

Language and Meaning: A Lexico-semantic Analysis of Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*

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

Abstract

This study examines and explicates how Helon Habila utilizes lexico-semantic patterning in his novel, *Measuring Time*, and how his choice of words has contributed to both lexical and thematic cohesion in the text. The novelist's choice of lexical items and its relationship with the artistic visions is a vital parameter in the novel. It is important to state that the ability of the writer to utilize appropriate words in the conveyance of the themes of the text is the hallmark of a good style. This paper explores Habila's deployment of features subsuming figures of speech, neologisms, idiomatic expressions, functional conversion, among others, and expounds their stylistic functions in the novel.

DOI: 10.7176/RHSS/12-9-04

Publication date: May 31st 2022

1. Introduction

In a lexico-semantic study of a literary text, the focus is on the critical study of the lexical items, how the author organizes them, as well as the meanings he creates with them in the text. This paper examines and explicates the special uses into which Habila puts certain lexical items, and significant creative strategies in his text under study, and how they contribute to both lexical and thematic cohesion in the novel. "Words and expressions deployed to represent particular objects or thoughts, and which help the writer to convey his/her thoughts are explicated in lexis (Ayo 2018).

In literary works, creative writers avail themselves of the opportunity of the poetic license which they enjoy. Thus, they sometimes deliberately deviate from the conventional use of the language code, and the normal semantic interpretation of the vocabulary of the language for stylistic effects. Such deviations inform the peculiar nature of the language of literature. "Literature is a specialized form of language, as language is of communication" (Frye 1970). For instance, in West African literature in English, the language of an entirely foreign culture, the writers have to manipulate and adapt English to suit African context and experiences. It is important to state that the experimentation with the English Language and adaptation do not imply an outright deviation from the entire norm of the language. Many African writers, particularly of English expressions have achieved their adaptive use of English with vigour and freshness, keeping within the English language while capturing the idioms and nuances of their own languages (Igboanusi 2004). This way, they adequately express African worldviews, concepts, culture, experiences, and personal visions among, others in their literary works in English.

Habila is a Nigerian prolific literary writer, with several awards to his credit for his novels, short stories and poetry. He is the author of the novels, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), *Measuring Time* (2007) and *Oil on Water* (2010). In his literary works, the novelist is preoccupied with the societal malaise in Nigeria, hindering growth and development. For instance, in *Measuring Time*, his second novel, the literary artist exposes socio-political problems such as corruption, injustice, violence, exploitation and their adverse effects on the people. He also advances corrective measures towards the eradication of the vices in order to enhance growth, development and the betterment of the citizens. *Measuring Time* confirms Habila as an exceptional voice in African literature. ... "The novel's triumph is to allow hope to endure" (Blurb).

Growing up in a period of political dysfunction and military dictatorship, Helon Habila as a teenager in the 1980s was motivated to rebel and fight against this notion. Writing became his voice and a means for protest. It provided an avenue to express himself and his beliefs. Many times, he has tried to step away from his usual fight against injustice and write about unrelated topics. Nevertheless, he has been unable to and stick to writing to reject injustice, oppression and exploitation (Website: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helon-Habila. Accessed on April 4th, 2022.)

1.2 The Synopsis of *Measuring Time*

The novel tells the stories of Mr. Musa Lamang, his immediate and extended families, and his involvement in the corrupt Nigerian politics. Lamang marries Tabita, the only daughter of her wealthy father, popularly called "Owner of Cattle", not because he loves her, but with the aim of inheriting her father's wealth. Soon after the

marriage, his father-in-law dies, leaving his wealth to him. Thus, he rises from a state of poverty to become one of the richest businessmen in Keti and beyond. Due to his wealth, fame, as well as good looks he is an attraction to many women who hover around him daily. As a result of his promiscuity and infidelity, his wife suffers heartbreak. She dies while giving birth to the twins, Mamo and LaMamo. Lamang's fame and popularity are short-lived on account of over ambition and traumatic experiences in politics, the causes of his miserable and untimely death.

Lamang's children hate him due to his ill-treatment of their late mother, from the stories they have been told, and as a result of his attitude towards them. They lack fatherly love and care from him. Aunt Marina, his sister, is solely responsible for the children. Moreover, they are bitter and angry with their father for taking them away from uncle Iliya, his brother. For these and other reasons, the twins resolve to punish him, mapping out and executing hurtful strategies to that effect.

Early in life, the twins and their cousin, Asabar, become adventurous, and full of the dream of joining the army. But while LaMamo and Asabar escape to the city to fulfill their dreams, Mamo remains in Keti as a result of his sickle cell anaemia. His university education is also truncated by ill health. Lonely and disillusioned, he becomes withdrawn. However, he is given a new lease of life by his association with Zara, his lover. Due to her encouragement and assistance, Mamo puts his writing talent to an advantage. He does not only become the secretary to Mai, the traditional ruler of Keti, but his is given the honour and opportunity to write Mai's biography. He becomes very popular in the society due to his excellent performances in the palace, and his effective organization of a successful fundraising ceremony in Keti. As a result of his successes and popularity, he begins to dine and wine with the important people within and outside Keti including the state governor.

LaMamo later becomes a soldier, and fights in Liberia and many other African countries. But Asabar with whom he has escaped to join the army returns home later, and becomes responsible and a problem to the family. He ends up paralyzed as a result of bullet wounds from the police. Haruna, Lamang's brother, who has fought in the Nigerian/Biafra war returns home after many years battered. Traumatized due to his horrible experience of the war and his situation generally, he commits suicide.

Habila also narrates the story of Zara's life. Having graduated from the university, she marries Captain George, an army officer. Her husband turns out to be an arrogant person without any regard for women, as portrayed in all his actions in the novel. He subjects his wife to inhuman treatment as a result of which she divorces him and returns to her village, Keti. On her appointment as a teacher in the village's community school, she meets Mamo with whom she falls deeply in love. However, despite her love for Mamo and his request that she marries him, she relocates to South Africa to work in an orphanage home with Themba, her university old friend.

Zara later returns home due to Themba's unnecessary demands on her contrary to their earlier agreement. Back home in Keti, she suffers depression as a result of her ugly experiences in life. All her efforts to get the custody of her only child from her failed marriage prove abortive. She also suffers lack of love and affection from her family. All attempts by Mamo to see her in order to rescue her from depression are resisted by her mother and sister.

The text is also the history of Keti, a peaceful village in Northern Nigeria, ranging from the pre-colonial period to the post colonial era. But the peace is soon threatened by the religious rivalry between Christians and Muslims in the community. The resultant riot is devastating as lives and properties are lost, and the church and mosque in the village burnt down. The corruption in the traditional leadership of the village further heightens the crises in the community.

The novel ends with the revolution that liberates the people of Keti from a state of helplessness, from the oppressive system in the community. On his return home from several wars all over Africa, LaMamo leads the protest against the societal ills in Keti, which have rendered the people hopeless and disillusioned. Aside the oppression and exploitation of the people by the corrupt traditional rulers, they are subjected to police brutality. From what he has seen and heard, LaMamo is provoked and determined to liberate his people from their ugly situation. In response to Mamo's warning that people would die, if he goes ahead with revolution as a solution to the problem, he says:

It is not a waste if people die trying to be free. Yesterday when I came I
saw the hopelessness on people's faces. There was no light of hope anywhere.
I felt as I have lost my way, as if I have entered some crazy town where sun never
shines. ... I can't bear that. This is the right thing to do. (293)

Against his brother's warning, he champions the revolution, and the intervention by the police leaves many people including LaMamo dead. Though he dies in the violence, he succeeds in the liberation of Keti and his people.

1.3 Thematic Preoccupations of *Measuring Time*

In *Measuring Time*, Habila addresses the socio-political problems in Nigeria. The major thematic preoccupations

of the novelist in the text are corruption, injustice, exploitation, violence, war and its aftermaths. Colonialism in Africa characterized by deception and exploitation, and their devastating effects on the continent is also addressed in the text. Moreover, the author X-rays the irregularities characterizing Nigerian politics, exposing the high rate of corruption and election malpractices prevalent in it. Other themes in the text are adventure, retributive justice, love, heroism, feminism and religious crisis.

1.4 Significance of Study

Generally, this study contributes immensely to knowledge. In sociolinguistics, language is studied in relation to the society, and the context in which it is used. The knowledge of the situational variables, which form the buck of this study, is very important to a language user as such knowledge enhances appropriate use of language in general. It also aids the language user in his/her choice of appropriate language variety, or register to suit particular occasions for effective communication. The study serves as a springboard for future researches on the language of African literature. Moreover, as a linguistic approach to the study of the language of African novel, it stimulates further studies in the field of linguistics.

1.5 Research Methodology

The library, internet and the novel, *Measuring Time*, form the basis of this study. Relevant literature on sociolinguistics, language, the novel under study and the author, Helon Habila is reviewed. This study involves the examination and explication of the creative/stylistic strategies that the novelist devised in his attempt to contextualize English (a second language), for literary creation in relation to the Nigerian social context and environment.

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. One of the reasons for this choice is the fact that this paper is aimed at identifying and expounding the stylistic/creative strategies devised for literary creation in a second language. Halliday's sociological approach to grammar emphasizes the basic functions of language, focusing on language as it relates to social context. The systemic functional approach is, therefore sensitive to the functions, which language performs. Halliday sees language as performing three basic functions comprising the ideational, interpersonal and textual.

Another motivation for the choice of the functional model is the fact that the Hallidayan model is text centred. 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. Moreover, the model is a comprehensive system, which can be used to examine and study the nature and problems of language of the prose fiction. The functional approach describes how social meanings are reflected in the various functions that language performs in human societies. It also explains the various ways these meanings and functions are manipulated in a particular syntactic realization (Ugwu 1990). Therefore, we find the functional approach very useful in our task of expounding the stylistic/creative strategies deployed by the author to tackle the problems created by the situational variables in Nigerian prose fiction.

2. Textual Analysis of *Measuring Time*

We analyse below the lexico-semantic features, and other creative strategies deployed by Habila to communicate his artistic visions, and explain their stylistic significance in the text. These comprise figurative use of language, neologism, idioms, semantic extension, functional conversion, code-switching and code-mixing, among others.

2.1 Figures of Speech

Figurative language is a conspicuous departure from what competent users of a language apprehend as the standard meaning of words, or else the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect (Abrams & Harpham 2009). Below are examples of Habila's prominent use of figures of speech for artistry in the text under study.

2.1.1 Metaphor

In a metaphor, a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison" (Abrams & Harpham 2009). Here are examples of Habila's use of metaphoric expressions in the text for stylistic effects.

1. Lamang was now dying because his sun, around which the whole world had once revolved, had suddenly lost its shine. 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)
2. Can this be the same man, my dreaded father, the sometime King of Women? (182 - 182)

3. It was not the dull ennui he had felt after Lamamo's departure; this was fire, it burned. (197)
4. "No! You are wrong there. Mamo was deceived like the whole village was deceived. He planned the fundraising, and his only concern was that the village got a well, but the Waziri went and hired these ... these...pigs ..." (291)

In sample 1 above, Habila conveys the themes of politics and over ambition. He uses the metaphoric expressions in this extract to capture Lamang's greatness, fame and subsequent downfall in Keti. His fame before his involvement in politics is compared to the "sun" that shines brightly, and his over ambition (vanity) to a "knife" that is responsible for his traumatic experience in politics. Lamang, who has been a great, wealthy, and popular businessman and politician, whose house has been a centre of attraction and activities in the whole of Keti ends up tragically. His misfortune and downfall are attributed to his over ambition and involvement in politics against his brother's advice.

The novelist also identifies betrayal as feature of Nigerian politics. Lamang faces traumatic experiences in politics due to betrayal by his close political associates. As the Victory Party's hot favourite for the state chairmanship, Lamang has put many strategies in place to ensure victory at the party's annual convention. He has the opportunity to have learnt about "Reverse osmosis", a scientific technique and practical solution, to the problem of drought in Keti and its environs. He is also of the assurance that his presentation of the new idea will ensure his victory at the convention. But ironically, Alhaji Isa Danladi, one of Lamang's political associates becomes his political opponent, "steals" his idea of "reserve osmosis" and beats him in the election to emerge the chairmanship candidate of the party. In his brief presentation of his vision for the party at the convention, Danladi informs the members of the party that he knows how to supply water to the whole state steadily and cheaply too, using "reverse osmosis", the technique introduced by Lamang. At the end of his presentation of the details of the technique, not only was he declared the winner of the election by unanimous decision, "reverse osmosis" becomes the Victory Party's election slogan.

All efforts by Lamang to seek redress for the injustice done to him by Alhaji Danladi from the party executives prove abortive. Out of frustration, he decamps to the New Victory Party and contests against Danladi as the party's chairmanship candidate. But he faces humiliation as he is arrested and detained for election rigging on the day of the chairmanship election. His traumatic experiences on his release from detention further compound his troubles; he suffers health and psychological problems until his miserable death. In the excerpt above, the novelist does not only convey the theme of betrayal, but he also attributes Lamang's tragedy to his inordinate ambition, thereby condemning such ambition in its entirety.

"The sometimes King of women", the metaphoric expression in sample 2, depicts the large extent of Lamang's association with many women, their attraction to him, and his indiscriminate love affairs with them before his poor health condition, which has disfigured him. They used to hover around him due to his good looks, wealth and fame. He has been so promiscuous that the refrain of a song about his love affairs, describes how some women lock up their daughters at night to save them from him. Unfortunately, he has now become so ill and disfigured that Mamo wonders whether his father is the same former handsome man, around whom women used to hover. The seriousness of Lamang's ill health due to his traumatic experiences in politics is depicted by the novelist in this extract.

In excerpt 3, Habila conveys the theme of love. Before Mamo's relationship with Zara, he has been lonely, withdrawn and hopeless due to his precarious situation earlier stated in this paper. But their relationship marks a turning point in his life as his condition drastically changes for good. She consoles him, keeps him company, and encourages him to utilize his writing talent. In short, she brings back his lost hope, and makes him to see the reason to live again. She so transforms him that Mamo becomes very popular, to the extent that he begins to associate with the important personalities in the society. As his only source of encouragement, joy, strength and inspiration, he cannot afford to lose her. But Mamo's joy is soon threatened by Zara's plans to relocate to South Africa. The novelist deploys the metaphoric expression in extract 3, to portray the intensity of his anger and pain at the thought and fear of losing her. He compares Mamo's anger to "fire" that burns. He becomes so devastated and frustrated that before Zara finally discloses her intention to relocate, he passionately pleads with her saying:

"Don't leave me, please." (189)

Habila also captures the dept of Mamo's love for Zara in this sample.

Sample 4 above is the author's expression of LaMamo's defense of his twin brother, Mamo. As Keti's angry youths led by LaMamo march to the palace of the Mai, in protest against the corruption, oppression and injustice in the community, they identify the Mai, Waziri and Mamo as the culprits responsible for their plights. But LaMamo defends his brother and refers to the Mai and Waziri, the real culprits, as "pigs". In a componential analysis, the lexical item, "pig" has the features – human + animal + dirty. The Mai and Waziri are regarded as pigs due to their deceitful, corrupt and dubious practices in Keti. They connive with other village heads in Kati's neighbouring villages to embezzle the fifteen million naira raised to drill wells in order to provide water for the people, who are subjected to water problem and drought. The destruction of Mai's palace and death of Waziri, arising from the revolution orchestrated by the youths is a deterrent to other leaders. Habila deploys this extract

to discourage corruption and injustice in the society.

2.1.2 Personification

Personification is one of the figures of speech used in the novel for artistry. Personification occurs when an animate attribute or quality is conferred on an inanimate object or abstract entity. Though it is an aberration in the conventional English usage, the literary artists put it to their advantage in literary works for the stylistic effect of foregrounding. We exemplify below few examples of Habila's use of this figure of speech in his text under study.

1. The table listened in silence, a few of the turbaned heads began to nod, some were holding side chats, and then finally the Mai ended his digression with, Now, let us hear your comments ... (230-231)
2. The huge baobab trees that formed a row at the front of the hills, looking like mute, giants guardians watching over the graves. (186)

In example 1 above, the novelist confers the human action of listening on "table" an object for stylistic effect. In a componential analysis "a table" has the features - human + object - hearing. To make a table to listen in silence in a conversation as Habila does in the excerpt is aberrant, but used by the novelist for artistic effect. The "table" as used above refers to the members of Keti Traditional council, who listen as the Mai enlightens them on the plans for his for the coming tenth anniversary.

2.1.3 Onomatopoeia

Abrams and Harpham (2009) say that "onomatopoeia designates a word or a combination of words, whose meaning seems to resemble closely the sound it denotes ... ". Below are few examples of onomatopoeia used in the novel.

1. ... the skies darkened, thunder rumbled, lighting flashed, but no rain fell. (277)
2. LaMamo was the one who heard the gentle tapping at the window, the one overlooking the grove. Tap ... Tap ... Tap ... (26)

Sample 1 above describes the weather condition after many hours of serious prayer by the Christians and Muslims in Keti. The problem of drought in Keti community has become so worrisome that the Christians decide to seek the face of God in prayer for solution. Soon after their arrival on the mountain, the Muslims join them due to the religious rivalry existing between the two religious groups. They pray for many hours for rainfall without success. "Rumbling" and "flashing" as exemplified in excerpt 1 indicate the sounds and signs of thunder and lightning respectively, which indicate signs of rain. With such signs, the people become hopeful and expectant, but rain never fell. Out of frustration, the two groups begin to jibe at each other. Their actions culminate in a serious religious riot, which disrupts the peace of Keti. Aside the burning of the church and mosque in the community, many lives are lost in the riot. In this sample, Habila depicts the religious rivalry existing between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria as a serious problem, thereby calling for solution to the crisis.

"Tap ... tap ... tap ..." in extract 2, is another "instance of the novelist's use of onomatopoeia to convey messages in the novel. It indicates the tapping sound at the twins' bedroom window at night, which puts them to fright. Hearing the sound, LaMamo becomes so frightened that he jumps out of his bed to join Mamo in his own bed. Their fear is borne out of their grievous and wicked acts of poisoning and killing the dog of the blind old witch, Nana Mudo, earlier that day. Both children become so terrified by the tapping sound that sleep eludes them for a long time that night. When finally they fall asleep, they are hunted by terrifying dreams. They wake up the next morning screaming as they can no longer see with their eyes; the rheum, which they have extracted from the dead dog's eyes the previous day, has glued their own eye lids shut.

Moreover, Mamo's face becomes bloated with serious eye infection later that day while LaMamo falls out of a flame tree, hard on his wrist with a fracture the next day. Thus, the twins are punished for killing the blind woman's dog. The novelist has used this extract to discourage wicked and evil practices, as well as to convey the theme of retributive justice.

2.1.4 Simile

"In a simile, comparison between two different things is explicitly indicated by the use of the word "like" or "as" (Abrams and Harpham 2009). Here are some examples.

1. Our traditional rulers are like politicians, you can't depend on their word. (125)
2. We were days and days in the water and mud like fish. (45)
3. But they say a palace is like a market place; people must always return to it one day. (124)

In extract 1, the author likens traditional rulers in Keti to politicians who are never reliable. In response to Mamo's question whether he thinks that the Mai will do anything to influence the governor, over the threatened Keti Community School, the headmaster likens traditional rulers to politicians in Nigeria. In this excerpt, Habila does not only satirize the traditional rulers, but politicians, thereby depicting the deception and insincerity characterizing the traditional leadership and politics in Nigeria. Like politicians, the traditional rulers in Keti are self-centred, and interested only in the things that benefit them, even when such things are to the detriment of

their people.

Habila paints a clear picture of the flooding nature of the Niger delta environment in Nigeria during the rainy season. In sample 2, he compares the soldiers fighting in Ughelli during the civil war in rainy season, to fish that live in water. This is as a result of flood; the soldiers live in the mud with snakes and rats. Their situation is so terrible that large layers of the soles of their feet go off with their boots whenever they pull them off. The author has depicted in this extract the suffering that soldiers undergo in war times, as well as the environmental problem in the Niger delta region, thereby calling for solution in order to alleviate the suffering of the people.

3. Neologism

Neologism, a common practice in language use involves the formation of new words through the operation of word formation rules for communicative purposes. This is through the addition of new words to the language, and the change in meaning of already existing words. Constrained in literary creation in a second language, African writers avail themselves of the opportunity of this morphological process, among other strategies to tackle the language problems in their works. In English, new words are formed through compounding and affixation. We examine below Habila's use of neologisms in his text under study.

3. 1. Compounding

The combining process technically known as compounding is a very common and productive source of new words and terms in English Language; it involves joining of two separate words to produce a single form (Yule 2010). Fromkin et al. (2007) opine that compounds are formed by uniting two or more root words in a single word. ... Below are some of the compound words used in *Measuring Time* for stylistic effects.

1. heartbreak (17)
2. lonely burial (15)
3. handsome ravisher (13)
4. busloads (42)
5. civil war stories (42)
6. shameless old women (288)
7. Cunning English man (216)
8. Indifferent Christian (216)
9. tax collection "(221)
10. colonial times (220)
11. loyal co-workers (217)
12. week-long send-off festivities (317)
13. faraway gunshots (278)
14. house-to-house intimidation (306)
15. police brutality (291)
16. a ngry-looking youths (292)
17. magic box (69)
18. goat head (75)
19. daylight hour (23)

The use of neologisms is of stylistic significant in literary creation. This is, especially useful as Habila has to capture the speech habits of his characters in Nigerian indigenous languages in his English target text. Note the use of compound words such as "goat head", "magic box", and "day light hour", among others in the samples above. From the above excerpts, we observe that with the deployment of coined words, the artist can adequately communicate his intended meanings, messages and intentions using the most appropriate lexical items.

The novelist deploys the coinages "heartbreak" and "lonely burial" in extracts 1 and 2 to convey the themes of feminism and deceit. He captures the experiences of most married women who suffer heartbreak and loneliness in marriages, arising from their husbands' infidelity and deceit. In *Measuring Time*, Musa Lamang claims to be in love with Tabita, the daughter of a very wealthy man popularly referred to as Owner of Cattle; he marries her not because he really loves her, but for her father's wealth. Soon after the marriage, her father dies and Lamang inherits his wealth, becoming one of the richest people in Keti. Though Tabita loves Lamang so dearly, her love is never reciprocated because of Lamang's love affair with very many women, especially Saraya, his first love. Due to loneliness, unfair treatment and her husband's infidelity, Tabita suffers heartbreak and dies miserably. As the authorial voice puts it:

Poor Tabita was buried the next day, under baobab tree in the village burial ground. It was a lonely burial. Lamang did not turn up — most people who still hummed the song about the King of Women, said he might have been with his lover, Saraya, and couldn't be bothered. (15)

The message inherent in these excerpts is the ill-treatment meted out to women by their husbands.

“Handsome ravisher”, the coined word in sample 3 portrays Lamang’s lust and love affairs with many women. Women are so attracted to him due to his good looks and wealth that he becomes so promiscuous. His promiscuity earns him the nick name “handsome ravisher”. Moreover, mothers lock up their daughters at night to save them from him. Even as a married man, Lamang indulges in secret love affairs with his first love, Saraya, also a married woman. Soon after the death of her husband, Lamang decides to marry Saraya, but for his brother’s intervention.

Habila deploys the coined words in samples 4 and 5 to capture the Nigerian/Biafra war, which has begun with killings in 1966. He attributes the war to the rivalry that exists between the Hausas and Igbos in Nigeria. The novelist emphasizes that the outcome of the hunting and mass killings of the Igbos in the northern Nigeria is their mass exodus to their hometowns in the southeast in busloads. The northerners also have to flee the Igbo lands in fear for their lives.

In excerpt 6, the author refers to the widows who hover around Lamang for his looks and wealth as “shameless old women”. Here, the literary artist condemns the immorality and lust prevalent in the society, ridiculing those who indulge in such acts.

The novelist uses the coined words “indifference Christian”, “Cunning Englishman”, “colonial times”, “tax collection” and “loyal co-workers” from excerpts 7 to 11, to condemn the evils and deception prevalent in the colonial administration in Nigeria. He portrays Mr. Grave, the district officer and British representative in Keti, as an embodiment of deception. As a result of his deceitful character and bad conduct, Mrs. Drinkwater refers to him as the “Cunning Englishman” and an “indifferent Christian” in samples 7 and 8. In his conversation with Mr. Drinkwater, the Christian missionary, he discloses the crafty strategies he has decided to adopt in order to ensure the co-operation and loyalty of the natives to the British administration, and for effective tax collection in Keti.

Similarly, Habila takes advantage of the use of compounding to convey the theme of appreciation among Keti people. The coinage “week-long send-off festivities” in extract 12 depicts the long period of the activities lined up by the Keti Christian community to send forth the Drinkwater sisters, Kai and Malai, as they are about to finally return to their country. The festivities are in appreciation of the meritorious services the Drinkwaters have rendered to the Christian mission in Keti. Their late father, the devout and committed Reverend Drinkwater, has served as a missionary in Keti till his death. The highlight of the activities is the drama presentation by the church drama group to entertain the audience.

Again, Habila uses the coined words “police brutality”, “faraway-gunshots” and “house-to-house-intimidation” to reveal the illegal activities of the corrupt members of the Police Force, who take laws into their hands to intimidate and brutalize innocent citizens in the society indiscriminately. According to the authorial voice:

They could hear far away gunshots: the police keeping the peace. Near him a man ... was talking about how the police had gone from house to house, beating whoever they found indiscriminately, untying the goats and throwing them into the back of their truck, and all the time shooting into the air. (278)

The author also satirizes police extortions prevalent in Nigerian Police Force, and perpetrated by corrupt policemen and women.

Furthermore, Habila points his search lights on Nigerian traditional rulers, who are so avaricious, greedy and corrupt that they indulge in corrupt practices, embezzling funds meant for community developments. They acquire wealth illegally at the expense of their subjects whose interest they ought to protect. The use of the coined expression “angry-looking youths” depicts the effects of the embezzlement of the funds raised to tackle the water problem and drought on Keti youths, and their violent reaction. The violence orchestrated by the angry youths, and the subsequent police intervention result in the loss of many lives.

We observe from the discussions above that the novelist’s use of coinage is of stylistic significance in the novel. He utilizes them to adequately communicate his ideas, intentions and messages in the text.

3.2. The Use of Acronyms

Yule (2010) defines acronyms as the “new words formed from the initial letters of a set of other words”. He adds that some acronyms are pronounced as new single words. “It is important to state that even though such words are originally created as acronyms, speakers quickly forget such origins and the acronyms become independent words (Akmajian et al. 2001). We exemplify few instances of Habila’s use of acronyms in the text.

1. ECOMOG (130) - Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
2. VP (153) - Victory Party
3. NVP (53) - New Victory Party
4. TV (182) - Television
5. KCS (121) - Keti Community School

6. DO (43) - District Officer

Creatively, the novelist makes extensive use of acronyms as a shortening process in the text under consideration to form new words in above samples.

3.3 Idiomatic Expressions

“An idiom is seen as a group of words established by usage and having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words” (Douglas 2004). Such expressions are interpreted with a consideration of the context in which they are used. Idioms are also said to be “fixed expressions whose meanings are not compositional, but rather must be learnt as a whole unit ...” (Fromkin et al. 2002). Below are few examples of idioms utilized by the novelist for stylistic effects.

1. “... He was a good man, even though his politics were confused,” the Mai spoke at last. (213)
2. Mamo standing next to the governor and the Mai, felt like an animal caught in a car’s headlights. (241)
3. The military after running the country into the ground had at last handed power to the civilians ... (69)
4. Lamang would put on his glasses and read the letters and tell Mamo that he had a gift for words, and that he had put it better than he, Lamang could have. (182)
5. Those people you saw yesterday they are the who’s who of this state, they make things happen. (149)
6. The doctor said he was losing his mind. (45)
7. A week since the day he went to see her and was given the cold shoulder by her mother and sister. (320)
8. Funny, he thought, how something I did to pass the boring hours of childhood has proved so enduring — perhaps that is the trick for things: to do them as if we are just killing time. (319).
9. As the village foremost traditional ruler he has the governor’s ear, and if any one can make the government listen, it is him. (121)

To say that Lamang’s “politics were confused”, as used in sample 1 denotes that his politics lack focus. The author captures Lamang’s failure in politics in this excerpt. This reiterates his bitter experiences, humiliation and frustration in politics.

After the successful fund raising durbar in Keti organized by Mamo, the Mai has hosted the important guests at a private party. Mamo, who stands next to the governor and Mai at the party is said to have felt like an animal caught in a car’s headlights. The idea the novelist expresses with the idiomatic expresses in the excerpt is Mamo’s uneasiness as he stands next to the governor of the state.

“After running the country into the ground” as used in extract 3 denotes “bad governance” characterized by corruption, injustice and other vices. The messages inherent in this example are the atrocities prevalent in the military administration in Nigeria, characterized by embezzlement of public funds, autocracy, corruption, assassinations, injustice, among others.

“To have a gift for words”, as used in sample 4 above denotes “to be a talented writer“. Lamang’s poor health condition has so affected his sight and hands that he can no longer write. To write letters to his business partners, former political colleagues or newspapers, he has to dictate whatever he wants written to Mamo who writes for him, after which he reads the letters. So impressed with how well Mamo writes the letters, he compliments him as expressed in the extract.

“Who’s who in this state” used in extract 5 denotes “the most influential personalities in the state”. Hearing about the visit of Mamo and Iliya, the principal, to Mai in connection with the closure of Keti Community School without informing him, Lamang blames them. To emphasize how influential he is despite having left the ruling party, he boasts to Mamo that the people from the state capital, who have visited him the previous day to beg for his return to the party are the most influential personalities in the state. He instructs Mamo to inform his brother of his decision to speak to the governor about the possibility of reopening the school.

“To be given cold shoulder” as used in sample 7 denotes “poor reception. In this extract, the author expresses the poor reception accorded Mamo on his visit to Zara’s house by her mother and sister, who prevent him from seeing her. Being moved by his concern for her and the need to rescue her from her state of depression, Mamo resolves to repeat his visit in order to see her. Moreover, he has been moved by the realization that he needs her, considering the fact that she has been his source of courage, strength and hope in the past, and in his difficult times.

The context in which “to kill time”, an idiomatic expression is used in excerpt 8 denotes to occupy oneself with an activity. During the send forth party organized by the church in Keti, in honour of the Drinkwater sisters, Mamo discovers to his greatest surprise that he is acknowledged at the last page of the script acted by the drama

group. Mamo's surprise is borne out of the fact that he never attached any importance to the script. He has only written it for his aunt, the leader of the drama group, many years ago just to occupy himself with it. Moreover, the audience has been so thrilled by the drama that Mamo concludes that doing things as if one is just occupying oneself is probably the trick to things. The message inherent in this excerpt is the need for appreciation and encouragement. Though Mamo has not attached any importance to the script, he is acknowledged. This is a source of encouragement to him in his writing career.

"To have the governor's ear" used by the novelist in sample 9 implies "to command the governor's attention". As the continuous existence of Keti Community School is threatened by the decision of the ministry of education, Iliya, the headmaster, makes frantic efforts to prevent the shutting down of the school, but to no avail. He seeks the help of the traditional ruler of Keti, for assistance because he commands the governor's attention. With this, the novelist conveys the importance of the traditional rulers who are the representatives of their people in the society.

We observe from the analysis above that Habila deploys all the idioms to communicate his messages and ideas to the readers.

4. Functional Conversion

Functional conversion is a situation where a lexical item is deliberately adapted to a new grammatical function without, a change in form as exemplified in the following examples from the text. It is also referred to as zero affixation. (Leech 1969). *It is also called category rule violation.*

1. There was the oily-voiced, equivocating Alhaji Danladi, who listened more than he spoke, and the clownish Emmanuel Dogo who acted as secretary, and the strill-voiced Gidado, who never seem to have original opinion but would always support and expand whatever Danladi proposed. (74)
2. A sweet perfumy smell issued from the Mai' voluminous robe; beneath the perfume there was another, vague smell: unpleasant, sporadic, making Mamo to feel enveloped and breathless. (213)
3. At last the Waziri said in an oily ingratiating tone, "Perhaps, Highness, you may wish to tell him about your childhood in the palace. (213-214)
4. LATER, IN his book Life and Times, Mamo would write that he knew the instant when his brother was shot; he felt something go out of him at that moment, as if his vitality had been halved instantly.
5. --- he fathered almost eleven children , but only five survived. ((40)

The lexical item "oil" is a noun, but in excerpt 1, it functions as an adjective qualifying "voice" giving more information about the voice, that is, describing the kind of voice referred to.

The word "perfumy", an adjective in extract 2 is got from the noun "perfume". It has been converted to an adjective by the attachment of the bond morpheme "y" to the noun to function as an adjective, qualifying "smell" in order to give more information about the smell from the Mai's robe, which is sweet as against the unpleasant one from beneath it.

Similarly, "oily", an adjective in extract 3, which is derived from the noun "oil" by the addition of the morpheme "y", gives more information about Waziri's ingratiating tone.

In sample 4, the verb "halved" used by the author is derived from the noun "half" by the addition of the bound morpheme "ved". The idea conveyed by Habila in the excerpt is the bond which exists between every set of twins. Such a bond accounts for Mamo's knowledge of the exact time of the death of LaMomo, his twin brother by a gunshot even in his absence. As earlier stated, the incident has occurred during the protest against Keti traditional leadership by the youths led by LaMamo.

The word "fathered" which functions as a verb in sample 4 is another instance of functional conversion utilized by the novelist in the text. "Father" a noun is converted to function as a verb "fathered" by the addition of the bound morpheme "ed", implying "gave birth to". Habila utilizes functional conversion as exemplified above for artistry.

5. Lexical Transference or Borrowing

Lexical transference or borrowing is a lexico-semantic device involving the transfer of words of the indigenous languages verbatim into the second language target texts. In Nigerian literature, borrowing is borne out of the attempts by the literary artists to tackle the problems of literary creation in the language of a different culture, English. Below are few instances of Habila's use of this stylistic/creative device.

1. Mamo had seen them arrive separately earlier on, all wearing their best *buba* and *wrapper*, their head scarves tall and stiff on their heads. (75)
2. "I don't know," she said, looking up guiltily, as if caught in *flangrante delicto*." (220)

3. The equestrian display proved to be the day's *piece de resistance* even the governor couldn't help waving his swagger stick in appreciation. (239)

Extract 1 contains lexical items of Nigerian origin *buba and wrapper*, words of the Yoruba Language for native attires worn by women. Nigerian literary artists resort to incorporating lexical items of indigenous languages into their texts, to express culture-bound words without English equivalents in order to communicate their ideas adequately. But sometimes, the authors deploy such words to promote the indigenous languages, as well as African/Nigerian culture. *Flangrante delicto* is of Latin origin while *piece resistance* is of French origin.

6. Pidgin as Borrowing

Akmajian et al. (2001) assert that Pidgin has no native speakers but it is used as a medium of communication between people who are native speakers of other languages. Pidgin is based on the linguistic features of one or more other languages and is a simplified language with reduced vocabulary and grammatical features. Below are examples of the writer's use of sentences in Pidgin English.

1. "So you tink say you fit come here waste army time, abi? You de craze? We say we wan eighteen years minimum, and you come here with sixteen years minimum "" you tink say army job na for small pikin? Oya, get out before I count three ... One ... Two ... Are you still there? I go handle you o ..." (61-62)

The use of Pidgin in above example is a reflection of the use of language in Nigerian prose fiction, and in the Nigerian society, where it is in contact with many Nigerian local languages and the English language. Pidgin is spoken all over the country as it is a common language that cuts across different classes of people and ethnic groups, though predominantly spoken by illiterates and people of low educational background. In above example, Habila presents in Pidgin English the speeches of an illiterate recruiting sergeant, in an army barrack as he rebukes a group of underage boys, who want to be recruited into the army.

7. Semantic Extension

This is a stylistic/creative strategy in Nigerian prose utilized by Habila in the novel. It involves the process of making English words to acquire extended meanings. Olusegun quotes Awonuga as referring to cases where a word retains its original meaning, but acquires additional uses in the Nigerian variety of English. He claims that the use of semantic extension reflects the influence of the Nigerian socio-cultural experiences on the use of the English Language in Nigeria. This is an attempt to reflect Nigerian context (environment and culture), and to reflect it as accurately as possible in English language as exemplified in the following excerpts.

1. The whole country is dead, all the villages are on fire and there is no food and there are only dead bodies on the streets. (131)
2. It was late, around midnight, and the whole palace was asleep. (214)
3. So, early in the morning, I went to see the Mai. I was bold; in my heart I knew no fear. (214)
4. The light was dying; soon it would be night. (278)

In narrating the story that has brought the present Mai to the throne of Keti, the author uses the expression, "the whole palace was asleep" as seen in extract 1 above. He depicts the silence in the palace around midnight when the present Mai sees the late Mai's wife, burying charm at the door to his uncle's quarters. In the extract, the human action of sleeping is conferred on palace, the residence of a traditional ruler. In a componential analysis, a palace has the features - human + abstract + human abode. For a palace to sleep is an aberrant usage in British Standard English, but utilized by the writer for artistry, that is, to reflect the use of English in the Nigerian context and literature.

Habila reiterates the aftermaths of wars in the novel under study. In sample 2, he uses the expression "the whole country is dead" in the context in which it is used to paint a clear picture of the destruction done to Liberia by the Liberian war for many years. In LaMamo's letter to his brother, he narrates his experiences of the war saying:

... the villages are on fire and there is no food and there are only dead bodies on the streets. There are many sick people here, hundreds of them every day, and mostly, they are women and children and some children with cholera and infection and many of the children die and are buried in the field. (131)

LaMamo is so fed up with the situation that he says:

Now I am alone I have nowhere to go and really I don't feel like fighting anymore. I even began to plan how to return home. (131)

Habila has used semantic extension in the examples above for stylistic effects.

8. Code-switching and Code-mixing

Code-switching and code-mixing are also some of the strategies devised by Nigerian literary artists to tackle the

problems of literary creation in English. They are sociolinguistic phenomena, features of language in contact, and also the effects of biculturalism, bilingualism and multilingualism. While code-switching involves rapid switch from one language to another depending on the situation, audience and subject matter, code-mixing involves the insertion of lexical items of local languages into sentences of the English language target texts (Edokpayi 2010). Azuike identifies the three major factors, which induce code-switching and code-mixing in a given speech community, as the participants in the speech event and the code the first speaker chooses, setting and topic. He adds that choices of appropriate codes enable the characters assume corresponding roles, which best serve their communicative needs in different speech encounters. Due to the multiplicity of languages in Nigeria, code-switching and code-mixing are common features of language use in Nigeria and by implication, the Nigerian literature. The instances below exemplify the characters' use of these creative strategies in *Measuring Time*.

An old trader they met in the bus had laughed at them when they revealed their plan to him. "The river, to Mali. *Haba Kai!* You must be a pair of dreamers. No one travels by boat nowadays. ..." (61)

In above excerpt, the novelist presents the speeches of an old trader who has been communicating with LaMamo and Asabar in English Language switch to Hausa, and back to English in a single conversation. This is in response to the revelation by the two young adventurers; they are so eager to see the world beyond their little village that they want to go up the River Niger. The trader exclaims in Hausa Language, and switching to English, he informs them that nobody travels by boat nowadays.

In the extracts below are some instances where characters insert lexical items of the Nigerian indigenous languages into English speeches and sentences. This is in attempt to express untranslatable concepts and words of Nigerian culture.

1. "Where are the *akara*, Where are the *akara*?" LaMamo shouted at his brother, breathing hard, laughing, high on adrenaline. (25)
2. There were women in stiff, towering head scarves and colourful *buba* standing hand in hand with the pot-bellied, fat-jowled, slit-eyed "big men," into whose ear they whispered ... (240)

The indigenous lexical items *akara* and *buba* are inserted into English sentences in extracts 1 and 2 respectively. It is important to reiterate here that the use of code-switching and code-mixing as seen in above excerpts is a reflection of language use in Nigeria as earlier stated.

9. Conclusion

We have identified and analysed in this study the various lexico-semantic strategies utilized in *Measuring Time* by Helon Habila to convey his artistic visions to the readers. These comprise figures of speech, neologisms, idiomatic expressions, functional conversion, borrowing, among others. We also stated that the ability of a creative writer to utilize appropriate words in the conveyance of his/her themes in literary texts is the hallmark of good style. It has also been established that the novelist utilizes some of the stylistic/creative devices expounded above not only to tackle the problems of language in the prose fiction, but as a way of promoting the Nigerian languages and culture.

References

- Abdurradeem, H. & Olagunju, F.O. (2018), "Repetition and Parralelism as Meaning Strategy in Niyi Osundare's Songs of the Season." *Language and Style in Niyi Osundare's Poetry*, edited by Okunowo Yomi et al., Tai Solarin University of Education Press and Bookshop Ltd., 323-348.
- Akmajian, Adrian et al. (2001), *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*, 5th ed., Mit Print.
- Doglas, J. O. (2004), "Language and Style in E. R. Braitwaite's To Sir, With love." *Language and Society*, edited by Lekan Oyeleye, Hope Publications, 281-299.
- Fromkin et al. 2011, *An Introduction to Language*. 9th ed., Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Frye, N. (1970), *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Atheneum.
- Habila, H. (2007), *Measuring Time*. Cassava Republic Press.
- Leech, G. (1969), *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, Longman.
- Igboanusi, H. (2004), "African World-Views in Western Languages: Semantic Dislocation in African Literature." *Language and Discourse in Society* edited by Lekan Oyeleye, Hope Publications, 217-233.
- Murthy, J. D. (2010), *Contemporary English Grammar*, Book Palace.
- Ogunsiji, A. (2018), "Language, Style and Meaning in Selected Writings of Niyi Osundare." *Language and Style in Niyi Osundare's Poetry*, edited by Okunowo Yomi et al., Tai Solarin University of Education Press and Bookshop Ltd., 123-140.
- Udofot, I. & Ekpenyong, B. (2019), *A Comprehension English Course for Schools and Colleges*, Development

Universal Consortia.

Ugwu, A. (1990), *A Study of some Aspects of Nigerian English in Nigerian Prose Fiction. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of English, University of Ibadan.*

Yule, G. (2010), *The Study of Language. 4th Edition, Cambridge University Press.*

Website: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helon-Habila April 4th, 2022,