

**TRANSITIVITY FUNCTION IN TANURE OJAIDE'S**  
*The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems*

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**Abstract**

*The study foregrounds the options that M.A.K. Halliday's transitivity system offers a writer in negotiating meaning for a text, with particular focus on process types. Since the transitivity system (together with polarity) is associated with the ideational metafunction of language, it examines how Tanure Ojaide deploys this grammatical tool in his *The fate of Vultures and Other Poems* to capture the Niger Delta experiential reality. The study finds that the dominant process type utilized in the poetry is the mental process, in view of the fact that it helps the author to depict the psychological effect of oil exploration and exploitation on the people of the Niger Delta.*

Style "... is seen as any particular and somewhat distinctive way of using language" (Trask, 1997:210). Mathesius sees it as an "individual, unifying character found to be present in any work resulting from intentional activity" (cited in Vechev, 1974:114). Leech and Short (2007) see the concept as the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose. The scholar (Ibid) adds that the term is sometimes applied to the linguistic habits of a particular writer and that, at other times, it has been applied to the language of a particular genre, period, school of writing, etc (see Darani, 2014:180).

The critical fact that emerges from the foregoing definitions and propositions is that a given writer deploys phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexico-semantic devices to encode the meaning of his text, thereby aligning language use to its artistic purposes. Hence, the nexus between style and stylistics and literary theory and criticism is watertight. Ayeomoni (2009:3) captures this fact inter alia:

Literary stylistics spans the border of two subjects, linguistics and literature or literary criticism. It also deals with relating linguistic features to context in order to make the meaning as explicit as possible. Linguistic structures of a text are analysed... in order to understand the structures of a text and the relation between it and meaning.

In other words, the connection between the two subjects (i.e linguistics and literature) is hinged on the fact that the varied and complex forms of language used in literature which, to a large extent, define and author's literary achievement, is the major focus of stylistic analysis. Hence, Crystal (1979) states that stylistics focuses on the variation that is found in texts. Stylistics explores language variation in (literary) texts from varied perspectives i.e style as choices, style as deviation, style as situation, style as a temporal phenomenon and style as an individual imprimatur. Leech and Short (2007) posit that examining the language of literary texts can be a means to a fuller understanding and appreciation of a writer's achievement.

Transitivity function, which is the analytical tool for this study, has been deployed by researchers and scholars for textual analysis over the years, because "... the transitivity system can provide a quantitative analysis of discourses, which is largely convincing and objective..." (Zhang, 2017:65). According to Song (2013:2291),

Halliday holds the view that language has three metafunctions: Ideational function, interpersonal functions and textual function. Language in its ideational function represents patterns of experience or (the) worlds, and it enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them. This reflective experiential aspect of meaning is called transitivity.

Thus, transitivity is associated with the ideational metafunction of language propounded by Halliday (1967). As Halliday (1967:38) posits, ...the realization forms of the ideational function are transitivity and polarity; the realization forms of the interpersonal function are mood and modality; and the realization forms of the textual function are thematization and information system (see Zhang, 2017:66).

Song (2013:2291) states that transitivity is a grammatical system and "...it deals with different types of process which can be found in the language and the structures". According to the scholar (Ibid), processes consist of process, participants and circumstances. There are sixty types of processes viz: material processes, mental processes, relational processes, behavioural processes, verbal processes and existential processes. Darani (2004:181) states that transitivity specifies the different types of "processes that are recognized in the language and the structures by which they are expressed." The scholar (ibid further states that, in the transitivity system, "the central participant roles are actors and goal, and the interest is on whether or not the process is directed by the actor towards a goal."

According to the scholar (Ibid),

Transitivity structure can be characterized as agent + process + goal configuration that represents the function of language expressing the speaker's experience of the external world or his own internal world. Furthermore, these three components are specified through choices in the transitivity system, which construe the world of experience into a manageable set of process types.

Importantly, and as Darani (2004: 181) suggests, "each process type provides its own model or schema for constructing a particular domain of experience" (see Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004). The present study, therefore, foregrounds transitivity function in Tanure Ojaide's text, with a special interest in the role processes, participants and circumstances play in negotiating meaning for the text.

### **On the Poet**

Ojaide was educated at the University of Ibadan, where he received a Bachelor's degree in English, and Syracuse University, where he received both M.A. in creative writing and PhD in English. A fellow in writing of the University of Iowa, his poetry awards include the Commonwealth poetry prize for the Africa Region (1987), All –Africa Okigbo prize for poetry (1988, 1997), the BBC Arts and Africa poetry award (1988), and the Association of Nigerian Authors poetry prize (1988, 1994, 2003 and 2011).

**Synopsis of the Text**

Tanure Ojaide condemns the representatives of the masses, the transnational oil firms, and successive governments in this collection of poetry. He highlights developmental or infrastructural inadequacies and the environmental degradation that pervade the oil-rich Niger Delta of Nigeria. The collection exposes how the representatives of the people, the transnational oil firms and successive governments of Nigeria exploit the people.

**Textual Analysis**

The pre-occupation of this collection of poetry goes beyond environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region to politico-economic issues in the country, Nigeria. Most of the poems can be seen as comparison between the landscape in which the poet was born into, a land which is rich in flora and fauna and the present environmentally degraded Niger Delta region. The poems are full of anger as the poet is vehement in his writing. The environmental, psychological and emotional state of the people is well depicted in this collection.

In all, four poems are selected to be analyzed. They include: 'Murderer', "song for my land", 'banner of the future' and 'the beast of change'. Extracts from these poems will be labeled "datum".  
Poem I — 'Murderer'

It is a ten-line poem (decastrich). The poet vehemently writes on how perfidious and deceitful those in power (sabotage the lungs of people under them, either through hazardous air or abject poverty. These same people in power carry out trivial projects as a means of soothing our bleeding hearts, while neglecting projects the people are truly in need of. The multinational companies and those in government are actually parasites and so they people refer to them as "murderer."

**Datum 1**

And whenever one of Circumstance		Them Actors		Smiles Material process
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**Datum 2**

Look Mental Process		Between the teeth Phenomenon
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**Datum 3**

Three Existential Process		The mouse Existent		Busy tearing your flesh Circumstance
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**Datum 4**

And circumstance		Blowing Material Process		Balm Actors		Into circumstance		Their wound goal
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**Datum 5**

But Circumstance	Its Behaver	Breath Behavioural Process	Is an infection Circumstance	Their wound goal
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Datums 1-4 presents a picture of the poet persona on a mission to expose the killers of dreams and life, people who in their greed forget the natural humanness that is supposed to be in every human. The people, in their quest for a bulging pocket, deceive those on whose land lie natural resources that can feed a nation and they do this in disguise of bringing development to their land. Datum 1, 2 and 3 which are material and existential processes respectively, exposes the truth about those multinational companies and so called government. The existential process makes it clear that these people are like cannibals who eat the life of their subjects.

In Datums 4 and 5 we see that these multinationals feast on the people while carrying out activities to make them forget their pain. Datum 5 declare that the balm being blown into the wounds of the people is an infections one as this infection is caused by the ever awake poisonous gas flares.

**Datum 6**

Your former circumstance	Praise Sayer	Shout verbal Process	Murderer verbiage
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**Datum 7**

The dead sense	Hear Mental Process	Nothing phenomenon	
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Datum 6 shows a revolt from the people against these firms. The masses have finally been cured from their docility and have realized the fraud being committed against them. Datum 7 displays an image of dead people, deaths mainly caused by oil activities.

**Poem ii- 'Song of My Land'**

The poem speaks of a race that feels alienated from its roots. Unwanted and unwelcome changes have made them outcasts. Although the poem is personalized, the persona represents a people that have lost their identity due to undesirable activities or have been pushed into carrying arms and perpetrating violence as a means of both survival and taking back their land. The persona feels downcast as his beloved land is being washed away by greed, inhumanity and violence.

**Datum 1**

More and more circumstance	The land Actors	Mocks Material Process	My heart Recipient
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**Datum 2**

Where circumstance	Are Relational Process	The evergreens identifier	Of my palm Identified
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**Datum 3**

Why is the sum of salvation circumstance	Eclipsed Mental	By coups and intolerable riots phenomenon
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As seen in Datum I, which is a material process the persona tries to feel comfortable in the community, as a member of that community, but everything has turned upside down. The people of the Niger Delta are known fishermen but these people are replaced with oil workers and fresh fish is replaced with canned fish. There is a note of by disappointment in the tone of the persona. The clause is that of the material clause and there is a circumstance participant that shows the consistency in the debasement which the land suffers.

The relational process clause present in datum 2, uses identifier participant to depict the land that used to be known for its fertility, calmness and happiness in the pre-crude oil era. The land seems to be lacking this unique feature now, and so the persona uses the word 'where' Nigeria as a whole and the Niger Delta in particular, the greenness of the land has been debased with coups, spillages and riot. In datum 3, which is a mental process, the poet presents the now natural phenomenon of the region.

**Datum 4**

My blood identified	Is Relational Process	Hot but not on Circumstance	Heat identified
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In Datum 4 the persona declares that his blood is hot but not on heat. In this Datum, the poet skillfully uses a clause to depict two issues on heat. The first means that the persona/people are angry (inner heat) and this heat is caused by the second type of heat and that is the one caused by oil activities. This heat is caused by the deterioration in the climatic conditions and the Ozone layers. The heat coming from gas flares and other oil activities destroys the ozone layers, which in turn takes away the coolness and gives back heat. This hotness is revealed in the complexion (a charcoal like skin) of people in the area.

**Datum 5**

Every step circumstance	I Senser	Take Mental Process	On the land is fraught with torment Phenomenon
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**Datum 6**

My clan	No longer Circumstance	Contain material Process	Me Recipient
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**Datum 7**

I	Am asked	For marks	I don't
acot	Material Process	Goal	Circumstance

Datums 5-7 shows how disappointed the persona feels on what the land has evolved into, and how alienated he feels toward his clan. From the phrases 'fraught with torment, 'no longer' and 'don't possesses', it is evident that the land no longer holds any resemblance to its former form. In datum 7, he is asked to produce 'marks he no longer possesses'. This can be linked to the extinction of the natural occupation associated with the Niger Delta people, which is fishing. This extinction is due to the destruction of aquatic life which is caused by the continuous spillage of oil.

**Datum 8**

The songs	Need	The soil for deep root and fresh note
Senser	Mental process	Phenomenon

**Datum 9**

I	Have sat	Through harsh winds and alternating hot and cold
senser	Mental Process	season  Phenomenon

Datum 8 is a mental process which shows the interdependency between the produce from the soil and the happiness of the people. In other words, the happiness of the people depends heavily on the fertility of the soil. When the soil becomes infertility due to oil spillage, the people become miserable because an infertile soil means hunger to the people. Datum 9 still emphasizes the climatic imbalance of the Niger Delta region. These two datums speak heavily of the environmental degradation on both land and air.

**Datum 10**

But still more and more more circumstance	The dear land  Actor	Mocks material Process	My loving heart  recipient
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Datum 10 portrays a picture of the poet trying to make good of the bad situation of the land but with every action he takes, the land still mocks him.

**Poem iv - 'The Banner of the Future'**

The poem revolves around Nigeria as a whole and is divided into four parts, each part serving as a journey/means to show how greed has gradually disunited the once united country. The poem is rhetorical in nature. The first part begins with an adjective 'once', which portrays, the 'no longer' existence of something. The poem refers back to the amalgamation and naming of the country, the great expectation conceived on getting independence and the undesirable wind of change that flooded the people. It also talks about the migration of some of its citizens due to poor economic level to search for greener pastures. The poet then moves to the agricultural sector and how it was totally abandoned at the discovery of oil. The poet also claims that the discovery of oil in Nigeria enhanced and lubricated the greed of a few people in the country while the unfortunate class suffered the repercussion of sucking the oil from the ground.

**Datum 1**

Once circumstance	A flag and an eagle Senser	Meant mental process	Everything pound phenomenon
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**Datum 2**

From circumstance	Health to wealth Phenommeno0n	The land's Senser	Salvation Mental Process
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**Datum 3**

When circumstance	We Actor	Wrote material Process	Our adopted names Goal
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**Datum 4**

We senser	Least expected Mental Process	A charger to grow Circumstance	Into a monster phenomenon
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**Datum 5**

There's existential	Hardly space to health Existent
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**Datum 6**

Soon whoever wants to live circumstance	Will have to fly material process	Further than the fatherland Goal
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Looking at the above datums, datum I to 5, the gradual process of dismantling is imminent. Datums I and 2 talk about the independence of Nigeria, and the ecstasy that came with freedom. Nigeria was finally freed from the clutches of colonialism and everybody expected a better life and a better pay

cheque, ‘from health to wealth the land’s salvation’. Datum 3 talks about the amalgamation. The population of Nigeria continues to increase. Datum 5 and 6 provide a picture of over populated people with very limited job opportunities. The people feel traumatized by the poor standard of living and so leave their country to find a more acceptable one.

**Datum 7**

There have been	Luckless years and self-inflicted tears
Existential process	Existence

**Datum 8**

What circumstance	Iroko	Will sprout material	On a ravished soil
	Actor	Process	Goal

**Datum 9**

New perches to circumstance	Turn mental Process	Eyes Senser	From pettiness phenomenon
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**Datum 10**

In a circumstance	Suffocating Mental Process	Haze to tend off famine phenomenon
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The datums above are extracted from the part 3 section of the poem. They illuminate the death of the agricultural sector. Datum 7 shows the existence of ‘luckless years and self-inflicted tears’; this is due to the concept of neo-colonialism apparent in Nigeria today. Under colonialism the people complained of being chained and wanted a way out but the post-colonial era becomes even worse as it was now their own people putting them in chains. Datum 7 still dwells on the issue of environmental degradation in general, as seen in other poems and oil spillage in particular. The iroko tree represents cash crops that held the wealth of the country. The phrase ‘ravished soil’ is decoded as a soil which has lost its value. The soil is held spell bound by activities of oil which bring about a low outcome in the area of agriculture. Datums 9 and 10 are still on the issue of oil. Datum 9 limns a psychological picture of a turn of interest from agriculture to oil, while datum 10 says instead of this interest to yield food, as the agricultural sector did, it yields thick air which is suffocating and deadly.

**Datum 11**

Do not Circumstance	Tell verbal Process	Me receiver	Guardians were dazed by the demonic flash of cash Verbiage
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**Datum 12**

And circumstance	Couldn't see Mental Process	Treasure carted away Phenomenon
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**Datum 13**

Sneezing material process	From Circumstance	allergic inhalation goal
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**Datum 14**

For how long will circumstance	Blood-sniffing Identifier	Beast Identified	Be Relational Process	Free to tear apart the land circumstance
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The receiver of the verbiage in datum 11 refuses to accept the fact that the so called representatives who are supposed to fight for the interest of the people were all bought over by the multinational oil firms. Datums 11 to 14 are all extracts from the last part of the poem which refer to the Niger Delta region in particular, where the oil wells are located. The region, although rich in this natural resource is one of the poorest regions in Nigeria. The poet persona thinks that their representatives were bought over because they were weak and couldn't resist the flash of cash. This weakness made them blind to the exploitations their people were passing through and also the wealth that was being transported to foreign lands. The persona tells the outcome of their (representatives) decision, which is to allow the exploiters exploit. The outcome is allergic inhalation of acidic air.

In the last datum, the poet was the relational process to refer to the multinational firms as a 'blood-sniffing beast'. The poet asks for how long exploiters would tear apart the land, that is, Nigeria.

**Poem v - 'The Beast of Change'**

The poem depicts the lowly but fruitful and satisfied lives lived by the people of the Niger Delta before oil was discovered. It speaks of how the lives of the natives of this region were forever transformed by the beast of change after the discovery and how hard it has been for them to go back to their previous way of life.

**Datum 1**

Old habits senser	Are Circumstance	Safe mental Process	Without Circumstance	Today's missile phenomenon
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**Datum 2**

Without circumstance	Pain mental process	Discoveries phenomenon
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**Datum 3**

And Circumstance	We actor	Need not open mouths to Circumstance	Sing material process
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**Datum 4**

Hymns goal	To the beauty that's a cursed circumstance	Beast recipient
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Datum 1 and 2 portray the mind of the poet as well as the people. The senser participant which is the 'old habits', refers to the lives and occupation of the Niger Delta people. The poet claims that the people were much happier before the painful discovery of oil. The poet labels this discovery a cursed beast as it brought nothing good with it.

**Datum 4**

And circumstance	We behavior	Dance behavioural process	In spite of ourselves circumstance
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**Datum 5**

There are existential	Forever new accomplishments existent	To bend or stretch us circumstance
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Datums 5 and 4 still lays emphasis the satisfied feeling that was evident in the lives of the lowly fishermen. Datum 5 talks of accomplishments whether good or bad. There was a season for everything. A season to fish and a Season to farm. There were also losses but the people received them all.

**Datum 6**

Do not look mental process	For yesterday's faces Phenomenon
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**Datum 7**

Only circumstance	Life senser	Remains mental process	A little more or less of us phenomenon
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**Datum 8**

Who will question verbal process	His Sayer	Mentor r eceiver	Over the source of his power circumstance
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**Datum 9**

And circumstance	Lose mental process	His senser	Benefits Phenomenon
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**Datum 10**

My heart actor	Pounds material process	Loud goal
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**Datum 11**

Can circumstance	i senser	transcend mental process	The low ground that gives circumstance	The eagle its high- flying name? phenomenon
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The mental process in datum 6 exhibits the reality of the Niger Delta which is, a lost past. The identity of the people has been taken away from them, leaving them, with just their lives and fragments of what used to be.

Furthermore, in using the verbal process type, the poet puts it that those in positions of government, who are supposed to be the mouthpiece of the people, will remain mute because of their self-interest. Datum 10, through the help of the material process type, shows the fear of the people while in datum 11, the poet persona tries to examine himself if it is possible to overstep what takes away his identity.

**Conclusion**

Conclusively, the text analysis above can be presented in the table below:  
Process Type Poem 1 Poem 2 Poem 3 Poem 4

Process Type	Poem 1	Poem 2	Poem 3	Poem 4
Material process	2	4	4	2
Relational process	-	2	1	-
Mental process	2	4	6	4
Behavioural process	I	-	-	-
Existential process	I	-	I	I
Verbal process	I	-	1	I

Total number of analysed clauses = 38

Total number of material clauses = 12

Total number of relation clauses = 3

Total number of mental clauses = 16

Total number of behavioural clause = 1

Total number of existential clauses = 3

Total number of verbal clauses = 3

From the above table, it is clear that the dominant process type is the mental process. This is because the poet uses it to depict the psychological effect of oil exploration and exploitation on the people. The material process is used to show actions that were taken by both the multinational oil firms and the people of the region. The relational process is used by the poet to show comparison or to show co-referential relationship between the subject and the complement of the clause, the existential process type is also used by the poet to show the existence of something. The behavioural is the least process

type used by the poet to decode his message. The verbal clause is also very few because in the struggle of the Niger Delta there is little or no dialogue.

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