



Literary and Linguistic Perspectives on Flashback: A Study of Audee T. Giwa's *From Fatika with Love*

*Tokunbo Olopade

Department of European Languages, Federal University Birnin-Kebbi, Kebbi State, Nigeria.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.11624880](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11624880)

Submission Date: 28 April 2024 | Published Date: 13 June 2024

*Corresponding author: [Tokunbo Olopade](#)

Department of European Languages, Federal University Birnin-Kebbi, Kebbi State, Nigeria.

Abstract

There are different studies on the conventional techniques that are used by literary writers to convey themes, characterization, setting and plot. Flashback is one of such conventional literary techniques. Like other literary techniques, it is used to achieve certain effects that are beneficial not only to literary writers, but also to readers of literary texts. This study investigates the motivations for deploying flashback in the novel, *From Fatika with Love*. Selected corpora from the text are examined, with a view to revealing the functions of flashback therein. The study hinges on the Projection Principle (cf. Adejare 1992, cited in Emuchay 1999) in making conclusions about the functions of flashback in literary writings. The Projection Principle posits that via selected samples from a literary text, conclusions can be made on what is being investigated; in this regard, the functions of flashback in the selected corpora, reflect its functions in literary writings in general. The paper explores The Critical Thinking Theory and the Text Analysis Theory as theoretical frameworks, and concludes that the functions of flashback in literary writings align with writers' purpose, as flashback link the past to the present, explain occurrences and facilitate the interpretation of themes, settings, characterization and other elements of literature. On the whole, linguistic conventions facilitate the use of flashbacks in literary texts, as evident in the use of discrete parts of speech particularly verbs and adverbs.

Keywords: Flashback, language, literature, Critical Thinking Theory, Text Analysis Theory, *From Fatika with Love*.

1. Introduction

Scholars hold the view that linguistic resources impinge on literary techniques deployed by literary writers, as evident in the basic genres of literature (drama, prose and poetry). Indeed, effective use of flashback is crucial in fiction writing. Considering the subjects of flashback (persons or phenomena), it is logical to claim that literary writers are confronted with the herculean task of recreating reality via reminiscence. Flashback is literary writers' way of making allusions from the universe of discourse, where human ordeals remain a recurring decimal. The investigation of the functions of flashback in the novel, *From Fatika with Love*, is essentially immersed in the concept of "realism" which is the core of the novel genre. Flashback is used in fiction to make the narrative "ring true". Instances of flashback in fiction are simply pieces of information on different contexts that predate the present moment of a narration: physical context, psychological context, etc. A literary artist deploys creativity not just in using other literary techniques, but also in using flashback. Good use of flashback presupposes enormous ingenuity in exploring linguistic resources. A study of flashback technique in a literary text investigates contextual antecedents that explain or interpret the characterization, setting, plot and theme(s). This study examines flashback in terms of literary and linguistic perspectives. In the study, flashback is viewed as a non-linguistic dimension of textual communication.

2. From Fatika with Love

Audee T. Giwa's *from Fatika with Love* is a novel about Talle who leaves Fatika to further her studies in Zaria, and ends up in Amnisia. In Amnisia, she contends with the realities of the real world of humans: racism, corruption and sexual exploitation. Her faith (in Islam) is brought to the fore, as she contends against the societal forces of her new world. As

the plot unfolds, the interpersonal relationships of intra-text characters, give the writer's thematic concern its intriguing twist.

3. Flashback

Tsegaye Abie Gebeyehu (2019, p. 1) reports that “a flashback, according to J. A. Cuddon (2013) is a term which probably derives from the cinema, and which is now also used to describe any scene or episode in a play, novel, story or poem which is inserted to show events that happened at an earlier time. It is, on the other hand, an interruption in the present of a vivid memory set in the past. There are a variety of things that can cause a flashback to occur, which include songs, food, people, places, or similar events to those in the past ...” Flashback is useful background information that connect past and present issues to prevent lack of understanding of the scheme of things. Commenting further on flashback, Tsegaye Abie Gebeyehu (ibid., p. 1) submits that “authors use flashback to give readers necessary background information or to create tension or contrast. It is an interruption that writers use to move the audience from the present moment to the past via inserting events in order to provide background or context to the current events of a narrative. Authors use flashback as a means of adding background information in the present events in their story ... This gives the reader added information about a character's past, including his or her secrets, inner or external conflicts, or significant events that affected his or her life ... This also helps the author create a theme for the story and increase the emotional impact it will have on the reader.” Studies on conventions of literary writings show that flashback remains a front-burner subject in the investigation of literary techniques. See Sharples, M. (1999), Rogers J. (2007) and Erdogan (2013) for insights on the effects of writers' approaches to categories of writings.

4. Theoretical Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks anchor this study: Critical Thinking Theory and Text Analysis Theory.

4.1 Critical Thinking Theory

The Critical Thinking Theory teaches learners the necessity of reflecting on the process, aims, content and style of writing as they interpret the social, philosophical, cognitive and diachronic contexts of already published literary works. This practice helps creative writers to produce novel literature that establishes the link between the past and present. See Steven Earnshaw (2007) for tips on this theory and how it directs the use of varied techniques in literary writings.

4.2 Text Analysis Theory

Comprehensive perspectives on the Text Analysis Theory are given by Marjory Meechan (2004):

Text analysis, both written and oral, concentrates on the linguistic structure of discourse, both within and between utterances. These kinds of studies include analysis of pragmatics and speech act theory ... A prominent sociolinguistic approach to text analysis uses variationist methodology. The variationist approach to discourse operates under the assumption that although a variety of structures may be used to fulfill any one discourse function, patterns in the variation found in natural conversational speech show that there is structure in discourse...

Besides examining the use of certain word-class categories as referring expressions, the theory explains the use of discrete clauses for specific communicative goals. It also captures the idea that meaning is based on the choice of words used in a linguistic stretch. See Marjory Meechan (ibid.) for tips on the theory.

5. Presentation and Analysis of Data

This section of the paper examines literary and linguistic perspectives on flashback in extracted passages from the novel (henceforth Datum A – Datum E):

Datum (A)

He left two houses – one in which he lived with his family, the other served as an Islamiyya school for our children. It is to Alhaji Ali's credit that he never charged anything for the use of his house as a school. And we all know that the mallam of the school lives there with his family.

Alhaji Ali also left a tractor, a motorcycle, twenty sets of clothing, five wristwatches and some money ... Exactly seven hundred and fifty-two thousand was found in the secret safe beneath his bed. He did not die owing anyone. People who owed him were called upon to pay up as quickly as possible. Additional two hundred and fifty thousand was recovered from these people ...

(p. 8)

The above flashback reveals issues regarding Talle's late father, Alhaji Ali. Through the use of past tense verbs (“lived”, “served”, “changed”, “left” and the past participle (“was found”)), readers are informed about the man's good character

traits as issues of the past. These facts cannot be presented in the present tense forms of the verbs because they are contextualized in the past. Context, as used in Datum (A), shows “time” of events. According to van Dijk (1977, p. 26), “the actual context is defined by the period of time and the place where the common activities of speaker and hearer are realized and which satisfy the properties of ‘hear’ and ‘now’ logically, physically and cognitively.” In English grammar, the term “verbal sequence” refers to the use of similar tense of a verb in linguistic stretches. Violation of this grammar rule results in incorrectness unless in certain exceptional cases which will not be discussed in this paper. As past issues, the flashback recalls Talle’s father’s property to be inherited and money recovered from those owing him. The writer subtly ushers the readers to the significance of interpersonal relationship and human virtues – issues that become challenges to Talle, as emerging situations move her from Fatika to Zaria and Amnisia. Since the propositions of the sentences are conveyed with the use of past tense verbs, readers interpret the “topic relevance” accordingly as past events that relate with the unfolding plot. The link between “topic relevance” and tense is revealed in the underlined structures:

He did not die owing anyone. People who owed him were called upon to pay up as quickly as possible.

Datum (B)

Talle observed the developments that took place on and by the road since the last time she and her father had plied it. The road has been tarred and, across the big river, which made travelling by road, during raining season an almost impossible task, was now built one of those modern bridges.

Trees were planted by the roadside. What was interesting to Talle was that in most of the villages they passed, the houses seem to be perpetually coming closer to the side of the road. You often passed groups of people where before you only passed herds of animal, cows and goats mostly being tended by a bored, listless herdsboy. (p. 26)

In (B), Talle embarks on a journey from Fatika to Zaria, to live with her uncle. The flashback is a nostalgic account of the physical features of the road during her last journey with her late father. She noticed translation from what these physical features used to be, to a more modern, cosmopolitan outlook, as evident in the bridges, trees and crowd of people she saw. The use of the expression “developments” and “... since the last time” is functional; it provides information in terms of how the past compares with the present in Talle’s village. Through these expressions, the writer conveys the concept of realism (how a work of literature depicts happenings in readers’ real world); in readers real world, villages can experience some developments that compare to those in cosmopolitan cities. By being able to imply “distant time”, the expression “since” accentuates the link between language and flashback technique. This implies that a writer’s mastery of the grammar of the language that conveys the text, is crucial in contextualizing the past in the presentation of his thematic concerns. Dittmar (1976, p. 163) notes that “utterances are only grammatical or acceptable, but must also be assessed by the extent to which they are successful and appropriate to the context ... in other words, the analysis must include those aspects which, in a theory of communicative competence, should decide the way in which sentences in a particular phonological and syntactic structure are regarded as functional for a given situation ...”. Other expressions in Datum (B) which reveal how language helps to convey flashback include: “... which made was now ...”; and “... where before ...”

Datum (C)

From the time of their birth, the two girls never spent a day apart. Surely, as the girls grew up, the parents noticed some marked differences in their character traits, but such differences only drew the girls closer. They would fight, they would curse, they would even scream at each other, but they always slept together. Nobody was allowed to share their bed. (p. 61)

Salma is to take a child from Haj Bisallah’s household, to Amnisia. Unfortunately, the bond between Haj Bisallah’s twins (Kari and Kure) makes their separation problematic; the same bond which prevented the separation of the twins made Talle the choice for the journey to Amnisia. By using past tense and other nostalgia-suggesting expressions (“from the time of their birth ... never spent ...”; “... grew up ... noticed ...”; “... would fight”; “... would curse”; and “... would even scream ...”), the writer narrates the bond pungently. In English grammar, the past future tense “would” (apart from the dominant simple past tense) is particularly appropriate for recalling past events. In Datum (C), “birth” and “grew” (usual collocates) appropriately establish the link between the past and the present in any narration. Flashback is used for explaining the motivations of an on-going discourse, in terms of the “topic relevance” of the discourse. This explains why Talle’s experiences are linked to the relevant flashback information in the novel. Ruth Wodak and Martin Resigl, cited in Deborah Tannen and Heidi Hamilton (2001, p. 385) posit that “we obviously used to think about what our ‘text’ is about since clearly what a person is talking about has a bearing on what is said and how it is said. We also need to think about who said it, or who wrote it or signed it, who is thought, in its particular socio-cultural context, to be responsible for what it says, who the intended audience was and who the actual hearers or readers were, because who the participants in a situation are and how their rules are defined clearly influence what gets said and how. We need to think about what motivated the text, about how it fits into the set of things people in its context conventionally do with discourse, ...”

Datum (D)

For two years before his death, the old man had been bed-ridden. His four wives stood stoically by him and helplessly watched his gradual disintegration.

He was a very popular man, a title-holder, a rich man. At the onset of his illness, people never wanted to leave the house. But when the sickness lingered, their thread of patience began to wear thin, until in the end it snapped. Alhaji Auta could not live, yet he would not die. And people just didn't have patience for this kind of neither-nor state of being. They stopped coming.

The wives, however, stood by him. At a time when his situation was entirely hopeless, Salma, who was the youngest of the wives, and therefore the favoured, was struck by some holy inspiration. Or at least so it seemed then. And she secretly whispered at the time she had no means of coming back ... (pp. 72-74)

In (D), the author uses flashback to recall Salman's late husband's wealth, popularity, prolonged illness and eventual death after he (Auta) had sponsored Salma's umra in the holy city of Makkah. Indeed, flashback makes readers conjure events and issues in a text concretely¹. The modal auxiliaries "could" and "would" are significantly used in the text to convey issues of the past. The expressions "onset" and "lingered" are also textually functional as they capture the beginning and spread of the "topic relevance". Literary writers are aware of the components of language (grammar and vocabulary) that convey writers' message and literary technique. Thus, selection of expressions from the repertoire of language is a demonstration of creative indulgence in verbal artistry. Evidently, literarywriters use flashback for reference-making (referring) through the instrumentality of language. Strawson (1952) posits that "'referring is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do'."

Datum (E)

When my husband brought me here, he cautioned me not to divulge my faith. I told him I could not lie about my faith. He said nobody was asking me to tell the truth either. Inter-religious marriages in Amnisia are not unheard of, but they are never spoken about. So, I shut up.

He bought this house for me, and the two cars. He came around long enough to get me pregnant. Then he would disappear. He hates staying around here longer than necessary. It must not be found out that he was married to a non-Muslim. It was bad enough his being married to a foreigner. (pp. 179-180)

In the above flashback, Zareefah narrates to Talle, how she got involved in inter-religious marriage with her husband, and the psychological implications. As we can see in the five flashback samples (Datum A to Datum E), flashback presents antecedents in terms of period, place, setting, people, institutions and events. For example, Talle's experiences link her with these flashback components in one way or the other. Similarly, the flashback reports about Talle's late father, is directly or indirectly about how people, place, and events explain his personality traits. Like other literary writers, Audee T. Giwa relies on effective description to reflect the originality of these flashback components. The emotive underpinnings of flashback make the task of generating and deploying it, problematic. In this regard, the literary artist must be equipped with adequate knowledge of vocabulary (diction) and grammar to cope with the constraints of using flashback in literary texts. There is dominant use of past tense (tense balancing/verbal sequence) in (E) to convey the flashback ("... brought ..."; "... cautioned"; "... told..."; "... could not ..."; "... said"; "... was"; "... bought ..."; and "... came ...")

In using flashback in the novel, Audee T. Giwa combines the "telling" and "showing" techniques. These two techniques are narrative devices. They differ in terms of quality and quantity of the description of actions or activities of fictional characters. For example, with the use of the showing technique, literary writers present readers with ample details that impinge on the interpretation of the setting, characterization and theme.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Language is not used without the purpose it is to achieve in the literary devices deployed by literary writers. However, literary writers' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (linguistic conventions) facilitates the use of language to convey literary techniques, as revealed in Audee T. Giwa's *from Fatika with Love*. The discrete functions of flashback mentioned in this study (linking the past to the present, explaining events, facilitating inference-making from the reader-audience, etc.) foreground its significance in literary writings, particularly in fiction where the "telling" and "showing" narrative technique are often fused. Flashback becomes crucial when a narrative is in the web of conflict. In such a situation, a relevant past activity or action is presented to give the tension its thematic background. Adèle Ramet (ibid.) posits that conflict is all about obstructing the course of: true love; solving a mystery; obtaining revenge; tracking someone down; and reaching a goal (as in Talle's advancement in life). The functions of flashback in the novel show that the technique is indispensable in literary writings. Flashback performs the function of:

- preparing reader-audience for a past action that is to be repeated;
- providing useful information about a character's past; and
- justifying a present action.

Adèle Ramet (2007) submits that “whilst the length of a flashback varies considerably from one short phrase to a complete chapter, the technique works best if you simply “flash” to a significant incident on the past, then bring your character straight back to the present as soon as you have imported the relevant information.” Language use, as Adegbija (1999) notes, “is not incidental. It is of credit.” Commenting on the importance of language in the literary artist’s use of flashback, Adèle Ramet (ibid.) presents the following key phrases designed to lead a writer smoothly into flashbacks:

- That summer had been almost perfect;
- There had been a time when things were different; and
- As a child, he had been nervous and shy.

Indeed, language conventions are instrumental in the effective use of flashback in literary writings. This study reveals that Audee T. Giwa uses flashback in the novel to emphasize message, expose personality traits, contextualize activities, justify or condemn happenings, present feedback and make readers think progressively as the plot unfolds².

Notes

- ¹ Like metaphor, flashback amplifies writers’ thematic concerns by making readers imagine the issues at stake.
- ² Every flashback is attached to its appropriate position in a literary text, so that there will not be distortion in processing the topic relevance of utterances. See Sperber and Wilson (1986) for better understanding of the term “topic relevance”. This term corroborates Searle’s (1969) notion of “direction-of-fit” and Allan’s (1986) notion of “world-spoken-of” which are essentially the referents that language picks in the universe of discourse.

References

1. Adegbija E. F. (Ed.) (1999). *The English Language and Literature in English: An Introductory Handbook*.
2. Adejare, O. (1995). *Communicative Competence in English as a Second Language*. In A. Bamgbose et al. (Eds.), *New Englishes*. Ibadan: The British Council.
3. Adèle, R. (2007). *Creative Writing (7th Edition). How To Content*.
4. Allan, K. (1986). *Linguistic Meaning vols. I and II*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
5. Audee, T. Giwa (2012). *From Fatika with Love*. Kaduna: Bookmakers International Publishers.
6. Dittmar, N. (1976). *Sociolinguistics: A Critical Survey of Theory and Application*. Edward Arnold.
7. Emuchay, J. O. (1990). *A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Articles of Olatuyi Dare in the Guardian Newspaper from October 1990 to March 1991*. Ilorin: University of Ilorin. M. A. Thesis.
8. Erdogan, T. (2013). *The Effect of Cceative Drama Method on Pre-service Classroom Teachers’ Writing Skills and Attitudes towards Writing*. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(1): 44-61.
9. Rogers, J. (2007). *Introduction to the Novel*. In: Steven Earnshaw (Ed.), *The Handbook of Creative Writing*. Edingburgh: Edingburgh University Press.
10. Searle, J. (1969). *Speech acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
11. Sharples, M. (1999). *How We wWrite-Writing as Creative Design*. London: Routledge.
12. Steven, E. (Ed.) (2007). *The Handbook of Creative Writing*. Edingburgh: Edingburgh University Press.
13. Strawson, P. F. (1952). *Introduction to Logical Theory*. London: Methuen.
14. Tsegaye Abie Gebeyehu (2019). *Analysis of Literary Techniques Employed in the Novel the Revelation: Flasback in Focus*. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*. Vol. 63, 2019.
15. van Dijk T. A. (1977). *Text and Context*. London: Longman Group Ltd.

CITATION

Tokunbo O. (2024). *Literary and Linguistic Perspectives on Flashback: A Study of Audee T. Giwa's From Fatika with Love*. In *Global Journal of Research in Education & Literature* (Vol. 4, Number 3, pp. 43–47). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11624880>