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Nature Speaks: Agency and Environment in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

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A B S T R A C T

This study explores the linguistic strategies in Ben Okri's "The Famished Road" to construct ecological interdependencies and agency in the novel. Employing systemic functional linguistics and ecolinguistic analysis, the study examines how Okri's linguistic strategies elevate the agency of non-human elements, representing them as vibrant and willful participants within their ecosystem. The purpose of this analysis is to understand how language in "The Famished Road" conveys agency and a symbiotic relationship between humans and non-human elements, thereby addressing broader ecological and environmental concerns. Employing an ecolinguistic analysis, the research examines linguistic portrayals that challenge anthropocentric views and emphasize respect for nature. Results show that the novel frames nature and non-human entities as vibrant, active participants, influencing ecological consciousness and fostering ethical considerations towards the environment. This study concludes that Ben Okri's 'The Famished Road', through its unique linguistic strategies, reflects and advocates for a symbiotic relationship between all life forms, highlighting the potential of literary works to contribute to environmental advocacy and consciousness. This analysis adds depth to our understanding of language's role in ecological literature and encourages further exploration into how textual practices can influence ecological and ethical perceptions.

I. INTRODUCTION

The paper aims to fill a gap in African literary discourse, which has predominantly examined the relationships among humans, non-humans, and the environment—as highlighted by Ogunsanwo (1995), Cezair-Thompson (1996), and De Bruijn (2007)—while often neglecting the pivotal role of language in shaping the interconnectedness of human and the non-human world. Despite extensive research into the ecological themes within African literature, (see Egya 2017; Egya 2020; Iheka 2018; Iheka 2021; Ogungbemi 2023), there remains a significant underrepresentation in studies that focus on how language itself constructs these themes and influences ecological consciousness and ethical considerations toward the environment. This oversight forms the primary gap this paper aims to fill.

The novel "*The Famished Road*" by Ben

Okri offers a reflective investigation of the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities, embodying the essence of African magical realism interwoven with ecological concerns. Despite the wealth of thematic analyses on its ecological and philosophical underpinnings, less attention has been given to the methodological use of language in portraying these themes. Extant studies like Ogunsanwo (1995) and Bruijn (2007), largely overlook how linguistic tools in Okri's work contribute to presenting nature as a dynamic participant rather than a passive backdrop in the human-centric narrative. This study, therefore, employs a linguistic analysis to dissect the ways language in "*The Famished Road*" empowers non-human elements, portraying them as vibrant and agentive beings within their ecosystems.

The objectives of this paper are to elucidate how Ben Okri utilizes linguistic strategies to elevate the agency of non-human elements, fostering a

narrative that encourages ecological respect and reciprocity between all life forms. By applying an ecolinguistic framework as described by Stibbe (2015) and integrating systemic functional linguistics as detailed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), the analysis aims to uncover how Okri's language choices influence reader perceptions and contribute to a broader ecological ethic. This approach highlights the unique contribution of *"The Famished Road"* to environmental literature and positions the novel as a critical text for understanding the role of language in shaping our environmental consciousness and ethical engagements with the world.

The relationship between Indigenous peoples and their ecological knowledge plays a vital role in progressing contemporary ecological and sustainability dialogues. Indigenous communities hold a profound grasp of their surroundings, frequently demonstrated through traditions and lessons that highlight living in harmony with the natural world. Hall (2015) emphasizes that Indigenous worldviews include a rich repository of environmental, ecological, or natural world-based knowledge, which is not merely beneficial but essential for inclusive sustainability conversations. These communities have long embraced the concept of sustainability through their cultural practices, which include preparing for the well-being of future generations—a principle that significantly predates modern sustainability ideologies. The work of Endres (2012) further supports this by examining how the discourse surrounding traditional ecological knowledge can enhance broader ecological and sustainability contexts, particularly highlighting the need to address environmental injustices. The controversy surrounding Yucca Mountain illustrates the significance of including Indigenous viewpoints, which enhance environmental discussions and facilitate the development of holistic approaches that respect the complex connections Indigenous communities have with their environment.

The integration of traditional ecological knowledge and practices of Indigenous peoples into broader ecological and sustainability discussions is emphasized by scholars like Bignall and Rigney (2019). They highlight the interconnected and relational nature of knowledge as understood within Indigenous epistemologies. According to these scholars, knowledge is not something

extracted from the environment or people but rather is shared in a relational manner with all creation, encompassing the cosmos, animals, plants, and the earth. This paradigm shifts away from extractive and exploitative methodologies, proposing instead a holistic and interconnected view of ecology. Cajete (2016) supports this perspective, suggesting that research and academic inquiry should be conducted in a manner that is accountable to all relations within the ecosystem. Such an approach not only fosters a deeper understanding of environmental issues but also promotes sustainability practices that respect and integrate the complex web of life, embodying Indigenous methodologies and ethical understandings that challenge human exceptionalism and emphasize a constructivist and relational view of the natural world.

The divergence between Indigenous narratives and those that have shaped Western imperial civilization reveals profound differences in ecological implications. Korten (2006) critiques the foundational narratives of Western societies, such as the 'prosperity story' that glorifies material acquisition, and the 'security story' which prioritizes military buildup to protect established dominations. These stories, which often downplay environmental considerations in favor of economic and security concerns, starkly contrast with ancient stories from diverse cultures that view environmental elements like weather, forests, and other natural resources as vibrant and integral parts of human societies. Bewaji (2018) notes that Yorùbá literature, both written and oral, portrays the environment as an all-encompassing entity, integral to the cultural, spiritual, and social fabric of life. This account implies that the world came into being as a result of the combined endeavors of different beings, such as deities, animals, and plants, emphasizing a cosmological outlook that cherishes the connections and relationships among all living beings. Such standpoint encourages a deep comprehension of the environment and promotes sustainable methods that aim for a peaceful coexistence between mankind and the natural world, endorsing a perspective that combines spiritual, environmental, and social aspects in a harmonious way.

DeBruijn (2007) challenges Douglas McCabe's interpretation of Ben Okri's *"The Famished Road"* as primarily promoting New Age spiritualism, critiqued for upholding cultural imperialism and

global capitalism. Instead, employing Kwame Anthony Appiah's cosmopolitan frameworks, De Bruijn argues that the novel intricately engages with diverse cultural and philosophical ideas, thereby promoting a cosmopolitan perspective that contrasts McCabe's singular focus on New Age spirituality. This reframing emphasizes the novel's exploration of multifaceted ontologies within a globalized yet culturally distinct African society, using cosmopolitanism to critique the imposition of a homogenized worldview. Additionally, De Bruijn employs detailed textual and critical discourse analyses, alongside inter-textual comparisons, to robustly counter McCabe's reductive critique and assert the novel's rich tapestry of beliefs interacting within its narrative. Meanwhile, Cezair-Thompson (1996) explores "The Famished Road" through postcolonial literature lenses, arguing that Okri transcends common postcolonial themes by weaving myth and transformation to redefine African narratives, a move away from solely colonial definitions of identity. Contrasting mythological with historical time, Cezair-Thompson highlights how Okri uses the 'Abiku' and symbolic roads to challenge colonial determinism, suggesting a shift towards a self-defined African identity through the power of myth and cyclical history. McCabe (2005) recontextualizes the novel within a New Age spiritual framework, focusing on spiritual dimensions that resonate with New Age beliefs about spiritual realms and transformation, thus arguing for a spiritual rather than cultural or political interpretation of the novel. These analyses collectively explore the novel's complex engagement with spiritualism, mythological transformation, and interconnected cultural diversities, yet they overlook Okri's nuanced use of language to depict the interconnectedness of all elements within the ecosystem, a gap that this study addresses by examining the linguistic representation of relationships between humans, non-humans, and the environment in "The Famished Road."

Duranti (2004) defines agency as a property of entities with control over their actions, effects on others, and accountable outcomes. This concept, crucial in systemic functional grammar (SFG), considers entities responsible for actions as agents, addressing who initiated an action (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin et al., 2010). In environmental discourse, rhetorical ecology extends this to include non-human elements like flora and fauna, exploring how these influence

and are influenced by communication strategies (McGreavy et al., 2018). This field emphasizes how discourse shapes environmental perceptions and actions, advocating for ecological responsibility and sustainability. Edbauer (2005) describes rhetorical ecologies as "co-ordinating processes" within networks of social fields, enhancing our understanding of communication's complex, interconnected nature. Rivers and Derksen (2015) further argue that agency is a distributed phenomenon across ecological systems, stressing the collaborative nature of influence and outcomes, thereby enhancing our understanding of ecological and communal interdependencies.

II. METHODS

The methodology integrates Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framework with Halliday's (2001) systemic functional linguistic analysis to dissect the language employed in "*The Famished Road*." This approach involves a detailed examination of lexical choices, and grammatical structures to identify and interpret how they contribute to the portrayal of non-human agency. The analysis further extends to understanding how these linguistic practices reflect and reinforce cultural and philosophical perceptions of nature within African contexts.

Ecolinguistics is essentially applying linguistic analytical methods to expose the narratives that govern our lives, subjecting them to ecological scrutiny and critical engagement (Stibbe 2015). The intricate nexus between linguistic expression and the foundational narratives that shape societies, cultural practices, and individual experiences is a subject of extensive scholarly discourse across both linguistic and philosophical domains. Ecolinguistics examines the influence of language in fostering, shaping, altering, or potentially undermining the relationships between communities, living conditions, and environmental health. Stibbe (2010) notes that ecolinguistics is connected to the expanding field of human ecology, intersecting with diverse, interlinked systems which encompasses economic, social, religious, cultural, linguistic, and ecological dimensions. There exists a modest but insightful body of research that applies the ecolinguistic approach to environmental narratives (see Stibbe, 2015, Poole, 2022). I concur with Stibbe's (2015) observation that critical analyses of environmental discourses—those advocating for a respectful rather than a domineering stance towards nature—

are underrepresented in the fields of linguistics and ecological studies.

The theoretical approach in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) centers on the meaning-making resources of language within specific social and cultural contexts (Bloor and Bloor, 2017). Since its earliest manifestations, SFL has been concerned with social action or ‘what people do with language’ (Martin et al., 2010). SFL employs the term lexico-grammar to encapsulate the idea that vocabulary (lexis) is inseparably linked to grammatical choices available in a language (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). These choices are contained in system networks, offering paradigmatic options that carry significant meaning, such as the difference between negative and positive evaluation. These systems characterize the vast body of options available to speakers to create meaning in context.

SFG also aims to develop a grammar designed to ‘make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any text, spoken or written’ (Halliday, 1994: 15). This aspiration underscores the practical applicability of SFL in analyzing and understanding diverse texts across various contexts. Contrary to purely formal linguistic models, SFL posits that semantic networks, which are social and cultural constructs, carry meaning potential that is ‘unfolded’ within texts (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2013). Meaning fulfills the three overarching components of the semantic system known as meta-functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual, each of which is reflected in instances of language use. Furthermore, it is a fundamental tenet of SFL that “the study of discourse cannot be separated from the study of the grammar that lies behind it” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). Any clause embraces ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings, reflecting the intertwined nature of discourse analysis and grammatical study within the SFL framework.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Linguistic Features, Agency, and the Interconnectedness of Humans and Non-Humans

The bonds between humans and non-human entities are a reflective aspect of our world, inviting exploration. It challenges us to consider how our actions resonate within the larger tapestry of existence, where every entity, however small,

plays a role in the collective future. The following excerpts show the link between human and non-human entities in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*.

Let us take a look at the first excerpt.

“IN THE BEGINNING there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry. In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn. We could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries. There was much feasting, playing, and sorrowing. We feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity.” (1)

Using linguistic features like personification and agency, metaphors, and semantic inclusion and kinship, the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and the spirit world becomes evident. The river is personified, given the ability to transform into a road that is “always hungry.” This personification attributes human-like qualities to natural elements, suggesting a deep interconnectedness between humans and nature. The passage anthropomorphizes the river/road as “always hungry,” which can reflect human perspectives on nature as possessing desires and needs similar to our own, leading to a more empathetic understanding of the natural world. The transformation of the river into a road symbolizes a journey or transition, implying interconnected pathways of life and nature. This metaphor extends to the idea of an insatiable road, hinting at perpetual motion and change within the natural and human world. Besides this, through semantic inclusion and kinship, the passage includes spirits, the unborn, and birds as part of a shared world. This inclusion of non-human elements within the same narrative space promotes a sense of kinship and interconnectedness with nature and the spiritual realm.

Moving on to the next excerpt:

“The darkness conquered our voices. A great cry, as of a terrifying commander ordering his troops, sprang into the air. There was the silence of deep rivers. Everything became still. It was as if the night had withdrawn its violence into itself. The wind breathed over the houses and howled gently through the trees. The whisperings of spirits flowed on the wind. The voices of water and slow footsteps floated towards us. It was as if the wind itself were preparing for a final onslaught. Then the stillness was broken by the panic of the innocent” (136).

One can see how linguistic choices enhance the narrative and promote an understanding of ecological systems as active, sentient, and

deeply intertwined with human existence. Linguistic choices like anthropomorphism and personification, material processes, and use of metaphors and similes. The passage begins with “The darkness conquered our voices,” where darkness is personified with the active ability to conquer, typically a human or animate trait. This anthropomorphism continues with the wind that “breathed over the houses and howled gently through the trees,” attributing human-like actions and qualities to natural elements, enhancing their agency and presence as active participants in the scene.

Natural elements in the excerpt exhibit significant agency. This becomes evident in the transitivity choices in the sentence “The wind breathed over the houses and howled gently through the trees.” The wind represents the Actor of the processes ‘breathed’ and ‘howled’. The wind is given agency, performing actions typically associated with living beings. For instance, the wind not only breathes and howls but also prepares “for a final onslaught,” suggesting strategic planning often associated with sentient beings. This use of agency aligns with ecocultural identity by positioning the environment as a dynamic actor rather than a passive backdrop, influencing human experiences and emotions directly.

The use of metaphors and similes reveals the interconnectedness between human and non-human environment. Metaphorical language, such as the night withdrawing “its violence into itself” and the wind’s preparation for an “onslaught,” constructs a vivid narrative that enriches the ecological scene. These metaphors serve not only to embellish the narrative but also to instill a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and the non-human environment, reflecting the principles of ecocultural identity where all life forms are intertwined.

Another interesting excerpt is:

“It was rapidly getting dark. The wind blew hard through the trees. Trees groaned, branches cracked, and the wind among the leaves sounded like a distant waterfall. Pods exploded from on high and one of them fell on my head, like a mighty knock, and I dropped to the ground. In the silence and darkness that came over me I found myself riding the invisible horse of the night. I rode through the trees.” (105)

The excerpt vividly captures a dynamic interaction between human and non-human elements through specific lexis (word choices).

The description employs richly sensory and active language to illustrate the agency of nature and its immediate impact on the human subject. The choice of lexis ‘wind’, ‘trees’, ‘branches’, ‘pods’ focuses on natural elements that are typically passive in ordinary descriptions. However, here they are active participants, affecting and interacting with the human subject. Verbs such as ‘groaned’, ‘cracked’, ‘exploded’, ‘fell’ attribute human-like qualities and actions to non-human elements, enhancing their presence and agency.

Analyzing the sentence “The wind blew hard through the trees,” one notices that the sentence structure places the wind as the Actor, attributing agency to it. The material process “blew” directs energy outward, affecting the trees, illustrating how non-human elements exhibit force and intentionality. Besides this, the sentence “Trees groaned, branches cracked” shows how agency is ascribed to non-human element. Here, the trees and branches are actors performing actions typically associated with human responses to stress or strain, thus personifying these elements and giving them a voice and a response to the wind. Another sentence that is useful to my purposes is “Pods exploded from on high and one of them fell on my head.” The pods are depicted as active agents engaging in explosive action, with one directly interacting with the human subject by falling on his head, bridging the gap between human and non-human realms. The natural elements here exert significant influence over the events. The pods “exploded from on high,” indicating a sudden, forceful action that impacts the narrator directly when one falls on his head “like a mighty knock.” This not only portrays the pods as active agents but also suggests that the natural world interacts with humans in profound and sometimes abrupt ways.

Another excerpt projects the theme of anthropomorphism thus “The trees were running away from human habitation (183).” The excerpt utilizes a material process to convey a vivid and anthropomorphic action. Here, “running away” is typically a human or animal action, and its application to “the trees” gives the non-human entities human-like capabilities. This suggests a dynamic, almost sentient response of the trees to human presence or impact. This statement employs “the trees” as the participants acting out the process of “running away,” which is described as a physical movement usually associated with

sentient beings acting under their own volition or in response to a threat. The circumstance provided by “from human habitation” establishes the context of the action, indicating the reason for the trees’ movement is their proximity to human living areas. Through this anthropomorphism, the sentence vividly portrays an ecological phenomenon of deforestation or environmental degradation metaphorically, suggesting that the natural world is actively responding to human encroachment. This brings an emotional and moral dimension to the environmental changes, encouraging the reader to perceive the natural environment as a living entity with agency and reactions to human actions.

The following excerpt provides further insight:

“Sometimes I played in the forest. My favourite place was the clearing. In the afternoons the forest wasn’t frightening, though I often heard strange drums and singing and trees groaning before they fell. I heard the axes and drills in the distances. And every day the forest thinned a little. The trees I got to know so well were cut down and only their stumps, dripping sap, remained. I wandered through the forest, collecting rusted padlocks, green bird-eggs, abandoned necklaces, and ritual dolls. Sometimes I watched the men felling trees and sometimes the companies building roads. (109)

Ben Okri deploys linguistic tools like metaphor and imagery, and semantic inclusion and agency. The description of the forest includes both its vitality and its decline. Phrases like “trees groaning before they fell” personify the trees, suggesting a living, suffering entity rather than inanimate objects. This metaphorical language serves to evoke empathy for the forest, aligning with Stibbe’s (2015) discussion on the power of metaphors to influence our perceptions of nature. The child’s narrative places humans and non-human elements in close relational proximity. For instance, “the trees I got to know so well” implies a personal relationship, a kinship, with the trees. However, the agency in this scene is primarily with the humans (“I heard the axes and drills,” “I watched the men felling trees”), indicating a hierarchical relationship where humans act upon nature rather than coexist with it. The excerpt utilizes linguistic features that both evoke a sense of connection with nature and illustrate the destructive impact of human activities on the environment. It underscores the need for fostering ecocultural identities that not only recognize but actively promote the sustainability of natural ecosystems as part of our own identity.

Anthropomorphism and the Representation of Nonhuman Animals as Partners

Anthropomorphism refers to a situation where human characteristics or intentions are attributed to non-human entities, such as animals, objects, or natural phenomena. It allows us as Aggarwal and McGill (2007:468) notes to “see a human in nonhuman forms.” In other words, anthropomorphism “projects human behavior onto nonhuman animals, and thus form a kind of moral or sympathetic connection with the latter” (Zhdanava, Kaur, and Rajandran, 2021: 35). We can infer from the following that anthropomorphism facilitates a moral or sympathetic connection between humans and non-human animals by attributing human behavior and characteristics to the latter. Ben Okri uses language to anthropomorphize non-human animals in *‘The Famished Road’*.

In the next excerpt,

‘Don’t kill lizards.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘They are messengers. Sometimes they are spies. My father once sent a lizard to warn me’ (316).

Ben Okri in this excerpt gives agency to animals and creates a parallel world of animals that has commonalities with that of humans. He uses relational processes in representing nonhuman ‘Lizards’ as ‘messengers’ and ‘spies’ which is a case of specification and anthropomorphism where nonhuman animals, equal to humans, perform the role of messengers and spies.

The attributive is realized by ‘lizards’ while the relational process is realized by the predicator ‘are’, and the identifying elements are ‘messengers’ and ‘spies’. The copular relational process indicated by ‘are’ provides some form of classification and identification of ‘Lizards’. Ben Okri humanizes the animal lizard by establishing a co-referentiality between lizards and the ability to spy or serve as messengers. Humans usually act as spies or deliver messages to other humans but here Ben Okri opines that animals such as lizards have agentive powers and are also out there to warn humans. In both cases, the sentences are using relational processes to attribute roles or identities to the lizards. The verbs ‘are’ in each case do not describe actions but rather serve to equate the subject with the complement, defining what the lizards are conceptualized as in the context of the discourse.

The sentences “Lizards Are Messengers” and “They Are Spies” anthropomorphize animals

by ascribing them roles or occupations typically associated with humans. In these particular cases, lizards are being attributed with the roles of “messengers” and “spies,” which implies they have a purpose or function that involves communication and secrecy, respectively — tasks that require intention, understanding, and often complex social interactions that are inherently human. These phrases create a metaphorical layer where animals are participating in human-like activities, which can be a way to convey certain themes or messages within a text. This anthropomorphic attribution can serve various purposes such as drawing attention to certain characteristics of the animals, creating a fantasy or allegorical narrative, or emphasizing a connection between human and animal behaviors.

The next excerpt also shows the use of language to anthropomorphize animals.

“I was about to chase it out when Dad said: ‘All creatures must be treated with respect from now on. If you want the lizard out command it to go and it will go. We must use our powers wisely. We must not become tyrants, you hear?’” (364)

Here, the lizard is treated as a sentient being that can understand human speech and commands, which further humanizes it. In the excerpt, a variety of linguistic processes are used to depict actions, mental states, desires, and relationships, reflecting a dynamic interaction. The initial sentence introduces a material process, “was about to chase,” indicating an action intended but not completed, involving the participants ‘I’ as the actor and ‘it’ (the lizard) as the goal. This action is interrupted by a verbal process, “said,” where ‘Dad’ serves as the sayer, introducing a lengthy directive.

Within this directive, Dad employs a relational process, “must be treated,” to establish an ethical obligation towards “All creatures,” marking them as the carrier of the attribute “with respect.” This ethical stance is reinforced by a temporal circumstance “from now on,” suggesting a permanent change in behavior. A subsequent mental process, “want,” expresses a desire involving ‘you’ (the sayer) and the goal of getting “the lizard out.” This is followed by a verbal process, “command,” where ‘you’ are also the sayer, directed to issue a command to the lizard, treated as capable of understanding and responding.

The prediction “it will go” uses a material process, indicating the lizard’s anticipated compliance as an actor, affected by the command.

Dad then uses a modalized mental process, “must use,” to advocate for wise utilization of “our powers,” showing a collective responsibility. The relational process “must not become,” paired with the modal “must,” emphasizes the avoidance of becoming “tyrants,” thereby highlighting the importance of restraint and ethical conduct. This discourse intricately weaves together ethical mandates, personal responsibility, and the interactive dynamics between human and non-human entities, underlining the narrative’s themes of power, responsibility, and ethical behavior.

In the next excerpt, Ben Okri further highlights the interconnectedness of the human and the non-human thus:

‘Mr. Lizard, where are you? Out! Leave this room and go somewhere else. Now!’ We watched the floor. There was no movement. Mum sighed. Dad didn’t repeat his order. He sat back down on the chair. We sat in silence. Then, after a while, the lizard came out from under the cupboard, nodded three times, and fled from the room (364).

The excerpt starts with a series of commands directed at “Mr. Lizard,” involving material processes like “leave” and “go,” which instruct the lizard to perform specific actions, namely exiting the room and relocating elsewhere. The urgency and immediacy of these commands are underscored by the circumstance “now,” marking a temporal directive for the actions to take place immediately.

As the scene unfolds, the family’s response is described through a variety of mental, material, and relational processes. The family’s collective observation of the floor, a mental process of “watching,” captures their focused attention, but it is met with the absence of any movement, a state conveyed through the relational process “was,” describing the stillness of the scene. This quiet moment is punctuated by individual reactions: “Mum sighed,” a behavioral process reflecting her inner state of resignation or disappointment, and “Dad didn’t repeat his order,” a negative material process indicating his decision to not reinforce his command, which he expresses by physically resettling himself on the chair.

The narrative climax occurs when the lizard, previously the object of the family’s attention and the subject of commands, finally acts. Emerging from under the cupboard, the lizard’s actions are detailed through several material processes: “came out,” “nodded,” and “fled.” These actions not only

signify the lizard's physical movements but also imply a degree of understanding or acknowledgment of the situation, particularly through the action "nodded," which anthropomorphizes the lizard by attributing it with a human-like gesture of nodding three times before fleeing the room. This careful arrangement of actions and reactions creates a narrative that is both engaging and illustrative of the varied ways in which entities can influence and react within a shared space.

The commands given to Mr. Lizard, such as "leave this room and go somewhere else," are inherently anthropomorphic. Typically, verbal commands presuppose an understanding and cognitive processing that are characteristic of humans. By directing the lizard with such commands and expecting compliance, the text implicitly attributes human-like understanding and decision-making capabilities to the lizard. The lizard's actions further emphasize this anthropomorphic portrayal. When the lizard "nodded three times," it displays a distinctly human gesture often associated with acknowledgment or agreement. This not only humanizes the lizard but also suggests that it possesses the capacity to understand and react appropriately to human communication. The nodding here is a pivotal moment that blurs the line between animal instinct and human-like interaction.

In the next extract,

"Azaro, rats can be our friends. They can sometimes tell what is happening in the world. They are our spies. Listen to them, Azaro, and tomorrow tell me what the rats are saying (51)"

the speaker addresses Azaro directly, using a series of relational and mental processes. Initially, "rats can be our friends" uses a relational process that ascribes a potential friendly relationship between humans and rats, positioning rats not merely as animals but as entities capable of social roles within human contexts. The phrase "They can sometimes tell what is happening in the world" introduces a mental process that attributes the ability to perceive and understand complex global events to rats, further anthropomorphizing them by implying they have awareness akin to human informants.

The statement "They are our spies" continues this theme, employing a relational process to categorize rats as active agents involved in espionage, which intensifies their role from passive observers to active gatherers of intelligence.

The command "Listen to them, Azaro" uses an imperative form, directing Azaro to engage in a mental process of listening, which underscores the significance of the information the rats could provide. The clause "and tomorrow tell me what the rats are saying" projects a future action where Azaro is expected to relay the information acquired from the rats, using a material process of telling that completes the cycle of information gathering and reporting. This narrative framework not only animates the rats with human-like qualities but also integrates them into a narrative of cooperation and communication with humans, emphasizing their value as sources of knowledge and insight.

Another interesting excerpt presents non-human elements with the ability to know things about humans.

"There are dolphins, plants that dream, magic birds inside us. The sky is inside us. The earth is in us. The trees of the forest, the animals of the bushes, tortoises, birds, and flowers know our future (363).

The excerpt utilizes existential and mental processes to convey ideas about existence and knowledge. It emphasizes the interconnectedness between humans and nature, suggesting that elements of the natural world are not just external entities but are also part of human experience. For example, in the statement "The trees of the forest, the animals of the bushes, tortoises, birds, and flowers know our future," there is a clear instance of anthropomorphism, where elements of nature are ascribed with the human ability to know or predict the future. In the context of Halliday's transitivity system, this statement represents a mental process, specifically, one of cognition. The trees, animals, tortoises, birds, and flowers are the Sensers, as they are the ones "knowing" or perceiving. The phenomenon, which is the entity that the Senser is aware of or perceives, is "Our Future." This illustrates how language can be employed to ascribe intricate cognitive capabilities to entities that are non-human, usually lacking the aptitude for such understanding. Positioning these nonhuman animals and things in the place of the senser help to trouble stories that promote binaries between humans and non-human animals in the world. Ben Okri uses this to prove a point—humans need nature for our continued existence. If humans destroy nature, humans have destroyed their future because they would have invariably destroyed the custodians of their future.

IV. CONCLUSION

The research concludes that Ben Okri's narrative strategies in "*The Famished Road*" effectively endow non-human elements with subjectivity and agency, echoing African oral traditions that highlight mutual reliance among all beings. By illustrating this interdependence, Okri's work prompts a reevaluation of ecological relationships and advocates for a more integrated and respectful approach to nature, aligning with eco-centric values and emphasizing the vital role of literature in fostering environmental consciousness. The study's findings underscore the profound capacity of language in literature to

reshape human perceptions of the natural world, as demonstrated in Ben Okri's "*The Famished Road*." The novel's linguistic artistry and narrative innovation are pivotal in affording dignity and voice to the environment, advocating for a harmonious existence among all life forms. The conclusion highlights the significance of embracing these literary insights to foster a more ecologically attuned and respectful engagement with the world. It posits that such literary engagements can propel cultural and societal shifts towards more sustainable and equitable environmental relationships, urging a reimagined ethic that values interconnectivity and mutual respect across all forms of existence.

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