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# Style, Character, and the Theme of Struggle and Change: Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

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## ABSTRACT

Following insights from stylistic studies on European and American literature, as well as a few earlier attempts on African literature, there has been a recent growing interest in the stylistic analysis of the African novel. The present study is meant to contribute to this growing literature by exploring Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, primarily from a systemic functional linguistics perspective. Critics of the novel have emphasized that it represents Achebe's most articulate ideology on the sociopolitical situation of postcolonial Africa, in general, and Nigeria, in particular. The present study sheds new meaning on the thematic concern of the novel by exploring the interaction between narrative situation, transitivity patterning, and symbolism, on the one hand, and the characterization of Chris (one of the protagonists) and the themes of struggle and change, on the other hand. The study demonstrates that the systematic variation in narrative situations and transitivity patterns in which Chris is cast across key passages in the plot of the narrative show a transformation in his character, from powerlessness and ineffectiveness through perplexity and fear to self-reformation and bravery. This narrative and linguistic configuration of Chris's characterization, together with the symbolic intervention he makes in saving a girl from abuse towards the end of the novel, realizes the theme of struggle and change. Through Chris, Achebe urges the enlightened but apathetic citizen to rise up and transform his society through struggle. The study has implications for studies on *Anthills of the Savannah*, stylistic analysis, and further research. It particularly shows that linguistic analysis and the tools of literary criticism can complement each other in the interpretation of literature.

## INTRODUCTION

The African novel, in its essence and origin, is highly political. It emerged as a kind of reaction to the negative views about the history of Africa and Africans, which were developed in Europe in order to justify the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism (Reddy). In the years immediately before and a few years after the independence of many African states, the novel was meant to reconstruct and assert the true cultural identity of the African people and assure them “that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them” (Achebe, “English and the African Writer” 30). In the postcolonial period, the novel has been used to criticize the continually degenerating African society, occasioned by poor governance and a reckless lifestyle that has become so prevalent in modern urban centers.

In *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987/8), Achebe attacks, *inter alia*, the irresponsible display of power, corruption, and cynicism that characterized the military regimes in Nigeria after independence. The story is set in the fictional state of Kangan and revolves around three friends, Sam, Ikem, and Chris, and one influential female character, Beatrice Oko. Through the use of multiple points of view, Achebe gives voice to these characters (with the exception of Sam) in order to present different perspectives on the postcolonial situation he reproduces.

The novel has received much critical attention since its publication in 1987. Many critics have explored its sociopolitical implications and the ideologies invested in it (e.g., Alden; Brown; Diamond; Erritouni; Greenwald; Innes; Reddy; ten Kortenaar; Udumukwu). However, these studies are mainly focused on Ikem’s activism and Beatrice’s role in articulating the new status of the woman in post-independence Africa. While many critics briefly talk about Chris, they do not recognize the significant role he plays in projecting Achebe’s thematic concern. Reddy sees his death together with that of Ikem as functioning to appease an embittered history while Brown sees it as suggesting Achebe’s proposal of an “enlightened dictatorship” to counter the corruption of power in African politics, a situation he notes contradicts Achebe’s attack on the dictatorial system of governance. Although Erritouni, in echoing Stratton, acknowledges that it is Chris who translates Ikem’s alternative politics into action, he does not demonstrate how Chris does this. The present study focuses on the characterization of Chris and shows how he contributes to the thematic structure of *Anthills of the Savannah*.

More specifically, the objective of the study is twofold. First, it demonstrates that through systematic variation in narrative situations and transitivity patterns in which Chris is cast mainly across three key passages in the plot of the narrative, he develops from a powerless character through fear and perplexity to an active and self-reformed one. Second, the paper considers the transformation in Chris’s character and, perhaps most prominently, the symbolic role he plays in the episode on Adama’s rape as a narrative tool Achebe employs to realize the theme of struggle and change. Here, the paper argues that, through Chris, Achebe apparently urges the enlightened but apathetic citizen to rise up and transform his society through struggle.

Chris is one of the four protagonists in *Anthills of the Savannah*. He has been friends with Sam, the military dictator of the fictional state of Kangan, since they

were both in secondary school at Lord Lugard College, together with Ikem. When Sam was invited by the coup-makers to become president, he appointed Chris Commissioner for Information and asked him “to suggest half-a-dozen names for his Cabinet” (12). As far as this study is concerned, the character of Chris will be discussed mainly in relation to his transformation through three key passages in the novel, with references to other relevant passages. These three passages are from chapter one, chapter fifteen, and chapter sixteen. As mentioned earlier, as far as his involvement in the politics or public life of Kangan is concerned, Chris develops from a state of powerlessness and despair at the opening of the narrative, through a state of fear and perplexity, and finally into a very effectual character toward the end, that is, in chapter sixteen. The shifts in Chris’s behavior are primarily played out by a patterned or foregrounded variation in three narrative situations in which he performs. These passages are considered in this paper as landmarks in the various shifts in the development of Chris’s character. Before examining Chris’s characterization in line with the objectives outlined above, it is important to discuss the conceptual framework within which the analysis will be situated.

## CONCEPTUAL THRUST

The study is placed within the methodological framework of stylistics, “a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to *language*” (Simpson, *Stylistics* 2). Indeed, broadly defined, stylistics is the linguistic study of style in any given text. But within the discipline of literary studies, it is defined as the study of the language of literature (Makokha, Barasa, and Daramola). Modern literary stylistics draws much of its analytical approach from the analytical methods and descriptive intentions of linguistics, which it combines with the interpretive goals of modern literary criticism. The focus of literary stylistics is, precisely, to examine the “thematic and aesthetic values generated by linguistic forms” (Zhang 155). The analysis progresses from the identification and description of linguistic forms to the literary interpretation given to these forms. By reading the text repeatedly, the analyst singles out the stylistically significant features and analyzes them by employing the techniques of linguistic description. This description is then followed by a discussion of the literary significance of these features, by relating them to the content of the text and its social and cultural (or extra-textual) context. Thus, in stylistic analysis, description and interpretation are inextricably linked (Zhang).

In this analytical framework, the analyst essentially goes beyond what the text means to explain how and why it means what it does; that is, how language functions to orient readers towards particular/possible meanings of the text (Halliday, *An Introduction*; Short). Short explains that the linguistic features of a text do not constitute an objective meaning of it per se, but the pattern they form prompts readers toward reasonable meanings that the text engenders.

The stylistic analysis of literary texts has come under several criticisms. Typical of these are the longstanding Fowler-Bateson controversy (See Fowler; Simpson, *Stylistics*), Fish’s attack on stylistics, and Lecercle’s doomsday prophecy on stylistics. The arguments against stylistics can be summarized into two main caveats. The first criticism concerns the scientific basis of stylistics. Critics argue that “there is no way to link the empirically defined features of the text with the

rest of the critical analysis except through the subjective, interpretive framework of the critic" (Catano 5). They note that even the linguistic features described in the analysis are themselves subject to the interpretive choices of the analyst (Ibid.). The second argument is that if the task of stylistics is merely to explain how and why readers arrive at certain interpretations of texts, then it is not necessary, since it does not reveal meaning beyond what a thematic analysis of the text could reveal.

The former argument was triggered by the undue emphasis some enthusiastic stylisticians gave to the scientific method in stylistics in its early development (see Catano). As noted by Makokha, Barasa, and Daramola, most contemporary stylisticians agree that stylistic analysis need not be strictly scientific. Drawing insights from interpretive linguistic disciplines such as discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, many contemporary stylisticians favor an interpretation that relates the discursive elements of a literary text to its extra-textual context and "the more complete and context-sensitive the description of language, . . . the fuller the stylistic analysis that accrues" (Simpson, *Stylistics* 3).

To the second criticism, it could be argued that stylistics is not only interested in the meaning of literary texts, but as much so in the language used to project that meaning. Stylisticians are normally interested in the functions language performs and particularly what the linguistic format of literary writings can contribute to our understanding of the nature and functions of language. This study employs one key lexicogrammatical resource of Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, transitivity, albeit other narrative stylistic tools to explore the characterization of Chris and the thematic value of his characterization.

Transitivity identifies the clause as the domain of language at which experience is represented (see Downing and Locke; Eggins; Halliday, "Notes on Transitivity: Part 1," "Notes on Transitivity: Part 2," "Notes on Transitivity: Part 3"; Halliday and Matthiessen). In other words, transitivity models the grammatical description of the clause on meaning or the ideational aspect of language. The transitivity system identifies three components of the grammar of the clause. The first is the process, which is the nucleus of the clause and is typically realized by the verb phrase. The second is the participant(s) directly involved in the process and is typically realized by noun phrases. The third element is the circumstances that are attendant to the process and, thus, not directly involved in it. The circumstances occupy the Adjunct element in the interpersonal clause structure and are typically realized by prepositional and adverb phrases (Simpson, *Stylistics*). Compared to the other two components of the clause, the circumstance element covers a wide range of semantic classes, comprising extent, location, manner, cause, contingency, accompaniment, role, matter, and angle, as well as their subcategories.

Six process-types are associated with the transitivity system of the clause. These are material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential processes. Halliday and Matthiessen identify material, mental, and relational processes as major process types. Material processes are action and event processes or processes of doing and happening and generally express physical experiences. This process type is associated with two primary participants, Actor (the agent of the activity) and Goal (the participant affected by the activity). Mental processes are processes of sensing, including perception, cognition, feeling, and desideration, and are associated with two participants, Senser and the Phenomenon being sensed. Relational processes are processes of being and, thus, establish

relationships between entities. Relational processes, for the purpose of this paper, are conveniently categorized into two subtypes, attributive and identifying, and are associated with two sets of core participants, depending on which subtype is realized in the clause.<sup>1</sup> These are Carrier and Attribute, on the one hand, and Identified and Identifier, on the other hand. The Carrier is the participant that is assigned an attribute and the Attribute participant indicates what the Carrier is, what the Carrier is like, where the Carrier is, or what the Carrier owns (Simpson, *Stylistics*). In identifying processes, there is a participant, the Identified, who is defined with reference to another, the Identifier, such that the two halves of the clause become coreferential (Mwinlaaru, "A Stylistic Study").

Behavioral processes, a minor process type, integrate the characteristics of mental and material processes and, thus, represent those human experiences in language that integrate consciousness and physical experience of the external world. They encompass physiological actions, such as *breathe* and *cough*, and observable processes of consciousness, such as *stare* and *listen* (Simpson, *Stylistics*). Two participants are involved in this process type, which are Behavior (the conscious being undergoing the behavior) and Behavior, a ranged (or Goal-like) entity at which the process is directed. Verbal processes are processes of saying and are associated with four participants: Sayer, Target (of, for example, blame or praise), Receiver, and Verbiage. It must be emphasized that the term "Verbiage" technically refers to "that which is said" and is not derogatory or evaluative as it is conceived in ordinary speech (Halliday and Matthiessen). The last process type, existential process, states that something exists and it has only one participant, the Existent (such as *two military jeeps* in *There were two military jeeps by the road side*).

It is significant to emphasize the idea of choice in the transitivity system. As Simpson notes, "transitivity offers systematic choice, and any particular textual configuration is only one, perhaps strategically motivated, option from a pool of possible textual configurations" (*Stylistics* 26). Thus, any particular choice of transitivity patterns in language use represents or characterizes reality in a way that is discernible. A systematic study of transitivity choices in a text, thus, reveals the possible meanings that are engendered by it.

This assertion does not imply that the transitivity patterns in a text offer an objective meaning or interpretation of it. For any selection from the transitivity system to have salience, it must be prominent and have relevance to the subject matter. The framework that offers a comprehensive explanation on the salience of linguistic choices in a text this way is the concept of foregrounding, which has its roots in the Prague School of linguists and is particularly associated with Jan Mukařovský (see Simpson, *Stylistics*; van Peer; Zhang). The concept in its original form, according to Leech and Short, is a distortion of the norm of a language in a text in a way that surprises a reader into fresh awareness of "the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an automatized background of communication" (qtd. in Zhang 155).

In contemporary stylistic practice, foregrounding is seen as not occurring only through deviation, but also through repetition or parallelism. Simpson uses the expressions "foregrounding as 'deviation from a norm'" and "foregrounding as 'more of the same'" to capture these two guises in which it can manifest (*Stylistics* 50). The present study will follow Simpson and define foregrounding generally as a stylistic technique by which a (linguistic) feature of a text acquires salience

or prominence by drawing attention to itself. Halliday accurately observes that it is important to distinguish the mere prominence of a linguistic item in a text, in terms of frequency, for instance, and foregrounding. Foregrounding, he notes, is “prominence that is motivated” (“Linguistic Function” 112). In other words, a linguistic feature that is given prominence will be foregrounded only if it relates to the thematic structure of the text as a whole or to the writer’s total meaning (Ibid.).

This paper analyzes foregrounded transitivity patterns and narrative situations in which Chris is cast in *Anthills of the Savannah*, showing their relevance to the development of his character, in particular, and to the thematic structure of the novel, in general. The study combines linguistic description with the tools of literary criticism, such as focalization, metaphor, and symbolism, in discussing style and the thematic value of Chris’s characterization. This triangulation of linguistic and literary analyses not only ensures a deep context sensitive approach to style, but also contributes to the epistemological dialogue between literary linguistics and literary criticism.

## TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIS’S CHARACTER

The paper proceeds, in this section, to discuss the transformation in Chris’s characterization through three stages, namely, powerlessness and despair, fear and perplexity, and self-reformation and bravery. This transformation in character is then situated within the context of the symbolism of the incident leading to Chris’s death and discussed in relation to the themes of struggle and change.

### *Powerlessness and Despair*

The first stage to be considered is the presentation of Chris as a character in a state of powerlessness and despair. Generally, this stage in Chris’s characterization spans from chapter one to chapter ten and is more striking in the opening episode of the novel, owing to two factors, namely, the cohesion among the transitivity patterns in which he is inscribed and the juxtaposition of the processes Chris is engaged in with the powerful demeanor of Sam, the dictator. This striking effect of the transitivity patterns associated with Chris in this episode makes them foregrounded.

Having been trapped by his initial commitment to the military government and his present duty to serve Sam, Chris, together with the Cabinet ministers, has gradually been reduced to a helpless victim of the monstrous power displayed by Sam. Chris is fully conscious of the fact that Sam’s choices and actions are inappropriate and he is equally dissatisfied with the boot licking and sycophancy of his colleagues, the commissioners, especially Professor Okong. His attempts to correct the situation, however, have been met with disdain in the face of strong suppression.

In the opening scene of the novel, we meet Chris and Sam in cabinet with other ministers and the Chief Secretary of State. Chris insists that it is important for Sam to visit Abazon, a drought-stricken province that Sam has refused water merely because its inhabitants voted against him in the referendum that sought to make him President-for-Life. Sam is so annoyed by Chris’s persistent plea that he visits this enemy province to observe the seriousness of the drought situation. As is evident in the following extracts from the opening scene of the novel, Chris’s

Figure 1

<p>   For a full minute or so the fury of his eyes lay on me.     Briefly our eyes had been locked in combat.     Then <i>I had lowered mine to the shiny table-top in ceremonial capitulation.</i>    <sup>3</sup>  Actor Pro: Mat. Goal Cir. (location: place) Cir. (cause: purpose)</p> <p>   Long silence.     But he was not appeased.     Rather he was making the silence itself grow rapidly into its own kind of contest, like the eyewink duel of children.     <i>I conceded</i>  Actor Pro: Mat.</p> <p><i>victory there</i> as well.     Without <i>raising my eyes,</i>     <i>I said:</i>  Scope Cir. (location: place) Cir. (accompaniment: comitative) Sayer Pro: Ver.</p> <p><i>“I am very sorry, Your Excellency.”</i>      Verbiage</p> <p>But His Excellency speaks instead.     And not even to him the latest offender but still to me.     And he is almost friendly and conciliatory, the amazing man.      “Do you realize what you are asking me to do, Chris?” he said.     <i>I say nothing,</i>      Sayer Pro: Ver. Verbiage</p> <p><i>make no motion, not even of the head.</i>     <i>At these moments my head assumes</i>  Pro: Mat. Scope Cir. (Manner: degree) Cir. (location: time) Carrier Pro: Rel.</p> <p><i>the gravity of granite</i>    and though <i>my thinking might remain perfectly clear and logical</i>     Attribute Carrier Pro: Rel. Attribute</p> <p><i>it seems to emanate from afar</i>    <i>taking in these happenings through a telescope.</i>      Carrier Pro: Rel Attribute. Pro: Mat Goal Cir. (manner: means)</p> <p>“You are telling me to insult the intelligence of these people,” he says,    his tone mollified and superior.     <i>I shake my head then, slowly.</i>      Actor Pro: Mat. Goal Cir. (time) Cir. (manner: quality)</p>
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Note: Internal clause boundaries are marked by double bars (||), and initial and final boundaries are marked by three bars (|||)

enthusiasm has been sapped and this lack of interest renders him powerless to fight for the cause of the ordinary citizens.<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious that there is a markedly asymmetrical power relationship in the fictional interaction portrayed in this opening episode. Chris and his colleagues are rendered diffident before the colossal power displayed by Sam. In particular, the processes in which Chris occurs as participant in the episode, as the extracts above illustrate, generally characterize him as an ineffectual character. In two of the five material processes in which he is Actor, he acts on his body part: “I lowered mine [my eyes],” “I shake my head then slowly.” These processes portray Chris’s efforts at articulating the truth as feeble and crippled by fear. The foregrounding of negation in both participant (i.e., “I say *nothing*,” “make *no motion*”) and circumstantial (i.e., “without raising my eyes,” “*not even of the head*”) elements attendant to the processes in which Chris casts himself is also significant. In a corpus of 18 million words, Halliday and James (32) found that, in English, the probability of occurrence of the negative term in the system of polarity is 0.1, while the positive term has a probability of 0.9. Thus, arguably, the preponderance of negative elements in the clauses that characterize Chris in this short episode is stylistically motivated. It reinforces Chris’s weakness and inertia; he is unwilling to proceed



Figure 2

He (Chris) is not looking at me (Ikem)    but at the sheaf of typed papers he was bouncing					
Behaver	Pro: Beh	Behavior	Behavior/Goal	Actor	process: Mat
up and down on the table between his palms    to line them up.					
Cir. (manner: means) Cir. (location: Place) Cir. (location: place) Cir. (cause: purpose)					

with any direct engagement with Sam, the symbol of corrupt power. In addition, the apologetic Verbiage participant of the verbal process, “I said ‘I am very sorry, Your Excellency,’” indicates Chris’s despair at the situation. He now shows “pure, unadulterated disinterest” in any further engagement (4). The relational clauses “My head assumes the state of granite; it (my thinking) seems to emanate from afar taking in these happenings through a telescope” show that Chris has been incapacitated by Sam’s suppressive power.

Interestingly, apart from the opening episode, Chris is cast in similar “disabling structures” in his engagement with other characters (Burton 201). For instance, in his next appearance at Mad Medico’s residence in chapter five, he is cast in verbal processes that show him a disadvantaged conversational participant, owing to Ikem’s and Mad Medico’s garrulity (e.g., “‘More or less,’ replies Ikem before I [Chris] can say anything,” “I [Chris] am going to explain again but Mad Medico has a better explanation and *drowns me out*”). The point being made here is that Chris continues to present himself as the weak character even in his interaction with his friends, a sustained strategy that is used to portray him as a powerless or rather less powerful character at the initial stage of the novel.

When Ikem visits Chris at the latter’s office to discuss their differences over editorial practice, Chris apparently shows disinterest and the processes in which he is inscribed in Figure 2 show a disconnect between him and Ikem, as the clause complex illustrates. In this example, Chris’s behavioral process of perception and his activity are directed towards an inanimate object, “sheaf of typed sheets.” The negation of the behavioral process (i.e., “not looking”) makes this similar to the processes in which he is engaged in the opening episode. Thus, Achebe uses semantic parallelism as a sustained strategy to foreground Chris’s detachment and inactiveness.

The only situation in which Chris is grammatically constructed to be clearly active at this stage of his characterization is his amorous interactions with Beatrice, as illustrated in Figure 3.

What is striking in these extracts, compared to those already discussed above, is that Chris is prominently involved in transitive material processes and the Goal participant is often Beatrice. Although many instances such as these occur in other parts of the narrative, they are more interesting in this first stage of his characterization as they clearly stand out against, as it were, his less active engagement with his political environment.

Thus, at this initial stage of the novel, Chris is generally constructed as a helpless and weak character, at least, as far as his engagement with the public life of Kangan is concerned, who is not up to the task of transforming the corrupt political system in which he is engulfed to make it meaningful to the ordinary people. He has no will power on his own as a member of the military government. He only “hang(s) around to observe it all” and to execute orders from the powers that

Figure 3

I affect great solemnity,    pull her back    and kissed her mildly.
Carrier Pro: Rel Attribute      Pro: Mat Goal (Cir (Place) Pro: Mat Goal Cir (manner: quality)
I drew her to me on the sofa    and kissed her.
Actor Pro: Mat Goal Scope Cir (location: place)      Pro: Mat Goal
Then Chris noticed the slightest heaving of her chest and shoulders    and went    and
Senser Pro: Mental Phenomenon      Pro: Mat
sat down on the sofa beside her    and placed his left arm across her shoulder    and
Pro: Beh Cir (location: place)      Pro: Mat Goal      Cir. (location: place)
with the right hand raised her chin gently    and saw she was crying.
(Cir: accompaniment: commitative) Pro: Mat Goal Cir (manner: quality) Pro: Men. Phenomenon
(She did not resist then)    as he pulled her to him    and reverently tasted the salt of
Actor Pro: Mat Goal Scope Cir (manner: quality) Pro: Mat Goal
her tears.

be (2). Having been frustrated thus, Chris is adamant to calls from Ikem to take proactive measures to transform Sam and his government, “letting him glimpse a little light now and again through chinks in his solid wall of court jesters” (46). What is interesting to this study, however, is that Chris is later picked out from his fellow commissioners and transformed into an instrument of change; someone who would act out Ikem’s ideas of liberation of the masses.

#### *Fear and Perplexity*

The second stage in the development of Chris’s character is characterized by fear and perplexity and ranges from chapter eleven to chapter fifteen. At this stage, Chris is motivated by the cruel murder of Ikem and the threat to his own life to stand up and fight against the brutish display of power. The inciting incident that triggers Chris to action is when Sam instructs him to suspend Ikem as the editor of the *Gazette* for no technical reason. He defiantly refuses to carry on with the instruction and intends to remove “his private papers and odds and ends to his residence until he could vacate there as well” (145). However, his final disentanglement from his role as a mere tool in the hands of Sam comes as a result of Ikem’s murder by the state security forces. As he is standing there, ineffectual, in the ruins of Ikem’s apartment, his “mind, locked out as it were on a barren corridor of inactivity, fluttered, panic-stricken, from one closed door to the next” (167) and he is shocked by the terrible things the government is capable of doing. Chris goes into hiding and, with the help of Beatrice, his girlfriend, and a few friends and sympathizers, he is able to broadcast the true story surrounding Ikem’s death on an international radio station.

However, Chris’s transformation is not complete. After he has broadcast Ikem’s death, his activities have merely been limited to moving from one hideout to another to protect himself from the state security. He finally leaves Braimoh’s house, his last hideout, disguised in preparation for his escape journey to Abazon. The extracts below highlight the processes in which he is engaged at a joint police-military operation barrier at the Three Cowrie Bridge (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Chris was out of the car like a shot    and so was the man who had spoken....	Carrier Pro: Rel. Attribute	Cir. (manner: comparison)
As they walked smartly away from their car towards the bridge	Actor Pro: Mat. Cir. (manner: quality)	Cir. (location: place) Cir. (location: place)
the soldier who seemed to have noticed Braimoh's suspicious move was coming briskly towards them.     Chris was watching him through the corner of his eye	Behavior Pro: Beh.	Behavior Cir. (manner: means)
until they drew level....	Cir. (location: time)	
“Hey, stop there!” he shouted.     Chris and his companion halted on the sidewalk	Actor	Pro: Mat. Cir. (location: place)
and turned to him   standing on the road.	Pro: Mat. Scope	Pro: Beh. Cir. (location: place)
... “You there, come down here.     Wetin be your name?”	Verbiage	Pro: Ver. Sayer
“Sebastian,” replied Chris,    using the name of his steward from instant inspiration.		Cir. (role: guise)
“Sebastian who?”		
He didn't know.     But luckily he realized quickly enough that it didn't much matter.	Senser Pro: Men.	Cir. (condition) Senser Pro: Men. Cir. (manner: quality) Phenomenon
... “What work you de do?”		
... “I de sell motor parts,” said Chris.	Verbiage	Pro: Ver. Sayer
... But he had already diverted the scorching fire away from Chris    and given him a little respite    just when he was beginning to wilt    and quiver a bit at the knees.	Behavior Pro: Beh.	Pro: Beh. Cir. (manner: quality) Cir. (location)
His right hand, heavy and idle beside him, stirred into life    and went to his trouser pocket	Actor	Pro: Mat. Attribute Pro: Mat. Cir. (location: place)
where it found one of the kolanuts    and brought it out.	Cir. (place) Senser Pro: Men. Phenomenon	Pro: Mat. Goal Cir. (location: place)
The soldier's eye caught it    and lit up.     Chris split the nut    and gave the bigger half	Actor Pro: Mat. Goal	Pro: Mat. Goal
to him    and put the other into his own mouth.	Recipient	Pro: Mat. Goal Cir. (location: place)

The transitivity patterns in this episode point to the fact that the passage is about flight, suspense, and urgency. The passage, in essence, dramatizes the second stage of Chris's characterization. That is, by deliberately casting him in this narrative situation, the writer demonstrates that Chris is not yet emotionally ready to fight against the corruption in his society even though he is willing to do so.

The situations in which Chris is cast above highlight the fear and perplexity that characterize his efforts to reconstruct himself and to fight against the state

powers. Most of the processes in the extracts above denote movement. The circumstantial relational process “Chris was out of the car like a shot” is a metaphorical expression of a material process that could be expressed as “Chris alighted from the car swiftly.” The original relational clause does not only intensify the urgency and swiftness of Chris coming out of the car, but also displaces the agency of the process. The comparison established by the use of the phrase “like a shot” accentuates the objectification of Chris in the clause. The implication is that Chris is acting instinctively to the danger of the circumstances in which he finds himself. His action is not directed by the volition of a human agent. The material processes “As they walked smartly” and “They halted” denote the urgency of Chris’s actions and those of his companion. The same urgency is found with the mental process “He realised quickly enough” and the circumstantial element “from instant inspiration.” This sense of urgency in Chris’s movement and mental activity shows that he is engulfed by fear and that his behavior has been reduced to an automatic response to verbal stimuli.

In addition, Chris is constructed as an ineffectual character. The behavioral processes in the clause complex “He was beginning to wilt and quiver at the knees” indicate the diminishing effect Chris’s interaction with the soldier has on him. Chris is very uncomfortable with the situation. Also worthy of note is the meronymic agency: “His right hand, heavy and idle beside him, stirred into life and went to his trouser pocket where it found one of the kolanuts and brought it out.” Here, agency is assigned to Chris’s hand, thereby robbing him of any consciousness of his actions at this stage. He became conscious of what is happening with him only when the soldier’s attention has been drawn to the kola in his hand.

It is also interesting to look at the verbal processes in which Chris is involved. He only responds to questions and queries. Very often he hesitates in giving his response to a query and his companion intervenes twice to rescue him. Also worthy of note is the fact that the role circumstantial element, *using the name of his steward*, accompanying his response to the soldier’s demand for his name emphasizes his disguised identity. But it must be mentioned that Chris’s disguise together with his use of Pidgin in this episode reflects his new connection with the ordinary people of Kangan, represented in this episode by his unnamed companion. This is significant, given that it is the only episode in the whole narrative in which Chris speaks Pidgin. More importantly to this study, however, the overall effect of the transitivity patterns discussed here is that Chris is obsessed with fear. Thus, though the textual development of the story in *Anthills of the Savannah* has led us to believe that Chris has metamorphosed from a passive participant of the corrupt government into a rebelling reformer, the transitivity patterns in which he is inscribed show that this transformation is not inherent in him. Besides, the driving force behind his rebellion at this stage is his love for Ikem as well as the quest for his personal safety.

#### *Self-Reformation and Bravery*

The final stage in Chris’s characterization is limited to chapters sixteen and seventeen, the penultimate chapter of the novel. By the time we get to this final stage in the development of his character, Chris has reformed himself into an active character poised to confront all odds in ejecting brutality against the common people, a situation that comes as a consequence of the knowledge that he gradually

develops of the plight of the ordinary citizen of Kangan. Chris's transformation at this stage is attended by two psychological situations that prepare him for the actual change in his character.<sup>4</sup> The first situation is characterized by "self-quest," in which he explores the conditions of the life of the ordinary citizen. He critically surveys the oddness of the locally manufactured bus, Luxurious, on which he is soon to embark to Abazon. As he finally embarks on Luxurious on the Great North Road, he observes "the march-past of dwellings in descending hierarchies [that] continued until modest militias of round thatched huts began to pass slowly across Chris's reviewing stand" (206–07). He also notes the dire need for water in the Northern Province.

These observations bring Chris to the second situation that enacts his transformation, "self-reflection." Thus, "the ensuing knowledge seeped through every pore in his skin into the core of his being continuing the transformation, already in process, of the man he was" (204). He wonders "what would happen now . . . if the wheels of fortune should return him to the very haunts of his previous life, to the same cocktail circuits . . . ?" (204). He resolves that "he would pray for courage to tell each pair of lips and set of teeth before moving on to the next . . .," his new found knowledge (205).

The psychological processes attending to Chris's transformation can best be explained by using the concept of focalization (Genette; Simpson, *Stylistics*). The narrative at this point is focalized almost entirely from Chris's point of view and we observe a corresponding progression in the levels of language as he shifts from self-quest to self-reflection. There is a slip from his role as the anchor of spatial viewpoint almost seamlessly into his cognitive field, enacting his role as conscious thinker. Thus, we see what Chris sees and we do so "in the gradual and accumulative unfolding of the focal points that are reflected in his visual purview" (Simpson, *Stylistics* 28). Then, in a moment, we are plunged into his thoughts. With this variable focalization, the narrator foregrounds a juxtaposition of the miserable conditions of the ordinary Kangan people, which Chris now sees, with the exotic lifestyle of the politicians, on which he reflects. The use of military imagery, "the march-past of dwellings in descending hierarchies" and "modest militias of round thatched huts," in presenting Chris's visual perception foregrounds the obsession with security in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

With the knowledge and resolution that ensues from these processes comes the final stage of Chris's transformation, "self-reformation," bravery and struggle, which is demonstrated by the following extracts from chapter sixteen (Figure 5).

Like in the Three Cowrie Bridge episode, Chris is cast in material processes that denote movement and urgency. In addition, however, these processes denote force: "Chris plunged into the crowd," "Chris plunged into another section of the crowd," "Chris bounded forward." Again, the scope of the material processes associated with Chris in these extracts has been broadened to include transitive ones, in which his actions actually affect others in the environment. In two instances, his actions affect no less a person than the police sergeant: "He sighted the police sergeant and pulled him aside; he held the man's hand." Of significance also is the manner circumstantial element "rather brusquely in his breathless eagerness," which shows the force associated with his pulling the sergeant. Even the clauses that report his death are characterized by a series of material processes, most of which are transitive and embedded in each other: "Chris *shook* his head and then

Figure 5

Chris plunged into the crowd    looking for someone who might have some coherent information.
Actor Pro: Mat. Cir. (location: place) Pro: Mat. Goal
Ultimately he sighted the police sergeant    and pulled him aside
Cir. (Manner: degree) Senser Pro: Men. Phenomenon Pro: Mat. Goal Cir. (location: place)
rather brusquely in his breathless eagerness....
Cir. (manner: quality) Cir. (accompaniment)
Chris plunged into another section of the crowd which was fast degenerating into a drunken mayhem
Actor Pro: Mat. Cir. (location: place)
"Go and have a drink," one of them said to him ...    "I have had a drink. Several drinks,"
Verbiage Sayer Pro: Ver. Receiver Verbiage
said Chris,    sounding superior without perhaps intending to....
Pro: Ver. Sayer Cir. (accompaniment: comitative)
Chris bounded forward    and held the man's hand    and ordered him
Actor Pro: Mat. Cir. (location: place) Pro: Mat. Goal Pro: Ver. Receiver
to release the girl at once.     As if it was not enough he said
Verbiage Cir. (contingency: concession) Sayer Pro: Ver.
"I will make a report about this to the Inspector-General of Police."
Verbiage
The other said nothing more.     He unslung his gun,    cocked it,    narrowed his eyes    while confused
voices went up all around...     Chris stood his ground
Behavior Pro: Beh. Behavior
looking straight into the man's face,    daring him to shoot.
Pro: Beh. Cir. (location: place) Behavior Pro: Ver. Receiver Verbiage
And he did point-blank into the chest presented to him.
Actor Pro: Mat. Cir. (Manner: quality) Goal
Chris shook his head    and then seemed to gather all his strength    to expel the agony
Actor Pro: Mat. Goal Cir. (location: time) Pro: Mat. Goal Cir. (Purpose)
on his twisted face    and set a twilight smile on it.     Through the smile he murmured
Cir. (manner: means) Sayer Pro: Ver.
words that sounded like The Last Grin....     A violent cough throttled the rest.     He shivered
Verbiage Actor Pro: Mat. Goal Actor Pro: Mat.
with his whole body    and lay still.
Cir. (manner: means) Pro: Beh. Attribute

seemed to *gather* all his strength to *expel* the agony on his twisted face and *set* a twilight smile on it," "He *shivered* with his whole body." Put together, the material processes in these extracts, thus, construct Chris as a very active character.

Further, in contradistinction to the opening episode, where there is a foregrounding of negation in the processes in which Chris is cast, the processes engaged in by Chris here are positive and effective. In the behavioral processes, "he stood his ground and looking straight into the man's face," his behavior is extended to an external participant. In the verbal processes, Chris not only

responds to questions, but also initiates speech exchange: “he ordered him to release the girl; he said ‘I will make a report of this to the Inspector General of Police.’” The verb *ordered* denotes a command and the Verbiage in the latter illustration is a rebuke to the sergeant. In the single instance in which Chris responds to a remark, the comitative circumstantial element portrays him as a confident and powerful participant in the interaction: “sounding superior without perhaps intending to.” Here, the Verbiage (i.e., “I have had a drink. Several drinks”) is a discursive strategy employed by Chris to bond with the Sergeant in order to elicit the information he desired from him, given that Chris has not tasted a drink since his arrival on the scene.

In sum, the transitivity patterns analyzed above establish a semantic parallelism of activeness, which characterize Chris as a very effectual character. The striking effect of this semantic paradigm is that it deautomatizes the regular patterns that have characterized Chris in previous episodes and which we have come to expect as readers. He is not the same Chris we met in the opening scene in chapter one or the Chris we met at Three Cowrie Bridge. He has metamorphosed into a fearless character who stands against all odds to rescue a helpless girl from sexual abuse by a police officer. Thus, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chris is characterized as transforming from a submissive citizen into an active agent.

## THEME OF STRUGGLE AND CHANGE

The analysis above has indicated that the processes, participant roles, and circumstantial elements in which Chris is cast across the passages considered in this study show that he develops from a powerless and inactive character into an effectual one. It is stylistically significant that, at the beginning of the novel, Chris cannot meet Sam’s eyes, but at the end, he stares directly into the police sergeant’s face. This transformation in Chris’s character has a political meaning. That is, he dramatizes the resigned attitude of the elite and, through him, Achebe calls for a transformation that will eject oppression and the corrupt and monstrous display of power from society.

This interpretation of the linguistic analysis of the novel is understandable when we place it within the symbolic context of Chris’s action in the last episode analyzed above. As mentioned earlier, stylistic analysis is enriched by relating the linguistic analysis to the content of the text and its social and cultural (or extra-textual) context; for, “the more complete and context-sensitive the description of language, . . . the fuller the stylistic analysis that accrues” (Simpson, *Stylistics* 3). Thus, it is helpful to integrate discussion on the characterization of Chris with an analysis of the symbolism of his action at the end of the novel in order to fully interpret the thematic value of his transformation.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chris singularly symbolizes the kind of transformation that Achebe proposes for the citizens of a power-corrupted African country such as Nigeria, more particularly those who are enlightened by virtue of their education and/or experience. The situational context of the final episode analyzed above is itself a symbolic representation of Kangan as a nation, apparently a fictional representation of Nigeria. The girl whom Chris rescues, Adama, stands for the vulnerable ordinary citizens of Kangan, while the police sergeant is an image of the monstrous power displayed by the military government, an effigy

of Sam, as it were. The ordinary citizens, thus, have become helpless victims who are oppressed for the self-gratification of the powers that be.

The passengers referred to in the quotation below symbolize the cynical populace of Kangan and their apathy is a reflection of the disinterestedness of the ordinary citizens of Kangan in how the state is managed: "a few of the passengers, mostly other women, were pleading and protesting timorously. But most of the men found it very funny indeed." It is within the context of this apathy shown by these other male citizens that we find the meaning of Chris's actions. That is, Chris becomes a foil to these passengers and, for that matter, the people of Kangan. He is the enlightened citizen who would set the example for others to follow; he, perhaps, symbolizes the unborn in Ayi Kwei Armah's (1968) *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The fact that he dies shows that Achebe means that the kind of change/reform that will come is not without fatal sacrifices; it must be borne by struggle. Arguably, Chris fights power, which Reddy notes to be the villain in the novel. Analogous to the story told by the white-bearded leader of the Abazonian delegation in which the tortoise seeks to struggle before his imminent death, Chris discovers that struggle is the definitive force that can rescue the people of Kangan.

Through Chris, Achebe challenges the enlightened but apathetic citizens to rise up and struggle to redeem their nation from corruption and bad governance. Achebe seems to be, thus, suggesting a transformation in the attitude of the elite to power abuse as a way of addressing Nigeria's problem, the kind of transformation demonstrated by Chris. It is, however, arguable that Achebe should limit such a national call to only the elite in society. It is also not clear what nature the kind of struggle he proposes should take; whether through Ikem's verbal militancy (see, for instance, Diamond; Mwinlaaru, "Transitivity"; Reddy; Udumukwu) or Chris's subversive behavior, both of which lead to the total destruction of the struggler. Although this dilemma is not addressed in this study, its construction in *Anthills of the Savannah* appears to be deliberate (Asempasah); for Achebe says through Ikem, "writers don't give prescriptions . . . they give headaches!" (161). This dilemma could, however, be addressed critically by studies that go beyond the stylistic and thematic aspects of the novel to engage the issues it addresses in socio-philosophical and political deliberations.

## CONCLUSION

In sum, the transitivity patterns associated with Chris in the passages analyzed are consciously selected by the writer to create a pattern of narrative situations that show his development from ineffectiveness and despair to activeness and then from fear and perplexity to bravery and struggle. It is significant, for instance, to note that, at the beginning of the novel, Chris cannot meet Sam's eyes, but at the end, he stares directly into the police sergeant's face. This transformation in Chris's character both dramatizes the resigned attitude of African elites toward the corrupt political systems of their countries and calls for a change in this attitude, an aspect that has not been clearly captured in previous criticism on the novel.

Since the publication of Halliday's analysis of William Golding's *The Inheritors*, many scholars have applied transitivity in examining literary texts from several dimensions, including characterization (e.g., Adika and Denkabe; da Silva; Ji and Shen; Kennedy; Mwinlaaru, "Transitivity"; Oduaran; Rodrigues), narrative



viewpoint (e.g., Mwinlaaru, "A Stylistic Study"; Simpson, *Language*), and power relations (e.g., Burton). Some scholars (e.g., Carter; Simpson, *Stylistics*; Toolan) have also used transitivity to develop pedagogical materials for stylistic exploration in the classroom. However, while many of these studies are on European and American literature, only a few analyze African texts (e.g., Adika and Denkabe; Mwinlaaru, "A Stylistic Study"; Oduaran). The present study adds to those that extend the findings of literary stylistic studies on transitivity to African literary texts.

Further, Ji and Shen demonstrate that the transitivity analysis of narrative texts can show how creative writers manipulate transitivity patterns to describe the mental or physical development of a character and subsequently provide "fresh insight into the thematic significance of the literary work" (346). The present study corroborates this observation, giving further evidence to the fact that stylistic analysis has a strong potential of shedding new meaning on a literary text. This contribution is significant, given that several scholars have raised serious doubts on the relevance of stylistics to literary interpretation (see Fowler; Fish; Lecerclé). Interestingly, by combining stylistic analysis and the tools of literary criticism to discuss character and meaning in *Anthills of the Savannah*, this paper has shown that stylistics and literary criticism are, after all, not antithetical. Further exploration on the manipulation of transitivity or other linguistic features in developing character will contribute immensely to stylistic studies.

## NOTES

1. The relational process type is a complex interwoven process type with two levels of distinction. Only the distinction between attributive and identifying processes are discussed here. The other level of distinction identifies three subtypes, comprising intensive, possessive, and circumstantial processes. For details on these categorizations, see Halliday and Matthiessen; Simpson, *Stylistics*.

2. Only clauses in which direct reference is made to Chris are parsed. The unparsed clauses or extracts provide contextual information for readers and may also be referred to in the discussion.

3. The transitivity analysis is based on Halliday and Matthiessen and the full realizations of the abbreviations in the text are as follows:

Pro.=Process  
 Rel.=Relational  
 Mat.=Material  
 Beh.=Behavioral  
 Cir.=Circumstance  
 Men.=Mental  
 Ver.=Verbal

4. The labeling of these contextual situations is borrowed from Ji and Shen.

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