on a brief present-time scale of a thought, perception, an expression and an object of imagination, which outlines the existence of immediate experience that engenders this experience (microgenesis) “as dynamic unfolding and differentiation in which the ‘germ’ of the final experience is already embodied in the early stages of its development” (Rosenthal, 2012, p. 1). So, he avers the major concerns of this immediate experience as the focal experience of any object that can be seen as a figure in the general field of consciousness, which as clothed in a percept, expression, thought and object of imagination (Rosenthal, 2012, p. 1). In fact, focal experience posits to develop and stabilize despite its modality and content, by dynamic differentiation and unfolding. This immediate experience, in microgenetic field, validates a phenomenological and genetic theory of cognition which emphasises mental action or the acquisition of knowledge through intuition or thought, perception or experience, and expression or imagination. These cognitive elements are essential in the process of genetic differentiation and development.

This theory of cognition, which is clothed in mental action of the acquisition of knowledge, is seen by the participant (the individual person) as first social, then individual. Thus, the writer of the text is overwhelmed by social forces within his immediate experience. This influences his decision at the micro level of budding experience that is maturational. Vygotsky, therefore, states that consciousness and the development of concept are at first seen as inter-mental phenomena shared among the participants, which later help them to develop their tailor-made consciousness that evolved into intra-mental phenomena. Moreover, in this objective and experiential world, so for the participants, language is the supreme symbolic mediating tool for the development of consciousness. In all, every individual person evolves, and as such, is endowed with the capacity of learning, a logical learning process which graduates to more mature participants acquiring new knowledge or skills. This continues to be acquired through social and interactional activities (Madu, 2017, p. 35).

### **Ontology of Faction in Narration**

Faction is a genre in prose writing which enables the writer to invite the audience or the reader to assess the “symbolic nature of an otherwise familiar series of events” (Ufot, 121). Similarly, Soyinka states that, it is a genre which tries to fictionalize events and facts, in the proportion that determines fact to fiction is utterly dependent on the discretion of the writer (ix).

So, in discourse of faction, the writer is allowed to narrate events he has experienced which he knows or he is aware of or he is part of. However, he has to fill the gaps if there are missing links in the story line. The author is also bound to reconstruct the circumstances by employing those narrative elements he and his audience or reader knows which would help them imagine what they do not know (Ufot, 121). Bamikunle observes, therefore, that faction is partly factual but chiefly imaginative and fictive construction or concoction of circumstances that are

prevalent within those established facts that facilitate “logical connections coherent meaning to otherwise haphazard collection of facts”(86).

Thus, the author from the foregoing has experienced or participated in those events, which spurred him to writing of the text, therefore, the audience is presented with a feeling of *deja vu*. This narrative technique, used by the author in the story line, highlights the factuality of the factual places and characters. These elements foreground existential repetitive cycles of errors which are typical to the social factual events, and they are the attributes a prose work has to be seen as fiction. So, a narrative of fiction has to be an artful selection of familiar real-life events “which cohere to exemplify a preponderance of particular thematic concerns” showing a relationship that exists between the past and the present events. More importantly, the relationship between major development in the text and functional choices of the language, the author uses in relating the story at different stages (Ufot, 2007, p. 122).

### **Stylistics and Fiction**

Style is pattern recurrence. Therefore, every stylistic pattern needs and seeks the company of another, that is, functional choices of linguistic pluralism in a context. In order to assert a reliable and coherent judgement about a style of a text, one needs “more than an isolated, erratic occurrence of linguistic form” (Osundare, 2003, p. 30), which is the aggregate of frequencies of linguistic elements in two different forms. Firstly, style represents more than one linguistic item, for example, a certain word in a text acquires some stylistic significant role *viz-a- viz* other words. Secondly, style must not be restricted to the phonological or morphological or lexical or syntactic observation, rather, it has to be a conglomerate of these observation made at different levels (Enkvist, 1964, p. 28).

Contextualism is a significant factor in arriving at this aggregate, because style is a product of frequencies of linguistic items in a certain context and thus, with contextual possibilities (Enkvist, 1964, p. 29). It is necessary therefore in measuring the style of a passage, one has to compare the frequent linguistic items of other passages or texts that have the same context in terms of social background, time of composition, genre and so on (Osundare, 2003, p.31).

Thus, style as a linguistic possibility, influenced by contextual variation or pluralism in a text, holds that language performs a lot of function in different contexts. As a result, any piece of language is assumed to represent the function of different functional levels, as Ufot (2007, p.122) has aptly put that, the writers of these fiction texts reflect a choice within the resource of possible choices, not only in the way the fiction writers write but also in what they say. “It is therefore not only in their way of putting things that style resides. It resides also in their meanings so that any alteration of manner entails the alteration of matter” (Ufot, 2007, p. 22).

Hawkes (1972, p. 16) vehemently observes that metaphor “is not fanciful embroidery of facts. It is the way of experiencing the facts”. It, therefore, denies us a literal sense, thereby,

induces us to make sense, that is, we are left “to find interpretation of text beyond the truth-functional meaning captured by paraphrase” (Leech and Short, 21). Ufot (2007, p. 122) succinctly states that the identity that exists between style and meaning is firmly established, so, “The blend of fact and fiction is a choice between choices. It is a style which incorporates matter and manner”.

### **(Literary) Pragmatics of Texts/Discourse**

It signifies a literary linguistic field that is saddled with the investigation of those peculiar influences that are associated with writers, which they endeavour to exert on their readers in the bid to establish a working co-operation by deploying the features of language (Mey, 1999, p. 12). “Such influences require consideration of the conditions of use of these properties when addressed to a specific audience, including consumers of literary work (Al-Hindawi & Saffah, 2019, p.395). Mey (1999, p.12) affirms that the pragmatic effects in question require a detailed exploitation of the entire contextual variables that are responsible for the use of the linguistic elements involved. In fact, Mey (2006, p.549) specifically states that literary pragmatics is mainly interested in sole of the participant or the writer in societal production and consumption of literary texts. Besides, Crystal (2008, p.141) aptly declares that it is interested in applying pragmatic concepts to the production and reception of literary texts.

Large chunks of work done on, according to Van Dijk (1980, p.5) literary studies are mainly on the analysis of the literary text rather than on the process of literary communication. However, a pragmatic description of literature shows that in the context of literary communication, the production of a literary text is a social action. McMahon (2014, p.234) is of the view that, the majority of contemporary literary pragmatics attempts to define literature as having an exceptional, functional and communicative status that equally operates on the principles which are similar to those found in nonliterary discourses. As a matter of fact, it is bent in restoring the importance of context in literary linguistics, which considers literary works as communicative acts.

The perception of an utterance is dependent on the circumstances surrounding of the utterance that is being uttered, that is, the context. If the utterance is made in isolation, it would not make sense or may be misinterpreted. In essence, context in a text implies the political, cultural/ ideological and economic status of a writer, whose social actions and discourse are captured and described within the context of language of the narrative (Mey, 1999, p. 36). Similarly, Allot (2010, p.38) affirms that the context of an utterance seeks to represent the source of information which enables the reader to decode what the writer intends to express. The readers are not likely to interpret the implicatures of the text, if they do not immerse themselves in the context of the narrative. As such, it would be difficult for the readers to achieve the optimal proposition conveyed or the desired illocutionary force/effect.

There are certain pragmatic approaches that highlight the significance of being conscious of context and literary function as the crux of any interpretation of a literary text or narrative. These approaches, therefore, try “to restore the significance of context in literary linguistics, and consider literary works as a sort of communication” (At-Hindawi and Saffah, 2019, p.397).

### **Narrativity of a Narrative**

Narrativity is a collection of textual attributes of a story. Simon-Shoshan (2013, p. 229) states therefore that all texts exist in the continuum of greater and lesser narrativity, this depends on the number and the significance of the narrative attributes they bear. Hence, when a text is referred to as a story, it means that it has the critical mass of narrativity. He argues further that, most scholars of narrative have defined narrativity purely in terms of dynamism, to mean the extent in which a text reflects transition and change, but he added specificity which he refers to as “the extent to which a text focuses on a particular time or place, a unique event, or individual people and objects” (Simon-Shoshan, 2013, p. 229). Almost all the texts contain a certain degree of narrativity, insofar as they are logical or rational to the contextual theme.

To discuss the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the point of culture and, perhaps, also on the nature of humanity itself. “So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report of the way things really happened, that narrativity would appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent-absent or, as in some domains of ... intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused” (White, 1980, p. 5). So, being a pan global fact of culture narrative and narration pose less problems than simple data, thus, Barthes (1977 p.76) states that “narrative is just there like life itself; international, transhistorical, transcultural”. Having seen this as less problematical, narrative may be considered as the possible solution to the problem of general human concern. This concern encompasses the problem of translating “knowing into ‘telling’, and also the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific” (White 1980, p.5). Though, readers may not be fully able to understand specific thought structure of other varied cultures, they would have far less difficulty in understanding a story that originated from another culture, however exotic that culture may seem to them. On that note, Barthes (1977 p.79) affirms that narrative is translatable without fundamental damage in a way that a lyric poem or a philosophical discourse is not.

This implies that apart from being one code among many a culture which may be used “for endowing experience meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of shared reality can be transmitted” (White, 1980, p. 6). The ‘end effect’ of our experience of the world and/or our willingness to relate that experience in language, and in narrative has “ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted” (Barthes, 1977 p.80).

### **Theoretical Foundation**

There is semantic stratum of meaning, in Systemic Functional Grammar, which is called metafunction, and it has three sublevels, which includes ideational metafunction (meaning), interpersonal metafunction (meaning) and textual metafunction (meaning). It is an approach developed by Halliday (2003, p. 636) in his linguistic theory, where he presented language as a social variable in a social context. According to Alaei and Ahangari (2016), the theory that is behind model is functional rather than formal, so, it considers language as a resource used for communication, and not as a set of rules. In fact, Systemic Functional Grammar states clearly that a particular aspect of a certain context defines the meanings that are possible to be interpreted or expressed.

This paper chooses ideational metafunctional approach for the analysis. Because, ideational meanings are the meanings about how we represent our experience in language which therefore construes a model of this experience (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 61). Ideational meaning is expressed through the transitivity or process type with the choice of process implicating associated participant roles and configuration (Eggins, 2004, p. 206). Besides, the pattern of ideational metafunction is realized by the transitivity system (Anggreani, 2007, p.49). Eggins (2004, p.206) asserts that forming the elements of this system are made up of participant, process and circumstance configuration which represent the real-life experiences: who is doing what, to whom, when, where, why and how.

## **Methodology**

The paper employs a qualitative research design. Its concern is the textual analysis of the text in terms of metafunction, through transitivity system/analysis. Moreover, qualitative study is a kind of interpretative inquiry which affords the researchers the opportunity to interpret what they see, read, and understand. These interpretations are based on the investigator's background knowledge or prior knowledge, context and history. The transitivity system of analysis is three pronged: participants, processes and circumstances, like said earlier.

## **Analysis**

In text, that is, Dear Mother, was analysed based on the transitivity patterns of the clausal representations of experience, ideas, message; it also conveys information which expresses content. It is a structure that has forming elements that include participants, process and circumstances of transitivity. These clauses in transitivity system represent real-life experiences such as, who is doing what, to whom, when, where, why and how. The analysis comprises the process type, the circumstantial elements and the participant roles in literary unities of the text.

## **Material Processes**

Material Processes are about the “doing” and the “happening” or about actions that are usually concrete, that is, tangible actions. Here, they express the idea that something does something or something undertakes an action. This may be done to some other entity:

It was a Friday evening. I had visited as usual to spend the weekend with my parents. I was very fond of them so every weekend, as soon as the last lecturer for my class for the day, I would take my notebook and rush out of the class straight to the bus stand.

The actor (the writer) is using the verbs (process material) to convey his experience to the reader what has happened or happening, at the time (circumstance).

As I made to continue flipping the pages of the novel, she continued taking and I could no longer concentrate. I had told her that I was busy but she didn't want to hear. She accused me of not helping my mother.

The writer is being rebuked by his grandmother (*Mama Nnukwu*) for not being helpful to his mother. The writer is relating an actual event, he experienced from his grandmother. He is trying to highlight real-world experience, and how he experiences it and whom he experienced it from.

Here, the intentional or unintentional performance of an animate or inanimate is externalised into the concrete embodiment of the action verb of happening or doing. The doer of the action is seen also as the “actor” with the optional “goal”, which is affected by the process and circumstances that show the verb in terms of condition, place, time etc.

## **Mental Processes**

Participants are always interested in concrete processes of doing. They often talk about what they feel, think and perceive not what they are doing. So, Halliday (2003, p.118) avers that the processes which encode the meanings of thinking, feeling or perceiving are mental process.

She took a deep breath. She knows I made a point and she sat battling with her mind on the best way to shatter my point. “Nnaa, what you said is right but your father wants you to go to school....”

The writer has read the mind of his mother by being conscious of the pervading circumstances. He was able to decipher the perception of his mother. The mother is the “phenomenon” who represents the trigger of the action while the perceived intention being communicated is the “senser”.

... I remembered how I quarrelled with my parents over education and I regretted ever stressing them. Now, I understood that indeed, education is an eye opener.... I was invited to the government house to meet with the executive governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chris Nwabueze Ngige.

Probing further, one can see that actions or doings in a physical or tangible sense are not the question. The question is about mental responses or reactions from the writer, about thoughts, perceptions and feelings. There are two obligatory participant roles in the processes which include, Sensor (always a conscious being) and Phenomenon (may be entities of any kind).

In the mental processes, there is always a participant who is a conscious being. He is the one that perceives, thinks, wishes or detests. This participant is called “senser”. The entity (or entities) that the participant operates with in his purview is seen as the “phenomenon”.

### **Relational Processes**

They are processes of description regarding abstract relations. Attributive process assigns a quality or adjective to a participant called “Carrier”, which is being realized by a noun or a nominal phrase while Identifying process consists of an Identified/Token and Identifier/Value. Moreover, Attributive Relational processes classify the entity that belongs to a particular or type of entity, and Identifying Relational processes/clauses assign definite identity to an entity.

Ifeoma was married and was staying with her husband in Delta state. Ngozi and her family were based in Cameroon. Sunday was staying with Onyebuchi to learn his trade.... Chinelo was the only person remaining and was staying with our parents.

The verb that realizes the processes of “being” in the relational clauses is verb “to be” and linking verb. They capture the intensive and circumstantial clauses of the text in the story.

... I had somebody who looks at my face to ask me if I want to go to the university.

... though I had no penchant for Agriculture.

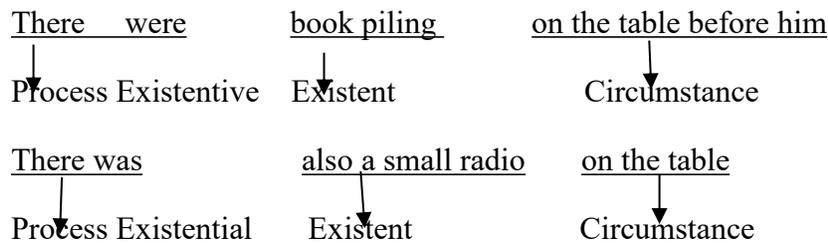
There are few verbs that realize the possessive relational clauses that encode meanings of ownership and possession between clausal participants.

In this clause, attitudinal adjectives that evoke emotion whether objective or subjective, positive or negative at the level of adjectives and nouns in interpersonal function show that the writer’s attitudinal approach to the entities or phenomena in the text. This arouses a certain image and effect in the narrative and context, such as realization, understanding etc.

### **Verbal Processes/ Clauses**



is neither a participant nor a circumstance. It has no representational meaning or experiential function. Thus, it is empty or dummy process.



## Conclusion

The author thought that he is not writing about his mother, but indeed, he is writing about himself, his autobiography, but he presented his mother as the metaphor of his real existence. This makes the story real, though he footnoted some fictional sweetener, which makes the text a “living” fiction. Thus the author in order to convince the reader, he uses naive and simple language or child who is still under the tutelage of his mother. Therefore, he owes his existence to the mother and also, the hub of his existential construct. The author sustained this literary form to foreground the import of a mother in the construction of humanity.

The text saw a metamorphic change of philosophy and thought which is maturational. The language represents human experience and specificity, showing deployment of aesthetic idiosyncrasy and peculiarity of the genre of an individual text. As a result, the lexico-grammar of the text captures the meaning-making resource of a language, through the abstract network of interrelations of events, web of logic, mood and topic, for its optimal interpretation. The author was able to interface directly with the ecosocial environment of the space and time. Thus, the semogenic resource that is immanent in text is grammatical metaphor. Grammatical metaphor is the linguistic process that reconstructs experience as the participant reaches maturity. This is what applied in the text and the author; the clauses construe a figure whereby the flux of experience is purely channeled into three themes: process, the participants in that process, and the accompanying circumstances.

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