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## **EDITORIAL**

The Chief Editor on behalf of the Editorial Board, has great pleasure in presenting the maiden edition Vol 1 No 1 of the Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences (JFHSMS) Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo to the research community and the world at large. JFHSMS aims to create a platform between the researchers and authors who seek to publish their work and the people who wish to keep up with the latest findings in the areas of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences. The journal provides opportunities to the researchers, academics and professionals to publish their research papers around the world. The quick review process, quality Editorial Board and quality articles guarantees this Journal as unique.

The Chief Editor is very grateful to the members of the faculty research committee and Editorial Board for their prompt and kind response towards the establishment of this Journal. Their contributions, no doubt is highly commendable and their efforts both human and material cannot be over-emphasized.

We seek the blessings and support of all in the success journey of the Journal.

Prof. (Mrs) Juliana O. Okoh

The Editor-in-Chief

# A CRITICAL STYLISTIC APPROACH TO TRANSITIVITY IN NNIMMO BASSEY'S ECOPOETRY

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## ABSTRACT

Niger Delta ecopoetry arose from the agitations of the people of the Niger Delta for environmental justice. While critical works have been written in this area, significant attention has not been paid to the perspective of Transitivity and Niger Delta ecopoetry. This paper therefore, is a critical stylistic study of Nnimmo Bassey's eco-critical poetry in the context of the struggle of the people of Nigeria's Niger Delta. An attempt at periodization of Niger Delta poetry is made. Nnimmo Bassey is classified along with the third generation of Niger Delta poets who are actively involved in the intellectual arm of the struggle. The critical stylistic tool used for the study is Representing Actions, Events and States by Jeffries (2010), which is an adaptation of Transitivity by Halliday (1985). Three poems are selected for detailed transitivity analysis from the collection, *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood*. The complete poem is presented in a transitivity chart, while the devices are counted for frequencies and calculated for percentages. These frequencies and percentages are then tabulated for data analysis. In this way, it is possible to identify the foregrounded devices. The results show how Transitivity has been used to inculcate in the reader the need for the people to control their own resources and enjoy a clean environment. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the plight of the Niger Delta people.

**Keywords:** Critical Stylistics, Transitivity, Ecopoetry, Niger Delta, Representing Actions, Events and States

## Introduction

This section attempts a periodization of Niger Delta Literature. The purpose is to trace the beginning of eco-critical literature in the Niger Delta and locate the poetry of Nnimmo Bassey within this corpus. An attempt is also made to justify the study by identifying the research gap it is designed to fill.

In the context of the Niger Delta, Dennis Osadebay, Gabriel Okara and J.P.

Clark are classified as pioneer poets as evident in the titles of Ogude (2011) and Udah (2011): “The Patriarchs of Niger Delta Literature” and “The Pioneers Poets of the Niger Delta” respectively. Dennis Osadebay wrote in the tradition of pioneer poets like May Casely-Hayford, discussing issues of nationalism, African culture and the African identity. Gabriel Okara and J.P. Clark handled issues around their riverine environment



(Nwoga, 1967 & Senanu and Vincent, 1976). Poverty in J.P. Clark's "Night Rain" was presented as emanating more from the naturally harsh environment than the consequences of oil exploration and exploitation. Okara's "Piano and Drums" treats the subject matter of culture conflict. This is understandable as these poems were generally written before the oil boom era.

The move towards eco-critical poetry was signalled when Tanure Ojaide (a Niger Delta poet) emerged with contemporaries like Niyi Osundare and Odia Ofeimun as the second generation of modern Nigerian poets (Olafoye, 2000). This paradigm shift was accentuated by the activities of MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People), which culminated in the "judicial murder" of Ken Saro-Wiwa in November 1995. The subsequent intellectual dimension to the struggle gave birth to a corpus of literature called Niger Delta Protest Literature. Ushie (2011) observes the dominance of poetry in this emerging genre of literature. It was referred to as "an earth-centred approach to literary studies", designed to draw attention to the destruction of the ecosystem and promote "ecological literacy" (Glottfelty, 1996; Ojaide, 2013; Okuyade, 2013; & Branch, 1998).

Nnimmo Bassey is one of the poets that have addressed environmental issues in the Niger Delta. He is an architect and a passionate environmentalist. His passion for the environment is obvious when one reads the blurb of his 1992 collection, *Patriots and Cockroaches*:

Nnimmo Bassey is Chairperson, Friends of the Earth International; Director, Environmental Rights Action (ERA) and Chair, Oil Watch Africa.....His travelogue on the environment, *Oil watching in South America* was released in 1997.

The poem 'Tidbinbila' is a product of one of his numerous travels. As far as the researcher knows, he has not been studied from the critical

stylistic perspective. This paper therefore sets out to study transitivity in Nnimmo Bassey's ecocritical poems from the perspective of Lesley Jeffries's Critical Stylistics. The poems for this study are taken from the collection, *We Thought it Was Oil But It Was Blood*.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is Critical Stylistics. Propounded by Jeffries (2010), it is a fusion of Critical Discourse Analysis and Stylistics with a view to showing the power of language and the consequent impact of language on the reader's or hearer's worldview. The book in which Jeffries explicates this theory is titled, *Critical Stylistics: The power of English*. Among her objectives, Jeffries states her desire to give the reasonably advanced student of English a sense of how to go about studying the power of texts and explaining how language represents the world in line with Halliday's (1971) ideational component of the metafunctions of language. Against this background, she came up with ten tools of Critical Stylistics of which Representing Actions, Events and States is one, based on Halliday's Transitivity, with insights from Simpson (1993). The tools are 1. Naming and Describing 2. Representing Actions, Events and States 3. Equating and Contrasting 4. Exemplifying and Enumerating 5. Prioritizing 6. Assuming and Implying 7. Negating 8. Hypothesizing 9. Representing the Speech and Thoughts of other Participants 10. Representing Time, Space and Society.

### Representing Actions/Events and States

Representing Actions, Events and States as a critical stylistic tool is based on the notion that the verbal element of a clause (predicator) is the location of the actions and processes that take place between entities. Action represents what is being done, event has to do with what is happening and state, what simply is. Depending on the ideological standpoint, the following groups may describe a dwindling economy as:

- i. World markets are falling. Event (This is the politician who wishes to get votes).

- ii. The honourable member has ruined the economy. Action (This is a member of the opposition).
- iii. The world economy is in crisis. State (This is a commentator).

It is obvious that each speaker has taken a perspective for a purpose. The politician canvassing for votes (presumably an incumbent) would want to downplay the situation by blaming domestic economic problems on the international market, the opposition will take a strong stance by scathing criticism; while the impartial commentator would present it as it is. Each of these choices has consequences for the perception of the reader or hearer.

The following are the main categories as identified by Jeffries (2010):

1. Material Action

This is referred to as the most prototypical verb, having to do with something that is done or happens in a physical way. Examples are

*The joint union committee walked out of the meeting*  
*The government postponed their enquiry.*

The participants in the clause are the actor (grammatical subject) and the goal (grammatical object). The actors, in this case, are 'The joint union committee' and the government respectively, while the goal, are 'the meeting' and 'their enquiry'. The reason for this participant labels is to distinguish the semantic role that such participants play from their grammatical role.

The sub-categories of material actions are;

- a) Material Action Intentional (MAI)  
This is intentional material action performed by a conscious being as in the example under material actions.
- b) Material Action Supervention (MAS)  
This is unintentional action by

a conscious being. As in  
*The baby fell out of his pram onto the tarmac.*  
*The judge lost her temper*  
In both cases, the actors though conscious are not in control.

- c) Material Action Events (MAE): This is action by an inanimate actor.

*The car backfired.*

2. Verbalization Processes

This is the process of saying. Participant roles are sayer and target. It has a human actor.

<i>John Sayer</i>	/	<i>told process</i>	/	<i>Mary target</i>	/	<i>his life story. verbiage</i>
<i>He Sayer</i>	/	<i>said process</i>	/	<i>that. verbiage</i>		

3. Mental Processes

Mental processes refer to what happens within human beings. This is further sub-divided into;  
Mental cognition (MC)

- a) - Thinking, knowing, realizing, understanding and so on
- b) Mental Reaction (MR)  
- Feeling (emotionally), liking, hating and so on
- v) Mental Perception(MP)  
- Sensing, hearing, feeling (literally), seeing, tasting and so on.

For a mental process verb, the other participants are senser and phenomenon, as in the following examples.

Senser	Process	Phenomenon	
The interviewer	realized	her mistake	MC
I	hate	the political system in Britain	MR
They	heard	the rumour about Mr. Price	MP

#### 4. The Relational Category

This represents the static or stable relationships between carriers and attributes rather than any changes or dynamic actions. The verbs in this category are;

- The copula verb (to be) and other intensive relations (RI)
- Possessive relations as indicated by verbs like 'have' (RP)
- Circumstantial relations (RC) which involves verbs of movement and the verb 'be' as well

##### a. Relational Intensive

'x is a' relationship. It involves the copula verb 'be' and other intensive relations

*Mary* / *is* / *wise* / *Tom seems foolish*  
*Carrier* / *process* / *attribute*

##### b. Relational Possessive

'x has a' relationship

Gill has a guitar. John owns a piano

##### c. Relational Circumstantial

'x is at/on a' relationship: verbs of movement and verb 'be' as well.

Bill is at home/John was in the room.

In traditional grammar, the verb is defined as a word that shows action or a state of being. This has been interestingly broken down into 'event', 'action' and 'state'. The 'action' component fits into material actions, the event component fits roughly into mental processes, while state fits roughly into relational processes. This model represents Halliday's ideational function of language, relevant to uncovering ideologies. The transitivity model as Simpson (1993:88) notes, is concerned with the transmission of ideas and it is a part of the ideational function of language. This is what Jeffries (2010), adapts for critical stylistic analysis.

#### Literature Review

Dorpar (2012a) sees Critical Stylistics as a new approach to Stylistics based on Critical Discourse Analysis that has given life and vibrancy to a stagnant Persian Stylistics by giving a new basis and methodology for the study of ideology and power in texts. Alaghbary (2013) mentions that Critical Stylistics has to do with understanding the precise ways in which texts may transmit, reinforce or inculcate ideology in their readers. Ye (2012) looks at how transitivity, and other critical stylistic tools are used in exposing the “implicit ideological consequences” of the opposing views of Tibet and China (Beijing) on the issue of independence for Tibet. Dorpar (2012b) in “A Critical Stylistic Analysis of Jashn-en Farkhonde”, suggests that Persian texts should be analysed by examining the ideologies behind the texts, the stylistic features that discovered these ideologies and the functions behind the ideologies.

Tosic (2006) observes that ecocriticism started developing in the 1990s as a meeting place of American critics dealing exclusively with American literature. Ecocriticism is seen as a semineologism, with "Eco" as short for ecology which has to do with the relationship between plants and living organisms to each other on one hand, and their environment on the other hand. Tsair (2013) identifies the collaboration between government and the oil companies as responsible for the Niger Delta predicament. Mowarin (2013) looks at the poetics of environmental agitation in Hope Eghogha's *Rhythms of The Last Testament and the Governor's Lodge*

and other poems.

Aghoghovwia (2013) posits that Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* is a cross between poetic activism and environmental rights manifesto. It reflects a tone of defiance and a mood of anger by the people. With this, he is able to draw attention to issues of environmental injustice in the Niger Delta. Ojarikre (2015) observes the deception the Nigerian government and the international oil companies. The people were hoodwinked into thinking that blood was oil. The poem, "Tibinbila" presents a contrasting picture of two environments. While Tidbinbila in Australia represents calm and environmental justice; the Niger Delta represents disquiet and environmental injustice.

Bassey (ND) observes that the colour of oil runs red in most parts of the world, especially in Nigeria. It is thus a symbol of militarization and repression. This has its roots in colonial politics, commerce and military adventurism. He notes the burning down of brass in 1895 by a British naval force to exclude middlemen and ensure the monopoly of the Royal Niger Company in palm-oil trade .He traces the history of operation and forceful acquisition from palm-oil to crude-oil trade. Aghoghovwia (2014) indicates that Bassey's activism focuses on social and environmental justice in relation to extraction and exposes the monumental damage done to local communities, not only in Nigeria's Niger Delta, but in other parts of the third world like Ecuador, Angola, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and South Sudan.

Abba and Oyemachi (2020) look at ecocriticism from the perspective of anthropocentric man. Man sees himself at the centre of creation and does not seem to bother about the violence he has caused other beings in creation, be they human or non human. They observe how Nnimmo Bassey's eponymous poem begins with rejoicing and dance, with the excitement that oil has brought wealth and freedom. But this was short-lived, as they were soon confronted with the reality that oil actually means death.

Methodology

Data for the study comprise three poems of Nnimmo Bassey's, selected on the basis of their eco-critical content. The theoretical approach is Critical Stylistics. Transitivity as a tool is applied from the critical-stylistic perspective as espoused by Jeffries (2010). This is referred to as Representing Actions, Events and States.

The three eco-critical poems are listed; while Lesley Jeffries' Transitivity is presented and used for data analysis:

- 1 “We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood”
- 2 “Tidbinbila”
- 3 “Facial Marks (Post-Petrol Era)”

Statistical frequencies and percentages are used for analyzing data. The frequencies give the number of times a particular device occurs; while the percentage is calculated by:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Devices Identified}}{\text{Total Number of Devices}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

In this way, the foregrounded devices are identified and their ideological contexts explained.

The transitivity devices represented in the charts and tables are explained in the theoretical framework. Each poem is completely analysed in the charts and represented on each table. The items in the discussion are drawn from the charts and

tables. Each transitivity device in the discussion is thus referenced on the chart and table. The blank spaces on the charts and tables mean that there are no transitivity devices there.

Chart 1 Nnimmo Bassey: We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood

TRANSITIVITY DEVICES

Line of Poem	Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Circumstance	Carrier	Process	Attribute	Circumstance
		Stanza 1										
1				The other day	MAI							
2	We	Danced		in the street				}	MC			
3				Joy in our hearts								
4				x	We	Thought	we were free		MP			
5	Three young folks	Fell		to our right	MAS							
6	Countless more	Fell		to our left								
7				Looking up				}				
8				Far from the crowd								
9					we	Beheld						
10							Red-hot guns					
Stanzas 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19												
1					We	Thought	it was oil	MC				
2										[But]/it	was	blood
Stanza 4												
1				Heart Jumping	}							
2				into our mouths								
3				Floating on								
4				Emotion's dry wells	MAI							
5	We	leapt		in fury								
6				knowing it wasn't funny								
7					[Then]we	Beheld		}	MP			
8							Bright red pools					
Stanza 7												
1									[First]/	was	the	

[illegible]

TABLE 1: Nnimmo Bassey: ‘We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood’

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentage
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	6	11.11
Material Action Supervention (MAS)	5	9.26
Material Action Event (MAE)	5	9.26
Verbalization Process (VP)		
Mental Cognition (MC)	13	24.07
Mental Reaction (MR)		
Mental Perception (MP)	5	9.26
Relational Intensive (RI)	20	37.04
Relational Possessive (RP)		
Relational Circumstantial (RC)		
Total	54	100

Nnimmo Bassey's, 'We Thought It Was Oil...' has 6 items of MAI,13 of MC, 3 of MAS, 5 of MP, and 17 of RI. The intentional action in stanza 1 shows the initial joy of the people. Of their own volition, they danced. The MAIs in stanza 17 are alternated with MAEs to show the resoluteness of the people in the face of suppression and exploitation. The MC that runs through the poem gives us a good idea of how the people were deceived into thinking that it was oil, when it was actually blood. The senger is the people represented by the deixis, 'We'. The phenomenon comprises a variety of items that they thought existed but turned out to be mere illusions. Such illusory phenomena are 1. We were free and 2. It was oil. They thought they were free and they thought it was oil. The items of MAS show the helplessness of the people. They are not to blame as this is an unintentional and helpless action on their part. The actors are young folks being felled by bullets. Since the process is helpless and unintentional, it is obvious where the finger should point.

The phenomena in the MP give us the picture of a people in hell and suffering of horrendous proportion. The phenomena are 1. 'Red-hot guns' 2. Bright-red pools' 3. 'Open mouths', 4. 'no screams' and 5. 'their shells'. The RI represents the static or stable relationships between carriers and attributes. The 17 RI structures attempt to present the situation as it is. The idea being communicated here is that it was actually blood and not oil. The different perspectives of the attributes in the RI reflect the various

dimensions and effects of the people's struggle to be free. Some of the attributes in the RI are 'blood', 'the Ogonis', the Ijaws, 'real' and 'open' representing various perspectives of the determination of a people to be free.

Chart 2 Nnimmo Bassey: Tidbinbila

Transitivity Devices															
Line s of Poe m	Actor	Proce ss	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Proc ess	Tar get	Verbi age	Sens er	Proc ess	Phenome non	Carri er	Pro cess	Attribu te	
		Stanza a 1													
1		Lost		in the beauty of Tidbinbila											
2	I	Caress	an assort ment of ferns												
3	[And]	Scrape	my soles	on paths											
4				Beaten by folks											
5				Search of peace											
6				On this rocky trail											
			Stanza 2												
1		Lost		in the beauty of Tidbinbila											
2				Between barkless gum trees											
3				& elegant eucalyptus trunks											
4	I	Gaze		Skyward											
5				Seeking you											
6				Dozing koalas											
			Stanza 3												
1		Lost		in the beauty of Tidbinbila											
2	(A garland of Sunrays)														
3	(A call from above the verdant caps)														
4															
5															
6															
			Stanza 4												
1	(Sleepwalkers, sleep scratchers)														
2	We	Yelp		as you turn your mournful face											
3	We	Appla ud	your love of the captive terrain												
4				Beyond the chains											

TABLE 2: Nnimmo Bassey: ‘Tidbinbila’

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentage
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	5	45.45
Material Action Supervention (MAS)	5	45.45
Material Action Event (MAE)		
Verbalization Process (VP)		
Mental Cognition (MC)		
Mental Reaction (MR)		
Mental Perception (MP)		
Relational Intensive (RI)	1	9.09
Relational Possessive (RP)		
Relational Circumstantial (RC)		
Total	11	100





Lin es of Poe m	Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstan ce	Saye r	Proce ss	Targe t	Verbiag e	Sens er	Proce ss	Phonomon on	Carrie r	Proce ss	Attrib ute
		Stanza 5												
1	(These pipes of dreams)													
2	(Of dollars and sorrows and tears)				MAE									
3	These ducts	Burro w		into our hearts										
4	These pipes	dry	our lands	MAE										
5	These pipes	Drain	our soul:											
6	Those pipes	Steal	our dreams	MAE										

Table 3: Nnimmo Bassey: ‘Facial Marks (Post – Petrol Era)’

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentage
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	4	20
Material Action Supervention (MAS)		
Material Action Event (MAE)	10	50
Verbalization Process (VP)		
Mental Cognition (MC)		
Mental Reaction (MR)		
Mental Perception (MP)		
Relational Intensive (RI)	6	30
Relational Possessive (RP)		
Relational Circumstantial (RC)		
Total	20	100

**Nnimmo Bassey: 'Facial Marks (Post-Petrol Era)'**

This poem contrasts the various uses, manifestations and effects of facial marks and environmental scars. There are ten items of Material Action Event (MAE) representing 50% of devices used. The MAE structures reflect the happenings resulting from environmental scars by putting it side-by-side facial marks. In the first stanza, the process shows that while facial marks 'help'; environmental scars 'alienate'. It is implied that while facial marks are made by human beings to identify and beautify, environmental scars are traced by 'illegal loggers' and 'Transnational eco-devourers' to destroy and exploit. This is done in a passive construction in the second MAE in the first stanza.

*Environmental scars  
traced  
By seismic lines and  
illegal loggers  
Transnational eco-  
devourers*

The Material Action Intentional (MAI) devices are calls to action. The ducts of exploitation have to be blocked and evil serpents have to be driven out. The Relational Intensive (RI) devices, under its attribute, describe environmental scars as 'death masks', 'hellish scars', 'slave marks', 'hateful' and forced' among other descriptions'.

## Conclusion

Jefferies (2010) sees ideology as those ideas that are shared by a community or society. She explains further that there are dominant groups whose ideologies are re-asserted and re-affirmed in the media and other texts to the point that they become naturalized and seen by the populace as commonsense. In this way, resource control has become the politico-economic creed of the Niger Delta and a preferred article of faith with the exploitative Nigerian state.

The application of Transitivity takes up issues of oppression, violence, deceit pollution and environmental degradation. Nnimmo Bassey presents oil as a resource curse and an instrument of deceit as exemplified in his poem "We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood". The predominant use of Relational Intensive and Mental Cognition shows that the people are not actually fooled. They realize that it is actually blood and not oil. "Tidbinbila" compares the preservation of flora and fauna in a region of Australia with the destruction of flora and fauna in the Niger Delta by contrasting both landscapes. This is achieved through the agency of Material Action Intentional, and Material Action Supervention which shows that the poet is reacting naturally to a natural environment. 'Facial Marks' (actually facial scars) emphasizes economic exploitation and the scars left by oil exploration and exploitation. This poem uses Material Action Event to present the backwash of oil exploration. In this way, Nnimmo Bassey has brought to the fore the ideology of resource control by highlighting issues or ideas that explicate exploitation, environmental degradation, deceit, rape, pillage, spillage and oil as a resource curse.

During the course of this study, the researcher did not see materials on ecopoetry and transitivity. This area still remains very fertile for exploration. This is more so in the genre of drama.

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