

## A LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE OF DICTATORSHIP AND CORRUPTION IN HELON HABILA'S *WAITING FOR AN ANGEL*

**Okenmuo, Amarachi Calister (Corresponding author)**

Department of English language and literature, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; amarachiazidiegwu@gmail.com; 08162567788

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**Ngozi Ezenwa-Ohaeto**

Department of English language and literature, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; nezenwaohaeto@gmail.com; 08033713548

### **Abstract**

Previous studies have concentrated on the literary and other dimensions of the linguistic analysis of *Waiting for an Angel* by Helon Habila. However, little or no study has revealed the lexico-semantic features deployed by the author in the discourse of dictatorship and corruption. This paper, therefore, explored the lexico-semantic elements existing in the clauses used to depict the theme of dictatorship and corruption in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. Purposive sampling was first used to collect textual data from the text. Then, the stratified sampling method was used to select a sample population to represent the whole population. The selected clauses were categorized into five extracts, and a qualitative research design was employed for the analysis. M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar served as the framework through which a textual analysis was carried out. The findings reveal that in the depiction of dictatorship and corruption in *Waiting for an Angel*, there were suitable collocations of words, e.g., 'political detainees', 'brutal warders', 'stealing money', 'hiding money', 'crack down', etc. The right registers of words were also selected from the requisite semantic domains like prison, the military and police, Nigerian lexicons, oppression and abuse, etc., and relevant figures of speech were also used by the writer to explicate the themes sufficiently. The lexico-semantic items deployed by the author enriched the discourse of dictatorship and corruption in the novel.

**Keywords:** dictatorship, corruption, lexico-semantics, Helon Habila, *Waiting for an Angel*

### **Introduction**

A lexico-semantic analysis of a literary work or any text in general entails studying the relationship between words and their meanings. Lexico-semantics is a combination of lexis and semantics. Odoemenam, Ordu, and Omoghie (2017) assert that lexis and semantics are intricately linked and cannot be separated in the description of texts. They are distinctive aspects of language that integrate with other aspects of language for human communication (Yeibo and Akerele, 2016). Jackson and Amvela (2007) define lexis as the 'stock of words in a given language, i.e., its vocabulary, or lexicon.' Semantics, on the other hand, is "the study of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences" (Yule, 2005). Words and their meanings are derived from language, a primary medium of communication that could be written or spoken, and employed to convey meanings and represent themes and concepts basically used in a text. Words, therefore, co-occur with other words to form phrases and clauses that make a complete unit and meaning of the language used in a text. From a literary and written perspective, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* is an employment of language explicated through choice lexical items to express one of Nigeria's postcolonial horrifying experiences. Organizing and making use of the English language by Helon Habila in order to present such experiences in the given context summarily performs three metafunctions: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual metafunctions (Halliday, 1994). The ideational metafunction (experiential) deals with using language to represent human experiences. The interpersonal metafunction captures the use of language to create and maintain interpersonal or social relationships, while the textual metafunction, which is germane to this study, expresses how language is internally organized to effectively pass the intended message. Being that Nigeria, and of course, many other African countries, is still greatly battling with both civilian and military dictatorship and corruption, it is of interest that the language used to depict these two major themes in *Waiting for an Angel* serves as the fulcrum through which the lexico-semantic analysis will be carried out in this study.

### **Synopsis of the Novel *Waiting for an Angel***

*Waiting for an Angel* is a novel written by Helon Habila in 2002. It was set in Nigeria during the 1990s to capture the political upheaval and military dictatorship of the times, especially that of Gen. Sani Abacha. The story revolves primarily around a major character called Lomba, who from the beginning of the novel was in prison because he was involved in the demonstration carried out by the residents of Poverty Street, a name replaced from Morgan Street by the residents to describe the terrible living conditions of the people in the military government. The story is not written in a chronological order, as such, before being detained, Lomba works as a journalist in a newspaper company named The Dial after he drops out of school following the death of the parents of his bosom friend, Bola. Their death occurs as a result of the military government's carelessness, and this results in Bola's insanity. Lomba's love life, and generally everything about him, is also depicted to be truncated and influenced by the military government.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars have continued to do lexico-semantic studies on texts of different genres, just as *Waiting for an Angel* has also garnered scholarly studies and attention from different dimensions. Odoemenam, Ordu, and Omoghie (2017) did a lexico-semantic analysis of J.P. Clark's "Night Rain" using M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as the analytical framework. Previous studies on "Night Rain", according to them, have centered mainly on literary and thematic analysis. So, using qualitative research design, they brought out the linguistic and stylistic features embedded in the poem through lexico-semantics analysis in order to determine the extent to which the author organized and deployed its potentials to relate the intended message. "Night Rain" they report, "is a unique literary piece by J.P. Clark in that it presents not only a description of a rainstorm in a small village but also a vivid description of the poor living conditions of the poorest of the poor in the land." Therefore, Odoemenam, Ordu, and Omoghie reveal that the writer achieved his purpose of passing his message through lexico-semantic features like the collocation of words (insistent ardor, thatch roof, etc.), the use of words from certain semantic fields (like aquatic living: sea, water, fish, etc.), and the use of certain figures of speech (metaphor, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, etc.). They conclude that to construct a literary text, writers, just like J.P. Clark, make deliberate and conscious efforts to make and arrange the right lexical choices within a given contextual terrain to be able to pass their message well.

Edem's (2023) study on Helon Habila's literary text was on *Oil on Water*. A lexico-semantic analysis was done where he 'examines how meaning is negotiated through the use of some cohesive devices in the text'. In his opinion, he relates that previous studies on *Oil on Water* have concentrated on proffering solutions to the environmental issues raised in the text without giving much attention to linguistic elements like cohesive devices coalesced to produce meaning in the text. He employed a qualitative research method and adopted Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion theory as a theoretical framework since, according to him, his work concentrates on the 'deployment of the writer's mental schemata and use of lexical choices to affect meaning in a text'. He reports that as words relate with other words to make predetermined meaning possible in texts, Habila passed his message of environmental degradation through his careful selection and use of some cohesive devices such as reiteration, synonymy (e.g., wet and water spray), antonymy (e.g., adventure and misadventure), hyponymy (e.g., living room, kitchen, corridor), and meronymy (whole body for biting arms, face and ears, etc.), which improve the textual quality of the text. Edem concludes that 'the author, through the use of cohesive devices, made reading the text meaningful and easily understood by the reader.'

Some previous research has focused on *Waiting for an Angel*. Madu, B. N., Njoku, I. K., Udoeye, I. and Akabike, I. (2022) applied Halliday's transitivity and mood systems of SFG on the novel of focus, *Waiting for an Angel*, and Chuma-Udeh's *Forlorn Hope*. They extracted ten clauses from the novels and classified them under the transitivity and mood components, revealing some processes and participants (actors and goals) and some elements of mood like theme and rheme. The research findings show that Habila and Chuma-Udeh employed suitable actors, processes, goals, and appropriate clauses to portray poverty, disillusionment, misgovernance, and political ineptitude under the autocratic Nigerian government in the novel. Kinrin, Awodi, and Abuh (2017) revealed the linguistic tools such

as parallelism, imagery, alliteration, coinages, the use of non-simple sentences, affixation, and graphology used by Helon Habila in *Waiting for an Angel* to foreground the aspects of language the author used in explaining how Lomba, a journalist, in the story got gravely dealt with in the military regime. Asika (2011) as well as Chuma-Udeh (2012) studied the novel from a literary perspective to expose military dictatorship in Nigerian novels. None of these reviewed works toed the path of lexico-semantic analysis of the discourse of dictatorship and corruption in *Waiting for an Angel*, hence the need for this present study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The textual metafunction of the three metafunctions of language by M.A.K. Halliday's SFG is the theoretical framework used in this study. This textual metafunction concerns itself with how clauses are internally organized to express intents in a particular context of situation. Here, language is used or functions as necessitated by situations, and language appears in a form. It means that the textual metafunction of language deals with the form and function of language in a text, bearing in mind the context of the situation as propounded by J.R. Firth. Adeyanju (2008) in Yeibo and Akerele (2015) views textual metafunction as "...the availability of an internal structure that makes it possible for the writer or speaker to construct texts that are not only coherent but also situationally appropriate". In the textual analysis of a text, therefore, the linguist must consider the linguistic items that make the text coherent and suitable for the context in which it is expressed. Leech and Short (1985) summarize that the textual metafunctions of language as propounded by Halliday are "... ways of using language to express, organize, and understand information for effective communication".

### **Research Methodology**

The research design employed for this study is a qualitative research design. The data were primarily sourced from Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. Purposive sampling was first used to collect textual data from the text, and because of the cumbersome nature of the data, which comprises six hundred and ninety-eight (698) clauses that depict dictatorship and corruption in the text, the stratified sampling method was used to select a sample population to represent the whole population. The clauses were categorized into extracts, and the lexico-semantic items were identified and analysed.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

#### **Extract 1**

You accept the inescapability of your fate; and with that you learn the craft of cunning. You learn ways of surviving —surviving the mindless banality of the walls around you, the incessant harassment from the warders; you learn to hide money in your anus, to hold a cigarette inside your mouth without wetting it. And each day survived is a victory against the jailer, a blow struck for freedom. The warders were more than usually brutal that day; the inmates were on tenterhooks, not knowing from where the next blow would come. We were lined up in rows in our cell, waiting for hours to be addressed by the prison superintendent. When he came his scowl was hard as rock, his eyes were red and singeing, like fire. He paced up and down before us, systematically flagellating us with his harsh, staccato sentences. We listened, our heads bowed, our hearts quaking. p. 10

#### **Extract 2**

There's no record of how far the superintendent went to help him regain his freedom, but as he told Janice, there was very little to be done for a political detainee —especially since about a week after that meeting, a coup was attempted against the military leader General Sanni Abacha, by some officers close to him. There was an immediate crack down on all pro-democracy activists, and the prisons all over the country swelled with political detainees. A lot of those already in detention were transferred randomly to other prisons around the country, for security reasons. Lomba was among them. He was transferred to Agodi prison in Ibadan. From there he was moved to the far north, to a small desert town called Gashuwa. There is no record of him after that. A lot of these political prisoners died in detention, although only the prominent ones made the headlines —people like Moshood Abiola and General Yar Adua p. 32

### Extract 3

We were going there to stage a peaceful demonstration . . . They appeared from nowhere in their trucks, shooting tear gas and returned. We broke their windscreen with stones, and we also seized their truck, but reinforcement came for them, this time with real bullets. One student was shot in the leg. When we saw the leg shattered and bloody, we decided to call it a day. But the bastards followed us to the hostels, chased us to our rooms. The air was so thick with tear gas we couldn't breathe. They went from room to room, breaking doors and looting. When we heard the girls screaming 'rape', our courage was rekindled. You should've seen Sankara directing us at the basketball court, like a fucking general. We soaked our handkerchiefs in kerosene and tied over our noses to neutralize the tear gas. We made petrol bombs —then we advanced to the girl's hostels. Taking cover from block to block. Running across the open spaces. They started firing when they saw us coming, but that crazy guy Sankara ran right at them, two flaming bottles in his hands. He hurled the bottles at their truck and it caught fire. That really made them mad. They flushed us out of the hostels into the streets. But that was to our advantage because the Area boys and park touts soon joined our ranks. Christ, it was brilliant. The street was like a fucking war zone, filled with smoke and darting figures and fire and gunshots. One student died. He was shot in the head—a chemistry student. The Area Boys captured a policeman and doused him in petrol and set him ablaze. More policemen came—that was when I decided it was not safe to stay. I escaped through the back streets. Later, we heard on the radio that all students should pack out of the hostels. The school was closed. We also heard that Sankara and two others were taken by the police. It is only today that I worked up the courage to come and pack my things, mehn, it was bloody. p. 60

### Extract 4

Outside on the street, Brother was a hero. Women and children would point at him as he hobbled past on his one good leg and the wooden one and repeat to themselves the story of how he lost his leg to a soldier's bullet, two years ago, in the post-June 12 riot. 98

'See this one, na soja gun do am (Translation: It was a soldier gun that did it). Six of dem, I handle five with my bare hands. When dem see say I go finish dem, n aim dem carry gun shoot me for leg....' p. 100

We 'd listen as the announcer's voice painted a grim picture of affairs in our country: arrests of pro-democracy activists by the military government, and sanctions placed on us country by foreign countries. Then one day, in November, after my exams, we heard about Ken Saro Wiwa's hanging. NEPA had taken the light; in the dull glow of the candle flame the two shadows looked even more shadowy, indistinct, merging into each other and into the wall behind them. p. 121

'This country is in dire need of a revolution.' Mao exploded in the thick, enveloping silence that followed Focus on Africa... We have to utterly destroy the status quo in order to start afresh. Rawlings did it in Ghana—even though he preferred to continue in the same neo-colonial, capitalist mode.' Look, we are living under siege. Their very presence on our streets and in the government houses instead of the barracks where they belong is an act of aggression. They hold us cowed with guns so that they'll steal our money. This is capitalism at its most militant and aggressive. They don't have to produce any superior good to establish monopoly. They do it by holding guns to our head. Let me tell you why they hanged Saro Wiwa. He was the only one who understood the economic aspect of the struggle. It is the money. He told Abacha, I know how much you and the foreigners are making—the billions you are drilling out of our soil. Give us some of it. They killed him because he threatened their monopoly, got it? Monopoly. That's what this is all about. Where is Abiola? In Prison! They 'll continue subjugating us, killing all dissenters, one by one, sending them into exile, till there is no competitor left to oppose them' p. 122

### Extract 5

They are old and rusty and utilitarian—and even if one didn't know that they were tools of slavery, the cruel purpose would still be unmistakable. 'These are the gewgaws of slavery,' 'That circular piece is the mouth-lock. And that bracelet is the leg-iron. The round one was for the neck, it was used to join one slave to another with that chain.' The slaves couldn't have slept a wink. Imagine them piled in hundreds in this narrow space, chained, tired, broken, and wounded; behind them lay family, friends, gods, land; and before them was the vast sea with coffin-like ship at anchor, waiting to take them to another place, dark and unknown, and slavery, or maybe death by water. This was really a 'sleepless section' No sleep was slept here, and if there was, it was in fits and jerks, 'It was in the ships that the

mouth-locks were used, so that they couldn't console each other and rally their spirits and thereby revolt. To further discourage communication, no two persons of the same language were kept together: Mandigo was chained to Yoruba, Wolof was chained to Ibo, Bini was chained to Hausa. You see, every oppressor knows that wherever one word is joined to another word to form a sentence, there'll be revolt. p. 149-150

### **Lexical Semantic Features Used to Depict Dictatorship and Corruption in *Waiting for an Angel***

To capture the relationship between words, phrases, and clauses and their attendant meanings used in the novel *Waiting for an Angel* to pass the message of dictatorship and corruption, the following lexical semantic features are discussed through the way they are organized:

#### **Collocation**

When words collocate, it means that they appear together as expected by users of the language. 'Collocation is the grouping of words according to the company they keep' (Yeibo and Akerele, 2015). Words keep company with fellow words and convey specific meanings in certain environments, and context is always an important factor for the collocation of words to give the intended meaning. In *Waiting for an Angel*, the following words collocate to express the subject matter of corruption and dictatorship in the various contexts they were used:

1. 'craft of cunning'—an evil skill developed by both innocent political detainees and other prisoners to battle dictatorship and survive in the prison;
2. 'hide money in your anus'—a creative but corrupt practice by the prisoners to maintain ownership of their little assets;
3. 'make life easy'—preferential treatment from a superintendent to a supposed prisoner over others, which points to corruption;
4. 'inescapability of your fate'—points to the inability to be free in the oppressive system;
5. 'walls around you'—conditioned to be in a place without freedom;
6. 'get me cigarette...food etc.'; 'hold a cigarette'—misuse of authority and corruptive practices in prison;
7. 'incessant harassment from the warders'—unnecessary maltreatment of the prisoners by the prison workers;
8. 'brutal warders'—the commonality of brutality meted upon prisoners, including those who did not commit any offence;
9. 'next blow'—awaiting physical brutality;
10. 'blow struck for freedom'—to be alive each day for the prisoners was a hope for freedom;
11. 'prison superintendent'—an official in the prison who orchestrates some of the vices and corrupt practices;
12. 'waiting for hours to be addressed'—the inconsideration of the addresser, here the superintendent;
13. 'heads bowed'; 'hearts quaking' (p. 10)—dehumanized and put to fear and submission.
14. 'Political detainee'—innocent citizens captured and held bound because of political issues;
15. 'pro-democracy activists' (p. 32)—citizens agitating for democracy;
16. 'political prisoners'—citizens in prison; 'shooting tear gas';
17. 'crack down' (p. 32)—the illegal arrest and detention of the activists is referred to as a crackdown (humiliation), and they increased the prison population (swelled).
18. 'Real bullets'—arms used against and on the innocent citizens;
19. 'breaking doors and looting'—criminal acts performed by those who are supposed to check criminality;
20. 'air so thick' (with tear gas we couldn't breathe)—unconducive and polluted environment caused by the law enforcement agency;
21. 'girls screaming rape'—reactions from the citizens as a result of attempted rape by the government security personnel;
22. 'courage rekindled'—a state of mind developed for the sake of defence against the dictators;

23. 'flushed out' (of the hostel)—a coercive measure applied to drive away students from their school abode;
24. 'school...closed'—a compulsive and inordinate lock of educational institutions by the government;
25. 'Area Boys'—A Nigerian name for stubborn and fearless street boys who attack the dictatorial government violently;
26. 'war zone'—a state of chaos and turbulence as a result of the invasion of the law enforcement agency and the defending students (p. 60).
27. 'Poverty Street' (p. 123)—captures the extent to which the decay and penury have reached that a street is named after 'poverty' of all words.
28. 'Cruel purpose'—unpalatable reason;
29. 'mouth-locks'—a tool used on slaves to prevent communication (p. 150).

### Word Registers and Semantic Fields

Registers are specific vocabulary and a range of language items that are frequently used when people talk about specific professions or human experiences (Okongor, 2015). The words used to depict dictatorship and corruption fall under the categories and sectors of living as follows:

1. **Prison:** jailer, harassment, warders, cell, prisoner, prison superintendent (p. 10), political detainee (p. 32).
2. **School:** School...closed, student, chemistry, hostels, porters (p. 60), teach (p. 123).
3. **Politics/Government:** revolution (p. 123), military leader, pro-democracy activist, government (p. 32).
4. **Physical abuse and oppression:** brutal, next blow, crushing blow, pummeled, inescapability of your fate, heads bowed, walls, waiting for hours to be addressed (p. 10), oppressor (p. 150), arrest of pro-democracy activists (p. 32), flushed out (of the hostel) (p. 60).
5. **Behavioural ills:** Hide money in your anus, the craft of cunning (p. 10), breaking doors, looting, rape (p.59), official arson, steal our money, the billions...drilling out of our soil (p. 122).
6. **Military/Police:** Bullets (p. 59), petrol bombs, tear gas, war zone gunshots, soldier's bullets, anti-riot police (p. 60), under siege, send into exile, cowed with guns, a pistol, military government (p. 122-123).
7. **Nigerian lexicon:** General Yar Adua, Moshood Abiola, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, General Sanni Abacha (p. 32), Ken Saro Wiwa, Emeka Ojukwu, Biafran, Abiola (p. 122), Post-June 12 riots, Area Boys (p. 60), Newswatch magazine, Dele Giwa, Badagry, Ibo, Bini, Yoruba, Hausa, Victoria Island (p. 150).
8. **Slavery:** locks, chained, oppressors (p. 150).

### Figurative Expressions

Figurative expressions are expressions that have deeper meanings other than their literal meanings. They beautify language and create stylistic effects. Helon Habila employs some figurative expressions to pass his message of dictatorship and corruption home to his readers.

Please take note: Portions where some parts of the expressions are in italics indicate that they are the centre of discussion and not the rest. From the excerpts purposively selected for this study, the following are the figures of speech employed:

#### Metaphor (a direct comparison of two different things)

1. 'Each day survived is a victory against the jailer, a blow struck for freedom.'—The survival of the prisoner each day is metaphorically depicted as warfare or resistance that births a win and seeks freedom. p. 10
2. 'Living under siege'—compares the oppressive state of governance to a military siege. p. 123
3. 'There was an immediate crack down on all pro-democracy activists, and the prisons all over the country swelled with political detainees'—the illegal arrest and detention of the activists is referred to as a crackdown (humiliation), and they increased the prison population (swelled). p. 32

4. 'They flushed us out of the hostels into the streets'—chasing the students away from their hostels is likened to flushing out liquid. p. 60

**Personification** (giving human attributes to non-human things)

'The mindless banality of the walls around you'—attributes human-like characteristics (mindlessness) to walls that have confined the prisoners. This points to a mindless, oppressive presence. p. 10

**Simile:** (comparing two different things using 'like' or 'as')

1. 'His scowl was hard as rock'—compares the superintendent's expression to rock, which depicts meanness and harshness. p. 10

2. 'His eyes were red and singeing, like fire'—likenes the superintendent's eyes to fire, which evokes danger and hostility and creates fear in the prisoners. p. 10

3. 'The street was like a fucking war zone'—compares the chaos caused by the force men to a battlefield. p. 60

4. 'You should've seen Sankara directing us at the basketball court, like a fucking general'—the chief organizer of the demonstration's actions is daring and is compared to a high military official. p. 60

**Irony** (contrast between what is said and what is meant)

1. 'Only the prominent ones made the headlines'—only those who are well known are given an account while the low-profile detainees suffer and die unnoticed. p. 32

2. 'In a normal country there wouldn't be a need for revolutions.'—points to the ironical situation of the abnormality and dysfunction of the society described. p. 123

3. 'They play with us, as if we were puppets'—the word 'play' is ironically used here as if the maltreatment by the dictatorial government were a comical or fun activity. p. 41

**Hyperbole** (exaggeration of things)

1. 'The inmates were on tenterhooks'—exaggerates the tension and fear of the inmates. p. 10

2. 'The air was so thick with tear gas we couldn't breathe'—exaggerates the effects of the tear gas to highlight the severity of the situation.

**Imagery** (using words to create pictures in the mind)

1. 'To hide money in your anus, to hold a cigarette inside your mouth without wetting it'—creates vivid, uncomfortable images of survival strategies.

2. 'My face struck the door bars, and I fell before the superintendent's boots'—creates a picture in the mind of the physical scene of brutality.

3. 'Blood where my face had touched the floor'—a sensory image is created with the expression to heighten the effect of violence.

4. 'The prisons all over the country swelled with political detainees'—conveys the oppressive nature and the resultant heightened increase in the number of people put in prison.

5. 'Transferred to Agodi prison in Ibadan'—provides a mental image of geographical and emotional dislocation.

6. 'The mob is on him... they pour petrol on him and set him ablaze'—creates a mental picture of how a mob performs jungle justice.

7. 'Fiery figure dancing and falling...twitching mass'—evokes a tragic image of human suffering and subsequent death.

8. 'Gun-toting soldiers hanging recklessly from the rails in the open back'—creates a vivid picture of the movements of military men on the streets.

9. 'The back door opened, and another black-clad, glass-wearing figure stepped out'—creates a mental picture of the operations of the security agents.

10. 'The street was like a fucking war zone, filled with smoke and darting figures and fire and gunshots.'—evokes in one's mind a chaotic and violent scene of shooting and disorder.

11. 'Shattered and bloody leg'—creates a vivid picture of a casualty in blood and in pain.

12. 'Pot-bellied, glaucomatous kids with their high-defined ribs'—a vivid depiction of malnourished and poor children.

13. 'Carcass or two of mongrel dogs worried by vultures'—evokes an image of dead, decayed, and smelly animals resulting in neglect.

**Symbolism** (using symbols to represent ideas and concepts)

1. 'The surge of liberty passes down my body'—liberty symbolizes living freely and independently and an essence of life.
2. 'The people lock their doors, scared to come out—symbolizing the silencing and oppression of citizens under dictatorship.

**Allusion** (direct or indirect references to past events, places, works, etc.)

1. 'General Sanni Abacha, Moshood Abiola, and General Yar Adua'—Nigerian figures whose lives surround dictatorship and corruption, oppression, and the oppressed. p. 32
2. 'Transferred to Agodi prison in Ibadan'—refers to one of the Nigerian correctional centres where those supposedly peaceful demonstrators and political journalists are detained. p.32

**Idioms** (a group of words with deeper meanings)

1. '...the inmates were on tenterhooks'—used to show fear and subjugation. p. 10
2. 'Put yourself in his shoes'—a point of comparison for justice. p. 31
3. 'When we saw the leg shattered and bloody we decided to call it a day'.—depicts the end of the struggle. p. 59

**Lexical Relations**

Words relate to each other in different ways and according to their contexts of use. The following lexical relations are identifiable in the selected text to depict dictatorship and corruption:

**Synonyms** (words with similar meanings)

1. Brutal and harsh (p. 10) (both indicate cruelty or severity).
2. Coup and crackdown (p. 32) (both indicate a forceful takeover or suppression).
3. Demonstration and protest (p. 60) (both refer to a gathering of unsatisfied people seeking to be heard).
4. Looting and stealing (p. 59) (both words refer to taking what does not belong to one)
5. Shooting tear gas and firing bullets (p. 60) (acts of defence used mostly by the police and the military)
6. Chained and detained (p. 150 and p. 32) (used in the slavery context).
7. Slavery and oppression (p. 150 and p. 32) are conceptually related.

**Antonymy** (words with opposite meanings)

1. Freedom as against chains or prison (p. 10) (a free person cannot be in chains; e.g., Lomba was confined in a cell and was not free to move or write freely).
2. Peaceful demonstration vs. violence (p. 60) (the intended peaceful demonstration contradicts the violent outcome).
3. Alive against dead (p. 10) (some demonstrators die, some live in an attempt to speak against the ills in government).
4. Normal country against country in need of revolution (p. 123) (a place where things are working well against a place full of all kinds of crime and systemic malfunction)

**Hyponymy** (specific terms under a broader category)

1. Cigarettes, soap, and books (p. 10) are hyponyms of things.
2. Superintendent and warder (p. 10) are hyponyms of enforcers.
3. Coup, crackdown and curfew (p. 32) are hyponyms of military actions.
4. Tear gas, cudgels, guns, pistol batons, bamboo shields, and rifles (p. 122-123) are hyponyms of police equipment and weapons.
5. Lock, leg-iron, and chains (p. 30 and 150) are hyponyms of slavery tools.

**Polysemy** (words with multiple meanings)

1. Blow p. 10 (physical strike or metaphorical loss).
2. Craft p. 10 (artistic skill or deceitful cunning).
3. Crackdown p. 32 (both literal suppression and figurative tightening of control).
4. Walls p. 10 (literal barriers or symbolic of oppression).
5. Freedom p. 10 (political liberty or personal release).



6. Bomb p. 60 (both an explosive device and a makeshift weapon like “petrol bomb”).
7. Revolution p. 123 (refers to both political uprising and radical change).
8. Monopoly p. 122 (in its economic sense and as a metaphor for power concentration).

**Metonymy** (representing something with something else closely associated with it)

1. Solitary confinement (p. 10) is closely associated with prison life.
2. Baton, bamboo shield, gun, rifle, and tear gas (p. 122-123) are associated with the police.
3. Mouth-lock, leg-iron, and chain (p. 150) are closely associated with slavery and captivity.

### **Discussion on the Lexico-semantic Features and their contribution to the general meaning of the texts**

Without the lexico-semantic features used by Helon Habila to vividly express the message of dictatorship and corruption in *Waiting for an Angel*, it would have been difficult for readers to grasp the intended message the writer was trying to pass across, and the story would have lacked formative wholeness, linguistic and literary aesthetics. These lexico-semantic features, namely, the collocation of words, the appropriate choice of words from their different semantic fields, and registers, the figurative expressions and the lexical relations, which focus on the themes of dictatorship and corruption, have greatly served the purpose for which they were employed and brought to bear the clear message of leadership highhandedness, in other words, dictatorship, and deep-seated systemic corrupt practices.

In the collocation of words, the association of certain words like ‘incessant harassment from the warders’, ‘warders...usually brutal’, ‘next blow’, ‘waiting for hours to be addressed’, ‘heads bowed’, ‘hearts quaking’, ‘inescapability of your fate’, ‘walls around you’, ‘political detainee’, ‘crack down’, ‘shooting tear gas’, etc., do not send a message of people who are free and happy; instead they create a picture and send a message of people suffering, crying, in agony, physically abused and not allowed to express themselves freely, move and associate freely, and this is what dictatorship is all about. The following words also collocate: ‘craft of cunning’, ‘hold a cigarette’, ‘hide money in your anus’—where political detainees, people who are purely innocent and should not be kept in prison, are kept there because the government does not want criticisms from them, so they learn also their own kind of corruption to be able to survive their tyrants; ‘steal our money’, ‘the billions...drilling out of our soil’, ‘schools overcrowded’, ‘school...closed’, ‘breaking doors and looting’, ‘girls screaming rape’—depict the theme of corruption practiced by the military government. The corrupt practices by these dictatorial leaders resulted to the suffering of the citizens to the extent that the residents of Morgan Street changed their name to Poverty Street in an attempt to capture the realities of their lives in the name, instead of the more sophisticated one that did not suggest how much they were suffering. They lack core necessities of life because the men at the helm of affairs in government selfishly divert public funds for their personal use, leaving the masses to suffer.

The writer also appropriately chooses registers from suitable and related semantic fields to be able to create that message of dictatorship extended to different fields by the military leaders. In the domain of prison registers, like warder, prison superintendent, jailer, cell, prisoner, prison superintendent, superintendent boots, awaiting trial, political detainee, forgotten and never going to be tried, and a host of others are used. In dictatorial governments, physical abuse is many times employed to coerce obedience from victims. Thus, registers from the domain of physical abuse and oppression are used, and they include brutal, pressed neck, bruised, batons on flesh, boots on flesh, next blow, crushing blow, flushed out, grinding my face into the floor, heads bowed, etc. There are also other domains where special terminologies were gotten to sufficiently pass the message of dictatorship and corruption across. Examples of these include the domains of politics and government, military and police, school, Nigerian lexicons, behavioural ills and slavery.

Figurative expressions are stylistically used to embellish the story to pass the intended message of dictatorship and corruption. These figurative expressions give the readers the instinct to go the extra

mile, from literal meanings to deeper connotations. The diverse figures used by Habila include metaphor, irony, simile, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, imagery, and allusion. In extract 4, the writer talks about 'living under siege'. This is metaphorically analysed as living without freedom under the military government. The writer attributes the human characteristic of being mindless to the inescapability of the long walls of prison. He again compares the street where the students protested and they were attacked by force men as 'a fucking war zone,' depicting indescribable chaos brought about by the police and those who sent them. The writer is very good at painting pictures of his expression in the readers' minds. Vivid examples are when the writer describes some corrupt and dictatorial practices, e.g., 'To hide money in your anus'—with the choice of these words, one immediately creates that picture in one's mind; 'my face struck the door bars and I fell before the superintendent's boots'—a clear picture is presented through the chosen linguistic items. Therefore, the writer's choice of these connotative expressions stands out in testifying to his depiction of corruption and dictatorship.

To further enrich his text, in addition to clearly passing his message across, the writer makes use of lexemes that relate, in other words making the text stand as a whole. To depict dictatorship and corruption, the following kinds of lexical relations form a synergy that makes the subject matters of focus a reality. A number of words relate synonymously in the various contexts: brutal and harsh, demonstration and protests, looting and stealing, wretchedness and poverty, cunning and craft, among others. The use of synonymous words in the text provides alternative ways through which the themes are expressed and avoids monotonous and bland output. Antonyms were also captured from the excerpts used for this study. These functioned to create disparity between what is and what is not. For example, the juxtaposition of 'freedom' and 'chain' makes the reader feel and understand the impact of each used. Hyponymy captures the specific names for items for which a broader name carries their definition or description. These specific words are used for a detailed explanation of the themes of focus. For instance, the use of superintendent, warder, police are hyponyms of law enforcers, and contextually they are used by these leaders to carry out their dictatorial activities. Other words like cigarettes, soap, and books are hyponyms of things. The use of these different words brings about broader lexical inclusivity and better understanding of the discourse. Included are also polysemous words and words closely associated with things. A word like wall doubles as a physical cemented construction and an obstacle to Lomba's freedom. The word 'craft' is pluralized to mean to learn an artistic good skill and as well to learn to be deceitful. Metonymy deals with using an item closely associated with a thing to represent it, and Habila also employs metonymy to diversify his lexical output so that if one does not understand a word or a phenomenon, an item associated with it would help bring the message home, thereby making understanding possible. So, Habila uses a word like 'khaki', which is a kind of clothing material and is closely associated with the force men. Batons and bamboo shields are also associated with the police. These associations deepen the imagery or the pictures created in the mind of the reader and make the process of understanding what the writer is passing across easily captured.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to identify the lexico-semantic properties present in the language used to depict dictatorship and corruption in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* using M.A.K. Halliday's SFG as a theoretical framework. A purposive sampling and a stratified sampling method were both used to gather textual data from the text of focus, and the data were further analysed qualitatively. The findings reveal that in the depiction of dictatorship and corruption in *Waiting for an Angel*, accurate use of lexico-semantic features like collocations was employed. The right registers of words were selected from the requisite semantic domains, and relevant figures of speech were used by the writer to explicate the themes sufficiently.

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