Mood and Syntactic Choices in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: Implications for the Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Correct verbal identification of different mood system has been a source of concern to teachers of English as a Second Language in Nigeria. Classroom efforts are mostly geared towards recognition of this concept, usually, in abstract and without connection to functional usage. Studies by scholars identify great difficulty in recognition of the verbal elements in sentence conveying the mood. However, such work never establishes a correlation between correct identification of mood and semantic interpretation. The purpose of this study is to establish the syntactic choices of the verbal elements in Julius Caesar and how they have helped to depict the mood of the characters in the text. This work relies on Systemic Functional Grammar approach to establish connection of mood to setting, tone and diction. It establishes that Shakespeare unconsciously reflects the mood through the characters use of certain clauses with the view to probably enhance the readers' understanding of scene of actions in the play. Implications for the language teachers are discussed.

Keywords: Language Teachers, Mood, Shakespeare, Syntactic choice.
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1.   Introduction

In an attempt to devise language patterns that will convey his individual feelings, thoughts, and personal vision, a creative writer is consciously or unconsciously being guided by the grammatical category of system. According to Halliday (1961), grammatical system accounts for those limited groups of possibilities or options from which preferred choices are made at certain places in the language pattern.

There is no gainsaying the fact, therefore, that a very prominent part of this grammatical category of system is the mood system. The writer's mood is indeed very crucial to the various choices he makes while depicting his feelings or reactions through his characters. The mood features have been observed to be much more prevalent in the playwright's arrangement of the elements of clause structure at the deep level of analysis, while its manifestations become apparent in the presence or

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absence of certain elements in the surface of the text. In this work, we examine the meaning potentials of the mood features, using the play, *Julius Caesar,* as our anchor. The playwright, William Shakespeare, read the murder of Julius Caesar, a roman emperor, in a history book, *Plutarch's Lives of the Greeks and Romans* which was written in Latin during the first century A.D and translated by Thomas North to English in 1579. (See Roman Gill, ed (1979) *Julius Caesar vii).*

Inspired by this story, the playwright decided to convert the prose narrative to the present play. *Julius Caesar*, perhaps with a view to bringing into focus what may be termed man's fatalistic ambition. In this study, we attempt to investigate how the playwright has been able to achieve this and we opine that the success of the dramatic edifice, and indeed any dramatic piece, might not be unconnected with the artistic maneuvers and linguistic experiment displayed on the surface structure of the play, prominent among which is the mood system.

System, according to Osisanwo (1996: 6) citing Halliday (1969: 37), is asset of features, one and only one of which must be selected, if the entry to that system is to be satisfied. In other words, system is sets of semantic choices made for linguistic units and these choices are called terms or options. This study x-rays the mood system that perhaps influences the playwright's choice of words.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Correct verbal identification of different moods has been a source of concern to teachers of English as a Second Language in Nigeria. Classroom efforts are mostly geared towards recognition of this concept, usually, in abstract and without connection to functional usage. Studies carried out by scholars (Lipski 1993, Lynch 1999, Silva-Corvalan 2003 and Montrul, 2007) identify great difficulty in recognition of the verbal elements in sentence conveying the mood. However, such work never establishes a correlation between correct identification of mood and semantic interpretation.

The purpose of this study is to explain the syntactic choices of the verbal elements in *Julius Caesar* and how they have helped to depict the mood of the characters in the text. It is hoped that this effort would impact readers significantly, as they would see language usage beyond the abstract knowledge. Likewise, language teachers would also be able to explain the nexus between the choice of verbal elements in structure and their semantic implication in text.

1.2 Methodology

This study considers it a virtue that any stylistic analysis should not be undertaken for its own sake, but must dissect texts, display their patterns and go on to investigate the literary significance of the patterns displayed. Against this background, we have adopted a qualitative research method, using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) approach. The Systemic Functional Grammar considers grammar in terms of usage and the creation of meaning. It takes the usage and meaning perspective rather than the rule, and it focuses the overall system of grammar instead of fragment (Halliday & Mattiessan, 2004). In other words, our approach locates language within its functional ambit, where it is not just seen as existing for its own sake, but as a product of setting, tone and diction. Relevant extracts from the primary text, *Julius Caesar,* were analyzed in relation to the mood system.

2. Review of related literature

System, as a grammatical category, forms an essential part of language description upon which Halliday (1964), Muir(1972) and Berry(1975) based their linguistic theory which today known as 'systemic theory', (Osisanwo, 1996), 'systemic linguistics', (Sampson, 1980) and so on.

Systemic linguistics, as a theory, looks at the whole language enterprise as "a whole system of choices existing in complex structural relations". This theory was initiated by J.R. Firth (1951) and popularized by M.A.K Halliday (1961) through his remarkable article, " categories of the theory of grammar ", according to him, language can be seen as a system of choices, a system whereby the choice of one thing dictates the choice of another. The theory recognizes a set of scales of abstraction which relates the fundamental categories to the linguistic material (Osisanwo, 1996).These fundamental categories are class, system, unit and structure of language, while the scales include 'rank', exponence and delicacy and the scales are used for the description of the grammar of any language. He concludes with the view that:

> Systemic grammar has a field day when considering
> Varieties of language, linguistic and literary
> Stylistics … as its framework suits any of the fields
> In question. (6)

The mood system falls within the fundamental category of systemic linguistics. The creative writer has, for quite some time now, been reflecting the mood system through the various choices he makes in depicting his feelings or reactions through his characters.

The general mood in a literary piece is perceived in various ways by different scholars. Murphy (1992: 146), For instance, describes 'mood in a work of art' as the general feeling that is conveyed to the reader. Describing 'mood' under the technical term 'atmosphere', he opines that we can talk of the mood of a novel, a play, or poem as being gloomy, sober, terrifying, evil, cheerful, happy, tragic, sordid, pessimistic, optimistic and so on. Likewise, Glenn, Miller, Webb and Gray (2004: 586) classify mood into certain, confident, doubtful, hesitant and ambivalent

Viewing mood from the perspective of the creative writer, Oni (1982:10) describes it as the state of mind in which the writer finds himself while writing his work, while another (writer) may make thought and restraint dominate his approach to his theme. Another may be explicit In other words, writers, according to him, may exhibit different moods even if they are handling the same theme.

While comparing 'mood' in prose or play with 'tone' in poetry, Okudolo (1985:15) observes that the tone of a poem is the mood or its prevailing or dominant atmosphere. According to him, mood is exactly that phenomenon which makes the reader feel just as the writer felt at the material time of writing. This, he argues further, could range from despair to hope, from harshness to melancholy, from pessimism to optimism and so on. The mood system not limited to the field of literature. In fact, it manifest in virtually all the levels of linguistic description. In syntax, for instance, features of mood have been observed in the arrangement of the elements of clause structure (subject, predicator, and complement, adjunct). Quirks and Greebaum (1973:300) opine that 'mood' is essentially the property of the verbal group (VG). According to them, the mood system is noticeable and expressed in the verbal group. Using the English language as pivot, they argue that 'mood' is expressed in English, to a very minor extent by the subjunctive, to a much greater extent by past tense forms and above all, by means of the modal auxiliaries.

This is however contrary to the opinion of Berry (1975:20) which posits that 'mood' should be totally separated from 'modality' a system whose environment or property of the clause, since the arrangement of the elements of clause structure determines the mood and not an element in the structure. According to her, the manifestation of mood is apparent in the presence or absence of the subject element in the clause structure at the surface level of analysis, whereas the covert element (subject) in the imperative sentence may be implied or overt at the deep structure level of analysis.

In what seems a corroboration of this view, (Scot, et al. 1976:29) maintain that mood is a system realized at clause rank in grammar. According to them, the writer is the product of the society and, in his use of language; the happenings around him control his mood, his lexical choices and the arrangement of his sentence patterns.

Mood, according to Uwalaka (1993:18) involves not only syntax and semantics but also pragmatic use of language. Quoting Jesperson (1924:313), she opines that mood is not a notational category but a syntactic one. In other words, mood portrays the state of mind of the speaker as reflected in the in the lexical choices he makes. Mood in syntax, therefore, determines the selective arrangement and positioning of the elements of clause structure.

From the discussion so far, it is apparent that the mood system is a remarkable feature in language use, be it literature, syntax or pragmatics. There is no gainsaying the fact, therefore, that opinions agree on the prevailing mood system in range of attitudes expressed, through sentence constructions, but diversify on the actual locating point in the sentence, as some believe it is the property of the verb, while some maintain that features of mood are realized at either clause or sentence rank.

In this study, however, we do not consider it necessary here to draw any point of convergence or act as arbiter in this matter; our focus is to determine the prevalent mood types in the dramatic text,

Julius Caesar, with a view of ascertaining how the syntactic choice of the mood system has enhanced the themes as well as the aesthetics of the literary text.

3.   Mood in Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

Mood in literature has been described as the state of mind in which a writer finds himself at the moment of writing his work of art. It is equally observed that the mood of the writer determines the atmosphere he creates in his dramatic text. In this case, the air, the feelings, the thoughts and so on that surround the reader in the course of reading the dramatic piece, arises from what can be termed the background of the actions and the people in the story, and in most cases, this background is provided by the playwright before the opening of each scene.

In *Julius Caesar,* the mood is created through this kind of background information by the playwright before any scene is enacted. For instance, in Act1, scene1, we find the description of the people's mood as being joyous and highly enthusiastic as they are celebrating a holiday in honour of *Julius Caesar,* but this mood is sharply contrasted with that of their tribunes who are unhappy because they fear that *Caesar* may prove to be a tyrant. The tribunes' mood later turns out to be cross and reproachful. This is displayed in their choice of words in the real scene:

> Flavius: Hence! Home you idle creatures, get you home.
>   Is this a holiday? What know you not.
>   (Imperative)

From the above utterance by flavius, it is observed that his mood dictates the use of imperative sentence, 'Hence!' This an order for them to stop what they are doing. This is equally demonstrated in the following admonitory tone which expresses a strong irritation:

> Home, you idle creatures,
> Get, you home.
>   (Imperative)

This is a classic example of **imperative** sentence that retains the subject element to reflect admonition. The use of possible rhetorical question in the utterance:, **"Is this a holiday?"** indicates that the speaker, Flavius, emits a strong negative assertion that implies what the people are doing ''is not enough for a holiday''.

Another tribune, Marullus, in his outright condemnation of the people's action, chooses the **interrogatives** rather than the **imperative**, and he does this in quick succession e.g.

> Marullus: Where are thy leather apron, and thy rule?
>   What dost thou with thy best apparel on?
>   You, sir, what trade are you?
>   (Rhetorical)

The use of **interrogative** sentence suggests a quest for information. However, Marullus, deviates from this here. The use of interrogatives in this context appears to be **rhetorical,** rather than a quest for information, otherwise the speaker should have waited for a response to be provided for a certain question before asking another. It can, therefore, be argued that a compliance with the order (earlier given by Flavius) to disperse is the motif behind the quick succession of the 'interrogative sentences introduced by Flavius, but this time, toned down by makers of politeness, like the adjective 'good' in:

> Go, go, good countrymen, and for this fault,
> Assemble all the poor men of your sort; draw them
> To Tiber banks, and weep your tears into the channel…
>   (Persuasive imperative)

The use of **imperative** sentences above is a clear attestation to what Quirk et al (1973:302) describe as '**persuasive imperatives**' and its effect can be seen in the subsequent utterance by Flavius, after the exist of all the citizens in:

> See whe'r their basest mettle be not mov'd;
> They vanish tongue-tied in their guiltiness.
>   (Imperative indicative)

Another mood of suspense is in Act 1, scene 2, when Brutus and Cassius leave the procession to discuss their uneasiness at having Caesar as their ruler. This background information is provided by the playwright but the manifestation is seen later in the utterances of the following characters:

Cassius: Will you go see the order of the course?

(interrogative)

Brutus: Not I.
Cassius: I pray you, do (persuasive imperative)
Brutus: I am not gamesome: I do lack some part of that quick spirit that
Is in Anthony

(indicative)

The use of the interrogative sentence by Cassius is intended to play on the psyche of the addressee (Brutus) and not to request for any information as it is the characteristics of that type of sentences. In other words, the speaker (Cassius) already know the response but when the unwary respondent provides an answer "**Not I** ", he pretends to be persuading him further. This time around, he chooses 'a persuasive imperative sentence: "**I pray you, do**" to further confirm his own assertion of the gullibility of his addressee. When this has been established, he goes ahead, using indicative (declarative) sentences to further flatter him:

Cassius: I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus, as well as
I do know your outward favour. Well, honour is the subject of my story.

(indicative)

After giving the story of Caesar's weakness which seems to prove that he is not a intractable, Cassius concludes:

…And this man is now become a god and Cassius is a
Wretched creature, and must bend his body if Caesar
Carelessly but nod on him.

(Indicative)

After a long story that seems to have conscientized his victim (Brutus), Cassius throws open, in a declarative/indicative mood:

O, you and I have heard our fathers say, there was
A Brutus once that would have brook'd th' eternal
Devil to keep is state in Rome as a king.

(Indicative)

It is this declarative sentence that finally acts as ignition to his victim's brain, as Brutus now realizes where his progenitor is going, but being noble, he decides to display maturity in decision taking:

That you do love me, I am nothing jealous; what you would work me to, I have some aim; how I have thought of this and of these times, I shall recount hereafter; for this present, I would not, so with love I might entreat you, be any further moved. What you have said I will consider.

(indicative)

The reader is able to understand the surreptitious intention of Cassius through his soliloquy in:
Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet I see thy
honorable mettle may be wrought from that it is dispos'd……..

(indicative)

Cassius happily sums up his 'achievement' in this rhetorical question:
For whom so firm that cannot be seduc'd? (Rhetorical)

This supposed 'achievement' later manifests as conspiracy to kill Julius Caesar, which is later carried out.

4.   Implications for the language teachers

It is against this background that we suggest that if learners are to better appreciate the theme of any dramatic piece, the teacher should endeavor to either consciously or unconsciously allow them to identify with the mood of the characters in the play. The language teacher should first explain the

grammatical rules of the functional sentences to be learnt with a series of meaningful drills from the drama texts in order to give the learners optimum practice in language production (Bankole & Ayoola, 2014).

Also, by using examples from drama texts the teacher is actually working within a level of language that involves thought and opinion, and teaching it in a way that necessitates an understanding of the essential elements of what is being learned. It is practice in performance by generating contextual meaning of morphological words (Lamidi, 2005).

Likewise, the language teacher can teach mood and choices by asking the students to role play characters in the text. This can be used to teach fluency and communicative skills (Paulston & Bruder 1976).

5.   Conclusion

In this study, we have been able to discover, among other things, that there are divergent views by scholars on the appropriate location of the mood system within the surface structure of texts. Our findings equally reveal to us that writers may have different moods even if they are handling the same theme.

Setting is the physical location in a piece of literature that provides background in which the events of the narrative take place. The setting in *Julius Ceasar* not only provides support to the contents of the play, but also sets the mood of the readers to a peaceful and joyous mood of holiday in honour of *Julius Ceasar* before Flavius introduces irritating atmosphere. The setting becomes charged; therefore, characters' actions are predicated or expressed in this charged atmosphere until the killing of Julius Ceasar. Thus, the feelings and thoughts that come out of the reader's mind all facilitate the projection of the mood system.

Equally too, the manner Shakespeare approaches the theme and subject of conspiracy and betrayer of trust is called the tone. The readers always rely on playwright's point of view of events taking place in the play. They observe the story through the eye of Shakespeare. They feel the way the playwright feels about the events taking place and the description that is provided. Therefore, the attitude of the playwright evokes feelings and emotions in the reader.

Likewise, diction or choice of words conveys deep feelings, and depicts the events, places, and characters in the play in specific colours, having an effect on the way the readers feel about them. For instance, Brutus realizes that his own gullibility has been made a destructive weapon for himself as he declares while dying:

Caesar, now be still; I kill'd not thee with half so good a will.

(imperative + subject)

The first version of that suicide address, **"Caesar, now be still"** is a command, an **imperative mood** directive at Caesar's ghost to stop haunting him and that the die is already cast, whereas the latter version reveals his 'honest' motif in a declarative form:

"I kill'd not thee with half so good a will."

(Indicative)

It is realized that the playwright, either consciously or unconsciously, reflects the mood in the play through the use of certain clauses by the characters, with a view to probably evoke various emotional responses in the readers, or thus ensures their emotional attachment to the literary piece they read. Once the readers are emotionally stirred, they fully comprehend the message that the playwright tries to convey to them.

We have also been able to point out the features of mood are not in a one-to-one correspondence with the contextual classes of sentences but that the features of mood can be realized at either the group rank or the clause/sentence rank, and it is realized at the second order of meaning (the deep structure).

We equally believe that this study does not in any way represent the full description of the mood system in the dramatic text, but our hope is that it has in a way provided the basis for subsequent research activities on the English system of mood in drama.

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