

## A CRITICAL STYLISTIC STUDY OF NAMING IN KAIANE AGARY *YELLOW-YELLOW*

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### Abstract

This paper, from a Critical Stylistic standpoint, examines Kaiane Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* in order to describe how the choice of names of characters, states and events impact on the ideologies projected in the text. To achieve this objective, the study uses a qualitative textual analysis coupled with Lesly Jefferies' (2010) Critical Stylistic Model (with specific reference to naming and describing) in scrutinizing eight (8) extracts purposively extracted from the text. The findings show that naming in the text is configured through noun phrase modification, premodification and nominalization. Conversely, describing in the text is mostly realised through postmodification and appositive nouns. The naming and describing technique serve to package information and uncover the identity of the referent. Through this Critical stylistic tool, ideologies such as socialism and environmentalism are foregrounded in the text. The analysis of the data shows that Critical Stylistic tools such as naming and describing account in no small measure to the meaning of the texts under study and at the same time serve in the linguistic construction of pertinent issues addressed in the text.

**Keywords:** Characters, Critical Stylistic, identity, names

### Introduction

Many studies have been conducted on Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* since its first publication in 2006. Among such studies are Koussouhon and Dossounmou (2014), Abioye and Ajiboye (2015), Koussouhon and Dossounmou (2015), Ibbi (2018), Robert and Umoekeh (2019), Aluya and Obande (2024) and Okafor et al. (2024). Koussouhon and Dossounmou (2014) investigated Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, focusing on both experiential and textual meanings. The purpose was to identify how the author encoded her experience through language, and how she organised her language to do so. The study analysed certain passages from the novel using insights from lexico-grammar theory derived from Systemic functional grammar, with a focus on transitivity and theme. The findings revealed that the author encoded and organised her experience using the material process, topical topics, and a combination of extradiegetic and hypodiegetic narratives.

Abioye and Ajiboye (2015) explored Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* through a stylistic lens. Using insights from the lexical stylistic approach combined with a qualitative descriptive method, the study investigated selected excerpts to see how the author used lexical features to convey his meaning. The findings revealed that some of the lexical stylistics features used in the text include loan words, loan blends and loan phrases, semantic extensions, coinages, neologisms, Nigerian pidgin, and images. The lexical choices were selected in a stylistic manner to establish a synergy between the language used in the text and the context in which it is utilised. The selections made are both aesthetically and socio-culturally pertinent to the text's language composition, as culturally sensitive terms can evoke vivid imagery in the reader.

Koussouhon and Dossounmou (2015) examined Habila's *Yellow-Yellow* from the perspective of mood and modality with the aim to determine the variety of moods and modality used in the text. The study, which drew on Critical

Discourse Analysis and womanist theory, evaluated some selected fragments from the texts using the qualitative descriptive approach. The findings revealed that the examination of interpersonal meanings is described within the context of Critical Discourse examination and Womanist philosophy. Furthermore, the discussion revealed that, despite the novel's monologic and dialogic structure, Agary attempted to depict the sociological schisms that characterise the daily lives of adolescent girls in Nigeria's oil-rich region. The selection of mood and modality found in the text showed some kind. The text's mood and modality choices revealed some form of power and hierarchical relationships, as well as clashing ideologies among the characters.

Ibbi's (2018) study concentrated on discourse markers as key aspects of Nigerian English and indicators of ownership and identity in general discourses and texts. It also looked at the significance of discourse markers in indigenous writings and how they might help us understand the presence of discourse markers in conversations. The study used Labov's variability theory to analyse excerpts from Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. Secondary sources, such as written materials and journals, provided more information regarding the discourse markers. The study revealed that indigenous discourse included in the texts plays an essential function in depicting ownership of the writings and is understandable to Nigerian consumers.

Robert and Umoekah (2019) explored Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* through a linguistic stylistic lens. The study aimed to determine the writer's style as well as assess the message given by the text. The study evaluated the text's primary lexical, lexico-semantic, grammatical, and graphological aspects using Halliday's Functional Linguistics and Linguistic Stylistics as its theoretical foundation. It discovered that the text's distinctive linguistic traits included concrete

nouns, active and dynamic verbs, the first-person pronoun "I", coordinate and simple sentences, semicolon and exclamation marks. In addition, it used neologisms, sexist tropes, parallel clause structures, Nigerianism, and pidgin to elevate and contextualise the discourse. According to the study, Agary played a significant influence in the thematization of the nation's woes.

Aluya and Obande (2024) explored the relationship between language and its environment, with a particular emphasis on the role language plays in regard to ecological deterioration and the social evils that accompany it. Using insights from Arran Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistics framework, the article examined purposively sampled extracts from Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* to determine how the issue of ecological degradation was framed, the frames used to construct it, the ideological stories presented in the text, and how they influenced the way characters think, talk, and behave. The findings demonstrated that complicated sentence structures, additives, adversatives, contrasts, pronominal and vocabulary items were among the framing tactics used to connect the topic of environmental degradation to other societal concerns. To emphasise the gravity of the situation, the author painted it in a negative light. This representation was created by combining source and target frames with evaluative and descriptive lexical words that have negative implications. These language resources emphasised the numerous ideological storylines in the text and how they affected the situation. Finally, the study demonstrated that language is an effective tool for addressing environmental problems.

Okafor et al. (2024) investigated how ecolinguistic theory is applied in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* to emphasise the issues that oil-rich communities confront as a result of oil drilling corporations' activity in the Niger Delta region. A purposive sampling of six extracts from the text

was carried out, and Stibbe's framing and assessment frameworks were used to provide insights for textual analysis. The findings revealed that Agary used ecolinguistic framing and evaluation tools to highlight concerns such as prostitution, discrimination, environmental degradation, kidnapping, the damage of micro/macro-organisms on the ecology, and oil theft/bunkering, among others. The study concludes that the book manufactured these concerns and presented them from a negative perspective utilizing framing and evaluation strategies.

The current study adds to the previously studied literature by focusing on Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* as its data for study. While the reviewed studies examined Agary's text from a linguistic perspective, drawing insights from transitivity theory (Koussouhon and Dossounmou 2014), Critical Discourse Analysis (Koussouhon and Dossounmou 2014), Lexical stylistics (Abioye and Ajiboye 2015; Robert and Umoekeh 2019), Discourse Analysis (Ishaku 2018), and Ecolinguistics (Aluya & Obande, 2024, Okafor et al. 2024), the present study draws theoretical insight from Critical stylistics and its primary objective is to investigate how naming and describing, as important critical stylistic tools, are used in the text to highlight the writer's ideological positions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The question of how the choice of names of characters, states and events in Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* impact on the ideologies projected is yet to be examined despite the many studies (e.g. Koussouhon and Dossounmou (2014), Koussouhon and Dossounmou (2015), Abioye and Ajiboye (2015), Ishaku (2018), Robert and Umoekeh (2019), Aluya and Obande (2024) and Okafor et al. (2024) etc., that have been conducted on the text. This study is based on Lesley Jeffries' (2010) Critical Stylistic model, which examines how the writer's choice of names for individuals,

situations, and events influences the ideology projected in the text.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The term "Critical stylistics" was originally used by Jeffries in 2007 and later in 2010 when his book *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English* was released (Aluya and Ocholor, 2024). This theory integrates ideas from several linguistic theories that have already been developed, including Functional Linguistics (FL), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Critical Linguistics (CL). Critical stylistics is the practice of using language to verify social meanings (Norgaard et al., 2010, Aluya, 2016). It focusses on exposing the underlying ideologies of the texts and demonstrating how language is applied to enforce specific ideologies through literary or non-literary texts without taking the external environment into account (Jeffries, 2014).

Jeffries (2010) asserts that Critical Stylistics is used to "assemble the main general function that a text has in representing realities" (p.14). She adds that it includes numerous tools that are thought to be more thorough than anything else in CDA. The model uses these various techniques to demonstrate the relationship between language, power, and ideology (Evans & Schuller, 2015, Ogunsiji and Aluya, 2022). These tools include naming and describing, representing actions/events/states, equating, exemplifying and enumerating, prioritising, implying and assuming, negating, hypothesizing, and presenting others' speech and thought. Furthermore, Jeffries (2010) claims that 'textual conceptual functions' are utilised to demonstrate the implicit ideologies generated by linguistic choices. This study solely addresses naming and describing among the ten tools because it is necessary to accomplish its objective.

Naming is the process of choosing a noun to represent a specific referent. Particular referents are realised in texts in three ways: through the use of nouns, noun phrases (which further determine

the nature of the referents), and nominalizations. All three methods of naming and describing can have powerful ideological consequences since the information they provide is difficult to discuss or challenge because, by being placed in a nominal framework, it is not affirmed, but rather presupposed. Nouns/noun phrases are used to package ideas because they are the entities used to label things and people in a different way than others (Jefferies, 2014).

### **Methodology**

The qualitative method is used in this term paper to analyze the selected data. The data for this study are ten excerpts purposively selected from Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* published in 2006. The selected excerpts are analysed based on one of the ten analytical tools of Critical Stylistics put forward by Jefferies (2010). The tool selected in the analyzing the text is naming and describing. This tool is briefly explained and relevant excerpts are brought from the text to illustrate it. This is followed by explanation of the excerpts given with reference to the Critical Stylistic tool under which it appears.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The section analyses the selected extracts using the Critical Stylistic tool of naming and describing. Jefferies (2016: 164) observes that names can call and name things in different ways. A name is not limited to the reference of the noun. It also includes the words that accompany the nouns, the co-texts like adjectives, postmodifiers, clauses and the nominalized verbs. Jefferies' insight on what constitute a name will form the basis of the interpretation of names used in the data for this study beginning with the following extracts.

**Text 1.** The day my mother's farmland was overrun by crude oil was the day her dream for me started to wither (p.10).

The use of nouns for name-calling features in text 1. It is introduced with the noun phrase "The

day my mother's farmland". This noun phrase is configured with the noun head "farmland", preceded by premodifying items such as the definite article "the", noun "day", pronoun "my" and noun "mother". These items lexical items form the co-text according to Jefferies. The premodifying elements perform descriptive function in that they describe the noun head "farmland" by alluding to it. Such allusion points to the owner of the farmland being referred to by the writer. Other lexical items in this text which also contribute to the destruction of farmland include "overrun", "crude oil", "dream" and "wither". These lexical items apart from the ones previously mentioned also serve as a co-text in that they supply extra information to the message conveyed in the text. The text features Agary's discussion of the subject of destruction of farmlands in the Niger Delta region owing to oil spillage. The writer's concern about this issue could be influenced by her ideology of environmentalism. Her vivid depiction of this issue is actualized through the naming and describing technique.

**Text 2.** Every young boy had visions of dying valiantly for the cause (p.34).

The issue of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta region amidst its abundant natural resources prompted activists like Isaac Adaka Boro, Ken Saro-Wiwa and others to protest against the government. It is this protest that led to their elimination by the government. Following their elimination, youths in the region resolve to continue their legacy by fighting for the emancipation of Niger Delta region from all sorts of exploitation and oppression from the government and oil company workers. The foregoing informs the writer's choice of the noun phrase "Every young boy" in Text 2. Note that this noun phrase begins with the determiner "every". This is followed immediately by the adjective "young" and the noun "boy". The premodifying elements consisting of the determiner and

adjective provide descriptive qualities to the noun head “boy” which is the writer’s subject of focus. Lexical items such as “visions”, “dying”, “valiantly” and “cause” function as co-text in this discourse to contribute to the subject of activism foregrounded by the writer.

**Text 3.** Some girls from my town did that in order to send money home to their families (p. 35).

The discovery of oil that is supposed to be a blessing to the people is a now a curse because of the untold hardship and various exploitations they are subjected to. They are environmentally exploited and their farmland are polluted as a result of oil spillage. This oil also leads to the destruction of plants and aquatic lives in the region driving the young girls into prostitution so that they can provide for their families. This situation forms the subject of Text 3 where the critical stylistic feature of naming and describing is introduced with the noun phrase “some girls from my town”. Observe that the noun phrase head “girls” is preceded by the determiner “some” which serves to introduce it. Also, the noun head is succeeded by the prepositional phrase “from my town” which qualifies it by adding some bit of information to it. The premodifying and postmodifying items alongside lexical items such as “send”, “money”, “home” and “families” serve as the co-text to vividly capture Agary’s discourse subject. Influenced by the doctrine of socialism, Agary expresses concern over these young girls’ involvement in prostitution while discouraging the act.

**Text 4.** The so-called youth groups had become well-oiled extortion machines all in the name of the struggle. They stole, blackmailed, and vandalized for the progress and development of the Ijaw nation, the Niger Delta people (p.158).

The issues of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta owing to its constant neglect by the government forced youths in the region to embark on a cause of emancipating the Niger Delta people

from the oppression and exploitation of the government and oil company workers. Unfortunately, the struggle of emancipating the Niger Delta people from the shackles of oppression and exploitation was abused by some of the youths in the region. The abuse of the Niger Delta’s struggle prompts Agary’s choice of the lexical expression “the so-called youth groups” in Text 4 which serve as a noun phrase to introduce the naming and describing technique. The noun phrase consists of the noun head “groups” which is preceded by a definite article “the”, “adjectives “so-called” and “youth”. These lexical items function to premodify the noun head in that they draw attention to writer’s referent in the text. Other lexical items in the text worth commenting on are: “oiled extortion machines”, “struggle”, “stole”, “blackmailed”, “vandalized”, “progress” and “development”. Whereas “struggle”, “progress” and “development” allude to the reason behind the region’s fight for emancipation, “oiled extortion machine”, “blackmailed” and “vandalized” describe the illicit activities of some of the youths in the region. Through naming and describing, the writer not only undermine but derided these so-called youths for hijacking and abusing the Niger Delta’s struggle.

**Text 5.** The oil companies, with the help of the government forces, flexed their muscles once in a while (p. 138).

Naming and describing in Text 5 is introduced using the expression “The oil company workers with the help of the government”. This is a noun phrase consisting of premodification and postmodification items. The noun head is denoted by “company”. It is preceded by the adjective “oil” and the definite article “the”. However, the postmodification items consist of a prepositional phrase complex (e.g. “with the help” and “of the government forces”). The pre and postmodifying elements function to supply additional information to the noun phrase head. The writer uses the noun phrase structure alongside other lexical items such

as “flexed” and “muscle” function as co-text to describe the injustice against the region perpetrated by government forces. The description in this text aids to foreground the writer’s discourse subject. To further buttress the atrocities committed by the government and its law enforcement agents against the region.

**Text 6.** These broadcasts drove the boys in my village to violence (pg.9).

Naming and describing in Text 6 is constructed using the noun phrase “the boys in my village in violence”. The noun phrase consists of the noun head “boys” preceded by the definite article “the” functioning to identify it as the referent. However, the noun head is succeeded by the prepositional phrase complex “in my village” and “to violence”. Whereas the noun phrase head exemplifies naming in the text, the prepositional phrase performs descriptive functions in that it provides additional information to the noun head. This information is important because it points attention to the place where the boys are from and their activities in the region. The naming and describing technique serve to describe the violent activities such as stealing, kidnapping for ransom, blackmailing and vandalizing of government facilities in the region.

**Text 7.** Fishing and farming, the occupation that had sustained my mother, her mother, and her mother’s mother no longer provided gain (p. 39).

Unlike in the previous Texts (1-6) where naming and describing is introduced with noun modification and postmodification, the reverse is the case in Text 7 where it is introduced with appositive nouns or nouns in apposition. The appositive noun is captured in the expression “fishing and farming, the occupation”. An apposition is a noun phrase that follows another phrase and provides additional information about it. It is important to note that the text begins with the noun phrase “fishing and farming” and succeeded by another noun phrase “the

occupation”. Naming as reflected in the first noun phrase refers to the two major sources of livelihood for the Niger Delta people. Conversely, the noun phrase “the occupation” functions to provide additional information to the first noun phrase. Through the information supplied by the second noun phrase, the reader is acquainted with Niger Delta people’s major occupation. Noteworthy is the choice of lexical items such as “sustained”, “her mother”, “her mother’s mother”, and “no longer” and “gain”. The use of “her mother” and “her mother’s mother” suggest that farming and fishing had been a longtime occupation for the Niger Delta people. The lexical item “sustained” equally suggests that farming and fishing had been beneficial to the people of region probably before the discovery and exploration of oil in the region. The lexical items “no longer” and “gain” suggest that these occupations are not beneficial to the people anymore. Agary’s expresses concern over the pathetic situation in which the Niger Delta people have been plunged into owing to the destruction of their farmlands and rivers by oil spillage. This concern is motivated by her ideology of environmentalism.

**Text 8.** The street commentary on the petrol shortage was extensive (p.110).

Naming and describing in Text 8 is captured in the expression “The street commentary on the petrol shortage”. This noun phrase expression consists of the noun head “commentary” with premodifying and postmodifying elements. It is preceded by the definite article “the” and adjective “street” which form the premodifying elements and succeeded by the preposition phrase “on the petrol shortage” serving as the postmodifying elements. The definite article and adjective modify the noun head by performing descriptive function while the prepositional phrase qualifies it by adding extra information. The additional information added refer to the subject of fuel scarcity which has led

to long queues at petrol stations across the nation causing the masses distress. As a socialist, the writer frowns at this unpleasant situation calling the attention of the government to it.

### Conclusion

The analysis has revealed that the Critical Stylistic tool of naming and describing has the ability to probe into different shades of meaning in texts together with their ideological implications depending on the text analyst's ability to select and properly apply the tool to the data under scrutiny. This agrees with the position of Jefferies (2014:

408) that "texts make meaning in fundamentally the same way whether they are poems, novels, newspapers or political manifestoes." For example, by using the critical stylistic tool of naming and describing in excerpts 1 to 8, readers or listeners are made to be immediately aware (through lexical and phrasal selection) of the unfavourable situation in the Niger Delta region and the ideologies that influence the writer's discussion of thematic preoccupations discussed in the text.

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