

Narrative Voice Structure in Kole Omotoso's *The Edifice*

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a reading of Kole Omotoso's *The Edifice* in which he exposes the themes of insensitivity, callousness, aggressiveness, oppression, marginalization and racial discrimination of the whites against the black people successfully. It is clear that the most important and highly unique technique that the writer uses to advantage and which projects the theme of the novel forward is the one of conversational speech which contributes highly to the success of the novel. This explains the reason the present writer is picking the novel out of all Omotoso's novels because it makes it more prone to linguistic analysis more than most African literary works. Using linguistic stylistic analytical tool of narrative voice structure and focusing particularly on free direct speech and free direct thought, this paper examines the themes of racial discrimination and oppression of the whites against the black people in the novel. From the analysis, the paper concludes that the implication of this racial discrimination is that all the expressions used in the novel against the black people by the whites are exaggerated, hyperbolic and highly calculated to depict African race in bad light.

Key words: Linguistic Stylistics, Free Direct Speech, Free Direct Thought, Narrative Voice Structure, Racial Discrimination

INTRODUCTION

The affinity that exists between language and literature is an intricate one. This is because language and literature are much interwoven. Literature utilizes language as its medium of expression. Literature can be called a store house for the preservation of language. Literature is thus a language bank. For example, Old English is preserved in the written literature of the time which has survived till today, Likewise, in another century, or more, future generations wishing to know how Nigerians of today used English, would only need to study the literary work written during this period.

It is not only as repository for language that literature act for. It also plays a very crucial role in the development of language. Writers apart from being among the most talented users of language constitute the group that is most intimate with and most knowledgeable about language. Since they use it perhaps more often than any other set of people, they know the strength and weaknesses of the language. They intimately feel its pulse. They consequently know where and how new words (neologisms) should be created. They know which syntactic structure is awkward and clumsy and therefore, to be discarded as well as which new grammatical forms and structures to use. For example, In Soyinka's free translation of D.O Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole, The Forests of a Thousand Deamons*, there are many spirits and elves that exist in the African mythology

which are none existing in the vocabulary of English language. Wole Soyinka had to create new English terms and words for them and which have now entered the dictionary of English language and which also leads to the development of the English language. Such words are Ghommid, Bog-troll, Dewild, Gnome, kobold etc.

Another example is the famous speech of Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* when he is telling his son Oduche the reason for his wanting him to go to the white man's church:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there.

If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there, you will bring home my share.

The world is like a mask dancing.

If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place.

My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow.

(Arrow of God: 45)

In the extract above, there are new uses of English language that Achebe has introduced to English language that injects new fresh breath into the language. For example, expressions "like a mask dancing", "To be my eye there", "bring home my share", "stand in one place", "my spirit" are all expressions that are noted in Achebe's African culture but which have gained new usage in English language and which has led to the development of the English language.

The reciprocity of English and literature are put more succinctly in National Teacher's Institute *English Language: Writers do the most in the renewal, expansion and general updating and development of English language.*

Research Problem Description

Kole Omotoso's written work is well known for its dedication and commitment for fusing a socio-political reappraisal of Africa and respect for human dignity. Several works have been done by scholars on the study and interpretation of Omotoso's novels. For example: Nazareth (1978) Balogun (1982), (1983) Dash (1997), Owomoyela (2008) and Akingbe (2011) have worked extensively on some of his novels. But little attempt has been made to look into the narrative voice structure of Omotoso's novels. Narrative voice structure provides another way of interpreting, evaluating and criticizing a text. This is the reason the study is necessary since it will enable critics and readers to have a better understanding of the text and therefore be able to pass objective judgment on it.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the research is to examine the narrative voice structure in Kole Omotoso's *The Edifice* with a view to determine its contributions towards the understanding of the text as a whole. More specifically, this study will help us to understand the text's thematic preoccupation and societal structure as reflected in character development better. Underlining the broad aims of this study are the following objectives.

1. To find out the way in which the narrative voice structure in *The Edifice* could highlight characterization and its thematic development.
2. To examine the extent to which the narrative voice structure reflects Nigerian social reality.
3. To determine the extent to which the use of narrative voice structure enables the reader to understand the overall meaning and message of the novel.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of *The Edifice* by Kole Omotoso is going to be done by using the framework of narrative voice in stylistics. This is because it is the most suitable for the analysis of prose work that contained speech. Many other scholars in stylistics such as Geoffrey Leech, Michael Short, Katie Wales, Micheal Toolan, David Crystal, Steven Croft, Robert Myers etc have all worked in this area.

Narrative voice is closely associated with the idea of narrative's viewpoint. Different narrators and different narrative technique change a story, affecting not just how we are told something but what we are told and how we respond to it. The feelings and attitudes of the narrator can be detected through the tone of the voice adopted, thus providing the writer with another way of shaping the responses of the reader (Scot and Myers: 2000: 73).

Narrative prose very often contains speech, through which the characters communicate with the reader or

with other characters. The thoughts of characters are often treated in the same way as speech, as if the character is thinking aloud in order to convey information to the reader.

Literary writers usually adopt a number of approaches to convey the speech of their characters through prose. These literary techniques are doing something fundamentally artificial with language. Scot and Myers (2000) are of the opinion that written speech tends to be very much more conventionalized and ordered than speech in real life. The writer's talent however, lies in convincing the reader of the reality of this artificial dialogue, so that disbelief is suspended.

The most important and highly unique technique that Kole Omotoso uses to advantage and which projects the theme of the novel *The Edifice* forward is the use of conversational speech. This method is the pillar on which the novel rests and which contributes highly to the success of the novel. This highly use of conversational speech explains the reason the present writer is picking the novel out of all Omotoso's works. It also leads credence to the fact that the use of conversational speech in *The Edifice* makes it more prone to linguistic analysis more than most African literary works.

Since Omotoso makes use of conversational speech throughout in *The Edifice*, the most suitable narrative voices that he uses to advantage are 'free direct speech/Free direct thought. Direct speech is the presentation of characters speeches directly to the reader. This is a technique adopted by literary writers to achieve verisimilitude in prose texts by presenting the reader with an exact copy of the words spoken. An imaginative experience imitates reality mainly via its presentation of speech acts and events directly to the reader.

In the use of direct speech, the author is able to withhold his judgement and comments about characters in his novel and let the reader see the character directly, hear them and make their own judgements of them. They are enclosed within quotation marks and introduced by a reporting clause.

The use of direct speech gives prominence and emphasis to the speaker's point of view. It allows writers to vary spelling, vocabulary, word order and so on in order to give an accurate phonological, lexical and syntactical version to represent a character's, accent, direct or individual manner of speaking (Scot & Myers 2000:83).

Free direct speech however is free from any intrusion from the speaker in his presentation i.e. there are no comments expressed in matrix clauses of the presentation. In free direct speech, the perspective of the narrator is minimized rather than maximized.

In addition to the direct speech and free indirect speech, Omotoso also makes use of first person narrator to complement the two narrative techniques discussed above. In the first person narrator's point of view, the author assumes the role of a character in the events and he is identified by the first person pronoun 'I'. However, he excludes himself/herself from the presentation of this person narration in which he writes about other characters. In a first- person narrative, the 'I' narrator tells of the events that he or she experiences.

Croft and Myers 2000:70 give the features of first-person narrative as follow.

- (1) *First person narrative allows the reader directly into the mind of the narrator.*
- (2) *Sometimes, the events of the novel can be renewed retrospectively, so the narrator's view of things can be change as he or she matures. This is particularly evident in **Jane Eyre** and **Great Expectations** for example, where the narrators, Jane and pip develop and change as they grow into adulthood.*
- (3) *Because this form of narration gives only one person's view of the story, it can present a biased account of events and by its nature seems more subjective than third-person narration.*
- (4) *In some cases, the first person narrator may not be the central character of the novel. For example in **The Great Gatsby**, the narrator, Nick, remains very much on the fringes of the events he relates concerning the central character, Jay Gatsby. This has the effect of creating some narrative distance, which is often not present when the narrator is also the central character.*

(Croft & Myers 2000: 70-71).

Synopsis of the Plot in *the Edifice*

There are some concepts in literature about what function works of art should perform in the society. These can be viewed from three perspectives. Firstly, there are those works which exhibit a mere representation of the alienated society as it is. Writers of these works believe that works of art should be engaged for the sole purpose of creating aesthetics or beauty. They believe that the purity of the art should not be spoilt with politics i.e. there should be no mixture of art and politics. To them, if art indicate life, we should imitate the beautiful things of life. The works of Zulu Sofola, Elechi Amadi, Cyprian Ekwensi, Sony Oti, among a few others belong to this category.

Secondly, some works not only represent the society but also put up some protest in varying degrees of severity, against the alienating order. These writers are called the critical realist school or the reflectionist. These works of art just mirror the ills of the society, but they did not offer any solution to them. Though they believe that works of art should perform certain functions in the society they seldom recommend solution to the problems so faithfully ex-rayed by them. There is protest and criticism in these works which are in the words of Olaniyan (1988:303) "easily sucked in by, and incorporate within, the capacious belly of the hegemonic umbrella". From Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Isidore Okpewho to Ben Okri, this category defines a sizeable proportion of mainstream Nigerian literature.

Lastly, are those works which not only represent and protest but in addition advocate a maximist solution to the societal problems and this is a total eradication of the prevalent system and the replacement of same with Marxism. They believe in the mobilization of the masses in the society for the purpose of fighting the oppressors. The writers of these works believe in using the revolutionary violence of the oppressed people to counter the reactionary violence of their

oppressors. Vivid example is the staging of the play of Ngugi Wa Thiong wa Thiongo and Ngugi wa mirii's *I will marry when I want* by the Kikuyu actors at the Kamirithu theatre. It proved so powerful, especially in the use of songs that it led to revolution and it was banned by the white authorities and was one of the factors leading to Nguigi wa Thiongo's detention without trial and eventually sending to exile. The original edition of this play went to three printings in the first three months of publication. After the staging of the play, the kamirithu theatre was dismantled by the authorities. The writers of these works are called the socialist realist school or the refractionist. It is here we find for example, in Nigeria, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Niyi Osundare, and Festus Iyayi as flag bearers.

The Edifice to a large extent belongs to this category of socialist realism. The author, Kole Omotoso, has already been categorised as belonging to the populist spectrum. Populism according to Dasylyva (1992:76) means an ideology that is essentially pro-masses. In the same vein, a populist literature is to be understood as a literature that identifies with the struggle, suffering, hope and aspirations of the highly marginalised masses expressively, conscientising them to a level capable of bringing about a positive revolution that could better their lot.

Omotoso himself gives this statement in support of the populist tradition he has chosen to express his artistic designs.

To call attention to our position vis-a vis the power within the structure of the Western world that would keep us slaves, forever and within Nigeria to pour venom on our own home-grown tyrants and betters of our foreign oppressors.

(Omotoso 1976:1)

Dasylyva (1992:67) asserts along this line that Omotoso's fiction is to a large extent intended to be an integral part of the conscientisation process for total liberation of the masses of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

The Edifice is a novel about a black student in a white man's country (Britain) and a white woman in a black man's country. (Nigeria). Dele finds it hard to accept the coldness of the climate and the attitudes. Ofeimum (1988) affirms that Dele experiences all the slash and bog of racism and cultural isolation. However he meets Daisy, a white girl who accepts him and loves him for what he is. Life becomes bearable and they marry.

He returns home however with a white wife whom he promptly relegates to the parlour of neglect, while he philanders incessantly with 'native women' Omotoso's uncanny sense of empathy presents the other side of the coin of the cultural isolation and chauvinism, unrelieved by human consideration against which this woman is slapped. She too tells her story. Her child dies in circumstances unexplained to her; her husband goes into politics and carouses in the murk and filth of it against all his glib professions before she came down from Britain.

We are confronted in the end with searing tale of marital breakdown as harrowing for the victims as for the society whose endless divorce from creative dreams is amply

personified by Dele. True, it is the wife who tells us in her person the story of the decay of her husband.

Without warning, she slips into her own narrative at the point where the edifice, the man, the marriage, her expectation began to crumble.

The Analysis of Omotoso's *the Edifice*

As we have already maintained earlier, we shall make use of the linguistic tools of free direct speech and free direct thought. This is because they are the most used in the novel.

Also, we shall isolate only linguistically and stylistically relevant passages of *The Edifice* for the purpose of this analysis. Through the process of this analysis, we shall see how this style of narration has been used to develop and project the theme and plot of the text.

Free direct speech

Let us consider the following free direct passage between Dele and his mother on the contemplation that Dele has arrived home:

*'Were they not here, when you were leaving?
"Answer me!"
'Yes mother'
'What did you tell them you were going to do when you left?"
'To catch and bring home the Golden Fleece'
'Where it is'
'mother, I have had a long journey. Can't we talk about this when we're on our way?'
'We shall talk of it here and now. Where is the golden fleece you went to catch?'
'I could not catch it'
'Why? Was it the cold that drove you back?'
'Yes and no'.
'What do you mean yes and no?'
'The country is not like our country. It is very cold'
'My sister's daughter spent five years there with her husband'
'It wasn't the kind of coldness you mean mother, which drove me back'
'Which coldness did?'
'The coldness of the people. That was what drove me from there?'
'What do you mean?!
'They would never talk to me!'
'Do you quarrel with them?'
'Yes and no'
'What do you mean'
'It wasn't a quarrel with me but with my colour'
'What colour?'
'My blackness, mother. They do not like black people there!'
'Are you the only black man to go there?'*

*Have not all kinds of people been going there since the beginning of time?'
'I'm a coloured man in a colourless society, and they did not like me?'
'So?'
'So I left and come back to you'
'Do you remember what you said as you were leaving us?'
'That I would come back?'
'Not that, when we said you would not like it there?'
'Yes I remember'
'Then tell these good people!'
'I said then not to worry, that I was going home'
'So?'
'But I didn't feel at home there!'*

This first conversational piece can be regarded as the summary of the whole of the novel. This conversation through rendered in a very powerful free direct speech (FDS) is the climax of the novel. It reveals Dele's sojourn abroad. That is, when he was there, he experiences racial discrimination of the highest order. The part of the world where Dele is pursuing his doctorate degree (United kingdom) is the most conservative part in the whole world hence the acute racial discrimination. To the whites there, everything that is negative stems from the black race while all things that are positive represent white people. This free direct speech between mother and son emphasises the coldness of the white people to the black people. The mother misinterprets the coldness that Dele means to the actual coldness of the weather in this FDS exchange:

*'The country is not like our country. It is very cold'
'My sister's daughter spent five years there with her husband'
'It wasn't the kind of coldness you mean mother, which drove me back'
'Which coldness did?'
'The coldness of the people. That was what drove me back'
'What do you mean?'
'They would never talk to me'
'Did you quarrel with them?'
'Yes and no'
'What do you mean?'
'It was not a quarrel with me but with my colour?'
'What colour?'
'My blackness, mother. They do not like black people there'*

Dele had to explain to her that the kind of coldness he meant is the coldness of the white people against his colour. Even, at that, the mother still failed to understand and she asks 'what colour' until Dele then explains to her that by colour he means the colour of his black skin which the white people over there are against.

So in this exchange between mother and son which can be regarded as the summary and climax of the novel, Omotoso has successfully used the narrative style of free direct speech to project the theme and plot of *The Edifice* forward. It is to

the credit of the narrative voice, free direct speech that we are shown the coldness, the aggressiveness, the racial discrimination and the oppression of the white men to the black folks in the novel.

Another extract of Dele which is rendered through free direct speech is also worth looking at:

I must do something, do something about my matriculation. They say I have to take a test in English before I can matriculate. Unless of course English is my mother tongue

Well, it's definitely not my mother's tongue. But then to take a test in English! And me from Nigeria's highest citadel of higher learning! When your host starts showing you the shopping list and asking for a change, it's time to start collecting your toothbrush and checking your ticket. If I can't matriculate without taking that test on Monday, then I shan't matriculate. I shall pack up my things and go away. Go back home.

Similarly, in this fourth conversational piece, through free direct speech, the hero, Dele is appalled at the thought of having to sit for a test in English before he can matriculate. This is despite the fact that he is a graduate of Nigeria's highest citadel of higher learning. It is so infuriating to Dele and he decided to go back home if they should enforce it. This represents some of the misery, hardships and academic frustration that black race is exposed to abroad in their quest for academic pursuit. The same thing is also in practice even up till today. This present writer also faced the same ordeal when he was asked to do a test in English (International English language testing system: IELTS) before he could be allowed to go and study for his PhD degree. This is despite the fact that he was already a master's holder of English language and also teaches English language in one of the highest citadel of higher learning in Nigeria. It was until the writer passed IELTS creditably well that he was allowed to go and study for his PhD in the United Kingdom of Britain.

This is also the legacy of the departed colonial masters in Nigeria, where before you can be successful and become somebody of repute, you must pass English and be able to use English language fluently.

Success in life in Nigeria depends on success of passing English as the language serves virtually all formal purposes in Nigeria. It is the language of the government, press, stock exchange, budget, parastatals, and ministries, Schools, politics even churches. This is to the detriments of Nigeria's indigenous languages which are regarded as vernaculars; languages that pupils and students are forbidden to speak in the four walls of the schools.

Free direct thought

In a similar manner, through free direct thought, (FDT) Dele reveals the insensitivity of the white against the blacks in the following free direct thought:

'... While the water boiled, I went through the papers. There was a picture of a child in Biafra, with a distended stomach and an agonisingly drawn face. There was a long article giving the facts about the tragic goings-on in a place once called the model for modern states in

Africa. The only hope for democracy in the third world. Facts, facts, facts. Nobody seemed interested in the truth. Just facts. (T.E:14)

Through free direct thought, the above thought of Dele which reveals racial discrimination of the white against the blacks is revealed. The piece is about the picture of the oppressed and anguished boy with his agonised face.

What is particularly pitiful about this extract is that the white press will not see any positive news to project about African race except negative things like war, poverty, sickness, boundary disputes, famine, debt, embezzlement, corruption and so on. The above extract is also about Biafra war in Nigeria. To really show the negative side of it, the paper embellishes the writer up with coloured and sensitive expressions such as:

- (1) *The tragic goings-on in a place once called the model for modern states in Africa.*
- (2) *The only hope for democracy in the third world.*
- (3) *A picture of a child in Biafra with distended stomach*
- (4) *A long article giving the fact about the tragic goings-on.*

All the above examples are projected to depict everything negative and bad about the black African country called Nigeria. And that is why all the expressions used there are exaggerated, hyperbolic and highly calculated to depict African race in bad light. The article even goes on to say that 'this type of war is going on in the only hope for democracy in the third world' and also 'in a place once called the model for modern states in Africa'. The impact of this statement is to rubbish the big name of Nigeria in the mud globally. Also, to depict every other countries of Africa in a negative light since the giant of Africa can be fighting a senseless war like that. It is to the credit of the master piece writer Kole Omotoso to project all these insensitivity, oppression, racial discrimination, and marginalisation of the whites against the blacks in the novel *The Edifice*. Free direct thought here also serves to project the theme and plot of the novel forward.

Furthermore, let us also consider the following free direct thought running through Dele's mind about a dream he once had on the same topic abroad:

Ogun olire!

*Who although his landlady has a bath and even showers
And permits him to use either of these once a week
Saying it was dangerous to battle in the mornings in
Britain*

Ogun prefers a blood bath

The blood of Vietnam

And the blood of the slaves who went to Americas

*Without immigration papers signed by our village chief
And the blood of our brothers and sisters and children
and fathers*

The blood they were spilling back home

Ogun, the blood of this cockerel

Here, receive it, it's yours

I bring it on behalf of all passengers on this bus

Who grumbled because the city council decided to operate 'pay as you enter'

And those of them who got off at the last stop

And those who will get off at the next stop

Look on them with your eyes and frown on them.
(T.E.:31-32)

In the third conversational piece rendered through free direct thought, the slavery period of the blacks is revealed. Those anguished and sorrowful period when the white used the black for their own gain and sugar. Those agonised period when the slaves' lips would be punctured with red-hot iron and padlocks would be put on them so as to prevent the black people from eating from the sugar plantain that they themselves (Blacks) planted and nurtured to its growth. The era when the blacks were there just to await the white's pleasure. The blacks were just things to be used by the whites as they like as they were not regarded as human beings. The age that the whites killed the blacks just for the fun and pleasure of it as they are the black's owners and they could use them as they wish. This period is contrasted with the modern age of the novel where the blacks are always denied entry because they cannot obtain visa to get to the 'Americas'. But during slavery period, the blacks did not need any visa to get to the Britain and America as they were transported enmass inside a large ship through a narrow passage of the sea to America where a large numbers of them died through suffocation, maltreatment, ill-use and sickness.

What is happening today in Omotoso's *The Edifice* is second slavery where the blacks in Europe and America are used to do all the whites dirty job and they are paid just a few dimes, cents, and pennies. Through this free direct thought the insensitivity of the whites landladies are also revealed. They are always maltreating their black tenants and will not allow them the modern comfort of their houses. Yet they themselves and their offspring's are enjoying these luxuries but just because of their black skin, the blacks are denied of any form of luxury in Britain. It is through this free direct thought that this greatest inhumanity of man to man on earth is revealed. Since the theme of the novel is the white's injustice and racial discrimination of the whites against the black, the use of free direct thought helps to move the theme and plot of the novel forward.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis, it is apparent that Kole Omotoso employs greatly the use of conversational pieces in the narration of *The Edifice*. That is what necessitates its choice of being chosen for this analysis. Furthermore, Omotoso also makes use of free direct speech and free direct thought maximally which complement the use of conversational structures in the novel and which contribute and help towards moving the theme and plot of the story forward. We

have seen how Omotoso makes use of free direct speech and free direct thought to project the theme of insensitivity, callousness, aggressiveness, oppression, marginalisation and racial discrimination of the whites against the black people successfully in the novel *The Edifice*. The paper concludes that the implication of this racial discrimination is that all the expressions used in the novel against the black people by the whites are exaggerated, hyperbolic and highly calculated to depict African race in bad light.

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