

Linguistic Choices and Character Agency in Soyinka's Translation of *The Forest of Oludumare*

Olajuyigbe O. A.

Ph.D.

Department of English

Adeyemi Federal University of Education

Ondo, Nigeria

kemolaj61@gmail.com

Adeagbo O. A.

Department of English

Adeyemi Federal University of Education

Ondo, Nigeria

Abstract

The study investigates the complex interaction between language and character as found in Wole Soyinka's translation of D. O. Fagunwa's *Igbo Oludumare* epic, *In the Forest of Oludumare*. Soyinka's beautiful transformation of language successfully evokes the wide universe of Yoruba cosmology in the original, while it is also enriched with modern allusions that touch upon current sociopolitical issues. The story, framed in the threshold space of the forest, explores conflicting aspects of the traditional Yoruba cultural background and contemporary African identity. Based on a critical examination of language and the representation of character, this study investigates how Soyinka's rendering maintains the soul of indigenous oral tradition in a dialogue with the intricacy of modernity. Investigating the

processes by which language defines character representation, the present study provides some insights into how translation should be understood in terms of reducing the gap between cultures and promoting greater appreciation of the African identity.

Keywords: Character Agency, Yoruba Cosmology, Oral Tradition, Postcolonial Identity, Cultural Translation, Modernity, African

Introduction

Soyinka's *In the Forest of Oludumare*, a translation of D. O. Fagunwa's classic *Igbo Olodumare*, showcases Soyinka's deft adaptation of language to capture the rich Yoruba cosmology found in the original text. By translating Fagunwa's narrative, Soyinka not only preserves the intricacies of traditional folklore but also infuses them with contemporary themes that resonate with modern sociopolitical concerns. The text occupies a space that bridges Yoruba mythological beliefs with current sensibilities, creating a narrative rooted in indigenous oral tradition while engaging with the dynamics of modern African identity (Gikandi, 2002). In Soyinka's version, the forest—central to many African tales—remains not merely a physical space but a liminal realm where natural and supernatural elements intersect. This space allows characters to navigate the tensions between Yoruba culture and a rapidly modernising world, echoing the spiritual and moral dilemmas present in Fagunwa's original (Feuser, 1998).

Soyinka's translation retains Fagunwa's use of Yoruba folklore to tackle profound moral and philosophical issues while ensuring cultural authenticity. The characters, who embody both human vulnerabilities and divine traits, navigate the forest's spiritual terrain, reflecting the Yoruba worldview's cyclical nature that ties individual growth to collective wellbeing. Encounters with spirits, gods, and ancestors illustrate the Yoruba belief in an ever-present dialogue between the seen and unseen, the old and the new (Irele, 2001). Thus, Soyinka's adaptation preserves these metaphysical dimensions and uses them to explore contemporary struggles with identity, alienation, and resistance. This approach aligns with what Okpewho

(1992) calls Soyinka's "mythopoeic imagination", which refashions traditional narratives as instruments for modern critique.

In translating *In the Forest of Oludumare*, Soyinka employs storytelling techniques—proverbs, idioms, and symbolic language—that both honour Fagunwa's folkloric style and enrich the thematic and character development of the narrative. This strategy enables Soyinka to serve as a linguistic bridge between Yoruba oral tradition and English-language literature, retaining the cultural essence while making it accessible to a global audience (Soyinka, 1978). The translation is thus more than a retelling; it stands as a cultural document that preserves Yoruba heritage while reinterpreting it through Soyinka's unique lens, offering a richly intertextual experience for readers unfamiliar with the Yoruba cultural context.

Soyinka's *In the Forest of Oludumare* combines Yoruba cosmology, folklore, and contemporary sociopolitical themes, remaining faithful to Fagunwa's original while imprinting his stylistic signature. Known for his ability to integrate traditional African narratives with modern issues, Soyinka employs language as a crucial tool to convey character identities and cultural values. In his translation, language is not merely a vehicle for dialogue but a sophisticated medium that embodies Yoruba culture's complexities and moral tensions. Scholars have highlighted that Soyinka's characters often act as cultural archetypes, deeply embedded in Yoruba thought yet confronting postcolonial complexities (Irele, 2001). His stylistic choices, evident in the characters' speeches, reflect a convergence of personal identity, collective memory, and the sociopolitical landscape, maintaining Fagunwa's essence while speaking to a broader, global audience.

Stylistics provides a good theory which to examine how linguistic devices can show underlying qualities of characters, and how language is a type of cultural expression. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) for example, allows for the analysis of language on three levels of meaning: the interpersonal, the textual, and the ideational, which makes it possible to see how

characters express their own agency, social status, and spirituality (Halliday, et.al., 2004). This analysis will utilize SFG and other stylistic approaches to reveal how Soyinka's language techniques create multifaceted characters who are at once an individual and a reflection of their culture and thus support the cultural and existential themes that pervade the narrative.

This analysis will specifically investigate Soyinka's language choices across dialogue, narration, and descriptive elements to reveal how elements like vocabulary, structure, and cultural symbolism shape character portrayal. As Obafemi (2012) observes, Soyinka's integration of Yoruba idioms, proverbs, and metaphors extends beyond stylistic ornamentation; rather, it plays a central role in defining characters' moral perspectives, social allegiances, and psychological depth. By examining these stylistic choices, this study will explore how Soyinka's language conveys character complexity, facilitating a deeper understanding of identity as shaped by language, culture, and the postcolonial experience.

Previous Scholarship on Soyinka

Wole Soyinka's oeuvre has always been praised for its elaborate treatment of Yoruba culture and mythology, and for using it to address postcolonial questions of identity and socio-political issues (Jeyifo, 2003). Characteristic of his writing style is the ability of language to construct intricate characters who harmonise the subjective and the collective, and express moral and spiritual questions of Yoruba cosmology. As noted by Sandile (2003) in his interpretation of Soyinka's *Idanre*, mythmaking becomes a way of identifying and nation-making. Sandile states that Soyinka's characters frequently perform as mythic archetype that, as reflections of Yoruba cultural values that have been carried over to modernity, act as reflections of Yoruba culture. As Gibbs (1981) highlights in his critical essay, Soyinka can be distinguished by his capacity to draw together the oral, and the literary mode, to enrich the lives of his characters in both traditional and modern terms. Language use by Soyinka is systematic in aiming to inscribe his characters in their cultural and spiritual realities. For example, Gibbs

details the way in which Soyinka utilizes Yoruba proverbs and idiomatic expressions to define the characters who could be moral agents, whose responses and choices fit into or diverge from the expectations of the group.

Haney (1990) provides an analysis of Soyinka's ritualistic drama that emphasises the importance of language in establishing understanding between characters and the environment. Soyinka's characters, Haney notes, sometimes represent the battle between rational agnosticism and mystical insight, an idea heightened by his symbolic and ritualistic use of dialogue. This tension between language and ritual places Soyinka's characters in a liminal space, which encapsulates a more general postcolonial antagonism between tradition and modernity. Jeyifo (2003) also highlights Soyinka's capacity to use characters as vehicles of political criticism. He provides evidence on how Soyinka exploits language to mock sociopolitical personalities exposing the shortcomings of leadership in the postcolonial world of Africa. Olorunto (1988) complements this view by examining Soyinka's trickster figures, whose linguistic dexterity reveals the satire and moral undertones embedded in his characterization. Msiska (2007) discusses the wider ramifications of language and identity on Soyinka's writings, above all the ways in which his characters transit postcolonial hybridity. According to Msiska, Soyinka's linguistic style reflects the negotiation of identities shaped by the convergence of Yoruba tradition and colonial modernity. These linguistic approaches not only establish personified characters, but also constitute a perspective on shared cultural strength despite the trauma of past upheaval.

The Role of Stylistics in Character Development

The linguistic analysis of character representation has been the basis of every stylistic analysis, perhaps even more so in writing where the cultural and narrative complexity are interwoven, e.g. Stylistics (i.e., the notion of the use of language for both character and thematic shaping) provides novel paradigms with insights into authorial strategies and subtle characters'

shaping. One of the main weapons in its arsenal is Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) pioneered by Halliday (1978), a theory that examines, from the perspective of language, how choices in language encode social relations and individual identities. SFG is especially useful in Soyinka's writing since it is able to illustrate how the language articulations contribute to the representation of a cultural identity and the psychodynamic complexity of characters. As Halliday's (1994) definition of language as a "meaning-making resource" looks to be stereotypical of Soyinka's use of language as a vehicle to show characters' social cultural position and their response to issues of colonialism and indigenous struggle.

The second is narrative stylistics, a chapter of stylistics dealing with the narrative potential of language, which has proved of great help in the work of Soyinka. Narrative stylistics, as the theory is explained by Toolan (2001), is the analysis of how language decisions from within a narration can disclose latent psychological and thematic content, and this idea appears to be especially suitable for Soyinka's narratives. When used in character dialogue, in particular, Soyinka's deployment of culturally grounded proverbs and idiomatic expressions, not just provides information about character, but also gives expression to a characteristically Yoruba viewpoint, thereby underwriting the characters' cultural context (Kumar, 2011). These kind of "language moves" are so important in the development of characters and their reactions to society and their own internal struggles in their native environment. Critics can then unravel how the language is not only a medium of conversation, but a sense of identity and resistance within a postcolonial world through the discourse of narrative stylistics.

They owe their origin to indigenous culture, but, at the same time, they are dealing with the legacies of colonialism. This solipsism is often evident in Soyinka use of the English language to accommodate Yoruba grammatical structures and colloquialisms, thereby allowing the same to be reflected in the language of Soyinka's characters, who are endowed with the double nature. Alarmingly, Larsen (1983) states that in *The Forest of Oludumare*, Soyinka's

characters use language as means of spiritual archetypal manifestation (e.g., through the use of rich, symbolic and illustrative language), which draws on the metaphysics and ethics of Yoruba cosmology. These frameworks point to the advantages of stylistic analysis as a tool for understanding explaining Soyinka's work, and in particular, for understanding the development of characters within a culturally layered text. The functional approach to language so characteristic of SFG [the single factor groups model] together with the focus on narrative voice in narrative stylistics [C. Clark, *Attributing narratives*, Cardiff University Press, Cardiff 2004] allow a more integrated analysis of the craft of Soyinka's language namely, so that each character's language use reflects not only a personal expression, but at the same time, a reflection of grand social-political insights.

Characterization in African Literature

African literature has always been known for its unique story telling styles, many of which are derivative of oral tradition and mythological structures. These elements are vital in the development of characters, and many African writers explore language as an expression of individual and collective identities. Achebe (1958) was among the first to illustrate how oral storytelling forms can shape character portrayal, notably in *Things Fall Apart*, where the protagonist's cultural and linguistic environment becomes central to his identity and ultimate fate. Achebe's work demonstrates that character is not just personal but social, shaped by collective beliefs and traditional norms passed through generations (Achebe, 1958). Writers such as Soyinka, and Amos Tutuola do the same, integrating Yoruba mythological and spiritual beliefs into their characters, who can often represent both a human and a divine aspect. Following Irele (2001), Soyinka's characters are frequently archetypal figures derived from Yoruba mythology, in which the individual is inextricably linked to greater cosmic and social forces. This relationship is an important one, because it helps us to see character not as an end in itself, but as a means of exploring larger questions of fate, ethics, and human endurance in

the Yoruba view of the world (Irele, 2001). The above representations indicate that characterization in African literature is a crossroad of individual will and spiritual predestination, where characters are often moulded by mythic and social forces greater than them (Irele, 2001).

More than that, a lot of African literary traditions place characters in certain cultural identities and moral systems through language, and this is usually done using idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and native language words. Barber (2003) explains that in Yoruba literature, for example, characters are often developed through a rich use of proverbial language, which not only reveals their personalities but also aligns them with the moral and social expectations of the community. As Barber points out, oral traditions do play a special part in the creation of characters, as many of the speakers in African literature seem to speak with the voice of the community's wisdom and sociomoral beliefs (Barber, 2003). Therefore, the incorporation of native linguistic components does not only enhance characterization but also places them in their cultural ethos. A perfect example of this is Soyinka's *In the Forest of Oludumare* with characters that represent the traditional Yoruba archetypes of the trickster, the healer, and the seer. These archetypes not only make the characters more complex but also emphasize the cultural legitimacy of the story. Ojaide states that the use of African spiritual archetypes in character development is a trademark of modern African literature, for a writer such as Soyinka, who is deliberately combating Western individualism, uses the character as a communal being (Ojaide, 1996). This approach resonates with the oral tradition's focus on collective values and provides readers with a character portrayal that is both contextually grounded and universally resonant.

The blending of oral tradition and mythological structures in African literature thus allows authors to craft characters who are complex and multilayered, reflecting both individual traits and collective cultural identities. This nuanced portrayal is particularly evident in works

by Nigerian writers, where language and folklore are used to create characters that resonate with readers on both a cultural and existential level (Irele, 2001; Barber, 2003). Consequently, African literature's approach to characterization continues to provide rich material for stylistic analysis, especially in examining how characters are crafted through the lens of cultural identity and collective memory.

Theoretical Framework: Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

The analysis of language and character portrayal in literary texts has been a crucial aspect of literary criticism and linguistics. One of the most influential theories in this regard is the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) approach, which focuses on the social and functional aspects of language (Halliday, 1978). Within the SFG framework, the concept of transitivity plays a significant role in understanding the language and character portrayal in literary texts. This essay aims to explore the theoretical framework of transitivity in SFG and its application in the analysis of language and character portrayal. Transitivity, in SFG, refers to how language represents the flow of events, actions, and processes in a text (Halliday, 1978). It involves the analysis of clauses and phrases to identify the participants, processes, and circumstances involved in the represented events. According to Halliday (1994), transitivity is a fundamental concept in SFG, as it reveals language's social and ideological meanings. In the context of literary analysis, transitivity can provide valuable insights into the characterisation of individuals and groups, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which they operate.

One of the key aspects of transitivity is the distinction between material, mental, and relational processes (Halliday, 1994). Material processes involve physical actions, such as "he ran" or "she wrote." Mental processes, on the other hand, involve cognitive states, such as "he thought" or "she believed." Relational processes, which include attributive and identifying clauses, express relationships between entities, such as "he is a doctor" or "she is happy." The distribution of these process types can reveal the character's personality, motivations, and

social status. For instance, a character who frequently uses mental processes may be portrayed as introspective or indecisive, while a character who uses material processes may be portrayed as action-oriented or assertive. Furthermore, transitivity can also reveal the power dynamics and social relationships between characters. According to Fairclough (1992), the use of transitivity can be seen as a way of exercising power and control over others. For example, a character who uses the imperative mood, such as “do this” or “go there,” may be portrayed as dominant or authoritative, while a character who uses interrogative mood, such as “what shall I do?” or “where shall I go?”, may be portrayed as submissive or uncertain. This highlights the importance of transitivity in understanding the social and power relationships between characters in a literary text.

In addition, transitivity can also be used to analyse the narrative voice and perspective in literary texts. According to Simpson (2004), the use of transitivity can influence the reader’s interpretation of the narrative voice and perspective. For instance, a narrative that uses predominantly material processes may create a sense of objectivity or detachment, while a narrative that uses predominantly mental processes may create a sense of subjectivity or intimacy. This highlights the importance of transitivity in understanding the narrative structure and the author’s intentions in a literary text. This theoretical framework of transitivity in SFG provides a valuable tool for analysing language and character portrayal in literary texts. By examining the distribution of process types, power dynamics, and narrative voice, transitivity can reveal the social, cultural, and ideological meanings encoded in language. As Halliday (1978) notes, “the analysis of transitivity is a key to understanding the social and functional aspects of language” (p. 123). Therefore, transitivity should be considered a crucial aspect of literary analysis, as it provides a nuanced understanding of the language and character portrayal in literary texts.

Methodology

This study adopts transitivity analysis, a component of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), as the primary analytical tool to explore how Wole Soyinka employs language to portray characters in *In the Forest of Oludumare*. Based on the processes, subjects, and situations covered in the text, the analysis shows the way linguistic choices reveal characters' identities, roles, and interactions.

Textual Selection

Excerpts with key characters were purposively selected on the basis of the richness of the character interactions, the self-expression and narrative relevance thereof. These include:

- i. Scenes containing characters disclosing their functions, aims and affiliations.
- ii. Narrated accounts orienting the reader to individuals confronted with cultural, spiritual, or moral difficulties.
- iii. Scenes containing symbolic actions or events important to the plot.

Analytical Framework: Transitivity System

Transitivity system classifies clauses according to the kind of processes (verbs) deployed, the status of participants, and context in which actions take place. This framework allows the study to reveal how Soyinka's language builds character identity and social ties. The six process types include:

- i. **Material Processes:** Events or activities that show characters' physical activities or agency.
- ii. **Mental Processes:** Thoughts, perceptions or emotions expressed or implicitly evoked which reveal characters' inner mental lives.
- iii. **Relational Processes:** Clauses denoting relationships (i.e., describing the interaction between entities or objects) and/or characters (i.e., revealing the characteristics of the character).

- iv. **Verbal Processes:** Lexical utterance of speech acts expressing authority, dialogue dynamics and persuasive power.
- v. **Behavioural Processes:** Sub-mental manifestations of states such as laughing or crying, emotional states and psychological states.
- vi. **Existential Processes:** Clauses indicating existence or events, which are commonly linked to cultural or religious ideas.

Participants: Investigation of who (or what) carries out or is involved in each process and what this reveals about their personality characteristics and roles.

Circumstances: Examination of adverbial phrases that provide context, such as time, place, or manner, enriching the portrayal of characters' environments and actions.

Data Collection and Analysis

- i. **Close Reading and Annotation:** Annotated passages included process types, participants and situations noted. Patterns of language use were identified to disclose characters' identities, social class and psychological conditions.
- ii. **Qualitative Analysis:** Transitivity patterns were examined in order to explain how characters are situated in relation to their own actions, to other characters, and to the wider cultural context.

Interpretation and Synthesis

- i. **Character Agency and Identity:** Transitivity patterns were interpreted to assess characters' levels of agency, emotional complexity, and relational dynamics.
- ii. **Cultural and Narrative Depth:** The results were condensed to investigate the extent to which Soyinka's linguistic devices weave together character description and Yoruba cultural values, as well as the thematic issues in the narrative.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section analyses selected passages from Wole Soyinka's *In the Forest of Oludumare*, using transitivity as a stylistic tool to explore character portrayal. The analysis focuses on the processes, participants, and circumstances Soyinka uses to construct the identities, roles, and relationships of key characters. Findings are discussed under key thematic headings.

1. Processes

A. Material Processes (Actions/Events): The material process in Systemic Functional Grammar deals with actions, events, and happenings. It reflects physical or tangible activities performed by an Actor (the doer of the action) upon a Goal (the recipient or object of the action).

Excerpt 1

The Description of Akara-ogun

that man among men, Akara-ogun, he with a life-and-death commitment to his stomach, the same who battled the wild Agbako in the Forest of a Thousand Demons, journeyed to Mount Langbodo and back, he who visited me that other time with the tales of his adventures that earned him renown throughout the land.

In this excerpt, Akara-ogun is the central actor engaging in several actions.

Clause Breakdown:

“That man among men, Akara-Ogun”. This sets Akara-ogun as the main participant (Actor) but does not directly contain a process. “He with a life-and-death commitment to his stomach”. While descriptive, this clause provides attributive information rather than involving a material process. “The same who battled the wild Agbako in the Forest of a Thousand Demons”

- Actor: Akara-ogun
- Material Process: battled
- Goal: the wild Agbako

- Circumstance: in the Forest of a Thousand Demons

“Journeyed to Mount Langbodo and back”

- Actor: Akara-ogun

- Material Process: journeyed

- Circumstance: to Mount Langbodo and back

“He who visited me that other time with the tales of his adventures that earned him renown throughout the land”

- Actor: Akara-ogun

- Material Process: visited

- Goal: me

- Circumstance: that other time

- Material Process (Embedded): earned

- Goal (Embedded): him renown

- Circumstance (Embedded): throughout the land

In this excerpt, the material processes—battled, journeyed, visited, and earned—depict Akara-ogun as a dynamic and active figure. His actions reflect physical courage (battled the wild Agbako), endurance (journeyed to Mount Langbodo and back), and influence (earned renown throughout the land). The circumstances such as in the Forest of a Thousand Demons and throughout the land highlight the scale and impact of Akara-ogun’s exploits, presenting him as a larger-than-life character. The action earned (renown) embedded within the final clause emphasises the reward of Akara-ogun’s efforts, linking his physical actions to his social recognition. This excerpt constructs Akara-ogun as an archetype of the heroic adventurer. His actions reflect bravery, persistence, and fame, aligning with traditional oral storytelling techniques where heroes are characterized by their deeds. These processes vividly animate Akara-ogun’s character while advancing the narrative of his legendary status.

Excerpt 2

The Description of Olowo-aiye

Before my father left home, he had lived true to a hunter's calling. Numerous charms circled his waist, and rings of supernatural powers weighed down upon his fingers. Six cows were slaughtered as sacrifice for his departure.

Clause Breakdown:

“Before my father left home, he had lived true to a hunter's calling.”

- Actor: “my father”

- Process: “had lived”

- Goal: “true to a hunter's calling”

These clauses emphasize the habitual and committed actions of Olowo-aiye before his departure. The material process “had lived” portrays him as deeply engaged in his identity as a hunter, tying his actions to his societal role.

“Numerous charms circled his waist.”

- Actor: “Numerous charms”

- Process: “circled”

- Goal: “his waist”

Here, the charms serve as active agents, symbolizing supernatural protection and power. The material process “circled” suggests dynamic movement, highlighting the visual and symbolic significance of the charms.

“and rings of supernatural powers weighed down upon his fingers.”

- Actor: “rings of supernatural powers”

- Process: “weighed down”

- Goal: “upon his fingers”

The “rings of supernatural powers” performs a material action, “weighed down,” which conveys both physical and metaphorical significance. It suggests the burden of responsibility and power that Olowo-aiye carries as a hunter.

“Six cows were slaughtered as sacrifice for his departure.”

- Actor: “Six cows”

- Process: “were slaughtered”

This clause shifts to a passive construction, emphasising the cultural practice of sacrifice. The material process “were slaughtered” foregrounds the ritualistic preparation, portraying Olowo-aiye’s departure as significant and ceremonial.

This excerpt vividly employs material processes to depict Olowo-aiye’s identity and societal role as a hunter. The actions associated with him and the sacrifices made for his journey reinforce his status as a larger-than-life figure. The processes “lived,” “circled,” and “slaughtered” emphasize the interplay of human agency, supernatural elements, and cultural rituals. These details create a rich portrayal of Olowo-aiye’s character through his actions and the material world surrounding him.

Excerpt 3

The Description of Esu-kekere-ode

After my father had wandered aimlessly for a while, he and this tiny kobold finally set eyes upon each other. A memorable day it was: danger met with trouble, succubus confronted incubus, two lions looked each other in the eye. The name of this creature was Esu-kekere-ode, Tiny Fiend of the Border. He wore neither smock nor trousers, he neither sported a cap nor wore a loincloth, deploying only leaves to cover his genital region.

The excerpt focuses on actions and events that describe Esu-kekere-ode and his encounter with the narrator’s father. The material process emphasizes physical actions,

encounters, and descriptions that contribute to the vivid portrayal of Esu-kekere-ode as a formidable and otherworld being.

Identification of Material Clauses

“After my father had wandered aimlessly for a while”

- Actor: My father
- Process: Wandered (material action)

This clause establishes the purposeless movement of the father, setting the stage for the encounter.

“He and this tiny kobold finally set eyes upon each other”

- Actor: He (the father) and this tiny kobold
- Process: Set (material action)
- Goal: Eyes upon each other

This is the pivotal moment of physical encounter, signifying a direct interaction between the two entities.

“Danger met with trouble, succubus confronted incubus, two lions looked each other in the eye”

- Actor: Danger, succubus, two lions
- Process: Met, confronted, looked (material actions)
- Goal: Trouble, incubus, each other

These metaphorical descriptions intensify the confrontation, using dynamic material processes to evoke a sense of foreboding and conflict.

“He wore neither smock nor trousers, he neither sported a cap nor wore a loincloth”

- Actor: He (Esu-kekere-ode)
- Process: Wore, sported (material actions)
- Goal: Neither smock, trousers, cap, nor loincloth

The lack of clothing, highlighted through negated material actions, reinforces Esu-kekere-ode's raw and untamed nature.

“Deploying only leaves to cover his genital region”

- Actor: He (Esu-kekere-ode)
- Process: Deploying (material action)
- Goal: Leaves

This clause signals a minimal action that emphasizes his primal existence and connection to nature. The use of material processes in this excerpt highlights Esu-kekere-ode's feral essence and sets the tone for his role in the narrative. The verbs (e.g., “wandered”, “met”, “wore”, “deployed”) are action-focused, lending dynamism to the scene. The juxtaposition of negated actions (e.g., “wore neither smock nor trousers”) with active deployment (“deploying leaves”) contrasts civilization with wildness, aligning Esu-kekere-ode with the untamed wilderness of his environment. This analysis also underscores the significance of physical description and metaphorical confrontation in shaping the narrative's tension and character portrayal. The material processes not only narrate action but also evoke the mythic and symbolic stature of Esu-kekere-ode.

B. Relational Processes (Attribution/Identification): Relational processes focus on states of being, classification, or identification, providing deeper insights into characters and their attributes.

Excerpt 4

The Description of Olowo-aiye

Ah, a most meticulous man was my father. There are men who simply surpass other men - Olowo-aiye was a colossus of a man. The day my father girded himself for that hunt, when it came to parting company with all kinds of relations, it was an earthquake impact upon the household.

In this excerpt, Soyinka highlights the attributes and identity of Olowo-aiye, emphasising his exceptional nature and the impact of his actions.

Identification Clauses

“Ah, a most meticulous man was my father.”

- Carrier: My father
- Process: Was (identifying relational)
- Identifier: A most meticulous man

This clause identifies Olowo-aiye with the trait of meticulousness, foregrounding his precision and careful nature.

“There are men who simply surpass other men - Olowo-aiye was a colossus of a man.”

- Carrier: Olowo-aiye
- Process: Was (identifying relational)
- Identifier: A colossus of a man

The clause positions Olowo-aiye as superior and extraordinary, drawing on the metaphor of a “colossus” to signify his strength and stature.

Attribution Clauses

“The day my father girded himself for that hunt, when it came to parting company with all kinds of relations, it was an earthquake impact upon the household.”

- Carrier: It (the event of parting)
- Process: Was (attributive relational)
- Attribute: An earthquake impact upon the household

Here, the event of the father preparing for the hunt is attributed as an “earthquake impact,” symbolizing its disruptive and significant nature. The relational processes in this excerpt are central to character development. Through identification, Olowo-aiye is depicted as meticulous and colossal, underscoring his unique status and larger-than-life presence. The

attributive clause magnifies the significance of his actions by likening the emotional and social disturbance of his departure to an earthquake. This creates an aura of reverence and elevates Olowo-aiye's stature in the narrative. The combination of relational processes with powerful metaphors enhances the stylistic richness and reinforces his legendary identity.

Excerpt 5

The Description of Esu-kekere-ode

After my father had wandered aimlessly for a while, he and this tiny kobold finally set eyes upon each other. A memorable day it was: danger met with trouble, succubus confronted incubus, two lions looked each other in the eye. The name of this creature was Esu-kekere-ode, Tiny Fiend of the Border. He wore neither smock nor trousers, he neither sported a cap nor wore a loincloth, deploying only leaves to cover his genital region.

In this excerpt, the relational processes contribute to constructing Esu-kekere-ode's identity and emphasising his peculiar characteristics.

Identification of Relational Clauses

“The name of this creature was Esu-kekere-ode, Tiny Fiend of the Border.”

- Carrier: The name of this creature
- Relational Process (Identifying): Was
- Identifier: Esu-kekere-ode, Tiny Fiend of the Border

This clause identifies the character explicitly by linking his name to his mythical role and geographical significance.

“He wore neither smock nor trousers, he neither sported a cap nor wore a loincloth.”

- Carrier: He
- Relational Process (Attributive): Wore, sported (negated states)
- Attribute: Neither smock nor trousers, neither cap nor loincloth

Here, negation is used to attribute a lack of conventional clothing to Esu-kekere-ode, symbolizing his non-conformity and primal nature.

“Deploying only leaves to cover his genital region.”

- Carrier: Leaves
- Relational Process (Attributive): To cover
- Attribute: His genital region

This clause attributes a specific function to the leaves, adding to his raw and symbolic connection to nature. The relational processes in this excerpt are critical in constructing Esu-kekere-ode’s identity as a figure that embodies wildness and supernatural power. The identification process (“was Esu-kekere-ode, Tiny Fiend of the Border”) establishes his mythic stature, while the attributive processes (e.g., “wore neither smock nor trousers”) contrast him sharply with human norms, emphasising his untamed essence. The absence of conventional attire and the use of leaves for coverage highlight a raw, primal connection to the natural world, reinforcing the thematic interplay between civilization and wilderness. These relational processes thus serve to position Esu-kekere-ode as an “other”, both familiar and alien, within the narrative framework.

C. Verbal Processes (Saying): Verbal processes represent acts of saying, often involving a Sayer, a Receiver, and a Verbiage.

Excerpt 6

The Direct Speech of Esu-kekere-ode

“Who are you? What are you? What are you worth? Of what are you made? How are you rated? What do you seek? What do you want? What are you looking at? What do you see? What’s in your head? What ails you? Where are you from? Where are you headed? Where do you call home? What earth do you tread answer me! Son of mortals, answer me in one word!

Surely you have courted trouble this day, you have climbed the tree beyond its branches, you have fallen from a great height to a well, you have heedlessly swallowed poison, ...

In this excerpt, the verbal acts of Esu-kekere-ode are confrontational, interrogative, and laden with symbolic imagery, contributing to the narrative's dramatic tension.

Identification of Verbal Clauses

“Who are you? What are you? What are you worth? Of what are you made?”

- Sayer: Esu-kekere-ode
- Verbal Process: Implied through direct speech
- Verbiage: Questions directed at the addressee (Olowo-aiye, Akara-ogun's father)

These interrogative clauses serve to establish dominance and unsettle the listener, forcing self-reflection and confrontation.

“Surely you have courted trouble this day, you have climbed the tree beyond its branches, you have fallen from a great height to a well, you have heedlessly swallowed poison...”

- Sayer: Esu-kekere-ode
- Verbal Process: Implied (statement as verbalization of judgment)
- Verbiage: Allegorical statements accusing the listener of recklessness and foretelling

doom. Here, the speech shifts from interrogation to an evaluative and metaphor-laden pronouncement, heightening the tension. Esu-kekere-ode's barrage of questions creates a confrontational tone. The rapid sequence destabilizes the listener, asserting the sayer's control over the conversation. It is both a challenge and a test, positioning Esu-kekere-ode as an authority figure guarding a sacred or mystical territory. The later portion of Esu-kekere-ode's speech employs allegorical language (“climbed the tree beyond its branches”, “swallowed poison”). These verbal processes reveal his rhetorical style, blending figurative language with an air of inevitability, painting a vivid picture of danger and foreshadowing conflict. Esu-kekere-ode's verbal processes portray him as a figure of immense verbal prowess. His speech

reflects arrogance, mystique, and a sense of ritualistic obligation, presenting him as both a gatekeeper and a judge. In sum, the verbal processes in this excerpt intensify the narrative dynamics. Esu-kekere-ode's speech is crafted to dominate, unsettle, and foreshadow, contributing to the construction of his mythic authority and the overall tension of the encounter.

Excerpt 7

The Direct speech of Anjonnu-iberu

'Anjonnu-Iberu roared with laughter. He said, "You have no idea what's in store, What kind of passage do you think this is? No one can enter here unless he or she swears on this book. I am Anjonnu-Iberu, Ghommid of Fear, who serves as Guardian to the Gateway of the Forest of the King of Heaven. I am no simply today's eboru, I have been here for ages, my sojourn here boasts just below a count of a thousand years. So, bring yourself over here, come and swear on this register. If you fail to swear, your punishment will be most severe. If you give false testimony, the lion will have you for his meal- restraint on the neck of the insane! - when I have bludgeoned you on the back of the neck you will have tasted a dose of what is yet to come.

In this excerpt, Anjonnu-Iberu's verbal processes demonstrate his authority, ominous nature, and function as a gatekeeper.

Identification of Verbal Processes

"Anjonnu-Iberu roared with laughter."

- Sayer: Anjonnu-Iberu
- Verbal Process: Roared
- Verbiage: (Implicitly, his laughter)

This opening act of roaring laughter is not a neutral utterance but an expressive verbal action.

It signals his disdain and sets the tone for his intimidating speech.

"He said, 'You have no idea what's in store...'"

- Sayer: He (Anjonnu-Iberu)
- Verbal Process: Said
- Verbiage: “You have no idea what’s in store...”

The use of a neutral reporting verb here frames Anjonnu-Iberu’s lengthy, domineering speech. His verbal expressions are marked by a mixture of authority and threat. Anjonnu-Iberu’s speech is structured to assert power. Through direct statements (“I am Anjonnu-Iberu, Ghommid of Fear”) and rhetorical questions (“What kind of passage do you think this is?”), he emphasizes his identity as a fearsome guardian. The verbal process revolves around the act of commanding an oath (“Come and swear on this register”). This imperative establishes the ritualistic significance of the passage and Anjonnu-Iberu’s role as an enforcer of cosmic justice. The detailed warnings (“If you fail to swear, your punishment will be most severe”) amplify the stakes of the interaction. Verbal imagery such as “the lion will have you for his meal” and “restraint on the neck of the insane” further portrays Anjonnu-Iberu as an agent of punishment and terror. The verbal processes in this excerpt are stylistically charged with Anjonnu-Iberu’s imposing presence. His roaring and commanding tone reflect his dominance, while the rich verbiage integrates elements of fear, ritual, and judgment, reinforcing the character’s archetypal role as a gatekeeper to supernatural realms. The interaction showcases the power of language as a tool for control and ritual obligation within the narrative.

D. Mental Processes (Sensing/Perceiving): Mental processes focus on internal experiences of **sensing, perceiving, feeling, or thinking**. These processes typically involve a **Senser** (the experiencer of the mental activity) and a **Phenomenon** (the entity being experienced).

Excerpt 8

The Direct Speech of Olowo-aiye's Mother

'My child, Olowo-aiye, my dear child. My eyes have followed you all through your wanderings. When I could bear it no longer, I asked for leave at the precincts of heaven to come and glimpse you with my eyes. 'True, the dwellers of earth have great knowledge, even so are the dwellers in heaven endowed with great wisdom, but there is no earthly creation or heavenly being who knows where the key to a mother's love is kept, except the God Almighty.

In this excerpt, the mental processes convey deep emotional and spiritual connections, centering on maternal love and divine knowledge.

Identification of Mental Processes

“My eyes have followed you all through your wanderings.”

- Senser: My eyes (metonymically representing the mother)
- Mental Process: Followed (perception)
- Phenomenon: You all through your wanderings

This indicates the mother's constant emotional and perceptual awareness of her child, symbolizing care and concern.

“When I could bear it no longer...”

- Senser: I (the mother)
- Mental Process: Could bear (affection/emotion)
- Phenomenon: It no longer (her inability to endure separation)

This process reflects emotional strain and a mother's longing for reunion.

“I asked for leave at the precincts of heaven to come and glimpse you with my eyes.”

- Senser: I (the mother)
- Mental Process: Glimpse (perception)
- Phenomenon: You

This act of seeking a “glimpse” emphasizes her profound yearning and the spiritual weight of her actions.

“There is no earthly creation or heavenly being who knows where the key to a mother’s love is kept.”

- Senser: Earthly creation or heavenly being
- Mental Process: Knows (cognition)
- Phenomenon: Where the key to a mother’s love is kept

This process highlights the mystery of maternal love, which transcends human and divine understanding, attributing ultimate knowledge to God. The mental processes in this excerpt serve to foreground maternal devotion as both deeply emotional and transcendent. The mother’s perception (“followed” and “glimpse”) establishes her enduring vigilance and spiritual longing, while her emotions (“could bear it no longer”) underscore the pain of separation. The reference to cognition (“knows where the key... is kept”) elevates maternal love to a divine mystery, known only to God, blending human affection with metaphysical themes. By emphasising these processes, the excerpt reinforces the mother’s unwavering connection to her child and situates maternal love as a bridge between earthly existence and divine realms. This interplay of perception, emotion, and cognition enriches the spiritual and emotional depth of the narrative.

E. Existential Processes (Existence): Existential processes express the **existence of something** and typically use the verb “**be**” or verbs indicating presence. These processes involve an **Existent** (the entity being established as existing) and often an expression of **circumstance** (where, when, or how the entity exists).

Excerpt 9

The Direct speech of Baba Onirungbon-yeuke

The man invited me to rise. His mouth opened and he began to speak: 'Rise, son of man, I am known as the Furry Bearded-One, who resides at the promontory of the rock. It is quite a while since I took up residence here, over three thousand years. I live here at the very ends of the earth, the wall that surrounds my home separates me from the dwellers of heaven. Within this compound however you will find many dwellers of heaven with whom we socialize. When you have eaten, I shall take you to the home of a most important Spirit, whose name is Death, for even as he keeps a home at the borders of heaven, so does he keep one at this halfway outpost between heaven and earth. When we have paid our courtesy visit to Death, we shall visit his wife-for she keeps a separate home, a Spirit whose name is Disease, a most depressing personality She is actually related to me on the mother side.

Identification of Existential Processes

“It is quite a while since I took up residence here, over three thousand years.”

- Existential Process: Is (denotes existence over time)
- Existent: Quite a while

This conveys the duration of Baba Onirungbon-yeuke’s existence in the location, emphasising timelessness.

“I live here at the very ends of the earth.”

- Existential Process: Live (indicating presence)
- Existent: I

This establishes Baba’s presence in a distant, mystical setting, marking the boundary between the earthly and the celestial.

“Within this compound, however, you will find many dwellers of heaven with whom we socialize.”

- Existential Process: Will find (existence in space)
- Existent: Many dwellers of heaven

This highlights the coexistence of earthly and celestial beings in a shared space.

“For even as he keeps a home at the borders of heaven, so does he keep one at this halfway outpost between heaven and earth.”

- Existential Process: Keeps (indicating continued existence)
- Existent: A home

This establishes Death’s dual existence in symbolic transitional spaces, linking heaven and earth.

“She is actually related to me on the mother side.”

- Existential Process: Is (denoting a relational existence)
- Existent: She

This implies the existence of kinship between Disease and the speaker, reinforcing familial and metaphysical connections. The existential processes in this excerpt emphasize **timelessness**, **liminality**, and **coexistence**. By situating the speaker and other entities (Death, Disease, and celestial beings) in spaces that bridge boundaries (earth, heaven, outposts), the narrative underscores a **world of transitions and dualities**. These processes ground the supernatural in spatial and relational terms, making the metaphysical accessible through vivid descriptions of existence. The focus on existential verbs creates a contemplative tone, inviting the reader to reflect on the interplay between life, death, and the eternal. This style aligns with the mythic and allegorical nature of the text, situating its characters and settings in a cosmic schema of existence.

2. Participants’ Analysis

Excerpt 1: Akara-ogun

Clause 3: “The same who battled the wild Agbako in the Forest of a Thousand Demons”

- Actor: Akara-ogun
- Goal: The wild Agbako

The Actor (Akara-ogun) is portrayed as heroic, with a focus on his physical bravery. The wild Agbako as the Goal emphasizes the magnitude of the challenge, aligning Akara-ogun with traditional Yoruba hero archetypes.

Clause 4: “Journeyed to Mount Langbodo and back”

- Actor: Akara-ogun

The absence of a direct Goal centers the Actor’s endurance and adventurous spirit, highlighting his epic journey.

Clause 5: “He who visited me that other time with the tales of his adventures that earned him renown throughout the land”

- Actor: Akara-ogun
- Goal: Me (narrator)
- Embedded Actor: His adventures
- Embedded Goal: Him renown

Akara-ogun’s dual role as both the physical Actor and a storyteller bridges his deeds with his social influence. The embedded clause links action to recognition, reinforcing his legendary status.

Excerpt 2: Olowo-aiye

Clause 1: “Before my father left home, he had lived true to a hunter’s calling”

- Actor: My father (Olowo-aiye)
- Goal: True to a hunter’s calling

Olowo-aiye’s role as Actor ties his actions to his identity, grounding him in his cultural role as a hunter.

Clause 2: “Numerous charms circled his waist”

- Actor: Numerous charms
- Goal: His waist

The charms act as an active participant, symbolizing supernatural protection and Olowo-aiye's integration of the physical and metaphysical.

Clause 4: "Six cows were slaughtered as sacrifice for his departure"

- Actor: Six cows
- Recipient/Goal: The ritual (implicit)

The focus shifts to the ceremonial role of the sacrifice, underscoring Olowo-aiye's societal importance and the cultural value of his journey.

Excerpt 3: Esu-kekere-ode

Clause 2: "He and this tiny kobold finally set eyes upon each other"

- Actors: He (father) and tiny kobold (Esu-kekere-ode)
- Goal: Each other

The dual Actors emphasize mutual recognition, setting up Esu-kekere-ode as an equal force.

Clause 4: "He wore neither smock nor trousers"

- Actor: He (Esu-kekere-ode)
- Goal: Smock, trousers, cap, loincloth (negated)

Esu-kekere-ode's lack of conventional attire contrasts him sharply with human norms, framing him as untamed and otherworldly.

Clause 5: "Deploying only leaves to cover his genital region"

- Actor: He (Esu-kekere-ode)
- Goal: Leaves

The minimal action suggests a connection to nature, reinforcing his raw and primal identity.

Excerpt 7: Anjonnu-Iberu

Clause 1: "I am Anjonnu-Iberu, Ghommid of Fear."

- Carrier: I (Anjonnu-Iberu)
- Attribute: Ghommid of Fear

Anjonnu-Iberu establishes his identity and role as a figure of terror and authority.

Clause 4: “If you fail to swear, your punishment will be most severe.”

- Actor: You (Receiver)
- Goal: Your punishment
- Attribute: Most severe

The participant structure highlights the consequences of disobedience, portraying Anjonnu-Iberu as an enforcer of ritual laws.

Excerpt 8: Olowo-aiye’s Mother

Clause 1: “My eyes have followed you all through your wanderings.”

- Senser: My eyes (Mother)
- Phenomenon: You all through your wanderings

The mother is portrayed as vigilant and deeply connected to her child’s movements, symbolizing maternal devotion.

Clause 4: “No one knows where the key to a mother’s love is kept.”

- Senser: No one
- Phenomenon: Where the key to a mother’s love is kept

This highlights the mystery and depth of maternal love, elevating it to a divine level.

Excerpt 9: Baba Onirungbon-yeuke

Clause 1: “I live here at the very ends of the earth.”

- Actor: I (Baba Onirungbon-yeuke)
- Circumstance: At the very ends of the earth

Baba’s existence is tied to a liminal space, reinforcing his mythical role.

Clause 4: “You will find many dwellers of heaven with whom we socialize.”

- Actor: You
- Goal: Many dwellers of heaven

The interaction between earth and heaven is emphasized, showcasing Baba as a mediator.

Observations for Participants Analysis

1. **Heroic and Archetypal Figures:** Characters such as Akara-ogun and Olowo-aiye are portrayed as heroic figures, their actions (as Actors) tied to their societal and cultural roles, reflecting bravery, persistence, and ritual significance.
2. **Mythical and Primal Entities:** Figures like Esu-kekere-ode and Anjonnu-Iberu are constructed as otherworldly through relational clauses and negated attributes, emphasizing their raw, primal, or supernatural natures.
3. **Symbolic Use of Non-Human Participants:** Objects such as charms, cows, and clothing act as Participants, enriching the narrative with cultural and supernatural significance.
4. **Dual Roles:** Many characters function as both Actors and Goals, linking their physical actions to their societal or personal recognition, as seen in Akara-ogun's earned renown.
5. **Maternal and Spiritual Connections:** Characters like Olowo-aiye's mother and Baba Onirungbon-yeuke highlight emotional and spiritual ties through sensing, existing, and identifying processes, deepening the narrative's thematic resonance.
6. **Dynamic and Static Portrayals:** While some characters, such as Akara-ogun and Esu-kekere-ode, are depicted dynamically through actions and speech, others, like Olowo-aiye's mother, are portrayed through relational and mental processes, emphasizing reflection and depth.

3. Circumstances Analysis

The Circumstances in Soyinka's text enhance the narrative by situating actions, linking characters to their environments, and enriching symbolic and cultural meanings.

Excerpt 1: Akara-ogun

Clause 3: “Battled the wild Agbako in the Forest of a Thousand Demons”

- Circumstance: In the Forest of a Thousand Demons

This spatial Circumstance situates Akara-ogun’s action within a mythical and perilous setting, reinforcing his bravery and the fantastical nature of his deeds.

Clause 4: “Journeyed to Mount Langbodo and back”

- Circumstance: To Mount Langbodo and back

The spatial Circumstance highlights the epic nature of Akara-ogun’s journey, emphasizing endurance and exploration.

Clause 5: “Earned him renown throughout the land”

Circumstance: Throughout the land

This Circumstance underscores the widespread impact of Akara-ogun’s achievements, linking his personal actions to collective recognition.

Excerpt 2: Olowo-aiye

Clause 4: “Six cows were slaughtered as sacrifice for his departure”

- Circumstance: As sacrifice for his departure

The Circumstance reflects the cultural and ceremonial importance of Olowo-aiye’s journey, emphasizing its significance to the community.

Excerpt 3: Esu-kekere-ode

Clause 1: “My father had wandered aimlessly for a while”

- Circumstance: Aimlessly, for a while

This Circumstance conveys the purposelessness and duration of the father’s movement, setting up the encounter with Esu-kekere-ode.

Clause 5: “Deploying only leaves to cover his genital region”

- Circumstance: To cover his genital region

The Circumstance ties Esu-kekere-ode's action to his primal and symbolic representation, highlighting his raw connection to nature.

Excerpt 4: Olowo-aiye

Clause 3: "It was an earthquake impact upon the household"

- Circumstance: Upon the household

This spatial Circumstance amplifies the emotional and social disruption caused by Olowo-aiye's departure, emphasizing its gravity.

Excerpt 5: Esu-kekere-ode

Clause 1: "The name of this creature was Esu-kekere-ode, Tiny Fiend of the Border"

- Circumstance: Of the Border

This Circumstance situates Esu-kekere-ode geographically and symbolically, marking him as a liminal figure.

Excerpt 6: Esu-kekere-ode's Speech

Clause 1: "Climbed the tree beyond its branches"

Circumstance: Beyond its branches

This Circumstance metaphorically illustrates the overreach and recklessness of the father's actions, foreshadowing consequences.

Excerpt 7: Anjonnu-Iberu

Clause 4: "For even as he keeps a home at the borders of heaven, so does he keep one at this halfway outpost between heaven and earth"

- Circumstance: At the borders of heaven / at this halfway outpost between heaven and earth

These spatial Circumstances establish Anjonnu-Iberu's liminal role as a gatekeeper between realms, blending the metaphysical and physical.

Excerpt 8: Olowo-aiye's Mother

Clause 1: "My eyes have followed you all through your wanderings"

- Circumstance: All through your wanderings

This temporal-spatial Circumstance reflects the mother's enduring watchfulness and emotional connection to her child.

Clause 3: "I asked for leave at the precincts of heaven to come and glimpse you with my eyes"

- Circumstance: At the precincts of heaven

This spatial Circumstance links the mother's actions to a divine realm, highlighting the spiritual dimension of her love.

Excerpt 9: Baba Onirungbon-yeuke

Clause 1: "I live here at the very ends of the earth"

- Circumstance: At the very ends of the earth

This spatial Circumstance situates Baba in a mystical and remote location, emphasizing his liminal and otherworldly presence.

Clause 4: "Within this compound, however, you will find many dwellers of heaven with whom we socialize"

- Circumstance: Within this compound

This Circumstance depicts a space of coexistence between celestial and earthly beings, reinforcing Baba's role as a mediator.

Observations for Circumstances

1. **Spatial Circumstances:** Frequently employed to situate actions and characters in symbolic or mythic settings, enriching the narrative's cultural and allegorical dimensions.
2. **Temporal Circumstances:** Used sparingly but effectively to emphasize duration and continuity, as seen in the mother's watchfulness.
3. **Symbolic Functions:** Circumstances often carry dual roles, providing literal settings while also reinforcing thematic contrasts (e.g., civilization vs. wilderness, earth vs. heaven).

4. **Cultural and Ritual Contexts:** Many Circumstances highlight the cultural significance of actions, especially in sacrificial and ceremonial contexts.

In *In the Forest of Oludumare*, Wole Soyinka's stylistic choices effectively combine processes, participants, and circumstances to construct complex characters, embed cultural significance, and advance the narrative. This analysis synthesises the findings from each component to identify overarching themes.

1. Heroism and Identity Formation

- **Processes:** Material processes like “battled”, “journeyed” and “earned” depict Akara-ogun's actions as emblematic of the Yoruba heroic tradition, emphasizing physical courage, endurance, and societal recognition.
- **Participants:** Akara-ogun is constructed as a larger-than-life figure, with his actions elevating him to a legendary status. Non-human participants such as the wild Agbako and Mount Langbodo serve as symbolic obstacles that define his heroism.
- **Circumstances:** Spatial markers like “in the Forest of a Thousand Demons” and “to Mount Langbodo” situate Akara-ogun's deeds in mythical landscapes, underscoring the epic nature of his identity formation.

2. The Interplay of Tradition and Supernatural

- **Processes:** Material processes like “circled” and “slaughtered” in Olowo-aiye's description highlight ritual practices, while relational processes (e.g., “was a colossus of a man”) depict his extraordinary role in the community.
- **Participants:** Olowo-aiye is portrayed as embodying both human and supernatural qualities, with charms and sacrifices serving as active participants symbolizing his connection to the metaphysical.
- **Circumstances:** Ritualistic contexts, such as “as sacrifice for his departure,” emphasize the integration of cultural traditions with spiritual beliefs.

3. Otherness and Primal Wildness

- **Processes:** Esu-kekere-ode's actions, such as "wandered," "wore," and "deployed," are material processes that emphasize his raw and untamed nature. Relational processes (e.g., "was Tiny Fiend of the Border") identify him as a liminal and mythical figure.
- **Participants:** Esu-kekere-ode is characterized by his lack of conventional clothing and symbolic connection to nature, positioning him as both primal and otherworldly.
- **Circumstances:** Descriptions like "to cover his genital region" and "of the Border" highlight his role as a liminal figure between civilization and wilderness.

4. Maternal Love and Spiritual Connection

- **Processes:** Mental processes like "followed" and "glimpse" convey Olowo-aiye's mother's emotional vigilance and spiritual devotion.
- **Participants:** The mother is constructed as a Senser deeply tied to her child, with divine realms such as "the precincts of heaven" acting as supporting participants in her journey.
- **Circumstances:** Temporal and spatial markers, such as "all through your wanderings" and "at the precincts of heaven," blend human love with divine intercession.

5. Power and Gatekeeping

- **Processes:** Anjonnu-Iberu's verbal processes, such as "said" and "commanded," reflect his role as a ritual enforcer. Material processes (e.g., "keeps a home") tie him to spaces of cosmic significance.
- **Participants:** Anjonnu-Iberu's identity as the "Ghommid of Fear" establishes him as an authoritative gatekeeper, while figures like Death and Disease further contextualize his role within the metaphysical hierarchy.
- **Circumstances:** Spatial markers like "at the borders of heaven" and "at this halfway outpost" emphasize his liminal position between realms.

6. Cosmic Liminality

- **Processes:** Existential processes such as “live” and “reside” associated with Baba Onirungbon-yeuke highlight timeless existence in transitional spaces.
- **Participants:** Baba is portrayed as a mediator, with his role bridging the celestial and terrestrial. Celestial dwellers and symbolic spaces act as supplementary participants in this liminality.
- **Circumstances:** Descriptions like “at the very ends of the earth” and “within this compound” define his existence in spaces of coexistence and boundary.

Soyinka’s use of Processes, Participants, and Circumstances intertwines action, identity, and setting to explore themes central to Yoruba cosmology and cultural identity. His characters serve as archetypes navigating physical and metaphysical landscapes, with Circumstances grounding their actions in symbolic and ritualistic contexts. This interplay reinforces the narrative’s depth, bridging human experience with mythological and spiritual dimensions.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how Wole Soyinka’s *In the Forest of Oludumare* employs linguistic and stylistic strategies to construct characters and explore themes central to Yoruba cosmology and cultural identity. Through the analysis of processes, participants, and circumstances, it becomes evident that Soyinka integrates material, relational, and mental actions with mythic and symbolic elements to portray his characters as dynamic agents within a richly layered narrative. The material processes reveal the characters' heroic and ritualistic actions, aligning them with archetypes from Yoruba oral traditions. Relational and mental processes further deepen their identities, emphasizing their connections to cultural, spiritual, and emotional dimensions. Participants such as Akara-ogun and Olowo-aiye emerge as heroic figures whose deeds are grounded in Yoruba cultural values, while mythical entities like Esu-kekere-ode and Anjonnu-Iberu embody liminality and primal otherness. Circumstances,

including symbolic locations and ritualistic contexts, amplify the cultural and metaphysical significance of these characters' actions, situating them within a cosmic framework.

The findings underscore the interplay between language and culture in Soyinka's work, illustrating how stylistic choices such as transitivity contribute to the thematic richness and cultural resonance of his narrative. By embedding characters in symbolic actions and mythological spaces, Soyinka bridges the human and the divine, the physical and the metaphysical, offering insights into the Yoruba worldview and its relevance in postcolonial literature. This study not only highlights Soyinka's mastery of language but also reinforces the importance of stylistic analysis in uncovering the cultural and ideological layers within African literary texts. Future research may extend these insights by comparing Soyinka's stylistic techniques to those of other postcolonial authors or by examining how similar linguistic strategies function in different genres or contexts within African literature. Such studies would further illuminate the role of language in shaping identity and preserving cultural heritage in a rapidly globalizing world.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Copyright: © 2026 by Olajuyigbe O. A., Adeagbo, O. A. Author(s) retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial purposes, with proper attribution. Author(s) are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms.

References

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann, 1958.
- Barber, Karin. *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theater*. Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press, 1992.
- Feuser, Willfried F. "Myth, History and Literature in Africa." *Présence Africaine*, no. 146, 1988, pp. 146–172. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24351763>.
- Gibbs, James. *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*. Three Continents Press, 1981.
- Gikandi, Simon, editor. *Encyclopedia of African Literature*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2002. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361269>.
- Halliday, M. A. K. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. Edward Arnold, 1978.
- . *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Edward Arnold, 1994.
- Halliday, M. A. K., and Christian Matthiessen. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 3rd ed., Edward Arnold, 2004.
- Haney, William S. "Soyinka's Ritual Drama: Unity, Postmodernism, and the Mistake of the Intellect." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1990, pp. 33–54. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819320>.
- Irele, F. Abiola. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. Oxford UP, 2001.
- Jeyifo, Biodun. *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, and Postcolonialism*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Kumar, K. N. "Yoruba Tradition and Culture in Wole Soyinka's 'The Lion and the Jewel.'" *International Refereed Research Journal*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2011, pp. 88–97.
- Larsen, Steen. *A Writer and His Gods: A Study of the Importance of Yoruba Myths and Religious Ideas to the Writing of Wole Soyinka*. University of Stockholm, 1983.

- Msiska, Mpalive-Hangson. *Postcolonial Identity in Wole Soyinka*. Rodopi, 2007.
- Obafemi, Olu. *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision*. Joe-Noye Press, 1996.
- Ojaide, Tanure. *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa: Essays on African Poetry*. Carolina Academic Press, 1996.
- Okpewho, Isidore. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity*. Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Olorounto, Sunday B. "Modern Scheming Giants: Satire and the Trickster in Wole Soyinka's Drama." *Callaloo*, no. 35, 1988, pp. 297–308. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930965>.
- Sandile, N. "Mythmaking as Self-Making and Nation-Building: A Reading of Wole Soyinka's 'Idanre.'" *Acta Academica*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2003, pp. 169–83.
- Simpson, Paul. *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. Routledge, 2004.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature, and the African World*. Cambridge UP, 1978.
- . *In the Forest of Olodumare*. Nelson Publishers, 2010.
- Toolan, Michael J. *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. Psychology Press, 2001.