

## Verbal Process Analysis and Gender Placement of Selected Characters in Auwalu Yusuf Hamza's *A Day And A Half*

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to carry out a verbal process analysis and gender placement in Auwalu Yusuf Hamza's *A Day and Half*. Language is generally assumed to encourage and assist individuals in making alternative choices in utterance. Considering gender and worldview, individuals choose specific utterances to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, based on their gender, social and cultural backgrounds. The paper is knitted within the confines of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, it specifically handles the verbal process, which is one of the six (6) process types of transitivity in the ideational meta-function of language. Adopting the purposive sampling technique, the paper seeks to examine the following selected characters; Talele, Mairo, Kasimu and Iro. Mairo is presented as cruel, impolite and harsh towards Talele, who appears fragile, weak and confused. While Kasimu is presented as compassionate because he is in love with Talele; and Iro is jealous and angry towards Talele, because she refused to accept his love. Coming from a male author, the paper concludes that relegating women to the background; issues of gender inequality /equity, as conveyed through the use of language, is a norm where most communities are patrilineal.

**Keywords:** Ideational Metafunction, Transitivity, Verbal Process, Gender, A Day and Half.

### Introduction

Communication is the very essence of language. Communication cannot be possible without the appropriate selection of words, because words give power to language. J. M McCrimmon suggests that "words are appropriate when they are suited to the writer's purpose which includes the writers' analysis of the situation and of the audience for which the writing is intended." (155) Therefore, words are selected and joined together to create meaning through language which reveals to us different communicative acts, so that we identify an expression as warning, persuasive, informative, or interrogative. This is to say that language analyses the feelings and experiences of people. Ronald, Carter posits that, "language simultaneously reflects and encodes social and cultural patterns" (6). Agreeing that individuals use language to make meaning from the ample

resources available to them and to be understood, the connection between gender and language use cannot be overemphasized: gender is the state of being male or female. Individuals use and interpret language base on their feelings, experiences, social and cultural backgrounds and the norms of their immediate community to which they belong. This means that a patriarchal society will produce timid and docile women. In a seemingly male dominated society, the female-gender longs to be heard, especially where she feels threatened and relegated to the background. Therefore, the representation of gender and its effects in the society is a global issue. Literary works of fiction like the novel, abound in gender base stories and provide sufficient information and data for such studies. Le Roux observes that "in very specific contexts...fictional texts are perhaps the only ones that can be used to highlight particular issues and illuminate the

existence, perceptions and experiences of certain kinds of people” (22). Therefore, fiction demonstrates vividly the ingrained ideological gender positioning in a male-dominated society. It also mirrors accurately inherent cultural dispositions and evaluations of women.

This study intends to investigate the choices of words used by the selected characters in the text through, verbal process analysis of the ideational meta-function of language in Systemic Functional Grammar, which sees language has a social semiotic system, that allows individuals to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them (Halliday:101).

### **The Text: *A Day and A Half***

*A day and a half* is a work of fiction written by a northern Nigerian author, Auwalu Yusuf Hamza, who was born in Yobe state and lives in Kano state of Nigeria. He was a former Chairman of the Kano State chapter of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA). His other publications include; *Gidan Haya* (in Hausa), *Love Path*, *Citizen's Parade*, *Empty Courts* and *A Question of Marriage*.

*A day and a half* is a beautifully intricate story that revolves around Talele. Talele is a single mother who is abandoned by the father of her child for a reason not known to her. Living in the slums of Tudun Nema in a compound that gathers all sort of different (characters) families; each with a unique story of lives harness and mercy to tell, she struggles to make ends meet for her and her son. No matter how hard she tries to mind her business, people won't let her be; having to deal with the reality of the burglary that left her with nothing, to false accusations of seducing husbands of her neighbour's, to been subjected to emotional, mental and physical torture by Mairo (her cousins' wife) and others; to the nagging thoughts of why her husband left her. She however finds peace, true companionship and friendship in Maman Fati, who gives her succour with a lot of

encouragement. Although all the events unfold in a day and a half, Talele finally has a happy ending. She discovers the truth about her husband leaving her, she reconciles with Mairo and also finds true love with Kasimu whom she marries and hopes to be happy.

### **SFG and Transitivity**

To M.A.K Halliday, language is interpreted as a “system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which the meanings can be realized and answer the question; how are these meanings expressed?” (79) It is from the point of view of language as an expression derived from the context of utterance that Systemic Functional Linguistics, hence SFG/L, was developed by Halliday and his associates during the 1960s. SFG seeks to account for how language is used; it sees language as a system of choices where each speaker makes choices according to their personal, social and cultural experiences. To Halliday, speakers must pay attention to how they generate utterances and texts to convey their intended meanings (335). SFG therefore, shows language conveying three meaning making potentials, also known as the metafunctions of language; thus, the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual metafunctions. The ideational metafunction is concerned with the clause as representation and deals with the option of transitivity. Transitivity aims at understanding the language of the speaker and writer and it is realized through six processes: material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential and relational processes. According to Halliday's theory, “patterns of transitivity, including processes, participants, and the circumstances, occur in the clauses and sentences of a text” (81). He theorises that “transitivity is the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience and transitivity is really the cornerstone of the semantic organization of experience” (81).

A central insight of Halliday's model

according to Fawcett R.P is that “transitivity is the foundation of representation: it is the way the clause is used to analyze events and situations as being of certain types (48)”. Halliday argues that “transitivity is the name given to a network of system whose point of origin is the ‘major’ clause, the clause containing a predication and the transitivity systems are concerned with the types of process expressed in the clause, with the participants in this process, animate or inanimate, and with various attributes and circumstances of the process and participants (38)”. This paper is concerned with only the verbal process of transitivity in the ideational meta-function. This process lies between the mental and relational processes. It represents the act of saying, telling, arguing, warning, shouting, asking, proclaiming, reminding Etc. Usually three participants are involved in Verbal processes: The Sayer is responsible for verbal process; the Receiver is the person at whom the verbal process is directed; and the Verbiage is the nominalised statement of the verbal process. It will also investigate gender placement of characters in the text, to see how their language use affects and conveys their intended meaning.

### **Relationship between Language, Gender and the Novel**

Language is a means of communication or expression, which can be by body gestures or through speech; while gender is the state of being either male or female. The female gender feels threatened and relegated to a mere bio-domestic machine not compatible with the demands of the society. However, in relation to gender language use, Shema’u A. Umar adds that “there is no such thing as language of females and that of males, but their writing and speech is hugely related to their issue of gender in language use”. (3) Gender issues always have a special place in novels, due to the large contribution of female writers of novels in their bid to demystify the patriarchy ideology. The novel can be regarded as an

exceptional field of study since it revolves around social and cultural views. Forugh Sahba and Zarah Gharbi notes that “It embraces the writer’s attitudes due to the focus it has on the representation of ideas” (103). The novel therefore, is the ideal tool for examining the relationship between gender and language.

### **Methodology**

The main data for this study is Auwalu Yusuf Hamza’s *A Day and A Half*. The novel is chosen for this study because it is a perfect material that portrays meaning in gender use of language. With the aid of close reading, the study employs the purposive sampling technique to identify and interpret the verbal process, which are expressed by verbs in clauses and sentences, and also gender placement of characters. Since the data are not confined in a specific area of the text, the linguistic data will be carefully selected to reveal the verbal process and contextual meanings in gender use of language. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is the chosen theory for this study because it is used to unravel the salient meaning of language and also its significance in meaning making analysis.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The verbal process is represented by the act of saying, telling, asking, warning, shouting, proclaiming, reminding Etc. There are three participants involved in the verbal process; the Sayer, the Receiver, and the Verbiage. The Sayer is responsible for the verbal process; the Receiver is the person at whom the verbal process is directed and the Verbiage is the nominalized statement of the verbal process. The presentation and analysis will be carried out in three phases; the first will be the verbal process between Talele and Mairo, the second will be between Talele and Kasimu and the third will be between Talele and Iro. Whereas for ease of presentation and analysis, the Sayer will be underlined; the Receiver/ process will be in **bold** and the Verbiage will be in *italics*.

**Example 1: Mairo and Talele (Pages 11 - 14)**

Talele was about to take her bath in the early hours of the morning when Mairo suddenly swung open the door, blocked the door and prevented Talele from wearing her clothes. Talele panicked. Mairo is described as a short and fat woman who is married to Iro, Talele's cousin. She is jealous of Talele because her husband Iro is in love with Talele. She embarrasses, harasses and belittles Talele at any given opportunity.

*"What do you want, Mairo?" she asked, her eyes cast down.*

*"Stand up, you miserable whore and husband snatcher!" Mairo said.*

*"Look at you," she sneered, "what's the difference between you and a man? You are handicapped there. A woman with tiny breast is handicapped. You should be on the streets pointing to your chest to earn the compassion of kind people to offer you alms. That is where you belong instead of remaining with regular people, working evil charms on my husband!"*

*"Shut up. I am not here to chat with you! Just listen, if you do not want me to line you with this cable," Mairo warned, "I wonder why a hunger stricken woman like you had the courage to allow herself be seen by a man? Look at your stomach; it must be flat because you have little to eat, not because it was well kept." Mairo said, upset by the smoothness of Talele's belly...*

*"Turn around," Mairo commanded.*

*"Nonsense, you are just lucky. Come on, turn back and face me; do you think I am interested in looking at your back?" Again, Talele complied in silence. "Let me warn you. I shall make you sit on red-hot charcoal if I ever see you show off your backside when my husband is in the compound. Do you understand? It is not that you have a big behind. It is your devilish walk which gives the impression it is big."*

*"If you take pride in bringing hurt to married women, you can ignore my warnings. You and I know we are not equals. I am above you in every respect, yet your evil charm is potent, but it will not last forever, so watch my warnings or you will regret it," Mairo stressed, her pain evident in her speech.*

*"Such a skinny neck. A thin neck is a feature of witches- I am not surprised yours is skinny," Mairo looked in Talele's face and smirked.*

Talele is also described to having small eyes and full black lips, from lip-dye she made permanent. Again, Mairo has this to say:

*"Do not be deceived. Men consider a woman with such eyes treacherous, cunning and devilish. I thought you should know; in case you are under the illusion men will pay attention to them." Mairo brought the lantern a bit lower. She stopped at Talele's lips...*

*"It is common knowledge only animals meant for religious sacrifice ought to have black lips; when it appears on humans, it is a sign such a person must be evil. You have so many evil traits on you, what a pity!"*

In the above excerpts from the novel, the verbal process types range from command, insults, order, warning, proclaiming, swearing, expression of deep emotions and even cursing. This process doesn't have a formal way of appearance. The writer uses his discretion to decide which character says what, as the story unfolds. Each sentence expresses an emotion that portrays the state of the mind of the characters at every point in the text. It is a technique used by the writer to connect his readers to pity the characters and also to either question certain realities of life, or to answer certain questions. The use of personal pronouns is in tandem with the narrative of the novel, since the participants were in a direct conversation with each other. Mairo

uses more compound sentences because of her position and feelings, simple sentences won't clearly express her intentions. Mairo's sense of reasoning is beclouded by her intense jealousy and inconsideration of Talele; she shows no compassion for her fellow woman. Her words are harsh and depicts torture and subjugation by same sex. Here, her social status comes to play. She reiterates to Talele that she has the money and position to place her wherever she deems fit if Talele doesn't heed her warning. In the case of Talele, we see helplessness, confusion and self-pity. This excerpt shows that not only men belittle and underrate women because of their gender.

**Example 2: Kasim and Talele (Pages 61, 137 – 146 and 184 - 194)**

Kasimu is described as a man that is madly in love with Talele. He was once married and was forced to divorce his wife by her parents because he couldn't take care of her. He is a simple factory worker that loves doing things according to rules. Kasimu visits Talele, meets her son Dauda and was surprised that Talele has not told her son about him.

*"Mama, this was the supervisor who gave me the money this morning."*

*"Dauda did not know who I was when he came to the factory. I wanted to introduce myself, but didn't know where to start, so I left it at that"* **Said Kasimu**...

*"Thank you, and may God reward you for your kindness."* **She said** this twice

*"It is amazing you sound so thankful for such a small gift."*

*"It is a gift from the heart, an expression of good intentions."*

*"I shall not forget your appreciation for my small gift,"* **he reiterated**...

*"What does finding me attractive mean?"* **she asked**

*"I am not completely immodest, perhaps with time you will get to hear much more. At the moment, I can only say you have a pleasant personality, which I find at home with my inner feelings."* **He said**

*"That pleasant personality, was it there when you first saw me, or is it something that has come with the marriage?"* **she asked**

*"It was there when I first saw you. It is even more obvious now that you are my wife"*

*"You don't have to worry yourself. I have already imagined how your walk will captivate me. I was saving my anticipation until we get married."*

*"I don't pray you fall, but even if you do, I shall pick you up and watch you walk again and again."*

*"I like the sound of what I say about you. I also like looking at you without the hijab. I will also enjoy looking at you walk."*

*"Okay, one last point before I go. If you want to make me uncomfortable, look at me with those captivating eyes of yours, yes, but please don't ask me for money when you look at me. Otherwise, you will take everything away from me your bewitching eyes will do the trick for you."*

*"You know, even when you look at me, I can relate with the movement of your lips. The black paint over them makes for easy translation of their motion. I could know they are speaking to me, relating to me."*

*"You have a lot to bring. You are bringing your person, with a character I admire so much. You are also bringing a pleasant personality and a radiant appearance. You have brought a lot already, believe me."*

The entire conversation between Kasimu and Talele depicts love, mercy, confirmation, assurance, expression of deep emotions, trust, comfort and promise. Clauses employed in the verbal process, helps the reader to understand, connects them to characters and make necessary criticisms of the characters and their verbal actions. Kasimu is only yearning for her love and commitment; he is not imposing anything on her

rather he is being gentle, which is evident in his choice of words towards her. He makes her comfortable with him and around him. The same eyes that Mairo insulted her of having, have captivated him and he admires them so much. Here, we see Kasimu showing affection and compassion towards Talele, because he loves her. He respects her feelings and shows her good companionship. These are assurances on her part that she would have a blissful marriage with Kasimu. His ego as a man are not seen anywhere near Talele, he uses his power as a man to win her and not to undermine her. He praises her a lot, encourages and strengthens her.

**Example 3: Iro and Talele (Pages 84 -90, 150 -156)**

Iro is Mairo's husband. He is described as rich but always drunk and high with drugs, also he believes a lot in voodoo and fortune tellers. He loves Talele his cousin and doesn't care about his wife and her feelings. He is also a cheerful giver.

*"People who are interested in your body are only capable of small love; but I am interested in you as a person. This is big love," Iro said, and rested his shoulder on the wall. "You may never have taken notice of my good side. Everyone has a bad side, at least my bad side is in the open. Do you know the bad side of the man you have accepted to marry?"*

*"I don't know his bad side, but life leads us into situations. Whatever we discover, we adjust to it."*

**Talele answered.**

*"Can you list five things about Kasimu that I don't possess and surpass?"*

*"He is a common supervisor in a factory. How much does he earn? I can pay his salary many times over, and I have not started becoming wealthy yet. Wealth is in my stars! Marry me instead. He is a mere supervisor."*

*"You will regret not marrying me. I know you will. You will suffer from hunger in that man's house. You will live a hard, difficult life"***Iro warned.**

*"Those large sleepy eyes of yours will shrink when you are confronted by persistent hunger," he said...*

*"Believe me, women lose all their beauty when subjected to hunger, even you will lose all those good looking areas of your body that I and the others watch with admiration."*

*"You need a man like me to protect you from things like these rats." Iro stated...*

*"He has to be alive first," Iro said in sudden fury.*

*"Only I can share your bed because I have the protection necessary to ward off the evil spirit around you," he said emphatically.*

*"Only I have finally obtained the protective potion to ward off any evil surrounding her, but if she wants to marry Kasimu's corpse, let her marry him." Iro said...*

In this conversation between Iro and Talele, we clearly see that social groups of men and women are not the same, they do not have equal powers and same social base. Where Iro talks with so much pride and confidence, Talele answers with fear and caution. As far as language and gender are concerned, the social superiority of men and the inferiority of women will remain a wide gap. Iro's choice of words towards Talele portrays lust, which overshadows his love for the poor woman. He is full of envy, anger and hatred towards Kasimu; Talele's choice. His verbal processes denote command, order and threat, which displays his masculine authority and violence over Talele. Talele would probably have succumbed to him if she didn't have Ma Fati's support and her courage too. Where he was describing her condition if she refuses to marry him, his gender plays more than his social status. His description of her belittles and demeans her completely.

## Findings

From the above data presentation and analysis, it is realised that the novel *A Day and A Half* is a work of fiction, that depicts reality and abound in language resources. Understanding how these language resources are construed in the novel is very necessary for unveiling and understanding the verbal processes conveyed in the texts. The study employed the verbal process of the ideational meta-function of SFG. The verbal processes deal strictly with conversations between characters in the novel; which excludes the writer from being part of the happenings in the story and allows readers connect with characters and make decision about them. As far as the ideational metafunction is concerned, individual's thoughts and emotions are portrayed in their verbal choices. From the verbal processes employed by the writer, it is clear that the notion of male gender always bullying and belittling the female gender is not always the case as seen in the character of Mairo, who despite been a woman, subjects Talele to all kinds of torture, agony, torment, cruelty and pain. It is also realised that when a man loves a woman, he does all kinds of things to win her; his attitude towards her is different as seen with Kasimu, and when he loves her and can't get her, his jealousy, anger, envy and frustration knows no bounds as seen in the character of Iro. Agreeing that the novel holds it all where gender and language use is concerned, it is also very clear that an individuals' gender, emotions, feelings and excitement will determine his choice of diction.

## Conclusion

SFG, through ideational meta-function and with the verbal process as one of its realization forms, tries to reiterate that the novel is an apt material where the investigation of gender and language use is a target. The study focused on the verbal processes of the characters in the novel and attempts to expatiate that not all male writers relegate female characters to the background. The study considers the gender, cultural and social positions of the characters in determining their language use; and concludes that there is a huge difference in the manner in which a socially stable person uses language to describe his position in the society to a less privilege person. The gender of a person allows the use of language that spells commands, order, cursing, swearing, emotions, pity and so on. The gender of the speaker is usually the most influencing factor in the use of verbal processes; the social status of the male gender gives them the power to use authoritative and commanding language while the social status of the female gender uses less of such, except where the woman is a victim of social vices and now wants to hide behind her shadow and show herself as mean and equal to the task. However, the portrayal of gender and language use in novels appear, it is important to note that it is the social and cultural stereotyping that gives it the enabling context for which it is used. In using the characters and their verbal processes, the author also considered what is obtainable in the culture of the Northern Nigeria.

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