

## Morphological Creativities and Phrasal Pragmatics in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a morphological and pragmatic study of significant word formations in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*. Ngugi borrows sense and morphological patterns of lexical items from source domains – military, medical, zoological, biblical – to create his own vocabulary. That is to say he attempts a corrupt version of lexical items which originally belong to other registers in order to transfer the sense and notions of source domains into the context of the novel. This study is a linguistic analysis of those lexical formations. Ngugi deploys affixation, compounding, clipping, and blending to form new words to elicit humour and satirize aspects of political hegemony in *Wizard of the Crow*.

**Keywords:** morphology, phrasal pragmatics, domains, Ngugi, *Wizard of the Crow*

### **Introduction**

This paper analyses pertinent morphological formations in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, and explains their significance. This significance is made explicit by the domain strategy deployed by the author. Ngugi borrows sense and morphological patterns of lexical items from source domains – military, medical, zoological, biblical – to create his own vocabulary. In other words, he attempts a corrupt

version of lexical items which originally belong to other registers in order to transfer the sense and notions of source domains into the context of the novel. He deploys the prefix 'out' to capture the intense rivalries which exist between African tyrants and protesters, and among state ministers who outplay one another to the gallery.

Since its publication in 2007, *Wizard of the Crow* has received critics' attention most of which stems from the literary perspective. However, it needs to be mentioned that some of Ngugi's novels have been examined from the linguistic angle. One of such is *Weep Not, Child*. Isaac Nuokya-Ire Mwinlaaru examines transitivity and narrative viewpoint this novel. Mwinlaaru is of the view that there is a stylistic correspondence between the author's transitivity patterns and the narrator's psychological viewpoint (354). This to him accounts for why the novel "tends to absolve victimizers from the responsibility for the actions in order to focus readers' attention on the victims of political conflict presented in the novel" (354).

From a folkloric point of view, Mumia Geoffrey Osaaji observes that oral literature has become a buoyant well to which most novelists turn to for inspiration. Thus, he examines some folkloric elements in *Wizard of the Crow*, and explains their stylistic and didactic significance. Some of these oral features are: oral dialogue between characters, stylistic allusions and digressions, embedded oral narratives, proverbs, riddles, magic realism, and the polyphony of narrative voices (Osaaji 107). According to Osaaji, the aesthetic significance of these features is that they add local flavour and realism to the story in keeping with the post-colonial celebration of cultural, social, regional, and national difference (107).

Asika Ikechukwu Emmanuel thinks Ngugi has thematically departed from the common Kenyan course of revolution and emancipation to the problems of power, neo-colonialism, imperialism, dictatorship, and corruption which have become the bane of the African continent (44). According to him, Ngugi in the novel points out leadership as the major problem of many African states (Asika 44). The author does this by creating a stereotypical tyrant through which other dictators in Africa

can be viewed. That is, the Ruler is a stereotypical reflection of leadership in many African states. He concludes that Africa has witnessed, and will continue to witness tyranny except the Nyawiras and Kamitis rise. These Nyawiras and Kamitis symbolize you and me (Asika 57).

Another critic, Amitayu Chakraborty preoccupies himself with modes of resistance in *Wizard of the Crow*. He observes that Kamiti and Nyawira discursively resist dictatorship in Aburiria. He contends that the author draws upon the African-American mythic-trickster aesthetic paradigm, Schechner's theorization of socio-dramatic/ritualistic performance, and Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque and grotesque to form certain modes of resistance in the novel (181). He argues that Nyawira's dance performance and Kamiti's mock-wizardry correspond to the trickster paradigm, and evoke the carnivalesque and grotesque. This correspondence is artfully aimed at resisting the domination of the nation-state which is represented by the Ruler (Chakraborty 181).

Gichingiri Ndigiri examines the spatial setting of spectacle and laughter in the novel. He says that African leaders have transformed their states into a stage where the masses do nothing but watch helplessly. However, the author boldly creates two characters that refuse to be awed by state power. By laughing at the spectacular excess, they inscribe a different meaning to the spectacles. He concludes that spectator laughter is a central component of this contestation. Also Lisa Clement states that those who say that Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* is not classified as magical realism may be right to an extent. She argues that it is incontestable that the novel "contains a similar recipe of ingredients which make the experience of reading it a kind of phantasmagoric dream which blurs the surface of the text yet reveals a definitive state of consciousness beneath" (1). She concludes that the novel is a masterful work of puppetry in which the author places his trust in the reader to find startling truth beneath the satire, and even hope (2).

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Jon Evans looks at fury, absurdity, and sorcery in the novel. He believes there is a similarity between the fictional Aburiria and the author's experience in Kenya. The latter could have been the motivational factor behind the novel. He finally concludes that "*Wizard of the Crow* is part satire, part comedy, part farce, and wholly absurd. It is an angry book, yes, but even at its most furious, it is never not funny" (Evans 2). Furthermore, Njogu Waita conducts a critical overview of Ngugi's treatment of identity, politics, and gender in the novel. He does this against the backdrop of pertinent questions, one of which is why the disease of contradicting identities continues to afflict Africans. Waita also sees the novel as a political novel by interrogating the political dispensation of the fictional Aburiria which is immersed in the abysmal quagmire of tyranny. For instance, he makes reference to *Marching to Heaven*, and laments the extent to which African leaders can go to immortalize themselves (Waita 47). Waita concludes that Ngugi in the text does not pretend to offer explicit solutions to the problems facing Africa. Nonetheless, he warns that Africa should not expect progress as long as she continues to pursue white elephant projects which leave her in a permanent debt trap (Waita 49).

Thus, it is obvious that Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* has mostly been critiqued from the literary angle. Another important observation is that most of its criticisms adjudge the novel a satiric piece. There is therefore need to show, with textual evidence, the linguistic components which contribute to the novel's satiric effects. Two of such components are the author's morphological creativities, and its consequent domain transfer strategy. In other words, this essay upholds that pertinent morphological formations are deployed by the author to enhance the satiric tempo of the text. What is more, these formations carry with them notions and effects from their source domain to the target domains. Talking about domains, this essay richly benefits from Belen Soria and Esther Romero's *Phrasal Pragmatics*.

### **Morphology**

Morphology is attentive to the syntagmatic relationship which exists among linguistic items below the word level. These linguistic items are called morphemes. Pushpinder Syal and D.V. Jindal define morphology as a “systematic study of morphemes” (77). Quirk et al see it as the syntax of lexis, in which “grammar and lexicology share a ground” (1517). Victoria Fromkin, Robert Rodman, and Nina Hyams see it as the “study of the internal structure of words, and the rules by which words are formed” (77). Akinola A. Asiyabola gives more insight into the theoretical basis of morphology. He identifies three important linguistic theories which can be applied to the study of morphemes and word formation: Items and Arrangement (IA), Items and Process (IP), and Word and Paradigm (WP) (77).

This paper benefits from the first two theories, viz: IA and IP. It is under this theoretical oasis that we highlight the types of word formation as follows: affixation, conversion, compound formation, reduplication, clipping, acronyms, blending, borrowing, invention, and echoism.

Affixation is the combination of free and bound morphemes to form a word. The bound morphemes are the affixes, and they could come before or after the free morpheme. When they come after the free morphemes, they are described as suffixes. An affix could be inflectional or derivational. By inflection, we mean a change made in the form of a word to express its relation to other words in the sentence. For example:

go + es = goes

house + s = houses

Inflectional affixes do not change the word class of a word. Derivational affixes, on the other hand, change an existing word into a new word. For example:

Play + er = player

Boy + hood = boyhood

Un + know + ing + ly = unknowingly

Affixation is the largest process of word formation in the English Language.

Conversion is the process whereby a word changes its class without a change in the form of the word. For example: *Invite* in

- (i) He did not *invite* me to his party (verb)
- (ii) I didn't get an *invite* to his party (noun)

Compound Formation is the process where two or more independent words are joined together. These independent words are referred to as bases. For example:

boy + friend = boyfriend  
sand + paper = sandpaper

Reduplication is the process of forming a word from two similar linguistic elements, such as:

goody + goody = goody goody  
wishy + washy = wishy washy

Clipping occurs when a word is shortened by cutting one or more syllables from a word, which may occur at any part of the word – beginning, middle, and at the end of a word, or at both ends of a word. For example:

photograph = photo  
telephone = phone  
petroleum = petrol

Acronyms are formed by joining together the initial letters, or a little larger part, of other words, and are pronounced as a word. For instance:

ECOWAS = Economic Community of West African States  
UNIBEN = University of Benin  
NEPA = National Electric Power Authority

People tend to confuse acronym with abbreviation, but there is a difference. While in acronym the letters are pronounced as a word, in abbreviation it is read letter by letter. Examples of abbreviation are: Ph.D., PTA, UNO, and M.Sc. Blending is the process where clipped elements from two words are joined together to form a new word. For example:

breakfast + lunch = brunch  
motorists + hotel = motel

### **Phrasal Pragmatics**

Romero and Soria argue that Robyn Carston's pragmatic programme is incomplete without Phrasal Pragmatics (183). In Carston's Lexical Pragmatics only the pragmatics of atomic concepts is taken into account. The central aim of Lexical Pragmatics in Relevance Theory is to account for how ad hoc concept constructions, that is, lexicalized atomic concepts can, through pragmatic derivation, yield ad hoc atomic concepts (185). The processes of this 'yielding' are narrowing, broadening, or both. Romero and Soria believe that it would be incomplete if lexical pragmatics is the only means of ascertaining the truth condition of phrases in propositions, hence Phrasal Pragmatics. Phrasal Pragmatics studies the behaviour of phrases and their meanings, and how these meanings must often be pragmatically adjusted to determine the truth condition with which they contribute to what is said by means of the utterances of the sentences that include them (183). While Lexical Pragmatics studies pragmatically derived atomic concepts, Phrasal Pragmatics studies pragmatically derived complex concepts. One of the limitations of Lexical Pragmatics, as suggested by Romero and Soria, is how to explain the possibility of a complete change in the denotations of a lexicalized concept, as in the case of metaphor (186). To solve this, they postulate that metaphor must be explained as a case of transfer of meaning by a mapping from the source domain to the target domain (187). For example, in *Wizard of the Crow* the Ruler threatens to 'outsnake' the Movement of the Voice of the People (25). The metaphoric properties of 'outsnake' emerges from the source domain- zoology. The likelihood features of snake –subtleness; cunning – are transferred to the rivalry sense between the Ruler and the protesters. What this essay does is to analyze the morphological make up of such words as *outsnake* and explain the aesthetic effect of the source domains on the target domains. This may be called morpho-pragmatic analysis and is the basis for the claim in this paper that Ngugi wa Thiong'o deploys morphological formations borrowed from specific source domains to

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elicit humour and satirize aspects of political hegemony in *Wizard of the Crow*.

### **Analysis**

OUTSNAKE in “He, the Ruler, would outsnake all their plastic terrorist snakes with the real ones” (25). This word is used after the Movement for the Voice of the People scatters the Ruler’s birthday ceremony by throwing plastic snakes on the ground to scare the people. The word is made up of a prefix and a base: out + snake. ‘Out’ denotes a higher degree of rank. Snake is a common noun. However, the author combines them to form a verb. The significance of this word is that it provides the author the means to satirize the stupidity of African tyrants. If the plastic snakes cause confusion, one wonders what the Ruler’s snakes would do. This word also pictures the subtle rivalry which exists between leaders and protesters. They always ‘outsake’ each other.

OUTDJINN in “Even if they are djinns, I will get djinns that can outdjinn them” (136). This is an assurance Sikiokuu makes to the Ruler – that he would devise means to capture the Movement of the Voice of the People. This is similar to ‘outsake’. It is a formation which consists of out + djinn. ‘Out’ is a prefix while ‘djinn’ is a noun. The two are combined to create the main verb of the verb phrase– can outdjinn. The effect of this word formation is that it further shows the intense rivalry between a tyrant and the protesting people. The dictator is ready to go to any length to silence the voice of protest. The verb ‘outdjinn’ is practically displayed when Arigaigai Gatherer becomes “an expert in djinns and djinn warfare” (145), and when Kamiti is enlisted to help capture Nyawira (367-373). The humour in the situations is enhanced by the surrounding ironies.

SWEEPER-OF-SOULS in “They accepted him as their new brother in Christ and they baptized him Sweeper-of -Souls” (43). This is a case of compounding which consists of three independent words: sweeper + of + soul (s). Sweeper comprises: sweep + er. However, the humour lies in the context in which the brother is converted. The story of Peter’s



calling in the Bible is alluded to the Garbage collector's conversion. This allusion is made explicit by the word – 'Sweeper-of-souls', which is similar to Jesus' Fisher-of-Men (Peter).

GREEN-LIGHTED in "...the belief that the Global Bank had green-lighted the project..." (139). This word consists of a compound formation and a suffix in the second word, thus: green + light + ed. The suffix indicates the tense (past) of the verb. Both independent words are nouns, but have been combined to become the main verb of the verb phrase. Also, Ngugi borrows from the Road Safety register. In the traffic control parlance, the green light signifies permission to move ahead. It is this sense of permission that is contained in the verb – green-lighted as used by Ngugi. This lexical item adds local colour to the novel, and creates a sense of intimacy between the reader and the author.

WHITE-ACHE in "In short, he suffers from a severe case of white-ache" (180). This is the adjectival that describes Tajirika's illness. Tajirika's obsession of becoming powerful like the white men during colonialism leads him to an episode of insanity. White-ache is a compound formation: white + ache. The author adopts it from words like headache, stomach ache, et cetera. Just as headache means pain in the head, white-ache means the discomforts that accompany becoming white. Such discomforts are: change of name, language, religion, and poverty. Kamiti summarizes it thus: "your white English destiny is as a homeless ex-colonial couple living solely on the memories of what used to be" (188). This lexical formation captures Ngugi's subtle satire at Africans who despise themselves because of the colour of their skin. The author implies that there is no gain without pain somewhere.

IFNESS in "He showed me that the ifness had resulted from my longing to be white" (338). This statement is credited to Tajirika in his confession to Njoya about his white-ache. This formation is particularly significant because its base is an adverb which does not take an affix: if (adverb) + ness. The '-ness' suffix is usually attached to nouns and adjectives to indicate status and state of being. The status indicated in the above context is the continuous barking of 'if' which Kamiti describes as white-ache. The suffix changes the adverb – if into a noun.

This enhances Ngugi's satire at the vain attempt by Blacks to imitate Whites. Also it expresses man's existence as hinged on conditions. This is because 'if' is an adverbial subordinator which carries a conditional sense. Tajirika is not the only one who barks 'if'. Sikiokuu, the Ruler, and Kamiti do. Kamiti's barking is feigned, the Ruler does not succeed in securing a loan from the Global Bank, and Sikiokuu is imprisoned for daring to be ambitious. It is only Tajirika's 'ifness' that comes to pass because parts of his body become white, and he becomes Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus Whitehead. This shows that every human has got some 'ifness' in the innermost recesses of his mind.

SPOKES-YOUTH in "Since when are you a spokes-youth for His Mightiness?" (146) The word is a compound formation: spokes + youth. It is an imitation of words such as spokesman, spokesperson. However, in place of 'man' and 'person', Nyawira deploys 'youth' in order to convey her notions and insinuations. One senses satire in Nyawira's question. She could have used 'man' or 'person', but chooses 'youth' in order to degrade Kaniuru's status. These politicians do have an apprehensive notion about youths. Tajirika says "What do these youth wingers know except... except... I don't even know what they do. But on second thought, even this is okay. He will be my boy, running errands for me..." (259). Also, Arigaigai Gatherer says much for these youth wingers who think they know everything" (222). It is this apprehensive notion that Nyawira conveys in the word 'spokes-youth'.

TEMPA in "Don't you remember? Tempa?" (191) Tempa is a short form of referring to Temporary Jobs which Tajirika orders his secretary to advertise for. This is a case of clipping. The last two syllables of 'Temporary' have been chopped off, while 'Jobs' has been completely deleted. It seems to be a common way of referring to contract jobs in Aburiria. The significance of this clipped word – tempa- is its phonological relation with 'temper' which is also two syllables with phonological realizations not too far apart. The sense of temper seems to be lurking around tempa in the text. For instance, Kamiti is angry because despite displaying his intellectual capabilities Tajirika refuses to employ him. The Aburirians form an endless queue hoping to get a job

which does not exist. It is this queue that is manipulated by the Movement of the Voice of the People to disgrace the Ruler in the presence of delegates of Global Bank. What Ngugi conveys through the clipped word *tempa*, is that violence and youth restiveness are unavoidable in a society where there are no jobs.

CORPORONIALISM in “We live in a corporate globe under imperial corporonialism, as proudly claimed by the new ogres” (760). The above word is got from a base (corporate) and two suffixes: corporate + ial + ism. The author forms this word to capture the impoverished state of the masses. This impoverishment is caused by the ruling class who form a corporate organization with a view to sapping the wealth of the nation. Ngugi calls members of this organization, ogres. The word formation is attention catching in order to draw the reader’s attention to these ogres.

PARROTRY and PARROTOLOGY in “...they assumed that the seminar was intended for those who had not yet accepted parrotry as a norm” (572). Parrotry is a combination of parrot + -ry. Parrot is the base, and ‘-ry’ is the suffix. The suffixes ‘-ry’ and ‘-ology’ depict domain and occupation. The source domain – zoology is transferred on the nature of the seminar. A parrot is a bird known for always unthinkingly mimicking others. It also talks too much for a long time. It is these features that are imported into the essence of government seminars which are preoccupied with too much talk and no action. The narrator describes the speakers at such seminars as Professors of Parrotology. Thus, Ngugi satirizes irrelevant government meetings, conferences, and seminars. He also satirizes the participants of such seminars. He sees the seminars as platforms for too much talk, policy formulations without any plan of implementation in mind.

SHIT-POINT in “I really hope to God that the reasons that drove you to hold the armed forces at shit-point are solid enough to withstand the wrath of the State” (392). When Tajirika requests to have an audience with Sikiokuu and he seems not to be taken seriously by the Police guards, he forces his way through by holding a bucket of feaces and urine. It is this process of forcing with a bucket of shit that Sikiokuu

describes as 'shit-point'. It is a compound formation which has two independent words – shit and point, linked together by a hyphen. The word is a corrupt imitation of gun-point which is in the military register. In the military, a government may be overthrown at gun-point. It is this sense that is transferred to Tajirika's action. The Ruler even takes him up on this when he asks Tajirika. "Was it the first act of a coup attempt?" (553). The effect of this compound formation is humorous. It is humorous that Tajirika's action of forcing the prison police to take him to Sikiokuu's office is described as a coup attempt. Coincidentally, it turns out to be because it is this same Tajirika that overthrows the Ruler.

AFROCHIATRISTS in "Henceforth they would be called specialists in African Psychiatry, in short, afrochiatrists, and they would be allowed to call themselves Doctor" (622). This is an instance of blending. The two words are: Africa and psychiatrists. In psychiatrists, there is a plural suffix '-s'. This blend creates a humorous effect which consequently satirizes government deceptive strategies. In this case, the Ruler pretends to be pro-witchcraft when he promises to modernize African witchcraft. However, it is a ploy to get a sorcerer to heal the Wizard of the Crow. Thus, the government is so cunning that it has words for any deceptive policy.

### Conclusion

This essay has examined instances of significant morphological formations and their pragmatic effects in *Wizard of the Crow*. It observes that Ngugi deploys affixation, compounding, clipping, and blending to form special words. These lexical items usually borrowed from source domains – military, medical, zoological, biblical – have pragmatic effects on the minds of the readers. These effects are humorous, and specifically intended to satirize social vices in the African states.

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