

Non-Verbal Communication of Colour in Yorùbá Novels

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Abstract: - This paper is a study of non-verbal communication of colour in Yoruba novels with a view to unveiling its latent signification and socio-cultural underpinnings. The theoretical framework relied upon is semiotics, which is the theory of signification and/or communication. Two major aspects of semiotics were explored in the analyses; these are indexical and symbolic significations while textual and semiotic analyses were the methodology applied. Five Yorùbá novels: Àgékù Ejò (crime novel), Ìrìnkèrindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèjè (mythological novel), Saworoide, Bòbó Àlútà and Afowófà (novels of realism) were purposively selected because they contained the non-verbal codes required in this research. Findings revealed that colour is polysemic in nature and most times interpreted in accordance with the context in which it occurred. For instance, the red horse which connoted royalty in Saworoide, ended as a code of sorrow when the king mysteriously died of headache. Also, black colour contextually signified evil action (murder) in Àgékù Ejò, mourning in Ìrìnkèrindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèjè and beauty in Afowófà while white horse symbolized victory in Bòbó Àlútà. Colour as a non-verbal communication code operated in different contexts to reveal understanding of the selected texts.

Key-words: Colour, Code, Semiotics, Textual analysis, Yorùbá novels

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the most important aspects of human life, which brings about social interaction, thereby leading to the development of the society. Human beings deploy communication for social interactions in the expression of thoughts, feelings, aspirations, fears, emotions, etc. It is also used in the extension of knowledge and transmission of culture from one generation to another. Communication is further subdivided into verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is the communication that is expressed through ordinary speech or words. It is oral or spoken communication. On the other hand, non-verbal communication is usually understood as the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless messages. This paper falls within the purview of non-verbal communication as it delves into the latent communication of culture in Yorùbá novels.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Textual and semiotic analyses are adopted as research methodology in this study. The reason for their adoption is that both methods are not only relevant to

qualitative data analysis but also to non-verbal communication which is pertinent to this study.

Textual analysis can be stated as the scrutiny of a text with a view to finding the most likely interpretations from that text. It is where the analyst must decentre the text to reconstruct it, working back through the narrative's mediations of form, appearance, rhetoric and style to uncover the underlying social and historical processes that guided the production. (McKee (2003)

According to Halliday (1978: 136), inside the text is a semantic unit containing specific textual components which makes it 'internally cohesive', and functioning 'as a whole as the relevant environment for the operation of the theme and information system'. The idea that Halliday is trying to convey is that the textual analyst is guided by the textual component of the text in his/her analysis. This idea is buttressed by Hall (1980) who, applying the theory of encoding and decoding, maintains that an ideology is encoded into the text which the textual analyst decodes but warns that the autonomy of the analyst must not be abused due to the polysemic nature of the text.

According to Gavins (2007) a participant may use text as a form of creative expression to inform, question, deceive, argue, command, request or fulfil some other objective in a multifarious range of possibilities. However, it is not sure that the producer of a text and their reader and/or listener shares the same perspectives. The reasons for the disagreement that normally occurs between authors and their readers may be traced to the factors which normally influence the production of the text as posited by Gavins (2007: 59):

The immediate physical surroundings, the previous experiences of the participants involved, as well as their positions within a wider cultural community, have as a great role to play in the communicative process as the content and structure of the language at its core. Human communication is not simply the transmission of a

predetermined message from participant A to participant B by means of a fixed linguistic code. It is a dynamic context-driven process involving the online negotiation of meaning and purpose by all those involved.

In this study, samples are taken from all the selected texts. The samples taken are the ones that serve the objective of the study. Wimmer and Dominick (1987) referred to it as purposive sample.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Colour plays a very vital role in the depiction of meaning in body adornment in non-verbal communication. Colour may have a universal or a local interpretation which may differ from one society to the other. Also, it may be contextualized. Historically, Adéjùmò (2002:27) relays that the recognition of colour is as a result of Newton's experiment of 1666 with a tiny ray of light coming into his dark room through a hole in the window shutter- throwing it against the wall through a prism. Newton observed that the ray landed on the wall in a band of colours, thereby making the discovery that sunlight is not white, as it appears, but a mixture of seven different hues. These appear whenever light is passed through a substance which bends the wavelengths combined in the rays. Whether passed through the glass of a prism, soap bubbles, a drop of water, or a raindrop in the sky, these colours always appear in the same order: violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. Newton named this band of colours "spectrum" and this has been known as such since then. Adéjùmò (2002:28) highlights the functions of colour as a means of identification, beautification and a conveyor of feelings which translates to communication as used in signals, graphs and uniforms.

Fádípè (1970) notes that the traditional Yorùbá spectrum is made up of three primary colours – *pupa* (red), *dúdú* (black) and *funfun* (white) out of which other secondary colours such as *tópolá* (yellow), *àyìnrín* (blue), pink, scarlet and green magenta are generated. He points out further that colour is very important in the Yorùbá traditional society and it is used for various purposes. Fádípè (1970:62–63) points out some of the functions which colour performs in Yorùbá society. These include:

Co-operation, the creation and maintenance of kinship and social solidarity, conflict, the acquiring and profiting by a knowledge of the physical world, and the imparting of that knowledge to others, and

to a limited extent, the cultivation of some of the higher interests of life, notably religion.

He does not expatiate further on how these colours function in Yorùbá society. Adéjùmò (2002:27–39) discusses the traditional role of colour in Yorùbá culture. She holds that *funfun* (white) is used by the Yorùbá to symbolize light and the transparent nature of the spirit world, being the colour that represents *Ọbàtálá*, the creator deity of the Yorùbá mythology who assists *Olódùmarè*, the Supreme Being in the shaping of man's physiological features. The colour symbolizes holiness, calmness and quietude. The author describes *pupa* (red) as the colour of blood, fire and searing emotions attached to *Ògún*, the Yorùbá god of lightning and thunder; and *Şònponá*, the Yorùbá god associated with small pox while *dúdú* (black) represents the power of darkness which opposes those of light. Black represents defilement, mourning and destruction and it is used to signify *Èşù*, who is believed to be a potential mischief-maker and promoter of malice and confusion. It is therefore, noted in this subsection that researchers situate the functions of colour in cultural and religious contexts.

Adélékè (2009:105–115) highlights the importance and contextualization of colours in both Elizabethan and Yorùbá cultures. He notes that the Elizabethan fool makes use of the following colours: blue, yellow, green, red and black and that the colours not only perform the functions of beautification and identity but they as well serve as communicative tools that transcend the surface verbal discourse. Adélékè (2009:108) observes that colours can be given specific meanings in certain contexts to acquire significance and act as signals in order to carry out certain intended meanings

Adélékè (2009) states that the fool's costume in Yorùbá society differs from those of the Shakespearean tradition in the sense that only *Èşù*, one of the divinities in Yorùbá pantheon, appears in more than one colour. This is, however, in contradiction with the view of Adéoyè (1979:125) who maintains that *Èşù* can only be identified with black. Adélékè (2009) further argues that in real Yorùbá mythology which is free from Western or Judaeo-Christian sentiments, *Èşù* appears in black and red, or black and white. He appears in two colours at a time which identifies him (*Èşù*) as a mediator-fool. Other Yorùbá gods have their favourite colours; thus red is for *Şàngó*, white for *Ọbàtálá* and indigo for *Ọrúnmìlà* among others. (Adéoyè, 1979, Adélékè, 2009:110) Adélékè (2009:110) views the black costumes of *Èşù* at both the physiological and the psychological realms. At the former, it may imply the unrefined and crude aspect of human culture; at the latter it may suggest the subconsciousness of the human mind in using Freudian theory.

Adélékè further notes that the red colour on *Èşù*'s toga may indicate 'rot' or 'suffering' while *Èşù*'s outfit in black and white, when observed from the angle of the binary

complementarity unveils co-existence of god and goddess, immortal and mortal, male and female, the ruler and the ruled, the rich and the poor which agrees with the Yorùbá's belief that black and white colours agree with each other as depicted in the Yorùbá saying: 'òwú dúdú àtòwú funfun kì í jara wọn níyàn' (Black thread and white thread do not contradict each other). The saying, according to the scholar seems to validate that there is accord in polarity and that human existence or survival is based on polarities.

Mákindé and Oḍénéyẹ (2009:115–126) analyse the various colours attached to ten most popular political parties in the South-western Nigeria. The colours analysed include green, blue, red, yellow, white and brown. The authors believe that the parties that make use of green are trying to identify with Nigeria since it is the colour of the country's national flag; those who use blue are expressing truthfulness, harmony and calmness. The parties that make use of red try to attract attention to themselves and attempt to be different and outdo others in their drive for membership and votes. Those who make use of yellow demonstrate that power could make people happy by providing the basic necessities of life for the electorate. Those who identify themselves with white display fidelity, purity of thought, clarity of ideology and governance, innocence and sincerity of purpose while the parties that choose brown extend friendship, reliability and simplicity to the electorates. Mákindé and Oḍénéyẹ fail to tell us how they arrived at the meaning associated with each of the colours analysed for Nigeria as a country. Apart from green and white which are associated with the national flag, there are also colours representing the identity of each state of Nigeria. However, the researchers do not tell us whether they conducted interviews for political parties' members concerning the meanings of the colours they chose.

A careful observation of the views of the authors on colour communication above shows that one colour may communicate more than one meaning. It also shows that the same colour may communicate both negative and positive messages. The inference here is that context is taken into consideration in the analysis of colour as portrayed in the novels as well as the culture of the Yorùbá people.

IV. THEORY

The theory adopted in this study is semiotics. Semiotics is a communication/signification theory that investigates sign systems and the modes of representation that human beings and animals use to convey feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas and ideologies. Semiotics is used in a broad range of disciplines, including medicine, science, arts, literature, anthropology, sociology and mass media. Semiotics attracts cultural and psychological patterns that underlie communication and other cultural expressions. It is the study of the action of signs. In the words of Eco (1976: 7):

Semiotics is concerned with everything that can

be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it. Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used "to tell" at all. I think that the definition of a "theory of the lie" should be taken as a pretty comprehensive program for a general semiotics.

A synthesis of Eco's views above indicates that semiotics is something that can be used to represent something else. It equally shows that semiotics may be used to mislead because it can represent or stand for the truth as well as a lie. If one considers, for instance, someone who puts on a wig of red colour and whose hair colour is black, one may believe that such a person has red hair. This is a lie and, therefore, misleading even though it is harmless. In the Yorùbá culture, when the head is raised up and brought down immediately, it is a non-verbal sign for giving approval for something. This same sign may be used to tell a lie for the same thing. Equally, dyeing a cloth from its original colour of white to blue or pink and dyeing of a mat from its original colour of brown to another colour are examples of lie and may mislead. However, two aspects of semiotics are adopted in these analyses; they are symbolic and indexical significations.

4.1 Symbolic Signification

According to Chandler (2006:49), symbolic signification is a mode in which the signifier does not have any resemblance with the signified which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional – that the relationship must be studied. Examples are language (alphabetical letters, punctuation marks, words, phrases and sentences), numbers, Morse code, traffic lights, national flags, etc. The symbolic signification does not have a natural link between the form and the thing represented, but only has a conventional link. The traffic sign of an inverted triangle is such symbol, as a matter of fact; it shares no natural link between its form and its meaning, 'give right of way'. The link between its form and meaning is purely conventional. The same may be said of military emblems, the naira sign ₦, almost all flags and all languages. Thus there is no natural connection between the Yorùbá word *sá lẹ* (run away) and its meaning. According to

William et. al. (2004:90), the term *symbolic* as used in linguistics is understood in the sense that, by general consent, people have “agreed” upon the pairing of a particular form with a particular meaning. This sense of *symbolic* goes back to the original meaning of the Greek word *symbolon* ‘a token of recognition’ used between two guests or friends, e.g. a ring broken into two halves, which allowed them to identify each other after a long time by matching the two parts and checking whether they fit together. The two halves of the ring are inseparable, just like the form of a word and its meaning.

William et al.(2004:91) further argue that symbolic signs are the exclusive prerogative of humans. In other words, other lower animals cannot make use of symbolic signs. The authors maintain that human beings have more communicative needs than pointing to things and replicating things. Also, man wants to talk about things which are more abstract in nature such as events in the past or future, objects which are distant from him, hopes about peace and a host of others. They believe that all these can only be achieved by means of symbols which humans all over the world have created for the purpose of communicating all possible thoughts.

According to Danesi (2004:31–33), a symbol stands for its referent in a conventional way. A cross figure can stand for the concept “Christianity”; white can stand for “cleanliness”, “purity”, “innocence”, and dark for “uncleanliness”, “impurity” and “corruption”. The author expresses that symbolism is more prevalent in mathematics and science than any other area of human endeavour pointing out that the science of geometry, as an example, has helped human beings solve engineering dilemmas since ancient times. Symbol equally plays a role in religious life – the Cross symbolizes Christ’s death and all Christian beliefs. The Star of David represents Jewish teachings. People throughout the world have agreed on certain symbols to serve as a shorthand system for recording and recalling information. Every branch of science has its own information system – astronomy uses a set of ancient symbols to identify the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars; in mathematics, Greek letters and other symbols make up an abbreviated language. Specific kinds of symbols appear in such fields as commerce, engineering, medicine, packaging and transportation. All the countries of the world have official or unofficial national symbols. A flag or an anthem may symbolize a nation. In Nigeria, for example, two horses facing each other and raising their forearms to carry an eagle is the symbol for the country. The United States is symbolized by Uncle Sam and the statue of Liberty. Canada is symbolized by the maple leaf while John Bull stands for England.

4.2 Indexical Signification

Chandler (2006:49) describes indexical sign as a mode in which the signifier is *not arbitrary but directly connected* in some way (physically or causally) to the signified – this link can be observed or inferred: e.g. ‘natural

signs’ (smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odours and flavours), medical symptoms (pain, a rash, pulse rate), measuring instruments (weatherclock, thermometer, clock, spirit-level), ‘signals’ (a knock on a door, a phone ringing), pointers (a pointing ‘index’ finger, a directional signpost), recordings (a photograph, a film, video or television shot, an audio-recorded voice), personal ‘trademarks’ (handwriting, catchphrase) and indexical words (‘that’, ‘this’, ‘here’, ‘there’).

In his own view of indexical sign, Danesi (2004: 31) states:

Indexicality manifests itself in all kinds of representational behaviours. Its most typical manifestation can be seen in the pointing index finger, which humans over the world use instinctively to point out and locate things, people, and events in the world... Indexicality is evidence that human consciousness is not only attentive to patterns of colour, shape, etc., resulting in iconic signs, but also to the recurrent relational and cause and effect patterns that are contingent on time and space.

Expressing their own viewpoint, William et. al (2004:93) maintain that index fulfils its function by ‘pointing out’ its referent, typically by being a partial or representative sample of it. According to the scholars, indexes are not arbitrary, since their presence has in some sense been caused by their referent. For this reason it is sometimes said that there is a causal link between an indexical sign and its referent. The track of an animal, for example, points to the existence of the animal by representing part of it. The presence of smoke is an index of fire. A very important kind of indexical sign, referred to as symptomatic sign is mentioned by Lyons (1977:108) and William et. al (2004:93-94). According to William et. al (2004), symptomatic signs spontaneously convey the internal state or emotions of the sender and thus represent the sender in an indexical manner. For example, the fact that our body temperature rises when we are ill is a spontaneous reflection of our internal state. Equally, when someone steps on our foot and we cry out, the cry is a spontaneous reflection of our internal state (surprise and pain) and thus constitutes a symptomatic sign. The authors express that since symptomatic signs are spontaneous, they may be considered to be deliberately selected by the sender for purposes of communication. They note that people do not choose to cry out in pain in the same way as they might, for example, decide

to name their dwelling place a house, home, dwelling, or residence in the appropriate circumstances (William, et.al 2004).

In their exploration of indexical sign, Johansen and Larsen (2002:32) provide a vivid example that since the wind affects the trees by bending them in the same direction, the slant of the trees can function as a sign of the dominant wind direction. This is regarded as a causal relationship whereby the dynamical object influences the sign; and without the bending force of the wind, functioning as the dynamical object, the trees would not function as a sign.

V. ANALYSES

Colour is a very important non-verbal communication that is used to express various kinds of meanings. The meanings expressed by colour largely depend on culture, context and situation.

The black colour is employed by the authors in different contexts to depict evil action, mourning, destruction, beauty and youthfulness. In *Àgékù Ejò*, the black outfit is associated with a murderer:

Sùgbón ọkúnrin kan wà tí
ó jókòó nínú sọ̀ṣì lórí
ìjókòó kan tí ó kágun sí
enu ọ̀nà àbájáde... ó wọ
sòkòtò dúdú ... ó sì gbé
kòdù dúdú lé e . Ó gbé
awò dúdú kirikiri bí i tí
Èni-àbàtà sójú lónà tó fi
jé pé kò sí ẹ̀ni tí ó lè rí
eyinjú rẹ . Ó de ate dúdú
sórí, bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni irun orí rẹ
kún, ó sì gùn dé e ní
èjiká. (p. 23)

But there is a man that sits inside the church on a seat that is extreme to the exit door... *He wears a pair of black trousers... he puts on black coat. He wears a pair of dark eye glasses like someone in the mud to the extent that no one can see his eyeballs. He puts on a black baseball hat with thick and long hairs falling on his shoulders.*

The character in a dark outfit metes out a dastardly act later in the novel:

Nìhìn-ín ni àlùfàà bá
iwàásù rẹ̀ dé tí ọ̀kúnrin
aláte dúdú... dide , ó nà

tàntàn bí ẹ̀ni tí ó sẹ̀sẹ̀ jí
lójú orun , àfi “Kẹ̀mù !
Kẹ̀mù!” iró ibon méji dún
látí ọ̀wọ̀ rẹ̀ , àlùfàà sùbú
sínú àga iwàásù lẹ̀hùn-ún.
(p.33)

At this juncture of the priest's sermon, the man with the black baseball hat... rises, he stretches himself like someone who just wakes up from a deep sleep, two gunshots are fired from him, and the priest falls down there into his chair of sermon.

The man in question not only murdered the priest but also the verger in the course of the service. The black colour in this context is a symbolic signification of an evil action depicted by the murder.

Also, in *Ìrinkerindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèje*, the author employs black to depict sorrow:

Báyíí ni a sọ ọ̀kan pàtàkì
nù nínú wa , a sì gbé ihò a
sin i sí i , a sì sọ̀kún a
kàáánú rẹ̀ bí ó ti yẹ . Ìnàkí-
gorí-itẹ̀ mú aṣọ̀ dúdú
kékeré, ó sán an mọ̀ aṣọ̀ rẹ̀
gégé bí àmì ọ̀fọ̀
Gòngòsútàkìtì tí iṣe àbúrò
rẹ̀. (p. 30)

This is how we lose one important personality among us. We dig a grave and bury him. We weep and pity him as we ought to. *Ìnàkí-gorí-itẹ̀ takes a small black cloth and ties it to his clothe as a sign of mourning Gòngòsútàkìtì , his younger brother.*

The death of Gòngòsútàkìtì throws his elder brother , Ìnàkí-gorí-itẹ̀, into a deep mourning. The code (black cloth) is a symbolic signification of grief.

The authors employ the use of the red colour for horror and death. This occurs in *Şaworoidẹ* when Lágàtà chooses to ride on a red horse:

Bí gbogbo èrò tí fẹ̀ máa
kọ̀wọ̀ rìn lọ , ni àwọ̀n
ọ̀gágun méji gun ẹ̀sin méji
dé, ọ̀kan funfun báláú ,
ọ̀kan pupa , ó rẹ̀ dọ̀dọ̀ ...

Àwọn ògágun nàà bẹrí
nówájú Lágàta , wón ní kí
ó mú èyí tí ó bá wù ú nínú
ẹşin méjèjèjì , kí ó sì gùn
ún lọ sí ibi ayeyẹ... Ara
Lágàta kò yá sí i , şùgbón
nígà tí èbè gbogbo
èniyàn pò, ó ní kò burú kí
wón mú ẹşin pupa wá . (p.
180)

As the crowd is about to
move en-masse, two
military officers arrived,
riding on two horses, one
is pure white, the *other*
one is red, deep red...
The officers saluted
Lágàta and asked him to
choose whichever one he
likes from the two horses
and ride on it to the venue
of the ceremony...
Lágàta hesitates but after
much persuasion by the
people, *he agrees that*
they should bring the red
horse.

Lágàta, a military officer who assassinates Lapite and becomes the king of the Jogbo community, plans his coronation ceremony without the necessary rituals. On the day of the coronation, his fellow military officers, in a bid to honour him, offer him two horses from which to choose one and ride to the venue of the coronation ceremony . One of them is white , the second one is red but Lágàta chooses the red horse. It is an invisible indicator of a looming death which befalls him later in the story. After they have crowned him as the king with the *adé idẹ* (brass crown), they beat the Şaworoidẹ (brass bells) and because he had not received the traditional incision, he begins to have a supernatural headache which later culminated in his death. After his death, the military return to the barracks and the kingmakers enthrone the rightful civilian owner of the throne. The red horse is a symbolic signification of death in the context. On the other hand, the red horse may symbolize royalty as it announces the arrival of the king at the venue of the coronation ceremony. This is a case of one signifier and two signifieds. The same red colour which indicates royalty also signifies death as pointed out in the passage in its different contexts.

While the red is used to connote doom, white is used to depict old age, purity, victory, etc. in the novels. In *Bòbó Alùtá*, a white horse is used to communicate victory:

Èşin funfun báláú ló gùn wòlú (p. 70)

He rides into the town on a purely white horse.

Dúrójaiyé, the gubernatorial flagbearer of the Kájòlà party , in the novel, rides on a white horse into the town for a campaign for votes. After the contest , Dúrójaiyé wins the gubernatorial seat and becomes the governor. Equally, the white horse is a symbolic signification of victory.

Both the white and the black colours are conjointly used to connote beauty . This is explicit in the description of Şolá, a lady in *Afowófà*:

Omọ dára síbè tẹgàn ni
hẹ!

*Adúmaádán ni Şolá n ẹ ,
eyin ojú, rẹ funfun pin in
bí ẹgbòn òwú*
(p. 40)

Without expressing
reproach against her, the
lady is beautiful! *Şolá is
black-but-shining. Her
eyeballs are as white as
wool.*

The physical features of Şolá are described in the text ; her body is described as black-but-shining and her eyeballs are white as wool. Both colours depict beauty of the skin and eyeballs. Although it is natural for one's eyeballs to be white; some eyeballs may be red or brown. The signification is indexical.

VI. CONCLUSION

Colour is a very important form of non-verbal communication which is polysemic in nature and largely controlled by the context and the culture of the environment in which it operates. The theory adopted in this study which is semiotics helps to locate the signification of the texts within the socio-cultural contexts of their non-linguistic roots. Colour, in its codification in this study, symbolically signified evil action, sorrow, horror, death, royalty, victory and indexically signified beauty as unveiled in the analyses.

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