

## Perspectivization in fiction: a deictic study of Wole Soyinka's "Ake"

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**Abstract:** The study of linguistics of literary discourse is a recent development in the global spread. Until 1982, efforts made in the seventies in this direction were by literary critics such as Chatman (1978), Ehrlich (1990), Fludernik (1993) and Mey (2000). No work that we are aware of has specifically studied how characters in fiction have been focalized through deictics alone. The common trend is that deictic features are taken along with other linguistic elements. Given the high place deictics occupy in human communication, it is essential to isolate them for study to explore the degree at which they influence character projection in fiction. This work will therefore not only add to the material on this area, it will also facilitate character appreciation in fictive works. The text, *Ake*, is extensively studied, and only the deictics that occur in conversations between characters are sampled. Examples of deictic usage are picked randomly to exemplify deictics of time, place and time as they occur in the text.

**Keywords:** perspectivisation, fiction, Wole Soyinka, characterisation, deixis.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Studying the linguistics of literary discourse is a recent development in the global spread. Until 1982, efforts made in the seventies in this direction were by literary critics such as Chatman (1978). According to Mey (2000: 18), "the first linguist who got seriously into the game was Ann Banfield, with her epoch-making book *Unspeaking Sentences* (1982)". Other scholars who have worked in the area include Ehrlich (1990), Fludernik (1993) and Mey 2000. While Banfield and Ehrlich work strictly within the area of syntax,

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Fludernik and Mey operate in an expanded frame that looks at both the linguistics and context of the text, albeit with varying emphasis and scope. One recent application of the principles proposed by these scholars is Adebite (2005) who studies pragmatic tactics in diplomatic communication in Ola Rotimi's play *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*.

No work that we are aware of has specifically studied how characters in fiction have been focalized through deictics alone. The common trend is that deictic features are taken along with other linguistic elements (see Mey, 2000). Given the high place deictics occupy in human communication, it is essential to isolate them for study to explore the degree at which they influence character projection in fiction. This work will therefore not only add to the material on this area, it will also facilitate character appreciation in fictive works. The text, *Ake*, is extensively studied, and only the deictics that occur in conversations between characters are sampled. Examples of deictic usage are picked randomly to exemplify deictics of time, place and time as they occur in the text.

## 2. CHARACTERS AND VOICE IN PROSE FICTION

Characters are the pivots of prose fiction, "no matter how sketchily delineated" (EZEIGBO, 1998: 13). According to Kehinde (2003), paraphrasing *Encyclopedia Britannica*, while the inferior novelist emphasizes the plot, the superior one emphasizes the people (including their action) in the novel. This view corroborates Henry James' (1984) idea of characters as the illustration of incident, and vice versa. Characters fictively bring alive events in human society as they show the complex intercourse between the human mind and the environment in which the individual exists. They enforce the reality and realizability of the story, such that we can immediately distinguish between make-beliefs and stories possessing verisimilitude. Generally, characters are portrayed through the descriptions offered by the author, through the action of such characters and through the reports made on them by other characters (cf KEHINDE, 2003).

Writers (of fiction) voice or vocalize their characters, that is, "they populate (the) narrative universe with characters, giving them each a voice as a way of expressing their relations to this universe and their relationships with one

another” (Mey, 2000: 189). This process necessarily implies focalizing and localizing the voices in the text. Through focalization, the characters are perspectivized, and their place in the fabric of the text is defined such that their voices can be heard. Each character speaks from a perspective that is relative to his/ her temporal and spatial location as designed by the author. Hence, it is impossible to sever perspective from voice. In the words of Mey (2000: 149-150):

Every point of view belongs to a character, hence every focalization happens according to a character’s perspective; similarly, every character’s voice presupposes the existence of a focalizing perspective in which that character is vocalized.

In fact, a good fiction is judged not only by the dominance of action in it but by its ability to make the characters meet the expectations of the reader through their personalities and what their voices reveal them to be (cf. MEY, 2000). These voices are managed through alternation of voices as in two-party conversations, through the use of deictics and through quoted discourse which appears without a verb “announcing the corresponding expected shift in voice” (MEY, 2000: 118).

However, voices may clash. This occurs when the voice and the character claimed to possess the voice does not match or when there is disharmony as a result of a projection of two or more voices. A voice clash may occur as a trash, mash and a crash. Overall, a voice in fiction mediates between the fictive universe and social realities that feed the text.

### 3. THE TEXT AND ANALYTICAL FRAME WORK

#### 3.1. Summary of text

The text, *Ake*, serves as background to Soyinka’s creative writings. It is an autobiographical fiction which narrates the childhood experience of the author. The story highlights some character traits of the writer such as – doggedness, determination, inquisitiveness, etc. The story is set in two different places – Ake in Abeokuta and the Ijebu town of Isara. “In terms of its traditional Yoruba flavour and its earthiness, Isara is sharply contrasted with Ake (OGUNBA,

1994: 2). Wole's family lives at Ake's personage. The personage is a highly religious micro-section of the larger Abeokuta community, secluded from the rest of the community. Isara, where the family usually spend their end-of-year holidays is the very opposite of Ake. In Isara, Wole's grand father, called 'Father', is an adherent of traditional religion. Wole's experience of the two different worlds greatly influences his awareness of the complex nature of modern African society.

Besides, Wole's parental background exerts tremendous influence(s) on him as he grows up. His father, nicknamed 'Essay', is depicted as a meticulous and strict man. He is a Christian and a strict headmaster of the famous and prestigious St. Peter's, primary School. Wole's mother, Eniola, also nicknamed 'Wild Christian', perhaps due to her religious zeal, is also a disciplinarian. She does not condone indolence or irresponsible behaviours in her children. Little Wole also gets influenced by Rev. and Mrs. Ransome Kuti (Daodu), and his wife (Beere), together with his peers, siblings, relations and neighbours such as Osiki, Bukola, Mrs. B, Joseph and Broda Pupa.

### 3.2. Analytical frame work

This work relies on the concept of deictics as an analytical tool to examine the voicing of characters in Wole Soyinka's *Ake*. "Deixis belongs within the domain of pragmatics, because it directly concerns the relationship between the structure of language and the contexts in which they are used" (LEVINSON, 1983: 55). Also referred to as indexicals, having been formed from the same root as 'index' – the finger – deictics are special words engaged in pointing at things, with presuppositions of existence of reference. The reference of indexicals shifts with utterances, depending on the current user, and their referents are "partly determined by extra-linguistic context (for instance, the time and location of the speaker and the speaker's intentions)" (BRAUN, 2001: 21).

Three types of indexicals have been identified in the literature, viz deictics of time, place and person. Levinson (1983) has discussed two others: discourse and social deictics. For operational reasons, however, we shall concentrate only on the three traditional types.

Deictics of time appear as temporal adverbials and tense items. They represent time as diurnal or calendrical units, and ultimately refer to the roles

of participants. Markers of time such as ‘today’, ‘tomorrow’, etc. indicate items that are relative to speakers. Tense is deictic in the sense that “nearly all sentences when uttered are deictically anchored to a context of utterance” (LEVINSON, 1983: 77). In this regard, time deictics prove useful in the management of time in utterances. Mey (2000) has identified the speech time (ST), the event time (ET) and the reference time (RT). The speech time, also called the coding time (CT) by Levinson (1983), is the time when the utterance is made; the event time is roughly equivalent to Levinson’s receiving time (RT) i.e. when the event spoken about happens; and the reference time refers to the time pointed to by temporal indicators. Smith (1989) has demonstrated that time deictics refer to times non-formulaically. For example, he has rightly shown that the present tensed locutions are capable of pointing to past times, future times, imaginary times and non-temporal times.

Place deictics relate to “the encoding of spatial locations relative to the location of the participants in the speech event” (LEVINSON, 1983: 62). Objects in spatial reference are either described/named or simply located. Either referencing is achieved through demonstratives and place adverbials. These items locate objects along the proximal or distal dimension. ‘Here’, ‘this’ and ‘these’, for example, indicate proximity, while ‘there’, ‘that’ and ‘those’ suggest distality. According to Odebumi (2001: 12), ‘here’ often involves a participant, in active or passive terms, in the event described, but ‘there’ may not achieve this at equal frequency with ‘here’. In an instance like “*Here* is the news”, Odebumi (ODEBUNMI, 2001: 12) observes that ‘here’ does not occur as a possible antonym of ‘there’ as is more commonly seen. In his words, “the whole expression could graduate to such meaning as (the imperative) ‘Listen to the news [as being read by me]’; and if replaced by its contextual antonym ‘that’, that is, if we have ‘that was the news, could mean ‘you have just listened to the news’”. Lyons (1977c: 677) suggests that a contextual switch from ‘that’ to ‘this’ may necessitate what he calls empathetic deixis. It is also possible for the proximal-distal dimension to be systematically neutralized ‘when it is not especially relevant’ (LEVINSON, 1983: 81). Enroute to a more coherent theory of indexicals, Smith (1989) has observed that ‘here’ can be used to indicate an unperceived place where the speaker is not located, and can be used to refer to non-spatial items.

Person deixis “depends upon the notion of participant roles and upon their grammaticalisation in particular languages” (GODDARD, 1998: 638). It is realized through personal pronouns in several contexts of use. The first person pronoun includes the speaker, the second person includes the addressee, but the third person excludes both the speaker and the addressee (cf BURLING, 1970, INGRAM, 1978, LEVINSON, 1983). Smith (1989) notices that the first person pronoun can make multiple references to someone other than the speaker, a group of people, an imaginary person and an impersonal item. Mey (2000: 46) soundly argues that “personal pronouns are important in establishing the current point of view, and as such are extremely sensitive to changes in that perspective”. A complement to this view which has central relevance to the inputs of deictics in appreciating characters in prose fiction states:

A more complex (and in many ways, more effective) method of keeping tract of the voices is the use of deictics, by which we are able to maintain a distinction not only between the different speakers and their voices, but also between what they say as the expression of their personal beliefs, and other (explicit or implicit) indications of their points of view (MEY, 2000: 113).

#### 4. DEICTICS AND PERSPECTIVES IN *AKE*

Deictics in *Ake* make both proximal and distal references. Proximal reference which dominates the conversations point to closer referents or objects within the immediate textual environment. The few distal references made with deictics lack immediate anchorage.

Both the proximal and distal references serve the functions of expressing characters' involvements in issues/events, seeking others characters' views or involving them in issues, keeping other characters or their actions in view, bringing other characters into view, focusing, specifying or seeking a location and stating time.

The first person pronouns 'I' and 'we' are engaged to express the current speaker's perspective on situations. Invariably, they state the nature and depth of the speaker's involvement in the context. The conversation between Bukola, the constantly reincarnating daughter of Mrs. B's and Wole is important here:

### Example 1

“Can you see when you do that with your eyes”?

“Only darkness”

“Do you remember anything of the other world”?

“No. But that is where *I* go when *I* fall in a trance” (p. 16)

‘I’ vocalizes Bukola, and also focalizes her ways. It establishes her involvement in the supernatural process of voluntary reincarnation. Her ‘going’ and ‘falling in a trance’ are conscious and deliberate. This agrees with the Yoruba world view expressed by the narrator:

... Bukola was not of our world. When we throw our voices against the school walls of lower Parsonage and listened to them echo from a long distance, it seemed to one that Bukola was one of the denizens, of that other world where the voice was caught, sieved, re-spun and cast back in diminishing copies (p. 16).

In an interaction between Wole and his father and mother, the first person plural pronoun ‘we’ is used:

### Example 2:

My father nodded in agreement, smiling. “How did you know that was the right thing to do?”

I looked at him in surprise, but everybody knows”

Then he wagged his finger at me, Ah – ha, but what you don’t know is that *we* have already done it. It’s all back in there while you were asleep” (p. 28).

‘We’ collectively picks out the parents. The transition from the first person singular perspective and the third person descriptive focus to first person plural perspective goes with power and assertiveness. Essay, the narrator’s father, intends to convince Wole to believe what he has said. The parents, representing the narrator’s source of living, are trusted, and their voice, especially when projected by his father, being respected as superior and feared, supercedes whatever impression Wole, a mere child, would have formed. The deixis ‘we’ is, therefore, a grammatical ploy to psychologically twist Wole to believing that his lost teeth have re-grown, when in actual fact, they have not. Through the deictic choice, Essay is presented as an intelligent and dynamic individual who understands the demand of the situation.

Sometimes, pronominal deictics are engaged to keep some person, event or object in view. In the course of Wild Christian's narration of her childhood experience with spirits to the children, Wole asks what the voice of the spirit was like. It is useful to cite some of the interaction:

Example 3:

'It was as if Uncle had been expecting the visit. He came out of the house and asked him [the spirit] what he wanted. We all huddled in the kitchen peeping out'

'What was his voice like? Did he speak like an *Egungun*?

'I'm coming to *it*. This man, well, I suppose we should call him a man. He wasn't quite human' (p. 6).

Wild Christian engages 'it' to keep Wole's question on track, without necessarily allowing it to obstruct the line of the narration. The pronoun 'it' goes back to the way the spirit sounded, which does not constitute the current focus of narration. It is therefore a strategy employed by the current speaker to avoid a voice clash. The current speaker concentrates, first, on the arrival of the spirit in their compound and his encounter with Rev. Ransome Kuti, the current speaker's uncle. The speaker feels it rather preposterous to talk about what the spirit says before reporting on the actual encounter; but Wole's childish fancy is more for the voice than for the encounter. The interests of Wole and his mother clash here. Wild Christian's ability to manage the situation effectively portrays her as a calculating and meticulous personality.

The second person pronoun 'you' features largely where some character seeks another character's view or wishes to involve the character in a matter. What follows is an example:

Example 4:

Suddenly her eyes would turn inwards, showing nothing but the whites. She would do it for our benefit whenever she asked her. Tinu stood at a distance ready to run away; somehow she expected terrible things to follow. I asked Bukola:

'Can *you* see when *you* do that with your eyes?'

'Only darkness'



'Do *you* remember anything of the other world?'  
'No. But that's where I go when I fall in a trance'  
'Can *you* fall in a trance now?'

As said earlier, Bukola is an *abiku*. In this interaction, Wole quizzes her on her adventures in the spiritual world, his inquisitiveness being put on display. With *you*, he directly addresses Bukola. By this, he seeks her views on her habitual trances: 'can *you see ...?* Do *you* remember ...?' Wole's obvious illocution is to make her explain her involvement in the spiritual process. In a way, *you* picks out not only Bukola but also all the *Abikus*. Bukola's perlocutionary explanation, therefore, seems to speak for all the members of the *Abiku* group.

In all cases where the third person pronominal deictics, *they* and *he*, are used in interaction, they bring some person or object and their activities or roles into view. These instances can be considered:

#### Example 5:

'Do you actually hear *them*?'  
'Often'  
'What do *they* say?'  
'Simply that I should come and play with *them*?'  
Haven't *they* got anyone to play with?  
Why do *they* bother you?' (p. 16).

#### Example 6:

... discovering that Osiki had an *Egungun* which emerged from their compound every year was almost the same as if we also had one of our own. We crowded round him and I asked if he knew which of the dead ancestors it was. He shook his head. 'I only know it is one of our ancient people'.  
'Are you actually there when he emerges from the bottom of the earth?'  
He nodded yes. 'Any of us can watch. As long as you are male of course. Women mustn't come near'.  
'Then you must come and call me next time, 'I said. 'I want to watch?'  
'You want to what?' It was mother, her voice raised in alarm.  
'Did I hear you say you want to go and watch *egungun* in *his* compound?'  
'Osiki will take me' I said  
'Osiki is taking you nowhere. Better not even let your father hear you.'

'Why not?' I said, *he* can come too.

Osiki, we can take *him* can't we? *He* is not like Mama, *he* is a man too' (p. 32).

Example 4 is sequel to example 5. It continues the conversations between Wole and Bukola on the latter's reincarnations. 'Them' and 'they' pick out Bukola's mates in the spirit world. It is these spiritual beings that have been brought into view: their intrusive nature as perceived by Bukola. In example 6, 'his' endophorically identifies Osiki, while 'he' exophorically locates Wole's father. 'His' in "... watch *egungun* in *his* compound" comes with Wild Christian abhorrence of *egungun* and her intention to condemn Wole's intended action. Though Osiki is present at the interaction, 'his' locates him and or his compound somewhat distally to delineate Wild Christian's detachment from what he stands for. 'He', referring to Essay, brings Wole's father into the conversation within Wole's focal point. In this context, 'he' is perceived as a superior figure, who possesses the cultural credentials to watch the *Egungun*, as against 'Mama' who does not. Values and points of view are here contrasted with the use of 'his' and 'he'. Wild Christian speaks from a Christian-oriented hindsight, and therefore perceives Wole as ignorant of the right Christian values. Wole, on his part, speaks from the background of a patriarchal and seeming male chauvinistic perspective, assuming the same position with his father, and seeming to see his mother, and perhaps the whole female gender, as disadvantaged.

Quite a number of place, discourse and time deictics are employed to achieve focusing. Some of the items are *this*, *that*, *here* and *then*. Examples abound on pages 55, 60, 65, 76, 88, etc. Two interactions can be examined:

#### Example 7:

The 'habit' had developed unnoticed by me. As for Essay – nothing escaped him. One day I was walking from the front room to the pantry, a course which took me between the Wash-Hand Basin and his dining-table when he, shouted:

'stop'

I froze

'Why did you do *that*?' (p. 60).

#### Example 8:

... when they came to our house, Wild Christian stood and watched until she judged that Mrs. B was ready for appeasement. Then she stopped the drumming and singing and beckoned to the maid to come nearer.

'Is *this* a good thing for you?'  
she demanded (p. 88).

'That' in example 7 has no immediate referent. In fact, in the present context, given the automation that attends Wole's present action, the perspective expressed is initially speaker-based. Wole himself, having had the 'habit developed unnoticed' could not immediately find the deictic centre of Essay's 'that'. In actual fact, Wole's father means to refer to Wole's "cleansing rite" performed in the Wash-Hand Basin, with his 'arm snaking out of its own volition, dipping in the basin...' (p. 61). in example 8, 'This' points to the show of shame that Mrs. B's maid has been exposed to, having constantly pissed herself over night. Wild Christian's 'Is *this* a good thing for you?' announces her disappointment at the maid's disgraceful habit. It goes a long way to demonstrate the extent to which Wild Christian can be blunt with issues, when it is highly necessary to do so. Evidence of this bluntness further glows in her relationship with her children and their peers or friends, especially Osiki. This manner does not, however, make her rigidly confrontational. On a few occasions, she has been diplomatic. A good instance of this diplomatic quality shows in the tact with which she handles the gluttonic intrusions of Mr. Adelu's.

Spatializers such as *here* and *there*, specify across the text, locations and various spatial settings; sometimes 'nowhere' does the job. The examples on pages 75 and 99 can be considered:

#### Example 9:

After prayers, Essay sat in the front- room, reading. Of his knowledge of *Lemoo's* presence in his background, he betrayed no sign ... When the house had fallen completely silent, Essay went through the parlour to the yard. I heard him shout.

'Is Odejimi *there*?'  
'Present sir, I'm right *here* sir,  
very sorry sir' (p. 75).

#### Example 10:

"Where are you going? to Wild Christian opened the windows as I sneaked past.  
'Only to the school compound.'  
'To do what?'

'To pick some guavas. They'll be plenty on the ground after rain.'  
'Tell Bunmi to go. You will only catch a cold.'  
'She can't. It's my guava tree.'  
Are you mad?'... come back *here* (p. 99).

In example 9, each of the speakers speaks deictically. Essay speaks from his own location, somewhere before he comes to where Odejimi is located in the yard. The distal – proximal tokens – *there/ here* – suggest their relative spatial occupations, given the context of the utterance of 'there', finding Odejimi, who is under the punishment and restriction of the boss. Essay, locates a predictable space from where Odejimi is not expected to have moved. That Odejimi's location is expected is confirmed by the use of the spatializer 'here' together with all the deferring tokens that go with it (eg. 'sir'). Thus, a boss-subordinate relationship is clearly established. Essay is here shown to be strict and firm in administering discipline. He expects his orders to be obeyed to the letters; and hence, seems to hinge his decision to pardon *Lemoo* on his being in the yard i.e. "there", a step he takes immediately he gets the confirmatory cue ... "here sir". In example 10, the deictic motion verb 'come' combines with the spatial marker 'here' to direct the movement of Wole. His course has thus been altered from a movement to the school compound to a movement towards the speaker. Here, a superior-subordinate relationship is again confirmed. Wild Christian asserts her authority over Wole by insisting that he opt for her own spatial choice rather than his. This trait further confirms her disciplinarian tendencies and her firm grip on the manners of her children.

Finally, temporal markers such as '*this time*' '*that time*', *before*, *soon*', '*then*', '*now*', etc. dot the text to spell out different times of event. The encounter between Wole and Essay about the Hand-Wash Basin provides a good instance of time deixis.

#### Example 11:

At the end of a minute I was taking that ninety-degree turn past the Hand-Wash Basin when the order came,  
'Stop!'  
I froze. Fast as the order had come, it was too late for whatever purpose he had in mind. Again he studied me intently.  
'Go back again.' *This time* when I say stop, stay exactly in whatever position you are ....' (p. 60)

The phrase, 'this time', indicates the presentness of the activity. But it reveals a coding rather than an event time. For the event is yet to be experienced by the addressee. In a way, the temporal marker, together with the dominant present tense in the utterance, prepares the addressee for the task. The temporalizer also seems to introduce a different rule of the game, which the addressed needs to countenance for a successful performance. By the use of the time deictic token, Essay's firmness is further established. He works with a clear focus and does not waver on the way to his target. The following example can also be examined:

Example 12:

'Good. So it's you. I thought so. I've always known it'.  
'We will wait, until your father comes. When he has finished with you, you will *then* come and eat my own punishment' (p. 91).

In example 12, 'then' indicates a future event, just/like every other event in the utterance. At least, three events, coded currently, have to precede the 'then' event: (i) the prospective – beater has to wait (ii) the father has to arrive (iii) the father has to punish the addressee. 'We' and 'my' contextually locate the same referent, (Wild Christian), and set up a link with the temporal marker 'then' 'We' picks out both Wild Christian and Wole, who both, by cultural demand, have to wait for her father to come before serious sanctions can be placed on Wole. The deictic "we" in this interaction presents Wild Christian in the light of a submissive woman who allows the husband's authority to precede and supercede her authority over the children.

## 5. CONCLUSION

We have shown in the foregoing that deictics are capable of projecting voices of characters in fiction. Through person, place and time deictic tokens, which make proximal and distal references, the author has exhibited such functions of deixis as expressing characters' involvement in issues or / events, seeking other characters' views or involving them in issues, keeping other characters or their actions in view, bringing other characters' into view, focusing, specifying or seeking a location and stating time.

The deictics have inputs in developing characters in the work; for example, in various capacities and manifestation, they have helped to depict Wole as inquisitive and exploratory; Wild Christian as a discipline – instilling, meticulous and calculating mother, and a tactful and submissive wife; and Essay as a strict administrator and a diplomatic and firm father and husband. By and large, it can be concluded that apart from literary and stylistic considerations, such as the sociology of characters, their lexico-semantic choices, etc, deictics can also be consulted in analyzing characters in fiction.

**Resumo:** O estudo lingüístico do discurso literário é um desenvolvimento recente na expansão global. Até 1982, esforços nessa direção foram realizados, nos anos setenta, por críticos literários como Chatman (1978), Ehrlich (1990), Fludernik (1993) e Mey (2000). Nenhum trabalho conhecido estudou especificamente como personagens em ficção vêm sendo focalizados a partir da dêixis. A tendência mais comum é que características dêiticas sejam estudadas juntamente com outros elementos lingüísticos. Devido ao lugar de destaque ocupado pela dêixis na comunicação humana, é essencial isolá-la a fim de explorar o seu grau de influência na projeção de personagens ficcionais. Esse trabalho irá, portanto, não só contribuir para a área em questão, mas facilitará a apreciação de personagens em obras de ficção. O texto, *Ake*, já foi extensivamente estudado e somente aspectos dêiticos que ocorrem em conversas entre personagens são tomados como amostras. Exemplos do uso de elementos dêiticos são coletados aleatoriamente para exemplificar dêixis de tempo e espaço presentes no texto.

**Palavras-chave:** Perspectivização, ficção, Wole Soyinka, caracterização, dêixis.

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