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Conflicts and Struggles in the Shadow of Colonialism: A Corpus-based Study of Address Terms in Gurnah's *Paradise*

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Abstract: This paper employs a research methodology based on corpus linguistics, utilizing the corpus retrieval software AntConc focusing on the address terms in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel Paradise. It's found that under the shadow of colonialism, conflicts become inevitable and pronounced. Even though, amid various conflicts, the colonized individuals with different races, religions, and identity backgrounds are not deeply entrenched in conflicts. Instead, they choose to struggle for survival, love and belief. The coexistence of cruelty and warmth, opposition and harmony, conflicts and struggles collectively shapes the complex and diverse socio-cultural situation in the region under colonial shadows.

Keywords: Abdulrazak Gurnah; Paradise; Corpus-based Study; Address Terms; Colonialism.

1. Introduction

In 2021, Abdulrazak Gurnah was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature by the Swedish Nobel Committee, marking the seventh African writer to receive this prestigious honor. As global interest in African literature grows, the study of African literature has become a prominent field in world literary research (Luo, Huang, 2023). Research on Gurnah's novels abroad began in 1988, and after his Nobel Prize recognition in 2021, there has been a surge in studies on his works, particularly *Paradise*. *Paradise* is a simple story about a humble character, but moreover a great work about a complex society (Liu, 2022). Through the writing of Yusuf's growth and love story, it reveals the racial, religious, and economic problems in East Africa under German colonial ruling, and moreover, it highlights Gurner's gradual maturity as a writer in terms of thought and technique (Zhou, 2022).

This paper employs a research methodology based on corpus linguistics focusing on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of address terms in Gurnah's *Paradise*. The study explores how these terms reveal racial and religious conflicts and the struggles of the colonized in the context of colonialism.

2. Research Methodology

Utilizing the corpus-based research method, this study employs the AntConc software to index address terms for major characters in *Paradise* including Yusuf, Aziz, Khalil, Kalasinga and Hamid. The analysis involves examining the frequency of address terms and their variations throughout the novel's plot development using AntConc. Each result is manually annotated based on plot and emotional tendencies. The paper aims to discuss how these address terms unveil racial and religious conflicts, and the struggles of the colonized.

3. Conflicts and Struggles

"Address forms are not only grammatical units but also units of verbal communication and pragmatics. It strongly reflects people's social attributes and interpersonal values, and is closely related to the entire social culture, political background, and traditional habits" (Zhao, 1997:16). Therefore, the selective use of address terms by one to the other naturally expresses recognitions and disagreement, implying the conflict or struggles hidden behind.

3.1. Conflicts

Under colonialism, conflicts—ranging from violent acts to abstract cultural and racial tensions—are inevitable. Homi K. Bhabha articulates identity as an intersubjective, performative act that transcends the dichotomies of public/private, psychological/social, and is shaped by the symbolic other, such as language and social systems (Li & Sheng, 2004:50). In the context of colonialism, where multiple languages coexist, the cultural and personal struggles of the colonized are often reflected in linguistic choices, including address terms. AntConc software facilitates the analysis of such terms.

3.1.1. The Cultural and Ethnic Conflicts

The address terms of Hamid to Kalasinga mainly reflects the cultural and ethical conflicts. Hamid mostly addresses him directly as "you", and distinctive "banyan", or "kafir". By using the Word function of AntConc, the frequency of "banyan" and "kafir" is shown in Figure 1. Hamid referred to Kalasinga as "banyan" 7 times and "kafir" 3 times. "Kafir" is a Muslim term for pagans. "Banyan originally means Indian banyan tree... As time changed, banyan gradually refers to a businessman who engages in usury and fraud for illicit profits, and Kalasinga describes it as "scum" (1994:74). "Usually, the speaker chooses a form of address consistent with the norms of behavior of the group to which he belongs." (1997: 17) Hamid uses "banyan" and "kafir" to refer to Kalasinga and his ethnic group, which also reflects Hamid's conflict with Kalasinga's culture and religion originating from India, showing his superiority of religion and ethnic identity, and reflecting their cultural and religious conflicts, which is closely related to the historical background at that time.

"During the reign of Sultan Amantan, Zanzibar developed a plantation economy based on slave labor, thus creating a distinct class differentiation in Zanzibar society. At the top were slave planters, mainly Arabs, and a few Indian merchants and a few Swahili merchants" (2013:71). Hamid is

not a plantation owner, but an Arabic smuggler and a partner of Aziz. Kalasinga, an Indian, is a mechanic, not a businessman. Therefore, Hamid's status is higher than Kalasinga's, which can be seen in Hamid's address terms for Kalasinga.

	Type	Rank	Freq	Range
1	banyan	1	4	1
2	banyans	2	3	1

	Type	Rank	Freq	Range
1	kafir	1	3	1

Figure 1. The frequency of "banyan" & "kafir" in the whole novel

3.1.2. Conflicts of Yusuf and Khalil

The different address terms of Yusuf and Khalil to Aziz can reflect their identity conflicts. From the Plot function of AntConc, it can be concluded that the frequency of Uncle and the frequency of "Seyyid" is shown in Figure 2. "Uncle" appears 243 times in the whole plot and "seyyid" 95 times. In terms of time, the frequency of the word Uncle goes from more to less, while the frequency of "Seyyid" goes from less to more.

Figure 2 illustrates the frequent use of "uncle" by Yusuf towards Aziz, stemming from a misplaced sense of friendliness. As a wealthy Arab businessman, Aziz frequently stopped at Yusuf's home during his early years, instilling in Yusuf a misguided admiration due to the duration of these visits. The text notes, "Yusuf enjoyed his visits...welcome though honor always was" (Gurnah, 1994:3), reflecting Yusuf's perception of Aziz's visits as a source of honor. However, after being enslaved by Aziz, Yusuf encounters Khalil, who shares a similar fate. Khalil instructs Yusuf to address Aziz as "seyyid," not "uncle," employing harsh methods to enforce this change in address. This transition signifies a shift from a perceived familial relationship to one of submission and hierarchy, highlighting the complexities of identity and power dynamics under colonial influence.

Figure 2 indicates a declining trend in the use of "uncle," exemplified by Khalil's corrective statement, "Uncle. He ain't your uncle, you stupid Mswahili boy" (Gurnah, 1994:32). The term "seyyid," an honorific for Muslim nobility, is consistently rejected by Yusuf, who refuses to acknowledge Aziz with this title, reflecting his resistance to the imposed identity of a slave. Conversely, Khalil's usage of "seyyid" when addressing Aziz is initially frequent and escalates throughout the narrative. This linguistic choice underscores the contrasting perspectives of Yusuf and Khalil in relation to Aziz, with Yusuf maintaining Aziz as an "other" and Khalil endeavoring to assimilate into Aziz's group. Khalil's unwavering use of "Seyyid" demonstrates his acceptance of Arabic culture and language.

The conflict between the two address terms also leads to the conflict of identity under colonialism. "A name is not only a predicate symbol, but also an identifier" (Wang, 2013:87). Tao Jiajun (2004:38) further elaborates that identity, in a wider context, pertains to the collective identity choices of a cultural subject amidst strong and weak cultures, leading to significant ideological and spiritual upheavals. Figure 2 shows a decline in "uncle" use, with Khalil correcting Yusuf, "He ain't your uncle" (Gurnah, 1994:32). Yusuf rejects "seyyid," an honorific, symbolizing his resistance to slavery. Khalil, however, increasingly uses "seyyid" for Aziz, reflecting his acceptance of Arabic culture and desire to assimilate, contrasting Yusuf's view of Aziz as an outsider.

Row	FileID	FilePath	FileTokens	Freq	NormFreq	Dispersion	Plot
1	0	paradise (abdulrazak gurnah) (z-library).docx	84067	243	2890.552	0.830	

Row	FileID	FilePath	FileTokens	Freq	NormFreq	Dispersion	Plot
1	0	paradise (abdulrazak gurnah) (z-library).docx	84067	95	1130.051	0.674	

Figure 2. The frequency of "Uncle" (up) & "Seyyid" (down) in the plot

3.2. Struggles

Gurnah, in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, emphasized it necessary to write about that as well, and to do so truthfully, so that both the ugliness and the virtue come through, and the human being appears out of the simplification and stereotype ... And that way of looking makes room for frailty and weakness, for tenderness amid cruelty, and for a capacity for kindness in unlooked for sources (Gurnah, 2021).

Paradise reflects this philosophy in its writing of the socio-cultural situation under German colonial ruling in East Africa. Even though, amid various conflicts, the colonized individuals with different races, religions, and identity backgrounds are not deeply entrenched in conflicts. Instead, they choose to struggle for survival, love and belief. The coexistence of cruelty and warmth, opposition and harmony, conflicts and struggles collectively shapes the complex and diverse socio-cultural situation in the region under colonial shadows.

3.2.1. Identity Struggles of Yusuf

The protagonist Yusuf's shifting address terms for Aziz distinctly reflect his struggles of identity recognition. The appellations "Uncle Aziz", "merchant", and "Seyyid" interchange frequently in Yusuf's speech and inner thoughts, yet none of these titles assumes an unequivocal dominant position.

	Type	Rank	Freq	Range
1	uncle aziz	1	197	1

Figure 3. The frequency of "uncle aziz" in the whole novel.

	Row	FileID	FilePath	FileTokens	Freq	NormFreq	Dispersion	Plot
	1	0	paradise (abdulrazak gurnah)..docx	84067	197	2343.369	0.835	

Figure 4. The frequency of "uncle aziz" in the plot.

Using the "KWIC" function with "Uncle Aziz" as the keywords, a total of 197 results were retrieved, all of which appeared in Yusuf's language, mental activities, and narratives presented from his perspective. Employing the "plot" function feature with "Uncle Aziz" as the keywords allows us to observe the following variations in the frequency of this address term as the plot unfolds:

Prior to Yusuf being pawned to Aziz due to his father's debt, the affectionate and respectful address of "Uncle Aziz" by Yusuf was most frequently used. During this period, Yusuf's perception of his own identity was singular and vague. Unaware of the specific business dealings between his father and Aziz, Yusuf remained oblivious to the debt his father owed Aziz which directly led to his transition from being the sole son of a businessman to becoming the slave of another.

However, after Yusuf left his parents, with the gradual realization of the reality of being pawned to Aziz as unpaid labor, he began to reduce the use of "Uncle Aziz", opting instead for the emotionally neutral term "merchant". Yusuf felt awkward addressing Aziz as "uncle" but, at the same time, could not refer to this former "uncle" as "Seyyid" like Khalil. The shift in address reflects the shattering of Yusuf's idealized perception of Aziz and is an embodiment of his personal growth and identity struggles.

The struggles continued and never ended. As Yusuf joined Aziz in the caravan and experienced hardships together, he witnessed Aziz's pain and hope, cruelty and tenderness, giving way to a more evident partnership. The frequency of the address "Uncle Aziz" reached a second peak. However the beautiful illusion is shattered after the journey. The torture and exploitation of Yusuf did not stop and even intensified. Ultimately, as he "ran after the column with smarting eyes" (Gurnah, 1994: 247), it marked Yusuf's escape from the painful life of slavery from his own perspective and the beginning of another phase of identity struggles.

3.2.2. "Brothers" of Different Races

The appellations used by the Arab Khalil towards the protagonist Yusuf, as well as the address terms between the Swahili merchant Hamid and the Indian merchant Kalasinga, also reflect the complex relationships that exist among colonized individuals with different racial and religious backgrounds, encompassing both cruelty and warmth, opposition and harmony.

Khalil's addresses to Yusuf, ranked by frequency from high to low, mainly include three types: "brother", "Mswahili" (Swahili), and "kifa urongo" (Swahili phrase, meaning living death).

	Type	Rank	Freq	Range
1	brother	1	34	1

Figure 5. The frequency of "brother" in the whole novel

	File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1	paradise ...	Yusuf on the back of the head.'Except for my	little brother,'	he said,and then laughed as Yusuf burst
2	paradise ...	and falling with an attempt at charm. 'Now we begin,	little brother,'	Khalil said,readying himself with a small sigh.'
3	paradise ...	to work for him.So you arrived and became my	little brother,'	Khalil said and reached out for Yusuf's
4	paradise ...	his accent,imitating him and then heaving with laughter.His	little brother	was teaching him to speak better, he told
5	paradise ...	We won't,'Yusuf said firmly. 'Shabab!What a brave	little brother	you are,Khalil said, slapping Yusuf on the
6	paradise ...	to the shop and invite you to her palace.My	little brother,	that fine big woman is in love with
7	paradise ...	the counter flap and into the shop. 5 'This is my	little brother,	who has come to work for us,' Khalil
8	paradise ...	the back.'He's back,'he told his customers. 'My	little brother	is back.Only look how big he's
9	paradise ...	to greet you.Where's your little brother?they ask.	Little brother!	The big oaf is playing in the garden,
10	paradise ...	to go inside he turned to look. 'Sit down,my	little brother.	Don't go,'he said gently,just as
11	paradise ...	journey.The customers want to greet you.Where's your	little brother?	they ask.Little brother!The big oaf is

Figure 6. The presentation of "little brother" in the context

The associated phrases of "Mswahili"included "stupid Mswahili" (2 instances), "ignorant Mswahili" (1 instance), "Mswahili brother" (1 instance), "poor little Mswahili boy" (1 instance), and "something about Mswahili" (1 instance).

It is evident that despite the presence of derogatory terms in Khalil's addressing of Yusuf (such as "stupid" and "ignorant"), most appellations (like "little brother" and "poor little Mswahili boy") convey a sympathetic and friendly

attitude. Even the seemingly unfriendly term “kifa urongo” reveals the complexity of Khalil’s emotions towards Yusuf. Though it seems demeaning, it is revealed that “kifa urongo” was the term his father used for his beloved sister Amina: “... ‘My Ba called her kifa urongo,’ Khalil said and then smiled. In the morning, my Ba called for her as soon as he was ready to eat his bread, and she brought it and sat with him while he fed little pieces to her. Like she was a little bird” (Gurnah, 1994: 230-231). Khalil harbors nostalgia for his warm family and love for his sister, and these emotions seem to be reflected in the appellation “kifa urongo” when used for Yusuf.

	Type	Rank	Freq	Range
1	mswahili	1	9	1

Figure 7. The frequency of “mswahili” in the whole novel

Khalil, being an Arab boy with a different religious and racial background from the Swahili Yusuf, occasionally faces conflicts. However, due to their small age difference and shared experience of being abandoned by their families to become slaves, they become “brothers” of different races, relying on each other for a significant period. The author appears to present the possibility of harmonious coexistence among people of different ethnicities and cultures in a region shadowed by colonialism by portraying the sincere and friendly mutual support between Khalil and Yusuf, despite their differences.

3.2.3. “Frienemies” in the Shadow of Colonialism

The appellations exchanged between the Swahili merchant Hamid and the Indian merchant Kalasinga present an intriguing depiction of the complex relationships among colonized individuals from different racial and religious backgrounds, with these two serving as representative figures.

Due to stereotypical perceptions of cunning among Indians, Hamid addresses Kalasinga with terms like "banyan" (referring to the Indian banyan tree, often associated with marketplaces where Indian merchants conduct various trades due to the large canopy providing shade), "thieving bastard," "Kafir" (a Muslim term for non-believers), and "infidel." In turn, due to religious conflicts, Kalasinga refers to Hamid as "Muslim dog-meat." However, amidst these derogatory terms, both merchants also use the term "brother" to address each other. In a scene where they, along with Hussein, try to persuade Hamid to cease cooperation with Aziz to avoid being taken advantage of financially, Kalasinga says, "'Listen to what your brother's saying,' Kalasinga said to Hamid. 'Maybe we are not rich people, but at least we live by the law and respect each other.'"

Both Hamid and Kalasinga struggle for survival under German colonial ruling. Despite harboring prejudices and, at times, hatred towards each other, their long-term coexistence in the same colonized land forces them to rely on one another. Individuals like Hamid and Kalasinga become “frenemies”, representing the intricate dynamics of survival in the shadows of colonization. This complex and evolving relationship stands as a testament to the resilience of colonized individuals navigating their existence under colonial oppression.

4. Conclusion

This article uses KWIC, Plot, Word and other functions of AntConc to statistically and objectively to analyze the frequency of the use of address forms by certain characters in *Paradise*, thus leading to the analysis of their conflicts and struggles in identity, race, and religion under the shadow of colonialism. There are still some shortcomings in this paper. Firstly, if it is believed that these words cannot reflect the character’s personality well, more words can be consulted. Simply searching for a few words of the character can inevitably lead to the suspicion of generalizing the character’s personality. Secondly, selecting certain words for retrieval also has a certain degree of subjectivity. However, corpus retrieval software provides new ideas and methods for literary appreciation. Analyzing novels through quantitative methods such as tables, images, and statistics, allows readers to have a more rational and objective understanding of the article.

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