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Aspects of graphology in the construction of selected Kiswahili children's novels

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Abstract

Graphology has today dominated children's literature making it look like an amorphous and an ambiguous creature with its relationship to its audience. Children lack the required knowledge and skills to associate meaning to the stylistic devices in use. This, however, means that children's literature has undergone a series of transformations and it appears that in the process of its transformations, it has been affected and it has equally affected its representation as well as the socialization of children as manifested in five (5) purposively selected Kiswahili children's novels of Nyumba ya Sungura (2012), Hadithi ya Mamba (2009), Harusi ya Mwanasungura (2006), Usicheze na Moto (2003) and Dani na Wezi wa Toyota (2015). This is so because a keen look at the five (5) literary texts confirms a lot of graphological dominance which has presented an avenue for debates and radical shifts in the scholarship in the discipline of children's literature. With Leech & Short's (1981) *Stylistics* and Rosenblatt's (1939) *Readers Response theories* Rosenblatt (1939), this paper attempted to highlight and re-examine some of the graphological aspects used in the construction of children's literature with a focus on selected novels and how those graphological features impact on the readers. It established that graphological aspects enhance thematic foregrounding in children's literature besides giving those texts some aesthetic appeal resulting into ideal comprehension.

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Public Interest Statement

Children as the target audience have minimal or no ability to associate meaning to these graphological features. It is on this background that this paper attempts to assess the critical role of graphology as linguistic stylistic feature that enhances thematic composition of a textual through foregrounding.



Introduction

Graphology as an aspect of literary style plays an important role in children's literature. Schneider (2016) defines children's literature as that which concerns texts written for children and read by children. A child in this context refers to human beings below eighteen years of age in Kenya. This basically means that such works are done by adults with the child in mind. It also goes without saying that it is the adults who hold the purchasing power of such texts and in this process, children only come in as consumers of availed texts. This situation raises questions as to whether children really understand graphological features used in those texts. Many literary critics and analysts who engage in textual analysis have had a tendency of leaning towards the analysis of themes, characters and characterization as well as stylistic devices used by the author in presenting their work while giving less attention to these graphological aspects. It is against this background that this paper set out to assess the critical role of graphological features in the construction of Kiswahili children's literature.

Theoretical Framework

This paper used a multi model theoretical approach of Stylistics theory proposed by Bally (1909) and expounded by Jakobson (1958), Halliday (1971) and Leech & Short (1981, 1997, 2007) and the Reader's Response theory was proposed by Rosenblatt (1939) and propagated by Hirsch (1967), Holland (1968), Bressler (1973), Culler (1975), Holland (1975), Bleich (1975), Fetterley (1978), Iser (1978), Fish (1980), Cuddon (1980) Rabinowitz (1980), Tompkins (1980), Riffaterre (1981), Jauss (1982), Booth (1983), Eco (1989) and others. Leech & Short define stylistics as the relationship between literature and linguistics. In their stylistic theoretical discourse, Leech & Short mention graphology among the nine levels of stylistics that concerns textual presentation. Stylistics theory therefore was key in the discussions about how graphological features are used in the construction of the selected texts as well as the role those features play in enhancing thematic comprehension and aesthetic predisposition resulting into ideal analysis. Readers response theory on the other hand states that the meaning of a text is dependent on the interaction of a text and a reader, and that this is affected by a series of factors making it possible for readers to come up with several interpretations of same text. Reader's response theory was therefore critical in the examination of the reader's ability to interpret and comprehend textual thematic composition.

Methodology

This was a qualitative study which relied on purposive sampling of texts. Five Kiswahili children's novels of Nyumba ya Sungura (2012), Hadithi ya Mamba (2009), Harusi ya Mwanasungura (2006), Usicheze na Moto (2003) and Dani na Wezi wa Toyota (2015) were selected. Textual data was collected through textual analysis. while participatory observation was employed for learners in classrooms and interviews for both pupils and teachers. Two teachers of Kiswahili from grades one (1) to four (4) in the selected primary schools were also subjected to informal interviews to supplement data. Interview

schedules and a camera were vital tools used in the collection of data. Qualitative data analysis was done, and data presented through discussion and essays in paragraphs.

The role of graphological aspects in selected Kiswahili children's novels

A perusal of the selected texts confirms some aspects of peculiarity in their construction which touches on graphology. According to Adegaju (2008), graphology concerns matters such as spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, a text's layout, lists, font choices, underlining, italicization, paragraphing, colour, pictures and many other paralinguistic aspects found in a text. These features in a text can create different kinds of impact, some of which will cause the reader to react differently. This paper equally looks at thematic analysis in selected literary texts but from a linguistic background of graphology. A keen look at the above-mentioned texts confirms that various graphological features appear in children's literature in Kiswahili ranging from colour, pictures / diagrams, typography and spacing, punctuations, glossary, capital letters, small letters, italicization, bold and many more which play a vital role in the construction of these texts. This section discusses a few of those features which include colour, pictures / diagrams, typography and spacing, punctuations and glossary.

Colour

Various colours appeared to have been used in all the novels that were analyzed. Such colours included red, yellow, green, brown and black that dominated the texts as well as pictures in the texts. Such was an example of colour used in the novel: *Harusi ya Mwanasungura* (2006) in words; "walipendana kama chanda na pete" (page 1.) In the same novel, other words written in a different colours included: "ukarimu", "sebuleni" (page 4), "kifunguamimba" (page 5), These colours were useful in directing a reader to unfamiliar or new vocabulary in the text with an intention of helping the learner to retain the new knowledge. These findings are similar to the findings of Oluwakemi & Omoniyi (2015) in a study on the effects of colour on the retention rate of graduate students. The findings indicated that colour was a powerful tool, with varied functions in education including seeking the learners' attention, enhancing clarity, establishing a code, labeling things in nature and also differentiating items. They concluded that colour provided a meaningful insight in increasing retention rate of the said adult learners. Similarly, Duyan (2016) in a study on learners aged between eight and nine (8-9) years in two primary schools on the effect of classroom wall colours on learner's attention demonstrated that colour had some impact on learners' attention. Equally, Cass (1967), Pierson (2008), Ruthiri (2012) & Mascarenhas (2015) have also extensively discussed matters of colour in relationship to children's literature and concluded that colours enhance readers' attachment, emphasizes and so foregrounds thematic content and provides aesthetic attraction. This makes it obvious that children's literature should always use appealing colours.

Colour should hence be given preference in textual illustration as against the black on white prints predominantly used in texts, to allow the learners have richer learning experience. For instance, knowing which colours will allow learners to retain more

information would greatly impact on design of instructional materials. Instructional text, especially for adult learners, should henceforth be accompanied by colours highlighting points and definitions for instructional enhancement.

Pictures / diagrams

This graphological aspect dominated all the analyzed texts as cited in an example on page one

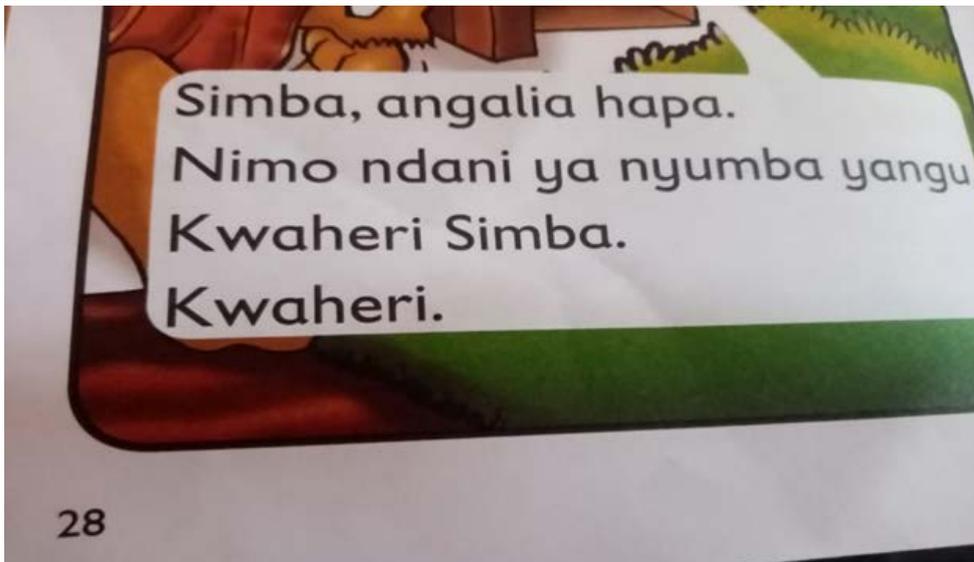


(1) in Nyumba ya Sungura (2012).

The pictures were done in different colours making the text to appeal to the intended readers. The picture also helps the learner to associate reality. The findings of the researcher agreed with views expressed by experts such as Greene (2001) & Mitchell (2005:140) as is equally supported by Adam (2019) that a picture in a text represents one thousand words. Nikolajeva & Scott (2001) and Helmy (2010) assert that pictures or pictorial representations in a text are a different way through which an author conveys the same information as it appears in writing. Ruthiri (2012) echoes the same but adds that in children's literature, pictures bring on board the aspect of realism. Schneider (2016), Akanwa (2017) and Adam (2019) confirm that pictures are essential components in children's literature and that without them, children's literature becomes incomplete because they represent one thousand words, making it ideal in thematic comprehension. They argue that a text with pictures gives the reader an opportunity to integrate both resources and this influences the reader's comprehension and retention of a texts' content.

Typography; font type and spacing

The first three (3) novels Nyumba ya Sungura (2012); Hadithi za Mamba (2009) and Harusi ya Mwanasungura (2006) were written in Futura Md BT 24 while the other two (2) written in Times New Roman 12.



An example of Futura Md BT 24 extracted from the novel of Nyumba ya Sungura (2012). These findings are in line with what Alotaibi (2017) recommends as a spacing of two (2) and two and a half (2.5) millimeters as the most appropriate for young readers as they will be able to read texts with such specifications with a lot of ease. It is this easiness in reading that results into ideal thematic comprehension. Kluck (1972) also recommended that wording in children's literature should be big and well-spaced so as to attract the young reader and to enable him read with some ease. Fordonski (1996), Hojjati & Muniandy (2014) say that font size in children's literature is a basic aspect that has a critical role and they recommend Times New Roman font size 12, which they say is popular in publications and that Futura Md BT 24 is the most ideal in inexperienced young readers.

Punctuations

A perusal of the analyzed texts confirmed normal linguistic use of punctuations such as italicization, colon, full stop, comma and question mark among others as indicated in the below examples.

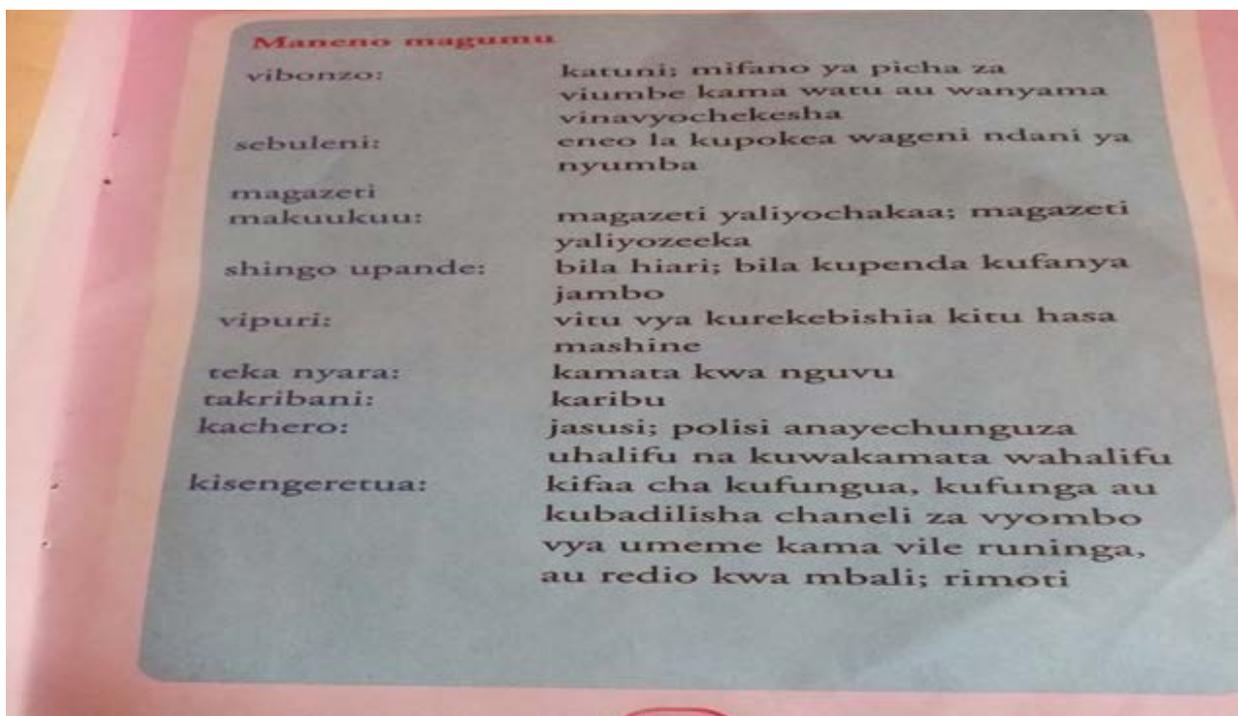


In the above that was extracted from the novel of Dani na Wezi wa Toyota (2015:16), towards the end of wordings on serial number nine (9) is a dash and two italicized words that the author is asking the reader to reconstruct. At the end of writings on serials one (1) to ten (10), are question marks marking the end of those writings.

The punctuation marks in the above excerpts play a significant role in guiding language use and enhancing cohesion and coherence. As Grindlay (2002) and Nordquist (2016) put it, syntactically, punctuations guide language use by enhancing cohesion and coherence among language structures. Lauchman (2010) echoed this sentiment but added that by so doing, meaning in a text is achieved. The extracts also portray three categories of punctuation marks as outlined by Chukwu (2010). The end or Terminal Punctuation like the full stop or period (.) and the question mark (?); the Internal or medial punctuation which includes the comma (,), the colon (:), and the dash (-), and the word or intra-word punctuation like the italics. These marks are of great importance in bringing out meaning in a text and and so enhance thematic foregrounding.

Glossary

Glossaries are used by authors to guide the reader on language use. The extract below from the novel *Dani na Wezi wa Toyota* (2015) is a guide to readers to understand the meaning of the various words.



An example of glossary showing difficult words and their contextual meaning as used in the novel *Dani na Wezi wa Toyota* (2015:15). It is an important component in children's literature which plays a role of enhancing a textual content comprehension. According to Nordquist (2019), a text is a communication tool, but its effectiveness depends on the level of the reader.

Conclusion

Children's literature has gone through a serious transformation and if any thorough textual analysis is to be carried out, then it should go beyond the common practice of looking at themes differently by relooking at the interlink between literature, linguistics and

semiotics. As we have been able to establish, graphology plays a critical role in enhancing thematic foregrounding as well as aesthetic attraction. This study therefore recommends that children be enlightened on the use of graphological elements in their texts to promote their understanding of texts and retention of the acquired knowledge.

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Disclaimer Statement

This work is part of Chapter Four (4) of my PhD research thesis titled: Matumizi ya Grafolojia katika Uchimuzi wa Maudhui katika Fasihi ya Watoto: Uchanganuzi wa Riwaya teule za Watoto to be submitted to Masinde Muliro University of Science & Technology (MMUST) for award of a PhD degree in Kiswahili in the Department of Language, Literature & Education in the School of Art & Social Sciences, under the supervision of Dr. Fridah A. Miruka (MMUST) and Dr. Benard O. Okal (Maseno University).

Author Bionote

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

The authors equally contributed in the research, writing and publishing this work.

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