

THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN THE DESCRIPTION OF SETTING: THE RIVER BETWEEN

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RÉSUMÉ

L'œuvre littéraire de Ngugi Wa Thiong'o « The River Between » est un roman qui participe à la description d'espace en utilisant la langue comme un système de signes pour l'encodage et le décodage de l'information. L'espace fictionnel dans le roman est organisé autour de deux noyaux spatiaux physiquement déterminés et métaphoriquement évoqués par un narrateur omniscient ; les deux rives Kameno et Makuyu. Dans cet article, nous allons appliquer les catégories dans le style dans une fiction de manière sélective à la description du monde de TRB. La procédure dans ce cas sera de commencer par une impression générale sur les crêtes puis de faire un usage sélectif de la liste de contrôle afin d'attirer l'attention des lecteurs sur ce qui semble significatifs sur la description de l'Espace.

Mots-clés : *Rivière, Côté, Makuyu, Kameno, Tradition, Etranger, Evangélisation, Circoncision, initiation, vallée.*

SUMMARY

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's literary work "The River Between" is a novel that participates in the description of space by using language as a system of signs for the encoding and decoding of information. The fictional space in the novel is organized around two spatial cores physically determined and metaphorically evoked by an omniscient narrator; both banks Kameno and Makuyu. In this article, we will apply the categories in style in a fiction selectively to the description of the world of TRB. The procedure in this case will be to start with a general impression of the ridges and then to make selective use of the checklist in order to draw the readers' attention to what seems significant in the description of the Space.

Keywords: *River, Side, Makuyu, Kameno, Tradition, Foreigner, Evangelization, Circumcision, initiation, valley*

1. INTRODUCTION

The literary work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o « The River Between » is a novel that participates in the description of space using language as a system for encoding and decoding information. The fictional space in TRB is organized round two spatial kernels physically determined and metaphorically evoked by an omniscient marrotor, the two ridges Kamenno and Mukuyu.

In this article, we will apply the categories in **Style in Fiction** selectively to the description of the world in TRB. The procedure in this case will be to begin with some general first impression on the ridges and then make selective use of the checklist in order to bring to the reader's attention to what appears to be the most significant style markers on space description. These style markers, in turn, will be related to other style markers with the context of the passage's literary function. The focus is then on Ngugi's passage offering a standard of comparison between the main environmental features in use in the novel.

2. LANGUAGE CONCEPT

Language, like any other concept, has several definitions. This is, of course, due to the fact that people seem to view things from different perspectives. However, most definitions of language seem to have some similarities. This can be seen in some of the definitions of the concept.

“Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thought.” Henry Sweet (1973).

Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager (1983), on the other hand, assumes that “a language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates”.

Wikipedia, the on line encyclopedia, defines the concept in the following words: “A language is a system of signs for encoding and decoding information”. “Language refers to the cognitive faculty that enables humans to learn and use systems of complex communication”.

All the above definitions tell us that language is a system of signs that we use in communicating with ourselves and with others. The signs are speech-sounds, as illustrated in the first definition. However, language also has written signs which are the alphabets that we use in writing. Therefore, communication, in any language, is only possible thanks to linguistic symbols that function according to some rules and conventions.

All these rules provide the underlying conventions on how to form phonemes into morphemes. These rules also tell us how to derive words from

morphemes. It is the same rules that govern every aspect of a language such as its grammar, syntax, phonology, etc.

The definitions also, especially the last one, illustrate that language is connected with the mental process of understanding. This is easily discernable when one looks at how language is acquired, especially, by children. However, it goes beyond how we learn a language. Communication is possible thanks to the mental process of encoding and decoding information as seen in the world of **The River between** and, particularly, in its organization.

Of course, these encoding and decoding activities are complex. The complexity could be seen in an individual inability to decode information in a language whose system he has not acquired, although our mental faculty is always opened to learning the symbols of any language if one decides to learn it.

Finally, the definitions simply tell us that language is what enables us to utter distinct sounds, join them into words, and into meaningful sentences for the purpose of communicating ideas and thoughts.

2.1. Language and space in *The River Between*

In this section we will apply the categories in **Style in Fiction** selectively to the description of the world in TRB. The procedure in this case will be to begin with some general first impression on the ridges and then make selective use of the checklist in order to bring to the reader's attention to what appears to be the most significant style markers on space description. These style markers, in turn, will be related to other style markers with the context of the passage's literary function. The focus is then on Ngugi's passage offering a standard of comparison between the main environmental features in use in the novel.

From the start and before introducing characters, the place where figures are located is physically determined and metaphorically evoked by an omniscient narrator. The fictional space of TRB is organized round two spatial kernels, i.e. the two ridges Kameno and Makuyu (*TRB 1965: 1*).

A. Lexical features on introductory passage

a. Nouns

Are the nouns abstract or concrete? What kinds of abstract nouns occur (e.g. nouns referring to events, perception, processes, moral qualities, social qualities)? What use is made of proper names and collective nouns?

Ngugi's passages contain a large number of physical concrete words: "ridges", "valley", "creator", "forest", "river", "trees", "sources", "lions", "region", "snake", "draughts", etc. Most of the concrete nouns refer to different components of the setting. They range from human beings, animals to a variety

of well-defined topographical features. The description owes its vividness partly to this choice of physical concrete nouns.

b. Verbs

Do the verbs carry an important part of the meaning? Are they stative (referring to states) or dynamic (referring to action, events, etc.)? Are they transitive, intransitive, linking (intensive) etc. Are they factive or non-factive?

Finite verbs are not frequent in Ngugi's passage under analysis. They are not more than four and most of them appear in the simple past tense (was, were, became, flowed) and have the impersonal third personal pronoun "it" and "they" as subject.

- The largest group of verbs is that of dynamic verbs. This form is used sixteen times in this passage (L2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 20 and 21):

Many sentences are characterized by the absence of verb. Indeed, sentences are of two types: verbless sentences and ing-form sentences.

- **Verbless sentences**

Ridges, discernable plan, whole extent, apparent haste, wild beasts, death struggle, this life stream, their leadership, etc...

All these sentences refer to physical perception and movements within spatial units. (L1, 5, 14 and 21)

- **Ing participle clauses**

Many sleeping lions, lying without, scorning draught, never hurrying, never hesitating, covering the slopes, sleeping lions united...etc. (TRB 1965: 1).

These "ing" participle verbs contribute to animate the non-human elements of ridges. They all have implications on movement and activity to the point that the human being seems to be overwhelmed by a natural process of decay which condemns him to inactivity. (L4, 12, 14 and 19).

The impression is that of a natural activity characterized by the absence of human interaction. Most of the subjects of finite verbs and non-finite verbs are elements of nature (the word "ridges" is constantly repeated as subject). (L1 and 21). Combined with finite verbs in simple past tense, the ing participle verb describes both the past and the continuity of actions. They contribute to produce the effect of recovering the land that was taken by white settlers and the continuity for the struggle. (L21)

c. Adjectives

Are the adjectives frequent? To what kinds of attribute do adjectives refer: physical, psychological, visual, auditory, color, referential, emotive, evaluative,

etc.? Are adjectives restrictive or non-restrictive; gradable or non-gradable; attributive or predicative?

Adjectives are frequent in TRB. Around twenty two are used. They are all common adjectives with various endings or no special endings (big, any, strong, happy, wild, deep, sleep, etc...). They all underline the theme of environment lifelessness:

They just slept the big deep sleep. People saw this and were happy. Wild beasts and trees were all united. (L22).

d. Adverbs

Are adverbs frequent? What semantic functions do they perform (manner, place, direction, time, degree, frequency, affirmative, negative, probability, quantity, interrogative, etc. Is there any significant use of sentence adverbs (conjunction such as so, and, however; disjunction such as certainly, obviously, frankly)?

In TRB, the largest group of adverbs is that of place (sixteen): "by, down, on, in, through, over, out, from, etc..." These adverbs are combined with the subject in verbless sentences to convey a step by step movement, activity and description of space. For instance: "down the valley, the ridges lay sides by side..." Where adverbs of place are not used, they are replaced by adverbs of manner with a-"ly" ending to emphasize the aggressive power of topographical elements over human beings: "even then you could not see the whole extent of the river as it is gracefully". (L11)

Adverbs of frequency are used four times along the passage: "lions which never woke, never dried, never hurrying, and never hesitating". The only use of frequency lies on "never" which is significant. It tells us the frequency in which the action happens. (L5, 14 and 17).

In the same vain, language as means of communication is used differently in both environments i.e., rural and urban environment. In rural area, language is taken as a form of social behavior dominated by the use of "proverbs" and "saying" as an intra-lingual communication.

Indeed, a proverb is a short sentence usually known by many people, standing something commonly experienced or giving advice. While a saying is a well-known and wise statement which often has a meaning that is different from the simple meanings of the words it contains.

Generally, they use them to express a warning or to give a piece of advice in a witty way as seen in the world of TRB:

"Giving into Caesar's the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's". (P.30)

"It is good to be wise in the affairs of the white man" (P.37)

"Days came and went" (P.13)

"Salvation shall come from the hills" (P.20)

"And I am a woman, beautiful of the tribe". (P.51)

"Sleeping lions would sleep no more. (P.63)

"A son shall rise. (P.20)

"Circumcision is a credit to the hill. (P.46)

"I want to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe; a husband for my bed; children to play a round the hearth" (P.43)

"The pain was eating him". (P.45)

B. Borrowing

"Borrowing is a process that focuses specifically on the mechanism by which an item is gradually converted from a foreign element to a motivated one. In other word, borrowing is connected with social dynamics, the definitional and analytic in studying lexical transfer" (Muysken 2000: 168).

Traditional as well as more recent studies of borrowing stressed that adaptations of foreign items of any linguistic level to the pattern of the recipient language, such as incorporation of verbal and nominal suffixes, assignment of gender, etc., were indications that the forms had been integrated into that language.

For example: "Darkness was settling when Waiyaki reached home. Chege had been waiting for me. He called waiyiki to his thingira" (*TRB* 1965: 8).

- Mugo often said you could not cut the butterflies with a Panga (*TRB* 1965: 20).

From what precedes, we see that in rural spaces the language is taken as a code belonging to a particular group of people as opposed to urban spaces where language is devoted for all the people in order to communicate.

C. Code - mixing

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (1986) code - mixing refers to the mixing of two or more languages varieties speech. Some scholars use the term "code-mixing" and "code-switching interchangeably, especially in studies of syntax, morphology and other formal aspects of a language. Code-mixing is similar to the use or creation of pidgins, while pidgin is created across groups that do not share a common language. Code-mixing may occur within a multilingual setting where speakers share more than one language.

To put it differently, code-mixing and code-switching, some linguistics use these concepts more less interchangeably, especially in formal studies of syntax, morphology, etc., both of them refer to utterances that draw from element of two or more grammatical systems. These studies are often interested

in the alignment of elements from distinct systems, or on constraints that limit switching. While many linguists have worked to describe the difference between code-switching and borrowing of words or phrases, the term code-mixing may be used to encompass both types of language behavior.

Indeed, code-mixing as a language contact phenomenon is one of the ways that villagers communicate among them. They feared Ukabi or outsiders:

Murungu brought the man and woman here and again showed them the whole vastness of the land. He gave the country to them and their children and the children of the children; tene na tene, world -without- end (TRB 1965: 18).

Generally speaking code mixing occurs when two languages are mixed in the same context but they are separated by a full stop. Code switching when the same sentence a speaker switches to another language.

D. General

Is the vocabulary simple or complex (i); formal or colloquial; descriptive or evaluative; general or specific? How far does the writer make use of emotive and other associations of words, as opposed to their referential meaning? Does the text contain idiomatic phrases or notable collocations (ii), and if so, with what kind of dialect or register (iii) are these idioms associated? Is there any use of rare or specialized vocabulary? Are any particular morphological categories noteworthy (e.g. compound words, words with particular suffixes)? To what semantic field do words belong?

Ngugi uses both simple and complex vocabulary in the description of rural space. They are: formal, colloquial, and descriptive. For example: discernible plan, no forest trees covering the slope, sleeping lions, the big deep sleep, beast, life-stream, ridges leader ship, isolated region etc. (L1, 6...)

The choice consists of a particular emphasis on a strong belief and hope to recover the ridges against Ukabi:

"This land I give you to you: O man and woman. It is yours to rule and till, you and your posterity". The land was fertile. It was the whole of Gikuyu country from one horizon embracing the heavens to the other hidden in the cloud. So the story ran in Kameno. Spiritual superiority and leadership had been left there. Kameno had a good record to bear out this story. A sacred grove had sprung out of the place where Gikuyu and Mumbi stood; people still paid homage to it. Another was Wachiori, a great warrior, who had led the whole tribe against Ukabi." (TRB 1965: 2)

The descriptive passage is sustained by the concrete items that locate the physical appearance of the ridges, "The two ridges lay sides by side. One was Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. Behind Kameno and Makuyu were many more valleys and

ridges, lying without any discernable plan". There is no doubt to affirm that the architecture of the ridges is disorganized, dirty and poor environment. (L4, 5 and 8).

In addition, the text contains some idiomatic phrases in Gikuyu dialect. A dialect is a regional or social variety of a language distinguished by pronunciation, grammar, and for vocabulary. It often used to characterize a way of speaking that differs from the standard variety of the language". In TRB, dialect is frequently combined with formal English to describe the tribe and the land in a metaphor that combines the purity of both tribe and land: "Gikuyu karing'a means Keep the tribe pure; Gikuyu naa naa Mumbi means Left a land virgin and fertile; Tene na tene means world-without-end".

E. Grammatical features

Does the author use only statement (declarative sentences), or do questions, commands or minor sentence types (such as sentences with no verb) also occur in the text? If these other types appear, what is their function?

a. Sentence complexity

Do sentences on the whole have a simple or a complex structure? What is the average sentence (in number of words)? What is the ratio of dependent to independent clauses? Does complexity vary strikingly from one sentence to another? Is complexity mainly due to coordination, or parataxis (juxtaposition of clauses or other equivalent structure)? In what parts of a sentence does the complexity tend to occur? For instance, is there any notable occurrence of anticipatory structure (e.g. of complex subjects preceding the dependent clause are favored: relative clauses, adverbial clauses, different types of nominal clauses (that-clause, wh-clauses, etc.)? Are reduced or non-finite clauses commonly used and, if so, of what type are they (infinitive clauses, -ing clauses, -ed clauses, verbless clauses)?

Is there anything significant about clause elements (e.g. frequency of objects, complements, adverbials, of transitive or intransitive verb constructions)? Are there any unusual orderings (initial adverbials, fronting of object or complement,)? Do special kinds of clause construction occur (such as those with preparatory *it* or *there*)?

Are they simple or complex? Where does the complexity lie (in pre-modification by adjectives, nouns, etc. or in post-modification by prepositional phrases, relative clauses, etc.)? Note occurrence of listings (e.g. sequences of adjectives), coordination or apposition. Are there any significant departures from the use of the simple past tense? For example, notice occurrences and functions of the present tense; of the progressive aspect (e.g. *was cutting*); of the perfective aspect (e.g. *has/ had appeared*; of modal auxiliaries (*can, may,*

must, would, etc.). Look out for phrasal verbs and how they are used. Is there anything to be said about other phrase types; prepositional phrases, adverb phrases, adjective phrases?

With an average sentence length of twenty-nine words, very concise, simple and direct sentences are used in TRB. The outstanding grammatical features of sentences are presented:

- The break of the old grammarians' precept that every sentence contains a verb: "The two ridges."
- The longest sentence is that of if clause (1). The type of subordinate clauses is "if clauses" introduce a comparison of the two ridges: "A river flowed through the valley of life. If there had been no bush and no forest trees covering the slopes, you could have seen the river when you stood on top of either Kamenno or Makuyu."
- The use of ing participle clauses that function as independent clauses: "Lying without any discernable plan. They were like many sleeping lions which never woke, scorning droughts and ..., never hurrying, never hesitating."

Prepositional phrases have been used to express location of different ridges.

The shortest sentences have three elements S+V+O (It joined them). And that of S+V+Cs (They become antagonist). I mean MAkuyu and Kamenno. The second type has four elements Adv+ S+V +Adv (Now you had come down). In this statement, the adverbs indicated both place and movement of the ridges. The third type has five elements S+V+O+Prep.Cl +Conj.coord. (Honia was the soul of Kamenno and Makuyu). The last type contains five elements too with S+V+Det+Conj.Coord.+Adv+Adj (People saw this and were happy): "The sentence functions as independent clause that stresses the location of Honia river."

A parataxis structure has been used once (and men, cattle, wild beast and trees, were all united by this life-stream. The use of correlative either...or is used once again (« Either Kamenno or Makuyu»). Different adverbs and prepositions were used as well as possible in the text. To cite some but few (sides "by" side...; "between" them...; come "down" ...; etc. (L3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 15, 17 and 21). The combination of adverbs and prepositions reinforce the description of the ridges.

b. Word classes

Having already considered major or lexical word classes, we may here consider minor word classes: prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, determiners, auxiliaries, interjection. Are particular words of these types used

for particular effect (e.g. the definite or indefinite article, first person pronouns, I, we, etc, demonstratives such as this and that, negative words such as not, nothing, no)?

Ngugi makes little use of pronouns and auxiliaries. The coordination conjunction “and” is not an exception. It appears eight times like either clauses or nouns in the introductory part of the space. Combined with different lexical items analyzed in the previous sections, these elements contribute to Ngugi’s minute and detailed description of the Ridges. Nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions are all effective for the description of rural spaces. (L2, 3, 7, 8).

F. Figures of speech

Here we consider the incidence of features which are foregrounded by virtue of departing in some way general norms of communication by means of the language code.; for example, exploitation of regularities of formal patterning, of deviations from the linguistic code. To identify such features, the traditional figures of speech are often useful categories.

a. Irony

Irony is a way of writing in which what is meant is contrary to what the word (s) is used for ironic purposes. In TRB, the lexical “Ukabi” is used ironically to mean “white man” as stated in the following lines:

The Ukabi would never come here. They would be lost in the hills and the ridges and the valleys. Even other Gikuya from Nyeri or Kiambu could not very well find their way into the hills. And so the country of many ridges was left alone, unaffected by turbulent forces outside. These ancient hills and ridges were the heart and soul of the land. They kept the tribes’ magic and rituals, pure and intact. Their people rejoiced together, giving one another the blood and warmth of their laughter (*TRB* 1965: 3).

b. Contrast

While paradox is a stronger term of intensity by bringing opposites together, contrast is not. Contrast is introduced by the conjunction “but” or “however”. It is used to show or emphasize the differences between two things. For example:

Our fathers do not know where his grave is. But some say that he was carried by Murungu. (P.19)

His voice, however, thin tremulous betrayed him. (P.38)

c. Metaphor and Simile

The use of metaphor and simile helps to compare and describe the physical topography of the two ridges that lay side to side:

“They were like many sleeping lions which never woke; Even then you could not see the whole extent of the river as it is gracefully, and without any apparent haste wound its way down the valley, like a snake” (P.1).

Ngugi uses of metaphor and simile serve to animate and humanize the topographical elements with a particular emphasis on hills and the ridges.

d. Cohesion and context

Under cohesion, in which one part of a text is linked to another are considered: for example, the ways in which sentences are connected. This is the internal organization of the text. Context discourse analysis considers the external relations of a text or a part of a text, seeing it as a discourse presupposing a social relation between its participants (author and reader; character and character, etc.), and a sharing by participants of knowledge and assumptions.

e. Lexical repetition

The most important feature of cohesion is obviously, the repetition of the motives of “ridges” and “river” throughout the text (“the two ridges”, “between them”, and “ridges”, “the two ridges ceased”, “the ridges were isolated”, “the ridges now lay behind...”; “a river flowed”, “the river”, “the river as it gracefully”, “the river was called Honia, Honia was...”). The repetition of “ridges” and “river” are evident. The item “ridges” is used several times as a motif that people wanted to put out white settlers in the ridges and restore the purity of the tribe. In addition, the river describes a space of strong unity among tribes’ members, not a source of division. (L1, 2, 4,5, ...).

f. Definite article

Ngugi uses few pronouns but makes frequent use of definite article “the”. It occurs fifteen times. And even on their first mention some elements of the setting are introduced by “the”: “the” two ridges, “the” other was, “the” ridges and...etc. They were used in order to emphasize the value of the descriptive ridges. (L1, 3, 4, 6, 8...).

CONCLUSION

The discussion conducted in this paper aimed at analyzing language in the description of setting in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*". A close study examined various aspects of language in order to bring the reader's attention to what appeared as the most significant style markers on space description.

= ANNEXE =

“The two ridges lay sides by side. One was Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. Behind Kameno and Makuyu were many more valleys and ridges, lying without any discernible plan. They were like many sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept the big deep sleep of their creator. A river flowed through the valley of life. If there had been no bush and no forest trees covering the slopes, you could have seen the river when you stood on top of either Kameno or Makuyu. Now you had come down. Even then you could not see the whole extent of the river as it is gracefully, and without any apparent haste wound its way down the valley, like a snake. The river was called Honia, which meant to possess a strong will to live, scorning draughts and weather changes. And it went on in the same way, never hurrying, never hesitating. People saw this and were happy.

Honia was the soul of kameno and makuyu. It joined them. And men, cattle, wild beasts and trees, were all united by this life-stream.

When you stood in the valley, the two ridges ceased to be sleeping lions united by their common source of life. They become antagonists. You could tell this not by anything ready to come to blows in a life - and - death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region” (IRB 1965: 1).

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