

**THE USE OF ADJECTIVES IN PROSE WRITING:  
A STUDY OF ALIYU KAMAL'S *SOMEONE SOMEWHERE***

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**Abstract**

*Language is the vehicle for literature. It is along this dimension that this paper examines the use of adjectives in prose writing to account for the manner they are used in Kamal's (2018) *Someone Somewhere* to describe some characters in a way that his readers could visualise them. The paper has also identified the ratio at which the adjectives are used to achieve such descriptive purposes. Twenty excerpts were selected using purposive sampling. After the analysis of the adjectives used in the sampled sentences, it is discovered that one hundred and thirty-two (132) adjectives manifest in them. These adjectives conform to the classes of adjectives given by Brandford (1967), Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), Hornby (1975), Fernald (1979) and Corder&Ruszkiewicz (1985). Moreover, it is realised that while some of the adjectives come before the nouns they modify, describe or specify, others follow the nouns. It has equally been found that the novelist, Aliyu Kamal, has successfully manipulated several adjectives in the selected excerpts to that effect. It is, academically, interesting to state that the highest adjectives used by Kamal in the excerpts studied are quality, participial, emphasiser, possessive, limiting and quantitative chronologically in descending order, whereas distributive, superlative, interrogative, demonstrative and comparative are the least used adjectives. The findings of this paper signify that adjectives and other word classes could be (better taught and) rigorously studied through literary works, especially novels.*

**Key Words:** Adjective(s), Language, Literary Work, Writing, English Adjectives types

**Introduction**

Language is often defined as an arbitrary vocal system used by human beings to communicate with one another (Finnegan, 2012 cited in Aminu, 2020). This definition downplays writing and signing just as it does to the notion that language is a social activity. Hence, language, according to Finnegan, could be seen as system that speakers, writers and signers exploit purposefully (P25). In other words, language is used to do things, not just report or describe them. Moreover, it is paramount to emphasise that

language exists only to be used, and our use of language distinguishes us from all other animals. In this regard, O'Grady, Archibald and Katamba (2011) assert that language is the heart of all things human. As such, Yule (1996, and 2011) and Grundy (2013) enlist the following as some of the properties of language: appropriateness, productivity, cultural transmission, discreteness, duality, non-literal or indirect meaning, inference, context, indeterminacy etc.

Concerning the communicative function of language, Abdullahi (2017) states that we live in a world of language. We talk to our friends, our associates, our love (our family members), our teachers and even our rivals. Therefore, language establishes and enhances the relationship between a certain communicator and the audience (Kabiru, 2016). Aminu (2020 cited Adedun 2011) submits that language and communication are closely connected and their close connection is so self-evident that one can safely say that they are inseparable. O'Grady, Archibald and Katamba (2011) have equally asserted that we use language when we are talking, thinking, reading, writing and listening. In fact, they are of the view that language is the vehicle for literature and poetry. It is along this dimension that this paper examines the use of adjectives in prose writing in order to precisely account for the manner they are used in Aliyu Kamal's *Someone Somewhere* to describe some characters in a way that his readers could visualise them.

Empirically, Saleh (2006) investigates Senior Secondary Students' familiarity with adjectives and how they use them in academic writing. Ezeribe (2008) studies the features and characteristics of adjectives in both English and Igbo languages. Benjamin (2012) examines the choice and use of adjectives in advertisement. She looks at how adjectives and para-linguistic devices are used to convince the consumers of supremacy and the importance of one product over others. Daura (2015) seeks to examine how restrictions on grammatical deviance affect the role and use of adjectives in English as a Second Language (ESL) context. In particular, the paper deals with coinages and interpretations of adjectives in English. The sampled adjectives were subjected to morphological examination to showcase their construction and the illocutionary force which they convey. Ali and Ahmed (2016) carry out a research to analyse adjectives used in commercial advertisement of edible products on television. They focus on “catchy” words and phrases used to communicate messages quickly and effectively. One of the most recent work on adjectives is that of Babura and Inuwa (2021), which examines how adjectives are used as a style device in the choice of diction in Audee T. Giwa's *I'd Rather Die* and Aliyu Kamal's *Someone Somewhere* to practically describe settings, characters and events. The researchers also examine how the two novelists depict the themes of abject poverty, corruption and bad leadership, among others, in Nigerian society. This study is justifiable, due to the fact that none of the above researches focus on the types of adjectives used to describe characters in prose writing. It is also justifiable considering the argument raised by Babura and Inuwa (2021) that there is no other way of reading literary

works except through the language in which they are composed. It is important, at this juncture, to say something about the meaning and classification of adjectives before analysing how they are used in the novel under study.

### **The Concept of Adjective**

The English Adjective has been traditionally defined as that part of speech that describes limits or specifies the attributes of nouns or pronouns in syntactic structures. Hurford (1994:8) defines an adjective as “A word typically used to modify a noun and describes some property of the thing referred to by the noun, such as its shape, colour, age, value, size, origin or the impression it gives”. Uzoma (1990:16) opines that “an adjective in a sentence tells more about a noun or a pronoun; it is used to enrich the language”. Crystal (1998 cited in Ezeribe 2003:25) defines an adjective as a term used in the grammatical classification of words to refer to the main set of items which specify the attributes of nouns. It is paramount to state that adjectives can occur within the noun phrase as well as in a post-verbal or predicative position. Aarts (2008:31) asserts that as with nouns, adjectives can sometimes be identified through certain formal characteristics, that is to say, some appear with a suffix like –ful, -less, or –ive (typical adjectival affixes) and a prefix –un. In a nutshell, Adedokun (2011) submits that Adjectives are words that go with nouns or pronouns to describe, qualify or add more information to them. Rasheed (2021) submits that adjectives are words that describe or modify a noun in a sentence. According to him (ibid), they nearly always appear immediately before the noun or noun phrase they modify. However, they may also come after the noun or noun phrase (Aarts, 2008). Moreover, according to Babura and Mahmud (2021), Adjectives also help us to have a graphic picture of the person or thing they describe.

### **Classification of English Adjectives**

Adjectives in English can be classified depending on their position in a sentence (Ndimele, 1999:97). That is to say, adjectives could be attributive or predicative (Aarts, 2008:32). An attributive adjective comes before the noun it modifies, thereby attributing a quality to what is denoted by the noun (e.g spacious room, black phone, smart girl etc). A predicative adjective, on the other hand, is that which occurs as part of the predicative practically after a linking or copular verb (Aarts, 2008: ibid). A copular verb is a type of verb which is used in identifying the subject or linking the subject to some property or attribute (Hurford, 1994:51).

Nevertheless, some adjectives can be used both attributively and predicatively. These according to Ndimele (ibid) and Quirk and Greenbaum (1977) constitute the central adjectives. Examples of such adjectives are Old, Expensive, comfortable etc.

- ai      The old record is available (Attributive)
- aii     The record is old (Predicative)
- bi      He wants to buy an expensive shelve (Attributive)
- bii     The shelve is expensive (Predicative)

- ci We should look for a comfortable hotel (Attributive)
- cii The hotel is comfortable (Predicative)

The non-central, a carding to Ndimele (Ibid), can be used as either predicative or attributive. Examples of adjectives that can be used predicatively include awake, glad, afraid, asleep etc.

- di The students are awake.
- e The winner is glad.
- f Most people became afraid.
- g They were asleep.

Examples of adjectives that can be used attributively, namely main, utter, latter etc. They, however, added that the restrictions of adjectives to attributive or predicative uses are not always absolute and sometimes vary with individual speakers. For instance, adjectives that predominantly occur in an attributive position do not characterize the referent of the noun directly. In a phrase like “an old friend” (meaning one who has been a friend for a long period of time) does not necessarily imply that the person is old, so that we cannot relate “My old friend” to “My friend is old”. In this case, 'old' refers to the friendship and does not characterize the person. In that use, 'old' is attributive only. On the other hand, in a phrase like “that old man”, the term “old” is a central adjective (opposite of young) and we can relate “that old man” to “that man is old”.

It should be, therefore, clearly affirmed that adjectives that characterize the referent of the noun directly are called inherent, whereas those that do not are termed non-inherent. Notwithstanding, some non-inherent adjectives occur also predicatively, for instance, both “a new student” and “a new friend” are non-inherent, though the former can be used predicatively (that student is new). It should, however, be noted that a few words with strong emotional value are restricted to attributive positions e.g. you poor man, my dear lady, that wretched woman (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:121).

Apart from the above classification of the adjectives, there are also the following sub-classes of adjectives.

### **Intensifying Adjectives**

These are the adjectives that have a heightening or lowering effect on the noun they modify. They can be divided into emphasers and amplifiers. The former has a general heightening effect while that latter scale upwards from an assumed worm, demoting the upper extreme of the scale or a high point on the scale. However, emphasers are attributive only e.g certain, pure (sheer), outright, a real (undoubted) hero etc. Amplifiers are central adjectives when they are inherent e.g. a complete victory, signifying the victory is complete. But when they (adjectives) are not inherent, they are attributive only. e.g. a complete fool, the very end, a close friend, his entire profit etc.

### **Limiting Adjectives**

Limiting adjectives, according to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), are adjectives that particularize the reference of the noun e.g. the main reason, the only point, the same background, the precise argument etc.

### **Denominal Adjectives**

These are adjectives derived from nouns e.g. criminal law, medical college, literary scholar, secularist leader etc. It is important to note that adjectives that are restricted or virtually restricted to a predicative position are mostly like verbs and adverbs. They tend to refer to a (possibly temporary) condition rather than to characterize it. The most common are those referring to health or lack of health e.g. well, unwell, faint etc.

On another note, a larger group comprises adjectives that can or must take complementation e.g. afraid (of, that, about), conscious (that, of), fond (of), loath (to) etc. Many of such adjectives closely resemble verbs semantically e.g.

- i He is afraid to do it (He fears to do it)
- j They are fond of her (They like her).

Similarly, Fernald (1979:62) classifies adjectives into the following classes:

**Descriptive Adjectives:** According to him, descriptive adjectives are the adjectives that state some quality of the noun or pronoun to which they are applied e.g. a useful resource, a healthy lady, a beautiful girl etc.

The descriptive adjectives can be sub-divided into two groups;

- i. Participial adjectives: These are derived from participles without the adverbial part of the verb e.g. striking staff, singing birds, a learned person etc.
- ii Proper adjectives: These according to Fernald (ibid) and Uzoma (1990) are adjectives that are derived from proper names e.g. European opinion, Nigerian business, Ghanaian visitor etc. Such adjectives, just like proper nouns, begin with a capital letter.

**Limiting Adjectives:** These restrict the meaning of the noun or pronoun within some special limits e.g. one person, double measure, a daily report etc. Corder and Ruszkiewicz (1985:712), Brandford (1967:138) and Hornby (1975) cited in Benjamin (2012), assert that adjectives could be classified into Predicative, Demonstrative, Comparative, Superlative, Possessive and Interrogative. Comparative and superlative adjectives are otherwise called 'gradable adjectives'. Aarts (2008:31) stresses that the comparative form of an adjective indicates the greater extent to which the normal form of the adjective called the absolute form, applies, while the superlative form indicates the maximal extent.

**Synopsis of the Aliyu Kamal's Someone Somewhere**

The novel, *Someone Somewhere*, is the thirteenth novel of the author and is set in the fictional village of Himma (seven kilometers away from Kano City). It recounts the life of Sa'idu, whose Uncle and guardian, Mallam Adamu, sponsored his education up to the University level. In the University, he becomes a man of himself. He joins Restafarianism- an association formed by students like Sa'idu in order to enjoy their life by smoking excessively and having illicit love with their girlfriends. He completely neglects his religion and parents. He solely concentrates on the frivolities of life. After he graduates from the City University, he is employed as a Custom Officer and eventually elevated to the position of Comptroller of Customs. He plots the murder of his superior and secretary, who dared to cross paths with him. The death of Mary (Sa'idu's Secretary) necessitates his exile after he is declared wanted by the police. Some of the touching issues presented in the novel include moral decay in contemporary Hausa Muslim Society, the University life, forced marriage, the dilemma of the female child in the process of seeking knowledge, corruption, poverty, filial ingratitude etc. (Babura and Mahmud, 2021:41).

**Theoretical Framework**

The paper chooses to analyse the adjectives used in the selected excerpts via the classes of adjectives given by Brandford (1967), Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), Hornby (1975), Fernald (1979) and Corder & Ruszkiewicz (1985).

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents and analyses the sampled data obtained from Aliyu Kamal's *Someone Somewhere*. It is important to state that the paper used purposive sampling technique to choose twenty sentences from the novel under study for analysis (Details of the sentences could be seen shortly). Note that following abbreviations are used in the labeling of the adjectives:

Qual = Qualitative, limit= limiting, Poss. = Possessive, Emph. = Emphasiser, Superl. = Superlative, Quant. = Quantitative, demos. = demonstrative, Compar. = Comparative, and Distr. = Distributive.

The data is analysed sentence by sentence. In other words, the adjectives that manifest in each excerpt are identified and labeled as follows:

1. Batula was light-skinned and of medium build with hair, black, shiny and attractive, long  
 Participial                      limiting                                      Qual. Qual.                      Qual. limiting  
 enough to reach down to her shoulder (page 20)
  
2. Damuna couldn't possibly appear spick and span, as his shirt was many sizes too small  
 Qual.                      Qual.                                      limit.                      limit.  
 for him and his trousers were shiny with dirt. His moustache had overgrown and looked  
 Qual.                                      Poss.  
untidy. His eyes had so reddened that the pupils were no longer visible (page 24).

- Emph. Poss. Emph.
3. Barau, bald and bulbously reddish-eyed, sat down looking grim. He was wearing a shirt  
Qual.                  Qual.                  Qual.  
clinging to his body and showing off the bulging biceps of a very strong man indeed. He knew  
participial                  participial                  participial                  limit. Qual.  
no woman; he had never worn a wrist-watch in his life. He was a man of a few  
poss                  limit.  
words who turned out to be most useful to Alhaji Sabo in situations like this or when he went  
superl.                  emph.                  demons.  
to collect some machandise (page 57)  
limit.
4. Mallam Adamu leaned back and rested his head against his rickety deck-chair. He felt a  
Emph.                  Poss.                  poss.                  emph.  
sharp pain surge down his spine... the chair most of whose nails had become loose or  
Emph.                  Poss.                  poss.                  Emph.  
fallen out made a loud jarring sound as if in protest (page 2).  
Emph.                  Emph. Participial
5. He hitched up his shoulders his ragged gown in need of patching. He could remember it was  
Poss.                  poss. Qual.  
Sallau who gave it to him during the young man's wedding with the sickly gentleman's  
Qual.                  Emph.  
youngest daughter. Sallau had by now become stinking rich (page 3).  
Superl.                  participial
6. The sword was the last and only valuable thing that he possessed (page 12).  
Limit.      Limit. Qual.
7. By now, Mallam Adamu had been sick and bedridden for a month. The recumbent old man  
Qual.      Qual.                  Emph.      Qual.  
was breathing with difficulty (page 59).
8. Laraba was thus engrossed as she sat thinking things over in her swanky house. Gone are  
Participial                  poss. Qual.  
days; how fast time flies, she was thinking. She was sitting on one of the five chairs  
interrog. Emph.                  limit.      limit.  
given to her by her old client, the Headmaster, the moment the furniture was delivered  
poss. Qual.  
from the city (page 27).
9. Laraba says to Rabi, one of the twelve prostitutes she had invited from the Niger

- Quant. Quant.  
Republic that "Don't bother paying attention to the worthless and a moral old man! If you  
Emph. Qual. Qual.  
dare to give in to this town's old men, you will quickly age and become old like them. I will  
Qual. Qual.  
have nothing to do with it (page 28).
10. Larai gave out a loud piercing cry, asking them to bring back her husband, who had died  
Emph. participial  
(page 74).
11. Larai let out a heart-rending cry and felt down unconscious (page 80).  
Participial emph.
12. Her mother most be unduly worried and agitated that she had still not returned home.  
Emph Participial participial  
And her infant brother weaned only two months ago had taken her for a surrogate mother  
Limit. limit. Qual.  
would be crying for her (page 87).
13. Teary-faced Maryam kept quiet and listened to the two friends. She resisted joining the  
Participial emph. Quant.  
talk out of the fear on making Sa'idu so angry as to risk his flying out without her (page 138)  
Qual.
14. His eyes were red blazing coals looking about her, she saw someone lying flat on the  
Poss. participial participial  
ground with a loaf of bread stuck in his mouth (page 28).  
Limit. Poss.
15. More people kept crowding into the club even as night deepened to the small hours.  
Quant. Quant.



The parlour was for the riff-raff of small drunkards while an inner room was reserved  
for the Quant. Compar.

town elite. It was adorned with more light bulbs that heightened the brightness of the  
distributive participial Quant. Qual.

room in greater excess. Top civil-servants, opulent contractors and some traditional  
compar. Distributive Qual. Quant. Qual.

rulers were all there to be seen. Other than whisperings here and there, nothing was  
limit.

heard of prolonged discussions (page 29).  
participial

16. She was really one of the beautiful and attractive girls I had seen. That is how she was  
Limit. Qual. Qual.

three years ago. It is very shameful to see that such a beautiful girl has degraded to this  
limit. Emph. Qual.  
(page 36).

17. Suddenly, Sa'idu came into view, stepping on his tattered jeans. His eyes had coloured  
Poss. Qual. Poss.

red and reduced to several times their actual size (page 43.)  
Qual. Quant. Emph.

18. Himma Primary School had its avenue of neem trees, circling it, its rows of flowers and  
Qual. Poss.

some of its old buildings to delight the eye. Very strongly, one of its new classrooms had  
Quant. Poss. Qual. Poss. Qual.

already begun to spring cracks. Its ceilings sagged. Its wooden chalkboard had become  
participial poss. poss. Qual.

- loose; it dangled ready to fall to the dusty floor (page 17).  
Qual. Qual.
19. Binta arrived at the offices of the customs and excise located between the Ministry of Education and tree-lined Government House at nine sharp. It was a gigantic edifice housing a hoard of customs officers. A fleet of flashy and expensive cars was parked under the deep shapes of trees away from the blazing sun (page 99).  
Participial Qual. participial  
emph. Qual. participial  
Emph. Participial
20. Musa didn't show any surprise at the change that had come over Sa'idu. It wasn't only long-serving officers along but even younger inexperienced one knew the ropes about the job (page 118).  
Distr. limit.  
participial compar. participial

### Findings

From the analysis of the adjectives used in the selected texts, in excerpts 1 to 3, Kamal is able to provide a cinematic portrayal of characters (i.e Batula, Damuna, Barau). To achieve this, the novelist uses different adjectives at different rates. For instance, he uses participial adjectives four (4) times, limiting six (6) times, qualitative ten (10) times, emphasiser and possessive three (3) times each as well as superlative one (1) time. So, the total number of adjectives used in these excerpts is twenty-seven (27). It could be realised that in excerpts 1 to 3, the highest used adjective by the novelist is that of qualitative, whereas the superlative adjective is the lowest.

Excerpts 4 to 7 showcase how Kamal uses a different kind of adjectives to describe Mallam Adamu as someone who lives in abject poverty. Such adjectives used in describing this character include quality and possessive adjectives in six (6) instances each, emphasiser in eight (8) places, superlative and participial once each. This gives a total number of twenty-two (22) adjectives used in excerpts 4-7, with the highest use of emphasizer and lowest use of superlative and participial.

Moreover, excerpts 8 to 17 illustrate how the novelist uses limiting, participial, possessive, quality, interrogative, emphasizer, quantity, demonstrative and distributive adjectives to describe characters associated with immoral acts in the novel. The rate at which the adjectives are used is as follows: nine (9) instances each of quantitative and participial, four (4) possessive, sixteen (16) qualitative, eight each of emphasizer and limiting, one (1) instance each of the demonstrative and interrogative as well as two (2) instances of

distributive. The writer uses fifty-eight adjectives altogether in these excerpts, among which that of quality is the highest used and interrogative and demonstrative the lowest.

The last three excerpts, i. e. 18,19 and 20, depict some instances whereby the novelist uses qualitative, quantitative, possessive, participial, emphasizer, distributive, limiting and comparative adjectives to describe one Himma Primary School and other Governmental Officers in the novel, among others. A qualitative adjective is used in eight (8) places, possessive five (5), participial six (6), emphasizer two (2) as well as quantitative, distributive, limiting and comparative one (1) each. In this part, the novelist uses a total of twenty-five (25) adjectives. The highest adjective used is that of quality while the lowest ones are distributive, limiting and comparative. The distribution of occurrences of the adjectives analysed could be seen on the following table:

**Table 1:** Summary of the number of the adjectives used in the selected excerpts

SN	Adjective Type	Number of Occurrence in all the Excerpts Analysed	Percentage
1.	Participial	20	15.15
2.	Limiting	15	11.36
3.	Qualitative	40	30.30
4.	Emphasiser	21	15.90
5.	Possessive	18	13.64
6.	Superlative	02	1.51
7.	Interrogative	01	0.75
8.	Quantitative	10	7.75
9.	Demonstrative	01	0.75
10.	Distributive	03	2.27
11.	Comparative	01	0.75
	<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100.13</b>

Generally, it has been realised that while some of the adjectives come before the nouns they modify, describe or specify, others follow the nouns they modify. This is, to a larger extent, not unusual, especially in literary works. In other words, some of the adjectives are used in a post-nominal attributive position. This, according to Aarts (2008:32), the post-nominal attributive position is the norm for adjectives in the Romance languages like Portuguese, Halian, Spanish and French.

## Conclusion

This paper has studied the use of adjectives in Aliyu Kamal's *Someone Somewhere* to account for the types of adjectives employed to describe some characters in the novel. The paper has also identified the ratio at which the adjectives are used to achieve that descriptive purpose. The novelist, Aliyu Kamal, has successfully manipulated many adjectives in the selected excerpts to that effect. Such adjectives include participial, limiting, quality, emphasizer, possessive, superlative, interrogative, quantitative, demonstrative, distributive and comparative. The paper signifies that adjectives and other word classes could be (better taught and) rigorously studied through literary works, especially novels.

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