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Transitivity and Narrative Viewpoint in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*

Isaac Nuokyaa-Ire Mwinlaaru
Department of English
University of Cape Coast
nuokyaaire@yahoo.com

Abstract

The linguistic study of African literary texts has become a fertile ground for researchers in both Applied Linguistics and Literary Studies. This study applies transitivity in analysing the narrative style adopted in a key passage in Ngugi's Weep Not, Child. The study reveals that the transitivity patterns in which the happenings, actions and inactions of characters are inscribed function to determine the psychological viewpoint from which the narrator relates the story. Specifically, it argues that the writer tends to absolve victimisers from the responsibility for their actions in order to focus readers' attention on the victims of the political conflict presented in the novel. This stylistic strategy foregrounds the universal theme of suffering in the novel. The study has implications for explorations on the interface between language and literature and further research.

Introduction

Weep Not, Child (1964) is Ngugi's reflection on the colonial experience of the people of Kenya under British rule. The novel is set in the political conflict between the Kenyan people and their colonial masters, which resulted from the former's quest for freedom. Ikiddeh (1966) presents a succinct but illuminating description of this socio-political background against which the novel is written. He notes that following the deplorable socio-economic conditions in Europe after the First World War, Britain settled a number of disbanded soldiers in Kenya, which was then its colony. The British Imperial Act of 1915 transferred the ownership of land from the

indigenous Kenyans to the white settlers. Thus, settlers could control and farm large acres of land and turn the original owners into labourers and pay them low wages. By the end of the Second World War, more settlers had arrived in Kenya and had taken complete control and ownership of land.

It was during this period of despair that Jomo Kenyatta returned home from Britain in 1946 and became the president of the newly formed Kenya African Union (KAU). The aims of the union were, among others, to fight for the return of the lost lands, abolish the colour-bar and to gain self-rule for the Kenyan people. Gradually, these agitations and the creation of awareness among the people of a possibility to gain freedom led to violence. Jomo Kenyatta and key members of KAU were arrested. A state of emergency was then declared and the militant wing of KAU fled into the forest. This militant group and the guerrilla warfare they inaugurated became known as the Mau Mau. Ikiddeh (1966) notes that for about a decade, Kenyans had to live in the grip of terror of the Mau Mau as well as the terror of the government's brutality against agitators and emergency law breakers. By the end of the emergency, 4686 Mau Mau had been killed, amounting to 42% of the total insurgents (Wikipedia, 2011).

According to Ikiddeh (1966), Ngugi was in elementary school during part of the emergency. He identifies some of the conditions of the period that characterised Ngugi's experiences, namely, the fear of walking to and from school, rumours of deaths and detentions, and the loud reports of machine guns. In 1954, Ngugi's elder brother joined the Mau Mau and, as a result, the colonial government became suspicious of Ngugi's family (Ikiddeh, 1966).

It is the collective experiences of the people, as well as his personal experiences, in this terrible historical event that Ngugi presents in *Weep Not, Child*. But the value of *Weep Not, Child* goes beyond a passive reflection of society. What we come to encounter in the novel is a

product of the mediation of social phenomena; a reorganisation of society by the writer in his/her own consciousness. As Fowler (1986) notes, literature is a discourse which does not reflect reality in a neutral manner but helps to interpret, organize and classify this reality.

Language plays a very important role in this creative process. It “functions ideationally to express and create meanings” (Syal, 1994:7). The language that is used to construct events and to depict people represents selections that are made out of all the available options in the linguistic system and these choices favour certain ways of seeing and reading (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). In consequence, certain meanings are projected over and above other meanings.

It is in the light of the above observation that this study interprets Ngugi’s *Weep Not, Child*, by analysing the linguistic choices made in the transitivity system of the English language. The study is a preliminary report of a research project on the interaction between narrative viewpoint and linguistic choices in *Weep Not, Child*. The focus of the paper is particularly on a short but key passage in *Part One* of the novel, a description of the failure of the workers’ strike. This passage is chosen to generally represent the narrative style adopted throughout the novel in presenting incidents which relate to the torture of people or an individual character. My interest in this passage is motivated by the fact that it is pivotal in the plot of the narrative; it dramatises the tension that has been building up in the preceding sections of the novel, sets the rest of the events in the narrative in motion and gives them meaning. It is the event in this passage that finally puts ‘the waning light’ off and inaugurates ‘the fall of darkness’ that is to follow in *Part Two* of the novel, thereby bridging the gap between the two historical periods captured in the novel, namely, the period just before the emergency and during the emergency itself.

Specifically, the paper aims to demonstrate that the choices the writer makes from the transitivity system to encode the actions and inactions of characters in this passage focuses

readers' attention on the vulnerable victims of the conflict he narrates. The paper argues that Ngugi narrates the passage from the viewpoint of the victims and the suffering they undergo while downplaying the role the victimiser plays in the situation. The paper will proceed to explain the concept of transitivity and subsequently the method adopted in analysing the text. The text will then be analysed and discussed in relation to the objective of the study. The paper ends by drawing conclusions and implications from the discussion.

Transitivity

An exhaustive and a very comprehensive discussion of the concept of transitivity within the space of this paper is certainly not possible (For a detailed discussion on transitivity, see Halliday, 1966-68; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Eggins, 2004; Downing & Locke, 2006). What has been attempted here is a highlight of the main elements in the concept in order to give a conceptual background to the present study.

Transitivity is a structural concept which refers to the way a writer or speaker represents, at the clausal level of language, his experience of the real world or his own world of consciousness (Halliday, 1973). The transitivity system identifies three components of the grammar of the clause. The first is the process, which is the nucleus of the experiential mode of the clause and is typically realised by the verb phrase. The second is the participant(s) directly involved in the process and is typically realised by noun phrases. The third element is the circumstances, which are attendant to the process, and thus are not directly involved in it. The circumstances occupy the adjunct element in the clause structure and are "typically expressed by prepositional and adverb phrases" (Simpson, 2004, p. 22).

Six process types are generally associated with the clause as a representation of experience. These process types include material, mental, behavioural, relational, verbalisation (or verbal)

and existential processes. As noted by Simpson (2004), the distinctions between these processes are more provisional than absolute.

To begin with, material processes are processes of ‘doing’ and ‘happening’. Associated with material processes are two key participant roles, namely, Actor and Goal. The Actor is the entity that is responsible for the action in the clause (that is, the doer involved in the process) while the Goal is that which is directly affected by the action in the clause. Other participant roles associated with material processes are Initiator, Scope, Recipient, Client and Attribute. The Initiator participant normally co-occurs with an Actor in a situation where the agency of the process in the clause is triggered by an external participant (the Initiator) who is not directly involved in the process as the Actor is. Scope is a Goal-like participant which is actually not affected by the action in the clause. The role of Recipient is occupied by participants who receive an entity, which can be either concrete or abstract, from another participant (the Actor) while the Client participant is the one to whom a service denoted by the process is done. The Attribute element is a quality assigned to one of the other participants identified above.

Mental processes, the second key process type in the transitivity system, refer to processes of cognition, perception and emotion. In other words, mental processes reflect the world of consciousness, and involve cognition (encoded in verbs such as ‘think’ or ‘wonder’), reaction (as in ‘like’ or ‘hate’) and perception (as in ‘see’ or ‘hear’). The two participant roles associated with mental processes are the Senser, the conscious being that is doing the sensing, and the Phenomenon, which refers to the entity which is felt, thought or perceived.

Behavioural process is an interface between material and mental processes. Thus, it represents both the processes of sensing and doing. Behavioural processes encompass physiological actions such as *breathe* or *cough*, and sometimes portray these processes as states

of consciousness as in *sigh, cry or laugh* (Simpson, 2004). In addition, behavioural processes represent processes of consciousness as forms of behaviour, as in the words *stare, listen, dream* or *worry* (ibid). The key participant involved in behavioural processes is the Behaver, the conscious entity who is behaving. A behavioural process may also take a second participant, the Behaviour, which is semantically very similar to the Phenomenon participant in mental processes.

The next process type to be explained is verbal processes. Verbal process is a process of saying and there are three roles associated with it, namely, Sayer, Receiver and Verbiage. The Sayer is the one who gives the message, the Receiver is the one who receives the message and the Verbiage is either the content of the message or the name of what is said. When verbs such as *curse, praise, blame* and *congratulate* realise the process, a fourth participant, Target, is normally involved in it. This participant refers to the one who is cursed, praised, blamed or congratulated.

Relational process is another key process type in the transitivity system. Relational processes establish relationships between two entities. There are two levels of further distinctions among relational processes, thereby making the relational process type a complex interwoven concept. The first level of distinction is the one among three main sub-types, comprising intensive, possessive and circumstantial processes. An intensive relational process “posits a relationship of equivalence, an ‘x is y’ connection, between two entities” while a possessive relational process establishes an x *has* y type of connection between two entities (Simpson, 2004, p. 24). Circumstantial relational process occurs in a clause structure in which the circumstantial element becomes an obligatory participant. This sub-process type normally results in ‘x is *at/is in/is on/is with/ y*’ configuration (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Simpson, 2004).

The second level of distinction is between attributive and identifying processes. In attributive processes, there is a key participant, the Carrier, who is being assigned an attribute. The Attribute participant, therefore, indicates what the Carrier is, what the Carrier is like, where the Carrier is, or what the Carrier owns (Simpson, 2004). 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 co-referential. The complexity in the relational process type lies in the fact that attributive and identifying processes intersect with the intensive, possessive and circumstantial processes identified above (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Simpson, 2004). This situation implies that there are six categories of relational processes: intensive identifying process; intensive attributive process; circumstantial identifying process; circumstantial attributive process; possessive identifying process; and possessive attributive process.

The last process type to be considered here is the Existential process. As the name suggests, existential processes assert that something exists. These processes typically include the word *there* as a dummy subject, as in *There is God*. There is only one participant associated with this process type, the Existent, which refers to that which exists.

In the words of Simpson (2004), “transitivity offers systematic choice, and any particular textual configuration is only one, perhaps strategically motivated, option from a pool of possible textual configurations” (p. 26). Thus, any particular choice of transitivity patterns in language use represents or characterises reality in a way that is discernible. Several scholars have employed the transitivity model as a methodological tool in interpreting literary texts (See Halliday, 1971; Kennedy, 1982; Burton, 1982; Adika & Denkabe, 1997, Ji & Shen, 2004, Rodrigues, 2008; Iwamoto, 2008). The present study demonstrates that transitivity interacts with narrative viewpoint to foreground the theme of suffering in Ngugi’s *Weep Not, Child*. Narrative

viewpoint, in this paper, is defined as the textual ordering of information in narrative texts to show the perspective from which actions and events are viewed and described. As Short (1996) notes, “the basic distinction between what happens and how it is described is useful if we are to understand how viewpoint in the novel works” (p.256).

Method of Analysis

The analytical approach adopted for the study is stylistic analysis. Simpson (2004) defines stylistic analysis as “a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to *language*” (p. 2). A stylistic approach to the analysis of literary texts is essentially an integration of the analytical methods and descriptive intentions of linguistics, on the one hand, and the interpretive goals of modern literary criticism, on the other hand. The focus of literary stylistics is to explore the “thematic and aesthetic values generated by linguistic forms” (Zhang, 2010, p. 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 isolates the stylistically significant features and analyses them by employing the techniques of linguistic description (ibid). 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/or its extra-textual context. Thus, as Zhang (2010) notes, in stylistic analysis, description and interpretation are essentially linked.

Stylistic analysis places particular emphasis on evidence, thereby making it a scientific or perhaps a quasi-scientific methodology. In discussing the methodology of stylistic analysis, Simpson (2004) observes that it should be rigorous, retrievable and replicable. Put differently, the analysis should be based on an explicit framework, be systematic and its methods transparent

enough to allow verification by other researchers. Stylistics, thus, offers literary critics a relatively precise method for describing the organisation and features of a text. In this enterprise, the analyst essentially goes beyond what the text means to explain how it means; that is, the technique that the literary writer employs in his use of language to orient readers towards particular meanings of the text.

The stylistic analysis of literary texts has come under several criticisms. Typical of these are the longstanding Fowler-Bateson controversy (See Fowler, 1971; Simpson, 2004, pp.149-156), Fish's (1981) attack on stylistics and Lecercle's (1993) doomsday prophesy on stylistics. The arguments against stylistics can be summarised into two main caveats. The first criticism is against 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, n.d., p. 5). In fact, they note, 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, n.d). In fact, as noted by Makokha, et al. (2010), 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 favour an interpretation which 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, 2004, p. 3).

To the second criticism, it could be argued that stylistics is not only interested in the meaning of literary texts, but it is as much interested 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. Indeed, there will be no need to do a stylistic analysis if the analyst is not interested in language (Simpson, 2004).

The centrality of language in stylistic analysis has motivated many scholars to examine literary discourse from several linguistic perspectives, namely, conversation analysis (e.g. Abbas, Suleiman & Abdul-Manan, 2010), pragmatics (e.g. Black, 2006), semantics (e.g. Acquah, 2010), functional linguistics (e.g. Halliday, 1971; Burton, 1982; Simpson & Montgomery, 1995), lexico-grammar (e.g. Yankah, 1995; Carter, 1997; Zhang, 2010) among others. Although the linguistic approaches to literature are varied, they all share two main objectives. They demonstrate the contributions linguistics can make to the study of literature as well as what the study of literary discourse reveal about language in use. As concerning *Weep Not, Child*, this paper shows that the transitivity patterning of the passage chosen for the present study encodes the psychological viewpoint from which the writer narrates events, and that this viewpoint foregrounds the universal theme of suffering in the novel.

Analysis and Discussion of Text

As mentioned earlier, the data for this study is a key passage in *Weep Not, Child*. The text is given below. The processes in the text are italicised and numbered in Arabic numerals for easy reference.

... Everyone *listened* [1] to him in silence. But something unusual *happened* [2] to Ngotho. For one single moment Jacobo *crystallized* [3] into a concrete betrayal of the people. He *became* [4] the physical personification of the long years of waiting and suffering – Jacobo *was* [5] a traitor. Ngotho *rose* [6]. He *made* [7] his way towards the platform while everyone *watched* [8], *wondering* [9] what *was happening* [10]. He *was* [11] now near Jacobo. The battle *was* [12] now between these two – Jacobo on the side of white people and he on the side of the black people.

All this *happened* [13] quickly and *took* [14] the people by surprise. And then all of a sudden, as if *led* [15] by Ngotho, the crowd *rose* [16] and *rushed* [17] towards Jacobo. At once the police *acted* [18], *throwing* [19] tear-gas bombs and *firing* [20] into the crowd, and two men *fell* [21] as the panic-stricken mob *scattered* [22]. Ngotho's courage now *failed* [23] him. He *was* [24] lost in the crowd. So he *ran* [25] blindly, *not knowing* [26] whither. He *wanted* [27] only to *save* [28] his life. A policeman *struck* [29] at his face with a baton and *drew* [30] blood. But he *did not stop* [31]. He *was not* [32] really aware of the blood, he *felt* [33] it only as something warm. Frantically he *ran* [34] until he *was* [35] in the clear, then *stumbled* [36] forward and *fell* [37], *losing* [38] consciousness. That *was* [39] where people from his village *found* [40] him, the hero of the hour, and *took* [41] him home (pp. 58-59).

To proceed with the analysis, I first isolate, classify and describe the processes identified in the text according to their process types. I then identify the participants involved in these processes and interpret how the process types associated with the various participants function to characterise them. I also relate this discussion to narrative viewpoint and to the writer's worldview of the political struggle presented in *Weep Not, Child*. The organisation and procedures of the analysis are largely adopted from Burton (1982). Presented below is the distribution of the processes according to their process types. The numbers here correspond with those that are used to label the processes within the text.

1. Behavioural process of perception
2. Material Goal-directed process (without an actor)
3. Relational intensive attributive process
4. Relational intensive identifying process
5. Relational intensive attributive process
6. Material action-oriented process denoting movement
7. Material action-oriented process denoting movement
8. Behavioural process of perception
9. Mental process denoting uncertainty
10. Existential process

11. Relational circumstantial (locative) attributive process
12. Relational circumstantial (locative) attributive process
13. Existential process
14. Mental process expressing shock
15. Material action oriented process wrapped in hypothetical circumstances
16. Material action-oriented process denoting movement
17. Material action-oriented process denoting movement
18. Material action-oriented but Goalless process
19. Material action-oriented but Goalless process
20. Material action-oriented but Goalless process
21. Material action-oriented self-directed process
22. Material action-oriented self-directed process
23. Material event-oriented process
24. Relational intensive attributive process
25. Material action-oriented process denoting movement
26. Mental negative process of cognition
27. Mental process expressing desire
28. Material event oriented process
29. Material action-oriented and Goal-directed process
30. Material action oriented process
31. Material action-oriented negative process
32. Mental negative process of cognition
33. Mental process of sensing (feeling)
34. Material action-oriented process denoting movement
35. Relational circumstantial (locative) attributive process
36. Material action-oriented self-directed process
37. Material action-oriented self-directed process
38. Relational process of negative possession
39. Relational intensive identifying process
40. Mental process of perception
41. Material action-oriented and Goal-directed process

The table below summarises the processes identified above according to their frequency and percentage distributions:

Distribution of Processes according to Process Types

	Material	Mental	Relational	Behavioural	Existential	Total
Frequency	21	6	10	2	2	41
Percentage	51.2	14.6	24.4	4.9	4.9	100

parallel and synonymously related relational clauses thus succinctly characterise Jacobo, a betrayer of the people.

Jacobo is probably the fictional representation of Chief Waruhiu, a very influential government-paid chief in Kenya who was assassinated by the Kenyan freedom fighters on 7th October, 1957 (Ikiddeh, 1966). An allusion is made to this historical figure and his resemblance to Jacobo in the interlude between *Part One* and *Part Two* of *Weep Not, Child*:

He was a Big Chief.
Like Jacobo?
No. Bigger. He used to eat with the Governor
... Now he was a big man with much land.
The Governor had given it all to him, so he
might sell the black people (p. 63).

It is the realisation among the freedom fighters that Chief Waruhiu is a traitor that motivated them to kill him. Likewise, 'the people' in *Weep Not, Child* attacks Jacobo because they have come to see him as a traitor.

But the transitivity patterns in the passage under discussion demonstrate that it is not all the people who are privileged with this realisation. The metamorphosis that Jacobo undergoes is presented as a perceptual and psychological transformation of Ngotho. As a matter of fact, the events of the first paragraph, in which Jacobo is characterised, are narrated from Ngotho's viewpoint. Ngotho, having been affected by a process locked up in mysterious circumstances (*But something unusual happened to Ngotho*), comes to understand what Jacobo represents, the pawn of the white man. Prior to this moment, Ngotho and the other dispossessed Africans had seen Jacobo merely as a rich African, and not as what he truly is, namely, a tool and ally of the white man. It is this sudden and fascinating realisation that spurs Ngotho into action, to attack Jacobo, a concrete image of all his woes and those of his compatriots.

What is more important as far as the present study is concerned is that by using relational clauses to describe Jacobo from the viewpoint of Ngotho's cognitive processes, the writer tends to suggest that Jacobo's perfidiousness is not of his own volition. The relational processes *crystallized* and *became*, in particular, present Jacobo's betrayal as an involuntary and spontaneous transformation in his character. The stylistic significance of this discursive construction of Jacobo is to downplay his treachery so that he too could be sympathised as a victim of circumstances. He is the African who is being elevated by the whites as a buffer between themselves and the exploited Africans in the political struggle taking place in Kenya.

As the narrative progresses, it becomes more apparent that the transitivity patterning of the passage under discussion is meant to background the role played by victimisers so as to project the victims of the historic conflict presented in the novel. This situation could be illustrated by considering the processes in which Ngotho and his behaviour are inscribed.

- a. Ngotho rose
Actor Process
- b. He made his way towards the platform
Actor Process Scope Cir(cumstance)
- c. He was now near Jacobo
Carrier Process Cir Attribute
- d. He (was) on the side of the black people
Carrier (Process) Attribute
- e. as if led by Ngotho
Cir Process Actor
- f. Ngotho's courage now failed him
Actor Cir Process Scope
- g. He was lost in the crowd
Carrier Process Attribute Cir
- h. He ran blindly, (he) not knowing whither

- | | Actor | Process | Cir | (Senser) | Process | Phenomenon |
|----|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| i. | <u>He</u> | <u>wanted</u> | <u>only to save his life</u> | | | |
| | Senser | Process | Phenomenon | | | |
| j. | <u>He</u> | <u>did not stop</u> | | | | |
| | Actor | Process | | | | |
| k. | <u>He</u> | <u>was</u> | <u>not really aware of the blood,</u> | | | |
| | Carrier | Process | Attribute | | | |
| l. | <u>he</u> | <u>felt</u> | <u>it</u> | <u>only as something warm.</u> | | |
| | Senser | Process | Phenomenon | Cir | | |
| m. | <u>he</u> | <u>ran</u> | | | | |
| | Actor | Process | | | | |
| n. | <u>he</u> | <u>was</u> | <u>in the clear</u> | | | |
| | Carrier | Process | Attribute | | | |
| o. | <u>(he) stumbled</u> | <u>forward</u> | and | <u>fell,</u> | <u>losing</u> | <u>consciousness</u> |
| | Process | Cir | | Process | Process | Attribute/Possessed |

Ngotho is associated with most of the material processes. He alone accounts for 10 (47.6%) of the material processes in the text. Thus, it appears that he is in control of most of the actions or doing processes in the passage. Indeed, Ngotho is “the hero of the hour” (p. 59). A more delicate analysis of the actions Ngotho engages in, however, portrays him as an ineffectual pitiable character. The material processes Ngotho is engaged in are either Goalless actions that denote movement, often followed by circumstantial elements of space (e.g. *Ngotho rose; he made his way towards the platform; he ran*), or self-directed (e.g. *he stumbled forward and fell*). The only action-oriented clause in which Ngotho seems to have affected something is the hypothetical construction, *as if led by Ngotho*. In this clause, the conjunctive element *as if* challenges the reader’s belief that it is the old man who sets the crowd in motion by his action of being the first person to attempt to attack Jacobo. The picture we perceive thus is that Ngotho

undertakes actions, but his actions do not physically affect anybody in the environment, and when they do, he becomes the victim of his own actions.

In 50% (3 out of 6) of the relational processes in which Ngotho occurs as subject, the Attribute element normally indicates his position or location in space (e.g. *He was now near Jacobo; he was in the clear*). Thus, he moves but only moves himself; his movement affects no one. Other relational clauses (i.e. *He was lost in the crowd; He was not really aware of the blood*) present Ngotho as losing his sensibility or perceptual abilities. He is not the Ngotho we saw in the first paragraph, in which events are perceived from his viewpoint. In this second paragraph, the actions and inactions of the characters are related to the reader from the viewpoint of an invisible observer, in this case, the omniscient narrator. Even Ngotho's actions are no more directed by his consciousness, as is shown by the circumstantial element and negative process in the sentence below: *He ran blindly, not knowing whither*. The relational possessive process in sentence (o) above (*losing consciousness*) finally removes Ngotho from the scene. More importantly, the pain Ngotho goes through in the passage is mostly presented as resulting from his own confused state of mind. In relation to this, his falling is not presented as immediately resulting from the fact that the policeman hit him in the face, but as result of him stumbling. That is, by postponing Ngotho's fall, the writer makes it less possible for the reader to readily see it as a consequence of the police action. This obliqueness in presenting narrative events reflects the thematic focus of the writer: to dramatise the universal phenomenon of human suffering and portray how helpless the individual is in extricating him/herself from it. By downplaying the role of the victimiser, the writer empathises with the afflicted and narrates events from the point of view of the afflicted in a way that tends to naturalise suffering.

This observation could further be extended by closely analysing the transitivity patterns in which the behaviour of ‘the people’ are inscribed:

- a. Everyone listened to him in silence.
 Behavior Process Behaviour Cir
- b. Everyone watched, wondering what was happening.
 Behavior Process Process Phenomenon
- c. All this happened quickly and took the people by surprise.
 Existent Process Cir Process Scope Cir
- d. the crowd rose and rushed towards Jacobo.
 Actor Process Process Cir
- e. Two men fell
 Actor Process
- f. the panic-stricken mob scattered.
 Actor Process
- g. People from his village found him ... and took him home
 Senser Process Phenomenon Process Goal Cir

The people are inscribed in only behavioural and material processes as well as one mental process, which is embedded in the behavioural clause in (b). Both clause (a) and the clause complex in (b) portray the people as having a cognitive limitation. They are struggling to decode and interpret the meaning of things happening around them by engaging in behavioural processes. Clause (c), *All this happened quickly and took the people by surprise*, which denotes that what is happening before the people comes to them as a shock, only reinforces the above observation.

The material processes in which the people are engaged are either self-directed (i.e. *two men fell*) or those of movement (i.e. *the crowd rose and rushed; the panic-stricken mob scattered*). There are only two processes in which the people really affect something in the

environment, and that thing is their own hero, Ngotho – *they found him and took him home*. Even here, the process in the first clause, *found*, is an inert mental process. The picture presented of the people is thus that of ineffectual beings who are in a confused state. The pain the people undergo is thus readily seen as a result of their own limitations and less as a result of an external force, the police.

The last group of participants in the processes in the text under study are the police, the instrument of the oppression of colonial rule. The following are the clauses in which the activities of the police are cast:

- a. the police acted, throwing tear-gas bombs and firing into the crowd.
 Actor Process Process Scope Process Cir
- b. A police man struck at his (Ngotho's) face with a baton
 Actor process Goal Cir
- and drew blood
 Process Goal

The police are engaged in material action-oriented processes only. In *the police acted* in (a), their action is Goalless or non-directed and does not affect anybody in the environment in particular. In the second clause in (a), *throwing tear-gas bombs*, the process carries a Scope as its complement, and for that matter, does not affect any concrete entity in the environment, except the weapon itself, *tear-gas bombs*. In the last clause in (a), the effect that the action of firing should have on the crowd is weakened by making the complement a circumstantial element. Again, the structure of the sentence in which the clause occurs (i.e. *At once the police acted throwing tear-gas bombs and firing into the crowd, and two men fell as the panic-stricken mob scattered*) blurs the connection between the firing and its effect, the falling of the two men. The use of the comma to separate the two parts of the sentence coupled with the use of the conjunctions *and* and *as* establishes a stronger bond between the scattering of the mob and the

falling of the men than between the firing into the crowd and the falling of the men. In other words, the structure of the sentence favours an interpretation that the falling of the two men should be accepted as the natural consequence of the scattering of the people. The only action by the police which directly affects something in the environment is the one located in (b). Here, what is affected is Ngotho's body part, his face. Thus, to a large extent, the linguistic choices the writer makes in the passage function to absolve the victimisers (the police) from the responsibility for the effects of their actions.

Generally, the transitivity patterns in which the participants in the text are cast seem to have an implication for Ngugi's worldview of the political struggle he presents in the novel. A close examination of the transitivity patterns described and discussed above reveal that the writer foregrounds the suffering and confusion of people and/or the victims in the conflict narrated in the passage, but mostly backgrounds the actions of the police as the taken for granted originators of this suffering. Very often, when the writer explicitly states the actions of the victimiser, the clause structure does not allow the reader to link the actions of the author of the affliction to the pain of the afflicted. The passage is characterised by an eery atmosphere. It is interesting to note that other passages in the novel that recount incidents of torture have similar linguistic patterning.

The implication is that Ngugi is looking at the political conflict of colonial Kenya from the point of view of the terror that came with it as well as the victims of the terror, rather than the cause of the suffering. Rather than being a political polemic against the oppressive powers of colonial rule, *Weep Not, Child* thus becomes a sympathetic and "a painfully tender account of the problems occurring when necessity seems to set up an antagonism between humanity and action" (Povey, 1970, p. 125). Ngugi uses a historical situation to dramatise the universal phenomenon

of suffering. Ngugi's perspective on the conflict he presents, as is demonstrated by this study, comes as no surprise. This is because it is most probable that it is the terror and suffering of people in this conflict that got strongly registered in Ngugi's sub-conscious as he was growing up through the conflict as a child, especially given that his own family was directly affected by it.

Conclusion

This study applied transitivity as a framework in interpreting a key passage in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*. It demonstrated that the transitivity patterns function as a determinant of the viewpoint from which actions in the narrative are perceived by the omniscient narrator. In the first paragraph, where the narrative unfolds from Ngotho's perspective, he is presented as a character who is fully conscious of the circumstances and even abstract meanings of the things happening around him. The narrator thus describes to us the image of Jacobo as it exists in Ngotho's consciousness. In paragraph two, where Ngotho is dazed by the circumstances in which he finds himself, the viewpoint shifts from Ngotho to an invisible observer-narrator. This finding gives credence to the fact that in omniscient narration, the narrative voice could still be coloured by the perception and sympathies of a character. In instances like this, the omniscient narrative technique becomes more like the first-person narrative technique. Again, the transitivity patterns in which actions and happenings are cast seem to portray the writer's vision/psychological viewpoint of the world he presents. Specifically, Ngugi's focus tends to be on the terror and suffering of the people he presents rather than what is causing the terror.

These findings have an implication for the interface between language and literature since they confirm that a systematic analysis of linguistic choices in a literary text could reveal

information on creative techniques and the meanings engendered by the text. Also, transitivity analysis of other key passages in *Weep Not, Child* will further illuminate the claims made in the study.

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