

The Stylistics of Functional Metaphor in Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract

The paper evaluates the importance and function(s) of metaphor in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah. This evaluation is done using Systemic Functional Grammar as a theoretical foundation. SFG is a model of grammar that sees language as a socio-semiotic tool employed by language users to perform specific metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal and textual). These metafunctions, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 30) relay the purpose of language, as helping us to "make sense of our experience and act out our social relationships". In a text, the reader actually encounters these linguo-authorial traits as he/she tries to comprehend what the writer means. Using a random process, twenty metaphorical expressions are selected from the text and judged on the basis of their functional categories and how they contribute to thematic preoccupations and authorial style. The findings reveal a stylistic arrangement of metaphors to consolidate meaning and reinforce lines of thought that run through the narrative. The paper concludes that in Americanah, Adichie succeeds in using different metaphors to convey units of meaning in ways that add to the profundity of her celebrated style.

Keywords: metaphor, metafunction, Adichie, Americanah, stylistics

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* is a contemporary novel about Africans in the Diaspora and the challenges they encounter in the pursuit of the Golden Fleece, especially in the United States of America. It is the third novel in her literary career, although she has collections of short stories and poems that complement them. Adichie's works have received generally favourable critiques and mentions in both local and international literary circles. Her first novel titled *Purple Hibiscus* (PH) introduced her to the world as an emerging talent who should be taken seriously. PH launched her into the literary limelight and commanded critical attention to an emerging artistic force in Africa. *Half of a Yellow Sun* (HYS), her second novel about the Nigeria/Biafra war, however, removed every doubt concerning her artistic competence.

Americanah explores the themes of love, exile, the search for identity, alienation and betrayal in the contemporary world. Ifemelu, a driven and assertive Nigerian lady goes on a long journey of self-discovery layered with labyrinths of love, betrayal, loneliness, poverty, estrangement and reunion. The plot revolves around her and Obinze, a charming young man and son of a university Professor. Their affair quickly blossoms into a deep relationship that transverses the cultural as well as the intellectual. They become so inseparable that both families become aware of their bond. They do things together, often with brilliant results.

The parting of ways, nevertheless, occurs when Ifemelu travels to America for further education. There, she garners many socio-political experiences that are to strengthen her already remarkable character. She becomes distant, troubled, lonely and more psychologically aware of the powers of inner strength. Also, Obinze has a spell in the United Kingdom, where he too is introduced to the real world which is starkly different from their

near idyllic and innocent upbringing back in Nigeria. All the characters Ifemelu and Obinze come in contact with in both the US and the UK facilitate the process of the major characters' development and awareness of the aforementioned themes. The plot twists and turns grapple with the existential realities of immigrant life in the West. Characters like Aunty Uju, Dike, Emenike, Bartholomew, Kimberly, Laura, Kosi and Blaine are all stylistically woven into the compelling narrative that showcases the author's real motifs and objectives.

Typical of Adichie's literary engagements, the novel *Americanah* speaks to the political, cultural, economic and sociological peculiarities of Nigeria. While she celebrates what she deems original and enthralling, she does not fail to criticise the parts of us that appear as openly hypocritical and somewhat backward. Adichie's skilful presentation skills which are at once sophisticated and at the same time fairly easy to penetrate have already made her a celebrated wordsmith both locally and internationally. Indeed, one cannot but agree with the opinion of Owoeye and Owolabi (2013: 28) who submit that "Adichie is seen as a leading light in modern Nigerian literature as she has, no doubt, proved herself as a 21st century star of the Nigerian novel".

Metaphor and African Writers

According to Toolan (1996: 18) "[...] metaphorical language is language used creatively, in ways beyond the reach of normal usages". Metaphor is a literary tool used for the comparison of one thing with another. According to Bellard-Thomson (2011), metaphor is simply "indirect meaning". It is a direct comparison of two dissimilar entities with a view to instigating an indirect understanding of the effort. The use of metaphors in writing predates documented endeavours, according to Melvyn Bragg in his November 25, 2010 edition of the BBC Radio 4 podcast, *In Our Time*. One of the powers of language lies in the art of stringing together small metaphors to produce a very strange unbroken picture/wonderful image. Metaphors are not just a poetic tool. They are everywhere. From business to agriculture, commerce and construction, people use metaphors to help shape our understanding, especially of complex phenomena. These are broken down into units of meaning which are then mentally assembled to form the semantic whole. The rich understanding of linguistic and aesthetic resources is a direct concomitant of readers' ability to process information through "ordinary" words, figurative expressions and imagery. Describing one thing in terms of another is a way of making the reader appreciate, further, the conceptual value of the initial referent. Artistic deployments such as these constitute the hallmark of literary language. When we seek to describe and project a particular meaning, the use of linguo-graphic comparisons, imagery, parables and local idioms usually suffice. All these aid the speaker/writer in couching their thoughts in both compact and concise manners, thereby illuminating otherwise dark conclaves and alcoves of meaning in communication.

The nature of metaphors allows for them to be absorbed into both the linguistic and contextual environment in which they are used. Scholars have argued that both the structure of the figure of speech and the context of its use have made metaphors a huge object of intellectual engagement in recent years (Opeibi 2009). In other words, to fully understand and appreciate the underlying meaning of a speaker/writer's motivated metaphor, one must share a certain degree of mutual socio-cultural proclivities and nuanced inclinations. Since metaphors could be culture specific, one then has to be properly immersed in the worldview, mores and sociolinguistic fads of the people with whom one intends to communicate. For example, the fox does not have the universally acceptable metaphorical interpretation of a

cunning entity. Indeed, in some parts of West-Africa, both the tortoise and the spider take turns in projecting the same figurative meaning. Also, metaphors have been studied in relation to such parameters as cognition, politics, rhetoric, and other human conducts and agents.

Examples abound of scholarly engagements that studied the subject of metaphor in relation to some allied disciplines. From Charteris-Black's (2005: xi) investigation into the "convincing explanations" of metaphor as "a highly effective rhetorical strategy for combining our understanding of familiar experiences in everyday life"; Steen's (2007: 3) detailed "analysis of the most important methodological issues involved in finding metaphor in language"; Cienki and Muller's (2008) seminal treatise that has expanded the frontiers of scholarship in the study of the relationship between metaphor and gestures, to Tendahl's (2009) hybrid theory of metaphor that uses Cognitive Linguistics to address and gauge the degree of metaphorical perceptions in language users: metaphor has been construed as a linguistic and literary phenomenon that language users use to empower themselves in the delivery of their intended motifs to particular audiences. It enables them to project meanings and describe persons, ideas and positions from different perspectives which eventually shed more interpretative lights on otherwise too familiar, vague, or difficult thoughts. Writers from all parts of the globe find metaphor a desirable element in the realisation of their artistic endeavours.

Africans, generally, use tropes in their daily use of language. These tropes, embedded in non-literal units of expression like metaphors, metonymies, proverbs, anecdotes and the like, could be found in linguistic realities of admonition, caution, praise, rebuke and sundry others. Indeed, Medubi (2018: 9) opines that

one of the strong appeals of many African writings, e.g. Chinua Achebe's novels, Ola Rotimi's plays and Wole Soyinka's works, etc., resides in their judicious use of proverbs, metaphors and other tropes to project specific character types, illustrate important points or paint particular pictures germane to the African cultural context and content.

The opinion above informs of the indispensability and acceptability of figurative language to and by both writers and readers of African literature, respectively. The conspicuous nature of these elements (proverb, metaphor etc.) in the communicative engagements of language users must have prompted Achebe's famous posit that proverbs are the palm-oil with which Africans eat their yam. They are very potent discursive weapons often wielded to project powerful meanings. The realities of African life are so graphically displayed on the pages of texts in such a way that those who are familiar with such existential variables and sociolinguistic environment relate so well with the linguistic realities of same.

Again, Soyinka (2015: 50) writes on the "metaphor-cluttered mind" of the average African intellectual, giving the example that "the breeding habit of rabbits is universal metaphor for high productivity". This, certainly, heralds a convergence of positive opinions concerning metaphor in African literature. A constant assertion in African literature is that since it is rather herculean for writers to use the indigenous language to project their thoughts, they most certainly have to settle for domesticating the language of the colonisers in such a way that the African essence is still reflected in these linguistic choices. Indeed, in the view of some scholars, the aesthetic deployment of tropes like metaphors, proverbs and other literary accoutrements constitute the bulk of artistic identities in African literature that may push critics to run commentaries on authors' styles (Osunkentan 2009). These local variables

may then be measured and used to gauge an author's immersion into the rubric of the society he/she purports to represent and propagate through his/her writing.

However authors use metaphor in writing, the goal remains the celebration of the beauty of language in the aesthetic communication of thoughts. In Adegoke and Adebayo (2018: 96), Leech's (1991) theory of metaphor is used to appraise selected poems from Niyi Osundare's *Village Voices*, published in 1984. The scholars find, among other discoveries, that Osundare employs "locally motivated metaphors...in the creation of effective imagery and projection of a distinctive point of view". They also examine Osundare's predilection for using his Yoruba roots as a base for the linguistic manipulations of the English language to suit his authorial style, a trait replete in all his works. Adegoke and Adebayo (2018: 87) submit that Osundare's use of metaphors "that are firmly rooted in the culture and environment of the Yoruba people" increases his poems' readability and generally enhances the interests of his international audience to get more intellectually acquainted with his African homeland. All these are made possible by the author's use of diction that positively project his ideas as having originated from his deft use of the linguistic resources at his disposal.

At this juncture, it becomes expedient to introduce the theory within which we are to analyse Adichie's use of metaphor in the propagation of authorial style in *Americanah*.

The Metafunctions of Language/Functionalist Stylistics

In Systemic Functional Grammar, language is viewed as a pragmatic tool human beings employ to realise their existential goals. This grammatical model posits that language is structured like a system that is further divided into "a set of possible elements" from which choices can be made to suit particular linguistic purposes (Halliday 2013: 17). SFG studies language from a discourse perspective by validating both the linguistic elements employed and other sub-linguistic parameters (such as context, familiarity with subject and relationship between interlocutors) as harbingers of meaning in any communicative event. It essentially explores the clause as the base of speech and relates the sociological aspect of life to the understanding of same. The theory claims that the purpose of language is, primarily, to initiate meaning in context, and consequently delineated same into the so-called metafunctions of language. These metafunctions serve as the tripod upon which the foundation of the "functional" essence of this particular theory of language is built.

There are three metafunctions of language, according to Systemic grammarians. These metafunctions, note Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), ensure conceptual cohesion and meaning in texts by linking the reader's experience with the world that has been created and sustained by text. Canning (2014: 46) avers that the ideational metafunction of language is "used to express ideas and experience"; that is, it is employed to relay information in a way that encapsulates the user's motivation, experience and immediate desire, (clause as representation). The interpersonal metafunction is applied to "mediate in the establishment of social relationships"; that is, it is used to strengthen and foreground lines of thought in mutual linguistic transaction (clause as exchange). Finally, the textual metafunction is responsible for the provision of the formal properties of language, that is, the attainment of a central unity of purpose in the textual through cohesive devices-(clause as message). All these are central to the stylistic evaluation of texts using the functional paradigm.

In the view of Canning (2014: 46):

Functionalist stylistics is concerned with the relationship between the forms of language as a system and the context or situation of its production, as well as the social, cultural and political (what we may collectively call ideological) factors that impact upon its construction and reception. In other words, functional stylistics deals with the connections between what Leech (2008: 104) calls “language and what is not language”.

The forms of language referred to in the excerpt stem from Halliday’s description of language as a linguistic system from which choices are made, both vertically (paradigmatic) and horizontally (syntagmatic). When we speak/write, we instinctively make choices from available linguistic alternatives at all the lexico-semantic levels. This is done within a framework of familiar social-cum-cultural settings. Also, when we listen/read, we unconsciously make sense, deductions and interpretations through a symbiotic interaction of the textual and sometimes, extra-textual environment in which linguistic elements are deployed. Again, this is summed up in Canning’s (2014: 46) opinion that “for functionalists, the context of a language event is as important as the formal features of which it is comprised.” It is against the backdrop that the stylistic investigation into Adichie’s use of metaphor in *Americanah* will be weighed, with reference to the metafunctions outlined in SFG.

Methodology

Twenty metaphors were randomly selected and shall be analysed, presently. As stated earlier, the ideation, interpersonal and textual metafunctions provided in SFG will be used to determine authorial intent and show how their effective usage contributes to the style of the novel *Americanah*. For want of space, only the ideational part of the triangle of metafunctions will be graphically represented. In doing this, the configuration of process types such as material, relational, verbal, mental etc. and transitivity function including actor, goal, benefactor and so on, shall be employed. These SFG variables are used to describe the functions of the clause and its importance as the base of meaning in discourse. Their deployments project both the regular and “instantial” layers of meaning that then go on to assume major blocs of thoughts, ideas and their comprehension by interlocutors. The contributions of the other two metafunctions in realisation of meaning will, however, be explained concurrently.

Data Presentation and Analysis

1. I’m longing for ceiling (32).

	I	am longing	for	ceiling
Function	Participant Actor	Process (mental affection)		Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Prepositional group	Nominal group

Ceiling, the metaphor for sex as used by the character in the structure above, performs the ideational metafunction of representing the human experience of passion. The participants in

this exchange (Ifemelu and Obinze) share this particular knowledge that the conscientious reader should also be aware of. Again, there is a textual metafunction of cohesion. The idea of metaphorical reference to sex as ceiling had earlier been projected on page 29. Therefore, the embedded meaning of same is reinforced in the narrative. It ensures the stylistic progression of the theme of love in the novel. The average reader is unconsciously made to participate in this trope as a result of the author’s deft presentation of same, using the characters’ own words and situational dispositions.

2. She is still single (48).

	She	is still	single
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (Relational)	Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group

In context, being married is given the metaphorical interpretation of responsibility. This meaning is enconced in Obinze’s dialogue with his wife, Kosi, concerning her friend’s rather unusual apathy in coming to visit them. Kosi’s negative connotations with the idea of being single as unlucky, unwanted and even irresponsible is transferred to Obinze, as well as the reader. This performs the ideational metafunction at the clause configuration. The inherent portrayal of love and its beneficial advantages to those who find it, against its stinging arrow to those who are yet to, runs through the novel. Also, the word “single” coheres with the author’s intent in many other instances. An example of such is found on page 476. The positive and negative celebrations of love are both functionally beamed to the reader through the above utterance.

3. The agreements that were trampled in the dust by government men whose children were schooling abroad (119).

	The agreements	that were trampled	in the dust	by	government men
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Circumstance Place		Participant actor
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group		

	whose children	were	schooling	abroad
Function	Participant Benefactor	Process (Relational)	Process (material)	Circumstance Place
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group		Adverbial group

The metaphor above is used by Adichie to demonstrate the manner in which successive governments in Nigeria have always treated the agreements legally signed with the union of university teachers. When we read “trampled in the dust”, whatever comes to mind has to be about total neglect, nonchalance and the lip service with which those in authority have always treated mass education. The powerful images that come to mind during the cognitive process of reading and comprehension say much about the reputation of Adichie as a remarkable

stylist. The metaphor performs both ideational and interpersonal metafunctions by highlighting the disturbing scenario of official indifference to teachers' plight and showcasing the social relationship with regards to the balance of power between governments and their citizens.

4. She perched on a chair at the back and ate fried chicken wings (123).

	She	perched	on a chair at the back	and
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Circumstance Place	
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group	

	ate	chicken
Function	Process material	Participant (Goal)
Class	verbal group	Nominal group

Adichie has often been accused of empowering her female characters, often with exaggerated courage. In the midst of the turmoil in Ifemelu's personal life (her mental vacillations about moving back to Nigeria, her obvious discontent in the troubled romantic triangle involving her, Obinze and Blaine, the disturbing headache she suffers at her temple, and the discomfiting temperature in the Philadelphian summer) she still manages to carry herself with endearing grace and poise that speaks to her inner strength and fortitude. The metaphor of "perching" confidently in a corner of a salon, despite the noisy environment and her own personal issues relays the idea of a strong female, whose bravery against both human and environmental adversaries is firmly established in various episodes throughout *Americanah*. Both ideational and textual functions of language are reinforced in this usage.

5. He went to America and got lost (138).

	He	went	to America	and	got lost
Function	Participant Actor	Process (material)	Circumstance (Place)		Process (material)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group		Verbal group

The author uses Bartholomew as an archetype of the African immigrant who has become "marooned" in America. The search for identity ultimately culminates in the loss of identity. In other words, the race to be accepted into mainstream American society eventually overshadows and removes the originality of many African immigrants. Therefore, the sense of loss of the African identity and the elusive American acceptability presents such characters as being "lost". The themes of loneliness, alienation, and misplaced cultural appropriation are all contextually put forward and related with in this clause.

6. The cultural cues had seeped into her skin (147).

	The cultural cues	had seeped	into	her skin
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Circumstance Place	Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group	

In describing Ginika, the biracial friend of Ifemelu, the author compares her seamless immersion into the American culture and society with that of Aunty Uju, who still finds it difficult to adjust. By comparing Ginika's quick acculturation to liquid seeping through an orifice, Adichie succeeds in imposing the functional attributes of creating a human experience and relating same with the different characters she has created on the metaphor used.

7. She was standing at the periphery of her own life (150).

	She	was	standing	at the periphery	of	her own life
Function	Participant Actor	Process (relational)	Process (material)	Circumstance (Place)		Participant (benefactor)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal	Group	Adverbial group		Nominal group

The themes of exile, alienation and detachment run through the mind as a result of the use of the metaphorical expression above. Here, Adichie recounts the experiences of diasporan Nigerians, nay Africans, who feel helpless as the Western systems determine their fates and emasculate their dreams. The mental images of helplessness and disillusionment are evoked by the way the clause is configured. This brings to light the textual representation of the aforementioned subjects and how they are perceived and reacted to, by the characters of both racial and systemic orientations in the novel.

8. The world was wrapped in gauze (154).

	The world	was	wrapped	in	gauze
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (relational)	Process (material)		Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal	Group		Nominal group

Again, the suffocating feeling of powerlessness in the face of myriad problems is vividly depicted in the metaphor above. The idea is projected in the clause, its engagement with characters is described, and the message being passed across coheres with one of the central themes of the novel. It thus embeds the three metafunctions of language described in SFG.

The author's disposition to the subject of racism and its allied human problems are laid bare in this aesthetic composition.

9. Her meagre bank account was leaking money (154).

	Her meagre account	was	leaking	money
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (relational)	Process (material)	Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal	Group	Nominal group

The clausal configuration above is used by Adichie to emblemise Ifemelu's dwindling finances in the face of the reality of American life. Equating money with a liquid material that is capable of leaking informs the reader of the prohibitive cost of living that literally drains the pocket of an unemployed immigrant. The dire circumstances of the lead character are projected by the deft use of the metaphor that informs of, as well as situates the economic haemorrhage that is being experienced by the lead character and how it affects her relationship with both humans and the environment.

10. It stung her, to have to beg (159).

	It	stung	her	that	she	had
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Participant (sayer)		Participant actor	Process (relational)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal	Group		Nominal group	Verbal group

	to	beg
Function		Process (material)
Class		Verbal group

The economic injury to Ifemelu's sense of pride and self-esteem is couched as a stinging bite that painfully runs across a human body. Adichie compares the humbling of a proud African woman to a throb that is inflicted by a poisonous insect. This description triggers the idea of capitulation amidst insolvency. The clause also relates with the reader who shares the same society and who may have the same economic challenges like the character being portrayed. Finally, the metaphor links up with the already established subject matter of economic inequality that is commonplace in all the seven parts of the novel.

11. I know I am mauling your name (173).

	I	know	I	am	mauling	your name
Function	Participant Actor	Process (Mental)	Participant (actor)	process (relational)	Process (material)	Participant (benefactor)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group	Verbal group		Nominal group

Adichie’s choice of the word “mauling”, out of all the possible alternatives, may be interpreted against the backdrop of the perceived heightened sensitivity of the average white person not to stir a racial controversy as a result of any linguistic slip. Kimberly’s utterance, being from a privileged upper class Caucasian, connotes an exaggerated, perhaps condescending, sense of altruism and the willingness not to offend. The functional significance of this clause, therefore, lies in its capacity to relay the aforementioned experience, weigh its implication for both Ifemelu and Kimberly, and associate with the theme of racism in the novel

12. Ifemelu sensed, between them, the presence of spiky thorns floating in the air (174).

	Ifemelu	sensed	between them	the presence	of	spiky thorns
Function	Participant Actor	Process (mental)	Circumstance (place)	participant (benefactor)		Participant (sayer)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group	Nominal group		Nominal group

	floating	in the air
Function	Process (material)	Process (relational)
Class	verbal group	Adverbial group

The theme of love, albeit in its contaminated variety, runs through the clause above. The sisters Kimberly and Laura have always had a cat and mouse relationship. However, the growing resentment of Laura in her sister hiring a coloured babysitter is metaphorically depicted as the presence of “spiky thorns”. The comparison is noteworthy, as its function is to tell the reader of the gap between the personalities of both sisters and how they perceive the people and the world around them. This is a crafty way of using language to create lasting effects in the minds of the readers.

13. ... to be a resident doctor is slave labour (178).

	To be	a resident doctor	is	slave labour
Function	Process (relational)		Process (relational)	Circumstance (Place)
Class	Verbal group	Nominal	Verbal group	Adverbial

		group		group
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Racism re-echoes in the way Adichie presented the clause above. In its sharp and direct comparison, unpacking the implanted racial innuendos is relatively easy. Aunt Uju's submission overtly exposes her own predicament in finding a permanent job offer as a medical practitioner in America. The pittance she is being paid, the contempt from both staff and patients, and the under-appreciation of her daily hustles are all summarised in the metaphor "slave labour". The conscientious reader is, thus, presented another avenue of the author's functional depiction and characterisation of the immigrant experience in America.

14. Ifemelu felt acid in her veins (179).

	Ifemelu	felt	acid	in her blood
Function	Participant Actor	Process (mental)	Participant (Goal)	Circumstance (Place)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group	Adverbial group

Acid, as used in the expression above, denotatively means blood, but it connotatively means anger. Adichie employs this particular metaphor to account for how Ifemelu's blood boils over as a result of frustration. The experience of anger is represented by the clause; there is an object for this rage (Elena, Ifemelu's housemate) and the linguistic structure also semantically supports the thoughts that have been documented in earlier pages of the book. Thus, all the three metafunctions are assembled in the clause.

15. I'm not comfortable going too far (180).

	I	am not	comfortable	going too far
Function	Participant Actor	Process (relational negative)	Attribute	Process (material)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adjectival group	Verbal group

"Going too far" is a metaphor for sex in the clause above. The author blends Ifemelu's innocence with her resolute mien. The character cautions her male friend against consummating their budding relationship, yet. The stylistic use of the metaphor above evokes a guarded attitude from a vigilant youth who is in control of her emotions. The themes of love and feminism are, therefore, foregrounded in the reader's mind.

16. Her mind choked with mud (181).

	Her mind	choked	with mud
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Circumstance (manner)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group

The feeling of dirtiness, resentment and self-loathing are all subsumed in the information above. Anybody familiar with the experience of choking is advertently made to comprehend the depth of Ifemelu’s situation. Taken advantage of by a coach due to her financial difficulty, the central character in *Americanah* is described as broken and scarred. This deep seated emotion is stylistically worded and leads the reader along familiar lines of thought

17. When she said she was the doctor the patient’s face changed to fired clay (213).

	When	she	said	she	was	the doctor
Function	Circumstance (time)	Participant (actor)	Process (verbal)	Participant (actor)	Process (relational)	Participant (benefactor)
Class	Adverbial group	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group		Nominal group

	the patient’s face	changed	to	fire clay
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)		Participant (Goal)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group		Nominal group

The conspicuous nature of racism in American society is laid bare in the metaphor above. Here, Auntie Uju relieves one of her experiences with her patients at the hospital. The forceful imagery of “fired clay” adequately captures the stony expression the said patient must have had on his or her face at the point of that disclosure. All the three metafunctions of language are represented in this clause.

18. His cousin Nicholas had the jowly face of a bulldog (275).

	His cousin Nicholas	had	the jowly face	of	a bulldog
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (relational)	Participant (Goal)		Participant (benefactor)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal Group	Nominal group		Nominal group

The purpose of the metaphor above will be best understood when the clause “yet still somehow managed to be very attractive” is taken into consideration. Teenage love and attraction occupy a considerable space in the novel, and the author manages to view the topic from different perspectives. Beyond the surface level, what Adichie attempts to communicate here speaks to the subject of love as incomprehensible, both to the people involved and the outsiders who judge them.

19. ... his words aflame with dishonesty (304).

	His words	aflame	with dishonesty.
Function	Participant (Sayer)	Process (material)	Circumstance (manner)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group

The clause above calls attention to the treachery of Emenike, Obinze’s bohemian friend. This particular character is often described in the novel as being unable to hide his true intentions, even when he tries very hard. As a flaming entity calls attention to itself, therefore, Emenike’s own dissembling words show themselves to the contextual hearer (Obinze) in a more virulent tone that display their mendacious essence.

20. The Island flooded and cars became gasping boats (437).

	The Island	flooded	cars	became	gaspig boats
Function	Participant (Sayer)	Process (material)	Participant (Sayer)	Process (relational) Attributive	Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group

Again, Adichie compares cars that are stranded in flood waters on Lagos Island to “gaspig boats” that have, probably, run out of steam. The imagery that this artistic comparison conjures up aptly captures the level of aquatic devastation. In deconstructing the metaphor, therefore, one has to be able to relate with the experience of flooding, acknowledge the inconveniences it causes the people and the environment, and purposefully link it up with the existential miseries of the characters in the novel.

Overview of Findings

All the twenty selected clauses analysed through the functional variables of participant, actor, sayer, goal and what they have been assigned to do (known as processes material, mental, verbal, relational) have stylistic meanings that carry pragmatic weight. The analysis has showcased the linguistic elements that constitute the base of the text and which are layered with units of meaning that go on to solidify the basic ideas of the novel. Participants are mainly Actors and Sayers reaching for particular goals in the practice of doing or acting (processes). The combinations of these are supported by the circumstances (Adverbials) that suffice.

Through the representation of the thoughts and the actions of the characters in the text, we can discern the central ideas of racism, alienation, loneliness and search for identity in the novel. These tropes are especially and forcefully represented in the words and actions of Ifemelu, a strong willed female who, despite all challenges, remains undaunted in the pursuit of her (American?) dreams. The excellent use of metaphors by the author also brings out the hidden meanings that are superimposed on the clausal elements. These are revealed

by the transitivity features that betray the real authorial intents behind the stylistic deployments of particular metaphorical expressions.

Since, according to Canning (2014: 61) referencing Fowler (1996), “modality is inherently bound up with point of view”, we then must acknowledge the authorial inputs in the propositional and pragmatic possibilities and functional realisations of the selected clauses. With regards to interpersonal metafunction, the clauses help us to understand and appreciate the truth values placed on characters’ opinions as measures of checking how the social relationships involving them are managed and emphasised. The umbrella of modality gauges the dispositions of the persons in the text and how they relate with one another as the narrative evolves. Indeed, the interpersonal metafunction at the level of clause configuration gives credence to its role as the custodian and moderator of the exchanges between discourse participants in a particular linguistic or situational context.

Also, cohesion ensures that the referents of particular metaphorical clauses are not lost on the attentive reader. The organisation of cohesive devices such as his, she, her, it, whose, and I are assigned to particular constituents within the linguistic context. However, their meaning making potentials have far reaching implications that extend to situational contexts within the text as a whole. All these have been ably demonstrated and explained in the analysis.

Conclusion

We have tried to analyse the twenty selected clauses and their metaphorical aesthetics with regards to their functional significance in Adichie’s *Americanah*. Although, a little familiarity with the primary text may aid further understanding of the discussions in this paper, we have, however, run elaborate commentaries on each of the selected clauses in ways that illuminate their connections to the storylines and different thematic concerns of the novel. It is the researchers’ opinion that the much celebrated Adichie’s compelling literary style has been further elevated by the adroit manner in which she has used metaphors to weave a forceful story that speaks to her ingenuity as an original storyteller in the modern African mould.

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In SKASE Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies [online]. 2021, vol. 3, no. 1 [cit. 2021-06-30]. Available on webpage http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/SJLCS05/pdf_doc/02.pdf. ISSN 2644-5506.