

SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF TRANSITIVITY PATTERNS IN VICTOR S. DUGGA'S *GIDAN JUJU*

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Abstract

Despite growing scholarly interest in transitivity studies across literary genres, Victor S. Dugga's *Gidan Juju* remains underexplored in terms of its linguistic structures and ideological formations. This study examines transitivity patterns in Victor S. Dugga's *Gidan Juju* within the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Guided by Halliday's (1994) transitivity framework, the study adopted a qualitative research design. Data comprised purposively selected passages from the play. Analysis was conducted at the clause level to identify the six process types of transitivity patterns (material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal and existential), their associated participant roles and the contextual circumstances. Findings reveal a striking dominance of material and verbal processes across the text to foreground thematic concerns in *Gidan Juju* material processes foreground physical acts of conflict, corruption and manipulation. Participant role analysis demonstrates consistent alignment with socio-political power structures: figures of authority are systematically encoded as *actors* and *sayers*, while subordinate characters occupy *goal*, *recipient*, or *senser* positions. The study concludes that transitivity analysis constitutes an indispensable linguistic lens for uncovering the ideological and thematic underpinnings of African dramatic literature. The study recommends that literary scholars should integrate Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and transitivity analysis to uncover linguistic mechanisms of meaning-making beyond traditional thematic interpretations.

Keywords: transitivity patterns, systemic functional linguistics *Gidan Juju*

Introduction

Language structures human experience by organising thoughts and interactions through specific linguistic patterns. One of such patterns is transitivity which determines how actions, participants and circumstances are represented in communication. Transitivity shows how meaning is made by showing who does what and how people or things are connected within texts. Transitivity specifies the different types of processes recognised in language and the structures by which they are expressed. At its core, it identifies key participant roles primarily the *actor* (the initiator of an action) and the *goal* (the entity affected by the action), highlighting how agency and impact are distributed within communication. Collaborating with this assertion, Abdulahi (2018, p. 122) opines that the analysis of transitivity allows users of language to represent

the same event in different ways by unveiling their mental pictures of reality.

Transitivity analysis plays a crucial role in literary studies by uncovering hidden themes and ideas such as power control and relationships between characters. Through transitivity, authors assign agency and responsibility, unveiling deeper narrative meanings. Usman (2020) asserts that literary texts are rich in transitivity patterns which reflect characters' interactions with their surroundings and serve as a gateway to thematic exploration. As such, transitivity is an essential framework for literary analysis. This paper dwells on transitivity patterns in Victor S. Dugga's *Gidan Juju* by examining how the author structures processes, assigns agency and depicts relationships between characters and their environment which helps to uncover underlying meanings within the text and reinforces the role of

literature as a tool for cultural expression and critique.

Research Gap

Previous studies have examined transitivity patterns in literary text. For example, the researcher is aware of Alagbe and Abashi's (2017) analysis of transitivity patterns in Sekula's *Mending the Tear* and Gimba's *The Herdman's Gift*. Similarly, Rauf (2020) studies transitivity analysis of gender in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Zhen (2021) studies transitivity structure of research article. All these studies analysed transitivity patterns in literary texts without much emphasis on the aspect of systemic functional analysis of those texts. Specifically, none of the previous studies used Victor S. Dugga's *Gidan Juju* for analysis. Hence, limited attention has been directed towards the systemic functional analysis of transitivity patterns in Dugga's *Gidan Juju*. Since the text under analysis possesses rich thematic and cultural dimensions, this study seeks to address this gap by applying a systemic functional analysis of transitivity framework to the text by offering an understanding of its processes, participants and circumstances. This approach will not only complement existing works but also expand scholarly discourse on African literary texts by contributing to the growing body of research on transitivity and its role in revealing the intricate relationship between language and meaning.

Objectives

The specific objective of this study is to analyse the transitivity patterns in Dugga's *Gidan Juju* to uncover how the text's linguistic structures represent experiences, actions and participants in the narrative. The study seeks to demonstrate how transitivity plays a crucial role in conveying deeper meanings in African literature and enriching the understanding of the linguistic features that shape the narratives. The objectives are to:

- i. examine the transitivity patterns in Dugga's *Gidan Juju*.
- ii. identify the different types of processes represented in the text through transitivity.

Literature review

Transitivity

Transitivity in linguistics is a fundamental concept used to describe how verbs relate to the participants and objects in a clause. Transitivity is a system that accounts for the experiential function of language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2019, p. 23). According to Dixon (2020, p. 22), "transitivity is the grammatical system that categorises verbs based on whether they take a direct object, focusing on how actions are transferred from the subject to an object". This definition underscores the central role of verbs in determining the structure of a sentence, specifically how actions are directed toward objects. It highlights that transitivity is not just a property of verbs but also an essential mechanism through which meaning is constructed in language. Onukwulu and Akinwumi (2021, p. 37) argue that "the degree of transitivity can significantly alter the complexity of sentence meaning, as it dictates the interactions among different elements of the clause". This reinforces the idea that transitivity fundamentally shapes linguistic constructions and their interpretations. From a narrative and discourse perspective, transitivity plays a crucial role in character development and story structure. Adejare (2019, p. 78) emphasises that "transitivity is instrumental in managing narrative progression, allowing authors to depict actions and relationships among characters effectively".

Transitivity Patterns

A very crucial component of transitivity is transitivity patterns. Transitivity patterns refer to the structural arrangements of process types within clauses. Each process type follows a specific grammatical pattern that consists of three main components: participants (Who is involved?), process type (What is happening?) and circumstances (Under what conditions does it happen?). Halliday (2019, p. 2) defines participants as "the entities involved in a process, either as actors, goals, sensors or carriers, depending on the type of process." This means that participants serve as the core elements in transitivity analysis, determining who or what is involved in an event or state. By identifying participants, analysts can classify roles and their

contributions to meaning-making in discourse. Matthiessen (2020, p. 15) states that “participants are obligatory elements in clause structure that interact with processes to create experiential meaning.” This underscores the integral role of participants in transitivity, they serve as the primary entities engaging with different process types. Without participants, process structures would lack coherence and completeness in meaning representation.

Thompson (2021, p. 30) explains that “process types categorize the nature of an action, mental activity, relational identification or existential occurrence within a clause.” This classification enables linguists to distinguish between material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal and existential processes which form the basis of transitivity analysis. Recognizing process types ensures that linguistic analysis captures the nuances of different expressions of meaning. Eggins (2022, p. 42) supports this view by asserting that “process types function as the core predicates in clause structure, guiding how participants are positioned and related.” By analyzing process types, scholars can determine whether a clause describes an action (material process), perception (mental process) or state (relational process), thereby refining the interpretation of discourse. Each process type is briefly explained below.

i. Material processes denotes actions or events in the physical world. The participants involved are the *actor* — the entity performing the action — and the *goal*, the entity affected by it. For example, in a sentence like “Peter kicked the ball,” Peter is the actor, while “the ball” is the goal. This type of process is often used to emphasize physical actions and events, making it a common feature in narratives about activities like sports or adventures.

ii. Mental processes involves cognition, perception or emotion. Here, the participants are the *senser*, the conscious entity experiencing the process and the *phenomenon*, what is being sensed. For instance, in “She believes in miracles,” *she* is the senser, and *miracles* is the phenomenon. Mental processes highlight subjective experiences and are essential for texts focused on personal reflections,

feelings or intellectual engagement.

iii. Verbal processes represent acts of communication. The participants here are the *sayer*, who produces the message and the *receiver*, the entity receiving it. In “He said he was tired,” *he* is the sayer, and *was tired* is the verbalised content. Verbal processes are prevalent in dialogues, speeches, and narratives where communication is central to the plot or theme.

iv. Relational processes express states of being or relationships. The participants include the *carrier* or *identified*, the entity attributed with a characteristic, and the *attribute* or *identifier*, the characteristic itself. For example, “The sky is blue” shows a relational process where *the sky* is the carrier and *blue* is the attribute. This type is crucial for defining identities, qualities and states in descriptive and expository texts.

v. Behavioural processes relate to physiological or psychological actions such as breathing, dreaming or smiling. The participant performing the action is referred to as the *behave*r. For example, in “She smiled,” *she* is the behave>r. Behavioural processes add depth to characters by depicting actions that are neither purely physical nor purely mental.

vi. Existential processes assert the existence of something, with the participant termed the *existent*. In “There is a problem,” *a problem* is the existent. These processes are often used in texts that introduce new information or emphasise the presence of particular elements.

Bloor and Bloor (2018, p. 67) define circumstances as “the optional elements in clause structure that specify time, place, manner, cause or accompaniment.” Circumstances provide additional contextual information that enhances meaning but are not required for grammatical completeness. By incorporating circumstances, clauses gain specificity and depth, making descriptions more precise. Similarly, Martin and Rose (2019, p. 89) posit that “circumstances contribute to the richness of transitivity patterns by situating processes within their broader contextual framework.” This suggests that while circumstances are not obligatory, they enhance the interpretation of events by answering questions related to how, where, when, and why an action

takes place. Their inclusion can influence the emphasis and communicative impact of a clause. Transitivity enables us to analyse how dissect experiences are represented through processes, participants, and circumstances. The study of transitivity processes allows linguists to the functional aspects of communication

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is transitivity system – a subset of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday. SFL offers a functional approach to language, viewing it not merely as a system of formal rules but as a resource for meaning-making within specific social and cultural contexts. Halliday (2014) asserts that language is primarily concerned with the organisation of meaning, and that grammatical structures are shaped by the communicative purposes they serve. Thus, language is understood as a dynamic system through which individuals construct and interpret experience. Central to SFL is the conception of language as a social semiotic system, which implies that linguistic choices are inherently tied to social meanings and cultural practices. Eggs (2018) explains that language both reflects and constructs social reality, as speakers and writers select from a network of linguistic options to encode their intentions and worldview. This perspective is particularly relevant to literary analysis, where language is deliberately manipulated to project characters, actions, emotions, and societal values. SFL is organised around three broad metafunctions which operate simultaneously in all linguistic expressions: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions.

The ideational metafunction is concerned with the representation of experience and logical relations in the world. It enables language users to describe events, actions, states, and the participants involved in them. The interpersonal metafunction focuses on the interaction between participants in communication, encoding attitudes, judgments, and social roles. It reveals how speakers negotiate relationships, express opinions, and position themselves relative to others. The textual metafunction, as Derewianka (2020) notes,

deals with the organisation of information, ensuring that discourse is coherent, cohesive, and contextually appropriate. This study is anchored on the transitivity system, which operates within the ideational metafunction. Transitivity provides a systematic framework for analysing how experiences are represented in language. It categorises processes into types such as material (actions), mental (perception and cognition), relational (states of being and possession), verbal (acts of saying), behavioural (physiological and psychological behaviours) and existential (expressions of existence). Each process type involves specific participants (such as Actor, Goal, Sensor, Carrier, and Sayer) and may include circumstances that provide additional information about time, place, manner, cause, and condition.

By applying transitivity analysis, this study examines how linguistic structures encode meaning and represent reality in the selected text. It enables the identification of patterns in the portrayal of actions, characters, and events, thereby revealing underlying ideological and stylistic choices. In the context of Nigerian literary texts, such analysis is particularly significant, as it helps to uncover how language reflects sociocultural realities, indigenous experiences, and contextual nuances embedded in Nigerian English usage.

Therefore, the adoption of the transitivity system provides a robust analytical tool for interrogating how meaning is constructed, how experiences are represented, and how linguistic choices contribute to the overall interpretation of the text under study.

Research Procedure

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the transitivity patterns in the selected literary text. The qualitative approach is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth analysis of how experiential meanings are constructed through language. The data for this study is sourced from *Gidan Juju* by Victor S. Dugga. The text is purposively selected due to its rich linguistic structures and thematic depth, which make it suitable for a transitivity-based analysis. A total of four (4) extracts are purposively selected from the text. These extracts comprise relevant words, phrases, clauses and sentences that exemplify

transitivity structures. The selection is guided by their significance to the study and their ability to represent different transitivity patterns within the text. The analytical framework adopted for this study is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the transitivity system as developed by M.A.K. Halliday. The analysis focuses on

identifying and interpreting the process types (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural, and existential), alongside their corresponding participants and circumstantial elements, in order to uncover how meaning is constructed in the selected extracts.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Explained below are a few transitivity patterns in *Gidan Juju*

Extract 1

(Singing, drumming and dancing is heard from a distance. Then presently, group of towns men and Women enter the stage from the auditorium. When they get to centre stage, they stop in anticipation. AKPESHKO AREN, the royal bard is heard chanting tales of an exotic past from back stage, then he enters, heralding the royal train.)

AKPESHKO: Darkness prevailed on the land for a long time. A lkingdom that remained without a king for one century suddenly has its life renewed. The seed stayed dried in the ground for a long time, but the rains have fallen. The supposedly dead seed has sprouted. The sun shines once again in Gwangwalla. Years of continuous pain and thirst now give way. The dry water holes are once again wet, bubbly and swelling up. Take your pot and calabashes. The nests have been repaired by the busy weaverbird. The birds are coming home to roost. As our ancestors did, so have we done today. What is a town without a noble king? What is a tree without fruits? Our new king emerges today at the end of his coronation rights. He went in a man but he comes out a royal deity. (15)

The excerpt from “Scene I - The Restoration” features all six transitivity process types: material, relational, behavioural, verbal, mental and existential, each contributing to the multifaceted portrayal of the setting of the play, historical context and anticipatory mood.

A more critically engaged analysis of this extract requires moving beyond merely identifying process types to showing how Halliday’s transitivity choices construct ideology, kingship legitimacy, collective identity, and socio-political renewal within the text. In this extract, the royal bard’s chant functions as a legitimising discourse that reconstructs history in metaphorical and ideologically loaded terms, thereby elevating the emergence of the new king from a ceremonial event to a cosmological restoration.

The opening stage direction, with “Singing, drumming and dancing,” foregrounds a **material and behavioural process complex** that immediately situates the scene within communal action. The verbs “enter,” “stop,” and “await” further reinforce a **material process of movement and suspension**, positioning the townspeople as participants whose agency is temporarily halted in anticipation of royal authority. This structural pause is ideologically significant: it constructs the king’s arrival as a moment that commands collective obedience and ritual stillness, thereby reinforcing hierarchical power relations even before his physical appearance.

Akpeshko Aren’s chant is dominated by **relational intensive processes** (“Darkness prevailed,” “a kingdom that remained without a king,” “the sun shines once again,” “years... give way”) which serve to equate political absence with cosmic disorder and political restoration with natural rebirth. This repeated use of

attributive relational clauses is not merely descriptive; it constructs kingship as a naturalised necessity. By equating governance with elemental forces—darkness/light, drought/rain, death/life—the text ideologically frames monarchy as the stabilising centre of existence, thereby legitimising hereditary or traditional authority as divinely or cosmologically sanctioned.

Furthermore, the bard’s use of **material processes of transformation** (“the seed... has sprouted,” “the rains have fallen,” “the nests have been repaired”) symbolically encodes political change as ecological renewal. These verbs do not simply describe nature; they metaphorically construct the king as an agent of fertility and restoration, even though he is not directly performing these actions. This indirect agency is ideologically important: the king is positioned as the implied cause of renewal, reinforcing a discourse of sacred leadership where authority is linked to natural cycles rather than human contestation.

The extract also deploys **verbal and rhetorical processes** (“What is a town without a noble king? What is a tree without fruits?”), which function as ideological interrogation. These rhetorical questions are not genuine requests for information but serve to presuppose the necessity of kingship. In SFL terms, they operate as indirect **mental construals of evaluation**, guiding the audience toward a shared ideological stance. The use of communal pronouns such as “we” in “As our ancestors did, so have we done today” further constructs collective identity through inclusive participation, erasing individual subjectivity in favour of a unified cultural consciousness that legitimises tradition.

Stylistically, the repeated cyclical imagery of nature (“sun shines,” “dry water holes... wet,” “birds... come home to roost”) creates a cohesive semantic field of regeneration. However, critically, this repetition also mirrors ideological saturation: the bard’s speech does not advance new meaning but reinforces a singular narrative of restoration and obedience to monarchy. The transformation of the king from “a man” to “a royal deity” at the end of the extract is a significant **relational identifying process**, which completes the ideological elevation of human authority into divine status. This linguistic shift is central to the construction of power, as it removes the king from ordinary human accountability and places him within a sacred ontological category. Overall, the extract is not simply descriptive of a coronation event; it is a carefully constructed ideological performance in which transitivity choices naturalise monarchy, suppress contesting voices, and elevate the king into a cosmological symbol of renewal. The repeated and patterned use of relational and material processes therefore functions not only as stylistic repetition but as ideological reinforcement, constructing power, continuity, and legitimacy through language.

Extract 2

(Enters the royal train made up of the KING, the kingmakers, ASHÈ EKOPO, and the CUSTODIAN. The TOWNS PEOPLE go down on their knees with heads bowed until he sits.)

TOWNS PEOPLE: Gbaaga Iduu! The Great Lion!

AKPESHKO: The King greets you. He acknowledges your salutations.

EZHIM: Our royal father, we, the kingmakers, greet you.

CUSTODIAN: It is one month today since the successful coronation of our king. Today, he appears in public for the first time. Your royal highness, your loyal subjects are here. Gbaaga Iduu! We salute you.

(The KING does not utter a word. Instead, he waves a horsetail in acknowledgment.)

EZHIM: Your highness, we are gathered to welcome you from the land of our ancestors, from the grove of royal consecration. You went in and came out hale and hearty; you came back alive. That is the sign that you are accepted as king, both in our world and in the king beyond. None of us have ever saw a real king in this land. We have had regents, Good regents, but no king. When weeds invade the land, it means that the owner is absent. The weed that once took over our land is now uprooted. Once again, we rejoice that you took the challenge thrown at you by circumstances beyond your control. Permit me to say that you... (16)

The excerpt from page 16, detailing the king's first public appearance post-coronation, showcases a rich interplay of the six transitivity process types- material, relational, behavioural, verbal, mental and existential. These processes collectively underscore the gravity of the occasion, the hierarchical structure of the society, and the profound symbolism attached to the king's presence. A more critically driven reconstruction of this analysis requires shifting from mere identification of transitivity processes to a sustained interpretation of how linguistic choices construct ideology, reinforce monarchical authority, and stage power relations during the king's post-coronation public appearance. Rather than functioning as a neutral grammatical mapping, the excerpt strategically deploys transitivity patterns to naturalise hierarchy, silence alternative agency, and elevate the king into a symbolic and semi-divine figure.

At the level of **material processes**, the scene is saturated with actions that dramatise submission, ritual order, and controlled political movement. The "royal train enters" and the townspeople "go down on their knees," while the king "waves a horsetail in acknowledgment." Although these are identifiable material processes, their ideological function is more significant than their grammatical classification. The distribution of agency is highly asymmetrical: the townspeople are constructed as active grammatical actors only in acts of physical submission, while the king's action is minimal yet symbolically loaded. This imbalance constructs a power structure in which authority is not demonstrated through extensive action but through the capacity to command action in others. Even retrospective references such as "you took the challenge thrown at you" function to construct the king as a heroic agent whose legitimacy is validated through ordeal, thereby reinforcing a narrative of earned sovereignty rather than arbitrary rule.

The **relational processes** in the extract work more extensively to naturalise hierarchy and stabilise ideological meaning. The royal train is defined through an attributive structure that lists its components, thereby linguistically staging monarchy as a composite institution of sacred authority rather than a single individual. More importantly, relational clauses such as "it is one month since the coronation" and "that is the sign that you are accepted as king" function to fix social meaning as already resolved and unquestionable. These structures do not merely describe identity; they actively construct kingship as a socially validated fact. Ezhim's metaphor that "we have had regents, but no king" operates relationally to erase competing political forms by framing them as incomplete or deficient states of governance. In this way, relational processes become ideological instruments for defining legitimate authority and delegitimising prior structures of rule.

The **behavioural processes** such as the townspeople "going down on their knees" and the king's silence followed by a restrained wave are not simply expressions of behaviour but dramatizations of embodied power relations. The collective kneeling encodes submission as a socially expected bodily practice, reinforcing the internalisation of hierarchy. The king's silence, in contrast, is not passive absence but an authoritative behavioural strategy: it constructs him as a figure whose legitimacy does not require verbal justification. His minimal gesture of acknowledgment becomes a controlled performance of dominance, where restraint itself signals superiority. Thus, behavioural processes contribute to the ideological construction of the king as both distant and revered.

In terms of **verbal processes**, the extract is dominated by acts of greeting, proclamation, and ritualised speech from subordinates, while the king is notably non-verbal. This asymmetry is ideologically significant. The townspeople's utterances such as "Gbaaga Iduu!" and Ezhim's elaborate salutations position speech as a form of allegiance rather than negotiation. Akpeshko's declaration that "the King greets you" paradoxically attributes verbal agency to the king while simultaneously maintaining his silence, thereby constructing a mediated voice of authority. This suggests that royal speech is not direct but institutionalised and transmitted through intermediaries, reinforcing distance and mystique around kingship. The absence of verbal

participation from the king further strengthens the ideology that authority is enacted through presence rather than discourse.

The few instances of **mental processes**, particularly “acknowledges,” are strategically significant because they ascribe cognition to the king without requiring verbal expression. This constructs an image of a ruler who is perceptive and all-knowing yet restrained in expression, reinforcing the trope of the wise and inscrutable monarch. Similarly, interpretive statements such as “it means that the owner is absent” embed cognitive reasoning within metaphor, positioning subordinate characters as interpreters of social reality while still affirming the inevitability of monarchical order.

Finally, the **existential processes** such as “we have had regents, but no king” function not simply to state existence or absence but to construct a historical narrative of political lack. The existential framing of “no king” erases alternative political legitimacy by presenting monarchy as an essential but previously missing element. This rhetorical construction produces a teleological ideology in which history is implicitly moving toward the present moment of coronation as fulfilment.

Overall, the excerpt does not merely display a range of transitivity processes; it orchestrates them to construct a coherent ideology of sacred kingship. Agency is asymmetrically distributed to privilege the monarch, relational structures naturalise authority, behavioural patterns encode submission, and verbal silence enhances mystification. The cumulative effect is the ideological reinforcement of monarchy as both historically necessary and socially unquestionable, rather than a neutral ceremonial description.

Extract 3

...the well-being of the town were tied asymmetrically. When it was his time to join his forbears, the never-to-be King did what any king would do; he called for my father and anointed him to be king after him. He also told him to return to this land and do whatever he could to bring back the glory of the land. Unfortunately, before my father could return and ascend the throne, he fell mysteriously ill and died soon after, in a foreign land. My memories were built only around the stories my mother told me about my father's recollections of his childhood. When a delegation from Gwangwalla came to invite my older brother to ascend the throne, he asked for time to consider the matter, while my great aunt served as Regent. After one year, he sent a letter to the Kingmakers, declining to be king. He said his foreign wife will not survive the traditions of our people. Am I telling the story as it happened?

CUSTODIAN: Exactly how it happened, your highness.

(The KINGMAKERS nod in affirmation.)

AREN: That was when my name began to feature in the contemplation list. You sent the Regent to personally come over and persuade me to return home to the throne of my forefathers. I was dutifully managing my computer software company in Finland and was quite reluctant to leave but you... (19)

... queen for yourself. Who took my beauty bag?

LAMI: Where did you keep it?

TANI: Let her look for the bag where she kept it. What is she shouting for?

SHEZI: Someone wants to look finer than you!

MANYI: Is this dress my size at all? (She makes different postures, trying to convince herself.) Are my hips protruding?

ASABA: Is it me you are asking?

MANYI: No, I am asking your shadow.

ASABA: Go and ask the mirror.

LAMI: Every lady here wants to be queen; do you blame them?

TANI: Is it true that the King is at liberty to choose up to three girls at once?

SHEZI: Nope. He can actually select up to six girls at once.

MANYI: So, we can actually end up being queens and co-wives in the same house?

LAMI: It is called a harem. A Zenana ...

ASABA: Ze ... whatever! Or I end up as the Queen and you all as my servant girls.

TANI: (Notices EKEANGBO sitting in a corner reading a book.) Hey, girl. Are you preparing for exams? What are you reading? The King's CV? (28)

EKEANGBO: What do I care?

TANI: What do you care? You don't care to be Queen?

EKEANGBO: I wish you girls good luck.

SHEZI: Thanks. Why are you here then? Why did you come?

EKEANGBO: My father is one of the kingmakers and he would not let me stay at home because every girl must be presented to the King. He would be charged for dissent, insubordination or something worse, if his daughter chose not to show up.

ASABA: Girl, I don't need a mother or father to nudge me to show up here in the waiting room of the palace.

MANYI: Wait, what do we even really know about the king? He didn't grow up here. We surely can't be preparing to meet someone we do not know ...

SHEZI: He - is - the - king. Period!

MANYI: We all know that.

LAMI: He is also good looking ...

ASABA: He returned from some country ... Inland or something like that.

EKEANGBO: Finland.

MANYI: What kind of name is that for a country?

EKEANGBO: It's Scandinavian (29).

These extracts above, encompassing Aren's personal history on page 19 and a lively dialogue among prospective queens on pages 28-29, presents a comprehensive array of the six transitivity process types: material, relational, behavioural, verbal, mental, and existential.

Rather than functioning as neutral grammatical categories, the processes in this extract work together to expose a tension between inherited authority, elite mobility and the anxieties surrounding kingship, femininity and social status.

The **material processes** in the extract are particularly significant in constructing a layered ideology of political succession and constrained agency. Aren's recounting of events such as the king "calling for my father," "anointing him," and the "delegation coming to invite" his brother positions succession not as a democratic or neutral process but as one controlled by elite decision-making structures. Although these are material processes of action and movement, their deeper implication is that political power circulates within a closed system of elite endorsement rather than popular legitimacy. Even the father's journey and subsequent death "in a foreign land" introduces a narrative of exile and fatal consequence, subtly suggesting that proximity to royal authority carries both prestige and risk. Aren's own material positioning—"managing my computer software company in Finland"—creates ideological contrast between modern, globalised individual agency and the traditional, unstable world of monarchy. In the dialogue sections, mundane commands such as "Let her look for the bag" and "Go and ask the mirror" extend material processes into the domestic sphere, where female characters are shown navigating competitive, appearance-driven expectations. This juxtaposition of grand historical action and trivial domestic instruction reveals how power operates both at state and interpersonal levels, with women's agency particularly confined to aesthetic and performative labour.

The **relational processes** are central to the ideological construction of identity, especially in relation to kingship and femininity. Statements such as "He is the king," "He is also good looking," and "It is called a harem" do not merely describe states of being; they actively construct a social taxonomy in which individuals are positioned within rigid hierarchies of power, desirability, and access. The repeated identification of

roles—kingmakers, regent, queen, co-wives—functions to naturalise a stratified system in which social mobility is mediated through proximity to the monarch. Importantly, the women’s discourse reveals how relational clauses construct femininity as competitive and aspirational: “Every lady here wants to be queen” transforms queenship from a political institution into an object of desire, thereby reinforcing a gendered ideology in which women’s status is defined through marital access to male power. Similarly, the definition of “harem” and “Zenana” introduces a culturally loaded relational framing that objectifies female identity as collective possession. These relational structures therefore do not simply define reality; they reproduce a patriarchal order in which kingship becomes the axis of identity formation for both male legitimacy and female aspiration.

The **behavioural processes** such as the kingmakers “nodding in affirmation” and Manyi “making different postures” function as embodied expressions of ideological positioning. The nodding does not merely signal agreement; it enacts institutional compliance, reinforcing the authority of succession narratives already established by elite actors. Manyi’s bodily adjustments, by contrast, expose internal insecurity and the pressure of performative femininity. Her behaviour constructs a subjectivity shaped by surveillance and self-evaluation, where the body becomes a site of social negotiation. Even vocalised behaviour such as “shouting” reflects heightened emotional instability within a competitive female environment, suggesting that social structures around kingship generate psychological tension at the level of bodily expression.

The **verbal processes** are overwhelmingly distributed toward secondary characters, particularly in dialogue and historical narration, while authority figures are often represented through mediated speech. The repeated acts of telling, asking, replying, and declaring construct a communicative hierarchy in which knowledge about kingship is circulated rather than directly accessed. Aren’s family history is constructed through reported speech (“told him,” “asked for time,” “declining to be king”), reinforcing the idea that royal legitimacy is mediated through discourse rather than direct experience. In the contemporary dialogue, verbal exchanges such as “Every lady here wants to be queen” and “He can actually select up to six girls” construct a discursive economy of desire, where speech functions to circulate rumours, expectations, and anxieties about royal selection. Crucially, the king himself remains absent from direct verbal participation, reinforcing an ideological distance between sovereign authority and everyday discourse. His power is therefore constructed through what is said about him rather than what he says.

The **mental processes** provide deeper insight into the ideological production of desire, uncertainty, and cultural interpretation. Aren’s memory construction—“built only around the stories my mother told me”—reveals that historical knowledge is second-hand, shaped by narrative mediation rather than lived experience. This introduces a critical epistemological instability: kingship is known through stories, not direct truth. Similarly, expressions of reluctance, questioning, and self-conviction among the female characters construct a collective psychology of uncertainty and aspiration. Manyi’s attempts to “convince herself” expose internal conflict between social desire and self-doubt, while questions such as “what do we even really know about the king?” destabilise the ideological certainty surrounding royal authority. Mental processes therefore function as sites of ideological tension, where official narratives of kingship are interrogated by individual consciousness.

Finally, the **existential processes** referring to “dissent, insubordination or something worse” do more than assert the existence of punitive categories; they construct a disciplinary framework that governs participation in royal structures. The existence of punishment is not neutral information but an ideological warning that reinforces compliance through fear. This existential framing reveals the coercive underside of the royal system, where participation in succession rituals is not optional but structurally enforced.

Extract 4

KING AWASKU: I like your confidence and boldness. We shall require more of this in the palace. I will take you. You shall be the glue to bind our kingdom with the Gold coast. We are rich in iron ore. Your people shall exchange their gold dust for our iron ore. I take you. (Again the OLD CUSTODIAN picks her up and ushers her to the chosen side. There is more ululation and victory chants.)

KINGMAKER 1: Your reign shall be great. Gbaaga Iduu!

OLD CUSTODIAN: It is with the difficulty of hewing the hardwood which we painstakingly carve our stools that our character of strength and tenacity is revealed. May our ancestors continue to guide you like your father before you, Gbaaga Iduu.

KING AWASKU: (He continues to move around, speaking to himself as in previous times. Again, he stops in front of another maiden.) Young woman, what do they call you?

NABULUNGI: I am Princess Nabulungi, daughter of Mwanga II, the Kabaka of Buganda.

KING AWASKU: I see that you travelled the farthest to get here. I have heard of your father and his mother. Abakyala Abisagi Bagalayaze. The great king of the Abalasangye dynasty. You come from a generation of warriors. I shall take you. Your genes are vital to our future plans. As the rains gather, we must create a shelter before the clouds open... (42)

... up on us. I take you too ... (There is soft drumming now playing in the background as the action reaches a crescendo. CUSTODIAN picks her up and ushers her to join others on the chosen side. There is more ululation and victory chants.)

OLD CUSTODIAN: May your reign surpass that of your fathers. You are choosing well, Gbaaga Iduu!

KING AWASKU: That will be all. Five is good.

(There is commotion off stage. Gun shots rend the air. Screams of warriors are heard. Commands are issued and the war intensifies and then dies down. All the while, the stage freezes. When the action resumes on stage, soldiers of the colonial government invade the stage, commanding everyone to lay down. Everyone does, except AREN AWASKU.)

AREN AWASKU: I thought you all assured me that the warriors were battle ready? Speak up, you imp. You earthworms. You lizards. Grovelling on your stomachs like centipedes. (Enters the DISTRICT OFFICER accompanied by two soldiers and MOOSTAF.)

DISTRICT OFFICER: (Amused.) And who are you? Oh, you must be the mule, Awasu?

AREN AWASKU: I am Aren Awasu, the King of Gwangwalla. (43)

.. **AREN AWASKU:** Never to return? You can banish me from the land but until I return to this land, the people and the land will never know true peace.

DISTRICT OFFICER: The ground has shifted from under your feet. You are now standing on quicksand. Arrest him. Put him in chains. (Two soldiers approach AREN AWASKU and in the most undignified manner, slap the cap off his head before forcing him down on his knees and thereafter, putting chains on his hands.)

AREN AWASKU: Your action today shall bring an end to your empire. I leave involuntarily, taking with me the secret of the prosperity of the land. I curse the land to reject you. This land shall not profit you nor your queen! I curse the land to reject you. This land shall not profit you for you or for anyone else until the day I return home, dead or alive.

DISTRICT OFFICER: In the name of her Majesty, the Queen of England, I hereby depose you as the King of Kwankwaala! Mustafi!

MOOSTAF: Yes, sir! My most distinguished and respected D.O, sir!

DISTRICT OFFICER: You shall immediately take over as vassal ruler of these people. Set up organs of local administration as soon as possible. We shall give you a three-month moratorium. In the fourth month, we expect you to remit taxes and send men every month to work on forty able-bodied men every month to work on the road construction sites. We have an empire to... (45)

These extracts from pages 42, 43 and 45 presents a dramatic arc, moving from the ritualistic selection of queens and strategic alliance-building to a sudden, violent colonial invasion and the forceful deposition of King Awasku. The six transitivity process types — material, relational, behavioural, verbal, Mental, and existential — are robustly employed, effectively portraying the shift from internal affairs to external imposition and the profound consequences of colonial power. More critically refined reading of this extract requires moving beyond identifying transitivity processes to showing how linguistic choices stage colonial invasion, contested sovereignty, gendered selection, and ideological displacement of indigenous authority. The extract is not merely a ceremonial moment of “choosing queens”; it is a dramatization of political economy, imperial violence, and the collapse of traditional kingship under colonial interruption. Transitivity choices here are therefore deeply ideological, constructing shifting power relations between the king, his subjects, and colonial authority.

The **material processes** are central in constructing both sovereign power and its violent disruption. King Awasku’s repeated declarations “I take you,” “I shall take you,” and “I take you too” encode selection as a performative act of authority, where speech is immediately converted into action. Although grammatically material, these processes construct the king as a figure whose language directly enacts power over bodies, particularly female bodies reduced to “being picked up” and “ushered to the chosen side.” The Old Custodian’s physical actions reinforce this choreography of obedience, positioning women as objects of movement rather than agents of choice. However, this controlled material order is violently interrupted when “gun shots rend the air,” “soldiers invade,” and people “lay down.” Here, material processes shift dramatically from ritualised selection to coercive colonial force. The slapping off of Aren Awasku’s cap, forcing him “on his knees,” and putting him “in chains” reconfigures agency: the king is transformed from agent of selection to object of domination. This reversal is ideologically significant, marking the collapse of indigenous authority under colonial material violence.

The **relational processes** function to construct identity, legitimacy, and ideological hierarchy. King Awasku’s assertion that “you shall be the glue to bind our kingdom with the Gold coast” assigns symbolic identity to the selected women, defining them not as individuals but as functional elements in state-building and economic exchange. Similarly, references to “we are rich in iron ore” and “your people shall exchange their gold dust” construct relational equivalence between human relationships and economic commodities, revealing how kingship is embedded in resource extraction ideology. The District Officer’s statement “you are now standing on quicksand” is a relational metaphor that redefines political reality, signalling instability and the erosion of indigenous sovereignty. Most importantly, “I am Aren Awasu, the King of Gwangwalla” functions as an identifying relational clause that is immediately contested by colonial authority, demonstrating a struggle over who has the power to define political identity.

The **behavioural processes** such as “ululation,” “victory chants,” “amused laughter,” and the physical submission of characters encode emotional and bodily responses to shifting authority. The women’s ululation and chants construct ritualised acceptance of royal power, reinforcing patriarchal spectacle as celebratory rather than coercive. However, behavioural submission becomes re-coded under colonial invasion, where people “lay down” and obey commands. Aren’s refusal to lie down disrupts this behavioural conformity, positioning him as the only resisting body in a field of submission. His bodily stance therefore becomes a symbolic site of resistance, contrasting sharply with the disciplined obedience of others.

The **verbal processes** are densely layered with competing discourses of sovereignty, violence, and imperial administration. King Awasku’s declarations (“I will take you,” “I have heard of your father”) function as authoritative speech acts that construct legitimacy through naming and historical invocation. The Old Custodian’s praise operates as ritualised verbal reinforcement of kingship ideology, invoking ancestral continuity. In sharp contrast, the District Officer’s speech introduces a new verbal regime of colonial

authority: “In the name of her Majesty... I hereby depose you” functions as a performative utterance that legally dissolves indigenous kingship. This contrasts with Awasku’s earlier performatives, showing a shift from traditional ritual authority to bureaucratic imperial legality. Moostaf’s deferential speech (“My most distinguished and respected D.O”) further illustrates the linguistic embedding of colonial hierarchy, where verbal submission becomes institutionalised.

The **mental processes** are relatively limited but ideologically significant. Awasku’s evaluative cognition (“I like your confidence,” “I have heard of your father”) constructs selection as informed judgment, reinforcing the idea that kingship is rational and discerning rather than arbitrary. However, Aren’s mental assertion that the land “will never know true peace” introduces a prophetic consciousness that frames colonial occupation as spiritually and politically destabilising. This cognitive projection transforms him into a figure of ideological foresight, resisting colonial authority through knowledge rather than force.

The **existential processes** such as “we have a kingdom,” “there is commotion,” and implicitly “there are soldiers” construct the presence of structures of power and violence. The existential framing of “there is commotion off stage” and “gun shots rend the air” establishes colonial invasion as an intrusive presence that disrupts the previously ordered ceremonial space. Importantly, existential assertions of empire (“we have an empire to...”) remain unfinished in the extract, symbolically reflecting the instability and incompleteness of colonial justification.

Overall, the extract stages a dramatic ideological shift in which transitivity patterns map the transition from indigenous ritual sovereignty to colonial administrative violence. Material processes move from ceremonial selection to coercive domination; relational processes redefine identity through economic and imperial categories; verbal processes shift from ritual affirmation to legal deposition; behavioural processes encode both celebratory submission and enforced obedience; mental processes frame competing visions of legitimacy; and existential processes expose the fragile and contested presence of empire. The cumulative effect is a text that constructs kingship not as stable authority, but as a site of ideological struggle between tradition, gendered power, and colonial.

Discussion

The findings of this study, based on the transitivity analysis of selected extracts, demonstrate that language in the text is not merely a vehicle for storytelling but a structured resource for constructing ideology, power relations, and social meaning. In line with the objectives of the study, the analysis shows that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly Halliday’s transitivity framework, provides a productive lens for uncovering how linguistic choices encode authority, identity, gender relations, and colonial tensions in dramatic discourse. However, beyond the mere identification of process types, the findings reveal that transitivity patterns consistently function to naturalise power and regulate social order within the play.

A key finding is that material processes dominate the representation of power and control, especially in relation to kingship and colonial authority. Actions such as “taking,” “choosing,” “kneeling,” “arresting,” and “deposing” are not neutral descriptions of events; they construct a world where authority is enacted through physical and institutional force.

Another significant finding is the ideological function of relational processes in constructing identity and legitimising hierarchy. Relational clauses consistently define kingship, femininity, and social status in ways that naturalise inequality. For example, kings are identified as central political figures, women are positioned as symbolic instruments of alliance or desire, and colonial authority redefines political identity through legal declarations. In relation to the

theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, this confirms Halliday's view that relational processes are central to encoding classification and attribution in social meaning-making. However, the present study further demonstrates that relational processes in the text are not merely descriptive but deeply ideological, as they fix identities in ways that discourage contestation.

The study also finds that verbal processes play a crucial role in mediating authority and constructing ideological truth. Speech in the text is overwhelmingly dominated by subordinate characters, custodians, and colonial administrators, while central authority figures are often represented through reported or indirect speech. This distribution of verbal agency suggests that power is not only exercised but also narrated and controlled through discourse. Furthermore, the findings reveal that mental processes are strategically used to construct consciousness, legitimacy, and ideological interpretation, although they are less frequent compared to material and relational processes. Where they occur, they highlight perception, judgment, and cognitive evaluation, especially in relation to memory, desire, and political awareness. This supports the SFL notion that mental processes represent internal experience, but the study extends this by showing that mental processes in the text often serve ideological functions - either legitimising authority through perceived wisdom or destabilising it through doubt and questioning.

In relation to behavioural and existential processes, the study finds that they contribute subtly but significantly to the construction of submission, emotional response, and systemic presence. Behavioural processes such as kneeling, chanting, and bodily reactions reinforce visible

hierarchies of obedience, while existential processes establish the presence or absence of political structures, often framing kingship and colonial authority as defining conditions of existence. These findings complement existing SFL research which suggests that behavioural and existential processes are less dominant but still important in constructing experiential meaning. However, this study highlights their ideological weight in reinforcing both ritual authority and colonial control.

Across all extracts, a major overarching finding is that transitivity patterns are systematically used to construct competing ideologies of power - indigenous kingship as sacred and ritualised authority, and colonial rule as bureaucratic and coercive domination. Gender is also consistently constructed through these processes, particularly through relational and material structures that position women as objects of selection, exchange, and symbolic alliance. This confirms the research objective on socio-political meaning-making while extending it to include gendered representation as a key ideological layer.

Conclusion

This study affirms that transitivity analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics provides an indispensable and robust linguistic tool for interpreting African drama. It enables a deeper understanding of how thematic concerns such as power, leadership, colonial intrusion, and social hierarchy are linguistically constructed and sustained. Beyond its descriptive value, the study has shown that transitivity analysis offers critical insights into the ideological workings of language, thereby contributing significantly to stylistic and discourse studies of African literature.

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