

Form and Content: An Analysis of Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a pragmatylistic analysis of Helon Habila's Measuring Time, focusing on some foregrounded lexical and pragmatic features in the novel. Using 15 purposively selected utterances of characters in the novel based on the depiction of foregrounded lexical features and three further extracts manifesting the use of presupposition and implicature as analytical tools for explicating the meanings communicated during exchanges in the fictional world of the novel, the paper shows that Habila utilises lexical repetition and parallelism as a foregrounding scheme for capturing experience and situating the major characters, their actions and their psychological states at various stages of the novel. It also shows that the exchanges between major characters in the novel are characterised by tension and agony, exhibiting a predisposition to violence arising from the unfavourable political climate and personal failures. The paper demonstrates the author's preoccupation with various aspects of the horrendous life lived by Nigerians in post-independence Nigeria and concludes that Helon Habila's Measuring Time is a documentation of leadership failure.

Keywords: *pragmatylistic, lexical repetition, Measuring Time, horrendous life*

Background to the Study

This paper undertakes a pragmatylistic analysis of Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2006), one of the epochal novels that have earned the novelist fame as an important new literary voice on the African continent (see Anyokwu 2008, Tranter 2008). From a literary perspective, it seems clear that *Measuring Time* is a novel informed by the new historicist consciousness, albeit within a critical realist framework (on new historicism and critical realism, see Barry 1995, Bressler 2003, Udentia 1993 and Webster 1990). Since criticism, whether literary or linguistic, involves interpretation and evaluation, the pragmatylistic framework should prove illuminating in showing how form and function interrelate in constructing the novel under study as a literature of change in the face of social fragmentation and despair, in contrast to the socialist, realist or materialist practice of neutralising the distinction between form and content owing to an overriding concern with the sociology of literature. Wales (1991:288) notes the tendency in Marxist criticism to neutralise the form-content dichotomy "in its concern to unearth the historical and ideological assumptions of thinking of dominant social

classes", while Bressler (2003:184) says of new historicists, in particular:

They continue to call for a reawakening of our historical consciousness, declare history and literature must be seen as disciplines to be analysed together, place all texts in their appropriate contexts, and believe that while we are researching and learning about different societies, we are simultaneously learning about ourselves, our own habits and our own beliefs.

This study shows the value of linguistic analysis to literary texts with a view to reinforcing the enduring and integral place of linguistic stylistics in contemporary practice (see Fowler 1996, Catano 2004, Kolawole 2003, Ayeomoni 2004 and Jaafar 2014). The study is further hinged on the argument that if, as Leech and Short(1981) submit, the goal of stylistics is the study of language as used in literary texts with the aim of relating it to its artistic function (Ayeomoni 2004:177), this can perhaps best be accomplished in a pragmatylistic framework, particularly as language use is always nurtured and textured by a set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing



pragmatic mappings, defined in Lawal (2003:153) as the linguistic, situational, psychological, social and cosmological contexts respectively. Ayodabo (2003:13) reinforces this view when he posits that style is really only definable in terms of the operations carried out by the producers and receivers of texts, and that it may not be out of place to say that pragmastylistics “is derivable from the pragmatics of discourse which deals with the systematic relations between structures of a text and its context.”

Pragmastylistics

In his definition of pragmastylistics, Owolabi (2010:13) submits that it is “a concept that x-rays the interface of context and choice.” In his view, this is because, from a morphological perspective, pragmastylistics involves “pragmatics” and “stylistics”, hence, he argues that pragmastylistics is unique in combining the two fields. Pragmastylistics is also referred to as pragmatic stylistics by a number of scholars (see Black, 2006; Clarke, 2009). Clarke (2009:5) posits that pragmatic stylistics is not a well-defined term. He nevertheless considers it as the application of ideas from pragmatics to the stylistic analysis of literary and non-literary texts. In his view, pragmatics, in turn, can be understood in a number of different ways, or in a very loose, general way which encompasses other definitions. This means that pragmatic stylistics, understood as linguistic pragmatics applied to stylistic analysis, could refer to any of a number of different approaches depending on which ideas about pragmatics are being applied.

Salvadore (2003:1) posits that consideration of linguistic variation is inherent in pragmatics, especially where such variation relates to contextual factors, an area where it frequently converges with work on stylistics. He adds that scholars are now showing interest in style within the framework of the contributions made by pragmatics, especially with the incorporation of work in speech act theory and the study of politeness or metaphor and irony from the perspective of relevance theory, all of which, taken together, “have ushered in a new and explicit label for this area of discipline:

pragmastylistics.” As Roshmawati (2012:2) contends, pragmatic stylistics is part of the manifestations of linguistic stylistics. This variety of stylistics, he avers, shows the meeting point between pragmatics and stylistics, that is, how pragmatic resources such as performative and speech acts can be employed to achieve stylistic effects. Pragmatic stylistics is thus viewed as a two-in-one theory of text analysis which focuses on the effects of contexts on the text.

In a similar vein, Galiṭa (2011:36) notes that research in the field of stylistics comprises all linguistic means of expression of subjectivity (phonetic, morphological, syntactic, lexical and semantic), while pragmatic research focuses on speakers’ usage of language depending on their mood, the time and place of the utterance and any other matters that may influence the process of communication. Thus, as Verdonk and Weber (1995:13) point out, a pragmatic model of meaning, applicable in stylistic analysis, will investigate the meaning of language in relation to a context of use and users. This is why Abushihab (2015:110) submits that analyzing a text according to the principles of pragmatic stylistics means approaching the text’s meaning and the intention of the producer. However, to this writer, pragmastylistics is simply stylistics with a pragmatic focus; that is, a systematic explication of both the formal and contextual aspects of a text geared towards shedding light on the resources used for conveying meaning in it, including not only the language but the various backgrounds (social, ideological, psychological, etc.) that inform it.

Speaking on the pragmastylistic method, Achoeah and Adelodun (2013:109) observe that the use of insights from pragmatics and stylistics in the analysis of a variety of texts across disciplines is widespread. Pragmastylistics then represents an interface between the two fields of investigation. It may be noted that while pragmatics is concerned broadly with intended speaker meaning (Yule, 2004:127), that is, how to make invisible meaning visible through contextual tools such as inference, presupposition, implicature, among others, stylistics is a systematic account of the resources



used in projecting meaning in a text, whether literary or non-literary, from the perspective of linguistics. That is to say that whenever you are doing pragmastylistics, you are simultaneously doing stylistics and pragmatics.

It is important to note that pragmastylistics, which is primarily a discipline informed by the stylistic method, is distinguishable from literary criticism even in its explication of the context or background of a text, since the conclusions which the pragmastylistician makes derive from linguistic analysis, with the analyst employing pragmatic tools such as inference, presupposition, mutual contextual beliefs, implicature, speech act theory, phatic tokens, (im)politeness and facework theory, among others, in his or her explication of meaning. Nevertheless, whether or not pragmastylistics encroaches on the artistic component of literature is perhaps not a useful question, since stylistics itself is complementary rather than antagonistic to literary criticism, a discipline which is devoted to the artistic component of a work and which relies on intuitive judgment. Thus, in his study of dramatic texts from the pragmastylistic perspective, Feng (2002:1) states that the theory of pragmastylistics of drama views pragmatics as a perspective on the dramatic text, employs linguistics as the source of analytical tools, examines the dramatic text (both dialogue and stage directions) as the object of study, advocates the visualization of the dramatic discourse for the full appreciation of the play text, and treats inference drawing as the central task for the purpose of identifying the linguistic features that contribute to the aesthetic values of the dramatic text.

Furthermore, Hickey (1993:578) says that pragmastylistics is stylistics but with a pragmatic component added to it. He claims that in studying the stylistic potential of a language or of a particular construction, or in analysing a specific text, pragmastylistics pays special attention to those features which a speaker may choose, or has chosen, from a range of acceptable forms in the same language that would be semantically, or truth-conditionally, equivalent, but might perform or achieve different objectives,

or do so in different ways. In other words, the choices are seen as determined by the desired effects (expressive, affective, attitudinal, etc.), by the communicative qualities aimed at (clarity, effectiveness, etc) and by the context or situation itself (what is already known and what is new, relationships between speaker and hearer, the physical distances, etc). Again, utterances with the same, or virtually the same, meaning may differ in their linguistic form and situational appropriateness, and these differences may have either stylistic or pragmatic explanations. As Hickey (1993:578) argues, with a seemingly psychological goal:

Pragmastylistics thus involves the study of all the conditions, linguistic and extralinguistic, which allow the rules and potential of a language to combine with the specific elements of the context to produce a text capable of combining specific internal changes in the hearer's state of mind or knowledge. It distinguishes the abstract theoretical meaning or semantic import of a sentence or text from its usage or effectiveness in a specific situation and from what the speaker means or intends to achieve by using it.

Helon Habila

Born in Kaltungo in the defunct Gombe State, Nigeria, in 1967, Habila read Literature-in-English at the University of Jos, Plateau State. After his graduation, he worked with **Hints**, a romance magazine and the **Vanguard** newspaper. In 2000, he won the Muson Poetry Prize, while in 2001, he won the Caine Prize for African Writing. Habila also won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for New Writing in 2003. Following the publication of *Waiting for an Angel*, his first novel, Habila was appointed a writing fellow at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England. He was the first Chinua Achebe Fellow at Bard College (2005), a William B Quatron fellow at the University of Iowa International Writing Programme and the John Farrar Fellow at the 2003 Bread Loaf Writers forum. Co-editor of the British Council's *New*



Writing with Lavinia Greenlaw, Habila has published only three novels to date, but he has a large collection of poems and short stories to his credit. He is currently an associate professor at the George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, USA, where he lives with his family. He published his third novel, *Oil on Water*, in 2010.

Synopsis of the text

As a novel, *Measuring Time* has a very broad scope. It is an epic ambition to tell the story of a village from its conversion to Christianity by white missionaries, through periods of political machinations and power struggles, to the present day (Tranter, 2008). The novel, told in indirect style, relates the story of a set of twins, Mamo and La Mamo, born to a philandering and uncaring father, Lamang, in Ketu, a Northern Nigerian village. Although the twins have similar names, their personalities are quite dissimilar. A sickle cell patient and a bookish and highly introspective individual, Mamo is an awkward invalid who tries to measure up to his brother La Mamo, who is very strong and bold but less intelligent. Told by their aunty Marina that their father had always been in love with Saraya, his village mistress, even while married to their mother, the twins whose mother, Tabitha, died in childbirth, are united in their hatred for him. The Lamang twins start out as starry-eyed idealists infused with a heroic vision of their place in Africa and, lacking parental love although in a wealthy home, they decide to join the army to realise their heroic quest.

However, the plan suffers a setback when, on the way to the city, Mamo suffers an anaemic crisis and has to return home, leaving his cousin Asabar and La Mamo to continue with the quest. While La Mamo roams various parts of the African continent fighting for odd causes, Mamo becomes a history teacher at the village secondary school, having dropped out from the university at 200 level owing to an anaemic crisis, and he soon engages in a passionate love affair with Zara, the estranged wife of a young philandering military officer, while Lamang, his father, engages in local politics, feeding the villagers and providing television viewing

entertainment. Surrounded by lustful and scheming widows, Lamang gains wide popularity with his idea of 'reverse osmosis', a solution to the drought in his community, but his fortunes begin to nosedive when this idea is stolen by a political rival, ultimately resulting in a stroke and eventual demise.

For Mamo, whose fortunes seemingly rise as his father's plummet, history and biography become pastimes for filling the void in his life, but he soon finds that he is being manipulated by the *waziri* (vizier), a palace chief who invites him to write a biography of the local emir (king) for sadistic reasons. Thus, although his fortunes seemingly rise as he mingles with the military top brass and royalty following a journal article in which he attempts a re-writing of local history, Mamo begins to realise why he must foil the wily *waziri*'s schemes, and that the money voted to sink wells in the village for the common good has been shared by members of the palace who are willing to offer him a share of the loot. However, for her part, unable to secure the custody of her son following a divorce suit she instituted against her husband, Zara, Mamo's lover, abandons Ketu and reunites with Themba, a university friend, in a contractual marriage of convenience in order to do charity work, but returns to Ketu a forlorn woman when the latter begins to demand conjugal rights against the agreed plan.

Books, and sometimes girls, provide some fillip as Mamo watches time ticking away in his hourglass, aware that the end may come any time, and that Zara's loss is irreplaceable: "*Why do I go on flagellating myself over something I knew I had lost a long time ago? For surely from the moment she told me she was going to South Africa with a former friend I knew I had lost her. This was time to let go.*" (pp.244-5)." Mamo is, however, not alone in the losing world: having witnessed the horrors of war, La Mamo loses his heroic quest and returns home to Ketu, only to lead a revolt against the palace and get killed by the police, leaving a pregnant Liberian refugee wife, Bintou, behind. Unable to secure parental support over her divorce and separation from her oppressive husband, Zara runs amok, while Aunty Marina, who has been



battered and infected with syphilis by her estranged husband, becomes morose at the loss of Lamang, La Mamo and others; and the entire community, plagued by drought, a corrupt royal institution and sectarian crisis, becomes divided and disappointed. Yet, there is still a stubborn air of hope in the land, as Mamo wanders around: "On the way back the hills in the distance loom large and black from brush fires that ceaselessly burn away the harmattan dried leaves. Above the hills the clouds have thickened, brushing the surface of the hills. **The rain will fall today.**" (page 322; emphasis mine).

Measuring Time is thus an affirmation of the resilience of the human will, a bildungsroman (developmental) novel which, on the one hand, captures the historical evolution of a community over a 100-year period and, on the other hand, the physical and psychological development of Mamo and La Mamo with the attendant progression from innocence to experience (Anyokwu 2008:23). Anyokwu (2008: 24) adds that like most modernist writers, "Helon Habila seems to fix his gaze on the revolting underbelly of human nature and the inescapable horror of the human condition", while Tranter (2008:2) adds that "Habila's work is ambitious in scope and the theme it tackles: politics, corruption, colonialism, coming of age, education, history and love."

Lexical repetition / parallelism in *Measuring Time*

In *Measuring Time*, lexical repetition and parallelism are predominant. This can be seen right from the first paragraph of the novel (p.13):

*They had decided a long time ago to make life hard for their father. He had broken their mother's heart, and though the twins had not been born then, some women in the village still hum the song, popular many years ago, about Lamang's philandering before and after he had married their **mother**. The song, a ballad that grew in detail and complexity with each rendition in the moonlit **village** square, called Lamang the "King of*

Women/Owner of ten women/In every village from/Keti to the state capital." The refrain described how **women** stood longingly on their doorsteps as he passed, and how mothers locked up their daughters at 8:24night to save them from "the handsome ravisher," and ended with the lines: **Mother** sighing with **longing/ Daughter** sighing with **longing/ Ah, King of Women, show some mercy.**

As can be seen from this extract, the novel, which begins with tracing the background of the relationship between the Lamang twins around whom the novel is built and their emotionally estranged father, manifests the use of lexical repetition right from this first paragraph. The lexical items *mother*, *daughter* and *women* are all co-hyponyms of the superordinate item, *female*. It would be observed that while lexical items such as *mother*, *song*, *daughter*, *women*, *village* and *longing* are repeated in this extract, there is also the lexically parallel items *song/ballad/refrain*. In the novel, this trend of lexical repetition continues in an attempt to reinforce the participants, ideas events and experiences (social, psychological, economic, cultural and political) encountered by the discourse participants in the fictional world of the novel. Consider the following from different parts of the novel;

Part Two:

1.) *After the closure of the school Mamo found himself with time on his hands and without much means of using it apart from taking long **walks** in the afternoon. He took **walks** not only to kill time, but also to avoid his father's constant looming presence in the house, and the inane laughter of the widows whenever they came to visit. A few times he had contemplated going to his uncle and asking for a small loan to enable him get a place of his own, a modest room somewhere, but he knew this wasn't the time to ask Iliya about a loan, so he took his long **walks**. (p.117). (Nominal: repetition of *walks* to indicate a*



method for killing time and avoiding certain responsibilities).

2. ...he was... constantly **shifting** in his seat as if **plumping** the cushion with his buttocks, **leaning** forward, then back, then sideways to whisper to the Mai.(p.124). (Verbal parallelism, with the **ing** forms in plumping/shifting used to indicate the Waziri's restlessness in the presence of the Mai, who is not aware that he is being conned by the Waziri who has invited Mamo to write a biography of the Mai without his knowledge).

3. Last week, Zara had finally turned up in Keti, looking **exhausted**, **defeated**.(p.141) (Adjectival parallelism: de-verbal adjectival form used to indicate Zara's weakened state after she fails to secure custody of her son).

4. The first two days, they didn't step outside the house: they **ate** and **slept** and made **love** and read and **made love** and **ate** and **slept** and made **love** again. (p.143) (Nominal/verbal: repetition of *love, sleep, ate* and *made* indicating monotonous action).

5. The police, they attacked them. They said that they found them with ballot papers...and...now two of the boys are dead...and they said Asabar might not last the night, **shot**, he was **shot** (p.175). (Verbal: repetition for emphasis with a tinge of sorrow. Here, aunty Marina indicates the outcome of a plan to rig election).

Part Three

6. We wanted to go on foot with the refugees sneaking across the **border** but the French workers helped us because they now have another camp across the **border** where it is safe so we went with them as their assistants which we are in reality and now we are here safe and it seems as if all the **fighting** and the **killing** that have been the major part of my life since I left home has been only a dream(p.195). (Nominal: repetition of *border* because the speaker, La Mamo, is a soldier fighting across different borders in Africa; and *fighting*, the main activity involved in military conflict; and *killing*, the result of fighting).

7. But I am not too worried because one of the doctors said when I get the glass **eye** it will look like a real **eye** and nobody will know..(p.196).

(Nominal: repetition of *eye* because, in this context, it is an item that has been lost in war)

8. It was not the dull ennui he had felt after La Mamo's departure; this was fire, it burned. It was **anger**, **anger** that she had left him for another person (P.197). (Nominal: repetition of *anger* to indicate the effect of the broken relationship with Zara on Mamo's mind).

9. Mamo wondered what kind of Waziri the vizier was---his shifty eyes, his **repulsive**, **serpentine** demeanour all screamed evil, but so far he had been nothing but the opposite. A sheep in **wolf's clothing**; or a **wolf** in **wolf's clothing** (p.199). (Nominal/Adjectival: parallel adjectival items *repulsive* and *serpentine* indicating a phoney character; nominal items *clothing, wolf* and *sheep* repeated in a semantic inversion to indicate that the Waziri is a very evil person, as Mamo assesses his character).

10. The Mai continued to stare, his eyes growing **duller** and **duller** (p.213). (Adverbial: *duller* repeated to show a seeming lack of interest by the Mai in the people around him).

Part Four

11). Come on, secretary, I know the **people**, I represent the **people**. It is my work to know the **people**. (p.281). (Nominal repetition).

12) Mamo was conscious that he looked **tired** and **haggard**(p.286).(Adjectival parallelism: *tired* and *haggard* describe Mamo's exhausted state).

13). La Mamo **descended** the stairs and **headed** past the kitchen toward the chicken coop (p.287). (Verbal parallelism, indicating action in a certain direction).

14). Let's go **inside**, ' Mamo said. They went **inside** (p.288). (Adverbial repetition).

15). But today the drama group had centre **stage**...As usual, the **stage** was the concrete platform in front of the church (p.316). (Nominal repetition).

As the above examples show, repetition cuts across nominal, verbal, adjectival and adverbial classes in *Measuring Time*, although the nominal and verbal categories are higher. Thus:

Nominal	Verbal	Adjectival	Adverbial
border	made	possible	lower
love	ate	amateur	inside



silence shot
grief waited
eyes prayed
anger break
wolf
clothing
money
people
hills
stage

The repeated lexical items are negative in meaning in the context in which they are used. While the verbal items *made, ate and slept*, relating to feeding, sexual activity and indulgent rest, may seem to signal pleasure, this is negated by the realisation that the lovemaking is perfunctory and merely escapist, and that it does not stop the breaking up of Mamo and Zara, who both profess love for one another. Again, the constant lovemaking, eating and sleeping are the main activities in the two central characters' lives only because their source of livelihood, the village school in which they used to teach, has been closed down by the government. Nominally, the items *wolf, grief* and *anger* are significant. Mamo is deceived by the Waziri, a member of the local traditional council, into making the Keti villagers to contribute money for sinking boreholes for the common use, but the money is embezzled, and, with the ruthlessness of a wolf, he even threatens to deal ruthlessly with members of Mamo's family because he would not be part of the plan to bring the local ruler, the Mai, into disrepute so that he (the Waziri) could take over.

Measuring Time, a novel of anguish and stubborn hope in the face of adversity, is built around lexical repetition. Since it is developmental novel which captures the historical evolution of a community and the physical and psychological development of Mamo and La Mamo from innocence to experience to demonstrate an affirmation of the resilience of the human will, the author's use of lexical repetition helps to situate the major characters, their actions and their psychological states at various stages of the novel.

Presupposition and Implicature in Measuring Time

Presupposition, in my view the basic assumptions made by speakers/writers concerning the listeners/readers in relation to the topic based on assumed common ground, is classified by Osisanwo (2003:86) into semantic presupposition, the logical relations that hold between sentences and pragmatic presupposition, which relates to "the conditions required before a speech act can be suitable for a given context." With regard to implicature, Borg (2009: 2) notes that two very different elements combine to make up the total signification of an utterance in the Gricean theory; the fundamental divide between what is said and what is implicated (implicature). Using the relevance theoretical paradigm, Carston (2004:2) submits that the conceptual content of an implicature is supplied wholly by pragmatic inference, the view adopted in this study. In *Measuring Time*, presupposition and implicature are tools of meaning negotiation. As would be discovered in the text, the exchanges between the lower characters and officialdom are characterised by tension because of the disparity in access to social and democratic facilities. But so are the exchanges among the lower class characters themselves, meaning that the tension in the novel is comprehensive and total. Consider the following extracts:

Extract 1

"You mean the money, the fifteen million that was raised for drilling wells so that the people could get water, was shared and nothing is left for the original project?" Mamo asked. The Waziri's smile slipped, then returned. "Not all the money. Did you think we forgot about you, our talented scribe? Ha-ha. No. You will give me your account number, and I will put in something for you."

"How much?" Mamo asked.

"Let's say a hundred thousand naira? You deserve it. But the book must be finished soon. It is very important."

"But what of the people? Don't they get anything at all?" (*Measuring Time*, page 281).

"Common, secretary. I know the people, I represent the people. It is my work to know the



people. Do you think they don't know how these things are done? They do. And do you know what---I am sure you didn't realise this before---this money shared by the Mais, it will eventually find its way back to the people. These same people will come to the palace with their list of problems, medicines for their children, school fees, hunger, and do you think we can turn them away empty handed? Never. So in the end, the people benefit more than anyone else.” (Measuring Time, p.281).

Extract 2

“...You are not the only ones affected, so don't feel victimised,” came the confident voice through the wall. “The country is going through a phase of change. No more private schools.”

“But we are not a private school,” Iliya shouted angrily.

“Please do not raise your voice to the honourable commissioner for education,” another voice said.

“But we got this letter from your ministry just a month ago telling us we are not being reviewed...” (Measuring Time, p.165)

“That is not important. Forget about the letter, things have changed now, no more private schools. From now on, education will be handled by the government only. Our children are our future, we can't take chances with our future.”

“You don't understand, Mr Commissioner...”
‘Honourable’

‘What?’

“You must address me as Honourable Commissioner for Education, or Honourable Commissioner, or simply Honourable, but not Mr Commissioners. We must respect our public officers.” For the first time, the voice was raised a pitch higher. Zara's mouth fell open. Mamo could imagine the expression on his uncle's face.

“Honourable Commissioner for Education...”
“Go on.”

“Let me point out that this is not a normal school. It is a special school; started by the community, to help dropouts, to give them another chance. If you close down this school...”

“I have made my point clear, I hope, Mr Headmaster. We are not closing down this school or any other school. We are taking them over and

improving them; we are turning them into model schools. If you have any complaints, please write to my office and you will be attended to.” (Measuring Time, p.165).

Analysis

The extracts above illustrate the conflict in the novel. In Extract 1, an exchange between the hero, Mamo and the Waziri, a member of the traditional council in Keti village, implicature and presupposition are at play. The Waziri who, together with his superiors, has embezzled the money contributed by the Keti villagers for building wells, labours to rationalise this fraud to Mamo, the palace scribe who mooted the idea of sinking boreholes in the first place. When Mamo asks: ‘You mean the money, the fifteen million that was raised...was shared and nothing is left for the original project?’ (p.281) the Waziri processes his concern as a request and thus derives the (infelicitous) implicature that he is requesting for his own share of the loot. Hence he says: “Not all the money. Did you think we forgot about you, our talented scribe?” and then proceeds, from this premise, to deliver categorical imperatives: “You will give me your account number, and I will put in something for you.”

Having processed the pragmatic presupposition that the Waziri thinks that he can be bought over through a deposit into his account and, by extension, conscripted fully into the corrupt Keti traditional cabal impeding social progress and making life difficult for the masses, Mamo plays along by asking “How much?”, which the Waziri processes as a genuine request for money rather than a sarcastic comment on the fraudulent council. Thus, the Waziri puts forward a figure (N100,000) but Mamo probes him further, asking if the poor members of the community would get anything from the bargain. This utterance, which the Waziri appropriately processes as a complaint, leads him to say “Common, Secretary, I know the people,” since Mamo has implicated that he is not concerned with their welfare.

The presupposition inherent in the marker “common,” namely that what follows is a



rejection of a premise and a signaling of disagreement is, in conjunction with the nominal, contextually formal and hence socially distant item, secretary, pragmatically marked. Put another way, it may be rendered as “Let’s be reasonable, Secretary,” indicating the Waziri’s exasperation with Mamo. “Common, Secretary” is therefore a relevant marker of a tense and combative cognitive state, however momentary; a point in the discourse where the non-deployment of the more intimate and hence socially close “Mamo” signals conflict. Thus, partly as a defensive, face-saving strategy, the Waziri proceeds into an elaboration of a warped logic by which the people would end up being the beneficiaries of the looted funds, but only annoys Mamo, who rejects the offer of a bribe and accuses him of deceiving the villagers.

Similarly, Extract 2 is characterised by tension. Uncle Iliya, the headmaster of the Ketu community school, a school set up through donations from members of the community, is in a hot exchange with the state commissioner of education who is in the village to announce that the school will be closed down by the government, and the exchange is overheard by Mamo and Zara, members of the teaching staff who are also lovers. Iliya, the brain behind the school, expresses displeasure with the plan, which has a political undertone, but is challenged by the commissioner who considers him disrespectful. In his argument with the commissioner, Iliya premises his objection on the fact that the school, being a special institution whose continued existence has just been affirmed a month previously by the commissioner’s office, should not be closed down. However, the commissioner is concerned more with the threat to his positive and negative face (he has been referred to as a *Mr.* rather than *honourable* and his plan is being resisted) and tells him to “forget about the letter because things have changed now.”

Notably, the commissioner processes Iliya’s complaint as being based on the pragmatic presupposition that he (the commissioner) is bound by the promise made in the letter his office had written a month earlier, indicating that the

school was not being reviewed; and that failing to do this would be tantamount to a breach of trust. The commissioner however rejects this implicated premise, which leads to the implicature that his integrity is not guaranteed in that context, and hence he appeals to a change in circumstances: “*The times have changed now.*” Interestingly, Iliya’s use of the presumably respectful “Mr Commissioner” is interpreted as a marker of disrespect by the commissioner, who rejects the attributed thought that he is an ordinary “Mr” rather than a “Honourable” and vigorously contests that designation in an attempt to educate the bellicose head teacher on proper etiquette given the social distance between him and the principal. Thus, he conveys his displeasure through an indirect rebuke: “*We must respect our public officers.*”

However, although Iliya applies the preferred designation without challenge after the initial surprise (‘What?’), he gets no reprieve and, worse still, has his inferior social status further confirmed by the commissioner who refers to him as “Mr Headmaster”. However, on a higher plane, the implied reader generates the implicature that the commissioner is snobbish, petty and rude, since respect is earned and is not a one-way traffic. Notably, he is seen as a character who is more concerned with his social leverage than the future of a community, being a mere undertaker in the intense power play in the novel. In this regard, the narrator’s representation of Mamo’s thought on the encounter is revealing (*Measuring Time*, p.165):

Although he didn’t say it, Mamo knew that his uncle was aware of the real reason the school was being closed down. The school was being used as a pawn in the battle between Lamang and his former party, the Victory Party. Elections were only days away and this was a direct warning to Lamang whose relentless campaign for his new party was beginning to get a following, and any villager who might be tempted to vote against the ruling party, to think twice.”



In general, the exchange between lower-status characters and officialdom in *Measuring Time* is characterised by tension arising from the establishment's lack of social responsibility. Where injustice is challenged by the oppressed, however politely, the response by officialdom is negative and violent. However, interpersonal communication between members of the lower characters in the two novels is just as marked by tension, as the shown in Extract 3 below:

Extract 3

"It won't work. We can't marry, it won't work. Not so soon after my divorce, and you...you have so much on your mind, your father's death, and your brother...I have so much on my mind too. If we don't lay our ghosts to rest, we will only make each other sad. I'd rather be sad alone somewhere alone than to be here and drag you down. I love you, Mamo. I do, but we need time alone..."(p.191)

"But there might not be another time," he said. "You might finally fall in love with your friend. He sounds like a saint. And maybe I will meet someone..." (p.191)

She shook her head, not looking at him. "I don't know, maybe you are right. But all I know is that I need things from a different angle, with more clarity; right now, I can't see at all. Sometimes I feel as if I'm losing my mind. If not for you, if not for the time we've had together, I don't know what I'd do. I have to go, I do." (*Measuring Time*, p.191)

Extract 3 is an exchange between Mamo and Zara. Zara, who professes passionate love for him, claims that she cannot marry him because the minds of them both are preoccupied with different things. In reality, however, she is the main impediment to the marriage, as she is quite unable to get over the loss of custody of her son to her philandering, ex-husband, George, a military officer, and is bitter with her mother for being indifferent to the agonies she went through in her former marriage and opposed to her decision to seek a divorce. Interestingly, however, Zara utilises the pronominal 'we' rather than 'I'. Since there is no reason to suppose that she is being deliberately uncooperative in the exchange, the use of 'we' can be seen as

signalling a rejection of the thought which she attributes to Mamo, namely that he thinks that marrying her would be okay despite the burdens on his mind. Zara thus implicates a parallel tormented psychological state between her and Mamo, and that she cares so much for him that she would not want to weigh him down through marriage. Despite this strategy, however, the implied reader is able to infer her selfishness and unwillingness to share her burdens with Mamo despite professing love for him. This is especially tragic since Mamo is a sickle cell patient who craves all the love and care that he can get, and regards Zara as a vital essence of his existence.

In the extract, Zara communicates her rejection of Mamo's proposal through a rather long series of excuses about her recent divorce, her need to go somewhere else (which she eventually does as the novel progresses) and think properly about her situation, his (Mamo's) concern for his twin brother who has not been home since age 15, his (Mamo's) loss of his father (*"You have so much on your mind, your father's death, and your brother..."*), and so on. To her, having different burdens about a failed relationship in one's mind presupposes that one cannot be happy in a new relationship. In doing so, however, she implicates that she is really the problem, because Mamo, for instance, does not dwell on his losses and does not crave a different environment to "clear" his head. However, although Zara introduces a seeming mitigating strategy, *"I love you, Mamo"* and *"If not for you, if not for the time we've had together"*, he is unimpressed by her grounds and thus appeals to time: *"But there might not be another time."*

In the discourse world of the novel, the implied reader knows that Mamo dropped out of university at 200 level because of his anaemic crisis and that Zara is a university graduate. However, the difference in social status is not the reason for Zara's rejection of his proposal and hence life in the village. By craving for a place where she can see things *"from a different angle,"* Zara implicates that she is bored with life in the village, particularly as the community school to which she devoted much energy after her sad marriage and departure from the state



capital has been closed down by the government for political reasons. Thus, her mental agony also has to do with the corollaries of the duplicitous and violent political climate in the novel.

However, Mamo's concerns about Zara transcend the marital angle: she has indicated that she is going to South Africa with Themba, a male university friend who runs an orphanage. Thus, Mamo's "But there might not be another time. You might finally fall in love with your friend. He sounds like a saint. And maybe I will meet someone," communicates the implicature that he is feeling jealous ("He sounds like a saint," looks like a pragmatic invitation to Zara to confirm if he, Mamo, lacks certain qualities which Themba possesses) and that he disapproves of her plan, as it would mean the greatest loss for him. In this context, the utterance, "Maybe I will meet someone" pragmatically presupposes Mamo's uncertainty about a post-Zara romance, and implicates his regret about the potential loss of the emotional security that she offers. Significantly, Zara is unsure that she will find happiness in her new endeavour: "She shook her

head, not looking at him. "I don't know, maybe you are right." Eventually in the fictional world of the novel, the South African experience fails because Themba starts demanding sexual dividends from her. Zara returns to Keti, but suffers a mental breakdown, which is foreshadowed in her admission to Mamo that "Sometimes I feel as if I'm losing my mind. If not for you, if not for the time we've had together, I don't know what I'd do. I have to go, I do." p.191).

Conclusion

From the analysis undertaken in this paper, it can be concluded that *Measuring Time* is a novel of pain, psychologically and socially. Since the emotional misfortunes of the lead characters in the novel, particularly Mamo and Zara, are partly influenced by the unfavourable political climate in the text, the verdict which seems to emerge is that Nigeria's post-colonial leadership provides a climate for worsening personal woes and hence is an abysmal failure.

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