

**THE IMPORTANCE OF LITERATURE FOR SECURITY IN THE NIGER DELTA,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA:
A SYNTACTIC STUDY OF KAINE AGARY'S NOVEL, YELLOW-YELLOW.**

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Abstract

By virtue of its immense contributions to the stability and development of the society, literature is very important to every society. There is a close and complex relationship between literature, language and the society. The novelists like the other literary artists draw upon their personal experiences in the society as the raw materials, employing language to reflect the lives of the members of the society. Literary works are developed from the language patterns in the code. Such language patterning forms the nexus, which is one of the veritable tools deployed by the writers for the conveyance of their messages and visions. Literature has the power to influence the society, especially as a tool for social change, reformation and development. The Niger Delta region has been besieged by violence, unrest and insecurity as a result of the terrorism by the Niger Delta militants due to the destruction of their farmlands, water, fishes, animals and economic crops by oil spillages. Their means of livelihood are totally destroyed without compensation. Aggrieved by their deplorable conditions, the youths take up arms against the oil companies operating in the region and the government in protests. The insecurity has forced most oil companies to fold up, and most foreign investors have fled from the area, thereby affecting the Nigerian economy adversely. This is most serious because petroleum, the country's main source of revenue is obtained from the Niger Delta. The problem is further compounded by the neglect of the people, and the failure by those in authority to address the problem promptly. Agary's novel, *Yellow-Yellow* is, therefore, an attack on the oil companies and the government for the oppression, exploitation and injustice perpetuated against the Niger Deltans, and a call to the authorities concerned to address the problem with the urgency and seriousness it deserves, to ameliorate the sufferings of the people. This study examines and explicates Agary's deployment of language patterning, with the focus on the syntactic parameter, to convey the themes of the novel and the plights of the people. She also stresses the urgent need for the government and the oil companies to take urgent measures, so as to proffer a permanent solution to the problems of insecurity in the region. This is the only way to boost foreign investments, and promote economic development and sustainability in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Injustice, Insecurity, Economy, Development, Poverty*

Background to the Study

Literature is very important to every society by virtue of its immense contributions to the stability, reformation and development of the society. It is a reflection of the society, an avenue for the expression of human experiences, instructions, corrections, as well as a source of deriving pleasure. There is a close and complex relationship between literature, language and the society. Literature has the power to influence the society, especially as a tool for social change, reformation and development. It is the "widow through which creative writers peep and project into the totality of human experience" (Osunkentan, 2004:313). Tung as quoted by Adebayo, (1993) notes that "an artist concentrates on such everyday phenomena and produce works, which awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm and impel them to write and struggle to

transform their environment” (33). In satirical novels for example, the ills of individuals, a group of people or institutions are held up to ridicule through language, aimed at the reformation and development of the society generally. Novels grounded in facts have helped to reform the society in which they were written (Kennedy, 1987). In times of social upheaval and unrest, literature can act as a powerful weapon for the fight against oppressive ruling class, injustice and corruption as Kaine Agary does in her novel, *Yellow-Yellow*. Therefore, the relevance of literature goes beyond entertainment. The themes of the novel subsume the exploitation, destruction and environmental pollution of the Niger Delta region, poverty, corruption, injustice and violence.

Yellow Yellow, is a visionary construction of the Nigerian society aimed at exposing and solving the environmental, social and economic problems of Nigeria, especially as they affect security in the Niger Delta. The author also advances the measures to proffer permanent solution to the problems for peace reign, in order to promote economic development and sustainability. Although Agary discourages violence and destruction to lives and properties in the novel, she artistically conveys the idea that reformation or change can be achieved through resistance against oppressive systems, hence the protests by the Niger Delta youths.

Insecurity in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta situated in the south south geo-political zone of Nigeria is one of the world's largest wetlands, and Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producing country. The discovery of petroleum did not only boost Nigerian economy but the African economy. This is by virtue of its tremendous contributions to the growth of the Nigerian and African economy by extension. Ironically, the petroleum which ought to be a blessing to the people of the region has become their source of sorrow and problems due to petroleum pollution. The destruction done to their farmlands, water, animals, agricultural crops, vegetation and means of livelihood by oil spillages plunged the people into serious problems of health hazards, unemployment, and poverty and so on.

Moreover, the Nigerian government and the oil companies operating in the region are nonchalant towards the deplorable conditions of the Niger Deltans. They fail to protect the environment, the source of petroleum in pursuit of economic development and benefits. The disagreement over the distribution of oil revenue further compounds the problems. According to Enyeting, (2009) Human Rights Watch observes that while the “people of Niger Delta have faced the adverse effects of oil extraction, they have in general also failed to gain from the oil wealth” (55).

Despite the fact that the Niger Delta is the main source of Nigeria's wealth, no adequate and functional scientific measures are put in place to prevent or solve the problems of oil pollution and its devastating effects in the region. National priorities and interest of the country are on economic growth and development at the expense of environmental protection and the Niger Deltans. “The oil which has brought so much wealth to the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian State has at the same time brought to the people of the Niger Delta untold poverty, disease, persistent pollution ...” (Nwosu, 2009:546). Forming various militant groups, the aggrieved Niger Delta youths resort to violence against the oil companies and the government. They wrecked havoc on the companies, killing oil workers, kidnapping others for ransom and destroying oil installations.

The activities of the Niger Delta militants have taken a new and violent dimension with its adverse effects on Nigerians and the Nigerian economy. The situation demands urgent attention to arrest the ugly trend, for no sustainable development can thrive in an atmosphere of crisis and insecurity. Agary's novel, *Yellow-Yellow* is, therefore, an attack on the oil companies and the government that are perpetuating the acts of oppression and injustice against the Niger Deltans. It is also a call to the authorities to take urgent measures, so as to proffer a permanent solution to the problems of insecurity in the Niger Delta. This is the only way to foster peace and security, which are prerequisites for boosting foreign investments, and promoting economic development and sustainability in any country. This paper, therefore, focuses on the strategies for developing and sustaining the Nigerian and African economy as conveyed by Agary in *Yellow-Yellow*.

Sustainable Development

Segynola, (2003) asserts that sustainable development is the development that lasts and does not endanger the environment and the recourses therein for the present and future generations. He claims that development involves increasing the availability and widening the distribution of the basic life sustaining goods and services, and that the attainment of sustainable development will invariably result in poverty reduction. The major concern of sustainable development is, therefore, the alleviation of poverty aimed at improving the standard of living of the people with the provision of the basic necessities of life. Akinbode (2003) emphasizes that the most realistic approach to development in developing nations is integrated approach, which encourages equitable distribution of wealth. He stresses Aina's claim that sustainable development seeks to incorporate environmental and human needs in the pursuit of economic growth and developmental objectives. To achieve the goal of developing and sustaining the African economy, the environment, development and human needs must be addressed as Agary portrayed in the novel under study. This validates the usefulness of literature in the battle for socio-political and economic reformation, and the subsequent development of the society economically and otherwise.

Syntactic Patterning

Agary's success in conveying the themes of the novel does not only rely on the views she expresses in the novel, but also on how her linguistic choices pivot her exposal of the ugly and pathetic situations of the Niger Deltans, and projects her artistic visions. It is, therefore, necessary to emphasize the issue of the language used in the novel. The scientific study of language is referred to as linguistics, and in the linguistic structuring of *Yellow-Yellow*, syntax forms a vital nexus deployed by the author to convey meanings and messages.

In this paper, we examine some of the syntactic forms and expound how Agary deploys them in the novel to convey her themes with the following examples.

Mood System

Mood reveals the various functions of speeches in discourse. Halliday (1970) sees mood as that aspect of the interpersonal function of language indicating the speech roles that characters adopt in their desire to communicate. The role may be that of declaring, questioning, commanding and exclaiming. We examine these sentence types bearing in mind that every English sentence serves a particular purpose determined by contextual and situational variations.

Declarative Sentences

Agary deploys the declarative functional sentence type to convey her artistic visions in the text. Heffernan, and Lincoln, (1986) opine that declarative sentences are sentences that make statements or assertions, stating facts that cannot be doubted. The discourse function of a declarative sentence is to convey information as exemplified below:

1. I left them and ran to my mother's farm ... I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its part. And so it was that in a single day, my mother lost her main source of substance. (4)
2. The community took the matter up with the oil company that owned the pipes but they said that ... they were not going to pay any compensation for all the destruction that the burst pipes have caused.(4)
3. In my juvenile mind, I thought he would come to me and fall desperately in love with me and rescue me from my colourless existence. (21)

In extract 1 above, Agary conveys the unfortunate plights of the people of the Niger Delta with the deployment of declarative sentences. She expresses the theme of environmental pollution, the destructions it has done to the people, which have subjected them to poverty, unemployment, hunger, diseases, pains and death.

In sample 2, the author portrays the injustice and oppression meted out to the people by the owners of the oil companies and their failure to compensate them for their losses. Instead of coming to the aid of the Deltans, the owners of the oil companies neglect them to suffer untold hardship, unemployment and starvation.

In excerpt 3, Agary conveys the theme of hopelessness among the Niger Delta youths as a result of the devastating effects of oil spillages on their lands, and the neglect of their communities by the government and the oil companies. The people have become so frustrated that life is meaningless to them. Poised to leave the villages by all means like every other youth, Zilayefa, the authorial voice in the novel expresses her need of a messiah to rescue her to Port Harcourt.

Interrogative Sentences

Interrogative functional sentences are deployed to make inquires. Agary utilizes the following sentences to convey her themes of unemployment, injustice, corruption and frustration as exemplified below:

4. To do what? ...Who do you know there?...Where will you stay? (43)
5. I had heard enough debates played out in that same living room about the Itsekiri and Ijaw conflict in Warri. Who owned the land? Who were the tenants? Who deceived whom? In what year? (157)

Zilayefa informs her mother of her plan to relocate to Port Harcourt without prior arrangement, friends or relations to accommodate her. Expressing her displeasure and surprise, her mother asks her the questions in sample 4. Agary captures in this example the plight of the frustrated Delta youths, who leave their villages without proper arrangements. She also reiterates the problem of urban drift prevalent in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta. Most people flock to the cities in search of greener pastures. The message inherent in this sample is the high rate of poverty, hardship and unemployment in the rural communities, and the need for the government and the oil companies to make life more meaningful for the people. This can be achieved by the development of the rural communities, provision of basic social amenities and gainful employment for

the teeming youths. These measures will go a long way to solving the problems of urban drift and youth restiveness in the region. Moreover, such youths can contribute their quota to boost the economic development of the region.

With the interrogative construction in sample 5, the author depicts and denounces the politics, corruption and tribalism involved in the distribution of funds in the Niger Delta by the Federal Government. This has led to incessant clashes over land ownership among the communities, especially between the Itsekiris and the Ijaws, resulting in loss of lives and valuable properties. This situation has constituted serious problems of insecurity and losses in the area, and it is an impediment to the economic growth of the region and Nigeria in general. Therefore, the government has to take drastic measures to arrest the ugly situation, and create an enabling environment to boost investment and the Nigerian economy.

Exclamatory Functional Sentences

Exclamatory sentences are deployed to express emotion of fear, disgust, anger, anxiety, surprise among others. We examine Agary's deployment of such sentences to convey her artistic visions in the text with the following examples.

6. "Ninety-six naira to one U.S. dollar. I remember the days when it was two U.S. dollars to one naira. They will kill us in this country! (110)
7. Not like that! (128)

The exclamatory sentence in extract 6 portrays Agary's regrets over the very poor value of the Nigerian currency, the naira, compared to the US dollar. She asserts that the exchange rate formally at two dollars to one naira is now at ninety-six naira to one U.S. dollar. The author concludes that those in position of authority in Nigeria would kill Nigerians if the value of the naira continues to depreciate. This is because the devaluation of the naira has serious adverse effects on the Nigerian economy and the Nigerians in general. The poor value of the naira is one of the most serious issues that the government should address to ameliorate the sufferings of Nigerians both in Nigeria and abroad. This is very important for the achievement of the goal of developing and sustaining the Nigerian economy.

Parallelism

Parallelism is a literary device which depends on the principle of equivalence. The connection of the equivalence is usually that of similarity or contrast as the case may be. Yankson, (1987) opines that parallelism is "the repetition of grammatical patterns in a literary text for a particular artistic effect" (14). In the text under study, major features of parallel structures deployed by the novelist is the use of pattern and lexical repetitions with the component parts having a common syntactic function.

Pattern Repetition

Parallel features juxtapose related ideas or words to give a natural semantic connection. In her attempt to adequately convey her messages, Agary makes extensive use of pattern repetition in the text as exemplified below:

8. Despite not having any official political opponents, the head of states succession plan was in such a high gear that, in an attempt to give this campaign an air of legitimacy, there were groups rallying in his favour. They were people organising the youths and others organising the market women... (110)
9. They talked a little about...plans for addressing youth restiveness in the Niger Delta... and most importantly, lucrative businesses to create wealth for Ijaw youths. (121-122)

The novelist deploys pattern repetition in sample 8 to convey the idea of bad governance in African countries, and to ridicule the African leaders, who hold on to power. They go to any length to succeed themselves, squandering public funds for campaigns in order to be re-elected. This has dealt serious blows on the Nigerian economy, as public funds that would have been utilized for vital projects for the benefit of the citizens is diverted for political campaigns. On assumption of positions, such leaders transfer financial burden on the people, increasing their taxes in the bid to generate revenue, having squandered the public funds for election.

Soon after Admiral Kenneth Amalayefa's party, the visitors discuss several issues among which are the plans to address youth restiveness, and, most importantly, creative businesses to create wealth for the Ijaw youths among others in extract 9. Agary deploys pattern repetition here to reiterate the seriousness of, and the need to address with urgency and promptness the problems of militancy and insecurity in the Niger Delta. This is very important because meaningful development and sustainability of the Nigerian and Africa economy can only be achieved in peaceful environment. This sample confirms our earlier assertion that peace and security are important prerequisites for developing and sustaining the economy.

Lexical Repetition

Agary repeats some lexical items in the novel as a form of run-in towards the communicative core, projecting the patterns as meaning potentials to the themes of the text. Here are examples:

10. They needed money to pay the hospital bills of some of their friends who had been injured and money to bail out others who had been detained by the police. (157)
11. The water that flowed with streak of blue, purple, and red, as drops of oil escaped from the pipelines that moved the wealth from beneath my land and into the pockets of the select few who ruled Nigeria was the same water I drank. (39)

In extract 10, the novelist repeats the lexical item “money” for emphasis. Agary stresses the problem of poverty and lack among the Niger Deltans. This place so much demand on Retired Admiral Amalayefa, a concerned Ijaw businessman. Although he provides the money, he is worried about the implication of another Ijaw/Itsekiri clash. Admiral's worry is due to the damages such clash can do to the people, their region and the Nigerian economy. The author also deploys repetition of the lexical item “water” in sample 11 for emphasis, to portray the problems of water pollution and its adverse effects, and to condemn corruption among Nigerian leaders. She stresses the fact that the wealth from the Niger Delta is controlled by the corrupt Nigerian leaders to the detriment of the Deltans from whose land the wealth accrues. To proffer lasting solution to the water and land pollution, the government should pursue adequate environmental management policies in the Niger Delta.

The Verbal Group/Tenses

Our major focus here is on the tense features of the verbal group. Tense is a feature of verb indicating the time of an action, which could be present, past or future. A novelist captures his or her events through tenses. Agary's use of these tenses serves to achieve the transitivity function of the verbs, that is, showing the relationship between the nominal and the verbal elements in clause structure as exemplified bellow:

Past Tense

12. What was the minister of petroleum doing? Despite being a man from the Niger Delta, there he was, sitting and feeding fat at the same table as the devils of government and oil companies and forgetting the starvation in his own home. (111)
13. Young boys threatened to rough up the Amananaowei and his elders because rumours, probably true, had reached their ears that the Amananaowei and his elders had received monetary compensation, meant for the villagers from the oil companies and shared it among themselves. (40)
14. They talked about how the oil companies were using the Nigerian arm forces...to terrorise and sometimes kill innocent villagers who questioned the inequality of their situations living in squalor while barrels of oil pumped out of their land provided the luxury that surrounded the oil workers and the elite of Nigeria. (158)

The novelist deploys the past tense form in samples 12 and 13 to denounce corruption and betrayal among the people of the Niger Delta. She also ridicules the Minister of Petroleum, the rulers and others who embezzle the money paid as compensation to the rural communities. Their acts of corruption are impediments to the economic development of the communities. Unaware of such compensations paid by the oil companies, the youths take up arms against them and the government in protests. The consequence is that the region is besieged by serious violent crisis, social unrest and insecurity. This has forced most oil companies to fold up or vacate the area. Most foreign investors have fled from the area, thereby affecting the Nigerian economy adversely. Therefore, to foster peace and create enabling environment for the promotion of economic development and sustainability, the Nigerian government should take the problems of the Niger Delta as a top priority.

In sample 13, Zilayefa conveys her urgent need of employment, the neglect of the rural communities and the non implementation of the developmental programmes for skill acquisition organised by government agencies in her village. Such neglect has contributed to youth restiveness, economic underdevelopment of the rural communities and the subsequent urban drift of the youths to the cities. The author also exposes the corrupt activities of the officers of the government agencies, who embezzle and divert the funds meant to develop the rural communities. They also neglect some communities due to tribalism. The main setback in this type of strategy "is the accentuation of uneven development in the already economically polarised country like Nigeria" (Segynola, 2003:260). The best solution to this problem is thorough supervision and monitoring of the activities of the agencies by the government, to ensure even distribution of the projects. Moreover, the Deltans for whom the projects are meant should be involved in their implementation. Example 14 also in the past tense reveals the bitterness of the Niger Deltans who are subjected to abject poverty in midst of plenty in their land, while the privileged Nigerians in positions of authority and the oil workers live in affluence and luxury.

Present and Future Tenses

15. "The government that should be enforcing the laws to protect us in the Niger Delta is infact putting our heads on the chopping blocks for the oil companies to finish the job. (137)
16. "Lord, take my soul, but the struggle continues". (34)
17. I just want to go and try my luck and see if maybe I can find work somewhere... I imagine that I could learn a skill like sewing through one of the skill-acquisition programmes organised by the government agency set up to address the development of the Niger Delta. (43)

In sample 15, Agary conveys the unfair treatment of the Niger Deltans by Nigerian government. In cases of oil spillages and the destruction suffered by the people, the government is expected to promptly take up the matter with the oil companies concerned. But reverse is the case in Nigeria because of bad governance. The leaders, who do not have the interest of the people they ought to protect at heart, fail in their responsibilities to them, neglecting and abandoning them to suffer their losses.

Sample 16 portrays the commitment and readiness of the Niger Deltans like Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogonis executed by Gen. Sani Abacha to continue their common struggle, for the development of their region. The extract which is the last statement of Saro-Wiwa before his execution, spurs the youths into actions at the slightest provocation despite all the efforts by the government to stop them. They chant "*Aluta continua.*" The execution of some and mass exodus of these able bodied young Ogonis is a great loss to Nigeria in terms of human resources, and it is an impediment to economic growth of Nigeria. The message inherent in this example is that killing the Niger Delta militants is not a solution to the problem of militancy in the region. Rather, the government should develop the region, create job opportunities, and establish industries and projects to uplift the lives of the people. This way, crisis, unemployment and poverty will be eradicated for peace to reign, thereby creating enabling environment for economic development and sustainability.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the syntactic patterning is a veritable structuring device which enables a writer to convey his/her messages. We have established in this paper that Kaine Agary's deployment of significant and functional syntactic forms in her novel has aided her in conveying her themes of exploitation, destruction and environmental pollution of the Niger Delta, and the solution to the problems. It is our hope that the Nigerian Government and the oil companies operating in the region will implement the recommendations advanced in this paper, in order to proffer a lasting solution to the nagging problems of crisis and insecurity in the Niger Delta. This is the only way to make peace and create an enabling environment for the achievement of the goal of developing and sustaining the Nigerian and by extension the African economy.

Recommendations

1. The government should take drastic measures to arrest the problems of crises and insecurity in the Niger Delta to make peace and create an enabling environment to boost foreign investments, and promote economic development and sustainability in Africa.
2. The government and the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta should provide basic infrastructures, gainful employment and social amenities in the region.
3. In pursuit of economy growth and development, the environment and social needs of the people should be addressed.
4. There should be equitable distribution of wealth and accessibility to social and credit facilities among the people.
5. The government should pursue adequate environmental management policies in the Niger Delta region.
6. The Nigerian government should take the issue of the Niger Delta as a top priority considering the importance of the region to the Nigerian economy.

7. The government should stop the killing of the Niger Delta militants; instead they should provide gainful employment to empower them.
8. The government should establish rural development programmes and projects to improve the quality of the lives of the people in the rural communities.
9. The Niger Deltans for whom developmental projects and programmes are meant should be involved in the implementation of the programmes.

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