COLLOCATIONAL PATTERNS AND SENSE RELATIONS IN THE EXPLICATION OF MEANING IN ARMAH'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

When literary writers write, they do so with the aim of conveying meaning. And the tool which gives expression to their thought is language. At various time, literary writers including the 20th century writers like Ayi Kwei Armah has deployed and manipulated language to suit his thematic concerns. This paper therefore seeks to study one of such language manipulations – collocation. It established that collocation is a habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance. However, from the study it is revealed that more often than not, Armah, violated this prism by using lexical items which normally should not co-occur. But instead of seeing this as a language error, it should be seen as novel and which contribute to the understanding of meaning. It analysed three of Armah's novels using the theories of reader-response and discourse analysis. The data analysed were randomly selected. It concludes that Armah relied on both habitual co-occurrence and abnormal co-occurrence of lexical items to convey his meanings. Armah has enjoyed a lot of literary analysis and criticisms, this present work seeks to study scientifically his word choice as a further contribution to the corpus literature (both literary and linguistic) on him. We opined that rather than see Armah's choice of words as bothering on obscenities, his choices should appreciated given the burden of the themes he seeks to share with his readers.

Introduction

The human language is the most universally accepted medium of communication. And many literary writers including the 20th century writers use language in their arts in an attempt to convey meaning. The 20th century writers use their novels as a medium of expression of their views, and conceptions about society. Their novels as a medium of expression does not only show the author's view points and problems but also explores the entire society or a segment of the society. That is why literature is regarded as a reflection of social reality, a form of social consciousness determined by social beings.

For writers to achieve their purpose, they need the resources of language. This is so because, language is the method of communication, while literature is the content being communicated. Linguists generally see language as a set of gestures and words and phrases with meaning behind them. On the other hand, literature is the manipulation and use of those gestures and words and phrase for creative purposes. Therefore, literature manifests

through language. There is no literature without language. Both language and literature have a close relationship. Egharevba (1987) a contemporary Nigerian writer maintains that an artist's sensibility is to a large extend informed by the historical period in which he was bred, and committed writing focuses on the prevailing historical issues of the writer's time. This study seeks to analyse The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Fragments, and Two Thousand Seasons.

In a bit to achieve the above aim, this paper takes a slight departure from the normal linguistic analysis of language use. Armah has variously been accused of using coarse language to draw attention to the decadence and corrupt behaviour in Ghana. This paper is premised therefore on the fact that Armah's choice of words is for therapeutic purpose. Armah had the content but his search for the form to give his readers content pitched him against some critics. It is for this purpose that this paper seeks to understand the collocational patterns in Armah's three select novels and to apply it within the confines of sense relation to the explication of meaning. The principal method apply in this paper is textual analysis.

In the course of this paper, attempt would be made to answer such burning issues as: Is Armah's use of language vulgar, repulsive and gutterish? It is safe to dismiss Armah as an egocentric writer? Or regard him as a mere satiristic writer? Or would it be safe to see Armah's choice of words as fitting symbols and imagery suit to carrying the burden of his mind?

The Concept of Collocation

Collocation is a term associated with the British linguist John Firth who introduce the concept into modern linguistics. Collocation means the tendency of words to co-occur (Baker, 1999). Cambridge Dictionary defines collocation as a word or phrase that is often used with another word or phrase, in a way that sounds correct to people who have spoken the language all their lives, but might not be expected from the meaning.

Newmark (1981) distinguishes between collocation and what is not collocation. He maintains that a colocation consists basically of two or three lexical words, usually linked by grammatical words, e.g. "a mental illness". The collocates within a collocation define and delimit each other by eliminating atleast some of their other possible meanings:

> *the defining may be mutual and equally balanced, but more often it is closer for one collocate than for other. Thus, "to pay attention" is a collocation, because it reduces the number of senses in which "pay" can be used to one. The word "attention" in the sense of "care", "solicitude". "To buy a hat" is not a collocation since it does not appreciably delimit the sense of "buy" or "hat".*

The source maintains that collocation is the element of system in the lexis of a language. It may be syntagmatic or horizontal, consisting of a common structure; or paradigmatic or vertical, consisting of words belonging to the same semantic field which may substitute for each other or be semantic opposites. These become collocations only when they are arranged syntagmatically.

According to Newmane (1981) syntagmatic collocations can be divided into seven groups:

i. verb plus noun

ii. determiner plus adjective plus noun

iii. adverb plus adjective

iv. verb plus adverb or adjective

v. noun plus noun

vi. count noun plus mass noun

vii. collective noun plus count noun.

On the other hand, the source also maintains that paradigmatic collocations may be based on well established hierarchies such as kinship, colours, scientific taxonomies and institutional hierarchies where the elements of the culture for each language often have their distinct linguistic likeness although the extra linguistic object may be the same. Alternatively, they may consist of the various synonyms and antonyms that permeate all languages.

What is Sense Relations?

Sense relations are very important to the understanding of meaning. The sense of a word can be understood from its similarity with other words, on the other hand, it can also be viewed from its oppositeness with other words. What this means is

that sense relations can be seen from the similarity of meaning as in synonymy, the inclusion of meaning as in hyponymy, and the oppositeness of meaning as in antonymy.

Sense relations may also be understood as the associations that exist at the word level, or phrase or sentence level. Meaning that these relationships may be syntagmatic or paradigmatic.

Theoretical framework

This paper anchors on two theoretical frameworks called reader-response theory and discourse analysis theory. Reader response theory focuses on the reader rather than on the author. This theory recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work of art and completes its meaning through interpretation. It believes that meaning of a text is derived from the reader through the reading process. Reader-response analyst focuses on what texts do in the minds of the readers. Reading involves an interactional and transactional relationship between the text and the reader. Thus, this paper is interested in the text inferred meaning and the individual interpretation by the reader influenced by his/her personal emotions and knowledge.

Also, this paper draws from discourse analysis which seeks an explicit, systematic account of structures, strategies or processes of text in terms of theoretical notions developed in any branch of linguistics.

Literature is the reflection of the society. And writers write for the society. The society/reader seeks to understand the writer through his language use. It is pertinent to note that, writers consciously or unconsciously deploy words (forms) to give meaning to their content. It is not the writer who is reading himself, it is rather the reader who is reading the writer. Hence, our adoption of reader-response theory. It is expected through this approach that the reader makes meaning from what is being read. Similarly, discourse analysis theory is fitting for this paper, because we truly see language in action.

Collocational Pattern in Armah's Novel and its Sense Relations

In**The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born**, a number of collocations are isolated and analysed as contributing distinctly to the lexical trend in the novel. Describing for instance, the corrupt practices in Ghana, Armah says:

> *…this was the point at which she told me that those who wanted to get far had to learn to drive fast. Accidents would happen on the road, but the fear of accident never keep men from driving and Kromson had learned to drive. (p. 58-59).*

Here we see that the verb "driving" takes on the noun "road" as it collocates. "Accidents" also has co-reference to "driving" and "road". "Road" as used here relates to the diverse ways of getting rich quick while "accident" is semantically conditioned to mean "caught". Thus, the semantic feature is /+ corruption/. What Armah seeks to convey in this habitual collocate is to condemn in strong terms "the get-rich-quick syndrome" which he compares to one driving on the road who ultimately get involved in an accident.

In an attempt to bringing out the weight of the pains in his heart, Armah engages in the violation of collocational rules in what Montgomery et al (1992) call "the effect of defamiliarization". Victor Shklorsky's is the proponent of the concept of defamiliarization. This paper agrees with him, if as readers we become to familiar with a concept, word, symbol, it can actually hinder our understanding. As readers, we need this disorientation to allow us to see the object/concept in a new light and appreciate its unique qualities. For example, Armah talks about the enjoyment by the rich at the expense of the poor:

> *…the sweet sadness of Congo music flowed out through a window near the end of a row of little houses (p. 50).*

In the normal English language code the adjectives "sweet" and "sadness" are seen as violation or poetic expression, but since, literature contrast from our everyday communication, it extends the boundaries of our world which we have taken for granted and gives us the option to think and feel it afresh by systematically shifting away from conventional linguistic practices and habitual mode of expression. Thus, the juxtapositioning of "sweet", an element of joy /+ pleasure/ with "sadness", an element of depression i.e, /- pleasure/ shows Armah's disdain for corruption in Ghana.

Also concerning the corrupt practices in Ghana, Armah depends on another set of collocational restriction. For instance,

> *…blinding lights, wild and uncontrolled, succeeded by pure darkness (p. 100).*

Again, "light" takes on the attribute of human- "blinding", as is said to be wild and lacking control but in quick succession, Armah talks about "pure darkness". Within the context of this novel "light" symbolizes independent Ghana and has the semantic feature /+ freedom/, which is soon over-taken by "darkness" which has the feature of /+ corruption/, /+ backwardness/. The stylistic effect of these collocations serve the artistic purpose of allowing the reader to draw the relationship between denotative and connotative meanings of the lexical items used.

A few other examples illustrate the range of occurrences of collocations in the novel. For instance,

> *… to have good leader. Our people have not known good governance and people like Koomson lacks good virtue, hence our leaders should adopt (p. 77).*

To explicate the contextual meaning of "good", the class of items with which it collocates may be divided into two: on the basis of concreteness and animacy. Concreteness here is used to refer to those who detest corruption like "the man", "Nana", "Baako" and "the people" while animacy here means those who are morally debased like the "minister", "the Whiteman" and "Brempong". Other collocational trends indicate that the choices are intended to suit the theme of corruption. For examples, "corrupt politician connive" while "good leaders are elected". A number of ideas are summarized in these carefully chosen words. "politicians" and "leaders" are possible synonyms, but "politicians" collocate with "corrupt" (of negative connotation) and "leader" collocates with "good" (of positive connotation) showing the divide between the two categories of leaders with the semantic implications of /+ virtue/ /+ model/, with politician depicting /+ evil/, /+ cheat/, /+ corruption/.

In addition, most of the collocates here include the definite article "the". For example, we have "the needy,", "the poor", "the sleeper", "the living dead". The emphatic and consistent use of "the" article is of stylistic importance to this paper. The role of the article "the" helps in conveying the author's sense of concreteness. Thus, "the" consistently precedes either adjectives, "needy" and "poor", or verb "dead", or noun, "needy" this is making the adjectives and the properties of the adjectives "needy" and "poor", as /- rich/, /- affluence/, /- availability/.

On the other hand, people like Koomson are described as "the mighty", "the rich", "a big shot", "my lord", "my master". These descriptions show affluence. The article "the" has already been said to show concreteness, the other article "a" is undefined, meaning that "a big shot" is ephemeral and "my" is a determiner and shows possession. Here Armah uses it to show the slave-master relationship that exists between the rich and the poor in Ghana.

Fragments shows a preponderance of collocations which reveal the subject of the novel. For example,

> *… the only things the nurses had for quarters, to leave the whole **aborted town** just to get out and keep going in the attempt… to forget all the reminders of futility (p. 12).*

Armah uses the noun "town" which has the feature /- animate/ with a lexical verb "aborted" with the features /+ animate/, /+ human/. This gives animate and human features to a normally inanimate noun "town". This is unusual collocation, and it depicts unusual, abnormal situation in the Ghana of the novel.

In another development, Armah in discussing the preparation made for Baako to travel highlights the frustrating nature of the society as both progressive and retrogressive. According to him, "light moved up and down".

> *…lights came casting giant leaf shadows upon the hills inside from cars returning, lights that moved **up and down** (p. 5)*

"Light" has the feature /+ development/ and is paired with "up and down" as collocates. The lexical items "up and down" show the swing in the society from progress to retrogression. It has the semantic feature /+ instability/.

Again, Nana's frustration in her dream Ghana is expressed in these lines:

> ***My spirit*** *is straining for another where there will be new eyes… the* ***shattered dreams…my ghost*** *will find the beginnings that will be known here as* ***my dream****(p. 196).*

"My spirit", "my ghost" and "my dream" are all abstract entities. There is an intratextual cohesion between them, and they share the common semantic feature /+ vague /. Besides, these normal collocates bring us to the constant narrative shift. "My ghost" represents the past, "my spirit" represents the future while "my dream" represent the future.

Another instance is:

> *I am here against the last of my veils. Take me. I am ready.* ***You are the end. The beginning****. I am coming (p. 201).*

From this extract, we have an unusual collocate "you are the end and the beginning". In normal English language code, we should have had "beginning and the end" but within the world of this novel, there is a conscious interplay of these words designed to foreground its use. Here, wrongful acquisition of wealth is described as "you" i.e. /+ animate/ and is said to be the "end and beginning". Within this novel, success of any kind is measured in terms of materialism.

In **Two Thousand Seasons,** we also noticed that lexical items collocate to show the theme of alienation and frustration. For instance, the Whiteman are known as desert, who only take without a corresponding giving. In the opening paragraph of the novel, we have,

> *… the* ***desert takes****. The desert knows no giving… there the devotes of death take life… (p. xi)*

Here the noun "desert" stands for the invading whites who have come in for forcefully occupy Ghana. Armah in showing his resentment for them described them as desert with the semantic feature /- life/ and the verb "takes" which is in the present tense.

This is an abnormal collocates because the inanimate "desert" is given human quality. What Armah intends to demonstrate is to highlight the possessive tendencies of these white invaders.

We also have another abnormal collocation in the following extract:

> *In the* ***living night*** *came voices from the source. We go to find our audience, open our mouth to pass on what we have heard (p. xi).*

Ekpenyong (2000) describes this kind of collocation as idiomatic. Ekpenyong asserts that the expression, "living night" is an idiomatic expression, but a cursory look depicts it as an abnormal collocate and more of a figure of speech. For "living" is a verb while, "night" is a noun (Verb + Noun). Also, in terms of figure of speech, it may be personification, because "night" is given an human attributes of "living". However, within the context of this novel, "night" is given an attribute of living and has the semantic feature /+ human/. The progressive verb "living" shows the continuity of "darkness" (i.e attribute of night).

In displaying his anger, Armah chooses putrid language to show his displeasure of the Whiteman:

> *So among us the* ***ostentatious cripples*** *turned the honoured position of caretakers into plumage for their infirm selves (p. 63).*

To show intensity, Armah uses the adjective "ostentatious" with the noun "cripples" as collocate. The word ostentatious is derogatory in nature and its use with another derogatory element such as "cripples" has rhetorical effect. Within the world of this novel, they share the same semantic components of /+ wealth/, /- motion/. Armah thus sees the Whitemen as 'cripples".

Like what we noticed in the two novels analysed in this paper. Armah likes to use the definite article "the" to describe the villians in his works. As already mentioned this stylistic device is aimed at concreteness. In **two thousand seasons we have**:

> *…****the hollow-eyed beggars*** *seeking refuge from the people.* ***The predators****, their first appearance among us was that of beggars.* ***The bloat-eyed revellers*** *also within swollen quantities (p. 21).*

"The hollow-eyed beggars", "the predators", the bloat-eyed reveller" all refer to flesh eating animals and they share the same semantic feature /+ death/, /+ destruction/. All these animals are introduced by the definite article "the" which make the white specific.

Furthermore, Armah in discussing about the suffering of the people in the hands of the white invaders compares them to a shrinking soul.

> *… the perception of beauty is so dependent on **the souls seeing,** on **the soul hearing**. **A shrunken souls, shrunken from the way**, **shrunken souls** turn from the way by the white destroyers… (p. 183).*

Apart from the conscious repetition of the words "shrunken" and "souls", they are abstract entities but made to take the qualities of living things e.g. "seeing" and "hearing". Besides the verb "shrink" is used in the past tense and made to collocate with the abstract "soul". On the other hand, the soul is supposed to depict life, but taking the verb, it takes an extra-textual meaning of life /- life/, /+ suffering/.

Finally, talking about the final annihilation of the black people by their white invaders, Armah makes use of predictable collocate but with a stylistic marker to make his message clearer to his readers. He says:

> *… the **desert** knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the **desert** to return anything but **destruction**. **Springwater** flowing to the **desert**, your future is **extinction**(p. xi).*

"Destruction" and "extinction" belong to same grammatical category and also share the same semantic properties of /+ death/ within the world of this novel. "springwater" has the feature /+ life/ and it represents the blacks in the world of this novel while "desert" represents the whitemen and has the semantic feature /+ death/.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have observed that for any literary writer to convey the burden of/in his/her mind, language is at the centre piece. And the choice of language by the literary artist depends greatly on the sensibilities of the artist, the social context and the period. Armah as one of the 20th century literary artist has within the world of his novels chosen dictions to suit his theme. This paper particularly looked at Armah's use of collocations and their semantic implication in the understanding of meaning. From our discussion here, collocation is seen as predictable co-occurrences of two or more words not determined by logic or frequency, but is arbitrary, decided only by linguistic convention. From the data analysed, Armah seemed to rely greatly on abnormal collocates, this is understandably so because of the theme of corruption, alienation, frustration and disappointment he tries to share with the public. So, this gives rise to the conscious violations of his collocation patterns. However, this stylistic linguistic analysis has helped in a better comprehension and understanding and perhaps free him from his critics who sees his choices of words as bothering on obscenities.

Our conceptual orientation in this paper has been critically tested. Truth is, words do co-occur but we have also noticed a deliberate departure from this angle. It underscores our concept of defamiliarization. The reader-response theory adopted also proved useful, because the selected texts were purposefully read and data selected for reader-centred and not author-centred. The discourse theory aspect of our orientation demonstrates how Armah's choice of words work in different situations (i.e. context of situation).

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