

Stylistic Analysis of Nominal Choices in Selected Biographies

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Abstract

This paper stylistically accounts for the use of nominal choices in the biographies of distinguished African biographees like Achebe, Dangote, and Mandela as written by Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Moshood Ademola Fayenwo and Margie Marie Neal, and Peter Limb respectively. The study is predicated on the descriptive and thematic analysis forms of qualitative research method, and Leech and Short's (2007) theoretical platform of Style as Choice. The analysis crucially reveals that these nominal elements in the purposively sampled biographies are stylistically used to extol, acknowledge and evaluate the laudable qualities, personality traits and positive impacts/achievements and ideological insinuations of the outstanding African biographical subjects in a manner that the choices generally belong to the semantic field of praise and positive evaluation for the purposes of inspiring the readers. This is particularly achieved through the biographers' manner of expression involving the use of proper nouns to depict the biographees as agents of positive change, use of abstract nouns to portray their unique abstract qualities, use of concrete nouns to foreground their tangible achievements, and use of noun phrases to portray their enviable identities and implicit ideological positions. The paper thus encourages its readers to exert positive impacts on their generation if they must be celebrated like these distinguished African personages.

Key words: Stylistics, stylistic analysis, nominal choices, biography, biographees, positive impacts

Introduction

The genre of Biography, which Hamilton (2008:18) categorically describes as "a distinct form of literature devoted to the laudable deeds of great people," has witnessed an array of scholarly investigations, but the nominal choices therein have not been explicated. This silence on the deployment of such significant linguistic elements in biographical narratives has created a dark spot in the ever expanding biographical literature. This paper is therefore meant to analyze the use of nominal elements, that is, nouns, noun phrases and their collocational ties in the biographies of distinguished African personalities like Chinua Achebe, Aliko Dangote, and Nelson Mandela, as authored by Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Moshood Ademola Fayemiwo and Margie Marie Neal, and Peter Limbs respectively. It specifically demonstrates how various forms of nominal items are deployed to extol, acknowledge and evaluate the unique identities, qualities and positive impacts/achievements of the biographees in the chosen texts, thereby inspiring the readers and influencing them positively. Particularly, it focuses on the use of proper, abstract and concrete nouns, noun phrases and other significant nominal choices and the essence of their deployment. Generally speaking, nominal choices or nominal features in the context of this paper encompass the use of single nouns, noun phrases, or refer to "nominal group," which Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 312) describe as being composed of elements such as determiners, numerals, adjectives, and the noun heads (e.g. Those two notable personalities ...which is a noun phrase comprising the aforementioned four lexical features). Although all kinds of significant linguistic choices abound in the biographical texts under scrutiny, this paper settles for the use of nominal items owing to their rich semantic import and suitability for the purpose of the descriptive stylistic study. The three biographies are purposively sampled from Africa to enable the researchers account for the laudable deeds of the distinguished African biographees that they are personally privy to as Africans themselves. The personages are also chosen on the basis of their diverse laudable impacts, and geographical locations, in terms of Achebe being a literary icon from Eastern Nigeria, Dangote as a world class industrialist from Northern Nigeria, and Mandela

as apartheid freedom fighter and an impactful first democratic president of South Africa. Essentially, the paper is an answer to the following research questions: what types of nominal items are deployed in the sampled biographies? How are the biographees celebrated with the linguistic items? What is the stylistic implication of the choices?

Statement of the Problem

The biographical terrain as a growing sphere of research has no doubt recorded a plethora of explorations in linguistic studies. These include the scholarly efforts of McAdams (1973, Kenney (1981), Marcus (1985), O'Brien (1993),; Thompson and Holland (2005), Hoyland (2007), Diaz (2009), Hale (2009), McVeigh (2013), Huber, Milne and Hyde (2016) and a host of others. But none of these studies has accounted for the nominal choices in biographical texts, especially the nominal items in the biographies of Achebe, Dangote and Mandela. The omission of such discernable significant features in the biographies of distinguished African personalities of their standing has indeed created a lacuna in biographical literature. It is this critical research gap that this paper is out to fill.

Conceptual Framework

Stylistics and stylistic Analysis

Stylistics as a subfield of linguistics is replete with numerous definitions, but the general entry point is offered by Leech and Short (2007: 11) as “the (linguistic) study of style.” The implication of this definition is that the vast world of stylistics pivots on style. The duo of Leech and Short then picture style as a linguistic coat of many colours viewable from different perspectives. These include style as Choice which puts it at “the way in which language is used in a given context by a given person for a given purpose“; style as Author/personality, where style is seen as “the linguistic habits of a particular writer; style as Text, where style is considered as “the linguistic characteristics of a particular text; style as literary genre, school or period in terms of how language is used in a particular genre, period, school of thought or writing such as Epistolary style, Victorian novels, etc. (p.11). Some scholars have also looked at style from the angle of deviation or departure from language norm, which encompasses rule bending, rule breaking, prominence and foregrounding. Enkvist (1964:15) from this end thinks of style as “as DEPARTURE from a set of patterns which have been labeled as a NORM.” Out of these myriads of perspectives, this study specifically adopts style as Choice owing to its suitability for the analysis and the purpose of the study. More on this is reserved for the theoretical framework.

Meanwhile, from the foregoing, it obvious that language use is the subject matter of stylistics. It preoccupies itself with what use is made of language in a text with implicit or explicit goal of explaining the relation between the linguistic choices and their communicative functions. By implication, stylistics does not only concern itself with patterns of language use in a text but also bothers about how and why a thing is being expressed (Leech & Short, 2007: 11). According to Paratha Misra (2012: 1), stylistics “is primarily concerned with the application of the methodology of linguistics to study of the style used in a particular context.” His use of “context” is informed by the shared understanding that when we use language, words are accordingly chosen to suit our purpose of or situation. It is this purpose that stylisticians primarily tend to unravel. For Crystal (1992:332), stylistic is “a branch of linguistics which studies the features of SITUATIONALLY distinctive uses (varieties) of LANGUAGE and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for particular choices made by individual and social groups in the use of language.” This definition quite aligns with our study which focuses on “particular choices,” in this case, nominal choices made by the authors of the texts under scrutiny.

The essence of stylistic analysis is further encapsulated in the words of Leech and Short (2007:11) that “we normally study style because we want to explain something...” That presupposes that stylistic incursion is a goal oriented exercise. To this end, Crystal and Davy (1969: 11) posit that:

The aim of stylistics is to analyze language habits with the main purpose of identifying from the general mass of linguistic features which are restricted to certain kind of social contexts to explain where possible why such features have been used as opposed to other alternatives and to classify these features into categories based upon a view of their function in the social context.

By this assertion, stylistic analysis which relies on language for raw materials is geared towards identifying and classifying features that have been uniquely employed in a text and accounting for the reasons that have favoured their choices by the addresser on the basis of context of use. The concept of “features” here in relation to stylistic analysis or linguistic description refers to a linguistic category found in a text. This could be a letter, morpheme, phoneme, single words, a phrase, sentence, an idiom or other units of linguistic associations (Leech & Short, 2007). But in this study, our attention is restricted to choice of nouns, noun phrases and other forms of nominal collocations. This is in tandem with the selective nature of stylistic analysis. As asserted by Leech and Short (2007:12), “any predictable method of stylistic analysis must select some features for analysis and ignore others” This principle of selection is dependent on the purpose of the research and the communicative value of the features. So, in its data analysis, this paper purposively concentrates only on the nominal features with communicative significance.

Biography

According to Hale (2009:48), the term biography refers to “the true story of a notable person’s life written by someone else.” The significance of this definition lies in: (a) Its description of biography as a “true story”, which clearly distinguishes it from fictionalized stories portrayed in creative literature, but pictures it as a component of social realities. (b) Its depiction of biographical subjects as “notable” individuals, which reveals that biographies are ideally written about the greats – male or female, and (c) Its description of biographical content as being documented by “someone else” which clearly distinguishes its authorship from autobiography that is self-authored. Warner (2022, online) further defines biography as “a detailed description or account of someone’s life and times, which is told by a different author.” This implies that the content of biography is beyond a shallow compilation of information about someone’s life comprising date and place of birth, family background, education and work experience. Otherwise, it will amount to a mere profile. It has to be a detailed description involving both the personal life of the individual and the historical facts about his existence in order to give the biographical discourse a context to lean on.

It is thus understandable that biography is a platform for expressing societal realities through true life stories. This sort of realism primarily focuses on the lives of eminent personalities. It leverages on the lives of the greats within a recognizable set of standards (Stanley, 1992:142). Notably, it’s not about people that are great in misdeeds, but in societal impacts. Chanyang (2018, online) corroborates this assertion with the view that biographies are basically written about people with “great contributions to the world” or personalities who lead “an extraordinary life”. To this end, biographers tend to choose biographical subjects that are iconic or people of renown whose lives provide them an opportunity to explore (McVeigh, 2013: 25). This could be about someone that is still alive, a male or female but with ideal qualities. That is, an individual whose character is worthy of emulation.

Biography as a true story of a notable personality is not just a narrative rendered in a third person pronoun and past tense, but it also characteristically captures the following specifics: geological account/family background of the subject, his/her place and date of birth, formative years, educational and occupational background, positive impacts on humanity, achievements and legacies, instances that manifest their ideal character, innate qualities, attitudes and world views, details that illustrate the person’s individuality as well as the biographer’s feelings and evaluative judgment about the biographee which of course makes the genre of biography evaluative in nature. It is these features that particularly make biography identity discourse.

Review of Related Studies

Available records reveal that research interest in biography began as early as 1920 when Burgess and Robert explicated *The polish peasant in Europe and America* written in 1918 by Florian Znaniecki at the University of Chicago (Rosenthal, 2004). Since then, many scholars have investigated different aspects of the genre of biography. By dates, these chronologically discussed briefly, McAdams (1973) investigated how personality psychologists discern, collect and analyze their interviewee’s life accounts; Kenney (1981) examined the three biographies of Christopher Columbus who is acknowledged to have courageously discovered America, while Marcus (1985) chronicled the various

stages of literary biography in Japan. Likewise, O'Brien (1993) viewed feminist biography as a shaped narrative; Thompson and Holland (2005) examined "memory book" as an innovative method of biographical research; Taylor (2006) studied how personal identities are constructed in biographical interviews, while Hoyland (2007) scrutinized various approaches used in documenting the biography of Prophet Mohammed. Not least among these studies are Diaz (2009) in his autobiography as a discourse of identity, Hale's (2009) PhD thesis on the "democratization of biography" in terms of joint ownership between the biographer, biographee and the material provider for its documentation, McVeigh's (2013) PhD thesis on "literary biography and its critics", and Huber, Milne and Hyde (2016) on the application of biographical research to the study of tourism among older adults in Germany.

A cursory look at all the biographical investigations reveals that none of the researchers has focused on nominal features of biographies. Most of the studies revolve around the issues of biographical research otherwise known as biographical method of research. As Hale (2009:18) rightly observes while bemoaning the shortfall of empirical studies on biography, "the overwhelming bulk of literature on biography is commentary on the biographical method." (That is, a qualitative research method using life story technique that originated in sociology in 1970s and later spread to other disciplines -which is quite different from research on biography or biography research). Other existing research efforts focus on issues like diachronic study of biographies, critical account of literary biographies, feminist point of view of biographies, democratization of biographies, autobiographical discourse (as related literature) and some commentaries and opinion papers on the genre, but to the utter neglect of nominal choices therein. This safely justifies the need for this paper.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is built on the theoretical platform of Style as Choice. Although style is approachable from several angles, such as the domains of text, author, nationality, deviation, conformity, this study views style from the domain of choice on account of its suitability for the exploration of the nominal choices in the sampled biographical texts. Style is primarily seen from the angle of choice as how a writer chooses to portray his/her ideas amid several other options. Particularly, Leech and Short (2007:11) see style from this perspective as "the way in which language is used in a given context by a given person for a given purpose." This simply sees style in the light of language use in the sense of "what choices are made by a particular author, in a particular genre or in a particular text," for a particular purpose (p.51). That is, how writers choose to portray their ideas to achieve their aims

Style as choice emanates from the fact that language is a pool of linguistic resources from which an addresser skillfully selects from to suit his/her purpose while creating a text. Finch (2000:189) re-echoes this with the assertion that "every time we use language, we necessarily adopt a style of sort; we make a selection from a range of stylistic and lexical possibilities according to the purpose of the communication." According to Leech and Short (2007:11), style as choice is rooted in Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, *langue* being the code or system of rules common to speakers of a language (such as English) and *parole* being the particular use of the system or selections of the system speakers or writers make on this or that occasion." They thus establish that "it is selection from a total linguistic repertoire that constitutes a style." Canning (2014:5) has also linked the notion of style as choice to Saussure's identified two linguistic axes called paradigmatic (vertical) axis and syntagmatic (horizontal) axis. Otherwise known as angle of selection and angle of combination respectively, the paradigmatic or vertical axis offers the variety of choices to choose appropriate words from, while the syntagmatic or horizontal axis brings about their appropriate combination. That is, choice between the varied lexical and syntactic resources of a particular language. The bottom line here is that style is about how an addresser chooses to use words from the linguistic system to suit a particular purpose. It is thus establishable that linguistic choices are purpose-oriented. They are meant to achieve a purpose that conforms to usage context.

Indeed, various choices are available to various language users to select from as linguistic tools to accomplish their specific purpose for a text's creation. For instance, a writer can choose to use the noun, *assassination* in place of murder just to emphasize the status of the personality affected by the crime. He can also choose the verb *move* or *depart* or *proceed* or even *disappear* instead of *go* or *go away*, or

employ *collect* or *withdraw* instead of *take* just to suit his semantic purpose. Morphologically, the verb *loveth* can also be deployed in place of *loves* to achieve a literary effect of archaism. This notion of choice is not restricted to the lexical level alone, it also encompasses linguistic elements like phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, idiomatic expressions (whereby connotative usage is preferred to denotative usage). Grammatically, passive voice can also be preferred to active voice; adjectives can also be used attributively in place of predicative use. Some choices can favour independent clauses semantically over dependent clauses. Also, simple and complex sentences can be alternated or interchanged as a linguistic pattern meant to kill monotony or boredom on the part of readers. This is to say that any of such features can be alternatively selected for dexterous use of language to fulfill a particular linguistic purpose. Halliday (cited in Leech and Short, 2007:28) adds that “even choices that are clearly dictated by subject matter are part of style.” For instance, in the case of a biographical text, linguistic choices may be thematically purposed at extolling the laudable achievements of the biographee, communication of societal values, identity construction or directed at influencing the readers ideologically. But this paper’s attention is restricted to the choice of nominal elements such as significant use of proper nouns, abstract nouns, concrete nouns and noun phrases, particularly how they are used to communicate various forms of meaning in relation to the subjects of the biographical texts under scrutiny.

The analytical model provided by Leech and Short (2007:66-69) as the arrow head of this theory, which is applicable here is known as “a checklist for linguistic and stylistic categories.” At the lexical level, it investigates the vocabulary generally used, to know if it is simple, complex, emotive, descriptive and evaluative, and then identifies the semantic field the lexical items generally belong to. It also probes into what use is significantly made of the various word classes. For example, it probes whether the employed nouns are countable, uncountable, abstract, concrete or collective ones, or whether the nominal choices refer to events, perceptions, possessions, processes, social qualities or moral qualities. It also investigates the type of identity and ideology such nominal items are used to portray. It goes further to interrogate the adjective types that are significantly used in the texts and what use is made of them. Are they attributive, predicative, gradable or non-gradable? What are they attributed to? Is it physical, psychological, emotive or evaluative states? Besides, are the deployed verbs dynamic in the sense of referring to actions and events or stative in the sense of referring to states and emotions? Do they contain significant aspects of the meaning in the sentences to portray physical activities, movement and achievements? What semantic functions do the adverbs perform? Do they indicate degree, manner, place or direction? What significant sentence adverbs/adjectives are noticeable? Are there patterns of lexical and structural deviation such as the use of metaphor and other figurative expressions? Or are there cases of structural repetition such as parallelisms? At the grammatical level, it scrutinizes the type of clauses/sentences predominantly favoured by the writer and their functions - in terms of whether they are structurally simple or complex, and functionally declarative, imperative, interrogative or exclamatory in relation to their communicative functions. It also investigates the tense type predominantly used – past or present, and to what effect? It also considers any other type of grammatical constructions that are generally used to any special effect. As hinted earlier, due to the limited space for this paper, this analytical paradigm shall only be used to account for the nominal choices in the biographical texts under scrutiny and their stylistic implications.

Methodology

The paper adopts descriptive and thematic analysis forms of qualitative research method. While the descriptive method is used to describe the linguistic features in focus, the thematic analysis is used to identify, extract and code the nominal features that the researchers wish to analyze. These items are selectively extracted from the primary texts by purposive sampling on the basis of their communicative value and evaluative significance. The instrument used for the research is the researchers themselves who carefully read through the primary texts to extract the required data. In this case, relevant clauses/sentences are sampled from each of the biographies and coded Texts A (on Achebe), Text B (on Dangote), and Text C (on Mandela) to the tune of sixty clauses in all, in the order of twenty from each of the texts.

Data presentation and Analysis

This analysis which is guided by the principle of Style as Choice focuses on how nominal items are significantly deployed to portray the biographees' unique qualities, possessions, achievements, actions/attitudes, values and diverse positive impacts on humanity. These resources of nominal elements which are highlighted in various coded texts for analysis, manifest in various forms thus:

Use of Proper Nouns as subjects - to portray the biographees as agents of positive change: In structures where the biographees feature as subjects or performers of actions in form of proper nouns, they manifest as agents of positive change and distributors of social goods. These social goods resonate either as positive impacts on individuals or human society in general as evident in the following data:

Text A: *Chinua Achebe more than anyone else reshaped the literary map of Africa* (p.280).

Text B: *Aliko Dangote has turned around many moribund corporations with the sole aim of saving the jobs of the employees...* (p.376).

Text C: *By 1950, Mandela remained thoroughly committed to African nationalism as his core set of beliefs* (p.42).

In the first sentence, which has the proper noun *Chinua Achebe* as its subject, the literary icon is accorded the agency role of reshaping the literary landscape of Africa. With the biographer's choice of the subject, Achebe is stylistically acknowledged as an innovative performer and agent of positive change, who helped to reconstruct a new way of viewing African literature, which was hitherto relegated to the background by the rest of the world before his arrival on the literary scene with his classical *Things Fall Apart (TFA)*. Through this prosaic construction, he raised fresh awareness about Africans as a people with dignity and unique culture. He helped to debunk and erase the Europeans' stereotypical portrayal of Africa as a dark continent with nothing good to offer, and also charted a new course for many other African writers. This reshaping exercise in no small way makes him a notable African. .

In the next sentence, *Aliko Dangote*, its subject is projected as an entrepreneurial agent of change. What bestows this status on him is his impact of rejuvenating and transforming dying business enterprises in order to save the jobs of the various employees. By the biographer's choice of subject, the biographee is positively evaluated as an agent of transformation and a Good Samaritan that impacts on both individuals and society at large for the common good of humanity. The sentence's predicate has *turned around many moribund corporations with the sole aim of saving the jobs of the employees...* stylistically speaks volumes of the importance of the nominal element serving as its subject.

The third sentence which revolves around the noun *Mandela* as its subject features the South African revolutionary as a selfless and restless advocate of African nations' political independence, sovereignty, unity, patriotism, democracy, and value reorientation as far back as 1950. We say 'selfless' in the sense that he was not only advocating these nationalistic ingredients for his own South African nation, but also for other African countries. He was also restless about it in the sense of making the agenda a way of life and the nucleus of his belief system. Stubbornly, this persisted until his dream was accomplished in the later years. It was such revolutionary tendencies that launched him into global limelight and leadership.

Use of proper nouns –to identify specific individuals, awards, events, traditions, institutions, and places that contributed to the greatness the biographees and to infer ideological positions

Text A: *Isaiah Okafor was a devout Christian* (p.7); *He was appointed a Distinguished professor of English at the... University of New York in 1989 and also given Callalo Award in recognition of invaluable contributions to world literature* (p.267).

Text B: *The man, who later grew up to become ...the first richest person in the world began his life with someone who shaped his life ... his maternal grandfather, Mr Sanussi Dantata...*(p.133); *Young Aliko set his eyes on business first before going to Cairo, Egypt to earn a business degree* (p.148).

Text C: *His clan name Madiba ('Reconciler') would remain a "praise name" in years to come* (p.2).

The choice of the proper noun, *Isaiah Okafor*, Chinua Achebe's biological father who is said to be a committed *Christian* (another proper noun), is meant to inform that the global personality owes his good Christian character and religious inclinations, which reflect in his life and works to his father. It suggests that Chinua's religious training and indoctrination from his father must have contributed to the writer's greatness. Ideologically, the usage thus encourages parents to teach their children the right way to go in life. His appointment as a *Distinguished professor of English* by the *University of New*

York and the *Callalo Award* as indicated with the choice of proper nouns in the second sentence are powerful feathers on his intellectual cap. As a mere BA (Hons) holder in English and History from the University College Ibadan that the recipient was, before the award, the Professorship entitlement in no small way contributed to Achebe's well deserved greatness and fame. The great reputation of the American university that awarded it is also a great tag on the awardee's greatness and global notability; so does the popular *Callalo Award* given him on the heels of his powerful global literary efforts. On Dangote, the proper name *Mr Sanussi Dantata*, his maternal grandfather who brought him up is referenced as a great source of his greatness. In the words of the co-biographers, he literarily shaped *his life*. The virtues of morality, hard work, religiosity and reverence to God that resonate in Dangote, which immensely contributed to his greatness and notability are all traceable to this benefactor of his. Besides, the man, Dantata was the one that gave him some money and an additional loan of N500, 000 (five hundred thousand naira) to boost his cement business while teething up in business in the late 1970s. This ideologically implies that no man is great all alone without the input of someone else. *Cairo, Egypt*, the abode of the Egyptian University where he earned a BSC in Business Administration is also named to depict the importance of the degree to his exploits in the world of business. The degree indeed helped to refine his raw business acumen and opened up his mind to global influence. On Mandela, we have the proper noun *Madiba*, his native name, meaning the "Reconciler." The biographer's choice and use of this nominal element indicates that it was its effect on Mandela that made him the national and global mediator and reconciler he eventually turned out to be. This is followed by the use of Xhosa *society*, the traditional homeland of Mandela which is known for respect for elders. The virtue of respect for all and sundry that encapsulated the person of Mandela all through his life must have emanated from this society.

Use of Abstract Nouns/nominals –to evaluate and describe the biographees' psychological and social qualities, virtues, innate abilities and to inculcate ideologies:

Text A: *The child exhibited signs of intelligence (7); Achebe has a profound gift of observation and tells his story with an adept touch* (p.66).

Text B: *He had an upbringing that emphasized empathy for the weak, respect for constituted authorities and obedience to seniors* (p.133); *Little Aliko began to display his knack for entrepreneurship and talent for business acumen very early in life* (p.129).

Text C: *Fearful of Mandela's growing popularity and his unwillingness to compromise with institutionalized state racism, the apartheid government sought once more to silence him...*(p.53); *Concern for the predicament of his people and astute understanding of what to do about it are apparent in Mandela's writings of this time* (p.53).

The descriptive role of the abstract nouns/ nominals in the various texts is evidenced by a lot of significant choices as highlighted in the above structures. In the first two structures, for instance, nominal qualities like *intelligence*, and *a profound gift of observation* are attributed to Achebe. While the first usage is a nominalized abstract noun that has to do with the novelist's mental capacity to understand things or learn and comprehend things easily, the second one is a noun phrase that has to do with his natural outstanding ability to note and record events creatively. Both unique innate abilities are assumed to have contributed to Achebe's greatness and leadership in the world of writing, ideologically suggesting that any writer who desires to be like him must intelligently stand out and remain creatively observant.

With their choice of abstract nouns, Dangote's biographers depict that the distinguished entrepreneur was brought up with the emphatic attributes of *empathy, respect, obedience* alongside the *business instinct* that was naturally in him while growing up. *Empathy* in this case has to do with identifying with the needs and emotional states of others in terms of the vulnerable in his society. Others deployed abstract nouns include *respect* in the sense of regard for others; *obedience* in the sense of his willingness to comply with orders and instructions; and of course *business instinct*, a compound abstract noun used to portray his intuitive and inbuilt business ability. The virtue of respect for elders in particular with its essential ideological undertone of valuing others, is a socio-cultural feature that distinguishes Africans as a people from other races. We also have the abstract nouns *knack* and *business acumen*, with *knack* specifically used to point out Dangote's entrepreneurial dexterity and aptness, and the abstract compound noun *business acumen* referring to his quick discernment and sharp perception of

business opportunities. By all standards, these virtues all contributed to Dangote's greatness and usefulness in Africa.

Mandela's leadership attributes are further portrayed with nominal abstractions like *popularity*, with which his ideas gained widespread acceptance, *unwillingness to compromise*, that is, unbending stance, with which he dislodged the apartheid regime that held sway in South Africa, Concern *for the predicament of his people*, which fuelled his zeal to fight for his people vigorously, as well as *astute understanding of what to do*, with which he led the people with so much wisdom. These all readily stood him out in his generation as a distinguished African personality, thereby inviting the text readers to imbibe same.

Use of concrete nouns to portray tangibility -in terms of the biographees' concrete achievements and other concrete entities that contribute to the overall meanings of the various texts:

Text A: *Achebe's reputation continued to grow like a forest fire, with **Things Fall Apart** and **No longer at Ease** listed as best sellers in Uganda in February 1963 (p.97); **The book that Achebe had written to coincide with the presidential elections was published by Fourth Dimension Publishers at Enugu as *The Trouble with Nigeria* (p.208).***

Text B: *He has built his business empire on **food, clothing and shelter** which made his company to emerge three decades later as the largest indigenous business outfit south of the African Sahara (p.187); Mr Aliko Dangote has surely taken over the nearly **100million Nigerian consumers** who cannot do without the **foremost industrialist** for their **food, clothing and shelter** (p.369).*

Text C *...All these draconian measures motivated and energized Mandela to protest along with **tens of thousands of other South Africans** appalled by the attacks on democracy and human rights (p.53); The systematic enrollment of **thousands of special volunteers**, each of them committed to nonviolent civil disobedience, now began (p.53).*

Concrete nouns/noun phrases here are understood as physical things or entities that can be seen, felt and touched tangibly. They are used for one tangible semantic representation or the other in the various texts. In the first instance, some of Achebe's works are pointed out as some of his concrete achievements. These include: ***Things Fall Apart***, his ever-green epic novel published in 1958, ***No Longer at Ease***, his second novel published in 1960, and ***The Trouble with Nigeria***, a non-fictional text published in 1983. These among others have added a lot of colourful feathers to his global literary cap. Tangible items like ***food, clothing*** and ***shelter*** which are portrayed as concrete nouns are also identified as Dangote's prime business targets. The wisdom explored by the industrialist is that by all means humans must feed, cloth, and shelter themselves before anything else. It is his discovering of these three basic necessities of life and his commitment to their provision that have shot him to the entrepreneurial limelight. Next, about ***100 million Nigerian consumers*** who are said to daily patronize these industrial endeavours of his are portrayed as physical entities and beneficiaries of the industrialist's good will. This has stylistically showcased Dangote's high rate of industrial impact on humanity. He is also specifically acknowledged as ***the foremost African industrialist*** in a bid to foreground his prime place in African entrepreneurship. Mandela's fight against apartheid is said to have attracted concrete human entities comprising ***tens of thousands of other South Africans*** and ***thousands of special volunteers*** respectively, who were strongly committed to the cause with him. This head count quantification does not only help to give us an idea of Mandela's teeming supporters, but also used to acknowledge and extol the freedom fighter as a man of the people, a man with a high level of public acceptance.

Use of noun phrases to portray the identities and ideologies of the biograhees:

Text A: *Achebe was **a thorough little Christian** (p.7); He is **the best African novelist of today** (p.66).*

Text B: *At the naming ceremony...**kola nuts and other edibles** were plenty in abundance (p.95); Dangote has also discharged other religious obligations as **a devout Moslem** (p,344).*

Text C: *By 1950, Mandela remained thoroughly committed to **African nationalism** as his core set of beliefs (p.42); His reputation as **a defender of black rights** soared through his legal work as an attorney and his high profile as **a political leader** (p. 42).*

The first highlighted feature is a noun phrase used to establish Achebe's religious identity as a ***Christian***. It does not only picture the biograhee as a Christian but a committed one, through the use

of the associated attributive adjective *thorough*. This is also said to have taken place in his formative years as indicated by the adjective *little*. By implication the structure also influences the readers to be thoroughly committed to whatever they do. Also, the noun phrase, *the best African novelist of today* as attributed to Achebe clothes him with the identity of the most superior African novelist. Little wonder that he is popularly known as the father of African literature. In Text B on Dangote, the use of *Kola nuts and other edibles*, especially *kola nuts* for the naming ceremony clearly portrays African cultural identity in the sense that kola nut is a special African fruit meant for such occasions. The noun phrase *a devout Moslem* is further employed to identify Dangote as an Islamic devotee, going by the choice of the inherent attributive adjective *devout*. Text C further attributes the identities of African Nationalist, black rights defender, and a formidable political leader in Africa to Mandela as depicted in the various highlighted noun phrases. This also goes with the ideological implication of *African nationalism*, which all Africans are implicitly enjoined to embrace through the nominal choice.

Use of noun phrases to express possession or ownership (genitive functions)

Across board, noun phrases are used to portray the biographees' abstract and concrete possessions with the predominant use of s-genitive case and scanty use of of-genitive case as demonstrated below:

Text A: *Achebe's style is a model for aspirants* (p.66); *Achebe's reputation as a novelist didn't obstruct his interactions on an individual basis with other writers...* (p.84).

TextB: *Aliko's generosity is both at the personal and corporate levels* (p.344); *The open-handedness and large-heartedness of Aliko Dangote are rooted in his strict Islamic upbringing ...* (p.344).

Text C: *Fearful of Mandela's growing popularity and his unwillingness to compromise with institutionalized state racism, the apartheid government sought once more to silence him...*(p.53); *Under Mandela's astute leadership, South Africa emerged from pariah status to become a respected "middle power" ...capable of launching its own initiatives to combat world inequalities...*(p.117).

Presumably, the various ownerships or possessions attributed to the biographees here are what make them distinctive. The portrayal is stylistically done with noun phrases to demonstrate what specifically stand them out in Africa and to establish that they have what it takes to be the notable and worthy sons of Africa that they are. For instance, with the use of s-genitive, Achebe is said to be in possession of a literary *style* that does not only set him apart, but also serves as a pattern and a guiding light to other African writers. Using s-genitive possessive style, he is further acknowledged with the possession of an outstanding prosaic *reputation* which however did not distort his interpersonal relationship with his fellow writers. Implicitly, Achebe's good interpersonal identity is hereby celebrated.

Dangote's continuous willingness to assist both individuals and organizations with his resources, is depicted as being in possession of *generosity* also with s-genitive. The possessions of *open-handedness and large-heartedness* are further attributed to him in the next structure. Although these virtues are more of a semantic replay of his aforementioned generosity, the possession is rendered with of-genitive, and revealed as products of his Islamic orientation. S-genitive phrases like *Mandela's growing popularity*, which depicts the apartheid leader's soaring public acceptance, *Mandela's astute leadership*, which pictures him as a critically discerning frontliner and a great mobilizer in the fight against social inequalities in South Africa are used to foreground Mandela's African and global leadership status.

Conclusion

In line with the purpose of this paper, the various nominal choices in the biographies of African distinguished personalities like Achebe, Dangote and Mandela have been analyzed stylistically. Ultimately, it reveals that: proper nouns are significantly used to portray the biographees as agents of positive change and distributors of social goods. They are also employed to identify specific individuals, events, locations and institutions that contributed to the greatness and success of the biographees. While abstract nouns are used to describe and evaluate the biographees' psychological and social qualities, innate abilities and attributes, concrete nouns are used to portray the tangible achievements of the biographees and other tangible entities that contribute significantly to the meaning of the texts. Noun phrases are used to express their identities, ideological positions, and possessions with both 's' and of-genitive forms. These nominal choices, which all belong to the semantic field of praise and positive evaluation, are stylistically deployed purposely to extol and acknowledge the unique

qualities and laudable deeds of the biographees for the purposes of inspiring the readers. Overall, the information about the laudable deeds of the biographees as embedded in the various nominal choices in the biographies is conveyed through the biographers' manner of expression and stylistic manifestation. The paper therefore encourages its readers to be positively impactful in their generation in order to be celebrated like these outstanding biographees.

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