

# Old-New Nigeria's National Anthem: A Linguistic Functional Analysis

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## Abstract

National anthems are solemn patriotic songs that are officially adopted by countries as the expression of their national identity which are rendered during special or official events. There are robust previous researches on the thematic and stylistics analysis of the just abandoned Nigerian national anthem without a comprehensive Linguistic and functional analysis of the old-new anthem. Therefore, this focus of this study is to investigate and present the functional analysis of the old-new anthem of Nigeria with a view to studying its experiential function and implications. Halliday's Functional Grammar (FG) was adopted as framework for this study. Specifically, the theory of experiential metafunction: processes and transitivity. The data for this study is taken from the newly re-introduced Nigerian national anthem. Six process types were identified in the anthem: material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral and existential processes. The findings of this work points to a predominant use of material processes to indicate the expected measures to be taken by citizens of Nigeria to strengthen the development and progress of their nation. Other process types are used sparingly to put in place relationships, and present the nation as important entity. This paper infers that the establishment of national unity is better portrayed through the functional analysis of the process types in the Nigeria Old-new national anthem because the linguistic tool of transitivity is that language form is not coincidental, but performs a communicative function.

**Keywords:** National anthem, process types, experiential meaning, Functional Grammar, Nigeria.

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## INTRODUCTION

Adeyanju (2002) posits that language is a means of communication with varied usages. Language is a cogent part of the society and society is also in existence because of Language. The multifaceted functions of language are demonstrated in its use in several facets of the society. Language is employed by various people as a coalescence potential to unify the members of the society together so as to achieve their common objective. Language can also be used as an interface with music which can also be displayed in form of poem to present and advance their ideologies. Most times, these ideologies are presented using music and its various forms so as to preserve them and also make them unforgettable and lasting national symbols.

Anthems are solemn, poetic patriotic songs that are officially adopted by countries, organisations, institutions, associations as the expression of their national identity and to enforce solidarity among the members which are rendered during special or official events. The National anthem of any country is a symbol that exemplifies the peculiarity of the country and it is usually sung in lyrical form. Kellen (2003) cited in

Agbeleoba (2018:31) observes that “the anthems of nations participate in a dynamic nexus between, on the one side, official and unofficial cultures and real/imaginary schema of power and identity, on the other hand”. Agbeleoba (2018:31) further state the importance of the national anthem by illustrating it as “the most important symbol of every modern nation(al) state the lyrics of which include reference to the people's glorious past, the love and respect to homeland and its symbols”. This implies that anthems can be seen as the clearest assertion of national identity which serves as a symbol bearing unique relationship with the countries being represented. The functional analysis of the poetic language used to express national identity and togetherness in the new anthem of Nigeria is, therefore, worthy of academic research.

The variables used in functional analysis differ from language units found at the phonological level all through to the sentential level. The clause as a unit of linguistic analysis is specifically worthy of academic attention because it focuses on content and ideas, and how people actively construe and make sense of reality, classifying the objects and events within their awareness

(Olakolu, 2020). Halliday and Mathiessien (2014) also confirm that experiences and happenings around are better demonstrated through the use of the clause. The implication of this is that the clauses found in Nigeria's National anthem are presented as linguistic means of encoding experiences, thoughts and unifying identity of the nation. Therefore, there is the need for the inquiry and analysis of the communicative functions of the use of these clauses in the anthem from the linguistic point of view in order to uncover the experiences and meanings therein.

The three (3) stanzas of the old-new Nigerian National Anthem written by Lillian Jean Williams have not enjoyed adequate attention of functional linguists which is the identified gap which this research paper hopes to fill. Based on this background, this study make use of Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) theory of Functional Grammar, especially the transitivity framework to investigate the experiential elements in the anthem such as processes and their occurrences, participants and circumstances involved in the transitivity system with a view to establishing the experiential functions of the clauses in the anthem.

### Nigerian National Anthem

The old-new Nigeria's anthem "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" was appropriated the status of the nation's first national anthem on 1 October 1960. The anthem's lyrics were written out by Lillian Jean Williams, a British expatriate who lived in Nigeria when it achieved independence. The music for the anthem was composed by Frances Benda. The composed anthem was used as the national anthem until it was replaced by "Arise, O Compatriots" in 1978 (Wikipedia, 2024).

On 23rd May 2024, the National assembly passed a bill to renounce "Arise, O Compatriots" and replace it with "Nigeria, We Hail Thee". That is the reason for naming the current anthem as old-new national anthem. The bill was signed into law by President Bola Tinubu on 29 May 2024.

### Theoretical Framework: Functional Grammar (FG)

Gerot and Wignell (1994) state that Functional grammar (FG) is a grammatical framework which is developed by Halliday with the aim of describing the actual use of language while concentrating on text and their contexts. This theoretical framework as the name implies, focuses on the functions of language as a meaning making mechanism in an attempt to comprehend how text works. Meaning in Functional grammar is divided into three types by Halliday (2014) which is termed as metafunctions: ideational (experiential) metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and textual metafunction.

#### Ideational (experiential) metafunction:

the focus of this metafunction (experiential) is how language can be engaged to organize, understand, and express our experiences of the world around us. Ideational function is divided into experiential and logical metafunctions. Experiential metafunction is concerned with contents or ideas. Logical metafunction is concerned with the relationship of the ideas. The experiential side of ideational metafunction is the focus of this paper.

#### Interpersonal metafunction:

This metafunction is concerned with exchange of information in social interaction. It helps us to interact using different communicative acts with other people, it enables us to take roles in communication.

#### Textual metafunction:

This has to do with the use of language to organize the events or experiences in the spoken or written forms (text). Language functions to organize our messages in ways which show how they fit in with other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing.

The identified three (3) metafunctions within FG: experiential (ideational), interpersonal and textual metafunctions are applied to look into the structures of wording within context and patterns. These metafunctions operate simultaneously within the language to realize meaning.

**Table 1: Metafunctions and Their Reflexes in the Grammar (Adapted from Olakolu, 2020)**

Metafunction (Technical name)	Definition (Kind of meaning)	Corresponding status of clause
Experiential	Construing a model of experience	Clause as representation
Interpersonal	Enacting social relationships	Clause as exchange
Textual	Creating relevance and cohesion to text and context	Clause as message

### TRANSITIVITY

#### Halliday describes transitivity as follows:

A fundamental property of language is that 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. ...Our most powerful conception of reality is that it consists of "goings-on": of doing,

happening, feeling, being. These goings-on are sorted out in the semantic system of language, and expressed through the grammar of the clause... This... is the system of transitivity. Transitivity specifies the different types of processes that are recognised in the language and the structures by which they are expressed (2014:201)

Transitivity is a part of the experiential function of the clause. Based on the view of Halliday (2014), transitivity is interested in the actions that occur, the participants involved in the said actions, and the circumstances of the action: when, where, how, and why the actions occur. Still sharing the same view, Iwamoto (2008) also stressed that the main function of transitivity in FG is to investigate “who or what does what to whom or to what”.

Transitivity in FG is further divided into three components: first is the process itself (the action), which is realized by the verb phrase, the second is the

participant in the process (the doer), the entity carrying out or being affected by the process and usually realized by the noun phrase, and the third component is the circumstance associated with the process (the situation), which is the adjunct part of the clause generally housed by the prepositional and adverbial phrases as stated.

In the transitivity system of Functional Grammar, six types of process are identified in the literature and the participants involved are named based on the type of the process involving them. The table below shows the six categories of process and their corresponding participants.

**Table 2: Process, meaning and participants (Adapted from Halliday and Matthiesen, 2014)**

Process	Meaning	Participants (1&2)
<b>Material:</b> Action, event	Happening, doing e.g, kick	Actor, goal
<b>Behavioral</b>	Behaving e.g laugh	behavior
<b>Mental:</b> Perception, Affection, cognition	Knowing, thinking, sensing, seeing, e.g know, think, feel,	Sensor, phenomenon
<b>verbal</b>	Saying e,g tell, warn, say, ask	Verbiage, target
<b>Relational:</b> Attribution Identification, possession	Being, attributing, identifying, e.g be, have, become	Carrier- attribute, token-value, possessor-possessed
<b>Existential</b>	Existing. E.g there + to be	Existence

Clauses in Functional Grammar stand for processes of different types, and the objective of transitivity is to show how the action of a clause is performed (process), by whom (Participant) and on what (circumstance). Therefore, under the experiential metafunction, the clause is represented in terms of processes, participants and circumstances.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for the analysis of this paper were purposively extracted from current Nigeria national anthem as written, composed and adopted in 1960 and later re-introduced in 2024. The data were subjected to functional analysis using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative technique presented the frequency of occurrences of the processes and the qualitative technique described each type of process showcasing the imports of the lines in the anthem. The data were collected by reading through the anthem severally and analysed to identify the process types and their significance.

Functional Grammar, especially the transitivity system which is a component of experiential metafunction, is adopted as the theoretical framework to explore the ideological importance of the lines of the anthem. The analysis is focused on the types of process in old-new national anthem.

## Data For Analysis

The data for this study is the current Nigerian National anthem. The National anthem is made up of three (3) stanzas consisting of six (6) lines each.

### Nigeria's old-new anthem

#### Stanza 1

Nigeria, we hail thee	1
Our own dear native land	2
Though tribes and tongues may differ	3
In brotherhood, we stand	4
Nigerians all, are proud to serve	5
Our sovereign Motherland.	6

#### Stanza 2

Our flag shall be a symbol	7
That truth and justice reign	8
In peace or battle, honour'd,	9
And this we count as gain,	10
To hand on to our children	11
A banner without stain.	12

#### Stanza 3

O God of all creation	13
Grant this our one request.	14
Help us to build a nation	15
Where no man is oppressed	16
And so with peace and plenty	17
Nigeria may be blessed.	18

## RESULTS

The findings of the analysis show that Nigeria's current national anthem has eighteen (18) lines and thirteen (13) clauses as data used for the analysis. Furthermore, only four (4) types of process were identified in the data. The most prominent process type

found in the anthem is the material process, which occurs in six clauses (61.5%) followed by both mental and behavioral process types which occurs in three clauses each (15.4% each) and relational process which occurs just once (7.7%). The distribution of the occurrence of the process types is shown in the table below:

**Table 3: The Distribution of Occurrence of Process Types in Nigeria's Current National Anthem**

<i>Nigeria's Anthem</i>		
Process Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material process	8	61.5
Mental process	2	15.4
Verbal process	0	0
Behavioural	2	15.4
Existential process	0	0
Relational process	1	7.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>

The table 3 above indicates that there are 13 processes found in the national anthem. The most dominant process type as stated earlier is the material

process, and the least in occurrence is the relational process.

**Table 4: Clausal analysis of the anthem based on the transitivity system of Functional Grammar**

S/N	Clause	Process Types				Circumstance
		Material	Mental	Behavioral	Relational	
1	Nigeria, we hail thee	hail				
2	In brotherhood, we stand	stand				In brotherhood
3	Nigerians all, are proud to serve our sovereign Motherland.	Serve	proud			Our sovereign Motherland
4	Our flag shall be a symbol				be	
5	That truth and justice reign	Reign				
6	In peace or battle, honour'd,			honour'd,		In peace or battle
7	And this we count as gain,	Count				
8	To hand on to our children	Hand on				
9	Grant this our one request.			Grant		
10	Help us to build a nation	build				
11	Where no man is oppressed	oppressed				
12	And so with peace and plenty Nigeria may be blessed.		Blessed			And so with peace and plenty

The first clause in the table above is a material process; the Actor is "we" which is a pronominal group referring to the citizen of Nigeria while the goal is 'thee' a pronoun whose reference is found in the vocative at the beginning of the clause, Nigeria and this clause serves as a call for Nigerians to respect their country. In the second clause, we also have material process with the goal as pronoun *we*. It has no goal because the action verb used in intransitive but it is accompanied by the circumstance of accompaniment, *in brotherhood*. Two process types are collapsed in the third clause; we have both mental and material process. The relational verbs '*be*' in the next clause is used to express the state of being of the flag being a symbol of truth.

## DISCUSSION

As stated earlier that the main concern of transitivity is the types of action portrayed by the verbs and the participants that are involved in the said actions, this section will explore the communicative function of the results above. Process is considered as one of the cogent components of the transitivity system under the experiential metafunction. There are four types of process identified in the data for analysis which are material, mental, relational and behavioural process.

The data for analysis are predominantly characterised by the material process of doing and this process is functionally employed in the anthem to encourage the citizens of Nigeria to respect and develop their Motherland. This goal was made possible through

the use of the action verbs like *hail* (line 1) and *serve* (line 4). The action verbs in the dominant material process are also used to appeal to God to help them as the citizen to build a country full of blessings and free of oppression. This is expressed through the action verbs: *grant*, *build*, and *oppress* in lines 14, 15, and 16 respectively. Material processes were predominantly engaged in the anthem to reveal our collective roles as citizens of the country. In the current anthem, the pronoun, 'We' is used as the actor and it refers to Nigerians, as citizens of the country. The pronoun 'we' when used with the verbs of material process establishes a cordial relationship between the country and its citizens. This implies that the citizens are presented as the actors while the nation is the goal of the material process in a transitive clause. This is in line with the view of Souza (2008) in his analysis of national anthems where he claimed that presenting the citizens as actors that needs to be active so as to secure the development of their countries (goals). The citizens are expected to be responsible and alive to their responsibilities for a sustainable development in their country.

The prevalence of material process in the data is followed by mental and behavioral processes. Mental process as employed in the data is an expression of how the citizen feels about the country and it is tailored towards engaging the emotions of the citizens for action. The mental process in the data is seen in instances like the verbs *proud* and *blessed*. This process is used because the act of patriotism involves emotion between the citizens and the core values of their motherland. The mental process functions to encourage them to remain loyal and proud of their country. And in so doing, to bring to pass their desire for a nation that is blessed and free of oppression. The process was engaged principally in the anthem to set the emotions and minds of Nigerians in motion for action.

The next identified process is the behavioral process. They behave like the material process on one hand and also partly like the mental process on the other hand and it is represented in the anthem by the verb *honor'd* in line 9.

Relational process is also used to give attribute to an entity. The relational process as seen is employed in the identification of qualities. For example, in line 4, the Nigerian flag is identified and given the attribute of a symbol of truth and justice. This shows how unique the nation is. This process was employed in the anthem to portray the status of freedom of the nation after independence.

## CONCLUSION

The concern of this study is on the analysis of old-new Nigeria's National anthem using the transitivity system of Halliday and Matthiesien's Functional Grammar to explore the linguistic choice of the anthem to present the messages to the citizens. Four (4) process types were identified in the anthem. The most dominant identified process is material process, followed by both mental and behavioral processes. And the least used with one occurrence is the relational process type. The finding of the study can be used as a guide to interpret the intended meaning of the anthem.

The study concludes that the current Nigeria's national anthem expresses tangible meanings which were adequately captured by the transitivity analysis of process types in the anthem. The findings from the study are in support of the transitivity theory of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) in the analysis of the language use in national anthems. This study also serves as a contribution to existing scholarly work on Nigeria anthems.

Conclusively, the experiential analysis of the Nigerian national anthem unveils a call for unity, pride in our motherland, hope for a land devoid of oppression, and emotional relationship among the citizens. It is a powerful symbol of the identity of Nigerians.

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