



Literature as the records of the past: A systemic functional analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract: This paper is meant for analyzing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half a Yellow Sun* to give a new or different understanding of the novel. Given that language use conveys message beyond the surface meaning, the textual metafunctional theory was applied to two excerpts with particular focus on Theme as the central element of the message. It employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The results revealed that this literary work based on historical events is textually well-tight. It is principally written in declarative moods. Components of Topical Themes referred mostly to Igbo people or Biafra. This implies that the novel tells South-Eastern Nigerian people's story (Ibo) and their experience in the sixties. In addition, human beings are mostly used as Topical Themes as compared to other entities such as animals and objects etc. This shows that the narrator is much more concerned with human life than anything else. Moreover, female characters were more topicalized than male ones, and this penlightens the writer's feminist style.

Keywords: Half a Yellow sun, Textual metafunction, Biafra, Female characters, feministic style.

INTRODUCTION

Many situations destabilize human societies but atrocities committed in wartime nullify human values and dignity (Doğan, 2021). In fact, wartime brings people to the same common denominator because they scamp off looking for shelter and rush for food all the same way, regardless of their status or any other backgrounds. They all have the same feeling of fear, pain and have the same vital needs. The Biafran war which lasted from 1967 to 1970 was one of the bloodier fratricide wars in Africa (De Mey, 2011). It opposed on the one hand Federal State of Nigeria and on the other hand, the Republic of Biafra, whose flag shows half of a rising sun and was the inspiration for the title of Adichie's piece *Half a Yellow Sun*. From coups to the secession leading to war, all Easterners and Hausa people, men, women and children have experienced the awfulness of war, driving them to dehumanizing behaviors. Collateral situations to war such as famine, disease, violation, unhomeliness and the likes were vividly portrayed in Adichie's endeavor, in a simple but captivating language use style. It was subjected to many analyses in the literary, historical, psychological realm, etc. (Abdoulaye, 2022; Rönnhede, 2019; Wosu, 2018; Onyuku, 1980).

The current paper tries to give a different understanding of Adichie's piece *Half a Yellow Sun* in the paradigm of systemic functional linguistics propounded by Halliday & Mathiesen (2004). For Halliday (1994), language is a semantic system for building and encoding meanings, a language produces whether in delivering speeches in front of the audience or in written form. In this line, Systemic functional Linguistic theory constitutes a sound tool for discourse analysis. It enables us to decipher meaning constructed beyond the surface meaning that we capture at first when reading *Half a Yellow Sun*. Explicitly, this paper utilizes that theory to explore the author's projection of participants as message unit (clause) to describe Biafra war experiences exemplified in the novel.

1. Theoretical background

The theory of discourse analysis employed in this paper is the systemic functional linguistics developed first by Halliday, expanded, and explicated by Halliday & Mathiesen (2004). One of the tenets of systemic functional linguistic theory is *clause as message*. Put another way, a clause is basic unit in which meaning is anchored (Koussouhoun & Dadjo 2015). Generally, when sending a message, there must be participants (subject and/or object) and the process (predicate element that describes the action or state, a verb). The first element to come at the beginning of the clause constitutes the main part of the message. It is known as Theme. The remaining (predicate and adjunct) called Rheme, just complements the Theme (Eggs, 1994). The Theme can be classified into three types as explained here beneath.

1. Topical Theme: this actually matters in the clause or the topic of the clause. It is the nominal group or circumstantial group viewed as carrier of the message being conveyed. Topical Theme is performer, behavior, senser, carrier that assume Transitivity function; circumstantial elements (place, time, etc.) placed before participants and process are topical theme.

2. **Interpersonal Theme:** This type refers to vocative, comment, finite, polarity elements that can be placed at the beginning of clause along with the topical component. Interpersonal theme carry mood and can be used to express courtesy, to hold one's attention etc.
1. **Textual Theme:** This one refers to conjunctive adjuncts and continuity adjuncts that have grammatical function. They are used for cohesion and tightness of ideas.

Another level of Theme analysis is labelled as markedness and unmarkedness. Marked theme stands for foregrounding predicate complement and circumstantial element being projected primarily in a clause. Unmarked theme refers to normal and usual components such as Subject, Finite, Predicator, WH elements starting a clause (Djimet, 2022).

1.

Method

This paper employed the mixed method of studies, that is, both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches were used to explore the thematic choice in the extracts. It is thought that the eclectic use of approaches helps to overcome the shortcomings of each, given that they complement each another (Creswel, 2014). The quantitative approach gives a large view of what is sought, while the qualitative one offers in-depth sight (Borrego, Douglas, & Amelink, 2009).

To proceed, two extracts were selected qualitatively from the novel under analysis, *Half a Yellow Sun*. Each extract is four-pages-long, font ten. Then, following the theory stated above, the extracts were split into meaningful units or clauses, to which numbers were assigned. After identification and numbering of clauses, Theme elements were reckoned and classified in terms of their value.

2. Results

The results are presented in two sections: the first section for extract one and the second one for extract two.

3.1 Extract 1

Tale 1 presents the different types of Theme. First, let us note that the main part of a clause is Topical Theme; thus, each clause must have one or it is not a clause. Second, Textual and Interpersonal themes are mandatory in a clause even though they play important role in the process of message delivery. Lastly, a clause may contain all of the three types of Theme.

Table 1: Theme type distribution

Themes	Numbers	Total	Percentage
Textual	1, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 25, 28, 29, 38, 42, 43, 47, 50, 52, 53, 61, 67, 71, 73, 74, 75, 77, 79, 83, 91, 100, 104, 107, 109, 111, 112, 114, 121, 135, 140, 148, 160, 167, 174, 176, 179, 181, 185, 186, 189, 190, 191, 192, 194, 200, 202, 208, 209, 210, 220, 221, 226, 230, 231, 235, 244, 247, 249, 251, 252, 256, 263, 265, 266, 269, 272, 275, 289, 300	77	25.50
Interpersonal	35, 66, 85, 92, 146, 163, 292	7	02.30
Topical	1 to 302	302	100.00

It is seen above that 302 clauses were counted in the first extract. This naturally entails that the numbers of clause in the text equals the number of Topical Theme which are doer, sensor, carrier in the story. The analysis revealed that the text was tightly built with conjunctive elements. In total, 77 Textual Theme were identified and this gives 25.50%. Interpersonal Themes, mainly Wh-interrogatives and vocatives were 07 in number, with percentage value of 2.30%. This signifies that there is not much variation of mood in the narrative.

The main message items, that is, topical elements which act, sense, behave, carry, or determine time and place were categorized in the following table.

Table 2: Topical Theme distribution

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
Olanna	13, 111, 113, 114, 116, 120, 126, 131, 138, 139, 144, 145, 151, 154, 159, 162, 178, 179, 182, 185, 187, 188, 192, 193, 194, 199, 202, 208, 210, 220, 222, 225, 230, 232, 237, 238, 245, 248, 253, 256, 258, 264, 265, 269, 270, 271, 274, 280, 284, 286, 287, 288, 289, 294, 296, 299, 301	57	18.87
Mohamed	122, 125, 127, 130, 132, 136, 140, 142, 146, 148, 157, 164, 173, 176, 181, 201, 212, 223, 228, 244	20	06.62
Ugwu	1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 28, 29, 43, 45, 46, 48, 49, 52, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 76, 77, 82, 83, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91, 93, 97, 108, 109, 110, 112, 115, 117, 118, 119	45	14.90

Horror, dead bodies, fear	42, 44, 88, 155, 158, 161, 190, 191, 196, 198, 200, 207, 211, 215, 221, 259, 279	17	05.62
Baby	4, 5, 20, 21, 73, 263,	06	02.00
Women	56, 260, 261, 262, 281, 291, 292, 297	08	02.64
people	15, 81, 99, 102, 121, 167	06	02.00
Circ.Time /Place	53, 60, 104, 143, 149, 177, 183, 184, 235, 246, 252	11	03.64
Hauoussa Nigerian	34, 103, 123, 124, 133, 135, 168, 169, 174, 175, 209, 214, 216, 216, 217, 219, 224, 226, 233, 234, 241	21	06.95
Igbo biafrans	9, , 24, 25, 33, 35, 36, 37, 40, 41, 47, 50, 51, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 61, 74, 79, 80, 85, 92, 94, 95, 96, 100, 101, 105, 107, 128, 134, 141, 152, 153, 163, 170, 171, 172, 174, 195, 197, 203, 204, 205, 206, 236, 243, 247, 249, 267, 275, 276, 277, 278, 290, 298	58	19.22
AOT	3, 7, 14, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 38, 39, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 75, 78, 84, 98, 106, 129, 137, 147, 150, 156, 160, 165, 166, 180, 186, 189, 213, 227, 229, 231, 236, 239, 240, 242, 250, 251, 254, 255, 257, 266, 268, 272, 273, 282, 283, 285, 293, 295, 300, 302	53	17.54
TOTAL	1 to 302	302	100.00

The above results unveiled that human beings were mostly projected as topical, either acting, sensing, behaving, or carrying etc. Olanna, one of the central characters, was topicalized 57 times, representing 18.87%. Mohamed, a friend of Olanna intervened 20 times over 302, with a rate of 06.62%. Ugwu, a servant occurred up to 45 times, giving 14.90%. Anything showing the ugly facets of war such as headless bodies, wounds, dead, fear and the likes occurred 17 times, at rate 05.62%. Baby, Olanna’s infant, was mentioned 06 times, yielding 02.00%. Women, apart from Olanna the main character, were stated 08 times and this provides 02.64%. Unspecific *people* were mentioned 06 times (02/00%). Any topical theme related to Hausa people (also referred to as Nigerians) occurred 21 times with a percentage of 06.95%; while the ones referring to Igbo people (Biafrans) happened 58 times at the degree of 19.22%. Lastly, any other things topicalized in extract 1 scored 53 times (17.54%), for example topical themes in clause 3 and 7 referring to objects (nightdress, pajamas).

The following table presents the degree of theme markedness. Markedness of topical theme shows a particular importance or emphasis laid on theme by the author.

Topical 3: Theme markedness

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
Marked	14, 27, 32, 36, 39, 40, 53, 64, 69, 85, 86, 99, 123, 124, 137, 139, 143, 155, 163, 177, 205, 213, 222, 227, 237, 264, 282, 285, 292	29	09.60
Unmarked		273	90.40
Total	302	302	100.00

As it can be easily read in table 3 above, 29 out of 302 Themes are marked. This gives 09.60% of markedness. Few circumstances of time or places were topicalized. This entails that the message is sent in simple manner, focusing on people and the things that intervene in the process, while 273 on 302 are unmarked, this provides 90.00% of unmarkedness.

2.2 Extract two

This section is devoted for extract two. As for extract 1, Theme types were first presented, followed by Theme markedness and categorization of topical theme. Extract 2 contains 301 clauses which constitute the basis of the analysis. It has almost the same length as that of extract 1 which has 302 clauses.

Table 4: Theme type distribution

Themes	Numbers	Total	Percentage
Textual	4, 7, 8, 10, 13, 20, 21, 23, 30, 33, 37, 40, 41, 42, 44, 47, 52, 57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 66, 67, 71, 75, 77, 84, 85, 86, 92, 99, 102, 104, 107, 108, 111, 114, 117, 124, 134, 135, 141, 142, 146, 147, 153, 155, 156, 161, 166, 168, 176, 178, 181, 182, 186, 188, 190, 196, 201, 209, 210, 223, 225, 226, 233, 244, 246, 249, 251, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 270, 274, 276, 282, 284, 288, 289, 291, 293, 301	86	26.57

Interpersonal	5, 24, 36, 49, 68, 101, 122, 131, 132, 139, 153, 157, 160, 163, 183, 216, 217, 279, 294, 297	20	20.64
Topical	1 to 301	301	100.00

Just like in extract 1, table 4 above showed that the text is grammatically well built. 86 clauses out of 301 contain textual elements such as conjunctions, liking ideas developed in the text. In extract 2, there are more interpersonal elements than in extract 1: 20 over 301 clauses have vocative, mood, polarity or comment that highlight the interpersonal aspect of the message. Topical Themes in extract 2 are 301, proportionate to the number of clauses.

The different participants in the process were singled out or grouped up according to their contextual affinity to deduce the message underlying beyond their individual value. Such participants are Olanna, Odenigbo, Danger/Bombing, Worries, Baby, Women, Nigeria, Biafra, circumstances, etc.

Table 5: Topical Theme distribution

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
Olanna	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 14, 22, 23, 29, 34, 46, 48, 53, 56, 58, 60, 63, 64, 65, 66, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 88, 93, 95, 97, 103, 106, 112, 113, 116, 117, 119, 126, 138, 141, 143, 152, 155, 157, 158, 166, 168, 169, 170, 171, 174, 177, 184, 185, 199, 200, 201, 203, 209, 217, 220, 229, 231, 233, 235, 236, 237, 238, 241, 245, 247, 250, 254, 256, 265, 266, 272, 274, 278, 281, 282, 287, 295, 300	91	30.20
Odenigbo	6, 9, 15, 16, 25, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 47, 50, 51, 52, 54, 57, 62, 114, 255, 260, 268, 269, 270, 275, 280	25	08.30
Mrs. Muokelu	179, 182, 183, 189, 190, 192, 193, 197, 198, 204, 205, 206, 210, 212, 219, 223, 225, 226, 232, 239, 301	21	07.00
Baby	68, 78, 92, 104, 107, 137, 146, 187, 249, 251, 267, 283, 291, 292, 293, 294, 296, 297, 299	19	06.31
Women	120, 121, 134, 167, 186, 188, 202, 230, 240, 248, 288, 289, 290	13	04.30
Men	7, 8, 125, 128, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135, 136, 139, 140, 142, 144, 145, 147, 148, 149, 153, 154, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 196	28	09.30
people	108, 122, 123, 173, 176, 178, 195, 216, 221, 222	10	03.30
Nigerian	20	01	00.30
Biafrans Igbo	21, 26, 30, 31, 49, 61, 98, 101, 110, 215, 257, 261, 262, 124	14	04.65
Bombing, horror	75, 79, 86, 91, 96, 234, 252, 253	08	02.65
Circums. of Time/Place	10, 13, 24, 43, 67, 69, 87, 99, 105, 213, 228, 264, 259	13	04.30
AOT	12, 17, 18, 19, 27, 28, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 55, 59, 83, 89, 90, 94, 100, 102, 109, 111, 115, 118, 127, 129, 150, 151, 156, 172, 175, 180, 181, 191, 194, 207, 208, 211, 214, 218, 224, 227, 242, 243, 244, 246, 258, 263, 271, 273, 276, 277, 279, 284, 285, 286, 298	58	19.30
TOTAL	1 to 301	301	100.00

Olanna, the main character, intervened in 91 instances over 301, at the rate of 30.20%. She got involved in many courses of events like no other characters in the story. Other individual characters are Odenigbo who is by the way Olanna's husband and Mrs. Muokelu. Odenigbo interfered in 25 occasions giving 08.30% and Mrs Muokelu in 21 generating 07.00% respectively. Olanna's Baby was topicalized in 19 clauses with rate of 06.31%. Another category of character mentioned is *Women*, they got involved in 13 04.30%. The occurrences of men in the course of events doubled that of women. Out of 301, Men entered into play 28 times, rating 09.30%. Unspecific people were mentioned 10 times (03.30%). Moreover, the analysis proved that the narrative focused principally on Biafra people's experience. Hausa, Nigerian people or any token related to Federal Republic of Nigeria occurred only once with a frequency of 00.30%. While, Biafra/Igbo or anything related to them were propounded 14 times, giving 04.65%. Bombing, horror and the like happened as topical theme 8 times (02.65%). Circumstances of time and place occurred 13 times, that is 04.30%. And any other things less important topicalized unfolded 58 times or 19.30%.

The following table presents foregrounded elements forecasted as message. That is, it presents unusual themes viewed as marked themes. As said earlier, these are most of theme time or place circumstantial elements or complements of predicate placed before the actor.

Table 6: Theme markedness

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
Marked	10, 13, 24, 43, 67, 87, 99, 105, 126, 213, 228, 259, 263, 264, 267	15	05.00
Unmarked	1 2 3 4 5 ...	286	95.00
Total		301	100.00

Results here above proved that 15 topical themes over 301 are atypical, so marked. This can be a deliberate fact by the narrative to insist on marked token. The remaining (286) topical themes are unmarked or just common to daily language use style.

Commented [H1]: Use the definite article 'The', please.

3. Discussion of findings

The analysis of the two extracts reveals that ideas are enhanced, extended coherently and cohesively. The rate of the use of textual themes is 25.50% and 26.57% in extract one and two, respectively. Continuity elements such as *and, while, until, before, then*, etc. in clauses, 6, 18, 28, 25, 52, 77, 187, 210, show simultaneity and anticipated series of actions and events happening. This entails rashness people are caught in-between in time of war. There is no time to start and finish an action before beginning another. In clauses number 43, 50, 61, 83, 196, 100, 104 and 135 in extract one and 57, 71, 83, 84, 94, 234, and 249 in extract two, textual elements like *yet, but, if*, etc. explain incertitude, contradiction and too much conditions in cascade. This is verified in the following clauses: *but Olanna was not sure, But she did not really believe the soldiers would have much use for a child as young as Baby, But she could not leave without Arize, But his tone lacked the certitude she was used to. if it really was Abdulmalik to cite a few, if Baby were to die.*

Concerning Interpersonal Themes, findings proved that the narrative has 02.30% in extract 1 and 20.64% in extract 2. These are among others vocatives expressing exclamation, fear and urgency as it is exemplified in clauses (122, 130, 216, 232, 279 146). This can be felt in clauses such as: Nkem, her cough is getting better and her appetite will come back. This call direct to Nkem aims at getting his attention on a worrying situation, an urgency. Interrogative mood and polarity elements transpired in clauses (132, 163, 183, extract 1) and in clauses (35, 66, 85, 92, 292, extract 2) as an expression of inquiry for information on the happenings or as an answer to that inquiry, or as obedience to orders given.

As for Topical themes, the analysis showed that there are 302 Topical Themes in extract 1 and 301 in extract 2. There is such a variety of participants projected as topical themes. These are mainly human beings, things, animals, spirits and circumstances. Indeed, analysis exudes that Olanna the main female character appeared the most with a rate of extracts 18.87% in extract 1 and 30.20% in extract 2, as doer, behavior, senser etc. This is visible in clauses (1, 14, 50) such as *Olanna jumped each time, she screamed, she was mourning her money in the bank in Lagos*, and so forth. Mohamed, a moderate muslim Nigerian interfered to the rate of 06.62% in extract 1 in the side of Olanna his friend whom he saved from muslim murderers. He appeared as scrupulous person in the midst of rioters and killers. His scrupulosity is seen from his action, behaviors in sentences 122, 130, 132, 201, 244, 146 etc. where one can read: *Mohammed left and came back moments later, holding what looked like a pamphlet; He was already heading indoors He worried too much, did Mohammed; Mohammed started the car; Mohammed was dragging her, pulling her, his grasp hurting her arm; Mohammed pushed her into the car and then went around and got in; until he parked at the train station and shoved her onto a crowded train* and so forth. Ugwu, a graduate but house servant actualized 14.90% as main message unit. His participation in the process is twice higher than that of Mohammed. This shows the many a duty to execute as a servant in Master's house. Women occurred as topical theme at the rate of 02.64% in extract 1 and 04.30% in extract 2. This is a feeble category which are often main victims of violence as exemplified in clauses (56, 290, 297 etc.) in extract 1 : *a pregnant woman split open in Kano Somebody screamed. A woman fainted*. On the other side, men's occurrence as topical themes scored 09.30% particularly in extract 2. Generally, there are more females occurring as topical themes than males in the narrative. This tilt towards female characters as topical themes implies, on the one hand, that women live more experiences than men in profuse violence time, and on the other hand, it displays the author's feminist penchant in describing society and the course of events.

Besides, the story highlights more experiences lived by Igbo people or Biafrans than it does for the ones lived by Hausa or Nigerian people. Igbo people or Biafrans occurred as topical theme at the rate of 19.22% while Hausa or Nigerians hold 06.95% only. In extract 2, Igbo people or Biafran as topical theme occurred at the frequency of 04.65% and only 00.30% for Hausa or Nigerians. The horror of war under the form of bombing, dead bodies, fear and the likes were topicalized to the rate of 05.62% in extract 1 and 02.65% in the second extract. This horrifying situation is pictured in clauses (88, 155, 158) in extract 1 where one can read: *the knife wound on his head was; how frightened he looked; Igbo bodies are lying on Airport Road*, etc. Following the frequency of themes projected as main message units and the Rheme or complement, given the types of processes in which the two opponent participants were involved, it can be deduced that Ibo (Biafrans) are presented as victims, chassed as 'runaway goats', subjected to destruction, while Hausa people are presented as doers of awful actions. This is a fact as illustrated in clauses (34, 35, 103, 170,171): *The Igbo must go; The infidels must go; They (Hausa) are killing us (Igbo) like ants; Those madmen were chasing us like runaway goats*, and so forth. This reflects African war situations where most often, socio-political conflicts find fuel in religious, ethnographic and socio-cultural backgrounds, and this so far persists on the continent.

Circumstance of time and place that shaped the happenings were also put in position of topical theme as being of particular importance in the flow of events. Topical themes in extract 1 (03.64%) and in extract 2 (04.30%) attest this importance as it is

corroborated in clauses (13, 43, 69). These clauses state the following: *And in the silence of the damp underground that made her think of a grave; That night, she was silent; Ever since Mrs. Muokelu, who taught Elementary One at Akwakuma, had told her about the children forced into a truck by soldiers and returned at night with their palms chafed and bleeding from grinding cassava.* Any other topical themes remaining (animals, abstracts entities, objects etc.) do not have significance to the analysis though they show the narrator's care for holistic description of events in all dimension and environment.

Finally, it is worthwhile to notice that Human beings are the most involved in the processes developed by the author. This shows that the narrator is mainly concerned with narrating human experiences during this disastrous conflict. By this selection, the narrative valorized human life over material and other entities that could have been placed as main parts of message to convey.

Conclusion

Adichie's *Half a Yellow Sun* plotted historical events which have affected sociopolitical life in Nigeria in the late sixties. The analysis carried out in the light of systemic functional linguistics has helped to understand the novel in a different horizon. After thorough examination of topical themes as main message, it was found that the novel prioritizes human beings, especially Ibo or Biafrans as Topical Themes. They are the actors, sensors, behaviors, agents and carriers of facts or feelings expressed in the processes. Most of awful actions are directed on them. They are the ones who look for shelter, who starve, whose bodies lay in streets etc. Therefore, *Half a Yellow Sun* is foremost an account of nightmarish experiences lived by Eastern Nigerians in their secession adventure. Just like the recent Eastern Ethiopia crisis in the Tigré region, similarly in Cameroon and other part of the world, any minority engaging separation enterprise undergoes lonely treatment by central government forces, which in most cases are in position of force. Africa must rethink the ruling systems inherited from colonization, leading to loosely unprecedented chaos. Africans should reconsider African values which are even by far more democratic, thus promoting social justice. This will surely avoid banalizing human life in bloodsheds.

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