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NEGOTIATING THE NOTION OF AFFECT IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THERE WAS A COUNTRY*

Ige Nafiu, Ade Adeniji Ph. D, & Oyetunji, Sunday A.

Department of English & Literary Studies Ladoke Akintola University of Technology PMB 4000,
Ogbomoso, Nigeria

Corresponding Author

Email: igenafiu@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Civil war writings in Nigeria are fictional and non-fictional works that project complex socio-political conflicts. Observation has shown that as much as works abound in this direction in linguistic scholarship, very little attention has been paid to the effectual aspects of the Nigerian civil war memoirs. To fill this vacuum therefore, this study sets out to examine the notion of effects in Chinua Achebe's *There was a Country* to examine how Achebe employs language to weep up emotions for the Biafrans through Teun Van Dijk's Social Cognitive Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), given that CDA sees language as social practice to address power relations, discourse as constituting society and culture, thereby addressing the challenge, power relations or social problems. We found that the distinctive features of affective discourse as the thematization of sympathy and suffering as a superordinate lexeme characterize the memoir. The values are manifested through such linguistic markers as nominalization, generalizations, and foregrounding of such lexical words as death, despair, suffering, and bitterness to effectively account for the discourse of exclusion thereby projecting effectual values of sadness, despair, and sympathy reflecting the different ideological preferences in Nigerian civil war memoirs. The identified aspects of effects are employed to perform three functions in the text: they drive the attention of the audience to see social actors as victims, hide the excluded social actors, and thematize sympathy. This study significantly fills the dearth of work on aspects of effect in Nigerian civil war memoirs, and sets a template for such analysis in linguistic scholarship.

KEYWORDS

Suffering, death, despair, Nigerian civil war, affect



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1. Introduction

Civil war period in Nigeria was turbulent. It was a period of depression, frustration, and trauma. The war brought tense and unstable situation in the political, economic as well as military circles in Nigeria. Though it was fought fifty-five years ago, its trauma is surprisingly still fresh in the minds of the citizenry. This attests to the reaction of a Nigerian-born American Professor Uju Anya who wished late Queen Elizabeth II “excruciating pain” while she was dying. Anya premised his reaction on the steps taken by the Queen during the civil war in Nigeria. Anya in a dysphemistic expression reacted thus:

“if anyone expects me to express anything but disdain for the monarch who supervised a government that sponsored the genocide that massacred and displaced half my family and consequences of which those alive today are still trying to overcome, you can keep wishing upon a star”.
(The Punch, 9th September, 2022)

All these reactions make one to wonder whether the Nigerian civil war has really ended. It has been observed that writers keep refreshing the memory of Nigerians and the world at large about the civil war. Given this background, this paper attempts to employ linguistic indices to examine affect as an aspect of social practice in the Nigerian civil war (6th July, 1967- 15th January, 1970), also known as the Biafran war memoirs. The civil war is a product of political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions following the United Nations formal decolonization of Nigeria. Immediate causes of the civil war could be traced to a military coup, a counter-coup, and anti-Igbo policies.

Affect is an emotional discourse representation which is mainly informed by appraisal framework, a theory which emerged from Systemic Functional Linguistics (White, 2011). It is an instrument for systematic analysis of evaluation. One of the functional roles of systemic linguistics from which appraisal framework emerged is that language issues can be best explained by reference to the social functions performed by language and reference to the functional demands placed upon language by its users as well (White, 2011). The social functions of language are tagged ideational, textual and interpersonal. From the foregoing three social functions of language, the interpersonal functionality is connected to the appraisal framework. The duo address aspects of language by which speakers/writers construct for themselves particular identities or personae and by which they position themselves and those they address.

This study views affect as significant social positions in Nigerian civil war memoirs. Affect, within the context of civil war, is an exposition of attitudes and feelings that civil war memoir writers have towards the circumstances that led to the civil war in Nigeria and the currencies that Nigerians faced during the war. This paper examines how Achebe has used discourse structures to represent his feelings. This work also shows how the author, in *There was a Country*, aligns and dis-aligns himself to a particular event, person and position.

Previous studies on the civil war narratives in Nigeria reveal that scholars have largely concentrated on literary studies of civil war narratives (Ezeigbo, 1986; McLuckie, 1990; Iyango, 1997; Ogunpitan, 2003; Oriaku, 2005; Agboola, 2009; Akazue, 2009; Dahunsi, 2009) and historicization (Akin, 2021). All these are literary and historical explorations. To the best of our knowledge, little attention has been given to linguistic analysis of civil war narratives in linguistic scholarship, for instance, Oha (1994), Osunbade (2011), Adeyanju and Olaniyan (2018), and Ige

(2017; 2019) are few existing works in this direction. Notably, there is dearth of work on linguistic investigation of Nigerian civil war memoirs with particular reference to affect and ideology which the war generated. Also, our observation reveals that no work has employed Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive approach to address Nigerian civil war discourse. This study therefore fills this vacuum in linguistic scholarship by examining the critical discourse strategies in the sampled texts with a view to showcasing the features of affect and the functions they are used to perform in the text. Next section is an exploration of the theoretical frameworks applied in this study.

2. Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This study adopts descriptive research design. The descriptive research is capable of handling both qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative aspect of descriptive research design is mainly used here for our analysis. The approach as shown in the analysis relies on discourse theory to create systematic explanations of context-driven and ideological meanings in the Nigerian civil war memoirs. In all, through affectual discourse structures in the text, this research design provides answers to personal and group positions about the Nigerian civil war memoirs. In this study, we examine divergent feelings in discourse structures of ideologies, the production of power as form of ideologies, and the reflection of power in discourses in purposively selected utterances in the text through the Critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework.

CDA is a social practice and method of systematically investigating the use of language and its contribution to forming and sustaining social practice and for analysis of how language can contribute to reproducing or transforming social problems. CDA scholars commonly view language as a form of social practice, and are concerned with systematically investigating hidden power relations and ideologies embedded in discourse. They are likewise dedicated to examining the social and material consequences of discourse. CDA is concerned how discourse is socially shaped and socially constitutive. Also, CDA researchers concentrate on the challenges of power relations, examination of social and material consequences of discourse. They maintain an explicit impetus to intervene actively in, or challenge the power relations or social problems under investigation.

CDA concerns the analysis of how language is used and can be a means to criticize or complement social events or practice. Several notable CDA scholars have attempted to outline methodological processes in an effort to strengthen the tenets of CDA and provide relevant useful strategies for analytical purpose. Of note is the fact that some CDA scholars such as Teun Van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and James Paul Gee have come up with various opinions on CDA. However, some of them have a central consensus that amidst many possible forms and genres of semiotic meaning, much CDA scholarship tends to focus on textual genres of discourse.

For the purpose of this study, Van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory is considered more relevant and consequently adopted. Van Dijk's view is that a lot of the positions found in prejudicial discourse can also be found in the domains of political views, class, religions, gender, caste, world region, language, or any other means by which groups of individuals may be stereotyped, oppressed or marginalized (Van Dijk 1993: 265).

Teun van Dijk is largely known with the socio-cognitive model. He sees it as "a type of discourse analysis that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts" (Van Dijk, 2001:352). Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model sees the cognitive and social dimensions as defining the

relevant context of discourse. In this regard, concerns of social dimensions, understanding the nature of social power and dominance become essential presupposition. Van Dijk submits further that “modern power” has also got a major cognitive dimension. Such mind management, or gaining access to the public mind is conceptualized in terms of social cognition in the meaning of “socially shared representations of societal arrangements, groups and relations, as well as mental operations such as interpretation, thinking and arguing, inferencing and learning” (Van Dijk 1993: 257).

Though social cognitions are embedded in the minds of individuals, they are social because they are shared and presupposed by members of a group. They monitor social action and interaction, and underlie the social and cultural organization of the society as a whole. Indeed, “ideologies are the fundamental social cognitions that reflect the basic aim, interests and values of groups” (Van Dijk 1993:258).

The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, July 6, 1967 – January 13, 1970, was a political conflict caused by the attempted secession of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra. The conflict was the result of economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria. Like many other African nations, Nigeria was an artificial structure initiated by the British which had neglected to consider religious, linguistic, and ethnic differences. When Nigeria won independence from Britain in 1960, the population of 60 million people consisted of nearly 300 differing ethnic and cultural groups. More than fifty years ago, Great Britain carved an area out of West Africa containing hundreds of different groups and unified it, calling it Nigeria. Although the area contained many different groups, three were predominant: the Igbo in the southeast, the Hausa-Fulani in the northern part of the country and, the Yoruba in the southwestern part. The causes of the Nigerian civil war were exceedingly complex. There are lots on memoirs in respect of the civil war. However, our choice of Achebe’s *There was a Country* was purposeful and moreover, it offers us the opportunity to examine the concerns of CDA relative to identified social problem, towards identifying the consciousness, objectivity, formality, thematic connection, and pragmatic presuppositions in our chosen topic. We examine and analyze the excerpts in the selected texts taking into cognizance the speaker and his or her socio cultural background within the context of what is said, how it is said and the factors responsible for the use of language.

3. Chinua Achebe 1930 - 2013

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe was born at Ogidi in the South- Eastern Nigeria around 1930s. In 1936, Achebe was admitted to Saint Philips’ Central School and also in 1944, Achebe sat for entrance examinations and was accepted at both the Dennis Memorial Grammar School in Onitsha and Government College in Umuahia. For so many reasons, Achebe elected to go to Government College, Umuahia. After this, he was admitted in the University College, now University of Ibadan. He won a bursary to study medicine which he abandoned and changed to humanities.

Achebe won a scholarship for undergraduate studies at the University of Ibadan. After graduation, he worked for the Nigeria Broadcasting Service and moved to the metropolis of Lagos. He became recognized internationally as a result of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* in the late 1950s. When the region of Biafra (South Eastern Nigeria) broke away from Nigeria in 1967, Achebe moved with Biafran independence and acted as an ambassador of Biafrans. During Achebe’s alignment with Biafra, the destruction of the Igbo as a result of starvation and violence of the war remained strong in his mind as well as the feelings of other Igbos. This is felt in their writing and emotions on civil war narratives in Nigeria

There was a Country is Chinua Achebe's latest and last novel. It is also the only comprehensive novel written by Achebe on civil war in Nigeria. It was published fifty four years after his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*. The six years immediately preceding the civil war was used to write three novels: *No Longer at Ease*-1960, *Arrow of God* (1964), and *A Man of the People* (1964). After the publication of *A Man of the People*, Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). *There was a Country* is a detailed narrative of the civil war relative to the prevailing socio- political and religious challenges in Nigeria. The book was published in 2012.

4. Analysis

The section is an analysis of Nigerian civil war memoirs (value positions) found in the extracts. It is only aspects that reflect affectual values that are subjected to analysis. Such distinctive features of affective discourse as thematization of sympathy and suffering as a super ordinate lexeme are found in the text and are cursorily examined. First; we look at thematization of sympathy.

4.1 Thematization of sympathy

Linguistic features of embedded nominalization; generalization, backgrounding, and hyponymy are found to project sympathy as one of the thematic preoccupation in the text. Let us examine excerpt 1 and 2 below:

Excerpt 1: But the *realities* of war, the *death*, the *despair*, the *suffering* soon dampened ... These *tragedies* continued to unfold we used a different language and memory of *death* and *despair*, *suffering* and *bitterness*.... The *suffering* of the children was the most heart *wrenching*.
(*There was a Country*, pp.200 emphasis added)

In excerpt 1 above, the choice of embedded nominalization and generalization creates compacted emotional messages for the readers or audience. The excerpt reveals a foregrounding of such doom related lexical choices as death, despair, suffering, and bitterness targeted at arousing readers' consciousness on the evil effect of the Nigerian civil war. Achebe's choice of these words gives exposee to the readers to imagine the extent of the despair that the Biafran Soldiers pass through. The mention of death is an indication of massacre at the war front and death related occurrences occasioned by hunger, deprivation of health related amenities, which has come to live with the Biafrans.

With death comes despair as there is nowhere to run for shelter. The Biafrans are being killed every now and then. There are corpses all over the streets. This alone generates the atmosphere of despair that settles over all and sundry in the embryonic country. The despair instilled in the people is further pressed by the suffering inflicted by the civil war, as such; bitterness overrides the mood of the people. These of course, are the realities of war.

According to Woods (2006:73), when a process is backgrounded, the effects will be foregrounded. A close look at excerpt 1 above reveals that Achebe deliberately employs the lexical choices of "death", "despair", "suffering" and "bitterness" to foreground what he calls the realities of war. The foregrounding of these lexical choices, no doubt, generates sympathy in the reader for the Biafrans. All these are employed by Achebe to project affectual value of despair.

Nominalization in form of hyponymy relation is further employed in the text to show the pains of the Biafrans which eventually leads to protest and solidarity. Let us examine excerpt 2 below:

Excerpt 2: The destruction of an entire people is an immoral objective even in the most of wars. It can never be justified, it can never be condoned. (*There was a Country*, pp.231)

The destruction of Igbo is condemned by Achebe as an immoral objective, but functionally, raises consciousness and sensitizes the psyche of the readers. This is achieved through Achebe’s nominal lexical choice “condoned” in “*it can never be condoned*” (the civil war). Going over the extract, we found that Achebe uses repetition in form of structural parallelism to depict and emphasize the pains of the civil war on the Igbo. The phrase “*it can never be*” in the excerpt indicates the readiness and impetus to action which the present generation, that are the recipients of his personal history of Biafra, should possess. Achebe here stylistically projects the picture that the entire Igbo have been destroyed during the civil war. In all, the nominalizations which mark the effects of the civil war are emotive and they serve as arousals of protest and solidarity. However, values here are geared towards generating sympathy for the Igbo.

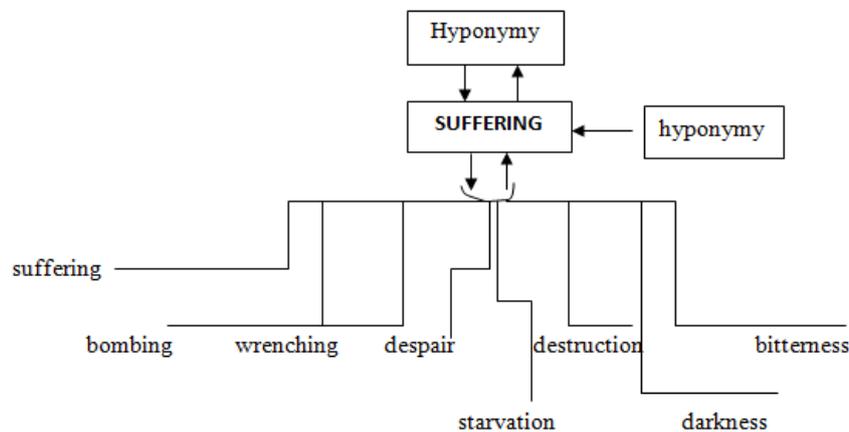
4.1.2 Suffering as a superordinate lexeme

The effect of the civil war as described by Achebe is hyponymic. Alabi (2003:228) defines hyponymy as the relation which holds between specific subordinate or hyponymic items and more general lexemes. Hyponymy in this study comes in handy to give an exposee on meaning relations in the various uses to which the lexical choice, suffering, has been put in the text. The use of the lexical word suffering lends itself to many contextual interpretations. The meanings can be arrived at through careful consideration of the word in hyponymic relation. This is deliberate on Achebe’s part to mirror and describe the ugly occurrences of the civil war.

This is intended to stimulate the emotions and feelings of readers. The general effects of hyponymy, as experienced here, bring to our knowledge ways of saying the same thing in different forms to reinforce meaning and create effect in the minds of the readers. All nominalizations found in the aspects of the effects of the civil war in the texts are abstracts which are based on the general ideas and emotional state of the social actors during the civil war. The ‘SUFFERING’ in the upper case signifies the hyponymy which subsumes all the subordinates in the chart below:

Representative chart on suffering.

Diagram 1

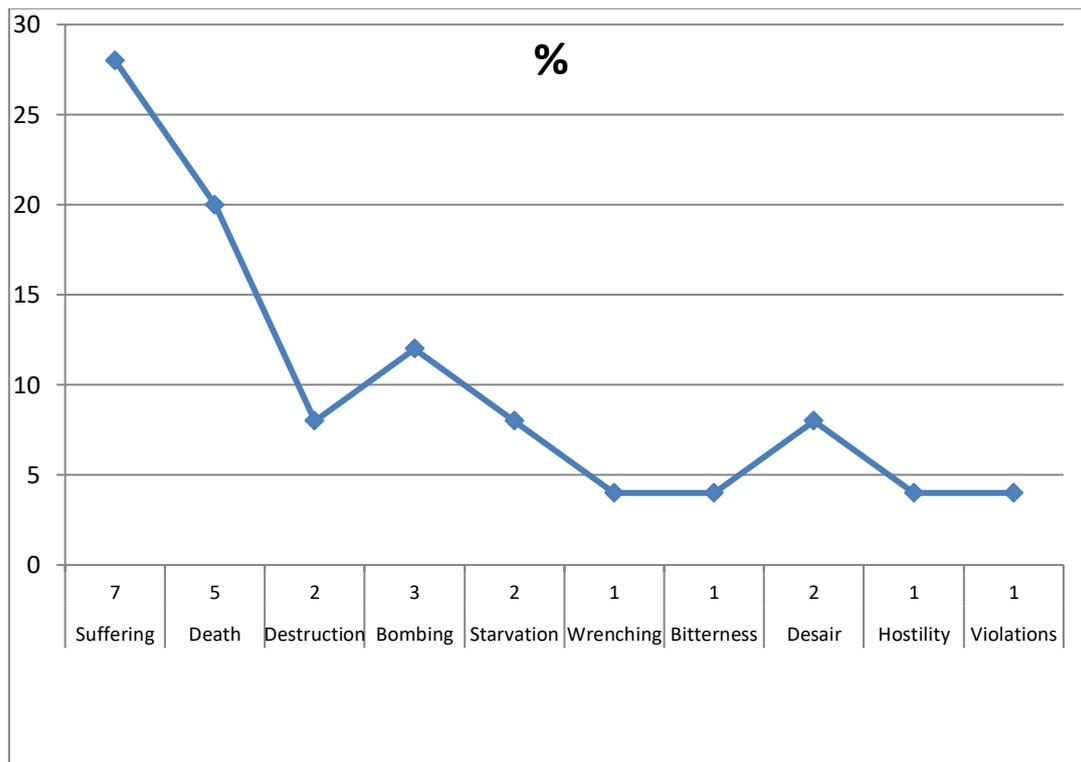


This is based on the number of times each of the lexemes occurs in the data. Rating is based on percentage. Suffering 28, Death 20, Destruction 8, Bombing 12, Starvation 8, Wrenching 4, Bitterness 4, Despair 8, Hostility 4, Violation 4.

Suffering has the highest number of occurrence because it has the principal meaning which connotes all other lexemes in the diagram above. The emotion of the lexemes in the above diagram is sympathetic. This is graphically represented thus:

Representative graph on suffering

Graphic representation 1



Suffering has a continuous level of effectual feeling and that is why it is the most repeated lexical item in the texts. Its significance in portraying the agony and despair of the war even above death is hinged on the fact that nearly all Biafrans experienced a degree of suffering at one stage of the war or the other. At this level, suffering is associated with different levels or classes of hardships, such as death, destruction, bombings and so on, as illustrated in the table and graph above.

The foregoing reveals that Achebe uses nominalization as the main lexico-grammatical formation in *There was a Country* for the various thematic projections in the text. Specifically, we see Achebe through the effect of nominalization creating sympathy affects for the victims of the civil war. This aim here is embedded in such lexical choices as: suffering, death, destruction, bombing, starvation, wrenching, bitterness, despair, hostility and violations, all reflecting the evil effects of the civil war. “Suffering”, as already observed, has the highest occurrence in the affect centered nominalization. The term “suffering” is repeated many times in *There was a Country*. This is closely followed by the choice of the lexical item “death”. Also, “bombing”, “destruction”, “starvation”, “despair”, “wrenching”, “bitterness”, and “violation” all employed to weep up sympathy for the Bafrans.

Thus far, we see the combination of nominalization and hyponymy making the Biafrans' suffering a phenomenon. This is further realized when Achebe employs nominalization to simplify the main propositions in *There was a Country*. When we are supposed to realize agent → process → goal structures, Achebe turns to noun phrases, as we have in the phrase in excerpt 3 below:

Excerpt 3:

“spirited humanitarian support of the suffering”
(*There was a Country*, p.222).

The process “to support” and the second process “to suffer” are reconstructed in entities. This type of application provides the contraction of long sentences to a noun phrase, as depicted in the examples “humanitarian support” and “the suffering”. This helps to contrast and compact more information in a clause through the process of nominalization. In *There was a Country*, some information are left unspecified. For instance, we do not know who is “supporting” who, since there is no indication of the timing of the process or an agent. Hence, Kazemian and Hashemi’s (2014:1181) position that ideational grammatical metaphor typically takes place in syndromes wherein every element has undergone a metaphoric shift comes to stand. In all, the various applications of lexical choices in the play are centered at foregrounding affected value sympathy. In addition, Again, Achebe succeeds in the use of nominalization to arouse sympathy in the readers. In another instance, Achebe tactically expresses affected value of sadness in the course of the narration. Let us examine example 4 below:

Excerpt 4: Biafra, for all terms and purposes was crushed –emotionally, psychologically, financially and militarily
(*There was a Country*, p.223)

Achebe economizes his description of the state of Biafra, using four adverbials to show the destruction of Biafrans. This is an instance of parallelism. Parallelism is applied to emphasize and link all the effects of the war together by representing them with the lexical choice of the cognitive verb “crushed”. This specifically foregrounds the evil effect associated with the civil war. This is an expose on the effects of the war on Biafrans as it reveals their emotional, psychological, financial and military stand points as negative. The affective value of sadness is highly emphasized here.

5.0 Conclusion

This study examines affects in Achebe’s Nigerian civil war memoir, *There was a Country* through the lens of Teun Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model. The analysis reveals two levels of authorial thematic preoccupation being projected: thematization of sympathy, expressed through linguistic features of embedded nominalization, generalization, backgrounding, and hyponymy are found to project sympathy as one of the thematic preoccupation in the text. Also, the theme of suffering as a superordinate lexeme is projected through hyponymic relations and nominalizations, which of course, are used to project affect values of suffering despair and sadness. This study significantly awakens the consciousness of the readers as well as reveals the objectives, thematic connection, and pragmatic presupposition in utterances in *There was a Country* there by enhancing our better understanding of the text.

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