

## THE NIGERIA'S NATIONAL ANTHEM: A TEXT LINGUISTIC EXPLORATION

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**ABSTRACT:** *Linguists always try to describe the way in which words and sentences are arranged in order to result in a comprehensible text. Analysing text of any kind is a very useful method for the aim of describing language functions. However, a paradigm shift in the study of text, from mere analysis of sentences to the function that each linguistic element performs in contributing to the comprehension of the text, has opened up different research areas in which language facilities can be applied to daily human life and be made to solve notable societal problems. Though some researchers have been able to find out stylistic values in the National Anthems of some nations, this paper focuses on the Nigeria's National Anthem with the aim of exploring its linguistic elements for optimal understanding and comprehensibility. This is done within the principles of grouping, prominence and cohesion stipulated in an Integrated Theory of Text Linguistics (ITTL) championed by Awoyale (1991). This paper is able to show that each line of the Nigeria's National Anthem has a relatively emphatic focus promoting and encouraging nationhood. Also, being a genre of poetry the National Anthem is characterised by few words expressing inexhaustible meanings. It also establishes that the structure and functions of language intermingle in a multifaceted context of communication, and validates the expressive and emotive nature of the National Anthem.*

**KEYWORDS:** National anthem, Text linguistics, ITTL.

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### INTRODUCTION

The National anthem of any nation can be described as symbol that portrays the uniqueness and characteristic identity of a nation usually rendered in lyrics. It is made up of clear statements that are instrumental to the cohesion among citizen towards accomplishing national goals. Kellen (2003:166) believes that anthems have always been sung in a way that shows the permanence of the nations. Kellen notes that "the anthems of nations participate in a dynamic nexus between, on the one side, official and unofficial cultures and real/imaginary schema of power and identity, on the other hand". Kyridis et al. (2009:5) stress the significance of the national anthem by describing it as "the most important symbol of every modern nation(al) state the lyrics of which include reference to the people's glorious past, the love and respect to homeland and its symbols" According to them, anthems provide the strongest and clearest statement of national identity which serve as modern totem as they bear special relationship with the countries or nations they represent. Oluga et al. (2015:1) also agree with the fact that anthems are usually carefully worded and poetically articulated/composed for them to specially convey their intended messages or meanings to their target audiences, especially the citizens of the nation or countries in question so as to have the desired effects. The functional exploration of such poetic language that exhibits and inspires national identity and national cohesion is, therefore, worthy of academic attention.

Oluga et al. (2015) delved into the various nations' anthem with respect to critical discourse analysis. The two stanzas of the Nigerian National Anthem composed and directed by Ben Odiase in 1978 have not received the attention of text linguists; the vacuum this paper stands

to fill. The genre of poetry itself stands out because it is readily available to express heavy emotions, feelings and thoughts in few words. It is a rapt overflow of feelings and emotions recollected in few words hence the interest of a text linguist.

### **Text Linguistics**

Text linguistics has to do with the description and analysis of extended texts (either spoken or written) in communicative contexts. It can be defined as the study of text as a product (text grammar) or as a process (theory of text). The text-as-a-product approach is focused on the text cohesion, coherence, topical organization, illocutionary structure and communicative functions; the text-as-a-process approach studies the text production, reception and interpretation (Dolník and Bajžíková 1998). Text can be understood as an instance of (spoken or written) language use (an act of parole), a relatively self-contained unit of communication. As a 'communicative occurrence' it meets seven criteria of textuality (the constitutive principles of textual communication): cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality, and three regulative principles of textual communication: efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness (De Beaugrande and Dressler 1981).

A look at the development of linguistic theories in this century shows a paradigm shift from a sentential perspective, as expressed primarily by Chomsky and his many followers, to a more textual or discursal approach championed by Van Dijk, De Beaugrande & Dressler and Tannen. One of the main reasons for this shift was the limitations that the study of sentences held for linguistic study, expressed as follows by Givon in Carstens (1997:17):

... it has become obvious to a growing number of linguists that the study of the syntax of isolated sentences, extracted without natural context from the purposeful constructions of speakers is a methodology that has outlived its usefulness.

Therefore, what language does and how it does it is of paramount interest to a text linguist. One of the ways in which language functions is evident in the relations of textual elements within the text (intra-text) and outside the text (extra-text). It can also be seen in the experiential disposition of the language and that of the relationship between the interlocutors.

Bearing in mind the above explanation, scholars have explored various aspects of textual world in respect of the functionality of language. They include: Halliday (1973), Halliday and Hassan (1976), Van Dijk (1972), Gutwinski (1976), Petofi (1976), Fish (1980), De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), Firth (1986) and many others. Also, in English as a Second Language environment like Nigeria, we also have scholars like: Ayodabo (1995), Ajayi (2002, 2014), Olateju (2005), Opeibi (2007) and Omotunde (2014), Agbeleoba (2014, 2017) among others who have worked on notable areas which include cohesion in literary texts, newspaper editorials, newspaper advertisement, etc. The functionality of the lyrics of National Anthem, especially, that of Nigeria has not been explored.

### **Framework**

This study adopts an Integrated Theory of Text Linguistics (ITTL) as initiated by Awoyale (1991). It offers the most suitable model in that it describes the features of text based on the situation and the strategies utilised as tools of description. The principles of ITTL to be adopted

are grouping, prominence and cohesion. Grouping involves how a writer/speaker selects and assembles the participants, events and language elements in the text. Participants may be human being, animals or inanimate object. Writer assigns role to a particular participant to bring about certain event. The principle of prominence upholds the fact that the grouped and connected participants, events and language elements in a text cannot be of equal importance or status. It takes care of the various roles assigned to the participants ranging from minor to major and functional participants. In order to investigate prominence of participants in a text, space allocation, depth of treatment, location and placement are often considered. Principle of cohesion investigates how language elements in the text are connected. It sees a text as a combination of constituent parts (sentences, words, phonemes, etc.) selected from repository of all possible constituent parts (code).

On the interrelationship of the principles of ITTL, Ajayi (2014:10) opines that:

Participants and events form the major tools which a writer/speaker uses to create his art. It is the duty of the author to select, assemble and classify participants and events and connect or link them together to form a single continuous line.

It is therefore of great interest in this study to uncover the pattern of selection, assemblage and classification that the writer adopts in the text. We will rely on the tenets of cohesion to measure the result of the interrelation among the principles of grouping and prominence. Semantic interpretation is however, the ultimate outcome of a text that shows its overall significance.

## Data and Discussion

The data for this study is the Nigerian National Anthem. The National Anthem is made up of two stanzas; each consisting of nine (9) lines each.

### THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

1. Arise, O Compatriots,  
Nigeria's call obey  
To serve our Fatherland  
With love and strength and faith.
2. The labour of our heroes past  
Shall never be in vain,
3. To serve with heart and might  
One nation bound in freedom,  
Peace and unity.
  
4. O God of creation,  
Direct our noble cause;
5. Guide our leaders right
6. Help our youths the truth to know,
7. In love and honesty to grow;  
And living just and true;

8. Great lofty heights attain;  
 9. To build a nation  
 Where peace and justice shall reign.

### Grouping

The principle of grouping concerns the selection and assemblage of participants and events employed by the writer.

### Grouping of Identified Participants

S/N	Participants	No. of Occurrences	No. of Lines
1	Compatriots	1	1
2	Nigeria	1	1
3	Fatherland	1	1
4	Love	2	2
5	Strength	1	1
6	Faith	1	1
7	Labour	1	1
8	Heroes past	1	1
9	Heart	1	1
10	Might	1	1
11	Nation	2	2
12	Freedom	1	1
13	Peace	2	2
14	God of creation	1	1
15	Noble cause	1	1
16	Leaders	1	1
17	Youth	1	1
18	Truth	1	1
19	Honesty	1	1
20	Lofty heights	1	1
21	Justice	1	1

The above table shows frequency distribution of number of occurrences and amount of space occupied by each participant.

### Grouping of Identified Events

S/N	Events	No. of Sentences	No. of Lines
1	The persona awakens loyal countrymen to heed the national call to serve.	1	2
2	The persona describes the attributes of the service to be rendered.	2	3
3.	The persona motivates countrymen to be committed to the cause of service to the nation started by heroes past	1	1
4	The persona describes the ultimate goal of their service which is to build a nation characterised by peace and justice	2	5
5	The persona offers a congregational prayer	3	7

The table shows the frequency distribution of the sentences and lines allocated to each event.

### Prominence

In textual analysis, prominence can be viewed as linguistic highlighting in a way that certain elements of a text stand out. It is also note worthy that the grouped participants and events cannot be of equal status and importance. Here, we look at the rate of flow and quantity of information, recurrence and status of assigned roles as signals of prominence.

In terms of sentence structure, the Nigerian National Anthem can be divided into nine complete thoughts; all developing the central idea of nation building. Each of the two stanzas presents a unique structure where the subject (NP) only appears in the first line. "Arise, O compatriots" is made up of NP + VP but the NP also takes care of the next line "*Nigeria's call obey*" and the third line "To serve our fatherland". In a paraphrase:

*O Compatriots arise (and) obey Nigeria's call to serve our fatherland with love and strength and faith.* This forms the topic sentence in stanza one while in the second stanza, *O God of Creation direct our noble cause* is positioned as the focal point of other sentences in the stanza.

Three main participants in the two stanzas are given prominence over other participants. They are: *Love, peace* and *nation*. Each of these participants occurs twice in the two stanzas. It can be deduced that the attention of the persona is on love and unity to build Nigeria as a nation. While building loyalty, dedication and trust in the citizenry, the persona believes that the place of love and unity are important in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria.

### Cohesion

According to Halliday & Hasan (1976), cohesion refers to the quality that binds the various elements of a text together. They identify two broad classifications of cohesive devices that are

evident in any unified text. They are: lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction).

Lexical Cohesion is evident in the Nigeria's National Anthem. The *Nigeria's call* in line two of the first stanza relates directly to lines 4 and 5 as well as lines 8, 9 and 10. In fact, you gain the understanding that nature of the *call* is *to serve our fatherland with love and strength and faith*. The second attribute of the *call* is *to serve with heart and mind one nation bound in freedom, peace, and unity*. Also in stanza 2, though there was no mention of the word *call*, it is implicit to understand that it centres on a *Call* on God rather than calling on the *compatriots* as in stanza 1. There is also a lexical tie in the openings of each line of the prayer from line 2:

Direct our noble cause

Guide our leaders right

Help our youth the truth to know

The three openers of the lines above perform the same function to different category of people. They all perform the function of assisting the objects of the sentences as in, *cause* can only be directed; *leaders* can be guided in decision making; *and youths* can be helped to grow in the knowledge of truth.

Grammatical cohesion was not prominent but the few ties that were used were employed strategically. However, conjunctives are visible and played prominent role in realizing a unified text. The use of *and*, *with* are frequent in the two stanzas of the National Anthem. Serve our father land *with Love and strength and faith*; serve *with heart and mind*; peace *and unity*; love *and honesty*; *and living just and true*; peace *and justice*. The cohesive devices employed were positioned to perform generative functions.

Generally, the few lines of Nigeria's National Anthem reveal so much about the history and structure of the country as well as factors that can bring about unity of purpose. They made it evident that the effort of past leaders had been geared towards unity and every Nigerian must uphold the tenets of heroes past. The lyrics also showed that love and peace are vital in ensuring that Nigeria remains one despite her cultural diversity. Pieces of information in the Anthem tend to reinforce each other and ensure coherence and unity in the text.

## Conclusion

The Nigeria's National Anthem is both a plea to Man (stanza 1) and a plea to God (stanza 2). Eighty percent of the participants are of virtues. It is, therefore, notable that a true Nigerian should always exhibit virtues highlighted as participants while prayers were offered to God for those ones that can only be divinely impacted. The genre of poetry is often characterised by few words expressing inexhaustible meanings as we have seen in the Anthem.

Conclusively, we have been able to establish that each line of the Nigeria's National Anthem has a relatively emphatic focus. The composer combines the techniques of grouping, prominence and cohesion in organizing the text in a complementary way, so that shifts are created, to some extent, through the role assigned to the participants to bring some linguistic materials into greater prominence than others. Words like *unity*, *love*, *loyalty* and *peace* are indicators of the fact that Nigeria is a heterogeneous society that needs these elements to

maintain her nationhood. This affirms the fact that the structure and functions of language intermingle in a multifaceted context of communication, and validates the expressive and emotive nature of the National Anthem.

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