

REPETITION AS A COHESIVE DEVICE IN MARIAMA BA'S "SO LONG A LETTER"

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ABSTRACT

*Linguistic scholars agree that both coherence and Cohesion are principal ingredients in the creation of a text. It is safe to say that both concepts have received wide attention regarding the study of a text. As used in this paper, the term text refers to a piece of utterance, be it spoken or written, whose part we put together to form a "unified semantic and syntactic whole" (Babalola, 2013). While the semantic whole refers to a semantic property of discourse, which is based on the interpretation of each sentence vis-a-vis other sentences, the syntactic whole essentially refers to the relations of meaning generated by the agreement of clauses and sentences within a discourse. This paper, in accord with Olowe (1988) and Halliday and Hassan (1976), therefore, centers on Cohesion, which encompasses the relations which is obtainable among the components of discourse (in this case, a piece of a literary text). Emphasis is laid here on cohesive lexical relation in the study of Mariama Ba's iconoclastic masterpiece – **So Long a Letter**. The study reveals that the author brilliantly and appropriately deployed the repetitive cohesive devices in her work, making it most successful.*

Keywords: Repetition, Cohesion, Coherence, Cohesive Device, Mariama Ba, So Long a Letter.

INTRODUCTION

Cohesion's concept refers essentially to the relations of meaning generated by the coming together of clauses and sentences within a discourse (literary text). It covers the relations which obtain among the various components of discourse. These relations are signaled by certain lexical and grammatical features that reflect the semantic level's textual structure. This researcher, agreeing with Olowe (1988), believes that Cohesion's concept is a semantic one and it refers to the relation of meaning that exists within the text, which equally defines it as a text. Therefore, Cohesion occurs where the explication of some elements of discourse is dependent on that of another. This means that one presupposes the other in that it cannot be decoded effectively except by recourse to the other. The result of this is the setting up of a relation of Cohesion, then the two elements-presupposing and the presupposed, are integrated into a text.

"Cohesion, according to Halliday and Hassan (1976), 'is a semantic relation between an element in the text and some other elements that are crucial in the interpretation of it. The grammatical structure in no way determines its location in the text'. Again, it (Cohesion) refers to the range of possibilities that exist for linking something with what has gone before. It is concerned with how the meaning of the element is interpreted. However, the success or otherwise of any piece of writing or speech inadequately being cohesive depends on the following factors: linguistic

ingenuity of the writer, the nature of discourse and the stylo-pragmatic features that govern the tenor the lesson. Gladly, these three factors are prominent in the text under study.

Cohesion can be divided into –grammatical and lexical Cohesion. This distinction is not expected to be stretched unnecessarily in so much as both are important in consideration of any semantic interpretation of a text. Moreso, they are used interchangeably in a text. For instance, 'what is taken as being grammatical may sometimes be used as lexical and vice versa' (*Babalola*: 2013: 56-63). This is evident in the instances where repetition, which commonly is categorized as an example of lexical Cohesion, becomes grammatical. The same is also the case of conjunctions, which usually are referred to as cohesive grammatical ties but are sometimes used as having lexical implications. There is a need to make a very slight distinction between the two broad and cohesive relations.

Grammatical ties are such items that are viewed as belonging to the closed systems of language, while the linguistic ties are found within the open class systems. So when we talk of Cohesion as being grammatical or lexical, we do not refer to a purely formal relation that does not involve meaning. Grammatical cohesive ties are categorized as ellipsis, reference and substitution. According to *Halliday* and *Hassan* (1976), "can be subdivided into repetition or reiteration, the use of synonyms, antonyms, and collocation, hyponymic relation, idiomatic expression and polysemy. However, this paper explores the cohesive lexical ties (relations) emphasizing repetition in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. "Repetition, essentially, is a literary term used to describe a reiteration of linguistic items across the major and minor grammatical boundaries in a discourse to create a certain effect as emphasis and emotional impact in literature." (*Babalola*, 2013). Repetition may be partial, full, or appositive, as seen in most instances in the novel under study. Another signal for lexical Cohesion is synonymous words either in juxtaposition or with intrinsic semantic coloration. Despite the many instances of synonymous usages and many other entailing lexical items as well as idiomatic expressions in the novel, this paper focuses on repetition as a cohesive lexical relation (tie)

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Several works on Cohesion, coherence, and cohesive devices exist, but this paper reviews only a few for time and space. Mohammed and Zalin's (2018) article titled; 'Impact of Teaching Cohesive on L2 students' Language Accuracy in Written Production" set out to determine if teaching cohesive devices would enhance students' prior knowledge subsequently results in increased written language accuracy. They based their research on a pre-post-test research design in which 40 students were tested using a note-taking test. The data was analyzed and reported with the use of descriptive statistics. The findings show an increase in the minimum and maximum scores and the mean scores between the pre-and post-test. Their results showed significant improvement in the participants' post-test language accuracy as evaluated through several error-free t-units. Having found that the teaching of cohesive text devices has a significant impact on language accuracy in written production, they recommend the activation of prior knowledge of cohesive devices to L2 learners to enhance written language accuracy.



Also, Aysha Mohd Sharif, in her paper entitled "The Analysis of Cohesive Devices in Psychology Research Papers," set out to provide a deep insight into the importance of Cohesion for reading and writing skills for academic purposes for psychology students. Her paper highlights the usage of various types of Cohesion with the range of cohesive devices used in reading and writing using the discourse analysis technique in the examination of the psychology papers; the findings reveal the types of Cohesion used and the range of cohesive devices for every kind in reading and writing. It also shows the implication of the usage of English for specific purposes (E.S.P.). Therefore, the paper recommends/recommends the rich application of cohesive devices in written discourse (especially in psychology papers). It enhances the comprehension and interpretation of meaning from such written speech.

Cohesion in written texts of selected Nigerian University Career Administrations" by Samuel Agbeleoba (2017) is yet another paper to be looked at. His article examines cohesive devices in various texts such as minutes, reports, journals, memoranda appointment letters, promotion letters, queries, expulsion letters and disengagement letters written by career administration in selected universities in Nigeria. Adopting Halliday and Hassan's Cohesion theory as a framework, his paper made efforts to classify the various cohesive devices used in the texts examined. His findings reveal that inter-sentential relations have something in common and that relational meanings make up a coherent semantic space. Therefore, he recommends that carrier administrators always guard against inappropriate use of connective devices and ensure that propositions in the text are well articulated so that relations between them are better understood. On his part, Azhar Hassan Salumee (2013) presented a paper on "Cohesion in Literary and scientific texts" His study aims to present data verifying the assumption that both lexical and grammatical cohesive devices are more frequent in literary ones. The study reveals that such Cohesion can be traced back to the writer's intention to use simple, comparative and descriptive language in expressing rather complex topics presented in scientific texts. The import of his findings is that indirect and complex language makes the reader's task more difficult.

"Reference Assignment and character indexing in Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus" is another related work by Osunbade Niyi (2013). His paper complements the pragmatic attempts to explore the role of reference assignment and character indexing in conversations with purple Hibiscus (P.H.). Adopting Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory (R.T.), the paper's findings reveal the generous usage of definite and indefinite reference markers and euphoric references, which serve to aid character indexing/presentation toward achieving cohesive effects in the advancement of novels plot. The paper also showed that a study of reference assignment in the novel of Adichie facilitates access to reference and cohesive bond and enhances meaning recovery in the text.

While it is true that this study may not have reviewed all the existing related literature to this paper, this researcher believes that there has not been any research carried out on repetition as a cohesive device in Mariama Ba's "So Long a Letter." This is the gap that this paper seeks to fill.

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

. Studies of *Mariana Ba's* literary works have dealt with language as a tool for thematization and characterization in her texts. *Osunlade* (2013:144) believes that literature finds its expression in language. *So Long a Letter* (S.L.L.) is a novel of change that takes a long letter and conversation pattern. This writing style is a deliberate device used in unfolding the inner workings of the main character's mind, and the brilliance displayed in her work is a (testimony) of her idiosyncrasy as a writer. It is pertinent to mention that since the debut of her career, very few writers have succeeded in imitating *Mariana Ba's* style. The novel, which was initially written in French and later translated into English by a Nigerian, *Modupe Bode-Thomas*, brought out the author's fluid use of language in the text's composition. *So Long a Letter* is a story about polygamy and the woman's place in a typical African society, reinforced by Islam. The marriages of two friends – Ramatoulaye and Aissatou -with their husbands are specific examples used to buttress the points. Each of these marriages ends in disaster because their husbands take second wives. These women Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, are unable to accept the indignity of living with a second wife. When Aissatou can no longer bear it, she writes to Madou to break the relationship between them (31-32).

On the other hand, Ramatoulaye decides to remain with Modou as long as possible even when it is evident that Modou had deserted her. Her social problems multiplied soon after her husband's death. She struggles very hard to remain in her marital home and determines not to succumb to those who want her to quit. In a nutshell, *So Long a Letter* is a beautiful novel that shows the author as very abstract, poetic and mystical.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the text (S.L.L.) by looking at the author's use of repetition as a cohesive lexical device. Repetition seems to stand out of all the noticeable cohesive devices deployed in work by the author. Hence, this study's interest in repetition appears more (prevalent) in work. This paper, therefore, considers some of the examples of repetition as contained in the excerpts below:

- i. **My friend, my friend, my friend.** I call on you three times (p.1)
- ii. She waited for it, **her** hand on **her** chest
- iii. She began consulting **doctor** after **doctor** (p.43)
- iv. **I asked myself, I asked myself, why?. Why** did Modou detach himself? **Why** did he put Binetou between us? (p56)
- v. **Waiting!** But **waiting** for what? (p51)

It is observable from the bolded words in the excerpt above that the use of repetition here as a cohesive device reiterates the speaker's messages and equally to express and register a deep impression in the readers' minds. It equally gives extended information (mostly the speaker's heightened frustration as in the excerpt above). Other instances of the use of repetition as a cohesive device in the text include:

- vi. One does not fix appointments with fate. Fate grasps who **it wants** when **it wants**. When **it** moves in the direction of your desires, **it** brings you plenitude. But more often than not, **it** unsettles, crosses you" (p2)
- vii. "**Modou**, a friend of the young as of old...**Modou**, the lion-hearted champion of the oppressed... **Modou**, **good** brother, **good** husband, **good** Muslim.... May God forgive him... May he regret **his** earthly stay in **his** heavenly bliss.... May the earth rest lightly on him! (p11)

Aside from the reiteration function of repetition, there is also the quality of musicality that the bolded words present above. The continuous repetition of 'Modou' at the beginning of the first three sentences in the excerpt on page (11) above sends a musical signal to the readers to the effect that the speaker may be singing a dirge.

It is pertinent to mention here that the use of repetition in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter (S.L.L.)* assumes a striking regularity with the prevalence of an aspect of repetition known as **appositive repetition**. The appositive repetition is the placement of two phrases, which are logically equivalent and belong in the same grammatical relation to the rest of the sentence are placed side by side (in apposition). This practice by authors/writers explains a word or phrase and provides extant information about such a word or phrase.

For example

- a. I read novels by Chinua Achebe, **the literary giant in Africa**

The highlighted phrase "the literary giant in Africa" is placed in apposition to Chinua Achebe.

It is important also to mention that usually (though not always) apposition requires the use of commas around the apposition phrase. For example 'The new yam festival of 2017, the last we participated in is the most memorable in life.' The relationship presents the apposition as a **memorable** one. Apposition here in this study can be classified into two - the full apposition and the partial apposition. Instances of the two forms of apposition as used in the novel under review abound. Some of which are considered in the examples given above. The essence of appositive repetition is that it allows a kind of semantic reiteration to run through the novel. The reader is reminded immediately of what has been said by way of the restatement. This means that should the first mention of a point be unclear, the second mention (provided it falls within the same grammatical slot) drives the meaning straight into the reader's mind. The import of this is that the author's message is easily understood at the first contact with the novel. This makes the salient points to become memorable as the narrative technique is made factual.

Examples of the full appositive repetition as used in the text include:

- i. 'Death, the tenuous passage between two opposite worlds, one tumultuous, the other still' (p.2)
- ii. 'The zem-zem, the miracle water from the holy places of Islam' (p.3)

- iii. 'They are there, his childhood playmates on the field of football' (p.5)
- iv. 'They are there, his companions in the trade union struggles' (p.5)
- v. '..... purifying baths, the changing of my mourning clothes every Monday and Friday' (p.7)

Besides the examples given above of those we refer to as full apposition, there are very few instances identified as partial apposition. These include:

- vi. 'We walked the same path from adolescence to maturity, where the past begins the present' (p.1)
- vii. '.....all parts of the country, where the radio has relayed the news' (p.3)

CONCLUSION

The novel's letter form (epistolary) accounts for both the cohesive and stylistic choice experienced in *So Long a Letter*. In as much as the events in the novel are reminiscences of the narrator's (Ramatoulaye's) life from childhood to adulthood and were chronicled at different time intervals, the introduction of this literary style calls for the cohesive device of continuity, and conjunctive connectors that are replete in the novel becomes apt.

In summation, therefore, is the use of repetition (most used in apposition), which gives an enduring effect of reiteration and accessibility of the message. It is observed from the text that lexical Cohesion operates most often in narrative and descriptive texts where they reinforce the entire passage of the text. Besides, the linguistic effect of the cohesive lexical device as observed in S.L.L., individual literary beauty of concreteness is given in detail to the passages. From the discussions attempted in this paper, it can safely be concluded that the novel *So Long a Letter* satisfies the descriptive framework presented at the introductory stage of this paper. It featured a preponderance of cohesive lexical devices even when we laid particular emphasis on repetition.

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