

Foregrounding the Verbal Process: A Corpus Stylistic Analysis of Adichie's *Zikora* (2020)

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Abstract

Literature mirrors societies. While the plethora of studies on African literature, spanning from the early 21st century, have discussed literary texts in their political spectrums, recent studies using transitivity analysis have offered new and objective understandings of these novels. Nonetheless, most transitivity analyses have been fixated on characterization, style and themes. Against this background, the purpose of this study was to use corpus procedures to examine the transitivity of verbal process types in Adichie's recent novel *Zikora*. Assisted by corpus linguistics, the study used transitivity as an analytical framework to analyse the verbal process in the text. From the analysis, three major findings are reported from the discussion. First, through the verbal processes, the Adichie deconstructed the myriad suffering and subjugation of women through dialogic means and taking responsibility for their livelihood. Second, the foregrounded verbal processes reflect the attribution of processes to other characters than accounting for the literary effects projected through the clauses. Finally, while the writer used the projected clauses to attribute the verbal processes to others, the dominant use of the first-person mode of narration identifies a sharing of roles to account for the writing of the literary work. Following these findings, the study extends the scholarship on literary stylistics and provides implications for further research in other genres of (African) literature.

Keywords

African literature, corpus, foregrounding, transitivity, verbal process

Introduction

Stylistics has served as an interface between language and literature functioning primarily to provide an objective interpretation of literary texts abound. Through literary stylistics, formed through structuralism, researchers have interpreted literary texts with a primary aim of revealing concealed meanings in different perspectives through the language (Nkansah, 2021a). This process is resounded in Simpson's (2004) explanation that "stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy is assigned to language" (p. 3). Simpson (2004) points out the procedural approach assigned to making meaning through language in a text. Language operates at the core of any literary text. The significance of textual interpretation is to report inherent meanings or messages facilitated by the language of the text. Interestingly, it appears words deconstruct their meanings in different ways (Mishra, 2011) which stylistics fails to account for. Although most scholars have advocated for the objectivity of stylistics (Murtaza & Qasmi, 2013; Nkansah, 2021b; Norhaslinda, 2016), it still carries some subjective meanings. Given this gap in stylistic interpretation, the researchers adapt corpus linguistics to cater for the inherent weakness in literary stylistics.

In this regard, the purpose of this study is to examine the transitivity verbal process in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Zikora*. Specifically, the paper reports the distribution of verbal processes which have been foregrounded in the text. Given the dominance of qualitative studies in interpreting literary texts, the novelty of this research lies in the combination of stylistics and corpus linguistics to develop a new understanding through the analysis of Adichie's current literary text. Despite the growing attention Adichie has received in her previous novels, the present research shifts the focus from style, characterization and ideological concerns to the organizing lexico-grammar, through transitivity verbal process, of the novel. The researchers situate the entire study in corpus stylistics analysis which offers strong potential to descrying new meaning in any literary work. Fialho & Zyngier (2014) assert that quantitative research in stylistics is under-represented, and as such, the present research contributes to the repository of studies in (quantitative) stylistic analysis of African novels. In light of this, the research is guided by two primary objectives:

1. To identify how the verbal process deconstructs gender subjugation;
2. To examine how the dominance of the verbal processes relates to the attribution of qualities to other characters.

This portion of the research draws on previous studies concerning transitivity and foregrounding. The review is aimed at revealing gaps that inform the conduct of this research. The study by Fialho (2007) investigated the reaction of readers to foregrounding through the concept of refamiliarization. Fialho's study was limited to the classroom context where readers were asked to reflect on a poem they were given. Her results demonstrate the appreciation of the formal elements of the text and how they strategize a refamiliarization through their recurrence. These findings support the insights readers bring to interpreting foregrounding in a literary text. Similarly, van Peer, Hakemulder & Zyngier (2007) explored how foregrounding adds to the aesthetics and

meaning of poetry. In a controlled experiment on a line of poetry, van Peer et al. rewrote a single line of poetry severally to readers to examine its appreciation. Conceptualizing foregrounding through deviation, the researchers confirmed that higher degrees of deviation amount to higher measures of foregrounding in literary texts. Oztekin (2013) adds to the application of foregrounding in poetry. He conceives of foregrounding as a way to influence the meaning patterns in poetry through linguistic levels. His analysis points out the emphasis on particular linguistic units in Turkish poems. Aside from the several studies of foregrounding in poetry, Nkansah (2021b) adds to the innovation of foregrounding through corpus procedures in prose works. Riaz (2021) and Ul (2014) concur on the prowess of foregrounding analysis to reveal stylistic effects in literary texts.

Offering new insights into stylistic methodologies, Nkansah (2021a) argues that “the consistency of features or patterns in unravelling a concealed message is key to stylistic interpretation” (p. 31). His analysis projects the thematic meanings of peripheral characters in the literary text analysed and its contextual effects. In addition to this, Hakemulder (2020) explored the effects of foregrounding on readers’ perception. Similar to the study by van Peer et al. (2007), Hakemulder (2020) experimented with literary text quality and its appreciation by readers. Minimizing the degree of foregrounding in the original text, foregrounding showed a higher score on the aesthetic appreciation of the manipulated literary text. More importantly, the literary text revealed a positive effect on the perception of the readers. From the ongoing review, studies in foregrounding have been skewed to analysing the psychological effects through experimentations (Hakemulder, 2020; van Peer et al., 2007; Oztekin, 2013) on poetry and prose. Delineating from these strands, the present study focuses on using a mixed-method approach, where the quantitative process is achieved through corpus linguistics to analyse Adichie’s *Zikora*. The present study adds to the scholarship of innovative research in foregrounding and corpus stylistics.

On transitivity analysis of literary texts, several studies have made insightful contributions to African literature (Boukari & Koussouhon, 2018; Ezzina, 2015; Mwinlaaru, 2012, 2014; Somone, 2017). The much research in transitivity by Mwinlaaru (2012, 2014) has added to the repository of investigating African literature. In 2012, he applied transitivity analysis to the narrative style of Ngugi’s *Weep Not Child*, from which he reported that the transitivity patterns inscribe some functions to determine the psychological perspective the narrator relates to the story. There was a foregrounding of the theme of suffering in the text. Similar to this, Mwinlaaru (2014) explored characterization and point of view in Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* through a transitivity framework. From his analysis, some characters are stereotyped as social actors in post-independent West Africa, foregrounding socio-political ideologies in the text. The need for struggle to transform society is also revealed through the transitivity analysis. Still on Achebe’s novel, Somone (2017) used the transitivity framework to analyse characterization in *Things Fall Apart*. Somone (2017) reports the dominance of the material process in the text, followed by the relational and verbal. He characterizes Okonkwo as an effectual character adding to the nouvelle studies in characterization. Ezzina’s (2015) research primarily focused on revealing transitivity patterns that informs power relations in Pynchon’s *The Crying Lot of 49*.

From the review of previous studies, most scholars have focused on specific characters in relation to particular themes to add to the styles of the work (Beale, 2018; Mahlberg & McIntyre, 2011; Mwinlaaru, 2014). Delineating from this strand, the researcher dovetails into the lexico-grammar (grammar of experience) and how it implies meaning through the development of themes. While literary writers can infuse certain literary issues or concerns in their works, transitivity is in the subconscious (Mwinlaaru, 2014; Mwinlaaru & Nartey, 2021) which brings out the ideological positions embedded in the text. It contributes to the literary implication of the text. This standpoint adds to the need for the conduct this research. Evidently, there is an empirical gap concerning the limited studies using corpus stylistics and systemic functional grammar to analyse literary texts. This attempt adds to the growing knowledge of the grammar of experience in narratives. Given that Systemic Functional Grammarians have posited the dominance of mental, material, and relational processes in texts (Alaei & Ahangari, 2016; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Mwinlaaru, 2014; Pasaribu, Sinambela & Manik, 2020), this study also offers a provisional case for the foregrounding of verbal process in the chosen literary text. The attention given to this process is hinged on what such a process reveals for understanding the meanings of the text to defying a universal meaning (Carter, 2010a).

Following the review of previous studies, this research uses foregrounding and Systemic Functional Grammar as theories to pivot this study. These theories are applied to the grammar of Adichie's *Zikora* with a focus on the verbal process. The subsections that ensue discuss the theories and how they are applied to the literary text.

Foregrounding

To provide the application of foregrounding in this study, the researchers discuss stylistics and narrow the focus to foregrounding. McCarthy & Carter (2014) explain stylistics as a science that functions as a bridge between linguistics and literature or literary criticism. From their definition, stylistics, as an omnibus discipline, links linguistics and literary criticism to reveal to us the linguistic choices which have been used to present the message in a text. Quite recently and in a broad sense, Hall (2017) states that stylistics is the careful linguistically-informed attention to language use in texts. Like Carter & McCarthy (2014), Hall (2017) brings out the centrality of linguistics to the description of the language in texts. He opens up the scope of stylistics through the use of texts as opposed to Carter and McCarthy who use literature. To foreground the importance ascribed to the language in texts, Hall (2017) modifies the attention of analysts through care and linguistics. Acknowledging the significance of the literary text, Simpson (2004) places a premium on the function or use of language. This is because linguistic features solidify the explanatory role of stylistics for meaning, through foregrounding. Although the study of foregrounding has been existing for a long (van Peer, 2021), it was fully-fledged as a theory in stylistics between the 1960s and 70s (van Peer, 2007). Nkansah (2021a) highlights the relevance of foregrounding in stylistics. The present study takes on the notion of foregrounding as the repetition or consistency of a linguistic form which informs the interpretation of the literary text. Through foreground, Semino & Short (2004) posit that stylistics makes interpretation explicit and retrievable and new ones formed. Foregrounding is used to project-specific points to produce thematic meanings for literary effects (Nkansah, 2021a).

The present research adopts foregrounding in its innovative sense, that is, providing a reaction to the dominance of the verbal process to interpret Adichie's *Zikora*. In addition, following van Peer's (2007) suggestion for statistical analysis in foregrounding, the study is assisted with corpus procedures to gain an in-depth understanding of what is foregrounded and how such forms construct reality in the literary text. It must be noted that the foreground does not exist in isolation to function in the interpretation of the literary text. In this regard, the study adopts Systemic Functional Grammar as a linguistic theory for foregrounding.

Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar/ Linguistics (SFG) is a linguistic theory that organizes the grammar of a language as a resource for making meaning and that meaning is encoded in the systemic pattern of choice (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Using SFG as a system to analyse texts requires that the researcher considers the linguistic choices made by the writer and other characters in the context of other potential choices. While the system of network is central to SFG, the notion of the three metafunctions is relevant as well. In any instance of language use, the grammar establishes three functions (metafunctions) which are the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. The interpersonal metafunction deals with the relationship or status differences which are communicated through a text (Halliday and Matthiessen). That is, people define their roles and maintain their personality through interpersonal metafunction. Amoussou (2016), and Alaei & Ahangari (2016) explain that the textual metafunction accounts for a world in which all elements of the texts cohere internally, and which itself coheres with its relevant environment. In the textual metafunction, primacy is given to thematic structure in the grammar of the clauses and clause complexes. The ideational metafunction focuses on how information and meaningful content are provided through the text. It is subclassified into the experiential and logical metafunction. In this study, primacy is given to the ideational metafunction, specifically the experiential subcategory, which construes experience around and inside us operating through the system of transitivity. In the system of transitivity, the clause signifies the experience which describes events. Three components are key in transitivity: process, participants, and circumstance (Ammara, Anjum & Javed, 2019).

The system of transitivity which is used in this study is within the content plane of lexicogrammar. The process types within the system of transitivity are material, behavioural, mental, existential, relational and verbal. The present study focuses on the verbal process orientation in the novel by analysing the transitivity patterns. According to Mwinlaaru (2012, 2014), the verbal process typically has three roles: Sayer, Verbiage and Receiver. This assertion is hinged on the preliminary overview of the literary text and projects certain meanings over other meanings through the dominant use of verbal processes. The researcher then makes an effort to interlace the possible narrative technique (mode of narration) present in the clauses by checking the concordance of the processes. Summarily, the adaption of SFG as a linguistic theory to analyse *Zikora* is hinged on the claim that grammar in literature is manipulated for literary and stylistic effects encoding possible meanings (Mwinlaaru, 2012). Figure 1 represents the organization of language on strata.

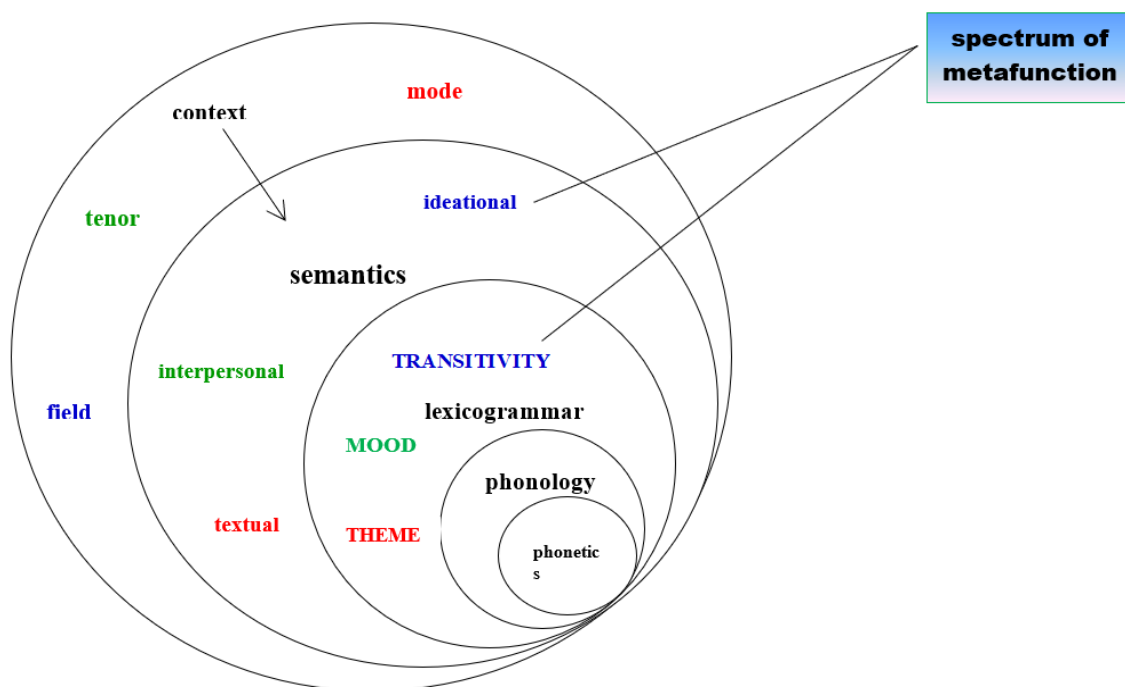


Figure 1. Adapted strata of language. Adapted from Halliday and Matthiessen (2014)

Method

Research Design and Approach

The methodology of any research influences the findings it presents. In this regard, following the review of the relevant previous studies, the research adopted the mixed-methods research design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the mixed-method design merges the quantitative and qualitative research designs in order to cater for the weaknesses associated with the two designs. Interestingly, Creswell & Creswell (2018) argue that the mixed-method design focuses on “mining” datasets than mere integration of approaches. The researchers agree with this statement since the ‘mining’ provides a more comprehensive understanding of the analysis. Although the data for the study is qualitative which demands qualitative analysis, the researchers applied corpus processes to ground the discussion of findings. That is, the quantitative method involved determining the frequencies of the verbal process while the qualitative method was used for in-depth interpretation of the results. Through the descriptive approach, the researchers identified the main trends of the process in the data and presented their description. For the quantitative aspect, corpus methods are applied to study the literary text with a focus on the verbal process and its literary appreciation (Hoover, 2007). McIntyre (2015) notes a corpus turn in stylistics to account for quantitative processes to account for rhetorical concerns. In using corpus stylistics as a quantitative approach, the researcher uses the literary text as the corpus data. It provides relatively objective methodological procedures guided by less subjective interpretation (Carter, 2010b). In all, the corpus methodology assists the researcher in selecting frequent verbal processes as a means of examining the entire text. Also, the qualitative aspect of the mixed-method

design informs the use descriptive approach to describe the data chronologically and in a subject- rather than researcher-focused manner.

Data Collection Procedure

The data for this research is Adichie's *Zikora*. The softcopy of the novel was downloaded from Z-Library (<https://b-ok.africa/book/6101035/045ab9>). This book of the author was particularly chosen because it is currently in the African literary world of writing. Most of the texts (*Purple Hibiscus*, *Half a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah*) from the author and other texts from other African writers (*Things Fall Apart*, *Changes*, *Faceless*, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Arrow of God*, *Disgrace*, etc.) have been over explored which leads to reduplication in results from the literary texts. The contemporariness of the novel in revealing feminist and masculinity ideologies also necessitated its selection for the analysis. Additionally, the novel has stylistically significant features such as projected clauses and reported speeches which carry implied meanings which will be revealed through the verbal process analysis. The upsurge of research in gender studies also finds its way into this research, particularly in the text. The author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, has received honourable prizes for her novels amongst which are Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction, National Book Critics Circle Award, and MacArthur Fellowship.

The .pdf version of the novel was transformed into a .doc version. To provide accuracy, the researchers formatted the .doc version by removing the title page, preface of the text, table of content and about the author sections in the book. The formatted data was then cleaned and transformed again to a .txt version which is machine-readable with the AntConc software. Figure 2 presents a graphical representation of the loaded data into the software.

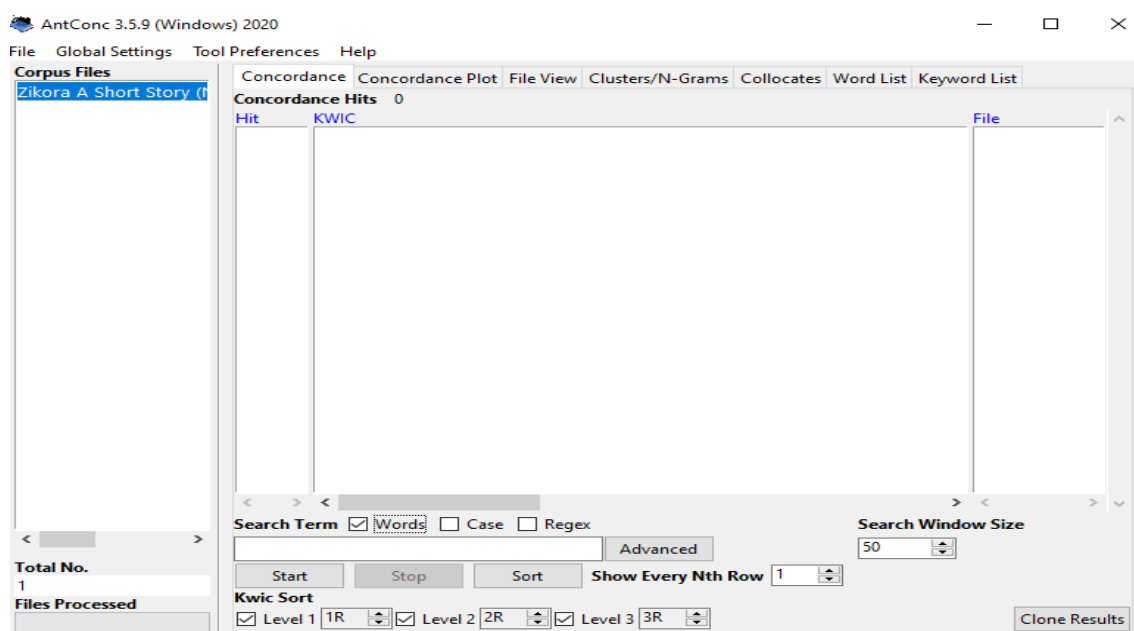


Figure 2. Loaded text into AntConc

Analytical Framework and Analysis Procedures

Given the theoretical focus of this research, the researchers adopted transitivity analysis as the analytical framework for the study. The transitivity analysis framework contributes to the meaning-making resources of language (lexico-grammar), which provides interpretive concerns on the roles the process assigns to participants in a clause. Martin, Matthiessen and Painter (2010) outline the analytical prowess of transitivity to interpret the world of experiences into a set of processes. As an analytical framework for this study, it represents the different domains of experience (Mwinlaaru & Nartey, 2021). Corroborating with Ji and Shen (2004), using transitivity as a framework for analysing narrative texts reveals the manipulation of patterns to describe and develop thematic issues in the work. Figure 2 illustrates the transitivity analytical framework.

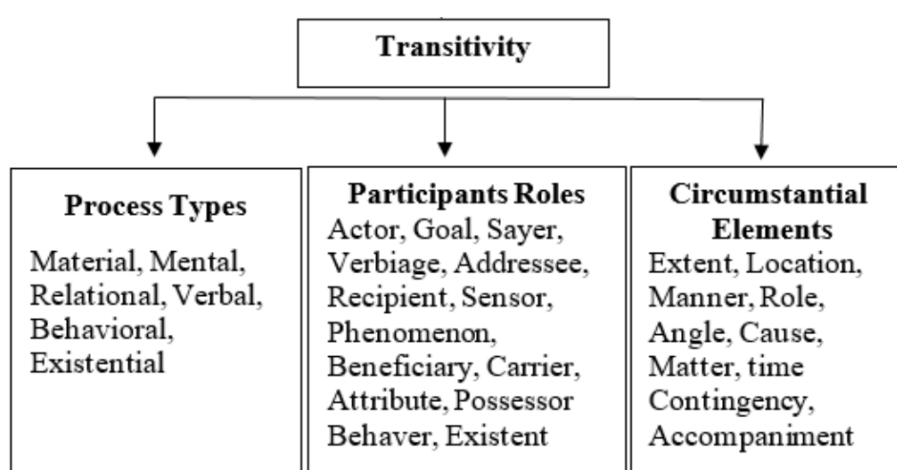


Figure 3. Transitivity analytical framework. Adapted from Ammara, Anjum & Javed (2019)

Post revising the entire text, the researchers recognized the broad transitivity analysis lurking in this study. Hence, the researchers focused exclusively on the verbal process which is foregrounded over the other process types, participant roles and circumstances. To add to that, generally, the process (realised the verbs or verbal group) forms the nucleus of the clause. The cleaned data (.txt version of *Zikora*) was loaded into the AntConc software to check the frequencies and concordances of the verbal process in the text. After thoroughly checking the wordlist, the researchers recorded and categorized the most occurring verbal process. After categorizing the frequency of the process, given the limited space in this study, the researcher generally considered the top ten (10) verbal process examples to inform the interpretation into themes. The clauses (or clause complexes) containing the ten frequent verbal processes were isolated and analysed. Here, the descriptive approach in interpreting the results chronologically based on themes was crucial. The researchers consulted an expert in the field of Systemic Functional Linguistics to check the validity and reliability of the processes and their categorization. He read through the novel to ascertain the dominance of the verbal process in the novel. He provided constructive comments which were factored into the analysis procedures to improve the reliability of the data analysis procedures.

Results and Discussion

The AntConc software revealed a total of 2292 word types and 11214 word-tokens in the text. The word list was checked and the frequency of the words pertaining to the context in the verbal process occurred. Table 1 presents the top ten (10) examples relating to the verbal process and their percentages against the entire word types.

Table 1. *Keyword list for frequent verbal processes*

Rank	Verbal Process	Frequency	Percentage
15	Said	119	5.2%
70	Asked	22	0.9%
72	Told	22	0.9%
99	Called	15	0.7%
130	Say	13	0.6%
157	Saying	10	0.4%
174	Call	9	0.3%
277	Ask	5	0.2%
558	Spoke	3	0.1%
564	Tell	3	0.1%

From Table 1, the study reports the frequent occurrence of 'said' (5.2%) of the total word count in the text. The unusual representation of 'said' is reflected in the data when compared with other verbal processes. It achieved a concordance hit of 119, which was either associated with the narrator or a different character in the text. The discussion of the identified verbal processes is done to inform the thematic interpretations. The researcher believes that the verbal processes add to the foregrounding of the thematic meanings in the literary text. Figure 1 presents the themes concerning the verbal processes.

Deconstructing the Myriad 'Feminine' Suffering and Subjugation

The discussion of this theme is reflected in the selected extracts from the text. In this section, the researcher discusses the focus of the projected clauses from the first-person mode of narration. That is, in the process of deconstructing how the feminine figure suffers, the analysis presents new meanings from the conventional interpretation. Extract 1 exemplifies the sexual subjugation and suffering of females.

Extract 1

*He **said**, "It's a shock." I **said**, "You came inside me." He **said**, "I thought you let me because you had protection." I **said**, "What are you talking about? You know I stopped taking the pill because it made me fat, and I assumed you knew what it meant, what it could mean." He **said**, "There was miscommunication." (Zikora 11)*

The narrator presents the story from an autobiographical perspective with the use of 'I'. It appears to be a recollection of experiences with a partner. In Extract 1, the naivety and gullibility of the masculine figure are brought to bear. He seems surprised by the news of pregnancy from Zikora, the main character of the text. The 'careless' behaviour of Emmanuel (he) is evidenced by the projections of Zikora through the reported speeches. Zikora interrogates the conscience of Kwame through the dialogical exchange foregrounded through the verbal process expressed through 'said' which frequently occurred (119) in the corpus data as seen in Table 1. Figure 3 from the concordance adds to the interpretation of the dominance of 'said' in the text.

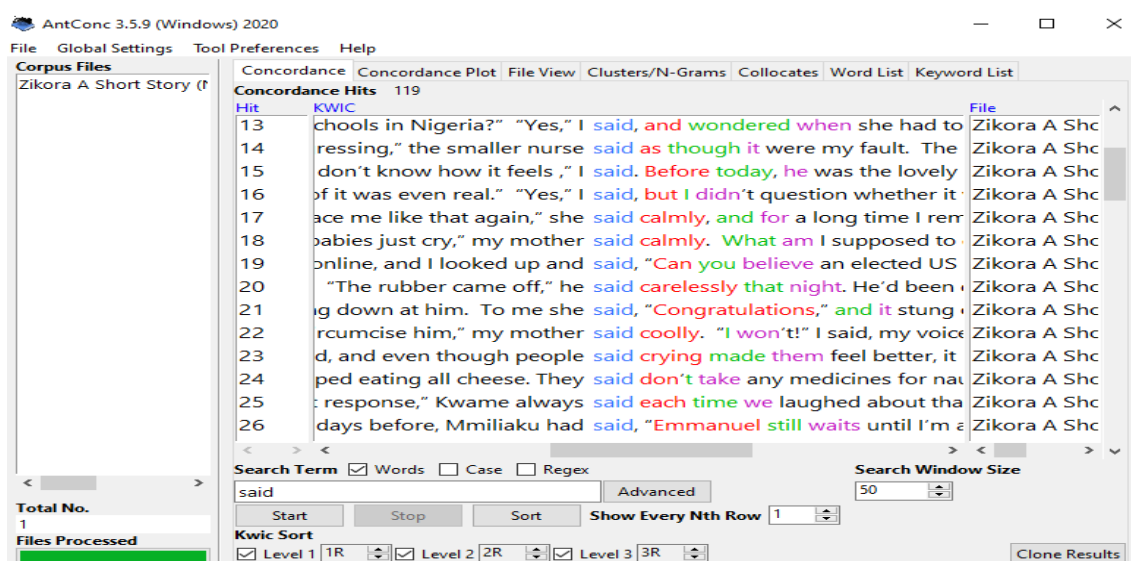


Figure 4. Concordance hit for 'said'

Related to the theme, Adichie presents the failure of taking responsibility for exploitation on the part of the masculine gender. From Figure 3, on hit 20, Adichie hints at the careless acts of the husband on endangering the health of the wife. Through the reported clauses, Zikora unravels some expectations from masculine figures that place a weight of suffering on females through sexual relations (Bonsu, 2021; Nnaemeka, 2005). This is reflected in the expression "I stopped taking the pill because it made me fat, and I assumed you knew what it meant, what it could mean" in Extract 1. She mirrors the new suffering of females in contemporary African society. That is, to meet the expectation of satisfying the male frequently with sex without getting pregnant, the female has to take contraceptives. More importantly, the possible effects inherent in taking these medications are not considered by the males. In another perspective, Tyson (2014) revises the advantages of deconstruction and adds that it becomes a useful tool for feminism since it attempts to reveal the oppressive role of ideologies in society. The

ideology which is foregrounded through the verbal processes of dialogic exchange is sexual gratification at the cost of the body of the female. To further deepen the stylistic effect of the verbal process, the narrator concludes with "He said, 'There was miscommunication.'", where the masculine figure fails to take responsibility for his actions to the detriment of the new suffering of the female.

The myriad suffering of the female is further reflected in another verbiage from the narrator who projects most of the clauses through verbal processes. The narrator, in a way, justifies the marital rapes females suffer in marriages. She puts it that:

*I was annoyed and wanted to **tell** her that not everyone was her Emmanuel, warped and stunted, raping her while she slept. (Zikora 15)*

Here, what appears to be a case against patriarchal tendencies concerning rape in marriages tends to be a call for guarding the reputation of an 'upright' male. This is evidenced in that nominal clause 'that not everyone was her Emmanuel'. The verbal process that adds to the foregrounding of this theme is 'tell'. There is an extension of forms of exploitation (i.e., socio-economic, sexual, political, religious etc.) in the novella. Zikora suffers marital rape from her husband. Such issues in African literature have been investigated by Buiten and Naidoo (2016), Curry (2011), and Teiko (2017). Intertextually, such acts are presented by most female African writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (Sackeyfio, 2012; Sackeyfio & Sackeyfio, 2007) where Esi, a career woman divorces her husband with marital rape being a reason. The strength presented by Aidoo for the female character is likewise seen in Adichie's *Zikora*. Instances are presented in Extract 2.

Extract 2

*"I just want them to know I can handle it, I can do it alone," I **said**. (Zikora 14)*

*"Some of us have men and are still doing it alone," Mmiliaku **said**. (Zikora 14)*

*I once **told** Kwame the story. (Zikora 10)*

*She would have wanted me to **tell** Aunt Nwanneka that I was perfectly fine. (Zikora 23)*

The advent of women empowerment has led to several calls for taking responsibility for their lives and advocating for justice. Related to this issue is 'voice'. The voiceless have found a voice (Sam, 2021) to share their plight and find strength in their weaknesses. This can be associated with Sam's analysis of Mara, from Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, as a woman herself. In this regard, the general notion of feebleness and dormancy of women in society is deconstructed as a way of finding strength. Arguably, the insidious nature of women in society is sidelined in the extracts. From Extract 2, one means of finding strength and rising from the subalternity is through dialogue. This is realised by the use of the verbal process 'told' in sentence three. Interestingly, the realisation of the verbal process 'told' in the extract is not constructing a sisterhood, but redesigning the social relations that exist between males and females. In 'I once **told** Kwame the story', the narrator presents how the dialogic exchange with the male creates a space for the subaltern female. This is supported by sentence four where the narrator voices her

sentiments rather than condones being 'fine' with her situation. The point established is that some female characters would want identifiable subalterns to keep mute and suffer. In another perspective, Adichie mirrors how other African women become oppressors to other women by reconstituting instances of silence. Again, Adichie foregrounds the empowerment of women rather than suffering in silence in sentences one, two and four. The writer outlines the inherent 'force' that drives the pioneering acts of women to be themselves in the text (Diala-Ogamba, 2021). What appears to be conspicuous about most feminist discussion on subjugation and oppression is deconstructed. The dominant use of 'said' coupled with 'told' and 'tell' is stylistically significant in realizing the intended meaning of deconstructing the suffering and subjugation of women in contemporary African society. This analysis deviates from studies by authors such as Mwinlaaru (2014) who emphasized political activism in Achebe and Ngugi's works.

Attributing Processes to Other Characters

Through the transitivity framework, literary researchers provide explanatory meanings to ground how writers conceal their identity by ascribing roles and communicating through other characters. In Adichie's *Zikora*, it is overwhelming that the writer associates several roles with other characters through the use of masculine third-person pronouns and nouns indicating masculinities. There is the perpetration of feminist ideals through the verbal processes. While this is foregrounded, a more objective interpretation is to review the characters' actual roles rather than what the narrator attributes to them. For instance, scholars (Sam, 2021; Nutsukpo, 2019, 2017) have often justified the subjugation of women and sexual domestication by Akobi through the report by the narrator Maya. Extract 3 presents some revisions to how the style variation from Adichie consolidates new perspectives of roles to characters.

Extract 3

*On our first date he **said**, "Looking nutty good!" (Zikora 8)*

*He **said**, "We're at different places in our lives." (Zikora 11)*

*He **said**, "I'll take care of everything," (Zikora 17)*

*"He sounds like a sad specimen," Kwame **said**. (Zikora 10)*

*The pregnancy websites **said** no soft cheese... They said don't take any medicines for nausea.*

*"That's your mom?" he **asked**. (Zikora 11)*

From the instances provided, the narrator through the verbal processes attributes some functions to the characters (i.e., he [Emmanuel], Kwame, and the pregnancy websites). From the extract, the numerical dominance of 'said' is foregrounded to deepen the relative essence of male character traits and media influences on the feminine gender. The occurrence of the verbal processes is predominantly in conjunction with masculine third-person pronouns (he) and nouns (Kwame). In sentence one, we are presented with a compliment from the main character where this compliment appears as sexually adornment. This is highlighted in the word 'nutty' (reflecting something stimulatingly

crazy). In sentence three, we are presented with the conventional responsibility of men taking responsibilities. This sharply contrasts Mmiliaku's purports in Extract 2 that "*Some of us have men and are still doing it alone*". This points out the competitive friction between masculine and feminine genders in realizing responsibilities in society. Further, the influence of media in our contemporary African society cannot be underrated. The media has become our primary source of information and enlightenment, spanning from relationships, health, economics, politics and education. From a historical literary perspective, Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* identifies the interplay of the media in postcolonial African societies (Ann, 2015). Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* also presents trails of the media through pornography and its influence on the central character Maya (Omolola, 2016).

In the current research, the media becomes a source of education for Zikora where she learns of the dos and don'ts during her pregnancy period. Adichie transcends her main female character over the traditional roles of men to enlighten them through technological media. The overarching influence of the media on the feminine figure is evidenced through the attribution of such function to the website. In the sentence, 'no soft cheese' becomes the verbiage that is negated to prevent the character from eating cheese. Here, the character does not follow her instinct but ascribes some dominance of the media to women in society. It is rather surprising that the reality of a pregnant African woman is constructed by western media ideals. The corpus identifies 'asked', with a frequency of 22 (0.9%) as the second most frequent verbal process. Linguistically, 'asked' denotes a demand for goods and services in the mood system in SFL typically realised by the interrogative sentence as evident in the sentence, and metaphorically through the imperative and declarative. 'asked' as a verbal process was associated mainly with other characters rather than the narrator from the autobiographical perspective. Figure 4 is an illustration of the concordance of the use of 'asked'.

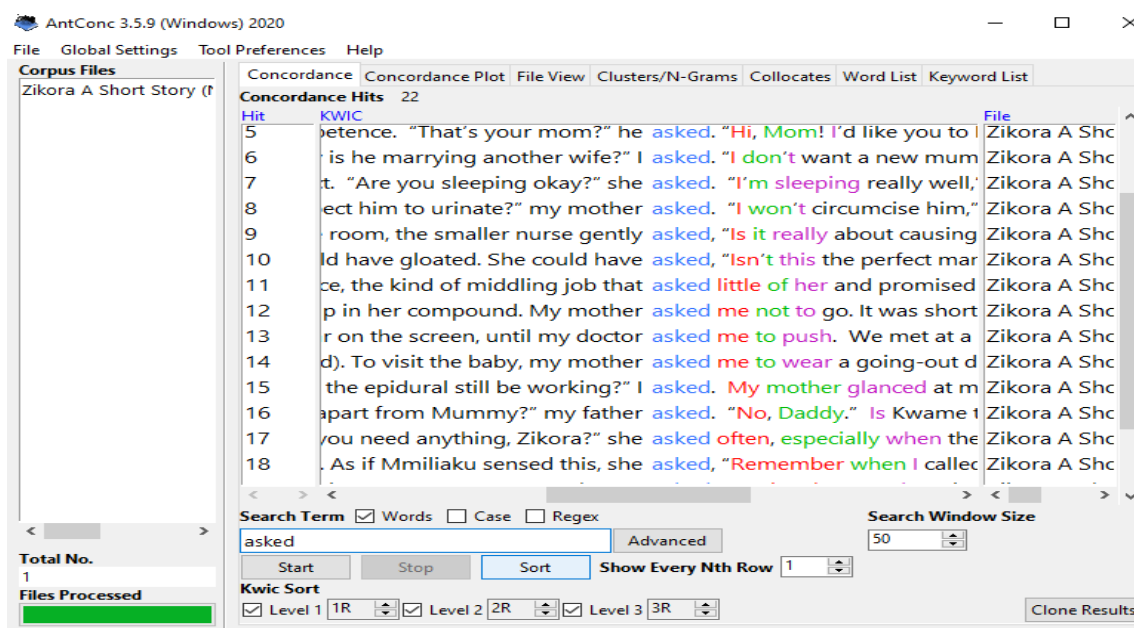


Figure 5. Concordance hit for 'asked'

From Figure 4, we witness the demand for information and request to perform a certain action from characters such as the narrator's mother, father, Mmiliaku and he (Kwame). Most of the hits (such as from 7 to 11, 16, and 17) reflect the request for information from the narrator. In this sense, the researcher justifies the demand for information by others from the narrator. This consolidated interpretation from the perspective of the transitivity process presents the narrator as a repository of information concerning other characters and her own life. The metaphorical use of 'asked' from hits 12 and 13 projects a control, in a form of request, over the narrator's acts.

Conclusion

This research set out to conduct a corpus stylistic analysis of Adichie's *Zikora* focusing primarily on the foregrounding of the verbal process in the text. Through foregrounding and SFL, the study reports three key findings from the analysis of the text. First, through the verbal processes, the Adichie deconstructed the myriad suffering and subjugation of women through dialogic means and taking responsibility for their livelihood. Second, the foregrounded verbal processes reflect the attribution of processes to other characters than accounting for the literary effects projected through the clauses. This was evident in the predominant use of third-person pronouns. Finally, while the writer used the projected clauses to attribute the verbal processes to others, the dominant use of the first-person mode of narration identifies a sharing of roles to account for the writing of the literary work. From these findings, the researcher reports that transitivity is in the subconscious of the literary writer and that the foregrounded meanings from the corpus-assisted analysis support the ideological position of the writer. Evidently, corpus stylistics offers a novel lens to interpret literary texts more objectively for new meanings and understanding. Generally, the foregrounding of the verbal process, which seems to be a stylistic deviation of the author, tailors with the feminist ideological position of Adichie.

There were some limitations that were encountered in the conduct of this research. First, the adopted framework in the study is based on three concepts, however, given the stylistically markedness of the process, we dwelled on only one concept. Further research could use the entire framework to modify or affirm the results of the study. Secondly, although the research is an interface between linguistics and literature, the discussion used more literary interpretation to foreground the essence of the concept that was investigated. Nonetheless, the researchers acknowledge the contributions the research offers to knowledge in stylistics.

That said, the study offers some implications for practice and further research. The findings offer pedagogical implications for teaching literature in second language contexts, specifically Ghana. The findings reveal the need to reconsider how the process(es) foregrounded in the text unravels new themes in any literary text. Finally, further studies could be conducted to reveal the process style of authors. Another study could focus on a comparative analysis of Adichie's works to project the textual transformation over time confirming it as a style.

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N/A

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