



LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN EGBUSON'S *LOVE MY PLANET*

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Abstract

With the aid of Systemic Functional Grammar and Environmental Semiotics, this study examines the relationship between language and environment in Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet*. Specifically, it interprets the lexico-semantic features of text within an ecological perspective. Focusing on how Egbuson employs language to convey environmental themes, promote sustainability, and raise awareness about ecological issues. Through the deployment of lexical choices and various rhetorical strategies, the study reveals that the language in the text is not merely aesthetic but integral to the communication of how language functions as a tool for meaning-making. The study also shows that poet's use of vivid imagery, metaphor, and symbolism to depict the beauty and fragility of the natural world. In addition, the study demonstrates how Egbuson's language shapes readers' perceptions of the environment and encourages them to take action towards environmental conservation. The study concludes by showing how idiosyncratic styles reinforce the thematic essence of the text. This enriching the understanding of how stylistic choices convey the complex issues facing the Niger Delta State, region etc. This paper contributes to the fields of environmental semiotics, –eco-linguistics and environmental literary studies, offering insights into the role of language in promoting environmental awareness and sustainability.

Keywords: Language, Style, Lexical-Semantics, Environment, Niger Delta



Introduction

The exploitation of natural resources, specifically oil, resulting in the marginalisation of its inhabitants, has led to environmental, social and economic challenges in the Niger Delta region. This longstanding issue has had numerous detrimental effects on local communities, whose livelihoods and cultural identities are tied to their natural surroundings. In response, third-generation writers from the Niger Delta and beyond have focused their subject matter on bringing these issues to the forefront through their artful use of language. Language, therefore, is the foundation upon which literature is constructed. It plays a crucial role as a creative outlet for writers, acting as the essential tool that brings together various elements of writing style. Syal and Jindal (2007, p. 25) assert that literary writers distinctly employ language to craft their style, meaning every literary work is constructed with language. These writers intentionally select impactful words and may even violate grammatical rules to amplify their intended messages. Syal and Jindal (2007) state that poets and prose writers rearrange word order within sentences and sometimes repeat certain sounds or phrases for dramatic effect. These techniques enable them to manipulate language in ways that convey an explicit theme with heightened force and effectiveness. In essence, they employ various linguistic techniques to encapsulate their messages while achieving aesthetic appeal. Thus, a work aesthetic value is closely tied to its stylistic value.

It is against this background that this study is carried out, presenting an opportunity to explore the intricacies of language in literature and reveal the implicit messages conveyed by the author through his distinct writing styles. Hence, deploying both the Systemic Functional Model and Environmental Semiotics theories, this study examines selected lexical-semantic features that relate to the environment in Egbuson's *Love My Planet*. In this paper, the relationship between words or phrases and their meanings is analysed through the lexico-semantic features of a literary text. The choice of words made by a writer effectively conveys their thoughts and perceptions. Therefore, this analysis involves examining vocabulary choices and semantic nuances, which illuminate the environmental motif of the text.

In line with Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 30), the ideational metafunction and environmental semiotics enable language to represent human experiences, actions, and processes as reflected in the narrative events of a text. Both of these fields reflect a specific domain of human experience as categorized below. Through the approaches of ideational metafunction, and environmental semiotics in this paper, Egbuson employs certain lexical items to construe experiences that are central to the novel's thematic concerns, particularly those reflecting real-world socio-economic, environmental and political issues.

A) Semantic Fields

According to Finnegan (2015, p. 197), semantic fields are distinctive sets of lexical items that share identifiable semantic connections or thematic associations. These associated words function as a means of uncovering deeper meanings and underlying themes within a text. Halliday (2002, p. 61) emphasises that categorisation through semantic fields or lexical relations allows one to identify how lexical items are systematically connected in discourse. He also notes that a semantic field is not a closed system, as it has the capacity to fit in additional lexical elements. Therefore, applying the ideational metafunction and Environmental Semiotics to Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, several dominant discourses emerge which can be categorized as follows:

1. **Lexical items depicting environmental impact:** Oil spillage (p. 228), gas flaring (p. 352), flooding (p. 173), environmental contamination, pollution (p.243), smell (p. 128), oil bunkering (p. 402), blackish water (p. 228), swamps (p. 278) The lexical items related to the environmental impact of oil extraction explore the negative consequences of industrial activities on communities: "But this water is polluted! Obviously polluted by oil spillage" (Egbuson, 2008, p. 228). Egbuson employs these lexical items as imagery of destruction in the text.
2. **Lexical Items depicting confinement:** night, (p. 9) Black Maria (p. 31), locked up (p. 7), prison (p. 23), darkness (p. 278), nightmare (p. 14), fear (p. 39), caged (p. 10) The thematic connections between the lexical items listed above evoke a strong sense of anxiety and oppression. Each term



contributes to an overarching mood of entrapment and dread, highlighting experiences of physical and psychological confinement. Egbuson's *Love My Planet* begins with an environment of disarray, filled with insecurity, crime and violence, and a manifestation of intense fear and terror. As such, selected lexical items and phrases are deployed by the author to convey the theme of confinement. The selected lexical items are further exemplified in the extracts below:

- i. “Oh, he **feared night!** Many times, he had wished that **night** was not a part of life...” (p.9).
- ii. “Araba explained that awake or sleeping life in Daglobe was a **nightmare**” (p. 14).
- iii. “Oh, this street too is now at the mercy of armed robbers,' Toundi remarked, 'and every **night** we're **caged in fear**” (p. 194).
- iv. “The world is a **Black Maria** and we are **locked up** in it until we develop the power to break out - money power” (p. 31).
- v. There are many **forms of prison**, and I'm in my own **prison** (p. 109).

The deployment of the bold-printed lexical items from the provided excerpts is synonymous, depicting a society where its inhabitants are devoid of freedom.

3. Lexical items depicting violence: bloody (p. 219), defend (p. 171), brutality (p. 228), militant (p. 402), attack (p. 13), soldiers (p. 228), bloodied (p. 25), struggle (p. 277), troops (p. 227), casualties (p.389). The distinctive set of lexical items uncovers the semantic themes that resonate in most Niger Delta texts. The lexical items above evoke themes of resistance and environmental conflict reflecting the socio-political issues in the Niger Delta environment. Below is also a sample passage from the text:

The next day thousands of troops swooped on some riverine villages in search of Dr Fitzgerald Alogu, the president's aide. The people of Yenge, Araba's home village were heavily brutalized for hiding their son... Sixty of the soldiers that had visited Yenge were gunned down on the river... (pp. 227-228).

4. Lexical Items depicting politics: policy (p. 52), election (p. 112), campaign (p. 257), government (p. 227), leader (p. 110), corruption (p. 340), vote (p. 50), opposition (p. 325), democracy (217), president (p. 320), Daglobe Unity Party (p. 373), Free Daglobe (p. 375) The above lexical items are used to convey the complexities of policies in the text. The choice of lexical items interplays between government actions and public response, highlighting issues such as accountability and civic responsibility. For instance, when Dr Fitzgerald Alogu, the president's aide, was released, he publicly proclaimed that "the federal government is an insensitive, incompetent, corrupt, selfish, people-hating and evil government" (Egbuson, 2008, p. 229). Egbuson's text criticises democracy, depicting the realities of political engagement and the struggles for justice in the Niger Delta region.

5. Lexical Items depicting the media and communication: headline (p. 30), editorial (p. 389), press conference (p. 405), broadcast (p. 376), Daglobe channel (p. 355), radio (p. 291), television (p. 218), reporter (p. 228), news report (p. 295), The Nation (p. 376), and the Sunday Vanguard (p. 361) The lexical items depicting media and communication in the Daglobe Delta enrich the narrative as they shape the environmental and socio-political landscape of the region. The selected lexical items contribute to an understanding of how the media operates in the text, providing information about the happenings in the environment. For instance, news reports detail various crimes in Daglobe, while headlines foreground key information on the most important news. It is important to note that some of these items are best interpreted within the specific contexts in which they appear, as lexical items alone lack the capacity to convey meanings.



B) Lexical Relations through Synonymy and Antonymy:

These are meaning relations that contribute to cohesion and stylistic effect. Lexical cohesion which is primarily elaborated by Halliday and Hasan (1976) is a cohesive device that creates unity in a text through semantic relationships between words. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 603) further classify lexical cohesion as part of the textual metafunction, emphasising its ability to transcend clause boundaries and allow meaning to unfold across larger stretches of text. These cohesive systems help create continuity and unity throughout a text. Using the understanding of semantic fields, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 61) highlight the semantic features that link the members of a lexical set, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and meronymy. However, this analysis focuses only on synonymy and antonymy. The analysis is presented within the specific context in which the lexical items are employed for a clearer understanding.

I The Use of Antonymy

This is the most glaring lexical relations that Egbuson employs to effectively convey his intended message. Antonymy, which involves words with opposite meanings, contributes to lexical cohesion as one of the lexicogrammatical systems within the textual metafunction of Halliday. Egbuson utilises the vocabulary of opposition to reveal various themes. These contrasts include fundamental ideas such as freedom versus bondage and light versus darkness. The opposition between freedom and bondage is vividly portrayed in the excerpts below:

- Araba explained that **awake** or **sleeping** life in Daglobe was a nightmare, a series of **longlived unpleasant** experiences and **shortlived happy** experiences. (p.14)
- On the border between **sleeping** and waking.... he saw the world as a net. (p. 9)
- During the **day** or at night.... he scarcely went out, locked up in the prison of his fear. (p. 7)

The contrasting lexical choices in the above excerpts effectively illustrate the conflict between the desire for freedom and the reality of bondage. The feeling of helplessness is centred on Araba, as it vividly conveys the psychological and emotional constraints he faces, suggesting that fear has effectively imprisoned him. This theme is well captured in the first chapter, setting the stage for the complex narrative that unfolds.

To foreground this aspect of meaning, the juxtaposed lexical items in excerpt.... one can be categorized as follows: "awake versus sleeping", "life versus nightmare", "long-lived versus short-lived and "unpleasant experiences versus happy experiences". Through these antonymous relationships, Egbuson conveys the pervasive insecurity and emotional turmoil faced by the inhabitant of Daglobe. Thus, the contrasting relationships carry negative connotations, further emphasising the sense of hopelessness.

In excerpts two and three, the contrast between sleeping and waking as well as day and night highlights the loss of safety and freedom. While day and waking symbolises light and safety, night and sleeping often connote danger. However, both times are framed within the context of fear, suggesting that insecurity permeates every moment, rendering both day and night equally oppressive. The lexical item "net" in excerpt two serves as a metaphorical net, implying being caught or trapped, which reinforces feelings of bondage rather than freedom.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of light and darkness symbolizes the conflict between good and evil. In the text, darkness represents a region that has been neglected to its core. This is exemplified in the excerpt and passage provided below: "Is it always dark like this? No lights outside. And everywhere is so quiet" (p. 156).

Oil City, the city of light, where there was electricity 24/7, sprang up from where wetland as cleared and sandfilled-Oil City tickled the young women of Ogazza also with its paradisaical grid of paved ways, a mini football pitch, a concrete court for lawn tennis, many comfortable portacabins, one shiny prefabricated bungalow, a swimming pool and a borehole that supplied running water. The bulk of its residents were Filipinos, Britons and Chinese. There were a handful of Nigerians and a couple of Venezuelans and Daglobans, but no one from Ogazza, one from Daglobe Delta (p. 160).

Light symbolizes the existence of progress, but this is absent in Daglobe Delta. In excerpt one, this absence is depicted through the imagery and emotional tone of Toundi. The phrase "always dark like



this" in the first excerpt suggests a prevailing and oppressive sense of darkness that has overshadowed its inhabitants. The thematic contrast between light and darkness in the passage effectively conveys the imagery and socio-economic dynamics of "Oil City". The city thrives in all areas, depicted as a modern space filled with amenities and opportunities, symbolised by "electricity 24/7" and the "paradisical grid." In contrast, the swampy Niger Delta region evokes a sense of environmental deterioration and its marginalised and excluded from this prosperity. The view of Oil City, as Toundi thought, the breathtaking beauty of the fluorescent brightness of the minicity..." serves as a metaphor for the light in "Oil City" standing against the implied darkness of the local area, indicating neglect or underdevelopment.

II The Use of Synonymy

Synonymy, as a cohesive device, expresses the same meaning or nearly the same meaning as another word. Egbuson employs this technique to convey the magnitude of the ills in Daglobe Delta. Throughout the text, an array of synonyms is used to convey the themes of confinement and bondage. This theme is prevalent from the very first chapter, where lexical items like caged, prison, locked up, fear, Black Maria, nightmare, darkness and night are repeatedly employed. These lexical items are reiterated in various contexts throughout the text to reinforce the overarching message of darkness and bondage. Lexemes under the central idea of darkness and bondage include the following:

- (i) The robbers' theatre of successful operation was **gory** and **ghastly** (p. 5).
- (ii) He agreed as he thought of how fear had **eroded** his joy. During the day and at **night** he scarcely went out, **locked up** in the **prison** of his fear (p. 5).
- (iii) **Locked up** in the prison of his **fear**. (p. 7).
- (iv) He assured the Daglobe **neglected**, **deprived** and **oppressed**... (p. 408).

By closely examining the bold printed lexical items in each excerpt, it becomes evident that they convey negative connotations. Through the deployment of synonymy, Egbuson effectively captures the essence of his message. In the first extract, the choice of words "gory" and "ghastly" are synonymous, as they paint a vivid picture of the gruesome nature of the crime. In this context, Egbuson carefully chooses his words to enhance the vividness of the description.

In excerpts two and three, the lexical items "fear", "night", "locked up", "eroded" and "prison" are synonymous, given their shared semantic characteristics that evoke a vivid portrayal of a debilitating emotional state.

Therefore, the array of these synonymous terms. Which reiterated in several contexts throughout the texts, is to reinforce an oppressive atmosphere, effectively conveying the overarching themes of darkness and bondage.

In the fourth extract, the lexical items "neglected," "deprived," and "oppressed" share a thematic connection, forming a cohesive theme of systematic disenfranchisement. This emphasises Daglobe's struggle against the chains of emotional neglect and oppression. Consequently, these thematic connections highlight broader societal issues of marginalisation allowing Daglobe's experiences to resonate with themes of darkness, bondage, and injustice.

C) Rhetorical Strategies

Rhetorical strategies are techniques employed by writers to convey meaning, persuade or engage the audience, and enrich the expressive quality of a text. These devices not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the work but also foreground key aspects of meaning. They are particularly relevant to the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions of language. This study identifies and analyses the most prominent rhetorical strategies found in the selected texts.

I Lexis and Dialogue

Lexis pertains to the vocabulary of a language. As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 387) elucidate, lexis is the fundamental building block of language. Within the systemic functional linguistics framework, it not only fulfils grammatical functions but also conveys the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions of language. The choice of words used in dialogue helps to convey meaning and emotions when analysing a text. Dialogue, defined as the exchanges between characters, reveals the distinctive traits of a character and provides insights into the themes of a literary piece. This leads to



characterisation, the art through which a literary writer crafts the portrayal of a character, encompassing their actions, thoughts, and interactions with other characters.

Through the omniscient narrator, Egbuson employs two major characters in the overarching narrative. These characters, Araba and Toundi, are depicted as symbolic figures, each offering a unique perspective through their dialogue that reveals their distinctive traits. For instance, the dialogue between Araba and the head robber who attacked his home in the Ministry of Housing vividly portrays the relentless pursuit of justice:

Armed robber: You want to know whether our people are armed robbers too. Have you been to our villages? When last were you there to see how our people are living? Is that life? Despite all the oil from our land. What job do you have to me in Dabaka? No job, no money to continue school, you except me to choose death? To accept injustice? I demand justice- simple justice.

Araba: But why attack poor people like us? Why not the rich who's known incomes can't account for their affluence and lifestyles? (Egbuson, 2008, pp. 12-13)

The primary metafunction of language used in the exchange is the ideational metafunction. To illustrate the ideational metafunction, the language use in the dialogue shows the vivid experiences of his people, which are poverty, injustice, and social inequality. The language employed is explicit, as the armed robber subtly references the living conditions of the people in the Niger Delta region with phrases such as, "have you been to our villages?" and "when last were you there to see how our people are living? Is that life? The characters' traits through the choice of words, rhetorical questions and tone are symbolic of the marginalised and exploited people in the Delta region who resorted to arms as a means of survival. From the language used, "our people...", "despite the oil from our land", it is evident that both participants share a similar cultural background as Niger Deltans. The conversation begins with rhetorical questions, leading to a declaration of his burning desire for justice. Therefore, the tone of the robber is revealed as one of frustration and desperation.

Due to the intensity of the situation, Araba's response, also conveyed through probing questions, reveals a more cautious tone. His response reveals his character trait as one who desires justice without disregarding the plight of the underprivileged, thereby signifying a more passive stance in contrast to the armed robber. This pivotal moment underscores the depth of Araba's convictions as the narrative unfolds. Araba embodies the vibrant and determined Niger Delta youth who have resorted to arms as a means to bring about positive change in their environment. His commitment to the cause is a result of the injustice meted out on his people and the environmental degradation resulting from oil spills, which have adverse effects on the community. The dialogue between Araba and Toundi further reveals their character

traits:

Toundi: But why did you kill the chiefs? That was evil, Araba, evil.

Araba: I didn't kill them. SJ did. The cause of the Daglobe Delta did. The death of six Daglobe Deltans...for the good of the whole (Egbuson, 2008, p. 238)

Toundi: Araba, you're evil.

Araba: And so, you hate me?

Toundi: I hate your means.

Araba: The end justified the means.

Toundi: No, no, no, she positively protested (Egbuson, 2008, p. 245).

Egbuson uses dialogue to reveal their distinct outlooks towards violence as a means to bring about change. The informal exchange between Araba and Toundi showcases a shared cultural understanding while highlighting their contrasting viewpoints on the subject of "violence". In contrast to Araba, Toundi embodies eco-feminism through both her words and actions. Although she aligns with his objectives, she disapproves of his methods, as evidenced by her consistent disapproval: "I believe in his cause, so



he's my brother, though I don't approve of his means. He is my brother in the struggle for justice" (Egbuson, 2008, p. 254).

II Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions

Halliday (1978, p. 113) refers to one of the functions of language in social contexts, noting that it regulates the meanings and styles associated with specific social contexts and that a writer's choices also reflect cultural transmissions. Proverbs are words of wisdom that offer insightful guidance and lessons. According to Mele (2016, p. 246), proverbs are mainly metaphoric; they contain references to the socio-cultural milieu and folk wisdom of a community. Similarly, idiomatic expressions cannot be interpreted literally, as they convey truths in a striking manner. Selected instances include:

1. The child learns to dance by looking at the adults at home and on the dance ground and copying their steps (p. 155).
2. Our elders say if Mother Tortoise and Baby Tortoise have equal wisdom, then there is no advantage in age... My son has more wisdom than me" (p. 157).
3. Remember the saying of our people: "The strong wind cannot fell the small trees that bow before it." Umya is the strong wind. (p. 402).
4.no one should expect the neglected people of the Daglobe Delta and other deprived people to stick roses into the muzzles of the guns of their corrupt and unjust oppressors... (p. 408).

The selected excerpts primarily exemplify the ideational metafunction which is realised through language that encodes the cultural values, traditional wisdom, and social realities of the people. In excerpts one and two, it is evident that proverbs reflect the communal wisdom and values of the Niger Delta. Egbuson explores these proverbs within the text to highlight the prevalent theme of moral decadence. The high rate of moral decay in Ogazza results from the failures of parental guidance and a decline in societal values. Egbuson's *Love My Planet* portrays a sense of unrest among the youth, who have resorted to taking up arms as a means of revolt against their parents to address the unjust treatment meted out to the environment and its people: "nearly every day pau, kpau, kpau in the village, no peace" (p. 157). The elders, in neglecting their responsibilities, have chosen to prioritise financial gain from oil explorers over their duties to the community. Ereki says: "The traditional council of chiefs were meeting even though the youths had threatened to deal with them over some money they collected from an oil company. They were gathered together foolishly. The youths took five of them, the ringleaders away and their bodies have not been found" (Egbuson, 2008, p. 152).

Egbuson through the use of proverbs, conveys lessons about the repercussions of negligence. Neglect from society has led to chaos, as the youth find themselves caught between their upbringing and the failures of their environment and elders, which in turn influences the decisions they make. The proverb in excerpt three offers advice from a father to his son to exercise diplomacy when dealing with those in positions of authority, represented by Umya Song. While the powerful may apply pressure on the repentant militants, likened to "small trees," they will not destroy them. Rather than engaging in rebellion against the government, it is suggested that they adapt through negotiation, enabling them to endure amidst exploitation, as fighting against the government is deemed futile. Meanwhile, the idiom in excerpt four, "stick roses into the muzzles of the guns," conveys a deeper meaning about non-violent resistance and the futility of expecting oppressed people to respond peacefully to oppression.

III Imagery and Symbolism

Egbuson, through imagery creates a mental picture of the dire situation and condition of the Daglobe Delta. He employs the lexical item "chains" to symbolize a despoiled environment:

In fact, the people's chains of poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, environmental contamination and suchlike were worse than the hostages' handcuffs. The NTA screen showed the people of the village: barefoot adults in ragged clothes; naked children, a lot of them with distended stomachs due to malnutrition; a bare-chested old man...; a bare-breasted middle-aged woman with a running sore busy with waving away the flies from her sore with a rag, her flabby breasts swinging as she did so; a close-up of the slimy edge of a watery dump for household rubbish and excrement; all the houses were the same - sticks and thatch on stakes. Egbuson, 2008, p. 243).



The extract employs the ideational metafunction to foreground the realities of suffering and deprivation in the Niger Delta community. Through a vivid, documentary-like portrayal, the writer constructs experiential meanings by linking human figures to their harsh physical and social environment using detailed participants and circumstances.

The passage presents an image of a marginalised, polluted, and neglected society, effectively capturing the lived experiences of its inhabitants. The vivid imagery of “barefoot adults in ragged clothes” and “naked children... with distended stomachs” highlights the community’s extreme poverty and malnutrition. Symbolically, the reference to “chains of poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance and environmental contamination” portrays these conditions as inescapable forces that have entrapped the people. By describing these issues as “chains,” Egbuson conveys the oppressive and enduring nature of their suffering, thus emphasising the deeply rooted environmental and social crisis facing the region.

The depiction of the “slimy edge of a watery dump for household rubbish and excrement” is symbolic of environmental degradation, reflecting the neglect and exploitation of the Niger Delta. It emphasises both the physical and moral decays of the society. Through the use of colloquial expressions, Egbuson employs one of the most striking imageries to convey a significant aspect of meaning:

Dat place, you no fit go near am oh- at all at all. Even this place wey hot so, na because of that fire, wey no dey quench. Yam, cocoyam, vegetable no grow well for our area... Many many village, because of weytin dem call oil pollution, de rivers no get fish again. Even periwinkle and crab no easy to find again. (Egbuson, 2008, p. 243).

Egbuson employs vivid descriptions of a deteriorated and contaminated environment, “you no fit go near am oh... because of that fire, wey no dey quench.” Furthermore, he employs imagery related to nature and aquatic life in expressions such as “Yam, cocoyam, vegetable no grow well for our area...” and “de rivers no get fish again. Even periwinkle and crab no easy to find again, respectively. Symbolically, the crops and fishes (farming and fishing) which are the primary livelihoods of the Niger Delta people, have experienced a significant decline. This decline signifies the environmental destruction that has affected both their means of sustenance and their deeply rooted traditions.

The activities of the oil explorers and the consistent gas flaring not only affect the livelihood of the people but also their health. As such, the writer through his omniscient narrator, presents more imagery: “You dey talk of only food. How about de type of sickness wey our people dey sick? Sometimes for night, person no go fit breathe well, or skin dey scratch am... The doctor say de cancer done fill all him body, no way to cure am” (Egbuson, 2008, p. 244). Two elderly men and a nursing mother were dying of cholera. Several women were scratching their private parts and complaining of severe itching... If you go dat place, he said, pointing at an oil-stained wet track, de water there black well well. We been think say we fit drink dis one (Egbuson, 2008, p. 228). The quote projects a mood of lamentation as it conveys an awareness of the suffering of the people. More so, the imagery in the second quote is not only suggestive of the health hazard, but it is also symbolic of the contamination caused by environmental neglect “...at an oil-stained wet track, de water there black well well”.

IV Metaphor

Metaphor is an indirect comparison between two things of different natures. In the selected text, Egbuson employs metaphor to foreground the stark realism of the narrative. Examples include:

1. The present stage of my life is my own prison. (p. 23)
2. The world is a Black Maria and we are locked up in it... (p. 31)
3. During the day or at night he scarcely went out, locked up in the prison of his fear. (p. 7)
4. Araba explained that awake or sleeping life in Daglobe was a nightmare (p. 14).

The metaphorical expressions in the excerpts above exemplify the ideational metafunction of Halliday’s systemic functional grammar, particularly the experiential meaning, which focuses on how language is used to represent reality. Egbuson employs metaphor as a stylistic and rhetorical device to reinforce the author’s themes of psychological entrapment, existential despair, and socio-environmental oppression. These are real-world experiences that the author uses symbolic and figurative language to convey. These metaphors do not merely decorate the narrative; rather, they construct a vivid experiential world that reflects the harsh conditions of the Niger Delta region.



Toundi, the female protagonist, experiences her own form of imprisonment, that goes beyond this general fear. Prison symbolizes fear, entrapment and restriction. Her imprisonment results from gender-based segregation by her father, Wenni. Toundi's internal struggle with her father's views weighs heavily on her, creating a sense of being trapped and confined, much like being in a prison. The word choice of "Black Maria" in excerpt two emphasises the idea of confinement. Communities in the Niger Delta have faced environmental, political and economic exploitation, leading to several social maladies. Thus, the metaphorical expression suggests that the people from this region are in a helpless and hopeless situation. Araba represents those who are confined due to the oppressive actions of their oppressors, trapping them in a state of perpetual anxiety.

The metaphorical phrase "locked up in the prison of his fear" depicts how Araba's fear confines him, much like how a physical prison restricts the movement of an inmate. It suggests that his fear is a powerful force that dominates his life. Araba represents those who are "locked up in the prison of fear" by the oppressive actions of those who benefit from the oil in the land while marginalizing the masses. As such, young men have resorted to arms, perpetrating evil in order to survive and provide for themselves. The metaphorical comparison of life to a nightmare in Daglobe not only sheds light on the prevalent societal issues afflicting the region, but also highlights the lack of value placed on human life, showcasing a society that disregards the well-being of its inhabitants. Egbuson's deliberate choice of the word "nightmare" symbolises fear and distress, emphasising the dire circumstances faced by the people of Daglobe, who find themselves trapped in a state of helplessness and hopelessness against the backdrop of the Niger Delta region.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the selected excerpts align with the core function of the ideational metafunction, which is to construe human experience and social reality through language. Hence, Egbuson's use of metaphor enhances the thematic depth of the novel while fulfilling a key function of language as a meaning making resource.

V Personification

1. A mosquito rudely woke him (p. 5).
2. The inmates of terror instantly fell, afraid of even the moonlight on the bed... (p. 10).
3. Frightened cries were approaching (p. 151).
4. See the way the sea was eating the land towards their doorsteps; think of the many wars with other villages over fish ponds and farmlands; consider the flooding of the village in the rainy season (p. 173). The phrase in excerpt one exemplifies the literary device of personification, where human characteristics, such as rudeness, are assigned to a non-human entity like the mosquito. The mosquito is portrayed as more than just a mere insect; it acts as a deliberate and disruptive force that interrupts the peaceful sleep of Araba, the male protagonist. In this context, the mosquito can be seen as a symbol of fear itself. This comparison draws a parallel between the relentless presence of the mosquito and the unyielding grip of fear on Araba.

In excerpt two, human characteristics, such as silence, are assigned to non-human entities (inmates of terror). The text vividly describes the sudden silence that occurs as a result of the gunshot and the bullet that falls on Araba's bed. This indicates the high rate of insecurity that has brought danger and fear in the estate where the four friends reside. Thus, the proclamation made by Toundi: "There's evil in the land!" The phrase in excerpt three emphasises how human emotions are attributed to a nonhuman entity approaching". The theme of insecurity extends beyond just the cities, as Ogazza is also plagued by insecurity, with the youth resorting to weapons as an ultimatum to the elders profiting from an oil company. The youth then resort to violence not necessarily to instigate change but to claim their share of the money given to them by the oil companies. Thus, we hear Ereki say, "The old people have eaten too much; it is our turn to eat."

Excerpt four employs several figurative expressions, including personification, metaphor and imagery, to describe the situation in Ogazza. The sea is personified as "eating the land," thereby giving it human characteristics to emphasise its destructive power. The vivid description of how the sea encroaches upon their land, and the many wars fought are example of metaphoric imagery: "eating the land towards their doorstep; think of the many wars with other villages..." The narrator utilises the verbs "see, think, and consider" in the phrase to emphasise the experiences of the people of Ogazza. The verb "see" is the



starting point for visualising the devastation as the flood encroaches on their lands. The subsequent use of the verb "think" encourages readers to reflect on the multiple hardships that the people of Ogazza endure. Not only are they dealing with the flooding, but they are also forced to engage in wars to protect their farmlands and fish ponds. Finally, Egbuson utilises the verb "consider" for his readers to evaluate their plights, which is a great calamity that has befallen them.

VI Foreshadowing

According to Abrams (2013, p. 140), foreshadowing is a literary device that gives hints or clues about what will occur later in a text as the narrative unfolds. A few selected excerpts are:

1. Araba was impressed by the other robber's statement: "I demand justice - simple justice" (p. 21).
2. Araba pondered the statement for a moment and repeated it aloud; it's for them we are laying the foundation of an egalitarian society" (p. 2).
3. He feared the tone of the last speaker; the tone of a man who knew that something evil was in the offing (p. 30)
4. The exploitation of oil resources, which has led to environmental degradation, economic disparity, and restiveness among the youth, is a historical issue in the Niger Delta region. As such, several groups have emerged, from militant factions to activist groups, to address this long-pressing issue. Their aim is to establish an egalitarian society in response to the marginalisation and injustices suffered by the region. In excerpt one, the robber's choice of words, "I demand justice," foreshadows a future struggle for justice and equality. Araba's reflection on the robber's declaration of justice underscores its significance, setting the stage for later developments in the narrative.

In the pursuit of justice and equality, particularly for marginalised communities in the region, the aspiration for fairness is a driving force for those advocating for justice. The second excerpt reflects deeply on the robber's declaration, which holds a significant weight in the narrative. The verb "pondered" indicates that Araba is deeply contemplating the statement, hinting at a developing narrative where justice will be central. Also, the repetition that reinforces its importance, through the choice of word, "laying the foundation of an egalitarian society", vividly portrays the arduous struggle for the liberation of the region, hinting at potential obstacles or resistance that may arise. Consequently, the reader is prompted to anticipate both challenges and triumphs within the unfolding narrative.

Through the choice of words and the tone of the character. Excerpt Three hints at the anticipation of an impending crisis that may occur as the voices within the marginalised communities seek progress in their region. The use of the lexical items "something evil" foreshadows a heightening point, preparing the reader for a narrative that is likely to explore the consequences of these injustices, possibly culminating in a struggle for justice. The tone of the speaker is described as fearful, which creates a disturbing atmosphere for the listeners. Thus, the atmosphere through the lexical item "evil," suggests darkness, thereby giving a glimpse to the readers of what to anticipate.

VII The Use of Allusions

Abrams (2013, p. 13) defines allusion as a "passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage." Egbuson references certain literary works in his text, as exemplified in the excerpts provided below:

1. Daglobe is Frankenstein... Every Araba is an indictment of society (p. 27).
2. Toundi's statement rang in her own mind for a long time, and the day Araba was released from prison, it rang again in her mind for a long time -everything good will come (p. 401).
3. That's why till tomorrow I will keep on recommending Gandhi's satyagraha - passive resistance, non-violent resistance, instead of your AK-47 (p. 126). Can anyone do that to Araba? Araba could have felled him before he finished his first sentence... He was about to regret the road not taken... That man wasn't an ordinary thief (p. 347).

In the first excerpt, Egbuson employs external intertextuality by referencing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a text about the consequences of unchecked ambition and the ethical dilemmas of creation through the story of Victor Frankenstein, who brings a creature to life, only to face the profound repercussions of his actions. Just as Frankenstein's creature becomes a monster due to its creator's



abandonment, Daglobe has birthed monsters in response to the region's struggles with violence and revolt, which stem from systemic injustice, neglect, and environmental degradation. Araba is depicted as a symbolic figure representing all those who revolt against the injustices meted out to the people, as their actions result from the societal failings in their environment.

Egbuson also employs external intertextuality in the second excerpt. By external intertextuality, we mean referencing the literary works of other authors within one's own literary work. Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* is a novel of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. Toundi embodies love and believes that positive change will come, even in an environment filled with societal, environmental, and political issues.

Egbuson's historical allusion to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of satyagraha, a form of non-violent resistance, contrasts with the notion of 'violence and bloodletting as instruments of justice in society' (Egbuson, 2008, p. 125). Gandhi's satyagraha reflects Toundi's perspective, which opposes Araba's violent approach associated with the AK-47. This reference highlights Gandhi's philosophy and the themes of resistance and individual choice in the pursuit of justice.

Excerpt four employs literary allusion to the poem *The Road Not Taken*. The reference to Robert Frost's famous poem suggests themes of choices and regret. This allusion enriches the text by evoking deeper reflections on how our interactions with others can affect our future. The thief, like Araba, symbolises numerous young individuals who possess intellectual capabilities but are adversely affected by societal injustices and inequalities.

VIII Rhetorical Questioning and Repetition

These are rhetorical strategies that can be used for dramatic effects, while rhetorical question is posed not to elicit answers, repetition is used to reinforce a message by repeating words or phrases. Nonetheless, both techniques are employed in Egbuson's text to emphasise key points such as the several issues in the Niger Delta environment and the importance of environmental consciousness and sustainability. Examples are:

❖ "Why not we say the people and their area should be treated justly? Why not we say that instead of fellow Daglobans embezzling the money from the oil from their region, a good enough fraction of it should be used to develop their region..." (p. 2). The above quote exemplifies rhetorical questioning that has a parallel structure. The recurring question says "why not we say" is a cry for justice and equality to liberate the people and develop their region. The narrator emphasises the disparity in wealth and opportunity for the Daglobans, but this is not the case as there is widespread poverty among the people. The subsequent sentences further reveal insight into the future of the country and the region that have been subjected to exploitation and marginalization. This exploitation has had far-reaching consequences, affecting socioeconomic progress, political stability, and the environment. What is to become of the country and the region that have been exploited and marginalised? To reinforce and heighten the message, the passenger further expresses

❖ "I fear, I fear for my country" (p. 30). "He feared the tone of the last speaker, the tone of a man who knew that something evil was in the offing (p. 30). Fear is a recurring word throughout the text. This fear is further confirmed by Araba, who, lost in his thoughts, underscores the tone of the passenger regarding the impending danger coming to Daglobe.

❖ "In spite of all the religions, in spite of all the churches, the mosques, the temples, the synagogues, the shrines...human society is growing worse morally... In spite of all the social laws, in spite of the prison system, human society is growing worse..." (p. 21). The repetitive structure present in the aforementioned quote illustrates a society that is experiencing a moral decline, despite the presence of numerous religions and laws. Toundi's contemplation in the phrase "in spite of" emphasises the notion of a society failing to progress, despite the efforts put into establishing various institutions and systems. The quote not only highlights the societal issues at hand, but also adds a rhythmic quality to the text, further reinforcing the conveyed message.

❖ "Isn't militancy committing injustice against the planet? Injustice against the natural environment, injustice against human beings, injustice against moral consciousness" (p. 335).

The repetition "injustice against" is followed by a succession of negative consequences stemming from the activities of various militant organisations. It becomes apparent that their cause has been defeated, which aimed to fight against injustice and protect the rights of the Deltans. However, their means has



profoundly affected various facets of human existence. The repetition utilised serves to reiterate youth restiveness in the region by revealing the destructive activities of the militants that have adverse effects on their environment. The place deserves special attention now, because if it isn't developed now, if the environment isn't taken care of now, what would happen to the people and their environment after the oil has finished? If no one cares for the environment now, is it when we have drained it of all the oil someone would pay attention to it? (p. 390)

The above excerpt employs rhetorical questions that are meant to provoke one's thought and emphasise the urgency of addressing environmental concerns. The repetition of phrases like "if it isn't developed now?" and "if no one cares for the environment now?" reinforces the importance of immediate action and highlights the potential consequences of inaction. The speaker, Safinatu, highlighted the critical timing of addressing issues in Daglobe, stressing that a delay in action would have detrimental effects on the people and their surroundings. Despite having access to oil from their land, the people of Daglobe have been neglected, prompting urgent intervention to facilitate development and improve their living conditions.

"I have lived among the people of the Daglobe Delta: I have drunk of the river water they drink, and I have contracted cholera; I have relieved myself in the open on the river and I know what it is to do so in the full glare of the people; I have shed tears with a family over the death of a newborn baby due to lack of medical care..." (p. 391). The repetition of, "I have" at the beginning of each clause by Safinatu is a clear indication of her experience. Through vivid imagery, she passionately shared her challenges living in a marginalised and exploited environment. She further emphasised the dire consequences of lacking essential amenities such as healthcare facilities, clean water, and safe living space by recounting a heartbreaking incident.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the novel employs a wide range of stylistic resources, semantic fields, lexical relations and rhetorical techniques which together reinforce its ecological, economic and sociopolitical themes. While the table highlights the number of occurrences and function at a glance, the detailed analytical discussion shows how these devices, through the realisation of Halliday's metafunctions of language, contribute to meaning-making and foreground issues such as environmental degradation, corruption, oppression, and resistance in the Niger Delta. This emphasises that each literary writer can express their creativity and individuality through their unique writing style regardless of whether the underlying message aligns with that of another writer. For example, Egbuson's *Love My Planet* employs an omniscient narrator and presents its message cohesively, with each chapter adhering to a central governing idea. This cohesion is exemplified through the concluding line of each chapter, seamlessly leading into the next. Thus, an author may opt for a more descriptive language, utilizing vivid imagery and symbolism to evoke the essence of their message, whereas another author may choose a straightforward style following a traditional narrative structure, progressing from the introduction through to the climax and resolution, often concluding with an epilogue. Exploring the narrative technique of this text reveals that the novel itself exudes artistic excellence. As Bradford (1997, pp. 50-51) explains, novels are comprised of prose. The stylistics of prose fiction focus on how different registers and forms of prose can be woven together to create a cohesive story with formal coherence. Through the resources of language, novels convey profound thoughts, emotions, and ideas in an intricately crafted manner. Lodge in "The Language of Fiction" cited by Varghese (2012, p. 46) affirms that the novelist's medium is language itself; it allows authors to structure each chapter uniquely while enhancing the overall meaning of their work. Given the focus on the style and language of Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, it becomes essential to give a thematic exploration of the text.

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