

LEXICAL SETS AND THEMATIZATION IN GABRIEL OKARA'S *THE VOICE*

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ABSTRACT: *Like all other constituent elements of language study, lexical items are perfunctorily organized and deployed by writers and speakers for meaning delivery and stylistic rhetorical effects, as words capture or reflect every facet of life, including objects, phenomena and concepts and, thus, form a veritable part of the communication process. This study, therefore, examines how lexical sets, which exude same or related semantic property or subject matter, have aided Gabriel Okara to transmit his social vision and achieve aesthetic purposes in *The Voice*. With M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional grammar, as the analytical template, the study shows that, in relation to definite pragmatic or sociological contexts, lexical sets play a dominant role in foregrounding the themes of light and darkness, corruption and moral decadence, hypocrisy, materialism, truth and integrity, etc, which constitute the pivot around which meaning revolves in the text. The study demonstrates the fact that the treasures or potentials of lexical items are inherently inexhaustible as they can be combined, manipulated or deployed in various ways for linguistic expression and human communication to be realized.*

KEYWORDS: Lexical Set, Thematization, Gabriel Okara, *The Voice*, Systemic Grammar.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of lexis in any linguistic construction or composition cannot be over emphasized. This is because it constitutes the building blocks with which writers and speakers construct sentences and texts. The overt implication of this fact is that whatever message or idea that a given text conveys or projects is constructed with lexical items. Lexis is one of the distinct levels of language study (other levels include: phonology (sound), morphology (internal structure and formation of words), semantics (meaning) and syntax (sentence formation). Alo (1995:18) defined the term as "... the level of linguistic analysis and description concerned with the way in which the vocabulary of a language is organized." This scholar (1998:33) adds that "as a level of language study, lexis seeks to elucidate how words mean and how they interact with one another meaningfully..." Basically, lexical words are distinguished from grammatical words. They are described as content words in the sense that they convey explicit meaning and belong to or can be structured into lexical or semantic fields i.e. boy, fan, mango, go, play, car, etc. Grammatical words, on the other hand, perform grammatical or structural functions i.e. relate one lexical word to another. Examples of lexical words include: to, on, of, in, beside, etc. Essentially, lexical words mean denotatively or connotatively. Denotative meaning refers to the plain, primary, or dictionary meaning, while connotative meaning is the extended, secondary, associative, transferred, or contextual meaning. In this study, for instance, the latter (i.e. connotative meaning) is more relevant.

The critical point in the present study is that, lexical items are organized in speech and writing to convey textual meaning and messages. It is, therefore, pertinent for the linguistic analyst to explore or examine how lexis is organized or patterned in a given text to transmit the vision of

the author. Lexical set, which is the specific focus of this study, is an aspect of lexical organization. According to Mesthrie (2002), the concept of lexical set was propounded by John Wells (1982) for identifying vowel categories by a set of lexical items in which they occur, instead of by symbols. According to the scholar (ibid), the advantage of this model is that it is particularly useful for students who do not have any concrete knowledge in phonetics, in the sense that it enables them to identify the sounds being referred to, even though they may not know the phonemic symbols which represent these sounds. Wells (1982), therefore, defined lexical sets in terms of a set of words in which the vowel components are pronounced the same way. The critical fact in the present study, however, is that the term has been expanded or broadened to encapsulate not only words with similar vowel elements, but also words which have common form, function, meaning or topic in general. In other words, the study adopts the general sense of the concept which refers to or implicates a group of words which share the same form, function, meaning or topic. It is necessary to underscore the fact that, in this general sense, there is an overt convergence between 'lexical set' and 'semantic' or 'lexical' field, in view of the fact that the latter also deals with a set of words or lexemes which exude the same or related meaning or semantic property and which are grouped according to subject matter. According to Lehrer (1985), "semantic field" or "lexical field" is a set of words or lexical items which represent an area of human experience or engagement, such as education, love, nostalgia, etc, which are related in certain ways. Though Wyler (1992) tends to distinguish the two concepts in the sense that while one is the form or arrangement of words, the other is the meaning inherent in the form or set of words, it is incontestable that the form of words takes its life from and is sustained, so to speak, by the underlying meaning. In fact, form and meaning in words are so intertwined that they are inextricable one from the other; it is meaning that gives form its inherent value. Lexis and meaning are so intertwined that the two concepts can hardly be described as distinctive levels of language study. This thesis explains why scholars have always analyzed meaning and lexis together, that is, in the sense that they live and work together functionally. Hence Darbyshire (1967:139) defined lexis as "the branch of linguistics which deals with the major units of language and carries the burden of referential meaning." McCarthy and Carter (1988) contend that, over the years, various scholars have considered semantics as the proper place to discuss or explore the concept of lexis. Esan (2005:91/92) also observes that "...Lexis and semantics are so intricately linked that they cannot be separated from each other in the description of texts." This scholar (2005:103) believes that lexis can be deployed by an author "... in a way to relate to themes, key concepts; ideas or motives" in a text. Alo (1998:39) adds that "a word or vocabulary is a two faced thing. It is made up of both form or content." This scholar (ibid) centralizes lexical semantics in textual analysis in the sense that it covers various shades of meaning which include denotation and connotations (i.e. emotive, social, figurative or transferred and contextual meanings, etc). The critical point is that all these viewpoints justify the fact that lexical set, semantic field or lexical field analysis is based on the meaning that lexemes share in a defined context.

Theme, the other prong of this discourse, is one of the primary elements of a literary text (such as drama or novel), the others being plot, setting, characterization, etc. The theme of a text refers to the central or principal idea that a text presents, passes across, encapsulates or foregrounds which can be captured in a single word such as love, nostalgia, coming of age, betrayal, etc. According to Kelley (2010), the term bifurcates into the concept and the statement. This scholar (ibid) explains that thematic concepts refer to readers' interpretation of the content of the text i.e. their answer to the question: what does the text say or mean? Thematic statement, on the other hand, highlights the critical thing that the text conveys or says about the subject, which must exude a universal or timeless applicability or veracity, even

though the immediate setting or socio-cultural context of the text is local. Balogun (1996:351) differentiates the theme of a text from its subject matter inter alia:

The subject matter of a literary work is the raw material on which the work is based while theme is the central idea that emerges from the way the writer has handled his subject matter- raw material. Theme is therefore the idea that emerges from the mode of presentation of subject matter.

The critical fact is that, whatever angle we look at it, the concept of theme is the central or underlying topics or issues that a given text addresses. It is, therefore, the hub or pivot around which textual content revolves. It acts specifically as the foundation of the literary text, and sustains the value of arts as a reflection or verisimilitude of existential reality, since it reveals specific viewpoints or certain underlying facts about human life and social behaviour in a given context.

One very fundamental aspect of the theme of a literary text is that it is never overtly or directly stated. It is invariably subtly embedded in the characters, events and places that make up the text, which must be sieved or delineated by the reader or scholar, as an aspect of his critical interpretation of the text. Balogun(1996:351) corroborates this viewpoint when he stated that theme is abstract in nature while subject matter is concrete, and that while subject matter is permanent and unchangeable, theme is subjective and changeable. Thus, theme is the main issue or insight distilled from the context or subject matter of any discourse. In other words, it interprets and summarizes the significant issues detailed in texts. According to Igwe (2009:294), it is "... the idea of a literary work abstracted from its details of language, character, and action, and cast in the form of a generalization." As Obstfeld (2002) observes, a literary text may have many thematic thrusts. The essential fact, however, is that all the identifiable themes in a given text must deal with ideas and questions which border on aspects or products of a human history and cross-cultural patterns of existence that are not clearly stated in the text, but which constitute subtle aspects or segments of meaning in the text.

A very important aspect of this study is that it is subsumed within stylistics, since it deals with how a given author has patterned the language of his text to encode meaning even though there are other potential or possible ways of doing so. In other words, the deployment of lexical sets to achieve thematization in the text under study is actually a study in language variation and function in a particular context, which is the primary focus of the domain of style study. As Lyons (1981:290) put it, "one way of approaching the phenomenon of stylistic variation is by considering the fact that a language system frequently provides its users with alternative means of saying the same thing." The critical point here is that style itself can be narrowed down to a matter of selection or choice from the wide range of options or alternatives in terms of vocabulary and structure that are open or available to language users or writers. Mullany and Stockwell (2010:43) capture this thesis inter alia:

All texts, whether spoken or written, display style, which can be loosely defined as the recognizable linguistic and discursive patterns in the text. Since every sound, word, syntactic structure,

co-referential link and overall shape of the text exists as a consequence

of choice (even if that choice is not highly conscious within the constraints

of the language system), style can be regarded as a set of choices. These choices are significant rather than ornamental: comparing the actual form of expression of a text with any of the other numerous possibilities in which it could have been realized quickly reveals differences in meaning, different emphases of meaning, different tones and evaluative shading, different perspectives and different senses of emotion, commitment and value.

From the foregoing viewpoint, it is clear that stylistic analysis is a holistic venture, traversing or encapsulating all aspects or levels of language study i.e. lexis, semantics, syntax, phonology, morphology, graphology, etc. Hence Mullany and Stockwell (2010:47) observe that “stylistic analysis can be conducted... across the linguistic rankscale, from phonology, morphology and lexicology, through syntax and semantics, and up to text and discourse levels.” Syal and Jindal(2010:25) also posit that a stylistic study involves describing textual features “... at the levels of phonology, syntax, lexis, etc, to distinguish it from other texts and to appreciate how it achieves some unique effects through the use of language.” These scholars (ibid) add that through choice, deviation and repetition, writers “... are able to manipulate language so that it conveys some theme or meaning with great force or effectiveness.” As we have earlier stated, however, linguistic elements do not operate in a vacuum; there is an enabling social or physical environment or context which combines with language to transmit meaning or messages. Therefore, in stylistic analysis, particularly in M.A.K. Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (which provides the theoretic framework for this study), contextual variables or constraints have a prime place in meaning making. According to Lyons (1981:291),

...the term ‘context’ is social and falls within the scope of the sociolinguistically definable notion of the domain of discourse. Many authors would include within the social context of an utterance, not only the more obvious sociolinguistic variables (status, age, sex of the participants; formality or informality of the situation; etc), but also the author’s feelings and communicative intentions.

This scholar (ibid) is convinced that stylistic variation is largely shaped by the social context and is, thus, an aspect of register:

There is a long-standing dispute among literary critics and writers on aesthetics as to the degree to which the recognizably creative use of language by individual writers is constrained by social factors. Without prejudice to the resolution of this dispute, one can make the following purely definitional point: in so far as stylistic variation is determined, or conditioned, by the social context, it falls within the scope of the sociolinguistic concept of register.

A significant fact, however, is that, as Lyons(ibid) observes, “stylistic variation in general, and register variation in particular, is not simply a matter of vocabulary. It also affects grammar

and, as far as the spoken language is concerned, pronunciation.” No doubt, this viewpoint emphasizes the interdependence of the levels of language in relation to meaning making and aesthetics. In other words, no aspect or part of language study is an island. Thus, though a study of this nature privileges the role of a particular aspect of language (i.e. lexical sets) in text making, it is apparent that this role can only be performed by the given aspect in conjunction with all other aspects.

LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Over the years, scholars have propounded various theories to explicate the phenomenon of linguistic style in literary texts. The Russian Formalists and the Prague school of the 1920s, for instance, emphasized the aspect of linguistic foregrounding in literary style (Hawkes, 1977; Bennett, 1979; Lemon and Reis, 1965). The structuralists of the 1960's also stressed the importance of language in foregrounding the style of a given author (see Hawkes, 1977; Culler, 1975). Fowler contends that linguistic formalism highlights the poetic nature of literary language which is distinct from “ordinary” or “scientific” language. Noam Chomsky's (1957) Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) is also interested in the form of language use, rather than functional dimensions. This linguistic theory is particularly interested in deviation i.e. the departures from or violation of linguistic norms by literary scribblers as a device for stylistic foregrounding. Transformational grammar also focuses on the concepts of deep and surface structures, suggesting that the meaning of surface linguistic constructs lies in the deep structure.

The systemic functional Grammar which provides the theoretical framework for the present study, is subsumed within functional linguistics. The interest of this grammar, which revolves around the works of J. R. Firth, is not only in describing the structure of language, but also in explaining properties of discourse and its functions. Stylistics investigates language use by writers or speakers. In other words, it focuses on style i.e. the varying forms of linguistic performance by speakers and writers.. In Systemic functional grammar, language structure is analyzed along grammatical, phonological, lexical and semantic lines. Language function, on the other hand, is examined from three angles viz: ideational, interpersonal and textual. These are called the metafunctions of language which we adopted as the analytical model for the present study. The ideational metafunction refers to the field of discourse; the interpersonal, the tenor of discourse; the textual, the internal organization and commutative nature of a text. M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional grammar is particularly germane to the present study because the thematic implications of lexical choices in a text belong to the functional dimension of language use. The choice of this model is thus justified by the very high priority it gives to the sociological aspect of language (Berry, 1975:22), as opposed to Chomsky's mentalistic or psychological transformational grammar. This means that systemic linguistics places a high premium on the role contextual or socio-cultural variables play in determining the meaning of a text. Hence Bright (1992:120) explains that, the model accommodates the various “ways in which language is integrated with aspects of human society.” In his introduction to Okara's novel, Ravenscroft (1969) remarks that the text had a mixed reception and that some African reviewers castigated its unconventional use of the English language. The scholar adds that reviewers abroad were also partly nonplussed by the language and uncomfortable about its strange symbolism. This situation could have engendered the initial cold feet developed by critics, and the awful misunderstanding of the linguistic and cultural values and significance of *The Voice* in African Literature (Iyasere, 1982). However, Duruoha () observes that, “a

growing volume of critique on this novel is emerging.” Earlier linguistic works on the text include: Burness’ (1972) “Stylistic Innovation and the Rhythm of African life;” Okiwelu’s (1987) “Gabriel Okara: The Voice and Transliteration;” Scott’s (1990) “Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice*: The Non-Ijo Reader and the Pragmatics of Translingualism; and Duruoha’s “Form as Metaphor in Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice*.” The critical point, however, is that none of the works focuses on lexical choices in relation to thematization in the text. The present study seeks to fill this gap.

A Brief Biography of the Author

Born in 1921 in the Ijaw area of Bayelsa State of Nigeria, Gabriel Imomotimi Okara is one of the earliest exponents of African literature in English. After obtaining a Higher School Certificate (HSC) at Government College, Umuahia, he became a book-binder, autodidact, administrator, and Biafran nationalist. Senanu and Vincent (1976:103) comment that from this point in his life,

...okara developed a remarkable personality by dint of personal tuition, reflection and deep interest in literature generally and in the language and culture of his people.

From the foregoing comment, we can observe that, though he later studied journalism at Northwestern University, USA, Okara had developed interest in literature generally and his linguistic and cultural roots in particular at a very early age. This interest must have motivated him to do extensive research into these two areas of study. There is no doubt that this would have equipped him with the intellectual resources to fashion out a new linguistic idiom to interpret his bilingual and bicultural environment in *The Voice*. Apart from this novel, the writer is also one of the earliest and foremost poets in Africa. His poetry has won major local and international awards, including the Commonwealth poetry prize (1979) and the Nigeria (NLNG) prize for literature (2005).

A Synopsis of the text

We consider it imperative to briefly state the story of Okara’s *The Voice* and, by implication, determine the socio-cultural context of language use in the text. This is because the operational milieu of language has the potential to condition all aspects of its use. The story of *The Voice* centres around Okolo the protagonist, who returns to his home town Amatu, after studying abroad. He is nauseated by the degree of moral corruption, deceit and materialism which have taken over the society and decides to devote his life to a conscious struggle to re-instate sanity and moral order. He seeks to achieve this goal by going around (both in Amatu and Sologa), to ask the leaders and the people whether they have got ‘it’. ‘It’, in the context in which Okolo uses it, represents goodness, truth, fait; in fact, the meaning of life.

Chief Izongo and the elders (who rule the community) feel threatened by his knowledge and straightforwardness and by his awkward question, “have you got it?” They decide to declare him a lunatic and ostracize him. He is subsequently exiled to Sologa, where “the big one” and his ‘listeners’ are perennially on the look out for him. This means that evil, materialism, moral decay and corruption are also effectively represented in Sologa. Tebeowei, a reticent but wise elder of Amatu and the white supervisor of the “listeners” at Sologa, warn him to abandon his struggle for moral revival because of the inherent dangers, but he refuses. He finds a soulmate in Tuere, who is branded a village witch, and who eventually dies with him. But the search for

“it” will not die, as symbolized by the fire in the hearth at Tuere’s hut and Ukule’s highly emotional assurance: “Your spoken words will not die” (P.127)

From the foregoing synopsis of the text, it is apparent that Okolo and his disciples are pitted against the rulers of the communities of Amatu and Sologa, because of his opposing moral beliefs and worldview. The battle is clearly that between the angels of light and the angels of darkness. Okolo (which, translated, means “the voice”), is an epitome of moral rectitude and uprightness and, thus, represents LIGHT in the text, while the hierarchy of elders led by Izongo, represent DARKNESS. The language of the text is, thus, fashioned along the lines of this frosty and antagonistic relationship between the two major groups. This constitutes the context of situation which informs lexical organization in the text.

Textual Analysis

We shall now examine the thematic implication of lexical sets in the text. In this task, we shall be guided by Halliday’s (1966:159) view that lexical items can be “simple,” “compound” and “phrasal,” in relation to how they constitute units of meaning.

Lexical Sets

According to Lyons (1970), the notion of lexical set or semantic field was specifically hatched by language scholars to account for the observation that the meaning of lexical elements is specified only by their relatedness to and from other relevant elements. The overt implication of this thesis is that lexical items have a peculiar way of relating with each other to give the meaning or themes of a text. Lehrer 1974:15 also avers that,

*...the words of a language can be classified
into sets which are related to conceptual
fields and divide up the semantic space
or the semantic domain in certain ways.*

Against the foregoing background, we now lay the foundations of our analysis by compartmentalizing lexical items into their semantic fields or sets to etch or foreground the different thematic concerns of the text. Subsequently, we shall place the related lexical items or sets in specific textual contexts and explain how they contribute to thematic development in the text.

Lexical set suggesting the theme of corruption and moral decadence

Lexical set	Lexical category /Word class
Stinking thing	Adjective / noun
Smelling insides	Adjective / noun
Women and Money	Noun / Conjunction/ noun
Stealing	Verb
Drunkenness	Noun
Bad money	Adjective / noun
Turned world	Adjective / noun
Spoilt world	Adjective / noun

Lexical set suggesting the theme of materialism.

Lexical set	Lexical category / Word class
Cars	noun
Concrete houses	Adjective / noun
Money	Noun
Clothes	Noun
Engine canoes	Noun functioning as an Adjective /noun
Whiteman's houses	Possessive case / noun.

Lexical set suggesting the theme of hypocrisy

Surface-water things	Compound adjective /noun
Surface-water laughter	Compound adjective / noun

Lexical set suggesting government and politics.

Elders	Noun
Imperialists	Noun
Democracy	Noun
Adviser	Noun
Leader	Noun
Affairs	Noun
(political) destiny	(adjective) Noun
Manage	Verb
Loyal	Adjective
Support	Verb
Pledge	Verb
Leadership	Noun
Honourable	Adjective
Collective responsibility	Adjective / noun
Country	Noun
Police station	Noun (functioning as adjective) / noun
Politicians	Noun
Election	noun
The Law	Definite article / noun
Big man	Adjective / noun
Eldest man	Adjective / noun
Superintendent	Noun
The listeners	Definite article / noun
Right-hand man	Compound adjective / noun
Second leader	Adjective / noun
(police) constable	Adjective / noun

Lexical set suggesting darkness

Lexical set	Lexical category/Word class
Witch	Noun
Witchcraft	Noun
Bad footsteps	Adjective / noun
Ugly inside	Adjective / noun
Locked –up inside	Adjective / noun
Bad bottom	Adjective / noun
Bad thing	Adjective / noun
Strange behavior	Adjective / noun
Fear	Noun
Bad rhythms	Adjective
Crooked	Adjective
Darkness	Noun
Izongo	Noun
Elders	Noun
The listeners	Definite Article / noun
Adadi	Noun
Hate	Noun
Groping	Verb
The Big One	Def. art. / Adj. / noun

Lexical set suggesting place.

Lexical set	Lexical category/word class
Sologa	Noun
Amatu	Noun
Town	Noun
Village	Noun
Abroad	Noun
America	Noun
Germany	Noun

Lexical set suggesting time

Lexical Item	Lexical category/ word class
Past	Noun
The new time	Def. Art./Adj./Noun
Old times	Adjective/Noun
Time(of the Imperialists)	Noun/Prep/Def.Art./noun.
Many Many Years	Indef. Determiner/Indef.Det./noun
Twenty years	Det./noun
Thursday, 15 July	Noun/,Det./noun
One morning	Det./noun
Three days	Det./noun

Three nights	Det./noun
Night	Noun
Seventh morning	Det./noun
Returning time	Adj./noun
Time(not correct)	Noun
Time (When it is ripe)	Noun

Lexical items suggesting light.

Lexical set	Lexical category/ word class
“It”	Pronoun
Sweet inside	Adjective/noun
Church people	Adjective/noun
Jesus	Noun
Open inside	Adjective/noun
Okolo	Noun
Tuere	Noun
Ukule	Noun
Tiri	Noun
Okolo’s father	Adj./noun
Bumo (The wise)	Noun (Def.Art./Noun
White	White
Straight thing	Adj./noun
Truth	Noun
Honesty	Noun
Discipline	Noun
Self-sacrifice	Compound noun
Light	Noun

Lexical set suggesting religious beliefs/pantheon

Lexical set	Lexical Category
God	Noun
Jesus	Noun
Woyengi	Noun
Animists	Noun
Muslims	Noun
Christians	Noun
Amadosu	Noun
Kolokuma Egbesu	Adj./Noun
Benikurukuru	Noun
Ancestors	Noun

Lexical set suggesting education

Lexical items	Lexical category/ word class
Book	Noun
Know	Noun
Standard Six	Adj./Noun
Teaching	Verb
Read	Verb
School	Noun
M.A	Noun
Ph.D.	Noun
Universities	Noun
College	Noun
Big school	Adj./Noun
School house	Adj./Noun

Lexical sets and the two broad themes of light and darkness.

Having shown the different compartments of meaning, we can safely say that the meaning of the text is structured into two distinctive or broad themes: LIGHT AND DARKNESS. As we have stated elsewhere (see Yeibo, 2011:217), we can, therefore, establish that the novel thrives on a running battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. This is the superordinate conflict that subsumes every other conflict in the text. A careful study of the lexical sets highlighted above shows that they are made to reflect this reality or phenomenon. The result is that the author's choice of lexemes is aptly guided by their semantic significance in relation to textual function. The implication is that some sets like "Corruption and Moral decadence," "Materialism," "Darkness," "Government and Politics," e.t.c., can be categorized under Darkness while "Light", reflects LIGHT. On the other hand, lexical sets such as "Education" and "Time and Place" constitute the physical and social conditions which are being exploited and manipulated by both forces (i.e. Light and Darkness), for the projection and promotion of their parallel causes. Instructively, while Chief Izongo, the elders, the white superintendent of the "Listeners" at Sologa, the listeners, e.t.c. prosecute the agenda of "darkness", the agenda of "Light" and social change, on the other hand, is being championed by Okolo, the conscience (Voice) of society, in conjunction with Tuere and supported by Ukule. We shall now show some lexical sets suggesting the broad themes of DARKNESS and LIGHT in specific contexts in the text, to illustrate this point:

Lexical set suggesting "Darkness" in textual contexts

- a) The world is no longer straight. (p.49)
- b) Izongo.... is in darkness groping. (p.111)
- c) You mean my wanting you has a bad bottom? (p.36).
- d) Yesterday, I and the elders swept from this town a stinking thing. (p. 72)
- e) You are a witch be. (p.29)
- f) I know the world is now bad (p.37)
- g) Bad footsteps coming out of people's inside. (p.30)
- h) How do you expect to find 'it' when everybody surface-water things tell. (p.34)

- i) How do you expect to find 'it' when everybody has locked up his inside? (p.34)
- j) Their insides were smelling bad and hard at me. (p.34)
- k) It is a bad spirit that is entering everybody (p.48).
- l) Wickedness issued forth from Izongo (p.35)
- m) If it is man-killing medicine to you, then it is is bad more than badness which to me is nothing (p.37)

Lexical set suggesting "Light" in textual contexts

- (a) He will continue to speak the straight thing at all times (P. 52)
- (b) Your spoken words are true and straight (P. 49)
- (c) We are all church people (P.30)
- (d) We are all know-God people. (P.32)
- (e) If it is a thing with a good bottom, why not send a messenger? (P. 36)
- (f) Having an open inside makes me know a lot of things. (P. 55)
- (g) They do not see in their insides that you call a white thing white and not black. (P.55)

Having delineated the broad or superordinate themes of Light and Darkness in the text, by highlighting relevant lexical sets in the contexts in which they appear, we shall now illustrate other or attendant themes in the text by exploring or foregrounding the relevant lexical sets under the appropriate sub-headings:

The theme of hypocrisy

As indicated earlier, this is a novel that re-enacts the lingering conflict between Satan and the angels of light. We see ample lexical evidence or clues of Satan disguising as the angel of light. This shows the theme of hypocrisy which is so pervasive and dominant in the text as every character's thought, action or utterance in the text is shrouded in naked hypocrisy. In fact, it could be averred that, in this text, every character has his or her own meaning of words according to whether the character exudes a clean or corrupt attitude to life. The conflict of the text is implicitly generated by this phenomenon, as each character has his or her own interpretation of, or disposition towards life. Significantly, it is this interpretation or disposition that determines meanings. This position is obliquely implied when Okolo observes in the text inter alia:

*Yes, each one has a meaning of life to himself
and that is perhaps the root of the conflict (p.III).*

Clearly, there is a conflict of interest and, thus, a conflict of feeling and attitude which result in a conflict of language use. Obododimma (1989) captures this phenomenon, quite aptly, when he talks about doing battle with words, averring that the battle is a battle of meaning. Chief Izongo's retort to Okolo illustrates:

*My wanting you may be a man-killing medicine to
you. It is the best food for my body. (P. 37)*

No wonder then, that chief Izongo defines the “straight thing” as doing what comes out of one’s mouth. Hear him:

People know me as one who does the straight thing

and that is doing what has come out of my mouth

(P. 126).

The critical point is that a lot of such inverted usages abound in the novel and this is prompted by the sly and hypocritical attitude of characters, particularly those that represent the broad theme of darkness. This means that the reader has to be conversant with this inverted context to be able to accurately decode the meaning of lexical choices. We shall now show some examples from the text, and explain their situational contexts, to further illustrate this hyper-hypocritical posturing that is prevalent in Okara’s text:

- (a) We are all church people (P. 30).

A Christian is one who goes to church and respects the will of God. There is nothing in the novel to show that the people of Amatu are “church people.” Clearly, the lexical items smack of sheer hypocrisy as they are deliberately use or deployed to gain situational advantage. “We are all know-God people” (p.32) is another obvious example.

- (b) The root of this is that yesterday I and the Elders swept from this town a stinking thing (p.72)

Quite clearly, it is a vexatious irony that okolo, the conscience of the society of the text, should be described as a “stinking thing” by chief Izongo himself. It only shows the warped usage of lexical items in the text to suit pragmatic purposes in sync with Satan’s manoeuvring nature. This world in which everything is turned upside down is further etched by Chief Izongo’s rhetoric:

Only a mad man looks for ‘It’

in this turned word (p.72).

- (c) “Listen not to him, fellow Elders. His mouth is foul’ (p.45).

Perhaps, we may not be too surprised when we realize that Elder Abadi sees Okolo’s mouth as “ foul” only when the latter accuses him of merely making noise in order to share in the spoils of corruption.

- (d) We must have discipline and self–sacrifice in order to see this fight through to its logical conclusion (p. 43).

From the situational context, we find that what Elder Abadi means by “discipline and self – sacrifice” is to support Chief Izongo and his corrupt and depraved leadership.

- (e) “Your head is not correct” Chief Izongo shouted at Okolo (p.38).

Chief Izongo actually means that Okolo is mad to look for integrity and sanity in a “turned world.” The semantic import of the context actually shows that Chief Izongo

and his followers who manipulate societal gullibility and helplessness, are actually the “mad” people.

- (f) Our insides are soft like water.... Our eyes too are soft and they cannot fall on suffering... you must leave this town” (P. 47/48).

From the context, we realize that chief Izongo is not sincere. Actually, it is to avoid their (himself and the Elders) own suffering i.e. the suffering of their consciences, that Chief Izongo banishes Okolo from the village of Amatu. This is the height of hypocrisy.

- (g) “Yes, you are going mental” (P. 86). The foregoing statement was made by the white superintendent of the “listeners” at Sologa. He, like Chief Izongo and his cohorts, believe that Okolo is “mad” to seek uprightness in a “turned world”. In fact, Tebeowei clears the fog when he asserts inter alia:

It is a bad spirit that is entering everybody and if you do

not allow it to enter you, they say it is you that has it (P. 48)

The social implication of this statement is unambiguous. It means that the whole society is actually “mad.” It shows the high level of social hypocrisy and spiritual malady that permeate the entire society. It implicitly justifies the biblical statement that “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). In one bold stroke, the foregoing statement also explains the underlying motivation behind Chief Izongo’s conditional statement to Okolo:

Your hands will only be untied

if you agree to be one of us (P. 47).

Perhaps, the fundamental questions to ask are: why is he soliciting that a “lunatic” like Okolo agrees to be one of them? Discernibly, this shows that the Elder’s Council is for “mad” men. It is for “stinking” people. The second question is: why were they so keen and relieved when Okolo indicated that “he would keep his thoughts to his inside if his hands were untied?” (p. 46). Again, why did Chief Izongo say “the boy’s head is becoming correct” (P. 47), when Okolo asked how he was going to wake him from dreamland? Let us remember that Chief Izongo himself had cautioned Okolo that asking the bottom of things in the town will take him nowhere.

The theme of moral decadence and materialism

As we have earlier mentioned, the theme of moral decadence and materialism is also very prominent in the novel. It is closely related to the theme of hypocrisy which we have already explored. The implication is that this is another monstrous malady on which darkness thrives in the text. Against this background, we appreciate why Okolo is hated and rejected in both societies (i.e. Amatu and Sologa) in the sense that he preaches moral discipline and sanity which are contrary to the entrenched social order. We find some lexical clues in the following contexts:

- (a) Everybody’s inside is now filled with money, cars and concrete houses and money is being scattered all around (P.50).

- (b) Even the Whiteman's Jesus failed to make the world fine. So let the spoil world spoil (P.82).
- (c) Without money I can't find him. Money is inside everything in Sologa (P.104).
- (d) Yes, Abadi who has finished going to all big schools in this world did the same thing and had the same shallow inside that has room for nothing else but money and women (P.54).
- (e) A heap of money he was earning. She it was who had paid for her son's training and for this job paid twenty pounds and for his wife thirty pounds. Her son to whatever she said must listen (P.60)

Note: it is instructive to note here (item e) that Ebieri's mother-in-law believes that her son must do her bidding because all his material needs have been catered for by her. She believes that her son is in eternal debt to her and must readily or perfunctorily pay back with slavish obedience and loyalty.

- (f) Nothing has any more meaning but the shadow-devouring trinity of Gold, Iron and concrete. (P.89).
- (g) His son would soon finish and join the council and then make money like water flow (P.59)

Note: we can discern the instinctive emphasis on the underlined lexical items. In fact, the simile advertently foregrounds its prominence in the context.

- (h) He was a policeman and to him it was the best work on earth, especially if one has a lucky head. If you have a lucky head and if you catch a rich trader stealing... then on heaps of money you stand up to your knees. (P.60).

Note: in this society, a policeman has "a lucky head" if he arrests a big thief. He would simply share in the loot and raise his social standing. Certainly, this explains why the policemen at Sologa abandoned Okolo's case and chewed his statement, then "washed it down with a beer". (P.80).

- (i) He said he lost his job because he had no one to put hand for him to give the headman the twenty pounds he had asked for (P.61)
- (j) And he had himself in politics mixed and stood for election. He was succeeding but only his rivals had money to give and he had not. So he failed (P.61).

The theme of fear

The theme of fear is also very prominent in Okara's The Voice. There is ample lexical evidence that fear plays a pivotal role in determining human action in the text. A seeming re-enactment of the scenario in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), where Okonkwo's actions and inactions are traceable to the fear of being thought weak, like Unoka, his father, it is a whirlwind that engulfs the whole society of the text, undermining social status. There is ample evidence that the 'darkness' that pervades the entire society is precipitated by fear. Thus, it could be established that, even the ultimate tragedy in the novel (i.e the killing of Okolo and Tuere) is precipitated by fear, as Tuere observes:

It is the fear in your insides for one harmless man that is pushing
you to do this thing you want to do (p.121).

For illustrative purposes, let us look at some contextual examples:

- (a) You fear every little thing; you are startled by every little sound... (P .121).

Speaker: Tuere.

- (b) The world has turned and people's insides are ruled by fear. (P.74). Speaker: Tuere

- (c) We fear not the Elders... we fear no one. It is they who fear us. By fearing us they fear the straight thing (P.122).

Note: In this context, Tuere underscores the Biblical truth that darkness must run away from light. This explains why chief Izongo and his cohorts fear the messengers of light (Okolo and Tuere).

- (d) Maybe he is in darkness groping and grabs out of fear at anything that touches him (P.111).

Note: The subject here is Chief Izongo. Fear dictates his impulses.

- (e) And when you question they fear a tornado is going to blow down the beautiful houses they have built without foundations (p.89).

- (f) You are a man with strong chest. Why do you fear Chief Izongo? He is a man like you and me. I know that you are doing this thing... because you are walking with fear behind you... (P.41). Speaker: Okolo (addressing Chief Izongo's messengers).

- (g) If this the ears of Izongo enters we will fall from our jobs (P.25). Speaker: 2nd messenger to his colleagues, expressing the fear of losing their jobs.

- (h) So do not fear if it is the straight thing you are doing or talking (P.106). Speaker: Okolo's father, to Okolo. Okolo derived his inspiration and strength from this paternal source.

- (i) Okolo looked at Izongo and fear snakes towards Izongo's inside... (P.46). This context implies that darkness always quakes before light.

- (j) "Laugh." He commanded, and they opened their mouths showing their teeth like grinning masks and made a noise that could hardly pass for laughter. (P.41). Speaker: Chief Izongo, to his Elders.

Note: Laughter is a spontaneous, individual action. To be forced to laugh is a clear token and dramatization of inner fear.

The theme of integrity and truth

The theme of integrity and truth is also dominant in Okara's text. It has been established that the novel is a battle field between light and darkness. Hence, on the other end of the spectrum,

we see true light glowing in another set of lexical choices. These choices are made with what one might call a “plain inside,” i.e. without any conscious or unconscious effort to becloud or ambiguate the conventional meaning. The following contexts serve as illustrative examples:

- (a) You have your M.A., PhD but have not got ‘it’ (P.44).

Note: This is an undisguised accusation made by Okolo. The subject is Elder Abadi, who, in spite of his towering intellectual accomplishments, throw propriety, decency, and integrity to the winds. The point is that he is a disappointment to the world of decency and integrity, as the first underlined words (i.e. M.A., Ph.D.) were supposed to have refined him.

- (b) He will continue to speak the straight thing at all times (P.52).

Note: This statement summarizes Okolo’s resolve to champion the truth, in spite of whose ox is gored, and at all times.

- (c) Your spoken words are true and straight (P.49)

Note: we had earlier indicated that Elder Tebeowei appreciates the integrity and value of Okolo’s crusade for societal regeneration but resigns to fate, insisting that there is nothing he or Okolo could do about it.

- (d) Having an open inside makes one know a lot of things (P.55).

Note: Tuere implies here that integrity and truth has enabled her to assess the inner motivations and impulses of Izongo and his cohorts, without prejudice. The inference is that objectivity opens up a world of spiritual knowledge and insight.

- (e) They did not see it in their inside’s that you could call a white thing white and not black. (P.55).

Note: In this context, Tuere implies that Chief Izongo and his cohorts actually underestimated Okolo’s intellectual prowess and integrity. They had actually assumed that, like Abadi, he would promote their cause of deceit, corruption and hypocrisy.

The role of place, time and education in thematization

In the discussion so far, we have shown how lexical sets have been deployed in Okara’s *The Voice* to aid or facilitate thematization, we shall now focus on how lexical sets which denote place, time and education help the author to convey the varied themes of the text. The two major places delineated in the novel are Amatu and Sologa. One is urban, the other rural. Both are evidently exposed to the same social quagmire. Tebeowei paints the exact picture of both places when Okolo indicates his desire to leave for Sologa, in the hope that life would be better there:

You think so?... Things are worse there and a person like you cannot stay there.... (P.51).

Apart from the two major places mentioned above, we also see references to “outside the country,” “Germany,” “America” and “England,” e.t.c., in specific contexts, for instance:

- (a) I have been to England, America, Germany.... (P.43). Speaker: Abadi.

- (b) They did not think in their insides that you could call a white thing white..... since you've never been outside the country (P.55). Speaker: Tuere, to Okolo.

As we have already mentioned, the concept of time is also very important in this novel. It enables Okara to draw a necessary boundary between the past and the present. It also enables the writer to draw a comparative line between the two. This is very relevant to the thematic thrusts of the text. Below are lexical items that indicate a few examples:

- (a) Things have changed, the world has turned and they are now the elders. No one in the past has asked for 'it' Why should Okolo expect to find 'it' now that they are the Elders (P.24).
- (b) But Okolo did not join them in their joy because what was there was no longer there and things had no more roots (P.23).
- (c) I know the world is now bad. (P.37).
- (d) Our father's insides always contained things straight. They did straight things. Our insides were also clean and we did the straight things until the new time came (P.50). Speaker: Okolo, addressing Tebeowei.
- (e) He will continue to speak the straight thing at all times, though Woyengi knows, it is the hardest thing to do in these times (P.52).
- (f) Some of you were fishermen, palm cutters and some of you were nothing in the days of the imperialists. But now all of you are Elders and were managing our own affairs and destinies (P.43).

Note: The foregoing statement was made by Elder Abadi, to the Elders. It hinges on colonialism and self governance or independence. The lexical set here shows that this text is set in post-independence Nigeria.

As we have stated elsewhere (see Yeibo, 2011:217), it is absolutely pertinent to underscore that, like the Biblical statement "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my word shall not pass away (Luke 21:33), the spoken word of truth in this text is portrayed as timeless. And just like Solomon's "vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2), material things in the text are portrayed as ephemeral or transient. There is also the concept of future time. Below are lexical choices that confirm this hypothesis in specific contexts:

- (a) Money may be lost forever but words, teaching words, are the same in any age (P.52).
- (b) Your spoken words will not die (P.127).
- (c) So Okolo turned in his inside and saw that his spoken words will not die.... (P. 110).
- (d) In front of Izongo, I will say this when the time is correct (P.93).

Note: the speaker is Tiri, the messenger (the son of Bumo, the wise). The spoken words of Okolo have grown in him.

- (e) If only Okolo would wait until the time is correct (P.96). Speaker: Tuere, expressing her anxiety over Okolo's fate.

- (f) Okolo has spoken. I will speak when the time is correct... (P.96). Speaker: Tiri, the messenger.

Lexical choices in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* also show that formal education can be exploited both positively and negatively. While Okolo finds authority in his educational status, for the pursuit of truth and integrity, Abadi and Tebeowei do not exploit its potentials for societal advantage. No wonder, Okolo's father cautioned him, before his death:

I wanted you to know book because of the changing world... Whiteman's education is not everything (P.106).

And Tuere completes this view when she tells Okolo:

*Well, I have a head though I have not entered the
doors of a school house, but having an open
inside makes one know many things (P. 55).*

Instructively, we see ample evidence in the text of how Tuere used her "native intelligence" to complement the efforts of Okolo to sanitize society. Let us now examine lexical choices that show what one may term "Okolo's Education"

- (a) You have hour M.A., PhD., but you have not got 'it' (P.44).

Note: Here Okolo reminds Abadi that he has attained the highest level of formal education but portrays no scintilla of moral refinement.

- (b) Yes, Abadi who has finished going to all big schools in the world... had the same shallow inside that has room for nothing else but women and money (P. 54) Speaker: Tuere

- (c) Let my eyes be blind, as they are to your books, instead of going to your school and coming out with a head and an inside like those he (Abadi) has (P. 54).

- (d) When he came out of school and returned home to his people... Okolo did not join them in their joy because what was there was no longer there and things had no more roots (P. 23).

- (e) I went to school only a little, but I have killed many many more years in this world than you have... these happening things make my inside bitter, perhaps more bitter than yours. But there is nothing I alone or you and I can do to change their insides.

Note: it is instructive, from the lexical choices used here, that Tebeowei, with the benefit of "little" formal education, age and natural intelligence, appreciates the debauchery and hypocrisy that pervades the society, but considers the situation totally helpless.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing discourse, we have shown that lexical sets or fields play a major role in thematization in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* and that this is a significant aspect of the linguistic style of the text. This is because, as Schriffin(1987) put it, language is a vehicle through which

a range of different functions can be realized. What is particularly noteworthy in this study is that it further establishes the fact that language can only perform its inherently varied functions in human communication in relation to the definite pragmatic contexts in which it operates or is deployed. Essentially, this fact informed our adoption of M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional model in the sense that it accommodates the various "ways in which language is integrated with aspects of human society" (Bright, 1992:120). Thus, the themes of Darkness, Light, Education, Hypocrisy, Moral Decadence and Materialism, and Fear, etc, which the lexical sets highlight are actually etched or foregrounded by the specific sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic contexts in which the text is situated and which help to clarify and define them.

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