

The old chief Mshlanga – A systemic functional approach to verbal art

O velho chefe Mshlanga – uma abordagem sistêmico-funcional à arte verbal

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ABSTRACT: This study analyses the semiotic choices that make up Doris Lessing's autobiographical story – The Old Chief Mshlanga – to understand how the narrator's perception of herself and the African continent changed as she grew closer to the local people. The text is part of a collection of African stories written to depict her early years in the continent, while drawing attention to the hardships imposed on the natives by the immigrants. Our choice resulted from our interest in the African people and from regarding Lessing as one of the main voices against the African discrimination. The study draws on Hasan's (1989) approach to verbal art and Halliday's (2004) Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG). Also, though we carried out a comprehensive analysis of the whole story, we segmented the extracts from the text, due to limitations of space, following Hasan's (1989) concept of Generic Structure Potential (GSP) for the Nursery Tale, which provides a better understanding of the significant attributes of the social activity.

KEYWORDS: verbal art framework; Systemic-Functional Grammar; Generic Structure Potential; african continent; black people.

RESUMO: Este estudo analisa as escolhas semióticas que compõem o conto autobiográfico de Doris Lessing – The Old Chief Mshlanga – para entendermos como a percepção da narradora de si mesma e da África muda à medida que ela se aproxima dos nativos. O conto é parte do volume de contos africanos que descrevem sua infância neste continente e relata os sofrimentos dos negros impostos pelos imigrantes. A escolha resulta de nosso interesse no povo africano e por termos em Lessing uma das maiores vozes contra a discriminação do povo africano. O estudo baseia-se na abordagem à arte verbal proposta por Hasan (1989) e na Gramática Sistêmico-Funcional (GSF) de Halliday (2004). Ainda, apesar de procedermos a uma análise exaustiva de todo o conto, nós nos limitamos, por motivo de espaço, a apresentar alguns extratos, segmentados segundo o conceito de Estrutura Potencial do Gênero (EPG) de Hasan (1989) para o gênero canções infantis. Assim propiciamos uma melhor compreensão dos atributos significativos da atividade social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: modelo de arte verbal; Gramática Sistêmico-Funcional; Estrutura Potencial do Gênero; continente africano; negros.

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1 Introduction

It is commonly accepted that we live our lives narratively. We tell stories to ascertain our *selves* and to make ourselves known to others. Linde (1993, p. 3) emphasizes this point when she argues that “life stories express our sense of self: who we are and how we got that way”. Besides, storytelling is one of the oldest ways of using language. Toolan’s (1988, p. 184) investigation of children’s stories, for example, concludes that linguistic analysis of children’s narratives is bound to look for some “fairly sharp issues of relatedness”. However, analysing a text is more than just to consider its structure. It is “a powerful method for understanding the ways in which all sources of realities are constructed through language” (Birch, 1989, p. 20).

Lodge’s widely known postulate that “The novelist’s medium is language: whatever he does, *qua* novelist, he does in and through language” (Lodge, 2002, p. xiii) reinforces Hasan’s claim that we should not attain to the language of literature but, rather, to the language *in* literature (Hasan, 1989, my italics). That means that language doesn’t have value *per se* but due to its *function* in the text. As much as Hasan (1989; 2015), Halliday (1981; 2002; 2004), and Hasan and Halliday (1989) are regarded as the main advocates of language as semiotics, their works used in this study – Halliday’s Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG) and Hasan’s verbal art framework – are considered two seminal exemplars of language used in social settings. This is precisely our aim regarding this study, that is, to show how the semiotic system may construe the protagonist’s change of perception of Africa and the natives while coming to realize that *she* was the one who could not get to be part of the African environment.

Doris Lessing’s fiction is highly autobiographical, resulting from her experiences in Africa. Her books talk of politics, racial inequalities, clash of cultures, and a fight between inner opposing elements within her own personality. Her African collections, and particularly this short story, *The Od Chief Mshlanga* (Lessing, 2003), show how the continent and its people shaped her character and made her take a stance against the discriminatory attitudes by the white immigrants.

Since an analysis of the whole story would be clearly beyond the scope of this study, we have opted for Hasan’s Generic Structure Potential (GSP) for the Nursery Tale (2015), detailed in the next section, as a template to segment the story and help us look into the extracts taken from the short story. This way, we aim to present the story’s development in a clearer and easier-to-be-followed way.

2 The Generic Structure Potential for the Nursery tale

Starting from Halliday’s (1989) elements of social interaction – field (the nature of the social activity), tenor (the agent roles) and mode (the way the social activity takes place), which act upon the language that is being used, Hasan develops her concept of Context Configuration (CC). She (Hasan, 1989, p. 56) states that “it is the specific features of a CC – the values of variables – that permit statements about the text’s structure”. In other words, if we understand text to be language in use in a specific context, it is, then, the verbal expression of the social activity going on, while the Context Configuration is an account of the significant attributes of this social activity. This means that we can make some assumptions regarding the text structure, for instance, those elements that are obligatory or optional. These elements, as well

as the others that make up Hasan's Generic Structure Potential for the Nursery Tale (GSPNT), are detailed in Table 1 and explained thereafter.

Table 1 – Generic Structure Potential for the Nursery Tale.

$[(\text{Placement} > \wedge) \text{Initiating Event} \wedge] \text{Sequent Event} \wedge \text{Final Event} [\wedge (\text{Finale})^* (\text{Moral})]$

Source: Hasan (2015).

According to Hasan (2015, p. 54-55), the elements within *angled brackets* – *Placement*, *Finale* and *Moral* – are the optional elements, which means that there may be stories without the *Placement* (setting of the story) and/or *Finale* and/or *Moral*. As for the other elements, *Initiating Event*, *Sequence* and *Final Events*, they are all obligatory, turning the story incomplete without any one of them. The other symbols are defined as follows:

() – *angled brackets*: enclose elements whose lexicogrammatical realization may be included or mingled with that of other elements;

* – *asterisk*: means that the order between the elements, *Finale* and *Moral*, can be reversible;

^ – *carat sign*: means that the order between all of the other elements isn't reversible;

[] – *square brackets*: they limit the elements' mobility. In the structure presented in Fig. 1, this limit is imposed on the first two elements – *Placement* and *Initiating Event*, and on the last two elements – *Finale* and *Moral*. This disposition means that the order of elements can be altered within the square brackets but not outside them. For example, neither of the two last elements can precede the *Final Event*. though their own order can be reversed within the brackets;

↖ – *curved arrow*: symbolizes the possibility of iteration for the respective element.

In addition to Hasan's enormous contribution to the study of literature, Lukin (2018) states that Hasan's interest went beyond the analysis of literary works to shedding light on what constituted the field of linguistics.

3 Methodology

Hasan (1989) argues that for statements to be valid, the analysis must be exhaustive, i.e., it must be deeply carried out in linguistic terms. Following Hasan's view, Pagano & Lukin (2015, p. 97), hold that "it can range from a full text to representative samples of it". In the case of the present study, extracts from the text relating to each element of the GSPN were picked out for the analysis according to Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) ideational and textual metafunctions. The former accounts for the logical and experiential meanings of the story, while the latter presents the organized structures of the text. Thus, the ideational processes, describing the doings and happenings, will give us valuable insight into the main characters' roles, while the textual items will enhance the understanding of the sequence and thematic construes in the story. These two metafunctions are described in Halliday and Matthiessen (2004).

In addition, clause complexing analysis, that is, the analysis of the grammatical construction of two or more clauses and their respective relations, is important to verify expansion and projection patterns at clause rank. Expansion occurs when the figurative meaning of one clause is elaborated, extended or enhanced. Projection refers to those cases of when the figurative meaning of the clause is projected. Once the text was segmented according to the GSP model, we selected some extracts from each element – Placement (also referred to as the setting of the narrative, providing background information about social activity), Initiating Event, Sequent Event, and Final Event – which helped us to give a clear answer to the question posed. Lastly, the planes of narration were considered, as we deem them relevant for the investigation of the narrator's position (Simpson, 2005). The next section details how the analysis was carried out.

4 The Analysis

4.1 Placement

Placement in the narrative is introduced by an outsider: a narrator whom we will call *the Imp* after Hasan (1989) as he/she is not a character in the story. This background information is delivered through a string of finite (clause with tensed verb) and non-finite (with no tensed verb) clauses that make up the clause complex structure.

Investigating the ideational processes in the story, most of them are typically relational, hence the careful description of the African environment, and intransitive, in the case of the clauses that make up the material ones. For instance, of the few transitive clauses that make up the material processes, those in Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) Transitivity System that refer to who does what to whom, just two out of twenty in the Placement have a human actor, though here the actors do not necessarily do something to the goal, but rather *with* it as follows: "She carried a gun in the crook of her arm / (the natives) take their money" (Lessing, 2003, p. 14).

These clauses foreground the only kind of relationship the little girl initially thought possible with the local Africans: one of power and indifference. The gun not only gave the girl a feeling of safety, but also symbolized punishment in case a native considered trespassing the culturally established boundaries. For the white foreigners, natives were nothing more than migrants who came to the farm looking for money and vanished soon afterwards. Therefore, no close relationship might be of regard when it came to them, which is exemplified in the verbal projection at the very end of the placement. "Her mother would come running anxiously: / 'Come away; you mustn't talk to natives'" (Lessing, 2003, p. 15).

The clauses above, following Hasan (1989, p. 68-69), comprise a second order or indirect plane of narration, ascribing to the Imp omniscience not only regarding the girl but her mother's feelings as well. Moreover, it is worth noting that the clause that projects the verbal one does so while, at the same time, it draws attention to the mother's rush towards the girl, showing her concern that her little girl might 'stray in the company of the natives'. Following Halliday (2004), this clause is structurally situated between the limits of a material and a behavioural process in the Transitivity System.

Also, deictic elements are crucial in the construction of the deep meaning of the story. For example, whereas descriptions of the natural surroundings and the situations give us a detailed picture of the setting of the narrative, characters are mentioned in veiled hints leaving

the addressee in the dark as to their identities. Reference in this case, then, is made by using social deixis such as a *white child*, *chieftainness* or *nkosikaas* to talk about the main character: “A white child [...] was supposed to accept it as her own / She was called ‘Nkosikaas’ - Chieftainness, even by the black children her own age” (Lessing, 2003, p. 14).

As Levinson (1979) points out, social deixis has its social significance as part of their meaning. These forms of address above overtly express her position of superiority compared to the locals. Still, following Levinson (1979), the social information encoded in the deictic items is anchored to the aspects of the speech event, that is, during social interactions. Deixis also expresses the Imp’s omniscience. Right from the very beginning, the story brings an intensive attributive clause which characterises the girl’s early years on her father’s farm as *being good*, shown in the clause below: “They were good, the years of raging the bushes over her father’s farm” (Lessing, 2003, p. 13).

Omniscience is reinforced in the way deictic elements are used in the Mood element, to portray the protagonist - *her*, *this child*, and *she* (see Table 2) all of which imply closeness and familiarity, a choice made instead of personal names, titles or demonstratives that imply distancing and indefinite articles.

Table 2 – Structure of the Mood Element.

	Subject	
	Deictic	Noun
Mood Structure	This	Child
	Her	Books
	Her	Rivers
		She

Source: Halliday; Matthiessen (2004).

Further examples of deixis can be found in the clauses that follow:

The sun was a foreign sun

The black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks.

they were an amorphous black mass

(they were) mingling and thinning and massing like tadpoles,

her rivers ran slow and peaceful. (Lessing, 2003, p.13-14).

In the chunk above, the deictic elements *the* and *they* highlight the girl’s strangeness towards the natives’ Africa. They contrast sharply with *her* own look on the African land.

A final word on the relevance of the deictic elements in the Placement concerns parallelism. Leech and Short (2007, p. 14-15) explain that “it is obviously the aesthetics of form which tends to draw the reader’s attention, rather than the meaning”. Here, in the chunk above, this resource foregrounds the girl’s inability to see Africa for what it really was. But this is not

devoid of meaning, as “the elaboration of form inevitably brings an elaboration of meaning” (Leech; Short, 2007, p. 14-15).

As for the thematic construction in the Placement, the same initiating clause – *They were good, the years of raging the bushes over her father’s farm* – presents a special theme category named substitution theme. This is based on the contrast between the presence/absence of certain syntactic structures used to highlight this part of the message (Gómez-González, 2001). In this regard, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 124) point out that substitute themes constitute special kinds of ‘afterthoughts’ (my inverted commas) whereby an element which otherwise would appear as unmarked theme is assigned to clause-final position. This is a reversal of the given-new order. In the clause above used as the example, the verb-predicative construction – *were good*, take the marked thematic position, what calls for the subject *they*, rising our expectations regarding what comes after.

In general, most of the themes are unmarked, with the subject in the initial position, emphasizing the *actor+process+scope/goal* pattern (as in the chunk above). The few marked themes in this section include a) finites and non-finites hypotactic elaborating clauses, clarifying aspects related to the girl and the natives; b) a subject-elliptical paratactic extension clause, depicting a material intransitive process of movement, one of the girl’s many exploratory walks around her father’s farm (both cases are illustrated in the next chunk). While in the case of non-finite elaboration Halliday (2004, p. 469) states that it is often difficult to identify the subject left implicit, Arús (2010, p. 32) claims that subject-drop cases in English is a way of presenting the subject as very given, to the point of making its mention redundant. We understand that both cases need to be examined within the context of the clause(s) instantiated to assess the need of mentioning it or not; and c) circumstantial adjuncts, as shown in the examples that follow:

(a girl) opening its eyes curiously on a sun-suffused landscape,
 who (the natives) existed merely to serve,
 and (the girl) wandered miles a day from vlei to vlei, from kopje to
 kopje, accompanied by two dogs:
 though she could remember nothing else. (Lessing, 2003, p.13-14).

The chunk above presents the account by an omniscient narrator of how prejudiced the girl had been taught to be and how strange the landscape and its people were to her. Therefore, venturing beyond the limits of the farm was possible only with the protection of her two dogs.

The chunk that follows

Because of this, for many years, it was the veld that seemed unreal;
 the sun was a foreign sun,
 and the wind spoke a strange language.
 The black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks.
 They were an amorphous black mass,
 mingling and thinning and massing like tadpoles,

faceless,
 who existed merely to serve,
 to say “Yes, Bass,”
 take their money
 and go. (Lessing, 2003, p.13-14).

Starts with a clause whose marked theme has a subordinating conjunction – *because* – that explains, by anaphoric reference to all that was previously said, why the girl could not look at Africa as her own place. This conjunction legitimates the predicated theme that follows it, explaining the contrast between what is familiar and acceptable to the girl and what is not. The construction of her views on Africa, thus, is carried out in a way as to make the local people’s identities semantically shadowy and unimportant. Firstly, the local people are represented as one group, by means of a derogative, social deictic underlining a racial feature – *black people*. Categorizing people like that “is always potentially an intervention in their lives, and often more” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 108).

The Imp uses another general deictic item - *they*, to refer to the group of natives. The pronoun here sounds as a reinforcement of the previous racist adjective. Now, the clause which follows is a non-finite, subordinate one, whose omission of the mood and the finite elements, as mentioned earlier, only enhances the idea of anonymity towards the African people. Thus, the natives’ identities are made *incognito* to the reader. Shortening the clause structure to a single qualifier – *faceless* - foregrounds the conflict that was to begin in the child’s mind. “Later, when the farm grew too small [[to hold her curiosity]], / Later still, certain questions presented themselves in the child’s mind;” (Lessing, 2003, p. 14-15).

Despite the great number of relational processes in the story, mental processes are vital to present the speaker’s cognitive perception of and emotional connections with both contexts – of culture and of situation, Hasan (1989); Halliday and Hasan (1989). Two clauses (in the small chunk above), particularly, whose marked themes show circumstantial adjuncts of time, foreground the construction of her new identity. The attribution of life to inanimate elements in the clauses make the mental processes seem to be impinged on the girl’s mind regardless of her own will.

As we have shown in this Section 4.1, clause complexing in the Placement presents two distinct semantic patterns, one which refers to what the white girl is expected to do - the ideal – and the other in which reasons are presented to explain why she can’t live up to those expectations - the reality.

4.2 Initiating Event

From this point on, narration is carried out by the girl herself. It is a subjective-plane account of how she came to recognize the black natives as the true owners of the land, in the person of their Chief Mshlanga. Hasan (1989) holds that due to the characters’ material position in the story, they are limited in terms of place and time, unable to show omniscience. Therefore, knowledge of social activity is acquired as we follow the narrator in her journey of self-discovery. For example, we only get to know how surprised she felt about the natives’

hierarchy when she comes across Chief Mshlanga's group, which was the turning point in her life. On then did she realize they were different from the black people on the farm. This is semantically conveyed by the verbal and mental projections in the interpersonal relationships between the girl and the Chief and his tribesmen.

I walked quietly on, talking softly to the growling dogs,
 Then the old man stopped, drawing his blanket close.
 The group was not a usual one.
 These (natives) had an air of dignity
 "My Chief travels to see his brothers beyond the river"
 "A Chief!" I thought. (Lessing, 2003, p.15).

Narration develops typically through simple and continuous past tenses, highlighting the finite structure. Non-finites, *talking* and *drawing*, in the extract above, are used only to elaborate on the characters' engagement in the daily social practice by means of hypotactic elaborating clauses (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2004). The verb "travels", in the present simple, gives the reader the idea of a habitual journey by the group across the African territory. And, although projection is carried out on the indirect plane of narration where quoting is verbatim, interference by the girl is evidenced in the comments she makes regarding both sides' stance during their interaction. These comments are useful means available to us, providing a thorough understanding of the social actors' role in the verbal exchange. "Morning, Nkosikaas, he said, using the customary greeting for any time of the day. / 'Where are you going?' My voice was a little truculent" (Lessing, 2003, p. 16).

Ideational processes in the Initiating Event resemble those in the previous element. It is realized by relational and intransitive material ones (*was not; had an air; walked; travels* [1st chunk]; *was so extraordinary; stepped forward* [chunk below]), whereby the main point of the message is achieved, i.e., to depict the protagonist's perception of the world around her and the effect it has on her inner self. Therefore, description entails small details (*'a chief', I thought; my voice was truculent*) which otherwise would go unnoticed were it not for the need to background the moment when the speaker finds it relevant to reveal the main local character's identity. This foregrounds ownership of the land as well as, if not more important, the natives' status as a people who deserve to be regarded with respect, and who have their own hierarchy like any white group of farmers.

The phrase "ask his permission" was so extraordinary to a white child,
 brought up to consider all natives as things to use;
 Then one of the young men stepped forward politely
 To prospect for gold in his territory. (Lessing, 2003, p. 16-17).

Thematic markers include (1) deictic elements – which structure the text flow and make anaphoric references to the group of natives, through the girl's mental process of realization of the group's importance and particularity, compared to the ones who roamed round the farm: *a group of three Africans; the group; they; and these*

A group of three Africans came into sight,
 The group was not a usual one
 They were not natives seeking work.
 These had an air of dignity. (Lessing, 2003, p. 16).

(2) dependent clauses and circumstantial adjuncts, “As I read more books about when this part of Africa was opened up... / During that year, I met him several times” (Lessing, 2003, p. 17) and (3) predication, to highlight the thematic/rhematic part of the message (Gómez-González, 2001 p. 6) “It was the dignity [[that checked my tongue]]” (Lessing, 2003, p. 15).

The thematic predicate construction above foregrounds the change that was about to happen in the girl’s perception of the values and rights of the African people.

Lastly, thematic conjunctive adjuncts of extension or enhancement, such as *and* and *then*, which contribute to the logical sequence of the events, were used to elaborate, enhance or extend the meaning of the previous situation.

and the dogs were at my heels.
 then the old man stopped.
 then one of the young men stepped forward politely
 and said in careful English (Lessing, 2003, p. 15-16).

4.3 Sequent Event

The first chunk of clauses in this Element describes the second time the girl hears about Chief Mshlanga. This time, she is assured by others that the land actually belongs to the old native. In this part of the narration, the speaker uses paratactic verbal projections to confer greater credibility to her account. At this point, she distances herself from the story to tell us the conversation that took place between the prospector and her parents. Thus, the first person pronoun *I* is replaced by *he* and the possessive *his*. This is an objective account on the indirect plane of narration (Hasan, 1989).

On another occasion one of those prospectors [[who still move over Africa [[looking for neglected reefs, with their hammers and tents, and pans [[for sifting gold from crushed rock]] used that phrase again:
 “this is the Old Chief’s country,” he said. (Lessing, 2003, p. 17).

Clause complexing includes embedded clauses and non-finites to enhance the context of situation – the meeting with a prospector - a social actor (Van Leeuwen, 2008) the narrator assumes to be familiar to the addressee through the deictic item *those*. Also, it presents a good number of dependent clauses, some of which have elliptical subject requiring the reader to recover the actor, doer of the action (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2004), from a previous mention in the text.

The semantic contrast between the embedded clauses which characterize the prospectors' exploratory intent of the African land and the admission by one such explorer that the whole stretch of land belongs to Chief Mshlanga foregrounds one of the central themes of the story - the white people's contempt for a Black country.

At this point, the narrative goes back to the subjective plane as the girl describes her meetings with Chief Mshlanga and the other natives. Here we find a much greater variety of ideational processes than before. Relational processes are mostly of the identifying kind, not the attributive one; material processes, as seen before, are mostly intransitive, referring to movements across the African land, with the exception of two clauses which have the typical *actor + process + goal* structure. They foreground the change that now has already taken place within the girl's mind as a result of her looking at the Black people without feeling threatened

During that year I met him several times in the part of the farm
 [[that was traversed by natives [[moving over the country]]
 Soon I carried a gun in a different spirit;
 I used it for shooting food
 and the black people moved back, as it were, out of my life. (Lessing, 2003, p. 17).

The following examples show ideational clauses and apposing embedded ones, aiming to give the addressee a clear picture of what became so important to the girl - a path commonly taken by the black natives, unknown to her up to that moment. It meant the path that would take her into the natives' private world and appease her mind of the questions which had been bothering her. Therefore, behavioural and mental clauses are the linguistic resources employed by the speaker to convey the deep meaning underlying this change.

I learned
 that the path up the side of the big red field [[where the birds sang]] was the
 recognized highway for migrants.
 Perhaps I even haunted it
 in the hope of meeting him.
 Being greeted by him, the exchange of courtesies, seemed to answer the questions [[
 that troubled me]].
 and slowly that other landscape in my mind faded,
 and my feet struck directly on the African soil,
 and I saw the shape of tree and hill clearly.
 to watch a slow intimate dance of landscape and men
 which was a very old dance,
 whose steps I could not learn. (Lessing, 2003, p. 17-18).

Of the five mental processes used, three are perceptive (*recognize, see, trouble, fade*) and two cognitive (*learned, hope*). The former show how the girl came to see her outer world,

while the latter mentioned *their* learning process, hers and her dogs'. Not until the girl began to have an unbiased view on the natives' way of living and understand that there was no need for the people to shut one another out was she able to see and feel the land as her own land. This process of change is reinforced in the parallel clauses that sequence the steps of each new perception, making the girl take a new stance towards her position in the environment and regarding the natives. As the questions about the African natives seemed to have been worked out, a feeling of unbelonging was what now started to make her feel uncomfortable. This feeling is admitted through the negative form of the modal *could*. The incapacity of following suit as the natives and the environment put on so intimate a dance made her feel she didn't belong there.

But I thought:

This is my heritage too;

I was bred here.

And there's plenty of room for all of us,

Without elbowing each other off the pavements and roads (Lessing, 2003, p. 17).

The girl now feels a deep need to be recognized as one of the local people, hence the adversative extension marker – *but* - starting the chunk above. What follows is a number of mental projection clauses (projected by the verb '*thought*') realized by relational processes, alongside embedded and independent clauses that highlight the protagonist's claim of Africa as her own place as much as the natives'. Deictic items such as *this*, *here*, *it*, and *my* depict how close the girl felt to the land she had begun to accept as hers. Moreover, the choice of words here is crucial in giving the reader the elements the speaker uses to lay her claim: *heritage*, *bred*, *plenty of room*, *without elbowing*, *respect*, and *tolerance*. This was a significant change from a person who used to accept her parents' stereotyped view of the Africans. Though the change has found its way in her mind, the girl remains unsure whether this living together would become a reality. This uncertainty is expressed by the repeated instantiation of the verb *seems* in the clauses that follow: "I seemed it was only necessary to let free that respect I felt / It seemed quite easy" (Lessing, 2003, p. 18).

Overall, the second part of the Sequent Event is the speaker's narration of her construction of a new self, using past tenses to describe the whole context of situation. The exception, the present simple, occurs in the clauses which make reference to her right to being regarded as one of them.

4.4 Final Event

This last narrative element portrays the girl's acknowledgement of her inability to relate. Her outlook on Africa and the natives falls short of bearing any resemblance to how the Africans see themselves. For, as she admits, her interest in the natives' way of living wouldn't go far beyond the boundaries of mere childish curiosity.

But the truth was
 I had set out in a spirit of curiosity
 I might now be feeling an urgent helpless desire
 to get to know these men and women as people
 “the child of Nkosi Jordan is welcome,” said Chief Mshlanga.
 “thank you”, I said,
 and could think of nothing more to say (Lessing, 2003, p. 22).

The chunk can be divided in two parts: the visit paid to the natives’ village and its outcome. In the first case, the speaker opens herself up about her initial desire to get closer to the natives, something that she *herself* was not so sure of, thus ending up admitting what laid beneath her intention. Her flippancy is clearly suggested by the modal verb *might*, implying a very fickle interest, and the alternative conjunction *but*, contrasting the desire with the reality: difficulties in making friends with the natives. An act of curiosity, thus, wouldn’t be enough to help her find the right words to use or keep on a conversation. At this point, the silence that sinks in (chunk below) shows the girl’s embarrassment through material clauses whose actors are not humans, taking the reader along in her deeply thoughtful analysis of the surrounding landscape:

There was a silence, while the flies rose
 and began to buzz around my head,
 and the wind shook a little in the thick green tree
 that spread its branches over the old men (Lessing, 2003, p. 22).

The clause complex that follows constructs the outcome of the meeting through material, relational, and mental clauses, expressing the interplay of environment and thoughts in the child’s mind. Narration takes place on the subjective plane except for the verbal projection instantiating the exchange between the two protagonists. Here, parallel constructions make up the rhythm and progression of the girl’s account by means of ideational processes regarding the landscape with conjunctions and a string of adjectives.

I had wanted to see the village
 and the pigeons cooed tales of plenty
 and the woodpecker tapped softly
 a cold, hard, sullen indomitability that walked with me
 as strong as a wall
 as intangible as smoke.
 I went homewards, with an empty heart
 I had learned
 that if one cannot call a country to heel like a dog,

neither can one dismiss the past with a smile in an easy gush of feeling,
 Saying I could not help it,
 I am also a victim (Lessing, 200, p. 22-23).

The resulting understanding was that she could not bridge the gap between herself and Africa.

5 Final Remarks

Doris Lessing's story has been widely analysed in different ways and for different purposes. In the present study, Hasan's (1989) verbal art framework based on Halliday's (2004) description of SFG proved essential for understanding how the narrator in Lessing's story changed her opinion about Africa. Hasan's (1989) GSP model helped us to segment the story, making it possible for us to identify the extracts that illustrate her process of change. Ideational processes emphasized the protagonist's role of observer, while the textual structure patterns accounted not only for the sequence of events and parallel constructions of the narrator's life, but also for the thematic positions. In this sense, these elements provided guideposts for the reader throughout the narration.

We are aware that the present work is just one way to approach literary analysis. However, this study has shown how Hasan's framework for verbal art can be effective in unveiling the text's deep meanings by disclosing its semiotic elements.

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