A Gazelle Of The Savannah

Sunday Ododo And The Framing Of
Techno-Cultural Performance In Nigeria

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Metafunctional Interpretation of Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice*

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Abstract

In the foregrounding model, stylistic value has a slightly different meaning from that which it has in the stylistic variants model referring to the special act of interpretation made in order to make a sense out of a seemingly strange and unmotivated expression. However, there appears to be strong connection between concept of text production and concepts of function and meaning. Meaning is better appreciated when approached from the perspective of its functional significance. This subsumes the implication which the text has regarding the intention of the speaker and the effect on the hearer by virtue of the peculiar manner in which linguistic choices are configured, in a bid to achieve a desired communicative function. This chapter reports an investigation of the triadic language function in Ododo's *Hard Choice* using Halliday's lexico-grammatical dimensions of situating pragmatic functions engendered in a discourse. The interplay of the ideational, interpersonal and textual meta-functions has been found to be cardinal in dramatic text as a mutation of real life interactional exchange. The analysis of the play-text reveals that there is a stringent interrelation among text, its motivating context and the envisaged function the co-text or linguistic patterning is designed to perform.

Keywords: Halliday's lexico-grammatical dimensions, Meta-functions, Linguistic structure, Ideational function, Semantic domain, *Hard Choice*, Play-text, SFL

Introduction

All texts are designed to appropriate designated meanings. A text in its utter nakedness is multi-levelled, multi-ranked and multi-functional since meanings

are not the sole property of the language user (Birch and O'Toole 1). The underlying immediate and wider situations that trigger a use made of a language are the stabilizer of the ever fluctuating currents of meaning from where the envisaged function is negotiated. Sunday Ododo's *Hard Choice,* if appreciated independent of the recourse to the functional triad, may be susceptible to unintended interpretation since no text harbours an exclusively unilateral meaning. Hence, the attempt in this chapter is to dissect the context-constrained meaning potentials in the play-text with a view to accessing the engendered discoursal functions as intended by the playwright.

The subject matter of the play-text, *Hard Choice,* revolves around the pragmatic philosophy that a man's destiny is the choice he makes himself or the choice made on his behalf even if it is unsavoury. Amaka, the queen of Emepiri kingdom, in her desperate desire to be a queen seeks the help of a deity god in eliminating all obstacles that may prevent her husband from becoming the king. Her request is granted on a condition that she sacrifices her unborn baby to the god, *Oguguru*, on the child's wedding day. Out of desperation, she accepts the pledge believing that other children will come; scarcely knowing that fate has another plan for her even though she eventually becomes the queen.

However, after several years of her inability to have another child, she offers an alternative sacrifice to appease the god. The long-awaited opportunity comes when the king of Emepiri kingdom, her husband, excitedly betroths princess Azinge to his friend's son, prince Oki. This act is in appreciation for the assistance rendered by the Igedu warriors in the elimination of Tanaka warriors who invaded Emepiri kingdom. King Igala 1 of Igedu kingdom heartily accepts the offer so that the friendship between the two kingdoms can be strengthened. On the wedding day, queen Amaka makes use of all the mercenaries at her disposal to snatch the crown of king Iginla, a royal blood, to replace the life of her daughter. She takes the crown to *Oguguru* shrine as a form of appeasement. This is an abomination as a king cannot rule without the ancient crown. The Igedu declares war against the Emepiri kingdom over the missing crown. An oracle is consulted on the issue and a delicate revelation is that the calamity can only be averted if the princess is killed as the sacrificial lamb to the god. The price is too high for king Eze to pay. He confronts his wife on the issue and she confesses everything to him and her daughter. As millions of lives are at risk, the princess decides to sacrifice herself in order to avert the impending destruction of Emepiri kingdom by the Igedu warriors.

Princess Azinge sacrifices her life and the crown is recovered from the shrine. With her coral beads, she crowns prince Oki as the prince of Emepiri kingdom and orders him to always wear them as a constant reminder to

everyone that a man's destiny is the choice he makes, the cost notwithstanding.

Considering the protracted emotion-laden development of the plot, it is not surprising that Ododo laces his literary creativity with ingenious linguistic medium which is potent enough to bear the weight of the pragma-semantic essence of the text in its entirety. Thus, the lexico-grammatical analysis of the play-text is imperative in an attempt to have an intrinsic appreciation of the overall essence of the piece and its packaging.

Theoretical Framework

Very much like speech act in pragmatics, tokens of lexico-grammatical patterning in texts are invested with thematic roles that underpin a communicative event. Halliday maintains that:

> We recognize that patterns in the grammar are ideational (either experiential, like transitivity; or logical, like expansion and projection), interpersonal (like mood and modality), or textual (like theme and information structure); and that any one of these META-FUNCTIONS may be foregrounded in a given work, or part of a work. What we are establishing, however, is the meta-functional profile, or progression across the discourse; it is the intersection of these patterns in a unique combination that gives a text its characteristic flavour. Having separated the meta-functional components in order to understand why the text means what it does, we put them together again to explain why the text is valued as it is. (Functions of Style…iii- ix)

Depending on the functional motivation therefore, a literary text is constructed in a manner that would best rehearse the interplay of the language components in order to achieve what may be described as communicative foregrounding; especially from the standpoint of its variation from the functional principles which apply to ordinary language. Also, this insight would in turn generate an understanding of how these options are realized within the larger context of culture. These principal meta-functions – ideational, interpersonal and textual – are necessary pre-requisites for an understanding of "why the texts mean what they do" (Halliday ix). In the literary genre, drama in particular, meanings are wrapped in layers of figures whose interpretation is governed by the meta-functions for which the text, in its entirety, is designed. Hence, it is pertinent to explore how the lexico-grammatical patterns of a dramatic piece can realize the meta-functional options available at the level of meaning investigation. Hasan says that it is with the interactions of these triadic

meta-functions and their combined calibration that a text's special personality can be shaped (The Analysis of One Poem...53; Linguistics, Language...1)

Ideational

Language serves a general purpose of expressing content (ideational). It is through this function that an encoder expresses his experience and worldview (Akmajian et. al. 20). His perception, cognition and reaction to his expressive content are 'aired' within the framework of his linguistic expression. As such, a speaker's experience is brought to bear through the medium of structural mechanism; "which takes them, linguistically, out of the domain of experience to form a functionally natural, 'logical' component in the total spectrum of meanings" (Halliday 328). Usually, ideational meta-function is expressed via the written medium. This is explicated by Leckie-Tarry in the following words:

> Where the focus (of the text) is unquestionably on the ideational, that is, where copious amounts of complex information are to be communicated, where direct feedback is unnecessary, where careful planning is needed to organize the information, and all that is communicated can be incorporated verbally, the relationship between function and medium is equally unequivocal. (52)

Elements of the field principally determine ideational meta-function. The ideational meta-function pertains to the experiential component of language. This further relates the experience of the outside world of reality and that of the inner world of consciousness (of the dramatist/playwright, for instance) to the form which a text is designed to take. Alabi asserts that in certain circumstances, the provisions of one or other of the meta-functions should be strong enough for adequate textual interpretation (Context and Style...6; An Integrative Stylistic...49). The ideational component of a language which is, for instance, designed to inform would definitely allow ideational needs to be more emphasized over and above other meta-functions. Even though, there may be unequal fusion of the functions associated with field, tenor and mode, they all seem to co-occur in a text. This is because the presence of one is predicated on the provision of the other. For example, precedence is given to ideational meta-function before interpersonal involvement becomes significant. Similarly, both ideational and interpersonal meta-functions cohere to inform the selection of the textual patterns and their corresponding functions which characterize a given discourse.

This ideational function governed by the field provides clues to the

appropriateness of the chosen medium (and text in itself) in the light of the linguistic potentials and pragmatic provisions offered by the domain of language use (Bradford 65). Thus, the relationship between linguistic domain and linguistic structure is a very strong one. Eventually, ideational function rests on the provisions inherent in the semantic domain.

Interpersonal

Wales presents interpersonal meta-function of language as the language component which is concerned with the relationship which transpires between an addresser and an addressee in a discourse situation (218). Cooperative principle, indirect speech acts, politeness and other conversational tacts in speech event are vehicles of expressing and even foregrounding role relation between and among discourse participants whether in immediate or wider situations. The tendency to express interpersonal information within the webs of one's linguistic realization would definitely constrain the language user to use the spoken medium. This is not to say that written texts do not manifest interpersonal component; they do especially with regard to texts 'written to be rendered orally' as is the case with the text under consideration. Leckie-Tarry confirms this stance as she writes:

> Medium is selected according to the dictates of the Ideational and Interpersonal meta-functions whereby the written medium is selected in texts where there is an over-riding weight on the Ideational meta-function, and the spoken medium is selected where the weight is on the Interpersonal meta-function, and partially in accordance with cultural norms, where certain long standing associations exist between function and medium. (54)

Usually, written genres, probably owing to a high level of carefulness involved in their formulation and generation, exhibit an appreciable index of formality in their linguistic texture. Oral culture is characterized by a unity and closeness of social discourse. Thus, the social proximity between interactants spatio-temporally determines the textuality of a given discourse on the cline of formality. This has serious implications, as we all know, for the interpersonal component of language use.

Interpersonal meta-function, in its own right, is principally influenced by the non-inherent features of context which vary according to the social interactions taking place and the constraints which the participants' factor places on the discourse. It is basically concerned with the knowledge

relationships between participants which are brought to bear in the propositional structure of a discourse. Halliday sees interpersonal component as the interaction between the writer of the text and its intended audience (Language, Context and Text...2). It carries a heavy semantic implication. Its lexico-grammatical properties include mood and modality which may be realized prosodically throughout the text.

Butler agrees that in any discourse situation, there is a 'primary knower' who is in possession of information, and a 'secondary knower' to whom the information is imparted (160). In the communication event therefore, these participants 'commune' in a distinctive manner for a clear understanding of use that is made of language. Central to a discussion of interpersonal meta-function is the mood. This is used by Halliday to refer to a set of related options which give structure to the speech situation and define relations which hold between discourse participants (Options and Functions... 87). Thus, the interpersonal component is a representation of the organization of participants in speech situations, providing options in the form of speaker's/writer's roles in view of a wide range of postures defined by the potentialities of linguistic interaction. At the extreme of this component of language are the politeness phenomena. In linguistic communication generally, certain communication enhancement strategies are injected into the mainstream of linguistic expression. Such ingredients may not be too apparent if the text is digested independently of the context.

In an intensive study of a play-text, it is pertinent to note the implication which the characters engender in relation to the ideational and textual components of the dialogic expression. It is by so doing that the propositional content or desired message of a text is dissected and its meaning potentialities accessed to the fullest.

Textual

In Halliday's terms, the textual function is one of the three major components of language. This meta-function concerns itself with the way language is constructed as a text, erecting a bond between itself and the context using the co-text as a semiotic bridge of meaning realization. The generic structure of a text, including its thematic structure, forms the basis on which the textual component of language is based. Textual component is a powerful tool of achieving linguistic foregrounding because of its propensity for highlighting or focusing the information inherent in a discourse. By extension, the totality of the medium of textual rendition provides the necessary clue of better appreciating how structural fabrics of a text or texts have been woven into a given discourse.

The analysis of an actual text would normally link its lexico-grammatical choices to its context of use. In systemic functional terms, even the grammatical constituents of language are said to be 'socially responsible'. This means that the vehicle of thought expression is designed to fit into the entire circumstances conditioning the linguistic expression. This leaves a text with the option of designing its own structure. The textual component of language is thus construed as the semiotic reality which appropriates the language form in relation to its envisaged function. This is why Christie and Unsworth subscribe to the viewpoint in the following words:

> This kind of fairly consistent organizing of texts into stages in a range of situation types is another way in which the social context influences how language is structured for use. As well as the influence of the register variables of field, tenor and mode, texts are also shaped into predictable stages by their cultural purpose. (11)

Thus, the textual meta-function is essentially dependent on the inputs of ideational and interpersonal components. It draws on their meanings and assigns second-order value to them. This textual component offers the writer or speaker an opportunity of constructing situationally relevant texts or passages of discourse through which the listener or reader distinguishes the text from a random context-blind set of sentences. This stance corroborates Halliday's perception of the areas of information system, transitivity, theme and voice as embodiments of textual functional component of language (Modes and Meaning... 57).

With the overview of ideational and interpersonal meta-functions, it becomes clear that the mode of linguistic expression is determined by the pressures created by ideational and interpersonal components in a given situation. Textual meta-function essentially pertains to the focus of the expression as dictated by the mode. This is why Leckie-Tarry posits that:

> Focus, therefore, has a strong motivating effect on the selection of medium ... As a product of the differential nature of the processes of speaking and writing, focus on the ideational motivates the selection of the written medium, while focus on the interpersonal motivates the selection of the spoken medium. Focus on content or information is typically associated with 'the specific written genre of expository prose' involving 'filling maximal steps of an argument and background information, and making use of complex syntactic structures to

lexicalize cohesive relationships.(43-44)

Textual meta-function thus, relates to how language is constructed as a text such that it expresses the intricate connection which it has with context. Cohesion and coherence are the major factors in this regard. Citing de Beaugrande and Dressler, Wales identifies some criteria of textuality which include: intentionality; acceptability; situationality; informativity; and intertextuality (390). All these are characterizing features of both the generic and thematic structures of a text. Undoubtedly, medium is a crucial factor governing textual pattering which in turn, is a reflection of the context informing language use or 'text engineering' in the first place.

Hence, in the following section, attempt would be made to deploy the varying indices of meta-function identified in a bid to allot functional interpretation to dialogic turns taken by characters in Sunday Ododo's *Hard Choice.*

Textual Analysis

The play opens with the welcome address given by the master of ceremonies (MC), Angus. To put readers/audience in the right frame of the authorial intention, he makes it known that the underlying context against which the interpretation of the text can be drawn is dual – involving two different cultures. This culture complex forms the basis of the reader's appreciation of the clash which unfolds as the play progresses. In Angus words,

> **Angus:** We heartily welcome you all to the wedding ceremony between our daughter Princess Azingae and Prince Oki, our son-in-law to-be who comes from far away Yorubaland. Today is the grand finale of a ceremonial process that started six days ago. Please let the ceremonies commence [*Drums, shouts of joy and ululation.*] (13)

As a strategy of shedding light on the construct of the social system, the concept of God and divine intervention which is a representation of unity was introduced by the writer in the words of Eze Okiakoh. Beyond the surface interpretation value of his utterances, the characterization of Eze Okiakoh makes readers to understand that even though the couples about to be joined are from two different cultures with differing belief and value systems, they can live together as one since the oneness of God being invoked at that point of their solemnization is a kind of metathetical index of unity. An example of such

passages is given below:

> **Eze Okiakoh:** Love that binds and unites shall be your companion always. The freshness and purity of the morning dew shall be the sustaining tonic of this new home. The sweet-soothing spirit of our ancestors will forever abide by you two. God Himself shall be your guide. Like the butterfly and flower, so shall the fragrance of your romance attract peace to our different kingdoms. And there shall be no regret in coming together. So shall it be!

To foreground this notion of unity, pairs of collocates 'united' (joined together in couples) by co-ordinating conjunction – and – abound in the same extract. Examples include:

Love that binds and unites…
The freshness and purity…
The sweet – (and) soothing spirit…
Like the butterfly and flower…

The meta-functional undertone is made more palpable when the writer adds:

… so shall the fragrance of your romance attract peace to
our different kingdoms. And there shall be no regret in coming
together. So shall it be!

Normally, the occurrence of the conjunction at the sentence initial slot is an unusual pattern. What this foregrounding device signals at the ideational level is the unusual matrimony which calls for the entire discourse in the first place. The conjoining function of 'and' in the unusual slot is a mirror of the event in its totality.

The second scene of the play presents a turn of event when the villains, in a groove led by Chief Ubanga celebrate the success of their heinous act of 'kidnapping' the royal insignia of the Igedu Kingdom. The stolen crown represents a stolen peace; hence, anarchy looms. At the level of interpersonal component of language meta-function, the writer stylishly introduces a blend of lexico-grammatical patterns and items which create a mental picture of the scenario being depicted such that, like a play back on a video screen, the readers

of the play-text appreciate the text in the true likeness of the authorial intention.

Chief Ubanga: Well done boys, well done! We're on course. Now the dice is cast, the battle line is drawn. Are we all together? *(A thunderous 'yes' is replied.)* Look I'm proud of you guys. It was a clinically executed operation. *(Brings out a bulky envelope and hands it over to* JASPA.*)* That's half a million, more would follow shortly. Always do your own bit and be rest assured that I won't fail you.

All: Chief, Chief!

Chief Ubanga: Point of correction boys, High Chief Ubanga, the Oyenmeme of Emepiri Kingdom. Now Jaspa, take that crown to where I told you and with your most trusted men, maintain strict watch over it. Under no circumstance must it be released to anyone without hearing personally from me.

Sample utterances from the kingpin, Chief Ubanga, include:

> Now the dice is cast, the battle line is drawn... it was a clinically executed operation... point of correction boys... Now Jaspa, take that crown to where I told you and with your most trusted men maintain strict watch over it. Under no circumstance must it be released to anyone...

Among others, these utterances rehearse a kind of regimented setting like what obtains in the military. Impolite imperatives like orders and commands characterise the extract. This explains why the response by 'ALL' is unanimous as a symbol of unwavering compliance with the order. This boss-subordinate relationship consolidates the interpersonal component which is laden with speech act directive. This component forms the basis on which the success of the military could be understood.

The third scene is a hideout where King Iginla whose crown is stolen is brainstorming with his chiefs and his son for the way out of their gory plight. The general atmosphere is tense with ceaseless agitation. Series of lexical choices which engender apprehension over the impending calamity if the stolen crown is not restored in good time cohere to make the textuality a most effective vehicle

of transmitting the authorial intention. A closer look at the highlighted words and segments in the following extract is an attestation to our conclusion:

Bashorun: I'm afraid not. I saw Baba Onifade before I set out early this morning from Igedu. He consulted ifa and reveals that the crown is now in the custody of some fiery gods fuming with anger. If not recovered in seven days from now, he dies (*Points to the king. Shocking expressions by all present.*)

Chief Shamu: You're the Bashorun, the grand-commander of Igedu army, what do we do? In a foreign land, we have all been humiliated; we cannot go home without the crown; what is a masquerade without his mask?

Attendant: Facekuerade.

Chief Shamu: Shut up, is this a time for careless jokes?

Attendant: It's not a joke, sir. A masquerade without a mask is a facekuerade.

One could read the tone of serious confusion from Chief Shamu's lines. His turns are littered with interrogatives. This is suggestive of the incapacitation the chiefs of Igedu kingdom suffer and by extension, their boss, King Iginla. If the chiefs who are supposed to guide the king in dilemma are themselves confused, then one begins to imagine the unimaginable anxiety everybody in Igedu kingdom is going through over the evil repercussion of the missing crown.
Despite the anarchy that looms over Igedu kingdom, heroism which is the hallmark of royalty in African cosmology is introduced as borne by the spurring words of King Iginla in the following lines:

King Iginla: My son, I know it has been very terrible for you because your wedding ceremony was the platform exploited by God-knows-who to embarrass our royalty and throw our kingdom into chaos.

Oki: But Your Highness, my loyalty has been questioned here and...

King Iginla: Sheee. I don't doubt you, my son, but in state matters, domestic emotions cannot be accommodated and don't grudge Bashorun for his stand point on this matter. Oki, Stand up and be a man. (*Oki looks at the King wandering.*) Yes, stand up and act. This is a moment of crisis, only women run their mouths and weep up emotions instead of their limbs and energy. Or I was wrong in supporting your wedding to the Princess of Emepiri Kingdom?

In the fourth scene, the warlord of the Igedus – Chief Bashorun approaches Eze Okiakoh frontally, demanding that something urgent be done to restore the abducted crown or else they would resort to waging war against Emipiri kingdom as the last option. As a general in the army, even though he is addressing a king, he could not help using subtle and overt threat as his utterances are quite challenging. Let us consider the extract that follows:

Bashorun: (*Approaches* EZE OKIAKOH frontally.) I am Bashorun, the Akogunmogun and generalissimo of Igedu armed forces. The Igedu aristocratic structure is about to crumble because of security breach in your domain. You betrayed friendship and humiliated the crown essence of Igedu Kingdom, why Eze Okiakoh, why?

Eze Okiakoh: Bashorun, the incidence of the abducted crown is indeed an unfortunate one. My chiefs and I have been brainstorming on how to recover it and save ourselves this mutual embarrassment.

Bashorun: Good to know, but Your Highness, your search is rather too slow for us. In case you don't know, the life of our king hangs on that crown. If in three days it is not recovered and surrendered, we shall be left with no other choice but to match on your kingdom and recover the crown ourselves. I believe you know what that means. In one word... WAR! (*Turns and leaves with his men. The others remain speechless as the message sinks.*)

However, Eze Okiakoh's response is not by any standard showing his status

in the present circumstance. Instead, he uses pacifying words to sooth the anger of the fuming general; knowing full well that the distasteful incident is the handiwork of his kinsmen. The scene ended with an order from him:

Eze Okiakoh: Summon the royal Dibia at once!
(*Fade out.*)

This is a confirmation that Eze Okiakoh is a peace loving king and that he does not abate crime in any form. In scene five, the ideational component is that of defeat. Ordinarily if weddings of common peasants have been successful, one expects a royal knotting to be in a grand style; devoid of the slightest hitch. This is because of the high powered intelligence and security guards that the royal courts of both Eze Okiakoh and King Iginla control. So, the disappearance of the royal crown is a symbol of total loss of control; and this spells doom for King Iginla's stay in power.

At the interpersonal level is the protracted trauma the incident brings to both the prince and the princess. In the African cultural milieu, the wedding day is considered as the most celebrated day in one's life. So, if such an expectation is thwarted, the depth of sorrow and agony is fathomless. This explains why Princess Azingae swoons only to recover two days later with an indissoluble trauma. Against all pleas and comforting words from those around her, including her mother and maids, she cannot be pacified. Textually, the playwright deploys highly emotive linguistic configuration to conjure up a mental picture of the scene in the minds of his readers. This is done not only for textual effectiveness but also to achieve foregrounding function. Some of the extracts below are attestation to our conclusion.

Princess: Calm down? I had a disrupted wedding ceremony, passed out for two days, and no caresses form Oki, my love and soothing words form the queen, my mother. I sent Chinelo, my chief maid, to get information and she dissolves into thin air; you then ask me to calm down? (*She yells again, ADA holds her down tenderly.*) Tell me, Ada, is the prince alright?

Ada: I believe so, my Princess... the last I saw of him was when he dashed after the masked men and they pulled a shot and his people held him back.

Princess: Ah aah, Ada, they got him, don't lie to me, they did.

Ada: No, they didn't

Princess: Yes, they did.

Ada: No, they didn't

Princess: (*Gets up at once.*) Then I shall go in search of my love myself.

Ada: You are forbidden.

Princess: What? ...

Princess: (*Rushes to hug QUEEN.*) Mother, why am I being detained after all I have gone through?

Queen: Detained? No, my dear, we are just making sure you don't join the train of irrationality, which could crush all of us.

Princess: I don't understand, Mother.

Queen: Well, I do. Right now you are emotionally unstable and you can't be left all by yourself.

Princess: Mother, where is my Prince?

Queen: Forget about the prince for now, your well-being is the most important thing right now.

Princess: And Prince Oki is the fragile spine of my well-being. Is he ok, Mother?...

Princess: Mother, I certainly deserve to know more than you're offering. At my moment of joy everything went berserk and I am being kept in the dark because of some security fuss?

Queen: You won't understand...

Princess: That's why I am asking questions, please make me understand. Everything sounds crazy, you all look crazy...(*Yells*) I'm crazy! (*Dashes at QUEEN...*)

In the extract just cited, the wordings of the Princess mirror atmosphere of restlessness which accompanies the disappearance of King Iginla's crown. The extract is configured in peculiar pattern typical of the language of an emotionally shattered individual. The lines of Princess Azingae in an index of peak of confusion; she can hardly think for herself anymore. This is why her utterances are intermittently punctuated with unending stretch of interrogation. Her sorrow, defeat and dilemma culminate in anger. A case in point here is the rage with which she attacks the Queen – her mother. The texture of her utterances vividly reflects her confrontational stance, as a child is not expected to react or charge at the parent the way she does.

The atmosphere of the sixth scene is tense and spiritually ecstatic. Since the missing crown seems to defy all forms of physical restoration, there is the need to seek the divine intervention of the more powerful forces of nature. Ideationally, gods are considered the 'all-knowing' and 'all doing'. This is why even the king who is considered the most powerful and reverend among his people resorts to invocation of the god, Otapaipoh, for a divine solution. The genre of language used by the Dibia is a textual manifestation of the incomprehensible ways of the gods. Just as an ordinary man who is not initiated in the occult way would never understand when the gods speak; the utterances of the Dibia in the course of his divine consultation are laden with heavy, intoned, embellished and foregrounded expressions. The incantatory mode is expectedly the driving force behind manoeuvring the physical reality with a metaphysical power. The dominance of this feature is palpable in the following extract:

Dibia: The sun and the moon are on a course of collusion and the stars are trembling. Why? A vow is abrogated but appeased. The object of appeasement is sacrosanct and restless. Your Highness, only the original vow will avert this calamity, but it is too dear to let go. My king, when a medicinal pot of soup sits on the fire boiling, only the brave and courageous attempt a leak from it. My lord, fire is burning inside water and water is helpless. Otapaipoh

says that only royal red wine will quench this fire and if...

Chief Ubanga: *(Cuts in.)* Enough of these incomprehensible statements!

Dibia: It's not me, it is Otapaipoh. Otapaipoh says that what belongs to the gods is being forcefully substituted; deceit and connivance are conveyor belts in this act. Your Highness, your clue to solving this impending calamity it to offer royal red wine to the gods. I speak no more... *(Packing his things to depart, other chiefs intercept him.)*

It is worthy of notice the confirmation of the seemingly incomprehensible nature of the Dibia utterances by Chief Ubanga when he cuts in, in-between the consecutive turns taken by the Dibia.

The seventh scene marks the turning point in the text where in the hideout of King Iginla, guards keep vigil in the stormy night. There is a commensurate change in linguistic patterning following the revelation from the god that Princess Azingae is the sacrificial lamb to atone the blasphemy committed by carting away the royal crown. The agitation and catharsis that follow the plot development at this stage necessitates an equally commensurate meta-function at the lexico-grammatical level. The mood and modality which accompany the news of sacrificing the innocent princess arouse the feeling of pity, sympathy and fear in the reader at the interpersonal level. This can even make feeble hearts to weep. This function is what the playwright intends to achieve by making an innocent soul to bear the brunt of criminals. Of course ideationally, an average man would be emotionally touched. The textual configuration which Ododo adopts at this point is quite reconciliatory.

Ordinarily, one would expect the aggrieved King Iginla to be confrontational but the playwright chooses to balance their turns as "two wrongs do not make a right". Hence, the need to join forces to douse the ire of the problem on ground is what underlies textual equilibrium which permeates the scene as illustrated in the following extract.

King Iginla: You know and you do nothing while your people defile it?

Eze Okiakoh: We're trying.

King Iginla: Eze Okiakoh, you have to do more than try because your ultimatum ends tomorrow.

Eze Okiakoh: That's why I am here. We…

King Iginla: (*Stops him.*) I won't listen. (*Turns to go.*)

Eze Okiakoh: You will listen, enough of this contempt. This is one royalty to another; despite the crisis at hand, I still deserve some respect from you. It is peace I seek and not a reminder of a war ultimatum. If it is going to be war, war it shall be! (*KING IGINLA turns to face him, a little silence.*) Of what benefit is war if it can be averted?

King Iginla: You have up till tomorrow night to avert the war that hangs on your kingdom. Finding my crown is the only way out. (*Turns to go again.*)

Eze Okiakoh: It has been found. (*KING IGINLA turns again and moves to him with interest.*) Otapaipoh, our ancestral oracle traced it to Oguguru shrine deep in one of our forests.

In scene eight, the mystery behind the missing crown is revealed. The Queen, in connivance with Chief Ubanga, is responsible for the upheavals. The extract that follows sheds light on the meta-functional components in force.

Queen: Eze Okiakoh, you surprise me. To fight for your daughter's life is senseless?

Eze Okiakoh: Working on my emotion won't erase the facts of the matter at hand…

Princess: *(Breaks the silence and steps forward.)* Father, I followed your arguments carefully and I can understand the difficult turf on which you both tread…

Queen: Never, you won't be sacrificed. Not my only child.

Princess: I shall be sacrificed; my mind is made up about this.

Queen: No, I say you won't.

Princess: *(Challenges her frontally.)* Then stop me…

Queen: No, no, no this is not my daughter, what has he done to you?

Princess: Nothing, Mother, just a hard choice that has to be made…

Queen: That choice shouldn't be made by you.

Princess: Then who other than whom the gods have specified?...Mother, it is tough but this choice has to be made…

Queen: Just as I made mine to appease the gods for your life and the throne of Emepiriland.

Princess: My life? *(Surprised.)*

Queen: Yes, your life, but now the gods are set to fail me…oh God save me *(She breaks down in tears.)*

At the ideational level, the family bond that is about to be broken is the basis for intrinsic appreciation of the authorial intention in this segment of the text. The conflicts of love and betrayal; loss and restoration; peace and chaos as well as good and evil engendered at the interpersonal level make the readers to appreciate better the indeterminate status of the relationship a hitherto happy family (King Okiakoh, the Queen and Princess Azingae) now share in the face of dilemma and hard choice each of them takes at different points of plot development. The brevity of the lines of each of them is a textual manifestation of the haste, urgency, co-ordination, caution and carefulness that the crisis at hand deserves; to avoid causing more damages as they all appear equally confused.

In the last scene (Scene Nine) in the plat-text, the Princess is sacrificed to cleanse the land of protracted evils. This act equally restores unity between the

two kingdoms. Ododo stylishly weaves the world knowledge of 'glad tidings' which follow atonement for sins into the webs of his drama. This ideational component functions as tension-diffusing agent in the text. The interpersonal meta-function discernible at this point is that of making readers unite with his thought pattern in agreement with the pace of denouement set for the play in a similar fashion as obtained in Shakespearean *Romeo and Juliet*. Let us consider the last two turns in the text:

Princess: Oki, all isn't in vain. Mine is a transfiguration, a mutation of celestial assurances for human edification. Carry on, Oki, carry on...*(Her voice dwindles and begins to fall; Oki moves quickly to bear her; she dies in his arms.)*

Prince: Princess Azingae, your sacrifice is noble; your courage unthinkable. With your blood the rebirth of a new dawn is here. As your blood paints this new canvas in striking colours, we shall ensure that each colour shines out brighter to light up this new world, never to dim again...This corals on our neck shall bear testimonies...emerald testimonies of all times...*(Looks at her body again with sinking emotion; the priestesses move to collect the body and set it down in the shrine; a dirge filters in; sudden strikes of lightning and thunder disrupt and the body ascends into atmosphere and vanishes.)*...

One major lexico-grammatical peculiarity noticeable in this last segment is the unusually long lines of each character. This device could be said to be deliberate as the playwright intends to drag his audience into a kind of unending tour of thinking, meditation and / or imagination of what the supreme price paid by Princess Azingae holds for the future of the two kingdoms. This, in a way, is strategic; a way of instilling in the audience / readers the focal points of the plot development of the play-text.

Conclusion

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has proven to be a resourceful tool of explicating and interpreting special uses that are made of language. Language meta-functions constitute a strand of SFL and this has been deployed in the explication of Ododo's *Hard Choice* in a bid to gaining access to the covert

functions borne by the lexico-grammatical patterns of the text. In this study, a meta-functional analysis was conducted on a scene-by-scene basis. The cardinal finding is that the playwright consciously aligns the plot development and linguistic patterning of the play-text with the contextual provisions and expectations as dictated by the socio-cultural milieu that underpins his composition. Without mincing words, with the analysis carried out, one can say that the success of the play-text was informed not by the author's ideological posture but by his judicious and effective manipulation of the lexico-grammatical components which cohere to form a formidable medium or vehicle of dramatic expression.

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