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A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY AUXILIARY VERBS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD*

Ogundeji Samson Abiodun
Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.
ogundejisamsonabiodun@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT
This study conducts a systemic functional analysis of primary auxiliary verbs in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964). Using a qualitative research design and purposive sampling, the study uses secondary data to examine instances of *be, have* and *do*. The study analyses twelve (12) purposively selected extracts from chapters one (1), two (2), three (3), four (4), eight (8), nine (9), and twelve (12). The selected extracts comprised four (4) declarative constructions, four (4) interrogative constructions and four (4) passive constructions. The analysis was anchored on *Halliday`s Introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar* (fourth edition, 2014). The findings reveal that primary auxiliary verbs function significantly in *declarative, interrogative* and *passive constructions*. In declaratives, they operate as the finite element of the mood structure to *assert or negate facts, express certainty* and *convey habitual actions or general truths*. In interrogatives, they serve as a pivotal tool for the speech function of *demanding information, confirmation and clarification.* Finally, passive constructions demonstrate how auxiliaries shift the thematic focus from the Actor to the affected participant, thereby giving *prominence, and emphasis* to the affected participant.

Keywords: Auxiliary Verbs, Systemic Functional Grammar, Primary Auxiliary Verbs, Declaratives, Interrogatives and Passivisation.

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Introduction

Auxiliary verbs play an important role in meaning construction. Joseph Babalola (2022, p. 248) defines auxiliary verbs as helping verbs that can change the grammatical status of the main verb. Auxiliary verbs typically precede the lexical or main verbs within a verbal group. An auxiliary verb differs from a main verb in that an auxiliary verb can precede the subject NP in an interrogative sentence. A lexical verb cannot precede the subject NP. E.g. can she dance? Is grammatical, whereas dances she? Is not. Also, the negative particle "not" can be attached to an auxiliary verb whereas a lexical verb cannot. E.g. Ade does not eat rice. In addition, auxiliaries indicate tense (present and past). Mohammed Betti (2022, p. 9) opines that an auxiliary verb adds "functional or grammatical meaning to the clause in which it occurs so as to express tense, aspect, modality, voice, emphasis." He further submits that auxiliary verbs are helping verbs. Auxiliary verbs can be dichotomized into two categories (Sidney Greenbaum and Gerald Nelson, 2013, p. 39). These are primary and modal auxiliaries. Though this research work focuses on primary auxiliary verbs, modal auxiliaries are used to seek permission, express requests, make suggestions, show possibility or reveal ability.

Primary auxiliary verbs may be defined as the auxiliaries which perform important grammatical functions in English including the expression of tense, aspect, and voice as well as the formation of different constructions. It is also a type of auxiliary verb that reveals participles, showing emphasis, expressing past actions, portraying passive constructions, showcasing negations and asking questions. Stageberg (1981) cited in Adewole Alagbe (2009, p. 58) submits that "English primary auxiliary verbs are closely related or associated with the main verbs." This means that both primary auxiliaries and main verbs contribute to the meaning and grammaticality of sentences. There are three primary auxiliary verbs in English, namely: *do, have,* and *be.* The variants of the verb "do" are: *do, does,* and *did.* The variants of the verb "have" are: *has, have, and had* while the verb "be" is the most inflected verb of the three primary auxiliary verbs. Its variants are: *am, are, is, was, were, being, been,* and *be.* Primary auxiliary verbs are mostly used to construct sentences that have *negation, inversion, substitution,* and *marked positive elements* (Muir, 1972, cited in Alagbe, 2009, p. 59). It is also important to note that primary auxiliaries have the potential of functioning as the lexical or main verbs based on the context, however, that is not the focus in this study. The researcher has observed that there are numerous studies on the use of primary auxiliaries, but not specifically on the systemic functional analysis of primary auxiliary verbs in Chinua Achebe`s *Arrow of God*. Hence, this study seeks to fill the gap.

Aim and Objectives

This study aims to analyse the systemic functions of primary auxiliary verbs in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows:

i. To identify the primary auxiliary verbs used in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*.

ii. To classify the different primary auxiliary verb forms portrayed in the text.

iii. To analyse the systemic functions of primary auxiliary verbs in the text.

Empirical Review

Previous studies have examined the use of primary auxiliary verbs in newspaper headlines, magazines, posters, articles, flyers, and banners. Some of these investigations include:

Adewole Alagbe (2009) in "The English Primary Auxiliary Verbs: A Linguistic Theoretical Exercise," investigates the linguistic theoretical exercise regarding the use of primary auxiliaries and why speakers misuse the English auxiliaries due to the inadequate language exposure and poor background. The study adopted traditional grammar and structural grammar to analyse the data.

Bakoji Fema, Haruna Shuaibu and Alhaji Abubakar (2020) in "The Auxiliary Verbs and their Functions: An Overview," examine the use of primary and modal auxiliary verbs in sentences. The scholars used a qualitative research design to collect and analyse the study data. A random sampling method was employed by the researchers to collect instances of the relevant data. The study reviews the works of different authors on the auxiliaries and how crucial they are. The findings show that modals are mostly used for *seeking permission, expressing obligations, possibility, suggestions,* and *ability* while primary auxiliary verbs are commonly used for *expressing inversions, negations,* and *passive forms* as portrayed in the study.

Another work that is related to this study is the paper written by William Twaddell (1963) on "The English Verb Auxiliaries." The study shows the use of *be*, *have,* and *do* verbs in English. Secondary data were used for the study. The findings show that Twaddell identifies four major grammatical modifications in the English verb system: *past, current relevance, limited duration,* and *passive forms.* The study posits that these four modifications contribute to the formation of English verb constructions.

An investigation by Munazza Hayat and Mehnaz (2015) on "Importance of the Usage of Multiple Auxiliary Verbs in English Language in the Corpus Approach /Group Learning of the Students of Bachelor Level in District Kohat" shows the multiple auxiliary verbs used by the bachelor-level students of Kohat District. The researchers randomly selected ten (10) colleges. A quantitative research design was used for data collection and analysis. Pre-test and post-test were used as instruments of the study. The statistical tools used in analyzing the study were tables, percentages, frequencies, and graphs. The results show that most of the students were deficient in the use of primary auxiliary verbs. The study also shows that it was cumbersome for the students to use the English primary auxiliaries appropriately because they had not mastered the use of the second language (L2).

A thesis written by Adrian Iqbal (2023) on "An Analysis of Auxiliary Verbs on the Jakarta Post Online Newspaper" reveals the classification of primary and modal auxiliary verbs portrayed in the Jakarta Post Online newspaper. The study employed a library research method to collect and analyse the relevant data. The findings show that the newspaper contained 56 primary auxiliaries and 73 modals. The study reveals that the Jakarta Post Online newspaper had more modals than the primary auxiliary verbs. *Do, have,* and *be* are the primary auxiliary verbs exhibited in the newspaper while *can, could, should, may,* and *will* are the commonly used modal auxiliary verbs in the newspaper. However, based on the studies reviewed, no study has been identified that

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examines the systemic functional analysis of primary auxiliary verbs in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God.* Based on this ground, this study will fill the gap left by the other researchers.

Theoretical Review: Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

This study is anchored on the fourth edition of *Halliday`s Introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar* (2014). It was first propounded by Michael Halliday in 1985. In 2014, this theory was revised by Christian Matthiessen. Systemic Functional Grammar primarily addresses three metafunctions in language. These are ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. The ideational function of a language allows a language user to share meaningful and relevant ideas based on experiences or things that happen universally, while the textual function of a language shows the grammatical systems that are employed in managing a spoken or written discourse.

The interpersonal function of a language reveals how language is used by two or more persons in a conversation. Linguistically, interpersonal communication occurs through spoken or written style, non-verbal communication, and listening. Within the interpersonal metafunction, this study specifically focuses on the MOOD system (declarative, interrogative, imperative), where primary auxiliaries function as the finite element of the clause. By analysing primary auxiliaries as finite in *Arrow of God*, this research examines how speakers like Ezeulu use these verbs to establish their social standing, issue commands, or ask questions effectively through the MOOD structure (subject + finite).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing content analysis to examine the use of primary auxiliary verbs in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God.* The study uses secondary data drawn from the text. The entire text was carefully read, and twelve (12) extracts containing primary auxiliary verbs were purposively selected for analysis. The selected extracts were drawn from chapters one (1), two (2), three (3), four (4), eight (8), nine (9), and twelve (12).

The extracts were grouped into three categories: four (4) declarative constructions, four (4) interrogative constructions, and four (4) passive constructions. The selection was based on the relevance of the extracts to the objectives of the study and their occurrence in constructions containing primary auxiliaries. Constructions that did not directly contribute to the analysis were excluded.

The data were analysed using *Halliday`s Introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar* (fourth edition, 2014) as the analytical framework, and the study focuses on how the identified primary auxiliaries function in declarative, interrogative, and passive constructions. The findings were presented and discussed qualitatively based on the systemic functions performed by the primary auxiliary verbs in the extracts.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Preamble

This section analyses the uses of primary auxiliary verbs in *Arrow of God.* It shows how primary auxiliary verbs are used in declarative, interrogative and passive constructions.

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CONSTRUCTION	BE	HAVE	DO	TOTAL
DECLARATIVE	1	2	1	4
INTERROGATIVE	1	1	2	4
PASSIVE	4	0	0	4
TOTAL	6	3	3	12

Primary Auxiliary Verbs in Declarative Constructions

This section showcases the primary auxiliary verbs in declarative constructions extracted from Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God.*

i. I *have* finished with you. (Achebe, 1964, p. 5)

ii. The story that the white man *had* whipped Obika spread through the villages while the age group held its meeting under the shade of ogbu trees in the market place. (Achebe, 1964, p. 87)

iii. Edogo's thoughts refused to stay on the door he *was* carving. (Achebe, 1964, p. 91)

iv. A man *does* not speak a lie to his son. (Achebe, 1964, p. 93)

The verbal group "have finished" in (i) uses *have* as finite, marking the clause as declarative and expressing perfective aspect (completed process). It also conveys authority and decisiveness which are the characteristics of Ezeulu's personality. A similar function is evident in (ii), where the auxiliary *had* indicates the past perfective aspect. This shows that the material process *whipped* was completed before another past action "spread". The auxiliary has structurally validated the certainty of the event within the narrative context.

On the other hand, a past progressive verbal group is formed by joining *was* + *carving* in (iii). This auxiliary is used within the verbal group to assert or confirm that the material process (action) was ongoing at a specific time in the past and provides information about Edogo's thoughts which were on the issue between Ezeulu and Obika over his friendship with Ofoedu. Unlike the perfective constructions in (i) and (ii), the progressive construction focuses on the ongoing nature of the process.

Negative polarity in (iv) is realised by combining the auxiliary *does* with the negative particle *not.* The negator *not* is used with the auxiliary *does* to deny the proposition. The auxiliary verb "does not" is used with the main verb "speak" because when the auxiliary verbs *does, do, did, does not, do not, did not* are used, the main verb appears in its base form.

Thus, the declarative extracts show that the primary auxiliaries perform different systemic functions, including the expression of perfective and progressive aspects and the realisation of negative polarity.

Primary Auxiliary Verbs in Interrogative Constructions

In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God,* there are many interrogative constructions used to examine how the primary auxiliaries function as the finite to facilitate the exchange of information through the interrogative mood. Here are some of them:

v. *Does* the moon kill people? Asked Obiageli, tugging at her mother's cloth. (Achebe, 1964, p. 2)

vi. *Do* you know the meaning of Idemili? (Achebe, 1964, p. 41)

vii. What *have* I done to this child? (Achebe, 1964, p. 2)

viii. Who *is* carrying the other? (Achebe, 1964, p. 123)

The interrogative extracts illustrate how the primary auxiliaries function as the finite in both polar (Yes/No) and WH-interrogatives. Extracts (v) and (vi) are polar interrogatives, but they use *does* and *do* respectively to seek information.

Obiageli`s question places *does* before the subject "the moon" to establish the interrogative structure in (v). Interpersonally, Obiageli uses this expression to perform a speech function of demanding information if the moon can kill. The auxiliary *does* is a tool for clarification and reassurance. This finite-subject ordering realises a polar (Yes/No) interrogative in SFG. Unlike (v) which uses *does*, a polar (Yes/No) interrogative is expressed through *do* in extract (vi). This structure realises a mental process of cognition "knowing" and creates a Yes/No demand for seeking information. In both constructions, the presence of *do/does* enables the main verb to remain in its base form.

The WH-interrogatives in extracts (vii) and (viii), however, demonstrate the use of *have* and *is.* A perfective aspect is formed in (vii) using *have* with "done" to establish a past action that directly impacts the interpersonal dynamics of the present. In contrast, in (viii), there is combination of *is* with "carrying" to form the progressive aspect verbal group representing a material process. Ezeulu uses this WH-interrogative to demand clarification from Obiageli regarding her physical struggle with Amoge's child.

Primary Auxiliary Verbs in Passive Constructions

Extracts from the text include:

ix. Ezeulu *was* carried away by his praise of the god of wealth. (Achebe, 1964, p. 9)

x. They *were* driven away by Umuofia..." (Achebe, 1964, p. 16)

xi. That ebenebe tree over there *was* once hit by thunder. (Achebe, 1964, p. 20)

xii. They *were* driven out of the ground by the rain. (Achebe, 1964, p. 35)

The use of auxiliary *was* in (ix) allows the clause to be passivised, shifting the thematic focus to "Ezeulu" for emphasis. This passivisation underscores Ezeulu's loss of control, presenting him as a Goal being acted upon by an Agent. In the active counterpart, the passive auxiliary would not be realized.

The introduction of *were* facilitates the structural shift where the original Actor "Umuofia" becomes a prepositional phrase in (x), giving thematic prominence to the pronoun "They" (the people of Okperi). Nwaka uses this passive structure to emphasize past military dominance and validate his political stance.

Furthermore, there is a shift in the thematic focus in (xi) to the "ebenebe tree" and moves the Actor "thunder" to the end of the clause. This foregrounds the spatial and spiritual significance of the location. This statement is said by Akukalia during his journey to Okperi. Also, in (xii), through the auxiliary *were*, passivisation is achieved. This structure downplays the active role of "the rain" as the Actor, placing thematic prominence on the pronoun "They" to emphasize the vulnerability of the entities being displaced.

Conclusion

This research work has identified the primary auxiliary verbs used in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* which are *be*, *do* and *have* verbs. Furthermore, the study has also classified the different primary auxiliary verb forms portrayed in the text which are *declarative, interrogative and passive constructions.* The findings show how primary auxiliary verbs function as finite in declaratives to *negate facts or assert certainty* and *clarification.* In interrogatives, the finite functions as a tool for *demanding information, confirmation* and *clarification.* In passive constructions, it functions as a thematic focus for *emphasis, prominence,* and *attention.* Hence, the research has fulfilled the objectives that have been set out at the beginning of the study. However, this study is limited to the systemic functions of primary auxiliary verbs in one literary text, *Arrow of God* and one theory. Future research could examine modal auxiliary verbs and other categories of verbs such as lexical verbs, finite or non-finite verbs, and dynamic or stative verbs. Such studies could be carried out in other literary works or across different genres to provide a broader understanding of verb use in English.

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