

Language and Meaning: A Study of the Syntactic Patterning in Helon Habila's Novel, *Measuring Time*

Edokpayi, Justina N. PhD
Ambrose All University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.
E-mail: ngoedos@hotmail.com

Abstract

In a literary text, language is studied at different levels comprising the graphological, phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic levels. This paper explores the significant syntactic parameters which Helon Habila harnesses to convey his artistic visions and sensibilities in *Measuring Time*, his text under study. As a linguistic component, syntax deals with the arrangement of words in sentences. It is central to language and every language has its own way of word ordering. In this study, the functional sentence types, parallelism and phrases as sentences, among other syntactic features used by the author in the text are identified, analysed, and their artistic functions in the novel are expounded. The Neo-Firthian Systemic grammatical model by M. A. K Halliday is adopted in this study. This paper will be of significance to knowledge because it will stimulate further studies in literature. Moreover, as a linguistic approach to the study of an African novel, it serves as a springboard to researchers in the linguistic study of African novels, in particular and literature in general.

Keywords: Syntactic Patterning, Helon Habila

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1. Introduction

A study of the syntax of a language involves a study of the structure and the ordering of components within the sentences of such a language (Yule 2010). Fromkin et al. (2007) assert that “the part of grammar that represents a speaker’s knowledge of sentences and their structures is called syntax”. They also claim that the rules of syntax combine words into phrases and phrases into sentences and that the rules specify the correct word order for a language”. In *Measuring Time*, Habila deploys syntactic patterns, among other linguistic parameters to convey the themes of corruption, politics, love, the aftermaths of war, disillusionment and so on. He X-rays the Nigerian society, exposing and condemning the societal malaise, which are inhibiting growth and development in the country.

1.1 The Synopsis of the Novel, *Measuring Time*

Helon Habila’s *Measuring Time* is a historical and captivating novel, which narrates the various events in Keti village, in northern Nigeria ranging from the pre-colonial period to the post colonial era. The village is besieged by injustice, large scale corruption, especially in the traditional leadership, and religious crisis which are responsible for violence and chaos in the community. Mr. Grave, the British representative in Keti perpetrates a lot of evils; he is deceptive, exploitative and wicked in all his actions in the community. However, he dies miserably.

The novel also tells the story of Mr. Musa Lamang, his twins, Mamo and LaMamo, and his extended family. Lamang marries Tabita, the daughter of a very wealthy man, called “Owner of Cattle” due to her father’s wealth. On the demise of his father-in-law, he inherits his wealth to become a very wealthy and famous businessman in Keti and beyond. Due to Lamang’s wealth and good looks, he is so attracted to women that he becomes very promiscuous. He has love affairs with many of the women, especially, Saraya, his first love, who is a married woman. His wife, Tabita, is subjected to loneliness and heartbreak as a result of lack of love and care from her husband. Unfortunately, she dies miserably and prematurely, leaving her twin babies to the care of Marina, Lamang’s sister.

Despite Lamang's success in businesses, and his brother's advice against his involvement in politics, he becomes active and popular in politics. But he faces traumatic experiences in politics as a result of his betrayal by Alhaji Isa Danladi, his close political associate and friend. Danladi steals his idea of "Reverse Osmosis" to defeat him in an election, to emerge the chairmanship candidate for the Victory Party. "Reverse Osmosis" is a scientific solution to water and drought crises in Keti and its environs, which Lamang has earlier introduced into the party, and explained to his party members as his campaign strategy to win the election in question. Frustrated out of the party due the injustice done to him by the party executives, who have ignored his petitions seeking redress for Danladi's betrayal, Lamang decamps to the New Victory Party. He contests under the platform of the New Victory Party against Danladi for the chairmanship position. But the election is characterized by election malpractices, resulting in Lamang's arrest, detention and torture by the police for election rigging. His bitter experiences in detention and after his release are so traumatic psychologically and physically that he dies miserably and prematurely.

Lamang's children are very bitter against him because he neither cares for, nor loves them. Moreover, they have been told stories of the ill-treatment he has meted out to their late mother, Tabita. Poised to punish him, they map out painful strategies executed at interval, which hurt him terribly.

Fascinated by the honour and respect accorded Haruna, their uncle, who has fought in the Nigerian/Biafra war, the twins and their cousin, Asabar, nurse the dream of joining the army. LaMamo and Asabar succeed in escaping to the city to fulfill their dream. LaMamo becomes a rebel soldier and fights in Liberia; he also fights in many African countries. Sadly, Mamo is confined to Keti as a result of his poor health condition arising from sickle cell anaemia, which denies him the opportunity of fulfilling his childhood dream of becoming a soldier. His precarious condition is further compounded by his truncated university education as a result of ill health. Frustrated and lonely, Mamo becomes withdrawn; he keeps to himself seeing no more reason to live. But as expected of a committed artist in literary works, Habila infuses hope in *Measuring Time*; Mamo finds solace and love in Zara, who gives him the reason to live again. Moreover, she encourages him to keep hope alive, and put his creative writing talent to an advantage. His condition drastically changes for good due to his association with Zara, and appointment as the secretary to Mai, the traditional ruler of Keti. His excellent performances in his writing career, and in the palace, especially his organization of a very successful fundraising ceremony in Keti, give him an opportunity to rise to an exalted position in the society. As a result of this, Mamo becomes so popular that he begins to associate with the important members of the society including the state governor.

In *Measuring Time*, the story is also told of Zara, a university graduate formerly married to Captain George, but frustrated out of the marriage by the ill-treatment meted out to her by her arrogant husband. Unable to bear his ill-treatment any longer, she divorces him, returns to her village and gets employed as a teacher in Keti Community School. While there, she falls in love with Mamo, also a teacher in the school. Mamo is so much in love with Zara who has been of immense assistance to him that he asks for her hand in marriage, but she declines. They remain close friends until she meets Themba, her old friend, while in the university. Unable to cope with some issues in her life, especially her failure to get the custody of her only child from her broken marriage, Zara relocates to South Africa to work with Themba in the orphanage home he runs there.

Habila also tells the story of Haruna, Lamang's brother, who has fought in the Nigerian civil war, and his horrible and traumatic experiences of the war. Many years after the war, he returns home so disfigured, weak and in a pitiable condition that Mamo whom he meets at home on arrival, takes him for a mad man. In spite of the encouragement given to him by his family members, and the villagers, he commits suicide.

The novel ends with LaMamo's home coming after many years of fighting various wars in many African nations. Fed up with horrible and traumatic experiences of the wars, to which he has lost one eye, he decides to return home with great expectations and hope, only to discover that Keti is no longer the same peaceful community he has left years ago. As authorial voice puts it:

LaMamo was silent for a long time, and then he said, "I felt as if I had lost my way coming up from the bus stop. This wasn't what I dreamt of coming back to. I told Bintou about the green hills and farms and valleys. ..." (286)

On arrival, LaMamo sees the hopelessness of his people's existence. They are subjected to exploitation, injustice and untold hardship perpetrated by the corrupt traditional rulers, and the police brutality, unlawful arrest and killings perpetrated by the police. LaMamo is poised to liberate his people even if it costs him his life. Mobilizing the youths, they launch an attack on the palace, killing the Waziri, and burning down the palace. The ensued police intervention leaves many people including LaMamo dead. Thus, LaMamo dies as a hero having liberated his people.

Ekwere summarizes the whole situation in his article saying, “The novel ends with LaMamo’s return to a village that had a ghost of its former self, amidst a growing revolution, which took the lives of many villagers alongside LaMamo and reset the lives of the people of Keti village”.

1.2 The Themes of the Novel

In the novel, *Measuring Time*, Habila is preoccupied with various issues among which are the vices that plague the Nigerian society. The major themes comprise injustice, exploitation, and corruption, which are responsible for poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Politics, colonialism, violence, love, feminism, retributive justice, adventure, among other themes are also conveyed.

According to Ekwere (2019) themes such as history, religion, politics, love, sickle cell anaemia, colonialism and military power are aptly portrayed ... We observe from the text that not only has the author exposed the societal malaise, but he condemns them in totality, and recommends the measures to rid the country of such problems in order to enhance growth and development.

1.3 Significance of Study

Generally, this study contributes immensely to knowledge. As a linguistic study of an African literary text in a second language, the study contributes immensely to future researches on the language of African literature. Moreover, it stimulates further studies in the field of linguistics since it is a linguistic approach to the study of language.

1.4 Research Methodology

The library, internet and the novel, *Measuring Time*, form the basis of this study. Relevant literature on linguistics, syntax, the author and the novel under consideration are reviewed. The grammatical model adopted in this study is the Neo-Firthian Systemic Functional grammar propounded by M.A.K. Halliday. The choice of this grammatical model is based on the advantages it has over the other grammatical theories available in language study. Again, this paper is aimed at identifying and analysing the syntactic parameters the author has utilized, and their artistic functions in the texts. Therefore, the choice is appropriate because Halliday’s systemic functional grammar is sensitive to the functions, which language performs in texts. Halliday sees language as performing three basic functions comprising the ideational, interpersonal and textual.

Again, Hallidayan model is text centred. In expounding the syntactic patterns in the novel, the model will be beneficial to us as it will enable us not only to take into account the linguistic features in isolation, but also to consider their relation to the other aspects of the text. The functional approach describes how social meanings are reflected in the various functions that language performs in human society. It also explains the various ways these meanings and functions are manipulated in a particular syntactic realization (Ugwu 1990).

2. Textual Analysis

We explore below the significant syntactic patterns utilized by Habila in his novel under consideration for artistic effects, commencing with the functional sentence types. These comprise the declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory functional sentences. Below are instances of the novelist’s use of the functional types of sentence in the novel.

2.1 Declarative Sentences

Declarative sentences are used basically to convey information. Quirk et al. (1973) see a declarative as a statement containing a compulsory subject preceding a verb. Declarative sentences make statements that cannot be doubted. The excerpts exemplified and analysed below, are instances where the author avails himself of the opportunity of the communicative functions of declarative sentences, to convey his ideas in the text to the readers.

1. “I know how we can supply the whole state with water cheaply and steadily using a technique called “reverse osmosis.” ... “If we can pump crude oil from Port Harcourt to the refinery in Kaduna, there is no reason why we can’t pump water. We

- will create artificial lakes and rivers; we will turn the barren lands into huge farms and green belts. Remember, money is not our problem, but how to spend it. (115).
2. The very next day Lamang held a big meeting in the courtyard to announce his move to the NVP from the VP, and to discuss the strategy for the coming election, for what sweeter revenge should he aim for against the party that had betrayed him than victory against it at the polls? (154).
 3. I give the party two months, no, just one month, before they regret choosing Danladi, and all the negative thinkers around him, over me. They'll see him for who he truly is, an ingrate, a double-crosser. (116).
 4. This is a man I opened my door to, and introduced to all the important members of the party ___ in fact, I recruited him into this party. ... I tell you, soon they'll see his true colours, they'll come begging to have me back. (116).

In excerpt 1 above, Habila conveys the theme of politics; he identifies betrayal as a feature of Nigerian politics. He presents the Trumpet newspaper report on Alhaji Isa Danladi's well prepared and presented manifesto, at the party's annual convention in the state capital, to elect the party's chairmanship candidate. In it, Danladi presents as his own vision for the party, the idea of "Reversed Osmosis", a scientific technique earlier introduced and explained to the members of the party by Mr. Musa Lamang, his political opponent, for the state chairmanship position. With his promises in the well articulated and successful presentation, he succeeds in convincing the party delegates. Due to how impressed the delegates are because of the scientific technique, Mr. Lamang leaves the convention hall without making his own presentation, and by unanimous decision, Alhaji Danladi becomes the party's chairmanship candidate.

Mr. Musa Lamang who has been betrayed by Dandali, petitions him repeatedly for the blatant theft of his idea without any response from the party leadership. Moreover, to his greatest surprise, majority of his friends desert him. As a result of the betrayal and failure to obtain redress from the party leadership, Lamang resigns from the party, and decamps to the opposition party, the New Victory Party.

The novelist also conveys the theme of sycophancy in Nigerian politics in the text. Stylistically, he deploys the informative nature of the declarative constructions to ridicule the sycophants in Nigerian politics, who for what they stand to gain betray and abandon even their closest friends, and associates without remorse.

In the same vein, Habila deploys declarative sentences to expose the election malpractices, which characterize politics in Nigeria. In their attempts to win elections by all means, the corrupt Nigerian politicians engage in different forms of election malpractices, which subsume buying votes with money, thuggery, snatching of ballot boxes, among others as depicted in the following excerpts.

5. He understood why when he realized what was going on. There was a bundle of cards on the mat before the youths, and when he looked closer he saw that there were ballot cards. ... "What are you doing?" "We are voting already," Asabar said with a laugh. The three echoed his laughter as they dipped their thumbs into a blotter of ink before pressing them on the white square space next to the rooster logo on the ballot cards ... "We will take them to the polling stations and put them in the ballot boxes. That's how you win elections. I am sure our opponents, the old Victory Party, ha-ha, are right now somewhere doing the same thing." (170).
6. "It is not important. We have over ten thousand cards here. If we can distribute them to the different polling stations on time, then the local government chairmanship is ours, after that the governorship" — (170).

As conveyed in samples 5 and 6 above, during elections in Nigeria, the jobless youths offer themselves as willing tools to the corrupt politicians to rig elections. With an offer of five thousand naira each, they risk their lives, snatching and carrying ballot boxes irrespective of the risks involved. In Keti community as in other parts of Nigeria, Mamo finds the notorious Asabar and his friends engaged in thumb printing ballot cards in Asabar's house, to be distributed to different polling stations. This is to enable Musa Lamang, the new chairmanship candidate, of the New Victory Party to win the chairmanship election. The irony of the situation is that the corrupt politicians make a lot of promises that are never fulfilled to the youths in order to lure them, after which they dump them, frustrated.

Moreover, the worst consequence of election malpractices in Nigeria from past experiences is that at the end of elections, wrong and corrupt people are voted into important positions of authority in government. This is the major factor responsible for bad governance, poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria. To tackle the problem of election malpractices, and enhance the choice of credible personalities into positions of authority in the country, decisive steps must be taken.

Furthermore, the author conveys the theme of retributive justice in the text, deploying declarative constructions as depicted in the excerpts below.

7. "But what ... what ...happened?" Mamo asked, coming out to the veranda and sitting beside his auntie who had her head in her hands.

"The police, they attacked them. They said they found them with ballot papers ... and ... and now two of the boys are dead...and they said Asabar might not last the night, shot, he was shot." ... "They are in the hospital. ... I am on my way there." (174-175).

8. The guards ran to the neighbouring village, but unfortunately Lamonje and her husband never got to enjoy the fruit of their crime. They both went mad. It was said that from that night of the murder neither of them was ever able to sleep again; they kept seeing Mai Kilang's bloody ghost in their bedroom. Lamanje would run out naked into the street screaming, 'Blood, blood on my hands! ... her husband committed suicide and she spent the rest of her life in the madhouse. (228-229).

9. That same evening the police came and took Lamang away to the state capital for questioning. (175).

10. Mamo walked and his mind was a big hole; the only thoughts that

echoed and re-echoed in the hole was, *I am a murderer. I've killed my cousin. But Asabar did not die; he remained in a coma. (175).*

In extract 7, the author conveys the theme of retributive justice. During the chairmanship election, the notorious Asabar and his irresponsible friends are accosted by the police, as they are found carrying ballot papers to distribute to different polling stations in Keti. In a gun battle with the police, some of the boys are left dead while others are badly wounded. Asabar is paralyzed and hospitalized due to severe bullet wounds from gun shots. The author highlights some of the risks involved in election malpractices in this extract. He also conveys the theme of retributive justice, thereby discouraging the youths from rigging and thuggery in elections.

Habila also deploys declarative sentences, which as earlier stated are informative in nature, to reiterate retributive justice in excerpt 8. He gives an account of a couple who stab Mai Kilang to death in his sleep, in their quest for the return of traditional leadership to their family. Though the couple craftily and falsely accuses the guards of being responsible for the death, the truth is revealed by the disgraceful ordeal they later face. Aside their going mad, the man commits suicide while his wife ends up in a psychiatric centre. In the extract, the novelist captures the repercussions of evil acts, thereby condemning and discouraging such acts in the society.

Similarly, Habila reveals the repercussions of vanity in the novel with the use of the declarative sentence in excerpt 9. The traumatic experiences of Lamung's family due to Asabar's paralysis are further compounded by the arrest for questioning, torture and detention of Lamang in the state capital over the issue of election rigging. To his greatest surprise and disappointment, neither his former political associates from the Victory Party nor the members of his new party showed any concern. Contrary to his expectation of something of hero's welcome after his release, no one visited him on his release after one week of detention. Devastated and disillusioned, he ends up tragically. His tragic death despite his wealth and popularity as a business man is attributed to his over ambition politically. As the authorial voice puts it:

His vanity was now a knife, stuck in his back, twisting, and torturing,
making his mouth more crooked as he contemplated his helplessness and
all the ill fortune that had recently dogged him. (182)

The declarative sentence in sample 10 captures the degree of Mamo's guilt and torment on the news of the death of two of Asabar's friends, and the fact that Asabar himself might not last the night as a result of their encounter with the police. Mamo's guilt and torment are borne out of his erroneous belief that he is responsible for what has befallen them. This is as a result of the fact that he has earlier written to the police, alerting them of their plan to distribute thumb-printed ballot papers to different polling stations, during the chairmanship election. Unknown to Mamo, the letter never got to the police, but has been intercepted and given to his father, by a corrupt policeman who works for him. Here, Habila does not only expose corruption in politics, but in Nigerian Police Force.

The different forms of corrupt practices prevalent in the forces and the society in general are also reiterated and condemned by the author in the following excerpts.

11. You don't understand how these things work, Mr. Teacher. We have the police in our pockets." (171).
12. The compound stood by itself, yards away from the nearest house. Asabar said he preferred it that way, for privacy, but Mamo knew that the real reason his cousin wanted privacy was because he was still selling marijuana on the side. The police had twice raided them, and on both occasions Lamung had bribed the police to let him go. (169).
13. They talked of the military coup. It had happened suddenly a week ago. The civilian state governors and local government chairmen had been replaced by military administrators, and as often happened after takeovers, promises had been made, expectations had risen, most of Mamo's father's old friends were now in prison for "economic crimes, "but nothing much had changed. (227).

In samples 11, Habila also lashes and condemns the corrupt members of the Police Force who take bribes to aid, and abate corrupt politicians in election malpractices, as well as the politicians for bribing their ways through to win elections. For instance, as Mamo reminds Asabar that jail term is the repercussion of his nefarious activities in election if caught by the police, he replies as stated in sample 11 above.

The author also lampoons the dubious members of the society involved in criminal activities such as the sale of illicit drugs. He does not spare the corrupt policemen and others who aid and abate criminals. Instances abound in the text where criminals commit grievous crimes with impunity due to the police protection that they enjoy. In sample 12, the novelist discloses Asabar's involvement in the sale of marijuana, and his arrest on two occasions in Keti. But his uncle, Lamang, bribes the police to release him on both occasions as practiced in the Nigerian society.

In excerpt 13 above, Habila X-rays the military associated with incessant military coups; this used to be the common practice in African nations, with lots of promises which raise the hopes of the people. But, ironically, such promises are never met with corresponding changes, and improvement in the conditions of the citizens. As prevalent in Nigeria, there have been reports of government officers found guilty of economic crimes, and billions of naira recovered from them. But Nigerians are never told how and where the recovered money is spent. Such public funds which ought to be used to improve the lives of the people are embezzled while the people suffer abject poverty.

Similarly, Habila points his search lights on other areas in Nigerian society where corruption abounds in the following excerpts.

14. We are not closing down this school or any other school. We are taking them over and improving them; we are turning them into model schools. (165).
15. "Give them one year and the school will be nothing but statistic on paper. Are you so naïve? Can't you see what's happening? If you think the military were inefficient, well, you have seen nothing yet. In year, no, six months everyone will have forgotten there was once a school here. There will be only grass and lizards and goats in the classrooms and crumbling walls. Mark my words, just mark my words." (166).

16. Iliya still sent letters to the ministry of education asking for the school to be reopened; still he received no replies. The school's signboard lay face-down on the ground, its wood eaten up by termites — a group of kids play hide-and-seek in the classrooms whose doors lay broken on the ground. (321).

Habila also exposes deceit and injustice in government, the intimidation of the members of the opposition parties, and the neglect of their zones and communities in excerpts 14 to 16 above. These are common and unfortunate practices in Nigerian politics responsible for the neglect of certain zones and communities by the government, in terms of human and infrastructural developments. As portrayed in the novel, Keti community suffers due to Lamang's movement to the opposition party; his former party members are poised to punish him and his community. They decide to close down the community school in his village. All efforts by the headmaster, Lamang's brother to dissuade the commissioner from the vindictive plan prove abortive. Though the commissioner gives a flimsy excuse for the closure of the school, the government's action is political and vindictive. Moreover, the closure of the school is a warning to other communities who would have been tempted to vote against the ruling party in future elections.

The novelist addresses and condemns government's neglect of the educational system at all levels in Nigeria. Through his statements of facts characteristic of declarative sentences in samples 14 to 16, the literary artist paints a clear picture of the ugly and poor states of educational institutions in Nigeria, from the primary to the university levels. The poor attitude of Nigerian leaders towards education is also responsible for the incessant strikes in Nigerian universities.

Though the commissioner of education has claimed that the need for better funding and improvement of the schools, have motivated the government takeover of the community school in Keti as stated in extract 14, many years after, the school has remained closed and overgrown by weeds as depicted in extract 16. This is the height of deceit and negligence associated with the different levels of government in Nigeria. With the samples above, the author exposes and condemns societal ills in Nigeria aimed at correcting them.

Furthermore, Habila conveys the themes of rivalry, violence and the aftermaths of war in the *Measuring Time*. He deploys declarative constructions in the extracts below with their communicative value to capture the causes and devastating effects of Keti riot and the Nigerian/Biafra war.

17. The trouble began when their path took them through the village mosque, which was in the section of Keti known as Hausa Quarter because most of the people living there were originally from the Hausa cities. The singing drew the Muslims out of the mosque and beds, and when they discovered the Christians were going to the hilltop to pray for rain, they decided not to be outdone. They went back into their houses and mosques and brought their mats and beads, and chanting "Allahu Akbar!" they all made for the hill ... (276).
18. The fighting descended into the streets, into the village, into the streets, into houses before the riot police came. Churches and mosques are on fire, there are dead bodies on the streets — I saw many with my own eyes ... '' (277).
19. People stood in groups at the hospital gate to hear the news from the increasing number of people fleeing from the fights. He saw women coming in through the gate, their possessions rolled up in bundles on their heads; others had children strapped to their backs and as they ran they kept looking back over their shoulders. (277).
20. He said, "it began with rumours of killings. The year was 1966. We heard from travelers and on the radio that the Igbo leader, Ojukwu, was planning to divide the country into two, and already the name of the other country was on everyone's lips then the riots began in faraway towns like Kano and Kaduna — everywhere Igbos were being hunted down and killed — every day they left the north in busloads for their hometowns with what little of their possessions they could gather" (42).
21. This is how it happened: Mr Eme had a local friend, and his name was Ando, and that day Ando went to visit Eme as usual. Mr. Eme had a gun, a rifle, which he always kept on the floor beside his chair in the living room. Well, as they talked Ando

suddenly swooped down and snatched the gun, he rushed out with it to where a crowd was waiting. It had all been planned. That was how Mr. Eme was killed. Yes, I was there, I saw it with my own two eyes. It was not a pretty sight I tell you ... That was the day the fights began in Keti. It went on all night. Some of them managed to escape to neighbouring villages, some were hidden sby friends, but most were killed. (43).

Clashes between the Christians and Muslims have been common occurrences in Northern Nigeria. This has been a nagging issue in the country because such crises have devastating effects. Not only are lives lost, properties are destroyed from past occurrences. In the most serious ones people are rendered homeless. Extract 17 expresses the clash between Keti Christians and Muslims, which has resulted in a serious riot in the community. The clash ensued on the hill as both religious groups offer prayers to God for rain because of drought. The seriousness of the riot has resulted in a lot of problems and casualties as presented in an eye witness account in excerpts 18 and 19 above.

Moreover, the novelist portrays in samples 20 and 21 the rivalry between the Hausas and Igbos, and its devastating consequences on Nigeria. Apart from resulting in the Nigerian/Biafra war that almost tore Nigeria apart, many lives and valuable properties are lost as the novelist depicts in the excerpts.

Habila also conveys the theme of determination in the text. He puts declarative sentences, which state facts that cannot be doubted to his advantage artistically. In the sample below, he presents Mamo's reflection on his past, deploying the declarative sentences in the excerpt.

21. At last Mamo went home, thoughtful, tired but determined to forge ahead—this was a chance he was resolved to exploit even if it killed him. On the way he encouraged himself by sending his mind into the future, to when the book would be ready. He reminded himself of the Waziri's promise that the book would make him the most famous of his peers. He reflected on the irony of life: how his illness, which had stopped him from pursuing his childhood dreams of martial glory, had pushed him to become studious and this had now opened for him other avenues of fame. (215).

Mamo, who has suffered a lot of setbacks due to health challenges, being born with sickle cell anemia reflects on his past. Not only has his hope of enlisting in the military been dashed by his health condition, his university education is truncated. All these have left him disillusioned and confined to the village while his brother fights in Chad as a soldier. But with Zara's encouragement and advice, he puts his writing talent to his advantage. Distinguishing himself in writing, he is not only appointed the secretary to the Mai, the traditional ruler of Keti, but given the task of writing Mai's biography. Due to his excellent performance in the palace, Mamo rises to an enviable position in the society, especially with his organization of a successful fundraising durbar in Keti. He begins to associate with important personalities in and outside Keti, including the governor of his state who commends him, and says to the Mai for whom Mamo works:

22. You really shouldn't keep such talented people in the village. You must send them to work for me in the capital. (240).

In the excerpt, the author encourages hard work and excellence, the prerequisites for success in life.

Habila condemns the wrong practice of conscripting under age teenagers into the army. In the extract below, Toma, a character in the text, who has fought in the Nigerian civil war, narrates how he and many under age youths from Keti and other neighboring villages have been lured with a money gift of five shillings each to join the army, by the district officer and some policemen saying:

23. Most of us were under fifteen, but nobody bothered to find out our age.

From the place we were taken to the state capital. We were in the state capital for a couple of days.....that was where we took our medical and physical texts. (43).

This is a grievous act of injustice and a common practice that is associated with war times. Those lured to take such risk have no knowledge of what is involved in wars. The result of such injustice is that promising youths are killed in the warfronts due to their ignorance, and the insensitivity of unscrupulous persons in the society.

In all the extracts above, we observe that the novelist has put the communicative function of declarative functional sentence to his advantages to convey his artistic visions in *Measuring Time*.

2.2 Interrogative Functional Sentences

Udofot & Ekpenyong (2019) note that a sentence that asks a question is called an interrogative sentence. Syntactically, interrogative functional sentences are deployed for inquiries, but sometimes such questions are rhetorical, and therefore responses are not given. Below are instances of Habila's use of interrogative sentences for stylistic effects in the novel.

1. "You mean the money, the fifteen million that was raised for drilling wells so that people could get water was shared among the Mais and nothing is left for the original project?" Mamo asked. (281)
2. ... "What exactly do they mean by 'review'?" What do these idiots know about general standards when they send their kids to private schools in London and America and now ... ? (88 - 89)
3. Do you want to deny the whole community this chance? (165)
4. What? Only an essay? But who has done it in this village before? (160)
5. "But ... just like that?" (163)
6. The youths must be encouraged to ask, why is it our way?
7. The rest of the world has science and commerce and prosperity. What do we have? (83)
8. "What is there to say?" (183)
9. ... "Now, who wants to come with me to the palace to tell the Mai and his Waziri what we think of them, and to demand the immediate release of our family from the police cell?" (291)

The novelist satirizes the fraudulent members of the ruling class in Keti and its neighbouring villages, for embezzling the public funds meant to better the lots of the people in excerpt 1. Due to the problem of lack of water in Keti, Mamo, the patriotic palace secretary has suggested and championed a fund raising durbar during which fifteen million naira is raised to drill wells to provide water for the people. The interrogative sentence in extract 1 expresses Mamo's surprise and anger against Waziri due to the misappropriation of the funds. The traditional leaders have shared the bulk of the money among themselves instead of utilizing it for the purpose for which it has been raised. In his response to the question, Waziri tries to appease Mamo, asking him:

Did you think we forgot you, our talented scribe?

Habila further ridicules Waziri who offers bribe to Mamo in attempt to make him to forget about the well project. Below is the conversation between them.:

"What," the Waziri said slowly, "if I offered you more money?" You will give me your account number, and I will put in something for you"

Mamo laughed. You seem to forget that my father left me a lot of money, more money than I need. But thanks for the offer. I just want you to dig the wells like we planned. (284)

In the extracts, Habila exposes and condemns corruption, and also encourages patriotism as displayed by Mamo.

The novelist addresses the problem of injustice done to Nigerian youths due to corruption and bad governance, deploying the rhetorical questions in extract 2. The corrupt Nigerian leaders send their children to the best schools in Europe and America, and neglect the Nigerian universities. This is the height of injustice done to the youths. Again, the incessant ASSU strikes, which they have to contend with is the result of the poor funding of universities. Such strikes subject the youths to psychological trauma. Due to idleness during such strikes, majority of them are lured into criminal activities, especially internet fraud and arm robbery. In spite of the problems the strikes pose to both students and parents, the government remains insensitive. The message inherent in the samples is that of the insensitivity of Nigerian leaders to the plights of the citizens, and the burning issues that need urgent government attention.

The reward for hard work is also captured in the novel by the novelist. Uncle Iliya expresses joy over Mamo's feat recorded in the publication of his essay in a Ugandan History Society Quarterly magazine, the first of its kind in the history of Keti. He is very happily and discloses his intention to put a copy of the essay on the school notice board, and also send a copy to the local government chairman, to show them the calibre of teachers in the community school. The question in sample 4 is Uncle Iliya's response to Mamo's assertion that his essay should not be publicized since it is only an essay. In this excerpt, the author stresses the need to recognize and reward excellent performances, in the different fields of human endeavour in the society.

The question in excerpt 5 is directed to Waziri by Mamo in expression of his surprise over his appointment as Mai's secretary. Habila also reiterates the recognition of excellence in this excerpt.

The need for education, especially in science, popularly referred to as "discovery" is emphasized by the literary artist. In samples 6 to 7 are questions asked during the conversation between Mamo and Iliya, his well-read and objective uncle. In their discussion, Uncle Iliya advises Mamo never to accept any idea at face value, but to develop an attitude of making inquiries, and basing his acceptance of ideas on verifications and evidence.

Iliya also condemns the bad aspects of African culture, and emphasizes the need for the youths to disregard such aspects, which are of no relevance to the growth and development of the society. He encourages the education of the youths, especially in the sciences with the interrogative construction in sample 7. In these extracts, the author stresses the importance of education and science, which are the prerequisites for growth and national development.

Mamo feels a flash of anger as a result of his different thoughts in his mind. These comprise the thoughts of Asabar's confinement to wheelchair for life, his bitter childhood without a mother, and the abandonment to which he and his twin brother have been subjected by their father. Angry with his father for neglecting them and his cruelties to their late mother, Mamo requests for more information about her from his father. In response, Lamang asks the rhetorical question in the excerpt, after which he says that she was so young and frail, and that she died so young. Not satisfied with his father's response, he asks: "Is that all?"

In this sample, the novelist ridicules the men who neglect their children and ill-treat their wives, thereby discouraging such acts, which are responsible for disunity in families.

Habila also conveys the theme of heroism in the novel. LaMamo is presented as a hero who is determined to save his people even if it costs him his life. He has returned to Keti, having fought as a soldier for many years, only to meet his people in distress and state of hopelessness. Poised to liberate them, he asks the youths of the village the question in extract 9. He leads the angry youths to the palace of the Mai in protest against injustice, deceit, police brutality, among others. As LaMamo champions the violence, Mamo warns him against police intervention, and the death of innocent people. In response, LaMamo says:

It is not a waste if people die fighting to be free. (293)

Justifying his actions, he says:

Yesterday when I came, I could see the hopelessness in the people's faces.

There was no light of hope anywhere. I felt as if I had lost my way, as if I had entered some crazy town where the sun never shines ... I can't bear that. This is the right thing to do. (293)

As a hero, even in the pool of his blood resulting from the injuries sustained in the violence, LaMamo declares that he "is not scared of dying". Consequently, he dies as a hero fighting for the liberation of his people.

2.3 Exclamatory Sentences

A sentence that expresses some strong and sudden feelings is called an exclamatory sentence (Murthy 2010). Such feelings include feelings of anger, joy, shock, excitement, surprise and so on. Habila utilizes some exclamatory sentences as exemplified below to express different feelings.

1. Mamo, I can't see!
"Me too!" (27)
2. "It is them. Waziri! Mai! (293)
3. "Duna! Duna! (25)
4. ... he was running around in circles, his eyes searching desperately, the dog snapping at his heels. "Here ... here ... here!" Mamo croaked. (24-25)

The exclamatory sentence in sample 1 above, expresses the twins' emotion of fear as they wake up in the morning to discover their inability to see, due to the rheum that glued their eyelids shut. Their screaming attracts Aunt Marina who intervenes promptly. As she opens the door leading to their room, they throw themselves at her in relief. Gradually, their eyes open, and they begin to see.

Sample 2 is another example of the novelist's use of exclamatory functional sentences for artistry in the text. He uses it to express the sudden reaction of Keti's angry youths during the revolution, on sighting Waziri and Mai, their targets, trying to escape from the palace in fear of being attacked. They try to escape from the youths who are bent on killing them due to their corrupt practices in the community. While Waziri dies in the violence and attack, Mai's palace is burnt down. Habila conveys the repercussions of corruption in the extract, thereby discouraging it in the society.

2.4 Imperative Sentences

An imperative sentence is a type of sentence that gives order or command, and expresses an advice or a request, among others. Here are few of the examples utilized by the novelist.

1. "Stop! Stop!" she'd screamed as he began. ... (30)
2. "Lamamo! Stop Listen!" (291)
3. Let's go home immediately. (293)

Sample 1 expresses Aunt Marina's order to Asabar as he gives reasons in his drunken state, why he regards Keti as hellfire. She gives him a sermon on the dangers of his alcoholism, one of which is that he would end up in hellfire spiritually. In this excerpt, the use of "hell" is metaphoric. Habila likens life in Keti to hell, depicting the hardship in Keti. The danger of alcoholism is also stressed by the author in this sample.

In extract 3, Mamo commands his twin brother. Angry and disturbed by the attack on the palace championed by LaMamo, Mamo tries to ensure that he leaves the scene. But he and the angry youths thwart all his efforts. Taking LaMamo by his arm, Mamo orders him to follow him back home immediately. His order is informed by his fear of danger and the arrival of the police to the scene. Determined to put an end to corruption and injustice in Keti traditional leadership, LaMamo ignores his brother to ensure that the culprits are fished out. Being badly wounded in the struggle, he dies a hero.

3. Parallelism

“When words or word groups perform the same function in the sentence, we say they are in parallel form” (Udofot & Ekpenyong 2010). They add that parallel structures help to emphasize the grammatical and logical relationships of the ideas that are expressed. Again, emphasizing the stylistic significance of parallelism in literary works of art, Hamzah and Olagunju (2016) assert that “every serious and committed writer sees repetition as an artistic technique to enhance thematic emphasis and aesthetic appeal, adding that when creatively employed in discourse or literary discourse, repetition helps to elicit the readers’ consciousness and generate the desired actions. When some structures exhibit identical patterns, they are said to be parallel. Pattern repetition comprises syntactic and lexical repetitions. Sometimes or most times, syntactic repetition is a way of presenting different patterns of contrasts in a given discourse by a writer to emphasize his thematic preoccupations in his text. Lexical repetition involves a situation where a creative writer may repeat a particular lexical item or pattern in order to foreground or project it as meaning potential to the themes of the text. Habila makes extensive use of pattern repetition in the text as exemplified and analysed below to pass messages across to the readers.

1. Gentlemen, this is the age of modernity; things like this are not impossible if we have the will and the money. This is the time to move our whole country forward and our people forward out of the dark ages. Think positively. Think supply and demand. (76)

Structure:

This is the time to move our whole country forward out of the dark ages.

This is the time to move our people forward out of the dark ages.

Structure:

Think positively.

Think demand and supply.

In the extract above, Habila emphasizes the need for technological development, a prerequisite for sustainable development, putting to his stylistic advantage the use of pattern repetition. He uses it for persuasion, a common feature of the political discourse, for the presentation of Lamang’s speech to the members of the Victory Party. With the device, Lamang tries to convince them of the need to move their country and people forward out of the dark ages, for the development of the society, as well as the betterment of the people. Stating how they can achieve that, he utilizes syntactic repetition to emphasize that they should “think positively”, and “demand and supply”. There is also the use of lexical repetition in the sample; the verb “think” is used twice in Lamang’s address, for emphatic purpose also

Similarly, the author deploys the stylistic device of pattern repetition to emphasize the inhuman treatment meted out to Africans, by the colonial masters during the colonial era in the following sample

2. He had read of how mercilessly they had dealt with whoever was unable to pay his hut tax : tying him up in the hot harsh sun, without water or food, in front of his hut, his family, his wife, his children so that the whole village will learn from his mistake. (231)

Tying him up in the hot harsh sun ... in front of

his family

his wife

and his children

He discloses the people in whose presence the hut tax defaulter is tied up as his family, wife and children. In this extract, the tax defaulter is tortured by the colonial masters not only for his failure to pay hut tax, but to act as a deterrent to other villagers who would want to evade tax payment. Here, the severity of the punishment meted out to the hut tax defaulter is emphasized with the use of parallel structures.

Furthermore, Habila uses pattern repetition in the sample below for emphatic and persuasive purposes in a political discourse.

3. Look at me today. I am the biggest cattle merchant in this state. I saw the

opportunity a long time ago before anyone else, I saw the big demand for beef in the densely populated coastal cities, and how people there were willing to pay almost everything to get good meat. I saw what that meant in business term, I did not hesitate, I seized the opportunity. (75).

Structure:

I am the biggest cattle merchant in the state.

I saw the opportunity a long time before anyone else.

I saw the big demand for beef in the densely populated coastal cities.

I saw how people were willing to pay almost everything to get good meat.

I saw what that meant in business term.

I seized the opportunity.

The creative artist deploys syntactic repetition in above structure, to present Lamang's political speech in his attempt to convince the party delegates to vote for him, in the party's forth coming annual convention for the election of the chairmanship candidate. To achieve his aim, he highlights his good qualities, achievements and contributions to the society, thereby emphasizing that he is the best and most qualified candidate for the position. We observe that the novelist repeats the use of the personal pronoun "I" for six times in this extract. The novelist presents different patterns of contrast with syntactic repetition in the excerpt.

The author portrays the act of making empty promises as a characteristic feature of Nigerian politics with parallel structures as exemplified below.

4. "Ninety percent of our people, in this local government, are either full-time or part-time farmers, and so their greatest fear, our greatest fear, is that of drought. But what if we assured the people that we would solve that? What if we guarantee that never again would they have to worry about drought, like that of 1973? (74-75)

During a meeting of the leaders of the Victory Party, to map out campaign strategies, Lamang identifies drought as the most serious problem in Keti and its environs with the use of pattern repetition in a political discourse. See the repeated patterns.

Structure:

Their greatest fear is that of drought (S + P + C)

Our greatest fear is that of drought (S + P + C)

To tackle the problem, he makes the following suggestions with rhetorical questions.

But what if we assured the people that we would solve that?

What if we guarantee that never again would they have to worry about drought, like that?

The rhetorical questions in the sample, also characteristic of political discourse, are means through which the electorates can be persuaded to vote for Lamang in the election.

Again, in sample 5, the author deploys pattern repetition to express Iliya's outburst of anger and admonition due to Lamang's disclosure of his intention, to go into politics despite his lucrative business.

5. What is the matter with you, why are you so restless, why can't you settle

down, marry, have a family? (70) Structure:

What is the matter with you?

Why are you so restless?

Why can't you settle down, marry, have a family?

All his brother's efforts to dissuade him prove abortive; he goes into politics, the results of which are traumatic political experiences, miserable and untimely death. In this example, Habila conveys the themes of over-ambition and greed. He also condemns them, thereby discouraging them in the society.

6. You are young. You take your education for granted. Don't. Keep writing.

keep writing. (80)

Structure:

You are young. S + P + C

You take your education for granted. S + P + C

Habila conveys the themes of counsel and encouragement in this extract. Parallel structures are also deployed here. With the use of syntactic repetition, Iliya frowns at Momo's nonchalant attitude towards his education, and the neglect of his talent in creative writing. In the same vein, he admonishes him saying,

Keep writing.

Keep writing.

The use of the lexical items "keep" and "writing" is repeated for emphasis, as Iliya encourages his nephew to put his talent to good use, especially as he is very talented in creative writing. In this excerpt, the novelist counsels and encourages the youths to take their education seriously, and also emphasizes the need for them to utilize their God-giving talents to the fullest.

7. What is the matter with you, why are you so restless, why can't you settle

down, marry, have a family? (70)

What is the matter with you?

Why are you so restless?

Why can't you settle down, marry, have a family?

Habila deploys repeated pattern in sample 7 for the presentation of Iliya's rebuke of Lamang. This is as a result of his disclosure of his intention to go into politics despite his lucrative business. He admonishes him to settle down, marry and get children.

The novelist also captures pain and sorrow in the novel under study in the following excerpt.

8. He said he would be gone for only two weeks. I waited and waited and waited, and then I got your letter. (305)

In above extract, he presents Bintou's expression of pain and sorrow as she wails over the death of her late husband, LaMamo. The repetition of the lexical item "waited" in the extract is emphatic. It emphasizes the fact that Bintou has waited for her husband's return for a very long time, before getting the news of his death from Mamo.

Moreover, Habila conveys the themes of craftiness, lies and deceit in the text as portrayed below.

9. Owner of cattle had no male child, and Lamang, a shrewd businessman even then, had immediately seen the financial benefits of such a marriage. He said to the old man, "I love your daughter, I will be happy to marry her, but I am only a poor student, how can I take care of her in the style you've brought up her in?"(14)

Structure:

I love your daughter.

I will be happy to marry her.

I am only a poor student.

Aimed at inheriting his wealth on his demise, Lamang craftily seizes the opportunity of the fact that "Owner of Cattle" has no male child, to deceive him into giving out his only child, Tabita, to him in marriage. As observed in the sample, the novelist projects and emphasizes craftiness and deceit as Lamang's bad character traits, utilizing pattern repetition. As earlier stated in this paper, Lamang marries Tabita not because he loves her as he claims, but for financial benefits since he is deeply in love with Saraya, his first love.

5. Phrase as Sentence

Habila utilizes phrase as sentence as one of the syntactic devices in the novel to articulate his messages as exemplified below. It is a special sentential pattern which forms a complete thought process of characters. It relates to the state of being of the characters as in the following excerpts.

1. Interspersed amid the male laughter were a few female voices. The widows. (75)
2. Supply and demand. (75)
3. By Mamo Lamang. (312)
4. What do we have? Culture. (83)
5. We are cut off from our office in Monrovia, no communications. Bad. (139)
6. “... No word up to now. Rebel.” (139)

Conventionally, every sentence contains a subject and a verb and ends with a full stop. But in each of the samples above, we observe that Habila uses a phrase ending with a full stop as a sentence, contrary to the norm of the English Language for emphatic purpose. In extract 1 for instance, the novelist emphasizes the dominant place of the widows in the life and affairs of Lamang. The widows in Keti hover around him shamelessly for his fame, wealth and generosity.

Extract 2 is another example of Habila's use of a phrase as a sentence in the novel for stylistic effect. He uses the noun phrase “Supply and demand”, as a sentence to emphasize “Reverse Osmosis”, which Lamang wants to bring to politics and the Victory Party as a campaign strategy. It is a new kind of scientific technique for the solution of the problem of water and drought in Keti and its environs. The strategy will enable him emerge victorious in the forth-coming election.

Similarly, the noun phrase “By Mamo Lamang” that the author utilizes as a sentence in excerpt 3 above, is for artistry. It is used to acknowledge Mamo, the gifted writer, as the original writer of the script acted by the Keti Church drama group. The audience is so drilled and entertained by the drama that Mamo becomes astonished. The message inherent in this excerpt is the appreciation of hard work. In each of the sentences above, we observe that the author deploys a phrase as a sentence stylistically, for the artistic purpose of emphasis in the text.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined and expounded how Helon Habila puts to his stylistic advantage, the significant syntactic strategies under study, to communicate his artistic visions in the novel. It is expedient to state that Habila's artistic craftsmanship in the use of the strategies has aided his communication of the themes of the novel. The features under consideration comprise the functional sentence types, parallelism and phrase as sentence.

It is worthy of note from the analysis that all the evil acts perpetuated by the corrupt and dubious characters in the text have attracted repercussions, thereby acting as deterrents to other members of the society. As characteristic of the literary works of art therefore, Habila's ideas in the novel are aimed at the discouragement of social malaise, as well as the promotion of good values, thereby contributing his quota to the betterment of the society. This explains the usefulness of the literary works of art and the artists to every society.

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