Exploring the Theme of Cultural Identity in the Poem "Song of Lawino": The Use of Halliday's Transitivity in Revealing Ideologies

Meissa Larbaoui*

Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Djillali Liabes University BP 22000, Sidi Bel Abbes, Algeria

Corresponding Author: Meissa Larbaoui, E-mail: meissa.larbaoui@univ-sba.dz

ABSTRACT

The individual's identity is crucial in his/her life in countless fields, especially the social, political, and economic ones. It is constructed by different cultural elements: ethnicity, history, traditions, language, religion, literature, etc. In the colonial period, the elites tried to erase the cultural identity of the colonized nations and forced the assimilation of their own culture. This image was highly seen in Africa during colonialism. Consequently, in postcolonialism; different Africans were not aware of their real identity and chose to westernize their culture. Literature was one of the ways that myriad African writers used to revive the real cultural identity of black Africans. Okot p'Bitek wrote a song that tackled the differences between the culture of the Africans and that of the Western people. It was about a conflict between a married couple who divorced because the man was deeply affected by Western culture. This paper attempts to analyze the poem by using the linguistic framework of transitivity with a qualitative research method. Halliday introduced the framework in the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar. It is generally used as a strategy in the stylistic approach since it deals with the analysis of the lexical and grammatical structures to interpret the implicit meaning of discourse. The findings revealed that the African and Western people were different in several cultural elements: beauty care, religion, education, politics, dancing, and time value. In other words, the verbs, adjectives, and other linguistic choices that were extracted from the different process types of the transitivity system had distinct and contrasting functions. Thus, the results showed that transitivity facilitated the detection of the linguistic elements used by the writer to describe the cultural identity of the African and Western nations, which helped in getting through the writer's inner thoughts, feelings, and ideologies. In the end, it was suggested to implement transitivity in the teaching of literature as a strategy to trigger students' critical thinking and demystify the analysis of literary discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is composed of language, which creates a strong relationship between the linguistic elements and the literary texts. In other words, writers make different language choices to express themselves and convey meanings. These choices may belong to grammar, syntax, semantics, lexis, and many other branches of linguistics. Therefore, the study of these linguistic choices is a way that leads to the interpretation of literary texts. In this regard, Thompson stated, "If we want to examine what a piece of language is intended to do (i.e. its function), we cannot avoid thinking in terms of choice. Clearly, speakers do not go round producing de-contextualized grammatically correct sentences: they have reasons for saying something, and for saying it in the way they do" (2014:8-9). Halliday's transitivity analysis is one of the strategies that analyze the linguistic choices of the written and spoken discourse, and it is highly used in the literary one. In literary texts, the writers' intentions and ideologies are expressed implicitly which can complicate the task for readers to grasp the meaning. In this respect, Hart claimed

that "…transitivity can reveal patterns in a discourse which, it is argued, are indicative of ideology" (2014:23). Thus, this paper aims to demonstrate the role of the transitivity system in revealing the writer's ideology and facilitating the readability of literary discourse. This will be manifested through the analysis of Okot p'Bitek's work "Song of Lawino" by focusing on his perspective toward the main theme of the poem, which is the cultural identity of the African and Western nations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is composed of two interrelated concepts: culture and identity. The definition of culture varies from one field to another. For example, there is Culture with a big 'C' that is considered as a general term gathering the different areas, such as poetry, music, gastronomy, etc. However, scholars and researchers of several disciplines, like linguistics, psychology and semiotics usually use culture

Exploring the Theme of Cultural Identity in the Poem "Song of Lawino": The Use of Halliday's Transitivity in Revealing Ideologies

21

with a small 'c', which is defined as "the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and values of groups of inter-acting people" (Bennett, 1998: 2). Therefore, culture is related to the individual's aspects and attitudes shared with members of the same community.

Concerning the concept of identity, in the past, it was regarded as the self of the individual with no reference to the outer world. Yet, in the modern period, identity refers to the exposure of the self to society. In other words, the individual acquires his/her identity through the interaction with the others by assimilating the cultural elements that shape his/her identity (Hall et al., 1996: 597-598).

Culture and identity were combined as one concept, i.e., cultural identity. This term started to be used when identity was no longer considered as isolated from the outer world but rather related to the others (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016: 15). Thus, "Cultural identity refers to identification with, or sense of belonging to, a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion." (Hsueh-Hua Chen, 2014: 1). The concept was used in different areas of research, especially literature (Skulj, 2000: 2).

Cultural Identity and Literature

Cultural identity is about the individuals' inner self and their relation to the social group to which they belong. However, their identity can be affected by other cultures of different social groups (Levin, 1973: 152). This phenomenon was highly seen during colonialism and post-colonialism, a good example for this would be the case of the Africans; they were assimilated into the culture of the elite during colonialism, which made them unaware of their own identity and traditions. In post-colonialism, the African writers used literature to resuscitate the real cultural identity of their nation that was buried by the elites (Ohaegbu, 1977: 27). For that reason, literature is a source of knowledge of the African culture and the reflection of facts of their identity, which were played and manipulated by the elites (Diop, 2012: 226).

Okot p'Bitek was one of these African writers, in his song of Lawino, he tried to describe the suffering of an African woman who lost the love and respect of her husband because he decided to westernize his culture. He divorced his wife who was still holding on to her African traditions and beliefs, and married a Western woman (Wanambisi, 1981: 32). In this song, the writer portrayed the African and Western identities by describing the different cultural elements that contributed to them, such as education, religion, social life, politics, etc. Most of the time, the writer attributed to the African culture the adjectives that represent bravery and loyalty, whereas the Western culture was described as odious and aggressive (Ojaide, 1992: 46). Therefore, the analysis of the linguistic choices used in the poem can help in revealing the cultural identity of both nations from the writer's perspective.

Halliday's Transitivity Analysis

According to Halliday, language has three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction is divided into experiential and logical. The first one is about the use of language to talk about different human experiences, whether actions or feelings, and create new ones. The second one is related to the logical connection between the different structures of language present in the discourse (Haratyan, 2011: 261). The interpersonal metafunction represents the social relationships and the different interactions that happen between individuals in different contexts (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006: 228). The last metafunction is related to the organization of language into a cohesive and coherent text in both speaking and writing (Liu, 2014: 1238).

The experiential metafunction is represented through the system of transitivity. This system is a description of the outer and inner experiences of the language user that can be actions, events, feelings, etc. (Halliday, 2014:214). Therefore, transitivity classifies the different processes that happen when using language to represent the experience of the participant in a particular context. In literature, this classification of transitivity helps in identifying the linguistic choices of the writer and developing a better understanding of the characters' role, which in turn reflects the ideology of the writer. There are six process types in the transitivity system, which are explained in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, material process deals with actions and events in a clause, and behavioral process aims at describing a participant behaving in a certain way; for instance, jumping. In mental process, the focus is on the inner self of the participant; it can be feelings, emotions, thoughts, etc. Besides, there is verbal process type that deals with verbs, like say, state, mention, tell, etc. Concerning relational process, it aims at creating relationships between two entities and it is divided into two different modes: attribution and identification. The former is used to describe an entity by attributing different adjectives; whereas, the latter refers to an entity by stating directly his/her identity. The last type is existential process, it is about mentioning something that existed in a clause and it generally starts with 'there'. In addition to the mentioned process types, the circumstantial elements are also part of the transitivity system and serve in analyzing clauses. There are different types of circumstances; for instance, time, manner, location, etc., (Bustam, 2011: 30).

Table 1. Process types of halliday's transitivity (halliday, 1985: 131)

Process type	Category meaning	Participants
Material:	'Doing'	Actor, Goal
Action	Doing	'Behaver'
Event	'Happening	
Behavioral:	'Behaving'	
Mental:	'Sensing'	
Perception	'Seeing'	Senser
Affection	'Feeling'	Phenomenon
Cognition	'Thinking'	
verbal:	'Saying'	Sayer, target
Relational:	'Being'	Token, value
Attribution	'Attributing'	Carrier, attribute
Identification	'Identifying'	Identified, identifier
Existential:	'Existing'	Existent

The use of transitivity helps in revealing the different meanings that are present in a clause (Suryatini, 2014: 2). Hence, discourse analysts have been using this strategy to analyze myriad types of spoken and written texts, especially literary discourse. In literature, the ideology of the writer is reflected implicitly through the different linguistic choices and grammatical structures that he/she makes. Thus, transitivity can be used as a strategy to clarify the literary components put by the writer in the discourse (Iwamoto, 2007: 67-68).

METHOD

A qualitative research design was employed in this study. The transitivity system was used as a strategy to interpret different stanzas that were extracted from the poem in "Song of Lawino". Each stanza was analyzed according to the process it represents in a clause. First, the actions and events that were mentioned by the author were classified in material process. Next, the feelings, thoughts, and senses of the characters were identified in mental process. Then, the indirect and direct speeches were placed in verbal process. After that, the descriptions and identifications of the characters were put in relational process. Following that, the behaviors of the characters were classified in behavioral process. Finally, the existing phenomena that were mentioned by the writer were identified in existential process. In addition to the mentioned steps, the participants' role in the clause and the different types of circumstantial elements that contribute to meaning were pointed out and interpreted according to the context. The analyses were focused on several cultural allusions of the Western and African identities that were stated by the writer in the poem which in turn represented different cultural categories.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed and summarized in tables where each one was representing a process of the six types of the transitivity framework. The name of the participants, the type of process, and the circumstantial elements that were used in the clause were mentioned below each element of the chosen stanza.

Material process expresses actions performed by characters. It describes how women took care of their physical appearance in a different way. In Table 2, the two last stanzas reflect the idea of religion in both cultures.

Mental process expresses the inner self of the characters, whether feelings or thoughts about something or someone. In Table 3, the feelings of both Lawino and her husband Ocol are described. Furthermore, the education of Lawino is referred by the writer in mental process.

Relational process is based on identifying the characters and attributing to them different adjectives. In Table 4, political and religious characters are described according to their cultural identity. Education is again indicated by the writer.

Verbal process reveals what the characters said in the discourse. As shown in Table 5, Lawino reported what her husband Ocol was telling her after joining the Western culture.

Table 2. Stanzas of material process

Participant 1	Process	Participant 2	Circumstance
She	Dusts	The ash dirt	Over her face
Actor	Material	Goal	Location
Young girls whose breasts are just emerging	Smear	Shea butter	On their bodies
Actor	Material	Goal	Location
Ocol	Condemns	Diviner-priests and Acoli herbalists	/
Actor	Material	Goal	/
He	Gave	it to the people to drink!	/
Actor	Material	Goal	/

Table 3. Stanzas of mental process

Participant 1	Process	Participant 2	Circumstance
I	Cry	Over my husband	whose head is lost
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon	Manner
Husband, you	Despise	Me	now
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon	Time
I	Do not know	The rules of health	/
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon	/
I	Do not understand	The way of foreigners	/
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon	/

Table 4. Stanzas of relational process

Participant 1	Process	Participant 2	Circumstance
He	Is	Clever	like white man
Carrier	Relational	Attribute	Comparison
Ignorance	Stands	Like an elephant	There
Carrier	Relational	Attribute	Location
They	Are	all wizards	/
Identified	Relational	Identifier	/
time	Is not	(stupidly) split up into seconds and minutes	In the wisdom of the Acoli / stupidly
Identified	Relational	Identifier	Location/ Manner
The stomach	Seems to be	A powerful force	For joining political parties
Identified	Relational	Identifier	Cause

Therefore, the most mentioned character in this process is Ocol.

Exploring the Theme of Cultural Identity in the Poem "Song of Lawino": The Use
of Halliday's Transitivity in Revealing Ideologies

23

Table 5. Stanzas of verbal process

Participant 1	Process	Participant 2	Verbiage	Circumstance
He	Says	/	Terrible things about my mother	/
Sayer	Verbal	/	Verbiage	/
He	Says	/	Rubbish	/
Sayer	Verbal	/	Verbiage	/
We	Recited	The prayers	/	For saying yes and the prayer of love, the prayer of trust
Sayer	Verbal	Target	/	Cause

Behavioral process demonstrates both the inner and outer world of the characters. In Table 6, the author compared between the dance of the African and Western cultures.

In Table 7, existential process type indicates that something was missing or not existing in Ocol's brother and wife.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATIONS

The writer used his literary piece to describe the real identity of the Africans, as was the aim of many post-colonial works (Ohaegbu, 1997:27). His linguistic choices reflected his ideology about the African and Western cultures, and transitivity made the task easier to detect the implicit intentions ((Iwamoto, 2007: 67-68). In material process, the writer described how women of both cultures keep their body and face beautiful. He used the verb 'dust' to talk about the way a Western woman did her makeup; he inferred that she covered herself with a big quantity of cosmetic products, which made her beauty look unnatural and dirty. On the other hand, Lawino put natural products 'shea butter' and the writer chose the verb 'smear' for Lawino's action, this means that she put messily the substance on her face. This implies that Africans take care of their body not to look beautiful as the Western women but to keep it healthy.

Concerning religion, Ocol was portrayed as having no interest in the African beliefs but rather he was newly attached to Christianity that represented the religion of the white man. The author developed this idea by attributing to the character 'Ocol' the verb 'condemn', which expressed a high degree of disapproval for the diviner-priests and Acoli herbalists who were African religious men. On the other hand, Ocol was the actor in a church where he gave cups of human blood for people to drink. The author ended that stanza with an exclamation mark '!' implying that the action of Ocol was considered weird in the African culture. This idea was also emphasized in relational process where Lawino identified the Protestants as 'wizards'; the identification mode was used instead of the attributive one to make it look like it was really who they were. In verbal process, Lawino described herself and people from her culture reciting the prayers, and she used a circumstantial element of cause to express that in their culture, the reason behind praying was love and trust. Therefore, the author portrayed the Western religion as strange and meaningless whereas he identified the African religion as sincere and affectionate.

Education is also one of the most dominant themes that contribute to revealing the African and Western identity. In relational process, Lawino attributed the adjective 'clever' to Ocol by comparing him to the white man. This implied that the

Table 6. Stanzas of Behavioral Process

Participant 1	Process	Participant 2	Circumstance
They	Dance	/	Silently/ like wizards
Behaver	Behavioral	/	Manner/ comparison
You	Dance and you sing	Provocative songs	With confidence
Behaver	Behavioral	Range (complement)	Manner

Table 7. Stanzas of existential process

Process	Participant	Circumstance
There is	Something wrong	With his brother's head
Existential	Existent	Location
There is	No brain	In it
Existential	Existent	Location

Western people are characterized by the quality of cleverness, and the fact that the author referred only to the white man means that this quality did not exist among the Africans instead, they were considered ignorant. The author reveals the same idea in mental process; he used verbs of cognition 'know' and 'understand' with the character 'Lawino' but he accompanied them with negation to stress the idea of ignorance among the African people. Moreover, in the existential process, Ocol complained about both his brother and African wife who were portrayed as having nothing interesting in their heads, i.e., ignorant.

The emotional state of the characters was also mentioned by the writer. This kind of feeling was generally classified in the mental process since this last concerns the inner part of the language user including emotions (Halliday, 1985:131). Lawino was crying because her husband abandoned her; she was still in love with him, and she was suffering from his loss. On the contrary, Ocol despised his wife for holding on the African traditions, and Lawino finished the stanza by using a circumstantial element of time 'now', which indicates that Ocol was not feeling that way towards her before plunging into the Western culture. Ocol's feelings are also expressed through verbal process where all the verbiage (what he said) were a kind of insults to Lawino and her family who were still holding on their cultural identity. Therefore, the writer implied that the Western culture brought nothing but pain and hatred to the African people.

Politics is a crucial element in the cultural identity of any nation. In relational process, Western politicians were identified as joining political parties only to fill in their empty stomach, and the author expressed this idea by referring to the money and goods of the African nations.

The author mentioned other cultural elements in the song that reflected the identity of both nations. He; for instance, described the way they dance in behavioral process. The Western people were dancing silently, and they were compared to wizards just to express that their silent way of dancing is odd and opposed to Lawino's culture. On the other hand, the Africans made more noise when they danced since in behavioral verbs 'dancing and singing' were used together; therefore, they did them simultaneously.

Time is used differently in myriad cultures, and it has a distinct value over the world. In relational process, time was identified by what it was not rather than what it was. the negation used implies that time was not counted by minutes and seconds in the African culture but it was the case somewhere else, i.e., Western nations. He also used the circumstance of manner 'stupidly' to show that the Africans considered the value of time less important in their culture comparing to the Western people.

It was claimed that the writer attributed positive descriptions to the African culture and criticized the Western one (Ojaide, 1992: 46), however, the results proved that he didn't avoid mentioning the negative points of his own culture.

CONCLUSION

The use of the transitivity system proved to be a useful strategy in analyzing literary discourse. It helped in identifying p'Bitek's ideologies on the African and Western cultural identity with religion, education, politics, art, time value, emotional expression, and beauty care. The description of the mentioned elements revealed that the author did not imply that the African culture is perfect whereas the Western one is worthless since he mentioned some negative points about the Africans; for instance, ignorance. Thus, p'Bitek intended to transmit the message to Ocol and other Africans who rejected their identity, that they should hold on their native culture despite its imperfections because it remains who they really are. The transitivity strategy can be implemented in the syllabus of students of literature since it showed its significant contribution in analyzing the different ideologies and implicit meanings of the literary discourse.

REFERENCES

Bennett, M, J. (1998). *Intercultural communication: A current perspective*. In Milton J. Bennett (Ed.), Basic concepts of intercultural communication: Selected readings (pp. 1-20). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Bustam, M, R. (2011). "Analyzing Clause by Halliday's Transitivity System". *Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 6 (1), 22-34. Retrieved from https://staffold.najah.edu/sites/default/files/Functional%20grammar%20processes.pdf

Diop, S. (2012). "African Elites and their Post-colonial Legacy: Cultural, Political and Economic Discontent – by Way of Literature". *Africa Development / Afrique Et Développement*, 37(4), 221-235. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/afrdevafrdev.37.4.221

Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). An introduction to functional grammar. London: Arnold

Halliday, M.A.K, and Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen. Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar. 4th ed., Hodder Arnold, 2014.

Hall, S., Held, D., Thompson, K., & Hubert, D. (Eds.). (1996). Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Haratyan, F. (2011). "Halliday's SFL and Social Meaning. Historical and Social Sciences". IPEDR, 17, 260-264. Retrieved fromhttp://www.ipedr.com/vol17/49-CHHSS%202011-H10074.pdf

Hart, C. (2014). Discourse, Grammar and Ideology: Functional and Cognitive Perspectives. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Hsueh-Hua Chen, V. (2014). "Cultural Identity". Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue, 22. Retrieved from https://centerforinterculturaldialogue.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/key-concept-cultural-identity.pdf

Ibrahim F. A. & heuer J.R. (2016). "Cultural and Social Justice Counseling: Client-Specific Interventions". In Marsella A.J (Eds), International and Cultural Psychology, 15-49. Switzerland: Springer.

Iwamoto, N. (2007). "Stylistic and Linguistic Analysis of a Literary Text Using Systemic Functional Grammar". *Society of Humanities* 151(162), 61-96. Retrieved from http://human.kanagawa-u.ac.jp/gakkai/publ/pdf/no162/16209.pdf

Kress, G, R., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2nded). London: Routledge.

Levin, H. (1973). "Literature and Cultural Identity". *Comparative Literature Studies*, 10(2), 139-156. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40246146

Liu, M. (2014). "The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning". *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4 (6), 1238-1242. doi:10.4304/tpls.4.6.1238-1242

OHAEGBU, A. (1977). "The African Writer and the Problem of Cultural Identity". *Présence Africaine*, (101/102), nouvelle série, 25-37. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/24350260

Ojaide, T. (1992). "Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity". *African Studies Review*, 35(3), 43-57. doi:10.2307/525127

P'bitek, O. (1984). *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*. London: Heinemann,

Skulj, J. (2000). "Comparative Literature and Cultural Identity". *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 2 (4) 2-7. https://doi.org/ 10.7771/1481-4374.1088

Suryatini, K, L. (2014). A*nalysis of English Transitivity Process with Reference to the Witch of Portobello by Paulo Coelho*. English Department Faculty of Letters and Cultures: Udayana University.

Thompson, G. (2014). Introducing Functional Grammar. Routledge.

Wanambisi, M. N. "Thought and technique in the poetry of Okot p'Bitek". (1981). ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library. Atlanta, Georgia. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2702&context=dissertations