

## A Lexico-Semantic Reading of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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### Abstract

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A key purpose for exploring the language of a text is to determine the extent to which a given author has organized and deployed its limitless potentials to encode or relate the intended message and social vision. With **M.A.K.** Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, as the analytical template, this study, therefore, investigates aspects of lexico-semantic patterning in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, such as simplicity of lexical choices, collocation, semantic fields, selectional restriction rule, category rule violation, imagery and lexical relations (i.e. synonymy), in order to establish their connotative implications and how they cohere in the text, to foreground the author's artistic target, in conjunction with other linguistic elements and cultural and contextual variables. The study reveals that the construction of a literary text is a linguistically conscious activity, as the lexico-semantic nuances and dynamics of Adichie's text explored are critical and strategic both stylo-rhetorically and in message delivery. It confirms the fact that the linguistic choices a writer makes from the plethora of options at his/her disposal are engendered by subject matter and context, as these twin elements choose their own variety of language.

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According to Jindal and Syal (2010:18), "... in studying language which is the subject-matter of linguistics, we mark or sub-divide the area in order to study it in an analytical and systematic way." Alo (1995:13) expounds this thesis inter alia: *Language is a complex phenomenon and to be studied effectively, it is broken into major levels or areas. Within modern descriptive linguistics, language is studied from the following angles: phonetics, phonology, grammar (comprising morphology and syntax), lexis and semantics.* Instructively, stylistics (which is the study of linguistic style) focuses on all the constitutive layers or dimensions of language use, which are deployed by language users in distinctive ways to transmit textual messages and achieve aesthetic effects. Alo (1998:5) avers that the descriptive study of style accounts for language use in texts from three distinct perspectives, in terms of focus and methodology viz: style as deviation (i.e. from linguistic norms or conventions), recurrence (i.e. of language patterns- lexical, phonological, syntactic, etc), and textual function (i.e. variations in sentence structure found in texts and their functions as elements of emphasis, focus and foregrounding), through the following constituent levels of language study:

- (i) Phonology (sounds/sound effects)
- (ii) Lexis (word usage and diction)
- (iii) Grammar (word and sentence structure)
- (iv) Semantics (units of meaning)
- (v) Graphology (Orthography or writing system)
- (vi) Pragmatics (Language of action or getting things done)

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The overt implication of the foregoing viewpoints is that lexis and semantics are distinctive aspects of language which integrate with other aspects or levels for human communication. Alo (1998:33) posits that lexis deals with "... vocabulary and word organization in a language". In Alabi's (2008:252) view, it is "... a general term which is used to refer to the vocabulary or diction of a language." Alo (Ibid) adds that,

*As a level of language study, lexis seeks to elucidate how words mean and how they interact with one another meaningfully. Words are many and various. They are also multiple, subtle and delicate in their different shades of meaning.*

The scholar (1998:33-38) outlines types of words to include dynamic and stative, concrete and abstract, simple and complex, formal and informal (colloquial), etc. Importantly, the term 'lexis' originated from Greek and came into prominence in linguistic circles in the 1960's. It is particularly used by British linguists for the vocabulary of language or sub-language especially of its stock of lexemes. The term became popular because it is unambiguous, unlike its synonym 'lexicon.' In linguistics, lexis describes the storage of language in our mental lexicon as prefabricated patterns that can be recalled and sorted into meaningful speech and writing. Thus lexis, as a concept, has a distinct identity from other traditional levels of linguistic study or interpretation, as it refers specifically to the word stock of a language from which writers and speakers make choices for self expression, according to their purpose or intended meaning. The areas lexis covers include synonyms and antonyms, collocations, idioms, figurative language, proverbs, phrasal verbs, registers, homonyms and homophones, prefix and suffix, general knowledge of words, loan words, neologism, adjectives and prepositions, etc.

Fundamentally, a writer taps from and exploits the vast resources of language for his imaginative creations. Lexical items help the writer to crystallize his thoughts, express certain emotions and create images all of which give literature its peculiar expressive beauty. In this regard, writers depend on lexical items and their connotative implications to convey their intended messages. Therefore, the writer must choose the appropriate words to effectively convey the intended message and also to achieve aesthetic beauty. This is clearly inevitable from the praxis that a writer must use linguistic resources imaginatively to have the desired effect on the reader or audience. Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between 'langue' and 'parole' is particularly relevant here, in the sense that, while langue refers to the abstract signifying system of a given speech community which precludes a specific user's application in a concrete context, parole means the "... particular uses of this system that speakers and writers make on this or that occasion" (Leech and Short, 1981:10). Wales (2001:54) adds that a language user is free to select features from available resources of language at his/her disposal and the choice is partly conditioned by the demands of genre, form or theme (of discourse) (see Alabi, 2008:254). This thesis explains why writers make lexical choices with great care to achieve the delicate target of conveying the intended meaning in a given context in the best possible way. In fact an artistic effort must fuse words, meaning and imaginativeness in language use.

As the foregoing implies, the rationale for studying the nature and functioning of the vocabulary of a text is to decode the meaning of the text (i.e. lexis as semantic markers or signifiers) which is at the heart of language study and use. According to Adedimeji (2006:181), "the engine of language is meaning; without meaning, there is no language. In fact, the essence of language is to generate or convey meaning." This notion is echoed by McCarthy and Carter (1988) when they averred that, most scholarly works on lexis over the years have discussed the term within semantics for, as Socrates put it, "words have the power to reveal..., conceal and signify all things; they... also turn things this way and that" (see Eyoh, 1997:90). The focus on these two concepts (i.e. lexis and semantics) is itself significant in the sense that it underlines their functional relationship. Darbyshire (1967:139) captures this relationship when he posited that lexis is "the branch of linguistics which deals with the major units of language and carries the burden of referential meaning." Bloomfield (1933) extends this thesis a little further in his view that the semantic aspect of language is directly linked to the lexical and grammatical system in that it is ordinarily divided into grammar and lexicon. In Halliday's (1978:79) view, "the semantic system is an interface between the linguistic system and some higher-order symbolic system and it is projected onto or realized by the lexico-grammatical system." Yule (1985:116) refers to lexis as "some sort of containers carrying meaning components." Esan (2005:91/92) avers that "... lexis and semantics are so intricately linked that they cannot be separated from each other in the description of texts." According to this scholar (2005:103), lexis can be deployed by an author "... in a way to relate to themes, key concepts, ideas or motives" in a text. Alo (1998:39) also hints at the nexus between vocabulary and meaning inter alia: "a word or vocabulary is a two-faced thing. It is made up of both form and content."

This scholar (ibid) contends that lexical semantics is very critical to language or textual analysis in the sense that it encapsulates various shades of meaning which include denotation and connotation (i.e. emotive, social, figurative or transferred and contextual meanings, etc).

However, it is imperative to underline the fact that lexical choices become meaningful only in concrete or pragmatic situations or contexts, which is one of the cardinal areas of emphasis of the Hallidayan systemic functional grammar, which we adopted for the study. The critical point is that linguistic form, which subsumes lexis and grammar (i.e lexis and sentence are both units of grammar (Halliday, 1994: xxi), assumes functional meanings in immediate or wider contexts. In other words, linguistic items or properties do not operate in a vacuum. Literature itself lives in particular cultures and language is spoken in particular contexts. According to Malinowski (1926), the text is extremely important but without the context it remains lifeless. Hence Lawal (1997:27) talks of "selectional possibilities and constraints" within which each language user selects lexico-semantic elements which generally reflect his/her intentions or purpose. Alabi(2008:254) also contends that,

*...textual selection is largely constrained by context. Context in this regard is both a theoretical and sociological construct, a sum total of the setting, whether physical or non-physical, or circumstances surrounding a discourse. The choices a language user makes become meaningful and distinctive only when they are used under 'unique' and 'appropriate' situations.*

It is apparent that the critical place of context in textual or linguistic study prompted Tsaaior (2013:7) to posit that "... the text-context dialectic has become a given, a monumental literary and hermeneutic event." According to this scholar (ibid),

*It has become an epistemology in linguistic, literary and cultural discourses that texts - whether oral, scribal or print - exist within concrete socio-cultural, political and ideological contexts. It is these contexts that give the text birth and fire them with life and ontological existence.*

This scholar (2013: 7-8) further posits that "as a science of signs, texts are defined by radically unstable, decentred and unfixed signifying codes that exist outside of the text- its context" because "meaning itself is not monolithic or homogenous but fluid, heterogeneous and in a state of perpetual flux. It is constantly shifting. It is negotiated, renegotiated and continually distributed beyond the boundaries of the text". Alabi (2008:252) corroborates this viewpoint inter alia:

*The style of a language text constitutes the hinge on which textual interpretation is suspended. However, the concept of style is amorphous; it requires appropriateness of context for it to be stabilized, meaningful and effective. The effectiveness of a given language text therefore rests on the oars of form and situation.*

Alo (2004:23) also states that "...language is perceived not as a completely homogenous entity but as a variable phenomenon observable along spatio-temporal dimensions." This scholar (ibid) identifies two major types of language variation viz: (i) Dialect (including sociolect) variation and (ii) register (functional or occupational) variation. According to the scholar (ibid), "...the former is variation associated with language users and the latter is variation according to language use." Alo (2004:73) adds that,

*the notion of variation can further be explained as differences of usage and meaning; for example, a word, even a concrete one, may carry a web of meanings or associations for different users in different locations. To illustrate, the English word 'head' has different lexical meanings: as part of the body of humans and animals, the head of a match or pin, the head of a bed and the head of an organization. Yet, the connotations of the word may also vary with different situations.*

Against the foregoing general background, the present study explores the strategic importance and relevance of lexico-semantic elements to the thorough understanding and interpretation of the linguistic style of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. In other words, the study distils or foregrounds rhetorical patterning in Adichie's text, with particular reference to lexical meaning and context of situation.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Over the years, the linguistic style of writers has been a subject of intense enquiry by scholars. The Russian formalists and prague school of the 1920s, for instance, saw style in literature as linguistic foregrounding i.e. they placed a high premium on the language of literary texts (Hawkes, 1977; Bennet, 1979; Lemon and Reis, 1965). The structuralists of the 1960s also emphasized the various linguistic devices used by writers to foreground aspects of meaning.

According to Fowler (1990), linguistic formalism promotes the view that there is a special poetic language which is distinct from “ordinary” or “scientific” language. Chomsky’s (1957) Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) also delineates the peculiarity of the style of writers in terms of deviation i.e. the style of a writer or speaker is marked by constant violation of linguistic norms.

However, since this study focuses on a functional use of language, we shall adopt M. A. K Halliday’s systemic functional grammar as the theoretical model for analysis. The interest of this grammar is not only in describing the structure of language, but also in explaining the properties of discourse and its functions. It revolves around the work of J.R. Firth in general and M.A.K. Halliday in particular. In Hallidayan (1971) perception, a formal feature is stylistic if it has a particular meaning, effect or value. This notion emphasizes how language functions in texts and the nexus between language and what it is used for, or to achieve. The critical point here is that, whatever linguistic resource that is worth describing must be put to use, in the sense that the description and interpretation are necessarily based on the situational variables that prompted its use. Hence Oha (1994:730) posits that the approach recognizes the interdependency of style, meaning and context of situation and that the latter should not be subjected to second fiddle position, or ignored, in the analysis of style.

In Systemic Functional Grammar, language structure is analyzed along semantic, phonological, lexical and grammatical lines. Language function, on the other hand, is examined from three angles viz: ideational, interpersonal and textual. These are referred to as the metafunctions of language. The ideational metafunction of language is synonymous with the field of discourse i.e. the subject matter or propositional content of the text and the context of language use i.e. is it a religious or socio-political subject? According to Adeyanju (2008:86), it “... implies that language serves as an instrument for the encoder (speaker, writer) to express and articulate his idea and experience internally”. The interpersonal or interactional function, at another level, refers to the tenor of discourse i.e the social relationship that exists among participants in a specific discourse situation, which can influence or shape language use. According to Ogunsiji (2001:77), it “... helps to establish and sustain social relations. The textual aspect is particularly germane to the present study. It is concerned with the mode; the internal organization and communicative nature of a text. Leech and Short (1985:209) see Halliday’s textual functions of language as “... ways of using language to organize, understand and express information for effective communication”. In Adeyanju’s (2008:87) view, it suggests “... the availability of an internal structure which makes it possible for the writer or speaker to construct texts that are not only coherent but also situationally appropriate”. The main point is that, the textual metafunction relates what is said in a text to ideas outside the discourse, as we shall demonstrate in the present study.

### **Brief Biography of the Author**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1977 in Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria and was educated at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) secondary school; her father was a Professor of Statistics and later Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University. She was a student of Medicine and Pharmacy at UNN for a year and a half before leaving for Drexel University, Philadelphia; Eastern Connecticut State University; and John Hopkins University, Baltimore.

Chimamanda Adichie is one of the most universally acclaimed and decorated African writers of her generation. Her works include *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *Americanah*. *Purple Hibiscus* won the Hurston Wright legacy award for best debut, fiction category (2004); Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for best first book (Africa) 2005 and Commonwealth Writer’s Prize (Best first book, Overall) 2005. It was also shortlisted for the Orange Prize for fiction (2004) and longlisted for the Booker Prize (2004), among others.

### **Synopsis of the Text**

*Purple Hibiscus* is a story of Kambili, a fifteen year-old girl growing up in a stifling Catholic household in Enugu, Nigeria. Her wealthy father, Eugene Achike, with strict Catholic doctrine, dictates to and oppresses Kambili, her brother, Jaja and their mother Beatrice. While generous and politically active in the community, he is repressive and fanatically religious at home. Eugene’s religious fanaticism, mercantile attitude and over-bearing nature end up imprisoning, stifling and incapacitating those whom he professes to love the most.

He has even repudiated his own father for refusing to convert to Catholicism and turns his grand children against him, allowing only fifteen minutes a year with him at Christmas; but things change when Nigeria begins to fall apart under military coup. Eugene sends his children to stay with his sister, Ifeoma, a University Professor. Here, Kambili and Jaja meet their cousins, learns what it means to be free to speak their minds, laugh and argue. They discover a life and love beyond the confines of their father's authority. This new knowledge and awareness challenge their values and lift the silence and shadow from their world and in time, give rise to devotion and defiance.

### **Contextualizing the Text**

*Purple Hibiscus* captures the complex political and religious struggles occurring in Nigeria. It highlights the country's history and cultural experiences from her independence times. Nigeria attained her independence in 1960. This was followed by instability and series of coups which caused a great turmoil. The turmoil in the country resulted in corruption which caused further instability and successive coups. Political unrest, chaos and violence rage as military coups unfurl subjecting the society to tyranny. This is highlighted in the text under "leader, Big Oga" which echoes the atmosphere of the time, symbolized by the reign of General Sani Abacha, who took over Nigeria in 1993. During this time, there were incessant arrests and jails of critics and activists and foremost intellectuals and educators fled the country to avoid the rising autocratic rule, intimidation and deteriorating social services. It was at this time that a celebrated writer, Ken Saro Wiwa was executed with other human rights activists and Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations. This is the backdrop or context against which the story of "Ogechi Nwankiti" in the text is crafted. Abacha died in 1998 and was succeeded by General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who attempted to restore democracy. A former General, Olusegun Obasanjo became the elected President of Nigeria and was inaugurated in 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999.

Adichie also touches on the rich diversity of her people and their traditions, the variety of their religious beliefs and philosophy. She explores Western versus African cultures by contrasting the legacy of colonization – its religions, language and customs with traditional cultural values. Devout Africans (traditionalists) who are unfamiliar with the peculiar religious practices of others (especially Christians) tend to be seen from a detached, ironic point of view in Nigeria. The contemporary Nigeria has a variety of religious beliefs – christians, muslims and practitioners of traditional religion. These are the relevant contextual situations which inform linguistic patterning in the text.

### **Textual Analysis**

From the discussion so far, it is apparent that lexico-semantics deals specifically with the study of word-meaning, where the unit of meaning is the lexeme. However, it needs to be pointed out, from the outset, that the study goes beyond the analysis of the meaning and stylistic value of individual words or lexical choices. It also perfunctorily analyses multi-word language units, as used in the context of the text. This is in cognizance of Halliday's (1966:15) thesis that, in the analysis of lexical categories which reflect contextual meaning, the scholar should be concerned with 'simple,' compound,' as well as 'phrasal' groups. As Carter and McCarthy (1988) observe, multi-word units behave largely like single words for the purposes of examining meaning relations in the lexicon. In this section, therefore, the study examines how Adichie has selected and manipulated words, as determined by aesthetic and contextual variables, to make meaning in *Purple Hibiscus* under the relevant sub-headings. We also need to state that, as a result of the scope of the study, we shall explain and illustrate each sub-heading with only one or two textual references or excerpts, even though such instances pervade the text and, therefore, constitutes the hallmark of its language.

### **Simplicity of Lexical Choices**

Examining the novel in terms of lexical patterning will reveal Adichie's stylistic technique of the use of simple but appropriate words to capture the thematic preoccupations and social visions in the novel. In other words, Adichie's lexical usage in the novel generally consists of simple vocabulary, ostensibly in the mould of Achebe's, Ola Rotimi's, or Elechi Amadi's works. This is a design to reflect the turbulent story of Nigeria, both of the domestic and socio-political spheres, in a subtle and detached way. The lexical usage and its apt selection therefore aptly reflect the different familial and socio-political experiences, without the author's emotional involvement. As the vocabulary of the novel shows and, as we have already mentioned, Adichie's concern is to capture the turmoil of domestic abuse and deteriorating social infrastructure, a corrupt crumbling society- a glimpse of life in Nigeria – symbolizing any post-colonial African country.

This she has achieved by a deliberate effort to make the language simple so that the reader can relate to a common experience without being belaboured or hindered by the complexity of vocabulary or structure. Let us examine the deliberate selection of words that are pointers to themes in the novel:

*Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja did not go to communion (3)*

We discover that the opening line of the novel clearly outlines or encapsulates the axis of domestic conflict, drizzling with the threat of violence and devastation. This serves as foreshadowing to the chaos and difficulties of daily survival which inform Adichie's novel. It illustrates how Adichie's words can be appropriate at relevant occasions; with such simple words as "started", 'fall' and 'apart' even an averagely educated person could digest the meaning or import of the novel. We can, therefore, say that Adichie's structure of words is simple:

*priest, communion, gospel, spirit, shrine, sacrifice, military, pagan, bribe, riot, ritual, soldiers, civil, freedom, arrest, jail, cord, sin, guns, strike, holy, cross, corrupt, fuel, idol, death, fold, ruler, devil, angry, palm, order, bless, hospitalwar, power etc.*

It is important to note that the string of simple lexical items we have presented, even though they can be ordinarily grouped into their word classes, do not make meaning in isolation but in the context of use to express perceptions and experiences. To make meaning, therefore, certain words in the lexicon can be selected at particular points along the chain to form an association which conveys meaning above their denotative meaning. It is also pertinent to state that there are splashes of words whose structures are complex; and that where they exist, they are deployed to address an intricate human condition in the text. For instance, we find such words as: 'demonstrators,' 'unpainted' 'underneath' 'falling' 'ungodly' 'godlessness', 'misinformed' 'unpleasant' 'traditionalist' 'everlasting' 'disregard', etc, which perform this function. This is another pointer to the fact that lexical choices in the text reflect context.

### Collocation

This is the grouping of words according to the company they keep. Simply put, words convey meaning depending on the environment they appear. According to Crystal (1992:71) collocation is the "habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items" and it broadly refers to the grammatical combination of lexemes. This explains why words occur in the sequence they do in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. In the text, significant items of meaning of a word will be derived from the syntactic relationships into which it conventionally enters. Examples of collocation in the text include:

*solemnity of mass, triumphant entry, palm Sunday, Pentecostal churches, amnesty world, reverend sisters, human rights, mortal sin, fade-looking labels, mysterious ways, immaculate heart, marital music, head of state, bloody coup, civil war, vicious cycle, power drunk, cabinet minister, teacher's salaries, illegal structures, drug trafficking, drug barons, heathen festival etc.*

Apparently, the words collocate in an associative bond to capture or foreground specific subject matters or themes of the text and can be divided into semantic fields, to delineate each compartment of meaning that is relevant to thematization in the text.

### Lexical Sets/Semantic Fields

In lexical sets or semantic fields, the study extends to clusters of key words which correlate generally within a particular field of discourse. The field theory of semantics originated from the lexical field theory introduced by Jost Trier in the 1930s. The Online Wikipedia states that a semantic field is a set of words grouped semantically (that is, by meaning), referring to a specific subject and that words in a semantic field are not necessarily synonymous, but are all used to talk about the same general phenomenon. In Brinton's (2000:112) view, 'semantic field' or 'semantic domain' "denotes a segment of reality symbolized by a set of related words. The words in a semantic field share a common semantic property." In this case, we shall consider semantic fields in the novel by designating or accounting for words that are appropriate for particular or specific situations or subject matters i.e.

i. Words which are associated with religion: Church, communion, missal, holy waters, cross, ash Wednesday, oblate, mass, altar, offertory, sermon, Pope, Jesus, gospel, congregation, amen, sin sacredness, death, spiritual, prayer, alleluia, bible, sacraments, forgiveness, idol, worshipping, Christians, pagan, apostle, ungodly, hell, shrine, heathen, ancestors, missionaries, festival, devilish, hellfire, sacrifice, bishop, sacrilege, superstition, ritual, confirmation, crucifix etc.

- ii. Words associated with the media: press, newspaper, radio, television, news, advertisement, editorial, newscaster, editor etc.
- iii. Words associated with squalor and poverty: beggars, hawking, helplessness, naked, wrinkled, torn, sun-dried skin etc.
- iv. Words associated with government/politics: Head of state, soldier, over-throw, coup, power drunk, tyrant, regime, martial, politician, civil, democracy, elected, civilian, human right, civil right, democratic coalition, cabinet, minister, president etc.

As we have earlier mentioned since the text focuses on familial and national socio-political issues, the semantic or lexical fields do not only impart or create meaning in the text, but specifically highlight the different fields of human endeavour that are relevant to the discourse. In other words, these fields of human endeavour are manipulated by the actors or characters to advance the plot or storyline of the novel in addition to the author's use of the device to aid thematization.

### Selectional Restriction Rule

There are also cases or instances when certain words in a lexicon can be inappropriately or deviantly used to encode meaning in a subtle way and enrich the language of the text. This deviant pattern of Adichie's choice of words is technically referred to as selectional restriction rule violation, what Yankson (1987:2) describes as a good example of the violation of collocation rules. Below is an example of such use of incongruous lexical items from the text:

*... things are tough, but we are not dying yet. i tell you all these things because, it is you. with someone else, i will rub vaseline on my hungry face until it shone (77).*

The expression "hungry face" violates the selectional rule. This is because "my hungry face" introduces incompatible set and this is regarded as semantic deviation. The noun 'face' violates the selectional features of the adjective "hungry" and thus, creates a situation of semantic dissimilarity. They do not share the same features. Other examples in the text to show this device as part of Adichie's linguistics style include the following:

*Everything came tumbling down after palm Sunday. Howling winds came with an angry rain, uprooting frangipani trees in the frontyard (257).*

This passage, like most others, systematically breaks the selectional rules. The noun "rain" violates the selectional features of the adjectives "angry". The adjective "angry" has the features:

Angry (adj)	+ human
	+ attitude

And the noun "rain" has the features:

Rain (noun)	- human
	- attitude

According to Douglas (2004:281), " to create special meaning there could be a departure from the normal use of a word or expression in language." Thus, the textual function of these incompatible juxtapositions or violations is that they underscore or bring forcefully to the fore the theme of turmoil and violence in an African society. By using these expressions, Adichie applies the principle of similarity-metonymy and metaphor, where the associated feature of face ( i.e. +personality), for instance, is utilized. Thus, selectional restriction imposes constraints on a lexical item by specifying categorial frames in which an item may occur.

### Category Rule Violation

This is when inherent features of one item have been imposed on another. This type of lexical patterning is also a significant style marker in Adichie's text. Thus we find the following usage, for instance:

*The climb was easy because there weremany zig-zagging paths (284).*

In the passage above, Adichie breaks the category rule, what Yankson (1987:2) describes as the deliberate misplacement of an item in terms of class. According to this scholar (1987:1),

*Language - any language - is a code: a set of rules for generating what generative transformational grammarians call 'well-formed' sentences. A breach of the code could, therefore, result in an 'ill-formed' sentence. One such rule is that every lexical item in the English language belongs to a particular grammatical category: noun, verb, adjective, adverb etc. However, creative artists are noted for breaching the language code, for stylistic effect.*

Thus, "the climb was ..." is a violation because VP now occupies an NP slot. The verb "climb" is a violation because it has the categorial features of (+ V – N). It also breaks the subcategorization rule that stipulates proper slot for different word classes. This rule can be summarized as (V-NP). Thus, 'climb' cannot function as an NP. Here is another instance of semantic deviation from the text:

*It rained heavily the day AdeCoker died, a strange, furious rain in the middle of the patched harmattan (206)*

"Furious" and "rain" are contradictory ideas with different features – "rain"/ +N –V/ and "furious/ + adj –N/. This only becomes meaningful if the rule of similarity is applied – metaphor or simile. Significantly, what makes these violated features notable is that they serve as foregrounding devices and within the context of *Purple Hibiscus*, they are meaningful and serve as pointers to the theme of poverty, despair, violence and chaos, all of which are variations of social mishap.

### Imagery

This is the language use that produces pictures in the mind. Images are the mental pictures and impressions created by words in a manner that we can perceive sensations without actually experiencing them. This is another strategic quality of language in the novel and it is created by Adichie's predilection for using language that appeals to the senses. The language that represents the mental pictures is called imagery. Imagery appeals to the senses through sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell. Adichie has used this technique throughout the text. Significantly, visual imagery dominates her work, as she seeks to make her message graphic and pictorial. One of the many examples could be seen in the extract below:

*They all looked alike, in ill-fitting blouses, threadbare wrappers and scarves tied around their heads. They all had the same wide smile, the same chalk-coloured teeth, the same sun-dried skin, the colour and texture of groundnut husks (19).*

This description from the text is made concrete and clear with pointed visual imagery. We have: "ill-fitting blouses", "threadbare wrappers", "chalk-coloured teeth", "sun-dried skin" "groundnut husk". What happens is that with the above imagery, one immediately visualizes the abject condition of the people. Here is another passage that accounts for this stylistic device:

*Jaja swung open Nwukwu's creaking wooden gate, which was narrow... the house that stood in the middle of the compound was small, compact like dice, and it was hard to imagine Papa and aunty Ifeoma growing up here... a square house with a square door at the centre and two square windows on each side bounded by rusty metal bars... a mat of closet-size building of unpainted cement blocks with a mat of entwined palm fronds pulled across the gaping entrance (63).*

In the extract above, we find such imagery which makes the passage stand out in terms of meaning: "creaking wooden gate", "narrow", "small", "compact", "square door", "square window". "rusty metal bar", "closet-size", "unpainted cement blocks", "entwined palm fronds" and "gaping entrance". We can picture concretely the abode of Papa Nwukwu as well as its surroundings. As we have earlier noted, Adichie has deliberately fashioned out such imagery to evoke a vivid picture of abandonment. These images constitute fundamental ingredients or tools for foregrounding the theme of abject poverty and disillusionment in the text.

### Hyperbole

This is the use of exaggeration or overstatement to foreground aspects of meaning in a text. In *Purple Hibiscus*, we find that Adichie employs deliberate and outrageously exaggerated statements, as in the passage below:

*...my son owns that house that can fit in every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate (83).*

The point here is that Eugene's house is quite big. Of course, a house could not have taken every man (everybody) in a whole town, but it is a device to amplify the situation and emphasize the rejection and the cruelty of man to man. Certainly, it makes the point being made here overtly pungent and incisive. Another of such techniques in the text is found in the passage below:

*I spent the night in the petrol station last week, waiting for fuel...if you could see the mosquitoes that bit me that night, eh, the bumps on my skin were as big as cashew nuts (76).*

Bumps from mosquito bites could not have been as big as cashew nut in the real sense of things. But to convey the pathetic infrastructural situation in Nigeria, Adichie has to be hyperbolic. This device is plenteously employed or deployed in the text to magnify facts or emotions in order to effect or affect meaning, especially that which pertains to the sordid infrastructural situation in the country.

### Metaphor

This is the imaginative use of words or phrases to describe something, to equate two unlike things or show that two items have the same qualities. In the novel, Adichie makes use of this implied comparison in which she equates two unrelated things, indicating a similarity or comparison between certain qualities found in the two things:

*The last time, only two weeks ago when her swollen eye was still the black-purple colour of an overripe avocado... (11)*

In the passage above, Adichie attempts to portray the cruelty and inhumanity of man to man by making an analogy between a swollen eye and an overripe avocado whose colour is black purple. Another passage which reveals more of this device employed by Adichie is:

*...but it was true. All my years in Cambridge, I was a monkey who had developed the ability to reason (244).*

Here, a human being is a monkey with reasoning ability. Thus, the description is to reflect the ugly and bitter experiences of the blacks (Nigerians especially), in the white man's land. Blacks are regarded by whites in the world as barbaric and primitive. Adichie captures the portrait of what blacks are subjected and reduced to and the device is an attempt to emphasize or foreground this fact.

### Irony

Irony is the use of words that say the opposite of what is really meant by writers and speakers, often, in order to make a critical comment. In the text, Adichie employs this device by stating the opposite of what she intends to say in the hope that the true meaning will be comprehended by the perceptive reader. Ironically, the novel features, primarily, colonial implantation in Africa. It is a satirical treatment of Christianity and its implied connection in Africa. Also, ironically, Adichie exposes the absurdity of and the economic exploitation of the colonies i.e. in the text, the priest talks about zinc and cement instead of talking about the gospel during sermon:

*you people think, I ate the money for zinc okwoa?... afterall how many of you give to this church gbo? How can we build the house if you don't give? Do you think zinc and cement cost a mere ten kobo? (19).*

Ironically, we also see that the front pews were reserved for the affluent and the rich:

*...telling Papa in a loud whisper that the front pews were reserved for important people. Chief Umeadi, the only man in Abba whose house was bigger than ours... (90).*

Another significant irony in the text is that Christmas day, which is meant for the celebration of the birth of Christ, is turned into a fund-raising occasion. Adichie, in the above passage, subtly criticizes the Church as a socio-cultural institution which relegates the poor to the background. The use of satirical statements to indict a version of Catholicism which is fanatical is also a strategic irony; it exposes the folly of attaching importance to external or cosmetic religious ritual. The extract below highlights this assertion:

*The water gives me bad breadth...  
And the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me, ... (6)*

In the passage, Adichie satirizes the issue of what Ogoke describes as undue importance attached to communion. Jaja explains to his extremist father, why he did not go to communion on Easter Sunday; the passage ironically undermines the idea that communion is an ordinary water. Adichie exposes the absurdity in the belief that refusal to go for communion is death, when Eugene tells his son, Jaja:

*You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that. (6)*

Adichie captures the irrationality and fallacy which characterize these religious beliefs, and thus, ironical statements in the above passage become potent tools for affirming or analyzing the absurdity of the alien cultural system which negates traditional religion. Adichie presents Eugene who holds very strong alien views concerning his father, Papa Nwukwu's traditional religion as the blind victim of an alien religion:

*...you are like the fly blindly following a corpse to the grave (70).*

The above passage contains naked irony: it is a way of expressing preference for the traditional religion against that brought by colonialism. The significance of this pattern of language in the novel is that it is used to reinforce its meaning. The ironical structures reflect the theme of oppression and ignominy meted out to Africans, in this case, traditionalists, and exposes the incongruous nature and loud absurdities of the foreign religionists.

### Synonymy

Synonymy which is an aspect of lexical relations is said to refer to words which share the same sense or are similar in meaning. According to Yankson (1987:4), "we say two or more lexical items are synonymously related when they share a general semantic feature." However, conventional differences mean that most synonyms are not mutually interchangeable and that their use is closely associated with register and discourse context. Pure synonyms, which exhibit perfect congruence of denotation and collocation, are therefore rare. Nevertheless, we shall use the principle of synonymy as a useful tool to explain the general proximity of meaning that exists between words in the language. We should have it in mind that while words may mean the same thing in the strictest sense, they may carry markedly different connotations. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, we notice that all forms of external symbolic rituals within the text are uncovered under religious fanaticism. The following words and phrases as used in the text, for instance, have synonymous relations, and are also synonymously related under the general semantic feature/+ fanaticism/:

*Confession, communion, confirmation, spiritual retreat, reciting novenas for forgiveness, Eucharist fast, Act of contrition, rosary, sacrament, sacristy, apostle's creed and credo.*

According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), it is necessary to distinguish "general" lexical items or relations (i.e. those which would still be valid out of the textual context) and "instantial" lexical items or relations (i.e. those which are relevant only within the text). The significant point here is that, in the context of *Purple Hibiscus*, these words remind us of the extreme enthusiasm of some people about religion and this is a defining and fundamental aspect of meaning in the text, particularly when we evoke the pervading context of Eugene's religious fanaticism, mercantile predilection and overbearing attitude which is at the centre of the conflict of the text.

### Conclusion

In the foregoing discourse, we have established the value of lexico-semantic patterning in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, in the sense that it serves as a vehicle for the negotiation of the various messages, visions and themes embedded in the text. The study demonstrates the fact that, lexis constitutes the bits and pieces of language which are combined meaningfully for linguistic expression and human communication to be realized. The critical point is that lexis and meaning, as distinctive elements of language, play a strategic role in the production of a literary text as a form of human communication. This is evident or implicit in the fact that the lexico-semantic devices we explored above are strategic both stylo-rhetorically and in foregrounding the message(s) and social vision(s) of the author which constitute the essence of textual production or verbal communication. Hence Ajulo (1994:2) posits that inadequacies in textual analyses of linguists arise from the exclusion of inputs from lexis. According to this scholar (ibid), lexis is a linking bridge which connects linguistic forms and functions (as we have in semantics and pragmatics) and that the co-extension of lexis into other grammatical units like group, clause and sentence shows its significant place in the analysis of other levels of language (see Alabi, 2008:253):

However, it must be pointed out that lexico-semantic elements of texts, as with all other linguistic elements, do not function by themselves or as abstract entities, that is, without an enabling context. Alo (2004:13) posits that "... all uses of language occur in some kind of contexts in place and time" (see also Sapir, 1921; Austin, 1962; Gregory et al, 1978; Labov, 1973; Halliday, 1975, 1985).

Hence, as the study shows, we have gone beyond the levels of linguistic study to contextual and cultural analysis in order to properly decode the text, for as Weltek and Warren (1977) argue: "literature is related to all aspects of language and stylistic analysis must adopt a variety of approaches, including the context of culture".

The implication of this approach is that we have demonstrated how the use of language in the text differs from the use of language outside the text, which reveals the linguistic dynamics and nuances of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The Hallidayan systemic functional grammar, which we adopted as the theoretical framework or template for the study, is itself subsumed within functional linguistics. This implies that the interest of this theory is not only in describing the structure of language, but also in explaining the properties of texts and their functions in specific situational contexts. As we have earlier noted, in Hallidayan (1971) perception, a formal feature is significant, in a stylistic sense, if it has a particular meaning, effect and value in a defined context. The critical point, as we have shown in the study, is that, context is especially relevant in textual analysis since the concept of lexis in particular is 'dynamic' in nature "in relation to the theoretical construct of language use" (Alabi, 2008:253). Thus, distinct contexts, themes/subject matters or genres require different vocabulary for their meaningful expression and authors generally reflect or capture such imperative in their choice of words. Wales (2001:233) echoes the nitty-gritty of this notion *inter alia*:

*... different fields of lexis require special jargon for their expression as registers. ... Against the popular notion that producing a text is a sheer recycling of old words, it should be brought to bear that when old words are used in a peculiarly unique situation, they usher in a different shade of meaning.*

Alo (1998:3) also argues that,

*It is not enough for ... users of English to be familiar with a fairly wide vocabulary and sentence structure to be able to communicate effectively in situations. An efficient language user is not recognized by only the size of his vocabulary or his knowledge of formal grammar. The ability to choose words appropriately in a context is what makes him an effective and competent user of English. The good communicator will choose words that drive home meaning firmly and exactly.*

The fact to be underscored, however, is that, to a large extent, words routinely designate specific objects, processes and concepts in life, and their designations form part of the very bedrock of communication. The point is that meaning, as the study of Adichie's text shows, is an intricate and highly sensitive phenomenon in the sense that it can be influenced by a lot of variables, making it difficult to explain or determine precisely what and how words mean. Ndimele (1999) must have had this potential or behaviour of meaning in mind when he tagged it a harlot among words; a temptress who can seduce the writer or speaker from the part of intellectual chastity. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that the construction of a literary text (or any other text) is a conscious or deliberate process, in the sense that any meaningful linguistic construct is a product of a deliberate patterning of lexical choices within specific contextual frameworks. Hence the linguistic style adopted in a particular work of art encapsulates how the various resources of communication cohere in the text.

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