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Ecofeminist Philosophy and Transitivity Selections in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*

ABSTRACT. The term ecocriticism is used to refer to literary criticism that examines the relationship between literature and environment. Ecofeminism can be regarded as an off-shoot or sub-theory of ecocriticism. The interest here is not just environmental justice but “gender justice” in relation to the environment. The paper therefore looks at environmental exploitation of women using Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. The theoretical framework for the study is Transitivity. Transitivity devices are identified; their frequencies and percentages are calculated; while the foregrounded ones are used for analysis. The results show a parallel pillaging, exploitation and degradation of the environment and the female gender.

KEYWORDS: ecocriticism, ecofeminism, transitivity, critical stylistics, environmental degradation

Introduction

Ecocriticism is defined by Glotfelty (1996) as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”. Ojaide (2013) defines it as ecologically sensitive creative writing and criticism designed to promote ecological literacy. The bottom line here is how literature reacts to developments in the environment. In the context of Nigeria, the Niger Delta has been the locus of the cry for environmental justice. The battle to attract development from the Nigerian government and corporate social responsibility from the transnationals was fought both physically and intellectually. The intellectual arm of the struggle led to a corpus of literature called Niger Delta Protest Literature in the three genres of prose, poetry and drama.

Ogude (2011) identifies Gabriel Okaro's *The Voice*, Elechi Amadi's *The Great Ponds* (1969) and *The Concubine* (1966) as pioneer efforts in Niger

Delta eco-critical prose fiction. Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*, pervasively eco-critical, was published in (1993) before the literary flourish that attended Saro-Wiwa's death in 1995. Isidore Okpewho and other Niger Delta writers like Buchi Emecheta and Festus Iyayi could be classified as second generation of Niger Delta prose writers. Buchi Emecheta wrote *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Second Class Citizen*; among others, in 1974. As Nutsukpo (2011) observes, her works were mainly feminist, depicting the lot of the woman in a patriarchal society and her own travails in the journey of life. Her feminist perspectives are taken further by Kaine Agary who looks at the lot of the Niger Delta woman against the background of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta. This paper therefore looks at the feminist perspective of ecocriticism captured as ecofeminist philosophy in Kaine Agary's prose fiction, *Yellow-Yellow*.

Ecofeminism

Wikipedia tells us that the term ecofeminism was coined by the French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (1974). Ecofeminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, economy, religion, politics, literature and iconography and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. Ecofeminist philosophy emphasizes the ways both nature and women are treated in patriarchal societies. To Regan (2020), Ecofeminism is an ideology and movement that sees climate change, gender equality, and social justice more broadly as intrinsically related issues, all tied to masculine dominance of society. Furthermore, Ecofeminism also calls to attention that women are disproportionately affected by environmental issues.

Miles (2018) says that modern ecofeminist movement was born out of a series of conferences and workshops held in the United States by a coalition of academic and professional women during the late 1970s and early 1980s. They discussed the ways in which feminism and environmentalism could promote respect for women and nature, motivated by the notion that the age-long association of women with nature has led to the oppression of both.

McIlhaney (1998) discusses the proper representation of women anglers in seventeenth-century British Poetry and regrets that women are no longer well represented. It is observed that in the seventeenth centu-

ry, representations of women anglers proliferated in pastoral and georgic poems, but that these depictions have been largely overlooked in current considerations of the woman angler. In her essay, "Whole Shoals of Men: Representations of Women Anglers in Seventeenth-Century British Poetry," she attempts to revive the image of the seventeenth-century woman angler and to explore the significance of this image within the context of the larger genre to which it belongs, the British piscatory (fishing) pastoral.

Mellin (1998) citing *The Alfoxden Journal*, comments on Dorothy Wordsworth's "disconcerting recognition of gender relations at the end of eighteenth-century England. In Dorothy Wordsworth's reading of the Alfoxden region, she observes the privileged place of men in the social structure. She describes one of the men in the landscape as "a razor-grinder with a soldier's jacket on, aknapsack on his back, and a boy to drag his wheel"; while the young lasses are described with their "summer holiday clothes, pink petticoats and blue. Mothers with their children in arms..." This is interpreted by Mellin to mean that unlike men, women's place is domestic: they are simply mothers.

Carew-Miller (1998) observes that much of Mary Austin's scholarship focused on her significant contribution to women's tradition of nature writing and her proto-feminist characterization of the natural world. She "feminizes the masculine genre of nature writing ... by inventing a female character who embodies and ideal relationship to the natural world".

Murphy (2000) talks about those feminisms committed to exposing, critiquing, and ending the oppression of women, overthrowing patriarchy and phallioncentrism, demand male recognition of the other as not only different in more ways than binary configurations can recognize, but also of equal ontological status. Armbruster (2000) tells us that ecofeminism explicitly works to challenge dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy within Western culture that construct nature as separate from and inferior to human culture (and women as inferior to men). Warren (2000) in "Nature Is a Feminist Issue" mentions the claim by ecological feminists (ecofeminists) that there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of colour, children and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature. Unjustifiably dominated groups are referred to as "Others", both "human Others" (such as women, people of colour, children, and the poor) and "earth Others" (such as animals, forests and the land). These others (human and earth) have been unjustifiably exploited and dominated.

Siddall (2009) documents feminist approaches to nature: Plato, speculating on cosmology in the *Timaeus*, saw the soul of the whole world as female and the earth as our nurse. Neo-platonic thinkers in the Middle Ages linked this with Christian belief: the goddess Nature is subordinate to God and acts as midwife to turn abstract ideas into material life. Nature was often presented visually, wearing a robe decorated with creatures from water and land, plants and flowers - and with a flower on her shoes. Dame Nature ('vicayre of the almighty lord'), presides in Chaucer's *Parlement of Foulys*, holding on her wrist the most perfect female eagle; beneath her is the hierarchy of creation, each in its correct place and subject to Nature's judgement. Siddall (2009) documents further that modern ecology movements aim to restore a greater respect for 'mother' nature, which has been damaged by male greed and aggression. Science and technology have asserted man's mastery and plundered the earth's resources; men have treated nature as a passive, acquiescent female who must constantly supply them with comfort and nourishment. In traditional cultures, it was common for miners, burrowing as in a woman for minerals, to perform ceremonies of propitiation to the deities of the soil and as an apology to the mother. Gough (2024) examines issues of the environment and how they relate to gender and education.

Transitivity

Representing Actions, Events and States is based on the notion that the verbal element of a clause (predicator) is the location of the actions and processes that take place between the entities. Actions represent what is being done; events have to do with what is happening and states, what simply is. Depending on the ideological standpoint, the following groups may describe a winding economy as:

1. World markets are falling. Event (This is the politician who wishes to get votes).
2. The honourable member has ruined the economy. Action (This is a member of the opposition).
3. The world economy is in crisis. State (This is a commentator).

It is obvious that each speaker has taken a perspective for a purpose. The politician canvassing for votes (presumably an incumbent) would

want to downplay the situation by blaming domestic economic problems on the international market; the opposition will take a strong stance by scathing criticism; while the impartial commentator would present it as it is. Each of these choices has consequences for the perception of the reader or hearer.

The following are the main categories as identified by Jeffries (2010) based on Simpson's (1993) explication of Halliday (1985).

1. Material Action

This is referred to as the most prototypical verb, having to do with something that is done or happens in a physical way. Examples are

The joint union committee walked out of the meeting.
The government postponed their enquiry.

The participants in the clause are the actor (grammatical subject) and the goal (grammatical object). The actors, in this case, are 'The joint union committee' and 'The government' respectively, while the goals are 'the meeting' and 'their enquiry'. The reason for this participant labels is to distinguish the semantic role that such participants play from their grammatical role.

The sub-categories of material actions are:

(a) Material Action Intentional (MAI)

This is an intentional material action performed by a conscious being as in the previous example.

(b) Material Action Supervention (MAS)

This is unintentional action by a conscious being. As in
The baby fell out of his pram onto the tarmac.
The judge lost her temper.

In both cases, the actors, though conscious, are not in control.

(c) **Material Action Events (MAE).** This is action by an inanimate actor. The car backfired

2. Verbalization Processes

This is the process of saying.
Participant roles are sayer and target.
It has a human actor.

Sayer	/	process	/	target	/	verbiage
John		told		Mary		his life story.
Sayer	/	process	/	verbiage		
He		said		that.		

3. Mental Processes

Mental processes refer to what happens within human beings. This is further sub-divided into:

(a) Mental Cognition(MC)

– Thinking, knowing, realizing, understanding and so on

(b) Mental Reaction (MR)

– Feeling (emotionally), liking, hating and so on

(c) Mental Perception(MP)

– Sensing, hearing, feeling (literally), seeing, tasting and so on.
The following examples.

For a mental process verb, the other participants are senser and phenomenon, as in the following examples.

Senser	Process	Phenomenon	
<i>The interviewer</i>	<i>realized</i>	<i>her mistake</i>	<i>MC</i>
<i>I</i>	<i>hate</i>	<i>the political system</i>	
		<i>in Britain</i>	<i>MR</i>
<i>They</i>	<i>heard</i>	<i>the rumour about</i>	
		<i>Mr. Price</i>	<i>MP</i>

4. The Relational Category

This represents the static or stable relationships between carriers and attributes rather than any changes or dynamic actions. The verbs in this category are:

- The copula verb (to be) and other intensive relations (RI)
- Possessive relations as indicated by verbs like 'have' (RP)
- Circumstantial relations (RC) which involves verbs of movement and the verb 'be' as well

(a) Relational Intensive

'x is a' relationship. It involves the copula verb 'be' and other intensive relations

<i>Carrier</i>	/	<i>process</i>	/	<i>attribute</i>	/	
<i>Mary</i>		<i>is</i>		<i>wise</i>		<i>Tom seems foolish</i>

(b) Relational Possessive

'x has a' relationship
Gill has a guitar. John owns a piano.

(c) Relational Circumstantial

'x is at/on a' relationship: verbs of movement and verb 'be' as well.
Bill is at home/John was in the room.

In traditional grammar, the verb is defined as a word that shows action or a state of being. This has been interestingly broken down into 'event', 'action' and 'state'. The 'action' component fits into material actions, the event component fits roughly into mental processes, while state fits roughly into relational processes. This model represents Halliday's ideational function of language, relevant to uncovering ideologies. The transitivity model as Simpson (1993, p. 88) notes is concerned with the transmission of ideas and it is a part of the ideational function of language. This is what Jeffries (2010) adapts for critical stylistic analysis.

Methodology

Primary data are collected from the novel, *Yellow-Yellow*. It is divided into three extracts based on the storyline. The first extract represents her

life in the village where she stayed with her mum, cut off civilization; the second chronicles her movement away from her “claustrophobic village’ to Port Harcourt, the supposed land of opportunities; while the third extract tells the story of how she met Sergio, then Admiral and how she got pregnant for Admiral. These extracts form the basis of the analysis in charts and tables.

Data are analyzed using the critical stylistic tool of Representing Actions, Events and States, which is actually Leslie Jeffries’ (2010) adaptation of Transitivity by Halliday (1985) and Simpson (1993). Furthermore, the simple statistical method of frequency distribution is used to determine the rate of occurrence of the Hallidayan transitivity devices as adapted by Jeffries (2010). The frequency gives the number of times a particular device occurs, while the percentage is calculated using the formula.

Number of Devices Identified $\times 100$

Total Number of Devices 1

The results are put on charts and tables for analysis

Kaine Agary: *Yellow-Yellow* (Transitivity Chart)
(Extract 1)
Extract 1(a)

[illegible]

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
				the oil company	said		they suspected sabotage...	vp					
	were not going to pay		[and] MAI										
		compensation ...											
my mother	lost	her main source of sustenance	in a single day	MAS									
...she and others in the village	had [gradually] lost,		year after year,										
		the creatures of the rivers to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares, and who knows what else,		MAS									

(Agary 2006, pp. 3 and 4)

Extract 1(b)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
				Our visitors	Told		of times						
			when they fell into the hands of a crazy whitey who beat them up or pushed objects like bottles into their privates as part of the "fun" ...					vp					
			After recounting all of these terrifying tales,...	Our visitors		would add	vp						
			[and]								na		our money []
											Na		our oil money!]

(Agary 2006, pp. 37 and 38)

Extract 1(c)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
Farming and fishing...	[no longer] provide	gain	MAE					I	had witnessed	lands claimed by massive floods	MP		
			during the rainy season the earth slowly melting into the rivers.										
Women	Rowed	their canoes	farther and farther away to find land for farming.	MAI							it	was	harder to catch fish
			In addition, every year										
			as though the water spirits had tied the fishes wombs....										
				My mother	told	me	of the days of her youth						
			when every husband was expected to give his wife a dug out canoe that he carved and crafted himself.					VP					
The wife	would use	this canoe	to fish, earn a living, and help to feed the family.	MAI									
			Those were the days when										
the Ijaw woman	could ignore	the nature of the Ijaw man	because she had a means of earning a living and providing the needs of her children.	MAI									
			Those were the days when										
Ijaw women	cooked	a fresh pot of soup	everyday because the rivers were teeming with fish....	MAI									
			Nowadays										

RI

RI

Extract 1
Kaine Agary: *Yellow-Yellow*
Frequency Table

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentages
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	9	26.47
Material Action Supervention (MAS)	4	11.76
Material Action Event (MAE)	3	8.82
Verbalization Process (VP)	4	11.76
Mental Cognition (MC)	-	-
Mental Reaction (MR)	1	2.94
Mental Perception (MP)	3	8.82
Relational Intensive (RI)	9	26.47
Relational Possessive (RP)	1	2.94
Relational Circumstantial (RC)	-	-
Total	34	100

Discussion of Extract 1

The 26.47% Rational Intensive device is used to convey the strong smell of spilled crude which makes Yellow-Yellow dizzy as explained in 1(a). The other part of the RI device is explained in 1(b), the ‘returnee girls’ after explaining their ordeals in the hands of ‘crazywhiteys’ exclaim, ‘na our money!’; ‘Na our oil money!’. This presents the Niger Delta woman as spoils of physical and economic conquest. Just like the land, they are raped, pillaged and left to lie waste. The eco-feminist perspective of the novel is illustrated here. The 26.47% Material Action Intentional devices combine with Relational Intensive devices of the same percentage (26.47), Mental Perception of 8.82% and Verbalization Process of 11.76% to present women’s rights and contrast the pre-and post-oil eras.

While the pre-oil era respected women’s rights; the post-oil era abused women. The eco-feminist dimension of the novel is taken a notch further here. As espoused in 1(c), the women are exploited and abused from within and without by black and white men alike. In 1(d), Relational Intensive (RI) combines with Relational Possessive(RP) and Material Action Intentional(MAI) to explain the motivation for militancy. Youths moved about the village dropping the phrase, “Aluta continua” after Saro-Wiwa’s death inspired by what was purported to be Ken Saro-Wiwa’s last words, “Take my soul, but the struggle continues.”

Extract (2a)

Extract (2b)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
			Walking into Sisi's house,								I	was	Struck dumb
											It	was	Like nothing
													I had ever
											There	were	seen before
													some big
													houses
I	did not expect	to see so much free space around the house.	in my village... MAS ... when I saw Sisi's with my own eyes,										
								I	felt	sorry for this old man at the porter's lodge who had to work the distance to the front door to announce visitors.	MR		
I	marvelled		at the beauty of everything, at the ease with which Esther was able to do something like boil water for tea.	MAS									

(Agary, 2006, p. 61-62)

Extract 2
Kaine Agary: *Yellow-Yellow*
Frequency Table

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentages
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	6	42.85
Material Action Supervention (MAS)	2	14.28
Material Action Event (MAE)	-	-
Verbalization Process (VP)	-	-
Mental Cognition (MC)	-	-
Mental Reaction (MR)	1	7.14
Mental Perception (MP)	-	-
Relational Intensive (RI)	5	3
Relational Possessive (RP)	-	-
Relational Circumstantial (RC)	-	-
Total	14	100

Discussion of Extract 2

The two most foregrounded devices here are Material Action Intentional and Relational Intensive with 42.85 and 35.71% respectively. The 'oneness and classlessness of 'Town' in Old Port Harcourt contrasts with the segregation and class consciousness in New GRA (Government Residential Area). This is expressed in 2(a) where we are told that all Town children played together in contrast with GRA where the crème de la crème of old Port Harcourt society lived in seclusion. These two devices, together with the 14.28% Material Action Supervention contrast the comfort of Port-Harcourt with the discomfort of *Yellow-Yellow's* 'claustrophobic village' and 'colourless existence': the 14.28% Material Action Supervention shows how *Yellow-Yellow* marvelled at seeing modern facilities in Sisi's house. She had not seen so much space around a house before and wondered at the ease with which, tea was made with an electric kettle. She was fascinated by these facilities which were not there in her little village.

Extract (3a)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
											things	were getting	more expensive
			In actuality,										
			As petrol prices	MAE									
	went up,												
bus fares	went up	MAE											
The price of bread	went up	MAE											
... school fees	went up	MAE											
... salaries	remained		the same.	MAE									

(Agary, 2006, p. 110)

Extract (3b)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
Admiral and I	talked		until very late, when he dozed off	MAI									
			with his dimples and sprinkles of grey in his hair								He	Was	so handsome
								I	felt	a deep sense of longing for him			
			not because of the comfort Emem hinted at, which was money, but because I was hoping that the relationship would give me a taste of paternal affection that I had never had								MR		

(Agary, 2006, p. 124)

Extract (3c)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Saver	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
			very awkward as I fought the intruding sounds of my mother's disapproving voice, telling me not to spoil myself.					It all	felt	MR	He	was	so handsome
			Nevertheless,					I	reasoned	that she was far away	MC	was	no way she could know that I had spoilt myself;
											there		
I	gave up my virginity to Admiral		with this consolation,	MAI									

(Agary, 2006, p. 144)

Extract (3d)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Saver	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
He	made	the moves,	kissing my ear and my neck,	MAI									
											... I	was	tuned on
											My curiosity	was	the better of me
I	wanted	something to compare with Admiral	since I'd only been with him	MAI									
... it all	went		to my head	MAS									
... I	followed	Sergio's lead	MAI										
We	ended up making	love	MAS										

(Agary, 2006, p. 172)

Extract 3
Kaine Agary: *Yellow-Yellow*
Frequency Table

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentages
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	5	25
Material Action Supervention (MAS)	2	10
Material Action Event (MAE)	5	25
Verbalization Process (VP)	-	-
Mental Cognition (MC)	1	5
Mental Reaction (MR)	2	10
Mental Perception (MP)	-	-
Relational Intensive (RI)	5	25
Relational Possessive (RP)	-	-
Relational Circumstantial (RC)	-	-
Total	20	100

Discussion of Extract 3

The 25% Material Action Event in 3(a) expresses the paradox of high cost of living, high petroleum products prices in spite of resource endowment; while the 25% each of Relational Intensive and Material Action Intentional show how Yellow-Yellow was sexually exploited by Admiral and Sergio, having lost her defences, like other Niger Delta girls, to poverty and lack of opportunities. Material Action Event is also 25%. It depicts the high cost of living during the Abacha regime, There was high cost of living. Prices of goods and services went up, while salaries remained the same. Material Action Supervention and Mental Reaction are 10% each. They depict how Yellow-Yellow, after offering herself to Admiral wanted to have the taste of a white man. In spite of her mother’s admonition ringing in her ears, she still offered herself to Sergio. This further deepens the ecofeminist perspective of the novel.

Summary Table of the Frequencies

Transitivity Devices	Extract One	Extract Two	Extract Three	Frequencies	Percentages
MAI	9	6	5	20	29.41
MAS	4	2	2	8	11.76
MAE	3	-	5	8	11.76
VP	4	-	-	4	5.88

MC	-	-	1	1	1.47
MR	1	1	2	4	5.88
MP	3	-	-	3	4.41
RI	9	5	5	19	27.94
RP	1			1	1.47
RC	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL				68	100

Conclusion

Material Action, usually referred to as the most prototypical verb, is dominant here. It involves what is done or happens in a physical way. It is instructive that Material Action Intentional dominates the transitivity with 29.41%. It presents the intentional actions of the actors of feminist exploitation and dehumanization. The lot of women pre-and post-oil is presented. They were a lot better before oil when they could fish and farm. Apart from Relational Intensive, Material Action Supervention and Material Action event also underscore acts of feminist exploitation. The Relational Intensive device of 27.94% captures the state of affairs. It explains the ordeal of Niger Delta females who have gone into prostitution to survive. They have lost their defences to poverty, deprivation and a lack of opportunities. In their frustrated and dehumanized state, they exclaim that they are victims of their own God-given wealth. Other devices like verbalization express the situation of females; while Mental Processes feel and perceive the sorry state of the Niger Delta Woman.

The different perspectives of the various devices foreground the ecofeminist slant of the novel "Yellow-Yellow". The transnational oil companies not only exploited and degraded the environment; they also exploited and degraded the female gender.

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