

LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF HELON HABILA'S MEASURINGTIME

Victoria Bala & Jesimiel Kefas

Department of English and Literary Studies
Taraba State University, Jalingo

Abstract

This paper explores Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* through the lens of lexico-semantic analysis, investigating how language functions not only as a narrative tool but also as a medium for ideological expression and thematic exploration. The study examines the author's deliberate use of lexical patterns, figurative expressions, collocations, and connotative meanings to construct characterisation, shape narrative progression, and communicate complex socio-political realities. Drawing on Lyons' Lexical Field Theory as a theoretical framework, the paper analyses how language is used in literary texts helps reveals how meanings are shaped and how writers manipulate linguistic choices to create particular effects. This is achieved through semantic relations that extend beyond sentence boundaries, reinforcing the novel's emotional and ideological depth. Special attention is paid to how lexical choices highlight the inner lives of the twin protagonists Mamo and LaMamo while also reflecting broader postcolonial themes such as identity crisis, disillusionment with leadership, historical memory, and the human cost of resistance. Through a combination of lexical richness and semantic layering, Habila crafts a narrative that is introspective, politically charged, and emotionally resonant. The study also draws from relevant critical literature to support the claim that meaning in Habila's novel is constructed not only by what is said but by the subtle semantic associations that permeate the text. By uncovering the intricate web of language use in *Measuring Time*, this paper highlights how linguistic strategies can enrich literary meaning and deepen readers' engagement with African narratives. Ultimately, the study affirms Habila's place among contemporary African writers who use language to interrogate history, identity, and power.

Keywords: lexico-semantics, lexical fields, figurative language, characterization

Introduction

Language is more than a medium of communication; it is also a tool for interpretation, resistance, and identity construction, especially in literary works. In stylistics, the study of how language is used in literary texts helps reveal how meanings are shaped and how writers manipulate linguistic choices to create particular effects. One important branch of stylistics is lexico-semantics, which deals with the relationships between words and their meanings, including how words group into fields of meaning (semantic fields), how they collocate (appear together regularly), and how they carry both literal and implied meanings (connotations). Lexico-semantics is a linguistic field that studies word meanings and how they are constructed and interpreted in texts (Leech, 1981). In literary works, authors use language deliberately to convey themes, develop characters, and evoke emotion. As Leech (1981) notes,

"semantics is central to understanding the stylistic choices an author makes, especially when those choices serve thematic or ideological purposes" (p. 9).

Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007) offers a compelling narrative that lends itself to lexico-semantic analysis. The novel follows the lives of twin brothers Mamo and LaMamo set in the fictional village of Keti, against a backdrop of postcolonial Nigerian history, failed political systems, and personal disillusionment. Through the lens of language, Habila constructs a powerful reflection on time, memory, and identity. The narrator's tone, the characters' speech patterns, and the repetition of certain semantic fields reveal how the novel constructs meaning and reinforces its themes. In particular, the lexical items Habila chooses often carry double meanings or connotative implications that point to broader issues in Nigerian society, such as corruption, elitism, and historical distortion.

According to Simpson (2014), "lexical and semantic choices are not just decorative features in literature; they structure the reader's understanding of character, theme, and ideology" (p. 68). In *Measuring Time*, the repeated use of words relating to temporality such as "calendar," "past," "future," "delay," and "change"—draws attention to the novel's central concern with the passage of time and its impact on both individual lives and the collective memory of a nation. These lexical items are not random but serve as symbolic markers of stagnation and longing in the postcolonial Nigerian context.

Furthermore, Habila's work aligns with what Halliday (1985) calls the ideational function of language, where language reflects the speaker's view of the world. Through figurative language, ironic contrasts, and meaningful lexical collocations, Habila critiques the post-independence socio-political reality in Nigeria. Words such as "history," "truth," "chief" and "power" are used with subtle irony, inviting readers to question whose narratives are preserved and whose are erased. As Wales (2011) asserts, "semantic features such as metaphor and irony are integral in articulating resistance and critique within African literature" (p. 211).

This paper, therefore, aims to conduct a detailed lexico-semantic analysis of *Measuring Time*, examining how Habila's use of language contributes to the novel's thematic complexity and ideological depth. It will explore the semantic fields that dominate the text, the figurative and rhetorical devices used, and the connotative meanings of key lexical items. By analyzing these elements, the paper seeks to demonstrate how *Measuring Time* uses language as both a narrative and political instrument.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this research analysis is Lexical Field Theory. The theory is suitable for this study because it is concerned with the relationship that exists between lexical items in texts. Originally proposed by Trier (1931) and developed further by Lyons (1977), Lexical Field Theory holds that words are not isolated but exist in structured semantic fields/groups of words with related meanings that help organize thought and experience. Lyons, a prominent linguist, made significant contributions to the study of semantics, particularly through his work on lexical fields, a concept that traces its origins to Jost Trier and was later refined by scholars including Lyons himself. Lexical field theory posits that the vocabulary of a language is not a chaotic collection of isolated words, but an interconnected system of meaning in which words are grouped based on shared semantic domains. According to this theory, lexical meaning is best understood in relation to other words in the same semantic domain. In literary texts, the repeated use of words within a specific field (time, politics, memory, decay) creates cohesion and emphasises thematic preoccupations.

In literary texts, the analysis of lexical fields can reveal underlying themes, character traits, and ideological concerns. For instance, in *Measuring Time*, Helon Habila employs distinct lexical fields related to war, illness, governance, memory, and history. Words associated with conflict (“rebel,” “gun,” “escape”) often frame LaMamo’s journey, while those tied to illness, stagnation, and reflection (“weak,” “bedridden,” “writing,” “waiting”) characterize Mamo’s introspective life. This contrast in lexical fields serves to reinforce the thematic dichotomies in the novel: action versus reflection, movement versus stasis, and hope versus disillusionment.

In *Measuring Time*, several prominent lexical fields emerge: time (“calendar,” “future,” “delay”), politics (“chief,” “power,” “corruption”), and identity (“orphan,” “exile,” “story”). These fields are not arbitrary; they function as cohesive devices that guide the reader’s interpretation. As Cruse (2011) notes, “the grouping of words into fields is a reflection of how speakers conceptualize and compartmentalize reality” (p. 282). Lexical Field Theory thus enables a systematic analysis of how Habila’s language choices contribute to the novel’s ideological and thematic structure.

Plot Summary of *Measuring Time* by Helon Habila

Helon Habila’s *Measuring Time* is a deeply introspective and thematically rich novel that traces the divergent life paths of twin brothers, Mamo and LaMamo, born in the small Nigerian town of Keti. The novel begins with a shared childhood marred by their mother’s early death and their father Lamang’s neglect. Their father is an ambitious, self-serving politician whose actions sow the seeds of emotional and moral distance between him and his sons. As adolescents, both Mamo and LaMamo dream of escape of becoming heroes and changing their fortunes. However, their destinies diverge drastically when LaMamo runs away to join a rebel movement, seeking glory in various African warfronts, while Mamo, hindered by chronic illness, remains in Keti. LaMamo’s journey takes him across different African countries, witnessing and participating in armed struggles that slowly strip him of youthful idealism. His letters to Mamo over the years reveal the trauma, disillusionment, and physical toll of life as a soldier.

In contrast, Mamo’s story unfolds in the quiet, reflective space of his hometown. He becomes a teacher, a historian, and eventually the secretary and biographer to the local emir. Through this role, Mamo begins to document not only the life of the emir but also the broader history of his community. His writing becomes an act of self-definition and resistance—a way of reclaiming agency in a society rife with political corruption, spiritual decay, and failed leadership.

The novel’s narrative structure is non-linear, with episodes of memory, flashback, and reflection interwoven with the present. As the years pass, LaMamo returns, worn and transformed by his experiences, while Mamo continues to struggle with his own sense of purpose. Their eventual reunion is subdued, marked more by shared pain than triumph, underscoring the cost of their individual choices and the weight of unfulfilled dreams. The novel concludes with a sober awareness of time how it is measured not only by clocks and calendars but also by memory, loss, and change. Mamo’s chronicling of history and LaMamo’s lived experience of violence both point to a generation grappling with broken promises and the need for personal and national healing.

Textual Analysis of *Measuring Time*

Below are the lexico-semantic features, and other creative strategies deployed by Habila to communicate his artistic visions, and explain their stylistic significance in the text. These comprise Lexical patterns and thematic concerns, figurative language

and semantic depth, connotations and connotations as well as lexical fields and characterisation.

Lexical Patterns and Thematic Concerns

Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* is steeped in lexical choices that resonate with the novel's central themes time, identity, disillusionment, and socio-political stagnation. Lexical patterns refer to the repeated and systematic use of certain words and expressions that form semantic fields or networks of meaning within a text. According to Leech and Short (2007), "lexical patterns are key to understanding the themes and motifs of a literary text, as they often reflect the author's underlying ideological stance" (p. 195). In *Measuring Time*, the recurrence of words associated with temporality such as "calendar," "history," "age," "delay," and "memory" forms a semantic field that underscores the novel's meditation on the passage of time and its effects on personal and national consciousness.

One of the most prominent lexical themes is the motif of time itself. Mamo, the reflective protagonist, frequently contemplates the weight of the past and the uncertainty of the future. Words like "measuring," "counting," and "waiting" appear in repeated contexts, reinforcing the characters' paralysis in a postcolonial state where progress is elusive. As Yule (2020) asserts, "semantic fields often reflect a cognitive structure, where related words reinforce a shared worldview or conceptual framework" (p. 114). In this case, the semantic field of temporality conveys a vision of stagnation, as time is often described not as a movement forward but as a circular or halting force. Mamo states, "It was as though time had stopped moving, and I was simply watching shadows that had once been people" (Habila, 2007, p. 138). This lexical choice of "shadows" not only metaphorically emphasizes decay but also situates the character's existence in a liminal, almost spectral temporality.

Another recurring lexical pattern is that of political disenchantment. Habila employs a vocabulary of decay, failure, and betrayal to describe the Nigerian political scene. Phrases such as "empty promises," "thieves in suits," "power games," and "rotting leadership" are recurrent throughout the novel, creating a semantic environment of despair and hopelessness. As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) note, "lexical choice in political discourse often reveals more about institutional corruption than overt commentary" (p. 302). Through this lens, the repetition of such negative political terminology reflects a collective cynicism in the fictional town of Ketu, which mirrors the larger Nigerian socio-political reality.

The thematic concern with identity and alienation is similarly reflected in the lexical field of absence and fragmentation. Words like "lost," "orphan," "disconnected," "wandering," and "forgotten" permeate the text, reflecting Mamo's internal struggle to define himself in the absence of parental guidance, national pride, or historical continuity. As Simpson (2014) argues, "Lexis is a key to emotional and ideological engagement, with lexical fields often reinforcing the psychological dimensions of characters" (p. 72). For Mamo, identity is not inherited but constructed through writing, observation, and quiet resistance, and the lexicon surrounding him emphasizes his liminal, observer status within a disjointed society.

The presence of religious and traditional lexical items such as "ancestral," "sacrifice," "ritual," and "destiny" further enriches the thematic complexity of the novel. These words evoke a fading cultural heritage, one that the younger generation views with a mixture of reverence and skepticism. The interplay between modernity and tradition, a common postcolonial dilemma, is lexically encoded in these opposing fields of technology and ancestry. Crystal (2019) notes that "the lexicon of literature can serve as a linguistic archaeology, revealing layers of cultural values and historical

tensions” (p. 178). In *Measuring Time*, this archaeological function of language is evident as Habila excavates the spiritual and moral decline of a society once anchored in tradition.

Moreover, the characters' vocabularies further illustrate their thematic roles. LaMamo's speech is peppered with military and revolutionary jargon “gun,” “mission,” “escape,” “attack” highlighting his life as a freedom fighter and exile. Mamo, on the other hand, uses literary and historical terms “chronicle,” “biography,” “memory,” “truth” that align with his introspective and intellectual disposition. These distinct lexical registers serve not only to individualize characters but also to reflect the broader thematic oppositions of violence versus thought, action versus reflection, and war versus memory.

In essence, Habila's strategic use of lexical patterns deepens the reader's engagement with the novel's themes. The words chosen are not merely decorative or incidental; they are thematic vehicles that structure meaning and emotional tone. As Wales (2014) points out, “in literary texts, thematic preoccupations are often foregrounded by recurring lexis that becomes a kind of code for deeper cultural and psychological insights” (p. 246). This is precisely what Helon Habila achieves in *Measuring Time*—a layered narrative built not just on plot and character, but on the rich, symbolic use of words.

Figurative Language and Semantic Depth

Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007) is not only a socio-political narrative but also a rich linguistic tapestry woven with layers of figurative language that contribute to its semantic depth. The use of metaphors, similes, irony, personification, and symbolic imagery infuses the text with emotional intensity and intellectual resonance, enhancing its thematic preoccupations such as memory, identity, history, and disillusionment. Figurative language in the novel functions beyond aesthetic ornamentation it is a vehicle for profound philosophical and psychological reflection.

Time, a central motif in the novel, is often framed metaphorically to illustrate the protagonists' entrapment within both personal and historical cycles. Mamo's physical illness becomes a metaphor for his social and existential paralysis. Habila writes, “*My illness was a kind of freezing; time stopped, and I was locked in a seasonless season*” (Habila, 2007, p. 88). This metaphor does not merely describe his medical condition but evokes a sense of suspended history where progress is impossible and memory becomes a burden.

The figurative use of “seasonless season” invokes T.S. Eliot's poetic phrase in *The Waste Land*, suggesting a cultural and spiritual barrenness that defines the world of the novel. As critics such as Ouma (2011) argue, “Habila's metaphors often perform a dual function they reflect personal stagnation and national inertia, interweaving the psyche of the individual with that of the postcolonial state” (p. 107). In this way, metaphor is deployed as a tool of semantic layering, enriching the narrative's philosophical undertones.

Similes in *Measuring Time* frequently convey emotional and psychological states with acute precision. For instance, Mamo's relationship with his father is described in emotionally distant terms: “*He looked at us like we were strangers he had once met in a dream*” (Habila, 2007, p. 64). This simile encapsulates the alienation and detachment that pervade familial bonds in the novel. Rather than portraying emotion directly, Habila filters it through figurative comparisons that evoke ambivalence, fragmentation, and memory's unreliability.

Critics such as Adeoti (2012) note that simile in Habila's work is often “tinged with irony and existential uncertainty, serving less to clarify than to destabilize fixed

meanings” (p. 93). These rhetorical figures thus resist simplistic interpretation and deepen the reader’s engagement with the text’s psychological landscape.

Habila also employs symbols to frame the postcolonial condition in metaphorical terms. One recurring symbol is the failing town of Ketu, which serves as a microcosm of Nigeria’s sociopolitical decay. The physical description of the town “*buildings peeling like scabs, roads cracked and weed-infested, the air thick with dust and regret*” (Habila, 2007, p. 171)—is loaded with symbolic imagery. The town becomes a corporeal metaphor for national neglect and historical amnesia.

As Emenyonu (2009) observes, “Habila constructs his fictional towns with the language of illness and entropy, making them allegories of a nation in decline” (p. 54). These descriptions are more than scenic; they form part of a symbolic code that conveys broader thematic concerns. The figurative language here carries semantic density, requiring the reader to decode layers of social and psychological meaning. Irony both verbal and situational is a dominant trope in the novel and contributes significantly to its semantic nuance. Mamo, for instance, who aspires to be a historian and writer, ends up becoming a ghostwriter for a corrupt local chief. This occupational irony is rendered with subtle humor: “*My job was to write the chief’s biography, but what I really wrote was a chronicle of his lies*” (Habila, 2007, p. 202). The semantic impact of this irony lies in its exposure of the disconnect between truth and official history, a recurring concern in postcolonial literature. As Bhabha (1994) contends, “Postcolonial narratives frequently engage in ironic mimicry, subverting official discourses through subtle linguistic inversions” (p. 122). Habila’s use of irony thus aligns with a broader postcolonial strategy of resistance through language, enriching the text’s political and ideological implications.

Memory is also rendered figuratively through personification and sensory metaphors. At one point, Mamo reflects: “*Memories came like shadows at dusk—long, haunting, and uninvited*” (Habila, 2007, p. 134). The personification of memory as a lurking force deepens the psychological realism of the text and emphasizes the involuntary nature of trauma. This device aligns with Ricoeur’s (2004) theory of memory as narrative, where recollection is not merely a retrieval of facts but a creative and emotional process shaped by language. Through figurative language, Habila enacts this narrative construction of memory, giving emotional and symbolic form to otherwise abstract experiences.

Figurative language in *Measuring Time* is central to its semantic depth and thematic complexity. Through metaphor, simile, irony, symbolism, and personification, Habila constructs a linguistic world that reflects the emotional, political, and philosophical dimensions of postcolonial life. These devices allow the narrative to operate on multiple levels of meaning, enhancing its impact and interpretive richness. In line with Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) view of semantic cohesion, figurative language in Habila’s novel functions cohesively, binding together disparate elements into a unified whole. It is through these richly textured figures of speech that Habila successfully explores the disjuncture of history, the fragility of identity, and the enduring quest for meaning in a fractured world.

Collocations and Connotations

In *Measuring Time*, Habila uses collocations and connotative meaning to enrich the text’s lexico-semantic texture. These lexical choices not only reflect the author’s stylistic preferences but also reveal deep-seated cultural, psychological, and thematic dimensions of the narrative. By combining words that frequently occur together (collocations), and by employing words with layered meanings beyond their

denotative value (connotation), Habila constructs a world that resonates with both immediacy and symbolic nuance.

Collocations refer to the habitual combination of words that co-occur more often than would be expected by chance. According to Firth (1957), “You shall know a word by the company it keeps” (p. 11). In *Measuring Time*, collocations serve to reflect the socio-cultural realities of the characters, evoke mood, and enhance narrative coherence. For instance, expressions such as “*ancestral curse*”, “*lost time*”, “*buried secrets*”, and “*sick child*” recur in the novel, forming stable collocational patterns that both reflect and reinforce the novel’s themes of heritage, regret, memory, and suffering. The phrase “*lost time*”, which appears multiple times in the narrative, does not simply denote time that has passed but evokes the notion of irretrievable experiences, missed opportunities, and emotional voids.

Similarly, collocations like “*bloody coup*”, “*military tyranny*”, and “*political rot*” situate the narrative within Nigeria’s postcolonial history of dictatorship and corruption. These fixed phrases are not merely descriptive; they draw upon a shared cultural understanding that lends semantic richness to the text. As Sinclair (1991) notes, “The meaning of a text is often built not on individual words, but on the predictable combinations they form” (p. 108).

Connotative Meaning: Beyond Literal Sense

Connotation involves the emotional, cultural, or associative meaning that a word carries beyond its dictionary definition. Habila masterfully employs connotative language to imbue *Measuring Time* with a tone of existential reflection, socio-political critique, and psychological depth. For example, the recurring image of “darkness” carries significant connotative weight. In one instance, Mamo says, “*Night brought not just darkness but the voices of the past*” (Habila, 2007, p. 102). Here, *darkness* does not merely signify the absence of light; it connotes fear, memory, mourning, and the heavy burden of historical trauma. In African literary tradition, darkness is often symbolic of ignorance, chaos, or colonial destruction, and Habila’s usage taps into this deeper well of meaning (Ngũgĩ waThiong’o, 1986).

Another example lies in the word “*dust*”, which appears repeatedly in the novel. In the sentence, “*The dust of Keti settled on everything like forgotten dreams*” (Habila, 2007, p. 153), dust connotes decay, stagnation, and neglect. It also metaphorically connects the material (the town’s dilapidation) with the psychological (forgotten dreams), thus extending the lexical field to include emotional resonance.

Words like “*father*”, “*home*”, and “*blood*” are also loaded with connotation in *Measuring Time*. While these words have neutral denotations, their usage in the novel is often charged with emotional conflict, betrayal, or loss. For example, Mamo’s concept of “father” is filled with ambiguity and pain. Though the word may denote a parental figure, it also connotes abandonment, hypocrisy, and failed expectations in his context. As Leech (1974) explains, “Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content” (p. 14). Habila’s word choices consistently reflect this layering of meanings, inviting readers to look beneath the surface of language to discover deeper symbolic or emotional truths.

Combining Collocation and Connotation

Habila often blends collocational phrases with connotative meaning to produce semantically rich expressions. Take for instance the phrase “*weighed down by silence*” (Habila, 2007, p. 89). While “weighed down” is a familiar collocation (often with burdens or responsibilities), its combination with “silence” introduces an emotionally potent image of silence as a burden, a kind of communicative or psychological

oppression. This phrase links language, or its absence, with the theme of emotional repression and social disconnection.

Similarly, the expression “*ghosts of the past*” (p. 45) is a metaphorical collocation whose connotative impact lies in its suggestion of unresolved history, trauma, and personal regret. Such combinations lend the narrative its emotional gravity and philosophical complexity, positioning language as both reflective and constitutive of human experience.

Scholars have noted Habila’s strategic use of language as integral to his style and thematic development. Ouma (2011) argues that *Measuring Time* “relies heavily on the expressive potential of language, especially through collocational patterns and connotative layering, to articulate the protagonist’s inner turmoil and Nigeria’s historical fragmentation” (p. 109). This linguistic strategy, he continues, makes the novel not just a story, but also a meditation on the act of telling, remembering, and writing. Furthermore, lexical theorists such as Carter and McCarthy (1988) stress that the interplay between collocation and connotation is a key source of semantic density in literary texts. This is clearly evident in *Measuring Time*, where language carries both narrative and symbolic weight.

Lexical Fields and Characterisation

In *Measuring Time*, Helon Habila employs lexical fields semantically related clusters of vocabulary to build multidimensional characters and to foreground their emotional and psychological states. Through the strategic use of these lexical groupings, Habila provides insight into individual identities, moral contradictions, and social roles. The lexical fields associated with each character function not only as descriptive tools but also as symbolic markers of internal conflicts and thematic concerns.

A lexical field is a set of words grouped by meaning referring to a specific subject. As Lyons (1977) defines, a lexical field is “a group of words with interrelated meanings, forming a system or subsystem within the lexicon” (p. 278). In literary analysis, identifying lexical fields helps to uncover patterns in a character’s speech, thought, and narrative presentation. These patterns often highlight ideological tensions, emotional states, and social identities.

The character of Mamo, the sickly and reflective twin, is characterized through a lexical field centered on illness, isolation, and intellectualism. Words such as *fever, weakness, frailty, blood, confinement, silence, and asthma* populate his narrative space, portraying him as physically vulnerable but intellectually robust. Habila uses this lexical group to emphasize Mamo’s marginalization and philosophical depth. For instance, when describing Mamo’s chronic illness, Habila writes: “*His chest heaved as if carrying the weight of years of suffering, his breathing shallow, his skin pale like ash*” (Habila, 2007, p. 34). This cluster of words belongs to the semantic field of disease and exhaustion, reinforcing the image of a body in constant struggle. But this physical fragility is juxtaposed with another field the language of knowledge and introspection: *reading, reflection, journal, words, thoughts, history, writing*. This contrast foregrounds Mamo’s resilience and establishes him as an observant chronicler of his time.

As Ouma (2011) observes, Mamo’s lexical associations “construct a portrait of the intellectual who is burdened by both personal and national histories a figure suspended between memory and resistance” (p. 108). Thus, lexical fields become instruments of characterisation, enhancing the complexity of Mamo’s identity.

In contrast, LaMamo the more physically robust twin is characterized through a lexical field of violence, war, and movement. Words such as *gun, battlefield, running,*

bloodshed, exile, refugee, desert, and rebellion are frequently associated with his storyline. These terms sketch LaMamo as a character in motion, shaped by conflict and survival. His involvement in warfare across Africa positions him within a broader postcolonial landscape of displacement and political instability. For example, when LaMamo recounts his experience in Chad, he states: “*There were bodies strewn across the sand like forgotten prayers, the sun bleaching out their faces, the wind carrying the stench of war*” (Habila, 2007, p. 157). The words in this passage belong to the lexical field of death and conflict, illustrating the moral disintegration and emotional trauma he endures.

Habila also uses lexical fields to code secondary characters. The father, Lamang, is enmeshed in a field of political ambition and moral decay, marked by terms like *campaign, speech, betrayal, bribe, hypocrisy, and failure*. His rhetoric is often inflated and performative, reinforcing his disconnection from genuine leadership. Aunt Marina’s character, on the other hand, is coded with terms related to care, secrecy, and endurance: *healing, herbs, silence, waiting, prayer*. These words align her with the traditional feminine role of nurturer, yet also suggest emotional repression and quiet resistance.

Character Juxtaposition through Lexical Fields

Habila’s twin characters are thus differentiated and developed through divergent lexical fields. Where Mamo’s world is one of books, illness, and contemplation, LaMamo’s is defined by guns, deserts, and rebellion. This contrast reflects the thematic dualism of *reflection versus action, memory versus forgetting, and stillness versus movement* that runs through the novel. Moreover, the convergence of their worlds when LaMamo returns and Mamo begins to write his brother’s story—represents a fusion of these lexical fields. The merging of terms from both war and writing reflects the broader project of narrative healing and national reckoning. As Habila writes: “Through writing, Mamo began to feel LaMamo’s pain, and in his pain, he discovered his own voice” (Habila, 2007, p. 243). Here, the lexical fields intersect to signal transformation.

Conclusion

Habila’s *Measuring Time* is a lexically rich and semantically layered novel that uses language not merely as a vehicle for storytelling but as a dynamic instrument of ideological and emotional expression. Through his deliberate and nuanced manipulation of lexical items such as metaphor, collocation, connotation, and lexical fields Habila constructs a narrative that is deeply reflective, thematically complex, and socially engaged. His lexical patterns allow for a multidimensional exploration of pressing concerns such as identity, memory, tradition, time, governance, and the human struggle for meaning within postcolonial African realities. This study has shown that *Measuring Time* transcends surface-level narrative to establish a sophisticated relationship between language and meaning. The characters are not only shaped by their experiences but also by the words that frame those experiences. For instance, the contrasting lexical fields surrounding Mamo and LaMamo reveal their divergent paths and internal struggles, while their convergence suggests the possibility of healing and synthesis. Similarly, the use of figurative language and semantic contrast imbues the novel with symbolic depth and interpretative richness. Furthermore, the semantic layering in the novel challenges readers to engage critically with the socio-political context of Nigeria and the broader African continent. Habila’s lexical choices often point to corruption, failed leadership, historical disillusionment, and moral decay, yet he does so without overt didacticism. Instead, the meanings emerge subtly through his diction and style what is said and, equally, what is left

unsaid. As such, his language becomes a site for both resistance and remembrance, crafting a narrative space where personal trauma intersects with national history.

Ultimately, a lexico-semantic analysis of *Measuring Time* underscores the centrality of language in the construction of meaning in literary texts. It affirms that meaning in literature is not only found in what is narrated, but in how it is narrated—through the intricate web of word choices, associations, and textual structures. This reinforces Habila's stature as a stylistically innovative and thematically engaged writer, one whose work deserves continued critical attention within African literary studies. Therefore, *Measuring Time* exemplifies the power of language to articulate individual and collective memory, to question power structures, and to offer subtle yet profound critiques of society. It is a novel that rewards close linguistic and semantic analysis, offering layers of meaning that reflect both the personal and the political. Through its rich lexico-semantic fabric, the novel not only tells a story it invites the reader to participate in the making of meaning itself.

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