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## Logico-Semantic Relations in Abubakar Othman's Palm of Time: Systemic Functional Analysis

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### Abstract

*Poetry represents one of the most condensed and patterned uses of language, in which meaning is constructed not only through thematic content but also through systematic grammatical organisation (Leech & Short, 2007; Burke, 2021). Although recent stylistic scholarship has emphasised linguistic approaches to poetic meaning, clause-level relations that organise poetic discourse remain underexplored in studies of Nigerian poetry (Adegoju, 2021; Taiwo, 2023). This study examines how logico-semantic relations function in selected poems from Abubakar Othman's (2000) "Palm of Time" and how these relations contribute to poetic meaning and coherence. Anchored in Systemic Functional Linguistics, the study adopts Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) model of clause complexes to analyse expansion relations (elaboration, extension, and enhancement). The study adopts a qualitative research design; five poems, "Love Is," "The Palm of Time," "The Long Silence," "Fragments," and "Waiting," are analysed through clause-level examination. The findings show a predominance of enhancement and elaboration relations, which ground abstract emotions in experiential circumstances and sustain reflective depth. Extension relations occur mainly for contrastive purposes. The study demonstrates that poetic coherence in Palm of Time is achieved through grammatical expansion rather than linear narrative progression.*

**Keywords:** Logico-semantic relations; Systemic Functional Linguistics; poetic discourse; clause complexes; Nigerian poetry

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### Introduction

Poetry is widely recognised as a condensed and highly patterned use of language in which meaning is achieved through both thematic

content and linguistic organisation. As Leech and Short (2007) observe, poetic language is "more densely packed and more richly textured than everyday language" (p. 155), requiring analytical approaches that



attend to its formal structure as well as its interpretive possibilities. While literary criticism has traditionally foregrounded thematic interpretation, recent linguistic approaches argue that poetic meaning is also realised through systematic grammatical choices (Halliday, 1985; Eggins, 2004).

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a productive framework for examining such choices because it conceptualises language as a resource for making meaning in social contexts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Within SFL, meaning is organised through three metafunctions which are ideational, interpersonal, and textual, each realised simultaneously in the clause. Of particular relevance to poetic analysis is the logical component of the ideational metafunction, which explains how clauses are related within clause complexes through logico-semantic relations. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) define logico-semantic relations as the semantic connections by which “one clause expands or projects another” (p. 443). Expansion relations such as elaboration, extension, and enhancement are especially significant in poetry, where meaning is often developed through clarification, circumstantial enrichment, and reflective accumulation rather than linear narration. However, despite their analytical relevance, these relations have received limited attention in studies of Nigerian poetry.

Abubakar Othman was a prominent contemporary Nigerian

poet whose work engages themes of love, time, memory, and social reflection. Existing studies on Othman’s poetry have largely approached his work from thematic or cultural perspectives (e.g., Ogunjimi, 2010; Akinwumi, 2015), leaving the linguistic mechanisms underpinning his poetic meaning underexplored. This study addresses that gap by examining how logico-semantic relations function in selected poems from “Palm of Time.” Specifically, the objectives are to: identify and classify the logico-semantic relations (enhancement, extension, and elaboration) used in Othman’s poetry, analyse their functional roles, examine how their interaction contributes to textual coherence and meaning development, and demonstrate the significance of linguistic analysis in the interpretation of poetic texts.

The study contributes to linguistic stylistics by demonstrating how clause-level relations structure poetic coherence and emotional resonance through systematic patterns of grammatical expansion. It also contributes to Nigerian literary studies by offering a linguistically grounded account of Othman’s poetic craft.

## Literature Review

### Linguistic Approaches to Poetry

Poetry has increasingly been examined as a form of patterned language in which meaning is realised through systematic grammatical organisation rather than thematic content alone. Leech and Short (2007) describe poetic



language as “densely packed” and structurally foregrounded (p. 155), a view that continues to inform contemporary stylistic research. Recent scholars argue that linguistic approaches are particularly valuable for explaining how poetic meaning is constructed at multiple levels of structure rather than inferred impressionistically (Burke, 2021; Burke & Stockwell, 2023).

Functional approaches to poetry emphasise that literary effects are not extra-grammatical but arise from regular language systems deployed in marked ways. Halliday (1985) maintains that literary meaning is realised through the same grammatical resources as everyday discourse, though often in compressed and intensified forms. This perspective has gained renewed relevance in recent stylistic studies that foreground grammar as central to poetic interpretation (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2019; Taiwo, 2023). However, despite this renewed emphasis on grammatical analysis, clause-level logico-semantic relations have received limited systematic attention in studies of Nigerian poetry, motivating the present study.

### **Systemic Functional Linguistics and Literary Analysis**

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) conceptualises language as a social semiotic resource organised around meaning in context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Because SFL links grammatical form to meaning and

function, it has been widely adopted in literary linguistics. Contemporary scholars note that SFL enables analysts to account systematically for how texts construe experience and organise discourse across clauses (Fontaine, 2017; O’Halloran, 2020).

Recent applications of SFL in literary studies demonstrate its continued relevance. For instance, Zappavigna (2021) shows how functional grammar captures subtle meaning-making patterns that thematic criticism often overlooks, while Adegoju (2021) argues that SFL-based stylistic analysis provides a principled framework for examining African poetic texts. Despite these advances, most SFL-oriented literary studies still focus on transitivity, evaluation, or thematic progression, with limited attention to logical relations between clauses.

### **Logico-Semantic Relations and Clause Complexes**

Within the ideational metafunction, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) distinguish experiential meaning within clauses from logical meaning realised between clauses in clause complexes. Logical meaning is structured through taxis and logico-semantic relations, which explain how “one clause expands or projects another” (p. 443). This study focuses on expansion relations, elaboration, extension, and enhancement.

Elaboration clarifies or restates meaning, extension introduces additional or contrastive content, and enhancement provides circumstantial information such as



time, cause, or condition (Eggins, 2004). Recent discourse-based studies emphasise that these relations are central to textual coherence because they regulate how ideas accumulate and interrelate (Thompson, 2014; Hyland, 2022). However, current research applying logico-semantic analysis has concentrated largely on academic, political, and institutional genres, leaving poetic discourse comparatively underexplored.

### **Nigerian Poetry, SFL, and the Research Gap**

Nigerian poetry has attracted sustained critical attention, particularly from cultural and postcolonial perspectives (Quayson, 2020). However, linguistic analyses of Nigerian poetry remain limited. Adegaju (2021) and Taiwo (2023) argue for greater engagement with grammatical organisation as a means of deepening literary interpretation. These scholars demonstrate that linguistic structure plays an important role in shaping poetic meaning, particularly in contemporary Nigerian literature.

Abubakar Othman's poetry has been examined primarily from thematic and philosophical viewpoints (Ogunjimi, 2010; Akinwumi, 2015), with little attention to clause-level meaning construction. To date, few studies have systemically continue to focus on transitivity, evaluation, or thematic progression, with limited attention to the atically examined how logico-semantic relations of elaboration, extension, and enhancement operate

in his poetry. This gap is significant because poetic texts often achieve coherence and emotional resonance through grammatical expansion rather than narrative sequencing (Halliday, 1985).

The present study addresses this gap by applying logico-semantic analysis to selected poems from *Palm of Time*, demonstrating how clause complexes contribute to poetic coherence, imagery, and interpretive depth.

### **Theoretical Framework: Logico-Semantic Relations in Systemic Functional Linguistics**

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as developed by Halliday (1978), conceptualises language as a social semiotic system in which meaning is prioritised over formal structure. Within this framework, language is understood as a resource for making meaning in context, and grammatical choices are interpreted in terms of the functions they serve. Meaning is realised through the clause, which operates simultaneously to construe experience, enact social relations, and organise discourse (Halliday, 1978).

At the level of the clause complex, Halliday distinguishes between taxis and logico-semantic relations as the two systems through which logical meaning is constructed (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Taxis refers to the degree of dependency between clauses, distinguishing between parataxis, where clauses are of equal status, and hypotaxis, where one clause is dependent on another.



Logico-semantic relations explain how one clause relates to another in terms of meaning, specifying whether a clause expands or projects another (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

This study is concerned specifically with expansion, one of the major types of logico-semantic relations identified by Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Expansion describes the relationship in which a secondary clause adds to the meaning of a primary clause by developing it further rather than projecting speech or thought. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) identify three subtypes of expansion: elaboration, extension, and enhancement.

Elaboration involves restating, clarifying, or exemplifying the meaning of a clause. In elaboration, the secondary clause does not introduce new experiential content but provides a more precise specification of what has already been expressed. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) describe elaboration as a relation in which a clause “says the same thing over again, but in different words” (p. 443).

Extension occurs when a clause adds new information to another clause, either by addition, contrast, or alternative. This relation allows meanings to be accumulated or juxtaposed, commonly through conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *or*, or *or*. Extension expands the semantic scope of the clause complex by introducing further experiential

material that complements or contrasts with the initial clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Enhancement refers to the relation in which a clause qualifies another by providing circumstantial information such as time, place, manner, cause, or condition. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain that enhancement “enriches the meaning of a clause by situating it within a circumstantial frame” (p. 448). Through enhancement, actions and states are grounded in context, allowing meanings to be temporally, casually, or conditionally specified.

In poetic discourse, these expansion relations function as meaning-making resources through which poets organise reflection, intensify imagery, and sustain coherence across lines and stanzas. Analysing elaboration, extension, and enhancement in Abubakar Othman’s poetry, this study demonstrates how grammatical relations contribute to poetic meaning beyond surface imagery and thematic content, consistent with Halliday’s functional view of language as a resource for meaning making (Halliday, 1978).

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how logico-semantic relations function in poetic discourse. The data consist of five poems purposively selected from Abubakar Othman’s anthology *Palm of Time* (Othman, 2000), namely “Love Is,” “The Palm of Time,” “The Long Silence,” “Fragments,” and “Waiting.” The selection of five poems was



guided by the need for analytical depth rather than breadth, as close logico-semantic analysis at the level of clause complexes requires intensive, fine-grained examination of linguistic patterns across texts. Purposive sampling was employed to allow for in-depth linguistic analysis of poems that exhibit thematic richness and structural density suitable for clause-complex analysis. Data was collected through close reading of the selected poems and segmented into clauses and clause complexes based on functional criteria rather than poetic lineation, recognising that line breaks in poetry do not always correspond to grammatical boundaries (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Analysis was carried out within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, focusing on the logical component of the ideational metafunction. Clause complexes were identified and analysed in terms of taxis (parataxis and hypotaxis) and expansion relations, specifically elaboration, extension, and enhancement, following the model proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The identified relations were interpreted qualitatively to explain their contribution to poetic meaning, imagery, reflection, and textual coherence.

## Result and discussion

This section presents the data and discusses the findings of the logico-semantic analysis of selected poems from "Palm of Time" (Othman, 2000). Drawing on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) model of clause complexes, the analysis

demonstrates that Abubakar Othman's poetry is predominantly organised through expansion relations, with a marked preference for enhancement and elaboration, while extension occurs more sparingly. I argue that this pattern reflects a deliberate poetic strategy in which meaning is constructed through experiential grounding and reflective refinement, rather than through linear narrative development. All illustrative excerpts are referenced by poem title and line numbers to ensure transparency and facilitate cross-referencing in the Appendix.

Across the poems analysed "Waiting," "The Long Silence," "Love Is," "Fragments," and "The Palm of Time", enhancement relations emerge as the most salient logico-semantic resource. These relations qualify processes by specifying circumstantial meanings of time, cause, condition, or manner, thereby grounding abstract emotional states in lived experience. For instance, in "Waiting," the clause "I wait" functions as the primary clause, realising a material process. This clause is followed by the dependent clause "when the night stretches its silence," which provides circumstantial information of time and atmosphere:

I wait  
when the night stretches its silence  
("Waiting," lines 3–4)

Within Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) framework, this configuration constitutes an enhancement relation, since the secondary clause qualifies



the process expressed in the primary clause by embedding it within a circumstantial frame. What is significant here is that the circumstance does more than locate time; it aestheticises duration, allowing waiting to be experienced through silence.

This pattern recurs later in the same poem:

I listen  
as the hours fold into themselves  
("Waiting," lines 6-7)

In this clause complex, "I listen" again functions as the primary clause, while "as the hours fold into themselves" operates as the enhancing clause, specifying manner and temporal quality. Through this enhancement relation, time is reconfigured as recursive rather than progressive. Such grammatical choices allow Othman to convey emotional suspension indirectly, supporting stylistic observations that poetic meaning often emerges through experiential framing rather than explicit emotional declaration.

A similar use of enhancement occurs in "The Long Silence":

Words retreat  
because grief has learned to speak  
alone  
("The Long Silence," lines 7-8)

Here, "Words retreat" functions as the primary clause, while "because grief has learned to speak alone" is a causal enhancing clause. This enhancement reframes silence as consequence rather than absence. The argument is that this

grammatical configuration enables silence to function as a meaningful communicative state, thereby deepening emotional resonance through clause-level organisation.

Alongside enhancement, elaboration relations play a vital role in structuring reflection in the poems. Elaboration enables the poet to revisit and refine meaning through restatement and metaphor, producing a cyclical rather than progressive movement of ideas. In "Love Is," the clause "Love is patience" functions as the primary clause, realised through a relational identifying process:

Love is patience,  
a quiet flame that refuses to burn out,  
a promise whispered to the dark  
("Love Is," lines 1-3)

The subsequent clauses "a quiet flame that refuses to burn out" and "a promise whispered to the dark" do not introduce new experiential content but instead restate and specify the meaning of the initial clause. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), elaboration involves saying "the same thing over again, but in different words" (p. 443). In this poetic context, repetition is not redundant but interpretively productive. Elaboration here functions as a grammatical mechanism for slowing down meaning, inviting sustained contemplation rather than forward movement.

This reflective use of elaboration also appears in "Fragments":



I gather the broken days,  
pieces of moments that refuse to  
settle  
("Fragments," lines 2-3)

In this example, "I gather the broken days" operates as the primary clause, while "pieces of moments that refuse to settle" elaborates it by specifying the nature of "broken days." This grammatical restatement mirrors the poem's concern with memory and incompleteness, reinforcing coherence through semantic refinement rather than narrative resolution.

In contrast, extension relations occur less frequently and are primarily contrastive rather than additive. For example, in "The Palm of Time," the clause "We held the moment" functions as the primary clause, followed by "but time loosened its grip," which introduces contrastive extension:

We held the moment,  
but time loosened its grip  
("The Palm of Time," lines 10-11)

The conjunction "but" signals an extension relation that juxtaposes human agency with temporal inevitability. A similar pattern appears later in the same poem:

We trace our names on sand,  
and the tide answers with erasure  
("The Palm of Time," lines 14-15)

Although extension adds new experiential content, its restrained use suggests a deliberate avoidance of narrative accumulation. The study argues that Othman employs extension selectively to sharpen

philosophical tension rather than to advance plot, thereby maintaining the reflective orientation of the poems.

These patterns show that textual coherence in "Palm of Time" is achieved through the patterned interaction of enhancement and elaboration, punctuated by selective contrastive extension. Coherence emerges not through chronological sequencing but through grammatical expansion that sustains thematic focus and emotional resonance. This finding directly addresses the gap identified in the literature review, where Nigerian poetry has often been discussed thematically without systematic attention to clause-level organisation.

The findings resonate with earlier stylistic claims that poetic meaning is frequently realised through indirect grammatical strategies rather than explicit emotional declaration (Leech & Short, 2007; Burke, 2021). However, while existing scholarship on Nigerian poetry has approached reflective depth and emotional resonance from thematic or philosophical perspectives (Ogunjimi, 2010; Akinwumi, 2015), the present analysis extends those discussions by providing a systematic grammatical account of how such effects are constructed. Foregrounding logico-semantic relations within clause complexes, this study demonstrates that coherence and emotional intensity in Othman's poetry are not only interpretive impressions but linguistically realised phenomena.



## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that poetic meaning in Abubakar Othman's *Palm of Time* (Othman, 2000) is systematically organised through logico-semantic relations within clause complexes, as theorised in Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics model. The analysis shows that enhancement and elaboration relations dominate the poems and function as key grammatical resources for grounding abstract emotions in experiential circumstances and sustaining reflective depth through semantic refinement. In contrast, extension relations occur sparingly and serve primarily contrastive purposes, indicating a stylistic preference for reflection over linear narrative progression. Rather than relying on linear narrative progression, the poems achieve coherence through patterned grammatical expansion that maintains thematic focus and emotional resonance across clauses. This clause-level account addresses a gap in existing scholarship on Nigerian poetry, which has often privileged thematic interpretation over linguistic explanation, and demonstrates that the aesthetic and emotional force of *Palm of Time* is linguistically realised through systematic logico-semantic choices. The study therefore, affirms the relevance of Systemic Functional Linguistics as a rigorous framework for poetic analysis and contributes a linguistically grounded perspective to the study of contemporary Nigerian poetry. It also establishes that enhancement relations function

as experiential anchors, elaboration relations support reflective depth through semantic refinement, and extension relations operate selectively as contrastive devices. These findings confirm that the aesthetic and emotional force of "Palm of Time" is grammatically organised through patterned logico-semantic choices, showing the analytical value of clause-complex analysis in the study of contemporary Nigerian poetry.

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