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A Linguistic Study of Helon Habila's Novel, Oil on Water

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Abstract:

Petroleum, Nigeria's major source of revenue is obtained in the Niger Delta. Yet, the region has been besieged by a lot of crises right from the colonial era. The process of crude oil extraction, resulting in oil pollution has done serious damages to the region, thereby hindering farming and fishing, the main occupations of the Deltans. This plunged the people into the unemployment that is responsible for poverty, hardship, diseases and deaths among the people. Deltans suffer so many losses, yet they are not adequately compensated. This is the cause of the Niger Delta crises. During the colonial era, the British government established oil companies to explore petroleum to enrich her home country, Britain, at the expense of the Niger Delta. Many years after independence, the condition of the region has remained deplorable due to corruption in Nigeria. Being exploited and cheated, the people resorted to different forms of protests, violence and militancy, that have culminated in social unrest in the region. Despite all efforts by the government to arrest the situation, the Niger delta issue has remained a serious problem of public concern, which needs permanent solution. To this effect, many Nigerian literary artists such as Ken Saro-wiwa, Tanure Ojaide, Kaine Agary and Helon Habila expressed their concern over the crises in their literary works, aimed at proffering permanent solution to the problem. This reiterates the importance of literature and the literary artists to the society. This paper examines and expounds how Helon Habila deploys language resources in his novel, Oil on Water, to convey the Niger Delta crises, their security risks to the society and the Nigerian economy, as well as the decisive steps to arrest the ugly situation.

Keywords: Niger delta, extraction, crises, pollution, solutions

1. Introduction

The Niger delta crisis has been a burning issue not only to the Niger Deltans, but to Nigeria in general. Based on their personal experiences in the society, the literary artists deploy the resources of language to reflect the lives of the people. They expose the societal ills that pose problems to the people and advance solutions to such problems, aimed at social reformation and national development. There is, therefore a close and complex relationship between language, literature and society. Language and literature play vital roles in every society. G. O. Osunkentan lends his voice to the importance of literature in his assertion that literature is the window through which literary artists "peep and project into the totality of human experiences" (313). Therefore, the relevance of literature goes beyond entertainment.

As political consciousness grew among the African elites during the colonialera, African literary artists deployed literature to posed resistance to the colonial imperialists. They came to Africa with the guise of propagating the gospel, and trading along the coast, but turned out to be exploiters, with the ulterior motive of tapping Africanrich natural resources. For instance, Britain established oil companies in the Niger delta to explore and extract petroleum, Nigeria's richest mineral product, to enrich her home country, at the expense of the Niger delta region.

The irony of the situation is that many years after independence the people of Niger deltafrom whose region the wealth of the nation accrues are still confronted with serious problems resulting from oil pollutions. They are neither adequately compensated by the oil companies nor the Nigerian government. The injustice meted out to Deltans has created a lot of problems ranging from unemployment, poverty, hunger to diseases; these are the major factors responsible for the crises in the region. The Niger delta crises have elicited a lot of reactions from different quarters, especially from Southern Nigeria. Unfortunately, all efforts by the government to arrest the ugly trend have proved abortive.

In the literary circle, some other Nigerian literary artists such as Ken Saro-wiwa, Tanure Ojiade, Helon Habila and Kaine Agary have protested against the injustice meted out to the Deltans in their literary works. They give vivid accounts of the damages done to the Niger delta arising from the processes involved in oil extraction, and their devastating effects on both man and the Niger delta region. In their works, they create public awareness on the crises, and advance suggestions on ways of proffering permanent solutions, in order to alleviate the sufferings of the people.

Habila's novel, *Oil on Water*, is preoccupied with the devastating effects of environmental pollution in Niger delta, the neglect of the people by the authorities concerned as a result of corruption in Nigeria, and the resultant social unrest in the region. He portrays the plights of the people, as well as how literature and the media serve as means of creating public awareness on issues that pose threats to man and the society, aimed at proffering permanent solutions.

To convey their artistic visions in literature, literary artists deploy the recourses of language. Hugh Widdowson asserts that, "there is always a struggle by the creative writer to devise language patterns that will convey his individual personal vision (15). This paper examines and explicates how Helon Habila deploys significant linguistic parameters in *Oil on Water* to convey his artistic visions. It is worthy of note that while the novel is a visionary reconstruction, it is also an exemplification of the relevance of "technique of means" in shaping and sharpening the artistic visions. This is by virtue of the fact that Habila's triumph in the novel does not rely only on the views he expresses about the ecological challenges faced by Niger Deltans, but also on how his linguistic choices pivot his exposal of the ugly state of affairs in the region. This is with a view to advancing suggestions to achieve lasting peace in the Niger Delta.

2. A Linguistic Study of the Novel, *Oil on Water*

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. In literary texts, language is studied at various levels. This paper focuses on the significant syntactic, lexico-semantic and graphological levels of language study. Although the graphic substance is not a branch of linguistics, its affinity with the phonic substance in particular and language in general is so close that it exerts considerable influence on stylistics. The graphic shape often attempts to represent the phonic substance. Consequently, the patterned system of the graphic substance is an aspect of the style of written discourse which should not be overlooked. We begin the analysis of the language of *Oil on Water* below with the significant syntactic features that the author deploys to convey his artistic visions in the novel.

3. The Syntactic Study of the Novel

Syntax is the branch of linguistics which is concerned with sentence construction. Noam Chomsky says that syntax deals with the arrangement of words in sentences, the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in a particular language" (1). In the text under study, Habila deploys the following significant syntactic features, among others to convey his thematic preoccupations.

4. The Functional Sentence Types

The mood system reveals the various functions of speech and discourse. Michael Halliday sees mood as that aspect of the interpersonal function of language indicating the speech roles that characters adopt in their desire to communicate. A character's role may be that of declaring, questioning, commanding and exclaiming. Below are the various functional sentence types.

5. Declarative Sentences

Declarative sentences make statements, assertions or state facts that cannot be doubted (A. W. Heffernan and John Lincion). We examine and analyze below the author's deployment of declarative sentences to convey his messages in the novel under consideration.

- This segment was accompanied by a long, rote-like voice-over about poverty in Nigeria, and how corruption sustained that poverty, and how oil was the main source of revenue, and how because the country was so corrupt, only a few had access to that wealth. Such great potential. You people could easily become the Japan of Africa, the USA of Africa but the corruption is incredible. (96 -97)
- Their rivers were already polluted and useless for fishing, and the land grew only gas flares and pipelines.(40)
- Next, there was a shot of picketing youths holding placards in front of an oil-company in Port Harcourt.(96)
- We went to the riverbank with the villagers to watch the speed boats that brought the soldiers ...Karibi sat between two soldiers, his hands tied behind him, his face staring into the distant horizon. His son said he'd betaken to Port Harcourt, where he he'd be tried and found guilty of fraternizing with the militants. ---But he's innocent.(13)

Helon Habila deploys the declarative sentences above to convey the various themes of the novel. He X-rays the ugly situation in the Niger delta due to oil pollution and its devastating effects on the People. In extract 1, he portrays corruption as the major cause of the problems in Nigeria. Nigeria is blessed with petroleum, the most valuable mineral product that would have made the country one of the richest and most economically powerful in the world. But today, Nigeria is a third world country, underdeveloped and poor. Nigerians are suffering and battling with inflation, hunger and diseases as a result of corruption. They are denied the basic necessities of life; Nigerian roads are death traps, the people lack good medical care, quality education and job opportunities for the teeming youths.

Habila conveys the theme of oil pollution, which has done damages to the Niger delta in the novel. In sample 2, he states that due to oil spillages, the farmlands and fishing waters in the region have been so polluted and useless that the people whose occupations were originally farming and fishing have become jobless, and therefore confronted with the problems of unemployment and poverty. Unfortunately, they are not adequately compensated by the government and oil companies for their losses. There are no meaningful human and infrastructural developments in the region, and the people lack the basic social amenities.

With the informative nature of the sentence in extract 3, the author conveys the theme of protests and violence in the Niger delta. The rate of unemployment in the region has become so alarming because the people are deprived of their farmlands and fishing waters, without the provisions of job opportunities. Many of their youths have resorted to different forms of anti-social behaviours culminating in militancy, a very serious crisis in Nigeria. The different militant groups in the region including the Black Belts of Justice, the Free Delta Army and the AK 47 Freedom Fights pose threats to lives and

properties. They abduct both indigenous and expatriate oil workers for ransom, and some victims get killed. Boasting of their destructive activities in the Niger Delta, Professor, a dreaded militant leader says:

... but I can tell you the war is just starting. We will make it so hot for the government and the oil companies that they will be forced to pull out. (220)

The problem of militancy has dealt a serious blow to the Nigerian economy and the world oil market. Due to the incessant abductions and deaths of oil workers, especially the expatriates in Port Harcourt and Warri, majority of them have left Nigeria. Moreover, many of the oil companies have been forced to fold up. These crises are adversely affecting the Nigerian economy. The world oil market is not spared the problems.

Habila also deploys declarative sentences in the text to convey the themes of deplorable environment, and alarming rate of poverty in Niger delta. He gives vivid descriptions of the deplorable living environment of the Deltans in the creeks in the sample below:

It was an entire village on stilt, situated by the river on a vast mud flat which at that time was under water... The houses were made from weeping-willows bamboos and raffia palms and bits of zinc and plywood and clock and it seemed anything else the builders were able to lay their hands on. The whole scarecrow settlement looked as if the next strong wind or wave would blow it away. (14)

The people cannot afford the basic necessities of life, and their children are denied quality education due to poverty as the author portrays in the excerpt below:

... I picked up pen and paper and the words had come effortlessly. I wrote about our childhood, about our days catching crabs to pay our way through secondary school, about Boma's dream of becoming a doctor. (127)

Habila also conveys the themes of marginalization, neglect and injustice. In Nigeria, only the privileged few enjoy the benefits of petroleum to the detriment of other Nigerians. Petroleum products have even become so expensive that they are beyond the reach of the common man. The people of the Niger Delta, the source of petroleum, from which Nigeria's revenue accrues, face the worst problems of ecological degradation as a result of the petroleum, which is of no benefit to them. They have nothing to show for it, but suffering, terrorism and social unrest. It is sad to note that the wealth of the nation is diverted by the corrupt Nigerian leaders to the detriment of the Niger Deltans. As portrayed by the author in the excerpt below, the injustice meted out to the people is responsible for the social unrest in the region.

But I don't blame them for wanting to get some benefits out of the pipelines that have brought nothing but suffering to their lives, leaking into the rivers and wells, killing the fish and poisoning the farmlands.

And all they are told by the oil companies and the government is that the pipelines are there for their own good, that they hold great potential for them for their future. These people endure the worst conditions of any oil-producing community in the world, the government knows it but does not have the will to stop it, the oil companies know it, but because the government does not care, they too don't care. And you think the people are corrupt? No, they are hungry and tired. (97)

Another message inherent in above sample is that the people of the Niger delta are justified in asking for their rights. They deserve better treatment from the authorities for the losses they suffer from oil pollution and its devastating effects on their land and water. The authorities concerned have to intervene to ameliorate the sufferings of the people if they want their maximum co-operation and peace in the region.

Also, in the novel under study, Habila condemns in totality the activities of the soldiers who parade the waters, perpetuate injustice and inflict pains on innocent villagers in the oil producing communities as portrayed in following sample.

We went to the riverbank with the villagers to watch the speed boats that brought the soldiers ...Karibi sat between two soldiers, his hands tied behind him, his face staring into the distant horizon. His son said he'd be taken to Port Harcourt, where he'd be tried and found guilty of fraternizing with the militants. ---But he's innocent.(13)

The presence and the incessant clashes between the soldiers and militants pose serious problems of insecurity and social unrest to the region. The villagers suffer harassment and torture, and their women and girls are raped indiscriminately. The soldiers burn down villages and force the people to relocate to peaceful communities as conveyed in the extract below. Now it was deserted: the people, with their chickens and goats and pots and pans, must have escaped rippleless down the river in their dugout canoes after the first shot was fired... Trees lay on the ground, cut in half, dripping vital sap. The smell of burning hung in the air. In the centre of a compound a hut had been hit square on its conical roof, causing the thatch to cave in, and now the grass and the rafters all lay in a big pile of ash in the middle of the hut. (71)

Helon Habila captures the alarming rate of fire accidents in the communities in the Niger delta. As a result of unemployment, poverty and lack, the people engage in the dangerous acts of bursting oil pipes lines to siphon fuel for sale. Many people have lost their lives in the process as witnessed in Jesse in 1985, and the recent incident in River state in June, 2019. A lot of houses are razed down by fire due to fuel storage in houses. Narrating his experience in his father's house in one of such communities, the authorial voice says:

Even before he opened the door I could smell petrol, and when he turned on the light I saw more than ten drums...We sat on two wooden stools in a clear space between two drums. In the two days I spent at home before returning to Port Harcourt, I saw how much my father has changed. He left home early in the morning in a pickup trucks to go to the bush, where he and his partner buy the petrol from the kids and he return home only after midnight, often drunk. The house stank of petrol and cigarette He said he smoked just to kill the smell. (64)

To prevent cases of fire accidents and loss of lives and properties in future, the authorities concerned should put adequate security measures in place in such communities.

The author also conveys the themes of health hazards, injustice and deaths in the Niger Delta as a result of the toxins, which constitute environmental pollution, thereby exposing the people in the area to diseases and deaths. Even when the situation is reported to the authorities, nothing is done about it.

I told them of the dangers that accompany that quenchless flare, but they wouldn't listen. And a year later, when the livestock began to die and the plants began to wither on their stalk, I took samples of the drinking water and in my lab I measured the level of toxin in it: it was rising steadily. In one year it has grown almost twice the safe level... When I confronted the oil workers, they offered me money and a job. ... So when people started dying, I took blood samples and recorded the toxins in them, and this time I sent my result to the government. They thanked me and dumped the result in some filing cabinet. More people died... Almost overnight I watched the whole village disappear just like that. (145) The consequences of such nonchalant attitude towards the people's welfare are protests and violence, which have been nagging problems in Nigeria over the years.

Habila deploys the declarative construction in the extract below to portray the states of fear, panic and uncertainty associated with the oil-producing communities of Niger delta. Due to incessant terrorism, harassment and the tussles between the soldiers and the militants, the people live in perpetual fear and uncertainty. In times of crises, they run helter skelter in panic and fear as reported below.

There was a loud noise as of stampeding feet, dust rose and covered the tight passages, and the stalls and the sheds, people rushed down the passages, knocking down tables and the entire sheds as they went. Then a single gunshot rang out. For a moment everyone froze. As I turned to ask the old man what was going on, a terrified market woman suddenly appeared in front of me, her eyes blinded by fear. (11)

In the instances above, Habila deploys the informative nature of the various declarative sentences to convey the themes of *Oil on Water*.

6. Interrogative Sentences

Murthy says that interrogative sentences are deployed for making inquiries. We exemplify below the writer's use of this sentence type for stylistic effects in the text under study.

- How can Oga do this to me? ... I respected him. I trusted him, and see what
- he did to me. Why? I want to know why, can you please tell me? (192)
- Where is the British woman ... and the professor? (129)
- But what do you think? Is she alive or not?
- Did Zaq give you any message for me? (96)
- Are you happy here? (41)
- I say how can we be happy when we are wanderers without a home? (41)

The author conveys the themes of betrayal, bitterness and revenge in the novel with the interrogative sentence in extract 1 above. He reveals Salomon's bitterness against Mr. Floode, his expatriate boss for impregnating and taking away from him his fiancée, Koko. Mr. Floode succeeds in taking Koko away from Salomon because of his poverty resulting from his menial job. Salomon, a university graduate is Mr. Floode's driver. Bitter and traumatized by Mr. Floode's betrayal, Salomon connives with his friends, abduct Mrs. Floode and demand ransom from her husband to punish him.

Another message inherent in this extract is that some of the Niger delta youths have taken to kidnapping, not only to make ends meet, but as a way of avenging the injustice done them by the government and oil workers. Like Salomon, many university graduates among them are forced to take up menial jobs as cleaners and company drivers due to unemployment as stated below:

Today he spoke grammatically faultless English, even the assent was modified, easy to understand. Later, she discovered that he was a university graduate, who like a lot of young men in the Delta, had been forced to take a job far below his qualifications. (191) Habila also conveys the theme of incessant kidnappings prevalent in the oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta in the novel. Sample 3 contains questions asked in quick succession. The author deploys these stylistically to convey Mr. Floode's anxiety over his abducted wife, Isabel.

Habila utilizes the interrogative sentences in samples 4 and 5 to convey the themes of displacement, hardship and sorrow in the novel. Members of Niger delta communities are displaced by the oil companies with the support of their corrupt political leaders. They are forced to sell off their ancestral lands, and those who refuse to sell are tortured and forced out of their villages like Chief Malabo and members of his family. They become wanderers in search of accommodation.

Question 4 above, is directed to Chief Ibiram who has been displaced from his ancestral home with his family members. Zaq, the journalist, inquires from him whether they are happy in their new location. With Chief Ibiram's response in extract 5, the author depicts the sorrow and hardship to which the people are subjected due to their displacement.

7. Imperative Sentences

A verb which is used to express a command, an advice or an entreaty is known as an imperative mood (Murthy 95). It is important to state that in grammar, the subject 'you' is omitted in imperative mood. We observe the prominent use of imperative sentences in the text, as Habila conveys the incessant cases of harassment and terrorism meted out to the innocent and helpless villagers in the Niger Delta communities. The soldiers and militants order their victims and villagers around indiscriminately as in some of the following extracts.

- Bring her here. Now! (196)
- ---You, come with us! (12)
- ---Oya, move faster now! (75)
- ---You two, come down. Now! (75)
- ---Stop and throw away your oars and weapons. Do it now! (43)
- Leave your boat and swim over to our boat. Do not take anything from your boat. (43)
- Just before I turned to see what he found so arresting, I heard the command:
- ---Oya, move faster!
- ...You two, come down! (127)

Okedirandeploys the following imperative sentences in the novel to express forcefulness, thereby conveying the terrorism and harassment to which the people are exposed, due to the activities of kidnappers, militants and soldiers. In extract 1, kidnappers order the passengers and the driver in a boat around. Chief Ibiram is commanded by the kidnappers to hand the British woman over to them while shooting into the air. Similarly, in samples 3 and 4, the journalists, Rufus and Zaq, in search of the abducted British woman are subjected to traumatic experiences, being commanded by masked kidnappers, with their hands raised above their heads at gun points.

8. Exclamatory Sentences

Exclamatory sentences are utilized to express feelings of fear, shock, anxiety, joy, among others.

- THEY ARE HERE! The soldiers are here! (12)
- In the distance a woman wailed at the top of her voice, calling to God over and over: Tamuno! Tamuno! (12)
- In the exclamatory sentences above, the author reiterates the state of social unrest in the Niger Delta region as a result of militancy.

9. Parallelism

Parallelism is a literary device which depends on the principle of equivalence. The connection of the equivalence is usually that of similarity or contrast as the case may be. Kofi Yankson opines that parallelism is “the repetition of grammatical patterns in a literary text for a particular artistic effect” (14). Habila deploys lexical and syntactic repetitions for emphasis in the novel to pass his messages across to the readers. We examine the following examples.

- Next, there was a shot of picketing youths holding placards in front of an oil- company building in Port Harcourt. This segment was accompanied by a long, rote-like voice-over about poverty in Nigeria, and how corruption sustained that poverty and how oil was the main source of revenue, and how because the country was so corrupt, only a few had accesses to that wealth. (96)

- We’re not the army. We’re reporters. We want to know what he’s done with the woman. We want to ask him why he has turned from being a freedom fighter to a kidnapper of women and children. We want to know if the white woman is alive. (129)

- There is war going on out there. People are being shot. In Port Harcourt, oil companies are being bombed, police stations are being overrun, the World oil market is shooting through the roof. **You** insist! (59)

With the parallel structures in example 2, the author presents Rufus’ introduction of himself and Zaq to Naman, the Priest, as journalists, whose mission on the Island is to get information about the abducted British woman, especially to know whether she is still alive. But Naman advises them against such a fruitless and dangerous venture because of his experiences and the danger involved in such a mission. In this excerpt, the author condemns the militants, who claim to be fighting for the rights and interests of the Deltans, but have become terrorists, kidnappers and dangerous to the same people.

Similarly, the author deploys parallel structures in samples 1 and 3 to reiterate youth restiveness in the Niger Delta, and reveal the destructive activities of the militants. Such activities comprise indiscriminate shooting of innocent people, bombing of oil companies, and overrunning of police stations. He emphasizes the adverse effects of the Niger Delta crises on the people, the Nigerian economy and the world oil market.

10. Lexico-semantic Features in *Oil on Water*

In *Oil on Water*, Habila utilizes some significant lexico-semantic features to convey his artistic visions. Below are few examples.

Figures of Speech

M. H. Abrams defines figurative language as “a deviation from what speakers of a language apprehend as the ordinary or standard, significant or sequence of words in order to achieve some special meaning” (118). Below are some of the figurative expressions that Habila deploys in the novel for the conveyance of meanings and messages.

11. Simile

Simile is a figure of speech that deals with comparison, usually with “like” and “as”. Below is an example of the use of simile in the text under study.

Had she escaped? I hope not because she has no way of surviving out there in the swamp by herself: first of all, her skin would be her worst enemy, it'd emblazon her presence like lightning in a dark night, wherever she went, and she might escape from one kidnapper only to end up in the hands of another. (155)

In the sample above, Habila reiterates the violence in the Niger Delta and the plights of the innocent victims of kidnappers, soldiers and militants. With the simile, the author compares the white skin of the abducted British woman in the midst of the villagers in a boat to lightning in a dark night, which shines brightly. Ironically, she is easily identified and rearrested by her abductors because of her white skin.

12. Metaphor

The artist utilizes metaphoric expressions which also deal with comparison to convey meanings and messages in the text as exemplified below.

- They have killed before, and I know nothing is going to save me... nothing. The professor is a mad man. I have seen what he can do. (206)
- Irikefe is now mostly ashes and rubble, bombed by the helicopter over there. Not a hut is left standing... (157)

In excerpt 1, Salomon calls the Professor a mad man not because he is insane, but due to his abnormal behavior and the terrorist activities he perpetuates on his victims. For instance, he abducts and holds people hostages and kill others at will. Salomon recounts his experience of Professor's acts of wickedness and inhuman behaviour just before his escape with the British woman from where he has held them hostages. According to him, the Professor has shot a man falsely accused of giving out information to the soldiers, and asked that his body be thrown into the river for the fish to eat. As a terrorist leader, Professor is so deadly that Salomon concludes that he would kill him. Here, Habila condemns the terrorist leaders in Nigeria whose activities have been posing threats to the peace of the nation. In sample 2, the writer likens Irikefe village that has been raided to rubble and ashes. He portrays the extent of destruction done to the village like the other communities in the region by the soldiers and militants.

13. Personification

Personification is a figurative expression where human attributes are conferred on abstract entities for stylistic effects.

- Salomon, Isabel and I hung on for dear life as the boat ate up the darkness,
- I had expected a blindfold, but nobody paid me or my fellow prisoners any attention once we left chief Ibiram and his people. (198)
- Our arrival was announced by more gunshots and whoops and calls, but the camp was clearly asleep. (198)

In excerpt 1, the author personifies a “boat”, conferring the act of eating, a human attribute, on it. Similarly, in sample 2, the human act of sleeping is conferred on a camp, a human abode. The author conveys in this extract the unusual silence and calmness in the camp due to the states of insecurity, uncertainty, fear and destruction done to it by the terrorists.

14. Idiomatic expressions

- The food wasn't remarkable---rice immersed in a mess of beans---but it was filling. (205)
- As a chief he had no control over the family's decision about what to do with their land, but as a chief his word carried weight, especially among the elders. (40)

The idiomatic expression, “ was filling” in sample 1 denotes “satisfying”. The idea the author conveys is that the food provided for the victims of kidnappers is not appetizing, but satisfying. The message inherent here is that of lack and want to which the abducted victims are subjected. They eat whatever their abductors provide for them, not because they like it, but to survival since they have no choice.

“His word carried weight” as used in extract 2 connotes the fact that Chief Malabo's words command authority in the village, especially among the elders.

15. Graphological Analysis of *Oil on Water*

Graphology deals with the production and receptive process of language. It is the graphic representation on paper. Geoffrey Leech asserts that it is “the line-by-line arrangement of words on the printed page” (68). Crystal and Davy assert that graphology deals with the writer's distinctive uses of punctuations, paragraphing, capitalization etc. When writers put these graphological features into deviant uses in literary texts, they become stylistically significant for artistic effects. We examine below Habila's use of some significant graphological features to create meanings and messages in *the novel*.

16. Capitalization

In the novel, some words and sentences stand out through capitalization. As exemplified below, capitalization does not only arrest the attention of readers in texts, but highlights or emphasizes important facts or information that the author conveys to the readers.

- THEY WERE THE MASTERS of the water ways---they knew every turning, every shallow, every rapid; many times I expected our boat to crash into some shadowy form... (198)

- ----THEY ARE HERE! The soldiers are here! (12)

In extract 1, Habila deploys the capitalized expression, "THEY WERE THE MASTERS" for artistic effect. He portrays the militants' in-depth knowledge of the water ways in the Niger Delta. He also emphasizes the fact that they exact so much authority and power in the region.

The capitalized expression in sample 2 is deployed to alert the villagers of the arrival of the dreaded soldiers, whose presence in the village spells danger. They have so tortured the villagers that many of them have deserted their villages and relocated in fear.

17. The Ellipsis

Ellipsis involves the omission of a word or words from a sentence when the meaning of the sentence can still be understood. It is aimed at avoiding repetitions and for stylistic effects in literary texts. It can occur within the nominal group, verbal or clausal structure. Below are few instances of Habila's use of ellipses in the text under study for stylistic effects.

1. I...am here. Please...don't shoot. I'm here. (196)

2. And the man started to count:

...One, two, three...(196)

The ellipsis dots in sample 1 above are deployed by Habila to reveal the states of panic and fear expressed by the abducted British woman as she runs into the same abductors from whom she has earlier escaped. As they threaten to sink the boat in which the woman and other people are being conveyed to Port Harcourt for safety, she surrenders herself to them in fear.

18. The Use of Pidgin

Pidgin is a common language that cuts across all classes of people in Nigeria. It is deployed as a common means of communication when illiterates, people of different ethnic backgrounds and classes are engaged in communication. The deployment of Pidgin English in Nigerian literature reflects its use in Nigeria generally. In the text under study, Habila presents the speeches of some of the characters in Pidgin English. Let us examine the following extracts.

- If you tink say na joke, try us. (196)

- ----Where you tink say you dey go?

---I have to see the Professor. I'm a reporter--- (202)

- No. One man dey with am. Him name na Salomon. Isabel Floode and the wanted driver. The two. Chief Ibiram don go. E no dey here anymore. Em say e no wan stay here anymore, surrenders because of so so fighting and because of bad fishing. (182)

We observe from the examples that Habila deploys Pidgin English in *Oil on Water* to convey his artistic visions. His use of Pidgin English in the text is a reflection of its use in Nigeria, especially as predominantly used in the Delta. He utilizes it for the presentation of the speeches of the illiterate characters in the conveyance of the themes of terrorism and insecurity in the extracts. For instance, in excerpt 1, an illiterate militant threatens the journalist in Pidgin English, as the journalist attempts to see the Professor on his facts finding mission.

19. Conclusion

In this paper, it has been stated that Helon Habila deploys language resources in *Oil on Water* to create awareness on the crises in the Niger delta, and advance measures to proffer permanent solutions that will restore peace to the region. We also established that right from the colonial era, the process of crude oil extraction in the region has resulted in the devastating effects of ecological degradation, which has subjected the people of the region to a lot of problems ranging from environmental pollution, unemployment, poverty, hunger, diseases to deaths. Habila calls on the Nigerian government and the oil companies to give more attention to the Niger delta, and address the problems with all seriousness and urgency in order to restore peace and enhance national development in Nigeria.

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