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**THE ISSUES OF ACCESSIBILITY: A LEXICO-SEMANTIC READING OF  
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *Half of A Yellow Sun***

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**ABSTRACT**

Scholars in Stylistics believe in the assertion that style is the man. That is, we do not all write the same way. Studies have equally shown that part of what that goes to determine originality in a writer's work(s) derives strongly from the unique way he/she expresses himself/herself. The question therefore, is, to which extent could a writer's style of expression open or block the gateway of meaning and accessibility in their works? If communication is the main preoccupation of a writer, how does he set to achieve this by the manner in which he expresses himself? The questions in the foregoing will be our guide as we attempt to do a lexico-semantic reading of Chimamanda N. Adichie's *Half Of A Yellow Sun*.

**KEYWORDS:** Style, Expressions, Meaning, Accessibility, Communication

**INTRODUCTION**

Good writers across ages choose from wide and broad spectrum of styles in dealing with issues of thematic relevance in their works. Thus, it could be safe to assume the impression that as there are many styles, there are many authors. However, the choice of style by an author, could determine the level of accessibility of his work. Osundare (2008:6) opines that: "all art communicates, but not with equal urgency or promptitude, not in the same style". Chimamanda Ngozi Achichie's style in *Half of A Yellow Sun* is gracefully accessible without being over simplistic. She has been able, through the careful selection of lexical patterns, to present a novel which thematic offering is not only engaging and enduring but equally accessible.

The above suggests that style may not just happen, that means an author can be deliberately Soyinkaresque or Acheberesque in his mode of presentation.

As Mukarosvsky (1964:58) states: "Literature is aesthetically purposeful distortion of "standard" language such that literature foregrounds its longing, it calls attention to itself through its form". Adichie's novel, understudy, draws a huge attention to itself by the deliberate blend of expressions that seek to make clear, complicated issues that surround the Nigeria civil war of (1967-1970). Successful in this attempt she is, that Achebe, in what that looks like a preface-commentary of sort to the novel has this to say:

We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with (the gift of Ancient story teller) Chimamada Ngozi Achichie knows what is at stake, and what to do about it, she is fearless or she would not have taken on the intimidating horror of Nigeria's civil war. (*Half of A Yellow Sun*)

One of the gifts of a story teller is his ability to pass across his message(s) in witty and accessible manner and the ability to carry his audience along in the course of telling his

story, same way, Adichie's through the medium of style that is so refreshing and accessible keeps her audience's appetite whetted throughout her over four hundred pages of narration in *Half of A Yellow Sun*.

### **Lexis, Grammar and Semantics**

Taking into account the nature of our study in this paper, it is pertinent to have a general overview of the definitions of the sub-topic(s) in this section so as to put in focus our purpose in this paper-accessibility of *Half of A Yellow Sun*.

#### **Lexis**

Lexicology according to Howard and Etienne (1999) can be defined "as the study of lexis, understood as the stock of words in a given language" Longman Dictionary of the English language (1991) sees lexis as 'a branch of linguistics concerned with the meaning and use of words'. Akande (2005) views lexis as "the totality of the vocabulary or word stock of a language" while Fromkin *et al* cited in Akande (2005) considers lexical items as words which:

"... are meaningful linguistic unit that can be combined to form phrases and sentences"

All said, the above definitions of lexis could be best summarized in the words of Mc Arthur, ed (1992) that says lexis is "an area of language study concerned with the nature, meaning ... and use of words".

#### **Grammar**

Chomsky (1972) considers grammar as a theory or hypothesis about how a language works just the way a biochemist might formulate a hypothesis about how cells could be multiplied and would then test the hypothesis against actual living cells, so also grammar should be a hypothesis about language formulated and tested in the same way.

In a similar view by some grammarians, grammar is considered as a set of rules governing the corrections of expressions, words and statements of a language. However, our interest about grammar in this study goes beyond its general definitions to how it could be uniquely deployed to create meanings in memorable manner, especially in such a way that the meanings contained in it will be explicit and serve communicative purpose.

#### **Semantics**

Is "generally defined as the study of meaning. Most linguists agree that meaning pervades the whole of language. However, the scope of semantics is wide, that means it goes beyond meaning in the general sense, it is divisible into several details such as: sentential semantics, pragmatic semantics and ever philosophical semantics etc. Our concern in this study is pragmatic semantics which studies the meaning of utterances/words and sentences in context. Going by the foregoing, our overall objective in this paper shall be to examine some randomly selected Adichie's lexical and grammatical choices in *Half of A Yellow Sun*, interpret their meaning's within the context(s) in which they are used and find out how they have contributed to the elucidation of the major theme(s) in the novel:

## **The Novel**

*Half of A Yellow Sun*, the second novel of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, won the prestigious international Orange prize for literature in 2007 and since then, like her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* that won the commonwealth prize for literature in 2005, it has enjoyed excited reviews, home and abroad. Adichie's novel achieves uniqueness by the manner she re-tells the story of the Nigerian civil war (1967) in a way that touches the depth of our humanity. The strength of her novel is driven by the energy of creativity that revolves around her evocation of the psychological impact of horror and terror that the obnoxious war unleashed on its victims. The novelist asserts that in war, physical ruins and death could be so devastating, but the moral wound is worse, it could take eternity to heal.

The physical wound of Nigeria Biafra of (1967-1970) may have been borne by a generation of people but the moral effects wrecked by the war still haunts the psyche(s) of several people who by extension have some connection with the war. This pre-occupation, the psychological effect of the war, than any other theme(s) informs the thematic direction of the novel. The novel X-rays the effects of the war on the middle class of the late sixties as regards their relationship(s) career(s) ideologies, visions and vocation(s). Using the fictionalized world of the Nigerian university Nsukka's middle class community as a basis, the novelist journeys around the lives of characters like Odenigbo, Professor Ezeke, Professor Achera, Okeoma, Miss Adebayo, Ugwu, Olanna, Richard, and others in order to illuminate the emotional turmoil that engulfed (and still engulfing) most Nigerians as a result of the war.

In the novel, the peaceful pre-war life on campus at University of Nigeria, Nsukka, that made Odenigbo's home host of intellectual discussions, suddenly gave way to chaos occasioned by the events surrounding the war. Equally the peace enjoyed by the Eastern part of the country got truncated as the war set in. Homes and institutions were displaced on account of attacks, and counter attack(s) between Federal Army and Biafran Army. Most people of Igbo origin identified with Biafran government by joining one service or the other. Odenigbo's joined Manpower Directorate, while his wife, Olanna and Ugwu their houseboy became emergency teachers, instructing some of the Biafran kids who were displaced on account of the war. Kainene, Olanna's twin sister and Richard her British lover, joined the refuge services of Biafran to offer help to those who lost their family members to the war.

As the war proceeded, events became worse especially on the part of the Biafrans. Apart from hunger, waste and death, psychological devastation set in. For examples, Odenigbo, a mathematics don, an intellectual and a visionary got depressed by the waste and destruction caused by the war, lost his revolutionary conviction, and became a frustrated alcoholic.

Olanna, his wife by the same reason at a period became totally overpowered by the shock of her uncle family's massacre in the North. Okeoma, a poet, a prominent voice of the stimulating intellectual gatherings at the pre-war Odenigbo's campus home, not only lost his mind but his life, as a volunteer in the army. Ugwu, Odenigbo's promising house help

was conscripted forcefully into Biafran army at a point. He lost his dream of surviving the war and becoming an intellectual like his master, rather, as a child-soldier his life took a descent into narcotics and sexual crime; he smoke marijuana and gang-raped a shop girl. Families lost their bonds and got scattered, and hunger, waste and other forms of devastation set in with cases of death and diseases reaching an all time high. though at this stage the Biafran threw in the towel b y accepting the "peace offering" from the Nigerian side and the war eventually came to an end, however, suggestions abound in the novel that the evil effects of the war will continue to linger in the minds of the people who survived the killing from the war but altogether continue to suffer from its psychological effect.

### Analyses

Like we have hinted earlier, the exercise under this, sub-topic, is such that will take into cognizance the contextual relationship between the lexis and meaning in the novel. To this end, under lexical examination, we will divide into three issues that evolved in the novel. By so doing we are not in anyway suggesting that everything about *Half of A Yellow Sun* is all about war and its effects. It will amount to research dishonesty to disown the fact that the novel contains other sub-plots different from the genocide. However for fidelity of purpose we will only highlight the themes of bloodshed, horror and devastation and the collocation-patterns of some of the randomly discuss words that contextualize them. As the table below confirms:

<b>A</b> <b>Bloodshed</b>	<b>B</b> <b>Horror</b>	<b>C</b> <b>Devastation</b>
Killed (Pg 143) Bloody (Pg.145) Blood strained (Pg.1480) Headless body (Pg.148) Blood- splattered (Pg.148) Shot (Pg.153) Blood measured (Pg.156) Massacre (Pg. 157) Carnage (Pg. 160)	Wards (Pg.145) Knife-wound (Pg.145) Frightened (Pg.147) Agony (Pg.149) Fainted (pg.149) Writhing (Pg. 153) Dark-swoop (Pg. 107) Chill-sound (Pg.159) Chaos (Pg. 245) Violence (Pg. 320) Fear (Pg. 225)	Burning (Pg. 145) Refuges (Pg.158) Starvation (Pg. 37) Gathering-thunder (Pg. 277) Carnivorous-metal (Pg. 279) Naked (Pg. 365) Disease (Pg. 369) Emaciated (Pg. 370) Starving (Pg. 329) Kwashiorkor (Pg. 375)

Though the list in the above in not exhaustive it generates enough instance of words usage the bear much on the situation that occasioned them Moreso, lexical items in column A collocate with the theme of bloodshed highlighted the column, while the ones in column B and C collocate with the theme of horror and devastation respectively. The overall effects of this effective collocation of events and words that runs throughout, the novel is that themes are highlighted and their meanings accessible. If meaning becomes more accessible in *Half of A Yellow Sun* through the collocative use of words, it becomes more freely accessible in the novel by the use of nouns.

The first noticeable grammatical peculiarity aimed at achieving lucidity in the novel by the author is her conscious retention, in higher degrees the use of nouns in preference to the

substitutions, (pronouns). The first twenty five pages, an introductory section of the novel are replete with the deliberate mention of Ugwu's name (a houseboy to Odenigbo) in order to foreground the boy's name in the novel. So noticeable is this device that readers may begin to wonder whether the boy would end up being the protagonist of the novel. A few out of the numerous instances of such occurrence in the novel are randomly selected and cited below.

. . Ugwu did not believe that any body not even this master he was going to live with. . Ugwu wondered if  
..... Ugwu mouthed (pg 1)

Ugwu held back.....Ugwu could see.....  
...Ugwu had never ... (pg 2)

Ugwu came out to serve their drinks,  
... Ugwu would continue to uncork bottles of beer and coke  
Ugwu brought out the Kolanut (pg 18).

We can go on citing other numerous examples of sentences like those above as they occur throughout the novel but the significance of them all is that Ugwu is given prominence by the author in order to bring into limelight the effects of the events around the war as interpreted by a young boy who was an eye witness.

Olanna, another character, whose life touches almost every strand of issues in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, is given prominence by the author through the constant reference to her real name in the novel. Olanna, the woman on which the numerous unfolding events in the novel revolves around, is the centre of the nerves that powers the thematic vitality of the novel. Whatever she does, or happens around her dictates the mood of events in the novel.

First, she plays the role of wife to the story's most revolutionary character (Odenigbo). The role that makes her famous within the intellectual group her husband belongs. Again though childless, she is like a mother figure to Ugwu and the child Odenigbo had out of wedlock, called Baby. Her gentle heart of love radiates concern and care for both relatives and friends as demonstrated by her reaction to the massacre of her uncle's family in Kano. Olanna falls into semi-consciousness state for days mourning the loss of her uncle and his family. She supports Biafran cause in her little way, offering voluntary services first as pupil teacher and latter as an attendant, in the Home for Biafran Refugees run by her twin sister Kainene during the war, even when Odenigbo's self assurance and confidence collapses on account of the terrible effects of the war, she trudges on, managing the remaining shred of lives the war left them with. So little wonder that just like Ugwu, the author again seems to deliberate foregrounds her importance by the constant retention of her name in most of the expressions that describe the central theme(s) of the novel. Few of the examples cited below are a testimony to the credibility of our assertion regarding her importance:

Olanna shook her head and smiled . . . Olanna sat opposite three little children . . . Olanna clutching a handbag and murmuring to herself, Olanna

could smell the mustiness on her wrapper (Pg. 27)

Olanna dressed reluctantly . . . the women took Olanna hand  
. . . Olanna stepped back, flustered for a moment . . . Olanna  
laughed grateful for the warrant on Okeoma expression (Pg. 49)

Olanna pulled at the phone wire Although heard her clearly . . .  
Olanna learned back on the seat "will you come for baptism,  
Olanna asked . . . Olanna hang up, smiling (Pg. 253)

If the author considers intensity of reference through pronouns as inimical to the prominence the story intends to bestow on Ugwu and Olanna, Odenigbo's roles as the quintessential idealist, intellectual power-house, Biafra enthusiast and patriot the novel could not have enjoyed a lesser treatment. Thus, his name-Odenigbo; straddles the horizon of recognition and importance at any mention of issue that is germane to the central theme of the novel. The few quoted examples below lend credence to our assertion.

When Olanna first introduced him to Odenigbo . . . Odenigbo  
shook his hand warmly . . . he watched Odenigbo wave around a  
copy of the Daily Times . . . (Pg. 75)

She could not imagine how she would leave with Odenigbo,  
Odenigbo set about separating their sleeping area (Pg. 327)

She did not know who did pack Alice things perhaps Odenigbo  
did, she dreamed of Alice and Odenigbo in Nsukka, Odenigbo  
tried... started the engine Odenigbo turned the key-Odenigbo urred  
the key again and again ... Odenigbo tried to start the car again.  
Baby was watching Odenigbo carefully ... Odenigbo came out and  
opened the bannet ... Odenigbo got in and took a deep breath and  
turned the key ... (Pg. 385)

Going by all the examples above put together, the intention to make more prominent, the three most significant characters in *Half A Yellow Sun*, Ugwu, Olanna and Odenigbo by constant noun reference(s) rather than pronoun-reference(s) indirectly helps in orchestrating the thematic issues revolving around them and helps in explicating the semantic implication of the issues.

Another grammatical feature that makes for easy understanding of the novel is the author's dexterous combination of sentence-types for semantic purposes. The author, like a very good writer, blends sentences; simple, compound, complex sentences together to achieve exciting communicative purposes. Her skill at providing information in crisp, fresh and unambiguous manner through simple, compound and complex sentences makes easy accessibility of meanings in the novel. The randomly selected examples below confirm our assertion.

- i. He (Odenigbo) was not tall (pg 6)
- ii. I will enroll you in the Staff Primary School (pg 11)
- iii. You are my house boy (pg 10)
- iv. She was bold. (Pg. 19)
- v. They were laid (Pg. 19)
- vi. He stood still (Pg. 3)
- vii. She smelt of coconut (Pg. 2)
- viii. She placed her glass down (Pg. 45)
- x. She cleared his mount (Pg. 65)

The semantic impact of these simple sentences in the novel is to render accounts of occurrence(s) (like a conscious writer of historical account would do) in such a statement-like manner, in order for the credibility of the information provided to appear factual to readers.

The finesse of Adichie's prose finds strength in her practiced use of compound sentences. That compound sentences occur in a novel of over four hundred pages would not have been news, what is novel is the unique way in which the author deployed the sentence-type to achieve clarity and economy of information. For example let us consider the first statement in the book:

Master was a little crazy; he had spent too many years reading books overseas, talked to himself in his office, did not always return greetings and had too much hair (Pg. 1)

In the above sentence, five pieces of information are craftily combined together in a single sentence to give us the background information we need about one of the principal characters, Odenigbo in the novel.

In another instance of compound-sentence usage, Ugwu, enchanted by the beauty of his master house, (who he has the opportunity of seeing for the first time) describes:

There were books piled on the shelves and tables in the three bedrooms, on the sink and cabinets in the bathroom, stacked from floor to ceiling in the study, and in the storeroom, old journals were stacked next to crates of coke and cartons of premier beer (pg. 6)

It would take a master of the language to successfully deploy a long chain of information through what some grammarians refer to as multiple-compound sentential channel, pieces of information that would have sounded boring if they were to come in the simple sentence format.

Time and space would fail us to continue citing and discussing instances of compound/or multiple compound sentences and their contributions in making Adichie's novel, *Half of A Yellow Sun* accessible, but it is suffice to say that the author has put them into good use to provide information in a refreshing manner.

If simple and compound sentences aid the communicative potency of *Half of A Yellow Sun*, complex sentences empower the prose's rhythm and musicality; it makes the information in the novel emphatic and not easily forgettable. Let us consider the following randomly selected examples from the novel:

The following weeks, when she stated teaching a course in introductory Sociology, when she joined the staff club and played tennis with other lecturers, when she drove Ugwu to the market ..., she stonily began to get used to Odenigbo friends. (Pg. 51)

The adverbs of time marker "when" is deliberately repeated in the above sentence to draw attention to the exact time Olanna becomes fully integrated into the University community where she had come to join her husband would-be, Odenigbo.

In another instance Odenigbo emphasizing that the white are racial bigots, claims: We are living in a time of great white evil. They are dehumanizing blacks in South Africa and Rhodesia, they fermented what happened in Congo. They won't let American blacks vote, they won't let the Australian Aborigine vote, but the worst of all is what they are doing here. (pg 110)

That the pronoun "They" is repeated over and again in this statement is a clear pointer to the fact that the speaker wants to draw it into the consciousness of his audience, the race that is responsible for the evil of racism almost all over the world.

Capturing the haste by which some of the escaping Ibo in the North ran from the massacre initiated by their Hausa host, the author relates:

They drove in a frenzied silence, past policemen in blood splatted uniform past vultures perched by the road side past boys carrying looted radios, until he packed at the train station and shovel her unto a crowded train (Pg. 148)

The sheer poetry in the above description aided by the musical use of the adverb *past* immortalizes in readers' subconscious the sad memory of man-inhumanity to man as revealed by the show of ethnic rapid cum religious wickedness meted to the Ibos by their Hausas host.

The last grammatical component we shall discuss in this paper is the preponderance use of the active voice. In addition to the insight that could be gained into the thematic kernel of *Half of A Yellow Sun* through its sentences, the use of active voice, rather than passive voice, adds vivacity, authority and freshness to the information they are meant to serve as the examples below reveal:

Biafra will win the war. (pg 298)

We will recapture Enugu. (pg 295)

Okeoma visited to pay condolence. (pg 386)



Action in above sentences are traceable to their actors (the subjects). This makes information in the sentences come alive and credible though the characters in the novel are fictionalized, the use of active voice provokes in those that are very conversant with the authentic account of the war, memories of persons, events and places that went with the war.

## **CONCLUSION**

By and large we have attempted in this paper, to show how collocation, good and deliberate use of noun, sentence-types, even adverbs and active voice could aid in accessing meaning(s) in the novel *Half of A Yellow Sun*. We have, by a way of extension, brought out the fact that it not just the story but its way of telling that makes a good prose not only interesting but memorable and enduring. Many novels on Nigeria Civil War arrived before *Half of A Yellow Sun*; however, the novel achieves uniqueness by the style in which its story is rendered. We are constrained by the dictate of this medium to say more on other factors that and accessibility in the novel, but it is our belief that we have been able to open vista of curiosity and interest through which further investigations on same topic could be conducted in future.

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